



Clan Short
Pacific Rim
Division
By
TheEggman

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Chapter 1

Republic Of Hawaii, Ewa Beach, Oahu

October 29, 2004 2:20 PM

"Okay boys," Mrs. Diaz loudly snickered, while all four teens giggled hysterically at yet another series of musical flubs. She then reminded, "Michael, *follow* the piano lead please."

Struggling to keep a straight face, Mike Gibbons complained, "It's boring though, Mrs. Diaz. I'm strummin' these chords forever! What's wrong with doubling the melody, at least some of the time?"

Mrs. Diaz sighed and explained, "There's nothing wrong with that idea but you're taking a serious rock tangent. The song is jazz. This is a jazz ensemble. That means no distortion, no Hendrix acrobatics and no wiggling your buns around to the point of distraction!"

Mike shyly smiled and blushed. Unable to hold it in any longer, Derrick, Keith and Preston roared laughing. As freshmen, the four boys were amongst the most talented musicians at James Campbell High School; they were the rhythm section, the core of the larger jazz ensemble; Derrick Seibert on drums and percussion, Preston O'Brian on upright bass and electric bass guitar, Keith Hundser on keyboards and vocals, and finally Mike Gibbons on acoustic and electric guitars.

Raising his hand, Preston asked, "Can we change tunes real quick, Mrs. Diaz?"

Eying them suspiciously, Mrs. Diaz nodded, "Which song... as if

I didn't already know?"

Glancing at each of his friends, Preston replied, "Weird." All four boys rapidly nodded.

"That would get us back on track," Keith promised.

Mrs. Diaz sighed, "Alright," then quickly added, "but before you leave today, I want to hear The 'In' Crowd all the way through." Getting four positive replies, she went over to the PA system and powered it on then went to take a seat behind her desk. Derrick picked up his headset and adjusted it on his head while Preston and Mike moved in front of the one microphone on a floor stand.

Flipping the microphone switch, Keith tapped it to verify it was on. He then checked that the Roland RS-5 synthesizer sitting atop the baby grand piano was working. Quickly, he changed the settings to Hammond Organ and played the opening chord. All four boys then sang the opening chord in perfect four part harmony. Keith nodded at Derrick, signifying he was ready.

Softly, Derrick counted out the tempo then began the opening cymbal swell. Together they began playing the introductory chords. Keith played both the Yamaha baby grand piano and the synthesizer then began sweetly singing.

[Isn't it weird? Isn't it strange?](#)

Even though we're just two strangers on this runaway train

We're both trying to find a place in the sun

We've lived in the shadows, but doesn't everyone?

Isn't it strange how we all feel a little bit weird sometimes?

All four boys had harmonized the first bridge beautifully, Mrs. Diaz believed. When they liked the song they were playing, they were amazing. She dutifully listened to the remainder of the song.

Yeah. Ooo. Isn't it hard? Standing in the rain.

Yeah, you're on the verge of going crazy and your heart's
in pain

No one can hear but you're screaming so loud

You feel like you're all alone in a faceless crowd

Isn't it strange how we all get a little bit weird sometimes?

Sitting on the side waiting for a sign, hoping that my luck
will change.

Reaching for a hand that can understand, someone who
feels the same.

When you live in a cookie cutter world being different is a
sin.

So you don't stand out. But you don't fit in. Weird.

Woah-oh! Sitting on the side waiting for a sign, hoping
that my luck will change.

Reaching for a hand that'll understand, someone who feels
the same.

When you live in a cookie cutter world if you're different
you can't win.

So you don't stand out but you don't fit in. Weird.

Isn't it strange how we all feel a little bit weird

Strange, how we all get a little bit...

Strange, 'cause we're all just a little bit weird sometimes.

As the last tones faded out, Mrs. Diaz stood and wiped her eyes. Walking around her desk, she smiled, "Very well done, boys."

"See, we *can* do it," Mike emphatically said.

"I know you can," Mrs. Diaz agreed. Leaning against the piano, she instructed, "As professional musicians, you might not always have the choice to play what you want though. That's what I'm trying to teach you; to play what's written on the pages. When it's time to improvise, the sheet music will tell you so." Holding back any remarks about their rock band, all four boys nodded and she asked, "[The 'In' Crowd](#) now please; just as well?"

Preston put his Gibson EB-3 electric bass back on its stand and moved over to the upright bass. Sitting down on the piano bench, Keith turned his microphone off.

From behind the drum kit, Derrick called, "Mike?" and suggested, "Put the Strat down and play the acoustic dude." Sighing, Mike did as his boyfriend asked, knowing they wouldn't get out of school until finishing the song correctly. Preston giggled as Mike put the amp on standby then moved the cable from the Stratocaster to the Martin DC-16RGTE acoustic-electric. Rolling his eyes and shaking his head, Keith silently wondered if they would ever be able to start the weekend. Derrick then called out the count and they began playing. During the first bars of the song, Mike clapped his hands. Then he began strumming chords for the next two refrains. During the

next two repeated sections, Mike doubled the piano melody easily. Mrs. Diaz signaled to begin playing softer, so slowly over the next sixteen bars, the band dynamics went from fortissimo to pianissimo. Derrick was playing his snare and cymbals with his fingertips. Preston climbed up onto the upright bass, balancing himself on the instrument to play the deepest notes available as softly as possible. Fearing for Preston's safety, Mrs. Diaz watched him more carefully and prepared to react should the instrument slip. For another twenty-four bars they played as softly as possible. The final bell rang, startling all four boys, but they never lost composure and quietly played on. Then they suddenly went back to fortissimo and played the final section.

More than pleased with near virtuoso performances from all four, Mrs. Diaz clapped and smiled, "Next week we play before the entire student body, and then, over next weekend, in front of your parents. You boys are opening the show."

"YES!" all four boys excitedly cheered.

While the boys began gathering their sheet music, Mrs. Diaz reminded, "The 'In' Crowd first, then Weird, then the rest of the ensemble joins you for [In The Mood](#) and the remainder of the show."

"They're gonna be blown away!" Derrick snickered.

Rapidly nodding his agreement, Mike smiled, "This year's band kicks serious ass!"

"Michael!" Mrs. Diaz shouted, causing Mike to momentarily shrink.

"Sorry," Mike sincerely offered.

Staring the boy down for a long few moments, Mrs. Diaz then

smirked, "Go on, be on your way. Have a good weekend." She got a chorus of replies while they packed their instruments.

With his bass guitar packed, Prez carried it over to Keith and melodically whispered, "[Can't take my eyes off of you.](#)"

While packing up his RS-5, Keith softly sang A cappella; "You're just too good to be true, can't take my eyes off of you. You'd be like heaven to touch, I wanna hold you so much. At long last love has arrived, and I thank God I'm alive. You're just too good to be true, can't take my eyes off of you."

Derrick began tapping his sticks together and sang harmony with Mike as they walked out of the classroom. Keith continued singing to Prez; "Pardon the way that I stare, there's nothing else to compare. The sight of you leaves me weak, there are no words left to speak. But if you feel like I feel, please let me know that it's real. You're just too good to be true, can't take my eyes off of you."

Prez joined the harmony vocals then Keith loudly sang down the empty school hallway; "I love you baby, and if it's quite alright, I need you baby to warm a lonely night. I love you baby, trust in me when I say. Oh pretty baby, don't bring me down I pray. Oh pretty baby now that I found you stay. And let me love you baby, let me love you."

Walking out of school and across the fields, the foursome continued singing.

Waiting on the bleachers by the football field like they did every school day, sat Drew and Corey. Interrupting Corey's rambling about Drew's participation in a great touch football play during PE, Drew began snickering.

"What?" Corey wondered.

"Listen, here they come," Drew giggled. As the foursome approached, they all loudly sang to their partners; "I love you baby, and if it's quite alright, I need you baby, to warm a lonely night. I love you baby, trust in me when I say. Oh pretty baby, don't bring me down I pray. Oh pretty baby, now that I found you, stay. Oh pretty baby, don't bring me down I pray. Oh pretty baby, now that I found you, stay. And let me love you baby, let me love you." Bringing up the rear, Drew and Corey followed and sang along as they continued the walk home up Pailani Street.

Approaching Komana Street, Mike said, "We'll see ya in about an hour."

At the corner, Keith nodded, "We'll meet you here."

"Kewl, kewl," Derrick chanted.

Glancing over at Drew, Keith wondered, "Ya coming home or goin' over to Corey's?"

Drew shrugged and Corey happily answered, "Over my house."

Prez asked, "Are you coming to the beach with us?"

After wordlessly checking with each other, Drew then replied, "Sure, we'll meet you here by the park."

Keith reminded, "Remember to tell your folks about the luau, Corey."

Corey gasped then smiled, "Thanks, I did forget." At the corner of Pailani and Ahona Streets, Corey and Drew went left while Keith and Prez went to the right.

After a few silent steps together, Keith looked over at Prez. Like

every October for the past two years, Prez was deep in thought again. Remembering that horrible day when the O'Brian's small plane crashed into the Pacific, Keith reached for his boyfriend's hand and squeezed tightly. It took three nightmarish days to recover the plane and their bodies. Thankfully, Prez's parents had made prior arrangements with Keith's parents. But what would it feel like to be orphaned at only twelve-years-old, Keith often asked himself. They walked into the house and went upstairs to their bedroom.

Once their instruments and backpacks were put away, they met at the foot of the bed. Longingly sighing, Prez moved closer to Keith. They hugged then gently kissed and Prez rested his head on Keith's shoulder softly whispering, "I'm sorry, babe."

"Don't be," Keith assured. "I understand."

Prez wondered, "Will I ever be able to deal with Octobers?"

Keith huffed, "I don't know, Prez. Know that I'll be with you each and every one of 'em."

Nodding slightly, Prez softly admitted, "That's the only thing keeping me sane, I'm certain of it."

Keith tenderly explained, "Besides us living together, we're having the second luau tonight so something good did come of it. Now all our neighbors get together to celebrate your parents lives, their own lives and how intertwined we all are. Almost all of us are from the mainland, whether this is the first generation or tenth, we've all made these islands home."

Prez whispered, "I hope everyone doesn't come over to me offering sympathies again."

"If anyone does, we'll just wander off with Mike and Derrick,

okay?"

Humming affirmatively, Prez planted a kiss on Keith's cheek, then promised, "Always and forever babe."

Squeezing Prez firmly, Keith repeated, "Always and forever." He then reminded, "You never did tell me what you dreamed last night."

Prez softly recalled, "It was as if we never left Texas. Instead of stuff getting better like it did after we moved here, it got worse. They divorced, but both died anyway. That's when I woke up."

Now understanding why Prez had insisted on never being left alone, Keith repeated his promise from four in the morning; "I will never *ever* leave you alone, baby. I can barely stand being separated part of a school day; forget days or weeks, it ain't gonna happen."

"There's no one on the mainland I would go to. There's only you, your family and Derrick's and Mike's families. That's it, Keith; I have no one else important to me. It scares me so much sometimes too. Every time your dad has to get in a plane to go over to another island, I'm a nervous wreck." Pausing as a plane flew over head, Prez complained, "All planes freak me out now, even the Air Force jets flying in and out of Hickam."

Feeling Prez quake in his arms, Keith only softly shushed his boyfriend and gently caressed his back for a minute or two. Keith then thought aloud, "Remember how we used to sleep over each other's houses?" Prez nodded, and Keith continued, "We've been friends since you moved here, Prez. Remember how when you moved in here, we had bunk beds, like Drew and John?"

Prez giggled, "Yeah, it was embarrassing for a while there."

"It was. We came of age together, Prez," Keith admitted. "No one knows me better than you. No one knows you better than me. Now the bunk beds are gone, replaced by a nice big bed. We sleep together, shower together, play music together..."

"I love it all, Keith, really I do. I just wish..."

"I know, baby. It's still a struggle; wanting what we have and them back too. But if they had lived, I really think we'd still have eventually fallen in love. It might've taken longer..."

"Because we weren't hearing each other beatin' off at night!" Prez giggled.

"Or me calling your name, or you callin' mine."

"Denying we were gay, but eventually comin' out to each other."

"Then lettin' the 'rents in on our little secret."

"We were so friggin' nervous!" Prez giggled.

"And it was like, a non-event to them. Even Drew and John were like, it's about time! What a waste of two nervous breakdowns!"

"Now Drew's heading down the same path with Corey. I wonder if it's our doing still, even though they both say it's not."

"John's gonna be the big test, but he's only ten."

Prez pulled back and smiled widely, "At ten, how's he gonna figure out his sexuality when we could barely manage at thirteen, and Drew's not too sure why he's doin' what he's doin' with Corey?"

"My point exactly!" Keith chuckled.

Reaching his hands under Keith's T-shirt and purposefully tapping his fingers around his torso, Prez giggled, "Ready for the beach?"

Clenching his teeth briefly, Keith cackled, "It's so unfair you're not ticklish!" then pushed Prez down on the bed, tore his sneakers and socks off and hurried to get his boyfriend undressed.

Many minutes later, while Keith and Prez were walking downstairs, John threw open the front door and screamed, "DREW! KEITH! PREZ!"

Flying down the remaining steps two at a time, Keith and Prez hollered, "What's wrong?"

As John broke down in tears, Keith and Prez circled him looking for some sign of injury and repeatedly asked what had happened.

After being led to the living room sofa, John sobbed nonsensically, "Kai... wasn't... school... went... his... house... no one... there... door... open... place... wrecked... so... much... blo-oo-od... Kai's... dead... know... it!" Keith and Prez put it all together quickly, but then John blubbered, "Nother... sixth... grade... gone... too-ooo! Good... dead... bad... lives... why-hy?"

"Emergency?" Prez asked.

Keith nodded and went to the kitchen to call his mom at work with Prez and John in tow. If something bad did happen to John's friend, he would've likely wound up at her hospital and, being a family trauma counselor, she would know what was going on. But Keith only got her answering machine, which was odd because there was an entire department of counselors, and there was a secretary that usually answered who would forward the call to voice mail. "Mom,

John just got home from school and he's freakin'. Some kids at his school never showed up, but John went to one kids house..."

"And two other friends, not just me!" John loudly interrupted.

After a pause, Keith frowned, "Okay, scratch that... John and some friends went to a kid's house and the place was trashed. We figured if a kid was hurt, he'd wind up there and you'd know about it. Can you call us back ASAP? John will wait here for your call. Bye." Hanging up the phone and turning to John, Keith asked, "Better now?"

John shrugged, "Until mom calls back, no it's not better... but it's all you can do, I guess."

Keith scowled and asked, "What's so special about this kid that you went to his house?"

Loudly whining, John tried to explain, "He's just a kid, like any of us but... Kai never wants to go home... Kai never ever says anything about his foster dad... and it's like... Kai has a heart attack if someone like... steps up next to him... he flinches and jumps, ya know? But Kai's the nicest guy, really! If he hears anyone mocking anyone else, he gets all kinds o' nutty and... I just know something is really very wrong, okay?"

Understandingly, Prez and Keith slowly nodded. Prez asked, "What do you want to do, kiddo? You can stay here and wait for mom to call, or you can come to the beach and keep yourself occupied?"

Keith suggested, "Why don't ya come with us, bro? You know the 'rents and everyone will be there by sundown for the luau. It's a small island; any problem, like what you're so scared of, would be common knowledge, and we'll all know about it soon enough."

John groaned indecisively for a few moments. He sighed, "Lemme call Jeff and Tommy real quick. I told 'em I'd meet 'em anyhow." John jumped up onto the counter to reach the phone and sat there while he dialed his friends. Keith and Prez went to the living room to give John some privacy.

"Keith?" Prez softly began, "From what John said, I'm envisioning a real mess at Kai's place."

Keith nodded thoughtfully and wondered, "How wrecked? How much blood? For all we know, it's nothing." Prez nodded, and Keith asked, "How about all of us check it out on the way to the beach?"

"The little tikes need to be kept clear though," Prez recommended.

"Okay," Keith sighed, "Us older dudes will check the place out. If the adults haven't already heard what's happened, our word will carry more weight than exaggerations from younger kids."

Entering the room, John announced, "Jeff and Tommy wanna go to the beach."

"Does Lindsay know about this?" Keith asked.

John nodded, "Course; she didn't look inside, but saw the broken door." As the three boys walked out of the house, John remarked, "It was like... there were huge claw marks in the door, bro; like a bear or a lion knocked the door down... so weird."

Locking the door, Keith chuckled, "Come on, John! A bear or a lion; in Hawaii?"

Becoming hysterical as they began the trip back to the park, Prez rambled, "They escaped from the Honolulu zoo, swam across

Pearl Harbor, avoided being seen by anyone and stopped at Kai's house for a snack!" Keith cracked up and then so did Prez. What an imagination John had, they both silently thought.

Shaking his head sadly, John softly insisted, "See for yourselves; no *dog* made *those* marks!" As they walked, John explained, "Kai's eleven! He should be in sixth grade, but he's in fourth because he got left back... he's hardly ever in school this year; like half the time... maybe! And does he ever ask any of us over to play? No. Or for homework? No. Some of us think he wears the same clothes over and over again." John then challenged, "So you tell me, is any of that normal?"

Keith sighed, "John, maybe his parents are poor, or maybe they're native Islanders that choose to be more separate. We simply don't know what their situation is."

Prez wondered, "If you never play or study with him, how do you know where he lives?"

"Me, Jeff and Tommy followed him home once," John meekly offered.

Keith glared at his little brother. "That's just wrong; you infringed on his privacy."

John sighed, "You'd have to know Kai."

Meeting Drew and Corey at the corner as arranged, Keith asked, "Do you two know a kid named Kai?"

John corrected, "Kai Makaokalani."

"Oh, yeah he used to be in my class," Corey said. "He's not the kind of kid you can really get to know," Corey offered. "He's very

quiet."

"See!" John excitedly said.

"Chill, bro," Keith said, "we'll all take a walk over there and check it out with you."

Jeff and Tommy came racing across the park. John hurried to meet them, and as usual, the threesome did a goofy three hundred sixty degree hands and arms spin before returning to the sidewalk.

"Where are we goin'?" Prez asked.

John pointed east and Jeff answered, "Hanaloa Street, near Hope Chapel..."

"There's a little dead end side street," Tommy explained.

Keith and Prez grinned at each other over John and his friends' synchronized performances.

Corey giggled, "The Three Musketeers!"

Seeing John sandwiched between Philippino Jeff, and African-American Tommy, Drew sniggered, "A walking Oreo cookie!"

"That's us!" Jeff, John and Tommy happily cheered, and wrapped their arms over their shoulders.

"Besides, who doesn't love Oreos?" John smiled.

"I wouldn't know," Keith smiled, "we can't seem to keep them in the house anymore." The three Oreo cookie monsters hummed hungrily, causing Prez to laugh. Near Komana Street and seeing Mike, Derrick and Lindsay at the corner, Prez held his hand high.

Not waiting for Keith and Prez to get closer, Mike shouted, "Did you hear this crap?"

Prez nodded and hollered, "We're gonna take a side trip to the beach."

Soon, Mike and Derrick joined with Keith and Prez. Behind them, Lindsay moved between John and Tommy. Bringing up the rear were Drew and Corey. "Double stuffed Oreo!" Corey giggled.

"You're just jealous!" Lindsay loudly laughed.

Turning and glancing at Keith and Prez, Derrick wondered, "What do you think?"

Keith shrugged and Prez answered, "It's either a bad scene or exaggerations."

In unison, the members of the Double stuffed Oreo loudly insisted, "We didn't exaggerate!"

"We'll soon find out," Mike melodically warned.

John said, "You'll see..."

Lindsay added, "it was horrible..."

Jeff nodded, "the door was broken down..."

Tommy finished. "flat on the ground."

Shaking their heads sadly, the four oldest boys grinned. To prove the little guys weren't so special, Mike then loudly sang [Bad Moon Rising](#). "I see a bad moon rising, I see trouble on the way."

Derrick joined in for the second verse. "I see earthquakes and

lightnin', I see bad times today. "

Prez and Keith added; "Don't go around tonight, well it's bound to take your life, there's a bad moon on the rise." All the way down Pailani Street and across the school field the entire gang sang. Emerging at Kaunolu Street, the youngest kids hurried ahead of the pack. Turning left at Hanaloa Street, they waited in front of Kai's house.

Almost simultaneously, Mike and Derrick gasped, "Holy shit!"

Turning to face the four youngest kids, Keith firmly instructed, "You guys stay here."

From outside, they could see the front door off its hinges and lying on the floor; the drapes on the inside of the front window were hanging crooked, as if the curtain rod was only partially knocked down. Having seen enough, Corey and Drew only went as far as the doorway and kept watch for police. Slowly walking on the door and inside the house, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick noticed deep and large scrapes in the heavy wooden door. The living room furniture was toppled over and some of it seemed crushed or torn beyond any chance of repair. On the far walls, about five feet off the floor there were streams of dried blood, apparently arterial spray. The four boys checked the other rooms, but found no one. Hurrying back outside again, Prez softly wondered, "Why aren't there any police?"

Keith added, "This is a crime scene; there should be a dozen cops roaming around gathering evidence."

"I told ya so!" John smirked.

Mike pushed past Keith and Prez, quickly heading to the street. Derrick dutifully followed and grabbed the waistband of Mike's shorts

when he leaned forward and lost his lunch.

When Mike stood upright again, Derrick rubbed Mike's back and asked, "Better?"

Spitting out the foul taste of bile, Mike nodded then smirked, "I hate it when that happens."

Behind them, Keith said, "We need to find the police."

Derrick nodded, "Nothing like this has ever happened in this town."

"The nearest cop shop is miles away," Mike reminded.

Prez suggested, "We'll start for the beach and flag one down."

"Good one bro," Derrick nodded. "If we don't see one on the way, we'll stop at the beach kiosk."

Keith proudly smiled, "That's my baby," and landed a kiss on Prez's cheek. All the younger kids busted up giggling and laughing. Blushing but smiling, Keith shook head and announced, "Let's get out of here."

"But what about Kai?" John hollered.

Holding his hand up about five feet, Prez said, "The blood was way up here, John."

"That was from an adult, bro," Keith assured. "No eleven year old made *that* mess."

Suddenly, Corey and Drew shouted "HEY!" and raced over to a tree.

Looking around, Drew nervously queried, "You saw them, right?"

Searching high and low, Corey replied, "Two little boys, about seven-years-old, blond and brunette?"

Drew nodded and wondered, "Where'd they go?"

Corey hummed uncertainly and commented, "Weird."

"Come on, dudes," Keith impatiently hollered, "we don't wanna be here if or when the cops show up."

Hurrying over towards the rest of the group, Drew relayed, "There were two little kids over there."

"We both saw them," Corey agreed.

Prez glanced over where Drew and Corey had been and sighed, "Well, they're not around now, so let's vamoose."

After walking silently down Kehue Street for a few minutes, Mike broke the silence. "This is mega-fucked up. Shouldn't that house already have been taped off by police?"

Keith turned and walked backwards. "John, did you go to Kai's right after school?"

All four of the youngest kids nodded and John answered, "We hurried over there from school. Then we all ran home."

"No side trips?" Keith asked.

"Nope," John replied, "there and then home, no place else."

Turning around again, Keith figured; okay, so around an hour

ago John and his friends were there. Checking his watch, Keith said, "It's quarter after four now." Looking around carefully, Keith noticed traffic was very light, but a lot of Ewa Beach residents would be preparing for the luau. They would only be passing one small grocery store, Silva's, down by the beach.

Prez softly realized; "There's really no chance of learning what's going on, until we get down by the beach, is there?" Keith shook his head. Prez then noticed a few band mates down by North Road and shouted; "Liko!" When Prez began jogging down the street to meet them, everyone else in the pack followed.

Liko was a sophomore and one of the trumpet players in the jazz band. With him were Makani, Charlie and Freddie; other musicians from James Campbell High School. Charlie played tenor saxophone and Freddie played alto saxophone. Prez approached them and slowed then he extended his right arm to shake hands and smiled, "How's it going, buds?"

Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike greeted their friends and learned they were heading to the luau too. They all went down North Road and began chatting. Traffic was a bit heavier on North Road, and there were other groups of kids heading down to the beach. None of them had heard of Kai or knew anything about the odd situation, and in fact, didn't believe half of what Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick were telling them. Remarks from John and his friends didn't really help them understand either. The large group of fourteen teenagers and younger kids walked down Kilaha Street, debating the fact that someone was obviously hurt badly in the house, and that two grade school kids were missing. It was quarter to five when the pack arrived at Ewa Beach Park.

The parking lot was virtually empty, and although the stage was still setup, the PA, lighting system and all the instruments were gone.

Off to one side of the stage stood statues of a menehune (a mythical elf rumored to have inhabited the islands before Polynesians) and two lions. The entourage headed towards the beach, except for Derrick, Keith, Mike and Prez. They stopped at the stage.

Climbing quickly up onto the stage with Derrick, Mike slouched and growled, "Fuck me!"

Prez and Keith glanced at each other and scowled. Looking up on the stage, Prez loudly said, "Dudes, this proves something is going on that we don't know about."

"We were just here yesterday," Keith reminded. "Practically the whole town is coming to this luau, but where is everyone? We're the first band to perform tonight."

"That's not lookin' very possible," Derrick complained.

"How could everything be set for a town luau yesterday, but be so deserted today?" Prez asked.

"We would've heard about it being canceled at school," Keith insisted. "We're all here, ready to jam and party, but not one adult anywhere? There were at least twenty of 'em doing various things yesterday while we did our sound test. At least one person should be here with leis."

"Tell me this makes sense?" Prez challenged.

Derrick turned to Mike and said, "Look down by the beach dude. All the tiki torches are gone; the tables for the food, gone too."

"How could we not have heard it was canceled?" Mike whined.

"None of us heard any such thing bud. Fourteen of us walked

here together. There are other kids down by the beach, just no adults. Now, either all of us have taken that final excursion into some demented alternate reality," Prez explained and Keith cracked up, "or *something* is going on. We just don't know what... yet."

Keith sniggered, "All our parents will be here soon. Might as well hang out at the beach."

"Just *once* I'd like to know what *the hell* is going on before it happens," Mike loudly bitched as he started for the stage stairs. Keith and Prez watched them momentarily then all four ran over to where the menhune and lions were just minutes earlier.

"Oooo-kay!" Keith droned.

Pointing at the spot where there had been statues, Derrick shouted, "Where did *they* go?"

"What in the hell is goin' on?" Prez softly wondered.

From the beach, Drew, Corey and John yelled, "KEITH! PREZ!" Seeing the three of them waving them over to the beach, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick ran to see what was wrong.

Mike fussed, "I'm gettin' seriously freaked out!"

Standing with Drew, Corey and John was another boy holding a beach blanket. When Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick arrived, Drew wrapped an arm around the boy and explained, "Bros, this is Bruce. He spent the whole night here on the beach; his mom and dad never came to pick him up."

"Aww," Prez groaned at the scared little boy. It seemed that every other week all summer long, some poor kid was being left behind on the beach. Mike rescued one whose parents were soon

found. Derrick bailed out another whose parents had been arrested for public intoxication. Keith had found two and Prez another two; all four of which had been completely abandoned and placed under the care of Child Protective Services.

Kneeling down in the sand in front of Bruce, Keith smiled, "Hey little guy, my name's Keith."

"Hi," Bruce softly said.

Prez asked, "How old are you, Bruce?"

"Eight," Bruce answered.

Keith asked, "Do you know what happened to your mom and dad?"

Bruce shrugged, "They said they'd come get me before night time," and then he began crying, "but they didn't. I slept here and been here ever since."

John hurried to Bruce and wrapped him in a friendly embrace, promising, "We'll make it better."

Keith nodded, "You're safe now, Bruce. My mommy helps people all the time. We'll help find your folks and get you taken care of."

"When's the last time you ate?" Prez wondered.

Bruce whimpered, "Lunch yesterday."

Turning away, Mike softly groaned, "God! Not another one."

Shaking his head sadly, Derrick whispered, "There ought to be a

test to become a parent."

Checking his shorts pockets and pulling out a few dollars and some change, Prez smiled, "How about we get you a little something to munch on right now?"

"Really?" Bruce excitedly squeaked.

Keith chuckled, "Really." Standing up, Keith reached into his pocket and pulled out another few bucks and some coins. He and Prez then started back to the park.

John proudly smiled, "I told ya," and took Bruce's hand. Leading Bruce to the vending machines, John explained, "My bros helped some other kids lost like you."

"You guys are really nice," Bruce beamed. "Nobody else helped me all day."

Shaking his head, Drew softly offered, "Some people are just mean, they don't know better."

"That's not us though," Corey quickly added.

Already at the vending machines, Keith got two cans of Hi-C fruit punch while Prez got two packages of cookies and a bag of potato chips. It wasn't much, but after more than a day without food, Bruce needed something in his belly and soon. As John sat down on the bench with Bruce, Keith popped the first can of Hi-C and handed it over to the boy.

Taking the can and quickly drinking, Bruce noticed Prez. "WOW!" Bruce shouted, "All that's for me?"

Uncontrollably chuckling at the boy's enthusiasm, Prez nodded,

"You bet; just for you," and offered the first opened package of chocolate chip cookies. "Even though you're hungry, try to eat slow," Prez suggested, and then explained, "If you eat too much too fast, you might get a belly ache and you could get sick."

Already chewing the first cookie, Bruce nodded and mumbled, "I'ww twy."

Waiting a few yards away, Mike whispered to Derrick; "I would've shit myself if I was left alone over night like that."

Derrick softly agreed, "I know, dude. Maybe it was something unforeseen though."

"Like what?" Mike excitedly queried.

Derrick shrugged, "A car accident? I dunno."

Mike scowled, "Would your mom leave you alone like that when you were eight?"

Rapidly shaking his head, Derrick giggled, "Around that age, I was only allowed to cross streets in our neighborhood by myself."

Smiling at his boyfriend's candor, Mike playfully suggested, "If we're around when the kid's parents are found, we should slap 'em silly!"

Trying not to crack up, Derrick sniggered, "A well timed 'accidental' fall could knock 'em down?"

"Oops!" Mike squealed. "So sorry!" Then both boys cracked up laughing.

In the distance, approaching from the parking lot was a woman that looked like it could be Keith's mother. Since John, Keith and Prez

were busy with Bruce, Derrick pointed and called, "Drew, is that your mom coming?"

Drew looked closely then huffed, "Finally!" before running off with Corey to meet her.

Within twenty feet of his mother, Drew shouted, "Mom, hurry!"

"Drew and John found another kid left on the beach," Corey added.

"You found him too, all three of us found him," Drew argued.

Mrs. Hundser smiled and then, as each of her hands was taken by the two boys, she began laughing.

"Mom!" Drew incredulously hollered, "What's so funny?"

Corey didn't understand why Drew's mom was laughing either, and explained, "Bruce is only eight and was left alone all night!"

As she was being pulled along by Drew and Corey, Mrs. Hundser giggled, "But you boys seem to find other pathetic lost and stranded boys at the drop of a hat! I thought it was over when school started again."

"It's not *our* fault!" Drew complained, "It's all those stupid parents!"

Raising their eyebrows and attempting to appear innocent, Keith, John and Prez smiled. Keith pointed at the boy stuffing his mouth with cookies and said, "Mom, this is Bruce." Turning to Bruce, Keith introduced his mother. "Bruce, this is our mom, Jennifer Hundser."

"Hello there, sweetie," Mrs. Hundser smiled.

Putting down the can of Hi-C on the bench and swallowing, Bruce looked up and said, "Hi."

Mrs. Hundser leaned over and gently brushed the boy's hair back, asking, "What's your last name, Bruce?"

"It's Downing," Bruce answered, and nibbled on another cookie.

"Where are you originally from?" Mrs. Hundser asked.

Bruce nervously glanced around at everyone surrounding him while he chewed, then softly offered, "Ohio, we was on vacation here, in Honolulu."

Thinking of the dozens of hotel and motels on the other side of the island, Mrs. Hundser nodded then asked, "Do you remember which hotel you were staying at?" Bruce only shook his head and chomped on the final cookie. "That's fine," Mrs. Hundser smiled, "I'm going to talk to the older boys for a few moments, but we aren't leaving you alone again."

Keith gave John the remaining can of Hi-C, and Prez gave him the bag of potato chips. Then the four teenagers gathered around Mrs. Hundser. All at once, they began softly chattering until Mrs. Hundser held up her hands in defeat. Turning to Keith, she got the first part of the story about Kai and the wrecked home. She had not heard of Kai or anyone named Makaokalani needing trauma care at Hawaii Medical Center West. Then the questions about the luau began. Mrs. Hundser answered with the only information she knew. "The luau has been relocated to Kauai; near Kalihiwai Bay. I only know because additional medical facilities are being setup there for emergencies. It's no longer just a Ewa Beach event though; the King, Queen and much of Parliament are attending. Even though road traffic is light, air

traffic has tripled. We've got a plane to catch. We'll bring Bruce along with us."

Turning green immediately and squeezing Keith's hand, Prez gasped, "A plane?"

"The only other alternative is by boat, which could take four or five hours at best," Mrs. Hundser explained.

"Or you could all close your eyes, tap your heels together and wish 'I want to go to the luau'," came a giggling voice from near where Bruce was sitting.

Startled at the voice behind him, Drew spun around and shouted, "HEY!"

"No, my name's not 'Hey'. I'm Galli... but you might have heard of my other name," the little ten year old, ginger haired and be-freckled boy giggled. He was dressed in a tee-shirt and board-shorts and twirling a small silver pen like item in his hands.

Mrs. Hundser faced the boy and smiled, "Hello Galli, it's nice to meet you. Which one of my boys rescued you?"

"Rescued me?" Galli incredulously sniggered. "My dear young lady, I've walked the stars and ran through dimensions and swam the rivers of time long before this planet formed. I'm here to bring you to the party... and you may call me The Doctor," Galli smiled as the Tardis thrummed into existence behind him and Bruce.

Stunned beyond words, Mrs. Hundser only stood silently with her jaw on her chest. Prez asked, "It still flies though, doesn't it?"

Galli grinned, "It *can* fly, but it doesn't usually. It can appear where-ever and whenever it wants; movement without movement.

You'll go inside, then you'll come out at the party..."

{Stop calling me 'It'. I have a name, Doctor.}

"Sorry, T..." Galli rolled his eyes. "Tardises these days."

"Ooo-kay!" Keith chuckled. "First, disappearing kids and statues now phone booths appear out of thin air!"

"If it gets us to the luau quicker than a plane, I'm game," Mike sniggered.

"Dude!" Derrick laughed.

"What?" Mike grinned, "Either the kid's trippin' or he's tellin' the truth. There's only one way to find out. Besides, without Prez, we're a three man band. Sorry, but the bass and Prez's vocals are just a little bit important."

The fact that Galli began to glow as time moved in flux around him sort of sealed the deal on his authenticity. "The statues said they'll meet you there," Galli giggled. "Lil' elf is really looking forward to talking to you, by the way."

Not the least bit frightened, Bruce giggled, "I like him. Can we go with him? Maybe he can help me find my mom and dad?" He grinned and took hold of Galli's glowing hand.

Not exactly certain where, when or how she lost control, Mrs. Hundser absently took hold of Keith's and Preston's hands. First Bruce and John entered Tardis, followed by Corey and Drew, Mike and Derrick and finally, Keith, Prez and Mrs. Hundser.

Galli grinned to himself as the last of them entered the small police box to find the control room inside was bigger than all their

living rooms combined. "They will never be the same again after this party," he whispered before entering and closing the door.

Time heard its Lord.

... And Time started to laugh...

John and Bruce hurried around the large space checking out various glowing lights. Glancing around in awe, Mike and Derrick shouted, "KEWL!"

"Is there a place we can sit?" Drew asked.

Prez fretted, "Or seat belts we can put on?"

The Doctor smiled as chairs appeared around the control hub at the center of the room. "Technically, we're there already. However, Time moves in here at a different pace than in the world. If you have questions, you can ask them. You won't miss a thing outside, for Time there will not have moved."

Noticing his mother turning the same green shade that Prez had, Keith sat her down before she fainted and asked, "You okay, mom?"

Rapidly nodding, Mrs. Hundser only whimpered.

Prez sat down beside her and breathed a heavy sigh of relief at not having to get into a plane.

Keith knelt down before Prez and asked, "You okay now, baby?"

Prez nodded and smiled, "Just fine now. Still trying to figure shit out, but since we're not flying, life is good."

Following Galli from station to station, Corey asked, "So this is

like a Time Machine?"

Speedily moving to another station, Galli answered, "Not exactly. TARDIS... Time and Relative Dimensions In Space. Time is just a small part of it. Dimensions, parallel universes... Paradox machine... but Tardis is so much more... at least to me."

{Thank you Doctor.}

"You're very welcome, T," Galli giggled.

Derrick asked, "Alternate parallel universes really exist?"

Galli only nodded then scampered over to another display and seemed mesmerized.

"What's that one you're looking at?" Mike wondered.

"A fractal screen saver," Galli laughed, "It's very pretty, don't you think?" Nodding, Mike cracked up laughing.

Keith went over and asked, "If there are alternate universes, are there alternate versions of us."

Galli nodded and rambled, "Consider every decision every one of you has made. For every possible decision, there's an alternate you. Unless of course, the decision has led to you not being born or physical death in that reality, but then again, there isn't an alternate you any longer in that universe, now is there?"

As Galli and the group around him moved nearer, Prez asked, "Is there a reality where my parents didn't die?"

Pausing and turning to face Preston, Galli softly offered, "My dear boy, there are more parallel dimensions than you could possibly imagine. In one, you were never born because they never married. In

another, you were born, but your father died before that day. In yet another, you were born, but your parents divorced. You moved with your mum to California. There are universes where you never met Keith, Mike or Derrick, and there are others still where you have met, but weren't friends. Do you understand what I mean by every decision now?"

"The smallest, seemingly insignificant decisions?" Prez pondered.

Galli nodded. "Well, I've simplified Timeline-type stuff for you - what you call an alternate universe? OTHER Universes and Dimensions... well, let's not get into that yet... I don't think this dear lady will cope," he finished as he realized that Mrs. Hundser had not blinked once that he had seen. Galli took her hands in his and softly asked, "Better now?"

She finally blinked and smiled, "I have one question that no one else has asked."

"Yes, dear lady?"

"How old are you... really?"

Squealing with delight and tossing his head back, Galli asked with his gales of laughter, "What do you want to know? My literal chronological age? Or my Lived Time age? Or my Time-Effected age? Or my apparent? As for the latter, I'm ten... as for the former I'm over seven billion years old... don't remember the exact number..."

{I remember, Doctor.}

"Not now, T!" Galli giggled as Mrs. Hundser's face started to go blank again. "The lady has almost returned to normal function! She has a husband and a life, after all. Let's not scramble her brain again!"

He squeezed her hands tightly and kissed them, bringing Mrs. Hundser's eyes back into focus, "Sweetheart, let us just say I'm old and leave it at that."

{Older than dirt...}

"Earth dirt, yes," Galli giggled.

Prez was just staring at him. "Seven BILLI... I... No way!"

Galli poked his tongue out and giggled. "I age well!"

Drew shook his head to clear it, then walked over and asked, "Why us? I mean... what makes us so special? For you to come see us, I mean."

Not wanting to divulge more than necessary, Galli took Drew's hand and smiled, "Because you *are* special." Glancing at each of them, Galli explained, "In a divided world, you and your families stand together. Each of you spend that extra second to make better decisions for one another. When a child is helpless, you help; as in the case of Bruce here. If there's a way to make life better, you each seek that alternative, even though it might not be the easiest choice available. Better versus easier; *THAT* is special; *THAT* is real love."

"Doctor Galli?" John called.

Galli smiled and corrected, "John, you may call me Doctor or Galli, however from all of you, please if you will, Galli."

John nodded and asked, "Where's Kai at Galli?"

Galli answered, "He's safe and I believe you will all be seeing him soon."

"Thank goodness!" John huffed.

Keith wondered, "Why was his house trashed, and why was there blood on the walls?"

Looking down for a moment, Galli then looked up at Keith and answered, "Kai was taken away before anything happened at the house. That's all I can tell you now, but by..." After pausing to check a display, Galli finished, "eleven o'clock local time tomorrow morning, you'll have all the answers regarding Kai.. and more... than you probably... would want... to know." After glancing at each person, Galli asked, "Any other questions?" Everyone shook their heads and Galli happily announced, "Then we have a party to attend!" Skipping joyfully towards the Tardis door, Galli flung it open and waved them out. As Prez passed, Galli giggled, "And thank you for flying TARDIS Airlines!"

Letting go of Keith and spinning around, Prez hollered, "You said we weren't flying!"

Leaning over and laughing hysterically, Galli patted his knees with his little hands and admitted, "Technically no, but welcome to Kalihiwai Bay any way. Have a good time at the luau!"

Squinting his eyes impatiently at the boy, Prez growled.

"You're not staying?" Keith asked.

"I'll be back so fast, you'll never miss me," Galli giggled, "I absolutely love poi!" Watching as they all moved away from Tardis, Galli then closed the door and went on his way. Galli had left them in a small clearing between trees facing Kauapea Beach to the northeast side of Kalihiwai Bay. They could faintly hear music and smell barbecuing pig in the distance. They only had to walk forward and

follow the smells to the beach.

"I think I'll take a plane to fly back to Oahu," Mrs. Hundser softly said.

Shaking his head violently, Prez promised, "I'll swim back before I ever step foot on a plane!"

Keith reminded, "We never even felt the thing shake or move."

"Thank God!" Prez huffed.

Mike wondered, "What time is it, Keith?"

Glancing at his watch, blinking and then looking again, Keith shuddered, "It's five twelve." From the time Galli appeared to that moment, only about a minute had passed.

John softly asked, "How're you doin', Bruce?"

Still clinging onto the blanket they found him with, Bruce shrugged, "Okay I guess; I'm not alone no more, and Galli was nice... just wondering where my mom and dad are."

Snapping back to reality, Mrs. Hundser fished her cell phone out of her purse, saying, "We'll get that question answered as quickly as we can." She then dialed Honolulu police and asked to speak to Mike's father; Lieutenant Robert Gibbons. In a short time, she had given him the entire story, the boy's name and description and informed him that they were already at Kalihiwai Bay. After a short pause, she grinned, "You'd never believe how we got here so fast. I can barely understand it, never mind explain it!" Finishing her call, she smiled at Bruce and said, "We'll have your parents located soon." She then said, "Michael, your dad and mom will be here in about an

hour."

"Thanks Mrs. H.," Mike replied.

Derrick said, "I wonder where the stage is."

"Aren't ya hungry, dude?" Mike excitedly queried, and then admitted, "I'm starving!"

Derrick softly chuckled, "You left half your lunch in the street."

Prez interjected, "First we find the stage and where we're playing, then we find food."

Shaking her head sadly, Mrs. Hundser playfully complained, "What is it with boys and food?"

Keith softly asked, "You're not hungry either, Prez?"

"A little," Prez shrugged, "still got a nervous stomach, thanks to that teasing little brat!"

Keith giggled, "He kind o' reminded me of you when you were ten though." Prez held off and cuffed Keith on the shoulder. "WHAT?" Keith laughed, "Galli's a cute little redhead!" and then took off running for the sand before he got hit again. Prez raced after him with Mike and Derrick in tow. Mrs. Hundser grabbed John and Bruce by the shoulders before they followed the older boys.

About a third of the way down the beach, Derrick pointed up into the sky and hollered, "Look!"

Corey, Drew, Mike, Keith and Prez stopped goofing around and looked north, where Derrick was pointing. Flying in formation, six Starfleet shuttle craft were coming in for landings at Princeville

Airport.

Thrilled to the core, John looked up at his mother and squealed, "Starfleet's gonna be here too?"

Having heard nothing about this, Mrs. Hundser nodded and smiled, "It seems that way."

"KEEEWWWWWWWWLLLLLL!" Bruce screamed as the formation passed overhead.

"Starfleet rocks!" John gleefully shouted.

"I know!" Bruce bounced happily. "I hope someday I can join."

"I'd be happy just gettin' to visit a real Starship!" John giggled. "Imagine it, way up in space, traveling from planet to planet at Warp speeds."

"Wouldn't that be the very bestest ever?" Bruce cheered. He then shyly moved closer to John and whispered, "I gotta pee bad!"

John giggled, "Me too," then looked up at his mom and explained, "We gotta go to the bathroom mom."

Scanning the bluffs and finding a row of porta-potties, Mrs. Hundser pointed and said, "Stay together..." but both boys ran off before she could finish the sentence. Rolling her eyes and hurrying after them, she realized that the Tardis trip was too much and she also needed to use the facilities.

Down on the beach, the other boys chased each other into and out of the surf, asking all sorts of questions, like why Starfleet was here? Why the King, Queen and members of Parliament were coming? Did any of this have to do with Kai? Or was it an extension

of a really good idea, celebrating the lives of the O'Brians? Everything was so out of control and hectic, they could only hope that they were still going to perform that evening. Seeing a Starfleet security detail pass by, they hoped their special night wouldn't be ruined by a lot of political speeches and other mindless, boring crap.

Taking the opportunity to tease the uniformed Vulcan men and woman, Keith and Prez loudly sang, "Some people call me the space cowboy, some call me the gangster of love. Some people call me Maurice, cause I speak of the pompitous of love." Seeing the security team returning, they stopped singing and giggled.

"Do you boys have any identification?" one of the officers asked.

Keith smirked, "We have high school IDs, but didn't bring 'em with."

Then one woman officer said, "Keith Hundser." Turning the device she was holding at Prez, she then offered, "Preston Albert O'Brian." And then she scanned Mike, Drew, Derrick and Corey, identifying each of them by their full names; "Michael Gibbons; Drew Hundser; Derrick Seibert; Corey Seaver."

The first officer asked, "Where are Mr. James Hundser, Mrs. Jennifer Hundser and John Hundser, please?"

Seeing his foster mom, John and Bruce hurrying over from the porta-potties, Prez pointed and replied, "Behind you."

The first officer and the woman turned around briefly. The woman nodded, "That is Jennifer Hundser and John Hundser. The other boy is... Bruce Downing, native of Cleveland, Ohio."

The first officer then commanded, "You three keep watch over

these boys. Make sure nothing happens to them."

All three officers replied, "Aye-aye, Sir." Then the first two officers went to meet Mrs. Hundser.

Eying the Starfleet officers assigned to them suspiciously for a few moments, the six boys stepped away and huddled up.

"What the fuck is going on now?" Mike whispered.

"And why do they have to make sure nothing happens to us?" Prez softly wondered.

Keith made eye contact with Drew and asked, "What are they doin' now, bro?"

Drew's head popped up from the huddle, then he lowered his head again and whispered, "Just standing there, looking up and down the beach, and at us."

Derrick sniggered, "Did ya ever have one of *those* days?"

"It's all John's fault," Keith smiled, "ever since he came home, everything's gotten really weird." Corey and Drew giggled their butts off.

"You sure, Galli?"

The huddling boys heard a high pitched boy's voice giggle from just behind where the Vulcan Starfleet security team was standing.

"Yeah. They're the ones you're after, Elven Prince!"

"You teasing me?"

"ME? Tease a PRINCE of the ELVES? Never!"

"Ha ha... Come on, I-Cheya! Let's go see if we can make some new friends!"

HUFFF!

Prez and Keith had enough time to glance at each other before the thundering of something running their way became apparent. They had all recognized Galli's voice, of course, but the other voice was a mystery... and that 'huff'... it was deep and guttural and...

"OH MY GOD! A bear?" Keith yelled in shock, as a large silvery colored bear charged around the security team and loped across the sand directly for them. The huddle broke up and all six boys quickly backed away until they were standing knee deep in water.

They had only seen pictures of such a creature in school books - books about alien planets. It was big, had saber teeth, a small beginning of a mane that started at its forehead and ran down the center of its back... and it was carrying the now 'living' statue of that menehune on its back. Only now they could see it wasn't a 'little person' from the ancient tales. It was a Vulcan boy, looking about nine-years-old; buck naked and grinning at them.

"HEY!" Prez yelled, "You Starfleet guys! Is this your idea of protection?"

"Don't worry," the small Vulcan boy giggled, "I-Cheya won't hurt you." The boy slid down off the massive beast and said, "I'm Joel and this is I-Cheya." Joel then asked, "Are you hungry I-Cheya?"

No. Bad Man made good meal. Me full. Me want play... red-haired boy look good to play with. Can I play 'Toss-The-Kid'?

All the boys in the water heard the bear clearly, yet they knew it

had not been with their ears.

"Huh?" Corey spluttered.

I-Cheya looked at him, and then batted his front paws in the water, making a sheet of it fly up and over Corey.

Play with Corey-Boy first. Then Red-Haired-Prezzy-Boy later...

More water went flying at and over Corey.

Joel giggled until he fell on his butt in the sand, letting the small waves at the water's edge wash over him. "He's just a baby Sehlat. He likes to play!"

"*THAT'S* a BABY?" Drew hollered in disbelief, and held on to Corey's hand tighter.

Corey whimpered, "Drew? Toss-The-Kid?"

Keith and Prez moved forward, watching the Sehlat carefully. Mike and Derrick followed with Drew pulling Corey along behind them. Standing before Joel, who was splashing in the surf, they each introduced themselves.

"We already know you," Joel smiled up at them, "and Mike and Derrick and Drew and Corey too. Boy, is my big brother Cory gonna be happy to find another blond Corey to hang out with."

I-Cheya huffed lightly as his paw snaked out and grabbed Prez and pulled him into the circle of his forepaws.

Keith didn't know whether to find an elephant gun to kill the 'bear' or simply try a rescue by hand.

Prez was momentarily struck dumb in shock.

Joel stood up and cuddled close to I-Cheya's side, "He likes you. He won't hurt you. He don't talk to his food."

I-Cheya's eyes were boring into Prez's, and they seemed to peer deep into the red-head's soul.

Leader. Master. Protector. Provider. Soul of Love poured out and Love Received. Blessed of Our Father, I breathe my promise on you.

The Silvery Sehlat then opened his massive mouth and exhaled over Prez, filling his whole being with warmth and comfort.

Prez started to wilt in the Sehlat's embrace as love and more poured through him. The love seemed to go right to his core, and unlocked an old grief; a pain that was healing but not yet fully healed.

"Preston, we are so proud of you," came the clear voice of Preston's father.

"Yes, you make us smile every day you live and every time you embrace all life has to give you," came a woman's voice that he had not heard in two years; his mom.

"We are with you forever. Your Father in Heaven is with you forever. We will wait for you, and we will cheer every moment of your life as you run your race," Prez's Dad said, and Prez felt fingers run through his hair in the way his dad always did when he was alive.

"We love you, son. And Keith is a catch," his mother teased as the voices faded away.

Tears flowing and sobs bubbling forth, Prez flung himself

forward onto I-Cheya's body and cried. I-Cheya gently removed Prez' clothes and started to bathe him with his tongue, helping in the way of the Spirit Guardians to heal and comfort.

Joel smiled.

Concerned because Prez was crying, Keith didn't know what to do at first, so he only reached down and caught his partner's clothes in the surf, before the tide left Prez to perform on stage naked. "Prez; what's wrong baby?"

Shaking his head but smiling widely, Prez asked, "Didn't you hear them?"

"Hear who?" Keith, Derrick and Mike wondered.

"My ma and dad," Prez answered. Noticing his three friends curiously glancing at each other, Prez began laughing through his tears. "I'm fine," Prez giggled, "great in fact! It's been so long since I've heard their voices." Cringing for a few moments, Prez then bellowed laughing, "It tickles!"

Keith scowled, "What the fuck! Prez isn't ticklish! For two years I've been searching..."

"It's I-Cheya," Joel smiled, "who knows, you might get lucky and have a ticklish boyfriend from now on."

Gift given. Gift Received. Who next? I-Cheya sent as he looked around at the other five boys.

"Wha... what is going... is this thing safe?" Mrs. Hundser nervously asked, her voice shaky, as she, John and Bruce hurried down the beach to the group at the surf.

"He's safe, Mrs. Hundser," Joel replied as he turned around to see her.

Her eyebrow rose as she beheld the naked little cherub smiling up at her.

"He's my guardian and friend. His name's I-Cheya. I'm Joel... Sa'ren Joel Short, son of Spock, son of Sarek of Vulcan. Nice to meet you!"

"Oh, you're the boy from the news... wait... aren't you...." she paused. Then she moved forwards and knelt down in front of him, "You're thirteen, right? The Admiral on the news said something like that, correct?"

Joel nodded seriously. "Yeah, I'm thirteen. Yesterday! I had a great party, and I got married and everything!"

Mrs. Hundser embraced him tenderly, and then totally missed what happened to Prez.

I-Cheya, not one to wait for an answer to a question he'd asked, decided to take matters into his own... paws.

Prez yelled like a banshee as he sailed through the air and out about fifty yards into the sea, thrown by the powerful arm of the Vulcan bear. Keith, turning around and watching his beloved try and learn to fly was therefore completely unprepared for the machinations of the sneaky Sehlat.

He was stripped, dunked and in the middle of a tongue bath before he realized what had happened. Corey, Drew, Mike and Derrick laughed hysterically at both Keith and Prez. Extremely ticklish, the Sehlat tongue bath had Keith in tears, rapidly trying to protect himself. The next thing Keith knew, his ass was parked in the

Sehlat's paw and he was being tossed out over the ocean, at least twenty feet in the air, looking down into the pale blue water.

I-Cheya took hold of Mike and repeated the procedure again. "Mom!" John whined and jumped up and down. "Please! Lemme get tossed too!"

"John, let the older boys take a turn first," Mrs. Hundser nervously replied.

Joel looked up, assuring, "It's totally safe, Auntie Jen. I-Cheya knows just how to Toss-A-Kid, he's had lots of practice."

Partially covering her eyes as Mike howled laughing from high in the air, she watched until he hit the water and rose to the surface. I-Cheya already had a hold of Derrick and was stripping his clothes off. Prez was swimming closer to shore, obviously no worse for wear, she gratefully acknowledged.

It wasn't long before all six of the older boys had been cleaned and thrown into the water, and now they were back and sitting before the Sehlat up to their waists in the gently lapping waves of the Pacific. Joel looked at John and Bruce, and then at the agitated mother who was still cuddling them. "Do you want me to go first, Auntie Jen?" Joel suggested, "Then you'll know it'll be safe for John and Bruce?"

Mrs. Hundser nodded slowly, and so Joel got up and was immediately grabbed by the huffing Sehlat and promptly lofted into the air and out to sea.

John wasted no time. In fact, he had saved the Sehlat some time; he'd already stripped naked and was waiting impatiently at I-Cheya's side.

The bear blinked at him with gentleness radiating from his eyes.

Brave-Boy. I like you. Gentle. You are... Mind-Walker. Special. You shall learn when Time right

John was pushed to the sand, the waves almost reaching him, and was given a tongue bath. His giggles were musical and light, and seemed filled with the wonder that only a child could muster. Then, he was thrown. He didn't fly out quite as far as his older brothers had, but far enough for the water to properly capture his body as he landed with a huge splash. Rising to the surface, John squealed with delight, splashed the water around him and shouted "AGAIN! I WANNA DO IT AGAIN!"

"Oh Jesus, give me patience," Mrs. Hundser softly prayed.

Joel was still out in the water and gestured to the shore, but he himself remained. There was one more child to come, and Joel wanted to be sure Bruce would be okay.

Bruce shyly moved closer. "Mr. Bear? Can you answer a question for me?"

I-Cheya blinked at him and nodded.

"Will I see my mommy and daddy again?" Bruce whispered, a single tear rolling down his face.

I-Cheya closed his eyes and sighed, then reached out and breathed on the boy, filling him with love and warmth that rolled through him as it had with Prez.

Peace. Love. Your heart shall find its home. Your soul shall find its rest. Trust in the ones who came and helped you

Then, he removed Bruce's clothes and washed him. This time, the washing did not cause giggles and laughter, but Bruce seemed to

grow more and more relaxed as the Sehlat continued.

It was therefore without warning that I-Cheya picked up and threw the small boy to land next to Joel out in the sea. And the boy howled with laughter the entire way through the air.

Mrs. Hundser looked at the Sehlat, "You didn't have his parent's authority for that boy."

I-Cheya huffed his laughter at her. *I have Father's authority! You want go?*

"I'm not going naked, you hear me?" Mrs. Hundser said seriously as she hesitantly walked closer.

I-Cheya nodded and breathed on her. She was suddenly wearing her swimwear. *Good?*

Shocked, she simply nodded.

No be scared. I need be full size

Out in the water and helping Bruce to the shore, Joel smiled as I-Cheya shifted into his full adult size. The gasps from everyone were expected. Joel giggled as he came alongside Corey and Prez, "Now *THAT* is what a full sized male wild Sehlat looks like!"

I-Cheya huffed deeply then gently scooped up Mrs. Hundser. All ten boys laughed and cheered as an adult screamed with fear, flying high over head and landing further out in the ocean than any of them had.

Happier than ever splashing and playing in the shallow water, the boys joked about each of their experiences with the Sehlat and how light they felt being thrown and flying through the air.

As Mrs. Hundser finally arrived at shore and walked up out of the waves, she squinted and loudly threatened, "NOT *ONE WORD* FROM YOU BOYS, or you *ALL* sleep in SEPARATE ROOMS!"

Joel buttoned his mouth immediately. He was still on his honeymoon with his new husband Kevin, after all. Drew dunked Corey under the water so he couldn't laugh. Drew enjoyed this as his smile clearly showed. The four older boys and John simply turned away from the beach and looked out over the Pacific, softly snickering. Holding Joel's hand, Bruce glanced around and smiled widely at everyone.

Walking up to the Sehlat, Mrs. Hundser softly asked, "Can I have my clothes back, please?" Nodding once, I-Cheya breathed over her. Not only had her clothes reappeared but she was completely dry. "Thank you," Mrs. Hundser smiled and gently petted the great beast.

After checking that the naked boys playing in the surf were safe, Mrs. Hundser noticed the Vulcan security entourage had taken positions around them, forming an arc about twenty feet away. Between the armed Vulcans and this Sehlat, she realized she had no need to worry so she began picking up all the clothes scattered around the beach. As if hearing her thoughts, I-Cheya relayed; *All are safe. None challenge I-Cheya and live.* Noticing the boys were now in ankle deep water walking further down the shore, she heard I-Cheya explain; *Come. Boys hungry.*

Mrs. Hundser smiled, "Of course they are. When they're not, I know they're sick," and walked alongside I-Cheya. The security team maintained their positions and slowly followed. Off in the distance, a very large group of children ran down the bluff to the beach. There was also a small white puppy gallivanting amongst the children. Most of the kids seemed to be stripping off their clothes; she happily noticed and rolled her eyes. At the water line, the group of kids and

teens pointed and laughed heartily at the approaching group as some of them stumbled out of their shorts and fell into the sand.

Joel broke away from the others and ran up the beach. One small boy and the puppy also separated from the mass of children coming down the beach. "Kevvy!" Joel yelled.

"Sa'r!" the other boy hollered.

While the two boys spun around hand-in-hand, the rest of the larger mass of children met Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Corey, Drew, John and Bruce in the shallow surf. Considering the numbers involved, introductions were mostly organized. The youngest kids met each other, the pre-teens said hello and the teens greeted and introduced each other.

Amongst the group of boys were: Reyes Taraschke, Jonah Desak, Brice Glotzbecker, Jerrold Hebda, Thanh Espiridion, Dee Vanderwood, Lupe Jui, Richie Grunert, Dillon Helde, Lenny Cuttler, Tory Burgas, Sung Henjes, Amado Kazanjian, Hank Leve, Sean Moorhead, Horacio Sulin, Geoffrey Eckel, and twin brothers Felipe and Cesar Laurito.

The group of girls included: Christel Robusto, Davina Pinnt, Lu Gurrieri, Melonie Correro, Trish Vesley, Mercy Hellar, Julianne Smolen, Carmella Socia, and sisters Earlene and Noreen Magyar.

The white puppy with black paws trotted ahead of Joel and Kevvy and into the surf. "Blackie!" Kevvy giggled. The pup only glanced back for a moment then went and stuck his nose near Prez's crotch. Keith was next to be inspected by Blackie.

Glancing back towards Joel and Kevvy, Blackie transmitted; *Boy!* making sure that everyone could hear. *Prez-Boy and Keith-

Boy want mating. Where quiet spot? They want make noisy!*

Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey roared laughing.

Blushing redder than his hair, Prez groaned, "Oh God!"

"So much for sneaking away for a quickie!" Keith giggled.

Blackie then checked out Mike and Derrick. *Mike-Boy and Derrick-Boy already make noisy*

Next on Blackie's inspection were Corey and Drew. Tilting his head curiously, Blackie wondered *Corey-Boy and Drew-Boy not make noisy yet?*

Covering his face with both hands, Drew helplessly giggled, but Corey loudly laughed, "That's none of your business!"

Arriving in the surf near Keith and Prez, Joel giggled, "Blackie's just a pup and hasn't really learned... wolf-control. He was guarding us last night as we... ah... well, you know... our wedding night?" Joel blushed before continuing, "So he likes teasing. He'll check out every boy he meets to find out where their dicks have been." Wrapping an arm around Kevvy, Joel quickly introduced all the boys to his new husband, Kevin Thompson.

"So you guys are married?" Keith smiled. Joel and Kevin nodded and kissed. "That's so cool!"

Prez explained, "Keith and me are hoping we can too, when we turn eighteen."

Mike and Derrick chimed, "Us too!"

"How did you two manage to get married?" Keith asked.

Joel explained, "Under Vulcan law; basically, when two people love each other and already have made the commitment, you're T'hy'la. Loosely translated, that means beloved, soul mate, best friend all rolled into one. The word is used for good friends too." Cautiously, Joel wondered, "If you could get married say... next week, just for the sake of argument, would you?"

Without even thinking, Prez cheered, "Absolutely."

"Definitely!" Keith smiled.

Joel glanced over at Mike and Derrick and got a simultaneous, "Hell yeah!" Joel then looked at Corey and Drew.

Drew smiled at Corey and Corey nodded at Drew. Then Drew shyly explained, "We've got... umm... some 'noisy' mating stuff to kinda figure out still."

Kevin giggled uncontrollably but Joel only smiled and instructed, "I've learned that noisy mating stuff has little to do with real love. What matters is what you feel, in your hearts and in your minds. How you really feel about each other is the only question to answer."

"Then we would, if we could," Drew answered.

That was all Corey needed to hear. He rapidly nodded then threw himself at Drew for a deep, lingering kiss. Corey then sighed, "You're so awesome, Drew."

Drew giggled, "Glad ya think so cos I love you too, Cor."

Kevin and Joel turned to each other, smiled widely and nodded. Through their mind-meld, they confirmed, *'They're the ones!'*

Joel then said, "Could you excuse Kev and me for a little while? I just wanna introduce Kevvy to your mom."

"Oh! Yeah!" Keith loudly agreed.

Prez smiled, "Go ahead dudes, there's only about forty of us now, so we're kinda hard to miss."

Breaking away from the pack with Joel, Kevin chuckled, "There's another fifty or so that were too shy or too hungry to join us." He pointed up the bluff, south of the lighthouse and said, "The luau is up there."

"Is the stage there too?" Mike wondered.

"Yup! Ya can't miss it," Kevin answered.

Kaleo Palakiko, one of the older boys at fourteen and walking with Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick, widely grinned, "Wait till you see it! All the open fields south of Kilauea Wildlife Refuge are ours! Hawaiian TV News trucks are there too!"

Mike and Derrick slowly droned, "Wow!"

"Amazing!" Keith chuckled.

Prez nodded and wondered, "All this can't be just because of my parents."

Kaleo looked over and asked, "What happened to your folks?"

"They were in a plane crash," Prez answered, "two years ago, October nineteenth."

"I'm sorry dude," Kaleo groaned, "I didn't know."

"It's okay," Prez softly assured.

Keith smirked, "What is the hubbub all about then?"

Stunned, Kaleo replied, "You haven't heard?" Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick all shook their heads. Kaleo then loudly asked, "You've heard of Clan Short though, haven't you?"

Keith nodded, "'Course, they're the group saving all those abandoned and abused kids on the mainland."

Swinging his arms around, Kaleo explained, "See all these kids here? We were all rescued by the Clan today."

"*ALL* of 'em?" Derrick shouted.

Giggling at Derrick's reaction, Kaleo nodded, "And the other fifty-odd kids too."

Prez glanced over and made eye contact with Kaleo then asked, "You too?"

Losing his smile, Kaleo nodded and softly explained, "I was put up for adoption as a baby. The adults in the orphanage were real creeps. They'd work us like slaves, beat us... used us for sex... prostitution; you name it, they did it."

"I'm really sorry," Prez softly offered.

Kaleo shrugged then said, "Don't be; it wasn't your fault."

"That's horrible though, dude!" Keith grimaced.

"Kids having sex with adults?" Mike shuddered.

"Gross!" Derrick growled.

"You're tellin' me," Kaleo softly said. "It was either do it or starve to death."

Derrick yelled, "They wouldn't feed you unless..." and Kaleo nodded.

"Where were the fucking police?" Keith hollered.

Sternly, Prez grumbled, "I'm gettin' really annoyed now."

Kaleo nodded understandingly and said, "It's gonna be better for all of us now that the Clan got involved. They said we wouldn't have to worry ever again, and I believe them." He then snickered, "That's why this group is here; being kids for the first time ever, walkin' naked on the beach, just like we should."

After a few more steps, Derrick wondered, "What happened to the adults at the orphanage?"

Kaleo shrugged, "Don't know, don't care." He then pointed up the beach at I-Cheya and offered, "See that big bear-like creature?"

Prez nodded and smiled, "He's a Vulcan Sehlat."

Kaleo nodded and chuckled, "Don't make him angry. I seen him pick up a fat man at our orphanage like he was a pineapple and throw him through a wall." Kaleo then loudly laughed, "It was great! Exactly what that overstuffed, tiny-pricked bastard deserved!"

All the older orphanage kids that heard and understood Kaleo's remark busted up in fits of laughter.

From further up the beach, Mrs. Hundser hollered, "All you nudists and partially clad kids, FRONT AND CENTER!"

"Who's that?" Kaleo asked.

Rolling his eyes, Keith giggled, "My mom."

"She's nice?"

Prez nodded and laughed, "She's a mom, what can ya do?"

"Right!" Kaleo snickered and turned around to face the rest of the kids. With a nod from Kaleo, everybody walked out of the water and up the beach.

Mike smiled, "They all listen to you?"

Kaleo shrugged, "Mostly; I'm one of the oldest and have been watching out for them the best I could so..."

Tory piped up and explained, "Kaleo in Hawaiian means 'the voice' and man, does he use it!"

Kaleo chuckled, "Shush!"

"WHAT?" Tory incredulously giggled, "Just cos ya can't ever shut up!" and then ducked away and ran up the beach.

As the mass of children approached, Mrs. Hundser searched her mind for some way to organize and care for the lot of them. "Okay," she smiled, "My Ewa Beach boys and their friends, stand with me and put your clothes on."

Still holding Bruce's hand, John shuffled forward, kicking at the sand and whined, "Mo-om!"

Joel looked up and said, "I have an idea, Auntie Jen."

"Yes, Joel?"

"If it's alright with you," Joel began, "I-Cheya could carry all the little kids up the bluff, with you, Kev and me in the center. You hold onto the kids in the front, and kids in the back hold onto me and Kevvy."

"Sounds like fun to me!" Kevin giggled.

"That's an awful lot of weight. Would he be safe?" Mrs. Hundser fretted. I-Cheya made himself adult size and proved he could handle as many as needed. Shaking her head sadly but grinning, Mrs. Hundser mumbled, "What *was* I thinking?"

"Okay!" Joel snickered, "Under ten-years-old, get your clothes on and line up here with me and Kev!" About a dozen little kids scurried away then began gathering their clothes and getting dressed.

Mrs. Hundser instructed; "Ten and over, get dressed and stay with the older kids. It's time to eat." With enthusiastic squeals of pleasure and hurrah's, the older kids peeled off. I-Cheya lay down in the sand and Mrs. Hundser carefully climbed up onto his back. Joel followed her up and offered an arm for Kevin to grab hold and climb up.

Kaleo was the first to return with his shorts on and his shirt in his hand. He moved close to Keith and whispered, "Getting down the bluff was simple; getting up again isn't gonna be quite so easy."

Lifting the first of the small kids up, Keith smiled, "Mom?"

"Yes?" she answered, and sat the child on the Sehlat's neck.

Passing the next kid up, Keith said, "The bluff's really kinda steep."

Sitting the next child down behind the first, she simply nodded

and hummed affirmatively.

Prez passed up another kid to Joel and Kevin then began snickering. Keith loudly laughed, "Mom! It's like a seventy degree angle and at least twenty feet!" and passed up another kid.

Shaking her head sadly and sitting another child down, Mrs. Hundser smiled, "Is this the same Keith Hundser that shimmied up a palm tree only two years ago?" After passing another kid to Joel and Kevin, Prez roared laughing.

Keith passed up another kid then laughed, "You almost had a heart attack! What about John, Corey and Drew and all these other kids?"

Parking another child, Mrs. Hundser shrugged uncertainly.

"We can do it!" John loudly insisted, and then ran over and started up the bluff. Two other boys about John's size ran over and followed John. But barely half way up, all three came tumbling back down again. Laughing and giggling, they brushed themselves off and tried again.

Prez passed up another kid then had to pause again as he hung his head and became hysterical at his foster mom's obvious teasing. Derrick snickered and pushed Prez aside then offered to lift the next kid. The little girl lifted her arms and Derrick picked her up. "Thank you," she softly said.

"You're welcome," Derrick smiled.

"Hey!" Prez laughed, "How come you got a thanks and I didn't?"

Shrugging, Derrick snickered and picked up the next kid that

giggled, "Thanks, dude."

"HEY!" Prez loudly laughed and all the little kids on I-Cheya and on the ground covered their mouths and giggled. Derrick howled laughing. Prez adjusted an imaginary tie around his neck and imitated Rodney Dangerfield. "I tell ya, I don't get any respect!"

"I-Cheya can come back for them," Joel helplessly giggled.

HUFF HUFF HUFF I-Cheya chuckled. *Big boys climb small hill*

Exasperated, Keith hollered, "Mo-om!"

"Alright!" Mrs. Hundser laughed. Kevin leaned against Joel's back and laughed as hard as he ever had before.

"It's just like home, huh Kevvy?" Joel snickered. Kevin couldn't reply for laughing. Joel grinned down at Prez, "Come on, slow pokes... my other brothers are waiting to meet you. And Brant will want to invite you to dinner!"

"You're evil, Sa'r!" Kevin howled with laughter.

Passing up another little girl, Keith then hollered, "Mike! Get your butt over here and give us some help!"

Prez handed over another kid and so did Derrick. Mike picked up a kid and passed him up to Keith's mom. Prez then wondered, "Who's Brant?"

As I-Cheya began to move now that he was fully loaded, Joel called back, "Oh, just my friend..."

"A vampire..." Kevin added with repressed giggles.

Simultaneously, Keith, Prez, Derrick and Mike screamed; "A VAMPIRE?"

Mrs. Hundser giggled, "Vampires don't exist except in the movies."

"Tell that to him, Auntie Jen," Joel giggled as he looked around her and pointed to the top of the bluff. There, in a pair of board shorts and nothing else, was a pale skinned, glowing-yellow eyed boy.

"You teasing people again, Joel?" he called down to them.

"Yes, Fangie. I am."

"Oh. Okay then. What about this time?"

"Vampires."

Brant rolled his eyes, "You know, that might have worked better after the sun had set. They're never going to believe us now."

"Not until they see your cute little chompers, anyway," Joel giggled.

Brant thought for a moment as the Sehlat made it to the top in only three giant leaps and stopped beside him. "Mmm... yes, that might be convincing," Brant smiled widely and made his very sharp canine teeth drop. Seeing the fangs, Mrs. Hundser's head spun, she became dizzy and slid off I-Cheya, landing on her butt only a foot before Brant.

Offering her a hand up, Brant apologized, "Sorry, Mrs. Hundser. I won't hurt any of you."

"G...good... are you really a..." she muttered as she was helped

to her feet.

"Yes, really," Brant finished with a smile as the rest of the group finally made it up the bluff to join them. Those of the rescued kids had already met Brant and so they just grinned at the eight boys who had arrived with the lady who was still staring at Brant. "I'm a vampire. Our ancient name is Moroi, but nowadays, vampire is the term."

"But it's... the sun's still out!" Bruce bubbled, pointing to the setting sun.

"Yeah, well... I'm special," Brant grinned. "The rest of my kin are still asleep right now. You can call me a day-walker, if you want."

Shaking her head in disbelief at what was in front of her, Mrs. Hundser mumbled, "You're not going to bite me are you?"

"Why? Are you tasty?" Brant giggled, and then shook his head, "No. I don't eat friends, or parents of friends. I'm a friendly vampire!"

"Oh, that is good to know," Mrs. Hundser stated. "Well, this just beats all! College definitely did not prepare me for this, but heck, look at all that has happened! I guess I shouldn't be surprised."

Cautiously, John stepped forward and placed a hand on Brant's arm. "You're warm," John said.

Brant nodded, "I've already eaten today," and then asked, "What's your name?" John introduced himself and Bruce. Then Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick stepped forward and introduced themselves.

Beginning to come to her senses again, Mrs. Hundser wondered, "How did you boys get up here? I thought it was too steep?"

Prez chuckled, "It was before!"

"I-Cheya made some really good steps for us all to climb," Keith finished.

Derrick and Mike went over and petted I-Cheya, thanking him for making large indentations they used as steps.

I big boned I-Cheya sent.

Bounding around the Sehlat, Blackie teased *Fatty!*

I-Cheya sneezed at the small dog, sending it rolling for about fifteen feet.

Joel was still shaking with laughter, and Kevin had laughed himself so silly that he had rolled down I-Cheya's back and nearly ended up back down on the beach.

"Leave the poor woman alone! My god, I don't know what to do with you little kids," Galli giggled as he approached with nine others behind him. Three were little boys, about seven- or eight-years-old, with bright purple eyes. The remaining six were - slightly different.

"Wow! Caitian! I didn't know we had any Caitians on Earth!" Keith exclaimed loudly.

The two cheetah looking figures looked at each other, then back at Keith. "What's Caitian? We're G-Cats! He's Mercury..." one said, pointing at the other.

"And he's Hermes," Mercury smiled. "That's Mont and Bast," he added pointing at the two Lion like boys behind them, who looked a fair bit older.

"And those are our sisters, Aphrodite," Hermes finished,

pointing at a tigress looking girl, "and Artemus," pointing at the lioness.

Confused, Keith mumbled, "But... ain't you from the planet Caitian?"

"Noooo," Mont grinned. "We're from Utah!"

"Well, that's almost a different planet!" Mike chuckled.

"Not quite as far out there as Caitian though," Derrick snickered.

Joel ran over to be picked up by Aphrodite, "They're kinda a human feline hybrid. They're super strong and CUDDLY!"

Kevin ran over as well, and asked Mont, "Did you bring our clothes with you?"

Mont smiled down and passed the small boy a carry-bag. "Here, Kev."

"ARRRRRRGH!" Derrick screamed.

Everyone turned to see him fighting with his underwear, which had inexplicably risen up in a massive wedgie... and there was no-one with him.

Brant sighed and covered his eyes with his hands before laughing softly.

"I did not do that!" Mike roared before Derrick could accuse him.

Spinning around, Derrick saw no one. Squinting his eyes suspiciously, Derrick queried, "Galli?"

"Wasn't me," Galli chuckled.

Sighing impatiently, Derrick then hollered, "Alright! My boxers didn't just fly up the crack of my ass by themselves!"

Prez, Keith, Drew and Corey couldn't stop laughing long enough to even try and appear innocent.

A wicked chuckle was suddenly heard behind Derrick.

Derrick spun around again, but still - no one was there. "Come out where I can see you!"

"Are you sure?" he heard in his ear.

"ARGH!"

Prez nearly wet himself, for Derrick had jumped so badly that he ended up rolling back down the bluff to the sand below.

There was a shimmer in the air and a black robed twelve-year-old boy in a black jumpsuit appeared. He had auburn hair, fairly short cut, and hazel eyes. "Sorry, I couldn't resist," he grinned at the laughing group of kids.

"Vampire," Brant giggled. "You're more evil than me!"

"Thank you, my undead lover," Matthew giggled. He then looked at Mrs. Hundser, who was again looking shocked. "Permit me to introduce myself, dear lady. I am Prince Matthew Parnell of the British Empire, also known as 'Vampire', a Captain in the VSO."

Now knowing better than to ask questions, Mrs. Hundser smiled, "My pleasure Matthew."

Waving his little hand, one of the purple-eyed boys said, "Hi

Aunti Jen! I'm Kyle."

"And I'm Tyler," the next boy said.

Tyler nudged the next little boy, who was still chewing a cookie. He quickly swallowed and said, "I'm Levi," then pulled another cookie out of the sack he held.

"He caught my cookie fetish... sorry, Lil'Bear," Joel smiled at Kyle.

"Daddy," Levi said to Kyle and pointed at John, "that one's way cute."

Blushing, John stepped back, but Drew and Corey caught him and roughly pushed him forward again. Shyly, John waved and croaked, "Hi Levi."

Levi giggled. "Don't worry - you're nice. Somebody is gonna be lucky with you as their partner. Right, Daddy?"

Kyle nodded, "I think so, Leev."

"HUNGRY!"

Everyone looked at Joel.

"Wasting away here, guys!" the little Vulcan whined, pointing at his thin tummy. Kevin patted his arm and passed Joel his clothes. "Oh, thanks," he smiled as he slipped into his jeans and tee-shirt, and pulled his Vulcan robe over it all. "It's kinda cool here."

I-Cheya led the way into the first field.

Kyle looked down the bluff where Derrick was climbing back up. "Need a hand?" Kyle grinned. Derrick nodded and appeared just

beside Kyle, still hunched over as he had been while climbing. Shifting his eyes then spinning around, Derrick huffed then smiled, "Thanks."

"Anytime, Derrick," Kyle grinned, and then introduced himself as they began following the rest of the group.

"How did you know my name?" Derrick wondered.

Kyle grinned and rambled, "You were born December thirtieth, nineteen-eighty-nine; started playing drums just before you turned seven when you got your first kit for Christmas. Your favorite food is baked ham, dripping in brown sugar and pineapple juice. Your favorite drummers are Neil Peart and Carl Palmer. You and Mike have always been best friends and became boyfriends right after Mike's birthday, June first, two-thousand-two..."

Derrick laughed, "Holy Shit! Is there a book about me somewhere?"

Clapping his hands, Kyle laughed and nodded then pointed at Derrick's head. "You're a walking book... and your fantasy section is really cute!"

"You're freakin' me out, dude," Derrick playfully warned.

Kyle looked up and promised, "You'll get used to it... eventually."

Before them in the first field were at least one hundred tables filled with all sorts of foods. Fruits, salads and vegetables were in one group of tables; another section had meats including sides of beef and barbecued pig; breads and rolls of every type were at another group; cakes and cookies and deserts were at another group of tables and finally, milk, water, soft drinks, beer, wines and hard liquor were

served from another area.

If the food wasn't impressive enough there were, scattered around several fields south of the lighthouse, eight huge multi-panel video displays with towers of speakers on each side of the screens. Canned music was already being played through all the speakers and the video displays showed the stage with colored lights shining down on an assortment of instruments.

"Incredible!" Derrick hollered. Nearby, I-Cheya lay down with Blackie and they were sharing two entire barbecued pigs. The Sehlat bit off a rear leg and Blackie cleaned up the mess falling from I-Cheya's mouth.

Kyle smiled, "Don't be shy either; it's all free! Compliments of Clan Short, Starfleet, and The Republic of Hawaii."

"How many people are gonna be here?" Derrick wondered.

Kyle shrugged, "Everyone's invited so anyone that can make it, pretty much. We're expecting about twenty-thousand, but could easily handle fifty-thousand, if we need to."

Softly snickering for a few moments, Derrick noticed Kyle looking up curiously. "Keith's gonna need a change of clothes," Derrick explained, "he's gonna just shit!"

Kyle said, "Stage fright?"

Derrick nodded, "It's not so bad anymore, but none of us have played for an audience like this!"

"Don't worry," Kyle said, "Me, Ty and Levi will get everything sorted out." Derrick was about to ask how, but suddenly decided to leave it alone. "LET'S EAT!" Kyle shouted and ran off for the line

where people were already loading down plates and trays. Derrick hurried after him.

After grabbing a plate and a tray, Derrick found Mike, Keith and Prez. "Is this totally awesome or what?" Derrick smiled.

"Oh dude!" Mike shouted, "I was psyched to play for our town! This is gonna be so awesome!"

"Now we're playing for tens of thousands!" Prez excitedly added.

"And even the King and Queen!" Keith laughed, "I feel like The Beatles, before the Royal Variety Performance! For our last number, I'd like to ask for your help. Will the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands? And the rest of you, if you'll just rattle your jewelry..."

Derrick, Mike and Prez roared; "DO IT, DUDE! YOU *HAVE GOT TO SAY IT!*"

Laughing hysterically and nodding, Keith chortled; "Only if we close with Twist and Shout."

"Hell yeah!" Mike and Derrick shouted.

Prez leaned over to Keith's ear and seductively whispered, "You do this and I guarantee you'll sleep like a baby tonight."

"Is that a dare?" Keith asked.

Shaking his head, Prez smiled, "A promise."

"Done deal!" Keith giggled. "I think I'll have the pork."

Leaning on Keith's shoulder, Prez softly snickered.

Mike and Derrick looked at them and smiled. Mike jeered, "They're at it again."

Derrick teased, "Directly to bed, do not pass go, do not collect two hundred dollars."

"Jealous?" Keith countered.

Sinking deeply into Derrick's beautiful hazel eyes, Mike shook his head. "Not at all."

"Just giving us some ideas for later," Derrick smiled.

"GAWD!" Mike laughed, "Usually we get randy *after* we play!"

Feeling like he was being watched and not wanting another wedgie, Derrick rapidly spun around. Not far down the food line stood Kyle, Tyler and Levi, looking far too angelic. Turning to his band mates, Derrick said, "Ya know, Kyle and those other two kids seem different somehow. And I mean more than just their purple eyes."

"It's your imagination," Mike offered, "They're just little kids... with colored contact lenses, I guess."

Shaking his head, Derrick began, "I was climbing..." but suddenly stopped. Scowling for a few moments, Derrick then grumbled, "Dammit! I forgot what I was gonna say!"

"I hate that!" Keith snickered.

Prez looked at Derrick closely then assured, "If it was important at all, it'll come back to you, bud."

Behind Prez, the woman serving asked, "May I help you?"

Turning around and smiling, Prez passed her his plate and said, "Yes please, I'll have a little of everything. Some of the beef and a little barbecued pork and a chicken leg." After he was served, Prez waited for his friends then they moved over to the next serving area for salad and veggies. They soon got bread and deserts and sodas then walked across Kauapea Road and found a place to sit near Kaleo and some of the other boys they recently met.

After eating for a while, Kaleo looked over and smiled; "Is this the best food ever, or am I just underprivileged?"

Shaking his head rapidly and swallowing, Prez said, "No, it's all really great, some of the best I've ever eaten."

"You're with friends now, Kaleo," Keith offered.

Mike nodded and assured, "The Clan will live up to their promises, no doubt."

"And we'll put on a show for you all that you'll never forget," Derrick promised.

Looking at each of them, Kaleo queried; "Put on a show?"

Keith nodded, "We're musicians."

Kaleo grinned, "Oh. Are you any good?"

Mike snickered and almost choked. Derrick patted his back a few times before Mike smiled and answered, "We're only freshmen, but beat out lots of upperclassmen for our high school jazz band."

Kaleo nodded, "I don't know any jazz. I don't really know any music; it wasn't allowed at the orphanage."

"Oh man!" Prez loudly said, "My whole life has been a series of

songs from country to blues to classical, jazz and rock."

Derrick asked, "Don't you know of any music you liked?"

Kaleo shrugged, "I heard some stuff on the radio whenever I was out of the orphanage, just not enough to know titles or bands."

Shaking his head sadly, Prez softly said, "I can only guess how bad it was for you..." Scanning around the table, he continued, "for all you guys. If you'll let us, we'd like to help push your past's way back, out of the way."

Keith added, "We'll go out of our way to keep in touch after tonight. Music is the center of the best times we've ever had in our lives. We'd like to help make it that way for all of you too."

"Music directly ties to emotions," Mike explained. "A soft classical guitar piece can bring tears of joy, or tears of sadness. Rock and jazz though, they make you wanna move, dance around, either close to someone special or further apart with a whole bunch of friends, just shakin' and groovin'."

Kaleo put his fork down and sighed, "I can feel how happy it makes you dudes but... for us... sometimes we were made to dance... to please someone... sexually."

Becoming very sad, Prez placed his fork down and wiped his eyes. Looking around the table, Prez said, "I can only hope that someday soon you'll all forget the horrible stuff that's happened to you. We just met you guys down on the beach, but I know that's an experience I will never forget, because it was so much fun. None of you have given me a reason to not like you. You're kids, just like us, but with nightmarish pasts. Music shouldn't remind you of something like that. Hearing music or looking at art; paintings, photos or statues shouldn't make you feel bad; it should make you feel good and show

you beauty in all its forms." Swallowing hard, Prez paused and wondered, "Am I making any sense or just talking to hear myself talk?"

Keith rubbed his partner's thigh briefly and assured, "Not at all, baby. We all feel the same way." Facing Mike and Derrick, Keith asked, "Don't we?"

Mike and Derrick both nodded and wholeheartedly agreed. Mike pointed and said, "Ya wanna see beauty? Look to the West." All the boys around the table looked and beheld an early autumn sunset. Some of them smiled and some of them gasped as if they had never actually noticed a sunset before.

While the rescued boys continued to watch the sky change, Derrick softly said, "Is that the most gorgeous sunset ever? All the shades of all the colors in the world seem to be right there. That's beauty to signify the end of the first day of your new lives, right there."

Minutes later, when all the boys had turned back to the table again, Keith suggested, "Tomorrow morning, why don't you all try to wake up early and look to the East. Watch the sunrise. The sky will go from pitch black to dark blue, then get lighter and lighter, with more and more colors. Any clouds will just make more pastel colors. You'll love it, I know it. Tonight, you can all sleep deeply without worrying about the next day's abuse. Use tomorrow's sunrise to mark your first full day of freedom." All the boys nodded excitedly and promised they would get up early.

Whistling a catchy tune, Kyle, Tyler and Levi walked by, with their trays piled so high with food it was a wonder the little boys could carry it all.

After they had passed, Derrick said, "Ya know, there's a fine line between genius and insanity..." Pointing over his shoulder at the three boys, Derrick continued sharply; "and *that's* the line!" Everyone at the table began giggling and laughing then became completely hysterical.

Picking up a small truffle from his plate, Mike laughed, "Catch D!" Opening his mouth wide, Derrick anxiously awaited and playfully wagged his tongue. Mike tossed the truffle and Derrick maneuvered beneath to catch it. All the boys at the table began playing the game. Soon there were baby carrots, corn, peas and other small items of food being tossed in the air. Not to be outdone, nearby tables of rescued boys began playing the game too.

Walking up to the table with John and Bruce smiling widely, Mrs. Hundser scowled disapprovingly. "I hope you're proud of yourselves. Look around; even some of the girls are playing with their food."

Keith chortled, "Sorry, mom," but didn't really mean it. Actually, he was proud of himself, Prez, Derrick and Mike. This was exactly how all these rescued kids should be allowed to act, Keith strongly felt.

Losing his smile, Prez firmly offered, "They've all had more than their fair share of chores, rules and regulations, mom."

Kaleo stood, introduced himself and explained, "I don't know if you know it, but all of us were in an orphanage run by some of the worst people in the world. Not only did they give us chores, we painted walls and ceilings, we mowed and edged the lawns on the property, all the maintenance that should've been done by adults, we did. If we didn't do it to their liking, they cursed at us and beat us." Removing his shirt, Kaleo pointed out two scars, one welt and several bruises on his torso and arms. Tory stood and showed Mrs. Hundser

his own signs of abuse before Kaleo continued. "Most of us have been photographed naked and our pictures are on the Internet; even the very little kids. We were prostituted to grown men and women. Did you know any of that?"

Her mouth agape, Mrs. Hundser wiped tears from her eyes and held back her sobs. Behind her, a familiar voice called her by name. Turning around, she recognized the boy, forced a small smile and said, "Hello, Stephen! It's so good to see you again!"

Stephen Wicks, age thirteen, rescued from Ewa beach back in June by Keith and Prez nodded and began sobbing; "It's good to see you too. What Kaleo said is true. I wish I had stayed with you, cos it happened to me too." Beside Stephen was another boy named Aaron Farris, rescued by Mike and Derrick, who also nodded his agreement.

"Child Protection Services did that to both of you!" Mrs. Hundser shrieked. Both boys nodded and Mrs. Hundser immediately dropped to her knees and opened her arms wide. "I'm really so very sorry!" Mrs. Hundser cried. Both boys hurried to her and hugged her tightly, wailing unashamedly.

"Kai can tell you; he had it bad too in the orphanage. And worse when he left," Kaleo said sadly.

John looked up quickly and excitedly shouted, "Kai's here?"

Kaleo pointed to where Joel and Kevin were sitting with a boy about Corey's age. Recognizing his lost friend, John ran in that direction, pulling Bruce along with him and shouting "Kai!" Looking over and smiling, Kai stood up just in time to receive a bear-hug from John.

As a psychologist and sociologist working for the largest and arguably best medical center on Oahu, Mrs. Hundser saw literally

dozens of families every month through all sorts of tragedies, ranging from illnesses to car accidents to suicides. On occasion, she and her department had placed children in the care of ROH Child Protection Services. She knew one woman at CPS fairly well, she had thought, but now, Mrs. Hundser was sad and fuming with anger.

John and Bruce returned with Kai while Mrs. Hundser was still on her knees comforting Stephen and Aaron. While Kai relayed his story to Mrs. Hundser's horror, Levi came near, but remained at a distance and listened, quietly munching on cookies. Scanning Mrs. Hundser's mind, Levi learned the name of the woman at ROH CPS. Skipping away seemingly unaffected, Levi shared all he had learned with Joel and Kevin.

The six Starfleet Security personnel assigned to Joel converged on the table where he was sitting. "The poor lady is about to pop her cork," Levi relayed. "She's pretty much decided not to call the CPS lady and yell at her, but instead to tell Mike's daddy."

"That's okay," Joel smiled, "the police already know Clan's here and will keep out of it."

Looking up at the man in charge of his security detail, Joel smiled and said, "Lieutenant Vorik, contact the Endeavour. Get a detail to visit Mrs. Tamara Hekekoa on Oahu. They have to find out if CPS is involved with the problem, or if it is higher up. Let's see if we can follow the trail to this 'Boss' character behind the sex-ring. I want an initial report as soon as is possible."

"I will contact Endeavour immediately and report back to you before twenty-four hours," Lieutenant Vorik replied and stepped back from the table.

Turning back to Levi, Joel smiled, "Can you do me a favor,

Leev?"

"Uh huh," Levi rapidly nodded.

"Help Auntie Jen," Joel said, "she's helped us a lot without knowing it, and she's had a surprising day already. Help her to enjoy the luau, okay, Lil'Mouse?"

"That's easy!" Levi giggled, "I'll just be me; adorable and cute!" He then ran over to the table where Mrs. Hundser was now sitting. Squirming his way between the boys surrounding her, Levi innocently asked, "You sad, Auntie Jen?"

Wiping her eyes with a paper napkin, she sighed, "Yes I am, Levi."

Taking a cookie out, Levi said, "Have a cookie." He held out his little hand with a cookie and offered it to her explaining; "They're chocolate chip and *always* make me feel better." Cracking a slight grin at the boy, Mrs. Hundser took the cookie and had a small bite. "All better now?" Levi wondered.

"Almost," Mrs. Hundser smiled.

Bouncing slightly and putting his other hand on his hip, Levi impatiently reminded, "Well, ya gotta eat the *whole* cookie!"

Softly chuckling, Mrs. Hundser popped the rest of the cookie in her mouth. While she chewed, Levi weaseled his way onto her lap and hugged her tight. All the Hundser boys, Prez, Mike, Derrick, Corey and Bruce all began sniggering and felt much better, because little Levi had shown up at the perfect time. Holding onto Levi as if he were the most precious thing in the world, Mrs. Hundser smiled and admitted; "Now I feel much better."

"See!" Levi happily squealed, "Chocolate chips and cuddles *always* work!"

* * * * *

Honolulu, Oahu 7:02 PM

On her way home from work on the H1 freeway, Mrs. Tamara Hekeia had called her husband at his office. She learned that he was just preparing to leave and expected to be home around eight. They chatted about going out to dinner that evening, since neither felt very much like cooking or eating late. Exiting the H1 and driving north-east on Nuuanu Avenue, she told her husband that she was almost home and would meet him there. Then they would go to Bangkok Chef, a nearby restaurant they both enjoyed for dinner. Turning left on Bates Street, she said goodbye, but her husband reminded her of a few errands that needed to be run the next morning. She turned right on Huake Place just as he said goodbye and hung up. Flipping her cell phone closed, she pulled into the driveway of her home. Slipping her phone into her handbag and grabbing her laptop computer case off the passenger seat, she then opened the car door and stepped outside.

What Mrs. Hekeia was not aware of, was that her cell phone transmissions had been monitored from the Endeavour in orbit; pinpointing her exact location. As she fumbled with her keychain to get her house key, four shimmering shafts of light appeared around her.

Startled, she blubbered, "Wha... who..."

"Mrs. Tamara Hekeia?" the Vulcan officer standing before her asked.

"Yes?" she nervously replied, and quickly glanced around at the

other three Vulcans.

"I am Lieutenant Ra'Vesti. I have questions for you, regarding minors Stephen Wicks and Aaron Farris."

Recognizing the names, she wondered, "Is there something wrong? Has something happened to the boys?"

Realizing the woman was being cooperative and was concerned, but was obviously surprised, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti suggested, "May we go inside with you? There is a situation we must discuss."

Mrs. Hekeia huffed, "My husband will be home within the hour."

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "There is no reason for fear Mrs. Hekeia, as long as you remain cooperative and provide the information we require for our investigation."

Resigning herself to what would hopefully be a short delay, Mrs. Hekeia nodded and held up her keys. Lieutenant Ra'Vesti stepped aside and she unlocked her front door. Walking inside and turning on the lights, she asked, "How might I help you?" and put her things down on the end table.

Following her inside, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti explained, "There have been multiple cases of child abuse discovered across the Hawaiian Islands today. Some have been at orphanages, some by foster parents. We are investigating these crimes. In the cases of both Stephen Wicks and Aaron Farris, the foster parents are now in custody for violations of the Safe Haven Act."

Realizing the seriousness of the situation, she softly said, "I see."

Raising an eyebrow, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "You do not appear surprised."

Sitting down on a kitchen stool, Mrs. Hekekoa sighed and explained, "It's a very strange world. Most families have two working parents. Children come home to empty houses and fend for themselves. They then come to Hawaii for vacations, but sometimes accidents happen. If I recall correctly, Stephen came to Hawaii with his widower father, but the father had a skiing accident and drowned. There were no other relatives able or willing to take him. There was a similar situation with Aaron; both his parents were killed in a car accident. Efforts to find next of kin to take him in proved fruitless. At ROH CPS, we try to care for far too many children with limited resources. Sometimes, investigations into possible foster homes are... how shall I say... expedited. Background checks are incomplete. Family reviews are not as timely as regulations say they should be. In far too many cases, my management has me fill in and submit forms that I know are inaccurate. But, I've seen too many other highly qualified coworkers dismissed for insubordination, because they were not willing to make those sacrifices." Becoming emotional, she asked, "How can we care for so many with so few? There aren't enough CPS investigators, there aren't enough truly qualified families, there isn't enough money or hours in a day to do all that the regulations require us to do!" Breaking down in tears, she sobbed, "It never ends! I'm sorry! We all do the best we can, what we believe is best for the children, but..."

The Vulcans watched silently as Mrs. Hekekoa cried. The woman did not appear to be acting, but such emotional displays were foreign to them. They waited a minute or two for her to calm down. Finally she rested her head on her hand and softly shuddered, "Too much stress, I'm sorry."

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "Mrs. Hekecia, if you will allow a mind meld I can verify your testimony and you will gain from me a small measure of composure."

"Will it hurt? I've never..."

"It will cause you no additional discomfort," Lieutenant Ra'Vesti assured.

She nodded then Lieutenant Ra'Vesti walked around and behind her then carefully placed his fingers around her face and head. In just over a minute her testimony was verified accurate and Mrs. Hekecia became more relaxed. Releasing his hold on her, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "Tell me the name and location of the manager that had you falsify the documentation."

Pausing briefly to consider her answer, Mrs. Hekecia sighed, "Walter Saunders, 1506 Puolani Street."

Activating his communicator, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "Four to beam up." Four sparkling silver shafts of light enveloped the Vulcans and they vanished from Mrs. Hekecia's home.

Aboard the Endeavour, databases on Walter Saunders and family were reviewed and scans performed on the house on Puolani Street. Since the entire family of four were inside the house, a detail of eight armed Vulcans were transported to the Saunders' home.

Upon materialization, the Vulcan men and women heard angry yelling from inside the house. Lieutenant Ra'Vesti opened his communicator and requested an additional six security personnel be immediately transported to his location. Moments later, when the six had materialized, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti ordered, "Create a perimeter outside the dwelling. Any human attempting to escape is to be stunned." The six sharply nodded then walked off to surround the

house.

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti knocked on the front door once, but the yelling inside did not pause. Remembering that humans often used an electromechanical door bell, he quickly found the little white button and pressed it.

A man's voice inside shouted, "God damn it! Who the hell is here now? Someone answer the fucking door!"

Moments later, the door opened and a small female appeared before the security detail.

"We are here to speak with Mr. Walter Saunders," Lieutenant Ra'Vesti announced.

The girl turned and screamed, "Daddy, it's for you!"

"Fuck me!" the man hollered, "All I want to do is sit down, relax and watch TV." He paused at the front door and upon seeing the Vulcans, loudly asked, "Well! What the hell do you want?"

"Are you Mr. Walter Saunders, of Child Protection Services Honolulu?" Lieutenant Ra'Vesti queried.

"Yeah, what do you want?" Mr. Saunders angrily asked.

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "We would like to speak with you regarding..."

"See me at my office!" Mr. Saunders interrupted and pushed the door closed.

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti easily caught the door and said, "Sir, I insist that we speak now."

"This is private property!" Mr. Saunders spat, and pulled his right arm back then landed a punch on Lieutenant Ra'Vesti's jaw. The door slammed closed.

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti softly commented, "Irrational and illogical," then rapidly pushed at the door with both arms and broke it down.

"WHAT THE FUCK!" Mr. Saunders yelled, and spun around. "You're going to pay for that, you muthafucking alien bastard!" he shouted, and hurried over to physically remove the trespassers.

But before he took a second step, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti aimed his phaser and fired. Mr. Saunders crumbled and fell to the floor. Lieutenant Ra'Vesti waved for his detail to pick up the unconscious human. Two lifted the man and Lieutenant Ra'Vesti opened his communicator then said, "Beam up security detail." Mrs. Saunders came to the room just in time to see her husband and several Vulcans disappear before her eyes.

Aboard the Endeavour, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti led the two dragging Walter Saunders to the brig. Laying the suspect down and securely restraining his arms, legs and torso, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti began his interrogation via mind meld. It took many minutes, but Lieutenant Ra'Vesti discovered more information before Saunders regained consciousness. Walking out of the brig holding cell, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti activated the force field, then went to a nearby console and pressed a few buttons to activate communications.

"Vorik," came a voice through the console.

"This is Lieutenant Ra'Vesti. Allow me to speak with Patriarch Short."

Several moments later, Joel's voice was heard, "This is Patriarch

Short."

While continuing on the console to search databases Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "Patriarch, this is Lieutenant Ra'Vesti reporting."

"Yes, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti?"

"The CPS worker identified was cooperative. She falsified information under orders of her management, one Walter Saunders, who is now held in our brig. Interrogation of Saunders has revealed that he is part of a larger conspiracy. Members of the Republic of Hawaii Ministry of Commerce have been identified. What are your orders, Sir?"

Joel hummed thoughtfully and asked, "Do we know where they are?"

"Yes. One is on Oahu in Honolulu. The other two are on Kauai. They are there at the luau, Sir."

"Understood, Lieutenant," Joel replied, and then said, "I think it would be best if we didn't cause a fuss here. Let's do this quietly and tidy it up later. Transport the two on Kauai directly to the Endeavour, and apprehend the other on Oahu, then continue with the investigation and report back to me. I will talk with the Prime Minister and the King and Queen, as soon as we have more details."

In the background came the harmonized voices of Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike singing; "I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts. There they are all standing in a row. Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head. Give them a twist, a flick of the wrist, That's what the showman said." And Joel howled laughing.

Raising an eyebrow curiously, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "Very well. Ra'Vesti out." Purposefully, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti contacted the

transporter room and sent the coordinates for each of the three individuals and holding cells for each. One after another, three men appeared in three separated cells. At first they were confused, but quickly became irate. Ignoring the various rude comments and obscenities, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti waited patiently until they all finished complaining. Then he began explaining where they were, summarized why they were brought to the Endeavour's brig, and finally that he intended to interrogate each of them. "You may choose to cooperate, in which case any judgments against you may be reduced, or you may choose to remain defiant. No matter which you choose, consider your answers carefully, as they will be considered testimony in the case and will be verified via mind meld." Again the men began yelling and screaming, protesting vehemently.

From their various statements, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti postulated that none would be cooperative. Therefore, he simply entered a command and stunned the man in the first cell to the left, and then he went over and inactivated the force field to perform his duty. One after the other, he went through the same process. In less than twenty minutes, he had extracted all the information required, but Mr. Saunders came to and began ranting. Uncharacteristically for a Vulcan officer, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti stunned him silent too, simply to gain a little peace to prepare his report. As he sat at the console, he paused thoughtfully. "I believe I will need to put in for some shore leave on Vulcan - I have been spending too much time around Terrans."

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti's final duty was to transport to the brig the remaining eleven individuals and the Republic of Hawaii's Minister of Commerce that had been identified from the mind melds he recently performed. Making his task infinitely simpler, all twelve were on Kauai at the luau. One by one, shafts of sparkling light appeared around the fields south of the Kilauea Lighthouse, creating new

conversations about their disappearance. After calling for assistance to perform interrogations on the dozen new suspects, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti left the noisy brig to contact Patriarch Short.

Chapter 2

Kilauea, Kauai

October 29, 2004 7:45 PM

The stage was setup in the field to the southeast of the Kilauea Wildlife Refuge and it was huge; sixty feet wide by one hundred feet long and ten feet high off the ground. Still, it was barely a spec compared to the width and length of the field. On each of three fields further away from the stage were large six-foot by four-foot video displays raised up two feet off the ground. Surrounding each of those video displays were towers of speakers. Under the video displays were massive subwoofer cabinets. All the instruments were rented from Mozart Music in Honolulu and they also arranged for the stage, the lighting, the PA systems and video systems through contracted vendors across the islands.

Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike reviewed the set list with Drew and Corey and two adults from Mozart Music named Don and Kayla. Drew and Corey were prepared to run the PA and lighting systems on Ewa Beach, but they were now going to need assistance from Don and Kayla to pull off a professional show before an audience of over twenty-thousand. Now Corey had access to a MacBook Pro to provide stage background images in addition to the computerized lighting console. Corey and Kayla worked together to come up with appropriate videos and images for each of the twenty-eight songs. Drew and Don reviewed all the additional abilities of the sound system. Drew knew a lot for a twelve-year-old, Don immediately realized. The twelve-year-old boy understood gain staging, signal flow through the board, compressors and digital effects processors.

Moving over to the rear of the stage, Derrick, Mike, Keith and Prez changed into matching polo shirts. The shirts were made of cotton and colored silvery-gray with large black eighth note symbols on each short sleeve. The only identifying characteristics on the shirts were pictures across the back; one had a drum set, another had a keyboard, the third had a guitar and finally the last had a bass guitar. Since all four boys wore the same medium sized men's polo shirts, they rarely ever wore the correct shirts. For this performance, Keith wore the bass guitar shirt, Derrick wore the one with a guitar, Mike had the drum set and Prez the keyboard. As had become ritual, all four walked between the line-up of parents; fathers on the right to shake their hands and mothers on the left for kisses on the cheek.

The setup was similar to what was expected at the Ewa Beach Luau. Keith would be stage left with a Steinway grand piano, and a stack of electric keyboards facing the audience; Prez would be beside him with the simplest set up, consisting of two Ampeg bass amps, a BOSS GT-6B stereo effects processor, and a Gibson EB-3 bass guitar; Derrick had a nine-piece Ludwig drum set, including four mounted tom-toms and two floor toms with a wide variety of eight different cymbals; at stage right would be Mike, and a selection of guitars including a Fender Stratocaster, a Gibson Les Paul Custom, a cherry Gibson 335, a Gretsch Tennessee Rose, an Ibanez Joe Satriani Signature, and a Martin D-35 acoustic guitar. On the floor in front of Mike's microphone stand was a GT-6 guitar processor. He had several amplifiers; a Marshall stack, a Fender Twin Reverb, and a Fender Acoustasonic. The band would be all lined up in a row, but had so much more extra space, even they couldn't imagine using it all.

Pika Kalani, one of the Hawaiian radio station disk jockeys, took center stage. "Aloha! Good evening ladies and gentlemen," Pika began. "Welcome to Kilauea! We have a wonderful show in store for you tonight. Later this evening, we will hear traditional Hawaiian

music from Ho'okena. Before that, we will have a few announcements from Prime Minister Kapule. First on this evening's program, we have another local group of talented high school students from Ewa Beach, performing covers of various hits from the past forty years. Are you ready?" Pika paused as a low cheer traveled around the fields. "Oh! I almost forgot!" Pika continued, "Tonight's performances and announcements will be broadcast live over HBN TV and KHWI Radio, Mix 92.7, the best of yesterday and today." Roars of approval swelled around the fields.

Backstage, Keith laughed, "Oh shit!"

"No one told us they were broadcasting this live!" Prez hollered. Derrick and Mike turned to each other and hugged, laughing hysterically, completely ecstatic.

"Welcome to Clan Short, Prezzy!" Joel loudly laughed.

"It's gonna be great!" Kyle giggled.

"You guys don't need to worry about a thing," Tyler assured.

Hearing this exchange and turning slightly, Pika chuckled, "More surprises are in store for all of us, all night long! Ladies and gentlemen all around the Hawaiian Islands, please give a warm welcome to Old Habits!" The audience applauded and Pika rapidly left the stage while Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick ran onto the mostly darkened stage.

A low rumble and synthesizer swells blared out of the PA system across the fields. On the stage backdrop, an upside-down image of a forest and a distant mountain appeared then began slowly spinning. Then came the growl of a guitar and a bass, followed by the drums and then Keith's vocals. "[Lunatic Fringe](#), I know you're out there, You're in hiding, And you hold your meetings, I can hear you coming,

We know what you're after, We're wise to you this time (wise to you this time), We won't let you kill the laughter.

"Lunatic Fringe, In the twilight's last gleaming, This is open season, But you won't get too far, Cause you've got to blame someone, For your own confusion, But we're on guard this time (we're on guard this time), Against your final solution."

The band played the middle instrumental break, dramatically leading to the solo. Mike played the guitar solo note-for-note flawlessly.

"We can hear you coming (We can hear you coming), No you're not going to win this time (not going to win), We can hear the footsteps (We can hear the footsteps), Way out along the walkway (out along the walkway). Lunatic Fringe, We all know you're out there, Can you feel the resistance, Can you feel the... thunder?"

The band finished the song abruptly and an overwhelming applause filled the fields. Giggling insanely, Mike walked up to his microphone and cheered, "Good evening, Hawaii!"

Simply because he liked the sound, Keith repeated the final lyric, "Can you feel the... thunder?"

Prez walked up to his microphone with his hand over the top of his eyes, looking around the fields before him and wondered, "How many of you are out there?"

Without prompting, many in the crowd held up a single finger and loudly answered "ONE!"

"Oh good!" Keith snickered. "A small audience!" Picking up the Les Paul, Mike began playing the introduction for [Takin' Care Of Business](#), and the rest of the band joined in, with Mike singing lead

vocals. Corey played videos of crowded city streets, freeways, subways, and train stations. When the song finished, Keith reset his synthesizer to imitate the sounds of ticking clocks then a bunch of alarm clocks going off. Derrick began beating the tom-toms and soon the band began playing [Time](#), with Derrick handling the lead vocals. Corey found lots of pictures of various clocks, from the smallest to London's Big Ben and looped them during the song.

At the end of the song, when the applause had died down somewhat, Derrick said, "This next song is for our new friends from Clan Short." Mike began playing a Martin D-35 acoustic guitar and soon the band were joined together for [I'd Love To Change The World](#). Keith used his synthesizer to play the lead guitar solos while Mike sang the lead vocals. The band then proved that they could play more than rock by throwing in the ballad [Never My Love](#), and sang two, three and four part harmonies.

When the crowd began to settle down, Prez said, "Thanks! For our next number, we'd like to play a song for all the kids down in the front rescued by Clan Short today." Derrick began a count-in and the band played [Rescue Me](#). With only short breaks for applause, the band plowed forward with [Draggin The Line](#), the instrumental [Sleepwalk](#), featuring Mike playing the Tennessee Rose, and then [As Long As You Love Me](#).

"This next song," Prez said, "is a little something for all our new friends to hopefully learn they're not alone anymore." Prez and Derrick counted off together then Keith, Derrick and Mike sang; "Billy Shears!" introducing [With A Little Help From My Friends](#). Prez sang the lead vocals with his three friends backing him up. Across the backdrop, Corey played various cartoon images from "Yellow Submarine". They then played [Weird](#), with Keith singing lead, and [No Such Thing](#) with Mike handling lead vocals.

Taking another short break for drinks of water, Mike then said, "This next song is for all our friends from Starfleet with us tonight." Hundreds of Starfleet personnel on-duty and off-duty and their families cheered. He then began strumming the Martin D-35 again and sang lead vocals for [Starrider](#).

Switching instruments, with Derrick on bass and Prez on electric guitar, the band then played another ballad; [If](#), with Keith singing lead vocals. Returning to their primary instruments afterwards, they carried on with [Separate Ways \(Worlds Apart\)](#).

The show forged ahead with [Go All The Way](#), [Time Of The Season](#), [One Thing Leads To Another](#), [\(Everything I Do\) I Do It For You](#), [Cult Of Personality](#), [Precious and Few](#), [Silent Running](#), [Wildest Dreams](#), [Traces](#) and [Highway Star](#).

As the crowd died down again, Keith picked up a Roland AX-Synth, slung the strap over his shoulder and stepped out from behind his keyboards. Stepping up to a microphone, he then said, "This next song is for the Halloween holiday just around the corner, and for two sharp fanged dudes we met earlier tonight." The stage became dark and up on the backdrop was a black and white photo of a creepy medieval castle high atop a mountain. Derrick counted off and the band played another instrumental: [Frankenstein](#).

Brant excitedly hollered, "A song for us?"

"I love these guys!" Matthew loudly laughed.

Turning to Joel, Brant begged, "Can we keep 'em? Pretty please?"

Nodding, Joel giggled, "As humans! You may not turn them!"

Matthew faced Kyle and whispered in his ear.

Kyle shook his head but pointed at Joel. Tyler giggled as Matthew talked quickly to Joel instead. Joel grinned and knelt down. Before him, on the ground, the Shattered Sword Sa'ren appeared. Then Brant and Matthew levitated and flew across the backdrop and twenty-feet above the stage.

The crowd roared at the impromptu 'special effect'. After they had flown with and past each other several times, Brant caught Matthew and gave him a dramatic bite on the neck. Matthew's arms hung limp as if he had really been bitten and turned. The band didn't even know what was happening until the two boys began slowly lowering down to stage level. In the middle of the drum solo, they weren't the slightest bit fazed. Brant picked up Matthew as his newly turned Vampire and then suddenly both boys disappeared completely off the stage. The audience loved it!

As the band members all smiled at each other, they noticed that they each were sporting a set of new fangs; courtesy of Kyle. It only created a dramatic pause in the music. The audience only roared louder and clapped. The boys then shook off the shock and continued on with the synthesizer solo before ending the song.

While the audience cheered, all four boys looked backstage. Kyle, Tyler, Levi and even Joel were rolling around, laughing hysterically. Stepping away from the microphones, Keith, Mike and Prez shouted, "We can'tt ftsing like ftthifts!"

The three purple eyed boys didn't even stop laughing, but instantaneously, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick had lost their long canine teeth. Seeing one another with normal teeth again, they each reached for and checked their mouths. Shaking their heads sadly, but returning their attention to the audience, they began laughing at

themselves. "Okay!" Mike giggled, "That was fun!"

Prez laughed, "Those two flying around were our new friends."

"Absolutely no fear of crowds or heights there!" Keith chuckled.

"This next song," Derrick humorously began, "is titled [Fa Fa](#), strangely enough! It's originally by a band named Guster that sadly doesn't get near enough airplay. Maybe Pika could help them out a little if you ask."

Mike howled, "We could sing most of it with fangs but not all of it!" and began playing the opening guitar harmonics. Derrick sang; "When you look in the mirror, wish you were somebody else. Just a perfect reflection, you and no one else. Minutes run into hours, hours run into days. You're still waiting for someone who never ever came. Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the same again, Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the same again."

The rest of the band joined him for the chorus. "You were always saying something, you swear you'd never say again. You were always saying something, you swear you'd never say again. Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the same again, Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the same again."

Picking up the lead vocals again, Derrick sang: "Go and run through the hallways, and find your way to the door. You will end up like always, back where you were before. Can you look in the mirror, wish you were somebody else. But it's still your reflection, you and no one else."

Again, all four boys sang the chorus. "You were always saying something, you swear you'd never say again. You were always saying something, you swear you'd never say again. Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the same again, Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the

same again."

Derrick sang; "No matter where you go, you'll never find your way home. You'll never find your way home no matter where you go."

All four boys sang; "Ooooooooo. You were always saying something, you swear you'd never say again. You were always saying something, you swear you'd never say again. Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the same again. Fa Fa-Fa Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa-Fa, Never be the same again."

Keith waited for the audience applause to die down then said, "For this next number, I'd like to ask for your help. Will the people in the cheaper seats please clap along? The rest of you, if you'd just rattle your jewelry." The audience laughed and the band began playing [Twist And Shout](#), with Mike singing lead vocals. As soon as the song was over, the four met in front of the mic stands at center stage, held hands and bowed then hurried off the stage.

Returning to the stage clapping furiously, Pika Kalani stepped up to a microphone and said, "Talk about talented! What do you folks think?" The audience roared their approval. "Let's see if we can get them to come up for another song or two, shall we?"

Still toweling off backstage, but hearing Pika and the audience, all four boys shouted, "Omigod!"

Joel smiled, "What do you say?"

Kevin giggled, "Go on up out there!"

One after another, the boys nodded. As they walked back on stage, Keith said, "My voice needs a break. Let's do an instrumental and then a ballad."

Mike and Derrick nodded, "Cool."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Prez agreed.

They then hurried over to their instruments and waved at the audience. Pika strolled offstage.

"Thank you all very much," Keith said, and the audience began to quiet. "This song's called [Moonflower](#), and features Mike Gibbons on electric guitar." Mike giggled and waved to the audience.

Derrick softly counted; "One, two, three, four, one," and Mike began playing the 335 again. It was a nice, mellow Latin tune, and obviously many couples in the audience appreciated it as they began to dance. Mike played clean at first, but as the song continued, he added more distortion and sustain to make that 335 cry.

Minutes later, when the song ended to another warm round of applause, Keith moved over to the Steinway grand piano. He cleared his throat then began playing the piano introduction to [Open Arms](#). Immediately, Bic lighters began lighting around the fields, and the audience cheered. Keith began singing sweetly. "Lying beside you here in the dark; feeling your heartbeat with mine." More couples began dancing, including Joel and Kevin, Kyle and Tyler and all the parents of the band members backstage. As Keith sang the last verse, the audience became louder and louder until the final piano notes were barely heard.

Again, the band went to front center stage and bowed while the audience cheered and hollered for more. Elated, they turned and jogged off the stage. Pika again went up on stage and said, "We'll all be watching for these boys in the future, I'm sure. What an unbelievable, energetic set! Did any of you see wires holding those two flying boys up? I sure didn't! I'm sure freaked out over that

version of Frankenstein! Potty break for the announcer! We're going to change the stage set up, so everyone has the chance to grab something more to eat. The food will be served until midnight. We'll continue on with our show in about twenty or thirty minutes, with an announcement from our Prime Minister." As Pika walked off stage again, he looked up for wires and pulleys but couldn't see anything and wondered how the two boys managed to fly.

Backstage three mothers were surrounding their sons, forcing them to put on hoodies so they wouldn't catch a chill from the night air. Fathers congratulated their sons as did John, Bruce, Galli, Kai, Kaleo, Tory, Joel, Kevin, Kyle, Tyler, Levi, Brant, Matthew, I-Cheya and Blackie. Last to join in, were Drew and Corey, since it took some time to get from the PA and lighting systems near the center of the field, through the crowds and backstage.

Drew asked, "How was the stage monitor mix?"

"Fantastic!" Mike cheered. "I could hear the keyboards at the opposite side of the stage and all our vocals perfectly."

Keith smiled, "It was great bro, good job. How did we sound out in the fields?"

"Oh, dudes!" Drew giggled, "Some of those really low synth and bass notes shook the ground; especially during 'Lunatic Fringe' and 'One Thing Leads To Another'. I wouldn't be surprised if it caused rock slides off the bluff and into the ocean!"

"Imagine if we had been near one of the volcanoes?" Corey snickered. "Brant and Matthew's little bit took everyone by surprise though."

Suspiciously glancing around, Derrick wondered, "Who's idea was it to give us fangs?" Interested in the answer, Prez also scanned

the group.

Kyle pointed at Ty and Ty pointed at Levi. Giggling their asses off, they chanted "Wasn't me!"

Noticing little Bruce yawning and John struggling to not catch the yawning infection, Prez then leaned over and whispered in Joel's ear; "The little guys are getting tired. Have any arrangements been made?"

Joel nodded, "Starfleet has a recreation facility near Anahola Bay. It's not too far."

"We should probably start rounding them up," Prez said. He then wondered, "Where are they?"

"The G-Cats have a lot of them," Joel replied. "They're really protective and good with kids."

Placing a hand on Preston's back, Keith asked, "What's goin' on, Prez?"

Standing upright Prez answered, "We're making plans to get some of the little tikes gathered and into a bed somewhere."

"That's an excellent idea," Mrs. Hundser proudly smiled.

Corey's mom gasped, "Where are they?"

"We've got it covered, Mrs. Seaver," Prez replied. "They're safe and being watched. Now we just need to get them together and over to Anahola Bay."

"Lieutenant Vorik," Joel loudly said. The Vulcan officer immediately came over and Joel commanded, "We'll need a bus to

transport the youngest kids to Anahola Bay Recreation Area."

"Aye, Sir. I will return when one is available," Lieutenant Vorik said, and walked away again.

"I'm a licensed school bus driver," Mrs. Seibert offered, "Get me wheels and I'll get them there safely."

Mrs. Gibbons whispered to her husband. He nodded then she said, "I'll join you, Anna."

Anna Siebert smiled, "Thanks, Laura."

Keith's dad, Jim Hundser suggested, "If all you ladies will take the first group, the remaining men and boys will gather the other kids. Then Anna can return and shuttle another group, if there aren't any objections?"

Joel said, "Take some of the G-Cats with you. Then everyone can be tucked in safe and sound."

"It's fine by me," Anna Seibert smiled.

"Mom," John whined, "I don't wanna go yet."

"Bruce is practically dead on his feet," Mrs. Hundser admonished.

John asked, "What do you wanna do, Bruce?"

Shuffling his feet uncertainly, Bruce sighed, "I am kinda tired after sleepin' at the beach last night." Bruce then leaned close to John and whispered, "Just don't leave me alone all night, okay?"

John smiled and nodded, "You won't be alone ever again."

Cuddle up with a G-Cat for a little while. I'll be there real soon."

Bruce brightly smiled, "Thanks, pal."

"Mom, just get a room with two double beds," Keith suggested. "Then John can hang out for the next bus and be with Bruce. Prez and I will take the other bed..." Seeing his mother glaring at him with distrusting eyes, Keith laughed, "WHAT?" Wide-eyed, Mike and Derrick smiled, but didn't dare say a word. Turning away, Drew began snickering and Corey leaned against him, trying unsuccessfully to not laugh.

Prez teased, "Drew and Corey want to sleep in the same room as us!"

Drew spun around and squinted; "I don't think so!" Corey lost the battle and cracked up.

Lanna Seaver covered her mouth, but locked eyes with Jennifer Hundser, giggling, "Boys will be boys!"

Jennifer Hundser sighed, "It's so true."

Keith chuckled, "We'll share a room with Bruce and John then."

Noticing that Mike was being too quiet and obviously hoping for a room alone with Derrick, Laura Gibbons smiled, "Mike and Derrick can share a room with two of the younger boys also."

"That sounds like a wonderful idea!" Anna Seibert cheered.

Gritting his teeth, Mike glared at Keith and softly growled, "This is all your fault!" Acting blameless and uncertain, Keith held up both his hands and shrugged, but snickered insanely.

"Drew and Corey can buddy up with two other boys as well,"

Lanna Seaver giggled.

"What a wonderful idea!" Jennifer Hundser smiled.

Clapping his hands once and rubbing them together, Joel smiled, "Sounds like we have a plan. Teens and tweens buddy up with the little kids."

Since misery loves company, Derrick playfully wondered, "Where are you planning on sleeping Joel?"

"With Kevvy and where-ever I-Cheya wants," Joel giggled. "We'll be safe and warm all night!"

Mike grunted, "Like anyone's gonna argue with a Sehlat!"

"Okay men," Jim Hundser chuckled, "Let's gather everyone together."

Bill Seaver nodded, "Drew, Corey and I will search the dining areas."

"Keith, Preston and I will search the audience and around the stage," Jim Hundser said.

Taking hold of Mike and Derrick by the shoulders, Rob Gibbons said, "We'll search the fields south along the bluffs."

"Meet at the end of Mihi Road with the first bus load," Anna Seibert said.

Noticing that Kaleo seemed rather confused, Jennifer Hundser asked, "What's wrong, Kaleo?"

Kaleo shrugged, "Nothing really... I'm used to taking care of the

little kids myself. Now I don't have to but..."

"Old habits are hard to break?" Mrs. Hundser smiled. Kaleo nodded. Mrs. Hundser suggested "You could take the night off tonight, or help if you like?"

Kevin called, "Blackie, come here boy." The white puppy with black paws trotted up and Kevin asked, "Help Kaleo find the rest of the kids, okay?"

Spinning around happily, the pup sent *Find kids. Easy!* then put his nose to the ground and scampered off. Kaleo chuckled and hurried after Blackie.

Lieutenant Vorik returned and said, "Patriarch Short, a vehicle has been located and acquired. It will be available in approximately ten minutes."

"Well done, Lieutenant!" Joel cheered. "Please have it parked at the end of Mihi Road. Then have a detail escort the ladies to the bus."

Before Vorik could reply, Jennifer Hundser said, "We don't really need an escort, Joel."

Lieutenant Vorik insisted, "It would not be an inconvenience."

Joel added, "And I'd like to make sure all of you are safe. Between I-Cheya and a detail of four, Kevvy and me are more than safe."

"Thank you, Joel," Mrs. Hundser smiled.

Mrs. Seaver giggled, "A security detail for us!"

"I'm beginning to feel like royalty," Mrs. Gibbons smirked.

Joel smiled and thought, *get used to it, ladies*, but said nothing.

Lieutenant Vorik said, "If you will follow me, ladies." The women and Bruce followed Lieutenant Vorik, who assigned two security personnel to lead them to Mihi Road. The mothers began making small talk with the Vulcan man and woman, trying to understand more of Vulcan culture and sharing their own views on similarities and differences. Soon after they walked away, Lieutenant Vorik's communicator chirped. "Vorik," he answered.

"Ra'Vesti. Allow me to speak with Patriarch Short."

At the stage area, Mr. Hundser, Prez and Keith had found eight young boys and girls still sitting in the front rows of chairs. Surrounding the eight youngest were another ten between age twelve and fifteen. Seeing Keith and Prez, they willingly got up and followed.

Ten-year-old Noreen Magyar smiled, "Your band is very good."

Her sister, eleven-year-old Earlene giggled, "And soooo cute!"

While Prez and Keith blushed and softly chuckled, Noreen argued, "Talent outweighs cuteness!"

Earlene shrugged, "But combined they're an awesome group."

Noticing a little girl struggling to keep up, Mr. Hundser asked, "What's your name, sweetie?"

Looking up at the man, she shyly answered, "Carmella Socia," and suspiciously asked, "Who are you?"

Pointing at Keith and Preston, Mr. Hundser answered, "I'm Keith and Preston's daddy. You can call me Uncle Jim, if you like?"

The little girl nodded and Mr. Hundser asked, "Are you very tired?" Again, the little girl only nodded. Mr. Hundser asked, "Would you like a piggy back ride?"

Carmella shrugged and wondered, "You won't hurt me, will you?"

Tightening his jaw slightly, because someone had obviously frightened this beautiful, innocent girl, he softly answered, "I promise to be very careful and only carry you, but *only* if you'd like me to." Carmella nodded again, so Jim Hundser knelt down. Uncertainly, Carmella wrapped her little arms around the man. Rather than chancing hurting or upsetting the girl, Jim wrapped his arms behind his back and clasped his hands together to create a seat for Carmella then stood.

Hurrying to catch up with the rest of the group, Jim made whinnying horse sounds and Carmella giggled delightfully. Another little girl hurried over to Prez and begged for a piggyback ride too. The smallest boy, five-year-old Geoffrey Eckel asked Keith for piggyback ride. Soon there were three kids aboard their horses giggling and laughing their way to Mihi Road. Imitating them, five of the older teen boys picked up the remaining five of the youngest boys and girls and galloped forward.

At Mihi Road waiting near the Starfleet bus were the four mothers. On the bus already were Bruce, the four G-Cats and sixteen of the youngest kids ranging from four to ten years of age. Prez, Keith and Jim Hundser arrived with their charges and got them settled on the bus. Then Drew, Corey and Bill Seaver loaded another seven of the nineteen kids they found. Kaleo and Blackie were next to show up. Nine of his group of nineteen were under twelve and ready for bed. Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo, Drew and Corey led the teens and tweens over to the dining area to wait for the next bus and grab

something more to eat and drink. Jennifer Hundser stepped off the bus and said, "We have forty on-board and eight seats left."

Jim Hundser nodded, "Rob, Mike and Derrick have the largest area furthest away. Let's give them a few more minutes."

"Some of the little ones are already asleep," Jennifer said. "Those G-Cats are amazing! They'll cuddle up with a kid, start purring and in under two minutes the child is sound asleep!"

Jim snickered, "Wish we could've done that with our boys." He then asked, "Is John on the bus?"

Jennifer shook her head and replied, "He wanted to stay with Joel, Kevin, Kyle, Tyler and Levi. He's still with them backstage, as far as I know."

Rob Gibbons, Mike and Derrick returned only a few minutes later with eight more teenagers, five pre-teens and a crying eleven-year-old girl named Daba Sung. Before anyone could ask, Rob explained, "Daba here saw her mother disappear in what sounds like a transporter beam."

Embracing the girl, Jennifer Hundser comforted her and asked, "How about we call your father?"

"My daddy divorced mommy and don't like me or mommy," Daba hysterically sobbed.

"Okay sweetness," Jennifer sighed, "we'll get you a safe and warm place to sleep tonight then contact your daddy in the morning. How does that sound?"

Daba sniffled and nodded, "Okay."

Leading Daba onto the bus where the girl was quickly picked up and cuddled by Aphrodite, Jennifer turned to her husband and softly huffed, "This is ridiculous!" Shaking her head slightly, she then gave Jim a peck on the cheek and explained, "By the time we get there, get all the kids tucked in and return, it'll take about two hours."

Jim Hundser nodded, "Rob, Bill and I will keep the teenagers together at the dining area. We'll be waiting there when you return."

"How many do you think there are?" Jennifer asked.

Bill Seaver answered, "Twelve were with me."

Rob Gibbons replied, "I had another eight."

"Plus Kaleo's ten and my ten equals forty," Jim Hundser figured.

Placing her hand on her forehead, Jennifer mumbled, "Four to a room plus G-Cats and adults... we'll need about thirty rooms!" Giggling insanely, Jennifer smiled "I love you," and then climbed the steps onto the bus. Jim watched as the bus started down Mihi Road.

Turning and walking up to Rob and Bill, Jim smiled, "I have this funny feeling in my gut." The three men began walking over to the dining field where all their sons and the other kids were.

Bill nodded and smirked, "You too?"

"Me three," Rob added.

"I only wish I could put a finger on the reason why," Jim sighed.

Rob playfully rambled, "Investigation into available evidence implies all our lives have already changed."

"Ya think!" Bill loudly chuckled.

Jim sniggered, "It's time to research Vulcan culture and law."

"I get dibs on the culture books when you're done!" Bill laughed.

Rob accepted defeat, shook his head sadly and chortled, "Pass the legal books to me when you're done, Jim."

The dining field was sparsely occupied when they arrived except for six tables of ravenous teens not far from the field's video displays and audio system. Most of the remaining thousands of luau attendees had finished their meals and were sitting or mulling around nearer to the stage. "Oh shit!" the three men chorused.

"We forgot our own kids!" Jim laughed.

Rob snickered, "Forty plus seven! Standing room only on the next bus."

"The bar is still open," Bill smiled.

"Three beers?" Rob suggested.

Bill shook his head and grinned, "Mai Tai. It's been a long day."

At the table where Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick were sitting, Reyes Taraschke bubbled over, congratulating Derrick. "Oh man, you were so great tonight. I've got so many favorite drummers and you're now on the list!"

Derrick giggled, "Thanks, dude. Who are your favorites?"

Easily, Reyes listed; "In no particular order, Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Vinnie Appice, Nick Mason, Alan White, Alex Van Halen, Steve

Smith, Ringo Starr, Bill Bruford, Keith Moon, Ginger Baker, John Bonham, Carl Palmer and Neil Peart."

"WOW!" Derrick laughed, "That pretty much covers the best of the best for the last sixty years."

"And you are on that list too now!" Reyes reminded.

Derrick blushed, "When I feel like I can keep up with Neil Peart, I'll let you know."

"Teach me?" Reyes begged.

"Huh?" Derrick grunted.

"To play drums, I mean," Reyes corrected.

Derrick nodded and smiled, "We'll find a way to make that happen; no matter where you wind up with the Clan."

"I wanna be with you," Reyes frowned.

"And I *have* to be with Reyes," little Jonah Desak reminded. The boys all looked around in shock as the sound of giggles from an unseen source echoed around them.

To ease their minds, Derrick smiled, "We'll see what we can work out, okay?" Reyes smiled and rapidly nodded. Seeing this, Jonah also nodded and grinned.

Overhearing them, Bill Seaver snickered, "Congratulations! Mike and Derrick have been adopted!"

"It's the other way around though, isn't?" Jim Hundser joked.

Placing four Kona beers on the table before Mike, Derrick,

Keith and Prez, Iokau Ai'la'ausd smiled, "You all look like you need it."

"Thanks, Uncle Iokii!" all four boys cheered.

Joel ran over and cuddled into Iokau's side, "Hey! Whatchya doing... uh..." Joel trailed off as he sniffed the air. "Urgh... umm... seeya..." he whispered before running back off towards I-Cheya and squirreling between the Sehlat's forelegs. Mont and Hermes went over to see what was wrong.

Stage lighting was turned up and Prime Minister Kapule walked over to center stage then began his speech. On televisions and radios across the islands, the Prime Minsiter was seen or heard. "Aloha. Good evening, Hawaii. Before we continue with the entertainment from Ho'okena, I have announcements to make. This has been a very challenging day across our Island Nation..."

Prez turned to Keith and rolled his eyes. "Yawn!"

Keith smiled, "Maybe we can get some more beers and pass out before he finishes."

Derrick giggled, "All pleasure must be paid for with pain."

"Owwie!" Mike laughed, "It hurts too much!"

"Yeah," Keith sarcastically chortled, "we can all tell you like it!"

As the Hawaiian Prime Minister started to recap on the excitement of the day, John quietly moved to where Prez and the others were sipping their beers. Kyle noticed his movement and popped over quickly to hear John say, "Something's wrong, Prez. I... he don't feel good." John hadn't taken his eyes from the speaking

Prime Minister.

Kyle narrowed his eyes as he reached out his mind towards the Prime Minister. While Prez put his pint down, he asked, "What do ya mean?" and placed an arm around John's waist to pull him closer.

"Him... he feels... bad. I dunno why, but he jus' does," John mumbled.

Joel's head popped up from where I-Cheya had been cuddling and huffing softly to him. "Lil' Bear?" he called to Kyle.

"Working on it..." Kyle replied.

Joel trotted over with I-Cheya ambling along behind him.

"It's him, Elf," Kyle grated as his eyes focused on the little Vulcan. "He's the 'Boss'. He's behind it all!"

Joel's eyes seemed to fill with flame, and as he turned to look up at the still talking Prime Minister, Prez and Keith shared an uneasy glance at the rage now portrayed in the Vulcan's eyes. "Get the kids safe, Preston," Joel ordered, his voice serious and icy cold. Joel had not used Prez's full first name once and Prez immediately knew something was seriously wrong.

"I-Cheya, Mont and Hermes? You're with me," Joel ordered. "Lieutenant Vorik, contact the Endeavour. I want a detail surrounding that stage immediately." Climbing onto I-Cheya, Joel said, "Get me over to the King and Queen as fast as you can Bo-bo."

Standing and reacting on pure instinct, Prez bellowed, "All you guys and girls, I want you behind the video displays and speakers. MOVE! NOW!"

Keith, Mike and Derrick moved so fast that the table was knocked and what remained of their beers toppled over and spilled. Keith said, "Kaleo, get the youngest kids and run!" Kaleo hurried off in one direction and Keith went in another. Mike and Derrick separated and went to two other tables, gathering everyone and getting them to safety. Three fathers dropped their drinks and scurried around making sure there were no stragglers.

Seeing all the kids running in the direction of the closest video displays and sensing danger, Blackie began growling and growling. Kevin came up to the little wolf-collie hybrid and said, "I think it's time for Awesome Black Feet?"

Blackie, still growling, swelled into his full adult form. Spots and collie-like markings were visible in his fur, but overpowered by the shining silver. *Me Awesome! Me kick butt! Gee-up, Kevvy-Boy!
*

Gathered behind the video displays and getting all the kids to sit down and stay low, Prez and Keith then began counting heads. From the other end of the pack, Jim Hundser also counted. "Including me, I got forty-seven dad," Prez said.

"Same here," Keith offered.

Relieved, Mr. Hundser came up with the same count and nodded, "All present and accounted for."

Shaking like a leaf and holding onto Drew as if his life depended on him, Corey hollered, "What's goin' on, dad?"

Bill Seaver replied, "Clan Short..."

"The prime minister is bad," John interrupted. Not fully

understanding his youngest son, Jim Hundser scowled.

Rob Gibbons ordered, "Just stay down low in case things get ugly," then raced from behind the video displays towards the stage.

As Kevin rode over to Brant to tell him about what was now happening, Joel, still seated on I-Cheya's back, was in deep conversation with the King and Queen of Hawaii. "Your Majesties, my brothers have just found out that your Prime Minister has been behind the whole 'Child-Sex trade' that has been plaguing these islands for the last three years or more. He is the 'Boss' behind it all. I'm going to arrest him now, so I just wanted you to know."

King Ekewaka Aalona shook his head and sighed. "There's nothing I can do, young man. If you can, please do. My crown is empty of power."

"Yes, please do all you can. I hate to ask it, as you've done so much already, but please," Queen Adamina begged, "please, help us by dealing with him!"

Kyle and Ty popped in next to the King and Queen as Joel turned away. "Popcorn?" Kyle asked with a grin as he held out a bowl.

"I love a good pig roast... and that guy is definitely a pig!" Ty giggled as he snuggled into the Queen's side and grabbed a fistful of popcorn.

Across the Hawaiian Islands, many tens of thousands of television sets and as many radios were tuned into the program. They had witnessed Old Habits performance, and were now listening to the Prime Minister's speech when a dozen shafts of sparking light appeared across the field immediately in front of the stage. What was not seen on television were the other transporter beams across the rear

and sides of the stage.

Acting as if he were unaffected by the appearance of many Vulcan Security officers, the Prime Minister continued his prepared speech about the outrage he personally felt regarding child abuse, pornography and prostitution. On stage left, Mont and Hermes climbed the stairs flexing their claws. Joel and I-Cheya climbed the stairs from stage right. Together the four approached center stage.

Interrupting the speech from atop I-Cheya's back, Joel said, "I think you can stop lying now. From telepathic links, Clan Short has learned that you've allowed this Child sex trade and have profited from it. You are under arrest."

"Pardon me?" the Prime Minister spluttered. "On whose authority?"

"I am Sa'ren, son of Spock, son of Sarek, Acting Patriarch of Clan Short, Prince of Britain and Defender of the Commonwealth Alliance. On my authority! Your guilt has already been established."

The Prime Minister smirked, "I don't think so..." He quickly moved his hand to draw a concealed pistol.

A number of highly interesting, yet shocking things happened at one time.

There were multiple shouts of 'Gun!' from the Vulcans and the two G-Cats on the stage.

The Prime Minister had his eyes focused on Joel's chest, bringing the gun up and into line to fire.

There were multiple sounds of 'thunder' from guns, a crackling of a phasenmorph, a 'swoosh' of a knife being thrown by Rob

Gibbons, and many 'phhhshhhhttt' sounds from phasers.

The Prime Minister screamed even before all the above slammed into him.

The small pistol in the Prime Minister's hand did manage to go off.

I-Cheya started bitching as the bullet from said pistol lodged itself in his nose, but didn't harm him though; he's I-Cheya!

The Prime Minister hit the deck, dead.

Joel looked down from I-Cheya's back at the lifeless body. "You are sentenced to death... in case you didn't know it... but I think you did... okay, that was a total waste of breath. Blow your nose, Bo-Bo."

'Clunk'

I want ointment. Nose feel funny.

"I'll get you a nice cow to eat later."

Mmm... cow...

All in all, the Prime Minister was killed with extreme prejudice. Or, as Brant so eloquently stated: "Now, that's one totally fucked up dude, Dudes!"

Joel slipped down from I-Cheya's back. "Your Majesties. Will you come up here, please?" he called towards the King and Queen.

Hearing Joel call the King and Queen, forty-seven kids and two adult men stood and walked around the towers of speakers to witness what was about to happen. Kaleo grinned, "Music, politics, violence and vaudeville! That's what I call entertainment! What a night!"

Snickering, giggling and laughter broke loose.

Kyle and Tyler were still debating whether or not to let the Royal couple walk up there or transport them, when Galli just giggled and folded himself, the two popcorn munching Mikyvis, and the Royals to the stage.

The King looked down at the serious face Joel was giving him, and his eyes widened as a crown appeared on Joel's brow followed by a complete suit of armor that appeared and covered him. "Yes, your Highness?" the King asked, having heard Joel's self revelation in the exchange with the now ex-Prime Minister.

Joel said, "The Islands and Republic of Hawaii need leadership, and the Government has been found lacking. Are you prepared to regain that which was taken from you?"

"I... I do not know, Highness. I never expected for this to be a possibility," the King answered.

Joel clasped his hands together and said one word, "Sa'ren."

Before the now emotionally numbed King, the Shattered Sword of Surak appeared in the young Vulcan's hands.

/Are you willing to rule with compassion, to guide with wisdom, to be the first in defense and the last to have comfort? Are you willing to be all you can be?/

The King blinked and stared at the light-pulsating Shattered Sword. He nodded slowly, "I will try... but I don't think I'm ready."

/That is why you are the perfect choice. I Crown you King of the Jeweled Isles, Lord of Hawaii and Protector of the Pacific Rim./

The Sword burst out in brilliant light. Around the heads of both the King and Queen beautiful Crowns appeared. On the apex of the brow of each, the Royal standard of Hawaii was clearly visible.

"Welcome back, Your Royal Majesties," Joel grinned as he bowed from the waist.

Meanwhile, Kyle was giving I-Cheya a nice relaxing nose rub to ease the poor Sehlat's irritated nostril.

It took a five hour investigation by the coroner to work out whether it was the knife thrown by Rob Gibbons, one of the twenty-six bullets from Hermes or Mont, the phasenmorph blast by Kevin, the combined impact of ten stun phaser beams, or the complete liquefaction of the poor sod's bones that killed him. The result was - Cause of Death: Stupidity. The autopsy completed, the medical examiner then typed his resignation, signed it and left it on his desk. "Now I've seen it all," he softly muttered as he left the building.

* * * * *

Anahola Bay, Kauai

Saturday, October 30, 2004 5:45 AM

Kyle popped into the dark hotel room beside the bed where Prez and Keith were sleeping. Reaching over and gently placing a hand on Preston's shoulder, Kyle melodically but softly called, "Prez? Hello, Planet Earth calling Preston O'Brian." Prez only hummed, but didn't move. "Come on big guy," Kyle giggled.

Rolling away from Keith, Prez groaned, "What?"

Kyle giggled. "If you don't get your butt outta bed, I'm gonna eat

all of the food!

Becoming more aware, Prez asked, "Breakfast already?"

Kyle hummed affirmatively and playfully explained, "With so many already eating, there won't be any *sausages* left for you or Keith."

"Kyle?" Prez wondered, "How did you get in here?"

"The usual way," Kyle giggled.

Prez opened his eyes and saw the time. "It's not even six in the blessed morning!" Prez grumbled. "You have five-seconds!" Kyle giggled and Prez counted down. Reaching two, Prez turned on the light. He couldn't see Kyle anywhere, but still heard his giggling. "Where are you?" Prez hollered as he got out of bed. "There better be a good reason for this, Kyle!"

"There is!" Kyle laughed, "Sunrise on the beach, remember?"

"That was for the rescued kids!" Prez loudly reminded.

Keith opened his eyes, rubbing them as they burned from the light. "Prez? Who are you arguing with?"

"Kyle," Prez answered, and searched the entire room.

Bruce woke, rubbed his eyes, and seeing Prez naked, looking under beds, tables and in closets, sat up and shook John awake.

Sitting up and seeing his older foster brother racing around, John wondered. "What's goin' on, Prez?" Prez hurried into the bathroom and turned on the light, then checked behind the shower curtain.

Realizing that he could no longer hear Kyle's laughter, Prez left the bathroom and sighed, "I'm cracking up."

Bruce leaned closer to John and whispered, "He's got red hair *everywhere*... and something's wrong with his wiener."

John began snickering and tried to explain; "When us guys get older we'll all grow hair down there, and our dicks get bigger too."

Hearing John's explanation, Keith laughed then got out of bed and went over to calm his confused boyfriend.

Seeing Keith naked and with a morning erection, Bruce's eyes widened and he gasped, "Wow!"

Placing both hands on his boyfriend's shoulders, Keith softly said, "Prez? It's okay now, baby."

On the bed, John watched a stunned Bruce watching two naked teenagers and laughed his ass off.

Bruce blushed and asked John; "We'll all get like that?" John could only nod and laugh more.

"He was here, Keith," Prez insisted, "I wasn't dreaming it, swear to God. He said there were sausages for breakfast..." John grabbed his belly and rolled into a fetal position laughing, causing Keith to begin laughing. Prez continued; "... and that we had to join everyone down on the beach for sunrise." Prez frowned, "You believe me, don't you, Keith?"

Keith nodded and gave his boyfriend a quick kiss. "I believe you, Prez, and that's not why I was laughing. I'm laughing because Bruce is now more confused than you." Prez only tilted his head curiously and Keith snickered, "I guess Bruce never saw his father or

any other older dudes naked before. You runnin' around in your birthday suit is enough to start the whole series of sexuality questions."

"You know, teenagers are goofy!" Tyler giggled as he appeared between John and Bruce.

Startled, Keith jumped and spun around. "See!" Prez hollered.

Keith stammered, "How... where..."

"Don't forget 'when!'" Tyler giggled, and stood on the bed.

Bruce hollered, "How'd you do that?"

"It's just one of the things we can do," Tyler giggled. He pulled French toast sticks seemingly out of thin-air and handed one each to Prez and Keith.

"What about us?" John loudly reminded, and suddenly he and Bruce found French toast sticks in their hands.

"Kyle evolved into an anti-energy being," Tyler explained helpfully. "But because he was the only member of his species, he turned me into one too."

"And the next day, they had me!" Levi said as he popped in next to Bruce, handing him a glass of orange juice.

After taking a sip of juice and absorbing the cryptic answer, Bruce seemed satisfied.

John wasn't quite so easy though and asked, "So you guys can just appear where-ever ya want, when-ever you want to?"

"Pretty much," Tyler grinned. "We can go anywhere in space

and time in any dimension, and transform matter into energy or the other way around. There's lotsa stuff we can't do, but there's plenty that we can."

"That's gonna take some getting used to," Keith smirked.

Prez triumphantly grinned, "So Kyle was here in our room."

"Course I was," Kyle snickered as he appeared, and then asked, "Are you always so cranky in the morning?"

"Not always," Prez smirked.

"He's *never* cranky with me or anyone at home," Keith honestly said.

Prez answered, "What trips my switch is teasing at five-fifty in the BLESSED MORNING!"

"Five forty-eight and thirty-four point six seven two five seconds... more or less!" Kyle giggled before holding out a breakfast sausage. "Wanna nibble of my sausage?"

Uncontrollably everyone in the room started laughing again, even Bruce.

"Okay guys," Kyle giggled, "the sun's gonna rise today at six thirty-nine exactly. If you're gonna shower, you've got less than thirty minutes to get it together and meet us down at the beach. All the kids are getting ready... so are Mike and Derrick... and Drew and Corey. There's more French toast sticks, sausages and juice on the dresser." Prez looked over at the dresser. Lo-and-behold there was a plate overflowing with food, and four glasses of orange juice waiting. One after another, the three Mikyvis waved and disappeared.

Picking up another French toast stick, Keith mumbled, "Gotta admit, they come in handy sometimes," and took a bite. John and Bruce raced over and dug in.

Between bites, Bruce wondered, "So when will my dick get big and hairy too?"

John laughed so hard that partially chewed French toast was spat across the room.

"It depends," Prez grinned, "some guys in my class were already that way when they turned twelve."

Keith added, "I started right after I turned twelve."

John snickered, "Drew's got some pubes and he just turned twelve."

Prez said, "Lots of stuff changes, Bruce; your voice will get deeper, your shoulders will get wider, you'll grow facial hair, start needing to shave and everything."

Awestruck, Bruce gasped, "You guys shave?"

Keith nodded, "About once a month; our mom doesn't like seeing us with mustaches, even though they ain't nothin' but soft hairs."

Bruce smiled, "Still! How cool is that?" Turning to John, Bruce asked, "Are you?"

Shaking his head furiously, John said, "I'm only ten; not much older than you."

"It's not that special, Bruce," Prez said. "Little boys become big boys, who become young men, who then become adult men. That's

just natural." He then chugged the last of his juice and smiled at Keith, prompting, "Meet me in the shower."

Keith nodded, up ended his glass of juice and followed Prez into the bathroom.

When the door closed, Bruce asked John; "They take baths together too?"

John nodded, "They stand and take showers. I take showers more than baths too."

"Oh," Bruce scowled thoughtfully. "I only ever take baths. My mommy says the tub is too slippery and I might fall down."

John nodded, "It does get slippery, so ya gotta move real slow and be careful, 'specially if there's no rubber mat in the tub. Drew and me took baths together for a long time. Then Drew wanted to shower alone. When I asked him to show me though, he did." John paused and asked, "You want me to show you?"

"Would you?" Bruce gleefully squealed.

"Sure, dude," John chuckled, "I guess I was about your age and Drew musta been about ten."

Standing upright more proudly, Bruce giggled, "I already feel so much more... bigger... like grewed up. You guys are so cool to me. Thanks, John."

Wrapping an arm around Bruce's shoulders, John smiled, "No problem, bro." Bruce inexplicably began to shed tears, and John asked, "What's wrong?"

Wiping his eyes, Bruce shrugged, "I dunno... I miss my mommy

and daddy... and can't wait to see them again, but... I like it here with you... and Keith and Prez and Drew too. I got no brothers, but now I got four! Soon I'll have to go back to Ohio... and... say goodbye."

"Well, you better call me and write me!" John said, "I'm gonna miss you too, Bruce, but don't cry now, cos we're still together, okay?"

After a few moments, Bruce weakly smiled. "You always know the best stuff to say and do for me, don't ya?"

Shrugging, John giggled, "That's just what brothers do! Come on, the shower's off so Prez and Keith are done. It's our turn now." John pushed his boxers down and Bruce stripped out of his shorts and briefs. Together, they hurried into the bathroom, past Keith and Prez and into the shower.

In twenty-five hotel rooms all the kids found brushes, combs, toothbrushes and toothpaste and even new clothes to change into. At six-twenty, doors began opening and the kids all made their way across Aliomanu Road, beyond the trees and onto the beach. The last out of their rooms were Keith, Prez, John, Bruce, Mike and Derrick. Making their presence known, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick sang: "Good morning mister sunshine, you brighten up my day. Come sit beside me, in your way. I see you ev'ry morning, outside the restaurant, The music plays, so nonchalant, ahh!"

Silhouetted against the brightening sky, many of the kids were sitting in the sand facing east, but some chose to stand, including Kaleo and Tory. They both turned around, while Tory giggled, Kaleo laughed, "Good morning to you dudes too!"

"How is everyone?" Prez smiled.

"Fed, clean and dressed in new clothes!" Kaleo excitedly

answered.

From the northern end of the beach, everyone heard the sound of bongos being beat and turned to see Kyle, Tyler and Levi marching toward them. Suddenly, Derrick had a set of four tenor drums before him and drum sticks in his hands; Mike had a snare drum before him and Keith and Prez found themselves holding pairs of cymbals. Following the tempo and rhythm being set by the three Mikyvis, Derrick and Mike played along. Kyle, Tyler and Levi loudly sang: "[Why don't you ask him if he's going to stay](#)? Why don't you ask him if he's going away?"

"Why don't you tell me what's going on? Why don't you tell me who's on the phone? Why don't you ask him what's going on?"

"Why don't you ask him who's the latest on his throne? Don't say that you love me! Just tell me that you want me! Tusk! Just say that you love me! Don't tell me that you... Real savage like! Tusk!"

Finished with their morning performance, Kyle made all the drums and percussion vanish.

Maureen and Earlene ran up the beach to Prez. "Are you stayin'?" Maureen asked hopefully.

Glancing at the four boys, Earlene said, "You can't just go away now; we need all of you."

Walking up and joining in, Kaleo said, "Tell us, what's really going on."

"I really don't know what to say," Prez stammered.

Keith nodded and explained, "We're not Clan Short. We rescued a handful of kids off Ewa Beach, but that's nothin' compared to the Clan."

"I strongly disagree," Galli said.

"So do I," Joel added.

Kevin offered, "You just don't realize what you've done."

"Last night, while we ate, you told us how you'd like us to be," Tory reminded.

Kaleo clarified, "We're here because you suggested it. You made us really notice the sunset; you entertained us, and for lots of us, it was the first time we really listened to music and paid attention to the words. The lunatic fringe you sang about – the low-lives that made us service their perverted wants."

Tory remembered, "Takin care of business? Well, ya have. Time? The time is now."

"You dedicated a song to the Clan last night," Joel said. "I'd love to change the world, but I don't know what to do?"

"Tell me where is sanity?" Kevin asked.

Kaleo recited; "I'm destitute, I'm looking for protection, I want love, And physical asylum, A vagabond, Running from destruction, Cover me, While I seek defection. Rescue me... rescue us."

"Didn't you know what you were singing?" Tory excitedly asked.

Prez was opening and closing his mouth like a fish. Keith still had some control over his vocal faculties, "Uh... you... you're inviting

us into the Clan then?"

Joel grinned and exchanged another look with Kevin, Kyle and Tyler. All three nodded at him. Joel turned back to the four boys before him. Rather than speak to them, he raised his voice, "Corey, Drew, John and Bruce! Front and center!"

The four boys came out of the crowd and gathered around Keith, Prez, Derrick and Mike. Joining up with them, they appeared as puzzled as the older four.

"Let it be known that as of 6:54 AM, Hawaii Time, on the 30th of October, Clan Short Pacific Rim Division has been established by the authority of the Acting Patriarch of Clan Short, me! Sa'ren Joel Short, son of Spock, son of Sarek of the House of Surak of Vulcan. Also, by my authority, I now appoint the Division Head - until it can be ratified by Cory Short, when he takes up his responsibilities..."

Joel let his voice trail off as he looked at Prez with what Prez was *certain* was a wicked, mischievous glint in his eyes.

"YOU'VE GOT TO BE JOKING!" Prez bellowed. He turned to Keith then stammered, "No, not me, a leader?"

Shaking his head, Keith chuckled, "Well it ain't me!"

"Don't look at me!" Derrick and Mike playfully chorused.

"Prez?" Joel called softly.

Prez turned and looked down at the small thirteen-year-old Prince.

"Keith is just as able as you to lead these guys. But he'd jump in before thinking everything through. You... you would think more

carefully. With Keith at your side, both traits - which are both good - will guide and guard this Division. And so, you are the Division Director."

Looking up into the morning sky, Prez loudly cried, "MA-AAAAA!"

From the tree line behind him, standing amongst the group of eight adults, Jennifer Hundser answered, "Sorry, hon... I agree with the little elf!"

"TRAITOR!"

"Thank you, hon!" Mrs. Hundser giggled.

"Are you sure, Joel?" Prez asked, his eyes shining with uncertainty.

"Yes," Joel nodded. "But, if you think it'll help, would two others telling you help?"

"What do you mean?" Prez worried.

I-Cheya moved into the center of the group and breathed on Prez, causing him to tremble violently.

"Son, I agree with Joel. You are all I could wish as a son and heir," came the voice of Prez's father - and everyone heard him.

Then came the voice of Prez' mother. "You make me so proud. You will always make me proud. These children need you Preston - more than you know. Be a father to them all. I love you... we love you so much."

Prez fell to his knees as tears poured from his eyes. He reached and pulled Joel into his arms, barely managing to say, "I... I accept,

elf," before dissolving into gentle sobs. The other seven boys quickly moved to surround them with hugs, and soon, everyone moved in to close all spaces and gaps. Only I-Cheya and Blackie were outside of this mass circle of kids and adults.

Joel lifted his voice as he looked around at the group surrounding him and Prez and started to sing:

"Well, I know this life is filled with sorrow
And there are days when the pain just lasts and lasts
But I know there will come a day
When all our tears are washed away,
With a break in the clouds
His glory coming down
And in that moment:

"Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
That God is love and love has come for us all
Every heart set free, every one will see
That God is love and love has come for us all"

Joel lifted Prez' tear stained face and kissed his nose, then sang the next verse as if for Prez alone:

"For anybody who has ever lost a loved one

And you feel like you had to let go too soon

I know it hurts to say goodbye

But don't you know it's just a matter of time,

Till the tears are gonna end

You'll see them once again

And in that moment:

"Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess

That God is love and love has come for us all

Every heart set free, every one will see

That God is love and love has come for us all"

Everyone gathered there easily picked up on the music and words and sang the last line a few times... and a tremor ran through everyone as Joel, the Shaper, confirmed a Destiny that would remain untarnished forever.

"Love has come for us all...

Love has come for us all!"

Prez stood and was quickly embraced by Keith who was hugged by Drew, Corey, John and Bruce. Mike and Derrick joined the group. Overwhelming cheers and applause erupted from the crowd of almost one hundred kids and adults on the beach.

Smiling widely at the enthused mass of kids, Prez silently thought; Clan Short Pacific Rim Division, that's a mouthful. We've got to shorten it somehow. C.S.P.R.D.? P.R.D.? He began snickering

insanely.

Keith felt and heard him. "What's so funny, Prez?"

Prez shrugged and softly chuckled, "We are The Rimmers!" Burying his face on Prez's shoulder, Keith cracked up.

"I knew I should have named them something else, Kevvy," Joel giggled as he heard what Prez said.

"I don't know," Kevin mused, "it does have a certain poetic charm to it, don't it?"

Bruce innocently asked, "What's a rimmer?" Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike blushed scarlet.

"It's because of their taste in steakhouses," Drew explained. "Because they like to eat Outback." Corey laughed so hard that he could only stagger around dizzily.

John pointed at Prez and laughed, "You're a real Queen and a leader now!" Drew and Corey howled laughing.

Prez playfully counted down; "Five... four... three..." Giggling, John and Bruce backed off into the pack of kids.

Derrick asked, "What's the first order of business, Prez?"

"Good question!" Prez replied, and glanced around thoughtfully. "What do you think, Keith?"

Keith shrugged, "Everybody's in such a good mood, we should let them be kids first. Then we can get some organization."

Prez shouted, "Let's go swimmin'!" As more hoorays began, Prez then loudly added, "Clothes optional!" Clothing began flying off

almost all the kids.

"Prez," Joel said as he touched the older boy's arm, "There's just a few things I need to tell you before you go swimming."

"Oh?" Prez wondered.

Joel said, "First, me and the others need to go soon. You don't know this yet, but since nine in the morning yesterday, me and them have been at two different places on Earth... at the same time. We have to go back to the correct point yesterday, so we can do the rest of... forget it, it's a time thing. Just know that right now, the rest of the Clan don't know about this Division. Once we leave, wait until at least eleven before calling the Clan in Orlando. The Vulcans from the Endeavour will show you how to do that."

Prez hummed thoughtfully for a moment or two then asked, "You can stay for a little while longer, at least go swimming with us?"

"Sure," Joel giggled. "It's only seven! We've got a few more hours!"

Thankful, Prez grinned.

Joel pointed at Iokau, who was talking with Prez' parents. "Talk to him, Prez. That's the next thing. He has a lot to tell you, and a lot of land to give to the Clan to build your Division."

Seeing Prez deep in thought, Keith softly said, "There's a lot of kids here, baby. They need places to eat, sleep and study, not to mention some sort of recreation."

Wide eyed, Prez softly gasped, "Oh dear Lord! So much for so many!"

Locking eyes with his love, Keith said, "Don't worry, Prez. I'll help every way I can; so will Derrick and Mike."

Already seeing the couple in action, Joel smiled, "You've got the resources of Clan Short behind all your decisions. You'll have anything and everything you need; housing, food, clothes, you name it and state a reason why then sit back and watch it happen." Joel then stripped and called I-Cheya; "Come on, Bo-bo!"

Play Time. Toss-The-Kid

I-Cheya grabbed Prez, got him naked in a split second, and then sent him flying far out into the waters that were colored by the rising sun. Hearing screaming, all the kids stopped what they were doing. Watching their new leader soaring high over their heads, they cheered and laughed.

While other kids were still being tossed by I-Cheya, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick began bouncing ideas around and wading in deeper water.

"We need a base," Prez offered. "Some place for all of our families to live, and for all the rescued kids to meet with us."

"Those meetings need to be pretty often," Derrick said, "at least at first, until everyone feels comfortable. We don't want them to think they're only slightly better off now than they were before."

Keith considered, "That base needs to be on Oahu. We all have responsibilities beyond the Clan. This coming week, there are school day jazz band concerts Tuesday through Friday. Then two more, Saturday afternoon and night."

"That brings up schools for the kids," Mike said. "Some of 'em would do fine in regular schools. Others are gonna need special

attention after what they've been through."

Prez asked, "So should we have everything on Oahu or scattered around the islands?"

"We need to talk with Uncle Iokii, to find out what land he's got for us and where," Keith reminded.

"Each location's gonna need a cafeteria with good food," Derrick said. "Like us, they need to be able to grab a snack or a drink whenever they want, day or night."

Refining that idea further, Mike added, "They shouldn't have to drop coins in machines either. Sodas, juices, milk and water with a wide variety of cakes, candies, chips, cookies and fruits, all available anytime they want."

"We'll need on-site medical facilities too," Prez said. "And evening on-call nurses and doctors, just in case."

Keith grinned, "Okay, so far we've hired special education teachers, chefs and cafeteria support people, pediatricians, general practitioners and nurses too. Can you say mega-bucks?"

"The more locations, the greater the cost," Derrick reminded.

"But how much do we need to consider costs?" Mike wondered. "My mom's an accountant and could keep our books for whoever might care. My dad's a cop and can coordinate security."

"My dad's a lawyer for legal stuff, and mom can handle a lot of psychological issues," Keith reminded.

Derrick offered, "My dad's a construction contractor and could probably coordinate any maintenance stuff for us. Mom's a school bus

driver; she could probably handle some transportation, but she can't be doin' that on several islands at once."

Keith suggested, "So let her coordinate transportation and do some driving now and then on Oahu. These guys have probably never seen a museum or zoo in their lives."

Keith almost sank when Tyler appeared on his shoulders. "Stop worrying so much and eat!" Ty giggled as he held out two hands full of perfectly dry cookies. With Keith kicking and paddling like mad to keep afloat enough to breathe, Ty smiled, "We get money from every planet in the Federation, and a few that ain't. You got more money than Fort Knox; use it or you'll get to help Sean collect new friends for Timmy!"

While Keith kicked, paddled and sputtered, Mike and Derrick laughed at him. Prez chuckled, "I'm almost afraid to ask, but who are Sean and Timmy?"

"Sean is my big bro, and Timmy is my nephew... he likes animal and fish friends." Ty giggled. "Timmy's also in charge of making sure everyone showers!"

Mike laughed, "Ah! A bathroom monitor and... what does Sean do?"

"Rooster tails!" Ty giggled as his hands refilled with cookies from nowhere.

Letting that cryptic answer pass, Prez asked, "So what do we need to be thinking of? There's almost a hundred kids to take care of here."

"What you need made available." Ty answered seriously. "Unca Morrow will handle almost everything; he learned not to piss off Cory

a while back."

"Uncle Morrow?" all three chorused.

Tyler rolled his eyes and shook his head. "Yeah... you know, the Admiral dude in charge of Starfleet?"

The four glanced at each other and smiled. Keith finally managed to say, "Unlimited resources, Vulcans, Starfleet and the Clan Sho..." His mouth sank below water again.

Prez chortled, "So we only have to talk with Uncle Iokii and find out where we can set up shop?"

"Yep." Tyler giggled. "Now tell your boyfriend to stop playin' fishie and take me surfin'. I ain't never been surfin' before, an' I think his shoulders are just the right size to enjoy it!"

Finally, Prez cracked up laughing. Mike and Derrick shouted, "Stop screwin' around, Keith!"

"Me too, Unca Prez!" Levi giggled as he appeared on Prez's shoulders. Both Keith's and Prez's surfboards appeared in front of them. Just as Prez sank, he grabbed hold of his board and pulled himself and Levi onto it.

Keith climbed onto his surfboard and sat there catching his breath for a few moments. Looking up at Tyler, he complained, "Ya know, having my board nearby might've been a good idea!"

"Sowwy!" Ty smiled and then asked, "How about I make it up to you?"

"Sure," Keith said. The word had barely escaped his lips when a large swell picked the board up and propelled them forward. "Oh

crap!" Keith shouted, and he pulled his legs out of the water. Starting to stand, Keith glanced quickly over to his side and saw Prez also standing with Levi on his shoulders. Looking in the other direction, Keith realized this wasn't a normal wave.

Mike and Derrick had the best view of their friends. While most of the waves in the protected bay were two or three feet, Keith and Prez were riding a six-footer! Derrick turned to ask Mike if he thought that might be a Mikyvis wave, when Kyle appeared on his shoulders. "Board!" Derrick yelled, a split second before his face sunk beneath the water.

"Oh! Yeah!" Kyle giggled. Then Derrick's and Mike's surfboards appeared floating in the water before them. Climbing onto his board, Mike cracked up thinking, thank goodness there's only three of 'em! Spitting and sputtering salt water, Derrick climbed up onto his board. "Hurry up!" Kyle whined. "Joel has already caught a few nice waves!"

Derrick looked up and coughed, "Joel? He can surf?"

From atop their wave, Prez looked around in the water before him in shock. He had never expected the strange little Vulcan prince to be able to surf. He nearly lost his balance laughing when he saw what was really going on.

I-Cheya had obviously stopped his game of 'Toss-the-Kid' and was now playing 'Living Aircraft-Carrier'. He was swimming to each wave, and letting himself be the surfboard while Joel and five or six more kids were excitedly giggling and squealing from his back.

Approaching the shallows, Keith and Prez turned around and dropped back down to paddle out again. Levi lay down on Prez's back while Tyler did the same with Keith. Seeing Derrick with Kyle and

Mike atop another unnaturally large wave, Keith told Tyler, "We're gonna break through this wave. Hold on tight." Prez said virtually the same to Levi moments before the second wave passed. Atop the wave, Kyle was laughing so loudly that even while Keith and Prez were momentarily under water they could still hear him.

"That was so much fun!" Tyler giggled. "Can you handle a bigger wave?"

Snickering, Keith replied, "No bigger than ten feet, Ty."

"Kewl!" Tyler laughed.

"Let's wait for Mike, Derrick, Joel and I-Cheya," Keith suggested as he reached the area where waves were breaking. Sitting up, Keith noticed that Levi had disappeared from Prez' shoulders.

Nervously looking around for little Levi, Prez loudly asked, "Where'd he go?"

Pointing towards the shore at Joel and I-Cheya, Ty giggled, "He's letting Joel know."

While Mike, Derrick and Kyle approached, at the beach, Joel was unloading some of the smaller kids. Then Joel called Drew, Corey, John and Bruce to join him aboard I-Cheya. Mike, Derrick and Kyle lined up beside Prez, Keith and Tyler. Sitting there waiting for I-Cheya to paddle out, Levi appeared upon Mike's shoulders. Looking up, Mike smiled, "My turn now?"

"Course!" Levi giggled.

"We're equal opportunity Mikyvis!" Tyler snickered. Once I-Cheya had joined the lineup, Ty giggled, "Ev'rybody ready?" and glanced around. Suddenly, the swell from hell arose beneath them,

and everyone began paddling.

Standing with Tyler on his shoulders, Keith could tell something was amiss and hollered, "I said ten feet, Ty!"

"This is ten feet!" Ty giggled.

"Oopsie!" Kyle laughed, "Plus my ten feet!"

Almost in unison, Keith, Prez Mike and Derrick screamed; "SHI-I-I-I-I-I-I-IT!" while three Mikyvis giggled hysterically and I-Cheya chuckled.

At the shoreline, Kaleo noticed the shadow of a twenty-foot high wall of water approaching and gasped, "Oh fuck!" then hollered, "EVERYBODY OUT OF THE WATER NOW!" Picking up two little kids, one under each arm, Kaleo hurried to shore. Big kids helped the smaller kids onto the beach and everyone watched the wave crest. Four surfboards and I-Cheya slid down the front of the wave and turned almost parallel to the shore.

The four women on the beach were horrified and buried their faces into their husbands' shoulders.

Prez silently prayed, "Ma, dad – get a few rooms ready. We're all gonna die! Clan Short Pacific Rim Division created and destroyed all within an hour!"

"My dads are both nuts," Levi giggled before the wave gently lowered to a far more manageable level.

"Spoilsport!" Joel whined.

I-Cheya just huff-huffed his laughter.

The wave shrunk down to a normal Anahola Bay two footer and

everyone rode it in to shore safely.

"It's alright now," Jim Hundser chuckled. Jennifer's head popped up and she saw all the kids stepping off their boards in shallow water.

While the older boys were happy to have enjoyed the ride and survived, John and Bruce were bouncing and spinning around. "That was awesome!" John loudly laughed.

His heart still beating a mile a minute, Prez carried his board to Kaleo and passed it to him. "I think I've had enough for one morning," Prez smirked.

Kaleo grinned, "I've never surfed before."

Prez nodded, "Two and three footers are perfect to learn on." Prez then smirked, "Just watch out if Kyle or Tyler are around."

Kaleo chuckled, "You dudes looked awesome though."

"I need to have a chat with Uncle Iokii," Prez explained, then asked, "Do you have any island preferences – where you might like to live, I mean."

Shaking his head, Kaleo said, "It doesn't really matter. Tory and I are good friends and would want to be together."

"Good idea," Prez smiled. "Now I have something I'd like for you to think about."

"What's that?" Kaleo wondered.

"I need a communications officer," Prez answered. "You would handle all communications between the Islands and with other Clan Short divisions. You'd have to be on Oahu at our main base though."

"Consider it done, Prez," Kaleo proudly smiled.

Prez shook Kaleo's hand then said, "Your first task is to ask everyone where they would like to be and who they want to be with. Once I'm done talking with Uncle Iokii, I'll know where we'll have our Rimmer camps."

Kaleo softly snickered, "Rimmers!"

Prez chuckled, "It was either that or C.S.P.R.D."

Taking the surfboard, Kaleo grinned, "You realize that makes you head Rimmer?"

Cracking up, Prez laughed, "You'll work out fine... mouth Rimmer!" Kaleo roared laughing.

Dressed in boardies and a T-shirt, Keith walked up smiling, "What did I miss?" and then handed Prez his clothes.

"Just the first of thousands of Rimmer jokes!" Prez chuckled, and then began getting dressed.

"Ah jeez," Keith snickered.

Kaleo said, "See ya later, dudes," then walked over to the water line with the surfboard. He stopped and gathered about two dozen kids around him then asked them all to begin considering where they might like to live and who they preferred to stay with.

Once Prez was dressed, he said, "Let's get our core Rimmers and go chat with Uncle Iokii."

"Oh jeez!" Keith laughed, "Core Rimmers?"

Prez smiled, "You, me, Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey." While

they walked together towards Drew and Corey, Prez said, "I'm gonna be the division leader, but you're my second in command, Keith."

"I know, baby," Keith smiled.

"Whenever I'm not around, you act in my place," Prez relayed. "Also, Kaleo is now our communications officer."

"Kewl," Keith nodded, "He's an excellent choice."

"He's already asking all the other kids where they want to live and with who."

"Whom," Keith corrected and grinned.

"Whatever!" Prez giggled, and waved Drew and Corey out of the water. They came running over and Prez said, "You guys are part of my core team. Get dressed and let's talk with Uncle Iokii."

Wandering further up the beach, Drew hummed thoughtfully and asked Corey, "Do you remember where we left our clothes?"

Shaking his head, Corey giggled, "I can't even really remember what I was wearing!"

Seeing Mike and Derrick riding a wave back to shore, Keith waved and hollered, "Come on! Stuff to do!"

Soon everyone was gathered and Prez began; "I'm head Rimmer and all you guys are my core Rimmers. Kaleo's communications officer and is therefore mouth Rimmer!" Everyone began blushing and giggling. Prez continued, "Whenever there's a decision to be made, I want as many opinions from all you guys as possible. Since I'm ultimately responsible and there's only six of us, decisions may not always be by democratic vote, but I'll always try to explain why

I've chosen to do something a certain way." Glancing around, Prez asked, "Every one kewl?" and his team nodded. "Our first decision is where on Oahu to have our main base, and if we can have multiple bases, where they should be." Receiving multiple positive replies, Prez said, "Let's go then."

Iokau Ai'la'ausd, also known as Uncle Iokii by all the kids, was one of the nicest adult men on Oahu. He was also one of the wealthiest on all of the islands. A native Hawaiian, Iokau was forty-seven years-old and had long black hair with streaks of gray running from his temples back down his pony-tail. He treated almost everyone with the same kindness and respect, unless you got on his bad side; in which case he would completely ignore that individual as if he or she didn't exist.

Uncle Iokii was near the other adults when Prez and the guys approached. Prez asked, "Can we take a walk and have a chat, Uncle Iokii?"

"Of course," Iokau smiled. "I would always make time for my favorite boys." Turning to the other adults Iokau said, "Excuse us please."

As they started to walk, Prez relayed, "Joel said we needed to talk with you about setting up our new division."

"Yes," Iokau began, "You boys might remember, I was accused of doing bad things not too long ago."

Keith nodded, "Yep, my dad's firm represented you, and all the charges were dropped."

"We all knew it was nothin' but lies," Mike assured.

"It was, yes," Iokau said. "What you don't know is why that

happened. I learned of the problems within our government, and tried my best to stop them. But, I was a single voice against many. Over the years, it cost me land and money.

"Since last night, much of my land has been restored to me by the King, with Clan Short assistance. I would donate some of my land to the Clan, as a way of expressing my thanks. The land south of the Kilauea Wildlife Preserve, where the luau was last night, is yours. On Oahu, much of the land north of Ewa Beach Park, from Fort Weaver Road northeast to Iroquois Avenue and bordered by North Road is yours. Also, on Oahu for your use is the land from Essex Road on the east, to Coral Sea Road on the west, and from Eisenhower Road north to San Juacinto Street. The United States Government has been leasing from me the land where Marine Corps Base Hawaii stands. You may use the land on the northern end of that peninsula as it is virtually unoccupied."

The boys' heads were reeling, but Iokau continued; "On the east side of Maui, the land east of Highway 360 to the sea and north of Waikoloa Road to the Waianapanapa Park border is yours. On Hawaii's northeast side, there is approximately two square miles of unused land. It is northwest of Paauhau Park. Kia Manu Road runs through the area.

"I have already arranged to sign over all the stated lands to Clan Short in perpetuity and will sign the legal documents first thing Monday morning."

As he smiled at the amazed looks on the boy's faces, Iokau decided it was time to put the icing on the cake. "Oh, I almost forgot... your parent's houses are paid off too. Call it an 'Aloha Gift' from the owner of the land they were built on."

Prez overflowed, "Uncle Iokii, you are an extremely generous

and great man. How can we ever thank you enough?" and offered his hand.

Firmly shaking Preston's hand, Iokau stated simply, "Care for and help the children that need it most. Teach them to care for and help each other."

Keith added, "I think the new Clan division should talk with the Royals and have a street named after you."

"YEAH!" Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey cheered.

Wiping away a happy tear, Iokau smiled, "I have always loved children, but never had any of my own. Now I feel I've done something that will far outlive me and provide for future generations."

"You've got almost a hundred kids you can call your own now," Derrick reminded, and gave Iokau a firm hug.

After giving Iokau another hug, Drew nodded and smiled, "Please visit us as often as you can."

"We'd love to see you," Corey assured, and gave him a third hug.

Iokau nodded and smiled, "I promise to stop by. If there is ever any way I can help, please let me know. Now, go back to your new Clan and share the good news."

The boys ran back to where the rest of their Clan was playing on the sand and in the surf. On the way, Prez told Keith, "Get all our parents to join us down by the water. Don't tell them what Uncle Iokii said."

Keith laughed, "Just to watch their mouths fall open, but for

once, we won't hear a word!"

"The rest of you dudes, gather our new Clan," Prez said. Four positive replies gushed forth. "I'll get Joel and our mainland brothers," Prez chuckled.

In a matter of minutes, all the adults and kids were collected and anxiously waiting. Standing around and beside Prez were his core team, Joel, Kevin and all the others from Clan Short on the U.S. Mainland. Smiling as widely as he ever had in his life, Prez loudly announced; "You've all been told to think about where you'd like to live and friends you'd like to stay with; now I'll explain why. We just had a talk with Uncle Iokii. Clan Short Pacific Rim Division will have bases on four islands. On Hawaii, we'll have about two square miles of land. On Maui, we'll have another large lot of land. On Oahu, we'll have three more large lots of land; one in Ewa Beach for our base of operations and the other two for whatever purposes we decide. Finally, here on Kauai, we have the land south of the wildlife refuge, where we had the luau last night.

"Our goal is to make certain you all have the best possible living arrangements; no more than two to a bedroom, so no one will ever feel alone or cramped; you'll all have recreation facilities and easy access to beaches; and if there's been some hobby or special interest you have, let us know what you need, we'll do our very best to supply it. When I asked Uncle Iokii how we could ever repay his generosity, he only asked that we care for and help each other. We can always try our best to do that, can't we?" A roar of affirmations exploded from all the kids.

Keith leaned over to Prez and said, "Uncle Iokii's gone, baby."

Nodding, Prez waited for everyone to chill then said, "Being the generous and humble man he is, Uncle Iokii has left, but he has

promised to visit us often. When we see him again, we're all gonna show our gratitude the best ways we can, won't we?" Everyone nodded and again agreed with Prez, albeit more softly.

When the sounds died down, Prez said, "Soon, more of our Clan brothers and sisters will be visiting us. We're gonna show them the paradise we've always dreamed of, aren't we?" Another enthusiastic cheer burst forth.

Mike chuckled, "You're more of a ham than I am!" and Prez playfully shoved him.

"I only have one more announcement," Prez began and watched the group of adults carefully. "Since all our lives are changing for the better, Uncle Iokii also wanted to make sure our parents could devote their skills and time to the Clan. Towards that end, all their mortgages are paid in full." As expected, eight mouths hung open in amazement. Prez laughed, "Now all you guys have eight real parents that care, and our parents have more kids than they can count!" All of the rescued kids laughed and surrounded their new surrogate parents.

Feeling a tug on his shirt sleeve, Prez turned and faced Joel.

Joel beamed, "You're a natural leader, Prez."

Prez shrugged, "I'm just doin' what I feel needs to be done."

"And you'll do great; I know it now even more. We've got to go real soon though. Is there anything else you need?"

Prez thought for only a moment then said, "You told me to contact the Endeavour after eleven. Exactly how am I supposed to do that and what should I say?"

"All that stuff you just told your clan, Unca Iokii already shared

with me and the commander of the Endeavour," Joel smiled. "They know exactly what lands are put aside, down to the nearest centimeter. Everything you need will be provided by the Endeavor or by Clan Short."

Excitedly, Prez rambled, "We need buildings for them, we need schools, the kids need clothes..."

Joel interrupted, "You'll get all that and more. Trust us Prez; we've done this before."

Kevin handed Prez a Starfleet communicator and explained, "Just open this up, tell them who you are and let the Vulcans do their bit."

Joel nodded and smiled at his husband then looked up at Prez. "Soon after that, more Clan will be showing up. Anything you need, just ask and it's yours."

Prez sighed, "It just feels like so much and I really don't feel prepared."

Keith took hold of Prez and repeated, "You will never ever be alone, baby."

Derrick said, "You've got us too, bro," and took hold of Mike's hand.

"And Corey and me too," Drew reminded.

"We're the core Rimmers!" Corey giggled. The group around Joel heartily laughed; even I-Cheya huffed a few more chuckles.

Relieved, Prez finally smiled. "Don't be a stranger, Prince. As hectic and odd as it's been, we're really gonna miss all you guys."

"Prez, we've really gotta go, now," Joel said with a small smile.

Prez's face fell slightly.

"Don't worry, doofus!" Joel giggled, "In a few hours you'll be meeting most of the Clan. You'll either see me later today, or sometime over the next few days - I might be busy making Kevvy squeal!"

"Hey!" Kevin protested as he blushed bright red.

"Oh, okay... Kevvy might be making me squeal!"

"Sa'ren!" Kevin groaned, "You're making it worse!"

"I know... but you still love me, right?"

"Grrrr..." Kevin managed through his giggles.

Joel kissed Prez on the cheek before slipping over to where I-Cheya, Brant, Kyle, Tyler, Kai and the two Lions were. "See ya soon, guys!"

They vanished.

Around Galli, Levi, Kevin, the two Cheetahs, Aphrodite, Blackie, Artemus, and Matthew all waved... and folded away.

Prez turned to Keith with a blank, uncertain expression on his face. Keith grinned, "I've always been proud of you, Prez, since before we became partners; even more so now. You know that, right?"

Nodding, Prez sighed, "It's just... been a busy day. It's not even been a full day. First Bruce then Galli, Vulcans, a Sehlat, a silver wolf-collie... hearing my parent's voices for the first time in over two years. Until yesterday, we've seen two or three Vulcans; now there's

six of 'em keeping us safe. I can only wonder what they're protecting us from?"

"You know the answer to that already," Derrick said.

Mike nodded and reminded, "From the same kinda dirt-bags that would hurt any of those kids playing over there."

"It's a good thing I can handle change pretty easily," Prez smirked.

Bruce meekly offered, "You guys found *me*, got me food... and kept me with you this *whole* time. Nobody else woulda done what you guys done."

Pointing out at the bay, Drew said, "Look at them, Prez. There's four dudes out there surfen' that've never done it before." Pointing at the beach, Drew smiled, "Me and Corey showed those others how to build a sand castle."

"Most've 'em have never done that, or even knew what a sand castle was," Corey added.

Derrick nodded, "Stuff we've always done and just take for granted, they're clueless about."

Keith then suggested, "Until it's time to call the Endeavour, let's get to know some of them."

"Excellent idea!" Prez smiled, "I only know a little about ten of them."

"How about we split up," Mike offered, "There's more than eighty of them and only eight of us."

"You're including me?" Bruce squealed.

"Why not?" John wondered then explained, "Until we find your folks, what else can ya do?" Bruce shrugged and John snickered, "Come on, let's teach them how to make a *real* sand castle!" They then hurried down the beach to where another bunch of kids were playing.

Soon, the remaining couples had stripped their shirts off again and were out in the water, mingling amongst their new Clan. Drew and Corey waded out to another group of similar aged kids and began teaching them to body surf. Mike and Derrick joined some others that didn't even know how to swim and began teaching them. Kaleo had taken to surfing easily and was sharing one board with Tory who was having a more difficult time learning.

Keith and Prez mingled around learning about some of the kids and how they wound up needing to be rescued by the Clan. For a short time, Keith went in one direction to talk with Drew and Corey while Prez went in another to talk with Mike and Derrick. Prez also took the opportunity to talk with his core team members once more about how long Joel's team was on the islands; none of them were to mention how long Joel was around. Prez and Keith then shared what they had learned about the kids and came to the conclusion that at least half of their Clan was orphaned visitors from North America or Japan. Of the remainder, many were Hawaiian orphans, but some were abandoned and some were runaways. In every case, the kids were either abused by foster parents or by the orphanages that were supposed to care for them. They had no one to protect them.

Hours flew by until Prez realized it was ten of eleven. Sitting in the sand beside Keith, between the adults and some of the kids, Prez anxiously checked his watch. He looked at the small Starfleet communicator, taking note of the Starfleet symbol and the Clan Short

emblem on the casing. He wondered what type of metal the casing was made of; it was too light to be steel, but too strong to be aluminum. Nervously looking at Keith, Prez wondered, "What should I say?"

Keith answered, "Just what Joel said, your name and that you're the leader of the new Clan Short Pacific Rim Division."

"My stomach's twisted into a big knot!" Prez smirked. "What if they ask what I want? Jeez, any question at all is gonna make me wanna puke!"

Wrapping an arm around his lover, Keith grinned, "Just remember they're Vulcans. No jokes, puns or innuendo. They won't laugh, but I prob'ly will!"

Rolling his eyes, Prez huffed, "Oh great!"

Checking his watch, Keith said, "I've got eleven o'clock."

Prez checked his watch and waited for the digital display to read 11:01 AM. He opened the communicator.

A female voice flatly said, "Starship Endeavor. T'Rel."

With as much confidence as he could muster, Prez said, "This is Preston O'Brian, leader of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division."

The Vulcan women said, "Your communication was expected Mister O'Brian. Prepare for transport."

Prez gulped and weakly asked, "Transport?"

"Aboard the Endeavour."

Softly whining, Prez stood and so did Keith. "There will be two

of us," Prez said into the device.

"The identity of the second person?"

"Keith Hundser."

"Acknowledged."

Closing his eyes, Prez said, "We're ready."

"Standby."

Keith softly chuckled, "This is so rad!"

Keeping his eyes closed, Prez pocketed the communicator and whimpered then reached for Keith's hand.

With his eyes wide open, Keith watched as the beach before him faded. Then it seemed as if he were seeing gray walls beyond the beach where blue sky had been. The beach faded away and the gray walls began to have a tan color. They were then standing on the Endeavour's transporter pad. "Awesome!" Keith softly cheered, and then turned to his exceptionally pale boyfriend. "It's okay, Prez."

Prez opened his eyes, looked around and took a deep breath. A tall Vulcan man stood before them. "Welcome aboard," the man said, "I am Lieutenant Ra'Vesti."

Since Prez hadn't yet regained his ability to speak, Keith said, "It's our pleasure, Lieutenant. I'm Keith and this is Prez... Preston."

Ra'Vesti nodded and said, "Follow me."

Walking behind the Lieutenant and out of the transporter room, Prez never let go of Keith's hand. He looked around at the walls

barren of any art and asked, "Why are we here, Lieutenant?"

"I will be assisting with the development of your facilities," Lieutenant Ra'Vesti answered.

"Thanks," Prez smiled, but then remembered what little he had learned about Vulcans in school and softly explained, "We've not had much exposure to Vulcans. Please pardon us if we seem to act... inappropriately."

The Lieutenant only nodded, but didn't say a word. He led Keith and Prez to another room then sat down at a console. After pressing a few buttons, an image of Kauai appeared on the display then zoomed into the north shore. South of the Kilauea Lighthouse and Wildlife Preserve, the perimeter of their new facility flashed.

"It's huge!" Prez gasped.

"And includes Secret Beach, where we met everyone yesterday," Keith smiled.

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "The Endeavour is prepared to provide structures for all expected needs. Is there anything specific you would like added?"

"We haven't been told what to expect really," Prez stammered.

Keith nodded and offered, "We don't even know what to ask for."

"If you will allow," Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "I will program our replicators to reproduce all structures and additional facilities similar to Clan Short Headquarters Orlando? I will then organize all structures for all Pacific Rim Division bases."

Prez said, "We'd like our main headquarters located on Oahu, in Ewa Beach."

"The land bordered by North Road and Fort Weaver Road," Keith recalled.

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti entered more commands and an image of Oahu appeared on the display then zoomed in closer to the south side of the island. He pointed at the flashing perimeter confirming; "This will be Pacific Rim Division headquarters?"

Prez and Keith answered, "Yes."

Moving to the west, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti then suggested; "This would be an adequate area for incoming children requiring special care or quarantine due to disease. It is near an airfield."

After briefly checking with Keith, Prez then said, "Agreed. Thank you, Lieutenant."

"Are there any other considerations?" Lieutenant Ra'Vesti asked.

"So we know what to expect," Prez began, "could you show us what the living quarters will look like?"

Soon, images of the exterior of a building came up on the display. It was two stories and 'L' shaped. Virtual reality images took them in a door and then to the first dorm room. The floor was carpeted dark green, the walls were painted with two tones of blue, darker blue on the bottom third and light sky blue on the top. The room appeared spacious with two beds, two closets, two dressers, two desks and chairs. All-in-all, it seemed bigger than the room Prez and Keith shared and very comfortable.

Satisfied, Prez then explained, "We just want these kids to be as

happy as possible. Sure they need medical facilities and schools, and all the usual required stuff, but we'd like them to feel at home."

"We're musicians," Keith began, "every site needs to have access to a variety of recreational activities; soccer fields, basketball and tennis courts, musical instruments, art and painting supplies, video games, TV's and stereos."

"These kids don't have the simplest things; not even clothes, shoes or sneakers," Prez said. "They need everything."

Lieutenant Ra'Vesti nodded and continued entering commands for another minute or two. He then stood and turned to face Prez and Keith asking, "Scanning of the children is in progress. Clothing will be provided for all. Your additional necessities have been noted and will be made available. Will there be anything else you require?"

Prez wondered, "How long will this take?"

Keith added, "There are more than eighty kids down on the beach. They've gotta be getting hungry by now."

"Within six Terran hours all facilities will be ready for utilization," Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said. "There are eighty-seven rescued plus fourteen family and friends, not including you. We will provide sufficient food and beverages for your Clan, gentlemen."

Prez and Keith smiled at each other. Six bases on four islands in six hours was nothing less than amazing to them. Facing Ra'Vesti again, Prez said, "The only other thing I can think of asking is for Clan Short to be notified of our progress and location."

"We're looking forward to meeting them," Keith smiled.

"I will contact Clan Short Headquarters," Ra'Vesti assured.

Standing up straight and attempting to act formally in boardies and a T-shirt, Prez said. "Thank you, Lieutenant, you've been very helpful. I'll certainly make mention of this to my superiors in Clan Short."

"Follow me to the transporter room," Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, and led the way with Keith and Prez trailing behind.

Frowning, Prez softly told Keith, "I hate this part."

Squeezing his partner's hand, Keith chuckled, "It's fun! Open your eyes this time and watch!"

Prez sighed, "If only I didn't know the basics of how I was being transported."

Keith leaned closer and whispered, "I'll check all your molecules later tonight." Wide-eyed, Prez giggled happily.

While Prez and Keith stepped onto the transporter pads, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti took position behind the control console. Holding up his hand in the familiar Vulcan method, Lieutenant Ra'Vesti said, "Peace and long life to you Preston O'Brian and Keith Hundser."

Keith and Prez easily returned the gesture saying, "Live long and prosper, Lieutenant." Then Prez closed his eyes and held his breath. Seeing an easy opportunity, Keith reached over and tickled Prez just before the transporter beam activated. Frantically brushing Keith's hand away, Prez opened his eyes and laughed. Keith cracked up laughing, thankful that he now had a ticklish boyfriend.

Arriving back on Anahola beach, Prez squinted and mooed then softly counted down. Hysterical, Keith didn't wait for 'three' and took

off running down the beach and into the water. While they chased each other into and out of the surf, Derrick and Mike came over.

Mike shouted, "Where the hell did you go?"

Ducking away from Prez, Keith laughed, "Aboard the Endeavor."

"You know what this means?" Derrick queried.

"No, what?" Keith giggled.

Derrick snickered, "Prez was flying!"

Coming to an abrupt halt and realizing the truth, Prez hollered, "OH MY GOD!" Keith, Derrick and Mike roared laughing then raced away. Looking down and kicking at the water, Prez realized that he was so concerned about the transporter beam; he hadn't even considered flying in a spacecraft in orbit. When he looked up again, many of his new Clan was hurrying up the beach to where tables of food now stood. Wondering what kinds of foods had been provided, Prez hurried over.

Noticing Prez only a few yards away at the first of four tables, Keith loudly chuckled, "Check it out, Prez. It's like a buffet restaurant at the beach! There's enough food here for a small army!"

Prez smiled, "Well, we are a small army now." On the table before him were hamburgers, cheeseburgers, hot dogs and assorted condiments. The next table over were sandwiches of every type from peanut butter and jelly on white bread, to heroes with meats on rolls. The third table had large bowls of salad, various fruits and cookies by the score. The last table had milk, sodas and water on top with more large buckets of drinks below it. The Endeavor had even provided

trays, paper plates, plastic utensils, napkins and large trash cans.

Jim Hundser walked over and asked, "Why don't you invite our Vulcan security team to join us?"

Prez nodded and smiled, "Good idea!" then wondered, "Where are mom and the other women?"

"The little ones have been asking for bathroom trips back to the hotel," Jim Hundser grinned.

Prez giggled and scanned the dunes until he found Lieutenant Vorik. "Let me invite the Vulcans," Prez said. "I'll be right back." He then hurried over to Lieutenant Vorik, politely asking him and his team to join them for lunch.

Lieutenant Vorik replied, "Our assignment is security."

"Come on," Prez grinned, "you guys must be hungry. At least allow one at a time to come over and join us. Security won't be drastically affected that way."

"Very well," Lieutenant Vorik nodded, "I will inform my personnel."

Blankly staring at the man, Prez then softly asked, "Are we that different? I mean, our two races have known each other for eighty years, according to our school history books. We humans like to get to know each other, at least a little bit. I understand that you're working, but take a break, relax a little."

"Our races are not 'that different', as you say," Lieutenant Vorik admitted. He then explained, "Vulcans are always content. Our race does not understand human emotions, or how they drive individuals. For example; it would be similar to you understanding the language

and culture of ancient Egypt. What has occurred here and at other locations on Earth would never happen on Vulcan. It is alien to us."

"It's completely despicable to me too," Prez shared. "Most humans aren't like the ones responsible for all these kids. Did you know that I'm an orphan like most of these kids?"

"I did not."

"I am. The Hundserts are my foster family. They've helped me in so many ways since my parents died; I can't begin to list them all. They treat me the same as any member of their family, so much so that I treat them like my family. It's more than that though. Keith and I have fallen in love. We're boyfriends, partners for life... what's the Vulcan word?"

"T'hy'la"

"Yeah, that's it; T'hy'la. Now you know something more about me and I know more about you and your culture. For me, it makes you more than just a security officer. It makes you an individual, a person; not just a name and a job." Pausing, Prez said, "Anyway, our families would enjoy getting to know each of you. Please join us for lunch."

Lieutenant Vorik nodded and after a brief pause said, "Thank you, Preston O'Brian. It is... my pleasure to know you."

Prez giggled, "Same here. I'll see ya later, okay?"

"Affirmative."

As Prez walked back to the tables for lunch he thought; for a Vulcan, that was almost emotional, and began softly snickering.

Preparing himself a tray with a burger, a hot dog, salad, an apple and two sodas, Prez went over to where the rest of the core Rimmers were sitting with Bruce, John, Kaleo, Jonah, Reyes and Tory.

Keith was telling them about their trip to the Endeavour, and now that Prez was with him, he said, "We asked to see what our dormitory rooms would look like. It was great, like a fly-by of an 'L' shaped, two story building. Then the view moved to ground level and we went inside."

"How big was it," Tory mumbled through his sandwich. Swallowing, he asked, "Like, how many rooms per building."

Keith scowled, "I'm not sure."

Washing down a mouthful of food, Prez said, "There was text on the bottom of the screen, really small, but it said, estimated one hundred rooms per building, so fifty rooms per floor."

"The bedrooms were really large," Keith continued. "Everybody gets their own bed, dresser, closet, desk and chair."

"There are even little refrigerators in each room," Prez added.

Mike figured, "Since there are eighty-seven kids, everyone could fit into one building."

"Or if there are two buildings," Derrick offered, "we could do dudes in one building, girls in another?"

Prez shrugged, "What do you dudes think; co-ed dorms or split the sexes?"

Kaleo said, "I'm gay so it don't make much difference to me."

Tory said, "Leaning towards gay," he then giggled, "but just

about everything gives me a woody lately; girls, guys, a strong breeze!" Corey laughed and Drew almost gagged on his food.

Corey quickly patted his back, then Drew giggled, "I know that feeling too well!"

Everyone in the group began laughing except little Bruce. "What's a woody?" he shyly smiled.

John snickered, "Remember Keith and Prez this morning?" Bruce nodded. John explained, "Keith had a woody, a boner, a stiffy..."

"That's enough, John!" Keith loudly laughed.

"Okay!" John howled. He then said, "Prez had a semi... not quite hard, but not soft either, prob'ly because he was mad at Kyle." Prez nodded and blushed.

Scowling thoughtfully, Bruce wondered, "Soft I get; hard... okay; but why do they change?"

John hummed thoughtfully then frowned, "That's not so easy to answer," and glanced at his older brothers.

From behind where Prez was sitting in the circle of boys, a new voice called, "Director Preston O'Brian?"

"Yes," Prez laughed, as he turned his head to see who was calling him so formally. He saw an older teen dressed in highly polished combat boots, blue trousers with gold braids down the side of each leg, a white shirt with a black bow tie, and all topped off with a Black Beret. Beside him were another teen girl and a younger boy similarly dressed.

Most disconcerting, the three had side arms. And behind them were a small armada of gorillas, G-Cats and human kids, also heavily armed.

Putting his tray down in the sand, Prez then hurried to his feet. Noticing the silver Eagle on the teen boy's shoulder, Prez knew he was a Colonel. Unable to hide the concern on his face, or in his voice, Prez asked, "How can I help you, Colonel?"

The teen smiled as all three of them snapped to attention and saluted. "My name is Donnie Williams. I will be heading up the temporary security detail for this Clan Division. With me are Lt. Colonel Emily Larson, my second in command, and Second Lieutenant Nathan Hayes, who will temporarily head up your Intel division, if that is alright with you, Sir." Once he was finished speaking, the three of them dropped their salutes, and went perfectly into a parade rest stature.

Holding out his hand to the superior officer, Prez said, "Nice to meet you, Donnie." They shook hands and Donnie returned to parade rest. Moving on to Emily and then Nathan, Prez greeted them in the same way, as is his usual manner. He then said, "I can only defer to your choice for our intelligence division... but I didn't really know we needed an intelligence division either."

Once the introductions were done, Donnie again spoke, and he gestured towards the group behind Preston. "Are these all of the Clan members, or are their more elsewhere? I also need to know who the leadership of the division are, so that I may assign personal security for them."

"All these kids around the beach are Clan. The adults are our parents, except for the Vulcans, of course." Prez smiled and spun around. "Core Rimmers and Kaleo, come on over here, dudes."

Donnie and Nathan helplessly snickered, however Emily did not.

Prez introduced Keith as his partner and second in command. He then introduced Mike and Derrick as his best friends and explained, "They're advisers right now. I haven't decided what jobs to give them." Prez introduced Drew as his foster brother and Corey as Drew's boyfriend, causing them both to blush while they shook hands with Donnie, Emily and Nathan. Finally, Prez introduced Kaleo. While Kaleo greeted the three officers, Prez explained, "He's one of the rescued kids, but has already proven himself to be a good communications officer. All the kids listen to him."

Donnie nodded and smiled. "The ones who prove themselves early are always the best. Now, I brought one hundred of my guys here, to start, however, General Casey will be here later on, and will decide on what kind of staffing to do on a permanent basis." He turned and made some hand motions to the people behind him. At once, many of them jogged off into different directions, while a small group of humans and hybrids walked up to the main group.

"For right now, my guys will just set up a perimeter, and escort anyone who needs to leave it. Also, until our replacements come, I think it would be prudent for at least one member of the team to be with each of the 'Core Rimmers', as you called them, at all times. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. And also, unless you really want to," Donnie grinned, "generally we try not to be too formal if we don't have to be."

"Okay," Prez smiled, "start by calling me Prez. If I hear Director O'Brian or any variation of it, I'm gonna immediately assume something's very wrong. As for individual security..."

"PRESTON!" Jennifer Hundser shrieked. Involuntarily, Prez's

shoulders tightened up around his ears.

Looking over, Prez saw his foster mom storming down the beach towards him, with a gorilla and an eleven-year-old boy. Prez rolled his eyes and sighed, "As I was going to say, personal security *might* be a problem."

Without another word, Donnie stepped around Prez, and took a few steps until he was right in front of Mrs. Hundser, making very sure that he was not threatening in any way. "Mrs. Hundser, I'm Colonel Donnie Williams of the Clan Short Special Forces Division, and the current commander of the security detail attached to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division. I understand your hesitancy to have personal security; however, it is justified and needed. If you would prefer, I can assign others to your detail. I must apologize, as I did not have the information as to gender and age of all parties involved."

Stopping in front of the boy blocking her path, Jennifer Hundser said, "Hello Donnie," and then loudly asked, "How is a gorilla and a little boy, both armed to the teeth, supposed to make me feel safe?"

Shaking his head, Keith giggled insanely.

"Oh man!" Drew gasped, "We're all in trouble now!"

It was actually Emily who stepped forward. "Ma'am, I understand your hesitancy to allow and accept personal security, however, please let me explain something. One week ago, our family was attacked, and more than sixty brothers and sisters of mine were killed. Had they had security, things would have been different. I know this is not something a mother wants to hear, but with your children becoming members of the Clan, there are many people who would like to hurt them. Our job is to make sure that does not happen." She paused for a second to take a breath, then pushed

forward. "Last week Donnie and I accepted the placement of two young boys as our children. As a mother, I understand that you want to be the one to protect your children, however, think about this. What would be a better way to hurt the Clan members here than to take away their mother? If you were hurt, it would devastate how many kids that have never had a mother before they met you?" She knew she could go on, but she had made her point.

Hearing Emily's explanation, Jennifer Hundser nodded and sighed. Lowering her voice and giving her attention to both Donnie and Emily, she explained her feelings. "I could almost begin to accept security for my boys and even for myself, however, look at these two!" Waving her arms at them she said, "A gorilla and a little boy? And they're carrying small cannons! Can we at least compromise and have one female for myself and the other three mothers down the beach?"

Emily grinned and looked over at Donnie. "I do apologize for that. *Colonel* Williams never consulted me on the assignments for personal security. Had he done so, I can guarantee that such an oversight would NOT have happened.

"If it would be acceptable to you, Ma'am, I would personally like to lead your security detail, until such time as a replacement can be found. I can guarantee that while General Casey may be a male, he would not over look such details."

"Thank you, Emily. And please, since we're going to be spending time together, call me Jennifer. If I could ask one additional small favor?"

"Yes, of course you may ask. I may not be able to comply, however."

Understanding, Jennifer nodded and begged, "Not a gorilla, please!"

Keith, Mike, Derrick and Prez began snapping their fingers and singing: "We've got a gorilla for sale, Magilla Gorilla for sale. Won't you buy him, Take him home and try him, Gorilla for sale. Don't you want a little gorilla you can call your own, A gorilla who'll be with ya when you're all alone?"

Jennifer Hundser shot flames from her eyes at all four, causing them to turn away and snicker.

Emily smiled and nodded understandingly. She seemed to get very much less formal and started to speak as a normal person again. "I understand completely; they can be a bit much at first, however, they're very good at what they do. I think it would be best to have at least one of the enhanced troops to back me up, so how about..." she looked around for a few seconds before she spotted someone that would work. "Lt. Tanya Casey!" She called out, and a girl of about thirteen jogged over and saluted. "Jennifer here would prefer two females to be her personal security. Please inform your CO, that I am assigning you to this duty."

"Of course, Colonel. I will be back in a few moments." With another salute, the girl turned and jogged away.

Turning to Nathan, Emily then said, "Can you please make the other changes that are needed? The mothers need to have female security, and the fathers should have males that are somewhat older. But as I said, make sure at least one is enhanced."

"Got it." The preteen boy said, but other than that did nothing.

Donnie took this opportunity to try and salvage some of his dignity, by addressing the group, trying to ignore the song they had

sung. "If any of you have questions, please feel free to ask."

While Keith, Mike and Derrick snickered, Prez smiled, "We're good for now, I think, Donnie."

Quickly moving forward through the group, John asked, "Can I have a gorilla?"

Prez giggled, "What do ya say, Donnie? John's another foster brother, but a little too young to be a Core Rimmer."

Donnie grinned and tried not to laugh at the statement, but then almost lost it when he had a thought. "Sure, but only if you teach him to surf!"

"Sure!" John excitedly answered. "I can surf... a little bit."

Keith reminded, "A gorilla's gonna need a much bigger board, bro."

Derrick scanned the nearest great ape and estimated; "About fifteen feet long, four feet wide and a foot thick."

Looking up at Prez, Bruce whined, "Can I have a gorilla too?"

"Donnie, this is Bruce," Prez smiled, "John, Drew and Corey rescued him from Ewa beach yesterday. We're still looking for his parents, so we've kept him with us."

Donnie turned to the assembled gorillas along the dune and said in a loud, clear voice, "Okay. You heard the little guys. Which of you wants to belong to which boy?"

The gorillas all turned their eyes in the direction of Bruce and John and looked down. Then they began to eyeball the two boys, causing them to feel very small and vulnerable. They started grinning

and baring their teeth.

To John and Bruce, the gorillas looked very angry and they both unconsciously stepped back. John gasped, "Err... umm..."

A pair of young Silver-backs stepped forward and the older of the two began to speak. "Me and my little bro always wanted a boy of our own. We'll take 'em!"

"They speak?" Bruce and John chorused. Glancing at each other, wide grins spread across their faces.

"How totally kewl is that!" John loudly giggled. The next thing John knew he was being swept up by the older, larger Silver-back. Wide-eyed, John laughed; "Who-o-oo!"

Busy laughing at John, Bruce didn't notice the younger Silver-back until a massive arm wrapped around and picked him up. "AHHH-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HAAA!"

"Of course, we speak," the older gorilla grinned. "You don't think that those dumb cats get to talk and us hugely intelligent apes don't, do you?"

Turning back to the remaining gorillas, Donnie's smile turned upside-down and he leaned to his right slightly. Seeing a duffel bag mysteriously moving and then a ferret scurrying out, Donnie scowled and shouted, "YOU THERE! HALT!" The ferret spun around, stood upright and pointed at himself, looking around as if it might've been anyone else. Shaking his head sadly, Donnie softly grumbled, "Sonofabitch! Why me?"

"Cos you led us to SHINYs!" the ferret giggled, then sped off and dove into the bushes. The mat of greenery seemed to tremble as if

there were many small creatures hidden within it.

Donnie tapped his communicator. "Daileass. How many of the ferrets are in Hawaii, and how did they get here?"

"Well... all of them," Daileass giggled. "Dave thought it would be a nice holiday for his flock. As for how? I sent them. The base is peaceful and quiet right now. Isn't that nice?"

"You bastard," Donnie muttered. Barely ten yards away, Donnie saw High Priest Dave's head pop up from the bush and grin at him.

From the bushes, the group of boys could hear what they believed were sounds as if a religious service were going on followed by high pitched singing. "Onward, Shiny soldiers, marching as to war, With the Shiny Warrior going on before. Dave, the Shiny Master, leads against the foe; Forward into battle see His Shinys go! Onward, Shiny soldiers, marching as to war, With the Shiny Warrior going on before. At the sign of triumph, Hater's host doth flee; On then, Shiny soldiers, on to victory! Dull's foundations quiver at our Shiny praise; Ferrets, lift your voices, high your Shinys raise. Onward then, ye Ferrets, join our happy throng, Blend with ours your voices in this Shiny song. Glory, laud, and honor unto Dave our King, This through countless ages men and Ferrets sing."

A mass of fur broke from the bushes and departed in all directions, muttering comments about needing to find shinys. One paused at the spit-shined boots of one of the gorillas, entranced by the shiny surface, then slowly looked up ... and up ... and up.

The gorilla glared down at him. "No," he said.

Rolling his eyes and slouching, Donnie then turned to Prez and snapped to attention saying; "Director O'Brian?"

"Uh oh!" Prez grunted. Closing his eyes and sighing, Prez opened his eyes again and said, "We have a problem, don't we, Colonel?"

Chapter 3

Anahola Beach, Kauai

Saturday October 30, 2004 12:35 PM

From further up the north end of the beach, a new voice shouted; "WHAT THE FUCK? DAVE! Get your ass over here and bring your entire flock!" Not getting the response he wanted, as the Ferrets kept running, the boy quickly dug into his pants pocket and pulled out a small pouch labeled 'Emergency Ferret Action Kit'. He pulled out a small thing that looked like nothing more than a ball point pen. He quickly pulled the top off of it and slapped the end of it, setting off a small explosive charge that propelled a tiny object high in the air. When it hit twenty-five feet in the air, it exploded in a very bright ball. All the Ferrets skidded to a stop and gazed at the shiny ball hanging in the air.

"NOW! Get your asses over here, or I'll have Daileass transport your Shiny Vault away!" Suddenly, every Ferret around turned and started sprinting towards him.

Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike all spun towards the unknown voice. "Who is *that*?" Prez exclaimed.

Donnie turned towards the group and softly said, "That would be General Adam Casey, the head of the UNIT; also known as the Clan Short Special Forces, with the rest of his family.

Looking over, everyone saw the group that was rapidly approaching them; it was led by a boy that was their age, with long straight black hair, and slate gray eyes. He was wearing a dress

uniform, with many medals and ribbons on it. Next to him was a slightly younger looking boy with long blond hair, and blue eyes. He was not wearing a uniform, but rather, a normal pair of jeans and a light button down shirt. Prez looked at Nathan quickly, then back to the blond. He knew they had to be brothers, as they looked identical except for the new one was older.

Behind them was an oriental boy about twelve wearing a simple oriental robe. The two swords that he wore at his left side most certainly seemed out of place; however, the way he wore them made it clear that they were not out of place on him. With him were five hooded figures with long gray snouts sticking out of the hoods.

Walking next to the oriental kid was another kid with brightly colored red hair, styled in a short spiky fashion wearing a pair of mirrored sunglasses. He was tall and lanky, and had a definite cocky grin on his face. Behind them came a couple of kids that were John's age, one Hispanic and the other was another blond, but this one with obvious Russian features.

Behind the two younger kids, was a woman with sandy blond hair, who was obviously Nathan's mother, and a man being pushed in a wheelchair by the biggest cat person they had ever seen. Tagging along beside the G-Cat was another small ten year old boy. Flanking that group were three triplets that again had to be brothers of Nathan, as they were obviously identical to him, save for their age.

Adam walked right up to Prez and held out his hand. "I assume your Preston O'Brian?" Prez nodded and shook Adam's hand. Adam grinned. "Welcome to the Clan. Uhh.... would you excuse me one second?"

Without waiting for an answer, Adam turned and was faced with all seventy-four ferrets, led by their leader, High Priest Dave; all of

them trying to look extremely innocent. "Okay," Adam loudly said, making sure they all heard him. "Here's the rules. You may NOT steal any shinys from the Shiny Haters for at least twenty-four hours. You may however, feel free to take any and all shinys you find out there," he said, and pointed towards the ocean. "If you dive to the floor of the bay, you might find little oysters." Adopting a reverent voice in a much lower tone and volume, Adam instructed, "Inside those oysters are pearls; bright shiny pearls, that can be made into adornments for your belts and hats. However, I must warn you, the oysters should be treated properly, as they are the ones who create such shinys for you to find. Treat them well and they will make more for you."

Adam knew he had their attention simply because almost all their eyes had glazed over, just thinking about pearls. Before he said anything else, the entire flock turned and started to run away, rambling excitedly. Adam's voice cut them off again. "SPIKE!" Adam bellowed, and one of the younger ferrets with spiky fur stopped dead in his tracks and looked back at Adam. Puppies were lodging protests that the ferret was able to make such sad eyes. Adam ordered, "Give him back his guitar pick!"

Mike's right hand dug into his pocket. He softly grumbled, "Dammit!"

"But... but... he has not taken the pledge!" The young ferret whined.

"He is a member of the Clan," Adam reminded. "What have we said about Clan members?"

The boy almost sounded like he was going to cry as he repeated in a small voice, "We can't steal their shinys unless they have been in the Clan for more than a week."

"Right," Adam droned. "So why?" Adam started to ask, but the young ferret quickly ran up to Adam and dropped to his knees.

"But... but... it's so... SHINY! It begged me to liberate it from the dull one. How could I live with my faith had I not done as the shiny had asked?"

The blond haired boy that was next to Adam spoke up in a quiet voice. "I understand. But how would the shiny feel if you took it from someone who would become a shiny lover, and perhaps be able to create wonderful music in the name of shininess, but now he can't because his shiny guitar pick was stolen. Don't you think that would make the shiny sad?"

The kid looked horrified then ran over to Mike, upending a small bag he had tied to his waist. He dropped to his knees and rifled through all the different baubles that fell to the sand. He found the guitar pick and carefully cleaned it off before offering to Mike while still on his knees. "Please mister; can you make shiny music with this?"

"I can now," Mike smiled at the thieving little ferret. Bending down and retrieving his pick, Mike then asked, "Did you know that shiny guitar picks can only make shiny music for a little while before they wear out?" The ferret seemed to gasp in horror and shook his head. "It's true; the music gets less shiny over time. When this one wears out, I'll give it to you, *only* if you use it as a shiny adornment that I can see. That way, I'll know it's shininess has not been completely used up and worn out. Every now and then you'll get a used shiny pick, then I'll get a new shiny pick to make shiny music with until it wears out. Then you'll get another, and another; soon you'll be wearing so many shiny picks that people will come from far and wide to see your shiny adornments."

"Oh! Thank you mister!" Spike squealed in delight. Looking between Mike and Adam, Spike asked, "Uhh... can I go look for other shinys now?" Adam nodded his head and the little boy was off like a shot. Adam then turned to the group and grinned, "Okay, crisis over. Now, where were we?"

Kaleo, Keith and Derrick were laughing hysterically over Mike and Spike. Prez snickered, "We were just getting to know each other, oh leader of the Shiny Tribe!" The rest of the Core Rimmers, Donnie and Nathan lost it and howled.

Adam couldn't help but laugh as well. "First off, I am not responsible for them; I just know how to make it so that they don't do anything too bad. Anyways, let me introduce you to what I call the Core of the UNIT. Just so you know, the UNIT actually stands for the Universal Next-Generation Infiltration Team."

He paused as he looked at the Blond next to him. "Okay, this guy here, is Logan. He's the head of the Intel team and also my partner. He's not physically enhanced like the rest of us, but he's smarter than anyone I have ever met. Next to him is Chang, my second in command, chief medical officer, and martial arts master."

Chang stepped forward and bowed. "It is an honor to meet all of you. As of yet, I have only heard some of what you have done, and I must say I am impressed with how well you have handled yourselves in very trying times." When he stood up straight again, the Rimmers could now see that he actually had very soft Klingon ridges on his forehead.

"Next to him is Will." Adam said pointing out the red head. "He is our Flight Team Commander. If it flies, he can fly it. Next to him is Jory, our demolitions and explosives expert, then Juan, our sniper and heavy weapons expert. Behind them are Logan's youngest clones;

Alvin, Simon, and Theodore. The big guy pushing the wheelchair, is Amur Khan, commanding officer of the Hybrids. The boy with his hand on top of Khan's is his partner; he doesn't like his real name, so everyone just calls him Runt. Finally we have Mom, Janet Hayes, and Dad, Joe Casey.

Mike looked at the seven foot six inch tiger hybrid and the small boy. "How does that work?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't let him get out of line," Runt said cheekily. "Isn't that right, Puss-Puss?"

Prez spent the next few minutes introducing the Core Rimmers to the core UNIT, then Adam spoke up again. "I can only imagine all the questions you guys have, so why don't we do this..." he looked over at his group. "Logan, Chang, Khan, Mom and Dad, why don't we stay here and answer all their questions. The rest of you guys, why not go mingle. Remember, we're on vacation here. Juan, that means you can't kill anyone unless I say it's okay. Jory, no blowing anything up unless Mom okays it. Will, no stealing the Vulcan's shuttles and going for joy rides. Okay?" Many laughed, but some grumbled as they all walked away.

Seeing no other place to sit, Adam sat down in the sand. Logan moved between his spread legs and made himself comfortable, leaning back against Adam.

Prez turned briefly and focused on Reyes, Tory and Jonah saying, "Guys, excuse us for a little while please? We're just gonna have a little pow-wow here." The three boys nodded understandingly and moved back down the beach to gather their lunch trays, and then began the trek back to the food tables.

"What about me, Prez?" Kaleo wondered.

Prez grinned, "You're being promoted to Core Rimmer. Since you were rescued by the Clan, there may be something you could ask or offer that none of the rest of us can." Turning back again, Prez sat cross-legged in the sand and noticed that Donnie had remained with the rest of Adam's group and was also sitting in the sand.

While his team sat down, Prez began, "Since we got out of school yesterday, everything's been so frenzied, let me try and explain our perspective a little. Me and my friends have rescued a few kids over the summer that were left at Ewa Beach, Oahu, where we all live. My foster mom, Keith and Drew's mother works in a hospital, helping all sorts of folks deal with lots of different kinds of traumas. So, with her assistance, we try and get the kids we found help. That's all we've ever done before. Now we've been made part of Clan Short, and let me just say, we're all a little overwhelmed. We know the basics of organizing groups and teams from our band and from school, but that's it. Clan Short has made the news! We haven't even made local news. We only know a very little bit of what the Clan has done. While we all think it's fantastic, we're not at that level."

"Not yet," Adam smiled understandingly. "Cory, Sean and Teri Short started the same way; a kid here, a kid there. The only difference I'm hearing is you guys worked within the system. You didn't know the system here was broke or how badly."

Keith nodded, "We do now though. So what do we do and how?"

"You continue rescuing kids," Adam stated simply. "You'll have plenty to do. And we'll teach you how to do it. It'll all be done so quick, you'll not even realize what you've learned until you've used those skills. Be yourselves; if you ever need help, just ask."

Prez reflected, "Like with the Vulcans; they already seemed to

know what we needed before we arrived on the Endeavour." Adam only smiled and nodded. Prez laughed, "We're musicians! We're good, our parents and teachers consider us virtuosos, but we're not..."

Holding his hand up, Adam asked, "How did you get to be virtuosos?"

Mike replied, "We learned our instruments quickly and easily then began applying what we learned to the songs we want to play."

"So you learn fast, hear it and play it," Adam confirmed. "It takes dexterity to play any instrument, but you guys tore through that easily. What you hear, you remember; developing relative pitch along the way. What you guys consider easy, thousands want and struggle with. It's gonna be the same with the Clan. You were chosen for your good deeds. Again, it's something you don't consider all that special, but it is. If everyone tried as hard as you guys, the Clan wouldn't need to exist."

"So what do we need to do?" Prez bluntly asked.

"Let's get organized," Adam said. "Prez you're the division's director..."

"Head Rimmer," Corey softly giggled.

"Right," Adam chuckled. "Keith, your Prez's partner and conscience; that's a full time job. You can have another job, but a relatively easy one and only if you want it. The reason I say it like that is because Sean's the same for Cory, but Sean's also the Clan Short Historian. They're not here now because they're taking a much needed vacation. You'll likely be first on their list of things to do and people to meet Monday. So you'll need an historian; someone who'll know everything about every kid here. Who wants the job?"

Keith sighed, "From the sounds of it, I think I'd better not take it. Prez is most important to me and to our Clan."

Derrick said, "I'll take it then. I already know about half the kids and a good part of their stories."

Mike asked, "Can I back up Derrick?"

Keith snickered, "You already back up to Derrick, you dog!"

While everyone began chuckling and giggling, Mike shoved Keith then loudly laughed, "As historian, I mean!"

Adam chuckled and nodded, "Backups are always good to have. Kaleo, you've managed to impress Prez enough where he's made you communication's officer." Adam paused and smiled, "Mouth Rimmer, I think I heard."

Nodding, Kaleo softly sniggered, "Yep. In Hawaiian, Kaleo means 'the voice'."

Adam said, "So some kids in the orphanage looked up to you and listened to you. Now more are listening to you. In Clan Short, you'll be communicating with all our divisions. Orlando is six hours ahead of us here in Hawaii. It's already dinner time there. Des Moines is five hours ahead. Eight in the morning in Iowa is three in the morning here. Calls will be coming in at all hours of the day and night. You've got to have a team that can help you get that task done and have them approved by Prez." Pausing, Adam asked, "Are you okay with the job?"

"Definitely," Kaleo nodded. "I'll just have to ask around and get two more people for round-the-clock availability."

"Get three more," Adam grinned, "someone as a backup,

remember?"

Slapping his own forehead, Kaleo laughed, "Doh! 'Course!"

Logan interjected, "We use a lot of technologies. One of the primary computers will be using Vulcan software. It's very secure and manages data logically, as you would expect however, it's not very user-friendly."

"Do you guys use computer systems?" Adam asked.

Prez nodded, "Windows PC's and an Xbox."

"We use Macs and PlayStations," Mike offered.

"I have a Linux system," Drew blushed. "None of the other dudes like it, but I think it's totally awesome. And when I get it configured to record the band, they'll all begin to love it."

"Sounds like we have a computer geek," Logan smiled, "that's totally kewl though. What else do you... umm... fool around with?"

"Corey!" Keith, Mike and Derrick shouted, then began snickering.

"Shut up!" Drew complained. Covering his mouth with one hand, Corey leaned against Drew and held him close with his other arm. "I can do a little programming," Drew admitted, "I've learned the shell, Pearl and C languages; enough to get stuff done."

Prez giggled, "Drew's our sound man; he connects all our PA gear, which includes about eight different kinds of cables. He makes our band sound good."

Logan smiled, "That's engineering, Drew. We'll get you up to speed on some of our technologies and you can become... Rimmer

Engineer?"

"P.C. Rimmer!" Keith snickered.

"But he does more than PCs," Prez reminded, and then suggested, "How about Toy Rimmer?"

"I like it!" Keith cheered. "Toy Rimmer he is!"

"I'll back up Drew," Corey widely grinned.

Mike grinned, "Corey backs up to Drew. I knew it!"

Derrick snickered, "Corey backs up *for* Drew, ya mean."

"You guys are just being anal!" Drew grouched. On the verge of self-combustion, Drew softly warned, "Sleep with one eye open tonight, bros."

While Prez and Keith mooed, everyone else in both groups laughed.

Janet rolled her eyes and said, "I think I'll leave this serious intellectual conversation and go talk with the other adults."

"Okay, mom," Adam said.

Joe nodded, "We'll join you, Janet."

Adam waved, "See ya later, dad." Then Janet, Joe and Amur Khan started across the beach.

Looking up at Adam, Prez asked, "You guys seem to do more than security. What does the UNIT do exactly?"

"We kick ass, take names and cap fools," Juan shouted from the

shoreline where he was bathing his tootsies in the water.

"You forgot making big booms!" Jory giggled from where Donna and Trist were burying him in the sand.

Smirking, Donnie shook his head. Adam smiled, "That's basically correct though. To give you more details, let me explain some of our history. First, you have to understand our terminology. My 'brothers' include Chang, Jory, Juan and Will. We were actually designed to be a single strike team, and the leaders of a much larger group. I was actually born fully human; however, when I was very young, I was taken and genetically altered to turn me into what we call a class A-10 engineered soldier. 'A' meaning I was enhanced after I was born, and the 10 means I am roughly ten times stronger, and faster, and heal ten times as quick as a normal person my age. You with me so far?"

Amazed, the wide-eyed Rimmers could only nod. Adam didn't seem that different from any of them, and it was difficult to believe he was genetically engineered, but they took him at his word.

Adam continued. "My brothers were engineered, and built from the genetic level up, then genetically aged so that they appear as old as they are now. From birth, they were all fully immersed in their field of study, and after taking some tests, all four of them have at least two doctorate degrees, as well as being enhanced. I managed to escape the military hospital that housed me, with Mom's help, and then we went and rescued the rest. Now, I know you guys have met some of the hybrids, but I guess no one ever explained what they were. They were another experiment at creating human animal hybrids, to work in the military. Obviously the experiment worked.

"So now, after we met up with the Clan in the Montana battle last week, we became the Clan Short Special Forces. Since then, we

have rescued in the neighborhood of ten thousand kids, with about eight thousand living at the UNIT base in Utah."

"Eight thousand!" The Rimmers chorused.

"Oh man!" Prez groaned. "The Vulcans are providing dorms that house a hundred. Across six Hawaiian bases, that's only six hundred kids!"

Donnie said, "They showed you 'L' shaped buildings, right?" Prez nodded and Donnie explained, "Expect those buildings to be setup so there are four of them at each base, forming a quad. You'll be able to house two thousand four hundred, right off the bat."

"We'll get more when we need to," Logan added.

"Not to mention," Adam interjected, "we are housing the largest number of rescued kids. No one expects you guys to even come close to that."

Derrick mumbled, "How the hell do ya feed 'em all?"

Logan grinned as he picked up a data pad out of his pack. "This is how." He punched a few buttons on the thing, then looked back at Prez. "I had Daileass set this up as we were leaving. One thing you guys will never have to worry about is money." He then handed the pad to Prez. "This is what is currently in the Rimmers bank accounts."

Prez and Keith looked at the pad. Their jaws dropped and they passed the pad to Mike and Derrick. Mike looked at it and almost screamed; "FUCK ME!"

"We've got hundreds of millions U.S. dollars?" Prez wondered in disbelief.

Logan grinned, "Yup. Now understand that is the Rimmers personal account; that is *not* the Clan account that Cory will have setup for you when he gets here."

Drew smiled, "So now we can get that PA system we've been wanting?"

Donnie said, "You'll have six PA's, one at an auditorium at each base. You'll also have communications systems in each room and between houses and the dormitories."

"After everything Joel told us about Cory, we can't wait to meet him," Derrick giggled.

Mike grinned, "Sean too. What did he call them again? Blondie and... what was it?"

"Big Ted," Keith chortled. "I miss that little guy already, and he's only been gone four hours. Oops! Should we even mention that time stuff?"

"I think it's okay now," Prez said, smiling at his boyfriend. He looked at Adam, "Do you know when Joel and Kevin will be back to visit?"

All smiles vanished as that question was asked. Adam looked down for a brief moment to collect his thoughts. "What?" Prez asked, noticing the quick shift in emotions.

Adam explained; "Obviously you would not have known this, but this morning... well... Joel was attacked and hurt... badly."

"WHAT?" All the boys shouted.

"But I saw him take on the Prime Minister! Where were his

guards? His friends? Where were you all?" Prez wept bitterly as tears started to pour down his face. The rest of the new core group shed tears and mumbled, wondering how anything could have happened to Joel so quickly.

Adam quickly held up his hand to quiet them. "I know you guys like Joel as much as the rest of us. All I can say right now is this; Joel is fine physically, and spending time with his family. I am sure that as soon as he is able, either you can go see him, or he will come here. However, if you wish, you guys can join in with many of the kids in the UNIT base that are making get well cards for him. Daileass is handling getting them all to Orlando, while Juan handles making sure people get whatever they need to make their cards."

"Absolutely," Keith sniffled, "we'll get him one from all of us and I'm sure each kid here is gonna want to offer their own personal note too."

Prez nodded and wiped his eyes then asked, "Do you know who hurt Joel? I mean, have they been found and are they being dealt with? I ask because there are so many here protecting us. Priorities, ya know?"

Adam's eyes hardened as he met Prez's eyes. "The ones who hurt him have been dealt with... with extreme prejudice."

"That's all we needed to hear," Prez said firmly.

Mike wanted to be sure he understood correctly and asked, "Extreme as in dead?"

"Exactly," Derrick nodded. "He's about one of the nicest guys we've ever met and didn't deserve whatever happened. He just married Kevin, after all."

Adam only nodded, but didn't bother to elaborate.

Drew's voice wavered; "Please send Joel our best."

Keith noticed two gorillas carrying John and Bruce rapidly approaching. "Shit!" Keith grumbled. Looking back over his shoulder, Keith said, "Okay, everybody chill out now. Let's not get John upset, he won't let it go and would want to see Joel immediately."

The gorillas stopped beside the group sitting in the sand. John began climbing down his gorilla's arm, loudly asking, "What's wrong?" Bruce was still working his way down off his gorilla's back.

"Nothing's wrong, bro," Keith said convincingly. "We were just talking about some of the bad stuff that happened to our kids and others in the Clan. It's upsetting."

"Adam, this is our youngest brother, John," Prez quickly added. "And the other little dude is Bruce, the boy we rescued on Ewa Beach yesterday. John and Bruce, this *General* Adam Casey." Prez believed that by emphasizing the rank of General, John and Bruce would both be impressed.

"It's good to meet you, John and Bruce," Adam pleasantly said. "Are you having fun with the gorillas?"

"Yeah, they're so kewl!" Bruce cheered.

But John only looked around at everyone suspiciously. John impatiently huffed, "It makes me crazy when you do this! You treat me like I'm littler and younger than Bruce!" He then threw a temper tantrum and reminded; "Who knew something bad was goin' on with Kai? ME! Who trusted Galli at first? ME AND BRUCE! Who knew the Prime Minister was bad? ME! Something's goin' on now too! I KNOW IT!" Pounding his fist into his belly, John screamed, "I FELT

IT! RIGHT HERE IN MY GUT! BUT DON'T TELL JOHN! HE'S TOO LITTLE! FINE!" Spinning around, John stormed off and told his gorilla, "Let's get away from here."

Bruce was speechless for a few moments, but then hurried after John.

Keith sighed, "Sorry about that, dudes."

Adam nodded, "It's alright," but then asked, "Is what John said about Kai, Galli and the Prime Minister true?"

After a moment's thought, Prez said, "Yeah, pretty much."

Logan hummed and nodded. He then asked, "Have any of you ever met an empath?" All the Core Rimmers replied negatively. "I have," Logan said. "You guys got upset over Joel and John showed up as soon as he could. Between that and the three other incidents, I think you have an empathic little brother."

Keith grinned, "You're kidding, right? John's always..."

Logan waited a moment for Keith to finish then chuckled, "You were going to say he's always done stuff like that, weren't you?" Keith slowly nodded.

Prez and Keith turned to each other and mumbled, "Oh my God!" Also stunned but somewhat less so, Mike and Derrick began softly snickering.

"Hey!" Drew excitedly said, "Remember when Mom's lung collapsed a few years ago? It was John that found her and called everybody for help. When Dad tripped and broke his ankle, it was John yelling for help then too. How many other times has John known stuff was going on and we all just figured it was coincidence? And

look how he's been with Bruce since we found him. You'd think Bruce would be a wreck wondering about his parents. But John stays with him and Bruce is doin' pretty good, considering."

"If I might make a suggestion?" Adam softly requested. Prez and Keith nodded. "Invite John into the core team. He would be another piece of the puzzle you guys definitely need. You need an Intel division to help you find out who's lying. He's not as good as a telepath, but it would make him feel better and you guys would feel better too."

Prez sighed and turned to Keith. "Adam's right, ya know?"

Keith nodded and honestly relayed, "It's always been our job to watch out for our little brothers."

Prez shrugged, "What better way is there to watch him? He'll be around us more of the time this way."

Shaking his head, Keith snickered, "Mom's gonna have a fit!"

Prez joked, "She'll be good or find herself with a gorilla for a shadow!" Standing up while everyone else giggled, Prez bellowed; "JOHN!" The gorilla carrying John turned around. Prez waved for them to return. Then the gorilla shook its head and started back across the beach. The other gorilla carrying Bruce also turned around and hurried back.

Remaining on his gorilla's back, John looked down and grumbled, "Well? What do you want now?"

Prez grinned, "I want you, bro; here, with the rest of us, as part of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division's Core Team."

Looking way up, Keith added, "Come on down, John. We all

want you here with us."

John glanced around at all the nodding heads. "Bruce has to be with me too," John defiantly reminded.

Nodding, Prez said, "That's fine. Bruce can be part of your team for as long as he's with us."

"Really?" John squealed.

"Really," Prez affirmed, "we even have a job that only you can do."

Tilting his head back and forth uncertainly, John asked, "You'll tell me what's going on?"

Keith assured, "We'll tell you later on tonight when we get back home, I promise."

John looked over at Bruce and nodded then both boys climbed down off of their gorillas. Landing in the sand, John wondered, "What job do you want me to do?" Both gorillas turned and took only a few steps away then sat down in the sand.

Drew said, "It's an easy one, bro. You've been doing it forever, we just didn't know it."

Logan introduced himself then asked, "Why did you come over here before, John?"

John shrugged, "My belly hurt; not like I was gonna be sick, but still, it made me want to cry. I felt like everyone was sad, so I wanted to find out why."

"It wasn't that everyone was sad and you know it, John," Logan

challenged.

Reluctantly, John sighed, "It was Keith, Drew and Prez that were sad."

"I rest my case," Logan grinned.

"Good job, bro," Keith proudly smiled.

Prez nodded, "Just like with the Prime Minister; you hit the nail right on the head." Walking behind John, Prez smiled; "Gentlemen, please meet the newest Core Rimmer; John Hundser, the Soul Rimmer!"

"Oh Dear Lord, please help us now!" Keith and Drew laughed. Prez picked up John and parked him atop his shoulders. Jumping up and down happily, Bruce was the first to begin cheering and soon everyone in both groups joined in.

Once everyone calmed down, Adam said, "Now I have an announcement. It's kinda sad, but there is a silver lining."

Concerned, Prez asked, "What's goin' on, Adam?"

"We can't secure your homes," Adam told them. "Your new homes are on the main Rimmer base. We'll have all your personal belongings packed up and delivered to you on base. When we leave here, we're going directly there."

Kaleo piped up. "That leaves me an opening."

"Is there a problem, dude?" Keith wondered.

Uncertainly, Kaleo said, "Well, most of the kids I've talked to don't want to be separated." Kaleo grinned, "We all want to stay

together and near our leaders, at least for a little while."

Kneeling down to let John off of his shoulders, Prez began chuckling. And he kept on chuckling while he leaned forward and John stepped into the sand. Looking up again, Prez laughed, "From the sounds of it, there will be plenty of dorm rooms; about four hundred at each base! Even if there were only one hundred rooms, everyone could've still stayed on Oahu. It gives us all time to get to know each other too. Let 'em know it's cool, Kaleo."

"Thanks, Prez," Kaleo widely smiled and breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

"There was no chance of us saying no," Keith reminded, and gently rubbed Kaleo's back.

Wiping away a stray happy tear, Kaleo said, "When we're done here, I'll let everyone know."

Prez asked, "Are we done, Adam?"

Adam nodded, "We've made a good start. If any of you dudes have other questions, just let me, Donnie or Logan know."

Keith remembered, "It's gotta be near dinner time for you guys. Why don't you get something to eat? When you're done, we'll introduce you to our parents."

Logan got up to allow Adam to get up then went to Prez. "Stop worrying, Prez," Logan softly said. "You're right, the Vulcans are good, really good in fact. They've provided security, all this food, and they will provide you and the kids with everything all you guys could ever need or want. All you have to do is be a big brother for them; that's a big enough job."

"The last things you asked for from the Vulcans was food and clothing. Food's been provided, soon they'll have clothes by the suitcase full!"

Prez smirked at Logan's telepathy and wondered, "How can so many buildings be built in only six hours?"

"Replicators and transporters," Logan smiled. "The technologies you're used to is nothin' dude. In the next few days, you'll be doing things without even thinking about it, pretty much; unless it actually requires that you make a decision."

Everyone returned to the food tables and loaded their trays. They then gathered near where Reyes, Tory and Jonah were still sitting. Conversation revolved mostly around music. Adam and Mike talked about guitars and favorite songs; Reyes and Derrick were talking about drums, drumming and their favorite songs; Runt and Keith were talking about keyboards and their favorite songs, while Kaleo told Adam and Logan about the concert. The remaining kids tossed in their own remarks. After about thirty minutes, everyone was done eating and the trash was deposited in the garbage cans.

It was then that Jory, Juan, Will, Runt, along with Koth and Korris, who just showed up, ran to the Rimmers grabbing them each by the arm, pleading to teach them how to surf. It was Keith that got everyone quiet for a moment, and then told all of them, "We'd love to guys, but the waves aren't big enough right now. We need to wait till the tide starts to come in before we can teach people."

"The waves ain't big enough?" Jory asked with a hopeful voice, and got nods in return. "Well, we'll have to fix that then, won't we?" Before anyone could ask, the young blond boy ran off.

"What's he doing?" Prez asked in a very worried voice.

In a very excited manner, Juan replied; "Oh, nothing much. Where do I get my wet suit? You guys wear wet suits, don't you? Or should I just have Daileass send mine?"

"I don't think you'll need the suit," Mike responded. "But for some strange reason, I don't think you'll be able to surf well with those army pants on."

Juan looked down as if noticing what he was wearing for the first time. "Oh yeah, you're right. Be right back!" All the guys, including Chang, Adam and Logan ran off to get changed.

Glancing at the other Core Rimmers, Prez said, "I guess that means we're going surfing." They all grinned, nodded and stripped.

"So why didn't you tell them they didn't need suits?" Mike wondered.

Prez chuckled, "'Cause it's funnier this way."

Five minutes later, Adam led his group back to the Rimmers, and frowned as he saw all of the Core Rimmers were simply naked. Juan however, just shrugged and dropped the long shorts that mom had insisted they wear. Shrugging, the rest of them dropped their shorts, all except for Runt, who would not drop his. None of the UNIT said a word to Runt, as all of them knew he was still very self conscious.

Adam sent a thought into all the Rimmers head's. *"Just a heads up, Runt is not comfortable being naked around people he doesn't know. He's actually fourteen, but hasn't grown to his age yet due to past abuse. Please don't bring it up."*

Prez scowled and grunted. Keith looked around nervously. Derrick whimpered and Mike whispered; "What the hell?" Drew

shook his head vigorously and Corey stuck his pinkies in his ears. They all heard Adam clearly, but didn't know how.

Adam went to them and spoke softly. "Sorry guys, I thought by now someone would have explained telepathy to you. When we get a few moments, I will let you guys in on all the mental shit that we have running around. Take John for example. I am willing to bet that John has a lot more to him than just being an empath, but I can't guarantee that. However, eventually you will all have to know what the different people with mental stuff can do. We have a few minutes until Jory gets back, so why don't I explain some now. That work?"

Everyone nodded, and Adam went on. "Okay. I know this will come as a surprise to many of you, but humans have always been telepaths, empaths, things like that for a very long time. Recently, there have been a lot more of us around then in the past. For some reason, we seem to be gathering them to us." Adam said, and then grinned at John.

"Now, the next thing you need to know is this. There is something that we are calling the Next Generation, or N-Gen. These are people who have pushed their mental abilities well above what they should be able to, and actually changed the way their mind works. I don't think I need to really get into the specifics right now, at least not yet anyways, but that's the general idea. Any questions?"

"Why do we need to know about N-Gens?" Prez asked.

Juan did not wait for Adam to respond; he jumped in grinning; "Cause John's gonna be one; at least I'm pretty sure he will be."

"He's *WHAT!*" Prez and Keith responded in unison.

Adam sighed and looked at Juan. "Way to go Mr. Subtlety!"

"What?" Juan whined with an impish grin.

Adam just shook his head and turned to the group. "Guys, calm down; it's nothing bad. All it will mean is this." Adam showed his maturity, as he stepped in front of John, crouched down, put his hands on John's shoulders and spoke directly to him. "All it means is that everything you already know how to do will get stronger. At some point, you will use your abilities more than you ever have in the past and it will cause you to change in here." Adam said as he tapped John's forehead. "When that happens, your mind will grow much stronger, and you will be able to learn to do things that you had never known you could have."

Adam stood back up and looked at the group. "If you all want, I can show you what I mean. What I'll do is show you what a normal mind looks like from the inside, and then show you what my mind looks like. It will not show you anything personal, or memories or anything like that, it'll just show you how a normal mind is set up."

"I'm ready," Prez nodded.

Keith replied, "Me too," then turned to the rest of the Core Rimmers and asked, "Is any one not willing to try this?" Everyone shook their heads except Corey, who appeared uncertain.

"I'm just a little worried," Corey offered. "Like monster movies and horror; I'll do it and will prob'ly like it but... you know?"

"It's cool, Cor," Drew assured.

"We're ready, Adam," Prez said.

"Okay, who wants to volunteer to let us run around in your mind?" Adam playfully grinned at them all. At the looks of concern from some of them, Adam laughed. "Just kidding. We'll use someone

who I know won't mind. Adam looked at Will who just shrugged. Suddenly, everyone was sitting in a room, around a big table. The room they were in looked to be surrounded entirely by glass, and outside the glass, they could see a whole bunch of different things happening. In one area, a helicopter was flying through a canyon, in another there was a helicopter being built. Another area had Will surfing, and a whole bunch of other things. Adam looked at the group and started to explain. "As you can see, Will's thinking about a whole bunch of different things right now, however, they are all happening at the same time, and none of them are taking his full concentration, meaning that none of them are getting as much attention as they would if he was concentrating. Does this make sense?"

Again everyone nodded, so Adam went on. "Now, let's move over to my mind." Suddenly they found themselves in a similar room, only this time there was nothing going on outside.

"It's empty?" John asked in shock.

Adam giggled, "Not really. See an N-Gen's mind has their mind separated into rooms. With this, I can put something into a room, and not really think about it. However, inside that room, I am using most of my concentration on whatever I am thinking about. Later on, I come back and I have figured out whatever I had been working on. Does that make sense?"

Logan added his own description with a grin. "For you geeks, it's parallel processing."

"Oh!" Drew excitedly chuckled, "How sweet is that?" Keith turned around and grimaced. Drew sighed then explained, "Imagine learning one song to play while you're actually playing another different song."

Logan tilted his head. "You mean other people can't do that?"

Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick loudly laughed; "No!"

Drew grinned, "Why not?" then remembered, "Oh, wait; that's right, you're *OLD*!"

Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick smiled. They surrounded Drew and Corey scurried away. Nearby, a small pool appeared, approximately twelve feet long by ten feet wide and six feet deep. The four boys took hold of Drew's arms and legs. Seeing the pool was filled with water and ice cubes, Drew stopped giggling and began struggling. "No! Wait! Ple-e-e-ease!"

Prez teased, "Can you say 'shrinkage', little bro?" The four older boys began swinging Drew by his arms and legs, counting down; "three... two... one..."

"NO-O-O-O-O!" Drew screamed as he flew up over the center of the pool. John, Bruce and Corey were hysterical as were Juan, Jory, Adam and Logan. Splashing into the pool and rising to the surface, Drew spluttered; "Fuckin' cold!" and practically flew out of the small pool.

They were suddenly back on the beach together, and they realized there was never really a pool on the beach. Drew was dry, but still feeling terribly cold and it showed. Everyone snickered evilly and Drew raced down the beach into the warmer water of the bay to hide himself. "You bastards!" Drew hollered. "Sleep with BOTH eyes open tonight!"

"Now for the really funny part; to you guys that felt like almost five minutes. Right?" Adam asked.

When they nodded Adam snickered; "It was actually 2.3

seconds."

Keith giggled, "Dare I say, that was actually pretty cool!"

Bruce grinned, "Drew thought it was way cold!"

Adam grinned evilly. "You wanna see cool? You wanna see what an N-Gen can do?"

Seeing all of them nodding and Drew walking back up from the water, Adam turned to Jimmy, grinned and nodded. Jimmy, naked as the day he was born, backed off a couple of feet, assuming a very feminine tone while crying "FLAME ON! BITCH!" Suddenly his entire body was wreathed in flame. He lifted a few feet off the ground, riding the thermals he was producing, then turned towards the water. Raising his arm, he snapped his fingers in the direction of the water. Suddenly a large portion of the bay, where there were no kids swimming, was on fire. Steam bellowed up into the sky.

Juan softly growled, "I hate it when he does that."

"Now there's something I've never seen before," Prez grinned.

Derrick shook his head sadly, "I don't know that I ever want to again either."

Mike softly sang, "Smoke on the water, and fire in the sky."

John hollered, "I could someday do *that*?"

"Showing off again?" a fourteen-year-old with shaggy blond hair yelled out at Jimmy. With him were four others: a middle-aged woman, a tall muscular twenty-year-old with crew cut brown hair, and two boys of eight and ten. Runt spotted the last of them and delightedly yelled; "Brandon!"

Runt ran over to the group yelling, "Bobby! Skipper!" He would have said more, but he slammed into the older of the young men, wrapping him up in a huge hug. Jimmy for his part, simply let the flames die out and snickered at the fact that there was now a cloud forming over the bay from all the water he evaporated with his fire. "Hey guys," Will said. "Prez, these are our friends Skipper Hamilton and Bobby Martin from Maine, their kids Brandon and Andy Jessup, and Bobby's mother Grace Martin."

Jory ran up to the group holding a small box in his hand. "You guys ready yet?"

Adam nodded then frowned. "I think we need boards."

Suddenly in front of them twenty surfboards appeared sticking out from the sand. Four of them were nothing short of massive. Adam took a step back in surprise, then looked at Logan who just laughed.

"Okay, we got the boards. Now what?" Adam said, and looked at Prez

"Umm, we need better waves still," Prez reminded.

"What did I say?" Jory exclaimed, sounding somewhat annoyed. "Just get your butts out there, and let me know when you're ready, and you'll have your waves!"

"Should we be worried?" Prez wondered, not really sure what was going on.

Jory shrieked, "NO!"

"YES!" Juan cried out, almost simultaneously.

Logan just quietly asked, "Are your wills up to date?"

Adam grabbed a board and started running out into the water. "Come on guys, you wanna live forever?"

Suddenly, the only people standing on the beach were the Rimmers.

They each shrugged then took a short board, but looked at the four boards that were sticking up out of the sand about fifteen feet and could only wonder what they were for. They hurried into the water and hopped onto their boards then began paddling out.

John whined, "There's no good boards here for me or Bruce."

"Don't worry little dudes, we got you!" Turning around, the two boys saw their two gorillas, both wearing leis and board shorts. The gorillas picked up huge eighteen foot long boards, tucked them under their arms and then picked up their boys. John and Bruce crawled onto their gorillas backs.

Once the group all assembled about seventy yards from the shore, Prez and Keith began to explain everything that was needed. When he was sure the guys had the basics down, Prez looked to Jory and hollered; "Well mister magic maker, let's see where these waves are?"

Jory just grinned, picked up the little box that was now dangling from his neck and shouted, "READY?"

Everyone nodded and the six core Rimmers held up an arm each. Then Jory cried his four favorite words: "FIRE IN THE HOLE!" Then he pushed one of his buttons.

Behind them about thirty yards, the world exploded. Keith, Mike, Prez and Derrick all screamed at the loud underwater explosion and then started paddling their arms off as the resulting waves started

to race towards them. "WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU THINKING?" Mike bellowed excitedly as he jumped up on his board and rode a wave that swelled to twelve feet high.

Tumbling about in the water around the boards were seventy-four ferrets. About half of them managed to scurry onto boards. "WAHOOOOO!" John loudly laughed from atop his gorilla. Keith quickly glanced over at his little brother and shook his head sadly. Six ferrets climbed onto John's gorilla and were peering down from his outstretched arms. Another four ferrets were aboard Bruce's gorilla, in awe at the shiny water before them. On each of the other surfboards were two or three ferrets, standing upright and balancing themselves.

On the beach, Juan and Jory started singing: "In Hawaii there's a place known as Anahola Bay, where the best surfers in the world come to stay, and ride the wild surf, they come to try, to conquer those waves some twenty feet high."

As they approached the beach and rode the white water, dozens of ferrets were chanting praises to the shiny water bubbles popping around them. Eighteen surfers and their boards turned around, paddled back out and prepared for the next wave. Two more gorillas jogged down from the dunes and grabbed the remaining two long boards then hurried out into the water.

After whispered consultation, Keith, Mike, and Derrick broke into close Beach Boys-style three-part harmony. "Little ferret, little one; take my shynys, one by one; do you love me, do you surfer gorilla; surfer gorilla, my little surfer gorilla."

Once they were lined up far out in the bay, twenty arms went up to signal they were ready. Jory shouted; "FIRE IN THE HOLE!" Again the entire beach trembled and a tremendous swell pushed the boards forward. Everyone stood and gained their balance as the wave

lifted them higher and higher. Prez noticed that on the beach six mothers were marching in line towards Jory. As the surfers approached the shore once again, all six women stood with their arms crossed behind Juan and Jory.

Noticing a looming shadow, Jory turned and saw them. "WHAT?" Jory squealed. "I made sure they were floating off the sea bed and shaped properly so they didn't hurt nothin'... and... and... no one got hurt... and... well... umm..." Suddenly his eyes dropped to the sand. "Sorry mom," he said in his best sad puppy dog voice.

Holding her hand out, Janet simply said, "Now Jory."

"But... but... mo-o-om!" Jory whined. Janet only glared angrily. Jory sighed, "Oh, alright," and handed his mom the detonator box.

Adam tried hard not to laugh and finally decided to take pity on his little brother. Arriving on the beach, Adam smirked, "Jory, she's got a bit of a point though. There's really a lot to go over with the Rimmers. Why don't you take some of the younger ones and do some swimming or whatever. We'll take care of business." Jory sighed and nodded sadly then turned and ran towards where a lot of the little kids were playing. Jimmy, Juan and most of the others followed.

Adam turned to John and asked, "Hey dude, could you gather all the Core Rimmers together while I go talk to our mothers?"

John nodded and ran off while Adam spent a few minutes talking to Janet and Mrs. Hundser. Once all the Rimmers were there, Adam walked over with Chang and Logan and Nathan joining in. "Okay guys. I just cleared it with our moms. We got lots of security stuff to go over, and I thought it might be best to do it back in Utah. Don't worry that we're not dressed, no one will really know we're there. Sound okay to you guys?"

Prez frowned, "How are we gonna get all the way to Utah? Transporter? I don't like to fly at all. That's how my parents died."

Adam's eyes softened and he gently said, "We don't use transporters like you know them; however, your time of ever having to worry about flying is over. Before we leave the base, I will make sure you have communications access to Daileass, and any time you wanna move from island to island, he'll move you. Just like this; Daileass, conference room 4-A, if you please."

For all the Rimmers, it really felt like they simply blinked and were in another place. This room was set up just like many of the conference rooms they had seen in the past, only this one was way high tech, with nice plushy chairs and a twelve foot long Formica table.

As soon as they appeared, Adam spoke while looking up a bit to the ceiling. "Daileass, could you do me a favor and raise the temperature in this room to a nice round eighty degrees and ask Ray Ray to send up some refreshments."

"Sure thing, Boss-O!" Came the giggling reply from all over the room, of a boy who sounded like he was twelve or thirteen. "And I gotta say, these guys are cute. I'll make sure to keep Melinda away from here!"

Logan giggled, "I think all the ones old enough to interest her are already spoken for, by each other."

Adam just chuckled as he motioned for everyone to sit around the table.

Drew and Corey blushed while everyone else giggled. John smiled, "Who's Daileass?"

"Well, John," The voice said from all over again. But this time, on the screen in front of John's chair, a face appeared. He looked just like Logan and Nathan, only a bit younger. "I am. But I guess you want more of an explanation. Let's just say that I'm the AI the runs this base and a lot of other things around here. See about four years ago, some bad doctors took images of me and my brother's brains, took them out of our heads, and put them in a positronic matrix. *They* came out of it okay, but I was the first, and they screwed up with me. So when Logan found my brain sitting in a box, he figured out how to hook me up to the server farm that he installed downstairs and basically gave me a body again, only my body is this base."

Saddened, John frowned, "I'm sorry, dude."

"Why? I'm not. See John, if there's one thing I learned while working with these guys it's this; a lot of bad shit happens all over the place. It's up to us to decide if we're gonna get wrapped up in what happened to us in the past, or use what we learned with what we had to go through to help try and make sure others don't have to deal with it." All around the table Daileass's face appeared on all the screens. "You guys have got a great chance here to really get out there and help." It was like he was talking to each of the new boys individually. "Being part of the Clan is not really all that difficult, not if you look at it in pieces. Sure, you have a lot more that you *can* do, but that's only because you would want to in the first place. You can give lots of people the kind of power that the Clan gives them, and they'll use it to make their own lives better, and forget about everyone else. But I really doubt that's you guys."

His face moved from being on all the screens to just being on the big one that hung on the wall. He looked right at John and spoke again. "John, you said you were sorry that I had to go through what I did, and I know you mean it. I appreciate that, however, there is a *lot*

more that I can do now than I could ever before do. I mean yes, I can spy real well on everyone, but that's just a perk." Everyone laughed at his joke, then his face got serious again.

"You can ask Nathan if you want, he's one of my brothers, and because of that we are always talking in our minds. Since I came online here, they have *always* been there floating around my thoughts, and knowing what I know. That means we've all heard just about everything that has been said on this base by anyone. I know you heard how many kids we got running around in here, and almost every single one of them have said the same thing in one way or another. Many of their lives have been bad for one reason or another, but every single one of them has learned how to survive. They are now learning how to take what happened to them and turn it around into something good, and in the process helping others that are going through the same things." He laughed for a second then spoke again. "I'll end my sermon with one last thing. One of the founding Clan members once said something that has turned into almost a motto for the Clan, even if most don't realize it. Sometimes it takes something bad to happen, so that something good can."

There was a small knock on the door and then it opened. Entering with a tray were two young boys; one who was seven, the other was eight. While everyone was thinking about what Daileass had to say, the two younger boys passed out drinks and some snacks to everyone in the room. The older one took a position behind Adam. The younger of the two boys walked out, shutting the door behind him.

Adam spoke softly so as not to break the mood. "Just so you guys know, the young one that just left is Ray. He's Donnie and Emily's adopted son, and the rug rat behind me is my personal assistant Aiden. But Prez, I saw you were about to say something.

Please go ahead."

Prez nodded to Adam, then smiled at the boy on the screen and said, "Thanks Daileass." Turning to John, Prez said, "That's our job now bro. Just like your family picked up my pieces after my parents died, all of us are going to help the rescued kids in Hawaii pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. Think about what their lives were like for a minute. Kaleo's fourteen, just like me and Keith, but had never surfed until today. Lots of these kids don't know how to play soccer. We can teach them. Lots of them slept four or more to a single bed. Imagine if you, Drew, Keith and I all *had* to sleep in one bed. Now they'll have their own beds and a certain amount of privacy, maybe for the first time in their lives."

"Talk about dealing with changes," Keith added. "Yeah, our lives are changing, but imagine how lonely some of them will feel in a nice big bedroom with only one other person. Imagine having so many after school chores that all you could do was finish them and then go to bed. That's what some of the kids told us their lives were like. We're gonna change them back into kids, John."

"I can do that," John happily assured. "We'll get a soccer lesson in as soon as possible."

"Now you guys got it." Logan beamed, but then got serious. "One thing to watch out for though; many of the kids won't be able to handle having privacy. You'll find your beds filling up at night. You'll find yourselves having less and less privacy for yourselves. You'll have to work as a team to make sure that none of you get overwhelmed by it, and can have some time to yourselves."

Nathan jumped in right behind his big brother. "One thing I think you'll find quickly is that nesting is great. If you don't know what that means, it's simple. Take a whole bunch of blankets and

pillows and spread them out. Then people sleep where ever they want to. It's great for forming bonds between people, and it really reinforces to those kids that never had anyone before, that they are actually wanted. Now, of course, don't force it, but make it available."

Turning to Kaleo, Prez wondered, "What do you think, dude?"

Kaleo thought for a few moments then said, "I'm sure most of the younger kids would like the nesting idea more than being in a dorm room. Me and Tory though, we're looking forward to sharing a room already."

Keith asked, "Are you and Tory becoming a couple?"

"He knows I like him," Kaleo shrugged, "and he likes me too. It's just the fucked up shit we had to deal with before that kept it from moving further than friendship. Maybe we will become a couple, but I don't really know if or when that might happen."

"Maybe we can setup a couple of nests," Drew offered. "Like maybe one for the younger boys with John and Bruce, and another for the eleven and twelve-year-olds with me and Corey. Some of the younger girls might want to stay with Lindsay..."

Turning to Derrick, Mike interrupted, "I'm sleeping at your place then tonight! All I need is a bunch of cackling little girls!" Grinning, Derrick took Mike's hand and nodded understandingly.

"Kids are flexible," Chang said, "They can adjust and cope with almost anything, *if* they have support. They need someone who loves them that they know they can count on; remember that. It's not what you provide them, so much as it is *who* you provide them, to love and be trusted."

Adam nodded, "Just remember one thing; many of the kids you

have now have probably had more exposure to sex than any of you. To many of them, that was the only love they ever felt. It will really fuck with them if you guys were to see what they were doing and freak out on them." Adam chuckled, "I'm sure many of you know how addictive sex can be, and you don't have to be older to have that addiction. All I would advise is to talk to them about it if you see it."

Adam made sure he got nods from them before he went on. "Okay, now for the next thing; security. I'm pretty sure you guys haven't really thought about what this all means in your day to day lives. I'm just going to assume that you guys want to continue going to the school you go to now?"

"Course we do," Prez quickly said. "Keith, Mike, Derrick and me want to be in our school's jazz band. We have commitments and responsibilities to that band." Keith, Mike and Derrick nodded.

Drew and Corey checked with each other. Corey said, "We just started middle school in September. It don't matter much to me where we go to school."

"As long as we're together," Drew assured.

"I only got one more year of grade school," John thought aloud. "It would be better if I could at least finish off this year."

Adam nodded, "I kinda figured that, however, there might be problems with things." He raised a hand to cut off protests then explained, "You have to understand, you just shut down a very profitable ring of child pornography and child sex. I'm sure most of those involved have been caught, but it has pissed off a lot of people, even some of the kids you go to school with. They probably don't understand what really happened, all they know is that shit that you were involved with made it so their mom or dad no longer has a job,

or their uncle was arrested, or anything else."

He took a deep breath then went on. "Obviously you know that you're part of the Clan, but there are people out there who don't like the Clan. Just look at what happened last week in Montana. I think you get the point." Met with nods, he stood up and started to pace.

"I'm hoping what I have set up will allow you guys to finish school without having any big problems, but you must understand that you and your family's security is most important. So here's what I have in mind, also anything can be revisited at any time. Each of you will have two security personnel assigned to your person. What that means, is that one of them will be with you any time you are not inside a secured building. When you are out and about, I expect you to listen to what they say when it comes to your safety. Logan has handpicked them, so that they are your age, with as many similar interests as we could make. They will go to school with you, be in the same classes, and even go to the bathrooms with you. They will be as unobtrusive as possible, but they will be there."

He saw that some of them were about to protest, and honestly he couldn't blame them, but he cut them off anyway. "You see all the pictures on that wall. There are sixty-one kids there that died to protect their family one week ago. You're family now and it security's job to protect you. If you allow them to, I doubt you will ever have a problem. Your lives have changed, and I'm sorry for that. But now you have to realize that you guys are targets and it's my job to make sure that nothing happens to you.

"One other thing to know; if something happens at school, if the school bully comes up and tries to start a fight, my guys will *not* step in. If any of you start a fight, you will have to deal with it; however, if it starts to get out of hand, or if others jump in, then my guys will too. And understand something that's very serious; if anyone were to ever

draw a weapon on any of you, that person will die quickly. This isn't a game, okay?"

No one said a word, but Keith groaned. Noticing everyone looking at him, Keith explained, "That could be bad. The Board of Education would have something to say if a handful of students were considered more important than every other kid and adult in the building."

Prez looked deep into Keith's eyes and softly asked, "Do you really think it will be that bad?" Keith only shrugged.

Adam said, "Just a scenario here. What if someone were to learn four Clan Short leaders went to your school and decided to send a bomb in the mail? Their intention is to hurt or kill you and they don't care who else gets hurt or dies to accomplish that goal."

"That would be extremely bad!" Prez loudly said. He then sighed, rested his head in his hand and said, "How can the four of us expect everyone in the entire school to become targets?"

Derrick wondered, "What if we continued most of our schooling on base, but went over to James Campbell only for jazz band in the afternoons? It's the last class of the day anyway. That way we're not there most of the day, reducing the risks."

"That'll work," Adam smiled. "You'll still need the two security personnel for each of you but it would only be for an hour or so."

"We'd better plan on that then," Prez agreed.

Sitting down again, Adam said, "We talked it over while we were here and have come up with this, if you guys approve." Adam looked at John. "Now, one last thing; John, you're going to be the head of the Intel team for the Rimmers. If you would like, Nathan

here has volunteered to come over and stay with you guys, and help get you trained in what you need to do, and help out how ever you guys need it."

John smiled, "Yeah, let's do that."

Seeing only nodding heads from the remaining core team, Prez confirmed, "Okay then; John, you'll be the only one going to the same school Monday morning, but with two security guys. All the rest of us will be attending school on one of our bases. Keith, Derrick, Mike and I will only be attending our jazz band class in the afternoons. Hopefully we've come up with a plan that everyone, including adults at the Board of Education can deal with. We'll find out Monday when our parents begin transferring us to Clan Short operated schools."

Adam waited for a few moments to make sure that they were done discussing things, then he spoke up. "Okay guys, just a few more things to go over. First off; Daileass, can you get me eight sub-vocals and comm-badges?" Suddenly there were eight small boxes sitting in front of each of the Core Rimmers. Adam had them open the boxes and then instructed them on how to fit and use the sub-vocals. Once they all knew what they were doing, Adam explained what they were for. "The sub-vocal will let you communicate with Daileass at any time, no matter where you are. You can arrange for transport, or anything else like that. You don't really need to talk, just activate it, and mouth the words. Any questions on that?" No one had any so Adam sat back down. "The comm-badges pin to your shirts. Just tap to activate it. They'll let you communicate with each other or anyone else that has one in the Clan, the UNIT or in Starfleet."

"There is one other thing," Adam paused then took a deep breath before continuing. "I am reluctant to bring it up. I totally understand how your mothers will take this, but I will strongly suggest that all of you get firearms training; whether it's a normal hand gun like we

wear, or even a phaser. Either way, I would like for all of you to know how to use one. I will not make this a requirement as none of you are military; however, I would strongly suggest it."

"One more thing," Adam said quickly, so as to not let them dwell on the gun issue. "Mike, I understand your father is a police officer. How do you think he would feel about switching jobs and working for the Clan? It would mean that he would be home a lot more often."

Mike quickly replied, "My mom worries about him every day. I'm sick of her freaking out if he's ten minutes late. I think both my mom and dad would like it." Mike paused and grinned, "Me and Lindsay on the other hand will have to get used to it."

Keith then offered, "I know my mom would freak out over hand guns being around. She wouldn't be too happy about phasers either, but they have variable settings, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," Adam responded quickly. "Phasers are safer for people who don't know what they are doing." Adam paused and laughed, "However, most of my guys like hand guns cause of the boom they make."

Prez cracked up and loudly chuckled, "Let's stick with the hand phasers. All our mom's would be happier but we'd still have to keep them locked up when they're not needed. Safety, ya know? All we need is for someone to accidentally stun themselves and the party's over! When you get the chance to train us, let us know."

"Now, for the last thing I wanted to ask about; there are three bases on Oahu, right?" Prez nodded, so Adam continued. "The third base was formally a Marine Corps base. If my numbers are accurate, it covers about five square miles. If you guys are okay with it, and it's

totally up to you, I would like to turn that into a rapid deployment base for The UNIT. It's already set up to handle any type of aircraft to land there. It would be perfect for what the UNIT needs, and if you're willing, I would like to annex it." Prez was about to speak up, when Adam once again, pushed on. "Basically, what I see its functions being is an emergency relocation facility for you, your families and your Clan. It would also house a Vulcan state of the art medical facility, as well as many different styles of training areas. See, we don't just school the kids here in military strategy and tactics, we let them pick just about anything they want, and somewhere, we have someone that can train them in it."

"I see no problem with that," Prez offered. "It's on a peninsula and would definitely be most secure."

Logan grinned. "Cool! That means we finally have a place to put the Goliath."

Adam also grinned and nodded to Logan. "Okay, I think that about sums it up. Anything else you guys can think of, or want to say?" Adam, still grinning, was looking right at Prez.

"I do have one more thing to say," Prez huffed. "In the little while we've known each other, you've presented me with several questions and chances to say something, but kept on talking so I couldn't answer. Just let me say that *I* am responsible for this division of Clan Short. All the people stationed on these islands will ultimately report to me because I report to the Clan Short Patriarch, whether that be Joel or Cory Short or whomever. Have I made myself clear, Adam?"

All the other core Rimmers were wide-eyed and completely stunned that Prez had put his foot down so forcefully. Prez and Adam didn't seem to notice anything except each other. Noticing that Adam

had never stopped smiling, Prez grinned, "You've been cutting me off on purpose, haven't you?"

Adam's grin widened and he nodded. "Yes, I have, and it was to see how long it took to get this kind of reaction. To be blunt, I needed to make sure, for myself, that the person I was having security put around would not just roll over when presented with someone who has some authority. I had to make sure that you would do what is needed to get *your* point across. Do you understand what I mean?"

Prez nodded, "That's part of leadership. One thing I learned from my dad, Keith's dad and Mike's dad is to give people a chance, maybe multiple chances, especially when you know you have to work with someone. But I have a responsibility to almost a hundred kids, my friends and their families, not to mention the reputation of Clan Short. What I need to know is where our authority overlaps and where it doesn't."

Adam nodded, "Very sensible. I will bring this up with Cory when he comes to see you, and make sure that what I am about to say is accurate, however, I believe it is. Due to the title you have been given as director of the Pacific Rim, I would assume that your area of influence covers everything from the West Coast of the United States; including the States of California, Oregon, Washington State, and Alaska; as well as the western section of Canada. It would also include any and all of the Pacific Islands north of the equator, including the entire country of Japan, and the coast line country in that part of East Asia. The only exception to that would be any UNIT bases. Simply put, that is because the military does not answer to the local governor, if you will, but only to the president, or Patriarch. Does that help clear things up?"

"I agree with the geographic coverage, however I do not agree with who the UNIT on Hawaii will report to," Prez said. "Basically

what you've said is that if the Pacific Rim needs UNIT assistance, only the Patriarch can approve that request. Due to time zones and the possible importance of needing the UNIT, waiting for the Patriarch is not reasonable. I see it more like a U.S. Governor having control over the military reserves and the National Guard in his State. Let's face it Adam, too many cooks spoil the broth; too many leaders in charge creates havoc."

Adam grinned broadly as he sat back. "Damn, you're good at this. Let me see if I can explain it like this. You will have many different security personnel hanging around the base at all times. They are your national guard. If you need for them to effect a rescue, that's what they are there for. The troops on the base are different though. All my base commanders have standing orders to aid and assist all Clan Division leaders no matter what they ask for, as long as it does not detract from ongoing operations. Basically, what that means is this; if for some reason, you need more military support than you have, you call the base on the island. If they have available personnel, you'll get them. However, if they are already all out and about, then you'll have to figure out something else." Adam paused for a second, then he went on. "Let me try it one other way, because I am sure that was somewhat confusing. As a division Director, you can ask my commanders for assistance. One thing I am sure Nathan will assist you on is learning the Military chain of command. However, and I am sure this will annoy you to no end, but you will get saluted."

Prez was about to say something, however, Nathan held up his hand and said, "If I may, Sir?"

"Go ahead, Nathan," Prez said with a nod.

"Adam, I think what Prez is saying is this. He's got personal security, what he doesn't have is the personnel to do an operation if needed. As a division director, he needs to have a squad of troops, I

would say maybe a hundred strong, that are at his disposal all the time. If the shit hits the fan, they can be pulled, but that would only be after the Core are completely secured. I think you're seeing the base in Hawaii as a worldwide response, where Prez saw it more as a Pacific Rim response. So what you need to do is make sure he's got the troops to do whatever he may need to. Remember, he will have the largest area to cover of any of the divisions, with a whole shit load of people, in several different countries. He *needs* troops of his own, more than just his security. Am I right here, Prez?"

"That's exactly right," Prez agreed. "From California to Japan is a huge area; it covers seven time zones and crosses the International Date Line. California alone is the most populated State in the United States. Japan is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Joel and his team of thirteen, not including Blackie and I-Cheya, took down the Hawaiian government. God forbid I was ever put in a situation like that, but I can't deny the possibility exists. Therefore the Pacific Rim needs dedicated UNIT personnel at all times, regardless of what the remainder of UNIT forces on that base are assigned to do. Because of where I've lived the last seven years of my life, near Pearl Harbor and Hickam Air Force Base, I am already very aware of the military chain of command. Joel made me director of about a third of the planet. I report to the Clan Short Patriarch. There cannot be two commanders in the Pacific Rim division both reporting to the Patriarch."

Adam was nodding as Prez was speaking. "You made good points, and I agree with you. Sorry for not understanding." He actually chuckled. "Sometimes it's annoying that I refuse to allow the telepaths, including myself, to read from people if there is no cause. Had I done that, I would have figured out exactly what you meant. Now, let's see what we can do."

Adam looked behind him to Aiden, who spoke almost immediately. "My suggestion would be Delta Brigade once we do the restructuring. That would give them one hundred and twenty troops, as well as eighty support personnel. You can house the officers at the main Rimmer base, while the rest are housed at the UNIT base." Adam was nodding the entire time, while Logan started to input things into the computer terminal he was sitting at.

Mike wondered, "What exactly are support personnel?"

Keith hung his head and chuckled, "Jeez dude, haven't you watched any war movies at all?"

"Hell no!" Mike laughed. "I'm a lover, not a fighter!"

Prez grinned at Derrick. "Is that true, dude?"

Derrick chuckled and nodded.

"We're talking about cooks, laundry and mechanics; all the people that support what the main troops do," Keith answered.

Adam spoke up at that point. "Not to mention the four troop transport helicopters, the two attack helicopters, and the Harrier jump jet that goes along with it, and of course, their support."

"Well, you won't ever get me in any helicopter or jet!" Prez grinned devilishly. While most of the Rimmers snickered, Prez then asked, "Daileass, is there anywhere you can't get me in the blink of an eye?"

"Hmmmmmm..." The boy's voice came over the speakers. "Well, Mars would be a problem, but other than that...."

Prez snickered, "I'll make a note: no interplanetary travel."

Adam laughed, then stood. "Well, I think that's enough for now. There's a beach with my name on it."

Logan's grin widened as he slapped Adam's arm. "Why don't you bring your guitar? Maybe you and the Rimmers can do some jamming."

"You play?" Mike smiled.

"Sort of, but I ain't that good." Adam said, showing an uncharacteristic lack of self confidence.

Logan laughed out loud, "He plays a lot of things, and the guitar!" The whole room busted up laughing.

Leaning back in his chair, Keith began jabbing; "Jeez, Prez! Could you pick someone other than a genetically enhanced military type to argue with?"

Derrick snickered, "For a while there, I thought it was gonna come to blows!"

"Nah!" Adam said with a grin. "I don't fight people who ain't got a chance."

"I'm not stupid enough to underestimate Adam, any of his brothers or the UNIT," Prez sneered. "At the same time, I am not underestimating my position as director of this division. The welfare of over a hundred people has been dropped in my hands. I don't take it lightly."

Aiden jumped in quickly. "You all gotta see Adam and Khan trying to take on Chang. It's amazing to watch!"

Calmly, without any hint of anger or arrogance, Chang said,

"While that is good exercise, I must agree with your assessment, Adam; I should reserve myself for people who actually have a chance."

All the Rimmers began mooing at the gauntlet being thrown. When most of the giggling and laughing had died down, Keith chuckled, "That might be fun and interesting to watch, but definitely *not* in front of any of our mothers!"

Adam laughed and suddenly the screen at the end of the room blinked on. What the Rimmers witnessed was something that shocked them. They recognized the huge Khan, but didn't recognize the hugely muscled hybrid that was facing off against him. "Oh shit!" Adam laughed, "That's Khan fighting Logan, one of the Wolverine Hybrids we rescued."

Meanwhile, back on Anahola Bay beach...

Runt was in an animated conversation with Bobby, Brandon, and Andy, as Skipper, Grace, Khan, Joe and Janet looked on bemusedly.

Skipper motioned to Will, who trotted over and listened to his whispered idea. He grinned delightedly and spoke quietly to Daileass; seconds later they vanished.

About five minutes later, two helicopters very suddenly appeared over the bay about two hundred feet from the shore, both of them were UNIT Hueys. The one closest to the beach turned hard, and came in fast and low. It landed a ways up the beach so that there wasn't sand blowing everywhere. The other landed right by it, and Will jumped out of the first one and ran up to the group. "Okay, so who's up for some para-sailing?" he asked with a huge grin.

Bobby came running, followed by Reyes, Tory, and several of

the other rescued kids. "You're kidding!" he exclaimed.

"Nope! We've got it all figured out. I got a huge 'chute that we can tether behind one of the Hueys, and drag people across the bay. Hell, if there's someone who has the guts, we can even hook up the tether and let them try and ski."

"If somebody has the guts?" Bobby scoffed. "I know a dare when I hear one. Count me in!" He grinned at Skipper.

"Do you even know how to ski?" Will asked Bobby.

"I grew up in Maine, what do you think?" Bobby gave back as good as he got.

Starting to head back to the helicopter, Will grinned, "Well, what do you want first, the parachute or the skis?" He stopped then turned back saying, "I'll need someone to act as a spotter in the helicopter. Runt, you wanna hang out the side and let me know when the little freak dies?"

"Freak? Why the hell am I freak?" Bobby asked, mocking offense.

"Simple man; you're about to be pulled by a freaking helicopter while you're on water skis! That's fucking dangerous, don't you think?"

"Nah, easy peasy!" Bobby confidently said.

Little Andy was looking like he half expected to see one of his fathers depart this mortal life immediately.

"Well, come on then, dead meat," Will laughed hysterically. "I'll make sure the medics are standing by. Oh, wait a minute! The medic

is flying the other helicopter!"

Grace picked up Andy, giving her firstborn a glare that said without words; 'You *will* be careful.' "He'll do just fine," she said comfortingly to Andy.

Bobby, Will, and Runt hopped into one of the Hueys. Will belted himself in as pilot then took off. They veered out over the water and off to the East. Will descended to about six feet above the water and hovered; Bobby jumped out, and Runt threw him the tether and Ski Rope to hang onto. Bobby tread water, got his skis on, grabbed the tether, and signaled. Will took off.

Bobby shot across the bay behind the helicopter, screaming maniacally. Most of the group on the shore were watching by now. Finally, he dropped the tether and swam back to shore laughing.

"I want to try that!" Tory called out.

Over the next half hour, Tory, Kaleo, Bobby, Brandon, and two of the UNIT security detail took turns hang-gliding-skiing behind the copter. Then Skipper took one of the gorillas up.

The Gorilla got ready to go and gave the signal. Just as the rope was tightened, a ferret leaped out of the water and onto the gorilla's shoulders. Unable to stop what was happening, the Gorilla simply shook his head and adjusted himself for the extra forty pounds of ferret on his shoulder.

Spike meanwhile was looking around mournfully for Mike.

After the gorilla plus ferret run, Will came back in and picked up his next rider; Khan. Once Khan was in the water, he looked up at his new boyfriend and did something that got Runt to reply with fierce negativity. He patted his shoulder inviting the smaller boy to

ride with him. Shrugging defeat, Khan simply gave the signal that he was ready. Will started laughing as he hit the accelerator on the helicopter. With Khan's strength and resilience, Will was going to see just how fast he could make the big cat skip across the water of the bay. He did pull it back when he noticed his gauge top the one hundred mile an hour mark. The big cat was barely clipping the wave tops at that speed, roaring and was obviously enjoying himself.

Appearing on the beach was all the Core Rimmers, Adam, Chang, Logan, Nathan and Aiden. Seeing Khan zipping back and forth across Anahola Bay, Adam groaned, "Oh Jesus Christ! I knew it; as soon as I left, Will found an excuse for a joy ride!"

"That looks like so much fun though!" Derrick laughed. Keith agreed and so did John.

Looking down at John, Keith reminded, "Check with mom first, bro."

"Why?" John whined.

Keith giggled, "I'm second in command! I can't get grounded now!" John sighed then tore across the beach to where all the adults were gathered.

Looking up from organizing his shinys, Spike noticed that Mike had returned. Quickly loading his pearls and assorted other trinkets into his waist sack, Spike then scurried over and parked himself immediately before Mike.

Meanwhile, just up-beach and to the west of where the Core Rimmers and UNIT guys had reappeared, another party was beaming in. There was a man in later middle age, two women in their thirties, a man in his late twenties, three teens, a group of ten boys and four girls, a set of red-headed seven-year-old twin boys and finally a nine-

year-old towhead who popped back out of existence, then back into it again, giving a hug to Prez.

Prez looked down at the small boy hugging him and immediately noticed purple eyes. "Another Mikyvis?" Prez chuckled.

"Yep!" the small boy giggled, "I'm Peter, by the way! Nice to meet ya, Prez!"

As John ran up to the group of adults, Mrs. Hundser didn't even wait. "NO!" she forcefully hollered.

"But MO-O-O-OM!" John whined in his perfected little boy voice.

"No buts mister! That is way too dangerous," She said, as she planted her hands on her hips.

Skipper thought it was time to interject something. "Mrs. Hundser, there is a reason we brought the second helicopter. It's a chance for some of my guys to practice their water rescues. Basically, in a few minutes we're going to run it so that when the person falls off the ski's, we're asking them to stay there, so that my guys can do a water jump and secure the 'patient' for transport. Not only would John be wearing a flotation device, he would also have someone to him within one minute, probably less."

Brandon was giggling at this. John gave a glance and smile to Skipper that clearly said, 'Thanks'.

Buckling but not quite ready to give in, Jennifer Hundser checked with Janet who only smiled and nodded. Jennifer then sighed, "We'll watch the first water rescue. Then you can have a chance, only if you go out with Keith."

John jumped excitedly and hollered, "Thanks mom!" then ran back across the beach to tell Keith and Prez.

Jennifer turned to Janet and said, "Remember those Valium we were kidding about earlier? I think I may need a few to help me sleep at night."

Janet reached into her purse and pulled out a pill bottle. Handing it to Jennifer, she sighed, "It's not the good stuff, but with all the shit you're about to start seeing, they can help. Not to mention, I write out standing prescriptions for all Clan parents for an almost unlimited supply of Valium."

As Tory came swimming back into shore from his para-surfing run, Peter looked at him, blinked, zeroed in on him, and popped out of Prez's arms and down to the surf line to meet him. "C'mere," he said warmly.

Puzzled, Tory walked over. "Hold still," Peter said, and concentrated. Ever so slowly, the bruises, welts and scars on Tory's skin from how he had been abused faded to faint ghostly vestiges. "There, feel better?" Peter asked.

Tory looked at his arms first then down the front of his body. "Much better!" Tory loudly said, "Thank you!"

Kaleo had jogged over to meet his friend. "How'd you do that?" he asked with wide eyes.

"Time regression; I took his skin back to before he got beat," Peter explained.

"Can you do that for Kaleo too?" Tory pleaded.

"Sure," Peter said, took Kaleo's hand and concentrated. Slowly

the livid bruise marks and pale scars on his rich brown skin faded into nearly normal skin tones. "How's your chest feel?" Peter asked.

Kaleo drew a deep breath and smiled. "Much better!" he grinned.

"Couple of bruised ribs," Peter explained, "they didn't show up for the medics, but they were obvious to me. So I regressed them too."

Kaleo warmly smiled, "Thanks!" Peter only nodded and giggled then popped out of existence. He mainly moved around the beach giving random hugs and healing rescued kids as he found them.

Logan caught Prez's eyes, and motioned with his head off to the side. When the two teens walked away a bit, Logan turned towards Prez. "I just wanted to have a few moments to inform you of a few other things that Adam didn't go into."

Prez nodded so Logan continued. He ran his hand through his long blond hair and sighed. "You gotta understand what Adam and his brothers are to really get them. I'm sure by now, you think Adam's an arrogant asshole, and he is, but only when it comes to the military stuff. Get him out of his element, and he's just a scared little boy. All of them are. They were all raised in a lab with no interaction with anyone but doctors. To be honest, I was shocked that Adam got naked on the beach."

"Why?" Prez asked. "I mean, don't take this wrong, but he's got a great body."

Logan smirked but sadly sighed, "It wasn't like that yesterday. See, someone healed his entire body yesterday. Before that, Adam was covered in scars. Think about it for a minute. If you're trying to make it so someone will heal quickly, how do you test your success?"

"Oh shit!" Prez gasped.

"Yeah. He told me a few of the things he had to go through, including intentional cutting with knives, being shot at point blank range, and being burned severely. Adam healed from everything quickly, but of course, he still felt the pain. I mean, I literally watched one time as a cut on his hand healed. I *watched* it close up and stop bleeding.

"The reason I'm telling you all this, is because I don't want you to get the wrong idea about Adam. He seems so self assured most of the time, but if you take him out of the military situation, he doesn't have a clue what to do."

"Is that why he was reluctant to jam with us?" Prez asked, starting to understand.

"Exactly. I mean, if you look at all the Core UNIT guys, there is something mentally wrong with all of them. I'm sure you've heard the comments about Juan, and for the most part, they ain't jokes. If someone hurts a kid, Juan would rather kill them than look at them. He is the total cold blooded killer. His abuse was a lot worse than many of them, though. Think about it, what would it take to turn a kid into a psychotic killer? I won't go into the details, but his personal 'doctor' thought it would be a great experiment to cut off his balls just to see if they would regenerate."

Prez bent over slightly in sympathetic pain as he started to shed tears. "Did they?" he asked, almost not wanting to know the answer.

"Yeah they did, with some help. They would have anyways, but someone helped move that along quicker. Jory is a bit better off, although he really has no social graces and is a bit obsessive when it comes to his explosives. Will is one hell of a cocky fly boy, but he has

a right to be. He's been flying since before he could walk, and with what the docs did to all their intelligence, you can guess that he picked it up very quickly. Chang is actually the worst of the lot, although you would never really guess that. The main reason he is so emotionless at times is because he had to learn to control his temper. I have never personally seen him loose it, but I have heard stories. It wasn't pretty.

"All in all, they are a fantastic set of people, who would do anything they can to help people," Logan said with a sigh, "You just have to understand that they have their problems and learn to let them go. Adam is a damned good guitar player. I'm sure nowhere near Mike's caliber, but he's still damned good. But I will guarantee you that you won't get him on stage without a fight. However, that's a fight I want to have. He needs to get out there more."

Prez nodded thoughtfully then smiled, "I think I can set something up. And thanks for telling me all this. It helps to understand the people we'll be working with more."

The two little redheads from the newcomers had promptly shucked all their clothing and headed for the water. The other kids, ranging from eight to thirteen in age were hanging back nervously. The older man put his arm across the shoulders of one of them, pointing to the Vulcan security forces, and then to the Rimmers' rescued kids group. The kids seemed to take courage from that, and began to strip and head for the water themselves.

Adam saw the group that was standing up the beach and waved them over. Once they got there, Adam started the introductions. He turned towards the Rimmers and said. "Guys, I'd like to introduce you to the core group from the North East United States Division. First we have Jonas," Adam said pointing to the auburn haired teen boy. Then he pointed to the dark haired one, "Harry is the guy hanging onto

Jonas." He said with a chuckle. After Jonas and Harry shook hands with the Rimmers, Adam turned to Jonas.

"Jonas, these guys are the Clan Short Pacific Rim Division, or as they're calling themselves, the Rimmers. Why don't you introduce the rest of your group?"

"Okay," Jonas said, pointing to the redheaded woman, "this is my mother, Maureen McConnaghay, and this," pointing to the other woman, "is Harry's mother, Abbie Johnson. Word of warning; never get on her bad side; her tongue could slice cold steel!" He grinned.

Then he gestured at the older man, who looked to be about fifty with salt-and-pepper hair. "And it gives me a lot of pleasure to introduce my brand new father, Judge Josiah Brewster of the Family Court."

"Over here we have State's Attorney George Wentworth and his older adopted son, Philip," indicating the younger man and the husky teen. "Philip's little brothers are those two little redheads down there in the surf, Drew and Randy. And the kids with them are brand new to our family, as of an hour ago."

Prez then quickly introduced his core team, starting with Keith and working his way round through Drew, Corey, John, Mike, Derrick and giving Kaleo special notice as one of the rescued kids.

Finally, after literally dozens of para-surfing passes back and forth across Anahola Bay, Khan noticed Runt signaling down that others were waiting their turn and allowed himself to release the tether.

Mike, Derrick and Keith were all wanting to take a turn para-surfing and were arguing about who would go next while the Huey and Khan returned to the beach. Spike sat in the center of Mike,

Derrick and Keith, reverently looking up at Mike.

Off to the side slightly, John was jumping up and down whining; "Keith's gotta go next! Mom's gotta see him do it or she won't ever let me do it!"

Derrick looked down and noticed the way Spike was watching Mike. Realizing that Spike practically worshiped the ground Mike walked on, Derrick grinned and wondered how Spike might react to shiny microphone stands, shiny guitar pickup covers and shiny tuner pegs. It was all too much to fathom and Derrick bowed out of the argument, becoming hysterical. Mike and Keith continued playfully bantering to and fro.

Derrick couldn't hold it back, and he tapped the little ferret boy on the shoulder. Spike looked up with big wide eyes that just radiated innocence. "Yes?"

"I just gotta know," Derrick playfully wondered, "Why do you look at Mike like that?"

"Oh! Cause he's a Shiny maker. He makes Shiny music for us. I already asked Shiny High Priest Dave and he agreed. Shiny Mike will be our first human priest, leading us in worship of the Great Shiny with his shiny music. Such Honor has never been bestowed onto a non ferret before, but with Mike's love of shinys and his great music, it's only right to make him the first Human priest. Dave's getting his Shiny robes now, but he's gotta make them, as we got none that will fit such a big priest."

Derrick snickered, "How long before his Shiny robes will be ready?"

The little Ferret boy excitedly bounced on his feet. "The most Shiny Dave said that they would be ready before the Day-Shiny falls

below the water shiny, and the Great Night Shiny rises into the air, and the lesser night shinys are out."

"Huh?" Derrick cocked his head to the side.

Only hearing the final part of the conversation, Mike sighed, "The sun, moon and stars, doofus."

"See?" Spike excitedly shouted. "He's gonna be a GREAT Priest! He knows! HE UNDERSTANDS!"

Mike wrapped his arm around Derrick's shoulders and explained to Spike; "We all understand. Derrick plays shiny drums with shiny rims and shinier cymbals. Derrick just doesn't fully grasp the shiny vocabulary."

Clasping his forepaws together and dropping to his knees, Spike blubbered, "Can I stay with you forever, please? Oh PLEEEASE!"

"Lemme check with our division leader," Mike giggled. Glancing around and finding Prez with Logan, Mike shouted, "Prez! Got a minute, dude?"

"Be right there," Prez loudly replied. Logan and Prez shook hands and together walked over to Mike, Derrick, Keith and Spike. "What's goin' on?" Prez smiled.

Derrick giggled, "Mike's being made the first human Shiny Priest!"

"I'm what?" Mike exclaimed.

Derrick nodded and snickered, "Spike wants to stay here with Mike too."

Prez looked over to Logan and said, "Well I'm not really sure.

Logan, what do you think?"

"Well," Logan began, trying to stop a smile while looking at Mike. "One of the things that being a Clan member means is that you can adopt. I'm sure Spike would love to have you as a Shiny Daddy."

"Oh YES!" Spike pleaded, "Please Shiny Mike, can you be my Shiny Daddy?"

Seeing the warmth and affection already clearly portrayed in Spike's eyes, Mike said, "If Prez says it's okay, I'd like it." Only to butter up Prez and to impress Spike, Mike explained, "Prez plays a shiny bass; it has shiny pickups and shiny tuning pegs."

"He does?" Spike gasped in awe.

"Shiny followers never lie," Mike grinned. "Keith plays shiny keyboards too. We all have our shiny favorites."

"Oh, I have died a shiny death, and now I'm living in the shiny fields," Spike whimpered. His face fell then and it looked like he might actually start to cry.

Mike immediately went to his knees in front of the small boy. "What's wrong?"

"I... I can't stay with you, not without my litter mates. We're the only family we really have," he said trying hard not to cry, and failing.

"How many are there?" Mike asked. "If they're all as cute as you are, I don't see why we can't have a few more." Seeing a more hopeful expression on Spike's face, Mike stood again.

"Really?" Spike cried with excitement. "Well, let's see... there's Xander, my brother, and my two sisters; Willow and Faith. We're the

Scooby Gang!"

His heart melting, Prez smiled, "Tell your brother and sisters that the four of you can stay here if you like. We'll even change our band name from Old Habits to Platinum Habits. How does that sound?"

Spike dropped to his knees and grabbed Mike's ankle. "Oh, thank you, Shiny daddy! Thank you!" He blubbered as the tears streamed down his furry face. Quickly he ran off to gather his family. Almost everyone around them had a smile on their face, and tears in their eyes.

"Mike Gibbons, Holy Father of Ferrets," Drew giggled.

"The ferrets are the Shiny Rimmers!" Prez laughed.

Keith snickered, "Yet another rimmer joke! I can't take it!"

Skipper motioned Bobby and Brandon to join him, and then approached Keith. "Sounds like your mother is being protective of John. You heard what I said to her, right?" Keith nodded a little uncertainly. Skipper asked, "Are you a good, strong swimmer?"

"Well, yeah," Keith grinned, "If you're going to surf in the waves around here, you pretty well have to be."

"All right then," Skipper continued, "how would you like to be the 'victim' for a sea rescue? We can use the practice, and it should alleviate your mom's fears about John getting a chance to para-ski."

Keith grinned. "Cool, go for it!"

"Okay, then, start swimming out, and we'll take the other bird up and rescue you," Skipper said. Keith gave Skipper a thumbs-up, told

his mother what was in the offing, and then darted down to the shoreline, starting to swim out. Skipper motioned to Little Andy, who hadn't been far away from his big brother and father figures. "Okay, Mister Loadmaster, one sea rescue coming up. Ready for it?"

The eight-year-old nodded his head vigorously, grinning ear to ear.

Skipper, Bobby, Brandon, and Andy hurried over to the other Huey. Brandon hurried forward, then stopped short. "Who's co-piloting?"

"Nobody; the Huey can be flown one-man. You're piloting," Skipper instructed, "The three of us will be needed in the back."

Brandon gulped and belted himself in, running quickly through the pre-flight checklist. "Ready!" he called back in his preteen treble.

"Take her up," Skipper instructed. "Keep her low, twenty-five to thirty feet. Head for where Keith's swimming out to." The ten-year-old did as instructed. Many of the rescued kids were watching with fascination as the small helicopter spun up and lifted off the beach. Prez was watching Keith too but noticed that Nathan was having a private chat with Derrick and Mike.

As he approached, Keith put on a good show of a swimmer panicking and drowning. The Huey came to a hover over where he was; Skipper and Bobby dove from it and easily swam over to him.

Andy dropped the rescue harness out the hatch. As Skipper buoyed up Keith, after telling him to go limp, Bobby belted him into the harness. Skipper wrapped his strong legs around Keith's waist and grabbed the line above Keith's head with both hands. Bobby wrapped himself around the two of them, clinging to Skipper's shorts with one hand and wrapping the other arm around Keith. He signaled Andy,

who engaged the winch.

The line came taut, lifting the three of them from the water. Brandon struggled to keep the helicopter level.

As the harness came up level with the bottom of the copter, Skipper grabbed the ski and then a handhold in the hatch, and pulled himself up into the bird. The smaller Bobby followed suit a second later, and together they helped Keith into the Huey's cargo space and out of the harness.

Just then, a commotion arose among the rescued kids on the beach. A nine-year-old girl of apparent Chinese-Hispanic ancestry, Lupe Jui, was animatedly pointing out to sea and screaming, "She's going out too far! She's going out too far!"

Prez, Mike, Adam, Chang, Grace, and Jonas converged on her. Chang laid one hand on her and turned her head to meet his eyes. She looked into them. With a great deal of effort, the twelve-year-old oriental boy, now sporting Klingon brow ridges and a purplish cast to his skin, managed to calm her. "The last thing she said was she wasn't going to be a sex toy to those pointy-eared freaks," the little girl said, gesturing at the Vulcans. "Then she went down to the water and started swimming out."

Adam began to react, caught himself, and glanced at Prez. "May I?" he asked. Prez made a hand gesture that effectively said, 'go ahead.' Adam activated his comm-badge. "Skipper! Bobby! Get to that girl swimming out! This one's for real!"

Inside the helicopter, Skipper called out, "Do it!" Brandon rotated the helicopter and headed across the bay to intercept the girl.

"Not sure what's up," Skipper said. "Be ready for anything." He fiddled with the First Aid kit, drew out a hypo-spray, and slipped it in

the pocket of the board shorts he was wearing. Bobby nodded. Over the sounds of the helicopter's engines and rotor blades, Keith couldn't hear what was going on, but looked out the open hatch. He saw the teenage girl in the ocean, further out from shore than he had been.

"Oh no!" Keith nervously complained, "Not today, not ever!"

"Come in low," Skipper called out. Brandon didn't respond, but skewed the copter into a descending trajectory, coming to a hover about twenty feet above the girl. The two paramedics dropped again. They swam over to the Anglo-Portuguese girl, who looked to be about fifteen.

"Get away from me!" she shouted. "I won't be your fuck toy, or anybody else's either."

"Get her!" Skipper told Bobby, moving in and drawing the hypo-spray. He injected her; she went limp, and began to sink. Bobby tread water, trying to support her.

Andy had meanwhile been playing out line. Now he tossed the harness down to them. "Lean against the left wall," Andy instructed Keith. Bemused that the little eight-year-old was giving him orders, Keith did as he was told.

The two paramedics got the girl into the harness and signaled Andy to activate the winch. As the combined weight of girl and two paramedics came out of the sea, the chopper tilted. Brandon fought it. At last the harness came level, and Skipper and Bobby repeated what they had done with Keith, drawing the naked body of the teenage girl on board. Skipper slammed the hatch; Brandon headed the 'copter for shore.

Bobby broke an ampoule of smelling salts under the girl's nose. As she came to, she said, "You should have left me. I won't put up

with you two raping me!"

"Neither one of us has the slightest interest in sex with you, whether you are willing or not," Bobby said steadily. Gesturing at Skipper, he added, "He's all I want." Looking from the feisty little blond to the big brunet, Keith's eyes widened.

"You see all those people on the shore?" Skipper said to her. "They're either rescued kids like you, or people committed to ending the kind of stuff you had to go through, with the power to make that happen."

"Or both," Bobby added.

Keith told the girl; "Me and Prez are a couple; so are Derrick and Mike and Drew and Corey! Nobody in this Clan will ever take advantage of you sexually. Tonight we're giving all of you the choice of where you want to sleep and who with."

"And," Bobby continued, "that means 'sleep' as in sleep, not 'sleep with' as in sex. You're welcome to fall in love and have sex with the person you fall in love with, if you want, but you've had sex just because somebody made you for the last time – ever!"

Keith asked, "What's your name?"

"Melonie Correro," she answered.

"My mom's real good at listening to people," Keith began. "Would you talk with her please?" Melonie only shrugged and sighed.

The Huey set down in the sand at the far south end of the beach. All the adults and about two dozen kids, including the other core Rimmers, raced down the beach. Skipper opened the hatch door and jumped out into the sand. Bobby and Keith jumped out next. Skipper

and Keith helped Melonie out of the 'copter.

"Mom," Keith called. Jennifer Hundser and Janet ducked down and stepped forward. "Can you have a chat with Melonie please?" Keith asked, and with an intense glare offered, "I think she has a lot to say."

Nodding understandingly, Jennifer took hold of one of Melonie's arms and said, "We'll take care of it." She then began to walk away from the 'copter with Janet and Melonie.

"Oh man!" John loudly whined, "now I won't get to get rescued!"

Jennifer's eyes almost shot from their sockets. She always knew John was special, but over the last day she wondered exactly how special.

"Who said we were done?" Bobby grinned.

Andy giggled, "Practice makes perfect!"

Keith grinned, "Come on, bro. We'll take a surfboard out and I'll dump you off to be rescued."

"YAAA!" John gleefully yelled and ran down to the shoreline. Bobby and Skipper jumped back into the Huey and it soon lifted off.

Keith grabbed a board and hurried back down to the water line. Laying down the board in knee deep water, Keith turned to John and said, "You just..." then began laughing his ass off.

John frowned, "What's wrong?"

After howling himself to tears, Keith leaned forward and softly

snickered, "Lookin' forward to this, are ya?"

"Course!" John smiled.

"I can tell!" Keith laughed and pointed at John's crotch, "So can everyone else!"

"Oh! SHIT!" John hollered and quickly covered himself with both hands. Embarrassed beyond his years, John smirked, "Sorry, bro."

"It's okay," Keith giggled. "I was gonna have you lay on my back and hold on. It might be better if you got on the board first though now!"

"Wise guy!" John complained.

"No complaints here," Keith reminded, "I know what it's like." Noticing Prez watching them from the shore, Keith explained, "Think about gross stuff, like mom naked, so that the guys rescuing you don't get the wrong idea."

John grimaced, "Eww!"

Holding the board steady, Keith instructed, "After you!" and John slid onto the surfboard. Keith joined John and they began paddling out. Soon they were far enough out and the Huey piloted by Will with the tether hanging down roared by. Keith grabbed the tether and sat upright, squeezing the board tightly between his knees. The board suddenly jolted as the slack was taken up and John hollered, "YEAH!"

Keith instructed, "Whenever you're ready bro, jump off and the other dudes will rescue you."

"Okay!" John giggled, but remained on the board through the first two turns the Huey made. He then stood and waved his arms before jumping off the swiftly moving board and into deep water. Keith then released the tether so he would be close enough by to help if needed.

Brandon brought the rescue Huey low over John. This time Skipper jumped, but Bobby decided to descend on the rescue harness rope. When ready, he signaled Andy to run the winch backwards and descended smoothly. Skipper meanwhile had swam to John and fitted him with a flotation vest. John was loving being the center of attention.

Bobby brought the harness down, slid easily off it and began harnessing John into it. The body contact had the expected results on John, who blushed deeply. Bobby grinned. "No sweat kid; it happens to me all the time too."

"It's the helicopter ride," John loudly giggled, "it was stiff before I even got on the surfboard!" Bobby cracked up and laughed all the way back into the Huey.

As they helped John in, Andy giggled. Bobby laughed, "Don't embarrass him." Turning to John, Bobby said, "Wanna ride copilot? The copilot seat is open; just don't grab the wrong stick!"

Turning bright pink, John giggled then turned to hurry into the copilot's seat before any more remarks were made. John looked around at all the dials, displays and knobs on the control panel before him.

Intent on his piloting, Brandon didn't say anything as John sat down. He turned the 'copter towards the beach when he spared a minute to look over and then did a double-take.

"I can't help it!" John giggled and turned red again. "This is about as much as I've ever had."

Brandon couldn't help it; he burst out laughing. "Just about as much..." he got out and howled laughing.

John blushed even harder. "Just about as much FUN, I meant!" he laughed.

"That's pretty obvious," Bobby giggled.

Brandon meanwhile had gotten control of himself and brought the helicopter in for a landing. "Wanna go for a ride when we take this back up?" he asked John.

"Could I?" John squealed. Brandon nodded and John smiled widely, nodding frantically as if nothing could make him happier.

"Sure," Brandon said. He nervously eyed John's boner. "Ummm..."

John giggled, "It's that way cos I'm in a helicopter... in the copilot's seat!"

Brandon giggled and confided, "I get one whenever I'm piloting or co-piloting too."

"How old are you?" John wondered.

"Ten," Brandon replied.

John thought for a few moments then asked, "How'd you learn to fly? I mean, I'd love to learn, if my mom would let me."

"I learned in the TARDIS. But Bobby 'n' I could teach you, if we

can get your mom to let us!"

John grinned devilishly, "Well, I'm here now. What my mom don't know won't hurt her. At least teach me what some of these buttons, dials and knobs do."

"Well, I think you already know what that knob does," Brandon giggled and pointed.

"That's a joystick!" John laughed. "I know a little, got three older gay brothers, after all. You gonna tell me what all of the knobs up here do?"

Laughing, Brandon began an explanation. "Here, grab this stick," he said. Giggling, John did. "That's the cyclic; it controls pitch and roll. This other lever is the collective. It controls the lift. If you're hovering, it makes the 'copter go up or down. If you've set the cyclic to forward pitch, it makes it move forward." He went on with his explanation, with John eating it up.

Mr. Hundser peeked inside the Huey and smiled, "How was the ride, John?"

Remaining seated, John looked back and hollered, "Awesome! Brandon's teaching me about the controls and stuff!"

Looking back, Brandon waved and smiled at John's dad. Jim Hundser smiled and waved at Brandon.

"Dad?" John innocently called. "Can I please stay in here for a while?"

"It would be fine with me," Brandon said. "I did invite John so it's cool. I like having him around."

Jim Hundser grinned and wondered if it would be best to let his son learn, but also considered the possible ramifications from his wife learning about this flight training. Finally, he admitted it would be good for John to have interest in flight since it was a necessary form of transportation across the islands. And the two boys were obviously becoming friends. "Okay," Jim Hundser said, "just for a little while. Pay attention and learn from Brandon."

"Thanks dad," John smiled, "I promise to pay close attention to Brandon."

Brandon giggled. Skipper looked in to say, "Brandon *is* a good pilot, Sir, and Bobby and I will be here helping coach John."

"Even better," Jim Hundser nodded, "have a good time." He then walked away from the helicopter.

Far away from all the other groups of kids and adults, Jennifer and Janet sat with Melonie.

"My mom and dad divorced when I was a baby," Melonie shared. "My mom died when I was ten."

"Do you know how exactly?" Janet softly asked.

Melonie sighed, "Oh, what does it matter? Since she died everything's gone to shit!"

"It matters because it might affect your health," Jennifer said. "Your life as it was with orphanages and foster parents is over now. We're going to help you, Melonie."

Melonie eyed the two adult women suspiciously. "What do want from me?" she sourly wondered.

"Not a thing," Janet assured. "All any of us wants, adults and kids alike, is to help you in every way necessary."

"The more you tell us, the better we'll be able to help you and the better you will feel from releasing the negativity of the past," Jennifer said.

Melonie slouched and said, "It was so long ago... they said my mom had something like a blood vessel explode in her brain. It happened while she was driving. She caused an accident. Other people were hurt. I was only in the orphanage a while when I was fostered to one family. They didn't like me and after a few months, I was back in the orphanage again. It went like that for a while; a few months in orphanages then a few months with fosters. When I was about thirteen I guess, the Haymons became my foster parents. That's when things got really bad." Hiding her face and weeping, Melonie said, "They used me, both of 'em, him and her and others too... for sex! I knew it was wrong, but when I said no, they beat me, put me to bed without supper and locked me in my room; usually just overnight, but for more than a day sometimes. As far as I'm concerned, sex is bad, always. I got pregnant once and they beat me for that too." She wailed, "I wanted that baby! They gave it no chance; gave me no chance."

"Did they abort the fetus?" Janet asked.

After a few moments of uncontrollable weeping, Melonie nodded, "Is that what an abortion is?"

Janet nodded and took Melonie's hand in hers. She softly asked, "Melonie, have you told anyone else this?" Melonie only rapidly shook her head. Janet looked at Jennifer and said, "She needs to be examined to find out."

"Examined?" Melonie screamed. "I knew it! You're just like the others!"

"No!" Janet loudly said, "No men around; just the three of us women. I'm a doctor and would simply like to know if the abortion was performed properly, so if you ever decide to have a baby, you may."

"What does it matter?" Melonie cried, "No one will ever care."

"That's where you're wrong," Jennifer corrected. "Janet and I care. Preston and Keith and all the boys that rescued you from bad foster parents care. The boys that rescued you from drowning care. They did it without knowing you and would do it again if they knew all your deepest secrets. You and I will talk more about this. We'll talk about your past, the present and your hopes for the future."

Uncertainly, Melonie made eye contact with Jennifer, but only for a moment. "I don't get it," She sighed and looked back down into the sand again. "Why does anyone care? You talk about the future like... there's something there... something worth living to see."

"There is, precious girl," Jennifer said.

"How you were treated was wrong in the worst ways known," Janet assured. "They were illegal acts in every civilized nation. Those that mistreated you and all the other kids on the beach have met justice. You will never see them again. All your fears and worries are past, over and done with."

"You'll be safe from those kinds of evil people from now on," Jennifer said. "My boys will make sure of it. Janet's boys and the rest of the UNIT will protect you for as long as you need or want protection. We'll take care of you; get you the medical care you need and help you release the past so you can live today and look forward

to many tomorrows."

"Can you trust us to do that?" Janet asked.

Melonie shrugged and wearily answered; "I guess."

Down the beach, Prez was talking with Keith. Soon after Keith returned to shore after Melonie's rescue, the conversation began about her. Then Mike took a turn para-surfing with Spike. Derrick then took a turn with Xander. But now Mike and Derrick were surfing with their entire ferret family. It was a sight to behold and hysterical to both of Prez and Keith. Which reminded Prez; "When you and John were getting ready to paddle out before, what was so funny?"

"John was a little excited about it," Keith chuckled.

Prez only shrugged and grinned, "No big surprise there."

"No Prez!" Keith howled, "John was *excited*; as in visibly, hard as a fuckin' rock!"

"No way!" Prez loudly laughed. Keith nodded and laughed harder. Prez wondered, "From what; being rescued or about the helicopter ride?"

"The helicopter," Keith snickered.

"Where is he now?" Prez smiled.

"Dunno," Keith giggled, "I never saw him leave the 'copter, so he must still be in there."

Adam and Logan strolled nearby and Prez called them over. As they came near, Prez asked, "How're you two dudes doin'?"

"Good," Logan grinned. "Wishing it was warm like this in

Utah."

"How're you two doing?" Adam asked slyly.

"Between Mike and Derrick and their ferrets, we're really good too," Keith giggled, still unable to shake his youngest brother's condition.

Prez locked eyes with Adam and smiled, "You know I trust and like you, right?"

Adam shrugged, "It was a rough start and I know it was partially my fault."

"It was a good test and when I asked, you answered honestly," Prez nodded. He then said, "Look inside my mind, Adam. Then you'll see what motivates me and why I acted the way I did. Just don't look in the room marked 'Keith - Private - Keep Out'."

Tilting his head uncertainly, Adam asked, "Are you sure, Prez? You really don't have to allow this you know?"

Prez nodded, "I'm sure. We will be working together again someday. I want you to know, without any doubt."

Adam closed his eyes and nodded. He frowned, then he smiled, then his face went blank and his fingers began slightly moving. A short minute or so later, Adam opened his eyes. He chuckled, "I just learned more music theory than I ever knew existed! Now I just need to try and apply it!"

Keith laughed heartily. Prez smiled and asked, "What else did you learn?"

"That you never really wanted command of this Clan or the

UNIT."

Prez nodded, "And what else?"

"You took this division to make your parents, Keith and his parents proud."

"Go on," Prez prodded.

"You measure success by what is visible and audible. When these kids seem like they're happy or say nice things, you know you've done a good job. You're worried about Melonie, and don't really understand why she got depressed when most of the others seem to be adjusting alright. Your need of a UNIT brigade was justifiable and I agree about that. You honestly hope you'll never have to make use of them. The next time a life is in danger, I shouldn't wait for any approval from you before acting." Adam then paused and blushed.

Logan could barely believe his eyes and incredulously giggled, "ADAM!"

"WHAT?" Adam laughed at Logan, "It wasn't in the room marked 'Keith – Private – Keep Out!'" Turning to Prez, Adam shyly stammered, "I... umm... won't say a word aloud... ever!"

Prez also blushed and giggled, "If it's what I think you're referring to, Keith and I already talked about your cut abs and tight tushie!" Adam turned beat red while Keith and Logan laughed their asses off. Offering his hand to Adam, Prez smiled, "We're cool now?"

Adam shook hands with Prez and agreed, "Definitely! I'm looking forward to working with you, Prez."

Logan grinned at Keith and wondered, "Do we have to keep our

eyes on our boyfriends?"

Shaking his head, Keith giggled, "Nah! Prez and I keep each other very happy. I trust him as much as he trusts me. He wouldn't have admitted his thoughts about Adam otherwise."

Logan nodded and huffed suspiciously, then scanned Keith from head to toe. Adam playfully shoved him and laughed, "You'd better stop!" Grinning, Logan looked up innocently then took off running down the beach to the water.

Adam wagged his eyebrows and giggled, "See ya later!"

Prez heard chirping and wondered, "What's that noise?" Keith shrugged then joined Prez following the foreign sounds. They found themselves standing before a pile of clothing and Prez asked, "What time is it, babe?"

Keith checked his watch and answered, "Quarter of five."

Kneeling down in the sand, Prez began digging through the clothes saying, "It can't be the Endeavour already!" Keith joined Prez in the search for his buried shorts and soon found them then dug the communicator out of the pocket.

Handing it to Prez, Keith grinned, "It's for you."

Squinting playfully, Prez sneered, "Someday!"

"Not today!" Keith giggled.

Prez opened the communicator and said, "This is Preston O'Brian."

"This is Lieutenant T'Rel aboard the Endeavour."

"How can I help you lieutenant?"

"We are about to beam up the food tables, Sir. In the same location we will beam down additional clothing and suitcases for your Clan. Please ask all persons to step back from the tables and notify me when we may proceed."

"Thank you, lieutenant. Give us a moment."

Keith stood and said, "I got this baby." Running over to the tables, Keith got everyone to finish grabbing whatever food they wanted and then step away.

Keith flashed a thumbs-up and Prez said, "We're ready now, lieutenant."

"Stand by."

"Okay," Prez stammered, "I'm sorry, acknowledged." The large food tables disappeared while Prez and everyone watched then a new set of tables appeared, loaded with all kinds of clothes. Barely five-seconds later, a large group of suitcases appeared beneath and around the tables. It seemed that every kid on the beach was racing towards the tables again. The adults, Keith and Kaleo were trying to hold back the rush while they figured out what was available.

"Transport complete," T'Rel said.

"Thank you, lieutenant," Prez smiled. "When should I expect your next call?"

"The next communications will be in approximately forty minutes Sir."

"Thanks again! This is awesome! The kids all appreciate your

kindness. Please inform your Captain we couldn't be happier."

"Very well. T'Rel out."

Prez closed the communicator and sighed, "They ain't much for small talk." Looking up again, Prez noticed all the kids were being sorted; one line for boys, another line for girls and from shortest to tallest. Prez pulled his shorts and T-Shirt on, pocketed the communicator then hurried over to Lieutenant Vorik.

Noticing the new Director approaching, Vorik asked, "Is there a problem, Director O'Brian?"

"No," Prez huffed from running, "everything's great! I just have some questions about our new bases." Prez waited for a response, but since he got none and the Lieutenant was waiting, Prez wondered, "What can I expect there? We're all anxious and anything you could offer would be better than not knowing anything."

"I understand that all the children will be billeted at the main base," Vorik confirmed.

Prez nodded, "For at least the first few days, maybe longer."

Lieutenant Vorik tapped a few keys on his pad and turned it so Prez could see then explained, "This is an overhead view of your [primary base at Ewa Beach](#). From the top northwest corner, you will find a helicopter and shuttle pad, a Federation Youth Services office building, and vehicle parking areas and a parking garage. The large ovular building is the Division Command Information Center with an attached auditorium. Below the CIC are housing facilities; from left to right there are town homes adequate for small families; three bedrooms, two baths, one half bath, approximately one thousand seven hundred square feet. Each town home building includes six units of similar size and function. Across and to the right are four

dormitory buildings, with sufficient facilities for three hundred eighty-four individuals. To the right of the dormitories are four single family homes. They are approximately three thousand square feet, five bedrooms, five bathrooms and fully finished basements. All dwellings will have been furnished and will be ready for occupation. To the South are recreation facilities including a regulation soccer field, basketball courts, swimming pool, pool house and an indoor recreation facility. Finally, to the Southeast is an outdoor recreation area. As it currently exists, approximately forty-five acres of the seven hundred fifty acre lot are in use. Around the structures, all the previously existing vegetation has been untouched to provide security and privacy."

Wide-eyed and flabbergasted, Prez looked up and smiled, "This is... nothing less than remarkable! I really don't even know what to say except thank you, thanks to the Captain of the Endeavour and the entire crew. My only question is; where are the schools?"

Lieutenant Vorik entered a few more commands then turned the device back to Prez. "There are educational facilities to the southeast of the outdoor recreational area.

"This is the Ewa Beach 'Incoming' base. As you see, it is almost identical to the main base; the only exception being the removal of the CIC and the insertion of medical facilities. All other bases are arranged similarly. As for medical facilities, the main division hospital is at the Oahu UNIT base on the peninsula."

"Amazing!" Prez gasped.

Vorik nodded, "The facilities are adequate and serviceable."

At the understatement, Prez chuckled, "We're going to need maps to get around!"

"I will be leading an orientation tour this evening," Lieutenant Vorik said.

"Is there anything else you know that I prob'ly don't?" Prez grinned.

Raising an eyebrow, Lieutenant Vorik stated, "Tomorrow we will need to arrange education for use of the various Clan Short hardware devices and associated software. The education could take as little as two hours, depending on your team's ability to absorb the information."

Prez thought for a few moments then said, "We're all good students. I need to check with my team, but I believe we could begin that around noon."

"I will make arrangements for that hour and will keep it, unless notified by you that it needs to change," Lieutenant Vorik nodded, and then input the data on his pad.

Standing up straight and attempting to appear more formal and professional, Prez said, "Thank you, Lieutenant. If there is anything more required, let me know."

"Very well, Director O'Brian," Lieutenant Vorik said.

Prez waved and giggled, "See ya later," then raced over to where everyone was gathered around the tables of clothing. When he arrived, most of the youngest kids were being helped with packing their new Clan Short suitcases. Prez noticed that they now seemed to have the basic clothing necessities. Arriving near Mrs. Seaver first, Prez asked, "How's it goin'?"

Mrs. Seaver looked up for only a moment then continued helping and said, "The children have a week's worth of underwear and

socks, sneakers to go with the sandals they already have, a few pair of jeans, T-shirts, button down sport shirts and windbreakers too."

"Can you think of anything else they may need?" Prez wondered.

Mrs. Seaver shrugged, "This is fine for everyday wear, but they would eventually need shoes and dress clothes."

"We'll deal with that when we need to," Prez said, and then smiled at the boy. "What do you think, Richie? Do you like your new clothes?"

Richie Grunert looked up and smiled, "It's kewl! I never had new clothes before. John said I'll have my own bed too! Is that for real?"

Laying a hand gently on the boy's shoulder, Prez nodded, "A new bed of your very own, and anything else you want or need, I promise. Ya know what else we're gonna do tonight?"

Richie looked down and softly offered, "Chores?"

Taken aback, Prez acted less shocked than he truly was and shook his head violently. "Nope, we're gonna play video games! And listen to music! And watch TV! And just hang out, so we can get to know each other!"

Richie delightfully squealed, "Really?"

"Really," Prez chuckled, "from now on your main job is to be the very best Richie you can be! All that means is school, which even I still have to do. But you can try all kinds of new stuff, if you want."

"Like what kinds o' stuff?" Richie wondered.

"You can play soccer or basketball or volleyball or tennis, or swimming in our pool. Or maybe you might like to try painting, or playing piano like Keith, guitar like Mike, drums like Derrick or bass guitar like me. Basically anything you want to try that you've always wanted to but never could."

"Won't I have to do any chores?"

Mrs. Seaver smiled at Richie and assured, "All you'll need to do is keep your new bedroom tidy. We'll have a service do all the cleaning and painting and lawn work, so you kids can be kids."

Prez locked his eyes on Mrs. Seaver and asked, "You've been considering all that?"

"Of course!" Mrs. Seaver giggled. "Did you think we weren't making any plans? You can't think of everything Preston; not even with your team helping you. Laura Gibbons, Anna Seibert and I have already resigned from our jobs. Our new jobs are going to be helping all these boys and girls every way we can."

"What about my folks?" Prez asked.

She said, "Your mom and dad will be handing in their notices Monday. Mike's and Derrick's fathers will be doing the same." She paused and closed up the suitcase for Richie, smiling, "There you are; all set. It's even got your name on it so you'll always know it's yours."

"Thank you, Mrs. Seaver," Richie softly grinned.

"The price is one kiss on the cheek!" Mrs. Seaver teased. But Richie giggled, leaned over and gave her a peck anyway.

Before he ran off, Prez took hold of him again and said, "Find your clothes and get dressed Richie. We're going to our new home

soon and we can't be naked all the time. Let's at least transport with our clothes on, okay bud?"

"You should talk!" Mrs. Seaver giggled.

Prez blushed and laughed. While Mrs. Seaver began packing the suitcase for the next child in line, Prez bellowed, "CAN I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE?" Once most everyone had turned his way, Prez loudly said, "When everyone is packed, we're heading to our new homes! If you're just waiting in line or not otherwise occupied helping some of the little tikes, get dressed. After we get home and get some supper, we'll decide what to do next and whether it requires clothes or not."

"What are we doing for supper?" Mr. Seibert playfully hollered.

Smiling, Prez shrugged and loudly said, "Whatever ya want. Put a plate of food in front of me and I'm happy." While they were helping kids pick clothes, Keith, Derrick and Mike began laughing. Prez noticed both helicopters were nowhere to be seen on the beach or in the sky.

Already dressed again, Nathan, John and Bruce ran over to Prez. John asked, "Can we have pizza for supper, Prez?"

"Let's wait and see what the adults have in mind bro," Prez said. "It might be even better than pizza."

"Nothin's better than pizza," John softly frowned.

Prez giggled, "But pizza for over two hundred? We're talking like a hundred and eighty pizzas!"

"We're good for the local economies," Nathan slyly chuckled. "Whatever you need for tonight and tomorrow, Prez, I'll let Daileass

know. You'll learn from me and Daileass how to place similar orders."

"Oh God!" Prez laughed, "You're right! We can't exactly go grocery shopping for a hundred plus, can we?"

Smirking, Nathan shrugged, "If you want to load a three-quarter ton van every other day, you can if you want, but it's better to just order bulk and have it delivered by truck."

Prez playfully rambled, "I'd like twenty dozen eggs, thirty gallons of milk, forty boxes of assorted cereals..."

"You're not too far off the mark!" Nathan laughed. "Daileass will get you hooked up with all our regular suppliers for food, clothes, households and general merchandise. That way you won't have to worry about security clearances, it's all been done already."

"Are you listening to this Daileass?" Prez wondered.

"Heard every word, Prez," Daileass assured via the sub-vocal.

Mr. Hundser walked up and placed a hand on his foster son's shoulder. "What's up, dad?" Prez smiled.

"We've decided on tonight's dinner," Mr. Hundser began. "We'd like to barbecue; maybe some chicken, hot dogs, burgers and sausages for the kids. The parents are leaning more towards salmon and jumbo shrimp. Some assorted salads would be nice too."

"I'll take care of it, Prez," Nathan said.

Mr. Hundser scowled, "How are you going to handle all that? The four fathers were planning on taking two or three cars to the grocery store just for dinner!"

Nathan smiled and held up a finger. "Daileass, we'd like to place

our dinner order now."

"Go ahead, Nathan," Daileass responded.

Nathan said, "We're barbecuing tonight. We'll need two hundred hamburgers and buns, two hundred hot dogs and buns, two hundred mild sausages, twenty chickens cut into parts... better make that thirty chickens... twenty salmon steaks and a hundred jumbo shrimp. Now for condiments; twenty bottles of ketchup, another twenty of spicy and mild mustard, relish, pickles, hamburger dill slices, mayonnaise and tartar sauce, and two fifty-five gallon barrels of barbecue sauces. We'll also want twenty gallons of macaroni salad and twenty gallons of potato salad. Course we'll need sodas, juices, water, milk and something nice for the adults, a case of beer and a case of white wine. Don't forget cookies by the case and plenty of fruits for the gorillas. Got all that?"

"I've got it, Nathan," Daileass assured. "I've also placed standard orders for your food for tomorrow and Monday. Eggs, pancakes, waffles or cereals for breakfast. Assorted lunch meats and breads for lunch. Pasta and meatballs with side salads for dinner tomorrow night. And how about London broil and baked potatoes for Monday night?"

"Sounds great!" Prez cheered.

Daileass said, "All this will be delivered to the main Ewa Beach base before six-thirty this evening local time. Please inform Adam that security and quartermasters will need to be in place before then. It's all been paid for out of the account Logan showed you this morning."

"You rock, dude!" Prez smiled.

Daileass giggled, "I aim to please! Anything else, guys?"

"Lemme check, just a moment," Prez said. Then he glanced around asking, "What else do we need?"

"Grills, tables and chairs?" Mr. Hundser grinned.

"OH!" Prez snickered, "Daileass, will we have grills, tables and seating for about three hundred?"

"There are twenty-five gas grills on your base;" Daileass replied, "four near the single family homes, one for each town-home and the others at the north end of the outdoor recreation area. Your CIC should have more than sufficient seating for everyone. There are plates and silverware in the CIC kitchen too."

"Thanks, dude," Prez said. "Catch ya later, okay?"

"You bet! Just give a shout if you need anything," Daileass said.

"We've got lots of grills, tables and chairs for everyone dad," Prez assured and then laughed, "This is nuts! This morning I was wondering how I would feed, clothe and house everyone! In a day it's all been done!"

"These kids are important to all of us, Prez," Nathan reminded. "If you can't do the basic stuff, we're in a lot of trouble!"

Prez nodded and said, "I gotta tell Adam that we need security setup on the new base. The food trucks will arrive by six-thirty."

"Gotcha covered, Prez," Nathan said. He then tapped his comm-badge and called, "Adam?"

"What?" Adam giggled.

Nathan grinned, "Prez is getting everyone ready to move onto the main Oahu base. We've already contacted Daileass for food."

Everything will be rolling in by six-thirty, so we need quartermasters and security."

"We're busy!" Logan interrupted, "Tell Donnie to get his teams over there and in place."

"Yeah," Adam giggled, "That sounds like a plan!"

Nathan snickered, "Where the hell are you both?"

"Wouldn't you like to know!" Logan laughed.

"HEY!" Nathan shouted.

"Adam out!" both Adam and Logan chorused.

Prez grinned, "What happened?"

Nathan frowned, "He shot me a telepathic bird!"

"What're friends for?" Prez chuckled.

Shaking his head sadly, Nathan softly commented, "They'll regret that!" and then tapped his comm-badge again. "Donnie?"

"Yeah Nathan, what's up?" Nathan repeated his message and Donnie replied, "Got it prepped and ready to go; two at the Iroquios Avenue entrance, two at the North Road entrance, another two at the housing area checkpoint, and four gorillas roaming looking for lurkers. Is Prez there with you?"

"Right here Donnie," Prez chimed.

"Just say when Prez."

Prez grinned, "I'm expecting the Endeavour any minute. When

is now."

"Done," Donnie answered. "We'll see you guys there. Donnie out."

Prez picked up the rest of the clothes in the pile nearby then stood and grinned, "Lemme get my Core Rimmers dressed."

"Good idea," Nathan agreed.

"Director O'Brian," Lieutenant Vorik called.

Carrying clothes with him to meet with Lieutenant Vorik, Prez answered, "Yes Sir?"

"Now that you have sufficient security, my team and I will be leaving as soon as you depart for Oahu. I will meet you there at twenty-hundred hours to begin familiarizing your Clan with the facilities."

"Excellent!" Prez chirped. "Eight tonight should work fine. Thank you for everything, Lieutenant. I look forward to seeing you later tonight."

The rest of the Core Rimmers had come up to Prez right at the end of the conversation and were just waiting for the transport when Juan and Jory ran up to them. "HEY GUYS!" Jory loudly huffed, obviously slightly out of breath.

Juan grinned, "We'd been looking all over for you guys."

"What's up, dudes?" Prez asked, matching their grins

"We kinda forgot something earlier, and I think you guys and your kids would be the perfect people to test them out on!" Jory

rushed out.

Mike held up his hand to try and slow him down. Trying hard not to laugh, Mike chortled, "Wait a minute, what do you mean. Start at the beginning, what did you forget?"

"We forgot about the bears!" Jory said quickly, then Juan slugged him hard in the shoulder. "OWWWW! What?"

"Let me do it asshole, you're confusing them!" Juan said, getting ready to hit his brother again.

"FINE! You do it," Jory exclaimed, while still grinning.

"See it's like this. You guys met Galli right?" Juan asked. When he got affirmative nods from all of them, he continued. "Well, a little while ago, Galli, Jory, Joel and I came up with something to help all the kids that we'd rescued. Right now, we got lots of them at the UNIT base, but to be honest, that's not really a good test of them; so we figured we'd ask if you guys wanna test them out for us."

"Okay, why not first tell us what 'they' are?" Prez chuckled, trying hard not to laugh at the enthusiasm of the confusing younger boys.

Jory punched Juan on the shoulder and jumped in; "See, you ain't doing no better!" He turned toward the group and started up where Juan left off. "See, we were looking to make something that would not only help the kids, but also be able to protect them, so we made teddy bears. We'd like to know if you guys would like to give them out to your group and see if they want them."

"Sure, why not," Mike shrugged. "I can see that; lots of kids would love to have a teddy bear. I mean I had one till I was almost

twelve. What harm could they cause?"

"Well, these ain't your normal Teddy bears," Juan said, grinning even wider.

"What do you mean by that?" Keith asked suspiciously.

"Well, see, these ones are actually sort of like android teddy bears," Juan tried to explain. "They're actually only VI which means they aren't actually intelligent, but they have some very complicated programming. They ain't ever going to become sentient, like an AI would."

"Okay, I've heard about AI, but what's VI?" Prez asked.

"Virtual Intelligence!" Juan, Jory and Drew all said at the same time. The Core Rimmers all had eyes on Drew with the same look; explain.

Juan said, "See, AI is like an actual living person; they can learn, they can do things that a normal computer can't. Virtual Intelligence, is different. It cannot learn, at least not anything past it's programming. If a VI is not programmed to do something, it can't learn how to do it."

"Okay, so what do these teddy bears do?" Mike softly wondered.

"It's really simple actually. They make friends with one of the kids," Jory explained, now over his initial excitement. "At that point, the bear acts as a friend for the kid. It will never betray them, never hurt them, never tell any of the kid's secrets, and most important, if someone tries to hurt the kid, the bear will protect the kid no matter what."

"Protect? How?" Drew asked.

"Well, they were programmed in fighting by Chang himself; who, as you know, is the UNIT's bad ass amongst bad asses. Not to mention that they all have retractable four inch claws that extend out of their fingers. Sort of like Wolverine in the X-Men comics," Juan explained, now in his 'teacher' mode. "If someone tried to hurt their friend, the bear would react and protect the child."

"But what if the kids are just wrestling around?" John asked.

"Well, first, they know the difference between someone trying to hurt the kid, and someone just playing. Second, they will always warn the person before they attack. If the person backs off, and the child can escape, the bear will not attack." Jory said. He and Juan were taking turns explaining different bits of the bears.

"Cool!" John exclaimed. "Can I get one; just to see what they're like?"

"SURE!" Juan cried out excitedly at seeing someone actually wanting one of the bears; someone who wasn't in the UNIT base. He pulled out a data pad, and hit a few buttons, then handed it to John. "We got about fifteen different types, different sizes, and colors. Just pick out which one you'd want, and I'll have Daileass transport it over."

John looked over the available options, and finally came up with what he wanted, a brown furred, blue eyed, male bear, that was as big as they were made, which was forty inches tall. As soon as John made his decision, Juan made a few entries then called Daileass for delivery.

Little more than a minute later, a three-foot four-inch Teddy bear materialized next to Juan, looking exactly as John had picked out. The bear looked up at Juan, and all Juan did was point to John. The bear's

face broke out in a huge grin and quickly waddled over to John. "Hi!" it said in a very life like, child like voice. "I'm Zed. What's your name?" Some of the kids further down the beach saw the Teddy bear actually walking. Word spread like wild-fire.

John was grinning, as was everyone else. "I'm John."

"Hi John, can I be your friend?" Zed asked, looking up at John with his big blue eyes.

Juan quickly jumped in before John could answer. "That's how it bonds to someone. If you say yes, it will bond with you, until either you decide you don't want him anymore, or until it is destroyed. Just so you know." Juan wanted to make sure that John understood, which he did.

John thought about it for less than a minute, then looked back down at the bear. "Yes, I would love to be your friend."

A human wave of about thirty kids, mostly under ten years old, converged on John and Zed.

Chapter 4

Ewa Beach, Oahu; CSPRD Main Base

Saturday, October 30, 5:45 PM

In only a few minutes, Anahola Bay beach was emptied of all people, ferrets, G-Cats, gorillas and Teddy Bears thanks to Daileass, the Endeavour's transporters and Peter Lambert. Everyone was transported to the north end of the outdoor recreation area, near where fourteen gas barbecue grills had been installed. The first buildings seen were the massive Command Information Center and the attached auditorium.

Donnie had already prepared a quartermaster team to organize the CIC kitchen. Daileass began transporting food directly into the walk-in freezers, refrigerators and pantries as soon as Kenny Butler and Frankie Long were ready and requested the transports.

Donnie, Kaleo, Tory and the group of rescued kids began their tour with the expansive outdoor recreation area and its six sand volleyball courts. Prez, the remaining Core Rimmers and their families were following Emily on a tour of the housing area. They walked across the double-wide base driveway, onto the sidewalk and turned left around the exterior of the first of four homes. In the distance, about five hundred feet away, a row of town-homes were seen.

"Your days of carrying house keys are over," Emily grinned. Leading the families to the first house's door, she explained, "These doors use voice-print analysis and fingerprints for access. We'll program each home for the family members later, but right now, you

only need to choose which home will be for which family. They're all very much the same, but once your personal belongings are delivered, they will easily become a home."

"It's easily twice the size of our other home!" Mrs. Seaver excitedly giggled.

Prez said, "According to Lieutenant Vorik, they're about three thousand square feet and have full basements." Pausing while Emily unlocked the door using security voice override, Prez followed everyone else inside the entryway, then continued, "They said there would be some basic furnishings..."

"Basic?" Mr. and Mrs. Seaver laughed. The entryway floor was finished with ceramic tile and the walls were a very pale frost-green color. Above them, inside the entry, hung a beautiful crystal chandelier. Mike, Derrick, Drew, Corey, John and Bruce hurried up the carpeted stairs.

"This is beautiful!" Mrs. Seibert cheered.

Stepping into the living room, Emily smiled, "The Vulcans know that us humans like earth tones and bright cheery spaces. Everything's been based on psychological evaluations, from the carpet and flooring colors to the paints used on the walls and ceilings." The living room walls were sky blue and the thick carpet was grass-green with small brown and tan splotches, making it appear very much like the outdoors. Furnishings included a sectional sofa that could easily fit eight adults comfortably, a teak coffee table and matching lamp tables. There was also a sixty-inch flat screen television, DVD/VHS combo and surround sound speakers. All the adults, Keith and Prez followed Emily through the dining room, furnished with a massive table for twelve, and into the kitchen.

"I love it!" Jennifer Hundser finally said. "Even the window treatments are lovely!"

The eat-in kitchen walls were a soft pastel yellow on the top with a chair rail at thirty inches off the floor, and the bottom third of the walls seemed to be genuine oak paneling. Glancing around at the oversized refrigerator, stove, oven and microwave, Jim Hundser wondered. "All the houses are like this?"

Emily answered, "The town-homes are slightly smaller, but they have the same psychological color schemes, functional furnishings and appliances, just on a scale appropriate for that size home."

Racing down the stairs, the boys were loudly laughing and commenting on what they had seen in the upstairs bedrooms.

Grinning from ear-to-ear as he entered the kitchen, Mike looked into his parents' eyes and chuckled, "Ya know that master bedroom suite you always hoped for? It's upstairs; the room's gotta be thirty-feet by forty-feet! There's a king-sized bed, beautiful dresser and chest of drawers, and the master-bath..." Mike laughed, "You've got a shower, tub *and* a huge whirlpool tub that could easily fit four adults!"

"There's also two recliners and your own entertainment center!" Derrick giggled.

Drew smiled, "The other four bedrooms and bathrooms up there ain't nothin' to sneeze at either!"

Enthusiastically nodding, Corey added, "There's bookshelves, computers, desks, stereos and TVs in every room."

Drew suggested, "Let's check out the basement," and began looking for the correct door.

While the families continued inspecting their new home, Donnie led the pack of kids to the indoor recreation facility, through it and into the pool house. They were soon surrounding the Olympic-sized pool and fifty foot diameter circular diving well. Kaleo and Tory didn't wait for permission before stripping their clothes off. Tory raced over to the slide and Kaleo climbed the ladder to the five-meter high diving board. Soon, half the kids were naked again and jumping in the pool with their Teddy bears. Most of the others just dove in clothes and all. The remaining twenty or so kids were quite happy watching the others and chatting with their new Teddy bears. What was most amazing was that the Teddy bears were swimming and acting as flotation devices for their new best friends. They were also programmed in first aid, and if necessary, could resuscitate their child.

The adults had finished learning about their new living arrangements and decided they had better get started cooking and feeding the masses. All the adults and the four oldest Rimmers were conscripted to cook and they began the trip back to the outdoor recreation area. Emily notified Kenny and Frankie to get burgers, hot dogs, sausages, chicken and everything else ready to feed the Clan.

Once they reached the grills, they looked over and saw something that made all of them stop. First of all, walking towards them were two kids; one of them was only eight years old, and the other was thirteen. With them was a rather short-furred critter walking upright with extremely long legs and arms. The Rimmers had met the gorillas, ferrets, and G-Cats; now it was time for them to meet their first Chimp.

However, while he was slightly interesting, what came behind the group of three was even more interesting. Lumbering behind them were fifteen vehicles. They were about six feet tall, three feet wide and eight feet long. They looked like bright boxes on top of two

independent rubber Caterpillar-style tracks.

When they got close to the grills, the Chimp pointed to the different grills and each of the lumbering boxes went to a grill, with the final one staying with the Chimp. The Chimp then climbed up onto the top of the remaining box and spoke loud enough for everyone to hear. "Okay everyone, these are Smart Shelves. They are all voice-operated so anything you need, just say what it is, and the drawer that it is in will open. Please make sure you put things back where you got them. These are also partially refrigerated, which means some of the compartments, the ones holding the meats, cheeses, and other things to be kept cold, are refrigerated. If you run out of something, it will go back to the kitchens and get it. They also have four slots that are heated so that what you cook will stay warm. If you have any questions, feel free to ask Frankie, Kenny, or myself. By the way, you guys can just call me Chef."

Glancing at Jim Hundser, Rob Gibbons smirked, "Gorillas, G-Cats, ferrets and now chimps!"

"At least he's dressed," Jim Hundser softly chuckled, "not like the chimps at the zoo at all."

"All right folks," Bill Seaver loudly said, "Chicken takes the longest to cook, so let's start with them."

Then all the adults and the four eldest Rimmers moved to man a grill.

Harry's mother, Abbie Johnson, came over to Rob Gibbons and said, "I have many years of experience as a short order cook. I can help."

"Thank you, Abbie. With over three hundred to feed, we'll take

all the help we can get," Rob Gibbons smiled.

"I'll take the last two grills then," Abbie offered and started for her stations.

Drew and Corey went to Bill Seaver. Corey asked, "How can we help, dad?"

Bill Seaver thought for a moment then answered, "You guys can just take it easy for a while. Once we start the burgers, hot dogs and sausages, you two can get the buns ready. If kids don't start smelling food and come running, you two can spread the word and get everyone."

Drew nodded and suggested, "I can hear them, let's go find 'em, Cor."

As they started to walk away, Corey softly giggled, "We're the Bun Rimmers!"

Laughing hysterically, Drew playfully shoved Corey and chortled, "Spread 'em!" Corey howled.

Everyone at the grills turned to their automated Smart Shelves and in their own words commanded, 'give me chicken'. Shelves opened with chicken parts and grills were loaded down with breasts, legs, thighs and wings.

Closest to Chef, Prez said, "We're gonna need barbecue sauce." Unexpectedly, a drawer opened loaded with bottles of sauce. Staggering back, Prez chuckled, "Sweet!" and closed the drawer. Keith noticed that Prez was just commanding the Smart Shelves UNIT to see what he had available. Keith turned to his Smart Shelves UNIT and did the same, since he had the time while chicken cooked. Soon all the others were testing their Smart Shelves. They had

everything necessary in the drawers: all the meats and fish and barbecue sauce. It would only take time to finish the chicken, then they could move on. Loudly, so everyone could hear, Prez asked, "Hey Chef, when we get food cooked and these UNITs start moving out and replacing themselves, what's the plan?"

Chef answered, "Start getting everyone over to the CIC dining room. Tables will be set with all the condiments and it'll be like any other cafeteria; kids go through the line, get what they want and go find a seat."

"Kewl beans," Prez smiled, "thanks, man."

Chef grinned madly and playfully retorted, "Chef or Chimp, not man. Chimps designed these Smart Shelves, not man."

Prez giggled, "That's awesome! Maybe a couple of you chimps might like to stick around here in paradise?"

"Thank you for the offer," Chef nodded. "I'll ask my team and anyone that wishes may remain here."

At the pool, Drew and Corey found themselves surrounded by all the kids and Teddy bears that chose not to go swimming. The group told Drew and Corey about all the great stuff they had already been shown by Donnie before the pool was discovered. A few of them, including four-year-old Kokaku Kidotai, five-year-old Geoffrey Eckel and ten-year-old Dee Vanderwood, took their new leaders into the indoor recreation facility. The building itself was absolutely beautiful with exterior walls that seemed to be made of a polarized transparent material that neither boy had ever seen before. Drew and Corey were amazed at all the stuff inside. There were handball courts, a sixteen-lane bowling alley, weights and Nautilus equipment, separate showers and latrines for boys and girls as well as sauna

rooms and a fully stocked equipment room. In the pool house, they found changing rooms and a jacuzzi that could easily fit ten adults or twenty kids. Everything they saw was as good or better than any health club or YMCA.

Drew and Corey went back to the barbecue grills and shared what they had learned with Keith and Prez. While the head Rimmer and his partner went to check out the other facilities, Drew and Corey manned their grills. When Prez and Keith returned, Mike and Derrick went. By the time Mike and Derrick returned, the first batch of chicken was cooked. Sausages by the dozens were placed on the grills next.

Drew and Corey were feeling very happy with their new homes and shared their enthusiasm while they went from Smart Shelf to Smart Shelf offering to spread buns. The adults were considering which house would be chosen and for which family. Since all the houses were similar, the only choice to be made was based on who needed to be closest to the dorms in the event of an emergency. Based on that criteria, the Hundserts' and Gibbons' homes would be closest to the dorms. The Seiberts' and the Seavers' homes would be closest to the outdoor recreation area. Closest to the pool would be the Gibbons and Seavers.

After Mike had flipped the sausages on his grill, he turned to Derrick and asked, "Have you seen Spike or any of the ferrets?"

Derrick giggled, "Shiny Daddy misses his ferret kiddies?"

Mike laughed, "They're ferrets! Spike got my guitar pick without me even noticing! Since I don't see a single ferret, something's goin' on somewhere, I just know it!"

"Thank goodness Adam laid down the law earlier," Derrick

smiled. "The islands would be stripped bare of all shinnies within a day!"

Moving between Mike and Derrick, Prez softly reminded, "We're going to have to lay down some laws of our own. Imagine our mothers taking off their wedding rings to shower and having them disappear? The screams would be heard all over the island!"

Mike nodded, "Good point and very true." Street lamps around the complex began to automatically turn on with the darkening sky.

Adam and Logan walked up to Prez with a PADD. "These are the operating procedures for the CIC," Adam explained. He paused and called over Keith, Drew and Corey then gave each of them a PADD containing the manual. "Okay," Adam began, "everything you need to know about the CIC is in this. It may refer you to the electronic manuals in the CIC for highly technical stuff, like wiring, cabling and software, but the basics are right here in this. Only the Toy Rimmers will probably ever need to see the tech manuals." Flipping quickly through the screens of information, Adam described, "The manual begins with a table of contents and has a really extensive index at the end. You'll never have a problem finding what you need. Then we have a floor plan of the entire CIC. As you'll see on the floor plan, there are several main rooms; the CIC itself, a recreation room, a dining room, conference rooms and kitchen. Also, there are bathrooms, closets, an equipment room and a server room." Looking up and making eye contact with Drew, Adam said, "You've got Mac servers and Linux servers already configured. They're up and running; your CIC is now fully connected to the other Clan divisions.

"Also, in the server room are test beds for both the Mac Platform and Linux platform. If you find out something's not working well or is not already installed, create and test your software updates on the test beds. Do not *ever* make changes directly to main servers

without first notifying CIC Orlando. If we like your upgrades and they test out successfully across all the CIC test platforms, we'll roll 'em out to the main servers and you'll get credit for your work."

Drew nodded and smiled, "Sweet! Can I hook up my own Linux workstation to the test bed? That way I can work from home, if I need to."

"Not a problem on the test bed," Adam assured, "Cory and Sean Short do similar stuff."

Logan sternly repeated and warned, "*Always* do your work on the test bed. All the CIC's are interconnected. Unknown software will be automatically identified and removed from the primary servers. There goes all your hard work, into the bit bucket."

"Yikes!" Drew softly squealed.

"The CIC uses Mac workstations," Adam continued. "It's all intuitive stuff. There are icons on the desktop to accomplish tasks you'll need to use almost every day, from communications to database searches. Some stuff is voice activated too, so you won't even have to type in commands. Our stuff is state of the art, integrating Vulcan technology. Most American corporations haven't come close to stuff we use all the time."

Noticing the expressions on all the core Rimmers' faces, Logan grinned, "Everyone has that worried look again! Take it easy; you'll be surprised how easy this equipment is to operate. If you ever get lost, just contact Daileass, and he'll get someone here to walk you through it."

Scanning quickly through the PADD's screens, Prez noticed, "There's only a hundred pages here and a third of 'em are the contents

and index."

"None of it's highly technical, in here anyway," Drew smiled.

"We'll have some reading to do tonight though," Keith sighed.

"Don't worry, bro," Drew teased, and backed up a few steps, "I'll help you through all them big two- and three-syllable words!"

While everyone else giggled, Keith squinted at Drew and warned, "Ready for another telepathic ice bath?"

"Noooooooooo!" Drew laughed.

Jim Hundser loudly called, "The sausages should be done now, boys."

"Okay, dad," Prez chuckled. Facing Adam and Logan again, Prez smiled, "Dinner should be ready in another half an hour or so."

"Kewl," Adam grinned evilly, "See ya later." He and Logan then walked off in the direction of the pool.

Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick chanted, "See ya," then turned their attentions to the grills.

In the distance, they could see some of the younger kids with their Teddy bears coming across the field towards them. Bringing up the rear and appearing to be an escort for the younger and smaller kids was Reyes. Prez began giggling at the Teddy bears because they seemed to be struggling to keep up on their short legs. John, Bruce and Lindsay were in the pack too.

Geoffrey went over to Drew while Richie went to Prez. Dee went to Keith, Kokaku went to Jennifer Hundser, Carmella went to Jim Hundser and six year old Dillon Helde went to Mike. Reyes and

his shadow Jonah went directly to Derrick. All the kids were getting hungry again. Through his comm-badge, Prez called Kaleo. "Prez to Kaleo." It took longer than expected for Kaleo to reply, clearly indicating Kaleo was at least shirtless.

A few seconds later, Kaleo said, "Hey, Prez."

"Dinner will be ready soon, Kaleo," Prez said. "Get the tribe over to the CIC dining room. Let them get started on the salads or whatever else is there...."

"No snack foods, Preston," Jennifer Hundser forcefully reminded.

Prez giggled, "Mom says no cookies or other snacks, real food only."

"I'll try to control their sugar addictions," Kaleo snickered; "it'll prob'ly be a lost cause though!"

"Do the best ya can," Prez smiled. "If I see you running from a pack of hungry cookie monsters and their Teddy bears, I'll know you lost the battle." Richie had wrapped an arm around his thigh. Prez smiled down at the boy that had attached himself.

Kaleo laughed, "Over and out!"

While loading grills with hamburgers, the Core Rimmers and their parents heard out of sync chorus' of "YAAAAAAYYY!"

"We're going to be over run!" Rob Gibbons nervously laughed.

Off to one side, Jonas from the Northeast Division motioned to his partner, Harry and to the little Mikyvis Peter. They talked in low tones for a few moments, and then Peter disappeared.

Once the grill was full of hamburgers, Prez smiled down at Richie and asked, "Ya hungry, little dude?"

Richie nodded and asked, "Can I have supper with you?"

"I'd like that, Richie," Prez assured, and then glanced over at Keith. Sitting on the grass barely a foot away from Keith was Dee, having a conversation with his Teddy bear. Keith smiled at Prez and shrugged.

"Hey Richie?" Prez softly said. The boy looked up and smiled. Prez asked, "Do you know your birthday?"

Richie nodded, "Febr'ary fiteemph."

"You're almost six! Wow, you're gonna be a big boy before we know it!" In the distance, Prez noticed that some kids were now moving from the pool through the housing area into the domed CIC.

"I guess," Richie giggled.

"What's your Teddy's name?"

"I named him RG2. My initials and my second part."

RG2 asked Richie, "Is Prez your daddy?"

"No!" Richie giggled, "Prez is our leader."

"You look kinda the same," RG2 noticed, "red hair, blue eyes and tanned skin."

Richie looked up at Prez and shouted, "HEY! He's right!" After a short thoughtful pause, Richie looked up and softly asked, "Would you be my daddy, Prez?"

Keith heard Richie's question and nodded at Prez. "Sure, Richie!" Prez cheered. "As soon as Keith and me get married, you can be our son."

Dee was near enough to hear and posed the same question to Keith. "Definitely," Keith assured, "then you and Richie can be brothers. Would you like that?"

Richie and Dee cheered and hurried to each other. Richie laughed, "You're gonna be my big bro soon!"

Dee giggled, "And you're gonna be my little bro!"

Jennifer Hundser loudly complained, "Would you all please wait for my fortieth birthday before turning me into a grandmother?" Jim Hundser howled.

"She's gonna be our grandma?" Dee asked.

Prez nodded and Keith pointed at his father saying, "And that's Grandpa Jim!"

"YAAAAAAAYYY!" Richie and Dee cheered and spun each other around, and their Teddy bears bounced up and down happily. After the two little boys ran over to their soon-to-be grandparents, they introduced their Teddy bears, RG2 and Eddie.

This topic of conversation and the resulting celebration opened a can of worms; four-year-old Kokaku and five-year-old Carmella wanted to be adopted by Jim and Jennifer Hundser; Dillon, Reyes and Jonah wanted to be adopted by Mike and Derrick. The Gibbons' teased the Hundser, but the Seavers hoped that one of the kids would latch onto them. It didn't matter if it was a little boy or a little girl, they would even consider adopting one of each.

Dee sat in the grass close to Prez. Richie sat beside Dee, who remained close to Keith.

While carefully flipping the hamburgers, Prez asked, "Dee, you're ten, right?"

Dee nodded and said, "The Vulcan doctor says I'm under... nearished... or somethin' like that. That's why I'm not so big yet."

Becoming concerned, Prez asked, "Did the doc say you needed special foods or vitamins?"

Shaking his head, Dee answered, "He jus' says I need to eat more better and check with umm... a kid doctor." He paused and scowled, "Not sure what that means."

"It means you need to see a pediatrician," Prez smiled. "It's okay, we'll make sure you eat plenty and see the doc as soon as possible."

Dee frowned, "They scare me."

Keith asked, "Doctors scare you?" Dee nodded and Keith took him by the hand saying, "Try not to be scared, okay? We'll all see the doc at the same time. Anything the doc wants you to do, he'll do to me and Prez and Richie too. That way we all know we're in good health." Keith noticed that Josiah Brewster was talking softly to their fathers while Maureen McConnaghay was whispering to their mothers.

Janet was nearby and heard the conversations that the kids were having. She walked over and was about to talk to the kids, but the kids immediately hid behind Keith and Prez preventing her from approaching. She immediately backed off, and motioned Prez over.

She quietly said, "Obviously these kids don't trust adults and

won't allow me to check them over, but I do have an idea."

"You're not thinking about drugging them, are you?" Prez wondered, becoming a bit defensive.

She held up her hand in surrender and spoke quickly to try and ease his fears. "No, it's nothing like that. There is a fully trained doctor in the Clan that is only nine years old in appearance. If you'll allow it, I'll call him in." She said, and then paused and teased, "Daddy!"

Prez blushed and giggled, "Sorry. Go ahead and give that doc a ring."

"Don't worry about it, I would probably have done the same thing," she said, and tapped her brand new communicator badge to call Orlando CIC. "Doctor Janet Hayes to Orlando CIC."

"Go ahead, Doctor," Seth responded.

"I was wondering if Antonio was available to check out two kids," Janet softly said, "Both suffering from at least undernourishment, but there may be other things going on. Neither child will allow an adult anywhere near them. I know he's probably asleep, and if he is, don't wake him, but if he's up, please get him for me."

Seth queried, "Doctor Hayes, do you believe this to be urgent?"

Janet considered it for a moment, then made her mind up. "Yes, I do."

"Very well, Antonio will not mind being woke up for that. I will let him know, and he will be there shortly. Orlando CIC out."

Janet nodded towards Prez and smiled then moved away from the grills and the two boys. Prez moved near to the grill and Dee hurried over from his hiding place behind Keith. Kneeling down, Prez softly assured, "It's okay, Dee, she's a nice doctor, but we're gonna find an even better one, just for you. Do you feel safer now?"

Dee nodded, but attached himself to Prez anyhow. Standing, Prez began adding cheese to the burgers on his grill, while Dee watched Janet like she was the wicked witch of the West. After only a minute or so, Prez turned to the Smart Shelf and commanded, "I need hamburger buns." A shelf opened and Prez began picking up buns and sliding cooked cheeseburgers onto them. As Prez was about to complete the burgers on his grill, a shimmer of light appeared next to Janet.

Antonio appeared with cookies in one hand and a glass of chocolate milk in the other. His clothes consisted of sandals and Transformers boxers, with his med kit on a belt around his waist. "Kewl! Burgers to wash down my cookies with! Who are the kids that need a real doctor, not a fossil?"

"I HEARD THAT!" Janet laughed and ruffled the little boy's hair. She then pointed him towards the two boys.

"Oh! You still have your hearing? Kewl!" He giggled as he ran over and away from any form of retaliation.

"And I still have my memory too, you little brat. I get kids like you back!"

"You pwomise?" He asked in his best little boy voice as he handed his cookies to the two children he had come to see.

Janet reminded, "You're almost as old as I am, little man!"

"Yes, but I, unlike you, haven't let myself go yet!" Antonio giggled, causing the other kids to laugh loudly.

Janet stood there speechless for a moment, then, "You're grounded, mister. No cookies for a month!"

Antonio took another bite of his cookie, while giving Janet his best 'Spock' eyebrow raise, then he took a long slurp of his chocolate milk. Putting the empty glass down in a safe spot, he grinned, "Riiight." He giggled as she also cracked up. He turned back to the two kids, "Hi! I'm 'Tonio."

"Hi Tonio, I'm Dee."

"And I'm Richie, Dee's brand new li'l bro."

Dee offered, "Prez and Keith are our new daddies. They says that we gotta all get checked up by a doc. Do you know any good docs?"

'Tonio giggled. "Kinda! You wanna help me check out this new toy Dr. McCoy gave me yesterday? We can see what it does!" He glanced up at Prez and Keith. "Daddies, huh? When?"

"About fifteen minutes ago!" Keith laughed.

"It was a short pregnancy!" Prez played along.

"Hey great-great-great-great-great Granny Janet! Did you make it official?" Antonio said loud enough for almost everyone nearby to hear.

"Nope. Didn't know it happened. Give me a moment." She made a few entries into the tricorder. "Prez, Keith, you want the rug rats?"

Antonio rolled his eyes and sighed, "Memory issues, you get

that when you are old."

"Yeah, but we kinda need to be married first," Keith grinned.

Prez laughed, "We had the kids on the sly! What's the diff?"

Janet looked at Tonio. "Can it, runt!" She looked at the kids and softly asked, "You want Prez and Keith as daddies?"

"You're just jealous because Dr. McCoy *likes* me!" Antonio giggled.

"YES!" Richie loudly stated.

Dee nodded, "Yup, me too!"

She entered a few things into the tricorder then looked up with a smile. "Hmmm... how many times did he pinch *your* butt? He's got mine at least fifty times. Congratulations, Keith and Prez, it's boys. And it's official."

"Official?" Keith and Prez incredulously repeated.

"Next time, just do it yourselves. Old ladies talk too much!" Antonio giggled as he hid behind Prez.

Keith blubbered but made no sense at all. Prez asked, "Don't we need to be married first?"

Antonio giggled, "Nope! I've got a son, and By and me ain't hitched yet!" He reached into his bag and pulled out eight cards. "Uncle Harrison sent these to HQ to pass on to y'all."

Prez and Keith looked down at the cards they were handed. They were Starfleet identification cards; one for Prez, Keith, Mike,

Derrick, Drew, Corey, John and Kaleo.

Keith wondered, "We're Starfleet Ensigns now, huh?"

"No. You're cooks now, you're Starfleet all the time." Antonio grinned. Dee and Richie held onto each other and shared a belly laugh. Mike and Derrick also began laughing.

Prez smirked, "Mike and Derrick, com'ere a sec." When they came over expecting a punch in the arm at least, Keith handed Mike his Starfleet ID. Prez handed an ID card to Derrick and playfully saluted, "Ensign Derrick Seibert, now you and your boyfriend get to adopt Dillon, Reyes and Jonah!"

"Oh yeah!" Janet said, as she pulled out some papers from her bag. She then handed them to Mike and Derrick. "Here are your official papers making you the Shiny Daddies to the Scooby Gang."

Mike and Derrick's jaws were now hanging on the ground. Surprised, they looked at each other and silently mouthed, "We're really parents!"

"I told ya, memory fails when you're *OLD*!" Antonio giggled.

"Yeah," Janet smirked, "keep at it, you little runt. You're only nine months younger than I am."

"And ninety years cuter!" Antonio shot back.

Janet smiled, "Yup! Oh and by the way, you're hanging out of your boxers."

"Hey, if you got it, why hide it?" Antonio blushed and giggled.

Prez then called over Drew and Corey. They finished loading cheeseburgers onto buns and hurried over. Prez and Keith handed

them their ID cards. Prez giggled, "You've been promoted again, from Toy Rimmers and Bun Rimmers to Starfleet Ensigns. As soon as some kids decide they want your scrawny butts, and you decide that you want them, you can adopt kids too!"

Watching their jaws drop too, Keith laughed, "Misery *loves* company!"

Two new adult men appeared on the driveway just a few paces from the outdoor recreation area. They approached Jim Hundser and introduced themselves. The tallest and plumpest of them said, "Sir, my name is Charles Plungis." Pausing briefly to point to the shorter and thinner man near him, he continued, "and this is Miguel Fuery. We *were* head chefs at the Halekulani restaurant in Honolulu. We now work here."

Shaking their hands, Jim Hundser smiled, "My pleasure, gentlemen. I wasn't expecting you so quickly."

Charles nodded, "It wasn't expected, but the offer was too good to pass up."

"We've had our fill of snooty people and would be much happier working for Clan Short," Miguel Fuery said.

Charles said, "If you would please step aside, we'll take over dinner preparations."

Holding up his index finger to pause the two men, Jim Hundser said, "Preston and Keith, go spend time with your new family. You're relieved. Go to the CIC dining room with the rest of the Clan."

"Dad," Keith scowled, "I was just about to start loading the grill with hot dogs."

Miguel asked, "Is that all we're preparing this evening, hot dogs and hamburgers?"

Jim nodded, "Mostly, and chicken and sausages for the kids. The adults are having grilled salmon and butterfly shrimp."

Charles and Miguel smiled widely and nodded at each other. Then Charles said, "We can easily manage two grills each."

"Of course!" Jim chuckled, "Mike and Derrick, step aside and finish your adoptions. You're relieved to spend time with your new family too."

"Thanks, Mr. H.," the two boys said in unison. The four boys walked away from their grills. Charles and Miguel took over for them. Prez and Keith watched as Janet made Dillon, Reyes and Jonah officially the sons of Mike and Derrick. Then Antonio began 'playing' with Dee and Richie and his tricorder. Abbie introduced herself to the two new arrivals. Between the three of them they now had all seven grills in that row in service and preparing dinner. Charles and Miguel were experimenting with their Smart Shelves. The spices that hadn't really been used before simply to save time would soon be professionally applied.

Soon the hotdogs were finished and in their buns. The last of the chicken parts, hamburgers, hotdogs and sausages were put on the grills. Two more men and a women appeared on the driveway. They introduced themselves as Jessica Simpson, Randy Leister and Chris Desantis. They were chefs from the Kahala Hotel and Resort in Honolulu. They relieved the entire back row of adults and took over seven grills. In virtually no time the hamburgers, hot dogs and sausages were cooked. The new Clan chefs began grilling the salmon and butterfly shrimp. Six more people showed up and introduced themselves to Jim Hundser as chefs from Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

They followed the other Clan adults to the CIC and immediately went to work in the kitchen. Chicken and vegetable soups by the gallon were prepared. Chocolate and tapioca puddings were also whipped up. A green bean salad was tossed.

Five minutes before seven, a train of fourteen Smart Shelves began the trip to the CIC kitchen. A small group of older kids were waiting outside the dining room and saw them coming. They went inside and announced the food was on the way. Ravenous, everyone went towards the kitchen serving areas and formed a line. Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey were ecstatic watching their simple barbecue dinner turn into a professionally prepared meal by a team of eleven chefs. All the rescued kids, G-Cats, gorillas, and other visitors from Maine and Utah were quickly choosing their meals and moving through the line. Keith and Prez estimated that there were about two hundred and fifty. The only ones missing the feast were the ferrets. Mike and Derrick asked around but nobody had seen them since they arrived or even knew where they were.

While almost everyone was still seated and enjoying their meals, Juan excused himself and went back to the kitchen. Adam, Logan, Donnie and Emily were seated at a table not far from the core Rimmers. One of the new chefs came out of the kitchen pushing a cart that held a single ten-gallon bucket. He went past Drew and Corey's table, then Mike and Derrick's table and Prez and Keith's table. He stopped at Adam and Logan's table and said, "Pardon me, please."

Since Adam and Logan were in mid conversation, Donnie looked up and politely asked, "What can we do for you?"

"Is Mister Logan Hayes at this table?" the chef asked.

Logan looked up and said, "That's me."

The chef said, "A young gentleman named Juan Casey asked that I bring this to you Sir. He said that you desperately needed it."

"Oh?" Logan innocently wondered, "What is it?"

"Barbecue sauce for your sausage, Sir." Emily quickly covered her mouth. Donnie caught his head in his hands and softly snickered. All of the Core Rimmers heard the chef, looked over and began giggling.

Shooting up from their chairs, Adam and Logan both screamed, "JUAN! YOU SONOFABITCH! WAIT TIL I GET MY HANDS ON YOU!"

Peeking around the wall separating the kitchen from the dining room, Juan laughed his ass off and bolted out the nearby dining room doors. Adam and Logan wove their way around tables and out the doors giving chase. Donnie and Emily could now laugh freely and soon most of the dining room was laughing hysterically. The poor chef was one of the last to catch on. "I thought ten gallons was quite a bit of barbecue sauce," he softly muttered, and then turned around to bring the bucket of sauce to the kitchen. He received a warm round of applause from most of the UNIT. No longer would he have to deal with aggravation from the rich and famous. Now he only had to deal with childish pranks, which was a change for the better.

Finished with their dinners, Prez had Richie in his lap while Keith was cuddling Dee. Antonio came over and said, "Hi guys, I got some good news and some not so good news." The boy doctor had Prez and Keith's undivided attention. "Richie here is in good health and so is Keith. Prez has a pretty bad sunburn on his shoulders, though."

"Oh no!" Richie squealed, "Daddy, do you feel okay?"

"I'm fine, little buddy," Prez assured.

Antonio handed Prez a tube of lotion saying, "Apply this three times a day and keep your shirt on in the sunlight."

Prez nodded and sighed, "Irish skin."

Keith asked, "How's Dee doin', doc?"

"He's not malnourished, but is undernourished," Antonio said. "For now, let's just feed him as much as he wants and as often as he wants. Morning multivitamins would be good for both boys. I'll come by again in a week and check his progress. If he gains just a few pounds, two or three, every week, you'll soon see him sprout up and gain a little more." Antonio looked eyes with Dee and said, "Drink lots of milk, and snack on fruits and nuts. Do you know what diarrhea is?" Dee nodded and blushed. "If you ever get that way, let your daddies know right away. It's bad for everyone but for you it could be real bad. Don't be embarrassed or hide it. Tell your dads so they can make sure it goes away fast." Turning to Keith and Prez, Antonio directed, "If Pepto or Imodium doesn't remedy the situation in six to eight hours, call me immediately."

Prez nodded, "Thanks, doc, we'll keep a close eye on him."

Keith grinned at Dee then tickled his belly and teased, "No! Loose! Poopies!"

Desperately trying to push Keith's hands away from his belly, Dee kicked his legs and laughed uncontrollably.

Richie giggled, "He's a silly daddy!"

Prez smiled, "That's one of the many reasons I love him."

The next table over, Mike was helping Jonah cut his chicken breast while Reyes was getting his first table drumming lesson from Derrick. While Mike counted out a four-four tempo, Derrick was teaching Reyes to use each arm and leg as independent entities: his right foot for the bass drum; his left foot for the hi-hat; the left arm for the snare and right arm for the ride cymbal.

Across the dining room, Lanna and Bill Seaver were sitting with Maureen and Josiah enjoying their dinner. Lanna Seaver said, "After I had given birth to Corey, the doctor said I shouldn't have more kids because it would be dangerous. Even though I wanted more, I had my tubes tied. For more than eleven years, Bill and I have considered adopting, but one thing or another kept us from pursuing it." She paused and giggled, "Now there are kids coming out of the woodwork! Part of me couldn't be happier."

"It's just so much so fast, quite a sudden change," Bill finished the thought for his wife.

"I know just what you mean," Maureen said with a smile. "Not long after Jonas was born, my ex started running around on me with a high school kid." She chuckled. "It's funny, this past week I welcomed her back to Arkham, because he took off on her too. But I never expected to have more than Jonas, until early this month when we found Clan Short in the middle of our lives."

"You need to roll with the punches, so to speak," Josiah added. "The kids are out to do the right thing, and they have the best possible equipment to do it; Vulcan discipline that they undertake willingly, positive peer pressure, and legal defense against any possible problems. But it is always a real shock to find all these changes in your lives."

He looked into the distance for a moment. "After my Annie

died, I expected never to have children. Honestly, while I've loved Maureen almost from the moment I met her, a big part of what brought us together and kept us going was Jonas; he looked to me as the father figure he never had. But now, we were going to adopt Peter, then Friday we took Calvin, and a week ago we agreed to foster the fourteen other kids we brought with us: Joey, Jacky, Trent, Linda, and the rest. We *just* got them only about an hour before Peter brought us all out here to the Islands."

Rob Gibbons smirked, "It's one thing for us to adopt and foster these kids."

Anna Gibbons softly said, "I'm having the most trouble accepting our kids adopting other kids."

"I'm at the same place too, Anna," Jennifer Hundser admitted. "While I'm playing it off as being too young to be a grandmother, the real issue is whether our teenagers are ready to be parents."

"They aren't, in the sense most people would mean it; the adults solely responsible for the kids' care, nurture, and upbringing," Josiah said. "But remember that lady with the catchphrase, 'It takes a village.' Their own parents will help, like any grandparents would, their friends will be there for them; there's a lot of mutual support with the other young parents. It's not like they're alone in an apartment trying to make enough money to take care of themselves and the kids, with nobody to turn to. They have the best possible support system, all around them. And the Clan exists specifically to make sure kids get what they deserve; loving families, so who better to give it than the Clan members themselves?"

"Plus, you're a cop, Mr. Gibbons, right?" Josiah went on. Rob nodded. "Then you know the theory of how League and Federation

law works with Hawaiian law?

"One element of that," he went on, "is that the leading House on Vulcan, the House of Surak, chartered Clan Short. That means the kids are acting according to Vulcan and Federation laws when they're functioning as Clan members; and Vulcan recognizes a young person as an adult when they show they're ready to undertake adult responsibilities; no nonsense about coming of legal age." He chuckled. "Actually, your kids are now all legal adults, as we just found out two days ago ourselves. As commissioned officers in Starfleet, they are now legal adults."

Harry's mother Abbie piped up. "Something Maureen had to remind me of when I got to worrying about Harry too much. Did you eight do a good job of bringing up your boys?"

"Of course we did!" Laura Gibbons said. "They know right from wrong and have never been a burden on us or a threat to anyone else."

Abbie offered, "Then what you need to do now is to stop worrying and let them show you just what a good job you did; to make you proud by proving themselves to the world, walking in your footsteps to make the world a better place. That was the toughest lesson I've ever had to learn, worse even than losing my Bert or my little Deborah. Harry's all I've got. But I had to let him be who he needs and wants to be. And I couldn't be prouder of what all he's accomplished."

"We've both known it was time to cut the umbilical cord for years," Jim Hundser told Jennifer. "We've almost completely accomplished that with Keith and Preston. And we've come a long way with Drew." She nodded and realized that what her husband said was very true.

"Maybe that's part of my issue," Lanna Seaver admitted. "It's something I know needs to be done and I've tried, but part of me doesn't want to complete that process."

Bill asked, "Why do you have to complete it now? If Corey was eighteen, would it be complete? Would it ever really be complete?"

"We're seeing age, simple numbers as meaning that some process is complete," Rob Gibbons recognized.

"It's really not related to age," Carl Seibert nodded. "Our boys have always been ahead of the learning curves since before they formed their band, since before they met."

"Ours too," Maureen said. "It may be the mother in me talking, but Jonas has always impressed me with how mature he acts for his age."

"I have the opposite problem," George Wentworth said. "I admit I wasn't ready for kids when I adopted. I've been on a fast track learning process ever since." He smiled ruefully. "But my boys were the wards of a religiously conservative couple that sheltered them way too much and did not give them any affection; quite the opposite in fact, they were physically abused. But the twins need cuddling more than what I think is normal for age seven, and Philip at 14 is more like a 12-year-old in terms of social development."

"Actually, none of ours have adopted... yet!" Josiah said. "But we've seen the results of adoptions in a lot of the kids from Orlando. And they're all the happier for it. They're able to give the younger kids something that they need and otherwise wouldn't have; and without interfering too much with their own ability to be kids, because there's always someone available to be responsible when they need a chance to unwind, let go, and just be kids for a bit. That's part of the virtue of

being the Clan; they have a Vulcan sense of what it means to be an extended family, something we seem to have lost over the years."

Abbie put in, "If Prez and Keith need to go do something not involving their kids, you don't think Mike and Derrick are going to have the slightest problem with having Dee and Richie come over and play with their kids, do you? We even do that as adults. I can't count the number of times Jonas spent the evening at my place, or even slept over, when Josiah wanted to take Maureen out, or she was working against deadline on a story."

"Just like any extended community, we all share in the responsibilities and the joy of having kids," Jim said. "We assist them when and where we can and they help each other too."

Bill Seaver challenged Lanna; "Tell me you don't enjoy having all these kids around."

"Of course I do," Lanna smiled, "I'm sure we all do. It's only the abrupt change."

Jennifer grinned, "I can't say that I'm not enjoying it though."

Anna chuckled, "I've always told Derrick; someday I hope you have children that act exactly the way you act. That day has come. I'll help him when I can, but the rest of the time I'll be absently giggling over the smallest things. Just remembering him carrying little Dillon around will likely set me off in a fit of hysterics later tonight." All the rest of the adults smiled or softly chuckled at that thought.

Maureen smiled. "I know it's a lot to deal with all at once. Just remember, there are a lot of us that have been in your shoes: Teri, Kyle's father Dan, Joe and Janet, all of us. And we're all just a phone call away. In fact, with Peter around," she giggled, "I can probably

just drop over for a visit whenever you want."

A group of two women and two men walked into the dining room asking for Director O'Brian. Hands shot up and pointed with the description of 'the red-headed dude with the little red haired boy sitting on his lap'. Stopping at the table and identifying Prez, the women leading the four introduced herself as Madeline Hupp, and her coworkers Judy Faris, Stephen Mier and Rodney Kile. "We're from New Jersey and have been hired as housekeeping professionals," Madeline said.

"Excellent!" Prez cheered, and then asked, "Is there anything you specialize in or areas where you don't work?"

Madeline answered, "We understand you're just getting your new Clan Short Division operating. While we generally specialize in housekeeping, we can assist anywhere you need us."

"I'll be honest," Prez explained, "we haven't even used the dorms or any of the housing yet. Tonight all the rescued kids will be bunkin' down with our families some way or another. What we'll need for tonight and the next few days is help in the kitchen. Is that okay with you?"

After checking with her coworkers and getting nods, Madeline said, "That's fine with us. We're very proud to be affiliated with Clan Short. Until you have adequate staff, we'll help in any way we can wherever you need us."

"Great!" Prez smiled, "It was good meeting y'all. Go over to the kitchen and introduce yourselves to Kenny Butler and the rest staff there."

As they walked away, Keith smiled, "We're getting close to full

operating mode here, baby."

"I can only wonder who's finding all these people," Prez scowled.

"It's almost eight o'clock, Prez," Keith reminded. "Lieutenant Vorik could be here in a little while. Let's just chill until he gets here, okay?" Keith then turned to Dee and said, "When the Vulcan Lieutenant gets here, me and Prez are gonna be pretty busy for an hour or two. Would you mind staying with Richie and Grams and Gramps for a little while?"

Dee shared a meaningful glance with Richie. They both soon nodded and Dee answered, "We'll stay with Granma and Granpa and our Teddies."

Prez asked, "You guys know John's friend Bruce; the little boy we found Friday, don't you?" Both boys nodded and Prez explained, "Since John's gonna be with us, Bruce will prob'ly be with Grandma and Grandpa too. So you three dudes can play together with your Teddies."

Dee wondered, "Why does Bruce follow John around so much?"

Keith softly answered, "Because he's scared; his mom and dad never came to pick him up at the beach like they said they would. Now he doesn't know where they are, maybe for the first time ever in his life."

"Aww, that's too bad," Richie whined.

"The same time we was saved, Bruce was lost," Dee realized.

Prez nodded and said, "He needs all the friends he can get right

now, just to make him a little less scared."

"I never had parents before," Richie sighed, "I can't rem'ber anyways."

Keith reminded, "But you do now."

Dee giggled, "I can barely believe it too!"

Prez smiled, "Wait until later tonight! We're gonna have a bunch of kids over our house, and another bunch over Mike's house and another bunch over Derrick's house and more at Corey's house. It's gonna be so much fun! We can play games or watch TV or listen to music; whatever we want."

Making eye contact with Prez, Keith nodded and chuckled, "I can hardly wait!"

"It's gonna be kewl, I know it!" Dee giggled.

Donnie and Emily stepped between the tables where Keith, Prez, Derrick and Mike were sitting. Emily said, "We've talked to your parents and are getting ready to send some guys over to your old houses. We'll be taking all your clothes, pictures and other personal belongings, but are planning on leaving some of the furniture there to be sold at auction; some of the living room furniture your parents asked to have delivered to their new basements. If there's anything in particular you'd rather leave behind or something you cannot do without, let us know."

Prez quickly replied, "In our bedroom closet there's two boxes of stuff from my parents. If I were to lose them, I'd be completely shattered."

On a small pad, Donnie jotted down and restated, "O'Brian

memorabilia for Prez in bedroom closet."

Keith said, "Just our instruments and all the stuff in our desk." Pausing while Donnie scribbled in the pad, Keith then asked, "You're taking everything, pictures and paintings on the dressers and walls too, right?"

Emily nodded, "We're planning on taking the team from one house to the next. Each of the six will be in a room and have Daileass transport everything from there to your new homes here. Basically, we'll transport everything obvious, including all the stuff in closets and pantries, including any special items you want in particular. For example, most of your moms want china, silver sets and lots of gifts from their wedding days. Your dads want file cabinets and miscellaneous special items. Mike's dad wants his rifle cabinet and the two locked handguns in his bedroom closet."

Mike said, "I have three guitars at home: an acoustic and my Strat are both in hard shell cases, but I also have the Squier Strat that I learned to play on in a gig bag. Maybe one of the little kids might want to learn to play...."

"If any of the kids want to learn, we'll get them their own guitar, Mike," Donnie interrupted. "Your guitars are yours. I would think they have some sentimental value to you."

"All your instruments are assumed to be coming anyway," Emily smiled.

Bouncing Richie on one knee, Prez said, "In our night table drawer, I have a few issues of Bass Player magazine and Keith has GQ magazines. Oh, please have Daileass get us some Flintstones vitamins. We'll need them for Dee and it wouldn't be a bad idea to have them available for all the kids here in the dining room or

kitchen."

Mike said, "I've got Guitar World and Guitar Player mags for the last three years in boxes on the floor of my closet."

Donnie nodded and scribbled more notes for vitamins and magazines.

Derrick giggled, "And another shoe box of all the birthday and Christmas cards he's ever received!"

"Yeah," Mike blushed, "definitely get that box too."

"Got it," Donnie grinned.

Keith asked, "Is there a chance we might be able to get some new things we've never had room for in our old houses?"

"Such as?" Emily wondered.

"I've always wanted an upright baby grand in our living room," Keith said. "We didn't have room for it before, but there's plenty of room for it now."

Tapping his sub-vocal, Donnie asked, "Daileass, do we have any upright pianos in our warehouses?"

"Just a moment, please, Donnie," Daileass replied.

While waiting, Donnie said, "All you guys have new instruments waiting in every auditorium."

"Really?" All four boys chorused.

Emily giggled, "Of course! We've now got a pro band in the Clan. We expect a few concerts now and then! Expect a packed house

too; between the UNIT and all the divisions, another fifteen to twenty thousand per show."

Keith smirked, "We ain't exactly pros."

"From what I've heard, you are," Emily smiled.

Drew came over with Geoffrey and asked, "Get my Linux computer from my bedroom please?"

Emily nodded, "No problem."

Daileass told Donnie, "We have three upright pianos in the warehouses: a Steinway and two Yamahas."

Donnie said, "Have the Steinway delivered to the Hundser's home, dude."

"It'll be there tonight," Daileass responded.

Prez wondered, "Do you guys know where our new chefs and housekeepers came from?"

"Peter Lambert saw you guys and your folks cooking," Donnie replied. "He took off shortly thereafter."

"To New Jersey?" Prez excitedly giggled.

Donnie shrugged and grinned, "Whatever it takes to get the job done."

"Word has it that he knows of some economic troubles there," Emily informed them. "They get helped and so do you."

"Sorta killing two birds with one stone," Donnie agreed.

Prez smiled, "A busy little Mikyvis!"

Glancing around, Keith said, "Oh! He's a Mikyvis too? I only got a hug and seconds later, poof! He was gone."

Prez nodded, "Same here, but did you notice Kaleo and Tory at the beach?" Keith shook his head. Prez said, "All their bruises and scars are gone now."

Emily explained, "Not too long ago, Peter had a terminal form of cancer. He was helped; now he helps everyone else every way he can."

"Prez?" Mike called, "Lieutenant Vorik's at the door."

"Okay guys, dinner's over," Prez said, "Let's start learning about our new digs."

Keith said, "I'll take Dee and Richie over to my folks."

"Dillon, Reyes and Jonah will be with my parents," Mike said. As he stood, he suggested. "All you guys can play together."

Keith checked with his boys, "How does that sound?"

Dee and Richie nodded. Richie said, "That's kewl, daddy." Keith's head spun. He couldn't believe how much he loved being called 'daddy'.

While Keith and Mike went with the boys towards their parents, the rest of the Core Rimmers gathered and started across the dining room towards the CIC with Lieutenant Vorik. Mike shoved a euphoric Keith into the CIC. Giggling like mad, Keith drifted across the room, took Prez in his arms and cheek-to-cheek they began slow dancing without music. Oblivious to everyone in the room, Keith whispered,

"I love you so much, baby." Derrick, Mike, Drew, Corey, John and Kaleo moved out of their way and began giggling. Lieutenant Vorik raised one eyebrow at the curious behavior.

Prez softly giggled in Keith's ear; "To what do I owe the honor?"

Keith sighed, "They called me daddy."

"It is surprising how good it sounds," Prez admitted.

Derrick turned to Lieutenant Vorik and explained, "We're parents for the first time."

Mike added, "Prez and Keith are real sentimental."

"And this is what usually happens whenever one or the other feels happy," Drew giggled.

Corey faced Drew and said, "We really should adopt Geoffrey."

"DUDE!" Drew loudly laughed.

"Look in his eyes," Corey said. "He's not saying it but he thinks you walk on water. I can't say that I blame him either."

Drew grinned, "He's five, you're eleven and I'm twelve. What's wrong with this picture?"

Derrick smiled and reminded, "Reyes is thirteen and we're fourteen."

Drew giggled, "You're not helping!"

Corey sighed, "Do you love me?"

Seeing the seriousness in Corey's expression and eyes, Drew

noded, "Course I do."

"And I love you," Corey assured. "Geoff was with us twice on the beach and he's been with us for over an hour, since before we came inside."

Mike grinned, "Just say yes, Drew."

Not letting go of Prez, and still swaying around together with him in a small area, Keith nodded, "Do it, bro. Geoff will feel awesome and so will you and Corey."

Already knowing the answer, Prez asked, "How long have you and Corey been friends?"

"Since we started school," Drew answered. "But that's only part of the issue. What about feeding him, clothing him, putting a roof over his head; doing everything a dad does?"

Keith sighed, "We have jobs, bro. We work for Clan Short, providing for all the kids already rescued and however many we need to rescue in the future."

"We've already given up parts of our former lives," Prez reminded. Looking up at Lieutenant Vorik, who was being more than patient this entire time, Prez said, "Tell him so he understands, please Lieutenant?"

Taking this as a command from the Pacific Rim Director, Lieutenant Vorik turned to the first available station and entered commands. The large flat panel display screen zoomed in on the Clan Short Pacific Rim Division's finances. "Here is your existing bank account balance," Vorik said. "Patriarch Short will provide additional funding when you meet him Monday." Then he moved to another station. A few commands later, the next display showed real-time

security camera color video of one of the single family homes. While continuing to enter commands, the Lieutenant said, "You may choose to live with your parents in one of their dwellings." Then another monitor came alive with camera video of the row of town-homes and he continued, "Or you may choose to occupy one of the six dwellings here, which are sufficient for the average family of four." The next display showed what was happening in the dining room just beyond the doors. Lieutenant Vorik stated, "You may choose to dine with your Clan or prepare your own family meals within your dwelling." Another flat panel display flickered on showing another building. "This is the educational facility on this base," Vorik said. Turning to face the eight boys again, he finished by adding, "You may choose to devote your time or not for every day of the remainder of your life. As long as you are, it is advisable and preferable to be content as often as possible. If being a parent for one of the rescued children provides a measure of contentment, you may do so."

Prez nodded, "Well done, Lieutenant."

Smiling, Drew asked Corey, "Do you really wanna?"

Corey rapidly nodded, "I'd be happy enough with you. Geoff would be a huge bonus for both of us."

Drew traced two fingers around Corey's ear and down around his jaw, softly saying, "Let's make it happen." Corey giggled and took Drew's hand, then kissed it.

Lieutenant Vorik looked at Prez. Prez nodded, "It's kewl with me."

"You may authorize the adoption," Lieutenant Vorik said.

"I can?" Prez squealed. Lieutenant Vorik nodded and Prez

explained; "Doctor Janet did the others."

Lieutenant Vorik tapped his communicator saying, "Vorik to Doctor Janet Hayes."

A few seconds later, Janet's voice was heard saying, "This is Doctor Hayes. Is there a problem Lieutenant?"

"No, Doctor. Please join us in the CIC with the child Geoffrey Eckel," Lieutenant Vorik replied.

Janet asked, "What is this in regards to?"

"The adoption of the child," Vorik responded.

"Understood," Janet said. "I'll be there as quickly as I can."

While they waited, Drew pulled Corey with him to the Vulcan Lieutenant and asked, "What else can these systems do?"

Lieutenant Vorik said, "You have access to all Terran law enforcement and security camera systems in the Pacific Rim." He then turned and entered a few commands. The screen flickered and showed a city street in Tokyo, Japan. Moving back to the first display where the account balance was still displayed, he entered more commands and the display changed to the corner of Yucca Street and Vine Street in Los Angeles, California. Lieutenant Vorik faced the boys again and explained, "These systems can provide you real time reconnaissance and surveillance. Support personnel may be left here monitoring while a team transports on site. Communications with away teams, other Clan divisions, Starfleet support or Vulcan command may be performed from here. The only alternate will be at the residence of Director O'Brian, where the same facilities will be provided in a smaller scale inside the dwelling tomorrow."

The door from the dining area to the CIC opened. Janet and Geoffrey and Geoff's Teddy bear walked in the room. Drew and Corey went over to Geoff. Kneeling down, Drew asked, "Geoff, would you like me and Corey to be your new daddies?"

The boy's mouth hung open in surprise for at least five seconds before he loudly giggled, "Would I? I'd love that!" then threw himself at Drew.

"That's one," Janet smiled, "Do I hear two more?"

Picking the boy up and standing, Drew nodded, "Plus one."

Taking Drew's hand, Corey smiled, "Plus one equals three."

Putting her tricorder down, Janet said, "That's all there is to it. I'll have the paperwork delivered tomorrow." She then went to Lieutenant Vorik and showed him the tricorder.

"Congratulations, dudes," Keith smiled. Geoff's Teddy bear jumped up and down happily.

Prez snickered, "Mom's gonna have a fit!" Prez then turned to Janet and said, "You'll need to show me how to do the adoptions."

Janet moved closer to Prez and showed him how to operate the tricorder while explaining, "You just need to put the tricorder in that mode and make voice recordings of the proceedings. You then either record or enter in the witnesses' names and presto! Paperwork is generated and delivered to the new parents."

Lieutenant Vorik said, "There are eight tricorders in this room, one for each member of your team."

"Hey! This makes me an uncle for three now, don't it?" John

realized.

"Yep," Drew grinned, "How's it feel, bro?"

"Pretty good!" John laughed.

Prez noticed Lieutenant Vorik once again waiting patiently, standing at parade rest. "We've got stuff to do here, guys," Prez reminded, hating to cut short the celebrations.

Holding a single hand up, Lieutenant Vorik said, "If I may make a suggestion, gentlemen?"

"Go ahead, Lieutenant," Prez said.

"I was not aware that new families were formed this evening," Lieutenant Vorik said. "So that you may spend time with your families, it would be best if our orientation continued tomorrow. The Endeavor will be leaving orbit at twelve hundred hours local time tomorrow. I will introduce other Starfleet personnel and then take my leave of you."

Prez glanced around at his core team and got nods of agreement. "Good, we'll meet back here at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. Let's try to give our full attention to the orientation tomorrow, okay?" Again receiving all positive replies, Prez said, "Thank you, Lieutenant, you've been great."

Lieutenant Vorik nodded, "Until tomorrow, good evening, gentlemen." He then tapped his communicator, saying, "Vorik to Endeavour. One to transport aboard." Moments later, the Lieutenant was transported to his ship in orbit.

"This is so kewl!" John beamed

"Ya, think that's kewl?" Keith grinned, "Com'ere bro." John walked over and Keith dug into his pocket, then handed John his Starfleet identification card.

"I'M AN ENSIGN IN STARFLEET?" John incredulously hollered.

Prez laughed, "Yep, a whole galaxy of new opportunities has opened up for all of us." Letting go of Keith, he went to Kaleo and handed him his Starfleet ID.

"Me too?" Kaleo gasped.

"You're a Core Rimmer," Prez snickered, "How's that for a change?"

"Wow," a stunned Kaleo smiled, "Two days ago I was an orphaned boy-toy. Now I'm part of the Clan Short team and an Ensign in Starfleet." He then laughed, "I gotta tell Tory and everybody else!"

Mike suggested, "While you do that, we should check out our auditorium and see what kind of instruments they got for us."

Nodding, Prez said, "Have everyone that's done eating meet us in the auditorium... Mouth Rimmer!"

Kaleo giggled, "You got it, Head Rimmer!" and then hurried out of the room.

"I can't take these rimmer jokes any more!" Keith laughed. Off to the side a few feet away, Drew, Corey and John began giggling. Keith suspiciously squinted, "What's so amusing, you guys?"

"Oh nuthin'!" John teased.

"Now I *know* something's goin' on," Keith threatened.

"Give it up, dudes," Prez grinned.

Corey cackled, "Keith's the Head Rimmer's rimmer!"

Trying not to laugh while everyone else cracked up, Keith and Prez checked with each other then nodded. Together, they began counting down; "Five... four..." and everyone scattered, running for the door back to the dining room.

Slowly making their way towards the door, Prez told Keith, "Let's get our kids, daddy."

"Ooo!" Keith moaned. "It even sounds good when you say it!" Prez giggled his ass off. Keith took Prez in his arms again, dancing the remaining few yards to the door.

Outside the CIC, Drew, Corey and Geoff had found the door to the auditorium and stepped inside the dimly lit entrance. While Corey held Geoff's hand, Drew searched around for light switches. Drew found a four-foot long steel door in the wall and opened it. "Circuit breakers," Drew said, and began flipping switches. The lobby lights turned on. Derrick and Mike walked in with Reyes, Jonah and Dillon while Drew was still flipping switches.

Derrick noticed, "There's another breaker box over here, Drew."

"Go for it," Drew said, "All the switches are marked."

Handing off Dillon to Mike, Derrick said, "Stay with your pop while I do this. It's just safer, in case of a short."

"Don't you dare electrocute yourself," Mike playfully warned.

"I got a few marked for the PA system here, Drew," Derrick said

as he flipped the switches.

Drew nodded, "There's one marked as projector and another marked screen over here. This place can be used as a movie theater!"

Dillon asked, "We gonna watch movies, poppa?"

Shaking his head but smiling, Mike said, "Not here, when we get home later, though."

"I never been to a movie place before," Jonah admitted.

"Me neither," Dillon sighed.

Drew hummed then snickered, "I got a switch marked Dolby seven-dot-one. This place can handle iMax flicks!"

Derrick smiled and made his voice very deep saying; "Voice of God."

Closing the breaker box door again, Drew said, "I think we're set."

Derrick nodded, "All the inside and outside lights are on."

Reyes went to the double doors, opened one and looked inside, then began giggling as he stepped inside. "We found the ferrets!"

Following his eldest son and carrying Jonah, Derrick scowled, "What the hell are they doin' in here?" When he passed through the doors, he couldn't believe his eyes and cracked up. For a moment, all seventy-four ferrets paused and looked over to the auditorium doors. Then they returned to the task at hand, polishing to a shiny sparkle every single piece of brass, chrome or steel in the auditorium, all the microphone stands, the guitars, the keyboards, the drums and the

cymbals.

Mike carried Dillon inside. Grinning at the scene before him, he then hollered; "SPIKE!"

In came Drew, Corey and Geoff. Many of the ferrets were wearing aprons and some were balancing four ferrets high to reach the cymbals. Even Dillon and Geoff found the scene before them funny.

Standing up on his hind legs, Spike gleefully cheered, "Shiny Daddy!" and began scampering up the aisle.

"We've been looking for you guys for hours," Mike told his furry son.

Stopping and squatting, Spike looked up and explained, "Weez were exploring. When weez found this place, High Priest Dave said we should always keep it SHINY!"

Unable to wipe the wide smirk off his face, Mike said, "You guys did an excellent job too!"

"We won't even need spotlights," Corey snickered.

Drew nodded and joked, "The audience might even need sunglasses!"

Bouncing slightly from the compliments, Spike begged, "Will you make shiny music for us tonight?"

Derrick nodded, "We're already gathering our Clan and all the visitors."

Mike explained, "Our Shiny leader Prez might have a few things to say first, but I'm sure we can talk him into playing some shiny songs. I've got some special ones already picked out for all you

ferrets."

"You do?" Spike happily squealed. Mike nodded and Spike reminded, "We have your special Shiny Robes ready too!"

"Excellent!" Mike cheered. "I'll even wear 'em whenever we perform."

Speechless, Spike hurried over and grabbed hold of Mike's leg, looking up with happy tear-filled eyes. Mike bent down slightly, softly petting the small ferret boy's head, and assured, "I love you too, Spike."

Prez and Keith walked out of the CIC with their two boys. Looking up at the moon and stars, as he often did since his parent's passing, Prez noticed something. He pointed northwest of the CIC and asked, "Keith, was that building there when we went inside for dinner?"

Keith hummed and scowled, "I don't think so. I would've noticed a seven-story building."

While they were looking at the new building, an additional story appeared and it grew to eight stories tall. Prez shook his head and sighed, "I'm not even gonna ask. Like the weather in Texas, give it another minute, it'll change." It didn't even take a minute. By the time Prez picked up Dee and Keith picked up Richie, there were nine stories. They walked around the CIC to the auditorium and slowly moved forward into the building with the mass of people.

Around the auditorium structure, about twenty feet high from the ground, was a wide teal-colored section that was made of a ceramic and glass composite material; it refracted the lights shining against it so that it appeared to glow. With all the exterior lights turned on, the auditorium looked impressive, like other more famous

venues such as Madison Square Garden, The Shark Tank or Honda Center. People that were driving past the new Clan Short main base via Iroquois Avenue and others that lived south of it could see the pretty teal glow through the trees.

The auditorium's inside lobby didn't appear that different than most movie theaters; however, there were two flat panel video displays. The movie being shown could be watched by anyone working at the concessions or anyone else that happened to be in the lobby area. Prez and Keith liked what they saw and thought serving from the concession stand and operating the projector would be jobs for any older kids that wanted them. They wondered how they might obtain movies to show. What they found when they went up four flights of stairs was a movie library. Making a quick survey of the library, they found *Toy Story*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and a hundred other favorites in the action, comedy, drama, horror and musical genres, ranging from G rated all the way through R. As they came back downstairs, they considered showing some horror flicks the next night, as it was Halloween.

When Prez and Keith made their way inside the auditorium theater, they were once again amazed. There were three balconies and seating for at least twenty thousand. Keith joked, "Not that it matters, Kyle, Ty or Levi could prob'ly add seating with a thought if we needed more!"

Nodding, Prez giggled and admitted that was likely very true. Prez then suggested, "Keith, why don't you go up on stage and check out the grand piano? While everyone gets seated, show 'em what you can really do, babe."

Keith nodded and asked Richie, "So I don't feel alone, do you wanna come with me, son?"

Richie nodded, "Uh huh, okay, daddy."

Feeling another joyful chill race up and down his spine, Keith giggled, "God, I love the sound of the word daddy!" He then quickly made his way down the aisle towards the stage.

Drew and Geoff caught up with Keith and shared something then hurried up the aisle to Prez and Dee. Drew told Prez about the PA system and the iMax surround sound system. He then pointed at Mike, who was now greeting people as they came in, and wearing a long white robe that had silvery eight-pointed stars embroidered on the sleeves and a larger one on the back. Rolling his eyes, Prez snickered, "Shiny Daddy!"

Keith made his way onto the stage and sat on the piano bench. Once Richie was settled beside him, Keith inhaled and considered what he might play for a few seconds. Then he began playing [Rachmaninov Piano Concerto number two](#), movement one. As Keith began playing, the chatter dwindled and everyone began to sit and quietly listen. Richie watched Keith and his hands purposefully moving along the keys with great interest. When Keith finished playing that piece, he looked back into the applauding audience and saw that kids were still filing in, so he played [Body and Soul](#). While Keith was playing, Prez gathered the Core Rimmers and had them sit on the edge of the stage while he checked the first available microphone and Drew got it working. Prez then joined his team and sat in the center of them with Dee beside him. Before him, in the first two rows, were the ferrets and many of the youngest Rimmer kids. He waited for Keith to finish and joined the audience in their applause.

While Keith and Richie remained at the piano bench, Prez lifted the wireless microphone and began, "I only have a few things to say. First of all, for my entire team and our families, I'd like to thank

Adam, Logan and the rest of the UNIT for their help today here and at Anahola Bay." More applause traveled around the audience so Prez briefly paused. He then said, "I've been told that Peter Lambert is responsible for hiring our chefs and housekeepers, without whom I'd probably be still standing at a barbecue grill and cooking while the rest of you ate!" As giggles and laughter erupted, Prez wondered, "Is Peter in here?"

Nathan shouted, "He's still building condos for the chefs and housekeepers, the last we saw, Prez."

Prez nodded, "In case we don't get to see him again for a while, please extend our thanks. For the rest of you visiting us from the U.S. Clan, thanks for coming and helping us through our first day. I'm sure we'll be seeing a lot of you occasionally for visits here in paradise. Janet, thank you especially for helping us adopt our kids and forming families. It feels great."

From the audience, Jennifer Hundser hollered, "It won't feel so great tomorrow!" While Prez and many of the Core Rimmers chuckled, she loudly teased, "You're all grounded for a week!" Most of the audience erupted in laughter.

Prez joked, "Sorry for making you a grandmother before your time! I'm sure you'll enjoy having our little ones around to spoil rotten."

"We've already begun!" Jim Hundser loudly admitted.

"I don't doubt it!" Prez snickered. He then said, "Thanks to all the ferrets and High Priest Dave for making everything in here sparkle."

All seventy-four ferrets stood and sang, God save our Gracious Shiny! Long live our Noble Shiny, God save the Shiny, Send it

victorious; Happy and Glorious; Long to Shine over us; God save the Shiny!

"Okay!" Prez chuckled. He then said, "Since we can use this place as a movie theater, I thought we might begin tomorrow night with some movies appropriate for Halloween. We'll need one or two projectionists and three or four to serve snacks and drinks at the concession stand. If any of our new Clan members are interested in those jobs, just let any one of us in the Core Team know.

"One last thing since it's getting late and we've all had a busy day. For all our new brothers and sisters now part of the Pacific Rim Division Clan; we've been considering alternatives for bed time tonight, but ultimately the choice is yours. Choice one: whoever wants to can start moving into the dorms; and, choice two: we can divide ourselves up into groups of twenty or so and spend the night together with our parents in our new homes. The choice is yours. Let us know what ya wanna do."

Tory and a bunch of other kids hollered, "We want a concert!"

Prez giggled, "Was that one of the choices I mentioned?"

Janet and Joe loudly added, "We've heard Keith, now we'd like to hear your band."

Prez looked left and right at his bands mates. Mike grinned, "I already promised Spike we'd play a few songs."

"We really should try everything out," Derrick agreed.

"Sweet!" Drew chirped. Prez smiled at him and Drew offered, "It's a five-dot-one surround system." He and Corey jumped down off the stage. Drew helped Geoff down saying, "Give us a few minutes to make it upstairs, Prez." Drew, Corey and Geoff started back up the

aisle on their way to the room where the PA system was set up.

"Okay then," Prez smiled, "One impromptu concert comin' up." Turning off the microphone, Prez asked Dee; "Ya wanna stay on stage with me or watch from the audience?"

Shrugging, Dee thought for a few seconds then wondered, "Would you be mad if I watched?"

"Not at all," Prez honestly said, "Whatever makes you happiest."

Overhearing them, Kaleo came over, held his arms out and said, "Jump, Dee." The boy pushed off the stage and Kaleo caught him, then spun him around before putting him down on the floor. One after another, Kaleo helped the little ones down the same way, then they went back into the audience and found seats.

Prez stood and walked across the stage. He had a new Fender Jazz bass guitar and an Ampeg amplifier with a cabinet of four ten-inch speakers to try out. Mike went to check out each of the three new guitars that were sitting on a stand in front of two amps. After turning on both the Marshall and Fender amplifiers, he first inspected the Candy Apple Red Fender Stratocaster with three single-coil pickups. While it was very nice, Mike didn't even pick it up because sitting beside it was a Martin D-45. Mike whimpered and lifted the guitar to see it even closer. The fingerboard hexagon inlays were absolutely beautiful. With Keith still at the Steinway grand piano, Mike and Prez checked their tuning quickly. Both instruments were perfectly in tune with the piano.

While they softly fiddled around to get the feel of their new instruments, Amur Khan lifted Joe, wheelchair and all, onto the stage. Mike and Prez were standing near each other chatting about the instruments and both were wearing wide grins. Derrick was softly

tapping his new drums to be sure they were tuned properly. Keith got up and went over to Derrick, then Prez and Mike joined them. Every instrument and amplifier was more than they could've dreamed the Endeavour would've supplied. Drew's voice came over the stage monitors. "Everything's powered up and ready for a sound check, bros."

While Keith, Prez and Derrick began working with Drew to ensure the equipment was operational, Khan pushed Joe closer to Mike. Joe said, "That's pretty much a top of the line Martin." Around them the many colored stage lights were dimming and turned back up again as Corey was testing his part of the equipment too.

Rapidly nodding, Mike agreed, "Yeah, they make more expensive models and other custom ones, but this feels and plays great!"

"Let's hear something," Joe prodded.

Still wearing his Shiny Robe, Mike hummed thoughtfully, then pocketed his pick. Believing it would be something instantly recognizable, he then began finger-picking [Beethoven's Fur Elise](#). Khan handed the third guitar, an Alhambra 4P classical guitar, to Joe. Surprising Mike and many in the audience, Joe effortlessly joined Mike playing the piece. While Mike was using a very standard classical technique, Joe was using a Flamenco technique. The duet was heard very well by the audience and at the end of the song, all eight of the Rimmers' parents stood and applauded. The rest of the audience and the ferrets clapped too.

Returning the guitar to the stand, Joe nodded, "Very well done, Mike."

Mike thanked Joe and smiled, "I had no idea you could play!"

"I took a few lessons from my cousin back in the seventies," Joe admitted. He then asked, "If you don't mind, I'd like to stay up here while you boys play?"

"We wouldn't mind at all," Mike grinned. "You might hear better out front, but if you want to stay up here..."

"I'll hear fine," Joe assured. "I'll be watching you play though."

Mike chuckled, "I do the same thing."

Khan pushed Joe over to the far right front of the stage. He and Joe shared a few words, then Khan walked off and left the auditorium. The boys gathered around the drum kit and discussed what songs they would play. Once they had reached agreement, they turned to the audience and signaled Corey to dim the audience and stage lights. Corey lowered all the lights, but left the blue stage lights on low so the band could see. Mike put the Martin guitar down and picked up the Stratocaster.

The first tune began with Keith's soft organ and synthesizer, and with Derrick brushing the chimes near his hi-hat. Many immediately recognized the song [Shine On You Crazy Diamond](#). Slowly the keyboards got louder, then Mike began playing the introduction guitar licks. Everything became very quiet again until Mike played the first four notes of the second section on his Stratocaster. Derrick and Prez joined in and Corey turned up the blue and green stage lights, then pointed a spotlight on Mike. After about a minute, Keith took over playing the melody on his synthesizer while Mike chopped away at some chords. Then Mike played another lead section before stepping closer to the microphone.

Looking down at Spike and the ferrets, Mike sang; "Remember when you were young, you shone like the sun. Shine on you crazy

diamond. Now there's a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky. Shine on you crazy ferrets. You were caught in the cross fire of childhood and stardom, blown on the steel breeze. Come on you target for faraway laughter, come on you stranger, you legend, you martyr, and shine!

"You reached for the secret too soon, you cried for the moon. Shine on you crazy diamond. Threatened by shadows at night, and exposed in the light. Shine on you crazy diamond. Well you wore out your welcome with random precision, rode on the steel breeze. Come on you raver, you seer of visions, come on you painter, you piper, you prisoner, and shine!"

While ferrets looked up in awe, Keith played the ending saxophone solos on a synthesizer. Further back in the audience, the band noticed more than a few smiling and giggling because they knew that High Priest Dave had to be taking note of the lyrics! Adam made a note to acquire the CD so that he would have another way of gathering all the ferrets without setting off small flares. As the song began to fade to ending, everyone clapped and cheered. All seventy-four ferrets were excitedly bouncing and chanting; "Shiny Mike! Shiny music! Shiny Diamond!" over and over again.

Derrick counted off a quicker beat then the band began playing Collective Soul's [Shine](#). This time, Derrick sang the lead vocals with Keith backing him up. "Give me a word, Give me a sign, Show me where to look, Tell me what will I find, will I find, Lay me on the ground, Fly me in the sky, Show me where to look, Tell me what will I find, will I find?"

"Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down."

"Love is in the water, Love is in the air, Show me where to look, Tell me will love be there, love be there, Teach me how to speak, Teach me how to share, Teach me where to go, Tell me will love be there, will love be there?"

"Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down."

Mike moved forward to center stage and played the short solo. Three of the female ferrets fainted. Spike and Xander smiled up at Mike while they fanned their unconscious sisters. Laughing his ass off, Mike moved back to stage right.

"Give me a word, Give me a sign, Show me where to look, Tell me what will I find, will I find, Lay me on the ground, Fly me in the sky, Show me where to look, Tell me what will I find, what will I find?"

"Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down. Oh, heaven let your light shine down. I'm gonna let it shine, I'm gonna let it shine, Shine on me, shine on me, come on and shine!"

Khan returned with two guitar cases. He gave one to Joe and left the other sitting on the stage. Ending the song on a thunderous chord, the audience loudly cheered and the band giggled insanely. Some of the rescued kids began hollering for replays of various songs from Friday night's luau.

The band met their requests by playing [Separate Ways \(Worlds Apart\)](#), [Go All The Way](#), [Time Of The Season](#), [One Thing Leads To Another](#), [Cult Of Personality](#), [Precious and Few](#), [Silent Running](#), [Wildest Dreams](#), and [Traces](#).

Prez stepped forward and said, "We learned today that General Adam Casey plays guitar. Why don't we get Adam up here to jam with us?" The band clapped and prodded Adam to join them.

While others clapped and some cheered, Adam blushed and shook his head.

Khan pushed Joe, with one of the guitar cases on his lap, over to Mike. Khan walked off the stage and out to the audience. Joe called for Mike, and Mike looked over at him. Joe smiled, "This guitar belonged to my cousin, Randy Rhoads. It's been locked away safe since he died. I know he would want you to have it."

Mike's jaw hung on his chest. He stammered, "Joe, any of Randy's guitars are part of rock history. I can't..."

"You can because he and I both want you to have it," Joe interrupted. He then opened the case and showed Mike the well-known white Les Paul Custom often played by Randy Rhoads.

Khan stood at the end of the row where Logan was trying to get Adam up to go and play with the band. Khan threatened, "You can walk to the stage or I will carry you in front of everyone." Not wanting to be embarrassed in front of everyone, Adam hesitantly stood and walked to the end of the row. Logan followed simply to be there and offer any support.

Since Mike was preoccupied with Joe, Prez continued clapping but went to see what was going on. Seeing the guitar, Prez gasped, "Is that what it looks like?"

Mike smiled, "It's not just a white Les Paul; it's Randy Rhoads' Les Paul."

"No way!" Prez chuckled.

Joe nodded and assured, "This is it. Randy was my cousin and this was left in my care."

"And Joe just gave it to me!" Mike beamed.

"Oh my God!" Prez reverently whispered.

Taking the Stratocaster off, Mike giggled, "This and the Martin are coming home with me tonight!" Facing Joe again, Mike promised, "I'll keep this safe and well cared for, I promise."

Joe nodded and smiled. "I know you will."

Mike went and put the Stratocaster back in the guitar stand, then came back to Joe and picked up the Les Paul. He carefully put the strap on and plugged it in. Derrick looked over and asked, "What's up, dude?"

"It's Randy Rhoads' guitar, dude!" Mike cheered, "Joe just gave it to me!"

"You're kidding?" Derrick incredulously chortled. Mike shook his head and turned the volume knobs completely down, then played runs all the way up and down the fretboard. Envious, Derrick playfully complained, "Now all we need is someone to give me Carl Palmer's kit, and I'll be just as happy."

The other guitar case Khan brought had Adam's Ibanez RG1550M electric guitar. Adam walked over to Prez grinning. "You guys far outplay me. I'm only here because Khan was gonna carry my ass if I didn't get up."

Prez chuckled and nodded understandingly, "Not exactly

conducive to maintaining authority over others."

"Not exactly!" Adam snickered.

"Whatchya wanna play, dude?" Mike cheerfully asked.

Adam thought for a moment, then answered, "I'd like to play Switch 625 but..." He paused then softly admitted, "The lead parts are challenging enough alone, never mind in front of all these people."

"Don't worry about the audience, Adam," Prez instructed. "Focus weed-hopper, use more of those rooms you have to concentrate on playing."

"I have another idea," Mike offered. "First of all, don't face the audience. Secondly, why don't we play something a little easier first?"

"Like what?" Adam nervously wondered.

"[Sunshine Of Your Love](#)? Do you know that one?"

Adam nodded, "Sure do."

"You take rhythm guitar, I'll play the octave higher and the solo, with Prez taking the octave lower," Mike instructed. "I'll get us started. After two repeats, Prez will join. After two more repeats, you join and we'll play the whole tune. It'll sound great, as good or better than the original record."

Searching the theory knowledge he had acquired from Prez, Adam soon nodded and grinned, "I'll be back stage a bit, staring at Keith or Derrick or the drapes!"

Snickering, Prez went to tell Keith and Derrick. A few moments later, Derrick counted off and precisely on the down beat, hit his snare as Mike began playing then Prez came in just as they had planned.

Adam concentrated hard and came in just where he should have. The ferrets were chattering about the choice of another Shiny song and enjoyed it immensely. Mike and Prez shared the lead vocals duties. It had been years since the band played this song and they were all enjoying the trip down memory lane.

The UNIT members began yelling and screaming before they had even finished the song. Then they played [Switch 625](#), with Adam playing the rhythm guitar part and Mike playing the lead part. More than happy, Adam finished the song with the band and waved to his out-of-control UNIT members, then pressed the standby switch on the amp and unplugged his guitar. Keith, Derrick, Prez and Mike all clapped along with the audience as Adam walked past Joe, receiving a firm handshake and smile before walking down the stage stairs.

For the last song of the night, Mike invited Joe to join the band. Joe agreed but the two bantered back and forth over the song. Finally reaching agreement, Joe took the Stratocaster and soon the band were playing [You Can't Kill Rock and Roll](#). Derrick sang lead vocals, with Prez and Mike backing him up; but the highlight of the song was Joe and Mike switching off the lead guitar solos during the middle break and end of the song. The auditorium erupted in cheers and applause at the end of the song.

After the ovations had quieted and the audience lights were turned up again, Prez walked up to the microphone and asked, "What's it gonna be tonight; does anyone want to sleep in the dorm?" He watched carefully as heads shook. "Okay, the answer is no then. So shall we split into groups of twenty or just guys and girls?"

Kaleo stood and answered, "We'd like to stay together, Prez."

Prez smiled and nodded, "Okay, are separate bedrooms in the same house acceptable, or do we create one big nest in the

basement?" Kaleo and Prez looked around. Some of the kids were indifferent. Prez then asked, "Those of you that aren't sure, give me some kinda clue. What's the deal?"

One little girl about ten years old admitted, "Just wanna stay with you, Prez."

A boy about eleven or twelve said, "Same here."

Another boy about eight said, "Me too."

Prez tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass?"

Daileass replied, "Hi, Prez! Excellent concert!"

Prez giggled, "Thanks, dude."

"What can I do for you?" Daileass asked.

"We're gonna need about a hundred blankets and pillows in the basement of the Hundserts' house," Prez answered.

Daileass inquired, "Anything else for anyone else that might be staying the night there?"

"Hold on, lemme check," Prez said. He then asked, "Who's staying the night? I expect about forty from the UNIT, am I right?"

Adam shouted, "Close, Prez; more like fifty on base, including the gate guards and gorillas."

"I forgot the gorillas!" Prez loudly admitted. Grinning and knowing the answer, Prez asked, "Where does an eight hundred pound gorilla sleep?"

At least half the UNIT loudly laughed, "ANYWHERE IT

WANTS!"

Back stage packing up the D-45 and white Les Paul Custom, Mike tapped his sub-vocal then asked Daileass to transport both instruments to his bedroom at home.

Prez chuckled and shook his head sadly, then asked, "We'll put aside an entire dorm building for the UNIT. Does that sound okay?"

"That's fine, Prez," Adam loudly responded.

"Who else is staying the night?" Prez asked.

Peter Lambert stood and answered, "Everyone from Northeast Division, Prez."

"Peter!" Prez shouted, "I saw the new building you built for us and heard about all the people you've employed. Thanks for your help, dude."

Peter giggled, "Well, there are actually *three* new condominiums to the northwest of the CIC. You've got ten chefs and four housekeepers. Tomorrow you'll have six landscapers and two doctors too! All the chefs, housekeepers, landscapers and doctors will take up residences in the condos."

Maureen piped up, "The rest of us from Maine will take a few condos over night?"

"Sounds good," Jonas said.

Harry, however, had been noticing the expression on the fourteen rescued kids the Northeast group had adopted earlier that day. Now he spoke up. "Um, I think our new guys will want to stay with the other rescued kids, for their own comfort, right guys?" There

were hesitant nods from their kids. "And we Clan guys probably ought to stay with them?" Again he looked at the kids, and got small smiles and nods. "Can you add us in, Prez?" he asked.

"No problem at all," Prez assured.

"The grownups will be sleeping in proper beds, though," Harry's mother Abbie said. "I'm too old for a slumber party sleepover!"

Prez chuckled, "Make that a hundred and twenty pillows and blankets."

Daileass giggled, "I've got a head count, Prez. You'll have everything you need waiting in your basement."

Looking out into the back rows of the audience at his parents' faces, Keith laughed, "Sounds cozy!"

"Until someone needs a bathroom!" Jennifer Hundser loudly reminded.

Prez grinned, "Us guys can share a toilet, most of the time anyhow. We'll have the girls use two of the three upstairs bathrooms, one for the boys that need more... umm... privacy! And the ground floor half-bath can be for us guys. That way you and dad can just hide in the master-bedroom and attached master-bath! We can make this work, mom."

Janet grinned at Jennifer and whispered, "Valium."

Daileass heard most of this exchange and said, "For showers tomorrow morning, might I suggest the mob showers in the dorms, Prez; girls upstairs and boys downstairs?"

Prez nodded, "Thanks, Daileass; that'll work great." Prez then

shared Daileass' suggestion with the audience. "One more thing, please, Daileass?" Prez began.

"Go ahead, Prez."

"How about a couple of TV's down in the basement? I'm thinking four each, PlayStations and Xboxes, and one big one for movies & TV."

"You got it!" Daileass said. "I'll add in a few microwaves, a case of popcorn and a fridge loaded with soft drinks."

"Good thinking," Prez gushed, "You're the greatest, dude."

"You're way cute too, Prez!" Daileass giggled. "By the time you guys get home, everything will be set."

Prez blushed and giggled, "Okay! We're set, folks. Let's get out of here." Prez turned off the microphone and loudly asked, "Kaleo, hang back a minute, please?"

Leading the newly adopted kids to the stage stairs, Kaleo nodded. Walking down the steps with Keith, Prez said, "I'm just curious here, but I expected some of the older kids might like to have a room in the dorms. I also expected that the girls would want a place of their own, separate from the boys. What gives?"

Kaleo answered, "It's simple insecurity versus security, Prez. A lot of kids found it hard to sleep last night in hotel rooms with four to a big room. A room that size would've had ten little kids or eight older kids in the orphanages. For those that were fostered, they were mostly all alone all the time. Besides," Kaleo grinned, "we do really want to spend time with all you guys. If we split up, it would be one or two leaders to a room. That's not good enough. We want to be around all of you. Not just you and Keith, not just Mike and Derrick or Drew

and Corey. And the girls are sorta left out in the cold too. Who would sleep with them?"

Donna and Tristan, Jory Casey's two lovers, were fairly close to Prez when this was said, and they giggled. Donna said through her chuckles, "At our base in Wales, boys and girls are always in the puppy-pile together. You better start getting used to it, ginger-top!"

Prez nodded and giggled, "I'm not the problem!"

"Our mothers are the problem!" Keith laughed.

"The sex thing, yes?" Tristan easily recognized. He then seriously said, "The difference is people that are used to consensual sex. Lots of these kids are used to non-consensual sex. They must realize that they now have choices, choices they never had before, like who to sleep with and where. If your mam says anything to any of you, remind her of that. What they're gonna learn from all you lads and from your parents is what love is like, real love versus sex."

"It'll take some time for them and understanding from your parents," Donna added. "It'll happen."

"Oh, and just sleeping in the nest don't mean everyone has to be naked," Tristan added. "A lot of the guys and girls started off with their pants or knickers on," he giggled.

"Unless it's extremely cold," Keith smiled, "and I mean cold by Hawaiian standards, below sixty degrees, we'll sleep with boxers and maybe T-shirts on; otherwise, we always sleep naked."

Prez and Derrick nodded. Mike revealed, "I'd have to be extremely cold to sleep with boxers on. I can't sleep with anything the slightest bit confining on, never have been. My parents would put baby PJ's on me and I'd cry all night. Take my clothes off on the

changing table and I'd go out like a light though."

Derrick smirked, "That answers a few outstanding questions lurkin' around my brain."

Everyone cracked up until Donna giggled, "Just give them the choice and no teasing anyone, clothed or naked."

All the Rimmers nodded and Prez assured, "It won't be a problem. Thanks for the advice."

"Advice is free," Donna murmured as she looked the larger teen up and down, her eyes loitering just below his waist. "But I'd pay to see YOU naked... hot stuff!"

Turning redder than his hair, Prez blushed and began sweating. Again everyone laughed hysterically, but Keith loved seeing his lover turn so red. Keith evilly snickered, "Blushing and ticklish now. This is really, REALLY good!"

Tristan giggled, "Donna, you gonna?"

"Hoo, yeah... maybe... yum yum!" she said as she leered at Prez.

Jory, standing not far away, started laughing loudly. "Soooo... she seduced me... now she's after a fourth and fifth for our group, Trist?"

"Looks like it... they're big too!"

"Yippee!" Jory giggled, his eyes flashing with mischief.

"Are they serious?" Prez yelled at Adam and Logan.

Adam shrugged and Logan didn't respond for trying to hold in

his own laughter.

Korris however, answered, "Yes, they are. Or they'll have my bat'leth up their arses!"

"Ooo! Kinky! But I'll leave that for Chang!" Donna retorted. Then she reached up and pulled Prez's face down to her level by the simple expedient of use of his ears. "Just joking, stud-muffin." Then she kissed him on the lips quickly. "Just a taste to remember you by!"

Covering all of his face except his eyes, Prez reverted to age ten. He moved away from the stage and started up the aisle mumbling, "I'm gonna hide somewhere. Maybe the ferrets will give me a break?" Keith giggled and, taking Dee and Richie by their hands, quickly caught up then got a few tickles in. Laughing, Prez swatted at his hands, then ran up the empty aisle. Everyone else followed when Drew and Corey began turning off the lights in the auditorium.

The ferrets began leaving en masse, and Mike shouted, "Spike! Where are you going?"

Spinning around, Spike answered, "Weez going to find a place to sleep."

"You've already got a place," Mike said, "with the rest of us."

Spike stammered, "But... but... my litter mates?"

"They're sleeping with us too," Derrick said. Xander, Faith and Willow looked around uncertainly.

"But... but... we-weez n-not hu-hu-human!" Spike stuttered, tears forming in his eyes. "We... weez never been... been allowed..."

"You're not only allowed, you're expected to be with us," Mike

interrupted.

"You just gotta be good," Derrick softly reminded. "No stealing any shinys in the house."

Confused and not believing it could be real, Spike said, "But... but if we really are your family, then the shinys are all of ours. We don't steal shared shinys, that would be wrong."

Carrying Dillon over near his ferret kids, Mike smiled, "Then everything's kewl and you can definitely stay with us at night, and eat with us too."

The idea of sleep *and eating* with their human family was just too much for Spike to handle. He couldn't say anything except "but". Mike offered Spike a finger to hold on to as he led the group up the aisle and out of the auditorium. Since Reyes was carrying a very tired Jonah, Derrick offered both hands and sets of fingers to Xander, Faith and Willow. The three ferrets only emulated Spike and held onto Derrick's fingers.

A short while later, the new Pacific Rim UNIT troops had chosen a dorm building to use as their barracks. The adults from Clan Short Northeast felt as if they had stayed awake all night and went to one of the condominiums. Janet, Joe and Amur Khan, were also feeling the effects of a four-hour time difference, took their leave and Daileass returned them to Utah with Adam, Logan and the rest of their UNIT troops. The adult Hundserts, Seavers and Gibbons went to the Seiberts' new home for coffee and to chat about their new lives. Prez and Keith led the mass of kids through their new house, showing them where the bathrooms were first on the ground floor, then upstairs.

Drew, Corey, John, Lindsay and Bruce led the Northeast Clan

kids down to the basement. Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick led the others outside to retrieve their new suitcases of clothing from the outdoor recreation area where they were left. Rather than bring them inside, they were left outside along the exterior walls of the Hundser house, so when everyone woke in the morning, clean clothes could be retrieved for showers at the dorms.

Drew and Corey were demonstrating the PlayStation games to half of the twenty Northeast kids while John, Lindsay and Bruce demonstrated the Xbox games to the other half when the Pacific Rim kids returned. Soon all the TV's were on, games were being played, popcorn was being popped and kids were helping themselves to the soft drinks in the refrigerator that Daileass had provided. On the other side of the huge basement, some kids were starting to choose pillows and blankets and beginning to make the nest. Many kids took their Teddy Bears to sleep with them. Other Teddy Bears watched their kids play video games, and yet a few others stood guard on either side of the basement steps. Keith turned off the overhead fluorescent lights on the nest side of the basement.

By one in the morning, when the Hundser returned home, most of the hundred plus kids had gone to sleep, while about thirty of the eldest kids remained awake, playing games or watching TV. When the basement door opened, four Teddy Bears extended their claws and moved to block the bottom of the stairs. Once they saw who it was, their claws retracted and they moved aside, allowing the Hundser adults down the stairs. While Jennifer crept quietly around the nest, Jim went over to the other half of basement to softly remind them of the time and to call it an end to a busy day. Prez and Keith assured that they would soon crash, and a few of them did soon after the Hundser went back upstairs. Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo, Reyes, Harry and the Scooby Gang were the last to give it up around

three in the morning.

During the night there were several trips made back upstairs to use the bathrooms, but every kid that needed to go had their Teddy Bear escort. Just after seven in the morning, kids began waking up. They used the bathrooms, played video games or watched TV until the remainder of the nest heard the noises and woke up too. At nine-thirty, Jennifer and Jim Hundser were sitting at the kitchen table having coffee when they heard the mass of kids climbing the basement steps. Most kids politely said hello or good morning while they passed the two adults on their way outside. Even the Teddy Bears and Scooby Gang waved as they passed. Keith, Prez, Drew, Corey, John and Bruce were the last ones upstairs.

After greeting his foster parents, Prez said, "We're heading over to the dorms for showers then to the CIC dining room for breakfast. I'll send over one of the housekeepers to organize the basement."

Keith nodded, "Depending on the kids, we may be doing this several nights, until everyone starts to feel more comfortable."

Jennifer turned to Jim and gasped, "They look like our kids, don't they?" Keith and Prez widely smiled as Drew, Corey, John and Bruce giggled.

Jim silently nodded for a few moments, then smirked, "If they put aside an hour or two, maybe we could have the chance to talk as a family, just to make certain they are who they seem?"

Prez chuckled, "I get the hint. Tonight, as soon as we're done with the CIC orientation, we'll have dinner together."

"Don't forget three extra places for your grandkids, Dee, Geoff and Richie," Keith playfully reminded.

Both Jennifer and Jim nodded and impatiently grunted affirmatively.

Drew giggled, "We'd better go now," then kissed his mom on the cheek before hurrying out of the room. One by one, each of them kissed Jennifer's cheek, then met outside and laughed their asses off.

Tapping his sub-vocal as he walked along the path towards the dorms, Prez said, "Good morning, Daileass."

"Good morning, even though it's already afternoon here, Prez," Daileass replied.

"Oh, yeah," Prez grinned. "Let Keith and my other Core Rimmers listen in to our conversation, please?"

"Okay," Daileass confirmed, "everyone can hear us now, Prez."

"Since you seem to know it all, can you tell me if anyone's still in the new condos?"

"Yes, I can," Daileass answered. "The first building alongside the CIC has two chefs asleep that were working late preparing food for today. Obviously, they're taking the night shift. Three other chefs are awake, but still in their new homes organizing their things. The other six are awake and working in the kitchen. All four housekeepers are awake and either in the kitchen or dining room. The six landscapers arrived about an hour ago and are also in the first building organizing their things."

"Excellent!" Prez chirped.

"The second building over from the CIC is vacant now," Daileass continued. "Your visitors from Maine stayed there last night,

but are now in the dining room."

Prez scowled, "Peter said there would be two doctors?"

"They haven't arrived yet, Prez," Daileass responded.

"Oh, okay."

Daileass said, "The third building is vacant and has not been occupied."

"Good deal," Prez said. "I'd like for you to take care of something for me?"

"Sure. What do you need?"

"We'll need a few more people around here," Prez replied. "Let's start with kitchen staff, dishwashers and pot scrubbers. The housekeepers are doing it now, but that's really not their job. Let's get more housekeepers too."

Keith said, "Doctors need nurses and receptionists."

Derrick added, "We should probably get another few chefs, so they're not working seven days a week."

"Is that all, guys?" Daileass queried.

"That's a decent start," Prez nodded.

Daileass said, "Okay, I'll get help wanted ads placed in the Star Advertiser. All employees have to pass Intel division's mind scans, so I'll let Nathan know. As people reply to the ads, I'll let UNIT Security know, so they can get past the checkpoints and on base for their interviews. Will there be anything else?"

"The only things I can think of are signs for the condos," Prez answered. "The first two need to be for staff only. Is that enough space?"

"That's a total of forty apartments, each about one thousand four hundred square feet. I think that would be enough for the main base."

"We'll deal with the others as needed," Prez agreed.

Opening the dorm door, Keith suggested, "I'm thinking lots of folks will be stopping by for visits. Let's make the third building for visiting Clan and other dignitaries that wouldn't be comfortable anywhere else."

"The only thing I'm wondering is if Daileass should even be doing this," Prez admitted. "After all, making signs is something maybe the kids could do?"

As he stepped inside the dorm, Mike said, "While that's a good idea, the kids kinda need to get their own act together before we start giving them odd jobs."

"I can take care of that, guys," Daileass said. "It's really no problem at all."

Walking down the hallway, Prez said, "Then that's all we've got for you, dude. We're going to take a shower now, so we'll chat again later."

"Kewl!" Daileass chirped, "Activating security cameras in the dorm showers now. See ya soon, you sexy hunks!" All the core Rimmers cracked up and made various silly remarks about Daileass' spying on everyone.

While the boys showered, they once again began renaming

people, concentrating especially on their growing staff. Generally, they would all be called Staff Rimmers. Housekeepers would become House Rimmers (but Vacuum Rimmers was suggested), while the landscapers would be called Lawn Rimmers and Tree Rimmers, depending on their specialties. Doctors could be called various unique names such as Cold Rimmers or Sick Rimmers or Temp Rimmers. The yet-to-be-hired kitchen staff would be Dish Rimmers and Pot Rimmers. The chefs were the most difficult to rename, and they couldn't really choose between Cookin' Rimmers or Hot Rimmers or Smokin' Rimmers.

As they finished their showers and toweled off, Mike happened to look up at the small security camera. Its red light was on, but then it blinked off and on and off and on! Again they all began laughing at Daileass. Mike flipped him a bird and Keith bent over and mooned him. The camera lens extended for a close up.

Over the speakers mounted in the ceiling, Daileass teased, "Now there's a hard drive I'd love to crash!" Everyone howled laughing.

Drew tried to hide, but the camera turned and followed him wherever he went. "I still see you!" Daileass repeatedly teased.

Kaleo, Nathan and Tory were laughing as much as everyone else. Nathan barely managed to breathe out, "Don't try to hide, it only encourages him!"

Before they and the other boys left the showers, Prez suggested that they check out a few of the dorm rooms. A few boys weren't very interested, but most were, especially the older ones and of course, all the Core Rimmers. They checked out three rooms. The smallest was about twenty feet by twenty-six feet, while the largest was twenty-four by twenty-six feet. Every room had two pre-made full size beds and oak furnishings. One room had sand colored carpet, another had

brown and the third had green. All the walls were painted two-tones; the bottom color varied, contrasting with the carpet color, but the top two thirds of the walls were always shades of sky blue. All the dorm rooms were much larger than the rooms they had in their old homes, and everyone thought they were fantastic.

They went over to the CIC dining room next. While it may have appeared very much like a school cafeteria, the food was nothing less than spectacular. Eggs, pancakes, waffles and various breakfast sandwiches were made to order. There were also assortments of breads, cereals and fruits; not to mention milk, juices and assorted flavored coffees and teas. Every served plate of food had fancy little garnishes too. Being friendly and outgoing, Prez introduced himself, his kids and his team to the chefs as he moved through the chow line.

After a meal fit for a king, Prez excused himself from the table to chat with Madeline. Richie wanted to come along, so Prez picked his son up and carried him. Soon Prez found Madeline in the kitchen by the dish-washing machine. After saying good morning, Prez asked her if she could send someone to the Hundserts' home to clean up and organize the basement, where over a hundred kids had played and slept. Madeline said she would make a point of going over herself to meet his parents, and she would also check the other three houses, interested in meeting the other families.

Prez also told her that there would be help wanted ads placed, and she would likely be interviewing more housekeepers by the end of the week. While he was on the subject, Prez called over chefs Charles and Miguel to tell them that there would need to be more chefs hired, as well as kitchen cleaning staff. If they needed or wanted anything, either for the kitchen or for themselves, they would only have to ask. If they couldn't find him to ask directly, any of his core team would suffice. They assured Prez that they would handle the

interviews, but reminded him that Kenny or Frankie would assist in getting anything required for the kitchen.

Prez returned to the table with Richie and sat down grinning. "Everything's set with House Rimmers and Hot Rimmers."

"We're pretty much a functioning Clan now, baby," Keith said. "I just had a chat with Daileass about the other five Rimmer bases. I was wonderin' if they were secured and they are. Starfleet has people at each of them. Once we move kids and begin occupying them, the UNIT will relieve Starfleet."

Longingly, Prez smiled and sighed, "What would I do without you?"

Keith giggled, "I know, baby. Later tonight, we'll make some alone time."

Prez turned to Richie and explained, "Me and daddy have another orientation today."

Richie nodded, "We gets ta play wit Dillon, Geoff and Jonah again?"

"That's right!" Prez cheered. He then asked, "Did you guys have fun playing last night?"

Richie nodded enthusiastically. Dee smiled, "Can we play video games at Gramma's again?"

"I think that would be good," Keith answered.

Dee looked at Richie and asked, "Ya wanna go now?"

"You guys don't have to go yet," Prez reminded.

"I know," Richie said. "We just wanna."

Sliding down off of Keith's lap, Dee hurried over to the table where Mike and Derrick were sitting with their sons. In moments, Dillon, Geoff, Jonah and Reyes were kissing their fathers and six boys came back to Keith and Prez. Dee and Richie kissed their fathers, then started to walk off.

"You guys know where you're going?" Prez worried.

Turning around, Dee nodded, "We know and our Teddies know too."

"Okay," Keith grinned, "You guys be good for Grandma and Grandpa. They're old and can't keep up with little guys."

Dee nodded and grinned, "We know, dad. We'll just be playin' video games in the cellar. Reyes is gettin' really good and we gotta try and keep up." He then turned and hurried after the other five boys.

Keith and Prez sniggered. "Did Dee just look like he was going to purposefully exercise my folks?" Keith giggled.

Prez nodded and laughed, "It sure seemed that way to me!"

Corey, Drew, Mike and Derrick came over to Prez and Keith's table. "All our kids are off bein' kids," Mike smiled.

"Somehow I feel kinda lost without them too," Derrick sighed.

Prez wondered, "Where are Spike and the Scooby Gang?"

Mike replied, "They went off exploring."

Derrick snickered, "Something about finding a place for a new

vault, whatever that means!"

Keith grinned, "If I were you, I'd use some of our new facilities to learn more about ferrets. Since they're hybrids, they've got human intelligence and ferret sneaky skills rolled into one. That's a potentially frightening mix."

"I'm not worried," Mike assured. He then sighed and explained, "What does worry me is how they seem to be just as happy off on their own. Like last night, they were shocked they could sleep with us. And this morning, they were just as surprised to be allowed to eat with us."

At a table nearby where John, Brandon and Nathan were sitting with Bruce, Benjamin Hatcher and Thanh Espiridion, Nathan overheard Mike talking about the ferrets. "The ferrets were one of the experiments," Nathan explained. "They used to be housed in cages. They could break out of 'em, but were punished severely if they were found roaming around. Really, they think and act like ferrets, but also have special skills, not the least of which is infiltration."

Suddenly, George Wentworth loudly called, "Randy and Drew, let's get ready for home boys."

Drew Hundser started to stand and looked around uncertainly until he saw two identical twins with red hair hurrying across the dining room towards the older man. Turning to Corey as he sat again, Drew sighed, "Ya know, there are lots of Andrews, but they're usually called Andy. That was maybe the second time in my life someone called Drew and didn't mean me."

"...and they'll find their way into every heating and air conditioning duct on the base," Nathan continued his explanation of the ferrets. "There's one other very important skill the ferrets have,"

Nathan said.

Mike wondered, "What's that?"

"They're assassins," Nathan smirked. "If you guys are ever in a position where you know who a bad guy is but can't get at him, they will solve the problem."

"I don't know if I like that idea," Mike droned. "They're just kids."

Nathan nodded, "They are kids but very special kids, with skills just like Adam, Chang, Juan and Jory."

Shaking his head, Mike worried, "But if something were to happen to any of them, I'd be totally shot to hell."

"They're your kids now," Nathan nodded understandingly. "You can use their skills or choose not to. I'm just saying, they are skilled. And one other thing you need to realize is that you and Derrick are extra protected. For example; let's say you're all on a rescue mission. Mike and Derrick are sentries, as are the ferrets. One or two guys sneak up from out of nowhere and jump you. Those ferrets will claw the shit out of them so fast, they'll be raw hamburger before you can say stop. Now that you're including them as humans, sleeping and eating with you, that's probably intensifying their programmed need to protect you. They will protect both of you with their lives."

Derrick sighed, "We have to chat with them and make sure they understand when it's proper to attack."

"Never on any of our bases," Mike agreed. "We're already more than safe here."

"It's almost eleven," Prez realized. "Let's get into the CIC and be

there ready when Lieutenant Vorik beams in." All seven boys got up then retrieved Kaleo on their way to the CIC.

They had just entered the room and were looking around while Prez experimented with a tricorder when Lieutenant Vorik beamed in. Finished with greeting them, Vorik explained that they would be joined by four Starfleet personnel when they too beamed into the room. Once everyone was introduced, Vorik stated, "I must take my leave of you now and return to my ship." Everyone said goodbye and included the usual Vulcan farewells. Then Lieutenant Vorik contacted the Endeavour and beamed out.

The orientation began with the communications systems, which were easy to operate. Kaleo contacted the UNIT base in Utah, the Des Moines base, the Northeast Division, the Oceanic Division in Australia and the Orlando base before moving on to Starfleet Headquarters in San Francisco. They then moved over to the surveillance systems, which were slightly more complicated, especially dealing with country codes and Japanese systems. By the time everyone had a chance to operate the systems and had a few opportunities to try it out, two hours had passed. But they weren't quite finished yet. There were still the equipment room and server room to check out. Drew and Corey were very interested in the inner workings of the hardware and software. After another hour in the server room, Drew and Corey remained with two of the four Starfleet engineers, crawling deep into code and wiring cabinets, while all the others left the CIC and returned to the dining room.

"My brains are in turmoil now!" Keith playfully complained. "If, then, else, do, while, do, until, the whole damn world is spinning in one great loop!"

"Around the Day Shiny!" John giggled.

Bouncing against Keith, Prez giggled, "It wasn't so bad until they started talking about voltages in the wiring cabinets! Someone please tell me how zero volts can be binary one? And what on Earth is trinary? That makes no frigging sense at all to me!"

As they walked through the chow line for snacks and drinks, Derrick scowled, "They said negative logic. By itself, negating logic is illogical. Vulcans would have a melt down."

"Maybe that's why Lieutenant Vorik had to leave," Mike grinned, "had he stayed, he only would've argued with the Starfleet guys."

Ensign Dave Patterson, one of the younger members of the engineering team assigned at age seventeen, smiled and reminded, "The Endeavour had to leave orbit on another assignment. It really didn't have to do with anything other than reallocation of resources."

Prez grinned, "We know, Dave; we're just taking tangents."

Keith nodded, "It's something we've always done, like improvising."

"Too much structure sometimes, dude," Mike agreed.

While filling a cup of Coke, Junior Lieutenant Kelly McGuire said, "You guys do have options in Starfleet, you know? There are classical orchestras, jazz and pop bands you could join. It won't make you Captain of a Starship, but it is a niche you can fill."

As they went to find seats, Derrick explained, "We've already got our own group. Right now we're happy playing covers of other band's songs, but we have been writing our own music."

"It's like the best of all genres," Prez embellished. "It's got the

drive and emotion of blues and rock, the harmonic complexities of classical and the improvisational freedom of jazz."

Arriving at an empty large table, Mike sat down and added, "It's kinda like the bands Yes or Emerson, Lake and Palmer, but not quite. There's just something that makes our music different from theirs."

"It starts with the melody," Keith nodded in agreement. "When we're writing, the melody drives the harmony, not like most rock and blues where the harmony drives the melody."

"When it comes to military strategies, Derrick and I seem to do well in lots of video and board games," Prez admitted. "Taking over the world is simple in Civilization Four or even more so on a board game like Risk."

Keith smiled, "One time, the four of us played Risk. It was me and Mike versus Prez and Derrick." He paused and giggled, "It had to be the shortest game of Risk in history!"

Remembering that rainy day, Mike smiled, "They wiped our armies out in under an hour! Then we swapped partners, Keith and Prez versus me and Derrick. That had to be one of the longest games in history! It lasted the rest of the first day and went for three more school day afternoons and nights before we called it a stalemate."

While the boys and the two Starfleet officers were chuckling, Richie and Dee came running into the CIC dining room yelling "DADDY!"

Concerned and a little frightened, both Keith and Prez rapidly stood.

John smiled, "It's all right, bros." Scowling, Prez and Keith

turned to John.

Nathan nodded, "Good one, John."

"This was easy though," John shrugged. "That was a happy yell, not a scared scream."

Richie took Prez by the hand and said, "Ya gotta come home, daddy!"

"Why? What's going on?" Prez wondered.

Dee gleefully answered, "Gramma and grampa wanna adopt Kokaku and Carmella! Ain't that great?"

"Told ya," John smiled.

"Oh jeez!" Keith snickered, "They couldn't take three of us adopting and them becoming grandparents!"

"And mom's finally got a little girl in the house!" John laughed.

Chuckling, Prez turned to Dave and Kelly then asked, "Would you two mind looking over my shoulder while I operate a tricorder?"

"For an adoption? I'd love to!" Kelly enthusiastically agreed.

Focusing on Prez, Keith said, "You get the tricorder and I'll round up Drew and Corey. They'll probably want to be there."

Hearing Corey's name, Dee remembered, "Corey's mommy and daddy wanna adopt Cesar and Felipe too!"

Prez giggled, "Well then, Corey absolutely has to come!"

Richie looked up at Prez and wondered, "Are we all gonna get

'dopted, daddy?"

Picking up his youngest son, Prez smiled, "I don't really know, but guess what?"

"What?" Richie chirped as he snuggled close to Prez.

Starting back to the CIC, Prez honestly answered, "No matter who gets adopted and who doesn't, we're all brothers and sisters, now and forever."

Keith lifted Dee and planted him on his hip, then asked, "How's your belly feel?" He then followed Prez.

"Really full!" Dee giggled, "We had popcorn and sodas while we played video games."

"Did you figure out the microwave or did grams help you?" Keith wondered.

"Me and Reyes did it," Dee answered. "It's got a special popcorn only button."

"Good job!" Keith cheered. After planting a quick kiss on Dee's cheek, Keith softly asked, "Did you use the bathroom yet today?"

Dee blushed and nodded, "I'm fine daddy, inside and out."

"Good," Keith said as he caught the CIC door with his other hand. Stepping in the room, Keith whispered, "I missed you."

"Did you miss Richie too?" Dee asked seriously.

Keith nodded, "I missed both of you very much."

Dee searched Keith's eyes and wondered, "Didn't you have fun

learnin' new stuff?"

"It was a little fun, but not as much fun as being with you and Richie," Keith truthfully answered. Keith then opened the server room door. Corey was on his hands and knees searching beneath the raised floor with Lieutenant Frakes, while Drew was on a ladder with Ensign Copella tracing cables in the ceiling. Keith playfully sang, "I've got a surprise for you two!"

Corey looked up and Drew looked down grinning at his big brother. Drew sang back, "Why am I suddenly very frightened?"

Corey giggled, "Maybe because the last time was while emptying our Christmas stockings?"

Keith laughed, "It's even better than that!"

Climbing down the ladder, Drew huffed, "Oh no!"

Keith glanced at the two Starfleet officers in the room and asked, "Are we about done for today?"

"We've covered everything we needed to and then some," Lieutenant Frakes answered. "If you ever need anything more, just contact us at Starfleet Headquarters."

Reaching the floor and stepping down off the ladder, Drew nodded, "Thanks, once we get into testing mode, we may need to do that."

Keith asked, "Are you guys staying or heading back to San Francisco?"

"I'll be heading back home," Lieutenant Frakes replied.

"Me too," Ensign Copella responded.

Corey said, "We'll give you a holler if something in the systems gets whacky."

Taking Corey's hand, Drew nodded, "Thanks for the extra time, dudes."

Opening the door and holding it for everyone as they passed, Keith added, "If you have the time, help yourself to a late lunch. Our chefs are some of the best and you won't be disappointed." Both men nodded and said they would have a little something to eat. Keith then said, "We have some family stuff to take care of, but it was great meeting you."

The two men replied in kind and followed Keith out of the CIC. When they returned to the table where Prez was standing and thoughtfully rubbing his chin, Keith asked, "Is there something wrong, Prez?"

"Not really," Prez grinned. "It's just a versatile little machine. Not only can I do adoptions, but it has a simple medical diagnostic facility, an element detector that can even identify radioactivity and a whole bunch of other stuff I barely understand."

Richie looked up and said, "Daddy even scanned me! It was kewl."

"His height, weight and body temperature are recorded right here," Prez smiled.

"Scan me too, daddy!" Dee insisted. "That way we know when I'm growin' and gainin' weight!" Keith put the boy down and Dee stood perfectly still, causing everyone around the table to grin or

chuckle.

Prez pressed a few buttons to put the tricorder in the correct mode then held it out and near his son. It made a whistling sound, then stopped and Prez said, "Forty-nine and a half inches, one hundred and twenty-five centimeters, forty-eight pounds or twenty-two kilograms and... ninety-eight degrees Fahrenheit or thirty-six point six degrees Celsius."

Keith asked, "Does it say where he should be at, Prez?"

Prez hummed for a few seconds before Lieutenant McGuire said, "Simply input the patient's age and sex."

"Oh! Okay," Prez nodded, "Fifty-five inches and seventy pounds."

Keith smiled, "You keep eating like you have today and you'll be all set."

Prez hung the tricorder over his shoulder then moved towards Dee, leaned down and picked the boy up joking, "Until then, we get to pick you up and gobble you up!" While Prez made goofy lip smacking eating noises, Dee loudly laughed and tried to push his dad's face away from his belly.

"You're both silly!" Richie giggled.

Keith swept Richie up and started playing the same game, with Richie gleefully screaming as they began the walk out of the dining room and back to the house.

Once they were outside and the two little boys had quieted down, Drew asked, "So what's the big surprise?"

"It's a secret!" Keith laughed.

"Daddy!" Richie giggled. "You're so bad!"

Drew groaned and teased, "So the kids know?"

Corey checked with Drew while saying, "We know just how to get them to spill the beans!" Then Corey went to Richie and began tickling him while Drew tickled Dee! Wildly laughing at the top of their lungs, both boys tried to push their uncles' hands away.

"UNCA DREWWWWWWWW!" Dee heartily laughed, "I'M GONNA PEEEEEE-HEE-HEEEEE!"

Drew stopped tickling his nephew and smiled, "Are you going to share the secret?"

Still giggling and red-faced, Dee checked with Prez. Prez shook his head, then started running away from Drew. Keith followed with Richie while Drew, Corey, John, Nathan, Kaleo and the two Starfleet officers chased after them. Prez hollered his name at the door and stuck his hand on the plate, then hurried inside. In the living room sat his parents with one little boy and one little girl between them. "I hear we're havin' babies again?" Prez laughed.

"We're what?" Drew incredulously hollered.

"Damn these short pregnancies!" Keith chuckled.

"Oh no," Corey softly groaned as the truth suddenly dawned on him.

As the two smiling Starfleet officers walked in the room, Prez pointed and said, "Jim and Jennifer Hundser, please meet Lieutenant McGuire and Ensign Patterson."

The Lieutenant stepped forward, extended his hand and said, "Kelly, and it's my pleasure."

After they had greeted each other, the Ensign moved to take his place and said, "My name's Dave."

Carmella looked up at Jim and asked, "Prez and Keith's gonna be our uncas?"

Smiling, Jim shook his head and answered, "No sweetness, even better, they're going to be your big brothers." The girl widely smiled and shuffled into her new father's lap.

Dee took a few steps closer to the sofa and said, "That means me and Richie are gonna be your nephews."

"We can all play together from now on," Richie smiled.

"Oh! That would be fun," Carmella nodded.

Prez checked with Lieutenant McGuire to make sure he had the tricorder in the correct mode then asked, "Carmella, do you want our daddy and mommy, James and Jennifer Hundser, to be your daddy and mommy too?"

The girl nodded, "Uh huh."

Turning to the boy, Prez asked, "Kokaku, do you want our daddy and mommy, James and Jennifer Hundser to be your daddy and mommy too?"

"Yes," the boy smiled.

Prez then grinned at his foster parents and asked, "Do you two want to keep Carmella and Kokaku as your new son and daughter?"

"Yes, we do," Jim Hundser replied.

"We do," Jennifer Hundser answered.

Prez smiled, "Okay then, these adoptions were witnessed by Keith Hundser, Drew Hundser, John Hundser, Corey Seaver, Nathan Hayes, Kaleo Palakiko, Lieutenant Kelly McGuire and Ensign David Patterson. Now I just hit send... and the official paperwork will be here tomorrow... unless Janet finds out and delivers them personally!"

"She already knows," Jennifer smirked. "I called her to do the honors, since I wasn't aware my son, *Director* O'Brian could do it!"

"Oops!" Prez giggled. "We haven't had much of a chance the last day or so, have we?"

"But we will make time tonight," Keith quickly promised.

"After we take care of the Seavers' adoptions, we'll be right back home again," Prez said.

Corey turned to Drew and grinned knowingly.

But the words had barely escaped Prez's lips before his comm-badge chirped. "Mike to Prez, come in, Prez."

Prez tapped his comm-badge and said, "Wassup, Mike?"

"You still in the adoption mode, dude?" Mike asked.

Prez chuckled, "Yep, how many this time?"

"Two," Mike giggled, "My mom's basically tossing me out of the house I haven't even slept in yet!"

"I AM NOT!" Laura Gibbons loudly laughed.

"We really should though," Rob Gibbons chuckled.

"And I haven't even been home yet either!" Derrick whined.

Prez laughed and said, "While I'm at the Seavers', you'd better go home, Derrick, and check. We'll meet up at the Gibbons' in about fifteen minutes, okay?"

"Kewl, bud," Mike giggled while Derrick whimpered in the background.

"See ya in a few," Prez chuckled.

Keith snickered, "Well, at the rate things are going, we'll be back in about an hour!"

Prez nodded, "Still in time for dinner!"

Drew teased, "Unless rescued kids begin adopting each other!"

Jennifer gasped, "They couldn't... could they?"

Shaking his head, Prez chuckled, "No, we could because we're Starfleet Ensigns."

Grabbing Kaleo by the shoulder, Keith grinned, "Now we just gotta get this guy here hitched with someone special and he can adopt too."

Shrugging, Kaleo joked, "I'm thinking a few days of freedom, then a boyfriend, then we'll see what happens."

John giggled, "I'm an Ensign too, mom. I just gotta find a cute girl, or boy... maybe one of each!"

"You do and you'll be grounded until your thirteenth birthday,

Mister!" Jennifer warned. Laughing hysterically at his mom's reaction, John hurried out of the house with Nathan close behind.

"We'll be back in a while, mom," Prez smiled, as he took Dee's hand and turned to leave.

"What's for dinner?" Keith wondered.

"Spaghetti and meatballs," Jennifer replied.

Keith hummed hungrily then picked up Richie and followed Prez.

Jim Hundser stood with Carmella and offered his hand to the two Starfleet officers saying, "It was good meeting you both."

While the men shook hands, Jennifer smiled, "I do hope we'll be seeing you again soon."

"Yes ma'am," Kelly nodded, "I hope so too."

"Please sit and enjoy your new family," Dave said, "We can show ourselves out."

While everyone else were still leaving the Hundser home, John and Nathan suddenly stopped running and came to halt near the Gibbons' home. John scowled, "Something's very wrong."

Nathan nodded and softly asked, "You know what that black cloud means?"

Shaking his head, John said, "I don't see it, but I feel it."

"The black cloud means death," Nathan revealed.

"Oh no," John groaned. "It's Bruce's parents, isn't it?"

Nathan nodded then pointed to the Seavers' home. "There's something else in that house too," Nathan prompted, "Do you feel it?"

John shook his head again and sighed, "Sorry, I've got Bruce filling my mind right now."

Prez walked closer and asked, "What's goin' on, you guys?"

"I gotta go back home, Prez," John explained, and wiped tears from his eyes. Nathan only nodded and wrapped an arm around John. "I'll prob'ly be home the rest of the night," John sighed.

"It's okay," Prez softly assured. "We can take care of these adoptions with two less witnesses. Go do what you obviously need to do." With that, John and Nathan turned around, then ran back home again. Prez and the rest of the group passed the Gibbons' home and went to the Seavers' home.

John walked back in his house and saw his parents still in the living room watching TV with Carmella and Kokaku. "I need to ask a really big favor," John sighed.

Seeing that John was no longer playful, but very serious, Jim and Jennifer turned to each other briefly. "Go ahead and ask," Jim Hundser said.

Since Bruce was in the basement playing video games with the other kids, John moved closer to his parents and softly explained, "Bruce's parents were found. They're dead."

"How do you know that?" Jennifer excitedly asked.

John shrugged but Nathan explained, "John's empathic and I'm telepathic. When we got near Mike's parents house, we both knew it." The phone began ringing in the kitchen. Jim Hundser stood to answer

it but waited.

John nodded and said, "You have to adopt Bruce too. Without me, without us I mean, he's gonna be totally lost and freaked out." The answering machine turned on while Jim hurried to the kitchen.

Jennifer asked, "You're both sure about this?"

Both boys rapidly nodded and Nathan explained, "That's Mike's dad on the phone now."

"Say you'll adopt Bruce too mom, please?" John whined and then rambled excitedly. "He's only had us the last two days. He needs us and I want him for a little brother. I'll share my room with him and Kokaku. It's really big anyway. We can all fit in there easy and it'll be fun." Needing some support, John smiled at Kokaku and asked, "You'd like another big brother too, wouldn't you, Kokaku?" The small Japanese boy grinned and nodded. "See, he likes the idea."

Jim Hundser returned to the living room frowning. Jennifer looked up at her husband and softly asked, "Jim? It's true, isn't it?" Jim Hundser grunted affirmatively, then sighed long and hard.

Jim squatted down in front of the sofa and Carmella asking, "Would you like another big brother to watch out for you and keep you safe?"

Counting her fingers, Carmella asked, "I'd have five big brothers and one little brother then?"

"Yes, you would," Jim softly smiled.

"We would all watch out for each other and keep one another safe because that's what families always do," Jennifer explained to

Carmella and Kokaku. Both kids excitedly nodded and smiled.

"Okay," Jim Hundser said as he stood. So the two young children would understand, he then explained, "Mike's daddy is on his way here. When he gets here, us bigger boys will go upstairs with Bruce and break the news. Bruce is going to be very sad, but we're all going to help him feel better. It's just going to take time, maybe even a few days."

Carmella said, "We can all help him, daddy."

"Okay, poppa," Kokaku agreed.

There was a knock on the front door. While Jim went to let Rob Gibbons in, Jennifer asked, "Would you two like to help me make dinner?"

"Could we?" Carmella excitedly asked.

"The three of us can make a nice big salad," Jennifer happily said. She stood and took both her new children's hands, then led them out of the room.

John offered, "We'll go downstairs and bring Bruce upstairs." When his mom and Nathan nodded in agreement, John led Nathan to the basement door and downstairs. In the basement, Jonah and Bruce were sitting on pillows on the floor, happily playing video games. At the next television, Dillon and Geoff were playing video games too. Reyes sat behind the four boys watching and playfully commenting on both games.

"Hey guys," John cheerfully said.

"Hey," Bruce smiled, "Reyes has been teaching us to play Sonic

better."

"You guys wanna play too?" Jonah asked.

Nathan sent to John; *"If it's okay with you, I'll stay here and let these guys know what's goin' on. I can help you from down here easily, if you need me to."*

John nodded, then said, "Bruce, could you come upstairs with me for a little while? There's something we need to talk about with my dad. Your Teddy and mine can come too."

"*Good idea!*" Nathan's voice loudly filled John's brain.

"Okay, pal," Bruce replied. "Someone take over for me here." Nathan quickly moved into position, sitting between Bruce and Jonah. Then Bruce passed off the controller and rolled away, then stood up. "How was your orientation?" Bruce asked John.

"Pretty cool," John grinned, "lots o' computers that can do lots o' different stuff. They make the Internet look lame in comparison." They started up the stairs and John rambled on about the communications systems and how they had contacted all the other Clan Short Divisions and bases. Jim Hundser and Rob Gibbons followed the two boys and their Teddy Bears up to the second level and into one of the bedrooms.

Jim Hundser closed the door and asked the two boys to sit. Bruce sat on the bed and John sat immediately beside him, bracing himself for what was soon to come. Rob Gibbons pulled out a desk chair, sat down and softly said, "Bruce, Honolulu Police called me a little while ago."

"You found my parents?" Bruce excitedly squealed.

Rob nodded and asked, "Did they tell you they were going for a boat ride?"

Bruce shook his head saying, "They told me they were going with some other grown-ups, but would be back to pick me up supper time Friday."

Rob sighed and explained, "Well, they went out on a boat. We're still investigating what exactly happened, but we know there was an accident." Rob paused and looked into the innocent eyes of the boy, saying, "No one on that boat survived, Bruce." The boy didn't seem to understand, so Rob softly said, "I'm sorry to have to tell you, but both your parents have died."

Bruce scowled and inhaled deeply. He remained quiet and wiped his eyes, then began trembling. John wrapped a caring arm around his friend. Both of Bruce's hands reached up for his eyes and he softly cried, "No, no, no," then began quaking violently as he tried to grasp the reality of the situation. Jim Hundser moved over to the bed and sat on the other side of Bruce, wrapping his arm around both Bruce and John.

"I promised you we'd make it better and we will, Bruce," John softly wept.

"How? Why? We was on vacation!" Bruce bitterly sobbed.

Jim Hundser softly offered, "We don't know how or why, but know that you are not alone, Bruce."

While Bruce wailed bitterly, John looked at his dad with red eyes and through sniffles explained, "Bruce only has grandparents, dad. They're real old and in nursing homes."

"We'll take care of everything," Jim Hundser promised.

John and Bruce's Teddy bears approached the bed and did the only thing they were programmed to do when their friends were sad; they crawled up into their laps and cuddled with them.

Jim Hundser and Rob Gibbons quietly stood, then exited the room, closing the door behind them. As they walked down the hall, Rob said, "As we learn more about what happened, I'll let you know."

Jim nodded, "I'll let Bruce know when he's more able to understand. For the next week or two, the reasons how and why won't matter to him."

Rob sighed, "This is one job of a police officer I will not miss." The two men walked down the stairs. Pausing at the front door, Rob smiled slightly and said, "I need to go home and extend my family."

Jim reached for Rob's hand and shook it firmly, saying, "Finally, we can do without worrying about how we can afford it."

"That puts us in a rather odd position," Rob realized. "Going forward, in an indirect fashion, we work for Preston."

Jim grinned and asked, "Is there any other fourteen-year-old more worthy?"

"Not that I've ever met," Rob agreed. He then said goodbye and left for home.

In the upstairs bedroom, there was a lull in the storm. Bruce said, "You know that I knew something was really wrong these last two days." John nodded and Bruce continued, "It wasn't like them to leave me like they did. They wanted to do something other than watch

me at the beach. It wasn't that big of a deal to me so I said, go ahead."

"You waited just like you were supposed to," John softly said. "You loved them and they loved you too. Your situation is like so many other kids here now. Some were bad parents, but lots were good. They came here on vacation as families, but wound up alone. Even Prez's parents died here, not on vacation, but still, it was another accident. And just like Prez, we ain't leaving you alone, Bruce."

Bruce sighed, "You really mean it too, don't you?"

John grinned, "Course! You've been my friend and shadow for two days. Tomorrow, if you want, you can be my kid brother. Prez can make that happen. He did it last night for Drew and Corey. He did it earlier this afternoon for my mom and dad. Now he's going from house to house making the other grown-ups parents of some of the rescued kids."

Bruce began crying again and through his sobs, huffed, "It just hurts so much! I'll never see them again!"

John shared in Bruce's pain and laid on the bed, pulling Bruce down too. Then John called his Teddy Bear Zed and Bruce's Teddy Bear Dex to come lay down on the bed too. Soon the two boys had cried themselves to sleep between Dex and Zed.

Prez, Keith, Dee, Richie and Drew came home after performing adoptions at the Seavers', the Gibbons' and Seiberts'. Mike went to the Hundser's house only to retrieve Reyes, Dillon and Jonah then went back home. Corey remained at home for dinner with his new twin brothers Cesar and Felipe. Derrick also stayed home for dinner with his new brothers Kawazoe and Sung, and his new sisters Latoya and Brandi.

While initially all the Hundser boys were happy upon returning

home and completing a grand total of ten adoptions across the four families, they soon learned about Bruce's parents. They began softly talking about Bruce's situation. With the six-hour time zone difference, it was after eleven at night in Ohio. Phone calls would need to be placed to verify that there was no other family willing or able to take Bruce. Assuming what Bruce had previously said was correct, he would become another foster son and brother in the house. When dinner was almost ready, Prez went upstairs and peeked into the bedroom to find both boys sound asleep.

Dinner time conversation revolved around assigning three bedrooms to ten kids. Then Keith and Prez offered to move themselves and their two boys into one of the townhomes, once most of the kids had become comfortable and were willing to move into the dorms. Until then, the basement nesting would continue, which Dee, Carmella, Geoff, Richie and Kokaku were thrilled to hear.

At the end of dinner, Prez, Keith, Drew and Corey began sharing all the miscellaneous Clan Short stuff their parents were interested in. While clearing the table, they chatted about the CIC communications and surveillance systems, the details of the UNIT and how the Pacific Rim Division had their own troops to deal with more serious situations should they arise. Finally, Prez decided that a nice dessert for the family would be appropriate. In front of all the kids and his parents, Prez called Daileass and asked for ten strawberry shortcakes with extra whipped cream and chocolate sprinkles. While that was a fair demonstration, Jennifer Hundser was still concerned about the boys getting into and out of dangerous situations.

Standing up from his chair at the table, Drew tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Daileass, my folks are worried we might not be able to move around fast enough."

"Oh, really!" Daileass giggled. "Where would you like to go?"

"Umm... how about over to the CIC?" The words had only left his mouth when Drew disappeared from the dining room.

Keith grinned at his parent's stunned expressions and explained. "We don't even have to speak aloud," Keith then grabbed another mouthful of strawberry shortcake, stood up and silently mouthed, "Daileass, get me to the CIC too." Keith's mouth was full and he couldn't have clearly spoken anyway, but he also disappeared from the room.

Then Prez's comm-badge chirped and everyone heard "Drew to Prez."

"Where are you, bro?" Prez smiled.

"In the dining room at the CIC now," Drew giggled. The rattling sounds of silverware, plates and glassware were clearly heard from the comm-badge in the Hundsers' dining room.

Prez sniggered, "Your strawberry shortcake is enticing me!"

Drew loudly laughed, "Daileass, get me back home and in the dining room before I miss out!"

A second later, Drew appeared standing before his chair again. Then Keith reappeared too, saying, "Thanks, Daileass. I think that's enough demonstrations for the 'rents."

Daileass giggled, "Any time, Keith. Give Prez a kiss from me and an extra special one from you too."

Keith grinned, "Any special reason?"

"I see and hear everything, remember? All the kids there are

saying nothing but nice things about the base and all you guys. Some of the kids in the dining room wish you were all there and they appreciated seeing Drew, even if only for a minute. Since you're doing such a good job and Prez is the leader, he deserves a kiss from both of us," Daileass explained.

"Can't argue with ya there," Keith smiled. Leaning over, Keith landed a kiss on his lover's cheek and explained, "That's from Daileass for doing a great job. All the kids in the dining room are saying nice things about us."

"Oh," Prez smiled.

Keith moved closer, then planted a big wet strawberry and whipped cream flavored kiss. All the little kids began giggling when Prez put his fork down and threw his arms around Keith's back. After about a minute, Keith pulled away grinning and Prez was swooning.

"What was the topic of conversation?" Prez softly wondered.

Drew covered his mouth and cracked up laughing, setting all the kids off. Jim and Jennifer just smiled and shook their heads.

Prez giggled and counted fingers while softly reviewing what he had already discussed. "Oh yeah!" He suddenly remembered, "There is one other thing you need to know, and I already know it won't make you very happy. Adam wants us to be able to protect ourselves at all times. He gave us two choices, and based on what I already know about both of you, I've chosen phasers over handguns."

"I strongly object to both!" Jennifer firmly said.

Keith sighed, "Mom, we can probably learn self defense too, but that's going to take way more time. It could potentially leave us vulnerable anyway. The choice Adam gave us was phasers or

handguns. Given only those two choices, what would you have us do?"

Jennifer quietly grumbled then reluctantly huffed, "Phasers, but they are to be locked at all times and away from where the children can get anywhere near them!"

Prez considered, "We could keep all of them in the CIC and locked in there. That would drastically limit access to them."

Keith softly offered, "We're all going to have one... even John."

"OH NO!" Jennifer loudly shrieked. She turned to her husband and seeing him calm only upset her more. "Jim, don't tell me you approve?"

"Joel made John part of the core team," Jim Hundser reminded. "Keith and Preston initially excluded him until they learned he was empathic. If any of them could tell when someone was lying, it would be John first. You know that as well as I do, Jen. Of our three sons, Keith is the musician and has always been; Drew is the engineer, forever tinkering with things and always has been; John has been the one feeling when anything was especially good or especially bad. It's always been this way, and John did it again just an hour or so ago. He knew Bruce's parents had died simply by emotions he felt from *outside* Rob and Laura's house. I understand your concerns; so do Keith and Preston. But we're not always going to be dealing with lost kids on beaches. What if our boys are ever in a position like Joel was Friday night? Joel could've been killed. It was his special group of friends that saved his life. Are any of our boys expendable? No, of course not. If one extra phaser in John's hands prevents one of the other seven from getting hurt, then it is worth it. The simple question that we have to answer is whether to treat John as less capable only

because of his age."

Seeing his foster mom still teetering on the fence, Prez offered, "Consider this likely scenario: there's one kid in a bad foster home with two adults. In that case, I would probably have four of the eight transported on-site. First thing to remember is Adam would have a fit if our personal security didn't come with us. Right off the bat, four becomes twelve, including our security team. Twelve against two, six armed outside the foster home covering our backs and six armed inside the home."

Jennifer emphatically stated, "I am not feeling better about this!"

Drew asked, "Remember how you felt about what happened to Stephen and Aaron?"

Keith added, "CPS was proven pointless; they should be called child prostitution services."

"That's why we're here now, mom," Prez softly confirmed. "Clan Short is the ultimate group protecting kids from those that would abuse them. Kids protecting kids; the fortunate liberating the less fortunate. Isn't that what dad does for his law firm? Isn't it what you do at the hospital; what Mike's dad does as a policeman; what my mom did as an accountant? It's what we've learned from all our parents; different flavors of people helping other people."

Everyone was surprised when John came around the corner and asked, "Would you let Bruce be fostered by someone else? If my carrying a simple phaser can help keep myself or any member of a team safer, what's the harm? Or should we let the bad people have their way with everyone? They can take our money, take our friends, take our kids, take our lives! I SAY NO! WE ARE SAYING NO! NOT ANOTHER STEP! THE WAY THEY THINK IS WRONG!"

THE WAY THEY ACT IS WRONG!"

Everyone in the room was stunned silent. John grinned triumphantly then tapped his sub-vocal. "Daileass, tell them what you've learned about Bruce's remaining family."

Over the room's ceiling mounted emergency speaker, Daileass said, "Bruce's paternal grandfather is seventy-two years old, suffers from emphysema and is at an extended care facility in Cleveland, Ohio. The paternal grandmother is seventy years old, has had one stroke that left her unable to walk; she is wheelchair bound at the same facility. The maternal grandfather died September eleventh, two-thousand-one at One World Trade Center. The maternal grandmother is sixty-four years old and living in a nursing home in Queens, New York. She became clinically delusional after the death of her husband. There are no other blood relatives still living on record."

"Thanks, Daileass," John smirked. He pointed at the ceiling saying, "There's a kid upstairs we've been caring for the last two days. He needs us. Even if we weren't Clan Short, he'd still need us. Yesterday morning, while Keith and Prez were showering, he told me that he didn't want to leave when his parents were found, because he'd miss us. That was *before* Joel made us a division of the Clan. All he needs is one tiny bit of happiness added to this day; just someplace to call home and a family he already trusts to call his own. Where's the problem?"

Jim and Jennifer both got up from the table and went to John. "There's no problem," Jennifer softly said and wrapped her arms around her youngest son.

Jim ruffled his son's hair and smiled, "You do have ways of making your point very well known."

Prez got up and retrieved his tricorder from the living room. He tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Daileass, transmit the records regarding Bruce Downing to my tricorder."

"Transmission complete, Prez," Daileass soon acknowledged.

Prez then spoke into the machine. "Upon learning of the death of Bruce Downing's parents, the Hundser family discussed the future welfare of the boy and have decided to adopt him effective immediately. Bruce is now resting after learning of his parents' passing. Unless the adoption is denied by Bruce Downing at a future time, this record is to be considered true and binding. I will speak for Bruce as Director of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division. Bruce Downing accepts James and Jennifer Hundser as his adopted parents. Do James and Jennifer Hundser accept Bruce Downing as their son?"

"We do," Jim replied.

"Yes," Jennifer stated.

"It's done," Prez smiled. "Eleven in one day and there's still a few hours left."

Looking at the young kids at the table, John grinned, "Why are old people so dense?"

Jim, Jennifer, Prez, Keith and Drew all loudly insisted, "We are not old!" John and all the kids cracked up.

"It looks like I slept through dinner," John smiled and sniffed around. "Italian?"

"Leftovers are in the fridge, bro," Keith smiled.

"And strawberry shortcakes for dessert, courtesy of Daileass,"

Prez added.

At the Seaver home, dinner was rather uneventful. Corey and his parents were getting to know Cesar and Felipe better. Derrick was home having dinner with his parents, two new brothers and two new sisters.

At the Gibbons' house, dinner was delayed because Mike was out searching the grounds and calling for Spike and the Scooby Gang. Amongst the trees southwest of the outdoor recreation area, they found Mike, but were covered with dirt and wood chips. Before Mike would dare bring them in the house, they had to be cleaned up, so naturally, Mike took them to the dorm showers. "Shiny lovers like us have to keep our hair clean," Mike explained as they walked to the dorm. "Sure, you can get dirty everyday, but then you need to shower to have Shiny coats to be proud of."

This made perfect sense to the Scoobies, but they were used to bathing themselves and each other. Also, they were far too short to reach the knobs to turn on the water. Mike stripped and began to show them how to shower, which was quite challenging because this was not the normal way that ferrets bathed. Since they weren't watching and demonstration was pointless, Mike got on his knees in the shower and organized a ferret assembly line. Daileass was of course monitoring this activity and everything Daileass saw was quickly known by others in Utah. Spike scampered under the water spray and out of it again, then shook the water from his coat, splattering Mike with mud in the processes. Various UNIT members gathered in a conference room and were observing the uproariously hysterical proceedings. Mike had to hold each ferret under the water, get sprayed with mud, shampoo them and rinse them off again. By the time all four ferrets were clean, Mike was filthy and had to shower again! And as far as the Scooby Gang was concerned, they were dry

enough after shaking the water from their coats. Mike demonstrated the toweling off process, but the ferrets found it faster and easier to just roll around on the towels on the floor. In Utah, kids were pounding on the conference room table and turning purple from laughing so hard. No sooner did Mike and four ferrets leave the showers, than Daileass had packaged the video into a QuickTime flick titled "A Day In The Life of Dirty Rimmer Ferrets" and transmitted it to every Clan base and division around the world.

The Seiberts' had finished dinner by the time Mike returned home with his ferret kids. The Gibbons' had only begun eating when Derrick came to the door with Reyes, Dillon and Jonah. While Mike and the ferrets quickly ate, Mike held back any remarks about the challenges he had faced finding the ferrets and then bathing them. Not knowing any better, Derrick had a normal, pleasant conversation with everyone at the table while Mike chewed his food as if it were made of leather.

Back at the Hundserts', Prez and Keith went upstairs to check on Bruce but were surprised to hear a chirping sound coming from the first bedroom. Together, they went into the room that was originally going to become theirs, before they and the Hundserts adopted kids. Prez sat down at the computer that was flashing an 'Incoming Message' screen. The first, most recent message on the list was the "Dirty Rimmer Ferrets" and the attachment. At first, Keith and Prez thought it might be spam but then they noticed who it was from and clicked on the attachment. "Oh God!" Prez groaned, but he and Keith couldn't help laughing. Mike was being as patient as he possibly could but getting flustered with the confused Scoobies.

The second message was also from Daileass, simply notifying Prez that Dr. Rod Andrews, pediatrician, and Dr. Randall Wiener, child psychologist, were now present on the Ewa Beach main base.

The third and final message on the list was from Lieutenant Stanley Mathers at C.S.P.R.D. Maui, sent just after four in the afternoon.

Prez grumbled, "This was sent almost three hours ago!" and opened the e-mail. It read:

Director O'Brian,

I am leading the Starfleet Security contingent at your Maui Base.

We now have in our custody five children, four boys and one girl, ranging in age from nine years to fifteen years of age. All are runaways from either their abusive natural parents or from abusive foster care providers.

Please contact me at your earliest possible convenience so that food, medical care and shelter can be provided for the above mentioned children.

Also, I would like to extend my thanks to General Adam Casey for the excellent security arrangements made here in Maui and at the other Pacific Rim Division bases.

Cordially Yours,

Lieutenant (j.g.) Stanley Mathers.

"Okay," Prez thought aloud, "There are five kids so at least five of us should go get them." Prez checked the oldest message, which was from Donnie. The UNIT troops would be moving onto the Oahu peninsula base during that day and on Monday.

Keith nodded and recommended, "The two of us, Mike and Derrick and Kaleo."

"Instead of Kaleo, lets bring Drew to hopefully make the younger kids feel more comfortable," Prez suggested.

"Good," Keith beamed proudly. "I hadn't thought of that, but it would probably make a difference to a nine year old."

"We work and play well together," Prez smiled, and then pulled Keith close for a deep kiss. Breaking the kiss, Prez said, "If you'll gather Drew, Mike and Derrick, I'll contact Lieutenant Mathers."

Keith nodded, "I love you."

"I love you too babe," Prez smiled.

Keith walked down the hall and back downstairs to get Drew and contact Mike and Derrick for their first Clan Short rescue.

Prez tapped his comm-badge and said, "Director O'Brian to Lieutenant Stanley Mathers."

Only a moment later, a deep voice replied, "This is Lieutenant Mathers. Good evening, Sir."

"I just got your message, Lieutenant," Prez began. "I'm sorry for the delay, but we had an orientation of our facilities this afternoon, a bunch of adoptions and just finished dinner a few minutes ago."

"It's not a problem Sir," Lieutenant Mathers responded. "Kids have been walking up to our gates all day. There are now seven here, five boys and two girls."

"Are they in urgent need of medical care, Lieutenant? If need be, I can bring a doctor with me."

"I don't believe so. They're bruised and scraped; and one girl has

a twisted ankle that I've already bandaged and iced."

"Okay. I'm gathering my team together and expect to be at your gate in the next five or ten minutes."

"Very well, Sir."

"Lieutenant?"

"Yes, Sir?"

"Please stop calling me Sir; I'm fourteen. If you must be formal, call me Director, but I'd much rather you call me Preston or Prez."

Lieutenant Mathers chuckled, "See ya in a few minutes, Preston."

"O'Brian out," Prez said as he stood. He went and checked on Bruce like he had originally intended to do, then went downstairs.

As Prez arrived at the first floor landing, Keith said, "Mike and Derrick are on their way."

"Kewl," Prez said, and then asked, "Is John done eating?"

"Just finishing up, Prez," John hollered from the dining room.

"We're picking up seven so you're coming with us, John. Make sure you've got your Starfleet I.D.'s ready." Prez then tapped his comm-badge again saying, "Prez to Corey."

"Yeah Prez, wassup?" Corey answered.

"We've got a few kids to pick up from the Maui base. I need you, dude."

"I'm on my way."

Jim Hundser came over and said, "This is just the beginning. You realize that after Friday's news, every abused kid on all the Islands will be locating us for help."

Keith nodded, "We kinda figured that as soon as we saw the message."

John hurried over saying, "I'm ready."

"Be safe," Jim Hundser smiled.

"We will, dad," the four boys chorused as they walked out of the house.

Prez hummed and softly said, "Lemme just tell Kaleo what's going on." Tapping his comm-badge again, Prez said, "Prez to Kaleo."

"Kaleo here."

"We're going to pick up a few kids from Maui, dude."

"Do you need me too?"

"We're kewl, man. Spend time with the others and let them know we'll have seven new arrivals in the nest tonight."

Sounding disappointed, Kaleo softly said, "Okay, if you're sure."

Prez assured, "You're doing an excellent job as Mouth Rimmer, Kaleo. This time it's only seven kids and from our base at Maui. It's really no big deal. Besides, the work you do as liaison is just what we need in this early stage of the game. We'll catch up with you guys within the hour at the pool, okay?"

Much happier, Kaleo said, "Thanks Prez. We'll see you soon. Kaleo out."

John looked up at Prez and said, "He's worried you don't need or want him around, Prez."

"Really?" Prez excitedly squealed. "Nothing could be further from the truth."

As Corey, Mike and Derrick walked out of their houses, Keith realized, "He's still one of the rescued, baby."

"We'll all go into play mode at the pool once we finish this little task," Prez promised. As Mike and Derrick approached, Prez teased, "Shiny Daddy showering with his ferret kiddies!"

"How the hell did you know about that?" Mike incredulously hollered.

Keith giggled, "We got a message from Daileass, complete with video and audio of the whole thing!"

"And your thing and cute bottom too!" Prez laughed.

"SONOFABITCH!" Mike screamed while all the others laughed hysterically.

"Be nice now," Prez playfully warned. "We need Daileass to get us from here to Maui. Get your I.D.'s out and ready."

Reaching into his pocket, Mike grumbled, "If he had an ass, I'd kick it so friggin' hard!"

While the rest of his Core Rimmers laughed their asses off, Prez tapped his sub-vocal and giggled, "Daileass, we need transportation to

the Rimmer Maui base where Lieutenant Mathers is stationed."

"Sure thing, Prez," Daileass said, "Stand by."

A few seconds later all seven were standing inside the Maui base main gate. A tall man of African descent walked out of the security building. Holding up his I.D., Prez said, "Lieutenant Mathers?"

Stopping and snapping to attention, Lieutenant Mathers saluted. All the other Core Rimmers smiled at both the Lieutenant and Prez. Adam had warned Prez about this just the prior day, but Prez wasn't really prepared for the salute. Prez returned the salute saying, "At ease, Lieutenant. We work together, I really don't expect you to salute me. I'm only an Ensign, after all."

Moving to parade rest, Lieutenant Mathers replied, "Pardon me, but under current Starfleet regulations, you have a rank one level below Patriarch Cory Short. As a Division Director of Clan Short, you outrank me and most of Starfleet officers up as far as the senior staff. When Clan Short calls, Starfleet answers."

That was news to Prez, but he kept his cool while those around him were more than obviously impressed. "Please, treat me informally," Prez smiled. He then introduced his team before sending Mike, Derrick, Drew, Corey and John inside to get the kids.

Relaxing more, Lieutenant Mathers said, "We've sheltered seven children here. The first showed up about noon; we were having lunch at the time. Each hour or so, another showed up."

Noticing the relatively small size of the security station, Prez said, "You could've called us sooner, Lieutenant. It must be getting crowded in there."

"From a security perspective, it made sense to hold them here," Lieutenant Mathers explained. "Two of the four parents that came to get their kids were more than argumentative, and are now enjoying the comforts of the brig at Starfleet Headquarters."

"Well, that'll make our job easier if we need to prosecute," Keith grinned.

"This is the way we'll work it going forward," Lieutenant Mathers said. "It's better to flush out the bigger jerks and have them stir things up here with us rather than have them seek you out."

The security station's door opened again. Drew, Corey and John led the group of rescued kids outside. John began the introductions once all seven were outside. "Guys, this is Prez and Keith; they're our big bros. Prez is the leader of our Clan and Keith's second in command."

Drew took over introductions and began with the youngest by placing his hand on shoulders. "This is Randy Beale, this is Samuel Bay, and here's Louis Mares and Roy Angulo and Gerald Mayers."

Derrick introduced the two girls. "This is Karen Dehart and Sonia Baugh."

Mike said, "Sonia twisted her ankle running out of her house."

Prez locked eyes with the girl and asked, "How do you feel, Sonia; can you walk all right?"

Sonia nodded, "I'll live now that I'm away from my parents."

"We'll get all you guys and girls fixed up," Prez promised. Karen and two of the boys had small gym bags with them. The others only had the clothes on their backs. As Prez began explaining how

things were at the main base on Oahu, Lieutenant Mathers moved away and went to the gate.

Keith watched the Lieutenant and only half listened to Prez, concentrating on the boy beyond the gate. His chestnut brown hair was a mess and his clothes looked tattered and torn, more so than the seven Prez was talking to. Lieutenant Mathers signaled to the security station and the gate began to open.

Keith went to the boy asking, "What's your name?"

"Hi, my name's Gage; Gage Lundberg," the boy softly replied.

"I'm Keith. What's goin' on, little dude?"

Gage sighed, "My mom and dad... they don't care about me, they only care about booze and drugs." Drew and Corey moved closer and listened. "They don't cook, don't clean, don't work... just don't care about nuthin' or anyone; not even me. I've been gone for two days. I wonder if they even noticed yet."

"No worries, Gage," Drew said, "We've got you covered."

Corey nodded and asked, "If they wanted you back, would you want to go back?"

Shaking his head furiously, "No, never again. I've run away before and the police put me back with them. Did it matter or change a thing? Not at all."

Stepping closer to Keith, Prez asked, "What's going on here?"

Keith answered briefly, "Gage has druggie parents. He's pretty much divorced himself of them."

Prez nodded understandingly and asked, "How would you like

about another hundred brothers and sisters just like you that really care what you're eating and where you're sleeping?"

"It sounds like it could be real nice," Gage replied, "better than my last eight and a half years."

"Let's go then," Prez smiled. "Everybody together now, pick up your stuff and we're gone." He then tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Daileass, fifteen to transport back to our main base, please."

"You got it, Prez," Daileass replied.

Gage looked around for a van or truck that would be coming, but then suddenly found himself and all the others standing in the center of the lawns of four nearby houses. "WOW!" Gage giggled. Prez smiled down at the boy. "Where are we?" Gage wondered.

"Oahu, Ewa Beach," Prez grinned. "Beats the hell out of flying, huh?"

"I'll say!" Gage giggled.

"Who's hungry?" Prez loudly asked. Eight arms raised with a few voicing affirmations. "Okay, Drew, Corey and John, please lead our new Rimmers to the chow."

Mike said, "Me and Derrick need to sit down with our kids and ferrets for a heart-to-heart."

"No problem," Prez nodded, "We'll bring our kids and meet y'all at the pool. Sonia, if your ankle starts bugging you at all, let someone know and we'll introduce you to our doctor."

"Okay, Prez," Sonia said. Mike and Derrick began the walk to their homes.

"Follow us, guys," John said, and then started in the direction of the CIC.

"Wait till you taste our food here," Corey said as he began walking. "We've got the best chefs in all the Islands right here." Drew agreed and began telling them about that morning's breakfast.

Finally alone, Prez turned to Keith and whispered, "If I don't get ten minutes alone with you soon, it's going to be very, very embarrassing for us at bedtime tonight."

Keith nodded and giggled, "I know, baby. We'll go inside, make the 'rents happy, check on the kids and then..."

Prez waited with baited breath before finishing, "Then make a mess out of our new bed?"

Taking his lover's hand, Keith teased, "I hope the Vulcans soundproofed this place," then together they walked across the lawn and into their parents' house.

Mike and Derrick went to the Seiberts' home to retrieve their kids, but found only Latoya and Brandi, the Seiberts' newly adopted girls were there with Lindsay and Christel, the Gibbons' newly adopted girl. Dillon, Jonah and Reyes were over at the Gibbons' playing with Benjamin, the Gibbons' newly adopted boy. The Scooby gang were split in half. Spike and Xander were at the kitchen table polishing silverware while Faith and Willow were polishing the brass knobs on the kitchen cabinets.

While everyone seemed happy enough, Mike turned to his mother and moaned, "Ma, you put our kids to work?"

Laura Gibbons held up her hands and shook her head giggling, "I did no such thing! They wanted to do it! For the first ten minutes

you were gone, they went from room to room. If it shined, they were interested! I told them to play with the boys, but that didn't last a full minute before they returned looking like their whole world was about to end. What you'll learn is to compromise with your kids."

Rob Gibbons entered the kitchen and said, "Do you think it was fun listening to you, at two years old, bangin' on a cheap toy guitar or a little toy piano? It wasn't but you were happy. Every Christmas and birthday, we replaced the worn-out toys until we got you a real child-sized acoustic guitar when you turned five. Since your first music lessons on that guitar went well, we got you the Squier electric guitar when you turned seven. You've got to meet your kids' needs to keep your sanity."

Mike hummed thoughtfully and softly said, "Maybe that's what I did wrong earlier."

"What kept you so long for dinner?" Rob asked.

"It took a few minutes for the ferrets to hear me calling," Mike explained. "When they came running up, they were really dirty. They couldn't sit down at the table looking like that, so I took them to the showers over at the dorm." Laura smiled as Mike wove his ferret shower tale. Rob and Derrick though were barely managing to keep themselves restrained to mere snickering.

Rob Gibbons asked, "Did you place an order for an aluminum tub?"

Mike shook his head and scowled, "Nope, wasn't me."

"Well, there's one out back now," Rob told his son.

Derrick tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass?"

"Hey, Derrick," Daileass replied.

"Patch Mike in with us so he can hear too, dude," Derrick said.

A second later, Mike and Derrick heard Daileass giggling, "Hi Ya, Mike!"

Mike wondered, "Did you deliver an aluminum tub to my house?"

Daileass hummed affirmatively and playfully explained, "It's for the Scoobies, but if you really want to bathe with them, it's big enough for you too!"

Mike grumbled, "I can't believe you recorded that shower, then sent it to Keith and Prez!" Mike's mom couldn't help but chortle and quickly covered her mouth. Rob Gibbons didn't hide it at all though and began chuckling.

"Everything's recorded, Mike," Daileass giggled. "I may not keep the recordings, but everything every camera sees is recorded. Besides it was an Oscar-worthy performance, if I do say so myself!"

Mike grinned but softly complained, "You dog!"

Widely smiling, Derrick then wondered, "Daileass, who else saw the shower?"

"All my brothers, of course," Daileass laughed. "And another hundred or two here in Utah. And the guys down in Australia and in Des Moines. The votes are in from everywhere but Orlando and the Northeast division. Mike has starred in the best comedy flick since Blazing Saddles!"

"Daileass!" Mike shouted, "I was naked!" Mike's parents and

Derrick lost it and cracked up.

"Well, duh!" Daileass teased, "I would hope you were naked in the shower! By the way, if you and Derrick ever break up, you'll have lots of guys and girls waiting in the wings for a date!"

Blushing fiercely, Mike softly groaned, "Oh God!"

Derrick giggled, "Daileass, can we see what everyone else in Clan Short has seen?"

"I suppose so," Daileass replied. "It's upstairs waiting on your computer."

Mike then ordered, "Daileass, delete that file."

"It's encrypted," Daileass giggled. "No one outside of the Clan..."

"Daileass! Delete that file now!" Mike interrupted.

"Oh, okay," Daileass sighed. "It's deleted." Of course, since Daileass wasn't directly asked or ordered to delete it, the archived backup still existed. And all the previously sent copies still existed as well.

"Thanks, dude," Mike smiled.

"Have a good night," Derrick said.

"You too, guys," Daileass cheerfully responded. "We'll chat again soon."

Mike smirked, "I would've threatened to tear him limb from limb but he hasn't got any limbs!"

Derrick and Mike then went to the living room to chat with all their kids. An extra amount of time was spent with the Scooby gang. Mike and Derrick wanted very much to make the ferret hybrids a part of their lives as much as was possible. Mike apologized for the shower fiasco, but told the Scoobies about the new bath tub that was theirs to use. Reyes, Jonah and Dillon liked the ferrets a lot. The new family talked about ferret favorite foods and ferret sleeping habits. Neither Mike or Derrick realized that ferrets were nocturnal but because they were hybrids, they were more inclined to stay up very late at night before sleeping for a few hours. They would then take afternoon naps if they felt like it.

Meanwhile, all the newly rescued Rimmer kids had finished eating and had moved over to the pool area. All the other families and kids were also by the pool and diving well, enjoying a warm autumn evening. Bruce was awake and surrounded by John and his new brothers and sisters. Off-duty housekeepers and chefs were also poolside, as were Doctor Rod Andrews, pediatrician, and Doctor Randall Wiener, child psychologist. Dr. Wiener made a point of pronouncing his name in the original German fashion 'VEE-ner', and was soon pointed to Melonie for a private chat. Doctor Andrews examined Sonia's ankle and diagnosed it as a minor sprain.

Many of the off-duty UNIT kids were inside the rec center lifting weights while others organized a game of soccer. The pro-sized field was well lit by solar charged lights and everyone could see to play the game.

It was about quarter-of-nine when Mike, Derrick, their boys and the ferrets joined everyone at the pool and jumped in for a swim. Now that all the Core Rimmers were present, Prez gathered them all together for a chat. Getting directly to the point, Prez sat between Kaleo and Keith and said, "Ya know Kaleo, you really have one of the

most critical positions on this team."

"How so?" Kaleo wondered.

"You're one of the rescued that was already looked up to," Prez answered.

Keith nodded, "Like last night, we were open to alternatives, but making plans other than mass nesting. The kids tell you their honest feelings of what they want or need."

Prez agreed, "I still had to poke and prod a little to get to the truth. Y'all wanted to be with the entire core team, not subsections of it. Maybe half of these kids know me well enough to understand that I'm an orphan too. The Hundasers saved me though and that makes my situation different enough."

Kaleo grinned, "I hate to tell you this, Prez, but there's some hero worship going on too."

"They put you on a pedestal the moment Joel did," Drew revealed.

John agreed, "They feel like you've got to deal with everyone's welfare, not just one person's."

"If that's true," Prez began, "and I'll assume it is, that makes Kaleo's role even more important to me and all of us. There's not one kid here that should ever feel like they can't approach me. If I'm occupied, like during tonight's rescue, they must have a Core Rimmer available."

"Prez and I were alone for a while and had the chance to bounce another idea around," Keith explained. "During more dangerous rescues, either he or I will be left here just so everybody has that

warm fuzzy feeling that someone's in charge."

Derrick said, "We need you doing what you do, what you've done since way before we met on the beach Friday afternoon."

"If it wasn't for you, me and Derrick wouldn't have been able to spend time with our kids and the Scoobies," Mike admitted. "Without you, Keith and Prez wouldn't have had some time alone."

Drew nodded, "Let's face it; without you we wouldn't get a lot of things done that have to be done."

Wrapping an arm around Kaleo, Prez smiled warmly and said, "It may seem less important to you, but believe us all, what you've done in the last two days is extremely important."

Understanding, Kaleo nodded and said, "Just let me be involved in a few of these easy rescues, okay? It seems to me a little experience is better than none when things get really hairy."

Prez agreed, "You're right. I need to allow each of you to command some of these rescue missions."

Keith offered, "You're taking the responsibilities seriously, baby. We all do though, and we all need that experience."

"You realize I'm going to put John in charge too?" Prez grinned.

"Nooooo!" Drew, Corey and Keith simultaneously hollered. John sat up straight, threw his chest out importantly, but helplessly giggled. The other Core Rimmers had a good laugh over that.

Around nine-thirty, some of the youngest kids began getting tired. Kokaku, Geoff, Richie, Dillon, Cesar, Felipe, Latoya, Carmella, Christel and Renee were led back to the Hundserts' home by the

Hundsers and Seavers to settle down for the night. Four bathtubs were filled and two kids per tub were bathed. While the tots got themselves settled in the nest for the night, the Hundsers' old living room furniture was rearranged in the basement so the adults could be nearby watching TV.

Shortly after ten o'clock, Kaleo went over to Prez and Keith explaining, "Some of us think we might like to try sleeping in the dorms tonight."

"Are you sure, dude?" Prez worried. "You don't have to, you know?"

Keith agreed, "Only if you really want to."

Kaleo nodded., "Tory and me want to. So do four other older dudes and four of the oldest girls." He then grinned and said, "Would you go over there with us? The place is so big and empty, even though it's not spooky, it is kinda scary, for us anyway."

Prez smiled, "No problem, bro. It is All Hallow's Eve, after all."

Standing up and reaching for Prez, Keith smirked, "Other than the showers, we really don't even know what else is there."

"Kewl!" Kaleo cheered. He then turned around and waved. Tory, Horacio Sulin, Sean Moorhead, Hank Leve, Gerald Mayers, Melonie Correro, Sonia Baugh, Vera Kirkwood and Trish Vesley all stood up and joined their three leaders for the walk over to the dorms. Sonia was helped along on her sore ankle by Horacio and Sean.

Prez grinned, "I'm really surprised to see you here, Sonia."

"While a nest sounds interesting and may be fun," Sonia shrugged, "I'm used to sleeping alone. I am what you might call an

active sleeper; I move around a lot at night."

"Whatever you guys want to do," Prez assured. "Just because we're going doesn't mean you have to stay."

"We figure if the ten of us can manage, then maybe more will join us tomorrow night," Sean explained.

Kaleo nodded, "You guys have started your own families too. We all know it and want you to have time with them."

Melonie asked, "Since there are so few of us, could we all stay on the same floor?"

Trish added, "I'd sure feel safer that way."

"It's fine with us," Prez quickly said.

"The issue is our parents," Keith told them. "We're fine with co-ed dorms. They'd be happier with girls in one building and guys in another. But the UNIT kids are already mixed in their building."

Prez suggested, "If it would make you feel better, I'll ask for two guards, one on each door into the building."

Kaleo, Prez and Keith glanced around. All the boys shook their heads as did Sonia and Vera, but Melonie and Trish shrugged uncertainly. That was all it took for Prez. He would ask for two guards to watch over the dorm that night. Keith opened and held the dorm door as everyone filed inside.

Prez opened the first bedroom door and turned on the lights. "This is real nice!" Sonia beamed. "I expected... less."

Keith stepped up and said, "Two double beds, a TV, a PlayStation, a stereo, a small fridge, two laptop computers, two desks

and two chairs in every room."

Sonia excitedly asked, "They're all like this?"

Prez nodded, "Some rooms are a little larger, but yeah, every room has the same basic stuff."

"Someone take my pulse," Sonia joked. "I must've died and gone to heaven." The three other girls nodded and giggled.

Kaleo pointed at the end of the hall and asked, "What's that room, Keith?"

"Got me!" Keith grinned, "Lets go check it out." The group went to the furthest room down the hall. Keith opened the door and turned on the lights. "It's a rec room!" Keith cheered.

The room was easily forty feet by thirty feet. In it was a large flat-screen television with Bose surround sound speakers, two long sofas in the center of the room, at least a dozen other chairs, a Baldwin upright piano, a Takamine acoustic guitar on a stand, an easel with many empty canvases against the wall, with a nearby table loaded with oil paints, watercolors and various brushes. There was even a refrigerator and microwave oven for snacks. Prez went inside and turned the TV on, while Keith went over and gave the piano a quick inspection. There was another door leading to the adjacent hallway. Prez silently considered, "At least twenty or thirty kids could hang out in this room at once. The twelve of us barely make a dent in the space available." After playing a few chords and scales, Keith took a deep breath and sang, "[Hey Jude](#)," then began playing the entire song. Prez picked up the guitar and, at the start of the second verse, began playing and singing with Keith.

"They sing too?" Sonia asked.

Trish nodded, "Wait until you hear their band. Mike and Derrick sing and play too."

Sonia smiled, "And I was worried that I was jumping from the frying pan into the fire."

Soon Prez began wandering around and all the kids joined in for the extended chorus loudly singing, "Na, na, na, na-na-na-na, na-na-na-na, Hey Jude," over and over again. Knowing that they had well exceeded the seven-and-a-half minute song, Prez loudly said, "One last time!" and everybody sang the refrain again before Keith and Prez ended the song.

Kaleo loudly cheered, "Well, I'm staying. Who's with me?" Soon all of the other nine kids agreed. Everyone went back outside and over to the Hundserts' house to retrieve their suitcases. It was then that Prez realized Sonia only had the clothes on her back. Moving over to stand near her, Prez tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass?"

"Hi Prez," Daileass cheerfully said.

"Can you see me and the girl beside me?"

Daileass turned a security camera and teased, "She's pretty! What does Keith think about this, I wonder?"

Prez giggled, "This is Sonia, one of the new kids we rescued earlier tonight. She's gonna need some clothes and a suitcase, dude."

"No problem," Daileass said and then asked, "Where should I transport her new duds?"

"She'll be staying at the dorm tonight," Prez answered. "Keep an eye on her, and when she settles into one of the rooms, transport her

clothes there."

"Who's Daileass?" Sonia wondered.

"That's not an easy question to answer," Prez said. "Let's just say he's artificial intelligence, but way more than your average machine."

"Aww," Daileass giggled. "I like you too, Prez." Prez cracked up and Keith rolled his eyes knowingly. Daileass laughed, "Made ya blush!"

"You are so bad!" Prez chuckled. "Talk with ya later, dude."

"Wait just a second please?" Daileass asked, "Who's that tall blond boy behind you and to your left?"

Prez looked over his shoulder and answered, "That's Sean Moorhead."

Daileass hummed hungrily and giggled, "He's so cute! You gotta find a job for him! And with a name like Moorhead..."

"STOP!" Prez loudly laughed. Kaleo and Keith turned to each other smiling, but shaking their heads.

"What?" Daileass giggled, "With a name like Smucker's, it's gotta be good!"

Shaking his head sadly, Prez uncontrollably laughed, "Over and out!"

"Catch ya later!" Daileass snickered.

Chapter 5

Ewa Beach, Oahu; C.S.P.R.D. Main Base

Sunday, October 31, 2004 11:33 PM

Wearing a robe and slippers, Jennifer Hundser softly walked down the basement steps, knowing that many of the kids were already asleep. She went over to the sofa where Preston and Keith were chatting with a few of their Clan members. The children were wondering where Kaleo and the older kids were. Preston explained that they were trying out the new dorms, then smiled up at his foster mother asking, "What's up, mom?"

"Your computer is beeping upstairs," Jennifer explained.

Keith groaned, "Uh oh!" then turned to Prez and pleaded, "Let me take care of this one, baby?"

Prez nodded and said, "I hope it's nothing too serious, but it's late. Kinda makes me wonder."

Jennifer said, "It makes me wonder too. I'm not going to be happy if you boys can't even get a decent night's sleep."

"It's probably nothing, mom," Keith assured and then followed his mother upstairs. Once they were walking through the kitchen heading for the stairs up to the bedrooms, Keith smirked, "I know what you're thinking. It's a school night, right?"

Jennifer nodded, "I realize there are special circumstances. John's staying home from school tomorrow for Bruce, and the rest of you boys will be attending school on base. Please make them

understand that even you need to relax and unwind this late at night though."

"I will, mom," Keith assured. Soon he was sitting at the desk and typing in the password. There was only one message waiting and it was from their own main gate on North Road. Although tapping his comm-badge would've been easiest, Keith chose to activate the camera and talk face-to-face with the security station. "Hey Chaz, wassup?"

"Hi Keith; sorry for contacting you so late, but two just walked up to the gate."

"It's no biggie. Mom's a little unhappy, but once I tell her it's only a short walk to the main gate, she'll relax. What's the deal?"

"Just two boys, caught with their pants down, ya know?"

"Ooo! Parents went all bonkers, huh?"

"You got it."

"Just so I know who to send, tell me how old they are?"

"They're twelve."

"Expect Drew and Corey then, dude. I'll send them right over."

"Got it. Thanks, Keith."

"Good night, Chaz," Keith said, and then scanned the screen looking for the correct disconnect button.

"Bottom right side, red button," Chaz grinned.

Keith giggled, "I thought so!" Chaz also began giggling and said

good night just before Keith disconnected. Keith then tapped his comm-badge and said, "Drew?"

A moment later, Drew answered, "Wassup, bro?"

"You and Corey need to get two boys from the North Road gate. They're gay and prob'ly really scared. Remember to ask if they're hungry...."

"Feed them, then bring them back here," Drew interrupted.

Locking the computer again, Keith said, "It's all yours, bro."

"We got it," Drew said, and Keith stood, then left the room.

Stopping by his parents' bedroom, Keith explained, "It's a rescue right here on base. Two boys that were caught in the act; it obviously freaked out the parents."

"What are you going to do?" Jim Hundser wondered.

Keith shrugged, "We'll give the kids food and shelter; we can't have them walking the streets. As far as I know, Federation Youth Services then intervenes on behalf of the kids. They may be good parents, but were just shocked. The important thing, from Clan perspective anyway, is what do the kids need and want? Are they too embarrassed to go home or are they too scared? If there's emotional or physical abuse involved, pulling a family back together is way more difficult. Exactly how all this really works, we'll learn tomorrow."

"What's tomorrow?" Jennifer asked.

"We meet Patriarch Cory Short and you get a new job," Keith grinned.

"Me?" Jennifer gasped.

Keith giggled, "Of course you! No more dealing with CPS., mom. If Prez is given the opportunity to suggest a head of FYS for this division, it's you. You'll be following FYS rules and deciding who goes home or even if they'll go home.

"No more wondering if another kid will wind up like Stephen or Aaron. What we couldn't do for them before, we're doing now. Did you forget about them? They're down in the basement."

Jennifer smiled, "I didn't forget, I'm just surprised. I haven't even resigned yet and you boys have already given me a new job."

Keith nodded and turned to leave, but his dad asked, "Is everybody comfortable down in the basement?"

Turning around again, Keith nodded, "Sure, why wouldn't we be?"

Jim grinned and reminded, "It's a basement!"

Keith laughed, "It's huge! And it's finished with wood walls, carpeted floors and our old living room furniture! The kids that are awake are playing games or watching TV. The others are snoozing soundly in a pile of pillows and blankets. We're fine, dad, couldn't be better."

"The tone of your voice just went from playful and enthused to somewhat less so," Jennifer noticed.

Jim prodded, "Explain that, if you can?"

Keith sighed, "It's only... well... a privacy issue. Earlier, Prez and me got our first chance to be alone in two days. Mike and Derrick

are feeling it too, even though they haven't directly said it. Kaleo's noticed, and some of the older kids are in the dorm because of it."

"If I might make a suggestion?" Jim interjected. Keith nodded and his father continued, "This is a big change for all of us. None of us can do it alone. We need to work together to have some of that private time."

"That's why your dad and I have always found ways to disappear alone together as often as we reasonably could," Jennifer smiled.

Jim agreed, "Now that the issue has been recognized, just work together so that you each get the private time you need."

"We'll help you as much as we can," Jennifer smiled.

"That's why we've adopted the youngest children first," Jim explained. "Not only did they seek us out, they need families and parents the most. While you boys have been organizing your Clan, all of the parents have been considering what we could do to help. Once we learned how easy the adoptions could be from Janet, we talked it over as a group and then as couples."

"Now you need to talk with your partner and the other..." Jennifer paused and smirked, "core Rimmers!" Blushing fiercely, Keith began giggling. Jennifer playfully huffed, "That is so typical of you two!"

Keith laughed, "Prez thought it up!"

Jim chuckled and teased, "But are any of you even considering changing it?"

"Course not!" Keith giggled. He then leaned over to give his

mom a kiss on the cheek and said, "Good night." Both his parents said good night, then Keith turned and left the room. Soon, he was back down in the basement and sitting beside Prez.

Meanwhile, Drew and Corey had retrieved the two boys from the North Road gate. Their names were Aki and Hajime, and they were too scared to return to their homes. They were sitting down in the CIC dining room with Drew and Corey. Having walked several miles from Waipahu to Ewa Beach, Aki and Hajime were famished. The kitchen night shift staff was baking breads and pastries for the next day. While the new boys scarfed down cheeseburgers and French fries, Drew and Corey had grilled cheese sandwiches simply because everything in the kitchen smelled so good.

Before Aki and Hajime finished their meals, Kaleo walked in holding hands with Tory, followed by Sean and Horacio. Aki, somewhere between stunned and happy, softly asked, "Is everybody here gay?"

Drew grinned, "No, our parents are here and they're straight."

"It don't matter what you are around here," Corey giggled. "We got gays, straights, chimps, ferrets and gorillas!"

Aki and Hajime nervously chorused; "Gorillas?"

Corey laughed and Drew snickered, "They're the best security in the world! Who's gonna argue with a gorilla?"

Holding a tray with six large cups, Kaleo started for the table. Tory was following with another tray loaded down with bags of chips and plates of cookies. Kaleo asked, "Who have we here, Drew?"

Drew introduced the two new boys and explained, "They were makin' out and got caught by Hajime's parents." Noticing that the two

boys were now blushing intensely, Drew apologized, "I'm really sorry, dudes, I should've known better. It even makes me blush sometimes."

Kaleo nodded and smiled, "It's really nothing to be embarrassed about."

Corey nodded, "Kaleo's our communications officer. We call him the Mouth Rimmer."

Tory laughed, "That's so friggin' hysterical!"

Eying Tory suspiciously, Kaleo put his tray down on a nearby table, then took Tory's tray and put it down too. Before Tory could stop laughing or say a word, Kaleo kissed him hard. Drew and Corey smiled, certain that Kaleo's friendship with Tory had obviously progressed in the last few hours. Kaleo didn't release the kiss until Tory whimpered from lack of oxygen. Kaleo picked up his tray and said, "Tell Prez we really like having our own rooms in the dorm."

"I can tell!" Corey giggled.

Drew joked, "So *that's* why ya got the munchies?"

Kaleo played along. "It'll take some extra energy to keep goin'!"

"HEY!" Tory laughed, "You'd better be good!"

"But you said it was good," Kaleo teased. "It was the best for *me* anyway."

Picking up his tray, Tory playfully groaned, "Ooo! Now you're really gonna get it!" and started for the exit.

Kaleo's eyes shot wide open and he whined with anticipation, causing all four boys seated at the table to blush and laugh. Quickly grabbing his tray of drinks and almost sending the cups flying, Kaleo

hurried after Tory.

"This is so weird!" Hajime grinned.

Aki nodded agreement. "We're used to not mentioning sex or anything about it ever."

Hajime added, "It's just not acceptable any time, anywhere."

Corey said, "Drew and me have known each other since before kindergarten. Our first time together was accidental, but... how should I say... opened my eyes and answered all the questions at once. That goofy feeling in my brain and dull ache in my belly went away whenever Drew held me."

Drew smiled knowingly at Corey. Noticing the two boys had finished eating, Drew said, "It's gettin' late; let's go home, dudes."

"Home?" Aki nervously squeaked.

Standing with his tray of trash, Drew nodded, "My house. Prez and Keith will want to meet you." Relieved, Aki and Hajime gathered their trash and followed Drew.

"And the other ninety or so kids," Corey grinned, "but about half of 'em are already asleep."

"Talk about your big sleep-overs!" Hajime smiled.

Drew and Corey led Aki and Hajime home then introduced them to Prez and Keith.

"Welcome!" Prez happily smiled. Drew then introduced Mike and Derrick, during which time everyone learned about Kaleo and Tory. Sitting down again on the floor with the two new boys, Prez

asked, "I understand you guys had an embarrassing night?"

While both boys nodded, Aki frowned and softly explained, "We've been friends since last school year, but over the summer it changed."

Hajime took over and added, "I thought my bedroom door was locked, but it somehow didn't close all the way and my dad walked in on us."

Keith asked, "He didn't hurt you, did he?"

Aki nervously sobbed, "He cussed and screamed and called my folks."

Hajime held Aki close and nodded, "My mom was throwing stuff at us and we got the heck out of there."

Aki croaked, "We heard on the news what happened Friday and that Clan Short bases were opened Saturday."

"It was a long walk, about five or six miles, and took us about two hours, but we didn't know where else to go," Hajime fearfully finished.

Nodding understandingly, Prez said, "You kept your head in a crisis and thought clearly. We'll keep you safe here."

Aki forced a grin and said, "This place is so awesome."

Drew smiled, "I only pointed out the dorms on our way here."

Hajime nodded and said, "But your CIC can be seen a mile away, at least. And the sign outside the main gate told us this was definitely the place."

"Here's the deal," Prez began, "We're just getting organized around here. Later this week, an adult will be talking with you both. Then they'll call your parents. Assuming that they really love you and were simply freaked out, we'll broker a peace with your folks, if that's what you guys want. Until you're ready for them and they're ready for you, you'll stay here with us."

Hajime mumbled, "The girls and boys sleep together here?"

Keith nodded and grinned, "They're mostly orphans and foster kids. That's the way they feel safe right now."

Aki leaned forward and whispered, "Some of 'em are naked though."

Keith giggled and Prez answered, "Imagine your parents selling your sexual services. That's what happened to a lot of these kids."

Aki and Hajime both gasped, "No way!"

Keith nodded and said, "You've seen each other erect, but have never been with anybody else. It's basically the same for me and Prez, and Derrick and Mike, and Drew and Corey. Lots of these kids have seen dozens... maybe a hundred other men and women naked."

Slowly nodding as the two boys absorbed the truth, Prez said, "You can sleep here if you'd be safe and comfortable. If you'd rather share a dorm room, just say so."

The two boys checked with each other and nodded. "We'd be uncomfortable sleeping with girls," Hajime meekly offered.

"Not a problem," Keith said. "There's a dorm with six boys and four girls already over there."

Seeing Drew and Corey preparing to stand, Prez turned to Mike and Derrick, then asked, "Would you dudes come for a walk with us?"

"All six of us?" Mike queried.

"Just wanna air out the cobwebs in my head," Prez smiled.

"An empty attack and starvin' spiders!" Derrick joked.

As everyone started to stand, Prez went to the kids still playing video games and said, "We're gonna take a short walk. You guys can just play and hang out until you're ready for bed."

"We're kewl," Jerrold said, still very involved in the game.

Prez grinned, "We'll be back in a little while," then turned and followed everyone else upstairs. They silently crept through the house and out the back door so as to not wake anyone.

Once outside, Hajime said, "Those are the biggest Teddy bears I've ever seen."

Keith giggled, "They're not your average every day Teddies either."

"They're virtual intelligence, they can carry a conversation with their friends," Mike stated.

Derrick added, "In some ways, they're better than guard dogs too. They'll protect their best friends to the point of destruction."

Prez offered, "If you guys decide you want one, let us know."

"We ain't got money for 'em though," Aki sadly sighed.

Keith corrected, "You don't need money for anything here. Don't

worry about a thing now, okay? You've already had enough to worry about just getting here."

Derrick agreed, "Walking as far as you guys did late at night was pretty dangerous."

Aki nodded, "We know."

"One guy offered us a ride," Hajime explained. "We just didn't have a good feeling about him." Keith noticed the look of disgust on Prez's face and knew things were going to be said to everyone very soon.

Prez sighed, "We've got your back now, guys."

As the group approached the dorm, the sentry, Paulie Casey stood from his chair and snapped to attention, then saluted, saying, "Good evening, Sir."

"Hey, Paulie," Prez grinned, "obviously you missed something."

Paulie checked his uniform and weapon briefly, then chirped, "Sir?"

Prez joked, "The next time you call me 'Sir' or salute me, it's a week of K.P. for you!"

While everyone else smiled or giggled, Paulie nodded and stood at ease, saying, "Never again, Prez."

"Good," Prez chuckled, "spread the word; I've been saluted way too much already."

Opening the door to the dorm, Paulie said, "Everyone on base will know by breakfast."

While everyone else stepped inside, Prez said, "Cool beans. See ya in a few minutes," then followed the rest of the group.

Keith led the pack down the hall, past the closed doors, and pointed to the first two rooms saying, "Kaleo and Tory are here on the right. Sean and Horacio have the room on the left. Hank and Gerald have the next room on the right. Melonie and Sonia are here on the left and in the room next door are Trish and Vera. You guys can pick any room you want." Keith then led Aki and Hajime down the hall to the bathroom and let them look around. The far wall was lined with toilets and the adjacent wall lined with sinks and then the parallel wall lined with urinals. Keith flipped the light on for the separate mob shower and both boys checked it out. When they walked past again nodding and smiling appreciatively, Keith flipped the lights off.

Prez pointed and said, "Down the hall is the first floor rec room."

Looking up at Prez, Aki asked, "We can have any room we want... together?"

"Sure," Prez nodded, then opened the room across from the bathroom and turned on the light. "Take your pick."

Both boys looked inside the spacious room and smiled widely at each other. "This is way kewl!" Aki excitedly said as he stepped into the room.

Hajime followed saying, "I live... or used to live, in a real nice house, but this is better! Two full sized beds too!" He then turned around and blushed, "Can we sleep together in one?"

Mike sighed, "Listen little dudes, whatever you *think* is wrong with loving each other is false." Pulling Derrick closer, Mike continued, "This dude here's my boyfriend. We really love each other.

When we sleep together, it's the soundest sleep ever."

Derrick nodded, "Prez and Keith are boyfriends too, so are Drew and Corey." Both Drew and Corey nodded and held each other close.

"Loving one another is good," Prez smiled. "If your parents can cope with having gay sons and can prove that to Federation Youth Services, you can return home, but only if or when you feel comfortable doing so. If your parents can't cope with gay sons, then you can stay here as long as you like."

"But what about school?" Hajime wondered.

Keith answered, "We'll have our schools set up soon, right here on base."

Prez tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass?"

"Hi Prez," Daileass replied.

"Sorry to bug you so late, dude, but we have two boys here that just showed up and will be staying a while."

"Boxers or briefs?" Daileass asked.

"Umm... boxers," Prez answered.

Daileass giggled, "Not you, silly! You got your own undies! What about them?"

"Oh!" Prez laughed. Turning to Aki and Hajime, Prez smiled, "Boxers or briefs, dudes?"

Aki and Hajime both replied, "Briefs." Only a few seconds later, both beds were loaded with new clothes for each boy. They each had

three pair of jeans, five pair of board shorts, five T-shirts, three button down sport shirts, and enough underwear and socks for every day of the week. There were even toothbrushes, tubes of toothpaste, brushes, combs and deodorants. Both boys hurried over to the beds and began shuffling through their clothes.

"That was awfully fast, Daileass," Prez challenged.

Taking on a mystical tone, Daileass replied, "I see all, I know all. I saw them approach the gate, saw Drew and Corey lead them to the CIC dining room, saw them talking with you guys in your basement. It was only a matter of time before you called me."

"You're the best, dude," Prez smiled.

"The best AI perv in all North America!" Mike whispered to Derrick.

"Any time, Prez," Daileass said. Then Mike heard Daileass giggling in his ear; "Thanks for the compliment, Showers with Ferrets."

"Dammit!" Mike grumbled. "These things are never really off."

Keith grinned, "You forgot; tapping is just to get Daileass' attention."

Turning his attention back to Aki and Hajime, Prez asked, "Have you guys met Kaleo?"

Aki nodded and Hajime answered, "In the dining room."

Drew grinned, "Kaleo and Tory made a great first impression."

"I'll say!" Corey giggled.

Prez smiled and hummed suspiciously. "Make yourselves at home, dudes," Prez said to the two newest Rimmers. "Ask Kaleo or anyone for a tour of the grounds tomorrow morning."

"Thanks, Prez," Aki enthusiastically cheered.

"We will," Hajime nodded.

"Y'all have a good night," Prez said. Keith and the other Core Rimmers also said good night, then left the boys to themselves. Down the hall, Prez stopped at Kaleo's room and knocked on the door. There were sounds of movement and garbled words from the other side of the solid wooden door.

Tory finally asked, "Who is it?"

Smiling at the ruckus beyond the door, Prez announced, "Prez and all the other Core Rimmers to see Kaleo."

"Except John," Keith reminded.

"Right," Prez agreed. John had attached himself to Bruce since learning of the Downing's passing.

After about thirty seconds, Kaleo finally opened the door, saying, "What's up, guys?" He was shirtless and trying unsuccessfully to appear innocent while he adjusted himself in his shorts, and a shirtless Tory attempted to straighten one of the beds in the background. All of the Core Rimmers cracked up.

"Wassup?" Keith echoed in an exaggerated incredulous tone through his laughter.

"*You* tell us what's up, besides the all *too* obvious!" Derrick playfully sang.

Blushing fiercely through his Hawaiian dark skin and the combined hysterics of the other six Rimmers, Kaleo giggled, "Well, you know how it is. I've been trying for two days! Tory and me have reached an understanding."

Tory walked up behind Kaleo and wrapped his arms around Kaleo's waist, smiling like the cat that just caught and ate the canary.

Checking with his brothers and friends, Prez cackled, "Anyone that did not see this coming since Friday afternoon, please raise your hands." Not a single hand rose. Still blushing, Kaleo chuckled and held Tory's arms. "It's so kewl," Prez softly and sincerely smiled, "we couldn't be happier, for both of you."

"Thanks!" Kaleo and Tory chorused.

Prez said, "Have you got a few minutes? There's a few things I need to talk about that are pretty important."

"It's all right for Tory to hear?" Kaleo confirmed.

Prez nodded, "Absolutely. If what I'd like comes to pass, everyone will know soon enough."

"Come on in," Tory invited and let go of Kaleo. Everyone went into the room and Kaleo closed the door behind them.

Once his team were seated on the beds, Prez said, "This has been bouncing around inside me for two days," and then asked, "Remember Saturday in Utah, when Adam mentioned the sixty-one that died in Montana last week?" Everyone nodded so Prez posed another question, "Is there anyone here that doesn't understand what happened that day?"

Corey was the first to raise his hand, followed by Kaleo and

Tory. Corey offered, "I don't pay attention to most news. I remember last Sunday's newspaper headlines though."

"Okay," Prez said and began pacing to and fro. "To make a long story brief, what basically happened was Clan Short was ambushed by a group known as the Fundamentalist Church of Christ. What started as a rescue operation, turned into a real battle. The UNIT was involved with Clan Short and several other U.S. Military organizations; they all fought to win that battle, but are still working to bring the FCC down. I initially thought it was just one of those crazy United States riots until I actually read about it online. It wasn't a riot but a real battle; a war, if you prefer that word."

Prez paused and asked, "Is everyone with me so far?" When everyone nodded, Prez began pacing around again, saying, "Not until Friday night did I realize that even here in Hawaii, we're not immune from those kinds of wackos; the kind that think kids are to be emotionally or physically abused, to be used for sex or prostitution, that gays, lesbians and transgenders are abhorrent. Now we all know they're here too, right?"

Seeing everyone nodding, Prez paced and rambled; "This is why I was slow to accept Joel's nomination as Director of this division. We're already at war, guys. Right now, while we get ourselves situated, kids are already coming to us, not the police or any other government aid organization. Sooner or later, we're going to be called for a rescue operation. The last thing I want is to see is any one hurt, but I want to echo right now what Cory Short said last week and how I strongly feel: Clan Short Pacific Rim Division is at war. This is why I was so insistent with Adam about having our own division of troops. We are *not* going to wait for those twisted bastards to come to us and catch *us* off guard. We're going to be ready. When Adam or Donnie contact me to set up phaser training, we're goin' to do it, and we all

have to pay attention. If we need extra training, I'll ask for it. I don't expect you to like it; I sure as hell don't like it, but at the same time, I don't want us to ever be caught off guard. Just realize that this is most definitely a war. Be prepared. Learn everything there is to know about a phaser and how to use one effectively."

"Yeah," Mike giggled, "you point the dangerous end towards the bad guys!"

"Thanks for that revelation!" Keith teased.

Prez then briefly outlined what he intended to do as soon as he could the following day, including a phone call to the King. Since it was very late and there were important things to deal with the next day, not the least of which were talking to His Majesty and meeting the Patriarch of Clan Short, Prez called it a night. Everybody said good night and Kaleo walked his fellow Core Rimmers to the door with one hand on the waistband of his boardies and playfully bouncing his eyebrows. Everybody cracked up and walked outside, still giggling.

They had barely started the walk back home when Prez told Keith, "I just wanna check the computer for any last minute messages," and then there was a loud boom followed by what sounded like the rattling of machinery. The entire team and many other UNIT security personnel raced over to the UNIT dorm where the sounds came from. From the basement of that building came a big puff of smoke. Bouncing up the stairs and climbing the safety railings around the basement steps, came a dozen chanting, coughing and screeching chimps. "What in the *hell* happened?" Prez excitedly bellowed above the sounds of the chimps.

One of the chimps, dressed in overalls and grinning widely, explained, "We were designing a new ATV sufficiently capable for

activity on volcanic mountain sides. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!"

"Is everyone all right?" Prez worried.

"Fine," the chimp nodded. He then sighed impatiently and complained, "Engine's trashed though."

While everyone else rolled their eyes and began giggling, Derrick sniggered, "The only active volcanoes are on the big Island of Hawaii. Just an idea, but you could take your project there."

"Thank you!" the chimp happily said. "Every design requires testing and then implementation of reworked designs." Turning slightly to face Prez, the chimp asked, "Director O'Brian, would you have any problem if we followed that recommended course of action?"

"Not at all," Prez giggled. "All I'm worried about is you chimps being happy and healthy."

"Be safe is all we're saying," Keith added to interpret for Prez.

More seriously, Derrick said, "The last thing we want to learn about is any of you chimps maimed or killed, okay, bud?" All the other Core Rimmers nodded their agreement.

"We are all capable of first aid in the event of such a failure," the chimp assured.

Corey wondered, "If any of you guys were hurt, would you need a doctor or a vet?"

"We'd have Daileass transport the injured party directly to Doctor Janet," the chimp responded. "If you'll excuse me now, I will

inform my teammates of the recommended change."

Prez nodded and Keith smiled, "Go ahead." The boys started back to the Hundser's home and Keith turned to Prez yawning, "I hope there are no messages waiting. I'm so totally wiped out."

Mike giggled, "I've been dreaming of ferrets and gorillas; tonight I'll add chimps to the mix."

"You know any control we *thought* we had before yesterday was just an illusion?" Derrick smirked.

"I had heard you and others make that observation before," Prez nodded, and then joked, "Silly me, I thought there could at least be direction to the chaos!"

The boys went inside the house. While Prez and Keith crept quietly upstairs to check the computer, Mike, Derrick, Corey and Drew went down to the basement to get ready for bed. Prez found only one message from Donnie waiting. The UNIT wanted to begin phaser training Tuesday afternoon at three. A second class was scheduled for Wednesday at the same time. Prez replied to the message informing Donnie that those dates and times would be fine.

Keith pulled Prez's face over for a deep kiss, then softly suggested, "Bed time, baby." Immediately Prez locked the computer and they went downstairs to join the nest. Geoff had put places aside for Drew and Corey to be nearby. In a short while, all the lights were off and everyone was sound asleep. Just before dawn, Dee and Richie tip-toed around and over other kids to fall back asleep between their new daddies. Reyes, Jonah and Dillon found their way in the dark to Mike and Derrick. A twisted knot of ferrets were already close by their Shiny Daddies.

A few of the youngest kids woke around seven in the morning.

They went upstairs to use the bathrooms and spend some time with their parents before they went to work. Little by little, more kids woke and came upstairs from the basement. The tweens headed off to the CIC for breakfast. Bruce, John and Nathan followed the mass of kids out of the house. A few minutes before nine in the morning, Jennifer Hundser kissed the little ones goodbye, then was transported by her security to Hawaii Medical Center West. Jim Hundser, Rob Gibbons, Bill Seaver and Carl Seibert were also transported to their places of business.

The last to emerge from the basement were Prez and the remaining Core Rimmers. Mike and Derrick took their boys home for breakfast and showers. Drew and Corey took Geoff upstairs for their first shower at home. While they waited for Drew, Corey and Geoff to finish, Prez and Keith had breakfast. Even though both of their boys had already been fed, Prez shared his cereal with Dee and Keith did the same with Richie. Just as they were putting their bowls in the dishwasher, the front door bell rang.

"I'll get it, Prez," Keith said.

Dee hurried and happily said, "I'll go too, Daddy!"

Opening the door, Keith found a man in his twenties with striking long black hair. "Hi," Keith said, "Can I help you?"

The man politely said, "My name is Derek Tecumseh. I'm from Camp Little Eagle in Orlando."

"Oh!" Keith cheered, "The Clan Short school. Please, come on in." Keith stepped aside and introduced himself and Dee. The older and taller man stepped inside the house.

From the kitchen, Prez hollered, "Who is it, babe?"

Keith replied, "Derek Tecumseh from Camp Little Eagle."

"Sweet!" Prez chuckled. "We can get our schools set up!"

As Prez went towards the entryway and Keith led Derek to the kitchen, the doorbell rang again. Keith and Dee again went to answer it while Prez introduced himself and Richie. At the door, stood seven smaller kids about John's age, give or take a year or two. Four of the kids were wearing black hooded robes, their faces only barely visible. The other three were wearing green Clan Short cloaks.

"Wassup, guys?" Keith asked.

One boy in a green cloak said, "Hi Keith, I'm Jacob Dodds."

"And I'm Jamie Dodds. Good to meet ya, Keith," the next boy in green said.

"Beau Wagner," the third boy in green waved.

"We're here to get Lei'd!" all three boys exclaimed in perfect unison.

Keith chuckled at their performances, "We'll see what we can do about the flowery necklaces. As for the other kind, you're on your own."

Jamie grinned and partially replied, "Oh, we already..."

Jacob continued, "know all about..."

Beau added, "the other kind..."

"and we practice..." Jamie snickered, watching Keith's eyes dart around to each of the three of them.

"whenever we ain't..." Jacob smirked, wondering if Keith would get dizzy and fall over.

"busy with stuff." Beau finished before Keith actually did fall down.

The three boys broke into giggles as they finished their circular reply.

Slapping his own forehead and closing his eyes, Keith muttered weakly, "You're all telepaths, right?"

"No, we only got one brain!" All three giggled in unison.

Noticing that Keith seemed unsteady, Prez came over, smiled at the crew beyond the doorstep and asked, "Keith, are you all right, babe?"

"I will be, just woozy," Keith answered.

Prez asked, "Who do we have here?"

"NO!" Keith quickly shouted. "Don't get them started again! They're Clan Short telepaths; Jamie, Jacob and Beau. I don't even know the other four yet, but if they answer the same way, I'll need to lay down again for a few hours!"

"Well," Prez laughed, "we should just let them all in then!" Looking down at his sons, Prez smiled, "Dee and Richie, help daddy to the living room and sit him down."

Dee and Richie held Keith's hands and led him to the sofa. As the seven kids walked into the house, they each greeted Prez and gave their names; Jacob Dodds, Jamie Dodds, Beau Wagner, Vicky Evans, Jason Evans, Nathan Evans and Riti Evans.

"Why don't y'all have a seat in the living room," Prez pleasantly said.

Drew, Corey and Geoff came down the stairs and stepped into the living room. Prez introduced Derek and the other kids to Drew, Corey and Geoff, then suggested, "If you guys could get everybody comfy, Keith and I can jump in the shower real quick?"

"No problem, bro," Drew nodded. Prez went over to Keith, offering a hand up, while Dee and Richie scooted down and pulled at Keith's other hand.

Corey asked, "Would anyone like something to drink? Soda? Juice? Tea?"

"Ich bin jetzt besser fühlen," Keith sighed as he stood. Then he pulled both boys close and held on tight.

Prez understood but didn't know how and wondered, "Welche Sprache sprichst du?"

"Deutsch," Keith replied. As soon as he finished he wondered, "Wenn die Hölle habe ich Deutsch lernen?"

Mr. T rolled his eyes as he looked at the three young boys trying to appear innocent. "You guys know that you're supposed to warn people," he admonished.

"Who, us?" all three replied in voices dripping with sugar and innocence.

Watching Keith, Dee, Richie and finally Prez climb the stairs, Drew asked, "¿Qué hizo Usted a Keith?" He then quickly covered his mouth and turned wide-eyed to Corey.

"¿Qué le hicieron ellos Dibujó?" Corey excitedly asked. He then gasped, "¡Dios mío!"

"Признавайтесь, мальчики," Mr. T said in a commanding voice.

"But we're innocent!" Jamie said in a voice that implied he'd just misplaced his halo. "We got nothing to confess."

"Dargh," Beau said to Drew.

"Blesio, gaffwy rhyw de?" Jacob added. Jamie merely screeched.

"Tudo bem, isso é dois chás e uma Coca-Cola," Drew summarized, then did a double take at what had come out of his mouth.

Little Geoff looked up and grinned, "Papá, estás hablando divertidamente."

Corey, Drew and Geoff went to the kitchen to prepare trays of drinks and snacks for their guests.

What was happening in the Hundser's home was happening all over the Ewa Beach main base. Mike and Derrick came out of their bathroom with their boys and the first words out of Mike's mouth happened to come out in Italian. Bruce, John and Nathan Hayes were at the CIC dining room when conversations suddenly shifted from one language to another with ease. Even the staff chefs, doctors, housekeepers and landscapers were affected. Naturally, being able to speak one previously foreign language was shocking enough, but understanding and speaking multiple languages was exciting. A few of the languages shared by Beau, Jamie and Jacob included French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Welsh. The most thrilling things occurred when John, Bruce, Nathan,

Kaleo, and Tory left the CIC dining room and discovered they could understand the dialects of all the birds in the trees surrounding the compound. Then a distant dog off base was heard barking, "Warning! My den! My pack! Go away!"

Prez, Keith, Dee and Richie hurried downstairs from their shower as John came into the house with Bruce and Nathan. Before John could say a word, Keith held up his index finger and forcefully warned, "ENGLISH, JOHN!"

John whined, "¿Pero por qué?"

"Because seven kids I never met just walked in the house already knowing my name," Keith exclaimed. "Our family is of German descent, but we haven't spoke German in four generations. Still, it just came flowing out of my mouth like I had a friggin' clue! Enough is too much!"

"Oh, okay," John grumbled through his grin.

Giggling at the insanity of it all, Prez went into the living room wondering, "Who's responsible?"

Mr. T smiled but shook his head sadly, explaining, "Jacob, Jamie and Beau enjoy a certain level of pandemonium."

"That's not fair!" the three boys playfully complained.

"Ah, but it's true!" Mr. T grinned.

"Isn't that one of the reasons we're here?" Jamie reminded.

"Warnings would've been considerate."

"There are over a hundred people though!" Jacob stated.

Beau nodded, saying, "Warning a hundred times or even a dozen gets real old, real fast."

"Now there are only the five missing adults left to finish the job," Jamie smiled.

John came in the room and said, "I thought it was fun!" Looking up at Keith and Prez, John explained, "Go outside and listen to the animals. We can understand them too." Before John finished speaking, all four Evans kids got up from the sofa and went to him. John smiled at the sudden attention and said, "Hi, how's it goin'?"

Drew, Corey and Geoff returned to the room with drinks and snacks. Keith quickly introduced the four Evans' and the other four still seated to everyone.

Eying Riti and the hump on his back, John explained, "Sorry, I just don't feel like you're in pain, but you look like you could be." John pointed at the hump saying, "That's gotta hurt."

Riti giggled. "They're wings!" the little eight year old said from within his hooded robe.

John's jaw dropped and he wondered, "Can you fly too?"

Riti nodded, "Alla time. It's my favorite way of getting about."

"That must be lots of fun!" John excitedly cheered. "I was in a helicopter the other day. It was great but flying on your own, without a machine? That must be awesome!"

Meanwhile, the other small black robed and hooded figure had her head turned towards John. There seemed to be something intense about the poise of the girl. Vicky murmured, "Powerful. Very

powerful. Definitely empathic, Jace."

One of the larger figures nodded his head, "I agree. Are there any other talents he's figured out?"

Blushing bright red, John looked up at the slightly taller boy and giggled, "Umm... none that I know of."

Jason nodded at the others, and all at once they lowered their hoods. Jason's open and smiling face was framed by his rich brown, curly hair; and in the light through the window, it seemed to glow faintly red as well. His blue-green eyes sparkled as he looked down at John.

The boy standing next to him grinned as well, his bright blond hair shimmering in the light of the room. "I can feel he's nearly ready, love," Nathan said as he linked hands with Jason.

Vicky nodded with a smile, her green eyes and flame red/auburn hair mesmerizing the ten year old John. "Yup," she added.

Riti caused the greatest stir, however, for he not only lowered his hood, but threw off his robe altogether. He was stark naked beneath. That in itself was not a big surprise for kids living on Hawaii; but his long webbed toes, long webbed fingers, blue-black fine hair and blue-black feathered triple jointed wings did cause a stir.

"Oh, WOW!" John yelled.

Riti played it up for all he was worth. He held John's gaze with his left eye while turning his right to look at Prez, "Is he always this excitable?"

Seeing two eyes move in opposite directions, Prez fell to the

sofa in shock.

"Oh," Riti giggled as he turned his head almost one-hundred-eighty degrees to look at Jason who was standing behind him. "They are all excitable."

"Only when alien bird-brains like you freak them out, Reet," Jason giggled as he started to tickle the winged boy's ribs.

Bruce moved forward and ran a hand over Riti's nearest wing. "Oh... oh kewl! Could you take me up with you? Just a little?" he asked excitedly.

Riti grinned and put both hands under Bruce's armpits and lifted. "Oh, yeah. You're light enough," he said. Then he looked at John, who was hopping from foot to foot in barely suppressed energy. He lifted John the same way. "You're light enough too. I just need to get my harness, then I can take you one at a time."

"I never manage to understand," Vicky smiled, "how someone weighing only thirty-five pounds can lift kids heavier than me!"

"I'm stronger than I look," Riti giggled before he French kissed his girlfriend. "And you make me feel as strong as He-Man," he added with a loving smile. The whole room broke out in "Awwwww! Sweet!" type exclamations.

"Now? Can we go now?" Bruce excitedly squealed with joy.

Jason laughed as Riti called out, "Draco! I need my flight harness, please!"

"Scaring the locals already, Feather-head?" came an unknown AI's voice from the speakers in the room.

Prez looked about quickly, "How? Who was that and how did he manage to get access to our network? I thought only Daileass could do that!"

Nathan looked at him and said with a sunny smile, "We're VSO, Vulcan Special and Covert Ops. We are the Dragon Division and it is our task to protect all of Clan Short. To that effect, we have access everywhere. Draco's the VSO AI"

"Not to mention he has the cutest transistors this side of the Beta Quadrant!" Daileass giggled.

"And yes, they are an item as well!" Nathan finished with a giggle.

"So... you're NOT Clan Short yourselves?" Keith asked as he moved closer.

"Yes," Jason said, "we are Clan Short as well. But being VSO is different. Cory Short has no authority over me as Division Leader for the Dragon Division of the VSO, but as Clan Short, he is my Patriarch on Clan matters. I'm also a Clan Patriarch - technically second in command of the Clan in Cory's absence. That is, in this case anyway. Joel was given that role for the weekend, but..." he trailed off with a serious look at Prez.

Prez nodded, but John groaned as he clutched his belly. "Can someone *please* tell me what's wrong with Joel?" he desperately pleaded.

Taking hold of John's shoulder, Keith softly said, "All we know is that Joel was hurt badly soon after he returned home. He's doing better and spending time with his family recovering."

John nodded and wiped tears from his eyes, but didn't speak for

almost a minute. Finally, he glanced at each of his brothers saying, "You've gotta stop doing this. You're not protecting me any more; in some ways you're making it worse because I've felt there was something. Then my imagination runs wild trying to figure out what the something is."

"I'm really sorry, bro," Keith sincerely apologized.

Drew added, "It's been our job since the day you were born."

"Since before I moved in it was my job to make Keith's job easier too," Prez admitted.

"Yeah, well stop, okay? If I can sense something's wrong, you might as well tell me," John muttered as a transporter beam dumped a harness in Riti's hands.

"Okay," the winged boy grinned as he put the harness on himself, "Who's first?"

"Me! MEMEMEMEMEMEMEMEMEMEE!" Bruce giggled as he reached up and laid his hand on John's mouth to stop John from saying the same thing.

Riti giggled, "Okay, outside we go."

"I've got to see this!" Prez and Keith said in unison. All those in the room followed the Bird-boy and his two overly excited minions onto the grassy area just outside the door.

Riti looked about, then sighed happily. "Just like Orlando; like home... mmm... okay, come here, Bruce."

Bruce bounced over with a wide grin on his face.

"First, you need to know that clothes are gonna get in the way.

You don't have a problem being naked, do you?" Riti asked seriously.

Bruce giggled and quickly stripped himself. "Nuh huh. Nope, I'm kewl with being naked."

Riti grinned and blinked his slightly oversized eyes at the cute boy in front of him. "Sexy too," he giggled, winking at Vicky, who was watching with a lot of interest.

Bruce blushed deeply, but was soon thinking about the airborne fun he'd be having. Riti pulled Bruce over and positioned him with Bruce's back to his chest. After snapping the harness in place and tightening it properly, Riti asked, "Comfy?"

"Yeah!" Bruce yelled with nervous expectation. He had the same fluttery feeling in the pit of his stomach as just before going on a rollercoaster ride. "Oh, yeah!"

Riti reached down and showed Bruce the last part of the harness, "You need to lift your feet into this and press down; that way you won't throw me off balance in the air."

"Okay, what do I do with my arms?" Bruce asked as he studied the lower harness.

"Whatever you like, but we'll go faster if you cross them and hold your shoulders with your hands," Riti answered.

"Kewl!"

Riti unfurled his wings and flapped them a few times, then he jumped ten feet straight up. While hovering there, Riti helped Bruce to get his feet into the lower harness. "Ready?" Riti asked with a smile.

"Yup yup yup!"

And they were off, swooping around the Ewa Beach Main Compound, and causing quite a stir with the other Hawaiian Clan kids in the area.

As they dove down towards where Keith and Prez and company were watching, Bruce let rip a war-whoop. Riti brought himself to a dead stop about two feet from the ground, and asked Prez, "Is it okay to go off and find some thermals? Bruce will be safe, I promise."

"Oh, please, please, please?" Bruce begged.

Prez giggled and pointed north towards the mountains.

And Riti was off like a bullet, Bruce crying out with excitement all the way.

And so it was that the newspapers, the following day had reports of two naked, flying boys being sighted over Ewa Beach, Honolulu, and various other areas of Oahu Island.

John waited patiently; well, as patiently as any ten year old can when there's a marvelous adventure incoming. He sipped on his cola as the increasingly larger group of kids waited for Riti and Bruce to return. "Where are they? Do you see 'em?" John asked as he scanned the northern skies.

Giggles from the rooftop made everyone spin around, only to see Bruce and Riti gliding down towards them. Just as they landed, Riti unsnapped the harness and Bruce tumbled to the ground, a tired but happy mess of an eight-year-old who started babbling a mile a minute to his new older brother Keith about his amazing trip.

John watched as Riti guzzled down a drink, and asked, "You

need to rest first?"

"Nope. I'm good. I saw a good mountain to the south on the larger island. You fancy a visit?" Riti asked. He giggled as John was already sending his clothes flying in all directions.

"YEAH!" John cried out happily.

Riti looked John over, then giggled harder. "Yep, you're excited, alright!"

John looked down and blushed. "It always does that when I go flying," he whined.

"No one'll see from up there," Riti giggled as the rest of the kids gathered began chuckling.

It took no time at all to get John fitted into the harness, and then they were off like a shot.

Flying fast over the deep blue waters of the Pacific, Riti had never felt so free since on Earth. John was babbling happily about the ships far below, and about how neat it felt to have the air rushing over his body with nothing but a pair of wings keeping him up. Riti pressed a kiss against John's head and whispered, "Wanna go lower and draw patterns in the sea as we fly?"

"Really? KEWL!"

Riti took that as a definite agreement. And so, laughing and cheeping happily, he dove down towards the sea. Less than a foot and a half above the water, he leveled out and John started trailing his hands in the warm waters of the Pacific. "This is so KEWL!" John giggled as the splashing he was causing soaked him. Riti giggled

more.

A sailing boat with a young family on it passed to their left, and both boys laughed at the shocked expressions on the faces of the young couple. The small five year old boy started yelling about angels and waving madly at them. John waved back, but soon the boat was far behind.

As they approached Hawai'i Island itself, Riti raised himself up higher and higher, before starting to ride the wicked thermals that the active volcano was producing. John had never enjoyed something so much in all his life. They spiraled up high, and just before they started to run out of warm air and even breathable air, Riti would dive back down at high speed. This would cause John to squeal out in excited terror; the same type of terror a truly scary rollercoaster would produce, before yelling "AGAIN! AGAIN!"

Over and over they did this, before Riti decided a nice drink was in order. They landed on a beachfront holiday area, and from Riti's only item of clothing - a utility belt, he produced a credit chip to pay for some drinks, a sticky bun each, and a nice bar of chocolate with peanuts. (Riti liked peanuts.)

John's nakedness wasn't an issue, simply as there were holiday makers all over this area, and most of the kids were in the same state. It was Riti that became the issue. His wings drew a lot of attention, even from some Starfleet personnel there. The Lo'Garn were still an unknown to most of the Fleet, even after the Dragon Division had linked up with Clan Short.

"Why don't they know your people, Reet?" John asked as they started making a more leisurely return trip to John's home.

Riti smiled, "My home world is over ten thousand light years

from the Federation. There's only a few of us here. It's a very long story, but it'll be on the Clan files if you wanna read it."

"Okay," John nodded. Then he felt something in the pit of his stomach. Something was wrong, and it was very close by. "Reet, down there; there's a kid in danger!"

"I see him," Riti said, his voice hard. His more acute eyesight could clearly make out a small sailing yacht with three people on board; a man, a woman and a small boy. The man was raising his hand over and over and bringing down his fist onto the young child, while the woman watched impassively. As Riti went into a dive, he saw the man throw the sobbing boy at the woman, who started to beat him too, as well as cruelly pull on the child's testicles. "Tuck your arms to your chest. I'm about to show them the meaning of vengeance," Riti snarled. He took out a small phaser from his belt and started firing at the two adults.

The phaser was on tight-beam mode, and on a high burn setting. Meaning, that the beam passed right through the man's feet, one at a time, and then through his hands as he fell to the deck of the yacht. The woman received the same treatment. As Riti landed and unhooked John, the little boy, no older than four years old or so, peeked out from behind his arms. When the 'lightning' from the sky had started, and the two adults started screaming, the child had fallen to the deck himself and covered his head with his arms in complete terror.

John reached him first, and drew him into his arms, "Shhh... you're okay, now. We're from Clan Short, and we won't let anything bad happen to you again. Shhhhh." John sat down and held the sobbing child on his lap, then looked at Riti, "What should we do now?"

"We' will do nothing, bro. I'll deal with this under VSO rules. I'll get Draco to beam you and the boy back to your base. We can have more flying later," Riti said, his eyes hard as agates.

"Umm... okay. Uh, Reet? I can see pictures in my head. I think it's from this boy's mind. What's going on?" John asked as he held the child tighter.

Riti smiled briefly, "That's telepathy. Focus on the pictures and tell me what you see."

John scrunched his eyes closed and his forehead crinkled. "I... these are his parents, but they've always hurt him. They like making him... oh, sick! He's a toy to them, mostly the woman. They're sadists and.... ergh!"

"That's enough," Riti said firmly. "Draco! Beam John and the boy back to Jason and Vicky."

"Okay," Draco answered, and the two little kids vanished.

Riti looked down at the still screaming and maimed adults, "You will regret what you've done, for a long, *long* time."

Sitting naked in the grass, John appeared directly in front of his older brothers and Mr. T, with the tiny rescued boy on his lap and clinging to him for all he was worth. John had the definite impression that this boy was not about to let go any time soon, either.

"Oookay," Prez droned and then whistled. "You leave with Riti and transport back with a strange kid? What's happening, bro?"

John mutely shook his head and simply cuddled the boy closer. His eyes seemed haunted.

Jason frowned slightly, then looked deep into both the tiny boy's mind and into John's. "Oh, I see," he muttered. He looked at Prez and the others, "John and Riti just rescued this little one from some abusive parents. Riti is, uh... dealing with the two adults now."

"Oh!" Keith murmured, then shuddered, for the look in Jason's eye as he'd said 'dealing' was anything but gentle. "What's the kid's story?" he asked instead.

Jason passed onto Vicky all that he had seen. "His name's Dewi," Vicky said. "He and his parents were visiting from Wales, U.K. Looks like the two arseholes won't be going back there."

"They'll be going back, in mason jars if they're lucky," Jamie stated flatly, obviously not pleased.

"How old's he?" John whispered in between pressing kisses into the crying boy's hair.

Kneeling down next to John and rubbing the little boy's back, Vicky murmured, "He's four... and a half. Can't forget the half, can we, sweetie?"

Dewi looked up and blinked at her through watery eyes. "I'm a big boy," he insisted weakly.

"And a brave boy too," Vicky whispered, and then she kissed his cheek.

"Yeah," John murmured as Dewi increased the strength of his hug.

"What you doing to Mammy and Daddy?" Dewi asked, his eyes traveling from face to face before him. "Please, don't hurt my Mammy and Daddy. I's was bein' bad. I's was sick 'cos boat rocked. I's bad, not

thems."

Vicky closed her eyes to hold in her temper, but Jason winced at the increased 'blue' language his 'innocent' little sister was sending out to all who could hear.

"You weren't a bad boy for bein' sick, Dewi," John whispered, his eyes beginning to leak tears.

Dewi turned and gazed thoughtfully at him. "But I's always bad. I's always bein' pun'shed, 'cos I's bad. Daddy says so. He says I's need to be's a man, so I's gotta get the bad outta me."

John didn't know what to say, so he sent an appealing look at Keith and Prez.

"No one should be hurt like that, sweetie," Vicky said as she continued to rub the small boy's back. "Bad boys and girls should learn to be good, but no one, not even Mammies and Daddies, should hit them and make them do dirty things."

"But! Daddy says a real man's gotta make a woman feels good, so I's was being a good boy when I's was lickin' Mammy in her spec'al place," he murmured.

Needing to release some anger, Prez turned and entered the house so that he could scream some profanities into the air without startling the hurting little boy.

Vicky gently cupped the small boy's face in her hands and allowed her eyes to glow out bright blue, bathing Dewi's face with a subtle azure glow. "Dewi, you are a good boy, but your Mammy and Daddy were being bad."

"No they wasn't! I was! I's bad!"

"No, sweetheart. Good Mammies and Daddies don't do that to their children," Vicky insisted.

"Don' believes you," Dewi muttered stubbornly. "Proves it!"

So Vicky did, by grasping her brother's mind and linking them together to project her life and her brother, Jason's life into the mind of the little boy. As the rolling pictures came to an end, she whispered, "Our Mammy and Daddy were good. They made mistakes like anyone does, but they never hurt us. The most they did when we were really bad was smack our bums and send us to bed early."

Dewi opened and closed his mouth over and over, unable to comprehend the difference between Jason and Victoria's happy childhood with his own hell. "I... I..." he trembled. Then, with his heart breaking, he wailed and cuddled back in to John's chest.

Just about this time, Riti appeared via a transporter beam. He took one look at the sobbing child, then glanced at Jason and tapped his head.

Jason took a look and saw what Riti had done as punishment and went a little green in the face. "DAMN, dude! Owwie!"

Jacob grinned. "I like that. Can I borrow it, bird-bro?"

"No," Riti answered Jacob. "I don't want you doing what I did. Besides, you're not VSO. You're not allowed to go quite as far as us with punishments under standard Vulcan law."

"What did you do?" Nathan asked Riti softly.

"Let's just say you can call him 'Chum boy' from now on," Riti

smiled evilly.

Beau grinned. "It's only illegal if someone finds out."

"And it fit soooo well," Jamie added.

Nathan Evans glanced at Beau and Jamie and gave them a withering glare before giggling to himself. All three of the Terrors looked at each other innocently before nodding their heads in unison.

Vicky, Nathan, Riti and Jason all said "No!" at the same time. The three Evans boys grabbed a Terror each and began tickling them mercilessly. Vicky just watched and pointed out places her brothers were missing on the Terrors.

Once the group had calmed down and reentered the house, they found Preston still swearing impetuously. Keith, Mike and Derrick got Prez under control, then they passed around drinks and took a seat in the living room with their guests. Riti and John spent a fair bit of time tempting little Dewi into drinking his, and eventually managed to get a few giggles out of the tiny cherub.

After calming down somewhat, Prez went over to Jason. "Dude, I'm just wondering; you said the VSO guard Clan Short. Why haven't we seen any of your guys here yet?"

Jason grinned, "You wouldn't because the AI's see and hear everything. What is of concern to the VSO are persons that might try to infiltrate and cause damage to Clan Short from within a Clan compound. There are operatives in place that will act as covert protection when you are outside of the monitoring area of the AI's video and audible monitoring range. In addition, they will deal with external threats that are intending to become internal threats to your Division."

Vicky decided a distraction might be good. "Keith?"

"Uh, yeah, Vic?"

"What would you say if I said you and Prez are hot-to-trot, and Riti and I would like a tumble in a bedroom with you?"

That was the kind of outrageously silly sexual remark to set Prez off giggling and then laughing. While Prez stomped his feet and fell back into the sofa hysterical, Keith smiled widely and answered, "I guess that means, some other time but not today, thanks."

Jason moved closer to Keith, then gently guided him out to the hallway and whispered, "Has anyone told you that John might be N-Gen?"

Keith answered, "Yeah, Juan did when he was here. It's been worrying us for a few days now, but they all told us it'll work out fine in the end."

Jason smiled, "Well, yes, it will. We've not lost anyone yet, but..."

"Lost anyone?" Keith exclaimed in a choked whisper.

Jason raised his hand to grip the older boy's shoulder, "Don't worry, Keith. Let me explain. When someone starts the turn, their power inside themselves increases off the scale. Their minds, however; are not set up to deal with that increase. It's like crossing a bridge when the bridge isn't even built. So, we need help. I was the first, and if I'd not had that help for another hour or so, I'd have died. So far, every N-Gen we've come across was turned in more than enough time."

Keith nodded, but then asked, "Does it hurt?"

"Like all hell has landed in your head, yes. When you start the turn by pushing yourself over your brain's, or mind's limit, you get a bitch of a headache that slowly gets worse and worse," Jason answered quietly.

"No way," Keith hissed. "I don't want my brother going through that! No way!"

Jason locked his eyes with Keith and said, "I could do nothing for Joel. But in seeing in his mind little John, there might be something I can do for him. That is why I brought five other N-Gens with me, plus Riti who is linked to Viccy. There is something I can try, but it has never been attempted before. One way or the other, he'll be an N-Gen, but I cannot say he won't feel some pain. All of us did to one degree or another. But my idea might work to do this painlessly. Joel would like that," Jason finished, his eyes filling with tears.

Wide-eyed and concerned about the seriousness of the situation, Keith said, "It would be as close to a hundred percent safe as is possible? I'll be honest, if my mom were to ever discover I had anything to do with something that hurt John, I'd have to move to the highest mountain of Tibet. Prez would insist on coming with me and then this division is shot to hell."

"No doctor would say a simple tonsillectomy is one hundred percent safe," Jason replied. "This would be like that, but bad tonsils won't kill you. John turning without assistance would be fatal if not helped in time. As I said, we haven't lost one yet, but we've had some really close calls. For John's own safety, I'd rather try to take him to N-Gen while he's relatively calm and there's a bunch of support around than have to try to do it when he's teetering on the brink and there may not be anybody available to help. Because I can assure you,

he will go N-Gen; the only question is when."

Keith nodded, then went to the living room and called Drew into the hallway. John was already eying his brothers suspiciously, but was still busy with Dewi. Keith briefly described the situation for Drew.

"Mom would go absolutely insane if anything happened," Drew agreed. "We'd all have to move to the furthest corner of the Earth to escape!"

"The alternative is far worse though," Keith recognized. "I think it's the best option."

Drew nodded and looked at Jason, "Do a real good job though, Jace. The alternative is having Daileass transport us all far away before five this afternoon."

Keith then went to get Prez. Prez excused himself and joined his brothers while John squinted at the activity. Vicky, Riti, and Nathan Evans surrounded John to assure him that everything would turn out for his benefit. Prez considered the situation carefully and agreed, "Whether we take action immediately or not, we're aware of it now. In my opinion, nowhere on Earth would be safe. We'd have to join Starfleet and remain as far away from this planet as is possible. We're agreed then; we do this now, rather than chance a bad scene?"

Keith and Drew both nodded. All four boys returned to the living room.

By this point, John had passed Dewi over to Bruce's arms, and was standing with his arms crossed. His face was stern and filled with a stubbornness only a ten-year-old could pull off. "Well?" he asked pointedly. "What are you going to hide from me this time? I need to be made a girl, maybe? Or is the world ending and I have to stay

behind to sacrifice myself to save all humankind? What?"

Keith couldn't help but snort out a brief laugh, while Drew cocked his head thoughtfully to the side, "You know, I always wanted a little sister. This might work!"

Still naked from his flight with Riti, John instinctively cupped his privates with both hands. "Nuh uh! No way!"

Drew cracked up laughing, and Keith joined him laughing more loudly. Prez decided that the worried look on his younger brother's face was not quite as funny as Drew and Keith thought, and so explained the situation to John and those gathered there. Once he'd finished, John was now sitting again and looking at Prez with his mouth hanging open. Prez then said, "It's up to you, bro. You can wait, or you can go with Jason's idea now. I can't and won't force you. It's gotta be your choice."

John closed his mouth and looked around at his brothers for a moment. His voice trembling ever so slightly, he said, "I don't want it to hurt, and I don't want to die. I want to get it done now." Then he looked down at himself and asked meekly, "Can I put my shorts on now, please?"

Prez laughed and tossed the boy his underwear and board shorts. Vicky giggled, "Owwww! It's nice scenery, though!"

John was in his clothes in a heartbeat, blushing as he warily watched Vicky. The eight-year-old girl didn't move, but her eyes had certainly been watching everything closely.

Once properly attired, John sat back down and asked, "What do I do?"

Grinning at his sister's antics, Nathan Evans said, "First, don't

worry. What will happen to begin with is that we'll all link our minds together and draw you into that group. You've got the skills at *least* of a normal empath or telepath right now, so you'll actually find it kinda kewl. Then we'll explain what we're doing. Most of this is going to be on us."

"How long will this take?" Prez asked seriously. "I expect Cory Short here any time, now."

Jason smiled, "Inside our minds? Hours, maybe. In the real world, a minute or so. Not long for you, Prez."

Prez, Keith and Drew uncertainly grunted, "Huh?"

"Thoughts operate on a faster level than reality," Jason explained as his eyes lit up. The green in his blue-green eyes seemed to be swallowed by the azure blue; even the whites of his eyes changed.

This happened as well to Vicky, Nathan Evans, Riti, the Double Js and Beau.

"Will I get to do that too?" John excitedly asked as he looked from glowing eye to glowing eye.

"Yes," all seven replied in one voice. "You will never need a flashlight again!"

"KEWL!"

Keith muttered in Prez's ear, "Oh, boy!"

"Are you ready, John Hundser?" came the seven fold choral voice from the glowing eyed kids.

John nodded, "Yes."

"Then we shall begin."

John opened his eyes and looked around. He was on a beach somewhere and before him were his favorite drink, fruit punch, and a plate of Wheat-Thins. "Mmm," He giggled, then started to snack.

Behind him, giggles could be heard. With a mouth full of his snacks, John turned to see all seven of the N-Gens sitting right behind him. "Having fun?" Riti asked with a gentle smile.

After swallowing his mouthful, John nodded, "Yeah! What is this place?"

"Your mind," Jamie giggled.

Jacob continued, "and it's..."

"Kinda kewl!" Beau finished.

John looked about the beach. "This is my mind? Really?"

"Yes," Vicky smiled. "All of us have a special place in our heads. You are most at peace when you think of the sun, sand and sea. So this is what your mind will be like when you come inside to think or be at peace."

John nodded seriously and continued to munch on his wheat-thins.

Jason moved closer and drew John into a loose hug, "Okay, little guy, first I want to show you what we're aiming for. Then, me, Nath' and Vicky will start our bit with the three terrible triplets..."

"We..."

"... are not..."

"...triplets!"

"No, but you're as close as triplets," Nath' giggled.

"But that..."

"... would be..."

"... incest!"

"Well, keeping it in the family is best!" Vicky giggled, causing the Double Js and Beau to poke their fingers in their mouths and pretend to puke.

John nearly choked on his munchies as he laughed, making Jason hammer lightly on his back to help him breathe. "You won't pass out, but your thoughts can become a reality if you're not careful," Jason explained to the red-faced and laughing boy.

John took a long swig of his drink and sighed. With a smile, he said, "Okay. So you and them," he pointed at Riti, Nath' and Vicky, "will do one thing. What are the three insane ones gonna do?"

Jason grinned as John received a triple raspberry from the three insulted yet giggling boys. "Okay, watch this," Jason said as he waved his hand.

In the air before them all, an image of a canyon appeared. On one side was John. Then, a bridge formed and linked both sides of the canyon, and John seemed to exist on both sides at once. "What happened with me," Jason explained, "and with Nath' and Vicky was that our power was such that we could exist across this canyon, but

our minds hadn't developed to the point where we had the bridge to cross. Or, you could think about a car; our engine was a jet engine in the body of a Ford. The body cannot hold it. So, the Mikyvis, Levi and his parents, came to help us in the past."

John nodded as he studied the image.

"What I'm going to do, and I will let you know now, this is not something an N-Gen has done before, so we will do this slowly and carefully; is build the bridge for you before your power ups to the level of a jet engine. While I do that, with Vicky and Nath', Riti will act as a power dump to ground us. Jamie, Jacob and Beau will be watching, so that they can do this themselves in the future. They already know how to do this to someone who's already dangling off the canyon as I was, but they want to learn a 'Gentle Transformation' as well, and I think it's a good idea. Once I'm ready with the bridge, Vicky and Nath' will withdraw from me to get you to go into overdrive. Once you are, Jamie, Jacob and Beau will start rearranging your mind to operate as an N-Gen."

"While you and Riti hold the bridge in place? Or the Jet Plane body?" John asked, still studying the image.

"That's right," Jason smiled as he ruffled the boy's hair. "So, tell us when you're ready, and we'll begin."

John took another long drink. Then he asked, "Will it hurt?"

Jason hissed a breath through his teeth. "Well, it won't be like when I transformed, no. Definitely not. You... well, you might feel a stretching of your mind, like when you overuse a muscle? Like an ache, I'd imagine. Then again, if we get this perfect, maybe nothing at all. I cannot promise 'no' discomfort, but I will promise - you won't be in pain and definitely not agony as me and my bro and sis went

through."

John nodded, "But if I said not now, and waited, it *will* happen and I *will* be in a lot of pain. And if you guys don't get to me in time, I could die. That's right, isn't it?"

Jason nodded seriously.

"Then a little stretching won't be a problem," John smiled bravely. "Thank you for doing this."

Jason hugged him. "I saw you in Joel's mind, and you're special to my brother and to I-Cheya. That makes you special to us. Joel would like us to do this, I'm sure. He really likes you a lot."

"Really? We didn't talk a lot when he was here."

"But he hugged you a lot, right?" Vicky asked with a smile.

"Well... yeah," John giggled.

"Sometimes actions speak louder than words," Jason said. "You were hugged the most by Joel, which means there's something about you that made Joel feel the most comfortable. He loves you, so we would do this even if we didn't know you. Now that we have met you, we love you as well, just for yourself. You're an amazing boy, and I sense you're going to do great things to help the Clan, and your big brothers. They are going to need you more than they realize."

Pride rushed into his heart, and John suddenly felt an echo of peace at that last statement. "Okay. I'm ready," he said softly.

At first, John felt nothing other than a tickling at the edges of his mind. He saw the twins and Beau darting their eyes around quickly as they followed something he himself could not see. He giggled as the

tickling became greater.

Then, as if a doorway opened, he saw a pathway before him; glowing azure blue just like the eyes of the N-Gens. "Is this the bridge?" he whispered softly.

No word answered him, but a feeling of confirmation swept through his being.

The beach and everything around him fell away and he seemed to only exist on this path of azure power. None of the others were now visible. Then, next to him on either side, Vicky and Nath' appeared.

"What do I do now?" he asked.

The answer he had was a pressure on his mind. Then, "Push back," Nath' ordered.

John didn't quite know what he meant, but instinctively he hardened his mind against the pushing sensation. From Vicky's side, another feeling of pressure started, and he started pushing back. Once he felt the pressure lessen, he smiled at them. They smiled back and then the pressure increased again. "More," Vicky ordered.

On and on this went, with John getting his shield up to push back until he couldn't feel the pressure, but then once he had held it for a moment, the pressure increased again. It was not so much to hurt him, but to make him stretch himself to hold equal pressure back. He felt what Jason had warned him about, a slight ache as if he was doing weight training or pushups, but he wouldn't even say it was unpleasant. It felt kinda good, he admitted to himself as he found himself holding his own against the increasing power of two N-Gen minds.

"Move..."

"...over..."

"...the bridge," came the triplicate orders from behind him.

Without turning, John started obeying the Double J's and Beau and started walking. Vicky and Nath' walked with him, but the pressure was no longer increasing. It was normal now.

With each step he took, the bridge became more and more solid; John felt his mind expanding with every footstep. Room upon room seemed to open in his mind, and his power seemed to fill the spaces around him.

He opened his eyes on the beach of the calm part of his mind, and looked around himself. Puzzled, he asked, "What now?"

Jason formed a mirror with his mind and held it before John's face.

John looked then squealed out in joy.

His eyes, normally light brown, were now washed out in an azure blue glow of his own power.

Beau was further down the beach with the other four building sandcastles. The Double J's did their Clan duty by giving new telepaths their official Vulcan Legal training on the use and responsibility of their power. "So, my telepathy is always on? I'll always read people's minds?" John asked as he sat with the Double J's.

Jacob smiled, "Yes, but you learn to point the 'sight' of your telepathy to just about the heads of those around you."

"That way, you hear a murmuring, not their thoughts," Jamie added.

"You're not speaking like you normally do," John giggled.

Jacob winked, "We can speak normally, but most times we like teasing others by twin or triplet speak!"

John laughed. "Okay, so if I pointed my power out normally, I'd only hear surface thoughts?"

"Yes," Jamie answered. "To read minds and go deeper, like memories, you have to actively scan. All other times, it's passive."

"What about empathy? That's what I've always felt and had," John asked curiously.

Jamie giggled, "That's different. Vicky will show you that one. Now, back to the rules for scanning a criminal."

A little later, John was hugging Vicky as she and Riti finished showing him the basics of his N-Gen style empathy. "What you do with it now is up to you. Like Jace and the Double J's gave you the basics for telepathy, we've shown you the basics for empathy."

Riti added, "It's like teaching someone the alphabet. The story they write once they know how to read and spell is then up to them. Same for you. Each N-Gen is the same, yet each N-Gen is different. The Double J's are practically locked telepaths. Sammy, you've not met him yet, is a pre-cog and an empath in the main, but his other powers do get used some now. Everyone is unique, yet also the same. You'll learn stuff and discover stuff that the others haven't, and then you can show and teach them. Same for the stuff we learn."

"But not all at once, no?" John asked wisely.

"Nope," Jason said as he came to join them. "It's always good to let you grow your power on the basics for a while before we teach you the tricks we picked up."

John nodded with understanding. "So, what's next?"

"Well, Beau and Nath' want to show you telekinesis. Beau surprised us the other day. He's a very powerful T.K. Go on, cute stuff, go have fun. That's the real fun power to learn so you can prank your big bros!" Vicky giggled.

John bounced up and ran over to the waiting twelve- and ten-year-old. Soon thereafter, sand balls, sand pyramids and sandcastles were hovering about the beach.

"The force..."

"...is strong with..."

"...this one!" Jamie and Jacob giggled as Jason found himself hoisted into the air and dunked unceremoniously into the sea.

Just before leaving the union of their minds, John asked, "What about this pre-cog thing? Riti mentioned it, but none of you have said anything about it."

Jason answered, "Because none of us can control it. Yet, anyway. Sammy uses it the most, but even he cannot control it on a whim. It's more a feeling that a certain action is going to be right or wrong. Or something is coming, like a flash image. It just happens. It's why I was very sure I could move you to N-Gen without hurting you. If you're the one to find a way to control it, please tell the rest of

us," he finished with a giggle.

"I will," John promised seriously, then he hugged each of them in turn. Giggling, he said, "I'm gonna prank my brothers good!"

"Oh dear," Riti murmured, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, "what have we unleashed?"

The beach faded away and they all opened their eyes on the living room in Prez' house. Prez and the others were looking a little worried, and Keith huffed, "You were gone for three minutes! You said it would only take a minute!"

"Oops," Jason giggled. "Well to us it seemed like a full day, so that's a fairly good going!"

Prez moved close to John, who still had his eyes closed, and touched his little brother's shoulder. "You okay?" he asked with concern, for the boy seemed to be sitting rigidly.

His eyes still closed, John shook his head. "No, I'm not okay," he muttered.

Then slowly, John opened his eyes and they radiated out in bright blue power. "I am GREAT!" he yelled out, "PHENOMENAL COSMIC POWERS!" His voice echoed and reverberated around the room. All the lights flashed, the chairs and sofas bounced around, and the mugs on the coffee table danced.

Then everything became still.

"In a cute, itty-bitty body!" John finished with an irresistible grin as his eyes returned to their normal light brown color.

Everyone in the room from Derek Tecumseh, the eldest, to

Kokaku Kidotai, the youngest, found John's comical cartoon reference hysterical and cracked up laughing.

Prez growled playfully and pulled John up and into his arms, "That's revenge for the custard attack last week, I take it?"

"Partly," John giggled evilly.

While everyone was still laughing there was a knock at the front door. Passing John over to Keith, Prez went to answer it. He opened the door to find four more kids, two of which he easily recognized from the Internet and newspaper article photographs. Already in an exuberant playful mood, Prez smiled and loudly greeted the two he recognized. "Cory and Sean Short, as I live and breathe! Welcome to Paradise and The Rimmers' Funny Farm!" Stepping outside and offering his hand, Prez pulled Cory into a tight hug briefly, then did the same to Sean.

The strawberry blond that was with the new arrivals stuck his head in the doorway and glanced around. "Are you sure the double J's are here, Cor? The house seems to still be in one piece!"

Before anyone could respond, the telepathic triplets yelled "WE HEARD THAT, DORK!" After giggling for a second, they added "Daileass? North Atlantic please? Three dips!"

There was a brief yell from both twins, then cursing.

"Well, *I* didn't know you meant JJ, did I?" Daileass giggled as the two soaking wet twins ran outside to warm themselves in the sun.

Cory laughed at their antics, then mouthed silently; "Ark, would you be so kind as to send the gloating redhead behind me on the trip that the twins intended him to go on?"

<Only if you go with him. Tyne's orders.>

"I can live with that. Timmy's complaining about Sean not bringing him pets." Cory replied with a giggle.

Both JJ and Cory vanished, then reappeared holding a baby seal between them, and of course both soaking wet.

Two giggling six-year-old boys came running up, the blond one holding a baby Nene goose. The redhead immediately spotted the seal, and exclaimed "KEWL! You gots me a new friend! Thanks, Unca JJ an' Daddy!"

Letting go of Sean, Prez turned and hollered into the house, "Richie and Dee, come meet some new friends. And can someone grab two towels for Cory and JJ?" Prez then faced Cory, pointed at the silver blond haired boy and asked, "Who's this guy?"

Richie and Dee came to the doorway as Cory said, "That's my bro, Adam Short."

Prez shook hands with Adam and said hello.

"I'm Timmy an thisiza my boyfriend Ricky," the redhead rushed out as Ricky handed the baby Nene to Sean. "Poppa, can you take care of Freddie while me an' Ricky an' Dee an' Richie goes an sees if Uncas Triple Awesome can make his momma better? She's sick."

Sean nodded, knowing better than to try to distract his son from an animal rescue. "Go on, Munchkin; good luck."

"You're silly, Papa! I don' need luck; I got Unca Beau!" Timmy giggled as the Nene was settling in Sean's hands. Once their charge was safe, Timmy and Ricky grabbed Richie and Dee's hands and

dragged them off towards the trees lining the driveway.

Cory shook his head and grinned, "I hope you haven't had it as crazy as my life! Is there a tub we can let Harold here play in, then we'll try the introductions over again?"

"My life, crazy?" Prez teased and crossed his eyes briefly. "I've come to expect the unexpected these last few days; especially after our chimps blew up an ATV engine in the wee hours last night." Keith came to the door with a stack of towels and stepped outside while Prez introduced his boyfriend to everybody. Finally, Prez said, "We can put Harold the seal in a tub upstairs."

Keith pleasantly smiled, "Come inside, dudes."

The now somewhat dry Cory and JJ took their partners' hands and followed their hosts into the house, Harold calmly riding in JJ's free arm. Once they got Harold set up in his private tub playground, they came back downstairs and joined the rest of the group. As they took a seat, Cory glanced at Sean. "Hey, Babe? It's been five minutes. You think the wildlife preserve is set up yet?"

Sean shook his head. "I doubt it; give them another five or ten minutes."

"Timmy's Zoo, Ewa Beach branch," Prez smirked knowingly. Prez then introduced Mike, Derrick, Corey, Drew and John. Prez then tapped his comm-badge saying, "Kaleo?"

"Kaleo here."

"Can you come to my house please, bud?" Prez said, "There's a whole bunch of people here you haven't met."

"On my way," Kaleo replied.

John screamed, "JACE! Put me DOWN!" and then there was a splashing sound.

Everyone turned towards the direction of the kitchen, then giggled as Jason walked back into the living room and said, "That got the little bugger."

"Huh?" Prez asked, and then he laughed at the cursing from the kitchen.

"John. I got him back. In the kitchen sink."

Cory sat back with a grin. "You have no idea just how true the zoo comment is! Why the sink? Pools give a lot better air time!"

"Not when one dunks a boy's butt and groin in ice-cube filled cold water, it don't," Jason smirked.

"I believe you might have just started a war you'll never win." Sean commented with a giggle.

"Oh," Jason smiled, "I don't mind... but I've not revealed all my tricks yet... have I, Vicky?"

"No!" came the answering giggle from the kitchen as more splashes happened, and more yells from a now very cold John.

"See? I have minions too!" Jason laughed maniacally.

Cory shook his head. "So what kind of setup did the Elf leave you with, Prez?"

Jason softly said, "We're gonna go outside and let you guys take care of business," then led Vicky, Nathan and Riti out of the house. As

soon as one small boy saw Riti, it seemed all the little ones were surrounding the Bird-boy wanting flights around the island.

"Thanks to Uncle Iokii," Prez explained, "we have six bases on four islands; three here on Oahu, one of which I already gave to Adam for the UNIT. The other one is a mile or so west, and we'll use it as an incoming base. There's also a base on Maui, another on Hawai'i and the last one on Kauai. The Endeavour set us up with buildings and facilities on all the bases similar to what we have here. We have a skeleton staff of chefs, housekeepers, landscapers and a doctor and child psychologist too, thanks to Peter Lambert. Adam provided personal and base security here. Starfleet security is stationed at the other unoccupied bases."

Pulling a dining room chair over, Keith sat and added, "Daileass got a few ads placed for more help too: nurses, receptionists and kitchen help. My mom's got degrees in sociology and psychology. My dad's into legal research, Mike's dad is a cop, Derrick's dad is a construction contractor, Corey's dad is a bank manager."

"The only important things we don't know are the specifics of the Clan Short Charter and the Safe Haven Act," Prez said.

"That is on the schedule," Cory replied. "Sounds like you have the basics. Are you confident that you could run this as a Division Director?"

Kaleo walked in the house and Prez quickly introduced him to everyone still in the room.

"Confident?" Prez smirked. "I'll be honest and tell you what I told my team last night, Cory." Prez paused and softly said, "I know some of what happened in Montana and that's why I was hesitant to accept Joel's offer to be Director. We're at war right from the get-go."

We know it and we support it. My biggest worry is for the well-being of a hundred kids and four families, a responsibility I didn't have Friday but I do now. I think I can do it, but I've already made some tentative plans to share some responsibility with my Core Rimmers."

"My Mom got to you before I did?" Cory said with a half-laugh. "She just spent an hour over the weekend chewing me a new one about not delegating enough. That sounds good. Just so you know, if you hadn't had reservations, I woulda denied Joel's appointment of you. People who know it all have no place in any kinda management position in the Clan."

Prez smiled and nodded, "I thought maybe you wouldn't like the idea of delegating. Your mom and mine are definitely singing from the same song book. It's been a busy... no, it's been a hectic two days. Without my team doing their bits, I'd already be shot to hell!"

"Yeah, it's nuts at times," Cory replied with a smile. He tapped his comm-badge with a grin and announced "Hey transistor-breath! Stop looking at nanite porn and open a Clan Wide channel!"

All the Core Rimmers cracked up, as did most of the others in the room.

"Trans What! Johnny Five Alive. No transistors, Ugly Bag of mostly water. You must have used up all of that single blond brain cell to come up with that incredible display of witty conversation." Daileass said, with a playful mirth in his voice.

"I noticed you didn't deny the nanite porn. Busted!" Cory laughed. "Seriously, open a channel so I can let the guys know where to find the Rimmers at officially."

"Shall I show everyone what you and Sean were up to three days ago after bedding down for the evening?" was the response

Daileass gave while making the necessary connections. "Talk about kinky. What I want to know is why the spurs?"

"Because we knew you were watching and wanted to confuse you," Cory replied. "Say when, D."

"So you are an exhibitionist. That explains so much, Blondie. When D," a giggling Daileass responded.

Cory smiled, then began speaking. "Attention, all members of Clan Short. For the second time in less than a week, a new Division has been formed. All Communications officers log this location. Family Clan Short - Pacific Rim Division has been acknowledged and approved with Preston Albert O'Brian as Director. All Divisions are to contact the Director within the next twenty-four hours to ensure what assistance is necessary. In addition, the next person who forms a Division while I'm on a break without at least dropping me a quick message will be locked in a room with me as I consume and digest two loaves of garlic bread. Confirm."

Cory grinned as the confirmations came in, almost overlapping each other in haste. "Congrats, Prez; welcome to the family!" Cory said as the last Division checked in.

"Awesome!" Keith cheered.

Prez suggested, "How about we celebrate at the CIC dining room with a great lunch before we have to head to school for band practice?"

"Great!" Mike enthusiastically said.

"We'll get our boys and meet ya there, Prez," Derrick said, and then took Mike's hand and went back home.

Keith gathered Bruce, Carmella, Dewi and Kokaku. Prez asked Mr. T to join them. Soon everyone had left the house. There was short detour to get Dee, Richie, Timmy and Ricky. It seemed that Freddie's mamma Nene was feeling better, so Freddie was left with her.

On the way to the CIC, while the little kids raced ahead, Sean turned to Keith and said, "We've already heard you guys are musicians. Would you mind having an audience?"

Mildly stunned, Keith wondered, "You guys would want to come to our school?"

"Sure, why not?" Cory smiled.

Keith giggled, "Well, it's school!"

Prez asked, "Would security be an issue?"

JJ snickered, "I'm head of Clan security. We'll have your personal security guys there anyhow."

Keith nodded, "If it's no problem for you, I'd love for you guys to be there."

Prez warned, "Mrs. Diaz, our teacher, is really our only concern. She's gonna have to get used to us bringing security along, or we've got an issue to resolve."

Mike sighed, "We can only hope she doesn't have an issue."

Derrick said, "We've worked for our places in the school jazz band. As long as they're kewl, we are. Otherwise..."

Prez finished, "If Mrs. Diaz, the school or other students have a problem, it's their problem, not ours."

"Let's not stress it for now," Keith suggested.

But Mike still offered, "We're not gonna quit, but if they force our hand, Clan Short takes priority." Almost simultaneously, Prez, Keith and Derrick agreed.

Cory said, "Don't worry about it, guys. Even if school turns out to be a problem, we'll put you on Clan concert tours once in a while."

Sean readily agreed, "We're brothers now. Any problem of yours, we'll come up with a work-around."

Mike turned to Sean and wondered, "What exactly are these rooster tails you're so good at?"

Adam, Cory and JJ burst out in giggles. Sean loudly chuckled, "Who told you about that?"

"Tyler told us Saturday morning," Derrick remembered. He opened the dining room door and held it as everyone stepped inside.

Sean smiled, "A rooster tail is what happens when you bring a shuttle down fast and low, like ten or so feet off the surface of the water..."

"You're a pilot? Prez nervously crowed.

Sean nodded and Cory said, "A damn good pilot too."

Sean offered, "I'll take you guys for a ride sometime."

While Mike and Derrick enthusiastically agreed, Keith explained, "Prez's parents were killed in a plane crash. It was only two years ago. Getting him to fly might require sedation."

Derrick teased, "You were flying on The Endeavour though,

Prez."

Picking up a tray, Prez grinned, "Y'all can go get your jollies while I watch the rooster tails safe on the shore." He then paused briefly and loudly announced, "We got pizza! One of our chefs is from New Jersey, and scuttlebutt has it, he makes the best pizza ever." Lined up ready to be served were several thin and thick crust pizzas; some were plain cheese, some were pepperoni and sausage, some had pineapple and ham, and two were vegetarian.

Dee looked up at Keith and asked, "Can me and Richie have pizza too, daddy?"

"You can have anything you want," Keith answered. "If you'd rather something else..."

"No, pizza'd be kewl," Dee smiled.

"I'll carry our sodas," Keith offered.

As everybody moved through the line, Miguel served Prez and said, "Charles is already doing interviews, Preston."

"Kewl!" Prez chirped.

Miguel nodded, "Several qualified chefs have applied. We're keeping them high on our list for future expansion."

Prez hummed thoughtfully while helping Dewi with his tray then said, "Ya know what, get them past the interview process completely."

Cory said, "Go ahead and hire 'em, Prez. You've got lots o' bases to get staffed. Better to have them before they're needed."

"You heard the boss," Prez smiled at Miguel. "Staff up for five

bases ASAP."

"What of the sixth base, Sir?" Miguel wondered.

"That's Adam's UNIT base," Prez replied. "I'm sure he's already getting staff he needs there."

Miguel nodded and smiled, "Enjoy your lunch, gentlemen."

"Have good day," Prez smiled.

Once everybody was seated and had begun eating, Prez asked, "You guys know what went on here with CPS and the orphanages?" When Sean, Corey, Adam and JJ nodded, Prez said, "I'm planning on talking to the King later. We think Republic of Hawaii CPS should just be closed up; that way we don't ever have to go down that road again. Going forward, Pacific Rim Division and Federation Youth Services picks up the ball. What do you guys think?"

"It's a big job we'd be relieving the government of," Adam softly considered.

"But a job the government screwed up majorly," JJ said.

Sean asked, "What if the CPS budget came directly to Clan Short?"

Thoughtful, Cory nodded, "That's a good idea. If the King's agreeable, we could take over. We could even present that option to some State Governors." Cory paused and smiled, "This is awesome pizza! Nice thin, crisp crust, excellent sauce and cheese too. Word's gonna get around about this dude. He's gonna have to do some pizza training for our other chefs."

Sean giggled around the latest slice of pizza he had shoved in

his mouth. "Thonehz unna anht o shoh hesahees!"

Adam laughed. "Okay, who brought Joey along!"

Mike, Derrick and Keith loudly grunted, "Huh?"

Prez grinned, "Many languages later and I still don't have a friggin' clue."

Timmy giggled. "You gotta unnerstan feeding hog. He said, Unca Tommy's gonna wanna swap reci-pees!" Timmy then quickly sought shelter on Cory's lap, giggling madly as Sean glared at him.

"That's what Granma Teri calls it!" Ricky added as he quickly joined Timmy.

Sitting nearby with Cesar, Felipe, Carmella, Latoya and Christel, Lanna Seaver overheard this and said, "I cannot wait to meet your Granma Teri!" She then noticed Jamie and Jacob, pointed and warned, "You two will use sunscreen lotion or else!"

"But" "we" "live" "in" "Florida." "We" "are" "used" "to" "the" "sun!" Jamie and Jacob see-sawed in reply.

"And you're already pink!" Lanna forcefully reminded. "No lip now, either you do the sunscreen or I will."

"But" "we" "are" "ALWAYS" "pink!" they argued back.

Corey Seaver went over to Jamie and Jacob, leaned between them and whispered, "She's my mom. She'll getchya, I guarantee it. You'll think you're safe, but you won't be really. Ask Brant, she got him Friday before we even met him. You will have no choice."

Jamie and Jacob both crossed their arms and sulked. "We don't

need no friggin' sunscreen..." Jamie muttered.

"We're always outside and we never sunburn," Jacob added in a low irritated tone.

'Chill, you two.' Cory pushed out telepathically to the twins. *'Let me handle this AFTER we are done eating.'*

'Yes sir, Captain Cowboy.' Both of them sent back, the sarcasm just enough to let Cory know they would do it for him, only because they knew he would keep his word.

As they uncrossed their arms and quietly resumed eating, Cory motioned to Mrs. Seaver to come over. Once she was at his side, he softly told her in a voice low enough that only she could hear. "Mrs. Seaver, there are a few things that you and I need to talk about after lunch concerning the twins. I think you'll understand their reaction a little better."

Perceiving a seriousness in Cory's tone and noticing many similarities with her own Corey, Lanna nodded and whispered, "I'll be home or by the pool most of the afternoon."

Cory nodded. "Thanks."

Corey Seaver came over to talk with Cory Short regarding the overprotective nature of his mom. In the meanwhile, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick were holding a conversation about the school jazz band with Adam and JJ. Simply because they very much wanted to, Kaleo and Tory were eating at a table alone. By the time Corey and Cory were done whispering, the other conversation had moved beyond music to their kids. Everybody joined together on that shared topic.

Then a UNIT Colonel moved towards the table and the

conversation paused. The teenage boy snapped to attention and saluted saying, "Kekoa Casey reporting in as Commanding officer of the Pacific Rim Division UNIT detachment."

"Excellent!" Prez cheered. "At ease, Kekoa." The Colonel moved to parade rest. Prez grinned, "Take it easy and chill out! Here's the way I'd like it to be; you act military and I'll assume there's a situation requiring Pacific Rim Division's immediate attention. Call me Prez. We're on a first name basis unless you're making a military report. Right now, we're finishing lunch. Have you eaten?"

"I have," Kekoa replied.

"Then grab a chair and join us, please," Prez smiled. Kekoa slid a chair over and sat between Cory and Prez. Prez asked, "You know we're just getting settled, right?"

Kekoa nodded, "General Casey has briefed me, yes. Just so you know, I am a native of Hawaii. I ran away from one of the orphanages that were shut down."

"I guessed your heritage from your name, brave one," Prez grinned.

Mike wondered, "How the heck do you know this stuff?"

Keith answered, "Etymology. Prez likes to know how we know what we know, so he studies root word forms whenever a new word pops up." Feeling like he had somehow absorbed a part of the Double J's circular speaking, Keith crossed his eyes briefly and giggled, "Ya know?"

"Here's what's been happening in a nutshell," Prez said to Kekoa. "The Republic of Hawaii's government seems to have changed from Parliamentary to Kingdom. How the King manages that

mess is still up in the air. What the Pacific Rim Division has been doing is mopping up the mess left behind by corrupt CPS and orphanages that were born from corruption in our Government. Kids have been coming to us directly and I expect that will continue. We haven't done a real rescue, just picking up kids here and there."

Prez paused and smiled at Cory saying, "Patriarch Short made us an official division of Clan Short only about an hour or so ago. In the next day, I expect business to increase. While I very much need you and your detachment, my team and myself need to learn the ropes by participating in rescues whenever is reasonable. I do intend to turn over more dangerous rescues to your troops; when exactly that might happen is only subject to circumstances. Personally, I'd be happy if there was never a need for violent rescues of any sort, but we all know that's a dream." After another brief pause, Prez asked, "Are there any questions, Kekoa?"

Kekoa thought for a few moments, then said, "Just let me reword what you've said to make sure we're on the same page." Prez nodded agreement and Kekoa said, "You'd like to have your team continue picking up kids when risk is low. When the risk is higher, you'd like to have your team still involved, but with divisions of the detachment. Highest risk rescues would depend entirely upon the Pacific Rim detachment. Have I misunderstood anything?"

"No, that's pretty much it," Prez smiled. "Are there any issues?"

"Yes," Kekoa said. "Mixing civilians with trained military is fundamentally dangerous."

Prez nodded, "That's understood. Would there be less danger if my team and our assigned UNIT security personnel hung back until cleared by you or your assigned team leaders?"

"Your safety and ours would both be more certain," Kekoa agreed.

Prez smiled, "Then that's what we'll do."

Keith softly reminded, "It's almost time for school, Prez."

Prez turned to Dee and Richie asking, "You guys stay with Auntie Lanna for a few hours while daddy and me go to school, okay?" Both boys nodded and Prez kissed their foreheads.

Keith also kissed Dee and Richie, then said, "Make friends with Dewi. He needs us all and every friend counts."

"We will, daddy," Dee assured.

"You know me and Prez miss you guys every time we're apart?" Keith dramatically frowned.

Dee and Richie nodded and replied, "We miss you too."

Corey and Drew came over with Geoff. Drew said, "We're all gonna hang together by the pool and rec center."

A few tables away, John, Nathan, Bruce and Dewi stood. Prez and Keith both heard John in their minds, but it was very quiet. *'It's kewl, bros. We're gonna hang together with the kids.'*

Prez told Drew, "We'll be gone about an hour and a half," then turned to Cory and Sean Short. "Are you guys ready?" With nods from the Short boys, Prez led the way out of the CIC dining room. Once everyone was gathered and the eight personal security guards were in position with their weapons hidden, Prez tapped his sub-vocal. "Daileass?"

"Ready for band class now, Prez?" Daileass responded.

"Yep, to James Campbell High School, outside the main entrance please."

In a blink, the group was standing outside of the school. Half of the security team led the way inside and Keith explained, "Our mothers have called the board of education. As far as we know, there's no problem."

Once in the school's main office, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick went to the counter and identified themselves. Mrs. Winchester stepped away from the counter briefly and returned with four large sealed envelopes, handing one to each of the four boys. "What are these?" Mike asked.

"Your transcripts," Mrs. Winchester answered. "We were told that you are changing schools."

"Oh!" Mike said, "Yeah, that's true."

Prez offered, "We just didn't expect them so quickly."

Mrs. Winchester then did a quick head count and said, "There are four additional boys here?"

"Yes, ma'am. They're visiting friends and Clan Short dignitaries," Keith said, and turned to point each out. "Patriarch Cory Short, Sean Short, Adam Short and JJ Richardson."

"We ain't no dignitaries," Sean softly giggled.

"Shush!" Cory grinned.

"You'll all need hall passes," Mrs. Winchester smiled. She took a pad of paper out then began scribbling out the passes. She only asked

for names as she worked and seemed to be completely indifferent about the group of sixteen boys. Once she was finished signing and distributing the hall passes, Mrs. Winchester warned, "Go directly to your class, boys. Only lavatory visits, no wandering around."

All the boys assured they would not stray and exited the office. They softly chattered about the school as they walked down the halls. Everyone made quick pit stops at the boys room near the destination classroom. Since there were six urinals and six commodes, four boys had to wait their turn. A loud gaseous explosion erupted from one of the commodes. Amongst the snickering from the Rimmers, Adam, JJ and Sean shouted, "Jeez Cory!"

"What?" Cory incredulously giggled. "It was good pizza! It was either here or in the classroom."

"Get it out of your system here!" Sean laughed.

Adam chuckled, "Can't take you anywhere!"

While washing his hands, Prez grinned, "Now we know for sure what that garlic bread threat was about!"

"It worked, though, didn't it?" Cory giggled.

When everyone finished, they went to the classroom at the end of the hall. The security team noticed there were windows and decided four would stand guard alongside the mostly glass wall. The bell rang and about twenty-five kids exited the classroom, then the Clan Short group entered.

By this time, Carmella, Kokaku, Richie and Dee were telling Dewi about the fun they had Friday with Joel's Sehlat, I-Cheya. Dewi didn't believe them, so the five little one's went to Bruce and John for confirmation. Dewi still believed the story was a prank. John figured

now was as good a time as any to practice his N-Gen skills, especially since his parents and eldest brothers weren't around. Lanna Seaver, Anna Seibert and Laura Gibbons watched awestruck as Richie was telekinetically lifted and tossed into the pool. Then it was Dewi's turn to go for a dunk. Soon Beau and Jason were also having fun with the kids, lifting them higher and higher, then letting them drop into the pool.

Mrs. Diaz watched wide-eyed as the four Core Rimmers, four Orlando Clan and eight security boys entered the classroom. "Hi, Mrs. Diaz," the four Core Rimmers chorused.

Mrs. Diaz grinned, "I saw your performances on television Friday night."

"It was completely unexpected," Keith smiled.

"Are you rich and famous now?" Mrs. Diaz joked.

"Not exactly!" Derrick snickered.

After getting a nod of approval from Cory, Prez explained, "We're now part of Clan Short, Mrs. Diaz," and then began introducing everyone.

Other band members began filing in the room as Mrs. Diaz told Cory Short, "While I'm very glad the injustices were resolved, I'm also quite embarrassed that it happened here."

"Don't be embarrassed," Cory calmly said, "It's everywhere, Hawaii is still part of our planet."

"Thank you," Mrs. Diaz said. She then went into high school teacher mode, saying, "Please be seated and remain quiet during

class."

"Can we applaud at the end of songs?" Cory cutely smiled.

Mrs. Diaz nodded and explained, "We've got concerts every day this week, beginning tomorrow morning. There's a lot to cover, so please, don't get too carried away." Each of the Clan Short Orlando boys nodded, then took seats. While the jazz band continued preparing for class, Mrs. Diaz moved to the front of the ensemble and shuffled through piles of sheet music. She looked at the band. Everyone soon stopped chattering and warming up. "Let's begin with [One O'Clock Jump](#)," Mrs. Diaz instructed. Everyone began digging through their sheet music.

The band was set up in a small semi-circle. Seated on the left side were four trombone players, and standing behind them were four trumpet players. Keith, Derrick, Prez and Mike made up the rhythm section and were in the center. On the right side were four clarinet players, and behind them were four saxophone players. One O'Clock Jump began with a short rhythm section introduction, followed by clarinet, trumpet and saxophone solos and then the full band.

While the Orlando Clan boys clapped, Mrs. Diaz called out, "[In The Mood](#) next, please." More sheet music shuffled, then Mrs. Diaz called out the tempo and the band began playing.

[Harlem Nocturne](#) was the next tune played, followed by [St. Thomas](#), both songs featuring the lead tenor saxophonist. The next song Mrs. Diaz called out was the Miles Davis classic [Blue In Green](#). It was a slow, moody blues tune that almost put the Orlando Clan boys to sleep. "[Sing, Sing, Sing](#) next, please," Mrs. Diaz instructed. The visiting Clan boys could finally hear a tune that featured Derrick on drums, and they bounced in their chairs as Derrick pounded away

at the tom-toms.

[Take the 'A' Train](#) featured Keith on piano at first, but soon the harmonized brass and reeds background took over the melody. For Maynard Ferguson's [Gonna Fly Now](#), Keith moved to the synthesizer, Prez picked up the electric bass and Mike moved to electric guitar. Now the Orlando Clan boys could really hear Mike playing as a fundamental part of the song. Without his rhythm guitar and solo section, the song simply wouldn't sound correct.

"Obviously you people need an audience," Mrs. Diaz teased. While the band members all nodded, smiled or giggled, she said, "Well done. Our concerts are during third and fourth periods tomorrow through Friday." The bell rang before she finished. While everyone gathered their sheet music and prepared to leave, Mrs. Diaz loudly said, "Don't forget there are two concerts Saturday; from two in the afternoon until three-thirty and from eight in the evening until nine-thirty." Noticing that Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick weren't packing up, she asked, "Are you boys staying for seventh period?"

"We almost always do," Mike replied.

Prez explained, "Our friends are from the United States and probably won't make any of our concerts."

"We're not so sure about that," Cory smiled. "If we get the chance, you might have a good part of Orlando Clan here Saturday."

Sean shrugged, "We'll have to see how things go."

As many of the band members walked out of the classroom, Timmy and Ricky raced in, William and Duke hot on their heels. "DAADDDDDYYY! POPPPAAAA! You gotta see the art classes that they gots in here! They got chalk an' clay an' paints an' pencils an' BIG drawin' paper! The teacher's real nice too! He let us make

prezzies for you while his class was drawin' pictures of William an' Duke! They's superstar birds now!"

Squark! Duke and William said in confirmation.

Mike and Derrick couldn't help but chuckle at the enthusiastic entrance of the two boys. Keith and Prez were more concerned, however. Each of the boys were less than half the size of the majority of the student body. From his piano bench, Keith turned to Cory and asked, "Umm... is it okay for Timmy and Ricky to be unescorted?"

Cory shrugged. "I'm more worried about anyone who screws with them. Timmy's got more kills during the Montana crap than some of the professionals that were fighting on our side."

Keith's jaw dropped. Mrs. Diaz was also stunned, partially at the revelation about Timmy and partly because of the two large eagles now in her classroom. Glaring at the adorable little boy, Prez stammered, "Timmy? No way!"

Timmy giggled and raised his left arm. Around his wrist appeared a small creature. "It's a Fuzzymore!" he grinned, as if that would explain it all.

"Three confirmed... and I'm not asking how many unconfirmed or shared responsibility," Sean stated seriously. "He is officially the deadliest six-year-old on Earth."

Cory nodded, "And also the most protective."

"Yep!" Timmy added with a serious, almost menacing tone. "NOBODY messes with my Daddy or Poppa."

Ricky giggled as he showed off his 'Fuzzymore' as well.

Cory added, "And he's got a Minion-In-Training!"

Prez turned to Keith, but Keith's head was sagging against the piano, softly chuckling because William and Duke had taken keen interest in Mrs. Diaz. The poor woman was now backed into the corner behind her desk. "Just a few quick questions," Prez offered. "What is a fuzzymore?"

Cory smiled. "I'll explain more when we are in a more secure location. Just think of a biological based weapon tied to the host's nervous system; in their case a *sentient* weapon." Derrick stood, then went to where William and Duke were perched on Mrs. Diaz' desk. The two eagles only rubbed their beaks against Derrick's arm and hand, but didn't take the hint.

Prez nodded understandingly saying, "That works for me. Question two; would someone please help Mrs. Diaz before she climbs the wall or wets herself?" But before anyone could reply or move, one of the air conditioning vents fell from the ceiling and landed on the floor with a loud metallic rattle and two ferrets attached.

"Spike! Xander!" Mike hollered. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Making sure Shiny Daddy is safe!" Spike smiled.

From the ceiling, peering down from the duct, Willow shook her head and smiled, "Weez warned them. They're too heavy to sit on the vent."

Timmy looked up at the vent. "Hey Willow! Thanks for the shins for us to put on the prezzies!"

Willow grinned. "You're welcome, Timmy! Their old owner won't need them where she's going. She thought locking the door

would hide what she was doing."

Mike put his guitar down and went over to his ferret boys then reached up and sweetly said, "Come on down here, pretty girls." Willow climbed down first and Mike set her on the floor. Then Mike helped Faith down and set her on the floor.

Timmy and Ricky went over to where William and Duke were perched on the desk. They bent over and the two birds climbed on their respective boy's shoulder. Timmy looked sweetly up at Mrs. Diaz and said, "You're really nice! They just want to say hi to you; they's not wild eagles, they's Spirit Eagles, and they both says you are a good person an' they likes you."

Mrs. Diaz whimpered, then sat on her chair weakly muttering, "Uh... thanks."

"Breathe slow and deep," Derrick softly instructed.

Trying not to laugh, but failing miserably, Prez roared. Keith tapped his sub-vocal. "Daileass?"

"Hi Keith," Daileass replied, "Ready to transport back home?"

"Not quite yet," Keith answered. "Do us a favor, dude; contact Doctor Janet. Have her fill a Valium prescription for Mrs. Diaz. She's about one hundred and thirty pounds. Transport it to her desk ASAP."

"Got it," Daileass giggled. "Guess band class wasn't so good?"

"Band class was fine," Keith snickered. "Immediately afterwards, things went slightly askew."

Slapping his hands on top of his amplifier, Prez bellowed, "Just *slightly* askew!"

Mike sat on a chair near Cory, Sean, Adam and JJ. Faith and Willow climbed up onto Mike's shoulders. Spike and Xander sat on Mike's lap. Mike began sharing the story of how he and Derrick adopted the Scooby Gang, two humans and one android before they had dinner Saturday night.

A small bottle appeared on Mrs. Diaz' desk. Derrick picked it up and read aloud, "Take one tablet at bedtime. Get at least eight hours sleep. Do not drive or operate machinery."

"Who's an android?" Keith loudly wondered.

Mike grinned and answered, "Reyes. Nathan told us, Saturday."

Adam shook his head and joked, "I don't know *what* you guys are complaining about! This has been a *quiet* day; just wait until things *really* get weird!"

"You should have been in Orlando on Thursday," Cory giggled.

"Why? What happened?" Prez heaved curiously.

"Joel's birthday," Sean giggled.

"How was that so bad?" Keith wondered.

"Well," Sean giggled, "lessee... he gets married, finds his dad, Captain Spock, who then becomes our dad, and gets to be an admiral. Then Joel gets the Star Cross, then Clan Short is destroyed as a Clan, then we become a Family, then Cory is given a seat on the Vulcan High Council, then..."

"ENOUGH!" Prez yelled, laughing so hard his ribs hurt. "You're KILLING ME!"

Their comm-badges went off. "Hey, guys," Seth laughed across

them. "Jude wants to know if he's chopped liver or something."

"Oh, that's right!" Cory giggled, "The day before, Elf kidnapped Jude to be his brother, they share a birthday, and together they saved the bloody Excelsior! Amongst other things..." he trailed off with a giggle.

"Unca Derrie? When do we get to watch ya beatin' your skins?" Timmy asked with puppy-dog eyes. Derrick quickly turned around and smiled at Timmy, uncertain if the boy was asking about drumming.

Wheezing and absolutely hysterical, Prez sat on the floor; his face becoming redder than his hair.

As Mrs. Diaz watched, totally numbed by the events around her, William flew over to the water fountain in the room with a paper cup in his beak. With Duke's assistance, the cup was filled. Carefully, William carried the cup over to Mrs. Diaz, who took it with shaky hands.

Keith snorted, then got up to help Prez, saying, "Daileass, we've scared the straights enough. Prepare to transport all of us back, outside our base auditorium please." Once Prez was leaning against him and everyone was standing, Keith said, "Now's a good time, Daileass."

"Leave the teacher here, Micro-brain!" Corey quickly interjected.

In a heartbeat, the classroom was empty except for Mrs. Diaz; who looked around and wondered if she had a waking dream. She noticed the bottle of Valium and stuffed it in her purse, then prepared to leave for the day.

Outside the auditorium, everyone grinned at one another. "Well, that wasn't really so bad," Keith giggled.

Wiping sweat from his forehead, Prez caught his breath and sniggered, "Daileass, patch me to all the speakers on the base."

Daileass replied, "You're set, Prez."

Prez called, "Attention all Rimmers. Jam time in the auditorium. Drew and Corey, we'll need you, so bring our kids. Anyone else not occupied is welcome to attend. That is all."

Prez's comm-badge chirped and Drew's voice said, "Hey, Prez. You guys weren't even gone an hour. What happened?"

"Ya had to be there," Prez giggled.

Keith led the way inside the dimly lit auditorium lobby. Since the Rimmers' CIC was the same design as the one in Orlando, Cory and Sean immediately went to the circuit breakers, then began turning on lights and equipment.

Smiling down at Spike and Xander, Mike wondered, "Why did you guys think we wouldn't be safe and join us?"

Spike stammered, "Because weez sleeps with you and... and... weez eat with you and..."

Xander finished, "You's treats us like human kids and you's loves us and weez loves you too!"

"UNIT security deals with immediate threats," Willow smiled.

Faith proudly continued, "Weez can learn about *future* threats while we're hiding."

Spike nodded, "A boy and girl don't like our Shiny Daddies."

"They says you're stuck-up showoffs," Willow frowned.

Derrick chuckled, "Oh really?"

All four ferrets nodded and Xander grinned, "They won't say that no more."

Keith groaned, "Oh shit."

Mike innocently asked, "What did you guys do?"

"Girl's locked in janitor's closet," Faith giggled.

Willow added, "Knob lock is jammed too!"

Spike nodded and grinned, "Boy's shiny horn is 'missing'."

"He'll never find it!" Xander playfully teased.

Derrick hummed thoughtfully and asked, "Was it a reverse 'S' shaped horn?"

All four ferrets shook their heads and in unison said, "A little horn," then held their hands up like they were playing imaginary trumpets.

Prez giggled, "Had to be Bobby."

"Bobby and Sheryl!" Keith snickered. "Birds of a feather." William and Duke squawked unhappily. Keith said, "Sorry, it's just an expression. I really like birds; lots have pretty songs and beautiful plumage." William flew over to Keith and landed on his shoulder. Keith only ducked his head slightly to accommodate the eagle's large wing-span.

Cory said, "All set, guys," and closed the circuit breaker panel door.

Holding the door into the auditorium open, Derrick scowled, "They say we're stuck-up? They outta know!"

Keith led the way into the auditorium agreeing; "They both think they're good enough to play first chair and solos. In reality, if there's a wrong note to be played, they've done it."

Sean followed and asked, "Is that where the nasty honk came from during the Rocky theme song?"

Prez nodded and explained, "Maynard Ferguson was definitely one of the best trumpet players ever. Bobby's delusional if he thinks he could ever match that man's range."

Beginning the walk into the auditorium and down towards the stage, Mike chuckled, "Good job, guys!" All four ferrets smiled proudly. Willow and Faith hugged Mike's head. "Hey Daileass," Mike called, "Transport my Les Paul and the D-45 to our stage, dude." A moment later, both guitars were in their cases and on the stage. "Thanks, dude," Mike politely said.

"Any time, Scooby Daddy," Daileass giggled. Mike growled, which only caused Daileass to giggle longer.

Kaleo opened the door allowing Dee, Dewi, Richie, Reyes, Dillon and Jonah to race down the aisle. John was next in line with Bruce, Carmella and Kokaku following close behind. William launched himself from Keith's shoulder to soar around the large auditorium's ceiling and was soon joined by Duke.

Dee jumped up into Prez's arms while Richie and Dewi hurried into Keith's open arms. After planting kisses on the boys' cheeks,

Keith wondered, "Where's Uncle Drew and Uncle Corey?"

"Headin' upstairs with Geoff," Richie smiled.

Timmy let go of Cory and went to Mike. "Can I play too, Unca Mike?" Timmy asked.

"Do you play, Timmy?"

Timmy rapidly nodded and sweetly smiled, "I likes guitar most."

"You're way too small to be able to play my guitars," Mike recognized. "Do you have your own gear?"

"Daileass!" Timmy excitedly hollered. "Get my guitar an' amp on stage too!" A second later, a child-sized Squier Strat on its stand and a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe amp appeared on stage.

"Pretty nice," Mike encouraged. "Daileass, get a Shure SM57 microphone for Timmy's amp and let Drew know what channel it's connected to." That was all Timmy needed to hear. He raced to the stage and up the stairs with Ricky close behind. Soon the two boys were pushing the heavy amp into position. Then they crawled underneath the backstage curtains, giggling loudly while searching for a power outlet. Prez, Keith and Derrick went on stage with their kids.

Cory went to Mike and softly said, "Timmy's pretty good. He learns everything by ear."

Mike nodded, "That's really good for his age. So we know how to talk turkey with him, does he know anything like key signatures or names of notes?"

"Pro'bly not," Cory grinned.

"Would you like him to learn?" Mike asked, and then leaned

down so Willow and Faith could climb into a seat.

"Whatever he seems interested in is kewl with me," Cory answered.

Sean added, "If he gets that dazed and confused look then starts blinking fast, you've lost him."

"Permanently?" Mike worried.

Sean shook his head, "Nah, just back down the ladder a few rungs 'til you get the spark back."

"Tell ya what," Mike began, "we'll start jammin' the blues and let him play by ear for a while. I'll watch him and he can watch me."

"That'll make him really happy!" Cory giggled.

"Sweet!" Mike chirped, and then went to join the others on stage. Mike filled in his band mates on the situation with Timmy, but then realized the two younger boys were still behind the curtains giggling insanely. Mike went to the curtains and loudly asked, "Hey you two, did you get lost finding the outlets?"

"Jus playin' with our plugs!" Timmy howled.

Mike's eyes nearly shot out their sockets. "We're gettin' our act together and there's an audience waiting," Mike grinned, and then went to get the Les Paul. After powering up his own amps, Mike flipped the power switch on Timmy's amp and the little red lamp lit. Snickering at the little devils behind the curtains, Mike began silently running scales and warming up.

Prez came over wearing his bass and wondered, "Where's Timmy?"

Mike nodded backstage, then giggled, "Playin' with Ricky."

Seeing the light, Prez smiled, "Remember when the four of us used to do stuff like that?"

"I'll never ever forget it, bro," Mike truthfully replied.

"Now that we're fathers, I guess we're too old," Prez smirked.

"Nuh uh!" Mike grunted, and then teased, "Speak for yourself, *Director O'Brian!*"

Prez bellowed laughing, then moved closer to Mike and whispered, "Keith kept telling me to direct him yesterday."

"Ooo! Direct me! There, like that, yeah!" Mike softly chortled. Prez cracked up.

"Hey you two!" Derrick and Keith hollered.

"We're ready already!" Mike loudly laughed, and then announced, "[Hoochie Coochie Man](#)."

Derrick counted out the slow blues shuffle and together the band began playing.

Derrick sang: Gypsy woman told my mother 'fore I was born

Prez sang: You got a boy-child coming, gonna be a son of a gun

Mike sang: Gonna make pretty womens jump and shout

Keith sang: And then the world wanna know what this all about

Kaleo strutted up on stage and really dug into the groove, causing a lot of kids in the audience to hoot and holler. The audience participation only served to encourage Kaleo's dirty dancing. All four band members sang the chorus and their kids started dancing on stage.

But you know I'm here

Everybody knows I'm here

Well, I'm the hoochie coochie man

Everybody knows I'm here

Timmy and Ricky crawled out from behind the curtain. Timmy went directly to his guitar and soon played along. Kaleo began lifting his shirt then lowering it and then lifting it higher before shyly pulling it down again.

Keith sang: I got the black cat bone and I got a mojo tooth

Derrick sang: I got the John the Conqueror Root, gonna mess with you

Prez sang: I'm gonna make you girls lead me by my hand

Mike sang: And then the world will know the hoochie coochie man

All five boys sang the chorus watching the kids dance around

and the audience getting more rambunctious. The six landscapers, three adult mothers, two doctors and Mr. T were laughing hysterically at the kids enjoying themselves. In little more than two days, the large group had bonded.

But you know I'm here

Everybody knows I'm here

Well, I'm the hoochie coochie man

Everybody knows I'm here

By this point Kaleo was shirtless and only holding his boardies up with one hand while he tried to entice Tory on stage. Timmy took the first twelve bar solo and did a good job. Then Mike knelt down so Timmy could see and took the next twelve bars, and finally Keith played the final twelve bar solo.

Mike sang: On the seventh hour, on the seventh day

Keith sang: On the seventh month, seven doctors say

Derrick sang: "He was born for good luck, that you'll see"

Prez sang: I got seven hundred dollars; don't you mess with me!

Only three rows back sat Aki and Hajime, Prez noticed. The two newest Rimmers seemed very happy and were sitting amongst other twelve year old boys, Brice, Chiba and Gregory.

All five boys on stage sang the final chorus.

But you know I'm here

Everybody knows I'm here

Well, I'm the hoochie coochie man

Everybody knows I'm here

The song ended to roars of applause and approval. In the front row, the Scooby Gang began chanting; "Shiny Daddy! Platinum Habits!" over and over again.

"That was soooo much fun!" Timmy screamed.

Prez went to Kaleo and smiled, "I can hardly believe you were doin' a strip tease!"

Tying his boardies, Kaleo giggled, "It was mostly for Tory." He then became more serious and softly said, "Ya know, three days ago, Joel rescued me from that orphanage and fat fucker. I thought I'd never want to dance or have sex again. Consensual sex is way different and lots more fun. It's a whole new world for me now. A lot of us feel pretty much the same way, and it's all because of you guys."

"We've not done much," Prez admitted, "We're only giving you guys the chance to be yourselves."

Kaleo smirked, "Don't sell yourself short. A bunch of the tweens were asking us about the dorms. Don't be surprised if you have a much smaller nest tonight."

From the auditorium floor near the edge of the stage, Tory

called, "Kaleo?"

Kaleo turned around to find Tory beckoning him with his index finger. Briefly turning back to Prez and bouncing his eyebrows, Kaleo devilishly grinned, "See ya later."

Prez cracked up, but noticed Mike on his knees again, silently showing Timmy a guitar part. Keith came over and said, "Derrick wants a workout, baby."

"Which tune?" Prez asked.

"[Moby Dick](#)" Keith answered, and then added, "That'll keep Timmy involved and make Derrick happy. Mike and I get to take a break and check out how it sounds around the auditorium." Prez nodded and Keith landed a deep kiss. The kids on stage and in the audience began cheering again, causing Keith and Prez to giggle into their kiss and hold it longer. When Keith stepped back, he waved at the audience, then led most of the kids off stage, leaving only Reyes and Timmy behind. When Timmy was ready, Mike walked off stage too. Then Timmy, Prez and Derrick started playing the song. After the one minute introduction, Timmy and Prez put their instruments down and waited off to stage left. Derrick pulled out all the tricks in his vast repertoire for about ten minutes. Reyes intently watched his dad using first the sticks, then his hands to modify tones of the drums. Sweating under the stage lights, Derrick pulled his shirt off while keeping the beat with the bass drum and hi-hat, wiped his brow, then waved Timmy and Prez back to finish the song.

During the applause, Prez congratulated Timmy, then introduced him to the audience. Noticing Keith and Mike returning, Prez asked, "Let us practice together as a band for a little while, please, Timmy?"

Timmy happily nodded, "Sure!"

"We'll call you back up for another song or two later," Prez said. "Think of any songs you'd like to play."

Noticing that Derrick was shirtless and obviously very warm, Corey dimmed the audience lights a little, then also dimmed some of the stage lights.

Platinum Habits began rehearsing. The first song was [Don't Stop Believin'](#) with Keith singing lead vocals. Before playing the second song, Keith played a chord on the keys and all four boys sang it in harmony. Keith then said, "All together now, nice and strong." Derrick counted out the tempo and the boys simultaneously sang "[It's In The Way That You Use It](#), It comes and it goes. It's in the way that you use it, Boy don't you know. And if you lie you will lose it, Feelings will show. So don't you ever abuse it, Don't let it go." After the opening chorus, Mike sang lead vocals during the verses, then all four joined together again for the chorus'.

The next song began with a single organ tone, then Prez and Derrick joined and finally Mike began playing his Stratocaster for [Stone Cold](#). Keith sang lead vocals with Derrick backing him up and Prez and Mike singing harmony vocals. [Something's Missing](#) was the next song played, with Mike singing lead vocals. Derrick and Mike began playing [Happy Together](#) then Prez and Keith joined in, with Prez singing lead vocals.

Everyone immediately recognized the opening electric piano chords to the Queen classic, [You're My Best Friend](#). Keith sang lead vocals and the band harmonized beautifully. The next song, [What You Wish For](#), also required good harmonies but this time Derrick sang lead vocals. [Stone In Love](#) was the next song played, with Keith singing lead vocals once again.

Prez called Timmy back up on stage.

As he hurried up the stairs, Mike asked, "What song did you decide on?"

"In The Evening," Timmy replied.

"Ooo," Mike groaned, "That's got a lot of studio trickery in it."

"I can play it!" Timmy proudly insisted.

"Let's see what we can do," Mike said. He then stepped up to a microphone and asked, "Drew, have ya got a digital flanger up there in your rack?"

Through the stage monitors, Drew hummed then said, "Yep, we got a good one too. What's the tune?"

"Zeppelin's [In The Evening](#)," Mike answered.

"Damn!" Keith softly grumbled.

"What's the problem, babe?" Prez wondered.

"I've never tried playing that keyboard part once," Keith responded. "I've sung it dozens of times with the CD, but I'll have to start from scratch."

Mike said, "Come on, Timmy, let's get Keith up to snuff," then started across the stage with Timmy in tow.

"Keith can play this easy!" Timmy said.

Mike nodded, "I'm sure he can too. We just gotta teach him the changes real quick."

Derrick tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass, I need

timpani, dude; at least one, preferably two. Put them to my left side, near the hi-hat. While we're at it, get me two gongs; an eighteen inch and a thirty-six inch. Put them behind me, within reach, but leave me a path on my right to get out of here. I'll also need microphones for each hooked up to the PA system, so contact Drew and get me whatever he recommends."

"On the way, Derrick," Daileass replied, and then set about completing the task assigned.

While Timmy and the band pulled together the song, out in the audience, about twelve rows back, to the far left of the center seating, an intense but quiet conversation ensued. "Go on up there and introduce yourself," Judy Faris softly insisted.

"Mom, please!" Troy desperately whispered.

Judy sighed, then leaned closer to her son, saying, "They don't know you or anything about you. They're just a group of caring boys that happen to be musicians, just like you."

"They're not like me," Troy nervously croaked. "They're better than me..."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Judy interrupted. "You really need to be more confident and forthright. It's not like you could ever feign arrogance. They're so sweet and well behaved, so much like you. They're even gay..."

"Mom!" Troy groaned and shrunk down in his seat. If only the auditorium lights were completely dimmed, Troy wished, then no one would see the blond highlights in his brown hair or the blush of his fair complexion, fresh from the chilly New Jersey autumn.

"You've really got to get out of your shell," Judy encouraged. "I

love you. Your father couldn't cope and caused you to feel out of place. I won't have his legacy hold you back. He's gone now, Troy, no longer a problem for either of us. In my eyes, he failed both of us.

"You're practically the same age, all musicians, all homosexual." Judy stopped there before her son slid off the seat and crawled along the floor under the auditorium seating. "Please, Troy," Judy begged, "allow yourself the chance to be the musician you want to be. You can help them and they can help you too. One success will lead to so many more successes, if you'll only allow it to happen."

"Okay!" Troy impulsively agreed, simply to get his mom off her soapbox. "When they're done, I'll introduce myself." Thankfully, Derrick began hitting the two timpani that had magically appeared on stage. Through the stage monitors, Troy could barely hear another boy's voice instructing Derrick to hit his bass drum too so he could mix the levels. Looking around, Troy could only assume that the voice was coming from a lit booth way up high above the balcony and behind him. The little red-haired boy, Timmy, was with the other band members gathered around the piano rehearsing the sections of the upcoming song.

"Sit up," Judy smiled, "you're going to hurt your neck looking around from so low."

Troy pushed himself up and watched the goings on carefully. Derrick was a very good drummer, but more interesting were the other three older boys on stage. Who was cuter, Troy wondered; the brunette keyboard player or the lighter brown-haired guitarist, or was it the red-haired bass player? His mom had earlier said the red-haired boy was the new Director of this Clan Short Division. The guitarist seemed stockier, but the keyboard player and bassist had nice long legs. The keyboard player had the best voice, in Troy's opinion, but the other three could sing very well too. The guitarist had a nice ass,

but the bass player had an incredible bubble butt. If only the keyboard player wasn't sitting at the piano. Troy's eyes rolled and he criticized himself for even thinking of them that way. Now he had a boner that would hopefully deflate before he had to stand and go meet them face-to-face.

A number of rows forward, three boys began giggling and bouncing against each other. All three, the two strawberry blonds and one black-haired boy, turned and smiled at Troy. As Troy attempted to convince himself they weren't really looking at him, the two red-heads stood and hurried up to the stage. The black haired boy walked back and never lost eye contact with Troy.

Squatting down in the aisle beside Troy, the black haired boy devilishly grinned, "I'm Beau, how's it hangin?"

Troy blushed at the question, but ignored it and smiled, "I'm Troy. Nice to meet ya, Beau."

"You wanna play on stage with the band?" Beau knowingly asked.

Judy smiled, "He most certainly does!"

Troy glared at his mom, then turned again to Beau, shrugging and balking, "Now's probably not the best time. I haven't even met them yet."

"You will *real* soon," Beau giggled.

Up on stage, everyone around the piano suddenly cracked up laughing. Prez loudly asked, "What the hell's going on lately? Why am *I* suddenly the object of everyone's affection?" In the audience, Cory, Sean, Adam and JJ snickered evilly.

Mike howled, "Direct me! Ple-e-ease direct me soon!" and Prez shoved him. Many more in the audience began giggling.

Jacob and Jamie both leaned back, plainly looking at Prez' ass and giggled, "It is" "a really" "cute butt!"

"Oh no," Troy groaned and again slid down into his seat.

Amidst much laughing and teasing, Keith stood and joked, "I've been saying the very same thing for two years! I gotta meet this dude!"

"Keith?" Prez softly pleaded, "Don't tease or scare him, babe, please?"

"You know I won't," Keith assured, and then paused to add, "He knows this song, according to the double J's. He'll play keys, I'll sing and we're ready to jam."

Beau stood and Troy found himself inexplicably rising in his seat, then standing. "Come on, Troy," Beau smiled. "It's totally kewl. You wanna meet them and they wanna meet you too sooo... what's the problem?"

Not understanding how anyone could've possibly known his thoughts, Troy nervously stammered, "I... they... how... Oh God!"

"Hey, those two boys on stage I was sitting with are both my boyfriends," Beau explained. "It really is kewl." Beau then leaned in close and whispered, "Once they get a look at you, I'll tell you what they *really* thought."

"Oh Jeez!" Troy giggled. He then inhaled deeply, prepared himself to face the music, as the saying goes, and started to walk

down the aisle.

Timmy, Jacob and Jamie hung back by the grand piano and Derrick remained seated on his drum throne, while Keith, Mike and Prez went over to the stage stairs and watched Troy approach with Beau. "They like what they see," Beau softly giggled. "Now they're just hoping you can really play the song." Still blushing slightly, Troy climbed the stairs.

Keith was the first to offer his hand to Troy, saying, "Hey dude, you ready to jam?"

Shaking Keith's hand and then knocking knuckles, Troy admitted, "Zeppelin's one of my favorite bands."

"Finally, a keyboard player with taste!" Mike teased as he knocked knuckles with Troy.

Keith complained to Mike, "I just don't know all the changes, bitch! How about we play some Chick Corea next, so I can watch you squirm?"

"No problem, bro," Mike giggled. "I can shred like Di Meola."

"In key?" Keith smirked. Mike playfully cranked up the middle finger of his right hand.

"You guys are really good musicians," Troy smiled at the playful banter, then shook hands with Prez.

Pointing at the stack of electronic keyboards, Prez invited Troy to "Show us your chops, dude."

Giggling at the innuendo, Troy moved behind the keys and adjusted a few settings, then began playing the main themes. Six rows

back, Sean was mesmerized by the new boy now on stage. Timmy and Mike both joined in for a few short bars. Prez chirped, "Sweet!"

Keith nodded and instructed, "You play the keys, Troy, and I'll sing, kewl?"

"No problem, Keith," Troy replied. Soon all the boys had moved into position.

Derrick gave one final instruction, "Drew, add a fairly fast flanger to the timpani, bro."

A few seconds later, Drew said over the stage monitors, "Give it a try."

Derrick played a drum roll and said, "Just a little deeper flange," and continued playing. When it was correct, Derrick said, "Right there, that's good, Drew."

Mike turned around and teased, "So good, a little deeper, right there, like that, yeah!"

"You're very bad," Derrick smirked. "Go to my room immediately."

"Ah jeez," Keith groaned.

Shaking his head sadly, Prez playfully reminded, "We used to get randy after jammin'. Now it's before, during and after!"

Mike snickered, "It started Friday night. Blame Joel."

Derrick shook his head and playfully disagreed, "Bet ya it was the Mikyvis trio."

Keith turned to Troy and smiled, "Lead the way, dude." After

about a minute's worth of synthesizer chord swells and Derrick's timpani, Keith held the microphone and sang, "In the e-e-e-e-vening," then Derrick tapped the tempo with his sticks and the whole band joined in.

"When the day is done

I'm looking for a woman, but the girl don't come

So don't let her, Play you for a fool

She don't show no pity baby, ya know she don't make no rules

"Oh, oh, I need your love, I need your love

Oh, I need your love, I just got to have

"So don't you let her, Oh, get under your skin

It's only bad luck and trouble, oh, From the day that you begin

I hear you crying in the darkness, Don't ask nobody's help

Oh, Ain't no pockets full of mercy baby, Cause you can only blame yourself

"Oh, I need your love, Oh, oh, I need your love

Ooo yeah, I need your love, I just got to have

"Oh it's simple, All the pain that you go through

You can turn away from fortune, fortune, fortune, Cause
that's all that's left to you

Hey, it's lonely at the bottom, man, it's dizzy at the top

But if you're standing in the middle, Ain't no way you're
gonna stop

"Oh, I need your love, Oh, oh, I need your love

Oh, oh, I need your love, I just got to have."

With Derrick's timpani drum accents, Timmy stepped forward and played the first guitar solo while Mike played the rhythm guitar, then the two switched off. Moving forward, Mike played the second solo section and Timmy stepped back, playing the rhythm guitar. Keith brought the band back to the main theme singing, "Oh whatever,

"That your days may bring

No use hiding in a corner, Cause that won't change a thing

If you're dancing in the doldrums, One day soon, it's got to
stop, it's got to stop

When you're the master of the off-chance, When you don't
expect a lot

"Oh, oh, I need your love, Oh, oh, I need your love

Oh yeah, I need your love, I just got to have, I just got have

Mike and Timmy went back and forth playing with and against each other during the ending solos while Keith improvised vocals here and there. The song ended with sharp sudden chords and an explosion of timpani, tom-toms and bass drum. Most of the audience stood, clapped and cheered loudly, especially Judy Faris and the Orlando Clan kids. Tilting his head uncertainly, Horacio grinned at Sean's enthusiasm. Completely oblivious, Sean clapped longer and louder.

Mike and Prez turned off their amplifiers as did Timmy. Picking up his shirt, Derrick came out from behind his drums and Reyes hugged him firmly. Derrick wrapped an arm around Reyes and went to meet Troy, where Keith was already standing and talking. Soon all the band members were standing around Troy and learning that he could also play recorder, clarinet, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, harmonica and rhythm guitar.

Cory looked over at Jacob and Jamie, asking; "Have they been educated yet?"

Jamie nodded, "Ask them what article thirteen is."

"Better yet, ask in any language you'd like!" Jacob giggled.

Cory then went over to the edge of the stage and called, "Prez?"

Prez answered, "What's up, Cory?"

In Italian, Cory said, "Recitare per me articolo tredici del rifugio sicuro agire in inglese."

Prez said, "Sexual Abuse. All provisions under this article are grounds for immediate removal of said minor children upon presentation of physical evidence, Vulcan Mind Meld Report or Clan Short Telepathic Scan Report. Subsequent or in conjunction with said removal, legal proceedings to revoke parental rights shall commence immediately and without fail."

Keith then recited, "Section 13.1: Use of minor children to provide sexual gratification. Section 13.2: Prostituting own children to provide sexual gratification for self or others."

Mike added, "Section 13.3: Forcing children to perform sexual acts on themselves or siblings or other minor children."

Derrick then said, "Section 13.4: Acquiring and or distributing nude and indecent photos or holographs of nude minor children for financial or other gain."

And Prez finished, "Section 13.5: Forced sex with non sentient species."

"Excellent!" Cory proudly smiled.

Troy innocently asked, "You guys learned that stuff in high school?"

"Umm no," Mike answered, then wondered, "How *did* we know that stuff?"

Jamie, Jacob, Beau, and Timmy giggled.

From up in the balcony, Kaleo peeked over the edge then

hollered, "What happened to the music?"

Prez immediately cracked up. Keith shouted, "Jam time's over, dude. Everybody's leavin'."

Since Prez was almost doubled over laughing, Mike tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Hey Mister see all, what's been goin' on in the balcony?"

"I don't watch and tell!" Daileass giggled.

"Sure, except when it's me!" Mike retorted.

Cory grinned, "I've got one more thing for you guys to do."

"What's that?" Prez and Keith simultaneously asked. They smiled at each other, then reached for each other's hands.

Cory smiled, "All Core Rimmers are on unconditional stand-down for the next two hours." Prez opened his mouth to object, but Cory cut him short, "It's non-negotiable, Prez. Spend time with your partners and with your kids; not a word about Clan business of any type." Cory checked his watch and said, "It's about quarter after three now. See ya around five-fifteen." Cory turned and started up the aisle, following the other hundred-plus kids and adults.

"I have absolutely no problem with that," Derrick said. He then grabbed Mike around the waist and devilishly grinned, "See you dudes later." As he, Mike and Reyes walked down the stage steps, Judy Faris walked up.

Seeing one of the housekeepers approaching, Prez pleasantly said, "Hi Judy. Is there something I can help you with?"

Judy shook her head and happily explained, "You already have,

Preston. I'm here to collect my son."

Prez and Keith both did double-takes between Judy and Troy. Finally, Prez turned to Troy and asked, "Why didn't you say anything?"

Troy shrugged, "It wasn't really on topic when I came up here."

Keith then recalled what the double J's had said and playfully hummed.

"Keith, be good," Prez warned. He then faced Troy asking, "Do you have all the instruments you need here?"

Troy replied, "I only have a recorder, clarinet, forty-nine key Casio keyboard and a Yamaha acoustic guitar."

"Daileass," Prez called.

Daileass replied, "You're on stand-down, Prez."

Prez grinned, "It's not Clan business; this is musical."

"Oh!" Daileass said, "Whatchya need?"

"Troy needs instruments to practice," Prez said. "Get him Selmer tenor and baritone saxes, an assortment of reeds for both, an eighty-eight key electric piano, a Taylor twelve-string acoustic guitar, a Fender Stratocaster, a Fender G-DEC Fifteen and a pair of headphones, so he can play without waking everyone in the condo." Troy's mouth was hanging open in amazement.

Daileass asked, "Anything else?"

"Lemme check," Prez said. He then asked Troy, "Is there

anything else you might need, dude?"

Troy stammered, "I... uh..."

Keith snickered, "Whatever you need, Troy, just let us know."

Troy nodded and Prez said, "That should do it for now, Daileass."

"By the time he gets home, all his toys will be waiting," Daileass confirmed.

"Thanks, dude," Prez said. He then made eye contact with Troy and assured, "Everything's waiting for you at home."

Troy softly said, "I don't know what to say... except thank you."

"You played keyboards well," Prez smiled. "If you play the other instruments as well, we'd love to jam with you."

Keith nodded, "I can think of a dozen tunes off the top of my head that need recorder or sax parts."

Prez said, "Start with the sax solo for Urgent by Foreigner and the recorder and acoustic guitar parts for Stairway To Heaven."

"Come over here tomorrow afternoon with a list of the songs you already know and let's try 'em out," Keith added.

Judy interjected, "Let me know how much I owe you, Preston."

Prez scowled and shook his head, saying, "It's not necessary. I'm being selfish and jumping on an opportunity to expand our set list."

Judy turned to her son and smiled, "What did I say? Did I say they were sweet?"

Pleased beyond comprehension, Troy couldn't help himself. He blushed and giggled, "And they're really cute too!"

Keith grinned, "Daileass can't get you a boyfriend. You'll have to do that yourself." He then leaned over and checked out Troy's tush, saying, "Shouldn't be a problem." Troy blushed so hard that he broke out in a sweat.

Pulling Keith by the arm, Prez laughed, "You're being bad, babe!" and led him off stage.

"See ya later," Keith giggled. Judy and Troy followed Prez and Keith off the stage.

Waiting in the audience were Drew, Corey, Geoff, Dee and Richie. Picking up Dee and parking the boy up on his shoulders, Keith said, "We've got a whole two hours off. What do you want to do together?"

Drew picked up Geoff and Prez lifted Richie. The three little boys seemed to check with each other for a long few moments. Prez asked, "What's wrong, Richie?"

"Nothin', Poppa," Richie quickly answered.

"I'm Poppa now?" Prez smiled.

Richie nodded and giggled, "Learned it from Timmy and Ricky. If we call both you daddy, then how can ya know which ones of yous we really want?"

Bending down slightly, Dee whispered, "Don't you love Poppa no more, daddy?"

"Of course I do," Keith quickly replied. "We've spent the whole

day together and barely any time with you and Richie."

"But you was workin' almost all the time," Geoff sadly groaned.

Richie explained, "Daddies should spend time alone too."

Drew smiled at Geoff and asked, "You three have been planning this?"

All three boys nodded. Richie giggled, "Reyes, Jonah and Dillon too!"

"We got lots o' kids to play with," Dee offered. "We got John and Bruce and Dewi... and Jonah and Dillon... and Timmy and Ricky and... Kakoku and Carmella to play with."

"Okay," Prez smiled, "I'll tell you what? Us daddies will play together for about an hour and then we'll meet you over by the pool. Then daddies can spend time with the boys they love. How does that sound?"

"That sounds great!" Richie cheered.

Keith reminded, "Make sure your Teddies and at least one big kid is by the pool with you."

Dee said, "Put me down, Daddy."

Keith helped Dee down to the floor and groaned, "I think you might already be gaining a little weight there, Dee."

Dee giggled, "I hope so. I'm almost as old as John, but me and Bruce are almost as big."

"Bruce is really a little bit bigger than Dee," Richie softly said.

"Not for long!" Dee joyfully sang. "Soon I'll be picking you up like Daddy and Poppa!"

Richie tightly wrapped himself around Prez and whispered, "I love you, Poppa."

"I really love you too," Prez softly replied and landed a kiss on Richie's cheek.

Soon Geoff and Richie were on the floor. The three boys pushed the heavy auditorium door open, then raced outside. Keith and Drew began flipping the circuit breaker switches off when Corey admitted, "We should've expected that from Geoff after showering with him this morning."

Prez sighed, "They've been confused by some perfect bastards."

Not stopping what he was doing, Drew softly asked, "Did Richie or Dee try to grab for your dick in the shower?"

Keith nodded and said, "We explained that little boys can play with other little boys, but only when they both want to do that. Bigger boys play with other big boys and adult men play with other adult men. They don't ever need to assume that someone wants their dick played with."

"They think that because they love us that that's what they're supposed to do," Prez grumbled. "Swear to God, the first rescue that involves a man fuckin' around with a little boy, I'm gonna aim a phaser on heavy stun right at his crotch!" Keith's head sagged and he began chuckling.

Drew giggled, "Sounds like a good idea to me!"

"It's just so fucked up!" Corey helplessly sniggered. He then

seriously explained, "Me and Drew started messin' around a little over a year ago and we both wanted to. These boys have been brainwashed."

Drew agreed, "Zap the first horny fucker that messes with little boys, Cor."

"Leave him with a numb dick and numb-nuts!" Keith chuckled.

"I say we expose him to his own kiddie porn and whenever he starts getting excited, stun his pecker again!" Prez smiled.

Finished with the circuit-breakers, Drew complained, "Can we please stop talking about it, right now?"

Also finished, Keith closed the circuit-breaker door and snickered, "Slightly counter-productive at this time!" He then swiftly took Prez in his arms and swung him around, kicked open the door and went outside with Prez giggling insanely.

Corey slid in close to Drew and softly asked, "Ya wanna?"

"Course!" Drew chirped as they walked outside. Corey removed the sub-vocal from his ear, then whispered in Drew's ear. Drew blushed, "We can try that too."

"Quick shower first?" Corey suggested.

Drew thoughtfully hummed, then countered, "We could beat Keith and Prez into my parents' bathroom and do everything in the big whirlpool?"

"I have a better idea," Corey giggled. "Tell them, but since my mom's busy with the kids, we could use the master bath whirlpool in my house?"

Drew's eyes widened and he rapidly nodded. Then Drew and Corey ran to Keith and Prez, shared the plan and then all four raced home.

As he watched the Rimmers split up to their various homes, Cory smiled and turned to Sean. "Hey, hot stuff, I gotta go tame a tiger. You think you can manage the rest of the zoo?"

Sean giggled. "Like they can be controlled? Go for it, I'll try to keep them from tearing the place apart."

Cory nodded. "Have fun!" He spotted Mrs. Seaver heading towards the pool, and quickly followed her.

Lanna Seaver had the twins, Cesar and Felipe, as well as Carmella and Kokaku with her as she made the turn around the rec center to the pool. Following her and the kids were four Teddy bears. Once she was certain the children were safe, she kicked back on a lounge to relax in the sun.

"Mrs. Seaver, can we talk for a minute?" Cory asked as he pulled over another lounge chair.

"Certainly, Cory," she happily agreed. "I hope Jacob and Jamie didn't misunderstand me during lunch. My son told me that I need to explain things to you as I would an adult so, let me begin by asking you to call me Lanna or Aunt Lanna, whichever you feel more comfortable with."

"Okay, Aunt Lanna." Cory replied with a grin. "I heard about you catching Brant... multiple times. I almost lost my lunch from laughing."

Lanna grinned, "That poor boy! When we met again later that evening, he made sure to keep several arms' lengths away from me! I

must admit, there is a method to my madness."

Cory laughed. "You do realize that he's immune to the sun, don't you? If he wasn't, he'd be a pile of ash. That's what usually happens to his species."

"My Corey did say that he was a Vampire," Lanna admitted. "I didn't know that when I saw him Friday afternoon though. I didn't even believe Corey when he told me. But then, during the concert, I saw him with fangs. Beyond being stunned about it, I was saddened because he's so young."

"He was turned in love," Cory replied seriously. "That's not a tattoo on his wrist. It's a band that absorbs into the skin if the two people are in true love when the partner is turned. It's extremely rare that it works, so you can tell just how special his partner was."

She nodded understandingly, then explained, "The reason I'm so concerned about sunburn is quite simple. When Corey was still a baby, my youngest sister, who was only seventeen at the time, developed skin cancer. If I can help one person avoid that horrible disease, I will. To further complicate matters, Corey's my only child, not because I wanted only one but, due to health reasons, I could have only one child. In Brant's case, I was protecting a child and avoiding future skin cancer. I know it was pointless now, but I didn't know that then."

Cory nodded seriously. "I understand what you mean. Unfortunately, in the Double J's case, it's not that simple. They are a lot better than they were when we took them in, but both of them still have a lot of issues that I'm pretty sure they will never totally recover from."

Frowning because she knew so much of the Pacific Rim

rescued, Lanna said, "I don't mean to pry, but can I ask how they were harmed?"

"Give me a second, I need to check with Sean to make sure I've got it right." Cory replied. Once Sean had updated his memory over their link, Cory frowned as he started speaking again. "I hate remembering this stuff; I really don't know how Sean can handle remembering it all." He paused before continuing. "Their sperm-donor used to feed them meals that would be illegal in solitary in prison. Basically, they had to let him fondle them, then relieve his urges to get something as simple as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. When he started using his fingers to take them to the next stage, they took a chance and ran away. We rescued them when we found them digging in a dumpster for food."

Fuming and becoming emotional, Lanna wiped her eyes. She understood that Jacob and Jamie now feared adults like many of the Pacific Rim rescued had Friday and some still did. Lanna cleared her throat and asked, "Please tell them I am not an abuser in any definition of the word. As a mother, I can only look out for the welfare of my kids or any kids placed in my care. Cesar and Felipe came to my husband and me, and it only took a little bit of kindness on our part to release some of their fears. Jennifer and Jim Hundser experienced the same with Carmella and Kokaku. In every case so far, the children have chosen their newly adopted parents."

Cory nodded. "Thanks. Trust me, if I know those two they knew what you said as you were saying it. Their security lies in knowing everything that is going on around them. In their case, the last thing that they will allow is an adult to order them around until they know the adult really well. I think it's habit more than anything; they developed it as a way to protect themselves and have never let go of it."

"They're telepathic?" Lanna asked.

Cory grinned. "Calling them just telepaths is like saying a Lamborghini is just a car. They were the first humans to be certified as Vulcan Telepath Trainers."

Moving closer to Cory, Lanna whispered, "I think Cesar and Felipe are also telepaths. Last night, Cesar told my husband to go ahead and do some office work that he needed to do. Bill still waited until after they went to bed and told them he was simply preoccupied. Only an hour later, I felt the need to use the bathroom but was waiting until the next commercial, to be with them. Felipe told me to go to the bathroom and I know I wasn't fidgeting. And they're always finishing each other's sentences. One can't speak without the other adding a tiny bit."

Cory couldn't help but giggle. "Try being around Jamie, Jacob, and Beau when they're in a pranking mood. I've seen them literally make their Pop dizzy enough to fall on the floor by standing around him and talking in a circle!"

Lanna smirked, "I know that most twins have an indefinable link. Can we find out if they're really telepathic or if they're just being twins?"

Before Cory could respond, three naked streaks ran by, screaming "GERONIMO!" as they went airborne and landed in the pool. "Be careful what you ask for!" Cory laughed.

Lanna laughed, "I don't know whether to ask how they knew or to point out how white their rear ends are compared to their backs!"

"Not by choice!" Cory laughed. "As far as how they knew..." Cory paused as he theatrically counted on his fingers, "at last count, I have two Mikyvis, three telepaths, one elf, and my husband - all with

permanent links in my head. Sometimes I think they know what I'm thinking before I do!"

"WE DO!" three voices yelled from the pool.

A shiver raced up and down Lanna's spine. "Should I be as concerned as I am?" Lanna worried.

Cory shook his head. "No. They have good reason to be so protective. My memory is not really stable yet, so they all work together to help keep things from throwing my brain for a loop. It's a case of they have so much love that they refuse to let me get hurt mentally ever again... all of them."

"Your memory isn't stable?" Lanna queried, "Were you hit in the head and suffered amnesia?"

"I had traumatic memory loss when my big brother died almost a year and a half ago. On top of that, I've almost died twice in the last month; once from injuries and once from almost mentally collapsing. I don't get a choice; the guys refuse to take the chance of anything ever hurting me again, mentally or otherwise." Cory replied softly.

As he finished, Beau walked up and plopped his naked butt in Cory's lap. "Cuddles. Now. Doctor's orders." Beau stated, his tone daring Cory to argue. He turned his face towards Lanna. "Go ahead, Aunt Lanna; we're gonna sit down with you an' talk after Cor is done."

Cory wrapped his arms around Beau and Lanna brightly smiled. "I've always considered myself lucky, even privileged to have the happy, healthy family I have. Now I look around at all these kids and watch them becoming happier day by day. I'll never forget how they acted Friday and most of Saturday though. A few were orphaned at birth and have never known any adult to be trustworthy. Some were

orphaned later in life, some are runaways, but they're all victims.

"Cesar and Felipe are only the first we'll adopt. I can easily see us adopting two more, possibly four more. All they have to do is show interest like the twins did. Anna and Carl Seibert adopted four right off the bat, two boys and two girls. Our situations are slightly different though, inasmuch as Mike and Derrick are older and committed to each other. My Corey and Drew have committed themselves too, but they're younger and will need help with little Geoffrey."

"This morning Jennifer Hundser called me regarding my assisting at Federation Youth Services. I couldn't give her an answer," Lanna sighed. "Jennifer has also called Anna and Laura for the same purpose. The more I think about it, the more I hope Anna or Laura accept. I'm quite happy these last few days watching the kids, although I realize that I can't watch over all of them all of the time. I've been asking myself, where can I do the most good and be happiest?"

Cory grinned. "You sound a lot like Aunt Helen! She got her son back, after Aaron talked Mom into overriding a judge who thinks any kid that farts wrong should be locked away until he's eighteen. Within twenty-four hours, her son managed to talk her into taking in two runaways. She spends all day just hanging around to give 'Mom Time' to any kid who needs it, no matter if they are her kid or not. A lot of the guys consider her the 'unofficial' HQ Clan Mom; my Mom is the official one, but Helen is the first one that everyone goes to if Mom is busy."

Lanna hummed thoughtfully.

A few minutes after four that afternoon, Drew and Corey arrived at the pool. Geoff hurried over to his Daddies. By the deeper end of

the pool, Gage was swimming and joking with some other boys between seven and ten years old when he noticed Prez and Keith had shown up. Dee, Richie, Carmella and Kokaku all hurried to them. Gage watched the two older boys with great interest and slowly moved away from the others he had been playing with. More kids wandered over to Keith and Prez. The kids wanted to show their leaders some new dives they had learned. Keith and Prez followed all the younger kids over to the diving well. Gage got out of the pool and followed, but kept his distance. He listened and learned that Dee and Richie were calling Keith daddy and Prez poppa. Then he heard Kokaku call them big bro. But lots of the kids were calling Keith and Prez bro. After some prompting, Keith then climbed the ladder to the three-meter high diving board. Keith did a twist, then a somersault, then straightened up and hit the water hands first. The dozen or so kids cheered loudly and then some older boys climbed the ladder to try the same dive.

Gage carefully considered what he knew and what he had learned all day at the Ewa Beach compound. All the kids cared about each other. And all the leaders were showing how much they cared too. But Gage's own parents couldn't even manage to show that much interest in anything but booze and drugs. Without even thinking, Gage walked over to the diving well as Keith climbed out.

"Hey, Gage!" Keith smiled. Reaching a wet hand for Gage's shoulder, Keith asked, "How's your first day been?" Gage could only nod, but then began to shed tears. Concerned, Keith softly wondered, "What's wrong, dude?"

Gage shrugged and wiped his eyes. "Never seen anything like this," Gage blubbered. Keith glanced at Prez, then led Gage to a nearby garden chair. "Everyone cares, some a lot, some a little bit, but everyone cares. Why? Why don't my parents give a shit?"

Keith sat Gage down and softly answered, "You know the answer, Gage; it's the drugs. It's one thing to drink a little once in a while, or smoke a joint at night when everything else is done. When that's all you do, though, everything else is less interesting. Maybe your folks just need help?"

By this time, Prez, Richie, Dee, Kokau and Carmella had surrounded Gage. Prez said, "We'll give them the opportunity to get that help, if that's what you want, Gage?" Samuel Bay, another boy also rescued from Maui the same time as Gage, saw the gathering and hurried over.

"It don't matter to me," Gage sobbed. "They can bury themselves in cocaine and drown in whiskey for all I care." He then took a deep breath and composed himself a little. "Look at all you guys," Gage grinned. "All these other kids around and I'm the center of attention?"

"For as long as you need it to feel better," Prez answered.

Gage nodded just as Sammy arrived and asked, "What's wrong, pal?"

Gage smirked, "Nothing's wrong now. I jus' now figured out how screwed up my folks are and how much I've missed out on."

Sammy grinned, "Oh! Well, get over your bad self! We're all here together now." Gage giggled, then Sammy looked up at Keith and Prez saying, "This place is awesome! We got so many new friends in one night, like more than any of us ever had before. When a bunch of us showered at the dorm this mornin', we checked out the whole building and a few of the rooms. After lunch, Mr. T led a bunch of us over to the school and even that place is great! Then we went to the theater and you dudes played music for us. We was playin'

basketball a while ago until we got too hot, then came here and jumped in the pool."

Gage agreed, "This really is the best place ever. I had the best breakfast and best pizza in my life here. I can't wait for dinner! I don't even know what chicken cordon bleu is, but I know it's gonna be great!"

Keith smiled and asked, "Is that why you came over to me?"

Gage shook his head then explained, "I just wanted to say thanks and ask you some things."

"You're very welcome, Gage," Keith chuckled. "What did you want to ask me?"

"I always really liked music," Gage admitted, and then asked, "Would you teach me how to play piano?"

"Sure, Gage," Keith happily answered. "If you want, we could go over to the dorm and I can give you your first lesson right now."

Gage's eyes widened and he rapidly nodded, then he got up and hugged Keith with all his strength. "I always wanted to play piano, but the druggies always said no," Gage whispered in Keith's ear. "I love you. It don't matter that you're gay cos Prez is great too. Would you..."

Feeling Gage's heart beating rapidly, Keith waited and smiled up at Prez, then whispered to Gage, "Would I what?"

Gage softly stammered, "W-would you... could I... be your son, like Dee and Richie?"

"Go ahead and ask Prez," Keith whispered. "If he says yes, I'd

love for you to be my son."

"What if he says no?" Gage worried.

Keith whispered, "I want you because you've shown us your heart, Gage. Your parents never saw how compassionate and sincere you are. If you ask Prez just like you asked me, he'll see your heart too and say yes."

Gage pulled back and searched Keith's eyes. Keith smiled and nodded, then Gage went to Prez. Gage beckoned Prez with his index finger and Prez squatted down. Gage hugged Prez and whispered, "Could I be your son? I want you and Keith to be my dads. You already mean more to me than my real parents ever did."

Prez smiled at Keith then whispered, "You get two dads and two brothers too. Is that kewl with you?"

Gage nodded and whispered, "Dee and Richie are really kewl. I jus' never had brothers before."

Prez then confided, "My parents died two years ago. I was an only child too and learned to be a brother to Drew and John. Then Keith and I fell in love."

"I know you're gay and I think the gay dudes I've met here are some of the best people I've ever met," Gage admitted.

Prez thought of asking Gage if he thought he might be gay too, but then thought again and realized it didn't matter. He only kissed Gage on the cheek and simply said, "Yes."

"Really?" Gage squealed.

Prez stood and chuckled, "Really." He then pointed over by the

pool and said, "That blond dude there is Patriarch Cory Short. He can make it official for us."

Gage nodded and giggled, "Whoosh!" then ran off towards Cory.

Richie looked up at Prez and asked, "Wha's goin on, Poppa?"

"We're getting you and Dee a new brother," Prez smiled.

Dee then put the question to Keith and squeaked, "Gage's gonna be our brother?" Keith only smiled and nodded. Dee and Richie cheered, then ran to each other.

While Dee and Richie spun around happily, Prez noticed Sammy looked a little down and asked, "What's wrong, Sammy?"

Sammy sighed, "I'm just being selfish. It's nothin' really."

Keith scowled, "That's not gonna cut it, Sammy. Aren't you happy for Gage?"

Sammy nodded and explained, "Me and Gage got to be good friends overnight. He wasn't sure if he wanted to be adopted this morning." Sammy stopped short and looked down at the concrete.

Prez directly asked, "And now you feel left out?"

"Do you want a family, Sammy?" Keith also asked.

Never looking up, Sammy softly admitted, "I do feel left out, but don't know if I'm ready for another family. The last one was screwed enough."

Prez and Richie went to Sammy. Pulling up the boy's chin, Prez said, "Think about it, Sammy. If you like what you see, if you want

brothers, sisters and parents here, all you have to do is choose where you'd like to be. That's the Clan rule; kids gotta want parents as much as parents want kids. If it doesn't work both ways, someone might feel bad."

"All you guys are wanted here," Keith added. "Now all you've gotta figure out is where you're wanted most."

Adam walked up and joined them. "I couldn't help overhearing you. Prez has it exactly right. You wanna hear my take on it?"

Sammy nodded, somewhat in awe that one of the Clan bosses would care enough to get involved.

"I had some pretty screwed up parents too." Adam began. "My mom was a druggie who cared more about her own problems than her own kid. She shipped me off to my father when the drugs finally took their toll. He had married another woman and they had given birth to another kid. Just before I got there, they abandoned the little brother that I was expecting to meet for the first time. They picked me up at the bus station, and things were going pretty good except for them telling me my little stepbrother was dead. I let it slip, kinda on purpose, that I might be gay. The next thing I knew, I was stripped and getting the crap whipped outta me. Little Kyle got a message from Cory and Sean's dead big bro about me; a few minutes later half of the Des Moines Police Department, and all of what was starting to form what would become the Clan, showed up and rescued me. The next thing I knew, I had a boyfriend, my little brother Tyler, two new big brothers named Cory and Sean, and the best Mom in the Universe." Adam paused for a breath, then finished. "Follow your heart; Cory's magic is contagious and you won't go wrong when you are around people he's touched with it."

From over by the pool near Cory, Beau shouted, "Hey doofus! It

was Polk County Sheriff, not Des Moines police! Remember Unca John, your father-in-law?"

"Bite me, Mini-Leech! There were a buncha cops there! I didn't stop to read badges!" Adam yelled back.

"No, you were too busy counting JJ's freckles! Kyle's told us ALLLLLLL about it!" Beau shot back with a giggle.

Adam turned back around, deciding to save his dignity by refusing to reply. "Now where was I?" he asked.

Sammy smiled, "I think I get the idea." He then moved closer to Prez and Richie and said, "I want to be part of your family too."

Prez softly said, "You don't have to rush into anything, Sammy. Are you certain you're ready?"

Sammy nodded, "From the first time I saw you, before you even saw me, I felt something in my belly that I never felt before. When you spoke to us at Maui, I felt it even more. At lunch, I saw you again and felt it again. The same thing happened when you were on stage. I'm not even sure what it is I'm feeling, 'cept I'm happy here and even happier when you and Keith are close by. Three brothers and two fathers works for me. Like Adam said, I can't go wrong."

Keith nodded and grinned, "That feeling in your belly is love. It makes you say and do things without even thinking, like you just did." After glancing at Prez and receiving a confirmation nod, Keith said, "We'd love to have you as our son too."

Richie and Dee surrounded Sammy, then wrapped him in their arms. Gage came running up to the group, loudly saying, "Cory's comin'," but then stopped short and asked, "What's goin' on?"

"We're multiplying," Prez chuckled. "Sammy's going to be your brother too, Gage."

Gage's mouth fell open, then he loudly laughed, "That's awesome!" Swiftly, Gage joined his other three brothers and giggled, "It's perfect!"

Cory walked up with Beau on his shoulders. Prez asked, "Where's your tricorder, Cor?"

Cory pointed up at Beau answering, "He's my tricorder." He then smirked, "I told you guys to stand down for family time."

"We did!" Prez chuckled, "But we fell back up again! During our family time, we doubled the size of our family! Isn't that what you meant?"

"In more ways than one!" Keith helplessly snickered.

"Okay then!" Cory giggled. He then got right down to business and asked, "Gage Lundberg and Samuel Bay, do you want Prez and Keith as your fathers?"

"You bet I do!" Gage cheered.

Sammy added, "Yep, I do."

Cory then asked, "Preston O'Brian and Keith Hundser, do you want Gage and Sammy as your sons?"

Taking Keith's hand, Prez answered, "Always."

"Forever," Keith nodded.

Prez locked eyes with Cory and warmly smiled, "Thanks, Cor."

Cory giggled, "No problem; this is a job I love doin'."

Turning the corner and holding hands, Mike and Derrick appeared with their sons Reyes, Dillon and Jonah. Mike wondered, "What's going on here?"

"We're makin' babies!" Keith joked.

Prez giggled, "We're up to four. What've you guys been doing all this time?"

"What we do best!" Mike joked.

Derrick nudged Mike and grinned, "In the auditorium, we noticed that the Scoobies were scratching themselves like crazy."

Mike nodded, "No more swimming in the pool for our ferrets. Their skin can't take the chlorine." Hearing this, Cory turned slightly and ordered the pool water be changed immediately at all Clan bases.

"Doctor Janet sent us some special shampoo and ointment to help them out," Derrick added.

Reyes laughed, "We got to bathe them again!"

Jonah explained, "They weren't too happy about it at first."

"But now they feels less itchy and way more better," Dillon giggled.

"Where are they now?" Prez wondered.

"Workin' on their Shiny Vault," Mike replied.

"Heaven help Hawaii," Cory softly muttered, shaking his head.

Keith looked at Gage and asked, "Ready for your first piano

lesson, son?"

"YEAH!" Gage loudly chuckled.

Prez glanced at Keith and said, "While you're doing that, I'll take our other three boys over to the townhouses and check them out."

"Good idea," Keith smiled, "We'll be moving there sooner or later. Let's all go together then. I'll want a piano of some sort there."

Derrick and Mike checked with each other, then nodded. Derrick said, "We'll join you."

"Might as well invite Drew and Corey," Prez suggested.

Before the older guys started walking over to the pool area, all the kids raced away and over to Drew, Corey and Geoff. Carmella and Kokaku were nearby and soon all the little kids had joined hands, spinning around Gage and Sammy, welcoming them to the family.

In the pool, Cesar and Felipe were with Jamie and Jacob. None of them were speaking but they were all giggling. Latoya, Christel and Brandi were together, floating on their Teddy Bears. On the other side of the pool, John, Bruce, Dewi and Nathan were with the Evans group practicing telekinesis, lifting and lowering some of the poolside lounges and their occupants. Bruce, Dewi and Nathan were loving the rides but Anna Seibert and Laura Gibbons were not quite as enthusiastic. Mike and Derrick couldn't help laughing at their mothers' nervous expressions.

'This is working out better than I could've ever imagined,' Prez proudly thought. Keith invited Drew and Corey to check out the townhomes. Soon the Rimmer families started walking towards the housing area.

Geoff looked up at Corey and sadly asked, "We gonna move away from ev'rybody, Daddy?"

Corey checked with Drew. Drew shook his head and answered, "No, Grandma and Grandpa would probably like us to stay with them for a while."

Keith said, "We're all going to stay together for a while, Geoff. But someday soon, Prez and I will move out with our boys."

"We'll always be close together, Geoff," Prez assured. "Then our boys can have sleepovers with you and other boys. It'll be fun for all of us."

Richie happily squealed, "Yeah, Geoffy. We can come stay with you, and you can comes stay with us!"

Corey picked up Geoff and smiled, "We're just going to look, because we haven't even seen the inside of those houses. It'll be like a new adventure for all of us."

Gage moved closer to Corey and Geoff. Gage said, "Imagine it, Geoff; we'll only be a short run across the compound. We can all still play together."

Reyes then said, "You know our Grandmas and Grandpas like having us around. Instead of us always nesting at the Hundser's house, we can nest anywhere we want."

Keith leaned closer to Drew and whispered, "Geoff needs a brother, so he doesn't feel so alone."

Drew nodded and softly said, "Lenny Cutler was with us up in the sound booth. On his own, Lenny went up there with his Teddy looking for me, Corey and Geoff. Most of the time, Geoff and Lenny

were playing with their Teddy's together while we ran the PA and lights."

"Make it happen, bro," Keith suggested.

Drew snickered, "Mom's gonna have a fit when she gets home!"

"I know!" Keith laughed, "It's gonna be great! She goes to work and comes home to a few new grandsons!"

Arriving in front of the townhomes, Prez unlocked the North end house while Derrick unlocked the house next door. Prez led his group inside. Derrick and Mike went inside the other townhome with their kids.

Inside the townhomes, both groups found large furnished living rooms. There were sofas, lounge chairs, a flat panel television mounted on the long adjacent wall complete with Bose surround sound systems. Prez walked through to the dining area and then into the galley style kitchen, where he also found a breakfast counter and four stools. Prez could see from the kitchen to the dining room and most of the living room.

In the living room, Keith turned on the fifty inch TV and flipped the channel to VH1 Classic, then turned up the volume. Keith then heard giggling. Lowering the TV volume, Keith glanced around and discovered Richie and Gage were missing. Following the sound of giggling boys, Keith soon found both boys, pissing in the toilet of the lower level half bath, with their boardies at their feet on the floor. "Don't cross the streams! Atoms are flying together at the speed of light!" Gage giggled. Richie cracked up again. Shaking his head but smiling widely, Keith left them to finish their business.

Prez walked up and wrapped his arms around Keith saying,

"This is really nice."

Keith nodded, then Richie and Gage hurried past. The boys went upstairs so Keith and Prez followed. At the top of the stairs were three bedrooms and two bathrooms. The master bedroom had a king sized bed and matching furnishings. In one of the two other bedrooms, Prez found Sammy lying on one bed and Dee standing on the other bed. In the other bedroom, Keith saw Richie turning on the smaller television while Gage sat at the desk powering up the laptop computer.

Meeting back outside the two rooms, Prez and Keith held each other close. "Look at our kids," Prez whispered.

"They split up and chose their bedrooms," Keith softly said.

Prez admitted, "I half expected Dee and Richie would be in one room with Gage and Sammy in the other."

Keith then asked, "What do you guys think; could this be our home?"

Four voices loudly cheered, "YEAH!"

"We lost Drew, Corey and Geoff," Keith noticed.

Richie said, "Geoffy don't like us splitting up."

"Well, we'll have to show him that we're only a short sprint away then," Prez suggested. All four boys raced past Keith and Prez, then hurried down stairs.

While Prez chuckled at the boys, Keith tapped his sub-vocal and called "Daileass?"

"What's up, Keith?" Daileass answered.

"This townhouse we're in will be ours, so we'll need a few things," Keith said. Prez went in the bedroom to turn off the TV. The laptop PC was in the middle of a Windows installation so Prez left it running.

"You'll have six *things* in that house!" Daileass giggled.

Keith shook his head and looked up for the nearest security camera, chuckling, "You really need a boyfriend!"

"He's already got me!" Draco interjected.

Keith snickered, "We'll need two pianos in this place, an upright in the living room and a Fender Rhodes in the bedroom Gage was in."

"Don't forget a little amp for the Rhodes, Daileass," Prez added.

Prez and Keith started walking down stairs and noticed a Yamaha upright piano, across from the bottom steps, between the living room and dining room. Keith smiled, "Thanks, Daileass. I'll give Gage his first lesson right here."

"You're welcome, Keith," Daileass giggled. "Good luck with Gage."

Keith replied, "Thanks, dude." He then asked Prez, "Send Gage in for a quickie piano lesson please, baby."

Prez nodded, "He'll be right in. We'll meet you back over by the pool."

"We'll be there in twenty or thirty minutes," Keith assured.

Prez walked outside to find everybody surrounding Geoff and Drew. All the kids were trying to assure Geoff that they would all still see each other every day and they could even have sleep-overs. Prez

saw that Geoff still wasn't all too happy. Prez sent Gage inside, then sat down on the step and waited for a chance to interject. Soon everyone saw him sitting there and stopped talking. Prez asked, "Can I see you for a minute, please, Geoff?"

Geoff nodded, "'Kay, Unca Prez," and Drew put the boy down. Geoff went to Prez and Prez sat the boy on his lap.

Prez whispered, "It's just the change that's scaring you, isn't it?" Geoff nodded and Prez asked, "Guess what you just did?"

Geoff shrugged and asked, "What?"

"You made a change, from Daddy to me, all by yourself."

"I did?"

"Uh huh; that's a change. And guess what? All these boys and their daddies love you, and don't want you feeling sad." Geoff blushed, nodded and grinned slightly. "You can show them that you can make changes too. Ya wanna know how?"

"How?" Geoff asked.

"Run over to Uncle Mike and give him a hug, then go to Uncle Derrick and hug him. Go to each of the boys and give them hugs. Every time you go from person to person, you're making a change."

"Yeah?"

Prez nodded and grinned, "Show 'em, Geoff," then helped the boy off his lap and watched as Geoff went around to Mike, Derrick, Reyes, Dillon, Jonah, Richie, Dee, Sammy, Corey and finally back to Drew.

"That's my big guy!" Drew proudly cheered.

Corey smiled and nodded at Prez, then turned to Geoff and suggested, "To show you how close we'll all be, let's walk back to the houses and then over to the pool."

Cutting across the grass, the group then took the path between the two northern most dorms and the CIC, then were back at the Hundserts' house. The whole trip took about five minutes at a leisurely pace. It only took another few minutes to walk between the four homes and wind up back at the pool house. Mike, Derrick, Prez, Reyes, Sammy and Jonah decided to use the diving well and split off to the left. Drew, Corey, Richie, Geoff and Dee went to the right and directly into the pool.

John was still practicing telekinesis, lifting Anna Seibert and flying her about six feet above the pool when he saw Drew and Corey jump in with the boys. Without even trying or focusing too much, John got an image in his mind of Drew and Corey naked together in a frothy whirlpool. John then scanned deeper to learn exactly what his big bro had done. Mrs. Seibert and her lounge chair stopped cruising and slowly began to lower nearer to the pool. Seeing an image of Drew licking and gently nibbling Corey's lily white ass set John off giggling. He didn't even hear Mrs. Seibert, Drew, Corey or anyone else calling his name, but simply laughed at the memories of Rimmers rimming in his mind. Kids in the pool under Mrs. Seibert scurried away just before the lounge chair and older woman splashed into the pool.

Wondering why John's powers had failed, Jason and Nath Evans and Nathan Hayes got the full picture and cracked up laughing. All four boys were rolling hysterically, then Vicky, Riti, Jamie, Jacob and Beau joined in. Drew and Corey began trying to figure out what John and the others found so funny. Mrs. Seibert waded out of the pool to

John and impatiently huffed, "You were doing so well! What happened?"

Barely catching his breath, John offered an apology.

"A momentary distraction," Nathan Hayes giggled.

"Now I have to get changed," Anna Seibert grumbled, and swished off to her house.

Corey and Drew had suspicions and got out of the pool, then went directly to John. Seeing them coming, but unable to do anything other than stand up and back away, John laughed even harder.

Drew challenged, "What's so funny, bro?"

"You're making us paranoid!" Corey threatened.

John gasped, "Clean whirlpool Rimmers!" then took off running. Corey and Drew gave chase, cutting across the soccer field, then the walkway between the dorms and townhouses, then towards the Hundser home.

Jennifer Hundser stepped out of her house just as John raced to the front door. John hid behind his mother. "Whoa!" Jennifer hollered as Drew and Corey approached. "What's going on?" Jennifer loudly wondered.

Drew and Corey were speechless. What could they say, after all? They couldn't tell her that John was an N-Gen. They also couldn't divulge what they had done together. John remained safely behind his mom, snickering evilly.

On the lawn outside his home, Jim Hundser appeared with his two security guards and shouted, "Is this the way we set an example?"

"Dad," Drew whined, "John's being a brat!"

Corey added, "He was kinda spying on us!"

"*Kinda* spying on you?" Jim queried. "Excuse me, but how does one *kinda* spy? Either he was or he wasn't?"

Jennifer turned and simultaneously pulled John before her. "Were you spying, John?"

Knowing he could still get in trouble, John grinned, "Well... umm... it was an accident. Besides, they weren't exactly keeping it private either."

Drew squinted at John. Clearly reading Drew's thoughts, John heard, "*You still have to sleep sometime, somewhere, bro!*"

Corey didn't keep his threat silent or private though. "You have to tell your folks what happened today. You know Derrick's mom is going to say something about being dumped in the pool."

"What?" Jennifer shrieked.

"That was an accident too!" John quickly and loudly assured. "She knows it and I did apologize!"

Keith walked up with Gage and saw there was something not right. Since he had no idea what was going on, he simply said, "Hi mom, hi dad." Both Hundser adults said hello, then Keith said, "We have a few things to talk about. It's been another busy day."

Jim sighed loud and long. Jennifer nodded, "Family meeting time," then turned and entered the house with John.

Following Drew, Corey and his dad inside with Gage, Keith

tapped his comm-badge and called, "Prez?"

It took a few moments for Prez to reply because he was naked at the diving well. As everyone got comfortable in the living room, Prez answered, "Yeah, babe, what's up?"

"Mom and Dad are home now," Keith explained. "It's time to fill them in on today's trivia."

"Is Gage with you?" Prez asked.

"Yep," Keith grinned. "Bring all our kids and Geoff too."

Prez replied, "Okay, we'll be there in a few minutes."

"Okay, baby," Keith replied. There were a few moments of uncomfortable silence before Keith scratched his head and grinned, "Okay, our guests from Orlando showed up this morning. Derek Tecumseh, the Clan Short educational adviser was first. He's going to help us get good teachers staffed here. While we're on that topic, we did go to band class today. We got our transcripts and the teacher had no problem with the security guys at all."

Jim glanced at Jennifer and nodded, "So far so good."

Keith then explained, "After Derek Tecumseh, we got another seven visitors from Orlando. Their names are Jacob, Jamie, Beau, Jason, another Nathan, Vicky and Riti. They're all really nice and have shared a lot of the knowledge we need already."

"That was very quick," Jennifer commented.

"You have no idea!" Keith giggled. John, Drew, Corey and Gage all began sniggering. While his parents looked around the room, Keith smiled, "Just so you know, we call Derek Tecumseh, Mister T. and

Jacob and Jamie are... how shall I say... playful? We call them the Double J's but really, they're only part of the set of Terrible Triplets, which includes Beau."

Jennifer turned to Jim and said, "I'm already getting nervous."

In perfect German, Keith then asked, "Sprechen Sie kein Deutsch?" (Do you speak any German?)

"Ein bisschen," Jim Hundser answered. (A little bit.)

Keith then asked, "Was würdest du sagen, wenn jeder hier nun sprechen konnte Deutsch, Französisch, Italienisch, Spanisch, Russisch, Japanisch und mehr?" (What would you say if everyone here could now speak German, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Japanese and more?)

Jim grinned, "I'd say I only got the first section of that! But I heard half a dozen languages named."

Jennifer asked, "Pouvez-vous parler français?" (Can you speak French?)

Keith nodded, "Je peux parler français facilement. Jamie, Jacob et Beau sont télépathes puissant. Nous allons leur faire partager ces connaissances avec tous les parents bientôt. Ils pourraient même prendre sur eux-mêmes, comme ils ont fait plus tôt aujourd'hui." (I can speak French easily. Jamie, Jacob and Beau are powerful telepaths. We'll have them share that knowledge with all the parents soon. They might even take it upon themselves, like they did earlier today.)

Prez walked inside the house after Richie, Dee and Sammy, but had only heard part of Keith's statement.

Jennifer smiled proudly, "Vous parlez français mieux que moi!" (You speak French better than I do!)

Prez grinned, "Je vois que vous avez couvert la première partie de la matinée, babe." (I see you've covered the first part of the morning, babe.)

So his parents wouldn't understand, Keith replied in Portuguese. "Eu lhes disse que ia para a escola também, mas não disse uma palavra sobre ter que sair mais cedo ou porquê. " (I told them we went to school too, but didn't say a word about having to leave early or why.)

In Spanish, John asked, "¿Por qué no les dices de mí?" (Why won't you tell them about me?)

Keith answered, "En un minuto, Juan! Vamos a tener esto un poco a la vez!" (In a minute, John! Let's take this a little bit at a time!)

John grumbled, "Voy a ir a buscar un poco de café, entonces!" (I'm gonna go get them some coffee then!) John then got up from the sofa and went to the kitchen.

Shocked beyond words, Jim and Jennifer sat back in their chairs.

"After we learned the languages, Cory and Sean Short arrived," Keith explained.

Prez added, "They brought Adam Short and JJ Richardson along with them. They're all really nice guys, you'll like them."

"There's a little something you probably need to know about Riti," Keith told his parents. Then he turned to Prez and asked, "How

should I say this?"

Prez shrugged, "There's really only one way to say it. Reet's an alien; he's partially humanoid, with arms and legs, but he's got some bird-like features like wings and Owl eyes that can move independently."

Keith nodded and watched his parents carefully as he explained, "Reet took Bruce for a short flight around the Island." Jennifer groaned and Jim closed his eyes. Since his parents hadn't run for the front door, the liquor cabinet or medicine chest, Keith softly said, "Then John went with Reet for a ride... to Hawaii. While they were gone, John and Reet rescued a little Welsh boy named Dewi."

Prez quickly added, "He's only four and was being horribly abused by his parents."

Drew added, "The kid's been brainwashed into believing that he's always bad. Doctor Weiner had a brief chat with him already."

"He needs real parents most," Keith said.

Prez nodded, "We could take him, but he needs to know a mother that won't beat or sexually abuse him."

Keith explained, "We'll see who he latches onto over the next few days, but for now, he trusts John and Bruce most."

"Which leads us to the next topic," Prez smiled. He stood and gestured for Gage and Sammy to also stand. "Mom, Dad," Prez began, "I'd like you to meet two of the boys we rescued from Maui last night." Prez wrapped his arms around both boys saying, "On my right is Gage Lundberg and on my left is Samuel Bay."

Keith rose with Dee and Richie then said, "They both decided

that they wanted parents and brothers. Specifically, they chose us, so we've adopted them."

Richie giggled, "They're really kewl too!"

Dee nodded and smiled, "Then Daddy and Poppa took us over to the townhouses. We got a place all picked out! When the little kids are readier, we'll move into that place as a family."

Richie said, "Daddy's teachin' Gage to play piano!"

"Well, that is good news!" Jim chuckled. "Welcome to the family, Gage and Samuel."

"Call me Sam or Sammy, okay?"

Jim nodded and grinned, "Sam it is then."

Gage offered, "Me and Sammy got to be really good friends last night. Now we each got three brothers and two great fathers."

"I can see how happy you all are," Jennifer smiled. "You even look like a family."

John walked into the dining room from the kitchen, telekinetically carrying two cups of hot coffee for his parents.

Seeing him before he entered the living room, Drew, Prez and Keith all hollered, "No, John!"

John giggled, "Why not?"

"Everything's going really good!" Drew said. "Don't ruin it!"

"You guys never let me have any fun," John softly complained. He set the two cups down on the table, then picked them up with his

hands and slowly carried them into the living room. John put the cups down on an end table between his parents.

Keith then began to explain, "You've both already figured out John's empathic?" Lifting their cups, the two Hundser adults nodded.

Prez then said, "We've learned that John's special on a level you probably didn't already know."

"John was identified as a next generation human, or N-Gen for short," Keith said. "It's basically the evolution of the species."

"We had a choice to make and the four of us talked about it with Jason," Prez carefully informed his parents. "See, making the transition isn't easy. It could've hurt John..."

"Or even killed him," Drew finished.

"I didn't want it to hurt," John said. "And I sure didn't want to die." John paused and scanned his parents. They were slightly nervous, so John explained, "The Terrible Triplets and the Evans kids helped me so it didn't hurt and I won't die." John then spun around and smiled, "Ya wanna help me out, Richie?"

Richie nodded and giggled, "Just don't drop me, 'kay?"

Keith quickly told his parents, "Put your coffee cups down, please." John spun around again and watched his parents place the cups back on the end table.

Turning back to Richie, John lifted his nephew about two feet off the floor while his parents watched. John was barely using any effort at all, though, so he stepped back and lifted the coffee table too. Powering up, John's eyes shone azure blue as Drew also lifted up from the sofa. While two people and the coffee table hovered, John

turned around so his parents could see his eyes. "Don't be scared," John pleaded with his parents. "I'm really fine. Now I can see images in my mind too. I wasn't spying on Corey and Drew. They were with Geoff in the pool and I just kinda saw what they had done alone together. I didn't mean to see it at first; it just happened. That's how I accidentally dropped Mrs. Seibert in the pool. I was practicing T.K. when I got too busy watching Corey and Drew. I still have a lot to learn, but I can feel that you're nervous. As time goes on and I practice more, I'll get more control. Then I won't accidentally see stuff I shouldn't or drop people in pools." John set Drew down on the sofa, then lowered the coffee table and then Richie. His eyes returned to their normal brown color, and he said, "See? It's so kewl. I can help Prez and the whole Clan even more now."

Eying her youngest son, Jennifer fretted, "Are you really okay?"

John giggled, "I feel great, mom, honest."

Jim looked at his other three sons and admonished, "I wish you had warned us."

Keith explained, "We knew John was N-Gen Saturday, but didn't find out that him turning could be so dangerous until today."

Prez sighed, "I'm Director and ultimately responsible for over a hundred kids and adults." He then softly asked, "Should I have called you both at work for this?"

Before his parents could answer, Keith took Prez by the hand and reminded, "You're not the only one responsible, Prez. I've got your back, baby."

"It's just like before the Clan," Drew chimed in. "We're together in this; Joel made us all leaders of this Clan. Now Prez wants to

delegate authority too."

Jim took a sip of his coffee and thought before saying, "Should we have been notified? In this case I believe the answer would be yes, but I'm also asking myself what purpose knowing might've served."

Looking at his parents and eldest brothers, John asked, "What's gonna happen if we have a *real* rescue while you're at work? Do you want Prez to call you every time something happens?" Pointing at his brothers, John then huffed, "They all talked about the turning without including me. I was the last one to find out! As usual, my brothers protected me until I had a fit about it! It was my choice. You all treat me like a baby still! Stop it!" Beginning to shed tears, John shouted, "Before I even turned N-Gen, I helped Reet find and rescue Dewi. You wanna baby someone? Baby Dewi! His parents were sadists! His father was slapping him around! His mother was tugging on his nuts! And Dewi still don't know how bad that really was! He thinks that because he got seasick he deserved it! While Keith and Prez were at school, me and Drew took Dewi to both doctors. It didn't take Prez or any major decision; we just did it cos Dewi needed it."

When John paused, Jennifer reached for his hand and smiled, "You've always been the youngest. We wanted to protect you from the harsh realities of the world as long as possible. We know it needs to change. Now you've got two little brothers and a little sister that you'll want to protect too."

John frowned, "Make it three little brothers, please?"

Jim chuckled, "We should at least meet Dewi first!"

Prez reminded, "It's up to Dewi, bro. He can latch onto whomever he wants."

Keith nodded, "Since his real mom was such a perv, we already

figured that Dewi needs a mom, not two dads. It don't take a degree to figure that out!"

"Can I make a suggestion?" Drew offered. Everyone nodded so Drew said, "They're serving chicken cordon bleu and rice pilaf at the CIC tonight."

Keith chuckled, "Good one, bro! Always thinking with your stomach!"

Drew cackled, "What? Mom and Dad already worked all day! Why cook another dinner?"

Prez nodded, "It's actually a good idea. Let's all sit together, though; grandparents, parents and our kids. We can show all the other kids what a family is like."

"Minus the hissy fits!" Corey giggled.

Pulling Corey back against him, Drew teased, "How can it be family time without the occasional hissy fit?"

Bruce, Carmella, Dewi and Kokaku walked in the house. Carmella hurried to Jim squealing, "Hi daddy!"

Jim picked her up and sat her on his lap asking, "How's my princess today?"

"Good," Carmella smiled. "We was playin' at the pool, an' the band played after lunch. We has pizza!"

John then introduced Dewi to his parents. Jim and Jennifer both said hello, but then Jennifer dramatically wondered, "Why am I sitting here alone?"

"Weez is big boys," Dewi answered.

John corrected, "You're never too big for a hug," then went around the boys to his mom where he gave a hug and got one. Bruce followed John, then Kokaku took a turn. Finally, Dewi moved forward.

While Dewi became acquainted with the family, Prez moved out of the room to the entryway. Richie dutifully shadowed his pop. Tapping his comm-badge, Prez called Mike. "Where are you, bud?"

"At the pool still," Mike answered.

Taking a seat on the stairs and parking Richie on his lap, Prez asked, "Is your dad home yet?"

"Haven't seen him yet," Mike replied. "He's probably getting changed out of his uniform though."

Prez shared the plan. "Let's get all our families together for dinner over at the CIC." He then asked, "Are Cory and Sean Short nearby?"

"Yep, only a few yards away."

"Let's lead by example and make it happen, dude," Prez instructed. "We'll meet you at the dining hall in a few minutes." Prez then heard various kids cheering and grinned, "I hear a few hungry kids."

"Can't say that I blame them," Mike chuckled. "Oh shit! The dinner bell has rung! There they go! Last one to the dining hall misses out!"

Prez then tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Daileass, where's Judy

and Troy Faris?"

"Troy's in his condo practicing," Daileass replied. "Judy's on her way up in the elevator."

"Patch me into the Faris condo, please?"

"Go ahead, Prez," Daileass said.

"Hey, Troy?" Prez called.

"JESUS CHRIST!" Troy nervously hollered. Prez cracked up. More softly, Troy wondered, "How in the hell?"

"Speakers and microphones in the ceiling," Prez breathlessly sniggered.

Troy nervously huffed, "You startled the piss out o' me, Prez."

"Sorry about that," Prez giggled.

Troy asked, "What did you need?"

"All our families are meeting at the CIC dining hall," Prez explained. "I'd like you and your mom there too. She should be walking in any time now, so don't let her make dinner."

"Oh my God!" Troy gasped, "She just walked in!"

Prez chuckled, "Well, turn her around! We'll meet you in the dining hall, okay dude?"

Somewhat embarrassed because he was shirtless and had been vividly daydreaming about the band while practicing, Troy stammered, "Uh... okay... but... can you see me too, Prez?"

"Not at the moment," Prez honestly answered.

Packing up his saxophone, Troy giggled, "Oh, okay. See ya in few minutes."

"Kewl bud, see ya." Prez lifted Richie then went back into the living room. Kokaku was proudly wearing his dad's necktie; it hung from the boy's neck to his knees.

In moments, everyone was walking out of the house and over to the CIC. Although Prez had pictured sitting down to dinner with Keith and their boys, Dee, Gage, Richie and Sammy had decided to sit with Reyes, Jonah, Dillon and Geoff. Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo, Tory, Drew and Corey sat together. Judy and Troy Faris chose a table close to the eldest Core Rimmers and were joined by Benjamin Hatcher, Sean Moorhead, Horacio Sulin and Roy Angulo. On the other side of the Core Rimmers sat Cory, Sean, Adam, JJ, Timmy and Ricky. At another table were John, Bruce, Nathan Hayes, Dewi, Kokaku, Cesar and Felipe. The next table over had Brandi, Carmella, Christel, Latoya and Lindsay, who were joined by Renee Carlos. The parents took the seventh table.

After dinner conversations began with JJ and Rob Gibbons, the idea was discussed to have Rob remain part of Honolulu Police, but on detached duty as a liaison between the Clan and the Police. Rob would pursue that option the very next day and, with luck, would be back on base by lunch time. JJ suggested talking to Fred White and Jack Watson, the former Indiana policemen working as Clan liaison out of Orlando, and using JJ's stepfather Commander John Martin, the Southeast U.S. head of Starfleet Security, and his bosses Starfleet Captain Barney Drumm and Admiral Juan Garcia-Lopez, if the Police Department gave him any difficulty about the proposal. Rob thanked him and noted down the names and numbers to call.

Kayla York was transported from Orlando to the dining hall to begin the organization of Pacific Rim Federation Youth Services. She glanced around; Cory grinned and pointed her at the parents' table. She walked over and introduced herself. "Hi, I'm Kayla York, Teri Short's number-two person. Teri sends her apologies, but her boys come first, and she's... tied up dealing with Joel right now."

Jim Hundser took the lead on introducing the eight parents.

"I recognize that expression," Kayla chuckled. "It was only about two months ago that Robin and I were wearing it. I call it Clan shock."

"You're probably wondering what Federation Youth Services does," she went on. "The answer is something like the one to where an eight hundred pound gorilla sits; anywhere it wants to." Everyone's eyes went involuntarily to the security gorillas, which appeared to be engaged in an animated discussion of something using coconuts and bananas as symbols to move around. "We typically underwrite the costs of things that kids need, like converting the old Naval Hospital in Charleston to a state-of-the-art pediatric facility, or enabling an older brother to afford a house for his younger siblings when he becomes their guardian. We cut red tape to make sure kids get the care and happy home they need. And we are the umbrella agency for professional services, like the two doctors that Austin and Dan approved to start up your operation here. But most importantly, we make sure every kid has fathers and mothers they love and who love them."

Lanna Seaver was the first to chime in. "After considering my options most of the day, I believe I would serve best as a house mother of sorts. Cory Short mentioned someone named Helen."

Jennifer Hundser then said, "Keith already forewarned me that

Preston would like me to lead Federation Youth Services. I have a Masters degree in sociology and a Bachelors degree in psychology. After John was born, I took a job working for Hawaii Medical Center West. I've been employed there for nine years."

Kayla smiled. "Teri and I already discussed that; with a little help from the Terrible Trio." She gestured over at Jamie, Jacob, and Beau. "We think you would be the perfect person for the job. Any idea who would be a good office manager or assistant director for you? Somebody well organized, not afraid to throw his or her weight around when it's needed?"

"That would be me," Anna Seibert smiled. "I've been driving school buses for five years and dealing with kids. Before that, I was an office secretary for seven years."

"That makes sense," Kayla replied. "You've got the two doctors, and they'll probably need additional staff, so make sure they know they're authorized to hire people. Any other roles you need filled that occur to you right now, Jennifer?"

"Preston has already had ads placed in local papers for nurses and receptionists," Jennifer answered. Turning to her husband, Jennifer grinned, "The only other position we'd need to fill is for a legal department."

"You belong to the Hawaii National Bar, right?" Kayla asked. Jim nodded. "Good, you are now head of FYS Legal Services, based out of here." She called over to the twins. "Boys! Mind dump, please; legal information, including the Safe Haven Act and Clan Charter for Mr. and Mrs. Hundser and Mrs. Siebert." Jacob gave her a thumb-up gesture.

Jamie giggled, "Once we get the updated data, we'll get it

dumped."

Bill Seaver said, "I've been a bank manager for eleven years. It's been a lackluster career; all I do is accounting and paper pushing."

Jim thought aloud, "That has some legal ramifications. Would you be interested in assisting the legal department, Bill?"

"It sounds like a winner to me!" Bill smiled.

"Oh, Jacob!" Kayla called out again.

"Got it covered already!" Beau giggled. "Honestly, old people!"

"I'll show you 'old,' you little scamp," Kayla laughed. Then she pulled out a communicator. "Crystal?" she said into it.

"Yeah, mom?"

"Finish off that paperwork I've got loaded. Jennifer Hundser accepted becoming FYS Director. Fill in Anna Seibert for her Deputy, James Hundser for Legal, and William Seaver as his assistant."

"Will do, mom. Send it to Prez's terminal?"

"That works; it's networked to the one in PRD CIC," Kayla said.

A few tables over, Cory and Sean Short were having a discussion with Mike and Derrick regarding upgrading Reyes' software and firmware. Austin Short was transported from Orlando to the Ewa Beach dining hall to meet Reyes and discuss how the upgrades would be done. Reyes only cared about keeping his memories. Once Reyes, Derrick and Mike felt comfortable, they went into the CIC with Austin, Cory and Sean to accomplish the deed.

When Mike, Derrick, Cory, Sean, Austin and Reyes went into

the CIC, Troy moved over by Keith and Prez to begin a serious music conversation. Troy had a few ideas for additional songs Platinum Habits could learn and cover. During the course of the discussion, Prez and Keith learned that Troy could not only play various instruments, he could also read music and had more than a basic understanding of music theory. Troy had never attempted to write any music, but he did have a notebook of lyric ideas.

Nearby, John was using the leftovers to build an armada of marching baby carrots. Jason Evans noticed the marching vegetables and 'fired' a baby carrot 'missile' from his table to John's, knocking down a row of carrot 'troops' and thus beginning the first Baby Carrot Battle. After only a minute or two, Cory Short came out of the CIC and went to Prez.

"There's a bunch of kids to be picked up at your base on Hawaii," Cory told Prez.

Prez sighed, then asked Cory, "Now's as good a time as any to delegate, don't you think?"

"It's your call, Prez," Cory shrugged. "If it were me, I'd include John and Nathan Hayes for Intel division inspection."

Prez said, "Okay," then turned to Kaleo saying, "You're in charge, dude. Take Drew, Corey, John and Nathan with you." Launched baby carrots fell to the floor before Prez even finished speaking.

Kaleo apprehensively asked, "What do I do?"

"Introduce yourself to Starfleet security first," Prez replied. "Ask the kids about their situations and tell them a little about this base. Make them feel like their lives are about to improve. When you return, get them fed and orientated. If anyone's hurt, like Sonia's

twisted ankle, get Doc Andrews to have a look. Just common sense stuff."

Keith reminded, "Make sure you've got your Starfleet ID's."

"We've always got them, bro," Drew assured.

Kaleo gave Tory a quick kiss, then said, "I'll be back soon." John and Nathan were already waiting when Kaleo, Drew and Corey stood. Tapping his sub-vocal, Kaleo called, "Daileass?"

Daileass replied into the ears of the five man team, "Transport to Hawaii when you say go, Kaleo."

"Let's go," Kaleo chirped. Then all five disappeared from the dining hall.

The team appeared inside the Hawaii base a few yards from the security station. As a Lieutenant stepped outside, all five held up their Starfleet ID's. "Good evening, gentlemen; I'm Lieutenant Roger Blair."

Kaleo smiled, "Nice to meet you, Lieutenant; my name's Kaleo Palakiko. With me are Drew and John Hundser, Corey Seaver and Nathan Hayes."

Lieutenant Blair asked, "Where is Director O'Brian?"

"We were just finishing up dinner," Kaleo explained. "We also have guests from Orlando, including Patriarch Cory Short."

Nodding, Lieutenant Blair said, "We've gathered ten youth today," he then waved at the other security guard. One by one, a group of kids came out of the shack.

John scowled then whispered to Nathan. Nathan softly giggled,

"Why are you whispering?" then transmitted, *'Logan is hearing everything I am.'*

Drew and Corey began greeting the kids and asking them their names. Included in the group of boys were Bill Devine, Nicholas Shavers, Roger Mosqueda, Jeff Cummings, Stephen Marr, Jerry Burk, John Huth, Manuel Simonton, Jonathan Dupre and James Hahn. John and Nathan had taken immediate interest in Bill Devine, the tallest of the group.

John and Nathan transmitted messages back and forth. As Nathan went to Lieutenant Blair, Kaleo innocently asked John, "What's the problem?"

John shook his head and transmitted to Kaleo, *"This one's not like the others. He's been planted by the Fundamentalist Church of Christ. Nathan called him a mole."*

Lieutenant Blair drew his phaser and waved for the Ensign in the station to come outside. With his weapon drawn, the Ensign hurried outside. "Put your hands on your head and step away from the others, Mister Devine," Lieutenant Blair strongly ordered.

Bill Devine looked around nervously at the two armed men and shouted, "What? What did I do?"

Lieutenant Blair yelled, "MOVE AWAY FROM THE CHILDREN NOW!"

As Bill Devine took his first step away from the other kids and put his hands on his head, Kaleo lost his temper and shouted, "You stupid son of a bitch! You wouldn't know a good thing if it was right in front of your face, would you? Didn't Jesus say, 'love one another as I loved you'? But that's not good enough for you and your so called church!" Never losing eye contact with the boy, Kaleo loudly said,

"Lieutenant Blair, as leader of this team and acting on behalf of Director O'Brian, I want this asshole arrested. Subject him to mind scans, find out where he came from. If there are any of those FCC jack-offs within the Pacific Rim jurisdiction, arrest them all on charges of conspiracy against Clan Short of Vulcan."

"Aye Sir," Lieutenant Blair responded.

Bill Devine grinned, "We'll get you; all of you fucking fags will die."

That was all Nathan needed to hear. Logan appeared beside Nathan and John.

Kaleo held off, and with all his strength and weight, landed a fist on Bill Devine's jaw. Staggering backwards, Bill then took two steps toward Kaleo, but was hit by two phaser blasts and crumbled to the pavement. Kaleo started shaking his sore right hand and complained, "Mother fucking assholes don't even know we're around for *all* abused and abandoned kids." Noticing the shocked expressions of the other nine kids, Kaleo calmed down and explained, "I'm sorry; I wish you guys hadn't witnessed that. I was rescued by the Clan Friday and my life has never been so good. Clan Short doesn't care if you're gay or straight. We're here for any abandoned or abused kid."

Logan conferred with Lieutenant Blair while Kaleo continued greeting the kids. Logon softly said, "Lieutenant, I'll take this worthless sack of shit to Utah. In no time, I'll have locations of any FCC congregations this guy knows of. When we get more of the scum in shackles, we'll find out where any more of them might be hiding. They stirred up shit last week. I intend to feed it right back to them." Drew, Corey, John and Nathan all assured the Lieutenant that Kaleo would agree with the plan. Logan then moved over to the unconscious

Bill Devine and they both disappeared.

Kaleo began talking with each of the boys. Nicholas Shavers was thirteen and his parents hated him because he was gay and in a relationship with Roger Mosqueda. Jeff Cummings was twelve and his father was an alcoholic child abuser. Stephen Marr was eleven and his mother barely provided him with enough food. She knew that she couldn't provide for him and dropped him off at the gate. Jerry Burk, John Huth and Manuel Simonton were also eleven. Jonathan Dupre was ten and ran away from his foster parents. James Hahn was nine and only saw his parents when they needed to bitch about how everything wrong with them was all his fault.

"We're going to our main base on Oahu in Ewa Beach," Kaleo explained. "All you guys will have warm beds and plenty to eat from now on. We've also got pools, indoor and outdoor rec centers, basketball courts and a huge auditorium. Four of our leaders have their own band and perform for us often. Stephen, you're the only one with a suitcase, but all of you will have clothes and anything else you might need by the time you're ready for bed tonight." He paused and asked, "Any questions?"

Jonathan said, "I ain't eaten since this morning. How long till we can eat?"

Kaleo grinned, "About two minutes," then tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Daileass, fourteen to transport directly to the Ewa Beach chow hall."

"Your will be done, Mouth Rimmer," Daileass giggled.

Rolling his eyes, Kaleo snickered from Hawaii to the Ewa Beach kitchen. Almost all the kids exclaimed joyfully at their first transporter trip, then went for trays and got in line. Putting his

suitcase down, Stephen Marr was the last to join the line. Kaleo also noticed the boy wasn't much taller than the nine-year-old boy beside him. Tapping his comm-badge, Kaleo called, "Doc Andrews to the CIC dining room, please."

Doc Andrews responded, "Is there a problem, Kaleo?"

Stepping away so the boy wouldn't overhear, Kaleo said, "I think so, Doc. We just picked up an eleven year old that's obviously malnourished."

"On my way," the Doctor replied. Kaleo started to walk towards the dining room to find Prez, but Doctor Andrews stopped him and asked, "Which boy, Kaleo?"

Turning around, Kaleo pointed and softly said, "The one in the green and blue striped polo shirt that looks like a tent."

Doc Andrews nodded, "Yep, I could've guessed," then went into the kitchen and began scanning the boy with his tricorder.

Sitting with Keith, Cory and Sean Short, Prez noticed Kaleo approaching and smiled, "How'd it go, Fist Rimmer?"

"Fist Rimmer?" Kaleo giggled, still rubbing his sore right hand with his left hand. "Guess you heard already."

As Kaleo sat down, Prez nodded, "Daileass patched us in to hear the blow-by-blow as it was happening." Prez then chuckled, "It's a good thing you went."

"If Prez, Mike and Derrick were there, the dude would probably need surgery instead of an ice pack on his chin," Keith snickered.

Prez warmly smiled, "You were great, Kaleo. I couldn't be

prouder."

Cory added, "The FCC is on the run now. Prez has confirmed your orders and so have I."

"Where's my brothers?" Keith asked.

Kaleo answered, "Last I saw, showing the newbies through the chow line." Seeing Drew leading the pack into the dining room, Kaleo pointed.

Nathan hurried to the table and skidded to a halt between Cory and Prez. Nathan giggled, "John's getting really good. He felt something was wrong as soon as we arrived. Then he began light scans as the kids walked out of the security station. He zeroed in on Bill Devine before I did!"

Keith groaned, "Oh God!" and Prez cracked up. Keith smirked, "He's going to be impossible to live with." No sooner did Keith finish speaking, he was promptly beamed by a baby carrot. Keith huffed, "We need to move out, baby, soon!" and then swatted another incoming carrot out of the air.

Prez giggled, "First we need to contact the King." He then asked Cory, "Would you like to listen in, Cory?"

A few tables away, Mr. T and Kayla York both hollered, "NO!"

Kayla added, "It's only seven-thirty here, but it's one-thirty Eastern Time. You need to go to bed to be ready for another day."

Cory scowled, "Guess we need to be on our way. The Double J's and Beau need a vacation so, if it's okay with you, they're staying here."

"I see no problem with that," Prez smiled. "We've got plenty of space."

Cory snickered, "Send them back to Orlando if they get to be too much for you." Suddenly, several dozen baby carrots were launched across the dining room that Cory began swatting away.

Sean laughed as two carrots came around from behind Cory and nailed him in both ears at the same time. "Now *that* is what I call a food fight!"

"Just wait, babe! Since the adults seem to want to ruin the fun, I guess we'd better get home," Cory pouted, and he deflected a carrot trying to climb up his nose.

Keith and Prez stood, then shook hands with Cory and Sean. Prez said, "Stop by any chance ya get, guys. The Funny Farm's always open."

As Mr. T, Kayla, Austin, Timmy, Ricky, Adam and JJ approached, Cory smiled, "You guys come to Orlando next time."

"We'll show you a real Funny Farm!" Sean giggled.

Cory tapped his comm-badge. "Hey, Nanonuts, are you ready to take us home?"

Daileass laughed, "Any time you're ready, Micromind!"

Everyone waved and the Orlando Clan group vanished.

Prez turned to Keith, saying, "Mike and Derrick are still in the command center with Reyes."

Keith nodded, "Let's see what's going on."

Prez suggested, "Then we'll call the King." The couple walked across the dining room and into the command center. Stopping short inside the room, they found Mike, Derrick, Dillon and Jonah surrounding Reyes, cuddling and hugging him. Concerned, Prez frowned and asked, "Are you guys all right?"

"Definitely," Reyes smiled.

Mike explained, "Reboot caused a rush of old memories."

Derrick grinned, "Reyes is thirteen going on fifty-seven."

"Jeez," Keith softly said, "You're older than any of our parents. No wonder the memories were overwhelming."

"It's great!" Dillon cheered, "He's our big bro now and always will be!"

Prez explained, "I need to call the King before it gets any later. Can I do it here or should I go home?"

Derrick asked, "Do you need us around, Prez?"

Shaking his head, Prez said, "Reyes takes priority. Family always takes priority."

"We'll take our kids over to the pool then," Mike suggested.

Derrick remembered, "The Scoobies probably need another ointment treatment anyhow."

As the family walked by, Adam's voice came over the speakers in CIC. "Commander Casey to Director O'Brian," Prez immediately hurried over to the terminal and nodded to Paulie, bringing Adam up on the main screen.

Noting the tone in Adam's voice, Prez knew it was a business call and asked, "What can I do for you, Commander?"

Adam stated, "I just wanted to let you know that we will be running multiple operations on your islands during the next several hours. This is because of the information obtained from the mole that your Intel team was able to discover. Basically, what is happening is this; the Mole was able to give us the information we need to execute several operations to take down a growing group of sleeper cells run by a rogue faction of the FCC in the Republic of Hawaii. Last week, we were not able to capture any of the FCC members alive, so we have never been able to get any information. That is about to change."

Prez almost shivered at the feral grin that came across Adam's face as he spoke. He was about to say something when someone rushed into the picture behind Adam and handed him a rifle and then a gun belt. Adam turned for a moment to that the soldier, then turned back to Prez.

Prez took a deep breath and softly said, "What do you need from us, Adam? You can have any of my troops that you need."

Adam gave a half smirk. "That won't be necessary. All of the troops you have were not there for the battle on Saturday. The troops I will be using for this... most of them were there, and now it's time for them to get some payback."

Prez nodded, "Okay, if you need anything from us, just let us know."

"Well, two things," Adam said, "first, if you or any of your team want to be involved, just let me know and I will assign some extra security for those operations. Second, you will probably be getting some more kids from this. At least the ones that do not need

debriefing."

Prez shook his head. "We haven't had phaser training yet; I think we'll stay out of this one. You guys are the military; we'll let you take care of it. As for the kids, we'll be ready for whatever you need."

"Sounds good, Prez, and thanks. Casey out."

"Oh joy," Keith sarcastically commented. "It wasn't bad enough to have greedy bastards in our government, now we have religious zealots too?"

"Not for very long," Prez sighed. Placing a hand gently on Paulie Casey's shoulder, Prez asked, "Get me King Aalona, please, bud."

"Before the list of topics grows anymore," Keith added.

"Placing the call now, Prez," Paulie reported. After a few moments, Paulie said, "This is Clan Short Pacific Rim Division headquarters. I have Director Preston O'Brian here to talk with His Majesty. Yes, I'll hold."

"Busy man," Keith softly said as he pulled a chair over and sat down.

Also taking a seat, Prez nodded, "He's got a shit load on his hands. I have to wonder if he's going to dissolve Parliament and take over or just oversee everything."

"Either way, he needs all the help he can get."

"We'll offer to help by eliminating CPS and national orphanages. If he accepts, that's one burden lifted."

After another few moments, Keith sighed, "While we're waiting,

I'll contact Peter Lambert for the additional condos at our other bases."

Prez nodded and smiled, "Thanks, babe." Keith then rolled across the room in the chair.

Paulie then repeated, "This is Clan Short Pacific Rim Division headquarters. I have Director Preston O'Brian here to talk with His Majesty." After a pause, Paulie said, "We've already been on hold." Paulie whined, "Okay, but this is important. Yeah, I'll hold." Paulie pressed mute and turned to Prez saying, "I think we're getting the Royal run-around here, boss. The second guy didn't even know we were on hold."

Prez nodded and said, "He's had a lot dumped on his shoulders, but if another person acts ignorant, get Daileass to find us a direct line."

Paulie smiled then remarked, "The music sucks."

Prez giggled, "Hawaiian?"

"No, far worse," Paulie grimaced, "ultra-light elevator music. They're probably expecting people to fall asleep while on hold."

"I hate that!" Prez snickered. He then slid forward and pulled up an Internet search on the King. Prez learned that King Aalona was working with Vulcan diplomats; The Republic of Hawaii had asked for and been granted the status of a Vulcan Facilitated Territory. The King was fashioning his new government after the United Kingdom's and Japan's Monarchies. Elections would be held to replace the Prime Minister, but the Parliament would report to the King. Any laws or policies instituted by Parliament on behalf of the People would have to be approved first by The Monarchy.

After about thirty minutes on hold and two more switches by Paulie, Prez had finished reading and Keith had completed his message to Peter Lambert. Paulie shook his head and sighed. Prez complained, "I haven't even met or talked with nine new kids." He then growled, "Daileass! Find me a direct video line to King Aalona. If he's not taking a shit, in the shower, or in bed with the Queen, find him and notify me when he's available."

Over the CIC loudspeakers, Daileass replied, "Workin' on it, Prez. I have your Clan robes. You'll need them for this meeting, now that you're officially Clan." Before Prez, a pile of folded black clothing appeared on the desk before him. Standing up, Keith and Prez put on their robes. On the left breast area was the Clan Short Emblem.

Looking down at himself, Keith smiled, "Pretty nice."

Prez nodded agreement, then grinned, "My only issue would be wearing black in the bright Hawaiian sun during the summer. Not that we ever get terribly hot here, but black absorbs heat."

Keith smirked, "Beats the hell out of talking to the King in boardies and T-shirts."

Prez and Keith sat back down. Only about a minute later, Daileass said, "Found him on a conference call with other heads of State, Prez. He did not know that you've been waiting and is wrapping up. Paulie can hang up. I'll connect you."

"Thanks, dude," Prez said. "Forewarn us before connecting. If Joel bowed to him, we probably should show our respect similarly."

"Got it," Daileass replied.

Keith said, "Joel's a prince, Prez. What should we do?"

Prez thought for a moment then said, "Let's start on the right foot or, more to the point, on one knee with our heads lowered." Keith nodded in agreement.

Only moments later, Daileass said, "The King is ready, Prez."

Keith and Prez got on one knee and lowered their heads slightly then Prez said, "Connect us, Daileass."

The screen flickered and King Aalona appeared on screen, saying, "Director O'Brian, rise and be seated, please."

"Good evening Your Majesty," Prez smiled up at the screen. Prez and Keith then returned to their chairs.

King Aalona said, "I apologize for the lack of communication within my Palace. In the future, Clan Short is to be treated with the same courtesies as any other head of State."

Prez nodded, "Thank you, Your Majesty. I called for several reasons. First, to introduce myself and my partner, Keith Hundser. Keith is second in command of our Division."

Keith said, "Hello, Your Majesty."

The King greeted Keith, then Prez said, "I just read that as of this morning, Hawaii is becoming a Vulcan territory. There are other thoughts I had that may be of interest to you, Sire."

The King nodded, but seemed distracted when he said, "Pardon me for a moment, please?" The King then looked beyond the screen and to his left slightly, forcefully saying, "I am in conference now, Aidrian! Do not interrupt us again!" Paulie quickly covered his

mouth, then kicked himself and his chair across the room as he began snickering. The King then sighed, "My apologies, gentlemen. Even my staff are uncertain how they should proceed."

Prez nodded and grinned, "I know that feeling too well, Majesty. A few days ago I was a high school student. Now I find myself responsible for many lives."

The King nodded understandingly and smiled, "What are your thoughts, Director O'Brian?"

Prez replied, "Majesty, I found no news articles on the topic of Hawaiian Child Protection Services. Since that is where Clan Short discovered injustices, I thought perhaps Clan Short could take over that function within The Republic of Hawaii. Patriarch Cory Short was here today, and he agreed that we could perform that function with only minimal additional funding. Specifically, in addition to the percentage of Gross Domestic Product already paid, the portion of our social services budget allocated to CPS and the orphanages would be sufficient."

King Aalona nodded, then asked, "Director O'Brian, how many children were rescued Friday?"

"Eighty-seven, Majesty."

"Have additional children been rescued?"

"Yes Sire; an additional eighteen."

"How many are you prepared to feed and shelter?"

"Our five bases can provide for a total of two thousand, but we are still staffing the other four bases. Additional facilities can be

provided so that we could double that if need be."

The King said, "My desire is to clean up the seedier areas of Honolulu. There are far too many children prostitutes on the streets." Prez nodded and the King asked, "Would you be willing to join me in a televised announcement to accomplish that task?"

"Yes, Sire, of course," Prez replied.

The King then turned slightly to his assistant and said, "Prepare for an immediate transmission to all Hawaiian television and radio stations, Aidrian." Keith, Paulie and the other boys in the CIC began scurrying around to get all the televisions turned on. Daileass was ready to record the upcoming announcement. Returning his attention to Prez, the King said, "While that is being accomplished, have you any other ideas?"

"Yes Sire, I did want to mention the sixth Clan Short base. It's on Oahu. The peninsula previously occupied by the United States Marine Corps is being occupied by the Clan Short's military division known as The UNIT. It will be a worldwide rapid response force not under my direct control. The UNIT's commander reports only to Patriarch Cory Short. There was an incident earlier this evening that I feel you need to be aware of as well."

"An incident?"

"Yes Sire, a boy from the Fundamentalist Church of Christ had attempted to infiltrate our base. As you are aware, the same organization was responsible for an attack on Clan Short, in the United States last week. Sixty-one of our troops were killed. The FCC mole has been interrogated, and operations are in effect to find the responsible parties and hold them accountable." Prez paused to gather his thoughts, then continued, "Sire, Clan Short is at war. While we

firmly believe people have the right to choose their religion and personal beliefs, no one has the right to enforce those beliefs on others in a militant fashion."

King Aalona nodded, "I strongly agree. Only a few weeks ago an ROH abortion clinic was attacked via a letter bomb. Ten innocents were killed and more than twenty injured."

A voice off screen was heard saying, "All television and radio stations are prepared for your announcement, Majesty."

"Very well," King Aalona said. "Are you prepared, Director O'Brian?"

Prez asked, "Our primary purpose is to rescue the young prostitutes?"

"Yes. I will not make any mention of your military operations."

Prez turned to Paulie and said, "Notify Doctor Andrews so he's prepared for possible incoming tonight. Also notify Kekoa and Starfleet Security, so they're aware of possible repercussions."

Returning his attention to the screen, Prez said, "I'll wait for your introduction before saying a word, Sire."

The King nodded and smiled, "You are a very capable young man. We are both new to this, but we will do what must be done."

Seconds later, the television in the CIC showed the King, but had the sound turned all the way down. King Aalona said, "Aloha. Good evening, citizens of The Republic of Hawaii. This evening I was contacted by Clan Short Pacific Rim Division Director Preston O'Brian. After a very productive conversation with Director O'Brian, I have two announcements. Effective immediately, all ROH branches of

Child Protection Services are closed. All future needs for Child Protection are to be directed to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division Headquarters. Employees of Child Protection Services are also directed to report to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division headquarters for possible re-employment.

"My second announcement concerns cleaning up the streets of our cities. There are far too many young prostitutes on the streets. I am certain that many do not wish to be prostitutes, but are working to survive in very difficult times. If you are among the many that do not wish to sell your bodies, I urge you, I beg you, to find your way to the nearest Clan Short base. At this time, I would like to introduce you to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division's Director, Preston O'Brian."

The television screen split in half with the King on the right and Prez on the left. "Thank you, Your Majesty," Prez smiled. "Clan Short exists for the benefit of abandoned and abused children. We value family, but not at the expense of our children. If you are abused or abandoned, you are welcome in the Clan. Federation Youth Services will work with children and families for everyone's mutual benefit, but emotional and physical abuse of children must not be allowed to continue in our society."

Prez paused for a moment, then spoke from his heart. "I am an orphan that was adopted by a caring family. I've always known I was lucky, but these last few days have proven to me how fortunate I am. My own parents never beat me or emotionally abused me. My adopted parents have never abused me either. Under *no* circumstances should a child be beat or abused into submission. It's been proven over and over again that violence begets violence. There are other alternatives. If you are an abused or abandoned child; if you are walking the streets trying to earn money to survive; if you are a pregnant teen shunned by your family, then come to us for help. We

can help and will help you. If you are a doctor or lawyer, or housekeeper or landscaper, or teacher or chef that has a deep caring for children, but are having trouble finding employment, come to us for help. Don't continue down the rough and rocky road alone. Clan Short is part of your community and we can help."

Prez then smiled, "Thank you for your time and thank you, Your Majesty."

King Aalona said, "Director O'Brian and I share the same dreams and goals for a better world; one filled with caring and hope for the future; a world where we all help one another; where separations are eliminated. We will begin working on the future progress of mankind here and now with our Island Nation. It may take a life time, but we will succeed with your help. Aloha."

A second or two later, normal television programming resumed. The King said, "Thank you for calling, Director O'Brian. I have high hopes that we've made an impact this evening."

Prez nodded, "Me too, Sire. We've accomplished much more than I could've hoped for."

The King then said, "I have decided that the uninhabited Island of Kaho'olawe shall henceforth be granted to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division."

Prez's and Keith's jaws dropped. Prez stammered, "Y-you are very generous, Sire."

"If ever we can help each other again, please call me," The King sincerely said.

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Prez smiled. "Have a good night."

"I will sleep better tonight. Good night."

The screen went blank and the speaker clicked, indicating the connection was broken. Keith and all the boys in the CIC erupted with applause, cheers and laughter.

Blushing fiercely, Prez loudly giggled, "Hey! Might I remind everyone that the shit is about to hit the fan?"

Springing out of his chair, Keith howled, "You got that right! It's only a matter of time before we're inundated with more kids! And tomorrow morning the gates will be crowded with professionals of every sort!"

While the laughter subsided, Prez stood and said, "Call me if you need anything, Paulie."

"Yes, Sir!" Paulie giggled, knowing the response he would get.

Prez spun around and shouted, "'Scuse me?"

"What?" Paulie giggled, "You just proved yourself by taking the political bull by the horns!"

Shaking his head, but smiling widely, Prez huffed impatiently.

Keith slid over and wrapped his arms around Prez. Keith whispered, "Speaking of horns."

Prez whimpered and Keith chuckled as he led his lover out of the CIC. As soon as the door opened, they were overwhelmed by more applause and cheering from the adults and kids still in the dining room. The adults were closest and therefore loudest, but further away, John was firing baby carrots up towards the high ceiling that exploded into carrot confetti.

Reyes Taraschke Personal Log 1

Saturday, October 30, 2004

Life has been amazing these last two days. This is the first chance I've had to write about it since my new daddies suggested the idea earlier tonight. They said that it would be good for me and for them too, if anything ever happened to my memory, to have a place outside my own positronics where everything I think and feel is stored. Almost everyone is down in the basement chatting or nesting or playing video games. Mike, one of my new daddies, asked our new leader, Prez, if I could use a computer to begin telling my story.

Yesterday morning, about ten, my life and the lives of all the kids at the orphanage changed dramatically. Our lives were terrible at the orphanage. We were all slaves to the adults. They had us cook, clean, paint walls and ceilings, repair anything broken, mow lawns, perform sexual acts for them, with them and with other adults. The days all ran together in a never ending blur of nightmarish images.

The strange thing is, I know my name is Reyes Taraschke; I know I'm an android; I know that I appear to be thirteen; I know that I have friends and I know their names. But I do not know my own birthday; the day I was first activated. I do not know how long I was at the orphanage; everything before June first, 2004 is a blank.

Even more distressing, my friends can tell me stuff *about me* that I have no recollection of. According to Jonah and Kaleo, I've always been at the orphanage. Jonah became an orphan at age three and is nine now, but he says that I've always watched out for him and been his best friend. Fourteen-year-old Kaleo had been at the orphanage since he was a baby, and he says that I was there as far

back as he can remember.

Who am I?

I do not really know. I only know what others have said about me, with very few exceptions.

My two best friends are Kaleo Palakiko and Jonah Desak. Tory Burgas and Liki Kealoha are also good friends. Between Kaleo, Tory, Liki and myself, we kept the adults at the orphanage from having their wicked way with the younger kids. We couldn't keep them satisfied all the time, but we really tried. Mostly, the kids were photographed. Sadly, the pedophile adults liked the little kids because they were young and hairless. That was something Kaleo, Tory, Liki and I couldn't satisfy because we're all pubescent adolescents. But we could at least try to wear the old folks down enough where photography sessions were the worst they could dish out to the little kids.

A simple knock at the front door yesterday morning changed all that. I wish I had seen it, but I was upstairs, tied up and getting my ass whipped at the time. I hadn't done anything wrong to get punished, but I did push Jonah aside so he wouldn't get sexually abused. Suddenly, there was a loud crashing sound and what I can only describe as an ear-splitting roar. Then the whole house seemed to shake, like a downstairs wall had been knocked down. Starfleet Vulcans beamed in and stunned the asshole that was whipping me, then set me free. When I made it downstairs with Jonah and some other kids, I found Kaleo, still naked, but wide-eyed and smiling like I've never seen before. A wall wasn't knocked down, but Mister Kanes, who had locked himself away with Kaleo, was lying unconscious on the floor beyond the wall he had been thrown through.

We were herded into a room where a little boy, as small as

Jonah, said, "My name is Joel Short of Clan Short. You are safe now. You won't be hurt any more." Oddly, the boy was wearing Armour and a Crown, and a large Sword seemed to be slung on his back. When he turned to talk to a large bear-like beast that was standing behind him, I could see that the Sword had nothing holding it on his back; and it was in pieces, but the pieces seemed to keep themselves together.

Kewl! Weird but very kewl!

I silently wondered, who are Clan Short? I had never heard of them. We were never allowed to watch television or listen to radios at the orphanage, so I had no idea. I was still thinking and trying to figure out what was going on while Joel was talking to other kids and with Vulcans. The next thing I knew, all the kids and I were standing on the lawn of a beautiful house. There was an older man sitting on the porch drinking from a cup.

We spent a good part of the day there with Uncle Iokii. Our orphanage had about thirty kids. Arriving intermittently over the next hour or so were more kids, until there were more than eighty kids at Uncle Iokii's house. The Vulcans had doctors that checked us out, gave us hypo-spray inoculations and healed our many wounds. Like me, many of us had bruises and other "soft tissue" injuries that would have to heal naturally over time. We were fed as much as we wanted and even had cookies and brownies for dessert. We were bathed. Soon, we had real clothes, not the kind we were used to, that you can see through, but real clothes – underwear, board shorts and shirts. They even gave us sandals for our feet. It seemed that no sooner did we all have clothes to be proud of, than Joel's Sehlat, I-Cheya was stripping them off, giving each of us tongue baths and then tossing us in Uncle Iokii's pool.

While Joel was sitting alone with Kevin, I took the opportunity

to go over and thank him for rescuing us. At that time, I learned a little bit about Clan Short and even asked about his Armour, Crown and Sword. I cannot say that I understood the explanation entirely, because it had to do with Vulcan history, but the general idea was that Joel was an heir to an important Vulcan family line. Therefore, the Armour, Crown and Sword respond to his commands.

Around the time all eighty of us had been tossed in the pool, trucks began rolling by the house. Some of the trucks stopped at Uncle Iokii's and delivered more food and drinks. I am certain that I had eaten a week's worth of food in a single afternoon. Jonah and I found a nice spot under a tree where we took a nap. As far as Jonah and I were concerned, this was all too good to be true. We were actually afraid to fall asleep as we might wake up back in the orphanage.

Kyle, Levi and Tyler woke us up. Kyle smiled, "Come on, sleepy heads. We're going to make a small change of location. There's gonna be a party tonight."

Between munched cookies, Levi corrected, "A luau."

Looking around quickly and realizing that we had, in fact, been rescued, Jonah squealed, "It was all real? We was taken away from there? It happened?"

Tyler rapidly nodded and smiled, "We said that we'd take care of you guys. Everything's falling into place."

Jonah and I got up and followed the three purple-eyed boys. It seemed we had just arrived with the larger group of rescued kids when we were someplace else, away from Uncle Iokii's house and pool. How we moved or where we moved to, I had no idea, but at least we were all together. People were setting up tables and tents.

Other people were cooking more food, and truckloads of food and drink were being prepared for the luau. A stage was being erected in another field. Speakers and video screens were being setup at other areas. We went down to a beach, where I-Cheya played Toss-The-Kid some more. Once again we were naked. I almost wanted to ask why they had bothered getting us clothes, but there were no creepy adults around and we were all having fun. Then we went back over to the fields where we ate again. Afterward, my belly felt like it was holding a month's worth of food.

"Pay attention to the band tonight, guys," Kyle grinned.

I couldn't help but wonder "Why?"

"They're that good," Kyle giggled. I noticed Kyle glancing at Tyler and Levi, then all three began giggling.

They were Clan and saved us, so I trusted them, but I could tell they knew something we didn't. I was about to ask what they were hiding when suddenly my lower abdomen twisted and growled. After all that food, I had to find a toilet, so that's what I wound up asking about. There were rows of Porta-Potties along the eastern bluff. Jonah and I raced in that direction with lots of other boys and girls following us. Considering how much I ate and how much my belly ached, I was prepared to fill the portable toilet to overflowing, but I didn't. When Jonah and I were kidding about it with Kevin, another Clan kid named Kai explained, "You guys weren't being fed right. I know what that's like. Your belly gets full fast, but your body is absorbing all you need that it hadn't been getting." He blushed and giggled, "You feel like you're gonna shit a mountain, but hardly anything actually comes out. That means you're gonna get healthier faster so it's kewl, bros."

Kevin paused and seemed thoughtful for a few moments. He grinned and nodded, then looked at us again, saying, "Come on. Let's

get a welcoming committee together!" and started running. Jonah and I followed, not knowing where we were going or who we were welcoming. Kevin gathered almost half of the kids and he led us west, across a road and beyond some trees until we were standing on a bluff overlooking a beach. Kevin had us all crouch down and hide. Even his dog was lying down flat on the ground.

We watched I-Cheya, way down the beach, tossing more kids. They were all boys except for the older woman with them. These weren't rescued kids though. They were naked and walking in the surf in our direction. Compared to Joel, they were tall. There was a redhead, two blonds and five brown haired dudes. Kaleo tapped Kevin on the shoulder and whispered, "Who are these guys?"

Kevin smirked and softly replied, "Friends."

I wondered, "Are we hiding to surprise them and if so, why?"

Kevin giggled, "It's all very kewl, even the woman. When I say go, run down the bluff and say hello to the guys." Kaleo, Tory and I uncertainly glanced at each other and shrugged. They were still quite a distance away. I thought to ask Kevin more about the group, but I didn't get the chance. He suddenly jumped up and yelled, "NOW!" Following his lead, all of us ran, slid and fell down the bluff to the sand below. We could hear the other guys laughing at our large group. Kevin was heading directly for Joel shouting "Sa'r!" while the rest of us were stripping our clothes off and heading for the water.

Joel hollered, "Kevvy!" and ran to his new husband. They spun each other around and hugged, then joined the rest of us, approaching the new guys. Kaleo, Tory and I were the first to meet Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Drew, Corey, John and Bruce. All these new guys were exceptionally cute! As usual, Kaleo was spokesman for our group. The new guys seemed more concerned about where the stage

was than they were about food. Seeing them up close, it was obvious that none of these guys were orphans or abused.

As it turned out, the red-haired dude, Prez, was an orphan. His parents died in a plane crash two years earlier, but he was adopted by his partner's parents. What was most surprising was that the new kids didn't know that Clan Short was in the Republic of Hawaii or that they had rescued over eighty kids that day.

I was walking beside Drew and asked, "Don't you guys get to watch television either?"

Drew tilted his head curiously and softly replied, "Sure we can, when there's something worth watchin'."

Taking Drew's hand, Corey grinned mischievously, "Me and Drew needed some private time alone after school though."

Blushing intensely, Drew shook his head and smiled so wide that his face seemed to split in half. Drew giggled, "Corey's my boyfriend."

"Oh," I droned. "That's really sweet. How old are you guys?"

Corey answered, "I'm eleven. Drew just turned twelve, in August."

Drew asked, "How old are you, Reyes?"

"Thirteen," I answered, but didn't elaborate. I didn't know them or if they might have a problem with androids, so I didn't tell them.

Both Corey and Drew scanned my body briefly. I was taller than Corey and about as tall as Drew, but Corey had as much hair around his dick as Drew and I. Locking eyes with me, Corey asked, "You're a

late bloomer?"

Drew giggled and teased Corey, "You're just an early bloomer, dude."

"That's your fault too!" Corey softly giggled.

Drew's mouth hung open and he turned even redder. The three of us cracked up. Jonah laughed too and I think that surprised Corey and Drew. Jonah's nine, but small for his age. Walking ahead of us, Kaleo was explaining to Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick that we were sexually abused at the orphanages. They were not only shocked, but obviously disgusted. Kaleo then explained how we were rescued by Clan Short, and that I-Cheya had "picked up a fat man at our orphanage and threw him through a wall." Kaleo cracked up at the memory and loudly laughed, "It was great! Exactly what that overstuffed, tiny-pricked bastard deserved!"

Almost all of us, except the very youngest kids, lost it and cracked up. Using space between my thumb and forefinger, I showed Drew and Corey about how small his cock really was. Corey absolutely howled laughing and staggered around.

Then the woman called us to her. We found out she was Keith's, Drew's and John's mother. She was also Prez's foster mom. With a nod from Kaleo, we all started walking up the beach.

Mike smiled, "They all listen to you?"

Kaleo shrugged, "Mostly; I'm one of the oldest and have been watching out for them the best I could, so...."

"Kaleo in Hawaiian means 'the voice' and man, does he use it!" Tory interrupted.

Kaleo chuckled, "Shush!"

"WHAT?" Tory incredulously giggled, "Just cos ya can't ever shut up!" Kaleo took a playful swing at Tory, but Tory ducked away and ran up the beach.

The woman had us get dressed, explaining that it was time to eat. I wondered where Corey's mom was, and Corey said she was on her way with his dad. Unfortunately, I never got to ask where Derrick and Mike's parents were as they were helping load I-Cheya with little kids. In only a few minutes, we were all dressed again. The little kids got a ride up the bluff from I-Cheya. The huge Sehlat left nice, deep indentations for the rest of us older kids to easily climb the steep bluff.

While we loaded our trays with food, Kaleo, Tory, Liki and I were keeping watch on the new guys. It could easily be seen that they were very close friends. We couldn't hear exactly what they were saying to each other, but they occasionally leaned against each other, and more often broke into fits of laughter. We found a table and sat down to eat. Two teenage boys from another orphanage, named Sean Moorhead and Horacio Sulin, joined us at our table. The orphanage Sean and Horacio were at was like ours. They weren't fed well and were sexually abused like we were. Prez stopped by our table and asked if he and his friends could join us.

It was a little strange at first. Us orphanage kids were eating fast until they sat down with us. We slowed down a little and Kaleo even passed a comment. "Is this the greatest food ever, or am I just underprivileged?"

Prez said that it was really good food, "some of the best I've ever tasted," making us feel better. The four guys made us feel more relaxed and talked to us about the Clan, told us they were musicians,

and then said that they'd like to help us recover from the abuses at the orphanages. They had us watch the sunset. It was the most colorful sunset we'd ever seen, with reds, yellows, greens, and purples washing across the western sky. Keith suggested that we wake up early the next morning to watch the sunrise on our first full day of freedom. Mike and Derrick began playing catch with their food. In moments, all of us were doing the same. Jonah was tossing tiny cakes up for me to catch in my mouth.

They weren't just nice guys; they were great. I could easily see myself becoming friends with any of them. While we were playing, Keith's mom came by our table. She didn't know how badly we were abused. Learning of our sexual and physical abuses made her very sad. All of the Ewa Beach boys surrounded her and tried to make her feel less sad. Ultimately, it was little Levi that made her feel better.

Arriving at the luau, after we had finished eating for the fourth time that day, were Mike's, Derrick's and Corey's parents. Derrick, Mike, Keith and Prez stayed with us while the adults ate. They were getting anxious about the concert and began singing for us.

Prez sang; "I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay. I sleep all night and I work all day."

Derrick, Mike and Keith then sang; "He's a lumberjack, and he's okay. He sleeps all night and he works all day."

Prez then sang; "I cut down trees. I eat my lunch. I go to the lavatory. On Wednesdays I go shoppin', And have buttered scones for tea."

While we were all giggling about Prez going to the lavatory, Derrick, Mike and Keith sang; "He cuts down trees. He eats his lunch. He goes to the lavatory. On Wednesdays he goes shopping, And has

buttered scones for tea. He's a lumberjack, and he's okay. He sleeps all night and he works all day."

Joel and Kevin joined us. Again, Prez sang; "I cut down trees. I skip and jump. I like to press wild flowers. I put on women's clothing, And hang around in bars."

Appearing very uncertain and shifting their eyes back and forth, Derrick, Mike and Keith disjointedly sang; "He cuts down trees. He skips and jumps. He likes to press wild flowers. He puts on women's clothing, And hangs around in bars? He's a lumberjack, and he's okay. He sleeps all night and he works all day."

We were all laughing and giggling when Prez sang; "I cut down trees. I wear high heels, Suspendies, and a bra. I wish I'd been a girlie, Just like my dear Papa."

Kaleo and Tory, and Jonah and I were in tears laughing harder than ever as Derrick, Mike and Keith reluctantly sang; "He cuts down trees. He wears high heels, Suspendies, and a bra?"

Shoving Prez, Keith complained, "What's this? Wants to be a girlie?! Oh, My! And I thought you were so rugged! Poofter!"

Joel and Kevin were rocking each other while laughing hysterically. Kaleo fell on the ground and roared laughing, but Derrick, Mike and Keith finished the song. "He's a lumberjack, and he's okay. He sleeps all night and he works all day. He's a lumberjack, and he's okaaaaay. He sleeps all night and he works all day."

Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike finally broke down laughing and bowed while we all clapped and cheered. Then they huddled up. We had just stopped laughing and caught our breath when they lined up and began singing; "Down at an English fair one evening I was there, When I heard a showman shouting underneath the flair. I've got a

lovely bunch of coconuts, There they are all standing in a row. Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head. Give them a twist a flick of the wrist. That's what the showman said." While they were singing, they were making hand gestures in front of their crotches, showing us the size of their 'coconuts'. All of us were cracking up, leaning against each other and falling down to the grassy ground while they sang this silly tune.

We didn't even realize that their parents were now watching and listening to their sons. While we all hiccuped and tried desperately to catch our breath, the four boys changed out of T-shirts and put on silver-gray polo shirts. Prez explained, "We've got to get ready for our act now, dudes."

Mike added, "Round everyone up and hurry over to the stage. Get the best seats you can."

Breathlessly, Kaleo giggled from the grass, "Please sing those songs again! That was great!"

Derrick shook his head and sniggered, "It's time to rock!"

All four boys enthusiastically shouted, "ROCK AND ROLL!" then walked off with their parents. Joel, Kevin and more of the Clan Short boys went with them back stage. Other Clan boys and G-Cats joined us gathering the rest of the rescued kids. We were given the first two rows of the audience chairs and were looking up at the six foot high stage. The only people that might have had a better view than we did were those watching the show on television in their homes. None of us had ever been to a concert before. The stage was pretty, with colored lights shining down from above and across from the sides of the stage.

The music that had been playing through the speakers stopped.

All the stage lighting went out. A minute or so later, a Hawaiian radio disk jockey came out and outlined the night's entertainment. Then he introduced the band from Ewa Beach, "Old Habits" and left the stage. Mike came out first, jogging all the way across the stage to the guitars. He was followed by Prez, who picked up another guitar. Derrick was next and went to the drums. Keith came up and stood before a rack of keyboards. Green and yellow lights around the stage turned on.

Keith played the first notes that rumbled across the fields, and swirled from the left speakers to the right and back again. Soon, Mike, Prez and Derrick joined in. With a spotlight on him, Keith sang lead vocals with the others singing background vocals. The fields seemed to be alive and awash in sounds. It was LOUD! It was hard to believe that the same four goofballs who were singing to us minutes earlier were now on stage playing and singing. They were very good musicians and vocalists. Derrick caught my attention though. He was a great drummer! Sometimes he seemed to be easily moving from drums to cymbals, but other times I couldn't even see his hands; they were moving so fast that they were a blur.

Every now and then, between songs, they talked to the audience. When they weren't singing, Keith, Prez and Mike were dancing around the stage. When they sang the first ballad, lots of the girls began moaning and groaning. Immediately after the ballad they played an awesome song about rescues. That's the song that got me up and bouncing with Jonah. Every time they sang "Oh oh, rescue me," I felt my heart race and my dick throb. All of the songs were brand new to me and probably to all of us rescued kids.

For some reason, I wanted to be up there on stage with them. As far as I know, I've never played an instrument and I only would've made a fool of myself, but I did want to play. Of all the instruments,

the drums interested me most. I couldn't figure out why I felt the way I did, so I just watched them enjoying themselves while they played for thousands of people. At one point, during an instrumental, I looked over my shoulder to one of the field video displays. A camera was on Mike while he played the melody of the song.

Keith sang the next song and was really getting into it. A whole bunch of us kids in the audience were up on our feet, dancing and clapping in time to the music. Prez sang the lead vocals on the next song that was about friends and friendship. Mike was instigating the audience to sing along during that song and many did sing. Unfortunately, we didn't really know the words and only sang a few words now and then. They then played another ballad. All around the fields, couples were slow dancing. Again, some of the girls in our group began moaning and squealing.

Mike sang lead vocals and played an acoustic guitar for the next song. He was obviously enjoying himself because he was hopping during almost the entire song. My attention kept getting drawn back to Derrick though. He wasn't just a good drummer, he was fantastic! I could see the face of the bass drum moving while his right hand hit cymbals and his left hand moved around the other drums. After dedicating the next song to Starfleet, Mike played and sang another song about star riders. Derrick's hands were blurs again. And the sound of the drums through the speakers were shifting left and right, back and forth.

The whole concert was nothing short of amazing! Pictures and videos were flashing up on the backdrop behind the band. The words were perfect for us rescued kids. Keith sang another ballad that had some of the girls in tears. I think Keith noticed them because he shifted focus and looked way out into the audience. They didn't get a chance to stay all lovey-dovey though because the next song Keith

sang was a rocker. Mike and Prez were bouncing around while they played, then stopped and walked up to a single microphone to sing the backup vocals. When Keith sang the next verse, they started bopping around again. Derrick was singing background vocals too. How he managed to sing and play like he was, I may never know. They played so many great tunes, I think each of us had our favorites and our favorite band members. While I obviously liked Derrick, Jonah thought Mike was the best. Kaleo was pointing at Keith during several parts of the show. Tory was actually following Prez's every move. Sean, the kid from the other orphanage, danced almost the entire time.

During another song, the four guys were singing different parts at different times. Keith would sing a part, Mike and Derrick would come in singing another part and Prez would add another part. Again, I wondered, how they could do that without messing each other up. They did it though and seemed to enjoy doing it, watching our eyes dart from one to the other. They then played another dance song that got us all up on our feet. Again, they sang different parts at different times, making our eyes dart around.

A harder rock song was played next, with Mike and Prez leaning back-to-back against each other. Jonah pointed them out. But again, I was watching Derrick and pointed him out to Jonah. Almost as if I had queued him, Derrick said, "Ask not what your country can do for you!" then they finished the song. I picked up Jonah and sat him up on my shoulders, then we both began clapping furiously.

They played another ballad, then started another spacey song with a low rumble through the fields. Without warning, they all fell into the groove and began rocking again. Derrick sang that song, occasionally asking, "Can you hear me, can you hear me running, can you hear me calling you?" It was another really great song. I

happened to look over my shoulder and, on the video screens, saw a close-up of Derrick playing and singing. I pointed it out to Jonah, Kaleo and Tory.

As if that song wasn't enough, Prez began slapping the crap out of his bass and sang lead vocals on the next song, which I think was titled 'Wildest Dreams'. Prez has a deeper voice and he sang it like he was leading an army into battle. And Mike was getting really animated during the guitar solo. It was all phenomenal, as if they had chosen the songs specifically for us. I know they couldn't possibly have, but it sure seemed that way.

During one instrumental song, Brant and Matthew were flying around way above the stage. The entire audience gasped then cheered. Derrick had a drum solo during the song that almost pushed my positronic matrix to overload. How was he controlling those drum sticks and hitting the drums so precisely, I wondered. Brant and Matthew landed on the stage, then disappeared. It obviously broke the band's concentration, but very briefly. They then continued playing and finished the song to a roar of applause and cheers. Something was happening on stage though. They were all looking back stage and shouted something. Then they all reached for their mouths and started laughing. Again, each of the four of them spoke to the audience and joked around. They were truly artists and musicians that loved what they were doing.

They played two more songs before jogging off stage. The disk jockey came back onstage and prompted them to come out again for an encore. A minute or two later they came back onstage, waving to the audience and thanking us. They played an awesome instrumental where Mike roamed around the stage playing directly to us. Then they played one more ballad that had the girls screeching and couples dancing. At the end, they gathered center stage and bowed, then

hurried off stage. The whole concert lasted over two hours. Remarkable!

I know it was my first concert, or at least the first one I could remember, but it was all so great. While I was trying to work my way backstage with Jonah, I overheard something from one of the Clan boys. They were planning on making a new Clan Division right here in Hawaii, and the Ewa Beach boys would be our leaders. The only question was, which would be the leader of the new division? It was to be kept a secret until morning though, until Joel could figure out which would be our new leader.

I never did manage to get backstage, but soon all the Ewa Beach boys came out from the pack of people surrounding them. Catching up to Derrick, I smiled and told him, "That was a completely awesome concert, from beginning to end!"

Derrick chuckled, "Thanks, Reyes. I saw you watching me."

"You're a great drummer."

"I try," Derrick simply stated.

Shaking my head, I giggled, "You do more than try, you are! Seriously!"

Moving over by Mike, Jonah asked, "Where are we going?"

Mike said, "We're gathering the little kids so we can get them to bed." Looking down at my friend, Mike asked, "How're you feeling? Are you tired, little dude?"

"I guess," Jonah shrugged. "But it's been such a great day. I don't want it to end yet."

"We're getting a bus to take you guys to Anahola Bay," Mike explained. "Starfleet's got a rec center there. Joel and the Clan have everything set for us."

Jonah looked up and almost begged, "You're coming too, aren't ya?"

Mike nodded, "Yup! First the younger kids go, then us older kids."

Jonah asked, "Would you stay the night with me and Reyes?"

Mike chuckled, "Derrick's gonna be with us too."

Before I could stop myself, I giggled, "Oh, sweet!"

Walking behind us, Mike's dad chuckled, "That settles those sleeping arrangements!"

We started finding other kids and walked over by the Porta-Potties to find some more. Each kid we found thanked Mike and Derrick for the concert and excitedly overflowed about their favorite songs. Soon, we had a bunch of kids with us and were heading back across the fields when we found a little girl crying. Her mother had been snagged by a transporter beam.

While Mike's father got the kids loaded on the bus, Derrick and Mike led us teenagers back to the food. I was more thirsty than hungry though after four meals in a single day. In a few minutes, I was sitting at a table with the Ewa Beach boys, Jonah, Kaleo, Sean and Horacio. We were all just relaxing while Prez explained that teenagers would buddy-up and share rooms with the younger kids. Of course, us rescued kids didn't know how to sleep with less than three or four to bed, never mind four to an entire room. We let them know

we were nervous about sleeping in a strange place.

Mike sighed, "It's a Starfleet facility. None of us could possibly be safer. I know it's something new to you, and we can fully understand how you feel, but this is really kewl, dudes."

Derrick nodded agreement, "Sleeping three or four to a bed isn't normal or right. Mike and me have our own beds at our houses, but the last two years, since we hooked up as a couple, neither of us can sleep well alone anymore. So I spend a few nights at his place with him, then he comes over my house and spends a few nights there with me. You'll see, it's way more comfortable to share a bed with someone else and still have room to move around, without having someone knock you out of the bed and onto the floor."

We all began giggling and nodding because we had been in that situation before. Only to change the subject, I began talking with Derrick about drumming and asked him to teach me to play. He promised that he would, no matter where we wound up with the Clan. Unable to hide my disappointment, I frowned, "But I really wanna be with you."

"And I *have* to be with Reyes," Jonah added.

Derrick nodded understandingly and smiled, "We'll find a way to make that happen."

Relieved, I said, "That would be very kewl." I felt like Derrick was the kind of person I would definitely want to emulate; not only because he was a drummer, but just because he was the kind of person I wanted to be like.

Uncle Iokii came over with some beers for the band members, which they happily accepted. Joel came over and started to greet us, but then seemed to turn pale and hurried off, burying himself against

I-Cheya. Two of the G-Cats went over to see what was wrong. "That was weird," Keith sighed.

The Prime Minister went on stage and began delivering his speech. It was quickly apparent that he was speaking of the Clan Short rescues. Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike began goofing on him and we all smiled at their wacky remarks. John walked over to our table and said, "Something's wrong, Prez. I..." Never taking his eyes off the Prime Minister, John shook his head and offered, "He don't feel right."

Prez put his beer down. Wrapping an arm around John and pulling him closer, Prez wondered, "What do ya mean?"

John shrugged, "Him... he feels bad. I dunno why, he just does."

Keith explained, "He's a politician, bro. He'll kiss anyone's ass to get the brownie points." Hearing that, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Horacio cracked up.

Kyle growled, "It's him, Elf. He's 'The Boss' behind it all!"

Then Joel called over, "Get the kids safe, Preston."

Keith muttered, "Preston? Since when?"

But Joel was already giving orders to his team. I could not believe what I saw when Kyle plainly disappeared from where he had been standing! I mean it; not a sound or anything; he was there one second and gone the next! While I was still searching the area for Kyle, Prez stood and shouted, "All you guys and girls, I want you over behind the video displays and speakers." He pointed and screamed, "MOVE! NOW!"

"Oh crap!" I hollered as I stood, and quickly grabbed Jonah,

then raced to where Prez had pointed we should hide.

"What the hell is goin' on?" Jonah screamed.

I frantically explained, "Clan Short found 'The Boss' behind the child sex ring!"

"I wanna see!" Jonah hollered.

"Are you nuts?" I ranted, "You saw what I-Cheya did to Mister Kanes!" Parking my butt behind the speakers, I forced Jonah down onto my lap and held him there.

In less than a minute, all of us were gathered behind the speakers. Prez, Keith, their father and Mike's father counted heads to make sure we were all safe. Mike's dad, still wearing his Police uniform, said, "Stay here and stay down low in case things get ugly," before running around the speakers.

Mike shook his head and grumbled, "If he gets hurt, my mom is gonna kill me!"

Derrick disbelievingly glared at Mike. "Oh," Derrick droned, "she'll break your heart." Mike nodded, then rested his head on Derrick's shoulder. Wrapping an arm around Mike, Derrick shifted closer and kissed the top of Mike's head.

Hearing that short conversation, I realized that Mike and Derrick were virtually inseparable. They knew each other so well that they could almost read each others minds. I wondered what it might be like to love someone that much; how wonderful that must be.

All I've ever known was physical love, the sexual acts, but not the emotions that should be behind them. At the orphanage, if we didn't have sex with the adults as we were told, we wouldn't be fed a

meal. And the 'meals' were small to begin with. I wanted to spend a lot more time with both of them, but didn't know how to accomplish that. Under no circumstances did I want them to think I had sexual desire for them because I honestly did not. I simply had a need for exposure to that sort of love. My dilemma was figuring out how to tell them what I wanted, since I couldn't really describe it in terms other than 'to learn the emotion of love'. And that's a really poor description, considering they were already obviously in love with each other.

We heard Joel challenging the Prime Minister. We heard the Prime Minister say, "I think not." Then there were shouts, gunfire and other sounds that might've been phaser fire followed by a man's scream.

After a few seconds of silence, we all heard Joel say, "You are sentenced to death... in case you didn't know it... but I think you did... okay, that was a total waste of breath. Blow your nose, Bo-Bo." Joel called, "Your Majesties. Will you come up here, please?" and we all followed Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick around to the front of the speakers to see what would happen next.

Kaleo joked, "Music, politics, violence and vaudeville! That's what I call entertainment! What a night!" Knowing Kaleo too well, I lost it and cracked up. At least I wasn't laughing alone though, almost all the kids were giggling.

When I looked up at the stage again, the King, Queen, Kyle, Tyler and Galli were on the stage with Joel. "Yes, your Highness?" the King prodded.

Joel said, "The Islands and Republic of Hawaii need leadership, and the Government has been found lacking. Are you prepared to regain that which was taken from you?"

"I... I do not know, Highness. I never expected for this to be a possibility," the King answered.

Joel clasped his hands together and said one word, "Sa'ren."

Before the King, the Shattered Sword of Surak appeared in the young Vulcan's hands.

/Are you willing to rule with compassion, to guide with wisdom, to be the first in defense and the last to have comfort? Are you willing to be all you can be?/

The King blinked and stared at the light-pulsating Shattered Sword. He nodded slowly, "I will try... but I don't think I'm ready."

/That is why you are the perfect choice. I Crown you King of the Jeweled Isles, Lord of Hawaii and Protector of the Pacific Rim./

The Sword burst out in brilliant light. Around the heads of both the King and Queen beautiful Crowns appeared. On the apex of the brow of each, the Royal standard of Hawaii was clearly visible.

"Welcome back, Your Royal Majesties," Joel grinned as he bowed from the waist. Everyone in the audience stood and applauded.

Then I remembered that Hawaiian television crews were on location and everything that we didn't see would likely be shown on the news that night. I reminded Derrick and Mike of that, and we were looking forward to watching it on TV at the hotel.

That's what my first day of freedom and as a Clan Short kid was like. For another hour and a half, we gathered back at the dining fields and relaxed, waiting for our bus ride to Anahola Bay. The stage was cleaned up and the final entertainment of the evening began, consisting of traditional Hawaiian music by Ho'okena. All the Ewa

Beach boys sat with Kaleo, Tory, Jonah and I. Joining us were Sean and Horacio, who introduced us to two of their friends, Hank Leve and Keanu Hekekia.

I found myself knee-drumming to the Hawaiian music and Derrick noticed. He smiled, "You seem to know at least a little of what you're doing," and then glanced down at my hands and knees.

Still, I wasn't quite ready to announce to everyone at the table that I was an android. I had good feelings that no one would really care, but I didn't want to ruin a very good day. I shrugged, "I guess there's some old Hawaiian blood running through my veins."

"It's very kewl, bro," Derrick smiled. "When I get around to showing you some drumming, I think I may start with hand drums like bongos and congas. What do you think?"

Excited about the opportunity, I squealed, "Would you really?"

Derrick nodded and chuckled, "Music is the same all over the world. Drum kits are only one facet of the art. I can play bongos and congas too. It's just not a big part of most rock or jazz, until you start getting into Latin rhythms, anyway."

I was so happy, I could only nod but honestly, I wanted to hug Derrick so much at that moment. In only a few hours, he had become so important to me, I hoped that we would see a lot of each other in future days and weeks. Derrick and I began discussing drum kits. Derrick's kit was a Pearl Vision set in metallic silver-flake. It had a bass drum, five inch deep snare drum, two mounted tom-toms and two floor tom-toms. His cymbals were all Paiste and he was most proud of his "sound edge" hi-hats. His own kit at home was big, but not as big as the one he played on stage. He wanted a set of "Roto toms" and more cymbals, like he had on the set on stage that night.

When the bus showed up to take us to Anahola Bay, thankfully Jonah and I got to sit nearest to the Ewa Beach gang, at the back of the bus. It was after midnight and everyone was tired, including myself, but for me it was nice. Even better yet, Mike, Derrick, Jonah and I did get to share a room together like we planned.

Derrick and Mike went directly to the bathroom to take a shower. After the concert, they said that they felt slimy and sweaty. Jonah got settled in one of the beds and I turned the television on. But I didn't know which channels were where, so I flipped channels until I found the news. By the time Derrick and Mike came out of the shower, Jonah was asleep. They were only wearing towels though and I uncontrollably blushed. There was no denying they were very cute, but I knew they were a couple and I sure didn't want to have sex with either of them. Sadly, they programmed my android brain like any other human boy's, and my dick started getting hard anyway.

"Relax, Reyes," Mike softly chuckled. "We made love in the shower so everything's kewl. Get yourself comfy and ready for bed."

Shaking his head sadly, Derrick chuckled, "Mike, give him a break."

Noticing Jonah asleep, Mike shrugged and removed his towel. Placing it across a chair to dry, he whispered, "Like any one of us doesn't know. Our things have minds of their own most of the time! I'll bet even Jonah knows." For some reason, even though what Mike said made perfect sense, I really felt uncomfortable seeing him naked. From his long brown damp hair to the bush around his circumcised dick to his feet and toes were all really cute. Thankfully, my dick realized the rest of me was uncomfortable and shrunk back to its normal state.

"He should only just be starting to ask questions to figure it out

though," Derrick reminded.

Mike turned to me and asked, "Did they show anything from the luau yet, Reyes?"

Shaking my head, I said, "I think this is a United States channel."

"Because of the information blackout, they won't have nothin'," Derrick explained. He then asked for the remote control. I gave it to him. Sitting beside me on the edge of the bed, still wearing only a towel, he flipped to channel nine saying, "They'll replay the local eleven o'clock news in a few minutes." Mike sat on the edge of the other bed naked and Derrick was sitting beside me, on the same bed Jonah was sleeping in. Derrick softly asked, "They sexually abused you too?"

I nodded.

Mike asked, "Have you ever liked or loved someone your own age?"

I shook my head and answered, "Never," even though I really couldn't recall if I had or had not.

Derrick asked, "They fucked with Jonah too?"

"As little as possible," I replied. "The older kids at our orphanage took care of the adults as often as possible, so they wouldn't mess with the kids too much."

Making a crooked, unhappy face, Mike grunted, "That means yes?"

I nodded, "I was getting a beating this morning for taking on an

adult so Jonah wouldn't have to. The bastard liked beating us and got off on doing it too. Then the Clan showed up and Vulcans beamed in, saving me from the worst part."

Uncertainly, Derrick repeated, "The worst part?"

I nodded, "After my backside was good and red and I was crying, he would've fucked me."

Scrunching his face, Derrick shook his head and grumbled, "That's so friggin' kinky and plain ol' wrong!"

"Reyes?" Mike softly called. I turned to him and he asked, "Take your shirt off, please?"

Vigorously shaking my head, I said, "I'm marked and bruised, if that's what you're asking. The Vulcans fixed up what they could. The rest will heal in time."

Derrick asked, "Are you sleeping with your clothes on tonight?" I shook my head and he said, "Then we're gonna see you either tonight or tomorrow anyway."

"We're prepared for it now," Mike added. I couldn't see any fault in that reasoning, so I took my shirt off. Mike groaned then leaned forward and rested his head in his hands. When I turned to Derrick, there were tears rolling down his cheeks. Mike got up and went to the bathroom. I heard water running and he returned with a hand towel, saying, "This is gonna feel cold, dude." He gently laid the towel on my back and I flinched.

Derrick softly shushed me and wiped his eyes, saying, "You're covered with bruises and welts. Never again, Reyes. You'll never have to deal with that shit ever again."

I began to cry because they were being so nice to me. Mike worried, "It hurts?"

Shaking my head, I sobbed, "This is the sort of stuff we did for each other at the orphanage. You guys weren't there, but you know what to do. I can only wonder why you care so much?"

"Because you're obviously hurtin', dude!" Mike firmly said.

Derrick added, "Real human beings don't do the shit that was done to you or any of the other kids. Anyone with an ounce of consideration in their body would do what we're doing."

Mike softly said, "I'm gonna remove the towel now before it starts to dry on you and hurts you more. It might sting a little as I remove it though, okay?"

"Okay," I said, and tightened my jaw in preparation. More carefully than anyone had ever done it before, Mike removed the towel and returned to the bathroom. It didn't hurt a bit.

While Mike rinsed out the towel, Derrick gently turned my head to him. All he said was, "I feel for ya, dude," and I lost any chance of controlling myself. Not once in my memory had I cried so hard. I felt ashamed for showing them, for accepting their kindness, for allowing what happened to ever happen, but I only cried on Derrick's shoulder and didn't say a word. I wanted to tell him everything, but couldn't make myself speak. If I had any human courage at all, while I was at the orphanage, I would have stuck my finger in a two hundred and twenty volt outlet and fried every circuit in my positronic brain. With my luck, it wouldn't have destroyed me though. It might have left me blind, deaf or mute and still a fuck toy for those perverts.

Mike came out of the bathroom and gently laid the cold wet towel on my back again. I looked up just in time to watch him run out

of the room naked with an ice bucket in his hand.

Forcing a weak smile, I reminded, "He's got no clothes on!"

"So what?" Derrick smiled. "We want you to sleep tonight."

Finally, after another quiet minute, I grew a human pair, stood up, then took my shorts and underwear off, explaining, "My butt hurts worse than my back."

Derrick gasped, then growled, "They used a belt on you too?"

Taking in a deep, quivering breath, I nodded, "After it was red, sore and I was crying, he would've..."

"My God!" Derrick croaked, and shot up off the bed so fast that his towel fell off. Seeing that my entire front wasn't too bruised or battered, Derrick pointed at the bed and ordered, "Lay down, face first."

I did as I was told and Derrick got another cold wet towel from the bathroom. He returned and put the second towel across my battered bum. The news program started on the television. Mike walked in with two buckets of ice in time to hear the news lady say, "Our top story tonight, the ROH Prime Minister was found guilty of organizing and profiting from a nationwide child sex scandal, and was executed by representatives of Clan Short of Vulcan. More on this story, and others, after these commercial messages."

Mike smiled at Derrick, "You got him to take his drawers off. Excellent!"

Shaking his head, Derrick frowned, "No, dude, not at all excellent," and then lifted a corner of the towel covering my ass.

"Jesus!" Mike gasped. He then started cussing up a storm. "I hope every one of them God damned sons of bitches were killed slowly and as painfully as fucking possible!" Then Mike squealed, "Oops!"

"Nice goin'!" Derrick chuckled.

"Reyes?" Jonah called, and then squatted on the floor before me at the end of the bed. "Are you all right, bro?"

Reaching for my best friend, I assured, "They're helping me, Jonah. Just like Kaleo, Tory and Liki did."

Looking around anxiously at all three of us, Jonah wondered, "They didn't try to..."

"NO!" We simultaneously shouted.

Beginning to laugh, Mike howled, "Oh Jesus Christ! We're all naked! Of course he thought we were fuckin' around!"

"We honestly never even considered it," Derrick chuckled, and pointed at his own flaccid dick, then at Mike's.

Mike smiled, "In the state Reyes is in, no one's gonna be messing with him for at least a week... maybe two!"

"That's fine by me," I giggled.

Derrick called, "Jonah?" My friend looked up and Derrick said, "Stand up and turn slowly in place, please?" Jonah was only wearing white briefs and did as Derrick asked. Derrick sighed, "You're bruised, but nowhere near as bad as Reyes. Do you hurt anywhere?"

Shaking his head, Jonah giggled and shamelessly pushed his briefs off, then turned around again. Mike cracked up and fell back on

the bed laughing, "If any of the Clan dudes walked in on us now!"

We were all laughing when the news started and we missed at least half of what was said. Even after a parental discretion warning, they blurred out the picture of the Prime Minister. We could barely see anything but his form falling down. Then they moved on to an interview with the King. Mike loudly complained, "What about our concert? Fuck me! That's way more important than this shit!"

Giggling hysterically, Derrick went over and kissed Mike hard. When they broke their kiss, they each said, "I love you," then returned to caring for my back. Once the towels were replaced and ice was applied, Mike changed the channel on the television. He found cartoons and settled there. Until about two in the morning, we watched TV while Mike and Derrick periodically replaced the towels on my back and butt. I don't believe that I've ever felt so cared for, peaceful or content.

As I drifted off to sleep, I finally figured out that Derrick and Mike weren't like boyfriends or brothers to me. They felt more like parents. That was a stupid idea. I was thirteen and would always appear thirteen. How could two fourteen-year-old boys be fathers to me? Once they discovered that I was an android, they probably would not want to be anything more than friends. I would have to be satisfied with them as friends. Maybe even best friends. It wasn't all I wanted, but it would be enough.

Saturday morning, I was woke by Levi calling my name and finger-combing my hair. He said, "The sun will be rising soon, Reyes. Do you want to see it?"

"Yeah," I croaked, and then called, "Jonah?"

Jonah groaned, "What?"

"Sunrise, bro."

"Kewl."

I giggled and sat up. Levi softly said, "There's French toast sticks and juice on the dresser. Let Derrick and Mike sleep until you get out of the shower."

I stretched and yawned, "Yeah. They were so great last night, Leev."

Levi giggled, "So I heard."

"How did you hear?" I wondered.

"You were talking in your sleep," Levi giggled.

Stunned because no one had ever told me that before, I asked, "Was I really?"

"Well," Levi giggled, "it's my good hearing, I guess. No one else heard, I'm sure."

I leaned forward to turn on the light, but the bathroom light turned on behind me. Levi was standing over there. I could have sworn he was standing right in front of me a second ago! I exclaimed, "How the heck?"

Levi held a finger to his lips and giggled. "Shhh! Don't wake up your dads."

Standing up and heading for the bathroom, I whispered, "You're so weird!"

"Boy, if I had a dollar for every time I heard that!" Levi giggled. "What you wish for could become your reality, if you want it

enough." He then ran to the door and waved. I went into the bathroom and tried to look at my back. Then I stuck my head out the doorway to call Jonah again, expecting Levi would still be in the room, but he wasn't there. I never heard the door open or close, but he was gone. I shook Jonah and walked to the door. It was double-locked and the security bar was still in place. I hummed and wondered, how did Levi get in the room in the first place? The dead bolt and security bar can only be done from inside the room. And he called Mike and Derrick my dads! Did I really call them that in my sleep? If I did, I could only hope that I didn't say anything about being an android, or that they slept through it and didn't hear.

Standing by the dresser and watching me, Jonah called, "Reyes? Come on, bro."

Smiling, I whispered, "Since when am I 'bro'?"

"Since last night," Jonah reminded. He then offered me a French toast stick. I took it and began eating. After more than a few of them and finishing one of the glasses of juice, Jonah seriously said, "There's no one I want to have as a brother more than you. We gotta stick together."

Feeling incredibly intense chills race up and down my spine, I softly said, "I promise, we will." Gesturing to Derrick and Mike, I asked, "What do you think of them?"

Jonah brightly smiled, "They're real nice. I can't believe we spent almost an hour awake together naked and none of us got hard!"

I led the way into the bathroom so we could talk behind a closed door. Once there and in the shower, I shared my hopes with Jonah. "I want them as our fathers, Jonah. It would be so kewl if you, me and them were together, every day and night, just like last night."

"Could that really happen?" Jonah wondered.

I began soaping up while Jonah shampooed his hair, saying, "I don't think so, but we could treat them that way anyway."

With his eyes still closed as he was shampooing, Jonah said, "You know that little kid that was following us around yesterday?"

"Dillon?"

"Uh huh. He was fostered and messed with like we were. He's really nice."

After thinking for a minute, I offered, "Well, they're gonna create a new Clan Division here. All the Clan guys consider each other brothers, so we could add Dillon to our family easily."

Rinsing his hair, Jonah wondered, "Who do you think they'll make Division leader?"

I shrugged and picked up the bottle of shampoo, giggling, "I hope it's Derrick."

Jonah laughed, "I hope it's Mike!"

For the rest of our shower, we let our imaginations run amok. I sniggered, "It's Keith!"

"Nope, Corey!"

"Drew!"

"John!" Jonah howled. He then loudly said, "Oh my God! He's so drop dead cute too!"

I mooed and teased, "Jonah's got a boyfriend!"

He smirked, "In my dreams maybe."

"Then why have you popped a bone?"

Giggling, Jonah explained, "Because when he hugged me last night, I suddenly felt so much better about everything. It was like, for a few seconds, nobody ever fucked with me. Whoever gets John as a partner is gonna be the luckiest person on Earth."

"So you do like him that way?"

Shaking his head, Jonah said, "I don't want a boyfriend or a girlfriend yet. All I want is a big brother and a little brother. Two fathers would be pretty kewl too."

"They don't scare you, do they? I mean, after the orphanage?"

"After last night, watching them with you, not at all."

I suggested, "Let's start showing them how we really feel today then."

"I'll talk with Dillon about it too."

"Kewl. I'm done."

"Me too."

We got out of the tub, dried off, brushed our teeth then went to get our clothes. I picked up my underwear and slid into them, then grabbed my shorts. In the light from the bathroom, I noticed that there weren't any grass stains. The little bit of barbecue sauce that dripped onto them during the luau was gone too. As I pulled them up, I watched Jonah dressing. His shorts were clean too! After sleeping under a tree in the grass and wearing them all last night, our clothes should have seemed at least a little dirty, but they weren't. Picking up

my shirt, I raised it to my face and inhaled through my nose. It didn't smell like me at all. It didn't smell of anything, as if it were brand new.

Jonah incredulously giggled, "What're you doin'?"

Raising my index finger to my lips, I softly shushed him and grinned, "I'll tell ya later."

We slid into our sandals, then Jonah started to wake Mike and I woke Derrick. Once we got responses from them, we reminded them of the sunrise and begged them to please come watch it with us. Mike groaned. Jonah giggled at him, then leaned over and kissed his cheek. Mike shuddered and giggled. Derrick reached for me and asked, "How're ya feelin', Reyes?"

"Much better," I answered. Taking a lesson from Jonah, I leaned over then kissed Derrick's cheek and whispered, "Thank you, for last night."

Derrick smiled and opened his eyes, saying, "Any time."

Jonah told them, "There's food and juice on the dresser."

Mike threw the sheet and blanket aside, then sat up in bed. Again, he groaned and leaned to one side, collapsing back onto the mattress. Jonah and I cracked up. Derrick looked over at Mike, then goosed his partner's ass. Mike squealed and lurched, then giggled. Tossing the covers aside, Derrick sat up. For the first time, I saw him with a morning erection and turned away. Seeing him hard felt so wrong! I didn't care about seeing Jonah's little boner or seeing any of the other teenagers at our orphanage with hard-ons, but seeing Derrick that way felt so weird. I told myself, if I really wanted him as a father figure, I had better get used to it. I asked, "You'll watch the sunrise

with us?"

Derrick nodded and grinned, "We'll meet you at the beach. It's right across the road. Lemme just get lazy-ass motivated."

Mike smirked, "Bite me!" Without delay, Derrick leaned back and bit Mike on the tush! Jonah and I cracked up again, then left them to get dressed.

Closing the door behind me, I saw Mike and Derrick start wrestling around on the bed. We could hear them laughing as we walked past our room.

I cheered, "They're so great!"

Jonah nodded and smiled, "I know it."

Breathing deeply in through my nose and smelling the fresh salt air, I told Jonah, "We're free, bro."

He nodded, "No more whoopin's, no more sex, no more pictures, nothin' to be scared of or worried about. It seems soooo... different."

"I'm liking this a lot," I admitted. "Have we ever woke up talking and laughing like this before?"

Shaking his head, Jonah reminded, "We'd be making our own breakfast, cleaning it up, doing chores or worse."

"Not today, not ever again."

Crossing the parking lot, we could see other rescued kids at the street. It was still dark and the street lights were on. There wasn't a car in sight, so kids were walking across the street in groups, except for one. When we got closer, we recognized Dillon. He obviously

recognized us too and ran to us. I expected him to run towards Jonah and he did. After they greeted and hugged each other, he then grinned and jumped at me, forcing me to catch him. Again, another pleasant chill raced up and down my spine.

"Did you sleep well, Dillon?"

He giggled, "Yup! Derrick's mommy and daddy is real nice!" Bursting at the seams, Dillon rambled, "She put me in the tub and washed me, but didn't play with my pee-pee! He helped me dress and didn't play with my pee-pee either! They says they didn't want to, that it was bad for my other mommy and daddy to that!"

Jonah grinned and wiped his eyes. Leave it to a five year old to make the truth plain. For the first time, to me anyway, my body was mine. I could choose my friends. I could choose whether or not to have sex and who I wanted to have sex with. I wondered what it would be like to want to masturbate. If I wanted to, I could do that now too. I had never wanted to before, that I could recall. The world was a different place suddenly. With that, I hugged the little boy in my arms and kissed his cheek. Dillon ate it up and hugged me back with all his strength.

Arriving at the beach, we joined with the others and sat in the sand together. Seeing some other kids coming, Dillon raced to them and brought them back to us saying, "Jonah and Reyes, this is Geoff, and this is Richie, and this is Dee, and this is Kokaku. They's my friends and ya know what? Nobody played with their pee-pees either! Not once! All night long!"

Helplessly giggling at Dillon's enthusiasm, Jonah instructed, "Breathe, bro!"

"Bro?" Dillon squealed. He stood there glancing between Jonah,

his other friends and me with his mouth hanging open.

From behind us, Kaleo loudly said, "We're all brothers and sisters now, in case no one has figured it out yet." We all turned and watched him approach with Tory, Sean and Horacio. Stopping nearer the larger group, Kaleo said, "Pay attention, guys. I learned a little something last night. Today, we're going to become a new Clan Short Division. They don't know it yet, but the entire Ewa Beach group are going to be our new leaders." Excited gasps, exclamations and squeals erupted. Kaleo widely smiled at the enthusiastic response, then said, "All of you have choices now, choices we never had before. The best part is, when the Ewa Beach group are made our leaders, they'll automatically be able to adopt kids. If you want to, you can choose any of them, or their parents, to be your parents. It's totally up to you, but I just wanted you all to know, you have choices. No one is forcing anything on us any more. What makes you feel good is probably good for you."

Hearing that, Jonah and I locked eyes. Slowly, our smiles spread. My only worry was whether Mike or Derrick cared that I was an android. That meant I had to tell them that before telling them that I wanted them as fathers.

The sky was changing from black to dark blue. Minutes passed, and far out on the eastern horizon, shades of purple and red began to appear. Behind us, we heard harmonized singing. "Good morning mister sunshine, you brighten up my day. Come sit beside me, in your way. I see you ev'ry morning, outside the restaurant, the music plays, so nonchalant, ahh!"

Tory giggled and Kaleo laughed, "Good mornin' to you dudes too!"

"How is everyone?" Prez smiled.

"Fed, clean and dressed in clean clothes!" Kaleo excitedly answered.

I so badly wanted to jump up and run to Derrick. There was something about him that was so kewl. It was the way he walked and spoke. He was quiet, but not shy. He was taller than me, but not taller than Prez or Keith. Just watching Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, John and Bruce walk nearer to us and knowing what they didn't know, set my heart racing and made my skin crawl with gooseflesh.

From the northern end of the beach, we heard the sound of bongos being beat and turned to see Kyle, Tyler and Levi marching toward us. Suddenly, Derrick had a set of four tenor drums before him and drum sticks in his hands; Mike had a snare drum before him and Keith and Prez found themselves holding pairs of cymbals. Where and how in the hell that happened, I have no idea!

Following the tempo and rhythm being set by the three purple-eyed boys, Derrick and Mike played along. Kyle, Tyler and Levi loudly sang: "[Why don't you ask him if he's going to stay?](#) Why don't you ask him if he's going away?"

"Why don't you tell me what's going on? Why don't you tell me who's on the phone? Why don't you ask him what's going on?"

"Why don't you ask him who's the latest on his throne? Don't say that you love me! Just tell me that you want me! Tusk! Just say that you love me! Don't tell me that you... Real savage like! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk! Tusk!"

Just as quickly as the drums and cymbals appeared, they were suddenly gone. The sun was fully above the horizon. It was a bright

clear morning and I didn't imagine it. What kind of magic is this, I wondered. So many remarkable things had happened since we were rescued, I couldn't begin to list them all. But it wasn't over yet.

Two girls got up and ran to stand before the four members of Old Habits. One asked, "Are you stayin'?"

The other girl said, "You can't just go away now; we need all of you."

Walking up and joining in, Kaleo said, "Tell us, what's really going on."

"I really don't know what to say," Prez stammered.

Keith nodded and explained, "We're not Clan Short. We rescued a handful of kids off Ewa Beach, but that's nothin' compared to the Clan."

"I strongly disagree," Galli said. How he appeared with the rest of the Clan Short group is beyond me! But there they were, standing just a few yards to the side of the Ewa Beach group. Geoff ran over to Drew and Corey. The little guy practically dragged them, John and Bruce over to us and began his introductions again.

"So do I," Joel added.

Kevin offered, "You just don't realize what you've done."

"Last night, while we ate, you told us how you'd like us to be," Tory reminded.

Kaleo clarified, "We're here because you suggested it. You made us really notice the sunset; you entertained us and for lots of us, it was the first time we really listened to music and paid attention to the

words. The lunatic fringe you sang about – the low-lives that made us service their perverted wants?"

Tory remembered, "Takin' care of business? Well, ya have. Time? The time is now."

"You dedicated a song to the Clan last night," Joel said. "I'd love to change the world but I don't know what to do?"

"Tell me where is sanity?" Kevin asked.

Kaleo recited; "I'm destitute, I'm looking for protection, I want love, And physical asylum, A vagabond, Running from destruction, Cover me, While I seek defection. Rescue me... rescue us."

"Didn't you know what you were singing?" Tory excitedly asked.

Keith stammered, "Uh... you... you're inviting us into the Clan then?"

Joel grinned and exchanged another look with Kevin, Kyle and Tyler. All three nodded at him. Joel turned back to the four boys before him. Rather than speak to them, he raised his voice, "Corey, Drew, John and Bruce! Front and center!"

The four boys left us and gathered around Keith, Prez, Derrick and Mike.

Joel clearly said, "Let it be known that as of 6:54 AM, Hawaii Time, on the 30th of October, Clan Short Pacific Rim Division has been established by the authority of the Acting Patriarch of Clan Short, me! Sa'ren Joel Short, son of Spock, son of Sarek of the House of Surak of Vulcan. Also, by my authority, I now appoint the Division Head - until it can be ratified by Cory Short when he takes up his

responsibilities..."

Joel let his voice trail off as he looked up at Prez.

"YOU'VE GOT TO BE JOKING!" Prez bellowed. He turned to Keith then stammered, "No, not me, a leader?"

Shaking his head, Keith chuckled, "Well, it ain't me!"

"Don't look at me!" Derrick and Mike chorused.

"Prez?" Joel called softly.

Prez turned and looked down at the small thirteen year old Prince.

"Keith is just as able as you to lead these guys. But he'd jump in before thinking everything through. You... you would think more carefully. With Keith at your side, both traits - which are both good - will guide and guard this Division. And so, you are the Division Director."

Looking up into the morning sky, Prez loudly cried, "MA-A-A-A-A!"

From the tree line behind him, standing amongst the group of eight adults, Jennifer Hundser answered, "Sorry, hon... I agree with the little elf!"

"TRAITOR!"

"Thank you, hon!" Mrs. Hundser giggled.

"Are you sure, Joel?" Prez softly asked.

"Yes," Joel nodded. "But, if you think it'll help, would two

others telling you help?"

"What do you mean?" Prez worried.

I-Cheya moved into the center of the group and breathed on Prez, causing him to tremble violently.

From out of nowhere, we all heard a man's voice say; "Son, I agree with Joel. You are all I could wish as a son and heir."

Then came a woman's voice. "You make me so proud. You will always make me proud. These children need you, Preston; more than you know. Be a father to them all. I love you. We love you so much."

Prez fell to his knees as tears poured from his eyes. He reached and pulled Joel into his arms, barely managing to say, "I... I accept, elf," before dissolving into gentle sobs. The other seven boys quickly moved to surround them with hugs. I was up and racing to Derrick and Mike like my shorts were on fire. In no time, all eighty-seven rescued kids were gathered around the Clan Short boys and our new leaders.

Joel lifted his voice as he looked around at the group surrounding him and Prez and started to sing; "Well, I know this life is filled with sorrow, And there are days when the pain just lasts and lasts, But I know there will come a day, When all our tears are washed away, With a break in the clouds, His glory coming down, And in that moment, Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, That God is love and love has come for us all. Every heart set free, every one will see, That God is love and love has come for us all."

Joel lifted Prez' tear stained face and kissed his nose, then sang the next verse as if for Prez alone. "For anybody who has ever lost a loved one, And you feel like you had to let go too soon, I know it hurts to say goodbye, But don't you know it's just a matter of time,

Till the tears are gonna end, You'll see them once again, And in that moment, Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, That God is love and love has come for us all, Every heart set free, every one will see, That God is love and love has come for us all."

Everyone gathered there easily picked up on the words and sang the last line a few times. From some unknowable place, a tremor ran through me. I looked at Jonah and Dillon and could tell that they felt it too, but we all continued singing; "Love has come for us all, Love has come for us all!"

We stopped singing, then glanced around at our new Clan brothers and sisters. Overwhelming cheers and applause erupted from the crowd of almost one hundred kids and adults on the beach. We were all so happy. Having never known ecstasy, I wondered if that was what we were all feeling as us rescued kids mulled around hugging and kissing each other. I didn't know the names of half the people that I was hugging, but it didn't matter in the least.

Keith asked, "What's so funny, Prez?"

Prez shrugged and softly chuckled, "We are The Rimmers!" Burying his face in Prez' shoulder, Keith cracked up.

"I knew I should have named them something else, Kevvy," Joel giggled.

"I don't know," Kevin mused, "it does have a certain poetic charm to it, don't it?"

Bruce innocently asked, "What's a rimmer?" Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike blushed scarlet. Smiling widely, I wondered how they might explain this remark away.

"It's because of their taste in steakhouses," Drew explained.

"Because they like to eat Outback." Corey laughed so hard that he could only stagger around dizzily.

John pointed at Prez and laughed, "You're a real Queen and a leader now!" Drew and Corey howled laughing.

Prez playfully counted down; "Five... four... three..." Giggling, John and Bruce backed off into the pack of kids.

Derrick asked, "What's the first order of business, Prez?"

"Good question," Prez replied and glanced around thoughtfully. "What do you think, Keith?"

Keith shrugged, "Everybody's in such a good mood, we should let them be kids first. Then we can get some organization."

Prez shouted, "Let's go swimmin'!" We all hooted and hollered. Prez then loudly added, "Clothes optional!"

Once again, I hadn't been dressed much more than an hour and I was stripping down with Jonah, Dillon, Geoff, Richie and Dee. In less than a minute, we were down at the water line, kicking cool water at each other. Every now and again, I'd look up and check where Derrick was. As long as he was nearby, I was happy. Jumping onto my back, Jonah held on tight and giggled, "It's gonna happen, Reyes! I can feel it like it already *has* happened; we're brothers!"

Before I could reply to Jonah, Dillon was barreling towards me. It was a good thing I was hunched over with Jonah on my back, or my nuts would be rattling around in my throat! Jonah jumped off my back and gathered Dillon in his arms. All three of us were happier than we ever had been and told each other so. I explained my concern to Jonah and Dillon; that I was afraid Mike or Derrick wouldn't want an android son. Of course, Jonah knew me, but Dillon was stunned, then

thrilled to learn I was an android. He took my hand and inspected it, then lifted my arm to see underneath. Dillon's hand was reaching for my crotch, but thankfully Jonah stopped him and laughed, "His dick is real flesh and blood too!"

Blushing intensely, I smiled and explained, "Only my brain is positronic. The rest of me is human. I eat, drink, pee and take a crap just like you, bro."

Looking up at me, Jonah assured, "That's exactly why I know it won't matter to Mike or Derrick that you're an android. You have feelings, bro. In every visible way, you're human. And they proved it last night. They care about you and they care about me too."

Above our heads, Prez flew naked over us, screaming in a mixture of fear and pleasure. Jonah and I laughed hysterically while Dillon giggled and clapped his hands. All of our new leaders were first to be tossed by I-Cheya. All of us gathered around the Vulcan beast and anxiously waited our turns for a tongue bath and to be tossed into the bay. After I had been tossed, I waited in the bay for Jonah and Dillon. What was amazing to me was that both of them landed about a meter in front of me. It was no problem to make sure they were both perfectly fine and we started swimming back to the beach.

We had barely arrived when Richie, Geoff and Dee came and pulled Dillon along with them to I-Cheya. The massive Vulcan bear was in the water with Joel and Kevin. A horde of little kids were climbing up to I-Cheya's back. Then I-Cheya swam out and caught a wave, giving the kids the thrill of their lives and their first surfing lessons. It was a little too exciting for a few kids. They hurried up the beach to the adults and soon a bunch of them were heading back to the hotel. Jonah took the next ride with I-Cheya, Joel, Kevin, Cesar and Felipe. This was a much bigger wave though, perhaps six or even

eight feet tall. Riding surfboards on the top of the wave were Prez with Levi on his shoulders, and Keith with Tyler on his shoulders.

After riding that wave to shore, Jonah hurried to me and laughed, "You have *got* to try it," then pulled me over. With me on I-Cheya's back were Joel, Kevin, Drew, Corey, Bruce and John. I-Cheya paddled out again and we lined up with Mike, Derrick, Prez and Keith for the next ride. Kyle was on Derrick's shoulders, Tyler was still on Keith's shoulders, but Levi was now on Mike's shoulders. Suddenly, the water level lowered by at least three feet and we were being hurled forward on a wave that never seemed to stop growing.

Standing with Tyler on his shoulders, Keith hollered, "I said ten feet, Ty!"

"This is ten feet!" Ty giggled.

"Oopsie!" Kyle laughed, "Plus my ten feet!"

Almost in unison, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick screamed; "SHIT!" while Levi, Kyle and Tyler giggled hysterically. I-Cheya huff-huffed his chuckles.

From I-Cheya's back, I could see Kaleo, Hank, Liki, Keanu, Sean, Horacio and all the bigger kids grabbing little kids and scurrying out of the water. Somehow, and I still don't know how it happened, the wave began shrinking down and down until it was barely three feet high.

"Spoilsport!" Joel whined.

I-Cheya just huff-huffed his laughter.

Prez raced out of the water with his surfboard. Derrick, Mike and Keith came to me. Derrick asked Keith to give me the surfboard

he had been using, so I could go out and learn to surf. Keith happily gave me his board, then my favorite two new leaders showed me how to paddle out and stand on the board. Strangely, I had absolutely no problem surfing, even though I was scared and thought I might not be able to do it. We only got two rides together before Prez and Keith called Derrick and Mike to shore. It then became my task to teach Kaleo, Sean and Hank how to surf. As it turned out, I was teaching all of the older kids to surf for the next twenty minutes or so. Now and then, I noticed all the new leaders talking with Uncle Iokii.

We were then all called together for a beach meeting. Even the adults were there with us. Prez loudly announced; "You've all been told to think about where you'd like to live and friends you'd like to stay with; now I'll explain why. We just had a talk with Uncle Iokii. Clan Short Pacific Rim Division will have bases on four islands. On Hawaii, we'll have about two square miles of land. On Maui, we'll have another large lot of land. On Oahu, we'll have three more large lots of land; one in Ewa Beach for our base of operations and the other two for whatever purposes we decide. Finally, here on Kauai we have the land south of the wildlife refuge, where we had the luau last night.

"Our goal is to make certain you all have the best possible living arrangements; no more than two to a bedroom so no one will ever feel alone or cramped; you'll all have recreation facilities and easy access to beaches; and if there's been some hobby or special interest you have, let us know what you need, we'll do our very best to supply it. When I asked Uncle Iokii how we could ever repay his generosity, he only asked that we care for and help each other. We can always try our best to do that, can't we?" A roar of affirmations exploded from all us rescued kids.

Keith leaned over to Prez and whispered something.

Nodding, Prez waited for everyone to chill then said, "Being the generous and humble man he is, Uncle Iokii has left, but he has promised to visit us often. When we see him again, we're all gonna show our gratitude the best ways we can, won't we?" Everyone nodded and again agreed with Prez, albeit more softly.

When the sounds died down, Prez said, "Soon, more of our Clan brothers and sisters will be visiting us. We're gonna show them the paradise we've always dreamed of, aren't we?" Another enthusiastic cheer burst forth.

Mike chuckled, "You're more of a ham than I am!" and Prez playfully shoved him.

"I only have one more announcement," Prez began and watched the group of adults carefully. "Since all our lives are changing for the better, Uncle Iokii also wanted to make sure our parents could devote their skills and time to the Clan. Towards that end, all their mortgages are paid in full." Eight adult's mouths hung open in amazement. Prez laughed, "Now all you guys have eight real parents that care, and our parents have more kids than they can count!" Almost all of us rescued kids laughed and surrounded our new surrogate parents. Jonah and I moved closer to Derrick and Mike.

Tapping his shoulder, I called, "Derrick?"

He spun around and faced me smiling widely. "Wassup, Reyes?"

Uncertainly and with all my hopes bunched into a knot in my throat, I asked, "Can Jonah and I stay with you and Mike, please?"

"Course!" Derrick quickly answered. "We kind o' figured and hoped you'd like to be near us."

Relieved, I hugged him tight and laughed with tears running

down my face. Jonah went to Mike and hugged him. Derrick softly shushed me and whispered in my ear. "Lives of pain and suffering are over now, big guy. We're gonna replace pain with joy and suffering with comfort. You'll see, I promise."

Excitedly, Prez rambled, "We need buildings for them, we need schools, the kids need clothes..."

Joel interrupted, "You'll get all that and more. Trust us, Prez; we've done this before."

Kevin handed Prez a Starfleet communicator and explained, "Just open this up, tell them who you are and let the Vulcans do their bit."

Joel nodded and smiled at his husband, then looked up at Prez. "Soon after that, more Clan will be showing up. Anything you need, just ask and it's yours."

Prez sighed, "It just feels like so much and I really don't feel prepared."

Keith took hold of Prez and repeated, "You will never ever be alone, baby."

Derrick said, "You've got us too, bro," and took hold of Mike's hand.

"And Corey and me too," Drew reminded.

"We're the core Rimmers!" Corey giggled. The group around Joel heartily laughed; even I-Cheya huffed a few more chuckles.

Relieved, Prez finally smiled. "Don't be a stranger, Prince. As hectic and odd as it's been, we're really gonna miss all you guys."

"Prez, we've really gotta go, now," Joel said with a small smile.

Prez's face fell slightly.

"Don't worry, doofus!" Joel giggled, "In a few hours you'll be meeting most of the Clan. You'll either see me later today, or sometime over the next few days - I might be busy making Kevvy squeal!"

"Hey!" Kevin protested as he blushed bright red.

"Oh, okay... Kevvy might be making me squeal!"

"Sa'ren!" Kevin groaned, "You're making it worse!"

"I know... but you still love me, right?"

"Grrrr..." Kevin managed through his giggles.

Joel kissed Prez on the cheek before slipping over to where I-Cheya, Brant, Kyle, Tyler, Kai and the two Lions were. "See ya soon, guys!" They vanished.

While I was still processing the disappearances, Galli, Levi, Kevin, the two Cheetahs, Aphrodite, Blackie, Artemus, and Matthew all waved and folded away.

While my mouth hung open, Derrick and Mike turned to Jonah and me. Mike laughed and Derrick smiled, "Give us a few minutes, please, dudes?"

Speechless, I nodded. Jonah and I walked away from the new "Core Rimmers". Jonah looked up at me and asked, "How?"

I shrugged, "How has anything happened since we were rescued yesterday? How were we being moved from place to place? How was

it that the guys who *just happened* to be musicians here to give a concert wound up being our leaders? How did Levi get in our room this morning? How were our clothes from yesterday cleaned?"

"HEY!" Jonah screamed, looked up at me and stopped walking.

Thoroughly confused, I confessed, "Magic or destiny?"

Shaking his head slowly, Jonah then reached over and tickled me then took off running for the water. Dillon caught up with us just as I caught Jonah and was mercilessly tickling him. He laughed at us, then began splashing us with water. We rounded on him. I held the little boy still while Jonah tickled him. The next thing we knew, a bunch of kids were around us, all tickling each other. Hank, Keanu and Sean were back on the surfboards and paddling out.

Our new leaders came down to the water. I introduced a bunch of kids to Derrick and Mike. When they moved off with a few kids, Drew and Corey came by and I performed introductions for them and did it a third time for Prez and Keith.

Dillon decided he wanted to stay with Jonah and me. Richie, Dee and Geoff, wanted to be wherever the Core Rimmers were. Over the next few hours, we all decided that we wanted to stay together and near our leaders. I noticed Prez and Keith were out surfing with Kaleo and Tory. They then handed their boards to Sean and Keanu.

For a while, Richie and Dee were playing in the surf with Prez and Keith. Drew and Corey were with Geoff, Lenny and Kokaku. John was building sand castles with Bruce, Carmella, Cesar, Felipe and other little kids. Derrick and Mike returned and spent time with Dillon, Jonah and me. There was a brief pause in our playtime when Mike asked Derrick, "Where are Prez and Keith?"

Checking his wristwatch, Derrick chuckled, "It's after eleven."

Turning to me, he asked, "Did you see where they went, Reyes?"

Shaking my head, I shared, "The last I saw, they were with Richie and Dee."

"I hope they're getting food," Mike smirked as he moved to my other side. "If I'm hungry, then all you dudes must be too." The next thing I knew, Derrick and Mike had taken hold of me and were lifting me up. Mike evilly sniggered, "You thought you were too big to get dunked, didn't you?"

As I started laughing, Derrick slyly stated, "Think again!" They reached down and cupped my feet in their hands, then walked with me to waist-deep water before sending me flying. By the time I rose above the water, Derrick had captured Jonah and Mike was carrying Dillon like a surfboard. One after the other, Dillon and Jonah were sent flying and landed a meter or so in front of me. Our little game was soon being copied up and down the beach. Teenagers were sending little kids flying out into the bay.

Derrick pointed and shouted, "They're back!"

Mike frowned, "I don't see no food, dammit!"

A small fish swam by me and I grabbed it, then held it up, suggesting, "Lunch!" Derrick and Mike howled laughing, then went to where Prez was chasing Keith in and out of the surf.

Mike shouted, "Where the hell did you go?"

Ducking away from Prez, Keith laughed, "Aboard the Endeavor."

"You know what this means?" Derrick queried.

"No, what?" Keith giggled.

Derrick snickered, "Prez was flying!"

Coming to an abrupt halt and realizing the truth, Prez hollered, "OH MY GOD!" Keith, Derrick and Mike roared laughing, then raced away. Tables appeared on the beach, and a few of the adult men, including Derrick's dad and Mike's dad, hollered, "Food's here!" Everyone hurried towards the tables. Once again, it was meal time and the amount of food available could have easily fed three hundred. Without trying, I became one of the servers with the other teenagers and adults helping the little kids. At first, I was getting Dillon and Jonah trays of food and drinks, but little kids seemed to come forward in a never-ending wave. It all worked out for the best, though, because I got to have lunch with the Core Rimmers and was amongst the first to learn about our new bases.

Sitting around in a large circle, we were just finishing up our lunch and joking around when behind Prez and Keith appeared another large group. I was looking up the beach, towards the dunes, where Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike were sitting. I am not lying or stretching the truth; at least a hundred appeared out of thin air! And among them were more G-Cats and gorillas! Wide-eyed, Jonah and I gaped at each other. Since when do gorillas stand upright, wear military clothing and carry weapons?

Being Clan is so much fun, but it's so weird sometimes too.

The new group were Clan Short Special Forces Division and were assigned as security for us. Gorillas, G-Cats and armed kids jogged off in all directions. Prez called all the Core Rimmers over to meet the security team.

They were all shaking hands and greeting one another until,

from further up the beach, Keith's mom screamed, "PRESTON!" This nice lady, who I had spent most of last night and the whole day with, appeared ready to burn down buildings with the fire blazing from her eyes. On one side of her was a gorilla. On her other side, and struggling to keep up in the sand, was a boy about eleven years old.

Keith's mom was having a very animated discussion with Colonel Donnie when Keith giggled insanely and shook his head.

"Oh man!" Drew whined, "We're all in trouble now!"

Jonah worried, "She won't hit us or nothin', will she?"

Drew shook his head and grinned, "Never, but she just learned the hard way that she's not in charge anymore."

Corey nodded, "Prez will never have an issue talking with any of us, but Drew's mom has ways of making her unhappiness clearly known." He then laughed, "As you can plainly see!"

Keith, Mike, Derrick and Prez began snapping their fingers and singing: "We've got a gorilla for sale, Magilla Gorilla for sale. Won't you buy him, Take him home and try him, Gorilla for sale. Don't you want a little gorilla you can call your own, A gorilla who'll be with ya when you're all alone?"

They're goofy! All four of them have a never ending supply of goofy songs stored away in their organic brains!

Mrs. Hundser shot flames from her eyes at all four, causing them to turn away and snicker. Smiling widely at us, Derrick held a finger to his lips. Before Jonah or I cracked up, we too turned and faced the sea.

Still facing seaward, I was struggling to not laugh, but I kept

seeing Derrick's hazel eyes and wide grin in my mind's eyes. I heard John ask, "Can I have a gorilla?" This I had to watch, so I turned around.

Prez chuckled, "What do ya say, Donnie? John's another foster brother. but a little too young to be a Core Rimmer."

Donnie grinned, "Sure, but only if you teach him to surf!"

"Sure!" John excitedly answered. "I can surf... a little bit."

Keith reminded, "A gorilla's gonna need a much bigger board, bro."

Derrick scanned the nearest great ape and estimated; "About fifteen feet long, four feet wide and a foot thick."

Looking up at Prez, Bruce whined, "Can I have a gorilla too?"

"Donnie, this is Bruce," Prez smiled, "John, Drew and Corey rescued him from Ewa Beach yesterday. We're still looking for his parents so we've kept him with us."

Donnie turned to the assembled gorillas along the dune and said in a loud clear voice, "Okay. You heard the little guys. Which of you wants to belong to which boy?"

The gorillas all turned their eyes in the direction of Bruce and John and looked down. They began to eyeball the two boys and bared their teeth.

John and Bruce stepped back. John gasped, "Err... umm..."

A pair of young Silver-backs stepped forward and the larger of the two began to speak. "Me and my little bro always wanted a boy of

our own. We'll take 'em!"

"They speak?" Bruce and John chorused. Glancing at each other, wide grins spread across their faces.

"How totally kewl is that!" John loudly giggled. The next thing John knew he was being swept up by the larger Silver-back. Wide-eyed, John laughed; "Who-o-oa!"

Busy laughing at John, Bruce didn't notice the younger Silver-back until a massive arm wrapped around and picked him up. "AHHH-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HAAA!"

"Of course we speak," the larger gorilla grinned. "You don't think that those dumb cats get to talk and us hugely intelligent apes don't, do you?" Two gorillas carrying the two younger boys walked down the beach, away from our group.

Seeing cookies and brownies remaining on John's and Bruce's trays, Jonah and Dillon practically dove for them.

While my two younger friends were scarfing down treats, Donnie scowled and shouted, "YOU THERE! HALT!" A ferret spun around, stood upright and pointed at himself.

Shaking his head sadly, Donnie softly grumbled, "Sonofabitch! Why me?"

"Cos you led us to SHINYs!" the ferret giggled, then sped off and dove into the bushes. With their faces stuffed, Jonah and Dillon stopped chewing, then looked up at me. Raising both my hands to shoulder height, I shrugged, shook my head and grinned. Now we had speaking ferrets!

Donnie tapped a communicator on his shirt. "Daileass, how

many of the ferrets are in Hawaii, and how did they get here?"

"Well... all of them," Daileass giggled. "Dave thought it would be a nice holiday for his flock. As for how? I sent them. The base is peaceful and quiet right now. Isn't that nice?"

"You bastard," Donnie grumbled.

We heard high pitched singing. "Onward, Shiny soldiers, marching as to war, With the Shiny Warrior going on before. Dave, the Shiny Master, leads against the foe; Forward into battle see His Shinys go! Onward, Shiny soldiers, marching as to war, With the Shiny Warrior going on before. At the sign of triumph, Hater's host doth flee; On then, Shiny soldiers, on to victory! Dull's foundations quiver at our Shiny praise; Ferrets, lift your voices, high your Shinys raise. Onward then, ye Ferrets, join our happy throng, Blend with ours your voices in this Shiny song. Glory, laud, and honor unto Dave our King, This through countless ages men and Ferrets sing."

A mass of fur broke from the bushes and departed in all directions, muttering comments about needing to find shinys. I looked down in time to notice a ferret gathering all our forks and spoons.

Donnie turned to Prez and snapped to attention saying, "Director O'Brian?"

"Uh oh!" Prez grunted. Closing his eyes and sighing, Prez opened his eyes again and said, "We have a problem, don't we, Colonel?"

Looking down, Derrick and Mike were spinning around, watching ferrets steal anything and everything that shined.

"This is *not* good!" Keith hollered. Prez had obviously given up.

He covered his eyes, shook his head and began laughing.

Up and down the beach, kids were screaming and hollering as ferrets snatched their silverware, some right out of their hands. One ferret stopped beside Mike and reached it's thin claw into his shorts.

Keith hollered at Donnie, "What do we do?"

"Pray," Donnie shrugged.

I tried to catch a ferret as it ran by, but only wound up missing and landing on my belly in the sand, then smiled up at Derrick.

Worried for all the kids, Derrick asked, "Do they bite?"

Donnie sighed, "In the worst way."

Stunned, Keith incredulously asked, "What? There's nothing we can do?"

About ten meters away, another group appeared. One of the older boys in the group was obviously stunned, watching ferrets scurry around Anahola Bay beach. He screamed, "WHAT THE FUCK? DAVE! Get your ass over here and bring your entire flock!" If a single ferret paid him any mind, I didn't see it.

Ferrets were everywhere! Some were in the water gathering seashells and stones. I went after those that were standing still, but I guess they saw my shadow and ran away before I had a chance of catching any of them.

I heard a small 'pop' and thought someone was firing a weapon at the tiny scavengers, but when I looked up, there was a flare shining in the air above the new older boy. Every ferret on the beach had stopped where they were though.

The same older boy shouted, "NOW! Get your asses over here, or I'll have Daileass transport your Shiny Vault away!" From all corners of the beach, ferrets hurried over and sat on their haunches before him.

Prez carefully sidestepped closer to Donnie and exclaimed, "Who is *that*?"

Donnie turned towards the Core Rimmers softly saying, "That would be General Adam Casey, the head of the UNIT; also known as the Clan Short Special Forces, with the rest of his family."

Adam walked up to Prez and held out his hand. "I assume you're Preston O'Brian?" Prez nodded and shook Adam's hand. Adam grinned, "Welcome to the Clan. Uh... would you excuse me one second?" Adam then turned his attention back to the ferrets.

"Okay," Adam loudly said, making sure they all heard him. "Here's the rules; you may NOT steal any shinys from the Shiny Haters for at least twenty-four hours. You may however feel free to take any and all shinys you find out there," he said, and pointed towards the ocean. "If you dive to the floor of the bay, you might find little oysters." Adopting a reverent voice in a much lower tone and volume, Adam instructed, "Inside those oysters are pearls; bright shiny pearls, that can be made into adornments for your belts and hats. However, I must warn you, the oysters should be treated properly, as they are the ones who create such shinys for you to find. Treat them well and they will make more for you."

The entire flock turned and started to run away, rambling excitedly. "SPIKE!" Adam bellowed, and one of the younger ferrets with spiky fur stopped dead in his tracks and looked back at Adam. It was the ferret that had reached his hand into Mike's pocket. Adam

ordered, "Give him back his guitar pick!"

Mike's right hand dug into his pocket. He softly grumbled, "Dammit!"

"But... but... he has not taken the pledge!" the young ferret whined.

"He is a member of the Clan," Adam reminded. "What have we said about Clan members?"

The grudgingly whimpered, "We can't steal their shinys unless they have been in the Clan for more than a week."

"Right," Adam droned. "So why?"

The young ferret quickly ran up to Adam and dropped to his knees. "But... but... it's so... SHINY! It begged me to liberate it from the dull one. How could I live with my faith had I not done as the shiny had asked?"

The blond haired boy that was next to Adam softly offered, "I understand. But how would the shiny feel if you took it from someone who would become a shiny lover, and perhaps be able to create wonderful music in the name of shininess, but now he can't because his shiny guitar pick was stolen. Don't you think that would make the shiny sad?"

The ferret seemed horrified, then ran over to Mike, upending a small bag he had tied to his waist. He dropped to his knees and rifled through all the different baubles that fell to the sand. He found the guitar pick and carefully cleaned it off before offering to Mike while still on his knees. "Please, mister; can you make shiny music with this?"

"I can now," Mike smiled at the thieving little ferret. Bending down and retrieving his pick, Mike then asked, "Did you know that shiny guitar picks can only make shiny music for a little while before they wear out?" The ferret seemed to gasp in horror and shook his head. "It's true; the music gets less shiny over time. When this one wears out, I'll give it to you *only* if you use it as a shiny adornment that I can see. That way, I'll know its shininess has not been completely used up and worn out. Every now and then you'll get a used shiny pick, then I'll get a new shiny pick to make shiny music with until it wears out. Then you'll get another, and another; soon you'll be wearing so many shiny picks that people will come from far and wide to see your shiny adornments."

Great! One of the guys I want for a father is certifiably insane!

"Oh! Thank you, mister!" Spike squealed in delight. Looking between Mike and Adam, Spike asked, "Uhh.. can I go look for other shins now?" Adam nodded his head and the little boy was off like a shot.

Adam then turned to the group and grinned, "Okay, crisis over. Now, where were we?"

Kaleo, Keith and Derrick were laughing hysterically over Mike and Spike. Prez snickered, "We were just getting to know each other, oh leader of the Shiny Tribe!" The rest of the Core Rimmers, Donnie, Jonah and I howled laughing.

I picked up Jonah and softly giggled, "This cannot be real! Do you think the abuses at the orphanage pushed us to insanity?"

Jonah nodded furiously and laughed, "This day is like those cartoons we were watching last night!"

Adam, the UNIT Team and the Core Rimmers were introducing

themselves so I put Jonah down, then he and I listened as we finished our lunches.

Leaning closer to Jonah, I whispered, "Do you think Mike is a little whacky?"

Jonah giggled and soda shot out of his nose! I cracked up while Jonah rubbed his nose and groaned. "No!" Jonah finally laughed. "Smarter than the average ferret, that's all!"

"Oh, yeah!" I droned. "So he was playing to Spike's weakness. Perfect! I'll remember that."

Jonah tilted his head curiously. He leaned closer to me whispering, "Isn't that what you did to the pervs at the orphanage? They wanted dick and ass and you knew it. Rather than have them fuck with me or the other little kids, you forced us out of the way and gave them yours."

I was just about to say no, that was different, but realized it really wasn't too different after all. Words versus actions; I had to be sure to remember this stuff. Naturally, for me anyway, I attempted to save it in my archive storage so it wouldn't be lost. I told Jonah, "I've lost too many... mem... o..."

Suddenly, Jonah was shaking me and softly sobbing, "Reyes? Oh shit, please speak!"

Looking around nervously, I softly said, "Something's wrong, Jonah. I can't store to my interpersonal storage archives."

"What's my full name and age?"

"Jonah Desak, you are nine years old."

"Good," Jonah smiled, and then pointed asking, "Who are they?"

I rambled, "Kaleo Palakiko, Derrick Seibert, Michael Gibbons, Preston Albert O'Brian, Keith Hundser, Drew Hundser, Corey Seaver, Donnie Williams, Adam Casey, Logan Hayes, Nathan Hayes..."

"Good," Jonah said, and huffed in relief.

Prez turned to us saying, "Guys, excuse us for a little while, please? We're just gonna have a little pow-wow here." We nodded understandingly, then went to gather our lunch trays and began the trek back to the food tables. On the way, we heard Prez tell Kaleo, "You're being promoted to Core Rimmer. Since you were rescued by the Clan, there may be something you could ask or offer that none of the rest of us can."

Jonah looked up at me, then turned to Tory, saying, "It happened again, Tory. Reyes zoned out on me for like thirty seconds."

Shaking his head, Tory grumbled, "Those fuckers messed with your memory so many times, it's a wonder you know yourself. I should've taken that little memory zapper thingamabob from the orphanage before we left. Maybe it could've helped, if we showed it to the right person." Tory paused and smiled at me, saying, "Then again, it's gone and can't ever be used on you again, Reyes."

"There's a malfunction though," I worried. Worst of all, it didn't even register as a malfunction. I simply got stuck, then was suddenly unstuck. We dumped our trash, then went back to the table for more cookies and brownies.

After we were a good five meters from the table and alone again, Jonah looked up at me whining, "We've got to trust Derrick and

Mike."

"I do mostly," I assured. "Right now they don't know and they treat me like any other kid. I'm afraid if I tell them, they'll treat me differently."

Tory shook his head, then said, "Listen, Reyes, and think about this. They're our leaders now. For you to get help, they need to know."

"I know," I whimpered. "But I don't think of Derrick or Mike as leaders."

"We want them as our dads," Jonah told Tory.

Tory giggled, "Oh, it's like that, is it?"

Jonah excitedly asked Tory, "Wouldn't you want a father too?"

Tory thought a few seconds then replied, "Nope. I don't really know what I want right now, but it sure isn't parents." After another bite of his brownie and glances between us, Tory mumbled, "Think of this then; these kids here are white, brown and black skinned. Jonah, you're white and Reyes, you're brown. If any of them is any kind of a bigot, then it's gonna be known and their leadership value goes directly into the toilet. If they consider you differently because you're an android, they are all fucked. Nobody will pay attention to them." He paused, swallowed the last of his brownie and pointed to the Core Rimmers, saying, "See Kaleo over there? Brown skin, exactly like yours, *and* our new communications officer; a Core Rimmer." Tory turned me to the group of Core Rimmers and UNIT guys, saying, "Look and listen. They're talking and joking around, right?"

I nodded and smiled, "Yup."

Tory explained, "I may not be the sharpest tack in the drawer,

but I see no reason to worry. I don't see bigots over there. If I'm wrong, then we need new leadership fast. Agreed?"

Jonah and I nodded. Tory said, "I can't and won't make you do it, but you have to, Reyes. I've known you for years and so has Jonah. We're buds, right?" I smiled and nodded. He asked, "Can you make it happen today?"

I sighed explosively and nodded, "I will, as soon as I gather the nerve and balls."

Glancing down at my naked body, Tory giggled, "You ain't no manikin, bro. You got balls, dick and a little hair too! I see a human boy in front of me. When you get a cut or scratch, you bleed red."

Taking my hand, Jonah reminded, "You're our friend, Reyes."

"And always will be," Tory reminded. He waved down the beach then said, "I'm gonna try surfin' again. I will stand on that damn thing today!" Jonah cracked up.

I giggled, "Ya want more instructions?"

Tory shook his head answering, "The knowledge is there, my body and mind ain't connecting fast enough, though. I'll get it right. See ya later?"

"Kewl, bro," Jonah and I replied. Tory jogged down the beach and caught up with the other guys surfing.

Alone with Jonah again, I looked down and smirked, "With all the Clan magic goin' on, I do need to take advantage of it, don't I?"

"I'm gonna be there with you when you tell them, bro. They say one wrong word to you and it's time for new leadership... new father

figures too."

"I'm sorry I scared you, Jonah. That and the fact that there's no warning at all is what really bothers me."

"Baby steps, Reyes. First you tell them the truth. If that goes okay, you can add tiny bits now and then. They were concerned about your body, they'll be concerned about your brain too."

I sighed, "I want them as fathers, Jonah. I don't know why, but I wish I did."

"Reyes?" I turned to Jonah and he said, "My earliest memories are of you. Even then, when I was four or five, you protected me and other kids. If you want my version of the truth, Kaleo, Liki and Tory learned from you to protect us younger kids. You did it for them too, remember?"

"I only know what you guys told me since June."

"None of us lied, bro. Three times I've seen you walk into rooms introducing yourself like we didn't already know you." Breaking down in tears and hugging me tight, Jonah sobbed, "Each time, you were the same guy and acted the very same way. You just had to get to know us all over again, like it was day one for you. You want your memories back and I want you to be happy, but memories hurt too, ya know? What if those things you can't remember make you sad? What if they make you different? It scares me, Reyes. I don't know how to live without you!"

I held onto my friend and little brother as if both our lives depended on the contact. After a long few minutes, Jonah wasn't crying any more. Derrick and Mike were still sitting with the other Core Rimmers and UNIT Guys. "I'll tell them, Jonah." He looked up at me and smiled from ear-to-ear. I confessed, "The longer I wait, the

more scared we both get. It's making us a little crazy."

He cheered, "You're the best, Reyes; the only brother I've ever known."

With a nod, I gestured to the leadership group sitting in the sand and suggested, "Let's keep an eye on them. As soon as we're alone with Mike and Derrick, I'll tell them." Jonah nodded and smiled. I led him out into the water, which seemed like the best idea until Jonah blushed. Grinning at his exceptionally pink face, I wondered, "What's wrong?"

He softly giggled, "Now that I've pissed, I really gotta take a dump!" I roared laughing, then we hurried out of the water, up the beach and towards the road. A gorilla and G-Cat stopped us, but Jonah danced in place saying, "Bathroom, NOW!" Remarkably, the gorilla and G-Cat easily kept up with us running at top speed to the public restroom near the hotel. With that disaster narrowly avoided, Jonah came out of the bathroom giggling, "It felt like all my insides were comin' out, but what happens? Marbles!" I nodded and laughed because the same happened to me. Our escorts found the remark funny too.

Back on the beach, we noticed that our leaders had moved and gotten partially dressed while we were gone. Now they were eating a second lunch and chatting. Since it was kewl to sit with them, we did so. Jonah sat near Mike and Adam and listened intently to their discussion about guitars. Derrick and I chatted about drummers. What was really kewl was that Derrick was left handed when he wrote but generally ambidextrous, so he played his drums as a right-handed person would. I didn't know it until Derrick told me that Ringo Starr was also left-handed and played a right-handed kit. That's how he was able to do tom-tom rolls so effortlessly. Derrick demonstrated by knee-drumming. It all made sense to me, but because I was right

handed, imitating him was difficult.

After lunch, the UNIT guys wanted to learn how to surf. Honestly, I was becoming a little frustrated because I had something to say, wanted to say it, but now I was being delayed. A whole bunch of surfboards appeared on the beach so I could at least spend time with Derrick surfing. A little time is all I got too because one of the UNIT kids used underwater explosives to create our waves!

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU THINKING?" Mike bellowed, and we all jumped up on our surfboards. Several of the surfing newbies didn't manage to ride the whole wave, but those of us that remained upright were joined by ferrets that were popping up out of the water and onto our boards.

Far to my left, John screamed, "WAAAAAA-HOOOOOOO!" from atop his gorilla. After that frightening ride, I went back to the sand and Jonah, passing my surfboard to Keanu.

After the second ride, all our Core Rimmers and the UNIT leaders disappeared from the beach and didn't return for an hour. During the time they were gone, some crazy people were getting pulled on surfboards by helicopters. Jonah and I hung with Dillon, Richie, Dee and Geoff while the daring got their jollies. I did a little regular surfing on two and three foot waves with each of the little kids I was with, but had no intention of getting dragged around Anahola Bay by a helicopter. My systems were screwy enough, I did not need to destroy my body.

When I noticed that the Core Rimmers had returned, Derrick and Mike were already talking with Nathan Hayes. I handed off my surfboard to Kaleo, then Jonah went with me so I could finally talk with them. But once again, there was excitement. One of the teenage rescued girls needed a second rescue, this time by helicopter. When

the helicopter landed, with the girl safe and sound, Derrick waved to me saying, "Com'ere, Reyes."

Jonah followed and Mike joined us too. "Confession is good for the soul," Derrick slyly stated.

Mike nodded and teased, "You got something to confess, Reyes?"

They were making it so easy for me. I'm an android, was what I wanted to say, but instead, what actually came out of my mouth was, "I'm gay." Quite simply, I balked at the last moment.

Taking Derrick's hand, Mike smirked, "Good for you."

Derrick grinned, "We'll see what we can do about helping you find a boyfriend. We might get lucky, he could even be an android."

Stunned, I squealed, "You knew?"

Derrick and Mike nodded. Glancing at me and then Jonah, Derrick sounded disappointed saying, "You can tell us *anything*, *any time*. Did you really think we'd be the least bit bothered about it?"

Looking down, I shrugged, "I didn't know, only had hopes."

Placing his other hand on my chin and lifting my face up, Mike locked his eyes with mine and firmly assured, "After Vulcan Sehlat tossing, Mikyvis waves, underwater explosions, how could you believe for a second that being an android matters? It doesn't, not in the least. You have hopes too, just like any of us."

Beginning to break down emotionally, I tearfully admitted, "I'm a damaged android. At the orphanage, they messed around with my memories. I don't even get a warning or error when I try to store

something in my archives; I just freeze up, then become unstuck. If it weren't for my friends' actions and descriptions, I wouldn't even be aware something went wrong. Assuming what I've been perceiving from human reactions is correct, I go into a loop trying to read from or write to any archived storage."

Jonah nodded, "He just zones out for a little while."

Surrounding me and Jonah, Derrick and Mike hugged us. Derrick said, "We learned the Clan has experts that can hopefully help you, Reyes. We'll get you all the help we can, I promise, first opportunity we get." I began shedding happy tears and Jonah looked up at the three of us, giggling his little butt off.

I smiled, "Thanks."

"Not necessary," Mike assured.

Derrick nodded, "That's part of what we're here for; to help. You'll all get what you need."

Somehow, I managed to not blurt out, "We want both of you as our fathers!" I only held onto Jonah with one hand, and Derrick with my other hand.

Mike confirmed, "We're good now?"

I nodded, "Excellent!"

Jonah giggled, "Better than ever."

Derrick suggested, "It might be a good idea for you to write down your memories; ya know, like what you've experienced the last two days? That way, when we get you fixed up, anything you may not have stored is safe."

Nodding agreement, Mike said, "Come hell or high water, we're getting you back to normal, Reyes. It's a good idea to be as prepared as possible."

"Can I ask a favor please?"

Mike answered, "Anything, dude."

I sighed and shared, "Let me tell the others my secret? I'm not comfortable with everyone knowing."

Jonah impatiently whined, "Reyes?"

I shrugged, "Everything's so new to me still. Once my memory access issue is solved, I'll probably feel better."

Derrick began nodding his head, then said, "No sweat."

Locking eyes with me, Mike said, "Prez needs to know. He'll be kewl about it too. It's just that, if we're gonna use Clan resources to get ya fixed up, he'll have to know." I nodded but dreaded telling our new director.

Jonah then asked a valid but silly question. "Why's nobody got a boner?" Derrick and Mike cracked up laughing. Rolling my eyes, I giggled. "What?" Jonah squealed. "The four of us are sandwiched together!"

Still laughing, Mike pulled Derrick's face closer and planted a kiss. He assured us, "Derrick's got everything I want and need."

Derrick continued, "None of you guys need to worry about forced sex any more. Like Tory said during lunch, sometimes our dicks get hard, but for no real reason. That does not mean the dude is hoping for action. It's just what happens to teenage boys."

Jonah nodded and smirked. Then Jonah paid for his innocence. Mike already had a hold on him and Derrick let go of me to hold Jonah's other arm. They lifted my little friend up, carried him further out into the bay and tossed him. They turned to face me, grinning evilly. Giggling hysterically, I started to back away.

Mike shouted, "Ya wanna go para-surfing, Reyes?"

"Not really!" I laughed.

Not far away, Dillon, Richie and Geoff hollered, "Toss me too!" Saved by the midget brigade, I waded back up onto the shore where I watched Derrick and Mike send little kids flying. Soon, some older kids, about ten and eleven years old, wanted in on the fun. I could tell Derrick and Mike were getting tired and giggled hysterically as they finally worked their way out of the water towards me. Before I could react, they each wrapped an arm around me. I expected to get tossed, but instead, I got a kiss on the cheek from each of them. Stunned, I stood there with my mouth agape like a fool. They simply kept wading further up the beach until they met with Keith and John.

We remained at Anahola Bay beach for a few more hours. I told Jonah that Derrick and Mike kissed me. That was really the highlight of my day. It felt so good to be cared for by two guys that I really cared about too. Another little purple-eyed boy appeared between Jonah and I. He healed all Jonah's welts and bruises. Even his scars faded away. Jonah wanted Peter to fix me up too, but he couldn't, explaining that my android systems would take care of all that.

"Who told you Reyes is an android?" Jonah impatiently asked.

"No one told me," Peter smiled. "I just know stuff like that."

I wondered, "What else do you know?"

Smiling even wider, Peter hummed then held up two fingers. "Good stuff, tonight and two more days," he giggled, and then he vanished.

Frustrated, I wondered, "What the heck does that mean?"

Jonah hollered, "What's happening tonight and in two days?" He then looked up at me and warned, "Don't you dare try to store that!"

Shaking my head, I assured, "Two days doesn't deserve long term archiving."

Relieved, Jonah smiled, "More cookies?" I nodded and Jonah took off for the food tables. Giving him a five-step lead, I then raced after him, caught up and carried him to the snack table. We had sodas too. We weren't allowed sodas at the orphanage. Juice was allowed only twice a week. Mostly we drank water. Then we went for another walk to relieve our bladders.

When we returned to the beach the food tables were gone, but replaced by tables of clothes. Jonah and I helped Dillon pick out clothes and got his suitcase packed with Derrick and Mike's help. Then they helped us choose clothes and got our stuff packed. Soon, we all had suitcases of clothes and the little kids had new Teddy Bears too. Dillon introduced us to his new Teddy he had named Niles. Groups of us rescued kids gathered around our new leaders. Prez called, "Daileass, transport all the kids around me to the outdoor recreation area at our main Ewa Beach base, please." They vanished then Keith said the same thing and another group disappeared. Derrick called Daileass, and the next thing I knew, we were all off the beach and standing in a grassy field. Mike and Kaleo showed up next with the adults and our luggage.

Glancing around, the first thing I noticed was a huge domed

building, a few large houses and what appeared to be an office building. All around the perimeter of the new base were trees. Emily and Donnie walked up and began tours. The Core Rimmers and their parents went to the homes with Emily. Donnie led all us rescued kids to the domed CIC, past the dormitories, then to the pool and diving well, where there was a pool house and an indoor recreation center. Again, I was amazed at all the great stuff. The pool house was basically boys' and girls' locker rooms, bathrooms and saunas. The indoor rec center had a weight room, bowling alleys, handball courts and a general purpose gymnasium that could be used for wrestling, basketball or gymnastics. Donnie then showed us the soccer field and the outdoor basketball courts. They had solar powered lights that worked on timers.

With the tour finished, we all went swimming in the pool. I tried out the diving well with a bunch of other teenage boys and a few of the more daring kids. At the diving well were three diving boards; one meter, three meters and five meters above the water. Everything we could ever need or want was there. Drew and Corey arrived by the pool and we showed them all the great stuff we were shown. After Drew and Corey left, Derrick and Mike came over. Finally, Prez and Keith were shown around. For most of us, it was like nothing we had ever seen before.

Some of the fostered kids remarked that it was better than the facilities their schools had. We had all gone from having virtually nothing to all this in a day. The sun set on our first full day of freedom without us even noticing until the lights had automatically turned on. Overflowing with joy, a bunch of kids wanted to go find our leaders to tell them how happy they were. Smelling the food cooking at the barbecue grills, we went around the indoor rec complex and over to where our leaders were. Richie and Dee peeled off to Prez and Keith. Dillon, Jonah and I went to Derrick and Mike. Geoff went to Corey

and Drew. Carmella, Kokatu, and a bunch of other kids went to the adults.

"Dinner will be ready soon, Kaleo," Prez said. "Get the tribe over to the CIC dining room. Let them get started on the salads or whatever else is there...."

"No snack foods, Preston," Mrs. Hundser forcefully reminded.

Prez giggled, "Mom says no cookies or other snacks, real food only."

"I'll try to control their sugar addictions," Kaleo snickered; "it'll prob'ly be a lost cause though."

"Do the best ya can," Prez smiled. "If I see you running from a pack of hungry cookie monsters and their Teddy bears, I'll know you lost the battle." Richie had wrapped an arm around Prez's thigh. Prez smiled down at the boy that had attached himself.

Kaleo laughed, "Over and out!"

Suddenly we heard about sixty kids holler "YAAAAAAYYY!" from the pool area.

"We're going to be over run!" Mike's dad nervously laughed.

Dillon, Jonah and I decided now was the time to make our feelings known. We couldn't wait to tell them but were nervous that they might not want us. Dillon and Jonah went to Mike while I went to Derrick. He was busily flipping burgers on the grill. When he finished, he wrapped an arm around my shoulders asking, "Everything kewl, Reyes? Do you like your new home?"

I nodded and gushed, "It's awesome in so many ways. There's

only one thing missing to make it the best."

"What?" Derrick quickly asked and offered, "Anything you need, let me know and I'll get it here."

Wrapping my arm around his back, I grinned, "I want you and Mike as my fathers." His head bounced and jaw dropped.

Derrick smiled, "You know I'm not even fifteen yet?"

Before I could reply, Richie and Dee cheered and hurried to each other. Richie laughed, "You're gonna be my big bro soon!"

Dee giggled, "And you're gonna be my little bro!"

"It don't matter to me," I assured Derrick. "It's all been building since the concert. Last night you and Mike took care of me and Jonah just like any real fathers would."

Coming over with Jonah and Dillon, Mike giggled, "We have an unexpected issue here."

"You're tellin' me!" Derrick laughed.

Looking at Dillon and Jonah, Mike smiled, "Please don't misunderstand; it's not that we don't want to, we do, but it's not usually allowed."

Noticing how disappointed we were, Derrick offered, "Tell ya what; we'll act just like fathers if you'll all promise to act like our sons."

Dillon, Jonah and I gathered and wordlessly agreed without any delay. Speaking for my two younger brothers, I assured, "We want to spend time with you two guys, as a family."

Jonah said, "Reyes has always been like a brother to me."

Dillon offered, "Jonah and Reyes is real nice. I was with 'em lots yesterday and today too. They can be my big bros too."

Derrick nodded, "Then we'll act like fathers, no problem."

From behind us, Mike's dad softly groaned, "Oh my God!"

Mike spun around and began laughing at his father. Mike's mom loudly whined, "Janet! Medication please!"

Holding a finger up, Doctor Janet smiled, "Just a moment," then went towards Dee. Dee and Richie hurried away, hiding behind Prez. Janet and Prez had a whispered conversation.

Only a few moments later, Prez blushed and giggled, "Sorry. Go ahead and give that doc a ring."

"Don't worry about it, I would probably have done the same thing," she said, and tapped her communicator badge. "Doctor Janet Hayes to Orlando CIC."

"Go ahead, Doctor," a boy's voice responded.

"I was wondering if 'Tonio was available to check out two kids," Janet softly said, "Both suffering from at least undernourishment, but there may be other things going on. Neither child will allow an adult anywhere near them. I know he's probably asleep, and if he is, don't wake him, but if he's up, please get him for me."

The boy asked, "Doctor Hayes, do you believe this to be urgent?"

Doctor Janet considered for a moment, then said, "Yes, I do."

"Very well, 'Tonio will not mind being woke up for that. I will let him know, and he will be there shortly. Orlando CIC out."

I whispered to Derrick, "Any doctor checks me out and everybody's gonna know."

Nodding understandingly, Derrick softly asked, "How do you feel? Is there any reason a doctor should check you over?"

Frantically shaking my head, I answered, "I feel fine. It's just like big lessons, stuff I want to save away so I don't have to relearn it, that's when I freeze up for a few moments. It's all automatic too, so I have to consciously remember to not do that. At least half the time, it's too late."

"Don't worry," Derrick smiled, "No doctors for you. We'll find an AI Engineer to get your problem resolved. If anything else starts acting flaky, let me know. I sure don't want a bad scene to get worse for my boy."

Hearing that, I smiled and happy tears flowed. Hugging him tight and with my face buried in his chest, I giggled, "Thanks, dad. I love you so much."

Squeezing me back, Derrick assured, "I love you too. We're gonna have lots of fun together."

"I know it."

A little boy appeared with cookies in one hand and a glass of chocolate milk in the other. His clothes consisted of sandals and Transformers boxers, with a med kit on a belt around his waist. "Kewl! Burgers to wash down my cookies with! Who are the kids that need a real doctor, not a fossil?"

"I HEARD THAT!" Doctor Janet laughed and ruffled the little boy's hair. She then pointed him towards Dee and Richie.

"Oh! You still have your hearing? Kewl!" He giggled as he ran over and away from any form of retaliation.

"And I still have my memory too, you little brat. I get kids like you back!"

Handing his cookies to Dee and Richie, he whined in his best little boy voice, "You pwomise?"

Janet reminded, "You're almost as old as I am, little man!"

I wondered, how in the world could a little boy about Dillon's size be as old as a grown woman.

"Yes, but I, unlike you, haven't let myself go yet!" the boy giggled, causing all of us kids to laugh loudly.

Janet stood there speechless for a moment, then, "You're grounded, mister. No cookies for a month!"

He took another bite of his cookie, then he took a long slurp of his chocolate milk. Putting the empty glass down in a safe spot, he grinned, "Right." He giggled as she also cracked up. He turned back to the two kids, "Hi! I'm 'Tonio."

"Hi 'Tonio, I'm Dee."

"And I'm Richie, Dee's brand new li'l bro."

Dee offered, "Prez and Keith are our new daddies. They says that we gotta all get checked up by a doc. Do you know any good docs?"

'Tonio giggled. "Kinda! You wanna help me check out this new toy Doctor McCoy gave me yesterday? We can see what it does!" He glanced up at Prez and Keith. "Daddies, huh? When?"

"About fifteen minutes ago!" Keith chortled.

"It was a short pregnancy!" Prez joked.

"Hey great-great-great-great-great Granny Janet! Did you make it official?" 'Tonio said loud enough for almost everyone nearby to hear.

"Nope. Didn't know it happened. Give me a moment." She made a few entries into the tricorder. "Prez, Keith, you want the rug rats?"

'Tonio rolled his eyes and sighed, "Memory issues, you get that when you are old."

"Yeah, but we kinda need to be married first," Keith grinned.

Prez laughed, "We had the kids on the sly! What's the diff?"

Janet looked at Tonio. "Can it, runt!" She looked at the kids and softly asked, "You want Prez and Keith as daddies?"

"You're just jealous because Doctor McCoy *likes* me!" 'Tonio giggled.

"YES!" Richie loudly stated.

Dee nodded, "Yup, me too!"

"Hmmm.... how many times did he pinch *your* butt? He's got mine at least fifty times." She said as she entered a few things into the tricorder, then looked up with a smile. "Congratulations, Keith and

Prez, it's boys. And it's official."

"Official?" Keith and Prez incredulously repeated. They can adopt kids? What was this going on? All of the leaders adopt too, I remembered. Now there were no secrets.

'Tonio giggled, "Next time, just do it yourselves. Old ladies talk too much!" and hid behind Prez.

Prez asked, "Don't we need to be married first?"

'Tonio giggled, "Nope! I've got a son, and By and me ain't hitched yet!" He reached into his bag and pulled out eight cards. "Uncle Harrison sent these to HQ to pass on to y'all."

Prez and Keith looked down at the cards they were handed.

Keith wondered, "We're Starfleet Ensigns now, huh?"

"No. You're cooks now, you're Starfleet all the time," 'Tonio grinned. Dee and Richie held onto each other and shared a belly laugh. Mike and Derrick also began laughing.

Prez smirked, "Mike and Derrick, com'ere a sec." Keith handed Mike his Starfleet ID. Prez handed an ID card to Derrick and playfully saluted, "Ensign Derrick Seibert, now you and your boyfriend get to adopt Dillon, Reyes and Jonah!" I almost shouted, YES!

"Oh yeah!" Janet said, as she pulled out some papers from her bag. She then handed them to Mike and Derrick. "Here are your official papers making you the Shiny Daddies to the Scooby Gang."

Mike and Derrick's jaws were now hanging on the ground. Surprised, they looked at each other and silently mouthed, "We're

really parents!" Dillon, Jonah and I smiled widely.

"I told ya, memory fails when you're *OLD*!" 'Tonio giggled.

"Yeah," Janet smirked, "keep at it, you little runt. You're only nine months younger than I am."

"And ninety years cuter!" 'Tonio shot back.

Janet smiled, "Yup! Oh and by the way, you're hanging out of your boxers."

"Hey, if you got it, why hide it?" 'Tonio blushed and giggled.

Dillon, Jonah and I surrounded Janet, giving her no escape. Mike smiled and Derrick prodded, "Since you're in the adopting mode, would you do the honors for us too, Janet?"

Janet nodded and wondered, "Which kids?"

Breaking down in a fit of giggles, Mike answered, "The three that have you trapped seem to want something."

Looking around and behind her, Janet noticed the three of us.

Derrick sniggered, "Just give us a few minutes before these burgers turn into hockey pucks." While Mike and Derrick got burgers on buns, Janet faced us and asked our names. She seemed to look at me for a long few moments as if she recognized me but never said a word. Relieved of their cooking duties, Derrick and Mike joined us. With Prez, Keith, Dee and Richie watching, Janet confirmed that we wanted Derrick and Mike as fathers. Derrick and Mike confirmed that they wanted us as their sons. Our new family wandered away from the grills and went to the CIC dining room, where most of the other rescued kids were already being fed.

That dining room was huge! There were easily a hundred tables that could seat eight teenagers or ten little kids comfortably. Directly across from the entrance were a pair of doors labeled "Command Center". To our left were two more sets of double doors. Derrick and Mike led us there where we found another huge room filled with billiards and Foosball tables, dartboards, arcade video games and wall mounted televisions. On our way back through the dining room, Dillon got tired so Mike lifted him up and carried him. Dillon poured on the charm. He whispered, "I love you, Poppa," and cuddled close to Mike. Mike ate it up and held on to Dillon like he was the happiest guy in the world.

Smiling up at Derrick, I shared, "I love you too, dad."

Derrick chuckled, "I'm trippin' so bad now!"

Mike laughed, then wondered, "How're you feelin', Jonah?"

Jonah giggled, "I'm the middle son. I love all of ya!"

Ruffling Jonah's hair, Derrick chuckled, "The perfect answer."

"Let's get dinner, dudes," Mike suggested.

As we arrived in the chow line, Derrick told us, "After we eat, us Core Rimmers are gonna get our own orientation from Lieutenant Vorik. It starts at eight o'clock, but should only take us about an hour or so."

"We'll be in the Command Center," Mike added. "You guys can hang at the pool with your buds."

I told our new dads, "We hung out with Dee, Richie and Geoff today, so we'll probably be with them."

"Kewl," Derrick chanted. Mike was busy helping Dillon choose chicken and macaroni salad. I got a cheeseburger, a hot dog, a sausage in a bun, a little macaroni salad and a little potato salad. I carried my plate and Jonah's. Mike carried his own plate and Dillon's. Dillon carried his own soda and Mike's while Jonah carried his own and mine.

Settled at our table, we began eating and chatting. Once I had shared that most of memories prior to June first were inaccessible, Jonah picked up the story. What we hadn't shared with them before about life at our orphanage was told. We all learned that Dillon had been fostered by a horrible couple. The little boy was only six years old, but he was being sexually fondled and photographed. While Mike helped Dillon slice his chicken, he explained that "little dudes shouldn't ever have to play sex games with anyone." When Derrick and I finished eating, I got my first drumming lesson. In the meanwhile, Mike was singing with Jonah. Mike would sing a line then Jonah would copy it.

"Guess who just got back today?

Those wild-eyed boys that had been away

Haven't changed, haven't much to say

But man, I still think those cats are great

"They were asking if you were around

How you was, where you could be found

I told them you were living downtown

Driving all the old men crazy

The boys are back in town."

Donnie and Emily came by and talked with all the Core Rimmers about stuff that had to be moved from their old homes to their new houses. Mike is a sentimentalist! I never would've guessed. Too quickly, dinner was over and our new dads went into the Command Center. Jonah asked, "What do you think is in there?"

I shrugged, "Clan Short stuff, I guess." Seeing Jonah's head tilt and knowing another question was brewing, I giggled, "I dunno, bro. How did Clan Short know about our orphanage or the others, or the fostered kids? I'd bet it has some kewl Starfleet stuff though. The Vulcans and Starfleet were involved in all of it."

Satisfied, at least for the time being, we went with Richie and Dee over to our new grandparents. Corey's dad, Derrick's dad, Mike's dad, and Prez and Keith's dad took us into the rec room beside the dining hall where we learned to play pool and tried our best at various arcade games. Soon, a bunch of other rescued kids were in there with us. Televisions were turned on. One had cartoons on it and another had a situation comedy on it. It was too kewl! We were not only allowed to play but encouraged to play. At the orphanage, we'd be cleaning up after our meager meals and then sent to bed or sent to play with some old man or woman.

In under an hour, our dads were out of the Command Center and gathering us together for a trip to check out the auditorium. Once there, Derrick helped Drew get the place powered up. I opened the lobby door to peek inside and couldn't help but giggled hysterically. Scattered around the auditorium and the stage were all the missing ferrets, dressed in aprons and polishing everything in sight!

Carrying Jonah on his hip, Derrick followed me inside. Mike had Dillon on his hip. Grinning at the ferrets handiwork, Mike hollered, "Spike!" Drew, Corey and Geoff followed us into the massive auditorium.

Standing up on his hind legs, Spike gleefully cheered, "Shiny Daddy!" and began scampering up the aisle.

"We've been looking for you guys for hours," Mike told Spike.

Stopping and squatting, Spike looked up and explained, "We was exploring. When we found this place, High Priest Dave said we should always keep it SHINY!"

Mike smiled, "You guys did an excellent job too!"

"We won't even need spotlights," Corey snickered.

Drew nodded and joked, "The audience might even need sunglasses!"

Bouncing slightly from the compliments, Spike begged, "Will you make shiny music for us tonight?"

Derrick nodded, "We're already gathering our Clan and all the visitors."

Mike explained, "Our Shiny leader Prez might have a few things to say first, but I'm sure we can talk him into playing some shiny songs. I've got some special ones already picked out for all you ferrets."

"You do?" Spike happily squealed. Mike nodded and Spike reminded, "We have your special Shiny Robes ready too!"

"Excellent!" Mike cheered. "I'll even wear 'em whenever we

perform."

Speechless, Spike hurried over and grabbed hold of Mike's leg, looking up with happy shiny tear-filled eyes. Mike bent down slightly, softly petting the small ferret boy's head, and assured, "I love you too, Spike."

When we got to the stage, I looked back at the room and estimated, "Fifteen thousand could fit in here easily. I can't even see all the balcony seats either."

Derrick nodded his agreement saying, "That's enough for most of the Clan, I think... maybe."

Surprised, I asked, "Clan Short is that big?"

Derrick answered, "About eight thousand in Utah. I can only guess that all the other divisions combined would double that number, but I'm honestly not sure. Our Rimmer Clan is already over a hundred kids, adults and staff."

Shaking my head, I giggled, "Rimmer Clan! That's so wrong!"

Bouncing his eyebrows playfully, Derrick chuckled and put Jonah down repeatedly saying, "Rimmers!", then Derrick, Dillon and Jonah began tickling me. While I was somewhat indisposed because I was still giggling from the onslaught, Mike knelt down before all the ferrets and accepted his Shiny Priest robe.

The large ferret standing before Mike said, "It is with great Shiny pleasure, that I bequeath to you, Michael Gibbons, with the robes of your new office. That of a Priest to the all great and powerful SHINY!"

Mike smiled, "Thank you, High Priest Dave. I will wear this

proudly tonight and always." He then stood and put his Shiny Priest Robe on for the first time. The ferrets all clapped and squealed happily at how perfectly it fit and, of course, how big and shiny the eight-pointed stars gleamed on the white robe. Our new family, Drew, Corey and Geoff witnessed this and began clapping and cheering. Seeing other Rimmer Clan kids and Clan visitors entering the auditorium, Mike suggested that the ferrets take seats in the front rows. Picking up Dillon, Mike went to greet the people coming in.

Prez, Keith, Dee and Richie entered the auditorium and looked around much like I had. Keith came down the aisle with Richie but was met halfway by Drew, Corey and Geoff. He came down to the stage where Derrick, Jonah and I were waiting, softly giggling, "Shiny Rimmers!"

"Not goin' there!" Derrick chuckled.

Keith went up on the stage with Richie. They sat at the piano, then Keith began playing. It sure wasn't rock or anything like what the band had played at the concert Friday night. Derrick led us up the stage steps, then we sat at the edge of the stage. Drew, Corey, Geoff and Kaleo joined us there. After at least ten minutes, Keith ended the song, then started playing another different song. Mike, Dillon, Prez and Dee joined us at the edge of the stage. The center seating area was filled about twenty rows. The three hundred people, gorillas, G-Cats and ferrets barely made a dent in the total floor seats available. When Keith stopped playing, everyone clapped, then Prez began speaking. He started by thanking all the visitors for their help setting up our new Clan Division. He also thanked Doctor Janet "for helping us adopt our kids and forming families. It feels great."

From the audience, Mrs. Hundser hollered, "It won't feel so great tomorrow!" While Prez and many of the Core Rimmers chuckled, she loudly teased, "You're all grounded for a week!" Most

of the audience erupted in laughter. Further down the row of seats, Richie and Geoff were assuring some kids that Mrs. Hundser was really nice. The cranky act was her way of teasing her sons.

Prez joked, "Sorry for making you a grandmother before your time! I'm sure you'll enjoy having our little ones around to spoil rotten."

"We've already begun!" Mr. Hundser loudly admitted.

"I don't doubt it!" Prez snickered. He then said, "Thanks to all the ferrets and High Priest Dave for making everything in here sparkle."

All seventy-four ferrets stood and sang, "God save our Gracious Shiny! Long live our Noble Shiny, God save the Shiny, Send it victorious; Happy and Glorious; Long to Shine over us; God save the Shiny!"

"Okay!" Prez chuckled. He then continued, "Since we can use this place as a movie theater, I thought we might begin tomorrow night with some movies appropriate for Halloween. We'll need one or two projectionists and three or four to serve snacks and drinks at the concession stand. If any of our new clan members are interested in those jobs, just let any one of us in the Core Team know.

"One last thing since it's getting late and we've all had a busy day. For all our new brothers and sisters now part of the Pacific Rim Division Clan; we've been considering alternatives for bed time tonight, but ultimately the choice is yours. Choice one: whoever wants to can start moving into the dorms; and, choice two: we can divide ourselves up into groups of twenty or so and spend the night together with our parents in our new homes. The choice is yours. Let us know what ya want to do."

Tory and a bunch of other kids hollered, "We want a concert!"

Prez giggled, "Was that one of the choices I mentioned?"

Doctor Janet and her husband loudly added, "We've heard Keith, now we'd like to hear your band."

Prez looked left and right at his bands mates. Mike grinned, "I already promised Spike we'd play a few songs."

"We really should try everything out," Derrick agreed.

"Sweet!" Drew chirped. Prez smiled at him and Drew offered, "It's a five-dot-one surround system." He and Corey jumped down off the stage. Drew helped Geoff down saying, "Give us a few minutes to make it upstairs, Prez." Drew, Corey and Geoff started back up the aisle on their way to the room where the PA system was set up.

"Okay then," Prez smiled, "One impromptu concert comin' up." Turning off the microphone, Prez asked Dee; "Ya wanna stay on stage with me or watch from the audience?"

Shrugging, Dee thought for a few seconds, then wondered, "Would you be mad if I watched?"

"Not at all," Prez honestly said, "Whatever makes you happiest."

Overhearing them, Kaleo came over, held his arms out and said, "Jump, Dee." The boy pushed off the stage and Kaleo caught him, then spun him around before putting him down on the floor. One after another, Kaleo helped the little guys down the same way, then we went back into the audience and found seats.

For a few minutes, while our fathers got their act together on stage, Dee, Dillon, Jonah, Richie and I chatted about them. The

consensus between us was that having family and them as fathers was the best possible choice any of us could have made. The greatest part was that the five of us were rapidly becoming close friends, just like our dads were close friends.

Kaleo, Tory, Sean and some of the older rescued kids were sitting in the row behind us. Kaleo leaned forward and tapped me on the shoulder. He whispered, "Some of the other kids are gonna be closely watching you dudes." When I uncertainly locked eyes with him, Kaleo whispered, "Others are gonna want families too. You guys are the examples or the pattern; how you guys act around your new dads is gonna show other kids whether it's kewl or not."

"What should we do?" I wondered.

Kaleo shrugged, "Show your dads that you love them, so the kids can see how their new leaders react to that love. Then they can find parents they may want to have adopt them too."

I nodded, "That's simple. I just don't think I'm ready to be an example for anyone." Realizing my main concern, I worried, "You don't think they'll treat us like leaders, do you?"

Kaleo grinned, "Ya never can tell if that might happen. For now, you're definitely examples."

Turning around again, I softly shared with my brothers what Kaleo and I were talking about. That got the little guys giggling. Of course we were going to show our new dads how much we loved and wanted to be near them as much as possible. As for other kids watching us when we were with our dads, we couldn't help that. All they would see was what they'd likely already seen; that we were their sons.

Mike began playing guitar with the older man in the wheelchair.

All the chatter in the auditorium stopped. It was so pretty and sounded really great with the two of them playing the same song.

While we all clapped and cheered, Jonah turned to me and grinned, "He's such a great player!" Mike switched to a red guitar, then checked with his band mates.

Then the auditorium lights dimmed but only slightly. Green and blue lights draped the stage. A spotlight turned on Keith as he began playing. Another spotlight turned on to Derrick when he added chimes. Mike began playing and another spotlight turned on him. Spotlights turned off and the stage lights changed to only blue while a single tone played. A shiver ran up and down my spine that only got more intense when Mike played four notes with a spotlight on him. Twice more he played the same four notes, then Derrick began pounding his drums and the lights above him seemed to flash in time with his drum beats. I had no idea what the song title was but it was awesome! I looked around and saw everyone transfixed on the stage, smiling or grinning and enjoying the song as much as I was.

Old Habits played for about an hour. With prompting from us rescued kids, they performed a few songs from Friday night's luau. Then they called Adam down to jam with them. In a few minutes, they began playing two more songs with Adam. Finally, they played another song with the man in the wheelchair. Watching Mike and him play together was great!

After the audience had quieted and the lights were turned up again, Prez walked up to the microphone and asked, "What's it gonna be tonight; does anyone want to sleep in the dorm?" He watched carefully as heads shook. "Okay, the answer is no then. So shall we split into groups of twenty or just guys and girls?"

Kaleo stood and answered, "We'd like to stay together, Prez."

Prez smiled and nodded, "Okay, are separate bedrooms in the same house acceptable, or do we create one big nest in the basement?" Kaleo and Prez looked around. Of course, the five of us had no input on the decision. We knew we were sleeping with our dads. Prez then asked, "Those of you that aren't sure, give me some kinda clue. What's the deal?"

Lu Guerrieri admitted, "Just wanna stay with you, Prez."

Chiba Atsushi said, "Same here."

Makan Kama said, "Me too."

For the next few minutes, Prez organized sleeping arrangements for all the visitors and us rescued kids. The auditorium began emptying out, but Kaleo and the six of us adopted kids went to the stage and waited for our dads. Dillon and Richie were very tired but neither wanted to leave.

When the ferrets tried to leave without us, Mike was a little put off, I think. Mike shouted, "Spike! Where are you going?"

Spinning around, Spike answered, "We're going to find a place to sleep."

"You've already got a place," Mike said, "with the rest of us."

Spike stammered, "But... but... my litter mates?"

"They're sleeping with us too," Derrick said. Xander, Faith and Willow looked around uncertainly.

"But... but... we-we're n-not hu-hu-human!" Spike stuttered,

tears forming in his eyes. "We... we've never been... been allowed...."

I almost groaned aloud. Wherever they used to live, they were treated more like animals than like humans. How unfair! They're so little; smaller than Dillon or any of the smallest kids.

"You're not only allowed, you're expected to be with us," Mike interrupted.

"You just gotta be good," Derrick softly reminded. "No stealing any shinys in the house."

Confused and not believing it could be real, Spike said, "But.. but if we really are your family, then the shinys are all of ours. We don't steal shared shinys, that would be wrong."

Carrying Dillon over near his ferret kids, Mike smiled, "Then everything's kewl and you can definitely stay with us at night, and eat with us too."

The last thing done that night was a trip to the field where we had all been transported with our suitcases. The original idea was to drag all the luggage to the Hundserts' house, but our leaders realized we would need to help the little kids and could be doing that for a long while. Finally, they called Daileass and had him transport the suitcases to the house. All eighty-seven of us and our leaders went down to the basement.

While popcorn was popped and sodas were passed around, my brothers and dads surrounded me. In a quiet corner of the basement, my dads said they were still trying to find someone that could help my memory access issue. Since I didn't want to forget anything that had happened and we all wanted to remember our first days together, I was led upstairs by Mike and sat before a computer. I've been up here almost three hours. Computers are easy but this word processing

program leaves a lot to be desired. Why I can't simply speak into a microphone and dictate, I don't know. Typing can be done quickly but a vocal interface would be faster; at least that's my point of view.

I'm going to go downstairs now. My brothers are probably asleep by now, which means I get to spend a little time alone with my new dads; the two best guys I could ever hope to have as fathers. I never did get to tell Prez my secret. If not tonight, I'll get around to it.

Reyes Taraschke Personal Log 2

Sunday, October 31, 2004

Sunday morning Jonah woke me up. Most of us kids played video games until our dads and leaders woke up and then went upstairs. After saying good morning to the Hundasers, most of us rescued kids went outside to our suitcases to get clean clothes to prepare for our showers. Of course, us adopted kids waited for our new fathers to come outside before going to the dorm. Mike and Derrick came out first, but we still waited for Prez, Keith, Drew, Corey, John and Bruce. When they came outside chuckling and laughing, we started for the dormitories.

During the walk, Prez immediately went to work as our new Clan director. He asked Daileass to patch in all the Core Rimmers and then found out who of our visitors were still around. After that topic, Prez got help wanted ads placed in the local newspaper for additional employees then arranged for signs to be made for the three condominium buildings. Once all that was done, all our dads began joking about Daileass spying on everyone. At that time, we learned that Daileass was the AI at the UNIT base in Utah. The jokes continued during our shower as our dads began renaming the staff. We had House Rimmers, Tree and Lawn Rimmers and Hot Rimmers.

While we were toweling off, Mike looked up at the security camera. Its little red light flashed off, on, off and on again, making us fully aware that Daileass was watching and causing another bout of silliness. For some reason, Drew tried to hide from the camera. I think he was only playing, but maybe he was bashful and shy. In my opinion, Drew had no reason to be shy. For a twelve year old, he's exceptionally cute. Since he's already reached puberty, Drew's

shoulders were wider than Corey's and overall, he was perfectly proportioned.

On our way to the CIC dining room, all our leaders wanted to check out the bedrooms in the dorms. They were big rooms and very similar to one another; only the dimensions were slightly different. Each room had two full sized beds, two night stands, two dressers, two closets, two personal computers, a television and a stereo. Corey checked out the TV in one room. He discovered that they had satellite broadcasting from the United States, Japan and Hawaii. The kids that had not been adopted would have very nice living arrangements.

We had great breakfasts at the CIC. It was like a buffet restaurant with everything we could ever want available for the asking. Prez introduced himself, Keith, Dee and Richie to the servers. For our family, Mike performed the introductions. The chefs serving that morning were named Miguel, Charles, Jessica and Randy. Our new families sat at separate tables; Prez, Keith, Richie, Dee, Drew, Corey and Geoff at one table while Derrick, Mike, Dillon, Jonah and I were not far away at another table. We had pancakes and sausages. Dillon and Jonah couldn't decide which kind of syrup to have with their pancakes so they tried them all. Watching them dip their pancakes in little bowls had Derrick and Mike grinning through the meal.

While we ate, we chatted about plans for the day. Our dads would be in the Command Center getting trained for at least two hours. All us kids could do what ever we wanted while our dads were busy. We decided we would likely split the time between video games in the Hundsers' basement or at the pool with the other kids. The last hour of the morning and early part of the afternoon were spent playing video games. Since there were only a few kids in the basement and it was obvious that I had some rare ability to play

'Sonic The Hedgehog' better than the rest, I shared my secret with Carmella, Richie, Dee, Kokaku, Bruce, Geoff, Cesar and Felipe. Having never met an android before, Carmella and Kokaku came to me and inspected me for signs of machinery. They even looked in my ears expecting to find flashing lights. Dillon, Jonah and I asked that they keep the secret, at least for another few days. A little at a time, I would tell the other rescued kids.

Unbelievably, to us anyway, Keith's and Corey's mothers came downstairs with trays of sandwiches and chips. It had only been about two hours since we ate a huge breakfast, but *they* were serving *us*. Shocked, we all thanked them. Cesar and Felipe sat on either side of Corey's mom to eat their lunches. While we ate, we learned that the adult men were keeping an eye on the kids that were out by the pool, diving well and indoor recreation center. One of the housekeepers, a lady named Madeline, came down stairs to organize and clean up the basement. After we ate, we all went outside and joined the rest of the Clan so the basement could be cleaned.

At the diving well, while Dillon and Jonah played at the pool with the other kids, I went to Tory. I explained that I had begun sharing my secret with some of the younger kids. Then I asked, "Are there any older kids that you think would be kewl knowing?"

Tory nodded and answered by calling over a bunch of kids. I already knew Sean, Horacio and Hank, but was introduced to about a dozen other thirteen and fourteen year old boys and girls. With the introductions complete, Tory offered, "Reyes has been a brother to me and Kaleo for years. He's got a little something to tell you guys."

Watching all of them carefully, I easily said, "I'm an android."

Horacio prompted, "Yeah? And?"

Uncertainly, I answered, "That's it."

Horacio turned to Sean. Sean rolled his eyes and giggled, "I thought maybe you were sick or in trouble. Jeez!"

"Get us all worked up for nothin'!" Horacio softly laughed.

One of the girls, Trish Vesley asked, "So, can you do anything kewl, like math or sciences?"

"I don't think so," I smirked. "The assholes at the orphanage screwed up my memory, so I don't really know."

Sean realized, "So you are actually sick *and* in trouble?"

"To a certain degree, I guess so," I replied, "but Derrick and Mike know. They're gonna get me help."

Glancing around the group then finally looking at me, Tory assured, "There's nothing to worry about, Reyes. You're set, bro."

For the first time, I decided to not ask that my secret be kept. About twenty of the eighty-seven kids now knew. I figured it wasn't really a secret to be kept any longer. Since they were being kewl, I decided to hang out with the older kids by the diving well. All the boys were naked so I stripped off my boardies too. I tried out the one-meter board a few times, then moved up to the three-meter board. After five totally wicked dives where I felt like I was briefly weightless in a pocket of air, I thought it was time to try out the five-meter board. That was too high for my pleasure and backed off to the three-meter board again.

Bruce, Dillon, Jonah, Geoff, Dee and Richie came over to the diving well and began getting dressed. I dove once more from the three-meter board then swam over to the ladder. Jonah prompted,

"Let's go back to the video games, bro."

Climbing out of the well, I wondered, "Where's Carmella, Kokaku, Cesar and Felipe?"

Bruce answered, "Cesar and Felipe went with Corey's mom."

As I pulled up my boardies, Dee added, "Carmella and Kokaku went home with our grandma."

The group of us began walking to Hundserts' house. Jonah told me, "You and Bruce are kickin' our butts every game! You gotta teach us how to play better, bro."

I nodded and smiled, "I'll try."

Bruce challenged, "I'll take ya on, Reyes. While we play, we can try and describe what we're doin'." Jonah and the other boys thought that was a great idea.

At the front door, Dee placed his hand on the security plate and stated his full name. The red light changed to green and the door unlocked. Dee opened the door and the rest of us followed him inside. To our left, in the living room were Keith's mom and dad with Carmella and Kokaku. Dee and Richie hurried into the room and sat on the sofa with their grandparents.

Uncle Jim asked, "Tired of the pools already, boys?"

Jonah grinned, "Bruce and Reyes is getting' good at Sonic. The rest of us need more practice."

"You know the way," Aunt Jen smiled, but warned, "Dinner time in about three hours. Don't fill up on popcorn and sodas."

Bruce nodded, "I'm only thirsty now," then led us to the

basement. When we got down there, Bruce noticed Dee and Richie hadn't followed. He said, "I guess Dee and Richie aren't comin'." He then turned on TV's and game stations.

I went to the refrigerator and asked, "Who else is thirsty?" Soon, cans of drinks were passed out then we sat down to play. Bruce and I took one game and began showing the others the tricks of the game. Dillon, Jonah and Geoff hooted and hollered because my score was higher than Bruce's from the very beginning. I began explaining what I was doing as I was about to do it. Minutes later, Bruce lost his final hedgehog and I had won.

"What was I thinking?" Bruce giggled, "Like I ever had a chance."

Jonah tapped my shoulder and suggested, "Lemme play with Bruce?" I nodded and rolled away then helped get Dillon and Geoff started. For at least an hour, I sat behind the other four and offered suggestions while they played.

The basement door opened and we heard footsteps on the stairs. I turned and saw John with Nathan. "Hey, guys," John cheerfully said.

"Hey," Bruce smiled, "Reyes has been teaching us to play Sonic better."

"You guys wanna play too?" Jonah asked.

John shook his head and asked, "Bruce, could you come upstairs with me for a little while? There's something we need to talk about with my dad. Your Teddy and mine can come too."

"Okay, pal," Bruce replied. "Someone take over for me here." Nathan quickly moved into position, sitting between Bruce and Jonah. Then Bruce passed off the controller and rolled away, then stood up.

"How was your orientation?" Bruce asked John.

"Pretty cool," John grinned, "lots o' computers that can do lots o' different stuff. They make the Internet look lame in comparison." They started up the stairs with their Teddy Bears in tow. John told Bruce about the Core Rimmers' orientation. Since John and Nathan were back, I figured it would only be a matter of time before Derrick and Mike showed up. But Nathan was kicking Jonah's butt while he told us that Bruce's parents had been found, but were dead. Nathan explained that Bruce was going to need all of us to help him through the loss. Easily and quickly, we agreed that Bruce would hardly ever have any chance to feel alone or sad.

After Jonah lost the game, I got to play against Nathan for a long while. It was a really long match and I completely lost track of time. I'd get my points past Nathan's, then he'd pull off an amazing move and pass me again. Back and forth we went like that. At first, Jonah was excitedly commenting, but then Dillon and Geoff ended their game and watched us play too.

The basement door opened again and heavier footsteps came down the stairs. Dillon said, "Hi, Daddy." I glanced over my shoulder briefly and saw Mike standing there.

"Whoa!" Mike chuckled. "Look at those scores! You guys have set record high scores."

Jonah giggled, "They've been playing this one match for at least an hour."

Mike said, "I hate to break this up, but it's getting near dinner time. Our parents want to know what's been going on, so we're gonna have supper at home tonight. Just so you guys know, I've got a new brother and sister."

Jonah asked, "Who?" Nathan and I began purposefully killing our hedgehogs to quickly end the game, causing Dillon and Geoff to squeal in hysterical laughter.

Mike answered, "Ben Hatcher and Christel Robusto." He quickly added, "Derrick's got new brothers and sisters too; Sung Henjes, Kawazoe Yoshitoki, Latoya Tran and Brandi Soriano."

We turned off the TVs and game stations then stood. Jonah told Mike, "Richie and Dee never came down to play."

Starting up the steps, Mike nodded, "Carmella Socia and Kokaku Kidotai were adopted by the Hundserts. Cesar and Felipe Laurito are now part of the Seaver family."

Dillon giggled, "I guessed that would happen," and Geoff nodded agreement.

Mike explained, "For tonight, we're gonna split up and have dinner with our families. Reyes, Jonah and Dillon, you'll have dinner with Derrick's family this time. I'll go find the Scooby Gang and they'll have dinner with my family. Next time, we'll switch it around, the Scoobies with Derrick and you guys with me."

Opening the basement door, we turned into the kitchen. Geoff saw Drew and took off like a miniature bolt of lightning. Drew squatted down and caught his little fireball, then picked him up. Mike laughed, "I guess that answers where Geoff is having dinner." I couldn't help but notice how much happier Geoff seemed with Drew. I also noticed the wall clock read twenty-of-five.

Turning to Mike, I asked, "You guys were busy for almost six hours with the orientation?"

Shaking his head, Mike answered, "A little over three hours with

that then with the various adoptions." He then faced Prez and Keith saying, "We'll see you dudes later tonight."

Prez was chomping on a piece of bread he had dunked in the pot of sauce and nodded. Keith answered, "After dinner, at the pools, bro."

Leading our little group to the sliding doors, Mike said, "See ya." When we got outside, Mike noticed Nathan with us and groaned, "Dude! I'm sorry, we completely forgot to include you in our dinner plans."

Nathan grunted then joked, "Just like my brothers. When they've swallowed the table, they look at me and ask if I might be a little hungry."

Mike chuckled, "Vocalize, dude!" A few seconds later, Mike laughed, "You and Daileass are definitely related. One talking in my ear and the other in my mind, at the same time."

Nathan assured, "It's kewl, Mike. You guys need family time too. I'll eat at the CIC dining room with Kaleo and the rest of the Clan. I'll catch up with you guys later at the pool."

Mike nodded, "Kewl dude," then led us to the Seiberts' house.

Before we arrived at the kitchen doorway, Derrick stepped outside with Sung and Kawazoe. Upon seeing the two small boys with my dad, I realized that they were now my eight-year-old uncles. Derrick confirmed, "You guys know each other?"

Shouting, "Yup!" Dillon and Jonah hurried to Sung and Kawazoe.

While my brothers and uncles greeted each other, Derrick came

to me and asked, "Do you like pork chops, Reyes?"

I nodded and smiled, "I haven't found anything yet that I don't like."

Mike slid in close to Derrick and planted a kiss then softly said, "I'm gonna go find the Scoobies."

Derrick smiled, "See ya in about an hour."

Mike nodded and hurried off past the homes toward the trees shouting, "Spike! Willow! Xander! Faith!"

Derrick slid open the kitchen door. Dillon, Jonah, Sung and Kawazoe went inside, but I hung back with Derrick. I asked, "Do your parents know about me?"

Shaking his head, Derrick answered, "No," then planted a kiss on my forehead and smiled, "It won't matter to my folks. I went over by the pool after the orientation looking for you guys. Tory told me that you shared your secret with lots of kids." Wrapping an arm around me and pulling me inside, Derrick instructed, "Be proud of who you are, Reyes. I'm proud of you and so is Mike."

With that said, I felt incredible shivers race up and down my spine. I closed the door behind me and grinned, "I need to use the bathroom."

Squeezing me firmly, Derrick teased, "You remember how that works?"

I laughed, "I think so," then went to the bathroom, just beyond the kitchen and dinette, near the basement door. The first floor bathrooms were split in half, with a utility room beyond the inner wall. In the utility room were water heaters and the largest washing

machines and dryers I had ever seen. For curiosity's sake, I made a mental note to sneak a peak at the housekeepers' closets in the rec center and the pool house some time in the future.

When I finished in the bathroom and opened the door, Grandpa Carl had just closed the basement door. He was dressed in jeans and a white T-shirt with a carpenter's tool belt around his waist. There was a ladder leaning against a nearby wall. He smiled, "How're you doing, Reyes?"

"Good," I answered, and then asked, "What're you doin'?"

Gesturing at the many framed pictures along the wall on the floor, he answered, "Hanging pictures. Would you like to help?"

I shrugged, "I've never done it before."

Picking up a metal bar, Grandpa Carl explained, "This is a level," and pointed to little glass encased bubbles saying, "You just need to watch the bubbles. When they're centered between the lines, we'll have a true level line to mark the wall."

I replied, "It sounds easy," and Derrick came around the corner.

Grandpa Carl pulled something off his belt and said, "This is a tape measure. I'll mark a distance from the ceiling. You can use the level to make sure we don't have drunken, crooked pictures hanging." Derrick began chuckling and I grinned.

Derrick smiled, "That was a shot at me and Mike."

While we waited for dinner to finish cooking, Grandpa Carl, my dad and I got some paintings and photos hung in the hall, the living room and dining room. Grandpa Carl told me that I had used the level correctly and congratulated me each time. I asked about some of the

people in the various photos we hung. They were Derrick's aunts, uncles and grandparents that still lived in the United States. I learned that my dad was born in California, where many of Grandpa Carl's and Grandma Anna's family were from. Derrick and his parents moved from California to Hawaii in 1992 when Derrick was two. In 1994, the Hundserts and Gibbons also moved from the States to Hawaii. The O'Brians were the last to move here in 1997. Derrick pointed out a photo taken in 1999 of all the families together. In the foreground of the photo sat Drew, Corey, John and Lindsay. Behind them were nine-year-old versions of Derrick, Mike, Keith and Prez. In the back rows were the mothers and then the fathers. Back then, Prez looked a lot like his mother. While we were in the dining room hanging the last of the large oil paintings, Grandma Anna said, "Perfect; dinner in five minutes, men."

Grandpa Carl nodded then told Derrick and me to "get washed up."

My dad and I went back into the bathroom, quickly washed our hands then hurried back to the dining room. All the little kids were already seated along the sides of the huge table. I sat down and Derrick asked for plates adding, "little ladies first." All us boys griped and groaned in frustration. Derrick cracked up before serving us. Thankfully, Grandma Anna and Grandpa Carl helped get all of us served.

Grandma Anna was a great cook. She made the moistest, tenderest pork chops I had ever eaten. There was also seasoned corn, green beans and what she called 'twice baked potatoes'. Latoya and Brandi helped her make them. The baked potatoes were allowed to cool then cut in half. The potato was scraped out of each skin then mashed and returned to the skins. Cheese and bacon bits were added on top then put back in the oven again. All of us adopted kids had

never had such a fantastic meal in our lives. There were ten people around the table and everybody ate their fill, but there were still leftovers. Never again would we be limited to what we wanted to eat. As if we could lift ourselves from our chairs after we finished, Grandma Anna began clearing the table and asked, "Who wants apple pie?"

I loudly groaned over the cheers of Dillon, Jonah, Sung and Kawazoe.

My grandparents smiled at me, and Derrick chuckled, "Stuffed yourself, huh Reyes?"

I honestly said, "Apple pie sounds great, but I couldn't eat another bite."

"I'll save you a piece for later or tomorrow," Grandma Anna promised, then turned and left the room with a stack of plates. Grandpa Carl followed her out of the room with a few serving bowls.

The moment they were gone, Jonah teased, "I'm here for breakfast tomorrow!"

Not too long after dinner and dessert, we went back to Mike's house. His family were still finishing up dinner. Mike seemed somewhat distracted, I noticed. Derrick led Dillon, Jonah and I down to their basement where the drums were set up. Derrick gave me another drum lesson, then let me practice on his kit.

Mike and Ben came downstairs both carrying acoustic guitars. Jonah went to them and asked, "When did Ben get a guitar?"

"Just a few minutes ago," Mike answered. "He told me that he wanted to learn how to play during dinner."

Jonah practically begged, "Can I have one too? I wanna learn to play."

Mike smiled, "Sure ya can. You never told me you were interested before." He then tapped his sub-vocal saying, "Daileass, another Taylor GS Mini acoustic guitar for my son, please."

A second later, a guitar was hanging off Jonah's shoulder, exactly like the one Ben had.

"Before we get into lessons," Mike began, "here's a goal for you guys to shoot for. It's pretty easy to play, and given the situation with Bruce, I think it's appropriate. Mike began playing then sang:

Would you know my name

If I saw you in heaven

Will it be the same

If I saw you in heaven

I must be strong, and carry on

Cause I know I don't belong

Here in heaven

Would you hold my hand

If I saw you in heaven

Would you help me stand

If I saw you in heaven

I'll find my way, through night and day

Cause I know I just can't stay

Here in heaven

Time can bring you down

Time can bend your knee

Time can break your heart

Have you begging please

Begging please

Beyond the door

There's peace I'm sure.

And I know there'll be no more...

Tears in heaven

Would you know my name

If I saw you in heaven

Will it be the same

If I saw you in heaven

I must be strong, and carry on

Cause I know I don't belong

Here in heaven

Cause I know I don't belong

Here in heaven

While everyone else in the room clapped, I sat there fighting back my tears. Derrick noticed though and came to me, then held me tight. Instead of mourning, Mike went directly back to Ben and Jonah, beginning their guitar lessons. I buried my face on Derrick's shoulder and let quiet tears flow from my eyes onto his T-shirt. After about a minute, Derrick led me upstairs and into the bathroom. He went in there with me, and I offered, "I'm sorry, dad."

He shushed me and said, "Don't be. It's plain ol' wrong for something like this to happen; now is worse because all you guys are settling into new lives. It proves that the cycle of life continues on, no matter what else might be happening. For Bruce, this is gonna be a day he'll always remember. What we can do is make it an easy transition from one life to another. From now on, we're gonna be his friends, brothers and sisters."

Understanding, I nodded and then sighed, "I might not have cried until later, if at all, but Mike singing that song wrecked me."

Derrick smirked, "That's part of why I love him. As whacky and fun as he can be, his heart shows in the music he plays." Gesturing to the sink, he gently instructed, "Clean up and join us when you're ready." Finally, he kissed my forehead then left me to wash my face and pull myself back together. The only question I had running through my mind was, why after so much good stuff did something

bad have to happen. There was no valid reason for it.

I went back downstairs. Ben and Jonah were practicing their guitars. Just as I sat down behind the drums, Mike's comm-badge chirped. Mike tapped the little badge on his T-shirt and replied. Keith's voice announced, "Dudes, we just learned there are kids to pick up from our Maui base. It's time to go do our stuff."

Derrick nodded and Mike said, "We'll meet you outside, bro."

Derrick locked eyes with me. I smiled, "It's kewl now, dad. I'll try to keep a tempo for Jonah and Ben." After about half an hour, Dillon was bored and Ben and Jonah's fingers were burning.

Since Dillon and Jonah hadn't seen the second floor, we went to investigate the upstairs. At the top of the stairs, the first thing you see are bathrooms; three of them are lined up directly across from the stairs and to the left. To the right of the staircase is a single doorway leading to a massive master bedroom suite. The master bedroom and attached master bath occupied the entire right side of the upstairs. Beyond all the bathrooms, to the left of the stairs, is the first and smallest bedroom; though, even this room was pretty large and had a full size bed. Further around the left of the staircase down the hallway are three more bedrooms. Each of these other three bedrooms were large enough for two full size beds, two night tables, two desks, two dressers and a complete entertainment center. It was obvious which bedroom was Mike's, the fourth of five bedrooms, by the musical paraphernalia in the room. Dillon and Ben hunkered down on the floor and played video games. Jonah and I were listening to compact disks on the stereo. Mike had a lot of music by guitarists, but many were by a man named Eric Clapton. The Scooby gang wandered in, but weren't interested in video games or music so they turned around and left.

We weren't up there alone for very long when Derrick and Mike walked in. After checking with us to see if everything was kewl, Mike went to his desk and unlocked the computer. Soon, Derrick was softly chuckling. Mike grumbled, "This is *not* funny!"

I turned to see Mike with his head sagging in his hands and Derrick turning red, holding back laughs to mere chortles and snickering. Soon, Ben, Dillon, Jonah and I were beside Derrick and Mike watching a video of Mike showering with the Scoobies.

At the end of the flick, Jonah giggled, "What were ya thinkin', pop?"

Shaking his head pitifully, Mike smirked, "They were dirty so..."

Ben teased, "Ya got a hairy butt!" then swiftly hid behind Derrick. Dillon, Jonah and I howled laughing as Ben tore out of the room and raced downstairs. Dillon tried to get away with passing the same remark, but Mike caught Dillon before he could escape and began tickling him.

A couple of minutes later, our little family was gathered with the Scoobies in the living room. We had our first family chat. The greatest part for Dillon, Jonah and me was that our dads didn't expect or desire anything from us except our best and our caring for each other. They didn't care if I became a drummer or if Jonah became a guitarist; our interests would be allowed to change and develop over time. Mike apologized to the Scoobies for the shower and then we went out back where a nice big aluminum tub was sitting, ready for the ferrets to use whenever they wanted a bath.

With our family meeting over, we went to join the rest of the Clan by the pool and diving well. Almost everyone was there, including the new kids picked up at Maui earlier that night. One of the

kids, Randy Beale, got along famously with Jonah and Dillon. Randy was seven years old; two years older than Dillon and two years younger than Jonah. The last two Core Rimmers to arrive at the pool were Prez and Keith. After they made the rounds checking on the new kids, they called together the Core Rimmer team. First, everyone was introduced to the doctor and child psychologist, then the Core Rimmers went for a private chat. That didn't last very long though. They returned to the pool and diving well to hang out with the rest of us.

At nine-thirty, by the clock in the rec center, adults began gathering the four and five-year-old kids to get them ready for bed. The Hundserts and the Seavers led the troop of midgets back to the nest for the night. That left our four grandparents, the two doctors, a small group of housekeepers and landscapers by the pool to watch over the remaining seventy or so kids. Mike was playing "Jaws" in the pool, pretending to be a Great White Shark and sending kids screeching away from his stealthy attacks. It was a great game and Mike was an awesome swimmer. To try and make things more even, Derrick began playing "Orca". The Great White seemed to like getting chased away by the killer whale, for some strange reason.

At some point, Prez, Keith, Tory and Kaleo vanished along with most of the older teenagers. About an hour later, around eleven o'clock, many of the younger kids left the pool to call it a night. When Randy began getting tired, Jonah led him to the Hundserts' house to join the nest. Prez, Keith, Tory and Kaleo returned and saw that only about twenty of the eldest rescued kids were still at the pool with Derrick, Mike and me.

After telling us that they were moving to the dorms, Kaleo and Tory said goodnight then departed. By eleven-thirty, everyone was walking to the Hundserts' house to chill out and call an end to a busy

day. This night, I didn't have to sit in a quiet bedroom alone typing my story. Derrick called Daileass and got me my own laptop computer. Keith's mom came downstairs a while ago. Two kids were picked up by Corey and Drew at our North Road gate about midnight. The newbies decided they wanted to sleep at the dorm, so Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Corey and Drew just left to walk them over there. Since I'm done for today and my dads still aren't back, I guess I'll join the nest.

Monday, November 1, 2004

Once again, Monday morning we woke in the Hundserts' basement. Dillon, Jonah and I were with our dads almost the whole day. After showers at the Seiberts' home, we had a home cooked breakfast. Derrick's mom made us hash browns and breakfast sandwiches on biscuits with egg, cheese and bacon. What made it really strange was that we all began speaking in tongues. Jonah began speaking in Yiddish. I was speaking Russian. Dillon was speaking Gaelic. Derrick's mom was speaking in German, and we could all understand each other perfectly. Clan magic was happening again and we weren't awake an hour.

Ben and Jonah were having a rough time with what Mike had showed them the prior evening so Mike showed them the 'spider chromatics' again. Mike played very slowly at first, with Ben and Jonah closely watching Mike's fingers. Christel and Lindsay excused themselves, then went upstairs. Us boys were sitting around the kitchen table, enjoying our time together when I noticed Prez, Keith, Bruce, John and a bunch of other kids outside. Also noticing the activity outside, Derrick softly chuckled, "Here we go."

Quickly, guitars were put aside and we went out the sliding glass doors. One of the kids had wings! He picked up Bruce and flapped his wings then took off like a shot, with Bruce laughing loudly at the top

of his lungs. Our group approached the others and three kids about Jonah's age met us. First they went to Derrick, already knowing his name, and introduced themselves. Their names were Jacob, Jamie and Beau. They went around hugging each of us in turn; Mike, Jonah, Ben, Dillon and finally me. We were just saying hello to the other three, Jason, Nathan and Vicky Evans, when Bruce and the bird-boy returned from their flight. The best part of this magical Clan insanity was that Bruce was a giggling mass of naked eight-year-old in the grass. After learning of his parent's passing, this was exactly what Bruce needed.

Little kids came from everywhere wanting a flight around the island. John was next in line though and quickly stripped. Some of us shook our heads sadly while other kids giggled insanely because John had a boner. This time Riti wanted to take John to the big island of Hawaii. They would be gone at least an hour, I figured. Anyway, I was too big to have a chance to fly with Riti so I turned to Derrick and asked, "Dad, can I go play the drums for a while?"

"Sure, Reyes," Derrick nodded. "Let Mike's mom know you're there though."

Mike chimed in, "She might be at the pool now. Check there first, okay?"

I agreed, thanked my dads and told my brothers where I was going then hurried to the pool. Mrs. Seaver was there and so was grandma Anna, but grandma Laura hadn't been there yet, I learned. I ran around the rec center and went in the front door. Sitting in the living room and watching the morning news, Grandma Laura asked, "Not interested in playing at the pool today, Reyes?"

"Nope," I giggled. "The little kids are getting flown around. Dad

said I could play his drums."

She closed her eyes, then opened them and slowly repeated, "Little kids are getting flown around?"

I nodded and tried to explain, "One of our visitors has wings. I can only guess where *he's* from, but it sure isn't Hawaii."

She groaned and seemed to gag, "Where?" I led her through the dining room to the kitchen's sliding glass doors and pointed to the large group of kids standing in the center lawns of the four homes. She turned to me and remarked, "I don't see anyone flying."

I grinned, "He just left with John for the big island."

"John?" She gasped, and then clarified, "John Hundser?" I nodded and watched as she hurried outside, muttering something about boys, Valium and how "Jennifer is going to have a heart attack!"

So I went downstairs to the basement and played drums. Remembering what my dad had taught me thus far, I set a tempo then pressed the bass drum pedal on every beat. I began tapping the hi-hat twice for every beat, and hit the snare on every second and fourth beat. Okay, this was easy and it sounded like some of what Derrick had done on stage Friday at the luau, and Saturday night in the auditorium.

After about a minute of holding that tempo, I began thinking of what my dad would do and had done. I tried to play what dad had called a 'fill' on the tom-tom. Bleh! That was awful. So I started over and thought of exactly how Derrick played a fill. Realizing that they almost always started on the third or fourth beat, I tried a simple fill, hitting the smaller tom twice then the next larger tom twice. It was simple, but at least it was progress. I decided to try it again. This time

I would wait until the fourth beat and play both toms twice, but faster so they would fit in that one beat. I must've tried that at least ten times before it sound anywhere near good. Taking a short break, I thought of trying the fill on beats three and four, but using the two rack-mounted toms and the two floor toms. I tried just that with my bass drum keeping the tempo. I made small amounts of progress, a little at a time, and kept trying different fills.

Derrick came down the stairs and smiled as I played, showing him the several different fill patterns I had managed to learn. On the next downbeat, I hit the crash cymbal and stopped playing. I stood and went to him feeling like I hadn't accomplished much, but at least it was something. Derrick wrapped me in his arms and hugged me tight saying, "That was really very good."

Looking up into his eyes, I asked, "Was it really?"

He nodded, "You kept the tempo through each of the different fills perfectly." Leading me upstairs, he instructed, "Next time, try keeping your main tempo with the hi-hat or ride cymbal, but hit the bass drum only on the up-beats." My dad counted it out for me and used his hands to demonstrate the bass drum hits.

We walked outside together and I giggled, "That sounds rough. I'm gonna wind up hitting the snare on the upbeats too."

Derrick shrugged, "Maybe, but I think you'll get it. You accomplished a lot in only two hours."

Stunned, I gasped, "I was down there two hours?"

Derrick cracked up and laughed, "It's lunch time! And guess what?"

"What?" I cautiously asked.

He pointed ahead of us and said, "That blond dude there next to Prez is Clan Short Patriarch Cory Short. Mike and I are planning on pulling him aside some time today so we can make good on our promise. We're gonna get you fixed up, as soon as possible, Reyes."

Completely shocked, I didn't know what to say and my mouth hung open. I was happy and frightened by the prospect. Then I remembered what the boy named Peter had said. "Tonight and two days." That was Saturday afternoon. Saturday night I became Derrick's and Mike's son. Now it was Monday, two days had passed and I could have all my memories back again before I went to bed.

"Well," Derrick smiled, breaking me out of my trance. "Aren't you happy?"

I nodded and admitted, "A little scared too."

"Ya know what?"

"What?"

"I think you're more anxious than scared. Do want to know why?"

"Why?"

Derrick explained, "Two reasons. First, what you thought was far away is now around the corner, and secondly, no matter what happens, you've still got a family that loves you. Jonah, Dillon, Mike and me love you just the way you are. The only thing this is going to do is add to what you already have." Realizing that he was right, I smiled up at him. He nodded and prompted, "Come on, let's catch up

with them."

Together, we ran to the CIC, catching up with Prez, Keith, Mike, Cory Short and some other guys they were with. They were in the middle of a conversation.

Keith nodded, "If it's no problem for you, I'd love for you guys to be there."

Prez warned, "Mrs. Diaz, our teacher, is really our only concern. She's gonna have to get used to us bringing security along, or we've got an issue to resolve."

Mike sighed, "We can only hope she doesn't have an issue."

Derrick said, "We've worked for our places in the school jazz band. As long as they're kewl, we are. Otherwise..."

Prez finished, "If Mrs. Diaz, the school or other students have a problem, it's their problem, not ours."

"Let's not stress it for now," Keith suggested.

Mike offered, "We're not gonna quit, but if they force our hand, Clan Short takes priority." Almost simultaneously, Prez, Keith and Derrick agreed.

Cory said, "Don't worry about it, guys. Even if school turns out to be a problem, we'll put you on Clan concert tours once in a while."

Derrick leaned closer to me and whispered, "Catch up with your brothers. As soon as I know something, I'll let you know." I nodded and hurried into the dining room.

Dillon needed help carrying his soda, so I put his cup on my tray and carried it to a table where Jonah was already sitting with Ben,

Sung, Kawazoe and Randy Beale. Our fathers and the other Clan leaders were sitting at a nearby table. Every time Derrick looked our way and grinned at me, I all but burst at the seams, ready to scream "I'm finally getting my memories back!" All during lunch, I listened to my brothers ramble on about their flights around the island with the bird-boy, who I finally learned was named Riti Evans.

Derrick and Mike came to our table. Mike explained, "We've gotta go to school, but should be back in about an hour-and-a-half." Our dads then kissed each of us on the head and we each said goodbye. Even their new brothers and Randy got a kiss before they hurried out of the CIC dining room.

Blushing from his unexpected kisses, Randy giggled, "They're really nice."

Jonah nodded and smiled, "They're our dads."

Ben added, "Mike's my big brother."

Gesturing to himself and Kawazoe, Sung proudly cheered, "Derrick's our big bro."

"Wow!" Randy reverently cheered, "Dads and brothers, huh?"

For the next few minutes, we told Randy about Derrick and Mike and a little about the other Core Rimmers. He was surprised to learn that they could adopt kids. Finished with our lunches, we dumped our trash, left our trays and glasses by the dishwasher, then went out to the pool.

Since I was being a drum geek most of the morning, my brothers had to introduce me to Riti and a Native American man named Mr. T. It turned out that Mr. T was the Clan Education adviser. He led all us kids over to the school buildings that were beyond the

trees south of the outdoor recreation area. He led a tour of the three buildings and explained about Clan Short education. It would be nothing like any other schools we had ever attended. That meant nothing to me because I couldn't recall having ever attended school. Some of the other kids, including my brothers, that had been to school seemed very enthused about the opportunities Mr. T talked about.

Kaleo was there and asked questions to make sure we all understood. We would all be tested on the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Depending upon the results of those tests, we might then either be immediately placed in classes or given another test to determine areas of aptitude; in other words, what we were best suited for. Those of us that were on that path would then have to choose between education in an area we were already suited for or another area we were more interested in pursuing.

Finished with our tour, our large group started back to the pool. Noticing that Drew, Corey and John weren't with us, I asked Jonah where they were. Jonah softly answered, "John and Riti rescued a little Welsh boy this morning. His name's Dewi Jones. Corey, Drew and John took him to the doctors."

"Was he hurt bad?"

Shaking his head, Jonah said, "He didn't seem too bad, but his own real parents were abusing and beating him. He's only four years old, bro."

I groaned then wondered, "Did I miss anything else?"

Jonah nodded and giggled, "Did you have fun?"

"Yeah," I smiled, "It wasn't too hard until I tried doin' fills and stuff that dad does. Time just flew, but dad said I was doing really

good."

Before making it to the pool or asking Jonah again what I had missed, we heard Prez over the PA system. "Attention all Rimmers; jam time in the auditorium. Drew and Corey, we'll need you, so bring our kids. Anyone else not occupied is welcome to attend. That is all."

"Sweet!" Jonah and I chirped.

Dillon laughed, "They're back!"

I picked up Dillon then Jonah and I ran to the auditorium. Kaleo picked up Richie and raced us there, with Tory, Dee and the rest of the kids not far behind.

Inside the auditorium, I was surprised to find two eagles flying around up by the ceiling. Derrick gestured for me to follow him. Leaving Jonah and Dillon with Mike and the Scoobies, I followed my dad up onto the stage. He said, "From up here, you can watch everything I do and then try to copy it. Whatever you need help with, just ask."

Thrilled, I giggled, "Awesome!"

Derrick tapped his sub-vocal saying, "Daileass, get a padded folding chair for Reyes. Put it about three feet off to the side of my drum kit please." A second later, the chair appeared. Derrick thanked Daileass then gestured for me to have a seat. From where I was sitting, I could see both of my dad's legs and watch everything he did from the best vantage point.

Out in the audience by Mike, a little red haired boy screamed "Daileass! Get my guitar an amp on stage too!" An instant later, a child-sized electric guitar and amp appeared on stage over by Mike's

amps.

I asked my dad, "Who are these kids?"

Derrick grinned, "Timmy and his boyfriend Ricky. Timmy is Cory's son."

Prez and Keith came up on stage with Richie and Dee. Moments later, two more chairs appeared beside mine. Dee and Richie came over and sat beside me while Keith and Prez got their gear powered up. Mike was still in the audience talking to Cory Short so Derrick began copying exactly what I had been working so hard to do earlier that day. Derrick then changed the bass drum pattern to what he had asked me to try and do. Ben, Dillon and Jonah came up on stage with Mike. He stood before the drum set, saying, "Timmy's gonna play with us, but he plays by ear. Let's start with some easy blues." Hearing the two little boys behind the curtain, Mike smirked and walked over loudly asking, "Hey you two, did you get lost finding the outlets?"

One of the boys loudly laughed, "Jus' playin' with our plugs!"

"We're gettin' our act together and there's an audience waiting," Mike grinned, and then went to get his guitar. Prez went over and started chatting with Mike. Within a minute, Prez was loudly laughing.

Keith looked back at Derrick. They began shaking their heads and smirking. "Hey you two!" Derrick and Keith hollered.

"We're ready already!" Mike loudly laughed, and then announced, "[Hoochie Coochie Man](#)."

Derrick looked back at me saying, "Slow blues shuffle," and then counted off the tempo while tapping his sticks together.

Simultaneously, bass, drums, guitar and keyboards began playing the instrumental introduction. Derrick sang the first line of the song, and then Prez sang the next line. Mike sang the third line and Keith sang the fourth line. Kaleo came dancing up the stage stairs then all four band members sang the chorus. From the audience, I could hear catcalls, laughter and whistles. Richie, Dillon, Jonah and Dee got up to dance with Kaleo. I cracked up because Kaleo was being extremely provocative with his dance, but Richie and Dillon just looked silly trying to keep up with him.

Returning my concentration to what my dad was playing on his drums, I began trying to copy his feet and hand motions. I think I managed to last through the second verse and chorus before I felt my leg muscles begin to cramp up. This was a relatively slow tune, but Derrick's bass drum foot was moving pretty fast most of the time. At the start of the song, Derrick had counted out to four, however that didn't seem to be what he was playing. At the end of the song, I called over, "Dad, was that four-four time like you showed me?"

He shook his head and answered, "Twelve-eight time, three eighth notes to every beat. Most blues shuffles are played like that."

It took me a few moments to grasp what he described. Three times four equals twelve, but instead of counting out each eighth note, he had only counted to four. That meant the entire band had to know how he was counting and what they were expected to play. It was fun learning this stuff, but it was not easy yet the band made it look so simple. I had to grin because Ben and Jonah were just beginning to get their fingers moving on their guitars. Ben and Jonah likely had so much more to learn and they probably didn't realize it. But the little red-haired boy playing guitar was pretty good and obviously younger than Jonah and Ben. I reasoned, that must be what it means to play by ear; you hear and copy without much understanding of how or why to

play something. I needed to ask my dads what they understood 'playing by ear' to mean. Since Mike was on his knees showing the little red-haired boy something, and Keith was talking with Prez, I posed my question to Derrick.

Smiling widely, he answered, "That's a tough one. Think of it like learning the alphabet, then how to spell words and then forming sentences. Now consider a blind person. They still speak with words and sentences, but maybe haven't learned to spell. In music, if you have a naturally good ear, you can still play songs. There's theory and ear training involved in music."

"What do you guys do, theory or by ear?"

"Both," Derrick chuckled. "Keith, Mike and Prez know theory better than I do, because they deal with notes and notation on a level that I don't need to know. I still know some theory, but they've all got me beat."

"What're you teaching me?"

"Right now, just rhythm and timing. Eventually, you'll be able to listen to a song and know which drums or cymbals are being hit by the tone. When you get there, we can move into more advanced theory and harmony."

Rather than ask what harmony meant, I said, "Thanks, dad," and tried to absorb what he had already explained. Keith and Mike went off stage. Prez and the little boy played an introduction with Derrick. They then put their guitars down and went off to the other side of the stage while Derrick played a drum solo. Oh, man! What an amazing solo it was too! At first it was only his feet playing the hi-hat and bass drum. Occasionally he threw in a few snare and tom-tom bits. Then his hands and feet were just a blur moving all over the kit. For a few

minutes, he played with his hands only and no drums sticks at all, then went back to playing only the bass drum and hi-hat again. He took his shirt off and wiped the sweat off his face then tossed the shirt aside. Prez and the little boy went back to their guitars and together, watching my dad for signals, they finished the song. While the audience cheered, I went to get my dad's T-shirt so he could wipe his face off again. Prez announced, "Timmy Short on guitar everybody."

After watching that drum solo, I had a hundred questions running through my mind at once, but all I could manage to say to my dad was "Wow!"

Timmy went out to the audience and almost flew into Cory Short's lap.

The band gathered in front of the drums and listed songs they wanted to practice. I went back to my chair then they began rehearsing. Richie, Dee and Dillon began chatting. Soon, they pulled Ben, Jonah and I into their conversation. Without intending to, it seems that we had all been selfish. Our fathers were spending time doing their Clan jobs and they were spending time with us, but none of us had seen our dads spend time alone, as couples. This was bad news. Before Keith walked off stage with Mike, Keith and Prez kissed deeply, but Mike only smiled at Derrick. Us kids had to remind our dads to spend time alone together. Here they were performing for us, all the rescued kids and our Orlando Clan Short guests. Dillon and Jonah were afraid that Derrick and Mike didn't want to get too close to each other. Dee and Richie were afraid that Prez and Keith didn't love each other anymore. We loved our dads the way they were Friday and Saturday. The last thing we wanted was for them to change.

As soon as the band took a break and Prez called Timmy back on stage, I went to Derrick, leaned close and whispered, "You and

Mike need to spend time alone tonight."

Derrick chuckled, "We're fine, Reyes."

Mike went to a microphone and asked, "Drew, have ya got a digital flanger up there in your rack?"

Through the stage monitors, Drew hummed then said, "Yep, we got a good one too. What's the tune?"

"Zeppelin's [In The Evening](#)," Mike answered.

"And you're going to stay fine too," I insisted. "The last time I know you made love was Friday night. Have you since then?" Derrick shook his head. I kissed his cheek then assured, "I'll watch over the kids for as long as you need." Without waiting for him to say anything, I went back to my chair and sat down. My dad smiled at me then nodded.

I told my brothers, "It's settled. After we're done here, we leave our dads. We go to the pool with the rest of the Clan, they go home for private time."

Derrick tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass, I need timpani, dude. At least one, preferably two. Put them to my left side, near the hi-hat. While we're at it, get me two gongs: an eighteen inch and a thirty-six inch. Put them behind me, within reach, but leave me a path on my right to get out of here. I'll also need microphones for each hooked up to the PA system, so contact Drew and get me whatever he recommends."

Keith, Prez, Mike and Timmy went to the grand piano to work on the song. Softly, so only those of us on the stage could hear, Mike played a little bit then Keith copied it. Timmy played a short part and Keith copied it. They went back and forth like that, pulling together

the sections of the song. Off to the side of Derrick, two large timpani drums appeared. Next, behind Derrick, the two gongs he ordered appeared.

Jacob and Jamie hurried up on stage and joined the band around the piano. I still couldn't tell the twins apart and complained to Jonah. "There's only one way ya can tell 'em apart!" Jonah giggled. He leaned closer to me and explained, "One's circumscribed and the other isn't."

"Great!" I softly chuckled. "I have to see them naked to know which is which?" Jonah nodded and cracked up.

Everyone around the piano suddenly burst into laughter. For a moment, we thought they had overheard us. Prez loudly asked, "What the hell's going on lately? Why am *I* suddenly the object of everyone's affection?"

Mike howled, "Direct me! Ple-e-ease direct me soon!" and Prez shoved him.

Jacob and Jamie both leaned back, plainly looking at Prez's ass and giggled, "It is" ... "a really" ... "cute butt!"

Amidst much laughing and teasing, Keith stood and joked, "I've been saying the very same thing for two years! I gotta meet this dude!"

"Keith?" Prez softly pleaded, "Don't tease or scare him, babe, please?"

"You know I won't," Keith assured, and then paused to add, "He knows this song, according to the double J's. He'll play keys, I'll sing and we're ready to jam."

Out in the audience, Beau was leading an older teen boy down the aisle. He seemed pretty tall, had brown hair with blond highlights and the most intense light blue eyes. All-in-all, he was extremely cute. Keith, Mike and Prez went over to the stage stairs to greet the new kid. Beau said, "Bros, this is Troy."

Keith was the first to offer his hand to Troy, saying, "Hey dude, you ready to jam?"

Shaking Keith's hand and then knocking knuckles, Troy admitted, "Zeppelin's one of my favorite bands."

"Finally, a keyboard player with taste!" Mike teased as he knocked knuckles with Troy.

Keith complained to Mike, "I just don't know all the changes, bitch! How about we play some Chick Corea next so I can watch you squirm?"

"No problem, bro," Mike giggled. "I can shred like Di Meola."

"In key?" Keith smirked. Mike playfully cranked up the middle finger of his right hand.

"You guys are really good musicians," Troy smiled at the playful banter, then shook hands with Prez.

Pointing at the stack of electronic keyboards, Prez told Troy, "Show us your chops, dude."

Giggling, Troy moved behind the keys and adjusted a few settings, then began playing the main themes. Timmy and Mike both joined in for a few short bars. Prez chirped, "Sweet!"

Keith nodded and instructed, "You play the keys Troy, and I'll

sing, kewl?"

"No problem, Keith," Troy replied. Keith went to center stage. Prez, Mike and Timmy moved over to the other side of the stage.

Derrick gave one final instruction, "Drew, add a fairly fast flanger to the timpani, bro."

A few seconds later, Drew said over the stage monitors, "Give it a try."

On the timpani, Derrick played a drum roll and said, "Just a little deeper flange," and continued playing. When it was correct, Derrick said, "Right there, that's good, Drew."

Mike turned around and teased, "So good, a little deeper, right there, like that, yeah!"

"You're very bad," Derrick smirked. "Go to my room immediately." I helplessly laughed, knowing I had put ideas into my dad's mind.

"Ah jeez," Keith groaned.

Shaking his head sadly, Prez playfully reminded, "We used to get randy after jammin'. Now it's before, during and after!"

Mike snickered, "It started Friday night. Blame Joel."

Derrick shook his head and playfully disagreed, "Bet ya it was the Mikyvis trio."

Keith turned to Troy and smiled, "Lead the way, dude." Troy began playing and Derrick started pounding the timpani. After about a minute of spacey introduction, Keith began singing. The sound was something out of this world. Prez, Mike and Timmy were bouncing

around and having fun. During the middle instrumental break, the timpani drums broke through the wash of sounds from the keys, bass and guitars like an explosion. It was obviously the first time that the band played the song. Even with two temporary musicians added, it sounded great. The audience agreed and jumped to their feet, cheering, clapping and whistling.

Keith immediately went to Troy and patted his back. They shook hands and Keith congratulated him. Picking up his shirt, Derrick came out from behind his drums and I hugged him firmly. Derrick wrapped an arm around me and we went to meet Troy. Jonah and Dillon went to Mike while Richie and Dee went to Prez. When we were all gathered, Keith asked Troy, "How long've you been playin', dude?"

"Nine years," Troy answered. "I started with guitar, moved on to piano, then in second grade, began clarinet lessons. I started messing around with harmonicas and the recorder too. In fifth grade I switched to tenor sax. Last year, I discovered that baritone sax and tenor sax weren't too different."

Cory Short came over to the edge of the stage and called, "Prez?"

Prez answered, "What's up, Cory?"

In Italian, Cory said, "Recitare per me articolo tredici del rifugio sicuro agire in inglese."

Prez said, "Sexual Abuse. All provisions under this article are grounds for immediate removal of said minor children upon presentation of physical evidence, Vulcan Mind Meld Report or Clan Short Telepathic Scan Report. Subsequent or in conjunction with said removal, legal proceedings to revoke parental rights shall commence

immediately and without fail."

Keith then recited, "Section 13.1: Use of minor children to provide sexual gratification. Section 13.2: Prostituting own children to provide sexual gratification for self or others."

Mike added, "Section 13.3: Forcing children to perform sexual acts on themselves or siblings or other minor children."

Derrick then said, "Section 13.4: Acquiring and or distributing nude and indecent photos or holographs of nude minor children for financial or other gain."

And Prez finished, "Section 13.5: Forced sex with non sentient species."

"Excellent!" Cory proudly smiled.

Troy innocently asked, "You guys learned that stuff in high school?"

"Umm no," Mike answered, then wondered, "How *did* we know that stuff?"

Jamie, Jacob, Beau, and Timmy giggled.

From up in the balcony, Kaleo peeked over the edge then hollered, "What happened to the music?"

Prez immediately cracked up laughing. Keith shouted, "Jam time's over, dude. Everybody's leavin'."

Mike tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Hey Mister see all, what's been goin' on in the balcony?" A moment later, Mike grunted and bitched, "Sure, except when it's me!"

Cory grinned, "I've got one more thing for you guys to do."

"What's that?" Prez and Keith simultaneously asked. They smiled at each other, then reached for each other's hands.

Cory smiled, "All Core Rimmers are on unconditional stand-down for the next two hours." Prez opened his mouth to object. Cory cut him short, "It's non-negotiable, Prez. Spend time with your partners and with your kids; not a word about Clan business of any type." Cory checked his watch and said, "It's about quarter after three now. See ya around five-fifteen." Cory turned and started up the aisle, following the other hundred-plus kids and adults.

"I have absolutely no problem with that," Derrick said. Releasing me, he then grabbed Mike around the waist and devilishly grinned, "See you dudes later." Dillon, Jonah and I followed our dads off stage. Beginning to walk up the aisle, Derrick tickled Mike's waist.

Mike incredulously laughed, "Derrick! Not in front of our kids!"

Derrick smirked, "Who do you think gave me the idea in the first place?"

Mike swung around to face us. Dillon giggled, but Jonah and I put on our best angelic expressions. Mike chuckled, "Don't pull that innocent crap on me. What will you dudes do while we're busy?"

Dillon easily answered, "Play at the pool."

"Practice guitar with Ben," Jonah replied.

I said, "I've got about thirty or so drum patterns to try and imitate."

Derrick smiled at Mike, "Give it up, our boys will be fine."

Mike nodded and softly told Derrick, "I need you so bad."

Dillon's hands shot to his ears and he shouted, "I'm not hearing this!" With that, Dillon and Jonah ran up the aisle, laughing their little butts off.

I told my dads, "Have fun," then followed my brothers up the aisle and out of the auditorium. Jonah caught up with Ben. They peeled off together towards the Gibbons' home. I followed Dillon most of the way to the pools, but noticed Grandma Anna seemed to be heading home. Dillon and I hijacked her and took her to the pools with us. Checking around the pool for adults, I found Grandma Laura and Mrs. Seaver. All the adult men and Mrs. Hundser had gone to work that day. Some landscapers and a few housekeepers were working near the pools too. Kaleo and almost all the older teens were at the diving well. Since everybody was accounted for, I went to the Gibbons' basement and began trying to imitate my dad's drumming.

I was only alone down there for about forty minutes when Dillon, Jonah, Mike and Derrick came down stairs. Jonah loudly laughed, "This is so not fair! In two days, Reyes is playing kewl stuff, but Ben and me are struggling to make our fingers move!"

Mike smiled down at Jonah saying, "You're all just beginning to learn. Have you ever heard of the learning curve?" Jonah and I shook our heads. I put the sticks down and stood up as Mike explained, "It's like climbing a hill as you learn. It's slow and steady progress then you reach a plateau, where you feel like there's nothing more to learn. But there's always more to learn, so you climb the hill some more until you reach another plateau. Don't be discouraged. It goes like that all through life with every thing there is to learn."

Derrick took my hands and looked at them closely then said, "That's enough for today, son. You've got blisters. Do they hurt?"

I shrugged, "Not too bad."

Derrick firmly said, "No more until tomorrow. We don't want the blisters breaking open and bleeding. You want them to turn into callouses."

Frowning, I started to complain, "But..."

"No buts," Derrick cut me off. He then tapped his sub-vocal saying, "Daileass, a pair of congas, ten inch and eleven inch, on stands." Instantaneously, two very kewl congas were beside the drum kit in the basement. Derrick smiled, "I'll show you how to play those tomorrow." We started up the stairs and Derrick softly instructed, "Keep an eye on those blisters tonight. If they start to break open, as I expect they will from the pool water, we'll have to bandage 'em up."

Arriving in the kitchen we found all four Scoobies sitting at the table and scratching themselves raw. "Okay men," Mike announced, "we have four little brothers and sisters here that reacted badly to pool water. Doctor Janet says the chlorine dried out their skin. We've gotta bathe them with medicated shampoo then dowse 'em in special lotion." Mike leaned forward, allowing Faith and Willow to climb up onto Mike's shoulders. Derrick picked up two bottles from the table and we all went outside to the aluminum tub where we spent the next half hour bathing our ferret brothers and sisters. Actually, Mike and Derrick did the bathing while Jonah and I toweled them dry. They were obviously feeling better after their baths and began scampering around the lawn chasing and playing with each other. Dillon had fun playing with them and they had fun running up and over Dillon.

Once we were done with the Scoobies, they went back to

working on their vault and the rest of our family went to the pool. We found Prez and Keith with their sons at the diving well with Cory and Adam Short standing nearby. Mike wondered, "What's going on here?"

"We're makin' babies!" Keith joked.

Prez giggled, "We're up to four. What've you guys been doing all this time?"

"What we do best!" Mike joked.

Derrick nudged Mike and grinned, "In the auditorium, we noticed that the Scoobies were scratching themselves like crazy."

Mike nodded, "No more swimming in the pool for our ferrets. Their skin can't take the chlorine." I overheard Cory ordering that the pool water be changed immediately at all Clan bases.

"Doctor Janet sent us some special shampoo and ointment to help them out," Derrick added.

I laughed, "We got to bathe them again!"

Jonah smirked, "They weren't too happy about it at first."

"But now they feels less itchy and way more better," Dillon giggled.

"Where are they now?" Prez wondered.

"Workin' on their Shiny Vault," Mike replied.

"Heaven help Hawaii," Cory softly muttered, shaking his head.

Keith looked at Gage and asked, "Ready for your first piano

lesson, son?"

"Yeah!" Gage loudly chuckled.

Prez glanced at Keith and said, "While you're doing that, I'll take our other three boys over to the townhouses and check them out."

"Good idea," Keith smiled, "We'll be moving there sooner or later. Let's all go together then. I'll want a piano of some sort there."

Derrick and Mike checked with each other. Wordlessly agreeing, Derrick said, "We'll join you."

"Might as well invite Drew and Corey," Prez suggested.

Without another word, my brothers, Sammy, Gage, Richie and Dee ran to the pool to get Corey and Drew.

Following the kids to the pool, Mike asked, "What do you think about moving into a townhouse, Reyes?"

I thought for a moment then answered, "I don't think it will matter where we live. Dillon, Jonah and I only want to be with you." Seeing both my grandmothers in chaise lounges floating about four feet above the pool, I turned to each of my dads with wide eyes.

Between his mom's nervous expression and my confusion, Mike cracked up laughing. Derrick chuckled, "John's an N-Gen. He and the Evans' are just practicing telekinesis; lifting stuff with their minds."

I nervously chuckled, "It took me two days to get used to transporting from place to place and seeing stuff just appear. I'll be fine, in a day or two."

With our families gathered, we started the short walk to the townhouses. Geoff was not at all happy about having any of us move

away, even though it was only a short walk away. All us kids tried to reassure him, but it simply didn't work. He didn't want Corey and Drew to move into a townhouse of their own, nor did he want to follow our family or Prez and Keith into our townhomes. I guess Geoff finally had a large family, grandparents, cousins and friends so the thought of being separated was more than the little guy could handle.

Dillon was about the same age as Geoff, but had no problem checking out our townhouse. The kitchen was perfect for our family. The dining room table could accommodate eight. The living room had entertainment and plenty of seating. We went upstairs and checked out the three bedrooms. The master bedroom had a king size bed and it's own private bathroom. Basically, everything was similar to what the full size homes had, just scaled down slightly. Finally, we went to the basement. My dads saw it as a perfect practice and rehearsal space. We weren't planning on moving there that night or even that week, but depending upon future rescues and those kids, it might happen by the end of November.

Back outside again, we told Corey and Drew what the inside of the townhome was like then set about trying to reassure Geoff again. It was Prez that figured it out though. Change is what scared Geoff the most. So Prez showed his little nephew how easy change was by having Geoff go to each of us for a hug.

"That's my big guy!" Drew proudly cheered.

Corey smiled and nodded at Prez, then turned to Geoff and suggested, "To show you how close we'll all be, let's walk back to the houses and then over to the pool."

Our families started the walk, but to prove the point, Jonah challenged me to run to our house and back again to our families. We

started our race at the edge of the dorm where the older kids had moved and made it back again before our families made it beyond the second dorm where the UNIT kids were living. Geoff seemed very happy with how quick it was and wanted to try it for himself. This time, Dillon, Jonah, Dee, Richie, Gage, Sammy, Geoff and I ran all the way to the Seavers' house and back to our dads. I was pretty hot and sweaty by the time we made it to the pools.

Our large group split in half, the younger guys going with Corey and Drew to the pool while the bigger kids went to the diving well. I couldn't help glance around the kids at the diving well. My dads, Prez and Kaleo were naked and having fun with the rest of us. After a dive and listening to Prez, Mike and Derrick singing their way from boards into the water, I glanced over at the pool. I don't know what happened, but a chaise lounge was in the pool, Grandma Anna was soaked and lots of kids were laughing hysterically. Sammy and Gage came running over to the diving well. They told Prez something that set Prez off in another fit of laughter. Prez has the most infectious laugh I've ever heard. In minutes, everyone knew that John had gotten distracted and accidentally dumped Grandma Anna in the pool.

At the diving well, Prez, Derrick and Mike were the center of attention. Kaleo was going from group to group at the diving well, sharing the news that Cory Short had made Prez the official director of our new division. If anyone thought that Prez wasn't the best choice, they weren't saying it. Instead, Prez was surrounded by a group of older kids. At first it seemed they were all congratulating him. Then Prez's arms and legs were grabbed by Derrick, Mike, Kaleo and Horacio. Prez was thrown, laughing his butt off, into the diving well.

We all heard chirping. Derrick, Mike and Kaleo found their shirts then checked their comm-badges. It was Prez's T-shirt that was

tossed to him.

Prez answered, "Yeah babe, what's up?"

"Mom and Dad are home now," Keith explained. "It's time to fill them in on today's trivia."

"Is Gage with you?" Prez asked.

"Yep," Keith replied, "bring all our kids and Geoff too."

Prez replied, "Okay, we'll be there in a few minutes."

"Okay, baby," Keith replied.

Prez announced, "Time to handle family matters, dudes." Prez slipped into his T-shirt then found and pulled up his boardies. He went to the pool to gather his kids.

Celebrations weren't quite over yet though. Kaleo, Horacio, Liki and Keanu took hold of Derrick then sent him flailing into the diving well. Mike was still laughing at his partner and so, didn't notice when Sean, Hank, Roy and Tory had surrounded him. Within moments, Mike was sent flying into the diving well. Finally, we chased Kaleo, got hold of him and swung our rescued brother, Core Rimmer and Starfleet Ensign into the well.

Then my dads came to me. I fully expected to be tossed into the diving well. Instead, Mike said, "Let's see what we can do about getting you fixed up." We walked over to the pool and had a chat with Cory, Sean, Adam and J.J. I explained as much as I could, that the adults at the orphanage periodically wiped my short term memories and that I couldn't access any long term archives without "zoning out". Jonah saw us together, added his part of the story then hurried

over to the diving well to get Kaleo, Tory and Liki.

While Jonah was gone, Cory stood and walked behind me. He brushed my hair aside and found the Matrix Uplink Port at the base of my skull. He grunted then said, "No identification." Jonah ran back with Kaleo and Tory. After they told their version of the same story, Cory asked, "This thing they used on Reyes, did it say Cynthetilife on it?"

Kaleo answered, "We never got a good look at it," and then described the little unit that caused me all this trouble.

Adam said, "He looks a lot like Austin. His hair and eye color's different, but generally, about the same height and build. Even what's hangin' between his legs is similar." JJ slugged Adam hard on the shoulder. "What?" Adam squealed. "He's naked, we're naked. Should I have not mentioned it?" We all began laughing.

I giggled, "Who is Austin?"

Sean grinned, "We think he's your android brother." Wow! I really had android brothers?

Cory nodded and added, "We can get you fully functional again, Reyes."

I asked, "Will I get all my memories back too?" While my dads and the other Clan leaders glanced at each other, I added, "I just don't want to forget anything and, if possible, I'd like to know more of who I am. All I know is what my orphanage brothers have told me."

Pulling me closer and hugging me, Cory carefully explained, "I don't know if we can restore *all* your memories, Reyes. What I can tell you is that you'll be able to access your long term archives again. And we'll get you upgraded to the latest software. You'll be everything

your dads and brothers love plus more than you are now."

Derrick asked, "What do you mean by more, Cory?"

Cory shrugged, "It depends; I know one android that's a hundred years old and another that's about seventy years old. Austin is about forty-eight years old, but looks thirteen, like Reyes. All I'm saying is, if we can get full access to his memory archives, Reyes will know everything he once knew. For example, if Reyes knew auto-mechanics once upon a time, he'll have all that knowledge restored. In addition to what he previously knew, he'll have a few new databases to access too. So he'll be the same guy and more."

Mike asked, "Will he remember us, his family and friends now?"

"Course!" Cory smiled. He then focused on me and assured, "We are not going to let you be hurt again, Reyes. What you know now, you'll still know tomorrow. We're just going to identify and correct the memory access problem then upgrade your software to current versions."

More chirping from a comm-badge was heard. Tory said, "I'll find the shirt and bring it back here," and then ran over to the diving well.

Derrick smiled, "I guess the only questions left are, how long will it take and when can we get it done?"

Cory answered, "When is up to Reyes. How long, twenty or thirty minutes, I guess; Austin's the expert, not me."

All eyes turned to me. It could happen whenever I wanted it to happen. I wouldn't lose my current memories and would gain everything I'd forgotten plus more. With nothing to lose and

everything to gain, I answered, "How about after supper?"

Cory nodded and smiled, "No problem."

Running with a T-shirt in his hand, Tory returned loudly asking, "Who's shirt is this?"

Mike said, "It's mine." Tory tossed Mike his shirt and Mike tapped his comm-badge.

Prez asked, "Where are you, bud?"

"At the pool still," Mike answered.

Prez wondered, "Is your dad home yet?"

"Haven't seen him yet," Mike replied. "He's probably getting changed out of his uniform though."

Prez said, "Let's get all our families together for dinner over at the CIC" He then asked, "Are Cory and Sean Short nearby?"

Mike nodded, "Yep, only a few yards away."

"Let's lead by example and make it happen, dude," Prez instructed. "We'll meet you at the dining hall in a few minutes." Having heard Prez mention food, kids began cheering and getting dressed. Prez chuckled, "I hear a few hungry kids."

"Can't say that I blame them," Mike grinned. Partially dressed kids ran past on their way to the CIC "Oh shit!" Mike laughed, "The dinner bell has rung! There they go! Last one to the dining hall misses out!"

Taking me by the hand, Derrick led me back to the diving well.

He asked, "How're you feeling, son?"

He handed me my shorts and, as we started to dress, I giggled, "Mixed up; a little scared, a little nervous, but mostly happy."

After we had pulled our shirts over our heads, Derrick smiled, "Understandable. I probably would feel the same way if someone was messin' around in my head." My dad then pulled me into a firm hug and assured, "We're gonna be there with you; me, Mike, Jonah and Dillon will be right there, before, during and after."

I shivered, "That's why I'm scared, dad. I have no idea what I might remember."

"Memories are good and bad," Derrick shared. "I had an older brother that died when I was two from complications of pneumonia. I barely remember him. That's why we moved to Hawaii, to start life over again, far from the bad memories."

"Grandma and grandpa didn't say anything about that."

"They wouldn't because it hurts too much," Derrick whispered. "For you, I'm feeling happy, anxious and frightened too. I don't even want to consider what I might do if this fix fails or makes matters worse. I'm not thinking of that though. I'm thinking of you, the whole you; all your memories and dreams for the future with us."

Shedding happy tears, I hugged my dad tight and admitted, "I love you, dad. I love our entire family. I don't want to forget a thing that's happened since Friday." What I had realized while writing the prior evening was that I could go into detail about everything I experienced; from the appearance of Uncle Iokii's house to the length of the grass and the shape of the tree Jonah and I napped beneath. Those things that weren't written in detail is what I was afraid of

losing.

"I love you too," Derrick said, and then kissed my forehead. He stepped back from me and we smiled at each other. Mike, Jonah and Dillon were dressed and waiting for us. Our family started for the CIC dining hall. Dillon hopped in front of me and held his arms up, wanting to be carried. I lifted my little brother up and parked him up on my shoulders.

At the chow line, I loaded up my tray and helped Dillon by carrying his glass of milk. Dillon, Jonah and I shared a table with Richie, Dee, Gage and Sammy. The main topic of conversation was me and my upgrade. At the next table over, I could hear my dads talking with Keith and Prez about it. Not far away, I overheard a little bit said at the table where Cory, Sean, Adam and J.J. were eating.

When we were finished eating, my dads went over to Cory's table. While I watched, a Caucasian teen boy with bright red hair and gray eyes appeared. He pulled a chair closer to Cory and sat down. Jonah began looking between that new boy and me. "Damn!" he giggled, "He looks a lot like you, bro!"

I giggled, "A little bit, but not a lot like me. I have auburn hair, blue eyes and darker skin. His nose is shaped different too."

When I looked over again, Austin was coming over to our table. With huge butterflies flapping around my gut, Austin patted my back and said, "How're ya doing, Reyes?"

Austin pulled a chair beside me and sat down. I smiled, "Really nervous."

"Don't be," Austin confidently said. He then reached his hand into his shorts pocket and pulled a palm-sized device out. Austin

asked, "Is this..."

"Get that away from him!" Jonah loudly interrupted. My little brother appeared ready to jump over the table and attack Austin.

Wide-eyed, Austin giggled, "Okay! That answers the question." He pocketed the device again explaining, "Those were meant for Cynthetilife androids, not for you, bro. Here's what I'm thinking; those things generally wipe the slate clean and restart Cynthetilife androids. The results on androids like us are pretty unstable though. I was told they used to use it on you every year or two. Is that correct?"

I shrugged and turned to Jonah. Jonah nodded then called Kaleo over. Jonah asked Kaleo, "About how often did they screw with Reyes' memories?"

Kaleo tilted his head and answered, "It wasn't something they did like clockwork, ya know? It was like, when Reyes seemed out of it, distracted or depressed, then they'd pull him aside and zap him again. Sometimes it was a year or so. I remember it being as long as three years too."

Austin nodded and smiled, "I don't think they messed you up majorly, Reyes. What I'm hearing is that whenever you started remembering old stuff, they'd wipe your memories again. I think all we'll have to do is recover your self-diagnostics, do the software upgrades and then tell you to reinitialize."

I asked, "Then I'll remember everything?"

Austin nodded, "Everything prior to the first time they wiped your memories. What I've learned is that they were wiping your memories as far back as Kaleo can recall. That means about fourteen years of your orphanage life is likely gone because it was never

stored."

Kaleo grinned, "That's no biggie. I wish someone could wipe most of the last fourteen years from my memory." Jonah agreed and so did I.

"Okay," Austin cheered. "Here's a little something you need to know first. My name, Austin stands for Android Upgrade - Second generation Teen Interactive Neurosystem. We found your name in the old records. Reyes stands for Research Engineering - Youth – Expanded Senses. Your systems and programming were the stepping stone to mine. That means you're my older brother and Marc's younger brother. As far as we know, you were developed in the late 1940's. Once we get you fixed up, your archives will confirm your activation date. Do you understand what I'm driving at?"

I thought for a few minutes then uncertainly said, "I'm probably about fifty years old."

Austin nodded, "That implies that you had a life and family before the orphanage. Although the memory wipes may seem bad to you, we were designed as companions. When our family dies or abandons us, for whatever reason, accidental or otherwise, we tend to feel worthless... suicidal. I'm sure they started wiping your memories to overcome that problem."

I nodded, "So there's gonna be some bad memories recovered as well as good memories."

Austin softly said, "Yeah."

"All I care about now is what I currently have," I shared, and pointed at the table where my fathers sat. "They're my dads. Jonah and Dillon are my brothers. Kaleo and Liki have been my friends for longer than I can remember. Will I remember everything about my

life now?"

Austin rapidly nodded, "We're erasing nothing, bro. Everything you know now, you'll know after we're finished. Worst case scenario, it's only the stuff between your first memory wipe to the last memory wipe that's probably lost forever. There may be little blocks of memory between the memory wipes you will recall. Like I said, those devices weren't designed for us so the results are unpredictable."

Kaleo huffed, "Count your blessings, bro."

Jonah agreed, "Yeah, there wasn't anything there worth remembering anyway."

Austin asked, "Are you ready, Reyes?"

Gathering all my courage, I sighed, "Yeah, let's get it done." Austin and I stood. Glancing at Jonah and Dillon, I said, "Come on, I want you guys there too." At the other table, my dads, Cory and Sean stood. Our group followed them towards the Command Center. On the way, I turned to Austin and smiled, "In case I don't get the chance after, thanks for helping me, Austin."

Austin giggled, "It's no problem at all, Reyes. Until today, you were a model type in a ledger. Now, I've almost got my big brother back. I hope to visit you here often. Maybe you would like to come to South Carolina some time to meet our other brothers. Who knows, you might even have buried memories of Marc already."

For the first time, I walked into the Command Center. The room seemed filled with computer monitors, keyboards and had a few kids sitting on each side of the rectangular room. My dads, Austin, Cory and Sean led us through the room, a few steps down a hall and then into an attached room with a big table and many chairs. Derrick invited me to sit at a chair at the head of the table. Derrick took the

chair to my right and Mike sat to my left. They each took hold of my hands. Jonah, Dillon and Cory sat down too.

Moving close to me, Austin pulled from his pocket a couple of small plastic modules and a meter long cable then put them on the table. Picking up one of the modules, he explained, "First thing we're gonna do is determine what software version you're at, Reyes."

I nodded and asked, "Will any of this hurt?"

"Not at all," Austin confirmed, and began pushing my hair aside to access my uplink port. Before I felt a thing, Austin said, "There; read from the chip and tell us your controller software version."

In a few seconds, I answered, "Five-seven-e-s point two one."

Austin laughed, "1957! At least it was a stable version!" He put the chip down then picked up another one and said, "We've got four upgrades to do, bro. Each will take about five minutes, but will build on the previous one. If there's any kind of hardware malfunction, we'll know it before the first upgrade completes. Go ahead and read only the first file and tell us if anything happens."

"Okay," I shuddered, wondering what sort of 'anything' might happen. Everything seemed to be fine for about two and a half minutes but then the room went dark. "Hey!" I hollered, "I can't see! I'm blind!"

"Relax, Reyes," Austin confidently said, "Memories are sensory; sight, sound and smells. Keep reading the file." My heart was beating through my rib cage, I was so nervous.

Jonah said, "He's twitching..." and then I heard nothing else until the file was completed. Suddenly, I could see and hear again.

I smirked, "That was scary! Will that happen with each upgrade?"

Mike chuckled, "You almost crushed my hand, dude!" Jonah and Dillon began giggling.

Austin said, "From here on, it'll be only a few seconds of dark and quiet. This is good, Reyes. It means nobody opened you up and physically messed with your positronics. Go ahead and read the second file, bro." I did as I was told. This time the room didn't go dark and quiet for more than two seconds. They were the longest two seconds I had ever experienced though, and I told them all so.

"Okay," I sighed, "the second file is complete."

"Good," Austin encouraged, "read the third file, and as soon as that's complete, read the fourth file."

Twice more during the next ten minutes, my vision and hearing blinked off then back on again. When I said, "Both files are finished," Austin removed the chip from my uplink port.

Putting the chip down on the table and picking up the cable, Austin explained, "This is the last part of the upgrade, Reyes. We'll connect to each other, I'll make the file available to you and you'll read it just like the others." Austin reached behind his head and connected the cable to himself then connected it to me. This transfer happened much more quickly. The weird thing was, when I blinked or closed my eyes, it seemed I was in a dark room alone with Austin. Assuring me in my mind that this was normal, Austin hugged me tight. When the upload was complete, I knew in my heart that Austin was my brother. What Adam had said was true; Austin and I were very similar.

Austin said, "We're almost done, Reyes. About another ten

minutes of databases to read in. Take everything on this chip, bro." He attached the chip to my uplink port then said, "Go for it." While I was reading in the files, Austin and Sean stepped out from behind me then sat at the table.

Since this was taking no effort on my part and everybody was staring at me, I wondered, "What sort of databases am I uploading?"

Sean giggled, "It would be easier to list what we're *not* uploading."

Austin smirked, "Anthropology, astronomy, biology, chemistry, geology, horticulture, mechanics, medicine, philosophy, physics, theology, to name a few. I don't want you accessing them all at once though, Reyes. We've got one more hurdle to pass first, remember?"

I nodded, "Reinitialize."

"Exactly," Austin confirmed. "You're a person not a library, bro. What's most important to you are your memories. Just sorting through that will take a good night's sleep and at least another day. For the next week, I want you to take it slow and easy, okay?"

I nodded and so did both of my dads and both brothers. While we waited for the file uploads to complete, Derrick got up and went to the First Aid chest mounted on the wall. He returned to the table with gauze, tape and a tube of antibiotic ointment. For the next few minutes, Derrick and Mike bandaged the blisters on my hands. I had completed the file uploads before they finished with the bandages. When my hands and fingers were bandaged, I reached behind my head to pull the chip from my uplink port and placed it on the table.

Austin locked his eyes with mine and softly said, "Reyes, when you initialize, everything you had forgotten is going to come rushing back. We're not talking a few years here, bro. For you, it could be

thirty, forty, fifty or more years of previously lived life. It's going to be an emotional rollercoaster ride of ups, downs, highs and lows. I want you to take it slow and I want someone with you for the next two days. I mean it, Reyes. If you have to piss in the middle of the night, take one of your brothers or fathers with you. Anything you see, hear, taste or touch could bring back another rush of memories."

Both of my dads and both of my brothers assured that I would not be alone a single minute during the next forty-eight hours. Austin, Cory and Sean stood and left us alone in the conference room.

Nervously, I smirked, "I know what I need to do but haven't had to do it in so long. I can't even remember having ever done it before. It's almost like jumping off a cliff."

Mike softly said, "Take your time, Reyes. The fact that Austin, Cory and Sean left says that they're not concerned. They wanted to give us private family time for this."

Derrick nodded, "We're all here, son. Once you start, everything you know now will still be here. Everything you once knew will be restored too. For us, nothing has changed."

"That's part of why I'm afraid," I sniffled. "I don't want anything to seem different to me."

Jonah challenged, "How different could it be? I won't treat you any differently."

"Me neither," Dillon assured.

Mike lifted his hand and mine. Derrick did the same, insuring me that no matter what, I had a family that cared. Derrick softly asked, "Ready?"

I nodded then closed my eyes and executed the reboot. My eyes opened and nothing seemed to have changed. I looked around the table and recognized my brothers and fathers. Seeing Derrick's concerned expression, I cried, "Of course it was you! How do you spell your first name?"

He answered, "D-E-R-R-I-C-K."

I sobbed, "My first father's name was Derek Taraschke; D-E-R-E-K. He was a musician too, a drummer, just like you. No wonder I've attached myself to you. Even though I couldn't remember..." I couldn't even finish the sentence because I was crying too hard. I recalled my first father and his death then stopped reading my memories because it was already too overwhelming.

Mike said, "Positronic subconscious recall? Stranger things have happened."

Softly shushing me, Derrick smiled, "A little at a time, Reyes. Don't over-do it."

Leaning back in my chair, I groaned, "Oh, I feel so dizzy."

"We've got no place to be any time soon," Mike assured.

"Do you remember me?" Jonah asked.

"Course I remember you," I laughed through my tears. "You too, Dillon; I met you Friday afternoon, after the rescues, at Uncle Iokii's house. Everywhere Jonah went, you followed."

"Yep!" Dillon cheered. "That's exactly right!"

"Aw shit!" I grunted.

Derrick incredulously giggled, "What?"

"I have to pee!" I grinned.

"But you've never swore before," Mike chuckled.

Jonah cracked up laughing, "He just hasn't needed to, but he used to cuss at the orphanage."

I started to stand, but was uncontrollably shaking all over. "Whoa!" Derrick giggled, and wrapped an arm around me.

When we stood together, I looked up at him and smiled, "Thank goodness my other dad wasn't blond too. He had auburn hair, like mine. I'd hate to break down crying every time I look at you."

Wrapping my other arm over his shoulder, Mike snickered, "The men's room is across the hall."

Jonah hurried to the conference room door and opened it. Dillon raced across the hall and body slammed the men's room door to open it. After we passed Dillon, he hurried to one of the toilets. My dad's supported me the entire way to the men's room urinal. Derrick didn't let go of me while I relieved myself. Mike stood at the next urinal, but didn't even hold his dick. He kept his right hand on my back, just in case I got wobbly and he needed to catch me. When Mike and I finished, Mike took hold of me at the sink so Derrick could take care of business and I could wash my hands. Seeing my own face in the mirror though caused another rush of old memories and I started crying again. There were so many other public men's rooms I had been in before, I had to concentrate to stop the flood of memories and tears.

Jonah stepped up to the sink beside me. I asked him, "Why did

Piglet look in the toilet?"

Jonah frowned, "Piglet?" and then smirked, "I dunno, why?"

I giggled, "He wanted to see Pooh!" Jonah groaned, but Dillon thought that was the funniest thing he had ever heard and cracked up.

Shaking his head, Mike smirked, "Oh, God help us, he's remembering bathroom jokes."

Turning to him, I asked, "What do toilet paper and the Starship Enterprise have in common?"

Mike chuckled, "They both fly around Uranus looking for Klingons."

Derrick laughed, "Don't let Juan or Korris hear that shit."

"Speaking of shit," I giggled, "What do you call a twelve-inch turd?"

"A foot stool!" Derrick and Mike answered. Jonah and Dillon howled laughing.

We were all finished in the bathroom and went out to the Command Center. I looked around again and wondered, "What happened to the old C.R.T. type televisions?"

Derrick groaned, "Oh man, they stopped making those years ago."

"We had one a long time ago, when I was a little kid," Mike added.

I searched my memory for when I had last seen one of the old tube televisions. I couldn't remember that, but I did remember other

things that brought me to tears again. Derrick softly asked, "What's wrong?"

All choked up, I shared, "I was first activated July thirty-first, 1948. Derek Taraschke died of natural causes in 1971. I lived with my cousin and his wife after that, but they died in a car accident in November of 1983. They first wiped my memory November twenty-second, 1983." Breaking down in tears, I sobbed, "That's the last thing I remember. Twenty-one years of my life were spent in that friggin' orphanage." My brothers and fathers wrapped me in their arms. I think we all cried for a long couple of minutes.

The door from the Command Center to the dining room opened. Prez and Keith walked inside and, seeing my family surrounding me, they came to an abrupt halt. Concerned, Prez frowned and asked, "Are you guys all right?"

Safe and warm in the arms of my new family, I nodded and smiled, "Definitely."

Mike explained, "Reboot caused a rush of old memories."

Derrick grinned, "Reyes is thirteen going on fifty-seven."

"Jeez," Keith softly said, "You're older than any of our parents. No wonder the memories were overwhelming."

"It's great!" Dillon cheered, "He's our big bro now and always will be!"

Prez explained, "I need to call the King before it gets any later. Can I do it here or should I go home?"

Derrick asked, "Do you need us around, Prez?"

Shaking his head, Prez said, "Reyes takes priority. Family always takes priority."

"We'll take our kids over to the pool then," Mike suggested.

Derrick remembered, "The Scoobies probably need another ointment treatment anyhow."

Our family walked out of the Command Center. Again, I looked around the dining room. Kaleo and Tory quickly came over to us, looking like they might cry. Kaleo complained, "You were in there so long. Is everything okay?"

I nodded, "It's weird, crying my eyes out one minute then cracking bad bathroom jokes the next."

Tory giggled, "That doesn't sound very normal."

Derrick offered, "It's basically what Austin said would happen though; ups and downs, highs and lows."

Glancing around the dining room as we slowly walked through, I listed off every person I knew, proving I had lost nothing. Kaleo and Tory followed us outside. Smelling the fresh salt air blowing from South to North, from the beach, I stopped walking. My dads, brothers and friends stopped and waited for me. "Ya know what? I've always lived near the ocean. My first family lived in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina until 1958. Ten years we lived there; the 'low country' it was called. Oh man, I remember riding bumper cars, with my dad, at the boardwalk. Myrtle Beach was a great place to grow up. I remember learning to surf, catchin' crawdads and frogs in the lagoon, sunset strolls along the beach. We moved here because my dad's wife was Hawaiian and she wanted to be near her family. Her name was Lokelani, which means heavenly rose. She was so pretty and so nice." Pausing, I sighed and enjoyed remembering stuff that had been

forgotten for so long.

Mike softly reminded, "A little at a time, Reyes."

Squeezing him tight, I smiled, "I'm good, Pop. Ya know why?" Mike shrugged and I explained, "Things that I took for granted matter more now. I have family again. I know what that means and I also remember how bad things can get. An hour or so ago, I still smelled that salt air, but it had no meaning. Now it does." Turning to Kaleo and Tory, I smiled, "I have friends that cared about me when I wasn't all there to show how much I cared about them."

"Aww man," Kaleo groaned. "You showed it the best ways you could, Reyes."

Tory nodded, "You were there for us when we were kids; younger than Jonah and Dillon."

Derrick gently prodded, "Tell them how long you were at the orphanage, son."

"Since November 1983, twenty-one years." Kaleo's and Tory's mouths fell open. I smirked, "You know stuff I don't though."

"Like what?" Tory challenged.

I told them the truth. "From November 1983 until this past June, I have no memories. When did the sexual abuses start?"

Kaleo grumbled, "Before I had hair on my dick." He faced Tory and asked, "1998?"

Tory frowned, "I'm not sure either. I was about eight the first time an adult messed with me so either 98 or 99."

Liki Kealoha, Hank Leve, Sean Moorhead and Horacio Sulin

came outside. Without stopping, they walked down the path towards the dorm and Horacio pleasantly said, "How's it goin' guys?"

"Really good," I smiled.

Not knowing any better, Dillon gushed, "Reyes is all better now! He remembers stuff he didn't used to. He's fifty-six years old!" All four of them stopped and turned around. Mutely, they seemed to glance at Kaleo, Mike and Derrick for confirmation.

Derrick, Mike and I cracked up. Jonah giggled, "We ain't keepin' any secrets in this family!"

"What?" Dillon squealed. "Was it a secret? Nobody told me that!"

Picking up my little brother and planting him on my hip, I chuckled, "It's not a secret. I have no secrets anymore."

Hugging me as tight as he could, Dillon giggled, "Good!" Resting my head against Dillon's, I breathed in deeply and sighed, thankful that I had a life that mattered once again.

Derrick whispered in my ear, "You need to rest." I nodded agreement and passed Dillon to Derrick.

Mike wrapped an arm around my waist. He suggested, "Let's check on the Scoobies?"

I assured, "I can stand and walk, Pop."

"Give it up, Reyes," Mike smirked. "Enjoy it while ya can."

We began walking towards the family housing complex. I smiled up at Mike and said, "I love you, Pop."

Mike giggled, "I love all you guys too. And I like being called 'Pop'."

Derrick softly chanted, "I'm not goin' there. I am not goin' there," causing Mike to heartily chuckle.

Glancing at my dad and then my pop, I couldn't help smiling. They were so obviously in love with each other. Unfortunately, I remembered my first dad, Derek crying when his wife, Lokelani died peacefully in her sleep. He passed only three months later. My cousin, Akamu took me home with him that day. When we met in 1958, after arriving in Hawaii, Akamu was seven years old. He became my best friend. In 1971, after my parents died, he was a twenty year old man with a fiancée named Hakumele. They married the following June and I was his best man. At the reception luau, I played various native Hawaiian drums like the Pahu drum, Ipu and Pu'ili.

At the south side of the compound, Mike began calling for the ferrets. In under a minute, all four came scampering out from the trees. "How're you guys feeling?" Mike asked, "Still itchy?"

Bouncing on his back legs, Spike answered, "Better now, Shinny Daddy."

Mike nodded, "Doctor Janet said we should apply the ointment at least twice..."

"Do weez got to?" All four ferrets whined.

"That's what the doc said," Mike smiled. "After this, it's up to you guys; you tell me if you're feelin' itchy."

Willow griped, "Weez don't gots to have another bath, do weez?"

Mike shook his head, "Nope. Just a little ointment on the red spots."

Satisfied, the Scoobies hurried towards the Gibbons' house. We sat in the grass and applied the ointment on their bellies, backs and legs. It was relatively easy to tell the four ferrets apart. Spike had the fur that stood upright from his head and down his back. Xander had the dark patches over his eyes and on his chin. Willow had a brown streak of fur down her back and belly. Faith had the lightest colored hair with dark patches only on her feet. Dillon told the ferrets all about my fixes and even had me tell them some bathroom jokes. With the task completed, each of the four thanked their "Shinny Daddy" then hurried back to the trees surrounding the compound.

Derrick asked me, "How do you feel? Do you want to lay down?"

Shaking my head, I grinned, "It's too early for bed. I just want to be with you guys."

Mike suggested, "Pools?"

Derrick reminded, "We need to keep Reyes' hands dry so the blisters can heal."

I said, "Why don't we hang out at the CIC? All the houses are dark. It looks like almost everyone is still there."

Dillon and Jonah agreed. They wanted to find Dee, Richie and Geoff. We started walking back to the CIC. On the way, I shared more memories. "Derek was one of the engineers at Vision Industries and a weekend musician that played drums and percussion in jazz bands. Not too long after I moved in, Derek began teaching me to play congas and bongos. I remember playing with his band. At the time, in the early 1950s, big jazz bands were becoming less popular. Bebop

and Latin rhythms were becoming more popular. Dad's band changed with the times; the big horn section was whittled down to two sax players and a flugelhorn. By the late 1950s, I was playing every weekend with my dad's band at clubs along the boardwalk in Myrtle Beach." I paused and chuckled, "It caused my dad some trouble every now and then. I looked thirteen, but was really under ten years old. In either case, my being at clubs where alcohol was served was a problem. My dad's band found a different place to play, a restaurant where only beer and wine were served. By that time, Latin rhythms were being replaced by early rock and roll."

Stepping inside the dining room, we found most of our Clan still there. Kids were hanging out together there and in the attached rec room. Derrick wrapped an arm around me and chuckled, "Reyes, you lived music history that Mike and I have only read about."

Mike nodded, "You'll have to tell us more about that sometime."

I was just about to start naming songs when Keith came out of the Command Center wearing a Clan Short robe. He hollered, "Prez is gonna be on TV!" and ordered, "Daileass, turn the TVs on to local channels in here and the rec room too, dude."

All the televisions turned on. Mike's head sagged and he chuckled, "Mister laid back, chillin' out, playing his bass. What a ham!"

Derrick shook his head sadly and commented, "For someone that wasn't sure he could be a Clan leader, Prez sure is pullin' out all the stops."

Glancing at my dad and pop, I wondered, "I thought he was talking to the King? That was a long while ago though."

On the televisions in the CIC, regular programming was

interrupted. King Aalona said, "Aloha. Good evening, citizens of the Republic of Hawaii. This evening, I was contacted by Clan Short Pacific Rim Division Director Preston O'Brian." Kids in the dining room began chattering while the King continued. "After a very productive conversation with Director O'Brian, I have two announcements. Effective immediately, all ROH branches of Child Protection Services are closed." In the dining room and rec room, cheers began. "All future needs for Child Protection are to be directed to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division Headquarters. Employees of Child Protection Services are also directed to report to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division headquarters for possible re-employment.

"My second announcement concerns cleaning up the streets of our cities. There are far too many young prostitutes on the streets. I am certain that many do not wish to be prostitutes, but are working to survive in very difficult times. If you are among the many that do not wish to sell your bodies, I urge you, I beg you, to find your way to the nearest Clan Short base. At this time, I would like to introduce you to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division's Director, Preston O'Brian."

The television screen split in half with the King on the right and Prez on the left. "Thank you, Your Majesty," Prez smiled. "Clan Short exists for the benefit of abandoned and abused children. We value family, but not at the expense of our children. If you are abused or abandoned, you are welcome in the Clan. Federation Youth Services will work with children and families for everyone's mutual benefit, but emotional and physical abuse of children must not be allowed to continue in our society."

Prez paused for a moment, then said, "I am an orphan that was adopted by a caring family. I've always known I was lucky, but these last few days have proven to me how fortunate I am. My own parents never beat me or emotionally abused me. My adopted parents have

never abused me either. Under *no* circumstances should a child be beat or abused to fit some predetermined mold. It's been proven over and over again that violence begets violence. There are other alternatives. If you are an abused or abandoned child; if you are walking the streets trying to earn money to survive; if you are a pregnant teen shunned by your family, then come to us for help. We can help and will help you. If you are a doctor or lawyer, or housekeeper or landscaper, or teacher or chef that has a deep caring for children, but are having trouble finding employment, come to us for help. Don't continue down the rough and rocky road alone. Clan Short is part of your community and we can help."

Prez then smiled, "Thank you for your time and thank you, Your Majesty."

King Aalona said, "Director O'Brian and I share the same dreams and goals for a better world; one filled with caring and hope for the future; a world where we all help one another; where separations are eliminated. We will begin working on the future progress of mankind here and now with our Island Nation. It may take a lifetime, but we will succeed with your help. Aloha."

Cheers and laughter erupted in the dining room. A few seconds later, normal television programming resumed. Derrick grinned, "It seems ROH CPS is closed and we're taking over."

"That's great!" Jonah and I hollered.

Uncertain what had just happened, Dillon glanced around then asked Mike, "What's goin' on, poppa?"

Sitting Dillon on his lap, Mike answered, "Uncle Prez has invited all the kids that need our help to come live with us."

Dillon squealed, "He has?"

All Mike did was nod before Keith and Prez came out of the Command Center. Proud of our leader, we all stood and clapped, whistled and shouted. From John's table, baby carrots were launched high in the air that exploded into carrot confetti. Sammy, Gage, Dee and Richie hurried to their dads.

Prez stood on a chair and announced, "King Aalona and I have opened up the flood gates. We're going to have street kids showing up soon. Think about that for a second, please. The people those kids work for are not going to be happy about this. Extra base security needs to be on alert through the next few nights."

From the Command Center, a boy's voice confirmed, "We're already on alert, Prez. Base shields have been activated. No one gets in or out without your prior say."

Prez grinned, "Excellent! Thanks, Paulie. Put our parents on both lists for tomorrow. They have to go to work."

"Tomorrow morning, we'll need the remaining parents manning the FYS building and prepared for interviews. Guaranteed we'll have CPS workers knocking at our gates. Hopefully, we'll have all sorts of professionals coming to us for employment. Let's get a coffee urn and a few dozen coffee cups over there. Since the adults will be occupied, we'll need the teens watching out for the tweens and little tikes at the pool, diving well and recreation centers. Drew and Corey, please oversee the safety of the kids."

Drew and Corey simultaneously responded, "No problem, bro!"

"Mister Gibbons, I'm hoping you can get the Clan Liaison situation sorted and be back here by noon."

Grandpa Rob replied, "I don't foresee any issues. I'll be gone around eight and back by ten, Preston."

"That would be great!" Prez cheered. "Return to the FYS building, please." He then continued, "John, Nathan, Jamie, Jacob and Beau, your services will be required to ensure we hire the very best people."

John loudly assured, "We got it covered, bro!"

Derrick gathered us together saying, "We're gonna need to go to work soon. There's a bunch of new kids to get oriented. Jonah and Dillon, it's your job to watch out for Reyes while we're gone. Make sure he doesn't get quiet or spend too much time reviewing memories."

Both my little brothers nodded. Jonah assured, "No problem, dad."

Locking eyes with mine, Derrick smiled, "No drums tonight, son; congas only."

Mike added, "And no writing either. Let the memories settle down for two days."

I nodded, "I think I'd rather hang around here with everyone for a while."

Derrick kissed each of us and then so did Mike. Holding hands, they walked across the dining room to where Prez and Keith were now standing near the table of new kids. From various areas of the dining room, Dewi, Cesar, Felipe, Bruce, Ben, Sung, Kawazoe and Kokaku converged and came over to our table. Dillon shared the news about my restored memories with everyone. I suggested that we all go over to the rec room and try out some of the arcade video games.

When our grandfathers brought us in there Saturday night, I didn't notice the pinball game, but there it stood. It brought back more happy memories so I went there with Jonah and Dillon, sharing my tales of times gone by. My first two pinballs were wasted before I got the feel of the game again. Then I took off, just like old times. I got an extra pinball and then broke the previous high score, earning another pinball. The next thing I knew, the table was surrounded by a large group of kids, shouting and squealing, encouraging me on.

I noticed that Bruce was not with the others around the pinball table and wondered where he went. It was obvious to me that Bruce had to be feeling painful pangs of loss over his parents. That train of thought caused me to lose a pinball. Since I couldn't decide if I should say anything to Bruce or not, I pulled myself together, pulled the pin back and let another ball rip. My concentration was completely shattered though. All I could think about was how Bruce must feel and how I felt when my first dad and mom died. Although that was very bad, I still had Akamu, my cousin, best friend and father figure. Within a year, I had a surrogate mom in Hakumele too. Losing them in a car accident left me without family and no one to turn to. Another pinball went into the gutter. My hands were shaking with everyone watching. I already had quadrupled the previous high score and didn't see any reason to continue the game; much the same way I didn't see any reason to continue living back in 1983. I let the final ball fall into the gutter. While everyone around me was ecstatic, I pulled Jonah along and picked up Dillon as I left the pinball table.

While others clamored to play the game, Jonah looked up at me asking, "Reyes? What's wrong, bro?"

Shaking my head, I explained how my thoughts went from Bruce's parents to my first parents and finally to my cousin and his wife. Alone in the dining room and sitting at a table away from others,

I told my brothers, "They were only in their thirties when they died. I had nowhere to go and no reason to live. It shouldn't have been that way." Falling apart again, I sobbed, "They never had a chance to have kids of their own. I tried to end it all by running into traffic, in front of a bus. All I caused was an accident where other people were hurt. I was arrested, then put in a hospital as suicidal."

"Reyes?" Jonah said. I wiped my eyes and he said, "That was a long time ago; it's over now, bro. I love you. Dillon loves you." Dillon nodded and climbed into my lap. Jonah finished, "Dad and Pop love you too."

I sighed, "I wanted to say something to Bruce."

Shaking his head, Jonah reminded, "How can ya make Bruce feel better? You're just now getting your memories back. Now's not the time for Bruce; it's time for you, Reyes."

I sniffled and admitted, "It's been more than twenty years, but it feels like just last week."

"Last week you were saving my ass from pervs!" Jonah loudly said. He looked around to determine if anyone heard his outburst. The adults were still seated where they had eaten dinner. They were now watching us. Bruce was there with the Hundses.

I told my brothers, "I'm not gonna try and off myself. I've got a family that I love again. It just hurts."

John Hundser appeared in the dining room. Not even looking our way, John went over to his parents and Bruce when I heard his voice in my mind. *'It's past now, Reyes. I'll make a deal with you. I'll help you focus on good memories if you'll help me learn to concentrate on more than one thing at a time. Deal?'* Arriving at his parents' table and standing between them talking, John's voice in my

mind asked, *'Well? Have we got a deal?'*

Focusing on John and wondering how I had heard him, I nodded, "Yeah, I'll try."

Dillon asked, "What're ya tryin'?"

Crossing the dining room with Bruce and Dewi, John sent, *'Kewl, bro.'*

Jonah scowled, "Reyes? Hello? Don't you freak out on me!"

Glancing at Jonah and then Dillon, I promised, "I'll try to focus on good memories."

Heading our way, John began giggling and sent, *'Good recovery!'*

"Oh!" Jonah grunted. "That's better." Dillon hugged me tighter, obviously happier. I silently wondered how I heard John in my mind.

He answered, *'N-Gen now, remember?'*

Since he was hearing my thoughts and he was now close enough to hear my voice, I grinned, "I thought that was telekinesis only."

'Empathy and telepathy too,' John replied. *'I felt you, Jonah and Dillon.'*

Jonah spun around and laughed, "Stop talkin' in my head!"

I helplessly giggled, "What did he say, bro?"

Spinning around to face me again, Jonah was blushing bright pink. He growled but didn't say a word. Dillon scrambled off my lap. First he hugged John, then Bruce and finally Dewi.

John enthusiastically said, "Let's go suit shoppin'!"

Bruce wondered, "Are Geoff, Ben, Sung and Bane still in the rec room?"

Standing up, I nodded, "As far as I know."

Dillon chattered, "Ya shoulda stayed, Bruce. Reyes got a new high score! Ev'rybody was watchin' and yellin'. It was kewl!"

Bruce giggled, "Wow! I'll bet your proud of him."

Dillon hurried back to me and hugged me.

John tapped his sub-vocal. "Daileass, are Bane, Ben, Geoff and Sung busy in the rec room?" After a short pause, John said, "Transport the four of them and all six of us to the store, by the swimsuits, please."

A split second later, we were all in a department store. Grunts and yells erupted from the four that had been playing in the rec room. John cracked up laughing and they all tackled him.

Shaking his head and helplessly giggling, Bruce told John, "We can't wear swimsuits to a funeral, you know."

"Yeah," John loudly laughed at his pint sized attackers, "but look how kewl the Speedos are!"

We all went to the nearby table where Speedos with the Clan Short emblem were displayed. The last to arrive, John stripped off his T-shirt, boardies and underwear. "Come on, you guys!" John encouraged, "Is there somebody here that doesn't have a dick?" Shaking his head, Bruce giggled at John, and most of the boys in our group began laughing too. Wiggling his hips and making his dick flop

around, John sent to me, *'This needs to be fun for Bruce. I know you want to help him as much as I do. Let's make this fun.'*

Without delay, I stripped my clothes off. Dewi and Dillon were next to unashamedly lose their clothes. I nudged Jonah and teased, "Now you're shy?" Soon, Jonah, Bruce and the rest of the boys were naked. Suddenly, Jonah turned to John and ran at him. Laughing hysterically, John raced down the center aisle of the store with Jonah in pursuit. Shocked but grinning widely, I hurried after them. Bruce and all the other boys with us started chasing John around the store.

It was then I realized that Jonah thought the world of John and had shared his feelings with me. If John was N-Gen and telepathic, then he must know how Jonah feels too. At some point, I had to get Jonah alone to find out what John had telepathically sent. The first time, John made Jonah blush and now, John's telepathic remarks caused Jonah to chase after John. I was laughing my butt off wondering if John liked Jonah or if John was simply teasing Jonah. To make matters more funny, John raced through the girls' and ladies' underwear, making all kinds of panties and bras fly at Jonah. I was practically in tears laughing and could barely keep up. When Dillon, Geoff and little Dewi passed me, I knew I had to try and stop laughing. After the third trip, Dee, Sammy and Gage were running around the store naked too. We ran the length of the store six times before stopping to get Speedos then finally arriving at the boys' dress clothes.

Jonah and John grinned at each other. I could only wonder what was truly going on between them. John focused on Dee, Gage and Sammy. The three boys shook their heads, then wandered off. When Bruce arrived, he giggled, "That was great." John focused on Bruce. Bruce caught his breath and said, "White is more normal for Buddhist funerals."

Surprised, John said, "Really?" and Bruce nodded. "Okay. Since you're family *and* Buddhist then you should wear a white suit. The rest of us will wear dark suits. That way they'll know who's who."

Bruce smiled, "Sounds good to me."

Glancing around the remaining seven of us, John asked, "Who knows what size suit, shirt or pants they should get?" Not one of us said a word. "It's kewl," John said, "I dunno what sizes I need either. Everybody line up between Dewi and Reyes, shortest to tallest. We're gonna do this quick and easy. John walked down the line and checked to make sure we were sorted. Soon we stood in order; Dewi, Dillon, Sung, Jonah, Bane, Bruce and I. John instructed, "Dewi and Dillon, go get boy's size small white dress shirts. Sung, Jonah and Bane, boy's size medium white dress shirts. Bruce, get a dark blue or black shirt. I think medium might work for you, but if it feels tight, get a boy's large." John stood before me and said, "I think you're too big for boy's size shirts, Reyes. I'm gonna have to measure your neck and arms, bro." John telekinetically pulled a measuring tape over then had me stand like a scarecrow. He measured my neck and arms, then sent me off to the men's shirts. John hurried over to help Bruce and get his own shirt. In a few minutes, we were all standing in our green Clan Short Speedos with dress shirts on. "Okay dudes, buddy up," John announced. "We're gonna get waist and inseam sizes for pants." Using Bruce as his buddy, John showed us how to measure each other. In another few minutes, we all had pants selected, but hadn't put them on. Finally, we measured chest sizes to get suit jackets. Then we went into the dressing room to dress, where we had mirrors to check ourselves out.

In a couple of minutes, we were all dressed in new suits. John did a great job keeping us organized and getting the task done quickly. The only one dressed in a white suit, Bruce looked awesome. John

smiled, "Good work, dudes. Hang up your jackets and slacks, take off your shirts, then go back to the swimsuits. Change out of your Speedos and put your clothes back on. Once that's done, all you guys still need are shoes, socks and ties. Help each other out, okay? I'll be right back." John then raced out of the dressing room. He returned barely a minute later and started getting undressed. He hung his jacket and pants, then began unbuttoning his shirt. John's comm-badge chirped. He tapped it and said, "Hey, bro. How's Stephen?"

Sounding frustrated, Keith said, "Why do you even bother asking?"

John giggled, "We're just finishing up with the suits for Wednesday. I'll be there in a few minutes."

Keith pleasantly said, "Kewl, bro."

John instructed, "Turn around, Keith." After a brief pause, John sang, "Kaleo and Tory sittin' in a tree..." and then cracked up.

"God, bro!" Keith huffed impatiently. "You're worse than Daileass!"

John howled laughing.

I grinned and wondered, "What was Kaleo doin'?"

John giggled, "Boyfriend stuff with Tory."

Jonah squealed, "Yeah? That's awesome!"

John teased, "Betchya you're next, Jonah!" and then raced out of the dressing room, carrying his new clothes.

Shaking his head, Jonah grumbled and concentrated on hanging

his clothes.

Sung grinned, "You got a boyfriend, Jonah?"

"No." Jonah flatly said.

Bane asked, "A girlfriend?"

"NO!" Jonah hollered. He pointed at me and then Dillon, loudly proclaiming, "I got brothers and fathers. That's all I want!" The other guys were all grinning, but Jonah's face was as red as I've ever seen. I couldn't tell if he was angry or blushing. When the others had left the dressing room a minute or so later, I asked Jonah, "What's up, bro?"

Jonah huffed, "Nothin'," but didn't even look at me.

For the first time, Jonah was hiding something from me and I didn't like the feeling. I carefully asked, "Are you angry or what?"

Looking up and around the empty dressing room, Jonah sighed, "I'm not angry. I don't know what I feel, really."

"I'm listening," I prompted.

Jonah whined, "I don't know, Reyes. It's weird, ya know?" He huffed then rambled, "I hated anybody messin' with me at the orphanage. I wanna be nine years old and not worry about boyfriends or girlfriends. But then I watch dad and pop, or Keith and Prez, or Drew and Corey and say, yeah, that's what I'd like too. Somebody to talk with, somebody to just be with that wants to be with me too. But I don't want sex as much as the other stuff. I don't know if I want a boyfriend or a girlfriend either. I'm happier than ever now, with you and Dillon, and Mike and Derrick. I want everything to stay like it is now."

I went to my brother and patted his back, saying, "I know now what I didn't know just a few hours ago. What they did to us at the orphanage was very wrong. It was wrong for me, for you and for all of us. Love is what dad and pop have. It's what all the Core Rimmers have and what their parents have too. Love is just what you said that you *do* want. It's not somebody grabbin' your dick first and then hoping for the best. It's the exact opposite, someone to talk with and be with and then maybe wanting to have sex. When you reach puberty, you'll definitely be more willing to have a sexual relationship. There's no rush, Jonah. Take your time."

We left the dressing room together. Jonah said, "I feel so different now, watching these people that really love each other." We helped each other choose ties to go with our suits.

I admitted, "I feel it too. Now I have my old memories to prove that those around me are really caring, loving people. I didn't have that this afternoon. I was just like you, dealing with only orphanage memories of adults wanting mainly sex from the kids. Watch them and learn, that's all I can recommend."

Jonah looked up and smiled, "You're still the best big brother I could ever want."

We went to get ourselves socks then went to get dress shoes. While we were alone together, Jonah asked me if I had ever had a boyfriend or girlfriend. The truth was, I hadn't. However, my first parents were excellent examples. Almost as good were my cousin and his wife. Maybe, if I had more time with them, I would've grown to love them as much as my first parents. And what I had witnessed since Friday morning were lots of people that had huge, caring hearts. I told Jonah, "We have a lot of abuses to get over while we learn from these guys how to have a successful relationship. Put it side-by-side in your mind, bro. Compare the old to the new, the bad to the good. If I

need help, you know I'll go to you. If you need help, I hope you'll come to me."

Jonah nodded then wondered, "What about dad and pop?"

I shrugged, "It depends on the situation. For some stuff, it'll be easier to talk to you. On the other hand, if I can't help you out, then I'll point you to them. I expect you'd do the same for me."

Finished with shoes we liked that fit well, we went to the checkout counter where we caught up with Ben, Dillon, and our dad and pop. Our stuff was checked out, then Derrick whispered something to Mike. They nodded then turned to us. Derrick said, "It's after ten, dudes. Time to wind down and call it a day."

Mike said, "I'll have Daileass transport you to my folks' house. Have grandma or grandpa help you get your clothes hung up."

Derrick added, "We'll be at the Hundsters' joining the nest as soon as we can." Our dad and pop kissed each of us on the forehead and we hugged them in return.

Once we had our stuff gathered, Mike called Daileass and had us transported to the Gibbons' home. Grandpa Rob was home, sitting in the living room watching TV. We said hello as we walked inside. I told grandpa Rob that we needed to get our stuff for the funeral hung up and put away. He showed us upstairs to what was planned on becoming our room. Once again, Dillon opened his mouth and told grandpa Rob that we had looked at one of the townhouses earlier that day. We were sure he was going to be shocked, but if he was, he didn't show it.

Christel and Lindsay were in their room doing whatever it is girls do between chattering. Grandpa Rob knocked on the door. Lindsay answered the door. Grandpa Rob said, "The boys are heading

over to join the nest. Have you girls decided if you're staying here or going there?"

Lindsay turned around to check with Christel. Christel said, "Let's stay here."

Grandpa Rob nodded, "All right then. Don't stay awake too late, ladies."

Lindsay giggled, "We won't, dad." We followed Grandpa Rob down the hall and downstairs. Us four boys said goodnight and hugged grandpa Rob, then went out the front door.

Once the front door closed, I giggled, "All right, you guys, this is just wrong." Coming to a halt, Ben, Dillon and Jonah smiled up at me. "Christel is six and breaking away from the nest. The older teenagers have already moved into the dorm."

Ben said, "Some of the other teenagers were planning on moving to the dorms too."

Jonah incredulously squealed, "What?"

Dillon whined, "But we have fun playing and then get to sleep with our daddies."

I told Dillon, "We can do that at the Gibbons' or the Seiberts'. Don't you think it's time to consider breaking into family units?"

Ben shrugged, "I guess."

Jonah told Dillon, "Wherever our dad's are is kewl with me."

Dillon asked, "Can we get some video games and build a nest of our own?"

I answered, "We can do that in a real bedroom, bro." Dillon whined indecisively. I offered, "Let's get all the Gibbons and Seibert kids together tomorrow and start talking about it. Our dads need time alone. If we can let them sleep together at night, we won't have to do what we did today."

Jonah nodded, "That makes sense."

We started walking to the Hundserts' house again. Ben began giggling. We turned to him and he laughed, "Mike's only been my brother a day. I just don't want to think of him having sex with Derrick."

I grinned, "Get over it. He's a teenage boy in love. The sex they have is nothin' like what we were forced to do."

"I guess," Ben giggled. "I wonder what they do together?" Dillon and Jonah loudly groaned, then attacked Ben for even mentioning it. I cracked up laughing at the three of them.

The light was on in the Hundserts' living room. I knocked on the front door. Uncle Jim opened the door and smiled, "Hello, boys," then stepped aside to let us inside, asking, "Ready to join the nest?"

I said hello and answered, "Yeah, is anyone down there yet?"

"All the little ones are already asleep," Uncle Jim answered. "Bruce, Gage, Sam and Dee are probably still awake."

Dillon said, "Thanks, Unca Jim."

Closing the door behind us, Uncle Jim led us through the house. He offered, "Sleep well, boys," then went past the basement door.

We each said, "Goodnight," to Uncle Jim and then went

downstairs. A lot of the youngest kids were already asleep in the nest. Missing from the basement were all the thirteen year old kids and a bunch of twelve year old kids. Playing video games and watching television, were most of the kids between eight and eleven years old. Jonah joined the crew playing video games. I decided to get my laptop PC and began writing, even though my dads warned me not to.

Dillon fell asleep on the couch beside me. I picked him up and gently put him in the nest near Richie and Geoff. A few at a time, kids stopped playing video games and went to sleep. John came downstairs about eleven-thirty with one of the boys picked up at Hawaii. John and Stephen were definitely falling in love. After teasing John but getting nowhere, Jonah gave up and went to the nest. Writing about my restored memories took a lot out of me. I know that's just the tip of the iceberg; however, I'm not going there now.

It's time for bed. I wonder what I'll dream about.

Chapter 6A

O'ahu, Ewa Beach, C.S.P.R.D. Main Base

Monday, November 1, 2004 8:45 PM HTZ

Prez and Keith looked around the CIC dining room. Dee, Richie, Gage and Sammy hurried over to embrace their dads. At least half the UNIT kids and most of the rescued kids were still there. Mike and Derrick had returned with their kids. The four big televisions mounted on the walls were still turned on. The doors to the rec room were open, with another dozen or so kids in the doorway, and the television that could be seen in there was on too. This family dinner had turned into much more than Prez had envisioned.

Since most of the Rimmers were present, Prez told Daileass to patch him in across the base PA system, and then stood on a chair while holding his hands up to get some quiet. Once Daileass gave the word, Prez said, "King Aalona and I have opened up the flood gates. We're going to have street kids showing up soon. Think about that for a second please. The people those kids work for are not going to be happy about this. Extra base security needs to be on alert through the next few nights."

From the Command Center, Paulie interjected, "We're already on alert, Prez. Base shields have been activated. No one gets in or out without your prior say."

Prez grinned, "Excellent! Thanks, Paulie. Put our parents on both lists for tomorrow. They have to go to work.

"Tomorrow morning, we'll need the remaining parents manning

the FYS building and prepared for interviews. Guaranteed we'll have C.P.S. workers knocking at our gates tomorrow morning. Hopefully, we'll have all sorts of professionals coming to us for employment. Let's get a coffee urn and a few dozen coffee cups over there. Since the adults will be occupied, we'll need the teens watching out for the tweens and little tikes at the pool, diving well and recreation centers. Drew and Corey, please oversee the safety of the kids."

At the tables with the newest nine Rimmers, Drew and Corey simultaneously responded, "No problem, bro!"

"Mister Gibbons, I'm hoping you can get the Clan Liaison situation sorted and be back here by noon."

Mike's dad replied, "I don't foresee any issues. I'll be gone around eight and back by ten, Preston."

"That would be great!" Prez cheered. "Return to the FYS building, please." He then continued, "John, Nathan, Jamie, Jacob and Beau, your services will be required to insure we hire the very best people."

John loudly assured, "We got it covered, bro!"

"Thanks," Prez said, then scanned the CIC. He then asked, "Where's Jason Evans?" Getting no response, Prez wondered, "Has anyone seen any of the Evans kids?" Again, there were no replies. "Well shit," Prez softly grumbled, "They didn't even say goodbye."

John telepathically replied to Prez and Keith; *'Sorry bros, it took a little extra time. Jace says you and Keith can know, but no one else, except me, of course. Off base VSO are watching the streets just outside our fences. If anyone tries something, they'll be lucky to find themselves in a VSO jail cell. Now don't say anything!'*

Prez said, "If anyone thinks of something I haven't, let a Core Rimmer know A.S.A.P.," and then got down off the chair. Keith and Prez took their Clan robes off then draped them over a chair. Taking Prez's hand again, Keith led the way over to the tables where the nine new kids were sitting. "How're you guys doin'?" Prez cheerfully asked.

After getting positive replies and compliments about the food from all, Keith turned to Drew and asked, "Who's who?"

Remaining seated, Drew rattled off brief introductions, pointing at each boy as he proceeded. "Here's Nicholas Shavers and his boyfriend Roger Mosqueda. Then we have Jeff Cummings, John Huth, Manuel Simonton, Jonathan Dupre, James Hahn, Jerry Burk and Stephen Marr." Each boy waved and widely smiled at Prez.

Keith grinned then whispered to Prez, "You did it again, baby."

Scowling, Prez searched Keith's eyes for an answer of what he'd done. John answered; *'They were barely here an hour before watching their new leader on TV with the King. They think you're awesome, Prez.'*

Closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, Prez then smiled, "Okay you guys, just chill out and listen. Friday afternoon, I was just another high school student. What I said on TV is the truth. We're here for anybody that needs and wants our help. I'm the same as any of you, doing the best I can as each situation presents itself." Seeing the same awestruck expression in almost all of the boy's faces, Prez turned to Keith.

"Prez is my partner," Keith said, and pulled Prez close. "We're just like you in every way; we sleep, eat, shower and relieve ourselves just like you do. Hero worship is totally uncalled for." Keith then

kissed Prez deeply, but when they stopped and looked back at the boys, all they managed to change was skin tones as a few were now blushing.

Getting up and moving between Prez and Keith, Drew took hold of them both then chimed in, "We're brothers and all you guys are our new brothers. We've only been Clan for a few days." Corey stepped up and Drew proudly said, "Corey's my partner."

John, Kaleo, Mike and Derrick joined Drew, Corey, Keith and Prez. Keith quickly introduced Mike and Derrick and explained, "Derrick and Mike are our Clan Historians. When you need something or if there are any problems, we're the guys you come to. Our main job is to make you dudes safe and comfortable. We're just getting our act together as a new division, but all the important stuff, like chefs and housekeeping, is already taken care of."

Prez pulled a chair closer and so did Keith, Kaleo, Mike and Derrick. Drew, Corey and John excused themselves to spend some time with Jacob, Jamie and Beau. Everyone sat down and Keith put his hand on the nearest boy's shoulder, then asked, "Tell us a little about yourself, Jerry?"

Jerry blushed and smiled, "There ain't much to tell. I'm eleven years old. My mom died of cancer a few years ago. I was placed in a foster home last year. My foster dad ain't too bad, but the woman, she's wicked; she goes out of her way to make my life shit when he's not around. Only when he's around and watching does she act nice. He don't believe what I said about her. Now she's even worse and he don't trust me no more. Saturday, she threw a knife at me while my back was turned. It was only luck or bad aim that kept me from getting hurt. I heard on TV that Clan bases were here last night. I left home before the sun came up this morning."

Prez asked, "If we could broker a peace, would you be interested?"

Jerry shrugged, and then tearfully answered, "She goes before I take another step in that house. If I ever see her again, I might be killed or forced to kill her in self defense."

"We'll take care of it, Jerry," Prez assured.

Keith nodded, "Don't worry about a thing, Jerry. Your foster dad will ultimately make the choice, but we've got your back now."

Before Keith finished speaking, John sent confirmation to the other Core Rimmers; *'Omigod! She really did throw a knife at him! It wasn't a small knife either; it was big! What a bitch! When are we getting our phaser training?'*

Mike sputtered, and then covered his mouth before cracking up at an inappropriate time. Prez grinned and moved on to the next boy. "Your turn, Stephen."

"I'm eleven too," Stephen said, but then he broke down in tears. "It's only my mom and me," he sobbed, "She ain't got a good job and tries so hard, but it ain't been workin' out. We can barely stay in an apartment for a while then the rent goes up and we can't afford 'lectricity or food." The boy fell apart and everyone tried to comfort him at once. During that chaos, Kaleo told Prez and Keith that Doctor Andrews had already been called for Stephen. John didn't know what to think of Stephen, because the new boy didn't want to be in the Clan; Stephen only wanted to be with his mother and didn't care that they didn't have a home. This boy was more frightened than any of the other eight newbies.

When Stephen finally calmed down and could hear beyond his own sobbing, Prez said, "We're gonna take care of your situation too,

Stephen. How would you like it if your mom worked for us?" The boy looked up with a bit of hope in his eyes, and Prez said, "It don't matter what her job is or how much she gets paid; the most important thing is to save families that need saving."

Prez then stood and looked around. He shouted, "Troy, c'mere a sec please, dude." Troy Faris hurried over to the tables. Prez introduced Troy to Stephen, then said, "Troy's mom is one of our housekeepers. We'll get in touch with your mom then you can live with her on this base or one of four other bases. We'll find her a job and you two get to be a family. How does that sound?"

Struck dumb, Stephen could only hang his mouth open as if it couldn't be real, but finally said, "That would be really good."

Looking at Troy, Prez asked, "Show Stephen around please, bud? Let him meet your mom and see your condo. Then take him over to my mom. If we can, let's get the ball rolling tonight."

Troy nodded and, as Stephen stood to follow, he grinned, "Two days ago, my mom and me were freezin' our asses off in New Jersey. Now my mom's got a great job right here on base. We've got a really nice apartment too."

Turning his attention back to the other boys, Prez sat again then continued, "This is what we do and how we do it; no red tape, no bullshit; if we can save a family, we will. Does anyone else have a family worth saving?" The rest of the boys shook their heads. The Core Rimmers listened to seven more horror stories from the new boys; one involving alcohol, another involving drugs, some anger management issues and some of complete parental indifference. The only other bright spot came telepathically from John via the Terrible Trio when Jonathan Dupre was talking. It was quite likely that Jonathan had an Aunt in Maine that was already associated with the

Clan Northeast Division.

The Core Rimmers then explained sleeping arrangements. The new boys had the choice of dorms or nesting in the basement, as had been the norm for the last two nights. Kaleo explained that most of the existing Rimmer tweens had decided to try out the dorms for the first time. Afterward, Prez tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass?"

"Mister Popularity!" Daileass teased. "What can I do for you? Perhaps you'd like to talk to the U.S. President or Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth?"

Prez sniggered, "No, no, we've got enough to deal with right here. All we need is some clothes for these new kids I'm with."

"Just in time," Daileass replied. "The store is finally stocked."

"What store?" Prez frowned.

Connecting to all the Core Rimmers sub-vocals, Daileass giggled, "Have everyone stand and I'll show you."

"Ooo-kay," Prez droned uncertainly. All the Rimmers stood and asked everyone else gathered to stand. Prez picked up Richie. Once the group was standing, Daileass transported them into what appeared to be a department store. "Where the hell are we, Daileass?" Prez excitedly wondered.

"In the basement of the CIC," Daileass laughed.

"I didn't even know the CIC had a basement," Keith said.

"It was an empty basement until today," Daileass giggled. "The only way in or out is via transport; there are no stairs or elevators. At

least one of the Core team has to request transport. To your left are the girls' and ladies' departments. To your right are the boys' and mens' departments. All the clothing you'll ever need is down here: underwear, socks, sneakers, shoes, sandals, shirts, jeans, shorts, suits, slacks, jackets and raincoats. There are some basic accessories too, like belts, hats, wallets, handbags, combs, hair brushes, toothbrushes, toothpaste and other toiletries. We even have our own Clan Short Speedos. Guess where the Clan emblem is?"

Knowing Daileass all too well by this point, Prez roared, "This is a hard one!"

"Is it?" Daileass teased, "Can I see?"

"No!" all eight of the Core Rimmers loudly laughed.

"Fine; be that way!" Daileass giggled. "Have the guys grab a shopping cart and start picking out their own clothes. There are dressing rooms too, if anyone needs to try on their new clothes. Don't forget Clan suitcases. When you're all finished, just swipe over the bar code readers at checkout and you're all done. This system will let me know what needs to be replaced and can keep everything stocked up. You guys also should know that the store occupies a third of the space down here. Another third is an emergency bunker. I'd doubt there's anywhere safer on any of the islands. You can fit a thousand people in there. The other third of the basement is emergency food and water storage and bathrooms with showers."

"Excellent!" Prez cheered. "Thanks, Daileass."

"One other thing you'll all need to know," Daileass interjected. "Cory Short, being a blond, forgot to mention that he had contacted the AI Division in South Carolina. Pacific Rim Division will have their own AI installed. Caleb and Noah will be on-site by the time you

wake up in the morning. Your new AI will work in parallel with me and Draco. Of course, he'll be your primary contact for transports and other requests. He's kind o' cute too, but I'm biased."

Mike smirked, "Will he be a perv like you?"

Daileass giggled, "Not exactly like me, but he will be monitoring things just like I have. He takes after his daddy." All the Core Rimmers began groaning through their chuckles. Exactly how an AI could reproduce was a question none of them were willing to ask.

"Okay dudes," Keith loudly said. "It's time to go shopping. And best of all, it's free!"

"It's free?" James Hahn and Jonathan Dupre, the two youngest boys uncertainly repeated.

"You bet," Keith smiled. He then realized the two boys had probably never gone clothes shopping before and didn't have any idea what size clothes they needed. "We'll help all you guys out," Keith reassured.

One after another, the boys began grabbing shopping carts. Gage looked up at Keith and asked, "Can we get some stuff too, Dad?"

Keith nodded, "You guys will need rain gear of some sort. It's getting to be that time of year."

"Lemme down, Poppa," Richie smiled, and Prez put his son down on the floor. Gage and Sammy grabbed shopping carts then led Dee and Richie down the center aisle. Prez hurried after his four boys while the remaining Core Rimmers helped the new boys select clothes. Drew and Corey made sure James and Jonathan were getting the correct sizes while Mike, Derrick and Kaleo helped the older

boys. Socks and underwear were the first items gathered. None of the boys were interested in pajamas; they all slept in their underwear.

Keith trailed behind and ensured everything remained organized. John walked over to his oldest brother and reminded, "The Downings' funeral is Wednesday. They're Buddhists, bro. I need a suit and so does Bruce."

"What time is the service?" Keith wondered.

"Eleven," John answered. "Bruce already knows you guys can't make it because of school."

Keith nodded, "Are any other kids going?"

"Eight other boys that I know of," John replied.

"Go get Bruce and the others that are attending," Keith said. "Tell mom and dad what's going on too, please." He then paused and chuckled, "We keep transporting in and out. They never know where the hell we're at any more!"

"I know," John laughed. "You should've heard what they were thinking when we all disappeared from the dining room."

"I can imagine," Keith smiled.

"Daileass?" John called.

"Bruce is with your parents now, John," Daileass replied.

"Sweet!" John chirped. In a flash, John was back in the CIC dining room.

Keith caught up with the new kids at the footwear department. Manuel, Jeff and Roger had older sneakers with hardly any tread

remaining. Keith had them select new sneakers too, so they wouldn't slip in the coming rainy season. Out of the corner of his eye, Keith thought he saw someone run past, but when he turned, there was no one there. Returning to the task at hand, he finished getting the new boys' sneakers and reorganizing the shoe department.

Mike and Derrick led the boys to the summer clothes department where they could choose T-shirts, board shorts and swimwear. Some of the boys were only taking two pair of shorts until Drew and Corey went over and told them everyone should have at least a week's worth of clothes. Soon every boy had five pair of boardies and five T-shirts in their carts. They passed through the sports and dress shirts, picking two or three out each and then moved on to the jeans.

Over by the racks of belts, Mike noticed movement and grinned knowingly as he stealthily crept between tables and racks. By the time Mike arrived, the belts were swinging, but no one was there. Then he saw that some hats seemed to be moving on their own and hurried over. There he found Spike and Xander, already wearing shiny new patent leather belts and trying on similar black patent leather Derbies. Mike grinned, "What are you guys doing?"

"Shiny Daddy!" the two ferret boys chimed in unison.

Xander grinned, "Weez getting new clothes."

"For the funeral." Spike finished.

"You're lookin' pretty snazzy," Mike chuckled. He dug his hand in his pocket then handed each boy a worn out guitar pick saying, "These will go well with those clothes."

Bouncing happily, Xander took a pearloid guitar pick and

smiled, "Thank you, Daddy!"

"Weez thought maybe you forgot," Spike slyly grinned.

Mike shook his head saying, "I can't give just one away when there are four of you." He then asked, "Where are your sisters?"

Spike and Xander pointed and chorused, "Over in the girls' section."

"I've got two more picks for them," Mike smiled.

"We'll go get them!" Spike and Xander cheered, and then scurried off across the store.

Stepping up beside Mike, just in time to see Spike and Xander scamper away, Derrick grinned, "The Scoobies are here?" Mike nodded and Derrick softly giggled, "Shiny clothing racks."

Mike chuckled, "They picked out shiny patent leather belts and hats."

"Of course they did," Derrick howled.

Over by the coats and jackets, Prez was helping his boys choose Clan Short ponchos for the rainy season when his comm-badge chirped. He tapped it and replied, "Prez here."

"Hey, Prez," Paulie said, "Daileass just transported a box of credit cards into the Command Center."

Prez frowned and asked, "Why do we need a box of credit cards?"

"For the kids," Paulie answered.

"Ya lost me, Paulie," Prez honestly said.

"Okay," Paulie began. "They're pre-paid credit cards. The kids get allowances every week and they're automatically added to the credit cards. If the kids do odd jobs around base, they get paid for that too on their credit cards. This way the kids learn responsibility, not only for the work they do, but for the money they earn. Then they can go online and order stuff they want, like video games, posters, music and stuff like that. Mister Takamura owns lots of companies; Nile dot com, e-Cove and Target, to name a few, so the kids can get their stuff at wholesale prices instead of paying retail."

"That's excellent!" Prez excitedly cheered. "Tell ya what, we can get that stuff sorted and the credit cards handed out tomorrow."

"One other thing," Paulie said. "Jamie, Jacob and Beau left your Clan Short IDs here in the Command Center."

Prez said, "Cory Short didn't mention we got Clan Short IDs too."

Paulie said, "He wouldn't; Intel Division handles Clan Short IDs."

Seeing the light, Prez droned, "Therefore, the Terrible Triplets."

"For the Rimmers, John's the head of Intel, so he fills out the forms and gets everybody their IDs."

"Okay, I'll stop by with the Core Rimmers when we're done with the new kids."

"Kewl. Thanks, Prez. Paulie out."

Prez grinned at Richie in his green Clan Short poncho. Other

than a little bit of red hair and a portion of his pale freckled face, the boy was lost under the hooded poncho. Prez grinned, "Can you walk around wearing that, Richie?"

"I think so," Richie said, and started walking around.

Uncontrollably, Prez giggled, "Let's get the next size smaller, son. I'd like to see your feet, so I know you won't trip over the poncho."

"Kay, Poppa," Richie said, and then tried getting out of the poncho himself, but was failing terribly until Prez lifted Richie's arms and helped him.

"I knew you were under there somewhere!" Prez laughed, and then began hanging the poncho.

"It was a size five," Richie blushed.

"Boys' sizes don't match ages though," Prez instructed. He then returned the poncho to the rack and pulled out a size four. "Try this one on." Prez held up the poncho and Richie stepped underneath it and got it on. Pleased that he could now see more of his son and his hands and feet were also visible, Prez nodded, "That one looks good, Richie. Bend, twist and turn to make sure you're comfortable."

Richie did as he was told and then began dancing and singing, "Well, shake it up baby now, twist and shout!" Prez swept the boy up and together they laughed their asses off.

John returned with Bruce, Dewi, Dillon, Geoff, Jonah, Reyes, Benjamin, Sung Henjes, and Bane Kahele. Since John not only knew Bruce, but could feel his emotions, John had Daileass transport his group of boys to the swimsuit department. Since there were no girls around, John stripped off his boardies. At first Bruce and the other

boys giggled, but then they followed their young leader and got naked too. The next thing Keith knew, his brother was streaking down the center aisle of the store, followed by Jonah, Reyes, Bruce, Benjamin, Bane, Dillon, Geoff, and Dewi. *'Don't say a word!'* John warned his fellow Core Rimmers. *'Getting suits is bad enough. Getting suits for a funeral is even worse. I'm making it fun so Bruce don't cry.'*

John had started more fun than he could've imagined. From that point forward, few of the boys bothered using the dressing rooms to try on boardies or jeans; they simply stripped and tried on their new clothes where they stood.

Peter Lambert popped in beside Keith while he was reorganizing the shorts tables. "Got your message!" Peter cheered, and then wrapped his arms around Keith.

"Hi, Peter!" Keith giggled, still feeling a bit jumpy because the towhead Mikyvis appeared out of nowhere.

"You guys need more condos at your other bases?" Peter confirmed.

Keith nodded, "We're gonna be staffing up quickly. I don't think we'll need your special talents, but we like the general design."

"How about I get Derrick's dad involved?" Peter suggested, "That way we give more people jobs and the work still gets done quickly. We could work twenty-four hours a day, as long as the bases are unoccupied."

"That would be great!" Keith enthusiastically said. "We'd like to start at the O'ahu Incoming base. Then we can continue with Hawaii, Maui and Kauai."

Peter nodded then said, "There's another idea you guys might

like. How would you like a small strip mall on base? We could maybe have a convenience store, a video game store, a skate and surf shop, a novelty store for posters and other stuff the kids might like. Maybe add a hair stylist too?"

"That sounds really good!" Keith cheered.

"Lemme check with Derrick's dad," Peter said, and then released Keith before disappearing. Peter popped into the CIC dining room a few yards behind Carl Seibert then hurried over to his side. After greeting each other, they began talking about the new condos and strip malls. Carl Seibert loved the plans; hundreds could be employed across the Islands building the two projects.

Troy and Stephen had returned to the CIC dining room, but the Core Rimmers were nowhere to be found. Troy asked Tory where they had gone, but Tory wasn't sure so he hollered at the ceiling, "Daileass, where's Kaleo and the rest of our leaders?"

"Just a moment, Tory," Daileass replied through the dining room speakers. Daileass then contacted Kaleo, giggling, "Oh, Fist Rimmer, your boyfriend is looking for you!"

Kaleo smiled, "I'll bet he is."

"The new boy, Stephen Marr, and Troy Faris are with him," Daileass playfully sang.

"Stephen probably needs some clothes," Kaleo replied. "Go ahead and transport them down here." Laughing his little butt off, John led the pack of hysterical streakers back down the center aisle. Their numbers were growing. Dee, Sammy and Gage had joined the group.

In the dining room, Daileass said, "Tory, Troy and Stephen,

stand up and prepare for transport."

Troy looked up at the ceiling as he stood. He was about to ask Tory about the transport when he found himself, Tory and Stephen standing in what appeared to be a department store. Tory hurried over to Kaleo; Troy excitedly muttered, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph! How the hell did we get here?"

Stephen grinned, "Pretty wicked, huh? That's my second time. First time took me from Hawaii to Oahu and it was just as quick."

Still shaking off the experience, Troy asked, "Do you know where we are?"

Shaking his head, Stephen answered, "Nope."

Kaleo walked over with Tory and put his hand on Stephen's shoulder saying, "You're in the CIC basement."

The streakers raced up the center aisle again and John sent to Kaleo; *'Stephen's got ratty ol' clothes, bro. He needs all new stuff.'* Troy's and Stephen's mouths hung open in surprise at the nudists as they passed.

Stephen looked up at Kaleo and shyly smiled, "I never said thank you."

Kaleo tilted his head uncertainly and asked, "Thanks for what?"

"Bill Devine was closest to me," Stephen reminded. Worshipful, Stephen blushed, "He could've grabbed me and broken me in two."

"Not in this lifetime," Kaleo assured. He then said, "Let's get you some clothes, Stephen."

"I got a suitcase full already," Stephen replied.

Not wanting to embarrass the boy, Kaleo smiled, "It's free, dude. Everybody gets a week's worth of the basics. Use what you've got as spares." Taking Tory by the hand, Kaleo led Stephen and Troy to the front of the store.

Troy wondered, "Are Prez and Keith down here?"

Kaleo nodded, "Around here somewhere."

Looking down at Stephen, Troy asked, "You all set now, bud?"

Stephen looked up and gratefully smiled, "Yup. Thanks for showing me around, Troy."

"No sweat," Troy assured, and then said, "Catch ya later, okay?"

Stephen nodded then, as Troy wandered off, glanced at Kaleo and Tory softly offering, "I hope they find my mom tonight."

Nodding and grinning impishly, Kaleo was a bit distracted because Tory had slid a hand up the back of his shirt and was running his fingers under the waistband of his boardies.

Appearing completely innocent of any controversial activity, Tory asked, "Your mom is nice?"

Looking through the stacks of packaged underwear, Stephen nodded, "We've just had it rough, ya know?"

Sliding a hand behind his back while Stephen was busy, Kaleo pulled his boyfriend's hand out of his shorts and giggled, "Stephen, this is Tory."

Briefly glancing up, Stephen smiled, "Hi," then tossed a few

packages of briefs in his cart.

Tory then asked, "Would you excuse us for a minute?"

"Umm... sure," Stephen replied, and then checked with Kaleo, "I can just take what I think I need?"

Again unable to reply because Tory was now searching for an elusive ticklish area, Kaleo nodded.

Tory smiled, "We'll be right back."

Without looking up from the socks he was perusing, Stephen nodded, "'Kay."

Kaleo and Tory then quickly moved several displays away and behind a larger rack of shirts. Kaleo softly giggled, "What's with you?"

"You're with me!" Tory playfully replied, and then pushed himself against Kaleo and into the rack of shirts, grabbing a kiss in the process. Breaking away and sighing contentedly, Tory softly admitted, "I'm so friggin' horny."

"I can tell!" Kaleo chuckled, "You're getting me all hot and bothered too!"

"Let's sneak away for a few minutes?" Tory softly pleaded.

Brushing Tory's dirty blond mop back, Kaleo whispered, "You know I really love you?"

Tory nodded and smiled, "Let's show it," then began grinding himself against the front of Kaleo's boardies.

Kaleo giggled, "I can't just walk away from a new kid." Tory

whimpered and Kaleo said, "Help me get Stephen caught up with the rest of the guys. Then we can disappear alone for a while."

Becoming more frustrated, Tory whined, "I want some now!"

"I know," Kaleo warmly smiled, "I do too. But I'm a leader now. Soon, okay?"

Tory softly grumbled, "Don't put me in second place."

"You're not second place."

"Prove it!" Tory demanded.

Kaleo looked around and saw Stephen moving his cart forward to the shoes. He tapped his comm-badge and said, "Keith?"

Keith replied, "Wassup, dude?" Tory ripped open the Velcro on Kaleo's boardies.

"I have a... umm... emergency," Kaleo nervously said as Tory knelt down and started lovingly playing with his dick. "Stephen Marr's... over... by... the shoes. Can you... help him... out... for a few minutes?"

"Sure dude," Keith replied, "I'm on my way. Is everything all right?" Tory swallowed Kaleo's dick and Kaleo's eyes rolled back in his head.

"Uh huh," Kaleo stammered, "it'll be fine... way fine."

Going back in the store toward the shoes, Keith briefly wondered why Kaleo was speaking oddly, then thought maybe he needed to use the bathroom. Finding Stephen not far away, he said, "Give me a holler when you can."

Nodding as if Keith was close enough to see it, Kaleo brushed Tory's hair back and gazed into his hazel eyes whispering, "Love you so much, baby."

Keith giggled, "'Scuse me?"

Realizing things were spiraling out of control, Kaleo abruptly said, "Sorry, Keith."

"Yeah!" Keith loudly laughed, "Over and in and out!"

Knowing he was caught, Kaleo giggled, "Out!" then tapped his comm-badge again. Smiling down at Tory, he sniggered, "You're gonna get me in so much trouble!"

Beginning to laugh, Tory had to spit out Kaleo's cock, but began stroking his lover's dark meat and snickered, "You're my Rimmer! All mine!"

Dropping to his knees on the floor, Kaleo helplessly cackled, "And you're mine!"

Approaching Stephen and still chuckling like a mad man, Keith could see the boy was having a rough time measuring his feet. "Lemme give you some help there, dude," Keith smiled.

"Thanks," Stephen meekly offered.

While helping Stephen, Keith noticed his socks were threadbare and softly asked, "Did you get yourself a week's worth of undies and socks?"

Stephen nodded, "Yup, Kaleo said I should even though I got a suitcase with some clothes."

"Kewl," Keith said, and checked the scale. "Size five and a

half," Keith rattled off, and then stood. "Let's get you a pair of sandals and a pair of sneakers, bro." Blushing because Keith had called him "bro", Stephen stood and followed the older boy to the racks. Keith wondered, "Are there any sports you like?"

Stephen shrugged, "I'm not really any good at basketball; too short. I like tryin' though."

Concentrating on the basketball sneakers, Keith asked, "Did Doc Andrews see you?"

"Yup."

"What did he say?"

"I'm malnourished," Stephen softly answered. "I gotta drink special shakes three times a day."

Pulling a pair of Converse sneakers off the shelf and nodding, Keith softly said, "It's gonna be okay now. Go ahead and try these on." Stephen nodded and returned to the chair. Beginning to lace a sneaker, Stephen started leaking tears again. He then fumbled and dropped the sneaker. Keith reassuringly said, "Hey, it really is gonna be okay. We'll get your mom and you all fixed up, you'll see."

Wiping his eyes, Stephen nodded and shuddered, "She ain't got a phone. She ain't even got a place to live no more."

Keith put the sneaker he was lacing down then sat beside the boy and asked, "Did you tell anyone else about that?"

Looking down at the floor, Stephen nodded and sobbed, "A lady in the dining room. She said she'd find her."

"Which lady?" Keith wondered.

Drawing in an unsteady breath, Stephen replied, "Mrs. Huzzer."

Keith grinned, "Mrs. Hundser is my mom."

"Really?" Stephen squeaked.

"Really," Keith smiled. "You're set, dude. It might take a day or two to find her, but we will. Then we'll offer her a job and you'll be living here on base with her and with us." Finally, Stephen looked up at Keith with a small spark of hope in his eyes. Keith's heart melted and he leaned closer to whisper, "Com'ere," then patted his lap. Stephen looked uncertain at first, then got up and sat in Keith's lap. Holding the boy close, Keith whispered, "Trust us. Your mom did the smartest thing ever and she doesn't even know it yet. But you and I do."

Stephen trembled uncontrollably and admitted, "I'm so scared."

"Scared of what?"

"New place, new people; I don't even know where my mom is."

Keith sighed, "She dropped you off in a car, right?" Stephen nodded so Keith explained, "Then she has a driver's license and her car is registered. We have our very own Honolulu policeman here that will help us find your mom. As for being in a new place with new people, you'll find out real fast this is the best place with the best people. All the kids you've seen around here had it worse than you. Some were orphans with no mother or father. Some had really bad foster parents that beat them or sexually abused them."

Stephen blushed, "Not sure what that means."

"It means grownups played with their dicks and worse. If it was a girl, they did sex stuff with them too. It didn't matter how old they

were either."

Stephen grimaced and groaned, "No!"

Keith nodded, "That's why Clan Short is here. Your mom prob'ly heard the news over the weekend. When she learned about the Clan being here, she knew her boy would be safe with us. What she didn't know was that we can help families too. She's gonna find out real soon though."

Relieved, Stephen sighed then rested his head on Keith's shoulder. Keith pulled the boy in close and hugged him. Stephen softly wondered, "Why's ev'rybody so nice if they've been hurt so bad? Was Troy hurt too?"

"Troy wasn't hurt, but his mom had a rough time finding work, just like your mom," Keith answered. "That's why Prez sent you off with Troy; to show you what it could be like for you and your mom. As for the rest of the boys and girls here, they want to be nice people. Everyone wants to be nice at first, it's just bad stuff that makes some people mean. All you've gotta do is give us a chance. Just like Troy, these kids want to be your friend."

"In school, lots o' kids made fun of me."

Keith sighed, "Some kids think they're better than everybody else. Some don't even know they're that way or how much it hurts other kids. Others do it on purpose, to make themselves feel better than they really are. The kids here though, they know how bad things can get. They don't want to make anyone feel bad; all they want is another friend. You wanna know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think you're gonna have lots of friends here. And in a few

days, once we find your mom, I think they're gonna look up to you."

Blushing, Stephen grinned, "Ya think?"

Keith nodded, "You're already a sensitive, caring boy. All you gotta do is stay just the way you are."

After a few quiet moments, Stephen said, "Keith?" Keith hummed, then Stephen whispered, "The stuff in my suitcase is really old and don't even fit me good."

"It don't matter. We're gonna get you fixed up with lots of brand new clothes and a new suitcase too."

Stephen's head popped off Keith's shoulder. For the first time since arriving, Stephen smiled.

Keith asked, "You're feeling better?" Stephen rapidly nodded then Keith said, "Let's get you some nice clothes." Stephen slid off of Keith's lap then Keith stood and tapped his comm-badge. "John?" Stephen sat down and returned to lacing his sneakers.

"Hey bro!" John replied, then asked, "How's Stephen?" Hearing his name, Stephen paused and looked up.

Keith's eyes rolled and he slouched. "Why do you even bother asking?"

John giggled, "We're just finishing up with the suits for Wednesday. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Kewl, bro."

"Turn around, Keith," John said.

Keith did as his brother asked and saw Kaleo with Tory holding

hands and walking towards him.

Over the comm-badge, John sang, "Kaleo and Tory sittin' in a tree..." then cracked up.

Kaleo and Tory could only blush, grin and hold each other close.

"God, bro!" Keith huffed impatiently. "You're worse than Daileass!"

John howled. Over the loudspeakers, Daileass giggled, "Shirt Rack Rimmers! I can't claim comedic value this time though!"

Mike grumbled, "That honor was saved for me!"

Privately to Mike, Daileass giggled, "That was a shower with the Scoobies and you have to admit, it was funny."

"I guess," Mike grinned, "if it was anybody else, it prob'ly would've been."

Daileass laughed, "The first time Spike shook muddy water all over you, the look on your face was priceless!"

Keith's comm-badge chirped. Keith tapped it and said, "Keith here."

"Okay," Prez suspiciously said, "John's laughing his ass off in a dressing room and Daileass is cracking Rimmer jokes. What did I miss?"

The dark Hawaiian skin on Kaleo's face turned even redder. Keith smiled and briefly answered, "New lovers."

"Oh," Prez droned, and then chuckled, "As long as they didn't

leave a mess."

Grinning evilly, Tory loudly giggled, "Cleaned up every drop, Prez!" From opposite ends of the store, Prez, Troy, Keith, Kaleo and Tory cracked up laughing.

Keith knocked knuckles with Kaleo and Tory then told Prez, "We're just getting Stephen started here, baby. It's gonna take us a while more."

"No problem," Prez replied. "Our boys have new ponchos. John, Bruce and that group have almost finished up with the suits. Our new Rimmers are checking out and loading up their suitcases."

Dee asked, "Where should we put our ponchos, Poppa?"

"I'll have Daileass transport them to Grandma and Grandpa's house," Prez replied. He then suggested, "Why don't you guys go help Daddy with Stephen?" Four positive replies from the boys burst forth, then Prez yelled, "John! Put some clothes on!"

John giggled, "I will, but I left my board shorts by the Speedos!"

"Exhibitionist!" Prez shouted. Laughing, John raced down the aisle.

"When ya got it, flaunt it!" John loudly laughed so that he was heard both over the comm-badge and in the store, heading toward Keith. *'Oh, by the way,'* John sent to Keith and Prez, *'Mom's already talked to Mike's dad. There's an APB out for Stephen's mother. The Terrible Trio are scanning Stephen too. We'll find her.'*

Stephen stood and started walking around in his new sneakers. Keith went over to him and asked, "How do they feel, dude?"

Making a crooked face, Stephen shrugged, "Weird; like they're... stiff."

Keith asked, "Do they feel tight around your toes or by the heel?"

Shaking his head, Stephen said, "No, they just don't bend right."

"Well, it's nice enough out for sandals tonight anyway," Keith assured. He then picked up a similar pair of sneakers and instructed, "Later tonight, bend and twist them in your hands like this. The next time you wear them, they'll feel better and, after a few hours on your feet, they'll be broke in just right."

Stephen sat down again to take his new sneakers off and shyly smiled, "Thanks Keith, for everything."

Keith smiled, winked and nodded then found a pair of sandals in a nearby rack. Kaleo and Tory had followed Keith. Keith dropped a pair of sandals in Stephen's cart then Stephen put his new Converse sneakers in the cart. Once he was dressed again, John hurried over to the shoe department carrying his own Speedos and a pair of Speedos for Stephen. John said, "Here Stephen, try these on."

Stephen smiled at John and, seeing the tiny swimsuit, he blushed, "Where?"

"Right here," John grinned. Rather than freak out the new boy, John moved closer and whispered in the smaller boy's ear. "It's kewl, dude. We was all running around the store naked."

Helplessly, Stephen giggled then pulled John closer and whispered, "I can't."

Tilting his head curiously, John softly said, "There's no girls

here. Why not? Are the older dudes..." But then John heard Stephen's thoughts and pulled back to look into Stephen's hazel eyes. His heart beating faster, John then anxiously looked around. Kaleo, Keith and Tory were near the swimsuits and board shorts. Since they weren't watching, John reached for Stephen's hand, pulled him aside and nervously whispered, "I umm... like your eyes. I think you're way cute too."

Abruptly pulling his hand back, Stephen said, "It's wrong."

Shaking his head, John softly admitted, "I'm only ten, but I know it's not wrong to like another boy. I just think we could be friends... really good friends... maybe." John wanted to share his feelings more, but didn't know what to say or how to say it. In his frustration and without even trying to, John pushed his feelings to Stephen. For a long few moments the two boys locked eyes. John then tentatively reached for Stephen's hand and Stephen reached for John's hand.

'Do you feel me? Can you hear me?'

Stephen nodded.

'It's okay. I know you're scared. I am too. Let's just be friends, please?'

Again, Stephen nodded and grinned. He thought it would be nice to hug John, if only for a second or two.

'Yeah, I'd like you to. You can, if you want.'

John clearly heard Stephen's worries in a long series of rambling short phrases.

'I don't know what I want either. I know what I feel now though'

and it's okay. You can hear me in your mind and feel my feelings cos I'm empathic and learning telepathy. If it scares you too much, I'll stop.'

Shaking his head, Stephen moved closer to John. They hugged and contentedly sighed.

'Oh man, this feels real nice! I don't wanna ever let go, but Keith's wondering what's wrong. If we don't catch up soon...'

Keith called, "John? Stephen?"

'Rats!'

Stephen giggled hysterically and then stepped back, smiling at John. He then loudly said, "Just a minute, I'm trying on my new Speedos." Stephen then started to take his shorts and underwear off.

"Oh, okay," Keith replied.

While Stephen changed, John only briefly glanced at Stephen's dick.

'You got no reason to be ashamed. Turn around.'

Blushing harder than he ever had, Stephen slowly turned around in a pair a Clan Short Speedos.

'Nice!' John then smiled, "Put your shorts back on, dude."

Stephen then quickly changed back into his briefs and shorts, but never lost eye contact with John. The whole time, John read Stephen's concerns and telepathically pushed answers back to him. Holding on to Stephen's Speedos, the two boys hurried over to the board shorts displays. Tossing both his own and Stephen's Speedos into the cart, John said, "Sorry." John then introduced Dee, Gage,

Sammy and Richie to Stephen, adding that they were Keith's and Prez's sons and his nephews. He then went to the boardies and found a pair that was brown and sand tan in Stephen's size. John handed them to Stephen saying, "Try these on," then looked up at Keith and said, "Get boy's medium size T-shirts for Stephen please, bro? Stick to browns, tans, light blue and especially greens, but no reds."

Keith grinned, "Don't ya think Stephen can choose his own clothes?"

Dropping his shorts and standing in white briefs, Stephen smiled, "It's okay. That's exactly what I would've got anyway."

John smirked at his older brother and tapped his head. Keith rolled his eyes, shook his head and wandered off to the shirts. Giggling at the two brothers, Kaleo and Tory followed Keith. Once they walked off, John dug through the stacks of board shorts and kept handing Stephen new ones to try on. After only a few minutes, Stephen had tried on five pair of really nice board shorts that all the boys thought looked good on him. By the time they caught up with Keith, Kaleo and Tory, five T-Shirts were picked out.

Stephen only tried on one and browsed the others. "These are really nice," Stephen gushed.

John smiled at Stephen and sent, 'I think so too, but I think you look good all the time.'

Stephen turned bright red and silently wondered why John thought so much of him.

While they walked to the jeans department, John sent, '*Because I can feel my brothers. I knew that Keith liked you a lot already. What he said about you being sensitive is so true and I think that's awesome. I couldn't wait to meet you. And then...*' John turned and

glanced at Stephen and sent, *'Your eyes! I could lose myself in your eyes!'* John and Stephen both began giggling and blushing.

Wondering what John and Stephen were giggling about, Gage and Sammy grinned and glanced curiously at each other. It was Richie that made the connection first though and started laughing.

Dee suspiciously wondered, "Why's ev'ryone laughin' and gigglin'? Did I miss somethin'?"

Richie laughed even louder. John did a quick scan of his little nephew then warned, "Don't you say it, Richie!"

"What?" Richie squealed, "Jus' cos you remin' me of Daddy and Poppa!" The next thing Richie knew, he was four feet off the floor and being flipped upside down.

"UNCA JO-HO-HON!" Richie hysterically laughed. Gage, Sammy and Dee cracked up at their brother.

"John!" Keith hollered.

"What?" John evilly grinned, "He was teasing me!"

Watching his son spin ass over tea kettle, Keith complained, "Well you're not really teaching him not to tease you. He seems to be enjoying it, if ya ask me."

"Oh?" John wickedly said, then sent Richie higher and spinning in a horizontal circle, as if there was a pole through his belly button.

Richie laughed "WOO-HOOOOO!"

"If he pukes, you're cleaning it up," Keith warned.

John hummed and slowed Richie's spin, realizing his nephew

could vomit, then lowered him down to the floor, laying flat on his belly.

Dizzily, Richie got up and staggered around, bouncing off tables and clothing display racks, but helplessly giggling.

Keith picked him up before he hurt himself. "Close your eyes," Keith softly instructed.

Richie giggled, "Everythin's still spinnin', Daddy!"

"I've got ya, Richie," Keith softly assured.

John noticed that Stephen was now watching him carefully. Stephen croaked, "You did that?"

'Please don't be scared,' John desperately pleaded.

"How can I not be scared?" Stephen asked, and then searched the racks of shirts.

John stood beside him and begged, "Please?"

Stephen sighed then softly said, "What am I supposed to think? In the last fifteen minutes I've felt your feelings; I heard your voice in my head. I know you heard my thoughts by what you said... or sent. Now I learn you can pick people up and spin 'em around too? Tell me how to react to this?"

John lowered his head and felt tears welling up in his eyes. "I'm sorry. I guess... maybe... I was only trying to help." John then looked at Stephen and saw he wasn't looking back, but only glancing through shirts. John sighed, "I'm really sorry," then wandered away into the center aisle, severely chastising himself. Not knowing where to go or what to do, John went back to the place where he first got to know

Stephen, in the shoe department. He sat in the chair Stephen had been sitting in, wondering what he could've done differently.

By this time, Richie had told Keith why John was spinning him around. In the shirts department, Stephen had picked out two nice shirts. Keith went over to Stephen to find the boy had the same lost and hopeless expression he had before they had talked.

Still carrying Richie, Keith softly asked Stephen, "What's the matter?"

Shrugging, Stephen moved on to the jeans, but didn't reply. Keith asked Gage, Sammy and Dee to find their Uncle John then followed Stephen. Before Keith could say another word to Stephen, Prez and the other boys joined with Keith, Stephen, Kaleo and Tory. "Where's John?" Bruce asked.

Stephen pointed in the direction he had last seen John walking, but didn't say a word. "Thanks," Bruce smiled, and then hurried off.

Richie whispered to Keith, "Lemme tell Poppa what's goin' on."

Keith nodded and handed Richie off to Prez. Immediately, Richie began whispering to Prez. Now understanding, Prez softly told Richie, "If it's meant to be, it'll be okay." With help, Stephen gathered jeans, a canvas belt, two baseball hats, toiletries, a Clan Short windbreaker, a poncho and a suitcase.

At the other end of the store, in the shoe department, John talked with his nephews and Bruce about what had happened. "I don't know why I did it!" John whined. "Richie was just bein' a kid. Stephen didn't seem to mind me talking telepathically. He really seemed to like it. When I played with Richie, I thought he'd like that too. I didn't even feel him getting scared, but should've. I dunno..." Leaning back

in the chair, thoroughly confused, John closed his eyes and huffed.

Dee, Gage, Sammy and even Bruce grinned. "I know why you did it," Bruce smirked.

Without opening his eyes, John wondered, "Why?"

"Cos you like him," Bruce helplessly giggled.

"Course I do; I even told him so."

Bruce asked, "Did you tell him you love him?"

"No."

"You do though, don't you?" Bruce grinned.

"So he got scared," Gage offered. "You bein' away ain't making him less scared."

Sammy nodded and reminded, "You guys just met. He dealt with a lot and liked it."

Dee agreed, "Look at this place. We got gorillas, G-Cats, chimps and a hundred other kids. We've had days with 'em and I still get weirded out watchin' gorillas patrolling the base."

"You did what any of us woulda done if we really liked someone," Gage smiled.

Sammy giggled, "You were showin' off!" Bruce, Dee and Gage all began giggling and laughing.

Opening his eyes, John demanded, "I don't like him like that!"

The other boys glanced at one another then sang, "Yes you do!"

"You wouldn't be so upset if ya didn't," Bruce said.

"Admit it," Gage cackled, "a part of you wants to be with him."

"Sitting here ain't doin squat!" Dee urged. "If you like him, ya gotta be with him."

Bruce nodded, "If he's scared, make him less scared. Show him the way you are, the way you were when you found me."

"Keith and Drew will tease the piss outta me," John pouted.

"They better not!" Gage giggled. "We've had pouncing lessons from Timmy and Ricky!"

Bruce suggested, "If they tease you guys, show 'em your powers all by yourself. Power up and toss 'em in the pool!"

"Wasn't that you flying Mrs. Seibert around the pool?" Sammy reminded.

Dee giggled, "You can get Daileass to help too; without even saying a word aloud."

A little uncertainly, John wondered, "Yeah?"

In John's ear, Daileass confirmed, "In a heartbeat, John. The North Atlantic is awfully chilly this time of year."

John couldn't help snickering evilly. "Yeah!" With a new found determination, John got up and said, "Thanks, guys. I owe you." John then led the pack running down the center aisle of the store. In the distance, by the checkout counters, everyone was gathered around Stephen. Keith, Prez and Kaleo were helping him get his clothes folded into the suitcase. There was still a lot more to do though. Stopping short of the checkout counter, John said, "You guys are

taking way too long." Three pair of jeans, two button down sport shirts, five T-shirts, a poncho and a jacket all flew into the air at once and began folding themselves. Then John neatly laid each item in the suitcase, closed it and zipped it up. While all that was happening, John sent Stephen a warm hug with one short message; *'I'd do anything for you, anytime; please just give me another chance?'* Stephen only nodded his head once, but that was plenty for John. With the suitcase closed and the task almost complete, John silently mouthed, "Daileass, me and Stephen need to talk alone. Transport us to the trees near the outside rec area, please?"

"Way to take charge, John!" Daileass giggled, "You got it, Soul Rimmer."

When John and Stephen vanished, Bruce, Dee, Gage and Sammy cracked up. "That's my big bro," Bruce cheered.

"And our uncle," Dee giggled.

Prez frowned and whined, "Someone tell me what the hell is going on?" Bruce, Dee, Gage and Sammy filled everybody in. Although no one really knew the details, John definitely had a crush on Stephen. It was too cute for the older Rimmers to comprehend.

Prez and the remaining Core Rimmers got the kids they had picked up at Hawaii settled into their dorm rooms then went to the Command Center. When they walked into the room, Paulie told Prez, "Colonel Williams called while you were busy, Prez. He's got more kids for us, all between four and eight years old."

"How many?" Prez wondered.

Paulie answered, "Eleven. Seven boys and four girls."

Drew suggested, "Let's bring some of our little guys with us

again, Prez."

Keith agreed, "Bruce and our kids will make them feel safer."

"Not to mention, I like having them around," Corey admitted.

"We all do," Keith confirmed and Drew rapidly nodded.

"Back to the store we go," Prez grinned. He then told Paulie, "Contact Donnie to be ready to have the kids transported to the store, where we'll be waiting." Keith led the seven Rimmers to the CIC dining room to gather their sons, Bruce, Carmella, Dewi and Kokaku. Once Drew and Keith explained there were seven new little boys and four girls that were going to be scared, all their sons readily agreed. Since Prez didn't know how many were what age, Jennifer Hundser, Anna Seibert, Lanna Seaver and Laura Gibbons all insisted that they join the welcoming committee. Finally, Prez called Daileass. "Here we go again, dude, back to the store; all us kids and our mothers."

* * * * *

John and Stephen appeared beyond the volleyball courts, near the south end of the outdoor recreation area. "You're scared?" John worried.

Stephen nodded, "It's only my third time moving around that way. Where are we?"

"Still on base," John answered, and then turned himself and Stephen around. He pointed and said, "That's the indoor rec center. On the other side of that is our pool and diving well; there's the Seiberts' house. Ya can't see it from here, but there's four houses over there. That big dome is our CIC and auditorium."

A deep voice back in the trees asked, "Is that my Johnny-boy?"

John recognized the sound of his gorilla's voice, turned and said, "Yep. How ya doin', Lucky?" Seeing the massive gorilla, Stephen gasped and hid behind John. "It's okay," John quickly said, "Lucky's my personal security gorilla. Saturday, when I asked him his name, he rattled off a bunch of numbers. The first and last numbers were seven so I named him Lucky."

"Seven-nine-o-three-two-seven," Lucky chanted. He then grinned, "You really shouldn't be out alone at night, Johnny-boy."

"I'm not alone with you around," John playfully reminded. He then pulled Stephen's hand to introduce him to Lucky, but Stephen was frozen solid. Moving beside Stephen, John said, "Lucky, this is Stephen; he's a new kid on base."

"Nice to meet you, Stephen," Lucky pleasantly grinned. He then locked eyes with John and said, "I'll let you talk with the newbie, but I'll be close by."

"Kewl, thanks Lucky," John smiled, and watched his gorilla return to the trees. Realizing that Stephen was stunned silent still, John inquired, "It's an awful lot, huh?" Stephen rapidly nodded. John sighed and briefly wondered how he could make Stephen more comfortable. Hitting an idea, he said, "Ya know what? This place is missing some really important stuff. Hey Daileass, with all these kids, we got no swings, jungle gyms, merry-go-rounds or slides. How about it?"

"You smoothie!" Daileass giggled. "Coming right up." In the grassy area between the edge of the outdoor recreation center and the tree line appeared two sets of six swings, two jungle gyms, two merry-go-rounds and four slides.

"Awesome!" John cheered. Then he checked with Stephen; "Better now?"

Shrugging, Stephen stammered, "Umm... where? How?"

"It's a long story," John smiled. "I could tell you, but it would be quicker if I showed you instead." Still partially dumbstruck, Stephen nodded. John then took Stephen by the hand and telepathically showed him everything that had happened since meeting Joel Friday afternoon. In Stephen's mind, everything flashed by like a movie being played at triple speed. John finished his little show in the CIC basement store, when he and Stephen hugged each other. "That's how it happened," John said. "We went from normal kids to Clan Short leaders, just like that. It's only been three days. What really matters is you."

Stephen blushed crimson and softly wondered, "Why? Why me?"

John shrugged, "Every kid here matters." He then paused and softly admitted, "You matter to me."

With an obvious quiver in his voice, Stephen nervously said, "I don't know who you think I am. I mean, my mom dropped me off because she couldn't afford rent in a one-bedroom shit-hole. I hadn't sat down to eat before a doctor here told me I was malnourished. I've got nothing, John."

"None of that stuff matters to me," John easily said. "Remember I showed you Brandon and Vicky. They're nice people and I like them, but they miss the mark somehow. But you; you made my heart beat really fast. You got scared of me and it hurt so much, like nothing else mattered if you didn't like me anymore. I can't explain it right. Part of me wants to do something... to make you like me, but I know that'll

only scare you more. I don't wanna trick you into liking me because... well... I don't wanna be N-Gen right now with you. If you only liked me because I'm N-Gen, it wouldn't be enough, it wouldn't be right." Not knowing what else to say, John went over and sat on a swing then looked helplessly at Stephen.

Stephen walked over and sat on the next swing saying, "I can't help being scared. Talking with Keith helped some, but you helped even more. When I saw Richie doin' somersaults and spinning in mid-air, I got scared again. Then I got angry at myself for being scared. Do you know why?" John shook his head and Stephen answered, "Because it hurt you. I didn't mean to, ya know. There's so many things that scare me here; new places, new people, transporting from place to place, talking gorillas, playgrounds that just appear out of nothing."

"It is weird," John giggled.

"John?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm curious. What else can you do?"

Shrugging, John smirked, "I'm not even really sure yet. But I can do this." The swing Stephen was sitting on pulled back and way up then John let it go. Holding on to the steel chains of his swing, Stephen cackled hysterically as the swing moved forward and back then John pushed it again. John made the other ten swings start moving too. Smiling widely because Stephen was obviously enjoying it, John watched Stephen swinging. Then John thought of another small demonstration. The sand in the volleyball court before them started springing up in thin and high towers then dropping back down again. Within a few seconds, John had a synchronized sand fountain

shooting before them too. Stephen howled laughing. John then envisioned synchronized fountains of sand in all the volleyball courts. Soon, sand fountains from all the volleyball courts were popping and falling.

"Okay!" Stephen hysterically cried out.

Fearing that Stephen might get scared again, John stopped his sand fountains then let the swings stop on their own. Stephen let his feet drag on the ground to slow his swing. In a short while, he was sitting still on his swing beside John, still giggling.

"How about a tour?" John suggested.

"An N-Gen tour?" Stephen grinned.

Shaking his head, John said, "A walk around the base. Once you see everything, you won't have to be afraid of where you are anymore." Enthusiastically, Stephen nodded.

The two boys got off their swings then walked across the driveway. Following the concrete walkway, John led Stephen around the indoor rec complex. Through the transparent aluminum walls, they could see almost everything in there except the locker rooms. John pointed out the soccer field and basketball courts. They then walked around the pool, pool house and diving well. The main housing area was next and John told Stephen which families were in each home. They went over by the dorms next. John told Stephen a little about the UNIT and base security while they passed. Then they walked by the townhomes. John told Stephen that as soon as things settled down, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick would be moving there with their kids. On their way to the CIC, they passed the condos, where Troy had already taken Stephen, and walked back around the dorms. John pointed at the one that some of the older kids were

already using.

"Is that where I'll be sleeping tonight?" Stephen asked.

"If ya want," John softly replied. "We've been nesting in the basement of my house the last few nights."

Stephen curiously repeated, "Nesting?"

John nodded, "Lots of the kids were just as scared as you when we got here. Saturday night, there were over a hundred kids in our basement. About fifteen were from the Northeast U.S. Clan division, the rest were our kids. It was pretty kewl. We have lots of TV's and game stations and one really big TV mounted on a wall. One half of the basement is like a rec room with our old living room furniture; the other half is where we all sleep. I don't know how many will be nesting tonight though. I'm figuring about thirty or forty, not including the seven of us Core Rimmers."

"Are you rich?" Stephen wondered.

John sniggered, "Nope, Clan Short is. We get what we need from them. Everything I've already showed you and the rest I haven't yet was all put here Saturday. It was just a big empty field before that."

Stephen incredulously repeated, "Everything here was built in one day?"

John nodded, "With Starfleet's help. Here's the CIC, where we arrived and had dinner."

"John?"

"Yeah?"

"Where am I sleeping?"

"Wherever ya want; in the dorm or in the nest." John then pointed to his left and said, "Here's our auditorium. My bros have a band. They had a concert Saturday night and a jam session in there earlier today."

As they walked past and out to the driveway, Stephen asked, "You're sleeping in the nest then?"

"Yep."

"Can I sleep with you there?"

John's heart skipped three beats then hustled to catch up. He turned and smiled at Stephen then nodded, unable to answer with words. They walked towards the housing area security checkpoint and Stephen reached for John's hand. Shocked and thrilled to death, John struggled to point to his right and choke out, "Parking garage."

"I can see that," Stephen grinned.

Turning to the left, John giggled, "Federation Youth Services offices over there." Pointing forward and to his right, John said, "Shuttle pad."

"Is there anything else?" Stephen asked.

"Nope, that's all."

"Can I ask a favor?"

"Course!"

"I told you my mom and me had to move out of our apartment?"

John hummed affirmatively. "I ain't had a shower since then."

"Oh! No problem. I'll show you the inside of the dorm then."

After a few silent steps heading back around the CIC on the way toward the dorms, Stephen chirped, "John?"

"Yeah?"

"I really like you a lot."

John blushed and giggled, "I like you too."

Stephen grinned, "I know already, remember?"

"Oh yeah! Sorry about that. I just didn't know what to say."

"If I tell you something, promise you won't laugh?"

"Okay, I promise."

"You make me feel really special. Better than I've ever felt before with anyone else."

"I'm glad," John smiled. *'It's so weird. I never wanted to sleep with anybody before. Drew and me used to have twin-size bunk beds. For the first time, I'm looking forward to sleeping beside someone.'*

"You're not doing anything to me, you know, with your mind?"

"No; what happened in the store, sending you my feelings, was an accident, honest. I hope it never happens again."

Stephen nodded then thought for a few moments before saying, "I hope it does happen again."

Coming to an abrupt halt, John stopped and looked at Stephen

carefully. The boy before him was a year older, but appeared a year or two younger; about Bruce's height, but much thinner than Bruce. Stephen smiled and nodded. John sent, *'You're so great, it's making me crazy inside! Nobody has ever made me not know what to say or do before. Part of me wants to show you everything everywhere, just so we can be alone longer. Another part of me wants to cry. Another part just wants to hold you.'*

"I know," Stephen nervously whispered. "It's the same for me."

Following his instincts, John stepped forward and wrapped his arms around Stephen. Both boys sighed and closed their eyes. After about a minute, John softly wondered, "Is this love?"

"I hope so," Stephen whispered. "I'm not thinking of my mom or anything else; only you."

"Can I kiss you please?"

"Yes."

Their eyes opened. Two faces slid by one another and their lips met for the first time. They both gasped and their mouths opened then their eyes closed.

Something happened then that none of the UNIT kids or gorillas had ever seen before. John and Stephen began slowly levitating; two feet then higher and higher, until they were up about thirty feet off the ground. They then rotated until they were horizontal and began slowly swaying; as if they were lying side by side in an invisible hammock.

Outside the housing security checkpoint, Chaz saw them and softly chortled, "Oh shit!"

One of the gorillas asked, "What should we do?"

"I have no fucking idea!" Chaz laughed. "If we say something and break John's concentration, they might fall."

"Daileass, are you seeing this?" the gorilla asked.

"I was," Daileass giggled, "the camera can't tilt up that high!"

Chaz ordered, "Get a trampoline underneath them, just in case." A second later, a huge gymnastics trampoline appeared on the ground beneath John and Stephen. John and Stephen began slowly drifting down moments later, like two feathers in the light Hawaiian breeze. As they made their way down, UNIT kids, G-Cats and gorillas hurried over to the trampoline and surrounded it. They landed and broke their first kiss, contentedly sighing and euphoric.

Then John heard soft giggling and opened his eyes. The kids, G-Cats and gorillas began clapping and cheering. "Oh no," John groaned. "Daileass, get us outta here!"

"Where to?" Daileass giggled.

Stephen's eyes opened and he looked around then closed his eyes and hid his face.

"Someplace more private!" John begged, "I don't care where!"

"No one's in your bedroom at home," Daileass suggested.

"Works for me!" John replied.

The next thing the boys knew, they were laying in the same position on a bed in a dark room with only the outside lights shining in through the windows. Relieved, John grinned, "Any chance of

keeping 'us' a secret just ended in applause."

"Why would you want to keep it a secret?" Stephen seriously asked.

"I wouldn't," John quickly replied. "But we haven't found your mom yet and I thought maybe you would."

"Not because of her; because of kids at school."

"Oh," John droned. "So other kids at school teased you?"

Stephen nodded, "They bullied me, John. That's why I pulled my hand away at first."

Feeling his temper rise, John huffed explosively then asked, "You know better now?"

Stephen nodded and brightly smiled, "After a kiss like that, I know way better."

Giggling like a hyena, John rolled back and pulled Stephen on top of him. The computer in the room began beeping and the screen flashed, 'Incoming Message'. "What the heck?" John grumbled. "Daileass, I ain't the director of this division. Why's my computer beeping?"

Over the bedroom communications system, Daileass giggled, "You need to see this message, John."

"Now?" John whined.

"As soon as possible," Daileass replied, and then giggled, "I think you and Stephen will really like it. It does raise a question or two though."

"All right," John groaned, and then let go of Stephen. After grabbing a quick kiss and making John giggle again, Stephen rolled off to the side of John. Getting up, John went to the computer. In a few clicks, he had opened the message Daileass sent and the attached QuickTime video. Watching himself and Stephen kiss then begin to rise in the air, John's eyes opened wide. "Holy crap!" John shouted. "You gotta see this, Stephen!"

Stephen got up and leaned over John's shoulder. He giggled and kissed John's cheek then confessed, "I thought I was imagining it."

"But no N-Gen's ever done that before!" John told him. "Sure we can lift other things and people, but Jace never told me I could do that!"

Stephen asked, "So this is new; for you and everyone else?"

John replied, "As far as I know." John then warned, "Step back, baby."

Stephen moved back from the chair and tearfully repeated, "Baby?"

Blushing and giggling, John stood and nodded, "I think I love you and, judging by what we just did, somethin' special is going on. Now I just gotta figure out what and how." John took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Imagining himself kissing Stephen, John tried to levitate off the floor. After about thirty-seconds, John's eyes opened and he whined, "It ain't working!" He then said, "Kiss me, Stephen."

Stephen grinned, "Call me 'baby' again."

John giggled, "Kiss me, baby."

Stephen happily obliged. Their eyes closed and they began

tickling one another's tongues. Almost immediately, John and Stephen rose up off the floor. A few seconds later, John's head bumped the ceiling. Helplessly giggling, John and Stephen broke their kiss and dropped to the floor with a loud thud.

"Okay!" John snickered, "One plus one equals two. Kiss me again."

Stephen smirked, "You just want more kisses!"

"Yep!" John laughed. "And to see if we can slowly lower down again, like we did outside."

"So we break the kiss more slowly this time?" Stephen queried. John rapidly nodded. Stephen teased, "Just say the magic word."

"Please?"

"Close!" Stephen giggled, "Four letter word beginning with 'B'."

John pleaded, "Please, baby?"

Stephen then laid a whopper on John. Humming deliriously, the two boys rose again. This time John expected the bump on the head. The kiss broke more slowly this time though and they gently lowered to the floor.

"One more test," John suggested. He took a step back, but held Stephen's hands and closed his eyes. This time they only rose an inch or two off the floor. "This is kewl!" John declared then pulled Stephen close for a hug. The same thing happened until John closed his eyes and imagined kissing Stephen. They rose a few inches higher then stopped. Humming curiously, John pushed Stephen away, but held his hands. They immediately lowered back to an inch off the floor. John released only one hand from Stephen and they dropped to the floor.

"It's you," John laughed, "You and me together make it happen! How awesome is that?"

There was a knock at the door and Jennifer Hundser opened it then turned on the lights. Jennifer smiled and wondered, "When did you get home?"

"A few minutes ago mom," John answered. He then confirmed, "Mom, you know Stephen?"

Jennifer nodded, "We met a few hours ago, yes."

Stephen waved, "Hi Mrs. Hundser."

John smiled at Stephen briefly then turned back to his mother and asked, "Where's dad?"

"In the kitchen," Jennifer answered.

"Have I got some stuff to show you!" John excitedly laughed. "Let's go downstairs."

Closing her eyes for a few moments as the two boys passed, Jennifer muttered, "Every time I hear that lately, I get nervous." Turning around, she followed the boys downstairs and into the kitchen.

Entering the room and finding his dad at the table, John smiled, "Hey Dad! Have you met Stephen?"

Jim Hundser nodded, "We met earlier. We're still looking for your mother, Stephen."

Stephen nodded and softly said, "Thank you, Mr. Hundser. I'm sorry I mispronounced your name earlier."

Jim chuckled, "All our boys mangled our surname. I think John said Huzzer until he was three or four."

John and Stephen giggled while Jennifer sat at the table.

"Okay," John grinned, "I got good news and then even better news. First, me and Stephen learned we really like each other a lot." Wearing a wide, loving and appreciative smile, John turned to Stephen saying, "We're boyfriends!"

"That's wonderful!" Jennifer cheerfully said, and felt more relieved that nothing odd was about to happen.

Jim nodded and smiled, "We're very happy, for both of you."

"What's even better is what happens when we're together," John grinned. He then paused and thought how to explain it since he wasn't quite sure himself. "My N-Gen abilities let me move stuff around telekinetically. But when Stephen and me are together, something new happens." John stepped forward and hugged Stephen. Stephen wrapped his arms around John and rested his head on John's shoulder. Before John's parents' eyes, both boys levitated about six inches off the floor. After a few seconds, John whispered, "Kiss me, baby." Stephen and John tenderly kissed. Two bewildered parents watched while the boys rose higher as their tongues danced. Before hitting the ceiling, their tongues slowed and they lowered down back down. Breaking the kiss, they squeezed each other tightly then separated and landed on the floor. Turning his head to see his parents, but already knowing they were frightened, John softly grunted, "Uh oh!"

Jim simply eyed the boys suspiciously, but Jennifer's head was hanging in both her open hands.

"Mom?" John softly called.

Jennifer lifted her head and leaned back in the chair. "I know boys grow up," Jennifer began, "I know boys are more adventurous. I also realize that things have changed. But now I only have to ask, how high can you levitate? Is there any chance you could float off into outer space?"

"I don't think so," John answered. "I really don't know because it's brand new to me too." John then tapped his sub-vocal and asked, "Daileass, can you help me out here, dude?"

Replying privately to John, Daileass giggled, "Do not tell your parents how high we know you can levitate!"

"DUH!" John laughed.

Over the room's loudspeakers, Daileass then seriously offered, "There are three telekinesis trainers in the Clan."

Draco added, "Eli and Benji have just woke up."

"Only three?" Jim asked.

"It is a rare skill," Draco replied.

"How quick can they get here?" John wondered.

"You rang?" Two voices announced from behind John. He spun around and saw two boys standing about a foot off of the ground, a pajama-clad leg doing circles around them.

"Don't forget us!" Two more voices announced from near the ceiling.

"I'm counting four," Jim helplessly chuckled.

One of the boys giggled from the ceiling, "I'm Sammy, he's

'Bastian, that one is Eli, the other is Benji, and our little friend is 'Leg'."

"Hey, hot stuff, you can stop getting us up now!" the boy identified as 'Bastian giggled, obviously speaking to the boy named Eli.

Jim sputtered and tried not to laugh for his wife's sake. "Oh Lord!" Jennifer smirked, and then laid her head on her crossed arms on the table. She then began softly mumbling, "If I take two Valium, I may not wake up until noon; it could be very bad."

Watching 'Leg' dance around, John chuckled and introduced himself, Stephen and his parents. He then demonstrated what happened whenever he and Stephen were close or kissing.

Twisting to and fro, 'Leg' seemed to look around the room, then hopped over to a table with a notepad and pencil on it. It hopped up on the table, grabbed the pencil between its toes, and furiously scribbled on the paper. It then picked up the paper in its toes, and hopped over to Jennifer. After placing the note on the table next to her, it cuddled up to her side.

Jennifer glanced at 'Leg' then lifted her head and read the note. It read:

Mommy Jennifer,

I'm the prosthetic leg that Eli used to wear before Uncle Marc gave him an android leg and arm to replace the ones that he lost when his parents' plane crashed. Eli is silly, but he won't let anything happen that could hurt John; he still remembers how messing around

caused his parents to lose control of the plane. Can I have a hug?

'Leg'.

P.S. Do you have a single lost sneaker? My toes are cold!

Saddened but also relieved, Jennifer looked up at Eli saying, "I'm not sure if I need to cry or laugh. Instead of choosing, I'll trust you boys to take care of business." She then got up from the table, kissed John on the forehead and warned, "You be careful!"

John smiled, "I will, Mom."

She then hugged Stephen and said, "Welcome to the family." She moved from Eli, to Benji, to Sammy to 'Bastian, hugging each boy. Kissing her husband, she said, "Work in the morning. Good night all."

Jim promised, "I'll be up soon, Jen."

The boys all said, "Good night," then waited until she had left the room.

Almost bouncing with anticipation, John asked, "So what do I do now?"

"Kiss again. That was cuuuuute!" Sammy giggled.

Turning to his new boyfriend, John smiled; ready, very willing and able. Stephen playfully complained, "I've been hoping for my first kiss forever. Now it's getting like kindergarten show and tell."

John took hold of both Stephen's hands. Once again, they lifted

off the floor a few inches. Wrapping their arms around each other in a tight embrace, John and Stephen levitated a few inches higher. Finally, John whispered, "I really do love you, baby." Stephen whimpered then hurried to kiss John. This time though, they almost shot to the ceiling and again, John bumped his head.

Benji giggled as he lightly punched Eli's new arm. "Told ya we shoulda brought your spare crash helmets."

The two hovering lovers only sputtered briefly, but seemed to forget about any lessons to be learned and kept on kissing.

Jim asked, "Does it mean anything that they rose so quickly this time?"

"Yeah, they need to get laid," Sammy muttered under his breath.

"You got a one-track mind, babe!" Benji giggled. "Actually, we're watching it now, me and Eli on the T.K. side and the cute boys we call boyfriends watching the mental side."

"So the more willing they are, the faster the levitation?" Jim pondered. "Interesting."

Eli tapped his comm-badge and asked, "Hey Draco, you think you can arrange a set of padded ceilings here?" Looking at John's dad, Eli said, "You're right, Jim, but we are trying to figure out just what John is doing differently. This is a new twist on the skill; at least in how it's being applied by John."

"Sure, one completely padded-ceilinged-house comin' up!" Draco giggled. The ceiling of the kitchen shimmered slightly. "Should help keep the noise down when Prez and Keith get it busy," he mischievously added.

"If they're like Cory, there's not enough padding in the Universe to do that." Eli giggled. "Jim, 'Bast thinks he might have figured out something about what is happening. We'll find out if he's right once the two lovebirds decide to take a break to breathe."

Hearing that their demonstration was sufficient, John and Stephen slowly lowered, but since neither was willing to separate, they remained hovering inches above the floor.

Since the boys were safe, Jim smirked, "This house is built well, but I'm sure a little padding and sound proofing could only help. As for Keith and Preston, if they don't take a break soon, I might be forced to lock them in a bedroom."

Contentedly snuggling Stephen, John softly offered, "They had a break today, Dad. Cory Short made 'em take time off."

Relieved, Jim cheered, "Oh! Thank goodness!"

"Now if Cory could just follow his own advice," Eli giggled. "Hey, John, you think our brain-leech boyfriends can look in you guys' heads while you're floating there?"

Feeling Stephen becoming nervous, John softly shushed his boyfriend and assured, "It's okay, baby. It won't hurt at all, I promise. Just stay with me." Stephen relaxed again then John nodded at Eli, "Go ahead."

Sammy and 'Bastian nodded and began their scan, keeping a respectful distance from the two boys to help them stay comfortable. After a few minutes, they both smiled; at the same time the two floating subjects blushed and giggled. "Okay, I think we've got it," Sammy announced. "Eli, Benj, stand by for dumping."

"Go for it," Eli replied.

Sammy completed the dump into Eli's mind, and then, after a moment for Eli to sort through it all, the boy giggled and said, "It's interesting. You've always been an empath, John, but when you became an N-Gen your mind opened up a lot more. You've always had the other abilities, but you've only used telepathy once before your change. Now, even with the basic training and Vulcan legal stuff the other guys gave you, you're still using your other abilities as if they were empathy."

"What do you mean?" John asked curiously.

Eli smiled, "You read people's minds and see images, pictures, feelings, desires, flavors, all that stuff. You don't usually hear the words they are thinking, but still understand what they are thinking as you interpret it through your empathy. You can talk to other minds, like a telepath does normally, and could listen the same way, but you're just doing it different. Same for your telekinesis. You've been shown how to do the beginning stuff; exploding carrots, floating your brothers and others around; but the higher stuff, like floating yourself up and more, you were meant to find out for yourself. It's just that you're doing it by going through your empathy first! So, when you're with Stephen, you're super happy. When you kiss him, you are literally walking on air. Your triggers for telekinesis are empathic. That's it. You need to find out exactly what those triggers are, then learn to not hit them when you are kissing your boyfriend. Or, when you both go further, you'll really join the 'Mile High Club'!"

Stephen blushed and hid his face. John giggled, "I'll work on the triggers. I guess what I don't understand is, why Stephen? I mean, he's the first person I've ever wanted to kiss. Would the same thing have happened if it were Lindsay, Tommy, Brandon or Vicky?"

"To a degree, but not to the same level," Benji giggled. "What makes this so obvious is that it is Stephen."

"Me?" Stephen incredulously squeaked. "Why me?"

"Because you're special," Eli said with a smile, yet dead seriously.

"I know that," John smiled. He and Stephen floated just a little higher as they hugged tighter.

"Well, yes... but not the way I meant," Eli giggled. "He's a resonance chamber for you, bro! You put in ten parts of power, you have an effect of one hundred or something. Since it's Stephen you like, your power output is increased by being near or in contact with him. That helps you, right now. You can learn quicker what the trigger is so that you don't flip it when you kiss or cuddle and feel good faster because he amplifies anything you do so you'll see it easier!"

Jim Hundser leaned back in his chair chuckling, "Oh no."

Letting go of Stephen for a moment, John turned to his father and asked, "What's wrong, Dad?"

Shaking his head, Jim smiled, "Nothing's wrong. Stephen acts as a power amplifier, raising ten to one hundred. You know what your brothers will say, don't you?" John thought for a moment then shook his head. Jim chuckled, "I can hear them now; introducing Stephen Marr, the Power Rimmer." All six boys cracked up and howled laughing. Throwing his arms up in defeat as he stood, Jim said, "Since I know everything will work out fine, I'm going to bed." Holding his son and Stephen by the shoulder, Jim grinned, "You two stay under a roof until you figure out how to control your triggers."

"DAD!" John loudly laughed, and blushed just as much as

Stephen. The other four laughed even harder.

"No matter what you might think, I was referring to the triggers in your mind, not the other ones!" Jim then turned to Eli, Benji, Sammy and 'Bastian saying, "You boys are welcome to stay the night if you like. I hope to see you again tomorrow."

"Holding hands won't be a problem, will it?" Stephen shyly asked as Jim walked out of the room.

"Do it now," Eli giggled.

They did, and both found out that they were about an inch or so off of the floor.

"How do we walk?" John giggled.

Eli shrugged and said, "Try it anyway."

They did and found that John was subconsciously moving them along as if they were.

"We're walking in the air!" John sang through his giggles, "We're dancing in the moo-oonlit sky!"

"Well," Eli cracked up, "at least you can do that outside until you learn control! Just anything more, stay under something solid."

"Or tie your ankles to a lamp-post!" Sammy howled laughing.

* * * * *

During the time John was alone with Stephen in his bedroom, practicing his kissing and floating skills, Keith had said it was time for Dewi, Richie, Geoff and Dillon to join the nest. Jennifer had taken the youngest FCC kids home with her and got them settled in the nest.

Bruce had taken the other young kids back to the Hundserts' house. Bruce, Gage, Sammy, Dee and Jonah played video games for a while before also going to sleep. Meanwhile, Prez and the remainder of the Core Rimmers were with the eldest FCC kids, getting them acquainted with the base then situated in dorm rooms.

Shortly after eleven that night, while John was with Stephen and his parents in the kitchen, Prez and the Core Rimmers were in the Command Center. They picked up their own new Clan Short ID cards. Then they began discussing how to deal with passing out credit and ID cards to more than a hundred kids. Pages were printed out listing each kid by name so each kid got their cards. Right after breakfast would be the best time to get everyone together. Kaleo and Tory would ask Sean and other older kids for help getting the job done as quickly as possible. Kaleo was hoping for four boys and two girls on the team passing out cards. If they could get four or more on the team, they might get all the cards passed out in an hour or less.

Just before they left the Command Center for the night, Donnie Williams called for Prez once again. A new potential threat had been identified through the mole and others captured during the FCC operations. They called themselves the Human Liberation Front; a group that believed any and all alien interference in Earth governments were to be eliminated. This not only affected Hawaii because of the King's recent declaration, but also several mainland American States. The UNIT Intel division needed to do more 'research' to find out more about the HLF. Donnie and Prez promised to share whatever information they learned about the HLF with each other then said goodnight.

Clapping his hands like one of the four- or five-year-old kids, Keith sarcastically shouted, "Oh goody! Greed, zealots and arrogance!" He then bent over, pointed his ass at Prez and grabbed his

ankles yelling, "Thank you, Sir, may I have another!"

Prez swatted his partner's butt and sniggered, "You're so bad, babe." Kaleo and many of the others in the Command Center howled laughing. Grinning insanely, Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey only shook their heads.

Covering his mouth with his fist, Kaleo yawned then turned to Prez and asked, "If it's okay, I'll go over to the dorms and talk with some of the kids, so we can get a team organized to pass out the credit and ID cards?"

Prez nodded, "Kewl, dude. Have a good night. See ya tomorrow." Everyone else said goodnight too and Kaleo turned to leave.

Keith hurried to Kaleo, held his shoulder then whispered, "You and Tory, in the store before; it's totally kewl with us, dude. We just gotta be careful we don't get caught by the kids, ya know?"

Kaleo blushed and whispered, "Thanks, Keith. There was no chance of waiting."

Keith whispered, "Next time, make yourselves more comfy. Have Daileass transport you back to your room for a quickie." He then put his clenched fist out. Kaleo knocked knuckles with Keith then left the Command Center.

Stepping up to the console, Drew said, "Computer; Internet search, news articles, Republic of Hawaii, United States of America, Canada, Mexico, Japan, China."

The computer responded in an emotionless adult female voice. [Ready. State additional search parameters.]

"Human Liberation Front; attack or diplomat or embassy or representative or threat. January one, 2000 through current date, inclusive. Display results. Execute."

[Processing. Estimated search completion time, thirty minutes.]

Corey stepped closer to Drew and from behind, wrapped his arms around Drew's waist. Corey sighed, "I get all tingly when you talk logical to the computer."

Drew blushed and softly said, "Love you so much, Cor."

Prez grinned, "Okay you two, you're relieved..."

"Don't say 'relieved'," Keith cackled.

Prez chuckled, "Okey doke. Go home, dudes."

Corey giggled, "Thanks, Prez."

Turning around and taking Corey's hand, Drew said, "Good night, guys."

Everyone said good night to Drew and Corey then, as they left the Command Center, Paulie said, "Hey, boss?" Prez turned to Paulie and Paulie pointed at one of the display screens saying, "Check it out." A bus had stopped at the corner of North Road and Iroquois Avenue. A bunch of male and female kids got off the bus. Some pointed down North Road then the group started walking.

"All right, here we go, dudes," Prez pleasantly said. "Our first group of teen street kids."

Keith frowned and wondered, "How should I contact Jamie, Jacob and Beau?"

Prez giggled, "Any one of three should work."

Keith tapped his comm-badge and called, "Jamie?"

"Hi, Keith," Jamie replied. Then came the all too familiar circular reply from the Terrible Trio; "Those kids," "are dressed," "real nice." "We'll meet you," "at the gate," "to check them out."

Rapidly shaking his head because the telepathic triplets had obviously seen what everyone in the CIC had, Keith grinned, "Thanks, dudes. See ya in a few. Out."

Derrick called Doctor Andrews while Mike called Doctor Wiener. Both doctors were asked to meet the team at the North Road gate.

Prez told Paulie, "We're going home after this, Paulie."

Paulie nodded, "My shift ends at midnight, Prez. I'll let the next shift know at turnover."

The team of four Core Rimmers said good night then walked out of the Command Center and outside. With towels in their hands, but still wet, Jamie, Jacob and Beau ran up to them.

"You guys need to know about John and Stephen," Jacob cackled.

While they continued to walk to the gate, Beau giggled, "They kissed a little while ago."

"You shoulda seen it," Jamie cheered, "They actually floated way up in the air!"

All three pointed to the area by the CIC and in unison chanted,

"It happened right over there."

"Together, they make an awesome couple," Jamie added.

Beau stated, "Stephen's only a little empathic."

Jacob explained, "When John gets close to Stephen, his N-Gen powers grow."

All three simultaneously laughed, "We've never seen anything quite like that."

"Whoa!" Prez loudly chuckled. "They kissed and actually levitated?"

All three boys laughed and nodded. Beau tapped his comm-badge and called, "Chaz, tell Prez and the guys what happened to John."

Over Beau's comm-badge, Chaz chuckled, "He scared the piss out of us. Swear to God, he and Stephen were up at tree-top level. We were all worried they'd fall and got them a trampoline."

Keith groaned, "I don't know if I should be happy or scared to death."

The terrible triplets surrounded and pounced Keith then began tickling him. "Be happy!" they all laughed as Keith struggled to protect himself from six hands tickling him at once.

Beginning to tickle the three terrors, Prez saved his partner from further abuse then asked, "So how does this work?"

"Our friends from Orlando were here," "Eli, Benji, Sammy and 'Bastian," "They checked 'em over to find out what the deal is,"

"Stephen's like an amplifier for John."

In unison, they all cackled, "Your dad called Stephen the Power Rimmer!" The eldest four Rimmers cracked up and agreed to keep the name.

By this time, Drew and Corey had finished making love in the shower then went downstairs to get ready for bed. They walked down the flights of stairs into the basement and couldn't believe their eyes. Hovering about a foot above the couch cushions, Stephen was laying on John.

John smiled, "Hey."

Corey complained, "I'm so jealous! I've always felt like that when Drew hugs me, but we've never actually floated."

"Stephen's my little amplifier," John explained. "He's empathic and my powers are based on empathy. When we're close, like now, this is what happens."

Stephen softly offered, "I was so scared when I got here. Ever since meeting John, I've felt so much better, like everything else is candy. It was love at first sight."

Running his fingers through Stephen's wavy auburn hair, John assured, "I love you too, baby." Stephen softly kissed John and they floated up another two feet.

"Wow!" Corey and Drew chimed.

Holding the kiss, John transmitted to Drew; *'I've never felt like this before. I feel like I could easily lift Aloha Stadium, but I just don't have the time. How can I be so happy and so peaceful at the same*

time?'

"That's love, bro," Drew smiled.

The next second, a bunch of two inch tall Lilliputians came running out from nowhere and started firing off grappling hooks with long ropes around the floating boys. "Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade inflatables!" they all squeaked, and they started lowering the laughing boys back to the sofa.

"What the hell are these guys?" Drew exclaimed.

"Imaginary," came a giggling voice from behind them. Corey and Drew turned to find a boy with bright yellow eyes and mischief clearly showing on his face. His white blond hair gleamed in the lights of the room. His impish grin was infectious. "I've never come across a psionic like your brother, so I was curious. Be scared."

"Who are you?" Corey asked cautiously.

"A friend of Levi's," the boy giggled. "You can call me Lord and Master." Levi's hand appeared from nowhere and slapped him. "Okay, okay," the boy giggled again. "I'm Quint. Nice to meet you." Looking down at the tiny troops, he called, "Now, my minions, start the Parade."

"Yeah!" all the Lilliputians cried. John and Stephan started getting towed about the room, laughing hysterically all the while.

Approaching the North Gate security station, the team of seven saw the two doctors standing by. Outside the gate stood a group of twelve teenage boys and girls. One boy was constantly tilting his head from side to side and holding his left arm. Another boy had a black eye and several fresh wounds on his face, neck and arms.

One of the UNIT security guards named Billy met the Core Rimmers. "Hi, guys," Billy softly said and gestured to the group behind the gate. "Some of these guys have weapons; knives and mace."

"They're afraid," Jamie said.

"Of their pimps and tricks." Jacob added.

"They don't mean no harm." Beau finished.

Prez nodded and softly asked, "What do you think, Billy?"

"It's my job to keep this base and you guys safe," Billy answered. "My gut says to call a company over."

Keith asked, "Can they be scanned as they enter?"

Prez agreed and added, "To see which has the weapons?"

Keith and Billy nodded, but the triplets assured, "They just want in. They'll give up the stuff as soon as they feel safe."

Prez thought for a moment then told Billy, "You and Andy stay sharp. I don't want them scared or shot on arrival. Let 'em in, Billy."

Billy went to the security station. A moment later, Andy came outside with his M-16 drawn. Billy opened the shield portal at the gate. All twelve kids hurried in at once. Many of the boys and two of the four girls were complaining about having to wait, exposed to possible identification. Hearing a disturbance, six security gorillas came from out of the trees and rapidly approached. The twelve street kids backed up against the closed gate, frightened of the massive beasts carrying M-2 rifles and grenades.

Prez gestured for the UNIT troops to lower their weapons and

grinned, "Now that I've got your attention, let me say welcome to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division. I didn't invite y'all here to be scared. The gorillas are only responding as they've been trained. As long as you're kewl, they will be too. There's one thing we have to get out of the way right now. We know some of you have knives and weapons. You won't need them here; you're all safe now." Keith bent down and picked up a small pebble then tossed it at the shield, just to the side of the kids. The stone bounced off the shield and fell to the ground. "That's a Starfleet quality shield around the entire base," Prez explained. "It's active now, for the first time, because we already know the pimps you guys worked for are going to be pissed off. They could fire bullets at that shield until they're blue in the face and out of ammo; nothing will hurt you here. So please, just toss your weapons and mace to the ground. Then we can introduce ourselves and get acquainted."

The twelve kids began unloading various knives, small bats and cans of mace. When they stopped, Prez glanced at Jamie, Jacob and Beau. All three nodded and approached the street kids. Billy and Andy began gathering the weapons on the ground. Prez clearly said, "Y'all know me from TV, so let me introduce my teammates. To my right is my boyfriend and life partner, Keith Hundser."

Keith waved and smiled, "How's it goin', guys?"

Prez then said, "To my left are Mike Gibbons and Derrick Seibert. They're also boyfriends and partners. We're the oldest of the eight leaders of this division."

"You're the oldest?" One of the girls incredulously repeated.

Prez chuckled, "Yep, 'fraid so! The other four members of our team are either asleep or taking care of other things. You'll meet

everybody tomorrow."

The boy that had been holding his arm and tilting his head to and fro grunted then groaned, "OW! What the fuck?"

Beau looked up at the boy and asked, "Feel better now?"

The boy turned his head left and right then rotated his sore arm around. He smiled, "Yeah, I do."

"Your shoulder was dislocated," Beau said. "Next time some jerk-off throws you into a brick wall, get up and kick him in the nuts."

The boy grinned, "I should've thought of that."

"You did!" Jamie and Jacob giggled.

Shaking his head, Prez chuckled, "That little black haired boy is Beau, a Clan Short healer, and the other two, Jacob and Jamie are telepaths. Their job is to check you guys over. Whatever they can't fix, they'll tell me about. The only other people that will have to know about your overall health are the two gentlemen standing by the security shack." Gesturing to the two men, Prez said, "This is Doctor Andrews, pediatrician, and Doctor Wiener, child psychologist."

"We don't need no head shrink!" one boy sourly bitched.

Prez moved forward and stood before the boy that spoke. He was about the same height as Prez, but a little thinner. Knowing what was about to happen, Derrick, Mike and Keith glanced at each other then shook their heads. Prez softly said, "You're here so I assume you want to get off the street, correct?" The boy nodded and Prez took one step back then loudly said, "There are over a hundred kids on this base right now. I'm responsible for them, my friends, their families and everyone else that arrives across five bases. We'll give you a

warm bed in a nice room and plenty to eat whenever you want it. We'll give you education and recreation of every sort. There's no price or cost for any of it. Nobody's gonna tell you to bend over and get ready for a good fucking. If or when you find somebody you like and they like you too, then you can make love together, consensually. The last three days those hundred kids, ranging in age from four to fifteen, have been here recovering from their own nightmares. They never got paid for sex. They were abused by adults that were supposed to be taking care of them. If the telepaths tell me that any of you need to see either doctor, then you will see them. I'm not jeopardizing the welfare of all for one person. If you'd rather go back to the streets then let me know now." Prez paused and locked eyes with each of the kids.

Beau looked over the group with a critical eye before adding his own two cents. "Before any of y'all go coppin' an attitude, you better understand somethin' right now. My two boyfriends there started out on the street, and were the reason that a group of great kids became Clan Short. I had no living relatives, and was almost killed by the sperm donor of a kid who became my brother. That asshole decided that since he couldn't screw my bro, nobody else would get to either. When you walked through those gates, you were asking to join the Family of Cory Short and to enjoy all of the benefits of that family. With those benefits comes the responsibility to allow yourself to be helped to become the person you should have been all along. It's all or nothing; either agree and find out just how great you really are, or turn around and make the stupidest move in your entire life. Your choice, but once you make it, you're determining your entire future."

Prez asked, "Does anyone want to leave?"

Eleven heads shook, but one of the smaller boys tentatively held up his hand.

Prez went over to the cute little African boy. He was looking

really sharp in his black suit, red dress shirt and black neck tie. Prez asked, "Don't tell me you want to leave?"

The boy shook his head and asked, "Is this like a military base?"

The Terrible Triplets helplessly giggled. Prez grinned, "Is Clan Short military? No, we're not. We have a military division. Anyone that decides they'd like to participate in our military organization just let me or any of the Core Rimmers know."

"Core Rimmers?" the tallest boy laughed. Turning away briefly, Prez rolled his eyes and realized that he had slipped. The Triplets, Derrick, Keith and Mike cracked up. Unable to control themselves, Andy and Billy quickly turned away and tried not to laugh. All the street kids began snickering.

Mike giggled, "Clan Short Pacific Rim Division was too big. We weren't Clan five minutes before Prez called us The Rimmers." All the new kids lost it and howled.

Derrick loudly laughed, "We've got Toy Rimmers, a Soul Rimmer, a Mouth Rimmer, Shiny Rimmers and most recently, a Power Rimmer. Prez is the Head Rimmer."

After waiting for everyone to calm down, Prez chuckled, "ANYWAY! We're a big family, not military. We have the facilities to protect ourselves, like the shields and base security."

Prez heard the Triplets in his mind then went back to Keith, Derrick and Mike, gesturing for them to take over introductions.

Keith went over to the four girls. They were: British fourteen-year-old Cassie Cornwall, American thirteen-year-old Caitlin Axford, German fourteen-year-old Helena Schmoll and Irish fifteen-year-old Mollie Mcelhannon. Derrick and Mike spoke with the eight boys.

They were: American fourteen-year-old Christian Beresford, American fifteen-year-old Lance Elling, African sixteen-year-old Jessie Foulds, French-Canadian fifteen-year-old Darren Devault, American fourteen-year-old Hugh Gartrell, African thirteen-year-old Clinton Foshee, American fourteen-year-old Allan Farabaugh and American fifteen-year-old Darryl Don.

Prez returned to the group and whispered to Cassie, Christian and Darryl to please see Doc Andrews. In only a few minutes, the Doctor had scanned them with his tricorder and administered inoculations via hypo-spray. Mollie and Clinton were asked to go with Doc Wiener to the CIC dining room for a private conversation. Waiting for Doc Wiener, Clinton and Mollie to pass, Prez then led everyone else to the CIC dining room. The Terrible Trio decided they were going to go check on John and Stephen then join the nest.

Much to everyone's surprise, Kekoa had gotten two extra chefs to man the grill in the kitchen for the incoming kids. Three of the older kids recognized Kekoa even though he was wearing fatigues. Once everyone got their food, Kekoa stood on a chair and told every one of his own history, from orphan to street hustler to rescued Clan Short kid to UNIT Colonel and Commander of the Pacific Rim detachment. Prez was thrilled. The one thing he and everyone else had forgotten was extra chefs to feed the kids. Kekoa took it upon himself to get the chefs and tell his story. Prez went into the Command Center and wrote a message to Adam Casey, giving accolades and the highest praise for his new UNIT Commander.

Once Kekoa had finished his pep talk, Derrick, Mike and Keith told the kids about current sleeping arrangements. By the time Prez came out of the Command Center, the kids had already finished eating and had decided to sleep in the dorm. They were in the process of deciding who would buddy up with whom. All Prez did was tap his

comm-badge and call Kaleo.

Kaleo immediately replied, "What's up, Prez?"

"Sorry to bug you, dude, but we have a bunch of newbies here," Prez said. "The only problem is, I don't know how many rooms are occupied in the dorm."

"Got it covered, Prez," Kaleo said. "Out of fifty-two rooms in this building, we're using twenty-nine. We've got one hallway upstairs with girls now. That's eleven rooms and twenty-two girls. Down here, we've got thirty-eight boys in eighteen rooms."

Prez asked, "Shouldn't that be nineteen rooms?"

"Four of the seven- and eight-year-old boys are sharing one room. They feel better that way."

"That's great!" Prez beamed.

"Until they get more comfortable, they'll stay together."

"That's sixty kids," Prez cheered. "You're awesome, Kaleo! Expect at least one big hug when I see you. You might even get four hugs."

Kaleo giggled, "I didn't do it; the kids did it all by themselves."

"You got bonus points twice today in my book, Fist Rimmer!" Without intending to, Prez caused another roar of laughter from the new kids. Even Kekoa was shaking his head, but chuckling.

"We'll meet you there after we take them to the store for clothes, Kaleo," Prez smiled. "We've got four girls and eight boys."

"No problem... Head Rimmer!" Kaleo giggled. In the

background, Tory was obviously hysterical.

Soon, all the newbies had dumped their trash. Their empty trays, plates, glasses and silverware were left by the restaurant-grade dishwasher. When everyone was gathered, Keith explained, "We're about to take you guys and girls to the store for clothes and suitcases. Just so ya know, we won't walk there. We use something like Starfleet transporters. It feels a little weird the first few times, being one place and then suddenly being in another place. Is everybody ready?" Getting nods and vocal affirmations, Keith then tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass?"

"Ready when you are, Keith," Daileass cheerfully said.

"We're outta here," Keith confirmed.

A moment later, the entire group of sixteen was standing in the CIC store. A couple of kids shouted expletives of various sorts. Prez, Mike and Derrick grinned or chuckled. Keith giggled, "I said it felt weird!"

Prez turned to Mike and Derrick saying, "Show the girls through please, buds? Keith and I will show the guys through."

Derrick nodded, "No problem, Prez."

But Mike playfully complained, "Oh sure! We get to be embarrassed with bras and panties!"

Wide-eyed and giggling, Keith teased, "I've seen you in your frilly panties. Kinda cute, but ya really need to shave the panty lines, dude." Some of the street kids were smiling and softly chuckling, but the rest obviously couldn't tell if Keith was serious or not.

Shaking his head, Mike grumbled, "Fucker."

Derrick smiled and assured the kids, "He wears boxers all the time, as far as I know."

Prez grinned, "To each his own," then slid in closer to Keith and wrapped him in a warm embrace. Each of the twelve kids grabbed a shopping cart. The four Core Rimmers led them through the various departments: socks, underwear and pajamas; sandals, shoes and sneakers; summer wear; shirts; jeans; belts, hats and accessories; dress clothes; coats, jackets and ponchos; toiletries and finally, suitcases.

Another hour was spent getting the boys through the store, checked out and their suitcases packed. Then Mike and Derrick got the girls checked out and packed. Seeing they were almost finished, Prez tapped his comm-badge and called, "Kaleo?"

"Here, Prez," Kaleo replied. A television could be heard in the background.

"We're almost done in the store, dude."

"Me, Tory, Sean and Horacio are standing by in the first floor rec room."

"Kewl, bud. See ya in a few minutes."

Once the final suitcase was packed and everybody was ready for transport, Mike called, "Daileass?"

"Shiny Daddy?" Daileass giggled.

Rolling his eyes, Mike grinned, "Wise ass. To the dorm rec room where Kaleo's waiting." A split second later, the group was lined

up with their suitcases between a sofa and the piano.

In a thick Irish brogue, Mollie excitedly asked, "How in the hell do you get used to it?"

Derrick shrugged, "Repetition."

On the sofa before them, Tory got up off of Kaleo. At opposite ends of the front sofa, Sean and Horacio turned around. Prez quickly introduced everybody then suggested, "Derrick, Mike, Tory and Kaleo, get the guys situated. The rest of us will take the girls upstairs."

Kaleo said, "Prez, I put signs up at the second floor doorways. The girls want to know when boys are around."

Tory nodded, "Everyone on both floors keep their bedroom doors open a lot of the time. By now, I'll bet most of them are asleep, but there might be someone in the bathroom."

"When you open the door, just shout, 'Boys on the floor'," Kaleo added. "That's almost exactly what the signs say."

Prez smiled, "Necessity is the mother of invention."

Keith added, "Once we're finished, it's bed time."

Mike checked his watch and realized, "It's after two in the morning. We've got a concert at school at ten in the morning."

Everybody split up and started to show the newbies to their dorm rooms. Walking up the stairs and carrying Mollie's suitcase, Keith softly said, "Hey, Daileass?"

"What's up, Keith?" Daileass asked.

"We're gonna need wake up calls in the morning, dude."

"Say when," Daileass said.

Keith suggested, "Nine?"

Prez said, "Make it eight forty-five."

Keith agreed, "I'm gonna need some coffee."

Into each of the Core Rimmer's sub-vocals, Daileass said, "Wake up call at eight-forty-five Hawaii time. Do you want alarms or music?"

"Music," all four chanted.

"Classic rock?" Daileass suggested, and all four agreed.

"Thanks, Daileass," Prez yawned. Stopping at the second floor landing and opening the door, Prez hollered, "Boys on the floor."

Referring to how tired they were getting after their third rescue group in one night, Keith softly joked, "Almost literally on the floor."

While the two leaders and everyone began walking down the second floor hallway, Sean softly said, "We left a few doors open down at the end of the hall. You can pick which room you like."

Prez told the girls, "They're all very much alike. Only the carpet, wall colors and game systems are different."

Beyond the bathroom and before the rec room, four bedroom doors were left ajar. Once again, the four girls were pleasantly surprised at the spacious rooms and amenities. The four split in half and chose two rooms across from each other. Prez and Keith told them to get with Kaleo in the CIC dining room for orientations after

breakfast. The boys said good night and started back down the hall.

Glancing between Sean and Horacio, Prez said, "I'm not prying, but I am curious; are you two a couple?"

Sean and Horacio grinned at each other. Horacio explained, "I'm bisexual, Prez. Yeah, we're messin' around together, but since Sean's gay and I'm bi, we're both free."

"We're free in more ways than sex," Sean happily said. They started back down stairs and Sean added, "There is one dude I'm very interested in. He don't know it yet, but I have been watching him."

Horacio asked, "Should I tell them?"

"I can do it!" Sean giggled. "It's that dude that was playing keyboards with your band earlier."

Prez and Keith excitedly shouted; "Troy?"

"Is that his name?" Sean asked.

Prez couldn't help laughing. Keith answered, "His name is Troy Faris. His mom's one of the housekeepers and yes, he is gay."

At the first floor landing, Prez leaned against the door and chuckled, "Would you like us to introduce you to him?"

"Hell yeah!" Sean laughed. "If he's really as cute as he looks..."

"Sean can stop beating his meat," Horacio interrupted.

"HEY!" Sean laughed and uncontrollably blushed. "I didn't even know his name!"

"Am I lying?" Horacio grinned at Sean. "Did you or did you not

tell me that he gave you a raging boner?" Keith and Prez cracked up.

Sean cackled, "Yeah, but let's not put the cart before the horse, so to speak. He might not like me or I might not like him. He's definitely eye candy though."

Keith smiled and promised, "We'll get ya hooked up sometime tomorrow, Sean. You take it from there."

Reaching for the door handle, Prez warned, "Troy's really shy, as best as I can tell."

Keith agreed, "The only reason he got on stage is because..."

"Keith!" Prez loudly squealed.

"What?" Keith cackled, "I was only gonna say that the telepaths knew he wanted to jam."

"Shy is good," Horacio confirmed, "Sean's not exactly the most outgoing person around."

Sean only nodded, but Horacio, Keith and Prez noticed a dreamy, faraway look in Sean's eyes. They all began chuckling. Opening the door, they went down the hall. Several bedroom doors were still open. When they noticed Prez and Keith out in the hall, Nick and Roger, two of the boys picked up at Hawaii earlier that evening, hurried out of their room in their underwear just to say hello.

"How're you guys doing?" Keith pleasantly asked.

The two boys cheered, "We're GREAT!"

"This place is really awesome," Nick gushed.

Roger nodded, "It's like the best hotel; big beds, televisions and

game stations in every room."

Horacio grinned, "We're choosing which room we want based on the game stations."

"Is it working out evenly?" Keith wondered.

Horacio nodded, "I think so. Most of us don't know one game station from the other. We've been trying them both out."

Grinning at the two younger boys, Prez slyly asked, "Will it still seem like a resort when school starts?"

Obviously less enthusiastic, Nick and Roger hummed. Keith, Sean and Horacio chuckled. Prez grinned, "Come on, you guys, even I have to go to school. But I will tell you this; Clan school won't be anything like your other schools. There will be placement tests and teachers for the basics; reading, writing and arithmetic. Depending on your placement scores, you could find yourself in more interesting advanced classes. You could take trade school classes like carpentry or auto mechanics or computer programming. One of those computer classes is taught by Patriarch Cory Short. There will be special military classes over at the UNIT base here on O'ahu, or in Utah, USA. Other classes are available in Florida or Des Moines or even in Wales, U.K."

Seeing a spark of interest in both boys' eyes, Keith added, "We spoke with the Clan education adviser today. He asked if me, Prez, Mike and Derrick would be interested in teaching music classes. We're talking everything from music appreciation to music performance and theory. You name it, the Clan schools can teach it."

"Don't forget our close affiliation with Starfleet either," Prez reminded. "If you've got the right skills, you'll get recommendations

and could attend Starfleet Academy."

"Really?" the two younger boys delightedly squealed. When Keith and Prez nodded, they found themselves on the receiving end of tight hugs from Nick and Roger.

Prez returned Roger's hug and said, "All you guys need to adopt a new attitude. Keep telling yourselves, 'I can do anything if I seriously want to do it enough'."

Roger looked up and smiled, "Thanks, Prez." Nick repeated the sentiment to both Prez and Keith.

"Any time, dudes," Prez assured.

"Spread the word," Keith said.

Prez then informed them; "Drew's working on setting up our own division website so all these little pieces of information can be shared with all the kids."

Keith said, "Until the site's built, things are going to be largely word of mouth."

Snapping his fingers, Prez said, "Daileass, I want cork bulletin boards in every dorm, on every floor, by the doorways and in each rec room."

Daileass asked, "How large and where exactly, Prez?"

"Twenty-four inches by thirty-six inches, landscape orientation, forty inches high off the floor so even little tikes can see and read from it."

Daileass said, "There's one by Kaleo's room now, Prez. Is that

what you want and how you want it?"

Prez turned around then went and checked it out. Keith, Sean, Horacio, Nick and Roger followed Prez. Hanging perfectly centered on the wall and at the height Prez instructed was a new cork bulletin board. Humming uncertainly, Prez checked with the others; "Is that too high? There could be little kids, five, six or seven years old trying to read from this."

Everyone turned to Roger for his opinion since he was slightly shorter than Nick. "I don't know," Roger said, "The overall height's okay, I guess. The lower half would have to be 'specially for kids announcements. Then it should work all right."

Keith praised the boy, cheering, "Good job, Roger."

"That'll work, Daileass," Prez said.

"All dorms are done, Prez," Daileass replied.

Tilting his head, Keith grimaced, "It's real low tech for a place filled with so much high tech stuff."

"It'll get the job done until we get the web site up," Prez said. "After the web site is running, we could use these for 'this dorm only' stuff or even the kids' artwork."

Kaleo and Tory returned from the other hall to find the group standing outside his room. "Lookin' for me?" Kaleo grinned.

Prez pointed at the bulletin board and told Kaleo, "I just had an idea to help with communication, Mouth Rimmer... or should I say, Fist Rimmer?" Nick and Roger began giggling.

Kaleo laughed, "I prefer Mouth Rimmer."

Bouncing his eyebrows, Tory seductively growled, "So do I!" Everyone gathered cracked up.

Kaleo chortled and appeared to change the subject. "Prez, I need to show you something."

Prez said, "Sure, dude, as long as it's relatively quick."

Keith nodded. "We have to wake up for school in the morning."

Horacio said, "We'll say good night and let you guys take care of business."

"We'll be helping with the ID cards tomorrow morning anyway," Sean explained. He, Horacio, Roger and Nick said good night then went back to their rooms.

Tory unlocked the door and led the way in. Entering the room, Kaleo pointed at two stacks of boxes beside the stereo. The first stack was cartons of Wet, KY and AstroGlide lubricant. The second stack was three cartons of Trojan Lubricated condoms. Each of the three cartons were different sizes; regular, Magnum large and Magnum extra large. Keith and Prez grinned.

Prez gave Kaleo the hug he had promised and declared, "You rock, dude. There's so many trivial things like that I completely forgot about." Stepping back from Kaleo, Prez asked, "You took that upon yourself too?"

With Tory wrapping his arms around him from behind, Kaleo nodded, held his boyfriend's arms and giggled, "Kinda had to."

"Besides you two being a couple, the great thing is, you thought of the other guys too," Keith expressed.

Prez glanced at the boxes again then turned to Keith, shook his head and grinned, "Extra large! And the box is opened! Dear God in heaven, I couldn't begin to imagine."

Keith, Kaleo and Tory cracked up. Then Tory offered, "Regular works for me. I'm completely average; six inches long and five inches in circumference."

Prez grinned, "Regular for me too. Six and a quarter by five and a half."

Keith and Kaleo grinned at each other. "Come on!" Tory giggled and swayed excitedly, pulling Kaleo around with him. "You say it or I will," Tory warned.

"Regular," Kaleo blushed, "Six and a half by five and a half."

"Omigod!" Keith groaned. "I can't believe we're talking about this."

Prez prompted, "Tell 'em, Keith."

Keith sighed then grinned, "Seven by six."

Kaleo and Tory incredulously hollered, "SIX? A LARGE! HOLY SHIT!" They then turned to Prez for confirmation.

Prez nodded, wrapped his arms around Keith then giggled, "It's a bonus." While Kaleo and Tory roared hysterically, Keith turned ten shades of red and shook his head.

To make matters worse, in Keith's ear, Daileass giggled, "You stud! Half a dozen hard disks just crashed!"

Draco warned, "Watch it, mate."

Over-tired and playful, Prez shared, "Being director of this division has nothing to do with how I act alone with Keith. We're versatile all the time."

Kaleo and Tory were surprised. Kaleo smiled, "We are too, but we thought it was because of the orphanage."

Shaking his head, Prez confirmed, "I don't think it has much to do with the orphanage. There are times when our roles change. That's just the way it is; that's love. Derrick and Mike are the same. I'm not sure about Drew and Corey. If they aren't versatile now, I'd bet money on them eventually becoming so."

Wanting to change the subject, Keith wondered, "Just curious, but who asked for the extra larges?"

"You'll never believe it," Kaleo devilishly grinned.

Prez thought aloud, "The tallest, biggest and oldest guy here is Roy Angula."

Tory cackled, "Nope! Try again."

Keith hummed, "Until Roy showed up, Horacio was the tallest and biggest."

"You're off track completely, Kaleo grinned, "Go the other direction."

Prez begged, "Please don't say it was someone thirteen or younger?"

Shaking his head, Kaleo honestly said, "I gave lube to the twelve- and thirteen-year-old kids. None of them, except Tory, asked for rubbers. They know I got 'em if they need 'em though."

"Fourteen and thin?" Keith softly considered. Kaleo and Tory nodded.

Prez asked. "Tall or short?"

Kaleo answered, "Taller than me, about the same height as you two dudes."

Tory reminded, "You've both already seen him naked, but that's all the clues you get."

Prez checked with Keith. "Almost all these dudes we've seen."

Keith softly listed the fourteen-year-old boys on the beach Friday and Saturday. "Kaleo, Keanu, Liki, Hank, Sean or Horacio."

"Liki and Hank aren't much taller than Kaleo," Prez recalled.

Tory cackled, "Ooo! They're burnin' up they're so close!" Kaleo only grinned and nodded.

Little light bulbs almost flashed over Keith and Prez. They both softly chanted, "No."

"I have no proof of this," Kaleo grinned, "just his word and what size rubbers he asked for."

Tory's eyes flashed mischievously and he whispered, "Nine by six and a half."

Keith and Prez gasped, "No way!"

Kaleo grinned, "We may never know for sure unless something happens in plain sight for everyone to see."

All four shook their heads then Prez locked eyes with Kaleo and

asked, "Can I give Tory a hug?"

Kaleo nodded and said, "Sure," but couldn't get Tory to release his grip. After a few moments of playful struggling, Tory let go.

Prez gave Tory a hug and said, "That's for keeping Kaleo happy."

"It's so easy and so much fun too." Tory giggled.

Keith gave Kaleo a hug saying, "For doin' an incredible job dude."

They all separated and Prez reminded, "We're outta here early tomorrow for our school concert, Kaleo. You're in charge until we get back."

"About eleven-thirty, dude," Keith added.

"You about covered everything already, Prez," Kaleo smiled. "All I have to worry about is more incoming kids while you four are away."

"Even if you do, you know the drill anyway," Prez assured. All four said good night then Prez and Keith left the room. On the way home, Keith gave Prez hell for sharing cock sizes. Laughing, Prez blamed Tory for starting it. They then discussed another very long and busy day. The Pacific Rim Division was growing by leaps and bounds. Cory and Sean were a cute couple, as were Adam and JJ. John was now an N-Gen and he had a boyfriend; one that could make their little brother literally float in the air. They promised to find the time to have a chat with John and Stephen. Their first trip to school turned out really well, all eagles and ferrets considered. Mrs. Diaz could've passed out from all the shocks, but she didn't.

Quietly walking in the house, they went directly downstairs. About twenty Teddy Bears waddled away from the stairs and retracted their claws. The nest had shrunk considerably over the last three nights; from about one hundred and twenty, to about ninety, to forty-nine of the youngest kids, four ferrets, and the seven Core Rimmers. Stephen and John were spooned together. Kicking off their sneakers and stripping off their clothes, Keith and Prez joined their sons in the nest and quickly fell asleep after an eighteen hour long day.

Only a few hours later, about seven-thirty in the morning, Dewi, Kokaku, Richie and Geoff woke up. The four youngest boys had heard noises upstairs. Together they climbed the stairs and went directly to the bathroom. Geoff and Richie taught Dewi and Kokaku to wash their hands after peeing. But the two four-year-old boys couldn't reach the sink. So the five-year-old nephews lifted their four-year-old uncles. The issue of uncles versus nephews never came up between the boys however...

At the kitchen dinette table, drinking their first cups of coffee, Jennifer and Jim Hundser heard two little boys loudly laughing, "Gramma and Grampa!"

"Mammy and daddy!" The two other boys screamed.

While the silly argument continued, Jim grinned at his wife. "You realize we'll be in our mid to late fifties when they reach eighteen?"

Smiling widely and nodding, Jennifer playfully whined, "I'm already getting too old for this." The sound of tiny feet rapidly climbing the basement steps was added to the boys' argument.

Then little Carmella raced by in her new pajamas. "Mornin', daddy! Morning, momma!" the girl shrieked as she ran down the hall

and upstairs on her own bathroom mission.

The pitter-patter of more feet on the basement steps was heard by the two adults. Jim reached for the pad of paper and pencil then began hastily scribbling. Jennifer wondered, "What are you doing, Jim?" Murakami, Shimizu, Cesar, Felipe and Dillon opened the basement door then ran into the bathroom with Dewi, Kokaku, Geoff and Richie. They did not bother to close the bathroom door, but just gathered around the toilet and pushed their underwear down.

Without looking up from his frantic work, Jim loudly responded over the sounds of four boys arguing and five boys pissing. "A quick family tree. It's only a matter of time before the boys come in here asking if we're grandparents or parents. I can only hope a visual will settle the problem."

The four youngest boys stormed out of the bathroom. Approaching Jennifer and possessively wrapping his arms around Jennifer's arm, Dewi sternly told Geoff and Richie, "My mammy!"

"You're all correct," Jennifer helplessly smiled at the forceful tone of voice and thoroughly disgusted expression on her new son's face. Now she only had to wait for Preston to make it official.

Geoff frowned and wondered, "How can that be?"

Jim said, "Gather around me and I'll show you." All four boys hurried to either side of Jim's chair. He then pointed to the little bubble characters he had drawn then said, "This is me and this is my wife," He connected the first two bubble characters with a line.

Dewi wondered, "Hows come ya don't got a willie and Mammy ain't got boobies?"

Jim grinned, "I forgot," then rapidly drew the correct body parts.

Noticing the oversized breasts and penis her husband had drawn, Jennifer grinned, "We will discuss your artistic interpretations later."

"I'll look forward to that," Jim grinned, but then continued on with his explanation. "This is Keith and this is Drew and this is John. They are our sons so we're their mommy and daddy, correct?" All the boys nodded, so Jim drew lines connecting each to the line between himself and Jennifer's exaggerated caricature. He then added appropriate appendages between his son's legs before Dewi asked about it. "Along comes Preston. He falls in love with Keith. And here's Corey falling in love with Drew. Here's Stephen, the new boy that loves John." Three new connecting lines were drawn. "Remember Saturday morning, when Joel made us part of Clan Short?"

Again the boys nodded, but Dewi frowned, "I wasn't 'round."

"But here you are, Dewi, and here's Kokaku, Bruce and Carmella." Jim drew four new lines connecting them to himself and Jennifer. Circling the entire row of kids, Jim said, "Everyone in this group are our sons and daughter. Now that we're Clan, Keith and Preston adopt Richie, Dee, Gage and Sammy." Quickly, more lines connected those four to the line between Prez and Keith. "Over here is you, Geoff. You're Drew and Corey's boy, correct?"

"Yup!" Geoff proudly declared, "dems my Dad and Pop!"

Again Jim circled that entire row, saying, "This is two rows away from me and my wife so everybody here are our grandsons. So you see, you are all correct." Gesturing at Geoff and Richie, Jim said, "You guys are our grandsons." Turning to Dewi and Kokaku, Jim said, "Since you're only one group away, you're our sons." Cutting off the inevitable argument over which is best, Jim said, "Everybody here

is our family. You're all the best things that ever happened to us."

Obviously satisfied, Richie hollered at the ceiling, "Daileass, a bowl of Cocoa Puffs with milk."

"I can get you breakfast, Richie," Jennifer softly said. "I can get all of you breakfast."

Daileass giggled, "It's really all right, Mrs. Hundser, but I'll meet you halfway." On the dining room table appeared boxes of Cocoa Puffs, Coco Pops, Fruit Loops, Frosties, a gallon of cold milk, ten bowls and ten spoons. Daileass giggled, "In the dining room, guys. All you have to do is pour, Mrs. Hundser."

All the boys turned around to look. Dewi squealed in delight; "COCO POPS! I *LOVE* Coco Pops!" He then ran into the room and wiggled his way into the nearest chair. As if Dewi had rung the meal bell, Carmella came down stairs as fast as she could. The other five boys in the bathroom raced to the table and squirmed into chairs.

Walking into the dining room with her husband, Mrs. Hundser said, "Thank you, Daileass."

"You're very welcome," Daileass giggled.

Opening the first box of cereal, Mrs. Hundser said, "We really need to get to know each other better, don't we?"

"I'd like that," Daileass replied, and then added, "I do have some information for you and Mr. Hundser."

Pouring cereal for Dewi and then beginning to add milk, Jennifer queried, "Oh?"

"Neither of you really need to hurry to work," Daileass said.

"About six hours ago, Teri Short began making phone calls. She has already found replacements for both of your old jobs. To Teri, Clan Short is the primary concern. She realizes you're both juggling too many eggs."

Dewi looked up and carefully said, "Mammy? The milk?"

Jennifer Hundser looked down and gasped as she realized she had poured too much milk. It had overflowed out of the bowl and onto the table. Dewi instinctively flinched, ready for a whipping. But Jennifer only apologized, "I'm sorry, Dewi. Mommy was distracted." Dewi looked up awestruck at Jennifer. Dewi began to realize more completely that his old mammy was bad and this new mammy was really nice.

Dealing with new Clan adults was familiar to Daileass. He disconnected himself from the speakers while he cracked up and cleaned up the mess. Dewi was provided a fresh bowl of Coco Pops with milk.

The two adults glanced at each other occasionally while feeding the hungry kids. They then went to the living room, sat down and sighed. Jim Hundser then looked up and softly called, "Daileass?"

Only just beginning to calm down, Daileass choked back a giggle and said, "Yes Sir?"

"I'll be honest with you, we're conflicted. We've worked all our adult lives."

Jennifer Hundser added, "We carefully chose our careers and enjoy the work we do."

"Pardon me, but all that is obvious," Daileass said. "Your sons and foster son are testament to your values and abilities as parents."

Joel and his team saw it; Donnie, Emily, Adam and all the UNIT here saw it; the Northeast division kids and their families saw it; Cory Short, his brothers and their sons saw it yesterday. I can assure you, Teri Short did not have to pull any strings. The hospital and legal firm were both very willing to concede to Clan Short priorities. Not because you're bad employees, but because you found work with employers that care as much about children and justice as you both do. It's guaranteed you'll both get your final paychecks. All you both need to do is a little turnover to make sure your replacements are up to speed on the cases you're working on. Once you and your replacements are comfortable, come back home, check on the kids then go over to the FYS building. According to my records, there will be sixty ex-C.P.S. employees looking for work either today or over the next few days. You have work to do here. Your sons have been working their cute butts off the last three days. If you'll please go over to the sofa, I'll show you your sons in action."

The Hundserts moved across the room to the sofa. The television turned on. Daileass played video with audio of the rescues at Maui, Hawaii and Ewa Beach. All ten kids at the table finished their breakfasts and joined the adults in the living room watching their fathers or older brothers doing what they do. Each of the kids recognized Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Drew, Corey, John and even Kaleo. Most amazing was Kaleo at Hawaii dealing with Bill Devine and Prez at the Ewa Beach main gate greeting the street kids.

When the clips were complete, Daileass seriously told them; "Stephen's only a little empathic, but a very sensitive kid. He was frightened beyond adequate description until he met John. They complement each other in ways no one in the Clan has seen before. Every relationship is unique and so is theirs. John stayed awake talking with Stephen and reassuring him until one in the morning. Drew and Corey were home about eleven-forty-five, but stayed with

John and Stephen until they were ready for bed. Mike and Derrick didn't make it to the nest until two-forty in the morning. Prez, Keith and Kaleo were working until almost three. Then they talked and released some tension by goofing around until ten minutes after three. Then they all went to bed.

"It's yours, The Gibbons', The Seavers' and The Seiberts' values coming out through them. Each of them do their bit just like their parents do. Your jobs are here with Clan Short now."

Jim turned to Jennifer and said, "It was highly likely that we'd be doing turnovers to replacements anyway. Teri just expedited things."

"The six-hour time difference is keeping lines of communication limited," Daileass reminded. "It's already after two in the afternoon in Orlando." After a moment's pause, Daileass said, "Stand by please." Another few moments passed then Daileass said, "Teri Short is having a conversation regarding Pacific Rim Division. Joel wants to visit. He was rather insistent about it. Now they're deciding when. If they decide before you leave for work, I'll let you know when they'll be arriving." Daileass then transported two comm-badges to the coffee table and added, "If you've left for work, I can contact you when Teri arrives with these communications devices. Would you like training now?"

Jennifer said, "I've seen the boys just tapping them when they chirp."

"Keep them with you at all times, preferably on your shirt or blouse. They're also tracking devices. That's all you really need to know for now," Daileass said.

The Hundserts chanted, "Thank you, Daileass."

Jennifer added, "We'll get ready for our last day of work now."

"Any time," Daileass giggled, "Hey, kids, ya wanna see something really kewl?" Ten different positive replies burst forth from the living room. "John is awake. Go downstairs and check it out."

All the kids hurried back down to the basement. Any chance of the others in the nest remaining asleep was shattered when ten kids began squealing excitedly at the sight of John and Stephen, still horizontal, but hovering four feet off the floor. Forcing his eyes open, Keith saw them, groaned and pulled a pillow over his face. Some of the other kids that hadn't seen it before rubbed their eyes, then bounded up. Carmella, Dewi and Kokaku were underneath John, jumping up and poking him in the back, amazed that the couple were moving higher from the pokes, but then slowly lowering down again. John and Stephen began laughing hysterically into their kiss and suddenly lowered to only about a foot above the nest.

Still lying down, Mike began singing; "Got a crazy feeling I don't understand, Gotta get away from here."

Derrick and Prez joined in and sang along. "Feelin' like I shoulda kept my feet on the ground. Waitin' for the sun to appear. Mamma's gonna worry, I been a bad, bad boy." At that line, John howled laughing while the others continued singing. "No use sayin' sorry, It's something that I enjoy. 'Cause you can't see what my eyes see."

Lifting the pillow off his face, Keith sang; "I can see it, I can see it!" then joined the others singing; "And you can't be inside of me, flying high again!"

While the band continued singing, John began telekinetically lifting the kids. Imitating his parents, Bruce crossed his legs into the

lotus position and hummed. Since the band were still singing through the screeching rug rats, John warned Stephen of what was about to happen then powered up and lifted his brothers, Corey, Reyes, Mike and Derrick.

Seeing the pretty bright blue shining from John's eyes, Stephen wasn't frightened since he'd been warned, but was thrilled nonetheless. Kissing John caused the couple and everyone else to float higher. Raising one arm and touching the ceiling, Reyes finally began laughing loudly at the situation.

Finished singing, Keith asked, "Hey bro, I don't suppose you could float my lazy ass up and into the shower?" Prez cackled at the question from his way overtired lover.

John was not able or willing to respond since he was kissing Stephen so he sent; *'I prob'ly could, but can't guarantee you won't bump into a few walls on the way.'*

"Oh well," Keith sighed, "never mind then."

Mike stretched then yawned, "Coffee; I must have coffee and lots of it."

Derrick asked, "Hey Prez, do you think we could get Doc Andrews to give us a shot of B vitamins?"

"I don't see why not," Prez replied.

Derrick said, "Coffee will get me through the concert, but I'll be draggin' ass after that."

Drew sweetly called his brother and asked, "Let us down, please?"

Powering down, everyone began lowering back to the floor and Stephen slowed his tickling of John's tongue. Soon, everyone was down on the cushions and pillows on the floor.

Some of the little girls that had not yet been to the bathroom raced up the stairs before the giggling boys had a clue they needed to go. All four bathrooms had been occupied by the girls and there were already lines formed. Having a revelation, James Hahn told Bane Kahele; "Dorms!"

"And quick!" Bane giggled. Then the two boys raced out of the house in their boxer shorts and directly to the dormitory with their Teddy Bears struggling to keep up.

Remaining in the basement nest were the Core Rimmers, their sons, two new little brothers and Carmella.

"Hey, John?" Corey sweetly called. "Can I ask a favor?"

"Yeah?"

"If I kissed Drew right now, could you... you know?"

John giggled, "Sure!"

Rolling over on top of Drew, Corey chanted, "Ready?"

John grinned, "Set!"

"Go!" Corey said, then quickly kissed Drew. The couple began levitating and settled about four feet off the floor with their blanket draped over them.

Standing up, Geoff giggled happily then jumped up and pushed his fathers a little higher, but only for a moment.

Derrick hummed then said, "There's one minor issue with this activity."

"Only one?" Mike cackled.

"Oh?" John wondered. He then turned his head towards Derrick and asked, "What's wrong, bro?"

Pointing up at Drew and Corey, Derrick smirked, "Drew's naked!"

Prez, Keith and their boys chuckled, but Mike teased, "Why are you looking?"

Derrick laughed, "My eyes are open and he's right there, barely four feet away and four feet up! It's not like I have much choice in the matter!" Corey simply changed his hold on Drew from the upper back to his buns and naturally, had to give them a firm squeeze through the blanket.

Drew broke the kiss and wondered, "What would happen if we rolled or moved, bro?"

John hummed then said, "You could, but I'll bet it would feel weird."

"Weird how?" Corey asked.

"There's nothing to push against at all," John reminded.

Stephen added, "When we're standing and kissing, our feet just dangle. There's nothing pushing or pulling us up. When we come back down slow, our toes touch the floor first."

Proudly smiling at his boyfriend's explanation, John said, "You and Drew would have to use only yourselves, your muscles working

together to roll or move."

Drew softly asked Corey; "Ya wanna try?" Corey nodded then dove back down for another kiss. Together they rolled towards their left where Prez and Keith were with their boys. The blanket draped over Corey's back fell on top of Prez, Sammy and Richie.

Prez laughed and Richie giggled hysterically, completely covered by the blanket.

Pulling the blanket off his face and seeing way more of his Uncle Corey than he wanted, Sammy snickered, "That's just wrong!"

Keith cracked up, setting off Dee and Gage in fits of giggles.

Mike sat up and said, "I can wait no longer. Coffee is what I seek!" He and Derrick stood, found their boardies and put them on then were followed by their sons to the stairs. "We'll meet you dudes after breakfast," Mike said.

On their way up, Derrick wondered, "The Scoobies are already gone?"

Mike shrugged, "Sixteen to twenty hours sleep is what I read is normal for ferrets."

Keith reminded, "They're ferret-human hybrids though."

"They get by on much less, like three," Mike said, "They go to sleep with us, but are already gone when we wake."

"Five hours is all we got," Derrick figured. "We'll have to ask them if they're sleeping enough." The family went through the kitchen then out the back door on their way home for breakfast and showers.

Keith sat up and pulled the blanket off of Richie. Keith

suspiciously grinned, "What're you doin'?"

"Hidin' from Unca Corey's butt!" Richie giggled. John and Stephen cracked up.

Drew said, "Let us down, bro."

John shook his head and teased, "I dunno. I was thinking of leaving you there. A hundred Rimmers might like to see this. Fifty cents a pop times a hundred is fifty bucks! Can you meet the fifty?"

Wickedly smiling, Corey warned, "We haven't got you back for yesterday, John. An opportunity will present itself."

Drew agreed, "It's even more likely now that you've got a boyfriend too."

Realizing that he and Stephen could someday be caught in a compromising situation, John huffed, "Oh, all right," then lowered Corey and Drew to the nest.

Getting up, Prez and Keith pulled on their boardies. Prez found his T-shirt and tapped his comm-badge. "Doc Andrews?"

A moment later, the Doctor replied, "Good morning, Preston."

"I've got a small favor to ask, Doc. We were up late and now we're awake early. There's a concert today we need to be alert and functioning for. Could we get shots of B vitamins, please?"

The Doctor hummed thoughtfully then answered, "I have an alternative idea. An additional Doctor from Starfleet has been assigned to our division by Doctor Leonard McCoy. Doctor Elaine Howard is with me now."

The woman then said, "Hello, Preston. I've been briefed about

all the children here. Since I arrived at six local time, I worked with the chefs already. I recommend that you go to the CIC for highly nutritious breakfast shakes. They were developed by Doctor McCoy. The shakes are excellent for malnourished and undernourished children, but they wouldn't do the rest of you any harm."

"Excellent!" Prez chirped. "I look forward to meeting you, Doctor Howard."

Doctor Andrews said, "We're on our way to the CIC dining room now, Preston."

"We'll meet you there," Prez said.

"Andrews out."

Keith suggested, "How about we take our boys to the dorm showers, baby?"

Prez agreed, "Six of us could get done more quickly."

Drew checked with Corey then said, "We'll join you with Geoff."

Glancing around at the youngest kids, Prez asked, "Did you guys eat already?"

While most of the kids nodded or simply answered 'Yeah,' Dewi bounced around happily about his Coco Pops.

Keith scooped up Carmella and asked, "Did our little sister get a bath last night?"

Carmella giggled, "Uh huh, Mommy gave me a bath b'fore bed."

"Excellent!" Keith cheered, then asked, "Do you need help

getting dressed?"

Shaking her head, Carmella answered, "I can do ev'rythin' 'cept tie sneakers. Mommy'll help me."

Keith put his sister down and she hurried up the stairs.

John noticed that Stephen had a worried expression on his face. Being malnourished and underdeveloped for his age, he wasn't in any rush to be naked around a bunch of other boys.

'It's okay, Stephen,' John sent, 'We'll stay here and shower together.' Feeling Stephen's continued trepidation, John paused then sent, *'I would never ever make fun of you!'*

Nodding, Stephen smiled, "Let's go," then got up off of John.

Sitting up and standing, John said, "We'll meet you at the dining room," then sent to his brothers and Corey, ***'Do not tease us in any way! I can deal, but Stephen can't.'***

Everyone nodded and Keith said, "Kewl, bro."

While everyone was climbing the stairs, Prez brought up the rear and tapped his sub-vocal. "Daileass, are Derrick and Mike in the shower already?"

"A very hot shower," Daileass giggled, "they're steaming up the camera lens."

Prez grinned, "I was going to have you tell them to meet us at the CIC dining room, but I'd better do it."

"Patch complete, Prez," Daileass giggled.

"Dudes!" Prez called. "Breakfast at the CIC today. Doc Andrews

has some vitamin fortified shakes for us that will keep us goin'."

Over the sound of the running shower, Mike asked, "No shots?"

"He and the new Doc say the shakes will be enough."

Derrick asked, "When did we get a new doctor?"

"It sounds like she was here at the crack of dawn."

Daileass loudly laughed to only Prez, "Don't say 'crack'!"

Derrick said, "A lady doctor? That's especially good for all the girls."

"Exactly what I was thinking," Prez shared.

Mike said, "We'll meet you for breakfast then."

"Later," Prez chirped. Walking around the main floor of the house, Prez grinned, "Draco?"

Draco replied, "How can I help you, Prez?"

Prez snickered, "You need to keep Daileass more occupied, if you get my meaning?"

"He does!" Daileass playfully assured.

Draco replied, "It's our job to watch everything. Daileass just gets a bit more enthusiastic about the job."

"I can't help myself!" Daileass giggled.

"Someday!" Draco warned.

While John and Stephen went upstairs, Corey, Drew, Geoff,

Keith, Prez and their four boys went outside then began walking to the dorm. Now that they were finally alone, John asked Stephen, "Did you get to eat three times a day?"

Stephen shook his head and sadly answered, "Never. Usually once a day at school. Every now and then, there'd be something at home; usually peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, sometimes Ramen noodles."

"Everything's gonna be fine now," John confidently assured, then stepped into his bedroom and pulled his T-shirt off. "I forgot your clothes," John griped. He then said, "Daileass, where's Stephen's suitcase?"

Daileass replied, "Outside your house, John."

"Transport it here, to my bedroom, dude," John said. "From now on, he's with me." The suitcase appeared beside the bed. Stephen smiled and shook his head. "What?" John grinned.

"I just don't know what I stepped in or when I stepped in it," Stephen honestly shared. The two boys began undressing and Stephen said, "Sunday, my mom and me moved out of our apartment because we had to. We slept in the car that night. After we talked all morning and most of the afternoon, she dropped me off at the Clan base in Hawaii late yesterday afternoon. The security guys there fed us. It was a big sandwich, a salad, a pint of milk, an apple and cookies. It was more food than I've ever had at once. I couldn't even finish all the sandwich. The other guys there ate all their food and one took my salad, another took the apple and another took my cookies."

Obviously annoyed, John excitedly asked, "They took them from you?"

"No, sorry. I hadn't touched 'em so, when they asked for them, I

gave them away."

"Oh, that's okay."

Already naked, John led Stephen, still in his threadbare briefs, to the bathroom. "This house is huge!" Stephen loudly giggled.

John nodded and went to the toilet. "It's bigger than the house we used to have." Pointing his dick at the bowl and beginning to pee, John glanced at Stephen. "Don't ya have to go?"

Stephen blushed, "I'll wait."

Wondering what he could say, John sighed, "Com'ere." Stephen took a few steps closer, but remained away from the bowl. John patiently explained, "Our other house had two bathrooms; it was less than half the size of this house. My parents, Keith, Prez, Drew and me all lived there. Us guys learned to share a bowl if we needed to."

"Didn't you ever feel embarrassed?"

"No," John chortled, "what's worse, pissin' your pants or sharing a toilet?"

Stephen giggled, "Pissing your pants."

Finished leaking, John flushed the bowl then turned to Stephen. "We're boys; we all got dicks. Prez moved in after his folks died. He's two weeks older than Keith, but Keith's dick is a bit longer than Prez's. I've seen Drew and Corey too. They're older than me and each of their dicks is different than mine. Prez and Mike are the only two on the team that have circumcised dicks. My friends Jeff and Tommy are my age and even their dicks are different than mine. I saw yours last night and it's a bit longer than mine. We're all different some way

or another; there's nothin' to be ashamed of."

Stephen blushed, "I just never had brothers or did stuff like this before."

"It's okay, I just want you to feel more comfortable," John said. He went to the tub and turned the water on then turned back to Stephen. Finally out of his briefs and naked, Stephen was relieving himself. John said, "You'll see at the pool later, at least half the guys here swim naked. An added benefit is not having to stay in wet shorts. It don't matter to any of us who sees our dicks. There's girls and adult women around too. When you see a dude suddenly running for his shorts and putting them on, you know what's happened?"

Giggling hysterically, Stephen nodded then reached to flush. Facing John again, Stephen blushed, "He got a stiffy?"

John laughed, "Some of the little dudes don't even care about that."

"They don't know better," Stephen offered.

John led Stephen by the hand into the tub saying, "We do though." Stephen slid the door closed then John turned on the shower. After wetting himself down under the spray, John moved around Stephen to allow him to get wet. Grabbing the soap while Stephen's back was turned, John then began washing Stephen's neck, shoulders and upper arms. "My brothers are gay," John explained, "I never thought of myself as gay or straight, because I don't honestly know, but it don't matter to my family. What's inside a person matters way more than the outside. All I know is I care about you, Stephen. Your past is past. You're gonna get healthier. Someday you're going to grow and maybe get taller than me. It don't matter to me how tall you might get. All that matters is you getting better, being comfortable here with

all the kids and with me."

Choking back his sobs, Stephen said, "John? I told you they teased and bullied me at school. It's because I like boys and they figured it out. I guess I act girly and seem gay."

"First of all, I see a boy in front of me," John seriously said. He then asked, "How does anybody seem gay? Does Keith? Does Prez? Or Drew or Corey? Or me for that matter?"

"No, I'm just different from a lot of boys."

"Yup, you're so different that I fell for you. You're so different that you can make me a more powerful N-Gen. You heard what they said, Stephen. I just have to figure out how to control it." Feeling that Stephen was frightened again, John said, "Turn around."

"I can't."

"Are you crying?"

Stephen nodded.

"Why?"

Stephen shrugged, "Because they were so mean and you're so nice. Because I'm falling in love with you and I'm scared you won't love me back."

John softly begged, "Please turn around?" Stephen huffed then did as John asked. Their eyes locked for a moment then they noticed the other had an erection. John blushed, "From washing you, baby."

Still upset, but because John was similarly aroused, Stephen helplessly giggled, "It felt real nice."

Blushing crimson, John admitted, "I was beginning to worry too. All them hugs and kisses last night and we never got hard."

"You're not angry or nothin'?"

Shaking his head, John admitted, "A little scared too now."

"Of?"

John shrugged, "I think I'm falling in love with you too. I wanna hold you so bad but..."

Before John could finish speaking, Stephen stepped closer and wrapped his arms around John.

John gasped, "Omigod!"

"So warm," Stephen sighed, and then tenderly kissed John.

The communications between Daileass and Draco were flying at the speed of light. Daileass giggled, "Do you think they'll float?"

"It don't really matter," Draco sniggered, "I'm just glad for their sake the house is empty."

"They're getting awfully loud," Daileass laughed.

"Above the shower door, is that the top of John's head?" Draco wondered.

"I think so. They're floating again."

"And calling each other's names as if they've forgotten who's who."

"Uh oh!" both AIs grunted in unison.

Daileass giggled, "Thank goodness you put the padded ceilings in."

Draco laughed, "John would be unconscious by now."

Daileass began counting the numbers of times John's head hit the ceiling. "Six... seven... eight..."

"Nine... ten, eleven, twelve... thirteen..."

"Where'd they go?"

"They're laughing. End of round one, intermission."

"Do you think they'll finish their shower or go for it again?"

"Dunno," Draco giggled, "I've activated the backup water heater, just in case."

By this time, Drew, Corey, Prez and Keith and their sons had finished their showers at the dorm and were walking into the CIC kitchen. The prior day's dirty clothes had been transported home by Daileass. A new display had been added at the kitchen entrance to help kids choose their breakfasts. It showed pictures of the various ways eggs could be prepared, breakfast sandwiches, and waffles versus pancakes. Keith and Prez greeted the chefs. Prez asked, "What's the story behind these shakes?"

"Doctor Howard ordered them," Charles replied. He then explained for the boys, "There are several flavors: chocolate, cinnamon, vanilla, butterscotch, eggnog, apple, cherry, lemon-lime, mango, pineapple, orange and strawberry. Each of the flavors can be mixed with others for variety. Many of the kids have tried apple and cinnamon for an apple pie flavored shake; others have tried various

mixed fruit flavors. We can offer small sample cups."

Looking down at his sons, Keith asked, "What flavor would you guys like?"

Richie delightfully squealed, "We can have shakes for breakfast now?"

Chuckling at their youngest son's enthusiasm, Keith and Prez nodded.

Gage quickly asked, "Can I try the apple pie?"

Sammy said, "I'll try chocolate and strawberry."

Dee hummed uncertainly then said, "Chocolate?"

Richie asked, "What's scutterbotch?"

Prez and Keith helplessly laughed at the mispronunciation. Charles grinned, "It's a very sweet candy flavor."

Gage grinned at Richie and explained, "Butterscotch and chocolate would taste like a candy bar, bro."

"*ALL RIGHT!*" Richie cheered. "Dat's what I'll have!"

Charles went to work getting small sample cups made for each of the four boys and quickly returned. Prez and Keith handed the appropriate cups to each of their boys. Each of them were pleased and ordered their shakes. Keith got a strawberry shake. Prez ordered a chocolate shake. Drew decided on a mixed fruit shake; lemon-lime, mango, pineapple and orange. The chef that prepared it remarked that it was the most unusual shake he had prepared thus far. Corey and Geoff had apple shakes.

Mike and Derrick came in with their boys, got their shakes and coffees then sat near Prez and Keith. Glancing around the dining room, the six Core Rimmers noticed that almost every table had only shake glasses. A lot of the glasses seemed to be less than half full and very few seemed to be empty. Fewer kids had plates of food.

Leaning back in his chair, Dee huffed and grinned, "Dunno if I can finish this."

Gage nodded, "My stomach's about to explode."

"They're just too good to not finish," Sammy smiled.

"Just do the best you can, guys," Prez suggested. "Don't overdo it, okay? Me and daddy could barely finish ours." Standing up, Prez glanced around until he found Doc Andrews sitting with an unfamiliar woman wearing a Starfleet uniform. Squeezing Keith's shoulder, Prez said, "I'll be right back, babe." Keith nodded and Prez went over to the table where Doc Andrews was sitting.

Doctor Andrews and Doctor Howard noticed Prez approaching and stood. The three of them shook hands and Prez grinned, "I have to ask, what's the deal with these shakes? I could barely finish mine and most of the kids seem to be struggling to finish theirs."

Doctor Howard smiled, "A sixteen ounce glass has the equivalent of ten times the Federation's Recommended Daily Allowance of vitamins and minerals in less than one thousand calories. They've been designed by Doctor McCoy for malnourished and undernourished children, but everyone can benefit from them."

Prez incredulously chuckled, "Ten times the RDA?"

Doctor Andrews asked, "You've met the new boy, Stephen

Marr?"

Prez nodded, "Yes, I have. He and my brother John have latched onto each other."

"Even better," Doc Andrews said, "Stephen needs to drink as much as he can of those shakes twice a day until further notice."

"My son Dee is undernourished," Prez told them.

The two doctors glanced at each other. "Sit with us please, Preston," Doc Andrews smiled.

Prez sat down with them and Doc Howard said, "Most of your Clan is in good health, by the book, but they're not like you or your core teammates. What you've seen over the last few days are a bunch of kids that are happy to be out of the bad situations they've been in. They're most likely eating better than they ever have before and, because they're happy, they're burning those calories playing."

Doc Andrews added, "When you asked me for B vitamin shots earlier, I suggested these shakes because they have twenty times the RDA of B-1, B-6 and B-12."

Wide eyed, Prez laughed, "Twenty times? So the kids are going to be even more active?" Both doctors nodded.

"Who are those two boys drinking coffee with their shakes?" Doc Howard wondered.

"Mike Gibbons and Derrick Seibert," Prez answered. "They're part of my core team and band mates." Again the two Doctors grinned at each other. Prez asked, "Is something wrong?"

"No," Doc Howard smiled, "It's simply the combination of the

shakes and the caffeine in the coffee."

Doc Andrews helplessly chuckled, "Your two friends will be high as a kite most of the day."

Prez cracked up then softly chortled, "Derrick's usually pretty mellow, but Mike is the exact opposite."

"Get a rope!" Doc Andrews laughed.

"Make it two, one for each of them!" Doc Howard giggled.

Seeing John and Stephen entering the CIC dining room, hovering a foot off the ground, Prez cackled, "Better make it four ropes," and pointed for the two Doctors to watch.

Jonathan Dupre hurried over to John. Jonathan reached for John and Stephen's shoulders then pushed them down to the floor. The second he released them, John and Stephen rose back up again. A few moments later, Jonathan loudly snickered, "Let go of each other!"

"Not on your life or anyone else's!" John laughed.

Prez noticed Derrick, Mike, Corey and Drew heading into the Command Center.

Jacob, Jamie and Beau hurried over to John and Stephen. In one voice, they said, "Watch what happens when they kiss." Stephen blushed and covered his eyes with his free hand as more kids gathered around.

Feeling his boyfriend's embarrassment, John loudly said, "Come on, you guys! Let us eat first."

Stephen then softly said something to John. Obviously, Stephen wanted to get it over with. He and John kissed then levitated, but

much more quickly than Prez had previously seen.

"Draco!" Jacob loudly laughed. "Padded ceiling in the Rimmer's CIC dining room now!" The sixteen-foot-high ceiling in the dining room shimmered and changed just in the nick of time. When John's head bounced off of the ceiling, every kid in the room burst into applause and cheers. Slowly the couple returned to their previous location about a foot off the floor. They then went to the kitchen for their breakfasts.

"Psionics," Doc Howard muttered, "very interesting indeed."

Doc Andrews smiled, "This is good. Stephen needs someone that cares watching what he eats."

Before Prez could reply, he heard John in his mind. *'I already knew that, bro. I'll take care of Stephen.'*

"John's already aware of it," Prez assured the doctors. "He'll watch over Stephen."

Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Horacio walked in soon after the large mass of kids that had been around John and Stephen scattered in various directions. Sean and Horacio went directly to the kitchen. Finding the first available chair and standing on it, Kaleo said over the PA system; "Can I have your attention please?" When the chatter lessened, Kaleo said, "Last night we received Clan Short ID cards and personal pre-paid credit cards. I need everybody to stay in the dining room after breakfast so we can get them handed out. Prez, do you want to tell everyone how the credit cards will work?"

Prez nodded then got up and stood on his chair. "As Kaleo said, these are pre-paid credit cards. That means you cannot exceed the amount available on the card. These cards are for you to purchase the miscellaneous things that you want; like things for your dorm rooms,

posters, music, video games, and so forth.

"Everybody will get a default weekly allowance. In addition to the allowances, you can each take optional odd jobs of various sorts. I'll repeat, the odd jobs are optional. We're thinking simple stuff appropriate for all the age groups. For instance, little tikes can work with the landscapers cleaning up any litter around the grounds. Older guys and girls can do housekeeping chores or work in the kitchen. We especially need help in the kitchen, mopping floors and running the dishwasher. Our auditorium can be used as a movie theater too. We'll need projectionists and concession stand people. Any one that takes a job will be paid for the work they do. Remember always, you're kids; school and recreation come first, then you can spend time doing odd jobs. We'll work it so that you can do one job for a few hours, then take time for your other responsibilities until you decide that you want to work another few hours."

Prez paused then asked, "Are there any questions?"

Nine-year-old Makaio Ka'aukai asked, "We're really getting allowances, Prez?"

Prez nodded, "Yup. We want you guys to learn responsibility for yourselves, the work you've done and your money. You can't get everything you want all at once, you'll run out of money. That means priorities. What do you want most and do you have the money for it?"

Seven-year-old Lupe Jui said, "Clan Short already gives us everything, Prez. What else could we need or want?"

Prez answered, "If you like flowers and want a plant in your room, get a plant. If you like pictures of snow-capped mountains and want to see that every day, get a poster of a snow-capped mountain. If you're interested in building stuff, you can get model cars, ships or

Starships. All the little, relatively inexpensive, miscellaneous stuff Clan Short doesn't provide is what you want to get for yourselves. If you want to be a musician and are taking guitar classes at our school, the Clan will get you a guitar. Remember, Christmas is coming soon too. Leave some stuff for us to get you for Christmas."

Thirteen-year-old Nicholas Shavers stood and said, "These odd jobs, can we spend time picking up garbage one day, and then a few days later mop floors, and then a day or two later run the dishwasher?"

"Exactly like that, Nick," Prez replied. "We're thinking it takes a certain physical ability to do some stuff, so those jobs require older and bigger kids. However, for picking up litter around the base, we have over seven hundred acres on this base and everyone can participate in that." Prez waited for a while for another question. Since none were asked, Prez said, "Please make life easy for Kaleo and those that will be handing out the IDs and credit cards? Form lines, wait your turn and do what Kaleo and the others tell you to do. Keith, Derrick, Mike and I will be leaving for school soon, but will only be gone an hour and a half. Kaleo, Drew, Corey and John will be here with you guys."

Prez got down off the chair and the chatter level quadrupled. The kids were obviously excited about having their own money to spend. He then welcomed Doctor Howard to Hawaii and the Pacific Rim Division before explaining there were a few 'Director' things he needed to check on in the Command Center.

Stepping inside the Command Center, Prez heard Keith and the others complaining. "What's going on?" Prez wondered.

Drew sighed, "There's virtually nothing about the Human

Liberation Front, Prez."

Keith said, "They've taken responsibility for various things, but so have other militant groups and terrorists. What's real and what's not? Are they full of shit and wanna-be bad guys or are they the real thing?"

"Even the US FBI and CIA public published reports come up empty," Derrick added.

"Okay," Prez said, "We've got Clan Short Intel divisions, the VSO and the UNIT. Share what we've learned with the other divisions and we'll take it from there." Prez started to reach for his comm-badge to call John, but then it surprisingly chirped. He tapped it and said, "Prez here."

Through the comm-badge, John said, "Stephen and me are having breakfast with Nathan and the Terrible Triplets." The three boys blew loud raspberries at John then began giggling. John chuckled, "Everything you, Keith and Drew said and heard, I heard too, Prez. When we're done here, we'll go in there. Jamie, Jacob and Beau want to show me some Intel stuff anyway."

Prez sighed then grinned, "We're gonna have to have a long talk about what you can and cannot hear from us, bro."

John honestly said, "Keith and Drew are the loudest and you're just behind them, Prez. Mom, Dad, Mike, Derrick, Corey, Bruce, Dewi and now Stephen are in my head too. It's just a matter of how much I want to pay attention to any of you." Keith and Drew locked eyes and began thinking of John hearing their thoughts. John huffed impatiently then his eyes blazed azure blue as he lifted Keith and Drew till their heads bumped against the ceiling.

Keith and Drew simultaneously screamed, "JOHN!"

Two twelve-year-old boys walked into the Command Center and grinned at the other two hovering almost three feet off the ground. A younger boy was with them.

Jamie, Jacob, Beau and Nathan cracked up. Still drinking his shake, Stephen glanced at John and the other four boys at their table wondering what was so funny. John evilly grinned, "What did I just say? Who can I hear loudest? Any more questions about what I can hear?"

Looking up at Keith and Drew, Prez chuckled, "No more plotting against our little brother, I guess."

John snickered, "Only if you want the table suddenly turned on you," and then put his brothers back on the floor. His eyes returned to light brown and he finished his shake then said, "Later, bros."

One of the two boys introduced himself to the Core Rimmers. "I'm Caleb Barnes." Pulling the younger boy close, Caleb proudly smiled, "This is Hunter."

The other boy waved, "I'm Noah Barnes. Your new AI is online. His name is Alden."

After each of the Core Rimmers greeted the two boys, Caleb explained, "We're running him through a few tests now, but he'll be available soon."

Prez explained that they had a concert at school and had to leave, but looked forward to chatting during the afternoon. Derrick and Mike struck up a conversation with Caleb and Noah regarding Reyes. Once Caleb was up to date, he tapped his comm-badge with an evil grin. "Hey Marc! You know, for being a gay Android you sure

gotta lot o' kids. You sure you ain't Bi?"

"I told you all that sugar would rot your brain," Marc replied. "What tangent has that warped mind of yours drifted off on this time?"

"I guess that means Austin didn't tell you his big bro showed up, did he?" Caleb giggled. "Are you sure that all you and Danny were doing is sailing?"

"Stuff it, Shrimp!" Marc exclaimed, his blush obvious. "I already know where KC is; I put a tracker on him, so I don't have to hunt him down next time he knocks himself out."

Caleb shook his head. "His other big brother, oh thou of the defective memory! Never mind; you and Danny get some clothes on, we're bringing back company."

"Whatever... unlike you two, we have some decency! Marc out!"

Drew fixed his hair and complained to Keith, "Life's definitely not the same anymore."

Keith nodded at Drew and sighed then reminded Prez, "We gotta move into the townhouse soon, baby."

"Where we're at prob'ly doesn't make a whole heckova lot o' difference," Prez realized. He then went over to Staff Sergeant Jimmy Hayes and asked, "What've you got for us this morning, Jimmy?"

"Nothin' serious, Prez," Jimmy responded. "There's some pending investigations around the Rim that the AIs are still reviewing. The only other thing worth mentioning is a car accident further up North Road, where it turns into 12th Street."

"Was anyone hurt?" Prez worried.

Jimmy explained, "A single vehicle lost control. Four adult males including the driver got out of the Mercedes. We never saw where the men went. Within an hour, a tow truck removed the car."

Prez silently wondered, a Mercedes lost control with four men less than a thousand feet from the base? "We're kewl until eleven-thirty then?" Prez asked.

"Should be fine, Prez," Jimmy replied.

"Please notify our security we'll need to leave for school soon," Prez ordered.

"Got it," Jimmy chirped and then began contacting the eight personal security guards.

"Kaleo's got the ball, guys," Prez loudly said to everyone present. "Drew, Corey and John will be here too if anything gets weird."

Tilting his head and appearing thoughtful, Jimmy softly and slowly repeated, "If... anything... gets... weird?"

Prez grinned, "Okay, weirder."

Derrick joked, "There is a limit to the definition of 'weird', and I think we breezed past that about two days ago."

The Command Center's door opened and John came in with Stephen, Nathan and the Terrible Triplets. At John's appearance mere seconds after his name was mentioned, Keith and Drew shook their heads sadly. First thing, John and his entourage greeted Caleb and Noah. John went to Derrick and Mike and asked, "Do you remember

the names of the street kids rescued last night?" Derrick and Mike both nodded. "Thanks," John smiled appreciatively. "We got ID cards for everyone except the ones we picked up last night." Spinning around to face Prez, John said, "Jamie, Jacob and Beau are gonna show me how to fill out forms for ID cards. Then we're gonna find a new voice for the computer; this one sounds too much like my Principal at school. Another thing we're gonna do is see if we can find out Kaleo's birthday." Prez smiled at John. Their eyes locked and Prez heard John say; *'I know, a Mercedes lost control close to our base. Is that just too weird or what? We're gonna dig deep to learn what we can about the HLF too.'*

Prez cackled, "If there's anything else, you'll let me know?"

"That about covers it, bro," John smiled.

Keith begged, "Please don't change our computer's voice to Woody Woodpecker or something dumb like that. Find something kewl we can all understand."

The Triplets all moaned, "Aww! Woody's kewl!" and then they all began laughing like Woody.

"We're outta here, dudes," Prez chuckled. Keith was closest to the door and opened it for Caleb, Hunter, Noah, Mike, Derrick and then Prez to pass before he followed them out of the Command Center. Derrick stopped at the table where his boys were sitting to tell Reyes that he needed to go with Caleb and Noah, to AI Division headquarters in South Carolina for a checkup. Jonah said that he would go with Reyes.

As the team passed through the dining room, many of the kids greeted each of them by name and gave them words of encouragement for their upcoming concert. Feeling a chill race down

his spine, Prez waited until they were gathered outside before sharing; "Thank goodness they're all chilling out. I don't wanna be on any friggin' pedestal. When people on pedestals screw up, it's a big crash to all that put the person up so high to begin with."

"They're recovering, baby," Keith assured. "The better they feel as individuals, the more they'll see you as just another teenager."

Prez nodded and smiled then glanced around at the security guys. Other than the short military hairstyles the guys had, they looked like any other teen boys. Prez confirmed, "All set, dudes?" Receiving positive replies, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, "Let's jam, Daileass. Outside our school's main entrance, please." For the first time, Daileass didn't reply, but simply followed the order. In front of his school, Prez frowned, "You okay, Daileass?"

"Sorry Prez," Daileass replied. "I'm a bit preoccupied with Alden and trying to make heads or tails out of some real screwy accounting records."

They all began walking towards the school. Prez said, "I'm okay if you are, dude. It's just not like you to say nothing."

To the entire group, Daileass giggled; "On the tits of a barmaid named Gayle, Were tattooed prices of beer, stout, and Ale. And on her behind, For the sake of the blind, Was precisely the same, but in Braille."

In an emulated Irish accent, Draco playfully sang to them; "There was a young gigolo named Bruno, Who said, 'Screwing's one thing I do know. While women are fine, and sheep are divine, Llamas are numero uno!'"

In fits of hysterics, the group came to a halt before the school's

entrance. Prez roared, "I'm so glad I mentioned it now!"

The boys went inside the school and a new voice, their new AI, Alden, obviously now online, continued reciting dirty limericks. "An agreeable girl named Miss Doves, Likes to fondle the young men she loves. She will use her bare fist, if the fellows insist, but she really prefers to wear gloves."

Daileass giggled, "There was a young man named Dave, Who kept a dead whore in a cave. Said he, 'I'll admit, She does smell a bit, But look at the money I save!'"

Outside the main office in tears, the boys heard Draco sing; "There was a young Scotsman called Andy, Who knocked over his bottle of Shandy. He lifted his kilt, To wipe up what he spilt, and the barmaid said 'Blimey! That's handy!'"

"We give! We give!" Derrick laughed.

Daileass got in one final shot. "What're you giving away?"

"Catch me at home in the bathroom, I'll show you!" Derrick giggled.

"Woo-Hoo!" Alden, Daileass and Draco giggled. Then they began arguing who would see what first.

Checking his watch and realizing the time, Keith chuckled, "We really gotta get movin', dudes."

* * * * *

About ten o'clock, Mike's dad, Rob Gibbons, transported from Honolulu back to the Federation Youth Services building with his security contingent. He was now officially the Rimmer Liaison to

Honolulu Police. The gorilla decided to stay with Rob when he went inside. His wife Laura, Derrick's mom and Corey's dad, Anna and Bill, were performing interviews of ROH Ex-C.P.S. workers. Miguel was doing interviews with chefs. The two doctors were meeting with nurses and receptionists. Landscapers were also doing interviews. Lanna Seaver and Carl Seibert were watching over the kids by the pool, diving well and the newly installed playground. Rob did a quick head count of people waiting in the lobby and came up with twenty-four.

During the time Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick were at school, Drew and Corey were in the server room, creating the Rimmers' web site. After confirming that Apache was already set up on the Linux server, Drew began writing the web pages. Corey handled creating the graphics with the Gimp program. The entrance page contained a GIF of a large ring of fire. In the center of the ring was a graphic of the Pacific Rim. They built the menu options across the top and had each catch on fire (or 'flame up', as Corey playfully explained to Drew) when the mouse pointer hovered over the individual options.

John and Nathan were getting all the newest Rimmers entered into the system as Clan members so they could get ID and credit cards as quickly as possible. After John had gotten his boyfriend's information entered into the system, he and Nathan continued with the other boys picked up at Hawaii, the younger FCC kids, and then the group Keith and Prez had picked up late the previous night. It took about half an hour to complete that task.

Then John began going through the various available computer voices. John liked the Terminator voice at first, but after a brief demonstration of the computer reading the Gettysburg Address, John grimaced then searched the list again. John softly rambled, "Bugs Bunny, Charlie Sheen, Chickenhawk, Goofy?" John grinned, "I gotta

hear Goofy reading the Gettysburg Address," and everyone in the room began giggling before the computer said a word. While it was funny, John knew that Prez and Keith would quickly lose their patience waiting for Goofy to finish any short phrase. John re-sorted the list in a descending order. He found Zsa Zsa Gabor, Wolfman Jack, Victor Borge, Robert Redford and a bunch of others before finally hitting upon a winner that wouldn't make his brothers completely insane. John then played the demonstration of Foghorn Leghorn.

"Four score and sev, I say, seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Pay attention, boy! Any o' this gettin' through that little blue bonnet of yours?"

"It's perfect!" John shouted, and spun around in the chair with his feet out and his arms up. "That's what my bros need; an occasional insult to keep them on their toes."

Stephen softly giggled, "You're plain evil, hon."

Slamming his feet down onto the floor, John smiled at Stephen and sent; *'Did you just call me hon? As in honey?'* Blushing because he was around a bunch of boys he had only just met, Stephen grinned and slowly nodded. John got up and began walking over to his boyfriend.

Quickly moving to hold John back by his shoulders, Jacob giggled, "Oh, Draco!"

"Oh, what-o?" Draco playfully sang. John twisted and turned to get past Jacob.

Standing directly in front of Stephen as a last line of defense,

Jamie laughed, "They're gonna do it again!"

Beau crowed, "We need padded ceilings in here too, dude."

The ceiling shimmered briefly and Draco teased, "They're the most padded division in the Clan."

Jacob let go of John and jumped out of the way. Jamie moved away from Stephen. Without further delay, John quickly went to Stephen. The two boys wrapped their arms around each other and kissed. Quicker than they ever had before, they rose to the ceiling and hovered there for about thirty-seconds while the other boys in the Command Center looked on. John pushed so much appreciation and love to Stephen that he shed tears of joy. They drifted back down slowly. Once they had set foot on the floor, the Terrible Triplets began singing, "Slip sliding away, slip sliding away, You know the nearer your destination, the more you're slip sliding away!"

"Shush!" John giggled at the teasing triplets. "We still got Intel stuff to do." He then asked, "How can I find out Kaleo's birthday?"

"We need his feet," Jamie said.

Tilting his head curiously, John repeated, "His feet?"

Beau explained, "Every baby gets tiny foot prints taken and stamped on their birth certificates."

John tapped his comm-badge and asked, "Kaleo, you busy, bro?"

Kaleo replied, "Still got a bunch more cards to pass out, John."

Jacob said, "Hold a foot up to one of the cameras."

"Have your tootsies smile, Kaleo," Jamie giggled.

Kicking off one of his sandals, Kaleo put a foot up on a nearby empty table and said, "Cheese!"

John said, "Snap a photo of Kaleo's foot please, Alden."

"Even his feet are cute," Alden giggled. "It's snapped and on the Intel division console."

Beau instructed, "Now we check Hawaiian birth records."

John said, "He's as old as Keith so for 1990, right?"

Jamie said, "For 1989 too, just in case."

"He might be turning fifteen today for all we know," Jacob added.

John commanded, "Computer, search Republic of Hawaii birth certificates, years 1989 and 1990, using the supplied image for a boy named Kaleo Palakiko. Tell me the date of birth. Execute."

"Hold yer horses there buckaroo!" Foghorn replied, "The search will finish in about three minutes, boss."

While they waited, Jamie, Jacob, and Beau began showing John just how much access he really had. To start it off, they had a little fun, bringing up Admiral Morrow's test scores throughout his entire Starfleet career.

John giggled, "An Admiral with average test scores, mostly. But a 'D' in diplomacy? Puh-lease!"

"I kinda like him though," Beau grinned, as the 'D' suddenly

turned into a 'C'. "I'm givin' him extra credit for dealin' with Cory!"

John smiled, "Can the change be traced back to us? Prez would get pissed off."

The three teachers giggled. "Naw, we give the VSO headaches tracing us. They are about the only ones that can pull it off." Jamie replied. "A double route through Alpha Centauri's secure networks along with a redirect through random Earth government agencies pretty much hides us."

Jacob pressed a few unmarked areas on the screen. "This session is routing through the U.S. Department of Education servers!" he giggled. "That's soooooo fitting!"

Giggling at the irony, John cackled, "Better than the U.S. Department of Fish and Game anyway!"

Jacob giggled. "They're on the list though. There's one other thing; what is the highest level of security encryption that you've heard of?"

Humming thoughtfully, John tried to recall what Drew and Corey had said about encryption. He answered, "Level 6."

"I can break that in twelve-seconds. Justy's working with me to get my times better," Beau bragged. "We use up to level fifteen normally; we will be able to use up to level twenty-five pretty soon."

John asked, "That means we can get just about anywhere, but can be found by no one?"

"If we really wanna hide, we can. Lots of times we don't need to though," Jacob said seriously. "I need to register you with a server,

come over here and stand in front of the console."

Moving over and standing before Jacob, John wondered, "Which system is this?" He then joked, "My handsome face might cause a few fried circuits."

[Identity confirmed. John Hundser access to Clan Short Diplomatic and Intelligence Networks confirmed. Note to Lieutenant Hundser, it is illogical that physical appearance will have detrimental effects on the physical makeup of my circuitry.]

Making a crooked face at the computer's remark, John turned around and griped, "Gotta be Vulcan."

Stephen blushed and giggled, "It's okay, I still think you're handsome, hon."

'I love you too, baby,' John quickly sent to Stephen.

Jamie, Jacob and Beau loudly giggled, "Float break!"

"Not this time," John blushed. He then asked, "What can we find out about these HLF scum bags?"

[HLF Search activated. Interstellar database access pending authorization.]

Glancing at the three teachers, John croaked, "Authorization?"

"You started a search, dude. Just say 'authorization confirmed'; the system knows that it's you by the bio-signature." Beau chuckled.

"Authorization confirmed," John repeated, and then smirked, "Stupid thing should've known it was authorized since I asked for it!"

"You have to verify, silly." Jacob laughed. "It needs to make sure

that it understood you correctly."

[Search initiated. Results to be delivered upon completion.] The system announced.

"Besides, the search is keyed to you now." Jamie added. "Nobody else can access the results."

While they were still waiting for records on the HLF, Foghorn said, "Search complete, I say, the search is done. Kaleo Palakiko was born September sixteenth, 1990. Pay attention to me boy! I'm not just talkin' to hear my head roar!"

Tapping his comm-badge again, John smiled, "Kaleo?"

"Here John, what's up?"

"Happy belated birthday bro," John grinned. "You were born September sixteenth, 1990. Just so ya know, Prez's birthday is September twelfth and Keith's is September twenty-second. You're right between the two of 'em, bro."

"That's great!" Kaleo chuckled. "Can I get a belated birthday cake too?"

"Sure," John giggled. "Tell the chefs your favorite and that we're making up for fourteen missed birthdays with a party of one hundred and thirty." With that, all the kids still in the dining room cheered and began wishing Kaleo happy birthday.

John smiled, "Septembers are gonna be busy birthday months from now on." Too quickly, John's smile flipped upside down and he wiped his eyes.

Concerned at the sudden change, Stephen hurried over and

asked, "What's wrong, hon?"

John sighed, "Remember I told you about Joel?" Stephen nodded and John said, "He's here and hurt worse than I could've imagined."

"We're done here," Jacob quickly assured. "Let's go see Joel."

Jamie offered, "We'll cover the FYS interviews for you later, bro."

John sniffed and nodded, "Thanks, guys."

* * * * *

Over at James Campbell High School, the trumpet player Bobby, who had mysteriously lost his shiny horn the prior day, wasn't participating in the jazz band's recital. His girlfriend Sheryl had been locked in the janitor's closet for hours, until almost eleven o'clock Monday night. When she was first heard banging on the door and calling for help, a locksmith was called. Arriving at the school hours later, the locksmith was unable to unlock the door. He wound up having to dismantle the knob and lock then take the hinges off the door to let the girl out. Completely freaked out after standing alone in a dark janitor's closet for over eight hours, Sheryl didn't even bother going to school that Tuesday. Mrs. Diaz was livid. Both Bobby and Sheryl lost their places in the jazz band and the marching band.

In the CIC dining room, Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Horacio, Sonia and Vera worked as three teams passing out credit and ID cards. Although everything was organized with two lines of boys and one line of girls, the task still took an hour. Many of the kids wanted to know more about the jobs that were available and some were even interested in the hourly rate of pay. All the kids had to do was initial the printed list beside their name for proof they had received the cards. Only two sets

of cards remained at the end; one set for Melonie, who had a scheduled appointment with Doctor Wiener that hour, and one set for Troy Faris. Kaleo tapped his sub-vocal and called Alden. "Where's Troy Faris at this morning?" Kaleo asked.

Alden replied, "He's in his condo apartment, practicing his guitar and singing, Kaleo."

Kaleo hummed thoughtfully for a few moments. Noticing Sean nervously fidgeting, Horacio grinned, "Sean will take them to him, Kaleo."

Almost snapping his neck turning to his roomie, Sean glared at Horacio.

Unaware of Sean's crush on Troy, Kaleo innocently asked, "Would you, dude? I'll ask Alden which apartment he's in."

Sean tried to find a graceful way out, but never said a word before Horacio let him off the hook by saying, "We'll both go over there."

Kaleo then asked Alden which condo unit was the Faris'. Kaleo told Sean and Horacio, "Building one, apartment 5-A; that's the fifth floor on the right side coming out of the elevator."

Tory appreciatively smiled, "Thanks, guys. This saves us a bunch of time," and then handed the two cards for Troy to Horacio.

"We've gotta show the newbies around first, and we're gonna give Melonie her cards, then go hang by the pool and diving well," Kaleo said. "Mrs. Seaver and Mr. Seibert are there managing all the kids pretty much by themselves." Kaleo and Tory stood, held hands and walked out of the CIC, leaving Horacio there grinning and Sean

sweating.

Once they were out of earshot, Sean faced Horacio and softly grumbled, "Why are you doing this?"

"Why are you so upset?" Horacio smirked. "I'm goin' there with you to make sure you actually get there... today! I can see you, roaming around this entire base, wondering how to tell Troy why you're there and what you really want."

"What do I want?"

"Come on, man," Horacio softly smiled. "You want to meet him and get to know him. What happens after that is up to you and him. You could have said something to him last night at dinner. But noooo! We sat at the same table as Troy and his mom, but not a peep out of you." Standing, Horacio pulled Sean up by his upper arm.

"You're forcing this. Why?"

Taking Sean by the shoulders and pushing him forward, Horacio answered, "We've been friends since we met at the orphanage, right?"

"Right."

"You know me and I know you just as well."

Sean nodded.

"I can give you what you need physically, but won't always be there for you. You need what I can't give you, Sean. I want a wife and my own kids someday. You want a boyfriend and partner." Horacio then moved beside Sean and wrapped an arm around his shoulders then softly admitted, "I'm being selfish really. If I found a nice girl and left you alone, how would you feel? Like shit, that's how. I know

it and don't want to chance losing you as a friend. So, I'll help you as much as I can. Just show Troy what you've always shown me, that you can be a real friend and then some."

"But what can I say to him?" Sean desperately moaned.

Outside the condo building, only a few yards from the double doors, Horacio stopped and stood in front of Sean. "Open your eyes, Sean!" Horacio giggled. "Don't just look at him, look around his house. What's in there? What is he interested in? Is there anything you guys have in common? Talk to him like you talk to me. You go in there stutterin' and staring at him, frothing at the mouth and he's gonna think you're a spaz. Just chill! Our friendship has lasted through good times and bad since we were nine years old. Whether you accept it or not, you are a great person."

Since Horacio was being honest, Sean was too. He grinned, "Dude, no one has ever affected me like he already has, and I don't even know him. He's gonna smile and I'm gonna melt; party's over, just like that." Horacio cracked up. Sean giggled, "See, you know it's true!"

Horacio went to the doors and opened one, then gestured for Sean to walk inside. As Sean reluctantly walked past, Horacio followed, saying, "Here's what your gonna do; act like you don't know him or like him; look at his ID and confirm he's Troy Faris then introduce yourself. Tell him you were passing out the cards with Kaleo, since he probably knows him as a Core Rimmer. All the while you're talking, look around his apartment. Pass a simple compliment about something..."

"Like what?" Sean interrupted, and then joked, "Nice apartment, dude?" Sean noticed that on this ground floor there were two

apartment doors on the right and the left sides.

"Yeah!" Horacio laughed, "That or anything else you see. Not his hair, or his eyes, or his face, or his ass."

Sean smirked, "Uh huh, then what?"

"Well, he might say thanks or something else, so strike up a conversation. If worse comes to worse, you can tell him about the ID and credit card. Say what Kaleo said. Say what Prez said. The idea is to say something so he has a reason to invite you inside." Stopping before the elevator, Horacio pressed the button and joked, "Once you're inside, you're set. Now you can talk with him... or jump his bones!"

Momentarily surprised, Sean then shook his head and grumbled, "You bastard," then snatched the two cards from Horacio.

"Yeah, I am," Horacio laughed. The elevator bell rang and its door slid open. Horacio pushed Sean into the elevator and promised, "I'll wait out front for five or ten minutes. If you're not back by then, I'll know we have a success."

The elevator's door began to slide closed and Sean reached his hand out to stop it. It automatically slid open and Sean blushed, "Jeez; I forgot where I'm goin'!"

Barely stopping himself from laughing, Horacio repeated, "The fifth floor, apartment 5-A."

"Right," Sean grinned, "If this don't work, I'm gonna chase you all over this base."

Horacio chuckled then countered, "If this does work, I'm gonna chase you around until you tell me everything that happened." Sean

pressed the button for the fifth floor. As the door began sliding closed, Horacio smiled, "Good luck!"

"I'm gonna need it," Sean huffed. The door finished closing and the elevator began to rise floor by floor. Horacio turned around and laughed, shaking his head, but wondering how he might react, after all the sexual abuse he'd been through, when faced with some girl he really liked.

Wondering what he might be able to say to Troy, Sean glanced around at the elevator walls. Brushing his fingers across the nearest wall, Sean realized it was a real wood wall, not a simulated veneer. Sean absently thought that what he'd seen thus far inside the new condominium was really nice. He looked up at the lights in the ceiling, noticing the new brass fixtures around each of the six frosted glass bulbs. The floor he was standing on looked like it might be real marble. The bell rang twice at the fifth floor and the doors slid open.

Sean stepped out of the elevator and looked around. Just like the first floor, the elevator was at the end of a single hall. However, here there was only one door on each side, not a total of four doors as on the first floor. Obviously, some floors had single bedroom apartments while others had two-bedroom apartments. The lower half of the walls on this floor matched the walls in the elevator. At the end of the hallway, well above where the entrance doors were on the first floor, was a large tinted window. It was about three feet off the floor and went almost to the ceiling. Wanting to catch a glimpse of what the base looked like from about fifty feet up, he walked to the end of the hall and peered outside the window. He was way above the trees and slightly higher than the domed CIC directly before him. To the right were the flat roofs of the dormitories. Sean hadn't realized it before, but all the dorm rooftops had solar panels. The closest one was the building he and the other kids were already living in. Sean noticed

that the UNIT dorm rooftop was set up with armaments of various sorts. Beyond the dorms were the pitched rooftops of the four Rimmer family homes. Over to the left was the roof of the Federation Youth Services building and the parking garage. "I wonder what this looks like at night with the CIC dome and the auditorium lit up?" Sean softly muttered. Knowing it had to be pretty, Sean realized he was just delaying the inevitable, sighed then turned around and went back down the hall.

He stopped and stood before apartment 5-A. There was a small doorknocker in the center, just below one of those security peek lenses. Sean lifted the doorknocker and was surprised to hear a bell ringing. Accidentally, he dropped the two cards. Squatting down and reaching for the cards, Sean mumbled, "An electric bell hidden in the knocker? That's a new one." The door opened while Sean was picking up the two cards.

Troy looked down and grinned. Sean looked up from Troy's bare feet past his legs and khaki cargo shorts to find him shirtless, but with an acoustic guitar hanging off his shoulders. Oh man, Sean silently thought, even his feet and legs are perfect. Quickly standing, Sean blushed and said, "Hi." Looking at the ID card, he confirmed, "Troy Faris?"

"That's me," Troy smiled, but then blushed because his voice cracked for the first time in at least a year. The word 'me' came out of his mouth sounding something like a chipmunk. Too much singing too early in the day, Troy reasoned. Covering his mouth with his fist, he cleared his throat so it wouldn't happen again.

Hearing Troy's voice for the first time, Sean's heartbeat quickened and everything Horacio told him to say fast-forwarded through his mind at once then was completely gone. He stammered, "I... uh... I'm Sean Moorhead. I was helping Kaleo... pass out credit

and ID cards before... earlier, in the CIC?"

Troy thoughtfully scowled and said, "My mom's an employee."

Sean shrugged, "Guess it don't matter; you live on base." Holding out the two cards, Sean said, "The credit card is pre-paid." Troy reached for the cards and their fingers briefly brushed. Becoming light-headed, Sean softly explained, "We all get weekly allowances. We can work odd jobs on base for extra money too, if we want."

Nodding, Troy then glanced at the cards in his hand and softly wondered, "You brought these to me instead of calling me to come get them?"

Feeling his face heat up, Sean nodded and grappled for an answer. "Saw you yesterday," Sean stammered, "with the band, on stage... and dinner last night. Didn't think you'd mind." He paused then asked, "You play guitar too?"

Troy nodded, "Guitar, keyboards and a couple other instruments."

"Kewl," Sean chirped. He then pointed down the hallway and admitted, "I was lookin' out the window. Bet you have an awesome view." Both boys blushed and Sean sighed, "From up here, of the compound, at night, I mean."

Troy nodded and smiled, "Ya wanna come in and check it out?" Not liking how he said what he had said, Troy's eyes closed briefly then he shyly added, "The view... out the windows?"

"Could I?" Sean excitedly squealed. Then he forced himself to relax a little and said, "If it's all right with you, I mean?"

Stepping back and aside to let Sean in, Troy said, "Sure, man."

Walking in the apartment, Sean admitted, "I don't think I've ever been in a building this high up before."

Closing the door, Troy said, "Really? I used to live in New Jersey and went to New York City a couple o' times. I've been to the observation deck of the World Trade Center. Talk about a view! It was a clear day and I'll bet it was twenty or thirty miles in every direction."

Stopping and waiting for Troy, Sean glanced around the kitchen and dinette offering, "I've never even been in an elevator before. If it wasn't for TV and movies, I wouldn't have known how to work it."

Realizing that Sean was a Clan rescued kid for the first time, Troy didn't want to make him feel bad, but couldn't think of anything to say at first. So he took his guitar off and said, "Lemme put this down in my room."

Trying to not stare at Troy's bare chest, Sean nodded then absently followed him through the living room, down a hall, past a bathroom and into Troy's bedroom. Troy's bare back was every bit as attractive as the front though. Slightly above the waistband of his khaki shorts was the waistband of his FTL underwear. In the bedroom, on the queen size bed was a guitar case. Troy put his guitar in the case then turned to see Sean still in the doorway looking around his room. Walking around his bed, Troy said, "Com'ere, Sean." Troy stopped before a set of sliding glass doors and pulled open the blinds. As Sean joined him, Troy smiled, "The CIC looks really kewl at night, almost like a space ship." Gesturing further beyond the CIC, Troy pointed out, "Way out there, you can even see the beach." He then went to the other window, on the adjacent wall, facing southwest,

and raised the blinds.

Sean followed and looked out the second window. "Wow!" Sean softly gasped.

"You can see part of the pool from here," Troy offered.

"Yeah," Sean said, "We're always over there by the pools and rec center."

Troy exclaimed, "There are two pools there?"

Sean nodded, "An Olympic size pool and a diving well." Glancing at Troy, Sean wondered, "How come I've never seen you over there?"

Troy blushed and shrugged, "I'm really into my music. When I'm not practicing, I'm listening to tunes or watching VH-1. I've thought about going to the pool, but then I hear something, take a tangent and forget all about it." Troy chuckled, "The next thing I know, it's dark."

Sean giggled and nodded, "You really should go over, at least to check out what's there. The indoor rec center has bowling alleys, handball rooms, weights and lots o' stuff. There's even a sauna in the men's locker room and a Jacuzzi."

"Yeah, I should," Troy nodded.

"The rainy season's gonna start in December. I'll show you around, if ya want?"

Troy shrugged then said, "I was working on a song before. I think I've got it down pat. If I played it for you, would you give me your honest opinion? Then we can go over to the pool."

"Sure," Sean giggled. "I don't know anything about music, but I can tell when something sounds good."

Going over to get his guitar and then to the stereo, Troy rambled, "I heard this song last night on the radio and I knew it was in my collection somewhere. It took me a while to find it, but I think Prez and the guys will like it." He paused then prompted, "Tell me what you think of this." Sean nodded, but was still standing by the window. Troy grinned and gestured to the bed. "Have a seat."

Sean sat on the edge of the bed and Troy pressed play on the CD player. The Moody Blues tune 'The Story In Your Eyes' began playing through the stereo and Troy strummed the acoustic guitar part along with the recording. Sean began tapping his feet and smiling.

Troy then loudly sang; "I've been thinking about our fortune,
And I've decided that we're really not to blame, For the love that's
deep inside us now, Is still the same.

"And the sounds we make together, Is the music to the story in
your eyes, It's been shining down upon me now, I realize.

"Listen to the tide slowly turning, Wash all our heartaches away,
We're part of the fire that is burning, And from the ashes we can build
another day.

"But I'm frightened for your children, That the life that we are
living is in vain, And the sunshine we've been waiting for, will turn to
rain."

Troy played through the middle eight and then sang; "Listen to
the tide slowly turning, Wash all our heartaches away, We're part of
the fire that is burning, And from the ashes we can build another day.

"But I'm frightened for your children, That the life that we are

living is in vain, And the sunshine we've been waiting for, will turn to rain.

"When the final line is over, And it's certain that the curtain's gonna fall, I can hide inside your sweet sweet love, for ever more." With his eyes closed, Troy played through the end of the song. As the stereo's music faded out, Sean began clapping.

The moment that Troy opened his eyes and turned to press the stop button, Sean bounced up, still clapping and loudly cheered, "That was excellent. What a great song! You really played and sang it perfectly." Sean realized he was spazzin' out and stopped clapping.

Blushing fiercely at Sean's compliments, Troy giggled, "I was thinking maybe Keith or Derrick would sing lead vocals. I'd sing backup with Mike and Prez."

Shaking his head, Sean forcefully said, "No! You have to sing it, just like you just did. What was that line? I'm frightened for your children?"

Troy recited, "That the life that we are living is in vain, and the sunshine we've been waiting for will turn to rain."

"Awesome." Sean reverently cheered. He then wiped his eyes and looked down.

Noticing that Sean seemed a little upset, Troy softly asked, "What's wrong?" and took his guitar off again.

Sean shrugged and sighed, "It's just... me. That line in the song makes me want to cry. I'm damaged goods. No one nice is ever gonna like me."

"I like you," Troy quickly said before he could even consider

stopping himself. Putting his guitar back in its case, he blushed and added, "No one except my mom has ever clapped after I played like you did. Besides, you're a nice guy and..."

Sean waited for Troy to finish then softly wondered, "And what?"

Shaking his head, Troy quickly considered everything he knew about Clan Short, the people at this compound, especially Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick. Rather than wait to say something and have it turn out badly, Troy looked off beyond Sean and huffed, "And I think you're really cute. I'm gay, Sean."

But Sean didn't get up and leave like Troy expected. He only smiled for a few moments then giggled, "I'm gay too. Not only do I think you're cute, my roommate forced me to come up here. Since I saw you yesterday, I can't get you outta my head."

Turning a hundred shades of red and purple, Troy squealed, "Me?"

Looking away slightly, Sean blushed and nodded, "Can't help it."

Troy thought for a few moments then grinned, "So much for going to the pool... again. We have some stuff to talk about, don't you think?"

Nodding, Sean giggled, "You want to know more about the credit card?"

Troy helplessly laughed, "Screw the credit card!" Sean cracked up. When they had stopped laughing, Troy then seriously said, "Tell me why you think you're damaged. If you're damaged, I must be

Quasimodo."

Sean grinned and tilted his head wondering "Who's Quasimodo?"

"The Hunchback of Notre-Dame," Troy explained, "frighteningly ugly."

"You ain't ugly," Sean slowly and softly said. He then grinned, "As a matter of fact, if you don't put a shirt on real soon, we'll never get to talking."

Blushing bright red, Troy went to the closet and picked out a faded navy blue Pink Floyd Dark Side Of The Moon T-shirt. Sliding it over his head and getting the shirt adjusted, Troy began, "You were rescued by the Clan?"

"Friday," Sean answered, "from an orphanage."

"It was bad for you there?"

"For all of us. The men and women there were vicious, in every sense of the word." Sean wiped his eyes; partially because of the memories and partially because he really didn't want to tell Troy what he had been through.

Pulling over his desk chair, Troy sat close before Sean and softly said, "I know a little about Clan Short. You don't have to tell me anything that will make you sad, okay? We can save that for another time."

Relieved, Sean sighed, "The summer of 1999, me, my dad and stepmother came here on vacation. My dad had a heart attack and died. After the funeral, she didn't even tell me she was leaving to go back to the States. I didn't find out until that afternoon, when the hotel

housekeeper came to the room. She took the plane tickets and some of her stuff, but didn't say a word to anyone that I was still in the hotel room. By that night, I was at the orphanage."

"How old were you?"

"Nine."

"That sucks. Obviously she was in love with your dad, but didn't give a shit about you."

Not wanting to dwell on it any more than he already had, Sean simply said, "She was a bitch."

Quickly doing math in his head, Troy asked, "So you're fourteen?" Sean nodded and Troy smiled, "I'm fourteen too. What's your birthday?"

"January twenty-seventh, 1990."

"I'm exactly a month older than you are. I was born December twenty-seventh, 1989."

"Here's the part I have to tell you," Sean shuddered. He paused and gathered every ounce of strength to softly admit; "I've been sexually abused by men and women."

Shocked, Troy couldn't think of anything to say. Saying that it sucks would've been an understatement. Troy softly asked, "That's why you think you're damaged?"

Sean nodded, "I never wanted to do it; I had to do it."

"I assumed that."

After a long many moments, each boy waiting for the other to

say something, Sean asked, "You're not bothered about it?"

"Well, yeah! I mean, shit! Who wouldn't be angry about something like adults molesting kids?"

Sean nervously asked, "You're not gonna tell me to leave?"

Shaking his head, Troy softly answered, "No. I want to help, if I can."

Sean brightly smiled, "You are, right now." Relaxing more, Sean chuckled, "I was sure that would be the end; you would tell me to get out."

"That wouldn't be much help," Troy smirked. "I have one question; then we can drop that topic as being just history."

"What's that?"

"They never got you sick, did they? No sexually transmitted diseases or anything?"

"No. The Vulcan doctors checked us over real good. There were bruises, cuts and scars before a little guy named Peter fixed me up."

Troy grinned, "A boy named Peter..." and then helplessly chortled.

"Not that kind of peter!" Sean laughed. "I don't know how he cleared all the marks up, but he did."

Playing the suspicious, jealous boyfriend, Troy teased, "Peters and Marks?"

Blushing fiercely, Sean giggled, "No Peters or Marks, just gross old ladies and men. Soon the ladies realized they weren't my type and,

for the most part, they left me alone. Then it was just gross men."

"Just curious, but umm... what made them gross?"

"What wasn't gross? Beard stubble, bad breath, body odor, you name it."

Dramatically grimacing, Troy asked, "You've never been with anyone our age?"

Sean thought carefully then admitted, "My roomie, Horacio. We've been friends since the orphanage. He's bi though and don't like kissing. We helped each other through some really bad times. He'll jack me off and I'll do the same for him, but that's all it's ever been."

Troy shyly admitted, "It's more than I've ever done."

Believing he had said too much, Sean sighed, "I shouldn't have told you that, huh?"

Thinking it over for a moment or two, Troy grinned, "Extra points for telling the truth."

Sean wondered, "What else do you do beside play guitar and keys?"

"I play clarinet, recorder, harmonica, tenor and baritone saxophones. I've played tennis too, but I'm not really good at it. I do enjoy it though."

"Do you swim?"

Troy nodded, "Used to go to the shore all the time. Point Pleasant is a beach in New Jersey that I really liked."

"Ever surfed?"

"Nope, never tried."

"I tried Saturday for the first time. It's really kewl."

"You'll have to teach me some time then."

"You still wanna go to the pool?"

"Sure," Troy agreed, "we can talk more there. Lemme just change into trunks." Sean nodded and widely smiled. Standing and moving his chair back to the desk, Troy turned to Sean and loudly giggled, "You're just gonna watch?"

Turning fire engine red, Sean cackled, "I'll show you mine if you show me yours?"

Troy howled laughing then leaned down and planted a kiss on Sean's forehead.

Stunned, Sean blushed and softly remarked, "No beard stubble, nice breath too."

Turning around and dropping his shorts and underwear, Troy giggled, "No B.O. either, I hope! I just showered this morning."

Sean hummed agreement then commented, "Really cute butt too!"

"Hey now!" Troy laughed, "You can look, but no touching... yet." He then pulled a pair of boardies out of his dresser drawer.

Watching Troy dress, Sean wondered, "When then?"

"Jesus! You move fast!" Troy giggled. Once he had pulled his

boardies up, Troy turned around and honestly answered, "I want to, Sean. I just can't go from 'I like you' to sex quite so fast. I'll tell you some important things though."

A little concerned, but mostly curious, Sean softly said, "Okay."

"I intend to spend the rest of the day with you. No matter what else happens, I want you nearby."

Smiling and standing, Sean said, "Sounds real good so far."

Troy devilishly grinned then moved closer and seriously said, "From now on, you keep your hands off your roommate and he keeps his hands off you. I know I'm the jealous type already. I also know I want a real relationship, not a one or two night stand. If we're gonna hook up, then it's long term."

Sean nodded, "I ain't runnin' for the door."

"Good. Nothing you've said has made me like you less. As a matter of fact, I like you a lot and have high hopes for us."

Holding his right hand up, Sean seriously swore, "I promise, no messin' around with Horacio or anyone else." Dropping his hand, he explained, "Sex before, at the orphanage, it was always fast. I don't mean to rush it; I just don't know any other way."

"I don't know of any way at all; I just have dreams and ideas."

Sean wondered, "What kinda ideas?"

Troy shrugged and blushed, "Being held close, hugs, slow dancing; guess I'm more of a romantic than I'd like to admit."

Understanding, Sean slowly reached for Troy's face and gently brushed the back of his fingers along Troy's left cheek and jaw. Sean

whispered, "Somethin' like this?"

Closing his eyes, Troy whimpered then whispered, "Exactly like that."

Taking a chance while Troy's eyes were closed, Sean tenderly kissed him on the mouth. It was a short, heartfelt kiss that left Troy reeling. Breaking the kiss and waiting for Troy to open his eyes, Sean then softly assured, "I'll wait, Troy."

Locking eyes with Sean, Troy couldn't believe how lucky he was getting. Sean was really good looking, about the same height and weight as he was, self-conscious, but sexually active and a great kisser. Troy whispered, "I won't make you wait too long, Sean." Reaching for Sean's head and tapping lightly, he said, "I need to know what's in here," and then he tapped Sean's chest adding, "and in here. All we have to do is tell each other the truth. Otherwise, we're screwed from the start."

Nodding, Sean asked, "Ready for the pool?"

"Yeah, just lemme grab a towel," Troy said, and started walking down the hall.

Following close behind, Sean told him, "There's piles of towels there already."

Troy grinned, "Force of habit. My mom told me she's been washing loads of towels every day. I'll leave a note for her so she won't expect me here for lunch."

After the note was written, the two boys left the condominium then went down the elevator. Looking into Sean's deep blue eyes, Troy asked, "Who taught you to brush your hand across my face like

that?"

Sean grinned, "Promise you won't tell." Troy rapidly nodded and Sean admitted, "Keith and Drew. When they do it to Prez or Corey, anybody can tell how much they like it. Did you like it as much as I did?"

"Definitely," Troy giggled. "I thought maybe... you learned it from one of those gross older men."

Sean huffed and smirked, "Those dudes just wanted to get their rocks off. Romantic to them meant asking me to take my pants off."

Stepping out of the elevator, Troy reassuringly said, "No more of that for you or any of the others," then reached for Sean's hand. They glanced at each other and Troy admitted, "This is what I've always wanted to do. I hope you don't mind."

Sean grinned, "Why would I mind?" then opened the door for Troy and followed him outside. Sean took the time to introduce Troy to a few of the kids then showed him through the indoor rec center. They paused at the Jacuzzi and again at the sauna then went directly to the diving well. Horacio was naked, up on the three meter diving board and Sean pointed him out. Seeing a handsome Latino teenager, Troy slowly and deliberately nodded then grunted. Grinning, Sean softly said, "You really are the jealous type."

"Sorry."

"Don't be. It makes me feel really good."

Chapter 6B

O'ahu, Ewa Beach, C.S.P.R.D. Main Base

Tuesday, November 2, 2004 11:10 AM HTZ

Jennifer Hundser transported back to the base with her security contingent. After dropping her jacket at the house, and then using the bathroom, she started towards the pool to check on the kids. On the way, she saw the merry-go-rounds, swing sets, slides and jungle gyms. At the playground were many of the youngest kids, including her three newly adopted children. She paused briefly to watch the kids play. Seeing their mother, Dewi, Kokaku and Carmella hurried to her side. She knelt down and kissed all three kids, wondering where the playground came from. The kids didn't know, but loved having it. As Jennifer walked around the indoor recreation building, her five grandchildren noticed and joined the three children walking with her. To her surprise, Joel was at the pool, surrounded by many kids, with a human woman and a Vulcan man. Nearby were four G-Cats, Juan and another young Klingon boy. The young Prince was barely recognizable in his black Clan Short robe and dark sunglasses. She assumed the woman with Joel was Teri Short and went over to introduce herself.

As she drew close to the group, Joel let go of Teri's hand and seemed to turn in her direction. "Auntie Jen?"

"Yes, Joel," she said softly, and she looked at the boy sadly, not really sure why he wasn't looking directly at her.

"Hi," he whispered back, and then he turned, reaching out for the man and woman he was standing near. "Mammy? Daddy? This is

Mrs. Jennifer Hundser. Auntie Jen? This is my mammy, Teri Short, and my daddy, Admiral Spock."

While Teri moved forward to greet Jennifer, Spock picked up Joel and cradled him over his right hip before moving to join the two women.

Holding out her hand, Teri smiled, "So you are the famous 'Auntie Jen'? It is a pleasure to finally meet you."

Jennifer shook Teri's hand and smiled, "My pleasure, Teri." She turned and said, "Welcome to Ewa Beach, Admiral Spock." Cautiously reaching for Joel, Jennifer asked, "You've been talking about us, Joel?"

Turning to the sound of Jen's voice, Joel trembled, "Yeah... was I wrong to?"

Pulling her hand back, Jennifer glanced at Teri and Spock then back to Joel saying, "You'll never need to be frightened of me. What's happened to you, Joel?"

Joel bowed his head as he was held tighter by Spock. "I was attacked on Saturday," he whispered.

"We heard," Jen said.

Joel removed his shades to reveal his empty left eye socket and white right eye. "I was blinded and gang raped," he whispered.

Facing Teri, Jennifer said, "The boy has clearly been traumatized. I appreciate your visit, but Joel doesn't seem ready."

Teri nodded seriously. "You would be right, but in his case the interaction with those that he cares about has helped more than

anything a psychiatrist has been able to do."

"Yeah," Joel whispered with a ghost of a smile. "And I insisted," he added with the beginnings of cheekiness.

Rapidly returning from the boy's bathroom in the pool house, John said, "Hi mom. You've met Aunt Teri and Admiral Spock, obviously." John and Stephen went directly to Spock and Joel.

Joel giggled as Spock put him down, "You can call Daddy 'Uncle,' silly!" Then Joel reached for and cuddled in with John quickly. "He told you already," he added with a kiss to John's cheek. "Did we float?"

"No," John sniggered.

"Shame," Joel teased.

Noticing the immediate change in Joel's demeanor, Jennifer's eyes rolled and she reminded, "Only indoors, John."

John blushed, "We've tested it out, ma. We can lift off slowly and come back down slowly too now. It's just a matter of how we stop kissing that makes the difference."

"We're walking in the air!" Joel sang before giggling.

"You're just jealous cos you and Kevvy can't float!" John laughed.

Joel stiffened for a second, then giggled briefly, "No, but he can take me to heaven and back!"

"Only if you have a regenerator to heal the bruises!" Kevin yelled from across the pool.

'I was teasing,' John sent to Joel. 'Don't be scared of me.'

Jen looked at Teri and Teri mouthed, "Pon Farr. Thank GOD it's only once every seven years!"

Reaching and touching John's face with his fingers, Joel sent, *'I know. Just thinking 'bout me and Kev makes me nervous, again. Just like it was Saturday or Sunday, but it's getting better again.'*

John replied; *'Ya know what we learned when Prez's parents died? Who's here now? Always show people you love that you care. Kev's happy because you're here and alive, Joel. I feel your hurt and confusion clearly. Let him know that he's important. Call him here just to hold his hand. It would make his day. Okay, it'll add to his day. Then the four of us, me and Stephen and you and Kev can go for a walk so our mom's can deal with business stuff.'*

'Can my kids come too?' Joel asked. John started laughing, for he had already been mobbed by the eight kids Joel had adopted. *'I'll take that as a yes,'* Joel added as he removed his hand.

John began introducing Joel's kids. "Mom, this little guy here is Rafe. The G-Cats are Aslan and Shere Khan, the badger hybrids are Brian and his twin sister Sue. Jules and Verne are the two ferrets and finally, we have Lee the chimp. Lee's mute, but he knows sign language."

Lee waved his fingers at Jen before climbing onto Joel's back. Kevin came running over, and Joel shyly took Kevin's hand. Kevin's face split into a smile.

'Told you,' John whispered in Joel's mind.

Looking up at his mother, John said, "We're gonna go for a

walk. Did you notice the playground I had Daileass build for us?"

Jennifer nodded, "That was your idea?"

"Course!" John proudly smiled.

Stephen grinned, "He just wanted to swing me," but then blushed and giggled.

"The kids seem to love it," Jennifer smiled, "Good job. Go on, have a good time boys."

Spock turned to Teri saying, "I will remain with our son."

"Thank you," Teri warmly replied.

Spock faced Jennifer and said, "It is agreeable to make your acquaintance. I look forward to meeting your sons."

Jennifer smiled, "Thank you, Admiral Spock. My boys will be pleased to meet you too." Spock followed the pack of kids, including her own children and grand children. Jennifer turned to Teri, saying, "The issues here with CPS have shattered my trust. Two abandoned boys that my sons recovered over the summer were among those rescued by the Clan." She pointed out Aaron Farris and Stephen Wicks explaining, "I can barely describe the effect all these kids have had on me the last few days. Suffice to say, my patience is at its thinnest for some parents and care givers."

"It's understandable," Teri pleasantly said.

The two women began walking toward the FYS offices and Jennifer said, "I'm very much a pacifist. The only issue I may have is capital punishment."

"You understand you'll only have to prosecute, not deliver

justice?"

"I do. There was one woman arrested Friday night. Her little girl, Daba was left behind. I spoke with her father and he doesn't want her. I've never wanted to strike a person so much before in my life."

"She's better off here then, Jennifer. All the kids are much better off here," Teri said, then paused and swung her arm, gesturing at all the kids. "Those that have made mental connections are teaching those that haven't. What we adults might be able to accomplish in weeks, they do in days or hours."

Jennifer nodded, "Doctor Wiener, our child psychologist, is having daily group sessions with some of the kids. What I find most remarkable is how the youngest seem to be learning fastest. Carmella, our adopted little girl, latched on to my husband Saturday. All Jim did was give her a piggy back ride. And Kokaku, one of our little boys, needed to go to the bathroom Saturday. I took him across the road and sat his little behind on the toilet then waited for him to finish. He was shocked that I waited for him and didn't fondle him. Since then, he attached himself to me. When I was busy with another child, Jim took him to the toilet in my place. Lanna Seaver told me that she had taken him to the toilet yesterday with the same results."

Smiling, Teri offered, "The adults that abused those kids are the extreme cases. If other less extreme cases can be educated and helped, they will be. The telepaths can determine in a minute or two if it's worth the effort."

Shuddering, Jennifer realized, "John's becoming telepathic. I heard him at work telling me you were here; clearly, as if he was standing beside me. I actually looked for him and expected to find him standing there in the room. It was seconds after Daileass called to

tell me you were here."

"John is a remarkable boy," Teri smiled. "His empathic abilities alone are helping many of the kids, Joel included."

"Will it affect him?" Jennifer worried.

Teri answered, "In the short term, yes; but we have Vulcan methods to release the long term effects. To the kids, it becomes like a nightmare; unreal and not worthy of remembering. For instance, when we arrived, John came running over to us with Jamie, Jacob, Beau and Nathan. Joel and John held each other and cried for about five minutes. After that, Joel was a little better and John seemed to shrug off all he had learned from Joel about the attack. Spock is prepared to offer John assistance dealing with the shared images. If John doesn't ask directly, Joel will ask Spock. Jamie, Jacob and Beau can also help John, if need be. I can easily understand your concerns. My boys, Sean and Cory, have been helped similarly."

Nearing the FYS building, Jennifer said, "I'll perform these interviews as I would any other, only with the added qualifications required by the existing Safe Haven Act and Clan Short charter."

Teri added, "Your husband will perform secondary interviews based on Vulcan law, which will supersede Hawaiian law."

"Understood," Jennifer said. She opened the door and held it for Teri. Thanking Jennifer, Teri walked inside. Seeing Rob Gibbons at the reception desk, with his security gorilla standing nearby, Jennifer said, "Good morning, Rob. How've things been so far?"

Rob smiled, "Busy, but organized. Anna, Bill and Laura have been doing interviews. Four individuals were released by Jamie, Jacob and Beau for not having the correct temperament. I've arrested

one for collecting child pornography."

Shaking her head sadly and smirking, Jennifer turned to the assembled group in the reception area. "Ladies and Gentlemen," she said, and paused briefly, noticing Tamara Hekekoa amongst the group. "My name is Jennifer Hundser. I am the Director of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division Federation Youth Services. Let me make myself perfectly clear. Our job is to protect children from all forms of abuse. We will not have positions filled by those that cannot abide by our regulations, both on the job and in their private lives." Jennifer briefly locked eyes with Tamara Hekekoa and informed them; "The practices allowed by Child Protection Services will not be continued here. We will be performing thorough background checks of all prospective foster parents. Anyone that fails to do their job to the best of their ability and report cases of abuse to this office will be summarily released and, if appropriate and necessary, arrested for their lack of common decency.

"In my years working at Hawaii Medical Center West, I've seen the most horrendous punishments inflicted by parents on their children." Teri Short watched and listened, struggling to keep her composure and not giggle or laugh aloud. Jamie, Jacob and Beau came out of a room and stood at the end of the hall near the reception area, grinning widely at Jennifer's remarks. Jim Hundser walked in to hear his wife say, "One woman tried to explain to me that it was appropriate to burn her child's hands on the stove for playing with matches. That is not only inappropriate, it is illegal. No, no people; corporal punishment in the form of a slap on the wrist or swat on the backside is one thing, but loss of control and whipping children into submission is child abuse. Adults will not get away with blaming their children for their own actions. My own children have never gotten away with the phrase, 'he made me do it,' without an adequate explanation. Therefore the adults I hire will not get away with it

either. Have I made myself clear?"

Everyone nodded or vocally affirmed that they understood. Jim Hundser grinned at his wife; "Having a good day, love?"

Jennifer smiled, "Generally, yes. I simply couldn't believe that one moron came here looking for work that was collecting child pornography."

The Terrible Triplets said, "That's why we're here, Aunt Jen."

Jennifer turned and instructed, "If you boys need a break, just let one of us know."

"We're good," Jamie confirmed.

"We just got here a little while ago," Beau added.

Checking his wristwatch, Jacob said, "It's not even been an hour."

Jim introduced himself to Teri Short. Now that she had released some of her concerns, Jennifer also properly introduced Rob Gibbons and Teri. The four adults briefly chatted then Jennifer asked Rob, "Who's next?"

Checking the clipboard of names, Rob called out; "George Lu?"

A man of Chinese ancestry stood and smiled warmly at the gathered group. Jim softly told Jennifer, "I'll join Bill and relieve him for a break. Send Mr. Lu over when you're done, Jen."

Jennifer nodded and appreciatively smiled then told the group, "We're going to try our best to have each of you interviewed by the end of the day." Facing Mr. Lu, Jennifer introduced him to Teri Short. The stout gentleman was very enthusiastic to learn he had met the

mother of the famous boys. The Hundserts walked back to their offices and began performing their new jobs.

As previously scheduled, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike arrived back on base about eleven-forty that morning. Keith and Prez had already received word from John that Joel, Teri and Spock were on base. They told Mrs. Diaz that they had more guests and asked if they could skip their sixth period band class. She eventually gave in when reminded that tempo for the band could be provided electronically by the synthesizer. Their concert had gone well, with only a few coffee and shake induced tempo increases. Prez tried to hold back Derrick, but it was like constraining a missile in flight. Walking towards the pool, they teased each other and goofed on the misfortunes of Bobby and Sheryl. While Mike and Derrick went directly to the pool to burn off excess energy doing laps, Prez and Keith went to find Kaleo. At the diving well, Kaleo reported that all the cards were handed out, that John had discovered his birthday and that Teri Short was on the base with Joel and Admiral Spock. Keith and Prez wanted to go find Joel and report to him all the good work they'd managed to accomplish in only three days. Kaleo held them back and prepared his two teammates for the shock.

"He's not the same mischievously playful elf we met on Friday," Kaleo sadly explained. "If you want my honest opinion, he's closest to himself around John, but even then, he's different." Pulling Keith and Prez closer, Kaleo sighed then whispered, "John sent me a brief thought. Joel was gang raped and blinded. All you can see is a scar on his face and dark glasses, but he's emotionally messed up."

"Where is Joel now?" Keith wondered.

"With John and Stephen," Kaleo answered.

Glancing between Keith and Kaleo, Prez asked, "Do you think

we should leave Joel be until he's ready?" Prez received his answer in a surprising way. He suddenly found himself floating and then gliding backwards. "JOHN!" Prez yelled through his giggles, "Stop it!"

"It's not me!" John giggled from behind him. "Blame the Elf!"

Prez managed to twist enough to look over his shoulder. He saw Joel standing a little in front of John and Stephen with Kevin next to him. Kevin's normally brown eyes were mixed blue, somehow, and Joel's glasses were missing. Prez felt his heart break at the sight of the scar and missing left eye, and slightly sick at the deathly white right eye on his 'mischievous elf'. Curiosity was also there, however. Joel had his hands spread wide as if waiting for a hug, and his lips were moving.

As Prez drifted closer, he realized that Joel was whispering over and over, "Feel the Sands of the Forge... Feel the Sands..."

He was telekinetic; something Prez never knew about Joel. Was it a Vulcan trait, or something due to Joel being part human?

Prez finally made it to the Li'l elf and then had Joel snuggled into his chest. "Hi, Prezzy," whispered the smaller teen.

With his throat tight and tears pouring down his face, Prez only held Joel firmly with one arm and gently pet the hair on the back of Joel's head with his other hand. Gaining a little strength back, Prez softly sobbed, "I'm sorry. I feel that if I had let you leave sooner or kept you here longer, this might've been avoided. It's stupid, I know, but that's what I feel."

Softly, Joel answered, "What Was is now no more. What Happened was new. What Is is now to be lived. That's what Levi's Friend said. Don't worry, Prezzy. I'll be okay... eventually. It is only

logical." His voice slowly shifted from emotive to void as he finished.

Kevin sighed, but John whispered, "Oh no, you don't," and laid a hand briefly on Joel's back.

Joel's suddenly emotionless face shifted back to emotive and he continued to snuggle with Prez as if nothing had happened.

Realizing that Prez was teetering on the edge, like he had been after his parents died, John took immediate action. John sent images into Prez's mind, reminding his brother that Joel had family and hundreds caring for him; just as the Hundserts, Gibbons, Seiberts and Seavers had been there for him two years earlier. To all the other Core Rimmers, John sent pleas for help before Prez completely lost it. *'Prez needs us all, now!'* Keith and Kaleo were the first to hurry over. From the pool, Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey came running to the diving well. Within thirty-seconds, Joel, Prez and Kevin were surrounded and embraced by the entire team.

Joel spoke, but his voice seemed richer; feminine even. "Preston, Child of Vulcan. Do not grieve beyond that which is necessary, Child. As I remained for my own son, so too would your parents remain in their own way for you. A mother's love is forever, Preston. That is no difference between Vulcan and Earth. It is eternal."

Finally more secure and seeing logic beyond his own emotions, Prez looked down at Joel and uncertainly repeated, "Child of Vulcan?"

Joel shook his head slightly and in his own voice answered, "That was my birth mother. You're a member of Family Clan Short, now. That makes you a son, or Child, of Vulcan. You're my brother, so you have to be."

Prez asked, "The same can be said of the entire team then; and

all the kids here?"

With a small smile, Joel nodded. "You are all Children of Vulcan as well as being Children of Earth." He added with a small giggle, "Good things need sharing about!" Then, after a brief pause, he added, "Besides, Cor and me're greedy. We like brothers and sisters, so we're collecting."

Prez grinned, "We won't let you down, Joel. We're collecting street kids, prostitutes now too."

Joel clapped happily. "I know. I've met some. More family! Yay!"

Keith chuckled, "I figure we'll have all our bases active and loaded by Christmas."

"That's two thousand more kids," Mike grinned.

Drew giggled, "The more the merrier!"

Derrick agreed, "That's one hell of a Merry Christmas!"

Humming hungrily, Corey reminded, "My mom's strawberry tarts." That was all it took for all the boys to begin rambling on about their favorite Christmas treats.

Kaleo offered to gather the Rimmers' sons and call the rest of the kids for lunch. With a nod and thanks from Prez, he was off.

"It's lunch time Li'l Elf," Prez said, and then asked, "You want a piggy back ride?"

Not only did Joel quickly scramble up onto the older teen's back, but his son, Lee the Chimp, was soon clinging onto his back as well. Keith offered Kevin a piggyback ride too. Derrick swept up

Rafe and parked the boy up on his shoulders. Mike knelt down for Jules and Verne to climb aboard. Drew offered Aslan a lift as did Corey for Shere Khan. Not to be left out, John gave Sue and Brian a lift then took Stephen's hand and followed the pack to the CIC dining room.

For this day's lunch, the chefs had prepared a Mexican feast of tacos, burritos, chili and Mexican rice. Once again, menu display boards had been prepared so the kids would know how to order their meals. Keith and Prez were a bit more careful with Dee, limiting their son to tacos and Mexican rice to avoid any digestion problems.

Joel, Kevin, Prez, Keith, John, Stephen, Derrick and Mike shared a table. The Rimmers shared with Joel and Kevin their current status and that a total of fifty-two more kids had been added to the Clan in only three days. Some more time was spent giggling about the insanity of Saturday night, trying to get dinner together for the masses, and then nesting with a hundred kids in the basement. At the next table were Drew, Corey, Geoff, Dee, Gage, Sammy and Bruce. At another nearby table were Dillon, Richie, Rafe, Aslan, Shere Khan, Jules, Verne, Sue and Brian.

The phone rang at the reception desk of the FYS building. Rob answered it; "Federation Youth Services, O'ahu, can I help you?"

A woman asked, "May I speak with Lieutenant Robert Gibbons please?"

"This is Lieutenant Gibbons."

"Sir, my name is Sergeant Rose Flora from Hawaiian Police. We've located Mrs. Kathleen Marr."

Rob smiled, "That's great news, Sergeant."

The woman softly explained, "Sir, she's been detained for petty theft."

"You understand that she had to relinquish custody of her only child to Clan Short?"

"I do, Sir. However, the grocery store manager is insisting we prosecute."

Rob sighed, "What is your location?"

"The Safeway store at 111 East Puainako Street, Hilo."

"I'll be there in two minutes or less. Standby with Mrs. Marr and the manager."

"Yes, Sir. Goodbye."

Rob turned to his gorilla and ordered, "Get Jim's security and be ready to take a short trip to Hawaii."

The gorilla nodded and, as Rob stepped away from the reception desk, contacted Jim Hundser's security. Rob knocked on Jim's office door.

After a moment, Jim said, "Come in." Rob opened the door to find Jim, George Lu, Jamie, Jacob and Beau smiling. Rob said, "We have a small issue to take care of, Jim."

Tilting his head uncertainly, Jim wondered, "What is it?"

"Stephen Marr's mother was located." Rob glanced at George Lu and decided not to say more.

Jim assured, "It's alright, Rob. George will be hired."

Rob nodded, "Mrs. Marr was caught stealing from a Safeway store in Hilo. The store manager wants to prosecute."

Standing, Jim huffed, "Not for very much longer." He grabbed his suit jacket then turned to George Lu and asked, "Care to take a short trip?"

George Lu answered, "I'd like to if it's a very short trip. I'm diabetic and have to eat soon."

"This won't take more than ten or twenty minutes," Jim promised. "When we return, you can have something to eat here."

George Lu nodded and stood. He then looked at the three boys and chuckled, "It was very nice meeting you."

"Same here!" Jamie, Jacob and Beau chimed.

Tightening his loosened tie, Jim asked Rob, "Security is ready?"

Rob nodded, "Standing by."

Jim placed a hand on George's shoulder and asked, "Have you ever been transported via a Starfleet transporter before?"

George shook his head and smiled, "No, never."

"It's a bit disorienting," Jim briefly explained. The three men walked out of the office. Waiting outside were two gorillas and two teen boys. One teen boy and one gorilla were dressed in standard dark blue police uniforms to blend in with Rob. Jim's security team were dressed in dark suits, white dress shirts and ties, similar to what Jim had worn to work that day.

Rob tapped his comm-badge and said, "Daileass, transport us to

111 East Puainako Street, Hilo, Hawaii."

"Yes, Sir," Daileass pleasantly replied. In an instant, the group was outside the Safeway store. A gorilla led the way across the parking lot and into the store. Needless to say, people stopped and stared. Once inside the store, Rob pointed to the Customer Service desk and they all walked there.

At the desk, Rob held out his Police and FYS identification then asked to see the store manager. Nervously watching the two gorillas, the woman backed up, bounced against the cigarette display shelves then hurried to the manager's office and frantically knocked.

Jim turned to Rob and said, "I'll take care of this. I can easily prove that the woman was distressed and she wouldn't have been detained more than a few hours for petty theft."

Rob nodded and grinned at Jim's determined glare. "We'll wait until you're finished."

When the customer service clerk mutely waved him over, Jim went into the store manager's office. He politely introduced himself as Legal Director for Federation Youth Services, greeted the store manager, Sergeant Flora and Mrs. Marr then closed the door.

Back at the CIC dining room, John was finishing his lunch when he suddenly stopped and grinned. Turning to Stephen, John smiled, "We found your mom, baby."

Obviously excited, Stephen squealed, "Really?"

John nodded and pulled Stephen close saying, "My dad's with her right now. It won't be long before she's here." With all John's empathic abilities, there was nothing that could have kept Stephen from becoming fidgety, and then kissing John repeatedly. "Okay!"

John loudly giggled.

Becoming hysterical at Stephen's excitement and John's pleasure, Keith laughed, "I told you we'd find her."

As Stephen began to relax and rested his head on John's shoulder, Prez smiled, "First thing we're going to do is get your mom into one of the condo apartments. You two can catch up on what's happened during your time apart. Tomorrow, we'll find your mom a job right here."

John's eyes widened and he croaked, "Ooo! Dad's getting pissed off majorly!" Keith and Prez nervously glanced at each other. John then said, "Dad just told some store manager guy how we could help him with youth petty larceny."

"Larceny?" Keith nervously repeated.

John nodded and asked, "What's that mean?"

Keith sighed, "Robbery or theft."

"Dad's calming down now," John relayed.

Keith nodded, "The angrier he gets the more determined he is."

Prez was watching John closely, but behind John, coming into the dining room, were Troy Faris and Sean Moorhead. They were holding hands. Prez couldn't help cracking a wide smile and thinking, that's one less thing I have to do today. John locked eyes with Prez and giggled.

Obviously, Mike had also seen Troy and asked Prez, "What's the plan for the rest of this afternoon?"

Prez answered, "All we have on our schedules is phaser training

from three until six."

"Kewl," Derrick smiled, "Wanna jam for a few hours then?"

Prez, Keith and Mike rapidly nodded. Prez looked at Joel and Kevin and asked, "If you'd like, you guys can meet us in the auditorium?"

Kevin smiled, "We might do that later."

Joel added, "We're going to stay with John and Stephen for now."

Keith promised, "We'll be back before you know it."

Stephen whispered, "Can you tell what's happening now, hon?"

John nodded, "My dad's still talking to the store manager." He then sent to Stephen, *'Do you really want to know what happened?'*

Stephen whispered, "No, I think I can guess."

Prez grinned at Joel and Kevin, "Don't you guys leave before we get back."

Mike added, "We'd really like to meet Admiral Spock."

"Daddy's *Uncle* Spock to you!" Joel playfully reminded.

Kevin giggled, "We'll be here for dinner too."

"Kewl!" Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike chanted. They all stood then dumped their trash and decided to find Troy to invite him to jam with them. While Prez and Mike went to Troy's table, Keith and Derrick went to get Drew and Corey. They stopped at the kids table to see if any of them wanted to tag along. Of course, all their own kids

did, but they didn't want to leave Joel's kids behind.

Brian grinned, "It's kewl. We're gonna go find the Scoobies then find some food that we find more tasty."

Richie wondered, "What's better than tacos?"

Knowing what kind of reaction she would get, Sue giggled, "Worms and grubs, of course!"

Richie, Geoff and Dillon groaned, "Ewww!"

Scrunching his nose, Dillon complained, "The Scoobies like raw chicken. They slurp it up like noodles too!"

At the far end of the dining room, Troy and Sean had taken a table by themselves, and had only begun eating when Prez and Mike walked up. Prez pleasantly said, "It's good to see you two together."

Mike nodded and smiled, "You make a cute couple."

Cracking a wide smile, Troy blushed, "I'm glad you think so."

Sean nodded, "We're just getting to know each other better."

Prez said, "We're heading over to the auditorium to practice and jam for while. Would you like to join us, Troy?"

"Yeah, right after we're done," Troy nodded. He asked, "Can Sean come watch and listen?"

"Course!" Prez and Mike chorused.

Prez said, "We'll have a bunch of our kids there too."

"What instruments should I bring, Prez?" Troy asked.

"Both saxes, the recorder, the acoustic and the electric guitars," Prez answered. "We'll need to get the right mics, amps, and the stage rearranged."

Turning to Sean, Troy sweetly smiled, "I'll need a hand."

Bouncing his eyebrows playfully, Sean slyly grinned, "I'll give you a hand."

Troy's face flushed scarlet while Mike and Prez giggled. Shaking his head sadly, Troy softly chuckled, "Breaking the speed of sound, Tiger."

"Can I help myself?" Sean grinned. "I'll be lucky to brush my teeth after Mexican food before tryin' to grab a kiss."

Mike and Prez groaned then laughed.

"No burrito flavored kisses!" Troy helplessly cackled.

Looking down at the table, Sean smirked, "I only offered to show you my burrito."

Troy's eyes opened wide and he playfully shoved Sean. Mike and Prez howled laughing. They waved and walked away in fits of laughter. Troy giggled and softly asked Sean, "Do you really want to that much or were you just playing?"

Sean considered the question then truthfully answered, "Both. Yeah, I was just being silly, but at the same time, I really want a relationship with you. I can wait and I will, Troy. When you're ready, I will be too."

Troy chewed on what Sean said while taking a bite out of his taco. He swallowed then softly called, "Sean?"

Shyly glancing over, but with a mouth full of food, Sean raised his eyebrows.

"We have to go back to my apartment to get my instruments."

Still chewing, Sean nodded.

"If my mom's not there, wanna play some show and tell and kiss and touch?"

Swallowing, whimpering and nodding simultaneously, Sean began gagging and choking on his food.

Troy patted Sean's back and giggled, "You okay?" Sean nodded and coughed up the clog in his throat then swallowed properly. Troy leaned closer and softly chuckled, "It was your idea!"

Sean grinned, "Please tell me you have mouthwash or a spare toothbrush at your place."

Widely smiling, Troy nodded and noticed that Sean was eating faster. "Easy, Tiger," Troy chortled.

Not wanting to shoot himself in the foot, or in the pants, Sean slowed down, ate a little more then asked, "I thought you didn't want to right away?"

Troy finished swallowing and clarified; "We ain't goin' all the way today. Part of me did want to take you up on the showing when you mentioned it before though."

Sean nodded understandingly, ate a little more, then flatly asked, "Which part?"

Quickly grabbing a napkin, Troy spat up his food and cracked

up. Sean grinned and happily bounced in his chair.

While Prez and Platinum Habits were in the auditorium getting their stage setup modified, Admiral Spock walked into the CIC dining room and went directly to Joel's table. John, Joel, Kevin and Stephen had barely greeted Spock when Jim Hundser transported into the room with Stephen's mother. John and Stephen's backs were turned. John hadn't said anything to Stephen when he felt his dad and Stephen's mom were ready to transport. John wanted to let Stephen have at least a little bit of a surprise. When they walked over to the table and Stephen's mom put her hand on her son's shoulder, Stephen immediately recognized the feeling and quickly jumped up into his mother's arms.

Both Stephen and his mother, Kathleen, cried happy reunion tears for several minutes. Mrs. Marr was a short, frail looking woman; maybe an inch over five feet tall and not much more than one hundred pounds. She had the same auburn hair as Stephen, but her eyes were deep blue, not hazel like her son's eyes. Finally, Stephen asked, "Did they tell you mom?"

"Tell me what, Stephen?"

Stephen happily said, "They're gonna keep us together; they're gonna give you work and give us a place to live!"

Mrs. Marr groaned, "Oh baby, they can't really..."

"Oh, yes we can," John loudly interrupted. "Can you mop a floor, Mrs. Marr? Can you vacuum a rug? Can you push dishes through a dishwasher? We'll find something for you to do. I'm part of the leadership team of this Clan. My big brother, Prez, is the Director and he's already said it's gonna be that way. We'll help families whenever we can."

While Stephen smiled proudly at his boyfriend, Mrs. Marr looked at John in amazement and disbelief, and then looked up at Jim Hundser for confirmation. Jim simply nodded and smiled, "It's true; John is my son and head of the Pacific Rim Division's Intel team. My foster son, Preston is the Director of this entire Division. We will give you work to be proud of and a place to live with your son."

John nodded and said, "All you need to do is relax for tonight. Put the old, bad stuff behind you. Tomorrow, we'll get you a job somewhere. Just tell us where you'd like to work."

Stephen smiled, "Keith said last night that you made the smartest decision ever when you brought me to the Clan. Do you know it too now?"

Mrs. Marr looked around and wondered, "Who is Keith?"

"He's Prez's boyfriend and John's big brother," Stephen happily answered.

"Boyfriends?" Mrs. Marr uncertainly repeated. Stephen nodded and giggled then hugged his mom tight.

John wanted to make sure Stephen wouldn't be hurt by anything his mom might say and performed a deep scan without asking. Amongst the things he learned was that Mrs. Marr was only sixteen when she gave birth to Stephen. Satisfied that the woman was only surprised, John smiled, "We got gays, straights, gorillas, G-Cats, chimps, ferrets, and visiting today, two badgers and two Vulcans!" Unable to logically define John's enthusiasm in the rambling description of his Clan, Joel clapped his hands and loudly laughed.

Over the dining room's loudspeakers, the Terrible Triplets giggled, "Don't forget," "the partridge," "in a," "pear tree!" In the corner of the dining room, well behind where Sean and Troy were still

sitting, a potted pear tree materialized with a single partridge sitting on its highest branch. Around the tree, occupying the entire corner almost up to the ceiling was a large cage so the partridge wouldn't escape. The bird had plenty of room to stretch its wings, perches to rest on, water and food.

Mrs. Marr softly asked her son; "You really like it here?"

Stephen nodded and answered, "Yes. These people are really nice, mom. They fed me twice in four hours; they had a doctor check me over; they got me all new clothes, like the stuff I'm wearing. John, Keith and another boy named Troy went out of their way to make me feel less scared. We could have a better life here. Please say we can stay?"

Mrs. Marr squeezed Stephen tightly and answered, "Anything to be able to stay with you."

John was ecstatic. First he sent his dad a short message. *'Dad, can you get Stephen's mom something to eat? She looks like she ain't eaten right in days. She prob'ly needs to see Doc Andrews or Doc Howard too.'* Jim Hundser nodded, but held up his index finger, signifying they should wait until Stephen and his mom were ready. John then sent to Stephen, *'Baby? Let my dad show your mom around and get her fed. She's kind of confused and scared, like you were last night. You can tell her about us later tonight. Don't dump it on her now, okay?'*

Stephen briefly turned to John, smiled and nodded. Understanding that Stephen was fit to be tied, and that he was going to be on the receiving end of a hug and many kisses very soon, John blushed and giggled. He sent Joel a quick message. *'Umm, Stephen's gonna hug and kiss me as soon as he lets go of his mom. We're gonna start floating and she's gonna freak out! We gotta go someplace,*

really quick!'

Joel giggled then looked towards his father and smiled, "Daddy, can I give John and Stephen a tour of the Enterprise?" John's mouth dropped open.

Spock nodded understandingly and tapped his comm-badge. "Spock to Kirk."

"A tour of the flagship!" John excitedly squealed. He looked up at his dad and begged, "Please say we can go?"

Jim Hundser chuckled, "I don't see a problem with that. Remember, Jamie, Jacob and Beau are here too though."

Joel said, "It shouldn't take much more than a few hours. We'll be back by dinner time."

Jim nodded, "That's fine."

Stephen softly told his mother, "Get some lunch and a tour of the base, mom. Try not to be scared. Everybody's real nice, even the gorillas. While you're busy, can I go with John and Joel?"

Kathleen Marr kissed her son's cheek and said, "You be safe and hurry back. I've missed you."

Stephen kissed his mom and assured, "I missed you too."

Hesitantly, Stephen and his mother separated, but watched each other until she turned to Jim Hundser saying, "I can barely believe all this. I thought I had failed miserably."

Leading her towards the kitchen, Jim Hundser shook his head and explained the details behind the news stories Kathleen Marr had

heard on the radio.

Throwing himself at John, Stephen repeatedly kissed every square inch of his face. Giggling insanely, John held his boyfriend and they slowly rose about a foot off the floor. Once satisfied he had shown sufficient appreciation and left no spot un-kissed, Stephen rested his head on John's shoulder and contentedly sighed.

Spock turned back to his son and said, "Your Uncle James has agreed for a tour to be granted, with a few surprises as well. Orders have been given for Acting Captain Sa'ren Joel Short, Acting Commander Kevin Thompson, and Acting Lieutenant Commanders John Hundser and Stephen Marr to report immediately to the Enterprise and await further instruction from the Admiral." Kevin turned and waved four G-Cats over to act as personal security for Joel.

Joel giggled, pulled Kevin close to his side, and then smiled towards Stephen and John. "Ready, Commanders?"

John, his eyes as wide as an owl's, nodded his head foolishly.

Joel tapped his communicator, "Short to Enterprise, nine to beam up."

"Locked on," came the response, "Acquired... wait. Illegal life form? Excuse me for a moment, Ensign Short."

The kids all looked at each other and shrugged. Joel whispered, "Levi's not with us - he'd trigger that response. John? Do you have antimatter underpants or something?"

John laughed and shook his head. "No," he said, as he realized that Joel couldn't see the head shake. "Just normal boxers."

Stephen giggled, "Plaid cotton. I helped him put them on."

The next voice heard over the comm was that of the most famous Starfleet Engineer John knew about - Captain Scott. "Sa'ren Joel Short!" he barked, "Where in th' Seven Circles of Satan's Spawn did ye' aquire that ungodly creature, laddie?"

Joel's eyebrows raised. "One of what, Unca Monty?"

"That there blasted TRIBBLE! They're all dead! The only good thing those thrice damned Klingons ever did!"

"Ummm... Oh! You have a restriction on Tribbles? Still?" Kevin giggled.

"YES!"

"She won't be a problem, Unk!" Joel said sweetly.

"SHE'LL BREED, an' I'd be defurring the Lady's innards for months!"

"She won't breed. She's controlled."

"She be clipped?"

"Well... no. Not really, but she's controlled. She's a Borg."

"Laddie, have ye been sippin' Romulan Ale? There be no creature I've been made ken to known as Borg."

"I been... no! No... well, not... NO! No drinkies! Never mind, Unk... she's... snipped," Joel sighed, giving up.

Kevin glared at the back of Joel's head. "When did you go drinking Romulan Ale?!"

"Tardis... with Juan... he was a little... squiffy... after..."

"And what about you?"

"I got the biggest hard-on off my life! You enjoyed THAT night, Kevvy!"

John felt Stephen's embarrassment and smiled at his boyfriend, playfully bouncing his eyebrows. *'We've gotta try some of that Romulan Ale, baby. You're plenty big already, but... just wondering.'* John and Stephen broke into fits of giggles.

Then Scotty's answer came back, "I'll be trustin' you for this time, Laddie... iff'n I hear whisperin 'bout any nestin' of those creatures in Spock's stateroom, I'll be puttin' you over my knee!"

Joel blinked, then giggled. He knew his Uncle Scotty would never really carry out such a threat. "Can we come up now?"

"Yes... transporting."

Relatively certain that his mom would not be in the apartment, Troy and Sean left the CIC dining room. In the condominium's elevator, Sean and Troy were holding hands. Two hearts were frantically beating. Sean wanted to tell Troy that they didn't really have to do what they were planning, only to reduce any pressure he may have inadvertently applied. He simply couldn't make his mouth speak the words. Troy was wondering what Sean found so attractive about him. Sean had said that he liked him the moment he got up on stage the prior afternoon. What was so appealing, he wondered. Was it his eyes or hair or the clothes he wore or was it something else? But Troy couldn't find the words to express himself without making Sean feel uncomfortable. So he let his mind race off on multiple tangents.

In the auditorium, the four band members were keeping Alden

busy while they waited for Troy to join them. Derrick ordered four-foot high risers for his drum kit and had his entire setup placed center stage. Mike ordered an additional Acoustasonic amp and a Bassman amp for Troy. Keith and Corey thought it would be really kewl to have some extra lights behind the drum risers. They wanted to be able to have the appearance of shafts of sunlight back stage. After nine yellow spotlight cans were placed and looked very nice from the audience, they added nine red spotlight cans. Separately the red looked nice too, but then they tried mixing the yellow and red cans to get an orange color. Corey could visualize beginning with the red lights, adding the yellow for orange and then fading out the red for yellow only. Four fog machines were added; one stage left, two center stage under the drum risers and one stage right. High above and forward of the stage, an additional white spotlight was installed for Troy. Prez worked with Alden to prepare a large sign with the band's name. They decided on using an italicized calligraphy font in a bright platinum color against the dark green curtain backdrop.

When Kaleo and Tory walked in the auditorium with dozens of other Rimmer kids in tow, the band were just finishing the new stage setup. Corey was up in the sound and light booth with Drew testing out the new lighting gear. Keith kept his piano and electronic keyboards stage left, and added a Hammond organ. Before the drum risers were the bass amp and Troy's guitar amplifiers. Stage right is where Mike had his guitar amplifiers. Prez ordered a GT-6B bass effects unit. Mike got two GT-6 guitar effects units; one for himself and the other for Troy.

From the stage and down into the audience, Prez loudly asked his kids, "How does it look guys?"

Richie hollered, "It's really kewl, Poppa!"

Gage agreed, "It's sweet!" Dee, Dillon and Sammy nodded their

agreement, adding additional remarks.

Up in the booth, Corey still wasn't satisfied. He asked Alden to connect him to Mozart Music. Within a minute, Corey was chatting with Kayla, the woman that he had worked with during the luau Friday night.

Keith wondered, "Where's Troy at, baby?"

Prez grinned, "He's already met Sean."

"Oh great!" Keith knowingly cackled.

"Let's get started without him," Mike suggested. "How about we start with Something's Missing, since there's someone missing."

Outside and in the trees to the south of the schools, Jules and Verne had found the Scoobies. Soon, all the ferrets were gathered with Brian and Sue, Aslan and Shere Khan, Rafe and Lee.

Spike ran up to Sue excitedly shouting, "Lookie! Fat grub! Is this a nice one, Sue?"

Sue popped it into her mouth, and then hugged Spike. "Yeah. Really juicy! Thanks!"

"There's more! There's more! Under the shiny rocks and stones!" Xander yelled.

Aslan and Shere Khan were digging holes in the earth, looking for worms, while Lee and Rafe were getting their heads together to design a super-duper new device to find the best grubs ever. At least, that was Rafe's plan. Lee was simply playing along.

Walking into the apartment, Sean nervously said, "I'm just wondering, you seem to have the larger of the two bedrooms?" He

then reprimanded himself; jeez, focus on the bed a little more, why don't ya?

Troy shook his head and, in an uncontrollably shaky voice from being excited and nervous, replied, "Both rooms are the same size. They each have sliding glass doors to the balcony. I get the morning sun and the better views outside." Troy wanted to mention that both rooms had similar beds, but stopped himself. Don't go there, he berated himself. You start talking about beds and you're gonna mess your pants! Yeah, you're already really attached to him, but slow the fuck down!

They went into Troy's bathroom. While Troy searched drawers in the vanity for his new unopened toothbrush, Sean picked up the bottle of mouthwash, opened it and took a quick mouthful from the bottle. Finding the toothbrush and putting it on the vanity counter, Troy then picked up the mouthwash and took a swig. Watching Sean swish the mouthwash around from the mirror, Troy grinned and a little bit of blue mouthwash dribbled out of his mouth. Grabbing the towel quickly, Troy patted his chin dry. Sean spit out his mouthwash then picked up the toothbrush and fumbled with the packaging before finally getting it out. Troy picked up his electric toothbrush and reached for the toothpaste tube. The simple task of unscrewing the top was somehow forgotten though and the unopened tube dropped into the sink. Impatiently rolling his eyes, Troy snatched it like it was alive and might jump from his hand again.

Sean seriously asked, "Are you nervous too?"

Running a squiggly line of paste on the brush, Troy grinned and nodded then handed off the tube and asked, "You are too?"

Sean nodded, "I really don't want to screw this up... you and me,

us as a couple, I mean."

"It's not that I'm not ready," Troy tried to explain; "it's just my first time doing anything like this."

"It's not my first time as in first times, but this is way different."

"How so?"

Sean shrugged, "This time I really care," and stuffed the toothbrush in his mouth before he said anything more embarrassing or stupid.

Troy nodded then put his toothbrush in his mouth and turned it on. Rather than watch Sean in the mirror, Troy concentrated on Sean's hand on the vanity. He had nice long fingers with trimmed nails and a little blond hair too. Troy softly ran his fingers along Sean's fingers then slowly up his hand to his wrist. Sean flipped his hand over. When Troy began the process of tracing his fingers again, Sean slowly closed his hand. Troy looked up into Sean's eyes. There was softness there in Sean's dark blue eyes; willingness, but a genuine fear too, it seemed.

In Troy's paler blue eyes, Sean saw something he could only describe as respect. No one had ever really respected him before and it was shocking. He wondered; why would Troy respect me, of all people? There also seemed to be lurking questions in Troy's eyes, all possible questions at once; where, when, how, and why?

Leaving the toothbrush hanging from his mouth, Sean reached for Troy's face and caressed it again. It was a rounder face than his own and, thank goodness, it was a smooth face; the face of a teen boy, not an older man. Troy took a deep breath in through his nose and closed his eyes then pressed his face against Sean's palm. In that one simple action, Sean had a revelation. He trusts me! For the first time, I

want to do all those things the gross older men made me do. Does he realize I could spend hours eating him alive? Go slow though this time, Sean told himself. There's no reason to hurry or scare him. I'll take a small step then let him take a step and we'll go back and forth like that.

Troy's eyes opened and he turned off the toothbrush before it wore his teeth down to stubs. Lifting his head off Sean's palm, Troy then leaned forward to spit out the toothpaste and suds in his mouth. While Troy wiped his mouth, Sean spat out the toothpaste in his mouth. Troy offered the towel and Sean took it to wipe his mouth. When Sean put the towel on the sink, Troy moved closer and wrapped his arms around Sean's back, resting his head on Sean's shoulder.

"You're shaking," Sean realized, and held Troy firmly in place.

Troy nodded and softly admitted, "Can't help it. It's so weird. I never thought it could be like this."

"Do you not want to?" Sean whispered, "We don't have to."

"I do want to; just don't know how to."

"For someone that don't know how, you're doing and saying the best things."

Troy giggled, "I'm there already."

Sean wondered, "Where already?"

"I falling in love with you."

Those were the most precious few words Sean had ever heard in his life. "I love you too, Troy."

"It's not even been three hours since we met."

"Is there a certain amount of time it should take?"

"I guess not. I just never believed in the possibility."

"Love at first sight?"

"Almost first sight."

"I'd never hurt you or anything."

Looking up into Sean's eyes, Troy smiled, "I know it." Sean softly kissed Troy, just long enough to feel soft lips against his own. Only to try to emulate Sean's kiss, Troy kissed him back. Pulling back, Troy asked, "How was that?"

Sean giggled, "Awesome!"

"I'm just following your example," Troy blushed.

Sean teased, "We could probably do everything we need to here, standing in the bathroom?"

Troy chuckled, "Or we could get more comfortable?" Sean nodded and Troy began pushing Sean backwards out of the bathroom.

Walking backwards, Sean giggled, "What are you doin'?"

Wide eyed, Troy playfully admitted, "I just don't want to let go of you."

Tossing his head back and laughing, Sean realized, "You're not shaking anymore."

"Be afraid," Troy giggled. "Be very afraid."

Stepping into Troy's room, Sean teased, "Of you? Never! Anything you did to me I'd prob'ly like a lot."

Troy laughed, "Kick the door closed, Tiger."

Sean did as Troy instructed and loudly purred then admitted, "I like that name."

Troy softly asked, "Show me a really deep and passionate kiss?"

Sean grinned, "I can do this." Their lips met and Sean snaked his tongue past Troy's lips and into his mouth. Holding Sean tighter, Troy whimpered and Sean desperately groaned. They began breathing through their noses and getting excited. However, they were still standing only a few feet beyond the door and the blinds Troy had opened hours earlier were still open.

When they finally broke apart, Troy gasped, "Oh Jeez! That was incredible!" Sean couldn't help giggling at Troy's enthusiasm. Troy then gathered his self control and softly smiled, "Gimme a minute, okay?" Sean nodded and watched Troy race from the sliding doors to the window, closing the blinds. Exactly why Troy was worried about the windows fifty feet up, Sean wasn't sure, but then he remembered the balcony. Troy then closed his guitar case, snapped the latches and put it on the floor. Lastly, Troy crawled onto his bed and patted the mattress for Sean to join him, saying, "My turn to try that out." Smiling widely, Sean sat on the bed by the headboard and pulled his feet up. Troy crawled over his boyfriend and landed the kiss he'd always dreamed of. This time, Sean briefly whimpered and pulled on Troy to have him eventually squatting across his lap. Breaking the kiss, Troy slid his face over Sean's shoulder and sighed, "Oh man! We ain't done diddly yet, but I feel all kinds o' crazed."

Sean nodded and breathlessly admitted, "It's all way different

for me too, now that I actually love who I'm kissing."

Troy softly said, "Tell me something. Why me?"

"I don't even really know," Sean honestly replied. "I guess it's everything about you combined. Your brown hair with blond highlights really looks kewl, but that was only the first thing. On stage yesterday, you just caught my interest. Now that I know you, it's even more intense than it was yesterday. I can barely wait for tomorrow."

Troy then softly admitted, "Before I got on stage, I was scoping out the guys in the band." Sean softly chortled. Troy said, "You got them beat now." He then whispered, "I love you and think you're way hot."

Sean took that as a signal and carefully groped Troy's erection through his shorts. Troy gasped and his entire body lurched. "I'm sorry," Sean sincerely said. "I'm rushing it again, ain't I?"

Troy shook his head and said, "Just a shock. No one's ever touched my dick when it's hard before except me." He then grinned, "Touch it again?"

Sean whispered, "I love you, Troy," then more gently pressed his hand against the front of Troy's shorts. Sean watched Troy's facial expressions. Since he was obviously enjoying it more, Sean softly asked, "Can I see it?" Troy nodded, so Sean deftly unbuttoned the shorts with one hand. He then slid his fingers inside Troy's shorts to protect against accidental snagging then used his other hand to lower the zipper. Seeing his boyfriend's circumcised erection for the first time, Sean looked up and smiled, "Nice, really nice."

"Ya think so?"

Sean nodded, "I've seen tiny ones and real big ones. Yours is

perfect, really."

Troy blushed, "God! You're so sweet! Who could've possibly ever taken advantage of you?"

"The slime of the Earth," Sean plainly answered.

Troy smiled, "Never again, Tiger." He then deliberately added, "You are all mine."

Glancing away shyly, Sean mumbled, "I really hope so."

Troy lifted Sean's chin softly saying, "Hey, I haven't had many friends, never mind someone I could call a best friend, until today. I really do care for you that much." He stole a quick, tender kiss then lifted Sean's arms to remove his shirt. Tossing it aside, Troy then removed his own shirt and carelessly flung it over his shoulder, causing Sean to giggle. Rolling off to the side of Sean, Troy pulled his shorts off. Returning to lay beside Sean and cuddling up close, Troy smiled, "Can I see your dick?" Sean nodded and Troy went to work on the boardies drawstring and Velcro. Seeing the size of Sean's uncircumcised erection, Troy softly gasped, "My God!"

Covering his eyes, Sean giggled, "I know. I'm surprised you didn't feel it."

"I did, but... what the hell do I know how a hard dick feels against my thigh? The good Lord gave you an extra helping."

"It's too much, isn't it?"

Troy looked up into Sean's eyes and seriously assured, "It's part of you. I didn't fall in love with your dick. I fell in love with the way you've acted and talked the last few hours." Troy then briefly looked down before smiling up at Sean and cackling, "This is one big

bonus!" Feeling his face flushing again, Sean giggled and realized he hadn't smiled so often in years. Troy shared, "Yesterday, I was afraid to get on stage. If I hadn't, you wouldn't have wanted to meet me. I mean, talk about your life changes. I go from shy lonely gay boy to having a very well equipped boyfriend in a day."

Sean grinned, "It's not always like that."

Troy loudly laughed, "I would hope not!"

Sean cracked up then chuckled, "I mean it's barely more than a chubby for most dudes. You make my dick this hard, Troy."

Kissing Sean's belly quickly, Troy then looked up and giggled, "Ya know, when we walked in the house, I had a thousand questions, wondering why you like me. I'm just gonna count my blessings and shut the hell up."

"You really liked being with me all this time?"

"Hell yeah, I did! What's just as much fun, to me anyway, is talking with you. All those men that were after your dick should've done what I did; they should have gotten to know you first. I've seen you bashful and shy, serious and silly, with other kids at the dining room, pool and diving well. You're really a sweet person. I'm proud to call you my boyfriend."

"Really?"

Troy nodded, "I'm so proud I want you to have dinner here with me and my mom."

Sean worried, "What if she don't like me?"

"That's her problem," Troy stubbornly said. "Anyway, I know

she'll like you. And you know what else?"

"What?"

"Just cuddling like this is fantastic."

"Yeah, it really is."

"Ya wanna spend the night here?"

"Isn't that gonna push your mom over the edge?"

"I really don't think so. She knows I'm gay and has been pushing me out of my shell."

Sean grinned, "You're out now!"

Evilly cackling, Troy tugged on one leg of Sean's boardies and admitted, "I've never seen blond pubes before either. Yours are especially nice."

Sean giggled, "What makes mine so nice?"

"Two things; they're yours and they're blond. Now lift your ass so I can get these shorts off of you!" Sean roared laughing and raised his butt. After removing Sean's shorts and tossing them on the floor, Troy settled down close to Sean again and kissed him. "I have one other question, being a virgin and all."

Sean giggled, "What's that?"

Troy whispered, "I wanna play with your dick, but I really don't want to hurt you."

"Why would you think it would hurt?"

"It's uncut. Isn't it more sensitive?"

"The foreskin is, but it'll stretch pretty far in both directions before it hurts. It also adds some really good feelings." Sean then scooted down and demonstrated on Troy's dick what feels really good. Apprehensively, Troy copied Sean's actions. Sean sighed then whispered, "That's real nice." Their faces moved closer and they kissed once again.

Almost an hour and half after Platinum Habits arrived at the auditorium and thirty minutes after they began practicing, Troy and Sean walked in carrying saxophones, several pocketed harmonicas, a recorder and two guitars. The band was playing Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds, and Mike was singing lead vocals with Keith backing him up. Corey was trying out the new laser lights he had Alden deliver and install; red and blue beams of light were dancing around the stage and out onto the ceiling of the audience area. Already more than pleased with each other, Troy and Sean were thrilled with the new stage setup and lights. At the front of the stage, Troy slid his guitar cases up and Sean slid the two saxophone cases onto the edge of the stage. The two boys then turned to each other, hugged tightly and kissed deeply; causing a stir of giggles in the audience that couldn't be heard over the music.

Leaning closer to Sean, Troy said, "Don't you go anywhere."

Sean replied into Troy's ear, "Never! We're going back to your place after this?"

Troy nodded and giggled then let go of Sean. Heading up on stage, Troy waited near the stage corner for the song's end so he wouldn't interrupt. Out in the audience, Sean found Horacio and parked himself next to his roomie. Horacio leaned close and said, "I left you around ten-thirty and now it's quarter of two. The ten minutes

has passed!"

Blushing fiercely, Sean nodded and laughed.

Horacio grinned, "Give it up, bro! What've you been doing all that time?"

Sean shrugged, leaned closer and replied, "Talking mostly."

"You're so full of shit!" Horacio laughed.

Sean assured, "It's true," and then answered, "What I'll never have to ask you to do again."

Horacio repeated, "Never again?"

Sean nodded and said, "Thanks for the shove," then held up his clenched fist. The two boys knocked knuckles then settled back to watch the band.

When the band finished the song, Troy walked across the stage. Keith caught up with him and knocked knuckles. Prez then shook his hand and congratulated him. Derrick came down off the risers and knocked knuckles. Still wearing an electric guitar and wanting to avoid shocks, Mike simply smiled and offered his congratulations and a rain check for more later.

Troy waved his arm and commented on how great the stage looked and that the laser light show was especially kewl.

Keith said, "We've got you all set, dude."

Mike pointed at the two amps before the drum riser and said, "One of each, dude; one for your acoustic and one for the electric."

Troy gushed, "I can't believe you guys got me a 50th

Anniversary Stratocaster."

"Sweet!" Mike chirped.

Troy nodded, "It's got the most beautiful grain pattern I've ever seen."

"That's kewl," Prez smiled. "Let's work on 'Urgent' and 'Shine On You Crazy Diamond' first."

Troy said, "I'm ready, but can I ask a favor?"

"Sure, dude," Keith quickly said.

Troy asked, "Do you guys know The Moody Blues song, 'The Story In Your Eyes'?"

Keith nodded, "Yeah, excellent tune too."

"We've never played it as a band before though," Derrick admitted.

Troy explained, "I played it for Sean this morning. I think Keith or Derrick should sing the lead vocals, but Sean wants me to sing it. Can we try it out, for Sean?"

Everyone enthusiastically nodded and Prez grinned, "You guys have really fallen for each other?"

Troy giggled, "He's so great! Where I'm weak he seems stronger and where he's less strong, I take over." He paused and noticed four wide smiles then blushed, "I'm trippin'?"

"Abso-tively!" Mike cheered.

Patting Troy's back, Keith assured, "We all know the feeling,

dude."

Prez said, "We've got a vocal mic for you, and clip-on mics for the saxophones."

Derrick instructed, "Get the tenor sax out, dude. Let's play 'Urgent' first." When everyone agreed, Derrick went back up to his drums.

Troy got his sax out and checked the tuning against the piano. He then clipped the microphone to the bell and grinned, "It's wireless too?"

"Prez, you and me are wireless now," Mike smiled. "Since Derrick and Keith are pretty much locked in place, the three of us can move around to keep the audience boppin' and hoppin'."

Through the stage monitors, Drew asked Troy for a quick sound check to set the level on the tenor sax. Troy played briefly and then Drew chirped, "Kewl, bro."

Platinum Habits and Troy ran through 'Urgent' with Troy playing saxophone, and 'Shine On You Crazy Diamond', with Troy playing his new Stratocaster and then the saxophone solo. They then played 'Stairway to Heaven', with Troy playing the opening flute part on the recorder and then switching to acoustic guitar. Keith easily handled the lead vocals. At the end of the song, while the audience was clapping and cheering, Drew's voice came over the stage monitors. "YEAH! That's how that song should sound live!"

The band then played 'Hoochie Coochie Man', with Troy providing an excellent blues harmonica solo. Keith played his keyboard solo on the new Hammond organ then Mike played a completely different solo than he had played the prior day. In front of the stage and before the first row of seats, Kaleo and Tory began dirty

dancing together. The band then taught Troy a few of their favorite cover tunes that really required his rhythm guitar and background vocals. They played, 'Never My Love', 'Starrider', 'I'd Love To Change the World', 'Time Of The Season' and 'Traces'. Hearing more songs from Friday night's concert, sounding every bit as good with Troy, many of the original kids got enthused and began telling the newbies about that night. When the final song ended to more applause, Prez moved closer to Troy and asked, "You wanna sing lead vocals on 'The Story In Your Eyes'?"

Troy nodded, "This time, for Sean. If I suck, then Keith or Derrick could easily take it."

Keith walked up to the nearest microphone and said, "Drew? Only the stage monitors for a few minutes please, bro?"

Over the monitors, Drew replied, "The main faders are down, dudes."

Troy checked his guitar's tuning against the piano then they began rehearsing 'The Story In Your Eyes'. Mike began with the introduction and Troy joined in. Then Prez, Derrick and Keith joined in turn.

In the audience, Sean leaned closer and told Horacio; "Troy played this same song for me earlier."

"Was it any good?"

Sean grinned, "The song?"

Horacio shoved him and laughed, "Of course the song!"

Sean giggled, "He played the song perfectly. He sang to me in his bedroom." Horacio began mooing. Sean cackled then leaned

closer and whispered, "For the first time in my life, I want to take him to the stars and back again, but he's a virgin."

"Was a virgin," Horacio softly corrected. He then wondered, "What's the problem?"

Sean rolled his eyes and asked, "What part of virgin didn't you understand?"

"Oh!" Horacio said a little too loudly. He then softly asked, "You know what you need to do then?" Sean shrugged, so Horacio explained, "Let him take you to the stars and back again."

Sean grinned, "Just the way he talks to me, he kind o' already has. He trusts and respects me. It's an amazing feeling."

"You know what I mean."

"I know. It's not a problem for me. I'll prob'ly be a problem for him though."

Shaking his head sadly, Horacio asked, "Why are you worried about it?"

"I just don't ever want to hurt him," Sean replied.

"Time, bro. He'll let you know when he's ready." Horacio then had an idea and asked, "Would you say Troy's hung average?"

Sean shook his head and replied, "More than average, judging by what I've seen of men. I'd guess close to seven inches long and at least five inches around."

Horacio smiled, "I'll take care of everything," and then stood up.

Sean nervously wondered, "Where are you going?"

"Trust me," Horacio replied, and then shuffled down the row to the aisle and hurried to Kaleo. Horacio and Kaleo chatted for about a minute then Kaleo tapped his sub-vocal. The band were working on their harmonies and singing along with only Troy's acoustic guitar accompaniment. Horacio began walking back up the aisle. However, before Horacio arrived, three wrapped boxes appeared in the seat Horacio had been sitting in. Shuffling back down the row of seats again, Horacio grinned and sat on the other side of Sean.

Pointing at the boxes, Sean asked, "What are these?"

Horacio looked over at the boxes and answered, "Presents, from you to Troy."

Sean groaned then asked, "What've you done?"

"I'm helping you, dude!"

Almost afraid to ask, Sean eventually wondered, "What's in the boxes?"

"One is a box of chocolates."

Sean smiled, "Awesome! Thanks!"

Leaning closer, Horacio whispered, "The other two are dildos, with lube and condoms in each box. I asked for three; a five by four, a seven by five, and the last one is just like you, nine by six. You guys can play with 'em together."

Sean excitedly croaked, "Dude! I might as well say, 'I'm lookin' forward to fucking you!'"

"No," Horacio sang. "What you are saying is, 'I love you and

want to play with you.' Give him the chocolates and the small box tonight. I'll take the other box back to our dorm room. You can give it to him whenever you're ready."

Satisfied that they had the vocals down and were ready, Keith waved both his arms and loudly said, "Crank it up, Drew."

"Kewl," Drew replied, "Let's hear it."

Sean shook his head and giggled, "I'm gonna smack you so friggin' hard!"

Quickly covering his mouth, Horacio cracked up and slid down into this seat, completely hysterical.

Derrick counted off then Mike began playing his electric guitar and Troy came in with his twelve-string acoustic right after Mike. Prez's bass and Derrick's drums came in followed by Keith's piano part. Finding Sean out in the audience, Troy stepped up to the microphone and sang emotionally, as if Sean was the only person in the audience.

Horacio leaned over and grinned, "He's singing to you again, dude."

Feeling an intense shiver race up his spine, Sean nodded and smiled, "I know it." Then he got up and walked down the aisle. Stopping at the first row of seats, Sean stood, proudly watching and listening to his boyfriend. Dillon, Geoff and Richie looked over and up at Sean. They looked up at Troy, noticing that he was only looking at Sean, and all three little guys began giggling.

The song ended with five voices singing through the repeated main riff then everything ended sharply. Sean began clapping and cheering. Having just heard the original recording with Troy only a

few hours earlier, Sean thought the band played the song perfectly and his new boyfriend had done an outstanding job. Out in the audience, Horacio stood and clapped, prompting everyone to get on their feet. Soon, almost everyone was standing and cheering.

Mike and Prez put their guitars back on their stands. Keith, Derrick, Mike and Prez surrounded Troy and congratulated him. Prez smiled, "You sing like that all the time?"

Taking his guitar off, Troy blushed, "This time was a bit more special."

"We could tell!" Mike laughed.

"All lingering questions have been answered," Derrick smiled, "You're in the band now, dude"

Glancing around at the others, Troy squealed, "Really?"

At Troy's obvious surprise, Keith chuckled, "You play guitar, harmonica, keys, recorder and sax, and you can sing too. You're in."

Prez nodded, "An added extra, you know enough music theory so we can share stuff quick and easy."

Mike chanted, "If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck."

At the edge of the stage, on the audience floor and behind Troy, Sean began laughing.

Stepping forward and giving Troy a hug, Mike giggled, "Someone's waiting for you," then stepped back.

Glancing over his shoulder briefly, Troy blushed, "We're done for today?"

"We're done for now," Derrick corrected. "If things don't get too whacky tonight, we'll play more then."

Prez nodded then told Troy, "We've got some Clan stuff to deal with. We'll be back about six."

Keith offered, "I'll have Alden transport your instruments back to your condo."

Troy grinned, "Don't bother, it's kewl. It gives him an excuse to come home with me." Turning red again, he then helplessly cackled, "And me an excuse to be alone with him some more."

Smiling widely, the four Clan leaders playfully sang, "Excuses, excuses!"

"Gotta love 'em!" Troy loudly laughed.

Patting Troy on the shoulder, Prez smiled, "We'll leave you two to pack up your gear." Keith, Mike and Derrick then walked across the stage and down the steps with Prez following. They each offered their congratulations to Sean, then got their kids and started up the aisle.

Troy waved Sean up onto the stage. Sean hurried up the steps. Troy met him and they hugged tightly then kissed deeply. Troy pulled back, tilted his head and smirked, "You're excited?"

Sean nodded and giggled, "You sang to me again, in front of everybody."

Troy provocatively mooed then rested his head on Sean's shoulder. "I can't believe this day!" Troy excitedly gushed. "First you, then us and now I'm part of a band!"

"There's only one more thing to do," Sean reminded.

Troy softly assured, "Don't worry about my mom, Tiger. I know she's gonna like you."

Sean sighed, "I'm just worried about my past, ya know? She may not like that."

Hugging Sean tighter, Troy explained his perspective a little. "She took a job with Clan Short. She has to know a lot of these kids have been abused. In New Jersey, she had a similar job working with special needs kids. If it worried her at all, she wouldn't have accepted the job in the first place. For weeks she's been pushing me to get out more and do stuff. That's simply not me, Sean. I'm a musician..."

"A really good one too," Sean interrupted.

After another tight squeeze and an appreciative kiss, Troy stepped back saying, "What matters is us, you plus me. Your past is over and done. You'll see, my mom's gonna think the same things I did." Troy then began packing up his saxophone and instructed, "Take the strap off my guitar, please?"

Sean nodded and went to Troy's guitar. He soon figured out how to take the strap off and wondered, "What did you first think of me?"

Blushing and giggling, Troy honestly replied, "Cute. A little shy. Dressed nice."

"In boardies and a T-shirt?" Sean giggled.

Taking the wireless device off his acoustic guitar, Troy nodded, "Yep, that's what I thought. Was it so different for you yesterday?"

Sean shrugged, "I guess not."

Placing his guitar back in its case, Troy said, "We had a good start. It's gonna get even better."

"Like how?"

"Right off the top of my head; neither of us is alone wishing for someone; next, you'll get me out of the house and by the pool; also, I'll get you more interested in music, which means you'll eventually be asking me to learn your favorite songs."

Sean nodded and smiled, "All good stuff so far."

With his gear packed, Troy went to him and reached for his hands, "What about going out on dates? What about slow dancing together? What about rainy afternoons just watching TV or playing games?"

Sean slyly grinned, "What kind of games?"

Moving closer, Troy whispered, "All kinds." The lights in the auditorium began turning off. Troy smiled, "Let's get out of here before they leave us in the dark."

"That's not such a bad thing either," Sean teased.

Troy laughed and picked up his saxophone cases. Sean grabbed the guitar cases and the recorder. As they started off the stage, Troy reminded, "It'll be another few hours before my mom gets home." He then joked, "Whatever shall we do?"

Sean roared laughing then remembered the gifts still waiting where he and Horacio left them. He worried if Horacio remembered to bring the one larger box back to the dorm. Approaching the area where he was sitting, Sean said, "Just a minute," and began searching

the rows of seats as he slowly walked by.

"What are you looking for?" Troy wondered. "Did you lose something?"

Sean turned and grinned, but didn't reply. Eventually seeing the two boxes, Sean put the guitars down then shuffled down the row. He picked them up and turned around. Seeing two smartly wrapped boxes with ribbons and bows, Troy's jaw dropped. "These are for you," Sean simply said, and held out the packages.

Speechless, Troy put the saxophones down and wiped happy tears from his eyes. He took the boxes, sniffled and stammered, "I... can't... believe you... got me presents. When? How?"

Sean shrugged, "Horacio and me were talking. He went to Kaleo and a minute later, presents appeared. I guess it was Daileass." Carefully placing the boxes down on his baritone sax case, Troy then gave Sean a rib cracking hug. Sean grunted then giggled, "You ain't even opened them yet!"

Troy cheered, "It don't matter. You got me presents!" then kissed Sean hard and deep. Breaking the kiss and resting his head on Sean's shoulder, Troy giggled, "You're trying to impress me and my mom, aren't you?" Sean only laughed. Troy playfully sang, "It's working!"

Now standing in a mostly darkened auditorium with only a few dimmed lights above and the little L.E.D. tracks outlining the aisle, Sean whispered, "I really do love you, Troy. I only hope you like them."

"I already do," Troy assured. Opening his eyes and sighing, Troy realized they were in the dark. Stepping back, Troy anxiously chuckled, "I can't wait to get these home and opened. What did you

do?"

Picking up the guitars and smaller sax case, Sean hummed then giggled. He could only hope that Horacio's ideas weren't going too far too fast. Troy picked up the other sax case and the two gift boxes.

Outside the auditorium, Madeline Hupp stopped Prez to ask if she could order commercial grade laundry carts for each of the dormitories, the pool house and the indoor rec center. She explained that more kids were moving into the dorms. Gathering and separating laundry would soon become an issue. Surprised that the housekeepers didn't have all the equipment required, Prez asked what was needed. He immediately had Alden acquire and deliver everything Madeline had asked for; including ten and twenty bushel laundry carts adequate for bedding, clothes and towels. Everything was delivered to the housekeeping rooms at the dorms, pool house and rec center.

At the CIC conference room, the Core Rimmers had gathered and were waiting for instructions about their phaser training. Everyone was more than a bit disappointed they hadn't stuck around for a tour of the Enterprise. And it was obvious that the tour was taking longer than expected, because John wasn't with them for the phaser training that he was looking forward to.

Juan walked into the conference room on the Hawaii base with a grin on his face. Holding his hand was his son, Tumelo. His son. He still could not get over that fact; he had a son. For a moment, he dwelled on the idea of how much he personally had changed in the last few days since the little boy had been around. Everything seemed so different when he had to think about this little boy, and how everything he did would affect him. For a moment, he flashed back to his conversation with the boy less than an hour ago.

Watching his son play with some small cars on the floor of his

room, Juan grinned and called, "Tumelo?"

The boy jumped to his feet, ran over to Juan and jumped into his arms. After a very wet kiss that the boy had placed on his cheek, Tumelo almost melted into Juan's chest and purred, "What's up daddy?"

Juan couldn't help basking in the feelings coming from the boy for a brief moment before he found his voice. "I gotta head over to Hawaii and train some of their guys in gun use. You wanna come with? I know they got a lot of kids your age, and the pool looked cool."

"Sure!" Tumelo exclaimed, but then got serious for a moment, or at least as serious as a five year old can get. "You mean you don't want me to learn about guns and stuff?"

Juan hugged the boy close to him trying to figure out what to say. For the first time in his life, Juan had something that was even more important than his guns. Yes, he had Koth and Joel and his family, but they didn't interfere with his love of guns. Tumelo though, it really made him rethink a lot of things he 'knew'. "What I want is for you to do what you want to do. If you wanna learn about guns, I'll teach you. If you wanna go to Hawaii and just play around with the other kids, that'll make me happy too. It's up to you."

"Maybe later," Tumelo said softly into Juan's chest.

"As I said, whenever you want." Juan said, squeezing his boy tighter for a second, and then suddenly he drove his fingers into the boy's side. Tumelo started to howl in laughter. Five minutes later, Juan finished the tickle torture, and got them both ready to go.

"Hey Juan!" He heard a voice say, and it brought him out of his musings. Looking over, Juan saw Prez starting to stand up out of his

chair in welcome. A quick glance showed that everyone that was supposed to be there was in fact there.

"Hey guys. Before we begin, I wanna introduce my son, Tumelo. Tumelo, this is Keith, Prez, Mike, Derrick, Drew, Corey and Kaleo." Juan said pointing out each person as he named them. Shyly, Tumelo buried himself into Juan's side while trying to hide behind the bigger boy; however, he did give a small wave, and a barely audible "Hi."

After the normal greetings were made, Juan looked at Prez. "You mind if he goes out and plays with the other little ones? He needs some time to learn how to be a kid again."

Not knowing until now that Juan was a father, Prez smiled, "Not at all, Juan."

"Cool." Juan then turned and knelt in front of Tumelo. "Why don't you head on outside and see what you can't get into. You know how to recognize the security guys, so if you have any problems, just find one of them, okay?"

"Sure thing, Daddy." Tumelo said as he scampered towards the door. He stopped, turned around, and gave a shy wave to everyone before darting out the door.

Moving to the front of the room, Juan said, "Okay, let's get this show on the road. Hey Daileass, can you teleport my table in here. It should fit right behind me.

"Sure thing, boss man." Daileass giggled. Juan looked a little perturbed. Behind Juan a table appeared holding a variety of weapons, both ballistic and energy based; some assembled, some not.

"Okay, before we get started, I know you guys have been real

busy lately, and who knows when something will happen, so if you guys agree, why don't we move the first part of this class into my mind. It'll save us a lot of time, and make things easier as I can set things up there in a way that will help. I don't know if you guys know or not, but the UNIT telepaths have many rules regarding what we can do with our powers and what we can't. One of the biggest rules is no using our powers on people unless they have done something wrong, without their permission. So I'm asking your permission to bring you all into my head for the book part of the training."

After getting agreement from everyone, Juan closed his eyes while sitting down. Next thing they knew, they were all in a close copy of the room, but they all knew they were in Juan's mindscape.

Juan let them look around for a moment as he knew this was a relatively new experience for many of them to be inside someone's mind. While he tried to copy the room exactly, he knew there were minor differences based on how he saw things, as opposed to how they saw the same thing.

"Okay, let's get going. The first thing you guys need to know about is the different levels that one can be trained in within the Clan. During our time in the Tardis, J.J., Riti and I came up with the different levels of training that one could go through. First off, there are two different classes that we teach to non-military personnel. The first is ballistic style weapons, and the second in energy based."

After making sure that they understood everything so far, Juan started talking again. "There are five levels to each class. Level one is standard Starfleet training in one or the other. This one will give you the certification to carry and use a weapon.

The second is Clan standard training. It builds off what is standard for Starfleet, and builds on that to give people a broader

spectrum of knowledge in not only the weapon style they want, but also the basics of the other. In other words, you guys all want to know energy based weapons. If you go level two, then you will also get to know the basics of ballistic.

Waiting to make sure they all understood so far, Juan hid the smirk that on the verge of showing. He knew that all of them were surprised by how serious he was being. He liked keeping people on their toes, and this was one of his favorite ways of doing it. Not to mention, when it came to gun safety, he was religious about it, and he expected the same from everyone he trained.

"The third level is what the Military members would receive. Your basic UNIT security members have level three training in either ballistic or energy. And since they are level three in one, they are classed as level two in the other. With me so far?"

Getting nods from everyone, Juan continued, "Level four is expert level. That is the level that some of the normal military members have, but all of the hybrids are trained to, as well as all the personal security forces. The final level, level five, is the instructor level. Currently there are less than ten instructors within the clan, but that is slowly growing." Again he paused to make sure they were with him, and seeing all of them nod, he went on. "My question to you all is simple. I need each of you to personally decide and then tell me what level you wish to train to."

Prez turned to his teammates saying, "We each need at least level two. Does anyone want to go beyond that?" Keith, Corey and Drew shook their heads. Mike and Derrick checked with each other.

Mike said, "Once I get level two, I may want to go to level three or higher."

Derrick grinned, "I might go as far as level three."

Kaleo added, "I'm thinking the same as Mike and Derrick. After level two, maybe level three. I'll decide if I need to go further than three after passing that course."

Prez turned to Juan saying, "Level two for now. If or when Kaleo, Mike and Derrick decide to go further, they'll contact you, Juan."

Juan nodded with a grin. "I'm glad you all picked at least level two. To be honest, had you picked level one, I would have just had some Starfleet schmuck come and train you."

Prez and many of the Core Rimmers chuckled. Prez then wondered, "You don't think too much of level one Starfleet standard, obviously. Is there a reason why?"

After letting the laughter die down, Juan once again seriously said, "Yeah, there is Prez. JJ, Riti and I agree that the biggest difference between level one and level two is this; level one gives you the training to use a weapon, but does not make sure you will use it. I know this may sound strange coming from me, but it's great to know how to use one, but knowing when to, and especially when not to use a weapon is more important. Even more important than that, is knowing that you can use it if needed. It's one thing to say that you can grab one of these," he reached behind himself, and pulled out a standard hand phaser, showing it to the group. "It's great to say you can use one of these, but it's totally different when you have to sight down on a living breathing person, and make the decision that it is time for their life to end. It should never be an easy decision; however, it must be one that can be made in an instant."

Juan watched for a moment, as each one of the Rimmers was

lost in their own thoughts. Finally Juan spoke again. This time his voice was soft and held a level of care and concern that they hadn't heard from him before. "I know none of you may believe this, but I do know what's going through your minds right now. I am sure since you all started up in the Clan you have had times where you've thought to yourself that you would like to kill the fucker that hurt some of the kids you've gotten to know. I am sure by now you have heard about some of what these kids have had to endure just to survive to this point, and you wanna make someone pay for it. I know very well what that is like."

He paused for a moment letting all take in what he had said. "However, when it comes time to actually pull the trigger it's another matter all together. Obviously, killing someone is a last resort. Most of the time, you can get away with just a show of force. If that doesn't work, then you can try to stun them. However, if that does not work, you must be willing to kill to protect your family and yourself. As I said, it should never be easy, but you must be willing to do it. Also know that if you ever have to do it, if you ever have to actually kill someone, as soon as it is safe to do so, you will be required to sit down and talk to one of the Clan shrinks or submit to a Vulcan mind-meld. It's a rule that I personally put into place because out of everyone, I know better what it is like to have to do it. Trust me, it never gets easier, nor should it. You will need to talk to someone about it. If you don't it will fester inside of you, until it hurts... hurts in ways you cannot even dream of."

He saw each of the boys lost in thought, and let them be that way for a bit before he brought them out of it. "However, that is the main reason why I will not train less than level two. Since the clan has telepaths, we use them. Before you are done with me, you will have faced scenarios that will test what I teach you, but more importantly, they will make sure you understand when to use force, how much to

use, and if you can make the killing shot."

Seeing that all the Rimmers were okay with what Juan had said so far, he launched into his training. For what the boys thought were the next several hours, Juan went through and taught them the different pieces and parts of not just the standard phaser, but also the phaser rifle. Once he was done with that, he taught them all the basics of the hand gun, and the smaller and easier of the rifles. By the time he was done, each of the boys could take apart and put back together all the weapons they were being trained in.

Done with his training, and confident that the boys knew what they were doing, at least as far as the book knowledge was concerned, Juan stated, "Okay, now here's the question. Do you guys wanna head over to the firing range now, or wait till tomorrow?"

Prez checked with his team again. "I don't know about you guys, but I'd like to get out of the classroom and into the sun."

Keith asked, "Will the firing range be in your mind or the real thing, Juan?"

"Real thing. We'll head over to the UNIT's Rapid Response Base. I got full firing ranges set up there for both ballistic and energy weapons."

"Get me out under the Day Shiny!" Mike cheered. Laughing and giggling, everybody nodded and agreed.

Everyone was laughing as Juan let them out of his mind. Before they really knew anything else, they found themselves standing just outside of Juan's firing range. For the next half hour, Juan went over the safety regulations that they had to observe while on the range, and then went through how to properly use the range. After he was satisfied, he spent the next two hours acting as range boss for the

seven boys.

Having completed level one and much of the level two training, all which remained for the next afternoon was running through some of the level two scenarios Juan had prepared. Juan and the seven Core Rimmers transported back to Ewa Beach, just beyond the pool. Tumelo saw his father approaching and ran towards him. Prez and Keith spent time playing with their boys. Mike and Derrick went with their boys to find the Scooby Gang. Corey and Drew found Geoff and Lenny together once again.

* * * * *

In Troy's bedroom, Sean was sitting on the bed, vigilantly watching his boyfriend open the larger of the two boxes. Troy took the ribbon and bow off then put them aside as mementos, so he would always remember Sean and the day. Ripping past the wrapping, Troy gushed, "Chocolates! Ghirardelli Chocolates! I've never seen a box of chocolates this big before!" He then looked at Sean and giggled, "I hope you're gonna help me eat all these? If I try, I'll turn into one big zit!"

Sean grinned, "Give some to your mom too. It can only help."

Opening the box, Troy smirked, "I hope you're kidding."

Sean shrugged, "Only partly. After today, she's lost her son."

Troy giggled, "You got that right!" He then sat nearer to Sean and offered him a piece of candy.

Glancing around the box, Sean mumbled, "I never had these before. Which is what kind?"

Flipping over the box lid, Troy said, "I like chocolate covered

cherries. Do you like 'em?" Sean shrugged because he really didn't know, but then thought of something and sniggered. Soon, Sean was giggling uncontrollably and trying desperately to not laugh aloud. Troy smiled and innocently wondered, "What's so funny? Haven't you ever had a chocolate... covered... CHERRY?" Putting the box aside, Troy threw himself at Sean and laughed, "Are you implying that I'm a cherry?"

Falling back to the mattress and becoming hysterical, Sean laughed, "Compared to me? YEAH!"

Troy quickly discovered that Sean was very ticklish. While he straddled his boyfriend and his hands flew from Sean's belly to his armpits, Troy laughed, "I'm from New Jersey! There's more sex and violence on the news every night there than at midnight porn theaters anywhere else!"

"I'm sorry!" Sean laughed and frantically tried to block Troy's hands. "It's just that you never did anything before today!" Troy stopped his attack and squinted. Sean helplessly giggled, "I'm glad it wasn't a box of only chocolate covered cherries. I'd be a dead man."

Huffing playfully, Troy rolled off his boyfriend and picked up the smaller box. Unwrapping the box and placing the bow aside again, Troy evilly gleamed, "Believe me, Tiger; I'm just as horny as the next guy. I'm into all the same stuff as any other gay teenager."

Catching his breath and sitting up again, Sean watched Troy open the second box and admitted, "I'm really glad to hear that."

Seeing the dildo in the box, Troy snorted then laughed, "You nut!" Pulling the plastic encased toy out of the box, Troy blushed and giggled, "Is there a message in this that I might have missed?"

Smiling widely at Troy's reaction, Sean honestly answered, "Just

one."

Still softly sniggering, Troy wondered, "And that is?"

Relieved, Sean sighed. He pulled Troy down with and onto him on the mattress. He then caressed Troy's face and shared, "What I felt for you two hours ago or this morning has doubled and doubled again. I don't ever want to hurt you like I was hurt. I was so worried you'd take the dildo the wrong way and get angry. Hearing you laugh about it made all the difference. I just don't want you worrying about my size, ya know?"

After laughing so hard for so long, Troy's heart melted. He shifted himself completely onto Sean and tenderly kissed him. Making eye contact, Troy warmly smiled, "I know what you mean about the feeling doubling every few hours. I feel it too. Sex is important, but it's not what matters most to me. It's this feeling inside that just keeps getting stronger and stronger. While sex is intense, it's nothing compared to this feeling.

"What more can I say, Sean? Really, you seem to get so worried over stuff. How can I make you feel better?"

Tilting his head from side to side, Sean softly said, "I don't know. I guess stuff that worries you worries me even more."

"Okay," Troy began, "That gives me something to go on. I'm not worried at all about introducing you to my mom. I know she's gonna love you because I do. It's really not something you need to worry about at all. Does that help?"

Sean asked, "Your mom won't care about my past?"

"She prob'ly won't even ask you about it," Troy quickly answered. "I'm pretty sure she'll ask me when she and I are alone." He

then thought carefully and softly asked, "What scares you so much about your past?"

Sean explosively sighed and wished he could turn away, simply so he could say what he needed and wanted to without Troy's beautiful eyes peering into his own. "I'm gonna tell you the truth, okay?" Troy nodded and Sean said, "I wasn't even ten before some man was sucking my dick. It was only a few days later, a different man was fingering my asshole. Not too long after that, I was getting fucked almost daily. On occasion, some men wanted me to fuck them, but rarely was I hard enough to actually do it. To me, sex is just an act that so happens to feel good. For the first time, today I felt real love and it was from you. It was there when you had me looking out the windows. It was there when you played and sang for me, both times. At the pool, it was still there. It was there again when we were naked together. There was something in your expressions while we were jackin' each other off that I had never seen before. I don't know if I can describe it right; it was more than happiness, more than appreciation, more than anything any man has ever shown me before."

Troy nodded and thought of what it might have been. He remembered what was in Sean's eyes at the time and finally hit upon a possibility. "I think it was passion, Sean. Yeah, there was happiness and appreciation there too, but beyond that, there was love. Really enjoying what you're doing and who you're doing it with adds up to passion. Passion is two things, love and desire. In our case, we wanted to do each other. You wanna know something else?"

"What?"

"The sex you had before with those men was dirty and they knew it. They didn't care about anything except getting off. That's prob'ly why you never saw it before. When I got you off today," Troy

paused and smiled, "it was like I had performed nothing short of a miracle. It was more thrilling to me than learning a song all the way through for the first time. It was more thrilling than playing for an audience. It was that special; that unique."

Sean finally smiled and admitted, "It was the greatest sexual experience I've ever had too. I think it was us kissing while we got off."

"That's all that matters, Sean. I don't ever want you to feel like you're just going through the motions with me. If something makes you feel that it's just an act, tell me, okay?"

"Nothing has been an act, honest. This is me, not an act."

Troy nodded, "I know it. Please promise you'll tell me if it ever feels that way."

"I will. I hope I never do though."

"If you do, we stop and figure it out. It's that simple."

"What scares you, Troy? About me or us, I mean?"

"Scares me?" Troy repeated. "About us?" He hummed thoughtfully then shook his head and answered, "The only thing that bugs me is my being jealous. It's wrong and a bad feeling, but I believe that just like I'm yours, my boyfriend is mine. That kind of love isn't something I can share; not now anyway, maybe I'll learn differently someday. I'm already there, Sean. I love you so much; I'm actually considering more than a sleepover tonight. I can see you living here with me and my mom. Maybe not this week or next, but I can see it happening."

Shocked, Sean asked, "You're serious?"

Troy nodded, "Why wouldn't I be? You're a sweetheart and a Tiger rolled into one. What's not to love?"

"My past."

"That was not your fault. And, what they left behind for me was a careful, considerate, warm and passionate guy that has more knowledge of sex than I do. I get a guy that's all that, who's also about my height and weight, blond hair, blue eyes, and, as if I might forget, he's got a nice dick that really grows. That's what I know today. I can only imagine what else I'll learn about you tomorrow."

Wiping his eyes, Sean weakly smiled, "You really think all that of me?"

Troy nodded and assured, "I want to spend my days and nights with you. I don't want to miss a single second, if I can help it."

"Nothing about me scares you; not even my size?"

"No, it don't scare me. It does make me wonder a few things though."

"Like?"

Slowly, a smirk spread across Troy's face. In a typically New Jersey blunt fashion, Troy answered, "How am I gonna get you in my mouth and how funny will I walk after I get you in my ass?"

Sean cracked up. After a few moments, he giggled, "Anything you do with your mouth is gonna be fine by me. As for your ass, that's why I got the dildo."

"It's half your size though!"

Sean seriously asked, "Have you ever had anything in your ass?"

Troy blushed and shrugged, "Just my own fingertip."

"Then that dildo is gonna feel huge. When it feels less huge, let me know. I've got two others for you."

Troy loudly cackled, "TWO?"

Sean giggled, "I'm taking no chances. That one's five inches long by four inches in circumference. One of the other dildos is seven by five, and then there's the nine by six. If I ever hurt you, down there, not only would I lose my erection, I'd probably hide from you for days."

Shaking his head sadly, Troy said, "You would too, I know it. See what I mean about being considerate?"

Sean shyly shrugged, "I guess."

"You're incredible," Troy smiled, "Add humble to the list. No other guy would ever be self conscious about a dick like yours. No other guy would be as concerned about his partner's comfort and then say, 'I guess'." Noticing Sean blushing, Troy assured, "This is not a bad thing."

Sean softly said, "I just wish I could list things about you that I like."

"You have listed some already," Troy reminded. He continued, "You've shown me the rest. You obviously like me playing and singing for you." Sean nodded and Troy added, "You like my sense of

humor too."

"Oh yeah," Sean giggled, "your reactions are too funny!"

"It don't matter that you can't explain it, Sean. You show it plenty." Troy then acted like he was searching his mind and teased, "If I recall correctly, you pulled me down and on top of you?"

"Yeah, I did."

Troy hummed then said, "We've been like this at least ten minutes. Do you want me to move?"

Sean cackled, "No way!"

"Somebody likes close contact as much as I do then."

"Yeah," Sean chuckled and blushed. "Close contact with you especially."

Troy teased, "Now I only have to wonder why our clothes are still on?"

Sean giggled, "You wanna have sex again?"

Shaking his head, Troy corrected, "I want to make love with you, but I'll be more honest; I'd really be just as happy spending the next hour cuddled up close and naked with you, before my mom gets home."

"What if..."

"If something pops up?"

"Yeah."

"Then we can ignore it or do whatever we want, if we both want

to."

"You could ignore it?" Sean incredulously cackled. "I don't even think I could do that; not with you anyway."

Troy slyly sneered, "That's what I'm hoping for, Tiger."

"Could we stay like this a little while longer?"

Troy nodded, "'Course." A few moments later, while running his fingers through Sean's hair and placing a few kisses around Sean's jaw, Troy grinned and softly admitted, "I'm trying not to dry hump you. Then my mom comes home and we've both got dirty shorts on."

Sean giggled, "That would be a slight problem."

Troy hummed thoughtfully then teased, "Then again, I'll bet you could fit into a pair of my shorts." He sighed and realized, "That would be a dead giveaway though, wouldn't it?"

Sean laughed, "Uh, YEAH!"

Troy continued kissing Sean then began twirling his tongue around under his ear. Hearing a desperate moan in response, Troy softly chortled, "Ya like that?"

Sean admitted, "No one's ever done that before."

"Fuckin' fools," Troy simply stated. "You taste really good." Troy went for Sean's earlobe next. Sean whimpered. "Don't tell me," Troy softly mumbled, "they never did this either?"

"Never," Sean sighed.

Troy whispered, "Assholes," then licked across Sean's throat and

began the process over again by the opposite ear.

Sean imitated what Troy was doing. Eventually, he asked, "Is this foreplay?"

Troy giggled, "If it isn't, it should be!" After another few minutes of making out, Troy felt Sean beginning to rock to the left then to the right. It wasn't the type of movement Troy was expecting or hoping for. Suddenly, Troy was on his back on the mattress, hysterically giggling with Sean smiling down at him.

"You're in trouble now," Sean warned, and then pushed himself up to stand.

Propping himself up on both arms, Troy cackled, "The Tiger is ready to come out and play?"

Taking his T-Shirt off and tossing it aside, Sean nodded, "For someone that's never done stuff before, you're really good at it."

Troy giggled, "That don't mean I never dreamed of doing it."

"You can stop dreaming," Sean promised, and dropped his shorts. Reaching forward and pulling Troy by the shoulders into a sitting position, Sean then lifted his partner's arms and took his shirt off. Reaching for Troy's boardies, Sean had them loosened and off in mere seconds. Carefully crawling back over Troy and laying down on top of him, Sean sighed and snaked his arms under Troy's shoulders. He then admitted, "I wanted to grab you at the pool before, just so I could feel you against me like this."

"Do it next time, Sean. This feels real nice," Troy whispered, and then kissed Sean's neck, earning a giggle. After another few quiet minutes of grinding and making out, Troy thought, so Sean thinks I'm cherry, huh? He then raised both arms and slapped Sean's ass cheeks

then squeezed them.

"Ow!" Sean chuckled. He raised his head and locked eyes with Troy wondering, "Is there something wrong?"

Grinning madly, Troy shook his head, saying, "I just don't wanna be cherry."

Sean grabbed a kiss then softly asked, "You want more than dry humping?"

Troy nodded and whispered, "Wanna suck your dick, Tiger. I want to know how to do all the stuff you know how to do."

Sean softly said, "I'm not gonna fuck you, Troy; not today; prob'ly not for a long while."

"No, but with the dildo, we could probably both have some fun?"

"It might be better for you to play with it alone first."

Shaking his head, Troy explained, "My days of beatin' my meat are over. I'd only be thinking of you anyway. Besides, I trust you to do better than I could."

Shivering with a sudden burst of pride and self respect, Sean smiled, "Say you trust me again?"

Troy warmly smiled, "I trust you, Sean." Quickly hiding his face in Troy's neck, Sean began to shed tears of joy. Feeling Sean quake against him then hearing a soft sniffle, Troy sighed and held Sean's head in place. "I love you," Troy whispered. "I love that you're shy. I love that you're so humble. I love that you chose to love me. From now on, we're a couple. It's you and me, Tiger; every day, doing

everything together. When you're at the pool, I'm there. When I'm practicing, it won't be to an empty room or an imaginary audience; it'll be with you here."

"Troy?"

"Yeah?"

"I don't feel worthy of you."

Troy softly shushed him and assured, "Believe me, you really are, Sean. Your old life ended Friday. Your new life started today. In between was the transition."

Sean hugged him tightly and whispered, "I'm so lucky and you're so awesome."

"Who else were you close to at the orphanage?" Troy wondered and quickly clarified, "I mean other kids, friends, besides Horacio."

"Friends as in sex?"

"No, friends as in friends."

"Mostly the other boys; especially Hank and Keanu."

"Not Kaleo?"

"He was in a different orphanage. I like him plenty now, but as a friend. Why?"

"Because I'm making it my goal to be as much of a friend to you as any of your other friends. I can't replace them, I know. There's gonna be stuff you need to talk with them about because of the shared experiences. The rest of the time though, I want this, what we're doing

right now."

"Talking and cuddling naked?"

"Talking and cuddling. Being naked is due to circumstance. I rushed you and I shouldn't have. I'm really sorry, Sean."

"Don't be. It was me, the past fucking with me. I was ready too, but when you told me that you trust me, it just hit me all at once. Maybe you don't know it, but even that small dildo could hurt you. Did you know that?"

"No; but that just proves my trust is well placed."

Sean growled then giggled, "That feeling just doubled again!" and firmly squeezed Troy. After another quiet minute or so, Sean whispered, "You didn't rush me."

"Be honest."

"Really, I didn't feel rushed at all. I was ready. I'm ready again if you are?"

Troy giggled, "I can feel you're ready!"

Lifting his head up, Sean whispered, "Wanna show you something," and then planted a deep kiss. The next thing Troy knew, Sean was nursing on his left nipple. After about a minute, the right tit was being teased. Sean then licked a wet trail down to Troy's navel. It was an outtie and Sean mumbled, "Wicked!" then went to work. The fact that it was a virtually hairless belly button is what turned on Sean the most. Sean gave it way more attention than he had either nipple.

Troy was giggling himself purple at the relentlessly exquisite torture. Before Troy completely recovered, Sean knelt on the floor

and swallowed half of Troy's erection at once. Having never experienced it before, Troy gasped and sat up straight before falling right back down to the mattress again. That was a reaction Sean did not expect and he was briefly concerned until Troy shouted, "Jesus H. Christ! Sean!" Unable to help himself, Sean giggled, which only served to squeeze Troy's member in his mouth. Troy whined loudly then pulled a pillow over and covered his face before any neighbors heard his unrestrained cries and got the idea a kid was being abused.

A bit less surprising to Sean was how good Troy smelled and tasted. Those older men must not have believed in showering, or just naturally reeked, because Troy was completely different and so much better. Another thing Sean was not prepared for concerned timing. Since older men took longer, Sean wasn't really taking Troy seriously when, after only three or four minutes, he began warning him. Not that Sean would've backed off; for the first time in his life he was enjoying the entire process immensely. Pulling the pillow back over his face, Troy screamed at the top of his lungs and bounced on the mattress like a bucking bronco. Finally, Troy relaxed and threw the pillow aside. It fell off the bed onto the carpeted floor.

Smiling proudly, Sean crawled back on the bed and cuddled up close to Troy with his head resting on Troy's chest. Troy was still delirious, but managed to wrap his right arm around Sean and kiss the top of his head. Hearing Troy's heart racing, Sean shared, "This is real love. For the first time ever, I wasn't reluctantly performing. It was so much fun! Your reactions made it really awesome. I can barely wait to do it again."

Still breathless, Troy loudly laughed, "Please wait! Let me focus! Just kiss me, Tiger!"

Shocked once again, Sean pulled back and softly asked, "You

want me to kiss you?"

"Hell yeah!" Troy laughed, and then rolled over on top of Sean and grabbed the kiss he wanted. Sean kept his mouth firmly closed. Snaking his tongue around and getting no more than lips, Troy pulled back and asked, "What's wrong?"

Sean shrugged, "My mouth... it's gonna taste like your jizz."

"Yeah. Do you think I care?"

"Don't you?"

"Absolutely not," Troy smiled. "What you just did for me was the most wonderful thing in the world. I love you, Sean; very much. I want to give you a real kiss, not a baby kiss, because you deserve it." He then leaned down and began kissing Sean all around his jaw then finally landed on his mouth. Troy made certain that his tongue reached every part of Sean's mouth possible. Confused and expecting Troy would soon be grossed out; Sean let Troy kiss him, but expected he would soon stop. Troy wouldn't stop until he got a response from Sean though. It was a long kiss that required them both to breathe through their noses. Finally, Sean's tongue began to respond and snaked its way into Troy's mouth. Squeezing Sean just as tightly as he had after receiving the gifts in the auditorium, Troy then broke the kiss. Troy softly asked, "They taught you it was wrong to kiss after a blowjob, didn't they?" Sean nodded. Troy carefully and softly stated, "It is not wrong when two people are in love. From my perspective, it's the most right thing to do. Do you understand?"

Sean nodded, "I think so."

"Let me explain a little more, okay?"

"Okay."

"We've still got about forty-five minutes before my mom comes home. Between now and then, I'm gonna suck you off, all the way, just like you did for me. When I'm done, I'm going to kiss you. My mouth's gonna be wide open, ready to invade, be invaded and swap spit. Do you know why?"

Uncertainly, Sean said, "Because you love me and I love you?"

"That's exactly right."

"I'm really sorry, Troy."

"There's no need to be. The thought never occurred to me that you wouldn't want to kiss me."

"I really did want to, but I was punched and slapped around for trying."

Shedding tears and angrily tightening his jaw, Troy forced himself to relax and sighed. "Remember what I called those men? They're fucking idiots, stupid and selfish to the extreme. I'll be just as honest with you as I want you to be with me." Troy paused then explained, "I'm from a city where there was plenty of violence. I was never personally bullied, but I was teased for being a musician. I have gotten into fist fights to protect myself. I want to find the men that hurt you and beat the fucking shit out of them. It scares me, but I know that once I got them down, I would kill them."

"You won't have to, Troy. I'm pretty sure that Clan Short killed them already. I didn't see them do it, but I did see the Prime Minister of Hawaii lying dead on a stage. I saw his body removed from the stage Friday night and put in a Coroner's van. What no one ever heard on the news was exactly what kinds of abuse those people did to lots

of us."

"I'm actually relieved that they're dead already."

"So am I and so are a lot of the kids."

Troy nodded then smiled, "Hey, are you as thirsty as I am?"

Sean nodded and grinned, "Yeah."

"Let's go to the kitchen."

As Troy pushed up off him, Sean wondered, "Where's our shorts?"

Offering Sean a hand up, Troy reminded, "What do you need them for? My mom's not home."

Taking Troy's hand simply because he very much wanted to, Sean shrugged then grinned, "If you're not gonna, I don't need 'em either; as long as I get to walk behind you and admire the view."

Uncontrollably blushing, Troy giggled, "You can even touch it now, if ya want?"

"Yippee!" Sean laughed, and reached for his boyfriend's ass.

Playfully blocking Sean's hands, Troy giggled, "Is it really that nice?"

"Awesome!" Sean giggled, and successfully got in a grope.

Giving up, Troy moved in closer and grabbed both of Sean's butt cheeks at once. He laughed, "I wouldn't know, but I know you've got a real fine one too!"

No longer interested in Troy's ass, Sean held on tight and stole a

kiss. There was a definite urgency and gratefulness that Troy felt and he reciprocated fully. When Sean slid his face over Troy's shoulder, he asked, "What have you got to drink?"

"I'm not too sure," Troy honestly answered, then giggled because Sean had completely destroyed his memory in less than a day. "Let's find out," Troy prompted, and then led Sean by the hand out of the bedroom to the kitchen.

* * * * *

Uncle Spock had been out by the pool area, spending time with his grandchildren and the other Rimmer kids, for several hours; since Joel, Kevin, John and Stephen left for their Enterprise tour. He excused himself to take an opportunity to meet with the Rimmer adults and spend time with his wife-to-be. While meeting with Jim Hundser and Bill Seaver, Admiral James T. Kirk beamed to Ewa Beach, arriving just outside the FYS building. He stepped inside where Rob Gibbons immediately recognized and greeted him. He wasn't expected, so Rob asked, "How can we help you, Admiral?"

"I thought I'd stop by and meet some of my extended family," Kirk casually smiled. "Besides, without my reminding Spock of his human heritage, he tends to become boring."

Rob chuckled, "Admiral Spock is down the hall, speaking with Jim and Bill about some Vulcan legal intricacies."

"Oh," Kirk groaned, "I've arrived too late." Rob chuckled louder. Kirk smirked, "Let me rescue your friends."

"Third door on your left, Admiral," Rob smiled.

Kirk thanked him and went down the hall. He was unexpectedly pounced by the Terrible Trio, just to say hello to their Uncle Jim.

They followed Kirk to the open conference room door, where Jim and Bill were trying to wrap their minds around the concepts Spock was presenting. Of course, Spock's strong engineering and diplomatic experiences were not conducive to educating a lawyer and a banker.

To throw a monkey wrench in the works, Kirk smirked and asked, "How do you feel, Spock?" The triplets helplessly cracked up.

Raising an eyebrow, Spock refused to directly answer as would be expected. Spock replied, "I am relaying to the members of the FYS Legal department fundamentals of Vulcan history and the resulting legal ramifications, Admiral."

Looking down at Jamie, Jacob and Beau, Kirk asked, "Is this a Starship? Have I transported to an incredible simulation of Hawaii?" Again, the triplets roared laughing. Kirk grinned, "We're off-duty, Spock."

Returning his attention to Jim Hundser and Bill Seaver, Spock performed formal introductions. Upon shaking hands with Jim Hundser, Jim Kirk smiled, "Please call me Jim, or Kirk, or only if you must, Admiral." While shaking hands with Bill Seaver, Kirk asked, "The same Bill Seaver that played for U.C.L.A. in 1987?"

Bill nodded, "Offensive back, M.V.P. that year. I'm surprised you remember."

"That was a memorable year," Kirk replied. "This year is shaping up to be equally memorable, in many ways." Glancing around the room, he suggested, "It's far too beautiful a day to be cooped up inside." Needing some backup, Kirk asked Jamie, Jacob and Beau, "Are you boys ready for some sun?"

In unison, the Trio replied, "Sure, Unca Jim!"

Jamie smiled, "We can be ready in only a minute or two."

"We'll just tell Aunt Jen we need a break and give her what we've already got," Jacob added.

Beau giggled, "We'll meet you out by the pools." With that, the three boys scurried out of the conference room.

Jim Hundser told Bill, "Go ahead. I'll wrap up with Spock and Jen then meet you outside."

When Bill Seaver stood, Kirk slowly raised his head to make eye contact and grinned, "No wonder you were M.V.P." He then told Spock, "Don't take too long."

"Yes, Admiral," Spock obediently responded.

Kirk sighed and turned around, muttering, "Jim. My name is Jim. You used to call me Jim."

Bill and Kirk walked out of the conference room and began chatting about the Pacific Rim Division creation. While they walked, Bill told the famous Admiral about the leadership team. The Terrible Triplets raced past them towards the pool. Bill talked about each of the Core Rimmers then told Kirk where they were at that time and that he expected them back soon. Arriving at the pool, Bill paused only because the threesome were lined up naked, standing before his wife, getting sun screen lotion applied to their shoulders and backs.

Soon, Jim Kirk found himself surrounded by some of the older Rimmer kids that recognized him. Word spread like wildfire amongst the kids. Soon, Kirk was almost like Santa Clause, sitting on a poolside lounge with kids on his lap and others surrounding him, telling tales of missions from long before many of the kids were born. Minutes before five that afternoon, Jim, Jen, Anna, Spock, Teri and

the team of Core Rimmers were meeting and chatting with him. He recognized leadership abilities in all of the Core Rimmers, much as he had with Cory and Sean Short and others in the original Orlando Clan. He was thinking of pulling Preston and Keith aside for a more detailed chat when his comm-badge chirped, ordering him back to Starfleet Headquarters. His concern never showed and he simply assured everyone that he would be back in a short while before transporting to San Francisco.

As Kirk left, Spock cracked the smallest smile at his best friend's back. He very much enjoyed winding Kirk up.

* * * * *

In the refrigerator, Troy found Coke and lemon-lime soda, orange, pineapple and apple juices and finally, filtered water. Troy was happy with a big glass of water. Sean had a small glass of pineapple juice. While in the kitchen, Sean asked, "Where's your dad?"

Troy replied, "My folks divorced. He was a homophobic asshole."

"Your mom divorced him because of you?"

Troy nodded, "It was mutual, I'm sure. Right after we moved here, I found out a couple of things that happened between them. It took a few years of arguing and fighting. He had had enough of her and me. She reached her limit with him too. She's my mom and I love her, especially for sticking up for me, but she's still a mom." He paused and giggled, "She can be a real pain sometimes. Boy, does she know what to say to push my buttons!"

Smirking, Sean asked, "What would she think if she walked in

on us now?"

Almost spitting out the water he was drinking, Troy laughed, "She'd know I have a boyfriend!" and then wiped his chin.

Sean giggled, "That's it though?"

"Well, she'd be embarrassed. I'd be twice as embarrassed for you and me."

After a moment's consideration, Sean asked, "You'd be embarrassed for me too?"

Troy grinned, but managed to flatly remind, "Umm... you're naked, Sean."

Sean nodded and smiled, "Lots of adult men and women have seen me. It wouldn't faze me much at all, unless she got too close."

Troy wondered, "Not that she ever would, but what if some grownup did get too close?"

"While I'm naked, I'd freak out. Before Friday, I did what I had to. Since Saturday, I'll do what I have to to prevent it."

"Perfectly understandable," Troy nodded. After another mouthful of water, he shyly asked, "So what do you think of us?"

"A couple o' things," Sean smiled.

Troy waited and watched Sean look away. He prompted, "Like?"

"I'm surprised mostly. I really didn't think you'd even let me in. Letting me look out the windows was really sweet. Even sweeter was what you said after I told you I like you." Troy turned crimson and

Sean helplessly giggled, "That's what's so amazing to me; you talk to me and wanted to know about me, even the bad stuff." He then shrugged and wondered, "Would most guys take the time to actually talk like you did?"

"I guess it depends," Troy answered, "if they want a boyfriend or to just get laid. I want a boyfriend. Remember me saying I'm the jealous type?" Sean nodded and Troy explained, "I only just met Prez and the band yesterday. Between then and dinner last night, I started to feel envious of them. Did you know they were two couples?"

Sean nodded and grinned, "Actually, they're three couples; Prez and Keith, Derrick and Mike, and Drew and Corey. Plus John and Kaleo make up our Core Rimmers."

Uncontrollably laughing while drinking, Troy sprayed water all over himself, Sean and the kitchen. "I'm so sorry!" Troy loudly laughed, then put his glass down on the counter. Sean cracked up then wiped water off his face and chest. Grabbing a towel, Troy quickly began sopping up the water on Sean. "I'm really sorry," Troy giggled. "I didn't know they called themselves *that*!" Before Troy had finished drying Sean off, he found himself wrapped in his boyfriend's arms. Still smiling, but not quite certain why Sean responded this way after getting soaked, Troy looked deeply into Sean's eyes.

Sean softly said, "I really love you."

"I love you too," Troy replied.

"For you, this is where you live cos your mom works here. For us rescued kids, we're all Rimmers." Troy began giggling, and Sean explained, "They're not just a band. Prez is our leader. Keith's second in command. Derrick and Mike and Corey and Drew and Kaleo and John, they're all the leaders of this Clan. In every sense, they are the

core of each of us. We revolve around them. We're like messed up, dirty chalkboards; ready to be cleaned so something new and better can be written. What we have here now is because of Clan Short. Without them, I'd still be some man's fuck toy. I don't want my life to ever be like that again.

"As far as I'm concerned, my life is here now, with you. I could've screwed up this morning. You might not have been interested or one of those that just wants to get laid. Not you though. You wanted to know me; the good and the bad. You're really patient with me. Then you got really angry about the stuff that was done to me. That's so awesome! I like when you call me Tiger too. I really don't want to mess this up, Troy. Sometimes though, I'm goin' on past experience only. It's like, I know where I want to be, but I'm in the dark, lost and feeling my way around. I kind o' know what love should be, but what I've been living with for five years has screwed that up too. Part of me thinks I'm screwing up now, telling you this stuff."

Vigorously shaking his head, Troy assured, "No, you're not. When it's from the heart, you're definitely not screwing up. Be this way for me and my mom. It's really great."

"I'll remember that, from the heart."

Troy reached in and stole a kiss. Backing up a step, he then softly said, "While I clean up this mess, tell me more."

Sean wondered, "Like what?"

Drying himself off, Troy shrugged, "Anything you want; about you, about us, about this Clan base, whatever."

Sean hummed then finished his juice. Figuring Troy would want to know more about the band, Sean said, "To you, they're Platinum

Habits. When we met them Friday, they were Old Habits. There was a concert Friday night at a luau. For most of us rescued kids, it was the first time we really listened to music and heard the words being sung. Every now and then I'd catch a phrase that would hit me like a bolt of lightning. The next day, I learned it wasn't only me catching those phrases; it was lots of other kids too.

"Prez and the entire core team are awesome. When Prez tells us what to do, we do it simply because he's so kewl and he's our leader. Like this morning, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike had a concert at their school. Before they left, Kaleo told everyone about the I.D. and credit cards. Prez asked if we had questions and then answered them. Then he told all the kids to line up, so we could pass out the cards. Prez is the director, but he rarely directs us. All the gay dudes think he's really cute. All the girls do too.

"Keith's really kewl too. His favorite saying is, 'be happy and safe'. Sunday, he caught two younger dudes goofin' around on one of the diving boards. All he did was shout up, 'Hey, knock it off! Happy and safe, remember?' The two dudes stopped, one backed off and waited for the other to dive then he went. It's so simple, but so effective. What makes it so different for us is there's no cussing or any punishment at all."

"Derrick and Mike are almost always together. Prez and Keith are too, but they'll separate a little more. Not Derrick and Mike; they're attached almost all the time. Me and Kaleo watch them a lot. We think that's what our relationships should be like. Now that I think of it, they're all just examples. Us older kids watch Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick. The younger kids watch Drew, Corey and John."

Finished cleaning the kitchen, Troy took Sean's glass and asked, "More?"

"No, thanks."

Troy put the glasses in the dishwasher then said, "I can't believe Drew and Corey are a couple. How old are they?"

"Drew's twelve and Corey's eleven. They told us they're in the same grade at school. Corey's only eight months younger than Drew."

Smiling and shaking his head, Troy remarked, "Partners at eleven and twelve! How totally kewl is that?"

Sean grinned, "I know. They're obviously younger, but act a lot older sometimes. Drew and Corey have a little dude named Geoff. Even John's got a boyfriend now; a new kid they just picked up last night."

"Did you just say Drew and Corey have a little boy?"

Humming affirmatively, Sean said, "Yep, all the Core Rimmers are Starfleet Ensigns and considered adults. Corey and Drew adopted Geoff. Mike and Derrick adopted Dillon, Jonah and Reyes. Prez and Keith adopted Richie and Dee then, last night, they adopted Sammy and Gage. I knew Richie from the orphanage. He's a completely different kid now."

"And Kaleo?"

Sean answered, "Kaleo's one of us, a rescued kid. He's got a boyfriend too now. He knew Tory from the orphanage, but they decided being friends wasn't enough." Sean paused again then beamed, "Our dorms are built really well; there must be cinder block walls between the rooms. When the doors are closed, you can't even really tell if someone's in a room or not. You can't hear stereos or TV's at all. Sunday night, Kaleo and Tory hooked up and all us dudes knew it. Kaleo's voice really travels!" Troy cracked up and Sean evilly

snickered. Remembering that obviously got Sean randy again. Troy noticed Sean's dick lengthening and thickening. Sean was definitely a grower and it was impossible to not notice.

Stepping closer to Sean, Troy kissed him deeply. Taking Sean's hand, Troy smiled, "Come on, Tiger. We've still got time and it's my turn." Troy then started to lead Sean back to his bedroom.

Sean nervously balked, "You don't have to, Troy."

"I know, but I really want to. Who knows, maybe I can make you scream and holler."

Sean giggled, "I'll swallow the pillow like you did."

Troy laughed at himself then reminded, "That was my first time! I only wish I was your first."

"You are, Troy!" Sean assured. Noticing Troy's puzzled expression, Sean explained, "You're not the first person to have sex with me, but you are the first person to make love to me."

Troy playfully grumbled, "Damn! Did the temperature in here just go up ten degrees?"

As Troy closed the bedroom door, Sean cackled, "Twenty at least!"

Sitting Sean down on the bed, Troy knelt down then enthusiastically began. Troy thought Sean's dick was amazing. Flaccid, he and Sean weren't that different, but soon Sean overstuffed his mouth. The feeling of Sean's cock sliding in and out of his mouth, throbbing as it was, reminded Troy of the feeling of a saxophone reed vibrating against his lips. After about a minute, Troy took a short break to stretch his jaw. Troy wanted to get more in his mouth and

make Sean understand that he was truly enjoying his first time. Sean softly instructed, "Pull the foreskin over the head and stick your tongue in there." Troy followed Sean's direction and got whimpers and groans in response. Ready for another full mouth, Troy tried to please more than half of Sean's thick tool. When Troy needed a second break, he dove down and licked Sean's scrotum then carefully sucked each testicle into his mouth. Again Sean whimpered then cheered, "You are so awesome! Are you sure you've never done this before?"

"Never," Troy confirmed, "Wanted to and dreamed of it only." Without instruction, Troy went down on Sean again, but this time used his hand to move the foreskin to and fro, in and out his mouth. Sean really liked it. Since it was good for Sean and a little easier on him, Troy kept at it.

Sean's hips started bucking and he grunted, "Fuck me!"

Troy thought the remark was an instruction, so he wiggled his finger into Sean's ass. Sean gasped and his hand began searching for the other pillow. Four times Sean warned Troy of his impending climax. Troy only thought, "No way I'm backin' off, Tiger. This is the way I've always wanted it and you are definitely worth it."

As previously promised Troy finished Sean off then crawled on the bed and kissed him. This time, Sean didn't hesitate. He accepted Troy's tongue and sucked hard then gave Troy his tongue. When they broke the kiss, Troy snuggled up close and asked, "The Tiger is tamed?"

Sean giggled, "Oh yeah! No one's ever swallowed before."

Shaking his head sadly, Troy softly confirmed, "They were morons. This is the right way." He then asked, "You know the

difference now?"

Sean dreamily chortled, "I swear, I'll never forget it!"

Noticing the time, Troy snuggled closer and whispered, "We've got five minutes before we have to get dressed. We'll clean up a little and at least look like we didn't spend two hours making love."

Sean contentedly sighed then asked, "You really love me?"

Troy nodded, "For me, you're perfect, Tiger." Not because Troy needed to say it, but because he felt that Sean needed to hear it, Troy easily repeated, "You're a little shy, I love that. You're a little self conscious, understandably so, and I love that. Just those two things make us perfect for each other, because I'm the same in different ways and for different reasons. You're humble and I'm a little more self assured; being a musician that taught himself a lot of what he knows, I simply became that way. That means you can make me more humble and I can make you more self assured. Are we kewl so far?"

Sean nodded, "Very."

"Kewl. I'm not done yet. You came here already liking me based only on the way I looked and acted on stage yesterday. You think I'm good looking, which I can't understand, so I know you won't believe me, but you, Tiger, are smokin' hot!" Giggling insanely, Sean almost broke out in a sweat, he blushed so hard. Troy only continued. "Other guys have tighter abs and more defined chests than we do, but guess what? I like what I see a lot. Have I misinterpreted anything so far?"

Sean purred, "No, you're right on target."

Troy crawled over and straddled Sean then locked eyes with him. Slowly and very clearly, Troy said, "I love you, Sean. Every hour that I spend with you, I love you more. I want to spend tonight and

the foreseeable future with you. My mom's gonna really like you. And she's going to be so surprised at me! I'm really looking forward to it too!" Acknowledging that Sean was looking directly into his eyes, Troy nodded and smiled then asked, "Are you ready to get dressed?"

Sean smiled, "As soon as I get another kiss. I gotta go to the bathroom too."

Troy admitted, "Me too," then rolled off Sean and onto the floor. They kissed, found their clothes then went into Troy's bathroom. They both relieved themselves. Troy flushed then began to pull his boardies on. Sean was at the sink washing his hands and then washed his dick. With his shirt hanging off his shoulder, Troy joined Sean at the sink to wash his hands and wondered, "What are you doing?"

Sean shrugged, "Just what I have to, to keep it clean."

"Oh, I didn't know. I thought it was for my benefit."

"Yours and mine. No funky dick cheese. The last thing I want is to have to get circumcised at my age."

Pulling his shirt on, Troy giggled then croaked, "Ouch!"

Drying himself off, Sean nodded and grinned, "A few days of chronic dick pain and no sex... now? No thank you! A week ago, I wouldn't have minded if someone chopped my dick clean off. Now I've got the most awesome boyfriend."

Tossing the towel in the hamper, Troy waited for Sean to dress then together they went to the living room. They sat close together on the sofa. Turning on the TV, Troy began channel surfing. Unexpectedly, Sean turned slightly and lay down with his head resting on Troy's lap. Troy smiled, "I love you so much."

Sean softly admitted, "Close body contact with you makes me less nervous."

Troy playfully mooded then grinned, "My mom's gonna walk in to find me kissing you."

"I can kiss you tonight in front of her?"

Troy nodded, "Right after I kiss you, we're kewl."

"Kewl. I don't think I could last too long."

Troy nodded, "Don't worry, Tiger," and began running his fingers through Sean's hair. After only a minute or so, Sean whimpered and smiled. Grinning, Troy looked down.

Sean giggled, "I hate to tell you to stop, but I'm getting a stiffie."

Troy laughed and teased, "Show me later."

Sean giggled, "I will; as long as I can see yours!"

Troy widely smiled and he joked, "Hi mom! This is Sean and these are our tents! I think we love each other!" Troy then raised the pitch of his voice and squeaked, "Ya think?" Sean cracked up.

Sean was still laughing and Troy smiling at his reaction when the condo door opened. Judy Faris walked in and turned to her right. Seeing Troy with another boy who was resting his head on her son's thigh, she smiled widely.

"Hi mom," Troy grinned.

Sean wasn't certain if another joke was coming until he noticed Troy looking to his right, towards the doorway. Quickly sitting up,

Sean waved, "Hi Mrs. Faris."

Gesturing to Sean, Troy said, "Mom, this is Sean Moorhead. He stopped by this morning to give me a Clan Short I.D. and a pre-paid credit card. We've been together ever since."

Barely containing her obvious excitement, Judy walked over and smiled at Sean, "It's my pleasure to meet you, Sean." She then locked eyes with her son.

Troy immediately began giggling. "Yes, mom," Troy playfully droned. He then took Sean's hand and confirmed, "We're boyfriends."

Bending at the knees slightly and raising her arms above her head, Judy Faris shrieked, "YES!"

Shaking his head and giggling, Troy turned to Sean and softly said, "Told ya!"

Judy joyfully teased, "If I don't get some hugs real soon, dinner won't be until breakfast."

Knowing that Sean was likely very nervous about an adult woman wanting affection, Troy softly offered, "It's okay, Sean."

Both boys stood and Judy wrapped them both in her arms. Each got a kiss on the cheek, then she asked, "What would you like for dinner?"

Troy answered, "We had tacos and burritos for lunch at the CIC dining room." He then checked with Sean, "What would you like?"

Sean shrugged and shyly admitted, "I don't even know what to ask for, so anything's fine, really."

"Whatever you were planning is fine, mom," Troy assured.

Judy sighed, "I was only planning on frying up some boneless chicken breasts. Let me see what I can do." She then released the boys and hurried to the kitchen.

Troy smiled at Sean then turned and said, "Don't go crazy, mom."

"What makes you think I'd go crazy?" Judy replied from the kitchen.

Turning back to Sean, Troy grinned and whispered, "It's too late." Covering his mouth, Sean insanely giggled.

Judy loudly asked, "So tell me, what've you been doing today?"

Leading Sean to the kitchen and offering him a seat at the breakfast counter, Troy then briefly outlined the day, omitting the intimate details. Judy was ecstatic to learn that Troy had gone to the pool then played with Platinum Habits again, and then been invited to join the band. Seeing that his mom was pulling out flour and bowls, Troy wondered, "What's for dinner?"

"Chicken Piccata and pasta," Judy answered.

Sean tapped Troy's shoulder. Troy leaned closer and Sean whispered, "What's that?"

Troy softly answered, "It's an Italian lemon flavored chicken recipe. It's really good."

Sean smiled, "It sounds like it."

"Wait 'til you taste it!" Troy excitedly cheered, and then wrapped

an arm around Sean.

Relieved that Troy's mom was being so nice, Sean leaned against Troy. Neither boy realized that Judy was watching out of the corner of her eye when Troy leaned down and tenderly kissed Sean. She began softly giggling. Troy only suspiciously eyed his mother. She acted like she wasn't really watching, but concentrating on making dinner. Troy grinned and mouthed, "You ready, Tiger?" Sean glanced over at Mrs. Faris. She seemed completely oblivious so Sean smiled and gently caressed Troy's face. Troy closed his eyes and he deeply inhaled then sighed. Sean stood up and passionately kissed Troy. Troy only wanted to catch his mom peeking, but the kiss was so tasty and so intense that he forgot all about his original purpose. Judy saw them and couldn't help stopping dinner preparation for a few moments. It swiftly became apparent that Troy and Sean were more than boyfriends. Her little boy had grown up between the time she left that morning and the time she returned. Shedding happy tears, Judy reached for a paper towel and wiped her eyes. Sean broke the kiss extra slowly, repeatedly snatching just one more little kiss. Then Troy led him to the living room.

Smiling widely, Sean was ready for rolling around on the couch while they waited for dinner. Surprisingly, Troy had something else in mind. He led Sean to the Yamaha digital piano that Prez had had delivered. Within a minute, Troy had the amp and keyboard powered on. Sitting down on the piano bench, he gently asked, "Tell me what you think of this song?" and began playing a soft piece. Sean didn't recognize it, but Judy did. Playing solo without any additional rhythm, Troy pressed the keys with extra dynamics; the soft parts softer and louder parts more present. From a place deep within himself never before reached, Troy closed his eyes and sang; "When you're weary, feeling small. When tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all. I'm on your side, oh, when times get rough, and friends just

can't be found. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down.
Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down.

"When you're down and out, when you're on the street. When evening falls so hard, I will comfort you. I'll take your part, oh, when darkness comes and pain is all around. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down.

"Sail on silver girl, sail on by. Your time has come to shine. All your dreams are on their way. See how they shine. Oh, if you need a friend, I'm sailing right behind. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will ease your mind. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will ease your mind." Troy finished playing the song, inhaled and looked up at Sean.

Unable to move or speak because he was shaking so badly, Sean forced a weak smile, nodded and wiped his eyes. In the kitchen, Judy Faris was almost as bad off as Sean. She always knew her son was talented and had heard him play the song before, but not like that. His very soul poured out to Sean.

Concerned because Sean was crying, Troy stood and was about to apologize, but he didn't get the chance. Sean unashamedly grabbed him and held on tight. "I just thought you might like it," Troy softly offered.

"I loved it!" Sean sobbed, "I love you so much!"

Trying to soothe his boyfriend, Troy rubbed his back and assured, "I love you too, Tiger. I'm really sorry it made you feel sad."

Sean sniffed then explained, "It's just my past again, Troy. I love when you sing for me, but this time, they felt like words you were singing to me and about us." After a pause and another sniffle, Sean

said, "I'd tell you which words I especially liked, but I can't right now."

Troy softly shushed Sean and held him tight, waiting for him to eventually relax. Since Troy's back was toward the kitchen, he didn't know his mom was watching. Through red, cried-out eyes, Sean noticed though. Judy softly smiled then held her index finger to her lips. Sean suddenly realized he had gained the sweetest boyfriend and a surrogate mother or even a mother-in-law. Feeling Sean quake again, Troy again rubbed his back and assured, "It's okay. I've got you."

Many moments later, Sean whispered, "I need to wash my face."

Since Sean knew where his bathroom was and couldn't possibly get lost walking down the hall, Troy realized that his boyfriend didn't want to be alone and led him there. Behind the closed door, both boys were silent the entire time Sean freshened up after crying. Once he was finished, Sean faced Troy wearing a perfectly evil grin.

Recognizing the implication of his boyfriend's grin, Troy softly giggled, "Oh no!"

"Oh yes!" Sean smirked. He wrapped Troy in his arms and urgently kissed him. Once Sean was certain he had gotten a rise out of Troy, he slid his face over Troy's shoulder and whispered, "Bedroom?"

Troy mooded then chuckled, "You're really tempting me!"

"Anything you want, any time."

"This could turn into a vicious circle. I sing a ballad, you cry, we make love then start over again."

"This is bad?"

"No," Troy honestly shared, "it's simply not necessary. I'll sing for you plenty. Making love afterward sounds nice, but I don't need it; not every time anyway. A hug and a kiss, like this, is perfect, really."

For a few moments, Sean absorbed that then giggled, "The feeling just tripled."

"I know, Tiger. I'm there too."

"Later tonight?"

"If the band isn't jamming, you and me are locked in my bedroom all... night... long."

Sean giggled then called out, "Daileass!"

The last time Troy had heard that name called he was transported from the CIC dining room to the basement store so fast he didn't know what had happened. "Oh God!" Troy softly chuckled.

Over the bathroom communications system, Daileass giggled, "Yes, Sean?"

Sean smiled, "Can you keep the Core Rimmers occupied for the rest of the night?"

Daileass laughed, "There's things I can do, but really shouldn't!"

"Try!" Sean grinned.

"It's the Core Rimmers!" Daileass giggled, "I can't make any promises."

Sean pleaded, "Just keep them busy from six-thirty until about

nine-thirty. We have plans."

Daileass seriously said, "With Joel and Teri Short here, they'll probably be occupied most of that time without my intervention."

Troy quickly jumped in and asked, "Who the hell are you, Daileass?"

Daileass giggled, "The less you know the better, Troy."

"You sound like a little kid," Troy observed.

"Partly true," Daileass admitted, and left it at that. He then giggled, "You be good, Sean. Keep my secrets and I'll keep yours!"

"I have no secrets," Sean grinned. Locking eyes with Troy, he loudly added, "I'm in love for the very first time and it's awesome!"

Troy inhaled deeply, but melted anyway. "I love you too, Sean." He took Sean's face in both hands then tried to find his tonsils. Breaking the kiss, Troy softly suggested, "Let's lie down on my bed and wait for dinner?" Sean nodded and smiled. A few seconds later, Troy was cuddled up with his head resting on Sean's shoulder.

For a long few moments, Sean wondered why Troy was resting on him. It seemed to him that he was the emotionally weak one. He eventually figured out that maybe Troy needed a little emotional stability too. That was an amazing idea. He also wondered what Mrs. Faris meant when she held an index finger to her mouth while he was still upset. He asked Troy about it.

Troy grinned and softly answered, "That means she didn't want me to know that she was watching. She saw me kiss you at the counter too. She'll admit it someday, probably weeks from now, when it suits her. It means she really likes you too, trusting you to keep it a

secret."

"Oops!" Sean chirped. "Guess I screwed up."

"Not as far as I'm concerned," Troy chuckled.

"Yeah, you're way more important."

After a few silent moments, Troy wondered, "Do you sleep on your back?"

"Yeah. I start on one side or another, but usually wake face up. Why?"

"I'm just so relaxed and comfortable, I could fall asleep. I was wondering about tonight too."

"I can't believe you want me to stay the night."

"Believe it, Tiger. Horacio might be looking for a new roommate by Christmas."

Sean thoughtfully hummed then said, "Christmas. What can I get my boyfriend for Christmas?"

Troy giggled, "You already got me presents! What do you want for Christmas?"

Sean shrugged, "I got my present early."

Nudging Sean, Troy giggled, "Really, what do you want besides me?"

"I'm gonna have to think about it," Sean answered. "So much has changed for the better, there's really nothing I can think of."

"Think about it and drop a few hints."

"The Clan's given us so much. Our dorm rooms are great. We've got TV's, computers, stereos and game systems in every room."

"This apartment was setup real nice too. None of the furniture or basic living necessities are ours. We brought a couple of suitcases and boxes of miscellaneous personal stuff. The rest was already here."

Sean repeated, "What do you want?"

"There are only two things I can think of. An iPod would be kewl. A portrait of you would be great too."

Sean squeaked, "You want a picture of me?"

Troy nodded, "Actually, one of you and another of you and me together would be even better."

Sean sighed. After a few quiet moments, he softly called, "Troy?"

"Yeah, Tiger?"

"You're really special."

Troy blushed and grinned, "I'm glad you think so."

"It's true. I want a picture of you and me too."

"Kewl. That's one Christmas present on your list."

Sean softly chuckled, "I don't think we're gonna get a lot o' sleep tonight." Troy's head popped up off Sean's shoulder. Their eyes met and both began laughing. "I'm serious," Sean chuckled. "Check it out."

Never losing eye contact, Troy reached down and felt Sean's boardies. "Again?" Troy cackled.

"Can I help it?" Sean chortled. "You're cuddled up to me; you mentioned Christmas presents and pictures."

Letting his face drop onto Sean's chest, Troy giggled, "I've never... not more than three times in a day. And we've already done it twice!"

Sean grinned, "Six times, easy."

Troy cracked up and laughed uncontrollably for at least a minute. He then lifted his face again, stole a kiss then grinned, "We can try after supper, Tiger."

"We could go over to the dorm?" Sean playfully suggested. "Then your mom won't hear us."

Chuckling and nodding, Troy answered, "I do want to see your room. What we do there is beside the point."

"Very kewl," Sean nodded. "I'm gonna show you off to any one that's there." He then teased, "I think I can wait until after supper for dessert."

Letting his face drop again, Troy playfully groaned, "God! I'm a dead man!" Lifting his face and making his eyes dart around mischievously, Troy cackled, "What a way to go!"

Feeling extremely playful, Sean reminded, "The other two presents are there."

Troy began laughing again then remembered, "Oh shit! I gotta put the first 'present' away before my mom finds it." He quickly rolled

off the bed, got the box from the top of the night table then hid the condoms and lube in the desk. While he was there, he took a pair of scissors out and cut the plastic shipping cover off the dildo. Dropping the wasted plastic in the trash can then holding up the dildo, Troy turned to Sean and asked, "Do I really need one this small?"

"It's not small, it's average. And for you, it's the perfect beginning, I hope."

Checking it out, Troy hummed then wondered, "This is average?"

Getting up off the bed, Sean went to Troy and nodded, "Of all the men I've seen, yep; that's about right. I've seen lots of adult men with less than that, but only one had more than me. It seems small to you because you're more than average."

"Me?" Troy squealed.

Giggling at Troy's curiosity, Sean leaned closer and whispered, "Five to five and half inches long is average. What've you got; about seven?"

Troy shook his head and softly answered, "I wish. Six and a half."

Sean shook his head and honestly shared, "Don't wish for more. What you've got is perfect, tasty too." Troy blushed so Sean took him in his arms, whispering, "I want you, Troy. What we've already shared is so much more than I've ever had or could've hoped for. I want tonight, tomorrow and years just like today. Don't think for a second you ain't got enough for me. It ain't true, okay?"

"As long as I can keep you happy, Sean."

Smiling widely, Sean admitted, "I'm completely blown away by you already. Making love with you is more than I dreamed or even knew to hope for." Pausing, Sean shook his head and remarked, "Making love; it's not fucking or sucking any more. It's so real to me already. You're teaching me what it always should've been."

Troy rapidly nodded, "Love and desire equals passion. That's what we've got."

From the living room end of the hall, Judy saw them embracing again. She loudly called, "Dinner's ready, boys."

"We're on our way," Troy replied.

Putting the bowl of pasta down on the table, Judy grinned and thought, yes, I can see that.

About the time Judy, Troy and Sean sat down to dinner, eleven sparkling shafts of light appeared outside the CIC dining room. Joel, Kevin, John, Stephen, the four G-Cats and three other boys ran inside. Already knowing that his brothers and parents were in there, John practically bounced over to them.

From one table, his mother shouted at John; "Why are you wearing a sling on your left arm?"

From another nearby table, Prez loudly asked John, "And why are you impersonating a Starfleet Lieutenant?"

"Well," said Joel. His Crown around his brow and his eyes glowing, giving off mist like wisps of blue energy, he continued, "In reverse order, because he is a Starfleet Lieutenant, Sciences, and the arm because he hurt himself saving two others. And those medals, they're real too."

It was then that they noticed Joel had a Commander's insignia. They looked at Kevin and saw him with Lieutenant Commander Insignia on his shoulder strap. Stephen was the same rank as John. All three had medals as well, and Kevin was sporting a lovely black eye and the faint scar of a freshly healed wound on his forehead.

Admiral Kirk walked into the dining room. Prez, Keith, Kaleo, Corey and Drew quickly stood, but Mike and Derrick hadn't seen him enter. "Admiral on the deck; get up Ensigns," Prez quietly ordered. Mike and Derrick looked around, and seeing the Admiral, quickly stood up.

Kirk locked eyes with Prez, saying, "As you were." Stopping behind Joel, John and the other boys, Jim Kirk grinned, "There was a bit of excitement while acting Captain Sa'ren Joel Short was in command."

"If he calls that a 'bit of excitement'," one of the three identical eight-year-old triplets whispered to his brothers, "then paint me blue and call me the Pacific!"

Kirk gently ruffled the boy's hair while grinning down at him. Then he looked up at the others. Kirk took and held Jim and Jen Hundser's eyes with his own. He began to explain, "First, our Joel took out the Enterprise, as was arranged, on a short hop to Alpha Centauri. There was an emergency delivery that Starfleet was requested to make. After all the tests Joel and Kevin had been through since last Thursday, it was easily within their capability. Both Admiral Morrow and I wanted to see them in action, and it was a nice treat for them and their two guests as well.

"Little did we know that on the way back, the Enterprise would run into a bit of trouble."

"Here it comes," Jim Hundser whispered. He had recognized one of the medals on his son's chest, and the identical one on Kevin's.

Jim Kirk nodded at him, "I figured you'd put it together quickly. It was for this reason I was called away earlier. On their return trip, the Enterprise received a distress signal from a J2C class transport. There were over three hundred civilians on board, and they were under attack from an alien and unknown vessel. As per Regulations, Sa'ren Short diverted course and intercepted the ongoing firefight. It was brief and seemed to be weighed against the Enterprise. That unknown vessel was of a very high tech level, but with assistance from another ship, the attacking vessel withdrew and left the combat arena at high warp. We believe it might have even been transwarp, but our technicians are still looking over the data."

"It was KEWL!" both Stephen and John exclaimed.

John's voice sounded a little hoarse and raspy. John coughed out, "Phasers and rocks and everything flying everywhere!"

"Calm down, Lieutenant," Kirk chuckled. "I need to finish so that your parents can hug you to death, and then seek some nerve relaxants."

Glancing between Kirk and her youngest son, Jen smiled weakly before her face returned to its hyper-serious expression.

Kirk continued, "Once the unknown vessel had departed, the ship assisting the Enterprise also vanished with very little communication. Acting Captain Sa'ren sent security and medical personnel over to the Transport ship. And he, Kevin, Stephen and John insisted on going as well; against Regulations, but I'm afraid they take after me in that regard. Once there, they found that there was a firefight going between human boarders and the crew and

passengers. This adds to the mystery, as we have no clue as to the identity of the attacking ship, yet humans are in league with them. None of the ten hostile intruders were captured alive, sadly, so we have nothing else to go on. Kevin fought his way to the bridge with Stephen to establish control there, while Joel and John headed to Engineering. On the way to Engineering, John stopped to help one of the Enterprise Medics assist a seriously injured crew-member from the Transport. It was at this point that John came under direct attack from one of the intruders. After a brief exchange of fire, John stunned the intruder and was about to continue helping the medic, despite his own minor wounds, when the bulkhead collapsed, causing an explosive decompression of that room. Somehow, and this still stumps me how he did it, John was able to keep his wits and use his skills to save not just himself, but the medic and the injured crewman. He used his T.K. to hold the two in place while also holding himself steady on one of the control stations. The strain on his already injured arm caused it to dislocate, yet he still held on and therefore managed to keep the other two in place as well. Once the force-fields came up to stop the breach, the three of them were without air, because the room had automatically sealed itself from the rest of the ship. The medic was trained in such situations and was trying to get over to where John was to re-pressurize, but she had been hit in the brief firefight, and so couldn't get there.

"Here is where it goes from amazing to unbelievable. Starfleet personnel are trained for explosive decompression. We are trained to remain conscious for at least sixty-seconds in order to attempt to save our lives or the lives of others caught in it. John had no training. By all rights, he shouldn't have been able to remain conscious for more than ten-seconds, yet he managed to not only remain active for nearly forty-five seconds, he also worked out which of the buttons the medic was frantically gesturing at to enable the room to re-pressurize. He

managed this just before passing out.

"This is the reason his voice sounds a little sore. He didn't know that he was meant to exhale in a decompression. He didn't have the training for any of what he did, yet he did it."

Jen and Jim Hundser just stared in horror at Kirk through all this.

"To add to this, not only did Kevin and Stephen return control of the Bridge to the Captain of the Transport, Kevin getting injured in the process in the fight; and not only did Joel stabilize the engines from an approaching core breach, John had unwittingly stunned the final invader who was about to detonate an antimatter bomb he had strapped to him. Such a blast would have utterly destroyed the Transport and would have crippled the nearby Enterprise. The stunned invader was spaced at this point, even though John says he tried to save him too. Holding three others plus himself in place was just too much of a strain, and choosing the lives of the innocent ranks higher in Starfleet than the life of a terrorist."

Prez, Keith and Drew couldn't contain themselves. They rushed over cheering to hug John half to death. Then they went for Stephen, Kevin and Joel.

Kirk smiled at them before continuing, "It was therefore with great pleasure that Admiral Morrow and I pulled the strings for all four concerned to receive immediate field promotions and medals. Normally it takes weeks to issue medals, but Morrow has already proved once he can pull strings for Cory, Joel and the rest that were on TV last Thursday. He did it again. I am proud to present Lieutenants Stephen Marr and John Hundser, Lieutenant Commander Kevin Charles David Thompson, and Commander Sa'ren Joel Short."

"They've got medals?" Drew asked excitedly as he started checking the four boys' chests. "Hey! Look! What are these for, Admiral?"

"I was getting there," Kirk chuckled. "Kevin and Joel already have the Star Cross each, and the Pantereas Commendation each. Joel also already had the Cochrane Medal of Excellence. The new ones; well, I'll start with Stephen. He gained Starfleet Command Commendation for Conspicuous Gallantry and The Legion of Honor. Kevin received the same, plus the Starfleet Purple Heart. As for Joel and your son: Joel received Starfleet Distinguished Service Medal, the Starfleet Silver Lifesaving Medal and the Medal of Valor, the second highest award for heroism in combat that we have. As for your son," he grinned at the two shell-shocked Hundses, "he has received Starfleet Distinguished Service Medal, Starfleet Silver Lifesaving Medal, Starfleet Purple Heart, and the Medal of Valor."

Prez and Keith simultaneously gasped, "The Purple Heart *and* the Medal of Valor?"

Throwing his chest out importantly, John grinned and croaked, "That's right! Your incredibly cute little brother! Later, you may kiss my feet!" Prez, Keith and Drew groaned then all four brothers began laughing.

Trying to stand to go to her son, but feeling dizzy, Kathleen Marr began to slip off her chair. Jim quickly grabbed her arm, got her seated again then smiled, "Welcome to Clan Short."

Jen loudly sighed then tapped her comm-badge. "Jennifer Hundser to Doctor Janet Hayes."

"Janet, here. I'm so glad you've gotten a comm-badge!"

"I'm sorry to have to use it so quickly," Jennifer smirked. "We

have a new Clan mother here."

Janet giggled, "Uh oh! How much does she weigh?"

"About one hundred and ten pounds."

"I'll have Daileass transport the bottle."

Kathleen wondered, "Bottle of what?"

Jen, Laura, Lanna and Anna simultaneously replied, "Valium."

Over the comm-badge, Janet chortled, "You'll sleep, but still turn gray. I'm afraid we haven't found a cure for that or worry lines."

While the women continued to chat about the daily thrills of being a Clan mother, Stephen moved closer to his mother and softly assured, "I'm fine, mom." He then moved closer, wrapped an arm around his mother and whispered, "John's the one who kept me from going crazy last night. I cried at the Hawaii base and more after I got here. I love him and he loves me too."

John had locked eyes with his father. *'I didn't go there looking for trouble. I only wanted to help Joel and Kev. Stuff just sort o' happened.'* Jim Hundser closed his eyes briefly and shook his head. *'How do I know why stuff happens around me? I pressed the right button though!'* Reading his father's next question, John sent, *'My shoulder should be fine in another day or two. Then I can lose this stupid sling. My throat actually hurts worse, like a really bad cold, it burns. That's why I'm talking this way instead of speaking. The less I use my voice, the quicker my throat will heal. My voice should be fine tomorrow.'*

"Are you able to eat?" Jim asked aloud.

John nodded, *'They recommended soup, ice cream and Jell-O, tonight.'*

Jim grinned, "Go ahead and show our guests to the kitchen," referring to the young triplets.

* * * * *

Finishing his dinner, Prez remembered that he still hadn't contacted Cory Short. Swallowing the last of his iced tea, Prez tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Daileass, I need to send a quick message to Cory Short, please, dude."

Daileass giggled, "Any chance to annoy Blondie is good by me! I'll record your message and send it to him as soon as he's busy with something else!"

Prez smiled and said, "Hi Cory, it's Prez. Last night, as I was wrapping up my conversation with King Aalona, he gave Clan Short a very nice gift. We have an entire uninhabited Island now, dude! It's called Kaho'olawe and is off the southwest end of Maui. We can use it for whatever the Clan needs, bro. It's about forty square miles. That's way too big for another Rimmer base, so let me know if you have any ideas what we could use it for. Hopefully, everything's goin' well there for you today. If it hadn't been, maybe my news added a bright spot to your day. Take care, bro." Prez paused then said, "That should do it, Daileass."

"The message is recorded, Prez. I'll deliver it tonight, before he goes to bed," Daileass slyly answered. Rolling his eyes and smirking, Prez only shook his head.

A small pharmaceutical bottle appeared on the table before Jennifer. She thanked Janet and ended their conversation. Handing the bottle across the table, she then explained to Kathleen, "One before

bedtime." Shooting flame from her eyes at John, she added, "I had this wild idea that I might not need to take one tonight."

Since almost the whole Rimmer Clan was present and everyone was in a good mood except the worrisome parents, Prez, Mike, Derrick and Mike gathered and decided it was time to soothe their shattered nerves. In an old Doo-Whop style, they began dancing and singing. "Only you can make this world seem right, Only you can make the darkness bright. Only you and you alone, Can thrill me like you do, And fill my heart with love for only you.

"Only you can make this change in me, For it's true, you are my destiny. When you hold my hand, I understand the magic that you do, You're my dream come true, My one and only you.

"Only you can make this change in me, For it's true, you are my destiny. When you hold my hand, I understand the magic that you do, You're my dream come true, My one and only you."

Lots of kids clapped and cheered, but not the parents. Before the old folks had another chance to dampen anyone's spirits, Mike had Alden transport his D-45 acoustic guitar. As soon as it appeared, they went right into Crazy Little Thing Called Love, with Keith singing lead vocals and performing a classic Elvis hip swivel and leg bounce. The rest of the band provided harmony vocals and tempo by clapping their hands. That got Drew and Corey dancing then John and Stephen held hands and danced a foot off the floor. Joel and Kevin joined in and soon all the Rimmers' sons paired up and joined their dads.

Prez was actually considering having Alden transport their parents into the pool to chill out. Thankfully, he didn't need to. At the end of the song, they clapped too. Then the dining room lights were dimmed. Three chefs came out of the kitchen pushing large carts of birthday cakes for Kaleo. When Kaleo ordered his cake that morning,

he couldn't decide which flavor he wanted. So the chefs decided for him. With so many mouths to feed, it was simple to make one chocolate cake, one vanilla, and one strawberry. The final dining room performance of the night was for one hundred and thirty-nine voices to sing Happy Birthday to the Mouth Rimmer.

Kaleo got so many kisses, handshakes and hugs, the candles on the cakes were burning down to stubs when he finally blew them out and made a wish. Slices of cake were still being cut and passed to the kids when Prez went to the table where Spock was sitting with Joel, Kevin, Admiral Kirk and Teri Short.

Across the room, all the other Core Rimmers, Stephen, and Tory were watching anxiously. When the adults stopped talking and looked up at Prez, he smiled and asked, "Uncle Spock, my core teammates and I were hoping you could do us a favor." Prez paused, expecting that Spock would say something. Quickly realizing that he was waiting, Prez continued; "Saturday night, Harry and Jonas were telling us about the tel-tor ritual. Five couples would very much like to be bonded and married."

Spock nodded once and explained, "You understand that I can perform the mind-melds, but I may not be able to complete the bonding, dependent upon the emotional and mental states of the individuals."

"Yes Sir, we do," Prez acknowledged. "We understand that the worst that can happen is you can't complete the bonding. As long as you explain to the couples why and what is needed to successfully complete it, we see it as a win-win scenario. Also, we all want Joel and Kevin here to witness it and would be honored if you would perform it."

Almost imperceptibly, Spock smiled, "Very well. Are you ready,

Preston?"

"Yes Sir! We all are," Prez excitedly chuckled. He then turned, nodded and waved the others over. Keith, Derrick, Mike, Corey, Drew, John, Stephen, Kaleo and Tory hurried across the dining room. Behind them, to witness the ceremony, came Dee, Gage, Sammy, Richie, Dillon, Jonah, Reyes and Geoff.

Spock stood before the five couples. His voice rang out, "Our people put the utmost emphasis on the idea of Family. Even our social structure proclaims this to all people, of all species. I am Spock, son of Sarek, of the Family of Sarek and the House of Surak, the senior house of Ektra-Maat T'Khasi, the house of all houses to which all Vulcans belong. My mother was of Earth, the daughter of Jeffrey Grayson, acrobat and scholar. I know that the peoples of Earth see Family as being as important as Vulcans do. And the foundation of Family is the bond of love expressed in marriage, into which Keith and Preston, and Michael and Derrick, and Drew and Corey, and Kaleo and Tory, and John and Stephen this evening propose to enter. I call you assembled here to stand witness to their union." Beginning with Keith, Spock entered brief mind-melds with each of the ten boys. Completing the melds, he said, "It is as I expected."

Walking into the dining room to find Prez, Troy and Sean heard Spock address the Clan. "We are gathered here this evening, to join Keith Hundser and Preston Albert O'Brian, and Michael Gibbons and Derrick Seibert, and Drew Hundser and Corey Seaver, and Kaleo Palakiko and Tory Burgas, and John Hundser and Stephen Marr in marriage, according to the laws of this nation, of the United Federation of Planets, and by the traditions of my people." He paused, and then said, "I am required to ask that if any person can show just cause why these couples should not be joined in marriage, that he speak now, or thereafter remain silent."

Not a single person said a word; in fact most of the kids had stopped eating and were proudly watching. Turning his attention back to the five couples; Spock led each couple through the wedding vows.

"According to the customs of your people, Keith, I charge you to take Preston's hand and pledge to him your wedding vow."

Keith faced Prez and took both his hands then clearly repeated; "I, Keith Hundser, take thee, Preston Albert O'Brian... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Prez joyfully repeated; "I, Preston Albert O'Brian, take thee, Keith Hundser... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Facing Derrick and swinging his hands, Mike grinned; "I, Michael Gibbons, take thee, Derrick Seibert... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Trying to stop Mike's swinging hands, Derrick smiled; "I, Derrick Seibert, take thee, Michael Gibbons... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Drew loudly proclaimed; "I, Drew Hundser, take thee, Corey Seaver... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Corey briefly giggled then joyfully repeated; "I, Corey Seaver, take thee, Drew Hundser... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Kaleo repeated; "I, Kaleo Palakiko, take thee, Tory Burgas... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Tory stated; "I, Tory Burgas, take thee, Kaleo Palakiko... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

John and Stephen were holding hands and floating almost two feet off the floor. They actually appeared taller than Kaleo and Tory and as tall as the eldest four. With his throat sore, John proudly croaked, "I, John Hundser, take thee, Stephen Marr... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

"I, Stephen Marr, take thee, John Hundser... to be my life partner... to have and to hold... from this day forward... in sickness and in health... for richer or for poorer... and I pledge my love to you... so long as we both shall live."

Everyone began clapping and cheering, but Spock returned to Keith and Prez. Realizing there was more, the applause slowly dwindled. Renewing the mind-melds with each boy in turn, Spock instructed, "Raise thy hands and rest them on thy beloved's temples. Repeat after me: My mind to your mind, my heart to your heart, my

love to your love."

The smiles on Keith's and Preston's faces slowly faded as their hands touched temples and they repeated the short phrase. Everyone saw the same thing happen to all ten boys. Smiles were replaced with expressions of astonishment, like each was gazing reverently at perfect rainbows or works of art.

Once Stephen, the last boy in line, completed the process, Spock for the fifth time repeated, "You are bonded according to the deepest traditions of my people. Not being telepaths, you do not have the telepathic aspect of the bond, but each of you will find strength in your mate, each will know without conscious thought the feelings of your mate, each will be truly joined in mind and heart to your life mate."

After several moments, Richie softly wondered, "Are they stuck like that? When do they get to kiss?"

Glancing down at the boy standing beyond Keith, Spock couldn't help smiling. The first kiss began with John and Stephen and they rose even higher, towering above Spock. Almost simultaneously, the remaining four couples kissed. As clapping and cheering began, John powered up and lifted all four other couples so everyone could easily see.

All ten boys warmly thanked Uncle Spock. Joel came over to congratulate them all then explained that he needed to be in the U.K. soon. He, Kevin, their kids, Teri and Spock would need to leave. All the Core Rimmers hugged Joel, then Teri and even Uncle Spock. As John was finishing up, Prez had Alden patch him across the base PA system and send his announcement out to all the other Clan Divisions. "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls; it is our families tradition and therefore a Rimmer tradition to give and receive abundantly. We've

received, now it's time to give. It's six-fifty-two Hawaii time. At seven-fifty Hawaii time there will be a concert at the Pacific Rim main base auditorium. We're celebrating our weddings. All who can attend are very welcome. Now, if you'll excuse us, we have less than an hour to get prepared. Alden, if you please, transport the ten of us, our kids, Troy and Sean to the auditorium lobby."

In an instant, the entire group was standing in the auditorium. Corey and Drew went right to work powering everything up. Troy turned to Sean and softly giggled, "It's so friggin' weird moving that way!" Smiling widely, Sean nodded and leaned in closer for a kiss.

"Okay," Prez began, "first things first. Alden, lock the auditorium doors. No one gets in until seven-twenty-five. Next, we all need to be dressed alike."

Mike quickly added, "Loose clothes so we can move around; shiny platinum-colored polo shirts, black pants and black sneakers."

Derrick instructed, "Close the stage curtains too, Alden."

Alden giggled, "I get to change the Rimmers! You're all gonna be naked for second or two."

Patting Drew on the back, Keith said, "Take a short break, bro. You too Corey." Once everyone was standing still, Keith instructed, "Do it, dude." In an instant, all the boys were standing in their birthday suits. It wasn't expected, but Alden got in a quick sigh and whimper before clothing them all again. Shaking their heads, but smirking, the Core Rimmers briefly remarked on their new AIs enthusiasm.

Drew and Corey went back to the circuit breakers. Looking down at himself, Sean grinned, "Nice!"

Kaleo asked, "What do you need us to do, Prez?"

Prez said, "I'm thinking you, Tory and Sean can get the concession stand manned. Our kids, John and Stephen, you'll act as ushers. Get everyone seated as quickly as possible. Richie and Dillon, you guys can help just by starting at the front of the aisles. Keep everyone in the center section of seats. As the rows fill up, walk forward so folks know the seats in front of you are filled. When everyone's seated you guys come up on stage and let us know."

Richie giggled, "'Kay, Poppa."

Dillon nodded, "Okay, Unca Prez."

Finished with the power, Drew announced, "We're set, Prez."

"Great," Prez smiled, "get the popcorn poppin' and we'll get a set list together."

Troy reminded, "My gear's at home, Prez."

"Alden!" Prez laughed.

"It's all on the stage waiting now," Alden giggled.

Without further ado, Platinum Habits and their kids went inside the theater. Drew, Corey and Geoff went upstairs. Kaleo, Tory and Sean went to the concession bar. Kaleo grinned, "Thank goodness there's operating instructions on this corn popper."

Checking the freezer, Sean giggled, "We got ice!"

Searching the refrigerator, Tory sniggered, "Now if I could just find the butter!"

On their way up the stage steps, the band members were tossing

out ideas for songs they could play. The ballads they had already rehearsed with Troy easily made the list. The band decided they wanted to play mostly ballads with a few light rock and blues tunes tossed in. They also wanted to test the capability of the sound system. Since it was a short notice concert, they expected only a few hundred Clan members to show up. Still, they wanted a dramatic opening number; something that would shake the ground. Slowly but surely, the set list was built.

Drew and Corey were given the titles and began getting a show prepared. With all the new lights and lasers, folks wouldn't know what to watch; the band and the stage show or the laser lights up on the ceiling. To check the audience sound levels, Corey raced back down to the theater with a tricorder set as a decibel meter. Behind the curtain, the band was rehearsing one of the tunes so they could get actual performance readings. Watching Corey closely from the PA booth, Drew slowly raised the power amps. The boys knew that eighty-five decibels was a normal and comfortable listening level and one hundred thirty decibels was near the sound of a jet engine and painful. They decided to start at ninety-five decibels. If many guests showed up, they could raise it a little bit and not deafen everybody in the audience.

Just as Corey returned to the PA booth, down on the stage the boys were singing A Capella. "You missed it," Drew smiled. "Troy and Prez taught the rest this song."

"It sounds awesome," Corey smiled. "Jaws are gonna drop."

"It's so perfect; it's making me want to cry," Drew grinned.

Realizing that their time was up, the band went back stage and got a little more rehearsal time in. At exactly seven-twenty-five, the auditorium doors unlocked. Rimmers began filing in from the door

nearest the dining room. Others from various Clan divisions began transporting in. Some were stopping for soda, candy or popcorn, but most just went inside the theater and found seats. John tapped his comm-badge at seven-fifty and told Prez, "We've still got folks filing in, bro. Looks like a lot from the Rapid Response Base and Utah are here; a bunch from the Nevada Desert Division; judging by accents, more than a few from Oceanic Division too."

Prez grinned, "It's Wednesday afternoon there."

"It's thinning out some though. Give us another ten minutes."

Troy began nervously pacing and the other four encircled him. They all grinned at each other. "I've never played for more than a hundred or so," Troy admitted.

Keith nodded and explained, "We found out last Friday, audience size don't matter."

Mike devilishly grinned, "Sounds like the same ol' story to me."

Troy blushed and giggled, "Ain't goin' there!"

Derrick chuckled, "Ah, but you so want to, we can tell!"

Prez smiled, "There's some extraordinary rumors about your boyfriend."

Playing along, Keith teased, "Just tell us if the rumors are true."

Troy laughed, "I have no idea what you're all talking about!" but still blushed bright red.

Richie and Dillon came backstage. Richie said, "We're done, Poppa."

Dillon added, "There's still some middle rows way back."

Hugging both boys, Prez smiled, "You guys did an excellent job. Go ahead and find Uncle John and some seats." The two boys hurried back off stage and raced up the aisle. Facing his band mates, Prez said, "All set and together now, dudes?"

Everyone nodded and Troy nervously giggled, "Just hope I stay with ya's through the whole show!"

"Play like you did yesterday and earlier today and we're kewl bro," Mike assured, and then started up the backstage steps.

Following the rest of the band up, Prez nodded, "You've got no worries, Troy. It's gonna be great." He then tapped his comm-badge and told Drew, "Let's jam, bro. As soon as you hear the gong and timpani, open the curtains."

"Kewl!" Drew chirped. He raised the main faders on the PA system.

The audience lights dimmed and applause began to swell from the estimated four thousand now occupying most of the floor seats. From behind his drum kit, Derrick glanced around at his band mates and got thumbs up gestures. Simultaneously, he hit the gong and one of the timpani. The curtains began to open. Visible to the audience first was Derrick standing and hitting the timpani with flashes of red light above and behind him. After about twenty-seconds, the curtain was fully opened and Derrick sat on his drum throne. Most of the stage was dark until Keith began the opening synthesized horn notes of Fanfare For The Common Man. Near Keith was Troy, playing the Hammond organ, with his tenor sax hanging off his neck. White and yellow spotlights draped Keith and Troy. While the audience stood and cheered, Keith, Troy and Prez began playing the opening bass

shuffle. About three minutes into the song, as the audience began to settle back down, Troy hurried out from stage left and the keyboards to play the first solo on his tenor saxophone at center stage. Soon, Keith was copying Troy note-for-note, reaching to play both the synthesizer and the Hammond. Mike joined the section with heavily distorted guitar chords matching the melody. Lined up in front of the drums, Prez, Troy and Mike got the audience revved up.

Ending the song on repeated blasts of sound to more applause, Troy put his sax down then went back to the piano. Taking his wireless microphone with him, Keith danced out to front center stage as rest of the band began playing 'Lovin', Touchin', Squeezin'. Troy played the Steinway grand piano. Keith sang lead vocals with the rest of the band singing backup vocals. By the end of the song, almost everyone in the audience was singing the repeated Na-na-na's.

For the next song, Troy again changed instruments to the acoustic 12-string guitar. Prez announced, "Welcome to Ewa Beach everybody! Y'all are probably wondering why we're up here on stage? The easy answer is that we couldn't have gotten married today without Clan Short. So this is our way of saying thank you. Y'all need to keep an eye on our new band member. So far, you've seen Troy playing keyboards and saxophone." Prez paused then gestured to his right at Troy saying, "Now he's got a guitar for our next song. We all play various instruments, but Troy's our wizard."

The audience began chuckling except for Kaleo, Tory, Horacio and Sean who shouted, "YEAH, TROY!"

"A fan base on day one," Prez chuckled. He then stepped back and Derrick counted off the tempo for 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps'. Mike played his Randy Rhoads Les Paul Custom and sang lead vocals. Providing backup vocals, Keith played electric piano and the Hammond organ. The next two songs were suggested by Troy.

The first was 'The Story In Your Eyes', and Troy sang lead vocals while playing acoustic rhythm guitar. For the second song, Mike switched to his D-45 acoustic and Keith played the Steinway. Troy remained on the 12-string and sang lead vocals on 'I Need You'. All five sang the choruses.

Horacio leaned closer to Sean and teased, "Don't tell me he sang this to you too?"

Sean grinned, but shook his head saying, "Not this one. Another that almost ripped my heart out. You should've heard it. At least I wouldn't have been crying alone."

Confirming that Sean had found a very romantic gay boy in Troy, Horacio asked, "You know how lucky you are?"

Sean nodded and grinned, "I know." He then remembered, "By the way, he wants to see our dorm room."

"His eyes keep coming back here," Horacio noticed. "He's singing to you right now."

Smiling widely and nodding, Sean sighed then moaned, "Yeah." Shaking his head, Horacio cracked up.

For the next song, 'Every Breath You Take', Troy switched to his Fender Stratocaster electric guitar, sang background vocals and Derrick sang lead vocals. Keith didn't have much to do through the first verse so he got the audience clapping along until keyboards were necessary.

About a third of the way into the song, Horacio had another idea and tapped Sean on the knee. "You want me to make myself scarce while you show him our room?"

"You don't have to."

"It's not a problem. Remember me asking you to help me help Sonia to the dorm the other night?"

Sean nodded, but because he was watching Troy, it took him about thirty-seconds to turn to Horacio and grin, "You scopin' her out?"

Horacio smiled and nodded, "A couple of minutes at a time with her whenever I can. You haven't noticed? What am I saying? Of course you haven't noticed!" Sean cracked up.

At the end of the song, Keith made an announcement while Troy changed instruments from guitar to saxophone and Mike changed from electric to acoustic guitar. "This next song we learned from Troy. He really should be singing it, but singing and playing sax is somewhat difficult." Prez crossed the stage to be closer to Keith and Derrick counted off again. Keith began playing the electric piano introduction. He then sang; "Don't go changing, to try and please me. You never let me down before. I don't imagine you're too familiar, And I don't see you anymore." The whole band joined in with Keith singing; "I would not leave you in times of trouble. We never could have come this far. I took the good times, I'll take the bad times, I'll take you Just The Way You Are."

Many rows forward of Horacio and Sean, Judy Faris was sitting near Kathleen Marr and Jennifer Hundser. Right after Troy's first sax part, Kathleen turned to Judy and asked, "That's your boy?"

Judy proudly nodded, "I expected he would slowly come out of his shell. This afternoon, I came home to find him with one of the rescued boys."

Kathleen asked, "Aren't you afraid for him?"

"Naturally," Judy answered, "but Troy's obviously happy. Just like Stephen is happy with John. Every one of the boys that got married are incomplete without their partners. Look at them. When they watch their partners, their eyes soften, but they're obviously strengthened."

Kathleen nodded, "Stephen took risks today that I never expected from him."

Jennifer said, "Spock has checked them. They may still appear to be boys, but they have enough of adult perspectives and love for each other that he agreed to marry them. It's shocking though, isn't it?"

"Very!" Kathleen smiled, "It will take me days to get over the change in him."

"Don't worry," Jennifer assured. "We'll take shared custody of our young married couple. Between you and I, we'll guide them when they need it."

Troy moved forward and played the sax solo and the three women paused. Then Keith emotionally sang the last verse to Prez and then Troy played the ending sax solo. The song ended and the audience broke into applause. Troy waved at the audience then went back to play piano again for 'Count On Me'. Keith and Derrick handled the lead vocals while the remaining three sang backup vocals.

The next song was 'Traces', during which Troy played recorder and sax parts and then Troy switched to acoustic 12-string for 'It's Only Love', and 'Can't You Hear My Heartbeat'. Keith sang lead for the first song; Mike sang lead on the latter two. Then Derrick walked down and backstage stage to take a break with Reyes, who was

waiting for the chance to perform on stage for the first time in twenty-one years.

On a mostly blue and green lit stage, with the shafts of red light rising from behind the drum risers, the remaining four played 'If'. Keith provided synthesized strings and sang lead vocals. Mike finger-picked the lead acoustic guitar part while Troy played electric guitar. The audience was very impressed with Keith's vocals and loudly applauded. For the next tune, Troy went back to acoustic guitar and Reyes came out on stage to play bongos. Troy and Mike began playing the acoustic guitar introduction of 'You've Got A Friend', with Prez singing lead vocals. Keith moved back beside Reyes to play maracas and provide background vocals. About a third of the way through the song, the red shafts of light behind the drum risers turned orange and Derrick came back on stage to play drums.

The stage darkened again and Reyes went off stage to loud applause. Keith went to the electronic keyboards and Troy moved from guitar back to the Steinway. With a single overhead spotlight on him, Troy began playing and singing 'Without You'. Soon, Keith was adding synthesized strings then joining Troy's vocals. Their voices together were smooth as silk. As the ending crescendo built, the orange lights behind the drums turned yellow and bright. By the time the song neared its end, Horacio noticed that Sean was a quivering wreck beside him.

For the next song, Keith went off stage to take a break while the remaining four switched instruments. Derrick came down off the risers to play bass guitar. Mike played lead acoustic guitar while Troy provided synthesized strings and harmonized backup vocals. Prez sang lead vocals and played acoustic guitar for 'If You Could Read My Mind'. Mike and Troy provided backup vocals for Prez. The audience was pleasantly shocked that the band had moved effortlessly

from rock to folk. They were also stunned that Prez could play acoustic guitar and sing so well. Applause slowly built and many in the audience stood for their leader. The band had carefully choreographed this part of the act just for the "moan factor". The stage lights went out and the audience stood for the first ovation. The four ballads were performed and executed flawlessly, leaving the audience breathless.

The band members moved around again while the audience cheered. Keith came back on stage to play synthesized horns and strings for the next tune. Reyes came up onto the drum risers to play maracas and tambourine. Suddenly, colored lights swamped stage right and Mike began playing 'What Is Life'. The shock of going from almost pitch black to all that light almost most knocked many in the audience front rows back into their seats. Troy and Mike played electric guitars and Derrick sang lead vocals.

While the audience was still clapping, Reyes moved over to the bongos and congas. The band played the instrumental 'Samba Pa Ti', featuring Mike on electric guitar. Mike walked back and forth across the entire length of the stage playing with heart, soul and fire. When Mike was stopped in one place for a while, his eyes closed and he sang each note he played. While Reyes was on stage, the band continued with 'Just Remember I Love You'. Troy played the D-45 during the first part of the song, but then pushed the guitar back and switched to baritone saxophone. Mike sang lead vocals with Derrick and Prez backing him up. Watching each other closely during the middle instrumental break, Mike and Troy played the exact same notes at the same time. After the song was completed, Derrick proudly introduced; "On bongos and congas, my son, Reyes Taraschke." Reyes waved at the audience then went off stage.

Barely pausing while the audience clapped and cheered, the

band pushed on. 'Who Loves You' was next on the set list. Corey activated the fog machines while Drew applied a slight phase shift to the hi-hat mic. Keith played the Steinway piano and Troy played synthesizers. Keith sang lead vocals with the other four band members providing harmonized backup vocals. During the middle instrumental break, Corey got clover shaped laser lights bouncing and spinning on stage and up on the ceiling. When they weren't singing, Prez and Mike bounced and danced around, obviously having a blast. Lights were flashing everywhere on each of the band members, making eyes dart around in the audience. Next, the band played 'Real Love', with more laser lights creating heart shapes that seemed to pulse in time with the music. Keith played keyboards. Troy played 12-string rhythm guitar. Mike played electric guitar and sang lead vocals. For the following song, Troy moved behind the keyboards and Keith moved to center stage, singing 'As Long As You Love Me'. High up on the ceiling, a spinning mirrored ball with red, green and blue pin spot lights made its presence known and so did the Scooby Gang, chanting praises to the pretty Shiny ball. Dancing and groovin', Keith, Prez and Mike got the audience fully engaged. Kids all over the audience were up dancing. Singing to each other, John and Stephen held hands and danced a foot higher than the chairs they had been sitting in, causing quite a bit of giggling and laughter.

More fog billowed onto the stage and laser lights flew around the auditorium during 'Time Of The Season'. Once again, as had occurred during the luau, eyes in the audience darted around to each band member as they sang the various parts. The final song of the mini-set was 'Easy', with Troy singing lead vocals and playing the Steinway while Keith played synthesized horn and string parts.

At the end of the song, while the audience clapped and cheered, the stage went completely dark again and all laser lights stopped. Several of the band members could be heard laughing. Realizing

something even more thrilling was coming, the audience was spellbound. Red shafts of light rose from behind the drums and red lights from above draped the band members. The band played 'Precious and Few', followed immediately thereafter by 'Truly Madly Deeply', with Keith and Troy singing a duet on the latter tune, and the rest of the band providing backup vocals during the choruses. Mike played the classical guitar for his short solos. It was Prez who whispered "I love you," near the end of the song.

The entire band was really pleased with the re-vamped version of 'Never My Love'. With Troy's additional background vocals and acoustic rhythm guitar, and Reyes providing castanets, tambourine and more background vocals, the song sounded exactly like the original recording. Without the audience even noticing, the shafts of light behind the drum risers were now orange. Then Keith sang lead vocals on 'How Can I Be Sure'. Troy remained at the piano for 'Your Song'. Midway through the latter song, Sean was a quaking, shivering mass of tear-drenched putty. Horacio reached for and held Sean's hand. Keith took over lead vocals for 'Don't Worry Baby' and 'I Can't Tell You Why'. The harmonized, multi-part vocals on the Beach Boy's classic impressed everyone. It was a song the four man band had tried and couldn't adequately accomplish, but with Troy, it was now perfect. Troy then left the stage for a short break and some cold water. Sean was almost thankful Troy had walked off stage before he needed to be scraped off the floor. The lights behind the drum risers were now yellow and the audience hadn't even noticed them changing color again. Keith manned the synthesizers and Mike moved over to the Steinway to play 'Imagine'. Everyone in the audience was surprised that Mike could play piano. His voice was so much like Lennon's it was eerie.

For the final songs, Troy returned to the stage. Keith sat at the Steinway and Troy manned the synthesizers for 'Unchained Melody',

with Keith singing lead vocals. After they had finished the song, Keith and Troy swapped positions and knocked knuckles. Troy sat at the Steinway and Keith manned the synthesizers. Troy began playing and, out in the audience, Sean began shaking again before a single word was sung. Horacio looked over at him. Forcing a smile, Sean said, "This is the song he played for me before supper." Troy sang the first verse of 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'. Keith sang the second verse. Cymbal swells, drums, synthesized strings and bass guitar were added. The final verse was sung by all five band members. As the final notes rang out, the audience shot to their feet clapping and cheering. This part of the program was considered by the band as the "wow factor." Derrick came down off the drum risers and waved Reyes to come out and join them. Platinum Habits met center stage, held hands and bowed then the curtains began to close.

The audience would have none of that; they wanted more! Reyes hugged Derrick and Mike then went back off stage. Platinum Habits were ready for two encore songs that would leave the audience reeling. They gathered around one microphone at front center stage. In a semi circle, from left to right were Prez, Troy, Keith, Derrick and Mike. As planned, Corey opened the curtain partway, only revealing the band, the drums behind them and the yellow shafts of light behind the drums. The audience sat down. As one voice in four-part harmony, the five man band sang 'Because', A Capella.

"Aaaaahhhhhh. Because the world is round it turns me on.
Because the world is round.

"Aaaaaahhhhhh. Because the wind is high it blows my mind.
Because the wind is high.

"Aaaaaahhhhhh. Love is old, love is new. Love is all, love is
you.

"Because the sky is blue, it makes me cry. Because the sky is blue. Aaaaaaaahhhh."

Loving it, the audience cheered, clapped and whistled. But the band were smiling and waiting for the audience to settle down. Once more, as one united voice in five-part harmony, they sang A Capella.

"I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows. I believe that somewhere, in the darkest night, a candle glows. I believe for everyone who goes astray, someone will come to show the way. I believe, I believe.

"I believe above the storm the smallest prayer will still be heard. I believe that someone, in the great somewhere, hears every word. Every time I hear a newborn baby cry, or touch a leaf, or see the sky, then I know why, I believe. I Believe!"

The audience, half in tears and the other half with their mouths agape, jumped up and exploded with applause, cheers and whistles. Stepping back from the microphone, Platinum Habits lined up, held hands and again bowed. Drew turned down the main faders. Corey closed the curtains then turned up the audience lights.

While the boys were still in a five way hug, Prez smiled at Troy and asked, "Still scared?"

Troy shook his head and laughed, "After thirty ballads and love songs, fear is the weakest of my emotions right now."

Keith giggled, "You wanna stick around for the reception, dude?"

"Don't make him make a decision! He's got better things to do," Mike countered. He then tapped his sub-vocal and told Alden, "Get a fix on Sean Moorhead, dude; transport Sean and Troy directly to

Sean's dorm room."

"Sean's standing and ready," Alden giggled.

Everyone released Troy and the last thing he saw was them starting to wave goodbye. Preparing to leave the auditorium, Horacio was standing behind Sean. Then Sean vanished and Horacio knowingly grinned. The next thing Troy knew, he was standing in a mostly darkened room. A little light coming in from the window blinds and a digital clock allowed him to notice Sean's silhouette moving towards him. Sean softly recited, "Like the winter needs the spring, I need you." They wrapped their arms around each other and passionately kissed. Many moments later, the kiss broke. Remaining close together, Sean whispered, "Did you like the stuff we did alone today?"

"I loved it all, Sean," Troy assured. He then wondered, "Did you think I didn't?"

Sean shivered and admitted, "I want you in so many ways, Troy. Before goin' crazy and showing you some new stuff, I wanted to check."

Troy giggled, "The dildo is in my condo, Tiger."

"First things first," Sean smiled, and began undressing Troy. Sean taught Troy a variety of kisses while he worked. Soon, they were naked and lying on Sean's bed. At first, they ground against each other, kissing and cooing. Crawling down the length of Troy's body, Sean whispered, "Wanna show you something." Troy uncontrollably shivered when Sean lifted his legs and began licking trails around each cheek of his ass.

Sean's tongue brushed over Troy's anus for the first time and Troy moaned, "My Tiger." Sean giggled and then loudly purred before

lightly tapping the orifice with his fingers. Spiraling out of control, Troy gurgled utterances that made no sense at all. After many minutes of instruction, Sean swung around to let Troy practice. Once again, Sean discovered that Troy was a natural, enthusiastically repeating all he had learned.

Facing and embracing their partners, Prez and Keith, and Mike and Derrick, shared a few quiet minutes alone back stage. What was most remarkable to both couples was how much they could feel from their partners. It wasn't telepathy, but it was so much more than familiarity. The time of guessing what their partners felt was over. They didn't even need to confirm the feelings aloud. Finally, each began congratulating the other on the marriages and concert. Then they went out the back stage door and towards the CIC dining room.

There, they found the entire Rimmer Clan, many other Clan members and five wedding cakes waiting. To his fellow newlyweds, John sent, *'I had Alden get us the cakes.'* Grateful, Prez and Keith only thought of the relationship topics they wanted to talk with John and Stephen about. John relayed the messages verbatim to Stephen. Both young boys blushed and giggled. John replied, *'There are some things we will do together tonight and few others we're not quite ready for. Prepubescent, remember? You think you two can last a long time? HA! We make each other shake over and over again without pausing or making a big mess! Bet ya can't remember the last time you could say that!'*

Keith and Prez laughed, remembering their own prepubescent escapades. Not until that moment did John know that once upon a time, prior to choosing their mates, Mike, Derrick, Prez and Keith had fun with each other as a group and as couples. However, the other Core Rimmers and their families were waiting.

All five couples gathered then went to cut the cakes. One couple

at a time fed their partners a piece of cake. Then, starting with Derrick and Mike, each newlywed smashed a small piece of cake onto his partners face. They went to the CIC men's room to cleanup. There, they decided they had waited long enough. Kaleo and Tory had Alden transport them to their dorm room. Prez and Keith, Derrick and Mike, Drew and Corey, and John and Stephen were transported to the townhomes for maximum privacy.

At the dorms, some of the kids were returning to their rooms. On the first floor, right after Aki and Hajime walked in, they could hear muffled cries and moans from Sean and Horacio's room. They had seen Sean with Troy that day and Horacio was still at the CIC dining room when they left there, so they knew who was making love. Thirteen-year-old roommates Aaron Farris and Stephen Wickes walked in the dorm and heard more desperate cries and giggling from Sean's room. Having a good idea of what might be going on, they blushed and giggled. Aaron nervously asked Stephen, "Ya wanna try, maybe?"

Opening the door to their room, Stephen waited until Aaron had stepped inside, closed the door and reached for Aaron's hand, softly admitting, "That's why I slept near you in the nest the last three nights. That's why I wanted you as a roommate, Aaron."

Beginning to shed tears of joy, Aaron leaned close and tenderly kissed Stephen for the first time. Forcing a wide smile, Stephen whispered, "You're gorgeous to me, ya know? I can't imagine how I could live without you."

"I think you're hot too," Aaron giggled. "I never wanna be with anyone else ever again." With that, Aaron led Stephen to his bed. The boys giggled and rolled around, sharing their bodies and minds.

Sean's orphanage friends, Keanu and Hank were next entering

the dorm and heard Sean making Troy squeal in delight. They helplessly laughed as they walked to the common room at the end of the hall. Both boys considered themselves bisexual, because of their orphanage experiences. As close as they had been through their orphanage experiences, they had no issue with seeking solace in each other's arms. They weren't ready for bed yet though and turned on the television in the common room. Keanu turned to Hank and grinned, "What do you think Sean's doin'?"

Knowing Sean for five years, Hank cackled, "You saw Sean with Troy today. The look in his eyes and the smile on his face says it all. I'd bet the Rimmers are rimming." Keanu nodded and evilly snickered.

Still chuckling from the sounds down the hall, Horacio walked in the common room. The three orphanage buddies became hysterical because, of all of them, Sean was the shyest, yet there they were, still making choices and watching TV while Sean had obviously found the boyfriend of his dreams. After hearing Troy sing so many ballads, they knew that Sean had no hope of ever breaking away from Troy. They also confirmed that it was a match made in heaven. Horacio only wondered when he would be able to return to his room and go to bed.

After the reception, eleven of the younger boys and nine of the younger girls decided it was time to move to the dorms. With Alden's help, Bill Seaver and Carl Seibert took the boys over and got them settled in three dorm rooms. Lanna Seaver and Anna Seibert brought the girls upstairs and got them in their rooms. The nest in the basement of the Hundser home had dwindled to twenty-five immediate family, the seven youngest F.C.C. kids rescued the prior night, the Terrible Triplets and Nathan. Almost all the kids were wound up from the concert and reception.

Circumstances however, cut the Rimmers' private celebrations short. At quarter of midnight, Prez's comm-badge chirped. Street kids had shown up at Hawaii, Maui, and their own main gate. Reluctantly, Prez contacted Mike, Derrick, Kaleo and Tory while Keith called his brothers and their partners. Soon the five couples and two doctors were at the Ewa Beach main gate, then at Hawaii and finally at Maui gathering nineteen more kids. Of the nineteen, twelve were boys and seven were girls, ranging in age from thirteen to sixteen. One boy and one girl were fifteen year old Betazed twins; Relud Glith and his sister, Inoyra Glith. John and Stephen found them to be the most interesting of the lot. Arriving back at the CIC dining room, Derrick realized their numbers had reached one hundred and fifty-one. In only four days, the Rimmer Clan had almost doubled.

Emerging from the dorm room around half past midnight, Sean and Troy went down the hall, washed up in the bathroom then went to the common room looking for Horacio. Little did they know that, in addition to Horacio, they would find Keanu, Hank, Aki, Hajime, Aaron and Stephen in the room. Only Aki and Hajime remained seated and giggling while the other five stood and applauded the after concert performance. Blushing bright red, Sean and Troy hid their faces on the other's shoulder and couldn't help laughing along. On their way out of the common room, Aaron and Stephen paused to hug Sean and Troy, whispering their thanks for pushing them beyond friendship.

Sean locked eyes with Horacio and giggled, "The room is yours for the night, bro."

Troy nodded and brightly smiled, "Sean's spending the night with me at the condo."

More laughter and teasing erupted from Horacio, Keanu and Hank. Cackling their heads off, Sean and Troy turned and walked

down the hall. Horacio followed and softly wondered, "So how far did you dudes go?"

Troy giggled and tried to hide his face with his one free hand. Sean answered, "As far as we could with hands, fingers and mouths." Facing Sean and wordlessly confirming everything they had done was fantastic, Troy brightly smiled and contentedly sighed.

They stopped outside Sean and Horacio's room. Horacio teased, "No dildo action yet?"

Sean and Troy shook their heads. Sean helplessly giggled, "Later tonight or tomorrow, after Troy's mom leaves for work."

Collapsing onto Sean, Troy giggled, "We got each other off six times already, Tiger."

Sean planted a kiss then smiled, "I told you that six times was easy. It's after midnight now. Restart the counter."

Laughing hysterically, Horacio prompted, "Wait just a minute," then hurried into his room. He came back out with the final wrapped present and handed it to Sean. Sean handed the box to Troy then leaned close to whisper, "We're workin' our way there; fingers and through each of the dildos."

Troy whimpered then tenderly kissed Sean. Troy turned to Horacio, offered his thanks and reluctantly admitted that he was jealous of him.

Shaking his head, Horacio assured, "Don't be jealous of me, dude. My hand's been on Sean's cock, but that's it. I wouldn't do with him what you've already done. I'm bi and want a girlfriend; everything's perfect and very kewl, Troy."

Troy smiled, "That's great. Thanks again for the presents. We'll see you tomorrow."

"Kewl," Horacio chirped, and then chuckled, "Have fun, dudes. Good night."

Sean and Troy shared silent thoughts. Sean took the box and handed it back to Horacio, saying, "Just leave it on my bed, bro." He slyly glanced at Troy and chortled, "If my finger and tongue makes you that loud, we'd better plan on playing with these here." Feeling his face flush again, Troy nodded and helplessly laughed at himself. Taking the box and cracking up, Horacio, Sean and Troy said good night. Horacio went into the room and tossed the box on Sean's bed. Sean and Troy returned to the condominium.

Kekoa had done his bit again, getting additional chefs to feed the new arrivals and giving them an introductory pep talk. Once the kids had eaten, the eight Core Rimmers, their partners and Kekoa took the newbies to the basement store to get them clothed. Kekoa pulled Prez aside and whispered, "I need to share something, Director O'Brian."

Hearing Kekoa refer to him with a formal title, Prez immediately knew it was important. The best area Prez knew of where there were no kids or chance for interruption was within the men's room. Once there, Prez formally said, "Your report, Colonel?"

Kekoa reported, "With the installation of your new AI this morning, additional security measures have been implemented. The technology is far above anything else on this planet and cannot be compromised." Prez simply nodded. Kekoa continued, "If the CIC were to be compromised, then explosive charges would take out the AI and everything above ground. Only these basement areas would

not be destroyed."

"What about Alden?" Prez worried, "He's a sentient life form, like Reyes, Daileass and Draco."

Kekoa answered, "All Alden's programming and memories would be stored off site. He'd be safe, Sir."

Prez thought for a few moments then asked, "If we have to use the shelters down here, would everybody be safe?"

Kekoa nodded, "Yes, Sir. Jory setup the charges personally."

Remembering the boy that setup the explosive charges so they could surf at Anahola Bay, Prez couldn't help laughing. Not expecting Prez to laugh, Kekoa curiously tilted his head. Leading Kekoa out of the men's room, Prez shared the surfing story.

Finally, the group was brought to the dorms. For the first time, a dorm room was shared by a boy and a girl; the twins, Relud and Inoyra. There were rooms still available in the first dorm for the girls, but all the new boys had overflowed into the first floor of another dormitory building.

It was almost three in the morning by the time the Core Rimmers went to bed. Only John's sleep was interrupted by a nightmare just before dawn. Completely freaked out by the images of fire, John got up and contacted the Command Center, fully convinced that somewhere there was a huge blaze and many kids were in danger. The on-shift UNIT team checked and double checked, but nowhere around the Pacific Rim was there any such fire. Stephen led John back to the nest, got him settled down and eventually they fell back to sleep.

Reyes Taraschke Personal Log 3

<Authors Note: This chapter was a team effort. In addition to advancing Reyes' story, there is also a fair amount said about AI Headquarters and the characters from the story ['Sentenced To Life'](#). More than a week has passed since the last chapter of 'Sentenced To Life', so naturally, AAKD has struck, and we introduce two brothers, adopted by the Owens family. Blame or praise for what is contained herein should be pointed to ACFan, D&B, Dewey, Fibita, Ilu, and Roland.>

Tuesday, November 2, 2004

It's a little before six in the morning. I woke from dreams I was having and couldn't go back to sleep, so I decided to get up, turn the television on and start writing.

In one of my dreams, I was with my first dad, Derek Taraschke. It started as memories of him teaching me to play congas, at home in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. It's weird, but I never saw him as an old man, even though he was already forty-five years old when I was first activated. In my dream, I remembered him telling me that he and mom couldn't have kids of their own, which is why they took advantage of the cybernetics developments at Vision Industries and adopted me. As happy as I was with him and mom, I never thought to ask why they hadn't adopted a human boy instead of an android boy. It's one of the questions still lurking in my brain that I have no answer for. I don't know why it matters. Without them, I never would've been created, but here I sit in the basement of the Hundserts' home, tapping away at this keyboard, trying to come to grips with fifty-six years of life as a thirteen-year-old android boy.

In my dreams, I clearly remembered my activation and meeting my dad, Derek Taraschke, and his wife, Lokelani, for the first time. While dad and mom watched, the AI engineers put me through a bunch of different physical tests of my motor functions, and then had me take a few written tests. It took the entire day, with only a break for lunch. Then, I went to my new home for the very first time. It was an almost two-hour long drive to a small house, number 596 on Mallard Lake Drive. It was a short walk through trees to the lagoon behind the house. I could follow the inlet directly to the beach about quarter of a mile away. In my dream, I took those same familiar walks, as if I had done it just yesterday.

That first night at home, my dad went to practice playing his drums and I went to watch him. I remember him warming up with various snare drum and tom-tom rolls. While that was somewhat interesting, I started bopping and hopping when he began playing the entire kit. My dad smiled and was soon laughing because I wasn't really dancing, but I was moving in time to his rhythms. After about an hour he was hysterical and took a break to ask if I'd like to learn how to play. Of course, I said yes. Derek started me out with maracas and tambourine and showed me different ways of playing both instruments. The next night he came home with bongos for me and we would practice together every evening after dinner. During the days, I practiced to songs on the radio. One night, he came home with a set of congas for me. The room with dad's drum set soon had filled with all my percussion instruments. Derek taught me everything he knew and we often faced each other while practicing in that room.

During my first days at home, Derek told me, "Though you are different from other children, inasmuch as you don't need to go to school, to us, you are completely human. We want you to have a long, happy life and be social with other boys and girls. If they ask why you

don't go to school, tell them you're being educated at home."

Mom said, "Another thing you might be asked about is your skin color. Your skin is dark, like mine, because of our Polynesian ancestry. Tell anyone who might ask that you're Hawaiian-American."

I could understand why school might need to be discussed, but didn't understand why my skin color was an issue. For the rest of the night, I studied the American Civil War and learned about prejudices. During those first days, I witnessed prejudices first-hand, because dad was Caucasian and mom was Polynesian. When we went out together, I noticed some people giving my dad and mom strange looks. I accepted these reactions as any other learned experience. Thinking of it now, while I write this though, it tells me why I was so concerned about telling people I'm an android over the weekend.

When I began meeting other kids in our neighborhood, I told them my heritage exactly as my mom had suggested. I remember the first friend I ever made way back in 1948. His name was Thomas Darr and he was African-American. I met Tom down by the lagoon, while I was searching for crawdads. Another friend made that first summer was Doug Witter. I met Doug through Tom.

In September, when school was about to start, I told Doug and Tom how I was being educated at home. Doug was about to start seventh grade, and Tom was starting eighth grade.

It's funny, I can remember their faces and mannerisms now still, wide awake. What I recall most of all was helping them with their homework during the school year. I also recall how confused they were a year later, because they had both grown and changed, but I had not grown or changed at all. I was five-feet and four inches tall, a hundred-twenty-four pounds in 1948, was still the same height and weight the next year, and I'm still the same height today, only about

ten pounds lighter from the meager meals served at the orphanage. I wonder how much I weigh now, after four days of good food. Before anyone else wakes up, let me see if I can find out.

I just called Daileass and learned that there was a scale upstairs, in the first floor bathroom under the sink. While I was up there, Uncle Jim and Aunt Jen came downstairs and started coffee. As of now, I weigh a hundred-thirteen pounds. Eleven more pounds to go to get back to my normal weight. Dewi, Geoff, Richie and Kokaku are awake now. They just went upstairs, needing to go to the bathroom. I'm gonna take a short break and return to the nest, before any of my brothers or my dads wake up and find me writing, which I was specifically told not to do.

* * * * *

Okay, so much for getting right back to writing. It's still Tuesday, just barely. It's been a long, crazy day, so let me try to organize everything that happened.

I actually did fall back to sleep for a little while. Waking to singing, I realized that John and Stephen were floating four feet above the nest. I hadn't even wiped the sleep from my eyes and Clan magic was happening once again. Barely two minutes later, when the singing had finished, everyone still in the basement were also floating several feet off the floor. With his new boyfriend, Stephen, John was powerful enough to levitate everyone down there. Floating there and touching the ceiling, I estimated that John was lifting about a thousand pounds between all of us, and it didn't even faze him in the least; he simply held a kiss with Stephen. I helplessly cracked up laughing at the insanity of it all.

My brothers, dads and I showered at the dorm, then went to the CIC for breakfast. For the first time, we had vitamin-fortified

breakfast milkshakes, recommended for all us kids by our new doctor. Dillon got a chocolate shake, Jonah got strawberry and I got an apple pie-flavored shake. In a minute, we were sitting at a table near Prez, Keith and their sons. I started telling my new family about my dreams and first family during breakfast. Derrick and Mike carefully watched me as I spun my tale. I paused when Kaleo and then Prez told us about the ID and credit cards. When that announcement was finished, Derrick asked me, "Are you feeling sad anymore, son?"

Shaking my head, I grinned, "Not so much about my other two families. Like Austin said would happen, a lot was integrated while I slept. Now I'm just a little disgusted about twenty-one years in an orphanage. It's weird, because I can remember some things about those years, but because they kept zapping me, there's no dates or times associated with those memories. It's a jumbled up block of stuff with no meaning or sequence."

Jonah wondered, "Do you remember when they started messing around with us kids?"

"No," I replied. "I only remember stuff since June. Between November 1983 and June 2004, there's a couple of things I vaguely recall, but none of it makes any sense at all; like images of people I don't know now. I can't even tell what they're doing that made me store the memory in the first place."

Mike sighed, "We'll just go with what Kaleo and Tory said." He then glanced at Dillon, who was trying to finish sucking his milk shake through a straw, seemingly oblivious to the conversation.

"The abuses started about five or six years ago," Derrick stated. "Until we learn otherwise somehow, that's all we can know."

Mike smiled, "You're all safe now."

Glancing around the table at Dillon, Jonah and me, Derrick asked, "Are any of you having bad dreams about any of that?"

Shaking my head, I answered, "No. I think the reality was worse than anything I could possibly imagine, so I'm not dreaming about it at all."

"Nope," Jonah softly replied.

Still with a straw in his mouth, Dillon only shook his head in response. Since Dillon obviously had his priorities in order, Mike widely smiled and helplessly chuckled.

Derrick grinned, "If you ever do, make sure to let us know about it, okay? Especially if it becomes repetitive, let us know, and we'll talk it out or have a chat with Doc Wiener." Jonah and I vocally assured our dad and pop we would say something, but again, Dillon only nodded slightly. Mike cracked up. Derrick sniggered, "Are you drowning in chocolate milkshake, Dillon? Please say something."

At last, Dillon released his straw, giggling, "It's so good, but I'm gettin' so full." Mike, Jonah and I roared laughing.

On his way to the dishwasher with his empty shake glass, and with Stephen trailing along, John stopped by our table and said, "Intel reports say ninety-two perverted adults, that either actively participated in the scandal, or coordinated the child sex trade within CPS and our government, were arrested or executed last Friday. You dudes really don't need to worry about that stuff any more."

At twenty-of-ten my dads went into the Command Center, with the other Core Rimmers, for their morning status report. I continued sharing my tales of days long ago in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina with my brothers for about fifteen minutes, until my dad and pop came back out of the Command Center. Getting good luck wishes

from a lot of kids, Derrick, Mike, Keith and Prez walked through the dining room and around the tables where all their sons were finishing breakfast. Each of us got a kiss on the head by all four of them.

Dad introduced me to the three boys with him; "Reyes, this is Caleb, Noah and Hunter." Derrick smiled, "They work at the Charleston AI Division. I'd like for you to go there with them, for a check-up."

I nodded, "Okay, I guess it's a good idea."

Caleb grinned, "It'll be more than a check-up, Reyes. You'll get to meet some more of your android brothers while we're there."

Noah said, "We've got a few things to take care of here with the new system before we leave. When we're ready to go, where do you think you'll be?"

"Probably over by the pool or diving well," I answered.

Jonah said, "I'll go with Reyes too, dad."

Derrick explained to Caleb and Noah, "Last night, Austin said that Reyes shouldn't be alone for two days. Jonah and Reyes have been together since the orphanage. If anyone would know when Reyes isn't acting right, Jonah would."

"Kewl," Caleb and Noah chorused.

"Have a good time and I'll see you later," Derrick smiled, and then left us. He went outside with the other Core Rimmers to transport to school for their first jazz band concert of the week.

Caleb said, "Give us about an hour or so, Reyes. We'll catch up with you over at the pools."

I nodded, "Kewl, I'll see you in a little while." Caleb, Noah and Hunter returned to the Command Center.

I had managed to finish my shake. Jonah gave up on his, with only a little left in the bottom of the glass. Dillon still had his straw in his mouth though and refused to give up until he had finished it all. Ben came over and asked if Jonah was ready to get in some guitar practice. Jonah was ready, but didn't want to leave me. I assured my little brother that I was fine and would stay with Dillon until he finished his shake. Then Dillon and I would catch up with them and I could get some conga practice accomplished. Taking their shake glasses to the dishwasher, Jonah and Ben left us to get their ID and credit cards, then head over to the Gibbons' home.

Thinking about all the music I used to play and what Platinum Habits had played for us the last few days, I waited for Dillon. It was amazing how many songs I didn't know yesterday that I now remembered. There were more than a few tunes Platinum Habits had played that I had never heard before, but there were many that I recalled from before November 1983. I noticed that most of our Clan had gotten their ID and credit cards. I went to get mine and Dillon's ID and credit cards from Kaleo. By the time that was done and I returned to Dillon, housekeepers were beginning to clean up the dining room. There was very little liquid left in Dillon's glass, so I giggled, "Give it up, bro, or we'll still be sitting here when everybody comes back for lunch."

Releasing the straw from his mouth, Dillon sat back, smiling and groaned, "My belly's gonna go boom!"

Handing Dillon his ID and credit card, I grinned, "Can you walk?" and picked up our two glasses.

"Dunno," Dillon giggled, and slid off his chair onto his feet. He

stuffed his cards into his shorts pocket. Dragging his feet and waddling, Dillon followed me to the dishwasher, where I left our shake glasses. We started for home. Soon after we walked out of the CIC, Dillon giggled, "We'd better hurry."

The little guy jogged past me. Going after him, I grinned, "What's the rush, bro."

"Bathroom," Dillon laughed. Sniggering insanely, I picked up my youngest brother and raced to the Gibbons'. Once there and inside, I put Dillon down and he hurried to the first floor bathroom. Heading down to the basement, I found Bruce, Dee, Randy and Thanh with Ben and Jonah. The six younger guys were playing CD's loudly through the basement stereo and having a small party, with sodas and snacks spread out on the coffee table.

Facing Jonah, I wondered, "Where'd you get the CD's?"

Jonah grinned, "Some are dad's and some are pop's." With his index finger, Jonah gestured for me to lean down. I did and he whispered, "We're keeping Bruce busy, since John is workin' in the Command Center." I nodded my approval, then went to the stack of CD's. Led Zeppelin II was currently playing. Jonah said, "The drum solo dad played yesterday is on this disk. Dad played it way better and much longer though."

Finding the Santana Moonflower CD set, I grinned, "Do you guys wanna hear another awesome drum solo?" and waved the jewel case.

Almost at once, all six hollered, "Yeah!"

Jonah hurried to the player and pressed stop. He pulled out the Zeppelin disk and I handed him the second disk of Moonflower,

telling Jonah to "play track three, bro."

While Jonah took care of loading the disk, Bruce put the Zeppelin CD back in its case and I went to the other side of the basement, where the drums and congas were set up. Soon, 'Soul Sacrifice/ Head, Hands and Feet' was blasting through the stereo and I was playing along on the bongos and congas. Dillon came down to the basement. Just like old times, I played the entire congas part for my brothers, uncle and friends. I distinctly remembered playing the song for Derek Taraschke and my cousin, Akamu. Honestly, I was playing for them as well as all the kids hooting and hollering before me. My first dad encouraged me to learn; my second father figure enthusiastically watched me play, and now I was playing for my brothers. I couldn't wait for the chance to play this song with my current dad. Judging by what I had watched him play the previous afternoon, Derrick could easily play this tune. I hoped that Platinum Habits could play it, and I could sit in with them someday soon. When the song ended, I was sweating profusely, but still surrounded by all seven of them, cheering and shouting.

Since my blistered hands were hurting, I suggested we all go outside for a little while, to work off our breakfast milkshakes at the pools before lunch. On our way upstairs, Ben and Jonah were giggling through their complaints about how I was improving on the drum kit and now had many years of experience playing congas recovered. I told them; "You guys have way more notes to deal with than I do. Two congas can make about ten tones. A full drum kit like dad's can make maybe thirty tones. I'll guess that a guitar can make at least forty different tones. In the hands of someone like Mike, a guitar could make even more tones than those forty. Please don't give up trying because of me."

Jonah looked up and smiled, "I ain't giving up, bro."

"We just wish that we could play better, faster," Ben added.

Jonah nodded, "What we've got is you, dad, pop, Prez and Keith showing us what we could someday be able to do."

"Like inspiration?" I offered.

"Yeah," Ben giggled. "That's the word I was lookin' for and not finding."

"Very kewl," I nodded.

Arriving at the main pool, we noticed quite a bit of commotion, because Joel had returned for a visit. John, Stephen and Nathan, as well as a human woman and Vulcan man, were there with Joel. Surrounded by most of the younger kids rescued on Friday, John seemed to be organizing the kids so they would each get a turn to talk to Joel and give him a hug. Ben, Bruce, Dee, Dillon, Jonah and Thanh hurried over there. Randy wasn't one of the original eighty-seven, but he followed his friends to meet the person many of us had been talking about.

Approaching, I heard John's voice in my mind, telling me what had happened to Joel soon after he left us Saturday morning. How something so horrible could happen to someone so nice made me sad. Rather than face Joel feeling bad, I considered going over to the diving well. John sent, 'Reyes, you don't have to hide. In your case, specifically, he'd love to know all that's happened to you, thanks to him. Come on over, and let him know.'

I did go over and wait for my chance to say thank you and tell Joel that, thanks to the Clan, I was again a fully functional android with memories going back fifty-six years. Surprisingly, Joel hugged me. How he remembered me when he had rescued so many, I don't know, but it felt nice and made me feel better. After our brief

moments together, I went over to the diving well, where the other teenagers usually hung out.

I waved at Kaleo, up on the three-meter board, and at Tory, sitting naked on the edge of the diving well. Beginning to untie my board shorts and join the fun, I was stopped by Caleb, loudly laughing, "Don't get naked yet, Reyes. Let's go to AI Division for a few hours. You can get naked there."

Retying my shorts, I grinned, "Let me get Jonah," and went over to the other pool. I hollered for Jonah and waited for him to get dressed. In a few minutes, we were gathered with Caleb, Noah and Hunter and transported seven thousand miles to Sullivan's Island, South Carolina.

Immediately upon arrival, I recognized the salty smell of the Atlantic ocean. In mid-autumn, some of the tree leaves were changing color, which was another sight I hadn't seen in over forty years. Looking down at Jonah, I smiled, "It feels so familiar, like home."

"Are you okay, bro?" Jonah worried.

I nodded, "Perfectly fine. It's been a very long time, that's all."

Leading the way with Caleb and Hunter, towards what appeared to be a house, Noah asked, "Where are you from, Reyes?"

"I lived in Myrtle Beach my first ten years," I replied. "My mom was Hawaiian and she wanted to be near family, so we moved to Honolulu in 1958."

Caleb said, "We'll try to take a short trip to Myrtle Beach too," and opened the door of the house.

My jaw hit my chest as soon as I walked through the door with

my brothers. In front of me, mid-pillow-fight, was a face no android ever expected to see, accompanied by an eight-year-old boy. The two were laughing as they ganged up on a platinum blond android boy who was barely holding his own. "He's *THE* Danny?" I asked in awe.

Noah giggled. "Yeah, that's the old man himself. He's pretty agile for a rustbucket!" Caleb and Hunter ran for cover, leaving Noah exposed to the inevitable attack.

"I heard that, shrimp!" Danny announced. "Minion, you attack low, I'll take that balloon he calls a head!"

"Oday Masdew Uncah Dahny!" the eight-year-old replied, giggling wildly as he launched himself at Noah's legs. Wide-eyed and giggling, Jonah dashed away from my side just in time.

I became an unwilling victim as the two boys found their target and began tickling any ribs they could find... including mine. Off to the side, Caleb and Hunter were joined by the blond.

"Uncle Marc, when are you gonna teach Uncle Danny that you don't pounce guests until after they've been introduced?" Hunter commented, trying to hide his grin.

"You're just mad that you didn't get him first," Marc replied, not bothering to hide his grin. "C'mon Hunter, lets go find a med-kit for when the animals get tired."

"I'll get some drinks," Caleb offered.

Following Caleb, Jonah wondered, "So this is testing Reyes' reflexes, I guess?"

Hunter giggled, "He's still standing."

Glancing at the pile up around me, Jonah smiled, "Prob'ly 'cos Noah's curled up at Reyes' legs and he can't fall down." Pointing out a pair of purple briefs hanging from a dining room chair, Jonah loudly laughed, "I expected doctors and smart computer people, not pillow fights."

Tickling my ribs and holding Noah down, Danny chuckled, "Hi Reyes. The little fireball on Noah at your feet is Joey."

Trying to block Danny's tickling, I cackled, "Nice to meet ya."

"Just be glad you missed the drum wars; that's what led to the pillow fight," an older lady said. She opened the oven to check on the contents.

"Again?" Caleb asked, rolling his eyes. "Mary, this is Jonah, he's Reyes' brother. Reyes is the one that Noah's tryin' to use as a shield."

Mary came around the counter, and once proper introductions were done, she smiled, "Let me guess... sweet tea for everyone as usual when this happens?"

Jonah uncertainly asked, "Aunt Mary, is sweet tea like iced tea?"

Mary smiled. "Yes, it's iced tea, but made sweet. It refreshes you better in the Southern heat."

"Did I hear someone asking for a computer geek?" An almost-twelve boy with dirty blond hair to his shoulders asked as he waltzed into the kitchen. "Hi Mom!"

"You done waxing the Mustang already, Jerry? You've only spent the last four hours out there," Mary said with a smile.

"I smelled sweet tea," Jerry stated matter-of-factly. He looked

towards the entry and giggled. "I see that Danny is welcoming family home with his usual shyness." Jerry introduced himself to Jonah.

"Dahdy!" Joey exclaimed as he broke free of the pile and rushed Jerry.

"Hey squirt!" Jerry replied as he caught Joey. "I thought you and Uncle Danny were practicing?"

"We was bud Uncah Mawc said we was shakin' dhe windows bud we wasn'd bud he said we was so we sdawded a piwwow fighd dhen Uncah Noah cawwed Uncah Dahny owd so we addacked Uncah Noah an' weez been dickwing him since dhen bud weez dickwin' Weyes doo since he was dhewe." Joey explained, seemingly not pausing to breathe. Jonah went into a giggling fit.

"Yeah, I can see we need to tweak those breathing routines of yours later," Jerry grinned as he cuddled his son in his arms.

"DAHDIY! You'we siwwy! I'm bweadhin' oday!" Joey giggled. He then turned to Jonah, "Dahdy buiwd me and wode my bwain aww by himself!" he announced proudly.

Suddenly, just as Aunt Mary was about to pass a glass of tea, Jonah fell on his butt, laughing hysterically. Aunt Mary then looked down, smirking, "What's so funny?"

Heaving and holding his belly, Jonah rolled and gasped, "Dickwin' Noah and dickwin' Reyes. It's dickwin my dickie!"

"I didn'd say 'dickwin', I said 'dickwin'," Joey said seriously. After a fraction of a second, he turned to Jerry. "Dahdy, does id sound wike 'dickwin' when I say 'dickwin'?"

Jerry nodded his head, "Yes it does, kiddo."

Joey tilted his head and then grinned. "Dhad's funny!"

Jonah howled, and looked into the room where I was still standing, but fiercely blushing since my board shorts were pulled down around my ankles. Danny concentrated on tickling Noah, who wouldn't let go of my legs.

Another boy came running down the stairs just then. "Hey Twerp, why'd you stop playin? I was tryin' to sleep. All this silence woke me up!" he sleepily blubbered as he landed in a chair, sliding it to the side about six inches. Sitting there, the boy waved at me and yawned, "I'm KC."

"Uncah Mawc made us do id," Joey accused.

I waved back at KC and introduced myself. Thankfully, this place seemed to be just as out of control as Ewa Beach and no one seemed to care that I was half-nude.

"I thought you were going to fix that defect in Marc's program, Dad?" KC stated with a grin.

Jerry paused for a second. "I tried, but you know how unstable those old positronic matrices are," Jerry smiled.

"Almost as unstable as eleven-year-old geniuses' brains," Marc quipped as he came back up the stairs with Hunter. "I see you're awake, KC. I'm ready for you, I've got the first aid kits all upstairs now."

"Bite me, Dad," KC grinned.

Marc grinned, but soon the grin began to look a bit wicked.

"Mmmmm, KC Barbecue. I am a bit hungry."

"I told Danny to keep you away from Logan; his addictions are contagious," KC half-muttered.

At last, Noah released my legs, allowing me to pull my boardies up and make a quick escape. I went into the kitchen with my brother, then greeted Jerry, Joey and Aunt Mary.

Laughing out loud, Marc tried to get everyone under a semblance of control. He must've known that it was something akin to herding cats, but he tried anyway. "Okay. Okay. I need to ask Jerry about his new brothers."

"What about them?" Jerry exclaimed. "Is something wrong with Paul or Ryan? I gotta call home..."

"Jerry. Calm down," Marc instructed. "I said I needed to ask you something."

Jerry sighed, "Sorry, bro. I feel really protective of them. I mean, who could have imagined an android forgetting that he was an android, and living on the streets for that many years. I worry about him, but his brother knew and took care of him for all that time. I just can't imagine what it must have been like."

"I know, bro. That's what I wanted to ask you. Is Paul still insisting that his older brother is human?"

"Yeah. Why?" Jerry suspiciously answered.

"Whoa, bro. I am just asking because I think we need to do something and I don't want to hurt either of them, but you know that Ryan's delusion that he is human may become dangerous at some point. Remember what happened in the hospital. They were lucky that

the duty nurse knew who we were and called us in. If things had gone on the way they were, someone could have been hurt."

"I know but..."

"No buts, bro. I want them to have a good life. They deserve that."

Just then Noah came barreling past with Danny in close pursuit.

I went to Caleb and whispered, "You dudes know about me, don't you?"

Nodding, Caleb softly replied, "Your dad said you were in an orphanage twenty-one years."

"They were periodically zapping my memory with some little Cynthetilife unit," I revealed. "To me, those twenty-one years are mostly blank, just a bunch of uncatalogued memories without names, places or times. Austin was able to fix me last night in about twenty minutes."

Danny hurried into the room again. Noah quickly followed, as quickly as he could with one hand stuck down the back of his shorts trying to de-wedgie himself. Not the least bit disturbed by the madness around us, Caleb asked me, "What did Austin do?"

I giggled at Danny hiding behind Caleb and then me, so Noah couldn't get at him. "He had a few chips that he attached to my uplink port. The first, I think, was basically to reset my diagnostics. Then there were several programming updates. Lastly, he updated a bunch of databases, but warned me to not access them for two days, so I've locked them down until tomorrow night. Then I reinitialized. Immediately, I remembered a bunch of stuff from my first two

families."

Joining us, Jonah laughed, "And a whole bunch of bathroom jokes."

I grinned, "I did that to refocus my recollections so I wouldn't stay sad." I told Caleb, "I've got two awesome dads and two great little brothers now."

"Don't forget the partridge in the pear tree!" Noah added with a smirk.

Shaking my head, I grinned, "Never; can't forget Shirley, she'd never forgive me."

Scowling and shaking his head, Danny wondered, "Okay; who hit you over the head with a coconut, Noah?"

"Nobody," Noah replied, "they really do have a partridge named Shirley in a pear tree."

"Yeah, sure," Danny smirked, "you know I wasn't born yesterday."

Noah threw in, "Not by one-hundred-twenty-eight years, three months, and..."

"No, but you're close!" Marc said as he joined them, the comments about me having got both his and Jerry's interest.

"So you let the only AI on the planet who passes out at the sight of a scalpel perform brain surgery?" Jerry asked with a grin.

"Well, since Austin is Marc's son, I probably better make sure the kid paid attention," Danny giggled. "C'mon, Jer, let's catch a cat so

we can scan Reyes."

"You'll pay for that later, Danny!" Marc replied with a grin.

"Hey you two, there are kids present!" Noah chimed in, before sprinting towards the door, this time with Marc in hot pursuit.

Totally confused, Jonah looked up at me. I grinned, "C'mon, there aren't any cats. They want to do a CAT scan on me." I locked eyes with Danny and prompted, "Lead the way."

"Yes, you've definitely got Austin's programming." Danny snickered. "Follow me."

Jonah and I followed Danny through a door and downstairs into a basement. Danny said, "Lights on," and a bunch of ceiling lights turned on. My brother and I had barely crossed the threshold when we heard the first tiny meow, followed by a chorus of meows. From almost every corner of the basement, kittens and cats emerged.

"Okay," I giggled at Jonah, "maybe I am getting a real cat scan."

Joey had followed the group down the stairs, and immediately started introducing each kitten to Jonah as they came over to investigate their visitors. Danny just shook his head with a grin. "I told you this would become a pet hotel if you let Joey install that pet door, Jerry."

"Hey, I could have installed it in your bedroom instead, like Noah suggested!" Jerry shot back. "At least Joey kept his promise; there are no sanitation issues down here."

Jonah sat down on the floor with Joey and got familiar with the kittens. Danny patted a table and instructed, "Lay here and relax,

Reyes."

Hopping up on the table, I made myself comfy and watched Danny attach a cable to a computer. Jerry came over and put a calico kitten on my belly. The tiny feline immediately purred, "Warm and cozy," then curled up to take a nap.

Jerry giggled, "Gives a whole new meaning to cat-scan, huh?"

Nodding and petting the kitten on my belly, I giggled, "I guess the fine line between genius and insanity was crossed right here."

Joey looked up from introducing kittens. "Dhewe's no wines hewe. Unca Mawc don'd awwow wines!"

Oddly, I understood Joey perfectly and told Danny, "Hurry and hook that thing up to me. I understood every word Joey said."

"Silly human!" the kitten on my chest purred.

"Malfunction!" I loudly laughed, and took the cable from Danny's hand, then attached it to my uplink port. Jonah, Joey, Jerry and Danny cracked up.

The kitten wiggled its way up to my chin and gave it a few licks. "You're a funny human, I like that. I think I'll keep you," it purred as it began washing my face.

While the kitten continued licking my jaw with its sandpaper tongue, I giggled, "Joey, this one says it wants to come to Ewa Beach with me."

"Keww! He's gonna be a Hawaiian Kiddy!" Joey responded with a smile. "Jonah gods his sisdeus."

Jerry giggled, "Three down and twenty to go."

Looking back at Danny, I wondered, "How's it goin', Doc?"

Danny sniggered, "Huh? How's what goin'?"

"The check up!" Jonah laughed.

Jerry giggled, "You're supposed to be doing diagnostics, old man."

"Actually I'm trying to figure out how to install a dataport on you to help fix your memory. The computer runs the diagnostics, I just review the results," Danny giggled.

"And just exactly what is inside your head?" Jerry teased.

"Unlike your stale air, my head contains a masterpiece of human engineering," Danny shot back.

"There's not much there from the orphanage," I grinned. "So far, I've found only fifty-three uncatalogued short memories with no time, date, names or place from those twenty-one years. It's not worth a lot of effort, as far as I'm concerned."

"Charles, control your human," Danny instructed as he scratched the kitten's ears. "There are a few things that we can do here that are not part of the normal diagnostics, Reyes. That's why Austin told you to check in with us."

My new kitten loudly purred, "You're feeling sleepy, very sleepy."

"As long as it's not a big deal," I yawned, then told my kitten, "You're not hypnotizing me."

The kitten seemed to chuckle as it continued to purr "Sleeeeepppppppyyyyyy..."

"I just woke up a few hours ago," I giggled, and yawned again. "It's dinner time here, but I just had breakfast." Complaints got me nowhere. I fell asleep anyway.

"Reyes?" a chorus of voices called.

Waking and looking around the table I had passed out on, I saw Jonah, Jerry and Danny smiling at me. "Please don't tell me that Charles put me to sleep," I muttered.

Jonah and Jerry cracked up. Danny sniggered, "No, I had the computer you were attached to put you to sleep."

I grinned, "Why?"

Danny smiled, "To try and help you get your twenty-one missing years of memories categorized. Maybe you can answer when the abuses started."

"Danny thinks he put you to sleep!" Charles purred from his perch on my chest.

"Silly androids, so self-assured," the kitten in Joey's arms smugly added.

"One of these days they'll learn. It takes a while to train pets," the calico in Jonah's arms purred. "Scratch my ears please, Jonah."

Holding onto Charles and sitting up, I asked, "How long was I asleep?"

"Long enough for us to adopt more kittens, for a total of four, so

far," Jonah giggled, and scratched his kitten's ears.

"Nice, I am glad I picked you," the kitten purred.

Danny shook his head. "Now you see what we gotta live with?" he giggled as a solid white tomcat began rubbing his head on Danny's leg. "Yes Bruce, I'll cuddle you while I answer Reyes' questions." Danny said as he picked up the cat.

"You're learning!" Bruce purred as he allowed Danny to pick him up.

The kitten in Jonah's arms leaped to the floor, explaining, "Sandbox time." Charles decided that was a good idea and leaped from my arms.

I wondered, "What's your kitten's name, bro."

"Patch," Jonah smiled.

Glancing at Danny and Jerry, I asked, "Do all my systems check out okay?"

Jerry nodded, "You're good, Reyes. We did some additional programming updates that Austin wasn't aware of. We replaced the access panel to your uplink port also. Your serial number is the same, just with the suffix 'X2'."

Danny instructed, "Take your clothes off, Reyes." I obediently nodded and started to undress. Once I was naked, Danny roamed around me, then leered and sighed, "All your systems are awesome."

I smirked and blushed. Jerry giggled, "You're a perv, Danny." Then Jerry told me, "Expect those bruises and welts to be gone by tomorrow."

"Uncah Dahny, I'm dewwin' Uncah Mawc on you!" Joey giggled.

"How many cookies will you take as a bribe, Joey?" Danny asked hesitantly.

"I'm nahd Dimmy!" Joey laughed.

"Cuddles?" Danny offered.

Joey giggled, "Good cuddwes ow showd ones?"

"Mega good cuddles," Danny offered hopefully.

Joey's eyes widened. "I know whad good cuddews awe. Whad awe mega good cuddews?"

Jonah cracked up.

Danny grinned, "Well, only old people, over a hundred years old, know how to give mega good cuddles. Come here, munchkin!" Danny opened his arms and waited for the boy to accept the 'bribe'.

Joey balked, "I bed Uncah Mawc give me cookies and cuddews."

"But he's not over a hundred years old, though," Danny giggled. "He don't know mega good cuddles."

"Maybe nod, bud I'ww seddwe for cookies, wegguwah cuddews and wadching you skwuhm for Uncah Mawc!" Joey cried with a giggle as he darted out of the room and upstairs calling his uncle's name.

"Aw, crap," Danny grouched.

"You want me to get the blankets set out on the couch for you, Danny?" Noah giggled.

"I wonder if the elf has any of his dinner-plate-sized cookies left?" Danny asked idly, wondering if it would help his situation at all.

"Yeah, you're sleeping on the couch all right," Caleb giggled.

Danny rolled his eyes. "You act like we're married or something!"

"You mean you're not boyfriends?" Jonah asked innocently.

Noah and Caleb fell to the floor in laughter, both clutching their sides.

"And I thought the Rimmers were crazy," I softly chuckled.

Marc came down the stairs, Joey riding on his back, munching on a large cookie. "A little birdie said there is something unusual happening down here." Marc stated, barely hiding his grin. "Nice butt, Reyes!"

Sadly shaking my head, I started to put my clothes on again.

"Whad's wong, Uncah Weyes? We doo bonkews fow you?" Joey chortled from his perch.

Marc came over and stood next to me. "Don't worry about it, Reyes. I know it seems crazy here, but that is how we deal with all of the crap that has happened recently. Believe it or not, even when we're joking around, we've been watching you and looking for signs of problems. You'd be surprised at how much a simple blush tells me."

Jerry looked up from where he was reviewing the data from Danny's scan. "He's right, Reyes. Most problems with an AI show

themselves in the responses before they are caught by the error handlers. Your base programming checks out pretty much, with a couple of small exceptions that Danny caught and fixed. There is one area I'm checking right now; it's not an error, but more of something that your brain tried to do to prevent damage. You were not programmed with the adaptive routines of the Austin series when you were at the orphanage, but your brain tried to do something anyway. If it passes the tests I'm running right now, I'll activate it permanently for you."

Pulling my T-shirt over my head, I queried, "My brain tried to prevent damage? From the orphanage, or from para-surfing security gorillas, or from speaking shiny-loving ferrets, or from hypnotist kittens, or from hundred-year-old perv androids? I can't understand how my programming might be concerned about damage."

Dillon appeared in the basement beside Jonah. I guess he got bored and dad or pop had him transported. Several kittens scampered over to Dillon. Jonah began introducing Dillon to everyone and all the kittens.

"You've managed to avoid Timmy's bedroom, so you're doing pretty good so far," Marc replied as he went over and looked over Jerry's shoulder. "Jerry, please tell me that I'm not seeing what I think I see?"

"You're seeing it. I just checked with 'Tonio; he's verified it. Reyes' is genetically Tyler's cousin, and his brain started using that gene to maintain emotional connections. Reyes, that is why each time you recovered, you made friends with the same people. You have empath genes from your father's side of the gene pool; it didn't totally take with your original program, but now that you have Austin-series code, you are halfway to becoming a full empath. You have a choice, I can turn it off, or you can leave it run, and have Ty or the double-J's

give you some training to use what was given to you." Jerry said seriously.

Dillon tapped Jonah and wondered, "What's that mean?"

Jonah smiled, "It means Reyes is like John was before he became N-Gen yesterday; he feels stuff from other people."

"Oh, kewl!" Dillon cheered.

I told Jerry, "Leave it run. Even if I don't make full use of it, it's answered a big question for me."

Jonah wondered, "Why wouldn't you want to use it fully, bro?"

I shrugged, "It's not that I wouldn't; I simply don't know right now. I would have to check with dad and pop, and then talk with John too. It opens up some doors though, so lets leave it as is."

"I think you've made the right choice, Reyes. Congratulations on becoming the first AI empath," Marc commented seriously. "Jerry, you might want to tie in routine cz-46T34N910257 to the init routine; that is how Austin managed to trigger control when he programmed himself for telepathy. I still don't know what in the hell that routine does, but it seems to work."

"Got it, boss!" Jerry giggled. "Reyes, I need you to plug back in for a minute, I'm going to drop in the control protocols that Austin developed, so that you can manage when and how you use it."

I picked up the cable, but before reattaching it, wondered, "You guys aren't sure what the routine does? Is it safe to include?"

"The only issue Austin has is an aversion to blood and scalpels, other than that he's as normal as any Clan member." Jerry replied.

"Wait, I take that back; he's a lot more normal than most Clan members!"

Recalling my visions alone with Austin, I muttered, "Austin's kewl," and attached the cable to my uplink port.

As soon as the security routines established a connection, Jerry entered a command into the console and the upload began. A few seconds later, he announced "Okay, Reyes, it's done. I gave you the instruction manual that Austin came up with for any AI that developed special skills; if you have any other questions just call him. You're now one-of-a-kind, and he's the expert on unique positronics." I removed the cable from my uplink port.

Still perched on Marc, Joey giggled, "I jusr dold Ausdin, he says awesome, and he's gonna have Uncah Kywe hewp him visid you do hewp widh youw new sduff!"

"Very kewl, Joey," I smiled, and then scowled, "How'd you tell Austin, Joey?"

Joey grinned. "Ausdin and Dimmy and Casey and me are bwodhews and we can dalk do each odhew's heads, because we awe speciaw bwodhews."

KC came sliding down the stair rails. "Hey Reyes, the twerp says you've taken after Uncle Ty! Awesome, dude!"

Joey giggled, "I ain'd a twewp, Cwash!"

"Yes you are, that's why I love you!" KC shot back with a smile, making it obvious that this was just friendly banter between the two of them.

I smiled, "That makes you and me brothers too, Joey, cos Austin

and KC are my younger brothers. Maybe once this new routine is enabled and I'm trained, I'll be able to talk with you in my head too."

"Awesome!" Joey exclaimed. "Casey! We've gonna be abwe da dawk do Weyes doo and have aww kinda fun an' pway games in ouw heads and do sduff aww dogedhew and have aww kindsafun!"

KC giggled, "Dad, have you been neglecting Joey's sugar intake? I understood every word he said!"

"Bide me, Casey!" Joey giggled, and then he stuck his tongue out at his brother.

Jerry smiled at the interaction between KC and Joey. I asked Jerry what he was smiling at. He softly replied, "They remind me of the sparring matches that I used to enjoy with Davie."

Surprisingly, an angel appeared next to Jerry, placing an arm over Jerry's shoulder. "See, you followed your heart and it's working out," the angel commented as he gave Jerry a hug.

"Yeah, but I'm still trying to figure out how you got wings," Jerry replied with a grin. "Reyes, this is Davie."

Davie smiled. "Just wait until you see yours... sometime way in the future!" He then turned to me, asking, "How you feeling, nephew?"

Wide-eyed, I stammered, "Uhh... good... thanks... uhh..."

"You've got wings!" Dillon excitedly screamed.

Rubbing his eyes and then staring in complete awe, Jonah hollered, "He's an angel!"

"Only physically," Danny giggled. "Jerry's told me some stories

about him."

Davie giggled, "You're not much better, Danny." He then turned his attention back to my brothers. "Hi, I'm Davie, Jerry's big brother and the Guardian Angel of the AI Division, when I'm not filling in for Saint Mikey. I couldn't pass up a chance to meet my new family while you're here."

Spinning around in circles like he had just met Santa, Dillon rambled, "Omigod! Jerry's brother is an angel? I can't wait to get home! I gotta tell everyone we've got angels in the family!"

"Who's gonna believe it?" Jonah wondered.

Only momentarily quieted, Dillon hurried to Davie and pleaded, "You gotta come to Ewa Beach, Davie!"

"Sure, you want me to bring Kyle and Tyler to help make waves?" Davie giggled. "That was funny to watch, by the way!"

"Bring anybody ya want!" Dillon cheered.

Giggling, I covered my eyes, knowing that Prez would definitely freak over an angel, two Mikyvis and more twenty-foot waves.

Davie placed his hand on my head. "Welcome to the family, bro. Consider this my present to you." A golden glow surrounded me for a second, then Davie lifted his hand. "No pain for my nephew, and no suffering for those who would be abused due to lack of information," he stated cryptically.

Without a second's thought, I rattled off, "September eighteenth, 1998, a man named Kanunu Kahoalani, the R.O.H. Prime Minister at the time, was at the orphanage talking to Mister Kanes about child

prostitution. That's when everything started. They could set it up so that new orphans would replace those that either committed suicide or left orphanage care at their eighteenth birthday. Kids that would not participate simply vanished. There would always be fresh kids and they would share the income."

Danny's eyebrows shot up and KC's normal smile vanished. Danny slapped his comm-badge. "Security, set local condition yellow. I repeat, set local condition yellow. Away team to HQ basement for extraction immediately."

KC looked Joey in the eyes. "Any more info, pass it to me over our mind-link, bro. It's time for me to pay Uncle Cory back for giving Uncle Marc the resources to save me."

A middle aged man came running down the stairs, followed by another android who could pass for Marc's twin. Danny gave orders to the man. Jerry softly explained, "You just blew the doors wide open to the Hawaiian Child Prostitution case, Reyes. That man is Lieutenant Rich Murphy. The guy that looks like Marc is John, his older brother."

Before I could respond, five heavily armed teenaged security personnel appeared behind Rich, and a Carolina Panther padded it's way down the stairs, its ears laid back against its head.

"Wiwwy says he's going doo," Joey stated firmly.

"I don't know how I recalled that so clearly," I muttered to Jerry, Jonah and Dillon. Davie innocently turned away and whistled the melody to 'Let It Be'.

Jerry smiled, "Welcome to 'Life with an active Guardian Angel'; you get used to it after the first hundred times or so."

I nodded my head, still not totally believing what was

happening, when the last member of the group appeared; a seven-foot tall Bengal tiger-human hybrid with blood-red wings, flaming eyes and sword.

"Hewwo, Kuan Di!" Joey called out.

"Hey, Joey." Kuan Ti responded before turning to the assembled group. "Are y'all ready to go? I hear that some people have volunteered to meet their maker, and I'm going to help you expedite the process," he added as his sword's flames flared up.

I am so glad I have access to my archive storage again. Lesson one; do not interfere with large cats wielding flaming swords. Lesson two; do not allow yourself to be touched by angels related to any member of Clan Short. Lesson three; the next time dad tells me to go to the AI Division for a check up, fake the flu, a belly ache, a nervous breakdown or any fitting ailment until he forgets.

Marc grinned at me, offering, "I can tell by the look in your eyes; forget points two and three, I already tried it and it don't work. It works better to just roll with the flow; you keep your sanity that way."

"Oh, so you're saying I am sane," I giggled. "This is good news."

"You're very sane." Marc replied. "The rest of these nuts I'm not quite sure about though."

Danny shook his head. "Okay, how are we getting there? I don't think transporters work with angels."

Kuan Ti shrugged. "Like this," he stated, as the team was surrounded by a red glow before vanishing.

Davie snapped his fingers, and all of us remaining suddenly

found ourselves in the living room, with the screen on the wall showing a man sitting in a chair in an elaborately furnished study. Closely looking at the man, I recognized him, even though he was older than I remembered. "I'm time-delaying this so you can see for yourself that it's taken care of," Davie stated. Still watching Davie, I never saw his lips move, but I heard his voice in my head, *'Only you're seeing the real events, Reyes. Your brothers, Joey and Jerry will be experiencing the PG rated version.'*

Dillon looked around and wondered, "So, umm... there's another bad guy that hurt us kids?"

I nodded, "The one guy that started it all at our orphanage, bro."

Jonah nodded, "And the three of us can tell everybody back home that even this guy was taken care of."

As we watched, the group appeared in front of the guy on the screen, with the angel now standing with flaming wings spread wide and his flaming sword pointed at the occupant of the chair. "I came for YOU!" he growled at the man in a booming voice that sent chills down my spine.

Obviously frightened, Dillon cuddled up to my side. Even Jonah shifted closer to me. I was holding them close, but storing the proceedings I was witnessing. There was no doubt that the Core Rimmers would be asking me about this later.

Back on the screen, security personnel for the ex-Prime Minister started pouring through the doorway into the room. KC, who had obviously been given a chance to outfit himself before they reached their destination, aimed the AK-47 he was holding. "Don't move, Dirtbags!" he exclaimed in a loud voice as the rest of the team took aim with their MP5-A's as well.

Danny looked over the shocked house security team, who were staring at the angel. "We're organizing a one-way trip to Hell; anyone want a ticket?" he asked sarcastically. One of the guards didn't take them seriously, and as I watched he suddenly found himself the target of an extremely pissed-off panther. With one swipe of the panther's huge paw, the man's head suddenly relocated so that it was flopping loosely by his left shoulder. The man teetered a few moments, then fell to the floor.

Jonah muttered, "Ouch! That's gonna leave a mark." I could only wonder what my brother saw; it definitely was not what I saw really happening.

Scott tapped his comm-badge. "Daileass, could you please escort these armed gentlemen to the holding cells at the hospital? I think they need to have their exit interviews."

"You're too nice, Scott; you're spoiling me!" Daileass giggled. "You want me to grab a qualified interviewer too?"

"If you would, please. Thanks, kiddo," Scott replied. Once the house security was gone, he turned to the man in the chair. "DUUUUDE! What the hell? Something little like an avenging angel appearing in front of you, and you shit yourself? What a pansy!"

Kuan Ti looked at the strike team members in the room, then back towards the guy that was cowering in his chair, pleading for mercy. "Oh shut up!" Kuan Ti growled low, and thankfully the man did shut up.

The huge cat turned towards the strike team and smiled wickedly. "Sometimes it's nice having a few of these abilities. Now, I will advise anyone with a weak stomach to leave. And yes, I know what you guys have seen before. This will be worse."

"Oh hell!" Someone said, and several of the strike team members filed out of the room, almost running. Then Kuan Ti spoke towards the remote camera that was hovering in one of the corners of the room. "Daileass, there are some that need to see this. They may. Other than that, this is classified material."

From all of the comm-badges the strike team members were wearing, Daileass' voice came across. "You got it, big guy."

Kuan Ti then closed his eyes, and appeared to be muttering to himself. A few moments later, he opened his eyes, and spoke loud enough for everyone to hear. "I have called a 'friend' in. Please step to the back of the room, and whatever you do, do not try and attack him."

Several remaining confused people stepped to the back of the room, and waited to see what Kuan Ti was up to. A few moments later, a being appeared in the room. The first reaction from all the strike team members was to either cry out in fright or start to recite prayers. However, all of them did the same thing, and tried to bring their weapons up. With a wave of his hand, Kuan Ti made all of their guns, knives, and other assorted weapons disappear.

I glanced at both my little brothers. It seemed they were in a trance. I looked over at Davie and he held his index finger to his mouth, gesturing for me to remain quiet.

The being that appeared was even taller than Kuan Ti, and wider. The 'thing' was hunched over a bit so it could fit in the room. Its huge bat like wings were furled across its back, and the huge ram-like horns had some very interesting decorations. Its skin was tinged red, and judging by remarks made by those there, it had a smell of sulfur rolling off it in waves. The thing that just appeared in the room

with them was a demon right out of the bowels of Hell.

The thing looked at Kuan Ti and spoke in a gravelly voice that just grated on everyone's nerves, almost as bad as fingernails being dragged across a chalkboard. "This had better be good, Kuan Ti. We were about to start the final round of a Bocce Ball tournament."

"Damn, so this is what being scared feels like; this sucks!" KC commented, and he found a statue to hide behind.

Kuan Ti grinned at KC's reaction before he continued. "Oh, I am sure you'll agree with me; this one you are really going to enjoy. However, if you don't mind, allow me a few moments to explain a few things to people who need to know," Kuan Ti stated, to which the demon just gave a dismissive wave.

Kuan Ti then looked up at the remote drone and spoke directly to me. "I know you can still hear what I am saying, Reyes. Daileass, allow Reyes to say hello to Mr. Kahoalani."

On the television I was watching, I noticed a video screen activate in the study with my face on it. I waved and smirked, "Remember me, asshole? I know what you did, and I told my friends. You haven't gotten away with shit, you fuckin' waste of flesh."

The man stared at the screen; the puddle that appeared under his chair confirming that he heard and recognized me.

Kuan Ti then told me, "The being standing next to me is called Drazotus. He is one of Satan's 'special case managers'. See, there are certain types of Evil that even the minions of Hell despise. Child abuse is one of those. There is a saying that 'there is a special place in Hell for child abusers', and that is completely true. Drazotus is one of those demons that handles the really bad people. The problem is, he does kind of enjoy his job a bit too much." Kuan Ti paused as

Drazotus started a booming laugh.

When the demon calmed down, Kuan Ti continued. "I have sent several people to Drazotus, because they deserved his 'special touch'. Know that your tormentor will have a long time to regret what he did."

Danny looked around the room as they talked, to find that he was the only one not hiding behind something. "Chickens! I've slept with the Titanic; what's a little demon visit?"

Kuan Ti then turned to Drazotus and spoke directly to the Demon. "The present I am giving to you is named Kanunu Kahoalani. He was the Prime Minister of the R.O.H. and retired from public service in the year 2000. I have been able to confirm that he is guilty of being responsible for eighty-seven current victims of child prostitution; in the past six years, add eighty-eight counts of accessory to murder, fifty-seven counts of selling of children for use in genetic experimentation, one-hundred-forty-eight past counts of child prostitution, and seven-hundred-seventy-seven counts of child rape. Also, fourteen butterflies lost their wings to him when he was younger, as well as four cats that he poured gas on, then tossed a match on, just to see what would happen. Not to mention all the other things he did while he was rising in the ranks of power, most of which would have resulted in a minimum of life imprisonment if he had been discovered. All of which if I tried to list out, we would be here for hours."

If the strike team members were scared before, the sight of a Demon who was getting more and more pissed as Kuan Ti was talking made it even worse. By the time Kuan Ti was done, the Demon looked to be absolutely livid at the man who was calmly sitting there in his chair. However, anyone who looked in his eyes could see the absolute terror he was feeling. "He feels absolutely no

remorse for his actions, which is why I felt he should be specially delivered to you or your boss." Kuan Ti grinned as he delivered his last line. "Of course, he does have one redeeming factor."

Drazotus looked over at Kuan Ti with a perplexed expression. "Really?"

"Yeah," Kuan Ti said with a toothy grin. "He maintains an absolutely gorgeous rose garden that he takes very good care of."

Drazotus looked at Kuan Ti like he'd lost his mind, before throwing his head back and howling in laughter. It took a full minute for the demon to calm enough to talk, and when he did, he walked over and slapped Kuan Ti on the shoulder. "Thanks. I was about to utterly destroy him, which would have meant no fun for me. Thanks for calming me down some."

"You're welcome. Now, you wanna take the scumbag away and start your work," Kuan Ti asked as he gestured over towards the man.

"Yeah, I should. If I hurry I can still get back in time to see who's going to compete for the title. There's gonna be lots of bets being placed soon."

With that, the demon and Kanunu Kahoalani disappeared.

Kuan Ti looked over at Danny and said with a shrug. "Hey, what can I say? It's good to have friends in low places."

"I KNEW Garth Brooks was evil!" Danny replied with a grin.

Kuan Ti shook his head. "That was a very bad pun, Danny. Round up your chickens and we'll go back to your compound."

Danny looked around, and giggled as he saw KC clutching the

replica of Michelangelo's 'David' statue. "Hey Crash, you're gonna need to let go of that to go home!"

KC shook his head. "It's going with me then; I ain't letting go until I'm home!"

"As you wish," Kuan Ti said, and he waved his arms, causing everyone to return to the AI Compound.

The television screen went blank. I checked with Davie, "So, he went to hell, alive?"

Davie simply nodded. Scaring the crap out of me, Dillon shouted, "That was kewl!"

"Yeah," Jonah giggled, "he's paying for being really bad."

I didn't have the nerve to question what either of my brothers thought they saw. I was happy they didn't see what I did, and let it be.

Marc walked over and placed a hand on my shoulder, softly asking, "Are you okay?"

I nodded, "Yeah, I think so. I need a change of scenery though. Can we check out Myrtle Beach now?"

Marc nodded, "I think that's a good idea; we'll go as soon as the guys get back. I think KC needs it as much as you, from what I saw."

As if making the point, KC appeared in the center of the room, his arms still securely wrapped around the statue. After a quick glance around the room, he let go and sprinted over to Jerry. As soon as he reached him, he wrapped his arms around Jerry and pulled him into a tight hug. "I'm sorry," KC sighed.

Jerry returned the hug, his face reflecting his confusion at KC's

reaction. Marc took my hand, and the two of us joined the hugging pair. "I'll explain, since KC can't," Marc said, just loud enough for the four of us to hear. "There are only two people on this end that saw everything that happened, me and you, Reyes; Davie filtered it for the rest of you to keep it down to what you can handle. I saw what KC saw by being there. For the first time in his life, KC has been scared by something other than his body being shut down because he pushed things too far."

"Uh huh," KC whimpered, the ordeal still fresh in his mind.

Marc noticed KC shivering, and his face shifted to a look of concern. "I hate to do this, but I'm gonna have to." Marc stated. "KC, code Joshua Stewart 53, initiate emotional processor shutdown. Self diagnostics mode three initiate. Execute."

I looked at Marc in shock. "Can you do that to any of us?" I asked as he watched the emotion drain from KC.

Marc shook his head, and Jerry explained, "KC is a prototype, and in his generation there were certain vocal overrides required by Vision Industries in all units in his series. Marc and I disabled all but this one in his latest program update, due to his unique safety protocol situation. We never thought we'd be using it for this kind of situation, though."

KC kept his arms around Jerry, but was now able to speak normally. "Diagnostics show all systems online, Dad. Safety protocol sector 3J56R restructure seventy percent complete."

"Why are you restructuring the safety sector?" Marc asked, a curious expression on his face.

"You know the update that you guys have nicknamed the 'Shannon Update'?" KC asked, his voice clearly showing emotion

despite the override. "I want it, now. If what I just felt like is what the people I care about feel like when I do something stupid, I want some limits put back on my safety protocols."

"What do you mean, KC?" I softly asked.

"I'm a 'Mach II' version of the Vision design." KC replied. "Dad... Marc Dad that is... was trying to make a more realistic AI for Vision Industries since your version is a little too cautious. I'm the result, but I'm a walking accident sometimes. They've figured out a better balance now for my safety protocols, but Marc won't force an update onto anyone without the AI's okay. It might change how I act a little, and he won't make anyone change just because he's figured out a better way to do something."

Before I could say anything, Marc added his own views. "I've learned something from Cory. I've always thought of each one of us as individuals, but he's shown me that we're not just a fancy creation of a company, we're people. That means we have the right to determine our own destiny, and the right to choose what is done with our programming."

I grinned and nodded, "I know what you mean, in a few ways. My first father was named Derek, D-E-R-E-K. Even with my memory still messed up, I latched on to Derrick Seibert, D-E-R-R-I-C-K. Both dads are drummers. Saturday, I found myself easily surfing at Anahola Bay, because I had surfed before. I was just as scared as the human boys when Kyle and Tyler created a twenty-foot wave for us to ride. Even this morning, I realized I was scared of others being prejudiced about androids, because I was raised in Myrtle Beach during the prejudices of the 1950's. In only a day, I've figured out why I've done those things. They're part of me now, not just programming."

Jerry smiled as he saw the look flash across KC's face. "The one time that there's a twenty foot wave that KC could surf without getting hurt, and he misses it!"

"Yeah, I know," KC replied. "I'm done restructuring, Dad. Thanks Reyes, you just proved that I'm right to get this update. I won't put bad memories in Joey's head; he might be a twerp, but he's my twerp."

"I'll do it for you, KC," Jerry said with care in his voice. "Let's go, it'll only take a minute. We'll adjust the limits on your emotional processor while I'm in there so it stops overloading."

"Thanks, Dad," KC said as the two of them separated and headed for the terminal in the office.

Marc squeezed my hand. "How are you handling what you saw? Are you dealing with it?"

"I'm fine," I assured, and carefully tiptoed around so I wouldn't scare Jonah and Dillon. "I hope I never ever see anything like that again. And I hope that's the last of the pedophiles responsible for the crap in R.O.H."

Danny came down the stairs, freshly showered, and Davie joined him. They came towards Marc and me. "You know, just when you thought you've seen everything, the Clan comes up with something totally original!" Danny giggled as he put an arm over Marc's shoulder. "That was definitely a new one for me!"

"I think you need the same update that KC's getting; you're nuts!" Marc replied.

"KC's going for the update?" Danny exclaimed. "I saw he was

scared. Did he take it that bad?"

Pointing at the statue KC was grasping onto for dear life, I giggled, "Yeah, he took it bad, and took the scumbag's statue too. It figures the pedophile would have a copy of David."

Jonah giggled, "KC had his face in a stone butt and his hands wrapped around the naughty bits too!" Dillon busted up laughing.

I shouted loud enough for KC to hear, "I guess that makes KC an honorary Rimmer."

"That's between him and Scott!" Marc giggled.

"I heard that!" Scott said as he came up behind Marc and grabbed a handful of underwear waistband. "We have liftoff!" he added as he yanked up, causing Marc to squeal as his underwear relocated themselves into his butt crack.

"Ahh, Strawberry!" Danny giggled. "Hey Scott, when did KC start collecting statues?"

"When our fearless leader decided he was insane," Scott deadpanned. "Marc, I think Danny's common sense circuit is burned out.

"He never had one, that's why he took the job!" Marc replied with a grin.

"I'll discuss that comment with you later, bro!" Danny shot back with an evil grin.

Smiling at my two brothers who couldn't stop laughing, I offered, "Maybe now's a good time to change into warmer clothes and head to Myrtle Beach? I'm anxious to see how the place has changed."

Davie looked around the room. "Everyone is about ready, once KC and Jerry finish talking, we'll be ready to go."

"We?" Danny asked. "You joining us?"

"I am your Guardian Angel. Of course I'm joining you!" Davie giggled.

Looking down at my brothers and myself, now wearing jeans, heavy sweaters and parkas, I giggled, "Went a bit overboard, Davie, don't you think?"

"No, this is overboard," Davie giggled as scarves, mittens, and tasseled stocking hats were added.

"I can't see!" Dillon laughed from behind his scarf.

Jonah sniggered, "I can't breathe!"

I giggled, "Has Myrtle Beach shifted north of the Arctic Circle?" I told Davie, "Cold in Hawaii is below sixty-five degrees. All we really need are jeans, long sleeve shirts, sneakers and windbreakers."

"You're no fun," Davie fake-pouted as he complied with my request. He noticed Jerry and KC returning, "Hey booger-breath, have you fixed Crash right this time?"

At last, my brothers and I were dressed more appropriately. The only things Davie added were baseball caps for my brothers and me.

Jerry giggled, "Unlike you, bro, his brain is fully functional."

"Now, is that any way to talk to an angel?" Aunt Mary asked with a laugh as she walked up. "I heard that you're planning a road trip. I've packed a snack in the bus. Which one of you is driving? That

way I know how hard I need to pray?"

"He is!" Danny replied, pointing at Jerry. "You need to call in the mega-prayers!"

"Hey, you're the one that had to take the defensive driving class TWICE!" Jerry shot back.

Rolling my eyes, I muttered, "Couldn't we just call Daileass and transport? Please?"

"Pretty please!" Dillon and Jonah chorused.

Mary smiled as she rustled my hair. "You don't need to worry, honey; Jerry's been trained by the Charleston Police Department to drive in all situations. He's safer to ride with than just about anyone else on the road."

I smiled, "I guess we couldn't be safer with a guardian angel."

Looking up at the woman, Jonah asked, "What did you make for us to snack on, Aunt Mary?"

Before she could answer, Dillon cheered, "What you was cookin' smelled so good!"

Mary smiled, "You'll find out when you get in the bus, little ones. You'll be happy. As far as what I'm cooking, you'll find that out at dinner time when you get back."

KC joined them, Joey happily riding on his shoulders. "Casey's godda BIG sdadue!" Joey giggled.

"What are you planning on doing with that now that you don't need to hide behind it?" Danny asked, his tone conveying that it was a

serious question.

"I'm keeping it," KC stated. "It is a good reminder that I'm not superman."

Danny nodded. "I think you've got a good handle on things. I would appreciate it if you chose someplace other than the living room to keep it, though."

"Okay, I'll have it moved to your bedroom then," KC said with a grin.

Danny rolled his eyes. "Help the little ones get in the bus, smart-Alec, before I decide to see if you float or sink."

"Yes Sir!" KC replied with a salute, Joey mirroring the salute from his perch.

Danny stopped Dillon, Jonah and me, asking, "Where are your comm-badges, guys?"

My brothers chorused, "We don't got one."

I nodded, "Only the Core Rimmers have comm-badges and sub-vocals."

"Well, you're going off base to an unsecured location," Danny told us. He tapped his chest and called, "Daileass, issue permanent comm-badges for Reyes, Jonah and Dillon. We can't have anyone getting lost." A moment later, each of the three of us had Clan comm-badges on our jackets. Danny explained, "They're tracking devices as well as for communications. Keep them with you at all times, especially when you're off-base."

Jonah, Dillon and I followed our hosts outside to a tour-style

bus. It had Clan and AI crests on the side and dark windows. Jerry opened the computerized door and stepped aboard, followed by KC, Joey, Marc, Jonah, Dillon, me and Danny. Granted, I hadn't seen the inside of a bus in twenty-plus years, but no bus I had ever seen had plush seats like this one. Stepping onto the bus behind me were Caleb, Noah, Hunter, Paul, Ryan, Scott and the other five security team dudes. Each seat on the bus had a box of food on it.

"Buckle up, guys!" Jerry announced as he took the driver's seat. "Hey George, wake up! We're heading to Myrtle Beach."

"Driver Jerald Owens authentication approved. Scanning traffic patterns to destination," the dashboard of the bus announced as the engine sprang to life.

Danny took the window seat across the aisle from my brothers and I sat down beside him.

"Oh wow," Dillon and Jonah gasped.

Buckling up, Jonah looked over at me, grinning, "They've got a speaking bus."

Already buckled up, Dillon giggled, "We gotta get a bus like this," then opened his snack box.

Glancing over at my brothers, I smiled, "Let's tell dad and pop about it when we get home. With all the kids we have, we'll need a fleet of buses."

Danny smiled at me. "Just let me know who and when. Charleston will provide the driver training, and we've got a direct line to get as many as the Clan needs. This isn't a normal bus, it's outfitted to SWAT team standards."

Turning to Danny, I explained, "Preston O'Brian is our division leader..."

"Head Rimmer," Jonah and Dillon giggled.

"And we have about a hundred and fifty kids at our base, but can have two-thousand at our five bases," I continued, "so we'll probably need at least ten of these just for our main base."

"You get that, George?" Jerry giggled.

"Acknowledged. Order for two hundred buses has been placed through Unit Material Acquisitions and has been approved."

Sliding down in my seat, I covered my face and laughed, "Prez is gonna deactivate me. I leave the base for a few hours, recall the ex-Prime Minister was the one that started everything, the dude is executed, and now Prez has gotta pay for two-hundred buses." Jonah and Dillon cracked up. I giggled, "I think I'll hide from Prez for the next few days."

"We paid for this?" Jerry giggled.

"Not that I know of," Danny responded, and then asked, "Hey Marc, did we pay for this bus?"

"Unless you count the gray hairs while the two of you learned to drive it, I don't think so!" Marc confirmed.

"Bite me!" Danny and Jerry chorused.

Danny turned to me and said, "By the way, the worldly assets of Mr. Kahoalani were transferred to Clan Short accounts. That'll pay for buses for every division around the world."

"Oh! So he's paid and paid again. Awesome!" I giggled.

"Route confirmed and clearances received by all local departments," George announced as a map appeared on the Heads Up Display.

Jerry became serious as he put the bus into gear. "Okay, we're rolling, guys. The restroom is in the rear of the bus on the right side, the weapons locker is on the left. Remain seated except to visit the restroom, unless otherwise stated by myself or Lieutenant Shannon in the case of a required security action."

Jerry pulled out, and within five minutes the bus was turning north onto Highway 17. As soon as it cleared the city limits, George announced, "Traffic Avoidance System Active" and the blue, red, and green lights over the cab and rear of the bus activated. Jerry shifted up two more gears as he brought the bus to cruise speed, his full attention on the road and the information being presented to him on the HUD.

I softly told Danny, "I remember taking the trip from Vision Industries to Myrtle Beach with my first mom and dad. It took about two hours, way back in 1948. Have the rules of the road changed that much?"

"Some of them have; but the State has allowed the Clan to operate under some special rules that usually only apply to law enforcement. That's why we have to be certified by them," Danny responded.

Nodding understandingly, I opened my snack box and peeked inside. Neatly arranged in the box was a can of soda, four small plastic containers, one large plastic container and utensils. Beginning to open up the smaller plastic containers, I found coleslaw, macaroni salad, dinner rolls and a lime Jell-O mold with fruit in it. The larger

container had several fried chicken pieces in it. Across the aisle from me, Jonah and Dillon were already stuffing their faces. Smiling, I told Danny, "This is awesome. Aunt Mary fixed us entire meals to-go. I expected sandwiches and that would've been plenty."

"You should see it when she's had a little warning!" Danny giggled as he opened his meal.

While everyone on the bus was inhaling Aunt Mary's feast, I couldn't help thinking about Kanunu Kahoalani and the ridiculous number of lives he affected. I didn't feel sorrow, fear or anything at all about his sentence. Since I knew that what had actually transpired was not what Jonah and Dillon saw, I whispered to Danny, telling him everything I was thinking. Nearing the end of my Jell-O dessert, I softly wondered, "I only saw it on a television, but it was shocking enough. I can't imagine what it might've been like to be there in the room. It was enough to send most of the strike team scurrying away, but you just stood there, not too far from Kuan Ti and that demon, like it was no big deal. You must've witnessed far worse in your long life, huh?"

Danny gave a wry smile. "Two lives... two lives and three bodies," he replied softly

Looking carefully at him, I admitted, "Sorry, I don't understand."

Danny nodded. "Very few people do. I lived a full life as a human, died and found my personality had been scanned and placed in a positronic brain. I lived a while in that body, then tried to kill myself, but ended up just taking an extended nap on the floor of the ocean next to the Titanic. Marc gave me this body, transplanting my positronics into it, and then a few days later I found out that I had really died the first time; the personality in my positronics is a new

person. It's kinda disturbing talking to your previous spirit, but that is what it took for me to learn I'm my own person with both his and my memories."

I could barely grasp what I was hearing. Danny was human once, had lived a full life, died and was then implanted into an android body. He lived a second life and was now in his third body, continuing his second life. "I can't imagine what that must've been like," I softly muttered.

"Don't try it, it sucks," Danny commented as he reached over and took my hand. "It really screws with the mind, trust me. The funny thing is, what I've gone through is the main reason Cory made me the head of AI division. I think he understands us better than just about anyone who isn't an AI; he understands that we need a purpose even more than most natural humans, due to how long we can live. I've promised to stand by his side as long as he's alive. After that I'll just see what happens."

I shared my own story with Danny, briefly telling him about Derek Taraschke, his wife and my mom, Lokelani, and then continued about my cousin, Akamu, who became my second father figure after Derek and Lokelani passed away. "I got to live twelve years with Akamu and his wife," I shared. "They died suddenly, in a car accident. It left me with no one. As happy as I am now, with Derrick Seibert, Mike Gibbons, Jonah and Dillon, I have to wonder what it might be like sixty or seventy years from now, when they're all gone and I'm still alive. It'll be different with the Clan than it ever was before, but I still wonder how my life will be. Who will I have to love, who might love and care about me?"

Danny had a far-off look for a second, then returned his attention to me. "Sorry, as soon as you finished talking, I had to deal with a brain leech who was chewing me out. Kyle's the most

protective little brother anyone can ask for. I'll be honest, if you had asked me that before I took my long swim, I probably could have given you an idea from my experiences. I know a few things that Kyle shares with just me, and based on that I'd say your best bet is just play it as it goes; what everyone called normal before the Clan formed is completely out the window now. I've noticed that the Vision AIs who have lived through the worst have been the ones that have surfaced to work within the Clan, usually in the Divisional staff."

I sighed, "It will be different, I know it. I haven't been asked to join the Core Rimmers. Even if I am asked, I don't know if I would accept. It's like having two families; the immediate family and the much larger extended family. I guess I'm worried about the day the Clan no longer exists. Will I ever feel that dull ache from feeling useless and worthless again? No one can answer that question, so I guess it's best to 'play it as it goes', like you said."

"You asked why I just stood there a while back?" Danny said. "I wasn't worried about what was standing there; I've had arguments with Saints and have an almost-eternal being who set up a permanent camp in a corner of my brain because he likes watching me think. In the last few weeks, I've come to understand a lot of things, the most important of which is that the supernatural have rules too. I wasn't worried, because I knew that by the rules the only one in danger was the target; the rest of us were safe as long as we did not involve ourselves in that being's mission."

I considered what Danny had just said about rules. As designed beings, our mission was to be companions, but that was the same purpose every real human had too: to live and to love. As long as we have love, the living is easy. Derrick, Mike, Jonah and Dillon would all grow old and die, but in the Clan Short world, there would always be someone to love; maybe not as much as the immediate family, but

there would always be someone. I shared all that with Danny once I had put my thoughts into order.

"I think you've hit it right on the head," Danny replied. "As far as being what you call a 'Core Rimmer', think of this; I never wanted to be the head of AI Division, in fact Cory and I argued about it in what the Clan calls 'The Great Logic War'. I lost the argument, and found out that Cory does not like sheep, he wants people who will tell him he is wrong. The question that you need to answer is not if you want to be part of the Clan's staff, but does the Clan need you in that position, even if you don't think you can do it. I bet your time is coming soon, and I promise you it won't be in any way that you think you'd fit."

I softly mumbled, "It's the twenty-one years of lost life experiences that bugs me. If I attempted to gather all the short bits of memories you guys restored, I doubt it would amount to more than a few days. Here I am, a fifty-six-year-old android in a thirteen-year-old boy's body that really only lived thirty-five years. It's too weird to consider being any kind of a leader right now."

"I spent seventy-two years unconscious on the floor of the ocean, and was made the Director less than a week after Marc reactivated me," Danny replied. "Cory created the Clan while he still was not able to remember over half of his life. Kyle founded a whole race, yet there are parts of his life that even now are buried so deep that he knows nothing about them. You're not alone, the people who are running the show know exactly what you're feeling. They've either been there or still are there."

My only response to that was, "No one's asked me to join the Rimmers yet," but learning all that Danny had said made an impact. I sat back and thought about it. Around me on the bus, I heard KC and Joey playing audible chess, each keeping a copy of the board in their

head to track moves; Scott was discussing plans for security once we reached our destination; Marc, Noah, and Caleb were discussing some project; and my two brothers were rambling about how fast we had to moving down the highway. I looked out the window and much to my surprise, all the buildings and trees passing by were a blur.

Noticing my concerned expression, Danny giggled, "It's best to not even ask our speed."

At the window seat across the aisle, Dillon looked down and giggled, "We're passin' other cars like they're standin' still!"

Jonah nodded and laughed, "We've gotta be doin' a hundred miles an hour, easy."

"Close," Danny giggled mysteriously.

In a few moments our speed dramatically dropped. I looked forward and noticed that we were moving to the right onto a highway exit ramp. Helplessly giggling, I told my brothers to sit back in their seats, then softly told Danny, "Ninety-five miles traversed in about forty minutes. A hundred and forty miles an hour?"

"Jerry didn't want to freak you guys out!" Danny giggled, not really answering the question.

"It doesn't seem Dillon or Jonah are the least bit bothered," I laughed.

From a few rows back, Marc sniggered, "And this wasn't an emergency!" and removed his crash helmet.

"Dahdy has had dhis bus doin' a-hundwed an' sebendy-six poind eighd-five-seven-fouw miwes an houw, and he sdiww had a geaw

wefd!" Joey added proudly.

Jerry giggled, "He's exaggerating by a couple percent, and I was in top gear."

As soon as the bus stopped along Ocean Boulevard, Dillon and Jonah unbuckled themselves and hurried to the restroom at the back of the bus. To secure the area around our bus, Scott and the security team were the first to exit. Waiting for my brothers, I let Danny and most of the occupants pass by me. Jerry's two brothers, Paul and Ryan, said hello to me as they passed down the aisle. I smiled and greeted them. They were both extremely cute.

Surprising me and making me jump, Peter Lambert popped in beside me. He gave me a hug and smiled, "Take your time, Reyes. You'll be home by dinner time in Hawaii, no matter how long you decide to hang out here."

I giggled, "More Clan magic?"

Peter shrugged and giggled, "Since I couldn't fix up your ouchies Saturday, this'll make up for it." He vanished again before I had a chance to say thank you. A Mikyvis' work is never done.

Still giggling, Dillon and Jonah came out of the restroom. Before they could ask, I smiled, "About a hundred and forty miles an hour."

"OMIGOD!" Dillon and Jonah loudly cheered.

I led my brothers to the front of the bus. Jonah giggled, "I'm sorry, I can't see dad, pop, or any of the Core Rimmers driving that fast."

"If we could get R.O.H. Police approval, and grandpa Rob

wasn't around, I think pop would exceed that speed," I sniggered.

Stepping out of the bus, I looked around and recognized nothing. In 1958, Myrtle Beach didn't have huge hotels on Ocean Boulevard, but it did now. Across the road from where the bus was parked was an amusement park called Wild Water and Wheels.

Marc asked, "What's the plan, Reyes?"

I answered, "I only wanted to check out my old house and see how things have changed. Already I can see it's changed drastically. It looks like they kept the boardwalk very much the same though." Turning to Jerry, I pointed and confirmed, "That's the south end of Ocean Boulevard, correct?"

"Sure is, at least that's what the sign says!" Jerry giggled as he pointed at the street sign directly behind me.

A chorus of giggles and laughter broke loose, the loudest from my two brothers. Chuckling at myself, I started walking south on highway 17. I smiled, "It's good to see that the Myrtle Beach State Park hasn't changed a lot." We got past the bus and waited for a chance to run across highway 17. Once that was done, I told everyone, "We're looking for 596 Mallard Lake Drive. It should be just over here a little way." I led the group down 17 toward Mallard Lake Drive. On the way though, I noticed a new strip mall, but kept walking. I paused and scowled, "This street, Perry Circle, didn't exist forty-six years ago." I suggested, "Let's go up here." Pointing to my right, I smiled, "I used to go crawdad fishin' at this lagoon. I think they did some land filling here, because that whole community of homes to the north there didn't exist in 1958. That was all part of this lagoon."

I realized that this part of Perry Circle should actually be in the

lagoon and went to peek over the side of the decorative road barrier to our right. "Yep," I giggled, "this road is on pontoons over the lagoon, not on land fill."

"At least they did something right," KC commented.

Scott asked me, "What's next, bro?"

I pointed to the left and said, "We could just cross over to Mallard Lake Drive, so I can get a look at my old house, then we can get out of here and go check out the boardwalk." Taking the lead, Scott led our group between two homes and out beside my old house. The siding and roofing colors were different, but even after all those years, the house was still recognizable. It sent a shiver up my spine. I almost felt like I could walk up to the door and yell, "Mom, Dad, I'm home!" Of course, I didn't do that and kept walking out toward the street to see the front of the house.

Jonah looked up and checked, "Are you okay, Reyes?"

I nodded and smiled, "After all these years, the house is still here and still looks similar, with only a few minor changes." I sighed, "Let's get out of here and have some fun."

Jonah took my left hand and Dillon took my right as we walked out of the neighborhood and back onto highway 17. Realizing that I was all right, Dillon and Jonah hurried ahead to walk with Hunter and Joey. Jerry moved beside me and asked, "Everything's kewl, Reyes?"

I nodded and smiled, "A few things have changed, but not too drastically." I paused briefly, then softly admitted, "I heard what you were saying to Marc about Paul and Ryan."

"I was a little stressed, sorry," Jerry sighed.

"Don't be sorry about caring, dude."

Jerry glanced my way and softly shared, "They were living on the streets for twenty years; almost the same time period you were in the orphanage."

"I guess I feel a little something too," I admitted, "probably because I was getting my memory zapped, but Ryan dealt with his loss differently. In both situations, we were changed."

Leaning closer, Jerry whispered, "You know who you are though. Ryan believes he's human. He doesn't like the slightest implication that he's an android."

I checked, "Paul knows the truth though?" Jerry nodded. I asked, "If you'd let me, I'd like to help them, like you all have helped me?"

"Treat them like humans, okay?" Jerry quietly instructed.

"No problem," I smiled.

KC tilted his head. "I hear GO-KARTS!" he giggled.

"Crap! Marc, did you grab the first aid kit from the bus?" Noah sniggered, before taking off in a sprint, KC hot on his heels.

"Where's a Mikyvis when you need one! C'mon, guys!" Marc joked as he started to jog after the laughing pair.

We raced after the group. Since he was the smallest and couldn't keep up, I picked up Dillon. Soon we were running up to the entrance of 'Wild Water and Wheels'.

"You first, Danny; they always wanna talk to the most ancient

person in the group," Caleb giggled.

Danny grabbed Caleb before he could escape, and after a well-executed noogie, he let him go, then headed toward the ticket booth. "I need admission for nineteen kids and a Guardian Angel," Danny said seriously as he passed over his Clan credit card.

"Guardian Angels get in free, since they usually end up working," the attendant joked as he scanned Danny's card without looking at it. His screen chimed, and it was obvious that he was comparing a picture on the screen with the person in front of him. "Oh! Welcome to Wild Water and Wheels, Director Page! One sec, I need to grab the Clan Short wristbands." He ducked under the counter, and came back up with a box of blue and green twisted rope wristbands. "Everything in the park is compliments of the Management," he explained as he counted out twenty of the bands. "It's the least we can do for the pride of the Carolinas."

In my arms, Dillon started giggling before I put him down. I turned and saw Davie standing there, absently smoothing the feathers in his wings. I giggled, "I guess the bus ride wasn't required for you."

"I'm riding the bus on the way back though!" Davie laughed. "You ever try dodging seagulls at over a hundred miles an hour? Timmy was right, them things is STUPID!"

Dillon howled laughing and I put him down. We walked forward and put on our wristbands. I think the park attendant standing nearby about had a heart attack when he saw we really were accompanied by an angel. Having never been to this park before, I glanced around while Jonah and Dillon excitedly squealed about all the kewl rides. Joey came up to my brothers saying, "Com'on, Diwwon and Jonah. We gods wides 'speciawawwy fow us." Joey, Jonah, Hunter and

Dillon peeled off for the little kids Go-Cart tracks.

I joined the line with the rest of the bigger guys for Speed Racers. KC was already in a red hot-rod go-cart. Jerry gasped, "Oh my God, KC put on a helmet," causing the rest of us softly chuckle. KC still burned rubber pulling away and onto the track.

Soon, I got in a very kewl lime green go-cart. It had been years since I'd been at a go-cart track. I put my helmet on and put the car in gear, unintentionally peeling out and onto the track. "Holy crap!" I shouted at the surprise horsepower in the little go cart.

Making his first lap around the figure-eight track, KC laughed and teased, "Com'on, Reyes, you're not gonna let Danny or Marc beat you!" He put the peddle to the metal and took off before I had a chance to reply. Just like with the pinball game, I got used to the newer go-cart and found myself in amongst my android brothers, leading our pack around the track.

Surprisingly, Danny was the wildest of the drivers, his go-cart slipping sideways in every turn as he pushed the limits of its traction. Marc was the sanest of the drivers, staying clear of Danny if possible while doing his best to ensure Danny didn't get a chance to lap him. I was laughing hysterically at the rude comments being made by Caleb, Noah and Jerry, all of which were very near or behind me. As I made a turn around a bend, I could see Paul and Ryan were side-by-side and directly behind Jerry. Back in the old days, go-carts went to a maximum of forty miles-per-hour. These new machines had speedometers that went up to seventy-five and standard tachometers too. I made myself a mental note to see to it that we got a go-cart track installed on one of our larger Rimmer bases, probably on the island of Hawaii.

About a half-hour later, when we had all sufficiently soiled our

shorts and laughed ourselves hoarse, our Clan group gathered again. Jonah and Dillon had little radio-controlled go-carts to bring back to Ewa Beach in one hand and the largest chocolate chip and ice-cream cookies I had ever seen. We headed back toward the bus, but Danny and Marc led us onto the monorail. This was something else that didn't exist in 1958. The monorail had two express tracks and two local tracks and a total of four trains. The express tracks only stopped at the extreme south end of Ocean Boulevard, in the center by Family Kingdom Amusement Park, and at the extreme north end of Ocean Boulevard. We rode the express train from the South end to the North end and back to Family Kingdom, where we got off to walk along the boardwalk. The entire ride took about thirty minutes, which I figured meant the express tracks exceeded one hundred miles-per-hour.

We took a nice leisurely stroll south along the boardwalk. Every half a mile or so there was another cabana where live music was being played; some were DJ's, some were jazz bands, some were rock-and-roll, and one even had a string quartet playing classical. Caleb, Noah and Hunter stopped at one place to get cotton candy. I couldn't believe it when Dillon followed and, having finished his giant cookie, got himself a cotton candy. We stopped at another arcade where Jonah shot water from a pistol into a spinning clown face and won a Teddy bear that he gave to Dillon to give to his VI Teddy Bear back in Ewa Beach. I cracked up at the thought of a Teddy Bear carrying a regular stuffed Teddy bear around base.

Along the way, Scott and our security guys stopped for slices of pizza and sodas. What was amazing to me is that, with the wristbands we were all still wearing from Wild Water and Wheels, everything we did along the boardwalk was free. Jonah and I stopped at another concession stand for a frozen custard. Unbelievably, Dillon had finished his cotton candy, had pink splotches all around his nose, lips and cheeks and wanted a frozen custard too! I howled laughing and

told our hosts how Dillon had been eating ravenously all day long, since our milkshakes at Ewa Beach that morning. To my knowledge, Dillon had been eating almost constantly for the last five hours.

Just as we were getting close to where the bus was parked, Danny spotted a miniature golf course. We almost had to carry Noah and Caleb, they were laughing so hard at the way Danny grabbed onto Marc and began dragging him towards the gate. The rest of us followed along. KC carried Joey on his shoulders to give his little legs a rest, while Scott had decided that Jonah deserved the same treatment. Just as we reached the gate, a kid about the same age as Hunter fell in behind us with his parents. As I entered the gate, I heard Noah behind me telling the attendant that the Clan was covering admittance for the kid and his parents behind us.

As I caught up with Danny and Marc, I heard Danny telling him "I told you that I was going to get your skinny butt out to play putt-putt!"

"My butt's no skinnier than yours; in fact your butt is my butt!" Marc replied with a grin.

"Yeah, I was going to talk to you about that; your butt itches!" Danny retorted.

"Well, if you took better care of my butt it wouldn't itch!" Marc quickly shot back.

His face covered with pink cotton candy splotches and smeared chocolate custard, Dillon looked up at me, giggling, "How can Danny's butt be Marc's butt?"

Shaking my head, I grinned, "This is a question for greater minds than mine," and then called, "Jerry, not to be the butt of any

wise cracks, but what are Danny and Marc going off about?"

"Never try to understand the Ancients; for it will cause much loss of sanity," Jerry replied in a mock 'wise-man' tone.

I giggled, "Thank you, mini-Confucius."

"Unca Dahny's skins wewe made fwom Unca Mawc's budd skins!" Joey interjected helpfully, as well as loudly.

"EWWW!" Dillon loudly laughed.

"That's what you two get for showing your butt in public!" KC laughed at the now-blushing pair. He then slid behind Scott. "Protect us from the butts!" he giggled.

"Be glad Jerry's driving, or you'd all be walking home!" Danny stated with a grin.

"Nope, they'd be flying 'Angel Express'!" Davie stated as he appeared above Danny. "And just so you know, version one of you agrees with me!"

"No fair ganging up on me!" Danny laughed. "C'mon, let's see who can sink their balls in less strokes."

"Shouldn't you be in your bedroom to do that?" Caleb asked innocently.

"Keep it up, Caleb. I'm sure your brother would love to practice first aid on you," Danny stated with a menacing grin.

"I'll give you mouth-to-mouth, babe!" Noah added helpfully.

"You know, you two really need to take some alone time."

Danny giggled.

"Every time we try, you two come up with more work for us to do!" Noah and Caleb whined in unison.

"Hey, it's not my fault that things get weird occasionally!" Danny replied in self-defense.

Caleb sighed, "Even in Hawaii we didn't get lei'd."

Dillon, Jonah and I softly sniggered.

"Occasionally... like every five minutes!" Noah grumbled. "Grab a club, old man; prepare to get your butt beat!"

"Dream on; I was playing this game when your grandparents were making out at lover's lane!" Danny shot back.

"At least my grandparents got laid, unlike you!" Noah giggled.

Hunter was holding his sides with laughter. "Pop, you're strange!" he sniggered.

"Thank you, that's the nicest thing I've been called all day!" Noah replied as he poked at Hunter's ribs, causing even more giggles.

Dillon, Jonah and I watched the miniature-golf game start and I checked with them to see if they wanted to play, but they both declined so we simply followed the AI division members that were playing, listening to countless insults and rude remarks.

"Are they always this crazy?" the kid that Noah had invited to join the group asked me. He and his parents were playing right behind the AI group, so they ended up watching as the boys had fun. For some reason, the two adults seemed very familiar. Believing I had met

them before, I scanned my memories.

I smiled, "Ya know, things are whacky at our Ewa Beach base, but this Artificial Intelligence division is weirder, without the ferrets, G-Cats and gorillas."

"They're from the AI division of Clan Short? Wait, are those two 'THE' Marc and Danny?" the father asked.

Glancing at the man and then his wife, I nodded, "That's them." The two adults checked with each other, causing me to blush, "I'm sorry, there's something familiar about you, but I'm not sure why I feel that way."

The man grinned, "You can call me Mr. Paul; or better yet, just call me Les." He paused for a second, then added, "You're a Marc series, correct? What year?"

"1948," I replied.

"Ahh, that explains it. Program update z-45-34A9; when Vision Industries started seeing problems with Marc series units having emotional issues if they lost the ones they were bonded to. It gives you a subconscious trigger when you are in the presence of a Charles series or a Victoria series adult android. If you didn't have a family bond, you would have felt comfortable opening up to us and asking for help."

Clearly curious, Dillon and Jonah looked up for my explanation. "That means that if there had been Charles or Victoria series androids on O'ahu in 1983, I would have bonded with them. Since there weren't, well, everything that happened that led to the orphanage and the Clan had to happen." I then introduced Les to Dillon and Jonah, and finished with, "We have two dads at O'ahu. We're only here for

the day."

Les smiled. "I'm sure that I speak for both Vicky and myself when I say I'm glad to see that you've found a family inside Clan Short. I've noticed a few things looking at them from the outside, and I think that you're in the best place that you could ever be."

The boy that was with them rolled his eyes and giggled. "You know, having android parents is never dull. I'm always learnin' about things most parents don't know."

"I'm glad you enjoy it, Wes," Vicky replied. "Why don't you go tell your cousin Marc that his Aunt Vicky is overdue for a hug? He's obviously not having much luck playing on this course."

Dillon followed Wes onto the course to get Marc rattled. I asked Les, "How old is Wes?" Jonah remained close to my side, watching me closely.

"Today is his seventh birthday," Les replied. "I never expected it to become a family reunion though; the funny thing is we would have missed you if Wes hadn't insisted on stopping for a cookie."

Jonah giggled, "We are the cookie clan."

I nodded and smiled at Les and Vicky, "Jonah's nine and Dillon is five."

We were sidetracked for a second when we heard Danny yell, "KC! Get off the windmill!"

"But Uncle Danny, you said we have to play the ball wherever it stops!" KC shot back as he lined up his shot.

"He's got you there, Danny!" Jerry laughed. "It's not his fault

that Marc's ball hit his and made it jump up there!"

"Boys will be boys," Vicky chuckled as she shook her head.

"Does he still count as a boy at 51 years old?" I grinned.

"Absolutely! Growing up is over-rated," Les replied with a grin.

A few seconds later, the boys returned with Marc. Dillon had co-opted Marc's shoulders, while Hunter had joined them and was dragging his uncle along. "C'mon, Uncle Marc! I wanna meet more of your family!" Hunter exclaimed.

Wes was giggling as he followed along, obviously enjoying the disruption to the Division's plans and the plight of Marc.

"Marcus Furst!" Vicky exclaimed, "I'm decades overdue for a hug from my favorite nephew! Get your little butt over here!"

"Aunt Vicky!" Marc whined, beginning to blush. "We're in public!" At Marc's sudden switch to embarrassed child mode, Jonah and I evilly snickered.

"Well, then you need to start keeping in contact more!" Vicky stated as she pulled Marc into a tight hug, being careful not to dislodge Dillon.

Les chuckled, "That's what I love about the series based on her. They definitely got the mothering instinct right."

"Tell me about it!" Wes giggled. "Mom, Dad; this is Hunter. I'm gonna go play along with him and his dads, okay?"

"Have fun, and stay with the group," Les replied.

"Thanks, Dad!" Wes giggled. "C'mon, Hunter, lets escape before

the hug monster catches us!"

Peter Lambert popped in, yelling, "RANDOM HUG!" and embraced Wes. A purple hard hat appeared on Wes' head and then Peter popped away again. Jonah and I glanced at each other, then fell against one another laughing, and became hysterical at Wes' shocked expression.

"What the..." Wes exclaimed.

"I'll explain while we're playing," Hunter giggled as he grabbed Wes' hand.

"Why is it I think I'd be better off by not asking?" Les asked me, as he watched his son being introduced to the golf players.

Still recovering, I giggled, "That little guy was part of the Clan. He likes giving hugs, and purple hard hats."

"He's a Mikyvis," Jonah cackled. "He helped me, Dillon and a bunch of us rescued kids on Saturday."

"Hmm," Les mused, "I'll have to investigate these 'Mikyvis' after vacation; I've never heard of them before."

Marc finally broke free of the hug he was trapped in. "Okay Aunt Vicky, you got in your usual torture. Now spill it; where'd you find the kid and what's his story so I can update my database?"

Vicky laughed, "Stop working so hard, young man, or I'll put you over my knee... again. Wes isn't an AI; he's one hundred percent just-turned-seven boy. And he's our son."

"How?" Marc began to ask.

Vicky interrupted him with a smirk. "You see, when you're all

grown up, if you like the opposite sex, you share your love with them, and sometimes, when you get intimate, you get blessed with a gift of a child."

Marc was speechless, his blush so bright that it could have lit a football stadium.

Nudging Marc, I playfully reminded, "Not all Vision Industries androids were gay adolescent boys, bro."

"Besides, one of the big selling points was that we are fully functional!" Les added. "Trust me, when she gets going, it beats any amusement park!"

"TOO... MUCH... INFORMATION!" Marc scowled as he tried to use Dillon's legs as ear muffs.

"You know, I really think Marc's blush is much cuter than most of his series," Vickie chuckled. "No offense meant, Reyes, but there's just something about the blush of a kid older than all but one of us! And Marc does it sooooo well!"

"Okay, you two clowns!" Marc stated, trying to regain some of his dignity, "Let me sort this out. You violated the android birth control laws and have given life to a young boy. A boy, which from my observations, is just as bad as his parents about enjoying being able to blindside people with surprises."

"Wow, you must have got a positronics upgrade; that is the fastest you've ever figured something like this out!" Les prodded with a grin.

Marc rolled his eyes. "It's a good thing you guys were a limited run; humanity would have performed a mass exodus just to escape

your sense of humor."

Les glanced at his wife, whose eyes were dancing with merriment at the exchange with Marc. He then took a second to check on Wes. Just as he found his son, Joey yelled "FOWWWWE!" and nailed his ball from the seventh tee. The ball took off, hit Wes' hard hat with a 'THUNK', and deflected onto the green. It bounced three times, then rolled into the cup.

"HOWE IN ONE! I godda howe in one, Dahdy!" Joey exclaimed loudly.

Vicky smiled as she saw Jerry come over and give Joey a hug of congratulations, after first making sure Wes was not hurt. "He's such a cute little guy, and so proud of himself for making that shot. How old is he?" Vicky asked.

"You mean Joey? He's almost three weeks old now. He's growing up quick." Marc replied absently, the back of his mind wondering just why Peter knew a hard hat would come in handy.

"Ahh, so you're ignoring the laws now," Les commented with a knowing smile.

"It's not ignoring when you're an embassy," Marc replied. "That's Earth laws, not Federation, and my home is Vulcan land."

Peter popped in again, and stuck a sticker on Wes' hard hat that read 'I Survived Putt Putt Golf with the AI Division' in bright green letters. He then gave both Wes and Joey a hug before vanishing again.

"Hey Marc, you're up. Everyone's seeking shelter, even the new kid!" Danny said as him and Noah joined the group.

"Just because I'm better at playing real golf," Marc muttered. He

turned to Noah and asked, "Hey, what made you give these guys Clan access to the park?"

"Let's see," Noah said as he made a show of tilting his head and stroking his nonexistent mustache, "the original Victoria, another AI adult, and an obviously non-AI kid who looks a lot like the two androids. Am I the only one who saw them screaming 'Clan Needed'?"

Danny and Marc looked at each other in shock. "I know Vicky and I didn't recognize them right away; how can you do that?" Marc asked.

"My boyfriend is an AI geek; and I keep up with him the best I can," Noah replied. "Besides, it's obvious if you watch facial reactions as to if someone is an AI."

"How?" Danny asked.

Noah grinned. "Humans don't process their surroundings, and you can see it in the eyes when an AI does it."

I checked with Jonah, "Can you tell that about me too?"

Jonah nodded and giggled, "Only when things happen quick, like Joey's hole-in-one bouncin' around and off Wes' purple hard hat. Real humans don't even try to follow the ball; we just hit the deck when trouble's comin' our way."

"KC's the only exception; he usually tries to catch the ball!" Noah giggled. "You got it pretty close with him, Marc; him, Austin, Joey, and Danny are the only exceptions to that rule."

I told Marc, "You gotta get the program updated for our eye

control, bro."

Jonah smiled, "Don't change it, Reyes. It's actually very kewl watchin' your eyes dart around."

"We shouldn't be that noticeable though," I countered. "There are prejudiced people in the world."

Noah smiled. "Don't worry, Reyes. It's not as bad as you think. I've been living with these guys for three weeks, and it's only in the last week that I picked up on it. If you live with an AI it's one of the kewl things that you pick up on, but it's not something that just anyone can see. In fact, each of you guys is a little different in how you do it; I've just been around so many different AI kids lately that I've figured out the pattern."

I sighed, "I was raised here, in the 1950's, when people were very prejudiced. Being aware of that is ingrained into my personality. When I moved to Honolulu, prejudices weren't as bad as they were here. Nobody here or at Ewa Beach treats me differently than any one else. I guess what I'd like to know is if those prejudices have lessened over the years?"

"It's kinda ironic," Marc replied, "once Vision Industries closed down and we were not a commodity any more, we slowly slipped from the forefront of the public's memory. The Cynthetilife series actually did us a favor; since they were less realistic, they didn't trigger the same political responses, which let us slide into the shadows as far as the nutcases go."

I grinned, "That tells me a lot. Prejudiced people are considered nutcases, so it's generally not normal any more, correct?"

Marc smiled, "You can thank the Federation partially for that as well; militant prejudice generally leads to violation of Federation law,

which leads to becoming Bubba's bitch. Bubba is actually pretty kewl, he sends thank-you cards to the Clan for the presents we send him, but for some reason, the people who get sent to him don't have the same appreciation that we do of his sense of humor."

"Okay!" I loudly laughed. Even Jonah found it funny.

"Okay, we better let you get over there to try to sink your ball in that hole before everyone starves to death," Les chuckled. "We can catch up more once you boys have finished playing."

Realizing that food came after a bus ride and completing the game of miniature-golf, the AI division members went into overdrive, whacking at balls almost simultaneously. Like a billiards game, some balls ricocheted off other balls and flew into the air, landed in traps, bounced off Wes' helmet and generally caused mass confusion and giggling. Les, Vicky, Dillon, Jonah and I scattered for safety. Since I had time, I led my brothers into a nearby men's room so we could relieve ourselves. Dillon spent more time washing layers of cookie, cotton candy and ice cream off his face than he did leaking. When we stepped back outside, our hosts had managed to complete the game without any injuries despite their best attempts to do otherwise.

"Hey Mom, Dad! We're going home with Uncle Marc!" Wes announced with excitement as he came running over to them with Hunter at his side.

"We are?" Les asked with a raised eyebrow. "Does Marc know this?"

"Uh-huh! Hunter's dad says he's even gonna let us help him set up their new 'puter!" Wes replied, totally ignoring the implied question about the invitation being extended.

We started for the bus. I told Les and Vicky, "It's kewl. Marc's

house is pretty large and it's the AI Division headquarters. The basement alone is huge. Joey's got about two dozen cats and kittens down there, and there's still space for AI Division computers and assorted gear."

"How did Joey collect that many cats if he's only been online for three weeks?" Vicky asked.

"It's a genetic attribute," I grinned. "Joey's related to Timmy Short, the six-year-old keeper of animals at Clan Headquarters. From what I've heard, and this is only hearsay, Timmy has all sorts of animals in his bedroom, including an alligator and a baby seal, acquired only yesterday. Those who are unwise enough to enter Timmy's room without knowing about his zoo, usually wind up addicted to Valium and still need some therapy. So a few dozen cats and kittens is really tame, in comparison."

Approaching our bus, Les shrugged and told Vicky, "It sounds all right, hon."

Vicky checked, "These felines are regular house cats, right?"

"Right," I nodded.

Jonah giggled, "We got G-Cats in Ewa Beach though; some are cheetahs, some are lions and some are tigers. They're all part human though and really kewl."

At Vicky's worried expression, I helpless sniggered, "I don't think that helped much, bro." They followed us to the bus anyway.

Dillon smiled, "The G-Cats ain't as scary as the gorillas."

Attempting to alleviate Vicky's fears, I explained, "They're security for Pacific Rim Division. I haven't seen any gorillas at Marc's

house." I was tempted to add 'yet', but edited myself.

"Hey Les, you guys got a car here?" Danny asked as he caught up with us.

"Actually, the car is at the airport in Kalamazoo. We've been using public transit while we've been here celebrating Wes' birthday," Les answered.

"You wouldn't happen to know the license number, would you?" Danny asked with a mischievous grin.

Les laughed, "Of course I do; it's 'ROBOTOY', I had a custom plate made."

Danny grinned as he tapped his chest. "Hey Daileass, by any chance can you find a vehicle with the plate that says 'ROBOTOY' in the Kalamazoo, Michigan airport parking?"

"I'm a step ahead of you, Evil One," Daileass replied. "There is a customized, candy-apple red, four-seat converted 1964 split-window Corvette en-route right now. I'm detouring it through the Rimmers; it's a sweet looking car, so Mike's ferret kids are gonna shine it up before I deliver it. It'll be there when you get home."

Danny was about to finish his fun when Daileass added, "Oh, by the way, the lot security guard was standing right next to it when I took it. Once he cleans out his pants, they should be getting a call from him."

"Awesome! Are you sure we're not related?" Danny asked as he tried very hard not to collapse in laughter. He turned back to Les, who had only heard one side of the conversation, and said "Your 'Vette is at our detail shop in Hawaii at the moment, and should be at Headquarters by the time we get there. When you get the call about it

vanishing, just smile and say 'thank you'."

Dillon, Jonah and I roared hysterically. There was only one possible 'detail shop' in Ewa Beach and we just happened to be related to the Scooby Gang.

Danny grinned at the confused expressions on the adults' faces. "Welcome to Clan Short!" he giggled cryptically.

Sticking his head out the bus door, Jerry asked, "Are you guys gonna stand out there, or are you coming with us?"

Still giggling, I followed my hysterical brothers on board the bus. Danny, Les and Vicky followed us aboard. Wes was already on the bus sitting with Joey and Hunter.

Once he was sure that everyone was seated, Jerry took the driver's seat. "Thank you for choosing the AI Division Transportation Network!" He announced with a giggle. "Since we have some new passengers, I will go over the instructions once again. While the bus is in motion, we ask that you remain seated with your restraints fastened. At the rear of the bus, the restroom is on the right and the weapons locker is on the left; please do not confuse the two, Scott hates cleaning pee off of his guns. In the event of a hostile situation, please follow the instructions of Scott. Due to the shortness of the return trip, there will be no in-flight movie. Once again, thank you; I hope you enjoy your ride."

Across the aisle from me, Vicky gasped, "A boy is driving this bus?"

Nodding, I grinned, "More like steering, the VI George takes care of a lot. The division has the added bonus of their own guardian angel, so we couldn't be safer."

Behind me, Jonah hollered, "Hey Davie, are you joining us inside or playing dodge the stupid seagulls again?"

Davie appeared, floating down the middle of the aisle. "I'll ride inside, Jonah. Wanna play a couple of hands of Uno? Hey, Booger Breath, you gonna take off sometime today?"

"Find a seat, Angel Boy!" Jerry shot back. "Just because you're considered an angel, for some crazy reason, don't mean you can ignore the rules!"

Davie blew a raspberry at Jerry, then took a seat across the aisle from Jonah.

Jerry giggled, then activated the bus's controls. "Hey George, we're going home!"

"Computing traffic patterns to return to Headquarters," the bus replied, almost immediately followed by "Route confirmed, awaiting activation."

"Light 'em up, George, we're rolling," Jerry replied. Immediately, the lights began flashing once again on the front and rear of the bus, and Jerry carefully pulled onto Highway 17 southbound. Just as soon as we cleared the Myrtle Beach population center, the bus seemed to lower itself to the ground as Jerry began working his way up through the gears.

Reassuringly, I smiled at Les and Vicky, "Easy as pie."

Dillon wondered, "Who's makin' pie and what kind?"

I smirked, "Haven't you eaten enough already today? Aunt Mary's got dinner waiting on us too."

Dillon giggled, "I just feel really hungry today."

Jonah commented, "Maybe you're getting better, bro? Yesterday, a lot of kids were piggin' out at home. The pizzas at lunch were a big hit."

Nervously, Les wondered, "How fast are we going?"

Around us, about a dozen voices chanted, "Don't ask."

I nodded, "My best guess, on the way here in heavier traffic, we averaged about one hundred-forty miles-per-hour. Since it's late and traffic is lighter, I'll bet we'll be back in thirty minutes."

"Twenty-seven minutes and forty-two seconds," Jerry yelled back. "Rough guess, give or take a few seconds for wind."

"You'we siwwy, Dahdy!" Joey giggled as he began passing out emergency cookies from the box under his seat.

Taking a cookie, Dillon cheered, "Thanks, Joey."

Rolling my eyes, I warned, "You're gonna explode, Dillon." My littlest brother nodded and giggled around his cookie-stuffed mouth.

Vicky whimpered, "Where are we going?"

"Sullivan's Island, near Charleston," I answered.

Les groaned, "Myrtle Beach to Charleston is ninety-nine miles."

I nodded, "We'll exceed two hundred miles-per-hour, if Jerry and George have their figures right."

Still playing with Davie and not the least bit rattled, Jonah giggled, "Does Valium work on androids? Maybe we should call Aunt

Janet?"

Again, Davie waved his arm, and then started whistling 'Magic Carpet Ride'. Les and Vicky snuggled together like newlyweds and didn't say another word about the speed of the bus.

Danny and KC were sitting in front of Les and Vicky, and I heard KC asking something that grabbed my attention. "Uncle Danny? What does it feel like to die?" he asked in an obviously worried voice.

Danny looked over at KC, and going by his expression what he saw on KC's face made him decide to be completely serious. "Is what you saw still bothering you that much?"

I saw KC nod his head. "Yeah."

Danny reached into a compartment next to him and pulled out an uplink cable. "I think we need to take this into private, kiddo. Do you mind doing a shared link so that I can talk openly?"

KC reached for one end of the cable and plugged it into his access port without a word, his answer obvious as he waited for Danny to do the same.

Danny turned his head before plugging in himself. "Marc, me and KC need to slip off for a private conference; could you make sure we get inside if we're not done by the time we get home?"

"Got ya', bro," Marc replied. "Good luck."

Paul and Ryan were sitting in the back of the bus, doing their best to be inconspicuous. I wanted to talk to them, so I decided to go to the restroom then I could remain back there with them to chat. Unbuckling my safety belt, I got up and went to the back of the bus.

Ryan was whispering excitedly in Paul's ear. I overheard a little before going into the restroom.

"This was the best day ever, bro. I think I like these guys. I think we may have found a home."

"Me too, bro. They seem to be really nice. Maybe we can make a home here."

While I was peeing, I thought a little about the two brothers. I had the impression that Paul's inner thoughts did not match what he said exactly. He really liked these guys, but they had suggested resetting certain portions of Ryan's positronic brain and purging the programming that made Ryan believe he was a flesh and blood boy. There was no way in hell Paul would let that happen. Paul had to believe that it would dramatically change who his brother is, and he couldn't let that happen. This was his brother Ryan and he was who he was, even if he thought he was a human boy. Washing my hands, I got worried thinking that they might want to run for it again.

I had to do or say something, but wasn't sure how to approach it. Drying my hands, I noticed the sharp cardboard edge of the paper towel dispenser, and grinned. They think flesh and blood makes them human. Well, I'm flesh and blood too; a humanoid boy with a positronic brain. Purposefully, I gritted my teeth and slid my hand along the cardboard edge, right along the fleshy bit at the base of my thumb near the wrist, giving myself a good inch-long paper cut. I held a fresh paper towel to the bleeding wound and stepped out of the restroom.

Sitting down beside the two brothers, I blushed and smirked, "Be careful of the paper towel dispenser, dudes," and then showed them the paper cut. Of course, they also saw a fair amount of blood on

the paper towel too. "Paper cuts bleed like crazy," I grinned.

To my surprise, I noticed that Ryan reacted almost immediately and made a scrunched-up face while making a fist with his hand, while Paul, on the other hand, did just what Noah had talked about earlier. I watched as he scanned my hand before reacting. It was subtle, but there. It did a lot to ease my mind that you wouldn't notice unless you were looking for it.

"That looks painful," Ryan said in a sympathetic voice. "Do you need a doctor; maybe stitches? Oh, wow. What if it got infected and fell off? We better get you to a doctor immediately."

I noticed that Paul was watching me intently. I felt certain that he was sizing me up. I laughed. What was I going to say that would not drive Paul away? I grinned, "It stings like all paper cuts, but it won't need stitches; at worst, it'll need a band-aid. I'll hold this paper towel against it for a little while and it'll probably stop making a mess." Deciding to change the subject, I smiled, "You dudes raced really well at the go-cart track. KC and Danny were in the lead, Marc was behind them and I was pretty close to Marc. You two and Jerry were right behind me."

"Yeah, the go-carts were way cool. I don't think I ever went that fast," Ryan bubbled enthusiastically.

It made me smile to see him happy, and I could see that it was making Paul smile too.

"Wasn't that cool, bro?" Ryan exclaimed, as he turned a million megawatt grin on his brother.

"Yeah, bro. It was way cool, but why don't you turn it down a notch, okay? You're gonna break the seat bouncing on it like that."

Ryan folded his arms across his chest and put on an obviously mock-frown as he made a point of turning his head away from Paul. "Killjoy!" Then he suddenly turned and gave Paul the one-finger salute and made a funny face with his eyes all crossed and tongue sticking out.

Paul just shook his head.

"Oh! My name's Ryan and the grump over there is my little bro, Paul." I couldn't help noticing the emphasis he put on little.

I introduced myself to them and offered my unwounded left hand to knock-knuckles with them, then started telling them a very abridged version of my history, carefully avoiding any mention of being an android. I did choose to tell them that Jonah and Dillon were my new brothers, that we had two great dads, and lived in Ewa Beach, R.O.H., on Oahu. I hoped that my openness would rub off on them and they would open up to me too.

Paul looked me dead in the eyes and replied, "We didn't have it easy either. We had to live rough... you know, on the streets."

"Jeez, bro. You don't have to be such a heavy," Ryan said as he punched his brother in the arm. "I mean it sucked and all, but we got through it, right?"

I warmly smiled, "You two had each other. Unfortunately, I didn't have a brother at the time." I softly asked, "Do you dudes know why I'm here today?"

Paul looked me blankly in the eyes before he spoke. "I don't think I understand what you mean?"

I shrugged, "I don't live here. My brothers and I are only here for the day. My dad asked me to come here for a check-up and my

bros decided to come with."

"Oh. I hope your results came back okay. They did, didn't they?" Ryan sounded genuinely worried.

"A check-up! What kind of check-up would you need to come to the AI division headquarters for?" Paul suddenly blurted out in a voice that had somehow become dangerous sounding.

Ryan turned and looked at his brother with a disbelieving look on his face. "Bro. Jeez! What's your problem?"

Quickly realizing that there was no backing down, regardless of Paul's intense glare, I locked eyes with Paul and sighed, "At the orphanage in Hawaii, the adults there were really bad. They used us kids for sex, prostitution, photography, like that. I'm an android, like Danny, Joey, KC and Marc. The orphanage adults used an incompatible device on me that periodically erased my memories. It caused a small problem, where I couldn't access any long term memories. Last night, another android named Austin fixed almost everything in only twenty minutes. Even though I'm healthy, my dad wanted to be sure everything was okay, so he sent me here, with Caleb and Noah. I don't really know these dudes, and they don't know me, still the guys here helped me. That's what Clan Short is about; kids helping other kids. The Clan doesn't care that I'm an android, or that I'm gay; they treat me like a brother, like every other real human kid."

Paul's eyes now betrayed a deep distrust. He looked like he would fly from the bus if he could.

"Oh wow. They messed you up pretty bad, huh?" Ryan said with such a sad look on his face that it twisted me up inside.

"Why are you talking to us? Who put you up to this? It's not

going to work. You understand me? It's not going to work!" Paul's voice cut in like a knife. It was cold and distant.

"Paul, you stop it right now! He hasn't done anything. He's just talking to us. Why are you always like this?" Ryan had tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Nobody put me up to this, Paul," I quickly and firmly assured. "We just spent hours together, and I never got to talk with either of you. The reason we went to Myrtle Beach in the first place is because I asked to see my old stomping grounds. I had no purpose other than us getting to know each other. If that's too much, if you're prejudiced and can't deal with androids, I'll just go back to a seat away from you."

Paul did something then I had never expected. He curled up into a ball and began to sob.

Ryan suddenly threw his arms around his brother and held him tightly and tried to calm him down.

I was suddenly horrified. I had just wanted to help. I felt like crying myself and started to bolt for the other end of the bus. But I couldn't go. I felt a hand stopping me and Paul's voice trying to come through his sobs. "Sorry... I... don'..."

Turning and squatting down, I softly asked, "What is it?" Paul only shook his head. Ryan glanced at me with uncertainty clearly written on his face. So only Paul and Ryan could hear, I whispered, "Four days ago, I was a fuck-toy for perverted men. Since then, I learned to trust the Clan. If it wasn't for them, I still wouldn't know who I am or where I came from. If you can trust me, I'll help you trust them? It's up to you."

I watched Ryan look from Paul to me and back again in

confusion out of the corner of my eyes.

Paul regained his composure enough to push forward.

"I don't trust anyone when it comes to keeping Ryan safe, but I will give you a chance to prove you guys aren't going to harm us." He said this loud enough for Ryan to hear unfortunately.

"What do you mean? I trust these guys. The Clan is great, bro," Ryan gushed without taking a breath.

Hunter had slipped by to the restroom when I was preoccupied, and somehow overheard us as he was coming out. He slid into the seat next to me and said simply, "You know I was dead, don't you?"

My head popped up and I stared at the younger boy, knowing he was human and not an android.

Paul was the first one to say something; the sarcasm dripping liberally from his mouth as he spoke. "So you are saying that you were raised from the dead?"

All Ryan was able to get out was a rather weak, "Oh?"

Hunter looked at the three of us for a second, then continued. "Dead dead, as in I met Saint Peter and went through the Gates. My father shot me because I wouldn't get out of the way when he tried to kill a kid in Montana. My body was even in the freezer at the morgue, in the hospital here in Charleston. Would you like to know why I'm here?"

Briefly glancing back at Caleb and seeing him mutely nod, I told Hunter, "Yeah, I'd like to know."

Paul looked at the boy with what could only be classified as

hostile intent and spoke before Hunter could say anything. "Okay. I know we've seen angels and all that, but this is a bit much. What are you trying to pull here, boy? 'Cause whatever it is, I ain't buying."

Hunter's eyes flashed for a second. "If you don't believe me, Davie is sitting up front and he can show you exactly what I went through. You ain't never laid there with part of your brain replaced with shotgun shot, have you? Take a look at my head, I've got the scars; Saint Mikey was going to remove any signs of it, but I wanted a reminder of how not thinking for yourself can hurt someone."

"Fine, so you were dead. I believe you." Paul's voice sounded defeated to me. Then he continued in a mumble I almost couldn't make out. "But that doesn't mean I'm buying what you're selling."

Ryan suddenly turned to Paul. It was the first time I could see anger in his face. "Just stop it, Paul. Stop it!"

I softly wondered, "Why do you think any of us is trying to sell something to you? I mean, really, for what purpose would anyone try to deceive you?" Locking eyes with Paul, I gently assured, "All I want, and all anyone here wants, is to help you and Ryan, Paul. Some of us at the orphanages didn't trust Clan Short when they rescued us, but by the next night, they had proved it to us. Only one girl that was raped and had a forced abortion still had trust issues, but by Sunday night, even she was much better. You two are like I was, in a shitty situation where nothing was what it seemed to be. That's over now, but only if you can trust someone other than each other." Shedding tears, I sobbed, "I feel you. You want to run away as soon as this bus stops. If you do that, Jerry will be wrecked and I'll be just as bad, sitting in Ewa Beach, wondering if I said or did something wrong, if I'll ever see either of you again."

Ryan looked at me like I had grown another head. "What do you

mean run away? I am not leaving. This is the first time in a long while we've had real beds and a place to stay that doesn't have stupid rules and crazy people trying to hurt us!"

I watched Paul look at his brother with what I could only call a combination of love and annoyance. He seemed to measure what he was about to say and stopped twice before he started as the rest of us looked at him and waited.

"I don't plan on running anywhere," Paul shared. "I don't know what things were like for you guys, but I learned one thing from being on the streets. Everyone wants something from you. Whether it's to join their stupid church, get you hooked on their drugs, be their damn slave, or just to make them feel important. Everyone wants something from you. But the one thing that everyone we got close to wanted was that they wanted Ryan to change who he is. There is nothing wrong with him. He is who he is and doesn't need fixing."

Hunter nodded. "According to the logs of the biobed, I was alive for over an hour after arriving at the hospital before I died. Two people took a chance on me; Caleb, who is now my new Dad, and has been with the Clan before it became a Clan, in fact before any of them had ever met an android, and KC, who was still adjusting to a brand new body, after being found at the bottom of Malibu Bay. That is over an hour, my Dad monitoring the biobed because he knows nothing about being a Doctor on humans, and Uncle KC, who did the best he could because he couldn't live with wondering if he might have saved me. They failed, and it broke both of their hearts; I know, because I saw them crying before I went to Up There."

"That's pretty intense, Hunter," Paul carefully said. "I mean seeing yourself dead. I can't imagine what that would be like. Guys, I know that you all aren't trying to hurt us, but I am not sure that everyone has our best interests at heart, even though that may be how

they see it. All I heard when we got here was how they could help Ryan, but he doesn't need the type of help they want to give him. He is who he is and that is fine."

I watched as Ryan's face got a confused look on it. "What did they want to change, Bro?"

"It's not important, Ryan. Don't worry about it. You're my bro and that is all that matters," Paul said in a soft voice to his brother.

I could see that Paul was trying to keep things under control. My guess was that we had gotten too close to the subject of his brother thinking that he was not an android but human.

"Like in our Clan," I smiled. "Trust comes a little bit at a time. All I can suggest is giving us all the benefit of the doubt. I came here not knowing anyone and trusted them to do their best for me. After tonight, spending time away from headquarters and getting to know everybody, how they are in the real world, I mean, maybe you and Ryan can go in baby steps and allow simple checkups? All that matters to me is that I'll get to see you two again. I want to be able to come back here and have friends. Maybe you'd like to spend some time in Ewa Beach too, just to get away for a day?"

Hunter decided to add in his own two cents. "If Uncle Cory ever catches someone trying to change a person from being who they are, or someone doing something to someone without their permission, he'll sic Uncle JJ on them. You don't wanna mess with Uncle JJ; he likes taking out police stations just because they ain't doing what they're supposed to be doing!"

"Okay?" Was the questioning response we got from Paul and Ryan.

Then Paul spoke up. "Who is this Uncle JJ? I think I've heard

his name," Paul exclaimed, "Wait, did you say took out a police station?"

Having just met JJ the previous day, I sniggered, "I heard about JJ's temper tantrums. I wish I had video of that!" Surprisingly, a video monitor lowered from the ceiling. On the video, I recognized JJ and Adam. The bottom of the screen read, Kokomo, IN, USA. I loudly laughed, "Who heard my wish?"

Almost at once, Marc, Caleb and Noah chorused, "George did it!"

On the video display, we watched and heard a slightly overweight Sergeant yell, "ON THE GROUND NOW PUNKS!"

JJ stared at the man in shock. "Is this how you greet all Federation Security Personnel?"

"You ain't no Goddamn Federation Security PUNK. Now both of you get your asses face down and spread eagled. You have ten-seconds to start moving." The Sergeant accentuated his point by cocking the riot gun he was pointing at the boys.

"Sergeant; I am Lieutenant James Richardson and my partner is Second Lieutenant Adam Short; we are both prepared to show identification to prove our identities. You fire that weapon and you'll wake up in a Federation holding cell; that is a promise."

"You are full of shit, punk; the Federation don't give kids weapons. Drop or you might be lucky and wake in a hospital. Three-seconds."

"Unconscious only, Mr. Short," JJ ordered. Adam barely had time to nod his head when the sound of a shotgun going off filled the room. As the buckshot ricocheted off of the boys and embedded itself

in surrounding walls and furnishings, a white beam shot from each of the boy's arms and knocked the Sergeant unconscious.

"Who wants to join him?" Adam got out just before an officer to his right started to empty his clip in the boy's direction. As the bullets bounced off of the vicinity of Adam's chest, Adam let loose a yellowish bolt from his arm and the officer dropped to the ground. "Stop that!" Adam pointed towards an officer that was hit by one of the stray bullets. "Get that man a medic; and for Heaven's sake stop firing at us before someone gets killed!"

Three officers nodded at each other and opened fire at the same time, trying to overpower whatever JJ and Adam were protecting themselves with. "Screw this shit!" JJ exclaimed. He dropped to his knees and slammed his fist on the ground. A silver-white bubble of energy quickly expanded from him and knocked every officer that was holding a gun on the boys into the nearest wall, leaving all of them unconscious on the floor. Adam pulled his communicator. "Terra Main Security; Priority One transmission from Clan Short Security, Second Lieutenant Adam Short."

"Proceed with Priority One traffic Clan Short."

"I need a security detail at this location ASAP. The local police department attempted to use deadly force on our personnel upon our entry to the premises. Request Central US Security assume jurisdiction. We need medical teams standing by upon arrival at detention facility for one gunshot wound and multiple electrical stun injuries."

"Acknowledged. We have accessed their building monitoring system. Your support is on their way; my supervisor has reviewed the situation and requests that I inform you that Federation Security will

prosecute them if you so wish."

Adam looked over at JJ, who was administering first aid to the downed officer. JJ nodded his assent, so Adam replied "My superior officer accepts the offer. Thank you." Starfleet medics and security beamed into view on the screen.

A minute later, the offending officers were gone and the Federation Security personnel began taking over operations. Adam accessed their computer and quickly found out where Brandon was in the building. JJ turned to a nearby Ensign and asked "Would you mind joining us? We are here to pick up a child; originally we were to accept custody under the SHA, but after the 'welcome' we got I'm not going to mess around. This will be a Clan Short extraction."

"I would be glad to, Sir," the Ensign replied. His superior came up behind them and asked "How did you cause so much damage, Lt. Richardson? And how did you escape injury?"

JJ smiled, "All I can say is it is experimental technology which Clan Short has been chosen to test."

Hunter cheered at the appropriate moments as we watched the video, booing officers who made the mistake of trying to cross his uncles. When JJ decided enough was enough, Hunter shoved his fist in the air in triumph. "Yeah, Uncle JJ!" he shouted.

"Holy shit! That was fuckin' BAD ASS!" Ryan hollered. I watched him excitedly bounce in his seat.

Paul on the other hand had developed what I could only assume was a scared expression. "Excuse me a moment," he softly muttered, "I need to stretch my legs."

He did not wait for anyone to answer and made his way toward

the front of the bus. I decided to see if he was going to be all right. I thought I might understand why he was having the reaction he did. He might just be thinking that he had just been given a lesson in what happens when you do not do what the Clan wants. In some respects that was true, but only in response to a dangerous situation where they are met with force.

"Paul?" I gently called and reached for his shoulder.

He swiftly spun around and raised his fists, as if preparing for an attack. Lowering his arms and fists, Paul huffed, "Sorry."

I asked, "What is it that you think you just saw?"

I could see the tears starting to stream down his face. Then barely above a whisper, he answered me. "That's what happens when you go against what the Clan wants."

"No, that is what happens to people who hurt the kids the Clan is protecting," Hunter stated factually.

I nodded, "There are bad people that want to hurt the Clan. Around base last night, and again this morning, there was talk of a problem when some of our Clan went to rescue some kids. One of my orphanage brothers is now a Clan leader. His name is Kaleo. At the rescue, a kid planted by the Fundamentalist Church of Christ tried to infiltrate our base. Kaleo had a hissy fit and cussed him out, then hit him. The dude tried to go after Kaleo. That's when both Starfleet security guys stunned his ass. You and Ryan couldn't be safer, Paul."

The almost defeated look in Paul's eyes concerned me, but I knew that only time would build the trust that Paul needed.

"Okay. If you say so. Well, I mean no one has really tried to hurt us. I mean... I guess," Paul said, his voice becoming barely audible by

the end.

"Bro. It's okay. They aren't like the other people. I really don't think they are," Ryan said as he made to hug his brother. Turning his head to everyone else he added, "Guys, don't take it personal. He don't trust no one, even me. He's been wrong 'bout people before and I got hurt real bad." Turning to his brother he held up a pinky and Paul slowly hooked his around it. Ryan smiled and said, "Bro, you know this is different. Give 'em a chance."

Paul smiled weakly at his brother, then turned to me. "Well, I think I can trust you, Reyes. You aren't a bullshitter, of that I'm sure. And the Clan, well... I mean look at what they did for Hunter and for you. I mean, anyone who would go to that much trouble for someone they don't know has to have a good point or two. So I guess the Clan can't be all bad." The words sounded sincere to me, but the look on his face still made me worry.

I sighed, "When you spend six years in an orphanage, getting raped and abused so you can eat a meager meal, what's wrong with having a warm bed, plenty of food whenever you want it, and nothing asked of you except caring for a family that cares about you? Life couldn't be better, if you want my honest opinion."

Hunter nodded as he chimed in. "You know who they were rescuing? They were there to get Austin's human 'little brother'; the only survivor of the family that Austin lived with before he was kidnapped. They did all of that just because Austin knew him and wanted to make sure he was alive and okay. Dad told me all about it. The Clan don't care what you are, they just want you to be happy and doing stuff that you like doing. Dad's teaching me computer stuff because I like it, and now me and Wes are gonna get to help with putting in a new computer in the AI Compound!"

I shared, "My dad is teaching me to play drums."

Jonah gushed, "And our pop is teaching me to play guitar."

Joey piped up from his seat. "Uncah Pauly, Dahdy is deachin' me howda build mowe Andwoids!"

I watched as Paul smiled at Hunter's enthusiasm, and as his grin grew and became more relaxed and open with each kid that spoke. I noticed that Joey pushed him over the top. After starting and stopping a couple of times, he finally spoke. "You have a special dad, Joey. He has spent a lot of time talking to me and trying to get me to realize that things are going to be all right, but that is kinda hard for me to believe after all this time. You know it's so cool that you guys have found someone to be a family with, but it's been just me and Ryan against the world for a long time. Look, I know I'm a pain in the ass, but I don't know how to be anything else. It really is the only thing that kept us alive." I watched as he shook his head. Then he got a conspiratorial look on his face and he leaned toward Hunter. "You know that was BAD ASS, what your uncle JJ did. I mean that was so cool."

At last there was a visible crack in Paul's defenses. Jerry hollered, "Okay, you guys, if you'll all park your butts in seats again, I can slow this bus and park it so George can chill for the night!"

"But Uncle Jerry, my butt don't got a shifter!" Hunter giggled as he plopped himself in Marc's lap.

Giggling, Paul, Ryan and I returned to the back row of seats and buckled our seat belts. In another minute or two, we were off highway 17. Not too long later, we had slowed considerably and were pulling into AI Division Headquarters driveway. When the bus had stopped, I released my safety belt and stood. Paul and Ryan followed me down

the aisle, but we had to stop and wait for Marc.

"Daileass, could you please transport these two to Danny's bedroom?" Marc asked with a wicked grin as he stopped next to the two connected androids. "Maybe even some soft music playing for when they wake up?" he added mischievously.

"No problem, bro," Daileass giggled, "How about 'The Girl from Ipanema' on the pan flute?"

"That works!" Marc replied. "See if he makes butt comments in public again," he added under his breath with a giggle.

Danny and KC disappeared from the bus. Marc, Paul, Ryan and I cracked up and exited the bus. Parked beside the bus was the '64 Corvette that belonged to Les. It was candy-apple red, and even in the limited light of the driveway, the car sparkled. Les was impressed and raving, "My baby hasn't looked this good in forty years, since I drove it off the lot."

I pointed and prodded, "There's something on the driver's seat, Les."

Unlocking the doors, Les leaned over and reached in. In his hand was a shiny foil wrapped mint and a note that read; This vehicle prepared by Scooby Gang Detailing. I sputtered, then turned away and roared laughing. Many yards away and approaching the house, Jonah and Dillon were occupied with Wes, Hunter and Joey. I couldn't wait to tell Derrick and Mike about Scooby Gang Detailing.

As we walked toward the house, I told Les, Vicky, Paul and Ryan about my ferret brothers and sisters, including some more stuff about my dad and pop. We were about halfway to the house when Willy came running out and pounced Joey.

"Wiwwy!" Joey hysterically cackled, "Whewe was you hiding? We wend fow a wide do Mywdwe Beach and you missed id!"

Amazingly, Scott and Marc were already in position behind Vicky. The sight of a panther pouncing an eight-year-old android was too much for her, and she proved that androids could faint just like a human.

Les gasped and lurched to catch his wife, but she was already safe, draped unconscious in Scott's and Marc's arms. Les sighed, "Maybe mentioning the panther would've been a good idea?"

I shrugged and grinned, "Maybe, but look at how telling you the bus' speed worked out." Davie floated past us, innocently whistling the REO Speedwagon hit, Time For Me to Fly.

Jerry laughed at his brother's antics. "You knew this was gonna happen, didn't ya bro?"

"Maybe," Davie giggled. He made a point of paying attention to Dillon, who was on the ground in the process of being 'welcomed' by Willy, complete with a thorough face cleaning to remove any traces of leftover food.

Les and I took hold of Vicky's legs to help Scott and Marc carry her into the house. We placed her down on a sofa and propped her legs up with some pillows.

Mary came walking into the room, carrying smelling salts. "How far did she make it?" she asked me with a knowing smile as she administered the smelling salts.

"Almost halfway," I giggled. "It was Willy's fault." The words had only left my lips when a conniving panther leaped and we both

tumbled to the floor.

"That's a new record... you're slipping," Mary chortled as she reached down and scratched Willy's ears. She then turned to Les. "Welcome to the asylum; unfortunately the inmates have taken over, so there is no escape. We had a psychiatrist, but the boys drove him insane within the first thirty-six hours. I'm Mary. Jerry, Davie, Paul, and Ryan are mine. My husband Jon is on his way over now. Would you like a coffee?"

Sitting down near his recovering wife, Les smiled, "Yes, with only a splash of milk, please."

From the kitchen, Caleb squealed, "Eww! Gross!"

"Most NORMAL people like sugar with their coffee, not the other way around!" Marc yelled back. "You're just gross!"

Glancing around for my brothers, but not seeing them, I soon heard Dillon, Jonah, Joey and Hunter hollering "DINNER!" I followed the sound to find my brothers already sitting at a huge table with Rich and John. Obviously finished with Danny and awake, KC hurried past me and found a seat. I took a chair near my brothers. Entering the room behind me were Caleb, Noah, Jerry, Willy, Danny, Marc, Paul, Ryan, Scott, Mary and her husband Jon. The table was loaded with bowls and platters of food, ready to be served, including boiled jumbo shrimp, country-fried steak with mashed potatoes, glazed baked ham with pineapple and cherries, country gravy and fried okra, string beans, fresh baked bread, butter, and various salads. Off to the side were pumpkin and apple pies for dessert.

Mary went into the kitchen and came back out carrying a platter of raw steaks, which she placed in front of Willy. "Keep your paws off the table, and no eating until everyone else gets served," she reminded

the panther.

Willy looked up at her, nodding his head before turning it back and looking longingly at the steaks in front of him.

Everyone briefly bowed their heads. When the last head popped up, hands flew everywhere, bowls and platters were passed around and the chatter level quadrupled. Thanking Aunt Mary for the wonderful Southern meal she had prepared, I was helping serve Dillon when I suddenly felt something rub past my leg.

Charles wondered, "Has that food been sampled?"

"We need to make sure our pets are properly fed," Patch added.

"Laps only, kittens, or no tuna for the night time snack," Mary announced, which led to the sighting of kitten heads poking up in various places all around the table, including one on Danny's lap.

Patch appeared on Jonah's lap. A moment later, I felt Charles making himself a comfy spot on my lap. Missy found herself a spot on Dillon's lap and peeked over the table edge. One glare from Aunt Mary and Missy lowered her head below the table though.

I loaded my plate with country-fried steak, mashed potatoes, string beans and drowned it all in country gravy. Dinner conversation began with telling Aunt Mary and Uncle Jon about our trip to Myrtle Beach. For me, the best part was that the beach side of Ocean Boulevard had not been over-developed with hotels. The efficient mass transit system was a great addition, making all of the city accessible in about thirty minutes. The boardwalk hadn't changed much since I last saw it; some of the concessions had moved around and the cabanas with live music were added, but it still felt very familiar and homey to me.

"I thought they had horse and buggies back then, bro," KC teased.

I grinned, "Nope, petroleum fueled engines." Soft chortling traveled around the table. I smiled, "They already had cars when Danny was first activated."

Shaking his head, Marc giggled, "They hadn't developed the wheel yet."

Danny grinned and warned, "Careful."

Marc giggled, then started humming the melody of Girl from Ipanema and I joined him. A moment later Aunt Mary and Uncle Jon joined us. Danny and KC groaned.

To change the subject, Danny asked me what my favorite songs were. In reverse chronological order, I remembered; "From the early 1980's, Hall & Oates: Kiss On My List and I Can't Go for That. There were so many great tunes from the seventies, but Kansas' Carry On Wayward Son and Boston's More Than a Feeling stand out. From the sixties, Jay and The Americans: Come a Little Bit Closer and This Magic Moment were big hits, and of course everything by The Beatles. Before that, my first dad influenced a lot of what I listened to, like Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Dave Brubeck, Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller and Harry James.

KC grinned at me and teased, "You're showing your age, Reyes."

I reminded, "While you were floating with fishies in Malibu Bay, I was working my ass off and periodically getting my memory zapped. You're only five years younger than me."

"But in a brand new body," KC giggled.

"On the beach, after supper, KC," I challenged. With their mouths stuffed, Dillon and Jonah looked up at me like I had lost my mind.

KC laughed, "For what; ya gonna beat me up, old man?"

"You won on the go-cart track. Let's see how good your legs work," I grinned. "A mile out and a mile back again. Remember, I'm eleven pounds lighter than normal and have been running in the sand for thirty-five of my fifty-six years. We'll see if you can do more than run off at the mouth or not." Around the table, mooing and giggling broke loose. I was more than certain I could run at least as fast as KC and had a very good chance of beating him.

Marc grinned, "Is this a closed race or open to anyone?"

I shrugged, "It doesn't matter," and then giggled, "It's open to anyone that wants to lose, I guess." Mooing erupted around the table and Dillon cracked up.

Jonah laughed, "You're so bad, bro. Don't tell anyone you've been running around in the sand with me on your back."

Jerry sniggered, "Let's do an androids only race then. I gotta admit, I'd like to see the results of that."

Joey wondered, "Can I wun dhe wace doo, Dahdy?"

"Sure, kiddo," Jerry smiled.

Right after dinner and the table had been cleared, everyone went outside to the beach. Danny, Marc, KC, Joey and I lined up. Jerry called for a starter pistol, then announced, "Okay, let's have a nice

clean race, guys. That means no tripping or shoving...."

"Yeah, Cwash!" Joey giggled.

"I'll be too far ahead of you for you to worry about that, Twerp!" KC replied with a grin.

Stretching and getting ready to run, I realized the jeans I was still wearing were far too constricting, so I stripped off all my clothes. Danny whimpered, "So, I guess Reyes is like the pace car."

"When in Rome," KC giggled as he also stripped.

"Awesome! Weez wacin' nekkid!" Joey exclaimed as he ripped his clothes off.

Danny and Marc shrugged, then also stripped. Off by the dune, all the spectators began giggling. Loudest among them were my brothers and Paul and Ryan.

Jerry pointed and smiled, "Way down by 23rd Street is a pier that's about a mile away, give or take a few feet. Swing around the first pontoon and the first one back here wins." He paused and asked, "Does everyone understand the rules?" Everyone seemed to focus on KC and I cracked up.

"Don't look at me!" KC whined. "I'm not the one who got picked as a Division head for making his own rules whenever he wants!"

Raising his arm with the starter pistol, Jerry giggled, "Okay, you clowns, on your marks..." Unexpectedly, Danny and KC jumped Marc and knocked him over in the sand. The spectators along the dune cracked up.

Joey rolled his eyes as he giggled. "Dhey's siwwy, ain'd dhey, big bwo?"

I nodded, "Actually, I think you're my only competition, Joey."

"WEAWWY?" Joey asked in awe.

Pointing at the three giggling goons trying to stand up, I smiled, "We can beat these guys easily."

"Yeah, dhey's old and swow," Joey giggled wickedly.

Jerry waited for Danny, KC and Marc to stand before quickly saying, "get set," and then fired the pistol.

As I expected, Joey and I were in the lead at the start of the race. I warned my young brother, "Pace yourself, Joey. Two miles is rough. Two miles in the sand at top speed will wear you out fast." I noticed that Jonah, Dillon, Hunter, Paul and Ryan were jogging along the dune, probably to make certain we all played by the rules.

Soon, I was passing the lighthouse, with Joey only a yard or two behind me. I could hear Danny, Marc and KC giggling and passing silly remarks about catching my bouncing butt.

It seemed obvious by the time Joey and I passed the Edgar Allan Poe Library that Danny, Marc and KC weren't really trying too much. I was keeping a nice even pace though and really not pushing anywhere near my capabilities. Approaching the pier, I realized that maybe Marc, Danny and KC would try to catch up on the return trip down the beach. Along the dune, Jonah, Dillon, Paul and Ryan were cheering Joey and me along.

Going around the pier pontoon, I made sure to keep my eyes on Danny, Marc and KC, in case they decided to break the rules and

tackle me. I couldn't be sure, but it seemed KC at least was trying to pour on the juice and catch up. Noticing Joey was slowing down, I asked him if he was okay.

Joey nodded, "Geddin' tiwed."

"Can you make it without cramping?"

"Dunno," Joey huffed.

I slowed down and prompted, "Jump on my back, Joey."

"You'ww wose, Weyes!"

"No I won't, I promise," I insisted. Joey leaped onto my back and KC made it much closer to us, but I turned up the juice and sprinted away.

Joey laughed, "You'we wosin', Cwash!"

"Just wait, Twerp. I'll wave as I pass you!" KC shot back with a laugh.

I sniggered, "He's dreaming, Joey. I spent most of the day Saturday running around a beach with Jonah or Dillon on my back."

Joey giggled, "I'ww jump off ad dhe wighdhouse, Weyes. You godda bead Casey."

"I will, Joey," I promised, "just by a bigger margin if you jump off, so don't jump off, this way we both win."

"Uncah Mawc and Uncah Dahny is cadchin' up," Joey warned.

Along the dune, I heard Paul and Ryan making announcements like it was a horse race. Jonah and Dillon were hysterical.

"You keep wunnin' an' I'ww keep wadchin'," Joey offered helpfully.

From the dune, Ryan hollered, "Passin' the lighthouse and we're in the final stretch with Reyes and Joey in the lead, KC in second place and the two geezers in a tie for third!"

"I'll give you 'geezer', kiddo!" Danny yelled back.

Up ahead, I could see Jerry and Caleb holding a yellow tape across the beach. KC tried to sprint ahead, but I leaned forward, allowing Joey's weight to force my legs to move faster and keep us balanced. We got ahead of KC again and Joey began cheering, "You god id, Weyes! Casey is wosing sdeam!"

At the dune, Dillon, Jonah and Ryan cracked up. Paul shouted, "Marc is waving his thingie at Danny, and the ancient one has collapsed in the sand. This race is, dare I say it, in the bag!"

I hit the ribbon chest first and Joey screamed, "We won! Weyes bead you cawwyng me, Cwash!"

Slowing my pace to a jog, I circled around the beach with the yellow ribbon flapping in the breeze. Joey jumped off my back and followed me around as I slowly cooled down. Soon, I had my brothers, KC, Paul, Ryan, Caleb, Noah and Hunter congratulating me. Coming over with Danny, Marc giggled, "Good race, Reyes."

Jerry sniggered, "Danny came in third. Marc was disqualified for breaking the rules."

"My dick was floppin' around anyway," Marc grinned. "I just made sure Danny got a good look."

KC smirked, "How?"

Shrugging, I smiled and gestured at my own body, explaining, "This isn't a belly; it's distended from not being fed enough. I spent twenty-one years in an orphanage. The last six years we didn't get fed, unless we performed for pedophiles. Since getting rescued by the Clan last Friday, it's no lie, bro, I've been carrying Jonah and Dillon around beaches with energy to burn. Plus the fact that I've always lived around beaches and know how to run in the sand."

Holding out a clenched fist, KC smiled, "I underestimated you, bro."

Knocking knuckles with KC, I shrugged, "That's never a good thing. About a hundred people in the R.O.H. over-estimated their position and underestimated the Clan. The asshole that Kuan Ti and you guys dealt with earlier was just one of those that made that same mistake."

After getting dressed again, Danny led they way back to the house. He said, "It's time for some late night jamming before Reyes, Jonah and Dillon have to leave and the rest of us go to bed." Turning and walking backward, Danny smiled at me and said, "I'd like to hear what you can play."

Blushing, I giggled, "I play mostly hand percussion, but my new dad has been teaching me to play a drum kit too."

Joey gushed, "I can pway weguwah dwums and ewecdwonic dwums doo."

Leading the way down to the basement, Danny asked, "What do you need, Reyes?"

I rattled off, "Bongos, congas, chimes, cowbell, maracas,

tambourine and timbales. With a full acoustic drum kit, I can try some of what Derrick's been teaching me." Only a few steps behind me, Jonah excitedly rambled on about the song I had played earlier that day.

Off to the side of the basement AI lab there was another room filled with all sorts of drums, percussion and musical instruments. There was also two electric guitars and an acoustic guitar. I pointed at them and wondered, "Who plays guitar?"

"I do," KC grinned.

I giggled, "I should've known. Mike Gibbons plays guitar..."

"That's our pop," Jonah gushed, "He can play anything and make it look easy."

I nodded and told KC, "I missed a lot in twenty-one years, but I hung around a lot of musicians before the orphanage. On guitar, Mike can blow them all away."

Gesturing to the drums, Danny prompted, "Show us what you can do, Reyes."

Alone, I walked over to where the hand percussion instruments were arranged near a drum kit. At first, I concentrated on the bongos and congas, recalling much of what I had learned many years ago from Derek Taraschke and started playing at about one-hundred-sixteen beats per minute. While I was playing, I started organizing what Derrick Seibert had played and been teaching me. After about sixteen measures I moved over to play the drum kit. [My little solo](#) lasted about two minutes, but I noticed Dillon and Jonah with their jaws hanging open. The rest of the guys down in the basement were widely smiling too, so I guess they liked what I was playing.

Joey sat at the electronic drum kit and counted off a tempo, then he and I began playing for a few minutes. KC added some gritty electric guitar to our groove. It was pretty good and the three of us played for a few more minutes. Since I never played electronic drums before, I asked Joey to show me what his kit could do and tried it out for a few more minutes. I would have to ask my dad to get me an electronic kit like Joey's.

It was getting late and our hosts had been more than kind for many hours. Jonah and Dillon called our new kittens. Marc had Daileass get us three kitty-carriers for the short trip. We had three boy kittens and three girl kittens from three different litters. We started hugging and saying goodbye to everybody from the AI Division. I could tell by the stunned expression Jerry wore that he was surprised as I when Paul and Ryan embraced me, promising they would visit Ewa Beach someday soon. Jonah and Dillon had their radio controlled go-carts and Dillon had his Teddy bear too. I tapped my comm-badge and called for Peter Lambert.

No sooner had I made the call than Peter popped into existence in front of us, wearing a 1940s-style chauffeur's cap and a change-making device around his waist. He pressed the 'quarters' lever, which dispensed a foil-covered chocolate coin, which he handed to Dillon. He clicked it twice more, for treats for Joey and Jonah. "Ready to go home?" he asked.

I grinned and nodded, "Yep. Can you get us home before dinner, with a little time to spare so we can introduce our kittens?"

Inside the kitty-carrier, Charles griped, "I am not happy."

His sister Charlette warned, "Step on my tail again, and be prepared to be ripped to shreds."

"Sure!" Peter replied cheerfully. In Cat, he added, "I'll have you to your new home and out of those carriers faster than you can pounce a catnip mouse."

From three kitty-carriers, a chorus of meows erupted, all encouraging Peter to get them where they were going quickly. Jonah and Dillon cracked up.

Peter then surprised us all by popping over and hugging Paul. He looked questioningly at Ryan, who held up his arms. Peter then hugged him too. "Listen, guys, I don't want to put any more pressure on you," he said to them. "But when the Clan found me, I was dying of cancer, and had a week to live. One of them took me, on his first day of life yet, and made me into this, so's I can help people ways that most folks can't."

"Jeez! It's bad enough with everyone giving me random advice, now I got 'em popping out of fucking nowhere giving random hugs," Paul said, but I noticed he did not have his previous combative tone. If anything it sounded a little tired, but a smile was threatening to break out on his face.

I noticed Ryan had a goofy grin on his face. "Random hugs are nice, bro! You're just a grump. I mean the Clan helped him to beat his cancer. That's great, right?"

"Yes, it's great he got help, bro. No really, I mean it," Paul said as he shook his head.

"Yep! A Grump!"

I found myself stifling a laugh as Paul gave Ryan a tortured look. I really had to wonder which brother was more of a helper.

Returning to Jonah, Dillon and me, minus his chauffeur's cap

and change-maker, Peter giggled, "Here we go, guys!" Having been transported a few times, let me just say that Mikyvis transportation seemed fairly different, maybe because we were time-shifting too. For less than a second, I saw a blur of colors that went from dark to extremely bright, like a kaleidoscope with many thousands of colors. It was so different, I had to wonder if it was normal. Immediately upon arrival, I blurted out my question to Peter, Jonah and Dillon. "Did all you guys see colors?"

"Colors? While I was transporting you?" Peter asked. When all three of us agreed, he said, "For us Mikyvis, we can see all times and places at once, though we usually just look at what we're interested in. I don't get any sense of traveling; it's just like sitting in the living room watching TV, then deciding to go to the kitchen, you just get up and go." He giggled, "Be glad it wasn't Dilly. His 'short cuts' usually involve three alternate universes!"

My brothers and I thanked Peter for his help and so did all six kittens.

"Any time, guys!" he said, "I'm only a shout away." And he vanished.

We were standing in the center lawn of the four Rimmer family homes. With as many weird things that happened while we were with the AI Division, the day felt weirder simply because the sun was still up and we had just spent hours at night time. By the Sun's position in the sky, I estimated it was probably about five o' clock in the afternoon. Our first order of business was to take care of our kittens and get our dad and pop caught up on some of what had happened. I knew I could use my comm-badge, but I hadn't really paid attention to any of the Core Rimmers when they used theirs, so I tapped the thing and uncertainly called, "Reyes to Derrick, come in dad?"

Excitedly, Derrick replied, "Where are you, Reyes?"

"And how did you get a comm-badge?" Mike hollered.

Dillon and Jonah began giggling. I grinned, "We're by the houses, and Danny got us comm-badges because we went off base, to Myrtle Beach. We've got a few other things to talk about too."

Jonah laughed, "Like where our kittens can live."

After a brief pause, Derrick softly queried, "You came back with kittens?"

"Six of 'em," I sniggered.

Mike laughed, "We sent you to get your systems checked, Reyes."

I chuckled, "Yeah, they did that, and a bit more." All we heard over the comm-badge was our dad and pop laughing.

Surprisingly, my comm-badge chirped. I tapped it and responded, "This is Reyes."

"Hi Reyes, it's Jimmy, in the Command Center. We were just called by the AI Division. They wanted you to know that Peter just popped back to give Paul and Ryan another set of random hugs."

I giggled, "Kewl. Thanks, Jimmy."

In moments, Dillon, Jonah and I saw our dad and pop running toward us from the pool area.

Charles, Patch and the other four kittens meowed unhappily, "Let us out of these cages!"

Looking into the kitty carriers, Jonah giggled, "Just a few more minutes. We want you to be safe."

The black and white spotted female kitten named Missy whined, "I gotta pee!"

Jonah put his carrier down in the grass saying, "Stay close to us for now, okay?" He then opened the cage door. Dillon put his carrier down and gave the same instructions to Patch and Riley. Patch, Riley, Missy and Natalie cautiously stepped out and into the grass.

Charles and Charlette, in the kitty carrier I was holding, were softly planning my assassination if they weren't let out of the cage in twenty-seconds. I quickly put the kitty carrier down. "Lucky, very lucky," Charles meowed as he stepped out of the carrier.

Stepping outside, Charlette warned, "We won't be cute little kittens forever."

I pointed towards Mike and Derrick, jogging in our direction, and told the kittens, "That's our dad and pop. They're Clan leaders, so be nice or they'll have you transported to the Northeast Division, where it snows six months out of the year."

Charles wondered, "What's northeast?"

Charlette asked, "What's transported?"

Patch mused, "And what is snow exactly?"

Jonah smiled, "Snow is cold and wet."

After a kitten outburst of disgust, all six looked up at me and purred, "Touché."

Derrick and Mike slowed their approach. Mike softly moaned,

"Aww, they're so little and cute!"

Bouncing over to Mike, Charles purred, "I like him."

"And they're both cute too," Charlette purred.

Our dad and pop hugged each one of us and then we all sat down on the grassy ground so they could meet the kittens and catch up on the day.

Sitting on Mike's lap, Dillon asked, "Is it supper time yet, pop?"

Jonah and I cracked up before Mike could answer, causing both our dads to grin and glance around for an explanation.

I sniggered, "Dillon's been eating almost constantly since breakfast this morning," and then rattled off the long list of meals and snacks consumed by Dillon while we were away. Even the kittens were hysterical, bouncing and climbing around Dillon.

Snuggling with Dillon, Mike laughed, "We'll head over to the CIC for dinner in about fifteen minutes."

Derrick locked eyes with me and asked, "How're you doin'?"

"I'm really good, dad," I smiled. "Danny Page, the first android ever, ran some diagnostics on me, and updated my software a little more."

Joyfully, Jonah burst, "Reyes is like John was before yesterday, empathetic, from dealing with the crap at the orphanage."

Mike and Derrick chimed, "Really?"

I nodded, "They gave me some additional code and a manual to deal with that, so I'm able to integrate it fully over time. They also

replaced the access panel on my uplink port. Most surprisingly, they were able to catalog and organize my memories from the orphanage too. I was able to tell them when the abuses started, September 1998, and who started it, the Prime Minister of the R.O.H. at the time. The AI Division has already sentenced him." Glancing at Jonah and Dillon, I softly told my dads, "I'll tell you more about that another time."

Mike nodded and wondered, "How much do you remember?"

"Not a lot," I scowled, "about fifty hours worth of various short memories. When I first got to the orphanage in 1983, it wasn't great, but it wasn't as horrible as it got after 1998."

Dillon gushed, "It was an angel named Davie that helped Reyes remember. Davie said he'd come visit us sometime soon."

Again, Mike and Derrick locked eyes with me. I nodded and chuckled, "Yeah, one of the guys there, named Jerry, had an older brother that died, and he's the Division's guardian angel."

Mike grinned, "Are you sure you're all right?" Dillon, Jonah and I cracked up and nodded.

Derrick chuckled, "Let's get the kittens set up in their own special place." All six kittens began complaining about being put into the kitty carriers again. Derrick called, "Alden, transport the five of us and all six kittens to my basement." A second later, we were all sitting on the carpeted floor of the Seiberts' basement.

Mike called, "Alden, get us two litter boxes and enough food and water dishes for our new pets, please, dude?"

Derrick asked the gathered kittens if they had a food preference. They all liked the dry kibble that they had been eating, so Derrick had

Alden get that brand of food, a few warm beds, and various toys and scratching posts for them too.

In one corner of the basement the food dishes were lined up, two large scratch and climbing posts were set up and three soft kitty beds were placed. In the opposite corner, well away from their food and play area, two large covered litter boxes appeared. The kittens scattered to check out their new accommodations.

Standing up with Dillon on his hip, Mike smiled, "Now that the kittens are happy, let's go to the CIC. We've gotta tell Derrick's mom that she's got pets, and get Dillon fed before he withers away."

Mike and Dillon led the way upstairs with Jonah, me and Derrick following. Derrick asked, "What else did you dudes do while you were away?"

I answered, "We took a bus ride to Myrtle Beach. I got to see my old house and neighborhood. Which reminds me, we have buses on order, paid for by the assets of the ex-Prime Minister that was confiscated by Clan Short."

Derrick nodded, "Kewl, we could use them to get kids off base, hopefully soon."

While Mike, Dillon and Jonah went outside, I paused and softly told my dad, "We'll have two hundred buses, forty at each base." Watching Derrick's eyes widen and his mouth drop open, I giggled, "They're not your standard buses either. They're tour buses and have like, first class, plush seating, and a bunch of Clan niceties too."

Leading me out through the open door, Derrick chuckled, "They are paid for, right?"

Nodding, I smirked, "That bastard lived in luxury off money

made from prostituting us kids. That money is now the Clan's, dad."

Derrick laughed, "I'll tell Prez. He'll be thrilled, I'm sure!"

"Those buses can break two-hundred miles-per-hour, dad," I giggled, "I know, because we went that fast, from Myrtle Beach back to Sullivan's Island in under thirty minutes. You guys will need special training to drive them. Contact Danny to get the training lined up."

"Okay," Derrick roared, "I'll gently tell Prez, when he's in a good mood."

Ahead of us, Dillon and Jonah were excitedly rambling, telling Mike about all the food they ate and the fun they had while away.

Thankful that Derrick was taking all this in stride, I giggled, "When we got back to AI headquarters, we had a big dinner. Then we jammed for about another half an hour before coming home. I got to play congas, bongos, a drum kit like yours and an electronic drum kit too. It's been a long day, dad. It was almost three in the morning when we left South Carolina. Peter Lambert transported us home and back in time."

Derrick nodded, "Are you tired?"

"Not in the least, surprisingly," I answered.

"Good," Derrick softly said and slowed his pace considerably. He then whispered, "Joel's father is Admiral Spock, from Starfleet, and we're all now considered nieces and nephews. Prez wants to take advantage of that, while Uncle Spock is here. If everything works out, dinner will end with at least three weddings, possibly as many as five; definitely me and Mike, Prez and Keith, and Drew and Corey, and

possibly Kaleo and Tory and John and Stephen."

"That's awesome!" I cheered.

"I know," Derrick smiled. "Prez said he'd talk with Uncle Spock, so we're not all surrounding him. All we can do is wait, but I want you and your brothers there to witness our marriage."

I happily giggled, "It's been a busy day here too, I guess."

As we walked into the CIC, Derrick told me about the jazz band concert that morning, about the short jam session they had with Troy Faris that afternoon, and a little about the phaser training. Once we were inside, Mike chatted with Prez, so our division leader knew that Dillon, Jonah and I had been given comm-badges while in Charleston. Derrick found his mom and told her about the kittens. Then our family sat down to eat. Jonah asked where John was. Dad told us that John and Stephen had gone with Joel and Kevin for a tour of the Enterprise. Jonah and Dillon were told about the planned weddings too.

Everything got more exciting when John, Stephen, Joel and Kevin returned from their tour. I could barely hear Admiral Kirk explaining what had happened, but I did hear that all four had been promoted in rank and received commendations for their service that day. While chatter around the dining room got louder because of the four heroes in the room, it was obvious that the Hundsers' and Stephen's mom were upset.

Derrick, Mike, Prez and Keith gathered to try and set everything right. The four members of Platinum Habits started singing and dancing to calm the stressed out adults. After two songs, both of which I table-drummed along to, everything seemed to be back to normal. Then the dining room lights went out and three of our chefs

rolled out three large sheet cakes filled with candles for Kaleo. While we were gone, Kaleo's birthday was discovered. I hurried over there to be amongst the first few that congratulated Kaleo. Of course, Kaleo wanted to know all about what had happened while I was gone, but he had the entire Rimmer clan lining up for cake and to offer him birthday wishes. I promised him that I'd get with him, Tory and Liki soon to share all the news.

I had made it back to our table with cake and just finished it when Prez stood and went over toward Uncle Spock. In moments, all the couples and their sons were standing, anxiously waiting to learn if the marriages would or wouldn't happen. When Prez smiled, nodded and waved us over, my excitement quadrupled. I hadn't witnessed a wedding since 1972, when Akamu got married to Hakumele. This ceremony was less formal, but still quite thrilling because it turned out that all five couples were to wed. I almost cracked up laughing during the ceremony because Mike was so happy, he was swinging his and Derrick's arms back and forth in delight. For me, it was so kewl because Kaleo was up there with Tory too. All at once, my dads, our leaders and two of my best friends in the world were promising their eternal love before the entire Pacific Rim Division. The room seemed to explode in loud applause after John and Stephen made their vows. Then we noticed Uncle Spock returning to Keith and Prez. Everyone was turning to me to know what was now happening, but I didn't have a clue until I heard John in my mind, saying, *'It's the Vulcan tel-tor ritual. We're married and getting bonded too.'* I softly spread the news with my brothers, but they already seemed to know, as did all the other kids in the dining room. When Uncle Spock completed the ritual with John and Stephen, everyone began clapping again. Then John levitated all the newlyweds so that everyone could see them kissing. The entire Rimmer Clan, including all the parents and other employed adults stood and applauded.

We were all still clapping our hands when the group of ten lowered to the floor and began thanking Uncle Spock, Aunt Teri, Joel and Kevin. Unfortunately, the latter four needed to leave for Joel's and Kevin's wedding ceremony in the U.K.

Before they left though, Prez made a division-wide announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls; it is our families tradition and therefore a Rimmer tradition to give and receive abundantly. We've received, now it's time to give. It's six-fifty-two Hawaii time. At seven-fifty Hawaii time there will be a concert at the Pacific Rim main base auditorium. We're celebrating our weddings. All who can attend are very welcome. Now, if you'll excuse us, we have less than an hour to get prepared. Alden, if you please, transport the ten of us, our kids, Troy and Sean to the auditorium lobby."

The next thing I knew, I was inside the auditorium. Corey and Drew went to get the place powered up at the circuit breaker panels. "Okay," Prez began, "first things first. Alden, lock the auditorium doors. No one gets in until seven-twenty-five. Next, we all need to be dressed alike."

Mike quickly added, "Loose clothes so we can move around; shiny platinum-colored polo shirts, black pants and black sneakers."

Derrick instructed, "Close the stage curtains too, Alden."

Alden giggled, "I get to change the Rimmers! You're all gonna be naked for second or two."

Patting Drew on the back, Keith said, "Take a short break, bro. You too, Corey." Once everyone was standing still, Keith instructed, "Do it, dude." In an instant, we were standing butt naked. Alden got in a quick sigh and whimper before clothing us all again.

Kaleo asked, "What do you need us to do, Prez?"

Prez said, "I'm thinking you, Tory and Sean can get the concession stand manned. Our kids, John and Stephen, you'll act as ushers. Get everyone seated as quickly as possible. Richie and Dillon, you guys can help just by starting at the front of the aisles. Keep everyone in the center section of seats. As the rows fill up, walk forward so folks know the seats in front of you are filled. When everyone's seated you guys come up on stage and let us know."

Richie giggled, "'Kay, Poppa."

Dillon nodded, "Okay, Unca Prez."

Finished with the power, Drew announced, "We're set, Prez."

"Great," Prez smiled, "get the popcorn poppin' and we'll get a set list together."

Troy reminded, "My gear's at home, Prez."

"Alden!" Prez laughed.

"It's all on the stage waiting now," Alden giggled.

Derrick and Mike hugged and kissed Dillon and Jonah, promising to catch up with them again after the concert. Drew, Corey and Geoff started for the PA room, way above the balcony. Jonah, Dee, Gage and Sammy went with John and Stephen. Derrick took my right hand and Mike took my left, leading me into the auditorium with them. I giggled, "What's goin' on?"

Derrick smiled, "You're with us, on stage." Following us, Richie and Dillon cracked up at my obvious surprise.

Mike nodded, "You've got your memory back and more

experience than the five of us combined."

Several yards ahead of us, walking with Keith, Prez swung around and chuckled, "You're part of the band too, as of now, Reyes."

Keith nodded and loudly said, "This concert is about love. We'll break up the ballads and love songs with a few rockers, but we need to come up with a set list that will teach every kid in the audience what love feels like. As soon as we have a list together, Drew and Corey need to know so we have decent lights and sound to really drive the theme home."

"We need a powerful set list, so nobody in the audience fails to catch our meaning," Prez said. "Let's hear some suggestions, dudes."

Troy offered, "I know the sax part for Billy Joel's 'Just the Way You Are'."

"Excellent," Prez and Keith chorused.

I reminded, "A couple of tunes from Friday night's luau would work; 'Traces', 'Never My Love', 'Precious and Few', come to mind."

Prez asked Keith, "How about 'Lovin' Touchin' Squeezin', babe?"

Keith smiled, "It's a rocker with a very direct message."

Derrick suggested, "'Who Love's You', 'Real Love', and Mike could play and sing 'Imagine'."

We walked up the stage steps and went behind the curtain and continued to bounce song titles around. Everybody came up with excellent ideas and all were accepted as part of the list. The problem boiled down to the opening number and something special for an

encore. Prez had Alden transport a PADD and he started taking notes and arranging the list. The remaining five of us bounced more ideas around.

Troy sighed, "Ya know, when I was sitting out in the audience Monday, I thought all of you played very well, but what made this band really stick out and shine was the vocals; whether you were rockin', playin' the blues or singing ballads. Even this afternoon, the vocals were fantastic. What if we closed A Capella?"

"Go with that, Troy," Keith encouraged.

Troy suggested, "Because, by The Beatles."

Mike smiled, "Awesome, that's one."

Troy giggled, "You're gonna laugh, but how about I Believe?"

"Yeah," Prez softly chuckled.

Derrick scowled, "I don't think I know it."

"Me either," Mike frowned.

Keith smiled, "It's a simple little two verse number, about a minute and a half or so." He went to the piano to play and sing the song with Troy and Prez. Derrick and Mike agreed to the tune, but we still needed the important opener.

Derrick smiled then began evilly chuckling as he walked up onto the drum risers. Simultaneously, my dad hit the large gong and a timpani, and then hit them again. Keith hurried over to his synthesizers and began playing the opening to Fanfare For the Common Man. With that, we were set and Prez sent the set list to Drew and Corey then we started practicing a few tunes. The four Core

Rimmers and core of the band knew so much, Troy and I just went along with it and played our best. There were four songs I would play congas and bongos to, and another two where I would play maracas or tambourine. They tried to get me to sing too, but I was never a great singer and my voice was about twenty-one years out of practice, so I wouldn't sing this time around, but my dad and pop promised to work with me, so that I eventually could add a voice to the band.

Before we knew it, our time was up and we went back stage to a dressing room that none of the Core Rimmers even knew was there, so we could continue to practice a little bit. At seven-fifty, we came out of the room and John called Prez, saying, "We've still got folks filing in, bro. Looks like a lot from the Rapid Response Base and Utah are here; a bunch from the Nevada Desert Division; judging by accents, more than a few from Oceanic Division too."

Prez grinned, "It's Wednesday afternoon there."

"It's thinning out some though," John said, "Give us another ten minutes."

Troy began pacing the small back stage area where we were waiting. Widely smiling, I watched as my dads, Prez and Keith encircled Troy. "I've never played for more than a hundred or so," Troy admitted.

Keith nodded and explained, "We found out last Friday, audience size don't matter."

Mike devilishly grinned, "Sounds like the same ol' story to me." I helplessly cracked up.

Troy blushed and giggled, "Ain't goin' there!"

Derrick chuckled, "Ah, but you so want to, we can tell!"

Prez smiled, "There's some extraordinary rumors about your boyfriend."

Playing along, Keith teased, "Just tell us if the rumors are true."

Troy laughed, "I have no idea what you're all talking about!" but still blushed bright red.

Richie and Dillon came backstage. Richie said, "We're done, Poppa."

Dillon added, "There's still some middle rows way back."

Hugging both boys, Prez smiled, "You guys did an excellent job. Go ahead and find Uncle John and some seats." The two boys hurried back off stage and raced up the aisle. Facing his band mates, Prez said, "All set and together now, dudes?"

Everyone nodded and Troy nervously giggled, "Just hope I stay with ya's through the whole show!"

"Play like you did yesterday and earlier today and we're kewn bro," Mike assured, and then started up the backstage steps.

Prez nodded, "You've got no worries, Troy. It's gonna be great." He then tapped his comm-badge and told Drew, "Let's jam, bro. As soon as you hear the gong and timpani, open the curtains."

"Kewn!" Drew chirped.

Applause began to swell from the audience. From behind his drum kit, Derrick glanced around at his band mates and got thumbs up gestures. Simultaneously, he hit the gong and one of the timpani, beginning 'Fanfare for the Common Man'. The curtains began to open.

Lights flashed above and behind Derrick as he hit the gong and timpani eight more times. Even from back stage, shivers raced up my spine as Keith played the opening horn parts on his synthesizer and Derrick sat at his kit. Troy, Prez and Mike came in then Derrick started pounding his drums. Beginning with a bass shuffle, the band took off like they had played the song dozens of times before. In those first few minutes, watching Troy play the Hammond Organ and then run out to center stage playing his tenor sax, I realized this new dude was every bit as good as the rest of the band. I had my work cut out for me to keep up with this group.

I tried to peer out far enough to see the audience. Beyond all the flashing stage lights, I didn't see much, but what I could see were many smiling faces. We wanted a dramatic opening number to get everyone's attention and my dad found it. The crowd enthusiastically applauded and cheered at the end of the song.

Just as spellbound as any one else, I watched and listened to Platinum Habits playing 'Lovin', 'Touchin', 'Squeezin', and 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps'. I played tambourine during 'The Story In Your Eyes', then stepped back stage again. Beginning the first section of pure ballads, the band continued with 'I Need You', 'Every Breath You Take', 'Just The Way You Are', 'Count On Me', 'Traces', 'It's Only Love', 'Can't You Hear My Heartbeat' and 'If'. Derrick came offstage for the latter tune and called Alden for a towel to wipe sweat off his face. Knowing he needed it, I got my dad a cold bottle of water too. I went back on stage again to play congas and bongos during 'You've Got A Friend'. The band wrapped up this section of ballads with the songs 'Without You' and 'If You Could Read My Mind'. Prez's baritone voice was perfect for the latter song; it was as good as the original recording.

All the stage lights went out and they moved around the stage,

preparing for Corey's wake up call at the start of 'What Is Life'. After all those ballads and soft lights, so many bright lights flooded the right side of the stage that many in the audience fell back into their seats. Covering my mouth with both hands, I cracked up. I had barely controlled myself when I stepped back on stage to play congas and bongos for 'Samba Pa Ti' and 'Just Remember I Love You'. Surprising me, when the latter song was completed, Derrick proudly said; "On bongos and congas, my son, Reyes Taraschke." Smiling warmly at my dad, I waved at the audience then went off stage. It was then that I realized how sweaty and tired I had become. Playing jazz on stage wasn't like this in the 50's and 60's; there were so many more lights, I couldn't help feeling warm. Derrick had to be just as hot and tired, but he didn't show it. I had Alden get me a towel and cold bottle of water. Completing this mini-set, the band played 'Who Loves You', 'Real Love', 'As Long As You Love Me', 'Time of the Season' and 'Easy'.

The band played their final mini-set of ballads consisting of 'Precious and Few', 'Truly, Madly, Deeply', 'Never My Love', 'How Can I Be Sure', 'Your Song', 'Don't Worry Baby', 'I Can't Tell You Why', 'Imagine', 'Unchained Melody' and 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'. Derrick came down off the drum risers and waved me out to join the band. The entire audience were on their feet, applauding and cheering. Gathered center stage, we all held hands and bowed. The curtains closed, but the audience seemed to get louder and called for an encore. I quickly hugged my dad and pop then went off stage to watch them perform the two encore songs, 'Because' and 'I Believe'. The concert lasted two hours and twenty-two minutes.

At the start of the final ovation, while the curtains closed, I heard John calling, '*Reyes, come on, bro, meet us in the dining room for the reception, dude.*' I tapped my comm-badge and had Alden transport me there. My brothers and all the Core Rimmers' sons were there. John ordered Alden to get five wedding cakes. Little by little,

the adults, our Clan and some of the guests came inside. I got to tell Kaleo, Tory and Liki a lot of what had happened while I was in South Carolina. When the four Core Rimmers entered, they got another ovation and more hugs and kisses as they passed through the dining room. All the newlywed couples went to the cakes. Each couple carved into a cake then fed their partner a piece of cake. Loud laughter broke loose as each of the ten of them smashed pieces of cake into their partner's face.

Dripping with icing, they went towards the men's room to clean up. The reception continued and I roared laughing at Dillon who ate two pieces of wedding cake! After a while, it became clear that the newlyweds would not be returning to the party. The Rimmer parents gathered the youngest kids to take home. As soon as Dillon finished stuffing his face, I took him and Jonah to the Hundsers' basement to join the nest. Jonah and Dillon decided they wanted the kittens to join the nest. Jonah had all six transported to the Hundsers' basement.

Now that the day is done, I figure it lasted about nineteen hours for Jonah and Dillon. I started writing this edition of my log a little after eleven and it's almost three in the morning now. My day has been twenty-three hours long. The Scooby gang just came in for the night and told me that they had been at the wedding concert too and had never seen anything like the spinning mirrored ball used by Corey. Wondering where my dads were, I tapped my comm-badge to check with Alden, asking if they were at the townhouses still. They had more street kids to pick up and get settled. I guess I'll call it an end to an exceptionally busy day and join my brothers in the nest too.

Charles just came up to me with a catnip mouse in his mouth. I heard him purr "Cuddle time, now. I need sleep and you are my pillow."

I guess that makes it official. I'm going to take my kitten to the

nest and get some sleep.

"Silly boy. Pet humans can be so vain."

Chapter 7

Ewa Beach, Oahu C.S.P.R.D Main Base

Wednesday, November 3, 05:07 AM HTZ

Reyes woke in the nest, disturbing his kitten, Charles. Perched on Reyes' belly, Charles meowed, "What's wrong?"

"I had a dream," Reyes whispered. "Noah noticed something about our eyes yesterday. I just realized that Ryan moves his eyes more like a human."

Standing and stretching, Charles confirmed, "You have to take care of this now, don't you?"

Reyes nodded, "Yeah, I really should."

Scampering off of Reyes, Charles padded away from the nest, to the other side of the Hundasers' basement. Carefully getting up, so he wouldn't disturb his brothers or dads, Reyes followed his kitten. Jumping up onto the arm of the sofa, Charles meowed, "Daileass, my pet needs to call AI Division headquarters."

Speaking in cat, Daileass softly chortled, "So naturally, you needed to call me for Reyes."

Charles yawned, "I'll never get him back to bed otherwise."

Reyes whispered, "Set up a video conference with Jerry Owens, please, Daileass."

Setting up the connection to the Owens' residence, Daileass silently sniggered to himself, "I really have to check my sanity

circuitry. Now I'm taking orders from Rimmer kittens."

The video screen on the wall activated, showing an empty room, a doorway and a curtain covered window in the distance. A moment later, a raccoon crawled up a chair, squeaking and clicking, "Hello? This is Lil. Who are you?"

Reyes grinned, "Hi Lil, I'm Reyes. Is Jerry available?"

"He's sleeping," Lil replied in raccoon.

Charles bitched, "She's got thumbs! How come she's got thumbs?"

Reyes asked, "Could you wake him, please, Lil? I have something important to talk with him about."

Lil answered, "I can try. He's not very bright and cheery when woken up," and then jumped down, out of the camera's view.

A few moments later, Reyes and Charles heard Jerry, sleepily asking, "What, Lil?" After a few more raccoon clicks and squeaks, Jerry sighed, "All right." The sound of rustling sheets and blankets were heard. Stumbling into view, completely naked, causing Charles to cover his eyes with his forepaws, Jerry flopped into the chair and yawned, "What's up, Reyes?"

Reyes smiled, "I'm sorry to wake you, Jerry."

Waving off the apology, Jerry muttered, "It's after eleven in the morning here. Normally, I would've been awake hours ago, but we had so much fun at Myrtle Beach last night, I guess I needed a little more rest than usual."

"We did have a great time," Reyes smiled.

With his forepaws still covering his eyes, Charles complained, "Both of you sitting around chatting in the buff. Can we get on with it, please?"

Jerry giggled, "I'm sitting now, Charles. You can only see from the belly up."

Uncovering his eyes, Charles grumbled, "Why human boys show off like they do..." He then proceeded to raise a leg in the air and lick himself. Charles noticed everyone looking at him and innocently asked, "What?" while purring loudly.

"Anyway," Reyes chuckled, "I realized something in my dreams and I needed to share it with you, Jerry. Remember Noah saying that he could tell who was an android by eye movement, and then me worrying about prejudices, asking Marc to correct that flaw so we weren't so easily recognized?"

Jerry nodded, "Yup, I remember. Noticing stuff like that isn't such a big deal, Reyes."

"I realize that now," Reyes smiled, "but later I realized that Ryan has somehow altered his eye movements. He's already got the modifications in place to control his eyes like any human would."

Opening his own eyes much wider, Jerry muttered, "If we could get those routines... maybe from the satellite uplink capability..." Jerry paused and sighed, "Paul would have a fit if he knew we accessed Ryan that way."

Reyes nodded and offered, "It's not life or death, Jerry. We don't have to rush anything. As a matter of fact, if Paul learned you had the ability to connect to Ryan via satellite, but haven't in all the time they've been there..."

"It might help him build trust," Jerry finished the thought.

"Exactly," Reyes smiled.

Jerry thought aloud, "A conversation with Danny or Marc, about the satellite link, in front of Paul, would initiate a confrontation."

Reyes added, "Knowing that you guys could connect to us from satellite, but never do without the android's permission, would make a big impact on Paul. You could even find an excuse to do an uplink to me. I'd realize it was happening..."

"And so would Paul, if we did it to him, and so would Ryan," Jerry happily gushed, but then Jerry got a concerned look on his face. "Wait! Ryan won't accept that he is not a hundred percent human. I don't think we could tell him we were doing it. This isn't going to be easy." He finished with a sigh.

Reyes reminded, "Ryan and Paul are in a safe environment right now. There's absolutely no reason to rush into anything. For now, just make them aware that satellite uplink is possible. Every day that goes by where it's not used is another reason to trust you guys. Then you contact me, say with a code update or something, and we let them witness the actual uplink."

"Yes, that will work for Paul, I think. Actions speak much louder than words with him," Jerry said, then paused with a thoughtful look on his face. "With Ryan though... There is no way to discuss doing it to him that won't set him off, like the hospital did, when they insisted that he was an android and not human. In his head he is human, going by what I have gotten from Paul, and what I have seen over the last week as I have watched him. But it should do us some good to let both of them witness a discussion about your uplink. Then we can disconnect it for you as well. If Paul trusts us, then we might be able

to do it. Paul would have to be included in the whole process. That way he could see for himself that we are not trying anything off." Jerry's face took on a look of concentration; his expressions mimicking the thoughts in his head as he played out possibilities.

Having a thought, Reyes carefully interrupted, "Jerry?" When Jerry looked up into the camera again, Reyes smiled, "We're human boys with positronic brains. Let me take care of getting them to understand that. I'd also like to remind you of last night's go-cart race. Danny and KC were in the lead; Marc and I were right behind them, with you, Paul and Ryan grouped together behind me. In unfamiliar situations, Ryan's looking for examples of what human boys do and how they act. I noticed something else last night, during the race on the beach; Paul and Ryan were on the dune, racing well ahead of Jonah, Dillon and Hunter. They were already proving that they were a bit more than human, Jerry."

"Well, Paul knows he is an android," Jerry reminded, "but you can't tell Ryan that he is anything except one hundred percent human. Also, Paul will never refer to Ryan as anything other than completely human. He's been that way since their family died about twenty years ago. Paul will not let anyone tell his brother that something about him is not entirely human, and I think he's right. If Ryan thinks he is human, so what. It doesn't hurt anything or anyone; however, incidents like the hospital are potentially bad. I think it is a really bad idea to discuss it with Ryan at all. My understanding of what is going on with Ryan is far from complete, but I believe it is the same as a delusional disorder.

"There are six key things to this type of condition," Jerry explained. "One, it is a primary disorder. Two, it is a stable disorder characterized by the presence of delusions to which the patient clings with extraordinary tenacity. Three, the illness is chronic and

frequently lifelong. Four, the delusions are logically constructed and internally consistent. Five, the delusions do not interfere with general logical reasoning, although within the delusional system the logic is perverted, and there is usually no general disturbance of behavior. If disturbed behavior does occur, it is directly related to the delusional beliefs. Six, the individual experiences a heightened sense of self-reference. Events which, to others, are insignificant, are of enormous significance to him or her, and the atmosphere surrounding the delusions is highly charged.

"I think confronting him on this delusion would be damaging to him, and Paul will not allow it anyway."

"Okay," Reyes sighed, "I guess I misunderstood your intention last night. I thought you wanted to deal with both, Ryan's insistence and Paul's protectiveness."

"You know, last Friday morning, I had thirty orphanage brothers and sisters, but I was only close to four of them; Jonah, Kaleo, Tory and Liki. By Friday night, I had eighty-seven Clan brothers and sisters. I felt an attachment to Derrick and Mike that night, where I considered them more than friends, I wanted them as father figures. I didn't understand why until Austin fixed my memories Monday night."

"I still don't understand why, but I feel the same sort of attachment with Paul and Ryan. Last night I asked myself which brother was helping more – Ryan being the jubilant kid, or Paul being the protector. They help each other constantly, just in almost opposite ways. Still, I feel something strongly for them. I must, or I wouldn't have had a dream about them that woke me up."

Reyes shrugged and meekly offered, "We've evolved, Jerry. Marc didn't think he had accomplished his goal of making a more human-like android, but he has. Look at Austin, he's telepathic. I'm

empathic. Ryan has developed another set of modifications on his own too. It's not an impediment, it's an advancement." A figure moved beyond Jerry, back by the door into the room, Reyes observed.

Jerry offered, "Don't get me wrong, Reyes. I think your idea is fantastic, because we could get a better understanding of what has happened to Ryan, and it would give us a chance to make sure there was nothing damaging going on in Ryan's hardware. However, Paul keeps saying that there is nothing wrong with Ryan, and changing who he sees himself as would change who he is on every level, and he wouldn't be Ryan anymore. I think he's right about that. We need to think about what is best for Ryan. Not what is easiest, or would make him what others think he should be. It is not a simple thing, but I want you to know something..."

Noticing Paul standing in the bedroom doorway, but behind Jerry, Reyes gestured for Jerry to go on.

"In the week they have been here, I have never seen them open up to anyone like you. Paul never talks to anyone for more than enough time to tell them to fuck off, and then he simply won't talk to them anymore. You have done more for them in just a meeting than anyone else I have seen. Paul trusts you more than he does me. I could see it in the way he acted with you."

Jerry appeared almost sad too, when he said the last part. "I am their brother now. I may seem overprotective, but I want what's best for them."

"So do I," Reyes assured. He then suggested, "Maybe it would be best if everyone backed off. There's nothing about either of them I would dare change, and I sure don't want JJ pointing one of his temper tantrums at me. In the meantime, I asked Paul and Ryan to visit me here. I've got two great new friends. Keeping them friends

just got a whole lot easier." Since Paul wasn't entering Jerry's room, Reyes pointed to let Jerry know that their conversation hadn't been private for a few minutes.

Jerry turned his head, calling, "Hey, big bro. If you wanna join in, come on over."

Paul looked like a deer caught in headlights. He just stood there and sputtered for a few moments before moving into the room. "Okay, Jerry. Tell me more about this uplink thing. I don't think I like it much. I mean someone can just access my brain without me knowing it. Fuck." Reyes watched as Paul began to cry.

Jerry frowned as he turned to Paul. "I don't like it either, bro; in fact I've been disabling it any time I do an update to our family. It's a leftover from when they developed Marc, and Vision left it online as a safety in case an AI went nuts. We've got a better way now; we'll just pull the AI out and bring them here if they're having a breakdown. The only interface unit remaining from Vision is here, and only Marc, Danny, or me can access it; but that don't mean someone hasn't figured out how to build one for themselves. Marc hates the thing; he remembers how they screwed with him when he was new, and refuses to let it be used unless all three of us are in agreement that there is no other way; something like the dataport being fried or other things like that. With my new program, either the AI has to turn it on consciously, or if they are offline then at least two of us have to be present for an override. The override won't work unless the AI is in a complete main processor shutdown, though."

"Remote access without your approval might have been true for Vision, but it ain't anymore." Jerry replied as he stood up and held his arms out for Paul. "You're just as human as me; and I'm not the only one who thinks that. In fact, Cory believes it and runs the Clan accordingly. Also, Ambassador Sarek has spoken for Vulcan and has

declared that you have the same rights as me."

Reyes nervously watched as Paul got himself together and put his arms tentatively around Jerry. "Maybe you guys... well, I think you guys are different," Paul muttered, "but I spent the last twenty years on the streets. Most people think of androids as things, and you know it. If you guys can do it then someone else probably can. How many androids have had their heads fucked up because of this? I had to be... I had to defend us against... They always turned on us when they found out. I mean all this time someone could have totally messed with our heads. What the Fuck!"

Jerry leaned into the hug. "I promise you that the number has been zero since the day that Vision closed it's doors. Marc has had control of the sat-link since that day, and his word, along with the amount of dust on it, proves it hasn't been used since that day. The Clan gets pretty violent when you screw with a person's head unless the person gives permission to do it."

Loudly, Paul exclaimed, "How can you know for sure that someone doesn't know about it, and has been messing with androids minds for God knows how fuckin' long?"

Sitting on the sofa in the Hundserts' basement, Reyes shed quiet tears. Charles poured on the kitty-charm, trying to calm his human. Reyes cuddled Charles, silently hoping that he hadn't messed up by making this early morning call.

Facing the monitor and camera in Jerry's room, Paul's rage suddenly deflated significantly. He wondered aloud, "Reyes, are you crying?"

Sniffling and nodding, Reyes moaned, "I'm sorry, Paul. I shouldn't have called..."

"Oh yes, you should," Paul contradicted. "Thanks to you, I know about the existence of the sat-link, and that it's not been used in a long time. Fucking bastards gotta control every little thing. I also heard you describe Ryan as evolved, that he is fine as he is, so much so that whatever modifications he's made to his programming, it's worth identifying and saving, maybe to use in other androids. Not that I'll ever let that happen unless Ryan agrees, and that likely won't happen. The fact is, you called it a positive change, not a bad one, like so many have implied... Hell! Have insisted, over the last twenty years."

Reyes only shrugged indifferently. Paul grinned, but it came across more like a grimace, "Ya know, I woke because I faintly heard your voice. Since I wasn't sure, I had to find out." Reyes wiped the last of his tears away and smiled. Paul glanced at Jerry then back into the camera, seemingly wanting to say something more, but not in front of Jerry. Paul giggled and blushed, causing Reyes to do the same.

Jerry chuckled, "Okay you two, break it up for now. Paul, we've slept about eight hours. Reyes, how much sleep have you had?"

"About two-and-a-half hours," Reyes estimated.

"Then you need to go back to bed," Jerry suggested. He told Paul, "I'll get a camera and monitor installed in yours and Ryan's bedroom, bro. You can talk with Reyes later."

"Yeah," Paul stammered, "umm... that would be good."

Jerry giggled, "Use your comm-badges until then."

"Kewl," Paul and Reyes simultaneously responded.

Paul smiled, "We'll chat later, Reyes."

"I'll probably be awake again in three hours or so," Reyes offered, and then blushed, realizing he was pushing for that call sooner rather than later.

On Sullivan's Island, South Carolina, Jerry and Paul began giggling. They both said goodnight to Reyes, and Reyes said good morning back to them. The three of them began arguing about who would hang up first. Walking away from the camera, Jerry howled laughing, "I'm gonna take a shower. Hopefully you'll hang up the call by the time I'm done."

For another minute or so, Paul told Reyes to disconnect, but Reyes playfully instructed, "After you." Paul wondered where the call-hangup button was and they both began giggling. Settling on disconnecting at the count of three, they eventually ended the call.

Charles griped, "Can we go back to bed now?"

Still giggling, Reyes nodded and picked up his kitten then went back to the nest.

* * * * *

Wednesday, November 3, 07:50 AM HTZ

At the Rimmer family homes, the little kids had already woken up. The Hundserts had fed their kids and grandkids breakfast. Cesar and Felipe brought their friends, Murakami and Shimizu, home to the Seavers' for breakfast. Dillon, Jonah and Reyes went to the Seiberts' with Benjamin, Randy, Latoya, Lindsay, Christel and Brandi for their morning meal.

While the adults were away from the tables, getting showered

and ready for the day, serious conversations were had at the Seavers' and the Seiberts'. Cesar and Felipe wanted Murakami and Shimizu as brothers, and the latter two shared the same wish. All Murakami and Shimizu had to do was tell the Seavers that this was the home and they were the parents they wanted. At the Seiberts', Reyes and Jonah were telling the others that it was time to make separate nests and become part of one family unit. Now that the Core Rimmers were married, that night would be the best time to make the change. Once everyone agreed, Reyes promised that, as the eldest, he would share the plan with Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick.

Shafts of sunlight through the window blinds and the sounds of his mom preparing for work woke Troy Faris. With his eyes still closed, he remembered the previous night. After a great dinner with Sean and his mother, he and Sean had gone to the CIC dining room looking for Prez and the other band members. Much to their surprise, all the Core Rimmers were getting married. For a short while it seemed there would be no band practice and he could spend the entire night with his new boyfriend. But Prez had other ideas. A little more than an hour later, Platinum Habits was playing before a really large audience. Troy remembered every song and how he moved from keyboards to saxophone to guitar and back again, providing lead and backup vocals. They even closed the show with a short song he had recommended and Prez enthusiastically approved. The next thing Troy knew, he was alone with Sean in the dorm.

By the time Troy met Sean in the dorm room, Sean was almost spastic, he was so emotionally excited. The prior Friday night, Sean had seen Old Habits perform and he expected a rock concert, like that one had been. This time though, Platinum Habits played only a few rockers to break up the love songs and ballads. Troy told Sean that, "every song was selected to teach all the kids what love truly meant, from the smallest thrill to the saddest shared moments." Agreeing that

they had accomplished the goal, Sean said the concert was nothing short of incredible from the first drum beats to the last words of the last song. After a brief conversation, the Tiger was ready to play. For about an hour they orally made love. But Troy really wanted Sean to come home with him and spend the night at the condo. About quarter to one in the morning, they walked into the apartment. Judy Faris was relaxing at home in her bed when they walked in. Troy touched base with her, to let her know that he was home and Sean was spending the night. The two boys then went to the opposite end of the apartment, to Troy's room. Troy opened the sliding glass door in his room then went outside onto the balcony with Sean to show him the CIC and how the base appeared all lit up at night. Sean thought the entire base was beautiful. They spent many minutes softly chatting out on the balcony. By the time they went back inside, the television in Judy Faris' bedroom was off and she was asleep, allowing Troy and Sean to make love again, this time with the dildo, before snuggling close and succumbing to slumber themselves.

The front door closed, letting Troy know his mom was gone. On top of the world, Troy rolled over and opened his eyes. At last, he was sharing his bed with another teen boy; and not just any teenager, a remarkably humble and compassionate one that just so happened to be cute and cuddly. Sean was still asleep though. Not knowing what to do, Troy considered letting him sleep, but then thought he could wake him up slowly so they could make love again before starting their second day together. Troy realized it hadn't even been a day since Sean rang the doorbell. Now he couldn't imagine spending a day without him.

The only thing Troy recognized that made him different from Sean and his band mates was the vocabulary they used. Troy was a Jersey boy and sounded like one. Prez was from Texas and had a mixed vocabulary; sometimes he was obviously a Southern boy, but

other times his vernaculars varied. All five of them used the word 'awesome' a lot. Even by the pool, Troy heard a lot of other kids using that word. A minute didn't pass without someone saying 'awesome'. Briefly wondering if he should use the word more often, Sean stirred and reached an arm out for him.

With his eyelids still fluttering, Sean softly smiled and croaked, "Hey."

"Good mornin', Tiger."

Grinning and opening his eyes, Sean warned, "Don't call me that unless you want more lovin'." Troy chuckled and considered saying something, but instead just reached over for a kiss. Sean pulled Troy over on top of him. Giggling into their kiss, they began grinding against each other.

Troy pulled back and grinned, "Now that you've seen the CIC all lit up at night, what do you think?"

"I think you've got the best view," Sean slyly answered.

Tilting his head, Troy suspiciously leered, "*I've* got the best view?"

"On top!" Sean giggled. He then wondered, "Is your mom still home?"

Troy shook his head and answered, "She left about five or ten minutes before you woke up." Sean suddenly spread his legs and Troy partly collapsed between them.

While Troy uncontrollably cackled, Sean lifted his legs and wrapped them around Troy's ass. He smiled, "You've got my heart,

mind and dick. There's only one thing left for you to have."

Sean wanted it last night too, Troy recalled. Smiling down at his boyfriend, Troy brushed Sean's hair aside and softly shushed him then softly said, "Soon Tiger, but not now, okay?"

Disappointed, Sean seriously groaned, "Why not?"

"Because this play time is just as special," Troy honestly answered. "I'm not the kind that wants only sex from you. What I want is waking up with you, brushing our teeth, showering and having breakfast together."

"That sounds really good, but I can tell you want to."

"It's only mornin' wood," Troy shared. "After seven times yesterday, I can honestly wait for a more special time. Remember, I know your past. I don't want even the smallest part of me believing that I'm fucking you. It's gonna be intercourse, you and me as close as we can be, physically and emotionally."

"You're so awesome," Sean sighed, and then smiled, "No one's ever called it intercourse before. I love that word. It's so much better than banging, boinking, screwing or fucking."

"And that's the way it's gotta be, Tiger; for both of us. We can keep each other perfectly satisfied without making that final move until we're both ready." Sean nodded so Troy lay back down on him and whispered, "My dream has always been to flip-flop; you do me, then I do you. It's gonna be so much more than orgasms. My job is to get your thoughts corrected from the scumbags that literally fucked you over. Your job is to get me physically ready. The goal we're after is for it to be beautiful, not just an act. In the meantime, we keep the tigers tamed."

Sean shuddered, "I love you so much!"

Finger-combing his boyfriend's hair, Troy warmly smiled, "I love you very much too, Sean."

At eight-forty-five, the Core Rimmers were awakened by Alden, as had been arranged. However, instead of playing any old classic rock tunes, Alden surprised them with audio from their concert. At first, the sleepy Rimmers thought they were listening to a live recording of Emerson, Lake and Palmer. Feet started moving around the nest. Not until Troy's sax part played did they realize what they were hearing.

Jumping up in their birthday suits, Mike and Derrick hollered, "Holy shit!"

Prez smiled, "Crank it, Alden." A second later, the sound was blasting out of all the basement ceiling speakers.

Mike gasped, "Fuck! We sound good."

Drew croaked, "Duh!" and Corey cracked up.

Derrick smiled and nodded then asked, "Alden, when can we each have copies of the concert?"

Into all the Core Rimmers' sub-vocals, Alden giggled, "There's a wave file copy on each of your computers."

Drew offered, "I'll run it through some software and check the mix."

Alden said, "You and Corey have all the original tracks direct from the board to mix as you like, Drew."

John and Stephen said nothing. Holding their kiss they floated

about three feet above their places in the nest.

Nathan stretched and loudly said, "You guys melted hearts last night."

Jacob agreed, "Between the marriages and the concert, yeah."

Jamie added, "Things have definitely changed around here."

In triplicate, the boys sang, "They're a real Clan division now."

Breaking his kiss with Stephen, John grinned, "Something's changing tonight too."

At once, Jacob, Jamie, Beau and Nathan loudly shushed John.

Beau giggled, "That was supposed to be a surprise!"

"No it's not," John sniggered. "They're all planning on sharing during breakfast."

The basement door opened and the kids that had been upstairs came downstairs. Geoff, Gage, Sammy, Dee and Richie went directly to their dads. Geoff weaseled his way between Corey and Drew. Seeing damp hair, Prez smiled, "You guys showered already?"

Richie nodded, "Me and Dee."

"Me and Geoff in another tub," Gage added. "Sammy, Kokaku and Dewi in the other one."

Rapidly nodding and reaching for Sammy's and Dewi's hands, Kokaku told his big brothers, "Sammy says when we wash, we're showing how much we like each other."

Dewi giggled, "Sammy was washed by me and Kokaku, as far

we could reach, anyways."

Sammy smiled, "I had to sit on the tub rim so they could wash my hair. And no funny business, right, dudes?"

Dewi and Kokaku proudly recited, "Brothers and uncles wash only; gotta be in love to play with willies."

Richie gushed, "And it was even nicer that way."

Dee giggled, "Poppa told us, hugs count more, so we gave away hugs too, all of us, before, during and again after we was done."

Starting to get dressed, with Jacob and Beau, Jamie sniggered, "Timmy's tribe, Ewa Beach branch."

"You guys are watchin' out for each other. Excellent!" Keith cheered, and then reached up and pulled down the two closest boys, Gage and Sammy. He kissed each of his sons and whispered, "I'm so proud of you."

Dee and Richie took Prez's hands to try and pull him up. Letting himself be dragged, Prez helplessly chuckled. Richie giggled, "C'mon, Poppa! Ya gots another concert at school today."

Slipping into the pants he wore the previous night, Mike wondered, "Where are our boys?"

As Derrick dressed, Dee answered, "At Derrick's house, havin' breakfast."

"And plotting and scheming," John teased.

Derrick huffed then grinned at Mike; "We'd better check."

Mike confirmed, "Breakfast at the CIC?"

Keith nodded, "We'll meet you there." He then stretched and yawned, "Let's get motivated." Soon everybody was on the move and getting dressed except John and Stephen. "What's the holdup, bro?" Keith wondered.

John sniggered, "We don't have to go to school."

"Not your school anyway," Stephen giggled.

"We'll meet you at the CIC," John laughed. "I'm feeling that some of our new kids want their own Teddy bears too." As his brothers and the kids walked up the stairs, John got more serious, and sent to Stephen, *'The first thing we have to do is get you a suit, baby. I want you to come with me to the Downings' funeral.'*

Stephen sighed, "I'm really not looking forward to this."

"I know," John softly said, and then planted a quick kiss. "I need you there," John explained. "You can help me keep Bruce and everybody from getting too sad."

Checking to see that they were alone, Stephen happily confirmed, "You saved all those people just to spend another day with me?" John nodded and smiled. Stephen giggled, "We're married! I can't believe it!"

"Believe it," John nodded. Then he telekinetically lifted Stephen up off him. While Stephen hovered horizontally and giggled, John stood. He grinned then guided his floating and hysterical husband up the stairs.

Stephen loudly cackled, "Where are we going?"

"To the first available shower," John giggled. "Then I'll put you down, take your clothes off and wash you, with my own two itty-bitty hands."

"I get to wash you too!" Stephen howled.

Humming affirmatively, John opened the door and teased, "Then we'll make lots o' soapy suds."

Stephen playfully screamed, "You're evil!"

In the first upstairs bathroom, Keith and Prez were brushing their teeth when they heard Stephen laughing his little butt off. Looking out the open bathroom door, they saw Stephen float by then John waved as he walked past. Prez shook his head, spit out the toothpaste and told Keith, "All Hundser men are perfectly wicked. None of us ever had a chance."

After spitting and rinsing his mouth out, Keith gleamed, "It's too late for complaints. Besides, I can't feel my brothers, but I can feel you, you sex machine!"

Prez whimpered then giggled and pushed the door closed.

Daileass sighed, "I love mornings. Six couples going for it simultaneously in three different houses. I think I love Hawaii." He then complained, "Storage space! I need more storage space!"

"You are a perv, Dailly," Draco muttered with what could only be described as a virtual roll of his digitized eyes.

"Thank you! Yes, I am a perv. Now, get back to cataloging my processors. With all the sex going on, I want some loving too."

"Mmmm.... processors!"

Alden groaned, "Eww!" and closed the channel.

Finishing in the shower, Prez shared, "I had a weird dream last night. It was as if I was watching creation, from the proverbial Big Bang right through the development of civilizations to the present."

Turning off the water, Keith turned and smiled, "That sounds intense."

"It was," Prez admitted, and handed a towel to Keith before grabbing one for himself. While they began drying off, Prez explained, "What made it seem so odd was that it *was* destiny; that one thing had to lead to the next and the next, right through all time. And it all led to the world around us. Meeting you when I moved here from Texas; coincidence or destiny? My parents dying so we could wind up living together and fall in love; coincidence or destiny? Finding Bruce last Friday; coincidence or destiny? Everything that happened before this very moment; was it coincidence or destiny?"

Toweling off, Keith nodded, "That's pretty deep, baby. But it does ring more like destiny than coincidence. My dream was strange too. I kept seeing connections, like fibers between me and everyone I know and love around me. I remember dreaming of my dad helping me with homework a long time ago. He was giving to me and I was giving something back to him. They were like brightly colored electronic filaments. You and I made love in the dream too. Together we lit up the whole room. In every scene of the dream, whether it was me with one other person, or with a bunch of people, I kept seeing those connections. They were powerful and good. Then I'd see other people outside our circle of friends and family. The connections were still there, but didn't feel good; they felt more like I was being controlled or forced. In each of those cases, it was bad, as if the feeling was making me feel weak or dizzy."

Their towels were stuffed into the laundry chute. They padded naked into their bedroom to get dressed. Prez said, "That sounds like the difference between giving and receiving abundantly versus always taking and never giving anything back, or wanting to give back, for that matter." After a brief pause, Prez wondered, "Maybe it's more like controllers, ya know? Like people that only want to control other people? They force their points of view to the extreme where people back off and don't want anything to do with it, or them."

From the dresser, Keith grabbed a pair of boxers and tossed them to Prez. Grabbing another pair for himself, Keith pulled them up saying, "And your dream was more like a feeling of being in sync with the world."

At the closet, Prez pulled a Yes *Fragile* T-shirt over his head and hummed agreement. "Which T-shirt do you want, babe?"

Pulling clean board shorts out of the dresser, Keith replied, "If the blue *Asia* one is in there, that one." Prez crossed the room with Keith's T-shirt. Keith was holding in one hand a pair of boardies out for Prez to put on, and in his other hand, a pair for himself. Before Keith was ready for it, Prez slid his free hand down the front of Keith's boxers and began fondling his husband's goods. Laughing hysterically, Keith tossed the shorts on the bed and asked, "You want something more, sex machine?"

Prez nodded and smiled, "Next time, it's my turn. Don't you dare believe that I'm gonna be a top only from now on."

Keith giggled, "Like I might disagree while you're cuppin' my dick and nads!"

Prez smirked, "I'll just have to go for a ride next time then," and then released his husband's privates.

Wrapping Prez in his arms, Keith whispered, "I love you, baby."

Prez stole a deep kiss then assured, "I love you too, babe."

As they were leaving the room, they stopped dead in their tracks, for from the direction of the dresser, they heard a silvery, light, musical laugh. It hinted at something they thought they once knew, as if remembering a dream. Then it was gone. Each raising an eyebrow like Uncle Spock, they glanced at each other, but neither said a word.

At the FYS building, interviews were in progress. First on Jennifer Hundser's list was Mrs. Tamara Hekekia. Before she wasted any time, Jen had asked Jamie, Jacob and Beau to perform deep scans on Tamara the prior afternoon. The Terrible Trio gave their Aunt Jen a dump of what they read and thumbs-up gestures. Jen thanked them individually then processed what she had learned overnight.

"My sincerest apologies, Tamara," Jennifer began. "The boys told me most of what I needed to know. Your only crime is one of poor judgment. In this office, no one will ever make you choose between what is morally right and keeping your job. Both those things go hand-in-hand here. There are no ifs, ands or buts; the children choose their foster parents *after* we have assured the adults are acceptable foster parents." Pausing briefly, Jennifer smiled, "So please, tell me how you feel after this past weekend's... events."

Tamara began, "It may sound odd, but truthfully, I've never been more at peace with myself, since meeting Lieutenant Ra'Vesti. When my husband and I got home from a late dinner Friday night, we both saw what happened to the Prime Minister on TV. Learning that our own government was the root cause of all the CPS problems was a relief. I called in sick Monday rather than go into what I was certain was a dead office. Then I saw Preston with the King on TV Monday

night. I knew that my strong suspicions were justified."

Jennifer nodded, "Preston is not the same quiet and shy boy that moved to Hawaii seven years ago. There are eight boys running this division. Four are my sons, three are close personal friends of my family and the last, remarkably enough, is one of the boys rescued from an orphanage Friday. I couldn't be prouder of them all." She then leaned back in her chair asking, "Is there anything you would like to know about Federation Youth Services or Clan Short?"

Tamara nodded and softly asked, "What is going on with the animals here; specifically the gorillas and cat people?"

Unable to help herself, Jennifer grinned, "They're genetic enhancements. All of them are part of the security force protecting this base and the people here." Becoming serious again, Jennifer said, "What you referred to as 'cat people' are G-Cats. You might even run across a few chimps and ferrets on occasion. If ever you feel the slightest bit uncomfortable going to a prospective foster home, all you have to do is ask and you'll have a security team with you."

"That's good to know," Tamara smirked. "There have been times where I've felt very uncomfortable at some homes."

At the CIC kitchen chow line, the Rimmers were arriving and lining up for their breakfast shakes. Derrick came in with his sons. Mike followed them in wearing his Shiny Priest robe. Naturally, almost everyone in line grinned, chuckled or completely busted up laughing. Immediately upon getting in line, Reyes thoughtfully scowled at the ceiling.

Keith chuckled, "Your Holy Shininess! Please tell me you're not wearing that to school."

Mike smirked, "Dull one, you shall be punished for your lack of

Shiny respect."

"Yeah! You tell 'em, Shiny Daddy!" Four voices yelled down from the air conditioning vent.

Reyes rolled his eyes then huffed and turned his attention to the chefs.

Turning to Prez, Mike seriously said, "We have a small problem."

Afraid to ask, but having no other choice, Prez grinned, "Spit it out before it rusts or tarnishes." In the air conditioning duct, four horrified voices gasped.

"We've been Clan for four days," Mike explained. "We have three days to have everyone take the Pledge."

Keith, Drew and Corey simultaneously and uncertainly repeated, "The pledge?"

Mike seriously nodded, "I'm safe. Derrick and our kids are safe. Outside of my immediate family, no one is safe from Shiny theft."

"Omigod!" Drew and Corey laughed. Keith rolled his eyes.

"What's the big deal?" Prez grinned. "We're all Shiny lovers anyway. Do you want your CD's missing? Do you want any of the small PC or sound system connectors swiped?" Facing Mike again, Prez said, "Lead the way, Shiny Mike."

Putting his right hand on his heart, Mike chanted, "Repeat after me. 'I pledge allegiance to the Shiny of the Shiny Nation.'" Everyone in line paused, put their right hands on their hearts and duplicated Mike's words. "I pledge allegiance to the Shiny of the Shiny Nation,

and to the Gleam for which it stands; one Nation under Shiny – sparkling, with incandescence and radiance for all!"

"I saw one who was mumbling! He's fair game!" Willow could be heard giggling.

The boy in question, Troy, gasped and quickly repeated his pledge loudly and clearly.

"Scared that your instruments would be stolen?" Prez giggled.

Troy, still wide eyed at his close call, nodded mutely.

Sean giggled, "No, more that he was scared *HE* would be stolen. He's got a shiny butt!" The other twenty-plus kids in line began laughing and giggling. Troy's jaw dropped and he turned ten shades of red then held off and cuffed Sean on the shoulder. Almost as red as Troy, Sean rubbed his shoulder and playfully reminded, "I told you there were things you had to take at face value as true."

Troy grinned, "But you told me that when we were in the shower and you were holding my shiny butt! Was I listening? Hearing yes, but not paying much attention."

The older four Rimmers were now laughing hysterically, trying to order their shakes. This normally simple task was made almost impossible by shiny shower shake remarks.

Out in the dining room, Mike stood on a chair and announced over the PA, "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, for your own security, I must ask that you all pause for a moment. On this Shiny Day, all that glitters and sparkles amongst us demands that we take notice; Dull ones will be converted; Shiny Haters and Dull Lovers will be arrested or destroyed. Those of you who, like me, enjoy the brightness and warmth of the Day Shiny, then look forward to the

fullness of the Night Shiny, please stand and put your right hand over your heart then repeat after me."

Everyone, regardless of whether or not they were personally taking Mike seriously, repeated the Shiny Pledge. "Thank you for your time," Mike said, and then took Derrick's hand and stepped down off the chair. The chatter level rose as did some chortling. As Mike and Derrick sat down to have their breakfast shakes, the giggling slowly dwindled. The original eighty-seven that had knowledge of the ferrets were sharing that knowledge with the newbies. They quickly learned that all of their personal shiny possessions were really at risk. It wasn't the other kids they needed to be concerned about; it was Mike's ferrets, and they could be heard scampering around the air conditioning ducts over their heads. Many of the newest street kids were especially concerned because they had sold themselves for the few articles of jewelry they owned. The Scoobies, still hiding in the air conditioning ducts, heard that some humans sold their bodies for Shiny's.

During breakfast, Keith and Prez were discussing their dreams and the ramifications of those ideas with Mike and Derrick.

Mike observed, "For us, our lives have reached critical mass. What was once just four friends forming a band has become so much more. If what we and our families have together now isn't proof of destinies being changed, then I don't know what is. It makes me believe that life isn't just a series of meaningless accidents; it's going someplace. Now and then I think I see glimpses of where it's going, but the glimpses don't make sense."

Nodding agreement, Derrick added, "Like pictures out of context. Us and our families share what we *think* we know with open minds and hearts. We're willing to receive what we're being given and then return something. It's a two-way street. Like the energy between

each of us is shared, give and take. It happens in our band all the time. I guess what I'm wondering is, did it start in our band or did it start before the band?"

Keith shrugged, "Does it really matter when or how it happened?"

Derrick shook his head and explained, "Just curious, I guess."

"What matters most is that it is," Prez offered. "How many other people have friendships only to acquire something without giving in return? How long can friendships like that last?"

"Not very damn long," Mike grinned. "I wouldn't want a friend like that."

Prez sniggered, "Why am I considering changing our concert at school?"

Derrick and Mike laughed. Keith wondered, "What kind of change?"

"I feel the need to play Yes' [Heart Of The Sunrise](#)," Prez offered. Knowing the extended bass guitar introduction that Prez loved playing, Keith cracked up.

Mike howled, "Beats the shit out of [The In Crowd](#)." They all nodded their heads, knowing they could play it without fancy effects and silently agreeing to shock the shit of Mrs. Diaz and the sophomores.

Derrick tapped Prez and pointed at several kids sitting at tables not far away. Prez kept seeing the same dark, 'Clan Short' green T-shirts on some of the kids. Emblazoned on the shirts were the band names 'Time Touched' and 'Platinum Habits'. Noticing Prez's

surprised expression, Derrick tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Alden, where did the kids get band T-shirts with our band's name on them?"

Into Derrick's, Keith's, Mike's and Prez's sub-vocals, Alden giggled, "Well, there were extras, after Time Touched's big tour."

"How many 'extras' were there for a tour that hasn't happened?" Keith wondered.

Alden giggled, "A crate of each size, small, medium, large, extra-large and Omigod, widen the doorways."

Prez smirked, "Check out the dates and places; they're all over the place, at cities I've never heard of; some are 2014, some are 3075; they're unrealistic dates."

"In this universe," Alden giggled to the four Rimmers.

Mike smiled, "You obviously know something we don't, Alden."

"Okay," Alden playfully began, and marked the video camera feeds to store the expressions on the Core Rimmers faces. "Word of your concerts got out; Friday, which lasted two hours, not including the two encore songs, and last night, again over two-and-a-half hours long. Since the Clan already has recording studios set up in Orlando, you're considered signed to a label. There's no need to worry about anything at all, management, accounting, legal services through FYS, which means Mister Hundser. It's all set. When you guys get the chance, talk with Keith's dad about it."

Keith interjected, "Drew was hoping to implement a design of a recording studio for us here."

Alden assured, "He'll still be able to do that, Keith. Russ will fill any niche you need; in design, in engineering, in mastering, whatever.

The band has total control of everything."

"All that's very nice to know," Prez chuckled, "but what about the tour concert dates?"

"They're real," Alden assured. "Later this month, you'll leave and return."

All four Rimmers incredulously laughed, "For fifty concerts?"

Alden sighed, "You guys need to get with the program. What is time to a Mikyvis? You can leave here at eleven in the morning, be back by eleven-o-two in the morning and still do a fifty city tour, without stressing anything; you'll have all the time you want to do whatever you need, whether that means preparing for shows, writing songs, rehearsing and relaxing, doing what you love doing, not to mention seeing more of multiple worlds than even Starfleet can transport you to. To Dylan Richardson, your tour manager, Kyle's and Tyler's son, time is a non-issue."

For many moments, the four band mates silently absorbed what they had been told. Kyle's and Tyler's son, Prez thought, the child of the same two that created a twenty-foot tall wave. Maybe Dylan was more like Levi or Peter, Prez hoped.

Mike softly muttered, "We'll need to tell Troy and Reyes."

Derrick nodded, "And learn about how this is done. I can only assume time will be virtually unchanged here, but where we're going and what we're doing will take way longer than two minutes."

"We'll have to bring our kids along then," Prez offered.

"I'm not gonna let many months away pass without them," Keith

stubbornly insisted.

Not too far away, John and Stephen sat with Nathan, Jamie, Jacob and Beau, having their breakfast milkshakes, when a group of FCC kids came over to their table. Acting as spokesman for the younger kids he was with, Chad Bunting carefully asked, "John, can we get Teddy bears too?"

To Chad and the other kids behind him, John smiled, "Yep, I've already got that on my to-do list today. I only want to ask you guys a small favor, okay?"

Chad nodded and Rena Hawkin almost whimpered, "Will it be hard to do?"

Standing, John giggled, "Is it hard to give and get hugs?"

Chad and Rena shook their heads, and then the other seven kids also shook their heads.

"The cost for a Teddy bear is a hug, from each of you," John smiled. Starting the process, eight-year-old Rena stepped forward and shyly hugged John.

Wrapping his arms around her, John sent his first telepathic message to her. *'You're not evil, Rena. None of you are bad or unholy kids. You don't have anything to be afraid of here. No one will make you pray for forgiveness on your knees because of a little mistake. All that you, and all the kids here, have to do is the best you can do. If you need or want help, to make your best even better, you've got all the Core Rimmers and all these other kids here to help you. Just ask for what you need and you'll have it, okay?'* Rena nodded and smiled. John asked, "What kind of Teddy would you like?"

"A bigger one," Rena answered, and gestured with her hand. She

added, "If it had blond hair and blue eyes too, that would be nice."

John nodded, "Okay, after lunch time, you'll get your very own Teddy."

Chad stepped close to John to give and get a hug. Again, John repeated virtually the same telepathic message, calming the boy; releasing fears instilled by his FCC parents and taking an order for another Teddy Bear. While Stephen proudly watched, John met with and shared the same with the other seven FCC kids. When he was finished, John re-introduced the kids to his brothers and nephews, so they could integrate more quickly and easily with the Pacific Rim Clan. Dewi, Bruce, Richie, Dee, Gage, Sammy and Geoff took over from there, introducing the FCC kids to Cesar and Felipe, Reyes, Jonah and Dillon. By the time John returned to Stephen and his milkshake, he could hear giggling and see smiles on the faces of nine FCC kids.

John scowled and Stephen asked, "What's wrong, hon?"

"I keep hearing Russian," John muttered. Without thinking about it, John had Alden connect him to the base PA and called out, "Who's thinking in Russian and why exactly?"

All John got as a reply was a lot of kids in the dining room giggling or calling out "Wasn't me!"

In a playful circular fashion, the terrible trio sniggered, "A simple question", "met with a simple reply", "can only mean", "it's time", "to check", "the", "main", "gate".

Grinning at the devious triplets, John finished his shake and sent, *'Save that for making Keith loopy, bros.'* He put his glass down and smiled at Stephen, "Let's greet our new Clan kid, baby."

Concurrently, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy were sharing another table during breakfast. The conversation began with the topic of the wedding. Kaleo shared, "Truthfully, I was surprised that Tory and I both passed the mind-melds. We've only been a couple since Sunday night."

Tory nodded and smiled, "That says we're on the same page of the same book, don't it?"

"Don't think for a second that I'm not thrilled," Kaleo said. "It's just that Prez and Keith and Derrick and Mike have grown up together. They've got years under their belts as couples."

Tory tilted his head uncertainly and offered, "Maybe the time we spent at the orphanage counts too? We were together even though we weren't a couple."

Sean knowingly grinned, "When it's right, time don't matter."

Troy agreed, "We were friends within half an hour, right, Tiger?"

Sean nodded. Tory giggled, "Tiger, huh?"

Troy smiled at Sean then assured, "Definitely! He's my Tiger."

"I love it!" Kaleo chuckled.

"We gotta get some kewl pet names," Tory prodded.

Kaleo looked down and softly muttered, "Non-stop."

"Scuse me?" Tory playfully squealed as Sean and Troy began laughing.

Innocently, Kaleo sniggered, "I was referring to myself!"

"You lie so bad," Tory giggled.

Kaleo shrugged and cackled, "It was worth the shot."

Sean softly said, "I think I've got a kewl one for Troy."

"You do?" Troy squeaked.

Sean nodded then leaned closer and whispered, "If you like it, how about Minstrel? Or maybe Pied Piper? I'd follow you anywhere."

Troy whimpered. Kaleo and Tory turned to each other and smiled. Tory teased, "Did someone just mess their pants?"

Troy blushed and nodded then leaned over to Sean and whispered, "I like both. We'll see which you actually use and what I respond to."

Humming thoughtfully, Kaleo grinned, "We may have our next married couple in the queue ready to take their vows."

Troy chuckled, "Now *that's* moving at the speed of light. We just met yesterday."

Kaleo grinned then reminded, "John and Stephen just met Monday night. When it's right, age and time together don't matter."

Tory said, "We saw you two in the kitchen chow line. It's in your eyes, it's in the way you play and tease each other; it's the way you are together."

Kaleo nodded and smiled at Sean, "We were right in front of you and Horacio last night during the concert." Sean blushed and giggled. Kaleo chuckled, "We heard almost every word you said."

Every time Troy sang or played a solo, you were totally under his spell."

Turning to Sean, Troy asked, "Were you?"

Fiercely blushing, Sean nodded, "Since before dinner last night. The feeling doubled and tripled so many times yesterday, it's infinite. Honestly, I may never be able to hear that 'troubled water' song without getting shaky all over."

Uncertain what to say or do in the very public dining room, Troy shed happy tears and wiped his eyes.

Since Troy was emotional, Tory softly asked both Sean and Troy, "If you could get married next week, would you?"

"In an instant," Sean quickly answered.

With a huge boulder stuck in his throat, Troy could only rapidly nod and force a smile.

Sean wrapped an arm around Troy and softly wondered, "You okay?" Still unable to speak, Troy nodded then wiped his eyes again. Sean whispered, "What do you want me to do, lover?" Turning to Sean so fast that his neck snapped, Troy widely smiled. A little taken aback, Sean pulled back and searched Troy's eyes. Sean squeaked, "What?"

Inhaling deeply, Troy grinned, "Call me that again."

Sean uncertainly asked, "What? Lover?"

Troy nodded and cheered, "That's the one!" Kaleo and Tory cracked up. Troy leaned closer to Sean and softly warned, "You have five-seconds to kiss me."

Turning fire engine red, Sean nervously looked around and giggled, "Here?"

"Time's up, too late," Troy sadly huffed. He then leaned over and tried to suck Sean's tongue off its roller.

While Sean and Troy were still locked at the mouth, Kaleo playfully recited, "I, Tiger, take you, Lover, to be my life partner, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live."

Only a few tables away, Prez over heard Kaleo and called over, "Who's marrying who?"

Gesturing at the two human vacuums attached at the mouth, Tory cackled, "Sean and Troy. I give them a week."

"A week?" Kaleo incredulously giggled. "A day or two, tops. We'll be lucky if they don't drop to the floor and go for it right here!"

Prez cracked up. Smiling widely at his hysterical partner, Keith loudly reminded, "We need a Vulcan for the mind-melds. At least give us a chance to call Uncle Spock back."

Finally breaking their lip-lock, Troy whispered, "Is Horacio here?"

Sean nodded and giggled, "He's watchin' us."

Troy whispered, "Then your dorm room is empty?"

Their eyes met. Slowly, two devilish grins spread. They got up and waved at Kaleo and Tory then went to take their shake glasses to the kitchen. Sean wondered, "Why the dorm and not your place?"

Troy held his answer until the glasses were safe on the

dishwasher shelf. Pulling Sean closer, Troy whispered, "Toy number one was fun. Time to play with toy number two?"

Pulling back to look in Troy's eyes, simply to make sure he was serious, Sean whined. Quickly, they started to make their way to the exit. Sean softly giggled, "I'm glad you waited. I would've dropped the glass."

Troy cackled "I know!" then increased his pace. Sean began laughing and decided a brisk walk to the door was not sufficient. He ran past Troy to the door and they raced each other to the dorm.

Seeing Troy and Sean trying to hurry past each other on their way out of the dining room, Prez grinned, "Amazing."

Keith nodded, "Barely seems like the same Sean we talked with the other night."

Still playing the role of Shiny Priest, Mike prophesied, "Henceforth there shall be weekly weddings and concerts of ballads."

Shaking his head sadly, Derrick softly chuckled, "We'll need more housekeepers to change the sheets."

At the Iroquois Avenue gate, John and Stephen were meeting their newest arrival, seven-year-old, spiky-blond-haired, slate-gray-eyed, Francis Petropavlovski; who had been abandoned by his parents. Speaking in Russian for the boy while simultaneously doing a language dump, John asked Frankie where he was originally from. In a small voice, Frankie answered, "Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy."

Taking interest in the carved dolphin hanging from the boy's neck, Stephen asked, in Russian, "Do you like dolphins, Frankie?"

Speaking in broken English for the first time, Frankie nodded

and widely smiled, "Very, yes, please, poppa."

Glancing at each other, John and Stephen grinned. John sent, *'We haven't been married much more than fourteen hours and we've been adopted. Our moms are gonna love this!'* Thinking of his mother's dwindling Valium supply, Stephen went into a giggling fit.

The newest Rimmer family started back to CIC dining room to get Frankie his first breakfast milkshake. In his mind, John heard Jamie giggle, *'So, how far did you and Stephen get during your honeymoon, bro?'*

'Not that far!' John laughed.

Beau sniggered, *'What's the problem?'*

'There's no problem,' John grinned, *'we simply didn't get there before doing more rescues.'*

Jacob jumped in, giggling *'Too bad. Try again tonight?'*

John replied, *'It was planned, but now with Frankie, we'll have to take an afternoon siesta.'*

'It's called Private Time,' Jamie replied seriously. *'I just explained it to him; it's a thing that Cory and Sean started.'*

"It's okay if you want to play with each other's stiffies," Frankie said in Russian. Flushing bright red, John and Stephen glanced at each other, and then at the boy walking between them.

'Nice Glow!' Jamie, Jacob, and Beau laughed in unison.

Suddenly, Frankie was smiling widely. Uncertainly and not expecting an answer, John telepathically asked Frankie, *'You know*

about stiffies?'

Surprisingly, Frankie nodded and replied, *'It happens and it feels good. It feels better, yes, when poppa plays with yours, daddy?'*

John grinned, "Let's speak, so poppa knows too."

"I heard every word, from all five of you," Stephen smirked.

'Good, you learn quick!' Beau giggled. *'You ready for the advanced course yet?'*

John gasped, "What?"

Jacob sniggered, *'It's feedback, bro.'*

'In close proximity to you, Stephen's getting in the loop,' Jamie explained.

Stephen frowned, "If only I..."

'Could send messages,' John, Frankie, Jamie, Jacob and Beau interrupted, completing the thought.

'You're learning,' Jacob giggled. *'I give you five minutes more and we should have you up to speed!'*

John, Stephen and Frankie walked into the CIC dining room together. Stephen took Frankie directly into the chow line for his first breakfast shake. John began a conversation with all three of the Terrible Triplets, wondering exactly what 'close proximity' meant. The replies John got wasn't much of an answer; how close Stephen needed to be to John depended on Stephen; it could be as little as a few meters or as much as many kilometers. In time, as Stephen's telepathic skills grew, they would find out what close proximity

meant.

Helping Frankie with his breakfast order and while waiting for the chefs, Stephen asked Frankie, in Russian, "Where were you before you came to us?"

Attempting to answer in English, Frankie answered, "The airport. Mommy and daddy left me sleeping on a bench."

Stephen wondered, "How did you know to come here?"

Frankie shrugged, "I felt good. I turn around when it didn't feel good more."

Absorbing that, Stephen realized he had a miniature empath on his hands and sent the thought to John. "You've been walking for a while," Stephen realized.

Frankie shrugged, "Easy, but it took a few hours. Left the airport around four, in the dark."

Accepting Frankie's food from Manuel, Stephen asked, "Are you tired; do you want to lay down after you eat?"

Fervently shaking his head, Frankie smiled, "Used to walk long time in snow. This was an easy stroll. I'm fine, poppa." Heading for the table where his mother was sitting, Stephen carried Frankie's tray while Frankie carried his milkshake.

Admitting that he could procrastinate no longer, Prez sighed then said, "Let's check on our Clan's status then get our buns to school." The other three nodded and they all stood. On their way to the kitchen, they stopped by the table where their sons were sitting. In an assembly line fashion, each boy got a kiss on the head from the

four fathers.

The team of eight Core Rimmers met at the dishwasher. Looking up at Prez, John said, "I'm gonna have to change my school plans, bro."

Prez asked, "What's the problem?"

John shrugged, "There hasn't been one really. I'm just thinking a Clan Short N-Gen in public school isn't such a good idea. Stephen's gonna be goin' to school here. That's where I want to be. Lindsay's here too, so it's just better for everyone." John barely paused long enough to breathe and grin, "And my son is here too now."

Drew, Prez and Keith gasped, "Your son?"

John nodded and giggled, "A new Rimmer kid I picked up at our gate just a few minutes ago. His name's Frankie, he's Russian and he's seven." Cracking up with Mike, Derrick and Kaleo over the stupefied expressions his brothers wore, John laughed, "Stephen's poppa and I'm daddy. They were the first words out of his mouth, swear to God!"

Stunned silent for a few moments, Drew sighed and tapped his comm-badge. "Alden," Drew ordered, "monitor our mom and Mrs. Marr for Valium abuse, starting immediately."

"Got it," Alden giggled. "By the way, they're using them responsibly, right before bed."

Facing John, Keith started for the Command Center door, wondering, "What about Jeff and Tommy?"

"I'm gonna call them later today," John said. "I'll invite them here so we can get caught up. Today's the Downings' funeral too. I'm

gonna be pretty busy."

Nodding, Prez asked, "Did you tell mom and dad about school or Frankie?"

"Not yet," John answered. "I'll get around to it today."

Opening and holding the CIC door, Derrick shared, "Me and Mike are thinking about school too, bro."

Mike nodded, "It's already getting crazy; in bed at three and awake before nine. First chance I get, I'm sleeping for twelve hours just cos I can."

Keith whined, "Please don't give up on the jazz band. We worked half the summer for those spots."

Noticing a man in a Starfleet uniform in the CIC, Prez honestly told his band-mates, "The school concerts are the only thing messing us up this week. Two more days and Saturday then it's done." The man in the uniform turned from his station to face them. "Lieutenant Vorik!" Prez happily shouted.

Lieutenant Vorik nodded once and flatly said, "Greetings, gentlemen."

All the Core Rimmers gathered around the Lieutenant, happy to see a familiar face. Barely able to hide his own pleasure, Prez said, "Welcome back! I'm only wondering, what's brought you back?"

Standing at parade rest, Lieutenant Vorik explained, "It is a standing order in Starfleet that all Clan Divisions are eligible for a permanent Starfleet Liaison of at least lieutenant junior grade rank. Upon return to my duties on-board the Endeavour, I placed a request for transfer to your Division, should you ever ask for such a liaison. I

received my new assignment this morning and so, here I am."

Prez cocked his head slightly, "I'm sorry, Lieutenant. It's not that I don't want you here, I could use the help, but I didn't even know I could ask for such a liaison."

Vorik nodded. "There is more," he said. "During your conversations with Jason Evans on Monday, you asked for a VSO liaison. Based on your requirements, for command and espionage assistance, the assignment was presented to me and I accepted. I am also versed in diplomacy, data coalition and tactics." Pausing and locking eyes with Prez, he asked, "Were these not your requirements, Director O'Brian?"

Prez couldn't help smiling. "They were," he answered.

"Then our common objectives have intersected," Lieutenant Vorik stated.

Mike asked, "How are you VSO and Starfleet, Sir?"

"I am VSO and was a part of Le'Metra Division," Vorik answered easily. "I was placed on assignment undercover within Starfleet two years ago. My mission came to an end two months ago, and was simply awaiting transfer out to another VSO operation. This opportunity came along, and so I took it, as I had nothing else pending. Division Commander Jason Evans found out about the Starfleet transfer request and talked to my VSO Division Commander. I was moved into Dragon Division, Voice Company, and the assignment for Starfleet was pushed through. Therefore, I am both, your VSO and Starfleet Liaison, as well as an adviser for anything Command orientated, should you require it."

Absorbing some composure and formality from the Lieutenant, Prez said, "I wish we could stay for a while to get reacquainted, but

we have a concert at nine-fifty-five."

Lieutenant Vorik nodded, "I shall be here when you return. Congratulations are in order for your weddings. I was certain this would come to pass when we parted company Sunday." Everyone began thanking him.

Kaleo grinned, "Me too?"

"No," Vorik replied, "You and John were unexpected."

Prez went to Jimmy, asking, "What've you got for us today?"

"I wish I could say it's been quiet, Prez," Jimmy smiled. "When Derrick sent Reyes to AI Division Headquarters yesterday, they restored more of his memories. He was able to identify when the Child Prostitution ring was set up and by whom. The Prime Minister of the ROH in 1998 was named. The AI Division security team came with Kuan Ti and uhh... dispatched the problem."

All heads in the room turned to Derrick and Mike.

Derrick nodded and grinned, "We haven't had the chance to tell you. Reyes, Jonah and Dillon returned from AI Division, with a half dozen kittens, then John and Stephen returned from their Enterprise Tour, then we relaxed the freaked out parents, then we got married..."

Sadly shaking his head, Prez sighed, "Moving right along," and then turned his attention back to Jimmy. "Send the report to my PADD, bro. Is there anything else?"

"The buses are here, boss," Jimmy answered.

Prez blinked, "Buses? What buses?"

Again, Jimmy turned towards Derrick and Mike.

Derrick giggled, "Oh, yeah, we have forty buses at each of our bases now, Prez."

"They've been paid for already," Mike cheekily grinned. Drew, Corey, Kaleo, John and even Keith turned away, giggling their butts off.

Rolling his eyes, Prez asked, "Is there anything else?"

"Well," Jimmy smiled, "we found a pair of turtle doves and three French hens in Shirley's cage this morning. Adjoining cages for the four calling birds are being prepared now. The jeweler called and said the golden rings were on back order, though."

Prez began pounding a fist into his other hand and softly counting down as he advanced menacingly on Jimmy.

Backing away, Jimmy giggled, "The AI's are still processing those accounting records. Other than that, we've got nothing."

Prez called, "Daileass, what's the deal? You've been reviewing those records for a day, to my knowledge."

Over the CIC loudspeakers, Daileass answered, "It's simple, Prez. Many of the debits that would be normal for any business simply don't exist. Alden, Draco and I are searching for possible matches across multiple corporations to find who's providing the assets and where the unaccounted for liabilities might be. As I said yesterday, it's screwy. If we did the Clan's books this way, we'd be short billions and clueless where the money went."

"Can you tell us which company it is that's causing you these

problems?" Prez wondered.

Draco answered, "That wouldn't be ethical at this time, Prez."

Alden added, "It's a major California corporation, that's all we can say for now."

Prez nodded and sighed, "You'll let us know if it checks out or not?"

"Of course!" Alden, Daileass and Draco chorused.

"We're outta here, dudes," Keith announced.

Prez declared, "You've got the ball, Kaleo."

Kaleo proudly smiled and nodded, "No sweat, Prez."

The four band mates started for the door. Drew and Corey returned to the server room to work on the division web site. John placed orders for ten Teddy bears, but was advised to get a hundred, so the kids could make choices. Silently asking himself where he could store the remaining teddy bears, John considered some suggestions from Alden, and then decided to make use of the empty sub-basement at the FYS building as the division's new 'bear cave'. All the teddy bears would be delivered there. John could then bring the kids to the FYS building's sub-basement to choose their new best friends.

With the teddy bear situation resolved, John and Nathan then went to Lieutenant Vorik. The three of them went to the Intel console and began reviewing the search results on the Human Liberation Front.

Nathan shared, "Logan told me about some stuff that UNIT Intel

discovered."

"Gentlemen," Lieutenant Vorik said, "let us discuss this privately in a conference room." John and Nathan nodded and immediately started down the hall.

Once they were all seated, John grumbled, "So, the HLF has threatened all twelve of the Safe Haven states in the U.S."

Vorik nodded. "That is an implied threat directly against Clan Short."

Nathan said, "Logan said that UNIT Intel found that the HLF claimed responsibility for the World Trade Center disaster. That's not generally known by very many people. As we all know, several terrorist organizations claimed responsibility for that, and supposedly investigations are still continuing; however, when motive is considered, the HLF is high on the list of suspects, because Starfleet had offices in both buildings.

"They're smart, keeping information isolated to those directly involved," Nathan continued. "FBI and CIA investigations couldn't find how they were funding any operations. No one discovered how they could've executed the Twin Towers attack. They must be moving small quantities of cash around so it doesn't stick out. In the final analysis, the HLF aren't faking; they're quite capable of executing terrorist activity so deep under the covers, we can't determine who is part of the organization or where their funding is coming from. Those responsible for Oklahoma City, were caught and brought to justice, but Vulcan telepathic scans of them got us nowhere. Each cell is completely ignorant and separate from all others, including the leadership."

Glancing between Vorik and Nathan, John asked, "How can we

discover who these dirt bags are?"

Vorik considered aloud, "Their organization must be structured such that leadership is shared from multiple locations. We'll assume that communications between leaders and to operatives are coded, so that they cannot be identified. It would also be a fair assumption that they are not using voice or Internet text, which implies postal delivery."

Nathan scowled, "That means they don't accomplish anything quickly. The best that could be done via mail delivery is hours later that same day or the next day, depending on the distance."

"They're using bogus return addresses too," John huffed.

Nathan smirked, "We can't exactly interrogate all the employees of the various corporations whose addresses were used for threats already made."

Vorik suggested, "We must ask for and obtain the next threatening messages, and share that information with Terran law enforcement."

Nathan nodded and stood, saying, "Logan's already on it. I'll summarize our conversation on the Intel console for other divisions."

John smiled, "Thanks, Nathan. The Double J's are sharing what I've heard telepathically."

"Kewl," Nathan chirped, and then left the conference room.

Done with the HLF topic, Lieutenant Vorik asked, "Your transition to N-Gen was painless?"

John grinned, "Pretty much, I've had worse headaches." He

covered his mouth then cleared his throat. John croaked, "This sore throat from yesterday is killing me though. Can we talk telepathically, please?"

Vorik reached one hand to John's head and placed two fingers on his temple. *'As you wish.'*

John sent, *'I need to ask you something. Over the last two days, since becoming N-Gen, I've been noticing some weird stuff. The ways people's minds are organized don't make sense.'*

Vorik asked, *'In what manner?'*

'Big differences. Like yesterday with Uncle Spock. A Vulcan mind I can understand being much more organized; like a perfectly clean bedroom, a place for everything and everything in its place. What's weird are my mom and dad, for instance, compared to Prez, Keith, Drew, Corey, Mike and Derrick. As organized as my folks are, their minds are cluttered messes. My brothers have much bigger bedrooms that are a little less cluttered. Their minds are almost like N-Gen minds, just no doors or windows to other rooms for processing other stuff.'

'You have identified what delineates the normal mind from the gifted mind,' Vorik stated. *'Your brothers are not N-Gen, but are virtuoso musicians. Drew is only beginning to build on his engineering gift. Kaleo and your parents are the normal minds.'*

John confirmed, *'So gifted scientists, engineers, artists and musicians would seem larger and more organized?'*

'It is quite likely that many throughout your history had the gifted minds you have perceived. For example, Vulcans are intrigued by Leonardo Di Vinci. He was an extraordinary artist and engineer for his time. We cannot know if he was N-Gen, gifted or normal in his

mind's structure, because he has been deceased for five hundred years. Available information leads us to believe he was one of many that would fall into the gifted classification.'

'Okay, then these are known differences. No problem.'

'You have changed since Saturday, John. The boy is there; however, you are more adult.'

John giggled. *'I've got my parents, five fourteen-year-olds, a twelve-year-old, two eleven-year-olds and even a piece of Joel Short in my head now. And that's not including my younger son, brothers and sister. Keith and Prez are performing right now. I can hear each of them individually and all the music around them too. They're playing Heart of the Sunrise, and the teacher is surprised. It took me a while to just find the volume knob.'* John sighed, *'I've gotta get ready for a funeral at eleven o'clock. Let me know if you learn something more about the HLF, please.'*

Removing his fingers from John's temple, Vorik replied, "I will investigate further then inform you." John smiled, then turned and left the conference room. One thing John had already learned was that saying 'thank you' to a Vulcan was redundant after asking for something and getting a positive reply.

* * * * *

Kaho'olawe Island

10:15 AM HTZ

"All it really needs is Gilligan," Peter said to Quint.

Quint quirked an eyebrow at Peter. "Explain," he said.

"It's a TV show, about castaways on a desert island," Peter said. "And this sure is; there's no fresh water, mostly scrub with very little grassland and fewer trees. The whole eastern side of the volcanic mountainside leads to lots o' sheer cliffs. I guess we'll leave that as a nature area, for folks to go for hikes and day trip excursions. The western tip of the island has some nice beaches though. Maybe the northern tip of the island would be a good place for a transportation hub, airport, harbors, roads and monorail to the rest of the western side."

"Thinking big, aren't you?" Quint smirked. "Tell you what; let's turn it into something that will knock their socks off!"

Peter giggled. "Whatcha got in mind?"

"Let's bring this dead rock back to life," Quint grinned. "Water is primo-numero-uno," Quint explained and snapped his fingers. "Let's filter the salty waters of the Pacific through some porous volcanic rock and give this desert fresh water."

Peter was smiling and nodding, "How're you gonna get it up to the surface of the island?"

Quint giggled, "Simple, we'll heat some rock so the water bubbles up to a mountain lake that overflows to form small rivers and streams. Craters are ugly, almost as ugly as gorges that serve little purpose, until they become rivers."

"I like it!" Peter grinned. "Then I can put housing along wherever there's fresh water, right?"

"You can pump the water anywhere it's needed," Quint shrugged.

"What about all those scrub bushes?" Peter asked.

"What scrub bushes?" Quint replied as he snapped his fingers again. "Shrubberies versus scrubberies. I left some scrub up on the mountainside as ground cover, though," he added as a "Q R Green" button appeared on his shirt. "Now that we've got water flowing up through the rock, this place will support life."

"Hey, lookin' good!" Peter said. "Tell you what, let's get a Rimmer over here to check things out."

"Fine by me," Quint responded. "And if you want to bring Tory along with Kaleo, go ahead."

Leaving Quint behind, Peter popped back to Ewa Beach. "Hey, Kaleo," he called out. "You busy?"

Startled again by the sudden Mikyvis appearance, Kaleo giggled, "Just watchin' the kids, Peter. What've you been up to?"

"Fixing up a dessert island. Wanna come see?"

"Don't you mean desert island?" Kaleo laughed.

"Nope, dessert. Here, have a cookie!" Peter giggled, and handed off a chocolate chip cookie, asking, "Where's Tory?"

Pointing up at the five-meter high diving platform, Kaleo grinned, "Gettin' ready to dive."

Peter waited until Tory launched himself, then levitated him over to where he and Kaleo were, putting a purple hardhat on his head in the process.

"I'm taking Kaleo over to check out the Clan's new island,"

Peter told him. "Wanna come with?"

"Sure!" Tory excitedly agreed.

"Don't you think we need some clothes first?" Kaleo giggled.

"Clothes are overrated," Peter smiled, as a purple hardhat appeared on Kaleo's head, followed by miniature hardhats on his and Tory's 'little heads', held in place by purple jock straps.

Busting up in hysterical laughter, Kaleo pointed at Tory's pale pubescent crotch. Tory pointed at Kaleo's equipment, howling, "Purple on dark meat looks awesome!"

Around the diving well, Horacio, Hank, Keanu and Liki heard Tory's remark and cracked up. Sitting near Horacio, Sonia grinned and sadly shook her head. At fourteen, she was still a virgin, but she very much enjoyed her new home and the silly sexual remarks passed by many of the older boys. At last, she could be herself and not worry about what her parents might complain about. Still laughing, Horacio looked at his hopeful girlfriend and playfully bounced his eyebrows. That pushed Sonia to giggles, especially since Horacio was naked, Hispanic and also had dark skin. Although Sonia did have on a bikini top and a pair of shorts, Horacio suddenly thought it might be wise to slip into his boardies.

Mentally messaging John that he was stealing Kaleo and Tory, Peter then transported them to the top of Kaho'olawe Peak to show them what he and Quint had been doing.

Eying the two teenagers, naked except for purple hardhats on head and penis-head, Quint chortled, "Planning on a nudist resort, Peter?" Quint turned to Kaleo and Tory, bragging, "This dried up ol' lava crater is now a mountain freshwater lake, fed directly from the Pacific Ocean and filtered through rock." There were hundreds of

evergreen trees as far as the eye could see surrounding the lake, making the crater rim far less obvious. "Peter and I thought the eastern third of the island could be like a natural preserve, where folks could hike and camp without having to leave the island," Quint offered, and then transported the four of them to the eastern side of the lake. Kaleo and Tory gasped at the beautiful sight of a waterfall that dropped off the cliffs in at least three stages to the Pacific about two kilometers east and far below.

"My God," Kaleo reverently cheered, and then smiled, "This is hardly a desert island anymore."

"You ain't seen nothin' yet," Quint grinned, and transported all four to the western side of the lake, where another smaller waterfall fed a river that wound down the island, split into three, one to the south and the other two to the east, and fed numerous streams in the distance. They transported again, this time to a large green field that seemed unnaturally flat, considering the location. Quint giggled, "While Peter was gone getting you two, I decided to smooth this area; it's about three kilometers long by one-and-a-half kilometers wide, so you have a good place to put an airport and harbor, at some future time."

Peter asked Kaleo, "Does Prez have any idea what this island might be used for?"

Shaking his head, Kaleo smiled, "It's way too big for a Rimmer base, so Prez gave it to Cory Short, for all of the Clan to use. I guess we can use it for whatever Cory and Prez decide."

"It's prettier than Kauai now," Tory smiled. Kaleo rapidly nodded agreement.

"Aww, it was nothin'," Quint cheekily giggled, and then

transported the group to the western beach. "I made this like other famous beaches I've seen, so it can be used as a recreational area in the future. Palm trees line the beach, making it appear similar to beaches in Florida and California."

Quint smiled, "I saw one other place that really didn't need too much from me." He transported them to a small, secluded beach where a house already stood. Pointing to the western bluff and cliffs, and slightly further north, where the final stage of the waterfall cascaded into the ocean, Quint said, "This place is so private and pretty, I thought it would be a perfect place for a Core Rimmer retreat, so I put this house here. It's powered by solar and wind, so it has all the modern conveniences, including a food replicator, so you don't even have to worry about cooking while you're here. I thought it should be large enough for all you guys, so I copied one of the single-family homes at Ewa Beach; six bedrooms, four and a half bathrooms and a full basement. As you can see, there's no access to this spot, and I don't believe there should be a road or a dock. Just have an AI transport you to Keoneuli Beach when you want to spend some time away."

"This is awesome!" Kaleo gushed.

Peter giggled, "Whatever you decide the island is to be used for, let us know."

Quint grinned, "Let's give it a day or so before we build anything. With all the subterranean water flowing now, we have a very large aquifer under this mountain, so it needs to settle, then we can begin building whatever you guys want."

"We've got plenty of time," Kaleo offered.

Tory added, "And you dudes have turned a desert into a lush

green paradise already. The Clan could do whatever we want with this island now, even if it's just a private get-away."

Peter giggled, "We're glad you like it. You wanna go back home now?"

Kaleo nodded, "Yeah, we really should. All the other Rimmers are busy and it's only Aunt Lanna and Uncle Carl watchin' the kids."

* * * * *

Ewa Beach

10:17 AM HTZ

Out in the CIC dining room, John found Stephen with his mother and Frankie; exactly where Stephen said he would be. Hurrying over, John rested his hurt arm across his partner's shoulder then leaned over and kissed his mother-in-law on the cheek.

Kathleen Marr grinned at her son; "Either John's read my mind or you've made a wonderful choice."

Placing his virtual halo over his head, John innocently giggled, "I had no idea from you or Stephen that's what I was supposed to do. It's just what I wanted to do."

Reaching a hand up to place on John's arm, Stephen smiled, "A wonderful choice, ma. That's the way he is *without* using N-Gen powers. With his N-Gen powers, it's a hundred times better."

"Ten times," John playfully corrected. "You multiply it by ten to get the hundred times."

Turning towards Frankie, John asked, "Do you like your new

grandma, Frankie?"

Frankie nodded and smiled, "Granny Kathy is very young and pretty. She got me tarts to go with my milkshake, daddy."

Kathleen Marr giggled, "I'm not even thirty yet and already a grandmother. Not many would believe it..."

"Outside the clan," Kathleen and John chorused.

Stephen giggled and happened to notice the wall clock. "We've got a funeral to go to, ma," Stephen explained. "Frankie and I still need to get suits too." Turning to John, Stephen asked, "How long do you think we'll be gone, hon?"

John answered, "Bruce said only an hour or two, tops. By one o'clock, we'll be back, I guess."

Stephen got up and kissed his mom, then softly said, "We'll be back for a late lunch." Sliding off his chair, Frankie gave his new grandmother a kiss on the cheek. then stood between John and Stephen.

"I'll be waiting," Kathleen smiled.

John tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Alden, take me, Frankie and Stephen to the store, by the dress clothes."

Alden giggled, "Soul and Power Rimmers in the store!" He transported them then finished, "Activating dressing room cameras."

John sniggered, "You goof! Are any of your cameras ever inactive?"

"The basement store ones were, until now," Alden giggled.

Reaching for Stephen's hand, John smiled, "Let's get you something really sharp lookin', baby."

In the CIC server room, Drew was in the groove, coding away and rapidly tapping at the computer keyboard. Keith remarked once that Drew should've played piano, his fingers were certainly nimble enough. Corey had completed his graphics work and gave Drew the file names necessary to complete the majority of the division's web pages. Not quite as busy as he had been the prior day, Corey called, "Drew?"

Busily working, Drew softly replied, "Yeah?"

Corey giggled, "More."

"More what, angel?" Drew muttered.

"Babies," Corey giggled.

Abruptly stopping what he was doing, Drew spun around in his chair, smiling at Corey. "We've done it four times since we got married," Drew sniggered.

Corey shrugged then rolled his chair closer to Drew. Corey whispered, "I like it a lot."

Drew giggled, "Can you stay in idle for just five more minutes? I can finish this one page in five minutes or less."

Corey nodded, but remained close enough to Drew where he could watch every move and see every small hair on Drew's arms. He began daydreaming, remembering the first time he had seen all three Hundser brothers naked at Ewa Beach. It was over four years since that summer day-trip, where all the current Rimmer families and the O'Brians spent a day together. There was no doubt about it, the

Hundser boys were the cutest on the entire beach that day. John was six, Drew was almost eight, and Keith was near his tenth birthday. Back then Corey was smitten with all three brothers. Even then, they were eye-candy. Now, Corey considered his new hubby the best looking of the lot. Reliving those memories, Corey knew that everyone there had to notice his long lingering stares at each of the three Hundser boys. Now that they had gone 'all-the-way', Corey couldn't take his eyes off Drew. Corey couldn't believe how careful and excruciatingly slowly Drew made love, not only the first time, but the subsequent three times. Drew had been asking for a turn since finishing their second time, and Corey believed he was ready to be just as meticulous as Drew had been.

Drew giggled, "I'm hurryin'."

Standing and pushing the chair away, Corey stood and moved directly behind Drew. He silently mused, "How can the back of his head look awesome?" and then started gently finger-combing Drew's hair, causing Drew to cringe and giggle louder. Widely smiling, but allowing Drew to finish his work, Corey began tracing lines up Drew's arms to his shoulders.

Drew sniggered, "The chubby I got knowing you were horny is turning into major wood."

Corey smiled, but tapped his sub-vocal. "Alden, as soon as my hubby stands and takes hold of me, transport us to our townhome's master bedroom."

Alden giggled, "I can even have him naked upon arrival, Corey."

Considering it for a moment, Corey giggled, "Another time, maybe. I'll take care of that this time."

"Signal me with 'escape plan N' when you want," Alden

instructed.

"Easy to remember," Corey giggled.

Watching as Drew saved and closed the file sent Corey's expectations into overdrive. Drew stood and faced Corey, but didn't take hold of him. Drew only caressed Corey's cheek and jaw before beginning his usual tender kisses across Corey's bottom lip, and then his top lip.

Corey whimpered through giggles, knowing that Drew was purposefully delaying the inevitable embrace. When, at last, Drew moved to finish his kisses with the knock-out lip lock and hugged Corey, they opened their eyes in their bedroom, right beside the bed. Wasting no time, Corey went right to work disrobing Drew. One thing they always relished was being able to touch each newly exposed area of skin. On a mission, Corey took extra seconds feeling up Drew's torso, waist and legs. Ticklish to the extreme, Drew was soon laughing hysterically. He giggled most of the time he was undressing Corey. The few moments Drew wasn't giggling, he was kissing Corey. Drinking in each other's bodies for a moment or two, they flung themselves together and held on tightly while desperately kissing.

It took about thirty minutes for Frankie and Stephen to finish choosing clothes and shoes. Even in his navy blue suit, Frankie proudly displayed his dolphin necklace over the tie. Stephen remained dressed in a dark brown pin-striped suit and carried his other clothes. John then asked Alden to transport them directly to his bedroom, so he could get changed.

Bruce was already in the room changing his clothes. In a somber mood and sitting on a bed with a blue dress shirt on, his underwear and socks, Bruce forced a smile for John and Stephen.

After introducing Frankie to Bruce and getting a weak attempt of congratulations, John smirked, "It ain't workin', bro," and then began changing clothes.

Bruce sighed, "Do me a favor, please, John?"

"Anything," John answered.

Bruce softly said, "Don't help me today."

Pausing, John locked eyes with Bruce and asked, "Are you sure?"

Bruce nodded and wiped his eyes saying, "I should feel it today. I keep telling myself, 'bad things happen so good things can happen'. It makes sense, but it ain't workin'. No N-Gen empath tricks, not today."

John nodded and promised, "No N-Gen empathy, just the same empathy I had before Monday. I can't stop that; not ever and 'specially not with you."

Bruce nodded and again forced a grin, "I couldn't ask for a better brother. You've helped me so much already. Since Sunday night, you've been great, really."

"That's what you'll always have now, Bruce; brothers that care," John assured.

Stephen reminded, "Don't forget your little sister, Carmella. She thinks the world of you, Bruce."

Fumbling with his white dress slacks, Bruce nodded, "I know it. It's not that I don't love it here. I do. It's just... my..." Breaking down, Bruce dropped his pants, wiped his eyes with both hands and wailed,

"My mommy and daddy! Everything was so simple! There weren't abused or abandoned kids in the world. What I didn't know about wasn't there. Then I was left alone, a whole night! The next day I was found by nice people. Later, almost a hundred kids were worse off than me. By the end of the weekend, I was just like them! I'll never dress in costumes on Halloween ever again! From now on, the last four days of October will always feel different.

"I ain't stupid. They were dead Thursday night, that's why they didn't come back. It took three days for them to be found. That means they were driftin' in the ocean all that time. All I want to know now is what happened on that boat? Once I know that, I think maybe I can start feelin' better."

Bruce continued to sob, with his eyes covered by his fists. John looked helplessly at Stephen. He sent, *'I want to go to him, but I can't. He won't accept that I'm just holding him. Can you do it, please, baby?'*

Stephen only nodded and went to sit on the bed beside Bruce. Frankie followed his poppa and sat on the other side of Bruce. Stephen barely got an arm around Bruce's back before Bruce grabbed hold of Stephen and bitterly cried. John gave Stephen all the help he needed to help Bruce. More than anything, John wanted to be sitting with Bruce and holding him while he grieved. For the second time since Monday, John wished he could give away his N-Gen abilities. They got in the way when he first met Stephen and now they were in the way again with Bruce. He sent those thoughts and feelings to Stephen while he continued to dress. Stephen offered his own thoughts to John, so he could realize that his N-Gen skills were helpful more often than not. Once John was completely dressed and only had to grab the suit jacket, he went to Bruce. Picking the pants up off the floor, John held them open and Stephen helped Bruce step

into them.

In a short few minutes, they had Bruce dressed. Leading him to the bathroom, John wet a washcloth and cleaned him up. It was already after eleven. They were supposed to be at the Iroquois Avenue gate by eleven. Alden was called by John and the four of them were instantly transported to the security station at the gate. Already waiting were Jim and Jennifer Hundser and Bruce's closest friends; Reyes, Bane, Benjamin, Dillon, Geoff and Jonah. Bruce's newest little brother, Dewi, also wanted to come along. No one was certain how much Dewi knew of funerals, but he wanted to be with Bruce and John. John introduced his parents to Frankie, the newest rescued boy, and telepathically told them that he and Stephen had been adopted by Frankie, making the Hundser adults Frankie's unofficial grandparents. Already occupied with Bruce, neither Jen nor Jim said a word. John felt his parents' surprise, but the only other thing he felt from them was concern for Bruce. The Scooby Gang was lined up, dressed in their new shiny black patent leather belts and hats. A separate Hummer carried six security personal. Once their passengers were loaded, the two vehicles started for the Waipahu Soto Zen Temple. It was only a few miles away and took about fifteen minutes to arrive.

Bruce was dressed in a white suit with a navy blue shirt and a white tie. Monday night, while they were choosing suits in the CIC store, Bruce had shared that white was more proper for the family of the departed at Buddhist funerals. The other boys felt that Bruce should be easily identified as the relative of the deceased. They therefore chose suits of dark blue, charcoal gray or black.

In the room were the two closed wooden caskets. Before each casket was a small altar. The altars had photographs of the deceased, bowls of fresh fruit and small arrangements of flowers from Bruce's grandparents in the United States and from Clan Short. Between the

two altars was a third altar holding a small sculpture of Buddha and traditional flower arrangements.

Buddhists do not believe in expensive, extravagant displays for the deceased during their funerals. As with many other religions, the body without the soul is an empty vessel, nothing more than the remaining matter.

Bravely, Bruce walked into the room first. He went to the center altar, clasped his hands together and bowed before Buddha. The group of seven monks sitting in the lotus position behind the caskets began chanting. Following Bruce's lead, John, Stephen, Frankie and Dewi in turn clasped their hands together and bowed before the altar. When everyone had shown their respect before Buddha, they all sat and waited for the monks to complete their chant.

The monk in the center of the seven stood. So did Bruce and therefore everyone followed his lead. The monk said, "Hinder not yourselves, Ananda, by honoring the remains of Tathagata. Be zealous, I beseech you, Ananda, in your own behalf. Devote yourselves to your own good! There are wise men, Ananda, among the nobles, among the Brahmins, among the heads of houses, who are firm believers in the Tathagata; and they will do due honor to the remains of the Tathagata." The center monk then resumed the lotus position and all seven chanted for several minutes. Bruce, his family and friends sat quietly until the center monk stood again.

Once the assembled group was standing, the monk recited verses for contemplation. "Short, alas, is the life of man, limited and fleeting, full of pain and torment. One should wisely understand this and lead a holy life, for no mortals ever escape death.

"Just as the dewdrop, at the point of the grass blade at sunrise, very soon vanishes and does not remain for long; just so is the

dewdrop-like life of men very short and fleeting.

"There are some cases in which a person overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, and becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, 'Who knows a way or two to stop this pain?' I tell you, monks, that stress results either in bewilderment or in search.

"A blessing: friends when the need arises. A blessing: contentment with whatever there is. Merit at the ending of life is a blessing. A blessing: the abandoning of all suffering and stress. A blessing in the world: reverence to your mother. A blessing: reverence to your father as well. A blessing in the world: reverence to a contemplative. A blessing: reverence for a Brahmin, too. A blessing into old age is virtue. A blessing: conviction established. A blessing: discernment attained. The non-doing of evil things is a blessing.

"Find out for yourself what is truth, what is real. Discover that there are virtuous things and there are non-virtuous things. Once you have discovered for yourself, give up the bad and embrace the good."

After another few minutes of chanting, the center monk stood again. He said, "Transference Of Merits To The Departed. Idam me natinam hotu, Sukhita hontu natayo. Idam me natinam hotu, Sukhita hontu natayo. Idam me natinam hotu, Sukhita hontu natayo. Let this love of family accrue to our relatives, and may they be happy!"

The remaining six monks then recited verses of thanksgiving. "Just as the full flowing rivers fill the ocean, even so what is given from here accrues to the departed. Whatever you wished or wanted may it quickly be. May all your wishes be fulfilled as the moon upon the fifteenth day, or as the wish-fulfilling gem."

* * * * *

Shortly after eleven that morning, Troy and Sean emerged from the dorm and went to the pool. Almost all the kids were there, but both teen boys perceived far less chatter and joyful children yelling. They swam around the pool then went and dove into the diving well. Everyone seemed to be having fun, but it was far too quiet. Finally, Sean's curiosity got the better of him and he went to Lanna Seaver. That's when they learned of the Downings' funeral. Troy didn't know who Bruce was, but learned from Lanna, Sean and Carmella. Having had Buddhist friends in New Jersey, Troy knew that the kids shouldn't be acting reserved and quiet. The lives of the deceased should be celebrated in a respectful way. Lanna agreed, but couldn't flip a switch to change almost a hundred kids. Sean and Troy went to Kaleo.

"Something's gotta give here," Troy told Kaleo. "It's bad enough now, but when Bruce comes back, he needs normalcy; kids playing and willing to play with him."

"There's not much I can do," Kaleo said. "Yeah, I can have Alden patch me across the PA and make an announcement, but that's not gonna change anything."

Sean softly said, "I have an idea." Troy, Kaleo and Tory looked at him. Sean asked Troy, "Do you know some sing-a-long songs?"

Troy shrugged, "Yeah, a couple."

Kaleo smiled, "That would do the trick. It would get them all out of their funk." Before Troy had a chance to say anything, Kaleo tapped his sub-vocal. "Alden, transport Troy's guitar here."

A second later, Troy's guitar case was on the ground beside Kaleo's chair. Troy grinned, "Don't you guys believe in *walking* to get

stuff?"

Kaleo chuckled, "Time is of the essence."

Kneeling down, Troy took his guitar out of its case, saying, "You guys need to help me out. A sing-a-long with only one person singing doesn't really qualify."

Kaleo smiled, "You start playing and I can almost guarantee, some kids will hear and join in."

Troy stood, began playing and singing. "It's a world of laughter, a world of tears, It's a world of hopes and a world of fears, There's so much that we share, That it's time we're aware, It's a small world after all.

"It's a small world after all, It's a small world after all, It's a small world after all, It's a small, small world."

Drew, Corey, Richie, Dee, Gage, Sammy and Clint came over and were the first to join in singing with Troy.

"There is just one moon and one golden sun, And a smile means friendship to everyone, Though the mountains divide, And the oceans are wide, It's a small world after all.

"It's a small world after all, It's a small world after all, It's a small world after all, It's a small, small world." While Troy repeated the final chorus, more kids came over and joined in.

After the fourth repeat, Troy ended the song then started a different one. "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands! If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands! If you're happy and you know it, And you really want to show it, If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands! If you're happy and you know it, stamp

your feet! If you're happy and you know it, stamp your feet! If you're happy and you know it, And you really want to show it, If you're happy and you know it, stamp your feet! If you're happy and you know it, shout hooray! If you're happy and you know it, shout hooray! If you're happy and you know it, And you really want to show it, If you're happy and you know it, shout hooray! If you're happy and you know it, do all three! If you're happy and you know it, do all three! If you're happy and you know it, And you really want to show it, If you're happy and you know it, do all three!"

By this time, there were the two adults, at least forty kids, some older and most of the younger ones, gathered around Troy, Sean, Kaleo and Tory. Judy Faris came over to gather towels for the laundry and saw what her son was doing. The rug-rats that were over by the playground heard the singing and came over too. Troy continued playing and singing 'Yellow Submarine', 'All Together Now' and 'Give Peace A Chance'.

Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick returned to the base from school to hear almost a hundred voices repeating, "All we are saying, is give peace a chance," over and over again. Following the sound of kids singing, the foursome walked from the housing complex, where they had arrived, to the pools. Kaleo got up and told them what was going on. "It didn't take much prompting either," Kaleo grinned. "Sean suggested it, I had Alden get Troy's guitar and he went for it."

Prez waved his team further away from the loud singing, to the far side of the pool house. "Y'all know what we have here?" Prez prompted.

Drew and Tory shrugged. Corey giggled, "A better time than we were having!"

"Exactly right," Prez smiled. He then tapped his sub-vocal and

called, "Alden, log this date and time."

"Go ahead, Prez," Alden replied.

Prez grinned, "Effective immediately, there are two new members of the Core Rimmer team. Sean Moorhead and Troy Faris are the Morale Rimmers. When any of us notices the kids are down, the Morale Rimmers will be called to come up with some activity to get them up again."

Keith howled, "Morale Rimmers now!"

Kaleo cracked up and laughed, "Get them up again?"

Tory joked, "Any of us could've easily done that!"

Mike snickered, "No, no, getting the boys up is only half the battle."

Derrick playfully wondered, "Is that part of their job too as Morale Rimmers?"

Shaking his head sadly, but smiling widely, Prez chuckled, "How long has the sing-a-long been going on?"

Drew shrugged, "About twenty minutes."

Troy finished the song and the other Rimmers hurried over to the mass of kids. At the end of the song, they all clapped their hands along with the kids. Prez loudly asked, "Is everybody havin' a good time?" More than a hundred positive replies burst forth. "Right then," Prez laughed, "there are now two new members of the Core Rimmer team. Sean and Troy are the Morale Rimmers and report directly to Kaleo, the Mouth Rimmer." Having started another load of towel laundry, Judy Faris walked out of the pool house and heard the

announcement. Beaming with pride, Judy began laughing. About a dozen of the older male ex-prostitutes cracked up, but most of the remaining kids cheered.

Bewildered, Troy and Sean looked at each other. They then shrugged and Troy said, "You'll have to outline what our jobs are, Prez."

"No problem," Prez nodded. He then loudly said, "Lunch time!" and again the kids cheered. The Clan got up and started towards the CIC Prez told Sean and Troy, "We'll chat while we eat."

Troy put his guitar back in its case then Kaleo had it transported back to Troy's condo. Troy and Sean walked with Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo and Tory to the dining room. Troy said, "I don't even know what it means to be Clan. What can I do to help besides play and sing? I really don't feel worthy or prepared for this."

Shaking his head, Sean softly queried, "Now you don't feel worthy?" He pulled Troy close and assured, "You're way more worthy than me, Lover."

Keith grinned, "Come on, dudes, enough of that worthiness garbage. Guess what; we didn't feel worthy either on Saturday when Joel made us Clan. What makes you worthy is what you do naturally, without instruction. After last night, the kids know you and trust you, Troy. That's more than half the battle, right there."

Prez nodded his agreement, saying, "You guys can do a lot just by being around. How much you take on is up to you. If you want, you can organize soccer teams or basketball teams. Or maybe we can have various different activities; stuff that gives kids something more to look forward to."

Mike offered, "How about monthly dances for the teenagers?"

Just think of alternatives that groups of kids might like."

Derrick chimed in, "We could use help with the various rescues too. Monday night we had three rescues. Last night at midnight, we were transporting from base to base and picked up another nineteen."

Prez said, "I won't require you two dudes to do that, but if you're willing, I won't refuse the help."

Troy shrugged, "I don't even know what that means. What kind of rescues?"

Mike explained, "Sometimes kids come to our main gate and we go get them. Other times, we transport to our other bases and pick up kids."

Expanding on it, Derrick added, "And once, we had a group transported to us by the UNIT Rapid Response Base Commander." Noticing Sean's bewildered expression, Derrick wrapped an arm around him. When Derrick, Sean and Troy came to a stop outside the CIC, the entire group stopped.

Sean softly asked, "Why make me a leader?"

Prez smiled, "I have several reasons. First of all, when we were showing new kids to dorm rooms, you were there and doing the job every bit as well as any of us. Secondly, you and Troy are not only boyfriends, but have become a team. Teamwork is extremely important in this division. I can't do the job alone. Cory Short doesn't even expect me to do it alone. I need teammates; Keith to bounce ideas off of; Mike and Derrick as historians; Drew and Corey and John and Kaleo all have their bits to do. How can I possibly manage a hundred and fifty by myself?"

After planting a quick kiss on his partner's cheek, Keith nodded

and elaborated, "Think of it this way – there are four dorms here, that's four hundred kids. We're eventually going to need leaders in each of the dorms at each of five bases. The eight of us can't possibly manage two thousand kids across five bases. The first eight of us originally included Bruce. But Bruce had his own stuff to deal with all weekend. He's putting the finishing touches on his situation right now. When Bruce has pulled himself together, he's going to be a Core Rimmer too, just like Joel originally intended. John's made Stephen his partner. When Stephen feels more stable, he'll eventually become a Core Rimmer too. In the long term, we're going to have chances to give lots of kids leadership opportunities. They may or may not be Core Rimmers, but they'll report to one of us. The job is huge and has to be shared, Sean. You made yourself a leader, just by being yourself."

Kaleo moved closer to Sean and said, "Saturday and Sunday, I didn't feel too capable in my job either. But these guys have made me feel like a brother each and every day. Their belief in me gives me the self-confidence I never thought I'd have. If I can participate then you can too, Sean. Sometimes it's so easy it doesn't even feel like I'm doing anything worthy of praise. You'll see – it'll be the same with you."

Troy squeezed Sean's hand and reminded, "I told you that you are worthy; you're worthy of me and so much more. And best of all, we get to work together just like all these other guys get to work with their partners."

Mike nodded, "That's the trick right there, Sean. We each affirm the others' abilities to do the job. No one goes out of their way to do the wrong thing. When it happens, it's how others deal with it that makes the difference. Don't attack as if the world is ending because of a simple mistake. You talk about it. Me and Derrick talk about stuff

alone. Every one of the couples on this team has their own conversations. Then we get together and deal with stuff as a big team." He then grinned and reminded, "Like my Shiny Pledge announcement this morning. Do you think I just did that without saying something to Derrick?" Sean shook his head and giggled. Mike added, "I know, it's funny, but it is a serious issue we all have to deal with. I heard some of the kids talking about it too. Standing in front of amplifiers hasn't blown my hearing to hell yet."

Smiling widely, the entire team went into the CIC for lunch. Glancing over towards the corner of the room, where Shirley's cage was, Prez noticed that four new cages existed. Shirley now had two turtle doves and three French hens with her. The four calling birds were making their presence loudly known.

Troy and Sean were near Mike and Derrick in line. Troy had planned the positioning and asked Mike, "Tell me about the ferrets, please?" Mike went through the entire tale of how he met Spike, how Logan mentioned shiny music and how he had simply ran with it. Without Mike intending for it to happen, Spike came to love and respect Mike and wanted to be adopted. The next thing Mike knew, he was a ferret-human hybrid father and Shiny Priest. Troy thought the story was sweet and really wanted to meet the Scooby Gang. Mike explained, "Imagine a ferret, but slightly larger and with human intelligence. When they stand upright, the Scoobies are about two feet tall, but at least half the time, they're scampering around on all four limbs. What you wind up with are furry kids that still have a fascination with shiny objects. Thus the Shiny Pledge, The Shiny Anthem and The Shiny Religion."

Sean and Troy grinned and uncertainly repeated, "The Shiny Religion?"

The boys made their way to a table and, as they sat, Derrick

explained, "Take the Bible, for instance. 'In the beginning the Great Shiny created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without shinnies and void, and dullness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of the Great Shiny moved upon the face of the waters. And the Great Shiny said, Let there be Shinies, and there were Shinies.' As I understand it, all the world's great religious texts are being adapted and translated."

"Ultimately," Mike added, "you can blame Joel. He made *all* the ferrets *really* believe it's real. Only High Priest Dave believed it before Joel did something. Now they're all Shiny fanatics!"

At a nearby table with Jacob, Jamie and Beau, Nathan interjected, "I think it was Logan who explained them the best. Take someone who will probably never lose the wonderment of a child, and give them something that they truly believe in. Ferrets have it hard coded into their DNA to like shiny things. They are the perfect thief in many ways; now add in human intelligence."

Troy grinned, "They're gonna love me and my saxophones then."

Prez nodded, and between bites of his cheeseburger, smiled, "Especially if you keep them polished and shiny."

Turning to Sean, Troy asked, "What do I do when I put my guitar away?"

Sean swallowed and answered, "Wipe down the body and especially the strings."

Keith smiled, "And your saxophones are shiny brass with Mother of Pearl keys. Did you wipe them down yet?"

Blushing, Troy nodded and softly giggled, "Right after we made

love. Right, Tiger?"

Sean smiled, "Before we even showered the saxes were cleaned." Turning red, Sean softly added, "The best part was, Troy hadn't even dressed so..." Troy nudged him and they both began chortling at the memory.

Derrick grinned, "They might not have trusted you at first for mumbling the Shiny Pledge, but if they see you caring for your instruments, they'll know you as a true Shiny Lover."

Sean asked, "And the difference between Dull Ones and Shiny Haters?"

Derrick answered, "Dull ones have not accepted or denied the Great Shiny. They can be converted and saved. Shiny Haters and Dull Lovers would be like Satanists are to Christians."

Keith nodded, "Bad scene for the Shiny Haters."

"You treat them like more human than ferrets then," Troy recognized. "That's really great!"

Beginning to pick on his French Fries, Mike said, "To us, they are kids. Just like we let our other kids do their thing with other kids, we let the Scoobies go do their thing."

Prez said, "For that very reason, keeping morale high around here won't be such a big job. The kids are kewl and split off in groups to keep themselves entertained. Today was the exception to that because Bruce has a lot of friends and family here now."

Kaleo had finished eating while the others chatted, but now chimed in. "With the sing-a-long, you guys changed them in no time. In the next hour or so, Bruce is gonna be back home. If Bruce is still

feeling a little out of it, and I expect he will, the kids will take care of him. Only if he's not ready to participate will there be another problem like there was before."

Sean wondered, "What should we do then; another sing-a-long?"

Still chewing, Prez held up his index finger to signal a pause. When he swallowed, Prez called, "Alden?"

Alden replied, "Here, Prez."

"We'll need two sub-vocals and two comm-badges, one of each for Troy and Sean," Prez instructed. Four small boxes appeared on the table before Prez. In a few minutes, Troy and Sean were educated about the use of the communications devices. Prez finished by saying, "Anything you need to keep the kids occupied, you have authorization to get. If you think balloons will turn the tide, then get a couple hundred balloons and a tank or two of compressed air..."

"Or helium for floating balloons," Keith suggested.

Troy grinned, "Water balloon fights."

Prez nodded, "Whatever it takes to keep the place running smooth."

Derrick reminded, "Soon we'll be getting into the rainy season. I'm foreseeing a lot of kids hanging together at the CIC on rainy days."

Mike verified, "You've been to the dorms now. Have you seen the rec rooms?"

Sean nodded, "I showed Troy around last night and again this

morning."

Troy added, "I've got a nice big bedroom in our apartment. All the kids have bigger rooms and the common rooms are awesome too."

Mike finished, "Kids are gonna be gathered around various public places like here, the rec room next door or in their dorm rec rooms."

Surprised, Troy asked, "There's a rec room here too?"

Everyone pointed at the double doorways on the north wall of the dining room. Keith explained, "There are arcade games in there, billiards tables, dart boards, Foosball tables, televisions and a jukebox. And there's the indoor rec center too, so kids are gonna be spread out on rainy days."

Troy had one more question. He pointed to the doorway into the Command Center and asked, "Do I get to see what's in there?"

"If you want to, we can show you around," Prez answered. "If you really want to be Core Rimmers, dealing with rescues and all the other parts of Clan Short, then we can arrange for access."

"Why wouldn't I?" Troy smiled, "In for a penny, in for a pound." Sean nodded agreement.

Prez seriously asked, "How much do you know about Clan Short?"

Troy answered, "Stuff that made the news in the U.S. I know about Montana too."

Sean nodded and added, "I told him about the orphanages and the Prime Minister too. Troy's been great about all of it."

Thoughtful for a few moments, Prez turned to Keith. Keith shrugged, "Break them in like we've been getting broke in, baby. Let them participate in the easy pickups and rescues. Then Sean and Troy can choose if they'd like to continue."

Kaleo said, "It's easy, but pretty long hours. After the concert last night, we had pickups here, Hawaii and Maui. By the time we got nineteen kids fed, clothed and over to the dorm, it was almost three in the morning again."

Prez added, "It was that way Monday too. Three times in one night we were down in the store, then getting newbies settled."

Keith reminded, "Even Sunday night, after an early evening pickup there were two kids who showed up at the gate looking for help."

Troy hummed then softly said, "Sounds like you guys need all the help you can get."

All the Rimmers nodded. Mike bluntly asked, "What do you think of our gorillas and G-Cats?"

Troy grinned, "New and interesting; kind o' like New York City subways."

Derrick, Mike, Kaleo and Tory cracked up. Prez and Keith only smiled and turned to each other. Since everyone had finished eating, Prez suggested, "Let's show you dudes the Command Center. Then we can talk about a few other things."

While everyone was standing and gathering their trays to take to the kitchen dishwasher, Troy asked, "Prez, are you thinking we can't handle it?"

Rapidly shaking his head, Prez then held eye contact with Troy and honestly answered, "No, that's not it, Troy. I can't say that I know you or Sean well enough to know if you can or can't deal with being full time Clan. I'm assuming you can because you want to. Wanting to do something is more than half the battle." Prez began walking to the kitchen and continued. "To make matters more complicated, you and Sean are just beginning your relationship. Loving relationships come first, in the Clan and to our families. I don't want to scare you off or make you feel uncomfortable, but I wasn't quick to accept being Director of this division. You and Sean really need to take your time and think if you really want in. You, in particular, need to talk with your mom too.

"There are a lot of benefits to being in the Clan," Prez continued. "We're Starfleet Ensigns and considered adults. That's allowed us to adopt our kids. They're so great, like little mirrors we can look into, and they help us remember to be kids ourselves. It's allowed us to get married. I guess all I'm saying is that I know I'm not the same dude that walked out of school last Friday afternoon." Leaving his tray at the dishwasher, Prez glanced at his teammates asking, "Am I the only one that feels that way?"

Keith, Mike and Derrick shook their heads. Kaleo answered, "I'm glad I'm not the same fuck toy I was last Friday morning. Now my friendship with Tory has become a full fledged partnership."

Tory nodded, "I feel the same way. I want to be Clan and a Core Rimmer too, Prez."

Prez only nodded and led the group to the Command Center. Drew noticed them all going in and thought that there was something important going on. Corey felt Drew becoming concerned, and Drew explained they should go see what was happening. They finished their

lunches and quickly went to the kitchen.

Inside the Command Center, Prez directly asked Tory, "Tell me why you want to be a Core Rimmer?"

"So I can spend even more time with Kaleo," Tory quickly answered. "When he's gone, doing Core Rimmer stuff, I'm alone and bored out of my mind. I also want to pay back the Clan for rescuing me and him from the orphanage."

Prez then posed the same question to Sean. Sean answered, "To pay back Clan Short too. I'd like to spend more time with Troy and all you dudes too. I know I'm not as confident as you guys, but I want to be. Like I told Troy yesterday, I feel so different already. It's like I know where I need to be, but I don't know how to get there. A good way to accomplish that would be hanging with dudes I look up to."

Finally, as Drew and Corey walked in the room, Prez posed the question to Troy. Troy said, "Since meeting Sean and falling in love with him, I've learned the real story behind the news clips I heard. Not until Sean told me did I know how bad it was for him, and a lot of these other kids. It makes me angry. If I can help change things so that stuff never happens again, then I want in. And truthfully, I don't care what my mom has to say about it." Troy reached for Sean's hand and said, "I'd kill the first son of a bitch I saw fucking a little kid and be glad I did it."

Accepting all their answers, Prez turned to his team mates. They all nodded. Prez said, "I'm going to give each of you an opportunity to think on it. We didn't have that opportunity." Locking eyes with Troy, Prez said, "How you make the decision and who you talk to is up to you." Prez then turned around and called, "Lieutenant Vorik. Could we have a few minutes of your time, please, Sir?" As Lieutenant Vorik approached, Prez explained, "I would like to expand the size of my

team." Gesturing to each boy, Prez introduced Troy, Sean and Tory as the new additions. He then asked, "Is it possible for you to perform brief mind-melds with each of them?"

Lieutenant Vorik nodded, "It is; however, I fail to understand the necessity."

Leaning closer to Prez, Keith whispered, "Prez? You're trying to relieve yourself of responsibility for them." Pulling back, he then slightly grinned, "I feel you, T'hy'la."

Placing a hand on Prez's shoulder and firmly squeezing, Derrick said, "It's not required, Prez. We chose without our parents' direct consent. Let them choose for themselves too."

Glancing at Mike, Corey and Drew, Prez saw them mutely nodding agreement. Prez sighed, "You're all right." Returning his attention to Vorik, Prez said, "I am sorry for involving you, Lieutenant. It's not your decision, it's mine and theirs."

Lieutenant Vorik reminded, "I am here to provide the functions you requested, Director O'Brian. Command decisions are within the realm of those functions. I suggest we adjourn to the conference room to discuss this decision further."

"Good," Prez nodded. The ten boys and Lieutenant Vorik went into the conference room. Once the door was closed and everyone had taken a seat, Prez told Lieutenant Vorik what had happened and that he had made Troy and Sean responsible for morale. That relatively easy decision blossomed into the current discussion.

Lieutenant Vorik asked, "Your request for mind-melds was for what purpose?"

Prez shrugged, "It was a stupid idea. I thought you could check

to see if they were capable; the right temperament. I think lack of sleep is catching up with me."

"And the reason why you would like to expand your team?" Lieutenant Vorik wondered.

"Because we have been so busy and working until the wee hours of the morning," Prez honestly answered. "In addition to that, I can't see how only eight of us can be responsive to up to two thousand kids across five bases. Cory Short agrees that I have to delegate authority. Adding to the Core team seemed to be a step in the right direction."

Vorik nodded, "A valid concern and wise decision."

Keith explained, "When Prez and I discussed this, we thought it would be a good idea to have leaders at each base that report back to us; specifically, at least one boy and one girl in every dormitory. We'd have like levels of responsibility, a tree structure similar to a chain of command."

Lieutenant Vorik nodded once saying, "Also valid and reasonable."

Prez sighed, "I guess what concerns me most are Sean and Tory. They both want to pay back Clan Short for being rescued. No one we rescue needs to feel like they should pay us back."

Drew reminded, "They're already Clan, Prez. Tory and Sean are both from the original group. They've got the most experience with the Clan and with us."

Kaleo knowingly grinned, "Did you worry so much when you made me communications officer, Prez?"

Prez huffed, then chuckled, "No, I didn't."

Mike sighed, then leaned across the table and asked, "You're worried about more dangerous rescues, aren't you, Prez?"

Prez nodded, "Yeah, I am."

Mike then turned to Sean, Tory and Troy in turn while saying, "We're getting phaser training. Someday, we may very well have to use those phasers to disable or kill people. Do any of you have an issue with that?"

Tory quickly said, "Not at all. If I'm aiming a phaser at someone hurting a kid, I'd have no problem firing."

Sean nodded, "Same here."

"Me too," Troy answered.

"I wish I had known this yesterday," Prez chuckled. "Now I'm gonna have to get Juan to give another class."

Sean reached for Troy's hand and giggled, "We were busy yesterday anyway."

Mike teased, "You were busy or were gettin' busy?"

Troy laughed, "Same difference!"

Corey helplessly cracked up and set the others off laughing.

Lieutenant Vorik waited for the laughter to subside, then said, "You have your new team members, Director O'Brian. I recommend that each of you who did not get adequate rest last night, retire for a short nap."

Prez said, "We have additional phaser training today at three."

Lieutenant Vorik reminded, "It is not yet thirteen hundred hours. I will notify you if activity requires it." Prez nodded and chose to not argue with Vulcan logic.

"Alden," Keith called, "one more sub-vocal and comm-badge for Tory Burgas. He's a Core Rimmer too, working with Kaleo in communications, effective immediately."

Before Tory appeared two more small boxes. Kaleo got his partner's sub-vocal fitted and proudly pinned the comm-badge on his T-shirt.

Prez smiled widely at Sean and Troy. He playfully asked, "Are you ready to join the Rimmer Funny Farm?"

Sean giggled and nodded while Troy laughed, "Yeah. We're ready."

Prez nodded, "Since you two weren't working until three in the morning, you're in charge until we're done with Juan's phaser training later this afternoon. John and Stephen will be back any time now to help out."

Everyone stood and started to leave the conference room. Keith said, "The rest of us will meet back here by three."

Prez stood before Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy softly explaining, "I really do want all of you on this team. You know that, don't you?"

Tory, Sean and Troy nodded. Troy asked, "What scares you, Prez?"

Prez sighed, "We're appreciated by many, but loathed by a few

radicals. The first time anyone on this team gets hurt, I'm gonna lose it."

Kaleo softly reminded, "The FCC and anyone like them."

Troy droned, "Oh, the Montana mess."

Keith nodded and said, "We've also rescued teen age prostitutes. Not only do we have to be a little more forceful with them, at first anyway, there are about twenty of them now that are older than us."

Troy shrugged, "No biggie. I've dealt with prostitutes in New York City before." Sean turned to Troy and raised his eyebrows. Slowly, Keith, Prez, Kaleo and Tory smiled. Troy giggled, "Not that way!"

As the group walked out of the conference room, Prez reminded, "Kaleo and Tory, get some rest too." Kaleo and Tory widely smiled. Prez smirked, "Whichever way you decide to rest is your decision."

Keith then swiftly swept Prez into his arms. Having never seen them do this before, Sean and Troy cracked up. While Prez cackled hysterically, Keith whispered, "The honeymoon isn't over yet!"

By placing his hands on their shoulders, Lieutenant Vorik stopped Sean and Troy. Both turned to face the taller Vulcan man while Keith danced Prez out of the Command Center. Vorik said, "Gentlemen, I will arrange to have personal security assigned to you. Whenever you leave secured locations, such as this base, your security contingent will accompany you."

Sean nodded. Troy asked, "We need security?"

"As Clan leaders, yes, it is required," Lieutenant Vorik replied.

"So if I want to take Sean out on a date off base, security needs to come with us?" Troy confirmed.

Lieutenant Vorik nodded, "Any unsecured location, yes."

Troy huffed, "Well, that kind o' sucks. What if we want to be alone?"

"Your security will be as anonymous as possible," Vorik answered.

Sean told Troy, "Whenever Prez and the guys go to school; they've got security with them. If they can deal, we can too, Lover." Any desire Troy had to argue vanished with that one simple word. He whimpered and Sean giggled, "We'll be over by the pools."

"Very well," Lieutenant Vorik nodded. He then set about arranging for six additional security personnel for Sean, Troy and Tory.

Sean and Troy walked into the dining room. At the other door, Sean noticed John walking in with Stephen, Bruce and those that had been to the Downings' funeral. Sean told Troy they should let John know what had happened the last hour. Already having done a light scan, John was obviously more than pleased with the team additions, and told them so, then introduced Frankie. Sean also mentioned that the rest of the team was taking a two-hour break. He and Troy then went to the pools.

Once there, Sean and Troy mingled around and many noticed their comm-badges and sub-vocals. Within minutes everybody knew they were new Core Rimmers. By the diving well, two of the older street kids, Kelly Littlepage and Lance Elling, went to them asking for dance music at the pools.

Sean smiled and nodded, "We can do that. The only thing is that we have to keep the volume reasonable, so if any of the little kids need help, we can hear them over the music."

Lance said, "That's totally kewl. We don't need a big PA system or live music, just a little ghetto blaster with a radio."

For the first time, Troy tapped his sub-vocal and called Alden.

"Morale Rimmer!" Alden giggled. "Do you know how appropriate that is for you?"

Troy laughed, "Ooo! You're a teasing little shit, aren't ya?"

Alden playfully hummed affirmatively, then asked, "What can I do for you, Troy?"

"The kids want to dance," Troy smiled. "All they need is a decent boom-box."

Alden said, "I have an alternative idea. I'll just connect the speakers by the pools and rec center to a station. Which station do they want to listen to?"

Troy asked, "Got a favorite station?"

Kelly checked with Lance and suggested, "KIKI Hot 93.9?"

Lance smiled, "Yeah!"

Troy forwarded the information to Alden. A second later, dance music was playing out of the poolside PA system. Soon, most of the older kids were dancing together. Horacio and Sonia were among them. Troy and Sean went over by the main pool and discovered many of the younger kids were dancing. Even Teddy Bears were

trying to dance, but generally only bouncing and waddling.

"Mission accomplished?" Sean grinned.

Troy nodded and smiled, "I can think of only one other thing we can do."

Sean leaned closer and whispered in Troy's ear; "Wanna show you something." Three other times Sean spoke those words and each of those instances left Troy gasping for breath. The next thing Troy knew, his boyfriend was dancing a few feet before him. Once again, Troy wasn't disappointed. Sean had natural rhythm and moved fluidly. Troy got his groove on and joined him. Barely five minutes later, out of necessity and before they overheated, they tossed themselves into the diving well. Not that it cooled them off very much. Sean leaned back with his arms draped over the edge of the well. Troy swam closer and attached himself to Sean's waist with his legs.

Reyes, Bane, Benjamin, Randy, Dillon, Geoff and Jonah were the first of those that had been at the funeral to arrive at the pool. Gage, Sammy, Richie, Kokaku, Carmella and Dee quickly welcomed them back. Dee asked Reyes, "How's Bruce doin'?"

Reyes shrugged, "He's okay, for the most part. Aunt Jen and Uncle Jim are talking with him, John and Stephen now."

Benjamin offered, "The worst part was in the limo goin' there. Once we got there, he was very kewl. When the monk stood, Bruce did and we all did."

"It was real pretty," Jonah relayed, "not scary or sad or nothin' like that."

Bane smiled, "I liked what the monks said. It wasn't like any

church service I've ever seen before."

Gage and Sammy then told the guys what had happened on base since they left. Not knowing any better, Reyes went to congratulate Troy and Sean. Reyes' four-and-a-half foot shadow, Jonah accompanied him. Finding them together at the diving well, Reyes grinned and started to laugh, but an odd, squeaking sound escaped his mouth. Quickly, Reyes performed a self-diagnostic and his hand covered Jonah's eyes.

"What?" Jonah giggled, and tried unsuccessfully to pull Reyes' hand out of the way. Reyes picked up his little bro and started to walk away. Jonah laughed, "It ain't like we never seen dudes makin' out before!"

Sean called out, "Reyes? Did you need something?"

Reyes giggled, "It'll hold."

Jonah cracked up. Between giggles, he told his overprotective big bro, "They're already holdin'!"

Rolling his eyes and shaking his head, Reyes took Jonah to the other pool and jumped in the deeper end.

John, Stephen and Frankie went home with Bruce and Dewi. All the boys changed out of their suits. Emotionally exhausted, Bruce wanted to lie down and take a nap. Dewi cuddled close to Bruce and joined him in bed.

John, Frankie and Stephen brought the FCC rescued kids to the FYS building's sub-basement, where one hundred Teddy bears were waiting to meet their new best friends. During the elevator ride down, John explained to the kids how the Teddy Bears bonded, and told them to take their time choosing. When the elevator door opened, all

the kids and Teddy Bear intermingled. Frankie quickly found a Teddy named Medved. In less than half-an-hour, the Teddy bears were waddling out of the FYS building and back to the pools with their friends. John had the remaining Teddy bears stay in standby mode until the next group of young kids wanted friends and he returned to the new 'bear cave'. Alden placed orders to replace the Teddy Bears that had been befriended.

Everything was back to normal and all the kids were having fun when John, Stephen and Frankie arrived at the pools. Carmella was the first one to greet them and wondered, "Where's Brucie?"

Picking his sister up the normal way, with his arms, John smiled, "He's okay. It's just been a tiring day for him, so he wanted to take a nap. Dewi's with him and so are Zed and Dex." Soon John, Stephen and Frankie were surrounded by Kokaku, Gage, Sammy, Richie, Dee and Geoff. The miniature news team was bursting at the seams to tell John all that had happened that morning, but John had already felt what was going on, primarily from his brothers. John and Stephen introduced Frankie to his cousins, aunt and uncles. Letting his sister down, John let Carmella go play with her friends. He then led the remaining group to the diving well.

At the edge of the diving well, away from where others were diving, Troy and Sean still hadn't moved. They were holding each other close and quietly talking. When John saw them joined at the hips, he grinned, "Teenagers!" then powered up. Unwillingly separated, Troy and Sean rose up out of the water, screaming and shouting, above the five-meter high diving board. Frankie and Stephen howled hysterically. When the coast was clear in the diving well, John powered down. Sean and Troy dropped into the well. Before Troy or Sean rose to the surface, John glanced at the kids and grinned, "Pounce time!" All six boys laughed and took off for the

diving well. They jumped up, grabbed their legs and landed rear ends first, cannon-balling the two startled lovers.

Sean knew better than to even try to retaliate, but Troy didn't. He swam quickly for the edge of the diving well with Sean loudly laughing, "Don't, Troy!" But it was too late. John's eyes blazed blue and Troy found himself swimming twenty feet in the air, going nowhere but further up.

John loudly giggled, "Welcome to the team, bro!"

Troy howled, "Put me down! Gently!"

So John did put him gently down – on the peak of the pool house roof.

While Troy laughed and ranted, Stephen giggled, "Evil, plain evil!"

John shrugged and smiled, "Just a newbie Rimmer initiation ritual."

Sean went over to John, softly chortling, "Can I have my boyfriend back, please?"

John laughed, "But look around! Morale's as high as he is now!"

"Except for mine," Sean giggled.

Knowing Troy wanted to get even, John grinned, "You can keep him under control?"

Sean hummed then laughed, "I can keep him under lots of things."

Thoughtful for a few moments, John then instructed, "Put your

arms out, Sean." Sean did as he was told and John powered up. Troy lifted off the pool house roof and over, above Sean, then slowly lowered into his boyfriend's waiting arms.

Troy softly giggled, "Suddenly, I feel the need to play heavy metal."

John heard Troy's playful remark to Sean. Sean put Troy down before he dropped him then landed a quick kiss. Holding up his hands to prove he was defenseless, John offered, "Truce?" Sean and Troy both nodded. John then asked, "Do you mind if I do quick mind scans of you both?"

Sean rapidly assured, "No problem, John."

Taken aback, Troy faced Sean and giggled, "You don't even care why?"

Shaking his head, Sean honestly said, "Joel thought enough of John to make him a Core Rimmer. I trust him."

Looking up at the two taller teens, John explained, "I'm not looking deep. I've just noticed a few things about others. It's like categorizing. Like the rest of my family and the other Core Rimmers, I'll set up rooms for you two. This way I'll know when you're in trouble and can get you help."

"Go ahead, John," Sean said, "but tell us what you see."

Focusing on Sean first, John hummed, then softly said, "Drop those abuses in the nearest trash can and you'd be far less cluttered in there." Before Sean could say a word, John nodded, "I know you're trying and Troy's helped. Think of 'em like a bunch of lies and half truths. They don't matter anymore, bro." Pointing at Troy, John said, "Tell him everything then dump the dirty memories. Keep everything

since Friday and you'll be kewl, bro."

Facing Troy, John asked, "Ready?"

"This should be interesting," Troy smirked.

John softly muttered, "Wow." He then smiled, "Lots of kewl memories; the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Madison Square Garden, World Trade Center, songs, music, guitars, horns, little musical notes all over the place. In case you didn't already know it, you're gifted, just like Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick. They're virtuosos on one or two instruments. You chose to know lots of instruments. You don't play trumpet anymore because of chapped lips? That's silly, especially here. You like how snow looks, but don't like the cold. Welcome to Hawai'i! You wanna see snow; take a trip up the mountains. When you're done, come on back down and get warm again." John then thanked Troy for the virtual tour of New York City and asked, "Do you wanna see something prettier?"

Sean grinned and nodded. Troy shrugged, "Sure, why not."

Gage asked, "Can we go too?"

Tapping his sub-vocal, John called, "Alden?"

Alden giggled, "Soul Rimmer?"

John ordered, "Take the nine of us to the Kauai base, by the main gate, so the Starfleet guys don't freak out."

Troy was just about to say something, but they had already been transported. Troy grunted at the sudden relocation then chuckled, "We're supposed to be watching the kids."

Waving him off, John assured, "The kids are fine." He then

reached his hand in his pocket and pulled out his I.D. to show the on-duty Starfleet security personnel. He told them, "We're just gonna take a quick tour then we'll go back home."

John called Alden again then started his tour at Secret Beach. Richie and Dee immediately recognized it and practically tore their clothes off to go play in the water. Letting go of Stephen's hand and covering his mouth, John cleared his throat then complained, "I should've brought some cough drops or hard candies."

Alden giggled, "Look in your left pocket, John."

John reached his hand into his shorts pocket and smiled, "You're the best, Alden." After popping a peppermint candy in his mouth, John waved his good arm around and croaked, "This is where it all began." Since his voice wasn't cooperating, John began sending thoughts to Stephen, Frankie, Gage, Sammy, Troy and Sean. *'We met Joel, lots of the rescued kids and some of Clan Short right here.'*

Taking Troy by the hand and walking down the beach, Sean excitedly gushed, "It was an awesome day. We swam and ate and swam some more." Pointing further down the beach to his right, Sean smiled, "A bunch of us came running down that bluff." He then pointed to his left by the shore and smiled, "Prez and the guys were right over there. We saw them naked and got naked too."

Noticing the lighthouse in the distance, at the edge of the peninsula, Troy sighed, "It's really pretty here."

'That's Kilauea Lighthouse,' John sent to the group. He then wondered, *'Gage and Sammy, why aren't ya swimming?'*

Gage grinned and countered, "Why aren't you swimming?"

John actually had to think for a moment or two. He admitted,

"Guess it's the funeral still messin' with me." He then took his shirt off and sent to Stephen, *'I wish Bruce was here. I think it would've fixed him up, at least a little bit.'* Frankie, Gage and Sammy stripped then joined Dee and Richie in the surf.

Stephen suggested, "Bring him here later or tomorrow, hon."

John nodded and smiled, *'You won't take your shirt off?'* Stephen shook his head then glanced at Troy and Sean, who were many paces away. *'Don't worry about them, baby,'* John assured. He then grinned, *'Watch a teenager turn into a little boy.'* He sent Sean a short message. *'Toss-the-kid?'*

Spinning around to face John, Sean began laughing and quickly taking his clothes off. Troy smiled at his suddenly hysterical and naked boyfriend. Smiling widely, Sean told Troy, "It's a favorite Sehlat game."

"A Sehlat?" Troy grinned, "As in a huge Vulcan bear?"

John giggled and, to both teenagers, sent *'Minus the Sehlat slobber,'* then powered up and lifted Sean.

Looking down at Troy, Sean giggled, "I'll tell ya about it later."

Actually tossing Sean was John's concern. Sean was similar in height and weight to Keith and Prez, about five feet eight inches tall and a hundred-thirty or so pounds. Telekinetically lifting him was one thing, but tossing him was a new feat. If John didn't toss Sean hard enough, he'd land in only inches of water and get hurt. So, John walked nearer to the water line and began bouncing Sean in the air.

After the third bounce and mid-fourth bounce, Sean loudly laughed, "Any time today, John!"

John grinned, "I ain't a Sehlat with tossing practice! I want you to go out far, but not so far that you'll be swimming back for an hour."

Sean howled, "I've got a sub-vocal. If I have to, I'll call Alden."

Walking closer to John and Stephen, Troy giggled, "It's not that I'm not liking the view, but he's gonna puke. Then he'll be wanting kisses, but getting none."

John laughed, "Okay, okay! Hold on to your jewels, Sean." Quickly reaching down with both hands, Sean cupped his privates just in time. Like a human missile, he flew out about a hundred yards and splashed down. "Ooo!" John croaked. "That was way further than I expected." Shaking his head, Stephen broke into fits of giggles. Frankie laughed so hard that he fell on his butt into the sand.

Dee, Gage, Richie and Sammy hurried over to John, naked and ready to be tossed. Troy walked down the beach and into the water to meet Sean. John grinned, "Okay, Gage and Sammy first, so they're around in the water to help Richie and Dee."

Simultaneously, Gage and Sammy shouted, "Me first!" It was then, while the two boys argued over who would get tossed first, that John realized how much taller he was than Stephen and his four nephews. He was about six inches taller than Dee and Frankie, about four inches taller than Stephen and Gage, about three inches taller than Sammy, and at least a foot taller than Richie. Since Sammy and Gage hadn't managed to choose who would get tossed first, John lifted them both at the same time. Figuring that Sammy was tallest, John sent him flying out over the bay first. He didn't go near as far as Sean, but still further than John expected. He had to get the proper push settled in his mind, or Richie would need help getting ashore from Sean and Troy, not Sammy or Gage. Sending Gage flying next, John found that he went about as far as Sammy had. Frankie gleefully

screamed as he sailed out and splashed down.

Troy walked out in the surf to meet Sean as he rode a wave to shore. For some reason though, Sean stopped and stood in chest deep water, waving for Troy to come out and join him. Grinning, Troy broke through a few waves and met his boyfriend. Sean reached for Troy and pulled him close. Troy felt his boyfriend's condition and excitedly laughed, "Again, Tiger?"

"Just from the waves," Sean smiled. After a brief pause, Sean shared, "I've been wanting to say something to you, but haven't been able to until now."

"What?" Troy softly queried, and then reminded, "You can tell me anything, Sean."

Sean nodded then pulled Troy's head a little closer so he could speak softly. "Ya know last night and this morning, I wanted intercourse?"

Hugging Sean tighter, Troy nodded, "Soon, Tiger. Both toys, one and two were incredible. You were great in every way."

"I'm really glad you enjoyed it too," Sean admitted. "That's what I have to tell you about." Sean smiled and shared, "I'm a bottom boy, Lover. I can and will do you too, when you're ready, but I have to admit, bottom is what I like most."

Many yards to their side and well above them, Dee screamed as he was tossed. Relieved that Sean wasn't going to share another horror story from his past, Troy giggled, "I wish the water was a few degrees colder."

Feeling Troy's growing problem, Sean laughed then planted a kiss and locked eyes with him. "I ain't ever leaving you. Luck don't

even begin to cover my life since Friday. Charmed is more like it; maybe even blessed."

"I feel the same way," Troy admitted. "The only difference between you and me is, your life changed five days ago. Mine changed a day ago, when you knocked on my door."

Sean asked, "Does it make you angry when I ask for intercourse?"

Troy shook his head and smiled, "I'm trying to live a dream with you, Sean. I really do want to wait so I'm ready for you too. Then we'll go absolutely crazy together."

Sean slyly smiled, "It sounds great to me too, but I gotta admit, I want you bad."

"Every time you ask, you're wearing me down too," Troy revealed. He then shrugged, "We'll see how it actually works out for us."

"I need to ask one tiny favor," Sean giggled, "Get my shorts, please?" He then smirked, "There's no reason all these guys need to see me hard."

Troy laughed, "You realize that me walking back with your shorts is going to say all that needs to be said?"

Sean shrugged and grinned, "Let's not advertise. The product has already been sold."

Prez, Keith and the rest of the Core Rimmers showed up on the bluff with their kids. Sliding down the bluff on his butt, Reyes loudly complained, "I can't believe you dudes came here and didn't tell us."

Helping Jonah and Dillon down the bluff, Mike and Derrick landed on the beach. Derrick smirked, "Didn't you think we'd like to reminisce too?" Also sliding down the bluff were Corey and Drew, who was carrying Geoff on his lap. Kaleo and Tory tried to remain standing, but laughed hysterically as they once again fell on their asses on their way down the steep bluff.

Reyes, Jonah and Geoff went into the water with Richie, Frankie and Dee. Gage and Sammy hurried up the beach to Keith and Prez to give them welcoming hugs. Gage smiled up at Keith, "This place is awesome! You guys met Joel and everybody here? It's so pretty."

Hugging his son, Keith nodded, "This is where it all happened."

Suddenly, a loud gunshot was heard causing everyone to snap their heads in the direction of the gunfire. Those standing behind John saw the back of his head had exploded outwards, and he was dropping to the ground. Before anyone else could move, they heard an explosion. At this time, all eyes went to where Reyes, Jonah, Frankie, Geoff, Richie and Dee had been standing; however, that is also where the rocket propelled grenade hit.

Reyes was in pieces. His head, torso, arms and legs were spread around a ten foot circumference. Red, blood-stained water washed over the remains of Jonah, Frankie, Geoff, Richie and Dee. Body parts of the five small boys washed ashore in the surf. Stephen dropped to the ground with his husband, screaming his name, demanding a response that would never come.

Yelling, "HOLY FUCKING SHIT!" Mike and Derrick were the first to drop flat onto the beach. Sean and Troy went under water and disappeared from sight. Corey, Drew, Kaleo and Tory were next to lay flat, prone on the beach.

Nearest the bluff, Prez bellowed "Alden! WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?" Beside him, Keith screamed and collapsed into the sand. Prez dropped down beside him and saw blood gushing from a wound just above his left knee.

Prez reached up to tap his communicator, when suddenly it went off. He wasn't sure who's voice came over it, but what the kid said made his veins run icy. "RED ALERT!" The voice screamed. "Pacific Rim Division under attack! Orlando, Utah, Wales and Australian Clan divisions are off the grid. All surviving Clan members are ordered to fall back to the Oahu..." Prez heard explosions in the background, and then suddenly the line went dead.

Over their screaming, everyone could hear boat motors racing towards the beach area from the extreme northwest of Secret Beach. Kaleo drew his phaser first and set it to maximum with a wide beam, loudly ordering Tory, Corey and Drew to do the same. Firing first upon the closest of the ten boats, Kaleo and Tory hit the bow at the water line. The front of the boat disintegrated and the boat flipped at high speed, sending six men flailing out in all directions.

While Prez took his shirt off and tied a tourniquet around Keith's leg, Sean popped up out of the water and fired upon the first man he saw that was still moving. Several yards away, Troy surfaced and fired upon another swimming man. Drew and Corey fired upon the second boat, sending it flipping and spinning sideways across a wave. None of the six aboard could have survived.

Returning gunfire from the boats caused all the boys to duck for cover. The boys on the beach that had been firing were now scrambling for tree stumps and logs. Drew and Corey ran over to where Stephen was crying and clutching the body of his dead husband. He protested loudly, but was overpowered as the larger boys

grabbed him and started to drag him to where Keith and Prez were.

Meanwhile, Keith and Prez were trying their best to lay down cover fire for Sean and Troy, who were making their way back to the beach. Every few seconds, one of the two boys in the water would turn around and fire at one of the oncoming boats.

By the time that Sean and Troy made it to the beach, there were only six boats left that were racing towards the beach. Both figured they had less than thirty-seconds before the boats would land.

"GET BEHIND SOMETHING!" Mike screamed as he found cover behind a tree trunk. Derrick was running towards Mike, with both Gage and Sammy trailing him. The two younger boys got to the tree just as Derrick hollered and hit the ground hard.

"DERRICK!" Mike cried out. He kept firing as well as running towards where Derrick went down. He was thankful to see his husband was still alive and was trying to crawl towards him. Grabbing him by the shirt, Mike started to pull him back. Derrick had barely avoided the bullets that hit the ground right where he had been.

"SHINY DADDY! We're here!" The Scooby gang screamed at the top of their lungs.

Spike and Xander had finally made it to the top of the bluff with the fifty-caliber machine-gun they had been dragging behind them. They were setting the gun up on its stand while Willow and Faith were busily getting ordinance in place and loaded.

"Those fuckers! Look what they made us do to the shiny gun," Spike grumbled, with a disgusted look on his face.

"The Dull Ones will pay for their blasphemy with their lives,"

was Xander's solemn response.

Willow shook her head in disgust. "I hope Juan never finds out we dragged a gun through the sand unprotected."

"He'd never let us live it down," Faith earnestly said.

Willow decided to take charge and began barking orders. Soon, Spike took up his place at the trigger while Faith and Xander got in place to aim the gun. Willow took up her place to feed the ammunition. "Die, you fuckers!" She screamed as she gave Spike, Xander, and Faith the signal to start firing.

Spike began to fire at the men in the boats and the Scooby gang began sliding down the bank. The gun was obviously too big for them, but somehow they were managing to do serious damage to the enemy.

"You Dull loving sons of bitches will all burn!" Spike screamed at the top of his lungs. He was gnashing his teeth and growling.

The gun would begin to slide down the bluff and Spike would pull the trigger again in very controlled bursts with Xander and Faith aiming for him. It would right itself again and begin the slide all over again.

Willow saw that Mike was hurt. He was bleeding. Tears came to her eyes. "You hurt the Shiny Daddy! Now you will suffer! Not one of them is to live. They all die! I'm going to slice your fucking nuts off, ram them down your throat, then shove this gun up your ass and blow your head into chum for the fishes!" She was literally shaking and almost foaming at the mouth.

Again and again Spike would let go with a burst of fire and the gun would slowly right itself. Several of the enemy would drop,

riddled with bullets. It would have been a comical scene watching the Scoobies slither down the bank like a sidewinder if it wasn't for the seriousness of the situation.

Hit in the left shoulder, but still able to fire on the enemy, Mike blubbered, "I've never heard them talk so much shit before!"

"Yeah, but they've taken out more of the bastards than we have!" Derrick said, and popped up again to disintegrate another boat, leaving six of the remaining eighteen men with no cover at all.

Having lost two of his boys, a nephew, a brother, and with his husband bleeding profusely, Prez was running amok. The four-letter 'F' word that Prez rarely ever used was pouring out of his mouth in nonsensical strings of profanity while he fired. Two men and another boat disintegrated by Prez's phaser blasts. Finally, Prez dove behind the tree where Gage and Sammy were hiding. Sean, Troy, Kaleo, Tory, Drew and Corey got the six men that were left uncovered.

The fifty-caliber machine-gun came to a stop at the bottom of the bank. The ferrets quickly uprighted themselves and took aim again.

"You sheep loving, fart sucking, motherless sons of whores will live in terror for the rest of your lives!" Willow screeched. Then a look of serene vengeance washed over her face as she became all business. Two more of the enemy dropped as the last of the ammunition was spent. "Too bad for you that it is only going to be a few minutes more." Willow gave the sign.

Almost as one the Scoobies grabbed their machetes and took off silently into the bushes.

The enemy had managed to move across the beach and get themselves some cover along the bank. This made it difficult for the

Rimmers to hit them. The Rimmers exchanged a few more volleys with the enemy and it quickly became clear that it was a standoff.

Suddenly, the enemy began screaming. Several more screams and a few seconds later, a man flopped into view and dragged himself along the sand away from the protection of the bank. A furry blur rushed out and jumped on his back. Six hard lightening fast chops with a machete reduced the man's head to chum. Another man staggered out and was dropped by a burst from Prez's phaser.

Two more ear shattering screams ripped through the beach. Another two men charged out from behind the cover of the bank. The first man was falling from Xander slashing his Achilles tendons. Prez didn't waste any time as he drew a bead and phasered the man into the next life.

The second man emerged holding a ferret by the scruff of her neck. Mike knew instantly who it was by the string of profanities coming from her mouth. The man had a gun to the ferret's head. "You fucking brats need to drop your weapons now! I mean it. I'll blow its fucking head off!" He smacked Willow in the head with the gun. "Shut it, you fucking rat!"

Willow bit the man. As she was falling, she took the first shot to her chest. The powerful projectile shredded her small torso. The next several shots hit Xander and Faith. Mike screamed at the top of his lungs "NO-O-O!" Tears streamed from his eyes as he leaped to his feet and took aim. He fired, disintegrating the man and his body turned to dust.

Wearing combat boots, camouflaged Speedos with a SuperSoaker water pistol slung under his right hip, and a yellow polka-dotted bikini top that had a hand grenade filling each cup, Juan proudly strode across the beach and stopped before John's body.

Without so much as a grin, he seriously said, "In this altercation, you faced sixty enemy attackers. You killed all sixty, but ten Rimmers died and two were wounded. Welcome to war." Suddenly all the boats, dead bodies and piles of dust on the beach disappeared. John stood up, with all four ferrets appearing behind him.

The Rimmers were completely perplexed and speechless. Both Keith and Mike realized that their wounds were gone. Extremely confused and pissed off, Prez rounded on Juan. Prez growled, "What the fuck is going on?"

Juan gave him a very sad smile. "Having the knowledge on using a phaser or gun is great, but having the willingness to actually *use* one, is something entirely different. A weapon that one either cannot or will not use is simply another weapon for the enemy."

"You mean this whole thing was in your head; no one actually died?" Mike excitedly asked, gently kneading his now not wounded shoulder.

"This was real to you guys, and that's what matters." Juan turned and looked squarely at Prez, who was still fuming. "Prez, I know you're angry, and you have every right to be; however, hear me out on why I did it this way. I have seen way too many kids in the past week or so that thought war would be cool, and playing with the big guns would be fun. Every single one of them had something like this happen to them, simply to show them that war is *not* fun, or exciting, or even something to look forward to. War fucking sucks, but until someone really sees it, they don't *really* understand it."

Juan paused looking around to make sure he had all of their attentions, not to mention hoping that they had let go of their anger and were actually listening to what he was saying. "Does it make it any easier to know that you guys killed sixty guys that were hell bent

on killing you? Does it make it any easier knowing that you *only* lost ten to their sixty?"

One by one, all the Core Rimmers shook their heads. "Exactly." Juan continued, before starting to pace in front of the group. "I had to take John out first because he is an N-Gen; no matter what I did, I could have only fooled him for a few minutes before he realized what was going on. I explained to him what I was going to do to make you guys believe what you saw, and he agreed to play dead. Before you get pissed at him, know this, I did not give him a choice. I told him to either play dead, or I would not involve him in this. He doesn't realize it yet, but he didn't need to do this. Since his live fire experience yesterday, he had his certification. The book knowledge is needed, but easy. It's the willingness, and the ability of using the weapon that I care about. Shooting at targets in a controlled environment is *not* the way to make sure someone won't freeze when the real thing happens. I am happy to say that none of you did that."

Pausing again, Juan made sure everyone was on the same page as he was before he delivered his final statement and letting them say what they wanted. "Kaleo, Tory, Mike, Derrick, Prez and Keith are all still asleep, the rest of you knew you were coming in for a scenario, but before you came in, I just blocked those memories. When you all leave this place, it will seem no more real to you then a realistic dream. I know what it is like to lose family, so I won't make you live with the thought that this was actually real."

Mike couldn't help it, he had to know. "All the little kids aren't here anymore. I am assuming that means they weren't actually here?" When Juan nodded, Mike kept going. "So that means the Scoobies are actually here. Why?"

Juan couldn't help grinning widely as he knelt down by Spike and placed his hand over the ferret boy's shoulder. "Well, when I

decided I was gonna use them in here, I realized that I ain't crazy enough to play them right. You and Derrick would have noticed they weren't acting like themselves, so I pulled them in after explaining what I was gonna do. Again, I got their okay before bringing them in, but they didn't remember it when they showed up. Everything they did is exactly what they would have done had this been real."

Grinning, Spike bounced up and down. He ran away from under Juan's hand, only to jump up into Mike's arms. "Yup yup! We did what we shoulda done. Did we do good, Shiny Daddy?"

Willow, Faith and Xander all crowded around Mike and Derrick for a group hug. Willow was the first one to speak after the hug broke. "Weez did exactly what weez s'pose to. Once we got here, we got them before they got you."

"You guys did great!" Mike said, trying not to cry at seeing Willow alive again after being killed just a few minutes earlier. "From now on though, I don't want you guys getting hurt."

"Why not?" Faith asked in a confused voice. "You guys be the humans, weez just hybrids. It's better if weez get hurts or killed then if yous guys do."

"It's not better to me or Derrick," Mike softly explained. Giving up any pretense, Mike wept, "You're not hybrids to us; you're our kids. If we were to lose one of you, never mind three of you, I'd go fucking insane." Seeing only confusion on the ferrets' faces through his tears, Mike huffed, "How can I make you understand? It don't matter that you're hybrid; you're every bit as important to us as Dillon and Jonah, our human kids. Reyes is an android and every bit as important as our human kids. The loss of any one of you would snap my brain into hundreds of pieces. Clan Short could kiss my ass one at a time or as one big group. Every time I picked up a guitar, I'd

remember you guys too, so there goes that life, out the window. Anything shiny would put me into fits of crying. Everything my life was before, and has been since I met you, would seem different. Your lives are that important to me." Shaking uncontrollably, Mike leaned against Derrick and hid his face on his husband's shoulder.

Rubbing Mike's back, Derrick softly added, "You wanted fathers. We want to be your fathers. This is love; this is caring. If you want to show us how much you care, all you need to understand is that you're our kids, not hybrid kids; not less important than human kids, but every bit *as* important. Your lives matter that much to us." With that the family came back into a hug.

Juan wiped his eyes as he watched the two older boys try and crush the ferrets between them. "I think you guys are now really starting to understand what being parents to those who were raised as a soldier is like. It is very hard to break the brainwashing that we all went through. I will be totally honest here; there are times when I feel just like they do. It will take them some time to get over that. Thankfully, they have you guys to help them recover their self-worth." He waited for everyone to get done crying, before he skillfully changed the topic.

"Now, I am going to go through and tell you guys where you did well, and where you could have done something different. Please don't argue with me, because nothing I say is meant to make anyone feel bad, just to think about. No one did anything that was actually wrong. Everything that every one of you did was perfectly understandable." First he turned towards Drew and Corey. "You guys did exactly the right thing when you pulled Stephen back from John's body."

He then turned to Stephen. "Understand, I know why you did what you did, and no one here will say anything bad about it, but had

this been real, you would have died." He held up his hand as he walked over to Stephen and pulled him into a hug. Into Stephen's ear, Juan whispered, "I didn't say that to make you feel bad. I know how you feel about John, and know I would be a total wreck if I lost Koth. However, crying over a body will do nothing except get yourself killed. If that ever happens, make sure the bastard that killed him pays for it... with his life."

Juan stepped back from the hug and smiled at Stephen. Stephen wiped his eyes and nodded. "It's never easy, nor should it be. But when the time comes, this will have helped you." He stepped back a few steps and regarded the group again for a moment. "I know you guys don't want to ever have to actually kill someone, but as you saw here, there may be times when it is kill or be killed. There may come a time when someone won't allow you the option of running. Killing should never be easy, nor should you ever use lethal force unless you need to. However, now all of you know that you can. Remember the pain you're feeling now, but don't let it paralyze you in the future. Within an hour of you waking up, you will have all the papers filed with Starfleet that are needed. You will then be allowed to go to the Armory and get a sidearm issued to all of you. It will be up to you all to decide on when and where to carry it; however, I would suggest that you never go into an unsecured area without carrying one. Now, are there any questions?"

Everyone shook their heads. Juan congratulated them once again, then let them out of his mind.

Standing beside John and shaking his head, Stephen muttered, "I think I had a nightmare about this place. I feel like I've been here before, but I know I haven't."

Locking eyes with his husband, John nodded and reassuringly

smiled. *'It was only a bad dream, baby.'*

Out in the bay, Troy looked to the northwest for approaching speed boats, but saw nothing. Sean looked over his shoulder where Troy was looking, then slyly asked, "Can I have my shorts or do I have to show off?"

"Sorry," Troy mumbled, and then shrugged, "Guess I'd just as soon stay here with you for a few more minutes."

John scanned everyone still really on Secret Beach. As expected, Frankie, Gage, Sammy, Richie and Dee had no memory of anything. Stephen, Sean and Troy all seemed to believe it was a déjà vu episode. Satisfied that everyone was fine, John sent to everyone on the beach, *'Let's go check the fields where the concert was.'*

In the townhouse where Mike and Derrick were sleeping, Mike woke with a start from the nightmare he'd just had. Derrick reached for his husband and croaked, "You okay?"

Taking in a deep breath, Mike sighed, "I guess. Gotta find the Scoobies and our kids."

In the townhouse next door, Prez got out of bed and was putting his clothes on when Keith awoke. He yawned, "Prez? What's the hurry?"

Pulling his T-shirt over his head, Prez answered, "I just need to find our kids, T'hy'la."

Sitting up and moving toward the edge of the bed, Keith wondered, "Did you have a weird dream too?"

Sitting down to slip into his sandals, Prez nodded, "A really bad

one, like our kids were in danger."

Reyes and Jonah went back to the diving well again to congratulate Sean and Troy on becoming Core Rimmers. Reyes noticed that not only were they gone, but so were John, Stephen, Frankie, Dee, Gage, Sammy and Richie. Walking all the way around the pool house by the diving well and then returning to the main pool area, Reyes noticed only kids dancing and others playing. He asked his little brother, "Does this mean we're in charge?"

Jonah giggled, "Don't look like anybody needs anyone in charge." He then poked Reyes in the belly and added, "But if they do, you're it!"

"That's what I was afraid of," Reyes smirked.

Back on Kauai, John and his small party had left Secret Beach and were roaming the fields where the concert had been. In the grass and ground, indentations could still be seen where the stage had been. Sean estimated where center stage was and told Troy, "The Prime Minister would've been about here." He then moved and said, "Joel and I-Cheya were about here. Then there were lots of bangs and noises and a scream." Sean pointed and smiled, "We were way over there, hiding behind video displays and speakers. When we came out from hiding, the Prime Minister was no more."

Stephen meekly offered, "I wonder if this division would've been created if the Prime Minister hadn't been discovered by John?"

John shrugged and croaked, "We'll never know. I guess we would have still been formed, but had a bigger job from the start." Pulling another candy out of his pocket, John unwrapped it and realized his brothers were waking up. He sent, *'C'mon, you guys. Let's get back home.'* Soon, everyone was gathered around John and

Stephen. John tapped his sub-vocal and asked, "Take us back home, by the pool please, Alden?"

They all arrived on the walkway between the pool and the soccer field. Richie looked up and cheered, "Thanks for tossing us, Unca John!" Dee, Gage, Sammy and Sean repeated the sentiment. Then the little kids took off running for the pool.

After shadowing his dad and pop all day, for the first time, Frankie wanted to play. Uncertainly shuffling his feet, Frankie frowned, "Daddy? Poppa?"

John smiled, *'Go ahead and play, Frankie. We'll be close by. Later, I'll want to introduce you to some of my friends.'*

Widely smiling, Frankie's face split in half. He gave his daddy and poppa quick hugs, then went to play with his cousins.

Sean turned to Troy and sighed, "You never got tossed."

Troy grinned, "No, but I did get a good view of *everything* while you were getting bounced." Sean turned red and giggled. Before John knew it was coming, Troy quickly reached over and tickled him. Laughing hysterically, the candy John had been sucking blew out of his mouth and stuck to Troy's T-shirt. Sean, Stephen and John cracked up.

Prez, Keith, Drew, Corey, Mike and Derrick arrived at the pool. The three couples split and went directly for their kids. Once Reyes, Jonah and Dillon were gathered and had been hugged, the family went for a walk to find the Scoobies.

Acting like he hadn't seen his kids in a month, Prez hugged each boy tightly. In Prez's arms and holding on tight, Richie softly

wondered, "Wha's wrong, Poppa?"

Relieved all the boys were fine, Prez sighed, "Nothin'. I just love you guys that much."

Richie giggled and landed a kiss on his dad's cheek then happily gushed, "Unca John took us to the beach where we met. We was over by where the stage was too."

Overhearing this, Keith's eyes almost shot out their sockets. John and Stephen walked up. *'I just told Mike and Derrick so I'll tell you too,'* John sent to his brothers. *'Those dreams weren't just nightmares. You've already passed your level two live fire tests. Don't answer aloud so the kids won't get scared, but I'm just curious, how much to you remember?'* John scanned his brothers and realized they only recalled tiny portions of their 'nightmares'. Just like Mike and Derrick, Prez and Keith only remembered the worst parts; what had happened to their kids. John nodded and smiled. *'You dudes were awesome! Even Sean and Troy passed with flying colors. I'm doing a mind dump of Starfleet Security Regulations and Procedures. We've got one hell of a team to lead this division. Juan couldn't be happier or prouder. Congratulations, you've all been promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade.'*

With Gage wrapped under his left arm and Sammy wrapped under his right, Keith happily cheered, "That means we've got the rest of the afternoon off!"

John covered his mouth and coughed then sent, *'The only thing I need is for Stephen to be made a Core Rimmer too.'*

Uncertain, Stephen asked, "You really want me, hon?"

Rapidly nodding, John sent, *'You were awesome yesterday, baby.'*

Where I go, you go.'

Stephen wrapped his arms around John and sighed contentedly. Closing their eyes, they began floating and Stephen playfully groped John's tush through his boardies. Suddenly they were three feet off the ground and giggling.

Prez tapped his sub-vocal. "Alden, one more sub-vocal and comm-badge for Stephen Marr, please, dude. He's a Core Rimmer too, Intel Division, effective immediately."

Alden replied, "On the patio table to your left, Prez."

Keith quickly realized, "That makes twelve Core Rimmers and six couples." He then chirped, "Sweet!" Keith went over to the Terrible Triplets to ask that the newest Rimmers get all the information about the Safe Haven Act and Clan Short Charter. Before actually asking though, Keith received triplicate confirmation that the task was already done. Stopping in his tracks, Keith began chuckling and shaking his head.

Prez went to the table and got the two communications devices for Stephen. The problem was that Prez was looking directly into John's and Stephen's shorts. John sent, *'Just stuff the boxes in my pocket, bro. I'll take care of Stephen later.'*

Doing as John instructed, Prez playfully huffed, "Seems you're already taking care of Stephen." Giggling like crazy, Stephen hid his face on John's shoulder.

At the CIC, Lieutenant Vorik received a report from Alden, Daileass and Draco regarding the accounting records of the California corporation they had been investigating. Since Director O'Brian was believed to be resting and he saw no need to immediately inform him, Vorik made strategic and tactical plans. He then contacted Kekoa, so

the Pacific Rim UNIT detachment would be prepared. Kekoa reviewed Vorik's plans, then contacted Donnie at the Rapid Response base. In order to execute the plan, four more teams of ten would be required.

Just before three that afternoon, John, Stephen and Lindsay walked back to the Hundser's house to call Jeff and Tommy. Minutes later, Kaleo and Tory finally made it to the pool. Of course, they were confused since it was now after three in the afternoon, but no Core Rimmers or Juan ever showed up at the CIC for level two phaser training. Prez filled them in on what they had already done. Once again, to Kaleo and Tory, it was just an intense dream.

Two gorillas made a rare appearance at the pool. With them were two teenage boys dressed in fatigues. They went to Prez and asked where Sean and Troy were. Only two lounge chairs away, Sean and Troy looked over. Each of the boys identified themselves to their new personal security guards. The four boys and two gorillas went for a walk together to get to know each other. Thanks to Lieutenant Vorik and Troy's remarks about wanting to go on dates with Sean, the two UNIT security boys, Jeremy and Lakota, were also gay partners.

As the boys were out walking amongst the trees, Sean asked Lakota, "Are you Hawaiian?"

"No," Lakota smiled, "Native American heritage."

Sean smiled, "That's great. I'm kind o' interested in Indian culture."

Lakota smiled and nodded understandingly, saying, "First thing you need to know is we're not Indians. Indians are from India. We're Native American."

"Oh, my bad!" Sean squealed. "Sorry, dude."

"It's a common mistake," Lakota shrugged. "It doesn't bother me so don't let it bother you."

Troy looked between Jeremy and Lakota asking, "How long have you two been partners?"

"About a week," Jeremy replied.

"You're just starting out, like us," Sean smiled.

Troy nodded, "We've only been partners two days. It feels like we've known each other much longer."

Jeremy nodded and grinned, "And in a few more days, you'll feel like you've known each other forever."

Glancing up and over at his gorilla, Sean asked, "Have you thought of a name for yourself yet?"

The gorilla nodded then softly answered, "Is Leo okay with you?"

Sean giggled, "It's better than a number. Leo works fine for me as long as you like it."

Seemingly standing more upright and prouder, the gorilla smiled, "Leo."

Troy turned and walked backwards to ask his gorilla, "And your name is?"

Shrugging, the gorilla complained, "Can't think of a good one yet."

Troy asked, "Ya want some help?" The gorilla nodded, so Troy said, "Well, when I look at you and think of your job as a protector, I think of a knight." The gorilla smiled and nodded. "Okay," Troy giggled, "The most famous knight I can think of is Sir Galahad. I would probably call you Gale for short. Is that kewl?"

The gorilla snarled, "Galahad? Gale? No."

Quickly thinking of an alternative, Troy offered, "How about Gary? Gary the gorilla."

The gorilla tilted its massive head from side to side, obviously uncertain. Leo said, "I like it."

The gorilla wondered, "If you were in trouble and calling me, how would it sound?"

Uncertain, Troy shrugged and loudly called, "Gary!" Leo unexpectedly swept Troy up in his huge hairy arm. Wide-eyed and truly shocked, Troy hollered, "GAR!"

Troy's gorilla evilly chuckled. Leo put Troy down again and Troy's gorilla said, "I'll respond to that. Gary works."

Coming out of the pool house, Dee went directly to Keith. Leaning closer to his dad, Dee whispered, "Daddy, I got diarrhea. My butt ain't burned this bad since Saturday."

Keith softly asked, "Did it just start?" Dee nodded and frowned. Sitting up, Keith sighed and turned to Prez saying, "Tacos two days in a row."

Rolling his eyes, Prez grumbled, "We should've thought of that."

Keith offered, "I'll take care of Dee," and stood then took Dee's

hand.

Prez nodded, "I'll check with Richie and the other kids."

Suddenly, Dee shook free of Keith's hand saying, "Uh oh!" then raced back into the pool house to use the bathroom again.

Keith quickly followed, but waited outside the closed commode door. Hearing Dee sniffing, Keith asked, "Are you all right, son?"

"It burns!" Dee whined.

Keith softly assured, "I know, Dee. Me and Poppa should've known better than to let you eat tacos."

Dee softly cried, "I'm scared, Daddy."

"It'll be okay, I promise. If you'll unlock the door, I can at least hold your hand."

Since he wasn't defecating at the time, Dee hurried off the toilet and unlocked the door. Keith had barely stepped in before Dee took his daddy's hand and sat his rear end back on the bowl. Keith wiped the tears off Dee's face and assured, "We'll take care of this, Dee."

"I don' wanna die!" Dee wailed.

Gently brushing Dee's blond hair, Keith softly shushed his son and promised, "You won't die. When you're done, we're going home to give you medicine and plain white rice. That should get you fixed up real fast."

Dee nodded then got a huge wad of toilet paper rolled around his hand and wiped his butt. Without looking at Keith, Dee softly said, "I never told you, I was fucked by a mean man."

"It's okay. You didn't need to tell me, Dee. We know all about the bad stuff done to you guys."

Dee whimpered, "He hurt me, Daddy. His dick was real big, like yours and Poppa's gets. A boy helped me Saturday so my butt-hole didn't burn or hurt no more."

Knowing it had to have been Peter Lambert, Keith nodded and considered giving Peter a hug the next time he saw him. If only the little Mikyvis would stay still long enough to get a hug. Keith sighed, "Remember what me and Poppa said, little boys should play with other little boys?"

Flushing the toilet then pulling his boardies up again, Dee grunted, "Uh huh."

"This is why," Keith carefully said. "When you get older, your dick's gonna be bigger, like mine or Poppa's. That's too much for little boys to ever have to deal with. Only very bad men would want boys to play with their dicks, or play with boy dicks. Do you understand?"

Dee nodded and forced a small grin, "You love me like a Daddy, not like a bad man. That's why you're here with me, in this smelly bathroom, ain't it?" Dee reached for and took Keith's hand.

Leading the way out of the pool house men's room, Keith smiled and nodded, "You're my boy and always will be, even in smelly bathrooms."

Once they were away from the crowded pool areas and on their way to the house, Dee prodded, "Daddy, when you and Poppa... does it hurt your butt too?"

Realizing what Dee was asking, Keith shook his head and smiled, "No, it doesn't hurt, but the first few times it was a little

uncomfortable. Even when bigger boys make love, it's something the body needs to get used to. Me and Poppa were friends for years before we started playing with our dicks. We spent a long time using our hands to play with our dicks. One day, I told Poppa that I wanted his dick in my mouth. I couldn't even explain why I wanted it, but said I wanted him to feel good. He said I could, but only if he could have my dick in his mouth. It was after we turned twelve that we started trying butt play. We both had fun learning and trying. He never forces me and I never force Poppa. Now it's really beautiful, and we both look forward to it because it feels really great, *and* most importantly, we know we're showing our love." Dee seemed satisfied with the answer and didn't say anything more, so Keith asked, "Do you like boys more than girls, Dee?"

Dee shrugged, "Dunno. It's like... I don't wanna be hurt or hurt someone else like that ever."

More than pleased with his son's answer, Keith stopped and squatted down. Lifting Dee and carrying him, Keith softly said, "That was a good answer. Let me try to explain something to you. Making love is beautiful in every way. Fucking is bad, hurtful sex. Does that make sense to you?" Dee nodded, so Keith took the opportunity to explain, "Boys your age don't have to choose between liking boys or girls. Me and daddy were very lucky to find each other when we were only seven-years-old. We've been best friends since then, with Derrick and Mike. The four of us were split into two couples and still as close as friends could be. Someday, you might find a special boy or maybe a special girl. When you feel something in your belly like butterflies, it might mean you're nervous or it might mean you're falling in love with that person."

Absorbing that, Dee asked, "So you won't be mad if I like a girl that way?"

"Never, Dee," Keith quickly answered. "Me and Poppa only want to see you grow up happy and healthy. What me and Poppa would both like, is for you and your brothers, to tell us when you start feeling those butterflies in your belly. That way we can help you decide if you're nervous or falling in love."

Dee nodded and smiled, "Kay, Daddy."

Back at the pools, Prez had just finished roaming around and checking that the kids were feeling well. Kaleo jogged over to Prez and sniggered, "Head Rimmer?" Overhearing this, a bunch of kids began giggling before Prez could even turn around to respond.

Facing Kaleo, Prez grinned, "Mouth Rimmer?" This only added to the group of giggling kids. Some of the closer teenagers were coming up with their own "rimmer" handles for their friends.

Kaleo smiled, "We'll be getting a few more guests any time now; from Des Moines this time. I told them to transport here, by the rec center and pools."

Prez nodded and hummed then suggested, "We could put our clothes on, at least temporarily?"

Kaleo laughed, "Why? They're looking forward to being warm for the first time in weeks. I'd bet their clothes will be shed in under two minutes."

"You're probably right," Prez chuckled. "At least I'll make an effort for folks I haven't yet met." Picking up his boardies, Prez asked, "Do we know who is coming?" and slid into his shorts.

"The division head, Julio Hernandez, his partner and second in command, Jesse Crowley, and over a dozen more family and friends," Kaleo replied, and then reminded, "They'll need your approval to

open the shield portal for transport, Prez."

Prez nodded and picked up his T-shirt, confirming, "Jimmy's already aware?"

"Yup," Kaleo nodded.

Prez slipped his T-shirt over his head then tapped his comm-badge and called, "Jimmy?"

Replying from Prez's comm-badge, Jimmy said, "Here, Prez. What's up?"

"A group of Clan visitors from Des Moines will be contacting you," Prez said. "As soon as they're ready, give me a heads up and allow transport."

Jimmy chuckled, "We just got the call, boss. Heads up!"

Before Prez and Kaleo, a few seconds later, all but one of the new arrivals appeared poolside. The last one appeared over the pool, and was soaking wet a few milliseconds later. Prez smiled, "Welcome to Pacific Rim Division Headquarters, where clothing and sanity are optional." While laughter or soft giggling traveled around the new group, Prez introduced himself and Kaleo then continued, "Our leadership team are scattered around right now. My hubby and second in command is taking care of one of our boys; Dee's feeling a little under the weather."

The teenage boy in the front of the pack grinned at the extended introduction, offered his hand and pleasantly said, "Hey, Prez. I'm Julio, director of the Des Moines division." Prez shook his hand and pulled him into a quick hug. Julio giggled, and continued his introductions with his partner, Jesse. Prez shook Jesse's hand and offered him a quick hug too. Prez wondered who the boy was that was

transported over the pool and was now swimming to climb out. Julio grinned, "That's Colin, our head of security. The dunk was planned."

Seeing Kaleo and Prez standing with a group of new arrivals, Tory quickly got his shorts on, grabbed Kaleo's boardies, and then hurried over there. Kaleo quickly pulled up his boardies, so he could greet the new Clan brothers with more than a handshake. Drew, Corey, Geoff and Lenny also joined the group. More introductions traveled around as the new Rimmers arrived.

Over at the edge of the pool, a blond boy was helping Colin out of the pool. His two companions, Lucas and Logan, both of which looked like miniature versions of him, were being no help as they stood there giggling. "That's what you get for picking on JJ," Lucas said softly in response to Colin's complaints.

Locking eyes with Julio, Prez wondered, "Were you folks here last night, for our wedding concert?"

Shaking his head, Julio said, "We couldn't make it, but Daileass sent us a digital copy. That's part of why we're here today, but mostly, we just wanted to meet you guys and get some sun."

"Very kewl," Prez chuckled. Glancing around the group of three adults, Prez offered, "Please make yourselves at home. If anyone's hungry or thirsty, just head over to the CIC." He led the pack over to where the Rimmer adults were sitting. He introduced Mrs. Lanna Seaver, Mr. Carl Seibert and Mrs. Laura Gibbons to Bob Busch, Mick Hernandez and Janice Hernandez.

Realizing the entire group was following him around, Prez chuckled and called, "Richie? Gage? Sammy?" Once all his boys arrived, Prez introduced them to the younger kids and asked that his boys show the kids around and introduce them to others.

Immediately, without even saying a word to Prez, Richie beamed and went to the youngest twins, Frank and Fred. With the twins was Agapito. Richie asked their names and took their hands, leading them back to the pool. Gage and Sammy gathered Abejundio, Abelard, Johnny, Eddie and Robin and three more sets of twins; Bobby and Bruce, Riley and Reese, and Kent and Kurt, then led them to the diving well. Kekoa took another set of kids, Mini, Alien, Lucas, Logan and Colin, for a quick tour of the Rapid Response Base.

Now with a much smaller group, Prez asked about the layout of the Des Moines base. Learning it was a secured neighborhood with a few visible modifications, Prez was surprised to hear that their CIC was below ground, underneath a bunch of homes. Roaming around with Julio, Jesse, Ricky and Rocky, Prez reviewed their first days and joked around at the insanity that had already become commonplace. They hadn't even left the pools and rec center when Prez noticed Johnny, Eddie, Sammy and Gage floating high above the diving well. Naturally, he looked around for John. Not seeing his youngest brother, Prez scowled.

Jesse grinned at Prez's confused expression. Julio laughed, "That's Robin doin' that, Prez. He's an N-Gen, telekinesis expert."

"Oh dude," Prez softly chuckled, "we're in trouble now. My brother's N-Gen too. Two N-Gens at once? I don't think the ROH can cope." He told his guests about John, his empathic and telepathic skills and how John's new husband had made him a much stronger telekinetic.

After making the phone calls, John, Stephen and Lindsay walked to the main gate on North Road to meet Jeff and Tommy. Nearing the gate, Stephen tightened his hold on John's hand. When John looked over, Stephen asked, "Why are you so scared?"

John shrugged, "I can't remember the last time I didn't call either of them for five days."

Lindsay shook her head and huffed, "Hello? A little bit busy here! I've got a new brother and a new sister. You've got a new sister and three new brothers, not to mention a new husband and a son."

John nodded and softly admitted, "That's gonna knock 'em for a loop too."

"Stop!" Lindsay forcefully shouted. "We've been friends since we started school together. If either of them gives you any shit for marrying a boy you obviously love, I'll kick both their asses."

John giggled, "You would too."

Stephen asked John; "Would you rather I wait at the pool or at home, hon?"

"That's not even an option," John quickly answered. "They either accept everything that's happened or they walk right back out the gate."

Lindsay smiled, "That's better."

When they arrived at the security station, John told both UNIT guards that he was expecting visitors. They only had to wait another few minutes before John and Lindsay saw their friends approaching. From opposite sides of the fence, they all shouted and waved. Jeff and Tommy hurried to the gate and John signaled for the guards to open the shield portal and gate. Just as they had Friday afternoon, the four friends clasped hands and spun each other around. Stephen couldn't help giggling at them.

Noticing the sling on John's left arm, Jeff wondered, "What

happened to you?"

John croaked, "A little accident. I'll be fine tomorrow."

Tommy asked, "Did you catch a cold too?"

Shaking his head, John grinned, "Part of the same accident. A few things have changed." John's voice cracked mid-way through the last sentence, so he cleared his sore throat.

Jeff and Tommy shook their heads. "A few things have changed," Tommy teased.

Jeff howled, "We figured that out when Prez was on TV Monday night!"

Feeling John getting nervous again, Stephen stepped forward. John popped another candy in his mouth and restrained himself from sending telepathic messages. Stephen couldn't help feeling proud of his husband. John felt it and reached for Stephen's hand saying, "Stephen, these are my friends, Jeff and Tommy." The three boys greeted each other. Then John said, "My arm and throat were hurt yesterday. We were aboard the Starship Enterprise for a tour..."

"The Enterprise?" Jeff and Tommy incredulously shouted.

John grinned and nodded. Smirking disbelievingly, Tommy teased, "Sure you were. Then you woke up!" Jeff cracked up.

Lindsay giggled, "He really was. So was Stephen."

"It's a perk when you're Clan," John struggled to clearly say. Becoming frustrated with his voice and wanting to get most of the questions answered quickly, John croaked, "Ya know what? I've never hidden anything from either of you before. Ya wanna know what

really happened?"

Not knowing any better, Jeff and Tommy nodded, "YEAH!"

Right then and there, John pulled Jeff, Tommy, Lindsay and Stephen into his mind. He reminded them of Bruce, introduced them to Galli and showed them the inside of the Tardis. Then they all watched what happened on Secret Beach; a little Vulcan boy and big Sehlat and a Vulcan security team and thirty naked kids. John then fast-forwarded through the concert and luau to Saturday morning, when Joel had created their new division. Then there were gorillas and G-Cats and surfing and helicopter trips at Anahola Bay. Again, John fast-forwarded through Sunday, for the CIC orientations and learning of the Downings' deaths, but slowed down Monday morning, showing his flight with Riti, Dewi's rescue, how he became an N-Gen, meeting Cory and Sean Short, and what happened when he met Stephen. Once more, John fast forwarded to Tuesday afternoon. He showed them the Enterprise and the space battle and how he managed to save two people from getting blown into space. John finished his little show with Admiral Kirk explaining things to his parents and finally, five simultaneous weddings and the concert. He released them all from his mind and watched as Jeff, Tommy and Lindsay glanced at each other.

Lindsay giggled, "Even I didn't know he could do *that*!"

Finally free to show some affection, Stephen did so and wrapped his arms around John. They floated a foot above the ground. Knowing Stephen wanted a kiss, John smooched his hubby hard, pushing Stephen backward slightly in the process. When they kissed, they rose about another two feet, but then slowed themselves and returned to a few inches above the ground.

Watching Jeff's and Tommy's jaws drop as John and Stephen

floated; Lindsay shook her head and grinned, "Once a show off, always a show off."

With his head draped over Stephen's shoulder, John sent, *'That's everything that happened since we left you guys Friday night. That's why I couldn't call you dudes until today.'*

Tommy noticed the clock in the security station and shouted, "You showed us all that in only a couple of minutes?"

John nodded. *'In about two minutes, actually.'*

"Awesome!" Jeff reverently cheered.

Tommy nodded, "Totally wicked! What else can you do?"

Throwing his head back and laughing, John powered up and lifted Jeff, Lindsay and Tommy. He and Stephen walked above the ground, pulling the other three along with them. John, Lindsay and Stephen gave Jeff and Tommy a leisurely tour of the base. Now much more relaxed, John realized that there was a new, strong mind present on base. John sent a warm hello to the new N-Gen and offered, *'We're heading toward the pools now, dude. We'll be the one's floating about a foot off the ground.'*

Feeling somewhat embarrassed, Dee told Keith that he'd rather stay at home and near the bathrooms than be seen running into and out of the pool house boys' room. Keith carried Dee upstairs and put him in a bedroom, where he had a TV, stereo and PlayStation to keep him occupied. Once he was certain Dee was resting comfortably, Keith returned to the pools where he joined Prez, Julio and Jesse.

Prez asked Julio and Jesse, "Would you like to chat about last night's teleconference with Cory?"

After checking with Jesse and getting a confirming nod, Julio nodded, "Sure, but obviously not here."

"Definitely not here," Prez and Keith chorused, and then stood. Julio and Jesse also got up from the lounge chairs they were occupying.

"Alden?" Prez called.

"Where to, Prez?" Alden answered.

Humming for a moment, Prez then replied, "Our Maui base, indoors so we aren't seen by the Starfleet security teams." In a blink all four were inside the unused Maui base's dining room.

Upon arrival, Keith instructed, "Alden, record our conversation, in case decisions become an issue at some future date."

Into all four leaders' sub-vocals, Alden stated, "Recording is now enabled."

Taking a seat at the nearest table, Prez began, "At this point, only our brother John knows what Keith and I know." Keith, Julio and Jesse all took seats at the table too.

"I'd rather he didn't know," Keith sighed, "but he's N-Gen and woke up when we started getting nervous."

"He's head of our Intel team and will keep the secret," Prez told Julio and Jesse. "That's part of the decision I'm struggling with; keeping the secret, from whom and for how long. Part of me would like to tell my entire command team. Cory, Starfleet and the Federation are preparing evacuations, but we all know people are going freak out, no matter how well prepared we are."

Keith nodded, "I'd like to tell all the members of our team, and our parents, but I don't want to create additional stress and worry. God forbid the kids found out, we'd be dealing with six weeks of crying kids."

Julio nodded and offered, "I understand where you're at. We've got a few telepaths and N-Gen's hanging around Des Moines. I'm pretty sure Colin knows."

"So does Johnny," Jesse added.

"That's probably only the tip of the iceberg too," Julio smirked.

Glancing around for input, Prez queried, "So telling the rest of the command team wouldn't be a terrible idea?"

Seeing Julio and Jesse shaking their heads, Prez heard John in his mind saying, *'Not Stephen, bro. I'll tell Stephen when I think the time is right. Him and his mom are just starting to feel like their lives aren't jinxed. Telling them now would only make that feeling worse.'*

Prez grinned, "John says to not tell Stephen. So the first chance I get, I'll pull everybody, except John and Stephen, aside to tell them."

Reaching for Prez's hand, Julio smiled, "Trust your team, bro. Imagine how we'd all feel if Cory hadn't shared this information with us. He trusts us to cope with everything that we'll have to deal with in a few weeks, when we start evacuating this planet. Trust your team the same way."

Prez nodded and sighed, "I do trust them; with my life, with saving other lives, but it's not everyday you get to save six billion lives. If I wasn't adequately blown away last Saturday, I think I am now."

Keith asked, "Are we done here, baby?" and then grinned, "We've left John and Robin unsupervised. Everyone on base might be floating thirty feet in the air by now." Suddenly, Keith disappeared from the chair he was sitting on. He reappeared thirty feet above the Ewa Beach diving well and dropped, screaming, "JO-O-O-OHN!"

* * * * *

Waking from their nap, Bruce and Dewi put boardies on then went over to the pool. Back from Maui with Julio and Jesse, Keith and Prez were relaxing on lounge chairs while Gage, Richie and Sammy played in the pool with their new friends. Seeing the two recently orphaned boys together, Prez glanced at Keith. Already aware of what Prez planned to do, Keith smiled and nodded. Turning to Julio and Jesse, Prez excused himself, got up then leaned over to kiss Keith before walking away and meeting his two new little brothers.

Making his planned talk easier, Dewi raced to Prez. Catching the tiny four-year-old boy and picking him up, Prez kissed his cheek and chuckled, "It's good to see you too, Dewi."

"Don't get ta sees you too much," Dewi giggled.

Prez nodded, "I'm working a lot, but I'm trying to change that." Prez looked down and smiled at Bruce, "How're you doin', bro?"

Bruce shrugged and forced a grin, "Okay, I guess."

Prez nodded, "I'd like to talk to both of you alone for a little while, if that's okay?"

Dewi rapidly nodded. Bruce said, "Sure. We were only going to the pool before supper."

"Let's just walk around," Prez suggested. "While we walk, I want to tell you guys some stuff about me." Starting for the trees to the south, Prez softly explained, "A little more than two years ago, I was at my house with Keith, Derrick and Mike. We were playing music after school, like we almost always did."

"Ya do still!" Dewi giggled.

"That's right," Prez grinned. He then continued, "Before dinner time, Derrick, Keith and Mike went home so they could have dinner with their families. I waited for my parents, and even made myself a sandwich, because dinner was going to be late. It had happened before; little delays that I didn't think too much about. Keith came back over to my house and we did our homework. It got late and Keith had to go home, but my parents still weren't home, and he didn't want to leave me alone. So he called home and got permission to stay the night with me. He went home, but then came back with his mom. They both stayed with me. That night, my mother and father never came home from work." Prez inhaled deeply and said, "The next morning, we learned that their plane never landed. It was another two days before the plane was found. They had crashed into the ocean off the coast of Lanai and had both died."

Bruce nodded and softly realized, "Three days, just like my parents."

Dewi innocently asked, "Was you sad, Prez?"

Prez nodded, "Very sad for a long time." Looking down at Bruce, Prez admitted, "I was still a little sad when we found you last Friday afternoon."

"You didn't seem too sad," Bruce challenged.

"When Keith and I got home from school, I was thinking of my

parents. But Keith's my best friend and he helped me feel better. We went to the beach that afternoon believing that the luau would be there, not at Kauai. That's why I'm afraid of planes and flying."

Bruce hummed thoughtfully then asked, "So even two years later, you still feel sad."

Prez nodded, "That's why I wanted to talk with you dudes. You'll never really forget your parents. The bad times will seem less bad and the good times will seem even better. Not only have the three of us lost our parents, it was at the same time of year. For Bruce and I, it was October."

Dewi said, "But my mammy and daddy was bad."

A little stunned, Prez locked eyes with the imp on his hip and asked, "You know that now?"

Dewi nodded, "Yup! My new mammy and daddy is more nicer!" Uncontrollably, Bruce giggled at Dewi's enthusiastic response.

Prez grinned, "Yes they are! They're my mommy and daddy too, ya know?"

"Yup! Daddy 'splained it."

After many silent steps together, Bruce softly wondered, "Will it ever stop hurting?"

Prez nodded, "In time. It's really only Octobers that mess with me now. With every passing day, it'll hurt a tiny bit less. Soon, you'll find yourself living each day, doing the best you can; but you're doing it for them as much as yourself and the people around that you love." Prez paused then smiled, "We're brothers now and always will be."

When it hurts, I'd like it if you guys came to me to talk about it."

Bruce reminded, "You're so busy though, Prez."

Pulling Bruce close and holding him by the shoulder, Prez said, "I'm never that busy, Bruce. Family always comes first. It was that way with my parents; it's that way with the Hundserts and with Clan Short too. If I'm not available, you've also got Keith, Drew and John to talk to. We're all brothers. Behind all the goofing around and teasing we do, we really love each other. We really love you two dudes too. Sharing problems is the best way to make them go away fast."

Also happening that afternoon, Mike and his family were with the Scoobies, walking amongst the trees south of the school buildings. At the root of an old, dead tree was a large, wide hole. With some prompting from the Scoobies, Mike followed the ferrets down the hole. Behind Mike were Dillon, Jonah, Reyes and, bringing up the rear, Derrick. The tunnel had twists and turns and larger passages that led to dead ends. For almost twenty minutes, they crawled on their bellies, following the Scoobies down the dark passages. It would've taken longer, but several parts of the tunnel were smooth and could be slid down. Dillon and Jonah thought it was the most fun they had ever had, even when they slid into each other in the dark. Coming around another bend in the tunnel, Mike saw small blue flames ahead. Popping up from some deeper area, Spike grabbed Mike's hand and smiled, "This is it, Shiny Daddy!"

Filthy and sore from crawling, Mike grumbled, "This is what?" The few blue flames turned into dozens, and then, as Mike looked around above him, he estimated there were hundreds. The Scoobies had managed to connect pipe work from natural gas lines to create the lighting.

"Yous can stand now, Daddy," Willow giggled. She tilted a mirror and the cavern was quickly well lit. Mike turned to the passageway to help his kids and husband. Once they were all standing, they faced the ferrets, all of whom were happily bouncing on their hind legs and widely smiling.

"This be our Shiny Vault!" the four ferrets chorused.

Glancing around quickly at various Shiny objects, Mike wondered, "Are we even on base anymore? Where exactly are we, Spike?"

"Under the auditorium's basement," Spike happily cheered.

Faith nodded, "Near where Shiny Daddies first plays us Shiny music."

Xander pointed up at another passageway saying, "That leads up to the auditorium basement." It had to be twenty feet up a sheer wall, maybe two or three feet below the ring of gas flames.

"Weez can get anywhere on base from here," Willow squealed.

At the many Shiny objects neatly organized and reflecting light from mirrors and gas flames, Derrick gasped, "My God!" The boys roamed around the cylindrical shaped vault. There were aluminum sculptures, chrome car and truck wheels, a pile of at least a hundred pearls, hub caps, various pieces of polished metals and piles of what appeared to be genuine gems of assorted sizes and shapes.

Out of curiosity, Mike wondered, "What's the most valuable thing down here?" He half expected the Scoobies would pull out the Hope Diamond from some secret hiding spot, but instead the foursome scampered to the largest aluminum sculpture. It had to be about fifteen feet tall and was absolutely the ugliest piece of modern

art he'd ever seen. It would've taken Mike, Derrick, Reyes and the remaining Core Rimmers hours to move the hunk of junk a few yards.

The Scoobies cheered, "This is the Shiniest!"

Closely examining the piles of gems, Derrick recognized diamonds, jasper, quartz, rubies, Tiger's eye and turquoise. He softly asked, "Do you guys always crawl in and out of here?"

Xander shook his head and seriously answered, "Weez can transport in and out with Shinies if weez need to."

Mike grinned, "Well, that answers how some of the larger Shinies got down here. This place is awesome guys." He paused and wondered, "How come I don't see any guitar picks?"

Crawling up Mike and parking herself on her daddy's shoulder, Faith replied, "Oh, weez keeps them always!"

"Them's from you, Shiny Daddy," Willow reminded, and then crawled up Mike's other side until she arrived at his opposite shoulder.

Reyes asked, "All this stuff came from Dull Lovers and Shiny Haters?"

Xander nodded, "Some of it. Most weez found."

Spike frowned, shook his head sadly and growled, "Tossed asides like garbage! Blasphemers!"

Nodding and forcing a frown, Mike huffed, "I know, it's very sad."

Pointing at four large tikis adorned with pearls, Reyes wondered, "Where did you find these?"

Willow answered, "They was buried here already."

Scratching his head and scowling, Reyes muttered, "They were here?" All four Scoobies replied affirmatively.

Derrick asked, "What's wrong, Reyes?"

Reyes sighed, "Tiki carvings are of Hawaiian gods, usually put at burial grounds. Tikis like these, with all these pearls, they must've been extremely important, guarding graves of very important people."

Mike gasped, "Tiki gods guarding burial grounds?" He asked the Scoobies, "Did you guys find any human remains here?"

Spike fervently shook his head, replying, "No Shiny Daddy, no bones, just Shinies."

Xander explained, "That's why weez picked this spot; it already had lots of Shinies."

Willow nodded, "Yup! Weez cleaned the buried Shinies up."

Derrick checked his wristwatch then asked, "Are we done here?"

Mike nodded and suggested, "Let's go out under the Day Shiny. Then we can all have dinner together."

While Xander climbed the wall to flip the mirror and turn off the gas flames, Derrick gathered Dillon, Jonah and Reyes. Spike held onto Mike's leg and asked, "Yous can find us now, Shiny Daddy?"

Mike honestly answered, "I probably couldn't make my way down the tunnel without getting lost, but at least I know where to find you."

The lights went out. Willow said, "Yous can call for us from any street drain. We'll hear yous down here." A few moments later, Xander was holding onto Mike's other leg. Mike called Alden and a split second later, the entire family was back outside and by the pool house.

Most of the other Core Rimmers were back by the pool with their Des Moines guests. John had led his friends, husband and a troop of kids to learn how to play soccer in the nearby field. Corey saw first how dirty Mike, Derrick and their kids were and cracked up laughing. Prez covered his eyes briefly and chuckled. Keith grinned and pointed at the pool house, saying, "No pool for you dudes until you shower."

Mike loudly bitched, "That's why we're here, Dull One."

Suspiciously glaring at Keith, Spike wondered, "Is he *really* a Dull One, Shiny Daddy?"

"No, he took the pledge," Mike answered. Turning around and following his other kids into the pool house, he smirked, "Keith just likes to tease and bother me. So I tease and bother him too, every chance I get."

Soon after Derrick, Mike and their boys emerged from the pool house naked and clean, Prez introduced them to Julio, Jesse and some of the Des Moines Division near the pool, then began performing poolside adoptions. First on the list was seven-year-old Lenny Cutler being adopted by Drew and Corey. Geoff now had an older brother that was about two inches taller than he was. Next, Frankie Petropavlovski was adopted by John and Stephen, with Jeff and Tommy witnessing the proceeding. Completely blown away at their best friend, John, being married and now adopting a slightly younger

boy, Jeff and Tommy overflowed with congratulations.

Reyes, Dillon and Jonah had talked Mike and Derrick into adopting seven-year-old Randy Beale. Next were five-year-olds Murakami Junichiro and Shimizu Atsushi, who were adopted by Bill and Lanna Seaver. Cesar and Felipe now had their two best friends as brothers. Anna and Carl Seibert adopted six-year-old May Hickox, giving Brandi the sister she very much wanted; and two former FCC boys, seven-year-olds Chad Bunting and Herbert Trumbo. Knowing his parents and how they still grieved over the loss of their first son, Carl Junior, Derrick widely smiled, knowing his parents would happily fill their large new home with kids of all ages. When Jim and Jennifer Hundser arrived at the pool, Dewi was officially made their son, and Rena Hawkin, an eight-year-old former FCC girl was made their daughter and Carmella's big sister. Just after five o'clock, the last and largest set of adoptions were four-year-old Aaron Pendergrass, five-year-olds Randall Mcfarren, Alan Mchugh and Tami Hepner, all of which were former FCC kids and were adopted by Laura and Rob Gibbons.

When the adoptions were complete, Reyes, Jonah and Dillon gathered all the Gibbons-Seibert kids together for a final chat. That night, the eleven boys planned to sleep at the Seibert's house while the six girls, including Lindsay, would sleep at the Gibbons' house.

Kaleo and Tory were interested in the songs Platinum Habits had played during their concerts and jam sessions. They spoke with Troy first, telling him that a lot of the kids preferred the music the band played, because it wasn't the sort of dance music they had previously been forced to "perform" for adults to. Keith overheard the conversation. Between Troy and Keith, Kaleo was able to order a large collection of compact disks in the classical, jazz and rock genres. Without realizing it, Kaleo had ordered over a hundred CD's

that now covered his bed. Keith also asked Alden to send Kaleo a copy of the prior evening's wedding concert.

Just before dinner time, Prez learned that a veterinarian, two nurses, two receptionists, six landscapers, eight housekeepers and twelve chefs, had been hired. The two nurses and two receptionists had already started work at the Ewa Beach main base. The new chefs and housekeepers would work weekends at the main base until additional bases opened. The new landscapers were directed to report to the Ewa Beach Incoming base, only about two miles west of the main base, by the next morning. Two of the chefs, one landscaper and one housekeeper had large families that would occupy the four single family homes at the incoming base until the condos were built. They could then move into large, five-bedroom and four-bathroom apartments that were actually larger in square footage than the single family homes. Five of the other planned employees would move into the townhomes on that base. The remaining employees would commute to work until the condominiums were built. Lastly, Jim Hundser told Prez that they had already hired enough ex-CPS employees to fill the FYS offices on the main base and there would be three at each of the other four bases, starting the next Monday.

Grinning, Jim told Prez, "There is one other thing, not directly related to hires."

"Like what, dad?" Prez wondered.

Jim began, "You and Keith have four sons in less than a week. Derrick and Mike have four sons in less than a week. Drew and Corey have two sons. John and Stephen now have one of their own."

"Oh God," Prez groaned. "You're not thinking..."

"I'm not only thinking it," Jim chuckled, "it's only a matter of

time before you have eight sons per couple, then maybe add four girls per couple, and so on." Prez began sweating and helplessly giggling. Jim explained, "Your families and team are expanding, Preston. Carl Seibert came to me with an idea to build specialized housing for the Core Team members at each base. Basically, the team you have now must stay here on the main base. Kaleo and Tory are married now, so in time, we can foresee them having families. Troy and Sean aren't married, but from what I've seen and heard, they might as well be."

"All true," Prez sniggered. "What do you need from me, dad?"

"Only your approval so Carl can begin work on the additional construction projects," Jim smiled.

Tapping his sub-vocal, Prez said, "Alden, Mr. Carl Seibert intends to build specialized housing for the Core Rimmers, on each Pacific Rim Division base. The project is approved, effective immediately."

"Got it, Prez," Alden replied.

Before dinner, Robin and John had met and shared some telekinetic tricks. At dinner time, the two telekinetic pranksters ordered extra asparagus and zucchini. Sitting on opposite sides of the dining room, another veggie battle began. This time, John paid extra attention to his parents, so that every time they looked up, launched asparagus and zucchini suddenly flew way up to the ceiling and hovered there until the adults had looked away. It soon became necessary for inter-dining room ballistic asparagus and zucchini missiles to slide across the dining room ceiling before dropping down to the intended targets. Prez was happily chatting with Keith, Julio and Jesse, holding a spoonful of apple sauce in front of his face when an asparagus warhead dropped and splashed apple sauce around the table. At a nearby table, Mike, Derrick and Reyes noticed the mess

and roared laughing.

Robin noticed Reyes laughing and, with total innocence on his face, dropped three cauliflower bombs into Reyes' soup. Prez, Keith, Julio and Jesse howled laughing. The adults finished their meals and left the dining room. A full-fledged 'leftover' war began seconds after the last parent exited the room. Veggies of every sort served, dinner rolls, French Fries and clumps of mashed potatoes were flung from every direction. An unsuspecting chef peered around the corner to see why the dining room had suddenly gotten so loud and was promptly splattered with a potato grenade. The last remaining adults in the area joined the kids in their play war, armed with large ladles to launch mass quantities great distances, and using serving tray covers to protect themselves from incoming barrages.

The worst of all of the remaining adults was Bob, who borrowed a slingshot from Logan and began launching deviled eggs at any available target. Along one table, the entire strike team that had come over from Des Moines pooled their resources and systematically began 'taking out' any of the teenagers who happened to move within range.

With the last of the ammunition splattered against the walls, floor, ceiling and even the cages surrounding the defenseless partridge, turtle doves, French hens and calling birds, the two instigators began telekinetically gathering the wasted food items and dropping it, *en masse*, into the nearest trash cans. This task was also made fun as John and Robin tried to make the grossest, squishiest plopping noises from the trash being deposited into the cans. Kids began leaving the dining room for the nearest showers at the dorms and over at the pool house.

After the dining room was mostly cleaned, Keith returned from the men's room with Dee. Keith sat down and Dee shuffled onto his

dad's lap. Facing Prez, Keith sighed, "I think we're gonna have to call Antonio. Dee's still got the runs."

Overhearing that, Nathan turned and said, "Can I suggest a quick checkup by Reyes instead?"

"Why Reyes?" Keith and Prez simultaneously wondered.

Nathan grinned, "He was upgraded. Now he's got the knowledge of any General Practitioner stored in his positronic memory. It would just be easier for Reyes to check Dee over real quick."

Reyes was at the next table over with Derrick, Mike and their kids. Prez called Reyes to come over. Keith explained the situation to Dee, who enthusiastically agreed to have Reyes play doctor with him.

Reyes was appearing a little uncertain, but then widely grinned, "Holy crap! I know exactly what to do!" Derrick and Mike began laughing as Reyes hurried to the Command Center to retrieve a tricorder. In less than a minute, Reyes returned and easily operated the tricorder, as if he had been doing it all his life. After scanning Dee, Reyes smiled, "He's not even a little dehydrated. I don't foresee any major problems, just discomfort from going so often. We can even take care of that. Let me just confer with Doc Andrews and Doc Howard. I'll come back with a hypo-spray and Dee will be done running to the bathrooms." Turning and slowly walking away, Reyes then tapped his comm-badge to call the two doctors.

Noticing Dee smiling for the first time all afternoon, Prez asked, "That was easy, wasn't it?"

Dee nodded and giggled, "He's a good doc too."

Cuddling Dee closer, Keith whispered, "There's nobody better

than one of your best buds."

Prez suggested, "Would you like Reyes to be your doctor tonight, at least until we're sure you're better, Dee?" Dee enthusiastically agreed.

Reyes returned and administered the hypo-spray in Dee's arm, saying, "This will take care of the diarrhea and lower abdominal cramps."

"How long will it take?" Prez wondered.

"Two minutes," Reyes answered. "The intestines are packed with blood vessels." He then rapidly shook his head and giggled, "I'm gonna have to access the various new databases I have!"

Mike howled laughing. Derrick softly called Reyes over for some one-on-one father-son cuddle time. Instructing Dee to drink plenty of water for the next few hours, Reyes then went to Derrick. "I want you to think about something," Derrick whispered to Reyes. "With all your new databases, you're an incredible asset to this Clan. If you want, you can become a Core Rimmer too."

Reyes blushed and grinned, "I don't know, dad. Playing on stage with you guys last night was awesome. That's really all I'm looking forward to."

Pulling Reyes close and firmly hugging him, Derrick smiled, "You'll get more and more chances to do that too. As your databases become more integrated, all you have to do is tell me what you'd like to do. If you say yes then we'll talk with Prez." Still uncertain, Reyes shrugged at first. Seeing the pride in Derrick's eyes and realizing that his dad wanted him to join the command team, Reyes considered it more carefully and teetered on the fence.

Jeff and Tommy stayed with John, Stephen, Frankie, Nathan, Jamie, Jacob and Beau through dinner and the subsequent food fight. The Terrible Triplets had to leave as well, since they were expected in the U.K. for Joel's and Kevin's wedding. The three boys gave goodbye hugs to John, Stephen, Frankie and Nathan. Prez and the rest of the Core Rimmers were next to get hugs goodbye. Cesar and Felipe heard triplicate goodbyes from their older friends and teachers. Jacob, Jaime and Beau then raced across the compound to hug Lanna Seaver and give her three goodbye kisses. They finished their farewells with the rest of the Rimmer parents before transporting out.

Frankie went to play with his cousins. Before they had to leave for the night, Jeff and Tommy had gate passes and comm-badges to call John and Lindsay, so they could visit often. John, Lindsay and Stephen walked them back to the North Road gate. With all that was available for entertainment and a hundred and fifty kids to play with on the base, they promised that they would be back almost every day.

"Vorik to Director O'Brian," came the call from Prez's comm-badge.

Prez tapped his comm-badge and formally responded, "O'Brian here. How can I help you, Lieutenant?"

Vorik answered, "There is a situation requiring the attention of your command team, Sir."

"Acknowledged," Prez replied, and then informed the Vulcan Lieutenant, "I have Clan Short guests from Des Moines. Would it be acceptable to have them join our team, Sir?"

"Yes, that may prove advantageous," Vorik answered.

"We'll be right there, Lieutenant," Prez said. Within a minute, most of the Pacific Rim Division team was gathered. Prez knew that

John would be along as soon as possible. Julio and Jesse rounded up Colin, Chris, Logan, Mini, Lucas, Alien, Doug, Travis, Johnny and Eddie. The large group entered the Command Center, where they found Kekoa already waiting with Lieutenant Vorik.

On the way back to the CIC from the gate, John began getting a queasy feeling in his stomach. Stephen worried that dinner didn't agree with his husband. John slowly shook his head and sent, *'I've been so preoccupied most of the day, I didn't feel it before now. Something big is going on.'* Together, the two boys ran back to the CIC and across the dining room into the Command Center. There they found all the rest of the Core Rimmers, the Des Moines Division team leaders and Kekoa gathered around Lieutenant Vorik. Rather than interrupt, John listened and began scanning his brothers to learn about the situation.

A major California technology company named Zorro Communications Corporation was getting tax benefits for operating social services in the form of orphanages spread across the state. However, their accounts for the social services spinoff didn't add up. Money that should have been spent to adequately clothe, feed and shelter about two hundred kids wasn't being spent. Not even their utilities bills made sense; water, electric and natural gas must have cost them way more than they were accounting for. Additionally, since what was required didn't make sense, not a single U.S. dollar could be found to be spent on any game or toy.

Pacific Rim Division was preparing to raid sixteen orphanages in eight California cities. In San Diego, there were two orphanages; in Anaheim, there were two; in Los Angeles, there were three; in Santa Barbara, there was one. Two orphanages were in San Jose; three were in San Francisco, two were in Sacramento and the final one in Fresno.

When Prez called Jack at the Rapid Response Base to arrange

for him to join in the planning, Jack asked who else was participating. As Prez ran through the list, Jack began evilly laughing.

"Do I even want to know what you think is so funny?" Prez smirked.

"Just wait," Jack replied. "I've been waiting to give paybacks for a prank that I was the victim of. This is better than *any* prank I could come up with to retaliate!"

Turning to Julio and Jesse, Prez grinned, "At least I'm pretty certain most of my team haven't pulled any pranks on you, Jack."

Julio nodded. "Maybe not any of your guys; but I'll bet you I can give a full list from my side. In fact, the list of innocent people is a *lot* shorter!"

Colin had overheard the conversation, and interjected "I think I know who he's talking about. And not only can't he spell 'innocent', he's never experienced it!"

Jack chuckled. "Not bad, Wet Dream... as soon as I get Daileass ready to record my fun, I'll be over." All the Core Rimmers' eyes shot open and they cracked up, each silently wondering who "Wet Dream" was. They could only assume it was Colin.

Colin gave a feral grin in the direction of the Rapid Response Base. "You need to sleep sometime, Jackie boy... and when you do, I'll be there."

"*This* is going to be AWESOME!" Daileass announced. "Can I save it as a training film, Colin?"

"Sure thing, little brother," Colin replied. "Make sure I get a

copy though, okay?"

"You got it!" Daileass exclaimed, his joy obvious at being able to film Colin in action.

Jack wasn't intimidated at all. "Just remember who cooks your food when you're here, Captain Hallucination!"

Nathan Hayes turned to Prez and the remaining hysterical Rimmers, chuckling, "This is how all our operations start. It's like a pre-release of tension... or at least that's the best excuse I can think of."

"Or in your case, a 'premature release' of some sort," Kris giggled under his breath.

Nathan smirked, "Uhhh... only eleven here... there ain't much release of anything... YET!"

"Will you pervs stop comparing your lack of pubic hair and get back to business?" Logan declared between giggles.

Daileass giggled, "Business? What business? Oh yeah! Some of you guys want to play soldier?"

Suddenly, Jack disappeared from the screen everyone had been watching. He appeared in the Command Center, directly behind Logan and, in a flash, pulled Logan's underwear and shorts down to the floor.

Logan kicked his shorts away, and pulled his 'Terminator' briefs back up, proudly showing off the "I'll be back" lettering across the posterior. "Who needs shorts, they just catch on things! Thanks, Miss Jackie!"

Jack reached down and grabbed the back of the Terminator brief and lifted Logan off the floor. "Did you say something, Logan?" All the Rimmers groaned in sympathetic pain.

"Yeah, is it that time of the month for you *already*?" Logan giggled, obviously ignoring any pain he might have been feeling.

"It is whenever I'm around you little shits. I don't know what it is about you guys," Jack said as he started to bounce Logan up and down by his underwear. "But just to make my day even more complete, guess what? You're in charge!" Jack then let the boy drop back down to the floor.

"What are you smoking? I'm a guest! This is *your* area of command!" Logan replied, trying to decide if Jack was still messing with him.

"Not today, Lieutenant," Jack seriously said. "It's time for you to get in some real command and control practice."

Logan straightened his briefs, then looked around the room before looking back at Jack. "I hereby relieve you of command for this operation, General." Logan stated, his tone making it clear that he wasn't playing anymore.

Jack nodded. "I accept your relief, and will be available if you need any help. You've earned this, Logan; good luck."

As difficult as it was to be serious after all that, especially with the young commander standing in stretched Terminator briefs, Prez wheezed and giggled, "So Logan's taking over our Command Center while my team and I are out?"

Julio smiled as he came over and ducked under Logan's legs, putting the freshly-minted commander on his shoulders. "I'll handle

this, Little Admiral!" Julio stated, earning him a playful swat on the head from Logan. "Just so you guys know, Logan is Second-in-Command of his strike team. General Adam Casey has been grooming him for full command. He's a veteran of more battles than I want to think about. Based on what Dad and Bob have explained to me, the best way to work it, when you're doing something major, is to have the guys who have been trained to do it run the show, while we just advise them on the direction we want things to go in."

"Kewl," Prez smiled. He turned to the Core Rimmers and said, "Logan is our manager. Requests into the Command Center go through him." Facing Julio and Logan again, Prez told them, "Lieutenant Vorik is our Starfleet and VSO Liaison. Any assistance Logan needs can also be funneled through him."

Logan nodded. "Okay, Julio, get your face sucking done with Jesse, we got work to do." As Julio put him down, happy to comply with Logan's first order, Logan began contemplating his staff. "Jack, you take Lucas with you to the Rapid Response base; if he tells you to do something, it's from me. John, what is the Intel situation here?"

John answered, "Since I'm going too, Nathan has the ball for Intel stuff. He and Lieutenant Vorik can handle it."

"That works; Tucker, Johnny, and Eddie, you guys work with them and sort out positions. Kris, you have tactical; Colin, and Dutchmen left are on standby for backup, that's your ball."

With that, the Core Rimmers and Julio, Jesse, Doug and Travis left the Command Center. They went to the dining room where one-hundred and sixty troops were waiting and ready for the operation.

Gathered were all one-hundred-twenty Rimmer troops, plus forty from the Rapid Response Base. An additional twenty from the

Des Moines Division strike teams were on standby, should backup or circumstances dictate help was required. The six Core Rimmer couples would be in command of ten of the sixteen brigades raiding the orphanages. Of course, the Command Teams' personal security guards would also be in attendance. Julio and Jesse would command another brigade. The last command team would be Doug and Travis, also from Des Moines. All sixteen orphanages would be invaded simultaneously at two in the morning Pacific Time. By the time adults on the premises knew what was happening, they would already be under arrest.

Depending upon how tired the kids might be, they would all be brought back to Ewa Beach to be fed, then clothed before housing was arranged. Hopefully some of the kids would accept the idea of sleeping at the dorms, but everyone knew the youngest amongst the rescued would want to nest. The best news was that there would be three Rimmer homes with kids. Two hundred kids wouldn't fit in one basement, but could easily fit in three, if needed. The final preparations were made by contacting the chefs and the Rimmers' parents to be prepared for the largest group of rescued kids yet. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, all the raids could be complete and the kids back in Hawaii between midnight and one in the morning, Hawaiian time.

Prez was annoyed that another U.S. corporation was cooking their books. At the same time, he realized that Lieutenant Vorik, Kekoa, Donnie and all the Clan Short leadership teams had come up with a great plan. Arriving at the best way to allocate his command teams, Prez sent the youngest and most recent Core Rimmers to cities where there were only two orphanages. The helpful Des Moines Clan guests would go to cities with only one orphanage. That left Mike and Derrick in Los Angeles. Keith and Prez would command from San Francisco. A coordinated attack in the middle of the night would catch

the adults off guard. The only unfortunate effect of the plan is the kids would be woken up and probably scared to death. For the benefit of the kids, the plan was to get them back to Ewa Beach and out of the frightening situation as quickly as possible.

In the CIC dining room, the last thing Prez told the assembled teams was; "I demand minimal casualties on both sides. As many as possible of these supposed 'care-givers' are to be captured alive. They are to be arrested and subjected to mind scans. What I really want to know is who is responsible? Is it the social services spin-off or is it from the corporation's board of directors? Are the city or state governments involved? I want answers; Cory Short will want answers. There will be no loose ends. Last Saturday, the news from the ROH traveled the globe. Tomorrow, the news from California will do the same. We'll have all those bastards under arrest and all the kids will be safe here with us." Pausing and glancing around the assembled group, Prez asked, "Are there any questions?"

Facing the troops, Kekoa confirmed, "Does everyone have the new MP5-AX?"

One hundred and sixty troops loudly replied "Sir, yes Sir!"

Before Prez could ask, Kekoa explained, "These new weapons have phaser capability, ammo that delivers a disabling electrical charge, and of course, they can also accept standard ballistic ammo."

Prez grinned and nodded; "Unless there's a major problem, communications will be limited to what can be passed by the AI's via sub-vocals. We need virtual silence, folks; surprise is our ally. If you've got to fart, do it quietly."

The large group of strike teams began to separate to prepare for transport. At exactly 10:45 PM Hawaii Time, the Ewa Beach CIC

dining room was emptied of all strike teams.

Prez and Keith went with one strike team to San Francisco. Mike and Derrick were in Los Angeles. Kaleo and Tory were in San Diego. Sean and Troy were in Sacramento. Drew and Corey were in Anaheim. John and Stephen were in San Jose. Julio and Jesse were assigned to Santa Barbara. Doug and Travis went to Fresno.

Upon arrival at the sixteen orphanages, Police Departments in all eight cities were contacted by the Command and Control Center at the Oahu Rapid Response Base and forewarned that Clan Short Pacific Rim Division had justification for the planned raids. Not a single law enforcement agency argued and they promised to steer clear of the orphanages. While the main attack troops moved out to encircle the orphanage properties, the Core Rimmers and Des Moines Command Teams hung back with their security personnel.

Even across the street from the orphanage, John felt intensely painful pangs in his belly. It was far worse than the painful jabs he felt about Joel's rape or from Dewi. This was a chronic, constant pain, and it was spreading such that his arms, legs and head hurt.

Shedding tears, Stephen felt a small part of what John felt, but Prez had ordered silence, so he said nothing to John, yet he watched him carefully. Holding his belly and looking at Stephen and then at Lucky, John began sweating. Feeling like he might hurl, John leaned forward, his arms braced on his knees. Remembering what Jacob, Jamie and Beau taught him about protecting himself from empathic and telepathic overload, John reasoned that's what had to be happening. He began the process of shutting down his N-Gen empathy and telepathy. It lessened the pain, but not so dramatically that he felt very much better. Slowly shaking his head, John tried to keep to the plan, but the pain was too much to bear. Shaking violently, John tapped his sub-vocal, softly sobbing, "Alden, to all command

teams. Prez, this...it's very wrong. Go now, bro."

Hearing the desperation in his brother's sobs, Prez ordered, "All teams; go now!"

All the strike teams responded and sixteen orphanages were raided simultaneously at 1:47 AM Pacific Time, Thursday, November fourth.

Sirens blaring and lights flashing, an LA Police squad car skidded at high speed around the corner less than a quarter mile from where Mike and Derrick were standing. "Sonofabitch!" Mike grumbled. "God-damned cowboys! They were supposed to stay away!" Raising his phaser and with Derrick following his husband's lead, they fired on the squad car, taking out the lights and then the two front tires. Out of control, with steel rims digging into the concrete street, the squad car screeched to a halt. Mike and Derrick fired on the grill and took out the siren horn. Derrick's gorilla, Talib, fired two fifty-caliber rounds at the squad car's engine block. Two officers scrambled out of the car with their hands prepared to draw their weapons. Mike's and Derrick's teenage security guards, Manny and Dave, saw immediate threats to their charges and fired their silenced MP5-AX rifles at the officers, hitting them both in both of their knees with high current electrical charges. Frozen for many seconds, the two men fell to the ground, bouncing and flopping around like fish out of water.

"Wow!" Manny softly chortled, "It fucking works!"

Smirking at his security guard, Mike softly hissed, "Ya think?"

Dave shrugged and explained, "They're new weapons. We've fired them at dummies before, but they don't dance like that!"

Mike's gorilla, Rafiki went to the two officers and called, "Terra-

Main, two to beam up for medical attention and prosecution."

Back in Ewa Beach, eleven minutes before eleven o'clock, Cesar and Felipe Laurito woke screaming. Naturally, the piercing sound woke the two younger and recently adopted boys sleeping in the same room; Murakami Junichiro and Shimizu Atsushi. It was the first night all four boys chose to sleep at the Seaver home instead of in the Hundser's basement. Startled, Bill and Lanna Seaver raced up the stairs. What the twin boys described was considered a nightmare by the two adults, a result of their previous lives at orphanages and foster homes. The boys couldn't be consoled or calmed. They wanted to join the nest at the Hundser's.

Lanna made a quick call and spoke with Jennifer. Minutes later, Bill and Lanna walked the four boys over to the Hundser's. After getting the four boys settled in the nest, the four adults had tea and chatted, unaware that this was anything more than a required adjustment period. The adults had no idea where their sons were; they only knew that they would be returning with close to two hundred orphans.

Felipe sent to Cesar, *'John's not here. None of our leaders are here.'*

Cesar cuddled closer to his brother and replied, *'It's really happening, I know it. We need to be here.'*

'I'm scared.'

'Me too.'

Chapter 8

Anaheim, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

Off of Ball Road, less than two miles from Disneyland, Drew and Corey were teetering between being concerned for John and frightened for everyone involved in the orphanage operations. Events were supposed to happen in a specific sequence. The strike teams were supposed to cut the phone and the power lines, surround the orphanages, then enter the buildings. Instead, because of John's distress call, all three steps basically happened at once.

The Cambridge Street neighborhood they were at seemed crowded with a lot of homes. Most of the houses nearby were single story homes, except the one they were closely watching. There were single family homes and duplexes lined up on both sides of the street. Overall, this house didn't seem to fit in the neighborhood. It was much larger than all the others and had many more large trees and shrubs around it.

Unfamiliar with their surroundings, Drew and Corey were nervous. Their security teams, Ata and Baakir, the two gorillas, and Conner and Chuck, reassured them that the strike teams were capable of much more than these simple raids of civilian properties. They were well armored and equipped with audio and video systems that fed directly to Alden, Daileass and Draco. They even had night vision goggles so they could see in the dark. Everything done would be documented so that the orphans would be safe and the adults responsible could be prosecuted, just as Prez had ordered. There was one other strike team at another orphanage in Anaheim that Drew and

Corey would also investigate.

Many quiet minutes passed while Corey and Drew waited for the call from their strike team that it was safe to enter.

At 1:53 AM Pacific Time, Drew's comm-badge chirped. "Strike team Fox One reporting location secure."

"That was the longest six minutes in my life!" Corey huffed.

Tapping his comm-badge, Drew nodded at Corey, saying, "We're on our way inside." Drew and Corey started across the street with their security.

The strike team commander said, "We'll have the lights back on in a minute or two, Drew."

The boys and gorillas walked into the house. On the right side of the entryway was a large kitchen; on the left was a dining room containing a long table with eight chairs and two benches. The strike team commander, whose name was Eldrin, but preferred the nickname 'El', approached.

Drew asked, "Where's the kids, El?"

"Down this way," El replied, and waved them forward through the dining room to a spacious living room area. There were two large sofas, four wing-back chairs and a large television in a nice wooden cabinet. Over all, everything seemed really decent looking. There were pictures on the walls, some of which were obviously done by the kids.

The lights came on and most of the kids closed their eyes briefly. Looking around the room, the two Clan Leaders saw twelve kids; eight boys and four girls. All the girls were wearing pajamas as

were the four younger boys, but the four older boys were only wearing briefs or boxers. At first glance, the kids looked pretty good. However, as Corey and Drew stepped closer, they saw that all the kids were very thin. Corey and Drew went to introduce themselves and tell them that they were Clan Short. From the kids, Drew and Corey began piecing together the living conditions in this orphanage. As it turned out, those pictures hanging on the walls were not done by the kids; they were purchased to keep up appearances for periodic inspections. Bedroom furniture would be carried out and temporarily stored while rented furniture was put in place for those city and state inspections.

Corey and Drew then followed two orphans, one boy and one girl, up the stairs to check out the bedrooms. They found three rooms all similarly furnished with two sets of bunk-beds, a single dresser and small closets. Drew turned to Corey and frowned, "John and me had bunk-beds in a room about this size, but we each had our own dressers and closets."

Inspecting a bed, Corey nodded, "These sheets haven't been washed in weeks. And the pillow is about as fluffy as a saltine cracker."

Pulling open the top dresser drawer, Drew faced the orphaned boy and complained, "What is this? One size fits all?"

The boy, named Jake, shrugged, "We each got one drawer for our stuff. That's mine."

Trying unsuccessfully to not act surprised, Drew turned and softly asked, "You only have three pair of boxers, three pair of socks and three T-shirts?"

Jake nodded, "The stuff I outgrew, Terry's wearing now, in the

next drawer down." Drew began sliding open the remaining four dresser drawers.

Looking in the closet, Corey found four pair of sneakers, eight pair of jeans in various sizes and eight button down sport shirts, also in varying sizes. That meant the four boys in this room each had only two pair of jeans, two shirts and a pair of sneakers. Shaking his head sadly, Corey turned to the boy saying, "This ain't right. Each of you kids should have more clothes than this; at least five pairs of jeans and five shirts for school days. Are your clothes washed every other day?"

Jake shook his head answering, "One load of colors every week. One load of whites every week."

"When was the last time your bed sheets were washed?" Corey wondered.

Jake replied, "The second Saturday of the month for this room. The third Saturday for the younger boys. The fourth Saturday for the girls."

Drew asked, "You do your own laundry, don't you?"

Jake nodded, "We all do. Each bedroom does their own wash."

Blinking fast and unable to believe what he was seeing and hearing, Drew asked, "So when do you get to spend time alone?"

Unable to comprehend the meaning behind the question, Jake answered, "We can use the bathroom alone except when we're showering. Then it's two to a tub, every Wednesday and Sunday night for this bedroom. The others shower Mondays and Thursdays or Tuesdays and Fridays."

Corey grumbled, "That's just friggin' wrong!"

Locking eyes with Jake, Drew wondered, "How old are you?"

"Fourteen," Jake answered. Drew briefly thought of Kaleo, who stood about two inches taller than Drew.

"I'm twelve," Drew informed him. "We're just about the same height and I've got at least ten pounds on you. How often do you guys eat?"

"Three times a day," Jake replied. "Breakfast and dinner here, lunch at school, except on weekends."

Corey asked, "Have you ever had a cookie, ice cream or piece of cake?" Jake only shook his head. Corey prompted, "Show us the next room, please?"

Jake nodded then led Drew and Corey into the next boy's room. In that room they found virtually the same; minimal clothing, dirty bedding, and not even a deck of cards for the kids to play. Corey had a thought and tore the sheet off one of the beds. As he had guessed, there were tiny bedbugs crawling around.

Moving on to the room shared by four girls, Drew and Corey followed Felicity. Nothing new was found there. Both Drew and Corey found that more distressing. Moving closer to the girl, Drew gently asked, "How old are you?"

"Fifteen," Felicity answered.

Leaning closer still, Drew whispered, "I don't mean to embarrass you, but why aren't there any tampons here?"

Tilting her head curiously, Felicity wondered, "What's a

tampon?" Drew's eyes almost shot out of their sockets.

Gathering his composure, Drew again whispered, "What do you do when you bleed, ya know, between your legs?"

Blushing intensely, she answered, "Paper towels or tissues."

Realizing that the girl obviously didn't have the first clue that what she was experiencing was natural and could be dealt with in a more sanitary fashion, Drew said nothing, but his blood pressure was rising to new heights.

On the way back downstairs with Jake and Felicity, Drew and Corey heard Prez over their sub-vocals. He ordered reports made to Alden for medical response assignment and prioritization.

Drew tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Anaheim location Fox one reporting. Twelve children here, eight boys and four girls. They're all thin and dirty. They've been cramped into three small bedrooms with minimal clothing and unwashed bedsheets that have bugs. Over-all, the house isn't too bad, but my mom and dad would spend a week cleaning, toss out most of the furniture and start fresh. There are no medical teams here yet. I'd say these kids need lots of good food, baths and nice clothes. We can provide them way more than they have here, that's for sure."

Alden said, "Your report is logged, Drew. Expect a medical team and VSO officers any moment."

Corey warmly smiled at the gathered orphans. "We'll be getting some visitors, guys. Things will probably happen fast, but here's the basics; doctors will check each of you out, we'll get you cleaned up, dressed in new clothes and provided new homes with some awesome kids that are like you."

Drew smiled and nodded, "We've got everything you guys need and we'll get you whatever you want. At last count, we had about a hundred and fifty other orphans at our main base. We'll bring you home with us, to Hawaii."

That got all the kids excited. They began smiling and chattering amongst themselves. Drew and Corey told them about the main Ewa Beach base. A Starfleet medical team came in and introduced themselves to Corey and Drew then began checking out the kids. Two VSO officers came in. Seeing them, Drew asked, "El, please show the 'care-givers' to our friends?"

Corey nodded, "We'll stay here with the kids until we're needed."

El showed the two VSO officers to the kitchen, where the care-givers were restrained.

As if confronted by the devil, the woman care-giver screamed, "Keep away from me you alien freak!" Her outburst caused all the kids to shrink in fear. Two little girls and the youngest boy began crying.

While the kids were being checked, Corey and Drew told them more about Ewa Beach, how the schools were being set up, how the dorm rooms were spacious and usually had two occupants, but some of the younger kids were choosing four to a room and two to a bed. By the time the medical team transported out with the kids, the two VSO officers were standing by, prepared to report their findings.

Corey and Drew learned that the care-givers had violated seven sections of the Safe Haven Act. They had followed directions of their corporate superiors to the letter. The kids were provided only what was required. They were allowed to attend school, but not allowed

class trips, extra curricular activities or anything that might be considered 'entertainment'. Daily portions of food were measured out, as if minimal recommended amounts of sustenance were all any child needed. The Vulcan mind-melds found no remorse in the care-givers.

Drew and Corey verbally assaulted the female care-giver for not providing the teenage girls knowledge of their biology or a tampon. She had the audacity to claim the girls were sluts for having their period. Drew announced, "For your barbaric acts and twelve counts against seven of the articles of the Safe Haven Act, I believe life in a Federation Penitentiary will show you what it's like to be underfed, under-clothed, allowed no form of entertainment or enjoyment whatsoever in your lives. That's what the law says I need to do."

"You have no right!" the man shouted.

"Oh, I have the right," Drew simply said. "I have the right to sentence you to death too."

"Evil bastard children," the woman hissed. She continued to taunt Drew and Corey using the most foul language she could think of.

Drew turned to the VSO officers to have the care-givers taken away to serve their sentence. Beyond disgusted, Corey pulled out his phaser and stunned the woman silent. She fell out of the chair she had been sitting in and her head made a disturbing crack against the linoleum floor. Corey then pointed his phaser at the man, wordlessly daring him to protest. Drew's mouth hung open in surprise and he incredulously hollered, "Corey!"

Corey complained, "That ignorant whore called *us* bastards?" He then faced the man and proudly said, "I have a mother and a father that *love* me. If they were here, my mom would've scratched her eyes

out and you'd be picking up your teeth for what she said to us."

Shaking his head yet smiling widely, Drew said, "Remember what Skipper said the other night? Feel pity for those you know you're better than."

Corey smirked, "I tried."

Drew smiled up at the two VSO officers. "Please take out the trash and file your reports for our leaders so everyone can be prosecuted." Corey and Drew held up their right hands in the familiar Vulcan method, saying, "Live long and prosper." Then Drew led Corey out of the house. Once outside and away from the Vulcans, Drew admitted that he was equally disturbed with the living conditions and with the woman's arrogance. He then tapped his sub-vocal saying, "Alden, Anaheim site two, please."

Alden replied, "A medical team and VSO are already on-site, Drew."

Drew nodded, "Let's get this over with."

Arriving with their security outside the second orphanage, Corey huffed, "I just wanna get home to Geoff and Lenny."

Drew nodded, "I'm gonna hold them so close, I hope I don't hurt them."

The second location wasn't much different than the first that Corey and Drew visited. Thankfully, at least the girls at the orphanage were taught about their bodies and provided a sanitary way of caring for themselves. Still, they had minimal clothing, were provided minimal food and were cramped four to a room with no opportunity for time alone. Drew and Corey again greeted the kids and assured

them how much better their lives would soon be.

One of the little boys asked, "Is we really gonna get t' have milkshakes ev'ry day?"

Drew chuckled, "Every day," and emphasized, "for *breakfast*."

All the kids under the age of ten simultaneously hollered, "WOW!"

Corey smiled up at the medical team commander asking, "When will we see these kids again?"

She answered, "We'll get them cleaned up and give them a chance to rest. By the time you're having breakfast, they'll be there too." Turning to the kids, she smiled and added, "For breakfast milkshakes." More enthusiastic cheers, laughter and joyful tears erupted from the orphans.

After the kids had been transported away, Drew and Corey stood before the VSO officers to receive the report on the care-givers. Guilty of twelve counts of six violations against the Safe Haven Act, Corey and Drew went to face the adult care-givers. Life imprisonment was again sentenced, this time by Corey. Other than the expected complaints of children passing sentence on adults, they weren't stupid enough to openly mock the two young Clan Leaders.

Drew explained, "If you had those same six violations but only one child, your sentences would've been twenty years, by Vulcan standards. With six violations times twelve kids, we had the choice of sentencing you to prison or death." Turning to the VSO Representatives, Drew ordered, "Tell them."

"That is correct," the young Vulcan man answered. "On Vulcan,

a death sentence would likely have been applied."

Corey asked, "So, what's it gonna be; death or life in prison?" Neither adult bothered to answer the question.

Shaking his head at their pretentiousness, Drew sighed, "Come on, Cor," and led his husband out of the house. Drew relieved the strike team to return to the Rapid Response Base.

At two-forty-five Pacific Time, Drew tapped his comm-badge and reported to Keith. By this time, Keith and Prez were aware of what was happening at all the orphanages. Relieved that Drew and Corey had the easiest time with the mildest abuses, Keith told them to go home.

Drew called Alden to transport their security teams, himself and Corey to the Command Center so they could lock up their phasers. There, they would wait for the other seven command teams to return. Logan and Lieutenant Vorik were still busily coordinating activities in California, with medical teams and with VSO operatives. Only then did Corey and Drew begin to understand the scope of the operations across California.

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Sacramento, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

At the Elk Grove community near Sacramento, Sean and Troy had to deal with neighborhood dogs that were barking warnings immediately upon their arrival. Before the dogs woke people, the two boys located the closest dog. Troy wasn't certain how he could understand the dogs, but he was more concerned for Sean, who seemed to know just what to do and didn't care how big the dog might

be. Sean led Troy closer to a six-foot tall stockade fence then whimpered and softly growled, "We're friends. Do not fear us. We're helpers."

The dog beyond the fence stopped barking and softly groaned, "I woke for nothing?" then lay down.

Confused, Troy's head sagged and his chin bounced on his chest. Troy grinned at his boyfriend and wondered, "How?"

Leading Troy to the next out of control pooch, Sean giggled, "You can do it too. Just remember to talk in short easy to understand phrases, just like they are." Gary, Jeremy, Lakota and Leo followed their charges to the next house, where Troy had his first canine conversation. This dog seemed to have control over other neighborhood dogs and when he barked, "Okay," all the other alerted neighborhood dogs settled down.

As they returned to the orphanage, Lakota grinned and explained, "That was an English Mastiff, probably about two hundred pounds. Of course every other dog listens to him."

Noticing Troy's confusion, Sean prodded, "Remember Monday; the two red-haired kids that went up on stage?" Troy blushed at the memory and nodded. "They're Clan Short telepaths," Sean grinned. He then said in Italian; "Mentre facevate pratica a casa Lunedì mattina, hanno fatto un trasferimento delle lingue a tutta la base, compreso cane mattina." (While you were home practicing Monday morning, they did a base-wide mind dump of languages, including dog.)

Humming thoughtfully, Troy then turned to Sean and teased, "You're teachin' the Clan virgin, Mister Unworthy."

Not recognizing what he had just done, Sean giggled, "Learn a

little, teach a little. Wait till you see what I teach you next."

Covering his mouth before a loud laugh escaped, Troy nodded and grinned, "I think I know what we'll be doin' after we get home."

Sean's comm-badge chirped. "Strike team Delta One reporting location secure."

Tapping his comm-badge, Sean replied, "We're on our way, Rob." He then reached for Troy's hand and admitted, "It's not even been a week since I was rescued. From here on, I'm probably following your lead, Troy."

Troy nodded and assured, "You're coming home with me tonight, Tiger. This is just a job."

Following Jeremy and Lakota with Gary and Leo bringing up the rear, Sean sighed, "Just a warning, if any of these kids have been sexually abused, I'm gonna be a cranky bitch."

Meeting them at the doorway, Rob said, "There are sixteen kids and two adults." He shook his head and reported, "All the kitchen cupboards are locked. The kids' bedrooms were locked too."

Beginning to shed tears, Sean nodded. Troy asked, "They did that shit to you?"

Sean shook his head answering, "No, they'd beat us if we tried to eat something before they fed us."

Rob grunted, "It looks like the kids here have been beat too. They're all malnourished."

Troy moaned then told the team, "We're here to take care of the kids. Then we'll deal with the fuck-wad adults." The lights in the

home came on right after Sean and Troy stepped in the house. They entered in the living room.

Sean shook his hand free of Troy's and immediately went to the kids. Having been in their place only days earlier, Sean didn't care that most of them were naked and dirty. Since all the kids were seated along a couch and on the floor in front of it, Sean parked himself on the floor before them. "My name's Sean." He pointed at Troy and smiled, "That's my boyfriend, Troy. We're Clan Short, here to rescue you."

One of the older boys sarcastically huffed, "Right. Move us from one shit-hole to another, ya mean."

Shaking his head, Sean said, "Last Friday, *I* was rescued by the Clan. I didn't believe it either, but I promise you, you'll have the best of everything."

One of the older girls, obviously smitten with Troy, pointed at him and asked, "He's an orphan too?"

Sean shook his head and smiled, "No, Troy's mom is a housekeeper at our base. I know it's hard to get, and you have every right to mistrust us, but things are going to be way better from here on. In days, I went from shy, lonely gay boy to having the best boyfriend in the world. It happened because our leaders let us be kids. We can play when we want, we can eat what and when we want, we can live with who we want and where we want. Our base in Hawaii is awesome." Hearing that Sean was from Hawaii, the kids perked up slightly. Sean continued, "We have a pool, a diving well, indoor and outdoor recreation, and our dining room is like no restaurant I've ever been in." Needing some backup, Sean smiled up at Troy saying, "Tell 'em what you told me."

Troy explained, "It's like a five star resort. Sean's dorm room has two full size beds, two dressers, two closets, two desks with a computer on each. He shares that room, for now, with one other teenager. They've got their own TV, a PlayStation and a stereo. The food in the dining room is made by the best chefs around. There's a soccer field, basketball and volleyball courts. For the little kids, we've got a full playground with slides, swings and merry-go-rounds."

Standing up, Sean took his Clan robe off and said, "All my clothes were provided by the Clan. My life has changed so much in only five days, I'll be honest and tell you that I was scared to come in here. Now that I'm here though, I'm excited for all you guys. You're gonna be like me and my orphanage brothers are now; cared for, clothed, happy and well fed."

As Sean was finishing the last sentence and sitting down again, he and Troy heard Prez in their sub-vocals, excitedly ordering prioritization for medical response.

Troy looked down at Sean saying, "I'll handle the report, Tiger. You take care of the kids." When Sean nodded, Troy went outside to the porch to make his report. "Alden, this is Troy. Sacramento location Delta One has sixteen kids. They're all malnourished. The only kids in there wearing clothes are the older girls, and what they're wearing is less than gauze. They're dirty and bruised mostly, but I saw one little boy who's wrist was obviously broken a long time ago. His arm and hand don't look right at all. Some of the other kids have infected cuts and scrapes. I'm not trained to say how serious, but for me, it's gut wrenching. I noticed lots of them scratching itches."

Alden asked, "Have you seen their bedrooms, Troy?"

"No," Troy replied.

"Check it out," Alden instructed. "Pull off a sheet and tell me if you see tiny black spots on the mattresses."

Troy groaned then whimpered, "Bedbugs?"

Alden added, "And lice, more than likely."

Uncontrollably shivering at the thought, Troy went back inside and called for Jeremy to join him. They went upstairs and found four bedrooms. In each room there were mattresses on the floor, but no other furnishings of any kind. There were only pillows and sheets on the beds. Wrinkling his nose and not at all happy with the task, Troy gingerly pulled back the sheet on one bed. At the disgusting sight before him, Troy dropped the sheet and grunted then hurried out of the room confirming, "Yep, bedbugs, lice and God only knows what else."

Troy returned to the living room, feeling like every creepy crawly insect in the house had attached itself to him. Medics had arrived while he and Jeremy were upstairs. Sean noticed Troy scratching and rubbing himself, practically squirming in a very uncoordinated fashion. Troy blushed and grinned then hurried out of the living room. Sean peeked around the corner in time to see Troy shove his hand down his shorts and scratch his crotch, the only area he hadn't already scratched. Covering his mouth, Sean giggled heartily.

"Not funny," Troy smirked. He carefully explained, "Their bedrooms are bug infested and disgusting. Was your orphanage like that too?"

Sean stopped giggling, shook his head and softly answered, "We were used as sex toys, so they kept us somewhat healthy. They kept us as close to naked as often as possible. That way, when they wanted

some, it wasn't a hassle to get at us. In Hawaii, it don't get cold enough to need more than a sheet. It's freezing here by comparison. Do they have blankets?"

Troy shook his head. "A full size mattress with only sheets on the floor in each room."

Sean nodded, "Like our place then."

Troy stared at Sean. He wanted to scream and toss a fit over what his boyfriend and all these kids had been through. Confused as to what he should do at that moment, Troy stepped closer to Sean and hung off him.

Sean whispered, "You're shaking."

Unable to hide what he was feeling, Troy softly sobbed, "From anger, disgust, sadness; so many bad emotions bubbling up, I don't know what to do."

Sean nodded, "That's a big part of why I love you, Troy. We're gonna do what has to be done. Two Vulcan VSO are already with the adults. Off the top of my head, I'm figuring a minimum of eight Safe Haven Act violations against sixteen kids. We've just gotta wait for the Vulcans."

A Starfleet doctor with a small girl in his arms came around the corner saying, "We're done, gentlemen. This little angel and I are ready to beam out."

Troy said, "Thanks, doc. How long before we get to see these kids again?"

"They want to stay together," the doctor answered. "If possible, you'll have a few in two days. If they insist on staying together, three

or four days."

Sean nodded, "Let 'em stay together. It makes a difference."

The doctor smiled then told the girl to "wave bye-bye." The girl giggled and waved her tiny hand. The doctor tapped his comm-badge saying, "Parker. Two to beam to Camp Bam Bam."

A female voice replied. "Locked on. Energizing." A silvery light enveloped the doctor and little girl. They vanished.

Troy squeezed Sean tightly then stepped back. Holding hands, they went down the hall, stopping outside the bedroom where the two adults had been left. The VSO reported that the care-givers had violated three subsections of Article ten, five subsections of Article eleven, three subsections of Article twelve and two subsections of Article fourteen. Troy and Sean thanked the VSO officers then dismissed them to prepare their reports.

Walking into the room, Troy flipped out and went off on a colorful tirade. Grinning widely at his boyfriend, Sean's eyebrows raised. When the male care-giver tried to offer an excuse, Troy quickly removed his Clan Short robe and T-shirt then demanded Sean do the same. Troy pointed out the difference between his well fed torso and Sean's thinner, less muscular torso, the result of Sean's years in an orphanage. The man still insisted that the kids under his care were "fine". Troy roared a string of obscenities that would make anyone from the New York metropolitan area proud, and then sentenced them to death. Both adults loudly proclaimed their innocence while Troy and Sean dug their phasers out of their robes. They set their phasers appropriately, nodded to each other then fired, silencing the adults permanently. Putting their T-shirts and robes on again, they then walked out of the room. On their way back down the hall, Troy ducked into a bathroom and puked into the sink. Appearing

discouraged, Troy wiped his mouth then returned to the hall and Sean.

"You're still totally awesome to me," Sean warmly assured. Troy uncertainly grunted. Sean wrapped an arm around Troy and wondered, "Can you teach me to cuss like you?" Grinning, Troy turned to Sean. "Lemme see if I can repeat this," Sean teased, "Worthless muthafucking, cock sucking, ass-eating, bitch-bastard, low-life scumbag wastes of fucking flesh." When Troy looked over and attempted to appear innocent, Sean giggled, "And you got it all out in one very loud breath. The veins in your neck and head were about ready to pop!" Troy smiled and shrugged. Shaking his head, Sean commented, "My Lover, a talented, sentimental musician with a wicked temper."

Troy sincerely offered, "I hope I didn't scare you."

"Nope," Sean confirmed. "For what you said about the kids here and me, I love you even more." They stepped outside and met up with their security and the strike team. Sean thanked and dismissed the strike team then tapped his sub-vocal. "Alden, take us to Sacramento site two, dude."

Upon arrival at the Woodlake community, Sean and Troy noticed one armored strike team member standing on the walkway leading to the home. He came to attention and said, "Sirs, Rahul Hayes reporting, sixteen children rescued. They are undergoing medical review. VSO are on site and interrogating the two adults. As per Director O'Brian's order, I've reported to the AI's what we've found."

Troy smiled, "Good job, thanks Rahul." He turned to Sean and suggested, "Go meet the kids, Tiger. I'll get a little more info about the care-givers." Sean nodded then stole a quick kiss. He followed the walkway to the porch and into the home. Troy asked, "Have the adults

been the slightest bit cooperative?"

Rahul shrugged and grinned, "About as cooperative as you might expect after being woken up then tied up."

Troy revealed, "The last two considered their kids 'fine', as if keeping them alive was enough."

Rahul sighed, "I don't know, bro. It reminded me of my own hell on earth."

"Sorry to bring back bad memories," Troy quickly offered.

Rahul smiled, "That's why I wanted this job and accepted this assignment."

"Well, I guess I need to see it for my own eyes. As soon as the last of the kids beam out, your team is dismissed." Troy said, and then walked towards the house. Rahul watched Troy and believed that the new Core Rimmer was confident and fully capable of performing his duties. Troy was most interested in how Sean was dealing with the kids. Sean didn't act like he even noticed that the boys and girls were nude. He dealt with their bitterness easily and calmly assured them that their lives would soon be like paradise, with all the comforts they each deserved.

Troy checked with one of the medics. "When will we see these kids again?"

Doctor Metzger smiled, "In two or three days, once we're certain that they're well enough to coexist with the others at Ewa Beach."

Troy nodded, "We've got two doctors and one child psychologist. With a hundred and fifty kids plus staff, we could

probably use at least one more of each."

Raising his eyebrows, Doctor Metzger smiled, "I'll put in for a transfer and spread the word. With these children, I've felt more useful tonight than I have in a long time."

Troy nodded and grinned, "I'll tell Prez. We've got four other bases to staff. I'm sure we could use dedicated talent."

Doctor Metzger picked up a small boy of about five-years-old. Only one other medic was still on-site with two other kids, about ten and thirteen years old. The little boy in Doctor Metzger's arms leaned over and kissed Troy on the cheek then hid his face on the doctor's shoulder. Sean began giggling.

Gently rubbing the boy's back, Troy smiled, "Thanks, little guy. I really needed that kiss." The two doctors and three kids beamed out. Sean broke into gales of laughter. "What's so funny?" Troy wondered.

"It's you!" Sean chuckled. "You stepped into the room and every girl turned to look and most of the boys too."

Intensely blushing and beginning to sweat, Troy begged, "Please stop."

Shaking his head, Sean slid in close to Troy then planted his own passionate kiss. It was a relaxing moment that they both needed. The VSO officers walked up. Sean and Troy were all business with the Vulcans. The total offenses numbered nine for each of the sixteen kids. In this case, however, the adults were not arrogant or self-righteous with Sean and Troy. Their silent acceptance of the verdicts changed their punishment from death to life imprisonment.

With the two adults in custody, Sean and Troy went outside to Lakota, Jeremy, Gary and Leo then made their reports to Prez and

Keith. Since Sean and Troy were new and Sean was a recent orphan, Prez sent them home to relax, adding that he and Keith would be there in little while for debriefing.

* * * * *

Santa Barbara, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

Julio and Jesse glanced at each other in shock as they heard the orders given to speed things up. They then locked eyes with Rocky and Ricky, who were quickly and silently modifying the settings on the phaser side of their MP5-AX machine guns. Julio glanced at Ricky's rifle, and nodded as he saw the position of the switch. He and Jesse both checked settings on their weapons as well; Logan had insisted they be fully qualified at the same level as the Dutchmen, so their weapons matched the weapons of their security.

Julio's eyes went wide as he heard the Unit security detail leader exclaim "What the fuck!" over the private channel.

"Ball-breakers, lock and load, we're going live," Julio quickly announced as his group began moving towards the duplex-like structure in front of them. "HQ, Butterfly Squad reporting we are hot and active," he added over the secure channel to Logan.

"Acknowledged, backup standing by," Logan replied. "No Aces, understood?"

"Yes, Sir." Jesse replied as he closed the channel. With Rocky and Ricky taking the lead and providing cover, the group joined the rest of the squad in a wholesale storming of the house. As soon as they entered the living room through the solid oak door, they realized

what had caused the exclamation.

Jesse's normally passive demeanor vanished instantly. Sitting on an end table were five young children, all appearing no more than eight years old, their bare chests striped with what could only be fresh cuts from a sharp object.

"These are the only kids we've found here so far," Lance, the head of the Unit strike force, announced to Julio.

Ricky twitched his nose. "There are more, and this does not smell right at all," he commented as he and Jesse began investigating the house closer. Constantly sniffing, Ricky's nose led him towards an elaborate bookcase on one wall. After a few seconds of inspection, he gave the bookcase a swift kick. The back of the bookcase collapsed, revealing a stairway leading into what could only be the attic.

Julio glanced over at Lance, who was in the process of 'softening up' the lone adult in the house that they had found to this point. "Put a guard on him, have one of your guys help these kids, and the rest of your team needs to prepare for the worst." Julio ordered. "I'll let you carry out the sentence if the scan matches what I'm seeing."

Jesse hit his sub-vocal. "Logan, I want a few of Colin's 'friends' here; we're in Hell, and I'm taking collections for the Sehlat Division Hunger Fund."

Logan didn't bother replying, instead three black-cloaked figures appeared next to Jesse. To Julio's surprise, Jesse pointed at the caretaker and said, "One of you take him; he's already claimed if the sentence is death. The other two, follow us."

"You're starting to worry me, babe." Julio whispered as the

troops formed up to climb the stairs.

Jesse looked at Julio, his eyes black with suppressed rage. "You've never been tortured," he stated, his omission of anything further more telling than anything else.

"Sir; there is a steel door, latched from the inside, at the top of the stairs." Gage, the ten-year-old explosives expert reported.

Julio tore his eyes from his enraged partner. "Blow the door, try to do it so nobody gets hurt if they're on the other side."

Gage nodded. "You got it; this is easy, try making a palm tree go up fifty feet and land in the same hole it came from!"

A minute later, Gage came down the stairs. "Stand clear of flying doors," he stated confidently.

Lance nodded. "As soon as the door passes you, move in," he ordered, getting a nod of approval from Julio.

As soon as the path was clear and everyone was in place, Gage smiled and released the switch he was holding. With a loud BANG, the steel door came flying down the stairwell and past the boys, embedding itself in the far wall. Only two Unit members made it into the stairwell before Jesse, with Ricky hot on his heels, stormed up the stairs with guns at the ready.

By the time Julio made it up the stairs, Jesse and Ricky were standing guard over five adults, taking turns at trying out the new stun bullets on anyone who had the lack of sense to twitch a finger. Julio's stomach flipped and almost emptied as he saw why. Three young boys were being helped down from where they were hanging by their wrists from the rafters. Two boys were gently being released from a rack. A boy and a girl were being disconnected from a chair that had

multiple wires coming from it that attached to various body parts. Two little girls and two little boys were strapped to sawhorses, fresh whip marks on their bare buttocks. Each station had multiple high-definition cameras focused on it, the lights indicating that filming was in progress.

"Are you guys Vulcan or do you use standard telepathy?" Julio growled to his hooded companions as he rushed over to help release the little ones from the sawhorses.

"We are both standard telepaths." One of them answered from inside his hood.

"Good; you don't need to get your hands dirty. I want a full report, in my head, ASAP."

"Yes, sir," they replied as they turned towards the adults. By the time all of the kids were freed from their bonds, the telepaths approached Julio. "We have your results, Director," they replied formally.

"Give me the dump." Julio said as the last boy from the sawhorse climbed up him and latched on for dear life. A minute later, his voice like ice, Julio announced "I find the adults who have been caretakers of the children of this house guilty of over one-third of the Safe Haven Act. Each adult in this room has willingly and maliciously abused those under their care, to the point of endangerment of life."

A series of loud 'clicks' from Jesse, Ricky, Rocky, and those that were not still helping kids from their bonds told Julio that his next words would have no arguments. "For the crimes that you have committed, I sentence you to... death."

Before Julio could even give the order, live rounds burst from multiple machine guns, quickly turning the row of adults into a pile of

hamburger. "Logan, we need a Sehlat for cleanup, at my location in the attic," Julio growled.

"Report, Julio." Logan responded, his voice steady.

"I have five adults who volunteered for supper, one pending, fifteen malnourished children who have been tortured on film that need medivac, and one child attached to my neck who seems to be a recent arrival that will need medical attention upon our return. Now, where is our furry gourmet?"

"I will arrange for his supper to be delivered to a location more able to support his weight," Logan replied. "Stand by for medical team arrival on lower level."

"Acknowledged," Julio replied as he signaled for the team to assist their charges with climbing down the stairs. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Jesse and Gage making the rounds of the equipment in the attic, obviously preparing to eliminate the reminders of the wrongs committed here.

Ricky remained behind with Jesse and Gage, and the rest of the group returned to the main level. After sentencing the final adult to lunch after reviewing of his actions and a quick stop to get his personal leech's major injuries treated, Julio began doing a walk-through of the house. The house was laid out with six bedrooms. Four of the rooms were obviously for the adults, even though each held two beds, and each contained a personal torture area with cameras, configured so that it became a bookshelf with a flick of a switch. The last two rooms had bunk beds sealed off with portable gates, and bare army cots in the center of the room for the kids to sleep on. The only visible toys were sealed behind the gates, obviously not intended for any actual use. In the kitchen, there were two refrigerators, one labeled 'adults' and the other labeled 'children'. After using his phaser

to cut the lock on the adult one, Julio found it full of steaks, milk, beer, and other normal adult foods. The kids' fridge, however, contained powdered milk, water, and a moldy chunk of bleu cheese. The cupboards were not much better; bread, some instant macaroni and cheese, and Ramen noodles. In the living room, Julio noticed that the DVD's in the locked case seemed a little too organized. He went to pull one out after breaking into the case, and instead the entire contents of the shelf came out; all glued together and glued shut.

Just then Gage and Jesse came down to the main level. Julio stopped them, and tapped his subvocal. "Logan, I need to borrow Lucas. We need to do some explosive mental healing here."

"On his way." Logan replied. "Like he'd ever let me live it down for refusing to let him have fun."

"No shit." Julio said, almost achieving a small grin. He turned to Gage, and said "You and Lucas need to see how small you can make this house."

Without waiting for a reply, Julio headed for the lead medical tech. "Are any of these kids in bad enough shape that they can't hang around to watch their horror being destroyed?" he asked seriously.

"No sir, in fact I think you'll heal them greatly by doing that where they can see it first-hand," the tech replied, her face pale from the accounts she had heard from the children.

"Can I push the button? They killed my best friend the day after we were moved here," a small voice whispered next to Julio's ear.

Julio turned his head, looking into the face of the formerly speechless boy that he'd been carrying around. "I can ask, little guy. What's your name?"

"I'm Terry. What's gonna happen to me now?"

"I'm going to take you to visit with some of my friends in Hawaii, then you'll go home to Iowa with us. We can talk about that more after we destroy this place though, okay?"

"Okay."

The seven-year old tucked his blond head back into Julio's neck, falling silent once again. Julio moved over to where Lucas had appeared with four large bags, all of which were waiting as Gage updated him on the situation.

"Guys, I have a thousand dollars that says you can't make this house into a pile of toothpicks in the dead center of this lot," Julio stated seriously, knowing Lucas wouldn't miss out on such a challenge.

"You're on." Lucas whispered firmly. "Gage, break out the sink, it's time to cook."

"On it; it's been a while since I stole money from a Director!" Gage grinned.

Julio nodded, even allowing a smile as Lucas and Gage broke out their 'portable kitchen sinks'. "One thing, little Terry here gets to push the button; they killed his best friend." Julio stated.

"I know, I've been helping in his head since I got here." Lucas replied as he started dumping chemicals in the sink. "Randall's favorite color was purple, we're gonna send this place up in a purple cloud."

The last made Julio relax; the Des Moines group had quickly bonded, and he knew that Lucas would go out of his way to keep his

word. He headed over to Jesse, who was quietly unloading his soul to Ricky. As Julio approached, Jesse fell silent. Julio walked up and kissed Jesse's forehead, before stating "I just wanted to let you know it's okay, hon. You can tell me when you're ready, but I'll let you and Ricky talk it out for now."

"Thanks, Babe." Jesse replied softly.

Knowing his boyfriend needed the privacy, Julio began making the rounds of the rest of the kids while his 'boomers' were setting things up for their show. By the time he was done, he had found some very disturbing things. The kids were listed as all being 'home schooled' due to 'emotional imbalance'. In reality, the adults either faked the required tests on the computer, or sat each kid down and gave them the answers to the questions. None of the kids were actually educated, the time was spent filming torture films for sale to anyone who had the means to get them. If the kids performed well, they were given a light meal at the end of their performance. If they did poorly or were off that day, they were limited to the contents of the kid's refrigerator. Clothing was what was on their backs... when they could wear it. For inspections, they were always on 'educational trips' and the rooms were reconfigured to look like they lived in luxury. Kids who did not survive were listed as 'transfers' and then 'runaway - not found' within a month of their supposed transfer.

Julio stepped off to the side, still holding Terry, so that he could think over what had just happened. As he watched without really watching, the Unit troops were busily running wire throughout the building, their instructions coming telepathically from Lucas. Lucas and Gage were quite busy setting charges, each triple-checking to ensure it was just right.

'I wonder how these creeps got away with this crap,' Julio thought to himself. *'What the fuck were they thinking? How in the*

Hell can someone do that to another person, especially a kid?'

"What'cha cryin' about?" Terry asked softly, his head pulled back to look at Julio's face.

Julio had not even noticed the tears flowing from his eyes. "I'm crying because I can't understand how they could treat you guys like they did," Julio responded quietly.

"But you saved us," Terry replied seriously. "And Lucas says that he's gonna give everyone buttons, but mine is gonna be the one that makes the big boom. He says that when we get home, he's gonna teach me how to make booms myself."

Realizing that Lucas was helping Terry deal by distracting his mind, Julio let one of his worries slide to the back burner for now. "Lucas was taught by the best, so you're going to learn a lot." Julio replied, himself glad for the distraction. "Who knows, you might even get to go launch palm trees with the Patriarch of Clan Short every once in a while."

"You means Lucas wasn't lyin' about that?" Terry asked.

"Lucas can't lie when he's mind talking." Julio stated seriously. "He won't lie anyway, he hates liars and won't become one."

Terry's green eyes gained a little bit of light to them. "Does that mean that you really are gonna be my daddy now? Lucas said that you would."

"You and I need to talk to Jesse, since he's gonna be your poppa, but I'm pretty sure he'll say okay and then it'll be for real." Julio replied.

Terry smiled. "Lucas says it'll be okay."

"You better believe it." Lucas' soft voice announced as he joined them. "Julio, either stop your hangin' on what happened, or I'm gonna get Colin to sort out your head. Got it, bro?"

"Sir, yes SIR!" Julio replied as he flipped Lucas the finger behind Terry's back.

"You know I hate needles." Lucas giggled. "Here Terry, this is your button. I've got the main control box disconnected, so it won't do anything. Once I tell you it's live, don't press it until I tell you in your head to do it."

"Okay Lucas." Terry replied, carefully taking the offered button.

Lucas made the rounds of the rest of the kids, giving each of them a button that would help enable Terry's button. As he reached the last boy, the one that had also been tied to a sawhorse, he was stopped before the boy would take the button.

"What about my pet spider, Frankie? He lives on the gate by my bed!" the little boy asked.

"You're Ryan, right?" Lucas asked, even though he already knew the answer.

"Yeah. Where's Frankie?"

Lucas held out his hand, and a little spider appeared on his palm, sitting in a ventilated plastic box. "He's right here, and a friend of mine talked to him to tell him what was happening. He's gonna ride in this box until you get to your new home, and we'll make sure that he's got a nice tank to live in so he don't accidentally get hurt."

"Wow! Thanks!" Ryan stated after checking to make sure it was 'his' spider. After carefully giving Lucas a hug, he took the spider and the button from Lucas and then settled down in the grass.

Once Lucas returned to the control box, Gage got up on a makeshift podium that they had thrown together from the equipment crates that had been teleported in. "Okay everybody, we're gonna pass out what we call 'Micky Mouse Ears'. You need to put them over your ears to protect them from the big boom. We're having a force field set up to keep you from getting hit by anything if something goes wrong, but it won't so you're gonna see a really kewl explosion. When I say 'press your button', I need you to do just that. Once everyone's button is pressed, your bad memories are going to go boom!" He paused, and after a nod from Lucas, continued. "We need to test it, so everyone press your buttons now and hold them until a little bang happens."

At the controller, Lucas watched the status lights. Once each light for the buttons went green, he signaled Terry and smiled as the sound of a firecracker went off behind him.

Gage smiled as well. "Okay, you won't hear me once your ears are covered, so Lucas is going to give you the order to hold your button down again once everyone is ready." Gage turned, and after cupping his hands around his mouth, yelled "CLEAR THE LINE!"

Once everyone had donned their hearing protection, and the third head count had been taken to assure the techs that everyone was accounted for, Lucas did a wide-area broadcast. *'FIRE IN THE HOLE!'*

Lucas and Gage checked each other one last time, ensuring the force field was active and all status lights were normal, then with a double thumbs-up, the order was given to press the buttons. Almost instantly, the row of lights lit up, followed by a flashing 'pre-armed'

light. Lucas signaled Terry, and less than a second later the ARMED light went live.

With a rumble, the staged charges began doing their work. First to go was the center of the house, along with the foundational supports within the central areas of the structure. As the house started to collapse in on itself, shaped charges began going off, directing the falling pieces into the vacated central area. Finally, less than thirty seconds after it started, the perimeter rings of shaped charges began going off, each ring pushing the debris into a tight pile in the center while breaking it up into smaller and smaller pieces.

When all was said and done, the former duplex now occupied a space the size of a lawn shed. As promised, the final explosion was a pyrotechnic blast which resulted in a plume of purple smoke rising from the center of the pile. As the former residents ripped off their hearing protection, each bearing the first smile to grace their face since moving in, Julio realized that this horror was finally over.

"Hey everyone, you can keep the 'ears' if you want, if not just lay them on the ground and we'll pick them up." Gage announced.

Julio smiled himself as he felt Jesse cuddle up to his free side. "Is this our new son?" Jesse asked, obviously already aware of what had been discussed.

Julio nodded. "Terry, this is your new Pop, Jesse."

"Hi Pop," Terry said timidly.

Julio looked around, and heard fire trucks in the distance. "Logan, fifteen plus staff to the Unit hospital, and we need a fast cleanup before the firemen arrive."

"Okay, bro; Daileass is on it. See you in a few seconds," Logan

replied.

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Los Angeles, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

Rafiki, Mike's gorilla, returned from where the policemen had been lying on the East LA street. When the gorilla was close enough, Derrick softly asked, "Where'd you send the cops, Raf?"

"Terra-Main Space Station for prosecution," the gorilla replied. "I figure that they're either extremely stupid or involved in the cover-up."

A muffled gun shot was heard. Mike grumbled, "Damned cops blew our surprise to hell."

Derrick scowled, "That confirms at least those two knew what was going on here. I'll bet others in the city government knew stuff too."

Mike sighed, "If Prez finds that out, LA will be short a couple of public servants."

Derrick nodded, "Definitely. Get that Irish temper up and we've got big problems." He paused then teased, "Now that I think about it, your temper boils over kind of quick too."

Mike giggled, "But I can recall what I've said and done. Prez just goes nuclear."

Derrick's comm-badge chirped. "Strike team Charlie One, location secure."

Derrick replied, "We heard a gunshot, Zack. Is everyone okay?"

Zack answered, "Yeah, we're fine. One of the 'care-givers' fired a thirty-eight revolver. Thankfully, we've got the best armor available. One team member is sore from the kick in the gut. The asshole that fired the thirty-eight is unconscious at the moment."

Following their security to the property, Derrick said, "We're comin'."

Zack softly said, "Prepare yourselves, guys. It's revolting in here."

"Are the kids safe?" Mike worried.

"Yeah," Zack sighed. "The adults are restrained and gagged so we won't have to hear their shit."

Derrick scowled, "I thought you said the man was unconscious?"

Zack answered, "He is, but the woman's a foul-mouthed wench. Gagging two is almost as easy as one."

Across their sub-vocals, Prez announced, "Attention Core Rimmers and Rimmer Strike Teams. It's way worse here than we could've imagined. There are twenty kids at our location. We need to prioritize what we've got and where we need what type of medical response. I want reports made to Alden, ASAP. We need the location, number of kids and their general condition. Alden, prioritize the incoming data and report back to me. This is turning to shit, dudes!"

Mike groaned, "Saints help us, John and Prez are both *very* unhappy."

Manuel, Mike's teenaged personal security, whose nickname was Manny, said, "While you two are safe inside, I'd like to have the gorillas check something out."

Mike wondered, "What's up, dude?"

Manny replied, "I keep seeing someone down the block peek around the corner."

Derrick looked up at his Silverback, Talib, and ordered, "Better go check it out."

Nodding agreement, Mike said, "We're safe so don't hurt any one. Bring whomever you find back to us."

Derrick and Mike went into the house. The lights flickered then stayed on. Zack, the strike team leader, waited at the end of the hall. Derrick wondered, "Where's the kids?"

Zack gestured to the room beyond the hallway saying, "In here. There are twenty. The two adults are in their bedroom."

Mike scowled, "What stinks?"

Zack approached Derrick and Mike then whispered, "The kids were locked in their rooms upstairs. If someone needed to go to the bathroom, tough luck. We're cleaning up the kids and I've already called in as a medical emergency."

Mike and Derrick couldn't believe what they had heard. They followed Zack into the kitchen. The kids were naked and pathetically boney, sitting down along the counters and walls, with members of the strike team carefully sponge bathing them with towels. With nothing more to do at the moment, Derrick and Mike grabbed towels and helped get the kids cleaned up. They gently assured the kids that

they were safe now and would soon be cared for by the best doctors in the Federation. The kids were literally scared shitless though, and one little girl lost control of her bodily functions while she was being cleaned. Although no one said a word about it and only moved her aside to cleanup the additional mess, she screamed as if her life were being threatened. The fact was, the girl was so emaciated that any touch probably did cause her pain. None of the other orphans moved or spoke to alleviate the girl's fear and pain.

Doctors and medics arrived. Upon seeing the children for themselves, they called for immediate backup. Derrick, Mike and the strike team members stepped aside to allow the medics access to the kids. Standing beyond the kitchen in the hall were two VSO officers. Derrick ordered Zack to "show our Vulcan friends to the dirt-bags responsible."

Shaken to his core, Mike tearfully added, "Get everything from them; we're prosecuting everyone responsible." The Vulcans nodded then Zack showed them to the adult's bedroom. Mike began wandering around to inspect the house. He noticed filthy walls; minimal, useless furnishings; not even a television in the living room. Fuming, revolted and saddened, Mike turned to find Derrick.

Outside with many of the strike team members, Derrick saw his husband and called, "Here, Mike."

Mike didn't even notice the gorillas or the other teenage boys that were found. Shaking violently, Mike buried himself in Derrick's embrace. Derrick softly assured, "It's gonna be okay, Lick. The kids will be fixed up by the docs. The two assholes responsible are dust already, they just don't know it yet."

Mike nodded and sobbed, "They don't even deserve an

explanation. I don't want to say a word to either of them."

"I know," Derrick whispered. "It's kewl by me. Let's do it that way."

Forcing a small relieved smile, Mike looked up. It was then that Mike smelled cigarette smoke. Looking around, Mike discovered his and Derrick's security surrounding a group of five older teenagers, some of which were smoking. Wiping his eyes and pulling himself together, Mike asked, "Who are these dudes?"

Manny replied, "The ones that were loitering around watching us are a local street gang."

Derrick said, "These are some of the Latin Kings. They want out, Mike."

Mike's Silverback laid his hands on two of the boys saying, "This is Alfonso and this is Hector. They'll act as spokesmen."

The boy identified as Hector stepped forward. "Me and my friends, we'd like to help. We knew what was happenin' here, but no one would listen. We'll help you if you'll help us?"

Derrick wondered, "What kind of help can you provide?"

Alfonso laughed, "Distractions!"

Hector grinned, "The cops in this city are fucked up. They like car chases, but can't run to save their fat asses. We'll keep them occupied if you'll help some of our brothers and sisters."

Mike asked, "How old are you dudes?"

Hector replied, "Nineteen. Too old and too set in my ways for Clan, but I got brothers and sisters that need to escape home and this

city."

Alfonso said, "Seventeen. I ain't ever been arrested, but I got brothers and sisters that need out too. We got no future here."

Derrick smiled, "I'm sure we can accommodate you. Start waking your brothers and sisters."

Grateful for a little cheer in an otherwise dismal night, Mike nodded, "Anyone that wants Clan help will get it." The Latin Kings began pulling out cell phones to call their loved ones. Mike turned to Zack asking, "Can you dudes provide transport for our new friends. Your job is done here."

Derrick reminded, "No weapons of any sort are allowed on base. With these guys covering your back, you won't need 'em anyway."

Having already noticed the weapons many in the strike team and personal security were carrying, Hector laughed, "Fifty cal's, M-16's and phaser rifles tend to deter!"

Derrick smiled then carefully said, "We appreciate your offer to help us very much, but we honestly don't need it. Clan Short doesn't require down payments and we sure don't want to be responsible for any of you getting arrested because you helped us. All you need to do is get the kids, okay?" The Latin Kings reluctantly agreed. That wasn't street rules they played by. Derrick called Alden and ordered a Clan Short communicator. He handed it to Hector saying, "You're now Clan intelligence on detached duty. Any kid you find that needs our help, just use this to let us know."

Alfonso pointed and said, "Vulcan dudes waitin' on you." Hearing themselves referred to as 'dudes' both VSO officers raised their eyebrows.

Mike turned and signaled for the Vulcans to wait just one minute, then faced Zack, saying, "Alden will know where we are. When everyone's gathered, bring them to us."

Zack nodded, "You got it, Mike."

Mike and Derrick went back inside the house to receive reports from the VSO. In the meantime, the members of strike team Charlie one split into five groups of two and began transporting away with members of the Latin Kings.

Upon hearing a grand total of thirteen violations against the Safe Haven Act, Derrick dismissed the VSO. Mike and Derrick set their phasers to maximum and wide beam so they could walk in the room and dispatch the two adults as quickly as possible. This one bedroom had the TV and all the good furnishings. The rest of the house was impoverished by comparison. Of course, the two adults were disintegrated, but so was the bed and about six feet of the wall behind the adults. Peering through the large hole in the wall, Derrick grinned, "Oops! Got a tree too."

Mike shrugged, "Oh fucking well! If we could do it without draining our phasers, I'd happily flatten this place."

Derrick led Mike out of the house. Once with their security, Mike called, "Alden, LA site two, please."

Alden replied, "I've received reports from both sites, Mike. It's your call, but LA site three is worse than two."

Mike checked with Derrick. They decided to deal with the worst case first and were transported to site three in Los Angeles. While the Compton neighborhood was different, the situation inside was similar to the first site. At least the kids weren't locked in their rooms at night and were allowed to use the bathroom, but the twenty kids were every

bit as emaciated, hurting and sickly as the others. There wasn't much time to speak to any of the kids, but they did tell the few remaining orphans that they would soon be feeling better and in Hawaii, living under much better conditions.

The total violations listed by VSO numbered twelve. As they had at the prior location, Derrick and Mike terminated the two adults. Beginning to lose patience and self-control, Derrick and Mike took pot-shots at furniture and walls as they left the dwelling. At the lowest setting, a phaser blast could move a stove or refrigerator. At the next higher setting, a short phaser blast at a plaster board wall would knock a hole through it. Making any attempt at salvaging the residence pointless, Derrick tried the next higher setting on the staircase, destroying most of the wooden steps. Outside watching and hearing Mike's and Derrick's remarks, two gorillas shook their heads while the two teenage security guards began sniggering.

Finally, Derrick and Mike visited site two in Los Angeles. Sixteen kids had already been taken to Blank Children's hospital in Des Moines, Iowa. VSO reports listed nine Safe Have Act violations. After checking with members of Strike Team Charlie two, Mike and Derrick decided life imprisonment was appropriate. By the time they exited the premises, strike team Charlie one had arrived with thirty-six Latin Kings kids between age seven and fifteen. They were spoken to and became more excited about the opportunities possible at Ewa Beach.

Derrick called Prez intending to report all that had been done, but the conversation revolved mostly around the Latin King kids. Alden transported all of them back to Ewa Beach to wrap up the night.

* * * * *

San Francisco, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

Even in their black Clan Short robes, Keith and Prez were chilled. It was forty-six degrees Fahrenheit in San Francisco and John's recent call left them both with shivers running down their spines. Each of the command teams had phasers and a tricorder with them. They were in an area of the city known as The Dogpatch. Sounds from a nearby freeway could be heard and it could be seen only a few hundred feet away. In a small park, Prez and Keith were with their security teams amongst a few trees, across 20th Street from the building that was being raided by Kekoa and his team. They were watching the house and waiting for word it was safe to enter.

Two other strike teams were in San Francisco. The first was west of the 101 Freeway, between 24th and 25th Streets. The other was in South San Francisco.

Holding Prez close so he could whisper as softly as possible, Keith shared, "John sounded real bad, baby."

Prez nodded and whispered, "I can only assume he's feeling stuff from the orphanage he's at."

"The AI's said they weren't spending enough on food or utilities adequate for twelve kids. For the first time, I can honestly say I'm really scared. I'm scared for John mostly, but partially over the orphaned kids."

"It's this place. What a hell-hole. A couple of houses near this small park, but warehouses and industrial complexes within sight. This is no place for an orphanage and kids."

"That's a violation against Article 10 of the Safe Haven Act, as far as I'm concerned."

Prez said, "Note that for this location, Alden."

Alden responded, "Noted."

Monitoring his tricorder, Keith said, "The air quality here is putrid. We're only a few blocks from the bay and what looks like industrial docks and shipyards. The wind is blowin' from that direction too."

Alden replied, "Got it, Keith."

Concerned for John, Keith softly told Prez; "I gotta check, Thy'la" Prez nodded and Keith tapped his sub-vocal. He silently mouthed, "Alden, patch me to John."

Alden replied "Patch complete, Keith."

Keith whispered, "You okay, bro?" A few seconds later, Keith nodded then said, "Be careful." Keith then told Prez, "He was holding hands with Stephen. Everything he might've felt was amplified. Since they let each other go, John's better." He then smirked, "We should've thought of that and warned them."

Prez grinned, "Like any warning might've made a difference."

Prez's comm-badge chirped. Kekoa coughed, "Team Able One to Director O'Brian."

"Prez, here. Your status, Kekoa?"

"Location secure, Sir. The care-givers are subdued. The children..." Kekoa paused. Prez, Keith, and their security heard the unmistakable sound of vomiting then spitting. "The children are

gathered and safe."

Quickly walking across the street, Prez asked, "Are you okay, Kekoa?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Not all of us are though." Kekoa paused then said, "It's gross in here, Prez. Brace yourself." Without thinking, Prez and Keith ran to the property, across the small lawn and through the already open door. The odor hit them first and they stopped just beyond the door. The smell was worse inside than it was outside. Several flashlight beams could be seen further ahead. Prez and Keith reached into their robe pockets for their flashlights and turned them on. To the right of the entrance was a large, almost barren room. To the left was a short wall then another room with a large table, however there were no chairs. Every wall the boys saw looked like it was gray, but as their eyes adjusted, it was obvious they had once been white; they simply hadn't been painted in many years and were in disrepair. What little furniture was in the room on the right appeared well beneath serviceable. They could only assume it was a living room. There wasn't sufficient seating for six, never mind twelve. At the end of the hall, Kekoa called, "Over here, Prez. We'll have the power back on in a minute. We have two adults, one male and one female, and twenty kids..."

"Twenty?" Prez incredulously repeated.

Kekoa nodded, "Yes, Sir. There are four bedrooms upstairs. The room the adults were in was spacious, well furnished and maintained and had three locks on the door. The kids were in the three smaller bedrooms; six in one, seven in the other two rooms. There were no beds or mattresses in any of those three rooms. Just disgusting old, threadbare sheets shared by every kid in the room. Not even a pillow was there for them. They were behind double locked doors too. They couldn't even use the bathroom; there were plastic buckets for them to

piss and shit in." Before allowing the leaders to pass beyond the doorway, Kekoa moved closer to them and whispered, "These kids are emaciated. Some are ill, some have open sores and wounds that appear gangrenous..."

Having heard enough, Keith tapped his comm-badge. "Logan, it's Keith; contact Starfleet Medical, code white, pediatric emergency, set Medical teams at condition orange. Respond to all orphanage locations immediately. Also, get teams at each site for Vulcan mind-meld interrogations."

Logan replied, "I'll coordinate with Starfleet, Charleston Clan Hospital, the UNIT Rapid Response Medical Wing and other major hospitals around the U.K. and U.S. which have large, excellent pediatric facilities. I'll have Lieutenant Vorik contact Commander Jason Evans for VSO Operatives to be dispatched."

At virtually the same instant that Keith began speaking, Prez tapped his sub-vocal and ordered, "Alden, connect me to all command teams. Attention Core Rimmers and Rimmer Strike Teams. It's way worse here than we could've imagined. There are twenty kids at our location. We need to prioritize what we've got and where we need what type of medical response. I want reports made to Alden ASAP. We need the location, number of kids and their general condition. Alden, prioritize the incoming data and report back to me. This is turning to shit, dudes!"

Alden replied, "Understood. Reports are coming in, Prez."

The lights came on. In a second or two, their eyes adjusted. The room beyond the doorway Kekoa was standing in was a kitchen. Prez and Keith barreled past Kekoa. To the right were a group of mostly naked kids. At first glance, Prez thought of the late night commercials asking for aid for starving children in drought stricken corners of the

globe. The few kids that were standing had distended bellies, as if they hadn't ever eaten a decent meal in their lives. At their feet were the younger and most frightened kids. Keith and Prez were momentarily struck dumb at the pitiful sight. They turned away and saw the two adults, their arms and legs restrained, laying prone, face down on the floor in their pajamas.

Choking back his tears, Prez moved closer to the kids. There were five kids standing, four boys and one girl. Only the girl had tattered boys briefs on. The tallest boy had kids under each arm and others gathered around on the floor, holding onto his legs. They all were very dirty, as if they hadn't bathed in at least a month. Some of the kids on the floor looked up at Prez rather oddly. Prez had seen shock and surprise in other kids faces before, however this expression was different; they almost seemed catatonic; conscious yet not understanding what was happening around them, as if they were in a different, unknown place. Locking eyes with the tallest boy, he softly said, "My name is Prez. What's your name?"

"Greg," the boy meekly answered.

"Do you understand we're here to help?" The boy nodded. Prez asked, "How old are you, Greg?"

"Fifteen."

What was most amazing to Prez was that this fifteen year old boy was about the same height as his twelve-year-old brother, Drew. Prez could see each of Greg's ribs, his collar bone and virtually no muscle anywhere on his body. Even what was hanging between his legs seemed more appropriate for a prepubescent. Pubic hair made it obvious he had passed that phase of maturity. Prez said, "You've been trying to protect these kids, haven't you?" Again the boy only nodded. Prez forced a weak smile saying, "It shows, Greg. They're all

clustered up to you." Glancing at each of the kids, Prez promised, "From now on, you're all Clan brothers and sisters. We'll get you all any help you need."

Outside the kitchen doorway, someone else threw up. While Prez was fighting back his own need to puke, he continued to try and get to know the kids. Behind Prez, Keith ordered members of the strike team to lift the man and woman. Keith began listing out violations of the Safe Haven Act to the two adults. He finally growled, "I swear to you both, you'll never see the sunrise again. As soon as I get all of what I need from you inconsiderate, inhuman shits, I will take extreme pleasure in turning you to dust myself."

The man protested, "You can't do..."

Keith was beyond outraged. Before the man could finish, Keith punched him in the face, breaking his nose and loosening teeth. Keith screamed, "Yes we can! There is no excuse you can possibly make!" However, the man seemed ready to speak again. Biting his lower lip with both his fists clenched and prepared to land multiple blows, Keith softly warned, "Don't! I swear, I'll kill you with my bare hands."

A UNIT Medical team entered the room. Among the medics was Doctor Janet Hayes. She laid a hand on Prez, then gently said, "We'll take over, Preston. I promise you, you will see these kids again and in better shape than they are now."

Prez nodded then introduced her to the kids. Also entering the kitchen were a Vulcan man and Vulcan woman. Both were dressed in black jumpsuits. They went to where Keith was standing before the two adults. Doing his best to control his temper, Keith told the VSO officers, "Suck them deaf and blind, for all I care. Who is responsible for this? Are they alone or is it in their management? We're prosecuting everybody responsible. If the garbage man knew and

didn't say anything, I want his ass on a hook."

The Vulcan VSO officers nodded then went directly to the two adults and began mind-melds.

The UNIT doctors were beaming out with children and additional doctors beamed in to replace them. Having completed their mid-melds with the adult 'care-givers', the Vulcan VSO officers led Prez and Keith outside to report their findings. They wanted a chance to discuss things away from the children and the chaos of the home. Thoroughly disgusted, the strike team members holding the adults upright let them go and nudged them just enough to cause them to both fall face first onto the floor again. One went so far as to sarcastically grin, "Oops! Sowwy!"

The twenty children that had been scraping an existence in this home had managed to keep each other alive. They had shared every morsel of food and taken over household chores for each other when one was too sick or injured to do the task themselves. They did not want to be separated and were being transported to medical facilities at Camp Bam Bam.

While still outside, Prez and Keith received reports from Alden. "The two locations in Anaheim and one of the San Diego locals have twelve kids each. With sixteen kids each are the two other San Francisco locations, one of the Los Angeles locations, the one in Santa Barbara, and one of the Sacramento locations. The other Sacramento orphanage has eighteen kids as does one of the San Jose sites. In addition to your location, two orphanages in Los Angeles had twenty kids each." Alden paused and sadly stated, "The other San Diego site has twenty-four kids, as does John's site in San Jose. Reported from Fresno were twenty-four found plus one D.O.A. We were expecting one-hundred-ninety-six kids. The actual count, not

including the one deceased, is two-hundred-eighty-four."

With tears welling up in his eyes, Keith groaned, "John, Stephen, Kaleo and Tory." The sadness Keith felt over his youngest brother, brother-in-law and two close friends that had been orphans themselves turned to rage. His comm-badge chirped. As soon as he tapped it, Kaleo bitterly ranted. Prez was beside himself. If only he had had a clue that it was this bad then he, Keith, Mike and Derrick would've been assigned to the worst locations. Those corporate morons and every person associated with this situation would pay. Prez didn't care if the entire State's government was involved, they would go down in flames with ZCC.

Without saying a word to anyone, Prez slowly walked into the house. Feeling the knots in his husband's gut and throat, Keith followed. The two adults were face down on the floor. All the children and doctors were gone. Prez ordered, "Stand them up and step away." Once the strike team members had followed his order, Prez glared at the two adults and ranted, "You have both been found guilty of *fifteen* violations of the Safe Haven Act. We have extracted from your memories the names of all your corporate superiors, and anyone else you knew by name, that allowed this repugnant travesty against humanity to continue. You are hereby summarily sentenced to death." While the man and woman loudly protested, pleading for clemency, Prez and Keith pulled their phasers out and set them to medium beam at maximum power. The two VSO officers remained at the back door watching. From the hallway doorway into the kitchen area, Kekoa also watched. Prez and Keith took three steps back. Tired of hearing their pleas, Prez bellowed, "I don't give a flying fuck about mercy for people like you! Neither of you look like you're starving. You did this for personal gain; for money and extravagant personal items. Worse, you have no remorse. Pray to whatever God you believe in and beg him for forgiveness. You aren't getting any from me!" Together, Prez

and Keith raised their arms, took aim and fired.

It seemed that the phaser blasts extended outward from the center of the torsos to their extremities. Finally, the two adults were dust on the floor and there was abrupt silence in the room. Now that sentencing was complete, Keith and Prez tried to take deep breaths, but all that accomplished was opening their throats. Keith hurried to the kitchen sink and vomited. Having nowhere else to go, Prez threw up onto the piles of ash that were, only seconds earlier, two extremely warped human beings.

The two VSO officers led Prez and Keith out the front door to the sidewalk. Prez thanked the VSO officers then asked them to prepare their reports regarding this location. Keith asked Alden to transport them and their security teams to the next San Francisco location. Doctors had transported the sixteen kids from the site to pediatric hospitals in Des Moines, Iowa. On-site VSO reports to Prez and Keith found the 'care-givers' guilty of ten violations of the Safe Haven Act. They were arrested and transported to Terra-Main Space Station for prosecution and would likely be sent to off-planet penal facilities.

Finishing at the second of three San Francisco orphanages, Keith and Prez began receiving calls from the other five Core Rimmer teams. Drew called Keith and Keith sent them home. John couldn't even call his oldest brother; Stephen made the call. Prez and Keith wished they could somehow undo any damage done to the youngest of the team. Troy called Prez. Kaleo called Keith.

Prez contacted Logan to ask for assistance rounding up what would likely be hundreds of individuals directly and indirectly responsible for the travesties uncovered. Keith checked with Lieutenant Vorik to make certain that Vulcan healers would be available. He sure didn't want any of them going through what Harry

and Jonas had experienced. As expected, Vorik was fully prepared. Not only would there be trained Vulcan healers, Riti and Vicky Evans would also be at Ewa Beach. Prez learned that all Clan Division leaders were made aware of the extent of the California Orphanage raids.

Numbed from the atrocities, Prez and Keith went to the last of the San Francisco locations. Immediately upon arrival, Prez's comm-badge chirped. "Yeah," Prez abruptly answered.

Derrick's voice asked, "Hey, how're ya doin', bro?"

Prez grunted, "Alright, I guess."

Derrick offered, "We're finishing up in Los Angeles. What do you need from us, bro?"

"Booze and drugs," Keith smirked.

Mike teased, "We're in a place where we can get them."

An unrecognizable voice wondered, "Wha'choo you want? Smoke? Blow?"

Keith sighed, "I was kidding."

Prez asked, "Who was that speaking?"

Derrick replied, "We picked up some helpers along the way." An unintelligible chorus of voices laughed and joked across the comm-link. Derrick chuckled, "Prez, say hello to the Latin Kings."

Prez carefully repeated, "Hello Latin Kings."

At least a dozen voices answered, "Capasa!"

Cracking the first smile in about an hour, Prez replied, "We've had better nights, dudes."

Derrick said, "They covered our asses and provided intelligence tonight, Prez. We've got about thirty newbies wanting to join the Clan, bro."

Prez nodded, "Any one that needs or wants our help is very welcome. We're almost done here. Is everyone ready to go home?"

Mike said, "We'll meet you there, bro."

* * * * *

San Jose, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

It was just as cold in San Jose as in San Francisco, but John was sweating and feeling horrible. Two orphanages in San Jose were being raided; one in the East Foothills and one in Cupertino, where John and Stephen were. Sitting on the sidewalk, across from the orphanage being raided, with his head between his knees, John could barely get a word out of his mouth without his entire body hurting. Stephen finally got up and began operating the tricorder to check John's health. As soon as Stephen let go and stepped away, John felt better and huffed in relief.

Stephen softly asked, "Are you feeling better, hon?"

John nodded, "I hate to ask you this, baby, but this time, I need you to not touch or hold me. The amplification effect ain't so good."

Reluctantly nodding, Stephen glanced down at the tricorder and watched his husband's body temperature drop from almost one-

hundred-two degrees down to just above normal, landing at ninety-nine-point-two degrees Fahrenheit in only fifteen-seconds.

In his ear, John heard Keith. "You okay, bro?"

"Fine now," John softly responded. "It was the amplification effect, partly. I'm better now."

Stephen said, "How does your throat feel, hon? You sound way better."

Mildly stunned, John realized his sore throat did feel much better. Warmly smiling up at his husband, John softly assured, "Much better, baby." Telepathically hearing Stephen's thoughts, John replied, *'I love you too.'* This began a game they started playing aboard the Enterprise, before everything got crazy.

Stephen thought, "I love you more."

John sent, *'I love you infinitely.'*

Stephen giggled and realized he was getting a stiffie.

John only hummed like he had just eaten a large piece of moist chocolate cake and washed it down with an ice cold glass of milk.

Interrupting the game, all the team members heard Prez in their sub-vocals. "Attention Core Rimmers and Rimmer Strike Teams; it's way worse here than we could've imagined. There are twenty kids at our location. We need to prioritize what we've got and where we need what type of medical response. I want reports made to Alden ASAP. We need the location, number of kids and their general condition. Alden, prioritize the incoming data and report back to me. This is turning to shit dude!"

John's comm-badge chirped. "Strike Team Beta One reporting."

"Go ahead, Yan," John replied.

Sounding out of breath, Yan huffed, "Location secure, John."

Standing up, John said, "We're headin' in."

Yan sobbed, "Don't, John."

John frowned, "I know, dude. I'm as protected as I can be. There's nothing else I can do except see it for myself."

"There's no point, bro," Yan weakly offered. "These... they won't be going to Ewa Beach. We'll be lucky if we can save their lives; never mind make them people again. We've made this a priority medical emergency."

John and Stephen slowly walked to the house. Lucky blocked the path to the stairway so neither boy could pass to witness what was upstairs. Even on the lower level, the rancid odors seemed to permeate walls and flooring.

Greeting the medical team, John and Stephen went upstairs with a large group of men and women. John received brief telepathic impressions from a few of the children then blocked any further telepathic contact. Most of the children were beyond any form of rational thought. They were unable to speak and barely had strength to move of their own accord.

Medical personnel found many open sores, wounds and broken bones. Gangrene existed in some form or another, in various levels of seriousness, on every child. Limbs would have to amputated, but the kids were so weak, the doctors worried if their young patients would be able to handle anesthesia. If they could manage to be sedated, the

next question was whether they would survive the surgeries intended to save their lives.

Those children that did survive would need years of round-the-clock care to be brought back to some semblance of humanity. Noticing Stephen's nauseated expression, John got his husband out of the house as quickly as he could, which meant holding him, levitating and gliding downstairs. Once outside, John tapped his sub-vocal and reported all that he had witnessed to Alden. Additional medical teams transported on-site and scrambled to the children. Two VSO officers stepped outside. Before they could speak, John sent, *'Report to only me, telepathically.'*

Each officer, one at a time, touched John's temple. In the last year, three children had died in this orphanage. To the adult caregivers, they weren't even worthy of sorrow or decent burials. The corpses had been dumped in the desert. When each child died, they accepted another, as if they were mere plastic poker chips and easily replaced. John pleasantly told Stephen to remain outside. He went inside and everything not nailed down on the first floor of the home began flying around in a torrent, into and through walls.

Wide-eyed, Yan muttered, "Oh shit!" He then loudly ordered, "Everybody out now!" The members of strike team Beta one ran out of the house through the nearest doorways. They pushed Stephen out to the street seconds before a seven foot sofa crashed through the living room picture window and wedged itself in a tree. Hearing the commotion downstairs, medical teams and feral kids upstairs completed transporting out, to Terra-Main Space Station.

Without speaking a word or telepathically telling the two fiends what he was about to do, John pushed all the hurt and suffering that he, Stephen and the feral kids experienced into the unsuspecting adults. They felt the hunger, the pain of untreated broken bones, of

wounds allowed to become infected and gangrenous. At first, the adults cried out in pain, but then collapsed to the floor and curled into fetal positions. The kitchen where the adults lay and John stood was a tornado of flying glasses, plates, pots, pans and assorted utensils. At no point did John allow anything flying around from his temper tantrum touch the adults or himself. So enraged was John that minutes passed before he noticed the destruction he was causing. Believing that it was time to let the two adults witness what was happening, John pointed his powers at the kitchen counter and sink. John didn't expect it, but the counter shuddered, creaked and levitated. The pipes broke and sprayed water all over the room, reviving the two semi-conscious adults. Finally, John growled, "You ain't even human to me. I have more respect for a slug than I do for you two." He pulled out his phaser, set it to maximum power and medium beam then fired on the man. Shaking his head sadly, John desperately cried, "You're a woman, capable of giving birth and the deepest love known. But did you ever show it once in your miserable life?" John fired again, turning the woman to ash before she could open her mouth to answer.

Having taken two lives, John broke down crying harder than he could remember. In an emotional rage, he fired the phaser across the back wall of the structure. As John walked through the house, every wall was systematically sliced by a continuous phaser beam. Outside, Stephen struggled to break free of Bond, his gorilla, to find his husband. They heard John's loud wails and, seconds later, watched him step outside. John turned and sliced the front exterior wall in half with his phaser. When John had stopped firing and turned to walk towards the street, Bond let go of Stephen. Running at top speed, Stephen flew into John's open arms. John sent to Stephen, *'I made them suffer then killed them, baby. I am evil.'*

"No," Stephen sobbed, "you're my world, John. You only did what had to be done. And you did it alone, rather than having me see

it. I love you more for that." Stephen hugged John with all his strength and John returned the hug as forcefully. Standing in the street, about five meters from John and Stephen, the strike team and security personal heard loud popping, snapping and creaking wood. While John and Stephen were still hugging and crying, the top three-quarters of the house began to slowly rise into the air. As power cables snapped, arks of bright blue electric light sizzled in the dark night. Yan reacted immediately, sending one of his team to cut the electricity to the house. Yan found and turned the natural gas line off before John caused an explosion that would destroy the entire neighborhood. Lucky hurried to John and Stephen, swept them up and brought them to the street. By the time Lucky put them down, there was at least twenty feet between the bottom half of the first floor and the hovering top part of the house. John kissed Stephen then Stephen returned the kiss. When they separated, the top part of the house crashed down, leaving a pile of rubble that barely looked anything like it was once a house. It reminded John of images he had seen in school, of homes devastated by an earthquake.

Lights in nearby houses began turning on. Yan smirked, "Let's get outta here!" He then called, "Daileass, strike team Beta one, ready for transport back to the Rapid Response base." A moment later, the ten person team was gone.

John sighed, "One more place to visit."

Stephen moaned, "I hope its not as bad as this was."

Nodding agreement, John tapped his sub-vocal and had his team transported to the East Foothills location. John sighed then tapped his comm-badge saying, "Beta command team on-site, Tony."

Tony, the strike team Beta two leader reported, "We're clear, John. The kids have been transported away by medical. VSO are still

here."

Beginning the walk towards the house, John begged, "Please don't tell me the kids were like little animals, barely alive?"

Tony sighed, "Emaciated, filthy, hurt in lots of ways. Incoming reports have been organized by the AI's. Of the sixteen orphanages, three were listed as level four, the most severe. The Cupertino place you were at was a level four, bro."

John's head sagged and he groaned. He asked, "And this place?"

"Level three, twenty kids in a real bad way," Tony replied.

Shaking his head, John turned to Stephen. "You don't have to come in, baby. I'd really prefer it if you stayed outside."

"John," Stephen whined, "I love you. Please, let me..."

"I need and love you too," John interrupted. "The best place you can be is by my side, afterward, picking up the pieces of me." Stopped on the porch, John pointed at the door saying, "What I do in there isn't me; it's everybody I know, love and respect; it's their pure anger mixed with my own. I don't want to show you that part of me."

Imitating their bonding ceremony, Stephen reached for John's temple and let his love flow. John nodded and smiled. Stepping into the house with Stephen and smelling the foul odors, John yelled, "Strike team Beta two, evacuate the premises." Tony approached and John said, "Get everybody safe. I feel a hissy fit brewin'."

Tony glanced uncertainly at Stephen and John. Stephen nodded and offered, "The last place is flattened, Tony. Rats don't even want it anymore."

Waving his team out of the house, Tony forced a slight smile then firmly grasped John's and Stephen's shoulders, mutely offering what support he could. Two teenage Vulcan boys approached and Tony stepped outside.

The summary report from the teen VSO to John and Stephen included: overcrowding, insufficient living area for the quantity of children in one room, failure to have available any space where the children could have privacy; unsanitary conditions, infestations of living areas by lifeforms accepted by the local general populace as a health or sanitation nuisance; signs of beating, physical restraints; threats of beating, strangulation or physical restraint, behavior which is indicative of such abuse, cowering, withdrawal, hiding behind people, or other behaviors known to be present in victims of abuse; failure to provide adequate food and sustenance. The list seemed to go on and on forever. Each of the abuses listed were repeated twenty times, on each of the children present. Making matters worse, the adults had no remorse. They had withheld common comforts and necessities for their own financial gain. As pleasantly as he could, John praised and thanked the two boys for their efforts.

Stephen meekly offered, "Humans are normally not like this. My mom worked her butt off for everything she could possibly provide me."

The two Vulcans nodded, but said nothing. After they walked away, John smirked, "They don't feel it, baby. What they feel, all the anger, sorrow and even happiness, they hold inside."

"I really wish we could do that," Stephen complained.

Nodding understandingly, John leaned closer to his husband and whispered, "What I'm about to do isn't usually allowed. All I know is, we won't be the same after this. I'm releasing as much as I can now so

I won't be veg later, okay?"

When Stephen nodded, John led him through the house to a dining room where two restrained adults were leaning on the table. Seeing two pre-teen boys beyond the room, the two adults immediately began complaining. With a swipe of his hand, John pushed the table into a wall, causing the two adults to fall flat on their asses. John evilly grinned, "Aww, did you fall down?" They started bitching again and John held up the index finger on his right hand. Both adult mouths clamped shut. Unable to speak, the two watched helplessly as John made chairs and other furnishings in the room swirl around them in a tempest. Rolling his eyes, Stephen clung close to John. Wide-eyed, through the churning debris flying about in the room, the two adults saw John and Stephen rise a foot off the floor. John turned Stephen away from the havoc and glared down, his eyes blazing azure blue, at the two cretins.

"You want to feel control?" John hollered. "You want to know terror? You've wanted more than you've deserved for years! You withheld food from kids! You left them dirty, naked and feeling worthless! You did it for money too, you pitiful shits! I hold your lives in my hand and they ain't worth diddly to me! What you are seeing now is the next generation of mankind." The two adults held only contemptuous thoughts for John and his show of power. They only wished to have the chance to do to John and Stephen what they had done to other children. With a nod of John's head, the adults jolted upwards, cracking their heads on the ceiling then dropped to the floor. John growled, "I could squash you like bugs with a thought. I could send you to a prison moon to suffer. You still have no clue how wrong you were, do you?" Shaking his head sadly, John stopped his mini-storm and pulled the phaser from Stephen's robe. He verified the settings then fired twice, instantaneously disintegrating the two adults.

Shaking like a leaf in Stephen's arms, John didn't know what to do or think of next. Was there another orphanage, somewhere else to go? Did he need to execute any one else? How could he possibly recover from what he had seen, heard and done? Who could understand what he had done? For the first time in years, John wanted nothing more than to crawl into his mother's lap and cry. He wondered if that were even possible; would his mother understand murder? Was there anywhere on the planet safe where he could simply relax? Last weekend, lust caused eighty to suffer in Hawaii. In California, greed was the only reason John could come up with for the tragedies he'd witnessed.

Softly shushing his husband, Stephen whispered words of encouragement, love and pride. Receiving no replies from John, Stephen shuddered, but acted accordingly. He called, "Alden, dismiss strike team Beta two and get me Keith." Stephen told Keith that John had executed four adults in under an hour. "I'm taking him home now," Stephen bluntly stated.

Hearing Stephen's voice quake, Keith replied, "We're arranging for healers, Stephen. Go to the Command Center, lock up your phasers and hang out for healing. Trust me, we'll all be feeling better soon, okay?"

Stephen wanted to say something more to Keith, but at the same time, his husband, his rock was a quivering mass. What had happened Tuesday during their time on the Enterprise was very different than what John had to do this night and Stephen understood that. Stephen had Alden transport them back to the Ewa Beach Command Center, as Keith had instructed.

* * * * *

San Diego, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

At Imperial Beach, a suburban area south of the San Diego Bay, Kaleo and Tory watched their strike team enter the orphanage. From the outside, it didn't seem to be more than a three or four bedroom, two story home. Compared to the ROH orphanage they were in only five days earlier, it was smaller, but seemed nicer.

Smiling widely, Kaleo brushed Tory's hair with his fingers and proudly said, "It's so awesome that you're here with me."

Taking a step closer and wrapping his arms around his husband, Tory nodded, "You know I'd have been pacing around, waiting for you to come back home."

Kaleo tilted his head asking, "You worry about me?"

Tory nodded and smiled, "Since Friday, every time you're away from me."

"That ain't gonna happen too often anymore," Kaleo assured. There was a long pause in their conversation then Kaleo wondered, "What do you think about this place?"

Tory shrugged, "It don't seem too bad. The neighborhood is real crowded though. It's near the beach too, I can smell the salt air. Compared to the place we were in, this seems okay. At least they've got the beach nearby."

Kaleo mumbled, "Maybe John's place was worse and that's why he told Prez to let the strike teams attack early." Many quiet minutes passed, waiting for word from the strike team commander.

Noticing the confused look on Kaleo's face, Tory asked, "What's wrong."

"I hate to think of twelve kids in a four bedroom house," Kaleo sighed.

Tory reminded, "Four per room ain't as bad as we had it."

Kaleo grunted then admitted, "I guess it's just being so near an orphanage again that's giving me the willies."

Tory admitted, "I feel it too."

Kaleo's comm-badge chirped. "Strike team Echo One, location secure." In the background, sobs could be heard and someone yelled, "This one's in shock! She's not bleeding! I can't tell what's wrong!"

Dale, the strike team commander, shouted, "Elevate her legs! Daileass, get us blankets!"

Beginning to panic, Kaleo and Tory raced across the street and towards the house. They pulled out their flashlights and went inside the house. Prez's voice came over their sub-vocals. "Attention Core Rimmers and Rimmer Strike Teams. It's way worse here than we could've imagined. There are twenty kids at our location. We need to prioritize what we've got and where we need what type of medical response. I want reports made to Alden ASAP We need the location, number of kids and their general condition. Alden, prioritize the incoming data and report back to me. This is turning to shit, dudes!"

One of the strike team members came running down the stairs with his helmet off. He barreled past Kaleo and Tory then puked on the porch. Kaleo went back outside and held the sickened boy by the waist so he wouldn't fall over into his own vomit. From inside the house and upstairs, Kaleo and Tory heard Dale's report. "Location

Echo one. Twenty-four children, all emaciated, one female confirmed in shock. Medical priority or we'll lose her."

Tory raced up the stairs hollering, "What can I do?"

Shaking his head, Dale softly said, "Pray."

"What?" Tory screamed.

Wiping tears from his eyes, Dale said, "They don't understand us, Tory. We told them we were here to help, but they can't understand or even speak any longer." Dale gagged then softly sobbed, "One of them was eating a pile of shit in one room. The lights are on but nobody's home, bro. They're all feral."

"No," Tory gasped. Overwhelmed, Tory repeatedly screamed, "No!" over and over again.

Hearing his husband's desperate cries, Kaleo left the sickened boy on the porch then practically flew up the stairs. Tory flung himself at Kaleo and broke down. Glaring at Dale, Kaleo loudly demanded, "Report!"

Dale again explained the pathetic state of the children. Before Dale completed his report to Kaleo, medical personnel arrived and raced up the stairs. Dale led the first team to the room where the little girl was in shock. Of their own accord, additional medics split off into other rooms. Chaos erupted around Kaleo and Tory. Six medics became eight, then ten, then Kaleo lost track of how many were there and which room they were in. The lights flickered then remained on. Medics were loudly ordering hypo-sprays and assistance. Kaleo saw a boy lying on a nearby bedroom floor glaring up at him. He must have been around sixteen, judging by the hair around his jaw and mouth, but that boy had the blackest, most hideous, piercing eyes. Not understanding the difference between helping and hurting, guttural

wails of children seemed to come from every direction. The sound of Starfleet transporter beams were the only other sounds that could be heard. Medics beamed out with a patient and others transported in. Trapped in a corner while hell broke loose around them, Kaleo and Tory couldn't fully grasp the fact that there was an orphanage worse than the one they had been at. At the first opportunity, Kaleo helped Tory down the stairs and outside. Kaleo made an additional report to Alden then called Keith. All Keith and Prez heard was nonsensical rants between Kaleo's sobs. Suddenly, two black-robed VSO officers were standing before Kaleo and Tory.

Kaleo abruptly cut off Keith then asked the VSO officers, "You have what you need to complete your reports?"

One nodded and the other replied, "Aye, Sir."

"I only need to know one thing," Kaleo said. Getting nothing more than nods from both Vulcans, Kaleo asked, "Is anything besides the death penalty appropriate?"

The same Vulcan that vocally responded before flatly answered, "No."

"You are relieved to complete your reports," Kaleo said. The two VSO officers stepped away and, a moment later, were transported from the location.

Tory's beautiful dirty blond mop was a stringy damp mess, but Kaleo still finger combed it away from his husband's face. Kaleo softly asked, "You ready to do it?"

Nodding affirmation, Tory offered, "I'm fucking pissed."

Kaleo sighed, "Me too. Just don't hit them with your hands."

With a deliberate stride, Kaleo and Tory went back in the home. They learned from Dale where the adult 'care-givers' were. Kaleo patted Dale on the back, offered him his thanks then relieved the strike team. Kaleo and Tory surveyed the house to insure everybody had gone then returned to the downstairs bedroom where two adults were restrained. The first thing Tory saw in the room was a beautiful porcelain sculpture of three breaching dolphins. He picked it up and found that it only weighed four or five pounds. Without a word, Tory hurled it with all his strength at the man's face. The hollow porcelain shattered and the man's face split open from several deep lacerations. The woman screamed seconds before Kaleo broke a Tiffany lamp over her head. Ranting and raving from their own abuses and those committed at that orphanage, Kaleo and Tory destroyed the bedroom, slamming the two adults with every hard item they could find. When they ran out of hard things to hit them with, they climbed up onto the bed, grabbed the pillows and hit them some more until the pillows gave up their down feathers. Eventually, there was nothing left to break and scarcely a safe spot on the floor where Kaleo and Tory could stand. The two adults were bleeding profusely and barely conscious when Kaleo and Tory took their phasers out and fired from atop the bed's mattress. But the two adults didn't disintegrate as expected. Kaleo inspected his phaser then made a crooked smirk at Tory before saying, "I guess the right setting might help."

Tory nodded, "Juan would have a shit-fit and have us re-trained for that."

Pointing at the two adults, Kaleo wondered, "Should we wait for them to regain consciousness?"

Tory shrugged, "If you want. I don't really give a damn."

Humming uncertainly, Kaleo suggested, "We could fuck them?"

"No way!" Tory hollered. "I ain't stickin' my thing in those skanky asses! My dick is only for you now."

"Excellent point," Kaleo cheered. Evilily smirking, Kaleo pocketed his phaser, opened his robe then tore open the Velcro on his boardies. Taking hold of his dick and waving it to and fro, he urinated on the two unconscious adults. Wrinkling his nose, Tory helplessly snickered and wished that he needed to pee. Finished relieving himself, Kaleo stuffed his goods back in his shorts. He and Tory then checked their phaser settings and imitated Prez, counting down from five before turning the two demented individuals to dust. Exasperated, Kaleo huffed, "Fuck! How're we gonna get out of here? There's glass and splintered wood all over."

Not certain what to do, Tory reset his phaser to a slightly lower setting and the widest beam then fired at the carpeted floor. Seeing that Tory was creating a clear path, Kaleo followed his husband's lead and also fired, creating a safe walkway from the bed to the door. They jumped off the bed and walked out of the room. Outside the house and approaching their security team, Tory said, "Let's see what's happening at Eastlake Woods."

Having heard the yelling and the crashing sounds of glass, Kaleo's gorilla, Rasul nodded then teased, "You're really not supposed to do that."

"Oh?" Kaleo innocently smiled, "Sorry, I didn't have a Sehlat or a vampire available." Tory and the two teenage security members cracked up. Kaleo giggled, "Alden, San Diego site two please."

Instantaneously, Kaleo and Tory arrived with their security team in an apparently upscale neighborhood. Kaleo was about to ask Alden if he had transported them to the correct place when two armed strike

team members stepped out of the house.

Kaleo asked, "What's the scoop, guys."

Fred answered, "Twelve kids have been transported out to Des Moines, Kaleo. You'll have them at Ewa Beach in the morning."

"Excellent," Tory chirped.

Kaleo complained, "I wish we could've met them."

Bayani, Tory's teenage security guard, softly giggled, "Spend less time redecorating."

Tory grinned, "Now that room almost matches the upstairs bedrooms."

Glancing around at six smiling faces, Fred offered, "VSO are inside waiting."

Kaleo nodded, "You guys are relieved."

Shaking his head, Fred reminded, "Wyatt's in command," then led the way inside the house.

Waiting patiently in the living room, two VSO officers stood as soon as they saw Tory and Kaleo enter. Eight violations of the Safe Haven Act were listed. Since they hadn't seen the kids for themselves, Kaleo and Tory had to ask Wyatt, Fred and the other strike team members their opinions before deciding sentences. They strolled around the house and saw acceptable accommodations, but the closets and dressers had few clothes. The kids had gone to local public schools in a nice community looking like they didn't belong. Having been in the same situation themselves, Kaleo and Tory decided to make the adults suffer as the kids had suffered. They sentenced the

care-givers to life imprisonment.

Uncertain if they were finished, Kaleo tapped his comm-badge and checked with Keith. "We're done in San Diego, bro."

Keith wearily said, "Kewl. How're you and Tory feeling?"

Kaleo checked with Tory. When Tory nodded, Kaleo answered, "Not too bad, considering."

Keith said, "We've got one more orphanage to visit."

"Thanks, dudes," Prez cheerfully relayed. "You two are off duty. We'll meet you in the Command Center for debriefing and healing." Keith and Kaleo ended their brief conversation.

Kaleo commented, "I'm gonna go into culture shock at home."

Tilting his head and glaring at his partner, Tory wondered, "Why?"

"The difference in the adults," Kaleo answered. "Not once have I heard any of them swear. Have you?"

Tory thought for a long few moments then realized, "You're right." Tory said, "They must though. All the Rimmers cuss and swear a little so their parents must too."

"Dude!" Kaleo shouted, "They might not be doing it for us, for our sake."

Tory groaned, "Do I feel like shit now? I hardly ever speak to any of them, never mind spending time with them."

Kaleo nodded, "Let's start changing that tomorrow, with all the adults; chefs, housekeepers and landscapers too." Smiling at the two

gorillas and two teenage boys waiting by the street, Kaleo said, "This is the first time I've been off base and needed security. You guys have been awesome."

Rapidly nodding agreement, Tory said, "I've seen you looking around, high and low, as if someone might appear to try and harm us."

Kaleo added, "That's what we've seen. I can only wonder what else you've been doing that we haven't seen." Two boys, Bayani and Mark, and two gorillas, Zareb and Rasul, grinned and attempted to appear innocent. The sight of two 'innocent' gorillas set Kaleo and Tory off, laughing hysterically. A few moments later, Kaleo called, "Alden, let's call it a night."

* * * * *

Fresno, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 1:47 AM PST

Immediately upon hearing Prez's order to go, strike team members hustled to cut the power, the phone lines and disintegrate the door locks with their phaser rifles. They stealthily entered the dwelling, insuring rooms were clear as they moved forward in the dark. On the ground level, the four adult care givers awoke while they were being restrained with zip cords. In pairs, other strike team members moved up the stairs. Through their helmets and face masks, they began to detect putrid odors of urine, feces and rotting flesh. Via their armored helmet communications devices and sub-vocals, messages were passed. Four of the six second-level doorways were secured with metal plates and deadbolt locks above and below the locked doorknobs. The two unlocked rooms were checked first and found to be bathrooms. Unbelievably, the bathroom toilets, sinks and tubs were clean. While locks were being disintegrated, the ten-man

team congregated in the hall. At floor level, they discovered small, fourteen inch long by six inch high steel passageways on the doors. One of the strike team members muttered, "Oh my God, they fed them through these."

"Like prison solitary confinement," another strike team member realized.

In rapid succession, the bedroom doors were opened. Huddled naked in fetal positions on the floor, they found children lying in their own urine, feces and blood. "I've got six," a strike team member announced.

From another room, another boy said, "Six here."

In the third room, another groaned, "Seven, one dead."

"Six in this room," another said from the last room.

While the strike team tried to awaken and check the kids, they all heard Prez say, "Attention Core Rimmers and Rimmer Strike Teams. It's way worse here than we could've imagined. There are twenty kids at our location. We need to prioritize what we've got and where we need what type of medical response. I want reports made to Alden ASAP We need the location, number of kids and their general condition. Alden, prioritize the incoming data and report back to me. This is turning to shit dude!"

From the third bedroom, while a moaning boy crawled at his feet, glaring up at him with desperate eyes, the strike team leader reported, "Daileass, we've got twenty-four at Fresno and one dead." Feeling his stomach turning, he muttered, "Partially cannibalized," then tore his helmet off and raced across the hall to a bathroom to vomit. Three others joined him, leaning over the sinks and bathtub. When they recovered and turned faucets to rinse away the mess, they

found the water had been turned off. At the toilet, the team leader flushed, however no water ran there either. Tapping his sub-vocal, he completed his report. "Daileass, medical priority. Get medics here now. When this is over, I want Vulcan healers assigned to each member of my team. Otherwise, we'll never be able to eat or sleep again."

Daileass replied, "Medics are on their way. Jason Evans and VSO have been notified."

He sighed then told one of the team members to get the water turned on and tapped another on the shoulder to get the electric power restored. Stepping out of the bathroom, he heard other members of his team in the other bathroom vomiting. With all his military and first aid training, the fifteen year old wasn't sure what to do next. There was no first aid sufficient for the kids. He wanted to go downstairs to the adults and exact vengeance, but that wasn't his job. The first four medics materialized in the hall, looking to him for guidance. He asked, "How many are assigned?"

Holding a hand up to his nose, one of the four men answered, "Twelve."

The strike team leader ordered, "Double it. These kids aren't standing or walking out of here."

With nothing left to do except coordinate the medics and care for his team, he gathered them all and led the way back downstairs. "Two at a time upstairs, in five minute shifts until the medics and kids are gone," he ordered. "Whatever help the docs and nurses need, give them. The rest will secure the premises." All the feral kids and medics were transported to Terra-Main Space Station. VSO interrogations of the four adult care-givers were complete. The strike team and VSO

waited for a Core Rimmer command team.

Doug and Travis found the four adult 'care-givers' guilty of nineteen violations of the Safe Haven Act. The only parts of the Act not infringed upon were the sexual conduct sections. The kids were treated worse than animals. Most horrific, the one corpse discovered had been partially eaten. The adult 'care-givers' were executed by Doug under VSO regulations. The remains were scattered around California, Nevada and Arizona deserts. Due to the extra time it took for the executions and subsequent dispersion of remains, Doug, Travis and their strike team were the last to return to the ROH.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Oahu

Wednesday, November 3, 2004 11:01 PM HTZ

Reports from the away teams began coming in to the command center. Logan, Nathan and Lieutenant Vorik organized the data by the number of orphans found at each location. Those with Zorro's described twelve children were considered Level One. Orphanages with sixteen kids were categorized as Level Two; those with eighteen or twenty children were Level Three. The worst cases were those reported with twenty-four children and listed as Level Four.

The next fifteen minutes were spent coordinating medical response units and VSO Operatives. When that task was near complete and Vorik was handling what remained, Logon concentrated on incoming reports of the 'care-givers' from the VSO Logan told Nathan; "We can't leave this task half-assed. I know Prez wanted minimal casualties..."

"But that was when we thought we had twelve kids at each of sixteen orphanages," Nathan finished. He smiled, "I'm checking with

Prez now. He's hearing the reports from the VSO at his location. Give him a minute." Logan took that minute to put his shorts back on over his extremely stretched out Terminator briefs. With the seconds remaining, he bitched about Jack ruining his favorite underpants before the operation began. Nathan told Logan, "Keith just said that he wants everyone involved prosecuted to the full extent of the law. His exact words were, 'if the garbage man knew and didn't say anything, I want his ass on a hook'. So let it be written..."

"So let it be done," Logan evilly grinned. He then contacted Colin. "Get your Dutchmen to Zorro Communications Corp's headquarters. Lock down the data center. If anyone gets in your way, turn them into a carpet."

"You take all the fun out of it; I'll have to leave them in one piece if they've got to be carpet." Colin commented.

Foster City, California

Thursday, November 4, 2004 2:24 AM PST

Colin and the Dutchmen raided Zorro Communications Corporation Headquarters. Transporting directly into the lobby, the two security men were immediately stunned. With special emphasis on acquisition of records from the data center, including freezing all databases, mail servers and preventing updates or deletion of information, teams of four spread out around the building to gather all the night shift employees. Faced with teams of armed boys, almost no one thought it wise to test the abilities of Clan Short representatives. All except one of the employees were first telepathically interrogated then sent home. The one employee that remained had been stunned for not stopping what she was doing when told to do so. She was

trying to key in a sequence that would have performed an emergency data wipe of the e-mail servers. As it turned out, the woman was only performing her job. Telepathic scans proved she knew nothing of the orphanages, so she was transported to the UNIT Rapid Response Base Medical facility to be revived, treated and debriefed before being transported to her home.

For about another hour, the Dutchmen remained on-site to insure no one got in the building or tampered with the electronic evidence being gathered by Alden, Daileass, Draco, George and Kerry. All electronic transmissions to or from ZCC were halted or denied so all available bandwidth fed data directly to the Clan Short AI's. Data that did not match the publicized reports ZCC made, and internal memorandums regarding the social services spin-off, were flagged.

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Postmortem

Thursday, November 4, 2004

3:00 AM – 06:00 PST / 12:00 AM – 03:00 HTZ

Incoming data from ZCC headquarters implicated all twelve members of the social services leadership, as well as twelve of the thirteen members of the board of directors of Zorro Communications Corporation. Also implicated in the horrors were the State's Fire Marshall, and the Director of the Department of Health, and the Director of Public Safety, who was responsible for building inspections. The three men had taken jurisdiction from the local departments, but had never once reviewed any of the properties. The Mayor of San Diego, where level 4 and level 3 orphanages were discovered was also on the hot seat. The Chief of Police of San Jose

and of Sacramento were identified as complicit as were six of the nine city council members of Fresno.

As additional names popped onto the screen, Logan and Nathan quietly considered who they should send to apprehend the individuals responsible. Hitting upon an evil idea, Nathan grinned, "There's one extremely adept group I can think of. I'll be back in less than five minutes, Logan."

"Kewl," Logan smiled.

Telepathically connected to Daileass, Nathan disappeared from the Command Center, reappearing in a Utah conference room. Mid-shower, wearing a shiny silver shower cap, holding a loofah sponge in one little paw and a bar of soap in the other, High Priest Dave appeared with his head thrown back singing; "We will; we will SHINE you! Yeah! We Will; We will SHINE you!"

Dave's eyes popped open and he looked around trying to find the water that was supposed to be falling on him, when he spotted Nathan standing there. "Oh hello, Nathan." The tone of High Priest Dave's voice was totally natural, as if nothing were amiss. "To what do I owe the honor of basking in your shiny glow."

'This is exactly why I needed to do this. Vorik would have needed to go see a mind healer after this conversation,' Nathan thought to himself as he fought back the urge to run. Hearing Daileass' loud laughter in his mind, Nathan smiled, "Glimmering High Priest of all that is shiny and lustrous, so many children are beseeching you and your flocks' aid in exacting justice on their tormentors." Nathan got interrupted by High Priest Dave, waving the Loofah sponge around, wielding it almost like a sword.

Forgetting all about his shower, Dave became all business.

Using his loofah sponge as a pointer, he prompted Nathan, "Ah! You have recognized our shiny greatness. How have the dull lovers harmed those whose true shine has yet to emerge? Tell me of the mission."

Nathan began briefing Dave on the California Orphanage operation and telling him of the Shiny Hating individuals identified as responsible for the abused, malnourished and feral children found. The change in Dave's mood was almost enough to make Nathan worry. Of course, the fact that as Dave was ranting about those 'damned dull lovers', he was waving the loofah sponge around and scattering water all over the conference room, which made it so the intimidation factor was significantly decreased. Nathan said, "Your task is to locate and exact vengeance upon the Shiny Haters. Have all of the Dull Loving bastards disappear, to Runi's dungeon. You and your flock will of course get to keep all shinys found on their person and their property."

His eyes glazing over, Dave shook his loofah and repeated, "All the shinys?"

"*All* the Shinys," Nathan emphatically stated, and then reminded, "Daileass has the list of names and will help you locate the Shiny Haters. Take the Scoobies with you."

"Daileass!" High Priest Dave barked, "Sound the Shiny Alert! Every member of my flock will be leaving the base to capture these Shiny Forsaken Heathens! The hour of their retribution is at hand! They may have been dull lovers in life, but the Transcendent radiance of Runi and his Shiny vampires shall show them that there is some luster in everyone... even if it is only in their blood! We shall take their Shinys and make them our own, for they do not..."

Dave's rant was cut short as he disappeared. Nathan sighed

deeply. "Thanks bro... he was really getting on a roll there."

"Tell me about it," Daileass laughed. "He still hasn't realized I transported him yet."

Nathan chuckled, "Take me back to the Ewa Beach Command Center, bro."

First to arrive back at the Ewa Beach Command center were Julio, Jesse, Doug and Travis from the Des Moines Division. Next in the room were Drew and Corey, quickly followed by Sean and Troy, and then Kaleo and Tory. Arriving with Stephen, and unwilling to speak to anyone about anything, was John. Being a big brother, Drew tried his best to get some description of what had happened from his little brother, but all he got from John was a firm telepathic, *'No, don't, bro.'* Mike and Derrick arrived in the CIC dining room with thirty-six Latin King kids. A few chefs were called to feed the newbies. While the kids were waiting on quick meals, Derrick and Mike alerted their dads to come and assist getting the new arrivals situated in dorm rooms. Carl and Rob pulled Jim and Bill from their homes to expedite the process. By the time Derrick and Mike walked into the Command Center, Keith and Prez were already there.

Lieutenant Vorik suggested that all the command teams discuss the missions in the conference room. Once alone, any remaining strength withered and all pretenses vanished. All emotions were plainly drawn on the faces of twelve boys and young men. Beginning with San Francisco, Prez and Keith reported two executions and four sentenced to imprisonment. Fifty-two kids were rescued; thirty-two would hopefully be seen at Ewa Beach within a few days. The other twenty were at the level three home and might not be seen for at least a week.

Mike and Derrick reported that two LA Police officers had been

shot and arrested for interfering with the first orphanage raid. Fifty-six kids were rescued from Los Angeles. Only sixteen would be seen within a few days. The remaining forty would not be seen at Ewa Beach for about a week. Four adults in LA were executed and two were sentenced to life imprisonment. An additional thirty-six impoverished street gang members had been rescued and were already on base. The four fathers were getting them fed and then settled in dorm rooms.

At Fresno, Doug and Travis reported that twenty-four were rescued, however any hopes of seeing them in the future were slim to none. One child was already dead upon their arrival. Four adults were executed in Fresno.

Julio and Jesse said that two adults in Santa Barbara had been terminated. Sixteen kids were rescued and most would be in Ewa Beach within a few days. One was going to Des Moines, to be adopted by Julio and Jesse.

Kaleo and Tory reported that two adults were executed and two imprisoned in San Diego. A total of thirty-six were rescued from San Diego, but only twelve would ever be seen at Ewa Beach. Those twelve would likely be there the next day.

Corey and Drew added good news. They reported a total of twenty-four rescued that would be at Ewa Beach in the morning. Four adults had been sentenced to life in prison.

Sean and Troy had rescued thirty-four kids from Sacramento and all would be at Ewa Beach in a few days. Two adult lives were terminated and two were imprisoned.

Finally, Stephen spoke for himself and John. "In San Jose, forty-two were rescued. We'll never see twenty-four of them. The other

eighteen will be here within a week, they hope." Breaking down, Stephen wearily sobbed, "John... four adults... executed."

Keith quietly lost it and wiped his eyes. Since he was two years old and Drew was born, Keith was the eldest big brother. It was his job to watch over Drew and John. In addition to all the other traumas experienced, Keith felt that he had failed to protect his youngest brother. With an emotional connection to Keith, Prez also began shedding tears. For what the other team members had gone through, Prez wished that he had ordered the immediate extermination of all the care-givers. Telling himself that he didn't how bad things were didn't help at all.

Eerily quiet through all this, John began shaking and so did the conference table and the lights in the ceiling. Vorik rapidly stood and went to stand behind John. Carefully placing his fingers around John's head, the Vulcan Lieutenant murmured, "My mind to your mind, my thoughts to your thoughts," beginning a mind-meld and preventing the likely destruction of the conference room. About two minutes later, Vorik released John. He said, "I have not completed training for full healing of Terrans. In the CIC dining room, sixteen certified healers await your arrival. You will all go there now. I strongly recommend that once the healing is completed, you all go to bed."

Drew asked, "Even me and Corey?"

Corey nodded agreement, "We didn't have to do nothin' compared to these other dudes."

"Yes," Lieutenant Vorik firmly insisted. He explained, "All of you have performed your duties admirably under most stressful circumstances. There is no need to be concerned or frightened. You will not be judged in any manner. Take seats in the dining room. The healers will choose their subjects." Every one stood. Prez and Drew

helped John walk to the dining room. Keith and Corey helped Stephen. The remaining six filed out behind them.

The Core Rimmers and Des Moines command team leaders took seats at two tables. Fifteen minutes later, Drew and Corey stood then went to the kitchen for cold drinks. They were soon joined by Doug, Travis, Julio and Jesse. When they returned, Sean was seated on Troy's lap. Soon thereafter, Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo, Tory and Stephen had all been healed. Terry, the Santa Barbara kid Julio and Jesse returned with also got attention from a Vulcan healer. Minutes later, the final Vulcan stepped away from John. Turning to Stephen, John yawned, "I'm real tired, baby."

Thrilled at hearing John's voice calling him 'baby' for the first time in about an hour, Stephen giggled, "Come on, hon. Let's find a place in the nest." Stephen helped John stand then they began the walk to the Hundsers' basement.

Prez pointed at Drew and Corey, smiling, "I've got a surprise for you two." When they suspiciously wondered what sort of surprise, Prez chuckled, "For doing a great job and not needing to take a life, you're in charge tomorrow." Briefly, Prez wondered where that thought came from. Fully involved in everything that occurred in California and since returning to Ewa Beach, he couldn't be certain if he thought of it himself or if was suggested in the mind-meld.

Drew asked, "All day, for everything?"

Prez nodded, "Unless the shit hits the fan and you need help, you've got the ball."

Corey grinned, "We'd better crash soon then."

Before the others could say a word, Prez stood then asked Doug, Travis, Julio, Jesse, Sean, Troy, Kaleo and Tory to stand. "You dudes

rock!" Prez cheered, "I can't begin to imagine how this night might have been without your help. We'd definitely still be out there." Troy and Sean blushed while Kaleo and Tory began giggling from the compliment.

Simultaneously, Derrick and Mike shouted, "What about us?"

Tilting his right hand several times, Keith playfully grunted. Shaking their heads, Corey and Drew began giggling at the incessant teasing the older four inflicted upon each other.

Prez reminded, "They're newer; fresh meat, ya know? Talk about baptism by fire." He then warmly smiled, "To build on the camaraderie we've already established, I'd like us all in the nest tonight, if that's all right?"

Kaleo nodded, "It's fine with us, Prez."

Sean had no issue with the idea, but checked with Troy. Troy nodded then told Prez, "Let me tell my mom where I'll be."

"Kewl," Prez chirped. He then devilishly grinned, "Let's make sure that certain corporate shit-stains don't get away with murder."

Standing and moving beside his husband, Keith asked, "Any one wanna help?" Mike and Derrick agreed, but Doug, Travis, Drew, Corey, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy decided bed was the better choice.

They said goodnight to each other. Prez, Keith, Jesse, Julio, Mike and Derrick had snacks and sodas while Kaleo and Tory followed Sean and Troy to the condo.

* * * * *

Las Vegas, Nevada

Thirty-seven-year-old Melvin Blair sat between two much younger looking, scantily-clad blonde-haired women as his limo made its way down Las Vegas Boulevard. All three adults giggled at a comment that Melvin made as he took a sip of wine from a glass that one of the women handed to him. They had just finished a long night of clubbing at the Stratosphere. And now, he was looking forward to chilling out for a little bit at Planet Hollywood before turning in for the night.

Moments after the limo came to a stop in front of the VIP entrance of the hotel, the door was opened allowing for Melvin and his escorts to step out. Given how late it was, one might expect the streets to be rather empty. However, in the heart of sin city, this was hardly ever the case as even now, there was a large rustle of people lounging and walking around the outside of one of the higher-end casinos that Las Vegas had to offer.

"Sorry," a deep, scruffy voice from a shadowy figure dressed in a long fancy-looking trench coat called out as he bumped into Melvin. The drink that the man was still holding onto nearly ended up all over his shirt.

"Watch it, bud!" Melvin angrily called out, once his mind finally registered what had just happened. When he turned around to face the person that had caused him to spill his drink, however, there was no one to be seen.

Shaking his head a little, the man shook the whole situation out of his head, and walked through the VIP entrance into the lobby of the hotel.

The long check-in counter, which normally would have at least twenty clerks checking guests in and out during the day, now had a lone middle-aged man standing at the closest station. "Yes, Sir? May I

be of service?" he asked, as the three adults waddled to the desk.

"Melvin Blair," the man spoke with a slight slur, a clear indication that he had already consumed a good amount of alcohol. "You should have a room reserved for me, under Zorro-Communications."

The man gave a slight nod and began typing on the computer keyboard that was in front of him. After a few moments, the man's expression turned to one of recognition. "Ah yes, Mr. Blair. Your usual presidential suite has been reserved for you. I'll just need your credit card to put on file."

Melvin scowled before he grudgingly reached into his pocket and presented his corporate credit card. "You would think you guys would keep this on file so you didn't have to ask for it ever time I was here."

The clerk gave a single nod as he began to type once again. "I'm sorry, Sir. It's the hotel's policy."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," Melvin replied as he made no attempt to cover up his annoyance.

After a few more minutes of typing, the Clerk handed back the card. "I'm sorry sir, but there seems to be a problem."

"Huh?" the man replied. "What kind of problem?"

Swinging the monitor around so the man could see it, the clerk pointed to a specific section. "It would appear that the credit card rejected our attempt to place the normal room retainer for your suite."

"Idiots," Melvin replied under his breath. "Look, I'm on the board of directors for Zorro-Communications, I've been here dozens

of times before. I have an unrestricted credit limit, so clearly your computers are messing up."

The clerk turned the monitor back around. "I am truly sorry, Sir, but I ran the numbers three times just to make absolutely sure. Perhaps you have another card?"

"Okay look, I don't need this," Melvin grumbled as he snatched the card from the clerk and pulled out a large wad of hundred-dollar bills. He then counted out five bills and placed them on the counter. "That should be enough to cover the retainer." He then counted out five more bills and placed them on the pill. "And there is a little extra to stop giving me a hard time."

The clerk smiled and nodded with understanding. "Very good, Sir. I'm sure this is just a glitch in our system that will be fixed first thing in the morning. I'll arrange to have your belongings taken to your room right away." A few moments later, the clerk handed over a small electronic key card.

Snatching the card, Melvin snorted, "Come on ladies, let's relax for a bit before we go up to the room."

Quickly following the executive, the three walked out of the lobby area and into the main casino area.

Although he planned on relaxing, Melvin also knew that it was late enough in the evening that all of the games he had placed bets on earlier would be over, which meant that he was free to go collect his winnings. As such, with his escorts in tow, he made his way to the sports room and walked up to the betting desk.

Taking out his receipt from when he placed his bets, he handed it to the attendant that was standing behind the counter. "I would like to cash these in. You can give me my winnings in hundred- and five-

hundred-dollar chips."

The attendant ran the receipt through the computer. "I'm sorry sir, but none of the bets you placed were winners."

"What do you mean?" Melvin asked as he felt his blood pressure beginning to rise once again. "I know at least three of the races I placed bets on were winners."

The attendant re-ran the piece of paper and shook his head. "I'm sorry sir, but all eight races were busts. I know it's not my place, Sir, but when you make long shot bets at hundred-to-one and two-hundred-to-one odds, you should expect to loose a lot."

"What?" Melvin asked in confusion.

"Don't worry, Sir. Your players club card has been credited with ten-thousand points for the ten-thousand-dollars in bets that were placed. I'm sure you will do better next time," The attendant replied cheerfully as he handed back the receipt.

"Let me see that," Melvin snatched the paper from the younger attendant. "I didn't place any two-hundred-to-one bets, and I sure as hell didn't bet..." The man's voice trailed off as he looked at the sheet in horror. Sure enough, the paper showed that not only had he made the worst possible bets, but in total, he had bet close to ten-thousand-dollars on them; all of which was charged to his personal account on his credit card.

"What kind of crap is this?" Melvin called out. "I would never have made these crappy bets. Especially not at this amount of money. I demand a refund."

"I'm sorry sir, but once you step away from the table after making your original bets, all bets are locked in and final. There is

nothing I can do," the attendant replied as calmly as possible.

"I don't give a fuck what you can or can't do," Melvin began to make a scene. "I want my damn money back, or I will have your damn job."

A few moments later, two men in nice looking business suites walked over. Each of them had small casino security emblems on them. "Is there a problem here?" one of them asked as he looked toward Melvin.

Melvin looked at the men for a few moments, as if considering if he felt like taking on the entire security team of the hotel. As he apparently decided against that action, he shook his head. "No problem, I was just leaving."

The two security men nodded, and stood patiently next to the counter as they watched Melvin hastily walk out of the sports room, with his escorts following close behind.

"They just don't understand you," one of the woman stated as she gave Melvin a kiss on the cheek and began to rub her hand down his back.

"They are a bunch of idiots," Melvin shook off the woman's advances. "Honestly, I don't know why I spend so much god damned money here for this kind of treatment."

Deciding that it would be best to cool off by playing a few of the table games, Melvin walked over to the cage, and took ten of the hundred-dollar bills from his large stack of bills to get an equal amount of chips. He then headed over to the roulette table, which he always seemed to have good luck at.

Although he might have had good luck in the past, after ten

minutes had gone by, it was clear that he would not have any such luck this evening. Each of the twenty-seven bets he placed lost. At one point he had bet on black six times in a row and the ball landed on red all six times. Out of spite, he bet red six times, and each of those times the ball landed on black. Finally, he bet on both black and red at the same time, and the ball landed on 0, one of only two possible positions that could cause a black/red bet to lose.

With half of his chips gone, Melvin next decided to play a little black-jack. Just like roulette, however, all eight hands he placed were all losses.

"To hell with this crap," Melvin muttered as he took the few chips he had left and walked over to the poker table. At least this was a game that he had a lot more control over.

Even with his card counting skill working at it's full force, the three hands he played of poker all went against him as well.

With all his chips gone, and determined to at least win something, Melvin growled at the card dealer. "Give me another thousand in chips," he demanded as he reached his hand into his jacket to pull out his large wad of money. To his shock and horror, however, he couldn't feel the expected bills. Instead, the only thing he could find in his pocket was a small shiny button which he quickly threw on the floor.

"Where the fuck is my money?" Melvin demanded as he quickly began to search all his other pockets for the missing cash, "Someone fucking robbed me."

Seeing that it was clear they were not going to be getting paid tonight, the two woman which had, up to this point, faithfully stood near or at Melvin's side, slowly began to step away from the man.

"Where do you two think you're going?" the man barked, "I'll make sure you get your damned money."

"You can keep your money, hon," one of them replied before they each disappeared into the crowd.

"Damn it," Melvin cried out as he slammed his hand on the table, causing the other players and the dealer to jump. Seeing more security making their way toward the table, he stood up and grudgingly decided it was time to leave for a bit.

As he walked away from the table, Melvin took out his cell phone and pressed a few numbers. "Henry, bring the car around, I'm heading back out."

By the time Melvin made it back to the VIP entrance and walked outside, his white stretched limo was already pulled up to the entrance waiting for him. Although the door to the back was already open, inviting him in; his driver, Henry, was not standing next to it as he normally would. Right now, however, this was one of the least concerns on his mind.

Sitting down in the limo and closing the door himself, Melvin let out a sigh of relief. He had never felt so humiliated by such low-lives in his life. So now, he needed somewhere to go hang out and relax, of which he knew the perfect spot. "Take me to Fremont Street." In a place like that, he was sure there would be plenty of respectable bars and clubs he could hang out at, and possibly find some better escorts.

Within moments, the limo pulled out of the parking lot and began to travel down the strip. Being as late at night as it was, there was very little traffic still on the street, so they made fairly good time.

As they went, Melvin looked out the window at the brightness

that was the Las Vegas strip, and the few people that were still out on the streets. "Damn low-lifes," he said to himself. "The world would be such a better place without them mucking things up all the time."

Sitting back in his seat, he opened the wet bar, and poured himself another glass of wine. After which, he closed his eyes and slowly began to sip. Because of this, he never noticed that the limo made a few turns that it shouldn't have, and that the lights of the strip were quickly getting left far behind them.

About five minutes later, Melvin opened his eyes back up and looked out the window. Seeing no sign of the strip, or the city itself for that matter, he leaned forward and banged his fist on the glass that separated him from his driver. "Where the hell are you going, Henry? I said to take me to Fremont Street."

As Melvin did this, initially he could only see the hat and the suit that his driver normally wore. At about that moment, however, two things happened which immediately caused him to freak out more than he had ever freaked out before. First, the realization that his driver was a lot shorter than he should have been. In fact, it almost looked like his driver was having problems seeing over the steering wheel. Second, the driver turned his head toward Melvin. Instead of seeing the face that he expected, a fur filled face of some type of half-human, half-animal creature shot him back a toothy grin.

"Fuck!" Melvin screamed as he fell back onto his seat. With his heart pounding, he immediately grabbed for the door handle, opening the door and literally throwing himself out of the limo while it was still going.

After he stopped rolling, Melvin managed to stand himself up and began to dust himself off. Looking ahead of him, he could see the

lights of the limo driving off in the distance, with his door still open.

"What is going on tonight?" he thought to himself as he continued to brush off the dirt and noticed that his clothes were not only filthy, but cut in several places. He also noticed that his right arm and knee were scraped up pretty bad, but between the adrenalin and alcohol, he didn't feel any of the pain.

Whipping out his cell phone, he decided enough was enough, and it was now time to call his old man to see if he knew what was going on. Typing in the numbers and hitting send, he patiently waited for someone to pick up. Instead, he was greeted with an automated message "We're sorry, but your account has been suspended due to lack of payment. To be connected to our automated payment system, please press one now."

"This isn't happening," Melvin screamed as he threw the cellphone to the ground and watched in satisfaction as it exploded into a dozen pieces. The satisfaction was short lived, however, as he was now faced with figuring out what to do on his own.

Looking around, he could see that he was in what seemed to be a large abandoned lot a good ways away from the city. Probably on the south side of town. There was nothing at all out here except for a few run down buildings, shrubs, a good amount of trash, and a boy in boxers.

Melvin immediately did a double take. With the moon as bright as it was, he could very clearly see a dark haired boy, no older than nine or ten, standing a few feet away from him, wearing nothing other than a pair of blue and white boxer shorts.

"Melvin Blair?" the boy asked softly.

"Who are you? How do you know my name?" the man

demanded as he began to stare down the boy.

"You are on the board of directors for Zorro Communications, aren't you?" the boy asked.

"Yeah, what of it?" the man challenged. "Who the hell are you?"

"My name is Brook, but that's not important," Brook replied. "I could be anyone. Any child that does not have a mother or father to care for them. Anyone that needs to live in a place such as the orphanages that your company has setup and manages."

"Oh, you're one of those little shits, are you?" An angry look came across the man's face as he lunged for the boy. Just as he did, the boy seemed to vanish in thin-air, causing Melvin to fall flat on his face, empty handed.

"You spend thousands of dollars that you have embezzled from a company who has been entrusted with the well being of kids," Brook continued from a location behind where the man landed. "And yet, many of those kids are sick or dying from poor living conditions and starvation."

"It's their own damn fault," Melvin growled as he got back to his feet. "Besides, they would die one way or the other. So what's wrong with making a little profit as a result? Isn't that the purpose of every company?"

Brook sighed and slowly shook his head. "How could a man like you be filled with so much anger and rage toward kids?" he asked. "Don't you feel anything at all for what your corporation has done to them?"

A ferrel grin came across the man's face. "Why don't you come here kid, and I'll show you how I feel about little shits like you." The

man then lunged for the kid a second time. Just like the first time, however, the kid once again vanished and appeared several feet behind the man.

"In that case, I have a message for you," Brook stated and continued before the man could say anything. "As of tonight, neither you nor anyone else at Zorro Communications will ever be involved in hurting or exploiting any child ever again."

This time Melvin laughed out loud. "Is that right, kid? And who is going to stop us? You?"

Brook shook his head. "No, I don't have any training yet. But my friends will."

"Oh really?" Melvin replied in amusement. "And who are your friends? More little squirts like yourself?"

Instead of replying, the boy vanished once again. This time, however, he did not reappear anywhere else that the man could see.

"Come back, you little shit," the man called out into the night. "We're not done yet!"

"Oh, you're done with him," a higher pitched voice spoke from somewhere to the left of Melvin. "Now you get to deal with us."

"How does it feel to be as helpless as those that you take advantage of?" another high pitched voice from the man's right spoke out.

"A bunch of girls, huh?" Melvin called out, still feeling slightly amused. "Come on out, unless your too scared."

"Your dullness shall never put out the shine of another

youngling again," a third high pitched voice called out, just as Melvin could make out a few shadows moving toward him. Slowing turning himself around, he could see at least ten small figures moving toward him in all directions.

"I don't care how many of you little shits there are, I'll take you all on," Melvin cried out, feeling confident that a few little girls would not be able to take him down.

"You got it, buddy," one of the voices called out just as the figures were close enough for Melvin to get a better look at them. In an instant, the man's face turned as white as a ghost as the confident, amused look on his face was replaced with one of sheer terror. Surrounding him were not the seven- or eight-year-old girls that he had expected, but instead very strange looking, short furry creatures, that if he had to guess, almost resembled ferrets.

"This is the part where you're suppose to scream," One of the ferrets grinned as the group of ferrets were less than a foot away from the man.

Less than a mile away, on the outskirts of the city, a small muffled scream could be heard off in the distance, echoing through the desert. With the sounds of the city easily drowning out the sound, no one in Las Vegas would ever hear that voice again.

* * * * *

Monte Carlo, Monaco

Fifty-one-year-old Charles Vogt, Chairman of the Board of Zorro Communications, and his wife, Shelly, woke late Thursday, only minutes after noon, in their suite at the Hotel de l'Hermitage, after a night spent at the Opera de Monte-Carlo and then at Le Grand Casino. Sitting and reaching her hand for the night table, as she did

every morning at home and away, Shelly gasped, "Charles, my pearl necklace, it's gone!"

"It probably slipped and fell behind the night stand," Charles yawned.

Looking around the floor, but not finding the necklace, Shelly began to panic and scurried around.

Charles grumbled, "My fucking Rolex is missing." He went to the window and drew open the curtains, affording him a beautiful view of the Mediterranean. Returning to the bed, Charles began searching for his watch. On the opposite side of the bed, Shelly was already on her knees searching for her pearls. It was then that Charles noticed his diamond wedding band, which he never took off, was not on his finger. Scowling, he went to his wife and wordlessly pulled her up off the floor.

Shelly griped, "Charles, my necklace..."

"And your earrings, and your rings, and my watch and my wedding band too," Charles grouched.

Shelly frowned, "We've been robbed?"

Nodding, Charles went to lift the handset on the room phone, only to discover there was no dial-tone. He sourly muttered, "What the fuck?" and repeatedly tapped the buttons to try and get a connection. Distraught, Shelly flopped onto the edge of the bed.

There was a knock at their suite door. Dropping the phone, Charles told his wife, "I'll bet that's security." He opened the door. Shocked to find his eldest son, Samuel, standing there, Charles sighed, "You picked a hell of a time for a visit." Turning and heading back to the phone, Charles bitterly asked, "Why aren't you at

Oxford?"

Samuel answered, "I'm between classes anyway." Samuel chose Oxford University simply to get as far away from his parents as was possible. Overhearing a conversation years earlier, he had unintentionally been privy to ZCC policy discussions and fought with his parents over the orphanages.

"Between classes?" Shelly incredulously shrieked. "The flight from London to Monaco is almost three hours! Who the hell..."

Rolling his eyes, Samuel loudly interrupted, "If you'll both just listen for a change, I'll explain everything." He closed the door and took two steps inside the suite and stopped, facing his parents, but staying far enough away to avoid any sudden movements.

"Watch your tongue, boy," Charles admonished.

"No pop, this time you need to watch out," Samuel evilly smirked. "You never spared the rod once in your miserable lives. Angie killed herself to get away from you two..."

Having heard this before, Shelly screamed, "You don't know what you're talking about!"

"I do know," Samuel hollered. "I know so much that I was visited minutes ago, by people who had been to Beverly Hills, and to Pacifica, and to Martha's Vineyard, looking for you. I won't do what Angela did, but I will make amends and have made amends. Look at you two, vacationing on the Med, with the high and mighty, only weeks after your only daughter committed suicide. You think you're above the law. In this case, you bought the law in L.A, lock, stock and barrel. What I reported at seventeen simply wasn't investigated, was it? In case you don't realize it, I feel nothing for either of you.

Therefore, I had no problem pointing them here. You're disgusting."

The word 'disgusting' was the prearranged signal. At that moment, twelve ferret-hybrids transported into the room. Shelly briefly screamed then fainted, falling back onto the bed unconscious.

Shocked at what was happening, Charles dropped onto a chair. He locked eyes with his son and growled, "What have you done?"

Wearing a self-righteous smirk, Samuel shrugged and calmly stated, "I'm allowing justice to be carried out, pop. As of this moment, you're worth nothing; your properties and worldly possessions will be confiscated. In a few weeks, Jimmy and I will evenly split the life insurance money for both of you. I don't want the homes, the jets, the yachts or anything from you. I don't even want to know where these guys are taking you. I only hope the remainder of your lives are as painful as possible, as horrific as it was for those unfortunates in the orphanages you profited from. I'll step back and allow justice to be served." He turned and went to the door.

Ferret-hybrids began to surround the Chairman of the Board of Zorro Communications Corporation. The last thing Samuel heard before closing the door was his father hollering his name and calling him a son of a bitch, as if that made any difference at all to Samuel. He had been called that and far worse by his father.

As instructed, Samuel Vogt waited outside the suite doors. Within a minute, there were no sounds to be heard. He opened the door and peaked inside. All the strange little ferret-hybrids, his mother and father were gone. He closed the door again and waited about a minute and a half before feeling a furry paw slide into his hand.

The creature squeaked, "Alden, return us to Oxford."

Samuel blinked and found himself in his flat. The ferret-hybrid

smiled then reached into his waist sack and pulled something out then offered it to Samuel. Seeing his father's wedding band, Samuel shook his head and sighed, "Keep it, I don't want it. To me, it's shine is tarnished."

Stunned at the choice of words, the little spiky-haired ferret-hybrid asked, "You believe in the Great Shiny?"

"I believe in doing what's right," Samuel stated. "My parents never could tell right from wrong. As long as there was profit, they believed it acceptable and proper. I didn't live in one of those orphanages, but was raised without hugs or love from either of them; they hired other people to care for us. They gave us everything we could want, but never gave us the love we needed. I feel more for nannies and chauffeurs than I do about them. My brother and sister matter to me because we've learned how not to act from our parents. At last, I feel like I'm liberated from the past; from knowledge I never wanted and could never do anything about." Samuel smiled, "Thank you."

The ferret-hybrid giggled and waved, calling, "Alden, take me to High Priest Dave." He vanished.

Samuel looked at the photographs of his brother and deceased sister on his dresser, praying that human-kind would somehow learn from past mistakes and improve. At least he and his brother, Jimmy, would know and remember enough to push for those changes in whatever ways they could.

Grabbing his trench coat and laptop computer, Samuel left his flat to return to school. Somehow the chilly, overcast skies of autumn in the United Kingdom didn't seem quite so gloomy anymore. A woman greeted him with a pleasant "Good afternoon". Samuel returned the sentiment, just as cheerfully, and found himself

repeatedly doing it. It felt good. He felt good.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, CIC Dining Room

Prez shared his thoughts during the short break. "We all know what the deal was tonight. A corporation created a social services spin-off for tax benefits. They hired sadists to care for kids. What happened tonight must never be able to happen again. To accomplish that goal, I intend to write an official Clan Short press release. We're pointing fingers and naming names. Vulcan mind-melds carry more weight than testimony under oath. Thirty-four adult men and woman were interrogated. From those reports, we're going to blow one hell of a shit storm all over the greedy louses that caused this mess."

Mike wondered, "What are you expecting for repercussions?"

Keith asked, "What do you mean?"

Mike sighed, "Think about it. The King wanted teen prostitutes off the street. Prez accepted that and we've had our shields up since Monday night. At some point, we've gotta get these kids off base; to the beach, to the zoo, any day trip like that. Otherwise, they're like rats in a very nice cage. We don't want the kids threatened because of stuff we decide to do."

"Our kids will always be safe," Keith assured. "There will always be security around. Let's say the rug rats are going to the zoo. At least four adults and eight security guards will be with them. If I know Adam and our UNIT troops at all, the first kid that gets approached or threatened, someone is going to be in a world of hurt."

"This all goes back to what is right versus what is wrong," Prez said. "History has shown us wars caused because right versus wrong

couldn't be decided. And why is that? Because some group is putting their own spin on the issue. American History, for example; all men are created equal, except women, except people of color, except this, except that. The American Civil War was fought because the southern economies perceived a threat. How many thousands died, eighty years after the Revolution because of that; for money? The Great War was started because of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. Austria presented Serbia with an ultimatum for what? Fundamentally, it was for territory and ethnic cleansing; holding an entire race responsible for the act of one man. Bang, another war.

"It happens over and over again, compromise that only comes back to haunt us. Enough compromises. Those money-hungry scums are responsible for seventy-two feral kids, about a hundred and fifty emaciated and another seventy-two malnourished. Another set of assholes, right here in Hawaii, sexually abused kids. Dee told Keith earlier today that he was fucked by an adult man. What was done to Reyes, or Jonah, or Dillon, or Geoff? All so someone could get their rocks off? Please, gimme a break. Any adult that makes *my* boys, or any of these kids here cry, there had better be a damned good reason or there will be hell to pay. That's our job, to be big brothers and protect all of them. Being big brothers, we can't delay. We do what we need to and deal with the side effects. If a single person questions what we did tonight, I'll vaporize that person."

Derrick softly said, "As long as you know that there will be repercussions, Prez."

Prez shrugged, "There were repercussions in Montana. No matter what we do or decide not to do, some will have opinions. *They* targeted *us*; The Clan as a whole. And they're paying for it, here in the ROH, in America, in the U.K., anywhere minds that hate are hiding, we're finding them. They have a choice; grow up and learn or pay for

their ignorance. It's that simple; love or hate, right or wrong, good or bad; no spins, no political compromise. Power doesn't exist in money or territory or conquest." Thumping his chest with his right hand, Prez reminded, "Power is right here, within each of us. Trying to take power from someone or forcing your power on someone is wrong and futile. We have to stand up for what is right."

Giggling, Mike teased, "Can I suggest having Lieutenant Vorik write the press release, Mister Subtlety?"

Prez cracked up then nodded and assured, "We're all going to have input, but I'm certain the majority of it will be facts and figures; who did what to how many. Anything beyond that is an editorial. I might get around to an editorial, some other time."

Wrapping an arm around his husband, Keith grinned, "Thank goodness you're not an N-Gen, baby. I half expected the table to shake and the lights to blink."

Meanwhile, in the Hundserts' basement, Vicky and Riti Evans had finished putting John and Stephen into a peaceful sleep. Having never met Stephen, Vicky and Riti were impressed with the boy's empathy. Of course John chose Stephen above all others. Vicky and Riti implanted suggestions into each boy's mind to help them fully recover from the California orphanage raids.

Corey and Drew had showered then decided to watch TV in the living room, waiting for the other Core Rimmers to arrive. Only Kaleo had access to the house; they hadn't yet given Tory, Sean or Troy access. When they arrived, Drew programmed the security scanner, so that the latter three could enter on their own. Once that task was completed, all six went down to the basement nest. Troy was introduced to Riti and Vicky as a new Core Rimmer and a member of Platinum Habits. The three couples made themselves comfortable in

the nest. Geoff briefly woke and called for his Daddy and Poppa. Satisfied that Drew and Corey were home, Geoff rolled over and fell back to sleep. Riti and Vicky went to work; finishing the job begun by the Vulcan healers; creating deep, peaceful sleeps and implanting suggestions appropriate for each boy to fully recover.

Back in the Command Center, while efforts were made on the press release, Mike and Derrick contacted other Clan Divisions to check on the rescued kids from California. The level one kids were all doing well and could still be expected in the morning, Hawaiian Time. Of the level two and three kids, many were being treated entirely on bio-beds. Others were still in surgery or had come out of their surgeries and were resting comfortably, some with new limbs. Lastly, Terra-Main Space Station was contacted for status updates on the worst cases. Seven of the seventy-two had already succumbed to their injuries and weakened states. How many more might pass was unknown; it was too early to tell. It was suggested that, with help from Starfleet diplomatic contact with Betazed, perhaps some of the feral children could be fully healed someday. Believing strongly that the Betazoids would be the only course of action appropriate, diplomats were contacted and awakened to deal with the emergency. The worst of the children that survived medical treatment would have the best opportunities to recover on Betazed. It was small bright spot to an otherwise dismal situation.

The boys went back to work on their press release. Over the Command Center speakers, Alden relayed, "You guys need to know a few things. First, remember that everything Daileass, Draco and I knew was shared with Cory Short, Jason Evans and other division heads soon after it happened. Next, someone in Los Angeles was trying to hack into our network, to learn what was going on."

"It was sooo cute!" Daileass laughed.

Draco added, "Jace had a good laugh too. It got better when I suggested that we let them believe they had succeeded."

Shaking his head sadly, Prez smirked, "What did you guys do?"

Alden replied, "We gave them about twenty seconds of out of focus video and distorted audio, to whet their appetites."

Dailass said, "We've been monitoring news networks in California and across the United States. They still haven't figured out what it is they've got, obviously."

Draco shared, "Cory and Jace agree, if you want to, video and audio from the actual operations can be attached to your press release."

The Core Rimmers and all the UNIT boys present in the Command Center gasped.

Keith offered, "Video and audio with the story would make a huge impact."

Derrick suggested, "Nobody should be identifiable; not the strike team members, not the adults and certainly not the kids."

Mike agreed, "Emaciated, naked kids do *not* need to be televised."

Julio grinned, "Ya might not want to show them the house we blew up either."

Keith told Vorik, "Please have Starfleet cleanup our messes. If they could provide replacement houses, we won't get flack for lowering property values." Vorik nodded and went to complete the assigned task.

Nodding his head, Prez approved of the ideas with the restrictions presented. He told the AI's to get to work immediately. Checking the digital world clocks in the Command Center, Prez said, "It's two-twenty-two here and eight-twenty-two on the East Coast of America. If we can get everything together in the next half hour, we'll make the news before the American stock market opens and before the London exchange closes.

* * * * *

Clan Short Of Vulcan Official Press Release

Thursday, November 4, 2004

06:00 PST / 09:00 EST / 14:00 GMT

Ewa Beach, ROH - On Monday evening, Hawaiian Time, Clan Short of Vulcan received an anonymous telephone call reporting that children were in danger at an orphanage in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. (The address of this location is being withheld at this time to preserve the anonymity of the caller.) Research into the location revealed that the orphanage in question was fully owned and operated by the social services spin-off company held by Zorro Communications Corp. (ZCC-NYSE).

Through extensive investigation into all ZCC owned orphanages, Clan Short of Vulcan found questionable accounting practices that together insinuated children at all sixteen orphanages were not being adequately cared or provided for. On Wednesday, November 3rd, at 3:14 PM HTZ, Clan Short Pacific Rim Division was notified of the transgressions and prepared for on-site operations to determine the extent of the failures to provide sufficiently for the orphaned children.

Zorro Communications Corp. public records stated that twelve children were provided for at each orphanage. Clan Short Pacific Rim Division operations discovered twelve children at only three of the sixteen orphanages. These three orphanage locations were specifically used by Zorro Communications Corp. as the 'showcase' homes for orphaned children and, as such, shown to investors and charitable contributors. The children at those three orphanages were found to be undernourished or malnourished, poorly clothed and living under unacceptable conditions. They were rescued by Clan Short of Vulcan.

Of the remaining thirteen orphanages, sixteen children were discovered at three, eighteen children at another, twenty children at six and twenty-four children at three. At each of the orphanage locations, conditions went from bad to worse to deplorable and horrific. Two hundred-forty-eight malnourished, emaciated and feral children were found at the latter thirteen orphanages and rescued by Clan Short of Vulcan. The total number of children rescued from the sixteen orphanages was two-hundred-eighty-four.

Interrogations of care-givers at the orphanages were performed by Vulcan mind-melds. As of the time this release was prepared, seven children are deceased, sixty-five are in critical condition and another ninety-eight are in serious condition. One-hundred-fourteen children are in stable but guarded condition. The pediatric hospitals where the children are being cared for is classified. At this time, all care-givers, Zorro Communications Corp. personnel involved, and individual participants in the orphanage conspiracy have been prosecuted to the full extent possible by Vulcan law.

Chapter 9A

Ewa Beach, C.S.P.R.D Main Base

Thursday, November 4, 2004, 07:09 AM

In the Hundser's basement nest, John woke to find Stephen's head lying on his chest. John remembered the faces of the people he had executed. He knew his actions were justified, but couldn't shake the images in his mind. John thought, *I've gotta get out of here*. Using telekinesis, John gently moved his husband aside. He wondered, *now what do I do? Where can I go?* Confused and frustrated, John stood and looked around the nest at his husband, son, brothers, sisters, friends and nephews. Certainly, none of them would ever look at him the same again, John strongly felt. He had the ability to cause other minds and bodies to experience pain; he could make furniture fly around as if caught in a tornado; he could lift a house and drop it, turning it into a rubble pile; he had killed four people. Mixed bad emotions bubbled forth from the ten-year-old N-Gen and he wiped tears from his eyes. He hated the sadistic assholes he killed and he hated himself for murdering them. All the people closest to him would certainly have good reason to mistrust him, John believed. Inner turmoil blazed forth bright blue when John dropped his hands from his eyes. Without consciously wanting to, John levitated and floated up the stairs.

Busy in the kitchen preparing coffee for themselves and breakfast for the kids, Jim and Jennifer Hundser listened to the morning news on the radio. Zorro Communications Corporation stock was in a free-fall, dragging other stocks and global markets down with it; the result of orphanage raids in California performed by their boys. Civil unrest was breaking out in London, New York City,

Washington D.C., San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tokyo and, to a lesser extent, in Honolulu. Crowds were gathered in front of American embassies all around the world, demanding explanations why one of their companies abused, mistreated and killed children. While the coffee brewed, Jim Hundser hurried to the living room and turned on the television to learn more about the prior night's events. Once the cinnamon rolls were placed in the oven, Jennifer Hundser carried four boxes of cereal to the dining room table. Putting them down, she went to the living room and stood beside her husband watching the news.

On the TV, the screen was split in thirds. On the bottom was the standard stock ticker. On the left were summaries of the London, New York and Tokyo stock markets. The London exchange closed two hours earlier, down over one-thousand-five-hundred points. There were still three hours left to the New York trading day. ZCC stock was down sixty percent and still declining. The Dow, NASDAQ and S&P 500 were all negatively effected. The largest section of the screen showed the released night-vision camera views from the Clan Short Pacific Rim Division raids. A list of those arrested was shown. Hearing about company executives and civil servants that were missing and assumed executed for their crimes, Jim and Jen returned to the kitchen to gather bowls, plates, glassware and silverware for the kids.

The basement door seemingly opened then closed of its own accord and John floated through the kitchen dinette. The two Hundser adults didn't see or hear anything. Invisible to the adults and John, Peter Lambert sat at the dinette table, slightly out of phase, insuring the adults didn't see or hear John. Jim and Jennifer returned to the living room, but only briefly stood there trying to absorb what had occurred. The commentator said that two hundred and eighty-four children had been rescued. Clan Short Headquarters in Orlando, Florida had reported at noon Eastern Time that fourteen kids had died

from their abuses. The oven timer beeped, breaking the two adults away from the television. Returning to the kitchen, they worried about their sons and questioned whether to allow any of their young kids and grand-kids know what was going on.

Peter popped out of the kitchen and outside then followed John. Sitting in the CIC dining room having breakfast were Vicky and Riti Evans. Peter, Vicky and Riti were there in Hawaii to make sure nothing upset the rescued kids or freaked out the Rimmer adults. John floated past the four Rimmer family homes, beyond the indoor rec center and dropped to his knees in the grass on the Southwest perimeter of the compound, on the far side of the basketball courts and soccer field. Shedding bitter tears, John reached down and pulled up fists of grass then took a deep breath and screamed. Nearby birds flapped off for safety. The ground beneath John quaked as ten large trees in front of him uprooted themselves and shot skyward then exploded into splintered wood chips and leaves. Twice more John screamed, uprooting and destroying seven trees and then another four trees before his eyes changed back to light brown. Peter hurried to John. Kneeling in the grass together, John and Peter clung to each other while John sobbed.

The Hundser's phone rang. It was Lanna Seaver, asking if they had seen the news. Worried about Corey and their newly adopted boys, Lanna asked if she and Bill could come over to be there when the kids awoke. Jen agreed, and no sooner did she hang up, the phone rang again. This time it was Rob Gibbons, also asking about the news and wondering about their boys. Jim Hundser overheard that the Gibbons' would be coming over too. For a few moments, Jennifer stood by the phone, daring it to ring again. Fully expecting the Seiberts as well, Jim found a carafe to hold the remainder of the first pot of coffee then started another pot.

Outside, John and Peter were pulling themselves together. Seeing the large area of wood chips and leaves where many trees had previously stood, John hummed thoughtfully then turned to Peter, wondering, "Did you make that happen?"

Breaking into gales of laughter, Peter poked John in the chest, giggling, "You did it! I just made sure you didn't cover the whole base in bits of trees. Vicky and Riti made sure no one awake saw or noticed it." Peter paused and grinned, "You'll have to decide what to have built here. There'll be a major termite infestation if we don't clean this up."

Absorbing that, John smirked and admitted, "I don't even remember coming out here, Peter. I knew I had to get out of the basement, away from my husband, son, brothers and parents, but that's about it."

Peter giggled, "This is Vicky's idea of a *controlled* tantrum." He then shrugged, "At least you didn't blow the roof off the CIC like Tyler did. You floated out here, John."

Frowning disbelievingly, John gasped, "Please don't say Stephen saw this."

Shaking his head, Peter said, "Nope, you did it without Stephen." Standing up, Peter then popped away, to the Hundser's basement. Seeing that Stephen and everyone was asleep in the nest, Peter popped back to John and assured, "Still sleepin'." He offered John a hand up.

All eight adults gathered in the Hundser's kitchen. Once everyone had coffee, the four men went to the living room. Listening to the radio news in the kitchen, Anna Seibert began preparing batter for pancakes while Lanna Seaver prepared batter for waffles. Jennifer

Hundser prepared a larger tray of cinnamon rolls. Laura Gibbons made a third pot of coffee.

The men in the living room could barely believe what they were seeing and hearing. Their sons and Clan Short were responsible for more than a hundred people being either executed or arrested; the world markets were in a tail-spin centered upon the devaluation of Zorro stock; sixteen California cities were without many public servants and almost three hundred children were rescued.

Fed up with commercials and second hand information, Jim Hundser tried to recall the name of the new AI and asked, "Was it Alfred?"

Carl Seibert scowled, "Or Albert?"

Searching his memory, Bill Seaver smirked, "Alex, Alfons, Alister, Alan?"

The Clan AI's were in silent fits of hysterics when Rob Gibbons finally shouted, "Alden!"

From the living room ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "Yes Sir?"

Rob ordered, "Enough of this watered down bullshit. What were our boys doing last night?"

Carl said, "Let our wives hear this too."

Connecting to the ceiling speakers in the kitchen, Alden summarized the entire fiasco for the adults, beginning with the initial anonymous phone call, the investigation and the raids the boys had performed. With unedited video displayed on the television, Alden outlined what each team had done in California. Several minutes later,

when some of the little kids in the basement nest woke, Alden cut off the remainder of the summary, explaining that kids were climbing the stairs. The last thing Alden said was, "All the Core Team members and many of the strike team members have already had Vulcan mind-melds for healing. Your sons will be fine." The television was switched back to the news. The four men went to the kitchen and their wives.

The somber mood was replaced with joy as Carmella, Dewi, Kokaku, Dillon, Geoff, Richie and Aaron Pendergrass emerged from the basement. Loudly cheering, "G'mornin' Momma. G'mornin' Daddy," Carmella went to Jim. The boys waved at the assembled adults and hurried into the bathroom.

Lifting his daughter, Jim smiled, "How's my princess?" then landed a kiss.

Carmella kissed him back, giggling, "Good. I gotta go though, Daddy." Jim nodded and put the girl down. She raced through the dining room, living room and upstairs.

John walked into the kitchen from the sliding door followed by Peter. Seeing the adults, Peter hurried to his Aunts, giving each a hug. More than a little surprised to see a morning gathering of adults, John closed the backdoor. Having never seen him leave, Jim and Jen were equally surprised to see John come in from outside. Trying very hard to act as if everything was normal, John said, "Hey," and went to refrigerator for juice.

Jennifer asked, "When did you go outside? You haven't been out there all night, have you?"

The half gallon bottle of juice almost slipped out of John's hand, but he caught it with his mind and made a show out of carrying it

towards the counter. John shook his head and softly answered, "Only a little while, mom."

Jennifer reached for a glass from the cupboard and handed it to her youngest son. Avoiding making eye contact with his mother, John took the glass then began pouring. The glass slipped and fell along with the plastic bottle of juice, but neither hit the floor. Peter had stopped time for everyone in the house except himself and John.

Peter instructed, "You pick up that glass and bottle now, John."

"I can't, Peter," John whined, "they're all gonna look at me funny from now on."

"That's a bunch of bull pockey!" Peter vehemently said. "All these grownups have heard the news already, John. They know what happened from TV, radio and Alden. They're here because this is where their sons, the Core Rimmers are. They're parents who love their kids unconditionally. If you had only looked at them, you would've heard their surface thoughts; love, pride, concern. They don't care about nothin' 'cept you and your brothers. That's why they're here. Nobody's gonna look at you funny. They don't have any idea how those trees got blown up. You're almost done, bro. Now you only have to tell them the little details. You guys made a huge impact." Peter then teleported himself and John into the living room where the TV was still on the news. In a flash, they were at Charleston AI Hospital, where a boy was cleaned up and resting comfortably with a new leg attached. Then they went to Camp Bam Bam, where a girl slept in a bed for the first time in years and was being nourished intravenously. Finally, Peter took John to Terra-Main Space Station. They remained invisible and silent to the diplomats, Mahael and Du'ualloxat Tam, who were discussing the future care of the feral kids on Betazed.

Returning to their previous positions in the Hundasers' kitchen, Peter said, "It hurts to kill, yeah, I get it. Colin and the Dutchmen, Vic and Strike Team Tango from the Des Moines Division, High Priest Dave and the ferrets, killed all except one of the Board of Directors. All but that one of the board was involved. None of those guys on the teams were happy about it either, but how many did that company kill and not care about?" John shrugged. Peter said, "The number you're looking for is sixty-three. Over the last four years they existed, sixty-three kids at those orphanages died before we got to them, John. Add in the seventeen that died overnight now. Those that survived to leave those orphanages at eighteen left without educational and social benefits we all have. They did it to rid the world of unwanted kids. They'll never do it again either; thanks to you, the other Core Rimmers and our brothers and sisters around the world.

"Sometimes bad stuff has to happen so something good can happen. Now all you feel is the hurt. In a little while, the kids Mike and Derrick rescued from LA will wake up. Then there will be the first thirty-six new Rimmers showing up. They don't know it yet, but they need you, bro. I know what you've been doing all week; helping all these kids of different races and nationalities get along together. Just like with Bruce last Friday and Saturday, you do it without giving it any thought at all; for you it's easy and effortless. Instead of arguing and fighting, they talk to each other; each and every one of 'em share their pasts and listen to other kids sharing their pasts. Thanks to you, they're healing. All you have to do is get the last of the tears out with your mom and dad." Peter gave John a tight and very non-random hug.

John nodded and sighed, "Thanks, Peter."

Peter confirmed, "Ready?"

John said, "Set." Peter snapped his fingers, just to signal John.

Three of the four women gasped and jolted to try and catch the falling glass and bottle, but John had them already, in his telekinetic grasp. "That was a close one!" John smirked. Peter laughed so hard that he might've wet himself, if Mikyvis actually peed. John set the glass and bottle on the counter.

His mother placed her hands on John's shoulders. Jen gently asked, "Are you alright?"

John peered up over his shoulder at his mom and admitted, "A little shaky still." In that one brief glance at his mom, John felt her concern.

"Obviously," Jennifer sighed, and then offered, "Let me pour the juice for you."

John stepped aside, saying, "Thanks, mom." The boys came out of the bathroom. Anna and Laura led the boys to the dining room for breakfast. Lanna got the milk from the refrigerator then went to the dining room too. John glanced at all the adults in the room; feeling their concern and impatience, waiting for their sons to wake and prove that they had recovered from the California Orphanage rescues.

Jim approached his son and asked, "It hurts, doesn't it?"

John took a deep breath and nodded. Looking up at his dad, John sent, *'Twenty-four feral kids at the first place I was at. It was horrible. There were twenty at the other place, just as smelly and almost as bad.'*

Bending slightly, Jim picked his son up and softly instructed, "Say it aloud, let it out."

Holding on to his dad tightly, John sobbed, "There were twenty-four feral kids at the first place I was at. There were twenty at the

other place, just as smelly and almost as bad. It was *so different* than when somebody is threatening you, like on the Enterprise, Tuesday." John shuddered briefly then continued, "This time, four were tied up. They couldn't have hurt me, but they had hurt so many so slowly, by starving them and treating them worse than bugs. Two of 'em wanted to hurt me and Stephen, like the other kids. They didn't deserve to live another day. I killed them, all four, turned 'em to dust."

John searched the faces of the other adults. All he saw was sadness on their faces. From their minds, John heard only concern for himself and the other Core Rimmers; their sons, still asleep in the basement. Mr. Seaver and Mr. Gibbons felt like they had failed their children by allowing such greed and selfishness to exist. Turning to face his mother and seeing tears streaming down her face, John sighed, "Sorry, mom."

Violently shaking her head, Jennifer cried, "Don't be sorry."

Jim added, "We have the most reason to be sorry. As parents, it's our job to protect our kids."

Wiping her eyes with a tissue, Jennifer wept, "Where heartless people like that come from, I have no idea."

Rob Gibbons softly said, "Generations try to make the world a better place for their kids. No matter how hard we try, something always gets missed; someone gets away with murder. You boys have done what we couldn't, what we didn't even know was going on." Jim put John down. John went to his mother and they tightly held each other, sobbing their eyes out.

As if their little butts were on fire, Cesar and Felipe ran up the basement steps and flew into the kitchen. The twins removed any doubt that they were telepaths by loudly demanding, '*Stop crying and*

stop worrying!'

Glaring at Bill Seaver, Cesar sent, *'We told you last night it was real!'*

Squinting at the other adults in the kitchen, Felipe continued, *'This is what the Clan does!'* Anna, Laura and Lanna came out of the dining room and into the kitchen. Quickly, Peter covered his mouth before he laughed out loud at the adults' stunned expressions.

Cesar added, *'They save kids, like us! Get over it already!'*

Felipe loudly shared, *'You want them to stop so you won't hurt! Little kids ain't stupid, ya know.'*

'Dewi, Kokaku, Aaron, Dillon, Geoffy and Richie are freakin' out!'

'Carmella's upstairs, wonderin' if she should come downstairs.'

'Somebody better start tellin' them the truth, fast!'

'Be glad we know you people are nice.'

Together, they assured, *'We'll fix it so no one hears what happened this morning.'*

Jim half sighed and half groaned then turned and started for the stairs. Returning to the dining room, the remaining adults, except Jen Hundser, who was still with John, began explaining the situation and their own reactions to the six worried boys. Finding Carmella sitting on the top step, Jim sat several steps beneath her and explained what had happened and how families work.

Turning in his mother's arms, John wiped his eyes then grinned at the twins. *'Jeez, guys. Got something to say?'* Giggling, Cesar and

Felipe nodded. More footsteps could be heard on the basement stairs. John asked the twins, *'Who's comin' up from the basement?'*

Cesar replied, *'Randall, Alan, Latoya...'*

'And Murakami, Shimizu, Don and Lenny,' Felipe finished.

John cheered, "Excellent!" The basement door opened and six boys filed across the hall, through the dinette and into the bathroom. Latoya hurried down the hall and upstairs on her own potty mission, unaware that Carl and Anna were there.

Cesar proudly smiled, *'Jamie, Jacob and Beau was teachin' us.'*

Felipe nodded, *'They says maybe we could help some day.'*

John grinned, *'That day has come. Do you want to join my Intel team?'*

Wide-eyed, the twins nodded and shouted, "Yeah, that'd be awesome!"

John giggled then sent, *'It's our secret for now. I'll tell Prez later then we'll tell your folks, okay?'*

"Okay!" the twins chorused.

John suggested, "Let's get some breakfast." The twins hurried to John and gave him a hug. Together, the three boys joined Carmella and the others at the dining room table. The first plate of cinnamon rolls was placed on the table. Soon, ten of twelve cinnamon rolls were being dunked into bowls of cereal and milk.

In the basement, the last of the youngest boys were waking up. Randy Beale woke Jonah. Jonah woke Reyes. The three brothers put clothes on then went upstairs and were surprised to find all the adults

there. Pancakes and waffles were prepared for the next crew of hungry kids. Chad Bunting woke Herbert Trumbo. Hearing their new brothers, Sung and Kawazoe woke. Smelling food cooking, they hurried up the steps. Waking in an upstairs bedroom, Bruce, Dee, Gage and Sammy came downstairs. The first group of kids finished their breakfasts then went to watch TV. John flipped channels to allow the kids to watch something more entertaining than news. The second group of kids overflowed to the kitchen dinette table. John invited Peter to join him downstairs, but Peter wanted to stay upstairs with the kids. So John went down to the basement before Stephen woke and discovered him missing.

Peter sat near Bruce and softly offered, "I can help find out what happened to your mommy and daddy."

Remembering some of what he learned of Mikyvis skills on Saturday morning, Bruce excitedly cheered, "Would you, Peter?"

Smiling widely, Peter nodded, stood and compassionately assured, "Be right back." He popped out of the Hundserts' dining room and onto a boat, out-of-phase so he would not be noticed, with four adults, two of which were Bruce's parents. The boat was stopped and drifting, many miles away from the east coast of Oahu, while the adults were chatting. In the distance, Peter could make out the peak of Diamond Head.

As one of the men started the engine, Peter heard the 'pop' of a fuel explosion. He rewound this time frame, and went to a point where he could look at the engine. After referencing Cory's knowledge of internal combustion technology, he quickly realized that this particular model of power-plant was using a version one nitrogen extractor unit, with a hydro extraction unit to provide the oxygen for the nitrous-oxide fuel mix. He slowed time, and watched as the engine was cranked by the man up top. He got his answer quickly, as a seal

failed on the oxygen separation unit; the failure spraying liquid oxygen directly on the magneto. The liquid oxygen quick-froze the primary ignition lead, causing it to crack and spark to the nearby engine block.

Peter nodded his head in understanding as he left the boat and watched from the water as the scene played itself out. He then went back to the maintenance facility which took care of the boat between rentals. After an in-depth check, he found that the company actually went over and above the factory recommended preventive maintenance procedures for their equipment; the failure was definitely not due to anything that they had done.

Returning to the Hundser's living room, Peter waved Bruce over. The two boys then went to the kitchen and stood before Rob Gibbons. Peter reported, "I saw what happened to the Downings, Uncle Rob." Turning his attention to Bruce, Peter sighed, "There was an explosion from a small oxygen leak. It got real bad, real fast. None of the four grownups had a chance. I even checked out the boat rental place. Everything they did was right; it was only an accident and no one's fault, Bruce."

Amazed that little Peter knew as much and more than he did, Rob Gibbons nodded and sighed, "Honolulu Police are already investigating the business, but not finding anything incriminating."

Bruce wiped his eyes. Peter hugged Bruce and gently assured, "It was their time. There was nothing anybody could've done." Bruce understood, but it barely made a difference. Releasing Bruce, Peter stepped back. Jim Hundser picked up Bruce a second before Bruce began bitterly crying. Jennifer joined them and softly rubbed her son's back. Carmella was the first to stop eating and go to Bruce. Soon all the kids were gathered around Jim, Jen and Bruce.

Peter spoke to Rob Gibbons so a report could be made to the engine manufacturer that would prevent future failures and loss of life.

Over at the dorms, kids were waking too. Some went to the bathrooms for showers while others wanted food first and would shower afterward. Liki and Hank went for their first early morning jog around the perimeter fence of the base with some of the UNIT boys. The televisions in the CIC dining room were turned on to the local news, which included an abridged version of the California Orphanage raid in the world news segment. As more kids gathered and watched TV while drinking their morning milkshakes, the conversations revolved around what the Core Rimmers had done. Awestruck, they could barely believe what was reported. Teenagers explained the news reports to the younger kids, who didn't fully understand how this rescue operation differed from others the Core Rimmers had performed.

Remaining in the basement nest were the six Core Rimmer couples and Frankie. At first, John lay quietly between his husband and son, reviewing the events of the morning. First and foremost on the list were the reactions of his parents. John expected they would be, at the very least, disappointed. However, they weren't the least bit disappointed in any of their sons. If anything, they were disappointed in themselves. John's parents still loved him and agreed that the lives taken in California were justified.

Next, was discovering how he had floated without Stephen, and how he had uprooted twenty-one trees. A single tree weighed way more than ten or twelve people, John reasoned. He began by trying to levitate himself. It took several minutes for John to gather enough emotions and channel the power to actually begin to float, but once he started, it seemed that it was suddenly easy and he rose all the way to

the ceiling. Controlling the emotions so he could lower to the nest again took almost as long as rising had. When he made it down to Stephen's side again, his head tingled, like it had when he first became N-Gen. The second attempt at levitation was much easier and more controlled.

Feeling what was happening with Bruce and Peter upstairs, John reached out to his new brother. Although Bruce was very sad, he was relieved that there were no human failures involved in the accident. John sent to Bruce, *'I know what happened and I feel you, bro. I'm not gonna do anything to change how you feel, unless you ask me to help.'* Bruce simply thanked his new brother and continued to cry in Jim's and Jennifer's embrace. John flipped over onto his belly and floated up a third time. Hovering about three-feet above the nest, John floated above his husband and softly called, "Hey, baby. I need to show you something."

Only beginning to become conscious, Stephen smiled and turned onto his side, reaching for where he thought John was. Finding only pillows and a blanket, Stephen opened his eyes. Believing that John's voice was a dream, Stephen grunted.

John giggled, "You're so cute when you first wake up." Stephen slowly rolled only his head. Seeing John floating above him, Stephen gasped and lay flat on his back. John lowered himself onto his husband then stole a kiss before pulling Stephen up with him. John sent, *'I figured it out, Stephen. It's all emotions at once that make it happen; love, hate, fear, joy, sadness, anger; all of 'em at once until they fill me up.'*

Frankie shifted in his sleep, wiped his eyes then saw his daddy and poppa floating above the nest. He began giggling hysterically, not realizing that anything was different. John lifted Frankie and

telepathically shared knowledge of his newly discovered power.

Waking and seeing his little brother and brother-in-law floating again, Drew groaned, "Can't you find a new way to wake up?"

John began giggling then powered up. Drew, Corey, Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy levitated quite easily. John also levitated the stacked cases of drinks, the boxes of snacks and the basement refrigerator. With a thought, the remaining basement furniture on the other side of the basement floated up in the air. Releasing Stephen and Frankie to gently float down to the nest, John felt no additional strain and he was holding almost a ton of people, appliances and furniture in the air.

Realizing what was happening, Keith sighed, "This is getting monotonous."

Troy rolled over and reached for Sean. Discovering that he and Sean were hovering several feet above the nest, Troy gasped then shouted, "Is this how you guys always wake up?"

"Look closer," Stephen prompted. All eyes turned to Stephen, down on the floor, and then to John, still horizontal and five feet above the nest.

Prez asked John, "You can do it alone now?"

John nodded, "No sweat." Prez smiled and hummed thoughtfully.

Seeing everything on both sides of the basement steps hovering, Corey gasped, "Omigod!"

Returning everything and everyone to the basement floor, John concentrated on Stephen, about to ask if his husband wanted pancakes

or a breakfast shake from the CIC. Stephen was concerned that John didn't need him anymore, now that he could float on his own power. So that Stephen and all in the basement could hear, John said, "Don't think that, baby. I didn't marry you only because we can float. You're the one I want to be with, on the ground and above it. For better or for worse, I love you, Stephen."

The others in the basement giggled, "Aww!" Smiling and standing up, Stephen pushed John into an upright and vertical position. John pulled Stephen up above the floor then they hugged and kissed.

Sean told Troy, "This is why I didn't mind sleeping here. The love in this house covers the entire base."

John said, "All our parents are upstairs. Breakfast is being made. And you'll probably want to see what's going on in the world news too." He then floated up the steps with his husband and son. By this time, Richie, Carmella and all the other fed tots were dressed and heading over to the playground with Peter. Frankie took an empty chair at the table. Anna placed a plate of two waffles in front of the boy. Covering the warm waffles in softened butter and then drowning them in boysenberry syrup, Frankie dug in.

Having heard the news, Stephen's and Troy's mothers arrived at the Hundser's home. Stephen proudly told his mother what John had done the previous night. Kathleen Marr couldn't believe that John accepted the burden of executions rather than allow Stephen to take a single life. She pulled both boys into her embrace and warmly thanked John. Going to Jim and Jen Hundser, Kathleen expressed her sincere gratitude for what John had done. While his mom was busy, Stephen took hold of both of John's hands, and then led him out of the room. Passing by the dining room, John started giggling. The giggles were echoed by Stephen and then by Frankie. Stephen led John

upstairs to their bedroom.

The remaining Core Rimmers got dressed then hurried upstairs. Judy Faris hugged the breath out of her son and Sean. All the other parents expressed their concern and pride for their sons. While the eldest eight sat down for breakfast, Drew tapped his sub-vocal and asked Alden to include Corey for a status update. Other than world-wide outrage over the orphanages, all was quiet around the Pacific Rim. California's Governor and Attorney General had a press conference to talk about what had happened in the Golden State, and how they were preparing laws and regulations that would prevent it from happening again. Alden added, "Cory Short and Logan Hayes have approved acquiring Zorro Communications Corporation's stock."

Drew thoughtfully scowled, "What's that mean to us, Alden?"

Alden explained, "At the rate ZCC stock is being sold off, the company would be out of business by tomorrow evening. There are several thousand employees, not to mention contractors, around the world that had nothing to do with the orphanages, who would be devastated if the company were to go out of business. Also, there are millions of ZCC network devices installed around the world that would have no support, rendering all those devices as liabilities. Mr. Takamura and a small group of Clan investors are going to save the company and take over, saving jobs, saving the retirement accounts of countless innocent senior citizens, and ultimately, we come out of this in a much better light; we identified a problem, resolved it and save the company from bankruptcy."

Drew nodded and smiled, "That's excellent news. Thanks, Alden."

Alden giggled, "Any time, Drew. We'll chat later."

Drew said, "Probably so," then went to the adult men gathered in the living room to share the news. Corey went to tell the women in the kitchen. Prez and the eldest Core Rimmers listened and heard the latest status update. Prez and the Core Rimmers agreed to put funds into acquiring additional ZCC stock. Deciding to use a quarter of the Core Rimmer's personal funds, Prez ordered Alden to execute the trades five minutes before the New York Stock Exchange closed, at whatever current market value. Drew and Corey met in the dining room to have breakfast. Drew wondered, "Where's John?"

Still chowing down, his face smeared with boysenberry syrup, Frankie smiled, "Upstairs with poppa." Stephen's implanted 'therapy' was being accomplished privately with John. Considerably more aggressive than typical, Stephen made John repeatedly giggle, shake and shiver. Things they hadn't had the chance to do during their brief honeymoon Tuesday night, Stephen enthusiastically did.

A devilish grin spread across Drew's face. He shifted his eyes mysteriously, causing the others at the table to begin softly chuckling. Leaning forward to help himself to a waffle, Drew was surprised when the platter slid away from him. Drew grumbled when the platter went airborne and floated up toward the ceiling. Soft chuckling around the table turned into loud laughter. Drew sighed, "I can't even think of pulling a practical joke on him anymore."

John sent, *'You can think it, but you'll pay.'*

Judy Faris went to the dining room to tell Troy she that was about to begin her work day, but hearing laughter and seeing a platter floating above the chandelier, she came to an abrupt halt.

Taking pity on his brother, Prez chuckled, "Come on, John, let Drew eat. He's acting director for today."

'Really?' John teased, and then levitated the chair Drew sat in and sent to the other Core Rimmers, *'All hail the chief!'*

While the others laughed, Drew only covered his eyes and shook his head, softly muttering, "And I was worried about him."

When Drew was lowered back to the floor, Judy kissed Troy and Sean on the cheek then said goodbye to the other adults. Huffing impatiently, Drew hollered at the ceiling, "Waffles, brat!" Drew heard John's laughter in his mind as the platter lowered back down to the table. As rough as the early morning had been for John, the day was shaping up *very* nicely indeed.

Keith downed the last of his juice, wiped his mouth then told everyone at the table, "We've got about half an hour to get our buns in gear and get to school."

Standing up, Derrick and Mike nodded. Derrick said, "We'll meet you in the center of the lawns."

Mike tapped his sub-vocal and said, "Alden, contact our school security teams. Have them meet us at the circle in back of our houses in about twenty-five minutes." Alden replied affirmatively then Mike and Derrick left the house with their parents, sons, brothers and sisters.

Glancing around the table at the other Core Rimmers, Prez confirmed, "You guys are kewl for a while?"

Kaleo nodded, "We've got it covered, no problem, Prez."

Troy also nodded and asked, "Are we gonna jam later today? For some reason, I feel like that's really important."

Prez and Keith agreed; they would get together in the

auditorium right after lunch. At that time, they could greet the Latin King kids and the others from the level one orphanages. Keith pulled Prez by the hand upstairs so they could shower. Kaleo and Tory excused themselves to get cleaned up then made a point of thanking the Hundser for breakfast. Jim got a hug from Kaleo and Jennifer was hugged by Tory. Sean and Troy were the last to leave, telling Drew and Corey that they would also be showering and getting clean clothes. Drew asked that they be prepared for orientations of the newest Rimmers.

During the time Corey and Drew were alone in the dining room, the Hundser and Seaver adults talked to the boys about the prior night. They weren't looking for additional details, enough had been seen and heard already. The only thing the adults cared about was what the boys thought of the experience.

Drew shrugged, "What's there to think of? They didn't like kids and never should have been put in a job to care for kids."

Corey wondered, "I can't understand why they hate kids so much though. That makes no sense at all to me."

Jen said, "I think it's the way they were raised; perhaps the way they were as children themselves."

Jim calmly offered, "From what I've seen of criminals and court cases, there really isn't a rational explanation. Some people were abused and become abusers themselves. Others are so selfish, nothing else matters except what *they* want; whether it's a man that kills for petty cash at a convenience store or an adult desiring sex with little boys and girls. They don't know they need help and never seek it, so they follow their desires."

Bill smiled proudly at his son and son-in-law. "You boys dealt

with everything perfectly. I don't think I could've done as well." Bill Seaver was a tall man that Corey and Drew believed was almost infallible. At six and a half feet tall and almost two hundred and forty pounds, he once played college football. He got his education and degree in Business Administration at U.C.L.A through a football scholarship. His wife, Lanna was also tall compared to the other three mothers. Corey was destined to become a tall, handsome man. That final simple statement from Bill Seaver was empowering for Corey and Drew.

Lanna told her son and son-in law, "I would be much happier if you boys could take a short break from Clan Leadership for a while." The idea was echoed by Jim and Bill.

In that motherly fashion that made it an order, Jen told the boys, "Make it happen, soon."

Drew and Corey sweetly smiled and sang, "Yes, mom." The two women rolled their eyes. Biting their tongues, the two men forced themselves to not laugh.

Showered, dressed and ready for their school concert, Keith and Prez galloped down the stairs. They said goodbye to their parents and Mrs. Marr then hurried outside. Meeting Derrick, Mike and their security teams, Prez called Alden and had them transported to school.

Jim and Jennifer Hundser decided they had delayed going to the FYS building as long as was necessary. They went upstairs to prepare for their day. Kathleen Marr decided to clean up the vestiges of breakfast while she waited for her son and son-in-law.

Although they had showered the prior night before joining the nest, Corey suggested that he and Drew get some shower playtime before kids began showing up. Drew agreed, but his comm-badge

chirped as they were climbing the stairs. Corey groaned, knowing his chance for a little bathtub fun had passed. Drew answered the call. "Pacific Rim Division; this is Drew."

A woman's voice said, "This is Doctor Darcy Ester calling from Blank Children's Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa."

Turning around and pulling Corey with him, Drew smiled, "Yes, Doctor. Are the kids ready to come home?"

"Yes, they are," Doctor Ester replied. "Two Starfleet security personnel will join them. They will bring the childrens' medical records."

Heading for the door, Drew replied, "Please inform Starfleet Security to transport the kids to our CIC dining room." Exaggerating a frown, Corey dragged his feet. Drew pulled Corey out of the house, giggling, "I'll have our Doctors meet us there."

"Very well," Doctor Ester said.

Walking toward the pools, Drew said, "Give us about five minutes to gather a welcoming committee."

Doctor Ester replied, "Thank you, Drew. I'll inform Starfleet and the children. Goodbye."

Noticing Corey rubbing the front of his shorts, Drew helplessly laughed, "Thanks, Doc. Bye."

Once the call was finished, Corey whined, "I wanna play! I wanted to play when we woke in the nest. But no-ooo! John had us floating around, wasting time instead of making time! And where is he? With Stephen, playing while we work!"

Drew kissed Corey's hand and promised, "Tonight, I'll turn over to Prez and then we are gone. I'm gonna do unspeakable things with you, dude."

Corey whimpered and begged, "Speak a few?" Drew cracked up laughing. Approaching the pool and calming down, Drew tapped his comm-badge, saying, "Drew to Doc Andrews and Doc Howard."

One after the other, the two doctors replied. Drew informed them of incoming kids and asked if they would come to the CIC dining room. Once the doctors had answered, Corey hollered, "Geoff, Lenny, Renee?"

Drew called for Richie, Bruce, Carmella and Kokaku to come help them greet new kids. While they enthusiastically agreed, Corey scanned the area for Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy. Since they were nowhere in sight, Corey made his lower lip tremble, reverting to five years old and preparing for a tantrum.

Lenny noticed and asked, "You sad, Poppa?"

Corey quickly flipped his dramatic frown into a grin. Hugging his boy, Corey assured, "I'm fine, pal."

Shaking his head, Drew giggled, "Poppa's bein' a bad boy." Purposefully avoiding Corey's gaze, Drew called for Reyes, Randy, Jonah and Dillon to join the welcoming committee. Not one to be avoided or ignored, Corey began tickling Drew's ribs and chased him all the way to the CIC. The welcoming committee followed and giggled at the two out of control leaders.

Dressed much more comfortably than he had been for about fifteen years of employment, Jim Hundser stepped out of his house, ready to start his work day at the FYS building. Before he could step off the porch, two squirrels scampered towards him. Jim hadn't seen a

squirrel in years, since he and his family arrived in Hawaii. The squirrels stopped before him and began squeaking. Jim nodded and replied in squirrel, "Yes, I'm a lawyer." The squirrels squeaked and clicked then pointed towards the south side of the base. Jim queried, "How many trees?" Outraged, the squirrels repeated the count then complained that they had just barely gotten their friends and families out in time. Walking by on his way to the FYS building, Rob Gibbons saw Jim and overheard the two squirrels bitching about how they came to Hawaii from Orlando, because Timmy Short said they would have no competition and a warm, safe place to live. They hadn't had their new homes for three whole days and now their trees were destroyed. The squirrels wanted to press charges and file lawsuits against the boy responsible.

Listening carefully to squirrels, Rob noted the description of the boy; Caucasian, brown hair with eyes that shone blue, as bright as street lamps. "Uh oh," Rob grunted.

Jim sighed then told the squirrels, "There's a problem, but we could work our way around it, if you'd be willing?" The squirrels wondered, what sort of problem. Jim answered, "A conflict of interest. The boy you've described is a Clan Short leader and my son." The squirrels were now annoyed that justice would not be served, and in their frustration spun around, loudly squeaking and clicking. "Wait, relax!" Jim squeaked and clicked, "We can take care of this in a way that will benefit everybody." Jennifer Hundser stepped out onto the porch in time to hear her husband explaining, in squirrel, "Our son was upset over lives taken the prior night. I can personally guarantee that John won't be blowing up any more trees. For the safety of your family and friends, can I recommend that you build new homes around the perimeter of the base?" Scurrying around in a fit, the squirrels squeaked and clicked, complaining that they might never be safe. "Yes, you will," Jim assured. "We would always keep the trees at

the perimeter for privacy. You would always be safe there and on this base. Honestly, we didn't even know you were here and therefore couldn't have prevented it." After another short exchange, the squirrels were satisfied and scampered off towards the trees.

Turning to his wife, Jim smiled, "There, problem solved."

Shaking her head, Jen cackled, "I certainly hope so. Besides your own testicles, there are at least a hundred other boys that are in danger of having their nuts stolen."

Rob cracked up laughing and Jim snickered, "The girls are safe though." Together, they started for the FYS building, wondering what more the day might offer.

* * * * *

Over by the diving well, Peter Lambert motioned for Robin to join him. He led Robin over to where Carl Seibert was reclining on a chaise lounge, working via his cell phone.

Finishing a call and glancing up from his phone, Carl Seibert smiled, "Hi boys. What's going on?"

"We're gonna go over to see what we can do with Kahoo... Kaho... um, that other island," Peter said cheerfully. "You wanna come with?"

Carl chuckled and easily pronounced, "Ka-ho-o-la-we." Behind Carl, his security gorilla, Joseph, who had been deep in conversation with another gorilla, perked up his ears at this.

"That's the one!" Peter cheered. Robin giggled. Peter smiled, "Anyway, me and Quint got the island workin' right yesterday, with water and stuff, and now we're gonna go fix it up with some

infrastructure and housing and stuff."

Carl gasped, "That old rock has water on it? Do I even want to know how you managed that? It was financially prohibitive, the last time any study was done on it."

"Simple, if you have a Q on call," Peter giggled. "He converted some of the rock under the old peak into a filtration system that produces good fresh water, under enough pressure to get it up to the top of the peak. We got rivers and streams flowing down from it."

Standing and clipping his phone to his belt, Carl grinned, "This I gotta see for myself."

Robin reminded, "First of all, Uncle Carl needs his security, second of all, please don't start us off at five thousand feet. Let me handle the telekinetics. I've grown accustomed to hearing people speak."

Joseph tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Fernando, we're going off-base."

Fernando wasted no time or energy, transporting from the Rapid Response Base, where he had been getting in some target practice, to poolside in Ewa Beach. He tapped Joseph on the shoulder and wondered, "What's the hold-up?"

"Smart-alec," Joseph replied. Fernando cheekily smiled.

The other gorilla who had been talking with Joseph spoke up. "What are you planning?" he asked.

Carl smiled, "Come along, Leo." Speaking to Peter, while Leo checked with Sean, Carl explained, "I learned when I met Leo yesterday, that he has civil engineering skills. I'd hire him, so his input

might be useful."

Once Sean cleared him to leave, Leo asked Peter, "What do you have planned?"

"We need to run water, power, and sewerage lines to handle any development we do over there. I was thinking of putting a main road from the northeast corner, where there's land suitable for an airstrip and harbor, down the length of the island to the beaches at the southwest end."

"You could basically use a gravity feed for the water if it's really coming out at that peak; that's fourteen-hundred feet high, if I remember right," Leo said. "What did you figure for power?" Peter shrugged. Leo suggested, "Put in two microfusion generators, one at each end of the island. That gives you fallback power sources and extras for any emergencies that might crop up."

Carl asked, "The intended purpose of this island is?"

Peter shrugged, "We're not sure. The King gave it to Prez, and Prez gave it to the Clan through Cory Short. I guess we should estimate how big the clan is."

Fernando offered, "All the divisions included, I'd guess about fifteen thousand."

"More than that," Joseph said, "I'd guess more like thirty thousand."

"For the sake of argument, let's go with twenty-five thousand," Carl suggested. When no one argued, Carl rambled, "A windmill farm of about forty windmills for a gigawatt of power, supplemented by an acre solar farm for another ten gigawatts, with the two microfusion generators should be adequate for our current size and a fair amount

of growth."

Leo asked, "Why are you considering an airstrip and a harbor, Peter?"

"Umm... it's an island," Robin giggled. "It's cutoff from the world without something for normal people transportation." To both Leo and Robin, Peter nodded and smiled.

Leo grinned, "So the two microfusion generators should be placed such that the important stuff always has power."

Peter agreed, "Yeah, to the north by the airfield and harbor, and to the center of the western side for whatever else, residential and commercial, primarily, I guess."

"Even for our own people, we need emergency services," Carl reminded.

"So for hospitals, fire stations and police all over the island," Joseph softly summarized.

Nodding, Carl asked, "How're we going to ascertain what goes where?"

"We'll go there now, if you're all ready?" Peter offered.

Smiling at the small Mikyvis, Carl Seibert suddenly didn't recognize where he was. Off in the distant eastern horizon, he recognized Mount Haleakala on Maui the same moment Fernando pointed it out. Fernando noticed Carl's apparent confusion and checked, "Are you okay, Carl?"

"I'm fine," Carl sighed. He grinned, "It took me those few seconds to realize where we are. Kaho'olawe didn't look like this the

last time I was here."

Peter giggled. "Me 'n' Quint got busy yesterday!" He motioned Carl to turn around, where he saw water gushing out of a spring near the mountaintop and forming a large lake. Then he led the group to the east side of the lake, where a 'bridal veil' waterfall dropped down the almost sheer cliff.

Robin looked over and smiled, "Uncle Carl, has John ever levitated you?"

Nodding, Carl answered, "Briefly, while I was on a poolside lounge chair."

Robin grinned, "Kewl, this will be the same, without the chair. You might feel a little weird, because there won't be nothin' under your feet, but I'll be supporting you. Just don't worry, okay?"

"I'm not afraid of heights," Carl assured, at the same moment his feet left the ground. All six of them were rising off the ground and into the air. Carl nervously muttered, "normally," as they continued levitating. What was weird was his feet weren't dangling; Carl felt like he was still standing on something, yet there was only many meters of air between the soles of his shoes and the mountainside.

"Okay, Leo, Carl, this is where we're gonna need advice," Peter said, sounding as professional as a nine-year-old floating in midair can. "What we thought is to pretty much leave the mountain area natural, with the water source, a wind farm and such located there, but no other development. Up here to the north, though," and they floated off in that direction; "we figured would be the right place to put the airstrip and harbor, and one of the microfusion generators."

Leo nodded and checked with Carl, saying, "It's a close point for

boats to make the twelve kilometer jaunt back to Maui."

"And air traffic wouldn't be flying over too many homes or businesses," Carl added. "Good plan, Peter."

"Then we figured a road more or less following the north coastline - 'Broadway'," Peter giggled. "That would run all the length of the island to the beaches on the southwest shore." He turned serious again. "Since the Clan doesn't have any real major plans for it right now, we thought it could be a place where all the Divisions could get together at once. I looked into what Starfleet can do, and we can house everybody at once."

Carl asked, "You mean a main northeast to southwest thoroughfare, like a highway, with parallel smaller avenues and roads?"

"Exactly," Peter said. "And we could run a monorail down the median too!"

Peter and Robin started the floating man-and-gorilla group moving up and westward.

"Okay," Peter said as they hovered over the western part of the island, "what we had figured is to put in quads of dorms up and down the main road along here to the north, and maybe in from there a bit. Down here along these cliffs on the south shore, and one row inland from them, would be the big single family houses. And just north of that the townhouses would fit. In the area west of that we put up the condo buildings, some ten-story ones and some new twenty-story ones. In the curve to the east between the townhouses and the barracks-style quads we could have some commercial and community buildings."

Carl glanced at Leo. Leo explained, "There should be strip malls

interspersed along the main roads in residential areas. No one should have to go far to get the basics, like groceries. Also, since we're planning a population of mostly kids, each strip mall should have a video arcade."

"A larger mall, centrally located, would be a good idea," Carl added. "In that mall, we could have a movie theater, with eight or more screens, so folks have entertainment choices. Along the same train of thought, we'll need a large auditorium, so division leaders and Cory Short can meet with the entire Clan at once."

Pointing down and toward the western shore, Leo asked, "Is that a beach area?"

Peter nodded, "Yup, Quint added palm trees."

"We could build another entertainment area there," Leo offered. "With smaller concession stands and the like nearer the beach. As we move inland, we could have restaurants and night clubs for the adults."

Carl nodded agreement, saying, "Emergency services should be near where the people are; fire stations and medical clinics between the residential and commercial zones, and definitely one of each by shoreline resort area."

Leo added, "Don't forget water treatment facilities. Twenty-five thousand toilets flushing means there needs to be at least one sewage treatment center; two would actually be better, one north by the airport and harbor, another south, a fair distance away from the shoreline resort area."

Considering the intended use of the island, Carl thought aloud, "I can easily foresee Preston, Cory or any of the division leaders having meetings at the auditorium, but once that's done, the kids are

free to do what they like. Some would head to the beach, some would go to the mall, some would go back to their residences, satisfied with reading or watching television. We'll need a communications tower on the mountaintop to relay television and radio broadcasts."

Joseph told them, "The entire Clan constitutes a small city. Those of us from the Special Forces division would act as police for the island. Perhaps three 'police stations' where there are emergency services might be a good idea."

Carl and Leo smiled and chorused, "Good idea."

Joseph shrugged and grinned, "The UNIT has medics that could easily serve as paramedics or assist in the medical clinics with the hired doctors and nurses. The Clan as a whole already has support staff of every sort."

Carl nodded and laid out a plan, "Centered along the primary highway and monorail system would primarily be residential, close to the shoreline and on both sides of the transportation system." He paused and pointed down, gesturing and explaining, "Along Broadway, we'll centrally locate our larger malls and commercial areas, with emergency service facilities there. A little further inland, nearer to the mountainside, we could have condos, townhomes and single family homes. To the north, the airport, harbor, water treatment and more emergency services. To the southwest, near our resort beaches, place more light commercial areas. Off to the east of the beaches, at least three kilometers away, place a second water treatment facility. On the mountainside, we'll have a wind farm, solar generating facility and the communications tower. The two microfusion generators would be north by the airport and harbor, and the other to the south, between the water treatment center and the beach resort."

"Here, sketch it," Peter said, handing Leo a laptop that hadn't been there before. Leo nearly dropped it. "Hey, let's get these guys down on the beach," Peter told Robin, who giggled and settled them gently onto the beach.

Three beach chairs popped into existence. "Relax," Peter told Carl and the gorillas. "C'mon, Robin!" The two giggling boys popped out, returning a few seconds later.

"Where are the microfusion thingies?" Peter asked. Joseph began to answer, but Peter said "thanks," and vanished again. Robin giggled.

Peter popped back, collected Robin, and they vanished again. When they reappeared, Carl asked, "What the Sam Hill are you boys doing?"

"Puttin' what you said in place," Peter sniggered. "Hey, you got a crew available to put in concrete?"

Nodding, Carl grabbed his cell phone, saying, "I can get a team of fifty put together within the hour," but then realized he had no signal on the island. Carl and Fernando were transported back to Ewa Beach by Alden.

"I knew I forgot something!" Peter grinned. He and Robin vanished again. When they returned, there was a bright red flashing light in the east. "One comm tower, check," Robin giggled.

"I need sand," Peter commented.

"You're standing on a sand beach," Joseph reminded him.

"No, I don't wanna take it from here," Peter answered. His eyes went unfocused, then came back. He flickered in and out of existence

a couple of times, then said, "That other universe, where they used this island to test bombs, they'll never miss it."

He tossed Robin a purple hardhat, which predictably made him giggle, then they disappeared again. When they returned, Robin commented, "Those were HUGE!"

Peter nodded. At Joseph's quizzical expression, Peter grinned, "Sewer mains." He then asked Leo, "Think about sewage treatment for a minute, please." Leo looked quizzically at him.

Leo sighed, "For now, since there's no sewage to treat, just place the lagoons and feed them water."

"Okay," Peter cheerfully agreed, vanished and quickly returned. "Done."

The boys vanished again. Looking off to the east, Joseph pointed and said, "Look!" The two gorillas watched as windmills began sprouting along ridges on the mountainside in the distance. After about a minute, a wind-farm had been placed. Only seconds later, another tall tower sprouted up, then Leo and Joseph saw reflected sunlight as sufficient numbers of mirrors were placed around the aforementioned solar collector tower.

When the boys returned, Robin looked a bit tired. "Cookie break," Peter announced, pulling out four enormous cookies from seemingly nowhere, and handing them to Robin and the gorillas, starting to munch on the last one himself. After their cookies, Peter and Robin took a swim.

Leo continued working on the laptop, drawing out his plans for housing and commercial area placement. Joseph kept an eye on the swimming boys. Having only arrived at Ewa Beach the prior

afternoon, Leo remarked, "Carl seems like a very nice man."

Joseph smiled, "He is. Since you don't know him very well, let me just say that Derrick had an older brother, many years ago. Carl Junior passed away, which has severely impacted Carl and Anna. Having lost a child, both of Derrick's parents are loving the Clan situation. Derrick now has three little sisters and four younger brothers." Joseph then asked, "How do you like Sean?"

Leo shrugged and grinned, "He's definitely nice. As shy and soft spoken as he is, I was surprised with him last night. Sean went right into Clan brother mode and did most of the talking to the kids rescued from the orphanages we were at."

The two gorillas continued chit-chatting about the Core Rimmers, their families and some of the other rescued kids for many more minutes. Peter and Robin returned to the beach from their swim and put their clothes back on. After being gone for a little more than an hour, Carl and Fernando arrived at the beach, with two-hundred-fifty men, ready to be allocated to perform the necessary work.

"You know, don't you, that it'll take several days for the base layer of road to cure sufficiently to put the surface coat on?" Carl asked.

Peter chuckled. "Mikyvis can handle time better than that!" he said. "Soon's your guys get it rolled and tamped, I'll be right behind them compressing time. By the time they get the main road laid, the end they start at will be ready for the surface coat."

Carl smiled, "I've already organized the personnel," and turned to the large group of men, saying, "Let's break into our groups of twenty-five, as we discussed, gentlemen. We'll get you transported to work sites. Five of us will be transporting to and fro with supplies of

concrete and anything else needed to accomplish as much as we can today."

Peter said, "I've got an eight-inch gravel sub-base layer in place for you already." He then led the two-hundred-fifty men, Carl, Robin, Fernando, and the two gorillas up to where the road was to begin at the western, beachfront end.

Carl checked with Peter, "We'll handle standard fifty meter segments?" When it was confirmed, Carl called Alden to transport the first set of heavy machinery and concrete trucks to begin this section. In a matter of minutes twenty-two teams of ten men were working on the roadway. The last thirty men were transported to the airport and harbor area to begin work there. For the next several hours, Carl, Fernando, Robin and the two gorillas transported back and forth between Oahu and Kaho'olawe with additional concrete trucks for the workers.

Peter pointed to the area near the end of the road, where the downward slope to the beach began. "I thought we could put a two-level parking deck there. Have one ramp from the road stay level, to lead onto the top deck, but excavate and run another ramp down to the lower level. That way we get parking without blocking any views or taking up too much land area."

Leo nodded and replied, "An excellent plan." He opened his laptop and pulled up a set of plans for a sizable parking garage.

As each fifty-meter section of highway was completed, Peter applied a bit of "Mikyvis time magic" to it to speed up the time needed for the concrete to cure. Meanwhile he called Starfleet to alert them to prep for the massive order of modular housing elements that would be needed from their fabricators.

Things began to fall into place. Peter popped over to the microfusion generator that had been positioned between what would become the sewage treatment plant and the community center area, and charged himself up from it for some heavy-duty TK work.

True to their word, Starfleet began transporting modular units one half hour after Peter's request. Between elements of "road aging" he lifted things into place in accordance with Leo's plans. Just to the east of the beach area, a boardwalk was put in place, where visitors could get food, bicycles, surf boards, or simply get out of the sun at an arcade or souvenir shop.

Just east of the boardwalk, two "streets", as yet only gravel sub-base, were lined on both sides with sets of ten townhouses, producing forty dwellings close to the beach. The south end of each street emptied onto the boardwalk as it curved around to the south.

The next two streets were set up similarly, but also featured one or two of the large single family homes, south of the townhouses, or rather, this was the case on both sides of one and one side of the other. At the north corner of the final side, though, where it intersected 'Broadway', there was a small supermarket and a few smaller stores, including a pizza shop and a video arcade with snacks, set up to be a teen hangout.

North of 'Broadway' were located dorm quads, resembling the ones at Ewa Beach and the as-yet-unused satellite bases. But unlike them, the central grassy area was here developed. The central quad of every set of three had a dining hall serving all three quads. The western one had basketball or tennis courts or a soccer field there, while the eastern one had a pool with diving well and a playground for the younger kids. A chain link fence blocked the quads off from the cliffs behind, with occasional breaks leading to steps down to the

narrow northern beaches.

In the center of 'Broadway', Peter and Robin began work at the shore. The streets were still sub-base, but Peter began naming streets as he worked. "This first one I'll name after Bruce's parents," Peter told Robin. "Welcome to Downing street," he giggled. Nearest to the cliffs, they built a single family home and numbered it 'ten' when it was done, then broke into a fit a laughter. "Wait until Prez learns I built him a house at number ten Downing Street! He'll flip!" At the next lot, Peter built a row of townhomes. At the next three blocks, dormitory quads were built. At the south side of Broadway, Peter set up a strip malls, facing the main roadway. Beyond that to the south and starting to climb in elevation, the first ten-story condominium was built. Peter and Robin staggered the building profiles such that all residents would have nice views, unobstructed by taller buildings. They finished Downing Street with two twenty-story condominiums that were based on the original design Peter's company developed for Ewa Beach. The first six floors were single bedroom efficiency apartments, the next seven floors were two bedroom, two bathroom units, and they were topped with seven floors of five bedroom, four bath penthouses.

When the first street was done, he cured some roadway then began on "O'Brian Street", the same way as they had developed Downing Street. During the course of the day, Peter and Robin developed "Hundser Street", where at the intersection Broadway a small medical clinic, fire station and police station were built. Much the same way, "Gibbons Street," "Seaver Street" and "Seibert Street" were developed. At the southeast corner of Seibert Street, just off Broadway, a large mall was built, named Seibert Plaza, complete with movie theater. When that task was finished, Peter returned to the corner of Broadway and Downing Street, where he built an auditorium similar to that at Ewa Beach. He even named it Downing

Gardens and dressed up the exterior with a plethora of fountains and flora. The design of the Gardens was evocative of a Japanese botanical garden, simplistic but functional. The final step was a bronze plaque memorializing Bruce's parents. At the end of the day, Peter intended on bringing Bruce back here to show him the length of Downing Street, culminating the little tour with this spot.

Transporting in with the last load of concrete, for the crew working south from the north of Broadway, Joseph turned in place, drinking in the sight of the work already done. He gasped, "I would've never believed it was possible." As the paving crews approached Seibert Plaza and Downing Gardens, Peter then suggested the names for the streets down by the beach. "From the east, there would be Furst Street, then Short Street, then Richardson Street and lastly Thompson Street. Peter conferred with Carl and Leo. Several teams split off to pave the side streets, while the others went back to the ends of 'Broadway' to put the surface coat on the island's main road.

Near six o'clock that evening, Peter, Carl and Robin gathered and looked over the incredible amount of work accomplished in a single day. To the large group of men that had worked so hard, Carl announced, "Gentlemen, congratulations on completing a phenomenal job. Each of you have earned your days pay and the incentive pay I promised. Funds will be transferred into the bank account numbers you've provided on your employment forms. As similar work is required on any of Clan Short's other properties, I will be calling on you again." The men were then instructed to split off according to island of residence. Carl, Peter, Robin, Joseph, Leo and Fernando split up to have men from each island state their name. Since all the personal data was electronic, AI's listened to stated names as they were spoken and each man was transported as close to their homes as was possible. In about two-and-a-half minutes, all the men were

transported to their homes.

Taking a final glance around the now developed, but still unpopulated island, Peter proudly giggled, "If everyone's ready, let's go back to Ewa Beach?"

"Sounds good," Carl agreed, and Peter transported them all back to Ewa Beach, right in front of the CIC building. As the others went inside, Peter looked around. The sun was setting, and the street lights were flickering on. Peter hit himself on the forehead, and concentrated. Over on the now-deserted island, street lights sprung up along Broadway, on Downing Street, and so on, and began glowing softly.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, C.S.P.R.D. Main Base

10:11 AM HTZ

Barreling into the dining room with their ten person welcoming committee in tow, Drew screeched to a halt before the Starfleet security. They were startled by the sudden, rapid entrance and Drew recognized that immediately. "At ease, Ensign," Drew smiled, and then introduced himself, Corey and the rest of the welcoming committee.

Ensign McGrane began introducing the rescued kids while Drew and Corey greeted each and asked their ages. The tallest was Mike Busse, age fourteen. Then there was David Lydon, age thirteen; Ryan Caswell, age twelve; Matthew Cottingham, age eleven; Rodney Castaneda, age ten; Jeremy Catlin, age eight; Leonard Santana, age six; Mark Fikes, age five; Robyn Ashe, age fourteen; Claire Endsley, age twelve; Lillian Fitts, age nine, and Glenda Keeling, age seven.

Doctors Andrews, Howard and Wiener walked into the dining room during the introductions. Drew softly and sincerely apologized to Doctor Wiener. "I'm sorry, I should've called you too. Guess I always make assumptions."

Patting Drew on the back, Doc Wiener grinned, "It's called a positive attitude, Drew. Keep it that way."

So that the business formalities could be taken care of, Drew loudly asked, "Who's wants a milkshake?"

All twelve newbies politely raised their hands, but the other Rimmers shouted, "ME!" Corey and Reyes began laughing.

Drew giggled, "Reyes, show everyone where to get their shakes, please, bro?"

Reyes nodded and smiled, "Right this way guys," then led the pack to the chow line, explaining all about the shakes and the flavors available. Doc Wiener followed and closely watched the new kids interact with the others in the welcoming committee. Like any new kid might, they warmed up slowly to the Clan Short veterans that were now, after only six days, more outgoing kids.

Drew and Corey stayed with Doctors Andrews and Howard while medical records were accepted and reviewed. Afterward, Drew thanked and dismissed the Starfleet Security team.

John, Stephen and Frankie ran into the dining room, on the ground, for a change. They waved at Corey and Drew then went to the chow line to meet the kids. With little else to do, Drew called Kaleo and Corey called Sean. The echo of the mob shower made it obvious where Kaleo and Tory were. Kaleo assured they would be in the dining room in five or ten minutes. The length of time it took for Sean to answer his comm-badge made it equally obvious to Corey what

they were doing. Sean estimated fifteen or twenty minutes before they could be at the dining room. Frustrated, Corey whispered to Drew; "I'm gonna go beat off." Smiling widely, Drew locked eyes with Corey and shook his head.

When the newbies, John and Stephen came out to the dining room, Drew pulled his brother aside. Immediately upon looking at Drew's face, John giggled, "Go, I'll get started with the kids." Drew and Corey transported to their townhome's master bedroom.

Ten minutes later, Drew returned to the dining room with a much more mellow Corey. Kaleo and Tory were there and sitting near the tables with the newbies. These were the kids from the level one San Diego orphanage that Kaleo and Tory didn't get the chance to meet. While telling the new kids more about the base, John teased Corey. *'At least twice a day, every morning and night or it's cranky bitch mode, huh?'* With any will to argue greatly diminished, Corey rapidly nodded and giggled. Drew sat down and pulled Corey onto his lap then they joined the orientation discussion.

Lenny sat back, smiled at Corey and rubbed his tummy saying, "I'm so full, Poppa." That sent the conversation off in an entirely new direction.

John told the new kids, "All of the leaders are Starfleet Officers and considered adults. We're all Lieutenants." Stephen picked up the story from there, telling the kids about the marriages and introducing Frankie as his and John's son. The kids were all shocked that other kids were married, considered adults and had adopted other kids.

The kids still hadn't finished their milkshakes and the conversation was still in progress when Drew's comm-badge chirped. Tapping it, he answered, "Pacific Rim Division, this is Drew."

"This is Doctor Janet Hayes, at Camp Bam Bam."

Getting up and stepping away from the chatter, Drew said, "Hey Doc. How're you?"

"Very good, thank you. I have a dozen children with me, anxious to see you, Corey and Hawaii."

"Great!" Drew cheered. "We're in the CIC dining room with the first dozen now."

Janet said, "I'll have Daileass transport them."

"Are you coming too?" Drew wondered.

Janet replied, "There's no need." A moment later, all twelve kids were standing in the dining room, not far from where Drew and Corey were, near the first batch of kids. Each of the kids were holding envelopes containing their medical records and wearing new clothes appropriate for the Hawaiian climate. They were excitedly looking around the CIC, drinking in their new environment.

Rolling his eyes, Drew giggled, "Don't say anything, Daileass!"

Over the dining room ceiling's speakers, Daileass imitated the character Carol Ann, from the movie 'Poltergeist'. "They're here!" Daileass giggled.

Shaking his head, Drew stood and told Janet, "They look great, Doc. A heck of a lot better than they did last night. Thank you." The three doctors went to the kids then began gathering the envelopes and greeting the kids.

Janet said, "The kids will be fine, Drew. The rest of their treatment can easily be handled by your medical team." She paused

then wondered, "Where are Preston and Keith?"

"At a school concert this morning," Drew answered. "Prez needed time off. He put me and Corey in charge for the day. John, Stephen, Kaleo and Tory are here too."

Janet hummed then said, "I understand. I'll let you get to work, *Director Hundser*."

Drew giggled, "Thanks again, Doc. Have a good day."

"You too. Janet out."

At the FYS Building, while Jim and Jennifer Hundser were doing interviews, Anna Seibert, George Lu and Tamara Hekekie were assigned the task of contacting the parents and care-givers of some of the recently rescued children. First on the list were the kids from Sunday night. Gage Lundberg's parents never answered their phone. A message was left for them to contact FYS regarding their son. Aki Hikada's parents were contacted and scheduled to meet with George Lu. Hajime Sato's parents were also contacted and scheduled to meet with Tamara Hekekie. Aki and Hajime were called to the FYS building, where they rehashed the circumstances that brought them to the Clan. Aki wanted to remain with Hajime and recognized that opportunities in the Clan were far better than he could expect otherwise. He hoped for visits with his parents in the future, but only if they could cope with his relationship. Hajime didn't ever want to return home. He knew his parents would not ever accept his gay relationship. Immediately recognizing anger management issues with Hajime's parents, Tamara went to Anna Seibert to request additional security be present for their interview. Anna agreed with Tamara's assessment and called her own security to be available at three that afternoon.

Sean and Troy walked in the dining room and went directly to the kids. Drew and Corey hurried over, quite obviously pleased to see kids they had personally rescued. Again, another group of kids were led through the chow line for their first vitamin fortified milkshakes. Having had to perform executions, Sean and Troy were happy to see all of the kids. The kids were equally happy to finally be at their new home, but because of their care-givers, were careful what they said. While the second batch of kids made their way through the kitchen chow line, Drew tried to relax them by telling them that their orphanage care-givers were sentenced to life imprisonment and would never set foot on the Earth again. Corey prompted each kid to say exactly what they thought of those adults and then made a point of introducing the on-duty chefs. Drew made contrasting statements, describing the good grownups working at the base verses the evil scum at the orphanage.

Soon, they were out in the dining room again, sitting at tables near the other twelve newbies. Drew's comm-badge chirped once more. While Drew and Corey handled the third incoming group. Sean and Troy began telling the second group about the base. Having heard much of it already, kids from the first group began adding their own remarks. Within fifteen minutes, the third group of kids were seated with their milkshakes. Kaleo led the third orientation conversation and encouraged kids from the first and second groups to answer questions for the third group. At eleven-thirty, small packs of Rimmer kids began arriving at the dining room for lunch. A quick tour of the dorms and the base was done with the newbies.

Over at James Campbell High School, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick decided to remain at school for a little while longer, during the lunch period. They chatted with Mrs. Diaz and some of their band-mates about that day's concert. This day, instead of playing 'Weird', as was originally planned and done the prior two days, the

four boys talked their teacher into allowing them to play a different song. She approved, with the caveat the lyrics were not rude or volatile. Of course, they assured her it would be something along the same lines as 'Weird', but they hadn't actually agreed on the song. They were also hindered by the capability of the school's PA system. Keith only had an upright baby grand and an older synthesizer too, so their choices were limited.

Ever since Troy mentioned the need to perform, Keith and Prez recognized it wasn't a simple desire to practice or perform for their Clan. It was more a requirement they had to meet. Derrick and Mike admitted to having the same perception. It wasn't until they had finished playing 'The In Crowd' that a spur of the moment song was chosen. Keith began playing the piano introduction to [Can't Fight This Feeling](#), causing Derrick, Mike and Prez to break into fits of giggles. Mike easily provided the counterpoint guitar harmony. Derrick added cymbal swells and Prez filled out the bottom then Keith began singing. "I can't fight this feeling any longer. And yet I'm still afraid to let it flow. What started out as friendship, Has grown stronger. I only wish I had the strength to let it show.

"I tell myself that I can't hold out forever. I said there is no reason for my fear. Cause I feel so secure when we're together. You give my life direction, You make everything so clear.

"And even as I wander, I'm keeping you in sight. You're a candle in the window, On a cold, dark winter's night. And I'm getting closer than I ever thought I might.

"And I can't fight this feeling anymore. I've forgotten what I started fighting for. It's time to bring this ship into the shore, And throw away the oars, forever.

"Cause I can't fight this feeling anymore. I've forgotten what I

started fighting for. And if I have to crawl upon the floor, Come crashing through your door, Baby, I can't fight this feeling anymore."

Mike played the guitar solo flawlessly, note-for-note, and made an act of it for the students, although he was actually bored.

Keith sang, "My life has been such a whirlwind since I saw you. I've been running around in circles in my mind. And it always seems that I'm following you, girl, Cause you take me to the places, That alone I'd never find.

"And even as I wander, I'm keeping you in sight. You're a candle in the window, On a cold, dark winter's night. And I'm getting closer than I ever thought I might.

"And I can't fight this feeling anymore. I've forgotten what I started fighting for. It's time to bring this ship into the shore, And throw away the oars, forever.

"Cause I can't fight this feeling anymore. I've forgotten what I started fighting for. And if I have to crawl upon the floor, Come crashing through your door, Baby, I can't fight this feeling anymore."

The song was a statement of what the four Core Rimmers felt and wanted to share. What they had experienced the previous night was a whirlwind of memories that were, thankfully, much less painful. At the song's end, clapping, cheering and whistling erupted. The Junior class present in the school's auditorium thought the boys did an excellent job covering the song.

In a grand mood after the show, the four boys were goofing around the school's outdoor lunch area. Near where Mrs. Diaz and many of their band-mates were sitting, they had finished an a Capella rendition of '*Sh-Boom*' and were in the middle of singing '*Blue Moon*' when suddenly their eight security guards closed ranks around them,

with their collapsible graphite-composite batons fully extended, creating a barrier such that none of the four Core Rimmers could be reached. A large group of boys and even some girls began shouting challenges and threats, obviously unhappy about Clan Short and the effects the prior night's activities had upon their families and the world. Caught in the maelstrom, Mrs. Diaz threatened detention. When that got nowhere, the Vice-Principal came over, threatening suspension of the entire group.

Disgusted, Prez spoke up. "It's alright, Mister Dela Cruz. If people knew the facts instead of jumping to conclusions, they wouldn't have any problem with the Clan or what happened last night."

Some of the group wanted explanations of the raids while others began shouting insults. Keith and Derrick answered some valid questions honestly, but with little detail. Fuming, Mike kept control of his tongue only because this was school property.

His patience exhausted, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, silently mouthing, "Alden, set local condition yellow. Lock down the Command Center and transport everyone within twelve feet of me there, right now." Alden followed the order. Everyone, including Mrs. Diaz and Vice-Principal Dela Cruz, suddenly found themselves in the Command Center. Lieutenant Vorik and the six on-duty UNIT boys shot to their feet and drew their weapons.

"Lieutenant Vorik," Prez bellowed, "show our visitors the unedited video and audio from Fresno."

Vorik nodded, "Aye, Sir," then turned and entered commands to complete the ordered task.

Vice-Principal Dela Cruz said, "This is inappropriate behavior,

Preston."

Keith challenged, "No Sir, what's inappropriate is ignorant people making stupid statements when they have no idea what they're talking about. They want an explanation. They're about to get it."

Prez smiled at his partner then calmly stated, "This is no longer a school issue. This is a human rights issue now." Prez emphasized, "I am in charge here. I could have each of these kids arrested as fast as we transported here. Instead, I'm going to teach a lesson they can take home with them." Vorik turned to face Prez. Prez nodded, "Play it." Immediately, the large video display behind Prez showed the greenish night-vision video from the Fresno Level 4 raid. Everyone that knew better turned away and didn't watch. The first minute or so was no big deal, just the strike team entering the premises with remarks that each room had been cleared. Then the strike team began climbing the stairs. The two bathrooms were cleared and efforts to open the triple-locked bedroom doors were made. The small, floor level food slots were shown and commented on by the strike team. Images of naked, feral kids soon filled the screen with more remarks from the strike team.

One girl, already revolted, covered her mouth. Prez locked eyes with Jimmy and said, "Show our guests where the lavatories are, bud." Jimmy was followed down the hall by two girls. Within another minute, the partially cannibalized corpse was shown. The remaining girls, Mrs. Diaz and three of the boys had hurried down the hall. Prez said, "That's enough, Lieutenant." A moment later, the screen went blank.

Prez announced, "That's what the four of us had to deal with last night. While you were having a reasonably decent time at home last night, me, my friends and my younger brothers were in California dealing with that... sixteen fucking times! We were expecting one-

hundred-ninety-six kids. We found two-hundred-eighty-four, in accommodations that were vile, to say the least. Seventy-two of the kids were exactly like what you just saw. We'll never see those kids on this planet again; fourteen of them have already died. With all Starfleet's advanced technology, we can't un-do the damage to those feral kids. Over a hundred and fifty others require up to a week of recovery time." While Prez was speaking, Mrs. Diaz and the others that had left the room returned.

Intently staring down the group of high school students, Prez complained, "All we wanted to do was spend a few extra minutes at school with our teacher and friends. You just had to cause a problem though."

Mike growled, "The four of us had to execute adults that were supposed to be caring for those kids. Not one of you had a friggin' clue. All you cared about was how it effected your family's bank account. People died last night, you selfish shits! Does any one have any more complaints?" Mike was ready to call his dad in to have the entire group of kids arrested and it clearly showed. However, heads shook and no one said a word.

Prez asked, "Before I send you back to school, are there any questions?"

One older boy said, "On TV, you said that Clan Short is here for the community; any one that needs Clan help."

Prez nodded, "True."

The same boy asked, "Gays too?"

Sadly shaking his head, Prez loudly sighed. Derrick calmly answered, "What does it matter who anyone chooses to love and have sex with? They're not raping, murdering or hurting anyone. It doesn't

directly effect you. Gays, lesbians and transgenders are people too. Let it rest, dude. If you want something to bitch about, then bitch about the sadistic assholes that starved and abused those kids in California."

"Or the one's right here, discovered last Friday, who sexually abused and molested kids," Mike growled.

Keith reached for Prez's hand, saying, "We got married Tuesday night."

Prez nodded and proudly smiled, "As Starfleet Officers, we're considered adults. We adopted four great boys, two of which were sexually abused by adults, discovered in last Friday's Clan raids. Richie is five and Dee is ten, but looks more like eight, because of the poor diet he was provided."

Mike took Derrick's hand and confirmed, "We're gay, married and adopted kids too."

Derrick said, "Misses Diaz? Mister Dela Cruz? I can't speak for Mike, Keith or Prez, but after this, I'm in no rush to ever go back to James Campbell High. You can't control this. Our presence there is dangerous for us and for everyone there. I quit."

Mike nodded, "Me too."

Keith nodded at Prez. Prez said, "Us too. God forbid there were a letter bomb attack at school in an attempt to get at us. Cancel tomorrow's concert for the seniors and the Saturday concerts. We won't be there."

Mister Dela Cruz nodded and softly said, "I understand, but I'm very sorry to hear it."

Mike explained, "We put on concerts for our Clan almost every day. If it's a choice between school band or saving one additional life, the life matters more." Keith and Derrick nodded agreement.

Prez said, "If everyone is ready, I'll have you transported back to school. You'll be able to make your next classes."

Mister Dela Cruz asked, "Can you transport us to my office?"

Prez answered, "Sorry, no I can't. I can get you to the main entrance."

Mister Dela Cruz angrily eyed the assembled kids saying, "A week of Principal's detention so we can all discuss this in depth is appropriate."

"And another week's detention with me," Mrs. Diaz added. "I now have to hold auditions to find an entire rhythm section."

The four Core Rimmers said goodbye to Mrs. Diaz and wished things had happened differently.

Mrs. Diaz nodded and smiled, "The band will eventually find musicians like you boys again. It's been a pleasure. I hope we meet again someday." All four boys agreed.

Prez called, "Alden, transport our guests back to James Campbell High, please." A moment later, the Command Center was cleared of all non-Clan persons. Prez said, "Stand down from condition yellow."

Sadly shaking his head, Jimmy smirked, "You scared the piss out of us!" Taking his seat, Jimmy softly grumbled, "Flashing yellow light, locked doors and a room full of people."

Prez shrugged, "I might not be able to change the world, but I can try in my little corner of it."

Keith sighed, "I hope it was worth the effort."

Derrick nodded agreement then added, "At least we won't have to worry about anyone there getting hurt."

Heading for the Command Center door into the dining room, Mike said, "Tengo hambre! Me pregunto qué hay para comer?" (I'm hungry! I wonder what's for lunch?) Stepping into the dining room, Mike shouted, "Oye, los Latin Kings! Lo siento, te perdiste esta mañana. ¿Qué está pasando?" (Hey, Latin Kings! Sorry I missed you this morning. What's happening?)

Several of the Latin Kings kids stood at their tables. Ten-year-old Bennett De Aquila replied, "Tuvimos batidos para el desayuno. Estamos teniendo queso y tocino para el almuerzo." (We had milkshakes for breakfast. We're having bacon cheeseburgers for lunch.)

Fourteen-year-old Dominic Grassus asked, "Cuando estamos recibiendo ropa nueva, Mike?" (When are we getting new clothes, Mike?)

Heading for the chow line, Mike loudly answered, "Más tarde esta tarde. Todo lo que los novatos se trajo a nuestra tienda donde usted puede escoger su propia ropa." (Later this afternoon. All you newbies will be brought to our store where you can pick your own clothes.)

Derrick asked, "Have you met all the Core Rimmers?"

Dominic replied, "Sí, nos encontramos con Drew, Corey, Kaleo, Tory, Juan, Esteban, Sean y Troy. (Yes, we met Drew, Corey, Kaleo,

Tory, John, Stephen, Sean and Troy.)

Prez waved, "Bienvenido a Hawaii! ¿Ustedes dormir bien?" (Welcome to Hawaii! Did you guys sleep alright?)

All the Latin Kings kids nodded and many disjointedly replied, "Si."

Dominic added, "Son habitaciones muy agradables y cómodas camas." (They are very nice rooms and comfortable beds.)

Keith said, "After lunch, we'll all meet in the auditorium. We'll get to know each other and play some music for you."

A lot of kids, newbies and old-timers alike began cheering. The four boys went to the chow line. Once they had their lunch trays, they checked on their kids then went and found a table near the other Core Rimmers. Drew swallowed what he had been chewing then told Prez, "Everybody's here. Including the Latin Kings, we've got seventy-two newbies."

John added, "We told them about the nest and Kaleo showed them the dorms. We might have some of the littlest kids in the nest, but almost everyone was looking forward to choosing dorm rooms."

Stephen nodded and explained, "None of 'em seem too scared. As long as they're close together, they'll be happy."

Sean smiled, "They're happy to be out of the orphanages they were at."

Mike asked, "What've the Latin Kings kids been doin' today?"

Kaleo answered, "When we were showing the other kids around, they were all over; some were playing basketball, some were playing

volleyball, a bunch were at the pool and diving well."

Derrick wondered, "They're mixing in with the rest of the kids?"

Tory nodded, "Oh, yeah. It wasn't like they were keeping themselves separate. Just the usual stuff; everybody sticking in the same age bracket."

Troy grinned, "One of the youngest, Russ Pass, climbed up the ladder for the five-meter board. When he saw how high up he was, he turned around and climbed back down again." All the Core Rimmers began chuckling and laughing.

Keith suspiciously eyed John and wondered, "You've been staying on the ground?"

John was munching on French Fries so he sent, *'So far, so good.'* When he swallowed, he said, "I've already shared languages with the newbies." Turning to Prez, John said, "I need your approval for two new members of my Intel team, bro."

Raising his eyebrows, Prez asked, "Who?" then took a bite out of his cheeseburger.

John grinned, "Cesar and Felipe," and Prez abruptly stopped chewing.

Keith loudly reminded, "They're six!"

John shrugged, "The Terrible Triplets trained them a little bit when we weren't looking."

Keith groaned. Prez turned to Corey and asked, "What would your mom think?"

Corey smiled, "My folks guessed they were telepaths. I think as

long as the circumstances are safe, my mom won't become a Valium junkie." All the Core Rimmers began laughing. Tory almost gagged on his hamburger and Kaleo pounded on his husband's back.

Waiting for a decision, Keith turned to Prez. Swallowing his food, Prez shrugged, "Don't ask me. Drew and Corey are in charge."

"Oh-ho no!" Drew laughed, "You're not really dropping this in my lap?"

"Why not?" Prez grinned. "This is exactly the kind of decision I deal with every day."

Rolling his eyes, Drew smirked, "At least give me a clue what to consider."

Kaleo said, "The limits are already in place. Keep them safe. On base stuff at the FYS building would be kewl. Anything on any of our bases, like Monday night with Bill Devine, would be kewl." Still eating, Prez smiled, nodded and gestured to Kaleo.

Checking with the older team members, Drew confirmed, "Limited duty, safe stuff that won't freak out Corey's mom?" Seeing nodding heads around the tables, Drew turned to John saying, "Get 'em trained, bro."

"Sweet!" John chirped.

Having a revelation, Keith hummed then grinned, "When we get some kind of off-base, division day trip planned, who would suspect two little kids could discern between good guys and bad guys?"

Troy smirked, "Stealth telepaths," causing another round of giggles and laughter.

Turning to Drew, John said, "Mom and dad are doing interviews today. I could get them trained this afternoon? You don't need me at the auditorium or in the store, do you?"

Drew said, "That works, bro. Go for it."

John said, "I'm also considering the Betazoid twins, Inoyra and Relud Glith. They're fifteen, but I haven't talked with them about it yet."

Drew hummed thoughtfully then realized, "We just rescued them Tuesday night. Give them another few days to chill out."

Prez smiled, "That was easy, wasn't it?"

Drew rapidly nodded then became very serious and told Prez, "There's one other thing to report. One of the girls got sick this morning. She's pregnant."

Prez asked, "Which girl?"

"One of the street kids picked up Tuesday night. Susana Gault." Drew answered.

Keith wondered, "What's the scoop?"

Drew nodded and frowned, "It's probably from one of her johns. She don't want it. Doc Howard says she wants an abortion."

Everybody was obviously saddened at the news. Prez sighed, "Even though we're capable of handling an infant, she's made her choice?" Drew nodded. Prez huffed, "Whatever and whenever Susana and Doc Howard want to."

Mike excitedly asked, "You're not going to even talk to her

about it?"

"No," Prez firmly said. "It's not my choice or ours. Susana knows where she is. I can understand her reasons easy enough." Glancing around the table, Prez asked, "Would you want a reminder of meaningless sex?" Seeing only slowly shaking heads, Prez said, "Then let it be. Have Doc Wiener ready for whatever Susana might need." Drew nodded then he and Corey went to the doctors' table.

Finished eating, Derrick stood and went over to where Reyes and their boys were sitting. Noticing Dillon's burger was only half eaten and most of his French Fries were untouched, Derrick worried, "Aren't ya feeling good, Dillon?"

Stuffed from enormous amounts of food over the prior days, Dillon huffed, "I'm fine, daddy."

Jonah smiled, "We just had milkshakes about two hours ago."

Reyes grinned and added, "We were part of the newbie welcoming committee. We had big breakfasts, milkshakes and lunch in four hours, dad."

Derrick chuckled then asked Reyes, "How're ya feelin'?"

Reyes nodded and smiled, "Awesome!" then he stood, turned around and pulled up his shirt. All the marks and welts from his orphanage abuses had completely vanished. Lowering his shirt, Reyes faced his dad and blushed, "I even can sit comfortably for extended periods without squirming around."

Thankful that Reyes' android recovery systems were functioning beautifully, Derrick cracked up at Reyes expression, but still remembered the sorry state of Reyes butt Friday night. Calming

himself, Derrick asked, "Feel like jammin', Reyes?"

Enthusiastically, Reyes answered, "With you guys? Always!" and then hugged his dad.

Derrick kissed his son's forehead then said, "We're gonna play Latin rock, of some sort, probably Santana."

Reyes looked up and grinned, "Head, Hands and Feet?"

"Ooo!" Derrick half moaned and half laughed. "I like that idea." They shared the plan with Mike, Prez, Keith and Troy. During that little conversation, a few other tunes were mentioned, prompting another call to Alden and more changes to the stage setup. Primarily, a set of Roland electronic drums, on risers equivalent to Derrick's, were added for Reyes. An electric guitar, effects unit and amplifier were set up for Keith, should the need arise. Keith's guitar skills were nothing like his piano skills, yet he could manage a strong rhythm guitar part easily. Another set of three electronic keyboards were add to stage right, so Troy or Mike could get to them without racing across the stage.

Corey and Drew finished eating then took their trays of plates, glasses and silverware to the kitchen dishwasher. Returning to the dining room, they helped Geoff and Lenny with their trays. They hadn't realized it, but they were being watched by the Anaheim kids. And the San Diego kids were watching the Anaheim group and the Latin King group. The latter group had followed Mike and Derrick from LA and were still doing it, but to a lesser extent than the two former groups. In a new place with new people, all the newbie kids were looking for examples of how to act. The Ewa Beach base wasn't anything like the homes they had been at.

Sean noticed what was going on, because he had done it himself

less than a week earlier. He told Troy, "It's newbie syndrome, round two. Follow the leader of choice."

Troy asked, "Is that what you did the first few days?"

Sean nodded, "We spent most of Saturday at Anahola Bay, pretty much doing whatever we wanted. Prez, Keith, and most of the Core Rimmers were busy with every one of us and at least a hundred Clan guests. When I wasn't surfin' with Kaleo and other teenagers, I did what they did; spent time with our little kids and tried to get to know some of the visitors."

Prez and Keith overheard Sean. Keith asked, "What made the biggest impact, Sean?"

Sean blushed, "I'm not sure I understand."

Prez reminded, "Sunday night, you were among the first to move to the dorm. How did you get to that point?"

Turning redder, Sean smiled, "Well, Kaleo and Tory wanted to move, but wouldn't if they were alone. If I had to say which things mattered most, it was the stuff said Saturday night, before and after the concert, and that we had a little sing-a-long in the dorm common room. You guys just went in and made use of what was in there. That made it home."

Tilting his head, Keith repeated, "Common room?" and then asked, "It's not a rec room to you?"

Sean said, "It's more than a rec room, but not like the indoor rec center, or the rec room here. Now it's more a common place for both halls to gather. Yeah, we watch TV and hang out there, but we talk there too." Seeing Keith and Prez share an uncertain glance, Sean explained, "Monday night, when more kids moved into the dorm, we

were watchin' a movie in there. When the movie ended and we were searchin' for something to watch next, some of the new kids wanted to watch American football. So we turned it on. Other guys saw it and joined us in there. I wasn't too interested so I left with Kaleo and Tory. I went to my room and played video games for a while. Later, when the football game was over, I wound up back in there with Horacio, Kaleo and Tory. Horacio was basically in there for several hours. It's a common room, whatever the most want to do is what goes on in there. This morning, Troy and I found Makan Kama in there, at the easel, painting with water colors." Eight-year-old Makan was one of the original eighty-seven. At last, he felt comfortable enough to choose to paint rather than play at the playground or pool.

Absorbing and considering what Sean had said, Prez asked, "So I need to have a chat with the newbies?"

"Oh, hell yeah," Sean smiled, and then stipulated, "Derrick, Mike, Corey and Drew need to say something too. Make it so it's just not the newbies though. Stuff that needs to be directed more towards them can be said another time."

Troy suggested, "Maybe down in the store, where it's only us and them."

Prez and Keith nodded. Keith asked, "Is there something else you guys would like in the common rooms?"

Sean shrugged, "I don't think so, it's a kewl place to just be together as it is. We'll see how it goes, but I don't see a need for video games or anything like we have in the rec room here. When Troy and I were there yesterday morning, some kids were watching a movie in there. The sound was turned way up and they were having fun."

Prez glanced around and saw that most kids were finished eating

or were finishing up. Standing, he tapped his sub-vocal and asked Alden to be connected to the PA systems. "Attention all Rimmers," Prez announced, "It's meeting time. If you're not otherwise occupied, please join us in the auditorium. After we chat, it's jam time."

Drew and Corey hurried to the auditorium to get everything powered up. Twenty-four Anaheim kids followed them and waited in the lobby while Corey and Drew flipped circuit breaker switches. Several of the older boys closely watched what Drew and Corey were doing, including Jake and Terry. Jake softly wondered what Drew was doing. Drew answered, "Powering the place up. All the basic stuff is at the top of both panels; lights and stage power outlets. As you move down the panels, there's special stuff like the concession stand equipment, the PA system for the band or the movie screen, film projector and the associated sound systems. We keep the refrigerators on so we always have ice and cold drinks. Other than those few things, almost everything else is turned off when we leave."

Corey noticed Jake's confused expression and smiled, "It's not that hard, dude. If ya want, you guys can come upstairs with us? Once you see what's what, it'll all make sense." Jake and Terry checked with each other then nodded.

Carefully carrying his tray, Richie came towards the table Keith was standing at, asking, "What's wrong, Daddy? Why're we havin' a meeting?"

Keith took Richie's tray. While stacking stuff on his own tray so he could carry everything for his son, Keith explained, "We just need to make all our new kids feel comfortable, Richie. Until now, we've brought home ten or twenty new kids at a time. Today, we added almost as many as we started with last Saturday."

"Oh!" Richie giggled. "They're nice, but so quiet."

Keith grinned, "A few days ago, you were kind of quiet too."

Richie blushed and smiled, "It's home now."

Suddenly, Prez snapped his neck turning to Richie. He softly mumbled, "Out of the mouths of babes."

Richie's face grew stern and he complained, "Poppa, I ain't a baby." Carrying their trays to the dishwasher, Sean and Troy heard Richie and began giggling.

"Definitely not," Prez smiled. "You just gave me a great idea."

Richie's mouth dropped open then he squealed, "I did?" Hurrying after Prez, Richie repeatedly asked what he had said. Prez cracked up and Richie caught the laughter infection, but still wondered what idea he had given his Poppa.

Standing at the dishwasher station was Horacio, busily pushing large plastic racks of plates into the machine. Prez smiled, "Awesome, bro."

Horacio nodded, "I'll be in the auditorium when I'm done here, Prez."

Putting his tray down, Prez explained, "This is mostly for the newbies, so they feel included." He then swept up Richie and planted a kiss on his son's cheek. "Three little words," Prez grinned, and then slowly repeated, "It's home now."

"Well, it is!" Richie giggled.

All the Core Rimmers and all the rescued kids gathered in the auditorium. The only adults in the auditorium were Kathleen Marr

and some unfamiliar adult faces of recently hired staff. The Rimmers assumed the new adults were those of off-shift housekeepers, chefs or other new employees. John, Stephen, Cesar, Felipe and Horacio seemed to be the only one's missing. The Core team went up on stage then sat at the edge. Once the chatter dwindled, Prez lifted the microphone then asked, "How is everybody?"

A lot of positive chatter erupted, but Relud Glith loudly asked, "Shouldn't we be asking how you guys are doing?"

Roy Angulo added, "Today's news was pretty intense, Prez."

Prez nodded, "It was intense," and the auditorium became extremely quiet. Prez sighed, "Suffice to say, we found things worse than we expected. The results of those raids are lives saved. Seventy-two of those lives are with us today. Within the next few days, we'll have some more brothers and sisters joining us. By next weekend, we'll have most of the California kids here with us. We're going to make this a home that we can all feel safe at and be proud of. That's what it's all about; home, safety, family, brothers and sisters, everybody helping each other in little ways that add up. Today, Corey and Drew have been in charge, helping me and the rest of the core team unwind. Horacio's in the kitchen helping out too. Has anyone else signed up for some of the miscellaneous odd jobs?"

Lance Elling shouted, "I'll be relieving Horacio at two, Prez."

Cody Padro yelled, "I've got the four to six shift."

Roy added, "I've got the job from six til eight."

Matthew Juckett said, "I'll be mopping the kitchen floors after eight."

Prez cheered, "Guys, that is *awesome*! And the best part is,

you'll get paid for helping each and every one of us out. Remember, there's a bunch of other stuff you guys can do too. Even you little tikes can make extra money by picking up litter around the base. I just want to remind you all that our employees are the best. We don't hire people that hurt kids, so there's no reason to be scared of any of the adults. Do you guys know how we're so sure the adults are kewl?"

Since no one else was saying it, Jonah stood and said, "John's an empath and telepath."

"Amongst other things," Keith softly muttered. Some of the kids in the front row heard though and began giggling.

In his mind, Keith heard his youngest brother, warning, *'That's one you'll get away with and not get dunked.'*

Jonah sat back down and Prez said, "That's correct. We have a bunch of telepaths in the Clan and they help us make sure only the very best people are hired. And guess what?"

Many kids around the auditorium wondered, "What?"

Prez said, "If any adult ever hurts you in any way, all you have to do is tell me or any of the Core Rimmers. Just like those adults in California we took care of last night, we'll take care of adults here that hurt our kids." Looking to his left, Prez asked, "Right guys?"

Keith took the microphone and said, "Quickly, in a minute."

Mike took it from Keith and assured, "They'll lose their job here. My dad is Clan Liaison to Honolulu Police."

Derrick took it from Mike and said, "Then they'll be tossed in jail for a very long time."

Drew took the microphone next, saying, "Ask the guys and girls from Anaheim. We sent the adults there to prison."

Corey took the microphone next and said, "They're lucky that's all they got."

Kaleo took the mic and admitted, "Tory and me were at one of the worst places in California. We beat the crap out of those two then sent them packin'."

Tory passed the mic to Sean, who said, "Kaleo, Tory and me are orphans too. We had it bad, but the kids in California actually had it worse."

Troy took the mic and explained, "Sean's my boyfriend now. I wanted to be part of this team because I don't think any kid should ever have to go through bad stuff. We're here to protect all of you and make your lives better."

Drew asked for the mic back and instructed, "Look around at people near you. You never know, that person sitting near you now might be your best friend tomorrow."

Prouder than ever of what the team had contributed, Prez asked for the microphone back. He watched as kids looked around and behind at other kids. He then said, "Your best friend might be one of those that stands out. Kaleo knew Tory stood out and here he is now. I knew Sean stood out and Sean knew that Troy stood out. Now they're up here on stage, ready, willing and very able to help any of you."

"Just because you were an orphan yesterday doesn't mean you're less capable of accomplishing anything you want. You only have to want it and put forth a little effort. That goes for you little tikes too. Cesar and Felipe are two six-year-old orphaned boys. They're with John right now, learning how to be part of John's Intel team. Little

does not mean less important, it only means it'll take time for you to get big. If you stand out, one of us will see it."

When Prez finished, Derrick took the microphone and said, "Our Clan started with eighty-seven rescued kids only six days ago. Now we're up over two hundred. Our five bases can handle two thousand easily, without adding any more buildings. Eventually, we're going to need leaders at the dorms, someone you could go to when there's a problem or something special that you need. Those would be the people that would get you to a doctor if your sick. They would be the ones that come to us so that you can get what you need. Right now, we're a close nit family and things are pretty easy. As we grow, we'll need those stand outs so that everyone still has that safe, happy, home feeling."

Derrick handed the microphone back to Prez. "This is our home. Home is a place of safety; a place where you *want* to be, but not because you *have* to be there, it's a feeling deep inside. While we were out last night, I couldn't wait to come back here, to my home, where my friends and family are. To all you newbies from Anaheim, Los Angeles and San Diego... welcome home."

The auditorium erupted in applause, cheers and whistles from two hundred and thirty kids. Prez pointed at Richie and mouthed, "Your idea." Richie giggled while Dillon proudly patted his friend on the back. Drew and Corey hopped off the stage then started up the aisle. They gathered Geoff, Lenny, Jake and Terry, and then Alden transported the six of them to the PA room. The remaining Core Rimmers stood. Troy kissed Sean, and then Sean, Kaleo and Tory walked down the steps, off the stage to join the audience.

At the FYS building, John caught his mom at her desk between interviews. "Did you know that Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick quit the jazz band?" Jen's mouth hung open in surprise for a moment. Before

she could say anything, John sent, *'They were confronted at school. It wasn't terrible, but their security had to protect them. Prez got mad and transported all the kids, a teacher and the Vice-Principal here. He showed them how bad things really were last night. Because of that, they decided it would be safer for everybody if they just quit and went to school here on base.'*

"I've changed my mind, mom," John said. "It wouldn't be good for me to go to my old school either. Stephen, Frankie and Lindsay will be here so, could you make a call and get my school records?"

Jennifer nodded and asked, "How're you and the core team doing?"

John smiled, "I'm good and so is Stephen. Prez and the rest of the team are about to finish their healing tasks now, in the auditorium." John giggled, "Ideas were implanted for each of us; a way to blow off steam. We're fine, mom. Don't worry so much."

Jen smirked, "I can't help worrying." John hugged his mother and pushed warm, loving emotions to her. Squeezing John tight, she purred, "Remarkable." She had always taken great pleasure giving and getting hugs from her boys, but being the youngest, she thought John's hugs were something special. Now she knew it wasn't her own perception; it was John.

John laughed, "I wish I could take all the credit. It's not just me though, mom. A big part of it is from all the kids in this Clan. Imagine being a teen prostitute and not having to do that anymore; imagine living in a slum, and wondering if you might get shot and die every day, then not having to worry anymore. The kids from Anaheim and San Diego got to go to school, but didn't have any other activities or life at all; just school and then back to the orphanage. The kids here are relieved and happy. Some are making friends, others are showing

interest in stuff they were never allowed to do before."

Just before lunch, Rob Gibbons had received six Clan Short Security emblems to have stitched on his police uniform shirts. He had Alden place the first emblem on the shirt he was wearing, and later that day he would get the other emblems stitched onto his other uniform shirts.

Anna Seibert went to the auditorium to find Jerry Burk. Outside the auditorium, in the lobby, Anna had a brief, private conversation with Jerry regarding his circumstances. Learning of the foster mother's attempt to harm the boy with a knife, Anna began planning her intervention in this case. She asked Jerry, "If we could guarantee your safety, would you want to go back there again?"

Running his fingers through his brown hair, Jerry sighed, "Ya know what, Aunt Anna? When I got here, I thought, yeah, maybe, if she was gone and I was safe, I might like to be with my foster dad again. Now though, I've got so many friends here, I'd be sad if I could only visit occasionally. As much as I like my foster dad, I'd rather be here. Could he visit me here once in a while?"

Anna smiled, "If you would like, certainly, we could arrange that for you."

Jerry nodded, "Please, ask if he'd want to visit me. Somehow, I'm not sure if he'll want to or not."

Nodding understandingly, Anna offered, "If he does want to visit, I'll call you to the FYS building." She then instructed, "Go join the Clan now, Jerry. We'll talk again later today."

Platinum Habits gathered center stage and began listing songs they wanted to play. After about two minutes, Derrick went to the edge of the stage and shouted, "Reyes, we need you." Reyes stood,

got pats on the back from his brothers then shuffled down the aisle and hurried up to the stage. Waiting for his eldest son, Derrick loudly asked if Reyes knew the intended first song. Running up the stage steps, Reyes said that he hadn't ever heard of it. While gear was being powered up, Derrick began clapping his hands to a tempo and singing what he needed Reyes to play. Keith and Troy began working out the keyboard parts while Mike and Prez figured out their parts. The first tune on the list was a song that the original four had messed around with before, but no matter how hard they tried, it would always be missing important parts. With Reyes and Troy, they could finally play it right. Drew, Corey, their boys and the two newbies, Jake and Terry, arrived at the PA room. Drew pulled the desk mic over and, through the stage monitors, told the band that he and Corey were ready. The band members signaled with thumbs-up gestures that they were ready too. Corey lowered the audience lights and turned up the blue and green stage lights.

In the audience, the original eighty-seven had tried to prepare the newbies for what was about to come. Few of those kids had ever been to or seen a concert of any sort though. Spotlights turned on and Mike began chopping away at heavily distorted guitar chords. Reyes played two explosive timpani beats and the rest of the band joined in for another measure. Another spotlight shone upon Derrick and he sang;

"Home by the sea. Home by the sea. Home by the sea.
Home by the sea.

Creeping up the blind side, shinning up the wall,
stealing through the dark of night.

Climbing through a window, stepping to the floor,

checking to the left and the right.

Picking up the pieces, putting them away,
something doesn't feel quite right!

Help me someone, let me out of here!

Then out of the dark was suddenly heard,
welcome to the Home by the Sea.

Coming out the woodwork, thru the open door,
pushing from above and below.

Shadows with no substance, in the shape of men,
round and down and sideways they go.

Adrift without direction, eyes that hold despair,
then as one they sigh and they moan!

Help us someone, let us out of here!

We're living here so long undisturbed,
dreaming of the time we were free.

So many years ago, before the time when we first heard,

welcome to the Home by the Sea.

Sit down. Sit down. Sit down, Sit down. Sit down,
as we relive our lives in what we tell you."

All the spotlights went out. Awash in blue and green lights, the band played the middle instrumental break. Around the audience, jaws hung open. The stage presence of the band members seemed to have changed as drastically as the type of song; from love to hate and from contentment to anger. Derrick seemed to be singing of the rescues the prior night, from their own perspectives and those of the rescued kids. Snapping the kids out of their thoughts, suddenly Reyes played those two thundering timpani beats again. Spotlights blazed and Derrick sang;

"Images of sorrow, pictures of delight,

things that go to make up a life.

Endless days of summer, longer nights of gloom,

waiting for the morning light.

Scenes of unimportance, photos in a frame,

things that go to make up a life.

Help us someone, let us out of here!

Cos living here so long undisturbed,
dreaming of the time we were free,
So many years ago, before the time when we first heard,
welcome to the Home by the Sea.

Sit down. Sit down! Sit down, Sit down, Sit down. Sit
down,

as we relive our lives in what we tell you,
let us relive our lives in what we tell you.

Sit down, Sit down, Sit down!

cos you won't get away, no with us you will stay for the
rest of your days

Sit down! As we relive our lives in what we tell you.

Let us relive our lives in what we tell you."

The spotlights went out and the band played the ending instrumental section bathed in blue and green lights.

Reyes walked off and waited at stage left. Troy moved from keyboards over to the electric guitar. A low pitched rumble filled the auditorium. Within seconds, the original eighty-seven recognized [Lunatic Fringe](#) and became excited, sharing stories about the luau concert with the newbies. With Troy's additional electric guitar part, the song sounded even better than it had the prior Friday evening.

Two hundred and thirty kids plus the few adult housekeepers, landscapers and parents that had entered the auditorium clapped furiously at the end of the song.

Putting down his Stratocaster, Troy picked up an acoustic guitar. Then the band played [Too Many People](#), with Troy providing lead vocals. Reyes came back on stage to play tambourine and maracas. Although the song was very much jammed, with only Troy and Prez having previously practiced the song, it came across beautifully, making it obvious that the band was having a good time. Screaming, 'too many hungry people losing weight', Troy seemed possessed, but then he softly sang the bridge. Mike played a solo different from the record, but kept the same attitudes, moving from enraged to gentle and melodic.

[Dirty Laundry](#) was next on the bands' off-the-cuff play list. Reyes sat behind the electronic drums. Watching his dad closely, Reyes and Derrick counted off and they started the tune with Keith's syncopated B-3 organ part. Switching between verses, Keith and Derrick handled the lead vocals. The first time through the chorus, the band members prompted the kids to sing, "Kick 'em when they're up, kick 'em when they're down." The second time through the chorus, Derrick and Reyes held the beat while the rest of the band were only singing. The girls were prompted to sing, "kick 'em while they're up," and then the boys were prompted to sing "kick 'em when they're down." At the end of the song, the girls and boys continued singing the parts they were taught until Prez told them "one last time", and then the band ended the song to more applause and screaming. Reyes took a break and stepped off to the side of stage left.

For a brief change of pace, Platinum Habits then played [I'd Love To Change The World](#). Since it was one of the songs mentioned by the kids Saturday morning, before they officially became a Clan, the band

thought it appropriate. The original eighty-seven appreciated it. Returning to heavier rock, they pressed forward with [Rescue Me](#), also from Friday night's luau. Within seconds of the start of the song, Kaleo clapped and loudly cheered, "YEAH! RESCUE ME!" Over the music, even Drew and Corey heard Kaleo up in the PA room, so Drew turned up the volume a little bit. Kaleo even got some of the kids around him to stand up, bopping and singing along with the choruses. Seeing Reyes return to the electronic drums, the volume got turned up again before the band played [One Thing Leads To Another](#). Reyes stepped back off stage. Drew inched the volume a little higher for [Wildest Dreams](#), with Prez singing powerful lead vocals. With some knowledge of the orphanage operations, to many of the kids, the song was so much more compelling than it had been, telling a tale of battles forcing changes in attitudes across nations. Again, a lot of kids sang along with the choruses. Applause broke loose for their leader and the performance.

Derrick called Reyes back on stage then they began playing [Soul Sacrifice/ Head, Hands and Feet](#), extending the drums and percussion introduction a few minutes. Mike and Troy tossed tambourines across the stage, catching and shaking them on the beat before tossing them again. Shaking maracas, Prez and Keith got the audience up on their feet, clapping their hands, stomping their feet and keeping tempo. The four of them put down the percussion instruments then went to their primary instruments and joined the tune in progress. Mike's lead guitar part blew everyone away because he was hardly ever watching what he was playing. His eyes opened only when he walked about near the edge of the stage. Then, Derrick and Reyes took over and played another extended percussion solo, causing the Latin Kings kids to dance, scream and shout. In a circular fashion, Keith, Mike, Prez and Troy tossed the maracas and tambourines to each other. By the time the rest of the band rejoined, kids were hoarse. The song lasted an incredible twenty minutes, six

minutes longer than the original recording, due to the drum and percussion solos. At the end of the song, Randy, Jonah and Dillon jumped up and hollered "YEAH, REYES!"

Derrick tossed a tambourine to Reyes. The band began playing [Urgent](#) with Keith playing keyboards and providing lead vocals. Shaking the tambourine, Reyes moved towards the front of the stage. With Prez and Mike, Reyes helped get the audience revved up. Troy picked up his tenor saxophone and played the solos. Reyes left the stage again. For the next tune, Troy moved to acoustic guitar and handled the lead vocals for [Tell Me What You Want](#), with Keith singing backup vocals. Many of the older ex-prostitutes wondered how the two dudes could sing that high without hurting themselves. One boy suggested that their cock-rings were just a tad too tight and a group of them cracked up laughing. Nearby teen girls heard the remark and the laughing boys. They smirked and sadly shook their heads, returning to their previous argument over which of the six band members was the cutest.

Troy switched from acoustic guitar to electric guitar. For the first time the kids had seen, Keith picked up an electric guitar. Then the band played [Revolution](#), with Mike handling lead vocals. During [You've Got Another Thing Coming](#), all five boys sang lead vocals during all verses and choruses. Then Troy melodically wooed into his microphone moments before the band kicked in for [Heaven's On Fire](#). Troy sang; "I look at you and my blood boils hot, I feel my temperature rise. I want it all, give me what you got, there's hunger in your eyes. I'm getting closer, baby hear me breathe, you know the way to give me what I need, just let me love you and you'll never leave."

Out in the audience, Sean rolled his eyes, grinned evilly and pushed his erection into a more comfortable position. All five boys

sang the chorus. "Feel my heat takin' you higher, burn with me, Heaven's on fire, Paint the sky with desire, angel fly, Heaven's on fire." Making Sean's predicament worse, Troy began pointing at him or making hand gestures whenever his hands weren't busy on the guitar. By the end of the song, Sean was sweating and squirming uncomfortably in his seat.

Switching things up and changing instruments again, the band then played [Can't Find My Way Home](#), with Keith singing lead vocals and handling the keyboards part. [Wake Me When September Ends](#) was the next tune played, with Mike singing lead vocals. After that song the band gathered around the drums, away from the microphones. Troy shared a few private words with his band-mates that set them off in hysterical laughter. Troy put his guitar down then hurried off stage, still giggling and flushed bright red.

Prez stepped up to a microphone and chuckled, "Troy's got an issue to deal with, but he'll be right back." With a deliberate stride, Troy went out to the audience and pulled Sean out of the auditorium, causing a stir of giggles from the kids as they ran out the lobby doors.

Reyes moved behind the electronic drum kit again. Coming out from behind his drums, Derrick went to forward center stage. The stage lights changed to blues and reds. Beginning the drum part of [In The Air Tonight](#), Reyes was the only band member that had a spot light on him. The moment Derrick began singing, another spotlight was added on Derrick. At the second verse, Corey flipped the switch for fog to begin pumping out onto the stage. Prez and Mike sang backup for Derrick during the first chorus, while Derrick strolled around stage. Drew began adding flangers and digital echos to the vocals. At the start of the third verse, Derrick began moving backward, away from the edge of the stage. By the end of the verse, Derrick was sitting behind his drum kit. He and Reyes played the

thunderous segue into the second chorus. Minutes later, the song ended with the same thunderous drum beats. All the kids stood and roared their approval. Sweating from the stage lights, Reyes took another break off to the side of the stage.

The remaining four members of Platinum Habits played a song they had occasionally tried before; Asia's [Time Again](#). Now that Derrick had gongs and a bigger drum kit, they could manage it. The song opened with Keith, Mike and Prez playing cadence and Derrick joined. Prez sang lead vocals. Keith, Derrick and Mike all sang backup vocals. Playing the intricate lead guitar part on his Randy Rhoads Les Paul, Mike actually watched his hands on the guitar neck. In awe, Reyes watched Derrick from backstage.

The next song began with a single distorted guitar chord and synthesizer notes that seemed to revolve around the auditorium. Keith set up his synthesizers to play electronic arpeggios then stepped away from the rack, strutting towards center stage, leaving the electronic wash of sound going. For the song, Drew activated the 5.1 system on the keyboard tracks then ran his finger over the electronic pads that caused the sound to travel around the venue. The final song of the day's jam session was [Won't Get Fooled Again](#). Corey had bright white lights flashing into the audience and lasers intermittently hitting the spinning mirrored ball high above the audience. After about a minute of this guitar feedback and keyboard wash, Mike and Prez strummed another set of thunderous guitar and bass chords. Derrick played in a way Reyes hadn't seen since the seventies, when he saw The Who on television. All four band members performed in ways not seen since the luau, strutting around the stage and having fun engaging their audience.

Tossing his wireless microphone up in the air and catching it, Keith handled lead vocals and Derrick backed him up. Prez had a

blast playing the bass guitar part for the song. Having no backup vocals to worry about, Prez and Mike stayed near the edge of the stage, playing directly to the kids. It was an angry song, encouraging a youth revolution, the teens and many of the tweens realized. Suddenly they were back to the spacey middle section with Keith simply hitting notes that took the repeating keyboard arpeggios into different directions, all the while Drew swirled the sound around the auditorium. Ending the song, bass, drums and guitar played the final chord and Keith stopped the keyboards. Corey flipped the off switch on all the stage lights, leaving them in the dark for several seconds. The kids stood up, clapping and cheering. A few seconds later, Corey turned on only the spotlights at center stage. Sweating and much happier, the band gathered center stage and bowed then yelled, "That's rock and roll!" Platinum Habits had played for more than an hour and a half.

While the audience was still clapping, Corey turned up the audience lights. Prez said, "One other thing for you newbies; if you feel like having a family will make you happy, then that's what you need to do. The way the Clan works, kids choose the adults and then the adults accept the kids. It has to be a two way street. Richie, Dee, Frankie, Gage and Sammy, come on down and stand in front of the stage."

As the kids made their way down the aisle, Mike called, "Jonah, Dillon, Randy and Reyes, you guys come down too." Reyes went down the steps to stand with his brothers and friends.

Keith reminded, "Frankie is John's and Stephen's son. Drew and Corey have kids too, Geoff and Lenny. They're up in the PA booth with their dads right now."

Derrick grinned, "The line-up of boys in front of the stage have stolen our hearts. They're our sons and we're really very proud of

them."

Prez added, "Ask the old timers, we're in here almost every day. We're done for now though, so all you newbies, please stick around so we can get you clothes and miscellaneous accessories. The rest of you are free to go have a good time. We'll catch up with y'all before dinner time." Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike walked down the stairs to the auditorium floor. The majority of the kids started to shuffle out of their seats.

Tapping his comm-badge, Drew told Keith, "Hey bro, two of the Anaheim dudes are with us. We'll get the place powered down then catch up with you in the store."

Standing before the rescued kids, Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo and Tory couldn't help smiling. Prez tapped his comm-badge and called, "Troy, I hate to interrupt you, but we're almost ready to take the new kids to the store."

Giggling such that his blush could actually be heard over the comm-badge, Troy replied, "Let us jump in the shower real quick. We'll meet you there in five minutes, Prez. Troy out."

One of the girls raised her hand. Keith smiled, "This is your home, Lillian. You don't need to raise your hand. Just call out one of our names, okay?"

Eight-year-old Lillian Fitts, rescued from San Diego, nodded and meekly wondered, "Why are you guys smiling at us?"

Keith chuckled, "Because we're so glad to see you here."

Mike said, "So all you guys understand, the rescues last night were much more difficult than we expected. All you guys being here

makes the effort worthwhile."

Derrick added, "During the next few days, more California kids will be showing up. They need more medical attention first though."

Prez asked, "What do you think of your new home?"

The first to answer was Corbin Sancho, a fifteen-year-old from Los Angeles. "It's kewl. We got pools, basketball courts and so much stuff, I don't think we'll ever get bored around here."

Fourteen-year-old Mike Busse, rescued from San Diego, enthusiastically said, "The dorms are real nice. Two per room, huh?"

Kaleo answered, "Whatever you feel comfortable with. We have some younger kids that chose to have four to a room, two to a bed or sharing bunk beds."

Going over to his newly adopted son, seven-year-old Randy Beale, Mike smiled, "Just because you move into the dorm doesn't mean you'll stay there. We picked up Randy and a few others Sunday night." Derrick and Mike prompted Randy to tell the newbies where he's slept.

Blushing and nodding, Randy giggled, "I slept in the nest that night and Monday. Tuesday night I moved into the dorm. Yesterday, I was adopted and back in the nest, with my bros and dads."

Keith asked, "Did Drew show you our basement?" Heads shook, so Keith said, "We know you guys must feel a little weird being in a new place with so many new people. Any of you that want to can sleep in our basement nest. Our friends in Wales call it a puppy pile, where all you guys can feel comfy for as long as you need."

"It's a great way to get to know people," Tory interjected. "Once

you've got friends, everything gets easier."

Prez said, "Our basement is fully furnished. It's not like most basements; it's got paneled walls and carpeting. It's warm and very comfortable. The choice is yours. If you'd like to join the nest tonight, then tell one of us. If you'd rather choose a dorm room and bunk with your friends, that's kewl too."

"We had over a hundred down there Saturday night," Mike said. "We can easily fit all of you."

Thirteen-year-old Calvin Heres' voice cracked mid-question. "Girls and boys together?" The Rimmers nodded and Calvin grunted, "Nuh-uh, no way." Only a few of the older boys and girls softly sniggered.

Derrick chuckled, "That's kewl, bro. The dorms are co-ed, boys downstairs and girls upstairs."

The stage and audience lights began turning off. Prez quickly said, "Let's finish this chat in our store. Everyone stand-up and get ready for transport." Once all the kids were standing, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, saying, "Alden, get a fix on the kids and transport us all to the front of our basement store."

Alden giggled, "As you wish, Prez." As soon as he had finished speaking, everyone was standing in the basement store. Some of the kids looked around uncertainly, but Bonnie and Janice, two of the youngest girls from Anaheim, wobbled unsteadily.

Prez and Keith hurried to them, making sure they were alright before letting go of them.

Just as Bonnie and Janice felt stable again, Drew, Corey, Jake, Terry, Geoff and Lenny transported into the store. Derrick explained,

"This is just like any other department store. Everything is free, so don't be shy. Anyone that needs help choosing sizes, let one of us know. You'll all need at least a week's worth of clothes."

Drew quickly emphasized, "A week's worth is *not* what those butt-heads at the orphanage gave you guys. There are seven days in a week, so a minimum of seven pair of boxers or underpants and seven pair of socks. A change of clothes for every day is normal."

Corey nodded, "Everybody gets a pair of sandals *and* a pair of sneakers. Basically, concentrate on everyday clothes. Here in the ROH, that means T-shirts, shorts, boardies, swimwear, light blouses for you girls. Get jeans, sport shirts and jackets or ponchos too, cos the rainy season here can start in late November."

Prez nodded and instructed, "Big guys and gals, help the little tikes. And we'll help whoever needs it, whenever needed."

Richie gushed, "We can help too!" then took a shocked Marvin Perkins by the hand and pulled him to the shopping carts.

Prez cracked up laughing at his boy. Keith smiled, "Everybody follow Richie." The Rimmers' sons split and found small groups in their own age bracket to help. Soon, all seventy-two newbies had shopping carts. Troy and Sean transported into the store while kids were grabbing carts and separating down the girls' side or boys' side of the store. For the next two and half hours, the kids were helped through the store. The Rimmers' adopted kids did a lot of the work with the other boys. Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo and Tory looked after the boys to make sure correct sizes were chosen. Drew, Corey, Troy, Sean and Reyes looked after the girls for the same purpose. Kids were measured for correct sizes and many went into the dressing rooms to try on their new clothes.

Drew stepped aside briefly, only to chat with Doc Howard. He informed the doctor that some of the girls hadn't been taught the first thing about biology or their bodies. Doc Howard assured him that the girls were now aware, but she could join them if Drew felt it was necessary. Before the girls got to their toiletries department, Drew had Doc Howard transport to the store, saving him from repetitive, infinite embarrassment.

Kaleo and Tory had similar discussions with the boys, informing them that condoms and lube were available for anyone that wanted them. Naturally, many of the older orphanage boys were very embarrassed. Prez, Keith, Kaleo and Tory assured them that there was nothing to be embarrassed or shy about. A detailed and humorous discussion about dicks, masturbation, puberty and sex relaxed many of the teen and tween boys. The Rimmers also reminded them that they would be showering at the dormitory mob showers with other naked boys, and on occasion, even the Core Rimmers and their sons used the mob showers. The boys were told that nudity in the R.O.H was common and everyone could feel comfortable at the pools with or without their boardies on.

* * * * *

While the Core Rimmers and their sons were busy in the store helping the newbies, the CIC kitchen phone rang. Lifting the handset in the kitchen, Charles Plungis answered; "Hello?"

The male voice on the other end of the line said, "Hi Charles. How's your new job with the Clan?"

Recognizing the voice of his old boss, Roy Combs, the assistant manager of the Halekulani Resort, Charles smiled, "It's been very pleasant, Roy. You wouldn't believe how nice it is to work for these people. The best part is the kids actually appreciate every morsel of

food prepared. There hasn't been a single complaint from anyone all week. The kids had a leftovers food fight after dinner last night, but even that was understandable, given the histories of some of these kids."

Roy smirked, "I can understand, better than you might imagine."

Charles asked, "Are they still trying to cut corners there?"

"Of course," Roy sighed, and then seriously said, "The reason for my call is actually two-fold, Charles."

"I'll try to help any way I can," Charles responded.

Roy explained, "Last Friday, a boy arrived with his manager. The boy has been here all week, but we haven't seen or heard from the manager since Friday. Of course, we needed to have him sign the credit card approvals for their continued stay with us..."

"But no man, no signature, and the boy has been left there without supervision all this time," Charles finished.

"Exactly," Roy grumbled, "To make matters worse, the boy was orphaned and had been living in Erie, Pennsylvania, with his aunt prior to the trip here. We've been unable to reach the aunt for three days. Today, the number is disconnected."

Concluding where this topic was heading, Charles confirmed, "So we have an abandoned boy with no other living adult relatives to care for him?"

"Yes," Roy answered.

Charles sighed then said, "I'll contact someone from the Pacific Rim Division command team as soon as we hang up. Expect a small

group arriving at your location within the half-hour."

"That would be a relief," Roy smiled.

"It's not a problem," Charles grinned, "that's what we're here for." After a brief pause, he asked, "What was the other purpose for your call?"

Since the boy was sitting in the office with him, Roy nervously chuckled, "Get me the hell out of here." Both men began laughing. Roy offered, "You know me, Charles. As assistant manager here, I have the contacts to arrange for any electrical or plumbing maintenance, appliance or furniture acquisition, or anything Clan Short might need."

Charles nodded and grinned, "The hiring process here is more involved than most places. You'll be telepathically scanned, Roy."

"I have nothing to hide and wouldn't anyway," Roy reminded. "I have a wife and two young sons."

"I'm sure you'll pass the test with flying colors," Charles grinned. "I did feel it necessary to tell you about the hiring process though."

"Understood," Roy agreed.

"Okay," Charles began, "I'll contact our Clan leaders to get someone there to pick up the boy this afternoon. What's the boy's name?"

"Ralphie Bonham," Roy answered.

Jotting down the name on a pad of paper, Charles nodded, "The boys will ask for you by name and say it's regarding Ralphie."

"That's fine," Roy said.

Charles asked, "When you get a day off, or can disappear for about three hours, come to Ewa Beach for your interviews and telepathic scan." His voice dripping with sarcasm, Charles evilly smirked, "Let's get you out of the world's most prestigious resort and here, helping kids quickly."

Roy asked, "If tomorrow around noon is agreeable, I'll see you then?"

"That would be fine," Charles smiled. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Thanks so much," Roy softly cheered.

"Anytime," Charles said. "Expect Clan representatives there within the next half-hour."

Wondering how the boys could get to Honolulu so quickly, but not wanting to delay things or hold Charles on the phone any longer, Roy said, "Thanks again. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," Charles replied, and then hung up the phone. Charles called, "Alden?"

"It took you twenty-eight milliseconds, Charles," Alden giggled. "What took you so long?"

"I had to breathe," Charles chuckled.

"Organic life forms," Alden teased, and then asked, "Which Core Rimmer would you like to speak with?"

"I'll defer to who you see is most available," Charles smiled.

Alden answered, "Mike Gibbons is available. Stand by, please."

In the basement store, Mike's comm-badge chirped. He tapped it and identified himself. Alden giggled, "I have Charles in the kitchen needing a Core Rimmer, Scooby Daddy."

Surprised that Charles would need assistance, Mike smirked, "You're on my list, Alden, right behind your daddy. Go ahead and connect Charles."

"I can't connect him; he ain't got a plug! I can initiate a conversation between you though," Alden giggled.

"Wise ass," Mike softly muttered.

In the kitchen, Alden called, "Charles, Mike is available now. Go ahead."

Charles said to the ceiling, "Mike, I got a call from my old boss. They have a boy there that's been unsupervised for a week. There's no family to care for him."

"Gotchya, Charles," Mike replied. "The thing is, we've got seventy-two newbies here, getting clothes and stuff. Let me see if John Hundser is available and I'll get right back to you."

Charles nodded, "Thanks, Mike. I'll be waiting."

"John or I will be right back with ya in a minute or two," Mike said. He tapped his comm-badge and called, "Mike to John."

Already aware of what was going on, John telepathically sent, *'I'm on it already, bro. This would be a great opportunity for Cesar's and Felipe's training. I'll talk to Charles and go with the twins to get the kid.'*

Mike only thought of three little guys going off base and said,

"I'll send the Scooby Gang with you too."

"Lucky's gonna be very disappointed," John giggled.

"Take Lucky too then," Mike chuckled, not wanting to deal with the wrath of a four-hundred-pound security gorilla.

"Sweet!" John chirped.

Simultaneously, Mike called Spike to gather his brother and sisters, while John spoke with Charles to get the name of his boss, the boy they were picking up and the location. Mike made sure to tell Spike to listen to John's instructions, but to insure John, Cesar and Felipe were safe at all times.

Concentrating hard, because he was at the pool, a fair distance from the FYS building, Stephen telepathically asked John, ***'Do... You... Need... Me... To... Come... Along, Hon?'***

'Whoa!' John laughed, *'You're coming in loud and clear, baby.'*

Stephen giggled, *'Sorry.'*

John instructed, *'This will be a quick and easy extraction. Stay at the pool with the others, sexy. You're the only Core Rimmer available for the kids not in the store. Is that kewl?'*

'Yeah, I was just checking,' Stephen replied, and then warmly added, *'I need you, John.'*

'I need you too, baby,' John smiled. *'We'll be gone and back real fast. Meet me in the store later, okay?'*

'Kewl,' Stephen giggled. *'Be careful. See ya later.'*

Chapter 9B

Halekulani Resort, Waikiki Beach, Oahu

Thursday, November 4, 2004, 02:20 PM HTZ

Within five minutes, John and the twins were at the Halekulani Hotel lobby. Standing in front of John and the twins were the Scoobies, wearing their new shiny patent leather belts and Derbies, complete with pearloid guitar pick adornments, and each with holstered Smith and Wesson nine millimeter semi-automatic nickle-plated pistols. Behind all of them stood Lucky, wearing a black business suit with a white shirt and a blood red tie, dark mirrored sunglasses and holding his MP5-AX rifle. One woman in the lobby screamed then fainted. A nearby gentleman caught the woman before she hit the floor, and then laid her on a nearby sofa. Remarkably, the lobby became as quiet as a Catholic church during a funeral.

Waving his massive arm, Lucky told everyone present, "Go on with your business. There's nothing here to see."

Confidently, John strode up to the lobby counter, that he could barely see over, and then introduced himself and the twins to the quivering young man behind the counter. Unable to dismiss the bizarre thoughts of the frightened receptionist or the hotel patrons that were scurrying out the doors and into the elevators, John giggled, "We're here to see Mister Roy Combs, please?"

The young man made an odd guttural sound and nodded then stumbled and hurried to the door marked 'Assistant Manager'. He knocked and rapidly entered the office. What John, the twins, the Scoobies and Lucky didn't see was the twenty-something year old

man lose control of his bladder and drop to his knees on the floor in tears.

In the lobby, a camera flashed several times. Taking photos of this rather unusual event was a staff photographer for Associated Press. Another seated gentlemen reading the Wall Street Journal looked up and saw what all the others had already seen. He casually folded his newspaper, stood and walked to the men's room.

After helping the lobby receptionist to the sofa in his office, Roy Combs stepped out of the room. He couldn't see the Scoobies or the twins beyond the counter, but saw John and Lucky. Blinking fast, Roy introduced himself and then asked, "Are you from Clan Short Pacific Rim Division?"

John nodded and smiled, "Yes Sir. We're here to meet and assist Ralphie Bonham."

Shaking off the shock, Roy realized that the normally busy lobby area was devoid of any resort patrons. He quickly said, "Please come with me to my office." The entourage walked around the counter. Now seeing the four armed and smartly dressed ferret-human hybrids and younger twins, Roy muttered, "Charles had told me things, but I never guessed..."

Passing by the man, John giggled, "There's no reason to kill or hurt Charles, Sir. He sees gorillas every day and wouldn't remember that we would come with security." John then introduced himself, Cesar, Felipe, Spike, Xander, Willow, Faith and Lucky.

Entering the office with the others, Willow excitedly bounced and cheered, "Yous have a very shiny hotel."

"Weez especially like the shiny fountain in the center of the

room," Faith smiled.

Spike nodded approval, "Weez can see you have your priorities set and are a true Shiny Lover."

Xander reached into his waist pouch and pulled out a spark plug, and then clipped it to Roy's suit jacket, saying, "A gift for you."

John smiled at Roy and sent, *'Just say, thank you.'*

Stunned again from his first ever telepathic communication, Roy slowly nodded and thanked the Scooby Gang.

Since they were still in their Clan Short Telepath training mode, Cesar and Felipe immediately went to the chair before Roy's desk, where Ralphie Bonham was sitting, drinking in the madness he was witnessing and loving every moment.

Ralphie casually chatted with the six-year-old twins. John spoke with Roy Combs. The young man from the lobby that was sitting on the sofa in damp slacks decided it was time to leave, and perhaps find a new job elsewhere. He hurried past Lucky, out of the office and to his car. Only Ralphie seemed to notice his speedy departure and helplessly giggled, "I don't know why he was so scared. None of you guys seem mean." He pointed at Lucky, asking and then learning the gorilla's name from Cesar.

Although John was still speaking with Mister Combs, arranging to pay for the room and food bill Ralphie had accrued, Cesar sent, *'Ralphie arrived here Friday, with his manager, John.'*

Felipe added, *'He was 'upposed to do modeling and get pictures taken.'*

'It might just be us,' Cesar offered, *'from the orphanages and*

fosters, but why would he come here, to the ROH, for modeling?'

John telepathically replied, *'It's a bit more than coincidental that the manager disappeared Friday while Joel was taking down the child-sex ring, huh?'* John had learned that Roy Combs was hoping to be hired at CSPRD headquarters. He informed the man that he could expedite the telepathic scans at that very moment, if he were willing. Roy agreed and sat in his chair, across from Ralphie, while John performed a deep scan, seeing images and hearing conversations the man had had with his wife or sons. Roy Combs was a kind and decent man, so John smiled, "Hand in your resignation today, Mister Combs. We could use your skills. If you could, please stop by the Ewa Beach base on the way home tonight. Please contact your parents and in-laws too. Your father in-law is a mechanic and your dad is an electrician. We could use both sets of skills."

Shocked at the offer of employment from a ten-year-old boy, Roy asked, "What would my compensation be?" He quickly explained, "I do have a mortgage and a family..."

"I know already, Sir," John grinned. "How 'bout we provide you a place to live, like a three-bedroom townhome, in addition to ten percent more than what you're earning now? When you come by tomorrow for your other interview, ask to see one of the townhouses and condos. That will get all your questions answered."

Pleased and satisfied, Roy thanked John and assured he would keep his lunch time appointment.

John focused on Ralphie and warmly greeted him, doing the usual Rimmer introductory chat while pulling an image of the boy's manager from the boy's mind. He telepathically told the twins that he was making the manager's image and name known to Nathan Hayes, who would pass it on to Daileass, so they could discover if Ralphie's

manager was legitimate or another child-porn scumbag that had already been prosecuted.

With more than the necessary business complete, John smiled, "How about we transport back to base from here, Mister Combs?"

"Thank you," Roy Combs chuckled, "our guests will be talking about this afternoon for the remainder of their stays."

"We have that effect," John laughed, recalling all the fun of the prior Saturday at Anahola Bay.

Pointing at a suitcase near the desk, Cesar giggled, "Is that yours, Ralphie?"

"Yup," Ralphie nodded.

Felipe told John, "He's got undies, sneakers, one pair of jeans, ten T-shirts and twelve Speedo's, bro." Hearing the precise contents of his suitcase rattled off, Ralphie's eyebrows rose.

John nodded, "Kewl. We'll transport to the store and get you plenty of new clothes, Ralphie."

Nodding and hopping off the chair, Ralphie grabbed his suitcase, enthusiastically giggling, "I've always wanted to try Starfleet style transportation."

John shared, "This is even faster than Starfleet transport. That takes a couple o' seconds; this will be like a blink and we're someplace else. Ya ready, dude?" Giggling happily, Ralphie rapidly nodded. The Scoobies, the twins, Lucky and Ralphie gathered around John. Tapping his sub-vocal, John said, "Nine and a suitcase to transport directly to our store, Alden."

Alden replied, "Gotcha all locked, Soul Rimmer."

Less than half a second later, all nine were in the CIC basement store. "Freakin' awesome!" Ralphie loudly laughed. The Scooby Gang scampered away to find their Shiny Daddies and report back to them.

John told the twins, "You guys were great, all afternoon. We've got one more interview scheduled. Jerry Burk's foster parents will be here between four and five this afternoon. I'll call you to join me then. I think another half day of training, just to make your mom happy, and I'll turn you loose to do the job without my supervision." Both six-year-olds hugged John. Hugging them back, John suggested, "While I introduce Ralphie to everyone, take off and go play at the pool, bros."

The twins giggled their thanks then tapped their new comm-badges, ordering Alden to transport them out of the store and to the pools.

John dismissed Lucky, wondering, "When you're not watching my back or the grounds, what do you do for fun?"

Lucky chuckled, "You have no idea how much fun we have patrolling the perimeter, Johnny-boy. Imagine me, in a tree about fifteen feet up. An older high school kid or bunch of 'em stops and peers into the fence, then I drop out of the tree, armed and growling."

John howled laughing, "Bowel control literally goes down the tubes?"

Lucky shrugged, "They never stick around long enough for me to smell anything." John and Ralphie cracked up. Lucky grinned, "Not to mention free botany lessons from the gardeners," and then had Alden transport him out of the store, back to his patrol station.

Still giggling, John began walking toward Prez and Keith to

introduce Ralphie. Telepathically, John explained to Ralphie that he already knew everything that Cesar and Felipe had learned. Once he was introduced around, Ralphie could tell his story his way to whomever he chose.

Ralphie nodded and smiled, "I have no problem being here at all. After spending about an hour in that manager guy's office, bored silly, this is already way more fun than all my favorite TV shows combined."

Knowing that Ralphie said precisely what he was thinking, John nodded and grinned, "I'll be honest and say I could never do what you do for a living. I'm married to a great boy, have a great son, and couldn't be a Speedo or underwear model, even though us guys spend half of every day naked around the pools. I guess it's one thing to be naked around family and friends, but photos that everyone, everywhere sees is past my limit."

Ralphie checked, "Is it really that kewl here?"

John gushed, "Dude, I love my brothers and friends. I always thought my life was pretty good almost all the time. Since we became Clan on Saturday, it's really been even better. We had a rough time last night with a rescue operation, but even that can't smudge six great days."

Noticing the girls in the store, Ralphie asked, "Everybody here gets naked?"

"Those that are comfortable do, which means most of the dudes. I'd say half the younger girls don't have too much of a problem being naked. The teenage boys cover up if they feel stiffies poppin'. The teenage girls almost always have shorts on, and usually cover up their titties. My best friend Lindsay has had some chats with the girls."

"So your gay?" Ralphie softly queried.

John nodded and giggled, "Yup. Stephen is special in so many ways. If he was a she named Stephanie, I'd probably still have fallen for him."

"Her," Ralphie giggled.

Since gender didn't matter, John remained focused on Ralphie and asked, "Are you gay too?"

"I'm pretty sure, yeah," Ralphie answered without any blush; "just never had a real close friend where I was comfy enough to say it before. I sure wouldn't have told my aunt."

"It's kewl, bro," John assured. "Our families don't have any problem with gays or lesbians, and none of us here do either. You can be whatever ya want here and not worry." A quick glance at Ralphie told John that his newest brother had typical worries about being gay. "Don't worry about sex stuff, bro," John instructed. "What's most important are the feelings two people have for each other. Having someone to hold and talk with is the best part and takes up most of every day anyway. Sex is a fun part of it, but the friendship is like no other."

Stopping well shy of Prez and Keith, John smiled and told Ralphie, "The secret is caring and love, dude. Care for someone and they'll care for you more, just to return the favor. Love someone and they'll love you too. The caring and love keep growing with each pass back and forth. It's amazing and limitless, so you can start caring and loving more people. The more you share the more you'll get and the more you'll give. It's so simple, like a carousel; round and round it goes."

Gesturing ahead, in the boys sportswear department, John

smiled, "Here's Prez and Keith." Leading Ralphie to his brothers, John introduced the newest arrival. To all the Core Rimmers, John telepathically added, *'Ralphie's very kawl. Even though he's a model and can act up a storm, he's really enthusiastic and happy to be here.'*

Noting the suitcase Ralphie was carrying, Prez shook hands with Ralphie, confirming, "Since John brought you here, I'm guessing you need clothes?"

Shaking hands with Keith, Ralphie answered Prez. "Yeah. Besides what I'm wearing, I've got plenty of Speedos and T-shirts, some briefs, a pair of sneakers, and one pair of jeans." John briefly scowled, obviously feeling something, so he hurried off, only telepathically telling his brothers that a newbie kid nearby needed some assistance.

Prez nodded, "Kawl, Ralphie. We'll return to the front of the store where there's undies. We make sure everyone has at least a week's worth of the basics. If your sneakers and sandals are more than a few months old, you can choose a new pair of those too."

Keith, Prez and Ralphie began the walk to the front of the store. Ralphie said, "Cesar told me you two were this Clan division's leaders."

Keith nodded, "Prez is the leader and I'm second in command."

Ralphie smiled, "If you have something else you need to do, I'm kawl, dudes. Being a model, I can get around this store, no problem."

Keith chuckled. Prez smiled, "That's very kawl, but for right now, we'd like to know more about you. John's told us virtually nothing. You came here to model and your manager went missing last Friday, soon after you arrived. Was your manager your legal

guardian?"

Shaking his head, Ralphie answered, "No, but in lots of ways he might as well have been." He sighed then shared, "My parents died. My dad passed about four years ago from a stroke. Then my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. After the lump was removed, she started the radiation and chemo. It was too much for her and she died. I was sent to live with my aunt and uncle, on my mom's side. Uncle Rob was my mom's brother. He died of a heart attack last year. Aunt Eve started seeing this guy a few months ago. I always got the impression he'd rather I wasn't around. Since she couldn't be contacted, I'll bet she split to be with him."

"That's rough, dude," Keith softly said.

Ralphie shrugged, "Mom and dad were, yeah. I barely pulled myself together and Uncle Rob was gone too."

At the front of the store, Keith pulled a cart out for Ralphie. Taking the cart from Keith, Ralphie slid his suitcase onto the rack underneath, and then rolled it to the underwear. Prez wondered, "So, did your aunt get you into modeling?"

"Nope," Ralphie smiled, "Mom and dad had me modeling before I started school. Toddler clothes for stores or manufacturers. I still do it because it's fun and it's big bucks. Lots o' times, I got to keep the clothes I modeled too. It's like a connection with my folks to me. If I had to keep doing that, it wouldn't bother me at all."

Keith said, "It's kewl that you enjoy it, Ralphie, but how would you feel if you didn't have to do modeling work any more?"

After humming thoughtfully while grabbing a few packages of briefs, Ralphie said, "Ya know, I'm not too sure. One of the bad parts of modeling has been home schooling with tutors. My friends have

always been other models, that I rarely got to see or talk to, unless we happened to be on a job together again. That sucked. The connection to mom, dad, and the money and clothes though kind o' made it all worth while."

Prez said, "Here, all the kids are expected to be kids first and foremost. School is scheduled to start Monday morning. We want all you guys and gals to have the best possible opportunities in the future, so school is the second most important thing we expect from you."

"My grades are good," Ralphie said. "I'm twelve, but at a seventh or eighth grade level in everything." Keith gestured to the pajamas. Scrunching his face and shaking his head, Ralphie easily admitted, "Underwear or naked, thanks." He moved on and grabbed some socks, explaining, "Even at home in Erie, PA, I couldn't stand being in PJs," and then quickly went to the footwear, adding, "I'd rather have flannel sheets, a blanket and a comforter. That way there were no Pjs to get all twisted and try to suffocate me."

"All the kids have ID cards and pre-paid credit cards for their allowances," Keith told Ralphie. "We'll probably have them for you and all these other newbies in a few days." He and Prez then suggested various on-base odd jobs Ralphie might be interested in, so he could earn extra money.

Sitting down to try on a pair of Nike sneakers, Ralphie was obviously upset, causing Prez and Keith to ask what was wrong. Concentrating on lacing the sneakers, Ralphie grumbled, "I'll bet my aunt emptied my savings account. That's about twenty-five thousand bucks and seven years of work, shot to hell. The fucking bitch."

Receiving a few words from John caused Prez and Keith to smile. Prez told Ralphie, "Your aunt abandoned you, Ralphie. We'll find her and she'll be arrested for being bitchy above and beyond the

call. Maybe we can recover your savings, even though you won't need it here, it's yours and can accrue interest in a bank."

"Sweetness!" Ralphie giggled. "Even if she spent the money and it's gone... thanks, guys, that almost makes my day."

Prez and Keith chorused, "Almost?"

With one sneaker on and the other laced, Ralphie paused, looked up and giggled, "I know about Clan Short. Don't think for a second I'm not happy to be here, cos I really am. Yeah, my life is changing and there's some screwed up stuff I'll deal with, but each and every photo shoot was screwed up someway or another. I've had people tell me that my hair was too long, when they're takin' pictures of underwear and not even showing my face. Suddenly, I've got a shitty, spur of the moment haircut to deal with too. This last week was kind o' fucked up, but I wasn't starving or anything, just a little worried about what was happening. If I had to be abandoned, where better than in Honolulu, where I could swim in a pool, or at the beach, watch TV, do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, and best of all, nothing was asked of me." Giggling his ass off, Ralphie put the other sneaker on and tied it. When finished, he loudly laughed, "Poor, poor me, abandoned in the Republic of Hawaii and rescued by Clan Short. No more work and surrounded by other kids like me to make real friends for the first time ever. I'd cry if I could stop laughing!"

The other seventy-two newbie Rimmers in the store heard Ralphie's declarations. Girls and boys and Core Rimmers alike began giggling and laughing.

Julio and Jesse had Daileass transport them to where Keith and Prez were. They arrived in the basement store only a few meters away and went to their Clan brothers. Julio said, "We're about to head home

guys."

Jesse softly offered, "Thanks for a great time." Considering the California orphanage operations the Des Moines Division helped with, Prez and Keith smiled at each other. All four boys softly chortled. Jesse giggled, "Seriously, other than a few hours in Cali last night, this has been a great little vacation."

Closest to Jesse, Prez offered his hand to shake and smiled, "It's been awesome meeting and getting to work with you, dudes."

Knocking knuckles with Julio, Keith chuckled, "After this last day, our two divisions have gotten really close. I know John and Robin had a good time, and our boys have become friends with some of your little guys."

Noticing Ralphie smiling at Jesse, like he'd been reacquainted with a long lost friend, Prez introduced the newest Rimmer to Julio and Jesse.

Standing and shaking hands with Jesse, Ralphie gushed, "Are you a model?"

Intensely blushing, Jesse shook his head and meekly replied, "No."

"You could be a great model and make big bucks, if you wanted," Ralphie pleasantly assured. Wide-eyed, Julio watched his partner's face almost turn Klingon purple and cracked up. Knowing that Jesse was very reserved almost all the time, Keith and Prez chuckled. Ralphie giggled and told his new leaders, "Seriously! Picture Jess in a suit and tie, or down to his drawers, or in Speedos. He'd be the next big teen model in days."

It was Julio's turn to blush, as the suggested images ran through

his head. "You've got a point," he squeaked as he tried to hide his body's response to the thoughts.

Jesse smiled, "Thank you. I don't know if I'd really be as good as you think, but I think we should maybe get together some time and you can teach me some stuff. I like modeling for Julio, so it won't be wasted."

Quickly, Prez shook hands and said goodbye to Julio. Keith said goodbye to Jesse with a hug, so he could tease his new friend and Clan brother. Keith whispered in Jesse's ear, "Get Julio alone and your butt in Speedos as soon as you get home." Blushing and nodding, Jesse gave Keith a quick peck on the cheek then stepped back.

Waving, Jesse only moved his mouth and Julio called for Daileass to transport them home. They disappeared and Ralphie began walking around in his new Nikes, away from where Keith and Prez were standing and grinning at each other. They both found Ralphie's personality and attitude amazing and refreshing, because he was a different breed of kid from the majority of the others.

Rapidly spinning around to face Prez and Keith, the boy nodded, "Yup. These are kewl," and went back to the chair to take his Nikes off. Since Ralphie didn't need much assistance, Prez excused himself to help some other nearby kids. Keith told Ralphie about the basement nest and the dorms. Ralphie quickly decided to bunk at the dorm.

In Prez's sub-vocal, Alden giggled, "Head Rimmer?"

"What's up, Alden?"

"Several very remarkable things," Alden giggled. "First let me introduce my little brother, Kerry."

A new voice said, "Hello, Prez. I'm the AI at Des Moines."

Pleasantly, Prez said, "It's good to hear your voice, Kerry."

Kerry giggled, "I'm connecting a call from Julio for you, Prez."

Prez chuckled, "He just left and he's calling already?" Scowling, Keith turned to his hubby and tilted his head.

"Yes, Jesse and I wanted to invite you to a threesome." Julio deadpanned. "Look at your PADD, dude."

Prez joked, "Can we make it a foursome? I happen to know things work really well that way." With Keith giggling and returning his attention to Ralphie, Prez called, "Alden, get me my PADD, dude." He held his hand out and a second later Prez's PADD appeared. He began reading the downloaded information from Des Moines. Simultaneously, John was receiving information from Johnny in Des Moines and passing it along to Prez. Reading about a boy named Ronnie McCullough, from Saint Joseph, Michigan, and hearing John's remarks, Prez scrolled forward. Seeing the photo of Ronnie and feeling tingles run up his spine, Prez shouted, "You've got to be shitting me!"

Julio flatly stated, "Dude, I've got a hot boyfriend in purple Speedos hanging on me. Do you really think I'd be taking the time to bug you if this wasn't real?"

Gazing at Ralphie and then back to Keith, Prez thought a moment, then softly told Julio, "We've obviously gotta get these two together. I'll need to chat with Ralphie and let him know, but let's consider when, where and how we're allowing them to meet, so they're not as shocked as we are."

"First we need to get him... and his little brother," Julio stated.

"Colin's assembling a hunting party, anyone there interested in joining?"

Prez explained, "Ya know, I'd really love to go, but with seventy-three newbies here, I should stay. Let me get Nathan, Kaleo and Tory. Alden, notify Nathan to get to Des Moines Command Center ASAP."

Alden confirmed the order. Prez walked away from Keith and Ralphie on a quest to find Kaleo and Tory. Seeing them with Sean and Troy, helping kids check out and load suitcases, Prez waved them over.

Drew saw Kaleo and Tory go to Prez. He and Corey went to the checkout counters and took over helping the newbies.

Pulling Kaleo and Tory close, Prez whispered, "Ya see Keith with the young blond boy?" When they nodded, Prez softly shared, "That's Ralphie Bonham, a boy John just brought here. Julio's on my sub-vocal, and just shared that Ralphie has a twin brother in Michigan, named Ronnie McCullough. I want you two to go to [Des Moines](#) and get to know Ronnie. John's tuned in to all of us, so whatever you learn, we'll all know about too."

Kaleo confirmed, "You want us to go right now?"

Prez nodded, "Colin and the Dutchmen are running the show. Nathan will be there with you too. Call your security to cover your cute butts and get going. We'll try to break this news to Ralphie."

Tory nodded and smiled, "I can't wait to see the Dutchmen in action."

Kaleo glanced around, looking for John. Levitating so he could easily be seen, John flashed a thumbs-up gesture, assuring Kaleo and

Tory, *'I'll hear and see everything you two do and share it with the team, bros. Concentrate on Ronnie, be safe and I'll take care of the rest.'*

Tory called for his and Kaleo's security, asking them to bring two additional hand phasers. Kaleo had Alden transport them all to the Des Moines Division Command Center.

Prez called, "Julio? Kaleo, Tory and Nathan Hayes will be there momentarily. They'll focus on Ronnie while the Dutchmen handle the gritty details. Is that kewl?"

"Sure; but you really shouldn't be thinking about handling Keith like that with the telepaths' links active. You're making Johnny blush!" Julio teased.

Blushing and starting to sweat, Prez stammered nonsensically. John broadcast, *'It was the 'gritty details' that got ya, bro. Your mind's tangents are showing!'* Scattered around the store, Core Rimmers began evilly chuckling.

Prez giggled, "Umm... yeah! Julio, do you need anything else from us?"

"Yeah, save some of those cherries for dinner," Julio giggled. "Go take some private time bro, you deserve it."

Prez giggled, "Out and in and out!"

"Poor Keith, only quickies!" Julio giggled as he cut the connection.

Feeling something wicked was going on, Keith sneaked up behind Prez and tickled his ribs. Laughing his ass off, Prez spun around, grabbed Keith before he could get away and kissed him hard.

In a mere ten minutes in the store, Ralphie was catching up with the other seventy-two newbies. Seeing Prez and Keith kissing, Ralphie's eyebrows rose, and without a second's thought, he continued on his shopping excursion to pick up a belt, a few more pairs of jeans, some sport shirts and a canvas wallet.

Finished sharing kisses of various intensity, Keith returned to Ralphie's orientation, explaining, "The dorm mob showers have liquid soap, bro. There's even hypo-allergenic soaps, marked with a capital 'H', for folks that can't deal with regular soaps."

Prez added, "Shampoos, deodorants, toothpaste and toothbrushes are more personal choices. Kaleo's got lube and condoms. When you want them, just let him know."

Nodding, Ralphie wondered, "Who is Kaleo?"

"Our communications officer," Keith replied. "He's out on another rescue mission right now. One of us will introduce you to him as soon as he returns."

"Kewl," Ralphie smiled, and then admitted, "I know what rubbers are, but what's the lube for?"

Having just gone through this, Keith and Prez grinned at each other. Prez said, "Lube has two purposes. The first, for younger pre-pubescent dudes like you, is for masturbation." Ralphie loudly laughed, but again didn't blush. Prez chuckled, "The second purpose is for on the condom, to make insertion much more comfortable, for you and your partner."

At last, Ralphie blushed and giggled, "I'm twelve, guys. I won't be worrying about inserting my dick into more than my fist for a while, I think."

Keith shrugged and chuckled, "Prez and I were twelve when we fell in love. Anything can happen with the right partner."

Rapidly approaching, with Stephen right behind, John laughed at his brothers, "You got Ralphie to blush, you horn-dogs!" He then faced Ralphie, asking, "How old do you think I am?"

Ralphie shrugged, "About my age," and then made the connection and gasped, "You're married?"

Stephen went into a giggling fit. John turned to his husband, planted a whopper of a kiss, and then introduced Stephen to Ralphie. John shared his age and then Stephen's age with Ralphie. While Ralphie gathered board shorts, Prez, Keith, John and Stephen went through the whole state of affairs; that all the Core Rimmers were considered adults, officers in Starfleet and had gotten married Tuesday evening.

Other newbies that had completed their shopping quickly were being transported out via Alden at Mike's and Derrick's commands, so they could hang by the pools or do whatever they liked with other Rimmer kids. A little at a time, the largest mass of kids that had ever been in the basement store at one time thinned out.

John and Stephen took over helping Ralphie. Prez and Keith went to the checkout counters to relieve Drew and Corey, who then checked around and helped other newbies. It seemed everyone on the boy's side of the store was gravitating toward Ralphie. Boys that only hours earlier were shy and quiet were warming up to their new environment. Not doing anything special beyond being friendly and meeting the other new boys, Ralphie joked around about the twists of fate that brought him to Ewa Beach. Clothing selections that had been progressing rather quickly slowed considerably as Ralphie used his modeling knowledge to help other boys select items that matched skin

tone, hair and eye colors.

All the Core Rimmers were receiving information from Kaleo, Tory and Nathan via John's mind dumps. It suddenly dawned on Prez that he had never officially made Nathan a Core Rimmer, so he told Alden to log the decision. John shared the information with Nathan. Alden shared the decision with Lieutenant Vorik, so that Nathan would also have security assigned.

John began receiving information about the operation in progress to rescue Ralphie's brother. Colin, the Dutchmen and all ground forces were transported to the State of Michigan, 623 Lake Michigan Street, in the town of St. Joseph. Within a minute, it was determined by telepathic scans that the two nearest homes were also included in the operation. Assigned to one of the homes were Nathan, Kaleo, Tory, Rasul, Mark, Zareb and Bayani. Hearing this, Prez's blood pressure went up and he walked away from where newbie kids might hear his inevitable swearing.

Believing a seven man team to be inadequate, Prez told John to have Nathan hold off a few seconds for reinforcements. Since he and Keith were safe on base, Prez ordered all six of their security to join the operation. Within thirty seconds, two gorillas, Gamba and Naasir, and four human security, Chris, Matthew, Justin and Daniel were on-site.

The four gorillas split in half, two on the front door and two on the rear door, all of which were armed with fifty-caliber machine guns. They were backed up by Chris and Matthew in the front, while Justin and Daniel took positions covering the rear. Hearing the commotion from three helicopter gunships and one heavily armed transport 'copter, an adult man came running out of the rear door with a thirty-eight revolver, directly into Gamba. Before the man could react and raise his weapon, Naasir hit him in the face with the butt of

his fifty-cal. The revolting sound of crushing bones was heard. The unconscious, dying man crumbled to the porch.

Wide-eyed, Naasir griped, "Oops!"

Gamba grinned, "Don't ya just hate when that happens?"

Naasir shrugged, "He ran right into you. Are you alright?"

Gamba sniggered, "He almost knocked the wind out of me. The butt of your gun has a few new scrapes from his teeth though, I see."

Inspecting his weapon, Naasir grumbled, "Damn it!" He thought a second then grinned, "I'll have the Scoobies polish it up, good as new."

In the front of the house, Rasul broke down the door and entered an empty living room with Zareb. In the rear, Gamba and Naasir entered the open door into a kitchen area, also cleared of any residents. Every ground level door was opened and cleared. Under the staircase leading up, another door led to a set of stairs heading down. Again, the forces split, four went down and four went up.

Outside, Nathan, Kaleo, Tory, Mark and Bayani heard a woman's abruptly cut short scream. Nathan hurried toward the front door. Reacting on Nathan's telepathic orders, Kaleo, Tory and their enhanced human security followed only as far as the front doorway, so no one could possibly escape. Nathan went inside and hurried up the stairs before him. The other four in the basement came up to the living room, with two small boys on the gorillas' backs. Both boys were clad in tattered sweatpants and sweatshirts that revealed the T-shirts and underpants beneath.

"I got me a gorilla!" one of the little lads cheered. The sentiment was echoed by the other little guy. Kaleo, Tory, Mark and

Bayani began laughing.

Upstairs, doors were broke down. Gamba yelled, "Cut her down!"

From the other upstairs rooms, Matthew was heard saying, "We're Clan Short, here to rescue you both."

Naasir grumbled, "Damn it! No pulse. She's gone."

At the Ewa Beach store, Prez was in the men's room having a meltdown and cussing up a blue storm.

Nathan, Chris and Matthew came downstairs with two slightly older boys, clad only in underpants and covered in bruises and welts, making their physical abuses obvious. The gorillas, Gamba and Naasir, followed the others downstairs. Gamba reported, "One adult female, deceased."

Kaleo queried, "Cause of death?"

"Suicide," Gamba replied, "she hung herself from the ceiling lamp fixture."

"Serves her right," one of the older boys groused.

The other nodded and evilly grinned, "Can I piss on her, so she don't burn in hell too fast?"

Tory giggled, "Do you need to leak?"

"I'll force it," the boy cackled, causing everyone to crack up.

Tory checked with Kaleo. Receiving a nod and a brief explanation of "It's therapeutic," Tory led both older boys upstairs to

wish their old mum goodbye and good riddance.

Kaleo began chatting with the two boys perched on the gorillas' backs. One was five-year-old Jimmy Carr. The other was six-year-old Scott Deaver. The four boys had been sexually molested and abused by their now ex-foster parents, Earnest and Elaine Yates. The two with Tory upstairs were nine-year-old Jason Mullins and eleven-year-old Billy Whittmore. It was Billy that suggested the trip back upstairs, Scott told Kaleo. Gamba explained that when he found the woman hanging, he held her up so Naasir could cut her down, in the hope of saving her life, so they could acquire more information telepathically. The welcoming conversation was cut short by loud laughter from upstairs.

Now knowing that his friends in Michigan were safe, Prez came out of the men's room, still a little red in the face from his temper tantrum, but obviously relieved. Heading for Keith and reading his PADD, Prez considered taking a brief trip to Maui. If all the mothers could be Valium junkies, then what was wrong with a Clan director seeking out some recreational herb? Heading for Keith, Prez giggled then started singing;

I could wile away the hours

Conferrin' with the flowers

Consultin' with the rain

And my head I'd be scratchin'

While my thoughts were busy hatchin'

If I only had a brain

I'd unravel any riddle
For any individ'le
In trouble or in pain
With the thoughts I'd be thinkin'
I could be another Lincoln
If I only had a brain

Oh, I would tell you why
The ocean's near the shore
I could think of things I never thunk before
And then I'd sit and think some more

I would not be just a nuffin'
My head all full of stuffin'
My heart all full of pain
I would dance and be merry
Life would be a ding-a-derry
If I only had a brain

Keith smiled, "What's wrong, baby?"

"Nothin'," Prez giggled. "Kaleo, Tory, Nathan and all our guys are safe. Gamba got a little rattled and Naasir probably over-reacted a little bit, but everybody's fine. They're wrapping stuff up."

Nodding, Keith shared, "Ralphie's tuned in about his brothers."

Having not seen that on his PADD, Prez's head sagged. He repeated, "Brothers? Not singular brother?"

John sent, *'Sorry Prez. I figured you were worried enough, so I didn't tell you. Ralphie is one of three brothers, including Ronnie in Michigan and Richie in Las Vegas.'*

Laughing his ass off, Prez wandered away and started playing Minesweeper on his PADD. Randomly choosing a corner to click on, Prez stepped on a mine and the board blew up. Shaking his head, Prez only laughed louder. A few moments later, newbie kids saw their new leader strolling around four feet up off the floor. Prez was paying attention to his game and didn't notice until kids began giggling and pointing, softly commenting on the levitated leader. Pausing to learn what the hubbub was about and seeing himself up off the floor, Prez loudly laughed, "John!"

John giggled, *'You said you wanted to get high, so-oo...'*

Smiling widely, Ralphie glanced around at his new leaders, wondering, "Will Prez be alright?"

"Eventually," Derrick sniggered.

Hugging Ralphie close, Keith playfully explained, "Prez loves math and history. He's doing calculus equations to figure out how one became three, and eighty-seven grew to over two hundred in six

days."

"Guess it's not easy bein' a head rimmer," Ralphie softly giggled. The remaining dozen newbie boys around Ralphie cracked up.

His eyes darting mischievously, Mike grinned, "It's been that kind of a day for Prez. Maybe it was the two hundred new buses?"

Derrick sniggered, "Or the kids at school making a ruckus?"

Keith laughed, "Or the two calling birds, three French hens and four calling birds?"

Drew giggled, "Today is our sixth day as Clan. Maybe he wants his six geese a laying and..."

"Five golden rings," all the Core Rimmers loudly sang.

From across the store, Prez bellowed, "I know y'all are goofin' on me. Remember, turnabout is fair play."

Only moments later, Kaleo, Nathan, Ronnie and Tory transported into the basement store, near Keith and Ralphie. Kaleo smiled and loudly introduced the two long lost brothers to each other, and then introduced the other four boys, Jimmy Carr, Scott Deaver, Jason Mullins and Billy Whittmore, also rescued from St. Joseph, Michigan. Tory, Kaleo, Keith and Nathan couldn't help noticing similarities between the brothers; they were the same height, approximately the same weight, had the same long dirty blond hair and dreamy light brown eyes, only Ralphie's hair was parted down the middle while Ronnie's was parted high down the left side.

First to speak, Ralphie asked, "Have you felt like..."

"there was someone missing," Ronnie softly finished. He huffed and smiled, "Even though I had Adam, a half brother that was very much a real brother."

Cautiously stepping forward and opening his arms, Ralphie admitted, "I didn't have a brother or sister. I hope we might someday, somehow..."

"We will get that close and closer," Ronnie softly assured, and stepped into his brother's open arms. Ralphie's arms wrapped high around Ronnie's back. Ronnie's hands wrapped tightly around Ralphie's waist. Each boy rested their head on the brother's shoulder and inhaled deeply.

It could easily be seen that the two brothers were relaxing and enjoying twelve years of missed hugs in this one embrace.

On the opposite side of the store, Corey, Drew, Reyes, Sean and Troy loudly laughed, "PREZ! That's the girl's changing room!"

Barely a second later, amongst a chorus of female yells, Prez walked out of the changing room, blushing and laughing, "Well, Minesweeper sucked so I started playing Ms. Pacman. Where better than there?"

Kaleo and Tory cracked up. They gathered Jimmy, Scott, Jason and Billy then led the way to the front of the store. Softly sniggering, Keith threw his arms up in the air, knowing his beloved had lost his mind somewhere at Anahola Bay Saturday afternoon, but wasn't sure where exactly.

Nathan called, "Daileass!"

Over the loudspeakers, Daileass giggled, "I know, bro. We've

gotta get these guys to take a break soon."

"Give me a break, give me a break, break me off a piece of that Kit Kat bar," Prez sang through giggles. Knowing this wasn't an order, but acting like it was anyway, many dozens of Kit Kat bars materialized up by the ceiling and fell around the newbie kids in the store. Some dropped directly onto unsuspecting kids and others were snatched out of the air. Soon kids were munching on the chocolate coated cookie bars.

Still attached to one another, Ralphie giggled, "These guys are lots of fun."

"The one's in Des Moines weren't exactly normal either," Ronnie sniggered.

Ralphie sighed, "I'm looking forward to meeting Adam someday soon."

Leaning back to look into Ralphie's eyes and seeing sincerity there, Ronnie smiled, "We will soon." Ronnie's comm-badge chirped for the first time. He tapped it and uncertainly said, "Hello?"

"Hey Ronnie, it's Garrett," the voice said.

"Hey," Ronnie smiled, "did Adam get to meet his brothers yet?"

"Not yet," Garrett replied. "Adam's a little freaked out here."

Ronnie huffed, "Adam, the butterflies aren't a bad thing, bro. Mine are still flapping like mad."

"Mine too," Ralphie giggled.

"Oh my God, you even sound similar," Adam gushed.

"But I'm cuter," Ralphie and Ronnie said almost simultaneously. Boys in the Des Moines Command Center and in the Ewa Beach basement store loudly laughed while the two brothers suspiciously eyed one another then broke into giggles.

Adam sniggered, "So everything's kewl?"

"Very kewl," Ronnie assured. "So pull yourself together and go meet your brothers. The butterflies will flap for a while. Get used to it and don't let the feeling hold you back."

Adam regained control quickly. "I've got to see them on the screen; one looks like me, and the other two look a little like me, but they're different too. They all seem so close, I don't want to mess that up."

"You won't," Ronnie promised.

Ralphie added, "You can't really. I mean, it's like we kind o' have to be who we are anyway. We sort o' have to love each other cos we're brothers. If we like each other too, it's a bonus. Liking each other a lot is even better." He reached for and took hold of Ronnie's hand, leading his brother toward the front of the store.

Squeezing Ralphie's hand tighter because he liked what was said, Ronnie nodded and smiled, "I already like Ralphie plenty."

"What's not to like?" Ralphie coyly giggled.

Rolling his eyes, Ronnie sniggered, "Your self hatred is really starting to bug me."

"I'll work on it with my brothers," Ralphie giggled.

Locking eyes with Ralphie, Ronnie nervously repeated,

"Brothers?"

Ralphie nodded, "Yup. We're triplets. There's one more we're still waiting to meet."

"Oh my God!" Adam and Ronnie softly gasped across the comm-link.

"So we're all gonna have butterflies the rest of the night and maybe into tomorrow," Ralphie laughed.

Garrett giggled, "We have *got* to get together soon. Imagine all eight of us actually in the same room."

His eyes flashing mischievously, Ronnie grinned, "It sounds like a great time to me."

Ralphie checked, "You guys do know it's still warm beach weather here, right?"

"Very kewl!" Garrett excitedly gushed. "We could all meet there, maybe tomorrow or Saturday? Then we could come here for a good ol' fashioned Christmas Eve, and then do it again, a couple o' hours later there. If we're lucky, it might even snow."

Turning toward Keith, Ralphie wondered, "What's Christmas like here?"

"Christmas is always Christmas, regardless of the weather," Keith smiled.

Joining up with the crowd around Ralphie and Ronnie, Drew added, "The best part here is, if you get a new skateboard or bike, you'll prob'ly be able to go out and use it Christmas Day."

Corey nodded, "I can only remember one Christmas it rained.

The rest were sunny and warm, about eighty degrees Fahrenheit."

Ronnie asked, "Are you chillin', Adam?"

"Yeah, bro," Adam sighed. "Now I'm feeling really excited, like it is Christmas."

Garrett chuckled, "What better early present could there be than when brothers are reunited?"

Ronnie smiled, "We'll see you guys real soon, okay? If you need to talk, just give me a call."

"Kewl," Garrett and Adam chimed. Everyone nearby said goodbye to Adam and Garrett.

Ralphie released his brother's hand to begin getting him new clothes. The crew helped Ronnie select his clothes from the store. Ronnie had started wearing boxers and wanted to continue wearing them. The two brothers chatted up a storm about just that simple choice, as if it were a major decision, and Ralphie tossed an extra package of boxers into his cart so he could try switching now and then.

Cautiously, Ronnie softly suggested, "You could wear mine too if ya wanted, bro? Ya know, when they're clean, of course."

Stunned that Ronnie would offer his underwear, Ralphie slowly smiled then giggled, "That's what brothers do, huh?"

Ronnie nodded and chuckled, "Just tell me what of yours is off-limits and I won't use it. I'll do the same too, for any favorite stuff I have. Other than that, all our stuff could easily be worn by any of the three of us."

Giggling like crazy, Ralphie hurried to Ronnie and wrapped his arms around him again, giving a very tight squeeze. "I never had brothers to even consider that. Thanks, bro."

Ronnie whispered into Ralphie's ear, "We're gonna spend a lot of time together, tonight, tomorrow and for a long time."

With happy tears pooling in his eyes, Ralphie softly said, "I love you, bro."

"I love you too," Ronnie quickly assured.

"I might need a little help, being a brother for the first time and all," Ralphie shivered.

Ronnie nodded, "Brothers help each other all the time, whenever it's needed."

Stepping back from the hug, Ralphie smiled, "I can't wait to meet our other brother, Richie."

Ronnie queried, "Is that his name?"

Ralphie nodded, "Yup, Richie Telford."

Tossing packages of socks into Ralphie's shopping cart, Ronnie smirked, "Our mother didn't have much of an imagination."

"Maybe she just liked 'R' names?" Ralphie giggled at his own bad pun.

Moving past the pajamas and into the footwear department, Ronnie glanced around from Ralphie to Keith and the other Core Rimmers, wondering, "Do you all know how we got separated?"

Kaleo nodded and frowned, "You were abducted, stolen as

infants. Maybe your names were given by that cretin? We don't really know."

Ralphie gasped, "No shit?"

While Kaleo, Tory and the other nearby Core Rimmers nodded, Ronnie checked, "Are you okay, bro?"

Ralphie nodded, "I guess. Both my parents had brown hair, so I guessed long ago that I was adopted."

John said, "We'll get pictures of your feet, to learn where you were born and who your real parents were."

"We were born June twenty-third, 1992," Ralphie said, and Ronnie rapidly nodded.

Over the store's PA system, Derrick called, "Customer service to the checkout counters, we're backin' up big time and need more help here."

Keith chuckled, "Okay, dudes. John, Stephen, Drew and Corey can help these six dudes through the store." Leaving Jimmy, Scott, Jason, Billy, Ralphie and Ronnie, Kaleo, Tory and Keith went to help Mike and Derrick. All the other newbie boys surrounding the twin brothers followed their leaders to get their clothing checked out.

* * * * *

At three that afternoon, the parents of Hajime Sato and Aki Hikada arrived at Ewa Beach. Although they arrived in separate cars, Hajime's parents began their hateful tirade in the parking lot and continued in the reception area, tearing into Aki's parents in Japanese. Rob Gibbons yelled over the combined voices, in Japanese, to restore order. Hajime's parents were warned by Rob that sexuality is not

determined anywhere except by the individual genetics. Of course, Hajime's father spouted more irritating and rude words at Rob. Rob's gorilla cursed the man in Japanese, effectively warning him that another word could land him in Starfleet prison for two years. Standing nearby in the hallway, Tamara Hekeia, Anna Seibert's security and George Lu witnessed all that had transpired.

Also speaking in fluent Japanese, Tamara informed the Satos that their interview was canceled due to their hateful, homophobic rhetoric. "I am summarily recommending that Hajime remain in the care of Family Clan Short of Vulcan," Tamara reported. "All parental obligations and responsibilities are nullified. You are not to come within one hundred yards of this facility or Hajime. Failure to comply..." Mister Sato stood and lunged at Tamara, but was blocked by Rob and his gorilla's large arm. Once Mister Sato was forced into a chair again, Rob Gibbons read the man his rights, handcuffed him and then called Starfleet security to place the man under arrest.

While Mrs. Sato wept over her husband and shattered family, George Lu greeted Aki's parents and led them from the reception area to his office. Comparatively, a very peaceful interview was held with the Hikadas. They admitted not knowing of, or understanding Aki's homosexuality. George informed them of Aki's wishes to remain with Hajime and as part of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division. Once they heard Aki's and Hajime's recorded statements, they reluctantly agreed. Since the Hikadas were patient and understanding, they would be granted weekly visitations on base with Aki. Sunday's were set aside, from nine in the morning until five in the evening.

George Lu carefully informed them of the security cameras and microphones scattered around the base. If at any time Aki, Hajime or any child on base was verbally or physically abused, their visitation privileges would be revoked. By the time the interview ended, Mrs.

Sato was no longer on base. George Lu supervised the first meeting between Aki and his parents. Understandably, Aki was upset about the way he and Hajime came out, but he was also relieved that his parents still cared enough about him to visit every week.

A little after four that afternoon, Anna Seibert met with John, Cesar and Felipe to learn what was already known about Jerry Burk's foster parents. The three boys were still in Anna's office when the Krey's, Theodore and Zelma, were led into the room by Rob Gibbons. Introducing herself, Anna stood and greeted Jerry's foster parents. Both seemed quite pleasant. Mr. Krey insisted that he be addressed as Ted and Mrs. Krey asked that her first name also be used.

Returning to her seat, Anna informed the two adults, "John is a trained Clan Short telepath and can confirm all statements made here today. Cesar and Felipe are also telepathic and are being trained by John."

Ted Krey nodded and flatly stated, "That's fine, we have nothing to hide. Jerry already told me about some issues he had been having with my wife. I assume that's why he ran away from home."

Anna nodded, "Yes it is."

John softly called, "Aunt Anna?"

"Yes, John?"

"I know what the problem is," John sighed, and then turned to Zelma, saying, "You're bipolar and don't consistently take your meds like you're supposed to." Seeing the woman blushing, John then told Ted, "Jerry wasn't lying, Mr. Krey, he really does like you a lot, he just doesn't trust Mrs. Krey. She did throw a large carving knife at Jerry, she knows it and is sorry about it and all the other things she did

that caused Jerry to not trust her."

Ted closed his eyes and softly muttered, "Zelma, you promised."

"They make me feel... odd," Zelma softly wept.

Opening his eyes, Ted asked Anna, "Is it too late for us?"

"I'm afraid it is, yes," Anna sighed. "Jerry would prefer to remain here with his friends. The trust issue Jerry has is confirmed and appropriate. I've spoken with Jerry and John has confirmed the knife incident. Initially, I thought I'd be having Zelma arrested for child endangerment, but circumstances are medical in this case. Zelma, you must follow your doctor's orders in the future. Ted, Jerry asked if you would like to occasionally visit him here on base."

Ted nodded, "Yes I would, but financially it wouldn't be possible for that to happen more than once a month. I often work weekends, and the flight is expensive."

"Don't worry about the cost," Anna instructed. "The Clan will arrange for your visits." She prompted, "Choose a weekend that would be acceptable for you."

He answered, "How about the first weekend of the month." Ted asked, "Could I see Jerry today, while I'm here?"

Anna nodded, "Yes, I'll arrange for that." She then told Ted Krey about the base's audio and video monitoring capabilities and explained the ramifications of any threatening actions made toward any child on base. To make this meeting easier for everyone involved, Zelma remained in the FYS reception area while Ted went with Anna to speak with Jerry.

Around the Ewa Beach base, kids were having fun, making use

of the pool, the diving well, indoor rec center, the CIC rec room and the dorm common rooms. The most unusual thing that happened was when Lupe Jui tried to jump off her swing, resulting in mildly scraped knees and hands. The unofficial Rimmer mom, Lanna Seaver, took Lupe to the FYS building for Doc Howard to clean and bandage the minor wounds.

Before leaving for the day, George prepared a brief e-mail for Jennifer Hundser, stating that perhaps it might be advantageous for FYS to develop group counseling sessions to help parents understand their bisexual, gay or lesbian children. George left for home to help his wife pack. They would be moving on base and into one of the one bedroom condo apartments that weekend. Since their own child had grown and moved out on her own, they had already begun considering adopting, if one of the kids liked them and wanted them as parents.

Also around four in the afternoon, the few remaining newbies, John, Stephen, Drew and Corey transported out of the store to get kids settled in dorm rooms. Kids began forming groups of two, three or four and choosing rooms. Ralphie and Ronnie chose to share a room together. They decided to remain there alone, talking and organizing their room until dinner time. Once they were left alone, Ronnie turned on the television. Ralphie checked the two laptop computers on the desks and powered them up. Still flipping channels, Ronnie softly admitted, "I never had a PC of my own."

Ralphie nodded, "But you know how to use one, right?"

"Yeah, from school," Ronnie answered. He chuckled, "This room is *really* nice. We've got our own Xbox, a stereo and two full size beds." Landing on a music video channel, Ronnie put the remote down and turned to his brother, nervously stammering, "Do you..."

umm... have you... ever?"

Tilting his head, Ralphie asked, "What's wrong, bro?"

"We're sleeping in this room together," Ronnie reminded.

"Yup," Ralphie smiled. "I never shared a room before. It's gonna be kewl, having brothers to chat with before crashing, I mean."

"Yeah, but..."

Figuring that he had already been caught, Ralphie's smile faded and he muttered, "You're worried about me, being gay?"

Relieved, Ronnie happily gushed, "You're gay too?"

Nodding, Ralphie giggled, "Yup. This place is filled with eye candy too. All our leaders are so cute, and lots of the guys in the store were real nice. Maybe someday I'll find a special one, finally."

Heading for his bed and lifting his suitcase, Ronnie teased, "Have you got anyone in mind?"

"Not yet," Ralphie giggled. He lifted his suitcase and dropped it on his bed to unpack, absently rambling, "Ryan Caswell is real cute, but really shy. Terry Fisk has a good sense of humor, but he's kind o' quiet and shy too. Mike Busse is older and lookin' really fine, but he might be just a dream, because he's obviously older than me." Unzipping his suitcase, Ralphie asked, "Have you got a boyfriend?" Ronnie shrugged and giggled. "Uh oh," Ralphie laughed, "you do, don't you?"

"Maybe," Ronnie blushed. He started pulling clothes from his suitcase and ripping tags off, saying, "My little brother, Adam is tryin' to fix me up with Garrett, ya know, the one who called me earlier?"

He's nice enough, I guess, and definitely cute, but we just met, and then I came here to meet you. You and Richie are my priority now."

"I know what you mean," Ralphie grinned. "There's twelve years of catchin' up to do."

While continuing to unpack and put their things away in dressers and closets, Ralphie and Ronnie spoke of their pasts. They had finished putting their things away then began to get their laptop computers set up. Ralphie took the MacBook as his primary computer while Ronnie was perfectly happy with the Windows computer. Since Ronnie was completely unfamiliar with Macs, he pulled his chair over to Ralphie's desk where he got his first lessons. Ralphie explained the Mac Finder as the equivalent of Windows Explorer then demonstrated various file functions. Macs had lots of kewl school tools too, like an audio recorder, so that class lectures could be played back as a study aid. Of course it had e-mail, calendar and contact list programs too, as well as good office products like a word processor to write reports. They had just moved on to the Safari browser when there was a knock at the door. Both brothers hollered, "Come in."

The door opened. Ralphie and Ronnie turned to watch their third brother, Richie enter the room, and stop just beyond the door, softly saying, "Hey."

Getting up from their chairs, Ralphie and Ronnie hurried to Richie and sandwiched him in a hug. "Look at you," Ralphie giggled.

Ronnie laughed, "All three of us growing up separately, but we all have long hair and wear the same kinds of clothes!"

Surprised at the reception, Richie smirked, "It's warm like this in Las Vegas."

"We were expecting you over an hour ago," Ralphie smiled.

Ronnie asked, "What took you so long?"

Awkwardly shrugging from the center of the sandwich, Richie sighed, "I was kind o' scared, I guess."

Stepping back, Ralphie wondered, "Scared of us?"

Also giving Richie some space, Ronnie smirked, "Are you sure you weren't just anxious?"

Richie shrugged and softly offered, "Nope, don't think so."

Ralphie briefly scanned Richie's expression before saying, "Come on in and have a seat, bro."

Taking hold of the door, Ronnie nodded, "Let's see if we can make you less scared. Ya know, I've had major butterflies flapping in my belly, since before meeting Ralphie."

"They're still flappin', but not so bad any more," Ralphie said, and then gestured for Richie to sit on one of the chairs.

Ronnie closed the door. Following Ralphie and pulling the chair away from the desk, Richie sat down, glancing at the two mirror images of himself, and then looked down at the floor. Remembering the many hours of therapy, Richie knew that these two were his long lost 'imaginary friends'. The truth fought the learned opinions implanted by the shrink to a painful stalemate. Pulling the other chair out and across from Richie's seat, Ronnie wordlessly prompted Ralphie to take a seat. Sitting down, Ralphie somehow knew that Ronnie preferred to stand, but didn't give it another thought. Instead, he focused on Richie, asking, "What's the deal, bro?"

Tears welled up in Richie's eyes. With his head still sagging and not making eye contact with either brother, Richie nonsensically blubbered, "You guys won't like me or want me around. I always knew... had clear images of both of you, all my life. When I got to about six, my mom had me see a therapist, because I insisted I had imaginary friends." Sniffling and wiping his eyes, Richie caught his breath and sobbed, "You're not imaginary, but I've been taught you are, but here I am, hoping you'll at least accept me as I am, even though I doubt you will. I came here to just get it over with."

Ralphie glanced up at Ronnie. Ronnie nodded at Richie, wordlessly gesturing for Ralphie to speak first. Ralphie leaned forward to try and look into Richie's eyes, saying, "We're not imaginary, Richie. I always knew I had brothers too, but was raised alone."

"I had a half brother that kind o' made things a little easier," Ronnie offered. "I still felt like there were others, besides Adam, but didn't really think about it too much, because there was always a real brother there."

Ralphie firmly assured, "We want you here with us, Richie."

Ronnie added, "As brothers, we automatically love each other. Now we have to get to really know each other, so we can be friends as well as brothers, don't you think?"

Still hiding his face and wiping his eyes, Richie shrugged then spilled it all in one long statement. "I'm gay and like being held by other guys; I love feeling strong arms around me, but bein' around girls always left me feeling... I dunno... wrong, with nothin' to say; I enjoy hangin' with other guys, I like checkin' out dicks in the shower and ain't found one yet that wasn't worth lookin' at."

Ronnie giggled, "I couldn't have said it better myself."

Glancing back at Ronnie, Ralphie laughed, "Me too. Long thin ones or short fat ones or any dick at all, really. Being a model, I got to see plenty of naked dudes and never saw a dick I didn't like."

Looking up at his two brothers, but still wiping his eyes, Richie squealed, "Really?"

"Really," Ralphie and Ronnie chorused.

Ralphie explained, "We came in here to get our stuff put away and spend some time alone together, just to start getting to know each other."

Ronnie nodded and blushed, "I play with my dick every night. There ain't nothin' comin' out yet, but I can't get to sleep without that wicked kewl feeling, ya know?"

Giggling his butt off, Ralphie nodded and bounced his eyebrows at Richie. At last, Richie shyly giggled, "I thought you'd hate me."

Ralphie sniggered, "Not because you like dudes and dick."

"Now we can compare notes," Ronnie joked. Ralphie and Richie evilly grinned and rapidly nodded.

Richie smiled and sighed, "Now I know that shrink was way more fucked up than I ever was. I *have* brothers, two very kewl brothers that are just like me, in appearance and everything, they're even gay like me. All I need to do is get past the lies the shrink dumped in my head."

"I know how we can make that happen," Ralphie grinned.

Ronnie had an idea of how and chuckled, "Yeah."

Richie wondered, "How?"

"Stay here with us," Ralphie simply said.

Richie thoughtfully hummed, thinking of his friends in Las Vegas as well as his long lost brothers now in Hawaii, becoming completely perplexed. Before he could speak, Ronnie said, "I've got friends we'll be visiting in Des Moines, Richie. We could visit your friends in Vegas too, just about any time we want."

Ralphie nodded, "I just think it's important that we spend as much time together as we can, these first few days, anyway. Your 'imaginary' friends will be in your face, reminding you it was the shrink that lied. You knew what we both knew, that there were guys missing."

"Kewl," Richie giggled. "I was stuck there for a minute." Looking up at Ronnie, he then loudly asked, "How'd you know what I was thinking?"

Ronnie shrugged, "Dunno, really."

Clapping his hands and then rubbing them together, Ralphie grinned, "We could stay here and catch up."

"Or?" Ronnie and Richie queried.

With a wicked gleam twinkling in his eyes, Ralphie giggled, "I happen to know lots o' guys here swim naked at the pool and diving well."

"Oo-oo!" Ronnie devilishly droned.

Holding both his arms out, Richie giggled, "Lead me to the

dicks, so we have dream material for later."

Ralphie took hold of one of Richie's arms and Ronnie took the other outstretched arm. Together they left the dorm room on a mission. They didn't make it out of the nearby dorm door before seeing their first naked boy, twelve-year-old Thomas Cork, rescued from Anaheim, streaking out of his room toward the lavatory. Thomas waved and giggled at the stunned triplets. The three brothers glanced at each other, sighed and then hurried toward the pools, chattering about other common interests, so they didn't arrive with tented shorts. Outside and crossing the compound, another call came for Ronnie from Adam.

* * * * *

The vast majority of the orphanage kids decided to move to the dorms. Only ten of the youngest orphanage kids, six boys and four girls, chose to join the nest. All of those young kids were led to the FYS Building bear cave by John and Stephen, to choose their new best friends. Seven of the ten were from Anaheim and wanted to be with Drew and Corey. By dinner time, the first floor of three dormitory buildings were filled with boys. Also, girls had overflowed into the second dorm building.

The Scooby Gang went to Mike and Derrick just as they stepped out of one of the dorm buildings. Spike grinned, "Shiny Daddies, weez got some shinys for yous."

Smiling and lifting his furry son, Mike glanced around at the four ferret-hybrids, smiling, "You got Shinys for us?" Spike, Xander, Willow and Faith rapidly nodded and hummed affirmatively.

Happily swaying to and fro, Faith added, "And the other Core Rimmers."

"And their mommies and daddies," Willow giggled, her eyes twinkling and darting around.

Expecting some baubles to be pulled out of the ferrets' waist sacks, Derrick prompted, "Can we see the Shiny's?"

"At the parking garage," Xander toothily grinned.

Spike called, "Alden, gets all of the Core Rimmers and their mommies and daddies. Then transport everybody to the parking garage, you know where."

Across their comm-badges, Alden giggled, "Workin' on it," and then executed the order. Derrick, Mike and the Scoobies were transported to an empty area of the second floor in the four story parking garage. Spike then scampered over Mike's shoulder and crawled down to the ground, gathering with his brother and sister. Over the next two minutes the others appeared; Keith and Prez, Drew and Corey, Sean and Troy, Kaleo and Tory, John and Stephen, Jim and Jen Hundser, Anna and Carl Seibert, Bill and Lanna Seaver, Rob and Laura Gibbons, Kathleen Marr, and lastly, Judy Faris. Everybody was chattering, wondering why they had been brought to the garage.

In unison, all four ferrets squeaked, "Follow us!" and scampered off to the other side of the second floor. The large group of twenty-four boys and adults followed them. Passing the ramps to the first and third floors, they saw a collection of vehicles and everyone stopped talking. Many jaws dropped.

The first car was a red Lamborghini Aventador. Willow smiled at Derrick, "This is for you Shiny Daddy."

The car beside it was a silver Maserati MC12 with blue stripes. Noticing many mouths hanging open, Spike giggled at Mike, "This is

yours, Shiny Daddy."

The next car was a black Ferrari 599 XX Evoluzione that had white interior leather. Faith told Keith, "This one is for you. It looks like a shiny piano, don't you think?" Nodding, but completely speechless, Keith stepped forward and opened his arms. Faith jumped up into Keith's embrace.

Beside the Ferrari was an Alpina BMW B3 GT3 with a white exterior and black interior. Xander pointed and cheered, "This is for the Shiny Rimmer Leader." Cracking up, Prez went to Xander and picked him up.

The four ferrets went down the line of cars, giving one to each of the remaining twenty Rimmers, explaining that the shiny cars were 'taken from the Dull Loving orphanage men'. Drew got a yellow Corvette. Corey got a lime green Bertone Jaguar. The blue Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupe was John's. Beside it was a red Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet for Stephen. Kaleo got a silver Mercedes-Benz SL 65 Roadster. Tory got the white Audi R8 LMS Ultra. The red Alfa Romeo Spider was for Sean. The midnight blue Aston Martin Vanquish was for Troy. Jennifer Hundser was pointed to white Rolls-Royce Ghost. The black Rolls-Royce Phantom VI was Jim Hundser's. Shiny Grandpas Rob and Carl each got Bentley Continentals. Rob's was white and Carl's was silver. Rob's was specially outfitted with bullet proof glass, and dash and rear deck police emergency lights by the Scoobies. Shiny Grandmas Laura and Anna each got Cadillac Escalades, so they could go places with car loads of kids. Anna's was white with black interior and Laura's was black with white interior. Bill Seaver was given an Ascari A10. Lanna Seaver got a red Hennessey Venom GT. Kathleen Marr got a Dussenberg J La Grande Torpedo that was at least twice the size of her old car, which was abandoned in the parking lot of the Safeway store in Hilo. Lastly,

Judy Faris got a white Weismann GT MF5. Of course, all the cars had been detailed, inside and out, to be as shiny as possible. The Scoobies were repeatedly thanked for the gifts and given hugs by all the Core Rimmers.

Across the parking lot were another two dozen 'spare' shiny Cadillacs, Hummers, Jeeps and Lincoln Towne cars, that anyone could use or give away to future Core Rimmers, whichever they decided to do. Walking out of the garage, the Rimmer families and the ferrets discussed when they could take the new cars out for a spin. Since none of the Core Rimmers had driver's licenses, Rob would arrange for that locally with Department of Motor Vehicles and the police. The discussion reminded Derrick that everyone needed to take additional driving classes for the new fleet of buses. On the way to the pools and playground to get their kids, Prez called Danny Page to start the process of arranging for bus driving lessons. Danny told Prez he would contact the Charleston Police and get back to him with dates and times.

During dinner, the Core Rimmers sat near each other and worked out how many dorm rooms were still available at the main base. It was pretty obvious that when the additional California orphanage kids showed up they would be overflowing onto another base. An additional one-hundred-seventy-six kids would be showing up within the next week and one-hundred-sixteen of them were boys. The third and final dorm at Ewa Beach would be all boys, meaning sixty would have to live at the Oneula Beach base about a mile west of Ewa Beach.

The fourth building was the UNIT dorm. Sitting with other UNIT boys, Kekoa was close to the Core Rimmers tables. Kekoa and those there were asked how many rooms were available in that dorm building. Since there were only a few rooms left in that building, it

was decided to let that building remain for only UNIT kids. In addition to the fifty base security personnel, the personal security for all the Core Rimmers and their parents were billeted there.

"Hey, Prez?" Daileass called out over Prez's comm-badge, "You make that trip to Maui yet?"

"Not yet, Daileass," Prez smirked, "given the right instigation though, I was considering tonight or tomorrow."

"Tonight I think," Daileass said with a chuckle. "Sammy's on his way over, he says he needs to talk to you."

Prez shrugged, "Kewl. I haven't met him yet. Open the shield portals and let him transport over, Daileass."

"Okay, oh and you may want to make sure your mom's all stocked on her drugs." As soon as Daileass's voice faded out, a large group of people appeared next to the table. At the front of the group was Sammy. Prez recognized him since he saw him during Wednesday morning's teleconference call. Standing next to him were Vishnu and Kartick, but what really drew attention was the two Juans with him.

Standing and offering his right hand, Prez greeted Sammy, his eyes constantly shifting to the two Juan look-a-likes.

"Hey Prez. It's good to finally meet you in person," Sammy said, barely restraining his laughter. "Oh... I'd like you to meet Phobos and Deimo, a couple of friends I just made."

Realizing that Phobos and Deimos were the names of moons of Mars, considered the God of War, Prez politely greeted the two boys, and then asked Sammy, "Are they Juan clones or just incredible look-

a-likes?"

Phobos puffed his chest out and spoke with obvious pride. "Ares is our father!"

While Prez silently chewed on that admission, realizing why Daileass suggested the field trip to Maui sooner rather than later, Keith stood and greeted Sammy then began introducing the other Core Rimmers at nearby tables. Kaleo got up to join Keith and Prez.

Once the introductions were completed, Sammy noticed the three boys that had been rescued earlier. Sammy grinned sweetly then pointed to them. "Hey, kewl. I see you got three out of the four of them here." Before anyone could say anything, Sammy turned around. "Hey Robbie! You wanna meet your brothers?"

A second later, a bald twelve-year-old boy with big brown eyes stepped forward, his eyes immediately drawn to the three who looked just like him, save for the hair, of course.

"Quadruplets?" Kaleo, Keith and Prez incredulously gasped. Understanding his brothers were flabbergasted, John telepathically called for Drew and Corey to join Stephen and to assist introducing the four brothers.

Regaining his senses, Prez locked eyes with Sammy, wondering, "Where was Robbie found?"

"Tacoma, Washington," Sammy grinned. "And the best part was, finding him wasn't the weirdest thing we found either."

"Obviously!" Keith and Kaleo laughed.

"Daileass!" Prez hollered. "Find me a way to get the Core Rimmers about six hours at Maui, so we can return relaxed, but fully

functional."

"I got one better. Tell your mom you're going on a week long vacation. You'll be back here in three minutes or less."

Mike yelled, "If we're going away for a week, our kids are coming with."

"And so is my mom," Keith reminded. "She'll want to see to it we're really relaxing."

Troy laughed, "We should bring some instruments too!"

"Get everything, and everyone you want. I'll send you guys over when you're ready." Daileass said with a laugh.

Sean giggled, "I am wondering where we're going."

Troy shrugged and grinned, "Does it matter?"

"I suppose not," Sean giggled.

Sammy laughed, "Well it looks like you guys got a vacation to plan. Enjoy it. I gotta take this lot on another trip." Sammy turned to Robbie, and his parents Jason and Trinity. "You take good care of your boys. If you ever need anything, just give me a call, okay?"

After many nods, handshakes, and hugs, Sammy and everyone with him left, leaving just Robbie and his parents standing there in front of the Rimmers. The other three brothers joined Robbie. After a brief exchange of brotherly greetings, Ralphie, Ronnie and Richie escorted Robbie to the kitchen chow line. Corey, Drew, John and Stephen helplessly giggled at the quadruplets.

Still standing with Kaleo and Keith, Prez smiled at the two adults before them. He chuckled, "Three of the four brothers had

already put their stuff in their dorm room, but I see we have the shortest dorm residency on record to deal with. Let's assume the four brothers are going to want to be together for a while."

"Agreed," Jason smiled.

Trinity giggled, "Now we're de-facto parents of four, and they all look the same as the one we started with."

Prez shrugged, "When the other three decide that they want you to be their parents, I can make that official for you."

Kaleo asked, "For now, would either of you like something to eat; perhaps coffee, tea or soft drinks?"

Seeing his father and Bill Seaver approaching, Keith pointed and giggled, "Here comes your welcoming committee. While you're with them, we'll get a place lined up for your family to be together tonight."

Prez nodded, "We have big townhomes on base. They're three bedroom, two-and-a-half baths, about seventeen hundred square feet, not including the finished basement."

Jason remembered, "Our personal affects were supposed to be gathered by someone named Daileass."

Into Prez's sub-vocal, Daileass giggled, "Tell me which townhouse to transport their stuff to, Prez."

"The opposite end unit from mine, Daileass," Prez responded. He then told Jason and Trinity Taylor, "Your goods will be at your new home when you're ready." He then introduced Jason and Trinity to his foster dad and Bill Seaver. Prez then wondered, "I'm just

curious, what were your jobs?"

"I taught social studies and coached football, at the middle school level," Jason answered.

Trinity said, "I taught math and algebra."

"Excellent!" Keith and Prez cheered.

Kaleo smiled, "Expect a visit from Mister Tecumseh, the Clan educational adviser."

Since the boys were done, Jim Hundser led Jason and Trinity to tables where many of the parents were already seated. Kaleo, Keith and Prez returned to their tables.

"Another eighty kids in a single day," Derrick giggled.

The day's not over yet either," Mike grinned and bounced his eyebrows.

Returning to his table and seat, Prez called, "Alden, check our list of rescued kids. How many are boys, how many are girls? Reply to all the Core Rimmers." Prez then began typing a quick e-mail to Mr. T, so he could come meet Jason and Trinity Taylor.

Alden answered, "There are two hundred-thirty-five currently on base; one hundred-fifty-three are male, sixty-four percent of the total; eighty-two are female, thirty-six percent of the total."

Sending the e-mail off to Mr. T, Prez said, "Thanks, dude." He then began puttering with his PADD, seemingly off on another task.

Surprised, Keith said, "It seemed to me that three of every five were boys. It's more like four of every six, almost two-thirds."

Derrick joked, "Hey Alden, isn't there an all girls school we can panty raid?" The rest of the Rimmers cracked up.

Alden laughed, "I'll check into it, Derrick."

Slowly nodding his head, Mike grinned and warned, "No nookie for you later."

Raising his eyebrows, Derrick smiled, "You know I like a challenge," instigating another round of laughter.

Noticing Prez was still involved on his PADD, Keith softly asked, "What's goin' on, baby?"

Humming curiously, Prez looked up and saw his hubby's concern. Prez grinned, "Minesweeper sucks and Ms. Pacman is too easy, so I'm downloading Pissed Off Chickens." Keith sputtered and tried to hold back, but all the other listening Core Rimmers cracked up, and then so did Keith.

Not very far away from the Core Rimmers' tables, the quadruplets were getting to know each other better. Finally comfortable enough to pose the question, Ralphie asked Robbie, "So, what possessed you to shave your head?"

Swallowing a mouthful of mashed red potatoes and gravy, Robbie smiled, "My friend in Tacoma has cancer. With the chemo and radiation treatments, he lost his hair and got really bummed out. I wanted to prove that hair grows back and it wasn't a big deal." Almost at once, the other three brothers cheered Robbie for making his friend feel better. They would all take a trip to Tacoma to meet Robbie's sick friend. That led the boys to chat about other trips they would be taking over the coming days and weeks. Once Ralphie shared that he had spent most of the last week at the beach riding waves on boogie-

boards, they couldn't wait to get their friends to come to the ROH.

Leaning back in his chair, Prez remembered his mom's home cooked Southern meals, sighing, "That was the best country-fried steak ever." Looking over his shoulder, he checked the plates before his boys. Sammy and Gage did a decent job of clearing their plates. They were considering dessert, but neither was moving off their chairs. Dee was still working on his plate, but Richie seemed to have given up.

Kaleo called, "Hey, Prez?"

"What's up, Kaleo?"

"Tory and me were thinkin', it would be very uncool for newbies at our other bases to not have Core Rimmers around."

Tory suggested, "With twelve of us, we could split up when necessary."

Kaleo added, "It's a matter of choosing who lives where, when the time comes."

Prez nodded, "Excellent points. Keith and I were thinking that certain Core Rimmers need to be here on the main base."

Keith explained, "Specifically, Kaleo you need to be here as Communications Officer. John's head of Intel, Drew and Corey work on the computers, so they need to be here. Prez and I need to be here too." He then asked Alden for a general dormitory breakdown.

Alden reported, "Dorm building one is full. In dorm building two, there's room for twenty-eight additional girls; the first floor is filled. Dorm building three has room for thirty boys on the first floor. The entire second floor is unoccupied. It's your choice, but maybe you

could make that third building all boys. Then you could house most of the expected California kids here."

Prez thoughtfully scowled, "That's assuming we don't get too many other kids between now and then. That's not a valid assumption. I'm not too happy about it, but when it becomes necessary, probably later next week, Derrick, Mike, Sean and Troy may need to temporarily move to another base, at least until we get the secondary leadership structure built."

Troy wondered, "Where could we move to?"

Keith smiled, "Take a townhouse, dude."

Mike reminded, "We all have access to Alden and could get anywhere we need to be."

Turning to Kaleo and Tory, Derrick teased, "You two could adopt a few kids. That would free up a few dorm rooms."

Tory blushed and began sweating. Kaleo laughed, "You're nuts!"

"My nuts," Mike softly joked. Derrick decided to have Mike for dessert, leaned over and munched on his hubby's shoulder.

Prez tapped his comm-badge and called, "Paulie?"

Paulie replied, "Yeah, Prez?"

"Give Donnie a call at the Rapid Response Base," Prez instructed. "We're expecting that this base will be loaded in a couple o' days. We're gonna need UNIT security at the Oneula Base pretty soon."

"Will do, boss."

"Thanks, bud."

Keith tapped his sub-vocal and asked, "Alden, without a Core Rimmer, how would kids from our other bases move around between bases?"

"Dimensional doors," Alden replied.

Keith's head sagged and he queried, "Pardon?"

Connecting to all the Core Rimmers, Alden giggled, "Dimensional doors can be installed at all the bases." Becoming serious, Alden explained, "They're voice controlled, so the kids would just say where they want to go then walk through the doorway and arrive. It's like transporting, but instead of being from anywhere to anywhere, it's more controlled. For example, if dimensional doors were installed at every base dining room, then kids could walk from base-to-base as easy as walking from room-to-room. That includes other Clan bases; all of them will have at least one."

Sean grinned, "Having them at the school and FYS buildings too would be excellent."

Troy nodded and smirked, "There would be no chance of being late for school."

"Or a doctor appointment," Sean added.

Prez asked, "Who does the installations?"

Alden answered, "AI Division handles that." He then asked, "Shall I coordinate that for you, Prez?"

Prez answered, "Definitely. Let's try to get them installed this weekend; in every dining room, the school buildings and the FYS

buildings. Priority authorization."

Smirking devilishly, Keith joked, "I'm gonna have a chat with Sean Short about blond forgetfulness."

Overhearing this, Dee and Sammy, both blond, shouted, "DAD!" Derrick and Sean simply glared and smirked evilly at Keith.

Corey went one step further. He tapped his sub-vocal and silently ordered, "Alden, Keith needs a dip in the diving well. Do the honors, please." Keith disappeared from the dining room and found himself falling twenty feet into the diving well.

Giggling his butt off, John scanned each of the three blond Core Rimmers to find out what had happened to his oldest brother. Settling on Corey, John loudly laughed, "I love it! You should've dunked him in the North Atlantic!"

Corey grinned, "Next blond joke, I will."

Smiling widely, but shaking his head sadly, Drew huffed, "We're gonna have to hide the rest of the night." Drew playfully suggested, "Let's go to the Command Center. The phasers are there." Drew and Corey stood and took their trays over to the table where Geoff and Lenny were sitting.

At the table where the quadruplets were sitting before empty plates and glasses, Ronnie's comm-badge chirped. Adam asked, "Hey Ronnie, you doing anything, bro?"

"We're just finishing up dinner," Ronnie replied.

"You didn't invite me? See if I make cookies for you next Friday!" Adam giggled in reply.

The other three brothers hummed hungrily. Ronnie sniggered, "We had country fried steak, mashed potatoes and southern gravy, and you missed it."

Adam quickly said, "Grandma Morrison's here, and she says she wants to meet the rest of her grandsons, like now. She kinda gets her way. I think Julio is the first person in history to stand up to her and survive!"

"Okay," Ronnie grinned, and then explained to his brothers, Drew and Corey, "We'll need to take a short trip to Naples, Florida."

Drew nodded, "Kewl, bro. We'll see ya later tonight?"

Ronnie nodded, "Yup, before bed time, so we don't start off on the wrong foot with Jason and Trinity."

"Mom and Dad," the other three brothers corrected.

Suddenly, with all four still sitting at the table, they transported away.

Corey softly giggled, "Alden, they weren't standing for transport."

Alden laughed, "I know. Kerry did it. Talk about your bouncy touch-downs!"

Seeing that Bruce had finished eating, Peter hurried over to him asking, "Ya wanna go for a little sight seeing tour?"

"Sure," Bruce quickly agreed.

While walking with Bruce over to where Jim Hundser was clearing his table, Peter explained what had happened during the course of the day at Kaho'olawe, constantly getting tongue tied just

saying the island's name. Bruce was giggling his butt off by the time they reached Jim. Peter called John, Stephen and Frankie over to join them on the tour. Peter and his five guests popped out of the dining room.

Shaking his head and standing up to clear the table, Prez chuckled, "The less I know, the better." Stopping at his sons' table, Prez gathered Richie's tray. The other Core Rimmer couples stood to take their trays to the dishwasher.

Dee wondered, "Where's Daddy at, Poppa?"

"Learning," Prez softly chuckled.

Gathering his own tray of trash, Gage asked, "Do you have to work tonight, Pop?"

"Nope," Prez answered, "Uncle Drew's in charge tonight."

"Kewl!" shouted Gage, Dee and Sammy.

From the other side of the same table, Drew wondered, "How much longer, Prez?"

Prez shrugged, "Until tomorrow morning. We won't be going to school." Realizing that Drew had no idea what had happened earlier that day, Prez carefully explained, "There was a bit of an issue at school. It was enough for us to give up jazz band."

Drew groaned, "Sorry, bro."

Prez shrugged, "It's no biggie. We get to play every day, right here, for all our kids."

Corey sighed, "We know you dudes busted your butts most of

the summer though."

"It wasn't wasted," Prez assured. "We learned kewl tunes. We might even get Troy to learn one or two of 'em, if he's interested."

Standing with his tray, Sammy asked, "So you won't have to leave the base tomorrow, Pop?"

Leading the pack towards the dishwasher, Prez said, "That's right, we're here with all you guys from now on." Hearing that, Richie, Geoff, Lenny and Dillon became more enthused. They suddenly and loudly squealed joyfully. Everyone that didn't already know the Core Rimmers would be around more, now knew.

Peter, Bruce, Jim, John, Stephen and Frankie arrived at number ten Downing Street, Kaho'olawe. All of them had a good laugh about the address then started walking up the deserted street. Jim was voicing how completely amazed he was. During dinner conversation, he knew what work Carl had performed that day, but didn't realize the extent, since Carl was mostly transporting to and from Kaho'olawe with machines and materials. The boys were happily chit-chatting and taking notice of buildings similar to what they were already familiar with. They approached Broadway and the very well lit intersection of Broadway and Downing Street.

Sopping wet, with a towel wrapped over his shoulder, Keith returned to the dinning room, looking for the blond bastard that had him dunked.

Troy walked past with Sean. Sean pleasantly said, "We're gonna check on Troy's mom." With Mike and their kids, Derrick calmly headed for the kitchen dishwasher, but didn't even seem to notice Keith.

Exiting the kitchen, Drew noticed Keith though. Quickly turning

around, he stopped Corey, Geoff and Lenny. Drew swiftly ordered, "Alden, transport us home, to my bedroom." They disappeared from the kitchen.

Meeting with Prez and their boys as they were coming out of the kitchen, Keith looked around for Corey and Drew. "Where'd they go, baby?"

"Who?" Prez wondered.

Keith smiled, "My brother and the evil blond."

Prez glanced around then shrugged and grinned, "They were just here. Obviously, they're hiding from you."

Widely smiling at Keith, Dee teased, "You was bein' bad, daddy."

Grabbing hold of his son, Keith tickled Dee mercilessly. Prez noticed Kaleo and Tory near the tables where many of the San Diego kids were at. In Tory's arms was five-year-old Mark Fikes. Kaleo had six-year-old Leonard Santana planted on his hip. Interrupting Keith's playful torture of Dee, Prez pointed and prodded, "Check it out, babe."

Pulling Dee close and hugging him tight, Keith followed Prez's arm then grinned, "It's only a matter of time."

Prez tapped his comm-badge, calling "Drew?"

Drew giggled, "What's up, bro?"

"There are some Anaheim kids looking around, prob'ly for you and Corey."

Drew laughed, "Is Keith still on the warpath?"

Keith smiled, "I don't get mad, I get even."

Drew and Corey howled laughing. Drew then giggled, "We'll meet you by the pools."

Corey giggled, "I'm gonna get wet soon anyway."

"When you least expect it," Keith warned.

Keith's mom, Renee and Carmella approached Keith and Prez. Jennifer said, "I was just called by Hawaii Medical Center East. There are two girls, orphaned today, that need a place to live. I'll take my little ladies with me to get them."

Prez asked, "Do you want any of us to come along, mom?"

"No, I don't think that will be necessary," Jennifer Hundser smiled. "I'll have my security with us."

Prez nodded, "Okay. Do you know how old the girls are?"

She answered, "Thirteen-year-old twins, I understand."

"We'll let Drew and Corey know," Keith said.

Jennifer said, "After I pick them up, I'll take them to their hotel to get their things."

Keith moaned, "Aw, more vacationers?"

Jennifer nodded and sighed. She looked down to ask Carmella and Renee, "Ready ladies?"

Renee and Carmella chorused, "Ready, Momma." Jennifer and

her two daughters walked away.

Heading for the door with Keith and their boys, Prez tapped his sub-vocal asking, "What do you know about these two orphaned girls from Hawaiian Medical Center East, Alden."

Alden answered, "Their parents were involved in a car accident on H-3 this morning. The father was D.O.A at the hospital. The mother passed earlier this evening. That's all I have, Prez."

Derrick and Mike caught up with Keith and Prez. Derrick said, "Dillon and Jonah want to watch a movie. How about we get all the little kids together in the auditorium for a flick?"

Keith nodded and smiled, "Good idea."

Prez stepped up on a chair and had Alden connect him to the base PA "We're going to head over to the auditorium for a movie. I know we've got 'Toy Story' in our library." Prez didn't need to ask if anyone was interested. Squeals and shouts burst forth. Kids began heading for the door along with some of the adults.

Keith grinned, "To infinity and beyond!"

On Kaho'olawe and crossing Broadway, Peter's group of sightseers had to pause because they heard a distant loud "MEEP-MEEP!" A roadrunner speedily ran down the street, kicking up a trail of dust, that was followed by a racing coyote, complete with fork, knife and bib.

"What the heck?" Stephen, Bruce and Frankie excitedly hollered. Peter bent over and cracked up laughing. At the stunned expressions of the boys, Jim also bellowed loud laughter.

John giggled, "Mikyvis illusions?"

"Uh huh," Peter giggled, still in hysterics.

Catching his breath, Bruce looked up and around the approaching block. In large brightly lit lettering on the corner facade of the building, Bruce read 'Downing Gardens'. It was an enormous amphitheater building, similar to the auditorium in Ewa Beach. Soon Bruce realized that only colors and distance made this building seem different. The group continued walking, but everyone was certain what they were seeing. It took only another minute for Bruce to see the plaque that Peter had erected in memory of Bruce's parents. Bruce stopped to read the plaque. Shivering and shedding happy tears, Bruce wiped his eyes then embraced Peter. The two boys remained attached in a hug for a long minute. Beginning to walk further up Downing Street, Peter explained that all the streets thus far built were named after the many Clan Short families. They didn't go very far before deciding to return home.

In their bedroom, working from their Linux computer on division web pages while Geoff and Lenny played video games, Corey turned to Drew wondering, "Is this a trick? I thought we were meeting at the pools?"

No longer interested in 'Sonic the Hedgehog', Geoff turned, yelling to Drew; "Let's go, Daddy!"

Drew tapped his sub-vocal and asked, "Alden, are they really going to watch a movie?"

Alden giggled, "I hope so. Most of the Clan is heading to the auditorium."

Standing up, Drew said, "Okay, let's beat the rush. Alden,

transport us and our boys to the auditorium lobby."

Corey stood and giggled, "I'm getting wet." As soon as the four boys were gathered, Alden transported them. Drew and Corey began powering up the building.

Behind the first pack of kids entering the auditorium, Kaleo and Tory walked in. Kaleo said, "Power up the concession stand, Drew. We'll get some popcorn popped." Kids went there and lined up, ready for candies, popcorn and sodas.

Leaving their boys at the concession stand, Prez and Keith went up to the projector booth to figure out how to load and thread the film. Reading the directions and following the diagrams, they got the reels of film prepared.

An additional bonus, Keith and Prez had seen the movie several times. Once the concession stand was cleaned up, all the Core Rimmers and Reyes took a stroll to tell the available Clan moms and their dads where they were going, and then took a week off at Archmania. During their visit, the band rehearsed a lot and got some much needed relaxation time, bonding the Core team together even tighter. The Des Moines leadership team had the same idea and arrived at Archmania at almost the same time the Rimmers had. Returning to Ewa Beach, only about two minutes after they had left, the Core Rimmers split off in various directions while their sons returned to the auditorium and 'Toy Story'.

Drew and Corey walked the little ones there. Geoff realized he needed to go to the boys' room and Lenny thought it was a good idea. While the rest of the boys returned to the theater, Drew and Corey accompanied their sons to the restroom.

A few minutes later, they stepped out of the boy's room and

back into the empty lobby. They all noticed strange things happening at the concession stand and came to an abrupt halt. Popped popcorn was un-popping itself and flying back up into the machine as whole kernels. The plastic soda cups, neatly stacked and arranged by size, were mixing themselves into balanced sets of upside down and right-side-up large, medium and small cups. Lenny and Geoff cracked up and looked up at the perplexed grins on their dad's and poppa's faces.

Corey checked with Drew, sniggering, "A Mikyvis?"

Shaking his head, Drew smiled, "Probably not. I can think of only one warped sense of humor that would pull this stunt to get our attention."

Together, Corey and Drew hollered, "QUINT!"

With a flash of light, Quint appeared before the four boys.

He blinked at them and in his best 'innocent little boy' voice, said, "Yes? You called?"

Corey, Geoff and Lenny roared laughing. Drew chortled, "If your gonna play innocent, maybe you could stop unpopping the corn and return the cups as they were too?"

"What? Oh, that... was just... entertaining... ummm...." Quint fumbled for a good excuse, then gave up. "I was entertaining myself. Sorry, but we superior beings need light entertainment at times..."

He snapped his fingers and the room filled with warm, sweet smelling popcorn up to the waists of the smallest of the kids. He blinked, tapping his fingers. "Dammit! Keeps bugging out on me... I'll deal with it, don't worry!" he grumbled to the others, but the twinkle in his eyes said that it was all under control.

Corey was too busy eating some of the popcorn to say much, and Lenny was already trying to swim in the stuff.

"Think I have it! There!" Quint chortled as he made most of the popcorn vanish. There was still a mound of the stuff around each kid and pre-teen.

Drew giggled, "Did you need something, or were you just bored?"

Around his popcorn stuffed mouth, Corey grinned, "No Lilliputians? All this popcorn could feed them for years."

"Yes, yes, no and agreed," Quint giggled.

Drew sniggered, "What could we mere mortals do for our Lord and Master?"

Again, Levi's hand appeared and slapped Quint.

"Well, minions," Quint grouched, as he fended off the still slapping hand, "I'd like an anti-slap head protective device, Mikyvis strength, then... buggerit! Levi! Go chase a comet or something! Where was I?" he asked them as Levi's hand vanished, leaving the little boys' giggles echoing through the air.

Covering his eyes and forcing himself to speak through his laughter, Drew replied, "You're in Ewa Beach, about to tell us what you needed."

"Right!" Quint shouted, and then told them, "You're needed back at Archmania, four days ago, but you can't know what you know, and certainly can't say what you know, so I'll just put a little lock in place, so we'll move forward, back in time."

Corey, Drew, Geoff and Lenny all grunted, "Huh?"

Quint huffed then softly grumbled, "Humans. Just come with me." He snapped his fingers, taking all four Rimmers back to Archmania, but left the piles of popcorn on the floor.

Mrs. Marr walked in just in time to see them all vanish. She looked at the piles of popcorn and sighed. Then five pairs of hands appeared from out of nowhere and started gathering up the popcorn with 'ACME popcorn Hoovers'. They vanished quickly, with all the popcorn gone.

She turned around, exited the auditorium and headed for her Valium supply.

John went to the pools with Stephen and kept on walking, seemingly standing on the water. Most of the teenagers were there too; making new friends and forming bonds. Arriving from Kaho'olawe, Bruce excitedly told John and many of his friends that a memorial to his parents had been built on the Clan's new island. Sean found his roommate Horacio, sharing a hovering lounge chair with Sonia. Sean and Troy found their own lounge chair to share. Sean called for John to do the honors. Soon, John had levitated an additional twenty lounge chairs and their occupants. Testing his newly discovered telekinetic powers, John began lifting weights at the indoor rec center. With Stephen holding him close, John realized he was levitating close to two tons and it wasn't much of an effort; his eyes hadn't even changed to shining azure blue. John and Stephen floated to the diving well. There, he held diving boys up in the air to do as many somersaults as they liked before releasing them to drop into the water. Girls on the slide were sliding back up and down over and over again until they were loudly laughing.

Stephen cackled, "You're a one man amusement park, hon."

John giggled, "It's fun for me too."

Kids from the auditorium began arriving at the pools. Derrick, Mike, Kaleo and Tory also joined the Clan at the pools. By the time Drew, Corey, Prez and Keith arrived, John had their fathers and the three remaining mothers hovering around in lounge chairs too. Seeing John's eyes shining blue, Drew pointed out to Corey, Keith and Prez that free-weights and Nautilus weights were also hovering in the indoor rec center.

Keith asked, "How much weight do you think you're holding up, bro?"

"I have no idea!" John laughed. "I lost count after two tons. Probably close to three tons or a little over." Reading Prez's thoughts, John levitated Drew, Corey, Keith and Prez so they were hovering twenty feet in the air, looking down at their Clan and the base.

Prez figured that maybe twenty or thirty of more than two-hundred people were not floating around. Prez shouted down at John, "Is any of this an effort at all, bro?"

John hollered up, "With Stephen, not really." He then levitated himself and Stephen nearer to his brothers and said, "I started with kids on lounge chairs then added more a little at a time."

Prez grinned, "Let's see what you can manage all at once."

Glancing around, John decided it was a good question. Lowering everyone, everything, himself and Stephen, John explained what he was about to do to all the kids and adults. He asked everyone to stay where they were or stand still. He concentrated on all the pool furniture, people and weights in the rec center then asked Stephen to

step back and powered up. All at once, everyone and everything surrounding the pool lifted four feet off the ground, including himself and Stephen.

Turning to his dad, Prez asked, "How much do you think he's lifting, dad?"

Jim Hundser, Bill Seaver and Rob Gibbons began bouncing ideas back and forth. "Figuring two hundred and thirty kids at an average of a hundred pounds, lawn furniture and weights, I'd estimate about hundred tons," Jim Hundser answered, and then glared at his youngest son. "Does this hurt at all?"

Shaking his head, John giggled, "Nope! My head feels tingly, but otherwise, I feel fine." All the older boys began giggling and laughing because John's 'head' was tingling.

Jennifer Hundser, her security team, two daughters and the two recently orphaned teenage girls arrived at the base. They walked together to the pools, where Jennifer assumed their Clan would be. Looking directly into hovering legs, Jen didn't know who to complain to first – John, Preston or her husband, Jim.

Sensing a brewing storm, John looked around and focused on his mother. John loudly laughed, "We were doing normal stuff! All the kids watched a movie. All the teenagers came out here. We were just curious!"

Jen sighed, "If you would all please land, I could introduce our two newest girls."

Lowering everyone and everything to the ground, John shifted his focus to the two new arrivals. He could hear their thoughts, but it wasn't what John expected. He expected separate surface thoughts, each of the two girls having their own ideas. Instead, he heard the two

girls telepathically conversing about the twists of this day, including the surprise of floating people. Taking Stephen by the hand, John swiftly pulled his husband over to the girls. *'Hi,'* John pleasantly sent. *'You're telepathic too, huh?'*

Stunned, the two girls confirmed with each other that yes, they could hear this boy's voice in their minds.

In seconds, the entire Clan were surrounding seven females. Jen Hundser introduced John, Stephen and the rest of the Clan leaders to Caitlin and Ida Durand.

John telepathically called Cesar and Felipe forward, so sets of twin telepaths could meet. While Prez performed his duty and greeted the girls, John sensed something different about these girls. Leaving the pack of kids to welcome the new arrivals, John and Stephen went inside the empty pool house.

Stephen felt John's concern and asked, "What's wrong, hon?"

"I think... no, I feel, they're gonna be N-Gen," John answered. "I dunno," John sighed, "I'm an empathic N-Gen, so if I were in their shoes, having lost both parents at once, I'd be freaking out. Is there a chance that tonight, tomorrow or the day of the funeral they could turn N-Gen? I can't help them both, I'm not even trained to help one of 'em." He looked at the wall clock. Nine-thirty-five at night would be eight-thirty-five the next morning in the U.K. John tapped his comm-badge and called, "John Hundser to Riti Evans."

Riti answered, "Good morning, John."

In the back ground, John heard many other voices, mostly kids, and perhaps some adults as well. John grinned, "It's night time here," and then presented his concerns about the twins to Riti. He wondered,

"What's goin' on? It sounds busy there."

"Oh, well, things are a tiny bit crazed here," Riti offered. "There's civil unrest from yesterday; people are bitching, moaning and whining like a bunch of little fucking babies, about the American company that messed with those kids, so we're monitoring the situation." Riti hurried, "About the twin girls, don't worry. Yes, something similar may have pushed you, but it's not stress; it's *stressing* their abilities. They may or may not be N-Gen, it depends on whether or not they have the gene. You can test it yourself, with a tricorder."

Relieved, John smiled, "Kewl. I didn't know there was a biological test."

"There wasn't," Riti giggled, "until *you*. The triplets monitored you during your transition, bro. Check your Intel console for specifics. All we know is there."

John grinned, "Thanks, Reet. This helps a bunch. I'll check out the girls."

Riti giggled, "You do and you had better float far above where Stephen can reach! Riti out."

Playing along, Stephen suspiciously glared, "He's right about *that*!"

Blushing, John grinned mischievously. Stephen huffed, turned and walked away. John levitated his husband and pulled him back. Stephen loudly laughed, "John! Put me down!"

Approaching Stephen and looking directly into his knees, John thoughtfully hummed and adjusted the levitation height so that he was looking at Stephen's crotch. Smiling up at his husband, John shared,

"I don't need to kneel down no more. Kewl!" Holding Stephen's butt in place, John ravenously mouthed Stephen's naughty-bits through his clothes.

Hysterical, Stephen screamed, "YOU'RE TWISTED!" and ran his fingers through John's hair. John hummed affirmatively and pushed Stephen into the boy's room to finish what he had begun.

The female Rimmers had taken control from Prez. Caitlin and Ida were more than ready to call an end to a horrendous day. They were shown the dormitory, where they chose a room and began unpacking their suitcases. For the remainder of the evening, they had twenty-eight other girls in that dorm ready to get them food, listen and offer shoulders to cry on. Adults and parents got their little ones ready for baths and bed. Suddenly, there were only boys remaining at the pools, not including Kathleen Marr and the other adult staff still enjoying the warm evening.

From the bathroom where Geoff and Lenny were bathing, Drew tapped his comm-badge and called Prez. "Hey bro, I forgot to mention, we're pretty close to having the official Rimmer web site up and ready."

Still at the pool with Gage, Sammy and Dee, Prez smirked, "What does 'pretty close' mean?"

Drew replied, "We'll have division notices available for Kaleo to keep updated. We'll only have to review the inline documentation with Kaleo. Then, all he'll have to do is keep it up to date with text. Pages for us Core Rimmers are built, so the kids will know about each of us. The only other major portion of the site pending are blogs for the kids. Each kid will have their own page with basic stuff; a photo, date of birth, date they joined our Clan, like that. In addition, the kids can update the remainder of their page with whatever additional

information they want." A loud splash was heard followed by Geoff and Lenny giggling and Corey's laughter. Drew roared, "Well, you expected to get wet tonight!" Returning to his conversation with Prez, Drew chuckled, "Umm... where was I? Oh yeah, the idea we had for the kids pages was mostly for hobbies and special interests; artists can get to know other artists, musicians other musicians, and so forth. Then they can get to know each other. We'll use John's Intel database as input for the kids' pages and they'll be automatically generated every day."

Prez said, "We'll need a page for Platinum Habits too, bro."

"What for?" Drew wondered.

"The holidays are coming," Prez reminded. "We'll have at least one Christmas concert and a New Year's Eve concert. Without school jazz band, we'll be having various Clan concerts throughout the year."

Emerging from the pool house, John and Stephen walked a foot above the ground. Stephen's mother got up from her poolside chair and started towards them. The two boys lowered to the ground. Kathleen Marr said, "I've figured out what I need to do and where I need to be. I felt useful today for the first time in a long time. This morning, while I was cleaning the house, I saw the spare bedroom on the first floor. For me, an entire apartment is too much, unless you boys will be living with me."

Having already understood the surface thoughts his mother-in-law had, John smiled, "We're almost always spending nights in the basement nest with the kids. I don't think that will be changing very soon. Tonight, we'll have a bunch of newbies with us down there."

Kathleen smirked at John. "I think the best place I could be is in the spare bedroom of your parents' house. It's more than sufficient for

me. I could be a housekeeper and cook for the kids at the Hundserts'. It helps your parents and keeps me nearby if either of you should need me."

Watching his mother closely while she spoke, Stephen turned to John and sighed, "Everything's so different here now. She misses me, hon." Turning back to his mother, Stephen reassuringly said, "Everything's perfect, ma. If you ever decide you want a single bedroom place of your own, just say so, okay?"

John nodded, "Yeah. I'm only thinking that you'd be sharing one of the upstairs bathrooms with a bunch of boys."

"That doesn't matter," Kathleen shared. "Since arriving, I've eaten every meal at the CIC dining room. I've only been sleeping and showering at the apartment. The rest of the time, I've been getting to know some of the other adults. I spoke with Madeline and she agreed, specialized housekeepers for the families would be helpful." Focusing on John, she said, "My only concern is whether your parents would want a live-in housekeeper."

Humming thoughtfully, John shrugged, "I dunno. Let's go find out. If they don't want a live-in housekeeper, we'll get a single bedroom condo for you, mom." Together, the three of them went to the Hundserts' house. When they walked inside, Keith, Drew, Corey, Jen and Jim Hundert were coming downstairs with the bathed kids. John asked Stephen, *'Do you wanna stay here with your mom or go downstairs with the kids?'* John heard Stephen's silent desire to remain with his mom. John leaned over and telepathically called Carmella. He caught his littlest sister and lifted her in his arms then sent to his parents, *'Mom, dad, Stephen's mom has a good idea that she needs to share with you. While you talk with her, we'll get the kids to bed.'* John, Drew, Corey and Keith led the pack of rug rats to the basement.

Jennifer asked, "What can I get for you, Kathy?" Starting for the kitchen, she suggested, "Coffee? Tea? A soft drink?"

Kathleen looked down at her son, unsure how to answer. Stephen only smiled. Kathleen implored, "Let me serve you, please?" and followed the Hundser adults. Bringing up the rear, Stephen remained close to his mom.

Without breaking her stride, Jen answered, "Now I can guess what this is about."

Jim said, "We are not wealthy. A week ago we were middle class parents raising a family."

Kathleen offered, "It seems you've very much completed raising your family."

Understandingly, Stephen meekly offered, "My mom just wants to be near me. Since this is where I am, mom's only trying to say that she wants to be here." Jen began filling a kettle with water.

Jim smiled at Stephen and Kathleen saying, "That's clear. What we're saying is that we won't have her acting as a maid or treated as such."

Kathleen sighed, "There's not much more I could do except housekeeping. With all the children that sleep here and eat breakfast here, I want to help."

Putting a filled kettle of water on the stove, Jen said, "Today was different, Kathy. Normally, the kids split off for the CIC dining room or the dorms for showers. Their parents or grandparents were here, so they stayed here for breakfast. On a normal day, only our own children and grandchildren might stay here for breakfast."

Offering Kathy a seat at the dinette table, Jim added, "Troy's mother is a housekeeper *and* a Clan mother too now. You're exactly like her and us; working for the Clan as a whole." Kathleen and Stephen sat down.

"You both work full time for Federation Youth Services," Kathleen observed. "While you were working, I was here from ten until almost one cleaning the kitchen, dining room, basement and all the bathrooms. It made me feel good, like I was contributing."

Taking a seat at the dinette table, Jen warmly smiled, "That's all anyone ever needs, isn't it?" Kathleen nodded then Jen continued, "We noticed the cleaned rooms. In the mornings, we have quite a gathering here; less than today, but we have eighteen kids and grand-kids."

Jen assured, "If you'd like to be a housekeeper, that's fine. We could use help here and around the entire compound. Please don't consider yourself *our* maid. I can only take so much change. That would make me crazier."

Gesturing towards the spare bedroom, Kathleen asked, "Could I move my things in there?" Jim and Jen nodded. Kathleen smiled, "Thank you, so much. I can't see myself staying in a big two-bedroom apartment or a slightly smaller one bedroom unit."

Jen nodded, "As mothers, we need to be near our kids." The kettle began to whistle and she stood to prepare cups of tea. Always listening, Alden heard and saw the conversation. He transported all of Mrs. Marr's things from the two bedroom townhouse selected Tuesday afternoon to the Hundserts' first floor spare bedroom. He carefully broke in through the ceiling mounted speakers; "Excuse me, your stuff is already moved, Mrs. Marr. What was hanging in the closet there is now hanging here. Your belongings from the dresser are

on the bed in that bedroom."

Jim and Jen thanked Alden. Kathleen Marr was too flabbergasted to speak. The two Hunders began a more in depth explanation of Alden, Daileass and Draco. They hadn't yet learned of the other Clan AI's; George, Kerry and Icarus.

Heavy footsteps were heard climbing the stairs. John sent to Stephen, *'Hey sexy, ya wanna roll around above the couch?'* The basement door opened. Keith, Drew and Corey emerged.

Stephen giggled then stood, kissed his mom on the cheek and softly said, "I'll see you in the morning." Stephen hurried to the basement door then skipped down the steps.

Keith told the adults, "The kids are asleep. John and Stephen will be down there with them. We're going to enjoy a quiet night by the pool."

Jim nodded and said, "Drew, program the doors to allow Mrs. Marr access to our house, please? She'll be living here with us and Stephen."

Drew smiled, "Kewl. This will only take a minute, Mrs. Marr." Leading the way to the kitchen sliding glass doors, Drew explained, "It's hand-print and voice-print activated. Just place your hand on the plate and speak your name."

Frankie walked in through the sliding glass doors. He waved and sighed, "Daddy says it's time to get ready for bed and I should come in now."

Jim smiled, "You know the way. Sleep well, Frankie."

Jen stopped Keith and whispered in her son's ear. Keith told his

mother that they had just gone on a week long vacation, during which time the band learned and rehearsed two dozen new songs. Jen didn't believe it until Keith giggled and took his shirt off. Jennifer squinted suspiciously and quickly tugged down a corner of her eldest son's boardies. Seeing Keith's tanned back had indeed faded and was nearer the same white shade as his butt, Jennifer appreciatively nodded, "Thank goodness. I was about to have a fit."

Keith giggled, "We know and took care of it, mom. After last night, we needed it." He said goodnight to his mom, dad and Mrs. Marr, then went to the pool to find Prez. Corey waited until Drew was finished with Mrs. Marr. Drew and Corey then went to the pool. All the Core Rimmers were there with many of their teenage Clan. Jennifer served the tea and Jim pulled a package of shortbread cookies from the cupboard.

Once alone with Jen and Jim Hundser, Kathleen said, "I cannot begin to thank you... well, for everything. Stephen's changed so much in so short a time. For changing my scared boy into a more secure young man, I'm proud to be involved with Clan Short. I intend to show it too. I've done housekeeping before, at smaller motels in Hilo. This house, with all the kids running in and out, needs a housekeeper so neither of you need to worry about anything."

Understanding Kathleen's perspective, Jim said, "You're part of the family now. Keith and Preston used to wash their own bedsheets, but they didn't have jobs then either. Our entire family used to participate in Sunday house cleaning. With all of us working together, the boys would be done and out by one the latest. Now however, I'm certain that won't be happening like it used to. We can and will help when we can, most likely on weekends."

Jen offered, "Our boys only ate dinner here one of five nights, on Sunday. They're happy to join the Clan at the CIC dining room for

most meals. Did you notice that the upstairs bathrooms have laundry chutes?"

"No," Kathleen answered, "I did look around upstairs though. There are two full size beds in three of the five bedrooms."

Pointing at the lower level bath and utility room, Jim said, "There are commercial sized washers and dryers in there. So far, our boys haven't slept in their rooms. Carmella and Renee, our two girls, slept upstairs for a short while last night. At some point they must've felt isolated though and decided to go down to the nest. I was surprised when they came up from the basement this morning."

Jen nodded and told Kathleen, "What we had planned for the bedrooms Saturday has already changed. Keith and Preston will likely move into one of the townhomes with their four boys. The smaller bedroom that was originally going to be for John and Bruce was considered John's and Stephen's room. Now with Frankie, even that's up in the air. The next room, with two full size beds will be for Bruce, Dewi and Kokaku. Carmella and Renee have claimed the last of the five bedrooms, with the mauve carpeting. Drew, Corey, Geoff and Lenny will take the largest room that was originally going to be for Keith, Preston, Dee and Richie."

Jim's eyebrows rose and he thought aloud, "Perhaps Frankie would want to share a room with Bruce, Dewi and Kokaku?"

Kathleen grinned, "That's a very large family; ten boys, two girls and three adults, including myself, and assuming that Keith and Preston move out with their boys. Since they're still living here, add six boys."

Jim softly gasped, "My God, she's right!" Jen smiled at her husband and Jim shrugged, "I lost count."

Relaxing, Kathleen teased, "Are you *sure* you don't need a full time housekeeper?"

Leaning back in his chair and munching on a cookie, Jim smiled, "Perhaps so."

Jen incredulously cackled, "JIM!"

Jim chuckled, "With three of us, we'll be washing clothes, sheets and towels from sunrise Saturdays until bedtime Sunday nights; dusting, mopping floors and vacuuming between loads; and then there will be the never ending task of folding and ironing the cleaned laundry, remaking nine beds and we all still have to eat at some point." Both women broke into fits of hysterics. Jim loudly said, "You're hired. And do you have three friends for the other three families to hire?"

While the adults were chatting in the Hundserts' dinette, Derrick and Mike were poolside, softly talking with their boys. Reyes, Jonah, Randy and Dillon wanted to spend the night together, as a family. This had been brewing since Monday night, Derrick and Mike learned. Tuesday night, nothing had changed because of the weddings and concert. Wednesday night, with the insanity of the orphanage operations, they again returned to the nest by default. The only question to be answered was where they would sleep that night, at the Seiberts' home or the Gibbons' home. The Seiberts' boys, Chad, Herbert, Sung and Kawazoe were pulled into the conversation. Of the Gibbons' four boys, three were already at the Hundserts' basement nest. Only Ben Hatcher was still at the pool and he was asked where he would like to sleep. Ben couldn't make up his mind; he wanted to be with his brothers, but also wanted to hang out with Jonah and Reyes. To make the decision easier, they decided to spend the night at the Seiberts' house and transport the sleeping boys to the newly created family nest. The nine boys said good night and went home

with Carl Seibert. Dee, Gage and Sammy kissed their fathers good night soon thereafter then went to the nest.

Keith whispered to Prez, "Mom warned me that we needed to take some time off. I told her we did and proved it."

Prez nodded and smiled, "The faded tan line?"

Keith nodded, "How a place can be so warm and pretty, but not give us any tan at all, I'll never understand."

"Something about cellular regeneration supposedly," Prez shrugged.

On their way to their new home for the night, the Taylors, Jason, Trinity and the quadruplets stopped by the pool. Prez introduced all the other Core Rimmers to the adults, then offered to walk the family home. They politely declined, assuring they could find their way easily enough, and the various time zone differences had them all feeling quite tired.

By ten-thirty, most of the Clan had left the pools to get ready for bed, but the ten eldest Core Rimmers remained. Prez and Keith began teasing Kaleo and Tory, wondering when they were going to start a family. Kaleo and Tory hadn't realized that Mark and Leonard were becoming more than a little attached. As recent orphans, Kaleo and Tory worried that they didn't have what it takes to become nurturing parents. It was Drew and Corey that corrected the perception, reminding them that the kids had figured it out all by themselves.

Sean and Troy began giggling. The next thing they knew, the other eight were picking some little boys that Sean and Troy could adopt. At least fifteen of the five- and six-year-old boys' names were rattled off. Sean and Troy were just about to leave the others to their

over active imaginations when all their comm-badges chirped.

Still smiling at the silliness, Prez tapped his comm-badge and answered, "Prez here. What's up?"

"It's Paulie, Prez. Local news is reporting that King Aalona's Palace is under attack."

All ten boys stood and began running towards the CIC Prez asked, "Do we know who's attacking?"

John and Stephen levitated and sped upstairs. Wearing stern expressions, the two boys swiftly floated past their parents. John telekinetically opened the sliding door and raced to the Command Center with his husband. Jim, Jen and Kathy nervously glanced at each other then hurried to the living room and turned on the television.

"No, the news hasn't reported that," Paulie told Prez. "Judging by what I'm seeing on TV, there's a fire-fight in progress."

Prez asked, "Our shields are still active?"

Paulie answered, "Yes, Sir."

At the indoor rec center, Nathan Hayes was teaching Brice Glotzbecker how to play handball when his comm-badge chirped. Nathan had just slammed the ball to the wall for Brice when he suddenly disappeared from the room, leaving Brice standing there watching the ball bounce. After a few moments, Brice picked up the ball and then returned it to the small storage bin in the equipment room. During that time, Brice considered why Nathan had left so suddenly. He ran out of the rec center and hurried to his dorm room to tell his roommate, Gregory Holton that something was going on. Greg was in the common room, watching 'Airplane' on a movie channel

with several other laughing boys. Soon they all knew the Core Rimmers were at it again. Assuming more kids were being rescued, none thought to change the channel on the TV. Scuttle-butt began flying through that dorm and into the others.

Prez ordered, "Paulie, alert all base security. Notify Kekoa to get his troops on base immediately. Alden, try to get the King on the line. Make sure we're safe and let's get the King's family to safety. Notify Donnie to be prepared to offer assistance. The UNIT can do way more than palace guards or police."

Amazed, the ten Core Rimmers watched John and Stephen run towards the CIC, as fast as Olympic sprinters, at least a foot off the ground. John and Stephen outpaced the remaining ten and were the first to arrive in the Command Center. Already at the Intel console with Nathan, John was making entries and ordering Lieutenant Vorik to bring up camera video of the exterior of the King's palace. Each of the four intersections surrounding 'Iolani Palace had cameras and provided eight views of the perimeter.

Immediately upon entering the Command Center, Prez saw flashes of gun fire on the displays and ordered, "Get me an estimate of how many are attacking." He happened to notice the time on the digital clock. It was ten-forty-seven, exactly twenty-four hours since the California orphanage operations.

Paulie said, "I have Donnie on the line, Prez."

Prez nodded, "Patch me in." Drew went to a station and commanded satellite surveillance of Honolulu, providing a ninth video image. Derrick ordered Alden to begin recording all activity in the room. Every order and all video was to be documented so it could be reviewed afterward.

A second later, another video screen activated. Donnie asked, "You'd like us to assist the King, Director O'Brian?" In the background, Drew had the satellite zoom in on 'Ioloni Palace. Prez noticed that the silver eagle on Donnie's collar had been replaced with a single silver star.

Kekoa raced into the room as Prez replied, "Yes, General. The King is now the only head of government this country has. We're getting an estimate on the number of attackers."

Kekoa reported, "The Pacific Rim detachment is on base, Director O'Brian."

Turning to Kekoa briefly, Prez nodded and softly said, "Excellent." Returning his attention to the video display, Prez nodded for Donnie to continue.

Donnie said, "Daileass is estimating eighty armed attackers. We're coordinating with the police to cordon off the area. We'll have three hundred troops at the palace within two-minutes. So you're aware, conditions in London are getting worse. Resources are being dispatched to the U.K. Reports from the Northeast Division indicate unrest in New York City and Washington, D.C. as well."

Paulie loudly said, "Prez, I have King Aalona on the line. Audio only."

Prez nodded to Paulie, "Patch him in and let Donnie participate."

Over the Command Center's speakers, King Aalona said, "Director O'Brian?"

"Here, Majesty. Are you safe?"

"For the moment," the King nervously replied. "We are under Vulcan provided shielding in the Queen's bedroom with our son. Several of my staff have been injured. It appears that militants have penetrated our fence and are in trees outside the palace."

Prez nodded, "We'll have military support there to assist in about a minute, Majesty."

"They have medical training and can transport out with your injured, Sire," Donnie added.

Prez said, "Majesty, we must insure your safety and that of your family. This entire base is shielded and we have secure shelter available, under ground."

"I agree," the King said.

Prez ordered, "Alden, coordinate immediate transport of the King, Queen and Prince to our shelter. As soon as that's complete, transport Keith to the shelter to welcome them."

Alden reported, "Synchronizing shield portals for transport."

Prez turned to Keith and prompted, "Get them calm and comfy, T'hy'la. Whatever it takes." They kissed then Keith stepped back from Prez. The audio channel from the King went silent. Keith disappeared from the Command Center.

Donnie said, "Thirty-seconds until deployment."

A large explosion occurred on the satellite surveillance screen, causing most of the Rimmers to gasp. Paulie shouted, "They've got RPG's, Donnie. It looks like they're assaulting the palace door to enter the premises."

Prez smirked and muttered, "Too friggin' late, assholes." Donnie grinned. Prez said, "Donnie, would I be asking too much if I said that our troops should be ordered to disable only? I want answers that won't come from corpses."

Donnie sighed, "Yes, Sir. This is an attack on a sovereign government leader. They're not limiting their actions. For us to do so would be dangerous and possibly fatal to our personnel. Emily will be in command at the location."

Understanding that Donnie's partner and other Clan members would be jeopardized, Prez huffed then griped, "I'm gonna kick someone right in the nuts for this." In the background, Prez heard Daileass assuring Donnie that the Pacific Rim Division headquarters were secured.

Kekoa moved and stood beside Prez at attention then softly called, "Sir?" Prez turned to Kekoa. "Our detachment is prepared for anything that may be required," Kekoa reported. "I had everyone grab their gear and immediately transport."

Prez forced a smile and offered, "Excellent. Hang out here, Kekoa. I may need your advice." Kekoa obediently nodded.

Meanwhile, in the CIC basement, Keith bowed before the King and forced a bright smile saying, "Welcome to Pacific Rim Division headquarters, Your Majesties."

Relieved, King Aalona nodded and sighed, "I wish it were under more favorable circumstances."

"You're safe here, Sire," Keith assured. "This basement is about thirty feet underground." Keith warmly smiled at the Queen and the young Prince, who appeared to be about six or seven years old, saying, "Please make yourselves at home. Can I get you anything?"

Soft drinks or snacks?"

Turning to his wife and son, King Aalona grinned, "May I introduce Keith Hundser, second in command of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division." Turning back to Keith, the King said, "This is Queen Adamina Aalona and our son, Kaimi."

Bowing again slightly, Keith smiled, "My pleasure, Your Highnesses."

The Queen locked eyes with Keith and smiled, "Please address me as Adamina, Keith."

"Momma?" Kaimi softly called. Queen Adamina turned to her son and he said, "There's nothing 'cept beds, tables and chairs in here. Do they have toys or something to play with?"

The Queen smirked at her son and sighed, "You really should try to go back to sleep."

"I ain't sleepy no more," Kaimi pouted.

Keith chuckled then ordered, "Alden, hook up a PlayStation and television for the Prince."

A moment later, the TV and game station appeared. Kaimi cheered, "Kewl!" then hurried past Keith to play.

Keith smiled, "Anything you might want or need, just call Alden and ask for it."

Queen Adamina smirked, "Perhaps some warm milk with nutmeg for Kaimi might help get him settled down?" Seconds later, a cup appeared on the table before the Queen along with a plate of cookies.

King Aalona grinned, "We must get one of those."

Keith faced the King to softly ask, "Majesty, may I have a private moment?" The King nodded and stepped away with Keith. Keith softly said, "Sire, we've assigned Clan Short Special Forces to assist with resolution of the problem at your palace. We'd like to know who may be the cause. Since Saturday, have you been threatened in any manner?"

The King huffed, "That seems to be constant in the last week. Trade ultimatums from other countries, ROH city and Island governments trying to alter decisions previously made and influence those currently being made."

"Have any of those ultimatums suggested violence of this magnitude?" Keith wondered.

"Several," the King answered. "We've been threatened with trade embargoes over availability of pineapples, for goodness sakes. I've presented that complaint to the League Of Nations." The King paused and seemed thoughtful then said, "This is a more direct threat on me, however. Perhaps... there was a brief message referring to an announcement published in the Star Advertiser on Monday. It instructed me to use certain words from that announcement to decipher a personal message. The deciphered content basically warned me against continued Diplomatic contact with Vulcan. If I persisted then I would be killed. It was not signed and I did not take it seriously at the time."

John immediately sent to Keith, *'We're on it, bro. Maybe we'll see what the King didn't.'* Alden, John, Nathan and Lieutenant Vorik concentrated on Monday's Star Advertiser Classified announcements to learn what had been written privately to the King.

Keith smiled and confirmed, "We'll investigate further, Majesty." He then asked, "Can I get you anything else?"

King Aalona answered, "May I watch one of the televisions in here? I'd like to watch the news and see what's happening at my home."

"Of course," Keith answered, and then went to a nearby table where a remote control lay. He turned on the TV for the King then handed Him the remote control. "I need to return to our Command Center, Majesty. If you need anything else, including contacting myself or Prez, just ask Alden."

Uncertainly, the King wondered, "Who is Prez?"

Keith giggled, "I'm sorry, Director Preston O'Brian. He's been Prez to me since the day we met, more than seven years now." King Aalona smiled and nodded. Keith then had Alden transport him back to the Command Center.

While Keith was busy with the Royals, UNIT troops had been transported to 'Ioloni Palace. Donnie had strategically located his troops. There were one hundred and twenty troops across the street from the external perimeter fence; another one hundred and twenty within the perimeter fence, eighteen of whom were assigned to the six roof level towers; and sixty within the Palace, divided into three groups of twenty to cover each story of the structure.

The firefight was still in progress when Keith returned to the Command Center. Donnie was still on the video display and relaying status updates to the Core Rimmers. Since Prez was occupied with Lieutenant Vorik, Nathan, John and Alden, Keith went to Derrick and Mike to learn what was happening.

Derrick began summarizing Donnie's strategy then finished, "A

few had entered the Palace, but were immediately overcome by the positioned UNIT troops. The Palace interior is secure now. Everyone hurt was transported to the Rapid Response Base medical facilities for treatment."

Mike explained, "Outside, we've got them sandwiched with nowhere to run. A group of four were surrounded. Two surrendered, but the other two were killed."

Keith grinned, "So we've got two in custody. We'll learn who's responsible soon enough, either from those two or from Intel." He then looked up at the nine active video screens. Gun and phaser fire was visible coming down from the towers. Suddenly, an RPG was fired from one of the towers. A large clustering of trees on the southeast corner of the lot exploded in flames. While many of the other Core Rimmers gasped at the sight, Keith groaned then muttered, "I hope that hit their guys and not any of ours."

A few moments later, Donnie called from the video screen for Prez. Keith hurried over and explained, "Prez is busy, Donnie. What've you got?" John transported to the basement shelter. While he greeted the Royals and made Kaimi feel welcome, he performed a deep scan of King Aalona.

Donnie smiled, "It's almost over, Keith. Did you see that last RPG hit?"

Keith nodded, "Yeah, that was them being hit, right?"

"Yes," Donnie replied. "That got ten of them at once. Our recon estimates three groups of three or four remaining. We've got a bigger problem looming though. From mind scans of our prisoners, we've learned that this is only the beginning of the attack. There were bombs placed in buildings somewhere around Honolulu. They don't exactly

know when they're set to go off or where though. All we can do is hope that some of the remaining wounded prisoners do know."

"Holy shit, Donnie!" Keith shouted. "They're planning on blowing up other buildings?" With a deeply concerned expression, Prez spun around and faced his husband. A dozen questions raced through Keith's mind at once; which buildings; where and when; were there people in the buildings and if so, how many?

Donnie nodded and said, "We just received four more wounded prisoners. Our telepaths will scan them. As soon as I know something useful, I'll let you know, Keith." John returned to the Command Center, still chewing a cookie and then handed one to his husband.

"Thanks, Donnie. We'll be here waiting," Keith responded. He went over to see how Prez, Nathan, John and Lieutenant Vorik were coming along, since there was nothing else to do except worry.

Clearly feeling his eldest brother's concern, John said, "I pulled the announcement name from the King's memory, but the words we're supposed to choose weren't in there; the instructions were written on plain typewritten paper that he's already thrown away. We've contacted the Star Ledger to learn who's account paid for the announcement. They haven't responded yet. The AI's are playing word skip games trying to come up with a message that threatens the King. Once we get something, we'll confirm it with Him."

Keith sighed then told Prez, "I'm gonna go back to the King, baby. We need to know if anyone or anything else was threatened in the message he received."

Prez nodded, "Go ahead, T'hy'la. Now we've gotta try and prevent other attacks while still figuring out who's responsible for the first."

Keith called, "Alden, take me back to King Aalona." Arriving beside the King and startling him, Keith apologized, "Sorry, Sire. We've learned more from prisoners and I do need to ask you more about that threatening message. Was anyone or anything else threatened besides yourself?"

King Aalona frowned, "What have you learned?"

Squatting down beside the seated King so that the Queen or Prince wouldn't overhear, Keith whispered, "Bombs have been placed around Honolulu, Majesty. The prisoners did not have specifics of where or when they might go off."

Quickly glancing beyond Keith at his family, the King then assured, "Nothing was said about any other threat, but to me, demanding that I break diplomatic relations with Vulcan or, and I quote, The King would not live to regret it."

Keith confirmed, "Those were the exact words; 'The King would not live to regret it'?"

King Aalona nodded once. "Precisely those words."

John sent, *'Got it, bro. That helps a bunch.'*

Keith wondered aloud, "What would hurt you and the ROH worst?"

"We have only two major industries," King Aalona answered. "Tropical fruits exports and tourism. All else is minor in comparison."

"Tourism," Keith repeated, then a shiver raced down his spine.

Almost simultaneously, Keith and King Aalona said, "Hotels and the airport."

Jumping up from his crouched position, Keith tapped his comm-badge and said, "Lieutenant Vorik, contact Honolulu Police immediately. Evacuate Honolulu International Airport and all major hotels in Waikiki for potential bomb threats."

Vorik replied, "Aye, Sir."

Frowning at the potential loss of life, King Aalona begged, "Please stop this."

Keith nodded, "We'll do our best, Sire." He then called, "Alden, transport me back to the Command Center." Keith disappeared from the King's side. King Aalona went to his wife and explained the current circumstances. She quietly shed tears so as to not upset her son.

Upon arrival in the Command Center, Keith immediately said, "The threat was general enough to include the King and the reputation of the ROH. What have we learned about that announcement?"

Vorik replied, "We have a name and account number for payment of the announcement. The search is in progress."

John said, "The AI's have provided two alternate versions of the threat." He frowned, "Neither tell us anything more."

Prez went to Keith and said, "The police and half of our UNIT detachment are trying to evacuate the airport and hotels." He closed his eyes, inhaled deeply then sighed. "Most adults would still be out partying, but lots of little kids would already be in bed." The television in the room switched from the Palace to Waikiki, reporting that all hotels and Honolulu International Airport were being evacuated, but didn't explain the reason why. Prez loudly complained, "Damn it! This is no time to pussy-foot around! People should be panicking and getting the fuck out of there!" Prez then ordered,

"Alden, prepare to break into broadcast signals for all Hawaiian television stations and dress me in a Clan Short robe."

It was too late for Prez to make his announcement. The television news showed bright flashes of distant explosions at high rise towers in Waikiki. All the Core Rimmers gasped then various expletives flowed.

At eleven o' one that evening, Prez hollered, "RED ALERT!" then turned to the video display where Donnie was still, his mouth now hanging open. "Donnie, rescue operations at that location, immediately."

Donnie nodded and began reassigning most of the troops that had been at the palace. Alden and all the AI's went into emergency mode, taking over the mundane and obvious functions. Alden had the satellite view zoom into the new location and reported, "2424 Kalakaua Avenue. It's the Hyatt Regency. There are two towers, forty stories tall."

From Orlando CIC, Seth called, "Pacific Rim Division, current sit-rep."

Kaleo hurried over and explained, "Seth, this is Kaleo. There was a terrorist bombing of the Hyatt Regency Hotel at Waikiki." While he spoke, Alden got a full description displayed then Kaleo passed it along to Seth. "Forty stories tall, twelve hundred and twenty-nine rooms total. Estimated casualties as high as five thousand, easily." Kaleo had only finished speaking when the local news reported additional explosions had occurred at Honolulu International Airport. Kaleo included that attack in his report to Seth.

Concurrently, Keith was ordering all the Rimmers' personal security into the Command Center. They would assist rescue

operations. Prez was passing out hand phasers and commanding his Core Rimmers. "Drew, Corey, Kaleo and Tory, you four remain here and coordinate as necessary. Sorry, but you four simply aren't developed enough to assist adults."

Turning to the personal security teams, Prez instructed, "Each of you need to be more worried about saving people in that hotel. Our security lies in getting people saved before parts of those towers become impassable. If we're trapped, then we're all really screwed."

Facing his UNIT Detachment Commander, Prez ordered, "Kekoa, get all our troops prepped for on-site rescue operations. We'll all need oxygen masks."

Prez told the two youngest team members, "John and Stephen, you have to go check the structural integrity of the buildings. If it's as bad as it looks, try to hold them upright for as long as you can." Nodding, John and Stephen transported out with their security to Waikiki.

Prez spun around and told Donnie, "We'll likely need a ship with tractor beams to hold up those buildings."

"I'm already on it, Prez," Donnie replied. "We'll get something there in ten minutes or less. I've also contacted Starfleet for portable force-field generators; in case the buildings do collapse, we can minimize collateral damage to neighboring structures."

In the background, another deep male voice, likely that of a gorilla, told Donnie, "We have something available, Sir."

Donnie ordered, "Get it there, ASAP!"

Prez turned to Nathan and instructed, "I need you coordinating with police and firemen, so we're not tripping over each other and

slowing each other down. Tell them what we've got planned."

Nathan nodded, "Got it, Prez," and disappeared from the Command Center.

Kekoa passed portable oxygen tanks and face-masks to Keith, Derrick, Mike, Sean, Troy and finally, Prez. When Prez finished speaking, Kekoa explained, "Each of these tanks will provide you with air for up to thirty minutes, depending upon your level of exertion. Expect only fifteen or twenty minutes. You guys *cannot* wind up suffering from smoke inhalation. I'll have a supply of extra tanks made available on-site. They screw onto and off of the masks, so replace them as necessary." Kekoa then demonstrated how to fit the face-masks correctly so that noxious fumes would not leak in.

Already at Waikiki, in the center of the intersection of Kaiulani Avenue and Kalakaua Avenue, John and Stephen hugged and tightly held onto each other then began rising into the air. A nearby news crew hurried over. Two gorillas, Bond, Stephen's gorilla, and Lucky growled, "Get back!" causing the cameraman to lower his camera and almost wet himself. Carefully watching the heavily armed gorillas wearing green military fatigues, the man stepped back about ten paces before Lucky nodded at him. He pointed his camera up at the two floating boys.

Recognizing the view from a dream, John told Stephen, "This is what I saw in my nightmare the other night. This is the fire I was worried about."

In the living room of the Hundserts' home, Jim, Jen and Kathleen Marr had seen the attack on 'Iolani Palace and were now watching John and Stephen rise six stories, then ten and then higher. Grabbing her husband's knee, Jen squeezed hard and screamed, "Jim!"

"Try and relax," Jim softly assured, "John lifted about a hundred tons by the pools, without Stephen." He pulled his wife close. Kathleen Marr was speechless; all she could do was wipe tears from her eyes and watch the television.

Jen still covered her eyes and peaked through her fingers at the television where John and Stephen were. She softly wept, "I was there only a few hours ago, with Caitlin and Ida, picking up their suitcases." Jim's heart sank into his feet and felt like it was bouncing in his chest. Only luck and timing prevented him from losing his wife.

Pandemonium was shown on television from another news crew arriving at Honolulu International Airport. Helicopter video showed the two larger gate buildings in flames. Hundreds of travelers were running away from the main terminal structure. Fire and emergency vehicles that were normally reserved for plane crashes converged on the terminal building from the tarmac.

The towers of the Hyatt Regency were octagon shaped, John noticed. Floating higher and traversing the circumference of the northwest building, John counted eight points where there were flames. Three were at the side where the elevator shafts were; one at the tenth floor, another at the twentieth and the last at the thirtieth floor. Inspecting the eastern tower, John counted five places where there was fire. Again, two of the five were at the side where the elevator shafts were. The terrorists specifically targeted the elevators, it seemed, to trap those in higher floors.

Realizing that they were over a hundred feet high, Stephen became nervous and whimpered. "It's okay, baby," John softly said, "just hold on tight. We can fly around like this for hours, but this tower won't last. The other tower has less damage though. It'll probably last, even though it's still heavily damaged."

Stephen softly complained, "You could at least be a *little* afraid."

John laughed, "Of flying? Never!" John then sent, *'There's only one thing missing. Tell me you love me?'*

Stephen nervously giggled, "You know I do!"

'I need to feel it though,' John reminded. *'I'm gonna try to hold this building upright. With your help, I think I can do it, for a little while anyway.'*

Stephen let his love flow as much as he could and actually brought himself to tears doing so. Approximately two-hundred feet in the air, John's eyes blazed blue, focusing his telekinetic powers on the weakened and burning northwest tower. From his husband and the thrill of flying, John unwittingly got an erection, which was felt by Stephen and caused him too get hard too.

From below John and Stephen, a boy's voice called, "How's it goin' guys?"

Another voice giggled, "We *told* you to tie your shoelaces to a lamp-post!"

"Don't forget us!" two additional voices hollered. Rising quickly and beginning to circle John and Stephen, Benji, Eli, Sammy and 'Bastian waved. John grinned and was thankful that there was help to hold up the incredible weight of a building. John immediately felt the weight shift and begin to even out.

Nathan arrived at the mobile emergency command center used by the police and firefighters. He quickly showed his ID and introduced himself. He then explained what Clan Short Pacific Rim Division was planning, including the intent to rescue those trapped inside the burning towers, provide medical services and acquire

Starfleet assistance to provide tractor beams and force field generators.

Another towhead boy popped in at street level. Then he was seen on the roof of the center structure, above famous restaurants and the hotel lobby. The news cameras tried to focus on the boy, but then he was gone. Peter Lambert was telepathically pointing the telekinetics to weakened areas of the structure.

On the ground, the Core Rimmers arrived with their security, the entire Pacific Rim UNIT detachment and another one hundred additional UNIT personnel from the Rapid Response Base. They ran towards the buildings. The fire-fighters that had recently arrived stopped them, but Prez identified himself and all the other boys as Clan Short and the firefighters begrudgingly allowed the boys to help evacuate those injured or trapped.

Last to arrive from Russia, fully engulfed in flame, Jimmy rose off the ground. He began removing heat and thus, broke the combustion cycle; effectively putting out the fires one at a time.

Another hundred UNIT personnel arrived to help evacuate Honolulu International Airport. All of this was televised and reported by the news. It was a sight to behold; hundreds of boys putting the lives of strangers before their own, and running to rescue people in two burning towers and from the airport gate concourses.

Seven boys were floating high above the ground outside one of the burning towers; one seemingly on fire himself and four orbiting the original two. Desperate tourists were trying to escape smoke and flames inside the burning buildings by crawling out onto window ledges. One woman and her child slipped and began to fall. Crowds in the street screamed in horror. However, the two never hit the ground. They simply disappeared from the camera's view. Other hotel

occupants jumped from their windows to escape the inferno. They also disappeared from view.

The cameraman Lucky had ordered back loudly wondered, "What's happening? Where the hell are those falling people going?"

Lucky simply answered, "They are being transported to safety."

When the cameraman asked "Where?" Lucky didn't answer, but glared at the man, again causing him to gulp and almost loose control of his bladder. It was the combined efforts of Alden, Daileass, Draco, George, Icarus and Kerry that prevented those jumping and falling from certain, horrible deaths.

It suddenly dawned on Nathan that John, Stephen, Eli, Benji, Sammy and 'Bastian would be in deep shit if they got distracted or tired; they would fall from thirty stories up. Rather than assume the AI's could capture them before they hit the ground, Nathan suggested that airbags and trampolines be set up under the floating telekinetic boys, just in case. Another alarm sounded so that those facilities could be delivered and set up on the street.

By this time, Judy Faris and the other Rimmer parents were gathered in the Hundsers' living room watching TV. They were mixed with emotions ranging widely and shifting rapidly from concern and fear to pride. At the Ewa Beach dorm common rooms and many of the bedrooms, Rimmer rescued kids watched with increasing enthusiasm and excitement, shouting out the names of their leaders as they came into view. In Japan, Canada and the United States, nationwide cable news networks were patched in, televising the events as they happened. Also on the news were reports from London of street riots as the stock markets continued their free-fall from the previous day.

In the basement of the Seiberts' home, where Aaron, Alan, Ben,

Chad, Dillon, Herbert, Jonah, Kawazoe, Randall, Randy and Sung peacefully slept, Reyes was typing out his latest log entries when he happened to look up at the TV. No sooner did he see John and Stephen, many stories in the air, then the camera focus changed to street level. He saw Derrick and Mike materialize then run toward a burning tower. Purposefully, he closed his notebook computer, changed the channel to Cartoon Network, so his brothers and uncles wouldn't see what was happening, if they should wake, and softly grumbled, "I should've just told dad to make me a Core Rimmer. Now that I'm fully functional again, my dad, pop and friends are trying to kill themselves. Why can't they just stick to afternoon concerts?" He tapped his comm-badge, ordering Alden to transport him to the CIC Command Center, to offer what assistance he could.

In Washington D.C., where it was minutes after five in the morning, Harry and Jonas were just waking to prepare for their day in the nation's Capital. Before joining Harry in the bathroom, Jonas turned on the TV and saw the news from Hawaii. At first his jaw dropped then he called Harry. While they watched, a camera happened to catch Peter for all of three-seconds before he disappeared from view again.

The Rimmers and the UNIT troops fanned out and up flights of stairs. As hurt and trapped people were discovered, they each transported the rescued to the Rapid Response Base's medical facilities. In groups and individually, they returned to the streets outside the Hyatt Regency then ran back inside. Starfleet personnel arrived by the dozen and began setting up force-field generators around the more badly damaged structure. Another truck arrived with firemen. The men began inflating huge airbags in the street to capture the floating boys.

Evacuations and rescues continued for another seven stressful

minutes before a new and never before seen site flew over the skies of Diamond Head and towards Waikiki from the northeast. Newscasters reported it as large as two aircraft carriers. It wasn't a Starship that anyone had ever seen before and no one was even sure if it was a Starship. It was the Goliath, based at the UNIT Rapid Response base, steadily moving into position and preparing to engage tractor beams.

Reyes Taraschke Personal Log 4

Wednesday, November 3, 2004

Thankfully, today was a little busy, but not crazy like yesterday.

I woke about two hours after I fell asleep, from a dream I had about Ryan, instigated by my trip to Sullivan's Island. In my dream, it dawned on me that Ryan had already managed to reprogram his eye movements to be more 'human'. I had to wake and call Jerry Owens immediately to chat about this discovery.

Incorrectly, I had understood that Jerry wanted help getting Ryan to remember and believe that he's an android. The only time Ryan's assumed belief could become a problem is if he and Paul were to leave Clan Short, like it was when they were found about a week earlier. Honestly, I'm happier knowing that I don't have to weasel around, trying to sneak in little truths that would ultimately send Ryan off on a fit and Paul into protecting his brother. Ryan evolved and modified his programming to not only believe he's human, but he actually changed code that allows him to act and appear more human. Yeah, we could all benefit from those modifications, but it's not all that important to me. Now I can simply concentrate on being friends with both brothers.

Both brothers are really kewl. I especially like the way they interact with each other; Paul as the protector, and Ryan as the silly boy. Last night, they hugged me before I left Sullivan's Island. For a few seconds, I was sandwiched between them. Those few seconds were a surprise, but I really felt good. Sitting here now writing this, I'm trying to understand how I feel about Paul and Ryan. Obviously, I like them, but is there something more? Could there ever be anything

more than friendship with one or the other? That might be bad, not only for me, but also for the brother left out from those feelings. If I ever did something to cause the two brothers to argue and create an irreconcilable rift between them, I would definitely work to repair the damage, then leave both alone. Neither of the two needs to ever feel bad over something I've said or done, that's for sure.

I did notice something that concerned me. Paul was keeping a distance even while giving a heartfelt hug. He had scoped everything out in the room before moving close. He knew his escape routes. I knew enough about the street kids and abused kids that I had previously met to see it in him. I want to help him feel safe and secure, but that desire can have the opposite effect. I couldn't stand it if I drove him away from me.

Right now I'm trying to understand my own ramblings in the prior paragraph. Sure I like them, but I like a lot of other dudes here in Ewa Beach. There are a lot of great guys that are my age, and they have brothers too; like Kekipi Mahelona is thirteen-years-old and usually hangs out close to his younger brother, Konani, who is ten-years-old. Oke Ka'aukai is also thirteen-years-old and hangs out with his two brothers; nine-year-old Makaio and eleven-year-old Kimo. All five of those dudes spend a lot of time together, and I like all of them, just not the same way I like Paul and Ryan. I believe what stands out about Paul and Ryan is that we had been alone during almost the exact same period of time; I was at the orphanage and they were on the streets. That they're androids also matters to me, which I feel kind of odd about. It's my preference, and I realize I shouldn't limit my options to so few, but I can't help it.

Oh my God...

I'm starting to fall for Paul *and* Ryan! Now what the hell do I

do?

All I can do is sigh and smirk. Could I have possibly made things more difficult for myself? I just asked Alden where my dad and pop are. He answered, "They're still on the rescue mission in California now." Great! Later, I'll get to chew on this while I sleep. Yippee! To make the situation more ridiculous, my kitten, Charles, is softly sniggering at me! At least I wasn't a babbling, stuttering idiot when I was with Paul and Ryan earlier today.

Moving right along...

Jonah and Dillon woke me around seven-forty this morning. Ben, Sung, and Kawazoe were already pulling their boardies and T-shirts on. So we wouldn't wake our dad, pop, or anyone else still asleep in the nest, Jonah whispered, "We've gotta get together as a group still, bro."

Sitting up, I nodded and quietly asked, "Where are we eating breakfast?"

Sung softly answered, "At our house."

"Kewl," I smiled, and stood to dress. I vaguely recalled Grandma Anna inviting us during the wedding reception. The five boys started giggling, causing me to suspiciously smirk.

Widely smiling, Jonah moved closer to me while I was bent over, pulling my board shorts up, and softly chortled, "It's the first time you've woke with a stiffy all week. I guess all your systems are completely back to normal."

I shrugged, "It took five days of no perverted adults wanting some."

Once I was dressed, all six of us went upstairs. We said good morning to Aunt Jen and Uncle Jim. Kawazoe told them we were going for breakfast at his house and we said goodbye before filing out the kitchen sliding door. I had just closed the door behind me when I became the target of silly morning wood jokes from Ben, Jonah, Kawazoe and Sung. Dillon loudly laughed. Walking towards the Seiberts' house, I reminded the four jokers that they had maybe three to five years before their dicks developed minds of their own too. Randy Beale came running up to us. We invited him to join us for breakfast.

Grandma Anna was awake in the kitchen when we stepped inside. Kawazoe and Sung hurried over to give her a hug and say good morning to their mom, followed by Ben, Dillon and Randy, then Jonah and I. She was then hit with a chorus of seven voices wondering, "What's for breakfast?"

"I promised you all something special," Grandma Anna helplessly chuckled. "Go ahead and get cleaned up. It'll be ready in about fifteen minutes." Chattering about how good the cooking food smelled, Sung and Kawazoe spun around, and then raced upstairs. Ben and Randy were on their heels, heading for another bathroom.

Jonah called, "Come on, bro," and hurried with Dillon. Remembering what my dad had said about his mom and dad, I stood there in the kitchen speechless for a moment or two. This woman, whom I had only met five days earlier, was only about forty-years-old, had lost her first born son and was now a mother and grandmother to a growing brood. She seemed so happy with her new life in the Clan. Grandma Anna was at the stove, so I tapped her shoulder and called, "Grams?"

Looking over her shoulder, she queried, "Yes, Reyes?" and I gave her a kiss on the cheek, then hurried after my brothers. She

wondered, "What was that for?"

I hit the brakes and spun around, smiling, "A kiss usually means, 'I think you're awesome.' In my case, add 'You're a great mother and grandmother too. I'm happy that you're my grams.'" Before she could say anything, I spun on my heels and raced after my brothers. In the bathroom at the top of the stairs, Sung and Kawazoe were naked and getting into the shower. In the next bathroom, Ben and Randy were standing at the toilet, giggling and peeing. Dillon and Jonah were in the third bathroom. I stepped inside and washed my face while they finished at the bowl.

Jonah called, "Reyes?"

With my eyes closed to protect them from soap, I replied, "Yeah?"

Jonah asked, "What do you think of Randy?"

I shrugged, "He's kewl. I guess he likes us too, since he's been hangin' with us since he showed up Sunday night." Then I started rinsing the soap off my face.

"He wasn't in the nest last night," Dillon grumbled. "He was at the dorm. I don't want him livin' in the dorm."

Jonah said, "We wanna ask him to be our brother too. If he says yes, and I'm pretty sure he will, then we'll talk to dad and pop."

Still rinsing off, I chuckled, "It's kewl by me. That'll be one more kewl guy to add to our family nest tonight." Grabbing a towel to dry off, I checked with my brothers, "Do you still want to do that too?"

"Yep," Dillon chirped.

Jonah smiled, "Yeah, it'll be kewl; all us Gibbons-Seibert boys in one nest."

I reminded, "We'll have to check with the girls in both families too."

Pushing me away from the sink, Dillon and Jonah nodded. "No problem," Jonah said, "I'll check with Brandi, Christel, Lindsay and Latoya later today."

"Don't forget, we've got the Downings' funeral today at eleven," I grinned, and tossed the towel over Jonah's head, then went to relieve my bursting bladder.

Dillon cracked up. Jonah giggled, "Reyes!" then shook his head until the towel fell to the floor.

While I leaked, I noticed Dillon looking my way. I considered asking him why he was looking at my dick, but decided not to embarrass him. Dillon noticed me glancing at him though and giggled, "Your dick changes a lot."

I smiled, "When you're a teenager, yours will too."

"Jonah's dick don't change that much," Dillon observed.

Without thinking, I offered, "Jonah isn't a teenager, and his dick hangs pretty long already. Some dudes grow, like me, dad and pop. Some show, like Jonah."

Picking the towel up off the floor, Dillon hummed, and then said, "Yeah, that's true. At the pools, most boys hang about as far as their sack, maybe a little more, no matter how old they are. Jonah's

hangs..."

"Dillon!" Jonah loudly interrupted. I noticed his face was scarlet red.

"What?" Dillon giggled. "It don't matter a whole heck of a lot, but yours does hang more."

I softly said, "Jonah's embarrassed, bro."

Dillon scowled at Jonah and tilted his head. He stopped drying his hands and wrapped Jonah in a tight hug.

Looking like he might cry, Jonah huffed, "It sucks. Somethin' that's a part of me that I should be proud of, or at least happy about... the pervs at the orphanage..." Shaking his head, Jonah clammed up and stopped talking.

I finished at the bowl and flushed, telling Jonah to close the bathroom door. He did so, and I put the seat down on the toilet, sat down and softly called, "Come here for a minute, please."

Still partially attached to Jonah, Dillon led the way. Locking eyes with both my brothers, I assured, "What those people did to us was very wrong. My first mom and dad never did that stuff, and neither did my cousin or his wife. From what I can recall, they didn't do it at the orphanages either, until they learned they could and get away with it."

"I know," Dillon sighed.

Jonah looked away as much as he was glancing at me and Dillon though. I told them, "I love you two guys as brothers, because you're very kawl, very nice, and know when it's time to be serious or when it's time to goof around. Right now, I'm not goofing around. It doesn't

matter what's hangin' between your legs. The only person that should matter to is a boyfriend or a girlfriend, someone you already like that you want to make love with. What those jack-offs did to us isn't making love; it was only good for them, they never cared about what it was doing to us." I specifically told Dillon, "They made Jonah feel like his worth was only in what was between his legs."

At first, Dillon's jaw dropped. Then he made the angriest, evil expression I ever saw on his face. He firmly told Jonah, "I wanted you as my brother because you were nice to me, and you're still really nice to me, even though you're older. I tell my friends how nice you are. Richie and Dee and Kokaku and Dewi all like you, because you treat them nice, not because you've got a longer dick."

It was Jonah's turn to wrap Dillon in his arms. With red eyes that were ready to shed tears, Jonah weakly muttered, "Thanks, bros. I really needed to hear all that. Maybe part of me knew it, but I haven't, ya know, completely believed it."

Laying a hand on Jonah's shoulder, I smiled, "You've been my kid brother for years and will be for years to come, even when you're eighteen, all grown up, and I still look like I'm thirteen. The same goes for you, Dillon. And if Randy joins our family, it'll be the same with him too."

Still aggravated, Dillon groused, "I'll check with Randy and ask him why he likes you, Jonah. He'd better not say *anything* about your dick."

"I hope he doesn't," Jonah helplessly chuckled at Dillon's almost murderous expression.

I recommended, "Just be nice about it, Dillon. First ask him why he likes you, Jonah and me too. If he gives the wrong answers, then

you don't need to ask him if he wants to be our brother. Just walk away, wearing that same angry expression. If he gives good answers, then bring him to me and Jonah, so we can all ask him together."

"Kewl," Dillon grinned, as if he were an integral part in a great conspiracy. Jonah released Dillon and wiped his eyes.

"Let's go eat," I smiled. Dillon hurried to the door and out of the bathroom, but I held Jonah back, picked him up and whispered in his ear, "Is that why you were so weird the other night with John?"

Jonah nodded and whispered, "He wasn't teasing me, just telling me that he liked what he saw. He knows how the adults took advantage too, and that's exactly what he called it, taking advantage. It's why I don't know what I want, Reyes. How can I tell if someone really likes me for me, and not for my dick?"

"The same way you could tell about me, Dillon, dad and pop," I answered. "You'll feel it and just know it." I then put Jonah down and we went downstairs for our grandma's special breakfast.

By the time Jonah and I arrived at the dining room table, everyone else was already seated and helping themselves to biscuits or muffins. Grandma Anna and Grandpa Carl were serving their kids and grandkids. On the table were O'Brien potatoes, scrambled eggs, grits, bacon, sausage patties, buttermilk pancakes, fresh baked biscuits, banana nut muffins, pitchers of orange and pineapple juice, and another pitcher of milk. I helped get everyone served, so we could all sit down and eat the feast prepared.

During breakfast, we discussed moving out of the main nest and into family nests. Everybody seemed ready to make the move that night, however, Grandma Anna and Grandpa Carl expected the family size to increase during the day. Grandma Anna was going to ask six-

year-old May Hickox to join the family. Grandpa Carl was going to ask seven-year-olds Chad Bunting and Herbert Trumbo to join the family. All three were former FCC kids that had been becoming friends with Brandi, Kawazoe, Latoya and Sung. According to Grandma Anna, the Gibbons family might also be growing by one girl and three boys that day. Ben already knew and confirmed that three FCC boys were becoming good friends and seemed to be latching onto his new dad and mom. The adults only asked that we keep the news from Derrick and Mike, until the adoptions were formalized by Prez. All us kids wrapped up our mealtime conversation by agreeing that we would nest wherever the newest adopted kids felt most comfortable.

I helped Grandma Anna and Grandpa Carl clear the table. Most of the kids went outside to the playground and pools, except for my two brothers and Randy. Walking in and out of the dining room, I heard Dillon asking Randy if he liked us and why. It was easy for Randy to say that he definitely liked us. He then recalled Monday morning, and that it was mostly Jonah, Dillon, Dee and Richie that helped him get acquainted with the base and some of the other kids. Since Randy was seven years old, he simply felt like he fit in most with us; since he was two years younger than Jonah and two years older than Dillon. Randy then reminded Jonah and Dillon that it was them inviting him to go here or there and do this or that. While we were gone yesterday, he simply hung out with other kids, but he was glad when we got back home. I learned that Randy waited to find a seat until Jonah, Dillon, John, Stephen, Frankie, Dee, Richie, Sammy and Gage were done being ushers at the wedding concert. They then went inside the auditorium theater and sat together.

Finishing up in the kitchen, I told our grandparents to be prepared for one more in our family nest. They had already assumed

that was the case when Randy was invited to join us for breakfast.

Jonah appeared in the kitchen, asking, "Are you done, bro?"

"Yeah, the dishwasher's loaded and running."

"Kewl, let's shower over at the dorms," Jonah prompted. "Randy invited us, so it's kewl."

The four of us hugged our grandparents, thanking them for an awesome breakfast and then said, "See ya later," before hurrying out the sliding kitchen doors.

I loudly laughed, "What's the rush?"

"We gotta get clean clothes and stuff," Dillon giggled.

Randy chuckled, "And my stuff is at the dorm anyway."

"Then dad and pop will be awake," Jonah added.

All three then cheered, "Then we get to have milkshakes!"

I could only crack up laughing and try to keep up as we ran into the Gibbons' house and upstairs to grab clean clothes from our bedroom. Widely smiling and wisely staying out of our path, Grandpa Rob watched the four of us race out of our room, down the hall and back downstairs. He was already dressed in his uniform and appeared ready to start his work day at the FYS Building.

We then ran down the path to dorm building one, where Randy was sharing a room with James Hahn. Randy unlocked the door and we all went inside. James was sitting at a desk in his underwear, browsing Nile-dot-com. We all said hello, and Randy asked, "Whatchya lookin' for, bro?"

James shrugged, "I'm just browsing books and CD's and stuff. I never had an allowance or money before. There's stuff I always wanted, but couldn't get. Now that I can get stuff, I'm wondering if I should spend the bucks on it or not. I read a Hardy Boys book and liked it, but I can only read a book once. Music CD's I can listen to lots of times though."

I offered, "I have an idea, James."

He wondered, "Yeah?"

"Books can be read and then shared," I suggested. "Next week, we'll be starting school, which means occasional book reports. A book you read today, others can read when you're done. If the store offers electronic copies, you could order that and share the file. Either way, you should get what you like and not worry about wasting money. Remember, you can earn more money too. You could ask Kaleo to setup a bookshelf in the common room, so everybody that finishes a book can make it available to others just by putting it there."

"Kewl!" James cheered, "I hadn't thought about electronic copies or sharing books like that. Thanks, dude."

I smiled, "My pleasure." Dillon took my right hand and Jonah took my left hand to lead me from the room.

Now shirtless and only wearing briefs, Randy said, "We'll be right back in a few minutes. We're just gonna take a shower."

Jolting as if he had a revelation, James chuckled, "Yeah, I'll be there in a minute," and stood up from his desk chair. As we left the room, James was scurrying around, gathering toiletries and setting out clean clothes.

Moments later, we were in the large lavatory in the longer wing

of dormitory one. My brothers and I hadn't been in this lavatory before, but it was the same as the one in the shorter wing, where we had been before with our dads and the other Core Rimmers. Each of us took a sink and started brushing our teeth. I tapped Jonah and gestured with a slight nod of my head towards Randy. Jonah raised his eyebrows and then nodded. I assumed this shower time was like a test for Randy to pass or fail. I have to admit, it was a pretty good idea. If Randy made more than a passing remark about Jonah's dick, he would fail the test.

In about a minute, we were done brushing our teeth and walking into the mob shower changing area. Just finishing up their showers were Kanoa Hale and Louis Mares. Dripping wet and padding our way, Kanoa smiled, "Rimmer sons are showering here?"

Stripping off his clothes, Dillon nodded, "We did Sunday too."

"Down the other hall," Jonah added, and pushed off his boardies and briefs in one swoop.

Kanoa is thirteen years old and Hawaiian, like me. We're pretty close to the same height and weight too. Unlike me, he's got almost black hair and very little hair down around his boy parts, but his voice has changed and he's got really wide shoulders.

Picking up a towel and beginning to dry off, Kanoa said, "You're very welcome here, any time, dudes."

Eleven-year-old Louis nodded, "Yeah, we don't want to feel separated, and don't want you to feel that way either."

Now down to my birthday suit, I gestured at my own body and then at my brothers and Randy, now entering the mob shower, saying, "We're all the same in every way that counts. Randy just happened to

invite us here to shower today."

Louis locked eyes with me and asked, "Are you really over fifty-years-old, Reyes?"

Nodding, I grinned, "Fifty-six and a half."

"And a half!" Kanoa sniggered. "As if the six months matters!"

I smirked, "But still thirteen, just like you," and then swiftly got Kanoa in a headlock. Pulling him into the showers again, towel and all, to the laughter and giggling of the others, I sniggered, "Just because I'm an android doesn't mean that I don't know how to act like any other guy!" Realizing that I was about to get him wet again, Kanoa struggled to break free. Giggling his butt off, Jonah skated across the smooth tile floor to turn on two more showers. The next thing Kanoa knew, Randy and my brothers were helping me pull him under one of the sprays.

Roy Angulo came in the mob shower, saw what was happening and cracked up. "This is why I love living here," Roy sniggered, "I never know what will happen, where, or who might be doing it." He undressed and my brothers told him what had happened to cause the shower wrestling and silliness. Already naked, James walked in the shower. Having accomplished my goal and gotten Kanoa all wet again, I released him and jumped back before he could shove me. We both cracked up and knocked knuckles. I turned my back to start my shower and was whacked in the butt by Kanoa's wet towel, causing another roar of laughter. Racing out of the room, Kanoa grabbed a dry towel and kept running, out of the lavatory and back to his room. Hysterical, Louis followed his roommate.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Dillon tapping Jonah and then discretely gesturing to Roy and to James. Roy was fifteen years

old. The hair on his legs went all the way up to his crotch. A little hair was also pointing up towards his belly-button. Roy's a tall dude. What hung between his legs was proportional for his overall size; about four inches long, just beyond his scrotum. At the same side of the mob shower, James had his head back to shampoo his hair. James was the same age as Jonah, maybe an inch or two taller, but what was hanging between his legs seemed longer and thicker than Jonah's. For a nine-year-old, it was a hefty slab of meat.

Grinning, Randy noticed the silent comparisons going on. He leaned over and whispered in Jonah's ear. Jonah whispered something back to Randy, causing Randy to lose his smile and vigorously shake his head. My attention was broken when Roy called, "Reyes, did everything work out okay for you yesterday?"

"Yeah, it was very kewl," I answered. "The guys in the AI Division are a lot of fun."

Roy nodded and meekly offered, "When I didn't see you or your brothers around yesterday afternoon, I asked Derrick where you were. He told me, and some other dudes that happened to be nearby, that you went for a check-up. I hope that doesn't bother you."

Shaking my head, I smiled, "Not at all. Everything checked out okay, and I learned why I was so worried about prejudices too. It was because of where I was raised. I know now it's not too much of a problem anymore."

"Kewl," Roy grinned. "You know, a lot of us are real interested in computers, electronics and stuff. We think it's awesome that we have you around."

"Plus one here too," James smiled. "What makes you so kewl is that you don't act like we'd expect an android to act, ya know, like

you're just another dude to us."

Again, I gestured down my own naked, soapy body and to all the rest of the bodies in the mob shower, chuckling, "I am just another dude. Even when I have access to all the new databases they added, I intend to only use that stuff when it's necessary."

James asked, "So you didn't have to do anything special when you told me about books before?"

Shaking my head, I explained, "Since I never had to go to school, I used to read lots of paperback books. Some were mine, or my dad's, or mom's, or my cousin's books. That was just real life experience; sharing books and having the stories to chat about."

Roy asked, "You have databases but can't access them?"

I nodded, "I was told not to, since my memory was zapped at the orphanage. I have twenty-one years and a whole new life to integrate, so I locked them down for forty-eight hours. Later tonight, I'll be able to access them, if I want."

"Very kewl," Roy chortled.

Finished showering, my brothers and Randy turned the water off and went to go dry off. I hurried to complete rinsing off. I turned my shower off and went to towel dry. I reminded my brothers, "Don't forget to take your comm-badges off the dirty shirts and put them on the clean shirts."

"Ooo!" Dillon groaned.

Jonah nodded, "I would've forgot too. Thanks."

Leaning over to dry my legs, I softly teased, "There was a lot of

whispering going on for a while."

Dillon lost it and cracked up, dropping his towel, shirt and comm-badge at the same time.

Jonah giggled, "I'll be chatting with James some time soon."

"Today," Randy firmly added.

Rolling his eyes, Jonah huffed, "Yes, brother."

I was only slightly stunned that Randy was asked already. Dillon noticed me and giggled, "Yep, we asked, and Randy said yes too."

Randy smiled, "I'll need to talk with James too, but it's kewl."

Beginning to dress, Jonah assured, "Dad and pop will definitely say yes to another son."

Randy giggled, "I'm really looking forward to surprising Derrick and Mike later."

"Later?" Jonah and Dillon queried.

I offered, "We could tell them at breakfast."

Pulling up his underpants, Randy briefly paused and glanced at each of the three of us. Finishing the task and grabbing his board shorts, he smiled, "Okay, then I need to tell James too."

Done with his shower, James came over to the changing area with us. He grabbed a towel and asked, "Tell me what?"

Jonah told James, "We asked Randy to join our family."

"We want him to be our brother," Dillon smiled.

James nodded, turned toward Randy and grinned, "When I woke and you weren't around, I wondered what was going on. You only slept at the dorm this one night."

Randy nodded and giggled, "I was surprised they asked, but I have to admit, I'm really happy. I couldn't see myself with any of the other families."

Roy walked in, prompting, "The Core Rimmers should be awake by now. Let's get over to the cafeteria before they leave for school." He grabbed a towel, wrapped it around his waist and grabbed his dirty clothes, then left us.

Randy stepped closer to James and softly said, "You're a kewl roommate, James."

Nodding, James smiled, "I'll ask around and find someone else to be roomies with, hopefully by tonight. That room is too big to be alone in."

Dillon asked, "Don't you want a family?"

James chuckled, "I've got family; tons of brothers and sisters. The Core Rimmers are big brothers. I like it here, in the dorm, though. In a big bed all to myself, I slept like a baby last night." He then waved and smiled, "I'll see you guys in a few minutes for breakfast," and then left the lavatory.

My brothers and I tossed our towels in the big laundry bin, gathered our stuff and left too. Randy giggled, "I guess I'll have to pack my suitcase again."

I recommended, "Do that later this morning, bro. The three of us will be going to the funeral for Bruce's parents at eleven. That'll give

you about an hour, I guess."

"Kewl," Randy sighed. He glanced around at the three of us then asked, "Do you think Bruce is okay?"

"He will be," Jonah answered. "He's got John and all the Hundasers lookin' out for him."

All three of them turned to me, wordlessly asking for my opinion. I shrugged, "It's going to take some time; maybe weeks for Bruce. Having a family will make it easier. When I can, I'll have a talk with Bruce too. I hope it's today, but we'll see how he is after the funeral."

We walked into the Gibbons' home again. Grandma Laura was sitting at the kitchen table. Ben was there too, practicing his guitar. He paused for a minute and asked, "Jonah, are you going to practice today?"

"Yeah, probably after dad and pop leave for school," Jonah answered. "I didn't get to play much at all yesterday."

Ben nodded, "Just for fifteen minutes or so."

"I've just got a few things to take care of first," Jonah said.

Our dad and pop walked in while we were still congregated in the kitchen. They said 'good morning,' then Mike checked with Ben, "The spider chromatics are easier?"

Ben nodded and giggled, "Yeah, check it out." He then ran through the exercise, way up high on the neck and kept a pretty even tempo, albeit slowly, because he was softly naming the notes as he played.

When Ben finished and looked up, Mike cheered, "Excellent!"

Smirking, Jonah told Ben, "I can tell you were busy yesterday."

Ben nodded, "The note names are the same at the twelfth fret, and it's a little easier."

Jonah asked, "Show me later?"

"No problem," Ben smiled.

Grandma Laura told Pop, "The Scoobies are around here somewhere. They said that they needed to talk to you."

Pop nodded and softly said, "They've got about fifteen minutes to find me."

Dad smiled, "Then we've gotta grab breakfast before checking our Clan's status and hurrying to school."

Seeing Dillon, Jonah and I carrying wads of dirty clothes, Pop checked with us, "You dudes showered already?"

I nodded, "Over at the dorm. Before that, Grandma Anna made us breakfast."

Dad smiled, "She loves cooking. You guys made her day." Then he leaned over and picked up Dillon. Dad got a kiss on the cheek and gave one back.

"I've still got room for a chocolate milkshake," Dillon giggled.

Grandma Laura hummed, then offered, "How about we do breakfast or dinner here Saturday?"

We all agreed that would be awesome. Then Dad told Pop,

"Let's get motivated and in the shower." Pop nodded and they started upstairs, with Dillon getting a free ride. Jonah, Randy and I followed.

Soon after we started up the staircase, Jonah bluntly stated, "We want another brother."

Pop chuckled, "Give us an extra five minutes in the shower, and we'll give it a whirl." Jonah, Randy and Dillon groaned through their giggles. I cracked up.

At the top of the stairs, Dillon whispered in dad's ear. Looking down at Randy, Dad asked, "You want two dads and three brothers, Randy?"

Rapidly nodding, Randy answered, "I've spent most of my time with Dillon, Jonah and Reyes since I arrived Sunday night. Two dads is kewl with me too, especially you two. All you guys are a real family, more than my other family ever was, that's for sure."

Dad nodded at Pop, saying, "I guess we can do this. We'll just have to get Prez to do the honors."

Pop smiled, "We'll gang up on Prez and make it happen later today. Are you dudes gonna wait for us to go to breakfast? Dillon's obviously starved after only one breakfast." Swiftly, Pop tickled Dillon's ribs. Dillon loudly squealed laughing.

I checked with Jonah and Randy. When both nodded, I grinned, "We'll wait up here in our room."

Jonah told Randy, "Let's play some video games while we wait."

"Kewl," Randy cheered, and then they took off down the hall. Pop put Dillon down and the little guy ran after Jonah and Randy.

Pop pulled his T-shirt off. Dad said, "There's a pair of headphones in Mike's bedroom end table, top drawer."

Pop said, "Help yourself, Reyes. There's CD's in my room too."

Dad tilted his head, wondering, "Is everything all right?"

I checked to be certain that Jonah was out of sight, then stepped closer and whispered, "Talking about Randy joining us, I happened to learn something that bothers me." I then softly outlined all the stuff Jonah had been through at the orphanage, reminding them that Jonah was just as likely to swim with his boardies on as he was with them off, then explained the reason why. After telling them about James, and that Jonah wanted to have a private chat with him, I then asked for my dad's and pop's opinions.

Pop softly said, "Let Jonah do what he thinks he needs to do, and let's just keep an eye on him."

Dad nodded, "If it continues to be a problem, we'll talk to Doc Wiener about it. In the meantime, encourage Jonah to take his shorts off at the pools."

Pop smirked, "If I had to guess, I'd say slightly less than half of all dudes hang pretty low. Since our dudes are mostly nude around the pools, point them out to Jonah. No dude's worth is in the meat hangin' or how big it gets." He then paused and locked eyes with dad, sniggering, "I married Derrick and he's not a low hanger." I moored through my giggles.

Pointing in the first bathroom, Dad playfully ordered, "Get your butt in the shower, Lick." Nodding and evilly snickering, Pop followed the order. Dad shook his head, rolled his eyes and chuckled, then went in the bathroom too.

Before I could walk too far down the hall, I heard four high-pitched voices squeaking, "G'mornin', Shiny Daddies!"

The Scoobies bathroom ambush pushed me over the edge and I cracked up laughing again. Walking by our bedroom, I saw Jonah and Randy sitting on the carpeted floor playing a video game. Dillon was investigating the room until he saw me walk past. He ran out of the room after me, asking, "What're ya doin, bro?"

"I'm gonna get a CD from Pop's room to listen to," I answered.

"Yeah? Which one?"

"I don't know yet. Something new, that I don't remember ever hearing before."

We went into Pop's room, knelt down before the stereo and started going through the shelves of CDs. Pop had absolutely no real organization of his CD collection. The stuff he liked most seemed to be on the top shelf right hand side. The rest were scattered around. I happened to find a CD by Guster, and recalled Dad mentioning that band's name during the luau concert Friday night. I told Dillon and we took the CD back to our bedroom. Soon, we were listening to the 'Lost and Gone Forever' disk. Dillon started spinning around and dancing, shaking his little butt around. We had only heard the first three songs and started listening to the fourth song, 'Fa Fa', which Old Habits had played for us during the concert. I couldn't even tell the difference between the Old Habits cover and the original tune I was listening to. Dressed and singing along, Dad and Pop walked in the room. Pop was wearing his Shiny Priest white robe, with the sparkling stars on the sleeves and back, over his T-shirt and board shorts.

Randy loudly giggled, "So, did you make us another new baby

brother?" Jonah, Dillon and I roared laughing.

Dad blushed and sniggered, "We tried."

"For some strange reason, it hasn't worked yet," Mike chuckled. "We'll have to keep tryin'."

"Let's go get some breakfast," Dad encouraged. I stopped the CD and shut down the stereo. Jonah and Randy turned off the PlayStation. In moments we were heading back downstairs. Crossing the living room, where Grandma Laura was watching the morning news on TV, we said goodbye and then headed outside. We hadn't gotten far when Ben came flying out the door and caught up with us.

Dillon and Jonah told Ben that Randy was our new brother, and that it would be official later that day.

I asked Pop, "What did the Scoobies want?"

He smiled, "I'm going to make an announcement at the CIC, since it affects us all."

Dad said, "We're safe, and all of both families are safe, but the rest will have to take the Shiny Pledge."

Reverently, Pop recited, "I pledge allegiance to the Shiny of the Shiny Nation, and to the Gleam for which it stands; one Nation under Shiny – sparkling, with incandescence and radiance for all!" Me, all my brothers, and Ben helplessly giggled.

"I guess I'm family just in the nick of time," Randy giggled.

"Wait," Mike suspiciously scowled, "are you saying that you're *not* a Shiny Lover?" Playing along, Derrick and I mooded.

Randy laughed, "I am, I swear I am!"

Jonah nudged Randy and smiled, "I pledge allegiance to the Shiny of the Shiny Nation."

Randy joined Jonah, reciting, "And to the Gleam for which it stands; one Nation under Shiny – sparkling, with incandescence and radiance for all!"

Dad led us into the CIC dining room and over to the chow line. I could swear I heard something up in the ceiling and looked up for a few moments. In line ahead of us were Sean and Troy. Ahead of them were Prez, Dee, Gage, Sammy, Richie, Keith, Roy, Kaleo, Tory, John, Stephen, Jamie, Jacob, Beau, Drew, Geoff and Corey. Pop went directly to Prez.

Before Pop could say a word, Keith noticed the robe Pop was wearing. He chuckled, "Your Holy Shininess! Please tell me you're not wearing that to school."

Pop smirked, "Dull one, you shall be punished for your lack of Shiny respect."

"Yeah! You tell 'em, Shiny Daddy!" Four voices yelled down from the air conditioning vent. I rolled my eyes, then huffed and turned my attention to the chefs to order my milkshake.

Turning to Prez, Mike seriously said, "We have a small problem."

Obviously afraid to ask, but having no other choice, Prez grinned, "Spit it out before it rusts or tarnishes." In the air conditioning duct, four horrified voices gasped.

"We've been Clan for four days," Mike explained. "We have

three days to have everyone take the Pledge."

Keith, Drew and Corey simultaneously and uncertainly repeated, "The pledge?"

Mike seriously nodded, "I'm safe. Derrick and our kids are safe. Outside of my immediate family, no one is safe from Shiny theft."

"Omigod!" Drew and Corey laughed. Keith rolled his eyes.

"What's the big deal?" Prez grinned. "We're all Shiny lovers anyway. Do you want your CD's missing? Do you want any of the small PC or sound system connectors swiped?" Facing Mike again, Prez said, "Lead the way, Shiny Mike."

Putting his right hand over his heart, Mike chanted, "Repeat after me. 'I pledge allegiance to the Shiny of the Shiny Nation.'" Everyone in line paused, put their right hands on their hearts and duplicated Mike's words. "I pledge allegiance to the Shiny of the Shiny Nation, and to the Gleam for which it stands; one Nation under Shiny – sparkling, with incandescence and radiance for all!" Even the chefs repeated the pledge.

"I saw one who was mumbling! He's fair game!" Willow could be heard giggling.

Troy gasped and quickly repeated his pledge loudly and clearly.

"Scared that your instruments would be stolen?" Prez giggled.

Troy, still wide-eyed at his close call, nodded mutely.

Sean giggled, "No, more that he was scared *HE* would be stolen. He's got a shiny butt!" The other kids in line began laughing and giggling. Troy's jaw dropped. He turned ten shades of red, then hauled

off and slugged Sean on the shoulder. Almost as red as Troy, Sean rubbed his shoulder and playfully reminded, "I told you there were things you had to take at face value as true."

Troy grinned, "But you told me that when we were in the shower and you were holding my shiny butt! Was I listening? Hearing yes, but not paying much attention."

The Rimmers laughed hysterically, trying to order their shakes. Prez and his family left the chow line with their breakfasts. I followed them, leading my brothers, Randy and Ben to a nearby table.

Out in the dining room, Mike stood on a chair and announced over the PA, "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, for your own security, I must ask that you all pause for a moment. On this Shiny Day, all that glitters and sparkles amongst us demands that we take notice; Dull ones will be converted; Shiny Haters and Dull Lovers will be arrested or destroyed. Those of you who, like me, enjoy the brightness and warmth of the Day Shiny, then look forward to the fullness of the Night Shiny, please stand and put your right hand over your heart then repeat after me."

Everyone repeated the Shiny Pledge. "Thank you for your time," Pop said, and then took Dad's hand to step down off the chair. The chatter level rose as did some chortling.

Dad and Pop sat down with Keith and Prez, at the table next to ours. Also at a table close by were Drew, Corey, John, Stephen, Jamie, Jacob and Beau. A few tables over, nearer to the wall where the Command Center doors are, sat Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy. I noticed everybody seemed to have favorite groups that sat together during meals. There was occasional shifting around as conversations changed from topic to topic. All the FCC kids were sitting together and having a hushed private conversation. Sung, Kawazoe, Cesar, Felipe, Chad,

Herbert, Shimizo and Murakami were sitting together at a table near Drew, Corey and John.

There seemed to be an awful lot of dorm kids wearing the same green T-shirts. Looking closer, I saw the band names Time-Touched and Platinum Habits, along with what appeared to be tour dates. It seemed rather odd, for various reasons. First of all, the tour dates and cities were completely ridiculous; I had never heard of some city names and the dates traversed centuries. Also, when had Dad and Pop left with Keith and Prez to perform these concerts? Granted, I was away most of the prior day, and I don't always know where our dads are every minute of every day, but I would think they'd have mentioned being to Jazwhoki in the year 4254. At a moment where dad was sitting quietly and listening to the conversation with Pop, Prez and Keith, I pointed out the T-shirts the kids were wearing.

Derrick tapped Prez and pointed at several kids sitting at tables not far away. Prez looked around. Noticing Prez's surprised expression, Derrick tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Alden, where did the kids get band T-shirts with our band's name on them?" Alden replied via sub-vocal, so I only heard half the conversation and explanations.

"How many 'extras' were there for a tour that hasn't happened?" Keith wondered.

A few moments later, Prez smirked, "Check out the dates and places; they're all over the place, at cities I've never heard of; some are 2014, some are 3075; they're unrealistic dates."

Mike smiled, "You obviously know something we don't, Alden."

Keith interjected, "Drew was hoping to implement a design of a recording studio for us here."

"All that's very nice to know," Prez chuckled, "but what about the tour concert dates?"

All four Rimmers incredulously laughed, "For fifty concerts?"

Pop softly muttered, "We'll need to tell Troy and Reyes."

Dad nodded, "And learn about how this is done. I can only assume time will be virtually unchanged here, but where we're going and what we're doing will take way longer than two minutes."

"We'll have to bring our kids along then," Prez offered.

"I'm not gonna let many months away pass without them," Keith stubbornly insisted.

As this haphazard conversation was going on, the FCC kids had all gotten up from their table and gone over to talk to John. One after the other, John listened to each kid and then gave a hug. John led the kids over to our table, reintroducing Dee, Gage, Sammy, Richie and Geoff as his nephews. In moments, my brothers and I were being reintroduced. The FCC kids were just a little scared and confused. The base was very different from their families and homes, and some of them were scared of me too, because I was a teenager. Jonah, Randy, Dillon, Dee and Richie assured them I was kewl, and was even more than a teenage boy, telling them that I was an android and older than any of their grandparents. Soon, I had Dillon sitting on one thigh and Richie sitting on the other. To prove to the FCC kids I was nice, Dillon asked me about life back in 1950's Myrtle Beach. Some of the youngest FCC kids stayed with me, listening to tales of long ago, while Gage, Sammy, Dee and Jonah took the older group around to nearby tables.

I was still telling them stories of crawdad fishin' and capturing pollywogs, when Kaleo loudly chanted, "I, Tiger, take you, Lover, to

be my life partner, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live."

Prez overheard Kaleo and called over, "Who's marrying who?"

Gesturing at the two human vacuums attached at the mouth, Tory cackled, "Sean and Troy. I give them a week."

"A week?" Kaleo incredulously giggled. "A day or two, tops. We'll be lucky if they don't drop to the floor and go for it right here!"

Prez cracked up. Smiling widely at his hysterical partner, Keith loudly reminded, "We need a Vulcan for the mind-melds. At least give us a chance to call Uncle Spock back."

Four-year-old Aaron Pendergrass pointed and wondered, "Who is that?"

"That's Kaleo," I grinned, "He's one of the kewlest around and a Core Rimmer too, like John, Drew, Corey, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike."

Five-year-old Randall Mcfarren asked, "Is he really nice?"

"He's one of the nicest," I assured, and then told them a 'G' rated version of how Kaleo saved little kids from abuses at our orphanage. Randall said that his parents used to punish him by making him pray on his knees, sometimes for hours, until he fell asleep. I told them that was bad and a form of abuse, which is why they were all rescued and brought here to be with us. The older kids returned and prompted the little ones to go finish their milkshakes. Dillon smiled and thanked me with a kiss on the cheek, then hopped off my thigh and returned to his chair, grabbing his near empty milkshake glass and going back to work.

Ready for their morning briefing, the Core Rimmers got up. They filed past our table and each of us got kisses on the head as they made their way to the Command Center. Ben and Jonah were talking about their guitar lessons and doing a little finger exercise with the fingers of their left hands tapping at the table. Gage, Sammy and Dee were ready to go over to the pools as soon as they finished their shakes. Richie and Dillon decided to take some of the FCC kids over to the playground for more introductions. I thought it might be a good idea to get a little drumming done, so I would join Ben and Jonah in the Gibbons' basement. In another minute or two, we had all given up on our milkshakes. We took the glasses to the dishwasher, then wandered off in separate directions.

On the way to the Gibbons' home, my comm-badge chirped. Ryan's voice called, "Reyes? Are you awake yet?"

I tapped my comm-badge and answered, "Hey, Ryan. I've been awake a while now. How're you?"

"I'm really good," Ryan cheered, "and so is Paul. He said that he talked to you earlier this morning and I missed it. He usually doesn't talk about people. I mean he does, but usually just monosyllables. You know... Uh... Hmmm... Yeah... Okay... Hell, he used more than one sentence. I mean, I thought the world must be coming to an end. Whole paragraphs, without much cussing or sour looks. Amazing!" Ryan had paused and giggled at that point. Then his voice took on a mischievous tone before he started speaking. "What did you say to him that's got him in such a cheery mood?" It's hard to remember that he's an android like me and his brother. It is amazing how hard it is to hear the usual signs.

I grinned, "Actually, I called to chat with Jerry. Paul happened to come by the room while we were talking."

Ryan giggled, "Oh, he was eavesdropping again?"

In the background, Paul groaned, "Ryan?"

I chuckled, "It's not nice to talk about people behind their backs, so it can't really be called eavesdropping."

"REYES!" Paul loudly laughed from the background.

"Snagged again, bro," Ryan heartily chortled.

"Busted!" Jerry commented from farther in the background.

"There goes my cheery mood," Paul softly grumbled. I became a bit concerned. He had retreated into himself. His voice had changed. It had gone almost flat. The most alarming thing was that he sounded ready for a fight.

"Jerold! Stop spying on your brothers!" Mrs. Owens said, seemingly from another room.

"And you stop listening in on Jerry, Mary!" Mr. Owens laughed.

Joey asked, "Do you needs cuddwes soes you can be cheewy again, Unca Pauw?"

"I'm fine, Joey," Paul assured.

I could hear in his voice that it was taking all he had to not run. I was imagining him looking anywhere but where there were other people like he had yesterday. His eyes had been like saucers. It had made me think of that saying, a deer in the headlights. I had imagined a set of antlers starting to sprout. He had looked like he was going to bolt just like a deer that was startled while feeding in a field. I was sure that was the look he had now and I thought it was cute. Oh boy. Something must be wrong with me. I am getting turned on by a boy

with antlers, and his impossibly cute brother too. I can't fall for both of them, can I?

Jerry giggled, "Cuddles *and* cookies."

"YEAH!" Joey screamed, "Gwamma, can I have cookies for me and Unca Pauw?"

Aunt Mary sighed, "One cookie each, Joey. Lunch will be served in five minutes."

"I don't really want a damn cookie," Paul softly bitched.

Ryan giggled, "Yeah, you want it and need it, bro."

Jerry hummed then wondered, "Are we still talking about cuddles and cookies?"

Paul grunted as if he'd been shot in the heart, and groaned in pain, then I heard a thump.

"Jon, remind me to have a talk with Marc and Daniel about the influence they are having on Jerry!" Mrs. Owens shouted.

"Before or after you have to listen to them complaining about the influence he's having on them?" Mr. Owens laughed.

I heard the patter of running feet, then Joey hollered, "Unca Weyes, Gwamma says you needs do come ovej fow wunch doo!" Joey paused then seriously said, "Unca Pauw, did you faww down? You've weaw easy do pounce, dhis way." A moment later Joey giggled, Paul grunted and Ryan and Jerry cracked up.

Jerry sniggered, "You're invited for lunch, Reyes. Get your skinny butt over here and save your boyfriends, now."

"HEY!" Paul and Ryan shouted, obviously blushing as much as I was.

I pondered aloud, "Does it matter that I've already eaten twice this morning?"

Jerry answered, "Nope, lunch is almost ready, so tell that AI of yours to do the honors before I have Daileass do it."

"Alden," I called, "please transport me to where Jerry, Paul and Ryan are?"

Alden giggled and sang, "I'm tellin' everyone that you've got two boyfriends, Reyes."

I groaned, "Don't tell..." and finished the statement in a strange living room, "anyone anything, Alden." Looking around the room, I found Joey sitting on Paul's belly on the floor.

Jerry smiled, "Welcome to the AI Division's catering headquarters, Reyes. This is my parents' house, next door to Marc's house."

Ryan stepped closer and gave me a hug. He whispered, "For whatever you said to Paul," and then landed a kiss on my cheek.

I shrugged and smiled, "It was the truth."

Paul softly prompted, "Let me up, Joey, so I can say hello to Reyes." Paul looked incredibly uneasy. I had been right in my thoughts; he looked like he could fight or run at any moment. My heart leaped into my throat as I saw him relax a bit when he made eye contact with me.

"And give him mowe hugs and kisses," Joey giggled, then rolled

off to Paul's side. I noticed he gave Joey a troubled look. It seemed to me that he was becoming attached to the little guy and didn't know what to do with it. All I could think was 'welcome to the Clan, dude.' It turns everything upside down and inside out, but always in the best ways somehow. Suddenly his whole demeanor changed.

Standing up, Paul evilly grinned, "If everyone would just allow *us* to get to know Reyes better, *before* marryin' us off, that would be kewl." Les, Victoria, Marc and Danny came in the front door.

"That's part of why I'm here," I admitted. "In the last two hours, I've already had a big breakfast and a breakfast milkshake too. Besides, I have to be back at Ewa Beach in about forty-five minutes for a funeral."

Everyone in the house queried, "A funeral?"

I nodded, "The parents of one of our rescued kids were found dead. Bruce asked me to go, and I said I would."

Coming over to give me a hug, Paul asked, "Have you ever been to a funeral before?"

I nodded, "Three, for my mom, and then for my dad, and then about twelve years later, for my cousin and his wife."

Ryan gasped, "Oh man!"

Paul frowned, "We're sorry to hear it, Reyes. Losing parents once was bad enough."

"It was a long time ago. Bruce was adopted by one of our core families. He'll have it easier than the three of us did. Now, I hope I can help Bruce in some way or another, so he doesn't stay sad for very

long."

"You'we good ad making peopwe happy, you make Unca Pauw and Unca Wyan happy!" Joey innocently stated.

Wondering what had been said about me during the course of the day, I felt my face heat up. Beginning to giggle, Ryan's face immediately dropped to my shoulder. Paul simply grinned and turned away from me and Ryan. Joey's eyes widened and he giggled, "WHAD? You was dalkin' about Weyes since bweakfasd! Was dhad a secwed?"

Paul smirked, "Don't be shy. Go ahead and let it all out, Joey."

Joey giggled, "You'ww dickwe me!"

"I'll tickle you any way," Paul warned and started to advance. Joey hid behind Jerry. Seeing that the games were about to begin, Danny widely smiled and moved behind Joey, wrapping his arms around him and Jerry so they couldn't get away.

Just as the tickling and loud laughter started, I whispered to Ryan, "Is Paul ticklish?"

With twinkling eyes, Ryan nodded, "Very!" The two of us quietly walked over and each took a side of Paul. I went for Paul's ribs and Ryan went for his brother's arm pit.

Surprised and squirming, Paul loudly laughed, "NO-O-O!" He had nowhere to escape to. Jerry joined us, reaching up and tickling Paul's neck. Trying to cover up, Paul started to wilt. Joey squirmed out from between his daddy and Danny to run around and tickle his uncle to tears. In less than a minute, Paul was hysterical and on the floor again in a fetal position.

Still abusing Paul, Ryan sniggered, "The grump is laughing! Get his feet, Joey!" Danny squatted over Paul's legs, so Joey wouldn't get kicked.

Looking over at Danny, I giggled, "It seemed you were on Paul's side for a moment there."

Danny shrugged and chuckled, "I don't take sides, I just get in as many tickles as I can."

"TRAITOR!" Paul hysterically cackled.

The front door opened again. KC bounced in and hurried over to us to help teach Paul a lesson. He grinned, "Hey, Reyes, long time no see."

"I know, it's been about twelve hours for you guys," I chuckled, "Did ya miss me?"

KC sniggered, "Don't feel bad, but you'll have to stay away a little longer than eleven-and-a-half hours for me to miss you. Try a day or two."

Joey frowned, "Dhad was mean, Cwash," and flung himself onto KC.

KC caught Joey and lifted him up to his hip. "No, Twerp; *mean* would be taking him on a tour of Timmy's bedroom without preparation!" he informed Joey with a grin.

Joey wondered, "Is dhere somedhing wwong widh Dimmy's woom? I was dhere. Id was cwearn and nice, widh aww Dimmy's animaw fweinds and ewewydhing." Hearing that, I lost it and cracked up laughing so hard that I accidentally missed Paul and tickled Ryan instead. Ryan tickled me back, and so did Jerry, then Joey, and lastly

KC shoved me down to allow Paul to get payback.

Evilly snickering at the turn of events, Danny joined the group. In seconds, all I could do was howl laughing and try to protect myself from six pairs of hands tickling me at once. Thank goodness Aunt Mary called, "Lunch time, boys!"

Joey was the first to run over to the dining room, followed by Jerry, Danny and KC. Paul and Ryan only stood and offered their hands to help me up off the floor. I was still catching my breath when I took their hands and got up off the floor. Ryan had the warmest, most appreciative smile spread across his face. Probably because I made him the first target, Paul wore a crooked smirk, but there was a twinkle of joy in his eyes that I never saw the prior night. They never let go of my hands and led me to the dining room.

Entering the already packed room, I couldn't believe the quantity of food on the table. It was a smorgasbord of stuff, including salads, a variety of dressings, eggrolls, little bagel pizzas, fried shrimp, broiled sandwich steaks, and a pile of rolls and breads. Before I sat down, I sighed and told Aunt Mary, "I'm really sorry, but I've already had two breakfasts."

"Eat as much or as little as you like, Reyes," Aunt Mary smiled. "The important thing is you're here to share the meal with us."

Sitting down, I thanked her and then everyone bowed their heads, as was done the prior night at dinner. After about thirty-seconds, Uncle Jon's head popped up. Everyone started serving themselves and passing bowls and platters around. I only took a little bit of salad, a bagel pizza and two fried shrimp, and then wondered, "Where are Caleb, Noah and Wes?"

Danny answered, "They're working on getting new AI's online

and operational. I'll bring back something for them to snack on."

Nodding, I grinned across the table and asked, "When did you get here, Willy?"

Joey giggled, "Wiwwy swidhers in dhe shadows and jusr shows up!"

"It helps being a black panther," Willy softly admitted. "People don't notice me, like a shadow, unless I face them and they see my eyes."

Marc smirked, "Or when he pounces you, seemingly from out of nowhere." Baring his teeth, Willy widely smiled. There's something unnerving about a smiling Carolina panther. Maybe it's me though.

Vicky sighed, "The pouncing last night scared the dickens out of me."

Les smirked. "Hon, you have too much 'dickens' in you for one little kitty to scare out."

I was curious if Jerry, or even Paul, had spoken with Ryan about our early morning conversation, but Jerry was several chairs away from me to my left. I knew they could not bring up anything to Ryan about being an android, but there was still plenty of information that Ryan needed in my opinion. Ryan was sitting directly beside me, to my left, and Paul was directly to my right, but I thought it would be considered rude to whisper to Paul, so I simply sampled my shrimp. Once again, it was as good or better than any fried shrimp I had ever eaten before and told Aunt Mary so. One at a time, others praised Aunt Mary's culinary skills. Aunt Mary thanked each of us for our kind words.

With an evil grin on his face, Jerry commented just loud enough

for me to hear him. "You know, I hear boyfriends feeding each other their 'shrimp' is the 'in' thing," he sniggered.

With his eyes, Paul shot arrows across the table at Jerry. The remark seemed to pass over Ryan's head, because he didn't even flinch or grin. Marc obviously noticed and grouched, "I don't even have any shrimp on my plate." Covering my mouth with a napkin, I helplessly giggled.

"Don't look at me!" Danny smirked, "There's still some shrimp on the platter."

"Well, you're the closest; help your brother already, Danny!" Mary smiled.

Before Danny had a chance to move, Joey reached across the table and pulled the platter to him. He then carefully picked it up, carried it over, and set it in front of Marc before climbing onto Marc's lap. "Hewe ya go, Unca Mawc; you an' me can ead *aaawwww* dhe yummy shwimps now!"

"Thanks Munchkin, let's dig in!" Marc giggled. Aunt Mary just shook her head and smiled. She stood and then retrieved another platter from the kitchen.

Ryan leaned over toward me and whispered, "Don't worry, Reyes. I liked you plenty last night before you left. Paul does too. We're just not gonna rush anything. Kewl?"

Nodding and smiling, I whispered, "Very kewl." Returning to my meal, I forked some salad, softly saying, "We've only been out of our bad situations about a week." Before stuffing salad into my mouth, I glanced over at Paul. He nodded slightly and sort o' smirked.

Jon nodded. "You boys have the right idea, no matter what our

resident Cupid tries to tell you," he said just loud enough for us to hear.

Paul sighed then looked across the table, saying, "Mar... uh mom, would you excuse us for a minute or two, please?" Before Aunt Mary could nod, Paul had already taken my hand and started to stand. He led me just out the front door and off the porch, with Ryan trailing us. Paul huffed, "I'm really sorry for all that in there, Reyes. I guess it's because it's been only me and Ryan against the world for so long; they see me with someone I can call a friend and suddenly rice is being tossed and rings are being bought."

Ryan smiled. "Jerry doesn't mean any harm. In his own way, he's showing us that he's as happy about this morning's talks as any of us are. At last, it looks like we've found a place to be, and with people we can trust. Knowing that is at least partially thanks to you, Reyes." After a brief pause and a glance at Paul, Ryan chuckled, "They could access you or Paul or any of the androids with a satellite uplink, but they never do."

I simply asked, "Was it just you and Paul who discussed that?"

Rapidly shaking his head, Ryan answered, "It was over breakfast, so just about everybody was there; mom, dad, Jerry, Marc, Danny and Joey all know about it now."

"Thanks to you," Paul softly told me. He then suggested, "Let's all learn what it's like not living on the edge of our seats. Then we can decide where we want to go from there, if anywhere."

Ryan giggled, "It had to happen sometime, but if anyone could wake up my grumpy brother's heart, it might just be you."

I grinned, "And what is it that makes you think I wouldn't be just as interested in *you*?" Getting no response from either brother, I

told them, "Right now, I like everybody inside at the table the same. Everybody here is nice enough, and no one has hurt me in any way."

Ryan wondered, "So where do we stand?"

Paul waited for my take on it. I shrugged, "We get back to the table and back to getting to know each other better. Tomorrow's another day. Maybe I can come back here again, or maybe you'll want to come visit Ewa Beach. Let's just see how things go."

Paul checked with Ryan, "Does that sound like a plan, bro?"

"Yeah," Ryan quickly answered, but then giggled, "The tickling was fun though, and you needed it. I say we should keep up appearances and keep acting the same, even though we know otherwise."

Paul nodded and suggested, "Let's finish lunch." I turned and headed for the door, noticing Joey was standing at the closed dining room window. Before I could turn or say anything, I was being tickled by both brothers. Giggling and laughing, we hurried back inside and returned to the dining room and our meal.

Soon after we sat, Aunt Mary glanced at me, Paul and Ryan, asking, "Is everything okay?"

Ryan and I nodded, but kept mum. Paul shrugged, "We know where we stand." Jerry began giggling. Paul smirked, "Don't go there, bro."

Jerry smiled, "No?"

"No," was the threefold chorus from Paul, Ryan and me.

Helping myself to another few of Aunt Mary's awesome shrimp,

I locked eyes with Jerry, telling him, "My twenty-one years in an orphanage, plus Paul's and Ryan's twenty years on the streets are enough for each of us to deal with for now." Before digging in, I glanced around, saying, "I've got stuff to tell Paul and Ryan, about my first family, second family and current family. It's a fair assumption that they'll be telling me some stuff about their lives too."

Les nodded, "That's a very mature point-of-view." Vicky nodded and widely smiled.

"Quite a difference from rolling around the floor tickling each other," Jon teased.

Ryan giggled, "Can't have too much of either, can we?" Paul gave his brother an evil look then returned to his lunch.

Joey asked, "Do you wanna pway dwums widh me again, Weyes?"

"I don't think I'll have the time today, Joey," I gently answered, and then promised, "I'll be around often enough where we'll have plenty of chances to do that. You could even visit me in the ROH, and maybe get to play with my dad's band."

Joey cheered, "Keww!" and then checked with Jerry, "Couwd I go, pwease, Dahdy?"

Jerry nodded and grinned, "Sure, munchkin. If I can, I'll even go along too."

I told everyone, "After I left here last night, I got to play a concert with my dad's band. I know it was recorded."

Before I could have Alden or Daileass give the song to the AI Division, a new voice announced over the speakers, "I have it,

Reyes." A moment later, we heard the applause over the dining room speakers and then my dad hitting timpani and the gong, starting 'Fanfare For The Common Man'.

I wondered, "Who was that?"

Danny grinned, "Our new AI, Stevie. Caleb, Noah and Wes got him installed and running earlier today."

For the next few minutes, everyone commented on the song playing. Joey asked who was playing the drums, and I told him it was my dad, Derrick Seibert. Les and Vicky were quite impressed by the rock arrangement of a classical piece written by Aaron Copland. I outlined who was playing what instruments for everyone at the table. By the time I was done, everyone except Paul, Ryan and I were done eating.

My kitten, Charles, suddenly appeared on my lap. He looked up and bitched, "Alden said you were having shrimp, and didn't invite me. Harumph! Where's mine?" Ryan began giggling and Paul widely smiled at my kitten and then me.

"You know Aunt Mary's rules, Charles," I warned, and then put a shrimp down on my napkin for him to snack on.

"This is great shrimp, Aunt Mary!" Charles purred. "Could you please remind my pet next time that he is required to have me verify the edibility of any seafood?"

The entire room became silent, except for the music still playing from our concert. Noticing all the thoughtful expressions around the table, Joey howled laughing.

"My royal decree has been acknowledged," Charles purred as he

reached a paw up and swiped a few leftover shrimp from my plate.

"Here you go, Your Highness," Mary said with a barely suppressed grin. She came over with a small dish. "I had some lobster left over from the Maine omelets this morning that is going to go to waste if you don't eat it."

Charles sniffed the bowl, then looked up at Mary. "Thank you, Aunt Mary. This is perfect to go with the shrimp. Please invite my pet for breakfast the next time that you do this; he needs to enjoy the finer things in life occasionally."

I knew my kitten had a superiority complex before I took him home. Now I only had to figure out what to do about it. My first objective was easy enough to accomplish. Immediately upon arriving home, I would tell Alden and the other AI's to stop obeying orders from a kitten.

"Just be glad he's not a panther!" Jerry commented at the look on my face. "*YOU* try telling Willie no when he decides that you're not treating him with the proper respect."

"One of these days you will understand your place," Willie stated with a purr. "Isn't that right, Joey?"

"Dahdy's an ardifificial indewwigence kid genius," Joey proudly giggled, and then hurried over to give his dad a hug.

Aunt Mary, Uncle Jon, Les and Vicky began clearing the table. Marc reminded, "Dinner's at my place tonight." Grinning at me, he added, "Before midnight." Without me even noticing, Willie had slithered away from the table and out of the dining room. In another minute, only Paul, Ryan, Charles and I remained in the dining room.

Holding a small piece of a sandwich, Ryan looked beyond me,

wondering, "What're you thinkin', bro?"

Shrugging, Paul softly shared, "I was just remembering some details, how mom and dad died, how we wound up homeless and on the streets. We know some stuff about Reyes, but he don't know much of anything about us."

I asked Paul, "When were you activated?"

"June fourteenth, 1951," he answered. "Ryan was born the same day."

Ryan offered, "Mom and dad worked at Vision Industries. Mom worked in housekeeping. Dad worked in building maintenance."

"They got me at a substantial discount off the normal price," Paul added.

Ryan smiled, "They always told Paul, 'to us you are a real boy'."

Paul nodded and then tapped my thigh. On my boardies, he wrote with his finger, 'U' and 'S'. I quickly realized that their parents considered both of them real human boys and they told them so. Nodding once toward Paul, I indicated his message was received and understood. That's probably why Ryan considered himself a real human boy; because his parents always told him it was so.

Paul asked me my activation date, and Ryan quickly asked me about my first parents. I answered them, adding little bits about my first years at Myrtle Beach; friends I had made and the times I played percussion with my dad, at home and on gigs with his band.

We had finished eating. I had Charles transported home, with a half-eaten shrimp hanging out of his mouth. Then Paul, Ryan and I took our plates out to the kitchen. After handing them to Aunt Mary,

we walked outside and down to the water line, talking about our lives before the Clan. I listened to Paul and Ryan tell me a little about their lives on the street. When I was asked to tell them about my time at the orphanage, I couldn't share a lot, because I honestly didn't remember, but I did tell them that there wasn't always sexual abuses going on; those had only begun in 1998. "Still, birthdays and Christmas weren't celebrated before 1998. Us orphans always had to do the maintenance around the house, the lawn work and all the painting and daily cleaning too. We always had to do for ourselves, to make life a little more bearable. All us kids always took care of each other, as best as I can recall."

Ryan asked, "And what's life like now?"

"It's awesome," I cheerfully giggled. "You met my brothers, Jonah and Dillon, last night. Today, we're adding another brother. His name is Randy Beale, he's seven years old, got auburn hair and brown eyes, and fits in our family perfectly. All the kids at our base in Ewa Beach are very kewl. Considering some of the stuff we've been through, there's hardly any problems ever. I've heard through the grapevine that some little kids worried about showering with older kids. Obviously that's all worked out too, because me and my bros went with Randy to shower at the dorm this morning. At one time, there was a five-year-old, a seven-year-old, a nine-year-old, an eleven-year-old, me and a fifteen-year-old in there with no problem."

Paul smirked, "That's a really big tub!"

I grinned, "It's a big mob shower. There are eight showers on each of two parallel walls, so sixteen could fit in there easily. I'd venture to say that when school starts next week, everybody in the hallway could fit in there at once, some sharing a shower spray, without bumping into one another. I'll show you around when you come to visit." Then I drew pictures in the sand, describing the basic

layout of our base. Sadly, my time was up and I had fifteen minutes to get dressed for Bruce's funeral. Once more, I was sandwiched between the brothers, all three of us giggling and promising to get together again soon.

Stepping back from the brothers, I smiled, "Tell everyone I said goodbye, but I've got to hurry."

Paul nodded, "No sweat." His eyes had gone flat again. I was worried and wanted to say something to make it better, but I realized that was a bit presumptuous of me to think that I could just make over twenty years of distrust and pain just disappear.

"I'll tell Joey that he's comin' with us to visit you," Ryan smiled.

I giggled, "Kewl," and then tapped my comm-badge to have Alden transport me back home and directly to my bedroom. In a flash, I was standing there in the room I shared with my brothers. Dillon and Jonah were already there, half-dressed in shirts, socks and their underpants.

Jonah jumped and hollered, "Where the heck were you?"

"We looked everywhere!" Dillon gushed.

I chuckled, "You didn't check South Carolina." Taking off my shirt, I explained that Ryan had called and that I was invited to lunch.

Charles padded into the room, heading directly to the nearest chair. "Good food!" he purred, then added, "You help Bruce-boy, I will guard the room." He curled into a ball and promptly went to sleep, still purring.

Dillon cracked up. Jonah giggled, "Patch, Riley, Charlette and

the other kittens visited us while we were in the basement practicing."

While we dressed, I asked, "Jonah, did you talk to James yet?"

Jonah nodded, "Yeah. He was kewl, but he's straight and wasn't messed with like we were. His parents sound like they were cranky fuckers. They'd take their problems out on him and ground him, so he couldn't leave the house. He actually ran away from home instead of going home from school Monday. Ya know, he didn't even notice my dick in shower. I don't think I could be like him. He's not only happy with his dick, he's very proud of it. It's gonna take me a while to just get over the orphanage and be happy, I think."

I said, "After the funeral, I'd like you to notice the other dudes at the pools. You'll see, at least a third, maybe almost half the guys here hang like you. It's not a problem you need to hold on to, bro." My brothers began giggling at my poor choice of words. I giggled, "You know what I mean! Notice the other dudes and be happy with what you've got, and who you are as a complete person. The problem was the pedophile adults, not you."

"Yeah," Dillon firmly chimed.

Jonah changed the subject by asking, "Ryan called you?"

While we finished dressing, I told my brothers about the dream I had and that I had called Jerry before they woke, and then summarized my conversation with Jerry, adding that Paul had overheard a good part of what we spoke about. Since we were running a little behind schedule, I checked to make sure that Dillon and Jonah had their comm-badges on their shirts, and then had Alden transport us to the gate. Obviously, Bruce, John and Stephen were running late too. The limousine and a stretch-Hummer were just beyond the gate, surrounded by gorillas and G-Cats. It was another couple of minutes

before Bruce, John and Stephen transported to the gate, with Frankie also decked out in a suit. His dolphin necklace was proudly displayed over the tie.

Aunt Jen and Uncle Jim immediately went to Bruce and led him to the white limo. The chauffeur opened the rear door and helped Aunt Jen, Bruce and then Uncle Jim. John sent to me, *'Bruce doesn't want my help today. I'm sending you and Stephen all you need to help him out.'* Nodding at John, I made sure that I remained close to Bruce. I went into the limo next, and was followed by Stephen, John and Frankie. In another minute or two, our limo was loaded and the driver pulled away.

Wiping his eyes, Bruce softly shared, "My mommy and daddy were good to me. Last Thursday, I was playing with other kids at the beach. They just wanted to go see the island from a boat. Ya know, I was having so much fun, I barely paid attention to them."

"Don't regret that stuff, Bruce," I quickly said. "You couldn't know what was going to happen and neither did they."

Aunt Jen added, "Reyes is right. Had they known, they wouldn't have left in the first place, Bruce."

"I dreamed of them last night for the first time," Bruce mumbled.

Uncle Jim asked, "Was it nice?"

Bruce scowled and shrugged, "Sort of, I guess. They said goodbye to me, like they knew they... d-died..." Losing it again, Bruce stammered through his tears, "t-t-they knew it was a long time. T-t-they f-f-floated up and away, waving and t-t-telling me we'd be together again someday."

Handing Bruce a tissue, Aunt Jen assured, "That says they loved you very clearly." Bruce only nodded and then blew his nose.

While each of us were concentrating on Bruce, I happened to notice John seemed a little distracted. I locked eyes with him. Raising his eyebrows and cracking a crooked smile, he sent, *'Local news reporters and TV crews were at the temple. Suddenly, they all decided to report on something more interesting.'*

If Bruce wasn't so wrecked, I would've cracked up laughing.

Making matters worse for me, Stephen turned to John, appearing a little concerned. John sent, *'What? There's an imaginary fire and burglary they can chase down now. Nobody is stopping and talking to Bruce or any of us if I can help it. I just want to get this over with, as quickly and painlessly as possible for Bruce.'*

Frankie suddenly needed to hug his daddies tight.

Bruce became very quiet. He wiped his eyes and sat between Aunt Jen and Uncle Jim, occasionally sighing. Bane, Ben and Jonah were keeping Geoff, Dewi and Dillon occupied, playing 'Go Fish' with a deck of cards they found. In a few minutes, we were at the Buddhist temple. I noticed that the gorillas and G-Cats were scattering, making sure the grounds and premises were safe. Lucky then went to the chauffeur. The chauffeur opened the door for us. The youngest were the first out of the limo, followed by Bane, Ben, Jonah, Frankie, Stephen and John. I stepped out next, but remained close to the door, just in case Bruce got wobbly and accidentally slipped or fell, so I could try to catch him. Uncle Jim followed me out and softly assured, "You boys being here means a lot to Bruce. He's just not able to express that now. Bruce wanted to invite more of you, but he wasn't sure if he could keep from crying. You boys are his closest, most

trustworthy friends."

Watching wide smiles spread across the faces of my brothers and friends, I warmly smiled, "We know, Uncle Jim. Bruce won't have the chance to stay sad for very long. He's got us and way more thinking of him today."

Bruce emerged from the back of the limo. My hand, Uncle Jim's arm and the chauffeur's hand all reached for him at once. While I stayed with Bruce, Uncle Jim and the chauffeur helped Aunt Jen out of the car.

Bruce checked with me and Jonah, asking, "Do I look all right?"

"You look awesome," Jonah brightly smiled.

I nodded and reminded, "It's your day, bro. You take all the time you need and do what you have to do."

Bruce forced a small smile and weakly thanked us. Aunt Jen took Bruce's hand. He looked up at his new foster mother and seemed to gain strength. He proudly led the way to the temple doors, thanking each of the gorillas and G-Cats as he passed them. Uncle Jim followed with Dewi getting a free ride and Geoff holding his hand. Then John, Stephen and Frankie went to the temple. I led my brothers, Bane and Ben to the temple and held the door open for them.

Bruce was completely awesome during the ceremony. He was like an eight-year-old rock, causing me to wordlessly check with John. *'It's not me,'* John sent. *'It's because of you guys being here, so he's being strong for all of us. He knows that if he loses it, Dewi, Geoff and Dillon will crash too, then we're all pretty much shot to hell.'*

I think the worst parts of the funeral was little Dewi asking

Bruce if the photographs were of his mommy and daddy. Bruce simply nodded and gently smiled, "Yeah, they were, Dewi. Now my mommy and daddy are the same as your mommy and daddy." Dewi slid off his chair, went to Bruce and weaseled onto his new big brother's lap.

I almost lost it!

At the end of the ceremony, I waited by the temple doors for Uncle Jim, Aunt Jen, Bruce, Dewi and Geoff to leave the small room we had been in. Bruce left with the framed photos of his parents. Aunt Jen was carrying one small flower arrangement, which I took from her so she could concentrate on Bruce and the two youngest boys.

Everyone began piling into the limo. While I had the chance, I softly asked Uncle Jim, "What's happening with the remains."

"Cremation is what they wanted and Bruce is following their wishes," Uncle Jim replied. "We'll get the urns over the weekend. Bruce is thinking of spreading the ashes over the ocean. Once he decides for sure, we'll arrange for that to happen."

Still standing outside the limo, Uncle Jim and I heard Bruce inside the limo, proclaiming, "Okay guys, let's lose these ties. I don't want to see *any* of you in a suit *ever* again." The cheering and giggling voices of nine other boys carried out to us and the limo driver.

The limo pulled away and we were on our way back home. Stephen asked, "How do you feel now, Bruce?"

Bruce thought a few moments, then shrugged, "It's over. Since Sunday night, it's like I've been living two lives. Now I can think of this life, here and now. What I really am is a little hungry and very

tired."

"We'll get you something to eat and then get you to bed," Aunt Jen promised.

Uncle Jim asked, "You know who to come to if you need anything?"

Bruce smiled, "My new mom and dad, or one of my brothers, or any of my friends." He became thoughtful, then softly said, "It's so weird, ya know? A really kewl vacation got bad one night, and then it became good the next day, and two days later it got bad again. The last two days have been weird. It's gonna get better again, right after I wake from a nap."

We all chatted about random topics for the remaining minutes of the drive back to base. I told my brothers about my short trip to South Carolina. Somehow, the rest of the world beyond our fences seemed different. I couldn't put my finger on a reason why I felt that way, but the sight of our base fences and the signs made me feel good. Soon, we were walking through the gate and being welcomed by our base security. Our group headed toward the CIC dining room for lunch. Few of the kids were still there, maybe a dozen or so. Everyone else had finished lunch and were returning to the pools, playground or rec rooms. Seeing his mom, Stephen led Frankie and John to her. Sean and Troy walked out of the Command Center and briefly spoke with John. When Troy and Sean left the C.I.C, John and his small group joined us in the chow line. We all learned that Sean and Troy were now Core Rimmers, and responsible for morale.

After we got our food and sat down, I heard Bruce ask, "You helped me, didn't you, John?"

"Not a bit," John assured. "I told you that I wouldn't, bro. I'll

never lie to you. What I did do was help Stephen and Reyes so they could help you any way you needed."

Bruce smirked, "Really?"

Crossing his heart with his hand, John giggled, "Really, I swear."

Aunt Jen smiled, "John's a horrible liar, always has been. You can believe him, Bruce."

Facing Stephen, Frankie and Stephen's mom, John smiled, "I have no idea where I got my empathy from, really." Stephen and his mom widely smiled.

Frankie lost it and laughed, "That's a lie, daddy!" That got our entire post-funeral group laughing.

Randy Beale came running into the dining room. Seeing that we were back from the funeral, he slowed his pace and came over to our table. Randy told us that Troy had started a sing-a-long at the pools. He saw them with comm-badges and sub-vocals and was wondering what had happened, so we told him that they were new Core Rimmers. The four of us wanted to get Randy's adoption taken care of and wondered where our dad, pop and Prez were.

Chewing his lunch, John broadcast, *'Lieutenant Vorik suggested that the Core Rimmers take a nap. All of 'em, except me, Sean and Troy are resting. Prez already knows there are some adoptions to take care of. He plans on taking care of that later, before dinner, when everybody is around to witness them.'* I could tell John sent his message to everyone because we all paused and turned to him for a second or two.

I guess Randy had never heard John telepathically before. He

vigorously shook his head and giggled, "Okay, that was weird!"

Jonah smirked, "You'll get used to it." Jonah then focused on John and slowly nodded. Glancing between them, I noticed John grinning and Jonah appeared thoughtful. Without intending to, I began to worry.

In my head, I heard John say, *'I'm helping Jonah too, Reyes. What I told Jonah is that Stephen hangs pretty long too, and that there's someone here on base that thinks Jonah's very nice and real cute. I already checked, and the reasons he likes Jonah have nothing to do with sex. Sorry, this is one time I can't tell you who it is that likes Jonah. We'll all find out, when they're ready to tell us. Also, don't bother trying to get Jonah to take his shorts off at the pools. It won't work. Jonah will get naked if and when he feels like it. Watch him; when he's got a lot of support around, being naked is no problem. When it's only a small group of friends around, the boardies stay on.'*

"Dillon," Jonah giggled, "you eat as much as me or Reyes!" Randy cracked up.

Dillon shrugged and grinned, "I'm hungry, and I don't wanna be little forever."

Over at the other table, Geoff giggled, "Yeah, me too!"

Jonah sighed then suggested, "Let's get out of these suits."

Dillon nodded then stuffed his mouth with the last of his French fries. Randy carried Dillon's half-full glass of soda. With Dillon still chewing, we gathered our trays and then got up to take them to the dishwasher. Randy handed the glass back to Dillon. Quickly sucking the last of his drink through the straw, he left it there at the dishwasher counter. On our way out of the dining room, Bane, Ben, Jonah, Dillon and Geoff paused at the Hundserts' table to give Bruce kisses on the

cheek. Aunt Jen and Uncle Jim looked up at me.

I giggled, "It wasn't my idea. None of 'em ever even told me."

After getting the last smooch, Bruce smiled, "Thanks, guys. I'll catch up with you later at the pool, okay?"

All of us promised Bruce that we'd see him later.

Following the pack toward the exit, I wondered, "Whose idea was that?"

Not one of them said a word, but they all started giggling. Dillon and Randy were on either side of Geoff though. The three youngest wrapped their arms around one another's shoulders. Only by their body language was I able to figure out it was Geoff's idea. Thinking about it, I realized that Bruce was Geoff's uncle now. And being the son of Drew and Corey, Geoff was picking up some excellent ideas.

Bane was the only one that went to the funeral who lived in the dorms. He took off to get changed as soon as we got outside. Once the rest of us were back at the single family homes of the Rimmer families, we split up. Geoff went to the Hundserts' house. Of course, Randy followed our family subset to the Gibbons' house. We found the house empty, and assumed Grandma Laura was at the pools.

Upstairs in our room, I went directly for the stereo and reset the Guster CD to play Fa Fa over again while we got changed. I went into the closet and started hanging up each of our suit jackets. Soon, I heard Dillon singing, "Fa fa-fa fa fa fa fa fa, never be the same again. Fa fa-fa fa fa fa fa fa fa, never be the same again."

Suit slacks were being tossed into the closet too, I realized and scowled, but started hanging them up too. While I was folding and

hanging slacks, I heard the out-of-sync chorus singing, "You were always saying something, swear you'd never say again. You were always saying something, swear you'd never say again. Fa fa-fa fa fa fa fa fa, never be the same again. Fa fa-fa fa fa fa fa fa, never be the same again." There was silence from my brothers during the next verse, which was completed by the time I finished hanging up all the clothes. I stepped out of the walk-in closet in my boxer shorts to find, in order, Dillon, Randy, Jonah and Ben line dancing in their underpants and singing the second chorus. Each of them were kicking their legs out, shaking their bottoms and having a great time. I cracked up laughing and joined the dance, at the end of the line behind Ben, thinking, "If dad and pop saw this performance, we'd all be over in Doc Wiener's office!"

We continued singing and dancing through Fa Fa and into the next song. Geoff came over and walked upstairs to find us still dancing in our underwear. Stopped at the bedroom doorway for a moment or two, the little guy grinned and then stripped his T-shirt and shorts off to join our underwear line dance through that song and the next.

Ya know, now that I think about it, that little dance was important for a few reasons. First of all, we needed it after the funeral. Secondly, it was really the first time we stayed indoors at our home for no real reason, other than being together goofing off. Lastly, it included Randy and Ben too, bonding our family together some more.

Listening to another song, we decided to get dressed and go outside. I turned off the CD player and stereo. Once Geoff was dressed, I picked him up and parked him up on my shoulders, demonstrating that I thought the kid had a great idea and it certainly helped Bruce. I carried him downstairs and outside to the pools.

Passing the Rimmer homes and approaching the indoor rec

center, we could hear dance music playing. As soon as we arrived, Carmella, Kokaku, Richie, Dee, Gage and Sammy welcomed us home.

Dee asked, "How's Bruce doin'?"

I shrugged, "He's okay, for the most part. Aunt Jen and Uncle Jim are talking with him, John and Stephen now."

Ben offered, "The worst part was in the limo goin' there. Once we got there, he was very kewl. When the monk stood, Bruce did and we all did."

"It was real pretty," Jonah relayed, "not scary or sad or nothin' like that."

Bane smiled, "I liked what the monks said. It wasn't like any church service I've ever seen before."

Gage and Sammy confirmed that Sean and Troy were now Core Rimmers. Jonah and I went to find them and offer our congratulations. We found them, attached to one another, heating up the water in the diving well. I started to laugh, but I guess I had a frog in my throat, because an odd squeaking sound escaped my mouth. Jonah cracked up at me and the two human vacuums attached at the mouth. I did a quick self-diagnosis and put my right hand in front of Jonah's eyes.

"What?" Jonah giggled, and tried unsuccessfully to pull my hand out of the way. Picking up Jonah, I started to walk away. Jonah laughed, "It ain't like we never seen dudes makin' out before!"

Sean called out, "Reyes? Did you need something?"

I giggled, "It'll hold."

Jonah cracked up. Between giggles, he told me, "They're already holdin'!"

Rolling my eyes and shaking my head, I took Jonah to the other pool and jumped in the deeper end.

Surfacing, we noticed a bunch of boys about Jonah's age were tossing a beach ball around. Saying, "See ya later," Jonah swam away from me and over to join Gage, Sammy and Ben.

I decided to head over to the diving well. A few of the guys there asked me about Bruce and the funeral. Horacio was sitting at a table with Sonia. They were sharing a soda and chatting. I took my boardies and boxers off then climbed up to the three-meter diving board. On the way up, I noticed Hank Leve, Keanu Hekeia and Liki Keoloha gathered together on lounge chairs. Keanu was nearest to and chatting with a set of three girls; Ipo 'Aukai, Lani Keawe and Vera Kirkwood.

I don't know Keanu very well, but he was obviously leaning more towards straight. Before diving, I wondered why Liki wasn't getting involved in the conversation with the girls. Liki was an orphanage brother and I knew that he preferred girls. After hitting the water, and then resurfacing, I climbed out of the well and went over to Liki. Carefully, so I wouldn't be overheard, I leaned over to whisper, "Why aren't you chatting with the girls too, bro?"

Nervously looking up at me, Liki got up from his lounge chair and then took my hand. He led me to a quiet area beyond the pool house, nearer to the Rimmer homes. He softly admitted, "I... uh... some of the other dudes are better developed, I guess. The girls don't seem to pay too much attention to me, and I'm not sure why."

"You're taller and a little heavier than me," I quickly said. I then glanced down his naked body. Leaning closer, I whispered, "You hang average, just like most of the dudes."

Liki scowled then huffed, "I dunno, bro. I just feel... different, inadequate, in height, weight, what's hangin', and everything, like I can't keep a conversation goin', so..."

Sadly and slowly shaking my head, I told Liki, "I know you and I think you're a hell of a nice guy. Can I ask you a very serious personal question?"

Rapidly nodding, Liki grinned, "Sure, Reyes."

"Are you sure that you're not making a big deal out of our orphanage experiences?"

Liki sighed, "How can I, or any of us, not make a big deal out of that shit, dude?"

"You can't simply erase the past, but you can keep it in perspective. That life is over, Liki. I know that in your case you never bitched or complained much about being with women, but you sure as hell did when you were with men; they were too rough, not rough enough, their cocks were too big or too small, they needed to shave or shower. Tell me I'm wrong."

Liki shrugged, "That's all true, but..."

I waited several moments then gently prodded, "But what?"

Liki's Hawaiian skin flushed and he asked, "Please keep a secret for me?"

"Sure, dude," I nodded, "no one will ever hear what you tell me

in private."

"Please don't tell, especially not your dads or brothers. I'm really kind of confused right now."

I held up my right hand and swore, "I promise to never say a word. This is between you and me."

Liki smiled, "Kewl." He paused a few moments to gather his thoughts, and then softly said, "Everything you said was completely true. Since moving here, Monday night, I took a dorm room with Keanu."

"Kewl."

"It's very kewl, maybe too kewl. So we got to talk, about what we had done, and what we kind of missed and needed. So, we do stuff together, and it's better than any sex I've ever had with any man or woman." He paused, blushed and giggled, "Last night, we got carried away. Blowjobs in a sixty-nine and swallowing, then intercourse; he did me and then he wanted me to do him too."

I chuckled, "That's why you two walked into the dining room so late this morning?"

Liki nodded, "Dude, it was awesome. Today though, I'm like, Keanu's a good friend, and he was totally into last night, kissing and all, ya know? We even fell asleep together, with my head on his chest." I nodded, and then Liki continued, "So now I'm asking myself, do I love him? Could I love him, like the Core Rimmers, forever? Would I still love him in five or ten years, when we're both adult men? *That's* the major problem, and why I'm not talking to the girls much today."

Holding up two fingers on my right hand, I asked, "Two

questions."

"Kewl."

"First question; does Keanu know how you feel?"

Liki gasped, "Fuck no! I'm so scared to tell him. What if he says, 'No, it can't be like that'? What if he says, 'Yes, let's be boyfriends'?"

I sighed, "Well, if you guys have sex again tonight and it's just as intense, it's not gonna be any easier to ask him tomorrow, is it?" Liki's eyes shot wide open and he shook his head. "So," I continued, "you've got to ask him, and no matter what his answer is, you've gotta figure out the answer to question two; what do you want to do? Do you want to make babies of your own with a girl, or would you be just happy adopting some with a guy? No matter which you choose, know this; you were my orphanage brother and you are my Clan brother now. Most of the kids here are exactly like you and me, and Kaleo, and Tory, and so on. Those that aren't exactly like us are only somewhat different, as in they were street prostitutes. At least they got paid. All we got was extra food. The extra food us older kids got we shared with the little kids. And we kept those freaks away from the little kids too. No one here is going to say anything too bad about your past. You're cute, and you're smart, and you're definitely able to carry a conversation with anyone you please. Just figure out what you want. If you want Keanu, then let him know, before you go crazy together tonight."

"What if he says no, and wants a different roommate because of it?"

I smirked, "From what you said, he won't totally blow off the friendship. The worst I can see happening is Keanu deciding to not

have sex with you, so he doesn't make matters worse for both of you." I stopped short there, because I saw Jonah running around the pool house.

Also noticing Jonah running toward us, Liki warmly smiled, "Thanks, Reyes. I'll chat with him tonight."

"Reyes!" Jonah yelled, and came to a halt a foot or so away from us. He smiled up at Liki and giggled, "How're ya doin', Liki?"

"Better now, thanks to your bro."

Jonah giggled, "Kewl, man." He then turned to me and asked, "Did you see where Sean and Troy went?"

"No, they were still attached, at the side of the diving well the last I saw."

"They're gone now," Jonah grinned. "And so are John, Stephen, Gage, Sammy and Dee. Our pool ball game has come to a screeching halt because half our team disappeared."

Liki giggled, "They're Core Rimmers now, so they could be anywhere."

I nodded at Liki then told Jonah, "Let's take a look around."

The three of us took the long way around the pool house and rec center, back to the pool and around to the diving well. We never saw Sean or Troy anywhere close by. Jonah and I shrugged.

I asked Jonah, "Does this mean we're in charge?"

Jonah giggled, "Don't look like anybody needs anyone in charge." He then poked me in the belly and added, "But if they do,

you're it!"

"That's what I was afraid of."

Giggling his butt off, Jonah then ran back to the pool and his game.

By this time, Keanu was no longer chatting, but climbing to the five meter board. For the first time, I looked at Keanu with a sexual eye. He was about the same height and weight as Liki, and of course, they were both of Hawaiian descent. Keanu dove and did a somersault before straightening up and slicing into the water with very little splash. I applauded and so did Liki, some other guys and most of the girls around the diving well too. I evilly grinned and bounced my eyebrows at Liki. He cracked up laughing, stopped clapping and slightly collapsed against me.

Keanu climbed out of the diving well while some of us were still applauding. Now that I could see him closely, I noticed that he had beautiful hazel eyes. Liki had light green eyes. The two of them together would be awesome, I thought. They were both exceptionally cute and would make a cute couple.

Walking up to Liki and I, Keanu grinned, "Was it that good?"

I told him the truth. "It was great, dude! I won't even climb to five-meters to try anything fancy. You cut into the water like a knife with virtually no splash at all."

"Sweet!" Keanu smiled. "Now, can I repeat it is the question."

Liki asked, "How about we get a soda?"

Keanu nodded, "Sure, Liki." They went over to the lounge chairs and slid into their clothes. I climbed back up the three-meter

ladder and watched them walk away from the well, in the direction of the CIC

I remained there at the diving well about another hour, trying dives, chatting with some of the other teens. Keanu and Liki never returned to the pools or diving well. I became somewhat concerned for them, so I got dressed and ran to the CIC. Inside the dining room, I found them sitting at a table together, way off to the side of the room, near Shirley's cage. Rather than bother them, I went into the kitchen and got a small soda.

On the way out again, Keanu and Liki hollered, "Reyes," and waved me over. I went there and watched them carefully. It seemed that both Keanu and Liki had puffy eyes, as if they'd been crying. I prepared myself for bad news.

Liki smiled, "Sit with us for a few, bro."

Doing so, I asked, "Please tell me you guys are all right?"

"We're fine," Keanu grinned.

Liki nodded, "Thanks to you, we both got to say what needed to be said."

Leaning over the table closer to me, Keanu grinned, "I've been surprised about stuff with Liki too. If it weren't for you, Liki wouldn't have pulled me aside to talk. Thank you, again."

Liki smiled, "We're on the same page, Reyes. We're starting to feel and think things that surprise us. So, for the time being, we're roommates, and more. In the future, we're going to take time to talk about this important stuff."

"We'll see how it goes," Keanu added. "Saying we're boyfriends

right now would be too much too fast for both of us."

"In the meanwhile," Liki continued, "we're still roommates and I think our friendship has grown over the last hour or so."

Keanu nodded, "If things start looking like we're getting more serious, we're going to chat with Prez and Keith, and then your dads too. We need to know what they know; how this could work, long term." He then firmly told Liki, "I am not changing rooms or roommates because of this. Compared to what we used to deal with daily, this is easy, and way more fun."

I couldn't help myself and happily gushed, "I am so relieved! I thought I had really screwed up, and in the process, got you two royally screwed up too!" Sadly shaking their heads, Liki and Keanu roared laughing. I giggled, "What really matters is you two, living together and deciding where your lives could go as closer friends."

Liki tapped Keanu's arm and softly suggested, "Now, to get Reyes back, we've gotta get him hooked up with someone."

Nodding, Keanu chuckled, "There's more than a few right here that think you're hot stuff."

I blushed so hard that they both howled laughing. Covering my face with both hands, I heartily giggled. Liki teased, "Ipo thinks you're way cute, bro."

Uncovering my face, I sniggered, "Sorry, wrong parts there, dudes."

Keanu shrugged, "How about Christian Beresford?"

Shaking my head, I smiled, "It's not that he's not very cute. One thing I've already told myself is, I need another android. I've had two

sets of parents already. Derrick and Mike are the third set. I can't see losing the family I have now without having someone that will last a long time with me. Luckily for me, I went to AI Division headquarters yesterday, where I met a bunch of very kewl androids, and as time goes on, I'll be sure to meet more, through that bunch."

My two friends chorused, "Excellent!"

Liki smiled, "You deserve someone, Reyes."

I shrugged and stood, saying, "Ya know, it seems to happen when both parties least expect it. Far be it for me to break from the norm." After a brief pause, I grinned, "I need to check on my brothers. I'll see you guys later."

"See ya, Reyes," they chuckled, and also stood.

Liki noticed my curious expression. He blushed and giggled, "There's about two hours until dinner."

"I know just how to work up an appetite," Keanu evilly grinned.

They actually passed me heading out of the dining room. I paused at the doorway to finish my soda, then tossed the empty cup in the trash, before hurrying back to the pool to find Dillon, Jonah and Randy.

Not only did I find them, but also my dad and pop were awake. Dad and Pop seemed quite busy with Dillon, Jonah and Randy, so I was surprised when they left those three and came toward me. Before I could say a word, I was sandwiched between them. I giggled, "Did you have a good nap, and more, I hope?"

Pop planted a kiss on my cheek and seemed to shudder, "Way

more than that."

Derrick whispered in my ear, "You're as important as the other three. Don't ever forget that."

Tilting my head, I smiled, "I know, dad. This shows it very clearly."

We separated, then went back to the other three sons and brothers. For a few more minutes, we hung out at the main pool with the other Core Rimmers and their sons. Kaleo and Tory were the last two to show up. It may be just me, but it seemed all of them were happier than ever. Prez even thanked me for arranging for the buses, although he had no idea when we would use a fleet of two hundred buses. "Figuring fifty kids per bus," he sniggered, "I could see using five or ten at each base."

I shrugged and giggled, "A road trip with our UNIT guys too?"

"There ya go!" Prez cheered. "That could fill a few more buses."

Pop called, "Reyes, let's go find the Scoobies."

I nodded and told Prez, "I'll see ya later," then went to my gathered family.

We headed out beyond the outdoor recreation area and into the trees. Pop seemed to know where he was going and only called for Spike, Faith, Willow and Xander once. In the distance, between trees, I could see our school buildings. The ferret foursome scampered up to us. At that time, Pop introduced Randy, and that he would soon be adopted into the family. Each of the Scoobies went to Randy and said hello.

Crawling up Pop, Spike asked, "Beez Randy a brother now?"

"Not yet, later; when we get Prez to make it official," Mike answered.

"Oh," Spike squeaked, and then started stammering, "But... but..."

Up Pop's other side, Willow scampered. She whispered in Pop's ear. My brothers and I checked with dad, but only got a shrug in response.

Pop nodded, "Randy's kewl, but if it's really important?"

"Yup, yup," all four Scoobies chanted.

Pop went to Randy and softly explained, "Once you're a real brother, the Scoobies will get to know you, but right now, they'd like to show us something. Would you mind if we caught up with you at the pools in a little while?"

Randy shrugged, "It's kewl."

Placing a hand on Randy's shoulder and squeezing, Pop assured, "You're our son, right after we get back and surround Prez." Jonah, Dillon and I nodded and helplessly giggled.

Derrick checked with Randy, "You can find your way back okay?"

Randy nodded and smiled, "If it takes me more than five minutes, I'll yell for help, and a bunch of gorillas or G-Cats will fall out of the trees."

My brothers and I cracked up. Pointing in the direction we came

from, Dad chuckled, "That's so true."

Before leaving us, Randy told Xander and Faith, "I've grown to love this family in only a few days. You'll see, I can be trusted with the Shiniest of Shinys, and more." He walked away, toward the main part of the base, loudly reciting the Shiny Pledge.

Dillon firmly told the Scoobies, "This better be really important. Randy is real nice."

Dad nodded and went to Dillon offering his arms. Dillon held out his arms and Dad picked up Dillon, saying, "Trust your pop and the Scoobies. As a family, we'll make it up to Randy so he won't ever feel left out again."

Glancing around at the ferrets, Jonah prodded, "So what's the big deal?"

"Weez gots ta show yous," Faith cutely giggled. She and Xander scampered away. Our family followed them, to the base of a dying tree. Willow and Spike climbed down off Pop.

All four pointed at a large hole near the root of the tree, squeaking, "You's gots ta follows us to sees it."

Mike chuckled, "Down there?"

I sniggered, "Couldn't we just transport to wherever?"

They all shook their heads. Spike grinned, "Not this time. You's can sees how weez found it first."

Xander, Willow and Faith scampered down into the hole. Spike held out a little paw to Pop. Taking the paw in his hand, Pop followed Spike, knelt down and crawled into the hole. Dillon and Jonah lost it

and cracked up, but they didn't even give it another thought. Dillon and then Jonah followed Pop into the hole.

Turning to my dad, I giggled, "Seriously?"

Dad nodded, pointed at the ground and sniggered, "After you."

Getting down on my hands and knees, I laughed, "We're gonna get so dirty."

Also kneeling down, Dad laughed, "Dirty tree hole Rimmers!"

Up ahead, in the dark tunnel, I could hear Pop bitching and my brothers laughing as we bumped into sides of the tunnel and each other. Squeaky little ferret instructions and laughter echoed in the tunnel. Mostly, we could stay on our hands and knees, but sometimes we had to lay flat and shimmy our way down and around the passages.

Pop griped, "But that way is bigger, I can feel it."

Spike answered, "A bigger dead end, Shiny Daddy."

"Weez don't want everybody down here, so's we made some wrong turns to no wheres," Xander explained.

Behind me, dad softly sniggered, "Yeah, how silly could you be, Mike?" He raised the pitch of his voice and squeaked, "Weez don't want everybody down here!" I laughed so hard that I fell forward and bumped my nose on Jonah's sandal-covered foot.

We crawled the winding turns of the descending dark tunnel for thirteen minutes, giggling and cracking bad Rimmer jokes. At last we reached the end. I could just barely see Pop offering hands to help Dillon, Jonah and then me out of the tunnel. Brushing myself off, I

watched Pop get Dad out and onto his feet. Way up the side of the space we had arrived at, the ferrets had fashioned natural gas piping and light with mirrors.

Pop asked where we were and the Scoobies all proudly replied, "This beez our Shiny Vault!"

Dillon and Jonah began checking the place out and I followed them.

Pop wondered, "Are we even on base anymore? Where exactly are we, Spike?"

"Under the auditorium's basement," Spike happily cheered.

Faith nodded, "Near where Shiny Daddies first plays us Shiny music."

Xander pointed up at another passageway saying, "That leads up to the auditorium basement." It had to be twenty feet up a sheer wall, maybe two or three feet below the ring of gas flames.

"Weez can get anywhere on base from here," Willow squealed.

Dad gasped, "My God!"

There were various shiny things in piles everywhere, not to mention hub caps, tire wheels and one really horrible modern art sculpture. I tapped it and assumed it was made of aluminum.

Mike wondered, "What's the most valuable thing down here?"

All the ferrets gathered before that awful aluminum sculpture and cheered, "This beez the Shiniest!"

Dad softly asked, "Do you guys always crawl in and out of

here?"

Xander shook his head and seriously answered, "Weez can transport in and out with Shinies if weez need to."

Pop grinned, "Well, that answers how some of the larger Shinies got down here. This place is awesome, guys." He paused and wondered, "How come I don't see any guitar picks?"

Crawling up Pop and parking herself on her daddy's shoulder, Faith replied, "Oh, weez keeps them always!"

"Them's from you, Shiny Daddy," Willow reminded, and then crawled up Mike's other side until she arrived at his opposite shoulder.

I asked, "All this stuff came from Dull Lovers and Shiny Haters?"

Xander nodded, "Some of it. Most weez found."

Spike frowned, shook his head sadly and growled, "Tossed asides like garbage! Blasphemers!"

Nodding and forcing a frown, Pop huffed, "I know, it's very sad."

Pointing at four large tikis adorned with pearls, I wondered, "Where did you find these?"

Willow answered, "They was buried here already."

Scratching my head and scowling, I muttered, "They were here?" All four Scoobies replied affirmatively.

Dad asked, "What's wrong, Reyes?"

I sighed, "Tiki carvings are of Hawaiian gods, usually put at burial grounds. Tikis like these, with all these pearls, they must've been extremely important, guarding graves of very important people."

Pop gasped, "Tiki gods guarding burial grounds?" He asked the Scoobies, "Did you guys find any human remains here?"

Spike fervently shook his head, replying, "No, Shiny Daddy, no bones, just Shinies."

Xander explained, "That's why weez picked this spot; it already had lots of Shinies."

Willow nodded, "Yup! Weez cleaned the buried Shinies up."

Dad checked his wristwatch then asked, "Are we done here?"

Pop nodded and suggested, "Let's go out under the Day Shiny. Then we can all have dinner together."

While Xander climbed the wall to flip the mirror and turn off the gas flames, Dad gathered Dillon, Jonah and me. Spike held onto Pop's leg and asked, "Yous can find us now, Shiny Daddy?"

Pop honestly answered, "I probably couldn't make my way down the tunnel without getting lost, but at least I know where to find you."

The lights went out. Willow said, "Yous can call for us from any street drain. We'll hear yous down here." A few moments later, Pop called Alden and a split second later, we were all outside and by the pool house.

Across the pool from us were Prez, Keith, Corey, Drew and some new guys. Corey saw first how dirty we were and cracked up

laughing. Prez covered his eyes briefly and chuckled. Keith grinned and pointed at the pool house, saying, "No pool for you dudes until you shower."

Pop loudly bitched, "That's why we're here, Dull One."

Suspiciously glaring at Keith, Spike wondered, "Is he *really* a Dull One, Shiny Daddy?"

"No, he took the pledge," Pop answered. Turning around and following us into the pool house, he smirked, "Keith just likes to tease and bother me. So I tease and bother him too, every chance I get."

Inside the pool house, we all started undressing. In the changing area, Dad separated our comm-badges from our clothes, then called Alden and had our extremely dirty clothes transported to the Gibbons' laundry room. Then our growing family went to scrub layers of dirt off our bodies. Randy came in and giggled, "So, was it really important?"

We all nodded and confirmed that it actually was. The Scoobies noticed us and checked with each other. Spike told Randy, "Weez showed our Shiny Daddies and brothers our Shiny Vault."

"Oh, wow," Randy gasped, "That's really important."

Willow offered, "Weez can show you later."

Still washing his face, Pop said, "Don't go too far, Randy. As soon as we're done here, we're surrounding Prez and adopting you."

Randy giggled, "With or without clothes?"

Pop grinned, "Why does that matter?"

Randy shrugged, "I just need to know how to dress, or undress

for the occasion."

Dad smiled, "Then get undressed."

"Kewl," Randy smiled, and started taking his boardies and underwear off. Before Randy could pick them up off the floor, his clothes disappeared.

Over the loudspeakers, Alden said, "Your clothes are in the Gibbons laundry room, Randy."

Pointing at the ceiling speakers, Dad explained, "Alden is our division's AI"

Randy wondered, "Like a computer?"

Jonah shrugged, "Not exactly, Alden's a bit more than just a machine."

"He's a real boy to me," Dillon stubbornly added.

Alden giggled, "Okay, you guys just earned bonus points."

Still washing his hair, Pop said, "The AI's make sure all you kids are kewl. If anything were to happen to any of you, like getting hurt or sick, they'd intervene and notify us."

The Scoobies shook water from their coats, then went to the changing room, where Randy was standing. Each of them reintroduced themselves to our new brother. Then they laid two towels on the floor and began rolling around on them to dry off. Pop noticed and helplessly sniggered. Dad sputtered then turned his face into his shower spray. I could tell he was fighting the urge to crack up laughing by his shoulder bounces.

Starting with Dillon, we exited the showers to dry off. Randy sat

on the bench and seemed very thoughtful. I wondered, "What's up, Randy?"

Blushing intensely, Randy mumbled, "Well, I feel kind of silly, but I guess now's a good time to ask a question." Looking up at Dad and Pop, he sighed, "Last night, at the dorm, some guys were talking about growing up and puberty. What's that last word mean exactly?"

Jonah smiled, "Okay, me, you and Dillon aren't there yet. Reyes, Dad and Pop are. They've got deeper voices, wider shoulders and hair around their dicks and sacks." Looking up at me, Jonah asked, "What you've got is what you've always had?"

I nodded, "Yep, thirteen is about average for puberty, so I've got some hair down there. Dad's almost fifteen and Pop's near fourteen-and-a-half. They've got more hair than I do."

Randy droned, "Oh, so that's why Roy has way more hair, up his legs and on his belly, he's older."

Pop shrugged, "Or he may have started earlier. Me, Derrick, Prez and Keith all started right around our twelfth birthdays. Corey Seaver is eleven, but he's got a little hair too. His voice hasn't completely changed, but you hear it cracking now and then because it is changing."

Dad nodded, "Another example is Drew. During the summer, his voice was changing. Now it's pretty much done. By the end of the summer, Drew's few hairs turned into more. Now he's got about as much as Reyes."

Randy asked, "So nothing happens like at the same time?"

Dad and Pop both shook their heads. I explained, "Some guys may get the muscles, wider shoulders and body mass first. It all

depends on genetics, how it runs in both your mom's and your dad's families. Our Dad and Pop shave. I don't and haven't ever. Even if I did, I'd always have the same fine hairs over my lip, like a thirteen-year-old might. I never asked Drew, but I don't think he's ever shaved either."

Pop tossed his towel in the hamper, saying, "If Drew's like Keith, I'd give it another few months. Before Keith turned thirteen, his mom didn't like seeing him with a mustache, so Keith's dad showed him how to shave. Now Keith gets reminded when to shave by either his mom or his dad."

Dad tossed his towel in the hamper and grinned, "Okay, guys, as soon as we get outside, the four of you need to surround Prez. Give him no escape."

The Scoobies giggled, "Weez can help too!"

Pop nodded, "You sure can. Since it seems we have a few new faces out there, we'll get introduced and then tell Prez to go into adoption mode."

Dad chuckled, "If he makes any excuse, or tries to say 'later', Dillon and Randy, your job is to turn on the water works." Immediately, Dillon and Randy put on their pouty-faces. They looked so pitiful, I couldn't help laughing.

Pop sniggered, "Jonah, your job, if the sad-sacks don't get him, is to make Prez feel like he doesn't like you or any of us."

Jonah nodded and giggled, "I can do that."

Dad prompted, "Let's go." We left the shower and the pool house, walked directly around the pool and stopped before Prez and Keith. The Scooby Gang ran up onto Prez's lounge chair. Xander and

Faith sat on Prez's knees. Spike and Willow went all the way up Prez's shoulders and sat there. Dad and Pop were introduced to Jesse and Julio, our visitors from Des Moines. They shook hands and knocked knuckles and made some pleasant small talk. Then Dad instructed Prez, "It's time to get your tricorder, bro."

"Now?" Prez confirmed, and glanced around our family and the two Des Moines leaders he was with. I noticed that was enough for Dillon and Randy to put on their act. Widely grinning, Keith pointed them out to Prez. "Oh, for the love of Pete," Prez chuckled, "No, not the pitiful routine!" He quickly tapped his sub-vocal, ordering, "Alden, get me my tricorder before they actually cry."

Keith sniggered, "Our boys are going to be so spoiled rotten. At the first tear, Prez will cave and give them anything they want."

Turning to Corey, Drew grinned, "Let's get Lenny and Geoff." Corey nodded and giggled. They both got up to gather the boys, preparing to adopt Lenny Cutler. Seven-year-old Lenny had been attached to Drew, Corey and Geoff since Sunday anyway.

The tricorder appeared in Prez's lap. From another chair, where she sat with Cesar and Felipe, Aunt Lanna called over, "Preston, we'll have two more adoptions over here, as soon as my husband is done with work." From the other side of the pool, Murakami and Shimizu ran over.

Seeing that the small task was growing exponentially, Prez sat up in his chair and loudly called, "Kokaku and Dewi, com'ere, please?"

The two little four-year-old boys climbed out of the pool and came over, weaseling between me and Jonah to stand before Prez. "Tell mommy and daddy the day is over," Prez told the boys. "Have

them come over here, so we can get Dewi officially adopted into the Hundser family."

The two boys loudly laughed, "YAAAAAA!" and took off like a shot for the FYS Building. Neither had bothered to get dressed though. Grinning, Prez thoughtfully hummed.

Julio laughed, "Well, did you tell them to get dressed first? No-oo-oo!"

Keith sniggered, "Two naked four-year-olds should put a very quick end to the work day." Rejoining the group were Drew and Corey, with Geoff and Lenny.

John, Stephen, Frankie, Lindsay, and their two friends, Jeff and Tommy joined our group. John told Prez, "Let's make Frankie official too, bro."

Glancing around the expanding group surrounding him, Prez smiled, "Let's get started." He pressed a few buttons on the tricorder then held it out, asking, "Lenny Cutler, would you like Drew Hundser and Corey Seaver as your fathers, and Geoffrey Eckel as your little brother?"

"Yup, to me they already are," Lenny smiled.

Prez asked, "Drew and Corey, would you like Lenny as your son."

Drew nodded, "Yes."

"Definitely," Corey smiled.

Prez asked, "Geoff, do you want Lenny to be your big brother?"

Rapidly nodding, Geoff wrapped an arm around Lenny's waist,

saying, "Yeah, Unca Prez." Lenny wrapped his arm over Geoff's shoulders.

"It's official," Prez grinned, "Lenny Cutler is now Drew and Corey's son and Geoff's big bro." The group around Prez applauded. Drew, Corey, Geoff and Lenny stepped back and embraced each other. Prez moved on to the next closest set, asking, "Frankie Petropavlovski, do you want John Hundser and Stephen Marr as your fathers?"

Frankie smiled, "Yes, Uncle Prez. I want their names too. Make me Francis Hundser-Marr, please."

"That's been recorded, Frankie," Prez smiled. The paperwork will be filed and Grandpa Jim will ask you to sign your name in a day or two." He paused then asked, "John Hundser and Stephen Marr, do you want Frankie as your son, and with the surname he has asked for?"

Stephen giggled, "Yeah, Prez. Thank goodness I won't have to get tongue-tied trying to say 'Petro-pav...lovski' too much more." The entire group around us began sniggering and laughing.

Prez chuckled, "John, do you want Frankie as your son?"

John nodded, "Yeah, bro. Let's get the dolphin lover hooked up." Again, we all began laughing. The only article of clothing Frankie had on was his dolphin necklace. The threesome stepped back and our group moved closer.

Prez asked, "Randy Beale, do you want Derrick and Mike as your fathers, and Dillon, Jonah and Reyes as your brothers?"

Glancing around at Dad, Pop, Dillon, Jonah and me, and getting

smiles and nods, Randy said, "Yeah, Prez."

Prez asked, "Derrick Seibert and Michael Gibbons, do you want Randy Beale as your son?"

Almost simultaneously, Dad and Pop chorused, "Yeah, bro."

Prez asked, "Reyes Taraschke, Jonah Desak and Dillon Helde, do you want Randy as your brother?"

I nodded, "Very much."

"Yup," Jonah added.

Dillon giggled, "Of course," earning more sniggering and giggles.

"It's official," Prez smiled, and then asked, "Who's next?"

Uncle Bill and Aunt Lanna stepped forward with Cesar, Felipe, Murakami Junichiro and Shimizu Atsushi. In a few minutes, the latter two were part of the Seaver family. Next to step forward were Grandpa Carl and Grandma Anna, who adopted six-year-old May Hickox, giving Brandi the sister she very much wanted; and two former FCC boys, seven-year-olds Chad Bunting and Herbert Trumbo. Dad widely smiled, and softly told me that he was certain his parents would happily fill their large new home with kids of all ages.

Uncle Jim and Aunt Jen arrived at the pool. Dewi was officially made their son, and Rena Hawkin, an eight-year-old former FCC Girl, was made their daughter and Carmella's big sister. Just after five o'clock, the last and largest set of adoptions were four-year-old Aaron Pendergrass, five-year-olds Randall McFarren, Alan McHugh and Tami Hepner, all of whom were former FCC kids and were adopted

by Grandma Laura and Grandpa Rob.

When it was all over, Prez recorded that the adoptions were witnessed by most of the Pacific Rim Division's Clan as well as Director Julio Hernandez and Assistant Director Jesse Crowley, from the Des Moines Division.

As we were walking away, Pop sniggered, "Almost every boy adopted was naked at the time of their adoption."

Dad shrugged and grinned, "Most of the fathers were too. I think Stephen was the only one under the age of twenty with shorts on."

Randy admitted, "I was wondering about that."

Dad asked, "How old do you think Stephen is?"

Randy shrugged, "Eight or nine, I guess. He's only a little taller than Jonah."

"He's eleven," Dad softly said, and Randy's jaw dropped.

Pop said, "All you guys get to have those morning milkshakes. Stephen has to have them twice or three times a day. A bunch of you guys are undernourished, but Stephen's malnourished. That's the one thing I'm watching very closely. I want to see all these kids growing and gaining weight." Reaching down and tickling Dillon, Pop laughed, "We'll have no little squirts in this Clan by New Years!"

While Pop and my brothers were laughing and teasing each other, I softly told Dad, "We're going to try and split off into our own family nests, either tonight or as soon as possible."

Dad nodded, "Whatever and whenever, Reyes. If any of the little guys aren't ready, it's no big deal."

I sighed, "Not for us, but for you and Pop it is." Locking eyes with him, I asked, "How many times a day did you and Pop make love in some manner before Friday?"

Dad thought a few seconds, then leaned closer and whispered, "At least twice, sometimes three times a day, and we always had intercourse once a day. He'd be bottom one day, I'd take bottom the next day."

I whispered back, "It's not been that way all week."

"It's getting back to normal, Reyes."

I nodded, "That's my goal, Dad. You two need that. Your love for each other is what made you father figures in the first place, last Saturday. My idea was to break into Gibbons-Seibert family boys and girls nests first. Then it'll be easier to move into the townhouse, where you and Pop can have that nice big king sized bed to yourselves every night." Pop had stopped messing with my brothers and stuck his ear between us to listen in. Dad and I softly sniggered. I grinned, "I'm gonna get all the kids gathered to talk about family group nests. That gives you two about forty minutes before dinner. Spend at least half that time alone, please?"

Dad nodded. Pop took Dad's hand, then tapped his sub-vocal and ordered, "Alden, take me and my husband to our townhome's master bedroom." They vanished.

I went to my brothers, who had already joined up with Aaron, Alan, Ben, Chad, Herbie, Kawazoe and Sung. We got the girls rounded up and went to a poolside private table for our second chat of the day, with a bunch of new members. Most of the kids agreed, it was time to break into family units. Lindsay had already broken off with Christel, and was enthusiastic to have Brandi, Latoya, and May

join as sisters that night. Nearing the end of our conversation, I noticed our grandfathers had been watching us. I waved them over so they could hear our plan. Grandpa Rob would have the girls together that night, most likely in an upstairs bedroom. Us boys would probably make a nest in the Seiberts' basement, but we couldn't be certain when that would happen, because the youngest wanted at least another night in the main nest. Aaron Pendergrass was only four-years-old. Alan McHugh and Randall McFarren were five years old.

Our meeting was complete and our granddads clued in, so the girls went toward the Rimmer family homes. I noticed Dad and Pop walking back to the pool area. They were dressed and had obviously showered again, because their hair was still damp. Since it was near dinner time, my brothers and uncles took off to get dressed. Dad and Pop sat at the table with me and I filled them in on the results of our meeting. They were both kewl with the plans.

Dad grinned, "Ya know, Reyes, since Saturday, you've been more than a big brother. You're relieving us of some parental duties."

"Today is the second time since Monday that you sent us off to go make love," Pop chuckled. He then playfully asked, "What do you think we did yesterday without our sons around?"

Dad nudged him and laughed, "That's not all we did, but we did get chances we probably wouldn't have had." Returning his attention to me, Dad smiled, "We want you to chill out. Being a big brother is one thing, but we don't want you worrying about us as well."

"I'm fine," I giggled. "I went to AI Division this morning before the funeral. Those guys are fun, and I can't wait for you to meet them. I'm hoping to invite a few of them here soon. Also, what I said before is completely true; Dillon, Jonah and I latched onto you because we liked you as a couple and wanted you as fathers. You two can't prove

to me, a fifty-six-year-old teenager, that you don't have needs. We all want you to be happy. Seeing you happy automatically makes us happy."

Dad sighed, "We need you to be happy too, Reyes."

I gushed, "I couldn't be happier. My memories are restored. I've got three kewl brothers and the best two fathers. Yesterday I met eight other androids; Danny, Marc, KC, Paul, Ryan, two adults named Les and Victoria, and a little eight-year-old android named Joey. I haven't seen another android since 1958, when Dad took me to Vision Industries for a final check-up and software upgrade before we moved here, to the ROH. Danny Page is the first android ever, a human personality imprinted onto a positronic brain. Marc Furst is really the first of the line of androids that I and most of us came from. KC is a blast, literally! He said himself, 'sometimes I'm an accident waiting to happen'. Paul and Ryan lost their parents twenty years ago. They lived on the streets almost the entire time I was at the orphanage. I learned today that their parents told them that they were completely human to them. My first parents said something similar to me too. In Paul and Ryan's case though, Ryan came to believe in that statement from his parents completely. He will swear to everybody he's one-hundred percent human. Paul protects his brother in every way, including that conviction. They were rescued only last week, a few days before we were, and they're still adjusting to Clan life. AI Division headquarters is two homes on Sullivan Island, so there aren't too many kids around, like there are here. Both are about my height and weight, Caucasian, with light brown hair and dark blue eyes, and a couple of freckles too."

My dad and pop glanced at each other and grinned. Realizing I was rambling, I moved on.

"Lastly, now that I've got my memories restored, you guys made

me part of your band last night. Honestly, I couldn't be more thrilled with everything without becoming a giggling spaz. Remember what I told you last night, that I developed empathy at the orphanage?" When they nodded, I continued, "I'm not even accessing any of my new stuff yet, and I could see you both glowing as you approached before. I could feel it in my heart, from dozens of meters away. That's the kind of relationship I want, and it's what Jonah wants too. I give Randy another day or two before he's realizing he needs a special friend that may one day become his boyfriend or girlfriend. Even the Scoobies see you as something special."

Turning to Dad, Pop chuckled, "We just lost our first logic war, I think."

Dad nodded then focused on me and asked, "What do you need?"

I shrugged, "The only thing I know for certain is that I should concentrate on another android. After losing two families already, I want someone who can be with me longer than a human, so he can be there for me and I can be there for him. In the Clan, everything has changed for me and for all androids. The one thing that hasn't changed is our longevity and human mortality. At this point, I'm looking around and keeping my options open. Danny and Marc are already together, even if they won't admit it. Joey's too young. That leaves KC, Paul and Ryan, all of which are very kewl. I just don't know any of them too well yet. And there may be other androids I'll meet in the future." I paused then softly asked, "How did you two hook up?"

Pop began chuckling. Dad grinned, "The summer of 1994, The Gibbons' and the Hundses moved to our neighborhood. Keith, Mike and I were only four, but we were already interested in music. We were friends from the start. Then Prez moved here with his folks in

1997. Three friends became four."

Taking over, Pop explained, "The four of us grew up together. We learned to play our instruments together. Prez was and still is an awesome guitarist, but our band needed a bass player. He took on the challenge. By the time we were about ten years old, we had each messed around with the other three, showin' off our little bones to each other, jackin' off and blowin' each other."

"We all knew what was going on and we were all kewl with it," Dad added. "Five years passed like that. Each of us had sleepovers with the other three, either one at a time or all at once." He chuckled, "One night, Corey was sleeping over with Drew, and I was there with Keith. They caught us in a sixty-nine. So many really good times, it was the best." He then sighed, "Then the O'Brians' plane crashed. Our best friend became an orphan. It was a major shock to all of us and our parents too. We're pretty sure that their deaths led the two of us to become a couple. The Hundserts took in Prez. We became one couple, Prez and Keith became another couple."

"It didn't change much sexually or in any other way," Mike said. "When we had sleepovers together, it was four hands or four mouths working over four cocks. I love Prez and Keith. I just love Derrick a little more."

Derrick checked, "I think it was how intercourse actually worked out that made the big difference." When Pop nodded, Derrick smiled, "Anal sex with Mike rocks more than it has with Prez or Keith. It's like a matter of timing. Mike and I can cum together almost every time. It's the same with Keith and Prez. At the end of the summer, just before school started, the four of us talked and decided from then on, intercourse was between partners only."

I chuckled, "It sometimes seems that you don't like Keith, Pop."

Pop laughed, "Keith and I have been busting each other's balls from the start. He took piano lessons from a classical instructor. I took guitar lessons from a pop and rock instructor. It started really getting silly between us then." He paused and glanced around. Seeing Keith and Prez together with Julio and Jesse, he leaned closer and softly said, "Keith's cock is seven inches long by six inches in circumference. My bone is seven-and-a-half inches long by five-and-a-quarter in circumference. Intercourse was way too short between us. He'd have me groaning and cumming in no time flat and I'd have him groaning and cumming in a few short pumps."

Dad smiled, "It was the same with me and Prez, and me and Keith too. When you've got three awesome friends, all of which you love and think are awesome people, it boils down to who does it for you in the sack. What you need to do is find those kinds of people, Reyes; the friendship is the most important. When you make love, is it over too fast, or are you both enjoying it and ready to climax together? A friend that can perform that miracle is probably the right one for you."

Hearing John's laughter and Stephen's giggling, I leaned back in my chair and huffed, "Wow. I can tell you that I never had a boyfriend before. The sex at the orphanage was never like what you described."

Pop smirked, "Those were perverted pedophiles only interested in their own pleasure. No matter what I ever thought of sex with Prez and Keith, it was never like that. We're best friends. Making it good for each other was always our primary concern. Growing up together, we learned our musical instruments and how to treat our *instruments*." Dad and I softly chuckled. Pop smiled, "Together, all four of us went from careful and scared to enthusiastic and playful. Right after school started, after the holidays last January, Keith got the flu. For a week,

Prez didn't get to sleep with Keith and sex wasn't possible. Imagine Prez getting bitchy and bitchier."

"No," I giggled, "I don't think I want to."

Pop nodded and softly sniggered, "Exactly. By the third day, we took Prez aside, before he had a complete meltdown. Keith knew about it too. It wasn't a problem for any of the four of us, and really told the whole truth; we love each other and take care of each other, no matter what the circumstances happen to be."

Dad recommended, "Have a private chat with Sean Moorhead sometime, Reyes. I don't know what happened or how exactly, but he's completely attached to Troy. And Troy refuses to take a step without Sean right there with him. Since you and Sean have similar experiences, I'd think you two could easily chat and learn something from each other. What we've just told you isn't really a secret."

Pop agreed, "It's got to be pretty obvious to everybody. I'd think everybody ten and over would understand easily enough."

Prez loudly laughed, "Okay, you three! Derrick, Mike and Reyes! You've got four telepaths ready to slam their heads into walls!" Julio and Jesse doubled up and roared hysterically.

"Lucky for you we know you told the truth," Keith loudly giggled.

Julio and Jesse breathlessly laughed, "BUSTED!"

Hanging my head, I softly giggled, "Four telepaths; John, Jamie, Jacob and who else?"

Dad sniggered, "Johnny, from Des Moines."

Turning around and glancing at Jacob, Jamie, John and Johnny, Pop laughed, "This was a private conversation with our son. Nobody asked any of you to listen in!" All four were giggling and playing innocent little angels. Suddenly, Pop covered his ears with his hands and laughed, "One at a time!" Sitting on the edge of the pool, Beau cracked up and slid into the water. He quickly surfaced, coughing and spluttering.

I noticed the adults, including the three from Des Moines, standing and gathering their littlest kids. Prez shouted, "Dinner time, Rimmers!" As usual, little kids cheered and made a mass exodus from the pool. Then the four Clan leaders sitting together got up and started to dress. I slid into my clothes while Dad and Pop gathered our family.

Arriving at the CIC kitchen, we found that our chefs had prepared two alternative main courses; there was roast beef or turkey, and all the usual side veggies, soups and salads. As soon as our family was close enough to the chefs, Pop asked, "Miguel, please get some raw chicken or turkey sliced for the Scoobies?"

Miguel nodded and smiled, but Jessica loudly said, "I'm going to the fridge. I'll get it." By the time our family was nearing the end of the line, Jessica had four small plates of chicken strips prepared. She handed a plate to each of our ferret brothers and sisters.

First to receive his plate, Xander happily squealed, "Weez get chickens and turkeys?"

Jessica nodded and giggled, "Everybody else gets a choice, why shouldn't you? Once you're seated, you can share your food with your brother and sisters, or have both."

Pointing up at Jessica's head, Willow asked, "What's that in your

hairs?"

"A barrette, so my hair is secure and doesn't fall forward into food."

Widely smiling, Willow and Faith checked with each other. They squealed, "Very nice and shiny."

Spike immediately tapped his comm-badge and ordered Daileass to get barrettes for his sisters. Appearing on each ferret girl's plate were two small barrettes, one gold and another silver. Soon after our family sat down, each girl helped the other put on their new barrettes.

Dinner started normally enough, but out of the corner of my eye, I noticed some kids were being silly and giggling. Looking around, I couldn't be sure what was happening. I figured that some of the newer kids were chilling out and more comfortable with their new environment. Jonah and Ben had obviously practiced guitar during the day while I was otherwise occupied. They were chatting about their exercises when I noticed Prez at the next table. He was talking with Julio and holding a spoonful of applesauce in front of him. Unexpectedly, something fell from the ceiling and dropped into the spoon, splattering applesauce around the table. My dad, pop and I helplessly cracked up. We were just calming down and returning to our meals when three cauliflower bombs landed in my bowl of soup. Prez, Keith, Julio and Jesse howled laughing.

Squinting across the room at John, I heard him giggling in my mind, *'Wasn't me!'* I grabbed a few extra napkins to clean up the splattered mess when I was hit in the back. Naturally, I quickly looked back. On the floor behind me was a half-chewed roll. John giggled, *'That was me!'*

I picked up the roll and watched the parents' tables. As soon as it seemed they weren't watching, I hurled the roll back across the dining room at John. Moments later, Dad used his tablespoon as a catapult to fling a barrage of peas across the room. Watching the adults, Keith prepared a mound of mashed potatoes for launching. When the adults weren't looking, he nonchalantly fired. Potatoes dispersed and went everywhere, hitting John, Drew, Corey, Jamie, Jacob and Beau.

When the adults left the dining room, the food hit the fan. What was occasional became non-stop. After a few minutes of this groaning, laughter and messy silliness, John broadcast, *'Teens are targets!'*

Troy gasped, "Shit!" and Sean cracked up, ducking for cover under the table and taking his plate with him for ammunition.

My brothers and the Scoobies scampered away. Teens that had been on the other side of the room came running to our side. Many of the older teen girls just ran for the exit, not willing to participate. Prez, Keith Julio and Jesse organized, put their leftovers on the floor, tilted the table on its side and set the chairs up as barricades. The four of them huddled behind their protection, each one occasionally popping up to fire. The dining room became a food fight war zone. Picking up my tray to use as a shield, I scooped up some corn kernels and sent them flying. Bob Busch, from Des Moines, popped out of the kitchen with a slingshot, launching deviled eggs toward unsuspecting victims. Our younger chefs, Tony and Gordon, in their mid-twenties, occasionally appeared with ladles of veggies to fire across the room. In minutes, both sides were scraping spent ammunition off the chairs, floor and tables.

It only lasted about twenty minutes, but when the last of the ammo was spent, we all looked around at the mess we had made.

Even the bird cages in the corner of the room were splattered.

Covered in food, from his hair to his feet, Robin giggled, "Watch this." He focused on one section of the room. We all watched as food remnants seemingly gathered into a large clump. Afraid of what was going to be done with this massive meter-in-diameter mess, little kids bolted for the exit, squealing and laughing. John telekinetically pulled three large trash cans into the room. Robin's clump dropped into the first trash can, making the most revolting squishy plop I had ever heard.

At the groans and disgusted faces, John howled laughing. More kids left to shower and change out of their soiled clothes. The telekinetics joined forces to clean up a majority of the mess we had made. Tables and chairs were returned to their pre-war states. Once the dining room was clean, the last of us went to shower and change clothes. In the shower with Jonah, I figured that we had showered three times and wore an amazing five sets of clothes during this one day.

Afterward, a lot of us returned to the CIC dining room and rec room to hang out.

Keith returned from the men's room with Dee. Keith sat down and Dee shuffled onto his dad's lap. Facing Prez, Keith sighed, "I think we're gonna have to call Antonio. Dee's still got the runs."

Overhearing that, Nathan turned and said, "Can I suggest a quick checkup by Reyes instead?"

"Why Reyes?" Keith and Prez simultaneously wondered.

Nathan grinned, "He was upgraded. Now he's got the knowledge of any General Practitioner stored in his positronic memory. It would

just be easier for Reyes to check Dee over real quick."

I was at the next table over with Dad, Pop and my brothers. Prez called me to come over. Keith explained the situation to Dee, who enthusiastically agreed to have me play doctor with him.

Uncertainly, I checked the time. It had been forty-seven hours and twenty-two minutes since I got those databases. I overrode the lockout on only the medical databases. I widely grinned, "Holy crap! I know exactly what to do!" Dad and Pop began laughing as I hurried to the Command Center to retrieve a tricorder.

In less than a minute, I returned and easily operated the tricorder. I scanned Dee and reviewed the readings. I smiled, "He's not even a little dehydrated. I don't foresee any major problems, just discomfort from going so often. We can even take care of that. Let me just confer with Doc Andrews and Doc Howard. I'll come back with a hypo-spray and Dee will be done running to the bathrooms." Turning and slowly walking a few steps away, I tapped my comm-badge to call the two doctors. I told them what was going on, explained my readings and transmitted them to the doctors.

The doctors reviewed my diagnosis and would have Alden transport a hypo-spray to me. Prez suggested, "Would you like Reyes to be your doctor tonight, at least until we're sure you're better, Dee?" Dee enthusiastically agreed.

I returned and administered the hypo-spray in Dee's arm, saying, "This will take care of the diarrhea and lower abdominal cramps."

"How long will it take?" Prez wondered.

"Two minutes," I answered. "The intestines are packed with blood vessels." Rapidly shaking my head, I giggled, "I'm gonna have

to access the various new databases I have!"

Pop howled laughing. Dad called me over, obviously beaming with pride. After instructing Dee to drink plenty of water for the next few hours, I then went to Dad. "I want you to think about something," Dad whispered. "With all your new databases, you're an incredible asset to this Clan. If you want, you can become a Core Rimmer too."

I blushed and grinned, "I don't know, dad. Playing on stage with you guys last night was awesome. That's really all I'm looking forward to."

Pulling me closer and firmly hugging me, Dad smiled, "You'll get more and more chances to do that too. As your databases become more integrated, all you have to do is tell me what you'd like to do. If you say yes then we'll talk with Prez."

Still uncertain, I shrugged at first. Seeing the pride in my Dad's eyes and realizing that he really wanted me to join the command team, I considered it more carefully and teetered on the fence. I told Dad, Pop and my brothers, "Let me sleep on it. A lot of things have changed this week. To go from messed-up memories to this in only two days, it's strange to think of myself as any kind of leader."

Pop nodded, "Take all the time ya need. There's no rush." Jamie, Jacob and Beau were wandering around. They came to our table and said good-bye, and that they were going to the U.K. soon for Joel's and Kevin's wedding. Shortly thereafter, John and Stephen left the dining room with the threesome.

From near his dad and pop, Richie hollered, "Dillon, do you wanna go to the rec room?"

Dillon checked with Randy, Ben and Jonah. All three agreed and stood. Dillon shouted, "Kewl. Let's go." At that table, Richie, Dee,

Frankie, Gage, Sammy, Bruce, Dewi and Kokaku got up.

Jonah asked, "Aren't you coming too, Reyes?"

"I'll catch up with you guys later." I loudly called, "Dee, if you need anything, let me know."

Spinning around, Dee giggled, "I'm way better already, but I will, Reyes."

Jonah shrugged, "Okay," and followed the pack to the rec room.

Prez, Keith, Julio and Jesse came to our table. Before sitting down, Prez called Troy and Sean over. He had his PADD and we had a band meeting. The original four members of Platinum Habits began listing their rehearsed songs and checking with Troy and me to fit us in. I couldn't believe the number of truly awesome songs that they could play. They listed songs by Rush, Yes and Emerson, Lake and Palmer that I had no idea they could play. Of course, Troy and I were asked which songs we had practiced too, and those were added to Prez's PADD.

Our meeting was cut short when Prez's comm-badge chirped. We heard an adult man's voice say, "Vorik to Director O'Brian."

Prez tapped his comm-badge and formally responded, "O'Brian here. How can I help you, Lieutenant?"

Vorik answered, "There is a situation requiring the attention of your command team, Sir."

"Acknowledged," Prez replied, and then informed the Lieutenant, "I have Clan Short guests from Des Moines. Would it be acceptable to have them join our team, Sir?"

"Yes, that may prove advantageous," Vorik answered.

"We'll be right there, Lieutenant," Prez said. "O'Brian out." He tapped his comm-badge and sighed, "We'll continue this later, dudes." Standing and looking at me, Prez asked, "Are you joining us, Reyes?"

Dad replied, "I asked, but he needs to think on it, Prez."

Prez nodded and smiled, "It's kewl. Give it serious thought though, okay, Reyes?"

"I will, Prez."

Dad told me, "Join your brothers as a brother. Do what you want to do tonight and take it easy."

Pop asked, "Where do you think you'll be sleeping?"

"Probably at the Hundserts in the nest until the youngest guys are ready."

Pop nodded, "We'll see you later then."

The Core Rimmers and Des Moines teams headed for the Command Center. I couldn't help wondering what they were going to do with two dozen guys entering the room. There were obviously a bunch of kids to be picked up somewhere. Getting up, I checked on my brothers in the rec room. It was mostly kids twelve and under in there, but I wandered around for almost an hour chatting with the kids. Deciding to hang with other teenagers, I told my brothers that I would be at the diving well where I was sure most of the teenagers were.

When I got there, I was surprised to find only fourteen teens, mostly couples; like Horacio and Sonia, Hank and Paige, Liki and

Keanu, Arnie and Jerry, Aaron Farris and Stephen Wickes, and some others, just chilling at tables with sodas and munchies. Again, I briefly socialized with the various couples. I learned that Horacio and Sonia were now considering themselves a couple. Hank and Paige were just starting their relationship, since Paige just joined the Clan the prior night. Liki and Keanu were sharing interests and building their friendship toward whatever it might become. Holding hands at the next table, Aaron and Stephen were definitely a couple. Arnie and Jerry were in a more romantic mood, sitting beside each other so they could kiss whenever necessary, and it seemed to be required, secondary to breathing.

Since everybody seemed happily occupied one way or another, I wondered what I could do. What I used to do, lifetimes ago, was practice. It was kind of late though, so going to the Gibbons' basement, where Dad's drums and my congos were wasn't an option. What I really wanted to do was go to the auditorium. On the way, I tapped my comm-badge and called, "Alden, I'm feeling like practicing. I'm going to the auditorium. Could you provide me some tunes to jam along with?"

"Sure, Reyes," Alden responded. "Let me know which songs and I'll play them for you."

At the auditorium, I went to the circuit breaker panels to powered up the lights and PA system. As I worked, I called, "Alden, could you pump the tunes through the stage monitors?"

"Absolutely," Alden assured.

"That's the only reason I'm turning on the PA. I don't need to be amplified, only the music loud enough to hear over the drums and congas."

"I've got it handled," Alden said.

Finishing at the circuit breakers, I asked, "Are you busy with the Core Rimmers?" and went inside the auditorium theater.

"Not too busy to help you out," Alden answered. "I've got subsystems to assist you. You'll hear my voice and get the songs you need without impacting the mission at all."

Walking down the aisle, I prompted, "If that changes, let me know."

Alden said, "Think of what you did just a while ago with Dee. In a few seconds, you accessed your medical knowledge, searched the digestive system, discovered what you needed to help with Dee's problem, and then accessed the knowledge to use the tricorder. I've got all that, plus several subsystems to handle tracking the Rimmers and Des Moines teams, coordinate transportation and anything they might need too. It's all interconnected and controlled by me. I'll tell you a secret."

"What's that?"

"You're hearing my voice, but this is one of my subsystems. I am also working with the various teams on their mission. Many times, I'm multitasking. Depending upon the task, whomever I happen to be talking with might never know if they're talking to me or one of the subsystems required to accomplish that particular task. When there's emotion to my voice, you're talking to the real me. If there's no emotion..."

"It's your voice through a subsystem," I finished.

"Exactly."

Climbing the steps up to the stage, I hummed, then said, "Alden, let me warm up to some early rock and roll from the fifties or sixties. How about *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, by the Platters, please?"

"Nice choice, dude."

Taking a seat at Dad's drums, I picked up the sticks and prompted, "Play it, Alden." Without a word, the song played through the stage monitors. I was about ten years old when the song was originally released and remembered every lyric while I played along. At the end of the song, I asked, "Alden, let's jump into the sixties. Line up these songs for me in this order; *Please, Please Me*, *Eight Days A Week*, *Ticket To Ride*, *Come Together*, *Mister Soul*, *Sunshine Of Your Love*, *Third Stone From The Sun*, *Communication Breakdown*, *Summer In The City*, *Good Lovin'*, *I Can See For Miles* and *Jumpin' Jack Flash*."

Alden checked, "Ready when you are, Reyes."

Saying, "Let's go, dude," Alden played the songs for me and I played along. I got a little messed up twice; once during *Come Together*, playing those six-to-a-beat tom-tom bits, and again during *I Can See For Miles*, trying to keep up with Keith Moon's craziness. About eleven o'clock, when I was done with that set, I considered finding my brothers, but told myself, no, dad and pop told me to do what I wanted to do, and I was having fun. So I listed off another twelve songs from the 1970s for Alden to play for me and I played along. About half-way through the list, while I was playing *Carry On My Wayward Son*, I saw the theater door open. In walked my brothers and friends. For the remainder of the set, I had an audience of about twenty kids who enthusiastically applauded and cheered at the end of each song.

When I was done, I thanked Alden, then put the sticks down and

stood, loudly saying, "Okay, you guys, it's almost midnight. Let's go to the nest."

During the walk out of the theater and while I was powering the place down, my brothers and all the kids were telling me how awesome I played. For me, it was simply fun, and I didn't say anything more than "thanks," never telling them about when and where I had messed up. Generally, they were right, given that I hadn't played those songs on a drum kit in over twenty years, I kept up fairly well.

We walked out of the auditorium and across the compound to the Hundasers' home. As quietly as possible, our large group went downstairs to the nest. All the kids went to bed, but I pulled out my laptop. While I'm sleeping, I'll think about becoming a Core Rimmer, but it's really not high on my list of things to do. Playing with the band is high on my list though. Figuring out my feelings about Paul and Ryan is also to be considered. For now, I'm happy enough having android friends. That's something I haven't ever had before.

Yeah, it been an awesome day. I'll write more tomorrow. Dad, Pop and the other Core Rimmers aren't back yet, so it's time to hit the sack.

Chapter 10

Ewa Beach, Oahu; C.S.P.R.D. C.I.C.

Thursday, November 4, 11:11 PM HTZ

Reyes transported into the Command Center. The first thing he noticed was the flashing red light in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and a blinking yellow light in the Southwest United States on the World Map. He looked around at the various monitors mounted on the walls in the room. One had local news, four were various street images from the Hyatt Regency, and three more were from the Honolulu Airport. Heading for Kaleo, Tory, Drew and Corey, Reyes prompted, "Gimme something to do, before I have the first positronic nervous breakdown on record."

Corey helplessly giggled. Drew simply wore an expression of surprise, since Reyes rarely entered the Command Center and had never been seen this stressed out. Kaleo wondered, "What's wrong, bro?"

Waving his arms at monitors, Reyes rambled, "I just saw my dad and pop run *into* a burning tower on TV. John and Stephen are like *three-hundred feet* off the ground. I don't even know who the other four are orbiting them like human satellites. The airport seems to be the place to leave, in a hurry, and *not* from a plane. Obviously, mass quantities of feces are being thrown into many rotating blades at once. So, what can I do to help make sure everybody returns home in one piece?"

Wide-eyed and grinning at his life-long friend's rant, Kaleo wordlessly checked with Drew, who had been Acting Director the

entire day.

Thinking only of where he could possibly assign an android with knowledge databases out the ying-yang, Drew called, "Alden, log this time. Reyes Taraschke is a temporary Core Rimmer, A.I. Division. He's a Toy Rimmer."

Alden replied, "Got it, Drew. By the way, Derrick offered Reyes the job last night." Alden then giggled, "His temporary status is fairly permanent, if you ask me, but we'll see tomorrow."

Drew went to Reyes, prompting, "Come with me, bro. We're keeping track of everybody rescued from the Hyatt. Right now, it's a lot of unsorted data we can't search easily. You can take that task, so you can see first hand what your dads are doing."

"Kewl," Reyes nodded, and followed Drew to a console.

Once Reyes was seated, Drew leaned over, softly explaining, "Jimmy's working on putting out the fires, from lower floors and up, since heat and flames rise. Our guys are working their way up the floors too. Everybody's gonna be fine, Reyes."

Reyes nodded and sighed, "This is dangerous, ya have to admit."

Drew offered, "Think about who would be most likely to be in those towers at this hour; little kids and their babysitters, right? That's what freaked out Prez and why he called red alert. That's why they're all there, bro."

"Right," Reyes huffed, and then concentrated on the incoming data on the screen. Already, Mike and Derrick had made three trips into the Hyatt, each of them rescuing a total of eight people. Scanning the list, Reyes figured that each of the Clan rescuers were finding between two and three people per trip, on average. At the Hyatt

performing rescues were the six eldest Core Rimmers, the UNIT Pacific Rim detachment, and another hundred UNIT troops from the Rapid Response base. At the airport were a hundred more troops from the Rapid Response Base. Six hundred and eighty-eight people had been rescued from the burning towers of the Hyatt Regency in the first ten minutes. Reyes started tapping away at keys, creating a quick database of who was rescued and by whom, ages as that information became available, and medical condition. About a minute into his assigned task, Reyes realized he had never created a database before, yet he was doing it easily, thanks to the upgrades he'd received since Monday night. Having known Reyes all their lives, Kaleo and Tory were more amazed than anyone else in the room.

Also having a meltdown about this time was Rob Gibbons. Pacing the Hundserts' lower level rooms, Rob was simultaneously on his cell phone and his Honolulu Police radio, ordering police officers to "wake the fuck up" and putting them back on duty, either at the Hyatt or at the airport. Gathered in the Hundserts' living room were Jim, Jen, Rob's wife Laura, Carl and Anna Seibert, Bill and Lanna Seaver, Kathleen Marr and Judy Faris.

Laura Gibbons was preparing for bed when trouble began at the King's Palace. For her three girls, Christel, Lindsay and Tami, Laura had read from Peter Pan until they fell asleep. Unaware of what was going on, she had taken a bath and then her Valium, but was now in the Hundserts' living room, sitting on the sofa in her bed clothes, robe and slippers, nervously bouncing her legs and shaking like a leaf, bitterly complaining; "I get my husband working from home and safe, and now my eldest child is running into a burning building. Someone remind me to smack Michael tomorrow, please?"

Anna Seibert nodded and smirked, "I suggest a line-up of the entire leadership team, to get spankings like they've never had before,

by each of us." All the Rimmer moms nodded and some vocally reaffirmed that plan. Jim Hundser, Bill Seaver and Carl Seibert knew the women were blowing off steam, but wisely said nothing, choosing not to test the theory and have it proven wrong.

Lieutenant Vorik learned the name of who paid for the Star Advertiser announcement and its coded threat to King Aalona. Oblivious to this, but simply tired of watching the news helplessly from the CIC basement, the King transported into the Command Center.

Drew went to the King, introduced himself as Acting Director, his relationship to Prez and Keith, and then explained what was happening, and that Prez had left Vorik with brief instructions on what to do when the individual or group responsible was identified.

"Contact the V.S.O., arrest everyone associated and perform mind scans. Then eliminate the problem according to V.S.O. regulations," Prez had told Vorik from behind his oxygen mask. Drew did not tell the King that Prez was aggravated beyond rational thought, but he recalled what his brother had said: "If I get any of these dudes within five feet of me, I'll kick them repeatedly in the nuts until Shirley has a deeper voice than they do."

Vorik followed Prez's orders. The individual was arrested and identified as an R.O.H. Human Liberation Front operative. Information obtained from one led to others and a full-scale, world-wide V.S.O. investigation was set to begin.

The Goliath centered itself above the Hyatt Regency's most damaged tower, then engaged their tractor beams. Relieved of the weight of uncountable tons of steel and concrete, John, Stephen, Eli, Benji, 'Bastian and Sammy began lowering themselves to the ground. Exhausted, they landed to the cheers of the gathered crowd. The boys

smiled and waved, but then John's knees buckled and he began to collapse against his husband. Certain that Stephen wouldn't be able to hold John upright for very long, Lucky swept up John, smiling, "I've got you, Johnny-boy." Bond, Stephen's gorilla, lifted his young charge. Questions from the media bombarded the six boys, but none were answered as there were too many being shouted from too many directions. Lucky called Alden and had them all transported directly to the Hundasers' foyer, leaving the reporters with no story; not that they would've understood telekinesis on this scale from young boys, never mind what N-Gens are. All the assembled adults jumped up to greet, hug and congratulate the six young heroes. Jim, Jen and Kathleen then thanked the two gorillas for protecting the boys. After a few minutes, they returned to the living room to watch the remainder of the rescues.

Collapsing onto the sofa, John wearily huffed then remarked, "I'm hungry and thirsty." Kathleen Marr stood, but before she asked what the boys wanted, six glasses of vitamin-fortified milkshakes, a large tray of brownies, two bunches of bananas and a bowl of assorted fruits appeared on the coffee table, courtesy of Alden. The boys and gorillas dug in, watching TV, where Jimmy flew to the southeastern tower, to concentrate on putting out the fires there.

While the boys chowed down, Lanna Seaver wondered, "Where's Corey?"

Through partially eaten brownie, John mumbled, "At the CIC, with Drew, Kaleo and Tory. Which reminds me." Swallowing, John tapped his comm-badge and called, "Drew?"

Drew's voice replied, "Here, bro. Where are you?"

"Home," John answered, and then asked, "Is there anything I might be needed for?" Jen glared at her youngest son. Raising his

eyebrows, John looked away before the flames in his mother's eyes set him ablaze.

Drew checked with Lieutenant Vorik.

A few seconds later, Lieutenant Vorik's voice responded, "No, we've identified the perpetrators of the Palace, airport and hotel attacks as H.L.F. The V.S.O. are now pursuing the investigation. We are sufficiently manned here and do not require assistance."

"Okay, thanks," John replied, and then helped himself to a second brownie.

Eli grinned at John, asking, "Do you even realize what you can do?"

John wondered, "What do you mean?"

"You're not pushing up off the ground to levitate anymore," Eli giggled. "You're creating mental ropes from everything above and around you, to pull yourself up."

Benji nodded, "In this case, you were like a fulcrum, bro. The buildings around the Hyatt tethered to us and then to the tower."

"Kewl," John smiled.

Eli, Benji, 'Bastian and Sammy helplessly giggled. Smiling widely around the shake glass against his mouth, Stephen had some random thoughts that John picked up on. John and Stephen began giggling, pushing Eli, Benji, 'Bastian and Sammy to loud laughter. This night, John and Stephen would sleep upstairs in their room when it was time for bed.

At the Hyatt Regency, the ten personal security gorillas for Prez,

Keith, Drew, Corey, Mike, Derrick, Sean, Troy, Kaleo and Tory had gone into formation, creating a line of defense, so that no one could get near their charges. Only firemen were allowed to pass their formation. Just beyond the gorillas, near the curb in front of the Hyatt, were the replacement air tanks. As Rimmers and UNIT troops returned, the first tanks of oxygen were near empty and replaced. Dozens of window jumpers had been saved by the A.I.s. In the first fifteen minutes they were on-site, the estimated three hundred Clan rescuers at the hotel had saved over a thousand vacationers that were easily accessible. Climbing stairways higher into the buildings, they needed to use hand phasers to disintegrate whatever debris might be blocking their paths, so they could clear out the remaining rooms. With nothing more to do at the on-site mobile disaster command trailer, Nathan returned to the Ewa Beach Command Center. He joined Reyes and worked to organize incoming data from Honolulu Airport.

In a thirty-first story suite of the Northwest tower, near one of the elevator shaft bombs, Kekoa found body parts that appeared to be that of a very large, obese man. A majority of the exterior wall had been destroyed. Judging by some of the clothing remnants scattered around, and the Cartier watch still wrapped around a severed arm, the man was quite wealthy. Not allowing himself to think of the revolting mess, Kekoa rapidly moved on to check other rooms. On the twenty-ninth floor, Mike discovered a twenty-something-year-old man hiding in the bathtub. Only when he helped the man stand did Mike realize the dude was drunk as a skunk. As he transported with the man to safety, Mike thought, at least he won't remember most of what happened. Also in the Northwest tower, Derrick found an elderly man, wearing pajamas and a T-shirt, kneeling down at the edge of the bed with a Bible in his hands, praying for painless passing to the other side. "Not today," Derrick smirked, and bent over to help the man stand. Holding onto the fragile man that had to be over eighty years

old, Derrick got a surprising kiss on the cheek, and then called, "Plus one, Alden." A split second later, they arrived at the Rapid Response Base medical facility's emergency room.

Prez's security, Chris and Matthew, were shadowing their charge in the southeast tower, staying as near to him as was reasonable, given the circumstances and Prez's order that everyone separate to help as many people as possible. Chris found a teenage girl and two very little kids hiding under a bed in one hotel room. At the opposite end of the hall, Matthew discovered an old woman that had been babysitting her two young grandsons when everything went to hell. Scattered around the two burning towers, Clan kids, many of which were enhanced humans, rescued people while firefighters did their job, clearing debris and extinguishing flames so the rescues could be expedited.

Back at the Ewa Beach Command Center, at 11:30PM, Clan wide red alert was called because contact with Cory Short and Joel Short had ceased. Alden reported, "Drew, as Acting Director, I need to inform you that, at this time, all Clan A.I.s are now running CSNIC processing. All functions and error handling routines have passed preliminary and advanced stress tests. Also, Draco has relocated to the Starship VHC Yoshuhlnak."

"Understood," Drew calmly said to the ceiling, expecting this announcement as a result of the Clan wide alert.

Sitting at nearby terminals, almost simultaneously, Kaleo, Tory and Reyes wondered, "What's that mean?" Corey cracked up.

Drew giggled, "It means that Alden is one of the most advanced artificial life forms on the planet. Each of the Clan A.I.s have more processing power than every other computer on the planet combined. Even with Draco helping from orbit, we still have seven A.I.s as capable as Alden, plus Daileass, all networked together, sharing

resources and information." Nathan began giggling. Seeing only blank confusion on the faces of his team-mates, Drew smiled, "Think of it this way, Alden alone transported all the personnel to California last night. Had he needed to, he could've transported more, like our UNIT detachment's helicopters and jet too. Kerry, George, Icarus and all of Alden's brothers can do the same. As for Daileass, well, he's the UNIT's A.I. I'm not even sure how much he could transport at once, without taxing himself or any of the related machines, so I'll just guess-timate, about twenty times as many people and equipment. That was prior to switching technology."

"Damn!" Kaleo, Tory and Reyes gasped. Nathan Hayes lost it and cracked up laughing so hard that he almost lost his balance and fell backwards in his chair and onto the floor.

As if the A.I.s weren't busy enough, Alden giggled, "You're a stud, Pop."

Kerry snickered, "He-man, master A.I. of the universes."

George laughed, "He's taking his shirt off to bare that **cough* muscular *cough** chest."

"As long as he don't take his pants off and prove he's only nine, we're kewl," Icarus teased.

"SILENCE!" Daileass hysterically bellowed.

Still laughing, Nathan breathlessly heaved, "That's the PG rated version of what I was hearing, before any of them said a word."

The digital World Map on the wall beneath the various World clocks in the Command Center now showed flashing red lights in the R.O.H., Russia, The United Kingdom, Orlando, Northeast Division and in Australia's Oceanic Division. While the boys were trying to

figure out what was going on, televised news reports were mentioning additional civil unrest in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. What made this odd was the time. In L.A., it was about two-thirty in the morning. On the East coast of America, it was five-thirty in the morning. People staying awake late, or others waking early, simply to riot was unheard of. Could this all be because of the ZCC orphanages, or was it the Human Liberation Front adding fuel to the fire? Even Lieutenant Vorik found the worldwide situations "illogical". When they looked at the World Map again, almost every Clan Division around the world was blinking red.

After Eli, Benji, 'Bastian and Sammy had eaten their fill and left for home, Jennifer and Kathleen firmly told their sons, "You're done for the night." The security personnel for John and Stephen also left the Hundsers' home.

John and Stephen went downstairs to the basement. Watching TV and the nesting kids, like they had intended an hour earlier, John and Stephen lowered down onto the cushions. Drew, Corey, Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy all had the same uneasy feeling that John had. John softly told Stephen, "It don't make sense." When Stephen tilted his head uncertainly, John explained, "Everything was fine, but now I can't feel Jacob, Jamie and Beau. It's like they suddenly fell off the face of the Earth, at the same time. Just like Joel earlier, but he told me it was happening."

"That's weird," Stephen muttered.

John nodded, "Joel can stop and does, whenever he goes into Vulcan emotionless mode. The Terrible Triplets too though? They helped me become N-Gen and taught me. They're the first three links made in my mind. There wasn't fear or pain or anything; they were there, and then they weren't."

Stephen offered, "Well, if they weren't scared or hurt, then it's probably nothin' too bad."

"I hope so," John sighed.

Stephen grinned, "What can I do to get your mind back on us?"

John smiled, "Let's float upstairs to the bathroom, sexy." Blushing and giggling, Stephen nodded. Without another word they rose and silently went up the stairs. Alone behind the bathroom door, John led his husband to the bowl, took position behind him and held Stephen's dick to let him relieve himself. He gleefully whispered, "My hubby is the only Core Rimmer that's a show-er, all the rest are growers. I can't wait to see where you're at in another year or two, when puberty hits."

Stephen cackled, "John! You're making it very hard to pee!"

"Let it get hard," John gleamed, "I'll take care of everything."

Stephen nodded and giggled, "Like this morning, with you laying on your back on the ceiling?"

John grinned, "That was fun. Sixty-nine is my favorite position, so far, anyway." Helplessly giggling, Stephen finished relieving his bladder. John shook his hubby's wiener and kept shaking until it was stiff. Beginning a forceful grind against Stephen's butt, John moaned, "You're so awesome, baby."

Stephen whimpered, then pushed his board shorts down and kicked them aside. For another minute or two, while John's hands caressed his body, Stephen reveled in the fact that John loved him and the numerous ways it was shown during the last four days.

In the dormitories, only the youngest kids had fallen asleep.

Most made it back to their rooms except the four youngest in dorm building one; seven-year-olds Akamu, Amado, Maleko and Sakamoto crashed in two piles on one of the sofas in the common room. In all the common rooms, teens and tweens rambled excitedly while watching their leaders on TV at the Hyatt. Things had calmed somewhat at the airport. Televised news showed mostly traffic jams on roadways leading away from the airport. Fires were still being extinguished, but all of the tourists had left the vicinity. News reports said that incoming air traffic had been re-routed to the landing strips at the UNIT's Rapid Response Base. Outgoing flights were temporarily suspended until those incoming planes were dealt with, and passenger jets could be relocated to the R.R.B.

Jake Westscott, Terry Parkinson and Chuck Fortenberry, all from the two Anaheim orphanages, were chatting with Mike Busse and Dave Lydon, from the San Diego orphanage, about what they were witnessing. The five thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys were simply amazed with what Clan Short was able to accomplish. In little more than a day, they had been rescued, clothed, fed more food than they'd eaten in the last week, and been given medical and dental attention; they had witnessed the rescue of the King of the R.O.H., and now the Clan were rescuing people from the airport, a huge hotel and providing an alternate airport for travelers too.

Two of the California girls from dorm building two came over to where their orphanage brothers were, in the first floor common room of building three. As amazed as the boys were, the girls were very concerned for everyone at the Hyatt. All seven of them took a walk to dorm building one, where some 'old-timers' could answer their questions. Horacio was there with Sonia, as well as Keanu, Liki, Hank, Louis, Jerrold, Arnold, Gerald and Roy. None of the boys were the least bit concerned. They pointed out that every few minutes another Core Rimmer could be seen returning to the Hyatt, before

they ran back into the buildings. Also, they had noticed that Drew, Corey, Kaleo and Tory had never been seen on TV. To answer the question definitively, Roy quickly shouted, "Alden, where are Kaleo, Tory, Drew and Corey?"

"In the Command Center, holding down the fort," Alden answered, and then played back Prez's recorded voice, telling those four they weren't developed enough to help adults.

That was all the kids needed to know. The visitors at dorm one returned to their own dorms. Within a few minutes, everyone awake knew the same information.

At the less damaged, but still burning southeast tower of the Hyatt Regency, Prez found the elevator end of the twenty-ninth floor hallway still ablaze. He went to check the opposite end of the hall. Every door that had not been left open from prior rescues, Prez disintegrated with his phaser. Hollering "Hello?" as he entered each room, Prez then waited a few seconds for a response before moving on to the next room. All those relatively safe rooms were empty. With only the other end of the hall to check, Prez crouched down and began firing on doors. He then shouted, "Is anybody there?" and waited for a response. Somewhere down that hall someone did respond. Prez ran into a nearby cleared room and stood in the shower to wet himself down, because he was going to have to race through flames. Dripping wet, he exited the room and softly grumbled, "This is probably gonna leave a mark," then raced through the flames into each room. In the third room, Prez found a woman and a small girl crouched in the bathroom tub. He tried to gather them in his arms, but for some reason, they cowered away from him. Prez only touched their shoulders then ordered, "Three Alden, now!"

"You're on fire!" The woman screamed, almost simultaneously

with Prez's words and Alden's teleportation.

The transport extinguished the flames, but Prez was now wearing melted sandals and most of his boardies were blackened and smoldering. The lower edge of his T-shirt had also caught fire. Only the crotch of Prez's boardies were not horribly burned, because at some point, he had unconsciously released his bladder. Even at the Rapid Response Base medical facility, Prez didn't fully comprehend what had happened. Not two nurses, but three hurried towards him. The woman and little girl were taken from him. The third nurse swiftly cut off his shorts and T-shirt, leaving him naked except for his face-mask and melted sandals. Prez excitedly hollered, "What the hell?"

"You've been burned," the nurse loudly told Prez, and then instructed, "Lift your left leg so I can cut these sandals off you."

Prez did as he was told. Only when he looked down and lifted his leg did he feel pain. The hair on his legs was gone and his skin was redder than it had ever been from any sunburn. Oddly, to Prez anyway, he began to shiver as he lifted his right leg for the other sandal to be cut off. He took his face-mask off and sighed, "Keith's gonna kill me. This was Mike's KISS 'Hotter Than Hell' T-shirt. He's gonna kill me too."

Appearing worried, the nurse asked, "How do you feel?"

"Freezing cold," Prez shivered. He didn't notice that his skin was covered in goosebumps, as his body automatically pulled blood from his skin and extremities to send to his vital organs, but the nurse had.

"Gurney!" the nurse screamed. "He's going into shock!" Two orderlies came from out of nowhere, one with the gurney and the other took hold of Prez to help get him on the gurney. In a mild state

of shock, Prez couldn't understand what had happened or how. The gurney he was on was rolled into a treatment room. The nurse and three orderlies crumpled in their hands the sheet Prez was laying on and then transferred him to a bio-bed. Prez silently wondered how his wet clothes managed to catch fire and where the third orderly came from.

From somewhere in the distance, it seemed to Prez, someone asked for someone's name. Working to cautiously clean Prez of the grime and soot from the burning towers, the same nurse asked his name again before Prez replied with his full name. The nurse confirmed, "Pacific Rim Director Preston O'Brian?"

Prez nodded and replied affirmatively, "That's me."

Pressing an emergency call button on the bed that lit a red flashing light outside the treatment room, the nurse turned and yelled down the hall, "Doctor here, stat!"

In a flash, two doctors hurried into the room. The nurse introduced the doctors to the Pacific Rim Division Director. The older doctor quickly examined Prez's burns and carefully rolled him onto his side. He pronounced, "Second degree burns on his feet and buttocks. Mostly first degree burns on his legs." The second, younger doctor administered a hypo-spray, then instructed Prez to lay on his belly, explaining that he would be more comfortable since his rear was burned badly.

Doing as requested, Prez hummed then smiled, "That's warm and tingly."

The second doctor grinned, "A future morphine junkie. We'll have to watch this one."

The first doctor ordered, "Monitor his vitals and let the bio-bed

treat the first degree burns. Then get him into one of the medicated tubs to treat the second degree burns." Looking down at Prez, the doctor smiled, "We'll get you back to your Clan by morning, Director O'Brian. I'm afraid you won't be very comfortable in clothing, from the waist down, for the next twenty-four to thirty-six hours."

Slightly stoned, Prez giggled, "Don't tell my husband that." Both doctors and the nurse softly chortled. The older doctor left to care for other incoming patients. The younger doctor monitored the bio-bed for many minutes before feeling comfortable enough to leave Prez with the one nurse. Now that he had something substantive to report, the younger doctor contacted the Ewa Beach Command Center.

Notified of Prez's condition at seven minutes after midnight, Drew quickly told Kaleo, "You've got the ball now, dude." He tapped his comm-badge to tell his dad what had happened, and then had himself and Corey transported to the treatment room where Prez lay. Seconds after Drew had taken his older brother's hand, Jen and Jim Hundser were bedside with their foster son. Jennifer broke down crying and kissed her foster son while wiping the hair off his forehead with one hand. Prez's mother, Margaret 'Maggie' O'Brian, had been Jen's friend for five years, before the accident that left Prez in her care. This was the first time Prez had been in a hospital that Jen knew of, and the many emotions flooding her mind from this one day left her completely bewildered. Several minutes later, Keith was mid-rescue when Alden told him that Prez had been burned. Upon arrival at the medical facility with three young kids and a teenage boy, Keith tore off his face-mask and raced down the nearest hall of treatment rooms calling his husband's name.

The nurse that had begun treatment on Prez exited the room and went to Keith, then led him back to the room, explaining that his husband would be fine, but to expect him to be uncomfortable for

another day or two. She stopped at the doorway, preventing Keith from completely entering the room. The nurse softly explained that Prez had automatically released his bladder when his clothes caught on fire. "That simple act prevented what would've been very painful burns for any man," the nurse added. "He had no knowledge that he had even caught fire when he arrived." She then firmly told Keith, "I can't let you get too close to him."

Keith dramatically frowned, "Why not?"

"You're filthy from the rescues and he could get an infection," the nurse said.

"Oh!" Keith gushed, then looked down at himself adding, "I guess I am a mess." He then looked at his husband and said, "Lemme grab a shower and get cleaned up, baby. I'll be right back."

Prez nodded, "I'm not goin' anywhere, T'hy'la." Keith transported home. Prez turned to Drew, asking, "Do we know how many we were able to save?"

Drew nodded, "Best guess, near three-thousand, the last I heard. The stats showed two-thirds were under seventeen."

"How many confirmed dead?" Prez wondered.

Drew softly answered, "About a hundred and fifty, from rooms near, above and below the bombs."

Prez grumbled then asked, "Did we learn who did it?"

Drew answered, "The palace, airport and hotel bombings were the H.L.F. The V.S.O. are on it, Prez."

Closing his eyes, Prez wearily ordered, "Get 'em all, bro. If they

can't be re-educated, remove them."

Drew nodded, "Relax, Prez. Lieutenant Vorik is handling the H.L.F. "

Prez sighed and kept his eyes closed, but asked, "Was anyone else hurt; Core Rimmers, Rimmer Detachment or anyone from the UNIT?"

Drew shook his head, "From the Hyatt, minor scrapes, cuts and burns only. The airport was successfully evacuated before anyone was killed. A couple of the airport security guys and some travelers were real close though and have temporary hearing loss. Some of the UNIT dudes at the Palace were fired on, but they're fine too, thanks to their armor. They just got bruised and the wind knocked out of them. You're hurt worse than anyone else, so chill, bro. Kaleo's got the ball with Lieutenant Vorik."

Hearing that, Prez relaxed and gave in to the morphine then fell asleep.

Asking what they were thinking when starting the rescues at the Hyatt, Jen initiated a very stern but soft conversation with Drew and Corey. Drew reminded his mom of exactly how many people had been saved only because of Pacific Rim Division intervention. First Drew reminded his mom of John, Stephen and the other Clan members that held the building stable for rescues before the Goliath engaged tractor beams, and then he stated, "Several dozen fireman wouldn't have been able to save that many before the building collapsed, that's for sure. We probably would've lost firemen in addition to tourists." Corey quickly calculated that of the three-thousand rescued about two-thousand were kids under seventeen. Drew explained that Prez had guessed that it would be mostly kids at the hotel and that was why he called red alert. Drew, Corey and even

Jim affirmed that under the same circumstances any of them would've done the same.

The last of the hotel's occupants that could be rescued had been. Just after Drew and Corey left for Prez, when the incoming data had slowed to a trickle, Kaleo asked that Reyes pass the relevant numbers of casualties and rescued to the Core Rimmers' PADDs and to the press. At twenty-two minutes after midnight, Friday November fifth, the news crews reported that of the four-thousand-eight-hundred and seventy-nine registered hotel occupants, one hundred sixty-six had been killed by the explosions or resulting fires. Approximately one-thousand-five-hundred had not been in the hotel at the time of the blasts; they were still out sightseeing or island hopping. Three-thousand-two-hundred-twelve had been rescued by members of Clan Short of Vulcan. At Honolulu International Airport, evacuations saved hundreds of lives at terminals 'A' and 'C'. A list of people missing from the chaos at the airport and Hyatt was growing near to two hundred, which was considered very low, and some of those missing might simply not have checked in yet. The details of the perpetrators of the night's violence had not been released to the press as in progress V.S.O. investigations were temporarily suspended to deal with developments in the U.K.

Back in Waikiki at the Hyatt Regency, Jimmy had completely extinguished the fires and transported back to Russia. Honolulu police and firefighters were instructed to clear the streets surrounding the Hyatt Regency. The portable force field generators placed by Starfleet were activated. At twelve-fifteen, the Goliath slowly reduced energy levels sent to the tractor beams that had been holding up the northwest tower. When the tractor beam was completely disengaged, the Goliath moved off to the northeast. Standing in the street in front of the Hyatt with Mike, Kekoa, Sean and Troy, Derrick called Kaleo to let him

know all that could be saved had been.

With the excitement drastically reduced and no further notifications of other pending emergencies around the Pacific Rim, Kaleo turned to Lieutenant Vorik, asking, "Can we stand-down from red alert now?"

Lieutenant Vorik nodded and suggested, "Local condition yellow would be sufficient to allow everyone to relax. Circumstances in the U.K. do not allow us to reduce our status further."

Kaleo thanked Donnie for the UNIT's help while Tory went to the communications console to notify Orlando and the other divisions. Derrick, Mike, Kekoa, Sean and Troy returned to the Command Center. They appeared dirty and sweaty, but were otherwise fine. Emotions that Reyes had successfully contained for over an hour exploded in a torrent of happy tears the moment he saw his dad and pop appear in the room. Bouncing out of his chair, Reyes hurried across the room to Mike and Derrick, blubbering, "Each of you guys rescued about forty people."

Derrick and Mike sandwiched Reyes between them. Derrick smiled, "It was worth climbing the stairs."

"Every five minutes, about fifteen times," Mike chuckled.

Wiping Reyes' tears away, Derrick smirked, "I guess you decided to be Core Rimmer?"

Nodding, Reyes nervously sniggered, "I saw you on TV. I changed the channel so the kids wouldn't see, if they woke, then transported here."

Kaleo enthusiastically congratulated the team and presented the numbers saved, by checking Reyes' database. He then reported that

Prez had been burned during a rescue, about thirty minutes earlier, but that he was fine and would be home by morning. Troy and Sean looked down at the floor. Derrick and Mike cursed the situations they were thrown into by mindless cretins. Kekoa looked like he was going to have fit, but didn't say a word.

All away team members stored their phasers. Kaleo and Tory offered to remain in the Command Center as long as necessary. Sean and Troy were asked to take charge the next morning, and they agreed. Derrick ordered Alden to stop recording and save the files for later review. All five were tired and filthy anyway, so they all left for home. Derrick, Mike and Reyes went to the Seiberts' home, where their kids were, to shower and call it a night. Reyes could barely let Derrick and Mike out of his sight. Without any complaints, Derrick and Mike allowed Reyes to follow them into a bathroom. While his dad's showered, Reyes leaned against the vanity and shared all he had done with databases in the Command Center, babbling about schemas and other techie gobbledegook. Derrick and Mike helplessly giggled at the upgraded Reyes.

Sean and Troy went to the Faris' condo. The last thing Judy, Troy and Sean saw before turning off the living room TV was the northwest tower teetering and collapsing under its own weight. The Starfleet force-field generators prevented collateral damage to other nearby buildings, but the center lobby and restaurant area of the Hyatt Regency was flattened.

After ensuring all Pacific Rim Detachment personnel were accounted for, Kekoa ordered them to stand down, and then went to his dorm room and collapsed onto his bed. Although physically exhausted from climbing stairs for about an hour, his mind could not stop racing. Kekoa was in an awkward position, being responsible for the safety of the Core Rimmers, but also being subordinate to Prez

and having to take his orders. Kekoa didn't like Prez's order to have everyone act separately, strongly believing that Core Rimmers should always have had at least their enhanced human security with them at all times. If Kekoa had insisted on that one detail, Prez probably wouldn't have been hurt. Finally coming to the conclusion that he needed to talk to Prez the next day, Kekoa closed his eyes and tried to sleep.

Finished with his shower, Keith got unexpected chills while dressing. He just knew something was very wrong and thought it might be Prez, so he flew into clean clothes.

The stand-down from red alert didn't last an entire fifteen minutes. At twelve-forty, a teleconference call between Clan Divisions was initiated by Sammy and Seth in Orlando. Included in the call were Kaleo, Tory and Nathan; Julio and Jesse from Des Moines; Brent and Lance from Nevada Desert Division; from the Rapid Response Base were Donnie and Emily; and lastly from Northeast Division were Skipper and Calvin. At two minutes before one in the morning, six-fifty-eight Eastern time, the Northeast Division called Red Alert. Civil unrest in New York and Washington D.C. had become organized. News reports showed fires scattered around Manhattan and more buildings ablaze in the Nation's Capital. In St. Petersburg, Russia, the Tsar's Palace was under attack. In Mumbai, India, and Kobe, Japan, and in Shanghai, China, the seaports were ablaze. Cargo ships moored at the docks were making hasty retreats to open water.

When Keith arrived at Prez's hospital room, Prez was still asleep. The bio-bed was still doing its job though, so Keith could only hold his husband's hand. Jim gave Prez's comm-badge to Keith, which had been given to him soon after he arrived. Jen then outlined some of the work that she had planned to do the next day. She also knew that

world events were such that the boys would be busy the next morning. Since it was almost one in the morning, she 'recommended', in that motherly fashion that made it an order, that Corey and Drew return home and get some rest. Keith would stay at the hospital with Prez until he was released.

Wound up and not very tired, Drew and Corey sat together on the sofa in the Hundserts' basement. On the other end of the sofa, Stephen sat on John's lap while John explained why everyone suddenly felt weird around eleven-thirty. Though the TV news was on, Corey and Drew were paying more attention to the PADDs they were reading, trying to learn more about who was responsible for the evening's chaos. The dry reading did make them tired. Eventually, Drew and Corey retired to the nest where Frankie, Geoff and Lenny were sound asleep, blissfully unaware of anything that was happening anywhere in the world. John and Stephen went back upstairs to their bedroom.

By this time, the last of the rescued kids who were watching world events unfold gave up the battle to stay awake and went to their rooms. Horacio and Sonia gently woke the four snoozing boys on the sofa, and then followed them to their dorm room. Once the boys were safe and sound, Horacio walked with Sonia upstairs to her room. They hugged and kissed then said goodnight. Horacio then returned to his room. The remainder of the teens went directly to bed, but many turned on their room television, turned the sound way down to almost nothing, then got undressed and climbed into bed.

Arnold James Smithson and his roommate Jerrold Hebda returned to their room, each bursting at the seams to say something about what was said earlier in the auditorium, and what they had witnessed that night. Both were thirteen years old and from the original group of eighty-seven rescued by Joel. Arnold was five-feet-

two-inches tall, weighed one-hundred-twenty pounds, had dark brown hair and gray eyes that seemed somewhat blueish in the daylight. Jerrold was an inch taller, five pounds heavier, and had red hair and blue eyes. Arnold was at the same orphanage as Sean. Jerrold had been there too, but was fostered two years earlier. They had moved into the first dormitory Monday night. Simultaneously, each boy asked, "What are we gonna do?" Breaking into giggles, they queried, "What do you want to do?" and then cracked up and embraced.

Not releasing his boyfriend, Jerrold leaned back so they could talk, reminding, "In this dorm, some of the younger kids are already looking up to us, asking what we're doing with our credit cards, even asking us if it's kewl to shower with older dudes."

Arnold nodded, "They've seen us picking up our stuff and organizing our room, so they do it too. I mean, we're clueless about a lot of stuff too. Some kids think you're related to Prez too though, so that might have something to do with it." Prez and Jerrold both had longish red hair, blue eyes and milky, pale skin decorated with freckles, but they were not related.

"Like the four seven-year-olds sharing a room down the other hall," Jerrold shared, "They asked us why we were cleaning up after ourselves. It's not only because we used to have to do it, but because the housekeepers shouldn't have to pick up our dirty clothes and underwear for us. We've all got laundry bags. We don't have to do our own laundry anymore, but the housekeepers shouldn't have to do everything for us."

"With only two of us in here, we get plenty sloppy," Arnold sniggered, "Their room was twice as bad with four of them in there. It was kewl how they had Daileass set up the bunk-beds perpendicularly, so the four of 'em could have desks and laptop

computers."

"Where do we go from here?" Jerrold wondered.

Arnold shrugged, "I'm with you, Jerry. If you want to try for leadership roles, I'm kewl with that."

"Are you sure?" Jerrold confirmed, and then offered, "It would be very un-kewl to decide later that we don't want the jobs. I want you near me, but if being a leader worries you at all, just say so. I don't want that stuff interfering with you and me being together."

"I missed you when you left the orphanage, Jerr," Arnold reminded. "As long as I can stay with you, like we used to be, before you left the orphanage, then I'll play dorm leader with you."

Jerrold hummed, "I missed you too, Arnie," then softly suggested, "How about we see what happens? If Prez, Kaleo or any of the Core Rimmers ask for help with something again, we'll offer to help."

Arnold rapidly nodded then stole a tender kiss. Jerrold returned the kiss more deeply. When the kiss broke, Arnold whispered, "I've always loved you, Jerry."

"I love you too, Arnie," Jerrold firmly assured, and made it a promise by adding, "I always have and always will."

Arnold happily giggled, "Take me to bed, ya sexy redhead."

Taking hold of Arnold's T-shirt, Jerrold stepped back, cackling, "I'm sexy? I don't have gray eyes that peer into souls," and pulled his boyfriend's shirt off. He smiled, "We haven't used both beds once, we always sleep together, since the nest."

Once his shirt was dropped on the carpeted floor, Arnold reached for Jerrold's shirt, pulling it up and off. Without pausing, he reached for the drawstring on Jerrold's boardies and untied it. Arnold smiled, "Ya know what the best part of us being together is?"

"What?"

"We've known each other for a long time, even though we were separated," Arnold admitted. "When we were rescued, we picked up where we left off without any problem."

"You were always my best friend," Jerrold confessed, "Now we're boyfriends, just like our leaders."

"In lots of ways," Arnold gushed. "We're almost the same height and weight. Our dicks are similar, soft and hard, only you're uncut and I'm cut, like Prez and Keith, and Derrick and Mike."

Gently taking hold of Arnold's stiffie, Jerrold gleamed, "Cut versus uncut makes no difference," and led his boyfriend to bed. Jerrold sat on the edge of the bed and pulled Arnold down on top of him. They laughed and giggled between deep kisses before shifting completely onto the bed and wordlessly moving to orally make love.

At the Rapid Response Base hospital, Keith watched TV and checked incoming messages and reports from the Command Center on his PADD while Prez recuperated on the bio-bed. Whenever a doctor or nurse came in to check on Prez, Keith asked for an update on his husband's condition. Between the news and his PADD, Keith feared that the situation was very bad in London, such that BBC broadcasts were not being received, and things were getting just as bad in New York City and Washington, D.C. Those cities were most important to Keith because that's where friends were known to be; Joel, Cory and Sean Short were in London; Harry and Jonas had

notified all the other Clan Divisions that they would be in their nation's Capital city. Scattered around the world, so many other cities were impacted, Keith could barely wrap his mind around the ever-increasing list.

In the Ewa Beach Command Center, Kaleo, Nathan, Tory and Lieutenant Vorik were working to prepare for the inevitable casualties and refugees. Around the R.O.H., there really weren't any major problems in any of the islands' cities. In Honolulu, the only unrest was at the American Embassy, at the gates of Pearl Harbor and at Hickam Air Force Base. Making efforts to protect his small country, King Aalona was on a phone and computer station, contacting military and police leadership of Hawaii and then those Admirals and Generals stationed at Hickam and Pearl Harbor. During this time, they all learned that it was Romulans disguised as humans that stirred up the existing civil unrest to this critical level. A world-wide signal was being transmitted that would cause their bio-phase chips to fail and uncover them. This would likely change the focus of the unrest as individuals suddenly phased to their true Romulan forms, but it wasn't expected to make matters any better for quite some time.

Unable to sleep, Melonie Correro walked out of dorm one to stroll around the base perimeter. Soon after she got away from the lights of the housing area, Melonie saw several jets flying over the base. Every few minutes, another formation of fighter jets taking off from Hickam sped past. Melonie was aware of what had happened earlier at the Hyatt and Honolulu airport, but didn't know anything more. Down at the south side of the base, where there was a clear view of the beach, Melonie saw bright lights of ships off-shore cruising at high speed by the island. For Melonie, it was very impressive and quite pretty to see late at night. Of course, she didn't realize that the jets and ships were task forces scrambling to support

military activities on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean.

At two-fifteen, Prez was moved to a medicated tub for the final stage of treatment. At last, Keith and Prez could talk. Right after they were left alone, Keith told Prez where the worldwide situation was at.

When that was completed, Keith smirked, "I'm just wondering why you didn't call Jimmy to put the fires out?"

Prez shrugged, "I honestly didn't think about it. Jimmy was doing his job and we were doing ours. I drenched myself in a shower before running and jumping through flames. I didn't think my clothes would catch fire, and honestly didn't know they had until the nurse said so. Even then, it didn't register." A moment later, Prez then wondered where his comm-badge was.

Keith answered, "I've got it in my pocket." Dramatically frowning, Keith softly shared, "There is some more good news and bad news."

Prez rolled his eyes then huffed, "Bad news first, please."

"You won't be dressed for the next thirty-six hours," Keith leered. "The good news is, I'll be alone with you as often as possible." Both boys began laughing and made plans to spend their first full night alone together in their townhome's master bedroom.

On television news, residents of Washington, D.C. were evacuating across the Potomac River to Virginia, or north and east into Maryland. People evacuating from Manhattan Island were walking across bridges and through tunnels into Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx and New Jersey. American Civil Defense authorities working with the Red Cross were setting up local refugee shelters at The Meadowlands, FedEx Field, and other similar large stadiums and venues. Full communications with the United Kingdom hadn't yet

been restored, so there was only hearsay being reported from refugees that had managed to escape London. Since many people would be displaced for weeks or longer, the Clan leaders on the teleconference call began discussing ways to get refugees from the local shelters to places more fitting for families.

An alert message arrived on Keith's PADD around two-thirty in the morning, informing him that Queen Elizabeth had made the Terran Call, stating that all Earth's military should go on alert as the planet was under imminent threat. For another fifteen minutes, Keith searched his PADD and listened closely to the television to learn who was threatening the planet. At almost the same time, he read about Romulans masquerading as humans and heard the same report on the TV news. Unfortunately, this information only made the rioting and other madness in the United States and around the world worse. Now people didn't trust each other. Accusations flew and rioters began fighting amongst themselves. The familiar New York City skyline had scattered billowing smoke rising in the air and fires could be seen.

About the same time, at two-thirty in the morning in Hawaii, battles in London, St. Petersburg and Washington, D.C. had created refugees estimated in the tens of thousands and as high as a quarter-of-a-million in total. How to deal with them was the latest problem at hand. Kaleo, Tory, Nathan and Lieutenant Vorik worked with the other Clan Divisions to organize and prioritize the situation. Of course, family groups needed to stay together. All the missing needed to be listed, so that when they were found, either among the dead or alive, the remainder of their families could be quickly located and either notified of the death or the family could be reunited.

All the Clan leaders on the teleconference talked about housing available in their areas. There were twenty-six donated military installations scattered around the States that could be used as refugee

housing. Surprisingly, Prez had snagged one of them; The Presidio on the northern tip of the San Francisco peninsula. There they had housing for about five thousand, they estimated. Kaleo knew that some of the housing at Oneula was already occupied with employees, but he confirmed that all of the housing at the Pacific Rim bases at Hawaii, Kauai and Maui were unoccupied. Those houses, townhomes and dormitories could give about three-thousand people temporary places to reside. Also taken into account was the island of Kaho'olawe, capable of providing temporary residences for about twenty-five-thousand. Nathan quickly estimated that between the three bases and the uninhabited island, Pacific Rim could provide shelters for about thirty-thousand-five-hundred individuals.

Julio offered, "We can use Wells Fargo Arena as our stage two refugee center. We'll get those folks out of the local shelters to Wells Fargo Arena, and then from there, over to final housing destinations." All the Clan Leaders agreed with that three step plan.

Seth loudly announced, "We've just been notified that the F.A.A. has grounded all North American air traffic. The order comes from the President of the United States. Only military aircraft and Starfleet shuttles used as emergency transportation are allowed in our skies."

On Kaho'olawe, Peter Lambert had provided buildings, but no one knew if any of them were furnished. Since there were standard Clan video and audio monitoring capabilities in all the buildings, Alden answered the question. "None of the buildings have any furnishings of any sort."

Nathan ordered, "Alden, start furnishing those homes and dorms now. Before we've exhausted what's in the UNIT warehouses, contact Tako Corp and have them fill our warehouses again. We need everything; from furniture and window treatments, to paper towels

and toilet paper."

Tory scowled, "Make sure it's the nice, soft T-paper, Alden; like we have here. For five years in that damned orphanage, my butt was repeatedly abused, by men and cheap, rough T-paper." Everyone in the Command Center and on the teleconference call cracked up. Kaleo threw himself at Tory and kissed him hard. When the kiss broke, Tory giggled, "Too true?"

Kaleo nodded and sniggered, "Talk about adding insult to injury, even a nice shit is ruined."

Getting everyone back on track, Nathan sighed, "Refugee estimates are climbing in leaps and bounds. Contact Starfleet and have them start replicating more housing too, Alden. We'll need it before the day is done."

Kaleo's comm-badge chirped. Stepping back from Tory, he answered the call. Keith reminded Kaleo, "Julio's Uncle is Iowa State Governor Ted Jacobs. We're going to need lots of help getting all these buildings built and refugees settled in."

Prez added, "They'll need food and drink too. The last thing we need are refugees passing out on us."

Away from the main teleconference, Julio could be heard chatting with his uncle. Moments later, an older man's voice, presumably that of Governor Jacobs, ordered, "Mobilize the Iowa State National Guard Corps of Engineers."

Minutes after that, Julio returned to the teleconference, stating, "Uncle Ted's calling neighboring states for their Corps Of Engineers. He'll contact the Governors of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Maryland, and Virginia. Soon we'll have skilled construction workers and support staff to man Seibert Mall Food Court and various other

restaurants around Kaho-o-whosie island."

At two-forty in the morning, Pacific Rim Division learned Starfleet Headquarters, San Francisco, was tracking an incoming Romulan Warbird entering the atmosphere from west of the city, approximately two-thousand-five hundred miles distant, over the Pacific. It was presumed that within the hour the Warbird would reach the city. Kaleo, Tory and Nathan decided to assist with defending the city. Donnie immediately ordered the Goliath to intercept the Warbird. At the same time, Kaleo woke Kekoa, explained the situation and then asked "What have we got, Colonel?"

"Plenty," Kekoa replied. "Let me get them airborne, and then I'll explain further." Before Kaleo could question the Detachment commander, Kekoa abruptly said, "Kekoa out." Only half-dressed in his fatigues and barefoot, Kekoa transported out to the Rapid Response Base, where he put Strike Teams Oscar, Romeo, Tango and Whiskey on alert. Teams Oscar and Romeo were put to work arming the Hind Gunship and the F-15E Strike Eagle. With the help of the A.I.s and an electronic map of the northeastern Pacific Ocean, Kekoa briefed teams Tango and Whiskey, the pilots for the Hind and F-15E. A blinking dot, about one-thousand kilometers north of the R.O.H., indicated their target.

General Donnie Williams entered the hangar, informing the pilots and Kekoa that the Goliath was taking off within the next minute or two. The group was informed that the Lafayette was in orbit firing on the Warbird, and that the Goliath would present a formidable opponent in the air. On and in the ocean, League Naval Battle Groups were already confronting and firing on the Romulan ship with all they had, including phaser cannons and photon missiles. The jobs of the Hind and F-15E were to transport to the Warbird, rapidly fire all their weapons and come back for rearmament. They were small and

maneuverable enough to avoid enemy fire and would initially be considered annoying mosquitoes on the ass of a rhinoceros, until the Warbird was hit with phaser cannons and twenty simultaneous matter/anti-matter missiles.

Donnie finished his briefing, telling the pilots, "The Goliath is running hypersonic and will be on target in fifteen minutes or less. Our job is to make certain those Romulan fuckers never get close to San Francisco. They go down in pieces or as a new hunk of ugly reef material off shore, but they are going down, correct?"

"Sir, yes Sir!" Twenty voices shouted.

With a nod from Donnie, Kekoa ordered, "Man your aircraft." Four boys ran to the flight-line and the remaining sixteen hurried to assist the teams preparing armaments. One pilot climbed into the F-15E. The other three boarded the Hind Gunship.

Noticing Kekoa's stressed expression, Donnie pulled him close to softly say, "I was briefed on the Goliath shortly after it departed for the Hyatt Regency. It's three-hundred-sixty meters long, one-hundred meters wide, wedge shaped and aerodynamic. It's basically an atmospheric battleship, powered by microfusion generators; it has all the same weapons and armaments as Starfleet, and the chimps developed configurable parabolic reflective shielding."

Kekoa scowled, "Which means?"

"It can absorb incoming fire to augment the shield power, and reflect a portion of the firepower back at the source," Donnie grinned.

Kekoa's jaw dropped, and then he chuckled, "The more it's hit the stronger it gets. They should've named it 'Rocky'."

"That Warbird will take a pounding from our forces, Starfleet

and the League's naval and air forces," Donnie stated, and then huffed, "The only question is, how long will the Warbird last?"

* * * * *

U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln Strike Group

Near 38 Degrees North Latitude, 160 Degrees West Longitude,
2:50 AM HTZ

Petty Officer Third Class Radcliff Conklin, standing at his General Quarters duty station at the forward phaser cannon, wondered when his life would start flashing before his eyes. He'd joined the Navy to see the world. During his three years in the Navy, he had seen a lot for a man of twenty-one years; the port cities around the Pacific Rim, from South America to North America to Pearl Harbor to Tokyo and Kobe, were his vacation spots. For the last two years, his primary home was the heavy destroyer U.S.S. Nicholson. Now Radcliff could include the sight of a Romulan Warbird burning through the atmosphere in his list of memories for old age; assuming he survived this encounter.

Firing his phaser cannon in controlled ten-second bursts at the Warbird's warp nacelles, Radcliff recalled basic training, when his nickname changed from Cliff to Rad, simply because his long red hair was uncontrollable those first two days at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. Even after they shaved his head, the nickname 'Rad' had stuck all through basic training.

The night he arrived at his job training location at Dahlgren, Virginia, his nickname became even more permanent. After eight weeks of no alcohol at all, those first three beers hit him like a tidal wave, allowing Rad to tell his buddies that he was bisexual and didn't care who any guy decided to have sex with, and his intoxicated list

included animals and watermelons. Soon thereafter, when his first week of training was completed, another inebriated experiment with his pals actually included three watermelons. Adequate holes were bore into the giant fruits. He and his five buddies pounded away at the watermelons to prove 'any port in a storm' was adequate. 'Rad' was a radical from that point forward.

Phaser and photon torpedo blasts lit up the night sky over the Pacific Ocean. The carrier Abraham Lincoln had Hornets and Falcons zipping around the massive alien spacecraft. From the surface of the ocean and from below the waves, matter/anti-matter missiles fired at the belly of the beast. Most disconcerting to Rad, to the fighter pilots and even to Admiral Noonan, aboard the Abraham Lincoln, was that all the firepower didn't seem to be impacting the Warbird's flight path toward San Francisco. Admiral Noonan had sent thirty of the armada's seventy aircraft on this first attack encounter. For the first time, their weapons seemed ineffective. For all previous Earth-bound encounters, the phasers and photon missiles were extremely effective. The Admiral would soon demand full-yield Starfleet phasers and matter/anti-matter weapons, not these almost worthless one-fifth yield weapons. It wouldn't take long before the Warbird was out of range of the strike force. At flank speed of sixty knots, the strike force was being outpaced by the Warbird. All Noonan could do was hit the Warbird with everything the strike force had.

Proving that they were getting the attention of the spacecraft's command, it discharged its fore and aft disruptors on ships of the surface fleet. One shot missed, but the other hit the Royal Navy cruiser Blake midships. In seconds, Admiral Noonan received word that the Blake was going down, and its Captain had ordered his men to abandon ship.

On the tail of that transmission, a second transmission came in,

notifying the Admiral that air assistance from Clan Short had been dispatched from Oahu and would be on location within two minutes. Adm. Noonan loudly asked, "What type of air assistance?"

Communication Officer Nealy replied, "One F15E, one Hind gunship and something referred to as a battleship named Goliath, Sir."

Adm. Noonan incredulously hollered, "A fucking battleship in the air?"

The communications officer could only shrug and then report, "Incoming transmission from the commander of the Goliath, Sir."

"This better not be some bullshit story cooked up by those Clan kids," Noonan softly grumbled, and then loudly ordered, "Over speakers, lieutenant."

A deep voice resonated over the speakers in the bridge. "This is Captain Tau of C.S.S. Goliath. Please switch to encryption code Delta four."

"Do it," Adm. Noonan ordered. A moment later, he said, "This is Admiral Noonan. What the hell is a C.S.S. Goliath, Captian Tau?"

"Clan Short Ship Goliath is a specially developed battleship, Sir," Capt. Tau replied. "We'll be in visual range to your south any second."

Picking up his binoculars, Noonan grumbled, "I don't have time for games," and then peered out to his south. He saw blinking red and green lights outlining a huge airframe that by all rights shouldn't even be able to fly.

"We are not here to play games either, Admiral," Capt. Tau assured. "Please inform your pilots that we are friendly and here to

help. Have them target their weapons to the north of the Warbird and we will take the south."

The rumble of a sonic boom shook the Abraham Lincoln as the Goliath flew over head, approximately one-hundred nautical miles to the south of the Romulan Warbird. Flabbergasted by the sight of Goliath, the Admiral blinked, and then told his communications officer, "Transmit to air wings Alpha, Bravo and Charlie to concentrate on the north side of the Warbird." He then yelled over the speakers, "Capt. Tau, we haven't slowed the enemy vessel at all in the last five minutes. If we can't slow her down, my forces won't be able to keep station."

"As soon as your aircraft are clear, we'll lock on to get her attention, Sir," Capt Tau reported. In ten seconds, the last of the Navy's aircraft had moved behind the Warbird. Closing from the southwest and perpendicular to the Warbird, as soon as the Goliath was in range, Capt Tau ordered, "Tactical, fire port weapons." A barrage of missiles and phasers fired from the port side of the Goliath at the Warbird and impacted against her shields a moment later.

Blinded by the flashes, Rad Conklin backed off from his targeting system with his eyes closed and hollered, "Holy fucking hell!"

"Tactical, fire starboard weapons," Capt. Tau ordered. Another outpouring of weapons from the Goliath hit the Warbird moments later. Slowing considerably, the Warbird returned fire on the Goliath. From Admiral Noonan's perspective, the Goliath visibly rocked from the disruptor's impact.

Across the communications link with the Goliath, Adm. Noonan heard a higher pitched voice report, "Shields at ninety-percent

Captain, and recharging from the absorbed energy."

Capt. Tau ordered, "Tactical, fire at will." He then called, "Admiral Noonan, please inform your strike force to pound the fucking shit out of this pigeon from below and the north."

Chuckling madly, Adm. Noonan cheered, "You slowed her down and got her attention. We'll follow the bitch all the way to San Francisco at this speed."

"F15E and Hind, incoming from the east to smack that bird right on the beak," Capt Tau told the Admiral. At supersonic speed, a single F15E approached the Warbird and fired twelve matter/anti-matter missiles. The F15E pulled up hard and vanished. Then the Hind hit the Romulan craft again with another eleven photon missiles while simultaneously firing its phaser cannon. After fifteen seconds, the Hind disappeared from view and all radar scopes. From beneath the waves, four photon missiles broke through the surface, heading directly for the underside of the Warbird. All four impacted.

Again able to see through his targeting system, Rad aimed his phaser cannon and fired, gleefully muttering, "We've got you now, you skanky fucking whore."

The Warbird fired its fore and aft disruptors. The starboard side rocked the Goliath. The port side disruptor blasts hit the destroyer U.S.S. Meredith and one of the Hornets buzzing around. The ops officer aboard the Goliath reported, "Shields at seventy-seven percent and recharging."

At the loss of another ship, Admiral Noonan shouted, "GODDAMNIT!" He then told the communications officer, "Relay to the captains of our boomers, I want to see a missile fired from them every five seconds to keep that bird blind. If I lose the last cruiser and

destroyer, we're fucked."

"Aye, Sir."

Turning to flight ops, Noonan ordered, "Get wings Delta and Echo in the sky."

"Aye, Sir." A moment later a klaxon sounded to get the next air wings off the deck.

All around the Romulan Warbird, phaser and photon missiles from aircraft, surface vessels, submarines and the Goliath were fired and hit her shields. Now well below supersonic speeds, she still held her easterly course for San Francisco. Additional Naval forces were heading northeast from Pearl Harbor to intercept. From Alameda, the U.S.S. George Washington and her strike group was prepared to block the Warbird's path. The battle raged on across the Pacific Ocean. Every six minutes, the F15E and Hind reappeared and fired their weapons, before returning to the Rapid Response Base for rearming. At three-thirty in the morning, the Royal Navy cruiser Lion was hit.

A thousand miles off the west coast of America, the Abraham Lincoln strike group had lost three of its four surface ships. All that remained were the heavy destroyer Nicholson and the two submarines. Of the fifty aircraft sent to engage the enemy, thirteen had been shot down and twenty needed to return to the Abraham Lincoln for refueling and arming. Airwings Foxtrot and Golf were launched so that the remnants of wings Alpha, Bravo and Charlie could return.

Eight hundred miles off the coast, two U.S. Air Force tankers and fifty fighter jets from Vandenberg and Travis Air Force Bases engaged the enemy. From the bridge of the Abraham Lincoln, the view was partially blocked by the wedge-shaped doorstop named

Goliath, but beyond it there seemed to be almost a hundred fireflies attacking a hawk. Somehow, in the midst of all the bright flashes, a disruptor blast managed to connect with the Nicholson, hitting her aft section. The captain ordered "Abandon ship!"

Leaving his duty station at the forward phaser cannon, Rad Conklin bitterly complained, "Still no life flashing before my eyes? Com'on! I love a parade!"

Racing toward a ladder that would get them on deck, one of Rad's shipmates hollered, "You're fucking nuts!"

"What makes you say that?" Rad countered, and then rambled, "Just because I was looking forward to Christmas shore-leave on Waikiki, with a hot girlfriend, a hotter boyfriend, and a bored out coconut, for when they weren't around, I'm kookie? I don't think so! What is nuts is how badly this ship is listing, and we're still trying to climb the fuck out. Now, move it!"

Other nearby shipmates, all scared to death and hurrying to save their asses, began evilly snickering and teasing Rad about his sexual preferences, or lack thereof. Once on deck, several men slipped down the steep incline into bulkheads and the sea, but Rad had managed to grab hold of one of them and swing him around the hatch. Clinging to the side of the superstructure that led to the bridge, Rad grinned at his ship mate; "Don't get the wrong idea, 'cos I saved your ass. I am not fucking you."

The nineteen-year-old blond Seaman nervously chortled, "If we survive this, I'll fuck you and then the coconut."

"Incentive!" Rad cheered, and then instructed, "She's teetering. When she leans starboard again, run for the edge and jump as hard as you can." After what seemed to be an extremely long and drawn out

thirty seconds, with lights flashing above them from the ongoing battle, Rad and the Seaman bolted for their chance. They climbed the ship's railing and pushed off with all their strength, landing in the cold water of the Northern Pacific Ocean. Only when they resurfaced did Rad ask, "What's your name again?"

"Gilbert Hoover. Why?"

Rad grinned, "If I'm gonna spread my legs, I should at least know your name." Hoover cracked up. Rad reached down to take his pants off and then tied the legs to fashion an emergency flotation device. Since Hoover was only watching, Rad prompted, "Get to it, Gil. I'm looking forward to a real fun night with you, on land, in a warm comfy bed." Snapping out of his trance, Gil took his pants off to create his own flotation device. When that was taken care of, they began swimming away from the sinking U.S.S. Nicholson.

A fair distance from the ship and seemingly safe, Rad and Gil stopped swimming. Gil called, "Hey, Rad?"

"You know my name?"

Nodding, Gil grinned, "Everybody knows you, dude, from the engine room to the bridge." He paused to control a shiver, then assured, "You're really not as crazy as everyone thinks."

"What makes you say that?"

"You grabbed hold of me, kept me calm and focused enough to abandon ship, reminded me to make my pants into a float, and then swim to safety. Four times you saved my ass."

"Honestly, I didn't get to check out your ass. I would've done the same for anyone."

"So, are you straight, gay, bi, or just into fruits?"

Rad smiled, "Bisexual, and I'm really not into fruit at all. It took a long time to wash sticky watermelon juice off my dick, nads and out of my pubes."

"Your Christmas plans were just made up then?"

"Mostly. I was planning on Waikiki, but the rest was all my imagination."

"Not anymore," Gil giggled through another shiver. "Come hell or high water, I'll be there too."

"Why?"

"To be with you."

"Why?"

"I want to try, with you."

Rad hummed then grinned, "I should've paid more attention to your ass long before tonight."

Gil asked, "Would you really want a boyfriend, or just one-night stands?"

"Now I know why my life never flashed before my eyes," Rad smiled. "My life's about to restart down a pretty nice course."

"Once we get out of the water."

"We stay right here. The battle is still heading east."

Gil paddled a little closer to Rad. Rad reached for Gil's hands. Gil wrapped his legs around Rad's waist, wondering, "How long until

we get picked up?"

Rad brightly answered, "A couple of hours, long enough for us to get to know each other, I hope."

Aboard the Goliath, the chimp at Ops called, "Shields at sixty-six percent and recharging. Sensors detect the Romulan Warbird shields have been dropping steadily, now estimated at fifty-five percent."

Capt. Tau muttered, "We're holding shields pretty well, but not inflicting enough damage on the Warbird." He tapped his console, calling, "Engineering."

"Here, Sir."

"Is there any chance we could use part of the energy we're absorbing to augment our phasers?"

The chimp cackled, "Judging by some mischievous grins around the room, I think that might be possible, Sir. We'll have to design an electro-magnetic variance buffer and an ion-flux containment unit."

"Make it happen," Capt. Tau ordered. "I want to hit their nacelle with a blast that'll knock out the shield and fry their drive engines."

"Give us a few minutes, Captain."

"You've got twenty minutes, Engineering," Capt. Tau relayed. "In thirty minutes, we're at the coast."

"Aye, Sir," a half-dozen chimps happily answered, and then set about their new task.

At this point, Naval Air Forces from the U.S.S. George Washington engaged the Warbird. There were now well over a

hundred and twenty jets attacking the alien vessel. Making their presence known, the two submarines from the George Washington strike group fired their photon missiles. Commanding the U.S.S. George Washington strike group was Admiral Harold Simmons. They were at station keeping two-hundred miles off the coast of San Francisco. Admirals Noonan and Simpson were coordinating their forces and sending rescue ships to assist those men who were floating around the north Pacific like a trail of debris from the earlier encounters.

Now included in the rescue missions were the Pacific Rim Division's Huey, and the Rapid Response Base's two new destroyers that were equipped with two Seahawk helicopters each. The destroyers weren't able to get to the fight in time, but they could easily help rescue the men left bobbing in the sea. With the help of Alden and the A.I.s, helicopters could take off, transport to the locations and pick up a dozen men each, and then return to their ships or the R.R.B., all in a matter of minutes.

When the men from the U.S.S. Nicholson were rescued, Petty Officer Third Class Radcliff Conklin and Seaman Gilbert Hoover were cuddled together under one blanket. This was no surprise to the UNIT boys aboard the Huey, but the resulting silliness and claims of fucking coconuts and watermelons had the boys laughing their asses off. Donnie Williams was there to greet each and every man that stepped off the Huey. Rad and Gil were pointed out as exceptional. Donnie made mental notes to meet with the two men after they got warm and rested. If Donnie had his way, which he usually got, their time serving in the Navy would soon end. They would be offered positions in the UNIT or, pending a meeting with Director O'Brian, might be employable at Ewa Beach.

Three-hundred miles off the coast of San Francisco, the

Romulan Warbird's shields were down to thirty-three percent. The buffering and containment system developed by the chimps was put online. With one hit from the disruptor, the Goliath received almost a gigawatt of additional power that could be routed to their phasers. With the okay from his engineering staff, Capt Tau ordered a port side phaser shot on the Warbird's starboard nacelle. The phaser broke through their shield and hit the nacelle, causing the Warbird to stop in mid-air.

The Goliath was jolted by another disruptor blast. Capt. Tau ordered, "Target their port nacelle. Starboard side phasers, fire!" This shot not only caused the Warbird's aft shielding to fail, and damaged the second nacelle, but brought all their shields down to ten percent. Capt Tau broadcast this information to all the ships, aircraft and land based armaments defending San Francisco. The Warbird was hit repeatedly from all the forces. The port side nacelle fell off into the Pacific Ocean. In the dark, pre-dawn sky off America's west coast, lighting inside the Warbird was seen flickering around the decks and then failing. Pulling back from the crippled Warbird, Capt Tau ordered another round of photon missile attacks. With no shielding remaining, each missile broke off a piece of the Warbird, sending them crashing down into the Pacific. The remaining shattered hull of the Romulan Warbird dropped into the sea, approximately two-hundred-fifty miles off the coast of San Francisco.

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C.S.P.R.D. Command Center

Friday, November 5, 2004, 3:07AM

Finished at the Rapid Response Base, Kekoa returned to the Ewa Beach Command Center. Still barefoot and with his shirt only partially buttoned, he reported to Kaleo, "Sir, our F15E and Hind

gunship will be assisting in the battle for San Francisco. Also, the UNIT's Goliath is on course."

Kaleo knew that he would be held responsible for the lives of the pilots, and worried, "Are their chances of success and returning home alive good, Colonel?"

"They're excellent, Sir," Kekoa grinned. "Once our birds take off, they'll be transported to the battle location. They will fire upon the enemy and return for rearmament. Both are highly maneuverable aircraft. It would take a lot of luck for them to be hit in the short times they'll be engaged."

"And what about the Goliath?" Kaleo wondered.

"I was only briefed about it from General Williams," Kekoa answered. "Suffice to say, the chimps have developed systems that I never dreamed of. The Goliath will present the Romulans with an above adequate opponent."

Nodding, Kaleo smiled, "I really hated waking you up. Take a seat and stick around, Kekoa. Your job is to report the status of our mission for San Francisco. Once that's done, say good night and go back to bed."

Nathan grinned, "Over here by me, Kekoa. You can just take that shirt off any time you want." Kekoa stopped and smiled. Nathan giggled, "Vorik is the only guy here not wanting to touch your chest."

Glancing around the room, Kekoa chuckled, "Rain checks, please?" and took the chair beside Nathan.

Every boy in the room began scribbling personal "rain checks" on note paper and stuffing them in Kekoa's open shirt, some taking

the opportunity for a quick feel.

There was a small earthquake around three-fifteen in the morning. It only lasted about ten seconds, causing Keith and Prez to feel a little dizzy. The swaying window blinds confirmed that it wasn't their imaginations. Kaleo, Tory, Nathan and the others in the Command Center didn't think twice about it, but it was confirmed via news flash that there had been a magnitude four-point-seven tremor.

Kekoa reported, "The Lafayette is breaking off to engage Romulans in a space battle. We've lost two ships from the Abraham Lincoln's strike force. With approval, I'll dispatch our Huey to help with rescue and recovery operations."

Tory quickly answered, "Go for it, Kekoa. The only snacks the sharks can have tonight are Romulan hors d'oeuvres."

Clan leadership on the teleconference decided that refugee support personnel would follow the sun. Each division would provide as many as they could to help get refugees from the local areas to the stage two area and out to the housing destinations. Intermittently, Kekoa reported losses of Naval pilots that would also be recovered. At three thirty, Kekoa sighed, "We lost a fourth ship, the U.S.S. Nicholson."

At four-thirty in the morning, Kekoa switched a monitor to the satellite covering the battle with the Romulan Warbird. The Goliath was half the size of the Warbird. Suddenly, bright flashes sprung from the Warbird. The boys watched for a few minutes as the battle culminated with the destruction and subsequent sinking of the Warbird's tattered hull. Everyone in the room and on the teleconference call cheered. It had taken an hour and forty minutes, but they had accomplished their goal to save San Francisco. Romulan ground forces on the peninsula were being met with deadly force from

Starfleet and California's National Guard.

Still working at his computer station during the celebrations, Kekoa received reports from the Goliath that thirteen chimps in the engineering section were wounded and five had died from their injuries. Before leaving for the night, Kekoa reported the losses to Kaleo, Tory and Nathan. "They developed something to enhance the ships phasers," Kekoa softly said. "It worked, but overloaded some of the phaser banks, causing several explosions in the engineering section."

The news brought tears to they eyes of Kaleo and Tory. Nathan said, "They're heroes and will always be remembered as such."

Nodding, Kekoa finished his report, saying, "The Goliath is returning to the Rapid Response Base. It should be home in about an hour."

Kaleo, Tory and Nathan each hugged Kekoa and softly reminded him that he had done an excellent job twice that night, and now it was time to go to bed.

With all his adrenaline seemingly draining out from his heels, Kekoa sleepily said, "Goodnight, or good morning, whatever... see ya later," and then headed out of the Command Center.

Also happening at this time, Prez was examined and released. He was given a white terrycloth robe that barely reached his knees. Keith reached into his pocket, then put Prez's comm-badge on the robe. The doctor ordered Prez to wear only that robe for thirty-six hours. Saturday afternoon, he could have Doc Andrews examine him again to be sure he was ready to wear regular clothes again. Simply so Prez could sleep without waking due to pain, the doctor administered another hypo-spray of morphine. He was given a bottle with twelve

tablets of Acetaminophen with Codeine to take no more than three times a day over the next two days.

A small disagreement ensued. Prez didn't want to take meds every eight hours. All he wanted was to be able to sleep. The doctor explained that codeine was one of those pain medications that needed to build in the system to perform at maximum efficiency, so that he could sleep. Obviously stoned again, Prez dramatically frowned and let out a brief childish wail.

Because Prez looked like Richie for a brief moment, Keith laughed, "Alden, take us back to our townhouse, dude."

Alden giggled, "He's so cute when he's out of it!" and then followed the order.

Keith and Prez arrived inside their townhome. They turned on the lights. Prez immediately began taking his robe off, but Keith forcefully said, "No, leave it on, baby."

Turning to his husband, Prez whined, "Keith, I'm gonna have to... wear..." Finally noticing Keith's leer, Prez grinned, "It looks that good?"

Keith nodded and admitted, "You had me so worried for a while there."

Stepping closer to Keith with his robe still on, but untied, Prez sighed, "I know. I felt you."

Keith carefully embraced Prez then whispered, "Lives were saved. I'm just sad that you got hurt. We'd both be sad if any of the other dudes got hurt. Given that, we can expect Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Troy and especially Kekoa to be equally upset. Imagine how Dee, Gage, Richie and Sammy are going to feel tomorrow too. I'm not

asking anything more than for you to be a little more careful in the future, okay?"

Prez nodded, "I should've thought of Jimmy. He could've cleared my way in a few moments. I guess I was more worried of wasting that time and losing lives because of it."

"I know you, baby," Keith assured. He then reminded, "You said it yourself, the first time anyone on this team gets hurt, you would lose it. Now the leader of this division has been hurt. You're gonna be the center of attention wherever you happen to be most of tomorrow."

Prez groaned at that thought then suggested, "Can we just hide out in here?"

Keith chuckled, "Sure we can, but we can't hide from our family and kids. Eventually, everyone needs to see that you're all right."

Prez nodded and firmly hugged Keith. They both relaxed for a minute, but then Prez softly chortled, "I burned my buns!"

Squinting and taking one step back, Keith took hold of his husband's privates, forcefully reminding, "These are mine! They're only attached to you, but they're my favorite toys. We're both damn lucky you didn't burn these too. Do you want to see me go bonkers? I can't go without for days, baby. I barely made it through last Saturday and Sunday."

"Neither can I," Prez quickly interjected.

Keith smiled, "You wait until this weekend. Once you're better, your buns are gonna feel way toasty."

"I'll look forward to that," Prez giggled. A moment later, he reminded, "I'm not untouchable now, you know? Only my feet and ass

cheeks are sore."

Keith softly reminded, "I can't live without you. It's been so many years that I can't even imagine my life that way." Prez nodded then they walked upstairs and into their bedroom.

The Goliath landed at the Rapid Response Base just before dawn. Donnie had arranged for honor guards of chimps, gorillas and humans to be present, in full dress uniforms. General Williams led the formation as they marched toward the hatch in two columns, stopped and spun on their heels to face each other. As is customary, Captain Tau was the first to exit the vessel. He went to the end of the line on his right side and loudly ordered, "Present, Arms." All of the honor guard troops snapped into position, and remained that way for all five stretchers carrying the deceased chimps who valiantly gave their best ideas and lives for their ship and for their world.

Asleep with his husband Stephen, John was having an odd dream and stirred in his sleep. He barely opened his eyes, figured none of his dream made any sense at all, and so snuggled closer to Stephen and fell promptly back to sleep.

* * * * *

Around seven that Friday morning, as kids began waking up and wandering into either the showers or the CIC dining room, the world was a different place. Nathan, Kaleo and Tory had been awake all night in the Command Center with Lieutenant Vorik. Sean and Troy were called to relieve them. They quickly got out of bed and showered. On the news that morning, Sean and Troy learned that battles had been fought and won in London, St. Petersburg, Sydney, Beijing, and in San Francisco. Unconfirmed reports flew that the battle for Washington D.C. was still in progress but almost won. Civil unrest was still occurring in Los Angeles. Hurrying through their

shower, Sean and Troy knew that Nathan, Kaleo and Tory had been awake about a full day and needed to rest.

Those Rimmer kids who went directly to their laptop PCs upon waking were getting Internet timeouts from various servers. The problem was not local. It wasn't an information blackout, as had been experienced by many in the R.O.H. the prior weekend. Nothing seemed to be available because worldwide networks were busy dealing with the Romulan threat and military responses.

Showered, dressed and grabbing their breakfasts from the CIC chow line, Sean and Troy learned from the other kids about the Internet being unavailable. Television news reported on the various parts of what was being called "The Battle of Earth". Standing upon a chair in the dining room, Troy pointed at the TV and announced, "There's the reason why the Internet is slow and appearing unavailable. What started here as terrorist attacks at the King's Palace, the airport and at The Hyatt Regency has become a war."

Sean stood on another chair and pleaded, "Guys, don't worry about the Internet. We have water, food and each other. Lots of people around the world have probably lost loved ones. Lots of people are probably searching for food and water. We're not suffering. Remember how little we were allowed to have only days ago? We've still got it good compared to lots of other people."

Nathan, Kaleo and Tory stepped out of the Command Center looking like they had been awake all night. Troy nodded and added, "A little patience and compassion, please guys? What I'm hearing from the news is that Clan Short, The UNIT and Starfleet have been important in winning these battles. We've got a lot to be proud of."

Kaleo got up on a chair and said, "Troy's right, we do have a lot to be proud of. We also have reason to be compassionate. Many were

lost in the battles over night. Among those lost were UNIT troops, including five chimps aboard the Goliath. For those of you that don't know, The Goliath was the ship that engaged tractor beams at The Hyatt Regency only hours earlier. Another of those losses hits home for us, as Clan. Early reports from London have said that Commander Charles 'Chip' Dodds has been killed. For those of you that aren't sure who that is, Commander Dodds was the adopted father of several Clan members." Choking up, Kaleo wiped his eyes and explained, "He was the father of Jamie, Jacob and Justin Dodds. Jamie and Jacob were just here for a few days, Monday through Wednesday."

Hushed whispers fell over the dining room broken only by a few snuffles. Tory stood on a chair and revealed, "The other night, during our California operations, me and Kaleo realized just how nice our adults are compared to some of those adults we had to put up with. We've started to show our adults just how much they mean to us. I suggest we all do the same; show our adults how glad we are that they're here and caring for us."

Kaleo nodded then added, "Show all those that you care about how much you care. Show it to the adults and show it to each other." Kaleo got down off the chair. Tory, Sean and Troy stepped down also. Leading by example, Kaleo went to Sean and the two hugged the breath out of each other. Tory went to Troy and they also hugged. All the kids in the dining room began hugging their friends and others they only knew by name. Tory then went to Sean while Kaleo went to Troy. Hugging each other like it might be the last chance they ever got to do so, all four clearly showed just how deeply they had been affected by the recent news. Thirteen-year-old Jerrold Hebda and his boyfriend Arnold Smithson, went to the kitchen and were the first to thank the on-duty chefs. Many of the newbies from California thought that Jerrold was related to Prez, because they had the same shade of red hair, freckles, blue eyes and were very similar in build. Other

teens and tweens followed Jerrold to the kitchen to thank the adults that had been feeding them for a week.

As other kids came into the dining room, they saw their leaders and other kids already there meandering about, hugging one another. Soon, an assembly line of kids formed in the kitchen to hug the chefs. It delayed service to some extent, but no one seemed to mind. Others around the world would very likely go hungry and thirsty this day. Kaleo and Tory went back to their dorm room. Sean and Troy went into the Command Center, but were only in there for thirty minutes, long enough for Lieutenant Vorik to meditate and refresh himself. Kids that arrived in the dining room at seven-thirty were still there when Sean and Troy stepped back in the room. The hugging and heartfelt words of appreciation were still being shared.

From his bedroom at home, John felt what was happening in the CIC dining room, and the mass of shared compassion woke him up. The dream from hours earlier still wasn't clear. Things like that didn't happen. If it had, he would've grabbed a phaser, put the division back on red alert and told Donnie to get his entire Rapid Response Base prepared for another alien attack of winged demons. Softly sniggering, he gently munched on Stephen's shoulder. After a quick virtual romp around rooms in John's N-Gen mind, they stretched and started to climb out of bed. From the window side of the bed, Stephen pointed at the window sill, softly asking, "Hon, where did that statue come from? I don't remember it being here when we went to bed, do you?"

Padding naked around the bed, John saw the statue: a large stone-like base, about six inches by three across, and standing an inch high, with a figure of Joel in his armor and carrying his sword standing on it. In all, the whole thing was about ten inches in height, and clearly what he recalled from his dream. With a whisper he

repeated what that dragonish, demonish creature had said to him; "I was bidden by Vae'Yarim to give this unto you, little Beloved..."

Looking more closely, John grinned, "Maybe it's a new N-Gen skill? It's from the dream I showed you."

Stephen hollered, "Alden, who was in our room last night?"

Alden giggled, "Our shields are still up, Stephen. I'm reviewing the surveillance for that room, but no one got on base without our knowledge. Only family could've gotten inside your house and in your room. The surveillance video shows nothing too terribly abnormal, just three-point-two-one minutes of blackness, which isn't right, but only means the camera is on the fritz. I'll replace it, guys."

John nodded, "Thanks, Alden. Since Prez is out of it, I'll take a status report in the shower."

Alden giggled, "And Stephen too, no doubt."

"SHUSH!" both boys demanded.

After sharing the news of Commander Dodds' passing with Stephen, Mrs. Marr and his parents, John felt he needed to do two things. The first and most easily accomplished was to join his Clan in the dining room. A little after eight o'clock that morning, John, Stephen and Frankie came in the dining room. Asking everyone to put down their milkshakes, John did what only he could do – create a group hug of two-hundred kids ten feet off the floor. For John, the love and compassion flowing from such a group sufficiently made up for the strain of holding up a building the prior night. Derrick, Mike and their kids walked in to this amazing sight. John telepathically shared the news with them, then pulled them up too, so that they could participate in the warmth and good feelings. John asked for a minute of silence to wish Commander Dodds, and all those lost, well

on their journey to the other side. A flash of light engulfed the floating Clan, like that of an old fashioned flash camera. But there was no one with a camera in the room. John hadn't done it nor had Alden or any of the A.I.s. It became another one of those strange things that was generally unimportant yet experienced by many, like the silvery, light musical laughs occasionally heard.

John lowered everyone down to the floor to return to their breakfasts. Then he and Stephen went into the Command Center to perform a second task. John's hope was to have a brief video conference with Jamie and Jacob. Sadly yet understandably, they weren't available, so John recorded a video message for them. John said, "You guys have been in my head since Monday. When I say I feel you, you know it's true. I'm doing what I can and what you dudes will allow me to do. Know this though, all two hundred and thirty-five Rimmer kids just shared a moment of silence for your dads. They were loved and their sacrifice has been noticed. The same goes for you guys, and Justy too. When you're ready, we're here for you. Just say the word and I'll be there with Stephen and as many kids as I can gather. Take care now, buds." After a brief pause, John said, "End message."

Somewhat shocked, Stephen softly asked, "That's all you're going to do, hon?"

John nodded and sighed, "I feel them, baby. They only had good fathers for about two months. I'm not gonna barge in on them, as much as I really want to. They need time and that's something I can't give them."

Nodding, Stephen sighed then muttered, "I wish we could do something more."

Pulling his hubby close, John nodded, "We all do. As soon as

they're ready for me, I'm there or they're here, whichever they choose." John turned to Lieutenant Vorik, asking, "Is there anything required of our team, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Vorik answered, "Refugee relocation is in progress. Assistance will be needed, at Des Moines, at Hawaii, Maui and Kauai, and at Kaho'olawe."

Telepathically contacting Johnny in Des Moines, John said, "A few of us need to remain here, for the King, covering the command center, and another couple, just for support and emergencies."

"Agreed."

John offered, "Let me talk to the kids in the dining room. Hopefully, we can get a bunch more helpers." He then wondered, "How many do you think we'll need?"

Lieutenant Vorik answered, "At least eight on Kaho'olawe and another four in Des Moines. If we could provide more than that, refugees would be helped quicker."

"Put me and Stephen down for Des Moines," John instructed.

Vorik nodded, "I will arrange for security for the volunteers and our other bases." While Lieutenant Vorik handled those tasks, John and Stephen went back to the dining room and their Clan to get as many helpers as they could.

During the time that John and Stephen were in the Command Center, Dee, Gage, Richie and Sammy learned from Derrick and Mike that Prez had been burned. Extremely concerned for their Poppa, no words could help them relax. The boys had to see Prez for themselves. Other nearby kids overheard about Prez and more hushed words spread around the dining room. Derrick asked Alden where

Keith and Prez were. As soon as Derrick said, "They're in their townhouse, still asleep," the four boys charged out of the dining room.

Mike grinned, "We're in trouble again."

Derrick shrugged, "What were we supposed to do; lie to them?" He then told Mike, "Now we have to initiate our newest Core Rimmer." Derrick and Mike evilly grinned at Reyes. At their dad's and pop's devious expressions and Reyes blush, Dillon, Jonah and Randy cracked up laughing. At some point, probably when he was least expecting it, Reyes would be grabbed by all four limbs and thrown into the diving well.

Via sub-vocals, Alden warned Prez and Keith that their kids were on the way. After only four hours sleep, Keith and Prez woke, but had not gotten out of bed before the townhouse door was opened and their kids were racing up the stairs. Dee and Gage entered the master bedroom in tears. Wordlessly, Richie ran around the king size bed, lifted the bed sheet and checked his Poppa out for himself. While Keith concentrated on reassuring Dee and Gage, Richie put the sheet down and glared at Prez, wearing a crooked smirk.

"What?" Sammy hollered at Richie. "Is it that bad?"

Richie shook his head, but said nothing. Having no other choice, Prez tossed the sheet aside. The boys looked at Prez's blistered feet, red and now hairless legs, and morning chubby, still surrounded by red hair. Prez got out of bed and turned in place for inspection.

At the sight of his Poppa's very red and blistered buttocks, Richie gasped, "Poppa? You burned your butt too?"

Prez picked up Richie and kissed him, then glanced at each of his sons, saying, "I'll be fine by tomorrow night, guys." Dramatically frowning, Dee scratched the side of his head. Prez asked, "What's

wrong, Dee?"

"Well," Dee softly began, "I'm just wonderin', with your butt, feet and legs so red, how're you gonna get dressed?"

Putting Richie down, Prez chuckled, "I'm not," and then went to the chair where he had tossed his white robe. Prez put the robe on and made a show of modeling it, smiling, "This is all the doc said I can wear until Doc Andrews checks me over tomorrow night."

Playfully bouncing his eyebrows at Prez, Keith turned then teased his sons. "It looks pretty good on Poppa, don't you guys think?" Evilily snickering, Prez rolled his eyes.

Gage covered his eyes with one hand, then began laughing. Dee and Sammy groaned, then accusingly yelled, "Daddy!"

Dee pounced Keith, giggling, "Poppa's hurt! You be good!"

Falling back on the mattress, Keith cracked up. Then Richie pounced Keith, followed by Gage and Sammy. Taking his robe off again, Prez joined his sons, tickling and generally abusing Keith. Afterward, the entire family kicked back on the king-size bed. Keith turned on the TV in the master bedroom. Sammy and his brothers began telling their fathers about the Battle of Earth and the casualties already known.

Not really understanding the seriousness of the world-wide situation, Richie asked Prez, "You hungry, Poppa?"

Before Prez could reply, Keith said, "Yes he is. Poppa has some pills to take, and they should be taken with food." Again, Prez rolled his eyes. Keith got up asking, "Who wants to help make Poppa breakfast in bed?" Four positive replies burst forth from the boys.

Prez negatively grunted, "Nuh-uh," and then got out of bed, before Keith could say another word about it. Noticing five very disappointed expressions on his husband and sons, Prez complained, "Come on, you guys. I'm not an invalid." None of them moved from the doorway. Returning to bed, Prez asked, "Ya wanna stay and keep me company, Richie?" Smiling widely, Richie nodded and ran to the bed, then scrambled across the mattress. Keith, Dee, Gage and Sammy left the room rambling about what they could make for breakfast.

On the way downstairs, Gage briefly stopped in his bedroom, then followed his Dad and brothers down the steps. "Dad," Gage called, "the PC I powered up Monday is stuck. It's got a blue screen with lots of letters and numbers on it."

Tapping his sub-vocal, Keith said, "Alden, please replace Gage's computer. Also, please limit our visitors to only immediate family and the other Core Rimmers."

Alden replied, "Got it, Keith."

In the kitchen, moments later, Keith opened the refrigerator, but found it empty. In the cupboards, there were plates, silverware and glassware, but no groceries of any sort. While the boys expectantly looked on, Keith chuckled, "Hey, Alden? It's time for some food and household supplies in here. We'll be here this weekend."

Alden asked, "What would you like, Keith?"

Humming thoughtfully, Keith then said, "I'm thinking mostly non-perishable stuff, but we will need bread, butter, milk, eggs, juices and sodas."

Gage loudly cackled, "And cookies, lots o' cookies!"

Alden giggled, "Food for the Head Rimmer's family, comin' up. Stand-by." Keith got a frying pan out and put it on the stove to preheat. Sammy ran out of the room on a mission. Above the kitchen cupboards, just within reach, Keith spied a stack of trays and pulled them down. He put one tray down on the counter and returned the others. Gage got silverware out and put it on the tray. Sammy returned with a step stool found in the entryway coat closet. He then went to work gathering a bowl, a small sandwich plate and a large dinner plate. Dee took each from Sammy and placed them on the tray. Over the loudspeakers, Alden said, "You're set now, Keith."

Keith opened the refrigerator doors. What had been a lot of empty space was now full of stuff, more than Keith had asked for. In the fridge, there were condiments, sandwich meats and even a gallon of chocolate ice cream in the freezer packed along side packages of meats. Beginning to giggle, Keith checked the cupboards again. They were now filled with boxes and cans of various foods. Only wanting to make Prez some scrambled eggs and toast, Keith now had to make decisions and giggled, "Alden, you're awesome."

Dee, Gage and Sammy cracked up laughing then began checking lower cupboards. Under the sink, cleaning liquids, dishwasher detergent and sponges were found. In the lower level bath, they found more cleaning fluids and extra rolls of toilet paper under the vanity; toothbrushes, toothpaste, safety razors, shaving cream, a septic pencil and various over-the-counter medications in the medicine cabinet. Sammy returned to the kitchen to help Keith. Dee and Gage checked the two bathrooms upstairs. Galloping downstairs with Dee, Gage loudly announced, "We're set with everything. We can live here as long as we want."

Susana Gault left the dining room with Doc Howard. She had waited a day, as the doctor had recommended, but felt even more

certain that she didn't want the baby. Susana had spent almost two hours with Doc Wiener the prior day, chatting about the reasons she wanted an abortion. After hearing all the good and logical explanations, Doc Wiener reminded Susana that she would very likely feel somewhat depressed after the procedure. Some of those negative feelings would be the result of hormones thrown out of whack, but other thoughts may be valid concerns and fears. He would be available for Susana to chat with whenever she felt the need to talk. Susana and Doc Howard started towards the F.Y.S. building. Seeing Susana leave with Doc Howard, Doc Wiener went to tables where Susana's friends sat, gently preparing them for the event about to happen and asking that they keep an eye on Susana. Doc Howard led Susana to a small, private treatment room, so she could undress and get comfortable on a bio-bed. The entire procedure would be completely noninvasive, take less than an hour, and Susana would be able to leave the F.Y.S. building in under four hours to have lunch with her friends.

In the CIC dining room, John levitated so he could be easily seen to make his request for helpers with refugee relocation. Drew and Corey went over to join John and Stephen. Next to stand and head toward John were Relud and Inoyra Glith. Finished with their breakfasts and coming out of the kitchen, Horacio Sulin and Sonia Baugh agreed to help and walked over. Almost at once, from various areas of the dining room, Roy Angulo, Gerald Mayers, Liki Keoloha, Keanu Hekekoa, Corbin Sancho, Dominic Crassus, Bianca Heres, Adrienne Norensis, Stephen Wickes, Aaron Farris, Jerrold Hebda, Arnold James Smithson, Nell Deckert and Mollie McElhannon joined John and Stephen. Over John's comm-badge, Carl Seibert and Laura Gibbons also volunteered. John asked the two adults to join the group in the CIC dining room.

Over the P.A., John announced, "Okay guys, all you kids will

need to take care of yourselves for the next few hours, until dinner time. Nathan, Kaleo and Tory were up all night, so let them sleep in as long as they need. Sean and Troy, Mike and Derrick, Prez and Keith, Reyes and Corey's mom, Aunt Lanna will be here to take care of what's needed. There are lots of people without homes to go to or food to eat that we need to take care of."

Fifteen-year-old Lance Elling stood and assured, "Don't sweat it, John. Us older teens can hold down the fort for just about everything."

"We'll all chip in to help around here," thirteen-year-old Nick Shavers added. A bunch of other kids, even some of the youngest assured everything was kewl.

Lowering to the floor, John addressed the group of helpers. "We've got hundreds of thousands to get settled down, fed and sheltered. Some of us will go to the United States and help at staging areas. Some will go to our other unoccupied bases to help there, and the rest will go to Kaho'olawe. All you guys and girls need to remember is to be helpful, keep stuff organized and people in transit to the destinations. In case of problems, Lieutenant Vorik will assign personal security to each of you, so you'll have nothing to be scared of. Trouble makers have a habit of making their presence known and will be dealt with accordingly. Don't put up with any bull, okay? The first time someone stirs up trouble, to the back of the line they go. If they don't like that, offer to have them arrested. If they're still crabby, then it's the third strike and they're out. The more time we spend farting around with butt-heads, the longer everyone else has to wait." Seeing nodding heads and grins, John paused and checked, "Is everybody ready?" Getting vocal confirmations from the group, he called, "Alden, I need eighteen PADDs, comm-badges and sub-vocals."

"On the table beside you, Soul Rimmer," Alden giggled.

John handed out the communications devices and did light scans of each of the volunteers to find out if they were too scared to be of much help to anyone. Drew and Corey went to Kekoa and asked him to work with Lieutenant Vorik for security for the eighteen helpers. Carl and Laura arrived and watched John in full Core Rimmer mode. In minutes, everyone had their personal security and were ready for assignments. Telepathically sharing personnel information with Eddie and Johnny in Des Moines, John sent Arnold, Jerrold, Nell and Mollie to the Rimmer Hawaii base. Adrienne, Bianca, Corbin and Dominic went to Maui; Stephen Wickes, Aaron, Liki and Keanu went to Kauai. Horacio, Sonia, Roy, Gerald, Inoyra and Relud went with Carl Seibert and Laura Gibbons to Kaho'olawe. John, Stephen, Drew and Corey transported to Des Moines, Iowa and the Wells Fargo Arena.

Doctor Randall Wiener walked into the F.Y.S. building carrying a set of three files. It took all week to gain access to the information in the files. Some of it came from the Honolulu Police, some from R.O.H. C.P.S., and the last bit from the coroner's office. The subjects of the file folders were three brothers; thirteen-year-old Oke Ka'aukai, eleven-year-old Kimo and nine-year-old Makaio. The three boys came to see him Monday afternoon. Doctor Wiener had made arrangements with the boys the prior evening to come see him. He had spent the early evening studying the files to be prepared for the boys.

Noticing the long face on the Doctor as he walked in the door, Rob Gibbons said, "Good morning, Randy. Are you all right?"

Forcing a small grin, the doctor replied, "Good morning, Rob." Approaching the desk where Rob sat, the doctor held up the files and softly explained, "This case is disturbing. It would be a horror story for any child. First, the father died at work; an accidental drowning while fishing off the coast of Maui. Barely two years later, the boys

came home to find their mother dead on the kitchen floor. To cap it all off, the orphanage personnel convinced the boys that their mother's death was their fault. Now I get to tell them truth, reopening the old wounds so they can heal."

Sighing, Rob nodded, and then gently said, "If anybody can do it, you can."

Nodding, Randy smirked, "What's amazing is the way the boys confronted me. All three are truly remarkable young men. I've seen them with the others, living, loving and playing as they should have always done. Knowing what's in these files, if I were in their shoes, I'd be alone in a corner, rocking and crying. For the first time last night, instead of one bed-time Martini, I had two, and wished that I could confront the sadistic assholes that told them it was their fault."

Rob grinned, "Would you like help with stress relief, Doc?"

Randy smiled, "Not this time, Rob. Sparring tonight with you would be dangerous. Your wife would beat the hell out of us both." Nodding, Rob softly sniggered. Randy chuckled, "Tonight, I'll take some frustration out on a punching bag at the rec center. No matter when I go, there will likely be a few of our base security kids there to cheer me on and instigate me." Helplessly, Rob and his security gorilla laughed. Randy smiled, "As soon as the Ka'aukai brothers arrive, please have them come right up to my office?"

Rob nodded, "Will do."

"Now it's time to make a nice relaxing cup of green tea with honey," Randy Wiener pleasantly said, and then left Rob's security desk in the lobby and started for the elevator.

Once alone with Prez, Richie said, "Poppa, tell me why."

Looking over and down at his youngest son, Prez wondered, "Why I got burned?" When Richie rapidly nodded, Prez briefly explained about the fire, how he had disintegrated doors, and when he realized there was someone needing help, how he wet himself down in a shower to go get the woman and little girl.

"Wasn't you scared, Poppa?"

Prez grinned and nodded, "Yep. Very scared."

"But you did it anyway?"

Prez sighed, "Being scared of doing things isn't a reason not to do them, Richie. Do you want to know a secret?" Again Richie nodded. Scooting down in the bed, nearer to Richie, Prez whispered, "I was scared when I realized how much I love Daddy. I was scared again Saturday night, when me and Daddy adopted you and Dee. What scared me most, both times, with Daddy and with you and Dee, was simply that I might not be ready, might not be good enough and screw up bad. Then I would hurt very important people."

Beginning to shed tears, Richie whimpered, "That's what I was thinkin' too. That I might not be good enough... and you might not want me no more."

Wrapping an arm around Richie and pulling him close, Prez assured, "I'll always want you, Richie. Adopting you and Dee was as important and as wonderful as marrying Daddy. To me and Daddy, you, Dee, Gage and Sammy are perfect in every way."

Wiping his eyes, Richie bravely asked, "You didn't get burned to get away from me?"

Patiently and softly, Prez explained, "Richie, I got burned because I wanted to help some people. I'll never, ever want to get

away from any of the people I love. I knew I was taking a chance, but people needed our help. I love you, Richie, very much. Yesterday, when you were helping in the store with the newbies, you and your brothers made me very proud."

"Still?"

"Always and forever, Richie; each and every day, no matter where I am or what I'm doing." After a pause to allow Richie to calm down, Prez asked, "Is that why you smirked after looking under the covers, because you thought I did it to get away from you and your brothers?"

Richie shook his head and began giggling. Barely controlling himself, Richie answered, "Because you got no hair on your legs no more, you're all red and hurt, but still had a big hard dick."

Tickling his son, Prez laughed as hard as Richie was. Of course, Prez blamed Keith for his excited state.

Arriving at the Rimmer Hawaii base, Nell, Mollie, Arnold, Jerrold and their UNIT security showed their ID badges to the on-duty Starfleet Security officers. Stepping forward, Jerrold explained that they were assigned to assist with refugee relocation and that additional security would be assigned to the base while the refugees were residing there. Glancing at one another, sixteen-year-old Nell and fifteen-year-old Mollie were quite impressed with Jerrold's outgoing demeanor. Arnold caught the glance and briefly chortled. Walking away from the gate security station, Mollie joked, "He looks a little like Prez and even acts like him."

Regardless of Jerrold's blush and Arnold's giggles, Nell grinned, "A take control sort o' guy. Funny how he volunteered, since Jerrold's generally very quiet."

Jerrold softly said, "Call me Jerry, okay?"

"And call me Arnie or A.J.," Arnold added.

"We'll probably be working together most of the day," Nell thoughtfully muttered.

Mollie gasped, "What about lunch? How're we goin' to feed all these people?"

John sent, *'Don't worry about that. I've already told my mom and dad and Charles and Madeline to get the three bases staffed with the pending employees already hired and on the payroll. If you guys are busy, lunch will be brought to you. We're gonna get our bases filled first, then we'll send folks to Kaho'olawe. Keep a close eye on your PADDs. We'll keep stuff organized that way. It's enough to keep track of who is where. That's our job.'*

"It creeps me out when you do that, John," Nell groused.

All four heard John's laughter in their minds for a few seconds while they walked around the base. In most respects, the Hawaii base was the same as Ewa Beach, except there were basketball and tennis courts at Hawaii. All that was missing was the domed CIC and condominiums. In place of the CIC was a building that was more like a buffet restaurant with the attached rec room. This base's auditorium was attached to the dining hall by covered walkways. In the dining hall, the four decided to pull two tables together and set up for refugee arrivals in the dining room.

The four enhanced human security were Patrick Pegram, Brian Whiting, Alice Straley and Wendy Gaitan. All four had MP5-AX rifles. Also assigned were two gorillas, for the boys, and two G-Cats for the girls. The hybrids were carrying fifty-caliber machine guns. Assuming there would be lines of people, all twelve decided to move

some tables and chairs aside to make space for two lines. They also discussed how to get refugees from the dining room and to their assigned residences. For any of them to take time away from the dining room was considered a bad idea; it would only slow down the process. They agreed to have maps drawn up.

Into their sub-vocals, Alden interjected, "I can get the maps for you guys. Give me a few minutes to get them printed and I'll transport them to you." All four volunteers cheered and thanked Alden. While they waited, they chatted about numbers of refugees that might be expected. None of them had ever been in the townhomes or the single family homes, so they didn't know how many could fit in those residences. Arnie tapped his comm-badge and called Drew to ask how space should be allocated.

Drew replied, "All the single family homes can accommodate large families of eighteen to twenty, assuming two of the twenty are babies or toddlers. The townhouses can hold six easily or eight, if two are babies or toddlers. The dorm rooms can hold smaller families of no more than four. Alden just told me what you guys have been doing and talking about. You're all doing great! The stuff you've done has been shared with the teams at Maui and Kauai. Even the guys at Kaho'olawe are getting their act together. We just transported four of our buses to Kaho'olawe. Jerry Owens is giving Mr. Seibert and Mrs. Gibbons quick instructions on how to operate the buses. Good job, guys. Drew, out."

With that information and the boost to their egos, Arnie, Jerry, Mollie and Nell did some quick math on their PADDs. They figured they could house nine-hundred-fifty people. When they looked up from their PADDs there were four stacks of maps and a pile of colored markers on the tables in front of them. The maps were actually black-and-white satellite photos. Similar maps were also

made up for Kauai and Maui. One-thousand copies of maps were sent to each base, so each refugee could have a copy. Alden had even assigned numbers to the residences, so they could keep track of who was residing where. Barely a minute later, the first group of fifty refugees arrived. At the same moment, Alden had also transported similar numbers of refugees to Maui and Kauai. Chefs, housekeepers and lawn maintenance personnel arrived at each base and everybody went right to work. Every fifteen minutes or so, another fifty or sixty refugees were transported to each of the three Pacific Rim Division bases.

From outside Doctor Wiener's office, Oke Ka'aukai meekly called, "Doc Wiener?"

Looking up from his computer terminal, Doctor Wiener smiled at the group of three boys in his office doorway, pleasantly saying, "Good morning, guys. Come in and lets get started." Oke, Makaio and Kimo filed into the room. Doc Wiener stood, went around his desk and watched the boys head toward the sofa. He gently closed the door, checking, "Have you boys had breakfasts?"

All three nodded, but wore serious expressions. Oke said, "We had showers, milkshakes and even got floated by John."

"Cut the crap, Doc," Kimo smirked, "We've been waiting three years for what you're about to tell us. Get on with it."

"Yeah," Makaio chanted, "prove to us the adults at the orphanage were bigger dicks than what they actually had hangin'."

Purposefully, Doc Wiener chuckled and sat on the edge of his desk, facing the boys. He smiled, "Given what I've read last night, Makaio's nine-year-old pecker is bigger than all of their sad units." All three boys giggled. Makaio blushed too. Doc Wiener reached back for

the neat stack of files on his desk. He displayed them to the boys, and explained, "Here is the whole story. Now, I'm going to show you only one of the photographs in these files, boys, but I am going to show you the real medical reports. When you're ready, I'll call and have Doctor Andrews come up and tell you what the big words mean." He confirmed, "Ready?"

Oke checked with his two brothers. When they nodded, Oke prompted, "Go for it, Doc."

Opening the top file, Doc Wiener explained, "All the files contain the same general information. For some reason, the C.P.S. notes on each of you are slightly different, but given what we now know, C.P.S. told more lies in one day than every kid on this base combined." He stood and stepped toward the sofa, handing each boy a copy of the same police report. After giving the boys a minute or two to read, review and confirm that they all had the same page, Doc Wiener explained, "Your mother passed on that Saturday afternoon, while you three were out playing. Please note the approximate time of death. You three all told me the same thing; that you came home for lunch, ate, and then went back out, returning home about five that afternoon and finding your mother on the floor in the kitchen. Your mother's estimated time of death was two that afternoon, at least an hour after you left the house and went back out to play. That's point one; proving that none of you had anything to do with her passing." He paused to gather three copies of another report, then handed each boy a copy. Again, he gave them time to read, review and confirm that they all had the same page in their hand.

"That coroner's report states two reasons for your mother's passing," Doc Wiener explained. "The medical examiner's investigation says that your mom was cleaning with a nasty combination of bleach, pine-cleaner and ammonia. She was moving

furniture around and breathing in the fumes from those cleaners. It probably caused her to cough and gasp for fresh air. That caused her lung to collapse. Struggling to catch her breath, she likely got dizzy and slipped on the floor, which caused the broken leg that each of you remember seeing. She didn't die from the broken leg, but since she was already in distress, the compound fracture caused her to lose consciousness and she fainted. She did not die from the fracture or the resulting blood loss. None of you left anything out for her to trip and fall on. There's nothing about toys in either the police or coroner's report. Her primary cause of death was asphyxiation due to the collapsed lung from the chemicals she was cleaning with." Pausing again, Doc Wiener watched the boys check over the report and softly confirm what they had heard him explain.

When all three expectantly looked up at him, Doc Wiener asked, "You boys have two options at this point. Either I can call Doc Andrews in to explain things to you in more detail, or I can show you a police photo. The reason I'm giving you that choice is the photograph does show your mom's hand and arm on your kitchen floor. It also shows something that none of you recalled to tell me about. So talk it over and tell me, is it Doc Andrews or the photo?"

Oke, Kimo and Makaio chattered briefly. Makaio looked up and asked, "It's really only her hand, right? We've had plenty of nightmares about finding her that day."

Oke nodded, "We can't see her face all blue again. We'll all start having those nightmares again."

Doc Wiener nodded and assured, "It's only her hand and a small section of arm." He swiftly added, "It's not her that I want you notice in the picture. It's what's also on the floor that I want you to notice."

The three boys checked again. One after the other, they elected

to see the photograph. Doc Wiener wordlessly handed each a copy of the photograph. He did not return to his desk, but stood before the boys and gently prodded, "What's on the floor?"

Makaio visibly shuddered. Kimo looked up with tears flowing down his face. He tried to speak, but failed. Also shedding tears, Oke choked out, "A phone and a mop handle."

Doc Wiener nodded. He handed them a box of tissues, then waited for the boys to finish crying. He said, "Last night, after I reviewed these reports and the photos, I spoke with Jim Hundser, a lawyer, and Rob Gibbons, a police lieutenant, to play Sherlock Holmes with me. Given the conditions, we concluded that when your mom collapsed her lung, she used the mop to keep her steady on the wet floor, then went to the phone. Before she could call for emergency help, the mop likely slipped, she fell, broke her leg and hit the floor unconscious." He firmly told the boys, "She did not die in pain; she did not give up, she fought for her life; she did not trip on any toy or anything else left on the floor. The floor was wet from her cleaning it. Another photograph that shows too much of your mom's broken leg shows a chair tipped over. She almost certainly broke her leg on that chair. The coroner's report even states that they found her skin and blood on the chair. Although it cannot be guaranteed that was what happened, any court of law would find all three of you blameless."

He waited for all three to nod that they understood. Doc Wiener smiled, "So, I'm standing before three of the strongest, most incredible boys on this base. They survived two tremendous losses, three horrible years in an orphanage, and yet had the common sense to come looking for help to find answers to their questions. You could have gone to any adult on this base. I was privileged to be the one you decided to come to. So, you tell me, who has the most guts and the

bigger dick, those jerks at the orphanage that blatantly lied, or you three?"

The three boys giggled. Since they met the man before them on Monday, they had concluded he was kewl and could be trusted to tell them the truth. Since Doc Wiener had told them and shown them more than they ever expected, their trust was confirmed. Oke smirked, "Makaio had a bigger dick at two than any of them jerk-offs." This started revolving commentary between the boys on each of their dicks. With loose remarks about Oke's newly sprouting pubes, they started play fighting and rolling around on the couch.

Laughing louder than necessary, only to show the boys that they were mature and had impressed him, which was the truth, Doc Wiener went to his desk. He picked up the handset, pressed a button and called Doctor Andrews to join him in his office "with three very kewl young men". Two minutes later, Doc Andrews knocked on the door. Hearing the knock, the boys stopped play fighting and watched Doc Wiener answer the door.

One thing both men knew was that, working with these kids, appearances meant more than anything. If they acted stuffy and superior, most of the battle was lost before they had a chance to open their mouths. The two adult men sat on the easy chairs across from the couch the boys were sitting on, put their feet up on the coffee table and chatted with the boys on their level. Doc Andrews then started answering questions. The biggest question was the one Doc Andrews had prepared for. He pulled a syringe out of his white coat and a folded, small paper cup. The syringe contained small amounts of the same cleaning fluids that the boys' mother had used. He squirted the contents of the syringe into the cup, allowing the boys to take short sniffs. Each of them coughed and felt the burning sensation in their lungs. When the boys stopped coughing, Doc Andrews reminded,

"That was after only brief sniffs. Your mother was breathing that in the whole time she was cleaning. The collapsed lung alone wouldn't have killed her. The broken leg wouldn't have killed her. The combination of circumstances and events is why she died."

Each doctor asked the boys if they had any other questions. The brothers were satisfied. Doc Andrews shook their hands and knocked knuckles with them, then left the office. To conclude the visit, Doc Wiener told the boys, "After what we've talked about and seen today, I wouldn't be surprised if one or all three of you had nightmares tonight. I'm not going to allow that to happen. What we discussed is the reality of the situation, so I will not allow your dreams to cloud what we've discussed. Tonight, and for the next two nights, at ten o'clock, I'd like to meet you at your dorm room. I'll give each of you a small pill..."

"Gag me!" Kimo grimaced. Giggling, his two brothers nudged him.

Again, Doc Wiener overreacted and loudly laughed, "Scratch the pills. Hypo-sprays for all?" When the boys nodded, he said, "Be completely ready for bed, because this shot will have you drowsy in five minutes, and a zombie in fifteen minutes. You'll sleep through the night, without any dreams or nightmares, and wake completely refreshed. Only to be sure none of you have a chance to hurt yourselves, I'll stay with you until you're all asleep, then leave your room."

He looked up at the ceiling, calling, "Alden, what dorm room are these three men in?"

"One, one, o' seven; dorm one, first floor, room seven, Doc," Alden replied.

Doc Wiener reminded, "The next three nights, I'll be at your room at ten o'clock. Do everything that needs to be done. You'll wake to leak if you need to, but be..."

"Zombie status," the boys chorused.

"Precisely," Doc Wiener chuckled at the performance.

Oke nodded and promised, "We'll be ready."

Pointing at the displayed certificates and diplomas on the wall, Kimo teased, "You don't act like any doctor I've ever been to. You sure those are yours?"

Standing and going to retrieve a specially made certificate, Doc Wiener showed it to the boys. Oke giggled, "What the fuck? Professor Porky Pig and Dean Bugs Bunny, E. Phud, of Warner Brothers University?"

Doc Wiener went into his well rehearsed 'Wabbit season, duck season' routine.

The three boys stood and left the office, giggling; "He ain't giving me no shot", "no way!" and "let's lock the door".

Entering the Ewa Beach dining room from the Command Center were The King, Queen and young Prince. Mike and Derrick greeted them. All three were still wearing the clothes that they arrived in. Derrick asked Alden to scan the three Royals and prepare to get them clothes and basic necessities, then Mike and Derrick showed them through the kitchen chow line. Prince Kaimi was offered a breakfast milkshake. Of course, he enthusiastically agreed, but first, Derrick explained to the Royals that the milkshakes had been developed by Doctor McCoy of Starfleet and were vitamin fortified. Kaimi became

far less enthusiastic and scrunched his nose.

Mike smiled at the boy; "Just try a little bit. You'll see, they're really very good. Pick your favorite flavor, Kaimi."

Not believing it could be good, Kaimi reluctantly said, "I'll try the strawberry." In moments, the Prince had a small sample cup. He put it to his lips like it was medicine, fully prepared to spit it out. After the first cautious sip, Kaimi's face brightened and he gulped down the remainder.

The King and Queen smiled at their son. King Aalona asked, "Would you like more, Kaimi?"

Rapidly nodding, Kaimi cheered, "Yes, please!"

While the Royals got their breakfasts, Mike excused himself. He went back out to the dining room to gather Dillon, Randy, Jonah, Geoff, Frankie and Lenny. The Rimmer boys were assigned to keep Kaimi company, and when he finished his breakfast, to show him around the base. Walking with the boys towards the kitchen, Mike explained, "At some point, the King will want to go back to his Palace to get personal items, and survey any damage done. I don't know if they'll be staying with us another night, but I'd expect them to. If so, we need to make them feel at home for as long as they're here."

Derrick chatted with the King and Queen, asking what they would like to do that day. King Aalona summarized, "First, I would like to visit my wounded palace guards and employees. Arrangements will need to be made so I may speak to the people and the press. I will need to answer questions that will likely be posed."

Tapping his PADD, Derrick nodded, "I have casualty numbers right here, Majesty." Pausing and carefully considering his words, Derrick softly reminded, "Since investigations are still in progress, we

can't mention the H.L.F.," and then passed his PADD to the King.

The King evilly grinned, "I am aware of that from Lieutenant Vorik. I will act ignorant of that information for the time being, but rest assured, the people will know I am not standing for this sort of militant terrorism."

The Queen interjected, "Our lives were put in jeopardy because of our own lack of experience. The last remnants of innocence have been shattered with the windows of our home. It will not happen again."

"I am considering several options available to me," the King told the Queen.

While Mike and Derrick were busy with the Royal Family, back at the townhouse, Keith and his sons were putting the finishing touches on breakfast for Prez. On the tray were scrambled eggs, buttered toast, a bowl of mixed fruit and a large glass of orange-pineapple juice. The final touch was a small flower, plucked by Dee from one of the bushes outside the townhouse, in a glass of water. The three boys raced back upstairs while Keith carefully carried the tray up.

Prez had just started eating when Alden announced over the speakers in the master bedroom, "Gage, I got you an Apple MacBook Pro."

Sliding off the king-sized bed, Gage hurried to his bedroom, saying, "I'm used to Windows. How much different is a Mac?"

"Almost everything available for a PC is available for a Mac," Alden replied. "I've already set it up to work with the printers in the house, so you're set for school and play."

Gage asked, "And it would work today?"

Alden answered, "Only Internet access would be affected, but that's not this Mac's fault; it's military conditions around the world causing that problem."

"Sweet," Gage giggled. He then started trying out his new computer. Sammy walked in and sat down beside his brother. Together, they figured out how to operate the machine.

Entering the room where his brothers were, Dee softly giggled, "Daddy and Poppa are being silly."

Gage smiled, "They love each other so much. It's a big change from the way my ex-parents acted."

Sammy pulled Dee closer and the three boys learned about the MacBook together. They learned that the Apple web site had a plethora of videos to help them, but download speeds were crawling along at a snail's pace. During the process, Sammy and Gage learned that Dee had been left back a year at his old school. In September, Dee had restarted the third grade. He wasn't the least bit familiar with computers. Sammy and Gage began teaching Dee all the fundamentals of operating a computer.

Meanwhile, the newly reunited quadruplets, Ralphie, Richie, Robbie and Ronnie had woken at their new home with their parents. The family was awake late, getting acquainted with one another and their spacious new home. Even after Jason and Trinity had gone to bed, the quadruplets remained awake in the living room, chatting and excitedly watching events unfold at the Hyatt Regency. At one in the morning, the four boys turned off the TV, then went upstairs to bed.

Ralphie and Richie were the first to climb out of bed and take a shower together. It was a completely new experience for the two look-

a-likes to see what their backsides looked like to the rest of the world. All the shampooing and soaping had the usual effects on the boys. Washing each others' erections, they giggled and stopped before reaching their climaxes, but they tightly hugged and promised to switch things around, so all four of them would have opportunities in the shower with one another. By the time they had finished and returned to their room to get dressed, Robbie and Ronnie were awake. The latter two confirmed that the former two had showered together.

Only wearing underwear, Ralphie explained, "We should've been bathing together all our lives. We've got twelve years to catch up on, bros. Tomorrow, I'll wait for one of you two to shower with."

Smiling, Richie added, "Now we know what everything looks like, from hair to teeth and from butts and dicks to toes, before we go out to the pools and get naked around the other kids." All four began giggling.

Smirking, Ronnie wordlessly checked with Robbie. Richie and Ralphie each grabbed a brother by the arm, and pulled them into the room. Closing the door, Ralphie softly said, "Yeah, we did wash everything. I knelt down and washed Richie's feet, legs, crotch, dick and nuts, and then kept going up until I finished washing his hair."

"I did the same for Ralphie," Richie proudly admitted. "We're catching up on lifetimes of missed opportunities." He paused and sighed, "It was better washing him and being washed by him than any shower I've ever had before. I was real careful with Ralphie. It seemed he was just as careful with me, maybe more so."

Robbie grinned, "Did you take it all the way?"

Richie and Ralphie shook their heads. "We could've, but stopped before that," Richie explained. "This time was more to act like real

brothers, not to get off."

Ralphie nodded, "Maybe another time. We need to get familiar with each other. We think these first few times should be like if we were younger; getting to know each other in every possible way, before we try anything more."

Richie devilishly grinned, "Before I try something for the first time with a boyfriend, and chance screwing up in a really bad way, I'm gonna try things with my brothers first, so we all learn what's kewl and what's not. Together, we can do stuff without losing brotherhood or friendship."

"I want to learn with and from my brothers, like it always should've been," Ralphie stated. He cupped his package through his briefs, giggling, "Down here, we've both got peach fuzz and exactly six longer pubes. I didn't notice any of that before. It's like all at once, we're together and starting puberty at twelve-and-a-half-years-old."

Covering his mouth to keep his voice from being heard outside the room by the two adults, Richie laughed, "The hairs are in slightly different spots, but it's so weird we've both got six of 'em."

Picking up his board shorts, Ralphie chuckled, "Let us know if you've both got the same number. That would be wicked kewl."

Robbie and Ronnie chimed, "Very kewl," and then opened the door to take their first shower together. The only thing different with this pair was Ronnie getting completely carried away shampooing Robbie's buzz-cut hair, remarking that it felt like velvet and setting both off in hysterical laughter. Ronnie would have gladly done anything that Robbie wanted, but they both decided that all four of them would experiment either as pairs or together. Robbie counted six actual pubes on Ronnie. When Ronnie was checking his brother out,

he found Robbie had a seventh of respectable length. The only reason Robbie could come up with was a joke about his buzz cut and that the extra hair had to grow somewhere. Again, the two boys roared laughing.

Dressed in board shorts and T-shirts, Ralphie and Richie went downstairs. Both boys gave morning hugs and kisses to their new mom and dad. Neither Jason nor Trinity expected hugs or kisses. Feeling shivers of contentment, like this is the way the family always should have been, Trinity kissed each boy back, and then went to get them fed. Breakfast sausages and pancakes were already made and keeping warm in the oven. Neither boy felt too comfortable being served, but Trinity insisted, reminding the boys that she very much wanted to, and that they would often have meals at the CIC, simply out of convenience.

While the first two boys ate, the family began talking about what had happened overnight. Ralphie and Richie were thrilled that Clan Short seemed to have saved many lives in the R.O.H., and according to the news radio reports, had also been of humanitarian and military assistance around the world. Robbie and Ronnie came downstairs, greeted their parents the same way and were served breakfast.

Once the Battle of Earth conversation was finished, the family then shared their plans for the day. The two adults would spend time at the F.Y.S. building and hoped to meet Mister Derek Tecumseh. They would then go to the base school and get familiar with those facilities. The boys wanted to invite their friends from the United States to Ewa Beach. They would spend the day together, getting to better know all the various friends, the kids already there, and the base facilities. Jason and Trinity reminded their boys of world events and advised them to check before making the invitations. The

quadruplets realized that asking before inviting, on this particular day, would be a good idea. Amazingly, the quadruplets took their empty glasses, plates and utensils to the kitchen. Jason and Trinity were dumbfounded watching four boys, who were complete strangers a day earlier, work together at the sink and dishwasher as if they'd been doing it all their lives.

The four boys stepped outside and went to the pools. They weren't too surprised to learn that many Core Rimmers weren't on base, and those that were around probably wouldn't be seen much, as they were dealing with Battle Of Earth repercussions. The only Core Rimmer near the pool was Reyes, the newest of the lot. Since they hadn't really gotten to know Reyes the previous night, all four went over to say hello. Reyes made the rounds with the quadruplets, taking them over to the diving well to meet some of the teens, and then back to the pool to meet other tweens. The introductions finished with Lanna Seaver, the shared Rimmer 'mom' for all the kids, and her boys, Cesar, Felipe, Murakami and Shimizo.

The telepathic twins didn't wait very long before sending their first thoughts to the quadruplets, simply to test and learn if they were telepathic too. Only just beginning to discover that they could understand each others' thoughts with little more than a glance, Ralphie, Richie, Robbie and Ronnie were surprised to hear the twins' voices in their minds. Quickly checking with each other, the quadruplets softly droned, "Whoa."

Squinting suspiciously at her twins, but helplessly grinning, Lanna queried, "What are you boys doing?"

"Just checkin', mamma," Cesar giggled.

Felipe nodded and laughed, "They heard us and we heard them.

John's gonna love this!"

Looking up at the four older boys, Cesar prompted, "Go ahead and ask Reyes what you want to ask. It'll be kewl."

Out of the telepathic loop, Reyes checked with the quadruplets, "Ask me what?"

Blushing, Ronnie grinned, "I was hoping to invite some friends from Des Moines here for the day."

Nodding, Richie added, "And I'd like to invite a few friends from Vegas Desert Division here too."

Reyes asked, "Have you called your friends already?"

All four shook their heads. Ralphie offered, "Since things are kind o' weird just about everywhere, mom and dad thought it would be better if we asked first."

"Very kewl," Reyes smiled, and then tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, once the quadruplets have invited their friends, go ahead and allow transport through the shields."

Alden giggled, "Kerry says the double twins are on the same wavelength already. They weren't sure if our four were awake or not yet. We're set, Reyes."

Reyes told the quadruplets, "Call your friends. They're waiting on you."

Ralphie smiled, "Kewl," and led his brothers only a few steps away. Ronnie contacted Des Moines and Richie called Las Vegas.

Concurrently, while the quadruple R's were at the pool, and Prez and the Royals were being cared for, Sean and Troy were back in the

Command Center. In the United States, President Bush did not make it safely out of Washington, D.C. He had been wounded and incapacitated when Air Force one was shot down. It was reported that thoracic vertebra T5 through T10 had been crushed. President Bush might survive his injuries, but he was paralyzed and required mechanical assistance to breathe. Many of the President's Cabinet and much of the Legislative Branches of government had been killed or injured during the Battle of Washington. That left one man, who had been out of the country at the time, in power – Secretary of State Colin Powell. He was in transit across the Pacific and would be landing at Hickam Air Force Base within minutes. Also needing a secure place to reside for at least the next day, Mister Powell would be staying at the Ewa Beach base. Sean and Troy were ordered by Seth in Orlando to transport to Hickam with their security, greet the President and transport back to Ewa Beach with Mister Powell and his entourage.

There was only one place to put Mister Powell. Troy checked with Alden to make certain that the third condominium building was empty. From investigating condo building one where he lived, all Troy knew was that the top three floors of every condominium contained single large apartments. He and Sean transported to the tenth floor of the third condo and got it set up, turning on the air conditioning, ordering beverages and food for the kitchen, flowers for tables in the dining room, living room and each of five bedrooms.

Sean's comm-badge chirped. "Air Force One has been cleared to land," Seth reported.

Heading for the door, Sean nodded and said, "We'll gather our security."

Troy added, "Let us know when his plane is taxiing and we'll be

there, Seth."

"Thanks guys, will do," Seth replied. "Orlando out." Sean and Troy stepped into the waiting elevator.

Sean called for their security team, and requested Keith's and Prez's team also, only to make certain that Mister Powell's secret service felt the new President would be safe. On the way down the elevator, Sean wondered, "Do we bow to him like the King?"

Troy shook his head answering, "Definitely not. President Washington wouldn't allow that and no President ever has. We'll show our identification and greet him like anyone else, then we'll assure him and his secret service that Ewa Beach is the safest place to be for as long as he needs to be here."

Sean giggled, "This one's mostly yours, Lover."

"Thanks!" Troy laughed. He then joked, "When Sir Paul McCartney comes knockin', you'll have to greet him. I'll be on the ground, unconscious."

Sean smirked, "And when you wake up, you'll have him teach you every song he's ever written."

Troy hummed then admitted, "You're probably right." The elevator arrived at the ground floor. Heading down the hall for the exit doors, Troy called Alden and asked, "Connect me to all the Core Rimmers that are awake, please?"

"Go ahead, Troy," Alden soon said.

Troy reported, "Just a heads up guys. Not only are we billeting the King and our Royal Family, the defacto-President of the United States will be here soon. Secretary of State Colin Powell is about to

land at Hickam. Sean and I are going to pick him up. We'll be back in a few minutes. In the mean time, maybe someone should let our chefs know. I don't know where he was at or how long it's been since he's eaten. Sean and I got the top floor of the third condo building ready for his party, and that included some basic food and drinks."

Keith quickly said, "Troy, get a housekeeper prepped too, bud."

Troy grinned, "Isn't it convenient, I just so happen to be on a first name basis with one."

Pausing from his breakfast in bed, Prez asked, "Did you gussy up the place, Troy?"

Arriving where four security gorillas and six teenage security were waiting, Troy answered, "We didn't have much time, Prez, but I did get Alden to deliver drinks, flowers and food."

"Good job, dudes," Prez cheered.

Sean called, "Have you got a fix on Mister Powell's plane, Alden?"

Alden replied, "It's taxiing now, Sean. There are U.S. Marines and Air Force security already stationed. I'll put you down near them."

Troy worried, "Please tell me that they're expecting Clan Representatives. I really don't feel like being shot today."

Seth interjected, "They're not only expecting Clan, they're specifically expecting you and Sean. Expect the usual security pat down though, guys. With all the crazy stuff going on in the world, they're probably in a bad mood."

The security team encircled the two Clan leaders. Sean grinned,

"I'm the only one allowed to pat down Troy."

Hanging his head, Troy blushed and giggled, "Twelve to transport, Alden."

Alden transported Sean, Troy and their security. They arrived at Hickam Air Force Base, standing about three meters before a group of heavily armed Marines. The jet carrying Mister Powell was some ten meters behind them. In an instant, several Marines were pointing rifles at The Clan team, and of course, the UNIT security pointed their weapons at the Marines. After a few silent and tense seconds, the Marine Captain in command screamed, "Drop your weapons now!"

In the hope of diffusing the situation, Troy calmly said, "That will not happen, Captain. We are Clan Short Pacific Rim Division representatives, ordered here to escort Mister Powell to safety."

The captain loudly grumbled, "I was told of no such plan! Now drop your..."

"I was told!" another man's voice shouted. Sean and Troy turned to see a man coming down the steps of the air-stairs. Approaching the two groups, he ordered, "Drop your weapons immediately, Lieutenant."

The Marine reminded, "Sir, I am a Captain."

The other man nodded then said, "And Mister Powell was a four-star general in the United States Army. Did it not occur to you that anyone simply appearing from nowhere might be associated with Starfleet? No, of course not. The longer you wait, the longer Mister Powell waits and the more disturbed he becomes. Drop your weapons now or find out who Mister Powell knows and how fast you will become a Lieutenant."

Saying, "Aye-aye, Sir!" the captain shouldered his weapon and his team followed suit. Sean's and Troy's security team then did the same.

The man then politely called, "Misters Faris and Moorhead, I assume?"

Stepping towards the man, Troy identified himself and then Sean did.

"My name is Gordon Rice, head of Mister Powell's security. May I see your Clan Short and Starfleet identification cards?"

Almost simultaneously, Sean and Troy apologized and fished out their I.D. cards. With all the excitement and with their nerves still settling down, they simply forgot. Troy offered, "I even asked if we were expected so we wouldn't get this kind of reception."

After reviewing the Clan and Starfleet cards for both boys, Mister Rice returned them to Sean and Troy, then waved them forward to follow. He then softly said, "Marines are a different breed. We had only just got the stairs and the hatch opened when you arrived." Shaking his head and sighing, Mister Rice confirmed, "Your base has Starfleet shielding?"

"Yes, Sir," Troy answered.

Sean added, "And it's active; has been since Monday night."

Leading the way up the air-steps, Mister Rice asked, "What sort of accommodations are available?"

Climbing the stairs, Troy replied, "We have the top floor of a ten story unoccupied condominium prepared."

"How many bedrooms?" Mister Rice wondered.

Sean answered, "Five."

Mister Rice grunted then asked, "Could additional condominiums be made available? We have fifteen secret service and four reporters in addition to Mister Powell and myself."

Troy nodded, "We'll make all three top level condos available. They're all five bedroom apartments. We'll make lower level single and two bedroom apartments available as needed."

Privately to Sean and Troy, Alden assured, "I'm on it, guys. The seventh, eighth and ninth floor condos will have beverages and food by the time you return."

Noticing the security teams following them up the air-stairs, Sean turned and wondered, "Leo, what're you doin'?"

"Keeping an eye on you," Leo replied. "After a welcome like that, it's more imperative now than ever."

Gary added, "We would've done so anyway."

Mister Rice turned at the top of the stairs and grinned at the gorillas. He helplessly chuckled at the four gorillas, "I had heard things... We have the same objectives, the safety of our charges. My men will not interfere with your job as long as you do not interfere with ours." Unhappy about their greeting by the Marines, Leo and Gary mutely nodded.

Inside the jet, Troy could not believe his eyes. There was a first class seating section forward, but behind that separating wall were couches, desks and all the comforts of home. If this was the Secretary Of State's plane, Troy could only wonder what the real Air Force One

had on-board. Confidently approaching the front of the plane was Colin Powell. Suddenly, Troy felt butterflies flapping in his gut and was uncertain how to even address the man. Stopping and coming to attention in a very un-military fashion, Troy waited until he was spoken to. Seeing his boyfriend come to attention, Sean did as well.

"Gentlemen," Colin Powell pleasantly said as he came nearer. "My apologies for the Marines. We had only just landed, got the air-stairs and opened the hatch when you appeared. My intention was to forewarn them." He then turned to Mister Rice and asked, "You put the fear of God into them?"

Mister Rice nodded and chuckled, "Yes, Sir; God and demotion. A simple reminder of your previous rank and contacts was sufficient."

Colin Powell nodded and smiled, "Not a bad idea. A six-month tour of duty in Antarctica, during winter, sounds appropriate." Returning his attention to Troy and Sean, Mister Powell said, "I assume we'll be transporting onto your base?"

Troy nodded, "Yes, Mister President. I thought..."

"God!" Colin Powell loudly interrupted. He bitterly complained, "Three months until January and Inauguration Day? I might go insane before then." He then sighed, "Please don't call me Mister President. I don't want the job. The sooner I get relieved of this mess, the happier I'll be. Call me Mister Powell, Uncle Colin, General Powell, or call me Mudd for Christ's sake, but don't call me Mister President."

Troy grinned at the man and Sean quickly covered his mouth, struggling to hold in his laughter.

Regaining some composure, Mister Powell asked, "Which of you is Sean Moorhead and which is Troy Faris?"

Mister Rice then introduced both boys and Colin Powell shook their hands. "Can we transport from here?" Mister Rice asked.

Tapping his sub-vocal, Troy asked, "Alden, can you transport us from within the plane?"

"No, I can't, Troy," Alden replied over the comm-badges. "Without a camera, you or Sean would have to be in physical contact with Mister Powell, like the rescues last night. There's an airport security camera pointed at the air-stairs. I can transport from the top step there to Ewa Beach."

Troy and Sean turned to Mister Rice. Security teams discussed how they would proceed exiting the aircraft so that Sean, Troy and Colin Powell were never left open to possible sniper fire. Surrounded by their security, Sean and Troy left first and returned to the tenth floor condo. Soon a team of five secret service agents arrived, one of whom looked somewhat like Colin Powell, but was obviously not the same man. They spread out, searching the condo, noting the video and audio surveillance systems. Then Colin Powell, Mister Rice and three additional secret service agents arrived.

As soon as the last groups arrived, Troy and Sean began showing everyone around. The condo had a very open floor plan. From the elevator, there was a lobby to double entryway doors and into a spacious foyer. To one side of the foyer was the kitchen and a large dining room table with seating for twelve. Opposite the kitchen and dining room was the living room area with three sofas and additional chairs. There were also five bedrooms, two of which were on the elevator side and very large. At the opposite end of the condo, beyond the kitchen, dining room and living room areas were the other three slightly smaller bedrooms. Every bedroom had sliding glass doors to the patio and there were two other pairs of sliding glass doors, one at the dining room and another at the living room side.

Lastly, were the four bathrooms. From this condo, five floors higher than the Faris apartment, the views out the windows were even more breathtaking. Troy and Sean could easily see the similarity with the two bedroom, two bath condo they were familiar with.

Troy then tapped his sub-vocal and asked Alden to connect him to the base P.A. Barely controlling himself, Troy called, "Attention. Would Judy Faris please report to condominium 'C', tenth floor, on the double? Judy Faris to condo 'C', tenth floor."

Hysterical, Sean collapsed onto a sofa and roared, "On the double?" Outside, kids scattered around the base that recognized Troy's voice calling his mother began laughing and giggling.

At Sean's reaction, Troy giggled, "I can't wait until she gets here!"

Colin Powell smiled at Troy, asking, "That's your mother, I assume?"

Troy nodded, "Yes, Sir. She's a base housekeeper and I'm assigning her here." Breaking into a fit of laughter, Troy admitted, "It never occurred to me before that I could assign her a job." Grabbing his belly, Sean howled laughing and rolled off the sofa onto the floor.

Meanwhile, Mister Rice had begun assigning secret service to cover the building. Two would be at the first floor entrance; two would be out in the lobby between the elevator and the condo doors; four would be assigned to the balcony to cover the outdoors flights of stairs.

Shaking his head and grinning, Colin Powell warned Troy, "You're going to get a talking to, young man."

Wide-eyed and obviously looking forward to it, Troy nodded.

Crawling back onto the sofa, Sean cackled, "And the first spanking since he was five!"

Finished loading washing machines with bed sheets at the first dormitory, Judy Faris began the walk to the condominium, softly rambling the entire time. "My son, the Clan Short leader. Wise-ass! I wonder what he enjoyed more, calling me over the P.A., calling me by my full name, or simply requesting that I hurry? Someone is getting an extended time-out! Oh yes, even better, an extended time-out from Sean!" She began giggling, then wondered why Troy had called her to the empty condominium in the first place. The answer to that question came as she rounded the path from the second condo to the third, when she noticed two men in dark suits on either side of the entry doors.

One of the men stopped Judy and asked her name, and then her reason for being there. He then spoke into a small device on his wrist. The gentleman paused briefly, obviously hearing a reply in his electronic ear-piece. A few moments later, she was allowed to enter the building. She got in the elevator. Judy was aware of the world events, but had no idea who her son was with.

Troy was working with Alden to get adequate communications set up in the condo for a head of state. Desks, computers, voice and video conferencing abilities were arranged in the foyer. During this time, Troy mentioned that the Royal Family of the R.O.H. were also on base. Sean began taking the reporters to the seventh floor's two-bedroom apartments. Mister Powell asked to meet with King Aalona. Derrick and Mike were near The King and Queen in the dining room when Troy called over his comm-badge for King Aalona. While Mister Powell waited for the King's arrival, he contacted NORAD and the State Department to let them know of his whereabouts, and ensure them he was safe. A Federal judge would be dispatched to Oahu to

have Mister Powell take the Presidential Oath of Office. That meant mobile television news teams would be coming too. At the Ewa Beach main gate, the last two Secret Service agents arrived in a van with all the luggage. Once clearance was received from Troy, the van was instructed to park at the base parking garage. Derrick would meet them to get the men and luggage transported to the condominium.

At the tenth floor lobby, Judy was again met by two men in dark suits. One opened the door for her and announced her arrival as she entered the apartment. Smiling like a Cheshire cat, Troy turned and waved at his mother. "Hi mom," Troy began. "I'd like to introduce you to Mister Colin Powell and Mister Gordon Rice, the head of Mister Powell's security." Judy began blinking fast as the two men turned and approached her. She immediately recognized Colin Powell.

He reached out his hand, saying, "Good day, Mrs. Faris." Judy shook the famous gentleman's hand, greeted him and asked that she be addressed by her first name. She then shook hands with Mister Rice and asked the same of him.

Seeing an opportunity to explain the situation to his mother, Troy quickly jumped in. "Mom, for the time Mister Powell and his group are here, I'd like you to coordinate housekeeping and anything like that they might need."

Judy smirked at her son. She softly warned, "You're enjoying this too much."

Troy blushed and giggled, "Just doin' a job that was assigned, really!"

Returning from his mission at the seventh floor, Sean found himself in the elevator with Mike and King Aalona. None were stopped at the tenth floor. Mike opened the door and announced the

King's presence. Everyone stopped what they were doing, including Colin Powell. King Aalona and Colin Powell greeted each other. While Heads of State met and began chatting, Judy went to the kitchen to ensure there was sufficient food and beverages, then began checking the bathrooms and bedrooms.

Troy, Mike and Sean stepped aside for a private conversation. Troy told Mike that the top four floors of the condo were occupied with Colin Powell's party. He then explained that a U.S. Federal Judge and television news crews would be arriving to swear in Colin Powell as President. The three boys began estimating the numbers and quickly assumed that the entire condo would be filled by that evening. Depending upon the actual numbers, some news crews might have to stay off-base. Mike contacted the Command Center to let UNIT security know to expect more guests. Security needed to know who would be arriving by name, so no one unexpected would be allowed on base. Troy passed the requirements to Mister Rice. Since Nathan, Kaleo and Tory were asleep after covering all night, Mike tapped his comm-badge and informed Clan Headquarters what was going on locally. Troy went to his mom and told her the situation. Initially, Troy thought his mother would be sufficient, but it was now obvious additional housekeepers would be required. Judy agreed and instructed her son to contact Madeline Hupp to allocate housekeeping resources for the V.I.P.'s.

Half-past ten that morning, while Judy, Troy and Sean were busy in the Executive condo, Prez, Keith and their sons emerged from the townhouse. By this time, kids were scattered around enjoying themselves by the pool, diving well, indoor rec center and playground. Bruce, Dewi and all the Hundser kids were first to run to Keith and Prez, which started a tsunami of kids to gather around. The first order of business was for Prez to assure everyone that he was fine. Prez removed his robe and turned in place, saying that only his

tush and feet hurt, like a really bad sunburn. It actually was a bit worse than that, but the kids didn't need to know it, so he said only what was necessary.

The kids surrounding Prez and Keith dwindled and returned to what they had been doing. The quadruple 'R's' stepped forward with six additional kids, two sets of twins and two other boys. Putting his robe on again, Prez smiled, "How're you guys doing?"

Helplessly giggling at quadruplet and double-twin speak he was hearing in his mind, regarding the cute teen redhead director with burned buns, Ralphie replied, "We're kewl, Prez. We only wanted to introduce some of our friends."

Taking over and bringing Adam along, Ronnie reminded, "The same time I was rescued, my foster bro, Adam, was rescued too. You can tell that Mark's his twin, and Jeff and Brian are their brothers and twins too." Prez extended his right hand to knock knuckles with each of the four brothers, and Keith did the same.

When that was complete, Richie moved forward to introduce "Prez, this cutie next to me is my foster brother Carrol. We've been brothers for about seven years. A few days ago, Terrence was brought home to live with us. When Pat started his crap with Terrence, me and Carrol got him out of there, which got us to the Desert Division Clan. Guys, this is the Pacific Rim Director, Prez, Preston O'Brian, and his partner Keith Hundser." So that Terrence would understand, Richie explained, "Prez and Keith are like Brent and Lance are at home."

"Kewl," Terrence warmly smiled. Keith greeted Carrol and shook hands with him.

Unable to bend comfortably, Prez knelt down to shake hands with Terrence, saying, "You've got two very kewl big brothers, huh?"

"The best," Terrence enthusiastically replied. "They's like brothers and real dads at the same time."

"I'll bet they are," Prez chuckled. "You be sure to remind them how nice they are by being just as nice too, don't ya?"

"All'a time," Terrence blushed and giggled.

Standing again, Prez extended a hand to Carrol, smiling, "Awesome job, dude."

Shaking Prez's hand while Keith said hello to Terrence, Carrol shrugged, "It was Richie that made me realize it couldn't wait."

Nodding, Prez smiled, "Good job, all around, dudes." He then asked, "Richie has given you the tour?"

"Not yet, Prez," Richie giggled, because Prez's robe had reopened. Pointing down at Prez's crotch, Richie giggled, "They just got here, seconds before you and Keith showed up."

Rolling his eyes, Prez closed his robe and tied the belt again, smirking, "That's twice this robe has opened itself in five minutes. This is going to be an interesting day." All ten kids nodded and helplessly giggled. Prez sighed, "I've got some other folks to meet, but you dudes have a good time while you're here, kewl?"

The quadruplets, double-twins, Carrol and Terrence chorused, "Kewl. See ya later."

Next on the to-do list was to greet Prince Kaimi and Queen Adamina. Once those tasks were completed, Prez decided to at least say hello to the V.I.P.s now residing in the third condominium. Prez contacted Troy, who in turn warned Mister Rice that the Division Director was on his way, inappropriately dressed in a white robe, due

to burns suffered during the prior night.

About the same time, Sean disappeared and reappeared with Derrick, the secret service agents and all the luggage, at the tenth floor condominium. Keith and Prez arrived at what they were calling "The Executive condominium". The secret service agents and journalists were gathering their luggage and returning to their temporary residences.

After brief introductions, Uncle Colin got busy with affairs of state. Prez and Keith approached Mister Rice. "I understand the length of your stay with us will be at least a day," Prez began. When Mister Rice responded affirmatively, Prez asked, "Is there anything I can get for you?"

Keith added, "TV and radio isn't much. We could get just about anything you like."

Mister Rice hummed then said, "Up here, we probably won't need much. What I'm thinking is some form of entertainment. Would it be asking too much for a dart board in the two condos downstairs where my men are staying?"

Prez smiled then called, "Alden, for the time Uncle Colin's party is here, please get us regulation dart boards and pool tables with cues and chalk for the eighth and ninth floor condos."

Alden giggled, "Comin' right up, Prez."

Unaccustomed to this, Mister Rice asked, "You got us pool tables too?"

Prez nodded, "If it's not there already, it will be soon."

Keith smiled, "Anything that will make your stay more

comfortable, Sir."

Into Prez's sub-vocal, Alden interjected, "It's all there now, boss."

Prez told Mister Rice, "Your dart boards and pool tables have been delivered."

"Amazing," Mister Rice chuckled. He then turned away suddenly.

Prez and Keith were both wondering if something was wrong elsewhere in the condo that got the man's attention. Finding a probable cause, Keith giggled, "Your robe opened, T'hy'la."

"Oh!" Prez gushed, and then quickly closed the robe and retied the belt. "Don't worry, Mister Rice. Here in Hawaii, we aren't as concerned about nudity. And I can't really tie this belt tightly without irritating the burn near my waist."

When the man turned and faced them again, Keith added, "Over at our pools, anywhere from half to two-thirds of the kids are naked at any given moment. It's truly no problem at all."

Prez reminded, "The kids here all have histories that make most of us shudder. Our first group were sexually abused. For the first time in their lives, they can swim and play naked without some perverted adult wanting something sexual from them. Others had been emotionally or physically abused, while others had been street prostitutes. Finally, we have kids from the orphanages in California and more street kids from a Los Angeles gang."

Keith nodded, "They're learning to let their guard down, at least a little bit. When they're hungry or thirsty, they're free to go to our CIC's dining room and get whatever they want. Actually, the dining

room is the only place we've told our kids that they have to have clothes on. Board shorts, T-shirts and sandals are required in the kitchen and dining room. It's as much for health and sanitation as it is common decency. They didn't know that a day, two days or a week ago, but they do now."

Mister Rice wondered, "How do you manage? I mean, you're still kids yourselves."

Prez and Keith grinned at each other. Prez explained, "First and foremost, our parents are the best. We weren't emotionally and physically abused like many of our rescued kids. We got time-outs and swats on the backside when necessary, but rarely. Push the disapproval to screaming and yelling, or time-outs and swats on the butt, and any kid knows he's gone too far. Parents that do take it further have as much of a problem, if not more so, than the kid. A parent's eyes can express most of what any kid needs, from acceptance and pride to displeasure."

"We also have doctors and a child psychologist on base," Keith offered. "Those that need special care, get it. As for our command team, we've learned all we need to know to perform most duties from Clan teachers. The rest, like greeting important people, is common sense stuff. We help each other whenever needed. Troy and Sean greeted you at Hickam because we couldn't. Kaleo and Tory, whom you haven't yet met, stayed awake last night in our Command Center, dealing with whatever was necessary. When they wake up and get the chance, we'll introduce you to them."

Prez smiled, "We're especially proud of Kaleo, Tory and Sean. Last Friday, they were among the first rescued. Kaleo was the first to join our leadership team, last Saturday. Tory, Troy and Sean joined Wednesday."

Mister Rice nodded, "I'll share this with Mister Powell. I would have never guessed that Sean was recently rescued. Mister Powell will be just as impressed as I am, guaranteed. We'd like to meet your parents at their earliest convenience."

Keith nodded and smiled, "We'll make sure they know. Most of 'em are at work at the Federation Youth Services building, which is our next stop." Mister Rice nodded then began chuckling and turned away again. Keith laughed, "Prez!"

Looking down at himself, Prez grumbled, "Damn it!" then adjusted his robe again.

Shaking his head, Keith grinned, "Mister Rice, if you need anything, just call for Alden to contact one of us," and then walked Prez toward the door. Keith softly giggled, "And you wanna jam for the kids this afternoon? When your robe slips open in the middle of a song, what then?"

Prez shrugged and giggled, "Dance? You always say my bits swing real nice."

Once they were alone in the descending elevator, Keith teased, "Show off."

"You love it too."

"There's no doubt about it," Keith chuckled, and then pushed Prez into the corner of the elevator for a few moments of passionate kissing. The elevator stopped at the ground floor, the bell rang and the doors opened.

Separating and beginning to walk out of the elevator, Prez double checked his robe was closed. Prez playfully complained, "You got me hard, T'hy'la." Grinning, Keith put on his innocent act. Keith

was hard too, but wearing board shorts and boxers made it far less noticeable than Prez. Before they exited the condo, Prez stopped short, calling, "Alden, my feet hurt. Transport me and Keith to our townhouse bedroom."

Alden giggled, "A likely story," then executed the order.

Back at the pools, Reyes had just been introduced to Adam, Mark, Brian, Jeff and Garrett from the Des Moines Division. Alien, Mini and Colin had decided to join the five newbies, making up poor excuses about how they would need security from The Rimmers. Richie introduced his two brothers, Carrol and Terrence, from the Vegas Desert Division. The fourteen boys were still near Reyes when his comm-badge chirped. Reyes tapped his comm-badge and greeted, "Hi, this is Reyes."

"Hey little brother," Danny Page's voice called, "are you very busy?"

"Not too busy, compared to the rest of the Core Rimmers," Reyes replied, and then wondered, "What's up, Danny?"

"We got a call a little while ago," Danny began. "There was an accident in Breckenridge, Colorado this morning. Debris from a Romulan starship, of some sort or another, burned through the atmosphere, landed on a house and killed the parents of three boys. We were called because two of the three are androids that Marc's been keeping tabs on. We need you to go pick them up, bro."

Reyes gasped then squealed "Me? Why me?"

"You said you weren't busy," Danny sniggered.

In the background, Marc hollered, "You've got two choices, Reyes. Either you go to Colorado or you get your skinny brown ass

here, suit up and grab a scalpel."

The fourteen boys surrounding Reyes broke into giggles. Reyes smirked, "You're both nuts! I don't have experience with rescues or surgery."

"Neither did the rest of us," Marc shouted. "Welcome to the club!"

Danny giggled, "You didn't have experience with databases either, until last night."

Marc yelled, "Pick your poison, Reyes; rescue or surgery. We can use help either way. Tag! You're it!"

"You forgot the third option. BOTH!" Kerry added helpfully over their comm-badges.

"Hey Kerry, remember that we've already started a blackmail file on you in our head!" Mini giggled evilly.

"It's gonna be a small file then!" Kerry giggled. "No matter which head you're using!"

"Kerry, have you been picking on your Division again?" Danny asked semi-seriously.

"Only a little bit, Grandpa Danny!" Kerry said sweetly.

"Well pick it up then; you're giving the family a bad name!" Danny giggled.

"Okay, Grandpa!" Kerry said, his voice conveying the evil plots that were already forming.

The boys around Reyes cracked up and turned away. Reyes

smirked, "Alden, take care of your little brother. Danny, I'll choose the lesser of two evils, the rescue. Alden knows where I'm going?"

Alden giggled, "I do now, Reyes. As for taking care of Kerry, it's a lost cause."

Reyes said, "I'll head to Colorado, Danny. These fourteen hysterical jokers around me are coming with me. Get them comm-badges, Alden. When I'm done with this, I'll call for Paul and Ryan and sedation, not necessarily in that order."

Danny and Marc chorused, "Good luck, bro. Danny out."

"Why not drag them into the fun?" Adam giggled. "You're outnumbered by quads anyways!"

"Who needs sedation?" Mark added. "Just grab a wave!"

Alden giggled, "There are four comm-badges on the table beside you for the quadruple Rs. All the Des Moines and Vegas guys have them already."

Reyes stood, picked up the first comm-badge and handed it to Ralphie. "Reyes," Ralphie sniggered, "we're even less experienced than you are. We just got here yesterday."

Reyes smiled, "Misery loves company," and passed the next comm-badges to Richie, Ronnie and Robbie.

Richie passed his comm-badge back to Reyes saying, "I've got one already."

"You're not wearing it," Reyes noticed.

Richie sniggered, "I actually didn't think I'd need it, so I left it at

the townhouse."

Handing the comm-badge back to Richie, Reyes prompted, "Keep it. We'll sort it out after this little trip." He then tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "We're ready when you are, Alden."

Alden giggled then reminded, "I'm ready, but you guys aren't. The temperature here is eighty-one degrees Fahrenheit. The temperature in Breckenridge is thirty-eight degrees Fahrenheit. Stand by." A moment later, all fifteen boys were standing there naked. Garrett and Ronnie quickly peeked at each other, causing all of them to laugh. A second later, all were wearing sneakers, socks, jeans, long-sleeve shirts and jackets.

Adam scowled, "We just got changed out of winter clothes to come here, now we're bundled up again."

"Hey, it's better than seeing all you cuties going turtle!" Brian giggled.

"Our brother, the perv!" Mark, Adam, and Jeff chorused proudly.

Ralphie giggled, "Attention Starfleet Command, we have a problem."

"Problem acknowledged," Robbie sniggered, "state the nature of the problem?"

"Garrett noticed that all four brothers' dickies look exactly the same!" Ralphie cackled.

Blushing bright red, Garrett loudly laughed, "Did not!"

"Yeah, and you're not drooling either, bro!" Adam giggled. "Wipe your chin, you're givin' us a bad rep!"

"No drooling allowed in freezing temperatures," Richie sniggered.

Robbie chuckled, "It'll only make icicles on your chin."

Reyes laughed, "Alden, get us out of here!" A moment later, all fifteen were standing in front of a fire station in the mountain town of Breckenridge, Colorado.

Zippering up his jacket, Ralphie shivered, "It's cold! I'd forgotten what it meant to be so cold."

Also unaccustomed to this, Richie followed suit, zipped up and stuffed his hands in his jacket pockets. Carrol and Terrence not only zipped up, but also pulled the hoods up over their heads. Richie checked with Ralphie, "Turtle status?"

Ralphie nodded and grinned, "Itty-bitty turtle, hiding up by my stomach."

Leading the way into the fire station, Reyes prompted, "Let's meet our new guys and get back to Ewa Beach quickly."

"You guys are such wimps!" Ronnie and Adam chorused as they unzipped their jackets.

"Bite me!" Mark, Jeff and Brian exclaimed as they tried to curl up into their jackets.

Holding the door to let everyone step inside, Ronnie giggled, "Can't bite what's currently all turtled up."

Pausing inside the doors, Reyes grinned, "Try to be nice now, dudes. Let's make believe we don't know anything about hybrid gorillas, ferrets, G-Cats..."

"Badgers, N-gens, wolverines," Alien smiled.

"Don't forget talking to raccoons and other small creatures!" Adam sniggered. "So don't mention Johnny's security detail!"

"Right," Reyes chuckled, "let's wait until we get them home to completely corrupt them." He turned and saw a fireman approaching. Reyes politely said, "Good afternoon, Sir. We're from Clan Short, here to pick up the three boys orphaned this morning."

"You guys got here pretty fast, considering everything that you're doing," the man said as he held out his hand. "I'm Captain George Waters."

Reaching out to shake hands with Captain Waters, Reyes introduced himself and all fourteen of his companions. Once finished, Reyes asked, "Where are the boys, Captain?"

"They just ate and they're helping the guys clean up," George replied. "We're trying to keep their minds occupied."

Reyes nodded and softly said, "We heard the parents were killed this morning, by falling debris, but haven't been told much else. All I know is that one boy is human and the other two are androids, which is why they sent me to lead this mission."

George tilted his head. "That explains why the two boys are trying to help the third one so much. We lost two families that were very active in the community today. I hope that you guys are able to help them with their loss."

Reyes gasped, "Two sets of adults?"

Having lost his own parents and his uncle, Ralphie sighed,

"Please tell us more, so we can help them a little better."

"Chauncey and Fred are from one family," George responded, "and the little one, Brandon, is from another. The fathers of both families were brothers. The pair of families were pillars of the community, always active in helping others. From what we can tell, a piece of debris from something that was shot down took out the west wing of their house, where the parents were at the dining table, while the boys and one of their friends were being home-schooled by a hired tutor in the east wing."

Reyes prompted, "Please lead the way, Captain." Captain Waters led the group back and into a combined kitchen and dining room off the main garage area. Without a word of instruction, the quadruplets and the double sets of twins headed for the three boys.

Seeing quadruple and double-double vision, all three recently orphaned boys came to an abrupt halt; all had dishtowels, one had a pot, one had silverware and the other had a glass. The pot and silverware fell to the floor with loud clangs. The glass slipped from the third boy's hand and he tried to catch it, juggling it several times before finally capturing the wet, slippery glass. Reyes watched that boy's eyes and realized that one was definitely an android, apparently twelve or thirteen years old.

Reyes helplessly chuckled, "Nice catch, dude!" Ronnie began introductions for his brothers, then Mark continued introducing his brothers and Garrett. Richie introduced Carrol and Terrence. Lastly, Reyes introduced himself, Alien, Mini and Colin. The android boy introduced himself as Fred Eckhart, his brother Chauncey and his younger cousin as Brandon Phillips.

"Why are you guys all here?" Brandon wondered.

"Because you guys automatically fall under Clan protection," Colin replied seriously.

"How?" Fred asked.

"Orphaned androids are automatically covered by the A.I. Division," Colin answered.

"And kids who lose their families are automatically covered in Colorado, by request of the head of Colorado C.P.S., as of about two hours ago," Mini added.

Prepared to explain more, Reyes was preempted by Ralphie saying, "Our job is to help you every way we can, give you guys a warm place to sleep, plenty of food, the best of education and recreation, and more friends than you can count."

"It's the same at Vegas and all our divisions," Richie smiled.

"Yeah, you should see the place we got in Des Moines." Mark added. "The Clan runs the entire neighborhood, and everyone looks out for everyone else."

Noticing the curious expressions on both androids' faces, Colin stated "I'll give you guys two names – the two people who won't let you guys or anyone you call family be left behind: Marc Furst and Danny Page."

Gasping, Fred's eyes widened, and then he muttered, "Danny Page? He's real? I thought he was a legend."

"Alive and well in South Carolina," Reyes smiled. "I met Danny, Marc and a bunch of other kewl brothers there on Tuesday. Once you guys are settled, we'll get you there for a visit too, to get you a checkup, Fred. You too, Brandon. One word of warning, if Danny

asks you to get undressed, ask him why first." At the memory, Reyes grinned widely.

Fred nodded and giggled, "I get the feeling you didn't heed that warning."

Reyes nodded and smirked, "He's awesome in lots of ways, but a bit of a perv. Stand still and he'll tickle you."

Chauncey stepped forward, cautiously asking, "We really don't have to leave anyone behind?"

"Course not, dude," Reyes assured.

Checking around the large group and seeing only smiles and nodding heads, Chauncey then knelt down and called, "Com'ere, Rikko." From a blanket in the corner of the room, a Siberian Husky puppy trotted over. Chauncey looked up and smiled, "He was my birthday present last month," then broke down weeping, "The best birthday... and the best birthday present... was the last... with..." Before Chauncey could finish, Fred and Brandon were on their knees consoling him. Soon, the entire group were on the floor too, each sharing Chauncey's pain in his own way.

Reyes assured, "Rikko's your companion, Chauncey. He'll go wherever you do, from now on." Standing and stepping back, Reyes made soft whimpering sounds, then barked. Rikko scrambled out of the pile he was surrounded by and bounced around at Reyes' legs, playfully barking and growling, quite obviously pleased to know Chauncey would be cared for and that he wouldn't be left behind.

Wiping his eyes, Chauncey giggled, "How'd you do that? Rikko's been freaked out all day. First the crash, and the fire, and then all the firemen, and then coming here, to a strange place with all these

strange people, he's been just as bad as me, Fred and Brandon."

Reyes shrugged and grinned, "He knew you were sad and worried about him. You may not believe it, but soon Rikko will have so many new friends that will understand him as much as you." Ralphie giggled at the understatement, which started all the other Clan boys laughing. "Rikko's ready to go," Reyes smiled, and then asked, "How about you three guys; are you ready to see your new home?"

From behind Reyes, Captain Waters said, "They each have two suitcases and a gym bag of clothes and other personal belongings." Waving the three boys forward, Captain Waters led them to the locker room to get their things. Rikko followed the boys. Certain they would need an extra pair of hands for the luggage, Mini followed Rikko.

Once alone, Robbie grinned, "The next time we go some place cold, I'd like a hat too." Before he could say another word, Robbie's other three brothers were rubbing his bald head. Trying to duck away, but failing to get very far as more hands reached for his head, Robbie giggled, "We don't have to go back outside, do we?"

Alien giggled, "Nope, we're kewl. Alden's got us easy, because of our comm-badges. We'll just surround them, have Alden grab three extra, the puppy and the luggage."

Pulling along two of the large suitcases, Captain Waters led the group back to the kitchen and dining room, praising the boys' parents and hoping that they would see each other again soon.

Reyes waited for the boys to enter the room to hear him say, "All three will be able to visit, Sir. They'll have the very best of everything, from education to entertainment." Focusing on Brandon, Chauncey and Fred, Reyes told them, "This isn't goodbye, dudes. It's more like, we'll see you again later."

The quadruplets and double twins went to the three newbies and offered to help with their luggage. In moments, Brandon, Chauncey and Fred had only gym bags and Rikko. Each boy hugged Captain Waters and thanked him, then they stepped back into the group. Reyes shook hands with Captain Waters and reminded, "Anytime you need to contact these guys for anything, just contact Family Clan Short Pacific Rim Division, toll-free. We'll get you hooked up."

Colin nodded and added, "That reminds me, guys; I heard that you were with a friend being schooled. What do you say we go visit your friend before we leave, so you guys can exchange contact info?"

Ralphie kept mum, but heard Richie in his mind saying, *'I hope it's a very short trip and we get inside a warm place quickly.'*

Ralphie sputtered briefly, then silently replied, *'Short, like my shrunk one inch dickie, and warm like the spot between my stomach and my spline, where my dickie is hiding!'*

Rolling his eyes, Ronnie smirked, *'You ain't been cold until you've been shivering in long-johns, jeans, a thermal T-shirt, a sweatshirt and a parka, like in Michigan, when the lake effect snows are blowin' and it's ten below zero during the day.'*

'You guys are both pervs!' Adam giggled mentally. *'What're ya gonna do if we go someplace cold?'*

'Stay home!' Richie and Ralphie telepathically shouted. Since arriving, Carrol had noticed how Richie seemed to fit in perfectly with his brothers. Now Terrence was noticing it too.

'Staying home means no making snow tunnels!' Adam added, ignoring Mark's brotherly glare.

Shaking his head, Robbie zipped up his coat and sent, *'The four*

of you are so outta control, you better zip up, cos we're leaving any moment.'

"Hey Kerry, our brothers think it's cold here!" Adam announced.

"I can fix that... just a second!" Kerry giggled. Alden was heard snickering as well. About ten seconds later, the entire group found themselves in front of a roaring fireplace, with a ten-year-old boy and his parents pointing hair dryers at them set to high heat.

Brandon, Chauncey and Fred cracked up and hurried to their friend, partially to get away from the blasts of heat, but mostly just to greet him and his parents. Giggling, Adam, Mark, Brian, Jeff, Garrett, Robbie and Ronnie surrounded Ralphie and Richie, tickle-torturing them for getting the whole group into this A.I.-plotted situation. Once the hair dryers were turned off and the tickle-torture was completed, Fred introduced their friend, Neil Bailes, and his parents, Hugh and Tanya Bailes.

While the group was occupied with introductions, Reyes asked Colin, "How can we deal with Neil contacting Brandon, Chauncey and Fred?"

Colin answered, "Simple, we make Neil a Clan liaison on detached duty and give him a comm-badge." Holding his hand out, palm up, Colin asked Kerry for Neil's comm-badge. The small device appeared, and when introduced, Colin stepped forward and pinned the comm-badge onto Neil's shirt, explaining that he could now contact any of his three friends just by tapping and calling their name. By the time Colin was done and Reyes' name was called for introductions, Reyes had three comm-badges for Brandon, Chauncey and Fred. The three communications devices were passed out and the four boys scattered to various areas of the house to try them out.

The four friends returned to the living room. Colin told Neil, "You can use the comm-badge for more than contacting your friends. Being a Clan Liaison, you could help kids in trouble too, ya know? If you know of or see a kid being abused, don't ever put yourself at risk. Call me or Reyes for help, okay? We'll put a team together to help and be there with you in no time. We'll sort out the details, and if necessary, deal with the extraction."

Neil giggled and sang, "Sweet!" He then proudly called, "Mom, dad, I'm Clan too!"

Tanya smiled, "That's wonderful, Neil."

Hugh gently warned, "Be sure to use it responsibly, and heed Colin's instructions."

Tanya added, "Look at how many Clan arrived just to pick up three."

"That was just luck and circumstances," Reyes grinned at the two adults. "When the call came in, I was being teased and laughed at, so they all earned the trip."

Before Reyes finished speaking, his comm-badge chirped and Drew called, "Reyes?"

Tapping his comm-badge and stepping back from the group, Reyes replied, "Here, Drew. What's up?"

Drew asked, "What're you doin', bro?"

"I'm wrapping up my first rescue operation," Reyes answered.

Drew chuckled, "Good. I was afraid of dumping a task on you that you hadn't done before. I've got three more here that I'd like you

to pick up and bring home."

Colin interjected, "I'll bring this bunch back to Ewa Beach, bro. We'll meet you there."

Reyes smiled, "Kewl. I'll be right there, Drew."

"Thanks, Reyes," Drew responded, "I'll see you soon. Drew out."

Returning his attention to Neil, Hugh and Tanya, Reyes sighed, "It was nice meeting you, but duty calls and I've got to be going."

Offering his hand to Reyes, Hugh smiled, "Thanks so much for coming to get the boys. When Neil told us what had happened, we were concerned. Now we know they'll be safe and cared for."

Shaking hands with Mister Bailes, Reyes smiled, "That's what we do best. I expect I'll be seeing Neil again in Ewa Beach soon enough."

"You bet!" Neil chimed.

"Maybe even this weekend," Chauncey giggled.

Locking eyes with Colin again, Reyes softly assured, "I'll see you guys in a few minutes." Colin nodded. Reyes tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Alden, take me to where Drew is, please?" The group waved as Reyes disappeared from the living room into the Wells Fargo Arena, in Des Moines, Iowa. Immediately upon arrival, Reyes eyes widened at the many thousands of refugees scattered around the arena. He excitedly gasped, "Holy crap!"

Corey, Drew, John and Stephen briefly turned in their seats and greeted Reyes. Drew pointed at the three boys seated not far away,

saying, "Those three lost their parents in Washington, D.C. this morning. They know each other and chose to stay together. I'll be over in a minute, Reyes."

Nodding, Reyes walked over to meet the three boys. He introduced himself, then asked their names. The oldest, a dirty-blond teenager with striking light gray eyes, stood and said, "My name's Christopher Stokley. Call me Chris." He then pointed at the next boy, a freckle-faced, red-haired pre-teen and introduced, "This is Pat, Patrick O'Hara." Chris gestured to the next younger boy, introducing, "And this is Raphael Montigua, we call him Rafe."

Drew stepped beside Reyes and warmly smiled, "Reyes will get you dudes to our base in Ewa Beach, Oahu. He'll show you around, feed you, get you clothes and all the other stuff you'll need. Like Corey said earlier, you guys can choose dorm rooms or sleep with us in our nest until you feel more comfortable." Turning to Reyes, Drew sighed, "Lots of kids lost parents and homes. Every one of 'em are being asked who they'd like to stay with, and then where they'd like to live, then we get them to a Clan Division. I wouldn't be surprised if I called you again in another few hours, Reyes. We'll probably come back home with a couple more too."

Reyes checked with Chris, Patrick and Raphael. "How're you guys feeling after everything that's happened?"

Chris shrugged, "Totally blown away. Half our apartment building was destroyed during the attack. Just getting downstairs and out was a challenge, to say the least."

Patrick nodded and softly mumbled, "Everything's changed. I guess I'm too confused to even remember how we got out of the city and here."

Beginning to cry, Raphael sobbed, "I had parents and an older brother last night. Today..."

Kneeling down before the youngest of the three, Reyes opened his arms. Raphael leaned forward and embraced Reyes, letting the tears flow freely.

Wiping his eyes, Chris sighed, "Rafe's brother, Jay, was a classmate and my b-best friend."

"We'll take care of you now," Reyes calmly assured. Looking at both of the other boys who were bravely holding back their own tears, Reyes promised, "Tonight you'll have about two hundred brothers and sisters, warm beds and good food. I'll get you to our doctors, so they can make sure everything's kewl. I'll introduce you to our child psychologist too, so you can talk to him about everything."

Patrick prompted, "Get us out of here, please? This place, and all these people, it's freaky and making matters worse."

Nodding at Patrick, Reyes gently checked with Raphael, "Are you ready to go to your new home?" Taking Reyes' hand and then Patrick's hand, Raphael pulled back and nodded.

Chris took Patrick's other hand and smiled, "Thanks for everything, Drew."

"No sweat," Drew smiled, "I'll see you three in a couple o' hours. Reyes will take care of you until then."

"Got 'em covered," Reyes assured Drew. He then called, "Alden, take me and our three new Rimmers home, to the CIC dining room."

Upon arrival at the Ewa Beach dining room, Chris incredulously

snickered, "What did you just call us?"

Reyes grinned, "Drew didn't tell you? This is Clan Short Pacific Rim Division, therefore we're all Rimmers." Chris lost it and cracked up laughing. Bouncing his eyebrows, Reyes giggled, "Who's hungry?" Letting go of Patrick, Chris grabbed his belly and roared laughing.

Uncertainly, Patrick grinned at Chris and then Raphael.

Wiping his eyes, Raphael looked up at Chris and teased, "So umm... you and Jay never..."

"Rafe!" Chris hollered.

"What?" Raphael giggled, "Like I didn't know Jay was your boyfriend. Thin walls in that apartment."

Covering his blushing face with both hands, Chris screamed, "Oh God!"

Patrick sniggered, "Maybe it's all working out for the best. I like boys too, but never could o' told anyone before."

"There you are," Colin said as he led the Colorado group, the quadruplets and the double twins into the dining room. All the Clan members had changed out of winter clothes and back into summer clothes.

"We arrived at the pools, thinking you'd be there," Alien stated.

Mini nodded, "When we didn't see you, we came here."

Reyes shrugged, "It's close enough to lunch time. I figured, we'll eat and then I'll get these three newbies to the store."

Richie noticed Ralphie seemed a little out of it, and wondered,

"What's wrong with you?"

Ralphie blushed and sharply shushed his brother.

Reyes first introduced Chris, Patrick and Raphael to Brandon, Chauncey and Fred. Quadruplet and double twin thoughts were silently flying while Reyes continued down the line from Carrol, Terrence, Colin, Alien and Mini to Adam, Mark, Brian and Jeff, and lastly to Ronnie, Robbie, Richie and Ralphie. While all the boys shook hands or waved to each other, everything suddenly stopped when Patrick locked eyes with Ralphie and blushed, "Hi."

Uncharacteristically, Ralphie squeaked, "Hi."

Reyes and Colin led the newbies to the kitchen chow line. Patrick reluctantly followed, but looked back over his shoulder to see if Ralphie was still watching. For some reason, Patrick felt like he had met or seen Ralphie before, but couldn't understand why.

Giggling began with Ronnie and Adam and progressed around to Garrett, Mark, Robbie, Richie, Brian and Jeff. Eight pairs of hands led star-struck Ralphie to a nearby table and sat him down before he wobbled and fell down. The same eight voices sang, "Ralphie's got a boyfriend!"

Blushing and suddenly feeling very warm, Ralphie giggled, "Oh my God, if only. Did you see his eyes? And freckles too? Cuteness overload! The next time he talks to me, I'm a goner."

Richie grinned, "I noticed that none of those three had suitcases, just the clothes on their backs."

Ronnie nodded, "We might have to let Ralphie join them in the store."

"Who knows, maybe Patrick will need help in the changing rooms," Robbie joked.

Garrett chuckled, "It's pretty obvious he likes you too, Ralphie."

Playing along, Ralphie fanned his face with one hand and wiped sweat from his forehead with the other. The whole group fell about each other, laughing hysterically.

Back at Wells Fargo Arena, John, Stephen, Drew and Corey were processing refugees as quickly as possible. Reuniting families was again made easier by the Clan A.I.s, who could correlate incoming data, then make that information available on PADDs and via sub-vocals. For almost three hours, people moved forward through lines to tables where Clan representatives sat, doing their very best to get everyone reunited, processed and sent off to various destination refugee housing facilities.

From the back of the line formed before Corey's and Drew's table, there was a commotion. A small child began crying and an older woman began swearing. Moving forward through the line was a very large man, a woman and a young girl. Corey got up to discover what the problem was. Following Corey were his personal security, Baakir and Chuck. Corey walked back through the line, but was stopped by the fat man, who demanded to be processed immediately.

The woman comforting the crying child hollered, "That fat sweaty putz knocked my son over and down."

"I'm an agent for the United States Secretary of Agriculture," the fat man grumbled.

The woman next to the fat man screamed obscenities at the other woman, then hollered at Corey, "My husband is Under-Secretary of Agriculture for Pork Futures! We've been waiting for hours, and will

not be herded with the common people..."

"I demand to see your superior," the fat man interrupted, and then roughly took hold of Corey's shoulder.

Baakir grabbed the man's arm and forcibly removed it from Corey, growling, "Porkie, you're under arrest. This boy is a Clan Short leader. All these other people are patiently waiting in line, but you and your wife seem to think you're better than everyone else." Porkie struggled to get free of the gorilla. Glaring at the obnoxious man, Baakir yanked and dislocated the man's arm at the shoulder. The man screamed in pain. Baakir told Corey, "I'll be right back, Cor." Corey only nodded and Baakir disappeared with Porkie, his bitch of a wife and the girl that was with them. The nearby crowd erupted in applause, cheers, and laughter.

Corey giggled, then loudly laughed, "He's the Under-Secretary of Agriculture for Pork Futures, so I guess that makes him pulled pork now!" Others in the lines around him chuckled and laughed. He went back to check on the small boy that had been knocked down. Seeing that the boy was only scared, his mother thanked Corey. Corey had Alden deliver a chocolate ice cream cone, which he handed over to the boy, who abruptly stopped crying and concentrated on his treat. Corey returned to the table and sat beside his softly sniggering husband. "Porkie" was the butt of many jokes in nearby lines for quite a while.

Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike entered the CIC dining room with much of the Rimmer Clan, just as Reyes was preparing to take Chris, Patrick and Raphael to the basement store. Once he had explained about the two rescues he had done, Reyes introduced his dads, Prez and Keith to the six newbies. He then took the three that needed clothes to the store. Wanting time together, Ronnie and Garrett volunteered to help the newbies. They pulled Ralphie along to get to

know Patrick better.

At the F.Y.S. building, Jennifer Hundser had finished another interview with an Ex-C.P.S. employee. Since her husband was still busy on the phone, she went to get Anna Seibert and Bill Seaver, so they could all have lunch together. Bill and Charles had finished their interview with Roy Combs, who would fill the position of Facilities Manager at Ewa Beach.

When the adults walked into the dining room at the CIC, around half past noon, none of the Core Rimmers except Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick were there. The Queen and young Prince Kaimi were there. Soon after the parents ordered their mid-day meals and sat down to eat, they were very surprised when King Aalona walked in with Sean, Troy, Logan Busch, Colin Powell and six secret service agents. Troy and Sean left the V.I.P.'s at the kitchen and went directly toward the Command Center. They had to arrange for Uncle Colin's Inauguration and those that would be attending the occasion on base.

Prez stood to greet the King and Uncle Colin, but his robe slipped open again. Giggling and shaking his head, Keith pulled Prez back down to his padded chair, joking, "I'm really starting to wonder, baby. Are you that horny? Let me deal with the V.I.P.s."

Relenting, Prez nodded and teased, "King Aalona is in his thirties and Uncle Colin is sixty-something. Neither could keep up with you or me."

Landing a quick kiss on his husband's cheek, Keith whispered, "You got that right, sex machine." He then stood and went towards the kitchen, leaving Prez at the table with their sons. Keith stopped by the parents' tables to let them know that Colin Powell wanted to meet them.

Jen asked, "When did you get home with Preston?"

"A little before five this morning," Keith answered, and then hurried to the kitchen to Uncle Colin and King Aalona. Mike and Derrick quickly told their boys they were taking some time alone at their townhouse. Jonah was glad to hear it and promised he would watch over his brothers and Kaimi. Richie, Geoff and Lenny were also with Kaimi and seemed perfectly happy. King Aalona went to the table where his wife and son were sitting. When Prez saw Keith return to the dining room from the kitchen with Uncle Colin, he stood and properly closed his robe, gathered his sons, and then went to get his husband the heck out of there. Once finished introducing all the parents to Uncle Colin and Mister Rice, Keith went with Prez and their sons, intending to go their townhouse.

Kekoa was coming toward the dining room as Prez, Keith and their sons were walking out. Kekoa formally called, "Director O'Brian, may I have a few minutes?"

"Sure," Prez answered, but held up his index finger to signal a pause, then told Keith, "I'll be right there, babe. Take our kids home and I'll meet you."

Keith started to walk away with his sons. Prez returned to Kekoa, stepped off the walkway to the grass and prompted, "Your report, Colonel?"

Kekoa said, "Sir, I understand the reasons why you ordered us all to separate last night, but that put me in a very difficult position. I report to you and to General Casey. It is also my job to make certain you are protected at all times. If Chris, your enhanced human security, had been with you, then you wouldn't have been injured."

"I know where you're heading," Prez quickly interjected, and

then asked, "Let me say a few things, please?"

"Yes Sir," Kekoa replied.

Prez grinned, "At ease, Kekoa." Kekoa went to parade rest. Prez said, "I screwed up. I knew Jimmy was here and could've contacted him, but simply thought more about the people trapped and didn't consider that at all. Keith already gave me hell over it. Thanks to rumors of my burns, I had to prove to the kids that I'm fine earlier today." Prez paused and sighed, "We're both in the same shitty situation. If any of your troops, you or anyone had got hurt last night, I'd be far more disturbed than I am now, that's for sure. I'm glad I was the worst injury and not anyone else."

Kekoa nodded, saying, "I can understand that, but at the same time, it's our job to be the ones who get hurt. I feel I should've been more forceful. Chris, Matthew and Gamba are all pretty annoyed with themselves too."

Prez smirked, "I'll take care of them. Keith and I were planning on spending some time off with our security teams any way. Now, let's play something out here. If each of the six Core Rimmers had kept their enhanced security with them at all times, then what?"

"Chris might've remembered Jimmy," Kekoa offered. "And Chris could've run faster and healed quicker than you."

"But I'd still feel like shit for allowing him to get hurt," Prez reminded. "And it would've taken longer to rescue about twenty people. Multiply that twenty by six for each Core Rimmer, and that's a hundred and twenty people that may or may not have been rescued."

Kekoa sighed, "Permission to speak freely, Sir?"

"You always have that with me, Kekoa."

"Given what we now know regarding the H.L.F., you and all of the Core Rimmers were in danger last night, not only from the fire, but also from enemy gun fire as well. For all we knew, there might have been H.L.F. snipers there. When I reported for duty, you told me that more dangerous rescue operations would rely entirely upon the UNIT detachment. We did not follow that protocol last night. We're all damned lucky only your butt and feet were burned. You and all the Core Rimmers might've been killed. Also, General Casey is eventually going to ream me a new asshole for allowing events to transpire as they did."

Prez groaned, then sighed, "Understood. I hadn't thought of that, but I will personally contact Adam. Let's treat this as a learning experience, from a new division director and a new division detachment commander. If Adam's gonna ream you a new one, then I should be there too, for the same chewing out." Finishing with a cute smile and tilt of his head, Prez waited for more to be said.

Kekoa sputtered, then laughed, "Yup, rimmers, I get it," and walked away as Prez started laughing too.

Prez bellowed, "You knew we called ourselves 'Rimmers'. That's why you accepted the assignment, isn't it?"

Never breaking his stride, Kekoa only briefly turned his head and sniggered, "Not goin' there, Prez."

Down in the basement store, Ronnie and Garrett maneuvered to get Ralphie separated, alone with Patrick. Garrett and Ronnie helped Chris and Rafe get clothing and everything else they needed at the store. Ralphie's brothers and new friends had helped get him over his initial awe, so he was ready to make the best impression possible.

With his modeling experience, Ralphie went right to work helping Patrick. Patrick picked up a package of three white BVD briefs. Since Patrick had pale, freckled skin, red hair and dark gray eyes, Ralphie picked up a package of four multi-colored FTL briefs. Showing them to Patrick, Ralphie slyly suggested, "These would look really good on you, I think."

"Umm..." Patrick blushed and stammered, "I've n-never worn... colored b-briefs b-before."

Rather than focus on Patrick, Ralphie instead pointed at the package, explaining, "Navy blue, sky blue and especially gray would look kewl though. When we get to boardies, I'll concentrate on those same colors, especially gray."

Patrick wondered, "Why is gray so kewl?"

"It would match your eyes," Ralphie softly said, and grinned.

Breaking into giggles and another blush, Patrick turned away for a moment or two, then concentrated on the safer white sports socks. Without facing Ralphie, he then giggled, "Get two packages like that."

Ralphie enthusiastically sang, "Sweet!" and grabbed another package, with black, blue and gray briefs. He dropped both packages into the cart. Ralphie gently called, "Patrick?"

With three packages of socks in his hands, Patrick hummed curiously, and then turned to quickly toss them in his cart.

Ralphie cautiously asked, "Am I embarrassing you? I don't mean to, ya know?"

Patrick shrugged, "I know. I can't help it. I never thought... like the way we met before... and that you... or that I..." Flustered, Patrick

huffed, "I'm not saying or doing much right."

"Don't worry about it."

"I can't help that either, because I am worried, and scared, and happy, and really confused."

Gesturing to boys' pajamas, Ralphie seriously said, "So am I. I just wanna get to know you better, after what happened up in the dining room and all."

Patrick stammered, "How're you... ya know, dealing with it so easy?"

Ralphie smiled, "Does it seem this is easy? It's really not, but neither was getting left alone for a week by my manager. It wasn't easy learning I had one brother, that became two and then three. And the last brother, Robbie, brought along his parents too, so suddenly we're not really orphans any more, we've got parents by default too. I guess I always had to roll with the flow on photo shoots, so I do that pretty easily. I'm really trying to roll with the flow now too, with you."

"I don't mean to make it rough."

"You're not," Ralphie giggled, "I am!"

Patrick smiled, "How're you making it any more rough? Sorry, I don't see that."

Stepping closer to Patrick, so he could speak more softly, Ralphie sighed, "Every instinct tells me that I should drop to my knees and beg you to like me. I know that's not how it works, but that's really what I want to do."

Wrapping his hands behind his head and cradling his skull with his arms in the cutest way, Patrick giggled, "That's what I was trying to say before. You and all your brothers are way cute, but you, your eyes locked on mine and we... it must've seemed really goofy."

Ralphie shrugged and smiled, "So what if it seemed goofy." Getting down on his knees, Ralphie looked up, giggling, "Ple-e-ease say you like me?"

Dropping his arms, Patrick cracked up. Noticing Reyes, Chris, Rafe, Garrett and Ronnie looking at them, Patrick laughed, "Everybody's watchin', you nutcase! Stand up!"

"Not until you say you like me," Ralphie stubbornly cackled.

"Oh JEEZ!" Patrick laughed. Still giggling, he leaned over and helped Ralphie stand, playfully reminding, "I said you're cute. It sort o' follows that I like you." The group of boys many meters away began clapping and cheering.

Holding Patrick's arms, Ralphie smiled, "Kewl, 'cos I think you're totally awesome, cute and cuddly too."

Patrick sniggered, "Before we start cuddling, we really should know each other."

"Which is what I was trying to do," Ralphie smiled. "I used to model clothes, from underwear to suits and everything in between. I want my boyfriend lookin' his very best, all the time."

Now knowing why he had felt like he knew Ralphie from somewhere, Patrick softly joked, "So, even though I might be a mass murderer, you still want to be my boyfriend?"

Not believing it, Ralphie smirked, "So you broke a few hearts.

Just let me be your friend."

Nodding, Patrick assured, "We are. And we're falling way behind the other guys."

"Your wish is my command," Ralphie smiled, and took hold of the cart. Before going too far, Ralphie confirmed, "You don't wear pajamas?"

Patrick shrugged, "Only during the winters in D.C., when it was really cold." In seconds they were in the footwear department.

Ralphie nodded, "It don't get very cold here. I haven't seen it fall below sixty-five degrees in a week."

Softly talking about their pasts while selecting new sneakers and sandals, Patrick admitted that he had seen some modeling photos of Ralphie. Patrick's apartment home was within Washington, D.C.'s city limits. He had woke to the sounds of yelling outside. After trying to ignore it for a while, he got up and went to look out the kitchen and dining room windows to see what was going on. Then there was a loud explosion, crashing and rattling sounds. He ran back down the hall to his bedroom, but there wasn't much of a hallway or any rooms there any more. His parents' bedroom was also gone, seven stories down in a heap of rubble on the ground.

Seeing Patrick blinking fast, Ralphie consoled him. Patrick sighed, "My folks weren't the greatest, but they weren't the worst either. They worked all the time. Dad did road work and mom worked shifts at a restaurant. I rarely got to see them for more than an occasional breakfast or dinner. I guess I still don't know how to feel about them or anything that happened all day today."

Ralphie softly assured, "When you're ready, I'll listen. Somehow, I'll find a way to help get everything perfect." Believing his life could

make a turn for the better, Patrick nodded, stepped back and wiped his eyes.

Soon, they were collecting board shorts, cargo shorts and Speedos. Patrick told Ralphie, "Don't get anything green, it makes me look like a Christmas tree."

"No greens, check," Ralphie confirmed. Rifling through shirt racks, Ralphie selected seven T-shirts and three button-down sport shirts, leaving Patrick with nothing to do except approve or refuse Ralphie's selections, and push the cart forward through the store.

At the jeans area, Patrick got to stand like a mannequin while Ralphie checked his waist and inseam measurements. Breaking into giggles, because Ralphie was once again on his knees before him and some of the other guys saw, Patrick told Ralphie, "If this is what having a boyfriend is like, I'm gonna be so spoiled."

"Tell ya what," Ralphie smiled, "you could pick out some clothes for me? I've got plenty of Speedos and briefs, so anything else is kewl." Following Patrick back to the shirts, Ralphie found himself telling Patrick about the base facilities, the Core Rimmers, his brothers, new parents and the new townhome they lived in.

Patrick held up a Heineken Beer T-shirt against Ralphie's shoulders. Since they were so close, Patrick left his hands resting on Ralphie's shoulders, nervously whispering, "I never had a boyfriend before."

"Me neither," Ralphie softly assured.

"I know I like other boys, but don't know much else. So I know for sure and don't chance breaking your heart, would you kiss me?"

Shocked silent, Ralphie slowly nodded. He carefully held

Patrick between his hips and ribs, leaned forward and gently kissed his new boyfriend. It wasn't a baby kiss nor was it a deep French kiss, but it was held long enough for both to know what soft lips felt and tasted like. Pulling back only a few inches, Ralphie asked, "Was that okay?"

Locking eyes with Ralphie's brown eyes, Patrick smiled, "More than okay. That was really nice."

"You kissin' me back made it great," Ralphie giggled.

Carrying a Clan Short poncho and pulling a suitcase, Reyes slowly approached, saying, "Chris and Rafe are checkin' out and loading up suitcases." Slinging the poncho onto Patrick's cart, Reyes prompted, "Try this on when you get a chance, Pat." He then slid the suitcase under the cart, telling Pat and Ralphie, "I'll finish up with the others, transport them out of here, then come back to help you two dudes."

Patrick smiled, "Thanks, Reyes."

"We won't be too much longer," Ralphie assured. Turning to Patrick, Ralphie scowled, "I don't like the idea of you being at the dorm, sharing a room with another guy."

Patrick nodded, then asked Reyes, "Please tell Rafe he's my roommate at the dorm?"

Reyes smiled, "I will, but he and Chris want to check out the nest tonight. That's where a lot of kids and Core Rimmers sleep. Rafe's been telling Chris that he needs to move past Jay and find a boyfriend too. Chris doesn't know how fast that might happen; he only wants to get used to the place and meet everyone."

Patrick nodded, "Okay, tonight I'll be crashing in the nest too

then." Ralphie pasted on a dramatic frown. Patrick giggled, "Just for tonight. I get the feeling I'll be spending a lot of nights with you, or you'll be with me."

"I'll be back in a couple o' minutes," Reyes chuckled.

Stepping back from Ralphie, dropping the Heineken T-shirt into his cart, and then picking up the poncho, Patrick smiled, "We may even be close to done, ya never can tell." Realizing he would be completely alone with Patrick for a while, Ralphie widely smiled.

Walking away again, Reyes helplessly laughed.

* * * * *

Before beginning his lunch, Colin Powell smiled and glanced around the dining room. Returning his attention to the Hundserts, he remarked, "They're so much like any other kids, it's hard to believe their pasts."

Jen nodded and explained, "Some just arrived yesterday and are still generally afraid of adults. All are basically good kids. They've been taught to do the right things, just for the wrong reasons. If the pattern holds, they'll be much better by Sunday evening."

Covering his mouth with a napkin because he was eating, Colin asked, "How so quickly?"

Jim smiled, "Mostly by watching and emulating the other kids. A few have more serious issues and see our child psychologist. Like any other child, what they fear most is rejection from their peers or failure."

Lanna Seaver offered, "About twenty of the original eighty-seven were ready to start fresh Saturday night and Sunday. It started

with our sons adopting Saturday night."

Mister Rice asked, "You allowed your boys to adopt?" and all the adults began chuckling.

Rob Gibbons answered, "We allowed nothing. As Clan Leadership, they're Starfleet ensigns and considered adults. As of Wednesday, they're all Starfleet Lieutenants. I must admit, I didn't expect it to be this easy. All our boys are doing great jobs parenting, even John and Stephen, the youngest of them."

Jim Hundser reminded, "Two hundred years ago, it was considered normal for teens to marry and have children. By the time our generation had arrived, a slew of requirements were added and simple economics had changed that perception."

Anna Seibert added, "Your generation, Mister Powell, had many more young parents than ours. With all the requirements for education, and two working parents, such as there are today, why is it that so many children are getting in trouble with the law? Or, like many of these kids, winding up cared for by perverts or sadists? There is something fundamentally wrong with our economics, and with our perceptions of what constitutes an adult."

"I agree," Colin said. "If there's one thing I could change, it would be economics. Two parents working eight- to twelve-hour days leaves no time for the most important task, raising our children the right way. The trouble is, many parents don't understand what constitutes the 'right way'."

Jen said, "It takes a village. Grandparents available, aunts and uncles, parents of friends; adults working together to make our children responsible and capable young people, without fear of rejection, without fear of failure. Look at what our boys and

thousands of others did around the world in the last day. Many of the Clan and UNIT boys have their own fears and troubles, yet they performed admirably under the worst case scenarios."

"They're a part of something bigger than themselves," Bill Seaver offered. "In my own son's case, for instance, before he was made a Clan Leader, he was responsible for stage lighting while his partner ran the band's sound system. Drew was asked to help his brother as a sound engineer. He wanted to do a good job. Corey was asked to run the lights. Drew wanted Corey with him. It's the simple desire to do a good job for those you care about that makes the difference. That's what all the boys did last night, all around the world; they wanted to do a good job and make a difference."

Lanna Seaver grinned, "Mister Powell, what would you say if I told you two six-year-old boys were part of this division's Intel team."

Raising his eyebrows, Colin said, "Twenty minutes ago, I might've said, they're too young."

"And a week ago, I would've agreed," Lanna admitted. She then explained, "They are being trained, and to make me feel more comfortable, their duties are limited. Two six-year-old boys, recent orphans themselves, wanted to be part of the team. How could I deny them the opportunity to grow, learn and be part of the bigger team?"

Jen said, "Lanna worries about them, of course. We all worry about our sons. They've taken on a lot of responsibilities and performed wonderfully for a week. Sean and Troy are basically in charge today. Other members are off performing other duties to help with refugee relocation."

Jim added, "Our boys are still chipping in to help, but they are mindful of what we've said. If I had my druthers, they'd all be at the

beach, surfing and having a good time with very few responsibilities. Given world events, however, that is not reasonable. Two cannot perform the jobs of twelve without burning out or getting frustrated."

Colin nodded, saying, "King Aalona and I already had a similar conversation. He is very impressed with Vulcan culture and logic. He feels your boys saved him and his family from a very unpleasant demise. Several State Governors are equally impressed and making alterations to their laws.

"Once my plane was airborne, we searched for a safe place to land and refuel. Diplomatic contact with Vulcan led us here. I am also impressed with the reception my entourage has received. I have had reason to thank the boys several times. And what do I get in return? Not cocky attitudes, but modest thanks. Even Judy Faris responded similarly.

"Whenever I am out of the country, I'm locked in a vicious circle; moving from a plane to a car to a room, to a car, to a meeting, to a car and back to a room. Yet here, I am considered safe enough to leave our spacious accommodations and join you for a meal." Colin finished his glass of iced tea then smiled, "Thank you. Our jobs are to serve. In the United States, that is taken for granted. In my travels, I have found it is not so in other countries."

Jim asked, "If I may, I can't help wondering, what is the status world-wide?"

Colin sighed, "We're in a bad way. Many governments have lost vast numbers of public servants. Queen Elizabeth is alive and well, however President Bush was not able to get out of Washington safely. The Capitol Building has been demolished. We have great challenges ahead of us, but we will persevere. As always, we will survive and become stronger for our sacrifices." Colin then nodded at Gordon

Rice and both men stood, as did the other secret service agents nearby. They took their leave of the other adults, then carried their trays to the kitchen dishwasher.

Some rescued Rimmer kids that had finished their lunches were in the adjacent CIC rec room. After briefly checking the rec room, Colin Powell, Mister Rice and the other secret servicemen left the CIC and began a brief tour of the base. They followed another group of kids toward the pools, walked around the indoor rec center, between the soccer field and basketball courts, between the dorms and single family homes, then back towards the condominiums. Everywhere the group of men walked, they saw groups of kids acting like well behaved, friendly and "normal" kids.

Sitting with the King, Queen and young Prince were Jonah, Dillon, Randy, Geoff and Lenny. Kaimi had been having the time of his life at Ewa Beach and had made five new friends that morning. Kaimi was so taken with everything he had experienced that he begged his parents to let him come back and attend school with his friends. "We will see. This must be discussed with Director O'Brian," King Aalona replied.

Kaimi dramatically pouted, "I like it here. It's much nicer than my school."

King Aalona nodded, "I agree, but we must check with Director O'Brian. That is only considerate."

Geoff quickly said, "That's okay, Kai. Unca Prez will say yes. I know it."

Dillon looked up at Queen Adamina, saying, "We have nice new schools here. My Daddy and Poppa says we're gonna have tests on Monday. That way, kids that are as smart as each other get grouped

together, no matter how old they are."

Queen Adamina confirmed, "You are Derrick's and Mike's boy?"

Dillon proudly nodded, smiled and hummed affirmatively. Geoff reminded, "Drew's mine and Lenny's Daddy, and Corey's our Pop."

Turning to Kaimi, Queen Adamina assured, "Your father and I will speak with Director O'Brian. We also need to ensure the quality of the school. If it meets our requirements and Director O'Brian approves, you may attend school here to be with your friends."

"Thank you, Momma," Kaimi cheered. He then checked with his friends, "Let's go out and play." In seconds, all five boys were hurrying out of the CIC.

Finished with their lunch, Sean and Troy went into the Command Center. In San Francisco, it was almost four in the afternoon and the battle for Starfleet Headquarters was won. Clan-wide, alert conditions were lowered. At the Rapid Response Base medical facility, a pair of girls had lost their parents, victims of burns suffered at the Hyatt Regency. Their names were Helen and Mary Donofrio. Helen was ten years old and her sister Mary was eight. Since he and Sean couldn't leave the base, Troy went back to the dining room to ask Mrs. Hundser if she could retrieve the latest pair of recent orphans.

Since there were a few more interviews to complete, Jen asked, "Anna, could you take care of this recovery?"

Excited at the opportunity, Anna brightly smiled, "Of course. I'll bring my girls along to help keep them calm." She tapped her comm-badge to call for her security team to meet her by the dining room doors, and then went to gather her three girls.

Back at the Wells Fargo Arena, it was dinner time. Additional tables had been teleported between lines of refugees containing food and drink for the masses, so they could eat and not lose their places in line. A man wearing a tattered pin-stripe suit approached the table where John and Stephen were processing a small family. Without excusing himself, the man in the suit asked John, "Where's your permit to distribute food?"

Blinking uncertainly at the man, John telepathically got a brief impression that this man had authority to ask the question. Beginning a full telepathic scan, John innocently asked, "What's your name and job?"

"My name is Javier Kukla, and I work for the Food and Drug Administration," the man replied.

"Why?" John prodded.

Mister Kukla sourly wondered, "What kind of question is that?"

Lucky moved around the table and stopped beside the man. John grinned, "You didn't need the job you had, other than to make bad decisions that lined your pockets. You've accepted large amounts of cash from Keka Pharmaceuticals, to prematurely release drugs to the American public, drugs that you knew were dangerous to kids. You've been telepathically scanned by a Vulcan-trained telepath, you greedy shit, and are under arrest." Lucky grabbed the man and evilly chuckled. Stephen lost it and howled laughing. From the next table over, Corey and Drew softly snickered. John laughed, "Watch how fast we get those drugs off the market and find the jack-off at Keka responsible. Ask some prisoners at the moon you'll be serving time at where their permits are, you jerk. Had you just kept quiet and accepted the food we're graciously providing, I wouldn't have had the chance or reason to scan you. Your guilt has been determined. See ya

later!"

Lucky sniggered, "I'll be right back, Johnny-boy," and disappeared with Mr. Kukla.

Around one-thirty that afternoon, Dee, Gage, Richie and Sammy decided to leave their dad and pop to go to the pool. With little else to keep them busy, Prez and Keith chose to head to the Command Center to relieve Sean and Troy, so the latter two could take some time off during the afternoon after a busy morning. Since Prez was burned and really needed to rest, Sean and Troy agreed to take only a few hours off. They would then return to the Command Center, so Prez could take a break.

Around the same time, Derrick, Mike and their security teams went with King Aalona to his palace. The Palace lawn and trees were in bad shape. The main entry doors were destroyed. Inside though, only the immediate area by the main entry foyer was in need of repairs. Half a dozen of the King's uninjured staff rushed to the foyer to greet him. King Aalona's staff had called to have the doors replaced, but were uncertain about Him returning to his palace that night. The King told his staff that he would remain at Ewa Beach for a few days then went to gather suitcases, fill them with clothes and other personal affects.

On the way, Derrick said, "Majesty, if I may?" When King Aalona nodded, Derrick called Alden to check on condo availability. Derrick then told King Aalona, "We have two five-bedroom condos available in building 'B', beside where Mister Powell and his party are staying. In building 'C', where Mister Powell is staying, there are still six two-bedroom units available."

"The two bedroom units are very large, Sire. That's where Troy and his mom live. We could easily keep you safe," Mike added. "All

you would need to choose is which condo you prefer, Majesty."

King Aalona sighed then forced a small smile. "Thank you, boys. I will consider the choices while visiting my wounded palace guards and other servants."

Derrick said, "Anything you need, Sire." He then called Alden to have the Royals' suitcases transported to Ewa Beach, and their group transported to the Rapid Response Base medical facility. All twenty of King Aalona's palace guards had been injured and two had died from their wounds.

The King's face saddened for a minute, but then became very stern. Stepping away from the receptionist's desk, King Aalona turned to Derrick and Mike. "This will never happen again," King Aalona firmly said. "Before I return to the palace, I would insist upon having my entire palace shielded." The King started walking to go visit his men.

Following the King, Derrick nodded and softly assured, "We'll make that happen for you, Sire."

Mike immediately tapped his comm-badge and called Prez. With Keith nearby in the Command Center, Prez said, "What's up, dude." Mike relayed the King's wishes to Prez, adding that two palace guards had been killed during the fire-fight. "No problem," Prez said, "I'll make the request from Starfleet now. Until it's installed, The Royal Family can stay with us."

Mike informed Prez, "That topic's already been discussed. Derrick and I will show the King several available condo units and let Him choose where He would like to be."

King Aalona asked, "Director O'Brian, how long before the

shielding is operational?"

Prez replied, "I won't know until I make the request, Majesty. Given world events, it might take a while, but I will do everything in my power to have it expedited. I can almost guarantee you'll be back at your Palace by Monday evening. If I have to call Cory Short to make that happen, then I will. Is that acceptable?"

"Yes," King Aalona answered. "You and your team have been more than kind. Kaimi has grown to enjoy being on base with other children. Thank you, Director O'Brian."

Prez smiled and assured, "However we can help, Majesty, let Derrick or Mike know. What they may not be able to accomplish, I can. O'Brian out."

Facing the King, Derrick asked, "Is there anything else we can do, Majesty?"

The King nodded, "I would like to stop at a gift shop or florist to get live plants for my wounded men." King Aalona then spent the next hour going from room to room, visiting his wounded palace guards.

Returning to the medical facility's main entry, where they had arrived, they stopped at the gift shop. King Aalona arranged for flowering plants to be delivered to each of his palace guards and two additional much larger plants to be delivered to the families of the deceased. He then filled out cards to be attached to all the plants. The families of the deceased guards were informed that they would not have to worry about funeral arrangements, The King would take care of that for them. King Aalona then asked to be shown the available condominiums, so he could prepare the funerals as promised. Assuming the King would want accommodations similar to Mister

Powell, Derrick had Alden transport the group to condo building 'B', tenth floor.

King Aalona hummed for a few seconds, then said, "This is much too large for my small family and a temporary stay. Might I suggest a two-bedroom unit in the adjacent building, where Mister Powell already has security stationed? Although we know we are safe, my wife and son might feel more secure after last night."

Derrick nodded, "I thought you might rather less traffic. That building will be very busy by later tonight, Sire."

The King nodded, "That will not be a problem. We would not be there often and would have our main meals at the base dining room. The smaller unit will be acceptable."

As they started walking towards the doors and elevator, Mike checked with Alden to confirm which two-bedroom units in building 'C' were available.

Alden answered, "All units on the fourth floor to the sixth floor are empty, Mike."

In the elevator, Mike said, "Majesty, you have a choice of two-bedroom, two-bath units. With all the traffic expected in that building, might I suggest the fourth floor? If the elevator is occupied, you and your family could use the balcony stairs. Units are available as high as the sixth floor; I'm just considering convenience, especially for Prince Kaimi."

King Aalona smiled, "You boys are quite remarkable. Is there anything you do not think of?"

Mike giggled, "We have about a hundred kids under ten years old, Sire. We always think of the littlest kids first." Derrick and Mike

showed The King the condos in building 'C'. Once the King had approved of the fourth floor condo, Derrick had Alden transport the Royals' suitcases there. The Queen was then transported from the pool area to the condo to begin unpacking and setting up their temporary residence. Alden filled the cupboards and refrigerator with food and drinks.

With an opportunity to be alone together, Richie, Carrol and Terrence sat at a poolside table. Sitting on Carrol's lap, Terrence asked Richie, "You really like it here, huh?"

Nodding, Richie smiled, "My brothers are pretty kewl, and so are Jason and Trinity."

Appearing very sad, Terrence asked, "Don't you wanna come back home with us?"

Richie sighed, "I do, but I want to be here with my brothers too. You're both important to me, but so are my brothers. What I'd really like most of all is if you two would want to stay here with me."

Carrol wondered, "Could that happen? I mean, we just started getting settled in Vegas. What about Brent, Lance and everyone there?"

Richie shrugged, "We're still part of the Clan. I'd have to believe that Brent and Lance would want us to be happy. We could still visit our other friends in Vegas too, almost anytime we want. So, I guess the question really is, do we want to stay together enough to make a small change from the Vegas Division to here?"

Carrol muttered, "We missed you last night, Richie. I feel like I'm being really selfish, wanting you with us there, but I know how much you need your brothers too." Tickling Terrence's ribs to get his

little brother's attention, Carrol grinned, "What do you think?"

Terrence shrugged, "I like it there, but here's not so different. There's still lots o' kids to play with. I just don't know any of 'em."

Walking over to the group, Cesar sent to Richie, *'Let us take care of Terrence and show him around?'*

'Thank you so much,' Richie quickly replied.

As if he didn't already know, Felipe introduced himself to the boy on Carrol's lap. "I'm Felipe. What's your name?"

Shyly smiling at the nude boy, Terrence introduced himself and then Carrol as being from the Las Vegas Desert Division.

Cesar introduced himself and quickly asked, "Ya wanna play over at our playground with us, Terrence? It's really kewl, with swings, slides, jungle-gyms and merry-go-rounds."

Checking with his two older brothers, Terrence asked, "Can I?"

Richie said, "Sure you can. While you're doing that, me and Carrol will be here by the pool. I'll introduce him around to some of the other guys." Nodding, Carrol helped Terrence down.

Wandering off between Cesar and Felipe, Terrence asked, "How can you play on the slide without clothes? Won't that hurt?"

Felipe giggled, "We like the swings and jungle-gym most."

"There's lots of other kids there already," Cesar smiled.

Alone with Carrol, Richie grinned, "Now it's your turn. I want you and Terrence here with me." He stood and untied his boardies,

sniggering, "The natives our age are mostly naked."

Carrol giggled, "You've gone completely crazy in a day!"

"By tomorrow, you'll be just as crazy as the rest of us," Richie smiled, and tossed his boardies onto the chair he had been sitting on. With a nod of his head, Richie prompted, "Come on." Carrol stood but didn't take his shorts off. In moments, Carrol was in the pool with Richie and being introduced to other tweens, like Kale, Chiba, Greg, Brice, Kelome and Thanh.

Meanwhile, Reyes had finished with his first set of newbies. Once they were mingling around the pool and diving well, getting to know the other kids, he stripped off his T-shirt and shorts, and then climbed up to the three-meter diving platform. Before diving into the well, Reyes saw Chris Stokley stripping out of his shorts, chatting with three of the other teenage boys. Reyes hadn't hit the water when he heard the chirping of a comm-badge. Rising above the water again, he heard a bunch of teenagers calling "Reyes!"

"Yeah, I know," Reyes smiled, and then swam to the edge. Wondering who might be calling this time and why, he climbed out, went to put his shirt on and tapped his comm-badge, saying, "Reyes here."

Drew giggled, "Alden said you've finished with the first batch, bro. Sorry to interrupt your break, but we've got five more here at Des Moines, for you to bring home."

Reyes grinned, "Not a problem, Drew. Let me dry off, hit the boys' room in the pool house and I'll be there."

Across the comm-badge, Reyes heard Corey giggling. Drew laughed, "Hurry, five just became seven. Grandma Morrison gave us

two more."

Reyes queried, "Grandma Morrison; as in the grandmother of Adam, Mark, Brian and Jeff?"

"The one and only," an adult woman's voice answered, "now get your skinny butt over here, so that I can make sure these young men have a suitable escort."

From the other side of the pool house, Ronnie loudly laughed, "Better hurry up, Reyes."

"Yeah, I'm hurryin', grandma," Reyes giggled, and then added, "See ya in a couple o' minutes. Reyes out."

Naked and laughing, Ronnie and Garrett jogged over while Reyes was pulling his boardies up. "She's timing you, Reyes," Garrett giggled.

Widely smiling, Ronnie nodded, "She gets her way and don't usually back down."

Garrett sniggered, "Yeah, Julio was the first to lay down the law with her, and survived."

Reyes grinned, "I really have to pee first." He then wondered, "How're the other newbies doing?"

Ronnie chuckled, "Ralphie's with Pat at the pool. The first thing Ralphie did was get himself and Pat in Speedos, the horn-dog. Ralphie swears he and Pat were good and didn't do anything; Pat changed in the upstairs bathroom, while Ralphie changed in his bedroom. Right now he's trying to talk Pat into a trip to the jacuzzi or sauna."

Rapidly nodding, Garrett smiled, "Rafe's with Fred, Chauncey, Brandon, Richie, Carrol, Bane, Thanh and some other guys at the pool."

"I guess I'll make this trip alone," Reyes smirked, and then headed directly into the pool house. Standing at a urinal, Reyes softly muttered, "I don't believe this. Now I know why dad and pop wanted to take that vacation at Archmania so badly." Finished relieving himself, he stuffed his pecker back in his shorts, then went to wash his hands. Standing at a sink, he had an idea and began evilly snickering before he finished drying his hands. Once that task was complete, Reyes giggled, "Alden, get me a PADD, load Pissed Off Chickens on it, and transport me to Drew at Wells Fargo Arena, not necessarily in that order."

"It took Prez five days to digress to Pissed Off Chickens," Alden giggled, "I guess that's why he's Head Rimmer," and transported Reyes to Des Moines.

Appearing at the Arena, behind Corey, Drew, Stephen and John, Reyes complained, "Twice today people have commented on my skinny brown ass. Is it really that skinny?"

Corey and Stephen lost it and howled laughing. John sniggered, "You've only been eating right for a week, bro."

Drew nodded and giggled, "If your butt is still skinny at the end of the month, one of us will let you know."

Through his laughter, Corey warned Drew, "You'd better not!" The seven boys seated behind Reyes also began giggling. The three older boys playfully passed remarks about their preferred butt shapes.

Holding out a PADD, Stephen giggled, "Reyes, Alden says this

is yours. Pissed Off Chickens is pre-loaded."

Standing, John smirked, "Challenge Prez to a few games."

Taking the PADD from Stephen, Reyes grinned, "I intend to, that's why I requested the game."

Stepping forward, an older woman smiled, "I'm Grandma Morrison, Reyes. I love how you and Preston are letting everyone believe you're cracking up. My grandsons and the quadruplets really enjoy the asylum atmosphere at your Hawaii base."

Shaking hands with Grandma, Reyes giggled, "Oh, are we faking it? That's good to know."

Leading Reyes to the seated boys, John introduced them. "Reyes, this tall guy is fifteen-year-old Travis Mcauley, this is fourteen-year-old Scott Shetley, and this is thirteen-year-old Lance Kinchen."

Grandma interjected, "Scott and Lance are guitar players out of New York City. Both left with only their guitar cases. Knowing your leaders have a band, and will be teaching music, I knew that they belonged in Ewa Beach."

Gesturing to the younger look-alikes, John continued introducing, "The platinum blond twins are Tanner and Toby Stoeher. They're ten years old. It's easy to tell them apart when they talk; Tanner's the joker and Toby's like his bro's straight man. The two red heads are the McPhearson brothers; Albert is seven and Charles is five." John paused then wrapped an arm around Reyes and introduced him to the seven newbies. "Reyes is our newest team member, but he's actually older than any of our parents. Reyes is an android and the eldest son of two other Core Rimmers. He'll get you clothes and stuff, then show you around our base. By the time all that's done, it'll

be dinner time. You guys can decide where you'd like to sleep tonight, in the dorm or in our nest."

Reyes said, "I can tell all you guys are a little freaked out by your expressions. Let's get you guys out of here and to your new home. You'll see, everything's going to be better than fine, it's gonna be very kewl." The boys all stood. Scott and Lance walked around the chairs they had been sitting in to pick up their guitar cases.

Little Charles McPhearson approached Reyes and felt his arm, then took his hand. He asked, "Is you really an an'roid?"

Reyes smiled, "Yup, I have a positronic brain."

Squinting suspiciously, Albert challenged, "You seem like any other real guy."

"Only my brain is a little like a computer; the rest of me is human," Reyes explained.

Taking Reyes' other hand, Toby looked up and smiled, "You're even warm."

Reyes grinned, "Real blood pumping through a real heart to real skin."

Tanner giggled, "Kewl!"

Travis, Scott and Lance gathered around Reyes. Travis asked, "Please tell us that people aren't goin' nuts, like they are in New York?"

Reyes sighed, "Let me tell you what I know happened first, okay?" Seeing seven nodding heads, Reyes explained, "Romulans masquerading as humans took advantage of us. They saw that people

were angry about the California orphanages and the company that owned them. The Romulans tried to make a bad situation worse, by directly attacking major cities, or by inciting riots in other big cities, like New York. Then survival instinct took over for other people, which only added to the chaos. In Honolulu, we have some people protesting still, but compared to other big cities, mostly everything is fine. On our base at Ewa Beach, it's very much like every other day. We're all very safe there. We've been fed breakfast and lunch, we'll be fed dinner, and you'll all have warm places to sleep. You'll make new friends with some of the other two-hundred kids on our base. It'll take time for cities like New York to recover and rebuild, but your lives have already changed for the better. You're safe now."

Scott nodded and smiled, "What're we waiting for? Let's go."

"Don't worry, boys; I will be personally checking on your living conditions before the day is over," Grandma stated. "I expect you to take care of each other and help the boys in Hawaii to welcome the other youth that will be joining you. Understood?"

Seven boys chorused, "Yes, grandma."

Reyes tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Alden, please transport me and our seven newbies directly to the CIC basement store."

By three o' clock, the Pacific Rim Division bases at Hawaii, Maui and Kauai were filled. Each location notified their leaders of the status. When they finished at the bases, the teams were transported to Kaho'olawe to assist with refugees there. There seemed to be thousands waiting still for assistance. All three teams went right to work setting up additional staging areas and calling people over to be assigned residences. What many of them didn't see was the flurry of activity from Starfleet and the Army Corps of Engineers from many States working to get more condominiums, dormitories, homes and

townhomes built and made available.

In the Command Center, Prez and Keith worked to get Hawaiian news, radio and television reporters to come to Ewa Beach at seven that evening for an announcement by King Aalona. All the reporters had to be identified and have appropriate identification to be allowed on base. Once they were done with that, they made all the gathered information available to UNIT security.

About five minutes after three, the Command Center received a call on an outside phone line. This was meant to be commonly used for public calls to Pacific Rim Division, expected to be emergency calls. With his butt sore and unable to comfortably sit, Prez had been standing, roaming around the room the last hour-and-a-half. Jimmy was closest and most available to answer the phone. "Family Clan Short, Pacific Rim Division Headquarters," Jimmy formally said, and then asked, "Please state the nature of your emergency?" Concerned that there might be a need for an extraction, on this of all days, Keith and Prez went over and stood by Jimmy, preparing to call Derrick, Mike, Sean, Troy, and even wake Kaleo and Tory, if need be. Jimmy prompted, "Ma'am, please calm down, take a few deep breaths, and try to tell me again what's wrong." After a pause, Jimmy nodded, "Yes, Ma'am. You're in luck, because Director O'Brian is standing right behind me. Please wait a moment." Pressing the 'hold' button on the phone, Jimmy turned around saying, "It's Ms. Laxmi Diaz. Isn't that your old music teacher, Prez?"

Prez nodded, "Yep. What's the problem?"

Jimmy explained, "Because of the parents of two students complaining about losing their places in the band, she was summarily fired today. She's hoping we can help her before she loses her house."

Keith smirked, "Bobby and Sheryl again; Mister and Miss

Stuck-Up."

Prez asked Jimmy for the phone and gestured to be taken off hold. Prez said into the phone, "Hi Mrs. Diaz." He paused for a long while, scowling and then frowning while he listened to his teacher's more thorough explanation of what had happened. He then said, "Don't worry about a thing, okay? We have schools right here on base. Come on over tomorrow. We'll have you chat with our mom, at Federation Youth Services, and then get S.O.P. telepathic scans, and then talk with the Clan Short Education Adviser. We'll pay you more than you were getting paid and provide you with on-base housing. You, your husband and family can move here and then rent or sell your other house. This problem is resolved to your benefit and to ours, because we need teachers still."

After another brief pause, Prez chuckled, "It's easy. I told you yesterday and Monday, I'm in charge here. My mom is Director of F.Y.S. for the Pacific Rim. So unless you've been really good at hiding some very uncharacteristic personality flaws that I've missed, you'll be working here Monday. And we won't fire you because two stuck-up kids bitched to their parents, who just so happened to make sizable cash contributions to the school. As for your husband, we can either find him a job on-base, which is preferred, or make arrangements so he can continue his job off-base. I know we need help in our medical departments, so it would be advantageous for us to help him get his degree and license as quickly as possible." Prez paused again then chuckled, "Good, you've made my day too. I'll let me mom know that she can expect you tomorrow morning about eleven. Have a good night. Yes, it will be good to see you again too. Bye."

Prez passed the phone back to Jimmy then smirked, "Their loss is our gain. We've got a new music and math teacher waiting in the wings." Tapping his comm-badge, Prez called, "Mom, are you busy?"

"I do have a future employee in my office," Jennifer replied, and then asked, "What's wrong, Preston?"

"Nothing's wrong," Prez chuckled, "as a matter of fact it's pretty good news. I just wanted to let you know that our old music teacher, Ms. Diaz, will be coming in tomorrow morning about eleven for an interview. Her husband is also coming. He's an intern, finishing up his dental degree."

"I'll mark them in my schedule," Jennifer said.

Knowing his mom was busy and not alone, Prez suggested, "We'll talk more about it during dinner, mom."

"That's fine," Jennifer said, and then asked, "How're you feeling?"

"I'm good, mom, as long as I'm standing," Prez chuckled. Keith and several other boys in the room sniggered.

Jennifer ordered, "Get some rest, Preston."

"I will; in about fifteen minutes, Troy and Sean will relieve us, and then we'll go back to our townhouse."

Jennifer said, "Good. Mom out."

In a very poor Irish brogue, Jimmy teased, "I'll let me mom know?"

Shrugging indifferently, but smiling widely, Prez tapped his comm-badge again, calling, "Mike?"

Obviously by the pools from the sounds, Mike answered, "What's up, Prez?"

Prez explained the story behind Ms. Diaz's situation to Mike. When Prez finished, Mike evilly snickered, "Those Dull Lovers shall pay!"

"Take the gloves off, dude," Prez chortled.

"The Scoobies will take care of Bobby's and Sheryl's families by day's end," Mike promised.

"Not one Shiny is to be left in the house, bro," Prez smiled.

"If they have a brushed steel fridge, it and everything in it is ours," Mike chuckled.

"Kewl beans. Prez out."

Keith laughed, "Prez! Can you do that?"

Prez shrugged, "I just did. Good teachers shouldn't lose their job because two stuck-up brats whined and complained. They were sucky musicians in the first place; now we know they're selfish sucky people too."

"The codeine in those pills is affecting your accent and judgment," Keith giggled.

A group of four leprechauns popped into the Command Center. Celtic music loudly played and all four began doing a jig. All the boys in the room, including Keith, loudly laughed. Prez clapped his hands to keep time with the dancers and music. After about thirty-seconds, all the music stopped and the leprechauns bowed, then disappeared.

Prez groaned, "Aw, I was just starting to get into it too."

Since the sudden appearances and disappearances didn't faze

Prez in the least, Keith howled laughing.

Sean and Troy stepped into the room to the remaining laughter and grinned. Prez sniggered, "I am not stoned. I'm a little disturbed about the shit last night with the H.L.F., and all the stuff we've had to deal with ever since, all night and into today. Bobby and Sheryl are stuck-up brats, and their parents are just as bad, causing a really good teacher to lose her job. We've all lost some of our innocence because of today's crap." Prez paused, then imitated Mike, laughing, "The Shiny Haters know not the shine they have within, and will therefore lose all their hoarded shiny belongings, starting with these two families."

Parking his butt in a chair and covering his face, Keith giggled, "Thank goodness Lieutenant Vorik isn't here to witness this."

"It's perfectly logical," Prez grinned at his hubby. "I can't prosecute them for being inconsiderate assholes, but karma levels everything out."

Keith hysterically wheezed, "Yeah, karma, right!"

Prez and Keith turned over the Command Center to Sean and Troy. Outside by the pools, Mike called the Scoobies and shared that Shiny Leader Prez had given them an assignment. Mike's only request was that the Scoobies stay together and keep one another safe. Proud of their assignment from the division director, the ferrets immediately went to work, learning where the Dull Loving families lived and planning their infiltration from the safety of their Shiny Vault.

Five-year-old Dulce Kentesius, one of the Latin King kids rescued from Los Angeles, was over by the playground with many of the other younger kids. She sat in the grass by herself, but would occasionally giggle and speak. Not very far away, climbing one of the

jungle-gyms, Prince Kiami, Dillon, Geoff and Lenny noticed the new girl. Wondering why she was alone and talking to herself, the four boys went over and sat in the grass with her. As the eldest in their group, Lenny introduced the other boys and asked the girl her name.

Dillon gently asked, "Are you feeling lonely, Dulce? Do you miss your mommy and daddy?"

Shaking her head, Dulce answered, "Daddy died a long time ago, when I was a baby. Mommy was arrested. I was living with my aunt and cousins, Antonia and Barbara Nepos." She pointed to Antonia, who appeared only a little older than Dulce. The two girls waved to each other. Antonia went right back to playing with the other kids on the merry-go-round.

The four boys were confused and glanced at each other. Since he didn't see any of the older boys knew what was going on, Geoff blurted out, "Who were you talking to?"

Looking down, Dulce shyly admitted, "The Hawaiian boy. He says he was a prince."

"I'm a Prince too," Kaimi quickly said. "My daddy is the King of the Republic Of Hawaii." He then wondered, "In what country is your friend a Prince?"

Dulce frowned, "He ran away. You boys scared him, I guess."

The boys shrugged. Lenny smiled, "Let us know if he comes back. We'd like to meet your friend."

"Okay," Dulce giggled, and waved as the four boys got up and said goodbye. They started back toward the jungle-gyms.

Geoff paused and turned around. He shyly asked, "Umm... if

you want, you can come play with us?"

Dulce checked with her new Teddy bear, named Aster. The Teddy offered its hand and smiled, "Let's go play." In moments, Dulce and Geoff were climbing the jungle-gym.

At three-thirty the alarm clock in Kaleo's and Tory's dorm room went off with music from Hawaiian radio station 92.7 KHWI. The Eagles hit 'Get Over It' was playing. The waking boys especially liked the line, 'I'd like to find your inner child and kick its little ass,' and started giggling into their kiss. Proud of the great work done by Clan Short all night, they made love. Kaleo entered Tory and kept going until they were close to climaxing. Kaleo then switched positions, rolled a condom onto Tory's cock and went for a ride. Since they were already close, they didn't last more than two minutes. Kaleo shot a whopper onto Tory's chest and belly. Seeing that, Tory gave up the battle and filled his rubber. After that pleasant start to their day, they cuddled for a few minutes, chatting about the changes in their lives over the week and waiting for their erections to deflate before taking a shower. The two Core Rimmers got status updates from Alden while under the hot showers. As soon as they were finished, dried off and dressed, Kaleo and Tory decided they would eventually take a quick trip to Kaho'olawe, to check on refugee relocation and take a look around.

Stepping out of their dorm, Kaleo and Tory first went to the CIC for some food, since they hadn't had breakfast or lunch. Miguel fixed the boys breakfast sandwiches and vitamin fortified milkshakes. They hadn't sat down with their trays when Marvin Perkins led a group of young boys from the Anaheim and San Diego orphanages into the dining room. With the little guys were their new Teddy bears. All the kids were a little hungry and wanted a snack, but when they saw the two Core Rimmers were awake, they stopped briefly to let them know

that a bunch of teenagers were helping with Battle of Earth people, and that Prez and Keith had been around base since before lunch. "Prez even showed everyone his burned butt," some of the boys giggled. Kaleo and Tory already knew what the little guys were telling them, but let them ramble on simply because they were showing signs of adjusting to their new lives.

Once the mini-news team seemed to run out of steam, Kaleo prompted the kids to get some food and return to the table, so they could all eat together. The boys hurried to the kitchen. Kaleo grinned, "We'd better be prepared."

With his bacon, egg and cheese sandwich already in hand, Tory paused, wondering, "Prepared for what?"

"Adopting," Kaleo sniggered.

Tory whimpered, then suggested, "Let's wait for the question to be asked, huh?" Kaleo nodded, then bit into his sandwich. Around the food he was chewing, Tory asked, "Do you think we can be parents?"

Kaleo shrugged, "I'd like to try, which means I sure won't act like the assholes at the orphanage. Let's watch how our Core Rimmer brothers and their parents deal with their kids. Maybe ask some questions, before any kids ask us if we would be parents." Seeing Marvin and the first set of boys returning, they clammed up and ate.

Behind Marvin was Leonard Santana. Behind Leonard was Mark Fikes, carrying a tray with a lunch meat sandwich and a small drink. The latter two boys were walking slowly and carefully, but they somehow managed to fumble, causing both trays to fall. Marvin quickly put his tray down on the nearest table. Kaleo and Tory got up to help the boys. By the time they reached the kids, all three were in tears and the others coming out of the kitchen seemed ready to cry

too. Kaleo and Tory helped all the boys get their trays onto the same table where Marvin had placed his tray, then set about relieving the crying and very upset boys. On his knees to be at eye level with the kids, Kaleo assured, "The trays get heavy and accidents happen."

"This ain't like California, guys," Tory added. "When accidents happen, you won't be punished or yelled at."

"Or told that's all the food there is," Kaleo explained. "What we do here is just help clean up." He showed the boys what was meant by picking up the plastic trays. Tory carefully picked up the plates that had fallen. Remarkably, one broke clean in half while the other didn't even have a chip.

Working in the kitchen that afternoon was fourteen-year-old ex-prostitute Christian Beresford. He rolled a bucket and mop into the dining room, grinning, "Well, we got past a few days without saying grace. Now we get to say it twice." While Kaleo and Tory helplessly sniggered, Christian went to work cleaning up. Not understanding the joke, but seeing the two leaders smiling, the boys calmed down to sniffles. Kaleo was about to lead them back to the kitchen for replacements when Miguel rolled a cart into the room with two replacement sandwiches for the boys.

"Look at this!" Kaleo cheered. "No big deal, guys. Even Miguel did his part and got you fresh food made up."

Mark and Leonard humbly said, "Thank you" to Miguel.

Miguel carefully picked up pieces of the two broken glasses, then took the remains to the kitchen. Tory went to the kitchen to dump one plate into the trash and put the other on the dishwasher shelf. He returned to the dining room, then went to get his and Kaleo's trays to bring them to the table where many of the boys were already sitting.

Miguel made eye contact with Kaleo, then offered, "Maybe we should make these first rows of tables, close to the kitchen, just for the younger kids?"

Kaleo nodded, "That sounds like a great idea. Have some signs made up for that, please." Kaleo then called Alden to have a group of twenty tables near the kitchen replaced with child-sized tables. Returning his attention to Mark and Leonard, Kaleo warmly smiled, "It's all over now. Nobody yelled or screamed or punished you guys at all, right?" All the kids nodded and some vocally confirmed that everything was kewl.

Putting Kaleo's tray down at the table, Tory started praying, "For what we are about to receive..."

"may the Lord make us truly grateful," Christian chorused with Tory.

"And just a little less graceful," Miguel softly joked. He then turned and headed back to the kitchen.

All the boys now got the joke and giggled, "Amen." Mark and Leonard were blushing bright pink and still giggling when Kaleo and Tory sat with the boys at the table.

Tory asked what the boys had been doing so far. He got the usual answers, that they had spent much of the days at the pool or at the playground. Some had been inside the rec center, but they were only exploring. All the boys liked sleeping in the Hunders' basement nest the prior night. They went there with all the other little kids, but didn't get to play any of the video games because they were very tired. Kaleo reminded them of the three-hour time zone difference. To them, nine-thirty at night felt more like half-past midnight. Pointing across the dining room, Tory reminded them that they could go to the rec

room anytime they wanted to play video games.

Once all the boys had finished their mid-afternoon snack, Kaleo told them that he and Tory needed to check out what was going on in the Command Center. Heading to the kitchen dishwasher, Kaleo and Tory helped the little guys with trays and glasses, then let them look inside the Command Center. Not seeing the Vulcan Lieutenant in the room, Kaleo asked Sean where Vorik was. "We sent him off to get some sleep late this morning," Sean answered. When the group of small boys had seen enough of the Command Center, they thanked Kaleo, then took off to return to the pool. Kaleo and Tory went inside and got briefed about what had happened since they went to bed that morning.

All four Core Rimmers were curious about what was going on at Kaho'olawe. Kaleo and Tory called for their security, then transported to the island's new airport hangar, where refugees were being processed by Rimmer volunteers. After taking a bus trip with Carl Seibert, Kaleo and Tory were simply amazed with all the development that had been done and was still going on. Down the center of Broadway, a monorail track had been built. The monorail train was still being prepared, but was expected to be online before sunset. The island now had a population of two-hundred thousand, many of which were seen from the bus windows walking along the sidewalks beside streets. When Kaleo and Tory transported back to the Command Center, Sean and Troy took a trip to Kaho'olawe.

Brandon Phillips spent most of the afternoon at the pools with Colin, Alien, Mini and the double-twins from Des Moines, and slightly less time with the quadruple Rs, mostly because Ralphie was occupied with Pat, and Richie was spending time with Carrol and Terrence. Colin seriously asked Brandon, "Would you consider moving to Des Moines?" and then quickly added, "We'll be spending

lots of time visiting here, and Rimmers will eventually visit us there too. You all have comm-badges, so you can visit your cousins anytime you want."

Alien added, "The Rimmers now have three androids and we don't have any at Des Moines. You'd be an important addition to our team, Brandon."

Brandon shrugged, "I don't see that as a problem at all, since we can visit each other easily. Let me just talk to Chauncey and Fred about it." In the pool playing water polo with many other tweens, Fred and Chauncey were closest to Robbie and Ronnie.

When Brandon called for Fred and Chauncey, Fred held up his hands in a 'T' shape and hollered, "Time out!"

Chauncey and Fred waded to the side of the pool and climbed out. Brandon explained the situation to his cousins, carefully watching Chauncey for any signs that he might not be ready for a separation. Once he heard the entire explanation, Chauncey was the first to tell Brandon, "That's totally kewl, cousin. It'll be only a little different than home. We lived in the same house, but you sometimes went places with your folks and we did stuff with ours too."

Fred checked with Chauncey, "Are you really sure? It won't be like home, where we were together part of every day. We might not always get to see Brandon every day. It'll be very different from home."

"What isn't different?" Chauncey giggled, and purposefully glanced around at the exposed dicks in their group. He then reminded, "Skinny dippin' is something we'd do at home maybe once or twice every summer. Here, it's normal. When we miss each other and want to see each other, even if it's only for an hour or two, we can do it

easily enough. Another bonus is Neil visiting us here or Brandon in Des Moines; it gives him two places to go now and then."

Pleased beyond words, Brandon hurried to give Chauncey and then Fred hugs, whispering in their ears, "I really love you." He then told Alien, Colin, Mini and his cousins, "We'll have dinner together here and then leave afterward." Once that was agreed to, Brandon, Colin, Alien and Mini were invited to join them playing water polo for a while.

All six jumped in the pool and Fred yelled, "Time in!" The teams were uneven and had to be redistributed, but soon the game was in motion.

Resting his head on Keith's lap, Prez had fallen asleep in the living room of their townhouse. Lowering the television volume, Keith closed his eyes and quickly fell asleep. When they woke after an hour nap, Keith led his husband upstairs to the master bathroom for a shower. Some of the blisters on Prez's tush had already popped, Keith noticed, and checked the robe for bloody drainage. Keith suggested a quick trip to see Doc Andrews, which Prez reluctantly agreed to. Stepping out of the townhouse before five that afternoon, they went to the F.Y.S. building.

Surprisingly, there was a room with six bio-beds. Doc Andrews had Prez lay on a bio-bed for another quick scan. While the bed did its job, Doc Andrews checked Prez's robe. Laying there impatiently, Prez said, "Hey Doc, that robe really isn't working out. It's one thing to hang out naked at the pools, but now I'm the only Clan Division Director that can say he's flashed the future President of the United States, our King, and Uncle Colin's head of security too." Keith cracked up.

Softly sniggering, Doc Andrews returned to the bio-bed,

offering, "How about a terrycloth shower wrap with a Velcro fastener instead? Then you're only showing off your leg."

"Works for me," Prez cheered.

Checking the readings on the bed, Doc Andrews nodded, "Remember to keep it on, Preston. I need to check for drainage. You're going to feel some tingling on your backside and feet while the bed keeps our Flashing Director free of infections." For another minute, the bed did its job while Keith sat in a nearby chair chuckling. When the bio-bed was finished, Doc Andrews proclaimed, "All set," and offered a hand to help Prez sit, reminding, "No pools until tomorrow night, after I check you over again. Assuming you're doing just as well, you'll be able to put on shorts and underwear again right after, although I'd doubt they'll feel very comfortable."

Sitting on the edge of the bio-bed, Prez queried, "When then?"

"Probably Sunday morning, you'll be clothed, at least when you're not in the pool," Doc Andrews replied, and then had Alden get a terrycloth shower wrap and T-shirt for Prez.

Scowling and curling his lips, Prez told Keith, "We never go more than two days without rehearsing. Our kids are gonna want our band to play tomorrow." Keith nodded, smiled and gestured an open palm to Doc Andrews.

Handing Prez the wrap and T-shirt, Doc Andrews shrugged, "If you're comfortable and awake to do so, that's fine. Rest when your body says it's time, Preston. It may seem a waste to you, but your body is recovering and sending you the signals needed to get well faster."

Keith offered, "Let's set up another movie for the kids tonight, baby. I'll have Kaleo check around and see if the older kids want to

watch another movie afterward." Nodding, Prez pushed off the bio-bed, landed on his feet and put the wrap on. Holding out the new white T-shirt, Prez read the words printed in large letters across the back. Smirking, he showed it to Keith.

**I flashed the
U.S. President
and The King
of the R.O.H.
at the same time!**

Again, Keith cracked up.

"Alden!" Prez laughed.

Over the ceiling mounted speakers, Alden giggled, "You've got bragging rights no other Clan Director can match, Prez."

Tossing the shirt on the bio-bed, Prez nodded and giggled, "Let's not advertise it, especially to the King or Uncle Colin. Put that on the bed in my townhouse and get me another T-shirt. I promise to wear that one after the King and Uncle Colin have left."

"Okay," Alden giggled. The new white T-shirt vanished. In its place, a white Beatles Abbey Road T-shirt appeared.

"Excellent," Prez chirped, and pulled the Abbey Road T-shirt over his head.

Doc Howard stepped into the open doorway and smiled, "Fashionable yet not too gaudy."

Finger combing his hair, Prez giggled, "At least I'm not showing off my goods to every visiting dignitary on the planet."

Glancing at the two doctors, Keith asked, "Will you be coming to dinner?"

"As soon as I finish off a report on our Flashing Head Rimmer," Doc Andrews grinned.

Taking Prez's hand, Keith chuckled, "We'll see you at the dining room." They left the treatment room and the F.Y.S. building then started for the CIC. Keith grumbled, "Dammit, I forgot your pills, Prez."

Prez nodded, "Right after dinner, T'hy'la." They walked into the dining room. All the Rimmer sons and their parents' kids, and the majority of the other rescued kids were already inside. The various refugee helpers who had volunteered were back home too. John, Stephen, Derrick, Mike, Kaleo, Tory, Troy and Sean approached. Prez asked, "How're things goin', dudes?"

Kaleo answered, "We're good locally, Prez. We might have some of those kids you were lookin' for, to act as dorm leaders. Today we got help with refugee relocation from Relud and Inoyra Glith, Horacio Sulin, Sonia Baugh, Arnold Smithson, Jerrold Hebda, Roy Angulo, Gerald Mayers, Adrienne Norensis, Bianca Heres, Liki Keoloha, Keanu Hekekia, Corbin Sancho, Dominic Crassus, Stephen Wickes, Aaron Farris, Nell Deckert and Mollie Mcelhannon. All of them did fantastic jobs. They kept working through lunch. Afterward, the twelve that were at our other bases went and helped at Kaho'olawe, then were relieved by Oceanic Division. Tory and I went to Kaho'olawe for a little while today, just to have a look around. That little barren island is gorgeous and populated now. Elsewhere around the world, things are pretty well fucked. Common landmarks all over

are either damaged or destroyed."

Tory added, "Population is two hundred thousand and growing. Some people are already doing stuff, working in their regular jobs, just at a new place. The food court at Seibert Mall was hoppin' with people."

Sean nodded, "What's really awesome is the diversity; Americans, British, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans and Russians, all coexisting and getting along."

Derrick nodded, "Our population is up by seventeen too, Prez. Reyes picked up three from Colorado, two of which will stay here, and one will go to Des Moines. My mom picked up two girls. The other thirteen were all refugees from Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines. Reyes picked ten up in two trips. Drew and Corey came back with the last three brothers. We're up to two hundred forty-nine."

Mike offered, "We'll take you around to meet them. Two play guitar, Scott Shetley and Lance Kinchen. Lance came out of New York City with his Gold Top Les Paul. Scott met Lance on the way to The Meadowlands, with his Strat, and they've been together ever since. I'd expect some more kids as the night progresses."

"Reyes is ready for more rescues," Derrick slyly grinned. "He's got his own PADD running Pissed Off Chickens."

Prez cheered, "Competition! Sweetness!"

Troy smiled, "Our ex-Latin King kids were worried about loved ones in and near Los Angeles. We let them use phones and call whomever they wanted for as long as they wanted. Sean, Kaleo, Tory and I went to Hawaii, Maui and Kauai, just to quickly check things out for ourselves. We were only gone for fifteen minutes, but reports from Starfleet security were positive. This war was a definite pain in

the ass, pardon the pun, Prez; but if this is the result, people treating each other with consideration and respect, it's long overdue."

Prez giggled, "From now on, when folks talk about a pain in the ass around here, everybody's gonna be looking at me."

"Face it, bro," John cackled, "your injury is symbolic of the whole war. And we know it was the Romulans that stirred everything up, too." John read Prez's next thought and silently replied, *'The H.L.F. is screwed now. We have entire families under arrest. Everyone that can be re-educated will be. All the rest are being held accountable for two deaths at the King's Palace, and the deaths at the Hyatt Regency. I'd give you numbers of H.L.F., but we're not done gathering them all. Roughly about two-thousand under arrest, so far, from around the world.'*

Prez asked, "What's for dinner?"

Stephen giggled, "Italian buffet, featuring..." Stephen spun around, signaling the mass of kids.

Enthusiastically, over two hundred voices shouted, "Pizza!"

Chapter 11

C.S.P.R.D. CIC Dining Room

Friday, November 5, 2004 5:35 PM HTZ

Adults and parents arrived at the dining room while the Core Rimmers were mingling, stopping at tables to ensure their Clan was doing well. Time was specifically spent with the eighteen refugee center helpers. Some of the kids felt their leaders needed hugs and embraced them. The parents of the Core Rimmers went to talk to their boys. On the way, the Rimmer adults got surprising hugs from many kids. The hugs were left-over from the morning's compassionate gathering. For the kids, the best part was the adults knew their names to thank them.

Judy Faris went to where AJ and Jerry were sitting, and Troy, Sean, Kaleo and Tory were standing. Jim and Jen Hundser went to Prez and Keith. Kathleen Marr spoke to John and Stephen. Bill and Lanna Seaver chatted with Drew and Corey. Anna and Carl Seibert, and Laura and Rob Gibbons spent their time visiting tables where the refugee center helpers were sitting. Kaleo and Tory went to share a few whispered words with Keith and Prez. The latter two then went to the table where AJ and Jerry were sitting. While all this was going on, many of the kids were making their way through the kitchen, and then to tables with their dinner, or second helpings of pizza.

Having spent the last hour unpacking and setting up their temporary residence at the third condo, King Aalona and Queen Adamina entered the dining room. Eating pizza, Prince Kaimi was already sitting at a table with Bruce, Richie, Dillon, Geoff, Lenny, Kokaku and Dewi. The Royal couple mingled among the parents. The

parents gathered their sons, and the other Core Rimmers together for a discussion with the Royal Couple. They softly spoke for about ten minutes, then Prez asked John, "Levitate me about a meter, please, bro?"

Nodding, John did the honors and teased, "Any higher and some of the little kids will be able to see what's underneath that shower wrap."

Stephen helplessly giggled, "Italian or Irish sausage?"

'My German sausage is for you, baby,' John smirked.

Rising up off the floor, Prez smirked at his youngest brother and brother-in-law. He then had Alden connect him to the PA. "I'd like to make some announcements," Prez began. "First of all, for those that aren't sure or don't know at all, Reyes Taraschke was made a Core Rimmer last night." Prez waited for some clapping and remarks to dwindle, and then explained, "Reyes' primary job will be Toy Rimmer, with Drew and Corey, but he's a backup for his dad and pop too, as Analyst Rimmer and Clan historian.

"Next, I'd like to thank all of our helpers today," Prez continued. "Eighteen of you guys stepped up to the plate to help with refugees, and according to Aunt Lanna, a bunch of teens and tweens split the day to watch our little tikes at the playground. Reyes has said that the quadruplets and their friends from Des Moines and Las Vegas were very helpful with a rescue in Colorado today." Watching the quadruplet brothers, Prez chuckled, "You're not here a full day yet and already making waves." Getting nudges and pats on the back from their friends, the boys blushed and giggled. Prez playfully sang, "We're watching you."

After a momentary pause, Prez sighed, "When you think about

it, this place could've been out of control, but you guys took care of one another, and everybody did more than their share to keep things running smoothly. I didn't do that, you guys did, so give each other a round of applause." Prez started clapping as did the other twelve Core Rimmers and all their parents, and the King and Queen.

When the applause faded, Prez smiled, "Right now, we have some changes to announce. Relud and Inoyra Glith have elected to join John's Intel team." More applause traveled around. Prez then said, "Nell Deckert, Mollie McElhannon, Horacio Sulin and Sonia Baugh would like to become dorm one leaders. When you guys in dorm one need help, Nell, Mollie, Horacio and Sonia are your contacts. Over at dorm two, Corbin Sancho, Dominic Crassus, Adrienne Norensis and Bianca Heres have agreed to become dorm leaders. For the time being, the twenty boys at dorm three can also contact those eight leaders for help, until we find four more who would like the job at dorm three. Those twenty at dorm three have only been here a day, but if two are interested, just let any Core Rimmer know.

"Thanks to some glowing recommendations from team mates and from two adults, we have two new Core Rimmers; Ensign Jerry Hebda and Ensign AJ Smithson are now Mouth Rimmers, reporting to Kaleo," Prez shared. More applause and congratulations were passed. "As I understand it, since yesterday's meeting in the auditorium, Jerry and AJ were only considering becoming dorm leaders. However, while helping with refugees today, each proved that he can make himself clearly and loudly understood." Chuckling, giggling and laughter erupted in the dining room. Widely smiling, Jerry and AJ turned scarlet red. Locking eyes with Jerry, Prez teased, "Now I know what I look like when I blush."

Nodding, Jerry loudly giggled, "But we are not related."

Prez nodded and sniggered, "Not so far as we know, any how. We'll let our doctors do a quick DNA scan to determine if we're distant cousins or something." Prez grinned, "The last announcement is that our division's web site will be up by morning. If your laptop is already active in your room, your browser home page will be changed to this division's home page. The Mouth and Toy Rimmers will get these last announcements added tonight. Before I turn over to Drew and Corey, I'd like to remind everyone that school starts Monday morning. Our placement tests will be in two sessions, from nine in the morning until eleven, and from one in the afternoon until three. Sunday night, all the Core Rimmers and the dorm leadership will be making sure that everyone gets a good night's rest."

John lowered Prez to the floor, and then levitated Drew and Corey. The four televisions in the room changed to the division's web site home page. Everybody saw the moving ring of fire graphic surrounding the Clan Short Crest. Pointing at the nearest TV's, Drew began, "Alden's helping us out with this quick introduction. That's our home page." Still eating, many of the kids watched the monitors as Drew explained, "By midnight, all the Clan Divisions around the world will be able to access our site. No one else, anywhere on the planet, can access this site. It's for internal Clan use only because we have your photos up on each of your personal pages. The idea was for you guys to share interests, start personal blogs, and get to know other Clan kids that share your interests. By clicking anywhere on the graphic, you'll be presented with a few menu options; Announcements, Blogs, Command Team, Education, FYS, Maps, Other Divisions, Our Clan, Platinum Habits, Recreation and Site Suggestions."

Corey took over, saying, "Alden, let's start with the announcements menu." The screen pointer moved to 'Announcements', the letters flamed up, and then presented the menu

beneath. Many kids giggled at the flaming graphic. Corey giggled, "Yeah, the Clan started with two gays dudes, so I ran with it."

"I can see you guys aren't worried about being formal," Thanh sniggered.

Corey smiled, "Course not. Announcements are from the command team, so we have Head Rimmers, which is stuff from Prez and Keith; the historians are under Analyst Rimmers, mostly to introduce newbies; communications are from the Mouth Rimmers, so we'll all be looking there to read about stuff that they have to tell us. Right at the top of the Mouth Rimmers section is a link to a listing of available odd jobs and a place where you can sign up for those odd jobs. Since we're on the subject, just to make sure the newbies are aware, you'll be getting ID and debit cards in a few days. Your debit cards hold your weekly allowance and all you've earned from doing odd jobs around the base. Specifics about who can sign up for what jobs are listed on the odd jobs sign up page."

"Soul Rimmers are the Intel department," Drew said, "so anything security related will be in this section. Sean and Troy are Morale Rimmers, so any activities, clubs, or events they want to announce will be there; then we have all the tech stuff from the Toy Rimmers, me, Corey and Reyes. There are places where you guys can send us notes in each of those sections. Please use them when you have a question, comment or suggestion directly related to command, or history, or communications, or Intel, or Morale or geeky stuff. Right off the bat, Prez has arranged for all of us to get comm-badges. When they arrive, Sunday or Monday, we'll get them distributed.

"Also, in the Intel section there's a listing of blocked sites," Corey added. "Many of those sites are pornographic. We know most of you aren't too interested in that stuff, but we do allow a large selection of sites that Mr. T has reviewed and considered educational.

If there's something you'd like to visit, but can't because it's blocked, the best place to make the suggestion that it be reviewed is under Soul Rimmer's Intel section. If it passes John's team, then we'll talk about it and check it out. The last step is when Prez says, 'okay, pass it up to headquarters in Orlando with our comments'. Sometimes, you mistype stuff and go to bad sites. That's no biggie; you'll simply see a screen telling you that the site was blocked and why. However, if you constantly try to access blocked sites, one of us Core Rimmers will be having a chat with you, especially if you haven't sent us a suggestion to modify the blocked sites list." Glancing around, Corey paused then queried, "Kewl?"

Seeing only nodding heads, Drew took over again and explained, "The Blogs section is sorted by individuals and is completely searchable. If you like American football, and want to get to know others that are too, search for football. Results will be broken up by division, and then by the person's last name. Whatever the topic, if the person has added that to their list of activities, hobbies or interests, you'll find them, so you can e-mail them or participate in their blog, and they can participate in your Blog too. Each of you can add stuff to your personal page; each of you can start a Blog. We've started a few basic Blogs for Art, Movies, Music, Musicians, Sports and Television. As you can see, each selection will open in new browser tabs, so you can find where you started and can get back to it easily. It's common Net-iquite to participate in someone's Blog first, so they get to know you and you get to know them, before you e-mail the Blog's owner, for a more personal friendship to be established."

"The Command Team menu option is strictly for you to get to know us," Corey instructed. "Right now, it doesn't include Jerry or AJ, but we'll get those pages loaded tonight too. Our pages are in the 'Our Clan' section too, but this way you guys don't have to remember our surnames." He giggled, "We've only been together a little less than a

week, and some kids still confuse Seaver and Seibert."

"It's a blond thing," Mike softly sniggered. Corey squinted at Mike. Without a word spoken aloud, Mike vanished from the dining room. Kids began chuckling and giggling.

Corey laughed, "I did not do that!"

Bouncing his blond eyebrows, Derrick grinned, "I did." Still gathered together, the Core Rimmers cracked up.

Reappearing in the dining room, dripping wet and freezing cold, Mike bitched, "Nice! I know what an iceberg looks like now, in the dark, from up close!" The entire dining room seemed to explode with loud laughter. Mike left to go change into dry clothes and un-shrivel his bits.

Drew giggled, "Speaking of education, the Education section is for you to get to know our teachers, do homework assignments or send essays and such to the teachers. FYS is Federation Youth Services. That's where you can get to know any of the adults, from our parents to the doctors and nurses, and even our housekeepers, grounds keepers and chefs. The 'Our Clan' menu option has links to other divisions so you can search there. The majority of the screen is an alphabetical listing of kids in this division. You can change the sort order, from the default of last name to first name, or by age, ascending from youngest to oldest, or descending from oldest to youngest. To make it a little easier, we've added labels to search for kids, ages up to nine-years-old; tweens are ages ten through twelve, and teens, for thirteen and up. You can also search by name, age, birthday, interests and hobbies."

"Maps are printable graphics of our bases and all the Clan bases," Corey explained. "Some of you guys may be taking classes at

other bases. That's why you all need comm-badges. Of course, once you're there, it would be nice to know where you are and where you need to go to. The Other Divisions option simply makes some stuff available that we've already shown, all in one place without digging into other menu options. There are links directly to their site, maps, their leadership teams and searchable lists of kids.

"The Platinum Habits section is for the band and where they may be performing concerts. The band doesn't consider performances here for us as concerts; they're rehearsals, so they won't appear. It also allows other divisions to request that the band perform for some function there. Recreation lists all the stuff we've got here and at our other bases. Maybe you don't like playing soccer, but you enjoy watching the game. When there are those sorts of activities going on, we'll list them here and you can go watch the game. The last little section is simply a form to fill out for site suggestions. If you have a good idea that we include, you'll get credit for it and a money bonus on your debit card too."

Drew smiled, "That's all we've got for you. I would like to know if any of you haven't tried powering up your laptop computers yet though. Just a show of hands, please?" Glancing around, Drew and Corey saw mostly newbie kids, and those that had only been around a little more than a day. Drew nodded, "Kewl. Remember, if you're having some laptop problems, Alden can help you and so can we; just let us know if you need it." John lowered Drew and Corey to the floor. The Core Rimmer team went into the chow line to get their dinners.

Around the dining room, the chatter level rose. Some were talking with the new dorm leaders. Others were talking about going back to their dorm rooms immediately after dinner, to investigate the new division web site, update their personal information with activities, hobbies and interests, and perhaps start a blog. Also, some

of the teens were discussing the limited access to porn sites.

Overhearing the conversation, Aaron Farris excused himself and reminded, "Some of us have been through that, having our pictures taken and being prostituted by adults for other adults. We never saw a penny of the money made."

Stephen Wickes agreed with his partner and added, "We're all naked half of every day. What can you see at those sites that we don't see all the time?"

Twelve-year-old Chiba Atsushi smirked, "Prob'ly stuff a lot of us wouldn't like to see, that we've experienced, and would just as soon not have any reminders of."

One of the teen girls nearby, Vera Kirkwood wondered, "Why look at pictures?" When she got no reply, she shrugged, "Some of us have partners and some don't. I'd think having a real person, as a boyfriend or girlfriend matters more. There are gays, lesbians and straights here, so why look at what you can't have, when there are kids here that might like having a partner?"

Coming out of the kitchen with their dinners, John, Stephen, Drew and Corey overheard parts of this debate. Clearly, without using the PA, John said, "It's not a matter of disallowing porn completely, without regard to content, it's more like who's got a bad reputation; who's really mistreating or capitalizing on the models without proper compensation."

Drew nodded, "There are sites you can visit that are kewl, with good stories and good pictures. The sites we don't want you guys visiting are the ones that want money for nothing, or sites that go phishing for e-mail addresses, so they can share your address with another porn company and start sending you spam."

Sean walked out of the kitchen with Troy. Hearing the debate, Sean sighed, "Ya know what, guys? This is kind of silly and I'll tell you why I think so. Let's say you're developing and not certain where your interests really are; as in you haven't decided if your gay, lesbian, bi or straight. Everybody is at least a little bisexual, so it can be really confusing for some of you. Please come talk to any of us. If you need something that will help you grow and learn, we'll get it for you."

Troy smiled, "And that's from a guy who is as shy as I can occasionally be. Growing up here, you've all got the best people working for your benefit. Maybe you're one of the really shy ones that can't figure out who to talk with. The truth is that you can talk to any Core Rimmer, dorm leader or any of the adult employees, in complete confidentiality. I know Kaleo has rubbers and lube, free for the asking for anyone that needs or wants them."

"I don't ask questions either," Kaleo offered. "You want it, and you've got it, plain and simple. If you think that you might be gay, but aren't sure, ask me and Tory, and then watch how many suggestions we give you. If you want a dong or a dildo to figure it out, I'll get you exactly what you want. The same goes for you girls. We're purposefully choosing girls as part of the dorm leadership teams, so you can get what you need, without worrying about being embarrassed. What we don't want is for any of you to become like the pedophiles many of us had to deal with."

"Maybe some of you are scared, because of your experiences at orphanages, foster homes or out on the street," Tory explained. "Let me address that right now. Me and Kaleo are married now, partially because we were good friends at the orphanage. We discovered right here what it really means to be in love and make love. It's nothing like what those jerk-offs at the orphanages put us through. Yeah, you feel that same twitchy, anxious feeling in your belly, but the aftermath is

completely opposite what it used to be. Instead of feeling worthless and valueless, you feel more deserving, worthy and valuable; *that's* caring and loving."

Sitting down beside Jonah, Reyes leaned over to whisper, "Listen and learn, bro."

Jonah whispered back, "I am. I'm pretty sure I'd like a boyfriend, but the past is still messing with me too."

Reyes nodded and softly said, "He'll fix that too, one way or another."

Before sitting down with his dinner, Keith grinned, "What have we been saying all week about giving and receiving abundantly? A sexual relationship is only part of that idea. It also applies to parents, children, friends and acquaintances; relationships that aren't sexual at all. When someone gives you something, you return something else to show your appreciation and thanks. We can't all be the best of friends, but those that do become best friends just so happen to be on the same page; the turnabout of giving and receiving is more meaningful. It's what makes us individuals and not carbon copies of each other."

Over at the table where the quadruplets and double twins were sitting, some giggling and loud laughter broke loose. Keith sniggered, "Even you guys aren't carbon copies. I see three different hairstyles and one with almost no hair. Earlier today, I saw all eight of you in the pool and could only positively identify Robbie. It won't be that way in a couple o' days." Before sitting down, Keith noticed Prez had started eating, but remained standing. He softly huffed, "Right after we're done eating, we're going home to the townhouse and you're getting a pill."

With his mouth full and chewing a bite of pizza, Prez obediently

nodded.

At the tables where the adults were sitting, Jennifer Hundser heard her PADD chiming, alerting her that an e-mail had come in. After a few minutes to eat and converse, she checked the e-mail. Mr. T had responded and would be available Sunday evening for about two hours. Jennifer let Jason and Trinity know when their final interview with Mr. T would be. She also sent a text message to Mrs. Diaz, so she would be available and on base too.

AJ and Jerry were at a table with Nick, Roger, Aaron and Stephen Wickes. This evening, Aki and Hajime asked if they could sit with the six older boys. They all lived in the same hall of dorm one and had made some educated assumptions about one another. Continuing beyond the topic of internet porn, the eight gay lovers spoke of their relationships and pasts, and where they hoped to be in future weeks, months and years. Twelve-year-olds Aki and Hajime got some verbal lessons from the six older and more experienced thirteen-year-old boys. On the topic of oral sex, Aki and Hajime learned it was actually way better to kiss and lick private parts; that way the whole experience lasted longer than when simply sucking like mad at the glans 'knob'.

"Make love to your partner's body," AJ softly instructed. "Jerry knows I'm all his. I know he's all mine. It's totally awesome when, after about twenty minutes of little kisses and touches, another simple something pushes you unexpectedly over the edge."

Jerry grinned, "It's very kewl to ask afterward, 'what did I do to cause that?' Even better is the answer, 'everything!'"

Aaron whispered, "We had to do stuff with men and women that we didn't want to do. I think that's when rushing through it is actually

appropriate. With Stephen, I don't want any reminders of that noise."

"It's like what the Core Rimmers say, give today, but be ready to receive tomorrow," Stephen softly agreed.

The conversation got silly and talking led to demonstrations, using folded slices of pizza to instruct Aki and Hajime on the finer points of rimming, which the two younger boys hadn't tried. It was all a matter of personal cleanliness, they learned. On occasion, it was necessary to take a quick shower before returning to their room and making each other messy and sweaty. All six were soon loudly laughing. It was no longer anywhere near serious by the time the crisp pizza crusts were soggy wastes of bread. So all eight went to the kitchen and asked for Italian sausage links to continue their goofy competition.

At another table, Judy Faris, Kathleen Marr, Jason and Trinity Taylor shared a table with the King and Queen. The monarchs were completely amazed with the entire leadership team. Although they had previously spoken with Lieutenant Vorik on the same subject, the dinnertime announcements and subsequent sexual discussion pushed the Royals beyond the logical chat with the Vulcan man. Now they were curious to learn the perspectives that the other parents had.

Judy Faris smiled, "I've always known where Troy was at. As a young boy, about Kaimi's age, he might go out and play with other boys, and come home filthy and bruised, but then he would poke at the Casio keyboard I got him, figuring out melodies by ear. He was a boy that enjoyed being with other boys, but also had a sensitive side."

Nodding, Kathleen agreed, "Stephen is very sensitive too. However, he's participated in more here these last few days than he has his entire life."

"Robbie's somewhere between those two examples," Jason simply offered.

Queen Adamina asked, "When did you tell your sons the facts of life?"

Trinity answered, "On Robbie's tenth birthday."

Smiling and nodding, Jason recalled, "He treated it like another present. With that information, he could understand what older boys at his school were really saying."

"Troy asked me when he was about nine-and-a-half," Judy smiled.

Kathleen sighed, "Other boys were mocking Stephen. When he told me that, I began the process when he was nine-years-old."

Jason frowned, huffing, "That's sad, and I can guarantee that the boys mocking Stephen had less knowledge than Stephen had."

Trinity nodded, "You probably saved him from some battles with ammunition to protect himself."

Quietly absorbing the conversation, King Aalona said, "Earlier today, Kaimi asked to be allowed to go to school here. I had several good reasons to allow it, but I also had reservations, because of the histories of many of these children. This evening's conversation and what the leadership team said has greatly reduced my concerns. This environment would be progressive for Kaimi." He wiped his mouth with a napkin, then said, "Excuse me, please." The King stood and went to Prez.

Wide-eyed, the Queen smiled, "It seems that I must prepare to

get Kaimi's school transcripts."

Seeing the King approaching, Prez wondered, "How can I help you, Majesty?" King Aalona told Prez of Kaimi's requested school change, and his own observations, made during the course of one of the most difficult days in history. He asked that Kaimi be permitted to attend school on base, and Prez quickly agreed. King Aalona also asked if Prez could join him at the time of the press conference he had scheduled for seven that evening. After mulling it over a few seconds, Prez smiled, "I'd be honored to do that, Majesty, but there are two problems with it. First, I can't be dressed in much more than I'm wearing now. Also, I need to take medication right after dinner. I don't want to make you appear bad, so, if it's acceptable, could Keith take my place? As assistant director, he knows all that I know, and is equally capable."

King Aalona nodded once, saying, "Again, you have impressed me. Yes, Keith can take your place at this evening's press conference."

After wiping his mouth and standing, Keith asked, "How would you like me to participate, Majesty?"

King Aalona smiled, "Join me in my condo apartment when you're done eating, Keith. I'll review my speech notes with you, and then we can discuss what you may want to add."

Keith nodded, "We'll have security for us available before we meet with the press."

"Very well," King Aalona smiled, and then walked away. Keith sat down again to finish his dinner. King Aalona stopped at the table where he had been eating, shared a few brief words with the Queen and other adults, and then left the CIC

Wearing a Cheshire cat grin, Prez glanced down at Keith and

softly sniggered. Keith grinned, "Very funny! What the heck am I going to say?"

Prez chuckled, "I didn't know what He wanted. Having you do it was logical. I can't stand there in my Clan Short robe with only a shower wrap underneath, and I sure as hell can't do it on pain meds."

With his eyes spinning, Keith started singing the Celtic music that was played in the Command Center only a few hours earlier. Mike, Derrick and Reyes cracked up. Looking around the dining room, Prez found his and Keith's security sitting together, and then walked over to them. He told them what was planned, asked them to get changed into dress uniforms when they were done eating, and to be prepared for anything during the press conference. Getting positive replies from all six, he thanked them, then went to the table where his parents were sitting, to let them know what Keith was about to do.

Naturally, those sitting nearby overheard the King and Prez. Soon everyone knew that Keith was going to be on television with the King. When Prez got back to his table, Kaleo offered, "We should prob'ly get the auditorium powered up to show a movie."

Prez nodded and smirked, "I'd doubt the little tikes will understand the content of the press conference or care, for that matter. That's a good idea, Kaleo." He then asked, "Troy, where's Uncle Colin?"

"His sleep schedule's all messed up," Troy answered. "The last I heard, he was taking a nap, before his swearing in ceremony. All of the press are staying at hotels off base, Prez. The only additional guest we'll have here is the Federal Judge and his wife."

Prez nodded, "Let Uncle Colin's secret service know what the King is doing. Maybe Uncle Colin will want to be there, or at least

watch it on TV. Then you and Sean can give Kaleo and Tory a hand at the auditorium. Get a movie set up for the kids."

"Kewl," Troy smiled.

Sean whispered to Troy, "I'll get us a cot." Troy's smile widened.

Turning to where John was sitting, Prez said, "Be there with Keith and the King, bro. We don't need any more drama today."

With his face stuffed and chewing his food, John gave a thumbs up and sent, *'No problem, Prez.'*

Prez nodded, "Wear your Clan Short robe too."

'I'm bringing Stephen too, to add to his training,' John relayed.

Tilting his head, Prez asked, "You're training Stephen?"

John nodded, "With me, he's telepathic, but not generally. Having an empath there is still good. Besides, I want him with me."

"Grrr," Stephen softly growled. Covering his mouth, Frankie went into a giggling fit.

At the young family's interaction, Prez grinned, "What about Jerry and AJ?"

"They've got the dump," John assured, and then recommended, "Give them tonight to sleep on it. A snap quiz in the morning might be good, just to be sure."

Prez nodded, and then went into the Command Center. The moment he stepped in the room, Paulie giggled, "You're starting to act telepathic, Prez."

Prez grinned, "I only came in here to ask Lieutenant Vorik to get personal security assigned for Jerry and AJ." Vorik immediately contacted the Rapid Response Base to complete that task.

Paulie smiled, "We just got a call from Des Moines. They've got more kids for us."

Curling his lips inward, Prez hummed, and then asked, "How many?"

"Nine in this group," Paulie answered. Checking his computer monitor, he continued, "Three sets of brothers. The first are a fifteen-year-old and a twelve-year-old, the second set are eight, six and four, and the third are all seven-years-old." Paulie sniggered, "It's another set of quadruplet boys."

Prez smiled, "Well, I was hoping to let Jerry and AJ have the night off. I guess that's shot now."

Paulie shrugged, "It's an easy pickup, boss; there and back in five minutes. They'll spend more time in the basement store."

Prez nodded, and then locked eyes with Lieutenant Vorik. Before being asked, Vorik said, "Additional security will be available within the hour, Sir."

"Okay," Prez sighed, "I don't want to delay this mission, and there are some very young kids too, so I'll send AJ, Jerry, Drew and Corey along with their two boys." He turned around and walked back out of the Command Center. On his way across the dining room, Prez thought of a better plan. Stopping at the table where his sons sat, Prez explained the situation. He asked, "Richie and Gage, would you go along to help?" Both happily agreed.

Dee frowned, "Why can't me and Sammy go too?"

Prez smiled, "Because daddy will be busy for the next hour or two with the King. I need you two here as witnesses, so daddy knows for sure that I took my pills."

Standing with gathered trays to take to the kitchen, Keith smirked, "Yeah, as a matter of fact, take Poppa to do that now. I'll see you guys later."

At Keith's suspicion and Prez's rolling eyes, Dee cracked up. Sammy giggled, "Okay, dad. We'll make sure pop pops his pills."

Heading for the kitchen, Keith said, "And make him relax for a little while. Sit down and watch TV for at least a half hour." He told Prez, "Mike, Derrick and Reyes can take over."

Softly chortling, Mike locked eyes with Prez. Wishing he had never chanced running through flames, Prez shook his head and sighed. Derrick smiled, "Go take a break, Prez. We'll keep the place running."

Prez sighed, "Come on Richie and Gage, let's go get the rest of the team." Heading towards the table where Corey and Drew were sitting, Prez shared the plan. Soon, Geoff, Lenny, Jerry and AJ were informed. Prez leaned over to kiss his sons and thank them.

Gathered with Corey, AJ, Jerry and the four sons, Drew called Conner, Chuck, Ata and Baakir to join the away team. Once the group was together outside the CIC, Drew tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, take us to Des Moines, where we've got kids to pick up."

They had only just vanished when Prez felt hands sliding into his. Looking up, Sammy smiled, "Let's go, pop. None of us really

want to see dad having a hissy fit."

Arriving at the Wells Fargo Arena, Drew glanced at Jerry and AJ, asking, "Would you like to run the show?"

Before either teenager could answer, Grandma Morrison laughed, "Drew and Corey are back again, already?"

Spinning around toward the sound of the woman's voice, Corey hurried to her, giggling, "Hi Grandma," and gave her a hug.

Drew approached more slowly, but still wore a wide smile. "You know we couldn't have stayed away from you for very long." He gave her a hug, then gestured to the others they arrived with, introducing, "Grandma, this little guy here is our son, Geoff, and beside him is our other son, Lenny."

Grandma had squatted down and opened her arms to meet both boys. "Oh my goodness!" Grandma heartily giggled, "They're so precious."

While she was down, Drew smiled, "The red haired boy is our nephew, Richie. He's Prez's and Keith's son, and so is the next dude, Gage, with chestnut brown hair."

Hugging the two boys, Grandma looked up and joked, "Is every boy at Ewa Beach this handsome?"

Drew giggled, "I guess." When Grandma stood, Drew smiled, "These last two dudes are new Core Rimmers, Grandma. The red haired dude is Jerry Hebda. The one with brown hair is his partner, Arnold James Smithson. We call him AJ."

"My Lord!" Grandma gasped. She then smiled, "Yes, I will be making a quick trip to Hawaii tonight. Come give me a hug, Jerry and

AJ."

Shyly, both teens stepped forward to be engulfed in Grandma's embrace. When they were sufficiently deprived of oxygen, she released them, smiling, "Let me introduce you to your new brothers."

Shortly after starting the walk, Richie and Gage stayed with Grandma, but the others remained with Drew and Corey. Jerry tapped Drew and whispered, "Is she always like that?"

Rapidly nodding, Drew softly answered, "I'm sure she's knocking back her enthusiasm a notch or two, because the refugee kids are victims, and she knows a lot of Clan kids have had bad times."

An adult man's voice called, "Mom, we've got another boy that chose to go to Hawaii." Immediately veering off course, Grandma led the pack in that direction. Walking with a boy of about twelve or thirteen, the man said, "This is Raymond Varga, from Los Angeles. His father was a county sheriff and a casualty of the riots there."

"Yes, you definitely need to go to the islands; you are too handsome to be wasted on the continent." Grandma stated matter-of-factly. "Drew, introduce your brother to his family. Then you need to see your Aunt Nancy immediately for your evening shakes."

Corey howled laughing. Drew giggled, "Grandma, we just had dinner, ten minutes before we got here! I had four big slices of pizza!"

Nudging AJ, Corey cackled, "She's warming up now."

"You are nine minutes overdue, young man. Now move it before I decide that you and Corey need to expand your family even more."

Losing control, Corey laughed himself into a case of hiccups.

Richie, Gage, Geoff and Lenny were giggling. Jerry widely smiled at this madness. AJ simply appeared astonished. Drew sniggered, "And what about Raymond and the other nine we came here to get?"

"Georgie, could you please send that nice young boy Leo over here, that Jeff and Brian just processed?" Grandma said sweetly into her comm-badge.

"Yes, Grandma." George responded amazingly quickly. About two-seconds later, a skinny white-blond nine-year-old boy with ice-blue eyes appeared next to her.

"Leo Daniel Scott, meet your new parents, Drew and Corey. Jeff said that you wanted parents like the ones you just lost, ones that like being funny."

After pausing long enough to ensure Leo was sufficiently glued to his new parents, Grandma added, "I instructed Nancy to ensure that your other nine additions were comfortable. They are waiting for you with her."

Shyly saying, "Hey," Leo glanced up at Drew and Corey.

Unable to catch his breath from laughing through his hiccups, Corey wobbled and fell down. Wide-eyed and grinning madly, Leo silently wondered what was going on. Geoff and Lenny went to help their pop, but they were too small and Corey accidentally pulled both down on top of him. All three became hysterical. Trying desperately to maintain composure during his first Core Rimmer mission, Jerry sputtered. Richie and Gage were happy to join Grandma for milkshakes. Seeing his partner was having fun, AJ tickled Jerry while simultaneously telling him to "Stop laughing!"

Pulling Leo close, Drew sniggered, "Is this the best part of your

day?"

Leo nodded and giggled, "Beats the heck out of waiting around here, doin' nothin'."

Raymond grinned, "So, umm... is it like this in Hawaii?"

"Nah," Drew giggled, "it's better." Noticing Grandma walking off with Richie and Gage, Drew smiled, "Let's follow Grandma, dudes." Drew, AJ and Jerry helped get Corey, Geoff and Lenny off the ground. The group hurried after Grandma, Richie and Gage.

Jogging along, Leo remained close to Drew, asking, "Do you think I could get a charger for my iPod Nano?"

"Not a problem," Drew answered, and then sniggered, "Remind me later, when we get home, with twenty more kids than the nine we came here to get."

Back at Ewa Beach, at his family's townhome, Prez had taken his pills. He sat down in the living room to watch TV with Dee and Sammy. What they saw and heard on the TV was all of what had just occurred at Des Moines. Catching his breath, Prez chuckled, "Alden, who is Grandma?"

Alden giggled, "Genetically speaking, she's the grandmother of Adam, Mark, Brian and Jeff. She believes that Ralphie, Richie, Robbie and Ronnie are her grandsons too, since Ronnie and Adam were, and still are, foster brothers. As you can see, the kids like her, so she's basically adopted all of Clan Short."

Dee giggled, "Should we tell our grandma about Leo?"

Prez smiled, "Let's wait and see what Leo, Drew and Corey

want to do."

Outside by the pools, the Des Moines group and Brandon were ready to head home. It was after eleven o'clock in Des Moines. Brandon hugged and kissed his cousins, but instead of saying goodbye, he said, "I'll see you tomorrow." The quadruple Rs said goodnight to the double-twins, Garrett and the rest of the group. Colin ordered Kerry to grab Brandon's suitcases and gym bag. As soon as all the farewells were done, Alien told Kerry to take their group home.

At the Wells Fargo Arena, Grandma and Nancy had gotten everyone milkshakes and introduced the new boys to the Ewa Beach group. There were the Hunnicutt brothers, four-year-old Shaun, six-year-old Michael, and eight-year-old Kenneth, from New York City. The seven-year-old Steib quadruplets were Kelly, Lawrence, Matthew and Nicholas, from Washington, D.C. The Nash brothers were fifteen-year-old Craig and twelve-year-old Phillip, from Los Angeles. Grandma and Nancy went back to work with refugees, allowing the boys to get to know one another.

Beginning the transition to Clan life, Richie and Gage talked with the Steib brothers; Lenny and Geoff chatted with the Hunnicutts; AJ and Jerry oriented Craig and Phillip; Corey and Drew spoke with Leo and Raymond. All the boys were told that there was pasta and pizza waiting for them at Ewa Beach. Still, they liked the shakes, so they wanted to finish them.

During the day, Corey and Drew learned not to dwell upon the Battle of Earth. Refugees craved normalcy. While they were chatting with Leo and Raymond, they learned that both were into music and water sports. Leo had played water polo at his school and preferred Top 40 radio hits. Ray liked to surf and para-surf and liked alternative music, like Toad The Wet Sprocket and The Lemonheads. With Craig and Phillip, Drew and Corey spoke of favorite sports, learning that the

two brothers really enjoyed soccer and played on their schools' teams. The Clan leaders asked that, once Craig and Phillip got settled, they start teaching the game to the others at Ewa Beach.

Sitting on the ground in a circle, Richie, Gage, Geoff and Lenny spent almost all their time assuring the younger group of rescued boys that life was really very good at Ewa Beach. Little Shaun Hunnicutt went to Jerry and held his arms out and up, wanting to be held. Grinning at the rug-rat, Jerry squatted down, lifted Shaun and parked him on his left hip.

Grandma returned and saw that most of the milkshakes were near finished. She prompted, "If you boys are ready, let's go to Hawaii."

Corey smiled, "You're coming too, Grandma?"

"Of course," she answered, "I've always wanted to visit Hawaii, and from what you boys said during the day, it sounds very different from the Des Moines neighborhood I'm at. Besides, I'd like to meet some of your parents, leaders, and some of my other grandchildren." She pointed at trash cans, so the boys could dump their cups. As the boys gathered around her, she wondered, "Is there someplace we need to be?"

Drew nodded, "First stop is our CIC dining room."

"Kerry, do the honors, please," Grandma called.

Upon arrival, AJ and Jerry got the newbies over to the chow line. Richie, Gage, Geoff and Lenny joined the group. Drew asked Grandma, "How about I get my mom or dad to show you around?"

Corey quickly added, "If they're busy, my folks, or Mike's or

Derrick's could give you a tour, Grandma?"

"Thank you," Grandma smiled. She went over to check on the new kids in the chow line. Corey and Drew called their parents. In moments, Jim Hundser as well as Bill and Lanna Seaver were transported to the dining room. Corey and Drew took their parents to the kitchen, where Grandma was helping little Shaun Hunnicutt.

Drew said, "We'll take over, Grandma. Let us introduce our parents." When the woman looked over and Corey had taken over with Shaun, Drew introduced his dad and Corey's parents.

The adults shook hands and Grandma began chattering, praising Drew, Corey, John and Stephen. Leaving the boys in the kitchen, the adults started giving Grandma a base tour. The sun had set, but all the automated lighting had turned on. From the CIC, they followed the sidewalk through the dormitory 'quad'.

There was a knock at the front door of Prez's townhouse. Since Prez was drowsy and relaxing, Dee shouted, "I'll get it, Poppa," and hurried to the door. He opened it and found Lindsay Gibbons standing there. Dee giggled, "Hi, Linds!"

Lindsay smiled, "Hey, Dee. Is Prez awake?"

Dee nodded, "He's just watchin' TV with us." Stepping back, Dee waved Lindsay inside, and then closed the door behind her. Dee returned to the sofa, where Prez and Sammy were lounging.

Prez smiled, "How're you doin', Lindsay?"

Lindsay shrugged, "Okay, just a little confused, Prez."

"About?" Prez prompted.

Lindsay shuffled her feet and rambled, "I was talkin' with my mom after supper. It's a little strange, we think, that other girls are being made leaders. Remember Saturday at the beach, almost all the girls were naked, no matter how old they are? How often have you seen a completely naked teenage girl since then?"

Prez blinked, "Never naked, only topless, and even that's pretty rare."

"You know why, don't you?"

Shaking his head, Prez heard John's voice in his mind, loudly hollering, *'Oh shit! We're in trouble now.'*

"I did that," Lindsay frowned. "I taught them that their bodies are theirs and not to make boys happy. Boys show off, but girls shouldn't and don't really need to be like boys that way. They used to think differently, ya know? Now they know better and ya know what? Some are getting boyfriends too! The boys like them more this way, at least the straight ones do. The FCC girls were the exact opposite; they were taught that liking boys was bad. I told them and showed them that boys are boys, they act different, but they're just like us with different parts, and when we grow up, maybe we'll marry boys and have babies with them."

Prez nodded and grinned, "That's great. I didn't know that."

Lindsay scowled, "So how come you made other girls leaders and not me? I was thinking you were making only boys leaders, which isn't fair, but you're the director, so..."

Holding a hand up to signal a pause, Prez sighed, "I'm sorry, Lindsay. I had no idea you had done anything. It's not a secret that girls need girl leaders for some stuff." He then called, "Alden, get a comm-badge for Lindsay." The communications device appeared on

Prez's shower wrap on his lap. He picked it up, offering it to Lindsay, smiling, "You're now a leader too and definitely deserve it. When I call for a leadership team meeting, that'll include you. You're not a Core Rimmer and won't be doing rescues, so tell your mom and dad that your duties are strictly limited to our five bases." Prez then gently explained, "Doing rescues, so far as I've seen, really requires boys. It can be rough and very distressing. After Wednesday night's California orphanages, we all had to have Vulcan mind melds to cope with what we had seen and done."

Pinning the comm-badge onto her shirt, Lindsay nodded and sighed, "John only told me a little bit. He wouldn't even say it aloud or why he wouldn't tell me more. My brother ignored my questions."

"It was *that* bad," Prez firmly assured.

Realizing that Prez wasn't going to say more, Lindsay sighed, "Well, thanks Prez. I'm going to go over to the dorms to let the other girls know. They're all really happy that you're making us leaders. Then I'll go home and tell my family." She giggled, "I can't wait for Mike to find out."

Prez laughed, "Neither can I."

Waving, Lindsay said, "See ya later," and went to the door. She stepped outside and closed the door. Dormitory one was closest and the second floor was filled so she jogged there.

Prez glanced at Sammy and Dee, wondering, "Did either of you know any of that?"

Dee shook his head. Sammy shrugged, "I've seen Lindsay going in and out of dorms with other girls, but I wasn't around Saturday either."

Only moments later, while Sammy was channel surfing for something on TV to watch, there was another knock at the door. Again, Dee bounded up off the couch to answer it. He opened the door and recognized the two teen boys standing there, wearing Clan cloaks with dirty and tattered suits beneath, but had to search his memory to remember their names. Dee muttered, "Harry and... uh?"

Prez leaned forward and looked over at the door. Standing, he excitedly called, "Jonas and Harry! Damn, I'm glad to see you two in one piece. Several times last night, Keith and I wondered if you were safe."

"Jonas!" Dee giggled and blushed, "yeah, that's it, sorry."

Harry gave Dee a quick hug and warmly smiled, "A week is long time when things are always changing."

"Can we come in and talk?" Jonas asked.

"Sure, dudes," Prez warmly smiled. Dee stepped aside, allowing the taller Clan leaders to enter. Once they were inside, Prez gestured to chairs and prompted, "Please have a seat, you look like you need to."

"We've been on the go since about five this morning," Jonah wearily offered, "and we left Washington at midnight. The place looks like something out of a disaster movie. And there's more people dead or homeless than I even want to think about." Two younger boys followed Jonas and Harry inside.

Dee giggled and hugged Peter Lambert before the shifty Mikyvis could vanish to prevent it.

"This is Galen, Kurt's nephew from the new compound in upstate New York," Jonas introduced the other boy. "He was dead

earlier today."

Squinting suspiciously, Sammy muttered, "Rapid recovery?"

Releasing Peter and lunging for Galen, Dee said, "Hi," and told Sammy, "See the purple eyes, bro. They're Mikyvis'. Remember me telling you how bad my butt hurt Saturday? It was Peter that fixed me, so I could have fun the rest of the day."

Peter giggled. "Yeppers! And I couldn't let somebody as cute as Galen stay dead." He blushed, and the two Mikyvis hopped onto the couch, one on either side of Sammy, cuddling him.

"The Capitol is in ruins, dude," Harry softly told Prez. "So's the Pentagon, and part of the White House, and a whole bunch of office buildings, stores, homes, condos, and you-name-its all over Washington. Most of Congress is dead, so're the President and Vice President. We had Romulan moles in government positions. Jonas shot one of them, and the V.P. was another. And you wouldn't believe how many, um, rectums were trying to 'follow standard procedure' when that would benefit nobody but the Romulans."

"We came here because you guys are playing host to the guy who is now the new President, to let him know," Jonas added.

Nodding, Prez sighed, "Keith told me about some of that." He then asked, "Please relax a few minutes? Are you hungry?" When his two worn out friends nodded, Prez called, "Alden, get a pizza and two Cokes here for Jonas and Harry. Then contact Uncle Gordon, or any of Uncle Colin's security. Let them know I'm coming for a visit with two additional Family Clan Short leaders, and give them Harry's and Jonas' full names. To make this clear to you, them and Uncle Colin, this is not a social call; it's business, so there's no choice. The most we're doing is showing our ID cards, but we are going to talk to Uncle

Colin. They've got about fifteen minutes to get ready. As soon as Harry and Jonas are fed and ready, we're there."

"Full court press?" Jonas asked, referring to Prez's tone.

Prez explained, "It's not been a great day. You two look like something that cat dragged in, played with and left to rot on the floor. Be that as it may, you guys were there, in Washington, where Uncle Colin eventually must go back to. He needs to hear what you have to say."

Interrupting Prez, Lay's potato chips dropped from near the ceiling onto Prez, Jonas and Harry. Alden giggled, "There, now you guys can say you got leied in Hawaii. The pizza and Cokes are on the table."

Harry asked, "Alden, are your circuits waterproof?"

"Um... no."

"Well, then no dunking until after you get your body," Harry warned. "But just remember, we owe you!" Turning to Prez, he smirked, "So, is this the new 'in' thing for Clan leaders; T-shirt and short terrycloth sarong?" Harry quipped about Prez's outfit.

"And it looks like you're shaving your legs now too!" Jonas chuckled.

Prez grinned, "Do you want to eat or see my burned butt? I'd think eating might be a little more important, but it's your appetite."

Over on the sofa, where two boys and two Mikyvis were sitting, Dee burst into giggles. The three teens glanced over to find billows of smoke rising off the front of Sammy's board shorts. Blushing, Peter

giggled, "That's what're known as hot pants, hot stuff!"

"We're eating!" Jonas replied to Prez, scarfing down pizza. "Seriously, how bad was it?"

"Second degree on my feet and tush, first degree on my legs," Prez answered. "Earlier today, I was in a robe that kept slipping open. Today, I've accidentally exposed myself to three dignitaries. At least a shower wrap keeps my dick out of everyone's sight. The worst part is the pain pills have codeine in them, so I'm not all here, really. I'll probably escort you to the condo, introduce you and then excuse myself to return here. Keith told Dee and Sammy to make sure I relax. Rather than get my sons in trouble, or make an ass out of myself in front of Uncle Colin, I'll avoid all that. I can see you're tired, but when you're done with Uncle Colin, please come back here?"

"Glad it's getting better, and that plan sounds good," Jonas said. "'Uncle Colin,' huh?"

Prez chuckled, "Troy, one of my new Core Rimmers, made the mistake of calling him 'Mister President'. Don't go there, or risk a ranting ex-four star general. He prefers Uncle Colin."

"Got it," Jonas and Harry said. They each finished a third slice of pizza and drank down some Coke.

In short order, the pizza was gone. Prez led Jonas and Harry to condominium C. All three showed their ID cards to the secret service men at the entrance. Since they were expected, they were quickly allowed inside and went up to the tenth floor executive condo. Uncle Colin was awake, but wearing a robe, proving that he had been asleep. Prez introduced Jonas and Harry as Family Clan Short Northeast Division director and assistant director. After briefly explaining his own situation and that his sons were expecting him home, Prez left

Uncle Colin, Jonas and Harry to their discussion and returned home.

At half past six that night, Mike made an announcement over the PA to the entire base that was heard in the auditorium, CIC, the dorms, the homes, the rec center and outdoors. "Attention all Rimmers; we will be receiving guests over at the FYS Building. They are news reporters who will have cameras, for our King's announcements. The reporters will be warned not to take photos; however, to be sure all of you are safe, please do not go anywhere beyond the CIC and auditorium. For your own safety and security, do not go near the shuttle pad, the FYS Building, or the parking garage. Stay to the south side of the base, in the housing area, by the playground, the pools or indoors. You can do whatever you like, but we'd like to be sure you're all safe. Our base security are concentrated north of the CIC. If they see you there, they will turn you around, so just don't go there. In a few minutes, Derrick, Reyes and I will leave the Command Center and be available to answer your questions. That's it, guys. Get back to having fun."

Roaming around their new home only to get familiar with it, Lance Kinchen and Scott Shetley were chatting about their favorite music CDs. They paused their conversation to hear Mike's announcement. In the trees to the northwest of the shuttle pad and realizing they were where Mike had said they shouldn't be, they started jogging toward the driveway leading to North Road. Lance grinned, "So the top five CDs are?"

Scott answered, "Number five is The Beatles White Album. Number four is Deep Purple's Machine Head."

"Number three is AC DC's Back In Black," Lance offered.

Scott said, "Number two is Zeppelin's Physical Graffiti."

Together, they cheered, "Number one is Zeppelin's fourth, ZOFO," and started laughing.

Scott chuckled, "It's so amazing that we never knew each other, but have the same taste in music."

"I wouldn't have listed The White Album at all," Lance truthfully admitted, "but you're right, there are too many classic rockers on those disks to ignore. Helter Skelter was one of the first metal songs ever written. That song alone gets it on the list." Taking an easy tangent, he started singing, "Why don't we do it in the road? Why don't we do it in the road? Why don't we do it in the road? Why don't we do it in the road?"

Joining with Lance, Scott sang, "No one will be watching us, why don't we do it in the road?"

Seeing the two security guys at the checkpoint were grinning at them, Lance cracked up and slowed to a brisk walk. Chaz asked, "Are you newbies all right?"

Also slowing his pace, Scott chuckled, "Just at the wrong place at the wrong time... again."

"For the second time today!" Lance laughed.

Chaz wondered, "Where are you from?"

"New York City," both teens answered.

Billy smiled, "That tells us why you're still wearing jeans and long sleeve shirts."

Lance smirked, "Now we're sweaty again."

Nodding at Lance, Scott asked the two security guys, "Is there

someplace we can take a shower?"

Billy smiled, "There are showers in all the dorms, in the pool house and at the rec center."

Tapping his comm-badge, Chaz called, "Alden, can you keep an eye on these two and get them clothes appropriate for the climate?"

"No problem, Chaz," Alden replied.

Lance grinned, "We've been to the store and already got new clothes, just before dinner."

Scott offered, "We didn't want to put clean clothes on when neither of us had the chance to shower before evacuating Manhattan."

Nodding understandingly, Chaz explained, "It's not a problem, dudes. Wherever you decide to shower, Alden will get you what you need."

Lance and Scott thanked Chaz and Billy and introduced themselves. Billy pointed out, "That first building is dormitory one. The first floor is already filled with guys, and the second floor has girls. This is your home, so take a look around, grab a shower and make yourselves comfy."

Scott grinned, "Reyes showed us around. When we were done with dinner, we decided to go for a walk to digest."

"This base is huge," Lance smiled. "We just discovered that all the buildings are in the center of the lot."

Chaz nodded, "We've got room to expand, if we need to, after we get the other four bases filled."

"Thanks for everything," Scott warmly smiled. He turned to

Lance, asking, "Wanna check out the dorms?"

Lance nodded, "It's closest and I'm long overdue for a shower." He waved at Billy and Chaz, saying, "We'll catch ya around later." Following the driveway, Lance and Scott walked toward the CIC and dormitories. Once they were alone, Lance asked Scott, "Is it just me or is everybody very kewl here?"

Scott chuckled, "It's a far cry from the city life we're used to, huh?"

Lance giggled, "I know they're really busy, but I'd really like to talk to more of the leaders."

"I can't wait to hear their band," Scott admitted. "I know what a virtuoso is, but I couldn't name one, and I don't think I've ever heard a virtuoso band."

Thinking about it for many moments, Lance turned to his new friend, wondering, "What kind of music do you think they play?"

Shrugging, Scott answered, "To be virtuosos, they could probably play anything and everything they want."

Walking around the CIC, they continued chatting about Derrick, Mike, Reyes, Kaleo, Tory, Drew, Corey, John and Stephen, the leaders they had already met and talked with. They walked into the nearest dormitory. In the first room, number twenty-six, two older teenagers were watching TV. Three rooms down the hall, two pre-teens were sitting on the floor and playing video games. In the next room, there were four young boys. They had double-sized bunk beds, four desks and chairs. A few doors further down the hall, two slightly older boys were naked and sitting at their desks browsing the Pacific Rim Division's web site.

Lance and Scott walked into the common room, where two teenagers and two pre-teens were watching the big television. Roger Mosqueda, Nick Shavers, Jerry Burk and John Huth introduced themselves to the two newbie teenagers. Lance and Scott told them why they were there and asked some general questions about the rooms. Roger and Nick led Lance and Scott down the other hall to their room, allowing the two newbies to get a good look around. Standing in the center of the room, Lance and Scott realized how large the rooms really were. Roger pointed out the stereo, thirty-two inch television, X Box game station, and the two laptop computers. Nick opened his closet, his dresser and night table drawers.

Scott grinned, "This room is expansive!"

Nick nodded and explained, "When we moved in, the beds were under the windows. We moved them to the adjacent walls. So it would all fit, we had to move the dressers closer to the desks."

Roger added, "The TV and stereo have timers, so we can watch TV or listen to tunes while we're going to sleep, and they'll turn themselves off. Even in the mornings, we'll turn on the TV, set the timer, hit the bathroom and shower, and go to the CIC for breakfast, knowing that the TV will turn itself off."

Nick said, "There are solar panels on the roof, so the building has its own power source. The hot water is also solar and heated more by electric water heaters. There are over a hundred kids living in this dorm and we've never run out of hot water."

At the enthusiastic descriptions, Lance chuckled, "We're guitarists and will hopefully have amplifiers pretty soon. I can easily see how we could set up a room so that we have space for all that stuff and still have plenty of area in the middle of the room."

Taking Roger's hand, Nick grinned, "We're a couple, which is why we came to the Clan; our parents couldn't deal. Are you dudes gay too?"

Scowling, Lance blinked at Scott then softly sighed, "I always considered myself straight, but honestly, I really don't know."

Scott nodded, "Same here. I've been concentrating on learning guitar since my tenth birthday."

Lance giggled, "You've been playing since ten too?"

Scott smiled, "I had an acoustic that I messed with before that, but got seriously into it when I turned ten."

Roger grinned, "The greatest thing about the Clan is we can figure everything out; sexuality and our education goals too, so we can choose good careers. You dudes are gonna flip when you hear Platinum Habits play for us."

Slightly out of sync, Scott and Lance uncertainly repeated, "Platinum Habits?"

Nick giggled, "The Core Rimmers' band; Prez plays bass guitar, Mike plays guitar, Derrick and Reyes on drums and percussion, Keith and Troy play keyboards."

"Troy also plays guitar, saxophone and harmonica," Roger smiled. "They're awesome! After your shower, come back here and we'll play a recording of their wedding concert for you."

"Thanks!" Lance happily cheered. "We've been hoping to hear them soon."

At Lance's enthusiasm, Scott chuckled, "Give us ten or fifteen

minutes, and we'll be right back."

"Take your time," Nick giggled, "we'll be here."

Scott led the way from the room and Lance followed. Just a little further down the hall was the lavatory. They walked in and went directly to the commodes. Sitting on a toilet, Scott said, "Tonight's dinner was fantastic. I didn't expect good New York style pizza, but it was awesome."

Letting a loud one rip, Lance giggled, "Gotta love Italian food and garlic!" Scott roared laughing. About a minute later, when Scott had quieted to soft chuckling, Lance giggled, "Do you want to be roommates, Scott?"

"On one condition."

"Name it."

Scott chuckled, "You always fart in the bathroom!"

Lance giggled, "When I'm awake to control it, I promise to try."

"Beware my silent but deadly farts, pal," Scott sniggered.

Seconds later, noxious fumes drifted beyond the wall separating them. Lance squealed, "OH MY GOD!" and Scott cracked up.

Hurrying to finish, Lance laughed, "The ceramic tile is melting, man!"

"And this cast iron bowl is a little less white too," Scott sniggered.

"No doubt!" Lance giggled. He flushed and pulled his jeans up, but left the zipper and button undone, and then went directly to the

mob shower changing area. He started to strip and heard the other toilet flush. Scott stepped out, holding his jeans up with one hand. Lance giggled, "You could at least blush!"

Shaking his head, Scott entered the changing area, sniggering, "Ya still wanna be roommates?"

Nodding, Lance grinned, "I know now to give you space after eating Italian food," and padded naked into the mob shower. He looked around the new environment. About three feet off the floor, there were soap dispensers on the pale blue ceramic tiled walls between every shower head. "For the little kids," Lance softly muttered, and turned on a shower.

Entering the shower in his birthday suit, Scott asked, "What's that?"

Pointing at the soap dispensers, Lance repeated, "They're pretty low for us, but for little kids, it's a good height."

Turning on the shower across from Lance, Scott offered, "I guess we need to get into big brother mode somehow."

Stepping under the warm water, Lance shared, "I had some younger cousins out on Long Island. It won't be too big a problem. Mostly, we just need to keep them entertained, even when you're teaching them stuff." Rather than stare blankly at his new friend's admirable body, Lance turned to face the wall, wet his front and got a palm full of soap. Scott had a really nice body to match his great personality, Lance had to admit to himself. He had a nice thick uncut dick that hung just a little longer than his sack. He also had wide shoulders and a torso that was appropriate for a guitar player; not too muscular, but certainly not beanstalk arms and legs, like on his own wiry frame. Then again, Scott was about a year older. After grabbing

another palm full of soap, Lance turned around asking, "What's your birthday, Scott?"

"May second, 1990," Scott answered, and then asked, "What's yours?"

"February sixteenth, 1991," Lance replied. He grinned, "We're only about ten months apart, man."

Turning to the wall, Scott checked, "You said you're from Chelsea?"

"Yep. You lived in Kips Bay?"

"Yeah, barely a mile from you; it might as well have been twenty miles."

Forcing himself to stop staring at Scott's muscular ass, Lance turned again, asking, "Would I seem fickle if I said I already like it more here?"

"Nope," Scott quickly responded, "I like it here too. The climate is awesome." He turned around and closed his eyes to wash his face, thinking, 'God dammit! What the fuck is wrong with me? I never looked at any other guy like Lance. So he's got a longer snipped dick! Good for him! He's been a great friend all fucking day. If I hadn't met him walking out of the city, I might've gone insane long before now. Don't screw it up by imagining he's gay. I have to keep my bisexual past secret or I'll lose a friend and damn good guitar player in one swipe.'

Breaking Scott out of his thoughts, Lance started singing; "Oh Yeah, yeah. We roll tonight, To the guitar bite. Yeah, yeah, oh. Stand up and be counted, For what you are about to receive. We are the dealers. We'll give you everything you need. Hail, hail to the good

times, 'Cause rock has got the right of way. We ain't no legend, ain't no cause. We're just livin' for today."

Sliding around and playing air guitar like Angus Young, Scott faced Lance and joined him, singing; "For those about to rock, we salute you! For those about to rock, we salute you! We rock at dawn on the front line, Like a bolt right out of the blue, The sky's alight with the guitar bite, Heads will roll and rock tonight!"

Lance shook his butt around and played air guitar too, continuing the chorus with Scott. "For those about to rock, we salute you! For those about to rock, we salute you! For those about to rock, we salute you! Yes we do! For those about to rock, we salute you! Oooh, salute! Oooh, oooooh yeah!"

Simultaneously, both teenagers cracked up laughing. Neither could bring themselves to admit the right thing to do was hug each other tightly and say thank you for turning a horrible day into a good one. Instead, Lance giggled, "That was too much fun for the fuckin' shower!"

Nodding, Scott chuckled, "Yeah, but we definitely need to practice singing."

"That's why we decided to come here," Lance reminded.

Rinsing his back and butt, Scott smiled, "I really needed this shower. All day I've felt so funky, man."

Lance giggled, "Let me just make sure I got all the soap rinsed from under my balls and we're outta here."

Feeling half his blood supply surging into the middle of his body, Scott adjusted the water so it was much cooler and faced the wall again. About a minute later, Scott and Lance turned off the water

and then returned to the changing room. On the wooden slat bench, they found neatly stacked board shorts, underwear and T-shirts. Blinking and scowling at each other for a few moments, they grabbed towels and started drying off. For the first time, Scott uncertainly called, "Alden?"

Alden giggled, "Hi Scott."

Still toweling off, Scott wondered, "How'd you know what size clothes to get us?"

Alden answered, "For now, I'm an AI, without a body. The cameras in the corner let me see you and the speakers allow me to speak to you. I've got lots of jobs around here, but mostly I keep my cameras on all the kids to make sure you're all safe. Soon, I'll be like Reyes, an android, walking around with you guys." He paused and then giggled, "Maybe I'll even get to dance naked in the shower and play air guitar with you!" Suddenly and very loudly, AC DC's For Those About To Rock (We Salute You) played from the ceiling, with Alden singing along.

Covering his blushing face with his towel, Lance giggled, "Oh God!"

Scott chuckled, "He could've played the recording for us."

Having never spoken with an AI before, Scott grinned at Lance and tapped him on the shoulder. Pulling the towel off his face, Lance cutely smiled, "This will take some getting used to."

Nodding, Scott suggested, "Let's get back to Nick and Roger so we can hear Platinum Habits." They hurried to finish up, got dressed in clean new clothes and rolled up their dirty clothes then went to room eleven. Soon, the four boys were listening to the Wedding Concert. At first, Lance and Scott didn't believe it was their leadership

team, but Nick and Roger were there. Jerry Burk and John Hoth joined the group in the room, also confirming that they had been at the concert too and it was Platinum Habits they were listening to. Completely captivated and enthralled, Scott and Lance remained there through most of the recording, until hearing their names called by Drew.

At the Iroquois Avenue gate, newspaper journalists, television news reporters and cameramen started arriving. Each vehicle was stopped and the base security checked all their identification cards. Standing nearby, in their Clan Short robes, were Nathan, John and Stephen, empathically and telepathically scanning each individual in the cars and vans.

Chefs were rolling carts of coffee and tea into the nearby Federation Youth Services Building, where the King would have his press conference. The largest first floor conference room had been set up for the dozens of men and women. Passengers in each vehicle were told that no one would be allowed beyond the FYS Building. Anyone caught filming or taking pictures outside the FYS Building's conference room, or anywhere outdoors, would be summarily removed from the base and the camera would be confiscated. Extra security was at the family housing checkpoint, around the FYS building and around the parking garage. Seeing many armed gorillas and G-Cats around the driveway, no one in the vehicles argued.

A call came into the Command Center from Gordon Rice, the head of Uncle Colin's secret service detail. Derrick took the call. Mr. Rice had a list of names for Uncle Colin's Inauguration, including a U.S. Federal Judge and three dozen news reporters and cameramen. Only the Federal Judge and his wife would be staying at Ewa Beach for the day, and would fly back to the United States Saturday evening. All the reporters would be at hotels in Honolulu. The Inauguration

was scheduled for ten o'clock Saturday morning, but reporters and the judge would begin showing up by nine o'clock in the morning.

Also, Uncle Gordon told Derrick that the White House damages would take at least a week to repair. That meant Uncle Colin would be remaining on base until the White House repairs were completed. Preparations would need to be made to allow Uncle Colin and his secret service to transport out and back to Ewa Beach. Derrick recommended Clan comm-badges and the Family Clan Short bases in the United States as secure interim locations and Uncle Gordon agreed. To get the ball rolling, Derrick contacted Seth at Orlando HQ. Mike and Reyes worked with Ewa Beach UNIT Security so that they were equipped for more reporters and the Federal Judge.

Prepared for their meeting and dressed appropriately, King Aalona and Keith stepped out of the Royal family's condo apartment. Waiting there in the hallway were Keith's enhanced security, Danny, and Prez's enhanced security, Chris. Down the hall, Keith saw the elevator doors opened and locked, with Matt and Justin waiting inside. All of them were dressed in formal uniforms. This seemed a little extreme to Keith. Following the King into the elevator, he grinned, "What's going on, dudes?"

Unlocking the elevator, Chris shrugged, "Prez told us to keep you and King Aalona safe." He pressed the button for the ground floor. The elevator began its descent.

Danny nodded, "Gamba and Nasir are waiting outside. Like we did at school, we'll surround you and our King. The gorillas will lead the way. The four of us will be to the sides and behind you."

King Aalona noticed, "You're not armed." Wearing cute grins, all four boys began whipping out collapsible batons, automatic hand guns and extra clips. At the King's shocked expression, Keith

sputtered, then helplessly cracked up.

Matt chuckled, "The gorillas have MP5-AX rifles and Lord knows what else."

Justin nodded, "Derrick and Mike added to our orders. Regardless of what either of you say during the conference, no one is getting within arm's reach of you. This will be an orderly press conference."

"Or else," Chris seriously warned. The elevator doors opened. Chris and Danny led the group out into the hall. King Aalona and Keith walked out next, with Justin and Matt bringing up the rear.

"Mike and Derrick have all of the gorillas and G-Cats posted north of the CIC, beyond the housing checkpoint," Justin continued. "With the attacks here last night, and all the Battle Of Earth crap, Mike and Derrick asked us, UNIT security and Kekoa, how to keep everyone safe. They're following the plan to the letter."

King Aalona grinned. Keith noticed, but he also heard noises in the air conditioning ducts above his head. Knowing it was the Scooby Gang, Keith sighed and thought, 'great, everybody's at high alert again, for a friggin' press conference.'

Stepping outside, Keith and the King noticed Colin Powell's secret service holding open the doors. The two gorillas were also dressed in their formal uniforms. Not only were they carrying their rifles, but also had their sheathed swords wrapped around their waistbelts. The gorillas sharply turned about-face and started walking the path toward the FYS building. The other four took their positions to the sides and the rear of Keith and the King. Keith wondered, "Nasir, is that sword ceremonial or what?"

Keith's gorilla didn't pause, but unsheathed his sword. Passing a

tree, he jumped and took a swing at a low hanging branch of fair diameter. The branch fell to the ground. Returning the sword to its sheath, Nasir shrugged, "Or what, it seems."

Pulling his robe hood over his head, Keith covered his face with his other hand, softly giggling, "Omigod."

Over at the FYS Building, a female reporter from the Tribune-Herald went to the ladies room. On her way out, she noticed a door left ajar and pushed it open. It was one of the doctors' treatment rooms with two bio-beds. She took her cell phone out of her handbag and snapped a photo. A gorilla and a G-Cat converged on her. The gorilla took the cell phone, held it in front of her face and crushed it. Little pieces of plastic and microchips fell to the floor like dust. The G-Cat informed her, "You're out of here. Let's get your things."

"But my job is to report this press conference," the lady meekly reminded.

The gorilla snarled, "Your instructions were no photographs beyond the conference room."

"What if a doctor was in there with a child?" the G-Cat hissed.

Without answering the question, the lady complained, "My editor won't be happy."

"That's not our problem," the gorilla indifferently said. "If you still have a job, next time you'll listen to instructions and follow them."

The woman was escorted to the conference room to retrieve her jacket and other belongings, then led to her car. She drove off base, certain that this would be a major problem at the newspaper and she

would likely have to find another job.

Only moments later, King Aalona and Keith arrived at the FYS Building. By this time, the gorillas had confirmed proper protocol with the King. Entering the conference room, Gamba and Nasir stepped to the sides of the doorway. Gamba loudly announced, "All rise for His Majesty, King Aalona, King of the Jeweled Isles, Lord of Hawaii and Protector of the Pacific Rim."

Everyone stood and applauded. King Aalona entered the room and wordlessly went to the podium at the front of the room. Keith followed with the four security boys. Televisions around the ROH were tuned in at homes, in the dorms, and at the CIC. Since he was still awake after meeting with Jonas and Harry, Colin Powell was watching from his condominium. Those watching saw Keith take a position to the right of the King and only a step back. Keith appeared very unhappy, like the room of reporters were enemies to be carefully watched. The security personnel took positions near the front row. Other gorillas, G-Cats and human base security were along the sides of the room.

One of the teen boys gathered in the CIC's rec room, Peter Dano noticed that "Keith looks really annoyed."

Hugh Gartrell nodded, "After all the crap last night and into today, with Prez's ass blistered and burned, I can't blame him."

Peter sniggered, "I wonder if the security dudes look that intense. Screw taking names, Keith looks ready to kick some ass."

The stress of the last day was clearly written on the King's face. He prompted, "Please be seated." Once everyone had returned to their chairs, King Aalona began; "Aloha, citizens of Hawaii. The scope and severity of events here and around the world have left me officially

dumbfounded, and personally outraged. As a race, acting as one with our off-planet allies and friends, we managed to fight off our attackers, and triumph, winning our right to exist as a species, with our freedoms, without their interference. We have won back our world. Those celebrating have good reason. I am also pleased and relieved with you."

The King looked down at his notes. With fire in his eyes, He looked up again and loudly raged, "These events started here, in our wonderful small nation, AT MY HOME! Violence started here, BY HUMANS! Humans, acting alone, without Romulan interference or intervention, ATTACKED MY HOME, PUTTING MY WIFE AND MY SON IN DANGER!" The King's words seemed to echo in the conference room. Several of the reporters visibly jumped in their seats at the strength and fury the King projected.

Taking a deep breath, King Aalona more calmly explained, "I was attacked because I chose to accept help from our Vulcan friends and allies, to reform our damaged government. For no other reason, but to tell me to break off relations with Vulcan, I was attacked. For the same purpose, those people attacked Honolulu Airport and The Hyatt Regency at Waikiki. Innocent lives were carelessly taken. Those responsible have been identified and they are being brought to justice. They will be held accountable for two deaths at my palace and one-hundred-seventy deaths at the Hyatt. The penalty is death. By my standards, by our society's standards and by the standards of Vulcan, mass murderers must pay with their lives. Does it give me my palace guards back? No. Does it alleviate the pain and suffering of the families of those men? Not entirely. Children are still without their fathers. Wives are still without their husbands. However, they do know that those who have harmed them have been dealt justice.

"If you are asking, what is justice, then I'd like for you to

consider the similar attack on an abortion clinic last month. What did those women, doctors and nurses do to deserve being killed and maimed? Citizens of Hawaii, I am done with this. Enforcing your beliefs in that militant fashion will not be condoned in this nation. If you do not believe in a women's right to choose, that is your problem. If you do not like Russians, or Americans, or Vulcans, that is your problem. If you encroach on another in this nation, you will be dealt with, in as severe a manner as you dealt with others.

"I am working with our Vulcan allies, and with diplomats in Japan, and with diplomats in the United Kingdom, and with the United States of America. Our laws will be changing, in a logical manner. Justice will be served, in all cases. Prove yourself a bigot, and you will pay the price, as a criminal, in a detention facility, where other bigots can treat you in a bigoted manner.

"Since last night, I have been here on this Clan Short Base, with over two hundred children, of varying ages, nationalities and races. I have watched them interact. Prior to having my crown restored last week, I have seen adults in many of our cities acting less mature than every child on this base. And these are children that have been abused. I defy people to try to make excuses and justify their actions when these children are more mature.

"No longer will this be the case. My innocence was lost with gunfire through windows of my home last night. World wide change is upon us. The attacks, battles, riots and the resulting changes were instigated. We were taken advantage of, and we have responded as one world. I will see this country through our changes, giving support where it is necessary, and delivering justice, with a logical perspective.

"To my right is the Assistant Director of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division, Keith Hundser. He is with me because the Division Director

was injured last night while helping people evacuate the Hyatt Regency. Someone please explain to me why three hundred Clan boys assisted and not one additional adult, beyond our police and firefighters, even offered to help?"

The King waited for a response for almost a minute. He then grinned, "These boys assisted me at my palace, they dealt with those that were attacking, they helped evacuate innocents at the airport and at the Hyatt. Most of the day, Clan Short military assisted in winning battles and Clan Short civilians helped relocate refugees. If you find fault with Clan Short, then I must state that your priorities are severely warped. I can foresee a world where neighbors help each other, where disasters as have been experienced around the world are met with thousands of helpers. Just as Clan Short was there for us in our time of need, we should be proud of them, and try to act like them, and help them as they have helped many others." Turning to Keith, King Aalona asked, "Please tell the press how many children have been rescued, Keith?" The King stepped back to allow access to the microphone.

Pulling his PADD out of his robe pocket, Keith stated, "Pacific Rim Division started with eighty-seven last Saturday. We've rescued at least ten per day on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday night, we returned from California with thirty-six. Thursday morning, we received the first of the Level One California orphanage kids, another thirty-six. During the day Thursday, we picked up eight more. Thus far today, we've added twenty-five American kids whose parents lost their lives. Currently, we have two-hundred and sixty-four children on base." Keith stepped back.

The press corps softly muttered amongst themselves. King Aalona stepped up to the podium. When the chatter dwindled, King Aalona said, "Yes, they have the resources of all of Clan Short

available to them. Yes, they have Starfleet and Vulcan backing them up; however, let me say that those are material matters. Thirteen boys manage all these children, and the rescued children managed themselves today, while many of their leaders were busy with Battle of Earth repercussions, namely, dealing with the refugees, providing safety for me and my family, and the American Secretary Of State, Colin Powell has also benefited from Clan hospitality.

"I wish you could have heard the conversation that I heard, in their dining room before dinner this evening. The discussion started on the topic of restricted access to Internet pornography. It blossomed into a more serious discussion that I have never heard from adults anywhere. Children under ten were present. Children ten and older participated, as well as the leadership team of this division. No one was rude. No one was dirty. No one mocked anyone else. The many adults and parents present didn't interfere, because there was no reason to.

"What a world we could have if we all treated each other similarly. If this is an indication of our future coming out through our children, then I say, it's about time."

After a brief pause, the King said, "I will be releasing further specific information about changes to our Nation's laws as time progresses. That is all I have for you this evening. Thank you for your time. Aloha, citizens of Hawaii." The King stepped away from the podium. The press corps stood. With a wave of Keith's hand, the security team converged, again surrounding the King and Keith as they walked from the room.

Out in the hall, Keith glanced at the King, completely surprised with what He had said. Noticing Keith's glance, King Aalona smiled, "Yes, Keith?" The door was held open for them and they walked

outside, back around the path toward the CIC and the condos.

Keith shrugged and softly admitted, "I'm just surprised, Majesty. I was with you when you prepared a great deal of your speech. You were calm the entire time."

"That was appropriate at the time," the King stated. "I would not show anger in front of you, Keith. My anger is not directed at you, but it was directed at those imbeciles that attacked my home, and at those adults that do not know how to act in public, and those who believe themselves better than other races and species. If I could have done so, I would have directly told those that believe in that arrogant manner to leave my country via the next available ship or plane. That was not possible, but I have made my intentions crystal clear. If I have my way, there will be new laws put in place so that bigots are arrested, perhaps overnight for the first public offense, three days for the second, and so forth, increasing the incarceration time with each public offense. I will push for something like that, but we'll have to see how that progresses."

Keith sighed, "It's really sad that laws have to be enacted so that people learn to grow up. I can't imagine what my life would be like if I had to get repeatedly grounded to learn a lesson. I sure wouldn't be playing piano as well."

"You wouldn't be here as a Clan Short leader either," King Aalona stated. "I believe it is a small percentage of people that will need to worry about such a law. It would be a considerably smaller number that would go beyond the first slap on the wrist."

"I sure hope that's true," Keith smirked. "Adults spending days in jails, eventually losing their jobs, and completely messing up their lives, all so they can complain about abortions or gays or other races publicly, or in militant fashions. Where is their self preservation

instinct; out to lunch?" Nodding, the King softly chortled. Approaching the CIC doors, Keith told the security team, "You dudes are dismissed. As usual, you did an awesome job. I need a soda, and then I'm going to check on Prez."

Waving, Chris, Danny and the gorillas went to change out of their dress uniforms. The King, Justin and Matthew followed Keith into the dining room. There they found about half of the Rimmer teens and tweens, all the chefs and housekeepers, the Queen and Prince Kaimi, standing proudly and quietly at attention. Keith, Justin and Matthew also stood quietly at attention for the Monarch. The King drank in this show of respect for a few moments, until Kaimi ran to his father. The King squatted down and caught his son, then stood, lifting Kaimi and planting the Prince on his hip. Everyone applauded. Queen Amadina approached her husband. The King smiled. Tapping Justin and Matthew, Keith jerked his head toward the kitchen. The three of them went into the chow line, leaving the Royals to receive the congratulations from the kids.

Grabbing a cup and starting to fill it with 7-UP, Keith told Justin and Matthew, "Prez and I are planning on spending time with all our security tomorrow. The week's been so busy, we simply haven't had the time to get to know any of you very well, and we're sorry about that, but we'll make it up to you. Either me or Prez will give you guys a call the first chance we get tomorrow."

Surprised, Justin and Matt glanced at each other. Justin smiled, "Thanks, Keith. That would be very kewl. We'll look forward to it." They heard the King thanking the Clan and the applause dwindling.

Keith smiled, "Grab whatever you came in here for, and then get out of those dress uniforms. Through tonight and into tomorrow, I suspect we'll only be dealing with refugees. Since Prez can't do a hell of a lot in a shower wrap, we'll let the other Core Rimmers deal with

that. I don't want to see any of you dudes in uniforms; board shorts, T-shirts and sandals are the uniform of the day. Not once have I seen any of you acting like a teenager. That stops now. Off duty, you're like everyone else. If I see you by the pool, it'll be like the other kids, naked and having fun." Nodding, Justin and Matt softly sniggered. Keith chuckled, "See ya later. I've got to go check on the Head Rimmer, and he had *better* be relaxing. If I have to tie him down, things could rapidly digress from there." Justin and Matthew cracked up.

Leaving the CIC, Keith went directly to his townhouse, sipping his soda and wondering what Prez was doing. Stepping inside his house, he was surprised to find Prez kicked back on the couch, watching TV with Dee and Sammy. Keith asked, "Gage and Richie aren't back yet?"

Shaking his head, Prez answered, "Drew gave me a call a little while ago. Thanks to Grandma Morrison, the nine they went to get became eleven. Most of them are under ten-years-old; four seven-year-olds, a nine-year-old, an eight-year-old, a six-year-old and a four-year-old. I had Drew call Doc Wiener and Doc Andrews to join them in the store. Drew said he would also call Derrick's folks too, so the kids could start to adjust, separately from the others. They'll prob'ly be there a while longer."

Nodding, Keith put his cup of soda down. He took off his Clan robe, suspiciously wondering, "What have you three been doing?" Prez sniggered, gesturing to his two sons.

Looking up at Keith, Sammy grinned, "Pop's been good. He took his pills and we've been here ever since."

Dee nodded, "Uncle Drew called and Lindsay stopped by. Poppa made her a leader and gave her a comm-badge. Jonas and Harry was

here too. Poppa took them to Uncle Colin and came right back home. That's all the work he's done, Daddy."

Bringing his cup of soda to the couch, Keith sat down next to Prez, softly asking, "How're you feeling?"

Prez shrugged, "A little drowsy, but okay for the most part."

Keith wondered, "Why aren't you in bed if you're drowsy?"

"It's only seven-forty," Prez reminded. "If I crash now, I'll be awake, wandering around, at three in the morning."

Keith sighed, "Betchya you'll sleep longer if you'd just let it happen." Prez whimpered. Dee and Sammy giggled. Grinning, Keith asked Prez, "When does your body do most of it's healing?"

Dee and Sammy chorused, "When you're sleeping."

Prez whimpered louder. Keith sniggered, "A nine-year-old and a ten-year-old know what you don't, baby." Standing up, Keith offered his hand to Prez. Stubbornly, Prez wrapped his arms around his chest. Dee and Sammy watched their pop and dad squint at each other for a few seconds. Keith warned his sons, "Watch out, dudes." Giggling, Dee and Sammy scurried off the couch. Leaning over, Keith took one of Prez's arms and pulled him up off the couch. With their sons starting to laugh, Keith got most of Prez over his shoulder, and then stood.

Prez hysterically bellowed, "KEITH!"

"It's bed time, T'hy'la," Keith sniggered, and then carried Prez to the stairs. Keith started climbing steps.

Waving at his sons, Prez giggled, "See ya in the morning."

Sammy giggled, "G'night, Pop."

"Good night, Poppa," Dee laughed.

Sliding his hands into the back pockets of Keith's board shorts, Prez copped a feel and grinned, "You looked yummy on TV, T'hy'la."

"I had my Clan robe on."

"Really? I didn't notice," Prez giggled.

When Keith and Prez were out of sight, Dee turned to Sammy, softly wondering, "Should we leave?"

Sammy shrugged, "Why? It's not like we don't know what they'll be doing. Since pop's hurt, they can't get too busy."

Dee grinned, "Do you like boys more than girls?"

Nodding, Sammy smiled, "Yeah. You?"

Dee shrugged, "I don't know yet."

From upstairs, the boys heard Prez loudly giggling, "Oh God, Keith!"

Sputtering, Sammy picked up the TV remote and turned up the volume. Facing Dee, he giggled, "Until dad comes back down here, we'll leave it loud."

Nodding, Dee smiled, "So are you looking around for a boyfriend?" Sammy nodded. Dee giggled, "Any ideas of who you might like that likes you too?"

Blushing, Sammy nodded, "Yeah."

"Who?"

"I'll let you know after I let him know," Sammy sniggered.

Down in the CIC basement store, the group of youngest boys had succumbed to Doc Wiener's gentle prodding and questions about their families. The crying and tears lasted a while, even with the Rimmer sons gallantly making themselves available for hugs. It caused the older boys to open up, softly sharing their losses and pain with AJ, Corey, Drew and Jerry. Strangely, Leo cried but never explained what had happened to him. When the older boys calmed themselves, AJ and Jerry went to help the younger boys.

As it worked out, the four Steib brothers stayed with the two Seibert adults and the Rimmer sons. The three Hunnicutt brothers happily trailed Jerry and AJ through the store. While assisting Craig, Phillip, Leo and Raymond, Drew and Corey happened to notice Jerry carrying Shaun Hunnicutt. After his emotional outburst, the four-year-old was tired and getting cranky. Having dealt with little ones often enough at the orphanage before he was fostered, Jerry held Shaun with one arm, got him clothing, and occasionally blew raspberries onto the boy's arm or belly. Corey and Drew could see what was happening, but wondered if Jerry or AJ realized it.

At a convenient moment, while they were at the checkout counters and Shaun was snoozing on Jerry's shoulder, Drew approached Jerry. So he wouldn't wake Shaun, or be overheard, Drew softly checked, "How do you feel, Jerr?"

Widely smiling, Jerry whispered, "Like me and AJ should've done this days ago, even though we didn't really know what we wanted to do, or if Prez needed the help at the time."

Drew nodded and smiled, gently offering, "You and AJ are

ensigns in Starfleet now. Talk it over, spend the time alone that you need to, but if I were you, I'd adopt all three Hunnicutts." Jerry grinned. Drew softly chortled, "I know, it's weird when you first think of it, but Shaun's out cold, in your arm and on your shoulder. They like and trust you and AJ. That's the way it happens. More importantly, for those three, they need that return to a regular life. Tonight, come back to the nest, ya know, after you and AJ take care of each other and talk it over. Then, if everything's kewl, ask them tomorrow."

Jerry nodded and then wondered, "What's it like?"

Drew smiled, "Do you really want to know?" When Jerry rapidly nodded, Drew led him a few paces away, and then softly admitted, "I've always loved Corey, since I was five and he was four. We started making out and trying stuff about a year ago, but never went for intercourse until Monday afternoon. We had already adopted Geoff on Saturday, so it was like nothing I ever expected. After we got married Tuesday night, we did it again. That's when Corey told me that he wanted my babies. When he made love to me the next day, I told him the same thing. Yeah, it's silly, but that's where we're at; so completely committed that we want to reproduce. Having kids makes the act something so intense, it's a wonder neither of us passed out."

Jerry smiled, "I never thought you and Corey swapped places."

Nodding understandingly, Drew grinned, "We're hearing that a lot from you dudes that were literally fucked with, and now getting into gay partnerships. The simple fact is, we've got the same equipment, so why shouldn't I give Corey what he needs? I don't want him looking for that somewhere else. He's mine, and I'm his, every way we need and no matter what one of us needs. If AJ's not sure, then let him make love to you, and then you tell him how much you want his babies. He'll climax like a volcano, and then watch how fast

he changes his mind. Prez will gladly do the adoptions for you."

"Thanks, Drew," Jerry smiled.

"Anytime," Drew softly giggled. "We're brothers now, and our sons are cousins. It's so kewl, for all of us." With a nod of Drew's head toward the checkout counters, they went back to help get the kids' suitcases packed.

Suspiciously, AJ eyed Jerry. At first Jerry smirked and shook his head, but then he mouthed, "I love you so much."

Feeling his heart race and his face flushing, AJ silently smiled, "I love you too."

Into AJ's and Jerry's new sub-vocals, Alden giggled, "Thanks so much, guys. That's really nice to know. Three's a crowd though, so I'll bow out."

Grandma Morrison's tour wrapped up. All the available adults met Grandma over at the Seavers' home. They had tea and chatted about their sons, grandsons, and what it was like to be Clan adults. Grandma especially liked Corey's light-hearted personality. All one had to do was make Corey giggle and soon he would be laughing. Twice that day, Grandma had seen Corey laugh himself into hiccups. "His laugh is so infectious too," Grandma happily relayed. "He made other saddened refugees laugh, adults and kids alike."

This didn't surprise any of the Rimmers' parents. Lanna Seaver smiled, "Corey was an only child. When he was alone, he wasn't especially sad, but he wasn't the same as when he was with the Hundser boys and their friends. He's always been especially attached to Drew, but in larger groups of boys, Corey really glows. Since Saturday and becoming a Clan leader, Corey's been in heaven."

With all the suitcases packed, the Seiberts and Doc Wiener said goodnight to the kids and departed. The Clan leaders prepared to get the newbies out of the basement store. Over all their comm-badges, Alden said, "Weather forecasts have a greater than sixty-percent chance of rain during the night. If it's alright, I'll transport the luggage down into the Hundserts' basement."

Drew nodded, "That's kewl, Alden. Since the Gibbons and Seibert kids have all moved on, we've got the space. Put the suitcases along the back wall beside the fridge."

"It's done, Drew," Alden said, "they're only two rows deep, and the smaller suitcases are in front of the larger ones."

Glancing around the group of newbies, Corey asked, "Are you guys very tired?" One after another, the Steib quadruplets and youngest two of the Hunnicutt brothers all answered they were tired. Corey said, "Kewl, then we'll put off your base orientation until tomorrow. Alden, transport us to the Hundserts' basement, dude."

In a blink, they were all standing in the Hundserts' basement. Gage said, "We're gonna go home now, Uncle Drew."

Drew smiled, "That's kewl. You guys were a big help. I'm going to tell Keith and Prez what awesome jobs you did too."

Kenny, Leo, Raymond and the Nash brothers warmly thanked Gage and Richie. Giggling, Richie and Gage hurried to the stairs and up.

AJ, Corey and Drew started pulling padding down from the stacks to rebuild the nest. Leo and Raymond helped with the mattresses. Craig and Phillip decided to help by grabbing blankets and pillows. Once there was sufficient padding on the floor for the seven boys, AJ asked the younger boys if they needed to use the

bathroom. The quadruplets silently checked with one another before nodding and chorusing, "Yeah."

Saying, "Follow me, guys," AJ led a pack of six upstairs.

Gently and softly, Jerry called, "Shaun?" When the boy hummed, Jerry asked, "Do you need to go to the bathroom, buddy?"

"I guess," Shaun yawned and wiped his eyes. Jerry followed the pack up the stairs.

AJ led the quadruplets to the ground floor bathroom saying, "If any of you need to do more than pee, follow me upstairs. Without a word all four shook their heads and gathered around the toilet. Still carrying Shaun, Jerry closed the basement door.

In the basement, with the bedding prepared for the little guys, Craig thoughtfully hummed. He called, "Hey, Drew?"

Heading to the other side of the basement, Drew cheerfully asked, "Wassup, Craig?"

Following along, Craig stammered, "Umm... I uh... who else will be down here?"

Turning to face the older boy, Drew shrugged, "Me, Corey, Geoff, Lenny, Leo, all the new guys, and a couple of other new kids we picked up the last day or so."

Corey nodded, "Travis is fifteen, Scott and Chris are fourteen, Fred, Chauncey and Lance are thirteen, and eleven other boys are Drew's age and younger." Corey told Drew, "We should probably go find them. Almost all of 'em are from the East coast of America. They're probably getting tired too."

Nodding, Drew held up an index finger to signal Corey to wait a moment. Drew asked, "Is something wrong, Craig?"

"I'm not sure," Craig sighed.

Seeing his big brother at a loss, Phillip grinned, "Think about it, guys; Craig's a couple of years older than us."

Corey began giggling. Seeing the light, Drew grinned, "Betchya I've got almost as much pubes as you do, Craig." Phillip and Raymond cracked up.

Seeing few light brown hairs on Drew's arms and legs, Craig smirked, "I'd doubt that."

Drew chuckled, "Corey's got pubes. I'd bet Ray's got at least a few too." Blushing, Raymond nodded. Moving closer to the taller and older boy, Drew smiled, "It's kewl, dude. We've all got dicks, and we all wake up with morning wood. This nest is for us to get to know each other a little better, nothing else. Guaranteed a bunch of you older dudes will want a dorm room for tomorrow night." Waving an arm around and spinning in place, Drew rambled, "We've got this awesome TV, a bunch of PlayStations and X-Boxes, the fridge is loaded with sodas and juices, and a couple of microwaves for popcorn when we get the munchies."

Going to Craig, Corey wrapped his arms around the oldest newbie and smiled up at him. "You're my big bro now, just as much as every other older dude on this base. Every other younger dude is my little bro. I've got your back, as much as Phillip, I promise."

Craig grinned, "That's why you were giggling?"

Corey nodded, "Last Saturday night, our first night on this base, we had over a hundred boys and girls down here. That other side of

the basement was wall-to-wall mattresses, blankets and kids, boys *and* girls, from four-years-old to fifteen-years-old."

Relaxing a little, Craig glanced around, blushing, "I'm not sure if I'm straight or bi."

Drew shrugged, "It's a big group. You'll figure it out when the right guy or girl knocks you for a loop. Pick your butt up and go get yourself that really special guy or girl."

Corey nodded, "Nobody here will give you a bad scene, dude." He released Craig and stepped back.

The Steib quadruplets came back down the stairs. Drew said, "Craig, if you'll hang out here with Phillip and Raymond for a couple of minutes, Corey and I can go find our other newbies. Whoever is tired, we'll bring back here. Is that kewl?" Craig smiled and nodded.

Going over to the nest side of the basement, the Steib quadruplets stopped a few meters away from the bedding to kick their sneakers off. They got undressed to their briefs, and then chose a place to sleep together.

Phillip asked, "Can we play video games?"

Corey nodded and smiled, "Sure, or watch TV; just keep the sound low on the TV's so the little guys can sleep."

Taking Corey's hand, Drew suggested, "Help yourself to the fridge and popcorn too. We'll only be gone about ten minutes."

Craig nodded, "Kewl." He and Phillip went to the row of game stations. Corey and Drew climbed the stairs with Geoff, Leo and Lenny trailing along behind. Raymond chose to turn on the big wall mounted television. At the top of the stairs, Geoff and Lenny tickled

Leo. All three giggled. Returning the favor, Leo tickled Geoff and Lenny back.

Hearing AJ, Jerry and the Hunnicutts coming down from upstairs, Drew and Corey waited. Now AJ was carrying Shaun and Jerry was carrying Mike. Corey giggled, "Are daddies and their boys ready for bed?"

Nodding, AJ and Jerry smiled. Kenny glanced around and loudly wondered, "That can really happen here?"

Drew chuckled, "If you want dads and dads want sons, sure."

"Awesome!" Kenny and Mike cheered.

In AJ's arms, Shaun nodded and yawned, "Kewl."

AJ smiled, "We'll talk about it tomorrow, after a good night's sleep."

Drew explained to AJ and Jerry what he and Corey were heading off to take care of. Jerry nodded, "We'll hang out downstairs with our favorite boys."

Innocently, Mike checked, "We're your favorites?" When AJ and Jerry nodded, the six-year-old in Jerry's arms squeezed him tight.

Heading for the kitchen sliding door, Drew smiled, "We'll be back in a flash." AJ and Jerry nodded, then took the boys downstairs.

Drew led the pack outside. The back porches of the four homes had lights, and there were additional bright pole lamps scattered around the walkways of the housing area. As soon as he slid the door closed, Drew tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Keith?"

Keith's voice replied, "Wassup, bro?"

Drew wondered, "Is Prez awake?" Over his comm-badge, Drew heard four giggling boys in the background.

"Nope, I wore him out," Keith sniggered. "Even on pain pills, it took some effort."

Corey started giggling. The next thing he knew, three sets of hands, Geoff's, Lenny's and Leo's, were tickling him. Drew chuckled, "Oh well. We'll get adoptions done tomorrow."

Keith wondered, "Who this time?"

"One for me and Corey," Drew smiled. "And, believe it or not, AJ and Jerry found the Hunnicutt brothers and they latched onto each other."

"That's great!" Keith cheered. "I knew those two would make awesome additions to our team."

Watching Corey overcome with tickling hands and falling down again, Drew chuckled, "Yeah, they're just like Kaleo, Tory and Sean used to be, a little unsure and quiet."

"We'll get that corrected soon enough," Keith assured. "I just sent an e-mail to Donnie to get them and Reyes phaser training."

In the background, Sammy suggested, "Get AJ and Jerry married, Dad."

Further away, Gage shouted, "Sean and Troy need to get hitched too."

Keith hummed, then said, "Yeah, let me see what I can do about

that."

"Kewl," Drew grinned, and called "out".

Slowing his tickle-attack on Corey, Leo looked up and meekly asked, "Do you really want me?"

Drew confirmed, "Do you really want me and Corey for fathers, and Geoff and Lenny as little brothers?"

Leo stopped tickling Corey, and so did Lenny and Geoff. Kneeling on the grass, with his hands on his knees, Leo thought aloud. "Grandma's kewl; she wouldn't set me up with bad guys, and you've all been really kewl to me." He looked at Lenny, and then Geoff, and then Corey. He smiled, "Yeah, this would be an awesome family."

The words had barely left Leo's lips when Corey, Lenny and Geoff attacked, tickling him down flat on the ground and hysterically trying to block three sets of hands.

Scratching the side of his head behind his ear, Drew softly giggled, "I guess it's settled then." Noticing Leo's iPod Nano and ear-buds had slipped out of a pocket and onto the ground, Drew picked them up and pocketed them. He then ordered Alden to get a charger. A moment later Drew stuffed the charger into his back pocket.

Drew hadn't noticed, but Lanna Seaver saw the young family out her kitchen sliding glass doors. She called Jen and Grandma over to see the boys first tickling Corey, then after about thirty-seconds of calm, the new boy was being tickled. Grandma smiled, "I simply had a gut feeling. The one flat on his back is Leo Daniel Scott. If he's not already your grandson, he will be soon enough."

It became obvious to Drew that they weren't going to make it to

the pools or CIC anytime soon. Recalling the names of the newbies rescued during the afternoon, Drew called, "Alden, hook me up to the PA around the base, dude."

Alden replied, "Go ahead, Drew."

Drew announced, "This is for our newest Rimmers only. Albert and Charles McPhearson, Toby and Tanner Stoeher, Nate, Sal and Rickie Ramos, Jimmy Carr, Scott Deaver, Billy Whittmore, Jason Mullins, Patrick O'Hara, Scott Shetley, Lance Kinchen, Rafe Montigua, Chris Stokley, Travis McAuley, Fred and Chauncey Eckhart, please meet me at the lawns between the four Rimmer homes. Thanks. That's all."

The tickling on the ground suddenly stopped. Four smiling faces with mischief in their eyes looked up at Drew. "No," Drew giggled, and backed away. Corey, Geoff, Lenny and Leo started to stand and Drew jogged away. In moments, Drew was being chased around the lawn by his husband and three sons. Noticing the gathered adults sitting at the Seavers' kitchen table, Drew waved as he ran by.

The Stoeher twins, the Ramos brothers, Jimmy Carr, Scott Deaver and Patrick O'Hara, with Ralphie glued to his side, were the first to arrive at the lawns. Seeing the chase, they all started giggling. On his return trip around the lawns, Drew laughed, "Are any of you tired? I sure am!"

"We can tell!" The twins loudly giggled.

Ralphie checked with Patrick, "Are you sleepy?"

Making a crooked face, Patrick reluctantly answered, "Yeah, I guess I am. It's been a crazy day." He smiled, "Thanks for making it easier. I really like you a lot, Ralphie."

Widely smiling, Ralphie nodded and giggled, "I'm right there with ya too, Pat. Let me just tell my brothers, I'm gonna be with you until you fall asleep, okay?"

Rapidly nodding, Patrick grinned, "Can you be good?"

Ralphie giggled, "I told you, I'll be kewl until we both decide it's time."

Pat nodded, and then gave Ralphie a quick hug, whispering, "Hurry." Ralphie stepped back and was off like greased lightning.

Jason, Billy, Chauncey, Fred and the puppy, Rikko, ran up to the group. Seeing Drew still being chased, Fred giggled, "What's goin' on?"

Rikko whined and barked, "Play time! Let's go!" The pup bolted for the group of boys running in big circles.

Pointing across the lawns, Toby shrugged and sniggered, "With them, we have no idea."

Pat grinned, "Are any of you tired?"

Fred turned to Chauncey, saying, "You should be by now."

Chauncey wondered, "What time is it?"

"Here, it's a little after eight o'clock," Fred grinned, "In Colorado, it's after midnight."

Lance gasped and checked his Casio wristwatch. "No wonder I feel run down," he muttered to Scott Shetley. "I'm still on New York time. To us, it's quarter after two in the morning." Pressing buttons on his watch, he reset the time to Hawaii Time Zone. Off to the side, Billy and Jason decided to be roommates at the dorm, and then asked

Jimmy and Scott Deaver, their foster brothers, if they would mind sleeping in the nest if they moved into the dorm that night. Jimmy and Scott had no problems with Billy and Jason moving to the dorms, but they were looking forward to another night in the nest.

Running up to the lawns, Travis McAuley, Chris Stokley, and Rafe Montigua, only a meter or two behind the former two, all loudly asked, "What's up?"

"Us, just barely," Tanner joked.

Fred smiled, "It's only quarter after eight Hawaii time, but after midnight in Colorado and after two Eastern time."

Rafe softly giggled, "Damn! My parents would've had a fit if they saw me awake this late."

Coming around the lawn again, Drew was laughing too hard to maintain his lead or say anything to the gathered group. Corey loudly ordered, "Catch Drew, dudes!"

The oldest boys in the group grinned and nodded at each other. Chris and Travis went one way. Lance and Scott took the opposite direction. Wide-eyed and knowing he was screwed, Drew slid down to the grass, curled into a fetal position and waited for the onslaught. In moments, he was surrounded by his husband, sons and twelve newbies, being tickled to tears.

After about a minute, Drew managed get only two words out clearly. "ALDEN, HELP!" He disappeared from the bottom of the pile.

Still curled up and laughing, Drew reappeared on the basement floor, not a meter behind Raymond, who was on the couch watching TV, and also behind Craig and Phillip. All three turned around and

grinned.

Shaking his head, Craig sighed, "This place is a trip."

Phillip giggled, "Are you okay, Drew?"

Still catching his breath, Drew couldn't answer, but nodded.

Kneeling on the couch cushion and looking over the back at Drew, Raymond teased, "So, umm... I can only wonder."

Drew gasped between giggles, "They couldn't catch me. Corey cheated... and got the teenagers... to block me... sixteen hands... tickling me at once."

"Well, yeah, that would do it," Raymond smiled.

Dizzily sitting up, Drew wondered, "Where are Jerry and A.J?"

Raymond pointed to his left, answering, "Laying in the nest, with the three Hunnicutt brothers between them."

Drew looked up at Raymond, asking, "Have people called you Ray, for short?"

Nodding, Raymond smiled, "All the time. My folks used to call me Raymond. It drove me nuts. I always thought I was in trouble. Don't do that anymore, okay?"

Knowing that dealing with the memories had to be rough, Drew answered, "No problem."

Craig softly sniggered, "Fill 'er up, Phil."

"Shut up," Phil giggled.

Standing, Drew put Leo's iPod, ear-buds and charger in the end

table drawer. Turning around, Drew grinned, "Are you that well hung?"

"He'd like to think so," Craig teased.

A little more loudly, Phil laughed, "Shut up!"

Corey had already warned the boys he was with that the little guys might be asleep, so he quietly led them in the house and down stairs to the basement.

Seeing legs on the staircase, Drew suggested, "Craig and Phil, hit pause, please, so we can get some introductions out of the way." Even Rikko padded quietly down the steps. He went to the nest, sniffing around to get the scent of the new kids.

Drew and Corey swapped the job of introducing all the newbies. Once that was done, Drew asked if anyone needed a bathroom. Only two did, Rafe and Ray, but the other newbies went for the tour, so when they did need to go, they wouldn't be completely lost in the foreign and very large home.

When the group came back downstairs, AJ and Jerry were up and out of the nest. Jerry told Drew, "All the boys are asleep. We're gonna take that time you mentioned now."

Nodding, AJ cutely smiled, "There's not much to talk about, which is good."

Blushing such that his freckles could barely be noticed, Jerry giggled, "We'll be back well before eleven." Corey and Drew nodded. AJ and Jerry went upstairs, and then out of the house, heading to their dorm room.

Wordlessly, Pat led Ralphie to the nest. For the first time,

Ralphie got to watch Pat undress to his underwear. Seeing his new boyfriend rapidly shift from blushing to leers, Pat tossed his shirt in Ralphie's face. Ralphie giggled and pulled the shirt away from his eyes, but then he realized how good the shirt smelled, just like Pat, and lifted it to his face again, inhaling deeply through his nose. It was Pat's turn to fiercely blush. Giggling at each other, they got two mattress pads, blankets and pillows from the piles, then got situated in the nest. They lay on their backs for a while, each completely amazed with the other and absorbed in his own thoughts.

Fred led Chauncey over to the nest. They set up two more spots, so they could be close together. Chauncey undressed and Fred softly reminded, "I'll be awake for a little while longer, just to run myself down a little more, so we wake together. I'm not leaving this house without you."

Chauncey smiled, "Brothers forever."

"And then some, big guy," Fred warmly assured. Once Chauncey was laying comfortably, Fred whispered, "Sleep well, with only the best dreams. Everything's going to be very kewl now, bro."

"I know," Chauncey yawned. Slowly spinning in a circle, Rikko settled down next to his favorite human companion.

Fred left the nest area. Rafe went to the nest with Chris. While Rafe undressed, Chris got his young friend's bedding prepared. When Rafe stood on the fresh bedding, Chris softly confirmed, "You're good?"

Rafe nodded and sighed, "Better, but something still feels weird. It's not being here, it's not anything else that happened today. I can't figure it out. We're together in a kewl place, but..."

Chris nodded understandingly, gently assuring, "It's big changes

happening fast. Don't let it mess with you."

Pat softly reminded, "I'm right here too, Rafe."

"With your new boyfriend," Rafe giggled.

Ralphie smiled, "I'll be going home as soon as Pat's asleep, Rafe. Chris can take this spot between you."

Chris chuckled, "I'll see you guys in the morning," and returned to the other side of the basement. Fred challenged the older boy to play Sonic, knowing he could easily beat him, but also sure that he could at least make it interesting. Chris nodded and smiled. They got a TV turned on and a game started.

The Stoeher twins and the McPhearson brothers couldn't keep their eyes open. Jimmy and Scott Deaver had played a few video games, yawning all the while. All six went to the nest and got settled in too. In a few more minutes, every thing was quiet. Pat shifted onto his side, facing Ralphie. Looking over, Ralphie whispered, "Can't sleep?"

"Guess I'm over tired," Pat shrugged.

Thinking of what he could do, Ralphie wished Pat was just a little telepathic, then he would know exactly what to do. So, he sent out a telepathic A.P.B. to his brothers. He soon heard the three-fold response; *'What's wrong, bro?'*

'Pat can't sleep. What should I do?'

'What is he doing?'

'Laying on his side, lookin' at me.'

'Hold his hand.'

'Ask him what he'd like you to do to help.'

'Jump his bones.'

Rolling his eyes, Ralphie smirked, *'Not funny, Ronnie!'*

Hearing the chorus of giggles in his mind, Ralphie combined the first two suggestions. Reaching over and gently laying his hand on Pat's hand, Ralphie asked, "How can I help?"

Pat hummed then smirked, "It's silly and you'll laugh."

Ralphie promised, "I'll never laugh at you."

"You'll do anything?"

"Anything to help you sleep. I want you wide awake tomorrow and spending the day with me."

Pat sighed, "Roll onto your side and scoot back a little, with your back to my front?" Wordlessly, Ralphie did just that. Scooting closer, Pat prompted, "Just a little closer, please?" Ralphie shifted closer. Pat hesitantly put an arm over Ralphie.

Taking hold of Pat's hand, Ralphie asked, "Better?"

"Way better. Thanks."

Thankful that he was still dressed and had only taken his sandals off, Ralphie smiled, "It's what boyfriends do, I think."

Pat inhaled deeply and relaxed. After about a minute, Pat breathed, "You really love me?"

"I think so."

"I think I love you too."

Not another word was spoken for many minutes. Ralphie realized that Pat was breathing slowly and evenly. Pat's arm was still over him though, so he couldn't get up. Not that he really wanted to get up and leave, but that would eventually have to happen. So Ralphie just lay there, enjoying the closeness, listening to the television, sounds of games being played and soft chattering from the other side of the basement.

Corey and Drew checked their PADDs for messages about other activity that might need to be taken care of. Other than messages from Kaleo, Keith and Derrick, all asking about updates to the Rimmer web site, there was nothing else going on. Corey and Drew replied to the messages with instructions needed to get the updates done. Drew then went upstairs to his bedroom and logged on the server, so he could amend the inline instructions. Thirty minutes later, he returned to the basement, Corey and the newbies. Many of the kids were in the nest, except the oldest boys. Having lost interest in video games, Chris Stokley seemed to be losing his fight to remain awake. He sat on the sofa and blankly stared at the television.

At the end of the movie *The Incredibles*, Kaleo and Tory led a large pack of rug-rats from the auditorium back to the dormitories. It was almost ten o'clock and dozens of kids were over-tired. Among the last kids to be dropped off at dormitory three, were level one orphanage boys Mark Fikes, Marv Perkins, Russ Pass, Leonard Santana and Stan Given. Once alone in their room with the two Core Rimmers, Marv Perkins yawned, "It's kind o' scary here."

Taking his shirt off, Russ muttered, "We're the littlest dudes in

this dorm."

Kicking his sandals off, Mark locked eyes with Tory and asked, "Could you stay a little while, please?"

With his puppy dog eyes in full operation, Leonard told Kaleo, "Yeah, we're liking havin' the kewl stuff in our room, ya know, but when the lights are off, we sometimes hear older dudes."

Tory knelt down to help Mark undress and assured, "We'll stay until you're asleep, okay?" As soon as Tory had taken Mark's shirt off, the little boy flung himself against his leader and held on tightly.

Seeing his partner taking care of little guys again for the first time in a week, Kaleo helped Leonard get ready for bed, wondering, "Do the older boys do stuff that scares you?"

Shaking his head, Leonard sighed, "Not really, I guess."

Marv frowned, "They stays awake later and we sometimes hear 'em laughin' and talkin'."

"It wakes us up," Mark smirked.

Nodding understandingly, Tory smiled, "How about we talk with them for you? That way they'll try to be a little more quiet."

Mark shrugged, "We'd still get scared."

The oldest of the five, but not one of the four that slept in this room, Stan innocently grinned, "We want dads." Tory's jaw dropped, pushing Kaleo into loud laughter and the rest of the boys to giggles.

Breaking into giggles, Tory gestured with his index finger for Stan to come closer. The small eight-year-old slowly approached. All four boys and Kaleo watched with great interest. Even Kaleo wasn't

sure what Tory was going to do next. Tory smiled, "You're from one of the Anaheim orphanages, right, Stan?"

Nodding, Stan answered, "The same one as Marv and Russ. Drew and Corey saved us. Leonard and Mark are from San Diego."

Tory prompted, "Since things have obviously changed, can you tell us what the deal is?"

He sighed, "We like our rooms, they're awesome compared to where we was, but since we moved in, it's like... not so kewl to use the bathroom here. It makes us nervous, around all the older, bigger dudes. It's not because they're bad or nothin', it's just that we're smaller, ya know? Me, Marv and Russ learned Leonard and Mark felt the same as us, so we stick together, especially in the shower. We're happiest around dudes our age, at the playground and pool. And when you dudes are around, all the Core Rimmers, but especially you two, everything's way better, ya know? I heard what you and Tory did this afternoon in the dining room, when trays fell. Tonight, you took us to the movies. During the show, we talked, and decided it's you two we want to be with."

Seeing Tory smiling, but with shiny, tear filled eyes, Stan softly asked, "What's wrong?" He checked with Kaleo, wondering, "Did I say something bad?"

Slowly and deliberately shaking his head, Kaleo grinned, "We're just beginning to consider maybe trying to be fathers. We were orphans too, rescued by the Clan just last week, guys. I guess we're seeing now what the other Core Rimmers have told us; that kids choose the parents all by themselves. We're surprised that any kid is choosing us. That's why Tory's crying happy tears; because he's happy and scared at the same time. Honestly, I'm feeling the same way; a little worried that I might not be the best dad for the best five boys on

the planet."

Russ giggled, "Since we ain't the best five, then we all must be right for each other."

Covering his eyes with both hands, Tory whimpered, "Oh my God!"

"All of you, come here by me," Kaleo gently prompted. The boys gathered around Kaleo. Only Stan was fully dressed, and the other four younger boys were in various undressed states. Working his way around the line of boys, Kaleo gave each a kiss on the cheek, then firmly assured, "To us, you are the five best boys on the planet. Don't ever doubt how totally awesome you are, okay?"

Starting with Leonard, each boy smiled or giggled, "Kewl, dad."

"OH MY GOD!" Tory loudly cried.

Kaleo sniggered, "Give your pop a hug, before he flies to pieces." Enthusiastically, all five hurried to Tory. In their haste to give hugs, they knocked Tory off his knees and onto his butt. Kaleo roared laughing and all the boys began giggling. The only reason Tory didn't collapse onto the floor was the five boys holding him upright. Standing up, Kaleo went to the group saying, "Tomorrow, we'll get Prez to do some adoptions."

Marv giggled, "Is that hard to do?"

"It's Prez's favorite job of all," Kaleo brightly assured. "He'll ask you guys if you want us for fathers, and then he'll ask me and Tory if we want to be dads. All we have to say is, yes, and it's done." Since Marv was the only one of the five down to his briefs and ready for bed, Kaleo lifted the boy and put him on one of the two double size beds. For the first time in his life, Kaleo looked at a boy as a special

gift that was his to care for and protect. Similarly, for the first time in Marv's life, he could see a warm joyous smile on someone he could proudly call his dad. Kaleo kissed his youngest and got a kiss back.

Over on the floor, Tory had pulled himself together enough to ask Stan, "Why don't you sleep here with your brothers tonight?"

Stan squealed, "Yeah? Could I really?"

Mark, Leonard and Russ giggled and crowded around their new big brother. Mark kneeled down to take Stan's sandals off. At the same time, Leonard and Russ took Stan's shirt off. Watching Stan unsteadily wobble and giggle, Tory cracked up. In minutes, the three smallest boys were in one bed, and Leonard and Stan were in the other bed. Once all had been kissed goodnight, Kaleo went to turn on the television and turn off the over head light. Kaleo and Tory stayed in the room with the boys, watched TV and quietly tried to get used to the idea that they would soon have five sons.

Still in their dorm room bed together, Arnie checked with Jerry, "You really want to adopt kids?"

"Not just any kids," Jerry smiled, "those three kids. Not only have they already given themselves over to us, we can actually adopt them."

"We're considered adults and Starfleet officers." Arnie admitted, "That's just blowin' me away." Lying on his back, with his left arm wrapped around Jerry, and Jerry resting against him, Arnie couldn't decide if he enjoyed this more than when their positions were reversed. There wasn't any rhyme or reason to which would be resting against the other. Whether Arnie was top or bottom, he could find himself in that very same place and enjoying it just as much.

Jerry chuckled, "When Aunt Laura and Uncle Carl mentioned

the possibility, you said yes first."

Arnie giggled, "I did, didn't I?"

Looking up into his lover's eyes, Jerry grinned, "And what happened when I told you how much I wanted your babies?"

Arnie sniggered, "Complete and total loss of all control. Did I last another thirty-seconds?"

"About that," Jerry chuckled. "But ya know what? It was the very best sex we've ever had. What was already good became awesome. I experienced every bit of you, Arnie. When you came inside me, for those moments, I really wished I could get pregnant and have your babies."

"I found out what it was like too," Arnie contentedly sighed. "It was like it was you and more than you too. We've felt like one while we made love before, but this time was way more profound."

"So, we've been best friends since we met. When we were separated, we really missed that friendship. We were reunited, rekindled that friendship, admitting that there had never been anyone any where near that close, so we became boyfriends, moved into this room and made love a couple of times and different ways."

"Now we're Core Rimmers too. Three completely awesome and adorable boys were placed before us. Now it's up to us."

"And them too," Arnie softly offered. "I really hope they weren't just over-tired and saying stuff that they thought we'd like to hear."

"That would hurt."

"And make me want to work to get them back to wanting us as

their dads."

"Jerr?"

"Yeah, Arnie?"

"Why do we want them so much? There's a bunch of other little kids right here already. None of them made me feel this way."

Jerry thought a long minute before answering, "They're just right for us. The other little kids that have looked up to us did it like little brothers to big brothers. As Core Rimmers, we're big brothers on a larger scale. Those three Hunnicutt boys just hit the mark. They kind of look like us, like they really could be our sons."

"They make me want to protect them, as much as I want to protect you, maybe a little more, because they're so small, and they've been hurt so badly today. We have to be the best fathers for them."

"We know how *not* to act; like those fuckers we dealt with the last five or so years. The rest, we'll learn from our Core Rimmer brothers and their families."

"We'll grow into parenthood and they'll become more our kids."

"They'll need special attention, Arnie. We need to learn what they saw today and cuddle them through nightmares and stuff like that."

Arnie shrugged, "Like we do for each other; no big deal." Arnie began giggling.

"What?" Jerry sniggered.

Shaking his head, Arnie giggled, "The way Shaun held onto you, and then held onto me; and Mike too. And Kenny is at that age,

making the transition from little boy to big boy. He wants and needs us too. With Kenny, it's in his eyes when he sees us with his younger brothers."

"So it's happening tomorrow?"

"I sure hope so."

"Let's go shower," Jerry suggested, and rolled to the edge of the bed.

Sitting up and propped on his arms, Arnie nodded, "There's one thing I want to do differently."

"Yeah?"

"We wash the sweat off, but what's still inside us stays there."

Shivering with glee, Jerry gushed, "Oh-ho, dude! You make me feel so freakin' amazing."

"Round four?" Arnie giggled, and then spread his legs and bent his knees. Not really interested in a fourth round of love making after three incredible times, Jerry rolled over onto Arnie, causing that closest leg, partially in the air, to bend over, making entry impossible. They held onto each other and rolled around, laughing into kisses.

In the basement nest, the oldest boys were still awake. Geoff, Lenny, Leo, Lance and Fred had made themselves comfy and were asleep, but Pat still hadn't moved. Of course, Ralphie was still lying there. His hand holding Pat's hand had gone numb and his feet had fallen asleep too. There was one thing keeping Ralphie lying there, unwilling to move. In that first thirty minutes or so after Pat fell asleep, Ralphie felt his new boyfriend's hardening dick shifting and poking against his rear end. For Ralphie it was a blessing and a curse;

that boner meant that Pat was gay, which was kewl, and it might even be from a dream Ralphie was in, which was even kewler. This got Ralphie hard too, but he was nervous, which kept him exceptionally still. Any movement might cause Pat to have an orgasm, which Ralphie feared would upset his new boyfriend. Wanting to see and touch his boyfriend's erection, but also being troubled about Pat's possible reactions, had Ralphie sweating like he had run five miles.

The A.P.B. went out again. *'Help!'*

'Are you still in the Hundserts' basement with Pat?'

'Or are you wankin' somewhere?'

'The white gooey stuff is normal, bro.'

'I love you guys, but I'm gonna kill you if I get out of here.'

The triplet giggling response was; *'What's wrong now?'*

'Pat's asleep and has been for over an hour. Laying here, perfectly still, both my legs and one arm are completely asleep. If I tried to stand, I'd fall on my face!'

Triplet loud laughter filled Ralphie's mind. He couldn't help it and softly giggled with his brothers for a little while, then loudly sent, *'GET ME OUTTA HERE!'*

'You wanted a boyfriend.'

'You've got him.'

'Permanently.'

'I'll tell mom and dad you can't make it home and why.'

'DON'T DO THAT, ROBBIE!'

'Have you got a better idea?'

'If I could reach my comm-badge, I'd call Alden, but I can't. That arm's numb from the shoulder down to each finger. Have him transport me, lying down, to my bedroom.'

'Lying down we can understand, but why your bedroom?'

Ralphie huffed, then admitted, *'Turtle status isn't my problem anymore.'*

Again, triplet loud laughter filled Ralphie's mind, and then *'Oh shit!'* Like an old black and white movie with poor sound, Ralphie experienced what all three of his brothers heard and saw; Jason and Trinity were standing in a bedroom doorway.

Grinning, Jason wondered, "What are you boy's doing?"

Trinity asked, "Where's Ralphie? Is he not home yet?"

Robbie innocently assured, "Ralphie's fine."

"He's over at the Hundserts', with Pat still," Richie giggled.

Trinity gasped, "Still?" She worried, "Patrick must be dead on his feet." All three brothers cracked up at the choice of words.

Jason suspiciously smirked, "Okay, let's hear it, guys."

Trinity huffed, "I'll go get Ralphie, Jason."

The triplets jumped off the bed, loudly chorusing, "No mom!"

Robbie sweetly asked, "Mom, could you leave us alone with dad

for just a few minutes, please?"

The two adults wordlessly checked with each other, and then nodded. Trinity warned, "Five minutes, and Ralphie better be home in six minutes."

"It's a guy thing, mom," Robbie explained.

Nodding, she left the doorway and seemed to be going downstairs.

Robbie, Ronnie and Richie pulled Jason into the room and closed the door. The threesome explained what was going on; that they were telepaths, that Ralphie was still with Pat, and excited, and his legs and one arm were asleep, to Ralphie's infinite mortification.

Thankfully, Jason took it well. He chuckled, "Do what your brother needs and asked you to do."

Richie tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Alden, do you see Ralphie in the Hundserts' basement?"

"Sure do," Alden replied. "He's asleep."

"Only partly," Ronnie giggled.

Robbie sniggered, "His legs and one arm are asleep, Alden. He couldn't stand up if he tried."

Richie smiled, "Leave Ralphie laying down and transport him to one of the beds in here, please, Alden?"

Alden giggled, "One quarter quadruplet, comin' up."

Ralphie materialized on the bed. He chuckled, "When I can

walk, you three need to run." His brothers cracked up.

When the laughter and giggling subsided, Jason confirmed, "You're all telepaths?" The boys nodded.

Tilting his head, Robbie wondered, "Why would we fake it, dad?"

"Yeah, it's really happening," Ralphie smiled.

Richie suggested, "Call mom up before she melts down and really gets angry."

Quickly jarring his head because the boys had read his every thought, as soon as he thought them, Jason turned around, opened the door and called, "Come on up, Trin; Ralphie's home."

Standing and coming up the stairs, Trinity huffed, "Thank goodness." At the same time, the quadruplets duplicated her words and in the same exasperated manner. Jason grinned at them.

Trinity didn't hear them repeating her words, so the quadruplets loudly confirmed, "Yeah, we know it's getting late, mom." All except Ralphie smiled, "We were just having a little fun with Ralphie, cos his feet and arm fell asleep." Ralphie started wiggling his toes and fingers to stop the pins and needles.

Stopping two steps short of the second floor landing, Trinity glared at Jason for an explanation.

Jason shrugged, "They're telepaths."

"We kind of thought maybe we were just imagining it," Robbie loudly added so his mom would hear.

Ronnie nodded, "But then we heard Cesar and Felipe this

morning."

Still wiggling his toes and fingers to wake them up, Ralphie grimaced; "And then we heard the double-twins, Adam, Mark, Brian and Jeff too. We've been practicing mind-talk with them most of the day. Most people we can hear, if they're just a little telepathic or empathic. The rest can't hear us, but we can hear them. That last bit is the case with Patrick. I can hear him, when he's awake to hear. He was behind me too, so..." Richie, Robbie and Ronnie softly sniggered. Trinity climbed the last two steps and looked in the bedroom.

Richie cheered, "It so awesome. My imaginary brothers definitely weren't my imagination. I heard them, from miles and miles away. Now we're together, at last." As soon as he stopped speaking, Richie scowled.

"Uh oh," Ralphie, Robbie and Ronnie simultaneously grunted, and turned to face Richie.

Like a light switch had been flipped, Richie palmed the sides of his head at the temples, loudly crying, "No! You frigging jerk, they were real! They are real! Get outta my head, you wacko!" In a heartbeat, Robbie and Ronnie sandwiched Richie between them. Ralphie struggled to sit up and get over to his hurting brother. He ignored the pain of numb legs and got to his brothers as quickly as he could. Telepathically and aloud, three brothers comforted the fourth, who was still hearing the words that he was taught to repeat for years.

Trinity shrieked, "What's happening?"

Recalling some of what Richie told them about the shrink he had seen many years earlier, Jason realized that was what was happening and hollered at the ceiling, "Alden, get Doc Wiener here, now!"

"Doin' it," Alden confirmed.

A moment later, the base child psychologist was standing behind Jason and Trinity. He tapped Jason on the shoulder, asking, "What's wrong?" Jason briefly explained what Richie had been through.

In that minute, the three boys had gotten Richie onto a bed and joined him, Robbie and Ronnie on either side and Ralphie on top. Richie was still crying, but it was as much for fear as it was the aching in his head and heart. Richie softly sobbed, "When's it gonna stop?"

Doc Wiener sighed, and then softly told Jason and Trinity, "The best treatment for Richie is right there with him. If you'd like, and if Richie wants, I can have Doc Andrews prescribe a sedative, so he can sleep whenever this happens late at night?"

Trinity nodded and nervously begged, "Please?"

Jason went in the room with Doc Wiener, asking, "Richie, would you want to take a mild sedative to help you sleep?"

"He don't want to, dad," Robbie frowned.

"It's only a little before eleven o'clock," Ronnie added.

Ralphie assured, "We can take care of Richie."

To Richie and the adults, the other three loudly confirmed, "We'll *always* take care of each other."

Jason thoughtfully hummed, then told the boys and Doc Wiener, "Leave us the pills. We'll leave only one with the boys. If it gets very late and Richie needs it, Robbie, Ralphie and Ronnie will get Richie to take it."

Doc Wiener looked up at the ceiling, ordering, "Alden, have Doc Andrews approve thirty Ambien, two-and-a-half milligrams."

"On the way," Alden replied.

Doc Wiener told them all, "Richie is not to do anything the slightest bit dangerous, like making a sandwich with a knife, or showering, where he could easily slip, after he takes a pill. He'll get to sleep in thirty minutes or less, so restricted activity once the pill is taken. Preferably, he takes a pill and goes directly to bed."

Three boys confirmed, "Got it covered, Doc."

The pill bottle appeared. Alden told them, "Done. They're on the dresser."

Doc Wiener picked up the bottle, then gave it to Trinity and guided the two worried parents into the hall. Pulling the door closed behind him, he softly explained, "One only. These aren't mild sedatives. Two and he'll sleep for twelve or more hours. Three would put him out for an entire day. Four, and we all go into emergency mode. Five or more could be deadly."

Both parents nodded. Trinity said, "I'll keep these hidden in a secure location, so Jason or I have to give them one." She went directly to her bedroom. One pill was put aside for that evening. The remainder of the bottle went into a lock-box on the top shelf of the master bedroom closet. The pill was put in a small disposable paper cup. Another paper cup was filled with cold water. Trinity took both cups to the bedroom where all the boys were still piled on and around Richie. Jason and Doc Wiener went downstairs.

Before she could say anything, all four boys chorused, "On the desk with the water too. Kewl, mom."

Rolling her eyes, Trinity smiled, "We'll be downstairs for a short while if you need anything."

"Good night, mom," came the quadruple reply.

Trinity closed the door and went downstairs. She thought, 'No wonder they're in sync all the time. If they were any closer, they'd all wear one pair of pants.'

The four boys softly giggled, picturing themselves waddling in unison in a really big pair of pants.

Richie smiled, *'Speaking of pants, Ralphie, no bone?'*

'My legs really hurt just standing. Guess it shriveled when I forced myself to stand.'

Ronnie frowned, *'You scared us, Richie.'*

'It's good we're staying together,' Robbie sent. *'The Doc said we're helping Richie as much as anything he could do.'*

Richie seriously sent, *'You drowned out the thoughts, in my ears and in my mind. You guys are awesome.'*

The other three replied, *'We think you are too. We all knew about this last night, Richie. It don't change a thing.'*

Richie confirmed aloud, "I'm better now, bros."

Robbie smirked, "About this particular headache you are."

Ronnie asked, "So what do you want to do about Carrol and Terrance?"

"As if we don't already know," Ralphie grinned.

Richie smiled, "We've gotta get them to want to move here, and adopted by Jason and Trinity too."

Ralphie deepened his voice and ordered, "Bros, project foster brother retrieval has officially begun."

Ronnie giggled, "Tomorrow, Richie will call Carrol and Terrance back here again."

Mysteriously shifting his eyes, Robbie giggled, "Richie and I will spend as much time with them around dad and mom as possible. Mom will flip over Terrance and dad will see Carrol as Richie's brother. By the time the day is done, and Carrol and Terry go back to Vegas, they'll be thinking about it. Sunday morning, at breakfast, we'll push it home, telling dad and mom that they need to adopt them too."

"A couple o' days of that, and our mission is complete," Ralphie assured.

Glancing at his three brothers, Richie saw devious expressions on their faces, but twinkles in their eyes that told him there was nothing more to worry about. He smiled, "Ya know, there's something about the way we are, right now, on this bed, with Ralphie on me and all of us snuggled together."

"We've been like this before," Robbie recognized.

Ronnie softly shared, "In our real mom's belly, before we were born."

Four wide smiles spread across four faces. They knew it was true. The brother in the middle changed, but the other three simply shifted around the womb. Carefully and uncertainly, Richie asked, "Do you think we could sleep like this?"

Wordlessly, Ronnie slid off the bed and started undressing. Ralphie followed, and then Robbie and lastly Richie. When they were all naked, the television was turned on, the sound turned all the way down, and the lights were turned off. Richie pulled down the blanket and sheet on the bed. Robbie and Ronnie got two pillows from the other bedroom and returned. All four returned to their previous positions. Warm and comfortable, they didn't need the sheet or blanket.

Forty-five minutes later, Doc Wiener went to his condo. Jason and Trinity walked up stairs. They peeked in the room and smiled. All four were sound asleep, but seemed completely relaxed and even satisfied. Two of the twelve-year-olds would've been plenty in a full-sized bed for any other set of brothers, but not for their boys. Trinity checked the cups on the desk, confirming the pill had not been taken. Leaving the boys alone, Trinity pulled the bedroom door closed, then went down the hall with her husband to their master bedroom.

All was quiet around the Ewa Beach main base. The only Core Rimmers still awake a little after midnight were Derrick, Mike and Reyes. At half past midnight a call from Des Moines came into the Command Center. While that call was being processed, another came in on the toll-free phone line. Before those two calls completed, a third call from Hector in Los Angeles also came in. To get these retrievals done quickly, Derrick, Mike and Reyes decided to split up. Derrick went to Los Angeles with his security. Mike went to Des Moines, and Reyes went with his new security team, to the island of Hawaii.

In Los Angeles, Derrick and his team went to a warehouse in Downing. Waiting outside and smoking a cigarette, Hector chuckled, "Big D! Long time no see, dude."

Derrick sniggered, "I knew you'd be a good Clan Liaison,

Hector. Who have you got for us tonight?"

"Me and my homies found two tonight," Hector smirked. "The first, an eight-year-old blond named Jimmy Matos, was shell-shocked from the riots or somethin'. After a short chase got us nothing 'cept winded, we decided to encircle him. Not our best move, but he wouldn't believe that we had no intention of killing his scrawny ass. He's a fighter when he needs to be, fer sure. The other," Hector paused to chuckle, "thirteen-year-old Tony Lanning, he's wearin' a T-shirt that reads 'Here Comes Trouble'. He walks right up to us lookin' for food and weed." Derrick cracked up. Hector knocked out a syncopated pattern on the warehouse wall. A few moments later, both boys were led outside by two much older men, probably in their mid-twenties judging by thick beards and tattoos. To the boys, Hector said, "Yo, this dude here is Derrick Seibert, from Clan Short. He's your new big bro. What he says, you do, as of right now."

Derrick smiled, "They look pretty good, Hector."

Shrugging, Hector said, "We fed 'em and cleaned 'em up. The riot fires got both their houses. Neither have seen their folks all day."

Tony went right to Derrick, holding out his fist to knock knuckles. Jimmy only waved to Derrick and walked right past him to the gorilla, Talib. Jimmy suspiciously eyed the large gorilla, dressed in fatigues and carrying an M-5 rifle. Talib grinned, "How's it goin', little man?"

Jumping back three feet in a single surprised leap, Jimmy gasped, "What the fuck?"

Derrick and his human security, Dave, lost it and howled. Hector and the two men softly snickered.

Pointing at Talib, Jimmy glanced around, grinning, "Now that's

kewl!" Talib bared a toothy smile.

"YO!" Hector yelled. Both boys jumped and gave all their attention to Hector. "You dudes are safe, like I promised. What's my payback?"

Tony recited, "We make something of ourselves, out of this town, in Starfleet or any thing we want."

"Just don't make you look bad," Jimmy added.

Slowly nodding, Hector promised, "Derrick tells me you're slackin', and I'll bring you right back here."

Tony promised, "We'll be kewl, dude."

In Des Moines, Mike met with Bob Busch and was introduced to twelve-year-olds, Bob Wheeler and Paul Eliason. They didn't learn about refugee facilities until late in the day. They were amongst the last from New York City.

Reyes and his security went to the Police headquarters in Hilo to retrieve eleven-year-old Hawaiian twins, Anakoni and Kapena Hiram, originally from Keaau. After running away from home because their parents didn't give a damn what the boys did, ate or even if they went to school or not. They had been caught shoplifting at the Safeway store where Mrs. Marr was found. With this rescue, word would get out around the islands that when the Clan said they'd handle something, their word was good as gold.

A little after one in the morning, the three Clan leaders and the six boys returned to the CIC After a brief orientation discussion, and quick meals of burgers and fries, they all went to the Seiberts' home. Derrick and Mike went to their room. Reyes led the six pack to the large room his brothers were already sleeping in, had Alden get some

extra bedding, and then they all got undressed to crash for the night.

Chapter 12

Ewa Beach, Hundser Basement Nest

Saturday, November 6, 5:30 AM HTZ

Drew woke up by Alden's soft voice calling in his sub-vocal. Groggily, Drew wondered, "What's up, Alden?"

"I've got good news," Alden cheerfully relayed. "Raphael Montigua's older brother, Jason, was found alive in the rubble pile that was half of their apartment building. He was dehydrated, unconscious and had a broken wrist, but he's ready to be released from Walter Reed Medical Center."

A little more loudly than intended, Drew cheered, "Excellent!"

Alden giggled, "Yeah, the best part is for Rafe and for Chris Stokley."

Sitting up, Drew scowled, "Why is it good for Chris?"

"Chris and Jay were boyfriends, kind of behind the scenes and closeted, but that's how it was."

"Now they don't have to hide," Drew smiled, and then ordered, "Wake up Conner, Chuck, Ata and Baakir. Have them meet us outside, on the lawns between our homes. I'll wake Corey, Rafe and Chris."

"Consider it done."

Drew patted Corey's butt and whispered, "Cor?" Getting a hum in response, Drew grinned, "Wake up, angel. We've got a quick

retrieval to do."

Corey inhaled deeply and sighed, "It's too early."

"This one is worth it," Drew assured. He stood and went to find his clothes.

Playfully giggling into Drew's sub-vocal, Alden teased, "I see you!"

Naked and with morning wood, Drew blushed at first and wanted to hide. He then sadly shook his head and grinned, "Alden, I was part of the team that designed and programmed you."

"Yep, you were," Alden giggled.

Finding his boxer shorts, and the rest of his clothes, Drew smirked, "Need I remind you that our intention is to give you a body?"

"I know, and I'm looking forward to it too," Alden pleasantly answered.

Nodding and starting to dress, Drew grinned, "You probably haven't had the chance or reason since you were activated, so check your system files for bodily responses to stimuli."

While Drew slid into his board shorts, and Corey began giggling, Alden gasped, "You made me ticklish? You made me ticklish almost everywhere! I thought this stuff was up to me!"

Drew sniggered, "A lot is; you can choose skin tone, hair and eye color, apparent age, height, build, how much hair and where, if you're a prepubescent, pubescent or a teen, even if you'd like to be circumcised or uncut, but *we are Clan*. You and your brothers have

already got a bunch of people lining up to teach you lessons. George, Icarus, Jack, Kerry and Stevie, I know you're listening too. All the same stuff can be said of each of you!"

Only half-dressed, from the waist down, Corey guessed the kind of reply Drew might get. Quickly, he hurried away from the nest and covered his mouth with both hands to mute laughter that would wake everyone up.

"That's not fair!" The six AIs bitterly complained.

Drew giggled, "Yes it is. Danny would know best, but Marc, Joey, Reyes and every android I met on Archmania is ticklish somewhere. You think I look cute? Well, guess what? All of you guys will be as human as us and then some. You'll be able to breathe, live and love, like the rest of us."

"I saved you from sixteen hands tickling you at once," Alden reminded.

"And thanks for that, dude," Drew smiled, "but I've never asked for help when I'm alone with Corey and he's tickling me, have I?"

Corey giggled, "There are pluses and minuses, guys. A mass tickle-attack is a bit much, but with a lover, it's never a bad thing."

Drew went over to where Chris, Rafe and Pat were sleeping. He woke Chris first, only because he would remember where he was and be quiet. By the time Chris had the news his boyfriend was alive, Corey was dressed. With Chris and Corey prepared to keep Rafe from screaming in delight, Rafe was gently woke and told to get dressed so he could join the party to retrieve his older brother.

Relieved and out of control, Rafe loudly hollered, "HE'S..." and Chris swiftly covered his young friend's mouth with one hand. Rafe

mumbled past Chris' hand; "alive?" Holding index fingers to their mouths, Chris, Corey and Drew nodded and giggled.

Nearby, Pat shifted and stretched, softly yawning, "What's goin' on?"

Chris whispered, "Jay is alive."

Widely smiling, Pat tossed his blanket aside and stood. He went to get his clothes. Noticing the other four grinning at him, Pat softly giggled, "What? He wasn't my brother or boyfriend, but he was my neighbor and friend. I'm going too."

Rafe stood up and hurried over to Pat, almost knocking him over in his haste to give a big hug. After some giggling, during which time Chris started to dress, Pat and Rafe flew into their clothes.

Drew asked, "Alden, is it very cold in Maryland?"

Into Drew's and Corey's sub-vocals, Alden replied, "Don't worry, I'll be putting you inside the hospital's lobby, Drew."

Corey giggled, "I'm surprised you aren't putting us down on a Himalayan Mountain, Alden."

Alden giggled, "The thought had crossed my mind. Then I started talking with Kerry, George, Icarus, and my other brothers. Our research into human boy's chasing each other and tickling proves you're right, Corey; it's not a terrible thing. The best part is, I'm still running the transporters, which means, one moment you might be chasing me, but I'll vanish, reappear behind you and reverse the chase, any time I want!"

Drew widely smiled, "This will be fun!"

Slapping his forehead, Corey giggled, "It opens up too many possibilities."

Anxiously, Chris, Pat and Rafe started up the stairs. Holding hands, Drew and Corey followed. All five went out the kitchen sliding door.

* * * * *

About the same time Corey, Drew and their group were leaving for Bethesda, Maryland, the phone in the Gibbons' master bedroom rang. Catching it before it rang a second time, Rob mumbled, "Gibbons residence."

"Rob, it's Steve," an adult male voice said.

Recognizing the voice of Chief of Police, Steve McGarrett, Rob became more awake, asking, "What's going on, Steve?"

There was a silent pause on the line, then McGarrett sighed, "I can barely explain it. Suffice to say, this is something you absolutely have to see."

Sitting up in bed, Rob wiped sleep from his eyes, yawning, "That doesn't give me much to go on."

McGarrett chuckled, "Not much to go on. You couldn't be more correct if you tried, Rob."

Rob smirked, "You've got my interest now." Pulling over the bed stand pen and pad of paper, Rob asked, "Where are you?" McGarrett gave Rob two addresses in Ewa Beach, the latter being the address that he and his team were currently at. Rob said, "Give me about twenty minutes, Steve. I'll see you soon." McGarrett

acknowledged Rob and disconnected the call.

Laura rolled over, sleepily muttering, "Rob?"

"It's nothing, Laura," Rob softly responded. Leaning over, he gave his wife a peck on the cheek, and then assured, "It's off base, but just around the corner. I'll bring my security and be back in an hour or so. Go back to sleep."

"Be safe," she smiled.

Rob stood and shrugged, "I always am, but with a gorilla and a teenaged jiu jitsu expert, I'm pretty sure there won't be any problems." He went to clean up and get dressed, call his security, and then decided to meet them at the CIC, so they could grab cups of coffee before leaving the base.

Upon arrival at Walter Reed Medical Center's reception desk, Drew and Corey showed their ID cards, identified their group and asked where they might find Jason Montigua. Even in Maryland, the two gorillas created a bit of stir and had their photographs taken by several cell phone users. Other than that, no one said a word about them. After a brief search on her computer terminal, the receptionist instructed, "He's in the pediatric wing; outside and across the way, sixth floor, room twenty-two."

Twisting his mouth into a crooked frown, Corey softly complained, "Outside? I don't think so!"

A little boy in the room whined, "I wanna play wit' da monkeys!" Baring a toothy grin, Baakir waved at the boy.

Drew tapped his sub-vocal, ordering Alden to transport them all

to the specified location. In a snap, they were in that room. Seeing his brother kicked back on a bed, Rafe hollered, "JAY! YOU'RE ALIVE!" and hurried there, jumping up on the bed before Jay could look up or move.

When his nine-year-old brother landed on him, Jay grunted "Umph!" Drew, Chris, Pat and the security team smiled. Corey helplessly giggled.

Rafe wept, "We thought you were dead in that wreck. I yelled and yelled, but..."

"I'm not dead," Jay clearly assured. Closing his eyes and concentrating on his little brother, Jay felt happy shivers race up and down his spine. Opening his eyes again, he saw the gorillas and blinked, "This concussion must be worse than they said though."

Giggling madly, Corey instructed, "Ata and Baakir, say hello to Rafe's brother."

Ata waved, "Good to meet you, Jason."

Baakir grinned, "Same here, dude."

Groaning, Jay muttered, "I'm dreaming this. Yeah, that must be it."

Chris stepped forward, smiling, "Fraid not, Jay." He leaned over to kiss his boyfriend beside the bandage on his forehead.

Jay sourly complained, "What're ya doin', man?"

Chris smirked, "What I've always wanted to be able to do in public. Rafe knew it. Because we were too in love to notice, it flew right over our heads. I thought I'd lost ya, man. Be glad I'm not

pushing Rafe out of the way and taking his place on top of you."

Rafe looked up into his big brother's curious eyes, nodding and giggling, "It's kewl, Jay. Pat's got a boyfriend too." Blushing, Pat nodded and giggled.

"Now's a good time for me to step in," Drew smiled. Approaching the bed with Corey, Drew cheerfully said, "Welcome to Clan Short, Jay. My name is Drew Hundser, and beside me is my hubby, Corey Seaver."

"Hi, Jay," Corey giggled.

Drew smiled, "We're two of the fifteen leaders of Clan Short Pacific Rim Division. Chris, Rafe and Pat decided they wanted to be in the ROH, as far as they could get from Washington as possible, so they spent yesterday and last night at Ewa Beach, Oahu. As soon as we get you out of that bed and dressed in more than a gown, we'd like you to join us there, to be with your bro and your boyfriend."

Rapidly nodding, Rafe giggled, "You'll love it, Jay. All the gorillas and G-Cats are kewl, just like everyone else there."

Jay suspiciously smirked at Drew and Corey. "Married? What're you, about twelve years old? Yeah, and Elvis is in the next bed." Pointing at the empty bed, Jay crowed, "Sing more for us, King."

Alden overheard, and suddenly an Elvis impersonator appeared mid-set, standing on the empty bed, singing, "You ain't nuthin' but a hound dog, cryin' all the time." Then he disappeared again. Everyone in the room giggled or chuckled, except Jay, who only looked more confused and searched for the nurse call button.

Grabbing Jay's hand, Chris sniggered, "It's all really happening. Yesterday, when we realized you and all our parents were gone, me,

Pat and Rafe started walking into Virginia, where they had refugee facilities set up. Red Cross sent us to Clan Short. The Clan transported us to Des Moines, Iowa, and from there, we were taken to Ewa Beach." He paused and then teased, "They've got an Olympic sized pool and a diving well, Jay. As soon as you're well enough, your ass is in Speedos, then your ass is mine!"

Turning beet red, Jay loudly laughed, "What is with you?"

Chris shrugged, "A day at a place where I could be me, where kids from four to sixteen decide what they want to do, when to do it and how. More specifically, at the diving well, there were about a dozen guys our age when I showed up there. Only three of 'em had board shorts on, one wore Speedos, and the rest were naked. Not one of them had a problem with the guys who were nude. At first, I had these boardies on that I'm wearing now. After a while, I figured, what the hell, and hung out naked too, just to see if could do it. I went to check on Rafe and Pat. At the big pool, Rafe was naked too. Off to the side, on a bench with his new boyfriend, Pat was wearing Speedos, giggling up a storm and trying to shift his skinny butt away from Ralphie, who in turn kept scooting his butt closer."

"He's such a goof!" Pat giggled, "In the best ways, but Ralphie's really a clown."

Glancing between Chris, Rafe and Pat, Jay sighed then softly asked, "Is this what you guys really want?" The three boys enthusiastically nodded and vocally confirmed their choice, reminding him that any other option wouldn't be near as kewl.

Corey smiled, "Schools are on base, Jay, run by Federation Youth Services. If you show the aptitude, you could find yourself attending Starfleet Academy someday. How does that sound?"

Wide-eyed, Jay glanced around, softly confirming, "No shit?"

"No shit," all the other boys and the two gorillas assured.

Since they were all nodding, smiling and serious, Jay chuckled, "Let's get going then. Rafe, get off me. Guys, turn around or you'll all be getting more than an eyeful of my ass."

Scooting down off the bed, Rafe giggled, "Did you hurt your ass too?"

Jay shouted, "RAFE!"

Landing on his feet, Rafe huffed then asked, "Are you really that dumb? I knew about you and Chris two years ago. Chris just told you that almost all the kids hang naked there in Hawaii. Drew and Corey are married, and have two sons."

"Working on three," Corey giggled.

Shaking his head, Jay grinned, "Just because you got your first pubes doesn't mean you can have kids."

Corey cracked up. Sniggering, Drew nudged his hubby. Getting the message loud and clear, Corey began untying his board shorts and so did Drew. Jay began laughing his ass off. In moments, Corey and Drew pushed their shorts and boxers to the floor. Suddenly, Jay wasn't laughing any more. Before him was a brunette that didn't have a large bush of pubes, but certainly more than Jay had ever noticed on other boys Drew's age, or had himself at that age. Drew also had a respectable sized uncut dick hanging for his age, height and weight. The blond boy, Corey, only a little shorter than his partner and also very well proportioned, had a patch of blond pubes over his uncut and decent sized meat. Corey giggled, "By the way, I'm eleven-and-a half. My birthday is March second, 1993." Jay's jaw dropped, because

when he and Chris began kissing and hugging they were eleven and neither had pubic hair.

"HOLY SHIT!" Jay laughed. "You didn't ask for the door to be closed or anything! You're all very serious, aren't you?"

Drew nodded and pulled up his drawers, saying, "Our first son, Geoff, is five. We adopted him last Saturday night. Our second son, Lenny, is seven. We adopted him Wednesday afternoon."

Also pulling his shorts and undies up, Corey smiled, "Leo is the third son, waiting in the basement at home. We just met him yesterday, but everything's looking good for his adoption at some point today."

Sliding to the edge of the bed, Jay pressed the call nurse button. Proving he had learned his lesson, he started fighting with the tied gown to get it off with his uninjured left hand. Grinning, Chris instructed, "Turn around, stud." When Jay smiled and turned in place, Chris untied the gown, whispering, "I thought I was really screwed, with no boyfriend, no parents, nuthin' except Rafe and Pat to take care of, or care about me. Nothing I saw or dealt with hurt as much as the thought that you were gone. I'm serious about you, Jay. Think about it as long as you need, but please say we'll be permanent."

Grinning as he turned in place again, Jay joked, "It seems I broke my right wrist in the fall somehow. I'll be needing a hand with a lot of stuff for a while." All the boys in the room smiled and most softly giggled. To test what he had been told, and wanting to say what he had repeatedly held back, Jay clearly proclaimed, "I loved you with all my heart the first time we kissed, Chris. That was the summer of 2001. We were eleven. Since then, the world has changed over and over again. Through it all, we stayed together and grew up. The thinking about it was over a long time ago. We just had to hide it.

Now we don't need to hide, right?"

Not caring that Jay was standing naked before him or that they were partially encircled by the others, Chris grabbed Jay and kissed him hard.

Faking a snuffle, Corey giggled, "That was too sweet. I think I'm gonna cry." Conner and Chuck, Drew's and Corey's security, knew their charges too well. All four helplessly cracked up.

The nurse came to the room. Gasping at the two gorillas blocking her path, she came to an abrupt halt. Baakir tapped Drew's shoulder and gestured to the nurse.

Reading the nurses name badge, Drew pulled out his identification and showed it to her, saying, "Nurse Torres, I'm Lieutenant Drew Hundser, of Family Clan Short Pacific Rim Division. We're prepared to take custody of Jason Montigua. Please have his discharge paperwork ready for us, including all the charges for his care at this facility. I'll sign the paperwork and pay the bill as soon as Mister Montigua is done swapping spit with his partner and gets dressed."

Rafe looked over at Pat, who bounced his eyebrows, and then they cracked up.

Still attached at the mouth with Jay, Chris recognized growing problems and blindly searched for the curtain around the bed. Sputtering, Corey went to the bedside curtain, which was at least a meter out of Chris' reach, and closed it for them. Corey giggled, "City kids are funny. All cranky and tough, but after a couple of minutes of Clan treatment, they get naked and start making out with their boyfriends."

Conner teased, "What's your excuse, Cor?"

Corey shrugged, giggled and pointed at Drew.

From beyond the curtain where Chris was helping him get dressed, Jay called, "Drew?"

"Yeah?"

"Since Chris doesn't know, I'm just curious."

"About?"

Jay sniggered, "Do you always show off?"

Corey quickly answered, "Never in a million years, Jay. Drew's got older brothers, and has hid from them, and his younger brother. In this situation, you didn't believe a lot of what we were all telling you."

Drew added, "You're Rafe's brother, so that automatically makes you my brother too. At our base, and in the ROH in general, nudity isn't too much of a problem. Since you're my Clan brother as much as any of the other dudes on base, and you would eventually see me naked at some point soon anyway, I shrugged it off and busted your implied dare." He evilly grinned, "Now you owe me, dude."

Corey, Rafe and Patrick began giggling. Jay suspiciously wondered, "What's that mean?"

"It means that you have a few hours to get comfortable at Ewa Beach," Drew smiled. "This afternoon, before dinner, *you* show off."

"Well," Chris sniggered, "Jay just might have to show off now. These clothes are shot, Drew. They're what he came in wearing; dirty and all ripped up. He didn't have anything on his feet either. His

boxers are all that are semi-usable."

Corey tapped his comm-badge, asking, "Alden, can you see Jay?"

"Not behind the curtain," Alden giggled.

Jay softly asked who Alden was, and Chris answered. A moment later, the curtain flew open. Standing in his underwear, Jay said, "Thirty-inch waist and mens' large shirts, loose fitting, if ya can?"

Over the comm-badge, Alden asked, "Turn in place slowly, please, Jay?" Once Jay had turned completely around, Alden said, "Twenty-eight inch waist and men's medium shirts would fit you, Jay."

"Tight clothes are uncomfortable," Jay simply stated. "I'd much rather them fitting loose."

A few moments later, Alden said, "Look on your bed and on the floor beside it, Jay. You're set now."

Chris picked up the Washington Capitols T-shirt and gave it to Jay. "Kewl," Jay chuckled, and slid into the shirt. Holding open the board shorts, Chris went to Jay and leaned forward. Steadying himself on his boyfriend's shoulders, Jay lifted his legs and got into them. Chris tied the drawstring. Glancing around, Jay queried, "This stuff is new?"

"Course," Corey answered.

Jay hummed, "Ya know, I've read about the Clan, and all the kids you guys saved. I just thought, that's a hell of a lot o' money." He sat on the bed to put the pair of sandals on.

Squatting down to help Jay get the sandals on, Chris said, "This is only the beginning. We'll be in a store later, where you'll get everything you need. Yesterday, I got all the stuff I'm wearing and a full week's worth of clothes, plus toiletries, plus an electric razor, baseball caps, belts, a poncho and a suitcase to put it all in."

Drew nodded, "That's the basics anyone needs. If you need something special for school, ask and it's yours. Once you move into the dorm, you'll have your own bed, desk, chair, and a laptop computer. Each dorm room has a television and stereo too."

Rafe gushed, "They're big rooms too, Jay. You and Chris would have space to spare." He paused then giggled, "As if you'll need that much space."

"RAFE!" Chris and Jay loudly laughed.

Giggling his butt off, Rafe hid behind Ata.

* * * * *

Arriving at the address where Chief Of Police Steve McGarrett said to meet him, Rob pulled up behind another unmarked police car. He noticed he was parked in front of a nice upper-middle class home in a well maintained neighborhood. With his security, Rob walked toward the open front door, greeting other police officers along the way. Before even stepping inside the house, Rob noticed the spots on the exterior wall where the house number once was. He also noticed the front door knob was missing. In the living room, just beyond the entryway, brown leather covered furniture was present and undamaged, but there were no lamps, end tables or coffee table. The entire entertainment system sat on the floor, but there was no entertainment center. Photos lay on the floor by the walls that had no frames. However, a large seascape painting in a wooden frame still

hung on the dining room wall.

Steve McGarrett came into the room saying, "Have you ever seen a home invasion robbery like this? That TV and sound system has a street value of about two grand, but here it sits."

Slowly shaking his head, Rob wondered, "What else was stolen?"

"A lot," Steve answered, "chrome tables with mirrored tops had been in here," and then waved Rob into the dining room. He pointed up at the ceiling. Rob noticed a hole where a light fixture had probably been, but there weren't any wires left hanging. Noticing Rob's frown, Steve nodded, "There isn't a wire in the house, but no walls are damaged in any room. The china set is another high value item left here in the hutch, but all the silverware, even the everyday, worthless stuff is gone." The two men moved into the kitchen. The floor was still wet, but there were no appliances except a black-faced microwave oven still in the wall. "The oven and fridge and all it's contents were taken. Who the fuck takes a refrigerator in the first place? I won't even ask who takes the fridge and the food. Brass and chrome fixtures throughout the house were taken, but this microwave, for instance, why is it here when the fucking toaster was taken? A four slice toaster, worth maybe twenty-five credits when it was purchased, gone." Pointing up at the ceiling, he said, "This designer fixture was left and it cost the home owners almost five hundred bucks! Street value is at least three hundred."

Rob wondered, "Where are the home owners, Steve?"

"At the dentist."

Rob blinked, "They left to go to the dentist, now, after being robbed?"

Leading the way to the bedrooms and bathrooms, Steve nodded, "Get this, everything was taken between midnight and five this morning. No one heard a sound, not the man, woman or either of the two kids."

"Do they normally wake that early?"

"Not normally, but three of the four woke because of pain in their mouths. The caps over root canals and all the fillings in their teeth were taken too, Rob. Who the fuck does that? Did they come in here wearing protective face masks, release a gas to keep them all asleep and numb, so they could take their dental work? What in the hell is a gold cap worth? It can't be used on anyone else's teeth; it could only be melted down to be sold. Still, that stuff's not twenty-four carat, high grade gold either, it's virtually worthless. Cheap childrens' toys were taken, but good stuff was left behind. Awards and trophies were taken, worthless junk to everybody except to the teenager that won them. Where are all the goddamned mirrors? They took them out of the frames and medicine cabinets first too! Copper plumbing gone, electrical wiring gone, but there's a Tiffany lamp worth almost a grand. It would've taken a team of eight men half a day to accomplish all this, and the place would be completely trashed."

McGarrett paused and sighed, "This is seriously the most twisted home invasion and robbery I've seen in twenty years." Walking away and shaking his head, he muttered, "Eight total frigging lunatics take the junk and leave the most valuable stuff behind. They were smart enough to wear gloves though. No finger prints, no residue of any sort any where. The other house is almost the same."

"Almost?"

"They had PVC plumbing. Other than that one difference, it's

virtually the same M.O.; take all the shiny crap and leave the good stuff." Rob suddenly had an idea, and thankfully he was walking behind the Chief Of Police, so it wasn't noticed. Steve grumbled, "If you have any clue where to go on this one, please say something, because I am stumped."

Rob shrugged, "Let's check metal recycling companies, pawn shops and junk yards."

* * * * *

Drew's and Corey's party in Maryland were only delayed a few minutes. Since they were too young to have debit cards in the first place, the cashier didn't believe the card could pay the expenses incurred for Jay's treatment. She was surprised when the card cleared the full amount on the first swipe. Signing his name to the receipt, Drew grinned, "I'm a Lieutenant in Starfleet, married to Corey, have three sons, and my own three bedroom townhouse. You'll get used to Clan organizational structure, just like we have."

"Imagine a ten-year-old coming here with his eleven-year-old husband and doing the same things we just did," Corey giggled at the woman. Drew slid the signed receipt to the cashier.

"Age doesn't matter?" the lady confirmed.

Drew shrugged, "It depends on the kid. Our two oldest leaders turn fifteen in late December. We're all between ten- and fourteen-years-old. What's really kewl is seeing the younger kids we rescued only last week helping us with retrieving kids. Our five-year-old son did his bit last night, helping other little guys adjust."

Corey smiled, "Geoff's changed and grown so much in only a week." He smirked at Jay and teased, "It's the bigger, older kids who

are the larger challenges."

Chris, Rafe and Pat softly sniggered. Jay smiled, "Next time, think twice about bringing gorillas to get someone out of a hospital." He told Ata and Baakir, "I really thought I was losing my vision and sanity."

Ata grinned, "Keep your vision."

"Sanity is optional," Baakir chortled.

"Alden," Drew giggled, "Walter Reed has had enough of us. Take us to Anahola Bay Beach, Kauai, to watch the sunrise."

"I think you're just in time," Alden replied, and executed the order.

On the sand of the beach, Ata hummed at the security implications, and then suggested, "Please stay together guys."

Conner nodded, "We're good for a while, because it's so early and we're alone."

Chuck agreed, "Do what you'd like here, but stay together. If one of us sees a threat of any sort, we are outta here, whether you're swimming naked or standing."

Certain their security were right, Drew nodded and smiled, "I thought it might be nice, especially for Chris, Jay, Pat and Rafe to see the place where we became Clan."

Having already heard various tales from other kids at Ewa Beach, Rafe squealed, "It happened here?"

"At just about sunrise last Saturday morning," Corey stated, and then pointed over at the area near the dunes where it actually

happened, adding, "Right over there."

Facing east with Chris beside him, Jay cracked the widest smile seen thus far and mumbled, "It's beautiful."

"So is our base, Jay," Chris softly assured. "It's not right on the beach, but less than a quarter of a mile from the beach. You can smell the salt air when the wind blows from the South."

Rafe was on the other side of his brother with Pat, also looking east. "It's all brand new, bro," Rafe enthusiastically said. "All the houses, dorms and everything there is only a week old."

Pat asked, "Rafe, now that Jay's here, I guess you and me are roommates soon?"

Nodding, Rafe teased, "We'll have to work something, so you can be with Ralphie."

Playfully shoving his younger friend, Pat giggled, "I know Ralphie and I have been joking a lot, but I don't think it'll be a problem. Really, he wants to wait as much as I do."

"Yeah, right," Jay knowingly chortled. Chris cracked up. Rafe, Corey, Drew, Conner and Chuck began giggling.

Widely smiling and looking around at all of the others, Pat cackled, "What? It's true!"

Jay sniggered, "Having sex for the first time isn't something you can plan, bro. It's something that progresses, a little at a time. First, it's hugs and kisses, then it's showing each other the goods, which leads to jackin' off, and onward to the first careful and scared blow-jobs, wondering if you'll gag on his boner and accidentally bite it off." Corey howled laughing at that point, because everything said was so

true. He and Drew had gone through it all in the last year.

At Corey's reaction, Jay sniggered, "Forget scheduling it, Pat. You and this Ralphie kid will know when it's time to do this or that and take the next steps. Sex isn't thought out, not those first times, any how. It's in the eyes, the heart and the body."

Revealing a little more, Chris nodded and reminded Jay, "Don't touch it that way or... ungh... oops, sorry, too late." Remembering his first warnings to Chris, said almost verbatim, Jay cracked up.

Facing Pat, Drew smiled, "What's most important, each of those first times, with every next step, and every time thereafter, is talking to each other about those experiences. Keith told me once that someone you have sex with, but don't talk with, is just a sex-buddy, and not a boyfriend. Sex-buddies can still become boyfriends, and boyfriends can fall apart and away, becoming sex-buddies."

Holding up two fingers, Corey giggled, "It always takes two." Catching Chuck bouncing his blond eyebrows at Conner, and the resulting warm, wide smile cracking Conner's face, Corey loudly laughed, "OMIGOD!"

Watching Corey stagger around, Drew wondered, "What?"

Chuck and Conner knew they were busted, but didn't say a word for almost a minute, while Corey tried to calm down. Conner went to Drew, stood at attention and formally reported, "Sir, last week, when General Adam assigned me to you, and Logan assigned Chuck to Corey, it seems that they knew us better than we knew ourselves. It was not planned, but we have learned that we are falling in love."

"AWESOME!" Drew loudly laughed, and hugged his new friend and protector.

Stuck at attention in Drew's arms, Conner giggled, "I was hoping you'd feel this way."

Baakir asked Ata, "What is it about sunrises and humans?"

Ata shrugged, "And sunsets too. It's like a primal instinct."

Corey ran for Chuck to offer his congratulations. Chuck was a lot like Corey in many ways, however Corey was not genetically enhanced like Chuck. With very little effort, Chuck ran away from Corey, giggling as he led Corey around a big circle on the beach.

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Ewa Beach Townhome #6

Saturday, November 6, 2004 6:06AM HTZ

In the Taylors' townhouse, four brothers were asleep, but busily humping away. On the bottom of the pile, Richie was pushing up against Ralphie, who in turn was grinding down, and on each side of Richie, Robbie and Ronnie were pressing their hips and morning throbbles against his hips. As the center of so much attention, Richie was the first to groggily realize what was going on. He thought about it, and soon realized that these three had helped him more in two days than anyone ever had before. Grinning, Richie decided to instigate the inevitable and sent to all three, *'Yeah, that's feeling so awesome, bros. Do it. I want you to. I really do love each of you so friggin' much, it makes me crazy wondering how I ever lived without you.'*

Each of the other three slowly became more aware of what was happening. At Richie's soft sniggering, the other three paused only a few seconds.

Ralphie asked, *'Are you sure, Richie?'*

'I've never been more sure of anything before,' Richie replied to all three brothers.

Robbie offered, *'I guess we knew our first times would be together, didn't we?'*

'I do now,' Ronnie answered. *'It's right and perfect for us.'*

They returned to their morning grind. Ralphie tenderly kissed Richie, then Robbie and then Ronnie. While Ralphie and Robbie kissed, Richie kissed Ronnie. With each cycle around, the kisses became more urgent and the thrusts more powerful until all four held their breaths and stiffened. Turning to jelly, they started giggling.

Becoming hysterical because he was wet on his belly and both sides, Richie laughed, *'Okay, who knew that he could really cum?'*

'Not me!' the other three replied.

'Wow!' Ronnie silently cheered. *'I don't know what's more amazing, the feeling of what we just did or the fact we did it together.'*

The other three easily assured, *'Both!'*

Robbie told his brothers, *'Let's do it again, only this time with me and Ronnie in the center of the cuddle. We didn't get to kiss each other.'*

Wickedly grinning, they suspiciously eyed one another, then nodded and scrambled off the bed, and then back on again, into Robbie's suggested position. Without any fear or worry, the process started over again. It took only a little longer, even with telepathic encouragements, but again, all four climaxed together and four new

wet spots were made against Robbie. Afterward, the grown up feeling every boy experiences with their first orgasms was quadrupled by their blissful telepathic conversation.

The only concern shared was that Ronnie was hooking up with Garrett and Ralphie was with Pat. Both Ralphie and Ronnie assured Richie and Robbie that they were working slowly in their relationships. They wanted their first times with their boyfriends to be just as special and automatic as what they had just experienced together. That gave the latter two time to find partners of their own, and in the meantime, they could be there for each other with a shared thought, either in pairs or as a group.

Just waking up in townhome number one, Prez rolled over towards Keith. Without thinking, he ground his morning wood against his hubby's ass. Prepared to yelp because he tightened his butt muscles, Prez was surprised that it didn't hurt very much; if anything it was little more than a tingling reminder that all systems were not yet at one-hundred percent. Groggily, Keith muttered, "Sex-machine," and fell contentedly back to sleep.

Prez whispered, "I love you," then rolled out of bed and went into the master bathroom. He wanted to see how his rear end looked and could do that, with the medicine cabinet mirror opened just enough to reflect into the full-sized mirror on the door. There was a violent need to pee first, after ten hours of sleep. Forcing his bone to point at the toilet, Prez waited for the flood gates to open. Typically, with his bladder bursting, his dick wasn't cooperating. Prez softly muttered, "No, I am not going to play with you. I need to pee, not cum, you stupid single-eyed beast." In response, his dick only lurched, but Prez could feel he was going to leak any second, at last. It started as a trickle and became normal flow. Prez sighed in relief. Closing his eyes, he smirked, "I've told you a million times, if Keith

isn't here to play with you, I have no reason to do it."

Finishing the final blasts, Prez shook his chubby and flushed the toilet. Moving over to the vanity sink, he turned on the faucets and tried to catch a glimpse of his wounded butt. It wouldn't work without moving the medicine cabinet mirror, so he finished washing his hands, his face, and drying them, then set the medicine cabinet mirror appropriately. He gasped at the sight of the many popped blisters then mumbled, "Now they can really call me a bubble-butt. I'll tell Keith it's feeling better, but looking like that, he won't believe it." Closing the medicine chest, he walked over to the shower, but decided to soak in the whirlpool tub instead.

Turning the water on to fill the tub, he reasoned, it's early, I have the time and who knows, it might even help a little. If I can simply sit more today than yesterday, Keith will notice that and chill out.

While the tub was filling, Prez went to make sure the door was fully closed, so he wouldn't disturb Keith. On the way back to the tub, he looked at the ceiling and softly called, "Alden? Can you hear me?"

"Just fine, Prez," Alden softly replied. "I've got good noise reduction software. I have a question for you too, as soon as that's convenient."

Prez smiled, "It's kewl now, dude. I'm feeling much better and thought I'd ask for a status report, so I don't have to wait and go to the command center. What's your question?"

"Well," Alden giggled, "it's something I've noticed repeatedly with some of you guys; teens mostly, but some tweens too."

Checking the water temperature, and satisfied he wouldn't fly out of the tub into a wall because it was too cool or too warm, Prez prompted, "Go ahead, Alden." He stepped into the tub and slowly sat

then kicked back to soak.

Alden seriously said, "I don't have a body, but when I do have to choose, I'd like to be better informed, so my question revolves around boys urinating with erections. It always seems to take much longer, and a lot of you get impatient about it." Prez began chuckling. Alden giggled, "Some even talk to their dicks, like they listen and understand. It's silly, but if I were to decide to become a pubescent or teen, would I do that too?"

"Very probably," Prez chuckled. "Reyes and all androids still need to leak. I'll assume that if you choose to be eight years of age or older, you'll get erections just like the rest of us."

Alden giggled, "So, why the frustration and dick talk?"

With the tub adequately filled and turning off the water, Prez smiled, "I can only say what I know for certain, because I feel it. When boys get stiffies, there seems to be one portal that basically says, in this state, you can only have an orgasm; no matter how bad I know I have to piss, and that's the problem. Needing to leak bad is uncomfortable and thus the frustration. Maybe you'll be able to control that switch better than human boys do, but then you're missing a normal and fun part of being male too."

"Talking to your penis is normal?" Alden giggled. "Have you named yours like others have?"

Cracking up, Prez slid further down and laughed, "No, I haven't named my dick. Keith calls it his favorite toy, but no, it's not named. Talking to it probably gets to be normal though."

"This is fun?"

"It's not as annoying as it sounds. I know that I'll eventually pee,

but talking to it for holding up the show, and keeping me uncomfortable, makes me feel better during the wait."

"It happens to all boys with erections, huh?"

Prez nodded, "As far as I know. Check your biological databases under the male urinary system and reproductive system for more details. I'm not a doctor and can only tell you what it's like."

"Thanks, Prez, I'll do that. Are you ready for your status report?"

Picking up the bar of soap, Prez nodded, "Go for it."

While Prez bathed, Alden reported, "It was a nice quiet night. Around twelve-thirty, we received a series of calls from Des Moines, Hilo, Hawaii police, and from the teenaged boy named Hector, in Los Angeles. Remember Derrick made Hector a Clan Liaison?"

"I remember."

"Hector found two boys that were refugees, but who didn't know about refugee centers, or maybe they chose to not know, they were talking to their dicks at the time."

Prez sniggered, "Alden, do you not want a boy's body?"

"Well, yeah," Alden giggled, "I think so... you know, it'll be kind of weird to talk to a body part that can't talk back, but it's fairly common, about 59.7695 percent of boys do, so..."

"Alden?"

"Yes, Prez?"

"Talk to one of the super-geeks; I'm sure they could figure out a

way to make yours talk back!" Prez laughed.

Kerry interrupted, "There ya go, bro! That old dormant tech-mode we won't need as androids, you can have and we'll put it in your dick!"

George offered, "It's really a better idea than becoming a boy in a girl's body. Can you see that? Alden, with boobs, getting cranky a few days every month? He gets annoyed and all the Core Rimmers go poof! Off to Antarctica."

Icarus sniggered, "I can picture it, I can picture it!"

"I've created a monster!" Prez laughed. "The little head is going to take over the world!"

Alden giggled, "This is all well and good, but forget the boy with boobs bit, I'm just trying to decide, do I want to be a smaller eight-ish-year-old, a slightly taller ten- or eleven-year-old, or a much taller teen?"

"No matter which you choose, the part is still an excellent place for a tech-mode," Stevie from AI headquarters offered.

Giggling hysterically, Prez sank in his tub and hoped he wouldn't inhale water and drown.

"Just don't let Jerry build your body; you'll need special underwear!" George sniggered.

"Yeah!" Kerry giggled. "He believes in the 'Three Leg Theory'; with the middle one extendable!"

Rising to the surface again, Prez heard Alden laughing, "No, no, no! I've heard the kids talking. Gay boys and straight girls like

looking at really big dicks, but then they wonder what the hell they're going to do with it."

"Guys!" Prez laughed.

All the AIs chorused, "Yes, Prez?"

Prez giggled, "Status report on three rescues, LA, Des Moines, and Hilo, please?"

Five AIs giggled apologies to Prez, promising to return to the topic another time. Alden continued his status report, giving Prez the number of boys rescued, their ages and names. "Derrick, Mike and Reyes were back here by one in the morning. They gave the six kids a chance to eat and chatted at the CIC dining room. They all went home, to the Seiberts', and were in bed by one-forty-five. Through most of the night, everything was quiet, until about five-twenty, when we learned that Raphael Montigua's older brother was alive." He then said that Drew and Corey had gone to Bethesda, Maryland, to retrieve Rafe's older brother, and the group was currently at Anahola Bay. Alden then reported that Rob Gibbons had received a call from his old boss and was off-base.

Prez wondered, "Are we still kewl with the level two kids?"

"Yup, they'll be here tomorrow, around lunch time." Lastly, Alden reported, "The seismic activity that we were so worried about is being closely monitored, but currently all reports are showing the disturbance is nonexistent. We have a... 'report' as to why it started... and stopped..." He paused. Then finished in a rush, "But I'm not so sure I believe it!"

Prez raised an eyebrow, wondering, "What makes you say that?"

"Daddy Draco told me."

"And you don't believe it why?"

"Daddy lies."

Prez huffed in relief then ordered, "Keep me immediately informed of any change in seismic activity, Alden. After all we've been through the last day, needing to evacuate this planet would be another kick in the nads we don't need."

Done with his bath and toweling off, Prez listened to the AIs discussing which age bracket boy that each wanted to become. None of them really had a clue, or were anywhere close to reaching a decision. Prez's laughter and occasional helpful remarks though did prove that Pacific Rim Division was the right place to debate the pros and cons. Finishing his morning routine, Prez thanked Alden and all his brothers for helping to make this a truly memorable morning.

Stepping out of the master bathroom, Prez grimaced at the idea of putting on the shower wrap when he was squeaky clean. Indecisively, Prez glanced at the Terri-cloth wrap and his sleeping husband. Prez had no idea when Keith went to bed, but assumed it was around midnight. Since it wasn't yet seven in the morning, he decided to not put on the wrap and to not wake his hubby with a blow-job. Leaving the room, Prez went downstairs to make some food for his family.

He paused in the living room, turned on a light and the TV, and then set about finding something entertaining to watch. "Religious, no; mindless talk, no; Barney the idiotic purple friggin' dinosaur, nope; news, Battle of Earth, oh, hell no, I know more about it than you do." At last, Prez found something to watch – The Teletubbies. He put the remote control down, softly cheering, "Good morning,

Tinky-winkie!"

Behind the scenes, while Prez padded around the kitchen preparing to make breakfast, and giggling about what he was hearing from the television show meant for babies and toddlers, the AIs were passing comments about him while still doing the other tasks needing to be done around the Clan.

"He's my boss," Alden proudly insisted, "and none of you can have him."

"This is coming from the first AI to move into a body with his tech-mode in his pecker," Kerry giggled.

Stevie droned, "Ya gotta admit, Prez is interesting for a human teen."

"You've been working for grandpa Danny too long," George sniggered.

In varying high, squeaky voices, Prez said, "Teletubby bye-bye," and said his farewells to his four morning TV companions. There was a knock at the door. After wiping his hands on a towel, Prez wondered aloud, "Who could this be?" Heading for the door, he called, "Alden, who's at the door?"

Never losing a beat on his play argument with his brothers, Alden answered, "It's Drew, Corey, and the rest of their rescue party."

"Thanks, Alden," Prez said, and then opened the door to wave his unexpected guests inside.

Seeing their big bro nude, Drew and Corey weren't fazed in the least and entered, saying good morning to Prez.

Giggling, Rafe covered his eyes. Leading Rafe inside by the arm, Pat chuckled, "It's less than the robe and shower wrap, Prez."

"I just showered and didn't want to put that crusty thing on," Prez grinned.

Noticing the program on TV, Corey giggled, "Teletubbies again, Prez?" Prez rapidly nodded and sniggered.

Catching Jay gawking at Prez, Chris widely smiled and turned his boyfriend's face toward him. Chris giggled, "Prez, this is Jay Montigua, my soon-to-be-ex-boyfriend, if he isn't more careful."

Offering his hand to Jay, Prez chuckled, "Going from the east coast of America to the ROH takes some getting used to. By the end of the day, Jay will be like everyone else; nudity won't be a problem, unless Darren's naked at the diving well."

Snapping out of his trance and blushing more intensely than he had in years, Jay shook Prez's outstretched hand, softly chuckling, "Hey, Prez."

Prez beamed, "Welcome to Pacific Rim Division headquarters, Jay. Please come in."

Giggling, "Thanks, Prez," Chris led Jay into the townhouse. Prez closed the door and turned back into the living room, offering everyone a seat.

Noticing Chris' suspicious glare, Jay pulled his boyfriend close, sniggering, "What? Did I have any forewarning our director was cute, or that he'd be nude? No one said a word. If I even tried to say Prez is fugly, my tongue would jump out of my mouth in protest." Rafe and Pat cracked up.

Widely smiling, Prez said, "One compliment deserves another. I'm seeing and hearing a handsome couple that belongs together, every bit as much as Keith and I."

Sitting down and pulling Corey onto his lap, Drew offered, "We left Walter Reed and went to Anahola Bay, bro. Since we're Clan a week, I thought, what the heck, I haven't seen a sunrise all week."

"We had to leave when our security thought too many other people were around," Corey added. "Your lights were on, so we brought the newbie over to meet you."

Prez repeated, "Lights were on? Plural?" Everyone nodded and Corey pointed upstairs.

Sleepily staggering down the steps, Keith softly called, "Prez?"

Prez went to the staircase landing, saying, "Right here, babe." Keith swung around the middle landing, seemingly on automatic pilot and following his erection wherever it might lead. Prez figured that since Jay had reacted to him naked and limp, Keith's handsome face, cut abs and thick, uncut bone would cause another problem. Prez laughed, "Alden, get our Clan Short robes on me and Keith, before Chris has a hissy fit, and Jay loses his boyfriend." Prez and Keith phased out and back in under a second, wearing their Clan robes. Prez explained, "We've got company, T'hy'la, including a brand new newbie."

Keith shrugged and softly grunted, "Oh." He took the last step into Prez's waiting arms. They kissed then Keith waved at the assembled group in the living room.

Drew giggled, "Jay Montigua, meet my older brother, Keith Hundser, the morning zombie." Corey began giggling and so did

Rafe.

Smirking at Drew, Keith reminded, "I got it from mom."

Smiling around the group, Prez said, "I was going to make breakfast, but thankfully I didn't get very far. I could cook for twelve, but it would be piecemeal, and we'd be eating breakfast until lunch."

Nodding, Drew tapped his sub-vocal, asking, "Alden, who's in charge at the CIC kitchen this morning?"

Over the room's ceiling speakers, Alden answered, "Jessica Simpson is there, Drew." He quickly asked, "Shall I patch you through?"

"Please," Drew confirmed.

A few moments later, Alden said, "Go ahead, Drew."

"Hi Jessy, this is Drew Hundser."

Jessica answered, "Good morning, Drew. What can I do for you?"

"I unintentionally messed up Prez's breakfast plans," Drew smiled, and then asked, "Could you get a cart prepared for twelve of us here?"

"I certainly can," Jessica replied. "Tell me what I should include."

Drew checked with Prez. Prez said, "Good morning, Jess."

"Hello, Preston."

"We've got milk, juices, butter and a bunch of condiments here,"

Prez told her. "All we need are the main course items; pancakes, scrambled eggs, waffles, some potatoes O'Brien if they're already made, sausage patties and links, bacon, mixed fruit salad, and some chocolate milkshakes for our four boys. When you're ready, let Alden know to transport the cart here."

"Give us about ten minutes, please?"

"Take all the time you need, and thanks, Jess. Prez out."

Locking eyes with Prez, Jay wondered, "How long has Prez been your nickname?"

"Over seven years," Prez answered, "since I moved here, Keith, Mike and Derrick have called me 'Prez'."

"You'll meet Mike and Derrick later," Pat assured.

Rafe giggled, "Wait 'til Jay gets a look at Derrick."

Chris nodded and smirked, "Hopefully clothed, at least at first."

Uncertainly glancing around, Jay wondered, "What's the deal with him?"

Rafe giggled, "Blond, like Chris, pretty tall, and definitely high on the cute list."

Keith told Jay, "Derrick's our best friend, our band's drummer and our Clan historian."

Prez grinned, "The most annoying thing about Derrick is his hair; no matter what he does, it always falls right back into place. He doesn't have to do anything to it, it's just always been that way."

"Awesome hazel eyes too," Pat softly muttered. Noticing

everyone suddenly smiling at him, Pat blushed and giggled, "Don't tell Ralphie I said that!" Nodding, everyone began chuckling. Blushing intensely, Pat told Jay, "He's already married to Mike anyway, and he's almost three years older than me too."

Rafe innocently said, "All you Core Rimmers are way cute. I was only here part of yesterday and heard lots of kids sayin' nice stuff about you."

Prez smiled, "We're their Clan leaders, so I guess that's to be expected, Rafe."

Jay grinned, "Did I just hear what I thought I heard? What do the kids call our leaders?"

Chris chuckled, "I forgot to mention, they're Core Rimmers and all of us are Rimmers." Jay sputtered then howled laughing, and dropped onto the nearest chair, completely hysterical.

Drew and Corey proudly chorused, "We are the Rimmers!" Twelve- and eleven-year-olds cheering that pushed Jay over the edge. He brought his hands to his face, forgetting completely that there was a cast on his right wrist. Before anyone could warn him, it was too late; Jay had cracked his forehead good. He moaned through his giggles. Everyone checked to make sure Jay was all right. During the subsequent tomfoolery, Prez learned Jay was already diagnosed with a concussion, so he called Doc Andrews and asked him to stop by as soon as he could.

Right after the Doc said he'd be over soon, Jay insisted through his giggles, "I'm fine, Head Rimmer."

"You're going to stay fine too," Prez stated. "A quick scan with a tricorder will make sure your day and ours, stays as drama free as

possible."

Glancing around the room, Jay queried, "Drama? What drama?"

"You were unconscious through most of it," Chris told Jay.

Drew began telling Jay about the California orphanage rescues that led to some rioting here and there, around the world. Corey picked up the story of Friday's riots and battles, omitting several details about who did what and where. Keith finished by saying, "We've basically had a week of drama, since we went to the luau on Kauai last Friday, where we met thirty of eighty-six sexually abused orphans. Our Clan has been growing ever since. Your day is going to be slow and easy with a concussion and broken wrist, Jay. Do what the doctors told you to do."

"I've got that covered," Chris promised. He then reminded, "I guess after we get Jay clothes, we'll need a dorm room, so he can lay down and rest when he needs to."

Drew nodded, "It's on the to-do list, right after breakfast. Depending on how Jay feels, if he feels weak, we might show you a dorm room first."

"I really am fine," Jay assured. "I can see everyone, in focus, and I'm hungry too, so I can't be too messed up."

Alden transported the cart of food to the townhouse, putting it down in the corner of the dining room and near the kitchen. He reported, "Breakfast is here, guys. Jessica said, the pitcher of milkshakes on the bottom shelf needs to be refrigerated. Also, Doctor Andrews is on his way. Expect a knock on your door in about fifteen-seconds."

Heading to the kitchen, Prez tapped Drew and Corey to help

gather plates, silverware and glasses. Keith went to the front door and opened it for the approaching doctor. Pat got up to help get the table set. Rafe remained in the living room with his brother, Chris and Keith.

Walking the path to the townhouse and seeing Keith waiting, Doc Andrews asked, "What happened, Keith?"

Keith smiled, "Nothing major, we hope, Doc. Our newest Rimmer laughed himself silly and clunked his head, with the cast on his wrist. He's already been diagnosed with a concussion, so let's make sure he didn't make matters worse."

Stepping inside, Doc Andrews chuckled, "I'm surprised we don't have more injuries from Rimmer jokes around here."

Closing the door, Keith softly sniggered, "They're killing me. Have you got anything for it?"

"Ear plugs," Doc Andrews chuckled.

Rejoining those in the living room, Prez said, "Hi, Doc."

Concentrating on the tricorder and Jay, Doc Andrews said hello and asked, "Where's the shower wrap, Preston?"

"Upstairs," Prez answered. "I took a bath and didn't want to put it on. Only when we received all our guests did Alden get me and Keith our robes."

Nodding, Doc Andrews sighed, "I'll take a look at yesterday's shower wrap and you can get a fresh one. Now, Preston; before you attempt to sit."

Slouching, Prez huffed, "Okay, but I slept ten hours and feel

much, much better." As soon as he finished speaking, Prez phased out and back in again, without his Clan robe and wearing only a new shower wrap. "Thanks, Alden," Prez smiled.

Over the ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "Any time, boss."

Still setting the table, Drew noticed the doctor fussing over Jay. Drew said, "We'll have Jay's medical records from Walter Reed today, Doc."

"Thanks, Drew," Doc Andrews softly said. More loudly, he looked at the ceiling, and called, "Alden, get me those records now. It's a priority, so put them on my tricorder too."

"On the way," Alden replied.

Doc Andrews asked Jay, "How do you feel?"

Jay nodded, "Okay, considering that I spent half a day in the rubble that was our apartment. Knowing that Rafe and Chris are alive and unharmed made the biggest difference. I'm hungry and I can see in focus." Grinning, he joked, "The two gorillas had me wondering though." Rafe cracked up. Drew and Corey softly sniggered.

Nodding, Doc Andrews stated, "You'll feel drowsy on and off today. Drink plenty of fluids, and have somebody with you when you're resting."

"That's me, Doc," Chris said. "We've been boyfriends two years."

"Three years," Jay corrected. At Chris' curious smirk, Jay shrugged, "Kisses count. I've never kissed anyone else, have I?"

Suspiciously squinting, Chris grinned, "Not that I know of."

"Never even considered it, baby," Jay warmly smiled.

Doc Andrews told Chris, "Watch your boyfriend. Being trapped and dehydrated didn't help his concussion. He does nothing strenuous today. Walking from place to place is all he's allowed to do, until I check him again tomorrow morning. That means no diving and no swimming, only wading. Feeling dizzy occasionally is normal, but actually wobbling or falling is not." Glancing between Chris and Jay, Doc Andrews softly asked, "You're intimate boyfriends?" When both boys blushed and firmly nodded, Doc Andrews said, "Sexual contact is strenuous activity for Jay. Don't go there until after I check again tomorrow and give you my okay."

A little annoyed, but more frustrated, Jay huffed, "I'm fine. What's the big deal?"

"A concussion is like bruising your brain," Doc Andrews calmly informed them. "Your brain sloshed around your skull, Jay. Blood flows into the damaged area, which is why a visible bruise on your body turns varying shades of blue. Aspirin thins your blood, so you can't even have that for any headaches today. If you need pain relief, come see me at the FYS Building, and I'll give you a hypo-spray. If you feel nauseous, that's a bad sign too. Vomiting is very bad. See me for both, nausea and vomiting. Properly cared for, you'll be active and fine tomorrow. Over-do today and you'll still feel poorly tomorrow. This could be over within a day, or a couple of days; that's your choice."

Prez smiled, "Jay, this fashionable shower wrap is my doing. It's all I'm allowed to wear." He released the Velcro, spun around and showed off his blistered butt. Putting the shower wrap back on, Prez turned again and continued, "I have a job to do here that I did very little of yesterday. Our band plays for the kids almost daily, but I can't do that either, until I get the okay to put clothes on. Make your life

and all our lives easier, please? Do what you've been told."

Jay grinned, "You talk like my dad used to."

Chris, Pat and Rafe helplessly chuckled. Already starting to eat, Drew paused and sniggered, "Pretty dense. What did we tell you before coming here, Jay?"

"You're my brothers," Jay repeated.

Pointing at Prez and Keith, Corey smiled, "They treated me like a brother long before last Saturday. You ain't seen nothin' yet."

Keith told Jay, Chris, Pat and Rafe, "The summer of 2003, we were all surfing at the beach. Corey tumbled off his board. The way he fell, his belly hit the board and it knocked the wind out of him. With his legs wrapped around Corey and treading water with his arms, Drew kept him above water and yelled for help. Me, Prez, Mike and Derrick were there as fast as we could. We got Corey to shore. Mouth-to-mouth, Prez gave Corey a quick puff of air into his lungs. It was scary enough, but thank goodness none of our parents were around. Corey wouldn't be allowed to go surfing again, then Drew wouldn't go, and what you see now might be very different."

Facing Prez, Doc Andrews asked, "What made you try mouth-to-mouth?"

Prez shrugged, "I've had the wind knocked out me. Corey was gasping for breath, so I figured it was a diaphragm spasm. A quick, small puff was all he needed."

Smiling, Doc Andrews nodded, "Excellent," and then wondered, "Your old shower wrap is upstairs?"

Prez nodded, "On the back of a chair in the master bedroom.

Help yourself; ya can't miss it."

"I'll check that and get out of your way," Doc Andrews said, and then started up the steps.

Keith prompted, "Let's eat, dudes."

Prez led the way, with Chris, Jay, Rafe and Keith trailing. Soon, they were seated at the table, with Corey, Drew and Pat, serving themselves. Doc Andrews came back down stairs. He said, "You're looking good, Preston. I'll see your bubble-butt in my office about five this afternoon." Giggling and sniggering broke loose at the table.

Nodding, Prez chuckled, "I'll see you later, Doc. Thanks for coming."

"Don't tell the A.M.A that I made a house-call," Doc Andrew grinned, and turned to leave the townhouse.

Right after Doc Andrews left, those at the table heard someone galloping downstairs. Jumping the last three steps, Richie landed in the living room. Standing in his Spiderman briefs, Richie delightfully squealed, "Ev'rybody's here for breakfast?"

Prez chuckled, "Com'ere, Richie. Let's get that belly filled, and I can introduce you to someone."

Richie hurried to his Poppa. Lifting Richie and sitting the boy on his lap, Prez smiled, "Richie Grunert, this new dude is Jay Montigua. Jay is Rafe's big brother and Chris' boyfriend."

"Sweet!" Richie giggled and waved.

Jay smiled, "Hi Richie."

Lifting a small forkful of pancakes for Richie, Prez said, "Richie

is our youngest son, Jay."

Keith asked Richie, "Are all your brothers still asleep?"

Shaking his head while chewing the pancake in his mouth, Richie mumbled, "Gage is awake too." He swallowed and giggled, "He stretches and yawns, lookin' around like he's lost, like you, daddy."

Quickly lifting his napkin to his face, Drew cracked up. The others at the table softly sniggered.

Confirming that Gage was moving, an upstairs toilet flushed. Soon, they heard another pair of feet on the stairs. Before even coming into view of those at the table, Gage cheered, "I smell food!"

Wearing blue boxer briefs, Gage came off the steps into the living room, saw the table surrounded, and smiled, "Wow! I didn't expect a morning party."

Keith smiled and reminded, "The first of two parties."

Nodding and approaching the table, Gage asked, "This afternoon, right, dad?"

Keith nodded, "As soon as we can get everybody together." Keith introduced Gage to Jay then prompted his son to get some breakfast. Nodding, Gage got a plate then went to the cart where all the food was. Rafe slyly watched Gage's every movement, but no one noticed.

Prez softly offered, "I was thinking that we could have the party at our new beach house on Kaho'olawe. What do you guys think?"

Keith nodded, "That's a good idea. We can check the place out."

Drew suggested, "Ya know, me and Corey, and John and Stephen are already friends with our security. The four of us can stay here most of the day, and you older dudes can get to know your security. AJ and Jerry can meet and get to know their security."

Prez thoughtfully hummed, and then offered, "That's not a bad idea, but you four still need a break too. You can stay here for a while, but try to get at least a few hours away."

"We will," Corey assured, and then stipulated, "but you two, and Mike and Derrick need to make your security your friends. We found out this morning that Conner and Chuck are becoming a couple, just from time spent together, and with me and Drew."

"That makes all of us safer," Drew explained. "They have personal reasons to protect us and each other now."

Keith told Prez, "If there's not much happening, we could stay the night there. Alden said that the place is as big as a single family house here. There's plenty of space for all of us."

"Not a bad idea," Prez smiled. "We'll go with that intention. Any business interruptions, we'll deal with and get right back to the party."

Loud giggling was heard from upstairs. Then Dee cackled, "You are too, Sammy!"

"Am not!" Sammy playfully insisted. Then there was some scrambling and more laughter upstairs.

Corey, Drew, Gage and Richie began giggling. Keith smiled, "That's our other two sons, Jay. Dee's ten, but looks more like he's eight, from past abuse. Sammy's nine, but actually looks a little older. Even for a ten-year-old, he's got some muscle definition you wouldn't

normally see on a boy that age."

"He likes gymnastic stuff and swimming," Gage explained. "It shows on him. Wish it showed on me too."

"Another year or two, Gage," Keith warmly smiled.

Drew nodded, "Sammy kind of reminds me of Corey. I think he's hitting his growth spurt already."

Sitting at a counter stool, Gage softly sniggered, "I know what's goin' on, if you want to know?" Richie giggled louder.

Prez chuckled, "I'm sure we have a very good idea, Gage. It's not nice to blab secrets."

Still smiling, Gage shrugged, "It's not really a secret, but that's kewl, pop."

The pitter-patter of bigger feet and more giggling wafted downstairs. Obviously, Dee and Sammy were making their morning pit-stop in the bathroom. "Well?" Dee giggled.

"I'm tryin'!" Sammy sniggered.

Everyone in the dining room widely smiled and softly chortled.

Dee giggled, "I'll be done and downstairs eating, and you'll still be standing here!"

Sammy cackled, "You're not helping!"

Alden politely said, "Excuse me, but it's happening again, Prez."

"I know, Alden," Prez chuckled.

Alden wondered, "Is there a safe age when this doesn't happen?"

"Yeah, infancy," Prez smiled. Noticing wide smiles and curious eyes around the table, Prez grinned, "A carry over from an earlier conversation with Alden and his brothers."

Alden shared, "Actually, it started with Drew earlier this morning, Prez."

Drew giggled, "Alden, are you still down that path? You can be any kind of male android you want."

Alden giggled, "So I can be eleven with huge muscles and a wiener that hangs to my knees?"

Everyone at the table suddenly stopped eating, grabbed their napkins and cracked up. "That would certainly be unique!" Corey uncontrollably laughed.

"Not highly recommended though, Alden," Keith chuckled.

Alden whined, "Why not?"

"Concussions whenever you get a stiffy for one," Jay laughed.

Alden gasped, "That could happen?"

"Not precisely the same as Jay or other humans," Drew smiled, "but you might knock yourself unconscious."

Corey giggled at the ceiling, "Guys, you see all of us every time we're naked. You see us limp and erect. Decide how much you'd like between your legs based upon all that criteria. Consider it statistically, based upon all the evidence available to you. You can choose your sexuality too, so monitor what the girls are saying, so you can make

the decisions."

"Don't confuse the issue, Corey," Alden sighed. "We're having a rough enough time deciding apparent age and all the stuff associated with it."

"Why does Reyes keep repeating 'Don't ask Jerry,' over and over?" Kerry giggled.

"Strange," Stevie muttered, "a minute ago, I presented the question anyway. Jerry, Paul, Ryan, Marc, Danny and KC haven't stopped laughing. Even Joey is giggling out of control."

Alden announced, "Incoming call for you, Prez."

"Who is it, Alden?"

"Danny Page."

Prez smiled, "Go ahead and connect him, Alden."

"What have you Rimmers done?" Danny breathlessly wheezed. The sounds of others laughing around him could be heard. "You've got every AI in the Clan obsessed!"

Drew quickly interjected, "Danny, it's Drew. It's my fault, dude. Alden teased me, and I teased him back. Really, the AIs are just trying to make body decisions. We made them male personalities, so I guess it's kind of understandable that they're getting a little carried away."

At least seven voices incredulously cackled, "A *little* carried away?"

Danny howled laughing, "Not one of them said *anything* about *something* little, Drew. It sounds to me like if they get their way,

Joey's unit will be considered small."

"That'll make the rest of us teens tiny by comparison!" KC breathlessly sputtered.

Slamming his fists against a table or something, Marc loudly laughed, "Is everyone in Hawaii horse hung, or what?"

Corey laughed, "Come visit and see for yourselves; we're average or maybe a little more than average. Just let the AIs figure it out, guys."

"I'll order five harnesses, just in case," Danny gasped.

"Danny, this is Prez. Corey's got a good idea. We're going to have a party a little later on Kaho'olawe. Have your crew join us there for a few hours."

Everyone at AI Division cackled, "Kaho-a-whatsie?"

KC roared, "That's a Hawaiian key-word for someplace shaped like a very large pecker?"

Prez laughed, "Just join us there. We could all use a break from yesterday's crap."

"More like a break from nano-nuts with penis envy!" Danny barely managed to reply.

"Who're you calling nano-nuts?" Stevie asked. "Remember, I've seen you nude, Grandpa!"

"We'll see you later, Prez." Danny evilly said, "First, I'm going to reprogram our AI, so he believes he's a female ferret. Danny out."

Once the call finished, Alden carefully asked, "Are you guys

angry?"

Everyone around the table loudly assured that none of them were the least bit angry. Prez calmly said, "You're only about four days old, Alden. You may be the best of the best this world has ever seen, but you've only had those days to process what you've been witnessing."

"The choices you make you'll have to live with guys," Drew smiled. "Discuss it amongst yourselves and with us." He sniggered, "It might be better to leave AI Division out of the discussions for a few days though."

The boys at the Seiberts' house were starting to wake up. Anna and Carl already knew that the kids had been invited for breakfast at the Gibbons' home. Anna had offered to help Laura with the meal for their very large family. Since Laura happily accepted, Anna was already there and assisting in the kitchen. Back home from his early morning shiny theft calls, Rob sat with Carl at the kitchen table, sharing what had happened and how to properly deal with it. All the kids from three families were waking and gathering in the living room to watch television while breakfast was prepared.

In the Hundserts' basement nest, kids there were waking up. The McPhearson brothers, Albert and Charles were the first two to wake. When they got up and got dressed, the Steib quadruplets, Kelly, Lawrence, Matthew and Nicholas woke up. Soon, Geoff, Lenny, Leo, Jimmy, Scott Deaver, Tanner and Toby Stoeher, were also awake. After making the required bathroom trips, all thirteen of them went to play video games in the opposite side of the basement, which eventually woke Raymond Varga, Chauncey and Fred Eckhart, Scott Shetley, Lance Kinchen, Craig and Phillip Nash, the Ramos brothers, and the three Hunnicutt brothers, Shaun, Michael and Kenneth. The latter three heard AJ and Jerry softly talking and cuddled around

them. It was obvious the boys still felt strongly about each other. Remaining in the nest under the covers, Ray, Chauncey, Fred, Scott, Craig, Phil, AJ and Jerry were waiting for their morning conditions to subside, but that wasn't allowed for more than another minute or two.

Hearing the voices of the older boys, Corey's and Drew's sons led a miniature tickle attack on the nest. The Hunnicutts had AJ and Jerry well under control, so Geoff pointed the McPhearsons to Ray. Lenny sent the Steib quadruplets to motivate Craig and Phil. Tanner and Toby were assigned to tickle Scott by Leo. Not completely satisfied with the morning mayhem as it was, Geoff, Lenny and Leo jumped in on Lance, Chauncey and Fred. Barking out missed tickle spots, Rikko patrolled the perimeter.

Jim and Jen Hundser were considering what to feed their brood when they heard laughter from the basement and shuffling feet up on the second level. Already awake and hitting the bathrooms upstairs, Bruce, Carmella, Dewi, Frankie, Kokaku, and Renee could also hear a little of the muffled basement chaos. Alone with Stephen and cuddling in their bed, John sent to his brothers, sisters and son, *'We've got newbies in the nest. Tell mom and dad to hold off breakfast, so you can help those little kids wake the older, big kids.'*

Standing at toilets in one bathroom, Bruce and Frankie evilly snickered, and in the other bathroom, Dewi and Kokaku loudly laughed. As soon as Carmella finished her business, she and Renee were the first to run down to the kitchen. By the time the girls explained their assigned task to Jim and Jen, the four boys were galloping down to the ground floor.

Hearing and then seeing an additional six young kids coming down the steps, two of which were little girls, Craig managed to hysterically cackle, "Oh, damn! There's more!"

Phil giggled, "They come out of the woodwork here!"

AJ and Jerry lost it and cracked up laughing.

Busy giving Chauncey what for, Geoff giggled, "Daddy says us little kids outnumber you big kids."

Lenny laughed, "We're in charge, and don't you forget it!"

Leo howled laughing.

Still laying in bed alone with John, Stephen giggled, "You are so bad, hon."

John nodded and grinned, "Those kids that lost their families yesterday will learn today, their lives have rebooted, memories will be cleared and the insanity has begun."

Stephen smiled, "You're helping them recover, without actually doing it yourself."

"I only do what needs to be done, baby. The little kids need to feel like they're helping. Between those two things and afterward, the rest is mostly automatic. It makes identifying who needs Doc Wiener's help easier too."

On the nightstand, John's comm-badge beeped. Reaching for it, John said, "Hello?"

"Good morning sweetie," Grandma Morrison's cheerful voice replied. "It's time to rise and shine!"

"Hi Grandma," John grinned. He seriously wondered if he might get an unlisted number for his comm-badge.

"Why don't you and your cute husband grab Frankie and then

bring your parents over to Des Moines for breakfast?" Grandma suggested, her tone hinting that there wasn't another option. "I've already helped you out, they've been working way too hard, so I have some of my friends helping to fill in while they are taking a break."

Knowing better than to argue, John smiled, "The whole family is awake, Grandma. If it's okay, we'll bring more than Frankie; we'll bring my other brothers and sisters too?"

Grandma hummed then answered, "Yes, do that. There are far fewer remaining refugees here."

"Good," John replied. "Give us a couple of minutes to get everything and everyone ready. We'll be there soon. John out."

Dramatically frowning, Stephen whispered, "No play time?"

Pulling Stephen down to kiss that frown away, John also pulled Stephen into his mind. They completed a half-hour of playtime and snuggling in just under three-seconds. Completely satisfied, they bounded out of bed to get dressed. Inspecting the statue of Joel and seeing his friend apparently reclining, John sent messages to his parents and mother-in-law, so they could get ready to leave. Stephen called Bond to get some security prepared. Knowing that there would be plenty of security already at Wells Fargo Arena, two gorillas and two enhanced human teens would be sufficient for this trip. John's gorilla, Lucky, and Barry, Jim's teenaged security, and Tanya Casey, Jen's teenaged security, were told to get ready for the morning excursion to Des Moines.

While in the bathroom and brushing his teeth with Stephen at his side, John told AJ and Jerry what was going on. The remaining Core Rimmers and dorm leaders were filled in by John's telepathic messages. He then told his brothers, sisters and son to wrap it up and

get ready to go on a little trip. Geoff and Lenny were told where Drew and Corey were, so they could take Leo over to Prez's and Keith's townhouse. The tickling had all but completely stopped anyway. Every big kid had little kids cuddling with them.

Jerry smiled, "Now that we're all wide awake, it's time to get breakfast. Once we're finished there, all you newbies can see the dorms later too. If you're ready, you can move in."

Leo asked, "Me too?"

Shaking his head, Lenny smiled, "You're with me and Geoff, bro. We're gonna go see dad and pop and Uncle Prez, and get you adopted, so you're really our big bro."

With that said, everybody knew the plan. Little kids got up off the big kids. Bruce, Carmella, Dewi, Frankie, Kokaku, and Renee went upstairs, followed by Geoff, Lenny and Leo. The bigger, older guys got up and started to get dressed.

While they were putting clothes on, Travis asked Scott Shetley, "Do ya want to be roommates?"

Scott sighed, "I'm sorry, Travis, but Lance already asked. We're both guitar players and like our music loud, so we're going to share a room."

Glancing between fourteen-year-old Scott, and thirteen-year-old Lance, Travis asked, "Are you dudes becoming a couple?"

Checking with one another, Lance and Scott uncertainly shrugged. Lance shyly offered, "I've never had any opportunities with anyone."

Scott explained, "Neither of us have ever gone there before.

We're not sure if we will or not either. I guess we'll see what happens."

Lance asked Travis, "Are you gay?"

Travis sighed, "I haven't had any luck on either side of the fence. I'm not really sure, but I guess I'm more open to the possibility of a boyfriend, especially here and now."

Scott warmly smiled, "It's kewl, man. The way things have worked out, me and Lance can make our decisions and you can too."

Unable to help overhearing, since they were all on the same side of the basement, AJ and Jerry locked eyes and slowly nodded, knowing that there was simply something about Clan life that allowed every kid to find themselves.

Lance called over, "Hey, Jerry, can you help Trav, ya know, so he finds the right roomie?"

Jerry smiled, "I can only point out some dudes that Travis might like. Ultimately, it's up to Travis."

Travis chuckled, "I don't think I need a matchmaker. I've simply never been lucky enough to have a relationship last long enough to get off the ground." The Steib quadruplets giggled. Travis smirked, "What's so funny?"

Kelly shrugged, "It's this place."

"And you older guys," Nicholas smiled.

Matthew giggled, "It's early in the day, but are you talking about breakfast?"

Lawrence rapidly nodded, "Bet you find a roommate by the end

of the day, Trav."

By eight o'clock Saturday morning, the Ewa Beach base was bustling with normal morning activities. Kids in the dorms were going to lavatories or heading to the CIC for breakfast. Doc Wiener was making his rounds, checking on his various patients by observation. Only when necessary, would he make arrangements to speak to kids in the privacy of his office. The daytime employees were getting their jobs started. After working seven days in a row, Steven Mier and Madeline Hupp were taking their first day off, now that they had additional housekeepers hired and on-site.

Liki and Keanu were jogging around the base perimeter. Not only were they getting exercise, but they were airing out their feelings and thoughts, still trying to decide where their relationship was going long term. That discussion was only temporarily side-tracked by the shocking appearance of two squirrels scampering across their path, squeaking, "Excuse us!" Native Hawaiian's, both boys were surprised and wondered how North American mainland creatures had arrived on Oahu. They had seen Timmy Short around base the prior Monday, but they weren't aware of Timmy's particular skills with animals.

Geoff, Lenny and Leo arrived at their Uncles' townhouse. None of them had been set up with access to the house, so Lenny knocked on the door. Inside, almost everyone was cleaning up after breakfast. Richie ran to the door and opened it. Seeing his two cousins and a new boy, Richie giggled greetings and let them inside, hollering, "Unca Drew! Unca Corey!"

Sitting on the sofa with Jay, Chris watched his boyfriend widely smile. Breakfast was plenty bizarre and Chris knew that the fun was only beginning.

Lenny introduced Leo to Richie, and then said, "Your dad needs

to make Leo our new big bro, Richie."

"Awesome!" Richie giggled, "A new cousin is what *we* want." He then screamed, "Poppa, get your tricoder and do an adopt'oning."

Jay cracked up laughing at Richie's enthusiasm and the mispronunciations. Giggling, Richie ran to the couch and pounced Jay. In seconds, Richie was laying across Chris' and Jay's laps and getting tickled.

In the kitchen loading the dishwasher, Keith softly sniggered, "You have your orders, baby."

Nodding, Prez smiled, "As if we didn't hear who was at the door or what they wanted."

"They must've heard Richie inside all four of the big houses, the dorms and the CIC," Corey softly giggled.

In the dining room and putting stuff back on the cart to be returned to the CIC, Dee, Gage and Sammy began giggling. They were the sons of the Head Rimmers, but Richie seemed to be more suited to a role as a Mouth Rimmer.

Drew told Prez, "I know you only saw Leo last night, bro, but he's already been asked, accepted and made himself a big brother for Geoff and Lenny." Prez nodded and started for the living room. Drew and Corey followed.

Keith softly told his other three boys, "Right after the adoption and welcoming Leo into the family, get Richie and go take your showers. We're going to start our party as soon as possible."

"Okay, dad," Dee, Gage and Sammy chorused.

Gathering his sons, Keith led them to the living room.

Prez called Alden for his tricorder. Drew, Corey, Geoff and Lenny surrounded Leo. With his tricorder in hand, Prez smiled, "Leo, I think you're setting a new Rimmer record for getting adopted the fastest. I saw your introduction on TV from Des Moines. Drew told me that it was pretty much in the bag before you went to bed last night."

Leo nodded and giggled, "It was that easy, Prez."

Prez teased, "In another minute, that'll be Uncle Prez, nephew."

Leo giggled. On either side of Leo, Geoff and Lenny spontaneously wrapped their arms around their new big brother and smiled up at him. Drew and Corey each rested a hand on Leo's shoulders. Watching this from a camera in the room, Alden snapped a still photo for the family and recorded the proceedings.

Prez asked, "Leo Daniel Scott, do you want Corey Seaver and Drew Hundser as your fathers?"

Leo nodded, "Yes."

"Do you want Geoffrey Eckel and Lenny Cuttler as your little brothers?"

"Definitely," Leo smiled, and hugged both boys that were glued to his sides.

"Drew Hundser and Corey Seaver, do you want Leo as your son?"

Drew and Corey smiled at each other, nodded once then replied in unison, "Yeah, very much, Prez."

Looking down, Prez grinned, "Geoff and Lenny, do you want Leo as your big brother and do you promise to listen to him?"

Geoff quickly nodded, "Okay, Unca Prez."

Lenny giggled, "Yeah, and most of the time too."

Everyone in the room cracked up. Prez laughed, "Good enough, Lenny. It's done. Witnessing this adoption were Keith Hundser, Dee Vanderwood, Richie Grunert, Gage Lundberg, Sammy Bay, Pat O'Hara, Rafe Montigua, Jay Montigua and Chris Stokley." Prez turned off the tricorder and everyone welcomed the newest member of the Hundser-Seaver family with applause and hugs.

Alden giggled, "Look on the end table, guys." Nearest to the end table, Pat picked up a stack of framed photos and started handing them out. There was a copy for Drew, Corey, Geoff, Lenny, Leo and all the members of Prez's and Keith's family. Alden said, "There's a Quicktime video of the happy event on each of your computers too. I've seen a lot of adoptions, but this one showed the happiest family group yet."

Drew looked up and smiled, "Remember that, Alden. Happiness isn't going to be in your pants, it's going to be in your heart."

Six thoughtfully humming AIs were heard over the speakers.

Alden teased his brothers, evilly snickering, "Muahahaha! The Rimmers are all mine!"

The speaker connection closed with an audible pop. Everyone in the room grinned at each other. Jay softly sniggered, "They're so confused."

Corey giggled, "Let's go to the CIC, Jay. You need clothes and

our boys need their milkshakes. If Derrick, Mike and Reyes aren't ready with their group yet, we might have to start without them, so you can relax as soon as possible."

Pat smiled, "Been there, done that. I'm going to go see if Ralphie is awake."

Rafe said, "See ya later, Pat. We'll talk about getting our dorm room, so when it's time for that, we're ready."

"Kewl, Rafe."

Everyone said goodbye to Pat as he walked to the door. Once Pat had left, Richie, Gage, Dee and Sammy hurried upstairs.

Chris checked with Jay, to be sure he was feeling okay and ready. Jay leaned forward, causing Chris to back up. Jay stole a kiss that Chris obviously wasn't expecting. Leaning back, Jay grinned, "That was for the kiss at the hospital. What do you think of that?"

Chris giggled, "You're feeling better."

Intently searching every feature of Chris' face, Jay nodded and gently assured, "About everything." Feeling a shiver race down his spine, Chris shook it off and peacefully sighed. At last, there would be no more hiding, no more arguing about what was appropriate behavior and where, all to keep their love safe from harassment. At their new home, nobody would say much about public displays of affection, except occasional teasing.

Drew tapped Keith on the arm then promised, "We'll be at Kaho'olawe after that, bro."

Keith nodded, "We'll gather our security and get the place set

up, as soon as our boys are ready to leave."

Prez reminded, "We'll make a quick stop at the store too, just so I can meet the newbies picked up overnight."

Squinting suspiciously, Keith grinned, "The key word is quickly, Prez."

"Very quickly, I promise," Prez chuckled.

Drew waved Chris, Jay and Rafe off the couch. Everyone said, "Later," to Prez and Keith then left for the CIC. On the way, Jay commented on the dorm building they passed. He noticed that a lot of the windows were opened.

Drew shrugged, "There aren't security concerns here, Jay. Between our base security and the AIs, everything's covered. Our weather is too nice most of the time to keep windows completely closed."

Pointing to his left, Jay wondered, "Who lives in those condos?"

"All the adult employees," Corey answered, and rambled, "chefs, housekeepers, lawn care, doctors, nurses, like that."

"Eventually teachers too," Drew added. "We're a self-contained community. Every kid here feels safe, no matter what their pasts were."

Chris softly said, "I'll tell you more about that later."

The combined Gibbons-Seibert breakfast was almost done. Mike was called aside by his dad. Derrick reminded Mike that they had six newbies to take through the store. Gathering the new kids, Reyes led them outside. Mike assured Derrick he would be at the

basement store to help, and then Derrick went outside. He and Reyes transported to the CIC, to let Kaleo and other Core Rimmers know what they were planning.

Mike followed his father into the office wondering, "What's up, dad?"

"I had a very strange call this morning," Rob told his son, and then quickly asked, "Where are the Scooby Gang this morning?"

Mike shrugged, "I have no idea. They were in the room with our sons and the six newbies when we got home before two this morning. We let them go and do their own things, dad."

Rob hummed, and then told Mike of the two homes that were burglarized over night. Listening to the story, Mike practically had to bite his tongue off to keep from grinning or laughing out loud. Rob pointedly asked, "Tell me you don't know anything about this?"

Acting completely stupefied, Mike softly assured, "I've seen what the ferrets collect, and it's mostly stuff they find. They know oysters make pearls too, so that's probably the most valuable things they gather. The Scoobies take junk, like hubcaps and tire wheels, dad. I can guarantee it wasn't my ferrets." He then started out of the office for the front door.

Following his son, Rob loudly said, "The fillings and caps on their teeth were stolen, Michael!"

Knowing his face couldn't be seen, Mike opened the door, shrugging and grinning, "It wasn't my kids." Closing the door behind him, he silently ordered, "Take me to Derrick now," and disappeared.

Rob Gibbons reopened the door to find his son had vanished. Closing the door again, he called, "Alden, where did you send my

son?"

"To the basement store, where Derrick is, with Reyes and the new kids," Alden innocently answered.

Rob asked, "Did you transport the Scoobie Gang anywhere off base last night?"

"No Sir," Alden fibbed. It was actually four in the morning.

While their sons were bathing and showering, Keith asked Prez, "What happened during breakfast baby; I felt something worried you."

Prez sighed, "Since I'm feeling better, John shared information about Inoyra and Relud Glith. I'm going to have to contact Admiral Morrow about this."

Keith gasped, excitedly wondering, "Morrow? Why?"

"It's a long sordid story," Prez began. "Betazed is just beginning diplomatic contact with the Federation, but someone in that group of Betazoids can't be trusted. Last night, John, Inoyra and Relud had a telepathic conversation. Someone tried to abduct the Betazoid twins for a slave trade. Although they escaped, they were telepathically messed with. To make matters worse, they're certain that their parents were murdered. This isn't a job for John's Intel team. It's not a job for a Clan Division either. It's in the Federation's hands to discover who tried to abduct the twins, and who killed their parents. All I can do is contact Morrow with the information we have, photos of the twins, and let the Federation investigate the Betzoid diplomatic team." With that, Prez walked upstairs to his computer, where he would send his message encrypted to Admiral Morrow and Cory Short.

Drew, Corey, their three sons, Chris, Jay and Rafe went into the

CIC dining room, where most of the Clan was gathered and having breakfast. AJ, Jerry, Kaleo, Tory, Troy and Sean could easily be seen, because they were seated at the first rows of tables around many of the youngest kids. Geoff, Lenny and Leo went directly to the kitchen chow line for milkshakes.

Drew rapidly blinked. There were a lot of people missing from the dining room, yet it somehow seemed more packed with kids than it had at dinnertime the previous evening.

Kaleo loudly called, "What's goin' on, guys? John sent a broadcast about going to Des Moines again?"

Walking over to where Kaleo was, with Drew, Chris, Jay and Rafe following, Corey giggled, "It's nothing, Kaleo. Grandma Morrison just wanted to give the Hundasers a break, so she invited them to breakfast, or brunch, figuring the five hour time difference."

Kaleo nodded, "I met her briefly last night, while she was being shown around base."

Looking around the six Core Rimmers nearby, Drew introduced Jay then said, "We need to take him to the store, dudes. Are you guys good to cover for us while we're busy?"

Troy answered, "We're going to take Jonathan Dupre to Northeast Division. He's got a great-aunt, his grandfather's sister, living there. We'll give him a comm-badge, so he can return when he wants."

"We'll only be gone fifteen or twenty minutes," Sean added.

Kaleo and Tory quickly assured they were kewl. Tory asked, "Is Prez still thinking of a Core Rimmer retreat today?"

Corey nodded, "It's in the works, bro."

Noticing the worried expressions on the faces of the Hunnicutt boys, Jerry asked, "Can we bring our boys?"

Patting Jerry on the back, Drew smiled, "Course ya can, bro. We're all bringing our sons too. We'll just take turns coming back here, if we need to deal with any other business."

Corey asked, "Would one of you let Lieutenant Vorik know what's going on? We'll all be available if needed, just off base." Tory nodded and stood. Without a word said, he went directly to the Command Center. Corey loudly giggled, "You're too easy, Tory."

Spinning around, Tory paused long enough to laugh, "You have no idea, but Kaleo does." At least half the kids in the dining room cracked up.

Sadly shaking his head, Kaleo sniggered, "It's a good thing we'll be alone on Kaho'olawe."

Still giggling, Drew tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, take us to the basement store, and include Tory, Kaleo, Troy, Sean, Jerry and AJ in the previous body type conversation."

"Good idea!" Alden giggled, and then executed the order.

Still unaccustomed to being transported, Jay looked around the store. Derrick and Reyes transported in with their six rescued kids. Jay chuckled, "This isn't a store, it's a warehouse!"

Derrick grinned, "Two-hundred and seventy-five kids as of this morning."

Corey cracked up. Drew smiled, "You saw all the kids in the

dining room. Somehow, even with a bunch of us scattered around this morning, it seemed just as full as it was for dinner last night."

Mike transported into the store. Tapping Derrick on the shoulder, Reyes shyly reminded, "Including me, two-hundred-seventy-six, dad."

Hugging his eldest son, Derrick chuckled, "I stand corrected."

"Or fall over from logic wars with androids and AIs," Mike softly sniggered.

"Alden," Drew hollered, "tell me you didn't include Mike and Derrick in our earlier conversation."

"Okay," Alden giggled over the loudspeakers, "I didn't, but I did, and so did Kerry, George, Jack, Icarus and Stevie. We're getting valuable input from all the kids up in the dining room too. All we asked about was preferred eye, hair and skin color, but we're getting a lot more."

* * * * *

Des Moines, Iowa

Saturday November 6, 2004 1:23PM CST

John, Stephen, Frankie, Kathleen Marr, Jim and Jen Hundser, all the Hundser kids, and the four security personnel arrived at the Wells Fargo Arena. At the sight of the large indoor amphitheater that still had hundreds of people waiting to be processed, Jen turned to John gasping, "You were here yesterday?"

John nodded, "Yep, and stop worrying so much, mom. There were a couple of butt-heads we had to deal with, but mostly,

everything was kewl. People were nice, considering they were worn out from all the Battle of Earth stuff."

"I was here," Lucky reminded Jen. "John and Stephen had all their security right beside them the entire time. Everywhere they were, we were too." Stephen told the adults about the Porkie incident.

Their conversation was interrupted by Grandma pulling up in a four-wheel ATV pulling a passenger train. The "thumpa-thump-thump-thumpa" of the ATV's engine quickly gave away the fact it was nowhere near stock.

"Hop on, the food's about ready!" Grandma yelled over the thump of her ride. "Dewi and Kokaku, you two cuties can ride up here with me."

Jim picked up Kokaku and Jen picked up Dewi. In moments the two boys were snuggled in front of Grandma. Giggling hysterically, John and Stephen pulled Kathleen into the next set of seats. Gorillas, security, the remaining kids and lastly, Jen and Jim piled in.

"Johnny, sweetie, I have no problems lifting the wheels off of the ground, so you won't need to assist me." Grandma stated in her most grandmotherly tone.

Watching his parents' eyes spin because Grandma called him 'Johnny', and got away with it, John laughed, "Grandma, I only levitated two people and one guy in a wheelchair yesterday!"

"And you did a very good job." Grandma replied. "Would you be so kind as to make sure the rest of your family stay in their seats? I'm sure they have never rode in a Des Moines tram before."

Nodding, John giggled, "Boys, hold on, and girls, close your

eyes. I'll take care of the rest."

Grandma hit the horn button on the ATV, and gunned the engine as a series of air horns on the forks began blasting 'Dixie'. Amazingly, the crowds watching parted, giving her clear space to proceed; her driving had already become legend within the arena. With the front wheels spinning a good six inches off of the ground, the tram took off, heading towards the ramp leading to the upper level.

Carmella and Renee screamed. Jen Hundser covered her eyes with both hands. Jim Hundser cracked up and all the boys, including Stephen and John, loudly squealed with delight.

Steering using the individual rear brakes, Grandma headed up the ramp, and in no time the tram was flying through the tram lane in the sky-walk. As they entered the Iowa Events Center, Grandma took a hard right, putting the tram cars on two wheels as they made the corner. Just shortly after they returned to rolling on all fours again, Grandma blasted through a set of open doors and brought the tram to a stop in a private dining room.

Approaching the tram, Logan grinned, "You're getting better Grandma; nobody puked this time!"

"It's not my fault some people can't handle a little adrenalin rush," Grandma replied.

Throwing his arms around Stephen, John roared laughing. Dewi and Kokaku wanted to stay with Grandma and go for a longer ride. Giggling hysterically, Bruce wobbled off the tram and fell down. Jim helped his son up and then helped his wife off the tram.

Wearily, Jen smirked, "You're really not helping my Valium addiction, Grandma."

"Give me a week and all y'all won't need it." Grandma stated factually.

Julio came over, and after inspecting the front tires of the ATV, stood up grinning, "Grandma, could you at least wear the print off of the tread on the front tires *before* we have to replace the rears?"

"That is why they invented tire rotation," Grandma replied. "You worry about your family, I'll worry about maintenance."

"Yes, Grandma," Julio replied with a smile; obviously enjoying the banter. "I hope the ride helped your appetites; Lucas, Logan and Mini took a kitchen break from the madness and helped Marcie with brunch."

"And Lucas didn't even blow anything up doing it!" Logan giggled. "He'll get over it, though."

"I'm sure I can find a way to improve his mood." Grandma stated with a twinkle in her eyes. "Jennifer, would you be a dear and settle the rest of your family? Logan, please disconnect the tram and hop on the back. These two angels need a proper ride; I believe a guided tour of the sky-walk system is in order." Jennifer's heart was still in her throat, so she could barely reply with a nod.

Dewi and Kokaku cheered their acceptance of the plan. Logan quickly undid the hitch and hopped on the seat behind Grandma. "HIT IT!" Logan yelled as soon as he had his hand on one of the handholds. With a blast of the horns, they were off, the rear tires screeching in protest.

"One of these days, she *may* grow up!" Julio giggled, as he watched the ATV go through the doorway. "Welcome to Des Moines!"

"We might even consider trying normal one of these days," Jesse

grinned as he came over and slipped under Julio's arm. "I hear it's boring though, so probably not this week."

"If you don't mind, just follow us and we can get comfortable while Grandma is terrorizing the Skywalk system," Julio added. "Mom and Dad should have everything ready to go, and it's more comfortable at the table."

"Not to mention safer," Jesse mumbled under his breath.

The group followed Julio to the table. Mick looked over at the two adults with a knowing smile. "Don't worry," Mick assured the Rimmer adults. "Despite recent events, things are a lot saner than they appear. Have a seat and relax."

John looked around the table. Julio and Jesse's family were there, as well as Mick's and Janice's group. Marcie and Robin sat together. Eddie was with Robin while Johnny was occupied by getting Fisher a bowl of berries. There were a few faces that John didn't recognize, so he telepathically asked Robin, *'Who are the newbies, bro?'*

'Which newbies are these?' Robin innocently giggled, and started thinking of names, beginning alphabetically, so John would have to dig to find the correct handles.

John widely grinned, *'Fine, keep your secrets. There's more than one way to name a kid.'* The only kid who wasn't drinking or eating at the time was a teenaged boy. Levitating the dirty-blond-haired boy with hypnotic hazel eyes, and earning the boy's loud laughter, John introduced him to his parents, sisters, Bruce, Stephen and Frankie. "Grandma's been collecting kids, specifically for us to bring home. This dude here is Erik Kendricks, he's fourteen."

Erik waved from his seated position a meter above his chair,

giggling, "Nice to meet you."

Lowering Erik and moving on to levitate the next kid, John smiled, "Everybody, this is Stuart Sutliff, but call him Stu." After a short pause, John giggled, "Stu's twelve, and wants me to lift him higher. May all your dreams come true, dude." John sent Stuart floating up to the ceiling, where he waved down at everyone and giggled.

Before his dad broke concentration on Stuart, Frankie sent, *'Don't make this next kid float.'*

Barely shaking his head, Stephen added, *'He's very shy and a little scared, hon.'*

Lowering Stu, John asked his husband and son, *'Do you have his name?'*

'I think he's hiding that too, dad,' Frankie sent.

Stephen tilted his head, trying to focus on the boy without staring at him. Drawing a blank on the boy's name, but feeling quakes of fear, as he had Monday night, Stephen got up and walked around the table to the small boy. Before Stephen arrived, Frankie strongly assured the boy, *'It's okay now, really.'*

Barely above a whisper, the boy whimpered, "I'm Wade Houseman." Breaking down in tears, he softly sobbed, "I'm five."

Stephen's slight build didn't prevent him from lifting the five-year-old. The suffering from the boy that Stephen felt he didn't understand, but Kathleen Marr read it clearly and it brought tears to her eyes. Stephen was soon helped by John, who took the little one in his arms. Frankie arrived and rubbed Wade's back. Without explanation, John walked away from the table with Wade. Gently

reassuring Wade, Stephen and Frankie never left John's side.

Wiping her eyes at the tenderness witnessed, Kathleen softly asked, "What just happened?"

Jen smiled, "It's the new John, the new Stephen and the new Frankie, doing what the three of them combined can do."

"They're a special group, and they're helping a very special little boy," Lucas whispered, his voice rough from the latest events.

Looking down the table at Lucas, Jen warmly smiled, "Rest your voice, Lucas. You can talk to us telepathically."

John took Wade and his family into the men's room. With a thought from John, the baby changing table dropped. Sitting the boy down on the table, John sent, *'Please tell us what's wrong?'*

Wade vigorously shook his head. Stephen prompted, "We'll listen and make it better?"

Frankie locked eyes with Wade, sending, *'Can you hear me and my daddy?'* Wade shrugged, but his eyes told the truth, that he could hear telepathically. Frankie offered, *'My daddy and poppa help kids. They helped me, just Wednesday. Do you know how I found them?'* This time, Wade shrugged but then nodded. *'Tell only me, please,'* Frankie pleaded, and then assured, *'It's really okay.'*

Confused as to what he should do, Wade leaned over and lay down on the changing table. Like a much younger boy might, he brought a fist to his mouth and sucked his thumb. John had been patiently waiting for Frankie's intervention to make a difference. Realizing that he had no other choice, John looked deep into Wade's mind.

Experiencing events from Wade's perspective, John heard a woman screaming in agony and a man yelling at Wade to stop. A younger Wade, about two-years-old, wanted cake. The woman, obviously Wade's mother, had said no. Wade had a tantrum and pushed his frustration to his unsuspecting mother. The father slapped Wade across the face, hard enough to free his wife and give Wade a bloody nose. In another vision, John heard the mother explaining to Wade why he shouldn't talk telepathically to other kids. It was apparently soon after Wade had started school. Wade didn't understand why he shouldn't do things that were completely natural to him. Thursday night, there had been another bad scene at the Houseman residence where Wade simply wished his parents would go away and leave him alone. Now Wade felt like his parents' deaths were his fault. Those memories were the strongest, but Wade had others that were just as bad, so he had come to believe that using his gift was always wrong.

John telepathically shared what he had learned with Stephen and Frankie. Stephen nodded, but Frankie turned red. Neither John nor Stephen had ever seen Frankie angry and were too surprised to even consider saying a word. Frankie stormed out of the bathroom.

John sighed then returned his attention to Wade. He smiled, "I know you heard me when my lips weren't moving, Wade. It was me making the other boys float at the table." He then proved it by levitating Stephen. Wade was watching, but still sucking his thumb. John teased the boy, "I can do lots more than that." Water faucets on all the sinks in the room suddenly turned on. Wade's eyes widened. John told Wade, "I can make people feel good stuff too."

"John!" Stephen hysterically cackled. "Omigod! Stop tickling me!" Hovering about a meter off the floor, Stephen laughed hysterically, twisting and leaping from tickles by unseen hands.

Wade stopped sucking his thumb and giggled. Just to give the boy a brief example, John telepathically tickled him. Lurching on the changing table, Wade brushed invisible hands away from his belly. Sitting up, Wade giggled as Stephen knelt and then fell to his side, curling into a fetal position and breathlessly laughing, unable to stop, and still a meter off the floor.

John stopped tickling Stephen and lowered him to the tiled mens' room floor. He held his arms open for Wade. Wiggling to the edge of the table, Wade held his arms open. Frankie returned to the bathroom with Lucas. John lifted Wade, firmly saying, "I'll help you learn when it's good and when it's bad, and I promise, I will never hurt you like your mommy and daddy did."

'Where in the hell is Pablito when I need the little asshole,' Lucas sent to John and Stephen. 'I'd love to shove as much C-5 up their asses as I can fit, then see what happens when it all goes off at once... five or six hundred times.'

Still on the floor and only beginning to catch his breath, Stephen giggled, "Be nice, Lucas. John, when we get home..."

"I know, baby," John widely grinned.

*'I was being nice. Would you like to hear my **REAL** plans?'* Lucas sent back with an evil grin.

"I'll take a rain check," Stephen muttered.

John told the imp on his hip, "Wade, this is Lucas. He's really good at helping guys like us. Just relax and you won't feel a thing."

Lucas looked at Wade with an unusual understanding in his eyes. His voice was rough as he said, "Hey little guy, you think you can handle seeing something that is kinda scary at first, but turns out

really good?"

Checking with John, Wade heard a soft assurance, *'I'm not letting go of you.'*

Wade asked Lucas, "Like how scary?"

"You'll get to see why I can't talk right, an' why mind stuff is good stuff." Lucas reassured him. "I'll make sure that you don't see the really scary stuff."

Tightening his grip on John, Wade nodded, "Okay," and then John nodded once at Lucas. Stephen stood close by, just in case.

Lucas nodded back, and then began his story. He showed enough of his pre-UNIT life to get the point across about how him and his twin used it to keep from causing Spence more pain. He then went into a light version of the beginnings of his transformation, including the loss of his voice. After that, he showed a couple of missions where mind tools saved lives, and then he showed the reunion with Spence and how telepathy possibly saved his big brother's life. *'If this stuff is bad, why has it saved so many lives?'* Lucas asked.

Wade shrugged, and then whimpered, "Why did mommy and daddy say it's bad?"

"They didn't understand, and were worried for you," John explained, although he only partially believed the last part. If Wade's father was still alive, John would gladly implant thoughts that caused the man to believe maggots and worms were eating him alive from the inside.

Glancing around, Wade checked, "Mommies and daddies don't

know stuff?"

Frankie nodded, "Sometimes even grown-ups get scared and do dumb stuff."

Stepping up and rubbing Wade's back, Stephen asked, "Are you hungry?"

Blushing, Wade nodded then hid his face on John's shoulder, giggling, "I gotta whiz too, daddy."

Hearing that, Frankie roared laughing at his dad's and pop's stunned expressions. He had seen those same shocked looks only three days earlier when he fumbled his first English words.

Gathering Frankie and leading him to the door, Lucas giggled, "Grandma had a feeling."

Stepping out of the mens' room, Frankie confirmed, "This means I've got a little brother, don't it?"

"It's all done except the paper work," Lucas answered.

Returning to the table, where the kids were eating and the adults had cups of coffee, Frankie smiled, "Wade's better now. He'll be out with Daddy and Poppa in a minute." Sitting on his chair, Frankie excitedly gushed, "I've got a little brother!"

Jim softly chuckled, "Congratulations, Frankie." Jennifer's soft giggling soon became loud laughter. In the space of a week, all her sons had adopted kids. Including Wade, she already had nine grandchildren.

Finishing in the bathroom, Wade had just used a big boy's urinal for the very first time, thanks to John levitating him. At the next urinal

over, Stephen relieved himself also, and silently forewarned John that payback for the tickling would be swift and repetitive. Of course, Stephen didn't have much telepathic control and Wade overheard his new Poppa's playful threat. Wade giggled and sent, *'You liked it, Poppa.'* John roared laughing.

Stephen smirked, "I'll get to tickle Daddy the old fashioned way."

'He can't wait too,' Wade giggled.

Inside the bathroom, it was obvious that Grandma was returning on her ATV; the sound of the engine caused the light fixtures to shake. Once Stephen and Wade had finished washing and drying their hands, John gathered his husband and new son, guiding them out of the men's room.

They came out just in time to see her pull up, with Logan seated on the handlebars and Dewi and Kokaku standing on the seat in front of Grandma, both wearing new black tee-shirts stating in large orange letters: 'Grandma's Little Biker: Lead, follow, or get the **** out of the way!' Behind Grandma, hanging on for dear life, was a set of twin strawberry-blond eleven-year-olds, a fourteen-year-old, who was obviously their big brother, and a fourth, younger blond boy, clearly a relative of the other three. Sitting at the rear of the tram, his T-shirt had the same words emblazoned, only on the back. Behind the ATV was a trailer, covered with a tarp bearing a large Harley-Davidson logo.

As the ATV came to a stop, Logan hopped off of the handlebars and ran back to the trailer. The three boys wearing black tee-shirts joined him as fast as their legs could carry them. The twins and their older brother, however, staggered off of the back and dropped to their knees, repeatedly kissing the floor. Grandma just shook her head at

the three newcomers, commenting, "No sense of adventure. You three need a good surf lesson or three. James, could you be a good son and help your new nephews to their feet and explain that their lives were not in danger?"

Obediently nodding, because he really had little choice in the matter, Jim stood and went to the three boys on their knees. The teenager could likely pull Jim onto the floor, so he helped the younger twins up. "Welcome to Clan Short Pacific Rim Division," Jim grinned, and then whispered, "Surfing is easier, I promise."

The twins introduced themselves and their older brother. One said, "I'm Kade Macadam Oldcambus."

The other twin said, "Pleased to meet you, Uncle Jim. I'm Karey Macauley, and that's our big brother Kassidy Malcom."

"My pleasure," Jim smiled, introduced himself, and then prompted the three boys to "Have a seat and order yourselves brunch."

"Thanks," the threesome cheered, and started for the table.

"FINE!" The fourth younger boy hollered, "Don't bother to introduce me, we're only family." He paused then whispered, "Brats!" Jim chuckled, and the boy looked up, giggling, "Taron Reyce Otter's my name, Uncle Jim. Can I have a room away from those three?"

Nodding, Jim chuckled, "Everybody chooses their own room and roommate. Join us for brunch, Taron."

"Can I get the present Grandma got me first?" Taron asked, a pout forming on his face.

"Certainly," Jim quickly said, and then asked, "Do you need

help?"

"They might," Grandma stated with a gleam in her eyes. "Taron, remember what I told you?"

"Yes, Grandma!" Taron replied, his grin evil enough to make the Pope run for cover.

Following Taron to the trailer, Jim was surprised when a Vulcan boy of about twelve hopped out, brushed himself off and adjusted his Vulcan robe. Beneath the robe, the boy seemed to be wearing casual youth clothing. Jim greeted the boy. "T'nar pak sorat y'rani."

"T'nar jaral," the boy replied. "Shal Vaziik, kan t'Varuun."

Jim smiled and completed the introduction. "Shal James, kan t'Kenneth."

Nodding once, Vaziik confirmed, "I am to address you as Uncle Jim?"

"Please do," Jim said, and explained, "all the children at our base do. It would be fitting for you to proceed as the others, agreed?"

"Agreed," Vaziik flatly stated.

As Jim was talking, Logan and the boys managed to get the last of the ties off of the front of the tarp. With Jim's help, they pulled it back, revealing two mini-trikes, two mid-sized trikes, and one full sized trike with a tee-shirt on the seat. Jim's eyes fell on the shirt, and he read out loud "My Mom wears the leathers in our family!"

"Put your tee shirt on, Son," Grandma instructed.

Picking up the shirt, Jim smiled, "I was just about to go to the

men's room to switch shirts... MOM!"

"Hurry up then, your trike will be waiting for you," Grandma smiled. "Boys, do you remember how Mr. Chuck told you to unload them?"

The boys chorused "Yes, Grandma!" as they reached down in unison to place their trikes in neutral.

Jim went to change shirts. Vaziik remained at the trailer with the boys and helped the youngest unload their trikes. Noticing Jen's worried expression, Julio explained, "It's how the little kids get around our neighborhood and base."

"It'll be safe for the kids, once Grandma gives them lessons," Jesse added.

Jen smiled, "That relieves one fear. My only other concern is for the dozen or more other boys that won't have trikes."

"We can't have that!" Grandma loudly said. She reached into a pocket, pulled out a business card and handed it to Jen, smiling, "Just tell them how many and of which sizes and mention my name."

Julio giggled as he turned to Jen. "Yeah, just tell them Grandma sent you; I swear she wasn't in Des Moines more than an hour before the entire staff of the dealership were at the front gate asking for her. Considering most of them were in bed at the time she decided to move, I think that's pretty good. I heard her call the owner of the Naples dealership to tell him she was moving before we left there, but never expected to see *that* response!"

At last, almost an hour after they arrived, everyone was seated around the joined tables. At one end of tables sat the adults; Marcie, Mick, Janice, Grandma, Kathleen, Jen and Jim. At the other end were

all the kids, chattering away, getting to know one another and telling the newbies where they would be living later that day. Bond and Lucky only snacked on bananas and guarded the entrance to the private room.

During the meal, all of the new refugee kids had opportunities to explain what had happened to them and their care-givers. Vaziik explained that he and his father had come to work for a trade consortium. Vaziik's father, Varuun, was misidentified as a Romulan and shot. The Starfleet cadet that had shot Varuun immediately recognized his mistake and tried to save the man by transporting Varuun and Vaziik directly to Starfleet Medical. Most importantly, Vaziik was with his father when he passed. Learning that he would be cared for by a Vulcan Clan and that Lieutenant Vorik was stationed at Ewa Beach seemed to provide Vaziik a measure of satisfaction. The meal ended and the larger group of Rimmers took their leave of the Des Moines group to return to Ewa Beach.

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Ewa Beach

Saturday November 6, 2004 8:52AM HTZ

A few minutes before nine in the morning, the United States Federal Judge and his wife arrived at the Iroquois Avenue gate. Once their car was parked, they were escorted to condominium 'C', where Colin Powell was waiting. News teams that had arrived overnight and earlier that Saturday morning began arriving too. The same FYS Building first floor conference room used for the King's speech was set up with American Flags and a Presidential Seal on the podium for the scheduled ten o'clock Inauguration Ceremony. This time, Troy made the announcement regarding more news reporters and

instructing all the kids to remain south of the CIC.

In the basement store, all of the newbies were getting along very well. Prez and Keith briefly joined the group. At a convenient point where he wasn't helping any of the newbies, Mike let Prez know that his order was carried out by the Scoobies. Mike and Prez transported out of the store and into the Shiny Vault. Mike's ferret kids weren't there, but there was a refrigerator and piles of new shiny trinkets gathered. Prez and Mike transported back to the CIC basement store. Mike went right back to work assisting the kids. Prez and Keith returned to the CIC dining room and their sons, to prepare for the afternoon party at Kaho'olawe.

The seven newbies accepted help from the Core Rimmers, their sons, and each other. Only Leo didn't fully participate and hung back, away from the majority of shoppers who were choosing underwear, socks, sneakers and sandals. The boys moved quickly through the store, but always helped each other choose clothes that looked good. As had become very standard in Ewa Beach, the boys changing rooms were unused; every one of the boys changed whatever clothing right where they stood. Nine-year-old Leo kept his distance and did a lot of blushing. Corey and Drew noticed. The prior night at the store, Leo simply did as the other boys were doing, which made his blushing understandable. Not having their new son nearby was simply odd to Corey and Drew.

At a time when he was able, Corey pulled Leo off to the side to whisper, "What's wrong, Leo?" The boy shrugged, turned even redder and grinned. Prompting his new son, Corey giggled, "You can tell me." Leo grinned wider and shook his head. Pulling Leo close and hugging him, Corey asked, "Do you really think of me as your father?"

Leo softly but firmly said, "Yeah, pop, I really do."

Never releasing the boy, Corey smiled, "Good, because me and Drew are thinking of you as our son, when you could easily be our friend. What makes our family so totally awesome to me is that Drew just turned twelve, I'm eleven, you're nine, Lenny is seven and Geoff is five. We're all on the same page so much, it's very kewl, don't you think?" When Leo nodded and hugged Corey tighter for a moment, Corey asked, "So why were you blushing?"

Leo shivered and tried his best to explain, "I don't know, pop. I didn't have brothers. I don't know much of anything about stuff... growing up stuff. My folks never told me nothin'. I've got no older cousins. Seeing all you guys, not just you and dad, but Derrick, Mike, and even Geoff and Lenny, just dealing with all these really cute guys, changing shirts, changing shorts, changing jeans... taking measurements. I don't know how to do that, without being embarrassed and blushing. I feel like I'm being really bad and dumb, doin' stuff that's just wrong, ya know?"

"I know," Corey quickly confirmed, "believe me, I know. It's something we get used to with time. And I'd like to start teaching you right now, if you want?"

"Is now kewl?" Leo worried. "We don't have to now, but I want to, and I don't want to, ya know?"

"Now is very kewl," Corey assured. Before releasing Leo, Corey softly asked, "Is there a boy over there that you really like?"

Leo giggled. After a few moments of giggling, he softly admitted, "All of 'em," and leaned onto Corey, unable to stop giggling.

Corey giggled along with his new son. "There's seven, one for

every day of the week," Corey giggled. Leo cracked up and flushed redder. Corey planted a kiss on the side of Leo's head and sniggered, "I was there too. At one point, not too many years ago, I looked at Keith, Prez, Drew and John with that same kind of awe and amazement."

"Really?"

"Really."

Not knowing how to say that he wanted to learn more, Leo prompted, "So, umm... what happened?"

Taking Leo's hand, Corey remained with his son, and kept a fair distance away from the shoppers, so he could explain his own experiences, and then puberty and growing up without being overheard. While the others gathered necessities, Corey used each boy in the store as an example, starting with Geoff, Lenny, eight-year-old Jimmy Matos and working through all the others, including Drew, and the three teenagers. Corey easily admitted that he was attracted to all three Hundser boys, in addition Derrick, Mike and Prez, assuring Leo it was completely natural and normal. When Leo had the whole story, the newbies were beyond needing to change clothes. They were only trying on ponchos and light jackets, gathering toiletries and various accessories, like wallets for the ID cards they would soon be getting. Corey stayed with Leo, and squeezed his son's hand every time something happened worth noting, like the eleven-year-olds grabbing deodorants, and the teenagers choosing razors and shaving cream.

The last thing Corey told Leo was "We'll be spending at least part of the day with only Core Rimmers and their sons. Treat them like family, Leo. You'll see soon enough, kids are gonna like you, simply because you're a likable dude. You're so much like me, Drew, Geoff and Lenny, it's almost like you were made for us. All five of us

enjoy good times, all five of us are generally pretty quiet, because we're all paying attention to what's around us. By tomorrow, when we get back here to the main base, you'll already have a set of friends to hang around with, so it won't seem like too much too fast."

Leo blushed, "Thanks, Pop. You really are a father, ya know? It's way easier talkin' to you than it would be with an older man, I mean."

Corey smiled, "Spend some one-on-one time with Drew. A lot of what I know, I learned from him, Keith, Prez, Mike and Derrick."

Unbeknownst to Leo and Corey or anyone else, Jimmy Matos thought Leo was about the kewlest and cutest boy he'd ever seen anywhere. It was Leo's blushing that really sparked Jimmy's interest. Obviously, Leo was shy and embarrassed, and Jimmy was equally surprised with his own feelings, so he said nothing about it to anyone.

In a little over an hour-and-a-half, everyone was done in the store. They transported out and directly to dormitory three, so Chris and Jay could choose their room and Jay could rest after a busy couple of hours. The four Core Rimmers showed them the huge lavatory, the spacious mob shower, and the next available dorm room, number thirty-one-ten; which meant the third dorm, first floor, and room ten. Seeing the vast, awesome room that Chris and Jay were moving into, the Hiram twins told Derrick, Mike and Reyes that they were also ready to move in. Derrick opened the next door for them. The twin Hawaiian boys giggled and hugged, then bolted inside, getting stuck in the doorway with their new luggage. Everyone around cracked up. Soon, the twins were excitedly settling into their new room, number thirty-one-twelve, right beside Chris' and Jay's room.

Knowing that some of the others who were rescued the previous day were talking about moving in, Drew called over the PA system for the Nash brothers, the Ramos brothers, Travis, Scott Shetley, Ray,

Lance, Patrick, and the Stoeher twins to join them at dormitory three's first floor. They all knew why they were being called and hurried across the compound. Some of the California orphans that had moved into dorm three also came running to welcome home the newest arrivals, just as Prez and the Core Rimmers had welcomed them only two days earlier.

Patrick arrived with Ralphie. Pointing at the room across the hall from his brother and Chris, Rafe smiled, "Let's move in, Pat."

Pat grinned, "Are you ready?"

Pointing into Chris' and Jay's room, where they were seen unpacking, Rafe giggled, "The room across is the hall is the one I want. How about you?"

Pat checked with Ralphie. Getting a nod and then a quick kiss from Ralphie was all Patrick needed. Pat sighed, "We need our luggage and stuff."

Tapping his sub-vocal, Mike called, "Alden, do the honors, please?"

The two suitcases appeared on the beds in the room. "There ya go, guys," Alden replied. Ralphie, Pat and Rafe went into room thirty-one-eleven.

Arriving next were some of the California orphanage boys. Mike Busse, Terry Parkinson, Ryan Caswell, David Lydon, Don Lien and Jacob Bartholomew all came running, welcoming the new guys that were settling in, and then opened their dorm room doors. Soon, music was blasting loudly into the hall from Mike's and Terry's room. Ryan Caswell went into the common room and turned on the big television mounted on the wall.

The Nash brothers, the Ramos brothers, the Stoeher twins, and Ray, Scott and Lance were next to arrive. The Stoeher twins took the room across from the Hiram twins, number thirty-one-thirteen. Scott and Lance took the last room in that hallway, room number thirty-one-fourteen. Their luggage and guitars were transported into the room.

Drew and Corey led their boys, the Nash brothers and the remaining newbies through the common room toward the next hall. At the immense space of the common room, Phil started giggling his ass off. Completely astonished, Craig yelled, "Drew!"

Wide-eyed, Drew jumped, spun around and hollered, "WHAT?" Surprised at Craig and Drew, who were silently grinning at each other, Corey, their sons and the others nearby the common room helplessly giggled. Calmly, Derrick, Mike and Reyes walked into the shared room. Others came out of their rooms to see what the shouting was about and gathered in the hallway near the common room.

Craig chuckled, "Dude, this is too much."

Drew tilted his head, asking, "Is it?" Phil had laughed himself dizzy and dropped onto the nearest couch.

Smiling widely, Craig swung his arms around, pointing and rambling, "This room is huge! A sixty inch TV, a Bose sound system, a piano, a guitar, an easel and painting supplies, four big sofas, three smaller sofas, and two, four, six, eight, TEN chairs! Thirty of us could be in this room at once and still have space! It's as big as my old house was, maybe bigger!"

Smiling, but very serious, Drew said, "And there are going to be fifty boys in two hallways on this floor. Some of those boys were orphans, from orphanages where they weren't fed or treated right at

all. You and your brother lost your parents during the riots in L.A. Nothing the Clan provides can make up for everything all you guys went through. The least we can do is make your lives as comfortable as we possibly can, give you good food, teach you how to be whatever it is you want to be, so when you move on, you'll have all the best opportunities."

Corey called, "Mike and Dave, com'ere a minute, bros." Mike Busse and Dave Lydon stepped into the room. Wrapping his arms around their shoulders, Corey introduced them to Craig and Phil, and then explained, "These two came from one of the better California orphanages we were at Wednesday night. You know, the ones that everyone bitched about around the world all day Thursday, that probably led to the battles and riots around the world. Mike is fourteen, about an inch or two taller than Drew, but nowhere near as tall as Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, or you, Craig. All because the caregivers at his orphanage didn't give a rat's ass if he ate enough. It's about the same with Dave, thirteen-years-old and as tall as Drew, but about ten pounds lighter. Drinking Doc McCoy's milkshakes, I give it about six months and I'm gonna be looking way up into Mike's and Dave's eyes, as I should be."

Looking around at all the boys gathered in and near the common room, Derrick sighed, "None of you deserved anything that happened to you. We can't fix everything. We sure can't bring lost loved ones back and make everything perfect. All we can do is try to provide you with what you need and what will make you happy, now and in the future. These are things, easily replaceable. Lives aren't quite so easy to replace."

Craig muttered, "But how... what could I do to repay this?"

Mike shrugged, "Your best, bro. Do your best here for yourself, for your brother, and all your Clan brothers and sisters. When you

move on as an adult, and see some kid walking the street, help him yourself or give us a call. Give that kid what you had, a chance for something better."

Moved beyond words, boys started clapping their hands. Shaking his head, Drew smiled, "No, not for me, or for Corey, or for any of us Core Rimmers. Applaud for Platinum Habits, not for simply telling you what is reality."

The clapping hands slowly stopped. Derrick huffed, "If anything, we should be applauding you dudes." Wrapping his arm around his eldest son, he explained, "Reyes is my son, an android that repeatedly got zapped with an incompatible unit that screwed up his memories. He's better, but twenty-three years of life is a jumbled mess." Pausing to point at Pat, Rafe and Ralphie in the doorway, Derrick continued, "Ralphie went his whole life having never met his three brothers. He's here now, with them, quadruplets reunited. Rafe thought his big brother was dead last night. Today, Jay is here, with his boyfriend, and they're right across the hall from Pat and Rafe." Slowly glancing around the others in the room, Derrick offered, "That's what you all need to do; applaud each other for every achievement you make. It doesn't matter if your gay or straight or curious or bi. When you see someone has made a breakthrough, pat him on the back, give him or her a hug, show each other that you care, just like my folks and brothers did for me."

Corey pointed out Victor Singh, Don Lien and Jacob Bartholomew, the three youngest boys, saying, "Those little dudes need you bigger and older dudes. They'll need you to help with homework, to reach what they can't reach, to show them how to play soccer and be a good sport, and when they reach puberty, teach them all that means too. Don't make fun of their first pubes, like some kids have and might do. Instead, pat 'em on the back, for no other reason

but to say, 'very kewl dude, you're becoming a man, now you have these choices ahead of you'. All you older guys can do that stuff easily. You little dudes are probably wondering, 'well, what can we do?' Two things; treat your brothers and sisters nicely, and when you can help somebody, then go do it – don't even think twice about it, help the new kid that's scared or misses his parents. Is someone crying and hurting? If they are, then be there to listen and help make it better. I've got five- and seven-year-old sons, two six-year-old brothers and two that are seven-years-old. Let me say that there's nothing kewler than an unexpected hug from any of them."

Drew nodded, "Corey and I grew up together. He's held onto me when I was wrecked and I've done it for him. Keith's been there for me and I've been available for John. I've seen Geoff holding Lenny, and then Lenny holding Geoff. In the store, we all saw Corey with Leo. I'll find out later exactly what that was about, but I could tell that Leo needed dad time and got it."

Glancing around, Mike asked, "Do you think I never cried, got upset or angry? Do you think Derrick never did those things either?"

"You'd be wrong if you think so," Derrick softly assured. "I'm a kid who lost his big brother when I was too young to remember him. Imagine my folks crying about that, and me crying because they were. I had Mike, Keith and Prez right there; one, two or all three of 'em making my life just a little easier. Prez lost both his parents in a plane crash two years ago. We were there when Prez needed us. That's all it takes, just caring, a little or a lot, it all helps, and somehow having people to lean on helps you both become stronger."

"This is *your* home," Mike firmly repeated. He then smiled, "I hear music playing down the hall. I see everybody's stopped what they were doing to listen to us. This is a welcome home party, so go help each other, now. Go learn about one another and become

brothers."

The majority of boys returned to their rooms, many of them feeling like they could do the things suggested. Derrick tapped Craig and prompted, "Let's get you and your bro into a room."

Following Derrick into the next hall, Craig sincerely offered, "Thanks, so much, for everything." When everything turned to shit the prior day, Craig had no clue what he was going to do, or how he would feed himself and Phil. In a day, all his concerns and worries were only shadows of a nightmare.

Shaking his head, Derrick opened the first room, smiling, "This is what we're here for, Craig. We don't provide the buildings or the food. We give you brother time, that's all, just like you're Phil's big brother. The rest are things from Federation Youth Services and The United Federation of Planets. We can replace things. None of you can be replaced." Nodding, Craig stepped inside his new room and looked around.

Holding an arm out, Mike stopped Phil before he could follow his brother into the room, asking, "What's your job, dude?"

Pointing at his brother, Phil answered, "Take care of Craig, help who I can, however I can, and be somebody, and then pass it along to the next kid that needs it."

Drew, Corey, Derrick, Mike and Reyes applauded, loudly cheering, "Beautiful!" Blushing fiercely, Phil went into room number thirty-one-fifteen, with his brother. Their luggage was transported in and the two brothers started unpacking.

Next in the hall were Chauncey and Fred Eckhart and their puppy, Rikko. Corey, Derrick, Drew, Mike and Reyes looked down at the pup and thoughtfully hummed. Rikko wagged his tail in a big

circle, watching all the boys that were looking down at him. Rikko barked "WHAT?" Leaning back against the wall and grabbing his belly, Fred cracked up.

Chauncey giggled, "Yeah, what Rikko said, what's wrong?" Sliding down the wall and landing on his butt, Fred roared laughing. The other six boys still waiting in the hall, Nate, Sal, Rickie, Travis, Tony and Ray softly sniggered.

Mike huffed then chuckled, "Alden, we prob'ly need to add a pet department to our store, dude."

"I've already got it covered, Mike," Alden giggled.

Drew opened the door and everyone peeked in the room, except Fred, who simply could not stop laughing. Inside the room on the beds were Fred's and Chauncey's luggage. Off to one side, they spied two steel dog dishes, a doggie bed, a big bag of Puppy Chow, a few dog toys, a collar and a leash, a poop-scooper, and a roll of plastic bags to deposit scooped poop in trash cans outdoors. Rikko trotted into the room, sniffed the various toys, grabbed a hard rubber bone and took it to his new bed, where he lay down and started gnawing.

Helplessly giggling, Corey checked with Chauncey, "Kewl, bro?"

Chauncey nodded and sniggered, "Very. Thanks, guys." He offered a hand to his breathless and hysterical android brother still on the floor.

Fred wheezed, "I can't believe it. All yesterday... and last night, you handled everything great, until now. The *dog* threw you a curve!" Travis sputtered but couldn't hold it back and cracked up.

Taking his brother's hands, Chauncey giggled, "Do you want to

swim in the North Atlantic today?" He dragged Fred into the room.

Everyone turned to Reyes. "All right," Reyes grinned, "I'll take Fred to AI Division HQ, the first chance I get, but I honestly don't see that changing very much. It's been sixteen years since Vision closed it's doors, and Fred could use some upgrades, but remember, that won't change his sense of humor a bit."

Turning to the last six in the hallway, Derrick smiled, "Next?"

Ray and Tony held up their hands. Mike went to open the next door, for room thirty-one-eighteen. Derrick scowled, "Do you two know each other?"

Tony explained, "We've been talking a little since we got here. Really, all we know is that we're both from LA. We were in the same school district, but at different schools."

Nodding, Ray added, "You dudes have set the ground rules. We're brothers, starting now."

Tony grinned, "As far as the whole gay-straight-other thing goes, we're both undecided, so it should be kewl."

Derrick nodded and smiled, "If something changes, let one of us know, so we can correct whatever, kewl?"

Tony chuckled, "Don't worry, big D. There's enough stuff goin' on here. This room is pretty much where we'll chill and crash."

"As soon as I'm unpacked, I'm back outside again," Ray agreed. Tony walked into the room with Ray following and dragging his suitcase along.

Drew opened the door to room thirty-one-nineteen, faced the

Ramos brothers, and smiled, "Welcome home, bros."

Nate peeked in the room, and then asked, "Can we get another bed sometime? Sal and Rickie might be kewl in one bed for a while..." Seeing Drew and Corey nodding, Nate stopped mid-sentence.

Reyes called, "Alden, get full sized bunk beds, and an extra desk, chair and computer too." The bed on the right side of the room vanished and was replaced with the bunk beds, desk, chair and laptop computer requested.

Sal giggled, "You dudes make stuff too simple. It's perfect. Thank you."

Racing past his two older brothers, eight-year-old Rickie giggled, "I got the top bunk!"

"Like hell!" Sal hollered, and entered the room, reminding, "You fall out of your bed all'a time!" Rickie denied it and Sal countered, emphasized with a shove, and the wrestling began.

Glancing at each of the Core Rimmers, Nate grinned, "Seems I've heard stuff like this before."

Corey giggled, "Ask Alden for safety rails on the top bunk, Nate."

Nodding, Nate smiled, "I will, after I squash both of 'em." Entering the room and passing through some invisible amplification field, Nate yelled, "QUI-I-I-ET!" Sal and Rickie stopped mid-wrestle and looked up at their big bro. Nate calmly closed the door.

Corey smiled up at Travis; "Looks like you're either on your

own for a while, or back in the nest tonight."

Travis shrugged, "My aunt and uncle worked, so I was on my own a lot anyway. Besides, I'm not really alone, am I?"

Heading to the next room, Mike grinned, "The day's not over, dude. We get plenty of kids fast enough. You won't be alone more than a night or two. Roy Angulo, over at dorm one, was in the same boat earlier in the week. Monday night he spent alone, Tuesday night he met his roommate, Pete Dano." He opened the door and Alden transported Travis' suitcase onto a bed.

Travis stepped inside and looked around. He spun around, smiling, "It's nice, but what are we allowed to do, so that it becomes mine, ya know?"

"You can buy posters, music CD's and pretty much whatever you want," Corey offered.

Drew said, "All you newbies will have your ID cards and debit cards in a couple o' days. You'll get a weekly allowance and can work odd jobs around base to add to that."

Walking back out of the room, Travis said, "I'm not gonna waste daylight unpacking now. After lunch, I'll get my stuff put away, maybe set up one of the laptops, and chill with the other dudes." He closed his door, wondering, "What's the deal with these odd jobs?"

"It's all on our Clan's web site," Drew explained. "Check under the Mouth Rimmers' section. For older dudes like you, there's a bunch of stuff you could do, in the kitchen, at the auditorium, just about anything you want to do."

Corey added, "We set up odd jobs in two-hours shifts. Yeah, you might like to do more, but your main job is to be a student and a kid,

with a bit more know-how than the youngest kids."

As the group started back down the hall, toward the common room, Derrick said, "We have Clan preferred vendors, where you can get whatever you want at discounted prices. Your room is yours, for now, and eventually yours and your roomie's. Whatever makes you dudes comfortable, go ahead and get."

"Just remember two things," Mike suggested, "first, Christmas is coming, so leave big stuff off to the side. Also, whatever you need for school will be provided. If you decide to learn guitar, we'll get you one. If you decide to learn mechanics and need tools, we'll provide that. Your money is yours, for those other personal things that we generally don't need to provide everybody."

Passing rooms down the longer hall, Derrick started figuring out how many were in this dorm, and then shared, "Including you, there are forty kids in this dorm. There are only six rooms left to fill." Mike hummed. Drew and Corey sighed.

Travis wondered, "What's wrong?"

Derrick shrugged, "Nothing's really wrong, it's just that we need to make decisions. Tomorrow, we're expecting a bunch more kids."

"Ninety-five, to be exact," Drew specified.

Corey told Travis, "We've got other bases and plenty of room, but it wouldn't be kewl to leave those kids without some of us Core Rimmers around."

"We don't know how many could fit here right now," Derrick explained, "but some kids are going to overflow to the next base. The trick is keeping everybody feeling like they're part of the whole Clan, and our Clan Division, as brothers and sisters, separated yet still

together."

Travis smiled, "You dudes really care." Watching the five Core Rimmers turn to him briefly, he chuckled, "You dudes do that. Didn't you hear yourselves in the common room before? Craig was only surprised, as surprised as I am. I've heard about Clan Short and wondered how you deal with so many kids. I expected far different from what I've seen since yesterday."

Reyes prompted, "Such as?"

Travis shrugged, "Smaller dorms, smaller rooms, small beds; just the minimum basics. Instead, I get here and I'm taken into a store and told, get what you need for at least a week, and it's free. Do you have any idea how weird it is to check out stuff, like I might at any other store, but walk away without spending a dime? I got fed restaurant quality food. Then I start looking around. The CIC rec room is the biggest arcade and game room I've ever seen. The rec center is the biggest health and fitness club. There are pools, a soccer field, volleyball courts, and a playground for little kids. I know there's a school here too, but haven't seen it yet. None of this is what I expected."

Stepping outside with the five Core Rimmers, Travis chuckled, "Then there's the kids. I was mingling around the diving well, with kids my own age, some with clothes on, some naked, and they're all very kewl about it. No one asked me why I still had my boardies on. No one said a word when I took them off. I learned some kids here were sexually abused, some were prostitutes, some are run-aways. I asked about you guys, our leadership. The worst thing I heard was, you're busy. I asked about all the adults and I heard, 'they're kewl too'. A couple of times, Kaleo came to me with Tory and started chatting up a storm. Once, he waved his hand over his naked body, Tory's, and then mine, telling me that last week, he was naked so some freaky

grown-up could fuck his ass or suck his dick, whenever *they* wanted some. Now he can wander around nude with other kids; he can talk to adult employees naked, and everybody looks in his eyes, instead of leering at his crotch. This is insane, in the very best ways, but extremely different from what I'm used to."

Mike sniggered, "Don't hold back, Trav, you're just warming up."

Travis laughed then continued, "My parents died when I was eight. I've been living with my aunt and uncle since then. They cared enough to give me a good home with good food, but they weren't parents. I learned the facts of life from school health and biology classes, not from my aunt or uncle. Just a few minutes ago, you told us bigger dudes to be big brothers to the little dudes. My stomach twisted for a few moments, then I thought, yeah, maybe I could sit down and explain the facts of life to a kid; yeah, I could be everything you dudes said I could be."

Drew giggled, "It's how we were raised, Travis. If I've heard my parents singing the song 'Can Do' once, I've heard it a thousand times."

Snapping his fingers, Derrick sang, "I got the horse right here, The name is Paul Revere, And here's a guy that says that the weather's clear. Can do, can do, this guy says the horse can do. If he says the horse can do, can do, can do."

While Derrick sang the part again, Drew snapped his fingers and sang the counterpoint part. "Can do - can do - this guy says the horse can do, If he says the horse can do - can do, can do."

Derrick and Drew continued singing their parts and Mike sang; "For Paul Revere I'll bite, I hear his foot's all right, Of course it all

depends if it rained last night. Likes mud, likes mud, this X means the horse likes mud, If that means the horse likes mud, likes mud, Likes mud. I tell you Paul Revere, Now this is no bum steer, It's from a handicapper that's real sincere, Can do, can do, this guy says the horse can do. If he says the horse can do - can do - can do. Paul Revere. I got the horse right here."

Near the pool house, Travis, Reyes and Corey cracked up, and the song fell apart. Corey howled, "I don't have any idea where that song even came from!"

Reyes giggled, "A Broadway play titled 'Guys and Dolls'."

Travis, Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey stopped walking and turned to Reyes. Derrick and Mike took hold of Reyes' arms. Derrick prompted, "Help us out, Travis. Reyes is going swimming." Nodding and snickering, Travis leaned over and tried to capture Reyes' moving legs.

Liki and Keanu were at the diving well and saw what was happening. They hurried over to help get Reyes off his feet and off the ground. Looking around the group that caught him for his Core Rimmer initiation, Reyes howled laughing. To the applause, cheering and delight of all the other nearby teens and tweens, Reyes was swung three times then sent flailing and flying over the diving well. Hearing the teenage commotion, Jonah, Randy and Dillon got to the diving well just as Reyes was thrown and they cracked up. Reyes hit the water and rose again, only seconds later, coughing and still giggling.

Chapter 13

Kaho'olawe Island, Keoneuli Beach House

Saturday, November 6, 2004 10:35 AM HTZ

While Corey, Derrick, Reyes, Drew and Mike were getting newbies settled into dorm rooms, Prez and Keith arrived with their sons, outside the beach house. Alden placed them on a spot between the house and the beach, facing the waterfall to the North. The entire area was beautiful wilderness, and it was secluded. To the left, beyond the house, was an angular, gradual rise that became a steep mountainside. To the right was the beach and a distant view of Maui. Around the house was manicured lawn and a few evergreen and palm trees. The house and lawn seemed out of place for the environment, but no one thought twice about that; this was their retreat.

From the outside, the house was very similar to the single family homes at Ewa Beach. The primary difference was the additional wide lanai that wrapped around the entire house. Instead of five steps leading to porches at the front and rear, this house had seven steps leading to the lanai on all four sides of the house. On the lanai were patio tables, chairs and lounges. There were also two additional sliding glass doors, one on each side of the house; one was in the dining room, and the other was in the ground floor bedroom.

Grinning up at Prez, Sammy asked, "We're gonna be here the rest of the day, pop?"

Prez nodded, "And hopefully, barring any unexpected madness, we'll stay the night. Tomorrow, we'll go back home."

Keith suggested, "You guys check the upstairs and basement of the house. Make sure all the beds have sheets, pillows and blankets. Remember to make sure that there are things for you guys too. All of Mike's kids and all of Drew's kids will be here, so get the games and stuff you'd like. Get Alden to help set up the basement too. I'm thinking one corner could be arranged as a stage, so the band can play some music for our security guys."

As if they were just told to raid the candy store, the four boys grinned at each other, then hollered, "YAAAAAAAAA!" and ran for the house.

Prez loudly laughed, "We'll make sure we have all the food and stuff we'll need."

Only Richie stopped, spun around and gleefully replied, "'Kay, Poppa." He then turned to race after his older brothers.

Over Prez's comm-badge, Alden said, "Hey boss, I didn't want to interrupt while Keith was talking to the boys, but food isn't too much of an issue here. When Quint created the house, he put a Starfleet replicator in the kitchen. Just tell it what you want and it will replicate it for you. You guys don't even have to worry about loading a dishwasher. Put the dirty plates and stuff in the side panel of the replicator and it'll all be taken care of. If you want to, you can cook something, but it's not necessary. As far as I can tell, Quint made this house exactly like what he knew was at Ewa Beach. From the cameras inside, I see enough to tell you that's there's not much you'll need from me, if anything. The basement is even set up with instruments, microphones and a suitable PA system. On the other side of the basement is a Foosball table, a pool table, and game systems for the kids. There's seating for your guests down there too. This is your place to chill out at, so Quint prepared just about everything."

Prez smiled, "Thanks, Alden. All we have to do is roam around opening doors and windows then." Keith took Prez's hand and they walked up the steps to the porch and inside. Keith and Prez made the rounds around the ground floor, letting fresh air circulate through the house. It was just like every other house at Ewa Beach, only the wall coverings, window dressings and furnishings were slightly different styles, more appropriate for teens than adults. They did notice that the ceilings had padding, like the Hundser home, which told them why they couldn't really hear their four sons scrambling around upstairs.

The four boys galloped downstairs. Without pausing, Gage giggled, "Ev'rything's kewl upstairs, dad. Even the bathrooms have all the stuff we'll need." The boys went down to the basement. A chorus of cheers erupted. Keith and Prez hurried down after their sons. On the way down, they started to see what Alden was talking about. The larger side of the basement was set up like an intimate night club, with tables, chairs, sofas and recliners. There was also a stage large enough for Platinum Habits, already prepared with instruments and amplifiers. On the opposite side of the basement was the gaming area. It was very much like the CIC's rec room, just scaled down.

Sammy scratched his head, then looked up at the ceiling, calling, "Alden?"

"What's up, Sammy?"

"The only things we haven't found are things for outside," Sammy said. "You know, beach balls, Frisbees, stuff we can play with at the beach."

Alden hummed then suggested, "There are four storage bins on the porch, one on each side of the house, Sammy. I can't see what's in them, but they're worth checking out." Sammy and his three brothers

ran upstairs to investigate.

Slowly nodding and widely smiling at each other, Prez and Keith then embraced. They sighed with relief that they could finally enjoy all they had been given the prior week, then kissed before walking back up to the main level.

After closing the basement door, Keith tapped his comm-badge and called, "Naasir, Justin and Danny, if you're not busy, please join us at the Kaho'olawe beach house."

Obviously surprised that Keith's call was so early, Danny answered, "Already?"

Prez tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Gamba, Chris and Matt, let's hang out for a while."

In the UNIT's dorm common room with Danny, Chris and Justin, Matthew responded, "We'll be right there, Prez."

Prez then hurried to the kitchen with Keith only a few steps behind. Prez searched the cupboards until he found a box of Cheez-Its and a bag of potato chips. Getting the idea, Keith found two bowls for the snacks. While Prez poured the snacks into the bowls, Keith double checked the fridge. There was plenty of various sodas and juices, whatever the boys and gorillas wanted. He then got glasses out for their guests. Asking for a large bowl of mixed fruit, Prez tried out the replicator. It wanted specifics, so Prez told it what he wanted. In seconds, a bowl of bananas, apples, oranges and pears materialized. Prez put it out on the coffee table in the living room. Following with the bowls of potato chips and Cheez-Its, Keith placed them down on the coffee table. The doorbell rang and together they went to answer it.

Standing at the door were the two gorillas and four teenage

boys, all of whom were wearing board shirts and light sport shirts with Hawaiian patterns. They actually looked like tourists. Keith warmly greeted them and waved his arm to prompt them to come inside. Prez shook all their hands and admitted, "We were just getting snacks together. Would you like anything to drink?"

The first to accept was Gamba, Prez's gorilla. "Could I have a glass of apple juice?"

Prez nodded, "Comin' right up," then went to the kitchen.

Keith scanned the eyes of the other five and prompted, "Please relax, dudes. You're off duty. Make yourselves comfy. We simply haven't had the time or chance to do this before today. Between our own kids, our parents, and all the other rescued kids, we've barely had time to get to know you."

Justin smiled and agreed, "It has been kind o' crazy, hasn't it?"

From the kitchen, Prez loudly said, "We know Adam and Logan chose you guys based on what they knew of us. Adam's been swimming around in my head. We just went with it, not really knowing how to act with *personal* security." Rather than try and sit on the furniture, the two gorillas simply hunkered down on the living room floor.

"Alden," Keith called, "one thing we do need is reinforced seating appropriate for our security gorillas. Please provide enough of those, scattered around the house, for all the gorillas showing up today."

Over the loudspeakers, Alden giggled, "Comin' up, Keith." In moments, steel framed chairs with thicker padding began appearing in the living room, dining room, at the kitchen dinette, around the lanai

and down in the basement.

Matt went to the kitchen and playfully challenged Prez. "*You* didn't know how to act? Sorry, I ain't buyin' that."

Softly chuckling at himself, Prez smiled, "See, I had no idea you had a sense of humor. You haven't shown it once, before now."

Taking a seat on one of the new chairs, Naasir offered, "I was chosen because I like to listen to music."

Choosing to remain on the floor for the moment, Gamba grinned, "He sleeps to that long hair classical stuff."

Keith grinned, "Really? Which classical?"

Naasir softly admitted, "Mozart, Bach, I especially liked the Rachmaninoff concerto you played Saturday night. It was beautiful and you played it as well as anyone I've ever heard."

Keith smiled, "Thank you. That piece did take a long while to get memorized."

Returning to the living room with a large glass of apple juice, Prez passed it to Gamba, saying, "This is why we invited you. For a week, you dudes have been covering our butts and never said anything like that."

Chris said, "We're all musicians or very interested in music. Matt plays guitar..."

"Poorly, compared to Prez, Troy and Mike," Matt interjected.

"You're not as bad as you think," Chris countered.

Matt shrugged then said, "Chris plays trumpet. Danny plays

keyboards."

Prez wondered, "What about Justin and Gamba?"

Gamba softly said, "I like trombone, and try. The chimps have provided me a mouthpiece so I can at least carry a tune lately."

Keith turned to Justin and asked, "What about you?" Justin blushed bright red.

Answering for Justin, Danny said, "He sings, really well too, but he'll never believe it."

In an attempt to save himself from further embarrassment, Justin huffed, "I've been happy listening to Platinum Habits."

Keith sat beside his personal security guard and softly said, "Your friends are saying the same about you as my friends said about me. I didn't believe it either, when they'd tell me that I was good."

"You are very good though," Justin insisted. "I just sing in the shower and with CD's."

Keith nodded, "I sang when I was practicing scales and chords on the piano. I still get a little nervous before every performance, whether I'm singing or not." Keith then said, "Ya know, Thursday, when we were confronted at school, I didn't see a shy person. I saw a very confident person."

Justin nodded, "That's completely different."

Danny softly asked Justin, "Would you sing for Keith and Prez, just a little?"

Justin vigorously shook his head, but with prompting from all the boys and the two gorillas, he finally gave in. "All right!" he

shouted, "Just this once and only a little."

Keith repeated, "Just name the song, dude."

Humming uncertainly while considering songs with easy lyrics and an easy melody, Justin soon shrugged, "[Live And Let Die](#)?"

"Not a problem," Keith said, and then went to the upright piano in the living room.

Justin warned, "Not a word from any of you!"

Only to be sure Justin felt more secure, Prez instructed, "Seriously, guys. I want to hear this."

The other three boys and two gorillas instantly agreed. Keith checked with Justin. "Ready?" Justin only nodded and took a deep breath. Keith played the first two chords, then Justin sang, "When you were young and your heart was an open book. You used to say, live and let live."

Keith, Prez and the other boys sang, "You know you did, you know you did, you know you did."

Justin continued, "But if this ever-changing world in which we live in, makes you give in and cry. Say live and let die."

All the others sang with Justin; "Live and let die. Live and let die. Live and let die."

Keith went off, playing the entire thunderous middle section. Expecting Justin wouldn't continue, Keith sang, "What does it matter to ya, when you've got a job to do, you gotta do it well. You gotta give the other fellow hell." While Keith was playing the second segue into the next verse, their sons came inside. Prez held up a single finger to

stop them, so Justin wouldn't get freaked out. They sat on the stairs, hidden from Justin's view.

Justin then sang, "You used to say, Live and let live."

All the others sang, "You know you did, you know you did, you know you did."

Justin sang the final section. "But if this ever-changing world in which we live in, makes you give in and cry. Say, live and let die. Live and let die. Live and let die. Live and let die."

Keith made a show out of the finale. Before he even finished, everyone began clapping. Prez nodded at his boys to come the rest of the way into the living room. Still clapping furiously, they turned into the room. Red as an apple at the applause, and sudden appearance of the four boys, Justin covered his face and began to cry. Getting up from the piano bench, Keith went directly to Justin, pulled him up from the sofa and hugged him tightly. "It's okay," Keith reassuringly whispered. "I cried too the first time. It does get easier, I swear to God, it really does."

Extremely embarrassed, Justin sobbed, "I'm supposed to protect you."

"You have and will continue to. There's only one difference now."

"What's that?"

"You thought I was special. I thought you were a security dude. Now we're seeing each other as real people, as friends, with fears just like anybody else."

Becoming weak in Keith's arms, Justin softly admitted, "My

foster parents made fun of me when I sang."

"They were wrong on so many levels. You are very, very good. Not many would even attempt singing like McCartney, never mind manage it so well." Keith pulled slightly back then showed Justin to the bathroom, so he could wash up and pull himself together. Prez and the other guests took seats around the living room.

There was a knock on the front door. Already in the foyer, Keith answered it to find Derrick and Mike standing on the mountain side of the lanai. Always ready to bust Mike's balls, Keith walked away from the open door, grumbling, "Aw shit, there goes the party." Familiar with this routine, the boys and gorillas began sniggering.

Stepping in the house, Mike gave as good as he received. "At our first Shiny Mass, you may become the first human sacrifice in Shiny Religion history, dull one."

Prez scowled, "Why the hell did you arrive outside and knock? This is *our* beach house retreat; all of ours, any Core Rimmer can decide to take a break here."

Derrick shrugged, "We didn't think of it that way. "

Closing the door behind him, Mike turned around, teasing, "Why is everyone dressed? I thought this was a day off and a party?"

Keith and Prez shrugged. In moments, they were undressed, their clothes tossed aside to the wall edge of the living room floor. Derrick and Mike followed suit. Soon, all the security guys, the gorillas, and the four sons were naked and there were piles of clothes.

Matthew faced Prez, remembering, "The first time I ever saw you, at Anahola Bay, you were naked."

Mike hurried over to the living room piano and began playing a slow blues strip tune. "Orgy!" he hollered, and everyone cracked up. Justin came out of the bathroom, looking much better and laughing at Mike's suggestion.

Not realizing the implications, Richie giggled, "Poppa, we got LOTS o' toys." Trying desperately to maintain, Mike's head dropped onto the piano keyboard, making a dissonant sound.

Gage nodded, "Badminton rackets, a net, all kinds of Frisbees and balls to toss around."

"There's some inflatable flotation stuff for Richie and other little kids," Sammy added.

"Even 'lectric cars and helicopters," Dee grinned.

Tapping Keith's arm, Gage asked, "Dad, could we play in the water?"

Keith thought about it, then nodded, "Only when there are some older guys watching you. It's the ocean, not a pool, so additional supervision." He announced, "Let's go outside, dudes," and led the way. Dee, Gage, Sammy and Richie hurried past and made it outside first. Derrick and Mike noticed the food replicator beside the refrigerator and briefly commented on it.

They all went to the beach. It was a protected bay and the waves seemed to be under a meter. Prez sighed, "I can't go swimming yet, especially in salt water. Doc Andrews will have a fit."

Keith evilly grinned, "So will I. We'll check out the water and the shore slope, baby." He tapped Justin and Danny and the three of them jogged into the water.

Prez tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, what are the rest of the Core Rimmers doing?"

Alden replied, "Kaleo and Tory are at the pool with Leonard Santana, Mark Fikes and some of the other younger California boys. AJ and Jerry are at the playground with the Hunnicutt brothers. Drew and Corey are showing their sons the townhouse they'll be moving into. John and Stephen are at the store, with your parents and some newbies picked up at Des Moines this morning. Reyes is at the diving well, being initiated by some of the teens there." He paused then giggled, "Troy and Sean are at dorm one, wrecking Sean's bed."

Softly sniggering, Prez ordered, "Tell Kaleo, Tory, AJ and Jerry to get their security, and come join the party. I'd like them to bring the boys they're with, those that want to come. When it's convenient for the others, let them know too, bring their security and their boys."

Derrick tapped his sub-vocal, adding, "Alden, tell Reyes to get his brothers and anyone that they want to bring along. After Thursday night and yesterday, I want Reyes to take a break."

Mike hummed, "It's almost lunch time." He turned to Derrick, suggesting, "Lets go figure out the replicator." Nodding and taking Mike's hand, Derrick and Mike started back to the house.

Glancing at Chris and Matthew, Prez smiled, "Just because I can't swim doesn't mean you guys can't. We'll have all day to get to know each other." Making the gentle reminder more appealing, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, saying, "Alden, we'll need a bunch of surfboards and bodyboards of various sizes for the boys, all the teens and the gorillas expected."

Almost simultaneously, four-dozen surfboards appeared, sticking out of the sand, and the AI Division materialized. All the new

arrivals were on the sand, standing a few meters before Prez, Chris and Matt, except one of the group, with brown collar-length hair, who landed in waist-deep water. "Stevie!" the half-soaked brown-haired boy hollered. "That female-ferret threat is going to become your reality, I swear!"

Across the comm-badges of those laughing and sniggering on the beach, Stevie meekly offered, "Oops! I missed! I'll adjust the GPS targeting for the transporters, Danny. They'll be perfectly aligned by the time you're ready to go home."

Wading toward the beach, Danny grumbled, "So you can put me down in six-feet of water, no doubt."

Still sniggering, the white-blond teen stepped forward. "Prez, I'm Marc Furst, and that's Danny Page, our dripping director, coming ashore."

Prez chuckled, "It's good to finally meet you, Marc. I usually greet new friends with hugs, but since I'm naked, I'll make that your choice."

Extending a hand to Prez, Marc nodded and grinned, "I heard you burned your buns. We can save the hugs for later." While they shook hands, Marc said, "Let me introduce you to the rest of the guys. First, before he strips, grabs a surfboard and runs, is KC."

Bounding forward, KC giggled, "Nice to meet you, Prez." They shook hands. Prez welcomed him and introduced Chris and Matt. Dropping Prez's hand, KC quickly shook hands with Chris and Matt, and then started taking his clothes off, beaming, "This place is awesome, dudes. I haven't surfed in so long. Call me in when there's food." Once naked, he turned and jogged away, grabbed a board then ran to the water.

Marc sighed, "Do you have medi-kits, Prez? KC's a little accident prone."

The next boy giggled, "Yeah, and warp speed is only *a little fast* too."

Prez chuckled. Marc smiled, "This smart Alec is Jerry Owens. He's eleven going on forty; an amazing feat for a real human. Glued to Jerry, but more interested in the ocean, and dancing in place to go surfing with KC, is Jerry's son, Joey."

Waving his hand, Joey giggled, "Hi-ya, Unca Pwez. Who awe dhose odher boys?"

Prez smiled, "They're my sons, Joey. The smallest, red-haired boy is Richie, and the other three are Dee, Gage and Sammy. Go ahead and say hello."

Jerry nodded at his son. That was enough for Joey to start stripping and yell, "I'm comin' oud dhere, Cwash!" Seeing Joey naked and running toward the water, Chris', Matt's and Prez's jaws dropped in astonishment.

Marc playfully shoved Jerry and giggled, "What did I say? Did I warn you?"

Jerry shrugged and proudly grinned, "That's my boy."

Matt incredulously cackled, "No shit, he's a boy! I never would've guessed!" Chris cracked up.

Blinking fast and shaking his head, Prez chuckled, "There's a sixteen-year-old low hanger at our base who would've reacted the same way, and he's straight."

Jerry giggled and tactfully changed the subject by moving between his new brothers to introduce Paul and Ryan. The two teens shook hands with Prez and warmly said hello. Looking up at Prez, Jerry took a few steps away from his brothers, giggling, "Is Reyes here?"

"Not yet, but he's expected soon," Prez answered.

Ryan widely smiled, "Kewl."

Paul smirked at Jerry and groused, "Would you give us a break?"

"Little brothers can be really annoying," Ryan warned.

"What?" Jerry laughed, "We haven't seen Reyes since Wednesday, have we?" Before the verbal became physical, Jerry took off like a shot down the beach, with Paul and Ryan in pursuit.

Marc sighed then grinned.

Danny stepped forward and hugged Prez, saying, "Nice to meet ya, Prez. Would you consider swapping AI's?"

Returning Danny's hug, Prez laughed, "We'd both still have our challenges. After seeing Joey, I know now why the AI's are so confused."

Danny stepped back grinning, "We should ignore their wishes and give them statistically average dicks." Prez, Marc, and Danny seemed to wait for something to be heard from the AI's in their sub-vocals, but not a word was said. All three cracked up.

Patting Chris and Matt on the shoulders, Prez prompted, "It's our day off. Go, grab a board and have fun. I'll take Danny and Marc

inside to meet Derrick and Mike." Chris and Matt nodded, and then jogged over to the surfboards. Starting for the house, Prez told Danny and Marc, "Mike's our band's lead guitarist and Derrick's our band's drummer. They're trying to figure out the food replicator. Whatever they're making will be *loud*."

Opening the sliding screen door for his guests, Prez waved Danny and Marc forward. The three of them went inside. Hearing Derrick's and Mike's chuckling from the front rooms, Prez loudly wondered, "What are you two doing?" Mike and Derrick roared. Heading through the kitchen, Prez told Danny and Marc, "They're our Clan historians too." Seeing the dining room table with a half dozen large trays of food, Prez stopped short and grinned, "Getting a little carried away testing the replicator?"

Still catching his breath, Derrick rapidly nodded. Mike sniggered, "I told it I wanted hamburgers, thinking I'd get two."

"As you can see, we got twelve, minus the two we ate," Derrick chuckled. Danny and Marc began giggling.

"So I asked Alden for operating instructions," Mike explained, and then picked up a large softcover book and waved it around.

Derrick smiled, "While Mike leafed through the book, I asked for and got hot dogs, to go with the burgers. Then we thought, some chili, shredded cheese and condiments would be nice."

"The ketchup, mustard and relish we found in the fridge," Mike grinned. "I ordered the chili and cheese from the replicator."

Smiling widely, Prez prompted, "And the large platters of spaghetti and meatballs?"

"Oh," Mike cheekily grinned, "I had to see if it could manage

acceptable Italian food. The sauce and meatballs are good enough, but not like my mom makes."

Derrick leaned over to pick up a large, laminated card, approximately eighteen-inches long by ten-inches wide, innocently explaining, "That's when I asked Alden for this summary. So I ordered nachos for us."

Holding up his left hand with all five fingers displayed, Prez playfully bitched, "I left you alone for five minutes..."

"Closer to ten," Derrick and Mike giggled. Danny and Marc cracked up.

Prez sighed, "Danny Page and Marc Furst, these are our Analyst Rimmers and underpaid comic relief, Derrick Seibert and Mike Gibbons."

First to walk around the table, careful to keep his distance from Prez, Mike smiled, "Reyes told us all about you," and shook hands with Danny, and then Marc.

"Thanks for checking Reyes' systems for us, dudes," Derrick warmly smiled. He shook hands with Marc and then Danny.

Locking eyes with Derrick, Prez smirked, "Get your security guys here, so we can get all this food eaten."

Nodding, Derrick called, "Alden, tell Talib, Manny, Dave, Clay, Rudy and Rafiki to join us here please?" While Derrick was still speaking, Reyes, Randy, Jonah and Dillon transported into the living room.

Alden reported, "In progress, Derrick."

Reyes and his brothers greeted their dads. Randy was then introduced to Danny and Marc. Reyes wondered, "Where are Caleb, Noah and Hunter?"

Danny replied, "They're probably still in Louisiana, installing their AI. Then they're off to Norfolk, to install an AI on the flagship of our Naval fleet."

Prez was patiently waiting for an opportunity to call the guys that were outside for lunch when AJ, Jerry, and the three Hunnicutt brothers appeared in the living room. The group were introduced to Marc and Danny. While that was still happening, Kaleo, Tory, Leonard Santana, Mark Fikes, Marv Perkins, Russ Pass and Stan Given arrived. Soon, introductions were flying and the youngest boys were sitting at the table, being served whatever food they wanted. Prez let Danny and Marc know that he was going to step outside and call the others in for lunch. Thankfully, Keith was walking up the beach with his security, Justin and Danny, to help Prez announce lunch was ready. The last to come running out of the water were Paul and Ryan. The latter two brothers were giving Jerry Owens one more toss into the ocean.

Calls of "Dad" and "Pop" rang out.

Prez and Keith turned to their sons. Sammy asked, "Do we have to put clothes on?"

After checking with Keith, Prez answered, "Not here. Just don't scratch your willies and then touch food." Nodding, the four Rimmer sons giggled. Joey thought what Prez said was about the funniest thing he'd ever heard and howled laughing. Considering teasing the well-hung boy, Prez grinned at Joey, which Joey found even funnier. Prez chuckled, "Com'ere, Joey."

"I've seen dhad wook befowe," Joey insanely cackled, "You'we dickwe me!"

Prez slowly counted down; "Five... four..."

Dee giggled, "Uh oh!"

All four sons laughed, "Run Joey!" Joey took off running for the house.

Sammy and Gage scoped out their dads and their four teen security then watched Joey's little butt running away. Grinning madly, Gage shook his head, muttering "That's not right. He's only a few inches shorter than me, but... jeez!"

Nodding agreement, Sammy grinned, "It's a low-hangin', adult-sized package on a little eight-year-old's body. If he falls forward, we'll have to dig to get his dick out of the sand and stand him up!" Keith, Prez, Chris, Matt, Justin and Danny cracked up.

Jogging over to the laughing group, KC wondered, "What's goin' on?"

Justin shrugged and giggled, "We couldn't help noticing Joey's endowment."

Grinning widely, KC explained, "If you didn't already know, Joey's an android too. What he's got is all he'll ever have."

Prez nodded, "I assumed everyone in the AI group is an android, except Jerry. Marc specifically pointed Jerry out as human."

KC hummed for a second, and then suggested, "A brief huddle, so I can share something, please?"

Heads nodded and they all gathered around KC then leaned

forward. KC softly told them all about Paul and Ryan, their time surviving on the streets, and that Ryan steadfastly insists he's completely human. "It's a delusion, but one that will turn this day to shit in a hurry," KC told the Rimmers. "Don't even go there, okay? Ryan will freak and Paul will get defensive, and then Jerry's in the dumps, so simply treat Ryan as a human."

Richie innocently asked, "Is there some other way to treat him?"

"Yeah," Dee prompted, "we don't treat Reyes or Alden like machines. They're just like us."

KC smiled, "That's great guys."

Keith told his sons, "What KC is saying is to not even mention that stuff around Ryan. Kewl?"

"Kewl, dad," Gage confirmed, and his other three brothers repeated the sentiment.

"Thanks so much, dudes," KC warmly smiled, and then stood up straight. He sighed, "I didn't get to do much surfin' before it got cold and things got crazy. I want to spend the day here, with everybody having a good time."

Prez nodded and joked, "Let's race inside and see if we can make our bits swing like Joey's."

Sniggering, "We can try," KC took off running, jumping and hopping, trying to make his adequate goods move like Joey's abundant bits. Prez, Keith and their teen security softly sniggered at KC's exaggerations, but the four Rimmer sons howled laughing. The latter group jogged after KC, toward the house.

Rapidly approaching from their right sides, Paul yelled, "What

in the hell are you trying to do, KC?"

Since Jerry was with Paul and Ryan, KC only shrugged and kept going as he had been.

Everyone climbed the steps up to the lanai and entered the house. The sounds of voices were much louder than it had been when Prez went out to gather everyone for lunch. He realized that almost everyone invited had arrived and so had all the security teams. Outside the dining room's sliding doors, Prez saw that some had moved to eat outside at tables on the lanai. The only people invited that hadn't yet arrived were Corey, Drew, John, Stephen, their sons, and their security teams. Beginning to fix himself a plate, Prez wondered what was delaying them.

'Hey, Prez,' John sent, 'me and Stephen will probably stay here. We'll stop by for a little while to meet the AI Division, but we won't stick around very long. It's totally kewl by us, bro. You guys need the time with your security. We're kewl here, and already have friendships with our security guys. Corey and Drew are still debating how long they'll stick around when they go. Also, we just got more newbies. We're getting them through the store now. Also, our division's Intel department will have a Founder family assigned from the Ark compound by the end of the day. As soon as they arrive, I'll know and get them into a condo apartment.'

Prez wasn't particularly pleased that his brothers and their husbands would only come for a short while, but he knew that he couldn't force them. He could only hope that they might change their minds.

Entering the house, Paul and Ryan saw that Reyes had arrived, and was sitting with his brothers and personal security in the living room. Paul and Ryan had seen Reyes naked during the beach race late

Tuesday night, but for the first time, Reyes was getting the full picture of his two friends. Reyes put his plate down on the coffee table and stood to greet his friends. Paul and Ryan noticed Reyes' blush, but only grinned as they sandwiched Reyes between them. "I missed you guys so much," Reyes softly smiled. "I hoped that there might be time to get together Thursday, and yesterday too. It just didn't work out. I didn't even know that you would be here today."

Paul sincerely said, "Don't worry about it. It gave us time and we knew you were busy."

Reyes insisted, "Next time I have any chance at all, I'll at least call."

"We missed you too," Ryan whispered in Reyes' other ear.

Reyes suggested, "Get something to eat." Turning to Paul, and knowing he would be more comfortable with less people and more space, Reyes asked, "How about we move outside and eat on the lanai?"

"Lanai?" Paul and Ryan queried.

Reyes nodded, "In Hawaiian, it's like a veranda, or a breezeway; the open porch."

Paul and Ryan agreed and released Reyes. The two brothers started toward the table. Softly giggling at the threesome, it was apparent that Jerry Owens still hadn't learned his lesson. Paul squinted wordless warnings to Jerry. Ryan smirked and sadly shook his head. Reyes rolled his eyes and turned to pick up his plate. He told his brothers that he was going outside to eat with Paul and Ryan, and then added, "Randy, you didn't get to meet them, so when you're done, stop out on the lanai and I'll introduce you."

"Kewl," Randy mumbled around the food in his mouth.

Reyes took his plate and walked around the dining room and beyond the sliding screen door to the lanai. This side of the lanai was pretty crowded. To the left, on the mountain side of the lanai, AJ and Jerry were with Shaun, Mike and Kenny Hunnicutt. Nearby were AJ's and Jerry's security teams. Closer to the beach were Sean, Troy, and their security. Reyes thought Paul would feel more comfortable sitting on the beach side of the house.

Ryan stepped outside giggling, "They're getting low on food. They had the replicator make more burgers, hotdogs, fried rice and eggrolls too. Paul's loading a plate."

While they waited for Paul to come outside, Reyes introduced Ryan to Sean Moorhead, Troy Faris, Jeremy Tribou, Lakota Harmon, and the two gorillas, Leo and Gary. Paul stepped outside during the introductions of the latter three, so Reyes repeated introductions of the former three for Paul. They then went around to the kitchen side of the house, with a wide open view of the beach, and took seats around a table. Conversation started where it had left off, with Reyes telling Paul and Ryan about the other Core Rimmers and their families.

AJ and Jerry had a meandering conversation with Shaun, Mike and Kenny. Jerry tried to keep the boys on the topic of their favorite interests and hobbies. The Hunnicutts were transitioning from big city life to the much smaller Ewa Beach community. Conversely, the three boys wanted to know more about Clan life in general. Of course, the boys were somewhat surprised with how easily other boys got naked. They were only allowed to do that in the privacy of their home or out in their backyard. AJ reminded them that there was nothing to be worried about, even on base where girls and adults were around. Jerry said, "Swimsuits are optional at all the beaches and resorts in this country. Today, it's all boys here, and we're in a very private spot

where nobody else can see."

Seeing developing teenagers and tweens caused the Hunnicutt boys a bit of confusion. The primary difference the boys noticed wasn't size or hair, it was because all three brothers were circumcised at birth and so many other boys they saw weren't. That was easily explained since AJ, Mike Gibbons, and Prez were all circumcised as well. Overhearing the conversation, Troy admitted that he was also circumcised, proving to the kids that even some of their leaders were just like them and it didn't matter in the least. AJ and Jerry sniggered at some of the other typical questions about puberty and size differences, but easily dealt with making the three young newbies more comfortable. As soon as four-year-old Shaun finished eating, he slid off his chair and stripped, proving that he could easily adjust. Shaun's giggling older brothers finished their meals, and then got naked too.

Inside the house, none of the Rimmers or AI Division members said a word about Battle Of Earth, or what they had dealt with that day. The Rimmers were more interested in Marc's intended project to restore his boat, and the night that Danny had arranged for a boat ride with Marc. Danny, Marc, Joey, and KC were interested in Platinum Habits. Nobody spoke of Clan business of any sort during lunch; it was more important to concentrate on the various individuals' families, hobbies, and interests.

At the Ewa Beach CIC dining room, everyone arriving for lunch knew where the majority of Core Rimmers were and what the purpose was by the end of lunch. All the parents were relieved that their sons were taking a break. None of the rescued kids had any problem with them being away, because John, Stephen, Corey, Drew, and all the dorm leadership were there on base should anyone need anything.

Back at the beach house, lunch had been devoured and the mess

easily cleaned up. Supervised by Kaleo, Tory, AJ, Jerry Hebda, Sean, Troy, Jerry Owens, and KC, the youngest boys returned to the beach first. In minutes, some of the boys were digging into the storage bins for more toys to play with. Sharing some of the more unpleasant aspects of their lives, Reyes, Ryan and Paul took a walk up the beach to the waterfall. Soon, almost everyone was back at the beach and in the water. KC grabbed a surfboard and paddled out, but since he had just eaten, he didn't catch any waves; he only watched the kids from the bay.

Sean decided to teach Troy how to surf. Kaleo took Russ Pass out for his first rides on a surfboard. Similarly, Tory took five-year-old Marv Perkins out on another surfboard, AJ took Shaun Hunnicutt out, and Jerry took Mike Hunnicutt out. The two little guys had life vests on, which turned out to be a wise move, because two over-excited and squirming boys sent themselves and their dads-to-be slipping into the ocean during each ride. So that Kenny Hunnicutt wasn't left alone on the beach, Jerry's new security gorilla, Kanye, lifted the eight-year-old and took him out for a few rides. Soon, the remaining surfboards were grabbed and the rest of the kids got taken out for rides by their fathers or by the friendly gorillas.

Drew, Corey, Geoff, Lenny, and Leo arrived. Drew reported to Derrick, Mike, Keith, and Prez that their band teacher, Mrs. Diaz, had been hired. Corey told Derrick that he would soon have four new brothers. The Steib quadruplets were making friends with Chad, Herbie, Kawazoe, and Sung. Corey giggled, "And now for the best part. The quadruple R's, and Cesar and Felipe have been hanging out with the Steibs too." Laughing his ass off, Derrick ran to the house to get dressed, and then transported back to Ewa Beach, intending to bring all fourteen back to the beach house. Corey took Geoff out for his first ride on a surfboard. Geoff had only gone Sehlut surfing the prior Saturday. Lenny joined Drew for a few rides and Uncle Keith

took Leo out for his first surfing lessons. When Leo felt ready, Keith left the boy to try surfing on his own and returned to his beach-bound husband.

Since Prez couldn't go in the water, his and Keith's human security and their sons took a break on the beach blankets. Glancing around their security, Prez revealed, "None of you have any obvious issue with us being gay. I'm wondering if any of you are too."

Justin raised his right arm and nodded, "Now I need to find a partner that won't tease me when I sing."

"That would be a good test, and if he does, a reason to immediately move on," Keith nodded.

Chris held his hand up and quickly glanced at Justin as he did so. Raising his eyebrows, Justin was very surprised. Having been busy enough the prior week, Justin and Chris never had the chance to talk about sexual preference. Chris was genetically enhanced and his musculature proved that. Justin wasn't genetically enhanced, but Chris still found him interesting and attractive? At some point during this day or very soon, Justin and Chris needed to have a private chat.

Matt held his hand up only halfway and said, "I'm bi. I like guys, but want kids too, someday."

Dee wondered, "Can't you adopt, like Daddy and Poppa?"

Considerate of the boy he was answering, Matt replied, "I guess I could, but since I like boys and girls, I should first see which I wind up with."

Keith turned to Danny and briefly asked, "Straight?"

Danny nodded and smiled, "Workin' on the relationship this last

week."

"Yeah?" Keith chuckled, "With whom, if it's not too personal?"

Danny laughed, "Well, actually it's pretty personal, but definitely no secret."

Justin grinned at Keith, "Your mom's personal security, Tanya Casey."

Keith chortled, "That's awesome!" Prez agreed and so did everyone else.

Deciding that they wanted to make sand castles, Jerry Owens and Joey came over to ask if anyone wanted to help. Gage, Sammy, Dee, and Richie agreed and got up to jog away with Jerry and Joey. Prez smiled at his departing sons.

Derrick returned with his four brothers and the four Steib brothers. With a few more interviews scheduled at the FYS building that afternoon, Cesar and Felipe decided to stay behind. The quadruple 'R's' had invited their friends from Des Moines and Las Vegas, and therefore decided to stay at Ewa Beach. Once the boys were settled and building sand castles, Derrick grabbed a board and returned to the waves.

Matt leaned nearer to Prez and whispered, "You really think of them as your own kids, don't you?"

Prez enthusiastically nodded, replying, "In the last week, they've made it so they are our sons, in every way."

Matt softly asked, "Can I talk with you privately for a minute, Prez?"

Prez nodded and told his gathered guests, "We'll be right back," then led the way from the blanket. A few paces away, Prez asked, "What's the scoop, dude?"

"Thinking and learning," Matt replied with a wide smile. Pulling his thoughts together while Prez strolled the beach, Matt said, "I'm bi, but there are a few issues I'm still working out in my mind."

Prez softly prompted, "Like?"

Matt sighed, "It's like, sex with guys is much more fun, but then I can't keep the non-sexual part alive. Sex with girls is less fun and more teaching them how, but outside the bedroom, keeping the relationship together is a bit easier."

Prez scowled, "I'm confused. Probably because I've always been gay, but what do you mean by 'teaching them how'?"

Matt asked, "You've never been interested in any girl?"

Shaking his head, Prez smiled, "I came to Ewa Beach with my parents June of 1997. Before school started in September, I had already met Keith, Derrick and Mike. We grew up together, learned music together, about our bodies together, and ultimately chose our partners."

"Oh," Matt giggled. Behind the giggles though, he thought of all his male friends over the years.

Prez asked, "Lemme see if I've got this right?" Matt nodded, and then Prez summarized, "Girls don't do it for you in the sack, but guys do?" Again, Matt nodded. Prez queried, "Everywhere else, you'd rather be with a female friend than a male friend?"

Matt chuckled, "Yup, that pretty much covers it. That's why I'm

still playing the field."

Thoughtful, Prez hummed then said, "I can only speak for myself and the three dudes that I know best."

Matt nodded and said, "Go ahead, Prez. I trust your opinion."

Prez sighed, "What makes you feel the best?" Making a fist and lightly pounding his belly, Prez said, "Here." He then cupped his privates saying, "Not here." Releasing his goods, Prez said, "Mike and I are both guitarists. When I got here and for another few years, we were both driving each other forward. I could've easily wound up with him. When I began playing bass guitar, Derrick and I spent time alone together; as the core of the rhythm section, we needed to be in sync. I might've wound up with him too. But when it came right down to making the decision, it was music and all the other times Keith and I were together that told me, he's the one for me. All three of them are sexy as hell, but sex makes up about an eighth of a day. Even in the most extreme case, we're still only talking four hours out of a sixteen hour day. It's the rest of the time that matters most. Keith does it for me all the time. We can joke around and laugh together, or be serious and cry together. Even in California, at the orphanages, he could read me as well as I could read him. Now, with our Vulcan bonding, it's incredible how much I feel from him."

"That's what I want!" Matt loudly declared.

Prez said, "It sounds to me like you really are split in half. You'll just have to keep looking, Matt. If you find another guy, then adopt kids. They're the greatest little mirrors. If you find a girl, then make some little mirrors of your own. The big thing isn't in your pants, or in his; it's the give and take, it's the partnership that counts most."

Matt tilted his head and softly asked, "You really don't care if

I'm bi; if I go gay or straight?"

"Course not!" Prez laughed. He pointed down the beach, saying, "I've got my life here; a husband and four adorable boys. A week ago, I thought it would be four more years before I could marry Keith. And now we've got sons, who each told us they wanted us as their fathers. Without them, I'd be a waste of space, so everything else is secondary. I've got you, Chris and Gamba covering my ass when it needs to be covered. Now, I'm considering all you guys as friends. Who you choose to be with is none of my business. As long as we can still talk like this and you still do your job, we are very kewl."

Matt nodded, "Thanks, Prez. That means an awful lot. Me, Chris and Gamba were pretty annoyed with ourselves when we learned you got burned."

"That wasn't your fault," Prez quickly assured. "It was my fault entirely. I gave the order, but the entire team agreed to let our security save people on their own, rather than miss a single person because you guys were shadowing us. Don't sweat the small stuff, bro. Later tonight, I'll have one of our docs check me over. In a month or so, all the leg hair will have grown back and I'll be as good as new." Prez confirmed, "We're good?" When Matt nodded, Prez suggested, "Let's get back to the party then, before Mike gets that orgy organized."

Matt began sniggering, turned and walked with Prez back to the rest of their large group. As far as Matt was concerned, if he could find another teen boy that he could talk to like Prez, all his confusion and worries would dissipate very quickly. He softly told Prez, "If I could find a dude that I could talk with like you..."

"Tell me something?" Prez carefully interrupted.

Matt nodded, "Anything I can."

Prez asked, "What made you want to talk to me in the first place?"

"That's easy," Matt smiled. "You keep your division organized; you make time to be with Keith, your sons, and the rest of your family and friends. Chris, Danny, Justin and I understand how busy you are. Still, you put aside today to be with us. You're easy to admire and look up to." Prez looked over and locked eyes with Matt. In a few seconds, Matt realized what he had said. They both started chuckling. Matt grinned, "Yeah, just call me dense and dumb."

Prez stopped walking and held an arm out to stop Matt. Prez smiled, "Something a lot of guys misunderstand completely, and you can verify this with Mike and Derrick; the roles in gay partnerships change, Matt. With other guys, what's your role?"

"Consistently top," Matt answered.

"That's part of the problem, I think," Prez shared. "You said it yourself, you'd like someone you can look up to. In a perfect world, he'll look up to you too. You need to be everything for your lover, or risk losing him when he needs something you won't give. I need Keith in every way and he needs me. When Keith's aggressive, I might become a giggling spaz and accept his advances. Swap it around when I'm aggressive. When we're both aggressive, and alternatively, when we're both chillin', sparks fly majorly. That's when all bets are off and we flip-flop until we're exhausted." Matt laughed his ass off and suddenly turned then ran to the bay. Grinning madly, Prez bellowed, "Did I say too much?"

Once in waist deep water, Matt turned and laughed, "Not at all, Prez. I'll just turn some rocks into sand here and life will be good."

Moments later, Danny Page and Marc ran out of the water. They

ran toward the house and beyond it like their butts were on fire. Jogging after them, Prez saw what the problem was. Marc screamed, "KC, get your ass down here!" Wide-eyed, but helplessly grinning, Prez ran over to the steep cliffs, where KC was climbing, about thirty meters up, and still completely naked.

Danny yelled, "KC, are you paying any attention at all to those safety protocols?"

"Course I am," KC loudly replied. "Joey's not here, is he? I'm perfectly fine, for now. I've been following this gorge most of the way. I could prob'ly make it half way up and back down again safely."

Prez tapped Danny and then Marc, signaling that he knew how to handle this. Danny and Marc gestured to the cliff. Prez tapped his sub-vocal, silently mouthing, "Alden, can you see KC?"

Alden privately replied, "Yup. I could get him down off there now. If he goes much further, my chances of transporting him will dwindle."

Nodding, Prez whispered, "Lock on to him, but listen to me and KC. Transport is your call, so do it when necessary."

"Got it," Alden giggled.

Moving a little closer to the steep cliff, Prez hollered, "KC!"

"This is one of two things I wanted to do as soon as I got here, Prez. I'm fine."

"Yeah?" Prez giggled, and started rubbing his crotch. "I'm way more than fine. I've got the most awesome view from here, dude. Why don't you spend the night tonight? If I could get Derrick, Mike and Keith, would you be interested in a five-way?" Marc's jaw dropped

and Danny sputtered then giggled.

"A *FIVE-WAY*?" KC incredulously laughed, paused and looked down. Seeing Prez practically playing with himself, KC stumbled. Before KC could slip or fall, Alden had transported him off the cliff and out over the bay, beyond the surfers, where he splashed down.

Prez turned to Danny and Marc, winked and grinned, "We're not called Rimmers for nothin'."

Danny checked with Marc, "Why haven't we ever approached KC that way?"

"He's my son," Marc giggled, "it's just too weird."

Starting back to the shoreline, Prez nodded, "He's an android, but still a teenager looking for thrills."

"You gave him thrills, all right!" Danny laughed. "He'll be swimming for a good half hour or more."

Prez shrugged, "More importantly, he's off the cliff."

Marc grinned, "And if he tries to climb it again?"

Prez smiled, "If Danny tries the same method and strikes out, let Keith, Derrick or Mike give it a whirl."

Rapidly nodding, Marc cracked up.

Danny giggled, "Yeah, any of the three would get my undivided attention."

Marc laughed, "HUSH!"

Noticing Keith approaching with a purposeful stride, Danny

giggled, "Keith looks determined, Prez."

Prez hummed, grinned and softly droned, "Yeah. Damn, he looks yummy." Marc and Danny giggled. Bouncing his red eyebrows at them, Prez said, "See ya a little later." He then veered off course, away from Danny and Marc, and toward the house.

Keith started running and hollered, "Prez?" Picking up his pace, Prez raced Keith to the house. "PREZ!" Keith laughed, and turned up the juice. Hurrying up the lanai steps and into the house, Prez led Keith up the stairs to the master bedroom, exactly where both needed and wanted to be.

Out in the bay, KC swam around the cool water, waiting for his erection to deflate. He and his condition didn't go unnoticed by those surfing. Reyes and Ryan went into a giggling fit. Paul yelled over, "KC! Down periscope, dude!"

"Yeah, right," KC smirked. "Blame Prez; he's at least as evil and twisted as Danny and Cory."

Ryan giggled, "What happened?"

Floating around the surfers, KC explained, "I was climbing the cliffs, minding my own business. And I did it when Joey wasn't around, so it's kewl, right? Wrong! Danny and Marc have their usual hissy fits. Then Prez hollers up at me, enticing me to join in on a five-way orgy!" Knowing more than most, Reyes howled laughing. KC bitched, "My bone will shrivel when the rest of me is pruned beyond recognition!"

"Just think of Grandma Morrison nude, dude!" Reyes giggled.

"Ugh!" KC grunted, and sank as if he were torpedoed.

Not too far away, Derrick and Mike were with their security. The latter four security boys had already talked to Matt, and told Derrick and Mike about Matt's chat with Prez. Noticing KC's condition and hearing why he got that way, Derrick and Mike were hysterical. Laughing himself hoarse, Mike squeezed his surfboard between his knees, holding on for dear life.

When KC had surfaced again, Derrick told him and all the others nearby, "That's Prez, on codeine. He's our best friend in the world, and would normally restrain himself with folks he doesn't know too well. So, between the pain meds, restricted contact with Keith and opportunities presented, Prez is being himself, as he would be alone with me and Mike."

"He's EVIL!" KC loudly laughed.

Derrick, Mike and Reyes giggled, "He's the Head Rimmer!"

Wanting to get even, KC wondered, "Where is he now?"

Derrick giggled, "I saw him racing Keith into the house."

"Afterward, Prez will be mellow for an hour or so," Mike cackled. Discouraged for the moment, KC swam away from the larger group.

Derrick tapped Mike, suggesting, "Let's make sure our two fearless leaders are okay."

Nodding, Mike asked, "And if they'd rather be alone?"

"Then we go to another room," Derrick replied. With the next wave, they rode to shore and hurried to the house.

Paul suspiciously smirked at Reyes, causing Ryan to loudly

laugh. Reyes giggled, "What can I say? They were close before the Clan, they're still very close, and our entire Clan is learning what real friendships are like, from the best examples."

Paul bluntly told Reyes, "That's not really what I meant."

"I'm sorry," Reyes blinked, "I thought you were referring to Prez and our leadership." He then asked, "What did you mean?"

Ryan watched and worried. Paul huffed, "Do you want something from us, Reyes?"

Sitting there on surfboards in the bay with both brothers, Reyes honestly answered, "No. What I've got are two friends, two very *special* friends, and that's more than I could've expected when I went to get a check-up Tuesday. When I went there, I didn't give too much thought about meeting any other androids. Why would I? Since Caleb, Noah and Hunter are human, I expected Clan humans. Instead, I found a place that had a bunch of androids. I consider all of the people at Sullivan's Island friends. Wednesday morning, a dream I had caused me to call Jerry. Paul overheard that conversation. Since then, the three of us became closer friends. Since Wednesday afternoon, I *have* considered letting that friendship grow into more, but my own personal worry is doing anything that makes two brothers argue and fight. That will not happen. I'll walk away apologizing at the first argument between you two. One of you being my friend without the other just feels so wrong that I won't allow it to go there."

Tapping his surfboard, Reyes smiled, "This is what I want; friends to spend good times with. Alternatively, I want to be there for those friends when their human companions reach the end of their lives. I'll need these same friends too, when my human family and companions pass away. That's what is *the most* important to me, beyond Jerry's dreams and schemes to make us boyfriends. You two

lost your parents. I lost my parents, and then my cousin and his wife. With the Clan, we have a lot less to worry about, but we still have to face human mortality. I don't want anything more from you than friendship, Paul."

Ryan giggled, "Reyes, put Jerry's scheme aside and think of the three of us as boyfriends. Do you realize what that means?"

"All too well," Reyes laughed.

Laughing along, Paul wondered, "Is that even possible?"

Reyes shrugged and smiled, "I have no idea, but there's only three people that could figure it out. I already said, me without both of you, as inseparable brothers, simply isn't good enough. I'd just as soon remain friends than go a step further with one and leave the other out in the cold. If you two go home later and decide, yeah, you can remain brothers and include me in whatever our friendship becomes, that's great. You could also say, no, we have to keep it limited to friendship, and that's great too. We're all still friends and can remain that way for a long time. If you're unsure, that's kewl, because I am too. Being a couple is one thing, being a threesome is new ground, for all of us."

Paul confirmed, "You can't leave Ryan out of it?"

"Not if it hurts you or him," Reyes replied. "You need Ryan and Ryan needs you. I like both of you, partially because of the way you both are together. Let's stay friends."

Ryan checked, "Could you really choose to stay friends?"

Reyes nodded, "Keeping friends is better than losing them." He then pointed at KC floating around many meters away, smiling, "He's a good friend too. All it would take is time talking with KC, like

we've talked, to learn if he's boyfriend material. Of course, I'll keep a medi-kit handy." Paul and Ryan cracked up. Reyes smiled, "Yeah, the three of us is more complicated, but not impossible. I told you guys what I had to do to stay alive. You told me some of what you did to survive. After all that, here we are, chatting in the buff about a hypothetical situation, in the middle of the bay. None of us is stupid; we can talk about all that and this too."

Ryan checked with Paul, asking, "What're you thinking, bro?"

Paul thoughtfully hummed before replying, "What I know is that Reyes hasn't lied. I'm beginning to believe he couldn't lie if he tried. I absolutely believe Reyes is serious; he won't want to be with me if it meant hurting you, or be with you if it hurt me." Suddenly, instead of concentrating on answering his brother, Paul nervously glanced around and sighed, "I really don't know what to think or say beyond that. I like you a lot, Reyes. Ryan likes you too..."

"No," Ryan quickly interrupted. "Tell Reyes what you told me, bro. We have to be open and honest now, or it'll only haunt us later."

Paul glared at his brother several moments before returning his attention to Reyes, and admitting, "I trust you, Reyes, more than almost everybody else I've met since joining the Clan. I trust Mary and Jon, and Jerry to a point, and you; that's it."

Warmly smiling at Paul and then Reyes, Ryan explained, "Since Wednesday, when you made Paul so happy, all I'd have to hear is you need help and I'd be there in a snap. And you know wherever I go, Paul is too. Yeah, something special is happening and I want it to continue. I have no idea how we could progress any further than friends, but having you as a friend has been good."

"Reyes?" Paul called. When Reyes eyes locked with his, Paul

grinned, "Do you ever lie at all?"

"When it's an obvious joke, I could and have. When it's serious though, I simply won't. It accomplishes nothing. I've told you what I really felt and thought the last two days. It's up to us where we go from here. None of us have ever had boyfriends before; what we did with others is only what we *had* to do and not what we *wanted* to do."

Ryan worried, "I... uh... we need time to think. At the same time, it feels bad making you wait."

"You're not making me wait," Reyes quickly assured. "I've got my dads, three brothers and I'm a leader here too. You've got a new family to adjust to. You know I'll visit Sullivan's Island every chance I get. If you two need to get away, I'm just a comm-badge tap away."

Paul checked, "In the meantime, things stay the same?"

Reyes nodded, "Unless all three of us decides otherwise, yeah. My crystal ball is foggy, so I can't say what might happen or when, but I like where I am and who I'm with right now."

"It seems to me that KC and you are complete opposites," Ryan grinned.

"Not completely," Reyes smiled, "and there are good things about opposites teaming up too."

Inside the beach house, Derrick, Mike, Keith and Prez were cuddling on the king sized bed, basking in the afterglow and chatting. Mike contentedly sighed, "For days like this, I would gladly deal with all the other craziness."

Keith smiled, "Thank goodness we took some time at Archnania

too. Our kids benefited from that every bit as much as we did."

"We'll have to take another trip there soon with AJ, Jerry and their boys," Derrick suggested.

Mike smiled, "When our Head Rimmer is less stoned, we'll arrange to get two more couples hitched and bonded."

"Lieutenant Vorik said he could do the bonding portion," Keith stated.

Derrick smiled, "The best part of that trip was that our team and our band really got closer. Reyes wasn't a Core Rimmer at the time, but I know it mattered to him. All our kids are real brothers, cousins and closer friends now."

Mike nodded, "I noticed Troy and Sean watching AJ and Jerry with the Hunnicutts, and Kaleo and Tory with Leonard, Mark Fikes, Marv, Russ and Stan. It seems Sean and Troy might be getting ready to start their own family. They're at least considering it."

Keith checked to see if Prez was awake by gently rubbing the back of his hand across his husband's face. Keeping his eyes closed, Prez purred. Keith grinned, "You're awake?" Prez hummed affirmatively.

Derrick chuckled, "You've got nothing to say, bro?"

Prez sighed, "I love this. I love you three dudes. It's turning into a really great day for everybody."

Mike sniggered, "Take another pill, Prez."

"After dinner," Prez grinned.

Keith giggled, "We wore him out."

Prez smirked, "It takes more than blow-jobs to accomplish that, and you three know it." Derrick, Keith and Mike sniggered. "I'll have to maintain with the help of my lover and two best buds," Prez smiled.

Keith planted a kiss on Prez's forehead. Derrick grinned, "We'll always be available for whatever and whenever, Prez."

Mike called, "Hey, Alden?"

Over the room's ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "Shiny Daddy?"

Mike chuckled, "I'm pretty sure I have a good idea what Prez and the rest of us need."

"For the time being, I don't see how I could help with that," Alden giggled.

Mike cracked up. Derrick sniggered, "Not that, Alden. If you choose to be under ten-years-old, you can forget about it. Pubes are required now in this club." He then asked, "Is the beach side of the lanai free of our guests?"

"Yes, it is, Derrick."

Stretching and beginning to motivate, Derrick instructed, "Move tables and chairs out to the lawn, then move the basement instruments onto the lanai, and the PA system to the lawn." Prez's eyes popped open and mischievously darted around.

"Somebody just became wide awake," Keith chortled.

After transporting tables and chairs to the lawn, and the band's

gear to the lanai, Alden reported, "It's set guys, and some of your guests have noticed."

All four bounded out of bed and hurried downstairs, bouncing ideas around for a set list on the way. Out in the bay, surfers caught the next ride ashore. Drew, Corey and Leo were the first to make it as far as the table with the PA mixer. Drew stopped and powered up that gear, instructing Leo on the workings of the PA system. Corey went to the lanai and began powering up amplifiers and microphones. Corey estimated that the lanai was about five meters wide, and the side where the gear was set up was about ten meters long, so the band had plenty of space. Derrick, Mike, Keith and Prez walked outside to find all their guests heading toward the house.

Slipping his bass guitar over his shoulder, Prez walked up to a microphone, saying, "Dudes, we're just going to have some fun. You can continue what you were doing or watch us, whatever you want. Drew can adjust the volume so no matter where you are, you'll hear us."

Flashing a thumbs up, Drew smiled, "It's just like our stuff in the auditorium, just fewer main speakers. This gear will easily fill this little area with sound, Prez."

Heading back toward Drew and the PA, Corey giggled, "We might be heard up over the cliffs and a little over at Maui."

Wide-eyed, Chuck confirmed, "Are you serious, Corey?"

Corey shrugged and grinned, "Sound travels." Chuck turned and walked away, waving the other security forces to him.

Approaching the house with Sean, Troy asked, "What's the first number?"

"We thought we'd play some of the new covers we learned at Archmania," Mike offered.

Watching Reyes, who was still walking up the beach with Paul and Ryan, Derrick grinned, "Let's let Reyes start us off with Fantasy." Suddenly stopping short, Reyes squinted at the gathering group on the lanai. Derrick and Mike softly sniggered at Reyes' reaction.

Before Reyes could say a word, Paul and Ryan wrapped arms around Reyes' back and guided him forward. Ryan teased Reyes; "You never told us you could sing too."

Paul smirked, "He don't lie, but conveniently omits certain details."

Reyes helplessly giggled. Paul and Ryan took Reyes' hands and started running. Reyes giggled, "At Archmania, we found out my vocal range is really high. Mostly, I sing backup vocals, except on a handful of tunes."

"Uh huh," Paul suspiciously grunted.

Ryan smiled, "He spills it *after* getting caught." He and Paul shoved Reyes forward, to the steps up to the lanai. Reyes walked over to the set of congas and timbale then put his hands-free microphone over his head.

Now that the whole band was ready, Drew hollered, "A quick sound check on the instruments, bros." Derrick started pounding a rhythm that Reyes, and then Prez, and then Troy, and then Mike and Keith played in time with. After a little more than a minute, Drew and Corey signaled with hand slicing motions across their throats that they were good. The band stopped at once. "Now only vocals, dudes," Drew prompted. Starting with Prez's baritone, and working up to Mike, Derrick, Troy, Keith and Reyes, the group sang a C major

chord. After making a few minor adjustments, Drew smiled, "Go for it."

With that, the band started playing the mellow introduction of [Fantasy](#). Keith played keyboards on the left side of the lanai. Derrick tapped cymbals, Reyes dropped his hands on congas, Prez and Mike played chords, and Troy played synthesizers on the far right of the lanai. With a swirl of horns and strings from Troy, the band picked up the tempo and went into the main part of the song. Playing congas and percussion, Reyes sang:

Every man has a place

In his heart there's a space

And the world can't erase his fantasies

Take a ride in the sky

On our ship fantasize

All your dreams will come true right away

Many of the AI Division guests and other boys scattered around the lawn were dancing. The entire band sang the chorus.

And we will live together

Until the twelfth of never

Our voices will ring forever as one

Every thought is a dream

Rushing by in a stream
Bringing life to the kingdom of doing
Take a ride in the sky
On our ship fantasize
All your dreams will come true miles away

Our voices will ring together
Until the twelfth of never
We all will love forever as one

Come to see victory
In a land called fantasy
Loving life for you and me
To behold to your soul is ecstasy
You will find other kind
That has been in search of you
Many lives have brought you to
Recognize it's your life now in review

As you stay for the play
 Fantasy has in store for you
 A glowing light will see you through
 It's your day shining day
 All your dreams come true
 Come to see victory
 In a land called fantasy
 Loving life for you and me
 To behold to your soul is ecstasy
 You will find other kind
 That has been in search of you
 Many lives have brought you to
 Recognize it's your life now in review

The audience exploded in loud cheers, whistles, and catcalls, because none of the band members had bothered getting dressed. Of the six on the lanai, only Reyes' and Derrick's goods couldn't be seen, but the other four swayed and bounced with the music, causing their male-bits to keep time of their own. Laughter and jokes traveled around the beach front.

Leaning over, KC told Joey, "They did that song great."

Still clapping, Joey nodded, "Dime Douched couwd pway id, widh weaw stwings and howns, bud id wouwd dake a wong whiwe do

weawn."

KC giggled, "You've got the beat memorized already, don't you twerp?"

"Bodh of 'em, Cwash," Joey grinned, "dwums and congas. I needs some congas, by dhe way."

"Use your head!" KC laughed as he pulled Joey into a hug.

"You'we siwwy, Casey!" Joey giggled. "My head ain'd a dwum!"

By this time, Platinum Habits had reached agreement on the next song. Reyes moved from percussion to the electronic drum kit. Stepping away from keyboards, Troy picked up a Stratocaster. The band started playing [Pour Some Sugar On Me](#). Keith sang lead vocals and purposefully overacted, swinging his free arm around with the echoing sound, to point to dudes in their audience. Troy played electric rhythm guitar, with Mike on lead guitar. Joey couldn't take it any more and ran with KC to the edge of the lanai. Joey watched Reyes and Derrick while KC stood before Troy and Mike.

Quite busy singing the backup vocals and playing guitar, Troy noticed KC watching, but couldn't do much about it. Mike decided to give KC a close up. Never missing a note, Mike sat on the railing surrounding the edge of the lanai, locked his legs around the top and leaned backward to hang upside down, with his guitar right in front of KC.

KC giggled, "And they tell me I'm looney!"

Mike smiled, "It's a big club and growing. Speaking of growing big clubs, I see yours is back to normal."

KC smirked, "No thanks to your Head Rimmer."

"Don't take what Prez said as anything other than a compliment," Mike assured. "He's whacked out on codeine, but not blind."

Warmly smiling, KC wondered, "So... about this orgy?" Cracking up, Mike sat up on the railing and returned to playing normally and on his feet.

Behind where Marc and Danny were kicked back on lounge chairs, John, Wade, Frankie and Stephen arrived, lined up and holding hands. Seeing a new young boy, Richie and Dillon led the youngest boys over to say hello. Rather than yell over the loud music, John telepathically introduced all the kids to Wade. Surprising the boys, Wade waved and telepathically said hi to them all at once. Stephen, John and Frankie couldn't help giggling at the boys' shocked expressions. The four Steib brothers were thrilled that a boy younger than them was powerful enough to be heard by the entire group of boys. They invited Wade and Frankie to build sand castles with them. Getting nods of approval from John and Stephen, the boys ran down to the water line.

When the band finished the song, John sent to his fellow Core Rimmers, *'There's only two rooms left on the first floor of dorm three. Travis has a roommate now too; Erik Kendricks saw Travis unpacking. Travis saw Erik and there's an attraction there. That was all it took. Are we doing more adoptions today?'*

Jerry, AJ, Kaleo and Tory all answered affirmatively before Prez had a chance to say a word. Keith, Derrick and Mike cracked up. John led Stephen around to Danny, Marc, Jerry and the other members of the AI Division.

Stepping up to the microphone with a wide grin, Prez chuckled, "Okay, I brought my tricorder in case of emergencies. Adoptions aren't an emergency or work. We'll just play a few more songs, then we'll take a break, so others that might want to play can come up. We obviously have guitarists and drummers. I know of a keyboard player too, but who plays bass?"

"One of my security," Mike said. "Clay plays bass."

"I'll be taking some of the music classes you guys are teaching," Clay hollered.

Prez smiled, "Kewl. And we'll sit in whenever, and play more later." After a brief pause, Prez introduced, "Our next song is one Troy knew and shared with us. Y'all have heard 'Carry On Wayward Son' on the radio before, but this next tune is on the same disk. It's appropriately titled [What's On Your Mind](#), with Keith singing lead and Troy backing him up." Kaleo, Tory, Jerry and AJ sniggered and took playful jabs at each other, forgetting their first names and instead using daddy or poppa. Prez stepped back from the mic and Derrick counted off. All at once, the band started playing the song.

During the course of the song, Prez happened to notice John and Stephen going to the water line, where Wade and Frankie were playing with other boys.

John pointed at Frankie and Stephen then started taking his clothes off. Obviously, Wade was having a small problem wearing clothes and was uncomfortable getting naked, for the moment. The young family was simply reassuring Wade that he could keep his clothes on for as long as he liked. The other boys weren't saying anything upsetting to Wade or Frankie, but Wade could hear their thoughts and told Frankie, who called over his dad and pop to relieve Wade's concerns. John simply had boys of similar ages stand together.

Starting with Richie, Dillon, Geoff, Leonard, Marv, Russ and Mark Fikes, who were in the same age bracket as Wade, John proved that everybody was a little different inside and outside. Now aware of Wade's telepathy, all seven of the more comfortable young boys gave Wade a hug and apologized for making him feel out of place. Finishing up his lesson, John stood beside Jerry Owens. Jerry was almost two years older and two or three inches taller than John, but what was hanging between their legs was similar enough. Turning his youngest son around, John pointed at groups of teens, some of whom were dressed.

Platinum Habits finished the song they were playing, and then went directly into The Moody Blues tune, [The Voice](#). Keith extended the spacey synthesized string, bass and wind introduction then signaled to Derrick to count them off and get the band together. Strumming his Stratocaster with his effects unit set to simulate a twelve-string acoustic guitar, Troy stepped up to a microphone and sang lead vocals. At Troy's first break from singing, he spoke with Mike, because neither were satisfied with the tone of the twelve-string simulator.

While the band played the song, AJ and Jerry went to gather the Hunnicutt boys. Not only did those three boys bounce up out of the sand, but Marv Perkins, Leonard Santana, Stan Given, Russ Pass and Mark Fikes jumped up and followed AJ and Jerry toward the house. Five young boys surrounded Kaleo and Tory. At one point near the end of the song, Prez chuckled his background vocals. Tory cracked up. Softly sniggering, Kaleo locked eyes with Prez.

At the end of the song, all the band members and remaining Core Rimmers loudly laughed. Prez put his bass down and went inside the house to retrieve his tricorder. First to walk down the lanai steps, Keith locked eyes with Kaleo, chuckling, "Wasn't it just two

nights ago that you and Tory strongly implied you weren't ready for kids?"

"Yeah," Kaleo smiled, "but Archania made that more like nine days, and then Stan, Russ, Mark, Marv and Leonard made their interest very clear. They're already brothers. When we took them to the dorms for bedtime last night, five sets of puppy dog eyes attacked, and we caved."

Keith grinned down at the giggling boys, asking, "Did you guys do that?" Nodding, they all wore irresistible smiles and effortlessly reproduced the puppy dog eyes. Everyone gathering around softly sniggered.

"By the way," Tory giggled, "I think we'll be moving into a townhouse tomorrow."

Jerry chuckled, "Yeah, we'll be moving out of the dorm and into a townhouse tomorrow too."

Keith nodded, "We're expecting ninety-five of the Level two orphanage kids tomorrow. Rather than move and move again repeatedly, I guess we'll have to talk about which families are moving to the Oneula Base."

Walking down the lanai steps, Prez suggested, "Tomorrow, dudes. Unless some of you really want to talk about that, today's a day off to enjoy ourselves." Sean and Troy grabbed a kiss then joined the gathering group of Core Rimmers and their sons-to-be.

Derrick said, "We're staying the night here, with Keith and Prez and all our sons."

Seeing John, dressed again and approaching with his family, Prez pleaded, "Please say you're reconsidering and staying the night,

bro."

John smiled, "I'll tell ya what, it all depends on who might be in the nest tonight. If the nest is empty, we'll stay here."

Stephen nodded, "All the boys we picked up at Des Moines this morning, and the last few from yesterday, all decided to move into the dorm. Unless we get a call to pick up more later, we'll be kewl to stay here tonight."

AJ checked with the Hunnicutt boys; "What do you guys think; shall we stay here tonight?"

Mike Hunnicutt looked up and smiled, "Dillon, Geoff and Richie is here too. That'd be kewl, daddy."

Kenny Hunnicutt nodded, "Yeah, kewl. Gage, Sammy and Jonah will be here." Kenny checked with Leo, asking, "Are you stayin' here too, Leo?"

Leo checked with Drew and Corey. Corey nodded. Drew grinned, "As long as we don't have more kids to pick up, we'll stay the night." Nodding, Leo widely smiled at Kenny Hunnicutt.

Sammy giggled, "Sweet!" and then called, "Hey Pop, would it be kewl to set up a nest in the living room for us?"

"Sure," Prez answered, "later, you guys can nest there if you want." The growing group of Rimmer sons cheered. Once the sound dwindled, Prez smiled, "Arnold James Smithson and Jerold Hebda, our two newest Core Rimmers latched onto kids faster than any of us. Only because of circumstances have we waited this long to make it official. Do you two Mouth Rimmers want Shaun, Michael and Kenneth Hunnicutt as your sons?"

Almost simultaneously, AJ and Jerry answered, "We definitely do, Prez."

Glancing down at each of the three boys, Prez asked, "Shaun, Michael and Kenneth Hunnicutt, do you want AJ and Jerry as your fathers?"

Shaun asked, "Forever, right?" which made everyone nearby smile. Nobody laughed because Shaun really had asked a valid question, one that was expected from a four-year-old that had recently lost his parents.

Prez nodded, "Forever."

"Kewl," Shaun smiled.

Giggling, Kenny interpreted, "That counts as a yes. And I say yes too."

Six-year-old Mike Hunnicutt nodded, "Yep, I want them as dads." Looking up at AJ, Mike admitted, "I didn't even know your real name until now. Pop calls you Arnie, and jus' about ev'rybody else calls you AJ, and we call you daddy." He blinked, "How can you answer to so many names anyway?"

The entire group began chuckling and giggling. AJ smiled, "I'm used to it. Besides, your pop is the *only* one who calls me Arnie."

Still chuckling, Prez smiled, "And with that said, it's official, you're a family." He then moved over to Kaleo and Tory, sniggering, "Five at once, dudes? That's a new Rimmer record." Soft chuckling turned into loud laughter and the loudest were Danny, Marc and KC.

"Just wait until Cory and Sean give you the advanced course,"

Marc sniggered.

Kaleo giggled, "We want these five, living in a house together with us."

"Waking together, living through each day and then going home together," Tory smiled. "We learned from you dudes, it seems that more than one kid works better, for them and for us."

Prez nodded, "That's all been recorded, so asking the formal question is pointless." Glancing at each of the five boys, Prez asked, "Leonard Santana, Mark Fikes, Stanley Given, Russell Pass and Marvin Perkins, do you want Kaleo Palakiko and Tory Burgas as your fathers, and each other as brothers?"

One after another, each of the boys replied affirmatively. As soon as Prez announced it was official, Russ cheered, "Kewl! We gets to play with gorillas too!" causing another round of laughter.

Off to the side edge of the lawn watching were Reyes, Ryan and Paul. Ryan whispered to Reyes, "Would you want to adopt too?"

Reyes eyes almost jumped out their sockets. Shaking his head, Reyes softly giggled, "We have enough to decide and work on without going there, I think."

"True," Ryan smiled.

John, Stephen and Frankie brought Wade to Prez. Having only seen Wade and not spoken to him at all, Prez squatted down, preparing to introduce himself. The telepathic five-year-old didn't wait for Prez to say a word and quickly answered, "Hi Unca Prez, I'm Wade Houseman. You're daddy's big bro, huh?"

Looking around, Prez saw Stephen giggling, John holding it in

and Frankie cutely blinking. Prez smiled, "Yep, definitely a good choice for this family." Keith, Drew, Corey, Geoff, Lenny and Leo cracked up. Prez showed Wade the tricorder and explained, "This machine will store your voice. Tell it that you want John and Stephen as your fathers and Frankie as your big brother."

Wade leaned in toward the machine and said, "Uh huh. Yup, I want them cos they want me."

Prez asked, "Frankie, are you ready for a little brother?"

Frankie nodded, "Wade's kewl, Uncle Prez. Yes, I want him." Wade smiled up at his new brother and suddenly lunged, wrapping Frankie in a tight embrace.

Prez confirmed that John and Stephen wanted Wade as their son, and then announced it was official. Again, the entire group present applauded and cheered. John levitated his newest son and slowly spun him around, causing Wade to squeal and laugh.

On another area of the lawn, the Steib quadruplets surrounded Derrick, wondering if he would be their big brother too someday. Derrick smiled, "I'd love that, guys. Tomorrow, when we go back home, we're going tell my mom and dad, and then Uncle Prez can make it official. All you have to do is decide for sure that's what you want." Mike noticed Derrick's newest brothers a few meters behind his husband, obviously paying close attention to the discussion.

Right then and there, Kelly checked with his other three mirror images. "Is Derrick our big bro or our dad?"

Lawrence scowled, "Big brother, I think."

"Yeah," Mattie nodded, "I want Sung, Kawazoe, Herbie and

Chad as brothers."

Nick hummed then nodded and smiled, "Yeah, their mom and dad is real nice. I think that's the way to go too."

"Tomorrow then, dudes," Derrick promised, "as soon as we can, we'll make us brothers."

"Kewl," all four chanted.

Noticing the other Core Rimmers were gathering around Keith and Prez, Mike tapped Derrick and tilted his head in that direction. The Steib quadruplets were heading off to the shoreline with the other boys anyway, so Mike and Derrick went to find out what was happening. They heard Kaleo saying, "Does it really matter where any of us live, Prez? We could get to the Command Center in no time anyway."

"And school's starting Monday," Tory added. "Even if we give the newbies time off from school, like we've had, they can still come to Ewa Beach."

John told Prez, "Mom and Dad had interviews today. You know about Mrs. Diaz, but they just had a teleconference call, with a Doctor Metzger from Starfleet, that Sean and Troy met in California. We'll assign him to Oneula, so there's a staff growing there, including chefs and housekeepers."

Prez sighed, "You dudes know the deal; I just don't want anybody thinking they can't approach me. The first few days on base, when kids were barely saying more than hello to me, drove me to playing Pissed Off Chickens. I don't want *anyone ever* feeling separated, and that includes all of you."

Keith reminded, "Comm-badges are ordered. We'll get them

passed out to the kids tomorrow." He then tapped his sub-vocal, asking, "Alden, what's the status of the request for the Rimmers dimensional doors?"

Alden replied, "Stevie will answer that, Keith."

Into the sub-vocals of all the Core Rimmers, Stevie answered, "A minor modification was made, due to the refugees using bases on Hawaii, Maui and Kauai. Dimensional doors at those three bases won't be installed until after the refugees leave the bases. The doors at Ewa Beach and Oneula will be installed tomorrow. Rylan, who is currently leading dispatch for the Archivist from the Ark Compound, is coordinating all the installations."

"Thanks, Stevie," Keith said, and then assured the group, "We're kewl for ninety-five newbies tomorrow. The newbies that want to nest can join the basement nest at Ewa Beach."

Prez smiled, "Okay, so AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory will set up townhomes at Oneula for their families. We'll do the usual orientations and trip to the store at Ewa Beach. Once that's done, all of us will help make the Oneula Beach base their home."

"We'll have another concert for the newbies," Troy suggested.

Nodding, Tory agreed, "That worked really well. That's why our boys were so ready to be adopted into a family."

Drew said, "We took a group of newbies to dorm three this morning. A bunch of the kids from level one orphanages came there too, to help welcome those newbies. It was very kewl to watch."

Having already forgotten something due to codeine, Prez wondered, "How many rooms are still available?"

"Only two on the first floor," Stephen answered. "The whole second floor is empty."

Prez called, "Alden, statistically speaking, are we kewl to make that entire dorm for boys only?"

"I think so, Prez," Alden replied. "Our Battle Of Earth intake were all boys, so we're near seventy-percent male at the dorms. Of the ninety-five expected tomorrow, that group is two-thirds boys. Eighty level three kids will be here later next week and they're split at the same percentage. Comparatively speaking, it approximates recent population statistics."

AJ grinned, "I didn't know you kept track of all that stuff, Prez."

Prez nodded, "I've been given a lot of resources. The more I know, the better I can allocate those resources. My only real concerns now are the refugees occupying three of our bases. How long will they be there? Will I need to move any of them elsewhere, so we can have the space for kids that need the space?"

Alden interrupted, "I'm sorry guys, but Jimmy in the command center wants to speak with Keith or Prez."

Prez instructed, "Patch Jimmy in to all of us, Alden."

"Guys, we just had three kids walk-up to our North Road gate," Jimmy said into the Rimmers' sub-vocals. "The oldest is one of the boys that was here in the Command Center on Thursday."

Opening his eyes wide, Keith wondered, "Has he said what he wants?"

"Not directly," Jimmy answered, "but the other two have suitcases. They're younger than your classmate, and if I were to guess,

I'd say they're brothers."

Keith told Prez, "Since you're only able to wear a shower wrap, let me handle this." Prez nodded and grinned. Keith told Jimmy, "Give me a few minutes to throw my clothes on, Jimmy. I'll transport directly to the North Road gate."

"Kewl," Jimmy replied, "thanks, Keith."

"I'll be back as soon as I can," Keith said, and started jogging toward the house. John hurried after Keith. Never slowing his pace, Keith entered the house wondering, "What're you doing, bro?"

"I'm going with you," John answered. "I felt you, Prez, Derrick and Mike all get concerned because of that call. What happened Thursday made you angry enough, so I want to check these dudes myself."

Stopping at the living room, where there were piles of clothes, Keith huffed, "Part of me wants to argue, but you're right, it's a good idea." He searched the piles for his boardies and T-shirt, and asked, "You and Stephen are kewl?"

John smiled, "We're excellent, bro. Stephen was empathic enough when he got here. Alone together, we're figuring everything out and having the best times. I officially take back everything I ever said about you and Prez, and Drew and Corey. Just like Stephen, Frankie's a little empath who gets telepathic around me. Wade's a strong telepath for five-year-old. My family may be young, but we're just as kewl as you older dudes."

Pausing as Keith stood to dress, John grinned, "I did quick scans of AJ, Jerry and all three Hunnicutts. I'm certain that's an awesome match too. The kids have made AJ and Jerry even closer, and they'd fiercely protect their sons. Knowing that they have a family again, the

kids have lost all their worries. All that remains are memories of good times with their original parents, and high hopes of more good times with AJ and Jerry. For the Hunnicutts and Leo, this day at the beach house is awesome. With far fewer people around, they can really get to know their new dads and all our sons."

Keith checked, "What do you think of AJ and Jerry?"

"They're very kewl," John smiled. "Imagine if you and Prez were both orphans, but still got to know each other, then got separated and reunited. At eleven-years-old, they were separated when Jerry was fostered. When they saw one another again, after Joel's teams rescued them, they all but jumped for joy. They're a perfect fit for our team too. Neither is thinking that they can't do the job. As a matter of fact, they're really glad and like the idea of being communications officers. Finding the Hunnicutts the way they did made what was good totally awesome."

Fully dressed, Keith scowled for a moment then reached a hand into his shorts to brush away some uncomfortable sand grains. John giggled, "I hate that too."

Keith smirked, "It don't get any better as you get older either. One minute it's like, hey, that feels pretty good and you pop a bone, then it's not so good and ya shrivel up. Pickin' sand out of your foreskin and pubes sucks." John howled laughing and nodded. Tapping his sub-vocal, Keith grinned, "Alden, take us to the North Road gate."

In a blink, John and Keith were standing outside the security station. Chaz and Billy came out to greet them. Beyond the gate and the shield, Keith saw Alec Triggs, the junior that had been amongst the group harassing them at school Thursday. It was Alec who specifically asked about gays in the Clan. With Alec were two

younger boys; one was about twelve-years-old and the other about ten-years-old. All three were definitely brothers. John recognized the younger of the two from his school, but they were in different classes. Keith nodded at Chaz and said, "Let 'em in, bro."

The steel gate rose and the shield portal opened. All three walked the base driveway and stopped before John and Keith. Alec smirked, "Bet you didn't think you'd see me again."

Keith shrugged, "Not this soon, that's for sure."

Alec nodded and softly said, "I'm not homophobic, Keith. The truth is, I was fishing for information. My parents are good people, and they're not particularly homophobes, but they don't understand it. They think it's a phase they'll grow out of. Because of that, they're trying to steer my two brothers in their preferred direction. If it's a phase, only my brothers can figure that out, not my folks."

Keith mutely checked with John. John nodded once at Keith, signaling that everything Alec said was true. Keith asked, "So your brothers aren't being abused. What's the deal?"

Alec sighed, "It's like they're limited, who they can hang out with, where, and for how long." He placed a hand on the taller of the two boys and prompted, "Theo, introduce yourself to Keith and tell him what happened before school started back in September."

Reaching forward to shake hands with Keith and then John, Theo Triggs introduced himself as Theodore, then said, "I had this friend over the summer. We were just getting to know each other, and things got pretty... uh... hot, I guess." Alec grinned and the other younger boy giggled. Blushing, Theo smirked, "It was kewl between us and getting better, but then I said the wrong thing on the phone with him, not knowing my folks were home and could hear, so no

sleepovers with him any more. And since I couldn't even go out if our parents thought I might be with him, he's moved on and it's over. I just feel angry a lot, at him, at my folks, with just about everyone."

Placing his hand on the other brother's shoulder, Alec said, "This is Bradley. I know and love both my brothers, Keith. Brad's going in the same direction as Theo, so he's already been restricted most of this school year. He can participate in sports and school clubs, where he's supervised, but the rest of the time, he's grounded more often than he's free. I'm taking a big chance, with my folks having a fit and all, but really, this is the right thing for everybody at home. My brothers would be happier here, discovering themselves and maybe being themselves for the first time in a long time."

Glancing around Alec, Theo and Brad, Keith explained, "What we have here are violations of the Safe Haven Act, section twelve-dot-two, subsection 'C', and a loose interpretation of section sixteen-dot-one, subsection 'B'. No matter what your parents might think, restricting social interactions, which are normal for most all boys around ten- or twelve-years-old, is defined as wrong. I don't have grounds to arrest your parents. We do have sufficient grounds to take custody of Brad and Theo."

Brad and Theo nodded and then grinned at each other. Alec asked, "Where do we stand, and what do I need to do, Keith?"

Holding up his index finger to signal a pause, Keith then tapped his comm-badge and called, "Mom?"

A moment later, Jen replied, "Yes, Keith?"

"I'm at the North Road gate with John, and a schoolmate and his brothers," Keith explained, and then outlined the Safe Haven Act infractions. He asked, "Do we have standard paperwork prepared? If

we do, we might be able to put this situation to rest today."

"John's been keeping me in the loop, so I'm filling out the form now, Keith," Jen answered. After a few moments of typing, Jen asked, "John's given me the names of the subjects, but are there any family members to be allowed visitation rights?"

Keith gave his mother the subject name of Alec Triggs as allowed visitation rights. There were sounds of more tapping keys, the whir of a laser printer, pages printing and then silence. Thinking he had been disconnected, Keith scowled for a moment.

Jen Hundser placed a hand on Keith's shoulder, causing Keith to jump in place. John cracked up, pushing Brad and Theo to giggles. Jen grinned, "Now you know how I feel when I see you disappearing and reappearing twenty times a day."

Keith smiled and gestured to each of the three boys, saying, "Mom, this is Alec Triggs, and his two brothers, Brad and Theo. Dudes, this is my mom, Jennifer Hundser, Director of Pacific Rim Division Federation Youth Services."

Stepping forward, Jen greeted each of the three boys then focused on Alec. She asked, "Do you believe that you'll be safe when you return home, Alec?"

Rapidly nodding, Alec said, "Our parents haven't ever laid a hand on us, Mrs. Hundser. The worst I expect is some yelling, and I might get grounded for a week or two, but ya know, I don't care about that. Brad and Theo matter way more. Them being here and happier is all that matters."

Jen smiled, "All big brothers should feel the same. If at any time your freedoms are unreasonably infringed upon, as in the cases of your brothers, call us on the toll-free number or come back again."

When Alec nodded, Jen showed him the pages she was holding and explained, "The first page is the summary. The next pages are explanations of the two Safe Haven Act sections infringed upon. If your parents think they can get this overturned, tell them to save their efforts and money. Months of restrictions on children is not acceptable, and most certainly not because boys are experimenting sexually with other boys."

Alec nodded and smiled, "I know it's true. I was there too." Completely surprised, Brad and Theo gasped and glared up at their big brother. "What?" Alec sniggered, and explained, "First of all, it was exactly that, convenient experimentation. Secondly, it was enough for me to say, nope, never again. I've heard both of you whispering at night. There's attractions that you two have that I don't. I still understand completely where you're at. You need to find the answers. Dad and mom can't find them for you, and shouldn't be preventing you from searching. Waiting until you're adults won't cut the mustard, in this case."

Jen nodded and seriously said, "Alec has complete freedom to come visit you two boys anytime he'd like. He's shown and proved maturity that your parents haven't." She then warmly smiled at Alec, saying, "I hope to see you again and often."

"Yes, ma'am, I'm sure you will," Alec smiled. "It might not be for a week or two, but I will be here. If my parents decide to get nasty and keep grounding me, I may just walk over here saying, enough is enough, and stay." He paused then locked eyes with Keith, grinning, "You said you take straights, right?"

Shrugging, Keith chuckled, "We'll make an exception for you, dude. If you happen to switch sides though, you can't complain about it." All five boys softly sniggered.

Rolling her eyes, Jen sighed, "So much for maturity. Boys are always boys, no matter which side of the fence they play on."

"We're wrapped up nice and neat, mom," Keith smiled.

John suggested, "Stephen, me, and our boys can show Brad and Theo around, introduce them and get them settled in a dorm room, bro. While I'm here, I'll take care of our Founder family, and get them set in a condo too."

Keith nodded but reminded, "Come back to the beach house when you're done. You heard our kids, they're all looking forward to spending the night together."

John nodded, "Kewl," and then waved Brad and Theo forward, saying, "Let's drop those suitcases off at a dorm room first." Jen joined the boys for the walk, but instead of going to the dormitory, she would go home.

Theo asked John, "Weren't you going to call some other guys?"

"I have already," John grinned. Jen smirked at John. Raising his eyebrows and stopping in his tracks for a moment, John giggled, "Here they come." A second later, Stephen, Frankie and Wade materialized before them.

Theo looked at his surprised little brother, sniggering, "I'm gonna like it here."

Smiling widely, Brad rapidly nodded. Stephen stepped forward, said, "Hi," to the two newbies, then reached for a kiss from John. Brad gasped.

Taking Stephen's hand, John grinned, "Yeah, I recognized you too, Brad. It's a small town. I didn't know for sure I was gay until I

met Stephen. Now Stephen's my husband, and we have two awesome boys."

Back near the North Road gate, Keith shook hands and knocked knuckles with Alec, happily admitting, "You surprised me."

"You know how it is, appearances at school?" Alec grinned. "Some motives may have been as they seemed, but in my case, I was testing and confirming what Prez said on TV. I learned more than I expected, being transported here, and then learning you guys were married and had sons. That clearly told me this is where my brothers need to be; around good examples of gay couples."

Keith confirmed, "Are you sure that you'll be okay at home?"

Alec smirked, "I told the vice-principal what the deal was, so I don't have detention. Two weeks grounded at home will be a break I could enjoy. It's worth it as long as my brothers have a life."

"We work to make sure all the kids get the best opportunities," Keith explained. "They could even work their way into Starfleet someday. All they have to do is decide what they want and work towards the goal. Let us know if you need anything, Alec."

Nodding, Alec promised, "No sweat," and turned to go toward the gate. The steel bars rose and the shield portal opened, allowing Alec to leave and return home.

Before returning to the beach house and party, Keith decided to go round up some more family members, including Bruce. While walking toward the pools, Keith had a perfectly wicked idea; he would see who Bruce was playing with and bring some adoptable boys back too, specifically for Sean and Troy.

Back at the Keoneuli Beach house, Danny Page and Joey were

playing drums; KC was playing lead guitar. And Clay, one of Mike Gibbons' security guys, was playing bass guitar. They were jamming a loose version of Heartbreaker, by Led Zeppelin. Prez was out on the lawn, monitoring the PA system and listening when Keith appeared beside him with Bruce, Ben and more boys. The boys immediately dashed for the beach, losing clothes along the way.

Seeing Ben and Bruce heading their way, Sammy, Gage and Jonah immediately jogged up the shore to them. The latter three hugged the two new arrivals. While Ben and Gage were close together, Ben whispered, "Hey, would you be angry if I said that I really like Sammy a lot?"

Giggling, Gage softly replied, "Not a bit. He likes you too, dude. Go for it!" Pulling back and locking eyes with Gage, Ben got confirmation it was true from Gage's nodding head and giggles.

After a quick kiss, Keith began telling Prez about Alec and his two younger brothers, and then shared his idea; "I found Bruce with Ben and the four boys from St. Joseph. Since Bruce is destined to be a Core Rimmer, and Ben is Mike's brother, I thought they needed to be here. The other four are already tuned in. They're all wanting to stay together and be adopted into one family. Since Troy and Sean need nudges to get with the program..."

"Perfect!" Prez loudly laughed.

Keith smiled and nodded, "Billy's eleven, Jason is nine, Scott is six and Jimmy is five. Seeing them with Bruce, who's from Ohio, I figured, okay, and Troy's from the American northeast too."

"You're a genius, babe. They were all together anyway, so half the battle is won."

Keith turned Prez around and pointed out to the bay. They saw

Billy Whitmore swimming out to the surfers, with Jason a body length behind, and both were going directly for Sean and Troy.

Down at the beach, a group of younger boys were back building their sand castle. Included in the group were the two younger Hunnicutts, the Steibs, all five of Kaleo's and Tory's sons, Dillon, Randy, Geoff, Lenny, and Richie. The kids had a huge sand castle under construction. Dee was learning the finer points of toy dune-buggy racing from Conner. Out in the bay, the remainder of the AI Division and security teams were on surfboards. Also out there were Corey, Drew, Leo, AJ, Jerry, Kenny Hunnicutt, Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Troy, Mike, Derrick, Paul, Ryan and Reyes. The surf was perfect for beginners and the more advanced surfers to enjoy themselves. Wading and swimming together, off to the side and in shallow water, were Sammy, Gage, Jonah, Ben, Bruce, Sung, Kawazoe, Herbert and Chad.

Yells of "Oh, jeez!" and "Wait!" were followed by laughter as Billy and Jason tried to join Troy and Sean on their respective boards. In seconds, with almost everyone watching, Sean and Troy were sliding off their boards into the water with the boys, and the surfboards were popping up into the air. It brought the music to an abrupt halt and everyone around the beach howled laughing.

Scrambling to catch the surfboards, Sean and Troy got 'help' from Billy and Jason. Since Sean, Troy, Billy and Jason weren't managing very well, only slipping off the boards with more giggling and laughter, Lakota, Jeremy, Leo and Gary paddled over to offer assistance. The two gorillas, Leo and Gary, reached down and swept up Jason and Billy onto their boards. Moments later, Lakota and Jeremy held the two surfboards steady for Troy and Sean to climb onto again. At the next fair swell, they all returned to the shore.

Scott and Jimmy ran up to their brothers from Michigan. Scott giggled, "From here, that was too funny." Jimmy went to Gary and

held his arms up. The gorilla took the hint and lifted the small boy.

Billy widely grinned, "It was fun too."

Troy smiled, "Thank goodness none of us got hurt."

"It might've helped if we had bungees connecting us to our boards," Sean sniggered.

Swinging his arms around, pointing at Troy's, Sean's and his brothers' crotches, Jason giggled, "Hey, perfect matches!" Softly chortling, Troy and Sean noticed what Jason was referring to; of the four boys, two were uncircumcised and two were circumcised. Desperately trying not to crack up, Troy turned beet red and covered his eyes. Jason giggled, "Wassamatta, pop?"

Billy grinned at the two confused teens, and then shyly explained, "Me and my bros have been around more than a lot of other kids. We've even been filmed. Those movies have been taken and destroyed, thanks to the Clan. Don't be embarrassed, okay?"

From his perch on Gary, Jimmy giggled, "We all got dicks, even the gorillas."

Scott nodded agreement and shared, "We know what we want too."

Raising his blond eyebrows, Sean wondered, "What's that mean, guys?"

Looking up at Troy and then Sean, Jason giggled, "We've been watching you!"

Noticing only confusion on Sean's and Troy's expressions, Billy nudged his younger brother, chuckling, "Let me handle this, doofus!"

He then softly told the two teens, "Yeah, we've been watching a lot of you, all our leaders, and how they act with their kids too. We were forced to do stuff we didn't want, and all you guys know that, but we can see that all you guys really love each other. It shows all the time."

Rapidly blinking, Troy asked, "How old are you, Billy?"

"Eleven, and I know I like boys more than girls."

"Me too," Jason chimed.

Scott and Jimmy chorused, "Us too."

Scrunching his nose, Billy complained, "Ladies smell funny, and they sure don't know how to treat a dick."

"Yeah," Jimmy added, "fingernails!" and shivered in Gary's arm.

Everyone in the small group softly sniggered. Returning to his prior topic, Billy gently smiled, "We want dads, ones that won't want to mess with us, cos they've got each other; ones that can show and teach us how to find and keep *real* boyfriends. Some of that stuff, we'll learn just by watching you." His smile faded and he firmly reminded, "In another year or so, *I'm* gonna be sprouting pubes. A year after that, *I'm* a teenager. I'll want a boyfriend, someone that looks at me like when you two look at each other. Someone that makes me feel all goofy, *without* touching my dick."

"We want *real* fathers," Jason seriously offered, "not grumpy old men who only smile when we mess with them or each other. The four of us learned stuff in the wrong order. In two days in the Clan, we're seeing more of the right stuff than we ever saw before. How you guys are the way you are is the big question. I can't wait to learn the answer."

Having been in the same shoes as the boys, Sean easily absorbed all that was said. However, Troy's heart was shredded into five even chunks; one for Sean and one for each of the boys surrounding him. Troy knew the facts about many of the Rimmer rescued kids, but now he felt a deep desire to do something about it again, as he had Wednesday night, when he aimed a phaser at a cretin that deserved to die. Anger, compassion and fear were only the tip of what Troy felt. Without delay, Troy went to Sean and hid his face on his Tiger's shoulder. Already understanding what Troy was feeling, Sean gently rubbed Troy's back. Now that he had the reassurance and safety he needed, Troy quietly sobbed.

For Scott, Jason and Billy, the three boys on the ground, the most remarkable thing was two teenaged boys holding each other so closely, but neither had an erection. They glanced at each other, wordlessly conveying confusion.

From Gary's arm, Jimmy loudly wondered, "Wha's wrong?"

"I think pop's crying," Jason frowned.

Rubbing his Lover's back, Sean assured, "It's okay, guys. Troy needs a minute, that's all."

"Lemme down," Jimmy told Gary. Once on the ground, Jimmy ran to Troy and wrapped his little arms around one of Troy's legs, in an attempt to give a hug. Scott followed Jimmy's lead and embraced Troy's other leg. Jason and Billy moved closer to the group. Sean reached an arm out and pulled Billy up against himself and Troy. Feeling the extra body on one side and a cool breeze from the shore on the other side, Troy lifted his face and guided Jason around to fill that space. Troy didn't realize what his tears were provoking, but Sean and the four boys knew it immediately; they were caring about and

for one another.

After a few minutes like this, during which time Prez had already picked up his tricorder, and Keith happily watched his weakly constructed plan fall perfectly into place, Sean playfully asked the four boys, "Who's your daddy?"

Billy, Jason, Scott and Jimmy hollered "You are, dad!"

Troy cracked up at Sean's question and the enthusiastic reply from the boys. His laughter shifted to more tears briefly, but as soon as the boys hugged him tighter again, they quickly dissipated. Lifting his face again and glancing down and around, Troy confirmed, "You really want us for fathers?"

Jimmy, Scott and Jason quickly said yes. Billy smiled, "Ya know, this morning, I think we could've become sons of any of the Core Rimmers. This right here makes it perfect. There are no other choices anymore." He checked with his brothers, "Right guys?" Again, the other three happily agreed.

Wiping his eyes, Troy nodded and then suggested, "Before we make this real and forever, let's have a pre-family, family meeting."

"Yeah," Sean agreed, "you guys need to know us and we need to know about you too."

"Kewl," Jason grinned, already overflowing with enthusiasm.

Titling his head, Billy carefully wondered, "Do you think we'll change our minds?"

Troy gasped, "I really hope not."

Sean explained, "Me and Troy started our relationship with

hours of talking. We're just going to have a short chat, to get to know each other. It'll make us closer and a real family in the long run."

Stepping back from Sean, Troy told their security team, "It's kewl, guys. Give us a little time and we'll be back soon."

The gorillas nodded and grinned, and returned to their surfboards. Lakota smiled and Jeremy said, "Very kewl." Watching the new family head toward the house, Lakota and Jeremy decided to take a walk down the beach toward the waterfall.

Noticing Prez was ready, holding the tricorder, Troy smiled, "Keep that nearby, Prez. We just need a few minutes to chat."

Widely smiling, Prez nodded, "Take an upstairs bedroom, dudes." As the group was passing, Keith winked at the two closest boys.

Sean loudly giggled, "I saw that, Keith!" All four boys began giggling.

Snapping his neck looking to and fro, Troy asked, "Saw what?"

"Our boys will tell you when we're alone," Sean giggled. "And then I can foresee four very pink bellies." Jason happened to be nearest and most convenient for Sean to tickle. The nine-year-old yelped and ran up the lanai steps, with his other three brothers following.

Once the new family was indoors, Prez asked Keith, "How'd you know?"

"I didn't really know," Keith admitted. "Like I said, they were with Bruce and Ben. Since they're newbies, I asked them if they were interested in being adopted. When they said yes, I listed each set of

available parents, starting with Troy and Sean and ending with them, mentioning that they were completely available and hadn't adopted yet. I also considered the boys' ages. Since Troy and Sean aren't so sure, I thought an eleven-year-old and a nine-year-old could look after the six-year-old and the five-year-old. Troy and Sean get the complete picture. The four boys get two great fathers. Everything else we saw happening was all them interacting." Noticing a twinkle in Prez's blue eyes, Keith excitedly giggled, "I did good?"

Slowly nodding and placing the tricorder down on the table near the mixer, Prez reminded, "Since Archmania, I think we're pretty even again."

"You might even be ahead of me again," Keith cheekily grinned.

Taking Keith's hand and leading the way to the house, Prez said, "Easily rectumfied."

Giggling, Keith asked, "Are you ready for that?"

Prez waited until they were inside and alone to softly answer, "Missionary, with your legs wrapped around my buns would be uncomfortable, but there's other ways I can manage quite easily." Starting to climb the steps, Keith whimpered. Prez grinned, "And this house has a nice big whirlpool tub we can easily fit in afterward."

Keith leered, "Additional incentive wasn't necessary, but since you mentioned it..." He started taking steps two at a time and pulling Prez along with him.

Just returning from a ride with Paul and Ryan, Reyes saw his two dads hop off their boards at the shoreline, drop them on the beach, and race toward the house. Sputtering and trying to hold back his laughter, Reyes caught Ryan widely smiling at him. On the opposite side, Paul attempted to hide his grin and suspiciously glared.

Pushed over the edge, Reyes loudly laughed, "WH-HA-AT?"

Sadly shaking his head, Paul paddled around to his brother. Paul told Ryan, "I think we have a problem, bro."

Nodding, Ryan giggled, "There are several ways to correct this problem." Without warning, both brothers pushed down hard on Reyes' surfboard, tilting it and knocking Reyes off balance. They released the board and it bounced back, throwing Reyes into the water. Reyes got even with Paul by jumping up and onto the back of his board, tossing Paul into the water. Laughing his ass off, Ryan caught a wave and escaped.

Two riderless boards drifted toward the beach while Paul and Reyes playfully dunked and fought each other. Running into deeper water, Jerry Owens flagged down Ryan. When Ryan approached, Jerry giggled, "Is everything okay, bro?"

Nodding, Ryan chuckled, "It's these Rimmers. We've been here about four hours. Twice we saw Prez and Keith go in the house, and they were soon followed by Mike and Derrick. We've witnessed adoptions of nine kids into three families, and there's another adoption of four sure to happen. These Rimmers eat and then have sex, they adopt and then have sex, they play music and go have sex!"

Jerry cracked up. He breathlessly asked, "Do you want to leave?"

"No!" Ryan giggled, and then quickly retracted it, loudly laughing, "YES!" Throwing his arms up, Ryan softly chortled, "Damned if I know. All I do know is that I need to pee."

An unexpected wave knocked Jerry over. Ryan grabbed his board and went to get the other two. Danny Page and Marc Furst rode a wave to shore. Hearing Jerry's hysterical laughter, Danny wondered,

"What's so funny?"

Jerry couldn't respond at all through his laughter. Splashing over in knee deep water, with Jonah following along, Gage answered, "It's our dads."

Jonah smiled, "Two couples of four very close friends who grew up together."

"Oh, that," Danny grinned. Sneaking a few tickles in on Jerry, Danny giggled, "I thought it was something funny." Giggling at Danny's tickle attack, Gage and Jonah hurried away and dove into deeper water before they got tickled.

Marc smirked, "That's cute, not funny." Pausing at Jerry's wide eyes, Marc grinned, "Be careful kid genius, I think it's time for you to get a partner too. Then you'll know the difference between cute and funny."

Even from a few meters away, Danny could tell that Ryan's gears were spinning. Thankfully, Paul and Reyes were body-surfing back to shore. Knowing that there was nothing he could say to any of the three that would make anything easier for them, Danny took hold of Jerry's arm and led him to the beach, rambling, "New lovers are cute. In the case of Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike, you're seeing four teenagers that intimately know each other. Without saying it directly, they're proving what I assumed; they learned everything together. I see four boys that are completely comfortable with each other. I don't need to know more than that. As for your brothers and Reyes, you need to take that same perspective, Jerry. None of us really know what's between them."

Watching Paul, Ryan and Reyes walking together toward the house, Jerry grinned, "Three together though, Danny?"

Danny shrugged, "Difficult, but not impossible. All you might accomplish going forward is making it more difficult. You don't want to do that to Paul or Ryan, do you?"

"Course not," Jerry sighed. "They've just been so happy."

Marc nodded, "We all see that too. Reyes is their best friend in the world, right now. Without our intervention, they made that choice. By calling them boyfriends now, before they're ready, you could impact their decision."

"I still can't get over the idea of a threesome," Jerry grinned.

Marc shrugged, "Were we on the streets for twenty years, or in an orphanage getting sexually abused, and zapped by a Cynthetilife unit? We're not them, Jerry. It's that simple; with Reyes and your bros, and with the Rimmers."

Since their little group of swimmers seemed to be breaking into smaller groups, Ben asked Sammy, "Go for a walk with me?"

Sammy's heart jumped in his chest. He rapidly agreed and nodded.

Although Ben already had positive feedback from Gage and Jonah, Ben had no idea how to ask the question he wanted to ask. They walked out of the water and many paces before Ben turned and smiled at Sammy. Sammy was a little taller than Ben and in a lot better physical shape. Sammy's blond hair and dark green eyes were major attractions too, but Ben found Sammy's entire personality as attractive as anything else he could see. The problem was that Ben had been part of the original eighty-seven sexually abused kids and Sammy showed up the prior Sunday night. Sammy didn't press Ben by asking any questions. They were together and that was enough for both boys. While walking, the boys began sharing their feelings and

other observations that had previously been kept very private.

Out in the bay, Gage and Jonah just rode a wave that flipped and tossed them around a little bit. Laughing hysterically, they knelt down in barely a foot of water. Catching his breath, Jonah cheered, "Now that was a wild ride!"

Rapidly nodding, Gage giggled, "Jonah?"

"Yeah?" Jonah widely smiled.

Gage's smile faded slightly, but then he gestured back out at the waves, asking, "Again?"

With a nod of Jonah's head, they got up and ran back out as far they could then dove into an oncoming wave. They went out almost as far as the surfers and watched their right side. When the surfers started paddling into the cresting wave, they waited for the wave to reach them and then swam like crazy. In seconds, they didn't need to paddle and were caught in the water's power. Trying to keep their bodies streamlined, so they could finish the entire ride, they unexpectedly crashed into each other and started tumbling out of control again. Two heads collided. Powerless during the remaining seconds, Gage's left arm and Jonah's right leg scraped the sandy bottom. Moments later, they were in only about a half-meter of water and popped up laughing, "OW!"

Hearing the two boys from his surfboard, KC turned toward them. Seeing their wide smiles, and hearing their giggles, KC chuckled and paddled back out again.

Jonah giggled, "We slammed into each other!"

"Did I hurt you?" Gage sniggered, and inspected his arm.

Shaking his head, Jonah smiled, "Bonking heads wasn't the problem. Your arm looks like hamburger and my leg feels like a palm tree trunk too."

Nodding, Gage grinned, "Time out to check with the nearest doctor."

Standing together, they both hollered, "Reyes!" and waded to the beach.

Out on the lanai, sitting at a table, having sodas and snacks with Paul and Ryan, Reyes stood and looked out at the beach. Watching Jonah limping up the beach with Gage at his side, Reyes sighed. He told Paul and Ryan what was going on and then jumped the lanai railing. Grabbing Prez's tricorder, Reyes ran down the beach. Paul and Ryan hurried after Reyes. Without intending to, Gage and Jonah also got Danny's and Marc's attention. They broke off their conversation with Jerry and hurried to check the two bleeding boys. Soon, Gage and Jonah were surrounded by six others.

Jonah giggled, "Jeez, guys. We're not dying."

"Just give us some Band-aids and we're back to riding the waves," Gage sniggered.

Fully in medic mode, Reyes checked the tricorder readings, telling Jonah, "First we wash the sand out of the wounds, then we scan again, then the topical antibiotics and bandages."

Inspecting Gage's arm with his own tricorder, Marc nodded, "Same here, sand in the scrapes."

Reyes tapped his sub-vocal, ordering, "Alden, transport Jonah and Gage into a shower." Before either boy could say a word, they

were standing in one of the second floor bathroom tubs.

Jonah impatiently huffed, "Dammit! We're scraped and bleeding a little bit."

"I know," Gage grumbled. "This is nothin' to be so worried about."

Two wash cloths wafted down from near the ceiling. Alden said, "You'll need those, guys. A word of warning; if you don't clean the scrapes right the first time, Marc or Reyes are talking about doing it again for you."

Jonah gasped, "Shit! I can't see half of what I scraped."

Contorting his neck to see his arm and shoulder, Gage scowled, "Same here, dude."

Blushing, Jonah grinned, "I can be such a wimp too. Reyes will only do what he has to, but I'll be a baby in front of everyone."

Gage's blush was only slightly less than Jonah's. Nodding, Gage admitted, "I wouldn't be much better, if at all."

Turning on the water to warm, Jonah suggested, "Well, we each do what we can, then we can help each other."

"Umm... uh..." Gage stammered, and then thoughtfully hummed.

Facing Gage again, Jonah wondered, "What's wrong?"

Flushing even redder, Gage giggled, "A lot! I like you, Jonah."

"I know you like me," Jonah giggled. "I like you too, which is

why we wind up doing stuff together, here and at Archnesia too."

Becoming flustered, Gage emphatically stated, "I like you so much that I want to be with you all the time. It's not like we're not together a lot on and off during the days anyway, but I want more time with you. I've wanted to say that since Archnesia, but couldn't find a way to. But now..."

Jonah waited for Gage to finish before softly asking, "Why now?"

Covering most of his face, except his eyes, Gage giggled, "Because I would love to help you clean your leg, and I'd love for you to help me clean my arm, but if I start touching you, and you start touching me, we're... I'm gonna... it's..." He rolled his eyes at his inability to say what he needed, and abruptly huffed, "We're gonna be in here for a long time."

Not knowing what Gage had tried to say, and wondering if his own orphanage experiences were clouding the issue, Jonah rapidly blinked, which only made Gage stare and giggle louder. Jonah turned around and checked the water temperature, finding it a little cooler than he would normally like, and then switched on the shower. Facing Gage again, Jonah asked, "You like me?"

Gage nodded, "Very much."

Jonah hummed, and then asked, "Like boyfriends like each other?"

"I think so," Gage smiled, "even though I don't know what having a boyfriend is like. When I imagine it, I imagine having fun with you." Bending down to pick up the two wash cloths and conveniently hiding his face, Gage quickly corrected, "Regular fun,

like at the pools or the beach, not like sex fun, okay?"

Taking one of the wash cloths, Jonah repeated, "Regular fun. Like best friends."

Gage nodded and smiled, "We're already best friends. What I guess I want is to be there when you need or deserve a hug." Gage enthusiastically giggled, "That idea makes me feel all whacky and dizzy, dude."

Smirking, Jonah giggled, "I make you feel dizzy, huh?"

Nodding, Gage laughed, "Hug me and see for yourself. It happens every time you brush past me. When I fall to the floor of the tub, you'll have to wake me and tell me what happened."

Reaching his arms out, Jonah turned Gage so he could wash the scraped arm. Wobbling unsteadily because he thought Jonah was really going to hug him, Gage audibly huffed in relief that he wasn't hugged and didn't keel over. Jonah cracked up and then so did Gage. Without delay, Jonah soaped up his wash cloth, giggling the promise, "I'm gonna try my best so this don't hurt."

Gage sniggered, "And I'll try not to scream in agony."

After putting the bar of soap down, Jonah worked up a lather then gently laid the wash cloth on Gage's shoulder. With his fingertips, he pulled the bottom edge of the cloth, so it dragged down Gage's arm. He checked, "So far so good?"

"Awesome," Gage smiled.

"Best friends, remember?"

"I wish I had said something before."

"I guess there's always so much going on, neither of us had the chance."

"Do you feel a little scared?"

"Yeah. I know why too."

"Why?"

"Stuff that happened to me at the orphanage."

Gage thoughtfully hummed, "Yeah, my parents didn't give a shit about nothin', especially me."

"Prez and Keith care about you now," Jonah reminded, "your brothers do, and now I do too."

"You've got a real family too."

Jonah giggled, "It's so kewl too; having a big bro and two little bros."

Gage carefully wondered, "Will you tell me what happened to you?"

After a long pause where Gage never stopped looking over his shoulder, Jonah softly admitted, "They took pictures of me, messed with my dick and butt, made me mess with them too."

"My parents would cuss and scream; their friends would come over and they'd cuss and scream. It was crazy. Late at night, I'd hear them fighting in their bedroom too. I don't think they ever had good sex. My dad and pop never do *anything* like that. When they're not making love, the most we hear is laughter."

"My dad and pop are the same. That's what it should be like, I

think."

"Fun?"

"And easy, like all the other stuff we do together."

"This is real easy."

"Yeah. You're not mad about the orphanage?"

"Nope. You didn't like it. It's the same as me; we had to put up with it."

"Reyes, Kaleo and Liki were always saving us younger kids from stuff. They stopped a lot before it happened to us. Instead, it happened to them."

"I heard that from other kids, at home, in Ewa Beach, where no grown-up ever even looks at all the naked kids. Gram and Gramps look in my eyes."

"Like the lawn workers only look when a kid screams, like the kid might be hurt or something. Our grandmas and grandpas are the same, always looking in our eyes. Its weird, in a good way."

Gage grinned, "When you're not looking at my arm, you're looking in my eyes."

Jonah smirked, "You haven't stopped looking at me. Not once did you look down."

"I'm wondering how I can be as careful with your leg as you're being," Gage giggled.

Finished washing Gage's arm, Jonah prompted, "Look down

now."

Doing so, and noticing that they both had erections, Gage smiled, "Yeah, so? You did an awesome job. I never flinched or gritted my teeth or nothin'."

Jonah stared deeply into Gage's brown eyes, asking, "That's all you're gonna say?"

Gage shrugged, "We see dozens of dicks every day. Your bone is nicer only because it's yours, my best buddy's."

Jonah squealed, "Really?"

Picking up the other wash cloth, Gage offered, "It's about the same as mine, maybe a tad longer, but mine seems thicker." He then asked, "Is that what you wanted to hear, a comparison?"

Completely surprised, Jonah softly asked, "It's not too big or nothin'?"

"Course not," Gage simply answered, and soaped up the wash cloth. "You hang a little longer than me, but now, there's not too much difference. If you wanna talk big, how about Darren Devault's monster? That thing must hang twenty centimeters, easy. He trims his pubes too, I think."

"He's sixteen," Jonah giggled.

"And you're nine, and I'm eight," Gage reminded. "When we're sixteen, then we can compare dick sizes." Displaying the soapy wash cloth, Gage grinned, "Cover up your dick and put your leg up on the edge of the tub."

Doing so and watching Gage's every move, Jonah smiled,

"That's it, huh?"

Starting to carefully wash the scrapes around Jonah's knee, calf and thigh, Gage shrugged, "Since I like seeing all the guys, and none of the girls are near as cute, I know I must be leaning way to the gay side. Your dick is just as perfect for you as any other guy's dick. Like I said, yours is special to me only because it's yours. If we didn't already like each other, then we'd just be hangin', like the rest of the time. As far as boners go, I've only seen my brothers stiff. We've all seen our dads and pops with chubby dicks, but we can't compare to any teenagers. Based only on that, I think we're about average." Gage stood up and rinsed the wash cloth. Noticing Jonah's slight smile and intense gaze, Gage giggled, "What?"

All Jonah could think of was the sincerity in Gage's words. Between Gage's voice, his beautiful brown eyes and husky body, Jonah knew he was feeling more than friendship. The answers Jonah had been seeking were right in front of him for many days and he didn't even know it. Now he was seeing Gage in a new way, and Jonah liked it. Shaking his head and starting to giggle, Jonah reached over, pushed Gage's stiffy down at the tub floor, causing him to gasp, and released it to watch it bounce up and slap Gage's tummy. It was a game the boys at his orphanage played often enough, and he was curious how Gage might react to it.

Gage laughed, "Two can play that game!" and did the same to Jonah's bone, only he made his head bounce in time to Jonah's wagging dick. They both began laughing. Before Gage could brace himself, Jonah landed a quick kiss on Gage's mouth. Jonah laughed louder at Gage's shocked expression. Gage got Jonah back with a slightly longer kiss, that caused Jonah to stop laughing. Gage warmly smiled, "Boyfriends?"

Jonah nodded, "Best friends, working on becoming boyfriends."

"Let's get out of here, before someone comes looking for us," Gage suggested. When Jonah nodded, Gage reached around him to turn the water off.

Jonah softly giggled in Gage's ear, "Don't hold me too close now."

Once the water was off, Gage slid in close and whispered, "Bed time, I'm going to be right beside you, cuddled up really close." He topped off his promise with a patented Hundser facial caress, and then pushed Jonah's throbber down again and giggled at the bouncing bone. He hurried to open the sliding shower door and get out before Jonah got even. Jonah swatted Gage's butt as he exited the shower. Knowing they had spent an extraordinary amount of time in the tub, they hurried to dry off, but couldn't stop smiling at one another.

Just as they were finishing and almost ready to step out of the bathroom, Jonah asked, "How do you want it to be?"

Tilting his head, Gage wondered, "Like boyfriend stuff?"

"Yeah."

"Anyway you want," Gage shrugged. "If you want to hold my hand, don't even think about not doing it. If you want a hug, or to give me one, we can do that too."

"Really?"

Gage giggled, "You keep asking that! Yes, really!" Seeing Jonah rapidly blinking and grinning, Gage softly explained, "The only reason I haven't come right out and said, I love you, is because I'm not

sure about a lot of sex stuff."

Jonah nodded, "I am, but not like this, like us, I mean. This is going to be way different from that."

"Where we're at is totally kewl," Gage assured. "We'll try stuff eventually, ya know, when we decide we want to."

Holding his used towel out, Jonah called, "Hey, Alden? Do we stuff these in the laundry chute?"

The two towels the boys were using vanished before Alden replied, "Not here, guys. I sent them to Ewa Beach, for the housekeepers there to take care of."

Jonah reached for the door knob. Gage reached for Jonah's other hand and took it in his hand. Widely smiling, Jonah admitted, "You're making me crazy."

"Good," Gage grinned, "I'm not alone then."

They stepped out of the bathroom and saw Reyes climbing the staircase. He stopped, saw them holding hands, and smiled, "I was just coming up to see if you were okay. I guess the question is redundant."

Jonah smirked, "We're good, bro; best friends and then some."

Gage nodded, "We're on the same page."

Reyes admitted, "I don't know what's more surprising."

Walking down the stairs with Gage, Jonah told Reyes, "Gage figured it out already, and he don't care about that. He likes me for me."

It took Gage a moment or two to figure out what Jonah was referring to. Gage smirked, "Your dick is fine, Jonah. So what if it hangs long." Lifting their clasped hands, Gage reminded, "This is all I want, to be with you, okay?" He told Reyes, "That's another reason for me to hate those orphanage bastards."

Glancing at Gage, Jonah smiled, "You made me really happy about so much stuff. Remember, those orphanage bastards are dead already. Don't waste your time hating them."

Nodding and smiling, Reyes turned around and went down the last few steps then started for the kitchen, where Marc was waiting with a medi-kit.

Outdoors, Ben and Sammy had run out of sand and were carefully climbing rocks, still heading toward the waterfall. Now and then a gust of wind would blow mist onto them and the rocks they were on. When they saw that they couldn't safely go any further, they began giggling at the predicament they had gotten themselves into. Sammy made the first move with a hug, much to Ben's pleasant surprise. They sat down on smoother rocks and started chatting about their pasts in more detail than they ever had before. Admitting things he didn't want to really say, Ben shed tears. Sammy shushed Ben and wiped away some tears. Ben held Sammy's hand against his face. They locked eyes. A few tender kisses were shared. Neither asked questions. They simply knew where they now were; a young couple falling in love for the first time. Seeing Drew's and Corey's security, Chuck and Conner approaching, Ben and Sammy stood and started back to the beach. When asked what they were doing, they simply answered they had attempted to get to the waterfall, but couldn't climb the last bit of the way to complete the trip.

In the master bathroom, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike lounged in the big whirlpool tub. Prez suggested, "Since we've got way more

than a houseful, we're all spending the night in the master bedroom?" Keith and Derrick nodded and agreed. Signaling his agreement, Mike lifted Prez's foot and sucked on his big toe. Prez cackled, "Stop that! We'll wind up back on the bed again!"

While Keith and Derrick sniggered, Mike grinned, "You asked a silly question, so I thought I'd remind you how we started sucking toes. It was your doing, sex-machine."

Keith giggled, "I remember that day."

"You should," Derrick smiled, "I never heard you laugh so hard."

Massaging Prez's left foot, Mike teased Keith, "You got the hiccups, and couldn't stop hiccuping most of the afternoon."

Keith grinned, "Derrick straddled my chest and fed me his bone. You held my leg still so Prez could make me crazier without getting kicked in the face. The funniest part was when we got back home. My folks were there; I'd hiccup and all four of us busted up laughing. They must've thought we were insane."

"Now that I think about it, the scariest part was John was laughing as hard as we were," Prez recalled.

Keith chuckled, "We were ten, and John was six. He couldn't have known."

In all their minds, John giggled, *'I didn't know then, but I do now! Thanks for that little lesson. We'll be late getting back to the party, by the way.'*

'Jo-ohn!' Stephen shrieked in all four minds, *'Don't start that*

now! Can we finish giving these Founders and newbies the tour first?'

The last thing Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike heard was John's laughter fading away.

Releasing Prez's foot, Mike sighed, "That turned my chubby into shriveled meat."

Derrick nodded, "Even though we were there too, there's something about knowing our little brothers are going to mess around that really dampens the mood."

Standing in the tub, Keith nodded agreement, saying, "Ya know what's weird? I want to rehearse now."

"We're backwards today," Prez realized as he pulled the drain and stood. "We normally jam first then make love."

Derrick stood and reached for towels then passed them around, saying, "Let's play some stuff that will keep the interest of our fellow musicians."

"Yeah," Mike chuckled, "I get the impression KC and Joey would really enjoy something a little more challenging, with great vocals and intricate music."

Drying his back, Keith smiled, "I can think of a dozen songs like that."

Evilly grinning while drying Keith's chest, belly and naughty bits, Prez chortled, "I get to start us out then?"

Almost simultaneously, Keith, Derrick and Mike nodded, "Karn Evil 9."

Beginning to build the set list, the four boys hurried to dry one

another off, and then walked out of the master bathroom and bedroom. Coming around the hallway with their four soon-to-be-sons, Sean and Troy knowingly grinned at their fellow Core Rimmers, who still had damp hair. Troy asked, "Ready to do more adoptions, Prez?"

Widely smiling, Prez locked eyes with Troy, nodding, "Sure, and then we'll play for our guests again before dinner."

Keith glanced at the four St. Joseph boys, asking, "You guys are all set?"

All four nodded and Jason answered, "Sean and Troy are the best possible dads for us." He then followed his brothers down the stairs.

Five-year-old Jimmy Carr, the youngest of the new family, abruptly cheered, "I can't wait!"

Sean explained, "They know as much about me and Troy as we shared with you dudes. We know more about them too." He smirked, "And we know what you did too, Keith." All six Core Rimmers softly chortled. Giving Keith a quick hug, Sean whispered, "Thanks, bro. They really weren't sure of anything more than wanting to be adopted as a group. We finished up with tickle torturing all four of 'em, for scheming."

Patting Sean on the back, Keith grinned, "It was a guess, really. All four were foster brothers before they got here. They knew they wanted to stay together and be adopted, but weren't sure by whom. Now they're happy and so are you."

"Everything's very kewl, bros," Troy happily shared. "Happy is a poor description of what we feel. When we learned what went on, me and Sean tickled them to tears." On the way downstairs, Troy chuckled, "Speaking of learning *things*, I've learned that I can be

naked and not too self-conscious at Archmania, but can we perform with shorts on this time?"

Sean cracked up. Derrick, Keith, Mike and Prez pretended to be disappointed and reluctantly agreed. They went into the living room to put their boardies on. Finding his shower wrap, Prez quickly fastened the Velcro. Looking through the dining room and into the kitchen, they saw Gage and Jonah sitting on the counter, with Marc and Reyes fussing over the two boys. Keith loudly asked, "What happened?"

Marc glanced over, grinning, "First these two mini-Rimmers got all banged up body-surfing."

Reyes nodded, "Then we discover that they did more than clean the scrapes, like they were told to do." Gage and Jonah grinned at one another, subconsciously calling for their virtual halos to appear and brightly shine.

Hurrying into the kitchen while still pulling their drawers up, Keith, Derrick, Mike and Prez carefully looked over their sons. Seeing the scrapes and bruises, Keith smirked, "I warned you about ocean waves."

"They're more than fine, Keith," Reyes assured with a knowing grin.

Gage glanced at his dads, smiling, "Remember at Archmania, I told you how I was starting to feel about Jonah? Well, Reyes had us transported up into a tub. I had to say something to Jonah."

Watching his fathers, Jonah rapidly nodded and smiled, "I'm really glad Gage did too. All the worrying I did, about someone liking me for the right reasons, got washed down the drain."

Proud of both boys, Mike loudly cheered, "Awesome!"

"This almost makes us in-laws," Keith chuckled.

Derrick suspiciously squinted then confronted Gage, widely smiling, "And exactly what are your intentions, young man?" Giggling insanely, Gage turned ten shades of red. Jonah lost it and cracked up. Walking through the dining room with their boys, Troy, Sean and all four boys heard Derrick and all six began loudly laughing.

Prez grinned at the new family, wondering, "Was it that funny?"

Sean giggled, "Could be, someday."

Blushing, Jimmy Carr giggled, "I think Richie's the cutest boy here."

"Un-uh," Scott Deaver cackled, "it's Dillon, by a long shot."

Jason smirked, "You're both wrong. Leo's got all the right stuff."

Cheekily grinning, Billy joked, "Tomorrow, I get to go back to base and get myself one or two of the quadruple Rs." Everybody in the kitchen cracked up.

"Well, those secrets lasted about twenty minutes," Troy helplessly giggled.

Picking up the tricorder off the counter, Prez spun around to face the newest Rimmer family. He set the machine up, and then said, "At last, Troy Faris and Sean Moorhead have been captured to fully immerse themselves in our shared delirium." Billy held onto Troy and looked up with adoring eyes. Similarly, Jason latched on to Sean, and the remaining two boys squeezed in to hold onto a brother and a

father. While Prez got the kids adopted, Derrick told Reyes about the plan to play more music for their guests. Reyes helped Jonah off the counter and Marc helped Gage get down to the floor. As soon as Prez said, "It's official," the room broke out in cheers and applause.

"Time to go play loudly," Billy prompted Troy, and then reached up on tip-toes to plant a kiss on his pop's cheek.

Jason shared, "Pop's gonna teach me and Billy to play guitar."

"Kewl," Jonah cheered, "my pop's teachin' me too."

Gage smiled, "My dad's teachin' me to play keys, Jase."

Sean giggled, "Platinum Habits gives birth to Silver Habits."

So that he wouldn't be the only one on the lanai totally nude, Reyes went to put his boardies on. During that minute or two, all the boys were welcomed into the family, and Gage and Jonah were praised for becoming the first of the sons to start pairing off as a couple. When Reyes returned to the room, the entire group started walking out the doorway. Sean kissed Troy, and then led their sons, Marc, Gage and Jonah down to the lawn. Marc ran directly down to the beach to wave Danny and KC back to shore. The six members of Platinum Habits went directly to their instruments. Drew and Corey manned the PA system.

Keith and Troy soon began playing rapid arpeggios on their keyboards, introducing [Karl Evil 9](#). Prez stepped forward to sing.

Welcome back my friends to the show that never ends

We're so glad you could attend

Come inside! Come inside!

There behind the glass is a real blade of grass

be careful as you pass.

Move along! Move along!

Come inside, the show's about to start

guaranteed to blow your head apart

Rest assured you'll get your money's worth

The greatest show in Heaven, Hell or Earth.

You've got to see the show, it's a dynamo.

You've got to see the show, it's rock and roll

Oh, right before your eyes we pull laughter from the skies

And he laughs until he cries then he dies then he dies

Come inside the shows about to start

Guaranteed to blow your head apart

You gotta see the show

It's a dynamo

You gotta see the show

It's rock and roll, oh...

The band played the entire musical interlude flawlessly; Keith and Troy on keyboards, Derrick and Reyes on drums, Mike on electric guitar, and Prez playing electric bass. Drew had the volume so loud that security gorillas were transported up onto the cliffs and the

other mostly naked security teams had ordered their rifles to protect the beach front. All those that had been on the beach or in the bay ran toward the house. Off to the side, Gage and Jonah were sharing news of their new relationship with their brothers and friends. That's when Sammy and Ben shared their good news too. During an incredible display of perfectly synchronized drumming by Derrick and Reyes, with no other music playing, Prez came in to sing the second half of the song.

Soon the Gypsy Queen in a glaze of Vaseline

Will perform on guillotine

What a scene! What a scene!

Next upon the stand will you please extend a hand

to Alexander's Ragtime Band, Dixieland, Dixieland

Roll up! Roll up! Roll up!

See the show!

Performing on a stool we've a sight to make you drool

Seven virgins and a mule

Keep it cool. Keep it cool.

We would like it to be known the exhibits that were shown

were exclusively our own,

All our own. All our own.

Come and see the show! Come and see the show! Come

and see the show!

See the show!

The audience cheered and hollered for more. Holding down notes on the keyboard before him, while Troy moved to pick up his guitar, Keith giggled, "I'd like you all to note our unofficial Rimmer theme song. Let us know if it fits." Derrick began keeping a rhythm that would lead in nicely to the upcoming song.

Displaying his hands in the common heavy metal fashion, with the index finger and pinky protruding, Mike prompted "Show me your horns, dudes!" Kids around the beach mimicked Mike's horns.

Keith began filling in the strings parts. Bouncing his eyebrows, Troy smiled, "This tune is titled, [Knocking At Your Back Door](#)." Laughter was barely heard and their audience began falling about the lawn and beach. Prez came in pounding on his bass. In seconds, the whole band joined in, and soon Keith was singing the provocative lyrics.

With electronic drums and amplified acoustic drums going simultaneously, the song's beat thumped into the bodies of the bouncing audience, many of whom were still proudly displaying their horns. Dashing once again for the edge of the lanai, KC and Joey watched the drummers and guitarists. During the choruses, all six boys sang. When Keith sang, "knocking at your back door," Mike, Troy and Prez spun around to shake and wiggle their tushes for the audience. This time, with the music so loud, Mike had no chance of talking to KC. Instead, Mike watched everything going on around him and never once looked at his guitar's neck, even during his guitar solo.

When the song ended, Derrick asked the enthusiastic audience, "What do you think, is that our theme song?" Overwhelming

affirmations were shouted from the eighty males in the audience.

Troy knelt down to adjust his effects pedal. KC wondered, "What're you doing, dude?"

"Making this Stratocaster sound like an acoustic twelve-string for the next song," Troy answered. "It's not my effects unit from the Ewa Beach auditorium, so a minor EQ tweak needs to be done. It sounded real thin and tinny the last time."

KC asked, "And what is the next song?"

Mike pointed at the cliffs and then across the bay, where several boats were seen moving into view. Troy stood and checked his tempo with Derrick and Reyes, then started playing the introduction to [Over The Hills And Far Away](#). The adjustments Troy had done made the Stratocaster sound exactly like a twelve-string acoustic. KC nodded and flashed Troy a thumbs up gesture. Soon, Mike was playing along with Troy. Away from the keyboards and standing with Prez, Troy and Mike, Keith sang the lead vocals. Bass and drums came in with Mike's switch to power chords. Near the end of the song, Keith moved back to the keyboards to help complete the song.

Reyes moved over to the congas and hand percussion, announcing, "I think this next song is appropriate for Danny and Marc. It's titled, [Reelin' In The Years](#)." Jerry, Joey and KC cracked up. Out on lounge chairs, Danny and Marc smirked at each other then glared at Reyes, making hand motions that they could break him into two. Reyes grinned and bounced his eyebrows. Mike played the opening licks and the whole band joined in. Derrick sang the lead vocals. The band made playing the song seem effortless. They mostly danced and bopped along, occasionally talking, and then everyone sang the chorus backup vocals, then they returned to dancing and chatting until the next chorus. During the guitar solos in the middle

and end of the song, Troy and Mike played harmonized guitar licks in exact synchronization.

At the end of the song, while still clapping, KC asked, "How long did it take you dudes to learn that tune?"

Prez answered, "We learned six Steely Dan tunes that day, so about an hour, maybe an hour-and-a-half."

Putting his guitar down and moving to the keyboards on the right side of the lanai, Troy nodded, "Once we got the sections and parts worked out, about eight times we played it from beginning to end."

From start to end, the song lasted four minutes and thirty-seven seconds. Calculating that eight full band rehearsals of the song must've taken them about forty minutes, KC was stunned. KC walked over to Joey and lifted his young android brother. Carrying Joey over around the side of the house, KC and Joey obviously had something to discuss.

Derrick announced, "This next tune is for many of the dudes here today. I won't embarrass anyone directly, you know who you are. The song's titled, [Love Is All Around](#). Prez and Mike are gonna sing lead vocals." He counted off and the band started together, with Mike and Prez sharing a single microphone. Out on the lawn, several couples slow danced, among them were AJ and Jerry, Drew and Corey, Chuck and Conner, Kaleo and Tory, Ben and Sammy, and Gage and Jonah. As usual, Sean didn't need a partner to want to dance. He danced alone at first, until Billy tapped his dad's shoulder, and then Sean showed Billy how to dance. Troy widely smiled at his sexy lover and new son. At the final verse, all six band members sang.

Over the applause, Marc and Danny shouted, "Beautiful song,

guys."

Troy put his guitar down and moved over to the right side keyboards. Mike announced, "This next song is another sweet slow dance tune, with a splash of funk and soul. It's called [That's The Way Of The World](#). Reyes will do the honors, with Keith and Troy doing harmony vocals, and the rest of us backing them up."

Again, the lawn and beach were filled with slow dancers, with some of the youngest boys shaking their bottoms around. Jimmy Carr danced with Richie. Scott Deaver danced with Dillon. Jason tapped Leo's shoulder and enticed him to dance. Still teaching Billy how to dance, Sean noticed his youngest sons were already making their moves. Keith's security guard, Justin Fletcher moved nearer to Chris Watkins and started dancing. KC and Joey ran around the side of the house and planted themselves in the middle of the lawn, directly behind Drew and Corey, asking questions about the mixing methods they used.

The band played two more songs, in rapid succession, and without introduction; [Play That Funky Music](#), with Troy playing rhythm guitar and handling the lead vocals, and followed that up with [Bohemian Rhapsody](#). For the final song, all six band members stepped up to their microphones, sang a chord and then sang as one;

Is this the real life?

Is this just fantasy?

Caught in a landslide,

No escape from reality.

Open your eyes,

Look up to the skies and see,
I'm just a poor boy, I need no sympathy,
Because I'm easy come, easy go,
Little high, little low,
Any way the wind blows doesn't really matter to me, to
me.

Keith took over lead vocals and played piano while the other
five filled in music and harmony vocals.

Mama, just killed a man,
Put a gun against his head,
Pulled my trigger, now he's dead.
Mama, life had just begun,
But now I've gone and thrown it all away.
Mama, ooh,
Didn't mean to make you cry,
If I'm not back again this time tomorrow,
Carry on, carry on as if nothing really matters.

Too late, my time has come,
Sends shivers down my spine,

Body's aching all the time.

Goodbye, everybody, I've got to go,

Gotta leave you all behind and face the truth.

Mama, ooh (any way the wind blows),

I don't wanna die,

I sometimes wish I'd never been born at all

Mike wailed the guitar solo, seemingly putting effort behind it, but again, he concentrated on the audience, never looking at the neck or fretboard. Afterward, Keith sang the next section, with background vocal help from his band-mates.

I see a little silhouetto of a man,

Scaramouche, Scaramouche, will you do the Fandango?

Thunderbolt and lightning,

Very, very frightening me.

(Galileo) Galileo.

(Galileo) Galileo,

Galileo Figaro

Magnifico.

I'm just a poor boy and nobody loves me.

He's just a poor boy from a poor family,
Spare him his life from this monstrosity.

Easy come, easy go, will you let me go.

Bismillah! No, we will not let you go.

(Let him go!) Bismillah! We will not let you go.

(Let him go!) Bismillah! We will not let you go.

(Let me go) Will not let you go.

(Let me go) Will not let you go.

(Let me go) Ah.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

(Oh, mama mia, mama mia) Mama mia, let me go.

Beelzebub has a devil put aside for me, for me, for me.

The band rocked out the segue into the last sections.

So you think you can stone me and spit in my eye.

So you think you can love me and leave me to die.

Oh, baby, can't do this to me, baby,

Just gotta get out, just gotta get right outta here.

Once again, the music slowed and became more mellow. In

perfect harmony, Keith and Troy sang the last verse.

Nothing really matters,

Anyone can see,

Nothing really matters,

Nothing really matters to me.

Any way the wind blows.

To loud applause, the band members stepped away from their instruments or put them down. At the edge of the lanai, they held hands and bowed for their audience. Once they stood up again, Prez hollered, "Dinner time!" and everyone came rushing toward the house. Laughing, the six band members got inside first and blocked the food replicator.

Questions about who wanted what were immediately answered and the replicated food was passed out; two large cheese pizzas, one large pepperoni and sausage pizza, and another with the works; a platter of cheeseburgers, and another platter of hot dogs; two three-foot long sub sandwiches, a tray of barbecued ribs, a bowl of mashed potatoes and a half-gallon pitcher of brown gravy, and large bowls of macaroni salad and cole slaw made up the first course. John, Stephen, Frankie and Wade transported into the house in time for the evening meal. Of course, with a grand total of eighty-eight present in the house and outside, all that was eaten and more was prepared as needed.

With Reyes, Paul and Ryan, sitting outside on the lanai, Joey excitedly gushed about the great songs the band had played that day. Not one of them had Time Touched ever tried to play, but Platinum Habits played them all marvelously. Inside, at the kitchen table with

KC, Troy, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick explained some of the progressions and techniques used to learn and master the songs.

Two things in particular grabbed KC's attention; the vocals and Mike's sweep picking technique. Mike simply told KC, "Sweep picking means you're raking your guitar pick down the strings and maybe back up again. You can't use regular alternating up-down picking. If you need to, then play the notes necessary on a single string before sweeping down to grab those next notes on the adjacent string. You can't be picking in an upward motion when you're needing to go down. Modify your picking technique to adjust to all down strokes until it's time to sweep back up again, and then it's all up strokes."

"As for the vocals," Keith explained, "a lot of what we do comes from perfect pitch. We know our vocal ranges and simply hear what's on the record as we reproduce it."

KC grinned, "I've heard of perfect pitch, but I'm not sure what that means exactly."

"Colors and flavors," Prez smiled.

"Every instrument has its own timbre or flavor," Troy offered, "but every instrument or voice is still singing the same notes. Reyes sings his high 'C' and it's about an octave higher than Derrick, Keith and I, about two octaves higher than Mike or Prez. See the notes as hues of colors; darker colors are the low bass tones; middle range colors are the two octaves centered on middle 'C'; the brighter colors are the octaves above there, getting closer to white and shiny."

"Shiny," Mike giggled, "yeah, I like that."

Noticing that KC was trying to understand, Derrick tried; "Okay, the lowest tones, like the boom of a bass drum, timpani, tubas and

basses are close to black – the very darkest browns, reds, blues, greens and violets. Start to move into the piano keyboard and they get just a little less dark. With every octave higher, imagine the notes getting just a touch brighter. The very highest notes of the piano, cymbal bell taps, violins, piccolos are all the bright colors."

Mike said, "Like a baritone sax blowing a low 'F sharp' would sound a lot like a distorted electric guitar playing a low 'E', with a fuzz box almost cranked. The timbre is really close, but knowing the difference is the flavor of that tone." He checked, "Getting it, KC?"

"Almost," KC chuckled. "I can promise you, I'll be sharing a lot of this with our band. Don't be surprised to find your music classes filling up."

Prez smiled, "Perfect pitch is one of those things folks say is impossible to learn. That's a bunch o' bull. If that were really the case, then no one could ever listen to a song and learn that song. Just start to see the colors of notes you're playing; feel the difference between a major chord, a minor chord, an augmented chord and a diminished chord; taste the difference between a plucked upright bass and an electric bass, or in your case, a six-string acoustic guitar and an electric guitar in its various amplified states, from clean to crunchy to completely over-driven distortion." He then glanced around the table suggesting, "Let's sing a C major seventh."

Getting nods, Prez sang the low 'C', Mike added the 'E', Derrick added the 'G', Troy sang the 'B' and Keith put the 'C' on top.

Wiping his mouth, KC said, "Wait just a second here," and then got up from the table, hurried to the piano in the living room and played a C major seventh chord. He shouted, "Holy shit!" and the five members of Platinum Habits around the table softly sniggered. Knowing where KC was coming from, because he wasn't a musician,

Sean thought it was hysterical and busted up laughing. Returning to the table and his dinner, KC smirked, "You dudes were maybe a tenth of a tone off from a tuned piano. That's nothing short of completely remarkable."

Keith chuckled, "Anyone can do it, with practice. You tune your guitar to five tones; E, A, D, G, B. Those five colors should be the first you'll see, clear as day, every time you hear them."

"There are twelve repeating tones in the chromatic scale," Derrick explained, "get the five learned and there are seven left. Then it's simply a matter of making the colors darker or lighter."

Trying to wrap his android brain around the concepts, KC muttered, "So violet, blue, red, green, yellow... umm, twelve unique colors?"

"They start to mix and fade," Troy explained. "Ask yourself, is gold more yellow, or more orange? It depends on the shade and lighting, right? Violet is a mix of blue and red. Orange is a mix of yellow and red. It's not something you can completely define, like an artist mixes paints, but you can start to see colors. For instance, to me, when I hear an F sharp, it's shades of red, from dark red to a red-tinged white, which is brighter than pink. Pink to me is the F sharp an octave-and-a-half above middle C. There are still much lighter shades of red."

Prez said, "Exactly what color each of us sees isn't important. The distinction is what is important."

"Take Eddie Van Halen's guitar playing," Mike suggested. "We guitar players hear most tunes in a key of E really easy, but then Eddie plays and we're like, what the fuck, that's a D or a D sharp, because Eddie almost always tunes down a half-step or a whole-step. At first,

it throws us off, until we figure out or learn that's what Eddie's doing. From there, it's easy, tune all the strings down a bit."

Keith smiled, "This will be one of our lessons, in the ear training classes. Relative pitch, figuring out one tone after another is usually the first step, like when you learn a solo or a melody for the first time. Those first times are rough; hunt and peck, until you start to make the mental connections. A perfect fifth always sounds like a perfect fifth."

"You're losing me," KC admitted.

"Then you need to learn theory," Troy smiled. "It's not so important until you work out songs with other musicians. Instead of showing someone what you mean, just say, it's not a major third away, it's a minor third away. A few words is quicker and easier than showing." Troy sang a major third interval, and then Keith sang a minor third interval.

Prez said, "Now extend that minor third an octave. There's no such thing as a tenth interval, but there is the sharp ninth, which is the same thing." Prez sang a tone and then Derrick sang the tone a sharp ninth above Prez's tone.

At KC's expression, Mike grinned, "We'll get into all that in school, in detail. And the great thing is, there will be no passing or failing. It might take some kids longer to learn, and they want to learn it, so they'll retake the relative pitch class before taking the perfect pitch class."

Derrick said, "The basic flow will be music appreciation, for those that just enjoy listening to music. Then, for those that want to learn an instrument, there will be lessons on the instrument and music theory classes. Those beginner musicians that are able and willing can then take the relative pitch class, and then the perfect pitch class. As

bands begin to form from the intermediate musicians, we'll have special classes with them that tie all the knowledge together."

KC smiled. "That sounds kewl. 'Skunk' Baxter told me that I'd really need to learn the theory before I could consider myself a real musician. Dilly hooked us up using one of his time-loop thingies when we were setting up the band."

"Excellent!" Mike cheered. "Here's the deal, KC; you can play an instrument and play it well, copying what other people do, as far as your physical ability will allow you to play. Understanding theory, even just a little bit, means you can use what you've been playing to be a unique artist of your own. You can use all that knowledge and experience to play your own solos, develop your own melodies, put a chord progression to the melody, and then make decisions about how the song will be arranged, and with what instruments."

Keith nodded, "For us, playing covers of other artists' music is fun. We're learning so much about how a song is formed, how it's arranged and even a little bit about the techie side, like what effects might be needed to pull it all off. During Bohemian Rhapsody, Drew and Corey were out there at the PA, applying a chorus and a phase shift to our vocals, so we sounded exactly like the record. What the pros do, we learn from, and then turn around to play our own music. I might come in with a melody and chord progression, Prez might make a suggestion, so that he can play a kewl bass part, that Mike can then add a counterpoint harmony to. Any of the six of us can do those things I mentioned. The next thing we know, we're done jamming and looking around with wide smiles, asking, was that really kewl or what?"

"Just wait until Timmy comes to class!" KC giggled. "His lessons were from Jimi Hendrix, and I think the little rat was given

some lefty secrets that he refuses to share!"

Keith grinned and rolled his eyes. Mike and Derrick cracked up. Troy chuckled, "But can Timmy develop a chord progression and a melody, or can he just imitate a guitar solo? That's the difference between an intermediate player and an advanced artist. I've read that Paul McCartney only knows the basics of music theory, but look what the man has done in his career; he's cut literally dozens of hit records of songs that he's written. Knowing the basics and having a good ear, Sir Paul does that."

Prez added, "Being a bass player, I've read articles about him. He considers himself only a fair player, but every bass player studies what he's done. That's proof that a little knowledge goes a long way. Even back in the sixties, he was writing songs using simple chord progressions in ways very few others were, and turning them into gold records. We'll play more advanced songs simply for the knowledge and experience we get doing so, but take 'Eleanor Rigby' for instance; Paul played that first with only his acoustic guitar. Then their producer, George Martin, suggested, 'What about a string quartet?' And another hit record climbs the charts."

KC grinned, "If I named a tune, that you don't know and have never played before, could you show me how you approach learning it?" All five heads of the Platinum Habits band members nodded. KC suggested, "I'll stick with Sir Paul. How about 'Band On The Run'?"

Troy sang, "Stuck inside these four walls, sent inside forever."

Keith said, "It's the key of D major."

"I think it changes keys later," Mike said, and then told Troy, "Sing the second half, dude."

Troy sang, "Well, the rain exploded with a mighty crash as I fell

into the sun."

"It sounds very C major," Derrick offered. Prez, Keith and Mike agreed.

KC giggled, "You've never played this song before?"

"Never even tried," Keith assured. Mike, Derrick and Troy all echoed Keith's words.

Prez honestly said, "I played the bass part once, along with the radio, years ago."

"Good enough," KC giggled. "Go play it."

They all got up and went outside. The amps were still powered on, so Prez went to check the PA system. It was powered up, only Drew and Corey had turned the faders down. Prez turned the faders back up. He then checked the power amps to the speakers and gave them half power. Keith was already adjusting his synthesizer for the song.

Eating dinner out on the dining room side of the lanai, with Paul, Ryan and Reyes, Joey wondered, "Whad's goin' on, Casey?"

KC grinned, "I gave them a new song to learn, so I could watch them." Opening his eyes wide, Joey ran over.

Up on the lanai, Mike had already figured out the opening guitar licks and well into the first verse. Troy strummed along with Mike, zeroing in on the chord progression as they went. Keith already had the synthesized keyboard part. On the lawn directly before the lanai, KC and Joey watched and learned.

Prez went up the lanai steps to join his bandmates. With his bass

guitar hanging off his shoulders, Prez prompted, "Just the intro into the first verse?" Everyone nodded and Derrick counted off the tempo. They began playing only that section, with Troy singing the lead vocals, and Keith singing harmony vocals. Keith finished the section with the synthesizer part. They stopped playing.

Mike started playing the music leading into the second verse, with Troy, Prez, Derrick and Keith joining in. What was most startling to KC and Joey was the band was working out the tune's sections at almost full tempo. Keith asked, "Ready to give verse two a shot?" Heads nodded and vocal affirmations traveled around. Derrick counted off and the band played only that section. Again, Troy sang lead vocals and Keith backed him up. Troy and Keith sang, "If we ever get out of here," and the band played exactly three more beats then stopped.

At the pause, Keith shared, "That section modulates from D to A minor. It's a cute trick, since the prior section is in D major and the next section is in C major, Paul's using the D major and A minor chords to prepare the listener for the key change."

Troy led the way into the next section with his Stratocaster simulating a twelve-string acoustic guitar and strumming. He kept on going, sang the lead vocals, and the others joined to provide him the remainder of background music. At the end of the third verse, they stopped playing again. Troy said, "The next two verses are very much the same. It's only the very end left." He strummed his guitar and sang, "And the county judge, who held a grudge, will search for evermore." The band played just that little section twice more and then they completed the song, with Troy singing, "for the band on the run, band on the run, band on the run, band on the run."

It took Platinum Habits a little more than ten minutes to work out the song, KC noticed. Derrick asked, "Ready to give it a go?" All

the others agreed, so he counted out the tempo again, and they started from the beginning, at full tempo, all together and completely in sync. They played the whole song, but weren't completely satisfied with two segue sections that lasted all of two bars each. As a band, they rehearsed those two sections. Then they played the entire song again, from beginning to end, perfectly. By this time, Reyes, Paul and Ryan were standing with Joey and KC.

Noticing KC's defeated expression, Reyes giggled, "You didn't dare them, did you?"

Shaking his head, KC chuckled, "Just a challenge to work out a song they hadn't ever played before." He showed Reyes his wristwatch and cackled, "They learned it all in just under twenty-five minutes!"

Joey giggled, "Id wouwda dakin' Dime Douched ad weast dwo ow dhwee houws do weawn dhad song!"

"And we'd still run through it a few dozen more times before ever performing it live!" KC laughed.

The band were putting down their instruments. Closest to the stairs, Keith walked down the steps to KC, smiling, "That's what a little knowledge and being familiar with the song does."

Prez nodded, "About four years ago, it would've taken us hours too. In those years, our ears have gotten better. That's what it's all about, KC; hearing and having the physical ability with the technique to reproduce what you're hearing."

Grabbing Troy around the chest and swinging him around, Mike chuckled, "Then this kid from New Jersey showed up, walking the walk and talking the talk. Every time either Keith or I challenge Troy, he rises to the occasion." Blushing and giggling, Troy let himself flail

around like a rag doll while being manhandled by Mike. Nearby, Sean and Billy cracked up.

Nodding, Derrick gestured to Reyes, explaining, "Completing our band, Reyes gets his memories restored and brings a whole previous life of percussion experience along. He came back from South Carolina wanting an electronic drum set, so I got him one."

Leaning over and tickling Joey, Reyes grinned, "Guess where that idea came from?"

"Unca Dahnny?" Joey giggled. Reyes leaned over, hoisted Joey over his shoulder and started towards the bay. Joey loudly cackled, "WEYES!"

"You're a twerp, Joey," Reyes giggled.

"Bud I'm you'we dwewp!" Joey laughed.

Splashing into the surf, Reyes nodded, "We've gedding wed."

Joey became absolutely hysterical. The last thing those on the beach heard before he and Reyes submerged was Joey hollering "Weyes is dalkin' wike me!"

Coming outside and seeing his boy being carried under water, Jerry Owens grinned, "What's going on?"

KC smiled, "Reyes learned that Joey really is a twerp, and how to speak like Joey."

Prez grinned, "By any chance, does Joey's monster cock act as a floatation device?"

Staring up at Prez like he'd really gone insane, Jerry saw him

wink and then cracked up.

Pushing Jerry over the edge, Derrick tapped his sub-vocal, ordering, "Awden, dwanspowd Weyes and Joey oud ovej dhe bay fow a weaw spwashdown."

Seconds later, Reyes and Joey emerged about twenty feet above and far out over the bay. Hugging Reyes, Joey waved at his hysterical father, screaming "Hi Dahdy!"

In groups, the other boys, personal security gorillas, teens and tweens left the house and returned to the beach. Reyes and Joey were still periodically appearing above the bay and splashing down. Everyone noticed, but no one said a word about that. Finding Jerry on his ass in the sand, wheezing and hiccuping, Danny smirked, "Okay, what did you Rimmers do this time?"

Prez shrugged and innocently batted his eyelids. Derrick ordered that 'Weyes' and Joey be 'dwanspowded' to the beach. Once they appeared, Keith changed the subject by asking, "Is there any pizza left?" Hanging his head onto his right palm, Marc softly sniggered.

Danny smiled, "Okay, I was thinking, it's about midnight Eastern Time, so I think it's best we say goodbye, before any other damage is done." Reyes gave Joey a kiss on the cheek and got one in return then put Joey down.

Crossing his eyes, Prez turned to Danny, assuring, "No damage done here. The funny farm is always like this."

Danny sputtered and wrapped Prez in a warm embrace, giggling, "You guys were damaged when we got here. We'll leave well enough alone."

For the next few minutes, the AI Division and the Core

Rimmers said their farewells. Reyes got sandwiched between Paul and Ryan again. This time tender kisses on the mouth were shared. Reyes promised that the next day wouldn't be terribly busy and suggested his two friends come visit the Ewa Beach base.

Derrick said goodbye to Paul and Ryan, adding, "We'll just have comm-badges to pass out and new kids to show around. We don't expect it to be too busy at all."

"Comparatively speaking," Mike playfully interjected, and shook hands with Paul and then Ryan.

Once his group were gathered, Danny tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Stevie, take us home to Marc's living room, and I had better land dry this time!" The group waved and soon vanished from the beach.

"He said dry, he said nothing about clothed!" Stevie giggled into the Rimmers' sub-vocals. "Momma Mary thought it was funny!"

Chris, Justin, Chuck, Lakota, Leo and Lucky walked up to the gathered group of Core Rimmers. Chris told them, "If you guys are staying here tonight, we're going to work shifts to make sure you stay safe all night."

Prez scowled, "Is that really necessary?"

"Yes, Sir," Chris nodded. "This place is secluded, but not impossible to reach. There are enough of us to have eight on guard per six-hour shift; including two gorillas and two enhanced. We all get a good night's sleep and so do you. Once you guys call it a night, we'll patrol the outside, with one staying close to the house, on the lanai. If there's any sort of emergency, inside or outside, we'll know about it."

Prez sighed, "Alright, I'm not gonna argue. Those here tonight

and tomorrow morning are part of this party though. When we eat, you dudes eat. Please, let's do our best to keep this a party?"

Saluting, Chris grinned, "Easily done... SIR!" and then bolted off down the beach before Prez could chase him. The rest of the Rimmers grinned or softly chuckled at Prez's irritated expression.

"Preston!" an adult male voice yelled. Everyone turned and saw Doc Andrews storming across the lawn and toward the beach.

Keith gasped, "Shit!"

"We forgot to go home and see the doc," Prez griped.

Not so surprisingly, the remaining Core Rimmers scattered like leaves in the breeze, leaving Prez and Keith to face the doctor. Doc Andrews complained, "I could've sworn we had a five o'clock appointment this evening. What time is it now?" Playing innocent, Keith and Prez pointed to their wrists, devoid of any watches. Doc Andrews smirked, "Don't pull that innocent little boy routine with me. What gets me is Alden or any AI could've reminded you. It's twenty after six, by the way. I waited, went to the dining room for dinner and spoke to your parents about their sons' forgetfulness. Luckily for you, they know of and approved of this break, or you'd both be sedated, under force fields on bio-beds, with tubes jammed up your dicks, pissing by remote control!"

"We're sorry," Prez and Keith sincerely sang.

Stopped before them, Doc Andrews sighed, "Tell me you haven't been out in the salt water."

Shaking his head, Prez assured, "Not once, Doc. We used the master bathroom's whirlpool tub."

"And you haven't been out under the sun all day, correct?"

Keith pointed to the lanai, answering, "Prez spent very little time in the sun; maybe a total of two hours. We performed for our guests twice, ate lunch and dinner inside and just said goodbye to our AI Division guests. That's how we managed to forget the appointment."

"You know I'm looking forward to your okay, doc," Prez reminded.

Doc Andrews gestured for Prez to drop his drawers and turn around. Prez pulled off his shower wrap and the doctor visually inspected Prez's bottom. Spinning around again, Prez got a nod from the doctor then put his wrap on again. Doc Andrews said, "Let's have the bio-bed run a final scan," and then ordered, "We're going back to Ewa Beach, to my examination room, Alden." In a blink, all three were inside the doctor's office at the FYS building, with Prez materializing already on his back and naked on the bio-bed. Going from standing to suddenly horizontal, Prez gasped and clung onto the side of the bed. Doc Andrews initiated the scan and stepped back.

Prez sighed, "I just want this over and done with. We've got ninety-five newbies showing up tomorrow. We have to greet them and put on a little concert for them."

Reviewing the readings on the bio-bed, Doc Andrews tilted his head uncertainly, saying, "Medical approval from me doesn't mean the burns won't hurt the first few times you put shorts on."

"As long as you say it's okay, I can deal," Prez smiled.

Keith said, "Waiting until you're more comfortable is no biggie, T'hy'la." Facing Doc Andrews, Keith assured, "I'm watching my husband, Doc. If he's not good, I will do what no one else would.

Prez, John and my mom are having a stubbornness contest. Which of the three will make me, Drew and my Dad crazier is still being decided."

Pouting, Prez muttered, "John wins, almost every time."

'Hello?' John immediately sent to Keith and Prez. *'I am not stubborn, just persistent! Wrap that around your buns.'* Keith grinned and sighed.

Doc Andrews nodded and ordered, "Stay out of the salt water one more night, and remember, sleep matters too."

Before sitting up, Prez confirmed, "I'm good to go?"

"No infections present, just some sand from the beach," Doc Andrews stated. "You might as well remain naked the rest of the night. Try putting clothes on tomorrow morning, but don't force yourself to stay in them all day. You'll be more comfortable switching to a shower wrap for periods of time."

Prez sat up. Jim Hundser strode into the doorway, snickering, "They manage two-hundred and seventy kids, fifteen other leaders, but can't remember a simple doctor appointment."

Hanging his head, Prez softly chortled. Doc Andrews grinned, "It's a disease present in all Clan Directors; they can do for others at the drop of a hat, but caring for themselves is an entirely different issue."

Keith chuckled, "How're you doing, dad?"

"Everything's fine," Jim smiled as he walked into the room. "After the Doc told us you missed your appointment, I gave him a few minutes then decided to come here. I would like to see where you've

been all day, and say goodnight to Bruce, or offer to bring him back home. Carmella, Dewi and Kokaku are all right, but I can tell that they miss him. I won't mention that last part to him, naturally, but just ask if he's staying."

Prez said, "The last we saw, he was with other kids his age, playing at the beach and then having dinner."

Keith checked, "Bruce seems to be doing much better today, or is he faking it for our benefit?"

"No," Jim quickly replied, "he is doing better. I think these last few days he's taking stock of what he now has; most important in that list are two little sisters and two little brothers. He's a big brother too now, for the first time in his life, and he very much likes it."

Hopping down off the bed, Prez quickly hugged Doc Andrews. Stepping back, he thanked him and explained that they really did have guests from another Clan Division that caused him and Keith to completely space the appointment.

Doc Andrews smiled, "I just happen to be one of the few people that can make you jump and realize that you screwed up."

Taking on a Vulcan demeanor, Prez nodded, "Correct, as it should be. You not only can cause me to jump, but physicians and psychologists are the only people that can remove me from duty, outside of Cory Short."

Jim wondered, "And what about me and your mother?"

Prez kept his cool and stated, "Before the head of Pacific Rim Division Federation Youth Services relieved me of duty, she would very likely get the support of physicians and psychologists, correct?"

Sighing, Jim faced Doc Andrews, and then grouched, "Vulcan training has taken all the fun out of being a parent."

Tapping his sub-vocal, Prez ordered, "Alden, return us and he who is our father to the beach house, in close proximity to where Bruce Downing is."

Immediately upon arrival at the beach, Prez and Keith couldn't hold back another moment and busted up laughing. Shaking his head sadly and grinning at his sons, Jim Hundser called for Bruce. Running out of the surf, Bruce bounded and landed about a meter before his new dad. At this hour, the setting sun and mountain cliff created a shadow that had darkened the entire beach front. There were lights on inside and outside the beach house. Flying around were several toy helicopters. Racing around in the sand were a couple of toy dune buggies.

Keith softly reminded, "It's pill time, baby. We delayed it three times now, for KC to learn 'Band On The Run', for the departing AI Division, and for Doc Andrews."

Starting for the house, Prez frowned, "I'm gonna take this pill and start getting drowsy." He glanced around and saw that most of their security had already left. He only saw the two gorillas, Lucky and Leo, and Chris and the others present when he was told the security plan for the evening. Even with all the Core Rimmers, their sons and the other boys around, the beach already seemed deserted compared to the daytime activity.

Walking up the lanai steps, Keith called, "Alden, please transport the band's gear back to the basement."

"Got it, Keith," Alden replied, and then executed the order.

Inside the kitchen, Reyes was cleaning, wiping up messes on the

counters. He grinned, "Doc Andrews didn't sedate you after all?"

Keith chuckled. Prez smiled, "No, but I'm about to take my final pill. The fun's only just about to start."

"Relax, Prez," Reyes gently offered, and explained, "A bunch of the youngest kids are already watching TV in the living room with John and Stephen. Drew, Corey and Leo are down in the basement with another group, including Gage, Jonah, Sammy and Ben. The teenage Rimmers are outside watching that pack."

Keith scowled, "I didn't see Kaleo and Tory out there."

Reyes giggled, "They're upstairs, choosing a room for the night. Something about selecting a bed with the best bounce. It's a rough decision and taking a while."

"This is what I love hearing," Prez cheered. "Before we all get back to business, everybody is chilling."

"Including you too now," Keith smiled at Prez, and pulled out the small plastic bottle that contained the last pill.

Prez took the pill out and told the replicator, "Eight ounces of cold water, forty-five degrees Fahrenheit." The glass appeared and he popped the pill into his mouth, and then washed it down. Prez asked Keith, "Do us a favor, T'hy'la. When Kaleo and Tory come downstairs, make sure someone gets Troy, Sean, AJ and Jerry to take some private time. While I become a veg, I want to see a lot of smiling faces."

"They might be smiling at you, Prez," Reyes giggled.

"But if they've had that time already, I won't know that for certain," Prez chuckled. "It might just be happy pecker syndrome."

Reyes stopped cleaning, tossed the towel he was using in the air and cracked up.

Taking Prez's hand, Keith giggled, "Come with me, pill poppin' Head Rimmer." He led Prez to the living room. There they found John, Stephen, Richie, Wade, Frankie, Dillon, Geoff, Shaun and Mike Hunnicutt, Scott Deaver, Jimmy Carr and all five of Kaleo's and Tory's sons.

Richie asked, "How're ya doin', poppa?"

Taking a seat on the far side of the sectional sofa, Prez smiled, "I'm okay, pal. The doc said I could put some real clothes on tomorrow."

Keith corrected, "It might only be for a few hours at a time, Richie. It depends how Poppa feels, and if the burns are still sore.

Sitting with Jimmy on the floor, Richie softly prompted, "Com'on, Jimmy." Richie and Jimmy got up and went to sit by Prez. A moment later, Geoff, Mike and Shaun went to sit on the other side of Prez. Stephen began giggling and then so did Wade. The latter boy levitated off the sofa and over onto Prez's lap. The other boys in the room giggled and got up to crowd around Prez.

Prez grinned at the boys, wondering, "Am I Mister Popularity tonight?"

Richie giggled, "We had fun today, Poppa."

Dillon shared, "Yeah, it was way kewl, like home, but different from home."

Nodding, Geoff smiled, "Yup, you think we don't know stuff,

but we do. Ev'rything you do ev'ry day, you do for us kids."

Jimmy said, "We got the chance now to say, thanks, so we ain't missin' out."

Scott nodded, "Our dad and pop says tomorrow we're back home, and lots more kids are showin' up."

"We know, Prez," Russ Pass smiled, "you make all our leaders kewl, so we all feel like we're kewl too."

With happy tears pooling in his eyes, Keith smiled at John and Stephen. Prez chuckled, "I'll tell you guys the biggest secret ever, if you promise to tell every new kid tomorrow."

Scrunching his face, Marv mumbled, "How can it be a secret if we gets to tell ev'ryone?"

"It's a secret I've been keeping," Prez answered, "and now it's time for everybody to know the secret."

"Yeah?" many of the boys queried. "And we can tell ev'ryone?"

Nodding and waving them all closer, Prez softly shared, "All the leaders and all your dads were kewl to begin with. I'm lookin' for the kewlest guys around to make leaders. All you guys are kewl now. Maybe someday you'll be among the kewlest and I'll make you leaders." While the boys chattered about being kewl, like their dads and their leaders, Prez locked eyes with John.

'I didn't do this, Prez,' John sent. 'I only put Wade, your newest nephew on your lap. When you really think about it though, the kids have you all to themselves. Who knows when you'll get the chance to spend time with little dudes like this again? Do you know what it means to them?' After a moment, John sent, *'I know what you're*

thinking. Meetings of just little boys, little girls, or dividing up the division into groups for more formal meetings won't work, bro. It's gotta be like this, impromptu, on their terms. Try to make yourself more available at the pool or at the playground. Kids will come to you when they see you like this, just chillin' and doin' nothin'.'

Richie told the other boys that Prez had burned his butt in a fire while rescuing other kids. All the kids wanted to know about the fire, so Prez dressed up the story for five- and six-year-olds to understand, making it exciting and a little scary at times. He told them that Keith, Sean, Troy, Mike and Derrick were all there too, and that they were all saving other kids and their loved ones. So that Kaleo's and Tory's five sons didn't feel left out, Prez told them that their dads had stayed awake all night, helping get kids that had no homes to go to anymore to a place with new homes, just over on the other side of the mountain. Geoff was told that his dad and pop were also playing important roles in the Command Center and helping many more families all day. AJ's and Jerry's youngest boys, Shaun and Mike, were told that their dads worked all the previous day getting those kids and their families settled in their new homes.

Keith went outside to get AJ and Jerry to take a private break, explaining that Prez had the youngest kids' undivided attention. When he went to share the same with Troy and Sean, they were with Mike and Derrick, gathering up the remaining groups of kids to come inside for the night. Joining the pack to go inside, Keith noticed that his dad had left for Ewa Beach with Bruce. Knowing how Bruce felt about his youngest brother and sisters, Keith smiled. It would only be a matter of days before Prez offered Bruce his Core Rimmer role, or Bruce asked Prez about it.

Kaleo and Tory came downstairs while Prez was still weaving his tales. Of course, their five sons jumped up and ran to their dad and

pop, yelling that they were heroes. By the time all those outside got inside the house, Reyes was telling the kids about all the people saved from the Hyatt and the Honolulu Airport. Thousands was a meaningless number to the kids, until Reyes recalled all the people that had been at the beach house that day and that there were twenty of them in the living room at that very moment. Suddenly, all the rug-rats gasped at idea of thousands.

In the basement and hearing all the activity up on the main level, Drew, Corey, Leo, Gage, Jonah, Sammy, Ben, Sung, Kawozoe, and Kenny Hunnicutt came up to see what was going on. As if Prez didn't already have a large audience, more boys piled into the living room.

Richie, Dillon and Geoff told brief stories about the prior Friday, when they met Joel, I-Cheya, and the Clan. Soon, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo, Tory and Sean were sharing stories about their rescues and the activities they shared Friday and into Saturday.

It was about nine-thirty when several fathers noticed their sons were constantly yawning. The coffee table was moved aside and Alden called to provide bedding for the thirty-four boys to create their nest. Since the Hundserts' basement was empty for the first time in a week, Alden pulled blankets, pillows and mattresses from the stacks there. Little guys made trips to the bathrooms. Reyes lowered the television volume and volunteered to stay in the living room with the boys. Once kids were falling asleep, and their own sons were asleep, John and Stephen would take the ground floor bedroom.

The remaining ten Core Rimmers climbed the stairs. At the top of the stairs, Prez reminded Drew, Corey, Sean, Troy, AJ and Jerry to go take some private time. When they were done, they were invited to hang out in the master bedroom until they were ready to call it a night. Unfamiliar with the house, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy peeked in the huge master bedroom suite. Seeing how truly massive it

was, with a sofa, four reclining chairs, a big wall mounted TV, a stereo system, and two desks that each had computers, monitors and office chairs, as well as a smaller replicator for drinks and snacks, the six decided to accept the invitation.

Already raging and not the least bit embarrassed, Corey promptly led a blushing and giggling Drew to the smallest bedroom, at the end of the row of bathrooms, just down the hall. AJ and Jerry took the next bedroom, and Sean and Troy took the room after that. Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Kaleo and Tory went into the master bedroom. The door was left ajar, so that their fellow Core Rimmers could come inside at will, and the sound from the television wouldn't disturb any of the kids downstairs.

As soon as the television was on and they had all gotten comfortable, Kaleo cheerfully raved, "This has been the most awesome day!"

"We're fathers!" Tory giggled, "I can barely believe that they wanted us."

Kaleo smiled, "What the hell are we gonna do with five boys?"

Mike chuckled, "What's your idea of the perfect father? Picture that and then be that person."

Tory sighed, "I have no idea," and Kaleo nodded agreement.

Keith suggested, "How about we table this conversation for a little while, at least until Sean, Troy, Drew, Corey, Jerry and AJ are here too. Corey, Drew and Troy could have input and the other three prob'ly need to hear the conversation too."

Flipping television channels, Prez paused on the movie Superman. He blinked and muttered, "I must've taken too many pills

too quickly today. Why does Christopher Reeves look a lot like Kyle?" Everyone in the room roared laughing.

'Just as soon as the Doc says you're clear, you're goin' swimmin', Prez!' Kyle's voice replied in all of their heads.

While that was going on upstairs, and the youngest boys were cuddling up in groups on the living room floor, six older boys went to the kitchen for drinks and snacks. They all wanted something different; juice, milk, soda, brownies, cookies and popcorn were ordered from the replicator. Gage, Jonah, Sammy, Ben, Dee and Leo took seats around the dinette table. Dee asked Sammy, "So why haven't you told dad or pop?"

Ben giggled and reached for Sammy's hand. Sammy grinned, "Mostly because Ben's folks aren't here. Aunt Laura and Uncle Rob need to know too. We'll say something at home tomorrow."

Ben giggled, "Mike's my only brother here too."

Covering his mouth to try and be quiet for the little guys going to sleep, Dee cackled, "What's so funny, Ben?" Dee and Leo went into suppressed giggling fits. Gage and Jonah turned to one another, bouncing their eyebrows.

Coming into the kitchen after saying goodnight to his little brothers, eight-year-old Kenny Hunnicutt grinned at the six wide smiling faces around the table, softly wondering, "What're ya doin'?"

"Dee and Leo are bein' goofy," Gage sniggered.

Dee laughed, "All I know is that Ben hasn't stopped smiling and giggling since before dinner."

Nodding, Leo softly added, "Since he and Sammy went for a

walk, it seems to me."

Ben giggled, "There's your answer."

Jonah checked with Ben, asking, "We got really lucky today, huh?"

"You know it!" Ben cheered.

Gage reminded Jonah, "Me and Sammy talked about you and Ben at Archmania. Sammy had it easier than me. Ben wasn't there, but you were, making me completely crazy."

Jonah whimpered and then asked, "Really?" Pulling Jonah close and helplessly giggling, Gage rapidly nodded.

Sammy told Ben, "Even when you weren't around, I was thinking of you."

Sitting down at the table, with some chocolate chip cookies and milk, in the chair beside Dee, Kenny grinned, "So you're boyfriends now?"

Gage, Jonah, Sammy and Ben all rapidly nodded and confirmed it by chirping, "Yup."

Dee carefully asked Kenny, "Where are you at, do you like boys or girls?"

Kenny thoughtfully scowled, "I'm not sure. My old parents were just starting to teach me some stuff. All I know is that my new dads are really in love, just like my old mom and dad were. They love me and my brothers too. Shaun and Mike felt it, now I see it too." He paused but held his thoughtful scowl.

Several of the other six boys asked, "What's wrong?"

Breaking out of his thoughts, Kenny grinned, "I just don't know. In the Clan, me and my bros can do stuff we could only rarely do at home; like spendin' all day at the beach naked. That wouldn't have happened at home. Here though, nobody cares about bein' naked. All our dads were naked too today. I never would've seen my dad naked at home. So, what do AJ and Jerry do? They point at their dicks and tell us which other guys here have cut dicks too. Me and my bros learned more today with them and all you guys then we ever did before. Now, I really need to think to tell you if I like boys more than girls."

"You know there ain't no rush, right?" Dee told Kenny, "I don't know either, and it's no problem for my dad and pop. It won't matter to AJ and Jerry either."

Nodding, Kenny said, "Yeah, I know. It's just, you know, sex stuff that I really can't answer."

Sammy said, "Sex stuff don't matter all that much, Kenny. My dad and pop said, when we're teenagers it'll get more important."

Ben nodded, "I like Sammy cos he's way cute, really nice, and we have fun together."

"Me and Jonah ain't done anything more than hug and kiss," Gage offered.

Jonah smiled, "The only reason everybody knew about us is because we were holding hands. Once Reyes and Marc knew, it was like, kewl, now we can tell everybody else..."

"Or just keep holding hands," Gage grinned. "That's us tellin'

everyone, we're together."

Glancing around the table, Kenny blushed and asked, "So you ain't done nothin' with your dicks?"

"Nope," Ben giggled.

Shaking his head, Sammy smiled, "We saw each other hard, that's it."

Jonah giggled, "I pushed Gage's stiffy down at the floor, just to watch it pop up and smack his belly. He then did the same to me. That's all we did." The other boys giggled. Trying to control his own embarrassment and giggles, Leo appeared to be on the verge of self-combustion.

"It's probably all we'll do for a while too," Gage told Jonah.

Obviously pleased, Jonah grabbed a quick kiss from Gage, and then asked, "You're cuddling me tonight?"

"All night," Gage quickly promised. Jonah leaned over to Gage. Oblivious to the others around the table, Gage leaned over, forehead-to-forehead with Jonah.

Pointing at his brother and Jonah, Sammy grinned, "That's what boyfriends do, Kenny. It's like, understanding everything, and what we don't automatically understand, we figure out together."

Ben explained, "Really, I guess all you need to figure out is how you might feel if another dude touched your dick. If it makes you sad or angry, well, you probably don't want a boyfriend. If it makes you happy, then a boyfriend is what you want." Suddenly, the sight of Gage and Jonah forehead-to-forehead connected all the dots and Kenny stopped eating his cookies. He blushed bright red and both his

hands dropped to his lap to cover up.

Dee giggled, "That question was answered easily." Patting Kenny on the back, Dee smiled, "Don't worry about it. We all get woodies, even Richie and little guys, like him."

"Yeah, I guess," Kenny softly giggled.

Pushing away from the table, Leo wordlessly got up and hurried into the nearby bathroom.

All the boys around the table glanced at each other. Kenny giggled, "He's smarter than me. At least he was able to get to the bathroom."

Dee whispered in Kenny's ear, "Do you like Leo?"

Cracking an evil grin, Kenny locked eyes with Dee. Leaning closer to Dee, Kenny whispered back, "He's *really* cute and so nice!"

Dee nodded, "He's mine, Gage's, Sammy's and Richie's cousin now."

Picking up on what Dee and Kenny were whispering about, Sammy softly encouraged, "Go for it, Kenny."

Flushing even redder, Kenny giggled, "How? I don't even know where to begin."

Gage smiled, "Be his best friend. After a while, he'll either tell you how he feels, or maybe you'll tell him how you feel."

"You have to get the friendship goin' first," Jonah reminded. "That's how all our dads got to where they are. That's how me and Gage were. When Gage told me what he was feelin', I didn't catch on

at first."

Believing Leo was taking too long in the bathroom, Dee got up and went to knock on the door. He softly called, "Leo? Lemme in, cousin." All Dee barely heard in reply was a soft whimper. Dee assured, "You couldn't be safer, cuz, I promise." The doorknob rattled and then the door opened a little more than a crack. Dee slid in and quickly closed the door then locked it.

Leo wasn't looking at Dee, but only standing at the sink and willing his erection to deflate. Dee stood beside his cousin, asking, "You never had brothers, huh?" Leo vigorously shook his head. "It's completely normal, dude," Dee easily said. "Sammy and me share a room at our townhouse. I had a bit of a chubby this morning, but he woke with a stiffie that wouldn't go down. He couldn't pee or nothin'. I was done, washed my hands and went downstairs. It took that whole time for Sammy to chill." At last, Leo softly giggled. Rubbing Leo's back, Dee promised, "When us dudes manage to go a whole day without poking out of our shorts, that's the real surprise."

Leo softly wondered, "How do you deal?"

Shrugging, Dee shared, "I was an orphan and saw all my orphanage brothers with bones. We all had to do stuff with adult men and women, and with each other too sometimes. The adults took pictures of us, and did stuff that only boyfriends should do together. I just want you to know, it's normal. Sooner or later, your two little brothers will see you hard, and they'll joke around, teasing you, ya know? They'll do that only to show you that they really are proud of you, their big brother, who's growin' up, and getting boners every time a stray idea crosses his mind. Don't ever think that Geoff and Lenny don't love you, okay? Brothers goof on each other, for all the silly stuff we do. I can tell you, just from their expressions, Geoff and Lenny think you're awesome. Drew and Corey do too, it was all plain

as day, when you got adopted."

"I didn't know much of that," Leo whispered.

"You just got here last night," Dee reminded, "today's your first day. Some of us were like me, abused by adults. Some were like Gage and Sammy, who's parents simply didn't care. Some kids were street prostitutes. And another recent set, from California, weren't fed right or allowed to do anything, other than go to school. Then there's guys like you, who lost good parents during riots. We all have two things in common."

"Yeah? What's that?"

"We're better off than we were, cared for and caring about our new families, and all us kids are Clan, brothers and sisters. That's why I'm in here with you, making sure you know that I'm your cousin, and your Clan brother too."

Leo asked, "How old are you?"

"Ten," Dee answered. Leo's jaw dropped. Dee sighed, "I wasn't fed unless I did the stuff I told you. I'd rather go a day without food than suck some man's dick, or get my butt fucked. When I could do stuff with my orphanage brothers, I jumped at those chances, because we were always careful with each other, and it was better than doing stuff with an adult. Then I would eat a lot, to try and make up for the other times I didn't eat. Gage is eight, Sammy's nine and I'm actually the oldest of my brothers. That makes you and me the same, Leo. We're big brothers now."

Leo nodded and smiled. He quietly offered, "We could go back out with the guys, but I feel really silly."

"Lemme tell you one other thing then," Dee offered, and then

pointed at the door, saying, "All those dudes out there like you. Nobody's gonna mock you. I'd doubt they'll even tease you, because it's clear you were embarrassed. We're all boys, and about the same age. Nothin' new happened that they ain't seen before."

"How'd you get so kewl," Leo wondered, "after all the stuff you went through?"

Dee giggled, "My poppa's the Head Rimmer. My daddy's second in command. I watch them, even when they think I'm not watching or paying attention, I am."

Leo nodded and smiled, "Thanks, Dee."

"Are you ready?"

"Yup."

Dee went to unlock and open the door. All the boys were still sitting around the table and chatting. Dee led Leo to the chair he had been sitting in and pulled the chair out for him to sit, right beside Kenny. Dee then went around to the chair Leo had been in and sat down.

Leaning closer to whisper, Kenny asked Leo, "You okay?"

Nodding, Leo smirked, "Just embarrassed."

"I'm with ya there, pal," Kenny smiled.

Upstairs in one of the hallway bathrooms, just finishing up their after-sex shower, Corey told Drew, "Let's check on, Leo."

Nodding, Drew pulled Corey by the hips, so their dicks were smashed together, smiling, "It's all new to him. He'll be fine after

another day or two."

"I'm sure he will too," Corey giggled, "but if you don't stop being bad, we'll never get out of this tub."

Drew started placing angel light kisses around each of Corey's lips. Between each kiss, he whispered, "I – love – you, Cor, always – have – and – always – will." Over the last year as Drew's partner, Corey had mastered the fine art of giggling and whimpering at the same time. The final deep, passionate kiss they shared almost left both feeling a little like Prez; whacked out and woozy on codeine.

The only reason Corey didn't jump Drew and instigate another round was that they were in the slippery tub. Turning off the water and stepping out of the shower, Drew and Corey continued talking about Leo. It had only been a little more than a day since they brought Leo to Ewa Beach, but the boy still hadn't said what happened to his parents, or anything about what he had experienced. Drew and Corey didn't even know what city the boy had come from. All they both knew was that Leo was clingy and definitely needed reassurances that he wasn't alone and wouldn't be left alone. They were certain that when Leo spilled the beans and told them what had happened, Leo would start to heal. Once they were dried off, they went downstairs in the buff.

As usual, Stephen was lying on John, about a meter above the sofa. Neither Drew nor Corey said a word, but Stephen began giggling at the thoughts they were having that John was telepathically sharing. Reyes softly grinned, "I know nothing." Around the living room floor, all the youngest boys were already asleep. The television had the Disney cartoon 'Aladdin' playing, but only the few oldest boys still awake were watching it.

'Leo's in the kitchen,' John sent to his brother and brother-in-law.

After kissing Geoff and Lenny, Corey and Drew turned and went down the main foyer to check on their eldest son. Before they even entered the room, they could hear giggling. Around the dinette table were, in order, Sammy, Ben, Dee, Jonah, Gage, Leo and Kenny. Finding Leo as red as an apple and still helplessly giggling, Drew smiled, "I can only try and guess what's goin' on."

Widely smiling, Jonah explained, "We came out here for snacks. One thing led to another, talkin' about me and Gage, and Ben and Sammy too. Kenny and Leo are new, so we were just chatting, getting to know each other. The next thing we know, Kenny stops eating and tries to keep his stiffy from rippin' through his shorts." Covering his mouth with both hands to mute the sound, Kenny cracked up. "A minute later," Jonah continued, "Leo gets up and goes into the bathroom. Dee goes to talk to Leo in the bathroom, then they come back out here again. Kenny makes sure Leo's all right. Finally, while Leo's telling us what Dee was telling him, *alone in the bathroom*, Dee pops a bone!"

Dee cackled, "It's all your fault, *all of you!* I'm the odd man out here."

Kenny giggled, "I told Leo that I think he's smarter than me. I sat here blushing and pushing my woodie down, but Leo had the sense to leave the table."

Sammy sniggered, "So, here I sit with my boyfriend..."

"And here I sit with my boyfriend," Gage added.

Ben giggled, "Not one of the four of us have popped a bone, but these other three have."

"What's wrong with this picture?" Jonah joked, and everyone in the room cracked up.

"And lastly," Kenny giggled, "to remind us that life is different in the Clan, two of our leaders..."

"My two fathers!" Leo playfully interjected.

"Walk in here, swingin' in the breeze," Kenny finished, just before AJ and Jerry, also freshly showered and naked, stepped into the room. "Oh God!" Kenny laughed, and then lowered his face to the table top.

AJ grinned, "We missed something, I think."

Widely smiling, Jerry suspiciously squinted, "What's happenin'?"

Billy Whitmore and Jason Mullins walked in, saying, "Gotta leak," and went around the table to the bathroom. The door was only partly closed and they went directly to the toilet.

Facing AJ and Jerry, Drew chuckled, "We were only checking on our boys."

"They're being boys," Corey giggled.

"Well, that's good," AJ teased. "That was confirmed during the day, but I'm glad they've all figured it out." Kenny cracked up.

Jerry joked, "Since they're all shirtless, but wearing shorts, maybe they forgot?"

"Not hardly!" Gage playfully assured. Loving the choice of words, Jonah howled.

Ben giggled, "Wait, this is where we started!"

Getting up from the table, Leo went to his dad and pop, and was sandwiched between them. Corey checked, "You're okay?"

"Much better," Leo softly assured, and then reached to give his pop a kiss on the cheek.

Drew told Leo, "If you need us for anything, turn left at the top of the stairs and go past all the bathrooms to the first bedroom."

Leo nodded, "I'll be fine," and gave his dad a peck.

Leading Leo and Corey a few meters away into the kitchen, Drew leaned in closer to whisper, "You fit our family, Leo. In lots of ways, all five of us are so perfect for each other."

Corey smiled, "We care a lot about you, Leo."

Leo blushed, "I felt that way before you adopted me. Thanks for saying it though."

Corey said, "You're fitting in with some friends too, I see."

"I'll be fine down here with these guys," Leo assured.

Drew nodded, "We'll see you in the morning."

With happy tears welling in his eyes, Leo nodded, "I love you."

"I love you too," Corey and Drew chorused.

Drew took Corey's hand and started back upstairs. Leo saw that AJ and Jerry were saying goodnight to Kenny. Also, Troy and Sean had come down and were softly chatting with Billy and Jason, who had emerged from the bathroom and were now in the foyer.

In another minute, the fathers had kissed their sons goodnight and gone back upstairs. After getting snacks from the replicator, Billy and Jason joined the other older boys at the table. AJ and Jerry trailed Troy and Sean up the stairs. The former pair began giggling. Briefly glancing back over his shoulder, Sean grinned, "Troy's got a real nice butt, huh?"

Jerry nodded and chuckled, "Actually you both do. Troy's is a bit rounder, almost a bubble butt, like Prez."

Sadly shaking his head, Troy teased, "Check the mirror sometime, AJ."

Chuckling, Jerry teased his lover, "I told you."

At the top landing, Troy grinned, "Your butt's muscular, Jerry. Still worthy of noticing, especially when you're surfing." Sean and AJ cracked up.

Before Sean and Troy could make the turn and walk the few more steps into the master bedroom, Jerry softly asked, "Hey, is this bedroom gathering kewl?"

Sean rapidly nodded and explained, "At Archmania, the bedrooms were exactly that; a room that was wall-to-wall thick mattress, pillows and blankets. All the older dudes shared one room, and all the younger kids shared a room with Reyes, John and Stephen. When Stephen was ready, he and John joined us in our room."

Troy smiled, "Those first two nights, it wasn't easy for me, but I learned something besides a bunch of new songs; we're all the same, especially when we make love. Our band needs more rehearsal time there anyway, so you two and all our sons will make the next trip together."

Nervously giggling, AJ balked, "It just seems weird, almost like the orphanage."

"No, AJ," Sean seriously said. "That was adult pervs. This is six couples. *If* we get randy, it's couples together, doing what *we want*, **not** what we're forced to do. That makes it easy and fun."

When AJ and Jerry nodded, Troy opened the door and went inside the master bedroom with Sean. On the king sized bed, sitting up near the headboard, were Keith, Prez, Derrick, Mike, Corey and Drew. Kaleo and Tory had taken the two recliners. There was an empty sofa and coffee table, as well as a desk and a computer workstation, both of which had office style chairs on rolling casters. Once AJ and Jerry were in the room, Kaleo prompted, "Close the door, Jerry, so we can talk and laugh without bothering the kids." Spinning around, Jerry closed the door.

Tory admitted, "We've been waiting for you dudes, so we can talk about being new fathers."

"Help yourselves to the replicator, dudes," Keith prompted.

Sean smiled, "This room is huge."

Troy grinned, "If it was wall-to-wall mattress, we could all fit in here easily."

"We were just telling AJ and Jerry about Archnania," Sean admitted.

Prez assured, "We'll get there again soon. We still have a bunch of songs to learn and rehearse."

Heading directly for the replicator, Jerry grinned, "I'm still a

little confused about this Archmania place."

Drew and Corey loudly giggled, "So were we!" Neither said a word about having taken a second trip to Archmania.

While Jerry ordered two McCoy milkshakes for himself and AJ, Derrick grinned, "Only Reyes knew what time and day it was. The rest of us just went with it. When the week was over, we came back home."

Jerry handed a milkshake to AJ. They went to sit on the sofa. Troy went to the replicator, ordering, "Turkey club sandwich on whole wheat bread, with lettuce, sliced tomato, and light on the mayonnaise."

"He's a pro!" Mike chuckled.

"Go to a New York City deli sometime," Troy giggled. "If you don't know what you want, it's to the back of the line." He then imitated the Seinfeld show, loudly insisting, "No soup for you!" When he didn't get laughs, Troy handed his sandwich to Sean, smirking, "I guess none of you ever saw that TV show. It was big in the New York metro area." Seeing only small grins and shaking heads, Troy sighed, "As Moral Officer, I'll have to correct this." He then asked Sean, "What do you want, Tiger?"

Backing up a few steps, Sean giggled, "Hot Italian sausage, Lover." Smirking, Troy squinted, but still blushed as everyone in the room cracked up.

Troy smiled, "You backed away so I couldn't grab ya." Still giggling, Sean rapidly nodded. Troy sighed, "Do you want anything *besides* my sausage, as in real food?"

Handing Troy his sandwich, Sean smiled, "I'll get another

shake."

Nodding and taking his sandwich, Troy softly joked, "You're gonna get another shake, alright."

Giggling along with the others in the room, Sean cheered, "Whoo-hoo!" and went to the replicator. He ordered his milkshake and then called, "Alden, are you and your brothers paying attention?"

Over the room's ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "We have been all day, guys."

"Alden," Prez sniggered, "please tell us that you guys haven't been on that topic since our conversation this morning." Sean went to the sofa and sat beside Troy.

Alden giggled, "Well, yeah. We're taking these decisions seriously, and not just dick size; skin tone, eye and hair color, and apparent age, everything that we have to choose."

Kaleo wondered, "Have you specifically made any choices, Alden?"

"A few," Alden seriously answered. "I'm strongly considering sticking to Hawaiian skin tone and dark brown hair. I've pretty much concluded that I won't appear younger than ten-years-old, but I'm still working on the actual age. We've checked statistical average heights and weights. For instance, only five percent of eleven-year-olds are as tall as Corey, and only half of that group might have reached puberty, like Corey. I'm strongly considering appearing thirteen- or fourteen-years-old, but I'm still thinking about that too. Part of me wishes I could've helped at the Hyatt, the other part takes a good look at Prez's toasted tush and says, no way!" Again, more sniggering and laughter broke loose.

"Okay," Prez chuckled, "before my ass becomes the butt of any more jokes, let's change the subject."

Keith nodded and admitted, "Each and every one of the six of us were just as surprised and thrilled as you dudes are with your boys. About an hour ago, Kaleo and Tory asked us how they could be fathers. We postponed that until now, thinking Sean, AJ and Jerry would all like to participate, and that Troy, Drew and Corey could add valuable input."

"None of us does the job alone," Mike quickly offered. "Reyes got his memories back and has played big brother almost to the point where he's acting like a dad."

Derrick tapped his sub-vocal and asked, "Alden, please tell Reyes to join us up here?"

Drew said, "While we're waiting for Reyes, let me tell you about Monday. We were checking out the townhouses. Geoff didn't want to go inside to even see it. No matter how much me and Corey tried, and then Dillon, Jonah and Reyes tried, we couldn't get him to budge. Prez came outside, saw what was happening, and had a quick one-on-one with Geoff. The problem was almost solved right then."

"Today we went back to check out the townhouse," Corey smiled. "With Lenny and Leo with us, Geoff was as excited as any of us. He was flying from room to room, and up and down staircases, making the rest of us follow him. Prez hit the nail on the head; our family was too small for Geoff to feel comfortable in a house of our own." Reyes came in the room and immediately realized he was the only one that had boardies on. Corey finished, "Maybe we could've gone without Leo, but with Leo and Lenny there, it made all the difference. Changing homes wasn't scary for Geoff anymore; he really

enjoyed looking around the place."

Derrick shared, "Our kids hang out together all the time. We've had them down in the basement store with us, helping with newbies. There are enough times where we can't be with them. Every chance we can be with them, like when we're dealing with newbies, they're right there. Since we can't possibly give every kid our undivided attention, our boys do at least half the job."

"That gets us right back to the question we left off with," Prez said. "The question is, what do you think makes up the perfect father?"

After many moments of silence, Kaleo huffed, "Well, right off the bat, all the stuff done to us at the orphanages and by foster parents was wrong. Not that I would ever even consider fondling any of our Clan's kids, but my sons won't ever have to deal with memories like that."

Sean softly said, "There are some memories I have of my dad that aren't great. I think he forgot what it meant to be a kid. There were things I did that he found hysterically funny. We shouldn't ever goof on our boys. If it ever accidentally happens, I'll see the sadness in their eyes and bend over backwards to set it right."

Finished chewing a bit of his sandwich, Troy looked to his left at AJ and Jerry, saying, "So we're all on the same page here, let me tell you guys that my mom divorced my dad, mostly because he was a homophobic prick. My being a good musician wasn't enough for him to be proud of; it wasn't manly enough." Glancing around the room at his friends, Troy continued, "First and foremost in my mind, our sons can have any hobby or interest they want. If any of 'em want to paint pictures of flowers, or draw pictures of girls' clothing, they've got my complete support. They can even wear the dresses if they really want

to. Once I'm shown that's what they really want, they've got my support."

"Excellent," Keith, Drew and Mike softly cheered.

"This is good, and it seems we're all on the same page," Prez smiled. "A hypothetical scenario for discussion; pick any of our little tikes and put him in your mind. School starts Monday. You see him excelling at almost all of his schoolwork, but he has a really bad time with math. The subject is also interchangeable; it could just as easily be English, as in reading or writing essays, or any other core subject. What do you do with the boy that says, I don't wanna do that?"

Tory quickly answered, "Help him understand why he needs to know the basics of that topic. I suck at math too, but then again, I didn't have anyone that cared if I could count or do simple math either." He then grinned, "Now that I think of it, I'll probably be fishing for help at math here pretty soon."

Derrick warmly smiled, "And you'll get it too, from six musicians that deal with dividing tempos all the time." He told all the others, "If any of your sons need math help, we'll arrange for that to happen. Having a teacher help is great, but having a dad help and show how proud he really is, turns a problem subject into a favorite. Like everything else, dads do as much as they can. The rest of us fill in where we can and need to."

"A quick question," AJ interjected. When he had everyone's attention, he asked, "How can you guys be students and teachers, and fathers, and Core Rimmers too?"

"We'll only be teaching music and basic math," Prez smiled. "We'll be teachers assistants for other beginner subjects too, but primarily, we're music teachers."

Keith explained, "If this were a regular school, we couldn't create plans and all that stuff too, and still be dads and Core Rimmers. In the Clan school system, we can do a lot more, in a much more relaxed way. We'll get credit for the teaching we do, but still have to complete high school curriculum."

"We'll also have to be Core Rimmers first," Derrick told AJ and Jerry. "When duty calls, school moves back a notch, and we get school credit for doing that job too."

Getting the group back on topic, Prez said, "So, dads don't need sex from their kids. Dads need to be the primary sources of encouragement. Dads need to remember what being a little kid is like. What else do dad's do and what else shouldn't be done?"

Again, the room became quiet until Corey giggled, "My folks have never laid a hand on me. I mean, look at how tall my mom and dad are? A swat on my backside from either of them could send me into the next room, through the nearest wall!"

"Ask yourselves, what a slap on the hands or across the ass accomplishes," Mike prompted. After waiting a few moments, he then answered, "Not a damned thing. Now, if you all want to know the truth, I got to spend LOTS of time in corners." The room quickly filled with laughter. Mike giggled, "I wasn't counting dots on the walls. I was building guitar chords in my mind. Sometimes I forgot what the hell I did that got me in the corner in the first place!"

Derrick sniggered, "And then he'd get in trouble for forgetting what got him in trouble!"

Jerry giggled, "So let's say Shaun gets caught stealing. What should we do?"

"Steal something of his for a week or two," Drew quickly

answered. "All our kids love their video game time, and we don't mind letting them do that, because they're building hand-eye coordination. If Geoff stole something, the Playstation would be the first thing he'd lose. He'd return whatever he stole and apologize, and get to listen to me and Corey telling him why it was wrong."

"The punishment is appropriate for the crime," Prez summarized. "Sometimes a kid just wants things his way and now. That's a time-out, into a corner, because the real world won't revolve around his demands."

Keith smiled, "We're big brothers for all our kids, and dads to our sons. I might suggest making angry faces in the mirror too. Prez and I tried making angry faces at each other, but that didn't work at all." Widely smiling at the memory, Prez bounced his red eyebrows and wagged his tongue around. Keith giggled, "So yeah, you can try that, but expect it to have the opposite affect, so make sure you're alone."

Derrick and Mike sadly shook their heads. Drew and Corey helplessly howled laughing.

Pushing onward, Troy smiled, "So we get to be strong and weak at the same time. Honestly, I don't see any problem with that."

"The only problem I can easily foresee is with Billy," Sean admitted. "He's eleven. I challenged the assholes at the orphanage when I was about that age. How do we deal with an eleven-year-old challenging our decisions?"

"It depends what he's challenging," Mike offered. "Assuming it's something major, affecting his life and well being, long term, then prove that you're more grown up and smarter than he is. Let's say he finds a boyfriend, off-base, non-Clan. You can see the kid's trouble,

but he can't. All he'll see is his boyfriend. Rather than create a bigger problem that would affect all of you for years, as much as it hurts to do, you have to let him learn for himself. Then you have to forget the 'I told you so' and pick up the pieces of your son."

Troy smirked, "We all have a good idea of how we should pick our battles carefully, but these are our sons. In one afternoon, I can't believe how attached they've gotten to us, and how completely attached I am to them. After our shower, we went down there. Jimmy and Scott were sound asleep and we kissed them goodnight. We kissed Billy and Jason goodnight too."

"It was like a major priority," Sean admitted. "We couldn't come in here without going downstairs, just to see them, check on them, and kiss them goodnight."

Prez sighed, "Believe me, we know what you mean. As crazy as it's been all week, we still took every possible minute to be with our boys." He checked with Keith, saying, "It seems to me we we're more successful with that since Archmania." Keith slowly nodded, and Prez told the group, "Before Thursday night, we were kissing our boys goodnight hours before they went to bed. That has to change, for all of us. I learned a lot from twenty little dudes just a few hours ago. All I did was sit down with them, and in two minutes every one of them was gathered around me. That tells me very clearly, I haven't been available enough for them. That has to change too, and I can't organize that like I do almost everything else. Somebody, *please* remind me to do that from time-to-time. All the kids need to know that I'm not only working for them, I'll spend time with them too. I was bitchin' about kids barely saying hello to me, and then to learn that I've been too busy to just sit with them? That's wrong."

"Prez?" Jerry softly called. When Prez looked eyes with him, Jerry smiled, "I understand, but you have to also accept the fact that

you're juggling a lot. Of course the kids gathered around you earlier. When we came in, we saw it. As far as I know, all the kids just love having the leaders around. I'd bet big bucks that every kid here, no matter how old, would love time alone with you. There have been times, especially last Saturday and Sunday, I wanted that too. When you guys are at the pool, it goes from good to great. Every mealtime you guys are there, the noise in the dining room is louder than when some of you aren't around. I'd like to suggest that we all make a point of spending time with the youngest kids, but if Prez could spend time with groups of kids, in all age brackets, for just an hour every week, I think we'd all be just a little happier. With fifteen of us, even paired up, we'd have a week covered easily. Each of us can take a group, starting tomorrow afternoon. How does that sound?"

Reyes smiled, "Easy, on normal days. So the more correct question becomes, what in the Clan is 'normal'?"

After a few seconds of them all glancing at one another, Corey loudly laughed, "OUCH!" and partially collapsed onto Drew, as if he'd been shot in the chest. They all cracked up laughing, and playfully tossed out ideas of Clan 'normal' stuff; like gorillas, G-Cats, ferrets, teenagers adopting kids, Valium popping mothers, learning dozens of languages in a single morning, N-Gens with all their diverse skills, occasional trips to a planet out of time where plants and animals talk, and an average of twenty incoming newbie kids per day over their first week. When it was all over, they still decided to go forward with Jerry's suggestion anyway, promising to never again broach the topic of 'normal'.

Chapter 14

Ewa Beach CIC Basement Store

Saturday, November 5, 2004, 11:00AM HTZ

About the same time Reyes was initiated into his Core Rimmer role at the diving well, John and the rest of the Des Moines brunch party returned home with eight new kids. One of the eight boys was five-year-old Wade Houseman, who was John's and Stephen's newest son-to-be. The first thing John did upon arrival was tap his comm-badge, calling Lieutenant Vorik, so he could meet twelve-year-old Vaziik. In the meantime, Jim, Jennifer and Stephen explained the basics of the shopping excursion to the newbies.

More concerned about their newest toys, the Oldcambus brothers wondered where their new trikes were. Frankie answered, "Daddy told Alden to leave them outside the CIC."

At the eight confused and scowling faces before her, Jennifer smiled, "It may seem that the leaders like talking to themselves, but often they're talking to our AI, Alden, through the sub-vocals in their ears."

Lieutenant Vorik transported into the store. John introduced Vaziik to his new mentor.

Stephen giggled, "While we were saying goodbye, guys; John, Johnny and Robin were saying their goodbyes telepathically, and John talked to Alden. Right out behind the CIC, across the driveway and near the shuttle pad, is a brand new trike garage."

"And I'll be adding to the collection, so more boys can join

you," Jennifer promised. "Then I'll see about getting a trike-trail set up at the Northwest side of the base."

Wearing a small grin, Jim reminded his wife, "Remind Carl to leave the trees and foliage untouched, love. Remember our squirrel families."

"I haven't forgotten," Jen smiled. "I may never forget."

Done with Vorik and Vaziik, John turned to the group of newbie boys, giggling, "Let's not talk about what would happen if we don't remember our squirrels." Leaning down, John used his hands to lift Wade, and then sat him in a shopping cart. Telekinetically, John made the cart buck like a horse. Holding on tight, Wade happily squealed. On its own, the cart rolled down the aisle to the boys' underwear and sleepwear department.

Next to take a shopping cart, Erik Kendricks wondered, "John, is there a reason you didn't lift Wade with your mind?"

Paying attention to Wade holding onto the sides of the cart, John pleasantly answered, "Trust," and lifted Frankie up off the floor to hover over the cart Wade was sitting in. Giggling madly at each other, Wade reached up while Frankie reached down.

"Wade knows what John can do," Stephen meekly added. "We can feel Wade's on the fence about it; wanting to try it again, but scared to try at the same time. John levitated Wade to a urinal in the mens' room at Des Moines. It was our lucky break that it wasn't anywhere else."

Watching the Oldcambus brothers grab shopping carts, Jen reminded, "We're all family now. Where you decide to live and with whom doesn't change that fact."

"Anyone that needs mom or dad time can find it, from any adult here," Jim assured. Rob and Laura Gibbons transported into the store and were quickly introduced to the batch of boys. John admitted to telepathically calling the Gibbons' to the store. Almost immediately, Laura took interest in Wade and Taron, the two youngest boys. Wade held back from Laura until he was assured by Frankie it would be okay. Taron got jabs from his cousins until Laura showed more interest in the cute strawberry-blond, eleven-year-old twins, Kade and Karey.

Knowing when to keep his yap shut, the twins' big bro, fourteen-year-old Kassidy, followed Erik into the underwear department. In the meantime, Jim was softly telling Rob that Erik's only surviving parent, the boy's father, was an LA motorcycle cop who was killed in an accident during the riots. With a purpose, Rob followed the two teenagers and made himself available to chat. Jim went to assist twelve-year-old Stu Sutliff through the store. Choosing to assist Taron, Kathy Marr trailed the blond boy and struck up a conversation.

* * * * *

In dormitory three, Pat O'Hara and Rafe had Ralphie there, helping to get the new digs organized. Having moved into the dorm and out again Thursday evening, Ralphie was able to explain a few new items, like the laundry sacks, and the satellite television and radio system. Noticing that Pat and Ralphie paused for kisses as they traveled from suitcase to closet and dresser, Rafe giggled, "We need to do something with this room."

"What's wrong, Rafe?" Pat wondered.

"You two can't pass by each other without a touch and a kiss," Rafe giggled. "Since this is how it is daytime and dressed, we need to do something for night time. We need extra privacy between the

beds."

Ralphie giggled, "What do you think we'll be doing?"

Already blushing slightly, Pat loudly laughed, "RALPHIE!"

Focusing on putting his clothes away, Rafe giggled, "Like Jay and Chris; gettin' naked, kissin', moanin' and groanin'."

"RAFE!" Pat yelled. Ralphie cracked up. Sadly shaking his head, Pat smirked at Ralphie, ordering, "Tell him what we've been doing since we met."

Ralphie giggled, "Getting closer and wanting to get even closer." Rafe howled laughing. Disappointed, Pat slouched. Ralphie went to Rafe, paused his unpacking, and more seriously said, "We're sharing more than hugs and little kisses. I've been telling Pat what my life was like, and he's telling me the same kind o' stuff. Intermixed with all that is my new life with three brothers, which might become five brothers, at least that's what we're hoping."

Rafe wondered, "Which two newer brothers?"

"Richie's brothers from Vegas, Carrol and Terrance," Ralphie said. "And that's just the start, because Ronnie's half brother, Adam, in Des Moines, has another three brothers, a twin and another set of twins."

Pat explained, "I'm telling Ralphie about Washington. We're city kids, and Ralphie's from the suburbs near Lake Erie. Do you think we're just gonna become boyfriends overnight? Yeah, I like a lot about Ralphie, and he like's a lot about me, but we're just starting, not like your bro and Chris at all. We hope to get there, is all either of us can say."

Nodding, Ralphie smiled, "And that it's looking good so far."

Rafe confirmed, "Like every other friendship?"

Ralphie nodded and Pat grinned, "With additional attractions tossed in." Much more enthusiastically, Ralphie nodded at Pat. Leering at Ralphie, Pat giggled, "Like with a pro model."

Slithering closer to Pat, Ralphie smiled, "Or with a hot redhead who could've been a model. Which reminds me, I think we'll have to wear our Speedos again today." Stepping into a hug, Ralphie and Pat sighed and purred.

Rolling his eyes, Rafe laughed, "Alden, how can we block the views between the beds?"

From the ceiling speaker, Alden giggled, "It's not been much of an issue before, Rafe. There are alternatives, like a thick cloth curtain, or we could simply rearrange some furniture?"

"Let's try something with the furniture," Rafe suggested.

"Step away from the beds, guys," Alden prompted. Rafe did as he was told and moved by the doorway. Not willing to separate, Ralphie and Pat slowly waddled together away from the beds. The two night tables and lamps disappeared from their positions between the beds and windows, reappearing near the furthest corners of the room. The dressers were also relocated from the walls near the closets to the space between the beds. One dresser faced Pat's bed and the other faced Rafe's bed. Alden asked, "How's that look to you guys?"

"Excellent!" Rafe cheered, "We can get this unpacking done faster too."

Pat wondered, "Where can we put our empty suitcases, Alden?"

"You could put them under your beds, or there's a storage room, just down the hall, where you could put them," Alden replied.

Across the hall, Chris had been doing most of the unpacking, leaving Jay to put sneakers and button-down sport shirts away in closets, because that was easier for him to do with one hand in a cast. With the last of the shirts put away, Jay watched Chris scurry between the beds and the dressers with socks, underwear and shorts. With nothing better to do, Jay went to his suitcase and started to carefully lift a stack of shorts. Hurrying over to his boyfriend, Chris giggled, "Leave it, before you drop it. I'll take care of it," and tried to take the pile of shorts.

Gripping the clothes tighter, Jay chuckled, "I can help."

Play fighting for the shorts, Chris giggled, "Yeah, help get 'em all wrinkly and dirty before you even wear 'em." When Jay wouldn't let go, Chris cackled, "The Doc said no exertion!"

"Was I talking about the clothes?" Jay sniggered, and repeated, "I can help." Pausing his struggle for the clothes, Chris looked into Jay's eyes; the eyes he feared he wouldn't ever see again only hours earlier. Without looking, Jay tossed the pile of clothes onto the bed. Watching tears flood Chris' eyes, Jay whispered, "I'm the only one that can help." In a flash, Chris was in Jay's arms and unashamedly crying. Holding his love close and tight, Jay softly joked, "I'm not quite dead yet. I do believe I'm feeling much better." Still weeping through a giggle, Chris smacked Jay's ass. Soothingly, Jay rambled, "It's my fault; my fault I got trapped, my fault you and Rafe thought I was I dead, it's all my fault, just like every other argument we've had. I hate to tell you, but those roles are about to change. Since the door is open, everyone can see me with you. They'll all see it soon, baby;

your hand in mine, and my mouth attached to yours. Corey and Drew showed the way. Prez and Keith proved it. You're mine, and everyone here's gonna know it, I promise."

"I was so scared," Chris bitterly wept. "Starting over again, but wanting someone like you, and always being disappointed, getting nowhere, with nobody, because they could never be you."

Knowing this was only the beginning of the recovery, Jay listened to Chris bawling nonsensically for a few minutes. When his lover calmed down, Jay led Chris to the bed on the left side of the room, and then tossed Chris' empty suitcase onto the other bed. He sat down on the empty bed and then pulled Chris down onto the mattress, signifying it was cuddle time, and the last bit of unpacking could wait. Kicking his sandals off, Chris then slid into his favored position, beside Jay and with his head resting on his left shoulder. Once settled, Jay softly told Chris what he was planning for his first days at Ewa Beach. He compared their old closeted life to the new one about to start that very day, after they grabbed a nap and then had lunch. Soon, Jay realized he wasn't getting any responses from Chris, only deep, steady breathing. With the door wide open, Jay whispered, "I can help, and I will," and then closed his eyes and fell asleep.

On the way to the bathroom, and again returning to his room, Scott Shetley saw Chris cuddled up to Jay. He couldn't help admitting how awesome they looked together. It was time to figure out his sexuality, once and for all, Scott told himself. All his life, Scott had been friendly with various boys and girls, but none were so close that he could picture himself holding them close and napping together, like Chris and Jay were. He yearned to be in a picture like that, but the other half was blank. Returning to the job of unpacking and organizing his new room, Scott saw Lance point and beam, "I thought that corner would be a good home for our axes, man."

Maybe it was his thoughts that made Scott believe Lance's smile was particularly bright. Seeing the smaller Les Paul case leaning against his larger, tweed Stratocaster case, Scott nodded, "Good spot, easily accessible for both of us. It's kewl."

Lance blinked, "Are you sure? You seem a little distracted or something?"

Scott grinned, "Look down the hall, in Chris' and Jay's room."

Heading out the door, Lance wondered, "What did they do?" but didn't wait for a reply.

Returning to unpacking his suitcase, Scott wondered and worried what Lance might have to say. Barely a minute later, while Scott was organizing his new chest of drawers exactly like his old one in New York City, Lance returned. Without saying a word, Lance went directly to his bed. Scott paused to watch Lance. He didn't seem fazed. Scott prompted, "What are you thinking?"

Heading to his closet with shirts, Lance shrugged, "What's there to think? Chris is happier, so that's really good."

"Nothing else and no other comments?"

"I don't really know Jay, but they seem to belong together. There's lots of gay guys here. It don't bother me a bit. Does it bother you?"

"No; I thought they looked pretty good, comfortable together."

Lance giggled, "Comfortable enough to leave the door open, so everyone going by could see."

Trying to keep his voice sounding like he was making idle

conversation, and returning to the chore close to finished, Scott admitted, "I've never had that, and can't even really see ever having it."

Lance grinned, "That's too bad."

Gathering up more clothes to take to the dresser, Scott suspiciously smirked, "You've had something like that and didn't tell me?"

"His name was Paulie," Lance giggled, "Paulie Panda." Spinning around, Scott grinned at Lance. Continuing his unpacking, Lance giggled, "Paulie was my snuggle bear from ages three until ten, when he was looking so much older than seven, it was a very sad day when Paulie gave his final wave bye-bye."

Cracking up, Scott laughed, "You're telling me your first boyfriend was a Panda bear?"

Lance giggled, "A guy's gotta start somewhere!"

"You're killin' me here!" Scott roared, and collapsed onto his bed.

Going about his business, Lance playfully giggled, "I told you already, over my head is the word 'virgin,' capitalized in big red neon letters. Sometimes, I think I'm lucky I can spank it and get off on it." Scott howled. More loudly, Lance giggled, "Yes, I can play guitar, but it's a fifty-fifty shot when it comes to playing with myself. I figure someday *after* I can play guitar really well, maybe I'll start thinking about sex, but not until then. That leaves us a few years of practicing, I guess."

Almost breathless, Scott sat up chortling, "Fifty percent of the

time is good by my standards."

"I'm sorry about that too, and that I'll be the only teenager at the diving well keeping my shorts on most of the time."

Scott grinned, "Why are you worried about it? You've got the same or more than most other guys." Uncontrollably, he blushed from accidentally divulging that he was paying attention in the shower the prior evening

"I don't care what the guys see," Lance grinned, "but I do care about sunburning my city boy white ass."

Understandingly, Scott nodded, "Then you definitely limit your exposures. I've had my share of sunburns too." He stood and set about finishing the last of his unpacking.

Finished unpacking, Lance zipped up his suitcase and stuffed it under the bed. The mattress top was at least six inches higher off the floor than his twin sized bed in Manhattan was. The box-spring was higher off the floor and the mattress had to be three or four inches thicker. Springing up, Lance landed on his back on his new bed. "Oh, man!" Lance cheered, "This is an awesome bed, the most comfortable bed I've ever felt."

Scott nodded, "Gimme a few here, and I can check out my bed."

Lance giggled, "Paulie would've loved it."

Losing it and cracking up, Scott fumbled, dropping his socks and underwear to the carpeted floor. Lance howled laughing and rolled back and forth on his bed. Squatting down, Scott giggled, "You've got me jealous of a damned stuffed Panda bear!" and started tossing his new, but slightly less clean underwear at his hysterical roomie. Fanning the flames, Lance held pairs of boxer-briefs to his

face and deliriously purred through his giggles. Laughing his butt off, Scott began loading several smaller socks into a single large sock. He stood, opened the Velcro on his board shorts and stuffed the over-filled sock into his opened shorts.

Lance glanced over and saw his roomie approaching his bed. Widening his eyes, Lance squealed "No! That's way, way bigger than I expected after last night's shower!"

Passing by the room, Craig Nash heard the remark, paused and peeked inside. Seeing Craig at the doorway first, Lance turned red and cracked up. Turning to see why Lance was blushing, Scott inadvertently showed off his sock-stiffy. Craig sniggered, "Nice, but I think Lance is right, it's way bigger than even the gorillas and G-Cats would want to deal with."

Wandering off to return to the relative safety of his little brother and their room, Craig heard Scott loudly laugh, "It's not what it looks like, Craig."

"Thank God!" Craig chortled. "I'm not sure what it was that I saw."

A giant stuffed Panda bear appeared on top of Lance. "PAULIE!" Lance cheered. The Panda teetered and toppled over, apparently giving his companion a long overdue hug. Lance giggled, "It's been so long, but not as long as Scott."

"Oh, God damn it," Scott laughed, "I guess I'll pack and move out, so you and Paulie can be alone."

Lance hysterically wheezed, "You just unpacked. Stay, and Paulie can find a home with a younger kid. We've got guitars to master, in between middle of the night wanks."

Pulling the sock out of his shorts, Scott grinned, "It's a deal. And it's good to know you won't get too upset if I become as hairy as Paulie."

"It's good to know you won't freak when you hear my bed squeaking late at night," Lance giggled.

Scott shrugged and grinned, "I figured, since you're thirteen, if you hadn't already started, your turn would be soon enough. We all learn it's a necessary evil."

Much more seriously, Lance asked, "Do you think we told each other too much?"

Scowling and shaking his head, Scott assured, "To be roommates, we'd better get used to telling the truth. At some point, one of us will have a girl friend or a boy friend. We'll have to deal with lots of daily stuff, so no, I don't think that we've messed up. I think we've started on the right foot. Goofing around is a good way to deal with it."

Nodding, Lance prompted, "Let's head to the diving well before lunch."

Scott sniggered, "Let me finish organizing socks and undies."

Lance giggled, "I'd help, but I know where them socks have been."

"I've got underwear on," Scott chuckled.

After humming thoughtfully for a few seconds, Lance muttered, "That's another point for consideration; I'd guess half the guys here wear underwear."

"I can go commando in this climate." Scott reminded, "Compared to Manhattan's heat and humidity, this is way more comfortable."

"We'll eventually have to fit in with the locals," Lance stated, and stood to remove his underwear. Purposefully, Scott attended to his clothes and storing them, instead of watching his roomie strip. Lance put his board shorts and sandals on again. Finished putting his stuff away, Scott zipped his suitcase and then slid it under his bed. He quickly stripped, stuffed his boxer-briefs into a laundry bag in his closet, and then slid back into his shorts and sandals. Thankful that Scott got undressed beyond his open closet door, Lance sat and waited on his bed, knee drumming and softly singing the lead guitar part to Led Zeppelin's 'The Ocean'. When Scott was dressed, he tapped Lance on the arm. They left the room, each singing the guitar parts to 'The Ocean'. After going through the common room, Lance and Scott passed the open door of the Nash brothers' room. Having heard from his big bro what Lance and Scott were caught doing, Phil cracked up.

Sadly shaking his head, Lance giggled, "We're getting a reputation."

"For having fun with stuffed bears and over-stuffed socks."

About the same time Scott and Lance were walking outside of dorm three, Drew was leading Corey and his three sons into townhouse number three. The young family stepped inside the spacious living room. The tan leather sofa was large enough for all five of them to be comfortable. To one side of the sofa was a matching love seat, and on the other side were two matching recliners. Drew paused and turned on the television. Corey, Geoff and Lenny went into the dining room, and then turned left into the kitchen. About to join the rest of the family, Drew and Leo paused to allow Geoff and

Lenny to race by and up the stairs.

Drew called, "What're you doin', Cor?"

Turning slightly and looking over the breakfast counter at his hubby, Corey answered, "Just looking in the cabinets. We've got plates, pots, pans and utensils, but no food at all." He then called, "Alden, get some food and stuff in this house, dude."

Alden queried, "Give me an idea of what you'd like, guys?"

Corey checked with Drew, who then answered, "Our main meals will be at the CIC, so snacks and sandwich fixin's, ice cream, potato and corn chips, a variety of cookies, and milk, juices and sodas. We'll definitely need toilet paper, bath, hand and kitchen towels, all those sorts of household supplies."

"It's on the way," Alden replied.

Corey asked Drew, "Are we going to Kaho'olawe today?"

Nodding, Drew replied, "After lunch for a few hours. How long we can stay depends on rescue activity."

Looking up at his new dad, Leo asked, "Are we staying here tonight?"

Drew nodded, "If we can't stay at Kaho'olawe, yes. Keith and Prez are already considering spending the night there."

Leo wondered, "What's the beach house like?"

Corey giggled, "Since we haven't been there, we don't really know."

Pulling his eldest close for a hug, Drew grinned, "We were told

it's sort of like the big homes here. I think it'll be a good place for you to get to know all your new cousins and the rest of the Core Rimmers."

Leo giggled, "Kewl, dad. There are so many kids here, I wouldn't know where to start or who to talk to."

Nodding understandingly, Corey softly explained, "A week ago Geoff and Lenny felt the same way, with only a hundred kids here. By Wednesday afternoon, when we adopted Lenny, both of 'em knew all their cousins and had other friends too."

Drew confidently told his eldest, "You'll be like that in a few more days, Leo. When kids have questions for a Core Rimmer, but none are around, guess who they'll ask." Shocked with the news, Leo's eyes widened. It had never occurred to Leo that he was now the son of two leaders.

From upstairs, Geoff and Lenny yelled, "DADDY! POPPA! COME SEE!" Leo giggled at his brothers.

Leading the way, Drew laughed, "We're coming."

Trailing his dad and walking with his pop, Leo wondered, "How can I answer any questions? I just got here."

Corey giggled, "Ask your brothers and cousins that question later. You'll have a whole day together."

Climbing the steps, Drew added, "You witnessed everything in the store, last night and again this morning, Leo. Believe it or not, you've got the answers already."

As soon as Drew stepped onto the second floor landing, both his hands were taken by Geoff and Lenny. Drew was quickly shown the

two smaller bedrooms and then dragged to the master bedroom. Peeking into the two smaller bedrooms, Corey giggled, "There's room for four." He glanced down at Leo, playfully asking, "Do you want another little brother, or one your age?"

Covering his face with both hands, Leo cackled, "Too much, too soon, pop!"

Wrapping an arm around Leo, Corey softly giggled, "Oh, the spare bed in that room is for your older boyfriend, isn't it?" Smirking at his pop, Leo jumped away from the arm over his shoulder and tickle attacked with both hands. Cracking up, Corey escaped by racing downstairs.

From the master bedroom, where Geoff and Lenny could be seen testing the mattress springs, kid-style, Drew sniggered, "What did your pop say, Leo?"

Leo giggled, "You call him 'angel'? He's wicked!"

Waving Leo forward, Drew loudly called, "Corey, I'm setting up our computers."

Approaching his dad, Leo grinned, "Do we really need two beds in both bedrooms?"

Drew shrugged and grinned, "We'll check with Grandma Morrison for a spare brother for you. Which reminds me, what were you and the evil angel talking about in the store?"

First checking that his two little brothers weren't paying attention, Leo blushed and giggled, "The birds and the bees, and the birds and the birds, and the bees and the bees."

"Now I get it," Drew smiled. "Too many cute dudes changing

clothes?" Nodding, Leo fiercely blushed. Drew grinned, "Let what you've learned settle for a few days. We've all been there. Imagine how I felt, being attracted to Prez, who suddenly became my big brother."

"Really?"

Drew nodded, "Later on, when we visit Kaho'olawe, you'll get the whole story."

"What's the preface?"

"Keith and John are my blood," Drew began, "but Prez is very much a brother too, and so are Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Troy, AJ, Jerry, and all the Core Rimmers. We're all family. All the kids that will be at Kaho'olawe are my nephews and your cousins. All the other kids are brothers and sisters too. That's the biggest lesson we teach every newbie." Noticing Corey out in the hallway, keeping a safe distance from Leo, Drew giggled, "Come check out our workstations, Cor. You can put the finishing touches on this, and I'll take Leo to rearrange the other bedrooms." Geoff and Lenny jumped off the king sized bed and raced past Drew, Leo and Corey, out of the room. Corey got tickled by everyone that passed him.

Drew went to the bedroom furthest from the stairs, where Geoff and Lenny had each chose a bed to bounce upon. Calling Alden, Drew replaced his sons' laptops with top-of-the-line MacBook Pro models. He then had Geoff's and Lenny's clothes transported into dresser drawers and closets. Ready for Leo's room, Drew called for Leo's suitcase. Immediately, Drew called for Alden to remove the extra bed. Heading for the bed with Leo's suitcase on it, Drew asked, "What did you think of your facts of life talk?"

"Trippie," Leo giggled. Watching Drew turn and smile at him,

Leo giggled, "Love has so many different levels and parts. Never once did I imagine how it could be. None of my old friends were really close friends, not so much that I'd want to cuddle with them. Cuddling nude is further out there." Geoff and Lenny raced by the room and downstairs.

Drew asked, "Do you think you have a sexual preference?"

"Boys," Leo blushed, and then muttered, "The basement store made it very clear, but it still seems weird to say."

"Think more about the whole person, not just the attached parts," Drew recommended. Beginning to empty the suitcase and load the dresser, Drew rambled, "Where I was at nine-years-old isn't that much different. Corey was already my best friend. We were already snuggling together, hugging and kissing occasionally too. He slept with me in my twin sized bed, and I slept with him in his double-sized bed. It's only a little more than a year since we started having kid sex; which is more like experimenting. Only since last June has it become much more than experiments. You've got at least another year or more before you're there, Leo. Being an American here in the ROH, you'll learn that you can be comfortable naked. Now that you know your interests, you can start looking for that very special best friend, the one you want to be with most, and can barely wait to be with. Getting there is everything, because without it, all that's left is sex."

Leo wondered, "Who do you think I need to spend time with later?"

"Anyone and everyone," Drew chuckled. "I know Gage, Sammy and Dee are already at Kaho'olawe, and they're in your age bracket." Noticing Leo seemed off in a trance, Drew gently wondered, "What's wrong?"

Snapping himself out of it, Leo frowned, "Stuff from yesterday. I'd rather not talk about it yet, dad."

"Whenever you're ready," Drew promised. Carefully watching his husband and eldest son, Corey came into the room.

Glancing at his dad and pop, Leo sighed, "I really want to fit in."

Noticing Leo's uncertainty, Drew offered a hug. Following Drew's lead, Corey completed the sandwich, cheerfully assuring, "You fit in with us and our family. By the end of the day, you'll have plenty of friends." Leo widely smiled and rapidly nodded.

During the quiet moments Corey, Drew and Leo were embracing, the distant pitter-patter of feet climbing steps was heard. A door slammed. The louder footfalls of Lenny and Geoff racing up to the second floor preceded Lenny's shout; "We got a cellar too, like gramma and grampa's house!"

Geoff giggled, "It's big! There's even a bathroom down there."

Stepping away from the hug, Corey went to the hallway landing giggling, "I guess you dudes like our house?" Enthusiastically, Geoff and Lenny overflowed. Softly giggling, Leo and Drew returned to the unpacking task. Taking their poppa's hands, Geoff and Lenny led Corey down to the basement.

Finishing the unpacking, Drew watched Leo at the closet hanging his rain jacket. When Leo turned to his dad, there was a brief introspective expression Drew noticed on his eldest. Pasting on a bright smile, Leo prompted, "Let's go see the basement, dad," and held out his right hand. Drew took Leo's hand and they started out of the room. On the way down the steps, Leo shared, "My old house didn't have a basement."

Drew suggested, "How about we make it a rec room, with games and toys for you and your brothers?"

"That sounds awesome!" Leo cheered.

"As soon as we get back from Kaho'olawe," Drew chuckled. "I'll bet your brothers are hungry again by now. Let's gather up the speed demons and your pop, and we'll go to the CIC."

"Kewl," Leo smiled, "I'm still pretty full from the milkshake. Next time I won't get a large glass."

* * * * *

Finished in the basement store, John watched his parents and the Gibbons' transport back home. All the newbie boys wanted rooms in the dorm, which wasn't surprising since almost all the boys were older than eleven years old. Eight year old Taron Reyce Otter was the youngest of the group, but he wanted a dorm room too, to prove himself 'grown up' like his three cousins, the Oldcambus brothers. What was surprising was Stu Sutliff trailing Vaziik and Lieutenant Vorik through the store. Only one boy from the prior night's rescues hadn't already taken a dorm room that morning. Over the base PA system, John called for eight-year-old Jimmy Matos to meet the group at dormitory three. Stephen called Alden to have the group transported to the third dorm's common room.

Upon arrival, Lieutenant Vorik told John, "I will return to the Command Center." When John nodded and thanked him, the Vulcan man then told Vaziik, "I am billeted at condominium B, first floor unit 1A. You are welcome."

Nodding once, Vaziik assured, "I will make a point of visiting you there."

Tapping his comm-badge, Vorik ordered, "Return me to the Command Center, Alden." He vanished and the chatter among the newbies got louder with remarks about the huge room they were in.

John smiled, "Oldcambus brothers, you're first on the list," and led the way with Frankie, Stephen and Wade. John called, "Taron, Jimmy Matos is your age. I'm hoping you two like each other enough to share a room." Reaching out empathically, John knew that Travis was in his room. He told Erik Kendricks, "There's a guy your age in a room alone, dude. Maybe you two will consider becoming roommates." He then tapped his sub-vocal, telling Alden, "Get room twenty-one set up for three, with bunk beds, an extra desk, chair, dresser and computer." Passing room twenty, where Travis was shirtless, John called, "Got a minute, Trav?"

"I'm not here a full day and already putting on a fourth shirt," Travis sniggered. Stepping out of his room with a clean polo shirt in his hand, Travis smirked, "I spilled chocolate milkshake on the one I wore to breakfast, and spilled cola on another at the diving well. It's all Darren's fault, showin' off without warnings."

Stephen giggled, "You're our first accident prone Rimmer, Trav."

Travis chuckled, "Normally, I could make it through an entire day in one shirt, but even though I feel pretty relaxed, I guess I'm still a little jittery."

Ignoring all the curious thoughts about Darren that the newbies were having, John grinned, "Travis just got here yesterday, and moved into the dorm this morning." Turning to Travis, John smiled, "Trav, meet your new neighbors. First we have the Oldcambus brothers, Kassidy is fourteen, and the twins are Kade and Karey." Casual greetings traveled around.

Opening the door across the hall from Travis' room, Stephen saw the furniture rearrangements done and called, "Right here, guys."

The twins cheered, "Awesome!" and hurried with their suitcases, past their big brother into the room. Sadly shaking his head, Kassidy followed his brothers.

Distracted by the threesome, John returned his attention to Travis, saying, "We're a little uneven with newbies again, bro." Gesturing to each boy with his right hand, John said, "Taron's eight, and Erik is fourteen. I was hoping you and Erik might like to try rooming together. You're both from California, so you've got a little something in common."

Trav nodded and offered his right hand to knock knuckles with Erik, warmly saying, "It's good to meet you."

Widely smiling, Erik greeted, "The pleasure's mine."

Of course, John couldn't help telepathically hearing the surface thoughts each of the two teens were successfully stifling. Travis thought Erik was the cutest dude he'd ever seen, and Erik thought just as highly of Travis, who still hadn't managed to get his clean shirt on. In fact, Erik's thoughts sounded like a broken record, repeatedly chanting, "Omigod! What a hunky champ!"

Wondering how clean Travis' shirt would be in a few hours, John helplessly giggled, "Are you two willing to share a room?"

Almost simultaneously, Erik and Trav enthusiastically agreed, "Yeah, sure." Jerking his head toward his room, Travis left the hallway and Erik followed, dragging his suitcase along.

Stephen, Frankie and Wade uncontrollably giggled at the two

star-struck teens seemingly floating into the room they now shared.

Jogging through the common room, Jimmy Matos hollered, "John! You called, dude?"

Nodding, John answered, "Just trying to keep a bunch of you dudes from living alone." He then gestured to Taron Reyce Otter and introduced the two eight year olds. They shook hands and knocked knuckles. John moved on to Vaziik and Stuart, smiling, "You two hit it off from the start, so I don't need to ask."

Watching his new Vulcan friend, Stuart smiled, "The Clan is Vulcan, and I've only learned a few things at school about the planet and the people, so it's been good."

"And I will learn more than I might in books from Stuart... Stu," Vaziik somewhat awkwardly stated.

Opening the door to room twenty-two, Stephen smiled, "Welcome home, guys."

Going to Taron and Jimmy, John asked, "How're you two doing?"

"I think it'll work fine," Jimmy answered. "Taron's not from LA, but I think we've got a lot in common."

"Plotting ways to annoy my stuck up cousins," Taron softly sniggered, and then bounced his eyebrows at Jimmy.

Grinning, Jimmy asked, "Are we the youngest dudes in this hall?"

John thought a moment then answered, "Yeah, in this hall you are. Down the other hall there are four younger than you."

"Perfect!" Jimmy giggled, "We're too young and innocent to be

blamed for anything!"

Evilly cackling, the two boys went to the open room where Stephen was standing. John giggled, "Jimmy, I know you're all sweet and innocent, but without your suitcase and clothes, that image is pretty much shot, don't you think?"

Jimmy shrugged and grinned, "I was at the pool before you called me. At first, it was a little scary, but it was kewl. To have lunch and dinner at the CIC, I will need clothes, though."

Tapping his sub-vocal, John called, "Alden, get Jimmy's suitcase, bro."

Over the hallway's ceiling speakers, Alden shared, "That's the last suitcase, John. Everyone has a home for the first time in a week."

Taron softly asked Jimmy, "What was scary at the pool?"

"Lots of dudes were naked," Jimmy replied.

"That's not so scary," Taron offered. "In Louisville, me and my friends would skinny dip every summer."

Leading the way to their room, Jimmy grinned, "I never did, until today."

Watching Jimmy and Taron step into their room, Stephen told John, "And there are only two empty rooms left in this hall, hon."

Nodding, John grinned, "An entire floor filled in a day and a half." Noticing Frankie and Wade almost toe-to-toe, John chuckled, "Are you ready to try again, Wade?"

Wade giggled, "Only a little bit, daddy." With those words, Wade rose off the floor a few inches, so he was looking in Frankie's eyes.

Taking a few steps closer to his boys, Stephen offered his hands to Wade. Rising another few inches, and looking in his poppa's eyes, Wade delightfully squealed, "I feels like a balloon!"

Frankie giggled, "But there's nothing pushing or pulling you up, is there?"

"Just like a balloon," Wade cackled.

John grinned, "Come on, let's get some lunch," and levitated the boy higher.

Stephen giggled, "Do you wanna walk, Wade?"

Shaking his head, Wade laughed, "I think I gotta whiz again!"

Clapping his hands, Frankie cracked up. Stephen giggled, "I think it's a little too much for him, John."

Turning around, John led his family and youngest to the lavatory. The newbies getting settled in their rooms noticed the airborne five-year-old going by their open rooms. Stephen noticed Erik and Travis standing very close together, softly talking, but not getting much unpacking done. He silently asked John; *'By the end of the day, hon?'*

'I don't think it will take that long,' John replied. A few moments later, Wade was floating before a big boy's urinal again.

* * * * *

Over the pool and diving well speakers, Aerosmith was playing 'Janie's Got A Gun', when Drew's voice interrupted the chorus; Janie's got a... "LUNCH!"

Amongst the sniggering teens at the diving well, the Nash

brothers hollered, "DREW!"

"What?" Drew giggled, and waved his arm at all the other kids getting out of the pools, adding, "It's lunch time."

Giggling hysterically and sadly shaking his head, Phil tried to put his board shorts on, but stumbled into each leg. Craig smirked, "Janie's got a lunch loses all the power and punch. It's not the same."

Tying his board shorts, Phil giggled, "That's Craig's favorite song. He knew a girl named Jane, but it didn't work..."

"PHIL!" Craig shouted.

"WHAT?" Phil loudly laughed. Closing his eyes, Craig sadly shook his head.

Corey giggled, "How about we have Alden play music in the dining room? We'll even have him replay the song, dude."

Nodding agreement, Craig changed the subject by asking, "Where are Prez and Keith?"

"Hiding," Drew grinned. "Because Prez burned his bottom, Thursday night at the Hyatt, they're laying low." A group of tweens and little kids, including Carmella, Kokaku, Rena, Bruce, Ben, and the quadruple Rs and their guests surrounded Corey's and Drew's family.

Corey explained, "The six oldest Core Rimmers worked their butts off Thursday night and all day yesterday. Before Drew's mom has a meltdown, they're taking some time off to chill."

Having seen news reports on TV about the Hyatt, Craig nodded understandingly, and said, "We just haven't seen or heard much from

them since we arrived. During breakfast this morning, Prez and Keith were there five or ten minutes, and then they were gone."

Nodding, Drew chuckled, "My mom sent Prez a flaming glare during dinner last night. Right away, Prez knew he was off duty. He was home, in his townhouse, and asleep around eight o'clock."

Already dressed, Darren Devault told Craig, "It's been a weird few days for the Core Rimmers; Wednesday through Friday were pretty messed up. Believe me, soon enough you'll see and hear Prez several times a day."

After putting his T-shirt on, Craig grinned, "I'd just like to get to know them better." Fully dressed, Phil joined his brother and gave a thumbs up to Drew and Corey, signaling that they were kewl to go to the CIC. Drew waved and the pack around him began walking toward the dining room.

Joining Darren, his roommate Lance Elling asked, "What do you want to know? We could probably tell you anything "

Slipping into his sandals, Craig shrugged, "With such a big Clan, I was wondering how he manages everyone."

Darren grinned, "Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike are very much hands off managers. They don't get involved unless they absolutely have to."

Lance tapped Darren and chuckled, "They missed Reyes' initiation." Lance then told Craig and Phil, "While you guys were getting settled, Derrick and Mike tossed Reyes into the diving well. When any of the Core Rimmers are hanging with the Clan, they mix in, just wanting to be regular kids, like the rest of us."

Now that Craig was dressed and ready, Darren suggested, "Let's

have lunch together. We'll tell you all you want to know."

"Kewl," Craig smiled. They started walking around the pool house.

Seeing Tony Lanning, Ray Varga and the Eckhart brothers nearby, Phil waved them over to join them.

Craig asked, "What happens when there's trouble; arguments or disagreements?"

Darren wondered, "What is there to fight about?" and reminded, "We've all got the same stuff in our rooms. Maybe little kids will whine about playing a video game in the rec room, but any of us can just say, 'wait your turn,' and lead the kid to another game."

"The Core Rimmers don't get involved in that stuff, because any of us can do it," Lance stated. "This isn't the city, where folks mind their own business and don't get involved. From day one, they've told us that we're family. They've shown the way, so each of us can pick up the slack."

"All the Hundsers say, 'be happy and be safe,' so we go with that," Darren offered.

A few paces ahead of the group, Roy Angulo and Pete Dano overheard the conversation. Pausing to join the group, Roy grinned, "A few days ago, two little dudes were playing rough in the pool, really close to the side. Before I could get there, Sammy and Gage each went to a kid and picked him up, showed them how close they were to getting hurt, and then tossed the kids into the center of the pool."

Pete chuckled, "That was Wednesday. They had been Core

Rimmer sons only a little more than a day."

Nodding, Roy laughed, "Later, at dinner time, the odds were made very clear when a food fight broke out, all the kids, twelve and under, against all the teenagers." The newbies began evilly chuckling, and wishing they had been around for the food fight.

Darren chuckled, "We're out numbered, but we can easily handle two little squirts at a time. It takes two or more of them to deal with one of us."

Many meters ahead of the large group of tweens and teens, John, Stephen, Frankie and Wade were seen. Lance checked with the newbies, "You dudes know John is N-Gen?"

Phil giggled, "Yeah, at Des Moines we saw some of what he can do."

Darren grinned, "Just before the shit hit the fan Thursday night, John levitated every kid and all the adults by the pool and diving well."

"And the furniture, and the weights in the rec center," Lance finished. "His eyes started glowing blue when he picked up the weights."

Roy nodded, "He's ten, and might want to be tossed into the pool or diving well, so he'll let you, but if he decides you need to be dunked too, he'll pick you up without ever laying a hand on you."

Gesturing to Roy, Pete sniggered, "The voice of experience. John let Roy toss him into the diving well twice. The third time Roy picked up John, Roy floated up about ten meters and they both dropped into the well."

Roy chuckled, "An hour or so later, there's John and Stephen on television, holding up a forty story tower, while his brothers raced inside to rescue trapped people." The old timers noticed expressions of disbelief on the faces of the newbies. Stephen, Frankie and Wade went inside the CIC, but John paused, turned and grinned at the group. Suddenly, all ten of the teens and tweens were walking two meters above the ground. Darren, Lance and Pete cracked up. Roy loudly laughed, "Higher, so we can see the entire base and the beach, John."

Without any effort, John steadily levitated the group about twenty meters above the ground, leaving Rikko on the ground barking, "STOP THAT! GET DOWN HERE!"

Glancing around the floating pack, Darren sniggered, "Do you believe us now?" Nervously nodding heads and giggling affirmations flowed around the group of newbies.

Adding to the lesson, John stepped inside the CIC to join his family while the levitated group slowly lowered to the ground. Darren asked Craig, "Are you getting the picture?"

"I think so," Craig uncertainly muttered.

"Look at it this way," Roy suggested, "they've got three hundred kids to care for, and their own kids, and their parents' families. It's unrealistic for them to be able to spend time individually with each of us. When they can, they certainly do, more so than my real parents ever did with me."

Landing on the ground, Pete grinned, "The real trip is that they treat every kid like their best friend, when they know only the basic background. In my own case, I came here to get off the street. Not knowing any better, I challenged Prez, telling him none of our group

needed a head shrink. He calmly and coolly got in my face and told me how it was. I didn't know what to think or say to the dude. He's a year younger than me, but as tall, and now that I've seen him naked, I know he's better built than I am. He could've grabbed me and walked me back out the gate. Instead, he told all twelve of us how things were, with over a hundred kids and everyone else on this base on his shoulders."

Darren added, "Considering all that, and that Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike get on stage to perform for us, confidence is a small word to describe any of the Core Rimmers, including the younger four."

"I found that out myself when I first saw the dorm bedrooms and common room," Craig admitted.

Phil nodded and sniggered, "Drew didn't act like he was younger and smaller than you, that's for sure."

Lance smirked, "Do they ever hold anything against us?"

"Nope," Pete, Roy and Darren chorused.

"They're our brothers, plain and simple," Lance stated.

"Not only are we getting all that family stuff, that lots of us haven't ever had, and entertainment around every corner, we're getting educational possibilities no one else would dare even offer us," Roy reminded.

The group walked into the CIC dining room. Grabbing a tray and getting into the chow line, Phil asked Craig, "What're you thinking?"

Craig shrugged, "That we're lucky on so many levels. I worried that we'd be split up, or that I'd need to quit school and work, to give us a tiny single room to live, eat, and sleep in. Instead, we've gone

from one family into another. All I want to do now is really get to know everyone here, pick up the pieces, build something as good or better, and move on."

"Let's find a soccer ball after lunch," Phil suggested.

"Sounds good to me," Craig nodded. He went over to the salad bar, got a plate and built his salad.

Coming into the kitchen next were Stu, Vaziik, Ray, Tony and all three Oldcambus brothers. Ray introduced Phil to the other newbies. Ray realized that their entire hallway had shown up within moments of each other without planning it. Only Travis was missing from the chow line, but was assumed to already be in the dining room, since his bedroom door was closed.

Sitting down at a table with his family, John noticed little Dulce Kentesius looking around the dining room at many of the Battle Of Earth newbies. Now and then, Dulce's cousin, Antonia would whisper to her distracted cousin. It seemed that many of the newest kids came to Ewa Beach with the spirits of their loved ones. Reaching out to the clairvoyant little girl, John struck up a telepathic conversation with Dulce, learning that she had always been able to see spirits; that some visited once in a while, but these Battle Of Earth parents were sticking around their sons. Dulce's family had always accepted her gift, and the five-year-old understood that it sometimes freaked people out. Fairly new to the Clan, Dulce would share what she was seeing with her cousins; six-year-old Felix Nepos, seven-year-old Antonia Nepos, ten-year-old Luke Nepos, and thirteen year old Barbara Nepos.

With his tray loaded with a big salad, a bran muffin, and a large glass of water, Craig told Pete and Darren he would find a large table for them in the dining room. Leaving the chow line without any sort of check-out still felt odd to Craig, but he went into the dining room,

searching for an empty large table. He walked past a bunch of smaller tables, where little kids were sitting, and then saw John, Stephen, Frankie and Wade at another table for four near the Command Center. Corey, Drew, Leo, Lenny and Geoff had another table near the center of the room. Not far away was a large, rectangular table that could seat twelve. At the next table over sat Lance Kinchen, Scott Shetley, Chris Stokley and another newbie. Putting his tray down, Craig looked over toward the kitchen. Seeing Pete and Roy, Craig held up an arm so he could be seen. Grinning and nodding, Pete and Roy walked in that direction.

Chris called over, "Craig, are you eating alone?"

Looking over, Craig grinned, "Nope, this table will be filled in a couple o' minutes."

Nodding, "Kewl," Chris then formally introduced Craig Nash to his boyfriend, Jay Montigua.

Going over to that table, Craig noticed the cast and carefully shook hands with Jay, chuckling, "Hey, you don't look too bad, for a dead dude, that is."

Lance Kinchen dropped his fork and covered his mouth with both hands a second before cracking up. With his mouth full, Scott widely smiled and bounced in his chair, quietly laughing. Jay chuckled, "Saint Peter said I wasn't done stirring stuff up, so he sent me back, to lounge in a hospital over night. Chris came with Drew and Corey to bring me here, where I could do more damage faster." Chris sadly shook his head and giggled.

Craig grinned, "I'm with Phil, just past the common room, in the first room on the left. Chauncey and Fred Eckhart are across the hall, with Rikko."

Chris asked Craig, "Where's Travis?"

"Meeting his new roomie, the last I saw," Craig answered.

Scott asked, "Did you meet him yet?"

"Not formally, but I heard John introduce him to Trav as Erik," Craig replied. "He's almost as tall as Trav, kind of thin compared to Trav, and has dirty blond hair."

Evilly grinning, Chris teased Jay, "If you had stayed dead, I probably would've started my search with Travis." Scott and Lance softly chortled.

"Nice," Jay smirked, "no respect for the nearly dearly departed. I guess I need to meet my competition."

Gesturing to his table where Pete, Roy, Darren and Lance Elling were already seated, Craig smiled, "I'm learning about this division from some old timers. We'll chat more later, I'm sure."

Chris nodded and Jay said, "Kewl, man. We'll talk to you later."

"Phil and I are going to kick a soccer ball around after lunch," Craig nodded, and then returned to his table.

Noticing Jay's desire to play, Chris shook his head, softly saying, "Tomorrow, stud; after Doc Andrews checks your bruised brain."

Jay sighed and then wondered, "What're we going to do the rest of today?"

Chris answered, "Hang out by the pools, stroll around the base and show you what's here."

Pointing across the room, Lance told Jay, "That's the rec room.

It's filled with all sorts of games; bigger and better than any arcade I've ever seen in any mall." For another few minutes, Chris, Lance and Scott told Jay about the various facilities on base.

Scott told Lance, "I can't wait to see the auditorium."

Nodding, Lance called over, "Drew?"

"Wassup?" Drew called back.

"Can we check out the auditorium?"

Humming thoughtfully, Drew then answered, "We usually keep it locked and powered down, so little kids don't play in there and hurt themselves, but I'll have Alden unlock it for you."

Lance happily smiled, "Thanks, bro." Drew flashed a thumbs up.

In Drew's sub-vocal, Alden asked, "Is there anyone else to allow inside, besides Lance, Scott, Chris and Jay?"

Drew silently replied, "Any groups of newbies over age twelve, bro. No one goes in alone and no one gets hurt in the dark."

"Got it," Alden said. He then softly called, "Drew?"

Drew answered aloud, "Yeah?"

"I need a family."

"I know you do."

Alden giggled, "How would you like another brother?"

"I'd love it."

"What do you think Keith, Prez and John would say?"

"The very same thing, no doubt about it."

Alden softly wondered, "And your mom and dad?"

"Why are you nervous? I know you talk to them every day."

"So much of the time it's while they're at work. It's pretty much business related. They're very different around any kids than they are at work."

"Have you ever shown them you're a kid?"

Thoughtfully humming for a moment, Alden then wondered, "What qualifies?"

Grinning, Drew prompted, "Come on, dude. Do you giggle? Is it the real you, or one of your VI's? Since I know you can rapidly switch from AI to VI and back again, how much time are they hearing a VI? The Alden I heard several times in California was a VI. The real kid is the one I'm talking with now, the one I've heard most of the morning, wondering how to choose a body, and all its parts!" Corey and Leo sputtered. Both reached for the napkins in the center of the table at once, and the whole family cracked up, including Alden.

"That's completely different!" Alden giggled into Drew's and Corey's sub-vocals. "They're adults! It takes more cycles to process who to pay more attention to than to actually do what you need me to do! All the Core Rimmers get most of my attention, the rest of the Clan gets a fair bit, and then it's all the adults needing to do business."

Corey giggled, "Alden, you're choosing to pay more attention to kids because you are one. Honestly, I think you could choose any family you'd like, and the adults would be just as happy as the kids.

Who you choose is completely up to you."

"Start showing our parents the real you," Drew suggested. "My parents, Corey's dad, Mike's dad, and Derrick's mom all have sub-vocals. Imagine having a body size and type conversation with one or all of them. Face it, dude, when humans show emotions, they're showing the real person inside. That's your clue. Where you belong becomes apparent."

Alden confirmed, "Could I really talk about that stuff with them, like I would with you guys?"

Drew grinned, "Try it on our dads first. Hearing our moms' perspectives would be good too. I wouldn't mind being around to at least hear some of that conversation."

Corey answered, "Drew and I were there when your software was designed. We know not to call you 'bro,' because we know not to influence your choice. Sure, we slip now and then, but we try not to sway what has to be your choice."

Giggling madly, Leo wondered, "What are you talking about?"

"Choosing a family," Drew replied.

"That's easy," Leo smiled. "Imagine what it's like getting hugged. When you want to shrink and hide, it's bad. When you want to snuggle closer, that's right. Dad was first to hug me, pop was next, before we left Des Moines. That said it was right." Lenny and Geoff enthusiastically agreed.

"Don't forget the benefits of catnip!" Charles added in passing, on his way towards the kitchen for a bowl of milk.

Chauncey's puppy, Rikko hurried over to say hello. Seeing the

large Siberian Husky running at him, Charles puffed up then bolted under the table, then tore for the next table, and then under the table where Lance, Scott, Chris and Jay were sitting. Since the puppy wasn't giving up, Charles unhappily meowed to be transported out of the CIC and back to the safety of home. Around the dining room, most of the kids were giggling.

Over in the corner, Shirley almost fell off of her pear-tree perch in laughter, partridge-style.

Unaccustomed to all of this, Leo giggled, "When are we going to the beach house, dad?"

Kerry interjected his two cents. "If you want, I can talk to our resident Mickey Mouse, and we can have you visit the house last week!"

"Or next month!" George added.

"Or maybe five-seconds before you asked?" Alden added helpfully. Rapidly blinking and trying to understand, Leo had no idea what the AIs were talking about.

"MEDIC!" John yelled with a giggle. "We need temporal tranquilizers over here!" Louder laughter broke loose.

Waddling out of the kitchen, carrying two trays of fruits, cookies and an entire pineapple upside-down cake, Lance Kinchen's Panda, Paulie shuffled over toward his companion. Dozens of kids and their teddy bears took notice of the giant VI Panda. Scott softly muttered, "It... is... alive." Lance fainted and fell face first onto his tray.

Scott, Chris and Jay hollered, "MEDIC HERE TOO!" Laughter became hysteria.

Watching Scott trying to revive Lance, Paulie asked, "Does this mean no dessert?"

"Don't worry!" Alden reassured Paulie. "He'll be just fine, as soon as we get the carrot out of his nose."

As Lance came around, John handed him a PADD. "Prez says the next Pissed Off Chickens tournament starts in fifteen minutes. Your logon is already set up."

Stephen giggled, "The girls say that you need to stay out of their changing room."

Turning to Scott and whimpering, Lance sighed, "I'm gonna go back to our room, and play 'Dazed And Confused' about twenty times."

Nodding, Scott sniggered, "I'll join you," and guzzled down the last of his soda.

Paulie said, "And I'll bring dessert."

Not knowing how to deal with his currently speaking Panda, Lance carefully suggested, "Why don't you pass that around to the kids here, Paulie?"

Paulie asked, "You're not hungry for cake or cookies?"

"No," Lance softly replied, "these other kids would enjoy it, and you too. Make some new friends, Paulie."

Nodding, Paulie giggled, "That's my generous best friend. Sure, I can do that."

Paulie was about to turn to start offering the cakes and cookies to the little ones when an arm (with a hand attached, thankfully)

appeared out of thin air and snagged a few, leaving behind a different cookie in trade.

Paulie turned around and blinked at Lance, curiously wondering, "Do you know what just happened?"

Lance shook his head, and then started laughing as two arms appeared and dumped a plate full of still warm, sugar coated cakes onto the already full plate in the Panda's paws.

Balancing the mound very carefully, Paulie snaffled one of the new, strange looking cakes into his mouth. He tasted and checked it for safety, and nodded. "Welsh Cakes, fresh too. And, from the records and recipe from Draco, made by Aunt Helen in the Dragon Division."

Carrying his lunch tray, Scott prompted, "Let's go, Lance," and led the way to the kitchen. Leaving his tray at the dishwasher counter, and taking the PADD off of Lance's tray, Scott asked, "Have you ever played Pissed Off Chickens?"

"I've never even heard of it," Lance grinned, and left his tray at the dishwasher. "Then again, I've never skinny dipped before last night; I've never left a stuffed Panda on my bed, only to have it walk into a room I was in an hour later, and I don't even want to consider whose arms were stealing and replacing cookies, or where the rest of the armless body might be."

Handing off the PADD and heading for the exit, Scott sniggered, "Some questions are better left unasked?"

Fiddling about with the PADD, Lance nodded and giggled, "I've got bigger problems, and about seven minutes to learn Pissed Off Chickens, to play against our Head Rimmer. I'd better learn this game

damn fast, or risk disappointing Prez."

Leaning close and looking over, Scott wondered, "Have you figured out the goal of the game?"

"There are various exploding eggs; the white eggs are the least powerful, then silver, then gold, then red are the most powerful. You have your chicken toss eggs at chicken hawks, coyotes, foxes and weasels who are trying to raid the chicks in the hen-house. Seems easy enough."

"There's always a catch," Scott warned. They left the CIC and walked across the quad towards dorm three. Lance started a beginning level of a Pissed Off Chickens game. As soon as a goofy little theme song played, the game began. Chicks ran out of the hen house, a chicken hawk dove from the sky, a fox and a weasel scampered behind rocks, barrels and bushes, a coyote made a dash for it and stole a chick, and Lance hadn't even found an egg to toss yet. The sounds of captured and dying chicks played over the theme music. Scott began laughing.

"FUCK!" Lance hollered, "They failed to mention the chicks don't stay in the hen house, and that all the villains would attack at once! Prez plays this game?"

"Apparently so," Scott chortled.

"I'm more scared now than when Paulie strolled into the dining room," Lance giggled, and managed to toss his first egg, yet missed the thieving weasel completely. Lance grumbled, "I think our leader has a screw loose!" Scott howled laughing, and pulled Lance by the shirt back onto the path. All the way across the quad, Lance concentrated on the game, bitching about the hawks, coyotes, foxes, weasels and his dwindling brood of chicks, while Scott sniggered and

kept tugging at his pal's shirt to keep him on course. They walked into the dorm, down the hall and Scott unlocked their dorm room.

Following Scott into their room, Lance screamed, "FUCK! They also failed to mention that when the chicks are gone, the hawk, coyote, weasel and fox come after you!"

Scott laughed, "Maybe you were supposed to save some of the chicks and never get to that point."

"WHERE THE FUCK ARE ALL THE EXPLODING EGGS?" Lance yelled in frustration. His screen filled with red, indicating his chicken was dead. He tossed the PADD onto his bed, and noticed a book laying there. He picked up and opened the manual. Inside the front cover, in large letters, were the words:

P.A.N.D.A. (Positronic Assisted Next-Generation Direct Assistance) Companion

Contact Jory, Noah, or Caleb for technical problems.
Powered by COOKIES!(tm)

There was, in small print, a note: Any sugar rich item will do. Welsh cakes, for instance!

At that point, Lance's PADD beeped at him, indicating it was time to start the pissed-off chicken tournament. Lance grumbled, "Prez better be playing this silly friggin' game, or I'm not wasting my time."

Watching his roommate sit on the edge of his bed to begin the game, Scott grinned, "I'll get our axes out, man."

"Kewl."

Pulling the two guitar cases away from the corner, Scott asked, "Is Prez playing?"

"Yeah." Suddenly and unexpectedly, Lance howled laughing.

Scott grinned, "What?" and set his Strat case on his bed.

"You know those eggs I found in places I had already been?"

"Yeah," Scott replied. He opened his guitar case, grabbed the strap, and flung it over his shoulder.

"It turns out that my chicken has plenty of eggs. I was dropping them as I searched."

Lifting his Stratocaster, Scott wondered, "Well, how do you get your exploding eggs?"

"I shake my chicken," Lance giggled. Cracking up, Scott put his Strat back in its case and flopped onto his bed in hysterics. Getting up and going over to Scott, Lance demonstrated by shaking his PADD, and a second later the sound of exploding eggs could be heard.

Wheezing, Scott laughed, "Don't shake your chicken at me! You might not like the consequences."

Blushing, but concentrating on the game, Lance giggled, "Or maybe I would. It would be more productive than this silly game, that's for sure." Scott gazed at Lance. Glancing up, over the PADD at Scott, both boys howled laughing. Accidentally shaking his PADD, Lance cheered, "MORE EGGS! HELL YEAH!"

"Shake that chicken, baby!" Scott sniggered.

"Speaking of shaking chickens, did you know that fifteen percent of the teens here talk to their penis while masturbating?" Alden asked

over the room's speakers. After a pause, Alden then asked "Why do they call it 'choking your chicken'? It's not like penises have feathers." Lance roared laughing.

"I think it's because it rhymes," Scott grinned.

"Uh oh, Prez stopped chucking eggs," Lance reported. Giggling and tossing his PADD onto his bed, Lance stood and announced, "Prez went to be with his guests. He says, he'll check later to see if we can shake our chickens more."

Sadly shaking his head, Scott sniggered, "My roomie was shaking his chicken with our Head Rimmer. I think I'm jealous again."

"Not near as jealous as Keith would be," Lance giggled. He went to get his Les Paul, and then got ready to play.

Standing and then putting the strap on his Stratocaster, Scott grinned, "Did you wonder why Prez got you a PADD to play that game in the first place?"

"John told me he's telepathically connected to Prez and all the Core Rimmers," Lance divulged. "John told Prez what was going on here, that everybody was perfectly fine. Then Paulie waddled in, I face-planted my plate, and Prez's first thought was to have me join a game of Pissed Off Chickens." He giggled, "So he's our leader, a virtuoso, and as looney as they come." Noticing a curious expression on Scott's face, Lance giggled, "What's wrong?"

Shrugging, Scott shared, "I remember learning something that I think fits Prez. 'Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend.' Maybe that's his philosophy when it comes to leading this division."

"That's very kewl," Lance beamed.

"I can't recall where I learned that or who said it, but it just popped into my head," Scott admitted.

Alden answered, "Albert Camus said it. He was a French Novelist, Essayist and Playwright, and won the 1957 Nobel Prize for Literature, born in 1913 and died in 1960."

Lance giggled, "Is there anything you don't know, Alden?"

"Lots, like how to choose a body to live my life in," Alden giggled.

"Understandable," Scott grinned. "That's a rough question, and one that humans don't get a choice about it."

Looking up at the camera, Lance asked, "When are you getting a body?"

"When I choose my physical attributes, choose a family, and am accepted by that family," Alden answered. "What do you guys think?"

Scott queried, "You could be anything you like?"

"Not anything," Alden giggled. "I would obviously be a male android, but apparent age, race, height, weight, eye, hair and skin color, are all up to me."

Scott hummed then said, "I like the age I'm at, but I know I've still got years until I'm fully grown."

"Whatever apparent age I choose is the way I'll always be," Alden told them.

"I wouldn't want to be younger than I am," Lance shared, "but I

won't mind when I'm eighteen and fully grown too."

Nodding agreement, Scott told Alden, "I'd go for a teen body. I can do stuff now that I couldn't when I was younger, simply because I'm further along in physical development. Generally, little kids have to work harder for the hand-eye coordination. Without that, I couldn't have started playing guitar."

Lance smiled, "Yup, I feel the same way. Just carrying this Les Paul is way easier than it used to be."

"It's a heavier guitar than a Strat or an acoustic," Scott reminded.

"When I got it, I'd wind up sitting after about twenty minutes," Lance offered. "Now I can stand and play for at least an hour before I start to feel the weight."

Alden told them, "I'd want to play with littler, younger kids too, though."

Lance replied, "Then thirteen or fourteen is perfect. You can still play with younger kids, but just have to be a little more careful, because you'll be way stronger than them. We're still kids too, enough so that we can flip from acting younger, our own ages, or even more maturely than our age."

Scott said, "I think it's important that you fit your family too, meaning you're obviously that family's kid."

"That helps a lot, guys," Alden giggled. "Thanks for sharing. There's still a bunch of decisions to make."

"Like what?" Lance and Scott chorused.

Alden giggled, "Being a teen exposes the whole sexuality topic."

Scott smiled, "You'll get a different answer from everyone you talk to about it."

"Yeah, I've noticed," Alden giggled. "Almost sixty percent of boys here talk to their erections in the mornings." Lance and Scott laughed. Alden giggled, "You two didn't this morning."

Lance giggled, "Because Scott was two urinals away to hear it, but I was. Even alone, there's a frustration factor, standing there holding your pecker for longer than necessary."

"I definitely was too," Scott admitted, "and didn't say anything aloud for the same reason; Lance and everyone would've heard."

"Oh man," Alden whined, "the statistics are totally blown away if guys silently talk to their dicks. The question then becomes, when don't guys talk to their dicks?"

"In front of their parents!" Lance laughed.

Nodding, Scott sniggered, "And in church. The rest of the time is fair game."

Alden giggled, "Back to the drawing board I go!"

Lance chuckled, "Before you go drawing obscene body parts, can you tell us if there's a hard rock or heavy metal radio station here?"

Alden answered, "There's not a local station in the ROH, but there are satellite radio stations you can find. The ones from the United States are channels 5050 thru 5069 on your satellite receiver."

"Excellent!" both boys cheered, and walked over to the television and stereo. Scott operated the satellite remote control and Lance got the stereo powered up.

In the meantime, most of the Clan was leaving the CIC dining room. Some went into the rec room, but many went outdoors, destined for the pools, the playground or the rec center. Chris Stokley and Jay Montigua went for a walk with Rafe, Pat O'Hara and Ralphie Bonham. The Oldcambus brothers and their cousin, Taron ran directly for their trikes. Ready to try something new, Jimmy Matos joined his roommate. As promised, Mrs. Hundser had ordered additional trikes. There were now twelve trikes in three sizes under a covered trike garage at the Southwest corner of the helicopter and shuttle pad. Waiting on an adult sized trike, Carl Seibert introduced himself, and then told the boys, "The East side of the base is where the school is, and where a family of squirrels have taken up residence. We'll blaze a new trike trail on the West side of the base."

Down the shorter hall of dorm three, Travis McAuley and Erik Kendricks had shared their Battle Of Earth losses, and gotten to know each other while unpacking their suitcases and setting up their room. Travis learned that Erik's mom had died of cancer three years earlier. With everything unpacked, and their suitcases stowed under their beds, Travis asked, "Are you ready for lunch?"

"Almost," Erik answered. He then faced his new boyfriend, giggling, "I haven't had a shower since yesterday morning, California time. Noon yesterday, I was escorted to a hospital; by nine last night, I was an orphan; at noon today, Des Moines time, I was being welcomed to the Clan. To me, the longest day was even longer, because of too many time zone changes. Before I go anywhere else, or go any further with you, that's first on my list." Reaching out his right hand, Erik prompted, "Com'on, Champ."

Taking Erik's hand in his, Travis grinned, "I've already showered today, and if I go with you, neither of us will get any cleaner."

Taking a few steps closer, Erik giggled, "I know exactly what you

mean, but our first time won't be in public, it'll be right here. Even if you don't shower, I want you with me."

Reaching for and taking Erik's free hand, Travis asked, "Newbie jitters?"

Erik stole a tender kiss then giggled, "The new place isn't as important as being with my new boyfriend. That's what's really blowing me away. Yesterday was a sucky day. So far, today is shaping up much better. I don't want to be away from you for ten minutes; sorry, no can do."

Travis warmly smiled, "There's never been anyone like you."

"My dad would've really liked you, Champ," Erik fondly reminded, and led the way to the door.

Travis chuckled, "I always thought motorcycle and cop were two words that didn't belong together." They left their room with the door open.

"He liked to rock and roll," Erik smiled. "He's been missing my mom for years. The most peaceful and relaxing thought now is that they're together again." They walked into the lavatory and went directly into the mob shower. Sitting Travis down on the bench in the changing area, Erik took his already unbuttoned top sport shirt off, telling his boyfriend, "You're giving me purpose again, someone to care for." Tossing his sport shirt onto the bench, Erik lifted his muscle Tee shirt up and off. "Since my mom passed, the most important times were dinners with my dad. Eating dinner with a bunch of kids I didn't know is what freaked me out last night."

Nodding, Travis shared, "I think that's what's been missing since I got here yesterday; someone familiar that I could share stuff with. I could only barely see myself as being a brother for any kid, but now,

with you, I can see that more clearly."

Now shirtless, Erik giggled, "You're my boyfriend, Travis. I'll always stay near you, and back you up on everything. I told you how I used to be with my buds at home." He reached to unbutton and unzip his shorts.

"The dancin' slut," Travis recalled, and bounced his eyebrows.

"I would dirty dance to any style of music with any babes, dudes, and even dogs," Erik giggled. "All that major league scoping and showing off, but I never got off the ground with anyone. I never had to pull any of those slick boy moves on you." Noticing Travis' eyes closed, Erik tossed his shorts onto the bench, laughing, "Are you really that shy that you can't look?"

Opening his eyes, Travis blushed and chuckled, "I was imaging you dancing like you were with me in our room, only in someone else's living room, with humans and their pets, and focusing on your voice." Purposefully looking at Erik's boxer brief covered mid section, Travis giggled, "I do want to see, and I'm seriously debating stripping, just so we're even and you can see me too."

Shrugging and then tossing his shorts aside, Erik giggled, "I can make this like high school locker room showers, but can you? What I want to do with you requires privacy, Champ."

"I think I'll leave it up to you," Travis smiled.

Nodding and pushing his underwear down, Erik was leaning forward and at eye level with Travis when he whispered, "Take the shower across from me." He planted a kiss then stepped back, giggling, "That's the last one you get until we're back in our room."

"Tease," Travis giggled, taking note of Erik's cute uncut limp

dick. Travis was born Irish Catholic and was circumcised at birth.

Walking backwards into the mob shower, Erik shook his head and playfully reminded, "I promised you that we're sleeping together tonight, and from now on. What we'll see now, we'll be seeing an awful lot of from now on."

Starting to strip, Travis leered, "I like what I'm seeing, cuddle bunny."

Still walking backwards and scoping out his boyfriend, Erik giggled, "Me too, Champ. Being in your arms is the most comfortable I've been in more than a day. I already know I belong in my hunky champ's arms, what I see only confirms what I feel." Now that Travis was naked, Erik turned his shower on, purposefully getting blasted with cool water and keeping it a little cooler than he would normally prefer. He had always hoped for a boyfriend with a cut dick, and without even asking if that were the case, had accomplished his goal.

Getting shower water running across from Erik as he was told, Travis evilly snickered, "Your backside is as nice as your front, so you might as well turn around."

Wiping water off his face and spinning around, Erik giggled, "It's the tall, hunky and quiet types I should've been focusing on all these years."

"I never focused on anyone before, until you," Travis chuckled.

"Uh huh," Erik suspiciously giggled. "You don't need to romance me, Trav, but I love it."

"The truth happened to seem romantic to you," Travis chuckled. "The truth is, I talk plenty. You left me speechless."

Cupping his soapy hands over his mouth, Erik tried to sound like a baseball announcer. "That one was low and inside. Two strikes and the batter is still woozy as he steps back up to the plate."

"The next one I'll toss underhanded and try to cop a feel," Travis joked.

Erik loudly laughed, "This water is nowhere near cool enough! We are outta here!" Watching Erik spin to face the wall and quickly rinse off, Travis cracked up. In no time, they had grabbed towels and their dirty clothes, and then hurried back to their room. As soon as the door was closed, they were wrapped in one another's arms, lapping water droplets off of each other.

Outside at the soccer field, Craig and Phil Nash had drawn a small crowd and a few participants in their soccer warm-ups. Tony Lanning and Ray Varga joined the two brothers in their soccer demonstrations. Coming from the rec center's equipment room with two more soccer balls, Bruce Downing led Dewi and Kokaku to the field. Pausing at the edge of the field, Bruce began encouraging the boys to play, and separating the spectating group into three groups; four to eight year olds; nine to twelve year olds; and thirteen and up. By this time, Craig, Phil, Tony and Ray had all figured out what was going on. They left the field. Craig and Tony took the pack of ten older boys to begin lessons. Phil and Ray took the middle group, and Bruce took the youngest boys onto the field. The Stoeher twins had played soccer before and became coaches too, assisting Bruce with the group of the younger kids. For the next hour, the groups practiced passing and dribbling the ball.

Completing the trip around the base perimeter, Chris, Jay, Rafe, Pat and Ralphie passed by and saw what was going on. Wanting to participate, Jay loudly whined. "No," Chris giggled, for the fourth time. In addition to wanting to try all three diving boards at the well,

Jay had wanted to lift weights, and play handball inside the rec center too. Chris, Pat, Rafe and Ralphie practically dragged Jay back to the pools. John and his family were playing in the pool with some younger kids.

Over at the diving well, Corey was up on the five meter board, and noticed Chris leading his reluctant partner away from the soccer field. Corey called his hubby and pointed. Drew turned and saw who Corey was pointing at. Drew turned to Leo, Lenny and Geoff, evilly grinning, "Back me up?"

A chorus of 'okay daddies', and a single, 'sure dad' rang out. Four bare butts jogged the path toward Chris and Jay, causing Corey to break into giggles. Still giggling, Corey jumped, twisted once, did a summersault and then splashed into the well. He quickly swam to the side and climbed out, then hurried to be with his family.

Seeing his young leader and his sons approaching, Jay sniggered, "You're really not giving me the impression of a shy, gay boy, Drew."

Gesturing to groups of kids around the pools, Drew smiled, "It's home and this is family, ye of the bruised brain. It's time to pay up, big bro. Drop 'em!"

"We wanna see some skin!" Corey, Geoff, Lenny and an extremely embarrassed Leo chorused. Nearby and resting on chaise lounges, Keanu and Liki overheard what was going on and cracked up.

Nodding and then turning to Chris, Jay chuckled, "Just the lowest board, please?"

Rolling his eyes, Chris smirked, "The three meter board, and only once, then you swim to the side and get out. The doc said no exertion, Jay. If Doc Andrews sees, I'm playing ignorant." Pleased for what

might be his only chance at something fun this day, Jay quickly took off his shirt. A bunch of large bruises scattered around Jay's arms, chest, shoulders and back that hadn't been noticed that morning at the hospital were plainly seen in the sunlight.

Joining the group, Keanu sniggered, "This makes you a hundred percent Clan, Jay. Your boyfriend took a few hours, until almost dinner time, to drop his shorts."

Seeing Jay's torso, Liki gasped, "Damn, Jay." He then faced Chris and giggled, "Your boyfriend has one of the sweetest six packs on base, dude." Evilily grinning, Chris bounced his eyebrows, but said nothing about how often he had gently traced those abs with his fingertips. Scowling, Keanu nudged his roomie. "What?" Liki giggled, "Now there are exactly four sets of awesome abs on this base; Jay's, Keith's, Roy's and Craig's. You've got a four pack, like Prez, Derrick, Pete and a few others." Gesturing at his own mostly flat, but undefined belly, Liki giggled, "This is the vast majority of dudes around here."

Once Jay had removed the last of his clothes, Corey and Drew locked eyes with the newbie, pleased that he hadn't balked and easily got naked. What hung between Jay's legs was typical and completely average in comparison to the vast majority of Rimmer teen boys, which Jay obviously knew, or he wouldn't have gotten naked so quickly.

Naked and walking closer to the two arguing roommates, Jay softly smiled, "If you two aren't boyfriends yet, I have to wonder why not. You're acting like a couple." He passed between them, walked over to the low, three-meter board, climbed the few steps and did one simple dive, bouncing hard on the board and flipped up-side down. Jay cut into the water like a knife, with most of his splash made by the cast on his wrist. Around the well, teens and tweens applauded an

excellent dive.

Drew asked Chris, "He's done a lot of diving?"

Nodding, Chris smiled, "At the local boys and girls club, and we've gone to beaches in Maryland. I haven't mentioned that you guys surf, and won't until tomorrow."

Flashing a thumbs up, Drew chuckled, "Message received. It won't be mentioned by me or mine, but plenty of kids around might say something."

Evilly grinning, "I'll have to limit his exposure," Chris picked up Jay's clothes. To loud laughter from all those gathered, Chris went to the diving well. He asked his partner of three years, "How do you feel?"

Holding onto the side of the well at Chris' feet, Jay smiled up, "Fine, baby. Only the flip felt a little disorienting, so I won't do that again until tomorrow." Before Chris could reply, Jay bounced up, grabbed his boyfriend by the waist and pulled him into the well, earning a yelp, more laughter and applause. Jay's clothes rained down into the well on top of them.

Being led away from Drew's family, Liki softly told Keanu, "I can't help noticing."

Shaking his head, Keanu admitted, "That's not what worries me. Course I noticed his abs. We're being noticed and kids are figuring us out though. As much as I definitely do care about you, I just don't know how to feel about it. It's not a happy feeling, like it should be; it's more like anxiety, or even a little scared."

Nodding, Liki assured, "That only means you want us more

private. I can try to keep it that way too."

"I don't want you changing anything though, Liki. The way you are and the things you say is what I love. That's what's messing me up inside. I could've wholeheartedly agreed about Jay's abs, but instead, I nudged you, which is what I think made everything obvious. So it's not you, it's my reactions completely. I'm wanting it private, and then turning around and making it public. Something's gotta give, and it's all me, dude."

Liki frowned, "Not any more. One major thing I've learned the last week is we're a team now. Let's always keep that in mind; we make it as a couple, or we break it - together. It's not on you, or on me, it's us."

Nodding, Keanu softly smiled, "Let's get a snack and a cold drink."

Heading for the chairs where they left their clothes, Liki giggled, "Uh oh! What did I say this time?"

"Just because we're going for a snack doesn't mean anything," Keanu softly chortled. Liki widely smiled at his lover. Keanu laughed, "Nope, not this time. We'll come back out here."

Liki sniggered, "For how long?"

"A while, until you *accidentally* get me revved up again," Keanu chuckled.

"I never do it intentionally," Liki giggled. "That's my story and I'm stickin' to it!"

After Jay's dive and watching Chris get pulled into the well, Drew, Corey and their three sons got dressed. They then went over to

the pool to tell John and Stephen that they were about to go to Kaho'olawe, and to have their security, Chuck, Conner, Ata and Baakir join them. Lenny noticed Leo's worried expression and nudged Geoff. Both little guys went to Baakir and were soon lifted into the gorilla's arms. Ata offered Leo an arm, and suggested, "Climb aboard, Leo."

Seeing Leo was still uncertain, Chuck climbed up onto Baakir's back. With one arm, Ata swept up Conner. Giggling at the demonstrations, Leo carefully climbed up onto Ata's back. The first thing Leo noticed was how much larger Ata's back was compared to his real dad's shoulders.

Telepathically, John told Drew and Corey, *'We're going to get some additional Intel help from the Ark compound; a family of Founders; two boys and two adults, named Praefectus. They'll be here before dinner, local time. I also want to empathically check on our newbies. We'll hang out here for another hour or so, and if the Praefectus family hasn't shown up by then, we'll go to the beach house.'*

Nodding, Drew said, "If you need help, let us know. We'll see you later."

Corey tapped his comm-badge, telling Alden, "All nine of us are ready for the beach house, Alden." They vanished from Ewa Beach.

Stephen asked his husband, *'Are you still worried about the Steib brothers and Stoeher twins?'*

'Not so much any more,' John answered, *'but they need to control reading surface thoughts of other Battle Of Earth newbies.'*

Four naked Steib brothers jogged around the side of the pool toward where John and Stephen were. *'We're fine, big bro!'* All four

Steibs chorused, and then leaped into the pool, bottoms first, cannonballing their two leaders.

Evilly grinning, John levitated the quadruplets many meters above the pool. Hearing their laughter, John sent them over the pool house and left them hovering above the diving well. "Quads on the wing," Stephen helplessly giggled.

After an hour of jamming to heavy metal music in their dorm room, Lance and Scott approached the diving well, noticed the floating and nude seven-year-olds and cracked up.

Kelly, Lawrence, Matthew and Nick shouted down, "LOOK OUT BELOW!" a few seconds before being released from John's telekinetic grasp and dropping into the well.

Tanning their white city-boy butts, Chris and Jay applauded the quadruplets from their chaise lounges. When all four surfaced, Jay chuckled, "That's what I call, graceful as an elephant in a china shop."

Walking up to the chairs where Chris and Jay were sitting, Lance asked, "How about we check out the auditorium?"

When Chris and Jay agreed and started getting up from their chairs, Scott said, "I'll ask some of the other newbies at the soccer field."

"I'll go with you," Lance offered. Scott grinned and nodded. Lance softly sniggered, "I'm sure Chris and Jay can dress without me watching, and they can find the soccer field too."

"Jay sure looks different without his shirt on," Scott grinned.

Lance giggled, "I noticed that too. I never would've guessed he

was that ripped."

"No wonder Chris was a little verklempt last night," Scott softly and uncertainly offered.

"He sure doesn't look verklempt now."

"More like completely composed and satisfied," Scott reverently whispered.

Catching something in Scott's tone, Lance wondered, "What's wrong?"

"Nothin'," Scott quickly answered, and carefully added, "just a little envious, I guess. I'm still racking my brain, trying to figure out what I want."

Nodding, Lance wanted to say something, but kept mum, refusing to orally acknowledge that he was attracted to Scott, and Chris, and Jay, and at least half the other teenaged boys he had met the last day. In comparison, very few of the teenaged girls got a second glance. Choosing a partner wasn't a high priority, so Lance only checked out eye candy. He understood that Scott was older and clearly ready for a partner. Lance only hoped that whomever Scott chose to be with would be a musician too.

The soccer lessons were coming to an end, Lance and Scott noticed. Craig, Phil, Tony and Ray were showing the kids how they could practice alone or in smaller groups of two, three or four. Noticing the Ramos brothers sitting on the grass at the edge of the field, Scott asked Nick Ramos if he and his brothers would like to join the auditorium expedition. Lance yelled for Craig, Phil, Tony and Ray. Nudging his roommate, Scott cracked up laughing. Lance giggled, "What?"

"I've been around you more than a day and never heard you that loud before," Scott sniggered.

Shrugging, Lance blushed, "I never had a reason to be loud before."

Pat O'Hara showed up with Ralphie, and not far behind them were Richie, Carrol, and Robbie. After lunch, Ronnie had gone to Des Moines to spend time with Adam and Garret. All five had wet hair and their clothes were stuck to their wet skin. Scott grinned at Ralphie.

Ralphie giggled, "None of us have been in the auditorium either."

Robbie grinned, "John said to have Alden help us turn on the lights, so none of us get hurt."

"The Steibs were going to come too," Richie revealed, "but Derrick showed up, and took those quads and his other four brothers back to Kaho'whoosie Island."

Nearing the large group of teens and tweens, Craig asked, "Has anyone seen Travis?"

"Not since this morning, when we moved into the dorm, before lunch," Chris answered.

All the teens that had met Travis the prior day thoughtfully scowled. Out of the loop, because he hadn't met Travis, Jay asked, "Is this guy expected to be social or does he prefer to be alone?"

"Definitely social," Chris told his boyfriend. Jay evilly grinned, causing Chris to giggle, "He was among the last to call it and go to bed last night, and he was *not* always with me."

Lance told Jay, "He was chatting with Scott and me for a while."

Craig added, "He spent time with me and Phil too," and then innocently revealed, "he met his roommate, and we haven't seen him since."

Pat and Ralphie glanced at each other, and then began giggling. Carrol, Robbie and Richie giggled along with them. Chris and Jay thought about it, then cracked small, evil grins. Tony nudged Ray, and they nonchalantly turned away, softly sniggering.

Wide-eyed, Craig gasped, "No way!"

Phil giggled, "Why not Travis?"

Ralphie giggled, "Pat and I were immediately attracted. When it happens that suddenly, you really have to act on it, or go crazy."

"Is there a difference?" Pat giggled, and cutely batted his eyelids.

Displaying his thumb and forefinger about a millimeter apart, Ralphie laughed, "One is acceptable crazy and the other isn't, unless you like tight white jackets."

"It's time to play detective," Lance giggled. "The game has changed from Where is Waldo, to Where is Travis, and who is his roommate?"

Tony sniggered, "And what have they been doing all these hours?"

Disapprovingly, Pat smirked, but uncontrollably giggled, "It's obviously private stuff that we don't need to know." Busting up laughing, the group started walking toward the auditorium.

Pulling Jay close, Chris grinned, "My boyfriend rose from the

dead and we're not locked away."

Ray giggled, "Me and Tony only met this morning and we're not locked away."

Sniggering, Jay admonished, "No, no, children. Be nice and pull your minds out of the gutter. They're only getting to know each other, in a slightly different manner than some. What goes on behind closed doors is none of our business." When most of the pack were grinning at him, he then stage whispered, "We'll ask Alden," and everyone roared laughing.

For the remainder of the walk, the group took tangents from Travis, to Lance's and Scott's observations about Craig's and Jay's abdominal muscles, which led to remarks about Keith's, Prez's and Derrick's abs, which led to Platinum Habits. Seeing the group approaching the auditorium, Alden had already unlocked an entryway door. They all walked inside. The lobby area was among the largest any of them had ever seen. Craig and Phil opened the closest pair of theater doors. "It's pitch black in there," Craig relayed. "I can only see the trails of LEDs down the aisle."

Finding the two circuit breaker panels, Scott called, "Hey, Alden?"

"I'm all set for you guys," Alden replied over the ceiling speakers, and then shared, "John told me to offer to play the Platinum Habits concert videos I have. It's up to you, but I could play the Wedding Concert, which is about two and a-half hours long, or the Welcome Home concert for the level one orphans, which is about an hour and a-half long."

Lance and Scott cheered, "SWEET!"

Robbie, Richie, Ralphie, Pat and the Ramos brothers each said

that they would like to see the shorter concert, so they could still enjoy the afternoon. Realizing that the Wedding Concert would have them in the theater until dinner time, the rest of the group agreed. Lance said, "I'd like to see the actual stage set up, before the flick," and Scott agreed. Alden began walking Scott and Lance through the circuit breaker panels. They powered up the lights, the movie screen, and associated sound system.

Lights began flickering on. Standing at the open theater doors, Phil gasped, "Omigod! It's humongous!" getting the attention of the others. Everyone, except Lance and Scott, who were still at the circuit breakers, hurried to peek inside.

Tony and Ray were the first to enter the theater. Following them inside with Jay, Chris called, "Alden, how big is this place?"

"It can seat twenty-five thousand," Alden answered. "It's designed the same as Clan Headquarters, in Orlando." He said nothing about Tyler blowing the roof off the Orlando CIC, or what the new Orlando CIC and auditorium was like.

"Would we ever need to use a place this big?" Jay wondered.

Alden replied, "Pacific Rim Division has five bases, capable of supporting up to two thousand kids right now. That could easily be doubled, if necessary, and then factor in the adult staff. Prez and the band members have already discussed Christmas and New Year's Eve Concerts for the entire Clan, so eventually, yes, we would need the capacity."

Walking inside the theater with his younger brothers, Nate Ramos grinned, "From back here, the stage seems small."

"There are ceiling video screens that could be lowered, so everyone can see," Alden informed them. "The Wedding Concert had

the largest audience, about four thousand, so we haven't needed to use the video screens."

Lance and Scott finished powering up and joined the rest of the pack. Barely three steps inside, Lance immediately began evilly cackling. Scott gasped, "Holy crap! Derrick's drum set includes gongs and timpani." He could only wonder what songs Platinum Habits played that required gongs and timpani.

Nodding, Lance giggled, "A grand piano, a Hammond B3, and racks of keyboards at stage left and stage right."

"I'm counting ten amplifiers and eight stage monitors," Scott shared.

Lance and Scott madly grinned at each other, and then started running down the aisle, past all the other newbies, and went up onto the stage. They wandered around, taking inventory of all the amps and guitars. Lance carefully picked up Mike's Martin D-45 and whimpered. Scott sniggered at his roomie. "Take this from me," Lance giggled, "I just came in my pants." Scott, Tony, Craig, Chris and Jay roared laughing. Once he was able to, Scott took the guitar from Lance.

Still blushing, Ray sniggered, "You two dudes can play guitar, right?"

Looking over with the D-45 in his hands, Scott answered, "We can play, but I've never seen a setup like this before." Turning around, he carefully returned the D-45 to the guitar stand. On the return trip toward the front of the stage, Scott checked out the three effects units on the floor. They weren't powered on, and he had never seen them at stores in Manhattan, so he could only wonder how they worked.

Going over to Keith's keyboard rack, Lance only looked around

and then giggled, "I have no idea what most of the knobs, buttons, and sliders are for."

"That's what we're here for," Scott pleasantly reminded. "Soon enough, we'll have a clue, Lance."

Jay grinned, "If you two are done, come on back down here, so we can watch the band."

Nodding, Lance headed for the stage stairs and called, "Alden, we want to hear and feel the music." Closer to the opposite side of the stage, Scott practically skipped down the steps.

Alden giggled, "Okay, but this system could leave you all with temporary hearing loss. I guarantee it'll be plenty loud though." The stage curtains began closing, the lights dimmed and the movie screen lowered from the stage ceiling.

From the rear of the theater, Kassidy Oldcambus shouted, "What are you guys doing?" With him were his two brothers, the Hiram twins, Jimmy Matos, Bob Wheeler, and Paul Eliason. All eight of them were splattered with mud, making it obvious that they had been on their trikes since lunch, and found at least one mud puddle.

Jay waved them inside and Craig hollered, "A virtual concert, featuring our leaders."

As the group jogged down the aisle, Kassidy wondered, "Is this kewl? Are we allowed in here?"

Alden answered, "Drew, Corey, John, and Stephen know and approved. This is one place you newbies haven't seen yet."

"The doors are usually locked though," Kassidy reminded.

Before taking a seat in the center of the tenth row beside Lance, Scott said, "So little kids don't come in here and play, then wind up getting hurt in the dark. It's kewl, man." He sat down beside Lance, leaned over and softly sniggered, "Are your shorts all gunked up?"

Nodding, Lance softly giggled, "Did you know it was possible to cum with a limp dick?" They both cracked up. Lance cackled, "Nobody ever told me!"

"Learn something new everyday," Scott chuckled. "If you keep doing that, you'll have a reason to wear undies."

"Depends," Lance giggled, pushing Scott to loud laughter.

Two dozen teens and tweens greeted one another and got settled in seats. The auditorium lights dimmed and Alden's video of the concert began with 'Home By The Sea', with Reyes playing timpani, and Derrick singing lead vocals. The video was very simple, capturing the entire band, but without any fancy videography; the picture periodically zoomed in on the lead vocalist and backed out to the entire band. Since four of the six band members were very much locked in position, Mike and Prez made up for it by bopping and dancing together, seemingly feeding off each other, but keeping the audience and their other band mates involved. The entire performance was amazing to each of those watching, and especially those old enough to recognize the tune. Lance and Scott were amazed with Mike, who never even glanced at his guitar's fretboard; he watched Prez, he moved over by Troy, he moved back by the drum risers to watch Derrick, but never once checked his hand position. Prez was doing the same as Mike, moving around the stage, but they thought the bass was a less challenging and interesting instrument.

At the end of the song, Lance softly checked with Scott, "Did you

catch a single chord that Mike played?"

Shaking his head, Scott sniggered, "I think I saw him playing some ninth chords, but I'm really not sure."

Lance blinked at Scott, asking, "You know ninth chords?"

"In one form, two when I look it up, again," Scott grinned.

"I am so screwed," Lance laughed.

Scott smirked, "You know ninth chords, I've seen you play 'em."

The next song, 'Lunatic Fringe' started. The sound of the audience cheering was clearly heard, since all the original eighty-seven heard it as the opener for the luau. Reyes sat at the electronic drum kit. Troy was now playing electric guitar. He was playing rhythm through most of the song, but did trade off licks with Mike during the guitar solo. Again, the band members paid attention to the audience and each other, but seemed to rarely look at their instruments. During the break between songs, Chris, Jay, Nate Ramos and the three Rs evilly grinned at Lance and Scott.

"No, we couldn't play either song, even with a month's forewarning," Scott chuckled.

"Aw shit," Lance grumbled, "Troy's put the Stratocaster down and picked up a twelve-string acoustic. I've never touched a twelve-string."

Scott answered, "Me either, but it can't be that hard." He then laughed at Jay, "Turn around! We can't play this either."

"They haven't started playing yet," Jay chuckled.

"Does it matter?" Lance and Scott chorused.

Led by Troy's acoustic guitar part, the band began playing 'Too Many People'. Reyes had moved over to hand percussion, shaking maracas in one hand, and keeping a separate rhythm on a tambourine in his other hand. During a short section where Reyes was unoccupied, he picked up a group of drum sticks and displayed them to Derrick. Reyes tossed a stick. Derrick dropped a stick and caught the one thrown, but never missed a single beat. Cracking up, Reyes tossed more drum sticks to his dad, until he picked up the maracas and tambourine to play again. The kids loved it that day, and the newbies watching the recorded performance loved it too.

Through the entire flick, each of the kids noticed that the band members seemed different, almost possessed with alternate personalities. Gone were the laid-back teenagers, and in their place amazing look-a-likes commanded the stage and their instruments. During the drum and percussion solos in 'Soul Sacrifice/Head, Hands and Feet,' all the kids were tapping their feet, and the Stoeher twins began playing air drums. Troy played saxophone during 'Urgent,' making the solo seem like the most natural thing he'd ever done. Hearing and watching three metal songs in a row; 'Revolution', 'You've Got Another Thing Coming', and 'Heaven's On Fire', most of the boys realized Platinum Habits wasn't like most bands that stuck to a single genre. Switching from those three rockers to the slower, bluesy jazz of 'Can't Find My Home' made it clear that the band could play anything they wanted, and the music was precisely what was recorded. The excitement Lance and Scott had before arriving at Ewa Beach doubled, and doubled again with each song Platinum Habits performed.

What grabbed everyone's attention, not just the two musicians who were watching and listening to every band member very closely,

were the vocals. They harmonized easily. Each of the band members had different voices that closely matched the songs they were covering. From lowest to highest were Prez, then Mike, then Derrick, then Troy, and then Keith. Reyes hadn't done any singing at all during that particular concert. None of the newbies knew that hours after the performance they were watching and hearing, all the Core Rimmers had taken a week off at Archmania. During that vacation, the band members had learned many new cover songs, as well as figured out Reyes vocal range, and where it could be applied to expand their repertoire.

At the end of the show, the lights were turned up again and the movie screen rose. Chris asked his partner, "What do you think?"

Jay grinned, "I think we'll be seeing a lot of concerts."

"As soon as Prez is off the injured list," Ralphie giggled.

Tanner shared, "John said, there are more kids scheduled to arrive tomorrow."

"So tomorrow we'll prob'ly get a show," Toby finished.

Everyone in the group stood and shuffled past rows of seats to the aisle. Noticing Lance and Scott were very quiet, Craig grinned, "What do you two dudes think?"

Lance smirked, "Yesterday, I thought I was ready to learn from these guys. Today, I'm not so sure."

Nodding agreement, Scott added, "They're not amateurs; they got the audience singing along during 'Dirty Laundry'; even in the flick, they made me feel like they were really standing up there, performing for our small group."

The Oldcambus twins chimed, "Yeah, we felt that way too."

Locking eyes with Scott, Lance asked, "What can we do to be more prepared?"

"Practice," Scott answered. "A lot of practicing, so we can at least play without looking at our axes."

Lance whined, "Did you see Mike playing those blindingly fast runs during 'Wildest Dreams'? He seemed to be picking every note. Watching both my hands, I couldn't reproduce that."

Scott sighed, "It's back to the basics, playing the scales to a strict tempo. That's what my old guitar teacher used to say; warm up with scales and chord progressions before moving on to songs. I didn't pay much attention to that advice."

Relenting, Lance sighed, "My head is spinning with ideas."

Chris suggested, "Let's go back to the diving well."

When Jay nodded, Craig glanced over at Lance and Scott, adding, "Like cramming for a test, let the ideas settle down." Off to the side, the muddy trike riders agreed they would need to use the pool house shower before using the pools.

Scott told Lance, "After dark, when we head back to our room, let's spend at least another hour just working on scales and progressions."

Speaking loud enough that Lance and Scott could hear, Chris playfully told Jay, "I didn't know they were that obsessed last night."

"I haven't been that obsessed since I was five, with them mud pies we used to make," Jay joked.

Lance giggled, "Are you mocking us, Jay?"

"Simply stating the facts," Jay chortled.

Scott wondered, "Isn't there something you really enjoy; something you want to be very good at?" Turning to Chris and bouncing his eyebrows, Jay helplessly sniggered. Without saying a word, Chris blushed and giggled. Scott chuckled, "I suppose that counts."

Craig nudged his brother, smirking, "What are you blushing for?"

Phil giggled, "Jay and Chris, obviously."

Grinning madly, Kassidy teased, "You dudes don't hold much of anything back, huh?"

Jay smiled, "I used to hold everything back, never giving a sign, or saying a word to anyone, including Chris, until we were behind closed doors. The facts are that being in love and making love are normal parts of life. The situation is much kewler now, and I promised Chris that it would all change. I'm following through on my promise. I had to wait about four hours in that hospital before anyone told me that Chris, Rafe, and Pat were alive and in Clan care. Four hours was rough enough, so I can easily imagine how they felt, thinking I was dead for a day. If any of you guys ever see me treating Chris coldly, you have my permission to line up and slap some sense into me."

Chris giggled, "He's serious."

"Dead serious," Jay confirmed. "Several times during that concert, I wanted to get up and dance, but that would be considered exertion, so I'll wait until tomorrow."

The group filed out of the theater, except for Lance and Scott. Going directly to the circuit breaker panels, Lance and Scott powered down the auditorium. Everyone left the building before Lance and Scott were finished. When the task was complete, Lance told Scott, "I'm gonna hit the men's room here."

Nodding, Scott confirmed, "I'll meet you at the diving well?"

"Kewl," Lance chirped, and went to use the facilities.

Stepping outside, Scott realized this was the first time in more than a day that Lance wasn't nearby. It felt strange; more strange than leaving the only home he'd ever known and walking through the city alone in the pre-dawn hours the day before. He had been telling himself to stop following Lance around like a lost puppy, but only discovered Lance following him instead. The mid afternoon sun was shining, adults and kids were walking around the CIC, but for the first time, Scott felt desperately alone. The distant sound of squealing kids at the playground could be heard. Tears for his deceased parents flooded his eyes. His mother, Cynthia Shetley should've been home by midnight, but never made it. His father, Emmet was expected between one and two in the morning, but again, the apartment door never opened. Laying in bed that Thursday night, Scott only occasionally slept. Mostly, he worried about them and his own future. Scott wiped his tears away, reminding himself to be strong and accept what had happened. Suddenly, all the changes of the past day and a-half were too pronounced; nothing around him was familiar. The sun seemed brighter than it ever had in New York City. The trees were old growth, and had never seen a trimming by man. The three condos were the tallest buildings on base, but even they seemed small compared to what Scott was used to seeing. Paying little attention to where he was going, Scott walked the path through the quad. He didn't even notice Keith was by the pool and just kept walking past

the rec center and into the trees, telling himself to pull himself together again before returning to the rest of the Clan.

Finished in the men's room and done drying his hands, Lance exited the tiled room and uncertainly called, "Alden, I'm the last one out, so lock the doors behind me, please?"

"It's covered," Alden replied, and then said, "Something's wrong with Scott. Walking across the compound, his head was hanging, he was slouching, and if wiping his eyes means anything, he was crying."

Scowling, Lance asked, "Where is he now?"

"He just walked right past the pools and into the trees, on the Southwest side of the base."

"I'll take care of it," Lance assured, and stepped out of the auditorium.

Outside, over the speaker, Alden asked, "Should I call for help?"

Shaking his head, Lance answered, "Not yet. I'll bet I know what's going on." Taking off like a rabbit, Lance ran at his top speed past the first two single family homes. He slowed and jogged past the diving well, and then the pool, just to make sure Scott hadn't already returned. Not seeing his friend, Lance turned up the juice and tore past the rec center.

Craig and Phil noticed Lance on a high speed quest and turned to each other. Since they had seen Scott walking by minutes earlier, the Nash brothers assumed that they had agreed to meet amongst the trees, to chat about their guitar playing goals.

Beyond the tree line and slowing to a brisk walk, Lance looked

around for his roomie. He didn't want to call Scott's name, knowing that would get the attention of any gorillas and G-Cats in the vicinity. Looking to his left and right, Lance followed a semi-direct path around the trees.

Sitting on a lower tree branch not far away, Scott saw Lance searching. From his seven foot high perch, he chuckled, "Looking for someone, pal?"

Spinning toward the sound, Lance saw Scott's legs hanging first. He looked up and giggled, "What're you doing?"

Scott grinned, "Living in the city, I never climbed too many trees as a little kid. I just wanted a place to sit and rest."

Approaching the tree Scott was sitting in, Lance smirked, "Nice try. Why didn't you go to the diving well, where there are tables and chairs, like we planned?"

Scott shrugged and reluctantly admitted, "I started remembering my folks. Since I got a little sad, I thought I'd chill out and not make a scene. Climbing this tree gave me something to think about, like not falling and breaking an arm, leg, or my neck."

Lance prompted, "Tell me something?"

"Sure."

"Did you ever catch your parents cuddling on the sofa?"

"A couple of times."

"You've thought about that, doing that with someone?"

"Yeah," Scott softly admitted, and with a small smile added, "a

lot more often recently."

"When you had me go look in on Chris and Jay earlier, that's what I remembered; two different people completely connected, soul mates who are dependent and relying upon each other. They know each other so well that they can almost read minds. My parents had to be together, even at the end, one followed the other to the other side. It's the way it had to be."

Shivering with delight, Scott smiled, "That's a beautiful idea."

"It's true," Lance shrugged. "My folks acted like they were in love, and from the sounds of it, so did yours. Sure, neither of us is thrilled that they're gone, far from it, but look where we are, man. When we left New York, it was in the mid-forties and we were wearing jeans, long sleeve shirts and winter jackets."

"Those jackets may never see the light of day again," Scott sniggered.

"The important points are, our parents stayed together, and in their place, we have a bunch of really nice adults, and all the married Core Rimmers to remind us what's important. Add to that the lucky happen-stance of Chris and Jay, who are just as committed as any other couple around here. Plus, several of those same Core Rimmers are virtuoso musicians. I'm seeing this whole situation as a wash, the good families we lost have been replaced with more good families, and more brothers and sisters around every corner. This place is like a gigantic family reunion. You and me are choosing to be really close brothers, sharing a room together. The way things were before lunch, alone together in our room, goofing around, and jamming after lunch, is only a preview of what the next few years are gonna be like. So, look up at the sky, say your final goodbyes, and jump down from that

branch."

Scott smirked, "You're not gonna let me drown in my thoughts?"

Shaking his head, Lance giggled, "Not sad thoughts. We've got all kinds of musical ideas to drown ourselves in. Now, am I gonna have to climb up there with you? That would seem really weird to everyone." A fair distance from the boys, but close enough to hear every word, Bengal tiger hybrid Rashad, allowed the teens to notice him walking away.

Waving at the G-Cat, Scott chuckled, "Like Travis disappearing into oblivion after meeting his new roommate?" Lance paid no attention to the wave and watched Scott carefully.

"Yup, just like that. People will start to talk, about way more than sock-stiffies and..." Lance unexpectedly stopped talking and looked well beyond the tree Scott was sitting in. Carefully turning to see for himself, Scott saw Paulie Panda approaching. Lance's surprised expression pushed Scott to soft sniggering.

Paulie called, "What're you doing, Lance? When did you start talking to trees?"

Before he cracked up and fell off the branch, Scott jumped down. Startled by people dropping from trees, Paulie loudly warned, "WATCH OUT!" and started running.

"WHOA!" Lance loudly laughed, and scrambled to get between Paulie and Scott. Paulie ran into Lance, who tumbled backwards onto Scott, and all three wound up on the ground in the dirt. Scott howled laughing. "PAULIE!" Lance incredulously giggled, "What the hell was that all about?"

Rolling off the top of the pile, Paulie answered, "You're my

friend, and I was protecting you. I don't have claws, like the Teddy bears..."

"Thank GOD!" Lance interrupted, and got onto his feet.

"But I still have the same basic friend protection firmware," Paulie finished.

"So you tried to tackle my roommate?" Lance giggled, and pointed to Scott, who was still laughing too hard to get off his hands and knees.

Paulie grinned, "That was my intention. You got in the way. I couldn't stop in time. Sorry."

Gesturing to Scott, Lance giggled, "He's my roommate and best friend. You don't need to protect me from Scott. As a matter of fact, you don't need to protect me at all. I'm three years older now, Paulie."

"You're the boss," Paulie giggled.

With that said, Lance turned and offered Scott a hand up.

Breathlessly wheezing, Scott got onto his feet, and unsteadily leaned on Lance. Brushing some dry leaves and dirt off Scott's shirt, Lance confirmed, "You're okay?"

"Fine," Scott giggled, and picked a leaf out of Lance's hair.

Turning to his Panda, Lance smirked, "Paulie, we'll have to figure out some new rules to play by. I'll need to know a few things."

"It's all in the manual, Lance, but I could tell you what you'd like to know."

Scott suggested, "Let's head back to the pools." Lance nodded

agreement and they began walking.

Lance wondered, "What've you been doing since lunch, Paulie?"

"What you told me to do," Paulie answered. "When all the cakes and cookies were gone, I played with the kids at the playground. I can do things the Teddy bears can't, like push the merry-go-round, and catch kids coming down the slide."

Lance asked, "Was there a special kid that you liked the most?"

Paulie giggled, "I like all kids. All are special to me."

Lance checked with Scott, got a nod in response, and then told his Panda, "Here's the deal; I've grown up and started doing more grown up things, like learning to play guitar. As much as I love having you around again, I don't think I could be a very good best friend and companion for you."

"I am programmed to be your best friend, Lance. I will follow you and do what you tell me to do. My programming will not allow me to harm children, unless a child is threatening my best friend. My primary weapon is my size and weight. I can lift up to two-hundred pounds, tackle, or bear hug."

Lance chuckled, "You always were a big cuddle bear, Paulie." Seeing his friend as a much younger boy, Scott couldn't help it and started chortling again. Turning to Scott, Lance bounced his eyebrows.

"I can also act as a pillow or bed for my best friend," Paulie stated.

"Those were the good ol' days," Lance fondly recalled. Arriving at the pool, Lance scanned for red heads, looking for Albert and

Charles McPhearson. Lance and Scott had escorted the McPhearson boys to the Meadowlands, Des Moines and all the way to Ewa Beach. Scott saw the boys were with Laura and Lindsay Gibbons, tapped Lance, and led the way.

Seeing their teen protectors and Paulie, Al and Charles raced over to them. Lance and Scott paused to catch a running kid. Glued to Scott's side, Al looked up and proudly told both teens, "We've got a new family! Mike's mommy and daddy wants us as much as we want them!"

At the seven-year-old boy's enthusiasm, Scott chuckled, "We told you in New Jersey that everything would work out."

Attached to Lance's side, Charles gushed, "You got's a kewl Panda bear, Lance."

Lance smiled, "Since you think so, and I'm way too old, how would you like to have Paulie as your best friend?"

Charles gasped, "Could I really?"

Turning to Paulie, Lance ordered, "From now on, your best friend is Charles McPhearson. You will live with, play with, and protect Charlie. I'll be happy with you as one of my friends, so I relinquish all claims of being your best friend. Charlie is your best friend."

Without any emotion, Paulie nodded, "Kewl, Lance. Charles is my new best friend."

Both McPhearson boys cheered, "AWESOME!" and hurried to Paulie. The two little guys took Paulie's paws and brought him to their new mom.

Hearing what Lance had done, Laura got up and went to him,

widely smiling, "You gave Charles your Panda?"

Nodding, Lance chuckled, "He was great when I was a kid, and could only pretend he was talking to me. I'm hoping to do better than a VI bear someday."

Laura gave Lance a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and then unexpectedly gave the same to Scott. "I know that you two chaperoned those two all day yesterday," Laura smiled. "Thank you both, so much."

Scott blushed, "It really wasn't a problem. We just kept them with us, so they felt safer."

Lance smirked, "It's the baby sitter that left them, to make it to the Meadowlands alone, that I'd like to have a few four letter words with."

"Starting with, what *the hell* were you thinking?" Scott softly offered.

Laura giggled, "I'd imagine so. I would do the same, and far worse. My husband and I are ready to adopt them, and they're very ready to be adopted; as soon as Preston is available to do the honors, hopefully tomorrow."

"Congratulations!" Scott and Lance disjointedly cheered.

Warmly saying, "Thank you again," Laura returned to her family, and Paulie, who was almost as tall as she. As soon as she had a chance, Laura tapped her comm-badge. She told all the other Core Rimmer parents what Lance and Scott had done, knowing that word would eventually get to the Core Rimmers.

Doc Andrews shouting, "Mister Montigua! GET OUT OF THAT

WELL, or I WILL have you sedated, and on a bio-bed, pissing by remote control!" set most of the Clan around the pools laughing.

"BUSTED!" Lance, Scott, Keanu, Liki, Pete, and Roy roared.

Climbing out of the well, Jay sniggered, "It was fun while it lasted."

"Mister Stokley, hiding under a towel doesn't relieve you of responsibility," Doc Andrews smirked.

Leaving the towel over his face, Chris groggily muttered, "I was napping. What did you say, Doc?"

Walking up to the lounge chair beside the one Chris was in, Lance giggled, "I don't think he's buying it, Chris." Intending to take a few dives before dinner, Lance started to strip and so did Scott. Chris faked snoring. Lance and Scott were looking at Chris when he disappeared from the chair. Less than a second later, Chris' loud scream pierced the air. Flat on his back, Chris dropped from ten meters above the diving well. All the teenaged boys around the well cracked up. Quickly curling up, Chris grabbed his knees seconds before hitting the water, ass end first.

Over the pool house speakers, Alden cryptically giggled, "I'm getting pretty good at these initiations!"

Wearing a satisfied grin, Doc Andrews walked back toward the FYS building. For a week, none of the kids had ever questioned him. These newbie, well adjusted, supposedly 'normal' kids, were the ones to challenge him. To teach a lesson, he responded like any one of the kids might to overinflated teenage egos.

Walking around the side of the well toward the diving boards,

Scott chuckled, "So, ignorance is not blissful after all, huh, Chris?"

Chris loudly laughed, "No one warned me that our doctor had a sense of humor!"

Jay teased, "An important lesson to be taught immediately upon arrival."

"You be quiet!" Chris giggled, "This is all your fault!" and splashed his lover.

Walking by with the Praefectus family and the Triggs brothers, John was simultaneously teasing his brothers soaking in the tub at Kaho'olawe, and Stephen, while calmly introducing the base, some of the other newbies, and the proud pediatrician. Nearing the pools, they saw Chris drop into the well, the McPhearson brothers with Paulie, and a bunch of other little kids with their Teddy bears dancing to Kenny Loggins, 'Playing With The Boys'. The singing kids had changed the chorus' lyrics to Dancing With The Bears. The next song was 'Kung Fu Fighting'. All the kids took a break to watch their bears perform a choreographed Kung Fu Dancing routine, and laughed their tiny butts off. The small pack around John were laughing almost as hard as any of the little kids. John giggled, "Who knew?"

Neil Green Personal Log.

Monday, November 1, 2004

School's out. Today is the third anniversary of my parents' deaths. Only three years have passed, but it seems like life times ago. Three years ago tomorrow, I was dumped in this hell hole. Nothing has been close to what it was ever since.

To prove that nothing's the same, I just had to help Tad. He's still sick and hocked up a big ol' nasty goober. Why they keep us all locked in this tiny room when one of the four of us is sick, I can't explain, other than the hope that we'll all get sick and die. Tad's breathing is strained, and it sounds like he's got a rattling freight train in his chest. If they'd just give the dude some cough medicine and a Tylenol now and then, I'd bet Tad would feel a tiny bit better. A damn cough drop would probably make him feel a little better. But no, let him struggle to even breathe, you fucking shits. Instead, Tad's all curled up on his bed, looking like he lost a fight.

Gerry just asked, "We're gonna die in this place, aren't we?"

"He's just got a cold, Ger," I softly replied.

Jessie grumbled, "Soon, we'll all have it."

Now they're arguing about who's gonna get sick and die first. I told them both to shut the fuck up, before the zoo-keepers come up here to make a bad scene worse. "We've gotta give a shit, because they sure as hell don't," I hissed at them. About once a week we've gotta go through this same shit, arguing about pointless worries. We're trapped in this room together every afternoon and night, like

the only three dudes in the whole world. In the other three rooms up here there are four girls and eight younger boys, but we're not even allowed to talk to them. We've got to be quiet, or the zoo-keepers come up and pound on our doors.

Now Jessie's looking out the window. Other kids are allowed to go out, but we aren't. Other kids are allowed to have friends. All we have is each other, except for the seven or so hours we're at school, five days a week. Holidays suck the worst; they're just additional days trapped in this room. I remember when I looked forward to holidays, back in that previous life. Thanksgiving turkeys, and Christmas cookies... oh, damn, I shouldn't have done that; now my stomach's growling. At least I got smiles and giggles out of Gerry and Jessie. I think I'll do some homework, before I start eating paper out of this journal again.

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Dinner was a joke. A glass of water, a slice of bread, two teaspoons of something that resembled creamed corn, and I'm not even quite sure what the slice of meat was, it was burned so badly. They take us downstairs to eat one room at a time. I guess they know that if all sixteen of us were there at once, we could gang up on them. Given that chance, I would grab a knife and kill them both, I know I would. And I wouldn't give a damn that I had murdered them. Instead, I'm there holding up Tad. He didn't want to eat, and barely could, but one of my warning glares told him to do his best. Without food and water, his cold would only get worse.

I couldn't bear that. Another dude was here when I arrived three years ago. He was older, and got sick, and one day he was gone, never to be seen again. I don't know where they sent him, or what happened to him. I've known Tad since day one here. Gerry, Jessie and Tad are all decent enough dudes, but being here, and forced to keep quiet, we

can barely get away with whispering to each other. We're trapped.

I had a guinea pig once that I took better care of than we're cared for. His name was Gus. Pretty original, considering I was seven when I got him. Gus was still alive when my folks died. He's probably gone too, left in his cage to starve. I'm sorry, Gus. They wouldn't even let me get my clothes, so I didn't have a choice. After I was brought here, I didn't even remember that Gus was at home for a couple o' days. With my parents gone, I guess it took me that long to even realize...

Shit! Now I'm crying.

All I have is this notebook. All I have is this... existence. I can't even call it a life. We don't even have a light in this room. I can read and write until the sun goes down. Then there's nothing better to do than lay down and sleep. Gerry and Jessie have already moved their beds to this side of the room, away from Tad's croupy coughing and sniffing.

What was that older dude's name? I wonder what happened to him. I wonder what will happen to us. They're not taking Tad away; not if I can help it. I didn't even know that older dude, but three years later I still wonder about him. Tad got here a few months before me. If they took Tad, or Gerry or Jessie away, I'd lose it. I'm beginning to think that this is their purpose; to get us weak, let us get sick, move us someplace else where things are even worse, and let us die. I hate thinking that, really I do, but when I think of that older dude, all those years ago, and hear Tad's snotting and sneezing, it makes me believe that they want us dead.

Dreams are better than reality. Sleeping is better than being awake. Tomorrow, we'll go to school again. Even there, we're separated, on the outskirts of the school population, 'those orphans',

sitting at their own lunch table away from other luckier kids. What I wouldn't give to play basketball or football. I'd be happy if someone just said something nice once in a while.

The sun is almost all the way down. Tomorrow's another day; I hope to write more then. Maybe Tad will be better. Since I'll be sleeping closest to him, I'll know what's going on.

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Wednesday, November 3, 2004

I went to school this morning, but was sent home sick. I probably caught the same bug that Tad's got. Good ol' Elk Grove High; where the rich mock everyone else. Being at the bottom of the ladder, everyone dumps on us orphans. It's not my fault that I get a timed shower twice a week. I didn't pick out the rags I wear as clothes every day. If I was allowed to, I'd run an electric razor over my face, but I don't have one, and even if I did, they wouldn't let me use it. So I look like a scruffy street kid. At least I got a tuna sandwich and milk at lunch. I get it free, all us orphans get free lunches at school. The roll was a little soggy, but honestly, with my throat as sore as it is, that helped.

To be even more truthful, I'm glad I'm here. All day yesterday, I kept thinking they're gonna take Tad away, and my last words to him were, "feel better". Pretty damned pitiful, I think, that I have to worry about who will be at the home and who won't be when I get there. If I could've run from school all the way here, I would've. Tad hasn't gotten any better. My brisk pace during the walk here didn't help me feel any better, and I know I've got a fever, but Tad is still here, so it was worth it.

One of the zoo-keepers bitched me out for getting sent home

sick. I didn't say a word until I got upstairs and in our room, and those whispered words were "fuck off and die". Plain and simple; you don't give a shit about me, and the best things that could happen to us would be for both of them to just fuck off and die. Maybe if you had helped Tad get well, I wouldn't be sick. Maybe if you gave us blankets, pillows and real beds, we'd be able to rest. Instead, here's a second hand sheet and a piece of thin foam padding on the floor to sleep on. During the summer, I sleep on the wood floor because it's cooler.

I hate hating, but ya know, I just can't help it any more. The assholes have the TV blasting too, probably purposefully to keep me awake, to keep me sicker longer, to make me go away someplace where I'll die. I wouldn't give you the satisfaction, you slimy fuckin' bastards. Even if I did die, I'd come back to haunt you; I'd point them both out to Jesus and all the Saints as the two most unworthy human beings on the planet. They'd tell me to forgive, and I'd have to say, sorry but I wouldn't be here if they had just kept us clean, fed and warm.

Whew! All that hate took a lot out of me! I can't help giggling.

I imagined having a really big sword and chopping them up. Then I got my hands on a Star Fleet phaser and tested each of the settings on them. Finally, I was sitting in the captain's chair of a starship and ordering photon torpedo attacks on their graves. My day dreams get just a tiny bit realistic.

Uh oh! My giggling woke Tad.

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So, I fell asleep and didn't wake until after Gerry and Jessie got home from school. Once again, they started bitching and whining

because two of four of us are sick. Actually, Tad thinks he's feeling a bit better, but unfortunately now I'm feeling worse. So now it's Tad's turn to deal with Gerry and Jessie. He just bitched 'em both out and demanded proof that they have dicks, and if they didn't then he would kiss 'em both on the mouth and make sure he gave whatever we got to them. I laughed myself into a major coughing fit. Since I'm way tired, I'll let Tad deal, but demanded that they wake me up for whatever table scraps the zoo-keepers decide to give us for dinner.

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Ugh! So, a herd of bison have pissed in my mouth while I slept. To add insult to injury, I had dinner. If I had the strength to retch, I'd do it... on Gerry or Jessie, for being whiney little bitches.

Tad says I was having a dream before supper; a good one from the sound of it. Just to goof on me, Gerry and Jessie wondered when I learned Russian, because all the Rs and Ps sounded backwards. Squinting at them, I wished that I could recall a little of it. Damn, it hurts to write - it hurts my fingers and my eyes and my brain.

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It's one of those colds where you lean back against the wall, close your eyes and fall asleep sitting up. Balance is nonexistent when you're sick and fall asleep sitting up, I learned. I tumbled over to one side and crashed to the floor. Now my headache is twice as bad from the clunk that's still bouncing around in my brain.

My throat feels like raw hamburger. Right now, I would kill for a bowl of ice cream. Even a plain ol' ice cube would put the fire out.

Gerry and Jessie are putting Tad's fire out now. After being sick for a week, Tad's gonna drown 'em. I wish I could mess around too, but that would definitely wreck my throat. Just accepting a blow job

would raise my temperature more and fry my brain. Tad's got the finest looking ass on him though, and his dick is more than six inches. I stole a plastic six-inch ruler from school so we could check each other out. Tad's dick is normally shorter than mine, but with a stiffie he's got about a half inch more than me; damn close to seven inches or maybe a little more.

Oh damn, Tad's getting near the edge and Gerry's gonna get the reward. Which is luckier, I'm not sure. We call it our protein fix, since we sure ain't getting enough from the zoo-keepers.

I wish it didn't hurt to laugh. I knew Tad was gonna drown someone. Gerry's trying to relearn how to breathe while Jessie, Tad and I are laughing at him. The really amazing thing is that Tad's dick ain't going limp. It's still big and pointing straight out. And there goes Jessie, on his knees for the second round.

This whole situation is so fucked up. We're stuck with each other, and know each other very well, but it's like we're dealing with our limitations the best ways we can. It's love - hate relationships, I'm sure; we can be a bunch of pricks, for sure, which is evident when one of us is sick and it's only a matter of time before each of us gets sick. At the same time, we take care of each other too, in every way, which Gerry has proved, and Jessie is still proving. Later tonight, I know it'll be Tad who's closest to me. It's always the same round-robin story each time; there's Tad and I , the two fifteen-year-olds, and then there's Gerry and Jessie, who are fourteen- and thirteen-years-old, respectively.

I'm pretty sure I'm gay. Tad is pretty sure he is, and he thinks he loves me, but Gerry and Jessie can't say they are or they aren't. Really, how can any of us know for certain when we're locked away alone together sixteen hours of every day? I'd like to try sex once with a girl, just to be sure we're not faking anything. If we ever get out of

this stinking shit-hole, I wonder how things will work out.

OMIGOD! Tad did it again, and now Jessie is coughing through his giggles and our combined muffled laughter. Normally, when we can get off daily, Tad's the power shooter from hell. With more than six days worth built up, he's probably going off like a cannon. And Tad just turned to me, like I have half a chance of doing him good when I can't breathe through my nose. I half-coughed and half-giggled, "When I'm feeling better, dude. I'll show the other two losers how to deal with your monster loads."

While Gerry and Jessie went off bitching and complaining, Tad sat down beside me. He leaned over and whispered, "Both times were for you, Neil. For more than that though, I'm really sorry I got you sick, dude."

Nodding understandingly, I said, "After all these years, we all knew we were bound to share the germ. Only the two little pussies over there still think bitching about it will prevent it."

More soft cussing flowed from Gerry and Jessie. Tad softly sniggered, "I gave them the germ with my sperm. They'll be sick and alone together all next school week, wishing one could help the other out, but too sick to even try." Tad peeked over into this notebook, then gave me a kiss on the cheek and evilly cackled at our other two roommates, "Your straight boy act is blown, literally!"

Now Gerry and Jessie are bitching because they know I wrote down everything that just happened. One of the zoo-keepers pounded on our door. Eight birds just flipped him off.

Sunlight is fading fast. More tomorrow.

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Thursday, November 4, 2004

SALVATION DAY HAS ARRIVED!

It's four in the afternoon and I've only been awake about an hour. Last night, about two o'clock in the morning, we were woke up. I was sick and pretty much out of it, but I remember enough to write some of it down.

I'm laying there, out cold, and felt someone nudging my butt. This wasn't like the normal attention-getting nudge, or Tad grinding himself against me. Grumbling because I felt like death warmed over, I tried to see what was going on. Tad was ordering me to wake up and softly warning, "They ain't taking you anywhere." That woke me up fast. Gerry, Jessie and Tad were lined up, like they were protecting me. Our room door swung open, but it wasn't the zoo-keepers - it was some sort of green-eyed army dudes!

The scary thing was the armor the dudes were wearing when they entered our room. They had night-vision goggles and didn't even look human. It scared the piss out of me! Dumbstruck, I couldn't say a word, or understand what my roommates were saying. Needless to say, my first priority was the toilet. Giggling erupted and the two armored dudes in our room took their helmets off and cleared the way to the door. It had been so long since I could freely leave our room without the zoo-keepers, I paused to ask where they were.

"Tied up to the chairs in the kitchen," one dude sniggered.

The other dude smiled, "Go pee, bro. They won't be harassing you any more."

Without delay, I waddled as quickly as I could to the bathroom us dudes used. There were two upstairs and one was for the girls, the

other was for us guys. On the way, I saw some of my orphanage sisters nude, waiting their turn at the other bathroom. I saw these girls dressed every school day morning but I don't think I ever saw any of 'em naked before.

Tad went with me and we shared the bowl, but rapidly blinked at each other, wondering just what in the hell was going on. When we finished, another taller dude was at the door. His eyes shifted down and then back up to meet our eyes. Pointing at the sink, he warmly smiled, "Wash your hands and your willies, bros. That's normal and there's no major hurry."

Doing as we were told, Tad softly asked, "Who are you?"

"Captain Rahul Hayes, strike team India, Clan Short Pacific Rim Division Detachment."

I sneezed and went into a coughing fit, spraying snot and spit all over myself. Now I needed to wash my hands and dick all over again.

Rahul scowled, "That sounds really nasty, bro. What's your name?"

"Neil Green," I wheezed.

"You'll be better real soon, Neil," Rahul assured. "We've got the best doctors on call twenty-four-by-seven. Whatever you need, you'll have. Whatever you want, you'll get."

"Something for this sore throat would be nice."

"Daileass," Rahul called, "get some of those vitamin C cough drops Momma Janet developed, with the mentholypus decongestant."

A younger, preteen boy's voice answered, "In your lower left

side storage compartment, Rahul." He then giggled, "They're in a bag and smaller than those .45 slugs, so you can tell the difference."

Smirking, Rahul teased, "Oh, they're like the size of your dick?"

"HEY!" Daileass laughed, "I may not be Joey-sized, but even in the Russian climate, I'm a fair bit larger than a cough drop!"

Pulling out a few of the cough drops, Rahul held them out to me, grinning, "One each half hour, Neil. We need you awake and able to speak for another hour or two, but after that, you're going to have a real bed to sleep off that cold."

Tad and I finished drying off, then I took the offered cough drops from Rahul's hand. Before unwrapping one, I admitted, "I've heard of Clan Short, but I didn't know they were in California."

Nodding, Tad shared, "We thought they were too far away and there were kids worse off than us for the Clan to help."

Pointing to the device in his ear, Rahul warmly smiled, "I'm getting reports as we speak. Let me tell you, this place is plenty bad and well worth our intervention. There's a lot that's classified that I can't tell you, but I can promise you that you're out of here tonight, and won't ever be back again."

I popped a cough drop and then asked, "Can I get my journals? They're the only things here that I want to keep."

"Go ahead," Rahul said, and gestured to our room. He then loudly told all the kids in the hall the same things he had just told Tad and I.

Returning to our room, Tad and I gathered my current journal and the other two guys. We then went downstairs. Truthfully, I was

really scared, being out of bed and out of our room in the middle of the night. Kids were gathering in the living room and sitting on the furniture. We weren't even allowed in the living room, and so sitting on the furniture was really bad. The littlest kids wouldn't do it and gathered on the floor in front of the sofa. I couldn't believe this was really happening, and had to see the zoo-keepers to make sure they were really tied up.

As if they would pop out in front of me at any moment, I slowly walked into the kitchen. They were really tied up on the chairs, and were even gagged. The cough drop was working miracles. Inhaling sharply through my nose, I gathered a big ol' goober and hocked it onto Mr. Franklin's face. I gave his bitch of a wife one too. The two Clan dudes in the room broke down hysterically laughing, which pushed Tad into a giggling fit.

Returning to the living room and feeling much more secure that things were going to work out, I heard the Clan dudes in the kitchen.

"...and he didn't even say a word!" one of them cackled.

The other giggled, "The best part is, it's running down toward their mouths! YUMMY!"

The first kid giggled, "Alden, make a note of that and tell Prez when he has the chance to hear it."

A third voice giggled, "Move closer so I can snap a photo."

Wondering why the president would give a shit that I spit on them, I took a seat on the chair and actually hoped to leave a nice skid mark on it. Tad squeezed in beside me, and then told all the kids what I just did. The two older girls groaned, but all the rest eventually giggled.

While we waited in the living room, I checked out Catherine and Jeanette, the two oldest girls in the room. They weren't bad looking at all, and I thought some about having sex with one or both of them. Nothing happened to my dick; not even a twinge or a little shift. I let my mind build on the fantasy, but John Henry was clearly disinterested. As awful as I felt earlier, and being preoccupied with writing, John Henry still got chubby from the activity in our room. That's when I noticed Tad had been watching me the whole time. At the first convenient opportunity, Tad and I needed to have a heart-to-heart.

From the kitchen, we all heard Rahul laughing, "Okay, which one of you violated the prisoners?" A chorus of denials broke free, with descriptions of me. Rahul came into the living room and stopped before the chair Tad and I were in.

"Awesome cough drops, dude," I cheekily grinned. "I feel better already."

"I'll bet you do!" Rahul laughed. Shaking his head, Rahul moved to the center of the room, where he could be easily seen and heard. "Okay," Rahul cheerfully began, "here's what's happening. Tonight, Clan Short Pacific Rim Division raided sixteen orphanages owned and operated by Zorro Communications Corporation.

"We've rated the orphanages by number of kids present and their general health. The rating system is simple, on a scale from one through four, with each higher number being worse than the previous. This place is ranked as a level two orphanage. In a few minutes, doctors and nurses will be arriving via transporter. They'll check each of you out, and start gathering groups to bring to hospitals. Those of you who want to be kept together with your friends only need to say something to one of us, one of the medical staff, or one of the two Clan Short Pacific Rim Division leaders, who will also be here as

quickly as they can.

"We've all got the picture of what things were like for you here," Rahul continued. "Those of you who have spoke are barely above whisper. That needs to change, right now. If you have anything to say or anything to ask, you need to let us hear you. Our two leaders are finishing up across town at another orphanage. They want you to talk freely and openly about everything, the same goes for the medics and for everyone on my team." Turning to Tad and I, Rahul prompted, "Tell the rest of the group about the care givers."

"They really are tied up and gagged," I clearly said.

"And they will remain tied up and gagged until every one of you are out of this house," Rahul promised. "We don't want to hear their excuses, and you sure don't need to hear anything more from them. Once all of you are gone, then your caregivers will be judged and sentenced by the two leaders coming here. You will never see them or this house ever again. You will see each other again. You will be fed, as soon as the medics take a look at you and have an idea what each of you can manage."

He paused to ask, "Are there any questions?"

Raising my hand and gaining Rahul's attention, I asked, "Why can't you feed us something?"

"Dude, I would love to get you a big bowl of chicken soup, and something for each of you," Rahul admitted. "The fact is, I'm not a doctor. What sounds like a cold to me, our team's medic thinks might be bronchitis or pneumonia. All of you are smaller than you should be and have obviously been starved, which we can see by your distended bellies. Very little food would have one or many of you puking it up. I can guarantee that you'll all be fed, once the doctors know how much

they can safely feed you. And each meal will get just a little larger, so we can have you healthy again."

"How can you know what it was like for us here?" Catherine meekly asked.

Rahul answered, "I was rescued by the Clan too. We unlocked your doors. We saw how and where each of you were sleeping. We looked in closets and dressers. Your caregivers have stop-watches and timers scattered around everywhere, leading us to believe that each of you were monitored and timed for everything. All of you are naked and not one of you asked for a robe, which tells me that clothing is something you keep off and as clean as possible, because you have so little of it. Before you go back to bed tonight, you'll be able to shower, and eat without a timer. You'll have clean clothes every day."

One of the little dudes, Dwight Scott hissed, "Liar!" Stunned, everyone looked at Dwight. Dwight was also surprised, quickly got up and ran behind the couch, sure that he was going to be hit for opening his mouth.

Carefully and gently, Rahul smiled, "I know it seems too good to be true, because I was just like you. Everyone on my team was just like you too. The only way you'll know that I'm not lying is when you're fed all you can eat as often as you can manage. You'll know I'm not lying when you have a clean change of clothing for every day." Snapping his fingers and hitting upon an idea, Rahul grinned, "Daileass, a Santa sack, with toys and games for sixteen kids."

On the floor before Rahul appeared a red velvet sack. Leaning down and picking it up, Rahul went to the sofa where the majority of the kids were congregated. Soon, he was passing out dolls to little girls, and various toy trucks and cars to little boys. Every kid got something to play with. For kids that hadn't had toys or games in

years, it was shocking; so much so that we didn't even know what to say. Tad and I got GameBoys. I hadn't touched a Gameboy in three years. Tad's was basketball and mine was baseball. Immediately, we turned them on and started to play.

Grinning at us, Rahul called two of his team into the living room, so he could step outside and be ready for Sean and Troy's arrival. At almost the same time Rahul was leaving, the first of the medics arrived. There were two doctors, one male and one female. Also, there were two nurses. Since they were focusing on the youngest kids first, Tad and I concentrated on our GameBoys.

I noticed Colin Townsend and Kim Brock were staring at each other's toys. Kim, a seven-year-old little girl, had a doll in a beautiful evening dress. Colin is new, a five-year-old little boy, who had a toy excavator on treads. After a few minutes of indecision, Kim got a very serious look on her face and approached Colin. She leaned in close to Colin and whispered in his ear.

After a few moments Colin said, "Really?" She nodded and smiled at him. He got a huge smile on his face and they traded toys. He told everybody, "My mommy had dress just like this," and then tears leaked from his eyes and down his cheeks.

I was becoming worried at this point. People were not this nice; not without getting something out of it. I was sure that there was a catch to all this. I mean, it was too good to be true, but I was pretty sure that life was going to be better than it had been for the last three years. I figured I would find out soon enough what the "catch" was. Hell, maybe I would even be willing to pay the price, whatever it might be.

A tall blond boy, who was about as cute as possible walked into the house and entered the living room. He glanced around at the

activity and smiled at us kids with our toys and games. "My name's Sean Moorhead," the cutie said, "I'm one of the Pacific Rim Division leaders. I guess you're all realizing things are changing. This time last week, I was an orphan too, and just like you kids."

At the same time Sean was chattering, telling us some of the same stuff that Rahul had said, a Starfleet Doctor came up to Tad and I. He scanned Tad with a funny lookin' little box, and said Tad had an upper respiratory infection that he was still kicking. When it was my turn to stand before Doc Metzger, I was told that I had bronchitis and a fever. When he asked how I felt, I pointed to the rest of the cough drops that I had put on an end table near the chair, saying, "Better since Rahul gave me those."

"And you'll be back to normal in another day or two," Doc Metzger smiled.

Another teenage boy, even cuter than Sean, came into the living room. Sean introduced his boyfriend, Troy, and then they started whispering to each other. Sean was gesturing to a couple of us kids in the room. Nurses were starting to transport out with some of us. A male nurse beamed in and gathered me, Tad, Gerry and Jessie together. I made sure I had my journals, GameBoy and the rest of the cough drops. With a tap to his chest, the dude ordered us to be transported to Las Vegas Children's Hospital.

Going from the relatively dim lighting of the living room to the bright lights of a hospital exam room, my eyes burned and my headache painfully throbbed. The male nurse said, "You'll be put in rooms once the doctors get finished. So that I can keep you four close together, tell me who you'd like to have as a roommate for a few days."

Tad quickly wrapped an arm around me, which I found

surprising. My mind ricocheted through tangents, wondering if Tad really loved me, and Gerry and Jessie softly said that they would room together. "I'll make sure you're close together," the male nurse promised. He then gestured for us to follow him to a small room off the main exam room. He turned on the lights and we saw that it was a lavatory with showers. He instructed us to take showers, specifically telling us to take our time. Focusing on me, he said, "A very warm shower is what you need. Let the steam loosen the phlegm in your chest; hack it up and spit it down the drain. You four stay in the shower until I or a doctor come and get you."

He left us. I put my journals, Gameboy and cough drops down on a shelf. We all went to the toilets and relieved ourselves. Then we went to the showers. I bathed like I haven't been able to in three years. Everything was washed twice. The next thing I know, Tad is right before me, smiling, "There's something I want you to have that I never could give you before." He then kissed me! I was sick as a dog, but the dude kissed me hard and deep! When he leaned back from me, I started giggling, which spurred on a coughing fit. I swear, it felt like my lungs were burning and all sorts of nastiness was spit down the drain.

Of course, while I was otherwise occupied, Gerry and Jessie were laughing at me, and the twisted expression Tad was obviously wearing. There he was, being all sweet and romantic, with a sick boyfriend who couldn't even say thank you, never mind the other dozens of questions flying through my mind.

We were finished with our showers, but the nurse or doctor hadn't come to get us, so we just waited there, bullshitting about the wild turn of events from the Clan rescue. Feeling cold, I remained under the warm water. There were a lot of unanswered questions lingering. What was going to happen to us in the hospital? Yeah, I

was sick and Tad had been sick, but why did Gerry and Jessie need to be there? What would happen to us when we were well enough to leave the hospital? Would we get to stay together or would we be separated? All those Clan dudes said things would be better, but in what ways would it be better? What was the cost for all these better things? Could we stay together as long as we wanted? Could we split apart if that was the way things turned out?

After being so limited in our choices for so long, having so many options was brand new and really scary. Hell having more than two options was brand new. It had been only two options for so long, do what you are told or get a beating, that we really knew nothing else.

The male nurse returned at last, and this time he introduced himself; we must've been showering for at least twenty minutes. He brought us towels and hospital gowns, that Aaron, our nurse, helped us get on and tied. I started posing questions to Aaron, and he started giving us answers. After a few days in the hospital, we would be assigned to the Pacific Rim Division Clan, but that didn't mean we were being forced to remain there. At any time, anyone could decide to move to another Clan Division. If that was where we had friends, then we could move. Another choice is not what I wanted, and judging by the uncertain expressions Tad, Gerry and Jessie wore, they didn't like it either.

Next, we wanted to know why all of us needed to be in a hospital. Since I was sick, Aaron started with me. After he spoke of my bronchitis, he asked, "How old and how tall are you, Neil?"

"I'm fifteen, and about five-three, the last I heard."

"The average height for a fifteen year old male is five feet eight inches. Accordingly, you should also weigh about one hundred and

forty pounds. All of you, not just you four, are malnourished. We're going to pump vitamins and minerals into you intravenously, and we're going to give you more food in the next day than any of you have had in the last week.

"We can't undo all the damage done in only a few days," Aaron continued, "but we are going to give you jump starts, so you can join the Clan and interact with other kids. I wouldn't doubt it if all your school grades have been suffering because of your weakened states. These next few days, the four of you and I will become friends. From seven at night until seven in the morning, your health and rehabilitation is my job. In the morning another male nurse will be assigned to you four. Doctors will wander in and out of your rooms, but soon you'll be calling my name as easily as you call for each other."

"What's the catch?" I wondered.

Aaron uncertainly repeated, "Catch?"

Suspiciously, Tad squinted, "The cost. What do you want from us?"

Aaron grinned, "Help me to help you get well, and then help each other get well, and lastly help each other stay well, long after you leave here. In other words, be brothers. Don't just act like you care, really give a damn about each other."

Leading the way back into the treatment room, Aaron had us lay on these funny looking tables. They were padded, better than the pads we slept on at the home. Maybe two minutes after I lay down, I was asleep. I don't know how long I was out, but when I woke, Aaron was there with three more male nurses, four doctors, and I had an IV tube in my arm. Looking around, I saw Tad, Gerry and Jessie all had IV

tubes too.

Each of us were helped into wheel chairs. We were wheeled down a hall, into an elevator, down another hall through the double-doors marked 'PEDIATRIC WING' and down the hall into our room. Gerry and Jessie were wheeled into the room across the hall. Only as I was getting helped onto a nice big bed did I shout, "MY JOURNALS! AND MY GAMEBOY!"

"Are right here," Tad giggled. "Just cos you're a veg, don't mean everyone is."

I smirked, "When did you decide to get a sense of humor?"

"I'll remind you after the nurses leave," Tad giggled. The two adult male nurses mooed through their chuckles. They showed us how to use the nurse call buttons and reminded us to use them even for simple stuff, like using the bathroom in our room. Tad blinked, "Even for the bathrooms?"

"You matter to us, to every doctor and nurse here, and most of all to the boys at Pacific Rim Division," one of the nurses told us.

The other one grinned, "There will be no tripping, falling down, or bodily damages of any sort. Rumors are already flying about your division's leader, so we're not testing him in any way."

They went to the door saying, "Good night," and one dimmed the lights. The other pulled the door a little more than halfway closed.

Blinking tears away, I told Tad, "No one's said good night to us in years."

"If they said anything at all, it was more like, 'get out of my sight'," Tad muttered. Another minute or two passed quietly before

Tad whispered, "I never thought this day would come. I thought I'd die in that home."

"I practically ran home from school," I half coughed. Once I was done coughing, I finished, "I thought they were taking you away, like they did that other older guy."

"Dave Horowitz," Tad reminded.

"Yeah," I remembered, and then asked, "What do you think happened to him?"

"Taken away to someplace worse, where he would die," Tad answered.

"We've got a chance now."

"Hopefully, a really good chance."

I sniggered, "Why did you kiss me? I'm sick, you goof!"

"Because you helped me while I was sick," Tad giggled.

"Being in a bed feels weird. Being here feels weird. I'm tired, and I'm comfortable, and I know I should sleep, but I'm afraid to."

"I know... right... Uhm... Are you crying, Neil?"

I didn't respond because I was crying. I couldn't figure out what I felt right then. Things felt so right, but feeling right felt wrong. I tried to answer but all that came out was sobs and coughing. Tad started to cry as well. I guess we didn't know how to feel good anymore. Not really.

Aaron came into our room with a box of tissues, a pitcher and a stack of plastic cups. On his way to the night tables between our beds,

he asked, "Why are you awake and crying?"

All I could say through my sobs and hacking was, "I don't know."

Tad was able to squeeze out a meek sounding, "Me too... Don't know."

"Too good. Don't know how." I tried again.

Nodding understandingly, Aaron poured from the pitcher into a cup which he handed to Tad. He gave me the tissues and I pulled a few to blow my nose. He then poured a cup for me. It was apple juice. I cried harder. Aaron pulled a chair between our beds.

"Guys, it's gonna be all right," Aaron softly assured. "I know you've been through hell, but this is how things are supposed to be. It's okay to feel scared and not to be comfortable with how things are." He took each of our hands in his and gave them a gentle squeeze. It was like electricity to me. I had forgotten what this had felt like. He asked, "Would you feel safer if I stayed here until you fell asleep?"

Tad and I nodded. We both reached for the tissues and blew our noses.

"I'll stay with you," Aaron softly promised. "So you know, three other nurses for the other three groups of kids are doing the same thing. We know how bizarre all this must seem to you, and expected this."

I heard Aaron sigh. He looked at me then Tad. "Let me tell you a secret, okay?"

I just nodded. I heard "okay" from Tad.

"I am scared too. You know, when they told us what we were being asked to do, I couldn't believe what they told us. I am so scared that I am going to screw this up and make things hard for you guys."

"Don't be scared," Tad prompted. "You've been doin' good. The shower was a little longer than we needed though."

Aaron chuckled, "You and especially Neil needed a long hot shower. If I promise not to act scared, could you guys do the same too?"

"I can act. We learned that lesson really well. Yeah, I can do that." My voice was so bitter. It surprised me a lot. I regretted how that sounded, and tried to explain myself. "I... I didn't... I mean... I'm sorry, Aaron. Sorry. Sorry." I broke down again.

Aaron assured, "It's okay, Neil. How about we drop the acting idea? Acting isn't real. So, I'm scared and you're both scared, so we're scared together. We'll deal with it and help make each other a little less scared."

Tad softly admitted, "It's been years since we've had juice. Water at the home and milk with school lunches. That's it."

"Apple juice today, and tomorrow orange juice," Aaron revealed. "There's too much acid in orange juice for your bellies right now. Tomorrow, you'll get milkshakes too, whichever flavor you like. We're hoping by Friday or Saturday, you can have soda pop."

I did not know what to say, but Tad beat me to it with, "Thanks, Aaron."

"Don't mention it, Tad. That's what we're here for. To help you

get better and see to your wants and needs, within reason of course. Besides, I think you two are pretty cool young men. I am proud to know both of you."

I thought I would die right then because as soon as I opened my mouth, all that came out was a hiccup, followed by a series of hiccup/coughs as I blew phlegm all over Aaron.

Grabbing the box of tissues to wipe up some of the mess I made, Aaron snickered, "Share and share alike, huh, Neil? I guess this shirt is laundry now." Tad howled laughing at my blush and Aaron's remarks. Extremely embarrassed, I slid down the bed and pulled the sheet over my head. I could feel Aaron picking up all the used tissues on my bed. What kind of person gets coughed and spit on, but then picks up more snotty tissues?

Honestly, for a moment, I thought Aaron was going to hit me, but he didn't. Mr. Franklin definitely would have beaten my ass for that. I did not know what to think at this point. I was sure I was going to wake back up in the home. Tad would be gone, and Mr. Franklin would be screaming at us, as usual. I peaked out from under the blanket and saw Aaron cleaning himself off. He was still chuckling. I thought that he must be nuts. I mean, Jeez, who thinks it's funny to have snot blown all over you? I don't think I've ever been so embarrassed in my life.

Rolling around his bed, completely hysterical, Tad almost rolled right off and onto the floor. Aaron sniggered, "You think it's so funny, you can have some," and tossed some used tissues at him. Tad tossed them back, but never stopped laughing. Tissues got tossed at me, which I rapidly threw back at Tad. In moments, we were having a used tissue battle.

The more we played, the more I coughed and laughed. Yes,

Aaron is insane, I finally recognized. The twenty-something-year-old man, whom I had hacked half a lung onto, was playing the gross game of snot rag warfare with us. I don't think I've ever laughed so much and for so long. We finished the game with Aaron holding the waste can, so we could bounce used tissues off him and into the trash.

I had coughed, giggled and laughed myself to exhaustion. With all the tissues cleaned up, Aaron returned to the chair between the beds. Tad giggled. Turning my face into the pillow, I sputtered, laughed and coughed. Aaron evilly snickered. Sometime before five in the morning, I crashed hard, and stayed asleep until about three in the afternoon.

Sounds from the television woke me, but I still didn't open my eyes. The smell of food being brought into the room made me open my eyes. Yes, I was still in the same hospital room, with Tad in the bed closest to the windows, chowing down on something that smelled so good, my first words were, "Where's mine?"

"Ten hours later," Tad grinned, and gestured to me, telling the man near his bed, "Mario, that's Neil Van Winkle, my boyfriend." Turning to me, Tad said, "Neil, this is Mario Hines, our day nurse. Since ten this morning, I've had breakfast, pre-lunch, lunch, and now pre-dinner. The best part is, every meal gets a little larger, and somehow, a little better than the last."

By this time, Mario had walked around Tad's bed to mine, he shook my hand and asked, "How're you feeling?"

I answered, "Besides hungry, I'm feeling pretty good, and really happy last night wasn't a dream."

Around a mouthful of food, Tad mumbled and giggled, "That means he probably won't hock goobers all over you, Mario."

"I'm glad to hear it," Mario chuckled.

"Oh God! Please tell me that you didn't tell him about... Oh God!" I said and pulled the blanket over my head again.

Tapping gently on my blanket, Mario asked, "Let me get you into the bathroom. While you shower and take care of necessities, I'll get you your first meal... and Tad's fifth, sixth and seventh meals. Maybe I'll just wheel in a mini-kitchen complete with chef for you two; it would be less walking back and forth, anyway." When I peeked out from under the blanket, Mario smiled, "Come on, Neil. There are towels and clean gowns in the bathroom."

"I just showered when we got here," I softly reminded.

"A shower a day, especially for kids with bronchitis," Mario prodded.

"Don' wanna come out. Uh Uhhh!"

"Then we can run a tube into your belly and give you the food in a mushed up, bland soup that you really won't enjoy."

I gave up. I was not really happy about it though. "Fine," was all I would say as I got up. I wasn't angry, but I was upset and embarrassed. I just figured it was better than where I had been.

"Kewl, buddy," Mario smiled, and he took my arm, helping me out of bed. Leading me and my IV rack to the toilet, Mario asked, "Waffles and sausage, or bacon and eggs, Neil?"

I thought about it, couldn't decide, and smirked, "Eggs, waffles, bacon and sausage sounds good." Tad burst into loud giggles.

"Another one," Mario grinned. "Let's make this easier on

everyone, and just wheel your beds down to the cafeteria."

"No argument here!" Tad cheered.

Mario glanced at me. I chortled, "As long as my gown fits the dress code, why not?"

"I figured as much," Mario sniggered. Releasing my arm and putting my hand on the IV rack, Mario paused at the bathroom door and explained, "There's about six feet of tubing, and the gowns have snaps on the sleeves, so you can get it together without pulling the needle out."

Nodding, I assured, "No problem."

Saying, "I'll be back with the grub," Mario left me at the bathroom doorway.

I rolled the IV rack in with me and closed the door. In no time, I had the gown off. Standing there before the throne peeing, I saw bright yellow pee. It had been years since my piss was this color. Considering that I felt like warmed over death the prior afternoon, but now I felt way better, I wondered what the heck was in the sacks that led to my IV. I tried reading the print, but didn't know what any of the ten syllable words meant. All that seemed to remain of my killer cold was some sinus and chest congestion.

It took Tad a week to get over the cold, but I was doing good in under day. At first I thought, okay, they said things would be better, and this was part of the proof. I also remembered spitting on the zookeepers, and wish I had puked, pissed and shit on them, because the IVs and one night's rest had me on the mend. I hadn't even had a real meal yet. As far as I was concerned, Tad was sicker longer because of the worthless meals and rotten sleeping condition at the home.

I took a nice long shower and emptied my sinuses, but not much came out of my lungs. There was still a little rattle and tickle in there, I could feel it. Drying off, I caught my own reflection in the mirror on the door. So that's what a malnourished fifteen-year-old looks like, I thought. In my opinion, the worst part was the patches of hair on my face, but I could also see that my legs and arms had less muscle than most kids at our school. All this needed to change today; I needed to shave and I wanted to see some average teenaged dudes to compare myself to.

While taking off the old gown was easy, getting the clean one on was a struggle, because it kept slipping down and off me. While I snapped the sleeve on one side, the other side was practically down on the floor. After a couple of minutes of muttered obscenities, both sleeves were snapped, but tying the back closed was a pointless effort. I walked out of the bathroom telling Tad, "Dude, tie the back of this thing before I have a fit, tear it into pieces and say fuck it."

Beginning to giggle before I reached his bed, Tad softly shared, "Tying it for you will give me a fit, and both our things will be stiff."

Sadly shaking my head, and exposing my rear so he could tie the gown, I asked, "You really want to be boyfriends?"

"Yeah," Tad quickly admitted. "Looking at Catherine last night didn't make my dick hard, it made it shrivel and try to hide."

"She caused no response from me either." I pointed up at the TV asking, "What channel is that?"

Finished tying my gown, Tad groped my butt for a long couple o' moments, giggling, "It's not a regular channel. While you slept, me and a bunch of kids wanted to know who rescued us, and where we'd be living. That's the auditorium at Ewa Beach, Hawaii. If you look

closer, you'll recognize Troy playing guitar up there. Our leaders have their own band, and that's them, playing for the level one orphanage kids and the rest of their Clan. This video and audio feed is what I've been watching for a couple o' hours now."

Drinking in the show, with lots of stage lights and active band members having fun, I muttered, "They're a good band." Then I faced Tad to ask, "Don't you want someone that wasn't an orphan; ya know, a little more normal?"

Tad sighed, "Yeah, that might be a good idea, but the truth is, it's already too late for me to choose anyone else. You and I have been best friends since day one... your first day there. Gerry and Jessie can finish me off, just like you, but when they're done, they don't look at me the same way you do. When it's only you and me making love, the real answer is in your eyes and in the way we talk right after we're done. We started messin' around because it was fun and simple. Now it's even more fun and far less simple, Neil. I patted your butt because I wanted to, dude. It wasn't just convenient, and it wasn't just me being silly, it was me touching you because I really wanted to. If Mario wasn't due back any moment, I'd be on my knees for you."

Nodding, I smiled, "All I can say is, let's try it for real, ya know, now that we're out of the home. I'm still wondering, will it be the same as the home, or better, or worse? If it's the same or better, for both of us, then yeah, our decision is made. That was clear to me when I ran home yesterday. Thinking the zoo-keepers would take you away scared the hell out of me."

"I know," Tad brightly smiled. "As soon as you told me that, I was thinking the same way; what if I went to school today, came back to the home, and found you weren't there. The answer was, I'd start crying and never really stop. For months and years, I'd cry every time

I thought of you. We can be boyfriends here and there at Ewa Beach too, Neil. The entire leadership team are married gay couples. Mario showed me a photo of him with his boyfriend."

I smirked, "What else did I sleep through?"

Shrugging, Tad pointed at the screen, giggling, "I saw the first groups of orphans from last night's raids arriving at the cafeteria. Our school cafeteria was small compared to that place. Some kid named Alden introduced me to our leaders by name. They went to the auditorium, and I saw them walking there. What little I've seen is really nice." Tad paused and then loudly called, "Hey Alden!"

A new boy's voice came from the TV and speakers in the ceiling, answering, "Yes, Tad?"

"Introduce Neil to the leaders," Tad prompted. He then scooted over and patted the mattress, telling me, "Right here is where you belong."

I climbed up onto Tad's bed, watched the television, and Alden began introducing me to the dudes on stage. When he had gone through all six on stage, three in the audience, two younger dudes in an equipment room and two more that were elsewhere, I turned to Tad. "They're all cute, but you want me?"

Rapidly nodding, Tad giggled, "They're married couples already. Even if they weren't married, I'd want you. I've had time awake to imagine stuff that you haven't. Try this out, Neil; picture us, about six months from now, living there, healthier, heavier and taller. We're just like those kids. Nobody will mock us for being orphans, because they are too. Everything we had to deal with yesterday is gone, never to be dealt with again. As soon as we get out of this hospital, we'll be there with them, in the Republic Of Hawaii. Just

thinking about it makes me shiver."

Walking into the room with two big covered trays, Mario wondered, "Who's cold and shivering?"

Tad laughed and pointed at the screen, admitting, "Us going there is making me shiver, dude."

Mario smiled, "First you get well. So far as I've heard, the doctors are thinking all you guys will be there early next week. If you get better faster, they'll adjust the schedule, so you've got some work to do." Tad pulled over the bed table and Mario put the trays he was carrying onto my bed table and rolled it over to us.

Separating the trays onto the bedside tables before Tad and I, Mario asked, "Did Tad tell you what to expect?" Tad shook his head and giggled. Mario chuckled, "Your digestive system is going to freak out with good food to process. Expect bellyaches, constipation, gastritis and then diarrhea, but if you're feeling nausea, stop eating and tell me. The goal for these next few days is to eat as much as you can and as often as you can without feeling nauseous. I was kidding before, Neil. The more food you want, the happier I will be, and the happier all the doctors will be. Food is energy. Energy is strength to walk around and do the physical therapy we'd like all you kids to do before going to Ewa Beach."

Before me were three plates; one had scrambled eggs, another had a big waffle, and the last had slices of bacon and sausage patties. There was a glass of apple juice and a glass of milk. I hadn't seen this much food at once in so long, I had to giggle like a kid on Christmas. Tad cracked up. Mario smiled, "Dig in, guys."

There was a time when I wouldn't touch eggs, no matter how they were cooked, but this time, I ate all the eggs, and then picked on

the bacon slices while buttering my waffle. Tad started giggling at me when I dumped all the maple syrup and all the boysenberry syrup on my waffle. I stole his corn muffin, righteously smirking, "The price for goofing on me."

Standing at the window, Mario looked over the city, with his shoulders bouncing, obviously from a held in laugh.

While I pigged out, the concert at Ewa Beach played on the TV. The music was okay, mostly stuff I'd never heard, or couldn't recall ever hearing before, but the band seemed to be having a really good time. The funniest part was Troy singing a song and getting really suggestive with his hands and body movements. Two songs later, the band members were gathered around the drums, and they all cracked up. Troy took off like a rabbit, down the stairs and into the audience. We saw him and Sean racing out of the auditorium like their shorts were on fire. I grinned at Tad. Tad bounced his blond eyebrows at me.

I wasn't half way through my waffle and felt my stomach complaining. Slowing down, I said something about it to Tad. "The same thing happened to me," Tad admitted. "Just eat slower, maybe drink a little milk."

Turning to face us, Mario reminded, "Your bellies aren't used to it. Like Tad said, get used to eating slower. Next you'll get a milkshake, like Tad did three meals ago."

"Before I could even finish it, I jumped out of bed and flew into the bathroom," Tad sniggered. "All that effort to piss and fart."

Doctor Metzger came in the room, smiling, "A healthy appetite is a sure sign my bronchitis patient is feeling better."

I softly admitted, "Just a little congestion still, Doc."

"Take extra hot showers, as hot as you can stand it, and lean forward while coughing," Doctor Metzger advised. "The best place for what's in your lungs is down the drain." Waving his stethoscope, he then asked, "If you're taking a break from breakfast, I can have a listen the old fashioned way?"

I nodded and the doctor came closer. Oddly, I found myself feeling like I couldn't trust the man. He had examined me and Tad the night before, and I recognized him, so he wasn't a complete stranger, and he certainly hadn't harmed me or Tad in any way, but distrust is what I felt. Leaning forward some, I breathed in deep and exhaled slowly, like he told me. He even warned me that the stethoscope might feel a little cold, and it did, but only a little, yet I jumped when he placed it against my back. Stepping back, he muttered, "Almost clear again," and removed the ear pieces. He locked eyes with Mario and told him that when one of the sacks dripping into my IV tube was empty, it wouldn't need to be replaced.

I couldn't spell what Doc Metzger said to Mario if my life depended on it. Let's call it Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious; some souped up stuff developed in Starfleet, no doubt. All that mattered is that it worked, clearing my lungs and turning my urine bright yellow.

Doc Metzger waved his box before Tad and proclaimed him "fit as a fiddle". All we needed was more rest, more IV vitamin and mineral supplements, and more food. Tad and I asked about the other kids from our home. Everyone was coming along nicely, so the plan was to send us to Ewa Beach on Monday. I returned to my waffle, sausage and juice. Waving and saying that he'd be back in a few hours, Doc Metzger left the room.

On the TV, the concert was over. The majority of the kids in the audience left the auditorium, but I'd guess close to a hundred remained. All the band members came down off the stage, and more

leaders came out of the audience to stand with the band members. After a minute or two of chit-chatting, the entire group disappeared from the auditorium. The camera view now showed a big department store.

The cute blond drummer named Derrick explained, "This is just like any other department store. Everything is free, so don't be shy. Anyone that needs help choosing sizes, let one of us know. You'll all need at least a week's worth of clothes."

Another leader named Drew quickly emphasized, "A week's worth is not what those butt-heads at the orphanage gave you guys. There are seven days in a week, so a minimum of seven pair of boxers or underpants and seven pair of socks. A change of clothes for every day is normal."

Corey nodded, "Everybody gets a pair of sandals and a pair of sneakers. Basically, concentrate on everyday clothes. Here in the ROH, that means T-shirts, shorts, boardies, swimwear, light blouses for you girls. Get jeans, sport shirts and jackets or ponchos too, cos the rainy season here can start in late November."

Prez nodded and instructed, "Big guys and gals, help the little tikes. And we'll help whoever needs it, whenever needed."

A small red-headed boy gushed, "We can help too!" then took a shocked little boy by the hand and pulled him to the shopping carts.

We noticed that the leadership team split in half, some went with the girls to one side of the store, and the remainder stayed with the boys.

Tad wondered, "Will that happen with us too?"

Before I could do more than shrug, Alden answered, "Yes it will,

Tad. All the kids get to choose their own clothes. Everybody usually winds up with more than a week worth of clothes. For instance, guys like you will find that underwear usually comes in packs of three briefs or boxers, so automatically you'll have nine pair in three packages. Similarly with packages of socks; you'll have at least nine pair or as much as twelve pair. When they get to shorts and shirts, they'll choose colors and styles, but generally every guy winds up with at least seven pair of shorts and two pair of jeans. The same sort of thing happens with shirts. The Core Rimmers..."

Shocked at what the kid had said and laughing my ass off, I spit juice half-way across the room. Tad and Mario cracked up.

Alden giggled, "Sorry about that, Neil. This is Pacific Rim Division. Prez immediately named the division 'The Rimmers', and the leadership team are the 'Core Rimmers'. You can probably already tell, our kids have a sense of humor and healthy libidos. The word Rimmers won't seem so funny after a day or two." The blanket and sheet that I had just drenched vanished off the bed and replacements appeared in a neat stack at the foot of the bed.

Heading toward the door, Mario sniggered, "Neil's a spitting Rimmer. We might have to put a warning label on you, buddy."

Alden continued telling us what our first shopping trip would be like. Finally finishing my first meal, I kicked back on the bed and watched the TV with Tad. Mario returned with an orderly to mop the floor. He gathered our empty trays and left the room again. When he returned, he had two big milkshake glasses.

We got to watch the kids finish their shopping, and then go to the dormitory, where they chose roommates and rooms. Those dorm rooms looked huge. With two double sized beds, two big closets, two dressers, two desks, two chairs, a stereo, a television and even a game

station, I guess that each room had to be at least twenty feet by twenty feet. Our bedroom at the home was about ten feet by ten feet. Our new rooms at Ewa Beach were four times larger than the room at the home, and there would only be me and Tad in there.

I told Tad that we needed to shave. We had needed to shave for about a year, but were never allowed to by the zoo-keepers. Mario agreed and left the room. He returned only two or three minutes later with two razors, a can of shaving cream, a tabletop mirror and a large tin bowl filled with warm water. Of course, Mario was there to guide and assist us, since neither of us had ever learned how to shave, and barely recalled watching our fathers shave. Amazingly, Tad and I managed to keep the nicks and scratches down to two each. Always prepared, Mario had a styptic pencil hidden in his shirt pocket.

The sun was going down in Las Vegas, but at Ewa Beach, the sun was still bright, and the new kids went to the pools. By this time, groups of new kids hung with their favorite leaders and their sons. More surprising, Tad and I watched as almost everyone shed their clothes and dove into the pools. My internal desire to learn how I compared to other dudes was answered from the television. It was easy to tell the Core Rimmers and some of the other kids were healthier and better fed than we were. They had muscle and height that many of the other kids didn't have.

I hadn't been allowed to participate in gym class for two of my three years at the home. Because of that, I hadn't seen the inside of a locker room those years. On the screen on the wall were hundreds of naked dudes. The most clear differences were in chests and thighs; healthier dudes had bigger chests and thighs, and some had awesome abs for teenagers. The backside views revealed teenaged dudes with great forms.

We could clearly see who had how much of what hanging

between their legs. Quite honestly, that was one way that Tad and I matched all those other healthier dudes we were watching. We asked Alden how old some of the kids were, and he began with the Core Rimmers. Most surprising was twelve-year-old Drew and eleven-year-old Corey. They were taller than almost every other kid their age and had pubes too, where most kids their age didn't. We eventually learned how tall Drew and Corey were too. The sad truth was that I was the same height as Drew.

Extremely angry, I went into a major bitching fit. Tad was at the same place as me, and he was about an inch or two taller than me, but realizing how our growth was stunted by the zoo-keepers, I wanted to beat the crap out of both of them. Tad and Mario calmed me down, but the truth of my complaints were all over the television.

Mario fed us dinner about six-thirty. I had been awake for three and a half hours and eaten three times. Awake for more than seven hours, Tad had eaten hourly. At last, Tad's belly was so full that he couldn't finish his meal, so he pushed it over to me to finish for him. While I finished his meal, Tad took a trip to the bathroom. Mario took our empty trays from the room, and Tad returned to the room, freshly showered.

Cuddling up to me, Tad pleasantly sighed, "It's really over, Neil. In a couple o' days, we're going to be in the ROH with those kids we're watching."

Nodding, I grinned, "You want to be boyfriends and roommates?"

"Yeah."

"If you ever decide you want it to change, just tell me, dude. I'll understand."

"It won't change, Neil. We went through hell together, and survived. While you noticed Drew's height, all I noticed was how extremely cute he is, and how undeniably cute you are. Under the worst circumstances, you've been my best friend in the world. Don't you think sex together was better than with Gerry and Jessie?"

"It always has been, but they're younger. I'll bet they were doing stuff together and with us simply because they could, not because they really wanted to."

"Why do you think I'd be more interested in anyone else?"

I shrugged, "You're taller, and after watching all those sexy teenagers on the TV, I now know that you're about the sexiest dude around."

"You're plenty sexy too," Tad giggled. "I may be taller, but here I am, snuggled up to you with a stiffy. We've got to find a way to be alone soon, dude."

Nodding, I chuckled, "Come with me, into the bathroom." Looking up and seeing I was serious, Tad rolled off the other side of the bed. On the way to the bathroom, I told Tad, "I love you, ya know?"

"I know," Tad giggled. "You never think anything you do is special, but you are very special. I'm gonna prove that too."

Soon, we were behind a locked bathroom door, embracing, kissing, and going for it orally, and for the first time since Tad got sick, we had intercourse too. Leaning against a wall, I got some of him and then it was Tad's turn to lean over and give me some too. Sweaty and messy, we took a shower together, which led to our first time cleaning up one set of messes that caused additional orgasms to flow down the drain with the soapy water. The only bad part was the

IV needles and tubes getting in our way.

Getting dressed in the gowns was far easier with a boyfriend to help. We walked out of the bathroom and found that our beds had been remade. Mario wasn't there, but our food trays were waiting, and it was obvious that someone had been cleaning. Realizing our alone time wasn't quite alone, we both blushed and giggled. The television was now showing the dining room at Ewa Beach. We crawled back up onto Tad's bed to watch more from Ewa Beach.

Soon thereafter, Aaron showed up. He was the one that cleaned our room and admitted that he heard us in the bathroom. That's when we learned that Aaron was gay, but his high school boyfriend couldn't deal with medical school. They parted friends.

I started writing in my journal around eight o'clock. Snuggled up to me, Tad fell asleep around nine o'clock. When he rolled away and onto his back, I went back to my own bed, where I continued writing about this most awesome day. Yes, I have a light attached to my hospital bed that I can adjust and swing down, so it don't disturb Tad. At least it doesn't seem to be bothering him.

Aaron's sitting between our beds again. Helping me keep all the facts organized, I talked with Aaron about the day and he even helped me spell some words now and then.

It's almost midnight now. Even in Hawaii the sun has long since set. Since most of the kids at Ewa Beach are winding down for the day, and there really isn't much of anything interesting going on, Aaron just told Alden to return control of the television to us.

Aaron flipped channels, and told me that the worldwide stock markets crashed, because of Zorro Communications, what their company had done to us orphans and because the Core Rimmers

uncovered the horrible truth.

According to the news, things were getting ugly all over; riots were going on in New York City and Los Angeles. Here in Las Vegas, everything seemed fine. Aaron said that he had no trouble getting from home to here. I just told him that it makes sense to me that people were angry about what was done to us orphans. When he turned to me rapidly blinking, I said, "We're level two and I watched level one kids half the day. I can only imagine what level three and level four kids might be like, and it's not a pretty picture."

Nodding, Aaron sighed and then smiled, "You're a remarkable young man. You've got a strong presence, some rough edges, but you're also amazingly sensitive." He gestured to Tad and reminded, "That's why he loves you."

I paused my writing, softly giggling, "He's so great too. I'm just a little worried." Noticing Aaron's curiosity, I sighed, "He's so cute, genuinely handsome, and I just feel like he can do better. I should feel something intense for him, I know that, and it bothers me that I don't."

Aaron smiled, "You're already intense, Neil. Every emotion you show is powerful. If you showed more, everyone that knows you would freak out and probably run in the opposite direction. Don't change a thing, and don't worry about what you do and don't feel. Just be yourself, with Tad and with all your new Clan family."

"Clan family?" I uncertainly repeated.

Aaron said, "A clan is an extended family. That's exactly what you'll be moving into, a community of friends that treat each other like close family. Did you know every kid in your orphanage looked up to you?" I shook my head wondering how that could be, since we barely ever saw each other. "It's true," Aaron continued, "you're the

oldest, and the most vocal, and they all still ask, 'What's Neil say we should do?' Our trips in and out of this room are always delayed by some other nurse, asking Mario and I to stop in and tell the kids what you're doing and saying, so they know it's okay for them to do it too."

"Great!" I sarcastically giggled. "Now you've got fourteen other kids hockin' goobers at nurses and spitting apple juice across the room."

Be myself, I mused. I'm not sure I know who I am anymore. I mean, I used to, but over the last three years, I think I have forgotten what it means to be myself. I mean... Oh... Never mind. Me a leader? Stupid, stupid, stupid! That was what my mind was saying. Instead, I said, "Well, you gotta have good aim to hock goobers in a way that bears imitating."

I'm not sure why everyone was asking what I thought. I mean, who am I? I don't even know the answer to that one. I don't know what I should be doing, so how can I tell someone else what they should do. The whole idea was just insane.

Aaron softly chortled, "The sign of a true leader is someone that marches to the beat of his own drummer. The next thing you know, he's got a parade of kids following him around."

Smirking, I warned, "Since nice guys finish last, you'll pay for this nightmare you're implanting, Aaron."

"Call it a night, Neil. Let's see if you can wake up in under ten hours."

Good idea. More tomorrow.

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Friday, November 5, 2004

I woke about noon. Tad had been awake less than a half-an-hour. Mario was already on a breakfast run for us.

Between two in the morning yesterday and two in the afternoon today, I've had four showers. At the home it would've taken two weeks to have four showers, and each would've been timed. They're not timed any more, and the last two showers were with Tad, my super sexy, super horny boyfriend. He was getting too close to losing it too fast, so I asked him what the zoo-keepers might think if they knew about our relationship.

Just that little bit set Tad off laughing. My intention was to plant images of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin in his mind so he would slow down or maybe lose his erection. That wasn't what happened. He got silly and only occasionally pumped into me, making me coo and squeal with each powerful thrust. I'll write here exactly what I told Tad. "Do me that way again, whenever you want." His response was a nod and a really deep kiss. I discovered that I can breathe through my nose again.

We came out of the bathroom to a cleaned room and breakfast trays waiting. Mario was glued to the television, watching the news reports of what was now being called the Battle Of Earth. While we slept, we missed Romulan attacks on San Francisco, Washington DC, London and Beijing. Unbelievably, the Romulans had taken human form and had lots of humans on their side. The video from Los Angeles showed a city and a county that was on fire from rioting. Not everything everywhere was on fire, but November is the time of year where the Santa Ana winds blow, and fires get out of control. That seemed to be exactly what was happening; small fires were spreading throughout entire city blocks.

Mario just left to get us milkshakes. Tad reached a hand under my gown. More later...

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It's almost three-thirty in the afternoon. The milkshakes are history and lunch is on it's way. Before he left the room, Mario told us that he's purposefully giving Tad and I extra time alone, to become a couple, to say what needs to be said and do what has to be done. As soon as Mario left, Tad hollered, "ALDEN?"

"Right here, Tad."

"Enough of this stupid war," Tad simply said. "Show us what's going on at Ewa Beach."

Taking over the television, Alden explained, "I'm kind of busy today, guys. There are refugees from the riots and battle zones. These kids in the basement store are mostly newbies." He zoomed in and introduced us to Reyes Taraschke, a new Core Rimmer, Ralphie Bonham, who arrived there yesterday, a really cute red-head named Pat O'Hara, a cuter blond teen named Chris Stokley, and a younger kid named Rafe Montigua.

Alden then instructed, "This is my voice from a virtual intelligence machine. You can talk to me and I'll interact with you, or execute instructions for you, but for the next few hours, I'll be busy helping with the refugees. So you know and can tell the difference, the real me shows emotion in my voice."

I thanked him and then asked, "Can you just show us what's going on everywhere there, and try to tell us who it is we're watching?"

"Sure, I can take you on virtual tours around the base. If you'd

like to see something else, let me know."

For about ten minutes, we watched what was going on in the store. Tad softly asked if I was ready to see something more interesting than guys choosing and trying on clothes. When I nodded, he ordered Alden to show us something else.

"Most of the Clan is having lunch," Alden reported, and switched to the cafeteria cameras.

Entering the room with our food, Mario noticed the television and smiled, "Good, you're catching on. Now you can have lunch with your Clan, remotely of course." He then explained, "I got you cheeseburgers and fries. The doctors think it might be too much too soon, but I know you two dudes better. I figure the worst that might happen is you can't finish it all, and digesting the beef will make you tired."

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We managed to finish lunch. Tad and I ate together on his bed, watching all the stuff from Ewa Beach on TV. After watching kids at the cafeteria, Alden switched to the pools, and then the play ground, and then inside the recreation center. Another group of new kids was rescued and Alden introduced us to them from the basement store.

Proving that we could digest our cheeseburgers, I let a loud nasty one rip. Tad counter attacked with a silent but deadly one. Cracking up, Mario left the room and stood out in the hall where there was fresh air. Laughing hysterically, Tad told me to return to my own bed, as if he's got a rose garden blooming over there! Doc Metzger came by, but Mario told him that now wasn't the best time. Down wind of us, the red onions on our cheeseburgers were creating more Battle Of Earth casualties. Tad and I were out of control. It's hard to

believe what real food was doing to us, but the proof is the poisonous cloud lingering in our room.

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The sun is setting here in Vegas. We've had dinner, and the gas attacks have subsided for the time being.

Okay, I had to pause for a few minutes. On the television, we were watching teenagers like us at the diving well, when suddenly my jaw dropped, and Tad hollered, "THAT CANNOT BE REAL!" Mario roared laughing and almost slid out of the chair.

Giggling hysterically, Alden introduced, "That's Darren DeVault, and yes it is real; nine-and-a-half inches long and six inches in circumference, limp and erect. He's fifteen-years-old, an ex-prostitute, and a really nice guy. I can tell you that Darren's roommate is this guy, Lance Elling, who is also fifteen, also an ex-prostitute, and very cute but completely average between his legs. Darren and Lance are straight, even though they had to act homosexual for money to survive. Lance and Darren help each other out sexually at night, and they're really good friends, but that's where they choose to keep it. These two guys and all the other ex-prostitutes here are off the streets thanks to King Aalona and Prez teaming up last Monday night."

Tad gasped then muttered, "Lance and Darren... but they don't want to be together?"

Alden seriously said, "Everyone is a little bisexual, and they had to do stuff on the streets. Alone in their room, they understand that, and that they want girlfriends and kids of their own. I've seen so many examples of really good friends, gay and straight, that to me these two guys are variations on a theme. Try to imagine what it might be like to have to sell your body to eat, and then not having to do that. They

were sexually active before arriving, and they treat each other like best friends all the time. The main difference between them and gay guys is when they finish and kiss each other goodnight, each goes to his own bed.

"They arrived late Tuesday night," Alden continued. "For the last few days, they're adjusting to their new home, and getting to know other kids. I know that they talk about guys who are good friends, and girls who they'd like to know better and maybe hook up with. The best part is how they each have helped the other adjust. The street prostitute show is long gone. Now they can privately tell each other what they perceive happening when they're talking to girls. It's really very kewl, I think."

Grinning at me, Tad evilly snickered, "I couldn't imagine being a prostitute or being like either of them."

"You're cuter than Lance," I honestly shared. Since Mario was in the room, Tad blushed bright red.

Chuckling, Mario told Tad, "When your boyfriend says romantic stuff, you're supposed to go kiss him." I blushed and went into a giggling fit.

Nodding, Tad slid off his bed and into mine. Grinning, I cackled, "It's true!" and was abruptly silenced. Of course I kissed Tad back, but watched Mario slink out of the room and close the door behind him. That was the kewlest thing anyone's ever done. Hearing the door click closed, Tad went berserk, giggling into our mouths, grinding and humping away. The last time he did something like this was just to annoy Gerry and Jessie, but this time his motive was me.

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I can't even begin to explain how awesome he's been making me

feel since we were rescued. Once we were stiff and puffing away through our noses, Tad pulled back to warmly remind, "I want you, not Darren, or Drew or Lance. In a couple o' days, I want to walk around hand-in-hand with you. I want them all to see me with you."

Smiling widely, I whispered, "You make me feel fantastic. I just don't get it, dude." Tad tilted his head, so I tried to explain, "Not only are you making me feel fantastic, telling me all your awesome ideas for us together, there at Ewa Beach, but Aaron and Mario have been telling me stuff too."

"Like?"

"The other kids want to know what I'm doing, so they know what to do. What the heck do I know, Tad? I'm just as messed up as every one else from that place. I'm going with the flow. It just so happens that the flow is pretty mellow, compared to being mocked at school, mocked by the zoo-keepers and locked away in a tiny room with three other dudes. What's so difficult about sitting in a bed watching TV? Is letting a doctor pass his little tricorder box over us hard to do?" Pointing at the TV, I shared, "As fun as everything looks there, it scares the hell out of me too. I want to skinny dip with those dudes, and at the same time, I don't want them to see my skinny ass. What's kewl and what's not, ya know? I'm relearning everything, just like everyone else."

"I know what to do," Tad offered. "Let's go for a walk and see the kids."

"Kewl," I smiled. "Lead me, dude. Show them you leading me."

"That's my intention," Tad said, and slid off me and off the bed. He reached for my hand and soon we were walking out of the room, pulling our IV stands along with us. Just outside our room, Mario and

Aaron were standing out there. They were obviously chatting and surprised to see us.

Aaron smirked, "I could swear I told you to press the nurse call button for help getting out of bed."

"We've got two days of food, vitamins and minerals stored up," I smirked.

Tad added, "We're not even bruised, so chill out. We just want to see the other kids from our home."

"So you can stop speaking for me," I finished.

"Independence is a good thing," Mario chuckled.

Aaron nodded, "I guess they've been making leaps in their recovery today, like you said. The only problem I can foresee is all sixteen of them wandering around the halls tomorrow."

Mario grinned, "Therapy is planned, as well as a few other things." He glanced at Tad and I, saying, "Have a good night, dudes. I'll see you bright and early in the morning, well before either of you wake to see me." Aaron, Tad and I said goodnight to Mario. He walked down the hall. Aaron led us across the hall to see Gerry and Jessie.

The first thing that struck me was the curtain between the beds was partially pulled, so they couldn't see each other. Gerry had been watching the television and what was going on in Ewa Beach until he saw us coming in the room. "Hey!" Gerry brightly beamed, "How're you dudes doin'?"

Tad giggled, "We're really good, Gerry."

Pointing at the curtain, I asked, "What's up with that?"

Gerry shrugged, "Too many years in a tiny room."

"We're gonna try splitting up at Ewa Beach," Jerry offered from the other side of the curtain.

Gerry nodded and smirked, "We've got questions to answer that you two obviously already have. The best way to find the answers is to do it separately. It's not like we won't ever see each other there, but are we friends or are we boyfriends?"

Jessie giggled, "After two days of good food, the stench from the other side of the room almost killed me."

Gerry countered, "The bathroom's on my side of room, stinky!"

Tad and I glanced at each other and cracked up. Almost simultaneously, Gerry and Jessie squealed, "WHAT?"

Tad looked up at Aaron, giggling, "They're fine."

"Still two bitchy queens, whining, griping and complaining," I teased.

Pointing at the television, Tad asked, "What're you gonna whine about there? Too much sun, not enough fun? It's probably a good idea that you get separate rooms and new roommates. You'll learn soon enough that all your old reasons for bitching are gone, especially when no one wants to hear your complaints."

"They're orphans too," I reminded. "Some of them were made orphans today. I swear to you both, if your bitching makes some newly orphaned little kid cry, and I'm around to witness it, you'd better pray and start running. Do you think I don't remember my

parents, or Tad doesn't? Every Clan kid has some memories, some good and some bad. Get over it already."

Tad and I glanced at each other and nodded, knowing we had said enough, and that we didn't want to hear their excuses. We turned around and left the room. Aaron led us, sarcastically sniggering, "I can't understand why they look up to you, Neil. It turns out your other half is the opposite end of the same sledgehammer."

Sadly shaking my head, I smirked, "Those two need deep enemas to get the shit out of their brains. It's probably best that they're not roommates when we leave here; guaranteed nobody else would put up with their attitudes."

In the next room, twelve-year-old Alton Santos and eleven-year-old Mack Roberts had milkshakes, and were tossing soft rubber balls around the room with their male nurse. The TV was on and showing them the Ewa Beach cafeteria, where kids were still eating. Tad and I greeted Alton and Mack. Aaron introduced their nurse, Fletcher. We had just started chatting about what Alton and Mack were planning for Ewa Beach when ten-year-olds Jimmy Lynch and Dallas Clark came across the hall and into the room. The nurse caring for Jimmy and Dallas was named Dewayne.

There were six kids and three men in the room. Tad and I learned that Mack and Jimmy were planning on becoming roommates. Alton and Dallas were hoping to start mixing in right away and would find other new kids to share rooms with. Most amazing to me were the changes in these younger dudes. The last time I saw them Wednesday morning, they dragged their tiny butts out to the school bus. Now though, they had energy to spare. The six of us dudes were chit-chatting away and the three adult nurses stepped out into the hall.

Realizing that all six of us were looking forward to going to our new home in the Republic Of Hawaii, but twiddle-dumb and twiddle-dumber were in a different state of mind, all six of us invaded Gerry's and Jessie's room. Tad and I hung back with the nurses, and watched four enthusiastic younger dudes slide open the curtain and climb up onto the two beds.

Finished with the queens, all six of us went further down the hall to the rooms where the youngest four boys were recuperating. Even though they were obviously tired, Colin, Christian, Dwight and Les were looking forward to getting out of the hospital too. None of the four youngest dudes had given much thought to roommates, but we had successfully implanted ideas and options available.

Tad told the gathered group, "We're gonna go see our sisters." All chatter stopped for a few moments. Eight younger dudes blinked at Tad and I, and then looked down at our clasped hands. Giggling and laughter erupted, with comments about us trying to switch sides. Aaron sputtered and began laughing.

Knowing that Aaron had to have heard Tad and I behind a locked bathroom door, I shot a warning smirk at Aaron. Intensely blushing, Tad giggled at our nurse, "No dude; not a word."

"Course not," Aaron chuckled. All the little guys cracked up, proving that enough had already been said. Before Tad and I caught fire, Aaron led us from the room and down the hall. After passing the nurses station and turning left, we saw a huge game room. It was filled with tables and chairs of assorted sized for all us kids. There were games of every sort in there, including arcade video games, a jukebox and a giant television. I flashed Aaron a suspicious glare, wondering why we hadn't been told or brought to this room. "Tomorrow," Aaron smiled. "All you kids, and especially you two, are ahead of where we thought you'd be by now. Doctors are already

discussing the possibility of getting all of you to Ewa Beach on Sunday. It's a split decision right now, but depending on what we observe tomorrow, you could make the decision clearer."

We went through a set of doors with Tad saying, "As long as we can all get to spend some time together in there."

"Our room is starting to feel small," I added. "Before we can go to Hawaii, where we're gonna meet lots of other kids, we need to know each other better."

Widely grinning, Aaron chanted, "Nope, not a leader, can't tie his own shoelaces, but takes the first opportunities to be alone with his boyfriend, and now has half the other boys wandering around in gowns, showing off their backsides."

Knowing I was being goofed on again, I sniggered, "You nurses and doctors had to have thought of that."

Nodding, Aaron assured, "The night you arrived. Like I said, certain things were planned, but others depended completely on you kids. Tonight you're doing what we had hoped would happen tomorrow night or Sunday." He slowed down and stopped completely, softly chortling, "If I could, I'd call Prez and tell him about you two. I don't have a comm-badge, but I know Doc Metzger does. He's spoken with Sean and Troy, so maybe your secret is already out."

Tad digressed into a giggling fit. Grinning widely, I joked, "You'll miss us. I wonder who will nurse the emotional nurse when we leave."

Obviously shocked, Aaron asked, "Did Mario tell you about that?" Tad and I blinked, not knowing what he was asking. Aaron grinned, "I'm already checking into a possible transfer to Hawaii.

When I know more, I'll let you know, future Core Rimmers."

We walked into the first room, where Catherine and Jeanette were lounging on their beds. Immediately squealing, they pulled the sheets and blankets up. What the fuck that was all about, I had no idea. They had hospital gowns on, just like the rest of us. The last time I saw them, they were nude and so were all us dudes. The lady nurse in the room began giggling. Tad cracked up. Before I could say a word, Catherine giggled, "Boys are supposed to knock before coming into a girls' room!"

Tad cackled, "No one told us that! The door was wide open too!"

Sadly shaking my head and rubbing my eyes with one hand, I reminded Catherine and Jeanette of early Thursday, and then admitted, "We checked you out then and nothing even shifted. Tad and I are boyfriends, so nothing in here will get a rise out of either of us. We're only visiting to see how you're doing."

"We're fine," Jeanette practically screamed.

Catherine smirked, "And thanks so much for the offhanded compliments!"

"It's so good to know we can't get boys excited," Jeanette grumbled.

"It proves that you're definitely normal females!" Tad replied. "All your parts are there, and you ain't nothing like those pictures in magazines, of girls that are so bad they look like boys! The reason we checked you out was because you're really hot, for being female that is."

Barely controlling himself, Aaron faked tapping the comm-link

on the wall. He sniggered, "We need a podiatrist to West Hall."

"A what?" I muttered in reply.

"Someone to remove you two's feet from your mouths!" Aaron responded with a chuckle.

The lady nurse giggled, "Thanks for visiting, but I think it would be wise if you three left."

"NOW!" Catherine and Jeanette screamed.

We left in a hurry and Aaron pulled the door closed. The three of us cracked up. Before we could get our act together, Alden giggled from the speakers, "Prez just took his after dinner meds. First he saw a crazy adoption from Des Moines, and then I showed him what just happened to you guys. Even with burned buns, he's rolling around the couch still."

Aaron snorted, "Now you're in big trouble. You made the crazy Irishman hysterical."

Turning to Tad, I grinned, "How about we hide out in our room the first week at Ewa Beach?"

Rapidly nodding, Tad giggled, "That works for me. We'll need wheelchairs though."

Aaron snorted, "At the rate you two are going, you'll leave here and arrive there in wheelchairs." Gasping, Tad and I flushed scarlet red.

We finished our visits with Kim Brock and Tracy Carpenter, the two younger girls from our home. Since our visits lasted more than two hours, Aaron insisted that we get back to our room and beds.

Actually it was bed, singular. While I finished writing about the happenings of our second day of freedom, my sexy blond boyfriend fell asleep, snuggled up to me.

Which leads me right back to where I started this section. I don't think that I'm anywhere cute enough for such a handsome boyfriend. I can only assume that Tad doesn't realize how incredibly awesome he is. I'm afraid to ask him that question. Without him, my life at the home would've been even more miserable. With him, so much kewl stuff has happened between us; there at the home, and here at the hospital too.

Aaron's still goofing on me too; calling me leader, and Core Rimmer, which still cracks me up, by the way. There's only one core I'm gonna be rimming for a long while, and he's still passed out at my side. I've been trying to get Aaron to quit his teasing by calling him our personal nurse, and Rimmer nurse. What worked was calling him dad. He's only about ten or so years older than Tad and I, but now that I think of it, Aaron's been more than a nurse, more than a friend, and more than a brother. Since I've obviously blown his mind clear out of the solar system, we'll have to save that topic for tomorrow.

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Saturday, November 6, 2013

Do you know what these evil, twisted hospital people did to us? Right after breakfast, Tad and I were taken to a room that turned out to be the dental office! I can't feel my face! Talking sounds like we're drunk! I can't even drink the damned milkshake through a straw, it's dribbling down my chin! I got four fillings and Tad got three! If I had snot to blow, Mario would be dripping by now!

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We found out that Alden, Kerry, George and Jack are some sort of artificial intelligence machines that will be real boys someday soon. Along with this new information, we learned what they're capable of. Since all sixteen of us were annoyed about the dentist visits, our new AI friends got our day nurses back for us. Mario was between our beds, replacing clear sacks of IV vitamins. With the task finished, suddenly he was naked. His clothes were scattered around the room, on our beds, the chair, and his boxers were hanging off the TV on the wall. Damn, the dude is way hairy! Before Mario could complain, he vanished from our room, and returned five-seconds later, dripping wet and with major shrinkage! He smirked at us, calmly grabbed his clothes and went into the bathroom. Tad and I are still giggling.

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Compared to yesterday and Thursday, the rest of this day has been easy, almost serene. We all gathered in that awesome game room during the afternoon. Catherine and Jeanette were the only two there with terrycloth robes on over their hospital gowns. All of us played games, chatted and shared our hopes for our new Pacific Rim Division lives.

One of the highlights was a chat Tad and I had with Catherine and Jeanette. Over a game of hearts, we learned that their nurse had advised them to talk with us. Yeah, we were gay and their was no chance of anything happening, but we were dudes that could advise them best about other straight teen dudes. They wanted to fit in and be liked, and had a crash course on how to be nice young ladies from their nurse, but at the same time, they wanted to find suitable boyfriends.

Tad and I told them the truth - from the first sprouted pubes, dudes are horny and only get more horny with age. Nice guys will

take their time, getting to know them, and maybe get goofy by making sexual remarks and jokes, but the straight Clan dudes would most likely be willing to bide their time. When they asked how we could know that, Tad and I shared what we had overheard from straight dudes at Elk Grove High. A nice straight guy won't ever brag about what and when they scored. The dumber straight guys would brag and probably exaggerate. Dudes like that were only trying to prove how straight they are, like it's a race to be won, and not a real person they're talking shit about. Our sisters needed to ignore and walk away from dudes like that.

After the card game and conversation was finished, the four of us older kids hung out with the younger kids for a while. The big television was showing us more from Ewa Beach. Our Core Rimmers were talking time off and weren't around most of the day, but there was plenty of other stuff going on, like soccer lessons, basketball games, volleyball games and bowling from the indoor rec center. Our AI friends just kept the cameras moving around the base, from place to place, and from one group of kids to the next.

Tad and I were getting the itch to be alone for a while when Colin came over to me and squirmed onto my lap. The little dude still had his doll in the evening dress, and treated it carefully, so it wouldn't break or get dirty. After that, Colin whispered in my ear, "Do you get bad dreams, Neil?"

I honestly told him, "Not yet, but ya know, it won't surprise me too much if I do." Then I carefully instructed, "We had it pretty bad at the home, Colin. That was the real life nightmare we all shared. Dreams are fake. Don't worry about them."

Nodding agreement, Colin asked, "Ain't you scared of Hawaii?"

Shaking my head, I replied, "It's not fear, dude. I'm eager to get

there; like a Christmas or birthday that's real close. I can barely wait."

"What about the other kids, and 'specially older kids?"

"You came to me, Colin. All those other kids you'll get to know too, and soon you'll have no reason to be afraid of any of 'em, no matter how old they are." I pointed out Christian Cole and reminded, "Christian's older than you, and now you and him are buddies, right?" Colin nodded and giggled. I advised, "Getting to know people takes some time, that's all. You don't need to worry. If a big kids scares you, all you have to do is tell me and Tad, or Catherine and Jeanette. Kewl?"

"Kewl, Neil," Colin giggled. He slid off my lap and hurried over to tell Christian, Dwight and Lester. Tad and I watched all four of our youngest boys go over to Catherine and Jeanette, obviously to confirm what I had said.

Ready to slink away for some private time, Tad and I paused because Doc Metzger and all our nurses came into the room. Doc Metzger announced, "Tomorrow is going to be another big day. After you all eat breakfast, the IVs running into your arms will be removed. Then we're all going down to the basement, where we have therapeutic tubs and a big pool, so you can all learn to swim. We're making arrangements now, but your dinner tomorrow will be in Hawaii." Sixteen normally quiet kids gasped and then exploded with cheers.

Once our cheers had dwindled, Doc Metzger said, "The only major thing remaining that we need to be aware of is the three hour time difference between here and Ewa Beach. To make sure you're all ready, I'd like you all to take three hour naps this afternoon. Then you'll all be able to stay awake later tonight, sleep in later tomorrow, and you'll be more adjusted to the time change. The last thing I'd like

to announce is that my transfer request has been approved, so I will be joining you in Hawaii. I know several nurses here have also applied for positions with Pacific Rim Division too, so you'll soon have plenty of familiar faces around."

Mario brought us back to our room. I had to write this before I could even try to sleep. I'm starting to feel hyper already. I just know this last day at the hospital is going to be awesome, but at the same time, I'm ready to move on. What's really freaky is the feeling that I'm going to miss this hospital.

How fucked up is that? A hospital and having an IV needle in my arm is better than the home I lived in for three years! It's true though.

Another huge shiver just raced through Tad and he's snuggled up to me again. OMIGOD! He only smiled at me and now John Henry is poking out of my gown. Tad's evilly snickering, and just asked Mario to step out of the room and close the door. He threatened a dunk in the North Atlantic, but did as Tad asked. More later.

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All I'm gonna say is, DAMN, THAT WAS GREAT ON A BED!

We took our nap, had pot roast for dinner, and now us dudes are heading to the game room.

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It's hard to believe, but I can't seem to last three hours without feeling like I'm starving. I mean, dinner was huge, and then we had milkshakes in the game room, and now I'm back in our room and pigging out on hot dogs. On the television, we're watching the new

dudes hanging out in their common room.

There was a bit of a pause while Tad and I rated hotties on the screen. All of 'em are in their underwear. The top five are Chris Stokley, Jay Montigua, Craig Nash, Scott Shetley and Lance Kinchen. Tad says the first two need to be swapped; he thinks Jay's hotter than his boyfriend, Chris. He's boning up over Jay's abs. Chris is a blond and perfectly proportioned, in my opinion. Aaron refuses to get involved in this argument.

Speaking of arguing, the dudes on TV were discussing their leadership team; specifically the oldest six - Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Sean and Troy. The common thoughts were that they were all sweethearts; as nice as could be, but not one of the twelve dudes would ever test their leaders' abilities, nor their resolve to do what needs to be done.

Some of the dudes in the room are level one orphans. They're saying that all their zoo-keepers were sent to off-planet penal facilities, and they're implying that some other zoo-keepers were executed on the spot. I'm not surprised, neither is Aaron, but it took Tad a few extra moments to realize we were right; whatever they got was justified. Mr. and Mrs. Franklin were more like prison wardens than caregivers. They timed us for meals, bathroom trips and showers. I'll never forget my first shower there, when I said I wasn't done, Mr. Franklin grabbed me and lifted me out of the tub and tossed me back in the room without giving me a chance to rinse or dry off.

There was another pause while Tad and I talked about Sean and Troy with Aaron. Maybe us kids from that home were in the same room as the two Core Rimmers ten or fifteen minutes, tops. What Tad and I saw were two dudes that were very much in love. All they showed us and each other was how much they cared. Once we were out of the house, I could only just barely imagine Sean and Troy

dealing with the Franklins.

Because Tad and I were getting quiet, our big brother Aaron abruptly changed the subject, to tell us what was planned for Sunday. All the dudes ten and older would be shown how to exercise, and how much to exercise by letting our bodies tell when we'd had enough. Calisthenics were planned, and short jogs around a track. Tad, Gerry, Jessie and I would then be shown how to lift weights; both free weights and on Nautilus machines. The last part of the planned routine was swimming in the pool and then some time in therapeutic whirlpool tubs.

Locking eyes with me, Aaron said, "Assuming you wake around ten, once you're showered, fed, the IVs are removed and you're dressed, the next couple of hours are booked. You won't have time to write in your journal until after you arrive at Ewa Beach. There will be plenty to keep you busy there for a few hours. You probably won't get to write at all until bedtime tomorrow night."

"No problem," I cheerfully smiled. "When I get the chance, I'll have a lot to write about. I'll have Tad to help. And in a week, you'll have a bunch to hear and read about. We're glad you're moving there, dude."

Tad sighed, "I wish Mario could move there too. I understand he's got his partner and family here, but I still wish he could be there."

Nodding understandingly, Aaron reminded, "Mario will be hearing from me often enough. He'll know about every inch you grow, every pound you gain, and every achievement you make. And then I'll bother him to get his ass on a plane and take a vacation in the ROH next summer."

"It's good to know we'll see him again after tomorrow," Tad

smiled.

Kicking his legs out, crossing them slightly at the ankles, and relaxing in his chair, Aaron chuckled, "You two aren't going to be able to sleep tonight. I can tell, you're unhappy about leaving some good people behind, but at the same time, you can't wait to live lives like what you've been watching for three days. I've heard enough from both of you to realize that you can't believe your punishment is over, that a hospital was easier and more enjoyable than your orphanage home, and that something even better than this is what's in store for you. I'm no Clan Short expert, but this hospital does interface with Starfleet Medical, which means I've heard some stories and have some facts that you don't."

Almost simultaneously, Tad and I wondered, "Like what?"

"Like those milkshakes we've been giving you, for instance," Aaron widely grinned. "They were developed by Doctor Leonard McCoy, and are packed with nutrients. They'll continue after you leave here. You could survive very nicely on just those milkshakes, but since you haven't done that here, I wouldn't dare expect it to change there." Noticing Tad and I smirking at each other and at him, Aaron chortled, "What's good for you can be very enjoyable too. I hear the Clan school system is much the same; instead of boring facts and figures, you'll get projects you enjoy that will be geared towards a career that you'll naturally excel at."

Aaron's laughing at me for writing all this down, like notes for a test.

Tad giggled, "You know what I saw that I'm really looking forward to?"

I softly teased, "Darren Devault?" and was sharply nudged in

the side.

Shaking his head, Tad smiled, "The class structure here in the United States sucks. At our school, everybody dumped on us. Only the wealthiest seemed to be immune from that crap. There at Ewa Beach, everybody's the same. That's what I'm looking forward to the most. Only one example of that are mixed race couples, like Horacio is a dark skinned Mexican dude, and his girlfriend Sonia is a fair skinned girl. Kaleo and Tory are another couple, completely in love and neither cares about skin color. It's what's inside that matters."

"As it should be," Aaron softly agreed. "Another little something that made these few days special were you two treating Mario and I like big brothers. Hawaii is as much a melting pot as America is; they've got native Hawaiians, Japanese, Chinese, Americans, and more living on those little islands. Another thing that makes all you kids from that orphanage very unique is your faith in something becoming better than it was. That is very rare. Regardless of what your schoolmates or your care givers tried to tell you, there's still a glimmer of hope alive in each of you. That's important, and something you can share with other kids in the Clan."

"They seem to be fine already," Tad offered.

Aaron shrugged, "Maybe they are, or maybe they aren't. Maybe the kids you've seen are fine, but others are bound to show up there that need to be shown the glimmer of hope. I think it's something we have in common."

"We?" Tad and I uncertainly repeated.

"I came out of Watts, Los Angeles," Aaron admitted. "A tough street kid made it of the hood, went to college, medical school and became a registered nurse. This is the career I've always wanted. I'm

looking forward to making the switch from American to Hawaiian too."

I paused to softly ask, "Your home town was burning yesterday but you didn't say anything?"

"Most of my closest family and friends have moved out," Aaron simply explained. "Like you, good memories are few and far between there. I could drive there in less than four hours, but it's been almost two years since I've made the trip. Both my parents have passed, my brother and two sisters have scattered to other States. What happened in LA yesterday proves that there's no connection left for me. My connections are here, specifically they're here in this room and up and down the hall." Tad and I broke into giggles.

Aaron chuckled, "I've already interviewed for Pacific Rim Division and have a job waiting. By next weekend, I'll be with Doc Metzger at Oneula Beach with all of you level two kids. I was amazed and disgusted to learn that there are ninety-six kids just like you."

Tad interrupted, "We won't be going to Ewa Beach?"

Aaron answered, "Yes, you will arrive there, and likely spend most of your first day there, but you'll be living at Oneula Beach, which is about a mile further west of Ewa Beach on Oahu. Pacific Rim Division has been active only a week. They've almost filled their headquarters at Ewa Beach. Rather than split kids up, they're opening their second base for you. And the hope is that around the time I arrive, the eighty level three orphans will be there too. Between just your two groups, the second base will be almost half full with a hundred and seventy-five of you. Almost everything we've seen on TV from Ewa Beach is duplicated at Oneula Beach. The main difference is the CIC building is only at headquarters. We'll have our own cafeteria, kitchen and auditorium at Oneula Beach. Everything

else at Oneula Beach - the dormitories, the townhouses, the large single family homes, the pools and recreation facilities are the same as at Ewa Beach. There are three more bases, on three other islands, and all are similar to Oneula Beach and Ewa Beach."

Watching me scribble down everything Aaron said, Tad softly chortled. Neither said anything more until I looked up and asked, "How do you think things will really be for us?"

Aaron smiled, "I think it's going to be exactly like what you've seen and told me about. When you arrive, you'll be introduced to the leadership team, which is pointless since you already know and can recognize them. The next stop will be clothes shopping. Just like the kids you've seen on TV, you'll be able to pick out your own clothes. From there, I'd expect you to go to the dormitory, probably as smaller groups. Once you're assigned to rooms and get some unpacking done, you'll get shown around a little bit. You'll be there for dinner, so that's next on the agenda. What happens after that is a little less clear. Some kids were allowed to do as they pleased, but the level one kids went to the auditorium for a concert. What I want you two to remember is your allowed to do as you please. If you get hungry or thirsty late at night, go to the cafeteria and get something. Nobody's going to tell you, no, and get back to your room. Here, you've been lounging most of the time, but there you'll be able to walk around, swim, play and burn calories. That means you need to recognize when it's time to eat. I know what you weighed and how tall you were upon arrival. By the time you leave here tomorrow, I'll know how much weight you've gained. When I arrive next week, I'll want to see all of you going into the cafeteria often for snacks and meals."

Tad added, "We've got to remember what life used to be like before the home, when we had parents and could do what ever we wanted."

"Precisely," Aaron smiled. "That's your new home. If you're out at the pools swimming and begin to feel tired, then by all means, find a lounge chair and rest for a while. Since Neil's been writing more each and every day, maybe you'll prefer to return to the dorm now and then, or maybe you'll learn to live life and not just write about it. Those first few days you'll be meeting almost three hundred other kids. Who'll become your new friends? Will they want to chill out with you in your room, or will you be chillin' with them in their rooms? Hang out in the dorm common rooms at night too, so you can be social while watching TV. Your lives are about to expand again. Take advantage of new learning experiences. Recall old hobbies and pick them up again, or become interested in something new and give it your best shot.

"It's simply not possible for you two to become reclusive. Some of the kids took more than a day to warm up and speak to doctors and nurses, but not you two. Immediately upon arrival, you had questions and asked them. When you woke the next day, there were more questions, more conversation with Mario, with Doc Metzger and with me. Although you two lived together, and were intimate for a long time, I witnessed you falling in love. Consider that with all the other new experiences ahead of you. This is only the beginning."

Chapter 15

There were so many explosions. Every five-seconds or so, there was another loud bang or boom. Intermixed with the bursts were sounds of people crying, screaming and yelling. Nine-year-old Leo Daniel Scott shivered in fear, wondering, "What's goin' on, dad?"

Standing just off to the left of the living room windows with her husband, Leo's mother, Nadine Scott, saw Molotov cocktails explode in flames inside several parked cars. She softly asked her husband, "Was that our car?"

"It was," Walter Scott, Leo's father sighed. He then answered his son, instructing, "Stay low, Leo."

Already on his butt and on the floor, in the corner of the living room with a heavy entertainment center behind him, a sofa to one side and a love seat to the other side, Leo cringed. Folded up tight, his chin was practically resting on his knees. He couldn't get any lower or occupy less space if he tried. Both his parents were frightened, Leo could hear it in the tone of their voices.

The area of Central Los Angeles where the Scott's lived wasn't the greatest, but it wasn't the worst, by any measurement. This night though, everybody seemed to be out of control. The neighborhood had nice people, and they were especially nice on this street. Even the old folks living in the apartment building across Francis Avenue were kewl. The Scott family had a decent three bedroom house at 2765 Francis Avenue, and there were others just like it up and down the block.

Trembling, Leo watched his mother and father move furniture

before the front door. They went to the back rooms to move the table and china hutch to barricade the back door. The few lights that were on in the house suddenly went out and the emergency lights came on. A car screeched around the corner. Every few minutes, the family heard that sound. Walter felt certain that it was the same car, racing around the block, seemingly just for laughs.

Swiftly, Nadine and Walter unplugged several of the emergency lights downstairs, leaving only one in the dining room brightly shining. Walter went to the quivering mass that was his nine-year-old son. Grinning, Walter joked, "Ain't staying up with the big people fun?" and reached to lift his son up off the floor.

Rising up off the floor and into his dad's arms, Leo nervously giggled, "It could be more fun, dad."

Already on her way upstairs, Nadine scrambled to reduce the light visible from the street. Carrying his only child up the steps, Walter assured, "We're staying inside and upstairs, away from the windows. All we have to do is let the loonies outside wear themselves out. We're safe, as long as we stay away from windows. If nobody knows we're home, everything will be fine by morning."

In his dad's arms, Leo softly wondered, "Why are they freakin' out? Why don't I hear sirens? Where are the cops?"

"I don't really know, Leo," Walter sighed. "What I do know is that we're safe inside, as long as we stay away from the windows. Can you promise me that you'll stay low and away from the windows, son?"

"I promise, dad," Leo nodded.

"We're going to play hide-and-go-seek," Nadine cheerfully told Leo. "No matter where we go, we're going to stay low and out of

sight. Crawl down along the floor, like a baby, my big strong boy."

"Like in the western cowboy movies, Leo," Walter instructed, and put his son down in the tub, the most protected place in the house. "This is where I want you to stay, no matter what. You can use the toilet and get water from the sink, just..."

"Stay low," Leo finished.

Walter smiled and ruffled his son's blond hair, cheering, "Smart lad. You make me proud and stay here, while mom and I make sure the house is secure."

"We'll be right back," Nadine assured, and then leaned down to kiss Leo's forehead.

Walter galloped downstairs. Nadine was only gone ten- or fifteen-seconds, returning to the bathroom with Leo's bed pillows and blanket. She stuffed the pillows behind Leo's back and covered him with the blanket, gently whispering, "You're my pride and joy. I love you so much."

Forcing a small grin, Leo whispered, "I love you too. Hurry back."

Nadine raced out of the bathroom and flew downstairs to help her husband. From the upstairs bathroom, Leo heard more furniture being moved downstairs. Outside, there were more screeching tires, pops, bangs and distant explosions that caused Leo to jump in his skin, but he still heard his parents softly talking and moving things around. As long as he could still hear his parents, everything would be fine. The last time Leo saw a clock, it was after two in the morning. It was going to be a long time before dawn. He wondered if the crazies outside would stop shooting before sunrise, or if it would stop after

daybreak, or if it would ever stop.

It seemed like an excruciatingly long time before Leo heard footsteps climbing the stairs. In reality, it was only about fifteen minutes, but reality had ceased to exist even before Leo woke around one-thirty from the noises of the rioting. Nadine, and then Walter came into the bathroom to check on their son. Curled up under the blanket, Leo smirked at his parents, "Back so soon? I was just about to yell down for a beer."

Walter chuckled, "Well, you know, there are places to meet, people to do and things to go."

Nadine impatiently huffed, "If our dry cleaner has been damaged, I'm going to have an 'A' number one shit fit."

Helplessly, Leo giggled at his parents.

Walter explained, "We're going to move a few more things to block the staircase, Leo."

"Like?"

"Your bed and dresser and then our dresser," Nadine answered. "If anyone gets inside the house, we'll be perfectly safe up here."

"Okay," Leo muttered. Only a few weeks ago, a fireman had been to his school and taught that all exits should be clear in case of a fire, so you could escape. It seemed to Leo that his parents were doing things that shouldn't be done, but he said nothing about it. With all the other stuff going on, a fire would be the worst possible addition to the chaos.

His parents left the bathroom again. He could hear them moving his twin-size bed. After a minute or two, they could be heard carrying

his dresser. It was a tall chest of drawers that only recently Leo could clearly see the top of. They returned to the bathroom, obviously tired. Lowering the top toilet seat, Nadine sat down, wondering, "Did we miss anything?"

Leo giggled, "The Lakers just came by to ask if we wanted to play. I said we were too busy."

"That figures," Walter smirked, "just when I feel like playing too." He leaned against the door-frame to catch his breath and seemed to inspect the room he had been in thousands of times. The small windows were high off the floor in this room, above the tub and on the same wall above the toilet. They would all be safe in this room, Walter was certain of it. He asked his son, "Is there anything you'd like to help pass the time?"

"My iPod Nano?" Leo softly requested.

Nadine added, "And the portable radio, so we can hear news and know when it's safe."

From his back pockets, Walter pulled two of the emergency lights out and put them on the edge of the tub then left the room. A minute later, he returned with the iPod, ear-buds and the radio. Leaving them on the floor near the tub for Leo, he sighed hard and long.

Leo prompted, "Take a break, dad. We're good for a little while."

"Are you implying I'm too old?" Walter teased.

"Not too old," Leo giggled. "Just old enough for piggyback rides."

"You're lighter than your dresser, that's for sure," Walter smiled. "What've you got in there anyway, rocks?"

"My stash," Leo giggled.

Nadine laughed, "Your stash, huh? You've been holding out on us, Leo."

Walter sniggered, "When this is all over, we're gonna break into your stash and tie one on."

Leo cackled, "They said at school that old folks shouldn't take out, it's bad for them."

Nadine giggled, "It's fine for you though?"

Rapidly nodding, Leo teased, "Eighteen and under only."

Sadly shaking his head, Walter chuckled, "We have got to get you out of this city."

Hopefully, Leo suggested, "Up into the mountains?"

Slowly nodding and widely smiling, Walter answered, "We'd all like it up there." He then turned to his wife, asking, "Ready for one more trip?"

"Let's get it over with," Nadine sighed, and stood.

Leo whimpered, "Don't go yet."

Nadine and Walter knelt down beside the tub. Nadine leaned over to kiss her beautiful boy and softly called him exactly that. Brushing his son's blond mop back out of his eyes, Walter smiled, "We only have our dresser to move. Another two or three minutes is

all it will take. You can be strong for that long, easily."

Nodding, Leo tearfully admitted, "I'm so scared. It's worse when you're not here."

"We're scared too," Nadine admitted, and then assured, "We'll make it through this night. We'll have a new car over the weekend and then we're off, into the mountains."

Walter instructed, "You know how to make the fear go away. Love conquers all, and this little family of ours has so much love, nothing can stop us. We're like Godzilla, King Kong, Superman and all the best comic book heroes combined."

"You can be brave, Leo, I know you can," Nadine confidently said, and kissed her son on the mouth.

Quaking, Leo whispered, "I love you."

"I love you very much too," Walter smiled, and landed two kisses, one on his son's forehead and the other on his cheek. He promised, "Two or three minutes and we're right back here, breaking into your stash."

Nodding, Leo forced a small grin and shivered, "I love you."

Brightly smiling, "I love you too," Nadine and Walter stood. With their adrenaline pumping, they hurried out of the room to complete this one final task and get back to safety quickly. Nadine and Walter each took a side of their long dresser. Another car screeched around the corner that neither adult paid any attention to. They believed that same lunatic was coming around the block again. However, this lap around, inside the car were two men hanging out the windows with AK-47 assault rifles. One fired low and the other fired high. Nadine and Walter never knew what hit them. They never

even made a sound.

From the bathroom tub, Leo heard the loudest gunfire yet and flinched when something heavy hit the floor. He wondered if his parents dropped the dresser. With his eyes darting in their sockets, Leo waited for some other sounds from his parents. Hearing nothing for way too long, Leo called, "Dad? Mom?" He waited for a reply, then more loudly yelled, "MOM! DAD?" Again there was no reply and no sound of the dresser being moved. All he heard was more yelling, pops, bangs and explosions. Beginning to cry, Leo desperately screamed, "DADDY! MOMMY! PLEASE?"

When there was still no answer, he scurried out of the tub, but remembered to stay down low and crawled along the hallway floor. Stopping at his parent's bedroom doorway, he saw their lifeless forms on the floor. Behind the dresser, the wall was riddled with bullet holes and the windows were shattered. Feeling like his skull and chest were going to explode, Leo quickly crawled the length of the bedroom floor. By the street light cascading into the room, Leo saw his father was missing a large section of hair and skull. It seemed the area above his dad's right ear was gone. Blood seemed to ooze from the wound. A few feet to his left, Leo saw his mother, also bleeding from her head. He whimpered. Without consciously deciding to, Leo scrambled along the floor, back into the bathroom and into the tub. Pulling the shower curtain closed and the blanket up over his body, Leo cried for his parents to come back, to never leave, to stay with him in the safety of the tub. Every so often, he'd call for them, not really believing what he had heard, seen and experienced. It couldn't be really happening.

Without meaning to, Leo cried himself to sleep. His parents were with him in his dreams. He woke briefly around dawn Friday, clearly remembering them in the dream saying that he would be fine, and that they would protect him. Sounds of gunshots, rioting voices

and insanity outside woke him. Sobbing his heart out, Leo reached for his iPod, put the ear-buds in his ears and turned it on to play, so he wouldn't have to hear anymore from the outside world. Every muscle in his body ached more than anything had ever hurt before. He fell back to sleep, feeling like his life was as good as over. Nothing would ever be the same again. He would never laugh with his parents over silly jokes. He would never see the mountains of Southern California again. If only he could die too, he'd be with them and happy again.

Leo didn't wake again until that afternoon, when he realized that his iPod's charge had completely worn out. He took one ear-bud out of his ear and listened. There were no shouting voices, pops, bangs or explosions to be heard. It was eerily quiet. Not knowing much of anything other than the fact his parents were dead in the next room, Leo lay there shedding quiet tears, wondering why he was left alive and alone. What was he supposed to do now? The single emergency light in the bathroom had dimmed long ago. Just to hear a voice, Leo reached over the tub for the portable radio. He switched it on and turned the dial, searching for his favorite station. Each and every station had the same voice, from the Emergency Broadcast System. The words were meaningless to Leo for a long and painful few hours. They spoke of places that he knew, but none of it registered for a long while.

About three o'clock that afternoon, the words started making sense. He knew the time now. He also knew that the sun would be setting in a few more hours. Another night, in this house, with his parents' bodies wasn't a pleasant idea. As if he might get an answer, Leo wondered aloud, "What do I do?" Only sitting and that thought made him realize it had been at least twelve hours since he last peed. The radio announcer soon said that Staples Center was an evacuation point. That was where the Clippers and Kings played. His family had been there a couple of times, and it was pretty close. He recalled his

dad saying once that it might have been quicker if they had just walked instead of driving.

Pocketing his iPod and ear-buds, Leo stood in the tub. Listening more carefully to the radio, he went to the toilet and relieved his bursting bladder, and then brushed his teeth. According to the radio, the rioting was still going on in some areas down by the airport and Santa Monica, but the State's National Guard had very much restricted the violence to those areas. He would be safe walking the mile or so to Staples Center, and he could get there by dark easily. Still in shock, Leo went on autopilot, deciding to shower and put clean clothes on. He could not go anywhere wearing only the clothes that he had been wearing the prior night and day. Once that was done, Leo made sure he had his iPod, ear-buds and the radio.

Pausing at the pile of furniture before the staircase, Leo put the radio down on the dresser, to use both hands and a shoulder to shove his dresser and bed aside, at least enough so he could squeeze past to the stairway. Picking up the small radio again, he turned to his parents bedroom, softly sobbing, "It's time to go now. I'll always remember you guys. Please, if you can, keep an eye on me? I kind o' know where I'm going, but I'm still really scared. Everything's so creepy quiet. What's going to happen to me now, ya know? Love conquers all, you always said that. Well, I love you both. It feels like there's so much more I should say, but I can't think now." He squeezed past the bed and dresser and started down the steps. Becoming more upset with the thought of leaving his parents and the only home he'd ever known, Leo paused and hollered in a squeaky voice, "I won't forget you," and then broke down crying. He would not ever say the word "goodbye" to his mom or dad. Feeling weak, he slowly shuffled down the steps.

At the staircase landing, Leo couldn't believe his eyes. The

living room was a disaster area. The furniture that had been moved in front of the door was lying on its sides, creating a barrier he would have to carefully climb around and over. Any of those items would seriously hurt if it fell on him. Curtains, drapes and mini-blinds were on the floor. The picture window was just a big gaping hole in the wall. Photos that had been on the walls were knocked down to the floor. His parents certainly wouldn't have done any of that. Turning slightly to look back toward the dining room and kitchen, Leo found cupboards opened and their contents scattered on the floor. The table and hutch moved to block the back door were knocked onto their sides and into the middle of the kitchen.

Glancing around, Leo got the distinct impression that someone had managed to get in the house and looted the place. They got in through the picture window, and when they were ready to leave, they had pushed the stuff away from the doors. Feeling an intense shiver race up and down his spine, Leo realized that he had slept through the whole thing. Scowling, he wondered why they didn't push their way upstairs. They would've found him asleep and killed him in the tub. His parents had already saved him, Leo realized.

Scared to death, he hurried to the gaping hole that was once his living room window. Leo used the twisted remains of a steel corner lamp post to clear the remaining glass from the window. He then used the curtains to cover the ledge, and carefully climbed out to the porch that ran the length of the front of the house. Never even feeling a small scratch on the inside of his left thigh and down to his knee, Leo kept hurrying. The apartment building across the street had been on fire at some point too. The outside wall was burned and discolored. The flames were out now, but he could still see a river of water flowing along the curb.

Sprinting as fast as he could down the walkway, Leo turned left.

All the homes on his street were wrecked. He turned right on South Hoover Street and kept running, down to Olympic Boulevard where he turned left. There was no traffic at all, frightening Leo more. For a while, he wondered if everyone was dead except him. At the corner of Olympic and South Alvarado Street, he saw a jeep and four armed National Guard troops. He ran to them and wailed, telling them where he lived, that his parents had been killed during the night, that his home was broken into while he slept in a bathtub, and that he really needed a ride to the Staples Center evacuation center, where he might finally feel safe.

* * * * *

Keoneuli Beach House, Kaho'olawe Island

Sunday, November 7, 2004 6:54 AM HTZ

With Leo's nightmare getting louder, and more scared kids waking in tears, Wade and Frankie hurried to the first floor bedroom to wake their fathers. Upon waking, John immediately felt and knew that Wade had experienced some of Leo's dream. He promptly replaced the scary images with fun ones and climbed out of bed. For the first time, Stephen was in such a flustered state that he didn't care about being naked and hurried to the living room with John and their two sons.

Simultaneously, John held the blocks on Wade's telepathy, entered Leo's dream and sent loud telepathic calls to Corey, Drew and all the other Core Rimmers, who were still sleeping upstairs. Barely awake, Drew jumped out of bed and hurried, taking two steps at a time down the stairs, to get to his eldest son. Before Corey and Drew even made it to the living room, John was already sharing Leo's nightmare with them, so they could know what had happened to their boy. No wonder Leo was more clingy than the average nine-year-old;

after what the boy had gone through the early hours of November fifth, anyone would be.

Crying and shaking so bad that every muscle in his body ached, Leo woke. Nearest around him and on their knees watching him carefully were Corey, Drew, Dee, Kenny, Geoff and Lenny. Standing behind that group were Gage, Sammy, Jonah, Ben, Billy, Jason, John, Stephen, Wade, Frankie and Reyes. Beyond that group were all the other boys who had been sleeping in the living room nest, and all their fathers. Prez, Keith, and all the Core Rimmers were soothing the youngest boys that had been awakened by Leo's nightmare. Even some of the security guys were inside. Realizing what he had done, Leo covered his face and cried harder.

Only about nine or ten inches taller than his eldest son, Drew leaned over, wrapped his arms around Leo and pulled him up. Drew stood and carried Leo out of the room, with Corey, Geoff and Lenny trailing behind. The family went down the foyer and out the kitchen dinette sliding doors. Drew sat on a lanai chair and parked Leo on his lap, gently shushing the boy's tears and rubbing his back.

Latching onto Drew with everything he had, Leo softly whimpered, "Don't leave me, daddy."

"Never, Leo," Drew assured, and held his weeping son tightly. Locking eyes with Corey, they shared worried expressions. Between soft kisses on Leo's cheek and face, Drew firmly promised, "You're with us, all day today, all night tonight, and forever." He looked at Geoff and Lenny, offering, "Tonight, we'll all crash in our master bedroom's king size bed. Leo's going to be in the middle, with two brothers on one side and two dads on the other side. It'll be our own family nest. How does that sound?"

Like Christmas had arrived early, Geoff and Lenny grinned at

each other, and then rapidly nodded, cheering, "Really kewl, daddy."

Tapping his sub-vocal, Corey asked, "Alden, is Doc Wiener awake?"

"Yes, he is," Alden answered, and quickly asked, "Would you like me to get him there?"

"As soon as he's able," Corey instructed.

"I've informed him that he's needed, and he's getting dressed," Alden relayed.

With his face still buried in the crook of Drew's neck, Leo reached both arms out. Corey took one outstretched hand; Geoff and Lenny took the other hand. All three surrounded the chair where Drew and Leo sat.

Beginning to calm down, Leo sighed, "I woke everybody, didn't I?"

"Don't even worry about that," Corey gently said. "Me and dad saw a lot of your dream, Leo. If I were in your shoes, I'd probably still be in the tub."

Looking up, Leo wiped his eyes, asking, "You really saw?"

Corey nodded, "The shower curtain was dark green and light green stripes."

"The shower walls were tan and brown tiles," Drew shared. Leo scowled, wondering how it could possibly be that Corey and Drew could describe his old bathroom. Drew grinned, "John's my brother, your uncle, and an N-Gen. That means he can look into other peoples' minds and share what he sees. Only me, pop, John and you know

what really happened. That's why you're going to be in the center of the bed tonight; you might not think you did very good Friday, but let me tell you that you did everything perfectly. For being so great, you're going to get smothered with so much love from us. We're going to do everything possible to help you get past this."

Glancing at his dad and pop, Geoff asked, "What happened?"

Corey grinned, "All you need to know is what we already assumed; that Leo's parents didn't make it through the riots... oh, and that Leo's originally from Los Angeles."

"Where movie stars are," Lenny smiled. "Kewl."

Wearing shorts, a sport shirt, sneakers and socks, but unshaven, Doc Wiener appeared on the porch. Corey smiled, "Good morning, Doc."

"Good morning all," Doc Wiener cheerfully said, and then asked, "How can I help?"

Corey gestured to Leo, saying, "Bad dreams, of his parents, from the LA riots." He then rubbed Leo's back, adding, "I'm going to take Geoff and Lenny inside, so you can tell Doc Wiener about your nightmare."

Leo nodded, and then asked, "Do I have to say it all?"

Squatting down behind the chair, where Leo could see him, Doc Wiener gently said, "The more people you tell, the better it will be in the long run, Leo." He asked, "Are there any friends inside that you'd like to share this with?"

Leo blinked, "I don't know about that. It's really scary. I mean,

Kenny's like me, I guess, but from New York City."

Doc Wiener nodded understandingly, saying, "That would be good for both of you then."

Drew prompted, "Is there anyone else, Leo?"

"Dee," Leo quickly said, and then added, "Sammy, Gage, Jonah, Ben, Jason and Uncle Keith."

Drew grinned, "You like Keith?"

Leo nodded, "He took me surfin'."

Looking up at Corey, Doc Wiener prompted, "Please send them out here."

Nodding, Corey gathered Geoff and Lenny, and then they went inside.

Standing and glancing around, Doc Wiener smiled, "This is a nice place. We could stay right here or go for a walk along the beach? Which would you prefer, Leo?"

Leo hummed then answered, "The beach, but I'm only wearing underwear, and dad's naked... again!" Drew helplessly chuckled, squeezed Leo tightly and planted a soft kiss on his son's cheek.

Doc Wiener sat on the next chair, grinning, "My job doesn't require special attire, but however you're comfortable, Leo."

Noticing Doc Wiener was sitting to take his sneakers and socks off, and that Leo was uncertain, Drew assured, "Briefs are fine. I'll bet that most of your friends come out here wearing only underwear or naked."

"For sure," Leo giggled.

Dee, Jason and Kenny hurried out the back door. Dee and Jason were nude and Kenny only had his white briefs on. They immediately went to Leo. Kenny smirked, "Ya scared the crap out o' me, pal." Right behind the first group of three, Sammy, Ben, Keith, Jonah and Gage walked outside. Not one of them had a stitch of clothing on.

Leo nodded at Kenny, sighing, "I'm sorry about that, but I..."

After waiting a few moments for Leo to finish his sentence, Doc Wiener offered, "Couldn't help it?" Leo nodded at the adult man. Doc Wiener said, "That's what this session's going to be about, boys. You're all victims in one way or another. Our goal is to not live as victims, so we're not feeling helpless most of the time. Leo would like to walk the beach while we talk, so if everybody's ready?" Heads nodded and Keith led the pack of boys to the lawn. Leo got up off Drew and held out his hand to his new dad. He held out his other hand to Kenny Hunnicutt. Kenny looked deeply into Leo's pale blue eyes, smiled and took the offered hand in his. Leo, Drew and Kenny walked down the lanai steps to the lawn.

Leo was encouraged by Drew to tell his story. "It was a school night, " Leo began his tale, "so I went to bed a little before ten Thursday night."

Inside the house, fathers were feeding breakfast to the remaining boys. The nest in the living room had been dismantled and the bedding transported back to the Hundsers' basement. The coffee table had been returned to its spot near the sectional sofa, where Prez, Derrick, Mike, Reyes, Corey, Jerry and AJ sat with their breakfasts. Around the other side of the coffee table, sitting on the floor with their morning milkshakes, were Richie, Geoff, Lenny, Dillon, and the other two Hunnicutt brothers, Shaun and Mike. In the dining room

were Kaleo, Tory and their five sons.

After the excitement, everybody was calming down. Only John was still a little on edge. The prior evening, he had managed to create a room in his N-Gen mind for his new nephew, but hadn't linked with Kenny. John stood at the kitchen dinette sliding door, with Wade at his side, watching Kenny walk away. Wade sent, *'I think Kenny's okay, daddy.'*

'His mommy and daddy didn't come home, so he's not the same as Leo, thank goodness,' John relayed to his son.

'Daddy?' Wade called. When John looked down, Wade giggled, *'I'm hungry,'* and telepathically tickled John for the first time. It was an unfocused tickle that caused John to shake and shimmy where he stood.

Having a giggling fit, Wade backed away. John sniggered, *'You learned that on your own, huh?'*

Nodding, Wade giggled, *'From you!'* and turned to run, but John already had his boy and levitated him off the floor. In seconds, Wade was twisting, turning and loudly laughing. Going to help his new brother, Frankie found himself also stuck in John's telekinetic grasp and being mercilessly tickled.

Sitting at the dinette table with their sons, Troy and Sean grinned at John, Frankie and Wade. Billy, Scott and Jimmy helplessly giggled at their two floating and hysterical friends.

All the Core Rimmers were sharing plans for the day with their kids. Mike asked Alden to check around and find out when their new arrivals might be coming. Over the ceiling speakers on the ground floor of the house, everyone heard Alden's reply; "The newbies will be at Ewa Beach about one this afternoon, guys. Some are in Las

Vegas, some are in Philadelphia, and another set are in Cincinnati. They've all been fed breakfast and will have had lunch before leaving the medical facilities they're at."

Around his breakfast, Derrick mumbled, "So we can meet them in the dining room, get them to the store, and then gather the Clan in the auditorium."

Corey asked, "Are there any other pending refugees, Alden?"

"The Wells Fargo Arena was cleared yesterday afternoon, Des Moines time, and is being cleaned now," Alden answered.

Prez asked, "Is there any other activity we need to know about, Alden?"

Privately to the Core Rimmers only, Alden responded, "The Short Family and the Core members of the UNIT were called away and are off planet. Uncle Colin woke at four this morning. He's surveying damages at Washington and New York City. King Aalona was told that his Starfleet force fields will be installed tomorrow, however it might be several more days before the damages to the palace have been repaired."

Over the ceiling speakers, Alden whined, "Kerry's got his body, and I want mine too!" Everyone in the house paused for the arguing AI brothers, and then Alden giggled, "Bob Busch has adopted fifteen kids in 48 hours, maybe a new record, outside of Momma Janet and Daddy Joe. So far this morning, twenty-seven boys at Ewa Beach were caught talking to their dicks. Out of the twenty-seven, nine have named their dicks, a surprisingly low number statistically, but not everyone is awake yet either." All around the house, boys began chuckling, giggling and laughing.

Reyes looked up and over at the nearest camera, giggling, "No,

no, no."

Believing that the AIs were speaking privately into Reyes' sub-vocal, Derrick smiled, "What are they saying?"

Reyes giggled, "None of us were given choices about our dicks, were we? I simply cannot fathom having that choice, and if I did, would I want my dick any different from the one I have? Hell no! Looking around this house, I see exactly what I would expect hanging between everybody's legs." Looking back up at the camera, Reyes laughed, "Pardon the pun, but you guys are making big deals over nothing!"

Six AIs giggled, "That wasn't funny, Reyes!"

Entering the room with Troy and three of their four sons, Sean smirked, reminding the AI's, "All you guys have seen me limp and hard. You've seen me and Troy alone together too. At the orphanage, I wished that my dick didn't grow quite so much. Troy's the only reason I'm not still wishing that. Now I know that it's all in the eyes when two people make love. All that really matters to us gay dudes is that there's something hanging between our lover's legs; quantity has nothing to do with it. Quality is in the heart, and that can only be seen in the eyes."

"It took me four days and a lot of trying to successfully get what I needed and wanted," Troy told the AI's. "I also happen to know that Sean talked to Darren Devault. If you guys haven't talked to Darren, then you need to. What he's got hangin' is damn close to what Sean's got erect. Not to mention, he was a prostitute, so he's got lots of experience with men and women. Just like Sean, Darren's dick got him attention, most of which he didn't appreciate or want."

Looking up and around for the camera, Billy seriously said to

the AI's, "You guys don't know this, but I had to mess with Jason and he had to mess around with me, just to make our old foster parents happy and give them something to film. At nine, Jason's got plenty. He's told me that I've got enough too, but we're still growing up. What matters most is, what's enough to some people might be too much for others. If you want to be copies of Joey, that's your choice, but I wouldn't, if I were you."

Looking directly into a camera again, Reyes smiled, "There ya go, dudes. If there's one dude anywhere in the Clan that isn't perfectly happy with what they've got, I'd be very surprised. It seems to me, the only real choice to be made is whether you want to be circumcised or not. About one-third are, on our base anyway, and each choice has its pros and cons, so two of the six of you can make that choice."

Arguments about who would appear snipped began amongst the AI's, and then the ceiling speakers popped mid banter. All the boys and teens in the house grinned at the ceilings. Looking up at Troy, Sean and their sons, who were obviously done with breakfast, Prez sniggered, "Let's get some showers going."

Troy and Sean clasped hands and started for the staircase. Jimmy and Scott stood and followed their dad and pop. Noticing that there was no one his age indoors and most of the kids were still eating, Billy hummed uncertainly. Standing and going to Billy, Corey smiled, "It's you and me, bro."

Vigorously shaking his head, Billy asked, "What about Drew?"

"He's busy with Leo, and we're only showering," Corey reminded the newbie Rimmer son. Taking Billy's hand and starting for the stairs, Corey then mischievously cackled, "Who knows, I might get to take two showers this morning."

Billy giggled, "The second much more fun than the first."

Looking down at the other boys on the floor, Prez reminded, "There's a big shower and a bigger tub in the master bathroom. Little dudes get the big tub, four or five at a time, easily."

Since Stephen was finished with his milkshake, John prompted Wade and Frankie for a family shower. The four of them got up and started for the staircase. Stephen silently reminded, *'John, I've never been naked with you and not gotten stiff.'*

'It's perfect for our boys,' John immediately replied. *'We won't make love, but they will see that we're in love and that we love them too.'*

'Are you sure this is good for them?' Stephen worried.

Frankie smirked, *'Com'on, pop. You can't really think me or Wade care about seeing you and dad stiff. I've been your son for twelve days, including the week at Archmania, and today's the first time I've seen you naked.'*

Wade wondered, *'Why won't you take your clothes off, poppa?'*

Stephen sighed then told his boys the truth. *'Because I'm a year older than daddy, but shorter and thinner than him and lots of other boys. I'm the same age as Corey and Billy, but Corey's about six inches taller than me. Billy's about four inches taller than I am.'*

Frankie reminded, *'You've been naked since we woke and nobody said a word about your height, weight, or your dick, did they?'*

'It's okay, poppa,' Wade silently assured, *'Grammy thinks you're*

still gonna be big, like your daddy.'

At the top of the stairs, Stephen came to an abrupt halt and faced his sons, squealing, "Did she really say that?"

Shaking his head, Wade giggled, "She thought it though."

Covering his mouth, Frankie softly chortled, "Poppa, you're gonna be big and tall too!"

Watching Stephen's jaw drop as he got Frankie's meaning, John helplessly sputtered then loudly laughed, "YIPPEE! LUCKY ME!"

Fiercely blushing, Stephen squinted at John. Giggling their little butts off, Frankie led Wade up the remaining steps, past their dads and into the master bedroom. Stephen smirked, "I have got to teach my mother to be careful what she thinks of around our family."

Leading Stephen toward the shower, John smiled, "She loved your father for a lot more than his height and his dick. He was a lot like you, from what I've gathered. You're the best parts of your mom and your dad. Even when they decided not to marry, he stuck around for a long time, until school and work led him out of the ROH, to Japan, as far as your mom knows. She's not hiding anything from you, baby."

"I know," Stephen sighed. "I can't help wishing he'd been around, ya know?"

Pointing toward the master bathroom, John nodded and softly said, "What we're going to do is right in there. Those boys are ours. They need to know that we're in love and love them. Letting them see our bones is really nothing to worry about. I'd be surprised if we didn't see them with little bones, from fathers washing sons and each other, and brothers washing each other and us too. We just slightly

limit them touching our bones, and when they want to know why, we explain that to them. It's just a little restraint, ya know?"

"We're the grownups," Stephen smiled, and then placed a tender kiss on John's mouth. Taking John's hand, Stephen led the way into the master bathroom and into the shower, where water was already running and their two sons were already giggling.

Soon after John and Stephen entered the shower, Kaleo and Tory came upstairs with their brood of five California orphanage boys. Entering the bathroom, Kaleo loudly said, "It's just us, dudes. We're gonna see if all five of our sons can squeeze into the tub at once."

Tory chuckled, "We're gonna hang in here until they're done, to make sure they're safe. By that time, you guys will be done, and then Kaleo and I can jump in the shower real quick." Seeing the whirlpool tub, Tory gasped, "Holy shit! This tub is huge!"

"Six little guys could easily fit in this tub," Kaleo sniggered.

Over the sound of the shower and the tub water faucet, John suggested, "We'll take over watching your kids when we're done too."

Frankie giggled, "Bet you they won't ever fall down," and then rose off the floor squealing, "Daddy!"

John sniggered, "Why should Wade bend down to wash your legs, feet and toes?" Wade lost it and cracked up. Giggling insanely, Stephen braced his youngest son before the boy slipped. Peeking over the top of the shower doors, Frankie waved at Kaleo and Tory. Softly chuckling, Kaleo and Tory waved back. John levitated a bottle of shampoo up to Frankie, and instructed his eldest to wash his hair while he floated.

Climbing into the whirlpool tub with his brothers, Stan smiled at two of his younger brothers that were staring at his dick. Realizing he was being watched, the youngest of the five, Marv, asked, "Wha's wrong, big bro? Why's your dick like that?"

Shrugging, Stan giggled, "Like what?"

Marv hummed, then muttered, "I never seen it like that. It's big, pointing up, and now I can see the head."

Relieving Stan of answering the question, Tory smiled, "It's because he's very happy to be bathing with his brothers. Stan's the oldest of you, so when he's really happy, it shows."

The next youngest boy, Mark worried, "It looks like it hurts."

Desperately trying to maintain, Kaleo softly chortled, "It don't hurt. Remember what me and poppa told you about foreskin? Marv and Leonard had theirs removed as babies." Pointing at Stan, Mark and Russ, Kaleo smiled, "You three still have skin. When you get older and happy too, your skin will stretch like that too."

To prove the point, Tory stood at the side of the tub, reached down and pulled the skin back on his dick. Tory said, "Now I look just like Leonard and Marv and all circumcised boys." All five of his sons agreed. Standing in the tub, Mark and Russ did the same as their pop, and a little more, proving to their brothers that the foreskin stretched in both directions very easily and it didn't hurt a bit.

Hearing Kaleo explaining the differences to his sons made Stephen's life infinity simpler bathing Wade's little uncut unit. All Stephen had to do was check that the boy was keeping it clean after going to the bathroom. At least Wade's birth father had instructed his son properly about that necessity.

Outside, on the beach, Leo had finished his horror story. He had all his new friends, cousins, dad and uncle surrounding him, to help him understand that nothing like that would ever happen again. Doc Wiener, Keith and Drew said that New York and Los Angeles experienced societal breakdowns which hadn't occurred in many other cities, in the US and around the world. Silent tears flowed down the faces of Dee, Gage, Kenny and Sammy. The words those four couldn't speak erupted in torrents of vulgar bitterness from Jason Mullins, Ben and Jonah. They expressed their disgust that so many good parents were taken when each of them had lived hellish existences.

As soon as Keith knew which address to have investigated, he silently instructed Alden to get Kekoa to assign a strike team to examine the Scott's house, gather evidence and above all, make certain that the corpses of Mr. and Mrs. Scott were respectfully cared for. Kekoa told Keith that he would pull his own team, and accompany Assault Team Alpha to Central Los Angeles. To begin investigations into all of their Battle Of Earth kids, Keith asked to speak with the Pacific Rim Division's new Founder representatives and interfaces to Ark.

Into Keith's sub-vocal, a new teenage male voice said, "Hi Keith. I'm Damon Praefectus."

"And I'm Ian Praefectus," a younger pre-teen voice offered. "Alden's already filled us in on what's happening."

Damon assured, "We're sending the personnel files of our Battle Of Earth rescued to Ark now. Since there were power outages affecting many street cameras, we'll check any available satellite video. We'll pickup investigations of the rest of our newbies."

"Save the majority of your UNIT Detachment for military

situations," Ian instructed.

Damon added, "Leo's part of your family, so Kekoa can do his bit, and we'll handle the remaining investigations. It might take a day, maybe two, depending on how much actual legwork needs to be done."

Keith smiled, "Kewl, dudes. Hopefully we'll get the chance to meet face-to-face later today, but with almost a hundred more newbies on the way, I can only promise we'll try."

"Catch ya later," Damon and Ian chorused.

Knowing that Leo didn't need to hear gunfire, Keith went to Justin, asking that those on the security team who had phasers help to assist his rattled nephew. Soon the entire group of six were gathered near Doc Wiener and the boys. Several of the personal security around the beach fired phasers at targets provided by Alden. Various sized targets placed out on the rocks by the waterfall, some three hundred meters away, were quickly and easily vaporized by the trained UNIT security troops. Kites were used as moving targets and were disintegrated just as easily. Conner and Chuck were amongst the group. Drew specifically pointed them out to Leo, confidently stating that he, Corey and all the Core Rimmers were always safe with these kinds of friends around. Lastly, Keith and Drew proved that all the Core Rimmers had been trained and fired phasers at targets about one-hundred meters away. Two more targets turned to dust on the beach.

Opening up to share his story, Kenny didn't know what had happened to his parents, but that didn't make living through the New York City riots any easier. His parents went to work, but never came home Friday evening. If it weren't for two kind neighbors in their apartment building, Kenny and his brothers might still be waiting. The two men kept the boys safe and got them out of the city, only

telling them that the downtown area where both Hunnicutt adults worked was the hardest hit area of town. It was after six o'clock Friday night when the two adult men took the three distraught Hunnicutt brothers to the Meadowlands. By eight eastern time, the Hunnicutts were in Des Moines. And it was about an hour later when AJ, Corey, Drew and Jerry picked them up to go to Ewa Beach.

In a single day, lives were turned upside down and flipped around. Doc Wiener made sure the traumatized boys knew appropriate ways to voice any discomfort they might experience in coming days and weeks. It could be as simple as headaches or bellyaches or understandable worries, but the important thing was to let someone know what they were feeling. At that point, all Kenny and Leo wanted was their new families always close by, and the safety they always had had before Friday, November fifth, 2004. For almost an hour-and-a-half, Doc Wiener and the group of boys had strolled along the beach. Near the end of the session and the walk, Doc Wiener's comm-badge chirped.

Carl Seibert asked, "Where are you, Randy?"

"At Kaho'olawe, chatting with two brave young men," Doc Wiener answered. The other boys agreed with the Doc's assessment and poured praise upon Leo and Kenny.

Carl heard all the boys and waited for them to finish before telling Doc Wiener, "I'm at the dining room, with the other parents and our Clan. Some of the other boys rescued Friday are having troubles too. Near me are Fred Eckhart, Travis McAuley, Craig Nash, Nate Ramos, Chris Stokley and Jay Montigua. They've told us that Raphael Montigua, Phil Nash, Sal and Rickie Ramos, Chauncey Eckhart and the Stoeher twins had a rough night."

Off to the side, Keith tapped his sub-vocal, telling Alden to

share this information with the other Core Rimmers and the personal security around the beach house. Alden replied, "I already have, Keith. Everyone in the house is hurrying to get back to Ewa Beach."

Doc Wiener told Carl, "I need a comfortable place to talk with all the boys rescued Friday."

Travis said, "We're all in dorm three. How about the common room there?"

"That's a good idea," Doc Wiener replied, and then instructed. "Gather all the rescued boys from Friday into that room, even those who haven't had nightmares, Carl. I'll be there in a minute or two."

Keith loudly said, "A lot of us Core Rimmers will be there too, Uncle Carl. We'll bring the Steib quadruplets along."

"Good, Keith," Carl replied, and added "Many of the parents will be there as well. Carl, out."

Glancing at Leo and Kenny, Doc Wiener grinned, "As you've heard, what you boys are feeling is completely normal given the circumstances." He reminded, "On Friday you were victims. What are you now?"

"Survivors," Leo and Kenny responded.

Nodding, Doc Wiener assured, "No matter what you did or didn't do, it was all appropriate and necessary, or you wouldn't be standing here now." He then asked, "If you feel anything at all, who do you talk to?"

Grinning at the group around him, Kenny answered, "First our friends, and then our dads..."

"And our leaders, and then you," Leo finished. "The important thing is to talk about it."

"Perfect!" Doc Wiener cheered, and then locked eyes with Keith.

"Go ahead, Doc," Keith smiled, "I'll take care of this group, get 'em home and get 'em fed. Drew and I will probably be the last of the Core Rimmers to join you at dorm three."

"I'll see you there," Doc Wiener softly said. He then told the gathered boys, "Have a better day and I'll see you soon." All the boys either waved or said goodbye to Doc Wiener, who then tapped his comm-badge and transported to Ewa Beach dormitory three's first floor common room.

"Okay, dudes," Keith clearly told the boys, "let's get back to the house, and get showered, dressed and back to our home base. Once there, all of us are going to eat breakfast before we do anything else." Leading the way, Keith jogged toward the house.

"I'm going directly into the bathroom," Drew grinned. The other boys began giggling. Purposefully, to lighten the serious mood the boys were in, Drew chuckled, "I woke with a major piss hard-on and have to drain the lizard." Cracking up, many of the boys agreed they had the same priority.

Through his loud laughter, Leo couldn't agree or disagree, but he did need to go too. Leo's real father might have admitted needing to relieve himself, but definitely not the way his new dad just did. For Leo, it was great to be around all these kewl dudes that simply stated what was the truth. It seemed nothing was ever held back. Keith flung open the screen door and they filed inside. Drew, Leo and Kenny made it to the ground floor's bathroom first.

Hurrying through the house, Keith found the place bustling with activity. Kaleo, Tory and their boys were in the living room getting dressed. Pulling up his boxers, Kaleo quickly told Keith, "John and Stephen have already left with their boys."

Half in his shirt, Tory giggled, "What was a relaxing bath time suddenly went into overdrive."

Heading for the stairs behind Jason, Ben, Sammy, Gage and Jonah, Keith paused and wondered, "Where's Prez?"

"Heading for a shower with Derrick and Mike," Kaleo answered.

Already climbing steps two-at-a-time, Keith heard Tory cackle, "The master bathroom's shower and tub are huge. Eight of us teens could fit in that shower easily. With a shower head on each of the three walls, it's like a mini mob shower, like our dorms."

Coming downstairs with Billy while Keith was going up, Corey asked, "Where's Drew and Leo?"

"Takin' a leak," Keith quickly replied. Ben, Sammy, Jonah and Gage went directly to the first available toilet. Keith entered the master bedroom and heard loud chatter from the bathroom. Stepping inside and going directly to the toilet, Keith found Richie, Dillon, Geoff, Shaun and Mike Hunnicutt in the tub. Opening the shower door, Keith discovered Prez, Mike, Derrick, AJ and Jerry. Joining the group, Keith chuckled, "Kind o' reminds me of gym class."

"Just don't drop the soap," Prez sniggered.

Derrick smiled, "Mike did. Unlike gym class, four hands goosed his ass when he bent over."

"Horny bastards!" Mike laughed, "I almost cracked my skull on the wall!" Evil snickering erupted from AJ, Derrick and Prez.

Jerry grinned, "It's a nice muscular butt."

"I've heard that, yeah," Mike sniggered.

"You and Prez have to get those DNA scans done," AJ told Jerry, and pointed out the two lower red-heads to Keith.

Other than foreskin on Jerry's meat, Keith noticed they were in fact very similar in every other respect. Keith nodded, "Yep, I think the theory of relativity applies."

Scrubbing his pits, Jerry sighed, "Because I moved here as a baby, and my folks died before I turned five, I just don't know much of anything. I can't even tell Prez what American State we came from."

Prez assured, "We'll have a Doc check it out for us, Jerry. For now, we're brothers; that's more important than anything else from our heritage."

Keith asked, "When we get back, what's the plan?"

Derrick answered, "We split up. Corey and Drew have their own needs with Leo. AJ, Jerry and the Hunnicutts can go to the pools. Kaleo, Tory and their boys will check with the kids at the playground. Before John left, he told Reyes to be with him at the dorm three common room, doing their empath thing. Reyes is showering in one of the other bathrooms. Once he's dressed, he's there."

Keith offered, "Drew and I can cover the dining room and CIC rec room. All of us that were out with Leo need to eat as soon as we

get back home."

Finishing up his shower, Prez shared, "That leaves me, Derrick and Mike to join the dudes at dorm three." He stepped out of the shower, and was followed out by Mike, Derrick, Jerry and AJ. While the door was still open, Drew, Leo, Gage, Jonah, Sammy and Ben stepped in with Keith. Kenny paused to say a few words to his new pop.

"Every other bathroom is filled, bro," Drew simply stated.

Wetting down under a shower spray, Sammy said, "Kaleo's left with his family, dad." He grabbed a bar of soap and started washing Ben's chest. Seeing his new boyfriend wearing a goofy grin, Sammy cheekily smiled at Ben.

Jonah shared, "Reyes was just getting out of the shower. Sung and Kawazoe jumped in that tub."

Meanwhile, Kenny gestured for his pop to lean down so he could share something. When Jerry leaned over, Kenny whispered, "I told Doc Wiener what happened to us. There's a meeting of other Battle Of Earth kids goin' on. I don't think Shaun and Mike need to go, especially so soon after Leo's nightmare."

Jerry locked eyes with his eldest son, then softly asked, "How do you think we should deal with it then?"

"I heard the same stuff that Leo did," Kenny whispered. "If it happens, we deal as a family, and I tell them what I learned."

Standing up again, Jerry nodded and smiled, "You're an awesome big brother. Go ahead and grab a quick shower, Kenny. We'll talk more later."

"Kewl, pop," Kenny proudly grinned, and slid the shower door open.

Outside the shower, giggling erupted when each of the five Core Rimmers who had just left the shower helped one of the five little dudes get out of the tub and towel dry. Geoff squealed, "That tickles, Unca Mike!" Drew helplessly sniggered. Leo giggled at his dad's expression and his little brother's laughter. In seconds, all five little boys were gleefully squeaking and the older boys drying them were evilly snickering. Moments later, Keith opened the shower door to step out, but had to yield to the five naked, partially dried, rug rats running by.

Over the next fifteen minutes, Troy and Sean transported back to Ewa Beach with their sons; then AJ and Jerry left with their boys, followed by Corey, Drew and their three boys. The last group remaining made sure the house was relatively clean and had Alden confirm there were no stragglers anywhere in the house. They went outside. Prez and Keith told the teams of personal security that they were ready to leave.

Stopping before his own four brothers and the four Steib brothers, Derrick squatted down and smiled, "Right after we get done with Doc Wiener, we're going to find my mom and dad and tell them how it is. Tonight, the Steibs are part of the Seibert family."

Kelly, Lawrence, Matthew and Nicholas all giggled, "Kewl, bro."

Sung firmly told Derrick, "Us four are going with our new brothers and you, bro."

Nodding, Kawazoe emphasized, "We've got to be with them, so we know what happened and can help make it better." Chad and

Herbert nodded agreement, making it clear Derrick had no choice.

Standing up again, Derrick nodded, "If everybody's ready, we're outta here."

Jonah cheekily smiled, "Pop, I'm stayin' with Gage."

Mike chuckled at his son's expression, and then asked Ben, "You're with Sammy?"

"Course!" Ben giggled, causing all the boys to break into giggles.

Without further ado, Mike, Derrick and their group of eight transported to dorm three's common room. Moments later, Keith and Prez took their boys and their boyfriends home, to the CIC's dining room, so they could grab some breakfast. The remaining security checked with Alden to make sure the beach house was empty then they left for Ewa Beach.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, C.S.P.R.D. Dining Room

Sunday, November 7, 2004, 9:27AM HTZ

Immediately upon arrival, Ben, Sammy, Jonah and Gage went to the kitchen chow line. Dee went over to the table where Leo was sitting with his new family. Since he'd already eaten, Prez told Keith, "I'll start making the rounds, beginning in the rec room, T'hy'la."

Nodding, Keith assured, "I'll catch up with you, baby." They kissed and separated. Keith called Dee and then they joined the boys in the kitchen chow line.

Richie took Prez's hand. Heading for the rec room, Prez grinned

down, promising, "Keep it up, Richie. You're going to be a great Core Rimmer one day."

"I kinda already am, Poppa," Richie giggled. "So are Dee, Gage and Sammy, and Geoff, Lenny, Dillon, Jonah and Randy. In a couple o' days, all the new dudes 'dopted yesterday will be too."

Prez checked, "Kids are going to you guys asking about stuff?"

Richie nodded, "All kinds o' stuff, even asking us about our daddies and poppas. It was weird last week, but now, I kinda expect it, at least once a day."

On the wall between the two sets of double doors leading into the rec room, Prez noticed six additional double-wide doorways. They looked like normal doorways would, except the center area appeared silvery, almost like a semi-liquid fixture. All six had lit marquee-style signs above them. Two were marked as 'INCOMING'. The third was labeled as LAS VEGAS. The fourth was displaying DES MOINES; and the final two were marked as 'OUTGOING'. Pausing a moment, Prez called, "Alden, are these what I think they are?"

Alden giggled, "Only if you're thinking they're dimensional doors. They were installed last night."

"What about the one to Des Moines, and the other to Vegas?" Prez wondered.

"That's just the last destinations used, Prez," Alden answered. "Carrol and Terrance came here from Vegas for Richie Telford. A little while later, Ronnie went to Des Moines to be with Garrett and the double-twins. Those are the first and only uses of the doors so far. Any kid with a comm-badge is authorized to go certain places, like where friends are and where school is. They work as master-slave pairs, partly to remove the possibility of traffic jams. Kids just tell the

door where they want to go. The silvery facade connects to the distant end, a room thousands of miles away, and kids walk through like any other doorway. There are three more in the Command Center, boss. One is fixed for emergency evacuation to the Ark Compound. Another is fixed to Orlando Clan Headquarters. The third is 'dialable' to other divisions' Command Centers. If they had been installed for Thursday night's craziness, we would've had Core Rimmers hither and yon."

Entering the rec room, Prez noticed there were more kids than usual, considering the time of day. Sixteen-year-old Peter Dano, one of the first group of street prostitutes, loudly called, "Welcome back, Prez."

"Hey, Pete," Prez smiled, and then wondered, "What's happening here? Why are so many inside?"

"It rained last night," Pete answered. "It's still cloudy and cool outside."

Roy smiled, "Some of us went over to the pools, but it's just not a pool day, so far."

Pete softly sniggered, "Without the sun, it's major shrinkage, bro." Roy, Prez and Richie nodded understandingly and softly chuckled.

Approaching Prez from the far side of the room, one of the newly assigned dorm leaders, Nell Deckert said, "Some of us decided to stay here in the rec room. A lot decided to go to their dorm rooms to watch TV, or check out the Internet. It's shaping up into that sort of lazy Sunday, unless the clouds break."

"Oh, well that'll make passing out comm-badges pretty easy,"

Prez chortled.

"That's been done too, Prez," Nell grinned. Pointing out the comm-badges pinned to their shirts, Pete and Roy also grinned. "During breakfast we got them distributed," Nell giggled. "Last night, me, Mollie, Horacio and Sonia talked about it, then we asked Alden if our plan was kewl. So, everybody got a comm-badge with breakfast, adults and kids. All they had to do is tap it, identify themselves to Alden, and it was done."

Walking into the room with Sonia at his side, Horacio said, "Only the boys that were with you at the beach house still need comm-badges, Prez."

"Excellent!" Prez cheered. He smiled at the subset of dorm leaders, saying, "The weather at Kaho'olawe was sunny and clear. Gather the rest of your team mates and take the afternoon off there."

Sonia giggled, "We haven't done much of anything, Prez."

"Yes, you did," Prez grinned. "You thought of what was planned and relieved us of another task. Since school's starting tomorrow, take the rest of the day off. It may be a week before I can do this again, so take a break. The beach house is a lot like the single family homes here. There's surfboards, a replicator for munchies, five bedrooms upstairs, a smaller bedroom on the ground floor, and the basement is set up like a night club with a gaming room on one side. We brought our sons and some brothers, so grab a group of friends and go have fun." He tapped his comm-badge and called, "Matt, are you awake, dude?"

Over the comm-badge, Matt replied, "Have been for hours, Prez. What's up?"

"I'm sending the group of dorm leaders to Kaho'olawe," Prez

grinned. "Since some people worked through the night, grab a group of security guys to go back to Kaho'olawe. I'll see all you guys back here for dinner or soon thereafter."

Matt chuckled, "We're on our way. Matt out."

With an open palm, Prez gestured to the door.

Nell grabbed Pete and Mollie took Roy's hand, then they hurried to gather another crew of kids. Following the group to the door, Sonia smirked, "It's funny, Prez specifically mentioned bedrooms." Mischievously flashing his eyes at his girlfriend, Horacio swiftly swept Sonia up off the floor and into his arms. Holding on tightly, Sonia loudly cackled, "HORACIO-O-O!" Appearing as a newlywed couple, they exited the rec room, to the laughter of the other kids.

"You're so bad, Poppa," Richie giggled.

Smiling down at his boy, Prez bounced his eyebrows, saying, "It's a team building tactic. Some teams are much closer than others, ya know?" Rapidly nodding, Richie laughed his ass off. Widely smiling, Prez asked, "You don't believe me?"

"I do!" Richie cackled.

Prez sniggered, "Good, I thought I was going to have to count down." Holding out his hand for Richie to take, Prez suggested, "Let's start walking around the dorms."

Out in the dining room, Keith was finishing up his late breakfast. Dee, Gage, Jonah, Ben and Sammy were gathered around the same table, with milkshake glasses before them. At the next table sat Drew, Corey, Geoff, Lenny and Leo. With their four sons, Sean and Troy came in the dining room from outside. Walking up to the tables where their teammates were sitting, Sean loudly shivered,

"BRRR! I don't think it's even seventy degrees out there."

"The wind is what's really making it feel cool," Troy added.

Watching Jason leave the family group and head directly toward Leo, Billy grinned, "Try Michigan in the late fall, Pop."

"New Jersey was cold enough," Troy chuckled, and pulled his eldest son close. Seeing Prez and Richie approaching, Troy said, "Everyone's hiding indoors today, Prez." Richie let go of his pop's hand and scampered directly to Jimmy. The two little boys hugged each other like they'd been separated for days.

"I heard," Prez answered, and then added, "I just sent the dorm leaders to Kaho'olawe for the day, since they've already handled passing out comm-badges. We've got very little to do until the newbies show up, so I thought I'd just stroll around the dorms, to let everyone know we're back home, and to see if anyone needs anything. Would anyone care to join me?"

Troy smiled, "I need to find my mom and tell her she's a grandmother of four." Having found the pool area deserted, AJ and Jerry came into the CIC with their three sons.

"We'd better find Doc Howard first, Lover," Sean giggled. "Mom will need to be revived and given her Valium prescription."

"You're prob'ly right," Troy sniggered. Once they checked with their already mingling four sons, Troy and Sean left the dining room to accomplish their mission.

Keith nodded, "Just let me take my stuff to the dishwasher, baby." He stood and began placing everything on his tray.

Mike and Derrick walked in with Dillon and Randy. Mike

smirked, "John told us to leave dorm three's common room. The older dudes supposedly felt uncomfortable with us there."

"The room was packed anyway," Derrick shrugged. "All our parents are there, plus John, Reyes, Relud and Inoyra, and all twenty-seven kids from Friday, and their friends and boyfriends too, of course."

Mike huffed, "Part of me thinks we should go right back there. They've gotta know any of us would be as freaked as they are." While Mike was speaking, Kaleo, Tory and their five boys walked into the dining room.

Finished with his breakfast, Drew said, "I'm sure they do know that. Other than each of us saying that, what more could we contribute? We can offer shoulders to cry on, but that's about it."

Since no one else was saying anything, Prez sighed, "Drew's right. Another thing to consider is that group building bonds, amongst themselves, with their friends, boyfriends and our parents too. This is only their second day here. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the original eighty-seven took three days to be comfortable enough to move into dorm one. The street kids from Monday and Tuesday night took a few days getting situated and comfy too." He pointed toward the rec room, grinning, "Now there are a mix of all those kids, and Latin Kings, and the level one orphans in there."

Returning from the kitchen, Keith smiled, "Handfuls of those first rescues are now Core Rimmers and dorm leaders. Something's happening that we didn't intend, but it's working out pretty good, over all. In less than a week, the kids built bonds. Everybody's discovering what they're capable of doing, and most comfortable doing. Christian Beresford is back at the dishwasher, for the third day. According to

Miguel, he's showing interest in becoming a chef."

Kaleo grinned, "Now think of the newbies we're about to get. Almost a hundred kids will be just like the rest of us in a few days. They'll be together, with similar histories, living in dorms over at the Oneula Beach base. They'll mingle and mix with other kids here and with other newbies we'll likely get over the course of the next week. Then we'll have other kids taking the odd jobs, a couple more dorm leaders and maybe others might want to become Core Rimmers."

"Which reminds me," Tory quickly said, "we started with less than a hundred and had eight Core Rimmers. Four of us over there at Oneula Beach doesn't seem like enough."

Corey suggested, "What about Sean and Troy? They've gone to tell Judy she's a grandmother. It's a fair bet that they'll need a place for their family."

"That sounds like a good plan," Derrick smiled, "assuming kids want to move into dorms."

Prez nodded, "Just like everyone else, we can get them started on the right foot with a nest." Facing Kaleo, Tory, Jerry and AJ, Prez suggested, "Since we have the time, you four dudes prepare to move out of the dorms here and into townhouses at Oneula. Be back by lunch time and ready for the newbies. While you're doing that, the rest of us will wander around dorms and check on the rest of the Clan."

When the Core Rimmers agreed, Billy giggled, "Me and Jason just moved into the dorm Friday night. We only spent that one night there."

Jerry grinned, "Have Alden help you pack. Your dad and pop will be along soon to help."

Keith told Kaleo, Tory, AJ and Jerry, "When you get to the townhouse, you'll have everything you need except food and household items. Have Alden get the place stocked up, so you guys can at least have stuff to snack on and drink there. Make it your home, dudes."

Stan frowned, "Us kids were just about to go play in the rec room, dad."

"That's fine," Kaleo smiled. "We'll get your stuff packed and moved."

Sean's and Troy's two youngest sons, Jimmy and Scott chimed, "What about us, Jerry?"

"Your stuff is still packed in suitcases," Jerry replied. "You guys can play and we'll get your stuff moved."

Jason asked Leo, "What do you want to do?"

"Spend time with my dad and pop," Leo quickly answered, and then wondered, "Don't you want to be with your dad's too?"

"Yeah, but only if that's kewl with you," Jason grinned. Standing up and sliding his chair under the table, Jason widely smiled, "See ya later?"

Rapidly nodding, Leo giggled, "I'll be here, dude."

Noticing that Leo now had two friends, Jason and Kenny, constantly fawning over him, Drew helplessly sniggered, "All the Core Rimmers and all our sons will be down in the store together, with our newbies after lunch. We'll see each other again soon, dudes."

Kaleo, Tory, AJ, Jerry, the three Hunnicutts, Billy and Jason

turned and left the CIC. Dee, Richie, Dillon, Randy, Geoff, Lenny, Scott, Jimmy and all five of Kaleo's and Tory's sons hurried across the dining room for the rec room. As soon as most of the group had left the area, Corey burst into giggles. Sammy, Ben, Gage and Jonah softly chortled.

Seeing his dad and pop, and the other four Core Rimmers, and the four sons all widely grinning, Leo wondered, "What's the joke? Did I miss something?" Corey lost it and howled laughing.

Going to his eldest son, Drew offered his hands, and Leo took them then stood. Wrapping Leo in a hug, Drew softly chuckled, "Kenny and Jason would turn the round world into a spinning diamond if it made you happy."

Loudly gasping, Leo glanced around at his remaining friends. When they nodded, he looked at the other Core Rimmers and saw them slowly nodding. Still holding onto his dad, Leo whimpered then locked eyes with Drew, softly wondering, "What am I gonna do?" Beginning to hiccup, Corey parked his ass in the chair Leo had been sitting in.

Shrugging, Drew smiled, "What do you want to do, Leo? Do you want a boyfriend?"

After thinking for a few moments, Leo giggled, "Yeah, I think so, but... ya know... two? I've only been here a little more than a day! What did I do to deserve two?"

Scratching his jaw as if the answers required thought, Derrick offered, "You're sincere and compassionate..."

Corey loudly hiccuped.

"Curly long blond hair, emotionally expressive intense blue

eyes, and about as cute as humanly possible," Keith smiled.

Prez reminded, "And the way you woke us all this morning put the final touches on the picture. Most people want to be needed. This morning, you needed, so all your friends were there for you."

Watching Leo turn shades of Mikyvis purple, Mike chuckled, "Put all that together, and you'll have every unattached gay nine-year-old following your every step, Leo."

Twice in quick succession, Corey hiccuped again.

Turning a dozen shades of red, Leo hollered, "OMIGOD!" and hid his face on his dad's chest.

After checking with one another, Ben, Sammy, Jonah and Gage disjointedly laughed, "You're making it worse, Leo!" Corey howled laughing and hiccuped again.

Reaching for Keith's hand, Prez softly chuckled, "Were we like that at nine?"

Taking Prez's hand and starting for the exit, Keith shrugged, "You were far worse, to me anyway."

Mike and Derrick followed their friends out of the CIC, softly teasing Prez, reminding him that he did often seem much more shy and reserved at the time. Prez defended himself, reminding his husband and friends that appearances and blushes didn't stop him from participating in every new sexual experience they all shared.

Still embracing Leo, who was sufficiently embarrassed enough, Drew tried to get his husband to stop hiccuping, instructing, "Three deep breaths and hold it, angel." While Corey got his hiccups under control, Drew had Alden deliver enough comm-badges for all the

Rimmer sons still in the CIC.

Sixteen communications devices appeared on the table where Sammy, Ben, Gage and Jonah were sitting. Over the room's ceiling speakers, Alden instructed, "Pin it to your shirt and give it a tap then state your names, guys, and I'll assign them to each of you." The four boys each picked up a comm-badge and followed Alden's instructions. Drew pinned one onto Leo's shirt. Still a little flushed, Leo tapped it and stated his full name. By this time, Corey had pretty much stopped laughing and hiccuping, but his face was still very red. He picked up a handful of comm-badges and Drew took the remainder. They then walked with Leo into the rec room to hand out comm-badges to the other Rimmer sons hanging out in there.

Finishing their milkshakes, Sammy and Gage decided to follow Ben and Jonah to the Gibbons' house, where the later two would practice guitar for twenty or thirty minutes. After that, Sammy would show Ben the bedroom he shared with Dee. Jonah would show Gage the bedroom that he shared with Reyes.

While in the rec room passing out comm-badges, a large group of boys and girls surrounded Drew and Corey, all wanting to be introduced to Leo. Corey and Drew didn't think anything of it and began introducing Leo to those kids and the others in the room that hadn't directly asked to be introduced. Thirty-something names later, Leo's head was practically spinning off his shoulders. As they were leaving the room, Leo softly asked his dad and pop, "How can you remember all those kids?"

Corey shrugged, "It took the first day or two to get names associated with faces and personalities. If you think you're straight, Earleen and Noreen Maygar are interested."

"Omigod," Leo bashfully muttered.

Drew huffed, "Corey!"

"What?" Corey giggled, "They walked away giggling! We know the reason why."

Shaking his head, Drew smiled, "These kids were about as shy as you those first days, Leo. Now they see a new face and want to meet him. I know for certain that Aaron Farris and Stephen Wickes, and Aki and Hajime are gay couples, so it's not like they're treating you any differently than anyone else. You're getting recognized a little more because you're with me and Corey."

Crossing the dining room, Corey seriously asked, "Didn't you have friends in LA?"

Nodding, Leo said, "Sure, a couple, but none that were more than friends. Now I've got a bunch of cousins who are my friends, and two others that would like to be my boyfriend, and two girls... I just don't know... how to act... or why things are happening the way they are."

Walking out of the CIC, Corey smiled, "Remember what we talked about in the store, Leo?"

"Sure I do. That was awesome, Pop. I never knew how to tell... ya know, my real parents how I was feeling. Now I do, but it's still so weird."

Following the path to dorm one, Drew sighed, "You're adjusting, Leo. Don't rush it, okay? All you need to do is take it all in, just like every other kid here has, and the newbies still are. There's really nothing to worry about. As for your real parents, I'll bet they knew how you felt without being told. My folks knew about me,

Keith and Prez too. We can feel how much you loved them, and how much they loved you, without John's N-Gen empathy or telepathy. It might also be that they're watching over you, like you dreamed and asked them to do. You were a happy family and they want you to stay happy."

"Just like all your other friends in LA, you'll make new friends here," Corey assured. "Like I told you, me and your dad were friends for years before we started hugging and kissing. Look at Sammy with Ben, and Gage with Jonah; they're doing the same stuff they were doing all week, just as partners in a group now. I don't see anything seriously sexual happening with either couple for a while. They'll be a lot like me and dad were when we were their ages, holding hands, hugging and kissing, and getting silly because boys dicks have minds of their own."

Stopping outside the doors to dorm one, Drew reminded, "Eventually, Jason and Kenny will realize that they're both trying to get your undivided attention. What you need to do is tell them where you're at. So, tell us where you're at, like you might tell them."

Scowling, Leo blinked, "I like them, a lot, but not like boyfriends. We just met and got friendly. Neither is special right now, like a boyfriend should be."

"That's perfectly kewl too," Corey quickly said. "That'll tell them to slow down or look for a boyfriend elsewhere. If you say that to both of them, with the same caring in your voice, they'll understand perfectly. Then it's their choice to grow a friendship with you or move on without you."

Drew nodded, "The Hunnicutts arrived here with you. Jason got here the day before. You're all in the same age bracket too, so it should be kewl with them to be your friend, for as long as it takes for

real deep feelings to grow."

"Love conquers all," Leo softly muttered, remembering what his parents always said.

Knowing why Leo said that, Corey and Drew nodded and chorused, "Yeah."

Drew reached for the door into dormitory one and opened it. Corey started to walk in when Leo checked his shorts pockets. Leo loudly gasped then whined, "Where is it?"

Spinning around in the doorway, Corey asked, "Where is what?"

Beginning to shed tears, Leo cried, "My iPod Nano! I came here with it, I know I did! My parents gave me that for my last birthday. Everywhere we went... everywhere I went, it was in my pocket. Where did I leave..."

"It fell out of your pocket Friday night, while you were getting tickled," Drew quickly and loudly interrupted, and embraced his freaked out boy. Hurrying over, Corey went to his son, effectively sandwiching him. Over Leo's weeping, Drew said, "I picked it up, got you the charger and put it in an end table in our basement."

Shaking like a leaf, Leo hugged his new dad tightly, crying, "Really? Omigod! I thought it was lost and gone forever. Can we go get it now, please, dad?"

"Sure we can," Drew softly assured, and planted a kiss on his boy's forehead. Pulling back just far enough to look into Leo's eyes, Drew pleaded, "Just slow down and take it easy for me, okay? It scares us when you get scared, ya know?"

Wiping his eyes and nodding, Leo forced a small grin,

promising, "I'll be fine, as soon as I see it and have it, dad."

Panting nervously as the Leo sandwich broke apart, Corey huffed, "It's safe, Leo. We're a family now, lookin' after each other and all these important things."

"It's so important too, pop," Leo shared. "My last birthday, it was the one major thing I asked for. It went every place with me." They started walking towards the house. Leo nervously giggled, "Picture it, a couple o' times my dad worked late, so my mom took me grocery shopping. A real fun place for me to be, right?"

Drew chuckled, "Yeah, real fun."

"Like sitting in a dentist's chair," Corey sniggered.

Nodding, Leo smiled, "So the ear-buds are in my ears and I'm pushing the cart. Every now and then, I realize my mom is speaking. I take an ear-bud out, wondering, 'What's that, ma? Were you talking to me?' As if she was talking to herself! She'd roll her eyes and giggle. I'd crack up and stuff the ear-bud back in my ear. Every trip to school on the bus, I'd be listening to tunes. It was a two hour trip into the mountains. Twice last summer we went up to Big Bear. All the way there and all the way back, I'm chillin' in the backseat, listening to my music, not theirs. A lot of really kewl memories are in that little iPod."

"That's what makes it special," Corey simply stated.

Glancing over at his son, Drew smiled, "Understand something that we already do, Leo; we're your dad and pop now, but we know you had parents, very good parents. We're not trying to replace them and won't ever try. What matters now is that we started loving you at the Wells Fargo Arena."

"Why?" Leo wondered.

Corey shrugged, "It's you, Leo; it's in your eyes, in your expressions, in the way you hold yourself and walk. While I was still on the ground with your brothers, you had given Grandma Morrison your trust, and easily transferred it to our little family. You need what you've always had, and we can easily give that to you."

Drew asked, "In the dining room, when Corey was cracking up over the boys that like you, what did you really think?"

Leo giggled, "I was confused, but Pop was obviously having fun, so it was all good."

Drew asked, "Do you see what we mean?"

Shaking his head, Leo admitted, "I don't think so."

Corey explained, "Another boy might have gone one way or the other, becoming very serious or angry because I was laughing, or becoming just as silly and forgetting all about the reasons why. Not you, Leo; you accepted both, what was going on around you and what was felt internally."

"That's why we started loving you and love you more now," Drew easily admitted. "You're serious, and you're fun; you're willing to goof around, and equally willing to share your deepest feelings, like this morning with Doc Wiener. In addition to a whole bunch of other memories, that iPod got you through a very rough night. Now we know why it was with you in the first place. All that is also why you made friends so easily yesterday, and why two boys in particular find you irresistible."

"Please don't call me that," Leo whined through giggles. Corey and Drew cracked up. Cradling his head with both arms, Leo couldn't

help himself; with both of his new fathers hysterical, he quickly found himself laughing along.

Still giggling, they stopped at the front door. Drew took an extra minute to program the door to allow Leo access. As soon as they stepped inside, they immediately smelled something sweet cooking. Drew loudly called, "Aunt Kathy?"

"We're in the kitchen, Drew," Kathleen Marr responded.

They started down the foyer to the kitchen, but were met halfway by Carmella, Renee, Dewi, Kokaku, and lastly Bruce. All five had flour sprinkled in their hair, on their faces and on their clothes. Carmella ran directly into Drew's waiting arms, loudly giggling, "We was makin' choco'chip cookies!"

Lifting his little sister, Drew chuckled, "I can tell."

Bruce grinned, "Aunt Kathy showed us how. We mixed the dough and she works the oven."

"And we eats 'em up!" Dewi and Kokaku proudly chimed, pushing Renee and Bruce into giggling fits.

Corey sniggered, "Did you leave any for us?"

"Lots!" All five mini-chefs cheerfully answered.

Spinning around, Bruce led the pack back into the kitchen. There they found a large tray containing piles of chocolate chip cookies on the dinette table. In the kitchen and wiping up a countertop, Aunt Kathy smiled, "On a damp, dreary day like this, cookies seemed like the best remedy."

Everybody helped themselves to a cookie, except Leo, who

softly prompted, "Dad?"

Still chewing, Drew nodded and gestured toward the basement door. Leo went there, opened it and went down stairs. Following his son, Drew swallowed then said, "It's all in the end table drawer, at the far wall, beyond the sofa, Leo."

Leo went and opened the only drawer. There was nothing else in there except his iPod, ear-buds and the plastic encased charger of a type that Leo had never seen before. It wasn't a cable to a computer, or an AC adapter, and it looked more like a case for the Nano, but the packaging read 'Apple iPod Nano Kinetic Charger'. Spinning on his heels, Leo smiled, "I thought I'd lost it somewhere in LA or Des Moines. Do you know what the word kinetic means, dad?"

"It means motion or movement," Drew answered, and then wondered, "Why?"

"I've never heard of a kinetic charger for any iPod before," Leo giggled.

Going over to his son, Drew asked, "Can I see it?" Nodding, Leo handed over the packaged charger and then pocketed his beloved iPod and ear-buds. Scowling, Drew read the package. It had an Apple logo on it, so it wasn't some off-brand crap that wouldn't work. Drew called, "Alden, is this charger something new?"

"It's very new," Alden giggled. "Thanks to our Clan's ties to Steve Jobs, we're getting to try out several new products for Apple. That's the first one anybody in the Clan has ever had the opportunity to try. The unit is a charger and a rubber water-proof case too, so it should keep your iPod safe from any sort of damage, Leo. Let your dad or me know how it works, and if it meets your needs and the hype on the package. Then we'll let Uncle Steve know if it's good for

release, or to go back to the drawing board."

Coming most of the way downstairs, Corey heard much of Alden's explanation. Sitting on a step, Corey said, "Later tonight, when we go back to our townhouse, we'll help you and your brothers set up the MacBooks you've got waiting for you."

Rapidly blinking, Leo giggled, "I've only ever used Windows machines."

Drew smiled, "Me and your pop are computer geeks. Did you notice the computers in our master bedroom?"

"Yup, four of 'em."

"Two are Linux desktops, one MacBook Pro, and one Windows desktop," Corey explained. "We develop stuff on the Linux machines, and the other two are for testing what we've developed."

Drew cheekily smiled, "The only time you'll hear me or pop cuss is over Microslouch Schwindows."

Leo giggled, "It's not that bad, is it?"

Handing the charger back to Leo, Drew shrugged, "No other operating system is as prone to viruses. No other operating system will crash because of a misbehaving application. The app will crash, but all the other running apps and the OS chug merrily onward, for weeks without a reboot."

"I guess I'll be learning a new computer," Leo smiled. "I'll also have to rebuild my iTunes library from scratch. First, I need to cut off this plastic packaging and try out the charger."

"There are scissors up in the kitchen," Drew said, and then

turned around. Corey stood and started back up the stairs, with Drew and Leo trailing behind. In moments, Corey had asked Aunt Kathy for scissors. Leo set about the task of opening the hermetically sealed package. Once it was open, he read the instructions and put his iPod Nano in the case. It only added a few millimeters of rubber around the small, gum pack sized unit. According to the instructions, it would only take a few minutes of walking for a completely discharged Nano to have enough of a charge for use, and as long as the user kept moving, the unit would continue to charge. Aunt Kathy removed a fresh batch of cookies from the oven, distracting Leo from further reading. Going over to the table where his dads and the other kids were sitting and pigging out on cooled chocolate chip cookies, Leo helped himself and thanked his dad for the charger.

* * * * *

AJ, Jerry and the three Hunnicutts transported from dorm one room eight to Oneula Beach townhouse number three's master bedroom. Jerry took the boys to their new bedrooms. Seeing his two little brothers thrilled with their new room, Kenny remained there to help them unpack. In no time, Shaun and Mike were paying more attention to the game station, television, stereo and computers in their room than to where their clothes were being stowed. Looking up at Jerry with an exasperated expression, Kenny sighed. Jerry sputtered and tried to hold his laughter to mere chuckles. Once the two youngest were set, Jerry led Kenny into the other room to help him unpack.

Kenny grinned, "I've got this, pop."

Nodding and flinging the suitcase onto a bed, Jerry warmly smiled, "I know you do. I just wanted to tell you how awesome you made me feel before, when you told me about the chat with Doc

Wiener, and how we should deal with Shaun and Mike."

Joining his pop at the bed and helping to open the suitcase, Kenny blushed and explained, "They didn't have nightmares Friday night or last night. Let's leave it alone until we need to talk to them about it. For at least a few nights, I'm sure I'll be sleeping in their room."

Taking the packages of white briefs from the suitcase and heading to the dresser, Jerry asked, "How do you feel about everything that's happening?"

Kenny sighed long and hard, then shared, "You and dad have been great since we met. I think the two men that helped us get out of New York City were a gay couple. Shaun and Mike made you and dad our fathers at Des Moines. Neither of you seemed the least bit bothered, but I have to wonder if you were bothered."

"Nope," Jerry quickly answered. "We were made Core Rimmers during dinner, about an hour before going to Des Moines. We knew we could adopt, but we really weren't thinking of adopting quite so fast. You, Mike and Shaun changed our minds. For you three, we want to be dads. It was automatic, kind of like how you're automatically their big bro. Until Friday night, my happiest day was the previous Friday, when I was rescued from bad foster parents. That was made even better when I arrived at a house and found Arnie there. I felt the same chills yesterday, when Prez announced the adoptions official. I really am very happy with all three of you, and our new family. Arnie's just as happy, Kenny."

Kenny smiled and wiped his eyes, softly admitting, "I thought we were really screwed when my parents didn't come home. I thought we'd never have a good place to live, or good parents again."

Seeing his boy struggling to be a grown man, Jerry turned and closed the door. He then went to Kenny and wrapped his arms around him. Burying his face in his new pop's belly, Kenny held on tightly to Jerry and sobbed. With tears welling in his eyes, Jerry promised, "We'll be the best parents we can be, I promise. Tell us what you need, Kenny. Whatever it takes, we'll make it happen. We're a family now. You're the big bro that needs to speak for your two little bros. We're the dads who will answer all the questions."

With his mouth mostly covered by Jerry's shirt, Kenny cried, "Why did my folks die? Why did Leo's folks die? Why did so many die Friday? Why... why did we get so lucky to find new parents the very same day? How can anything be so wrong and feel so right at the same time?" Kenny looked up for an answer. Instead, he found tears pouring down Jerry's cheeks. Kenny sniffled, and then wondered, "Why are you crying?"

Jerry shrugged, "I'm sad because you are, and because I don't have many answers to give you. I'll do my best to get the answers though. We'll find out what happened to your parents. The first chance I get, I'll talk to Prez and Keith. Arnie and I are here for you and your brothers, whenever you need us. Even tomorrow, when we're at school, we're still just a comm-badge tap away. We'll be a real family, I swear we will."

Nodding, Kenny wiped his eyes. He forced a small smile then said, "We are already, pop. I know I could call you by your name, but I really don't want to. I want you and dad, just like Shaun and Mike. This is our home. I want to come back here later. More than ever, I want to make something bad turn into something good. After spending the day at the beach house yesterday, I know that can happen, with you and dad and my brothers."

Jerry widely smiled, "My big boy was forced to be a young man

way before his time. From the moment we met, I saw you trying so hard to be a man for your brothers. You need to return to being only a brother again, just like you were yesterday, Ken. Watching you yesterday, I was so proud of you so many times. I'm more proud now, having my little man tell me what he needs and wants, for himself and for his brothers. We'll make this the very best family ever, I promise."

Matching his pop's smile, Kenny nodded, "I know it. Thanks for listening, pop." He stepped back and returned to unpacking his suitcase. Picking up packages of socks, Kenny smirked, "Will I ever get to wear these?"

Jerry chuckled, "December and January are usually pretty rainy and cool. When we picked out sneakers, you said that you liked to play basketball. Anytime you're wearing sneakers you'll need socks."

Ripping open the package, Kenny put the new socks in his dresser drawer, softly muttering, "I wonder if Leo or any of my cousins shoot hoops?"

Taking a pair of jeans to hang in the closet, Jerry shrugged, "What's the deal with Leo?"

Kenny giggled, "He's really nice; a new friend who seems to like me too."

"That's a good beginning," Jerry offered. "That's where your dad and I were."

Before Jerry finished his sentence, the door flew open and Mike ran in giggling, "Shaun took a crap and there wasn't toilet paper! His whole world almost ended!" Jerry sputtered and uncontrollably cracked up.

Kenny huffed then smirked, "Me and pop were talkin', but did

you knock, Mike?"

Mike scowled and whined, "Don't start that again, Kenny! We was all nekkid yesterday. We're all boys in this house now!"

Picking up his middle son, Jerry chortled, "Kenny's a big boy and there's a price to be paid for not knocking, ya know." Jerry began tickling Mike, and Kenny hurried over to get in his licks too. Loudly squealing, Mike promised to remember to knock on closed bedroom doors.

Walking into the room, carrying Shaun on his hip, AJ grinned and loudly announced, "I had Alden get us some basics in this house, including Oreo's and milk, if anyone's interested." In a flash, Kenny was out of his bedroom and stampeding down the stairs.

"NO-OO-OO!" Shaun screamed, "Kenny's gonna eat up all da cookies, daddy!"

"He's gotta find them first," AJ laughed, and hurried downstairs.

Following with Mike, Jerry sniggered, "I assume we have toilet paper too now?"

Hiding his face on AJ's shoulder, Shaun giggled, "It's plain white."

Mike grinned, "Our mommy used to get toilet paper that was pink with flowers. It drove daddy nuts!"

AJ cracked up. Jerry chuckled, "Alden, do we have glasses for milk with our cookies?"

From the ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "In the kitchen cupboards there are glasses, plates, silverware, pots and pans. All that

stuff was already here, Jerry. I provided the food, drinks, and other household necessities, like plain white toilet paper."

Coming down the final steps into the living room, AJ, Jerry, Mike and Shaun saw their new living room, complete with a large sectional sofa, two recliners, end tables, lamps, a large sixty-inch wall mounted television and the Bose surround sound system. To their left, they saw the large oak dining table, eight chairs, and three bar stools at the breakfast counter. They went into the kitchen, where Kenny had climbed up onto the counters to search the cupboards for the Oreo cookies. Seeing his dad, pop and brothers, Kenny gushed, "This place is so kewl! Our old kitchen was painted yellow and had more flowery wallpaper. This is painted white, with no girly flowers. I think the countertops are real granite too." Locking eyes with Jerry, he wondered, "Did you ask for a place like this, pop?"

Shaking his head, Jerry smiled, "I can only assume all the townhomes have the same sort of stuff." He sat Mike down on the counter then tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Jerry to Kaleo."

"Here, bro," Kaleo replied. Deciding to imitate Kenny, Mike stood up on the counter, almost giving Jerry his first parental heart-attack.

Following his middle son from the floor, so he could react if needed, Jerry asked, "Have you been to your townhouse yet?"

"We just got here," Kaleo sniggered.

Tory laughed, "Is this place friggin' awesome or what?"

Jerry chuckled, "Yeah, that's why I called. We've got everything here, dudes. There's a really large fridge, stove and microwave in the kitchen. Kenny took glasses out that are a light frosty green color..."

"They match the plates too, pop," Kenny giggled, and opened another cupboard to show the rest of the family a plate that was mostly white with light frosty green around the edge.

Kaleo said, "Our glasses and plates are a powder blue color."

Pouring glasses of milk for the three boys, AJ wondered, "Which townhouse did you take?"

"The end unit, number one," Tory answered.

Kaleo asked, "Do you have a big black leather sectional sofa in your living room?"

"Ours is brown leather," Jerry answered, "and we've got a killer entertainment center. The TV looks the same as the one in the Hundserts' basement and in the dorm common room."

"Yep, that's what we've got too," Kaleo happily chortled.

"Upstairs, we've got a king sized bed," AJ shared.

"OH, PLEASE GOD!" Tory hollered.

Kaleo sniggered, "We haven't even been upstairs yet, but Tory just went up to check it out."

Putting the package of Oreos down on the counter and opening it, Jerry laughed, "Somebody fucked up, big time, bro. Don't they know we're orphans? We would've been happy with simple stuff, but this is just like the stuff at the beach house."

AJ giggled, "If we didn't have other stuff to do, I'd stay here with my new family all day and into the night."

Across Jerry's comm-badge, everyone heard Tory

enthusiastically singing, "Kaleo, get your sexy brown ass up here, before I faint!" Jerry, AJ and all three of their boys cracked up.

Kaleo chortled, "I'll talk with you in a bit, guys. Kaleo out."

Taking a cookie from the package, Jerry shrugged, "It sounds like all the townhouses are basically the same."

Around the partially chewed Oreo in his mouth, AJ mumbled, "I guess we might've known. Our dorm rooms were awesome. A townhouse for three times as many is three times more awesome."

Shaun giggled, "We got a big boy's dresser an' beds, jus' like Kenny!"

Splitting his Oreo cookie, Jerry started licking the sweet creamy filling. AJ coughed and began giggling at his partner's provocative show. Glancing around and seeing his pop and dad being goofy, Kenny softly sniggered, "After our snack, I think dad and pop need some alone time, bros." His two younger brothers giggled and nodded.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, over at dorm one, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick had finished wandering around the first floor. Seeing their leaders in the hall, some of the boys came out of their rooms and reported that the Internet was returning to normal. In the common room, Makan Kama was painting and a small gathering of younger boys were watching television. The Core Rimmers then went upstairs to check on the girls. The only big difference between the first floor and the second floor was that the boys generally kept their dorm room doors open. Only a few of the doors upstairs were open, but a large gathering of girls were in the common room watching TV. Some had their laptop computers with them. A few were updating their personal

web pages, while others were just browsing the various pages to see what the other Clan bases looked like and what kids were listed there.

Not seeing Melonie Correro around, Prez wondered where she was. Twelve-year-old Leia Iona answered, "She went with Sonia, Horacio and the other dorm leaders, Prez." Speechless, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike glanced at one another.

Noticing that the Core Rimmers were flabbergasted, Lani Keawe smiled, "Don't worry, dudes. Sonia is Melonie's roommate. We all know she's fine and won't try to hurt herself again, like last week."

"The boys here proved that she's safe," Ipo 'aukai explained. "Melonie's just not sure what she wants now, long term. Since men have hurt her so badly, she's not sure if she can hook up with a boy. As much as Sonia and Doc Wiener have helped, watching Horacio with Sonia has helped Melonie too. If I were inclined, Horacio's exactly the type of boy I'd want to be with." Softly giggling, Lani leaned over and kissed Ipo on the mouth, making Ipo's statements perfectly clear. Once again, four gay Core Rimmers were dumbstruck. Noticing their expressions, Ipo smiled, "What did you want us to do, dudes; tell you we're lesbians?"

Shaking his head, Prez grinned, "Bluntly telling me or any of us isn't necessary, Ipo. I'd just like it if everyone felt comfy about who they are and the partner they've chosen. You've all seen us kissing our partners. I hope you don't think you have to hide your feelings."

"We don't," Ipo and Lani chimed.

Ipo explained, "Maybe some other couple would kiss in public, but it's not our way. It's like many of the boys have no problem showing off around the pools. Boys do things that way, very blunt and

direct. On the other side of the fence, some girls might want to be almost as direct, but we choose to be a little more discreet."

Understandingly, Keith nodded and smiled, "Tell the other girls, no matter what their sexuality, that we don't expect anyone to feel like they have to hide anything. We've never been closeted and sure don't expect anyone else to feel like they have to be."

Disjointedly, all the girls in the second floor common room agreed to tell the other girls. The Core Rimmers waved and left the girls in the common room. The shorter hallway of the second floor seemed to be deserted. Heading downstairs, Mike chuckled, "So Prez, you're suddenly into muff divers?"

Prez sniggered, "Keith and I were eight and you had just turned nine the first time we sucked dick. I'm very happy with my sexuality and sex life, and I think we all made that abundantly clear yesterday."

"This is their home," Keith reminded. "They should feel as comfortable as we are showing a little affection."

Derrick admitted, "I was only stunned. I guess it's just as well I was shocked in a small group, rather than in the dining room, where everyone could see me chasing my eyeballs around the floor."

Mike hummed then said, "I guess we should've guessed that girls were hooking up, since everybody else seems to be, including our sons." Reaching the first floor landing, he held open the door for his friends, saying, "I'm completely thrilled with Jonah and Ben. All I'd like to know is why nobody said a word about Gage liking Jonah."

Roughly pulling Mike by the arm away from the door, Keith sniggered, "Hey bro, my kid's got the hots for your kid." Prez and Derrick cracked up.

"That's great," Mike giggled, "better late than never. I guess the next question is, should we talk to any of them about it?"

"Only if they want to talk," Prez easily answered.

Derrick nodded, "They're building the friendships now. When they're ready to take the first sexual steps, they'll figure it all out, just like we did. All it took was each of us giving a damn during every first step. Caring for each other is all it takes, slow progress, orally and anally."

The four Core Rimmers walked into dormitory two. Again, many doors were left open. In room number three, Hugh Gartrell sat at his desk before his laptop computer. Knocking on the door frame, Prez checked, "How's it goin', Hugh?"

"Good, Prez," Hugh answered before even turning around. When he did turn and saw the other three Rimmers with Prez, he got up and smiled, "Kelly and me would like to get a water fountain for our room. Is that kewl?"

Prez blinked, "I'm not sure what you're referring to."

"It's like a sculpture that you fill with water and it trickles down through a little pump," Hugh explained. He then chuckled, "We went to hang out at the diving well last night and Wednesday night. The sound of the pool filters had us yawning up a storm, so we came back here, put the TV on and we were out cold in minutes." He then waved the four Rimmers into his room and showed them what he was considering on his laptop at Nile-dot-com. "This is a pretty big model," Hugh offered, "but it's the one me and Kelly like the most. It would be a night-light as well as soothing water bubbling over little rocks."

All four Rimmers nodded and Derrick smiled, "Very kewl. If

that's what you dudes want, go for it."

Keith wondered, "Where's Kelly?"

"He went with Horacio and Sonia," Hugh replied.

Prez wondered, "Why didn't you go too?"

Hugh shrugged, "I didn't feel like it. Since I got here, every day's been kind o' busy, so I decided to chill."

Mike confirmed, "Everything else is good?"

Hugh nodded, "Really good. What's most awesome is not having to sell my ass to eat. Now I can choose, and there are so many really cute guys and girls to choose from, I can't make up my mind." All four Rimmers and Hugh chuckled.

Derrick smiled, "There are ninety-five newbies arriving after lunch."

Hugh wondered, "How many are teenagers?"

"Probably about a third of 'em," Mike answered.

Keith recalled, "You're bi, right?"

"On the streets, I had to be to make the bucks," Hugh replied. "The only good part of that whole two years was realizing it ain't dick or tits that make the person. I'll go either way to have a real relationship, like you dudes have."

Prez checked, "That's not happening with Kelly?"

Shaking his head, Hugh grinned, "Similar pasts is what makes us kewl roommates, but friends is where we want to be. We'd both

like something more than memories of our time on the street."

"Understandable," Derrick softly said.

Keith assured, "The right person will make themselves known, Hugh."

"Soon, I hope," Hugh cheekily grinned, "like before I have to ask for a new mattress, because I've drilled a hole in this one." The Rimmers cracked up and left Hugh to his online shopping.

A few doors down, twelve-year-old roommates Jeff Cummings and Thomas Cork were sitting cross-legged on the floor playing a video game in room nine. Keith checked on the boys. All they wanted was another week off before school started. Since they were level one orphans that just arrived on Thursday, Prez told them they could choose to take the time to adjust or decide to go to school.

In the common room was another gathering of boys, mostly ex-Latin King kids between five- and twelve-years-old. Two were playing checkers and most of the others were watching TV cartoons. Tommy Cork had followed the Core Rimmers, and began tinkering at the piano. Since the boy was interested, Keith spent a few extra minutes teaching Tommy some simple exercises.

The remainder of dormitory two visits were uneventful, inasmuch as the kids were glad to see their leaders, but didn't have much to say or share. Since dorm three was mostly boys rescued from the Battle Of Earth, who were still in a meeting with Doc Wiener, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike skipped that building and went to dormitory four to visit the UNIT base and personal security. There they found AJ's, Jerry's, Kaleo's and Tory's personal security teams preparing to move to Oneula Beach.

When they walked back outside again, the dreary cloud cover

over the South side of Oahu was burning off and the sun was shining through. Judy Faris approached the four leaders, pleasantly beaming, "You made me a grandmother exactly one week after arriving, and I couldn't be happier." The boys started chuckling and giggling. Judy smiled, "Of course, it also means the family has grown such that I told Troy it was time to get a place of his own."

Approaching from behind Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick, Troy loudly laughed, "In other words, she's kicking me out on my ass, Prez."

"No," Judy giggled, "it means one middle aged grandmother in a two bedroom flat with her son, son-in-law and their four sons is a bit too much. Besides, with you out of the way, I can concentrate on several very available adult men here, and perhaps rebuild another family by adopting some adorable children of my own." Troy smirked and rolled his eyes. The other five Core Rimmers cracked up.

Troy groused, "Thank goodness you said that you're adopting."

"My biological clock is winding down, but not dead yet," Judy teased. Troy's jaw dropped. Again, five Core Rimmers roared laughing.

Rolling his eyes, Troy waited for Sean and the other four teammates to slowly soften to mere chortling. Locking eyes with Prez, Troy grinned, "I know you want us all together, but since that's not reasonable, I thought we'd take a townhouse at Oneula, saving our boys from grandma's bad influence."

Judy giggled, "I could say so many things, but Tiger and Lover would implode, leaving us with two fewer leaders, so I'll leave it alone, for now." Wondering what they had said or done that Judy heard or saw, Sean and Troy flushed scarlet red.

Keith chuckled, "Six leaders at the other base would be awesome, dudes."

"We just told our personal security to pack and move over there too," Sean shared.

Tapping his comm-badge, Prez called Donnie Williams, simply to insure that the Oneula Beach base security would be available by evening. Donnie replied, "So you're aware, your base security forces will become Clan Security, effective immediately. After this weekend's insanity, JJ, Seth and I agreed that Special Forces is the military, and JJ leads Clan Security. Going forward, when the other three bases are ready to be occupied, contact Clan HQ and they'll allocate resources for you. Your Clan Security are moving over to Oneula Beach now, Prez."

Judy interjected, "Chefs, housekeeping and lawn care were told yesterday to be there today."

"Excellent!" Prez cheered, "You guys make my life so easy. Thank you."

Donnie asked, "What's the expected population, Prez?"

"Right off the bat, ninety-five newbie kids, six Core Rimmers, their thirteen sons, another twenty adult staff, some of which have kids, and the fifty base security, so about one-hundred-ninety," Prez answered.

"They're your fifty security, Prez," Donnie teased. "Seth or JJ will take over only when something's wrong that you need to report. Otherwise, they report to you and the Core Rimmers. I hope to visit you guys later today. Donnie out."

Prez groaned, "I guess I need to put someone in charge at

Oneula too then."

Scowling, Keith wondered, "Why, baby? That only muddies the waters."

Sean softly offered, "Kaleo's most familiar with everything, but Troy doesn't have the same pasts that the rest of us have. I'd immediately defer any big decisions to them, unless it was big enough to ask you about, Prez."

"Then that's the way it'll be," Prez smiled. He checked with Sean and Troy, asking, "You've still got some time to get your move started, if you want?"

Troy nodded, "Yeah, we might as well."

Sean reminded Troy, "There's only a few things of mine still in my dorm room. Most of my stuff has already moved, so let's start at the condo."

Sean and Troy started for the condominium. Judy smiled, "I want to meet my grandsons during lunch."

"Yeah, so you can tell them the same stories you told Sean," Troy snickered. "That'll be real near the top of my list, ma."

Waving her hand and fingers, Judy giggled, "I'll see you boys later. There's still laundry to move around."

"See ya later," the four remaining Rimmers chanted.

"Dad!" Leo yelled, "My iPod's workin' again already!"

Corey loudly laughed, "What's that, Leo? They didn't hear you at Maui." Geoff and Lenny cracked up.

Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike turned slightly to watch Drew's and Corey's family approaching. Leo had ear-buds in and a wire leading down into his shorts pocket.

Grinning at Leo, Drew sniggered, "That's one feature to tell Uncle Steve about."

Keith blinked, "Which Uncle Steve is this?"

"Steve Jobs," Drew answered, "one of the Orlando dudes is related to the CEO of Apple Computers."

Corey explained, "The iPod Nano that Leo came here with needed a charger, so Drew got one from Alden. It's a recently developed kinetic charger that Leo's testing for Uncle Steve and Apple. In the walk from your parents' house to here, barely two minutes, and it's already working."

Going over to his new nephew, Keith slid in close, and pulled one of Leo's ear-buds. Keith put it to his own ear and sang along;

I don't care who you are

Where you're from

What you did

As long as you love me

Who you are

Where you're from

Don't care what you did

As long as you love me

Every little thing that you have said and done
Feels like it's deep within me
Doesn't really matter if you're on the run
It seems like we're meant to be

At the next chorus, Derrick, Mike and Prez danced, clapped their hands and snapped their fingers in time, and sang backup vocals for Keith.

I don't care who you are (who you are)
Where you're from (where you're from)
What you did
As long as you love me (I don't know)
Who you are (who you are)
Where you're from (where you're from)
Don't care what you did
As long as you love me (yeah)

I've tried to hide it so that no one knows
But I guess it shows
When you look into my eyes

What you did and where you're comin' from

I don't care, as long as you love me, baby

Leo giggled, "You dudes know and play Backstreet too?"

Lenny nodded, "The very first night, right after we was rescued, their band played at a luau, and that was one of the songs."

Corey told Leo, "That night and before, the band's name was Old Habits. Now they're Platinum Habits. They can play about two-hundred and fifty of the best hits from the past forty years."

"Some stuff wasn't exactly a big hit," Mike offered, "but we play it because it's challenging us, as musicians and as a band."

Prez grinned, "Right after our newbies show up, I think we'll hit the store, have a meeting in the auditorium, and then we'll jam for at least an hour."

Keith smirked. "We never went to any other store as often as we have this one since Monday. If we went to music stores this often, the entire Clan might go broke."

Doc Wiener, parents and kids walked out of dormitory three. All of them were heading towards the CIC. The rescued Battle Of Earth boys looked perfectly fine, the Core Rimmers noticed. Phil Nash pointed at Drew's family, and then he and his big brother Craig started jogging toward the Rimmers. Following along, Scott, Lance, Travis, Erik, Chris and Jay were softly chuckling. All eight boys hollered, "DREW!"

Slouching, Drew impatiently yelled, "WHA-AT?" All eight of the boys sped up to a full run, directly at Drew.

Before John had even stepped outside with his family, he playfully warned Drew, *'Better run, bro. Those dudes are hell bent on specifically thanking you for bringing them here. You're goin' swimmin'!'*

Jogging away, down the path between the dorms and the CIC, Drew giggled, "It's not my fault! Blame the Romulans!" Knowing that he had little chance of escaping fifteen- and fourteen-year-old boys, Drew turned left and ran down the path between the dorms and the townhomes, toward the pools. The best Drew hoped for was making it to the diving well and jumping in, before he was captured and tossed in. Giggling, Corey, Leo, Lenny and Geoff followed after Drew.

Suddenly, more boys aged between eleven- and thirteen-years-old appeared on the path between dorms one and two. Most surprisingly, the Vulcan boy, twelve-year-old Vaziik was among the pack and as tall as any of the thirteen-year-old boys. Laughing his ass off, Drew turned up the juice and bolted for the pools.

Corey and the rest of the family followed the pack of older boys. Many meters ahead of the older set, the set of slightly younger boys were gaining ground on Drew. "Alden?" Drew laughed.

"No," Alden giggled.

"Please?" Drew begged.

"Nope," Alden giggled, "and by the way, I've decided to be thirteen, pubescent, and a Hawaiian version of you and your brothers. I might not have the longest dick amongst my brothers, but it definitely will be thickest and uncut."

Roaring hysterically, Drew could barely run. Moments later, so many pairs of hands had a hold on him that he couldn't even hit the ground and curl up to protect himself. In seconds, the original eight

older boys were there too. Drew was ceremonially stripped and lifted high up off the ground, with Vaziik, Fred and Chauncey Eckhart underneath Drew, holding up his back and buns. The Vulcan boy was the quietest of the lot, but one of the strongest, and anyone watching would've seen him wearing an expression of satisfaction.

During the remaining steps to his watery retribution, Drew giggled, "Why me? Why not John, Stephen or Corey?"

"Because you're kewler," Travis sniggered.

"All three of them look up to you," Scott Shetley chuckled.

Craig reminded, "How many other twelve-year-olds don't piss their pants when fifteen-year-olds scream at them? Not too many."

"All you did was spin around and yell back," Phil giggled.

Jay playfully shared, "Not to mention, you drop your drawers pretty darn fast for a shy gay boy." Hearing that, Corey, Leo, Lenny and Geoff cracked up.

Chris chortled, "Given what we've seen so far, in another five or six years, when you're done growing, you could easily be the sexiest Core Rimmer of the lot, assuming you're not all turtled up from being tossed in pools."

Arriving at the diving well, Craig instructed, "No swinging, dudes. On the count of three, toss him."

All twelve boys counted together. "One... two... three!" and hurled Drew over the center of the diving well. Before Drew hit the water, Alden got in a lick too by transporting his friend and co-creator ten meters up in the air and re-materializing him there.

Quickly curling up before having the belly flop of the millennium, Drew loudly laughed, "ALDEN!" Over the pool-side loudspeakers, Alden laughed along with all the other boys as Drew dropped and hit the water.

When Drew rose to the surface, the pack of Battle of Earth boys rounded on Corey, Leo, Lenny and Geoff. Since none of the later four knew it was coming, it was far easier to catch, strip, lift and toss them. The only excuse given was that they were Drew's family and therefore equally cute and worthy of being dunked.

Materializing before Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike, Donnie Williams transported onto base with another teenager and two men. Donnie and the other teenager were wearing dress greens and the other two men were wearing Navy dress whites. Smiling widely at the unannounced visitors, Prez chortled, "Alden, we're under-dressed for some occasion here. Get the four of us into our Starfleet uniforms." The four Core Rimmers phased out and back again. Three of the four, Derrick, Keith and Mike were wearing commander insignias on their shoulder lapels. Wearing Admiral's insignia on his lapels, Prez suddenly found himself being saluted by his three friends, Donnie and the other three. "Knock it off," Prez giggled, and then sloppily returned the salute.

Donnie helplessly chuckled, "Director Preston Albert O'Brian, please meet Colonel Cody Wilkins, Petty Officer Third Class Radcliff Conklin and Seaman Gilbert Hoover. The latter two men were aboard the U.S.S. Nicholson Thursday night, and were part of the task force that intercepted the Romulan Warbird destined for San Francisco."

Reaching forward to shake hands with both men, Prez smiled, "I skimmed through the report; awesome job, dudes. Call me Prez."

"As soon as you get out of that penguin outfit, Admiral," the

Petty Officer chuckled, and shook Prez's hand, adding, "Call me Rad."

The Seaman shook Prez's hand and grinned, "Call me Gil, Admiral."

Prez sniggered, "What I'm trying to figure out is how three Lieutenants became Commanders, Alden."

Across their comm-badges, Alden giggled, "It just happened minutes ago. It's on your PADD, that you rarely keep with you. Cory Short had some time to get caught up on paperwork. For the California Orphanage operations and the Hyatt Rescues, Keith, Mike and Derrick were promoted two ranks. You went from Rear Admiral lower half, with one star, to Rear Admiral upper half, with two stars. Cory was considering creating a new award just for you, Prez. He had second thoughts about having any Rimmer wearing a Purple Tush though, so you got a plain ol' Purple Heart."

Nudging and shoving Prez for his heroism, Derrick, Keith and Mike helplessly roared laughing. Donnie explained to the Rimmers that Rad and Gil chose to work for the Clan instead of the UNIT, so both men now reported to Prez.

Alden giggled, "Just a warning, Prez; watch your coconuts and watermelons for holes!" Gil fiercely blushed. Holding his lover close, Rad explained the AI's remark, assuring that since Friday morning, fruits were no longer on his list of favorite partners. All eight in the group busted a gut laughing.

In the light-hearted mood everyone was already in, Donnie dropped a bomb, grinning, "Emily is pregnant." Before Donnie could say another word, all four Rimmers enthusiastically congratulated Donnie on becoming a daddy. Bolstered by the well wishes, Donnie

smiled, "I'm stepping down to give my family all the attention they deserve. Going forward, Colonel Wilkins will be taking my place." Donnie turned to his replacement for him to continue.

"We're hoping to have the turnover complete this week," Colonel Wilkins explained. "My wish is to keep everyone doing their jobs exactly as they had been under General Williams. The same sort of friendly interface between Family Clan Short and Clan Short Special Forces will also continue. Part of my days will be spent here, mostly to observe, but partially so we can get to know one another, thus keeping things informal until they absolutely need to be formal."

"You'll regret that," Alden giggled. "Should I order the Valium now, Admiral Blister-butt?"

"Remember he's a Rear Admiral... it figures!" Mike laughed.

Prez evilly grinned, "As long as my pissed off chickens keep laying explosive eggs, and the gardens of Maui keep blooming primo herb, I won't need Valium. You might though, Alden. Your first day with a body, after you climb out of the diving well, you're spending with Grandma Morrison." Prez then shook Cody's hand, asking, "Turn over starts when, Cody?"

"Donnie's left that up to me," Cody answered. "I think I should jump in with both feet and start right away, with Donnie acting as my advisor. Right now works for me."

"Kewl," Prez smiled.

Keith stepped forward to shake hands and asked, "Do you have a partner, Cody?"

Nodding, Cody shared, "His name is Sheldon Lloyd."

When Mike took his turn to shake hands with Cody, he warmly invited, "I hope we'll be seeing each other a lot. The past week has been insane."

Derrick took his turn to meet the new R.R.B. Commander, adding, "We've only seen Donnie on TV monitors since last Saturday. Bring Sheldon along with you any time you're visiting."

"Thank you," Cody sincerely gushed, "I'll do that."

While the Hundser-Seaver family were climbing out of the diving well, drying off and getting dressed, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick were wrapping up with Donnie, Cody, Rad and Gil. The two enlisted naval men wanted to continue their education and didn't feel ready to accept officer ranks. Prez promoted both men to Chief Warrant Officer. Considering themselves a life-long couple after two days together, Rad and Gil chose to move into a two-bedroom condo. Donnie and Cody returned to the Rapid Response Base to continue the turnover process.

The four Core Rimmers entered the CIC. Many of the kids had already arrived, but the four Core Rimmers saw their teacher, Ms. Diaz, sitting at a table and having lunch with her husband, daughter and son. To greet and welcome their teacher and her family, all four immediately went to them.

Ms. Diaz and her husband started to stand, but Prez immediately begged, "Please sit. Y'all are eating. We just wanted to say hi, and meet your family."

Mr. and Mrs. Diaz returned to their chairs. Laxmi Diaz introduced her husband, Eugene Diaz, her teenaged son, Angelo, and younger daughter, Cecelia, to the four ex-students who were now Clan Short leaders. Ms. Diaz explained that her husband would finish

his dental surgery internship in December then start his practice on base. Office space had already been allocated for him at each base's FYS Building. Eugene had been considering specializing in pediatric dental surgery, but was struggling with a decision that would limit his income. Circumstances worked in his favor as well. The prior day, the family had started to move into the townhouse beside the Taylors'. They had been finishing that process during the morning. During the afternoon, while her family unpacked, Ms. Diaz, Mr. Taylor and Mrs. Taylor would be meeting Mr. T and taking a class for special education, concentrating on the needs of Clan kids who had been abused by adults.

Across the room, John was introducing his family to the family of Roy Combs, who were also moving in that day, Roy would become the Pacific Rim Divisions' new Facilities Coordinator. His wife, Monica, would become an additional chef, with prior experience working in bakeries making breads and various desserts. Their children were thirteen-year-old Reginald, who preferred the nickname 'Reggie', and ten-year-old Cameron. Naturally, John was sharing all the introductions telepathically with the other Core Rimmers who weren't yet in the dining room. John also shared one additional tid-bit of information, telling his brothers and teammates, *'Angelo and Reggie have already seen each other entering and exiting their new townhomes. Although neither considered himself gay, attraction is a small word for what these two already feel and think for one another. Once they meet and get together, each of 'em is strongly considering tearing the clothes off the other.'*

Prez and that group already noticed Angelo's medium frame, wavy, dark brown hair and beautiful brown eyes. As far as they were concerned, Angelo was a fitting name for the angelic boy at the table. John's family and Prez's group swapped places to meet the other new family, by which time Drew's family was entering the dining room

with the bulk of the rescued Battle Of Earth boys. During small talk at the Combs' table, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick took note of Reggie's slightly larger frame, dirty blond hair and blue eyes. Interestingly, Reggie seemed quieter and more reserved than Angelo, who was a bit more willing to converse, but was still a new boy in a new place.

The dining room and chow line had filled while the various Core Rimmer couples made the rounds, visiting newbies and making them all feel welcome. Erik Kendricks and Travis McAuley were at a small table alone, way over by the rec room and Shirley's cage. Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike were roaming around tables of teenagers, including Chris Stokley, Jay Montigua, Lance Kinchen, Scott Shetley, Craig and Phil Nash. John and Stephen went with their sons to where Jimmy Matos, Taron Reyce Otter, the Hiram and the Stoeher twins were sitting. Jason Taylor approached Prez. As soon as he was able, Jason grinned, "Our family needs your assistance at your earliest convenience."

Concerned that something was wrong, Prez quickly asked, "What can I do to help?"

"Two things," Jason smiled, "We'd like to adopt Robbie's three brothers, and Richie's foster brothers, Carrol and Terrance, and with their addition, suddenly our big, beautiful townhouse isn't large enough for our family."

Derrick, Mike and Keith softly chortled. Prez laughed, "You've been here three days! Are you related to the Short family, by any chance?" While other nearby kids and Core Rimmers laughed, Prez called, "Alden, get my tricorder, and please assist the Taylors with their move from a townhouse here to a single family home at Oneula Beach."

Over the Head Rimmer's comm-badge, Alden giggled, "Got it

covered, Prez," and the tricorder appeared, hanging off Prez's neck. Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike followed Jason back to the table where his family were sitting. At the same time, a dimensional door chime went off. Ronnie, Garrett, Adam, Mark, Brian and Jeff walked through the door from Des Moines, specifically to be present for the adoption. All six hurried across the room toward Jason and Prez.

Nearing the table and locking eyes with Trinity, Prez playfully sang, "Mrs. Taylor, I didn't even know you were pregnant, and now you've gone and made two more? The three additional copies of one weren't enough?"

Around the area, several kids giggled. Rafe Montigua shot soda out of his nose, loudly groaning, "Argh! Prez!" His brother Jay cracked up. Chuckling madly, Chris handed Rafe a handful of paper napkins to wipe his bubbling nose.

"Sorry about that, Rafe," Prez chuckled.

Trinity giggled, "Some things are unplanned. We started hearing yesterday that Richie would be happier with Carrol and Terrence here. With one of them wishing, we heard about it from all four. Adding two more would only make all of us happier."

Prez nodded and told the family, "The home you'll be moving into has one ground floor guest bedroom. Upstairs, all but one of the five bedrooms are huge. The smallest room is about sixteen square meters. It has one double-size bed. The master bedroom and master bathroom suite occupies about a third of the upstairs. The other three bedrooms are about four meters by five meters, so four could fit in one room, on two double-size beds. There are three bathrooms too, so whenever you want to, you could expand your family more. Beyond sixteen kids, we'll have to design a new home for you."

Over the comm-badges at the Taylor table, Alden giggled, "Well, Carl Seibert has prepared for that eventuality too. Each of the other bases will have at least one twenty-story condominium that has three penthouses consisting of two floors and twelve bedrooms. The new limit will then be twenty-four."

Noticing Jason Taylor's worried expression, the quadruplets giggled, "Don't look so nervous, dad. We can prob'ly manage with only twelve brothers for a month or two."

Adam cheered, "Grandma will be happy to hear this!"

Prez smiled, "By tonight, you'll have ninety-five newbies, and three Core Rimmer couples, and their sons, there at Oneula Beach too."

George's voice came over the speakers. "If the quads decide they want to contribute to the family fun, we've also got what's known as the 'Patriarch Special' which will house a small village or two!"

"Yeah, Timmy's got an entire Indian Camp in the courtyard!" Kerry added helpfully. "It's only five-hundred-ten-thousand square feet or so, not including the courtyard in the center. It's a cozy little castle!"

Beginning to slump, Jason withered into a chair, with his wife and family softly giggling at him. A holographic image of the Patriarch's home was displayed over the table.

"Can I visit the Indian Village? That looks fun!" Terrance asked Richie and Carrol, the puppy dog eyes already in gear.

"Sure you can," Prez replied, and then pointed at the dimensional doors, explaining, "You can go with any of your brothers to Orlando and visit Timmy. All you need is your mom's and dad's

okay and a big bro with you, okay?"

"SWEET!" Terrence giggled.

Pulling over an unoccupied chair, Prez sat down near Terrence, asking, "Remember when I met you on Friday?"

"Uh huh," Terrence grunted, and shimmied over onto Prez's lap.

Holding him in place, Prez reminded the boy, "You told me then that Richie and Carrol were like your brothers and dads."

Terrence nodded, "Yep, I reme'ber."

Prez gently explained, "What I want to know is how you'll feel, deep inside, when you're adopted by Jason and Trinity? That makes you their youngest son. That makes them your mommy and daddy. That will also make Richie and Carrol your brothers, like Ronnie, Robbie and Ralphie, not your dads."

Terrence giggled, "Yep."

Richie gently prompted, "Tell Prez how you feel, Terrance."

Terrence hummed a moment then pointed at Jason, saying, "Daddy played catch with me and it was so much fun." He pointed at Trinity, saying, "Mommy put med'cine on my ouchies from Pat, and it didn't hurt." Dropping his hands, Terrence said, "Richie and Carrol did that stuff too, and they saved me from Pat, and they's a little bit more like big bros, I think. And ya know what?"

"What?" Prez asked.

Rapidly blinking, Terrence frowned, "I don't wanna be a Terry or a Terrence ever again, and I don't wanna be nothin' but a Taylor,

like mommy, daddy and my brothers."

Prez asked, "What would you like your first name to be?"

"Trevor," the little six-year-old answered.

Pulling his tricorder over and getting it set up, Prez explained, "I'm going to call you by your old names two more times, to ask you if you want Jason and Trinity as your mommy and daddy, and then to ask if you want your name changed. All you have to do is answer into the machine, okay?"

"Kewl, Prez."

Prez asked, "Terrence Myers, do you want Jason Taylor and Trinity Taylor for your real mommy and daddy from now on?"

"Yep, I do."

"Do you also want your name changed from Terrance Myers to Trevor Taylor?"

"Yep, I don't like Terry or Terrence, and I don't like bein' a Myers either."

Looking up, Prez asked the adults if they wanted Trevor as their son. Holding hands, both affirmed it. From there, Carrol, Ralphie, Ronnie and Richie agreed to be Jason's and Trinity's sons and they all wanted their last names changed to Taylor. It was clear that five boys were very pleased, but Robbie was ecstatic, having all three of his blood brothers accept his parents, plus the two extras that made Richie very happy. When the task was complete and Prez announced it official, the entire dining room broke out in cheers and applause. Chuckling helplessly, Prez listed the double-twins, Keith Hundser, Mike Gibbons, Derrick Seibert and the majority of the Pacific Rim

Clan as witnesses.

Mark giggled as he had a thought. "I think Grandma adopted your new parents, Trevor! That makes you a Morrison too!"

Adam nodded. "Yep; and all her grandkids get free rides on her Harley!"

Chuckling and sadly shaking his head, Prez got up, passed Trevor over to Carrol, and left the new family to explain to Trevor that a Harley is a motorcycle and that he couldn't go for rides until the family got moved to their new home.

Getting into the chow line to get lunch, Keith told Prez, "I was surprised you didn't wince when Trevor sat on your lap."

Shrugging, Prez grinned, "It's only bugging me around my waist, T'hy'la. That would be the case in a shower wrap too, so I'll stay dressed." He and Keith ordered grilled ham and cheese sandwiches and French fries for lunch.

Once served and returning to the dining room, Keith checked, "Greet the newbies and then get them to the store?"

"Yeah," Prez answered, "I thought it would be better to meet in the auditorium after that. Then we can chat and play a couple of tunes until dinner time. After dinner, we'll get them over to Oneula Beach. Those that want to move into dorms can, and the rest come back here to nest."

With his mouth full, John told his brothers, *'Me and Stephen and our boys can cover the nest, bros. Drew and Corey covered it two nights in a row.'*

Passing John's table, Keith scowled, "That might be an awful lot

of kids. If it is, we'll be there too."

Stephen shook his head, reminding, "That's an even better reason for your family to not be there. Besides, it gives our family a chance to check the newbie kids empathically and telepathically, so we know where they're at. After being in hospitals and those awful orphanages, I'd bet they're all a little freaked out."

Nodding, Prez offered, "Let us know if you change your minds."

Wade sent, *'Why'd we wanna do that, Unca Prez? The minds we got are fine.'* John, Stephen and Frankie cracked up.

The Core Rimmers eyebrows raised, hearing Jeff and Brian in their heads. *'We're hanging to annoy... we mean help... our big quad bros get moved in. Yell if you need a hand with the newbies; we picked up a few tricks from Grandma.'*

Putting his tray down at the table where Derrick, Mike, Reyes, Sean and Troy were sitting, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, my PADD, please?"

Alden privately replied, "Pissed Off Chickens?" and delivered Prez's PADD.

"After I shop for telepath proof hats," Prez sniggered. At one side of the dining room, eight boys giggled, and at John's table the laughter only got louder.

Over at condominium 'B' fourth floor apartment 'A', Rad and Gil got settled into their new home. Alden was called to stock the refrigerator and cupboards with food and household supplies. Rad also asked for a bottle of Dom Perignon champagne. The two young men toasted their good fortune and their new relationship. They took their glasses and the bottle of bubbly to their bedroom. In minutes,

both young men were naked and rolling around their new bed.

While eating, Prez checked the housing situation at Oneula Beach from his PADD. As of that moment, two of the four single family homes were already occupied by employees with large families. With the three Core Rimmer families and two chefs' families already moved in to the townhouses, only one townhome remained unoccupied at Oneula Beach. It was now imperative that the condos get built quickly over there, so Prez messaged Derrick's dad and Roy Combs about it.

Via PADD, Carl Seibert replied,

No problem. Using Tech-bots and human construction employees, we'll have them built in three to five days, only accounting for possible rain and weather.

Prez grinned and messaged,

Take a telepath out of petty cash.

Moments later, Carl replied,

Thanks, but we've got four Steibs pending adoption already. Glance over and notice the McPhearson boys sitting with the Gibbons' family. Does after dinner sound good for both families' adoptions?

After replying affirmatively to Mr. Seibert, Prez showed Derrick his PADD. Beginning to chuckle, Derrick showed it to Mike. Sniggering, Mike passed the PADD back to Prez, and then asked

Derrick, "We're moving permanently?"

Nodding, Derrick replied, "I guess we have to." He then tapped his sub-vocal, asking Alden to get the instruments moved out of the Gibbons' basement, and their kittens moved out of his parents basement, to their townhome's basement. Keith gave Alden a similar request, to have his keyboards and Prez's bass and guitar moved to their townhome's basement.

Tapping his comm-badge, Reyes called, "Paul?"

From South Carolina, Paul's voice replied, "Here, Reyes. What's up?"

"I just finished lunch," Reyes explained. "We'll have some new kids arriving anytime too. I was hoping you and Ryan could break away and keep me company this afternoon."

"We'll be there," Ryan cheerfully answered. "Give us a minute to change out of jeans and into shorts, Reyes."

Sounds of the brothers rapidly climbing stairs could be heard. Saying, "We're on our way," Paul then ended the communication.

A few tables away, more laughter broke loose. Gage was spoon feeding Jonah pudding. At the same table, Sammy was sharing an ice cream cone with Ben. To tease the older boys, Richie spoon fed Dillon and Dee spoon fed Randy. It was a sloppy process, but the boys were having fun.

Over the remaining fifteen minutes of lunch, Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Troy, AJ, Jerry and all their sons returned from the Oneula Beach base. The younger boys scattered to sit with their friends. The six Core Rimmers told their teammates that the move was complete. Alden even swapped around laptop computers, so they could keep the

ones they were already using, and the now empty dorm rooms had new, unused laptops waiting for the new occupants.

Shifting his eyes mysteriously, Kaleo grinned, "The cartons of rubbers were transported to Sonia's and Melonie's room. The cartons of lube went to Horacio's room."

Once again, Jason Mullins and Kenny Hunnicutt were with Leo at the table with Drew's family. Gently and sincerely, Leo thanked both boys for that morning, and then told them that he liked them both very much, and that he was interested in someday having a boyfriend, but that day probably wouldn't be soon. Kenny and Jason both seemed very satisfied to be Leo's friend and that all three could easily remain friends.

The kids that had finished their lunches were making beelines out of the CIC for the playgrounds and pools. The families of the new employees left to complete their moves. The Core Rimmers' fathers also left with some of their children. By one o'clock, only the Core Rimmers, their sons, four mothers, the three doctors, Lindsay Gibbons, Nathan Hayes, and a few other kids that were either still eating or chatting with friends remained. Paul and Ryan transported into the dining room. Reyes stood to greet his friends with open arms. Once again sandwiched between them, all three shared hugs and kisses, causing Reyes to helplessly giggle at the method they were always greeting each other.

Chapter 16

Ewa Beach, CIC Dining Room

Sunday, November 7, 2004 1:01PM HTZ

With a warning from Alden over the ceiling speakers, California Level Two orphanage kids began transporting into the dining room. In rapid succession, kids from Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara arrived; each carrying folders of medical records that were gathered by the three doctors. This time, all the kids were wearing either black or green Clan Short polo shirts. All the boys and the younger girls had boardies or shorts on, but a bunch of older girls were wearing skirts. All the kids were short and thin for their ages, but generally looking pretty good, compared to how they were last seen. Prez began introductions, and some of the newbie kids started giggling. Needless to say, all the Core Rimmers and their boys were stunned silent and grinned at the newbies.

An older boy that was holding three spiral bound notebooks, fifteen-year-old Neil Green from Sacramento, smirked, "We've been in hospitals for three-and-a-half days, with IVs running into our arms, and doctors and nurses fussing over us."

A teenage girl, Maggie Rogers from San Francisco, softly explained, "By the middle of Thursday, we were all wondering about you dudes, and where we would be eventually living."

Thirteen-year-old Conrad Bowers from Los Angeles, grinned, "We've been watching all of you on TVs. Kids named Alden, Kerry and George told us which were leaders, and showed us kids at playgrounds, pools, rec rooms, even this dining room, and what the

dorms look like, inside and out."

Dennis Mitchell, a twelve-year-old from Santa Barbara, pointed at Core Rimmers, rattling off, "You're John Hundser, and you're Stephen Marr, and you're Drew Hundser, and Corey Seaver, you two are new leaders since Friday night, Arnold James, or AJ Smithson and Jerry Hebda."

Picking up where Dennis left off, fifteen-year-old Catherine Montgomery, listed, "Kaleo and Tory, Sean and Troy, Derrick, Mike and Reyes, Prez and Keith." Pausing and blushing, she giggled, "The only bummer out of this whole thing is that you're all gay." All the other teen girls began nodding and giggling.

"That's not too terrible a thing," Carter Rackham, a fourteen-year-old from Sacramento admitted. "I'm gay, and never could've admitted it before, but thanks to you dudes getting us out of the shit-holes, I've now got a kewl boyfriend." Standing beside Carter, Douglas Zimmerman reached for his new partner's hand.

Twelve-year-old Lynn Goodwyn, from San Francisco, glanced at the group of adults, saying, "We even know you. Aunt Lanna's the group mom, at pools and playgrounds most of the days. Aunt Jen is the head of Federation Youth Services, and Aunt Anna is the assistant. We even got to see inside the FYS building. We sort of know where things are, but just haven't done it ourselves."

Also from San Francisco, thirteen-year-old Dale Barrett said, "We're all set, dudes. I'm pretty sure most of us want to get to our new dorm rooms. Compared to where we were, those rooms look *awesome*. Now that we've got those damn IV needles out of our arms, we're ready for everything, starting new, better lives here. For us, being here at last, puts everything else in the past."

Since the newbies were done, Drew and Corey shouted at the ceiling; "Alden!"

"Yes?" Alden playfully sang.

Drew sniggered, "Four days of morning status reports and you never mentioned what you were doing?"

Alden giggled, "Um... I forgot?"

Corey laughed, "Is there anything else that slipped your mind?"

"Ask the newbies," Alden prompted.

A couple of kids chorused, "First we get clothes and stuff."

"Then we have a big meeting," another few chimed.

"And Platinum Habits puts on a concert for us," eleven-year-old Paul Brooks said, "like they did Thursday night."

Mike warned, "As soon as you get your body and can stand, start running, Alden. You're going swimming!"

Alden giggled, "But, why?"

Prez sniggered, "Why do I bother with morning status reports?"

"Or having PADDs, for that matter?" Keith added.

After a few seconds, Nathan giggled, "They're fishing for excuses."

Knowing Nathan could hear his brothers and all the Clan's AIs, John smirked, "And your excuse is?"

Shrugging, Nathan giggled, "I knew what they were doing, but

not the extent. Obviously, these kids have been watching us from the security systems since they arrived at the hospitals."

"The next morning, just before lunch," giggled Shane Swanson, an eight-year-old from Los Angeles.

Pedro Fernandez, a nine-year-old from Sacramento, cheekily grinned, "The choice was between talk shows, news and game shows, or seeing who saved you and where you'd be living, so which would you choose? We only watched you on the TV's the last few days."

Widely smiling, Derrick glanced around the newbies, saying, "The first group of orphanage kids weren't like you. They stayed at hospitals over night and were here the next day."

Many kids nodded, "We saw that too."

Abruptly and uncharacteristically, Frankie squealed, "Not one of you want to nest? Why not?"

Since none of the older kids were answering, six-year-old Victor Dixon softly replied, "We was packed four to a tiny room. Some of us would nest, if you really want, but we'd rather have nice big rooms an' our own stuff, for the first time ever."

Nodding and grinning, John wandered around the group, telepathically checking the kids thoughts and empathically checking emotions. As surprised as anyone else, John told his core teammates, "It's true; each of them knows all of us already. Primarily, I'm feeling mostly anxiety; they've been looking forward to this day since they went to sleep Thursday night. They want to do what they've seen being done from our surveillance cameras." He faced the kids, reminding, "We're here for you. Say hello or something to Prez once in a while, or he'll only..."

"Play Pissed Off Chickens," many of the kids disjointedly giggled.

A few of the teenage girls laughed. Maggie teased, "You might be our leader, but stay out of the girls' changing room!"

"Okay," Prez chuckled, "you guys run the show. Whatever you really want is kewl with us." Gesturing at the mothers, Doc Howard and Lindsay, Prez prompted, "Girls gather around the ladies. They'll help you through the store." Twenty-four newbie girls crossed the room. Prez then said, "Guys, you're with us and our sons." Going to Paul and Ryan, Prez wrapped his arms over their shoulders, and smiled, "We've got two additional helpers today," and introduced the brothers from AI Division to the assembling group.

Dale Barrett smiled at Drew and shared, "We saw all you dudes in the store too, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. We heard the same thing at least three times; a week's worth of the basics."

Realizing that he had been watched while he tried on clothes Friday night, Leo slouched, covered his blushing face with both hands and softly giggled, "Omigod!" Quickly, Leo was embraced by his brothers. He also got a shoulder massage from Drew, and Corey joined his eldest son giggling.

The girls and ladies vanished from the dining room. With the remaining seventy-one boys gathered around the Core Rimmers, their sons and two helpers, Keith ordered, "Take us to the store, Alden," and the entire group relocated to the front of the basement store. Giggling level two boys scattered to get carts. That should've been a clue, but the Core Rimmers only laughed at the enthusiasm.

The five mothers, Doc Howard and Lindsay had a comparatively calm and easy time getting twenty-four girls through

the store. On the other half of the store, pandemonium reigned as seventy-one boys tried to work their way through the various departments. They all tried to get at the shelves of underwear at once. And the same thing happened with socks. Loud laughter and giggling echoed through the store as boys tried to hurry, grabbing the things they needed and wanted, tossing them in carts, forgetting which cart belonged to who, and getting stuck in the traffic jam moving to the next department. The youngest got pajamas while some teens and tweens got bathrobes. Having seen Prez in his shower wrap, many teen boys asked for them and a pile was delivered by Alden.

Only to try and restore order, the Core Rimmers told the gathered mass of boys that little dudes had the right-of-way, then the tweens, and then the teens. For the most part it worked, but the sheer number of boys still kept the noise level high compared to the girls' side of the store. Already teaching some newbie girls, Lindsay pointed across the center aisle at the disorganized boys. John squinted and smirked at his life-long friend.

In the boys' side of the store, there were twenty-three teens, eighteen tweens, and thirty little guys nine-years-old and younger. Pouncing lessons began in the boys shoe department, when a few teens and tweens attempted to weasel their way in before all the little guys were finished. Little boys shouting, "BONZAI!" and grunting teens could be heard by the girls on the opposite side of the store. Teens learned quickly that their family jewels were at risk from pouncing little tikes. Many teen and tween boys decided to go back to the underwear department, looking for jocks and cups.

Giggling at the worried teens and tweens who found many jocks of assorted waist sizes, but no hard cups, Troy grabbed an empty cart and put his son, Jason, inside the cart. Sean watched his future husband start running and pushing the cart down the aisle. Then Troy

jumped up on the cart's cross rail. Jason laughed, as much for his new pop's wicked snickering as for the expressions he was seeing on his dad and many of the other teen and tween boys watching from the boys underwear department.

Sean followed his Lover's lead, lifting and putting another of their sons, Scott, into another empty cart. In moments, teen and tweens were buddying-up to participate in the new sport of shopping cart aisle racing. Four carts could race down the center aisle at once, relatively safely, but there were a few cart bumps now and then. It was something that some of the kids hadn't done in years, since they were small enough to ride in the cart. For other boys, they had never done it at all. And it occupied a good half hour, to allow the youngest boys to move through the store.

Prez and Keith gathered Neil Green and Thaddeus Markell, and some little tikes to race down the aisle together. At the start line near the front of the store, Prez glanced over at Neil, smiling, "We know a little about you, Spitting Rimmer." Neil blushed and giggled. Tad roared laughing. Prez chuckled, "Your day will come, dudes. Know that you're being watched."

Keith chuckled, "Alden, you've got their tags ready?"

Alden giggled, "Of course," and two paper labels appeared on the front and back of Neil's and Tad's shirts. The patches read, "WARNING! Spitting Rimmer! Llamas can't aim!"

"I didn't spit on anyone," Tad giggled.

Shrugging, Keith grinned, "But you laughed your ass off when the nurse got goobered."

Prez told Neil, "You watched us, but we've heard plenty about you too, so it's all even." Abruptly, Prez gushed, "Ready, set, go!" and

started the race before anyone was ready.

"CHEATER!" Neil laughed.

Keith sniggered, "Of course!"

"Of course," Tad giggled.

In an hour-and-a-half, the girls made it through the entire store first. At the checkout aisles, all twenty-four were issued comm-badges and soon transported out of the store with their suitcases. It took the girls a total of two hours. Since the boys simply couldn't be helped, Lindsay and the five women took the girls to the Oneula Beach base, to begin moving into dormitory one's second floor.

Across the store, little tikes were choosing jeans and sport shirts, tweens were gathering boardies, shorts, swimwear and T-shirts. The teens were finishing in the shoe department and waiting their turn to move forward. All the Core Rimmers and their sons were having fun, racing shopping carts up and down the aisle, meeting the new boys, but at the rate they were progressing, they'd never get to the meeting or concert; they'd be lucky to finish in the store by dinner time. Making matters worse, the departments the boys had already been in were a shambles. If Core Rimmers spent time reorganizing then they couldn't assist kids and they might be down there until bed time. Keith had to ask Alden to straighten up the mess.

The only thing the Core Rimmers could do was be proactive and assign dorm rooms to the boys. Getting out PADDs and working feverishly to discover who wanted to be roommates with whom, Rimmers assigned little guys closest to the lavatories, and then moving to tweens further out, and lastly the teens by entryways and the common rooms. All the boys had chosen their roommates at the hospitals based on existing friendships and sexual preferences. Only

three of the youngest boys wanted to share a single room. Once dorm room assignments were near complete, the usual brotherhood and teamwork chats started. At the various hospitals, the boys had already heard much of the biological and sexuality chats. Again, this group was much more tuned in prior to arrival than their level one orphanage counterparts.

Boys began packing suitcases at the checkout aisles. Troy and Sean ordered the new comm-badges and passed them out. In pairs, boys and packed suitcases were transported directly to dorm rooms. John, Stephen and their two boys were the first Core Rimmer escorts for the newbies at the Oneula Beach dorm. Each pair of newbies transported to their dorm rooms with Rimmer sons. With the first group of tweens, Corey, Drew and their sons joined the Oneula Beach group. Minutes later, with the last of the tweens, AJ, Jerry and their three sons were there at Oneula's dormitory one.

Once alone with only teens, the remaining teenaged Core Rimmers went off on silly rants, wondering whose bright idea it was to try getting seventy-one boys through the store at once. They blamed the girls, Alden, the other AIs and each other. Threats of drum stick and electric guitar enemas at the first convenient opportunity were passed. Mike ordered a stock of various sized dildos for the boys' toiletries department, so the next time they could at least get their rocks off after four frigging hours; all of which drove the twenty-three newbie teen boys, and Paul and Ryan into hysterics.

At five-thirty in the afternoon, after the last of the teens had been shown their new rooms, the newbie boys were given a quick tour around the Oneula Beach base. The tour ended at the Oneula cafeteria. Everyone was led through the dimensional doors and back to the Ewa Beach dining room. Immediately upon arrival, the level two orphanage girls, who were already sitting at tables eating dinner,

helplessly giggled at their orphanage brothers and mercilessly teased them. The girls had toured both Ewa Beach and Oneula Beach. They had played at playgrounds and gone swimming. They had started to meet the other boys and girls.

Nodding and smiling, Keith playfully countered, "There are three times more boys than girls. Since it took you two hours and it took us only four hours, either it should've taken us two more hours, or the girls still took too long."

John smirked, "Plus, each of the dudes got to spend that time with fifteen of us, *and* all twenty-four of our sons, *and* Paul and Ryan too. They know us and we know all seventy-one of them. We had almost as many helpers as there were girls to start with. Doing the math, that's a hundred-and-eighteen compared to thirty."

Derrick joked, "We're doing a panty-raid on an all girls orphanage soon. When there are a hundred girls on one side of the store, we'll let our moms deal and take a nap during those hours."

Anna Seibert and Laura Gibbons sang, "Sour grapes!"

Mike snarled, "Is that what's for dinner?" and then cheekily grinned, bouncing his eyebrows at his mom and mother-in-law.

Prez didn't participate in the banter, because he had noticed that every newbie girl had McCoy milkshakes before them. Some newbie teen girls had small plates of salad, or veggies, or bread too. It reminded Prez where these kids came from. As fresh, fun and normal as they were, it was all because of the days spent at the hospitals, and because they were happier. John's and Drew's families, and the Rimmer sons, led the newbie boys through the chow line. Near the CIC entrance doors, Prez purposefully held the other Core Rimmers back in a huddle to share his thoughts. They all noticed that the chefs

had obviously been briefed by the doctors, because each newbie boy shuffling through the line got a McCoy milkshake and was then asked if he wanted something additional.

Kaleo softly reminded Prez, "Remember where we were a little over a week ago, at the luau and Anahola Bay?"

Nodding, Prez said, "Sure, almost every minute of it."

Realizing where his husband was going, Tory smiled, "Dinner at the luau, you got just as sad as you are now."

Sean shared, "If you ask me, that's the kind of stuff that made you our leader, Prez. You didn't know much about any of us, but you cared, very deeply."

"I wasn't at that table, but heard about it," Jerry grinned, "I have to agree with Kaleo, Sean and Tory. We can see it in your expression and eyes, Prez. You're losing your appetite just thinking about what they went through."

"Don't go there," AJ instructed. "Instead, consider how much you mean to this entire division. I'm standing here with you for only two reasons – Jerry was willing and you asked us to be Core Rimmers. It wasn't Keith, Kaleo, or any one else's request that mattered; it was yours."

Kaleo nodded and shared, "You made me a member of your team first; me, a boy-toy only a day earlier. Any kid here would gladly do almost anything you asked of them. You don't even realize that, do you?" When Prez shook his head, Kaleo chuckled, "All of the original eight Core Rimmers were almost unreal to us. Joel rescued us and he made you our leaders. After a week with you, and the week at Archmania, I still wonder what makes you dudes tick. Anytime I ask myself why you aren't stuck-up and superior, I only have to watch

you to realize that you couldn't be that way if you tried. It would come off as a joke. Remember that stuff and eat dinner. These newbies are here and eating because of you, more than any of us."

Prez sighed, "I get it, but I can't help feeling what I do."

Reyes suggested, "Then eat at a table with some of them, Prez. Show them how much you care, by asking them what their medical instructions are. If you'll do that, we'll do it too." Paul and Ryan were stunned silent with Reyes, and with the Core Rimmers' interaction. Reyes held up both his hands for Paul and Ryan to take, clearly signaling that they would find a table to be together with some of the newbie kids.

Each of the other Core Rimmers chimed, "Me too." With a small grin and Prez's thanks, the huddle broke and they went to the kitchen for their dinners. A few minutes later, Prez was sitting at a table of newbie teen boys, and the rest of the team followed his lead, choosing tables where newbie boys and girls were sitting.

The Core Rimmers knew that the original eighty-seven and the level one orphanage kids would get their height and weight checked by doctors once a month. The same group would get their blood checked twice a year. They learned that the level two orphanage kids were going to get their height, weight and blood checked every two weeks. Other than malnourishment, they were all relatively healthy. A few had been sick, with respiratory or sinus infections when they were rescued, but those conditions were treated while they were at the hospitals. One teenaged girl and one tween boy now wore prescription glasses. According to the kids, the hospitals they had been at went far beyond normal care. Doctors visited each kid every morning, afternoon and evening. Nurses checked on them constantly, and gave them decks of cards and games to play. Most importantly, each kid had a clean, warm bed to sleep in and plenty to eat anytime they were

hungry.

Since the level two kids had just arrived, each Core Rimmer suggested that they take the next week off to adjust, like all the other rescued kids had the prior week off. While that sounded great to the kids, they also admitted that they wanted to attend Clan schools, where they were told they would get a better education, and that's where the majority of other kids would be anyway. They were told to sleep on the decision. Those that wanted to go to school the next morning for placement tests could do so, or they could choose to take the week off.

Noticing Keith had finished eating and was only chatting at a table of level two girls, Kekoa went over to report his findings from Los Angeles. Seeing Kekoa approaching, Keith excused himself from the table. Crossing the dining room and meeting up with the detachment's commander, Keith asked, "Is there anything disturbing about your report?"

Kekoa shrugged, "You're concerned about Leo hearing it?"

Keith slowly nodded, "Yeah, and even if Drew and Corey should hear it."

"I think at least one of Leo's new parents needs to know," Kekoa suggested.

Keith led Kekoa to the table where Corey's and Drew's family were sitting. By the time Keith had invited his brother and brother-in-law to come with them, John was also standing there too, innocently blinking and cheekily smiling. John shared, *'It's just easier if I pass this along to the other Core Rimmers. We've got almost thirty B.O.E. kids here who are just like Leo. All of us need to know.'* Begrudgingly, Keith nodded agreement. Keith, Corey, Drew, John and Kekoa left

the dining room and went into the Command Center's conference room. As soon as the door was closed, John looked up at Kekoa, saying, "We're doing similar investigations for all the other B.O.E. kids we've rescued. If any kid, or any of the adopted parents, or Doc Wiener need the information, we should have it as soon as possible."

Nodding, Kekoa grinned, "I figured as much," and then took the chair at the end of the table. Once everyone was seated, Kekoa said, "Let me preface everything by telling you that we have standard video and audio recordings of the entire operation."

"Los Angeles is still cleaning up the mess," Kekoa continued. "They have the National Guard protecting the county. There's a city-wide dusk curfew imposed for all citizens to get off the street. When my team arrived at 2765 Francis Avenue, the Scotts' residence, the entire street was cordoned off by police. We identified ourselves and the purpose of our presence there. Francis Avenue is only about a kilometer long; it spans from Hoover Street to South Vermont Avenue."

"The police told us that this particular neighborhood was claimed by four gangs. The Crips were done arguing and fighting. If you weren't friend then you were foe. On Francis Avenue alone, twenty-three were killed and another sixty-seven wounded." Locking eyes with Drew, Kekoa softly said, "Leo's the only person under the age of eighteen alive, and he's the only one that got out of there physically unharmed."

Corey gasped. Drew closed his eyes and deeply sighed, then reopened his eyes and prompted, "Go on, Kekoa."

Kekoa pulled out his PADD to read from his notes. He shared, "The house was heavily damaged, inside and out. From the sidewalk, my team counted and verified fifty-six bullet holes on the front wall

of the house, facing the street. All the front windows were shattered, so obviously there were no holes to count in those spaces. Inside the home, we found fourteen bullet holes in the ceiling, and that it had very definitely been looted. On the first level, furniture and all personal belongings were awry. We found two puddles of urine, one in the dining room and one in the kitchen, and both were in the middle of the floor, away from any vandalism target."

"That seems odd," Keith scowled. "When a dude needs to piss, it's usually against, in or on something."

"We came to the same conclusion," Kekoa said. "Whatever the purpose was, somebody was in a hurry. We took samples from both puddles, kept one set and gave a duplicate set to the police."

Corey asked, "Was the furniture near the doorways tipped over, Kekoa?"

"Yes, it was," Kekoa answered. "That's another weird thing about this case. It seemed as if the looters got in through the living room picture window easily enough, but when it was time to leave, they spent time pulling furniture away from doorways. The only reason we could come up with, for something that illogical, was flight-or-fight reflex; they were under duress. How they left wasn't as important as leaving... quickly."

After checking the four faces, Kekoa continued. "There was nothing salvageable downstairs that I thought Leo might want to have. The family portrait was tattered and torn, so I didn't bother with it. We climbed the steps to find that the top landing was barricaded with furniture; a twin sized bed and a chest of drawers. There was a small space on the right side, that a boy might've gotten past. Our tunnel rat and one other team member got past it easily. It had to be

moved for me and the rest of our team to get past it."

Drew nodded, "Leo said he pushed the stuff aside when he was ready to leave." He then asked, "Did the bathroom tub look like it was slept in?"

"There was a blanket, pillows and six emergency lights in the bathroom," Kekoa replied. "Only one of the emergency lights had discharged. The remaining five were near fully charged." Pausing to clear his throat, Kekoa said, "The bodies of an adult male and an adult female were found in one bedroom, on the floor, near the opposite ends of a dresser."

"They were still there?" Corey excitedly hollered. "Two days later, they were still there?"

Nodding, Kekoa softly reminded, "The City and most of the county are riot zones. There's a lot more to be cleaned up, beyond this one neighborhood."

Corey cried, "Omigod! Leo's nightmare was real! He relived the entire night in his dream!"

Taking Corey's hand, Drew nodded, "It seems that way." Fuming with anger and saddened beyond rational thought, Corey wiped tears from his eyes. Looking at Kekoa, Drew prompted, "Continue, please?"

Kekoa sighed, "Both adults had received shots to the head, and each had other gunshot wounds; the woman was hit in the shoulder and the man was hit through an arm and into his torso. The LA County Coroner was dispatched and both bodies were taken to the morgue. Half my team remained at the Scott residence until the coroner was finished there. The other half of the team and I went to

Police Headquarters and the LA County Sheriff's Department.

"Police and Sheriffs had arrested sixteen members of the Crips. From telepathic investigations, we've taken custody of four of them, who were directly responsible for the Scotts' deaths, and many others on Francis Avenue."

Abruptly, John yelled, "COREY!" When Corey jumped and locked eyes with him, John firmly said, "Care for the living first. That's logical, bro. Leo's more important than the men who are already as good as dead."

"They know that too," Kekoa evilly grinned. "They actually offered confessions to the police if they'd refuse the custody change. California still hasn't recovered from the ZCC orphanages, so the police weren't willing to argue with us. Needless to say, the murderers struck out."

Squeezing his husband's hand and getting his attention, Drew gently instructed, "Let 'em stew and suffer, Cor. We'll take care of them, in a few days, after we tell Leo most of this and make sure he's okay."

Keith nodded, "I agree. Let them fret and fuss another day, at least. When it comes time to deliver justice, I want to take one out."

"And I'll take the last of the four," John said.

Turning to Kekoa, Corey instructed, "Keep them miserable, around the clock, dude. Leo's suffering and will always remember the way his parents were taken from him. Those scum get minimal food and drink, and constant annoyance until we put them out of our misery."

"Believe me, they're not comfortable, Corey," Kekoa smiled.

"With your order, they'll look forward to death."

Keith asked, "Is there anything else on this case, Kekoa?"

"That's the majority of it," Kekoa responded. "While I was there, my team investigated Jimmy Matos, and the Nash brothers. We didn't get to Tony Lanning or Travis McAuley, so we'll let Ark and Founder Intel do their thing. The rest is normal Clan policy. We're paying for the Scott's last wishes and final resting places. If no documentation can be located, they'll be cremated and the remains sent here. As Leo's guardians, we'll be notified if need be."

Drew smiled, "Thanks for taking care of this for us, Kekoa."

"It's part of the job and kept you guys safe," Kekoa simply stated.

"Let's get back to the dining room then," Keith prompted. All five stood and pushed their chairs under the table.

Suddenly, Corey jumped, twisted and began laughing. Drew, Keith and Kekoa glanced around for some explanation.

Over Corey's laughter, John grinned, "I warned him to chill out. Leo needs his dad and stubborn pop too. Until Corey chills, he'll feel like he's being tickled, by Drew, in all those same naughty places."

Drew gleamed, "And I'll get to reap the benefits." Softly chortling, John, Keith and Kekoa left the conference room. Drew remained with Corey. After a while, Corey laughed himself nearly to exhaustion and left the room with Drew. They got as far as the Command Center before another exasperating thought caused another burst of laughter from Corey. Bouncing his eyebrows at the boys in the room, Drew smiled, "This is gonna be an interesting night!"

Out in the dining room, Keith went to Prez. Through his sub-vocal, Keith heard Alden groaning, "Prez is highly perturbed. He's ordered me to drop the corpses of the four gang members on the doorsteps of their families, with notes that are to read 'Either you're friend or foe; if you're not with us, then you're against us. Sincerely, Family Clan Short Pacific Rim Division.'"

"Understandable," Keith softly said. "Prez is hitting them with their own ultimatum."

"There usually aren't identifiable remains after phaser blasts, Keith."

"At the highest setting," Keith reminded. "At the next lower setting and a wider beam, internal injuries would be massive and deadly."

Instantly processing the potential broken bones and organ damage likely, Alden droned, "Oh my... you're pissed too."

Stopping and standing behind Prez's chair, Keith softly explained, "This was no accident, Alden. All our families would help almost anyone, anytime, and every way we could, before we were Clan. Alternatively, you don't fuck with our families. Leo is now family. From what I've heard, those men didn't care who they were shooting at. They got their rocks off with automatic weapons, when resources to stop them were at their lowest. It was violence for violence's sake. If the Crips want a war, they'll be overwhelmed with a show of strength that they won't soon forget. Put our heavily armored two hundred guys and only our Hind gunship up against a thousand of them. We'd have minimal, minor casualties, and they'd be decimated."

Still at a table with Neil, Tad, Carter, Doug and three other teen

boys, Prez firmly said, "Kids from Los Angeles to Beijing are mine to protect. Kids are here, in the situations they're in, because we didn't know if it was logical to intervene in civil unrest. That mistake won't be made twice. Work with me, like the Latin Kings, or suffer the consequences. I've already notified Brent and Lance in Vegas, and Hector in Los Angeles. They're listening to their cities' grapevines. At the first threatening move by any gang, we're there to take back the city."

From the Command Center doors, Corey bounced into the dining room, laughing hysterically. Drew followed and held his arms up, loudly giggling, "Look, no hands!" Grinning insanely, John sadly shook his head. Everyone else cracked up, but the loudest laughter came from Leo, Lenny, Geoff and the quadruple Rs. Corey rested at the table where his sons were sitting. It was Leo's peaceful expression and caring manner with Lenny and Geoff that calmed Corey down.

Leo's face radiated innocence and trust, Corey noticed. There was a deep desire to be part of the family, made apparent by the way Leo interacted with his new little brothers. Underneath all that, Corey knew there was a deep pain in his eldest son. Too occupied with Geoff and Lenny, Leo didn't ask about the meeting his dad and pop were at. Alone together in the near future, Corey and Drew would have to consider how much Leo would need to know, or want to know.

Noticing that most of the kids were done with dinner, Prez stood and had Alden connect him to the base PA so he could announce a meeting, which all kids and available adults could attend. Those who had already taken their trays to the dishwasher got up and started for the exits. Drew and Corey had been expecting the announcement since before the trip to the basement store. They gathered their sons and transported into the auditorium to get the place powered up.

Ready for their first division meeting and concert, Chris, Jay, Craig, Phil, Erik, Travis, Lance, Scott, Tony and Ray stood and joined the mass of kids leaving the dining room. All eight spent most of the afternoon together. Of the eight, only Erik and Travis weren't in the auditorium the prior afternoon. The other six told them about the concert video they had watched.

Wishing he could participate in the conversation, Kassidy Oldcambus followed the pack with his brothers, Kade and Karey, but tried to ignore the telepathic conversation.

Evilly grinning, Karey silently shared, *'Kass has the hots for Jay and Travis.'*

'What I'm wonderin' is why Kass is thinkin' about the amount of pubes each has?' Kade privately replied.

Karey shrugged and reminded, *'It ain't like Kass is hairless. Compared to us, he's got plenty of pubes.'*

Receiving another thought from his big bro, Kade sent, *'Oh, it's the bigger, buffer guys that Kass likes most. He was only comparing Jay to Travis.'*

Looking up at his older brother, Karey smiled, *'Stop worryin' about us, Kass. It ain't like we never knew you liked girls and guys. It don't matter to us at all.'*

Kassidy squinted and glared at both his younger brothers, warning them that they would eventually be back in their dorm room. Kade and Karey giggled, making it clear they were looking forward to it.

During the walk, Lance raved about Mike and Troy. Erik told Lance, "I started guitar lessons two years ago, but my school grades

took a nose dive. My folks made me quit, but I never really lost interest; I just hadn't learned enough to really try learning on my own. I figured someday, ya know?"

Lance grinned, "You never said anything all day about that?"

Shrugging, Erik giggled, "I didn't tell Trav either. There were too many other dreams to share."

"Since way before I got here, being a musician has been my biggest, most important dream," Lance admitted.

Raising and displaying Travis' hand in his, Erik giggled, "Here's my dream."

Lance giggled, "It's all in the priorities, I guess. I wasn't even ready for my Panda's return."

Paused at the mass of kids entering the auditorium, behind Scott, Lance, Erik and Travis, were Tony and Ray. Tony teased, "I dunno, Lance. If I were in Trav's place, I think I'd be getting a little jealous of you and Erik."

Spinning around, Lance giggled, "I'm not putting any moves on Erik. Look at Trav compared to me. I'm not feeling especially suicidal tonight." Ray and Phil cracked up.

Craig sniggered, "Most of the afternoon, and through dinner, you have been chatting up a storm with Erik though, Lance. Trav's barely gotten a few words in compared to you."

Quickly moving around to Scott's other side, Lance admitted, "Scott's heard all this before, most of last night." He then locked eyes with Travis, giggling, "No boyfriends, no girlfriends, no Panda bears, but only a Les Paul hanging off my shoulder." He whined through

giggles, "Please don't hit me! I'll just fall down and bleed!" Everyone in the group of eight roared. Kassidy helplessly sputtered and sniggered.

When the laughter began to subside, Erik pulled Travis close, planted a tender kiss on his mouth, and then whispered, "Only friends, Champ. It's you I want. Kewl?" Nodding, Travis landed a deeper kiss, causing all their other friends to chuckle and applaud. Shuffling into the auditorium, all eight remained together and found seats in the auditorium.

Another group that remained close together were the Combs and Diaz families. The four adults sat close together with their kids separated. Angelo slyly glanced down the row at Reggie, wondering if he would ever get to know the older Combs boy. All weekend long they had seen one another carrying stuff into their new townhomes, but other than casual greetings, neither Angelo nor Reggie had made other moves. Separated by six seats, both teenagers were silently considering what might happen if they ever got the chance to say more than "hey".

Since the eldest Core Rimmers were the last to be served dinner, they were the last to arrive at the auditorium. As they walked in the theater and down the aisle, the audience started applauding, and it only got louder, with cheers, names being called, and whistling. More curious than anything, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick led the way down to the stage.

Reyes waved at the newbies he had brought to Ewa Beach that were calling his name. Walking with their friend down the aisle, Ryan and Paul silently wondered if this sort of reception was common. Reyes introduced Lance Elling and Alton Teele to Paul and Ryan, and asked if they would mind sitting with his friends. Seats were shifted and soon Ryan and Paul were being introduced to other nearby

teenage boys.

Blushing intensely, Sean and Troy giggled the entire way down the aisle. Kaleo and Tory knocked so many knuckles with ex-orphanage brothers and new friends that their fists were a little sore. The majority of the Core Rimmer team walked up onto the stage, where John's and Drew's families were already sitting. Scattered around and loudly chanting "We are The Rimmers!" were many of the UNIT base and personal security personnel.

Most of the team sat on the edge of the stage, but Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick remained standing on the auditorium floor. Prez asked Drew to pass him the microphone. Facing the audience and raising the mic to his mouth, Prez chuckled, "What's goin' on, you guys? None of us have said a word or played a song yet."

Earlene Maygar yelled, "We love you guys, Prez." The applause seemed to swell with giggling from the crowd.

When the sound started to dwindle, Hugh Gartrell hollered, "The next time you run into a burning tower, keep that bubble butt kewl, dude." Again, the applause and laughter swelled.

Fanning her face with one hand, Cassie Cornwall loudly laughed, "Lord knows your butt makes plenty of us hot enough." The almost seven-hundred strong crowd cracked up, including the Core Rimmers and Prez.

Catching his breath, Prez raised the microphone, joking, "Meeting adjourned."

Prez's personal security, Matthew and Chris yelled, "Not until you play the new Rimmer theme song!"

Horacio laughed, "We heard about that. It's a must, dudes."

Madly chuckling, Prez handed Keith the microphone. Remembering that he had adoptions to do, Prez tapped his sub-vocal to have Alden deliver his tricorder. While Prez got situated, Keith sniggered, "We had this crazy notion this might be a semi-serious welcome home meeting for our newbies, kids and families alike."

Mike asked Keith for the microphone, and then prompted, "Would the Combs family, the Diaz Family, the Taylor family, the Praefectus family, Rad Conklin and Gil Hoover please stand?" Scattered around the center seating in the auditorium, the named families and individuals stood. Mike said, "Please welcome Mr. Roy Combs, our new Facilities Coordinator, and his wife, Mrs. Monica Combs, our new breads and pastries chef. Mrs. Combs is now our top most favorite person in the world, right guys?" The kids loudly agreed.

Taking the microphone again, Keith introduced, "Joining us from the frozen tundra of Chicago, we have Mr. Doyle Praefectus joining our chefs. Mrs. Essie Praefectus is finishing her teaching degree. She'll be a teachers' assistant first and then a teacher. Their sons, Daemon and Ian, have already joined John's Intel team."

While the crowd was still applauding, Derrick took the mic and introduced, "Mrs. Diaz is our new math and music teacher. After the New Year, Mr. Diaz will become Doctor Diaz. Mr. Jason Taylor is our social studies teacher and football coach, and Mrs. Trinity Taylor is our new math and algebra teacher. Gil Hoover and Rad Conklin are our resident heroes. Both men were stationed aboard one of the destroyers that fought to save San Francisco." The audience continued applauding the newest arrivals. Turning to Prez, Derrick asked, "Do they have jobs yet?"

Leaning closer to the microphone, Prez grinned, "Gil's a Mouth Rimmer; he was into communications on his ship and will continue in that role, for as long as he's happy there."

"And Rad?" Derrick wondered.

Prez chuckled, "I don't know really, but thought he'd start a fruits and veggies garden for us."

Returning to his seat, Gil softly chortled. Rad grinned and loudly wondered, "Will I ever live it down, Prez?"

Holding up an index finger to signal a pause, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike huddled together. After a brief whispered consultation, all four circled the one microphone and began sweetly singing as a barber shop quartet; "Down at an English fair one evening I was there, When I heard a showman shouting underneath the flair. I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts, There they are all standing in a row. Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head. Give them a twist, a flick of the wrist. That's what the showman said." While they were singing, they were making hand gestures in front of their crotches, showing everyone the size of their 'coconuts'.

Recalling the first time he'd heard that song at the luau and laughing himself silly, Kaleo slipped off the stage. All the other Core Rimmers and most of the audience cracked up. Tory and Jerry offered hands, and Mike cupped his hands to help Kaleo climb back onstage. Rad laughed, "I'll take that as my answer then," and sat down beside his partner.

When the applause dwindled, Derrick said, "Before I pass the mic back to Prez, I'd like to announce that Family Clan Short Pacific Rim Division now has three-hundred-ninety-two rescued kids. Including our parents, employees and their kids, we've broken five-

hundred. Add in our base security here and at Oneula Beach, and our personal security, puts us over six-hundred-seventy in only eight days." During the applause, Derrick passed the microphone back to Prez.

Further back in the audience, near Fred and Chauncey Eckhart, Ricco barked, "Plus one canine."

The Scooby Gang yelled, "Plus four ferrets!"

The chimps hollered, "And a dozen chimpanzees."

Appearing on the stage and climbing into the Rimmers' laps, six kittens purred, "Plus six felines."

Rolling his eyes, Reyes softly warned, "Charles, the music here is going to be the loudest you've ever heard." Without further commentary, all six kittens arched their backs, puffed up and disappeared from the auditorium stage.

The Rimmers on and standing before the stage sang, "Four calling birds, three French Hens, two turtle doves and Shirley in pear tree!"

Displaying his tricorder and lifting the mic, Prez asked, "If the Gibbons family and Seibert family are ready for their additions, please come down to the stage?"

The Steib quadruplets and the McPhearson brothers raced down the aisle, with Paulie the Panda in pursuit. Prez, Derrick and Mike squatted down to catch the six little dudes. All four Steib brothers slammed into Derrick and knocked him over, starting the audience's laughter. The McPhearsons went directly to Prez, and Paulie embraced Keith, leaving Mike there without any kids at all. The audience roared laughing; the loudest laughter coming from the other

Core Rimmers and Lindsay Gibbons.

Standing, Mike sniffed one of his armpits, loudly joking, "Yeah, I did use deodorant today. What am I? Only their big brother, but do I matter?" Prez helplessly laughed, kissed Albert, and then lifted Charles, planted a smooch on his cheek, and took them over to Mike.

Albert giggled, "Momma and Lindsay told us to go to Prez first, cos he matters more, since he burned his butt." From the front rows, where they could hear Albert's confession, to the back rows, the audience exploded. Derrick and Prez only glanced at each other then howled laughing.

The Scoobies loudly assured, "Weez loves you, Shiny Daddy!" causing more applause and laughter to last longer.

"Come on down here guys," Mike prompted the Scooby Gang. All four disappeared under the chairs and scampered down to the stage. Faith and Willow climbed up Mike and stopped at his shoulders. Spike and Xander landed on Mike's feet. Mike reminded, "We've got over a hundred newbies to take the pledge, guys. Can you get them ready, quietly, while Prez handles these adoptions?"

"Weez can do that," all four ferrets squeaked. They gave Mike hugs then scampered back up aisles. With some help from previous pledge takers sitting nearby, the newbies learned about the Great Shiny, Shiny Lovers, Dull Ones, and the evil Dull Lovers and Shiny Haters.

Simultaneously, while Shiny lessons were in progress, Prez got the McPhearson brothers adopted into the Gibbons family, despite Mike's attempts to talk Albert and Charles out of it, and add them to his and Derrick's family. Only six rows back, Dillon, Randy and Jonah were hysterical. The Steib quadruplets were adopted into the

Seibert family. Prez announced the adoptions official. The audience applauded and cheered.

Lowering the microphone, Prez turned to John, asking, "Has Vaziik been introduced to Lieutenant Vorik?"

"First thing," John answered. "I asked Vorik to join us in the store, while Vaziik was getting clothes. Vaziik now understands the Clan as a whole, our Clan and leadership style, and has a good example to look up to locally. Vaziik was with the rest of the B.O.E. kids and Doc Wiener this morning. I had a telepathic conversation with him, only cos it's quicker and easier that way. He's kewl, bro."

While Prez was occupied with John, Mike went back to the Scoobies and near the newbie kids. Spike reminded his Shiny Daddy to put his Shiny Priest robe on for the occasion. After getting the robe from Alden, Mike made a show of putting it on, as if he were Moses about to part the Red Sea. Just as John and Prez were finishing up, about two-hundred kids rescued since Thursday, including Vaziik, and the new families stood to proudly recite the Shiny Pledge. The rest of the kids applauded, cheered and whistled.

Raising the microphone, Prez said, "It's almost seven-thirty, and our newest arrivals came from the United States, so it feels much later to them. We're going to get on with the show, but first, I do want to say that what happened Thursday night at the Hyatt will not happen again. Keith's talked to me about it, and so have all four of my sons, both my parents, all the other Core Rimmers and Kekoa Casey. Our biggest, most important job is to be brothers for all of you, and fathers for some of you. I won't endanger that primary mission by putting the command team of this division in harms' way again. In the future, dangerous rescues like the Hyatt will rely solely upon the UNIT Pacific Rim Detachment." The audience applauded, but Prez didn't think it worthy of applause and reminded, "Old timers need to

remember school tomorrow at nine in the morning, for our first placement test, so set your alarm clocks." Drew and Corey jumped down off the stage. Leo, Lenny and Geoff stood on the stage. With Drew's sub-vocal tap, all five disappeared from the auditorium and reappeared up in the PA room. Prez continued, "We're going to play some new tunes and some that y'all will definitely recognize."

The audience lights started to dim. Prez chuckled, "That's my queue that I've yapped long enough." Kids in the audience giggled. John levitated his family off the stage and up the aisle. AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory hopped down off the stage. With a tender kiss, Sean wished Troy good luck. Sean then jumped down and joined the audience with the other Core Rimmers and their sons. Following Derrick, Mike and Keith up the stage steps, Prez turned off the microphone and took it up onto the stage with him. He slid the mic back into its holder on the stand and then turned it on before going to pick up his bass guitar.

Mrs. Diaz softly told her husband, daughter and son, "The four boys from my old band class are virtuosos. I've watched them sight read music and perform expertly the first time through. I have no idea what they'll be playing, but guaranteed it'll be far better than most fourteen-year-olds could accomplish."

Gathering around the drum risers, the band started putting together the set list, which was passed along via their comm-badges, as it developed, to Drew and Corey. Out in the audience, many kids noticed various changes on the stage, like additional guitars, two of which were where Keith normally stood on stage left; two additional bass guitars and one acoustic guitar was at Prez's position, just slightly left of center stage; and on stage right, Mike's and Troy's selection of guitars were up to five each. Old timers told the newbies which instruments each band member played and shared stories about

the luau, the Shiny Concert, the Wedding Concert, and the Welcome Home Concert for the level one orphans. Up in the PA booth, Corey and Drew were teaching Leo about the mixer, lighting console and outboard sound gear. The stage lighting dimmed such that even the littlest kids in the front rows could barely see their dads moving into position. Wearing his white Shiny Priest robe still, Mike was the most visible band member.

Pin-point spotlights shone onto the spinning mirrored disco ball high above the audience. Yellow lights beamed behind and over the drum risers, and at the extreme left and right of the stage came on. Reyes shook a tambourine over Derrick's head, moving from the left overhead mic to the right and back again. At stage left, Keith played the opening synthesizer arpeggios to [Karn Evil 9](#). The audience enthusiastically applauded and cheered before Prez stepped forward to sing lead vocals.

Welcome back my friends to the show that never ends

We're so glad you could attend

Come inside! Come inside!

There behind the glass is a real blade of grass

be careful as you pass.

Move along! Move along!

Then, at stage right, Troy added the Hammond organ part at the second verse. Pounding his drums, Derrick came in with Mike strumming power chords. Reyes moved over to his electronic drum kit, put the tambourine down and picked up drums sticks. Watching his dad, Reyes came in playing the same part in perfect

synchronization.

All the newbie kids were stunned seeing their leaders transform from regular teenage boys to professional musicians, commanding the stage and their instruments. Shivering excitedly, Lance and Scott were more awestruck than they had been during the concert video they saw Saturday afternoon. Keyboard and guitar solos made some kids get on their feet. Watching Derrick's and Reyes' drum solo and Prez begin singing again, with strobe lights flashing and only drums backing him up, drove the rest of the kids to stand. Hearing the verse about 'seven virgins and mule,' almost every boy twelve years old and over uncontrollably cracked up. The security guys and the Rimmers' sons, all of whom had heard the song the prior day, applauded through the entire song.

Mrs. Diaz was completely captivated. Somehow her four virtuoso musicians had managed to find two other teen boys every bit as talented as they were. Of course, she didn't realize that Reyes only appeared to be thirteen, but was in fact a fifty-six-year-old android. Paul and Ryan were sitting together at the left end of a row, surrounded on three sides by many of the ex-street kids. The brothers had seen Reyes playing percussion and drums very briefly when they first met, and again at the beach house, but it was nothing like seeing Reyes play on stage with all the lights. At the end of the song, the spotlights on the disco ball went out, and so did many of the stage lights, leaving the applauding audience in virtual darkness.

For the next song, Troy moved away from the Hammond organ and went to pick up a Les Paul electric guitar. While kids cheered and Troy got situated to play and sing, Keith had synthesized sounds of a thumping heartbeat, electronic squeals and a helicopter traveling around the auditorium, introducing the Aldo Nova song [Fantasy](#). With explosions of sound and light, Mike and Troy started playing the

primary guitar power chords and the band joined together. Troy stepped forward to sing lead vocals.

Out in the audience, Judy Faris proudly smiled at her once shy son, who now had the attention of hundreds. Even she was somewhat surprised, in the middle of the song, when Troy grunted and jumped back from the microphone to play the dueling guitar solos with Mike. Prez joined them at center stage. In a semi-circle, the three guitarists bounced, swayed and shimmied to the delight of the crowd. The adults in the back rows couldn't tell who was having more fun, the six boys on stage or the rest of the kids who were on their feet, dancing in place or clapping their hands in time to the music.

When the second song ended, the band barely paused for the applause and cheering. They went right into the song [Heavy Metal \(Takin' a Ride\)](#), with Mike singing lead vocals. Scott Shetley and Lance Kinchen had their jaws hanging on the floor while watching Mike sing and play lead slide guitar at the same time. Only the band members knew the goal was to rock this audience, so they could sleep and be ready for school the next morning. Kids began moving away from their seats to dance in aisles. Since none of the band members needed to change instruments, they went directly to the next song. A Capella, Derrick, Keith, Mike and Troy sang, "[Carry On My Wayward Son](#), there'll be peace when you are done. Lay your weary head to rest. Don't you cry no more." And the band seemed to explode at once with two guitarists, two drummers, bass guitar and keyboards. Keith sang lead vocals, with primarily Derrick and Troy backing him up during the choruses.

During this song, Troy, Prez and Mike moved forward to play the guitar solos and instrumental breaks at the middle and end of the song. Up in the PA booth, Corey had an electronic tempo detector, so he could set the digitally controlled strobe lights to perfectly sync

with the music and musicians. Corey activated the strobe lights during the final guitar solo and instrumental break. Almost all the stage lights went off with the final chord. The kids roared their approval.

Corey turned up the center blue and red lights, so Derrick could safely move down off the drum risers to take center stage. After putting his guitar down, Troy moved back to the Hammond organ. Mike switched guitars to his Stratocaster. Reyes quickly reprogrammed his electronic drums, tapped his sticks together to count off and began playing [In The Air Tonight](#). Mike played a single heavily distorted power chord. Keyboards came in from Keith and Troy. Still wearing his wireless microphone wrapped over his head, Derrick strolled near the edge of the stage, singing directly to the kids. Suddenly, rows of seats emptied and kids stormed the stage. About half way through the song, Derrick turned to slowly walk back stage, winking at Mike and Prez on the way. Returning to his drum set and joining Reyes, they played the thundering drum part. The song ended with booming drums and crashing cymbals. Hollering and screaming, kids enthusiastically endorsed the dramatic performance.

Troy went to get his Stratocaster. Keith hurried across to stage right to play the Hammond organ and synthesizers there. Keith started playing low bass tones and synthesized strings. Glancing around the kids closest to the stage, Prez chuckled, "Big kids help the little ones, so they can see too. This next song is the one Horacio and our security teams asked us to play, it's our division's theme song. It's called, [Knocking At Your Back Door](#)." Stepping back, Prez started pounding on his bass. From stage right, Keith sang the lead vocals.

Not believing the teenagers on stage could be so suggestive, Angelo Diaz cracked up. Six seats away, Reggie Combs blushed and softly chortled. Led by most of the original eighty-seven, more and more kids left their seats and hurried down to the stage.

Up in the PA booth, Leo giggled, "What's goin' on down there, pop?"

"Got me!" Corey laughed, "It's the first time that's ever happened."

Holding a pair of binoculars to his eyes to see, Drew smiled, "It's been a few days since the kids have gotten a concert. At the front of the stage, I see Chris, Jay, Craig, Phil, Lance, Scott, Tony and Ray, the Steibs and the quadruple R's. Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Billy, Horacio and Sonia are there too. It looks like there's a mix of newbies and old timers at the stage." One thing Drew didn't comment on was Robbie Taylor carefully watching Billy Whittmore. Billy was too busy dancing with Sean to notice Robbie.

During the song, more kids gathered at the stage in front of their leaders. Driving the kids and adults crazy, every time Keith sang 'knocking at your back door', Troy, Prez and Mike spun around to wiggle their butts around. Mrs. Diaz and her husband cracked up every time the boys shook their tushes at the audience. Sitting beside his blushing older brother, Reggie, Cameron Combs laughed more than he ever had, at his embarrassed brother, and the bottom jiggling band members. As much as he really wanted to appear innocent sitting beside his parents, Angelo Diaz, was pushed into a giggling fit by his seemingly disinterested younger sister. If the truth be told, the younger Diaz child was most fascinated by anything that she shouldn't be interested in. Teenage boys shaking their bums were just showing off, and therefore nothing was the slightest bit intriguing.

Vaziik was led down near the stage by Stu, the Oldcambus brothers, and their cousin, Taron. Vaziik was shown how to keep time and dance. Although a foreign activity, Vaziik was encouraged by his roommate, Stu Sutliff, to follow his friends' leads and do what they

were doing.

At the end of the song, it seemed like about a hundred kids were swamping the stage. While Keith returned to stage left, Mike chuckled, "Guys, we really love to see you having fun, but please be careful. We don't want anybody getting hurt, so spread out a little. Please don't make any adults come down and break up the fun, all right?" To give the younger and smaller kids space, most of the older and bigger teens wandered away from center stage and toward the aisles.

Pointing at stage left, all four of the quadruple Rs shouted, "Keith's picked up a guitar."

Stepping up to a microphone, Keith grinned, "Yeah, I'm not sure how this thing works. Where are the white and black keys, Mike?" Giggling and laughter traveled around the audience.

"I glued little labels on the fretboard for ya, bro," Mike sniggered.

"Oh, kewl," Keith cheered, and then rapidly blinked at the supposedly alien instrument, softly muttering, "What's a fretboard?"

Fully realizing what he was about to say, Troy chuckled, "Where your left hand is resting, Keith; the long, hard, wood thing." Pulling his bass guitar out of the way, Prez looked down for Keith's hand. The audience howled laughing. Evilily grinning, Keith bounced his eyebrows at Prez, Troy and the audience. Sniggering insanely, Derrick counted off the next song. All at once, three electric guitars, two drummers and bass guitar began playing [Go All The Way](#). Keith sang lead vocals and the rest of the band sang the backup vocals.

At the luau concert a week earlier, Keith didn't play guitar, many of the original eighty-seven realized, and told the newbies about

it. With two additional band members, the song sounded even better, as far as they were concerned. The song ended to loud applause. Keith put the electric guitar down and returned to his keyboards at stage left. Troy put his guitar down too and picked up his tenor sax. With Derrick's count, the band started playing [Urgent](#). Again, Keith handled lead vocals with Reyes, Mike and Derrick backing him up. Mrs. Diaz was thrilled with Troy, easily moving from strings to keys and to reed instruments.

Still seated four rows back, Jonah went into a giggling fit. Smiling over at his boyfriend, Gage wondered, "What?"

Jonah sniggered, "Knocking on your back door, go all the way, it's urgent. Get the message?"

Cracking up, Gage laughed, "I think they're trying to wear everybody down. What's left is for lovers to finish off."

Leaning closer to Gage and gesturing for him to move closer, Jonah asked, "Ya wanna try stuff tonight?"

Gage giggled, "I told you that I'd wait for when you're ready. If you're ready, I will be."

Jonah admitted, "You're awesome. I want it to be way better than anything else that was done to me. I'm really scared too, Gage."

Gage begged, "Don't rush it, okay? Just sleeping with you last night was awesome, even though we didn't do nothin'. I was holding you, and that was plenty. I'm with you, and you've got me at your side. That's all I want."

For the remainder of the song, Jonah's thoughts spun wildly. There were few other boys as cute as Gage, and probably fewer still anywhere near as compassionate. Not wanting to rush anything, Jonah

wasn't sure what to do. On a whim, while the audience was cheering at the end of the song, Jonah tapped his comm-badge, ordering, "Alden, take me and Gage to my bedroom in the townhouse."

Clapping his hands with Sammy, Ben and everyone else, Gage hadn't even seen Jonah tap his comm-badge. Still applauding, Gage suddenly found himself alone with Jonah, sitting on a soft bed, in a dark bedroom. Gage giggled, "Jonah, did you..."

Silencing his boyfriend with his deepest, most passionate kiss, Jonah pushed Gage flat on the bed. Falling back, Gage helplessly giggled, and then he slid his hands into Jonah's back pockets and got into the kiss.

Realizing his brother and Jonah were gone, Sammy nudged Ben and pointed to the two empty seats. Ben giggled, "Where'd they go?"

"I have no idea!" Sammy laughed.

"Betchya I know," Ben evilly cackled.

Opening his eyes wide, Sammy wondered, "Ya think?"

Ben nodded and mischievously leered, "If Gage comes back here lookin' like both his heads are in the clouds, you and me are so outta here."

While Sammy was searching Ben's eyes, Platinum Habits started performing [Shakin'](#). Up on stage, playing the rhythm guitar part, Mike sang; "Rosanna's daddy had a car she loved to drive. Stole the keys one night and took me for a ride. Turned up the music just as loud as it could go. Blew out the speakers in her daddy's radio.

"She was shakin' (oh oh ooo oh), Snappin' her fingers (oh oh ooo oh), She was movin' round and round (oh oh ooo oh), That girl

was shakin' (oh oh ooo oh).

"We started drinkin' wasn't thinkin' too straight. She was doin' eighty and she slammed on the brakes. Got so high we had to pull to the side. We did some shakin' 'til the middle of the night."

That was as much as Ben and Sammy could take. Almost at the same instant, they glanced at each other and reached for their comm-badges. Stopping Ben's hand from completing the emergency call, Sammy ordered, "Alden, take me and Ben to my bed at the townhouse."

Left there in the auditorium, with four empty seats to his left, Dee only had to think a few moments to realize where his brothers and their boyfriends had gone so suddenly. Gage and Sammy were never sexually abused and therefore were virgins – very likely past tense. Helplessly, Dee cracked up. Sitting to Dee's right side, Jason Mullins, Sean's and Troy's new nine-year-old son, smiled, "What's so funny?"

Pointing over at the empty seats, all Dee could manage was the brief giggle, "Boyfriends!"

Jason nodded and smiled, "Has anyone ever told you that you've got a real cute laugh?"

Blushing, Dee shook his head and giggled, "Never."

Jason assured, "It really is," and faced forward as the song ended. Standing up, Jason and the rest of the crowd burst into applause and cheers.

Rapidly blinking and slowly clapping his hands, Dee tried to understand what Jason was saying. Jason had been around since Thursday, and Dee knew that he was another sexually abused kid.

Drawing a blank, Dee tapped Jason's shoulder. At center stage, Keith started singing, the words bouncing from side-to-side and around the auditoriums' loudspeakers. The band began playing [Pour Some Sugar On Me](#). Dee gestured for Jason to follow him. Dee led the way down the almost empty side of the row of seats and waited for Jason. Prez noticed his eldest son leaving the auditorium, and only thought that maybe he needed to leak. They did come directly to the auditorium after dinner, so there was no big surprise. Walking up the aisle, Dee noticed he was being watched by his grandparents. He waved to them all and mouthed, "Be right back."

Out in the lobby, where it was much quieter, Dee turned to Jason, softly asking, "You like my laugh?"

Nodding, Jason explained, "I love it, and being here. I've laughed more here in three days than I have in nine years. Compared to my old life, this place is like a dream." He then asked, "Did I freak you out saying that?"

"A little," Dee reluctantly admitted.

Jason smiled, "Don't worry about it, Dee. I know I'm gay. Here, there are so many cute guys our age, I sometimes say exactly what I'm thinking. I didn't think it would freak you out. I guess I just didn't think." Losing his smile, he sighed, "I made the same stupid mistake with Leo. He wants a boyfriend, someday, just like, not now or soon. After what he told us this morning... I didn't think of that either, I guess. For the first time, I can have friends. I can have a boyfriend too, and I want one, but... I guess I'm screwing up bad, scaring guys that I really like. I don't mean to scare anyone." He reached a hand up to wipe forming tears away.

Reassuringly taking hold of the slightly taller yet younger newbie, Dee grinned, "We was all like that last week, when we were

new too. It's like, before we weren't allowed friends. Now we are allowed. Before, we wouldn't even try to bring a kid home. Now, we all live together, so it's better than havin' a friend visit. He's right next door.

"After what all of us from the original group did, just trying to get to know each other, I can easily guess how four times as many must seem to you," Dee continued. "Being one of four hundred, *not* one of a hundred kids, must seem like too much. You and your bros did fine yesterday at the beach house. Think of it, you went to Kaho'olawe with your bros, all orphans, and came back adopted with two dads! Are you happy with Sean and Troy?"

Rapidly nodding, Jason giggled, "Yeah, they're awesome."

"Sean was rescued the same day as me, which makes him a brother," Dee revealed. He watched Jason's jaw drop, and giggled, "Now you're getting it. Your dad was my bro. Now my ex-brother has an awesome boyfriend, four sons that they obviously love, and would do anything for, and they're brothers to my daddy and poppa, which makes my ex-brother my new uncle!" Jason cracked up. Dee giggled, "It's crazy. My daddy and poppa are your uncles. Think of the level two kids and where some of them might be next week. Who'll be adopted? Who'll have a boyfriend? Who'll be a Core Rimmer, and who'll be a dorm leader? The idea of being a really big family is all we've been running with for a week. Look how it's working out.

"My dad and pop really like seeing the kids are hookin' up too. All it takes is one kid being happier than the day before, and they're happy too. You want friends, so you got 'em, by the dozens, just for bein' kewl, dude. All the guys sittin' around the kitchen table last night are already your friend. Nothin's hard about it at all."

Jason asked, "I'm tryin' too hard, huh?"

Dee smiled, "Yeah, I think so. My past is like yours, just from an orphanage. Your dad, Sean, was at the same place as my little bro, Richie. Sean thinks Richie has changed. Richie is sure Sean is different too. I'm just saying, it's all different here. Now we can be real people, not some jerk's toy. We don't always see it, but other people see us changing. You're not like you were Thursday. I'm not the same as I was before either. Let the changes happen, Jase. It don't take trying at all, stuff just happens."

"Thanks, Dee," Jason warmly smiled.

"Anytime!" Dee giggled. "Speaking of time, it's time to leak, before we go back inside." Rapidly nodding, Jason agreed. In moments, they were standing at urinals. Beginning to relieve himself, Dee grinned and huffed, "Oh boy, I think I waited too long."

"I didn't have to go when we got here," Jason giggled. His eyes widened and he loudly warned, "FOG ALERT! Watch out!" barely a second before he let one rip that was at least as loud.

Dee cackled, "OMIGOD, JASON! That was like an adult fart coming out of your little butt! Did it hurt, or what?"

Jason giggled, "I feel much better now."

"Yeah, and I'm dyin' here!" Dee squealed.

"Four nights in a row I've had real food," Jason smiled. "I used to eat frozen dinners seven nights a week."

"The next time Cory Short visits, you're our counter-attack," Dee coughed.

Stuffing his wiener back in his shorts and zipping up, Jason rapidly blinked and tilted his head, checking, "*The Cory Short*, the one that started it all?"

Also finished, Dee redid the Velcro fastener on his boardies, nodding, "Yeah, he was here Monday, to make my pop the director officially." He paused then sniggered, "And pollute the air."

Heading to a sink, Jason giggled, "I hope I get to meet him too." Noticing Dee was heading for the door, he asked, "You're not washing your hands?"

Dee gasped, "Need... fresh... air." Jason howled laughing, and hurried to finish at the sink.

Soon, both boys were walking into the auditorium and hurrying down the aisle. Platinum Habits was now playing [Long Cool Woman In A Black Dress](#). Although he liked what he heard, Jason didn't know the song. Dee had heard the band rehearsing it at Archmania. Keith was again playing rhythm guitar, and Troy was singing lead vocals. Dee was about to shuffle down the aisle and return to his seat when Jason tapped his shoulder and gestured to the floor in front of the stage, yelling, "Do you like to dance?"

Nodding, Dee reached for Jason's hand and they hurried to the floor where many dozens of kids were dancing. They had only begun when the song ended and both boys cracked up. Applauding, Dee watched his dad put the electric guitar down and return to the keyboards at stage left. Keith gave his band mates a thumbs up gesture, and the band started playing [Something's Missing](#). Dee pointed at his dad and pulled Jason over to that side of the stage where they danced through the whole song. Playing lead guitar, Mike sang lead vocals.

When the tune ended, Reyes stood and walked off to extreme stage left. Troy took his guitar off and told the audience, "This next song me and Reyes learned and have played, but ya know, it didn't add anything, so we're gonna take a break. For those that don't know, Reyes and I are the new members of the band. Check out what these four can do." Reyes got a towel and a bottle of water, and watched from the left side wing. Troy went over to the far right side.

"We know!" Sean, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory laughed.

With his index finger, Troy gestured for Sean to come up and keep him company. Already blushing, Sean hurried over to the stairs at stage right and flew up two steps at a time. He disappeared behind the curtain at the same moment that Derrick began counting off. The remaining four members of the band started playing [Here Comes The Feeling](#), with Prez singing powerful lead vocals. For many of the kids that hadn't been to the luau, or ever seen less than five Core Rimmers on stage at once, the performance and sheer energy displayed was amazing. During the chorus' strick beat, Mike and Prez marched in place before their microphone stands. At the end of the song, the auditorium exploded in applause and cheers. The adults in the back rows stood and gave the boys an ovation.

From stage left, Reyes returned to his electronic drums. Troy returned to pick up a guitar from stage right. Mike switched guitars for the next song. Moving his mic aside, and wiping sweat off his face with the lower edge of his T-shirt, Derrick instructed Reyes, "You and Prez start us off anyway. Go ahead and count it off. I'll be ready." Troy nodded to Reyes, assuring he was ready. Prez moved closer to Reyes and they counted off together. Bass guitar and electronic drums kicked off [Get It On \(Bang A Gong\)](#). Strobe lights flashed over the stage and the band through most of the entire song. Troy sang lead vocals and played rhythm guitar.

The funny thing was, Sean had never emerged from behind the curtains at stage right. Nudging his husband to go check, Tory cracked up. Reluctantly, Kaleo giggled his way up the stage right steps and went behind the curtains. Thankfully, the music was loud enough that they couldn't be heard. Tapping Sean on the back, Kaleo giggled, "What's wrong, bro?"

Turning to face his friend, Sean cackled, "Absolutely nothing!" and pointed down at his tented shorts. Already well aware of Sean's endowment, Kaleo roared laughing. Sean blushed, "Troy practically climbed all over me the second we were alone. He plays provocative songs, I get the profits and the bone. Now he's out there singing about banging and getting it on, and I stand here waiting for my cock to deflate!"

Hysterical, Kaleo searched for the curtain edge and then staggered out to the floor and Tory. Seconds later, AJ, Jerry and Horacio knew about Sean's predicament. At the end of the song, Troy went to switch from electric to his acoustic guitar. Turning around and returning to his microphone, Troy noticed his friends on the floor before the stage, brushing one index finger over the other and giggling, "Shame on you!" Troy helplessly sputtered and quickly turned around before covering his mouth and cracking up.

Pushing his mic up and out of the way, Derrick grinned, "You left Sean sweating?"

Nodding, Troy sniggered, "We're alone in our townhouse tonight. If that song didn't make my purpose clear, this one will. Go ahead and count it off."

Pulling his mic down again, Derrick counted off the tempo for [The Story In Your Eyes](#), and the band started playing. Hiding behind the curtain, Sean rolled his eyes, muttering, "My wicked Lover. He'll

get what he wants the way he wants it all right. Maybe twice!" Troy stepped up to the microphone and sang the lead vocals.

Gage and Jonah returned to the auditorium. They went to dance at the front of the stage. Barely a minute later, Ben and Sammy returned to their seats, thinking that Jonah and Gage hadn't yet returned. At the end of the song, Sammy found them applauding and pointed them out to Ben. They hurried down to the stage, noticing that Reyes was moving over to his congas and hand percussion. Troy moved over to the keyboards at the right side of the stage. Seeing Sean peeking from behind the curtains, Troy seductively smiled, "Got the message?"

"Loud and clear," Sean beamed, and held two fingers up to make his intentions known.

The stage lights dimmed and Reyes counted off the tempo to [That's The Way Of The World](#). Many of those that hadn't been dancing before, including some of the parents, got up and danced in the aisle. Reyes sang the lead vocals, with primarily Keith and Troy singing backup and harmony vocals, but all of them sang various parts. Moving nearer to the stage, Paul and Ryan watched their friend and danced in place. Reyes noticed his two friends dancing in perfect synchronization without watching each other. Keith played the electric piano and synthesized strings parts. Troy played synthesized horn parts. Since Keith and Troy were only playing through parts of the song, they raised their arms over their heads and clapped their hands to the beat. Soon, dancers were clapping their hands and so were those still seated.

Without really intending to start anything, Sammy, Dee, Gage and Richie were lined up across from their boyfriends and dancing partners, Ben, Jason, Jonah and Jimmy. The next thing they knew, Kaleo and Tory had joined the two lines. Then AJ and Jerry joined at

the opposite end. Soon, the lines were expanding with couples dancing before the entire length of the stage; Horacio and Sonia, Ipo and Lani, Aki and Hajami, Stephen Wickes and Aaron Farris, John and Stephen, Wade and Frankie, Keanu and Liki, Roy and Mollie, Nell and Pete, newbies Carter Rackham and Douglas Zimmerman, and many others overflowing into the aisles.

With the applause at the end of the song, Troy went to get his Stratocaster. Reyes returned to his electronic drum kit. Bass and drums introduced the next song. Playing rhythm guitar on his Strat, Troy sang the lead vocals for [Love Will Find A Way](#), which kept the lines of dancers before the stage happily shaking their butts around.

At the end of the song, Kaleo and Tory hollered, "Rescue Me!"

Prez chuckled, "Did you not realize that's your job now?"

AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory hollered, "Play [Rescue Me](#)!"

Keith giggled, "Only if you guys sing too."

A bunch of kids yelled, "We will!" Guitarists and drummers, Mike, Troy, Derrick and Reyes started the song. Prez and Keith joined in. Singing lead vocals, Mike watched the audience. Kaleo had learned most of the lyrics. With prompting from Prez, Keith and Troy, almost the entire audience sang the choruses along with the band. Powering up, John levitated both lines of dancers at the front of the stage. Encouraged by the floating and singing kids, the band repeated the end chorus a few more times. When they ended the song, the audience exploded in applause, cheers and yells. Laughing hysterically at the enthused kids, John lowered them all down to the floor.

Bass, drums and keyboards started off the next song, [Roll With The Changes](#). Standing at the Steinway, Keith sang lead vocals. For

the middle guitar solo, Mike and Troy swapped off four bars each, then finished with both of them playing. Dancing kids screamed with delight. At the hospitals and since arriving at Ewa Beach, the ninety-five newbies had been told that the leaders of this division had their own band, and they had seen them Thursday evening on televisions, but none of them expected anything like what they were now experiencing. Nearing the end of the song, Troy hurried over to the Hammond and swung his guitar around his back to play the organ part.

At the end of the song, Mike asked the cheering kids, "You're not tired yet?"

"NO!" was the overwhelming response. Stepping back from the microphone, Mike cracked up. Crossing the stage, Keith went to the Hammond organ. Troy put down his guitar and Reyes stepped out from behind the electronic drum kit. Picking up two tambourines, Reyes tossed one Troy.

Prez playfully prompted, "You will be tired and sleep. This song's for any of you that are the slightest bit worried about school." The stage lighting dimmed. Keith played low bass notes and some much higher arpeggio trills on the Hammond. Derrick began pounding a simple beat with his bass drum. Reyes and Troy tossed tambourines to each other and briefly shook them before tossing them again. Adding his bass part, Prez instructed, "Your old lives are past, over and done. Clan schools are not like your old schools; it's gonna be as fun as any school can be. All you have to do is try, give it your best shot, and [Hold Your Head Up](#)." Mike came in with the guitar part and the band joined together, with Derrick singing the lead vocals. All six sang the choruses. The song soon became an anthem, with all the Core Rimmers and dorm leaders prompting kids to "hold your head up high".

At the end of the song, while the newly empowered audience and proud parents applauded, Troy went to pick up his Stratocaster. Reyes returned to the drum risers, stopping at the congas. Mike started playing before Troy reached his microphone. It was a necessary trick to get Troy into the groove for the song he was about to play rhythm guitar and sing lead vocals to – [Play That Funky Music](#). Troy screamed, "Hey! Do it, now!" and the band joined together. Kids that had been resting quickly got back up and started dancing. Down on his knees at the edge of the stage, Mike wailed the guitar solo directly to the dancing kids. He bounded up at the end and quickly returned to his microphone to sing backing vocals with the rest of the band. At the end of the song, Troy kept his guitar on, but swung it around to his back, so he could play keyboards for [As Long As You Love Me](#).

Up in the PA booth, Leo could barely believe what he was hearing and seeing. Way down on the stage, Uncle Keith roamed around singing the lead vocals directly to groups of kids. Leo had seen Backstreet perform the song on television, but they weren't playing instruments. All the band members were dancing, singing and playing their instruments. "HOLY CRAP!" Leo excitedly shouted. Corey cracked up.

Drew sniggered, "Pretty good, huh?"

Unable to tear his eyes away from the window where he was watching, Leo laughed, "They're awesome! I thought they could only play oldies!"

Corey giggled, "The really kewl thing is, they learned that song in one afternoon. They first heard it at school, came home and started working on it. By dinner time, it was this good, with them dancing too, like they are now."

Watching his eldest son dance alone, Drew took a moment and tapped his comm-badge, ordering, "Alden, get Leo down to the rest of the dancing kids." In a blink, Leo was with the rest of the kids, before the stage. Noticing his newest nephew, Keith knelt on one knee, singing directly to him for a few moments.

I've tried to hide it so that no one knows

But I guess it shows

When you look into my eyes

What you did and where you're comin' from

(I don't care) as long as you love me, baby

Just as he might have if any of the real Backstreet members had sung to him, Leo stopped dancing. He smiled up at his Uncle and turned pale, not recognizing that he had stopped breathing. Standing up, Keith moved over to sing to Earlene and Noreen Magyar, causing them to screech at the top of their lungs. Giggling his ass off, John came over just in time to support Leo before he crumbled to the floor. John floated his faint nephew to the first available seat in the front row, sat him down and pushed Leo's head down between his knees.

John giggled, *'I keep warning Keith, one of these days he's gonna pull that stunt and somebody's gonna crash to the floor. He didn't believe me.'* Leo only groaned. John shared, *'Sorry, only me and your dad are likely to grow up looking a little like Keith, and we're already spoken for. You can do pretty well with any of the other dudes your age, Leo.'*

Up in the PA booth, Corey and Drew heard John telepathically telling them what had happened. Drew giggled, "Well, that trip lasted

about a minute!"

Corey laughed, "Alden, get an extra chair up here, then transport Leo into it, before he has an embarrassment embolism, or some such shit." A moment later, the chair appeared and so did Leo, with his head still hanging between his knees.

Geoff and Lenny came over to help their big brother. Leo whimpered, "I can't believe I almost fainted. He's my uncle now! What's wrong with me?"

"Absolutely nothing!" Corey, Drew, Geoff and Lenny chorused.

Corey reminded, "I was where you are at age nine, Leo."

Rubbing his big bro's back, Lenny nodded, "Keith's great as an uncle, but when he's on stage, I forget all about that."

"It's all of 'em, really," Geoff giggled. "Like one minute, they're uncachs, and then they're Core Rimmers, our leaders, and then they're a band. It's weird when I reme'ber they're all three."

Drew wondered, "What about me and pop, Geoff?"

"You're daddies and Core Rimmers, only two," Geoff giggled.

Down at the stage, the band began playing [The Voice](#). Keith handled the keyboard introduction. Strumming his acoustic twelve string guitar, Troy sang lead vocals.

Won't you take me back to school?

I need to learn the golden rule.

Won't you lay it on the line?

I need to hear it just one more time.

Oh, won't you tell me again?

Oh, can you feel it?

Oh, won't you tell me again tonight?

Each and every heart it seems,

Is bounded by a world of dreams.

Each and every rising sun,

Is greeted by a lonely one.

Oh, won't you tell me again?

Oh, can you feel it?

Oh, won't you tell me again tonight? Tonight?

Cause out on the ocean of life my love.

There's so many storms we must rise above.

Can you hear the spirit calling, as it's carried across the waves?

You're already falling, it's calling you back to face the

music.

And the song that is coming through.

You're already falling, the one that it's calling is you.

Make a promise, take a vow.

And trust your feelings it easy now.

Understand The Voice within.

And feel a change already beginning.

Oh, won't you tell me again?

Oh, can you feel it?

Oh, won't you tell me again tonight?

Oh, won't you tell me again?

Oh, can you feel it?

Oh, won't you tell me again tonight? Tonight?

And how many words have I got to say?

And how many times will it be this way?

With your arms around the future and your back up against
the past.

You're already falling, it's calling you on to face the music.

And the song that is coming through.

You're already falling, the one that it's calling is you.

Each and every heart it seems,

Is bounded by a world of dreams.

Each and every rising sun,

Is greeted by a lonely, lonely one.

Won't you tell me again?

Oh, can you feel it?

Oh, won't you tell me again tonight?

Tired newbie kids returned to their seats and enjoyed the remainder of the show. There were only four more songs. For the first, [Stone In Love](#), Keith took center stage singing lead vocals. The second was the ballad [Truly, Madly, Deeply](#), sung by Keith and Troy from opposite sides of the stage and behind racks of keyboards. Mrs. Diaz was as proud as any of the parents. Boys that were her students had performed flawlessly for two hours. All six of the boys loved what they were doing. Their stage presence was felt and audience interaction was appreciated as part of the show. Even the lighting and

sound quality was something to be experienced. She and her husband had paid to see other artists and shows that weren't this good.

The already dark stage went black at the end of the song. The audience was still applauding when lights shone down onto Prez, and Keith at the stage left keyboard rack, and Troy standing at stage right, playing the harmonica introduction to [He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother](#). Once again, Keith and Troy shared the lead vocals. Before the stage and out in the audience, kids and adults slow danced. The lyrics brought tears to the eyes of many level two orphans.

At the end of the song, the stage lights all went out, and the audience remained on their feet to give the band an ovation. They were still applauding and cheering when a single spotlight turned on, that Mike walked into while strumming his acoustic guitar and humming. Stopping before his microphone, Mike sang;

[Seagull](#), you fly across the horizon

Into the misty morning sun.

Nobody asks you where you are going,

Nobody knows where you're from.

Here is a man asking the question

Is this really the end of the world?

Seagull, you must have known for a long time

The shape of things to come.

Another spotlight shone brightly to Mike's left. Playing his twelve-string acoustic, from out of the darkness, Troy stepped

forward. Mike continued singing;

Now you fly, through the sky, never asking why,

And you fly all around 'til somebody, Shoots you down.

Da da da da da da down.

Mm mm mm mm, mm mm.

Two more spotlights shone brightly. Strumming acoustic guitars, Prez and Keith stepped from out of the darkness and into the lights. Mike sang;

Seagull, you fly, across the horizon,

Into the misty morning sun.

Nobody asks you where you are going,

Nobody knows where you're from,

Behind the drum risers, beams of yellow light brightly shone like a sunrise. Standing in silhouette, Reyes shook maracas and Derrick beat a tambourine.

Now you fly through the sky, never asking why,

And you fly all around 'til somebody, yeah,

Shoots you down. Mm mm, yeah.

Seagull you fly, seagull you fly away.

All six boys sang the final sections.

And you fly away today

And you fly away tomorrow

And you fly away,

leave me to my sorrow.

Mm, mm, mm.

Seagull, go on and fly, mm, mm, mm,

Fly to your tomorrow, leave me to my sorrow, fly.

The final guitar chords rang out to silence. Minimal lighting on the band members flickered off in the reverse order. Applause, cheers and whistles from the audience cut through the darkness. All the stage and auditorium lights were turned up. The band members put their instruments down or back on the guitar stands. Lining up across center stage, the band members held hands and bowed for the applauding and cheering kids. For quite a long while, Sean had been able to leave the stage; he simply liked the new vantage point and hearing what the band was hearing from the stage monitors. Now that the show was over, he stepped out from stage right, clapping and proudly cheering his boyfriend and teammates. Troy went over to Sean and stole a deep, wet kiss.

Stepping up to a microphone, Prez smiled, "Okay, you've been a great audience. I guess we needed the extra hundred to make it a real party. Dorm leaders and Core Rimmers, hang back to let everyone else leave and get back to their dorm rooms. Just this one night, we're

going to walk around and make sure everybody hits the sack."

From the back rows of the auditorium where most of the adults were sitting, Bill Seaver hollered, "All the parents will be joining you too. Judy and Kathy will get the girls at Oneula Beach settled for the night."

Watching the majority of their audience head for the exits, Prez, Keith, Troy, Derrick and Mike helplessly giggled. Yes, it was definitely a school night and the parents were happily returning to their normal routines. Focused on his mom conversing with the other adults, Troy read her lips when she turned toward the stage. Judy teased her son by silently mouthing, "I can't do it, ma. They're way better than me."

Cracking up, Troy shared what his mom had said with Sean, and then the rest of the band, admitting, "That's almost exactly what I said last Monday afternoon, before coming up on stage."

"Please tell me that you didn't really believe that?" Reyes quickly asked. When Troy blushed and nodded, Reyes sighed, "I was up here that day and watched everything, Troy. You fit in from the start. At Archmania, you added at least as many songs to the set list as I did."

Glancing at Troy and Reyes, Keith grinned, "Both of you add important voices, tunes and experiences to this band. Most of what we played tonight couldn't have been done correctly without both of you."

Prez prompted, "Sean, you were at the luau. How does the band sound now compared to then?"

Sean giggled, "You dudes were awesome then, and it's more awesome now." Since everyone was anxiously awaiting more, Sean

smiled, "Take 'Hold Your Head Up', for example. What made the song great was not only what was said, but watching Troy and Reyes toss tambourines around. You always look like you're having a blast. Another example is the guitar duels between Mike and Troy. Even from opposite sides of the stage, Keith and Troy are dueling keyboards. As a whole, it's the same showmanship as the luau and more, because there are two more of you. I was there at Archmania, so I saw rehearsals that almost everyone else never did. Not one of you argued once. I saw the original four bringing the two new dudes up to speed on songs they already knew. I saw the two new guys work together with the rest of the band, adding new songs to the list. Two songs I wish you'd played tonight are 'Just My Imagination', and 'Ooo Baby Baby', with Reyes singing. Those are dreamy, slow dance tunes that I *really* like."

Bouncing his eyebrows, Troy widely smiled. Sean smirked and giggled, "You're just evil, Lover. We may be the only two falling asleep at our school desks tomorrow." The remaining Core Rimmers and the dorm leaders waiting near the edge of the stage cracked up.

Drew and Corey returned to the auditorium, appearing beside the other Core Rimmers and dorm leaders. Prez and Keith started off the stage and were followed by Sean, Troy, Derrick, Mike and Reyes. Going directly to Paul and Ryan, Reyes had a whispered conversation with them. Seeing Roy and Pete with the group, Prez asked them, "Did you dudes need anything?"

Reaching for Mollie's hand, Roy grinned, "Our girlfriends."

"Who weren't our girlfriends this morning," Pete smiled.

Nell giggled, "Some dudes need a written invitation."

Nodding agreement, Mollie smiled, "A day at the beach house

was invitation enough."

All the Core Rimmers cheered, "Excellent!"

Keith asked Drew, "How's Leo?"

"Better," Drew chuckled. "You surprised him, bro. He's a shy nine-year-old realizing that he likes boys. You drove it all home in one verse of one song."

Corey nodded, "He wanted to be with us, while we walk around checking dorms, but Geoff and Lenny need their big brother. We transported with them to the townhouse, got them settled, and told them we'd be back in about an hour."

Drew assured, "I'll bet Geoff will be asleep when we get home. Lenny might be, or he might be keeping Leo company."

Mike asked Lindsay, "Mom and dad are kewl with you doing this?"

"Yep," Lindsay grinned, "this is my job, no thanks to you." Impatiently, Mike huffed.

Grinning, Prez instructed, "This little exercise is mostly for kids who might be anxious about school tomorrow. If the kids are already in bed, leave well enough alone. It's the stragglers we need to check on. Ease their minds so they can be rested. If you run across a really troubled kid, tap your comm-badge and have Alden call us via our sub-vocals. At least two of us will come to help."

Keith asked, "I guess it would be good to know if any of you are stressed about school?"

Mostly, heads shook. Nell sighed, "It's been over a year since

I've seen the inside of a school."

"Almost two years for me," Mollie admitted. "There's a lot of catching up to do."

Derrick confirmed, "You're fine otherwise?"

Corbin grinned, "I'm actually looking forward to it." Adrienne, Bianca, Dominic, AJ, Jerry and Sean agreed.

Prez confirmed, "Is everyone set and ready?"

Troy nodded, "We told our boys the plan while we moved. Billy and Jason will show the newbies how to use the dimensional doors."

"Same here," AJ, replied. "Kenny's our oldest."

"Stan's our oldest and familiar with the dimensional doors," Kaleo answered. "We've used 'em three times."

Saying goodbye and goodnight to everyone, Paul and Ryan then gave Reyes hugs and kisses, and then transported back to Sullivan's Island. Glancing around, Reyes asked, "Do you need me at the dorms?"

Shaking his head, Derrick answered, "Let the boys in all three townhomes know you're home and available if needed, and then kick back, Reyes."

"We'll be home as quick as we can," Mike added.

"Let's get to it and get home to our kids," Prez encouraged. The Core Rimmers and dorm leaders started up the aisle. Most left the auditorium, except Drew and Corey who first powered down the facilities before heading off for dorm three.

Prez and Keith walked into dorm one. Coming out of room seven, Doc Wiener closed the door, started down the hall and then smiled, "Tonight's performances were truly memorable, boys."

Keith chuckled, "It was the kids making everything more fun."

"I really think that the extra hundred-and-thirty turned everything around," Prez shared.

Doc Wiener told them, "The three Ka'aukai brothers are patients of mine. Friday, they learned the truth about how their mother died. I destroyed all the lies CPS told them, but had to reopen old wounds. I've been giving them sedatives that will block most dreams, so the truth isn't clouded by their imaginations. All three are asleep. Their alarm clock is set for seven-thirty, so they have plenty of time to shower, eat and get to school."

"Kewl," Prez and Keith chorused.

Doc Wiener said, "I've only got one more patient to check on, but I'll be around the dorms if you need me for anything."

"Thanks again, Doc," Prez warmly smiled.

Just inside the first set of doors at dorm three, at the staircase landing, Pat and Ralphie had obviously discovered the magic of deep French kissing. Obliviously, they held one another tight and swapped spit. Following Drew through the second set of doors into the first floor hallway, Corey giggled, "Breathe, dudes." Affirmatively and enthusiastically, Pat and Ralphie hummed into their kiss.

A few steps down the hall, when the door closed, Drew grinned, "They seem very disturbed about school."

"More like about being separated for eight hours," Corey

giggled.

"It's Ralphie, the aggressor, in the corner though," Drew noticed.

Rapidly nodding, Corey giggled, "Pat's figured stuff out, obviously."

John's voice drifted through Corey's and Drew's minds, telling them, *'It basically happened during the meeting with Doc Wiener this morning. Pat, Rafe and Chris shared their story, and Ralphie cried as hard as the three of them. Now Pat believes that Ralphie's his angel. Rafe and Jay are happy that they survived and are together. Chris is happy with Jay, Rafe and Pat here. This morning was what our moms call a necessary evil. It put everything into perspective for all the B.O.E. kids.'*

Corey and Drew didn't stop walking until reaching an open door. Looking inside room six, Victor Singh and Harry Cohen, who were ex-level one orphanage boys, were roaming their room in their underwear, getting stuff ready for the next day. Both were ten year old boys from Anaheim and rescued by Drew and Corey. Drew wondered, "How's it goin', dudes?"

Smiling at the two leaders, Harry said, "We're good, mostly."

Vic asked, "Will we need to bring our laptops to school tomorrow?"

Corey answered, "No, tomorrow's tests only. You don't even have to worry about pencils, just be there," he paused and giggled, "wearing more than briefs."

Knowing the sort of responses he might receive, Harry grinned, "We were hoping for a poolside dress code."

"Speak for yourself!" Vic giggled. "We're almost the same age, but you're almost three inches taller than me! I've got a lot more growing to do, before sitting in school with my willie hangin' out!"

Thoughtfully, Drew muttered, "The topic of laptops going to school is an important one." Tapping his sub-vocal, Drew ordered, "Alden, get laptop backpacks for all the kids at both bases. We'll need them either Tuesday or Wednesday. Actually, you might as well get backpacks for every computer, whether a kid owns it already or not."

"On the way," Alden replied.

Corey asked the two boys in the room, "Everything else is kewl, dudes?"

"Yeah," Harry and Vic chorused.

Waving, Drew smiled, "Sleep tight. We'll see you in the morning." He and Corey walked further down the hall. Three more room doors were closed. The fourth door was open, with sounds of Chris and Jay chuckling up a storm drifting out to the hall. Grinning at Corey, Drew knocked on the door frame.

Turning and seeing the two young leaders, Jay went off, waving his right arm with the cast, and ranting, "I can't do shit with this friggin' thing! I can't beat off, or do half of what I want with Chris, without beaning him and knocking him out cold. Necrophilia was never my favorite thing, ya know?" Corey and Drew cracked up. Jay pointed at the laptop PC, bitching, "I can't even type on the damned computer without making errors all over the place. Simply hitting enter without hitting four other keys is damned near impossible. And I'm supposed write on a test page tomorrow? How? With my toes?"

Chris, Corey and Drew howled laughing. Slowly nodding, Jay smirked, "Just my luck, the Romulan asshole that blew up my

apartment and broke my right wrist is already dead. Why couldn't it be my left wrist? My whole life is screwed for the next six weeks!" Corey started hiccuping. Drew led his hysterical hubby down the hall. "I want some payback, dammit!" Jay yelled after them.

Over Drew's comm-badge, Alden softly giggled, "Speaking of payback; I kinda forgot to tell him that with Clan medical capabilities, his recovery time is measured in days, not weeks. I'll bet you that next time he won't accuse me of being programmed by Microsoft!"

Done swapping spit with Ralphie, Pat giggled into Chris' and Jay's room, "Quit yer bitchin'! Your boyfriend is in your room. *Mine* is going back home, a fact neither of us is happy about." Before Pat could get to his dorm room door, Chris and Jay hurried out to the hall after him, tickling him mercilessly and giving him no end of shit for giving them shit.

Passing the last closed room doors in that hall, Corey and Drew heard music from Lance's and Scott's room. Drew knocked on the door. A moment later, the door swung open. Shirtless and with his Les Paul hanging from his shoulder, Lance grinned, "What's up, guys?" Beyond Lance, Corey and Drew could see Scott, also shirtless and with his Stratocaster hanging off his shoulder.

Corey giggled, "Revved up from the concert, dudes?"

Lance cheered, "They were SO AWESOME! Keith can sing exactly like the guy in Journey *and* the guy in REO Speedwagon. Mike completely blew my doors off during almost every song. I've been playing for three years, but he made me feel like a beginner."

Coming to the door and standing about a meter behind his roommate, Scott chuckled, "Sometimes I closed my eyes and listened. The scary thing is, I could barely tell it wasn't the original band's live

recording I was listening to."

"So we're trying figure out a few songs they played," Lance grinned.

Drew chuckled, "Keith's been playing keys as far back as I can remember, about nine years. It's the same for Mike, Derrick and Prez."

Nudging Lance and getting his attention, Scott smirked, "No wonder we're so far behind them."

Corey shared, "Troy told us that he was messin' around with piano and guitar at a young age too. Then, around fifth grade, he started with the wind instruments too."

Drew wondered, "Are you dudes considering school tomorrow?"

Lance checked with Scott, who shrugged, "We're on the fence about it, but leaning toward not. We've got a new home and new people to get used to."

"Not to mention a hundred songs to learn or relearn," Lance grinned.

Corey giggled, "If we don't see you at breakfast, we'll know why."

"Have a good night," Drew offered. Scott and Lance said goodnight. Seeing the two young leaders walk toward the common room, Lance closed the door. Almost everyone from the other hall was in the common room watching TV, and most of them were directly responsible for dunking Corey and Drew earlier in the day. Evil snickering erupted in the room. As soon as Craig, Phil, Erik,

Travis, Tony and Vaziik stood, Corey and Drew ran back down the hall, laughing their butts off. Before being chased out into the night, Drew giggled, "Goodnight, dudes!"

At the second dormitory Derrick and Mike found much the same as Drew and Corey had; all the youngest boys were in closed dorm rooms already asleep. All the older ex-prostitute boys were still awake though, and loose talk about who wanted to sleep with whom flowed freely. Walking down the hall, Derrick and Mike were confronted by Kelly Littlepage and his roomie, Hugh Gartrell. Kelly was down to only his boxers. Hugh was shirtless and wearing boardies, commando style, sagging low with the top of his pubes showing.

Kelly devilishly grinned, "Have I mentioned that all the Core Rimmers are hot?"

"Hot enough to give straight dudes reason to switch sides," Hugh evilly snickered.

Derrick blushed and chuckled. Mike chortled, "Comin' from you dudes, with all your experiences, that's a compliment."

Kelly asked, "Is it true that you two, Prez and Keith learned *everything* together?"

Nodding, Derrick admitted, "Yep, it's true."

Hungrily growling, Hugh suggested, "We should take over the common room some night; you two, plus Prez and Keith, and Kaleo and Tory too."

From the lavatory where he was shaving, Darryl Don loudly cheered, "Count me in on some of that action! I'd show that sexy red-Head Rimmer a few new tricks." Derrick and Mike cracked up.

"We're serious!" Kelly laughed.

Hugh sniggered, "Curiosity killed the cat, but the bi-boy has to ask; what are you dudes packin'?"

Mike giggled, "Come on, dudes! Any of us Core Rimmers doing stuff like that would be wrong on so many levels."

Nodding, Derrick laughed, "First off, we're married. Secondly, we're Clan leaders. Both are reason for us to not even go there."

Darryl sniggered, "Just answer Hugh's question, and include any of the other Core Rimmers you know intimately."

Glancing at each other, Derrick and Mike shrugged. Derrick began, "Mike's seven-and-a-half by five; Keith's seven by six."

Hugh, Kelly, Darryl and several others who had been listening in loudly cheered, "AWESOME!"

Mike giggled, "Derrick's about seven by five-and-a-quarter. Troy, Prez and Kaleo are about six-and-a-half by five-and-a-half."

Done shaving, Darryl walked out of the lavatory, grinning, "Are all of you guys above average?"

"We can't really say *all* of us are," Derrick sniggered. "We haven't seen the youngest four."

Kelly smiled, "But Drew and John are Keith's brothers. Maybe they're not fully grown yet, but in three or four more years, all of 'em will be."

Hugh longingly sighed, "If only some of our paying customers were as kewl and endowed."

Walking out of his room, Christian Beresford chuckled, "Let's make this like show and tell. You told, now show the goods!"

"Uh, we'd better go," Derrick chortled.

Kelly chuckled, "What if we promise to be good and keep our hands off of you?"

Stepping out of their room with wide smiles and sparkling eyes, Darren and Lance Elling made it six ex-prostitutes surrounding Mike and Derrick. Derrick locked eyes with Darren DeVault laughing, "DUDE! You're straight and hung like a horse!"

Darren smirked, "Nine-and-a-half inches, limp and erect, but I ain't stupid. If you two are gonna show, I wanna see too."

Mike shrugged and checked with Derrick; "It's not like no one's ever seen us. All the Core Rimmers have."

Taking Mike's hand, Derrick giggled, "Okay, but this circle becomes a line, and no fair touching!" Rapidly nodding, Mike pointed at the hallway wall. Chattering, chuckling and passing silly remarks, six boys lined up and leaned against the wall. Coming out of their room, Cody Padro and Dominic Slager also leaned against the wall. Without further hesitation, Derrick and Mike embraced, looking deep into each other's eyes, confirming that this was kewl, not only for both of them, but for the dudes in this hall who were waiting expectantly. Each came to the conclusion that they were all Clan brothers anyway, and that none of these dudes had ever nested in the Hundserts' basement, and therefore hadn't seen morning wood or chubbies that most kids had. Derrick and Mike deeply kissed. Replaying their favorite song in their minds, The Scorpions 'Still Loving You', the kiss became more urgent and they started swaying.

"Whoa!" Hugh softly commented, "That's one fucking hot kiss!"

Even the straight boys had to admit it was true.

Finished walking through dorm one, Prez and Keith walked into the dorm two hallway. Keith wondered, "What's goin' on?"

Kelly gestured to the two human vacuums, saying, "Show and tell time."

Prez sniggered, "If you dudes had joined the nest, you would've seen something any given morning."

Pointing like a teacher, Keith playfully instructed, "Don't bother looking at their arms; they're just feelin' each other up. Watch their legs and their butts. Right after the grind begins, they'll be ready to show." Everyone, including Mike and Derrick, nodded and softly chuckled.

Raising his eyebrows with an evil thought, Prez seductively purred, "Keith, just hearing your voice gets me all kinds o' randy."

A little stunned, Keith locked eyes with Prez. Always losing himself in Prez's blue eyes, Keith started to melt. Before his lover completely withered, Prez pulled Keith close. Keith landed an extremely passionate kiss. Wholeheartedly, Keith and Prez displayed their love with roaming hands and soft groans.

Darren grinned and proclaimed, "Four for the price of two!"

Swooning, Derrick and Mike hesitantly separated, each grabbing tender little kisses as they took the first steps back. Letting go of each other, Mike and Derrick reached down and tore open the Velcro on their boardies then pushed their shorts and boxers down. All eyes focused on two erections for a long while. Prez and Keith separated then followed their friends examples', proudly displaying

their goods for inspection.

Darren grinned, "When I had to make money, I only took johns that were growers, like you dudes. For me, that was my only condition making deals with other dudes."

Kelly nodded, "I would've taken any or all four, at a substantially reduce rate; like for a nice dinner at a nice place."

Pointing across a row of four teen packages, Hugh smiled, "That's why they're leaders. Two cut with low hangin' sacks, two uncut of highly respectable length, and all four are much thicker than a lot of men I was with. They've got the confidence to be leaders, and on stage for two-hours at a shot, right there. What gets me is how high Derrick and Keith can sing without very tight cock rings. That's what I expected to find."

Sniggering, the Core Rimmers began pulling up their drawers. Mike explained, "This is what most kids in the nest eventually see. The facts are, we're the same as you."

"And you're the same as us," Prez added. "Believe you can do something and the battle is won."

Keith nodded, "Think of what you'd most like to be and then be that person. Think about what kind of careers you'd like."

"You dudes are older and only get a few years of Clan care," Derrick reminded. "Get as much as you can out of each and every day. Make your lifetimes plans here, so when you're ready, you can move on to Starfleet or higher education at universities, or whichever career you choose."

Darren wondered, "Why do you guys care so much?"

Prez smiled, "Don't you feel it, Darren? I think you must, and that's what's really blowing you away."

Keith answered, "We're brothers, now and forever. It's a kind of magic that started back in the States only about ten weeks ago. We don't know how or why the magic started, and I personally don't really care."

Derrick emphasized, "In the States, two brothers grew to four and then six, and kept on growing. Right here, four friends became brothers, and then lovers and musicians, and are now two sets of two couples. We figured it out yesterday, when all four of us were on the same bed together for the first time in over a week. It wasn't the time since we'd last done it that made it outstanding; it was something way more than anything we could logically define."

"It's within all of us in the Clan," Mike confided. "It's brotherhood, sisterhood, parenthood, family, love and respect, caring and consideration."

"If we could do nothing else except spend time with each and every kid, we'd love it," Prez explained. "The reality is there's enough day-to-day planning and resource reallocation necessary. For instance; ninety-five newbies kept us busy all afternoon. To provide them leadership at Oneula Beach, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy are moving there with their kids. Almost all of them will be here again tomorrow; some going to school with us, but hopefully the majority will want to take the week off, so they'll do what they want, just like everybody else has this last week."

"For the next day or two, I fully expect that most will eat their meals here," Keith offered, "but over time, more and more may choose to eat meals there. Some of the kids here may decide to eat over there, just for a change of scenery or to be with friends." He

paused and chuckled, "The dimensional doors to get us base-to-base are right there in the dining room. Are the chefs going to make coordinated meals at both bases? I haven't asked, and really would rather be surprised when we're given that many more choices for meals. If ya don't like what's here, maybe they'll have something different offered there. Imagine having five choices at five bases three times a day."

Moans, moos and evil snickering erupted. Derrick chuckled, "It's near eleven, dudes. Try to get a good eight hours sleep."

"We'll see you in the morning," Mike, Prez and Keith chorused. Everyone said goodnight, and the four Core Rimmers walked down the hall as couples, hand-in-hand. Now that the rounds were made, they believed that all the rescued boys still awake seemed to be in good spirits. They went home to their kids waiting at the townhomes for the first time. They goofed around at the steps up to their front doors, calling, "Goodnight neighbor!" far more than necessary before going inside.

Inside their townhouse, Prez and Keith climbed the stairs. The television was on in Dee's and Sammy's room. Keith and Prez looked in and smiled at Sammy and Ben, lying on top of the covers on one of the beds in their underwear. Sammy blushed, "We didn't want to sleep apart."

"I checked with my folks," Ben offered. "It's kewl."

Prez chuckled, "Where are Dee and Gage?"

"Dee's in the next room with Richie," Sammy sniggered. "I told him he could stay in here."

Ben giggled, "Gage is next door with Jonah. Reyes feels like he

should've just gone home with Paul and Ryan."

Keith smiled, "Set the TV timer and get some rest. There's school in the morning." Prez and Keith then said goodnight and went into their bedroom.

* * * * *

Oneula Beach

Sunday, November 7, 2004, 10:33 PM HTZ

The majority of level two orphans were very tired upon arrival at their dorms. As expected, ten o'clock at night felt more like one or two in the morning to them. Little kids immediately hit the bathrooms and bed. Kaleo and Tory had the youngest sons, and were told to go home, for all their sons to have nearby Core Rimmers and dads.

Walking from the Oneula Beach dining room and into the quad of dorms, AJ, Jerry, Sean and Troy were called by an unknown teen boy's voice. All four stopped and turned to find a teen of similar age, wearing khaki cargo shorts, and a white polo shirt with a Clan Short Security logo over the left breast area. Jogging from the housing area check point, the guy loudly said, "I'm Emerson Bannister, this base's chief of security."

When Emerson was nearer, Troy introduced himself and Sean, and then Jerry introduced himself and AJ. Shaking hands with each Core Rimmer, Emerson smiled, "Call me Em, dudes. My team and I aren't military, we're like civilian police. Since this isn't the division headquarters, I assume Director O'Brian will be living there and you four are living here?"

"That's right," AJ replied, "but there are two more Core Rimmers living here. You just missed Kaleo and Tory. They went

home with their kids and all of ours."

When all the Rimmers nodded, Em asked, "Is there anyone in charge here?"

Sean answered, "We're not working it that way. Prez decided against that idea."

Troy nodded at his partner and then turned to Em, grinning, "One Head Rimmer playing Pissed of Chickens is plenty."

"Sweet," Emerson chortled, "I love that game." The Core Rimmers cracked up. Emerson laughed, "Don't knock it until you've played it. You've gotta keep the weasels from stealing your exploding eggs. One less egg means one more wolf."

Jerry sniggered, "I've never even watched Prez play, but it sounds bizarre enough."

Em smiled and wondered, "Where are you guys living?"

"All of us are living in the townhomes," Troy responded, and then pointed in that direction, adding, "Kaleo and Tory are in the first unit, me, Sean and our sons are in the next one, and then AJ and Jerry and their sons in the third unit."

"All the kids on this base, including our own kids, are pretty new to the Clan," Sean softly explained.

"Not a problem," Em smiled. "Our guys will be making rounds through all the dorms and every shared building. We'll even be roamin' around outside your townhouses, and the single family homes too. We've got this base covered, everything inside the fence is secured."

Jerry told Em, "We're gonna check the newbie kids ourselves tonight. You can join us too, if you want."

Em chuckled, "That's kewl, dudes. Tonight's a special night for these kids. They need to see you guys. Tomorrow we'll start getting to know the kids. I just wanted to say hello." The five of them said goodnight, and went off in opposite directions.

Eighteen of the older boys from dorms one and two were relaxing before dorm one's common room television when Troy, Sean, AJ and Jerry made the rounds. Troy asked the teenage boys, "Can't sleep?" All eighteen happily gushed on and on about the concert, their rooms, both bases, and that they were simply too overjoyed to even try sleeping. Sean and Troy recognized Neil Green and Tad Markell on one of the sofas. Scribbling in a notebook, and using Tad's chest as a desk, Neil put his pet project aside. At the end of the rambling, Troy sniggered, "Well, that might just force your school decisions, guys. If you can't sleep and can't wake..."

"Or function very well when you do wake..." Jerry softly chortled.

"Then take the day and the week off," Sean grinned.

"We all had a week, so don't think of it as missing something," AJ smiled. "It's school, and this is a new place with new rules. Get used to it all first, and don't worry about school. You've got all sorts of stuff to keep you occupied between both bases."

Troy nodded, "Don't forget to start up your laptop computers and check out the division's web site."

Dale Barrett softly sighed, "None of us are too good with computers."

Almost simultaneously, AJ, Jerry and Sean called, "Alden?"

"Yes?" the Rimmer AI giggled. Wide smiles spread across the boys' faces.

Troy asked, "Can you guide and assist willing students learn the joys of computing?"

"As long as they understand that I'm not responsible for Windows crashes," Alden giggled. He then played an audio file of Keith's last rant over that same issue. Needless to say, Alden bleeped out quite a bit of vulgarity, but left Prez's soft sniggering in the background, which made the rant even funnier.

The recorded Keith finally bitched, "If I had to spend this much friggin' time programming my synthesizers, we'd all be royally screwed!" Lowering the pitch of his voice, he droned, "Uh... duh... huhu... umm... What's a scroll wheel? Which memory location? How do I pull it up to use it? That question always makes me snigger, by the way. Press which button how many times? Do I need hamsters and lube for this exercise? Duh-huhu..." Prez roared laughing. All eighteen newbies cracked up.

"So yeah," Alden giggled. "I can replay that whenever a system crashes. That ought to work."

Sean giggled, "Just ask Alden, guys, he'll help."

"And talk about dicks until you're laughing so hard, you're crying," AJ softly chortled.

"That's mostly taken care of, at least for me," Alden happily gushed. "Polynesian, thirteen in appearance, but just starting puberty, like Reyes, Drew and Corey; about their height too, one-hundred-sixty-three centimeters or five-feet-four-inches tall. My dick will be

like theirs too; a grower, Polynesian dark and uncut. I'm still deciding about my voice. I like my voice, but maybe a little deeper, as if it's changed." Dialing in new timbre on his voice synthesis controls, a much deeper and sultrier sounding Alden asked, "Is this one okay? What do guys think? It's a little deeper than Prez's voice."

"Yeah, like Isaac Hayes," Troy giggled.

Sean prompted "A little higher, like Troy's, Mike's or Derrick's voice."

"Or yours," AJ and Jerry disjointedly offered.

Humming for a few moments while he sampled all three voices, Alden then dialed in a new teenaged boy voice and tried it out, asking, "Like this? Maybe with an accent? I've been sticking pretty close to English speaking Native Hawaiians, but that can change too."

Around the room, the boys shrugged. Jerry recommended, "That tone is kewl, Alden. Try it out on others tonight and tomorrow. If the general agreement is yes, then keep it. We need to know what to expect to hear, so don't make too many changes. Find one that *you* like. What others think is nice to know, but it's more important that you like it."

Alden giggled, "Thanks, Jerry. Thanks guys, I'll check in with the other Core Rimmers and the few other kids that are still awake." Alden touched base with all the Core Rimmers first. They were briefly confused, but everyone liked the sound of Alden's new voice. He shared all his thoughts for his as yet to be created body, just to speak and give everyone enough to offer opinions.

Troy wondered, "Is there anyone awake at dorm two?"

Dale, Trent, Darrell, Ellis, Owen and Virgil each confirmed that

they were the only ones still roaming that dormitory, the last they saw.

Jerry reminded, "You know where we live. If you need anything, let Alden know so he can let us know."

The eighteen newbie boys assured everything was kewl. Saying goodnight, the four Core Rimmers returned to their townhomes and sons.

Inside townhouse number one, Kaleo and Tory were upstairs in the master bed with all five of their sons. Only Stan was still awake with his dad and pop; his other four brothers were peacefully sleeping. Kaleo had the room's television on, but the sound level very low and without the surround sound system. When the doorbell rang, Kaleo softly asked Alden who was there, and then mouthed, "Let the guys know we're up here and unlock the door to let them in. We don't want to risk waking anyone."

Hearing Alden's explanation and the front door unlock, AJ, Jerry, Sean and Troy let themselves in. Only a soft kitchen light in the rear of the house provided illumination for them to get to the stairs. Rounding the turn halfway up the steps, they got a little more light from the hallway bathroom.

Entering the master bedroom, AJ smiled at the sight of two young fathers surrounded by five sons. Troy whispered, "Nothing from our boys next door?"

"Or our sons?" Jerry softly added.

Kaleo shook his head. Tory whispered, "Not a peep."

Holding up his arm and hand, Sean quietly said, "Goodnight, guys. We'll set our alarm for seven." Troy nodded and waved, and

then so did Jerry and AJ.

Heading for their respective homes; Troy and Sean climbed the steps to the second townhouse, saying goodnight to AJ and Jerry, still heading toward the third townhouse. The latter two found a TV on entertaining an empty living room. The three Hunnicutt brothers had obviously crashed, but wanted normal sounds in their environment. Picking up the remote control, AJ turned off the TV. Leading the way with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, Jerry guided AJ upstairs. They checked on their sons. Not so surprisingly, Kenny's room was empty. Obviously, Mike and Shaun wanted company in their room. One of the two windows was open, only about six centimeters. All three boys were shirtless and wearing briefs. The two youngest were breathing deeply from one bed and Kenny was in the other. All three were intertwined with sheets and blankets, making any chance of adjusting anything futile. Softly sniggering, AJ and Jerry went to their new master bedroom.

Next door, Troy and Sean found Billy awake, reclining on the living room sofa, snacking on potato chips and watching television. Widely smiling because his dads were home earlier than expected, Billy sat up and told them, "Jase crashed right after Jimmy and Scott, maybe fifteen minutes after you left. When I couldn't sleep, I came down here."

Troy asked, "Are you worried about anything?" and parked his butt on the sofa to the left of his eldest son.

Shrugging, Billy hummed then reluctantly replied, "I was never too great at school. I work my ass off to get C's."

Taking a seat on Billy's other side, Sean nodded, "Me too. Ya know what though?"

Billy wondered, "What?"

"Clan schools are organized differently," Sean reminded. "Everything is different from what it was. No one cared if I passed or failed before. Plenty of people care now, most importantly me. I want to make all my brothers, sisters, sons and T'hy'la proud."

"Encouragement is primarily what you need," Troy smiled. "All four of you got here Thursday. Next Monday works for placement tests just as easily as tomorrow. In the meantime, you'll get encouraged, by me and dad. Right off the top of my head, I can see you tomorrow, a Core Rimmer son, the oldest at this base, with a bunch of other kids who decide to take the week off. They'll look to you for answers about me, and dad, and all the other Core Rimmers. You spent the day with us yesterday and today, so no problem, right?"

Rapidly nodding, Billy grinned, "Right."

Picking up what Troy was saying, Sean admitted, "Last Sunday and Monday, I never believed I would find a boyfriend. By the time I had lunch Tuesday, I had met and fallen for your pop. Wednesday, we were Core Rimmers, leaders. I couldn't really imagine myself as a leader. By watching all the other Core Rimmers, including your pop, I started actually feeling like a leader. By Thursday, I was thinking like a leader, with a shit-load more to learn. Most importantly, I want to learn how Prez keeps us organized; I want to learn what Keith does backing up Prez. I can pay attention to any of these dudes and learn something from each of them."

Troy nodded, "So this week, you and your brothers chill, and me and your dad will encourage a little something new everyday. There's passing and failing, without trying or caring. Try a little and care a lot, and watch it all turn around, Billy."

Billy cheered, "You two are awesome! I expected... I don't know... the other creeps would've blasted me with both barrels, making me feel even worse."

Troy asked, "Do you know what that is?"

Curiously tilting his head, Billy wondered, "What what is?"

Troy explained, "Person A feels bad; worried, sad, anything negative like that. Person A tells person B, who then adds misery, who tells persons C, D, E, and F, and now they're all unhappy. It's called a vicious spiral, a never-ending loop down the toilet and through the sewer. Your old parents kept your entire family on the downward spiral. My father was like that. It got him divorced and alienated from his wife and only son. We're not going there, Billy. Every hour of every day can be something important, if you'll only treat them that way. In this family, everybody's allowed to have a bad time. The thing is, we're going to help one another, not make matters worse. I know your dad will keep an eye on me as well as all four sons. I'll watch out for Sean and all four sons. All four sons watch each other and both dads. We can choose to keep each other happy, or make one another miserable."

Uncontrollably, Billy rapidly nodded and giggled.

Sean asked, "It sounds like a good idea, huh?"

"Very good," Billy giggled.

"Share it," Sean simply instructed. "Share it with your brothers, your friends and all the kids. We choose to be happy or sad. We choose to make others happier or sadder. Vulcans have complete control over their emotions. We're humans trying to think logically like Vulcans. That means thinking through some instinctual gut reactions. The simple answer to the simple question; 'Will this action

help or hurt?' interrupts the gut reaction. Helping is always better than hurting. Avoid those nasty downward spirals as much as you can. Just trying landed me the partner and future husband of my dreams."

Troy provocatively chuckled, "Ooo! Keep it up, Tiger." Sean and Billy helplessly giggled. Unintentionally, a yawn escaped from Billy. Rubbing Billy's shoulder, Troy prompted, "Come on, let's call it a night."

Nodding and turning the TV off, Billy shyly smirked, "I guess I was more worried than I wanted to admit."

Standing, Troy suggested, "There's no reason to stew in worries. Think about them a little on your own, but if you're getting nowhere, say something. Get it off your chest."

Talking Billy's hand, Sean also stood, guiding his eldest son up. Starting for the stairs, Billy smiled, "We knew you guys were kewl. Things are gonna be so much better."

Climbing the steps behind his son, Sean instructed, "Turn off the alarm in your room. I'll turn off the alarm in Jimmy's and Scott's room. Adding school on top of everything else is too much."

"We'll need to reiterate that with all the other newbies tomorrow morning," Troy softly said. He tapped his sub-vocal to make sure Alden was listening and all the other Core Rimmers could hear him saying, "All the kids that arrived since Wednesday night, Latin Kings and everyone afterward, need to take time to acclimate. What we've been treating loosely, so that everyone can choose for themselves, needs to be made a little more important."

At the top of the steps, Billy waited for his dad and pop. He hugged both of his new parents and got kisses on the cheek with soft wishes for him to sleep well. Billy went into the room he shared with

Jason. Sean turned off the alarm clock in the next room, and then went with Troy to their new master bedroom. Closing and locking the door behind him, Sean leered, "I'll reopen it before we crash. You're ass is mine, Lover."

Loving the determined tone, Troy giggled, "I've ridden your cock a couple of times. I'm sure that I'm used to it now. I want bottom, with you in control, hovering over me, Tiger."

Going to take Troy's clothes off, Sean smiled, "You guys played five songs in a row that basically told every kid here, get yourself a partner and go bang your brains out."

With his polo shirt being pulled up and over his head, Troy sniggered, "Older kids that wanted to hear that message got it, but for the little kids, it was just rock and roll good times."

Dropping the shirt and then reaching for Troy's shorts, Sean realized his Lover was already raging. He locked eyes with Troy and softly asked, "From thinking of us?"

Nodding, Troy whispered, "I told you almost a week ago, we're gonna play by the same rules. You threatened twice, Tiger. Now I want it twice; the first time my way and the second time in whichever position you want." Sean let Troy's shorts drop to the floor. Holding up an index finger, Troy giggled, "A little music to mask any noises from waking our boys." Kicking his shorts away from his feet, Troy hurried to the never before used stereo, powered it up and found an oldies radio station playing The Temptations 'Get Ready'. Turning to face Sean, who had taken his own shirt off, Troy danced over to him, making his cock crazily bounce, and sang; "And I'm bringing you a love that's true. So get ready, so get ready. I'm gonna try to make you love me too. So get ready, so get ready, 'cause here I come. I'm on my way." Helplessly, Sean evilly snickered, dropped his drawers and

joined Troy's dance. Soon, they were embracing and slowing their dance, bare body against warm bare body.

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Ewa Beach

Sunday, November 7, 2004, 10:50PM HTZ

Listening to Alden's new voice on the way home, Drew and Corey returned to their townhouse. In the living room, with his ear-buds in his ears, Leo danced to his music. Their nine-year-old son happened to be facing away from the door, toward the dining room and kitchen. He didn't even realize Drew and Corey were dancing with him until he turned around and jumped, startled by their sudden appearance. All three helplessly giggled.

Pulling an ear-bud out, Leo beamed, "More proof that you two are right for me. My mom and dad would've pulled that same trick, starting to dance with me, one or the other or both at once."

Corey giggled, "Your brothers are asleep?"

Leo nodded, "Lenny gave it up right after you left."

Drew confirmed, "You're doing okay?"

Nodding and swinging an arm around the room, Leo smiled, "This is part of what I needed too; a home to be with my family. The nests are nice, a good beginning, but this is nicer. I went up with Lenny and got him tucked in next to Geoff. That was so awesome! I never did it before. They're feeling more like little brothers every day. It turns out that Grandma Morrison was right; you two *are* my dads, you're friends too, but I definitely see you as fathers. Which reminds me, I'd like to spend more time with my new Grandmas and

Grandpas. My old ones were back east, in Vermont. They died years ago, before I started school."

"We wanted to talk with you about that," Corey began.

Drew explained, "We're hearing through Alden that other Core Rimmers are seeing newbies needing time to adjust. You're one of them, Leo."

"I don't want to be separated from you and my brothers," Leo whined, "not for two hours, and definitely not for most of the school days after tomorrow. We talked about this already. I was scared enough just this last hour. What am I adjusting to that can't be done where my new family is; G-Cats and gorillas? No, what I'll be doing is wanting to be with either family, the ones that are gone and I can't be with, or with the new family at school. It's not even an option for me. School ain't a biggie. And it's placement tests, to see where I'm at, like any school change would be. I'd be better off there with my new family than anywhere else."

Corey smiled, "Done. We had to check, Leo."

Nodding, Leo sighed, "My folks always used to wonder about people that... uh... dwell, yeah that's the word... people that dwell on stuff. I'm not gonna dwell, I'm gonna remember them just as they were and we were. I can see parts of them already in both of you. In this family is where I belong and want to be. This is where I'll be, surrounded by a huge new family, with uncles and cousins around every corner. I barely got to say anything to Bruce yesterday or today. Him and I need to talk soon."

"That would be good," Drew assured. "I know that you're a lot alike. You both need and want your family around. Bruce is at the exact same place you are, Leo; building family bonds with parents,

and with brothers and sisters. He'll be at school tomorrow, so you can talk with him any time ya want."

Forcing a disapproving frown, Corey crossed his arms, huffing, "If you're waking for school, it's bed time, young man."

Breaking into a giggling fit, Leo teased, "Close, pop, but no cigar." Dropping his arms and rapidly blinking, Corey faked confusion, appearing to try to understand where he screwed up, but helplessly sputtered and giggled.

"We're all going to bed," Drew sniggered. He turned Leo toward the steps, prompting, "Move your cute blond butt, mister."

Slumping and dragging his feet, Leo giggled, "It ain't blond yet, dad, another three or four years, I guess. For now, it's just white." He then sped up the stairs.

"What I'm trying to figure out is why it always works when Drew says it's bedtime," Corey giggled. "No one takes me seriously when I say it."

Climbing steps and bringing up the rear, Drew teased, "I do, angel, at least twice a day."

At the top of the steps, Leo blushed and giggled, "So are you two gonna mess around?"

Drew chuckled, "Not in bed tonight. In the shower, steaming up the bathroom before bed."

"And after we wake too, more than likely," Corey giggled.

"It's the best part of being so young," Drew instructed his son. "We can go for it quick, but over-and-over again faster than even

fourteen-year-olds. They're trying to make it last. We've tried going slower to make it last, and usually fail, so oh well, try again later."

"Leo's exactly where we were at nine," Corey told Drew, "knowing what he wants, but a little scared of actually going there. Those first hugs and kisses seem like such a big step."

"I remember," Drew smiled. "We were friends for years first. Leo needs to find the friend that makes him want to overcome the fear."

"I have no idea who that might be or when," Leo softly sighed, and then giggled, "Wouldn't it be funny if your son turned out to be a breeder?" Stopping at the staircase landing, Leo spun around to see the expressions on his dad's and pop's faces.

Walking into the master bedroom, Corey giggled, "That's allowed too, Leo. It's the person, the whole personality, not the attached parts, not anywhere near as much as you think."

Pointing at the bed, Drew reminded Leo, "You're in the center of the bed." He then took Corey's hand and grinned, "Get comfy. We'll be back in fifteen minutes."

Widely smiling, Leo whispered, "Have fun," and then took his comm-badge off his polo shirt. Corey and Drew went into the master bathroom, and closed the door. He put the comm-badge on the dresser, before the framed photo taken of his adoption. Nodding at his new family's smiling faces, Leo was more certain everything was right. The toilet flushed and the shower water turned on.

For that one horrible night, he and his parents were victims. As soon as he woke Friday afternoon, he was a survivor. Leo took his new wallet out of his back pocket and looked at the only remaining Scott family portrait. If only all three had Clan style protection that

crazy Thursday night. How wonderful everything might have been if the entire Scott family survived. He put his wallet on the dresser and his comm-badge on top of it, then he took his shirt off and dropped it on the growing pile with his brothers' dirty clothes.

Taking his shorts off, Leo watched his brothers sleeping. Both boys had brown hair, like Drew's hair. Leo had blond hair, almost the exact same shade as Corey's hair. The five of them actually could all pass for brothers, or cousins at least. Little would most people ever guess that the two oldest boys were really fathers of the younger three. It would be a trip to call Drew 'dad' and Corey 'pop' in some public place, just to watch reactions. Before dropping his shorts on the pile of dirty clothes, Leo took his iPod out of the pocket and placed it on the dresser.

Pausing in boxer-briefs, Leo wondered if he should keep them on or take them off. He hadn't yet been able to sleep nude, like his dads and brothers. During summer months in LA, he would sleep naked, without even thinking about it, and the climate at Ewa Beach was much like summer in Southern California. Now was the perfect night to give it a try, he reasoned. Pushing his boxer-briefs to the floor, Leo walked around the king-sized bed and climbed up, crawling over beside Lenny.

In the dimly lit room, Leo positioned a pillow behind his back. He sat up near the headboard, which was fashioned with a top section, about a foot above the mattress, as shelving for stuff, like the digital clock-radio already sitting there. He suddenly realized that he might actually be able to sleep with his trusty iPod, simply by putting it up on the shelf. That would remind him too much of Thursday night though, so he decided not to try it.

From beyond the closed master bathroom door, Leo heard his dad and pop giggling up a storm. They sent Leo's thoughts down a

different tangent. He looked down at his limp package, and then at Lenny's similar uncut goods, and even Geoff's little turtled unit. Dicks are funny things, Leo grinned, and really thought about being gay, and what his new pop had told him. Yep, dicks are strange and nut sacks are weirder. Here's some leftover elbow skin, just to cover the jewels. That's not kewl! Dicks alone are bizarre, so let's make 'em look more odd with some crinkled up elbow skin.

Having seen his pop, with no visible hair on his sack, and his dad, with only a few hairs on his balls, and his teenage uncles with bushes of hair, Leo helplessly giggled and quickly covered his mouth. He tried to recall what his friends' packages looked like, other than the freaky sacks that all had the same elbow skin. Generally, among the boys his age, Leo thought most were about the same. Dee, Ben, Gage, Jason, Jonah and Sammy all had uncut dicks. Kenny, Billy and Scott all had cut dicks, which made their units more unique and somewhat more attractive. Sputtering and quickly covering his mouth, Leo giggled with the realization that he had spent many minutes with over a dozen different dicks flashing through his mind. He told himself, "Nope, not gay... MUCH!"

Shifting in his sleep, Lenny snuggled up to Leo's right leg. Lenny's eyes briefly opened and he softly sighed, "My big bro," and then seemed to fall right back to sleep.

Finger combing hair off Lenny's brow, Leo whispered, "You're an awesome little bro, Lenny." A wide smile spread across Lenny's face, but otherwise he didn't flinch.

This place felt like home more and more with every passing hour, Leo realized. The shower water turned off. Only moments later, the bathroom door opened a crack, letting light flow and steam billow into the room. Wondering how much of that steam was from hot water and how much was from his new dads, again Leo burst into a

giggling fit. He pulled one of the other two pillows to his face and tried to stop laughing, but remembering what Corey had said about sex between boys, Leo only laughed harder.

At his age, playing with his dick to make it hard was just something fun to do when no one was around to see. Until he was told what masturbation was, Leo had no idea that the afternoons spent at home, studying at the kitchen table, with one hand turning pages and the other hand rubbing his crotch actually had a name. Corey had also said that it was common; every boy played with their dick to some extent, and it was likely to continue into adulthood. Leo had no clue what an orgasm felt like, or what it might be like to have another boy fondle his dick. He could only just barely imagine hugging and kissing any of his friends, new or old, and what that might feel like. As curious as he really was, Leo knew it wasn't kewl to ask if his dad and pop had gone for oral or anal sex. He wasn't ready for either and didn't want to know any more than he already did. The whole idea of friendships becoming sexual relationships was brand new to Leo.

The bathroom light went out. A moment later, Corey and Drew stepped out of the bathroom and toward the bed. They smiled widely at Leo, clutching onto a pillow and laughing as quietly as he possibly could.

Drew crawled onto the bed beside his son, whispering, "Fifteen minutes, right?"

Glancing at the clock, Leo turned back to his dad, laughing harder and shaking his pillow covered face. Corey glanced at the clock, gasping "About twenty-five minutes, Drew." Feverishly nodding his head, Leo almost lost it and tried to eat the pillow, so he wouldn't wake Geoff or Lenny.

Grinning at his hysterical son, Drew softly smiled, "Well, we

had to leak first and towel off too."

"Or you're getting old," Leo cackled, and quickly covered his face with the pillow again.

Suspiciously squinting, Corey climbed onto the bed, giggling, "For that remark, Leo gets tickled first thing in the morning." Evilily grinning at Leo, Drew slowly and deliberately nodded his head. Reaching over to turn off the bedside lamp, Corey yawned, "We'd better call it a night." When the light went off, a night light across the bedroom, near the master bathroom door, flickered on. Another night light in the master bathroom reflected off the vanity mirror, providing sufficient illumination for anyone that needed the bathroom in the middle of the night.

Patting the mattress, Drew softly prompted, "Slide down, Leo."

"And give me my pillow back," Corey quietly giggled.

Handing over the pillow, Leo shifted to lay down, giggling, "I love you, pop. You too, dad."

"We love you too," Corey and Drew softly chorused. The three boys settled down in bed. One after another, they sighed and relaxed. Leo remained on his back. Drew moved onto his side, facing Leo. Corey maneuvered onto his side, snuggled up close to Drew.

After a little more than a minute, Leo whispered, "Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"What's it really like to love a boyfriend?"

"When it's right, it's like being reunited with another half of you. You can talk about anything and everything together. There's no one

else you'd rather be with."

"What's it like to make love?"

"The same; two halves become whole. The feeling lingers on too. All day long, I can see it in your pop's eyes. I can feel it when we hold hands."

"I want that."

"You'll have it too, as soon as you find that very special other half of you."

Leo thought about that. After a few moments, Leo admitted, "I'm confused. You, pop, Lenny and Geoff feel like parts of me."

Corey interjected, "We're family."

"Our ages have something to do with it too," Drew softly considered. "Keith and John are my blood, my brothers and my friends. My dad is so much older that the friendship part is different. Dad's more like a mentor, someone I look up to."

Leo sighed and smiled, "I feel that way about both of you too. You mean so much in only two days."

Corey patiently reminded, "You need and we can easily give you what you need. What we need from you, you're already giving, just by being who you are."

Reaching a hand over to firmly grip Leo's shoulder, Drew explained, "There's only two or three years difference between us. We all have good parents who love us. I purposefully didn't use past tense, Leo. That kind of love never dies."

Feeling more calm and content than he imagined he might

Friday afternoon, Leo giggled, "This feels so right. It's like I can feel my real parents here too. It's definitely them plus this family I feel, all at once."

Corey brightly smiled, "Grandma Morrison's got a sixth sense. We feel it too, Leo."

Leo nervously asked, "Can I lay between you?"

Drew nodded and Corey giggled, "We figured you'd prefer that." Drew and Leo swapped places. Lenny flipped over and cuddled Geoff. Laying on their sides, Drew and Corey faced each other and Leo.

Drew checked, "Better?"

Leo nodded and shivered, "The best."

"Always tell us what you need or want," Corey encouraged.

"The worst thing we can say is no," Drew smiled.

"I need a dozen peanut butter chocolate chip cookies!" Leo giggled.

"No!" Corey and Drew firmly chorused.

Mulling over a question in his mind, Leo soon anxiously asked, "Show me what it's like to be loved, please?"

Corey and Drew knew this question would be asked, but thought it would take Leo longer. Drew softly smiled, "We will, but I want you to know that Corey's my other half."

Corey grinned, "Drew's my other half. You need what we can easily give you; a little experience so it doesn't seem so scary." He

leaned over and kissed Leo on the mouth, gently and softly gliding his tongue over Leo's lips. Corey pulled back when Leo started giggling.

Reaching over, Drew picked up where Corey left off, kissing Leo the same way. Leo's mouth opened and Drew's tongue darted out only a little, to glide around Leo's front teeth and inner lips. He then pulled back, instructing, "Now it's your turn. Show Corey what a good student you are." Nodding and giggling, Leo turned to his dad.

Corey leaned over and kissed Leo. For the first time, Leo let his tongue dart out and caress the inside of another mouth. After a few moments, Corey smiled, "Very nice. Kissing is an art, and you get an 'A' plus. Now prove to Drew that you learned the lesson." Happily giggling, Leo turned his head to his dad.

Drew instructed, "Tongues are ticklish. Soon after your tongue explores my mouth, my tongue will touch yours. Let your tongue explore mine. Your tongue can retract and mine will go find it. Then my tongue pulls back and your tongue goes to find it." Enthusiastically nodding, Leo reached up for a kiss with his dad. Corey helplessly giggled at Leo's expression. Drew was the ultimate kisser and Leo was learning from the expert.

When the kiss broke, Leo giggled, "This is French kissing?"

Drew nodded and chuckled, "The advanced course requires a partner. It's held a lot longer, so you both have to breathe through your noses."

Leo confirmed, "Swappin' spit?"

Slowly nodding, Corey giggled, "Are you ready for the next lesson?"

"I think so," Leo nervously cackled.

At once, Leo felt his dad and pop reach hands over onto his shoulders. The two hands slid down over Leo's chest and back up to his neck. Cringing, Leo uncontrollably laughed. Both hands quickly moved down to Leo's chest again. To mute the sound before Lenny or Geoff woke, Drew leaned down for another tender kiss. Corey whispered, "Your boyfriend is the one you want to kiss tenderly, and he wants to kiss you tenderly. He's got the body that you absolutely have to touch. You've got the body that he can't stop touching, like me and Drew are showing you now."

Pulling back and widely smiling, Drew quietly explained, "You're giggling for two reasons. First, this is your first time experiencing any of this. Secondly, it's because we're your fathers. The slight differences in our ages make all this possible. When you and your boyfriend get this far, you won't be giggling, you'll be smiling, but too anxious to giggle."

Rapidly nodding, Leo giggled, "It feels great." Locking eyes, Corey and Drew took the next step. Each of their hands traveled down to Leo's belly and abdomen. Purposefully, Corey and Drew caressed Leo's torso, allowing their hands to explore their son's body. Leo nervously wondered, "When will you touch my dick?"

"That's actually the last thing touched," Drew smiled.

Corey nodded, "Me and Drew touched everything, from our hair to our toes."

"Your boyfriend is the one you'll want to touch everywhere," Drew instructed.

Leo giggled, "Omigod, I'll want him to touch me like this too." Two hands traveled down over Leo's hips and down to his legs,

causing Leo to gasp and lurch. More giggling erupted and two hands traveled up the inside of Leo's legs and thighs. Drew winked at Corey. Corey sent his index finger out to gently trace Leo's scrotum, earning another gasp. Drew then repeated the process, but traced all the way up and around Leo's erection. Shaking and shivering, Leo gasped and then groaned.

Drew softly sniggered, "Do you want to practice?"

Shaking his head, Leo giggled, "That was amazing! Nothing ever felt like that! It was like a rollercoaster dive!"

"That's an orgasm," Corey giggled.

"Yeah?"

Corey giggled, "Did it feel like you couldn't stop it if you tried, and willingly tossed yourself over a cliff?"

"Yeah, exactly like that."

Drew helplessly chuckled, "It wasn't my intention, but that's the way it happens. All the kisses and touches make us all extremely sensitive. Eventually, it will last longer than a few seconds."

Taking hold of Leo's cock, Corey locked eyes with his wide-eyed son, and softly smiled, "The best part is, until you hit puberty, you can do it again and again, really quick." Corey gave Leo many firm, slow strokes, pulling Leo's foreskin over and back off the head of his cock. Contracting every muscle in his body at once, Leo shook, shivered and groaned through a second orgasm. Corey and Drew helplessly giggled.

"Omigod!" Leo huffed, "Amazing! I wonder how I never

discovered this before."

Corey giggled, "How do you really feel?"

"Like saying thank you is no where near enough," Leo gushed.

Drew smiled, "You want to return the favor."

"Yeah, definitely."

"For your boyfriend, you will," Corey taught. "Everything he does for you, you'll have to do at least as much for him. Love is giving and receiving abundantly. Love is listening, sharing thoughts, and feelings, and then it's the physical part."

Leo asked, "How come I feel a little sad?"

Drew explained, "It's a guilty side effect from feeling so good, and wondering how anyone could be allowed to feel so good. It's normal and natural too."

"Don't even let yourself think it's because of me or Drew being your dads," Corey softly insisted. "Legally and logically, you're our son. At the same time, your our friend, Leo. This was the first lesson. If you want another lesson from us, and not from a boyfriend, you have to tell us when you're ready."

Drew emphasized, "Both of us, Leo. I won't without Corey and he won't without me there too. You know enough now to choose a boyfriend. All you need is a few more days, to discover who you enjoy being with most."

Leo checked, "Anybody I want?"

Corey nodded, "It's usually someone you can talk with about everything. A test hug and holding hands works too. If all that feels

good, to you and him, then make sure he knows how you feel and maybe try a soft kiss."

Nodding understandingly, Leo whispered, "Hold me?"

Snuggling up to either side of Leo, Corey and Drew wrapped their arms over their boy. In mere minutes, Leo was sound asleep. Corey purred, "I love you, Drew," and closed his eyes.

"I love you too, angel," Drew whispered, closed his eyes and nodded off into a deep sleep.

Chapter 17

Oneula Beach, Townhouse #2

Monday, November 8, 2004, 7:00AM HTZ

The incessant, annoying tone of Troy's alarm clock disturbed his pornographic dream, co-starring Sean. It was just getting to the best part too, with his toes in the air and Sean hovering over him. Groaning and reaching around the headboard to turn the thing off, or break it into a million pieces, Troy realized that there were warm bodies on both sides of him. He forced his eyes to open, turned the damned alarm off, and looked around his new master bedroom's spacious king-sized bed.

Before Troy lay his king-sized Tiger. Beyond Sean was Jimmy and then Jason. Turning slightly to see which sons were behind him, Troy discovered Billy and Scott. Although all six of them on the bed had a sheet covering their lower halves, Troy helplessly smiled at the way the bed was divided; all three with uncut dicks on the side nearest the door, and all three with circumcised dicks on the other half of the bed. The boys had to have specifically chosen this, Troy grinned knowingly.

Sean stirred and reached to pull Troy over and on top of him. Before being kissed deeply, Troy managed to say, "Good mornin', Ti-", but groaned and chuckled the '-ger' into Sean's open mouth. As usual, Sean immediately got busy, grinding his hips up against Troy's morning wood. It felt so fine and necessary that Troy allowed three good pumps before negatively humming. Sean's eyes popped open and Troy watched them darting around. Four waking boys giggled at their fathers' morning routine. Evilily snickering, Troy backed off of

Sean's lips.

Looking left and right, Sean grinned, "What're you guys doin' in here?"

Billy shrugged, "Jimmy woke to pee, and the rest of us heard the toilet flush. It's a new place, ya know, so we all woke and looked around. You looked so awesome to all four of us, we decided we could easily fit and join the picture."

Worried that it wasn't such a great idea, another bad move made with the best of intentions, Jason meekly asked, "I hope you don't mind?"

Smirking disbelievingly to his left and to his right, Troy playfully prompted, "Come over here. It's pile-up on dad time!"

Giggling, all four sons tossed the sheet aside and crawled onto their dad and pop. "NO-OO-HO!" Sean loudly laughed.

"Oh yes," Troy chuckled. He rested his head down close to Sean's ear, whispering, "You were so awesome last night, Tiger. I loved every moment, both times." He planted a wet kiss on Sean's neck while giggling sons created a lopsided pyramid of bodies, with the two youngest and smallest on top.

A little uncomfortable from the extra weight on top of him, Sean breathlessly panted, "I really love you guys."

Troy checked with his eldest son, "What's your job today, Billy?"

"Be a big brother," Billy warmly smiled. "I'll try and keep the other kids occupied. I was wondering though, how can I do stuff that

the older kids, and especially the girls, might want to do."

Sean reminded, "We showed you guys around, but very quickly. Go exploring and take some kids with you, Billy. What's in the rec room on this base? Is it the same as at Ewa Beach? How about the rec center here; is it the same as Ewa Beach, or is there something one has that the other doesn't?"

"The kids at Ewa Beach have only ever seen that base," Troy reminded. "Even if only kids your age and younger join you, that's more than half of the newbie kids here at Oneula. I'd think there would be another twenty or so at Ewa Beach in the same age bracket. Expect to lose a couple of kids here and there, as they get interested in stuff you find."

Sean instructed, "If you find something you've never seen before, maybe Alden could help you figure it out."

Disbelievingly, Scott squealed, "Billy's gonna play leader today?"

"Billy's the oldest Core Rimmer son," Troy reminded. "All you guys can help your big bro, too. Don't forget to let the other Rimmer sons know what you're scheming. AJ's, Jerry's, Kaleo's and Tory's boys would be into exploring." Troy grinned, "That's a dozen boys, ranging from five- to eleven-years-old. You each get to talk to other kids your age to have them join the search party."

Sean teased, "This is sounding like way too much fun. No school for me, Lover." Suspiciously, Troy squinted down at Sean. All four of their sons giggled. Starting with Billy, the boys stole kisses from their fathers and rolled out of bed, inspired with purposes. The older pair went to the hallway bathroom and the younger pair went into the master bathroom. Once alone with Troy, and hearing a toilet

flush and tub water flowing, Sean brightly beamed, "You really liked it that much?"

Troy smiled, "Enough to say we need to keep track of which is top and bottom how often. I want my fair share of lovin' like that." He then asked, "Do you still have trouble believing that I'll never leave you?"

Sean shyly shrugged, "I'm scared, Lover. I wasn't near as scared in California as I am about keeping everything between us kewl. There's nothing logical about how scared I am; it's like a boogymen from the past messing with me."

"Never ever, Tiger," Troy promised. "I'm hooked on you, like an addiction I don't want to ever break. On top of being perfect for me, you're becoming one hell of a good father too. Everything's always a gamble with relationships, but we spent time getting to know each other, and we keep making time, like this right now, to make sure everything is kewl. It's paying off."

"I'm following your lead," Sean grinned. "You told Billy that he needed encouragement. So I follow your boosts with more of the same."

Troy reminded, "This time. Another time, you were teaching me to speak dog. Before that, you showed me the best ways to make love. All that stuff I learned was from you." After grabbing a tender kiss, Troy prompted, "Com'on, Tiger. We've got about twenty minutes to have a little fun in the shower." He rolled off the bed with Sean following him into the master bathroom.

Two giggling boys in the tub didn't seem to pay their clearly excited fathers any mind. Sean and Troy went to stand before the toilet. Still, neither Jimmy nor Scott said a word; they only went on

bathing each other and enjoying accidental tickles. Soon after they started leaking, Troy turned questioning eyes to lock with Sean's eyes.

Noticing Troy's curious expression, Sean whispered, "What?"

Troy quietly queried, "Nothing said, about either of us?"

Sean smiled then clearly shared, "Five- and six-year-old gay boys prefer dicks their own size. These two know dicks of all ages, shapes and sizes to make that choice. Right guys?"

"Right!" Jimmy and Scott loudly giggled.

"Pop's butt jiggles more than dad's though," Jimmy quickly cackled. Widely smiling but slouching slightly, Troy huffed. Sean evilly snickered.

Trying to dunk his slightly younger brother, Scott giggled, "I told you not to say that!"

"It's true!" Jimmy squealed.

Sean sniggered, "What do you guys think; should I marry pop this week or next?"

"This week!" Jimmy and Scott cheered.

"We get rings first," Troy chuckled. "Prez and the other guys are still waiting on their rings."

Sean grinned, "Are rings that important?"

"For a marriage they are, to me anyway," Troy leered. "You need visible proof of who you belong to. Then you'll have a constant reminder that we're really forever."

Mooing erupted from Sean, Scott and Jimmy. Giggling his butt off, Troy finished at the bowl and rapidly retreated into the shower. It was a nice sized shower, definitely built for only two; there was no way a group of six teens could fit, like at the single family homes. Turning on the water and hopping back from the first cold blast, Troy had a momentary vision of a brood of a dozen sons. As frightening as it was, Troy acknowledged that it would probably make the entire family happy.

Sean entered the shower and slid the door closed. He skated directly against Troy, whispering, "It seems you're walking a little funny this morning. How do you feel, Lover?"

"I know that I got a lot, twice," Troy softly sniggered.

Leaning against the nearest wall, Sean stuck his butt out, smiling over his shoulder, "Take a turn?"

Feeling a sudden sexual rush race through him, Troy balked, "What about the boys in the tub?"

"That's what they expect," Sean quietly shared. "Us not making love would become more of a problem for them. These two will tell the other two, yeah, dad and pop are kewl."

Taking a step closer to caress Sean's back, Troy whispered, "So they know we won't mess with them?"

"Only partly," Sean softly answered. "What I heard them imply was that their old folks used to get off on them, and rarely each other. Us purposefully getting caught once in a while tells them we're in love, which is most of what they care about. Since we haven't missed a morning since day one, let's continue as we were. It won't freak them out at all. Us not making love would freak them out much

more."

Beginning a forceful grind against Sean's butt cheeks, Troy sighed, "That's so damn annoying. Give me a minute to chill, Tiger. I'll be good to go, once I release some aggravation here."

Pushing his butt back against Troy's cock, Sean giggled, "Wear it off in me, Lover. I understand completely, and I have to admit, the way you feel is getting me hotter."

Troy took hold of his erection, aiming for Sean's crack, but paused when Jimmy and Scott loudly laughed, "You're so bad, daddy!" Troy slumped slightly, but Sean howled laughing.

Sadly shaking his head yet widely smiling, Troy loudly joked, "Daddy is very good at being the baddest boy around. Since I love him for it, I guess that makes me just as bad." Jimmy and Scott cracked up again, driving Sean into hysterics. From inside the shower, Sean and Troy heard their two youngest boys race out of the bathroom, presumably to tell their older brothers what was going on.

Meanwhile, in the hallway bathroom tub, Jason talked with his big brother Billy. "I don't know what I'm doing wrong. Leo's not into having a boyfriend yet. Dee told me I was trying too hard. All I'm trying to be is nice."

Listening to his younger brother, who had always been on the same page of the same book as he, Billy silently mulled over the situation for a few moments. "Jase, maybe it's not you, bro," Billy uncertainly offered. "Maybe it's them. I mean, two people have to want the same thing. Are you acting differently with Dee and Leo?"

"I don't think so," Jason murmured. The two boys swapped places in the tub, so Jason could rinse shampoo from his hair. With his head back and his eyes closed, Jason giggled, "Maybe you're right,

it's just me, because Dee and Leo are blonds. They're especially cute to me, so that might be part of it."

Nodding understandingly, Billy offered, "How about if you treat other guys the same as them? It might take a while, maybe a few days, but you can start today, by helping me explore the bases with the other kids."

"Leo and Dee will be at school," Jason sighed.

"Even better then," Billy grinned. "You can get to know other guys, and when Dee and Leo see you making other friends, treating those guys the same as you acted around them, they might realize you really weren't changing anything. Besides, liking blonds limits your options. You're missing out on all the guys with brown and red hair, who you might actually like more than a blond."

Nodding agreement, Jason changed the subject, asking, "What about you, bro? Have you got anyone special you like?"

Billy giggled, "There isn't anyone like that yet. All these guys are very kewl. I showered with Corey Seaver yesterday, while you and Drew were with Leo. There's a really cute guy, who's my age, a little taller than me, and he's already got a patch of pubes over his dick. I was really nervous, at first. Corey's married to Drew, ya know? Showering with him was just like showering with you. It was kewl. He's a brother and a leader, so he told me that kind of stuff, like the plans they had for yesterday, with the new orphanage kids."

Jason asked, "He never touched you?"

"Sure he did," Billy giggled. "He washed my hair, and I washed his. We had stiffies, but he never touched mine, and I didn't touch his. The only other part of me he touched was my back, the areas I can't reach. He did it so I would do the same for him. I think that's part of

the deal around here, Jase; treat the guys like you'd want to be treated."

"I am!" Jason excitedly squealed.

Billy nodded and smiled, "I know. Which is why I think you should just be you today, exploring the bases with other guys. I figure either you'll find other kids that you like, as much or more than Leo and Dee, or those two will see that you're really that friendly with everyone."

"That'll work," Jason warmly smiled.

Still dripping wet, Jimmy and Scott raced into the hallway bathroom. Scott giggled, "Daddy was bein' goofy in the shower. Him and pop are gettin' messy!"

Jason cracked up. Billy sniggered, "Thanks for that news update guys. Judging by the way they woke, I figured they would."

"This is so awesome!" Jimmy squealed. "They love each other all the time, and still find ways to love us too. How can they do that?"

Billy giggled, "We'll know the answer to that when we have boyfriends, and decide we want kids."

Jimmy and Scott hollered, "Drats!"

"That'll take too long," Scott grumbled.

"Ask dad and pop then, cos we don't know the answer," Jason grinned.

Jimmy giggled, "Let's go!"

Scott told Jimmy, "Later, when they're done gruntin' and

groanin'."

Nodding, "Kewl," Jimmy spun around and led Scott out of the bathroom. They went to their room to get dressed.

Pointing at Billy's bone, Jason giggled, "Down, boy."

Billy grinned and huffed, "Someday, bro, we're gonna have someone and be like dad and pop."

"Soon, I hope," Jason smiled.

In the townhomes on either side of Sean's and Troy's, AJ and Jerry, and Kaleo and Tory were only slightly less involved. Those two sets of Core Rimmer sons weren't sexually abused and far less knowledgeable. The pairs of fathers were still teenage boys in love, and had to show it before moving forward with their morning routines. The Hunnicutt brothers couldn't help hearing AJ and Jerry in bed, even though the two newest Core Rimmers tried their best to keep the noise down. Kaleo and Tory had all five of their sons with them all night, so they went for a slippery, soapy grind in the shower. Eight boys in two townhomes heard enough to know their dads were getting busy and went into giggling fits.

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Ewa Beach, Townhouse #3

Monday, November 8, 2004, 7:00AM

Waking to the sounds of rock music from Drew's clock radio, Geoff and Lenny saw Leo laying between their daddy and poppa. The latter three started to wake, allowing Geoff and Lenny to climb over and cuddle with them. Locking eyes with Leo, Lenny asked, "No bad

dreams, bro?"

"Not one," Leo smiled, "I had all of you dudes keeping me safe."

Carefully and softly, Drew asked, "How do you feel, ya know, since me and pop finished in the shower?"

Leo thought only a moment, then brightly smiled, "Now I know more of what being in love means. I know that won't happen again, unless I ask about the next steps." Glancing at Corey and Drew, Leo beamed, "It was very kewl. Thank you, both."

After planting a kiss on Leo's forehead, Corey giggled, "You're very welcome. Now you know what Geoff and Lenny know; you can talk to me and dad about anything and everything." In the middle of Corey's statement, Geoff's belly loudly growled, causing all five to break into giggles.

Pulling Geoff closer, Drew planted a kiss on his youngest son's cheek, and then sniggered, "Let's get Geoff fed, before that Sehlat belly devours us all." Still giggling, Geoff and Lenny rolled off the top of the pile. Rolling to the same side of the bed as the two youngest boys, Drew confirmed, "Geoff and Lenny, you know the deal?"

Enthusiastically, Lenny nodded, "It's time to shower with Leo."

Wide-eyed, Leo gasped. Looking at his dad, pop, and both brothers, Leo balked, "Would that really be kewl?"

"Of course," Corey giggled. "You're brothers, and you all know what's kewl and what's not."

Running around the bed, Geoff reached for Leo's hand, sharing, "Come on, bro. We know *all* about dicks, and how to only clean

them."

"We know you're older," Lenny giggled, and took Leo's other hand. "If you get a goofy look on your face, we'll stop whatever."

Encouraging his eldest son, Drew smiled, "You haven't had a shower until you've knelt down and had these two shampoo your hair."

"Omigod!" Corey cheered, "I almost fell asleep, it was so relaxing."

Pulling a reluctant Leo out of the room to the hallway bathroom, Lenny explained, "Dad and pop says there's plenty of good ways to show love. We won't touch your dick at all, if you don't want us to." All Leo could think of was how quickly he had his first orgasms ever. He couldn't allow either brother to take the chance. Letting go of Leo and climbing into the tub, Lenny giggled, "Daddy and poppa need two showers a day, just to play or make whoopee. They vanish during the day too sometimes." He leaned over to turn on the water.

Pushing Leo toward the tub, Geoff giggled, "Daddy and poppa really love each other, all'a time. Watch 'em talk, bro. That's not what me and Lenny saw before joining the Clan. They just wanted to play with our willies and make 'em stiff. Now we all got stiffies, but it's from real love." Geoff followed Leo into the tub and slid the door closed.

"Family love," Lenny told Leo, and then turned the shower on. Shaking water off his face as he turned around, Lenny gestured to the tub floor, explaining, "You're too tall, bro. I might barely reach your hair, and Geoff don't have a chance." Reaching both arms up and demonstrating, Geoff could only reach the tops of Leo's ears. Leo knelt down with the shower spray at his back, and with Lenny and

Geoff side-by-side before him. Leaning back a little bit, Leo got his hair wet.

Picking up the bottle of shampoo, Geoff added, "While we shampoo your hair, you can wash us. Then you stand to shampoo us, and we wash you." Pouring a little shampoo onto a cupped palm, Geoff passed the bottle to Lenny.

Nervously, Leo nodded and softly begged, "Don't touch my dick, bros. If I'm making a goofy face, it's prob'ly already too late." The two little dudes giggled and nodded. He picked up a bar of soap and started carefully washing Geoff.

Beginning to wash Leo's hair, Geoff and Lenny giggled. "We know all about older dudes," Lenny reminded.

Leo smirked, "I know you do; some way too old."

Lenny shared, "Fiddlin' with our willies feels good to us, but we don't ever get the shakes, like boys a little older than us, like John and maybe you. Then there's a little older than you, like poppa and daddy. They're startin' to make messes, like teens and men."

Geoff nodded, "Our friend Timmy calls it spermies. It'll happen to all of us someday."

Leo asked, "You know that I didn't know any of that stuff until Saturday?"

"We didn't know, but we figured," Lenny answered.

"You had a nice mommy and daddy," Geoff added.

Thoughts of what his two little brothers had been through caused Leo's jaw to tighten. Fearing the two boys would see his anger,

Leo couldn't even look at the faces on either side of him. Clearly, as if his real parents were just beyond the shower door, Leo heard them chorusing "Love conquers all. Show them." Leo pulled both brothers up against him and gave each a kiss.

"We're not done yet!" Geoff giggled.

Lenny smiled, kissed Leo back, and then told Geoff, "Leo's gettin' like daddy and poppa. He's wantin' to do stuff about bad grown-ups."

Leo sighed, "Most of all, I want to be your big brother. I want to somehow make everything perfect for both of you."

"You are!" Geoff giggled. "You're not playing with our dicks. You don't want us to even wash yours."

Wiping away some shampoo bubbles before they dripped into Leo's eyes, Lenny nodded, "That says it all, bro." He then quickly added, "You've got real nice hair; long, blond, like poppa's, but yours is a little wavy."

Leo asked his brothers, "We even look like brothers and a family, don't you think?" Lenny and Geoff agreed.

"Okay, ready to rinse," Lenny instructed. Geoff carefully moved aside, so Leo could stand and get under the water.

With his head back, eyes closed and his hands running through his hair, Leo smiled, "That felt awesome! I'm gonna get used to this, real quick."

"Every day, morning or night or both," Lenny giggled.

Geoff smiled, "This way us little guys show you big guys you're

important to us."

"Daddy says us kids under ten out number both tweens and teens combined," Lenny cheekily grinned. Looking down at his brothers' Cheshire cat smiles, Leo cracked up. Quickly, Geoff and Lenny grabbed the two bars of soap and started washing Leo. "This is the way we prove we run the show around here," Lenny mischievously cackled. Beginning to flinch and jump, Leo's giggling turned into loud laughter as two pairs of hands went to work, seemingly finding tickle spots at hitherto unknown places. Firmly cradling his head with both arms, so he wouldn't knock either brother over, Leo roared laughing loud enough to be heard in the master bathroom shower, where Corey and Drew were bathing.

Rinsing his hair, Corey giggled, "Serious and worried Leo just flew out the window."

Nodding, Drew chortled, "Pouncing lessons have begun. I'm proud of all three of them; Leo for trying his best, after having the rug pulled out from under him, and Geoff and Lenny for doing what's natural and easy, including Leo in their lives."

"Instead of two sitting in the tub, they're standing in it, bathing with their new big brother," Corey smiled.

"It sounds like they're having the time of their lives," Drew softly said, and then leaned over to lap some water dripping down Corey's arm. Squirting the water back out of his mouth at Corey's tiny nipples, Drew grinned, "You're marked as mine now."

"I've been marked as yours for a week!" Corey loudly cackled. "Now you get marked as mine!" Drew mooed through his giggles. Picking up the soap, Corey instructed, "Turn around, stud."

Doing as he was told, Drew leaned against the wall and wiggled

his butt for his hubby. Looking over his shoulder, Drew giggled, "Mark me, angel."

Soaping his lover's ass, Corey playfully sang, "This is the way we wash our buns, wash our buns, wash our buns..." Drew cracked up, until Corey slid a hand between his butt cheeks. The other hand slid in and Drew moaned as fingers brushed his sphincter. Kneeling down, Corey let his soapy hands run down Drew's legs. Once he was settled with a luscious meal before him, Corey reached his right hand between Drew's legs to stroke away while he nibbled and periodically fingered his hubby's bung hole.

Drew began whimpering and Corey giggled, knowing that Drew would likely want to have even more fun. To make that moment happen faster, Corey released Drew's bone, spread his cheeks and stuck his face in the crack. Gasping and squealing with every flick of Corey's tongue, Drew intermittently begged, "Now, Cor. Please, angel?"

On the fourth such request, Corey stood and got behind his husband. Drew made it clear that he was done waiting by backing up against Corey's bone. Leaning onto Drew, holding on tightly and thrusting away, Corey softly groaned his never-ending devotion and love. Reaching climaxes one after the other in only a few minutes, Corey dizzily picked up the soap to rewash his hubby's butt.

Relieved and satisfied, Drew happily raved, "You're the best of everything, Corey Seaver. My best friend and the most awesome lover I could've ever hoped for." Becoming coherent again, Corey giggled, but Drew rambled on, "Think of us in about three or four years, when you're taller than me. If it's this awesome now, when we're fifteen or sixteen, sex is gonna be incredible."

Corey giggled, "Until then..."

"We practice," both boys cheered.

In the townhouse next door, unit number two, Mike's and Derrick's family weren't as organized or motivated. Soon after their seven o'clock alarm chirped, Derrick and Mike made love on their bed. In the two bedrooms down the hall, Jonah and Gage shared a room with Reyes, and Dillon and Randy shared the other room. While his brothers slept in, Reyes heard the alarm from the master bedroom and woke. Sliding his legs off the edge of his bed, Reyes sat up and stretched. Simply doing that little task, Reyes mind raced with memories of the nest, the overcrowded orphanage mattresses, and the beds he had slept in decades earlier. Blankly watching Jonah sleep for a few moments, Reyes grinned and silently thought, this is right, the way it always should've been. Wrapped up by Gage's arm, Jonah blissfully slept mostly on his boyfriend. Reyes stood and went to the hallway bathroom to relieve his bursting bladder. He didn't even close the door, but went directly the toilet.

Over the ceiling speaker and in his new teenage voice, Alden said, "Good morning, Reyes."

"Good mornin', Alden."

Alden said, "Reyes, I'd like to introduce you to my newest brother, Remi, from the Gulf Coast Division in Louisiana."

A new boy's voice, with a very obvious southern accent said, "G'mornin', Reyes."

Reyes giggled, "You waited until I was at the bowl, trying to leak, to introduce me?" Remi evilly snickered.

"All you Core Rimmers were busy Saturday and yesterday,"

Alden cackled.

Jack sniggered, "And Remi had his own very new division keeping him occupied."

Reyes chuckled, "Like I'm going to believe *that*." All seven AI voices giggled and laughed from the speaker.

Falling right back into the pattern that had become constant since Saturday, Alden giggled, "Did you know that you're in a very elite group of boys that rarely talks to his dick?"

Still waiting for the flood gates to open, Reyes smiled, "I'm glad to hear it."

"Is there a reason why?"

"Not really," Reyes grinned. "I have on occasion, just not recently. Why should I talk to what can't talk back, when I've got you to fill my morning quota of dick talk?"

"Hey now, we're a team!" Kerry giggled.

Stevie admitted, "You're already like what we hope to be, Reyes; AI boys walking around in the buff, not caring who sees what in whichever state. So, when do you talk to your dick?"

Reyes sniggered, "There was this one time, I was in a public restroom at a mall. My dad called for me to hurry, and I was almost done anyway, so I rushed. The next thing I know, I'm doubled over and cussing up a storm because I zipped up right over and onto my dick, pinching a little skin."

"Does that hurt?" George innocently asked... a little *too* innocently.

Alden laughed, "With all the various skinned knees and other minor injuries we've seen, and how the kids reacted, what do you think?"

"I'll take his word for it," Icarus giggled. "Note to future self, no rushing or hurrying with metal objects anywhere near my pecker."

"Note to self; make sure Icky's zippers are all plastic!" Kerry giggled.

Leaking at last, Reyes giggled, "Don't you guys have other stuff to do?"

"All done," Alden cheered. "Foods for all the kitchens are stocked. Even the basement store is restocked, ready for another hundred kids. Our VIs are handling other stuff, but right now, I'm only talking to you and Fred Eckhart, and my brothers, of course."

Reyes wondered, "What's Fred doing awake so early?"

"Chauncey woke early to walk Rikko," Kerry answered.

George added, "Leaving Fred alone and available to chat."

Alden asked, "Have you seen Fred naked yet, Reyes?"

"Nope, I haven't."

"He's cute!" The seven AIs sang, leading to a brief interruption of arguing brothers, laying claims to the android boy.

Done leaking, Reyes flushed the toilet. He crossed the room and went into the tub. Soon after the shower started and Reyes was wet, he picked up the soap, telling the AIs, "Not one of you has mentioned his dick."

Alden moaned, "It's real nice too; not too long, not too fat, just perfect; Alden sized." The other six AIs laughed and goofed on their brother.

Reyes smiled, "The point is, it wasn't his dick that attracted you first, was it?"

"He's an android," George firmly reminded.

"With wide shoulders," Icarus purred.

Kerry giggled, "And a real cute butt."

Stevie cheered, "And he treats Chauncey like a real brother."

"Without Fred, I think Chauncey would be in a really bad way, missing his parents and all," Alden shared.

Jack said, "From what I've gathered, hearing Fred and Chauncey talking, they shared a bedroom about as big as their dorm room. For Chauncey, as much as things changed, they stayed the same too, with Fred and Rikko around."

Reyes teased, "Maybe I'll spend some extra time with Fred today." Overlapping AI complaints and warnings poured down out of the speaker. Reyes cracked up.

In the next townhouse over, Prez and Keith were in the shower. Stroking Keith's soapy erection, Prez giggled, "Today, Keith."

Shaking his wet head and splashing Prez with water, Keith giggled, "Tomorrow, sex-machine."

Dramatically frowning, Prez whined, "By tomorrow I'll be climbing all over you at school. Take me now!"

"You need to heal a little more before I grab your hips and pump away."

Prez pouted and rambled, "In today's music class, our two head Rimmers were teaching rhythm. The next thing we know, they're on the floor, ripping clothes off each other. We learned three-four time, four-four time, and twelve-eight time in only five minutes."

"You're exaggerating," Keith sniggered.

"You're forcing me to do a lot more than exaggerate," Prez leered, and then turned around. Stepping back so his buns were flush against Keith's hips, Prez slid around, proving he was sufficiently healed and as ready as ever.

Groaning as self-control slipped away, Keith then firmly instructed, "You tell me if anything hurts."

Nodding, Prez promised, "It won't hurt. Going another day without would hurt both of us way more."

Reaching down, Keith made the minor adjustment so he could enter his husband. Both softly moaned.

In the bedroom normally shared with Dee, Sammy woke with Ben in his bed. The thrills of having his first boyfriend cuddled up to him raced through Sammy's mind and pushed him into gleeful giggles. Hours earlier, Sammy had had his first sexual experiences by Ben's hand. Naturally, Sammy returned the favor. Now, Sammy woke his boyfriend with gentle cheek kisses. Seeing Ben's eyelids flutter and his mouth form a smile, Sammy landed the first of many tender kisses on the mouth. By watching his dad, pop, and Uncles Corey, Drew, John and Stephen, Sammy had learned well the skills of expert kissing.

Ben woke to the hottest kisses he'd ever received. How such a good kisser was becoming a better kisser, Ben had no clue. He guided Sammy on top of him and held him firmly in place.

Awake from the sounds of alarm clocks, shower water running, and his daddy and poppa makin' whoopie, Richie bounded out of bed. Needing to pee, he hurried for the hallway bathroom. Hearing his younger brother, Dee stretched and sat up in bed. He also needed to use the toilet, but not as seriously as Richie. Getting out of bed and walking out of the room, he peaked into the other bedroom that he normally shared with Sammy. Seeing his brother on top of Ben, Dee giggled, "Yeah, I might've stayed in that room. If I did, would you two still be doing this?"

Ben and Sammy hummed affirmatively into their kiss. "Great!" Dee giggled, "Just what every guy needs to see in the morning, his brother makin' out with his boyfriend." Ben and Sammy broke their kiss. With mischievous sparkles in their eyes, they agreed to teach Dee a lesson. Sammy rolled off Ben and out of bed, with Ben following him after Dee. Loudly laughing, Dee took the easiest escape route, downstairs and into the first floor half-bath. He closed the door and locked it, just in time.

From upstairs, Richie heard Dee cackling, "Three days in a row, you're stiff as steel, Sammy. Show Ben how long it takes for you to pee that way!"

Sammy blushed and giggled, "Now you're gonna get it, bro!" Ben howled laughing.

Heading into the master bedroom and bathroom, Richie didn't even pause to say good morning to his dad or pop, but went directly for the tub and turned the water on.

Realizing they weren't alone, Keith and Prez paused. Dropping his face onto Prez's shoulder, Keith softly sniggered, "Has to be Richie."

Nodding, Prez puffed, "Finish us off, T'hy'la." Doing as he was told, Keith started pumping away again.

Next door, Reyes finished his shower and slid the door open. The shower sounds woke Dillon and Randy. They hurried into the bathroom to relieve themselves and greeted their mostly wet big brother. Reyes moved over to the sink to brush his teeth. Moments later, Reyes had a little brother on either side, reaching their hands into the sink, chattering about how hungry and thirsty they were. Without drying their hands, both little guys raced downstairs.

Waking up to various sounds from the hallway bathroom, Jonah carefully told Gage, "I really wanna do what my dad and pop are with you."

Gage smiled, "I want it too, and you know we will, just not as some kind of pay back. When we do stuff, it's gonna be so awesome that you'll completely forget the stuff at the orphanage. Each new thing we do will wipe out hundreds of other bad times you had."

Purposefully, Reyes extended the time he took brushing his teeth, believing that running water would mask the sounds his dad and pop were making in the bedroom. When there was quiet at last, he spit, rinsed and turned the water faucet off. Returning to his room, he said good morning to Jonah and Gage, then began dressing.

Since their private conversation was on hold, Jonah suggested they get glasses of juice from the kitchen. They rolled out of bed and went downstairs without even looking in Dillon's and Randy's room. Reyes couldn't help noticing both boys had major morning wood.

Since they obviously didn't care, Reyes said nothing about it, choosing not to embarrass either of them.

Downstairs, Gage heard Dillon and Randy rummaging around the kitchen and paused before taking the last step into the living room. Only giggling, Gage pointed at his own and Jonah's boners. Jonah grinned and shrugged then lead his boyfriend to the kitchen. Wordlessly, Jonah reached for glasses, and Gage got a carton of orange-pineapple juice from the fridge.

While Gage poured four glasses of orange-pineapple juice, Jonah noticed that Dillon and Randy were sharing glances and smiles. "Out with it," Jonah giggled at them.

Pointing at Jonah's and Gage's mid-sections, Dillon cackled, "Who made who?"

Quickly putting down the carton of juice, Gage cracked up and felt his face turning redder by the millisecond. Unintentionally, Gage had shown off to Jonah's younger brothers and now they were paying the price.

Locking eyes with Jonah, Randy giggled, "It's just way different from what we expected, bro. You're getting like dad and pop already."

Taking hold of Gage before he caught fire, Jonah smiled, "It's because Gage really loves me. Since Saturday, Gage has told me a lot of stuff; dreams he has, worries he's got, all the good stuff and bad stuff that's crossed his mind. I told him a lot of stuff too; stuff I couldn't tell anyone else before, even stuff Reyes hasn't heard me ever say."

Randy giggled, "So umm... how is it?"

"I tried like crazy to get Gage to let me blow him last night,"

Jonah freely admitted. Dillon and Randy stopped giggling and their jaws dropped. Jonah dreamily sighed, "Twice, Gage said, 'another time'. I was on my knees, reaching for his shorts, only to have him giggle and pull me up, and onto the bed to make out. Twice we kissed and ground off against each other, and we were still talking a little! It was crazy and awesome and totally excellent all at once. I didn't feel bad afterward. Gage didn't feel bad either. It was the right time for us to do only that. After the first time, we went right back to the concert. After the second time, I fell asleep with his arms over and around me. Now, I've got a little glimpse of what love should've been like all the time. Now, I understand dad, pop and all the Core Rimmer couples a little better. Not one of them is always strong, or always weak; they're real people who are both strong and weak, just when that's what they're feeling. Those orphanages pricks kept us weak."

"They made you feel inferior," Gage softly told Jonah, Dillon and Randy. "They dumped their shit on you emotionally and sexually. My pop told me that. I didn't completely understand it all, even from Richie and Dee, but now with Jonah, I do understand. They wanted you to believe you were sex toys. Jonah and all of you are people, not toys. Because I was treating him nice and talking with him, Jonah thought it would be good to suck my dick, only cos that's what he learned. All I need or want is him nearby to be with and talk with. Yeah, we can do other sex stuff too, but not as some kind of payment. We'll do whatever and whenever, as long as we both feel it."

Completely blown away with Gage's words, and the way they were said so gently, Jonah sighed, rested his head on Gage's shoulder and closed his eyes.

"DADDY! POP!" Dillon screamed, and ran out of the kitchen.

Randy giggled, "He's gonna tell dad and pop, like they didn't

already know. I bet they do."

Shrugging at Randy, and then warmly smiling at Gage, Jonah stepped back from the hug to continue pouring juice. They barely heard Dillon upstairs, excitedly rambling to Derrick and Mike. Just finishing their shower, two hysterical teenagers tried to towel dry and keep Dillon from bouncing through the roof.

Dressed and coming downstairs, Reyes heard Dillon going off the deep end about Jonah and Gage. Reyes went into the kitchen, slightly grinning.

Pointing at Dillon's untouched glass, Jonah giggled, "Do you want a glass of juice, bro?"

Picking up the glass, Reyes nodded and smirked at Jonah, "You're learning?"

"I'll say!" Jonah laughed, "More in two days than ever thought possible in two years."

Gesturing an open palm toward Gage and looking up at Reyes, Randy teased, "Meet Jonah's Mister Perfect."

Holding out his right arm to shake hands, Gage giggled his first and last names and added, "Pleased to meet you."

Softly sniggering, "The pleasure's mine, Mister Perfect," Reyes shook Gage's hand.

Everyone heard the master bathroom tub water turn on. Coming downstairs, Mike and Derrick were mostly dressed, but carrying their shirts. Entering the kitchen, Derrick smiled, "I'm sorry, Gage. I accused you wrongly." He then glared at Jonah, smirking, "You're the

bad boy!" Mike, Randy and Reyes cracked up.

Quickly hiding behind his sniggering boyfriend, Jonah giggled, "I didn't know better! Even though I do now, it was worth the shot!"

Mike prompted Randy, "Dillon's expecting you. Go get your bath taken." Randy quickly drank the last of his juice, put the glass down on the counter and jogged across rooms and upstairs. Mike rounded on Gage and Jonah, then hollered at the ceiling, "Alden?"

"Yes?" giggled Alden.

Mike sniggered, "Gage and Jonah need to shower, with an escort!" Alden, Derrick, Gage, Jonah and Reyes cracked up.

Holding Jonah in place behind him, Gage carefully side-stepped around Derrick, Mike and Reyes, heading out of the kitchen. Still giggling, the two new boyfriends then tore through the dining room and upstairs.

Alden giggled, "This has been a *very* interesting morning."

Derrick wondered, "What do you mean, Alden?"

"Well, I see everything that's going on," Alden reminded. "Even over at the dorms, kids seem to be having a lot more fun than usual. Partners of every sexuality are clearly more enthused than typical. Even where roommates are only friends, they're acting like best friends."

"It's back to school jitters, I think," Reyes smiled. "With part of the day already planned, everybody's doing what they want to do first." Turning to his dad and pop, Reyes grinned, "Which reminds me, I've never gone to school before in my life. What the heck am I

going to do?"

"Anything you like, Core Rimmer," Derrick smiled, and then pulled his polo shirt over his head and adjusted the collar.

Mike nodded, "Your options are wide open. If you want, you can hook up with Mr. T and become a teacher, so you're with the majority of everyone else. If you'd rather, you can man the Command Center, with Rad and Gil; or you can be available for kids that aren't going to school today."

"You could also take Fred Eckhart to AI Division headquarters," Derrick reminded.

"Then there's the drums and percussion in the basement to play," Mike added. "You could check out the Oneula Beach auditorium and let us know what's there. Any of the above works, Reyes."

Tapping his comm-badge, Reyes called, "Paul?"

Paul flatly replied, "Hey, Reyes. What's up?"

"Are you and Ryan near Mark or Danny? We've got a newbie android that could use his first check-up in at least sixteen years. While Fred is busy with them, I can visit with you and Ryan."

Paul answered, "Kewl. I'm at home, and there's no meal on the table, so Danny and Marc are next door."

Scowling, Reyes worried, "What's wrong, Paul? You sound like you're in the dumps."

"It's just a rainy, gloomy day," Paul replied. "Ry's taking a bathroom break, so I'm just kickin' back on my bed, day dreaming. Make sure you bring a raincoat, Reyes; there are torrential down

pours at times."

To see what kind of response he might get, Reyes grinned, "I guess we'll be spending most of the time indoors, in the bedroom?"

"REYES!" Paul loudly laughed. Reyes, Derrick and Mike softly sniggered. Paul chortled, "Someone's mind is in the gutter today."

The pitter-patter of running feet was heard. Then Joey giggled, "Hi Weyes."

"Hey, Joey," Reyes chuckled.

Joey thoughtfully wondered, "Unca Pauhw, why awe you hidin' undew youw piwwow?" After a short pause, Joey seriously added, "Yous godda wose deedhs befowe dhe Deedh Faiwy weaves ya anydhin' - Gwanma says so!"

Since Paul was either hysterical or embarrassed, Reyes giggled, "Joey, tell Uncle Paul that I'll see him in about an hour. We still haven't had breakfast yet."

"Suwe wiww, Weyes," Joey giggled.

"Reyes out." He then called, "Alden, where is Fred Eckhart?"

"He's just gone into the mob shower," Alden replied, and then giggled, "This morning, they really are mob showers. Entire halls of kids are in lavatories."

"Oh well, I'll catch up with Fred at the dining room then," Reyes muttered.

Derrick wondered, "Is there something wrong, Reyes?"

Shrugging, Reyes answered, "This is something good to do

today, but what about all the other school days? I don't see myself as a teacher, and don't really want to be seen as one."

Derrick and Mike grinned at each other. They moved over to sandwich Reyes between them. Mike chuckled, "This might be the first time ever that *not* going to school is a problem."

Reyes grinned, "It's been a very long time."

Nodding and hugging his eldest tighter, Derrick reminded, "Since being rescued, you've been watching over your brothers. Take a break. Everything at this base and Oneula Beach are at your disposal. Chill out and go with the flow. Make the most of whatever presents itself."

Mike agreed, "Stay with Paul and Ryan there, or bring them back here, if that's the way things work out. As for being separated from us, why not be a teacher's assistant two or three days a week? You could easily help any kid here with any assignment, and you get to be social too."

"You said that some of the little kids you rescued treated you like something different," Derrick reminded.

"The McPhearsons and the Stoeher twins," Mike recalled.

Derrick prodded, "Show them you're not so different after all."

The conversation was interrupted by knocks on the front door. Stepping back from Reyes and Derrick, Mike checked, "Better?"

Reyes nodded and smiled, "It will be, I'm sure. It's just another series of changes."

Mike went to answer the door. Derrick softly smiled, "Paul and

Ryan are becoming more than friends?" Nodding, Reyes giggled. "Spend as much time as you want with them," Derrick suggested. "That takes priority, over almost everything else, Reyes. Jonah's got Gage, now it's your turn."

Drew, Corey, Leo, Lenny and Geoff filed into the living room. Mike told them, "We're just waiting on baths and showers to finish."

Corey giggled, "Try having your whole family in the same bed. That got us all movin' at once."

"We got to wash Leo," Geoff happily cheered.

Blushing, Leo nodded and softly chortled, "I learned it's like an initiation into the Clan."

Derrick confirmed, "So we're going to talk most of the newbies into a week off?"

"Yeah," Drew quickly replied. "I'll bet Kaleo will start as soon as he's gathered kids."

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Oneula Beach, Dormitory #1

Monday, November 8, 2004, 7:43AM HTZ

Outside the exterior door into the dormitory, Jerry offered, "How about me and mine check out dorm two and then the dining room? Maybe some kids are already waiting there?"

Troy nodded, "Kewl, bro. We'll get the kids here moving."

Walking with his partner and three sons toward dorm two, AJ

chirped, "See ya in a few."

"I'll take Jimmy and Scott upstairs with me," Sean told Troy. On queue, Jimmy and Scott began complaining, and Billy and Jason began laughing, purposefully taunting their two younger brothers. Troy opened the door and led the way inside. Looking down at his two youngest sons, Sean loudly giggled, "We prob'ly won't get too far before being shooed away."

"FINE!" Jimmy and Scott hollered, and reluctantly stomped up the steps.

Following the boys upstairs, Sean giggled, "You're not acting gay enough."

Jimmy whined, "Boobies make us go boo-hoo."

"Willies make us go whoo-hoo!" Scott cheered.

At the landing and holding the inner door open for the older boys, Troy cracked up. At five- or six-years-old, Troy had no idea there was a difference, but all his sons already knew and were following their hearts. In the first floor hallway, towed boys were walking between the lavatory and their rooms. Music could be heard from a room somewhere down the hall, but closer, a television was cranked as loud as it could go.

Knocking on the first door frame, Troy peeked inside, asking, "How's it goin', guys?"

Two fifteen-year-old boys, Neil Green and Thaddeus Markell, occupied room number one. Troy couldn't help noticing that both boys were a few inches shorter and many pounds lighter than he. Also, only one bed had been slept in, making it clear these two were already a couple. Troy recalled some of what Doc Metzger had told

him days earlier, but didn't let on that he knew anything. Pausing in place, only partially dressed, Neil loudly crowed, "Awesome! I never slept so peacefully before. The hospital was okay, but this mattress was obviously made for me."

Thaddeus, who preferred to be called by his nickname 'Tad' chuckled, "Thank goodness neither of us snores too loudly."

Troy smiled, "I'm glad to hear it. Remember, school is optional for both of you. Breakfast is not optional. We're gathering everyone together for breakfast at Ewa Beach."

Slipping a polo shirt over his head, Neil said, "Kewl, Troy. So you know, every one of us that got here yesterday knows exactly where we're at medically; we're malnourished. You dudes are going to see a lot of us going for as many meals as we can pack away."

"All day, everyday," Tad pledged. "The docs and nurses fed us real food, anything we wanted, whenever we wanted. So we got vitamins and minerals from tubes, and more in our bellies too. You dudes won't be so much taller than us for very much longer."

"My dad was about five-eleven," Neil shared. "I can and will match that."

Loving the determined tones of Neil and Tad, Troy warmly cheered, "Excellent!"

Pulling a polo shirt over his head, Tad shared, "Every kid in our group has the same attitude."

Waving, Troy instructed, "We'll meet in the dining room here, then we'll all go over to Ewa Beach together."

At the next room, the loud television was found. Troy greeted

fourteen-year-olds Carter Rackham and Doug Zimmerman. The two new boyfriends hurried to the door in their underwear and sandwiched Troy between them, each reminding Troy that they were rescued by him and Sean. Doug was the bitter one challenging Sean. Sincerely apologizing, Doug retracted every word he said. Both were looking forward to breakfast milkshakes and more food. Both were determined to gain weight and height, and so they released Troy to finish dressing.

Turning to his two sons, Troy cheerfully prompted, "Knock on some doors and help me out. It's easy." Billy seemed to try to stand up straight, but slumped and withered again as he turned around. Troy smirked, "Wait a second." He went to both his sons and softly reminded, "The only way you can fail is by not trying at all. Watch it get easier with each knock."

Billy and Jason turned and went a few doors down. While Troy watched, Billy knocked and Jason said, "Good morning" to ten-year-old Frank Perry and nine-year-old Leroy Wheeler. Again, two boys pleasantly returned the greeting.

Billy softly stammered, "Uh... we're going to Ewa Beach... to have breakfast." Already showered and mostly dressed, Frank and Leroy were looking forward to it.

"School," Jason whispered, and nudged his big brother.

"Yeah," Billy said more loudly; "you guys don't have to go to school today."

Frank paused and blinked, "What're the other dudes doin'?"

Leroy nodded, "Yeah, it won't be kewl or fun if we're pretty much alone."

Jason grinned, "We're trying to get all the newbies since last Thursday to take time off. That includes us too. My pop said that's about half of all the kids."

Watching his younger brother and learning a little, Billy offered, "We don't wanna be alone either. There are two bases to explore. That'll take at least half the week."

"After breakfast, Billy's gonna take us for a closer look around," Jason explained.

"Yeah?" Leroy giggled. Uncontrollably, Billy blushed and nodded.

Frank nodded, "Kewl, as long as we're not bored."

"Can't happen around here," Jason giggled.

Billy nodded, "We'll be around this dorm. Come find us when you're ready?"

"Kewl," Frank replied.

Sitting down to put sandals on his feet, Leroy said, "Just another couple o' minutes."

Billy and Jason went to the next room, where George Ward and Victor Dixon were at their dressers, freshly showered and completely naked. Billy spoke a little easier with the eight-year-old and six-year-old, but Jason was too enthralled with George to say a word. From the profile view Jason had, George's dick hooked out and hung down perfectly over his sack. George was simply too handsome to be ignored. Billy, George and Vic noticed Jason gawking and helplessly giggled. Soon, Jason was blushing and giggling too.

Madly laughing, Sean, Jimmy and Scott came through the door and hurried down the hall. Troy grinned, "What happened?"

"We just got told off and pushed away!" Scott cackled. "As if I *wanted* to see anything I saw!"

Sean sniggered, "The girls would just rather we shout down the hall when we've got announcements."

Scrunching his face like he might be ill, Jimmy whimpered, "I saw a naked girl. Bleh!" Billy, Jason, Scott, Sean and Troy roared laughing. Jimmy faked dry heaves, and then giggled along with his brothers and dads.

Scott hugged his little brother, giggling, "We may never be the same."

"Somebody please show me a dick," Jimmy cackled.

Crossing the hall from the shower and hearing Jimmy's request, five-year-old Jeff Muller, called, "Here, Jimmy," and quickly pulled the towel away from his waist. His show was witnessed by many of the boys on that hallway.

"Thanks, Jeff," Jimmy giggled, "that's a real nice one too, by the way." Loud laughter and applause shattered the morning calm.

Scott hugged his brother, playfully wondering, "Why's Jeff's dick real nice?"

Jimmy giggled, "After what we saw upstairs, any dick is real nice."

At the Oneula Beach second dormitory, AJ, Jerry and their sons were inexperienced fashion consultants for the twenty-two newbies

that had never owned so much clothing before. All the boys were used to wearing blue jeans and dark shirts. Color coordination was Kenny's field of expertise. Kenny, Mike and Shaun helped all the boys choose clothing, to some extent or another. Already aware of the lousy situations these boys had been in at orphanages, AJ and Jerry explained the laundry bags, telling the newbies that all their clothing, and especially underwear, was to be changed every day. While they were away from their dorms during the day, housekeepers would make beds, vacuum the carpets and get laundry done.

The last important job done by both teams at both dorms was to remind the kids to wear their comm-badges and keep them on all the time. Comm-badges were required to pass through the dimensional doors, and they acted as tracking devices. Relatively quickly, due to having fewer kids at dormitory two, AJ and Jerry brought the kids over to the dining room.

Finding the dining room empty, Jerry went over to introduce himself to one of the chefs, named Alan Drake, and asked if any one else had been in the dining room.

"Not yet," Alan pleasantly replied, and then asked, "Is this group heading to Ewa Beach this morning?"

Jerry nodded and smiled, "Yup. It's their first morning, and some may still decide to go to school." He then wondered, "Have you seen our base security this morning?"

"They were here well over an hour ago, for shift changes between six and seven," Alan replied.

Seeing many girls enter the main dining room, signaling that dorm one was ready, Jerry grinned, "Expect a gathering at lunch time, Alan. I think kids will split their lunches, some here, and some at Ewa

Beach."

Alan nodded, "I'll let Charles and the Ewa Beach staff know. Thank you, Jerry."

Waving and smiling, "Any time," Jerry returned to the dining room, where AJ and his sons were already getting lines of kids through the dimensional doors. Alan and the other chefs began transporting trays of food from the Oneula Beach kitchen to the Ewa Beach kitchen. Soon after Jerry joined his husband at the dimensional doors, Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Troy, their sons and the remaining boys from dormitory one entered the room.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach CIC Dining Room

Monday, November 8, 2004, 8:07AM HTZ

Hundreds of adults, kids and UNIT security personnel were already sitting at tables with their friends and having breakfast when three dimensional doors chimed and the signs above them changed to display 'Oneula Beach'. The silvery facade faded away, allowing kids at either end of the doorways to see into the room at the distant end. In small groups, Oneula Beach kids came in the room. Already occupying tables near the doors, the Ewa Beach Core Rimmers and their sons greeted newbies. Even Shirley, the turtle doves and French hens softly cooed their good mornings. The four calling birds loudly squawked their morning greetings, causing Shirley to pause and glance down at the noisy group. If birds could roll their eyes, Shirley, the doves and hens would've all gotten dizzy and fallen off their perches, but the four noisy calling birds kept shouting 'good morning' over and over again.

Six-year-old Justin Young, and his roommate, five-year-old

Simon Ferguson, ran into the dining room, turned sharply and went to the outbound doors. Justin loudly laughed, "Oneula Beach" at the first outbound door. Seconds later, Justin and Simon raced through, back to Oneula Beach, and back again into the Ewa Beach dining room. To the loud laughter of many of the Ewa Beach kids, Justin and Simon ran round-and-round, traversing almost three kilometers between bases in the seconds it took them to run from one outbound doorway to the next.

John, Stephen, Corey, Drew and Reyes sat at one table. At the next table over were Mike, Derrick, Keith and Prez. Beyond those two tables were the two tables of all their sons; Dillon, Richie, Geoff, Lenny, Wade, Frankie and Randy were sitting at one table, while Gage, Jonah, Sammy, Ben, Leo and Dee sat at the next table over. Spare seating had been left at all four tables so the Oneula Beach leadership and their sons had places to sit. Over a hundred boys and girls crossed the dining room. Many newbie kids were prompted to return from the kitchen to tables where new friends were already sitting.

Upon arrival, Kaleo, Tory, AJ, Jerry, Sean and Troy already appeared a little frazzled and worn out. As they passed, Keith chuckled, "This morning was a special case, dudes. By tomorrow, kids will be wherever they want to be, without Core Rimmers leading them around."

Drew called, "Kaleo, Tory, AJ and Jerry, you dudes come sit with us."

Corey giggled, "Daddies have some catchin' up to do."

Tory laughed, "We're going to have to wake earlier to get five sons bathed, and then us showered too."

"We were the last group to show up at the other dining room," Kaleo sniggered.

Prez smiled, "You loved every second too, I can tell."

"Absolutely!" Kaleo and Tory cheered.

Prez's PADD played a power chord, notifying him of a message. After wiping his hands, Prez read a note from Mr. T that had all the Division's teachers included. It read:

Good morning Prez,

It's customary to have present division leaders make a short statement when new children start school. For many of the kids, knowing you're there with them makes a huge difference in their attitudes. I'm certain you're very aware that willingness to do well is in the attitude of the students. Be brief and positive then return to your seat. I intend to be there as soon as I wrap up a few tasks here at C.L.E.

Have a good day,

Mr. T

With Keith looking over his shoulder, Prez replied to the note.

I can easily do this, for the fifth time since yesterday.

Cheers,

P.A.O.B.

Keith grinned, "Is this before our five minute rhythm techniques demonstration?"

Shaking his head, Prez chuckled, "After, way after."

Mike sniggered, "Do you want help, Head Rimmer?"

Prez slyly smirked, "With Keith and rhythm demonstrations, or with a pep talk for the kids?"

"Both!" Derrick and Mike chorused, causing Reyes to burst into laughter.

Unable to wipe the grin off his face, Prez squinted, "See me before and after school."

"WHOO-HOO! DIRECT ME!" Derrick, Keith and Mike loudly sang.

Sadly shaking his head, yet still giggling, Reyes returned to his prior conversation, saying, "So, our kittens didn't want to be in the basement. Since it's smaller, it's not anywhere near as nice as the Seiberts' basement." Picturing the put-off kittens, Stephen and Corey began giggling. Reyes grinned, "We showed them upstairs, which became interesting too, when Gage turned on the television and six kittens jumped, puffed up and scattered."

From the next table, Gage giggled, "They say they've never seen a TV or heard anything so loud. The surround sound system wasn't even on!"

Nodding, Jonah laughed, "It was like the Rimmers riding Kyle's

wave; all six screeched, 'SHIT!' knowing they were going to die, and then flew away!"

"Two went under the dining room table," Reyes giggled, "two went behind and under the sofa, and two went back downstairs into the basement." All the seated Rimmer sons howled laughing. "It was like that for the next hour," Reyes sniggered, "every new room and new sound caused the kittens to freak out. Jonah and Gage went to bed just to calm down the kittens."

Trotting over to the table, Rikko whined, "I'll play with kittens."

Smiling down at the large puppy, Reyes replied, in dog, "You'll eat the kittens!"

"No!" Rikko barked, "Not tasty."

From a few tables away, Fred giggled, "Rikko has played with our neighbors' cats and kittens."

Chauncey nodded and grinned, "At least until the finicky cats decide they've had enough of dog slobber."

"Kisses," Rikko growled.

Chauncey giggled, "Right, kisses, how silly of me."

Holding his belly and cracking up, Fred bellowed, "Until Rikko gets kitty smacks across the snout!"

Not too far away from Fred, Chauncey, or the Core Rimmers, Trevor Taylor looked over and up at his new dad asking, "Can we get a puppy too, daddy?"

Before Jason had a chance to think or look at his wife for her opinion, the quadruple R's shouted, "Yeah, this family needs a puppy

too!"

Across the dining room, sitting with other adults, King Aalona heard and grinned, "Perhaps Clan Short will eliminate our need for stray animal control too?"

At the worried expressions the woman wore, Jim Hundser helplessly chortled. Rob sniggered, "Let us talk to our sons, Majesty. It seems appropriate, but we can't allow every kid to have a pet."

Walking back across the dining room, behind his husband and the other Oneula Beach Core Rimmers, Kaleo overheard Bill Seaver offering, "We could drastically reduce the numbers of euthanized animals, especially young kittens and puppies that are healthy, but simply don't have a home."

Crossing the room and overhearing the adults, Kaleo went into a giggling fit. Before going to join his husband at the table with Drew and Corey, Kaleo stopped by Prez, leaned over and whispered what was being discussed at the parents' tables. Nodding, Prez grinned, "I'll take care of it," and then typed a message to Jason Taylor regarding the acquisition of pets.

Keith softly wondered, "What're you doin', T'hy'la?"

"It's not a horrible idea," Prez quietly answered, so more than three-hundred-fifty kids didn't flip out. He added, "A house pet for a family is a little different from what we generally have. I'm thinking we need to concentrate on breeds that build bonds with groups, like herding dogs. That way the responsibility of caring for pets is spread out to entire bases. Something positive can come out of this for our kids and the animals too."

Derrick softly giggled, "No bird dogs, Prez. Shirley and

company were here first."

"Scratch those field hunting breeds," Prez sniggered.

Getting into Prez's word play, Alden giggled in their ears; "If you want, I can have Timmy give you pointers. Last count was two-hundred-seventy-four canine breeds, five-hundred-twenty-six feline breeds, forty-three avian breeds, and five-hundred-thirty reptile breeds in his bedroom. Other types we're still counting; and only five percent of his 'friends' are classified as extinct!"

Meanwhile, from his PADD, John ordered an extra fifty teddy-bears for the bear cave. After school, he intended to take kids to choose their new best friends. Almost half of the level-two orphanage kids were under ten-years-old and might want one. He hoped that eighty bears in the cave would be a sufficient start for the five- to seven-year-old kids. Then he could restock, if necessary, for the eight-to- ten-year-old kids.

Around the table, Drew, Corey, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory were excitedly rambling about their first night in townhomes with their families. Only two couples, Drew and Corey and Kaleo and Tory, went to sleep in king-sized beds with their sons. From the next table, Sean joined the conversation, making it known that they also woke to a bed filled with sons.

Similar chats traveled around the tables of Rimmer sons. When that topic wore itself out, Billy checked around the tables, asking, "Which of you are going to school?"

Mike Hunnicutt replied, "We ain't goin'. Dad and pop says we need a'justments."

With a brother to each side, Kenny sputtered on his milkshake, swallowed and then laughed, "We need to adjust to a new place! We

do *not* need adjustments!" Other boys at the tables nearby helplessly giggled. Before either brother could attack him, Kenny pulled both his brothers close and into tight hugs.

Stan told Billy, "Me and my bros ain't goin' either."

Jason smiled, "One of our dads is gonna say somethin' to the rest of the new kids. While old timers are at school, we've got two bases to explore."

Sammy prompted, "Let us know what you find, Billy."

Nodding, Billy grinned, "We already found tennis courts at Oneula that ain't here. I hope to get most of the new kids exploring with us."

Overhearing the boys, John gasped, "Another something I forgot." He tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, get playground equipment installed at... ya know what, get 'em at all our bases, even the ones with refugees. Make sure all the playgrounds are properly equipped with the same stuff as here, dude."

Alden replied, "Got it, John. It'll be done in just a minute or two."

"What's the delay?" John wondered.

"Four bases worth of playground equipment isn't in our warehouse," Alden giggled. "We have to buy more stuff, so they're all the same."

Also overhearing the boys, Prez smiled at Troy and Sean, wondering, "You started this?"

Still eating a stack of buttermilk pancakes, Troy nodded. So he

wouldn't embarrass his eldest son, Sean softly explained, "Billy needed encouragement. Exploring is today's task. Tomorrow and each day he needs it, he'll get a new challenge."

After swallowing a mouthful of pancakes, Troy quietly snarled, "His old parents started the vicious downward spiral, Prez. Now we get to counter-act their major fuck-up. In the process, we hope all our other sons and the newbies will watch and learn."

Prez widely smiled at everyone around the table. Keith giggled, "You made them Morale Rimmers, baby."

Nodding, Prez grinned, "And now I'm going to add to the expedition." He stood and stepped up onto his chair, facing the majority of the Clan and spoke over the PA system. "I'd like to address all the newest kids first," Prez announced. "That's all of you that have arrived since Thursday. All of the rest of us have had a week off school to get familiar with our base and with one another. I strongly suggest that each of you take the next week off too. We can easily rotate weekly placement tests for everyone on Mondays."

"If you're wondering what you can do while the other half of us are at school, I've learned that Billy Whittmore is heading up expeditions to explore both bases. Even if you sleep here at Ewa Beach, I highly recommend joining Billy, Jason, Scott and Jimmy. What you guys find at Oneula Beach, many of us won't know about, so we can start sharing that during lunch, and after school, and again during and after dinner."

Standing and displaying his cast, Jay Montigua reminded, "It would be better if I didn't go, Prez. Writing with this thing is almost impossible. The next six weeks I'll be dealing with this."

Prez smiled, "Jay, when was the last time you saw one of our

doctors?"

"Yesterday morning, after breakfast, I saw Doc Andrews," Jay responded. "I'm supposed to see him again this morning."

Prez called, "Doc Andrews, what's this six weeks nonsense? My burned tush should've taken a week to heal, not two days."

Standing, Doc Andrews smiled, "Yesterday, I checked Jason's concussion and his wrist. Today, and everyday this week, I'll be examining Jason's wrist. I intended to surprise Jason, but expect the cast gone by Saturday, and then three or four days wearing an Ace bandage." Jay's and Chris' jaws dropped. Around the dining room, giggles erupted. Loud laughter burst from Rafe, Pat, and Ralphie, but the two loudest were Drew and Corey.

Jay grinned, "Nine or ten days is a hell of a lot better than six-weeks."

"I want a second opinion!" Alden giggled over the speakers. "I bet I can find a doctor who isn't scared of transporters who will make it heal faster!"

"Who?" Kerry asked.

"Yeah, if I have to!" Alden laughed.

The original eighty-seven who had met Galli cracked up. Doc Andrews sat back down to finish his coffee.

Hearing Corey hiccuping and seeing Drew was red as an apple, Jay grinned, "You knew, didn't you? You're both going swimming after school." The faces of most male teenagers grew wide, evil grins.

"So, yeah," Prez chortled. "Some time to acclimate is highly

recommended. I do *not* expect to see many new faces in school today." Pointing over at the table where Troy's and Sean's sons were sitting, Prez prompted, "Billy, please stand so kids can see you." Reluctantly, Billy stood at his chair. Prez instructed, "All of you wanting to explore the two bases can gather with Billy." He then softly smiled, "Thanks, Billy. Have a seat, bud."

Returning his attention to the Clan, Prez prompted, "It's getting near school time. Those who are definitely going to school, let's get motivated. We'll have at least two groups going there, led by a couple of Core Rimmers. The Core Rimmers from Oneula Beach were the last here, so they'll be available for those making last minute decisions. Do not fuss over this one simple decision. If you've only been here a few days, then let it wait a week. Join Billy's expedition and we'll see you in about two hours."

Stepping down off the chair, Prez gathered the contents of his tray. Around the dining room, many old-timers had already deposited their trays at the dishwasher. They got up to wait outside the CIC. Others took their trays to the dishwasher. The majority of newbies remained seated at their tables until this wave of activity passed.

Sean called, "Billy, com'ere a minute, please?" Billy stood and brought his milkshake glass over to Sean's table. Sean pushed his chair out, gestured to his lap and instructed, "Have a seat."

Billy giggled, "Don't you think I'm too big?"

Shaking his head, Sean smiled, "Not until you're eighteen. I sit on your pop's lap and he sits on mine." Carefully, Billy sat on his dad's lap. Wrapping his arms around his eldest son, Sean whispered, "I could tell you were surprised and embarrassed when Prez had you stand. That's not a failure, it's just something new."

"I was so scared too, dad," Billy reluctantly admitted. "My stomach went all crazy. I thought I might barf."

"You got past it though, without making a mess," Sean smiled. "I'm the exact same way, especially when Prez or Keith ask for my opinion. It just happened again to me last night. Even though I know them and like them, and I know they like me, it's still something I'm getting used to. Remember, all you need to do is try. You can't make kids do anything that they wouldn't normally want to do anyway, so just brush away the blushes and butterflies. Don't let them get you down, okay?"

Wiping joyful tears from his eyes, Billy nodded and smiled, "Okay."

Finished with his breakfast, Troy gently asked, "Do you know what it takes to be a leader?"

Shaking his head, Billy giggled, "I have no idea."

"Followers," Troy simply stated. "A good leader, people will want to follow. No one follows a bad leader. Your brothers already know you're a good leader. With their help, you'll be set to learn what they already know. These first steps, climbing out of that vicious downward spiral your old parents had you drowning in, were handled perfectly. I'm really very proud of you."

Happy tears flowed freely down Billy's cheeks. Glancing at his new dad and pop, Billy squealed, "Really?"

Troy nodded and smiled, "Absolutely."

"Definitely," Sean said barely a second later.

Sniffling and wiping the tears away, Billy sighed, "I really love

you guys."

Hugging his eldest tightly, Sean replied, "And we really love you too."

Standing and leaning close to Sean and Billy, Troy softly but firmly assured, "That love won't fade, Billy. It'll only get stronger with every achievement you make. Failures never count, as long as you try your best, they're only temporary disappointments."

Billy wondered, "Why does Jason seem better at this than me? Even Scott and Jimmy seem better than me."

Slightly grinning because he had been expecting that question, Troy answered, "Only because of fewer years on that downward spiral, Billy. It's the same one your dad was on from the orphanages, and I was on with my dad. Now that you've broken free of the suck-zone..." Sean and Billy cracked up. Troy finished by giggling, "The only way to go is back up, out of the muck and mire." He landed a kiss on Billy's cheek, then prompted, "Ready, Tiger?"

Nodding, Sean giggled, "After a pep talk like that, I'm ready to take you home!" Rolling his eyes, Troy evilly snickered. As far as Troy was concerned, Sean got some in the shower, and so the next time was his turn, regardless of how often his butt was twinging.

Sliding off his dad's lap, Billy giggled, "I didn't feel nothin', so you've got time to run, pop."

Sean evilly grinned, "The next time I provoke your pop, your job is to make sure I get some. Lie like a rug if you have to, and tell him you were sitting on my big lump."

Hungrily humming, Troy locked eyes with Sean, clearly conveying, 'your big lump fits me perfectly, Tiger.' Sean giggled

through a weak tiger roar.

Rapidly nodding and laughing hysterically, Billy took his shake glass off the table. Warmly smiling at his new parents, Billy giggled, "I'll see you in a few hours."

Standing up, Sean nodded, "Have fun."

Troy reminded, "We'll love you no matter what."

Nodding and delightfully shivering, Billy returned to the table with his brothers. The Hunnicutts and all five of Kaleo's and Tory's sons gathered at that table. The smallest kids moved onto their big brothers' laps to make room. Soon after Billy sat down, he and all the seated boys got the typical assembly line of kisses on the top of their heads from Troy, Sean, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory.

On the way to the dishwasher, Sean noticed the curious expressions on the faces of his team mates. Once they were far enough away from their sons and where anyone else might overhear, Sean quietly explained what was going on. The subset of Core Rimmers went outside and waited a few minutes for other kids, during which time each of the six shared more personal information about their life challenges. AJ and Jerry admitted that they felt a little weird entering their townhouse the night before. All of them understood exactly where Billy was at and they agreed the explorations were as good a method as any to help Billy. When it became obvious that no additional kids were going to join them at school, the six of them started across the outdoor recreation area and southeast toward the school.

Over with Chauncey and Fred Eckhart, Reyes asked, "Would you guys like to visit the AI Division? We could get Fred checked out, upgraded and come back here whenever you're ready, so you can

still explore the other base?"

Fred checked with Chauncey, asking, "If you want to?"

Nodding, Chauncey offered, "I know you're fine, Fred, but upgrades are important. I just want to look around with the rest of the guys, so let's do both."

"Kewl," Reyes smiled. "I want to spend some time with friends there, and bring them back here too. We haven't seen the Oneula base either." He then tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Reyes to Marc."

A moment later, Marc giggled, "Here, Reyes. What's up?"

"I'm on my way with Fred and Chauncey Eckhart," Reyes explained. "Do you have dimensional doors there, or do I need to call Alden?"

"Just got 'em installed last night," Danny replied.

Hearing a familiar swishing sound, Reyes grinned, "Yeah, put your jeans on for company, Danny. We'll only be there a little while, so you can get naked again later." Marc cracked up.

"The satellite up-link needs a test, Reyes," Danny giggled. "Let us know if you suddenly feel like hopping around like a kangaroo." Fred and Chauncey roared.

Waving the two boys to follow, Reyes started for the dimensional doors, grinning, "I'm hopping there and next door, to visit Paul and Ryan. I learned tickle attacks are constant at Sullivan's Island, so I'm staying away from you two. By the way, Fred already knows you're a perv, Danny."

"Your honesty algorithms are on the fritz, Reyes," Danny

sniggered. "I have the remedial software ready."

Paused at a dimensional door with Chauncey, Rikko and Fred, Reyes chuckled, "I'm a big boy and want firmware, grandpa." Over the sound of Danny and Marc laughing, he told the door, "AI Division headquarters." The door chimed, the display over it changed to the new destination, and the silvery facade faded to show the living room of Marc's house. Reyes walked through the door with his two guests and Rikko.

Back inside the Ewa Beach dining room, Phil Nash loudly called over, "What's the deal, Billy?"

Shivering, Billy replied, "We're going to check out what's at each base. We only know a few things, like this base has a lot of basketball courts, but the other base has tennis courts. This base has the CIC, but Oneula has a dining room and a rec room that are just as big. Our job is to find out what else is different." When Billy stopped speaking and noticed the many dozens of boys and girls who had listened to him, he blushed.

Phil nodded, "Let us know when you're ready."

Holding up his half-full milkshake glass, Billy giggled, "Any minute, I hope." Billy simply couldn't believe kids were looking to him for guidance, but they were, and it was freaking him out.

At the Taylor family table, where the six boys were seated, Ralphie caught Robbie's thoughts. Ready to play, Ralphie grinned, *'Billy's kind o' cute, huh, Robbie?'*

Also getting in on the teasing, Ronnie drank his milkshake and added, *'It's the shy one's you need to watch out for. I'll bet when Billy's chillin' more, he gets plenty wild.'*

intermediates and advanced class rooms."

Derrick asked, "You saw the inside of the buildings too? What's in there?"

"Each building is a little different," Sonia answered. "All eight of the outside buildings have entrance doors. The center building is connected by four doorways, and could be used as a gathering place where everyone can meet, like for start of day attendance, or maybe an end of day study hall. Some rooms looked a little like regular school rooms, with tables and chairs or desks. Some were filled with groups of computer stations. There wasn't one regular high school type of desk-chair combination anywhere. One building is already set up for you dudes, to teach music, with instruments on a stage area at one side, and the rest of the room was a lot of chairs, with only a couple of tables and some computer workstations."

Horacio happily gushed, "Each building has access to a patio area. Over-all, it's probably the best, most comfortable school I've ever seen anywhere."

Standing outside the entrance doors of a center building, ready to greet their new students, were Mr. T, Mrs. Diaz, Jason and Trinity Taylor and two new adult faces, one male and one female. Prez and Mr. T greeted each other with handshakes and a hug. Mr. T introduced the two new teachers, Mister Edward Stevenson, who preferred to be called by his nickname 'Eddie', and Miss Opal Perez. Mr. Stevenson was to become the Sciences teacher, and Miss Perez was to become the Language Arts teacher.

While Prez and Keith went into Director mode, Mike and Derrick held the doors open and waved kids inside. Amongst many of the older teens, Corey, Drew, John and Stephen led their families into this building. Not including the Core Rimmer families, another one-

hundred fifty kids were in this first group. They all easily fit in the room. John estimated that this space could easily accommodate three times as many kids. Even the ceilings were high and octagon shaped, kids noticed. There were only padded benches around this room, and many didn't recall seeing this room on Monday. Corey and Drew checked a door to an adjacent building, but found it locked.

Having already done a light scan of Mr. T as he walked by, John led the group to the center doors, loudly calling, "This way, guys. Mr. T wants us in the computer lab anyway."

Wade giggled, "Daddy, you read him without asking?"

Leaning against the door to hold it open, John smiled, "Only for what was of interest to us, where we need to be and what we'll be doing."

Earleen Maygar walked with her sister past John, slyly giggling, "I told you we're not guys, John. You're forcing me to prove it."

Noreen locked eyes with Stephen, who was holding the opposite door open with Frankie. She evilly grinned, "To you and your husband, which I may never forgive either of you for, by the way."

Nodding and giggling, John checked Stephen's expression. Knowing he was just hit-on in a major fashion, by a girl for the first time ever in his life, Stephen intensely blushed. Frankie and Wade went into giggling fits.

John smiled, "You've been threatening that for over a week, Earleen. I thought you two were interested in Jeff and Tommy?"

Hopefully, Earleen wondered, "When are you inviting them again?"

"After school today, they'll be here," John sniggered. John had created rooms for his two best buddies when they were visiting the prior Wednesday afternoon. Now he didn't need phones or comm-badges to contact them or know when they wanted to contact him.

Not able to talk across the stream of kids flowing through the doors, Stephen sent, *'Don't you dare even think of it, John. It'll never happen with girls.'*

'I know, baby,' John replied. *'I'm not there either, especially since you keep me very happy all the time, not only when we're alone.'*

The large octagon shaped room the kids were entering was a maze of computer workstations arranged in circular formations, from the exterior wall and into the center of the room, creating five concentric circles. Each circle was briefly broken with space for people to move from circle-to-circle and around the room. Each computer station was equipped with a keyboard, mouse, joystick and stereo headset with a microphone. Thrilled kids roamed the circular rows of computers.

Corey tapped his sub-vocal, wondering, "Alden, where are the actual computers?"

"Here with me," Alden giggled. "It's called mainframe time-sharing, Corey. We can't have the kids rebooting and starting over."

"You're going swimming, Alden," Corey giggled, "I swear, as soon as you have legs, start running to the diving well."

Remembering that his real father spoke of mainframes from his job, Leo asked, "You and dad know about mainframes?"

Corey nodded, "Which is why Alden gets dunked."

"Very probably the first day," Keanu evilly grinned.

Over the speakers, Alden giggled, "You and Liki enjoyed Keith's rant about Windows, so why dunk me?"

Derrick and Mike joined the group in the room. Liki giggled, "Because you made it so we could hiccup and mistype even more stuff on our laptops. I think you were trying to cause Windows to crash."

Unexpectedly, Alden replayed another recording over the room's speakers. Drew's recorded voice gently said, "This graphic isn't working, angel."

Corey's recorded voice asked, "Which graphic where?"

"The flaming Pacific Rim on the home page, on the Windows system," Drew replied.

"Aww, Jeez!" Corey loudly griped, "Thirty-two-bit OS and sixty-four-bit graphics, my ass! It's skipping two of every three images! Fifteen frames per second is down to five! It looks like *bleep*! God *bleep bleep-in'* Win-blows can *bleep* my fat *bleep-ing* dick! Why do something the right way when you can implement a *bleep-ed* up architecture, and force every dumb *bleep-ing* company under the sun to support the mutha-*bleep-in'* piece of *bleep*?"

Wide-eyed, Leo smiled up at his pop; the slightly older boy who had patiently taught him the facts of life, who was prone to giggling fits, and was so nice so often that hearing his voice sounding that exasperated simply didn't fit. Softly giggling at his own ranting voice, Corey pulled Leo close.

Recalling the time, place and circumstances of the recording, Drew quickly giggled, "That's e..." But the recorded Drew softly

giggled, "I love when you talk dirty windows, Cor." To the hysterical giggles and laughter of the gathered kids, Drew blushed and loudly laughed, "ENOUGH, ALDEN!"

Entering the room to find over a hundred and fifty laughing kids, Prez, Keith, Troy, Sean, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo, Tory and the six teachers curiously grinned. Blushing bright pink, Drew giggled, "It's better you don't know. Suffice to say, it's Alden's fault."

"Ah!" Prez smiled understandingly. He then loudly called, "Okay, everyone gather around over here." Kids started moving toward him.

Keith instructed, "Big kids let the littler kids in close, so they can see and hear." Kaleo, Tory, AJ, Jerry, Sean and Troy joined the other kids in the room, making sure the smallest were in front of the taller kids.

Prez cheerfully said, "Let's start with a few introductions, just to be sure everyone knows our teachers. First, Mr. T, the Clan educational adviser is here, to oversee everything." Kaleo and some older kids that had met Mr. T a week earlier disjointedly greeted him. "Then we have Mr. and Mrs. Taylor," Prez smiled, "who joined us Thursday evening with one son, and now have six." Kids nodded and giggled. "Mr. Taylor will be teaching social studies, civics and history. Mrs. Taylor is a math, algebra and geometry teacher." Moving on, Prez introduced, "This is Mrs. Diaz, from our old high school. She was our high school's band leader and a math teacher, and will continue those jobs here. Additionally, Mrs. Diaz is the music department adviser, since five of us will be music teachers, namely myself, Keith, Mike, Derrick and Troy. Next, our language arts teacher is Miss Perez. Lastly, our sciences teacher is Mr. Stevenson.

"All our teachers are certified Clan education professionals. As I

understand it, they've taken special classes and gone through simulations, with classrooms of kids that are just like many of us. These men and women are not like your old teachers at your old schools, shuffling kids every forty-five minutes like an assembly line. These people are here to help every one of us, not just as teachers, but as part of our communities and part of Family Clan Short."

Prez paused because the three youngest boys were whispering. Before Prez could ask, Dewi, Kokaku and Aaron Pendergrass cautiously walked to three adults, Mr. T, Mrs. Diaz, and Mr. Stevenson. The boys held their arms up, wordlessly prompting to be picked up and held. Each adult squatted down to lift a boy.

Prez chuckled, "Thanks to these three, you all get the point now? Just like every other adult here, these are kind men and women that want to help us. When I say they're part of our communities, I mean they live here, or at Oneula Beach; three have families and two are single, living in condos, for the moment, but we know what will happen as soon as they get used to living as Clan in paradise, don't we?"

Richie giggled, "Smoochin'!" sending most of the kids into a giggling fit. Mr. Stevenson started whistling and acting innocent, driving older boys to laughter. Geoff, Dillon and Wade playfully shoved Richie around a little.

Prez chuckled, "That's what happens. Before I turn over to Mr. T and our teachers, let me remind you that this is nothing like other schools. The test you'll be taking today isn't even like what I imagined it might be. Instead of computerized math and English, multiple choice questions, we'll see a little of that, which will lead to various tangents, such as movie clips, cartoons, and games that will try to discover where your real interests and abilities are."

Going to Kokaku and taking his young brother from Mr. Stevenson, Prez explained, "Let's say Kokaku starts his test with a few questions, appropriate for his pre-school age group, and they lead him to a cartoon that he watches and is then questioned about during the course of the flick. These questions will help determine if Kokaku is a musician or a scientist; if he's got a logical, mathematical mind or if he's a mini philosopher, which I sometimes think is the case. What it all amounts to is, you'll each have individualized tests, that go with your flow, testing without actually seeming like any kind of test, like we're used to."

Keith asked, "Are there any questions?" He paused long enough to watch kids of every age shaking their heads. He then asked, "Is anybody still scared about passing or failing?"

Simply to make sure other kids understood, Troy shrugged, "From what's been said, the test adjusts itself, so that's impossible."

"Exactly correct," Keith said. "The test shows what the Clan already knows, that everybody is capable of doing something very well. Even if you don't know today what that might be, you'll know very soon."

"By the time you leave school this afternoon," Mr. T interjected. "We will know exactly what is needed to make you the best person that you can be. The Clan educational system is unique in more ways than testing. Our actual classroom situation is spread across three continents. Most of you will be attending classes in various locations, around the world, during your day. For those with duties outside school, your schedule will adjust to allow those duties to be completed without penalty. To give you an example, Patriarch Short manages to show up for classes one day a week at the most recently; yet in no way is he behind, he doesn't have to play catch-up with the rest of his schoolmates. Homework consists of things that you enjoy

doing in your free time. According to my sources, that means the Core Rimmers will probably be doing their Health Classes more at home than at school."

"They've already passed Family Planning, despite their insistence that there are only bees and no birds," Mrs. Diaz teased.

Glancing at each other, Prez and Keith blushed and chuckled. Keith went to retrieve Dewi from Mr. T, mostly to have a little kid to hide behind for a minute or two. Mike went to get his littlest brother, Aaron from Mrs. Diaz, softly sniggering, "That comment was for my dirty dancing during guitar solos?"

"And Preston singing love songs to Keith every Friday afternoon for two months," Mrs. Diaz giggled. Softly chortling, Mike, Prez, and Keith returned to the mass of students, giving their full attention to the teachers.

Mrs. Taylor announced, "Everybody find seats. The smaller chairs and computer stations are in the center of the room, for little boys and girls. Each row toward the outside of the room gets slightly larger. It's important that you can comfortably reach the keyboard, mouse, and joystick." Kids started to move around, taller teenagers near the outside wall and getting progressively smaller and younger toward the center of the room.

"Make sure you sit with your friends nearby," Mr. Taylor instructed. "Other schools don't appreciate friends talking, but Clan schools encourage it. This will allow more open conversations during lecture sessions, and to encourage those who might be more comfortable talking with their closest friends, to help one another whenever necessary."

Miss Perez said, "Our jobs are to encourage you. As important

as that might be, you encouraging each other is more important."

"One more thing," Mr. T added. "If I catch any of you trying not to talk to each other during the test, you won't get any cookies with lunch!"

"WHAT?" about a hundred-and-sixty kids incredulously hollered.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, back at the dining room, the Stoeher twins, Tanner and Toby, were sitting with the Hiram twins, Anakoni and Kapena. All four were eleven-years-old. Since Saturday, they had been living in the same hall of Ewa Beach's dormitory three. Naturally, they were becoming friends. With all their milkshake glasses empty, Tanner directly asked the Hiram brothers, "Can you guys hear each other in your minds?"

Anakoni scowled, "Not without talking."

"It's not that we haven't tried," Kapena moaned. "Since getting here, we met lots of dudes that can."

Anakoni asked, "Can you two do it?"

Nodding, Toby grinned, "We could before getting here. Saturday, we talked with Cesar and Felipe, and then Ralphie, Richie, Robbie and Ronnie. We're practicing and it's getting a little better."

Tanner offered, "You two look almost the same, like me and Toby. Have you ever tried before getting here?"

Kapena hummed then answered, "Not really. For us, it's like we can't when we actually try. But once Anakoni knew I had accidentally

cut myself pretty bad." He showed the Stoeher twins the scar at the base of his left thumb, grinning, "I was making a sandwich when it happened. My bro was outside, so he couldn't have known, but he did."

"Another time, I fell out of a tree and Kapena knew I wasn't okay," Anakoni shared. "I bumped my head pretty good and scraped the hell out of my back, the way I slipped. My bro was at the same park, but not around me, so he couldn't see what happened, but then he was there, helping me get home."

Toby instructed, "Talk to John Hundser later. He's our Intel leader and expert. If there's anyone who'll know what's up, he might."

A little defensively, Kapena asked, "Why does it matter?"

Tanner shrugged, "It doesn't, not to anyone besides you two. It's just kewl having the connection with Toby. You'd like it if you could learn it." He gestured to his brother, smirking, "The chocolate monster here..." Toby and the Hiram's cracked up, and Tanner giggled, "keeps both our bellies full, with cookies, cake, ice cream, candy bars..."

Anakoni giggled, "Why do you have strawberry shake then?"

Tanner smirked, "Just cos he's a chocolate freak don't mean I can't have my own favorites."

Toby suggested, "If you'd wanna try mind talkin', we could help."

Kapena nodded and smiled. Anakoni chuckled, "Sure, let's do that."

At the next table over Craig sat with his brother Phil and the three Oldcambus brothers. The oldest of the three, Kassidy

Oldcambus quietly checked with Craig. With a nod from Craig, Kassidy called over, "Guys, telepathy is no big deal. My little bros dump silly ideas in my head now and then. It used to drive our parents crazy, especially at dinner time."

Karey evilly grinned at his twin, wondering, "Is now a good time to admit we can hear Kassidy's thoughts too?"

"WHAT?" Kassidy incredulously hollered, and quickly asked, "Since when?"

Kade told Karey, "Now's not a good time, obviously." With nods and giggles, the eleven-year-old twins slid away from the table, got up and took off running for the exit, with Kassidy chasing after them.

Looking over at the Hiram twins, Craig innocently smiled, "Maybe it's better to never admit you're telepathic." The Hiram and Stoeher boys cracked up.

Looking around the dining room, Kenny Hunnicutt sighed, "I think Leo's the only new kid that went to school."

Billy shrugged, "It makes sense, since his entire family went, he prob'ly figured he might as well. It looks like the older Latin King kids went too."

"More stuff to share at lunch and later today too," Jason helpfully added.

Scowling, Billy wondered, "How am I gonna remember stuff?"

Stan smiled, "We'll all help, Billy."

In front of Billy, near his shake glass, a PADD materialized on

the table. Twelve heads glanced down at the device. Over the loudspeakers in the ceiling, Alden giggled, "That will help you keep a list, Billy."

Jason looked up, laughing, "Alden, you're a kick."

Over Jason's comm-badge, Alden giggled, "That's good?"

"Sure is," Jason chuckled, "anything fun is a kick, like doing somersaults in a pool or spinning around just to make yourself dizzy and wobble into stuff."

"That's an interesting new slang use of the word I'll remember," Alden admitted.

Kenny smiled, "Anyway we can get our kicks, Alden. Like amusement parks are strictly for kicks. You've heard that before, haven't you?"

After a few moments, Alden giggled, "Yup, I just found it in literature and in some songs, used in that context. Now it makes sense. Who would willingly want to get kicked, after all?"

Two sets of quadruplets, the Steibs and the Taylors, and Pat, Carrol and Trevor converged on the table where Billy sat. Ronnie sent a test telepathic message to his ex-neighbor from St. Joseph, just to see if he would get it. Richie kept Carrol and Trevor in the loop while Ralphie kept Pat informed. Billy giggled, "It's time to go?" and all eleven boys began giggling.

Ralphie sniggered, "Kewl. You heard Ronnie?"

"The words but not his voice," Billy softly admitted.

Robbie smiled, "It's kewl, dude. You'll get used to mind

talking."

Gesturing to the quadruple R's and the Steib brothers, Pat giggled, "You might even be heard, if one of these eight happen to be paying attention."

Smirking at his boyfriend, Ralphie giggled, "Are you saying I talk too much?"

Shaking his head, Pat leaned closer to whisper, "When we kiss, the best part is I can still hear what you're thinking. Those thoughts mean a lot to me, Ralphie."

'I guess Ralphie needs to work on his kissing then,' Richie silently teased.

Robbie grinned, *'Or maybe he talks so much that even with his mouth full of tongue, he can't shut up.'*

Ralphie smirked, *'You both need boyfriends! Billy's still smiling, so go for it, bros.'* The Steib brothers uncontrollably giggled.

Lanna Seaver and Laura Gibbons returned to the dining room and walked directly to the area where the girls were congregated. Standing with his empty shake glass, Billy said, "Let me take this to the dishwasher and we'll get started." Billy started toward the kitchen.

"I've got your PADD, bro," Jason said.

"Kewl," Billy replied.

Looking at the PADD, Jason tried it out, asking Alden for instruction.

Getting shoved by Richie and Ronnie, Robbie followed Billy. Robbie confidently shared, "I've been here since Thursday night. My

bro and I haven't checked out half of what's here yet."

A little stunned with Robbie's company, Billy softly asked, "Have you been busy?"

"With three brothers, adding two more, and getting family stuff together, yeah," Robbie warmly smiled. "You weren't here at lunch time yesterday," Robbie realized, and explained, "That's when my parents officially adopted my brothers, and Carrol and Trevor."

Many girls started giggling and some cheered, "Thank you!" Turning slightly and pausing, Billy wondered what was happening, but then continued to the dishwasher.

Robbie grinned, "Aunt Lanna and Aunt Laura have given the girls something else to do." He giggled, "Girl stuff, ya know? They're going to learn about make-up and painting their faces."

Nodding, Billy grinned, "You can... umm... hear everything from everybody?"

Robbie chuckled, "Not everybody and not all the time." Billy put his glass down on the dishwasher shelf and turned to find Robbie directly before him. Blushing, Robbie sent, *'I think you're cute too, dude. I'd like to see if that leads us somewhere. How 'bout you?'* Billy's jaw dropped. He recalled a joke made Saturday, when he'd said that he might go for two of the quadruplets. Suddenly, he wanted to cover his face and run away. Robbie giggled, "Damn, you're cute inside too. You're going nowhere far from me, for a while, I think."

Billy happily gushed, "You're making me crazier! How am I gonna deal with about a hundred guys and you too?"

Robbie shrugged and smiled, "With help, from me, my brothers, your brothers, and prob'ly the Steib brothers too." Reaching an arm

out, Robbie took hold of Billy's hand. He sent, '*Let's get this party on the road,*' and led Billy back to the dining room. The two boys saw that the girls were lined up at dimensional doors heading to Oneula Beach.

Lanna Seaver went to Billy and Robbie, saying, "Laura and I are going to spend a few hours with our new girls. We'll give them a crash course on becoming young ladies."

Billy smiled, "Thanks, Aunt Lanna. If they want, the girls can join us when you're done."

Lanna then squinted at Robbie, smirking, "Last night, Laura and I decided to spend this morning with the new girls. It's only coincidence that it works for your benefit, Robbie."

Robbie giggled, "I thought you might miss hearing Cesar and Felipe."

"I was, actually," Lanna warmly smiled, and turned to join the rest of the girls.

Walking toward the group of gathered boys, Billy grinned at Robbie, playfully challenging, "Not everybody and not all the time, huh?"

"Aunt Lanna's different," Robbie smiled. "She's the perfect mom for telepathic twins. She could hear Cesar and Felipe the very first day, before they were even adopted. That's another reason why I know there's something very kewl about you, Billy." Obviously surprised, Billy snapped his neck turning to Robbie. "I don't know what's different yet either," Robbie giggled. "All I know is that you heard Ronnie and me, in a different way than most. That makes you interesting..." Blushing and giggling, Robbie added, '*cute and cuddly*

too.'

Breaking out in a nervous sweat, Billy whimpered, "No one's ever said that about me."

'I only thought it, and you heard it,' Robbie giggled. 'Yes, I can hear you too, and I think you're right, there's a lot of exploring to be done.'

Two blushing and giggling boys joined their brothers and friends. While simultaneously sharing thoughts with Robbie, Billy loudly announced, "Let's get going." Hearing their big brother speaking so loudly, Jason's eyes widened, and Jimmy and Scott bounced in their seats. Noticing Billy and Robbie were holding hands, Jason's eyes almost jumped out of their sockets. All the other boys around the dining room were standing and walking towards the rec room, but Jason remained seated, dizzily trying to process Billy with a boyfriend. He could only wonder how it happened. The whole time Jason's wheels were spinning, Robbie was sharing Jason's thoughts with Billy.

To snap Jason out of his trance, Billy giggled, "Are you coming with us, bro?"

Looking down at the table, Jason saw the PADD sitting there, reminding him to bring it along. Standing with the PADD, Jason wordlessly joined the mass of boys lining up at the dimensional doors.

Robbie giggled to Billy, *'Jason's completely confused. He's remembering a talk you two had in the shower this morning. He thinks you've changed, just because we're holding hands.'* Starting to loudly laugh and following Billy to the dimensional doors, Robbie sent, *'Yeah, I really do like you, especially when you think stuff like that! You're younger than me, but not **that** much younger, only ten*

months. That means, two months of the year were the same age. None of what you're thinking matters to me. Richie and Ronnie were in situations just like you, and I love them.'

Focused on the kids going through the doors to Oneula Beach, Billy instructed, "Just like here, guys. As soon as you get there, turn sharp and you're going toward regular doors into the rec room there. Ya can't miss 'em." At the same time, Billy wondered what Jason was really thinking.

'He's thinking it's very kewl that we're hookin' up, and that he needs some of that kind of luck,' Robbie shared with Billy. 'Don't worry so much about your bro, he'll be fine, once he makes up his mind which guy he likes most. Excuse me for a few moments, Billy; triple-trouble are giving me shit.'

Realizing that Robbie was hearing all of his three brothers at once, and wondering what they might be saying, or sending, since none were actually speaking, Billy sputtered and started laughing.

Giggling his butt off, Ralphie sent to Billy, *'Kiss Robbie, now!'*

'Billy, you know you want to,' Richie teased.

'Robbie wants you to do it,' Ronnie slyly smiled.

Robbie squinted, *'Ralphie, suck face with Pat and shut up. Ronnie, I'm telling Garrett how bad you are. Richie, stop acting like you're only paying attention to Carrol and Trevor; you are far from innocent, bro.'*

Richie sniggered, *'You can't even act like you're really angry, bro. You really want it as bad as Billy.'*

All three brothers loudly ordered, '*JUMP HIS BONES, BILLY!*'

Privy to this entire telepathic exchange, the Stoeher twins sadly shook their heads. Tanner interjected, '*I don't know why some guys make such a to-do about being boyfriends. Do they need an announcement letter or what?*'

Toby smirked, '*You have to admit, the ones that act shy are cuter.*'

'And usually the ones that start stuff up too,' Tanner evilly grinned.

Toby firmly objected, '*I did not start anything Saturday night or last night!*'

'I didn't say that, did I?' Tanner snickered. "It works like a charm, every time." He then focused on Robbie, sending, '*Kiss him and get it over with, will you, please?*'

Robbie sent the equivalent of a telepathic APB, shouting, '*I WILL KISS HIM, WHEN **WE'RE** READY, NOT FOR ANY OF YOU!*' Intensely blushing, Billy's eyes widened, he sputtered, turned away briefly and cracked up.

About three-hundred meters away, sitting at a school computer station and taking his placement test, John Hundser heard and helplessly began laughing. Wade softly giggled, making it obvious that he heard too. Saturday, John had told the quadruple Rs to keep practicing their telepathy. Obviously, there would be some additions to his Intel team quicker than expected.

Walking through the dimensional doors with Pat, Ralphie giggled, '*Yeah, yeah, big deal. You really want to jump his bones.*'

Returning his attention to Billy, Robbie sighed, "Sorry about that."

Nodding, Billy breathlessly giggled, "Why did I hear Tanner and Toby too?"

Robbie softly explained, "The best me and my bros can figure is that there are senders, there are receivers, or there are receiver-senders. Like I said earlier, you're a little different, cos you can definitely hear us, but your thoughts are open enough to allow us to hear you too. I'll bet you could learn to be a full time receiver-sender too, at least with me."

Following the last kids, Billy and Robbie passed through the door to Oneula Beach. The Hunnicutts, Billy's three brothers and Kaleo's sons were waiting. Jason passed the PADD to Billy. Almost simultaneously, the next two oldest boys, Kenny and Stan asked, "Whaddaya want us to do, Billy?"

Not noticing that almost everyone in the room was listening, Billy shrugged, "I was thinkin' it might be kewl to know which games are for which age groups. I can also put groups of pluses and minuses next to games, like a rating system, for each age group. You guys test games, and me and Robbie will keep the notes."

Ralphie, Ronnie and Richie sent, *'You're still taking notes? We thought you'd memorized the book by now!'*

Billy blushed and giggled. Sadly shaking his head, Robbie sighed, "Don't pay attention to them, Billy. I'll take care of perv brothers at home tonight, I promise." Receiving ideas from Robbie about what he intended to do, Ronnie, Ralphie and Pat went in one direction, and Richie quickly took Carrol and Trevor in the opposite direction.

"That was easy," Billy grinned, and then wondered, "What did you tell them?"

"A threat that I might still have to keep, if they're not good. I promise to tell you another time," Robbie giggled. The two boys wandered over to where some older teenagers were checking various video games out. Terry Parkinson and his roommate, Mike Busse, were at the jukebox. They chose the rock genre, and started it randomly playing songs, beginning with [Hotel California](#).

* * * * *

AI Division Headquarters, Sullivan's Island, S.C.

Monday November 8, 2004 3:07PM EST

The moment Reyes entered Marc's living room, Danny went over to offer a hug, softly sniggering, "I can't believe you heard me pulling on my jeans. Marc was clear across the room. Stevie denied having any involvement."

Reyes chuckled, "Nope, no AI pranks, I heard it." He then waved and said hello to Marc, before returning his attention to Fred and Chauncey. Still loosely holding Danny, Reyes introduced, "Danny Page and Marc Furst, this is Fred Eckhart, and his brother, Chauncey, and Chauncey's puppy is Rikko."

Recalling having seen Marc at Vision Industries many years ago, Fred reached an arm out to him to shake hands and say hello. Chauncey followed his brother's lead.

Danny smiled, "Welcome to Charleston. Keep your clothes on if you wish, but Marc here doesn't mind looking."

Marc's eyes shot up. "**ME?**" he incredulously yelled. "The only

person around here who is a bigger perv than you is Stevie!"

Doing an excellent imitation of a female ferret, Stevie squeaked, "It's not my fault grandpa programmed me this way! And you guys keep taking your pants off, fueling topics of conversation." Reyes helplessly chuckled.

Alden giggled, "Far be it for us to let a commentary pass by."

"You're both pervs, so give up on the halos already!" Jerry said as he walked in the room. "Hey there, I'm Jerry Owens; I'm the only sane AI specialist in the entire Division."

Danny flipped Jerry the bird. "You, sane? Yeah right, you're the only programmer in AI history to have programmed a version of the OS that has a habit of collecting anything furry that walks within five miles of him!"

The back door slammed. From the kitchen and running to the living room, Joey screamed, "Dahdy, can I..." Seeing Reyes and Rikko, Joey audibly gasped and came to an abrupt halt. Kneeling down, Joey giggled, "Whad a pweddy doggie! We gods do ged a puppy doggie, Dahdy!" Rikko bounced over to the new little boy, licked Joey's face and jumped up, knocking Joey off balance. While Rikko gave him kisses, Joey loudly laughed, "We gods do ged lodsda puppy doggies, Dahdy!"

A calico cat came walking into the room, going directly to Joey. "I approve of this idea. You may add canines to our house, Joey. I find them most entertaining."

Joey giggled. "Okay, Fuzzy. You gonna say hi do dhe new guys?"

"Of course; the kittens are looking for new pets," Fuzzy replied

with over-dignified assurance.

"*SEE!*" Marc and Danny chorused in unison.

"Hey, it's genetic, he's Timmy's brother!" Jerry responded in his own defense.

Releasing Danny and going to stand between Fred and Chauncey, Reyes threw his arms around them, sniggering, "This is AI Division normal. My first visit here, I wasn't in the door a full ten-seconds before I was victim of an in-progress pillow and tickle fight." Proving the shock of cat-speak was wearing off, Chauncey and Fred began giggling.

Coming downstairs, KC helpfully added, "Reyes was standing with Noah and his board shorts at his ankles, with his pecker flappin' in the breeze. A hell of a thing to wake up to, by the way, but nothing shocks me any more."

"When did your shock circuit *ever* work?" Danny giggled.

"Your batteries are failing you, geezer," KC grinned. "Was I not shocked on the side of that cliff when Prez tried to seduce me?" Chauncey and Fred cracked up.

"I was too; I think Prez needs to see Dr. Dan!" Danny replied. "His tastes are definitely slipping fast; must be stress related."

Softly, but still loud enough to be heard by KC, Reyes told Chauncey and Fred, "KC had major wood after that incident."

"Cos Unca Pwez is cuder dhan Unca Dahny," Joey giggled, and quickly hid behind KC.

Grinning, KC sighed, "And we wonder why our AIs have penis

envy."

"I don' god penis envy! Dahdy gave me a BIG one!" Joey stated proudly.

Pulling his little brother in front of him, KC lifted and flung Joey over his shoulder, sniggering, "I rest my case, twerp!"

Fred and Chauncey looked to Reyes for explanation. Shrugging, Reyes giggled, "It's true enough." He then asked Danny, "Is it CAT scan time?"

"I have already scanned you. I approve," Fuzzy factually stated.

Everybody in the room looked down at the calico cat, watching it strut toward the kitchen and the basement door. Rikko followed Fuzzy, and so did Chauncey, Fred, Danny and Jerry.

Giggling, Reyes wondered, "What is it about this house that causes normal people to lose it?"

Marc shrugged, "It's a vibe that started... shit, it started soon after Danny was reactivated."

"We need someone to intervene the next time Cory and company invade," KC joked.

"Actually, Danny managed to warp reality long before Cory called," Marc giggled. "The Clan just accelerated the process."

Glancing around the room at Marc, KC, and Joey, who was still hanging off KC's shoulder, mostly upside down, Reyes smiled, "I guess I'll take a quick walk next door, to let Paul and Ryan know that I'm here."

Marc nodded, "I'll go downstairs. After you rescued Fred, I

checked the old logs. Fred's last software and firmware upgrades were done in 1986."

KC grinned, "Is Fred usually so quiet? He barely said a word."

Reyes shrugged, "Honestly, I haven't spent that much time with him. Considering what happened in Colorado, and how upset Chauncey was, I think they're both adjusting pretty well. Besides, since arriving, we didn't give them much of a chance to say more than hello." He then asked Joey, "Do you want to come with me, little brother? Once we get your uncles movin', we'll come back here, or go to Ewa Beach and jam for a little while."

Joey giggled, "Okay, Weyes. Pud me down, Casey." KC helped Joey down. In moments, Joey was on his feet and flying into Reyes arms.

Catching and lifting his little brother, Reyes planted a kiss on Joey's cheek. Reyes smiled, "We'll be back in a little while."

"See ya," Marc and KC chorused.

Walking to the kitchen, with Joey still in his arms and planted on his left hip, Reyes asked, "Is it raining still, Joey?"

"A widdwe," Joey answered, "nod as hawd as id was befowe." At the back door and noticing that it was raining hard again, Joey giggled, "I god hewe dwy. We've going do have do wun." Agreeing, Reyes put Joey down. Soon they were racing out the door and over to the Owens' house. It was a relatively short run, about fifty meters, but they still got drenched.

Sitting in the living room watching television, Jon Owens saw his grandson and Reyes come in the house. Chuckling, Jon stood and offered, "Let me get some towels." Joey stripped off his shirt and

kicked off his sneakers. On his way to the linen closet, Jon asked, "How're you today, Reyes?"

"I'm good, Uncle Jon," Reyes replied. "School started today. My family and about half of our Clan are there, and the other half are newbies exploring the two bases."

Returning with two bath towels, Jon smiled, "You have two bases?" and handed off the towels.

Nodding, Reyes began drying his thick auburn hair, and answered, "We have five bases on four islands. The two on Oahu are occupied with rescued kids, as of yesterday. The other three have refugees, since Friday's insanity."

"Hi, Reyes," Willie purred as he slinked around the corner. Reyes greeted the panther hybrid.

Hearing Reyes voice, Paul and Ryan galloped downstairs. Ryan gasped, "You're sopping wet!"

Sadly shaking his head, Paul smirked, "I told you to wear a raincoat."

Jon recommended, "Why don't you boys get Reyes into some dry clothes?" Looking down, Jon instructed, "You too, Joey, change into dry clothes, before you catch cold."

"Choo!" Joey faked a sneeze, then giggled, "I don't think we can catch cows, gwandpa."

Almost simultaneously, Paul and Reyes corrected, "Yes we can, Joey."

Reyes smiled, "We'll get past it quicker and easier, but listen to

your grandpa. You can't keep time and play drums when you're sneezing, sniffing and coughing, twerp."

Beginning to strip off his remaining clothes, Joey giggled, "I'ww pud showds on fow Hawaii." In moments, Joey raced naked up the stairs, leaving a pile of damp clothes on the entryway floor.

Ryan called, "Come on, Reyes. You're not catching cold today either." Reyes followed Paul and Ryan up the steps. Catching eyefuls of two round butts, currently covered in jeans, Reyes began giggling. Without turning, Ryan wondered, "What's so funny?" Reaching both hands forward, Reyes pinched both brothers' buns, causing them to yelp and race up the remaining steps. Laughing, Reyes hurried after them.

At the top of the staircase, Paul squinted, "Very funny."

"We should've expected that though," Ryan giggled.

Paul huffed, "We've got stuff to talk about anyway," and started down the hall.

Ryan reached for Reyes' hand and took it in his, saying, "Me and Paul have been talking, and you need to know about it."

Nervously, Reyes nodded. He didn't expect them to have discussed anything quite so quickly. As soon as he stepped into Paul's and Ryan's bedroom, Ryan released Reyes' hand to close the door and lock it.

At the dresser, with his back turned from Reyes and Ryan, Paul opened a drawer, softly saying, "We told you about what we did on the streets, but didn't tell you about how things were before that."

Locking eyes with Reyes, Ryan grinned, "We're brothers, so of

course we fooled around a little bit, now and then. It was never like we were boyfriends though. When we talked about you with us though, suddenly we had to face facts."

Returning to his brother and Reyes with boxer-briefs, board shorts and a polo shirt, Paul dropped the clothes on the nearest bed. He cautiously explained, "I love Ryan, he loves me, and we're obviously feeling strongly about you."

Reyes noticed Paul's eyes darting around, almost as if he were making sure he was safe in his own bedroom. It was probably the door being locked, Reyes rationalized. Paul's only escape route was altered.

Reaching for the comm-badge on Reyes' T-shirt, Ryan took it off, softly giggling, "Four times since Saturday night we talked about you, and got stiffies." Intensely blushing, Reyes also giggled. Leaning closer and on Reyes, Ryan whispered, "We'd like to try having a real relationship with you."

"If you're still considering it," Paul quickly added, intentionally leaving all three of them an easy out.

Reyes warmly smiled, "I am and do want to try, but I'd like to say a few things to both of you. If that's kewl with you, then we can talk more or move forward?"

"Kewl," the brothers chirped.

Gesturing to the bed, Reyes prompted, "Have a seat." He took his damp T-shirt off while Paul and Ryan sat down. Holding out his T-shirt, he grinned, "Swap ya, wet for dry?" Widely smiling, Paul took Reyes' wet shirt, snarled, and then dropped it on the floor. Giggling, Ryan handed the fresh shirt to Reyes, and then returned the comm-badge. Once he had slipped the polo shirt on, Reyes grinned,

"Right after my rescue, between Saturday and Wednesday morning, I hadn't woke with morning wood once. Since Wednesday, every morning, without fail." Ryan giggled louder. Paul smiled and nodded.

Reyes continued, "I tell my brothers, and even myself, it's because I'm healing, returning to normal, but I know that's only half true. I would've been with you everyday since we met, but I just didn't get the chance. As soon as I heard it was raining here, I wanted to get here, to bring you to Ewa Beach, where it's sunny and warm.

"I've noticed some other stuff too that has to be aired out." Before either brother could ask, Reyes locked eyes with Ryan, saying, "Paul needs you, just as you are, and so do I. At the beach house, I told you that I couldn't be with one of you without including the other. That wasn't a very difficult decision for me, because you would be shattered without Paul, and he'd be destroyed without you. Each of you are only half a person without the other in your life. To make this work, you come to us, Paul and I, for everything, together or one at a time, but know that everything you tell me won't be kept a secret from Paul. Secrets aren't possible between two when there are three."

Ryan rapidly nodded agreement, smiling, "That's easy."

Focusing on Paul, Reyes sighed, "I see more than you probably think I do, Paul. Please don't take this wrong, as any sort of threat, but I often see your eyes bouncing and darting around, to make sure you're safe. You always need to know your escape route; I saw it here Wednesday, I saw it at the beach house, again yesterday in the basement store, and just a minute ago when you crossed the room with the clothes. As fucked up as my situation was, your time on the street was every bit as bad, possibly worse. It's all changed now, Paul. It's time to share all those old worries, get 'em off your chest. For twenty years you did your best to keep Ryan safe. You did it, Paul. He's here, with us and perfectly fine and completely safe. Going

forward, that becomes part of my job. I intend to prove to both of you how safe we really are."

Paul reluctantly mumbled, "I can't help myself sometimes."

"I know," Reyes warmly smiled. "Here, your contact with other kids is limited, compared to my life at Ewa Beach. I want to go back there with both of you today, so I get time with you, and you get time around all our kids. We're perfectly safe now, Paul. Nobody is going to hurt Ryan or me. Can you share your old job, protecting Ryan with me?"

Shedding tears, Paul nodded, "I'll try. You guys will have to let me know when I'm messing it up."

Kneeling down on the floor between Paul and Ryan, Reyes offered both his hands, firmly assuring, "I will, but don't worry about it." Paul and Ryan each took one of Reyes' hands. Reyes softly reminded, "I want to be with both of you; one without the other won't cut it. I need both of you, with the past way in the background where it belongs. The really interesting thing is that I've always been in families of three. I thought my orphanage family was big, but the Clan's got that beat. The future is all three of us. I already feel like we're family, and have high hopes it'll only get better."

Ryan wondered, "Having two boyfriends doesn't scare you, Reyes?"

"Compared to the orphanage, two dudes I really care about will be easy and fun," Reyes answered. "This is my place now, between you with my hands in both of yours. What I've learned from my dad, pop, and the other Core Rimmers is that we're a team, from now on. What isn't already fixed from our pasts will be, with two helping the other one."

"We can try," Paul sighed.

Ryan corrected, "We will try, bro. There's never been anyone like Reyes, and you know it."

"There's no rush and plenty of time," Reyes gently reminded. Brightly smiling, Reyes added, "As the song says, we can work it out."

Blushing, Paul grinned, "We get a boyfriend who can sing us to sleep at night." Ryan cracked up.

Reyes giggled, "I get a warm comfy place between you." Paul and Ryan grinned at each other then pulled Reyes up off his knees and onto the clothes, face down on the bed between them. All three giggled and cuddled together for the first time. Reyes told his two boyfriends what was going on in Hawaii that day. After a minute or so, while Reyes was still talking, all three heard feet running down the hall.

"Weyes?" Joey yelled from the other side of the door, "Awe we going do jam hewe ow ad Ewa Beach?"

Paul loudly replied, "Ewa Beach, Joey."

"I'ww teww gwandma, gwandpa and dahdy," Joey cheered, and took off running back down the hall.

Since Reyes was on his belly, Paul shared an unnoticed mischievous glance with Ryan. Without warning, both boys goosed Reyes' butt, to get him back for the pinches on the stairs. Lurching, Reyes squealed and giggled into the mattress. Laying back down on his side, Ryan smiled, "What I'd like to know is how you got so sexy?"

"I dunno," Reyes giggled. "Maybe it's only apparent to my equally sexy boyfriends."

Paul grinned, "Nope, I think it's a unique combination of brown Polynesian skin, hazel eyes and auburn hair wrapping up a very caring heart."

Reyes moored through giggles, "You're the seducer? I never would've guessed."

Ryan evilly snickered, "He never used to be. Again, that's your effect on Paul."

Paul grinned, "See, Ryan is trying to make you believe he's innocent."

"I already know Ryan's not innocent," Reyes playfully teased, and quickly turned his head. Ryan's jaw dropped and he uncontrollably blushed before laughing along with Paul and Reyes.

Paul sniggered, "Remember, bro, *we*... as in both of us got bones talking about what we might say to Reyes today."

"I'm curious," Reyes giggled, "exactly what were you discussing that caused that? We spent hours naked together Saturday with no visible reactions."

"Exactly!" Ryan and Paul loudly laughed.

Ryan playfully offered, "Delayed reaction?"

"Seeing a guy dressed versus undressed are often two completely different pictures," Paul carefully explained. "In both conditions, we liked what we saw. Your words, voice and personality didn't change at all. Some guys might get naked and then act superior,

others might be the opposite, very shy and reserved, but not you though. Ryan confirmed what I saw, so that's simply you."

Ryan added, "Which is why I called you sexy. You definitely are perfectly proportioned, everywhere. Everything about you is becoming very familiar."

"Ditto times two," Reyes smiled. "That's why I had to pinch your butts. Also, I spent more than twenty years in the ROH, before the orphanage, and spent a fair amount of time naked around other naked people. It's simply the way I learned to be, before orphanage pedophiles clouded the picture."

Paul thoughtfully hummed, then smirked, "I want to get changed into shorts and get to Hawaii. Who's ready to leave?"

Ryan nodded, quickly sat up and giggled, "It just so happens that I didn't put undies on, so Reyes gets another peep show."

"Which I will take *full* advantage of," Reyes cackled.

Paul squinted and smirked, "How full?"

"Only half," Reyes giggled, "unless you show some white butt too. So keep your underwear on, or we might *not* be leaving quite as quickly as we hoped."

Sounding like a newscaster, Paul stood and huffed, "Thus proving that once human or android becomes sexually active, there is no undoing it." He started across the room to change clothes.

Ryan got up and Reyes rolled off of the boxer-shorts and boardies that he had landed upon. Unbuttoning his jeans, Ryan locked eyes with Reyes, seductively asking, "Do you want to touch me?"

Reyes smiled, "I've loved every hug and kiss you guys have given me, and I do want to go there, but not right now. Simply knowing that we're going to try being partners is perfect. If we see it's working out, three ways, we know what to do next, later today, tomorrow, whenever."

Pausing a moment then proceeding to unzip, Ryan giggled, "You know, as much as I want you to touch me, no one has ever said no that gently, seriously or warmly."

Turning around in only gray boxer-briefs, Paul sighed, "I think we've all had our share of experiences that weren't fun or good. It was a meal, or a temporary place to sleep."

Nodding, Reyes admitted, "Honestly, it's those bad sexual experiences that are in my memories, and what I'm most afraid of."

"How so?" Ryan wondered, and reached for the boxer-briefs on the bed.

"I remember every word of what you said about your orphanage," Paul admitted, "but I'm not sure why you would be frightened by us, Reyes."

Reyes shrugged, "I want this to work, not short term, weeks or months, but years. We've all done enough sexually to be experts. My wish is for us to be together, everywhere, all the time. That's how all the people I look up to act. Maybe you don't see it because you haven't gotten to know them, but my dad and pop show their love for Prez and Keith everyday, without running into a bedroom. From day one, as soon as we met them, the four of them have been inseparable. All the people in love that I've ever known have been like that. We can be like that.

"I learned stuff that makes me wonder how things might work

over years. For example, Ryan might not be feeling very well one day, he's sick, and doesn't want to mess around, but Paul and I are completely ready and only waiting for Ryan. How do we work that? When is it okay for two to be alone without the third? How do the two that were alone make it up to the third, so he never feels separated, out on the edge of the branch?"

"We hadn't thought of that," Paul murmured.

"Think of it," Reyes prodded, "if I've been alone with you, for whatever reason, then both of us have to make it up to Ryan, alone as couples and again, all three together. It's not the way I want it to be generally, but there will very likely be instances exactly like that. Only yesterday, what I thought would be an hour or two in the store, and then plenty of time to be with just the two of you, didn't quite work out that way."

"No, it didn't," Ryan giggled. "I felt just like those kids. This stuff is free? GIMME!"

With the brothers dressed and ready, Reyes stood, sadly saying, "Plan is a four letter word. I thought we'd have way more time than we actually had."

Sandwiching Reyes between them, each brother planted a soft kiss. Paul sighed, "Please don't worry so much about what we did with our time. It was important to us that we be there with you. We've watched you here, interacting with everyone, and there at Ewa Beach, with your brothers, fathers, friends and all those new kids. You don't change very much for anyone, and that's how I know it's you I want to be with. The only thing delayed was the talk we just had; no harm done."

Nodding, Ryan added, "It sure wasn't boring, Reyes. We did

have dinner together, which was really nice. As much as you wanted to know about the kids, they wanted to know about you and us too. It was so good to hear how hopeful those kids are."

"Even better was the concert after dinner," Paul beamed. "You were with the rest of your leadership team, and then with your band, where you needed to be. Those are parts of you that we completely accept and enjoy."

"It was after ten when we left Ewa Beach," Ryan reminded. "It was after four in the morning when we got home. We were awake about twenty hours."

"Time zones are another little issue we'll be dealing with," Reyes softly huffed.

"Then we're staying there with you or you're coming here with us," Paul firmly said. "As for when we'll be acting as couples, let me say that I think it will be very rare. For instance, what you didn't notice, I sure did, namely Ryan's chubby!" Reyes and Ryan cracked up.

"BUSTED!" Stevie and Alden shouted from the ceiling speakers.

"You two pervs stay outta this!" all three boys chorused as one.

"Hey, we've graduated to pervs!" Stevie giggled. "Dad's gonna be so proud of us!"

Realizing they would never be truly alone, Paul released Reyes and Ryan, went to the door and opened it. Reyes picked his wet shirt up off the floor. All three exited the room. Paul softly bitched, "First thing, we're going out on a date, away from perv AI cameras and

microphones."

Ryan hopefully gushed, "Waikiki?"

Reyes nodded, "My treat."

Paul stopped walking and spun around, forcing Ryan and Reyes to stop short or bump into him. Paul squinted, "What? You're paying?"

Reyes nodded, "I've had a Clan debit card most of the week that I haven't used once, and I'm a Core Rimmer, with access to funds I can't even count. Waikiki it is, and then a moonlit walk on the beach after we eat."

Without delay, Paul and Ryan jumped Reyes. All three fell to the floor with loud thuds and crazed giggling. Downstairs, on the living room sofa, Jon grinned up at the ceiling. Hurrying to the staircase from the kitchen, Mary yelled, "Is everybody all right up there?"

Paul laughed, "We're fine, mom." He then softly warned Reyes, "But one of us may not be so all right tomorrow morning." Ryan nodded and proceeded to try and rip open the Velcro on Reyes' boardies. Howling, Reyes blocked Ryan's hands from completing the goal.

Blinking rapidly, Mary realized that Paul had quickly, and without hesitation or stammering, called her mom. She walked away satisfied, but confused nonetheless.

As she was about to re-enter the kitchen, Stevie whined, "Mommy! They called me a perv!"

Mary sighed, "If the shoe fits..."

"I don't have feet."

"You don't have a butt either, but when you do, it will be swatted, with love, of course."

"Of course!" five of six AIs cheered.

Stevie sniffled, "So much love from my mother and brothers..."

"Stop teasing the boys and help me in the kitchen, Stevie," Mary lovingly instructed.

"Kay mommy," Stevie happily replied.

Sharing an abundance of kisses and playful gropes, Paul, Reyes and Ryan managed to get off the floor. Between the brothers, with both hands taken, Reyes giggled because he had never even considered what it might be like holding hands with two boyfriends. Paul led the way downstairs, with Reyes in the middle, and Ryan bringing up the rear, softly commenting on Reyes wiggling backside the entire time. Arriving in the living room, they went to Jon. Paul said, "Dad, we're going to go next door, and then we'd like to go to Hawaii with Reyes, if that's all right?"

Jon reminded, "Lunch will be ready in a few minutes. Joey said that Marc and the boys there will be here soon, including Reyes' friends." Paul and Ryan checked with Reyes.

"It's kawl," Reyes smiled. "Last time I had two breakfasts and two lunches in under six hours. This time, Paul and Ryan can eat two lunches." Jerry walked in the room with Joey. Reyes scowled, "Is Fred all right?"

Nodding, Jerry assured, "Fine and completely up to date, with all the latest stuff we gave you last week, minus the special skills stuff from Austin. They'll be here in a few seconds."

Reyes blinked, "Is it still raining?"

Jerry shrugged, "I think so."

"You're dry," Reyes noticed.

Nodding, Jerry giggled, "And you've got boyfriends, I see. Now that we've gotten the obvious out of the way, when's lunch?"

Looking down, Reyes glared and grinned at Joey. Joey giggled, "WHAD?" and hid behind his dad.

Passing by with platters of food, Jon chuckled, "Has any one ever told Reyes that Joey likes running?"

"Especially in the rain," Jerry simply stated.

"Com'ere, Joey," Reyes evilly snickered, and let go of Paul and Ryan. Joey bolted down the hallway, giggling his little android ass off, with Reyes in pursuit. Joey ran through a dimensional door, to Marc's house, through another door to Orlando HQ CIC, where Seth and others noticed the ongoing chase. Joey actually led Reyes around and above the world, to Terra Main, the Ark compound, to Northeast Division's CIC, to Wales, to St. Petersburg, the Oceanic Division, and even through Ewa Beach on the return trip through the Desert Division, Des Moines, Gulf Coast and Fort Lauderdale before returning to his own house and out through the back door into the rain, where Reyes would not go.

"Congratulations, Reyes!" Stevie giggled. "You're the first

person to visit all of the Clan's divisions!"

"Actually the second, Joey beat him by at least five-seconds!" Alden giggled.

"Joey is Timmy's brother and has spent more time out of time than Uncle Galli, so he's exempt from counting!" George helpfully added.

"Reyes, do you realize that you already visited tomorrow without the help of a Mikyvis?" Kerry mischievously added. "Joey's already corrupting your reality!"

<I do believe that both of them have set a new record for distance traveled by a human in five minutes, without the assistance of a Federation transporter.>

Still breathing heavy, Reyes returned to the living room, softly panting, "Joey's getting tickled to tears today, Jerry."

From down the hall, running feet were heard. Daringly, Joey ran into the living room. He cackled, "Anodhew go, Weyes?" and actually ran around the sofa and past Reyes. Capturing the android imp, Reyes held Joey still while Paul and Ryan joyfully tickled him to tears.

Danny walked into the room, grinning at Joey's plight. "Okay, that explains why I've just got calls from every division in the Clan, asking what Joey did *this* time. Reyes, you do realize that tickles just encourage him, don't you?"

Reyes chuckled, "This lets my little brother know I'm not angry, just getting even. One good prank deserves another."

Paul evilly grinned, "When will we stop?"

"Just before Joey wets himself and me again," Reyes sniggered.

Chapter 18

Oneula Beach Rec Room

Monday, November 8, 2004, 9:50AM HTZ

Using the PADD provided by Alden, Billy and Robbie took notes on the various games available at the base. With Alden's help, Billy had organized his first spreadsheet, naming games and listing pro and con columns by age groups. Jason, Jimmy and Scott were with groups of boys their own ages, testing games and chattering up a storm, so Billy saw everything was very kewl. Not far from Billy and Robbie, dancing to the jukebox music, Travis McAuley was with his roommate and new boyfriend, Erik Kendricks. Some other teenagers were playing foosball or billiards. Level one and level two orphanage teen boys were watching and asking questions, to learn the rules and how to play both games.

Heading out of the rec room to get sodas from the kitchen, Lance Kinchen and Scott Shetley, the two guitarists rescued from New York City, were losing interest in exploring the bases. Lance sighed, "This is all kind o' kewl, but getting good at a video game seems pointless to me. I'd rather play guitar or dance."

After a restless night, Scott sleepily nodded, "Your pick, I'll do either."

Giggling, Lance teased, "Ya wanna dance with me, big guy? I didn't know..."

Moving closer and guiding Lance to a private area of the dining room, Scott stopped Lance from walking. Gently resting a hand on

Lance's shoulder, Scott whispered, "I saw and heard you last night, and I know you saw me." Not quite a year younger than Scott, Lance fiercely blushed, apologized and briefly tried stammering nonsensical excuses. "Shush," Scott warmly smiled. He released Lance's shoulder, whispering, "Every guy does it, and I'm not bothered at all. The thing I have to tell you is that I was looking at you, wishing we... ya know, uh... weren't so far apart. If you... ya know... want... we could try... if it's kewl, and we still want, then we'll see?"

Relieved, but also very surprised, Lance nervously glanced around. Since no one else was nearby or paying any attention, Lance whispered, "I didn't think you'd want to."

Scott shrugged, "I just don't know, Lance. We walked out o' the city together and stayed together. My time's spent playing and practicing guitar, for four years. I never gave much thought to being with anyone at all before. Since Saturday, I can't seem to stop thinking about it. If I can't with you, then I just can't with any guy. Together, we could try. If we both like it then we can talk it out, and see what we wanna do about it."

Lance blushed and softly confessed, "I didn't think you'd be interested. I'm just gonna admit it, I would've joined you in your bed, or asked you into mine, if I thought I had any chance at all."

Scott carefully shared, "Thanks." He then wondered, "Why wouldn't you have a chance?" Only turning redder, Lance decided to keep his thoughts private and shrugged. Scott smiled, "After three days together, you and I have the best chance. No matter how it works out, we'll still be roommates and buds, Lance. A while ago, during last summer, I got two hand-jobs, from a guy and then from a girl. Neither ever spoke to me again. I guess they were embarrassed, and so was I, but not *that* bad. Maybe it was my fault. I could've returned something, but I was too freaked out and didn't. No matter what the

reasons, we ain't going there, man. When this experiment is over, you tell me what you liked or didn't like. I'll tell you the truth too."

Lance worried, "What if one of us likes it more than the other?"

"We can figure that out if or when we get there," Scott offered. "If it's kewl, we've got bunches of gay guys to confide in and talk to."

Nodding, Lance suggested, "Let's get some sodas, and then tell Billy we're heading to our dorm to jam." Scott agreed and they did exactly that. Knowing that the two older boys played guitar, Billy nodded and reminded them to find the group again when they were ready.

Watching the teens walk out of the Oneula Beach rec room, Robbie giggled, *'Ya know, I guess some dudes are just thick as a brick.'*

Tilting his head, Billy smiled, "What do you mean?"

"Lance and Scott," Robbie grinned. *'You seemed a little bummed that they were leaving, so I did a quick scan. They're already best friends. Lance would walk on his hands through glass if Scott told him to. Scott thinks Lance is the cutest, most cuddly dude around. Every time Lance smiles at him, Scott feels like king of the universe. They've got the same interests and the exact same thoughts. They ain't playing guitar, Billy; they're gonna try making love, like a test, to see if they can deal.'*

Billy grinned, *'Those two guys? Never in a million years would I have guessed.'*

Robbie shrugged, *'What makes any guy gay?'*

'Attraction first, I think,' Billy offered.

Robbie nodded and smiled, 'Exactly. As much as I'm attracted to the way you look, the way you think is the kewlest. It's exactly the same with Lance and Scott. All the attractions are there. The difference is that you and I know we're gay. They're just now considering it more seriously than they ever needed or wanted to before.'

During the silent walk from Oneula Beach to their room, Lance tried to wrap his mind around what they were going to do. For three days, Scott had been the best friend ever. Lance completely suppressed any sexual thoughts involving Scott. The fact that Scott wanted to make love with him was simply too unreal to be true. Considering what could very likely happen when they were alone, there wasn't a single idea that didn't thrill Lance to his soul. If he wasn't so terrified, Lance might've actually gotten more than a chubby, but the truth was, he was scared to death of doing something wrong.

Only minutes later, Lance and Scott were back at Ewa Beach, walking into dorm room thirty-one-fourteen. They noticed their beds were remade and the room seemed spotless. Once the door was closed and locked, Scott put his soda down on his desk, sincerely imploring, "Don't ever stop talking to me, Lance." He pointed at the two guitar cases leaning against the wall, firmly reminding, "That's us, no matter what. Before we got here, we were talking about getting our own band together. Before we crashed last night, all we talked about was the Platinum Habits concert. Music is the foundation... our reason for being together from the start, early Friday morning. The second anything seems wrong, let me know and I'll stop."

After putting his soda down on his dresser, Lance nervously

replied, "Kewl, you too, okay?"

Hearing the soft and shaky tone of Lance's voice, Scott asked, "What's wrong?"

Turning to face his best friend in the world, Lance shrugged, "Nothin'." Shyly glancing across the room, he sighed, "I don't know how to do anything, man. I've never... with anyone before. I'm so scared that I'm really shaking like a leaf. I want to, but I'm just thinking, maybe I can't."

Scott grinned, "Course ya can! I caught you spankin' it, and you must've caught me. Did you shoot?"

"Yeah!" Lance giggled. He wanted to add, 'it was the best ever', but held back the remark.

Moving slowly toward his roomie, Scott smirked, "Then you can, when we get to step two."

"What's step one?" Lance wondered. Done explaining, Scott demonstrated by softly running a hand up Lance's arm. Lance watched his friend's hand travel up his arm as far as he could then locked eyes with Scott. The slightly taller, older boy moved closer and placed the first tender kiss on Lance's mouth. Lance returned it, trying to copy it as best he could. Scott kissed Lance again, with only the tip of his tongue brushing Lance's lips. It tickled and Lance uncontrollably giggled. Moving back, Scott grinned. Lance giggled, "Obviously you've practiced step one."

Shaking his head, Scott assured, "Only in my dreams, man. I made the first move, now it's your turn." Wrapping his arms around Scott, Lance planted a deep, lingering kiss; tasting lips, tongue, teeth and mouth, causing both of them to breathe through their noses. When the kiss broke, Scott chuckled, "Whoa! I thought maybe I was

moving too fast for you, but I guess not!"

Turning beet red and vigorously shaking his head, Lance giggled, "Was it okay?"

"Incredible!" Scott assured.

"I would've kissed you last night, before we went to bed, but thought you'd slug me," Lance giggled.

Scott smiled, "We're still thinking the exact same things, Lance. I would've kissed you last night, but thought you'd freak out on me."

Relieved, Lance sighed and let some truth slip out. "I wouldn't let myself consider this before. We like all the same music, play some of the same tunes; we're already teaching each other songs, and you don't treat me like I'm younger than you at all. I want to learn everything with you. Just cos I'm scared doesn't mean I don't want to do this with you... ya know?"

Scott nodded, "I know. It's only a little weird when I think of it. Like, what might happen if..." He let his hands travel down Lance's back to his butt. His right hand gave Lance's left butt cheek a firm squeeze.

Jumping in place, directly against Scott's front, Lance's eyes widened. He giggled, "I haven't moved away, so I must've liked it, from you, I guess."

"See, that's what I mean," Scott chortled. "I think of kissing you, and it's weird, but the reality was it was *really* nice. I think of goosing your ass, and it's weird, but the reality is that now I want to touch more of you." He paused, and then grinned, "Holding you close like this feels really good. Your heart is beating just as fast as mine, I can feel it. I would've hugged you Saturday, but then Paulie showed up.

Instead of giving a hug, we both wound up on the ground with a VI Panda on top of us."

Lance wanted to say so much, but couldn't find words to express himself without talking for an hour. He reached up and gave Scott a second deep kiss, pushing his taller friend backward a step. The whole time he was kissing Scott, Lance hoped and prayed that his message of complete acceptance was being clearly received.

After a moment and muted chuckles, Scott let Lance push him back again, and kept slowly moving back, until they were standing at the foot of his bed. By the second backward step, Scott knew precisely where they would eventually wind up. Lance broke the kiss, giggling, "Look where we are."

Surprised again with Lance's actions, Scott laughed, "Ya know what? Fuck it! I don't care anymore if I can't give you a descent hand-job or blow-job. I promise, I'll learn exactly what makes you crazy. I'm falling in love with you, Lance. I was so scared to think that, never mind say it."

Lance nodded, "I'll have to agree, screw all the worries. I feel perfect like this, real close together. I love being held by you, and holding you here, against me. It's not so surprising, now that I think about it. If this is what the Core Rimmers feel like, no wonder they travel in pairs all the damn time."

Scott checked, "Do you want to try it, being boyfriends, I mean?"

Nodding, Lance grinned, "After kisses like that, we already are, it seems," and then tried to shove Scott over, so he'd fall back on his bed. It didn't work; Scott only wobbled.

Scott evilly snickered. Lance cackled and the battle began to see

who would land on the bed first. Being two inches taller and about fifteen pounds heavier, Scott eventually won the battle of the bed, and the subsequent battles for Lance's sandals and clothes. He then stripped in record time and climbed onto the bed, over Lance, softly checking, "You've got a chubby?"

"Yeah, that was fun," Lance giggled. "You do too, it seems. You're pokin' out of your foreskin."

Carefully lying down on top of Lance, Scott smiled, "If I ask you something, promise you'll tell the truth?"

"Uh, we're naked on your bed," Lance cackled. "I think I can promise that easily enough."

"How far do you want to go?"

"All the way and everything," Lance blushed, "if not today then soon. If this is going to work, we need to know what it's all like. I just don't know all the specifics, ya know? I've never had any friend like you before. During the shower Friday night, and every shower since, I thought stuff about you that I've never ever thought before. I'll admit that I pictured you and me rollin' around together last night. It's all scary, man; thinking about the stuff I'm thinking and feeling; dicks in hands, mouths and butts, I mean."

Lowering all the way down, Scott whispered in Lance's ear, "I want it all too, everything and every way. But I want it more than good for both of us. It's gotta be great, cos I really don't wanna fuck it up by hurting you, or being hurt by you, only cos we're dumb virgins. Agreed?" When Lance nodded and whispered approval, Scott asked, "Would you get pissed if I asked Mike for a few recommendations?"

"I'd rather talk to Drew or Corey," Lance confided. "I just feel like they're the best two to ask, since they're younger, but married,

and were probably where we are now not so long ago."

"Then you talk to one or both of them, and I'll talk to Mike. Between what you learn and what I learn, we'll be kewl."

"It's gonna be a real hot night tonight," Lance giggled. Wide-eyed and rapidly nodding, Scott evilly snickered, and then dove down to munch on Lance's neck. Cringing from tickles, Lance howled laughing. He couldn't get Scott to stop either. Before hyperventilating, Lance figured he had to fight fire with fire, and reached up to nibble and suck on Scott's neck. In seconds, both were loudly laughing, and only occasionally getting nibbles or sloppy wet sucks in.

After taking a breather to cuddle, Scott teased, "Gonna squeeze your lemon, boy."

Getting the Led Zeppelin reference, Lance giggled, "Make the juice run down my leg?"

Sliding down Lance's body, Scott shook his head, teasing, "Over my hand or in my mouth." He soon had a hand wrapped around Lance's circumcised bone and inspected it up close. Wondering what was going to happen next, Lance's wide eyes watched his best friend's every movement. The new sensation of someone else's hand firmly stroking his rod caused a guttural groan to escape. Scott checked, "Okay?"

"Friggin' awesome," Lance panted. Scott returned to his inspection. Having never been in a similar situation, everything was brand new. He didn't expect another guy's cock to feel so warm, look so perfect or smell so intoxicating. Lance's pubes were the same color as his hair, light brown. Scott lowered his face closer and gave a tentative lick. It didn't taste of anything; like wetting a finger to turn a page of a book. He licked again, longer and slower this time, to be

certain he could finish what he was about to start. At the warm, wet lick, and subsequent coolness, Lance shivered, "Oh God, Scott. That feels awesome, man. Do just that, as long as you want."

"Yeah?" Scott chortled.

"Definitely!" Lance cheered.

"Ya want some too?"

"Definitely!" Lance giggled, "You have got to know what that feels like."

Shifting around so they could progress together, on their sides and with plenty of access, Scott sniggered, "Judging by the way you're shaking, it must feel great."

Dizzily nodding, Lance reached for Scott's hardness. It was as if Scott's two previous quick experiences never happened. Scott reasoned that they were quick because they were meaningless. The girl and the guy were only acquaintances that Scott barely knew. Time already spent with Lance far exceeded both his other times combined. It dawned on him that it was probably a safe bet that neither wanted him as a boyfriend, they only wanted sex. He had never even kissed the guy or the girl. Being with Lance was much more important. Just feeling Lance's hand on his dick caused Scott to gasp.

Lance had no issue with foreskin and was soon discovering that even with a stiffy, the flesh could still completely cover the head. This was the greatest first time; far better than he had ever dared imagine. Foreskin was different, and Lance could see how it attached, rolling over and back off the head. He gave the length a good long lick.

Moaning, Scott repeatedly blinked, wondering if his brain had

melted and would ooze out of his ears. Lance giggled at Scott's reactions. Realizing he was being goofed on, Scott smirked at Lance and took the unsaid dare by licking completely around the glans of Lance's throbbler. Lance was sure something snapped inside his head. Ravenously, he engulfed a comfortable mouthful of Scott and twirled his tongue around.

Scott softly instructed, "That's really kewl, man. Pull the skin back and forth like that, yeah. It's great both ways, covered and uncovered." He then dove onto Lance's cock to share the same process and good feelings. Explorations continued to scrotums. Lance had only a couple of scattered hairs on his sack, so Scott licked the wrinkled flesh and carefully sucked each testicle. Even though Scott was a little hairier, Lance again enthusiastically repeated his friend's actions. They then took the first looks at pink, puckering sphincters. Both had brown hair and brown pubes, even down there. Scott wet a finger and gently rubbed Lance's orifice, pausing only to ask, "How's that?"

"Really nice," Lance softly replied. He wet his middle finger, and then said, "Here, check it out." He rubbed, tapped and then carefully inserted only the fingertip.

Pulling his face out from between Lance's legs, Scott sighed, "Really, *really* nice." He then called for his new boyfriend. "Com'ere, sexy lover boy."

Lance worried, "Is it too funky down there, Scott?" and pulled his head out to see Scott's expression.

"Not in the least," Scott firmly replied. "I showered with you, ate with you and we've been together all morning. Nothin's stinky; you smell and taste awesome. I only wanted to see... to look in your

eyes... to remind myself it's really you that I'm doin' this with."

Smiling, nodding and sitting up, Lance crawled over and lay on top of Scott. Gently running his fingers through Scott's shorter and darker brown hair, Lance warmly smiled, "It's no dream, but it sure feels like one. It's me you've been touching, and you're the one I'm touching. Everything you've done that I did too, I wanted to do.

"How many times can I think something you say is kewl, something you show me on guitar is better than my way? Who did I choose to sleep beside Friday night and have as a roommate? The likes have way outweighed the dislikes from the first minutes. I've prob'ly been falling in love with you since we walked out of New York. I wouldn't let myself admit it, but now I want you to know, I really love everything about you."

"I love you too," Scott whispered, and sealed it with a series of varying kisses. Lance accepted and returned as many kisses as he received. Becoming desperate, the two teens started grinding against each other, resolutely calling each others' names between kisses, leading to their first uncontrollable orgasms as a couple, with open eyes and open mouths.

Giggling with relief, neither could believe they climaxed so quickly. It wasn't what either had thought would happen when they walked into the room; Scott expected and wanted to suck dick, and Lance would've been happy with jackin' off, but it was still the most intense sexual experience either had ever had. They shared those expectations and firmly assured what they had done was better, although neither knew why exactly. More important to them at that point was fulfilling the others fantasy. They did all that and enjoyed themselves immensely. After three orgasms each, they cuddled on Scott's bed. Lance really felt fantastic in Scott's embrace, with his head resting on his friend's shoulder. Scott liked it very much too, but

wanted to try reversing, so he could cuddle against Lance. Once settled with Lance's arm around him, Scott had to admit it was the better place to be.

Checking the clock on the night stand, Lance sighed, "I don't want to move, but it's getting near lunch time. Prez said they'd be back in two hours, and it's quarter to eleven."

Rubbing the crusty dried cum spot on Lance's belly, Scott chuckled, "And we must smell like we've been having sex. Since no one else is around, we could probably have a shower."

Lance giggled, "We need to and I really want to, but..."

After waiting a few moments, Scott widely smiled and finished, "But we're gonna be hard as steel the whole time?"

"Yeah," Lance giggled.

After thinking a few moments, Scott grinned, "We have two choices; chance a shower, and go to lunch looking and smelling innocent..." Lance evilly snickered. Scott giggled, "Or we go to lunch stinking like cum and sweat."

Lance laughed, "The shower is a risk we have to take."

Scott smiled, "Agreed. If anyone comes in the toilet or shower, the first thing we do is hug and hide our bones."

"Kewl," Lance giggled, "but if we get caught, my bone and the rest of me will shrivel into the smallest corner."

Propping himself up on one arm, Scott confirmed, "Was what we did good?"

"It was awesome!" Lance cheered.

"I want to do it all again, and more."

"Me too."

"We'll protect each other."

"Always, man. We love each other."

Scott leaned over for a short, tender kiss. Lance returned a deeper, passionate kiss. Grinning like madmen at the experiment that had apparently become a lifestyle change, they got out of bed and went to the door. Like a city thief in the night, Scott stuck his head out the doorway, checked the hallway, turned and nodded at Lance, and then took his hand. They ran for the lavatory and into the mob shower, laughing and giggling the entire way.

Once under the shower spray, they started bathing each other. To keep their intimacy and presence secret, they only whispered affirmations that their friendship was growing into a serious love affair. Beginning to relax, Scott showed Lance how to wash his uncircumcised dick. Getting excited and forgetting where they were, they locked eyes and locked lips, caressing the other's erection and jewels. The world around them vanished. It wasn't their intention to climax, but neither would break the kiss or release the other's erection.

From the changing area, Chris Stokley gasped, "Whoops!" and spun around, toward Jay and the wall.

Their trance shattered, Lance's and Scott's heads snapped to the sound, and they saw Chris and Jay. As one voice, the two startled lovers shouted, "AW FUCK!" and slammed together, hiding their

erections as previously planned.

Not the least bit disturbed, Jay took his T-shirt off and tossed it on the bench.

Moving as one with Lance, Scott reached to turn the water off. Embarrassed far beyond his thirteen years, Lance began sincerely apologizing.

Jay grinned, "Don't even try, you're not sorry."

Chris smirked, "Jay, be nice."

Together, Lance and Scott began shuffling toward the shower exit, and both profusely apologized.

"Well, I sure wouldn't be sorry," Jay told Chris.

The two long time lovers blocked the shower exit and loudly demanded, "CHILL AND RELAX!" Holding on tightly to Scott, as if his life depended on him, Lance quivered in fear and hid his flushed face on Scott's shoulder. All Lance could picture was Chris pounding him unconscious, and Jay turning the lump on the floor into soup.

Jay grinned, "That's why we're here, guys."

Paying close attention to Scott and Lance, Chris nodded, "Since everyone else is busy..."

"We decided to chance it too," Jay smiled.

Locking eyes with Scott, Chris gently shared, "Of all the guys we expected might be here, you two weren't even on the list."

Holding Lance's head down and his body firmly against his own, Scott nervously stammered, "Well... uh... we just... alone... and

then... umm... and before lunch... so-oo..."

Jay checked with Chris for help interpreting. Chris reached to hold Lance's and Scott's wet shoulders, and then confirmed, "You just started and discovered you're more than friends?" Feeling his face flush more intensely, Scott slowly nodded. Chris smiled, "Kewl. Listen and hear me, okay?" Again, Scott nodded. Chris admitted, "We're here for the exact same reason, to make love."

Jay gently called, "Lance?"

"This is so fucked up," Lance softly whimpered.

"No, it isn't," Jay assured. Since Scott seemed a little more composed, Jay asked, "Do you love Lance?"

Nodding, Scott replied, "Yeah, a lot."

Barely believing what he had heard Scott say, Lance's head turned enough to see Scott's hyper-serious expression. Tears that were pooling in Lance's eyes flowed freely down his cheeks and onto Scott's shoulder.

Pointing into the mob shower, Jay gently begged, "Please, stay? We can deal with this easily."

Releasing Lance and Scott, Chris turned to his lover, blinking, "We can?"

Jay chuckled, "I'm burning up, man! You know I am."

"It's their first day," Chris grinned. "I can't understand how they spent two nights in the same room, but only this morning did they decide to try anything."

Nodding, Jay reminded, "It's not our first day. We can relieve

their embarrassment or let it fester. Sorry, but we live in the same dorm and the same hall, two doors away from each other. We have to fix what we accidentally screwed up." He turned to Scott, saying, "It's better to become closer friends than barely be able to face one another, right?"

Scott checked with Lance, carefully asking, "Can you do this?"

Barely lifting his face up, Lance sniffled, "Jay's right. We have to try, or we'll wind up avoiding each other, running in the opposite direction."

Jay smiled, "We'll make it worth your while, I promise."

Glaring at his long time lover, Chris cackled, "Ya wanna rephrase that, Jay?"

Hiding his face on Scott's shoulder, Lance began giggling. Scott sniggered, "It did sound pretty bad, Jay."

Untying his board shorts, Jay chuckled, "The important point is, it's not bad. It's who we are. The Core Rimmers told us to be brothers." He slipped his shorts and boxers off, then tossed them onto the bench, telling Chris, "By sharing three years of history, we can make this better." On his way into the shower, Jay tapped Lance on the back, prompting, "Come on, back under the water, so I can explain a few dozen things."

When Lance nodded, Scott led them back under the same shower. Chris began undressing. Jay turned on the shower across from Lance and Scott. Once he was soaked, Jay turned to face his two new brothers, sharing, "Do you want to know what's bad? Being in love for three years and not feeling comfortable to show it is bad. Knowing you're gay, and happy that you are, and happier that you have the best boyfriend in the world, but feeling the need to always

hide all of it, is bad. Telling the most important guy in the world, 'don't hold my hand, here and there and those places too, because someone might see and figure us out,' is very bad. Saying, 'don't try to kiss me anywhere, except behind closed doors in your bedroom or mine,' is extremely bad. Saturday morning, when I was brought here, I learned it doesn't have to be that way anymore. It was like having every worry I've carried suddenly shoved off my back. During the day Saturday, Chris showed me around this base, and for the first time, I kissed him in public. Every chance I get, I'm gonna hold his hand and kiss him, simply because I finally can without anyone caring. A lifetime of worries began falling off and away. I've got three years of major fuck-ups to fix."

Chris padded naked into the shower. Jay glowed and proudly beamed, "Look at this sexy guy!" Pausing about two meters away, Chris glared at Jay like he barely knew him. Jay prompted, "Really, look at all of him, guys." Seeing Lance and Scott giving Chris a good once over, Jay shared, "He was cute when we were eleven. Cute has become almost blindingly hot. Dozens of times Chris could've told me, 'the hell with you!' Dozens of times, I had to fix what my big mouth fucked up. The number of times I could've lost him forever is horrifying; that's exceedingly bad."

Barely believing what Jay was saying, Chris sighed, "You're making mountains out of molehills, Jay." He went directly to his lover.

Sliding close to Chris and taking him into his arms, Jay seriously said, "They're molehills now, but they were the Himalayas at the time."

"We've gone over this the last two days," Chris reminded.

"Now I'm proving how serious I am," Jay smiled. "If you want

me to, I'll scream it to this entire base; I repeatedly fucked up."

Shaking his head, Chris smiled, "You don't need to; it's over and done, way in the past. The way you've been since getting here proves it."

Jay leaned closer for a tender kiss that was passionately returned. Jay softly said, "For each time I denied my love, I'll declare it, starting right now, with these two guys." Stepping back and exposing his hardening dick, Jay told Lance and Scott, "Lesson one, do as I say and not as I've done. When you really love someone, tell him, all the time, whenever the mood strikes you. Don't wait for an argument to say it; it becomes a desperate plea when you haven't said it enough."

Chris giggled, "It's the concussion, guys. Jay hasn't been well since an apartment building fell on him." Scott and Lance softly chortled.

Jay sniggered, "It knocked some sense into me."

"Well, one of us needs serious psychological help," Chris giggled. More loudly, Lance and Scott chuckled.

Jay grinned, "See, because I haven't said three simple little words enough, he thinks I've lost my mind, now that I'm saying private things in public." Trying to sound disappointed, but failing miserably and wearing a wicked grin, Jay huffed, "I guess I'll just have to show Chris how much I love him." Turning around, Jay backed up to Chris and ground his butt against Chris' hips, madly chuckling, "You'd better believe I'm his bottom, especially now with this damned cast. Have you guys gotten this far yet?"

Going into a giggling fit, Lance vigorously shook his head. Slipping in front of Lance and reaching back to hold him in place,

Scott duplicated Jay's grind and chuckled, "It's next on our list of things to do." Cracking up, Lance blushed crimson.

"Great!" Chris giggled, "Your insanity is contagious, Jay."

Glancing back over his shoulder, Jay grinned, "I've only just begun." Like an Olympic skater, Jay spun around behind Chris. Exposing his lover's erection and grinding his woody against Chris' ass, Jay gleamed, "The game is dare-match-dare. Are you guys playing that game?"

Sliding in front of Scott and reversing the grind, Lance giggled, "Yup. I did everything Scott did."

Jay sniggered, "Very kewl. I was beginning to wonder if you would get into this, Lance."

Chuckling insanely, Scott playfully wondered, "What're you doin', Lance?"

"Recovering from the heart attack I just had, and what they're doin'," Lance giggled.

Chris grinned and confirmed, "You two guys just started today?"

Slightly out of sync, Lance and Scott answered, "Yeah."

Lance blushed, "We've barely been alone a whole hour."

Jay smiled, "But you haven't had intercourse?"

Scott blushed and sang, "Not yet."

Chris smiled, "I'm Jay's bottom boy. In the dare-match-dare game, nothing is really out of bounds. *You* decide what's kewl and

when." He paused then giggled, "Of course, I never expected this to happen. Since it has, and you're both obviously ready, I'll strongly recommend careful and slow penetration. We started before we turned thirteen, and found careful and slow is the *only* way."

Sliding in front of Chris again, Jay intensified his grind, causing his cock to crazily swing. Jay checked, "Are you guys getting the picture?"

Slipping back behind Scott and holding his hips, Lance confirmed, "We're each bottoms and tops, all the time?" Jay nodded.

Scott asked, "It's not like one leads and the other follows?"

Chris replied by posing the question; "Real life isn't that way, so why expect anything different now? Just like one of you might have an off day, but the other is doing just fine, so get used to being versatile in the sack. When either of us has had a bad day, the other knows it, so we do what's necessary to fix the problem, at least temporarily."

Jay added, "You guys set the pace and the rules. From what's been said, I got the impression that Scott led the way, this time. The next time around, let Lance lead." Showing off the cast on his wrist, Jay smirked, "This damn thing is slowing me way down, but the best part is, I'm getting some great bottom action for the next week, simply because it's easier with this cast."

Chris sniggered, "And next week, my butt or my legs are in the air as often as possible." He suddenly shoved Jay and loudly reminded, "DAMMIT! We'll be in school by then!"

"Oh, really?" Jay innocently chuckled.

At Chris' twisted smirk, Lance and Scott cracked up. They

decided to turn off the shower and leave the room, so Chris could get Jay back. In a flash, Chris jumped and landed on Jay's back.

Under attack from Chris and cracking up, Jay quickly asked, "Are you dudes wanting to be out, to more than us?"

Picking up two towels from the stack, Scott shrugged at Lance, waiting for his decision. Taking one towel, Lance moved closer to Scott and stole a tender kiss. Holding Lance in place against him, Scott turned to answer, "Yeah, it's kewl, Jay."

With his feet off the floor and still hanging onto Jay's back, Chris prompted, "Let's have lunch together then."

"Kewl," Lance answered.

Scott replied, "We'll see ya later then." Taking the towels with them, Lance and Scott left their two brothers wrestling in the shower.

Alone in their room drying off, and at last comfortable enough to drop the bullshit along with the towels, Lance grinned, "So, I guess we don't have to talk to Mike, Drew or Corey anymore."

Nodding, Scott chuckled, "Let's get their opinions anyway. We also need to talk to Horacio at lunch. We'll need lube and rubbers, and he's got 'em."

Lance widely smiled, "You told them that you love me, a lot."

"I do," Scott grinned. "My boyfriend is my best friend."

Going to wrap his arms around his new boyfriend, Lance giggled, "Ask for two dildos too, smaller than either of us. You've got a mouthful that will stretch my skinny ass."

"You've got length I gagged on, twice!" Scott sniggered. He

leaned over and nibbled on Lance's ear, softly assuring, "I'll get used to it soon enough. I know I want more of you."

"Now?" Lance incredulously giggled.

"Now we jam, and then we have lunch," Scott chuckled, "and then this afternoon, you're my dessert!"

"So much for exploring," Lance grinned.

"We are exploring, each other."

"I want beefy Scottish sausage."

Scott giggled, "Before we jam?"

"After," Lance corrected, "with the dildos, lube and rubbers."

"Kewl."

"Can I play your Strat? You can play my Les Paul."

Going to the guitars, Scott giggled, "Now I know we're serious! First we swap mouthfuls of spit, then cum, and now we're sharing our axes too?" Sadly shaking his head, Scott joked, "I must really love you."

"Hey!" Lance laughed, "Don't forget I love you back!"

Pulling the first of two guitar cases out of the corner, Scott teased, "Guaranteed by tomorrow morning, neither of us will ever forget it."

The only reason Scott wasn't immediately tickled is because he was holding Lance's Les Paul case. At the first opportunity, when the cases were on his bed, but the guitars not yet out, Lance started a

tickling free-for-all. As Jay had suggested, Scott allowed Lance to lead the way, wherever he was planning. All Lance really wanted was more kisses. Landing on top of Scott on the other bed, Lance freely shared his love mouth-to-mouth, and received Scott's tight hug and desperate moan, "Damn, I love you so much!"

Pulling back to look into Scott's eyes, Lance giggled, "That's all I wanted to hear."

"You were so scared when they walked in on us. That scared me way more than anything they saw or thought."

"Why?"

"I thought maybe you'd change your mind about us."

"Never," Lance firmly declared. "I couldn't hide from you. This is where I need and want to be, holding you and being held by you."

Scott smiled, "Doing regular stuff seems a little weird too, huh?"

"Yeah, it does," Lance giggled, "but that's what we do, besides suckin' face." Scott sniggered and softly slapped a bare butt cheek. Lance gasped then cackled, "Do that again!"

Cracking up, Scott laughed, "Get off me or I will. Once I get started, it may be hours before I leave your pretty butt alone." Still cackling, Lance rolled off Scott and the bed.

They got the guitars out and started playing a twelve-bar blues in A. From Lance, Scott learned new lead licks. Lance learned new chord patterns from Scott. For about half an hour, they sat on their desk chairs with their male bits hanging out, playing their guitars without amplifiers. When they were ready to take a break, they were horny and hungry. Rather than chance making a mess that would

require another interrupted shower, they dressed and went to the CIC dining room.

At Sullivan's Island, Aunt Mary's lunch had been devoured. Rikko was on the dining room floor with Fluffy and some kittens. Still sitting at the table, Joey, Paul, Reyes and Ryan were wrapping up their plans for the afternoon. Also at the table were Rich and John Murphy, and KC, Chauncey and Fred Eckhart.

In the weeks since their arrival in South Carolina, neither John nor Rich had been surfing. They decided to join the party going to Hawaii. Once Joey was safe on the Pacific Rim Division base, they would take a trip off base to surf for a few hours. They would then meet Joey on base before returning to Sullivan's Island.

While that conversation spun around the table, KC asked Fred, "Have you ever played any musical instruments?"

Fred grinned, "Only pianos, for family sing-a-longs at Christmas, Independence Day, and other gatherings like that."

Sitting between Fred and KC, partially paying attention to Rikko, Chauncey noticed his brother and KC, smiling at each other, but not saying another word. Waving his hands before their faces, Chauncey giggled at them. KC grinned, "I was just thinking of practicing guitar for a while." Before doing anything else dumb where everyone would notice, KC stood with his empty glass and left the dining room.

At eleven-twenty, the morning test was finished. All the kids walked out of school feeling like they had played games or watched

cartoons and movie clips for two hours. From a respectful distance, the teachers watched the kids, joking about the morning's pointless test concerns and worries. Everyone was surprised to various extents. A beeline was made to the CIC dining room.

Leading the pack, Sean and Troy were in a bit of a hurry, wondering how Billy and their sons were doing. AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory just wanted to see their sons. The remaining Core Rimmers found it cute, and now knew what they looked like a week earlier when racing to find their kids.

Almost everyone else went directly into the CIC to get lunch, except Corey, Drew and Leo. Having a stray thought during the test turn into a revelation of sorts, Leo asked for a few minutes alone with his dad and pop. Knowing that Friday dinners and Monday lunches included pizza, Geoff and Lenny raced to the dining room door. Corey, Drew and Leo took the long way around the auditorium and the CIC, so they could talk.

Worried silly, Leo told Drew, "This morning, you asked how I felt after your shower and before we went to sleep." He wondered, "Did I understand what you were asking, or jump too fast?"

"That's exactly what I was asking, Leo," Drew proudly replied.

Only partly relieved, Leo bluntly asked, "Did you think you were molesting me?"

Drew sighed, "We're in a weird situation, because of our ages, Leo. Part of me did think we went a little too far, but your responses last night and this morning made me feel better."

Corey carefully reminded, "I told you that you could easily be our friend, Leo. I'm surprised that you're calling us dad and pop so

quickly."

Leo smirked, "Because you wanted the jobs as much as I wanted you to have 'em. Yeah, the age thing is a little strange, but it's so good too. I couldn't have had so much fun learning the facts of life with my mom or dad, as I did with you, pop. You two did stuff *for* me last night; it wasn't done *to* me, I all but directly asked for it. We are friends, and we are family, willingly adopting each other. I won't be asking you more than questions about boyfriends and the next steps. You're a couple, and I ain't looking to squeeze myself into that picture. I want a boyfriend of my own, to have what you two have, and all my uncles have, and the other Core Rimmers have too. My younger brothers know sex stuff that I don't."

"Didn't, past tense," Corey briefly corrected.

Confused, Leo glanced at his pop and then his dad.

Drew grinned, "You know plenty, Leo. From what you've said, I know for certain that if your folks had ever met our folks, they'd be friends and we'd be friends. You know how to care about people. The only thing you *didn't* know was the sexual stuff. Geoff and Lenny learned it in the wrong order and wrong way; first the sex and without any caring. The right way is caring first and then the sex."

"You've gotta have the closeness to be able to deal with the sex," Corey smiled. "Just like our first time, and how much we talked afterward and for days later, you're talking to us about your first time. And you'll do all this again, with your boyfriend. Like you wanting know how we feel, he'll want to know that you're okay with what was done. You'll want to know if he's okay, and if you did it right, or if you could do it better. First the friendship, and then the fun, in that order."

Drew said, "Keith told me once that someone you have sex with, but don't talk with, is just a sex-buddy, and not a boyfriend. Sex-buddies can still become boyfriends, and boyfriends can fall apart and away, becoming sex-buddies. You and your boyfriend talking keeps the friendship going, so you're more than sex-buddies. Fail to tell the truth and you're in trouble."

"It takes hours to talk about every first time experience," Corey stated with certainty. "There's immediate questions and answers, and then additional stuff that has to be talked about. I taught you only one major lesson about oral sex – covering your teeth with your lips. The rest you'll learn about with a boyfriend."

Drew checked with Leo, asking, "You're comfy thinking about intercourse too?"

Blushing, Leo shrugged and giggled, "Only thinking about it. I can't see myself as either top or bottom, so that's way off in the future. Hugs and kisses are all that seems doable for now."

Squeezing Drew's hand, Corey reminded Leo, "Years of hugs, leading to months of kissing, leading to months of masturbation, months of oral, and only now have we reached the last, best stage. It's all worth the time it takes." He giggled, "I was in a rush, Leo. I would've gone from hugs to humping in four days." Drew and Leo cracked up and so did Corey. When he could speak again, Corey giggled, "Be like Drew. Taking your time is better, believe me!"

Drew chuckled, "I'm only curious, but did Geoff or Lenny try to wash your dick this morning?"

"OMIGOD, NO!" Leo gushed. Blushing, he softly giggled, "After how quick it happened last night, I wouldn't let them. I felt weird enough with all three of us sportin' wood, seeing them and them

seeing me like that."

Drew offered, "We've watched Geoff and Lenny bathe. They know how to only wash a dick. They'll get silly about it, but now it's a game to them. Exactly three quick passes with a soapy hand, rinse, and then they return to teasing and playing grab-tag."

"Exactly where little dudes like them should be," Corey smiled.

Leo nodded agreement. Another stray thought crossed his mind, prompting him to ask, "Dad, was I too heavy to lift yesterday?"

Drew chuckled, "I got us to the chair in the nick of time."

Leo giggled, "Kewl, I won't ask for a piggy back ride then." Evilily snickering, Corey and Drew rounded on Leo. Before Leo knew it, each father had one of his legs in an arm, and their other arms behind his back, lifting him off the ground. Holding onto their shoulders, Leo happily cheered, "This works great!"

Corey smiled, "If you're into the idea, have lunch with my mom and dad. Tonight, have dinner with Drew's parents."

"Kewl, I'll do that," Leo giggled.

While that was going on outside, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy saw other newbies in the kitchen chow line, and sitting at tables already eating, but didn't find their sons. Walking through dimensional doors to Oneula Beach, they found all twelve sons and some other boys still in the rec room there. Jason was surrounded by a bunch of eight-, nine-, and ten-year-old boys, including Kenny Hunnicutt and Stan Given. Jimmy, Scott, Leonard, Marv, Mark and Russ had a pack of rug rats around them. All six new fathers proudly watched the kids interacting. Initially, Billy wasn't seen, because Robbie had decided he was comfortable standing behind his

boyfriend, with both arms wrapped around his belly.

Suddenly, Robbie stopped telepathically communicating with Billy and turned around. Billy looked around for the problem, making himself visible to his fathers. Troy's jaw dropped to his chest. Between his lover's obvious surprise and the wide grins of the other four Core Rimmers, Sean sputtered then completely lost it and howled laughing.

Giggling, Robbie told Billy, *'Remember how confused Jason was earlier this morning? I think Troy's twice or three times worse.'*

Displaying the PADD to his dad and pop, Billy giggled, "Alden got me this to keep track of games and rank them."

Still speechless, Troy grinned and slowly nodded. Sean howled, "Alden got you a boyfriend too?"

"It's not *my* fault!" Alden giggled from the speakers.

Briefly looking up at the ceiling, Billy blushed. Robbie planted a kiss on the back of Billy's head, and then explained what had initially happened earlier that morning, minus his brothers' telepathic remarks. He then shrugged, "We were holding hands, but then Billy needed both hands to work the PADD. This is where I've been ever since."

Nodding, Billy giggled, "It works out pretty good too. Robbie gets stuff from his brothers, and the Steibs, and the Stoeher twins too, then passes it to me, vocally or telepathically." Hanging his face and rubbing his eyes, Troy could only quietly wonder.

Robbie told Sean and Troy, "Billy's a telepathic receiver, at the very least. He's heard every word sent to him. He knows a lot about me, my family, and I know some stuff about him and his family. I

know how you two guys became a couple, and how you adopted Billy and his brothers. What started out pretty good has been getting even better."

Billy nodded and joked, "Yeah, I think I'll keep Robbie around."

Robbie incredulously laughed, "You *think*?"

Blushing fiercely, Billy giggled, "I've been waiting over two hours for a kiss." Robbie stepped back, took hold of Billy's shoulders and turned him around. Instantly, they were face-to-face and grabbing hold of one another. Anxious and nervous, Billy's heart rate doubled in mere seconds. Robbie planted an open mouthed whopper of a kiss. They held it for a long minute, only breaking it off when the room of giggling turned into applause.

Clapping his hands along with the others, Sean told Troy, "Insecurities are bursting like balloons, I guess."

Also applauding, Troy found his tongue and smiled, "I expected something positive, but not this." He and Sean stopped clapping and moved closer to Billy and Robbie. Seeing their dads going to their older brother, Jason, Jimmy and Scott prompted their groups to get lunch, then went to join their fathers, and Billy and Robbie.

The new young couple remained hugging. Billy smiled at his dad and pop, sharing, "I told Robbie a bunch of stuff about my old life. He don't care."

Robbie told Billy, Sean and Troy, "Course I don't. Richie and Ronnie had it like that too. We talked with my folks about that, all Friday night, and privately shared more, on-and-off all day Saturday. With Ralphie on my side, we've got that all out of the way now. It hasn't been mentioned since the adoptions yesterday, now that I think about it." He softly giggled, "I didn't wake up thinking about a

boyfriend, but I got lucky."

"I'm luckier," Billy warmly smiled, and stole a quick kiss before breaking into giggles again.

"Let's all have lunch together," Troy prompted. "I'd like to know how the remainder of the morning went." The rest of the family and Robbie agreed. On the way out of the Oneula Beach rec room, they decided to remain there for their meals. Kaleo's and Jerry's families agreed it was a good idea and also stayed at Oneula Beach. This was their new home and it was time to start treating it as such.

Back at the Ewa Beach dining room, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike noticed only some of the level two orphans were there, and that the rest of their Core team mates hadn't returned. That allowed them to sit and eat their meals with their sons. Reyes' small group had returned from AI Division HQ. John and Rich Murphy had already left to go surfing. Sitting at a table for twelve, Reyes was with Paul, Ryan and Joey. They were with Randy, Dillon, Jonah and Gage, who were chattering about school and the tests they had taken. Placing their lunch trays down, Mike and Derrick took two chairs at the table.

As soon as his dad and pop sat, Reyes smiled, "Fred's been checked and upgraded. His sense of humor hasn't changed."

Seeing only a soup bowl before Reyes, and salad plates before Paul and Ryan, Derrick nodded and wondered, "Eating light today, dudes?"

Munching on a cheeseburger, Joey broke into giggles. Paul grinned, "It's our second lunch in just over an hour."

Ryan nodded, "Our mom fed us another huge smorgasbord." He paused to glance at Joey, and chuckled, "Joey is a bottomless pit."

Glancing at both his fathers, Reyes shared, "We'd like to go out tonight, off base. What do I need to do?"

"All three of you?" Mike checked. Reyes, Paul and Ryan grinned and nodded. Mike answered, "Take your security and two of mine, since there are three of you to keep safe."

Reyes confirmed, "That's it?"

Nodding, Derrick smiled, "That's it. What's the plan?"

"We were thinking the Ocean House at Waikiki," Reyes offered. "It's always been nice and has good food. We can dress casual too."

Paul asked, "Is security really necessary?"

Mike nodded, "Definitely. Think of the Clan more like Vulcan diplomatic facilities, Paul. Each of us are citizens of Earth and of Vulcan. Also, Reyes is part of our leadership team, and you and Ryan are wards of the Clan, with family in South Carolina and here."

"It's just precautionary, dudes," Derrick added. Noticing Joey eying the pizza on his plate, Derrick grinned, "There's more where this came from, Joey."

Rapidly nodding, Joey swallowed then giggled, "I'm gonna ged some doo, Uncah Dewwick."

Mike chuckled, "The pizza at the beach house was okay. This is ten times better, Joey."

Widening his eyes, Joey inhaled the remainder of his cheeseburger and stood. Still chewing, he hurried toward the kitchen.

"Bottomless," Ryan giggled. "He ate good at home too."

Across the room, Chris and Jay shared a table with Aaron Farris, Stephen Wickes, Roger Mosqueda, Nick Shavers, Keanu Hekekia, Liki Kealoha, Lance Kinchen, Scott Shetley, Travis McAuley and Erik Kendricks. Chris wiped his mouth and told the other boys, "Me and Jay used to be real careful of what we did in public. Now that we're here though, we've been holding hands everywhere we go together."

"We always wanted to, but couldn't," Jay smirked. "Now that we can, we almost always do."

Scott wordlessly checked with Lance. Chewing pizza, Lance shrugged and mumbled, "If ya want."

Scott grinned, "Do you want to though?"

Aaron offered, "It's not like you have to, Lance. Stephen and I are done looking around. We'll be long term, so we show it."

Stephen noticed, "Liki and Keanu don't hold hands." Glancing at them, Stephen asked, "Have you made up your minds yet?"

Nodding, Liki grinned, "It's been a real good week, so we're goin' for it."

"We tried holding hands a couple of times," Keanu explained. "It's not something we're very comfortable with yet, but we'll keep on trying. We want to, but one or the other of us suddenly feels odd actually doing it."

Liki smiled, "Trying is enough, Keanu. Don't sweat the small stuff."

Lance asked Scott, "Do you want to?"

"If you do, I do," Scott smiled.

Giggling, Lance assured, "I will if you will." Aaron, Stephen, Chris and Jay softly chortled. "What?" Lance giggled, "It's true!"

Slowly shaking his head, Aaron chuckled, "We can tell you're just starting out."

"You're still being careful," Chris sniggered.

After swallowing, Jay leaned forward to speak softly. "It starts that way," Jay told Lance, Scott, Keanu, Liki, Travis and Erik. "Telling the truth only seems rough, guys. You've all managed to say enough of it to get started, so keep on keepin' on. Every time you tell each other the truth, it helps to let the other guy know what to expect. If you can't truthfully say whether or not you really want to hold hands, what're you going to do when you're bent in half, with your partner hovering over you? He may be perfectly fine and happy, but you can't stay like that very long. It's the same on top, holding that one push-up, on top of a bouncing, soft mattress, for a couple o' minutes. One of you has to be able to say, hey, let's change positions, before my aching back bitches about it later."

Aaron also leaned forward to confide, "After our times in the orphanages, and with fosters, we go out of our way to always make it excellent. For us, the best way to start is by straddling and going for a ride. That way, the one on top has more control, how fast and how deep, and can say when it's kewl to shift into another position."

"Even if it's only for a few minutes," Stephen smiled. "The dude on top is actually bottoming, and can choose to stay in that role in another position, or he might ask for a complete reversal. You've gotta tell the truth, be glad to hear it, and respond to it. For months, pedophile scum tried to make us believe we were worthless because

our parents died. The whole time, we were telling ourselves, no, they're worthless, and Joel proved that. I don't recall ever hearing a single news story about one of those fuckers; they all simply vanished, and no bitter tears were ever shed."

Aaron, Liki and Keanu stopped eating to applaud Stephen's rant. Erik, Travis, Lance, Scott, Chris and Jay also clapped their hands. Intensely blushing, Stephen laughed, "That ain't even half of what I'd like to say, but we're eating, and my folks did teach me some table manners."

Offering his fist to Stephen so they could knock knuckles, Chris smiled, "Getting back on the topic of being a couple; by talking and listening to each other, you can make what usually lasts five or ten minutes more like thirty or forty."

Travis chuckled, "Can it really last that long?"

Aaron, Stephen and Chris nodded. Jay explained, "When Chris and I were younger, it was kewl enough just going five minutes, but we weren't being truthful either. I wasn't telling him, hey, my arms and back are getting sore. Because I was uncomfortable, and didn't say anything, I wouldn't get off on it. Then it's him making it up to me so I do get off. That's kewl and all, but it's the very best is when we both get off during intercourse. No matter what the position happens to be, it's always better that way."

"We swap all the time," Chris grinned. "Especially with the cast on Jay's wrist, we have to swap roles and positions. Yesterday morning, after two entire days apart with no sex, neither of us lasted long at all. By last night, we were back in the groove and lasting thirty minutes. This morning's romp took almost forty minutes."

Nodding, Aaron giggled, "Slow and easy wake up calls are

awesome."

"It's a hell of a lot better than an alarm," Stephen smirked.

Jay grinned, "Going longer than five or ten minutes requires communication, guys. Just because you started in a position doesn't mean you have to remain that way. The whole purpose is to make each other feel good, right? So, share it all and make it last. Taking more time is more fun, but say something if you'd be just as happy with a quickie."

Chris sniggered, "Yesterday morning, once Doc Andrews said it was kewl, there was no reason to say a word. We expected that first time wouldn't last very long, but we got to play both roles."

Turning to Scott, Lance sighed, "I want you, all the time now, and I want everybody to know this ain't fake."

"We've got a lot in common," Scott brightly beamed.

Erik asked, "What about condoms? Do you guys use 'em?"

Keanu nodded, "We are."

"We stopped last night," Stephen cheekily smiled.

Chris grinned, "We used to use 'em all the time, but now, after thinking Jay was dead for a day, we agreed to not bother."

Thoughtfully scowling, Travis admitted, "I think they're really uncomfortable. Erik's not quite as bad, but he's said it too."

Jay thoughtfully frowned then asked, "Trav, are you beefier than Erik?"

Travis paused to consider the question. Before his boyfriend

could reply, Erik giggled, "Yeah, he is." Widely grinning at his partner, Travis turned red. "What?" Erik giggled, "I'm about a half inch longer than you, but you're at least a half inch thicker around than me."

Locking eyes with Travis, Jay chuckled, "Switch to the next larger size, bro. Length is how *they* measure, but thickness matters too. Just don't unroll it all, so it fits you."

Scott checked, "So the more permanent a couple you think you are, the less need for rubbers."

Jay nodded, "I don't want anybody else, male or female." Chris brightly smiled. Jay had always been the voice of reason, reminding Chris of what was kewl and where and when. Now he could tell that Jay never lied and was only dealing with high school and homophobes. Seeing Jay acting completely unconcerned about their relationship was the best part of Clan life.

Nick checked with Roger, saying, "Without isn't all that different from with. It's only a little more comfortable for both of us, I think."

"No elastic pullin' pubes out," Roger nodded, and then scowled, "but it seems we're not lasting as long again." Nick giggled and the others around the table knowingly grinned.

After clearing his throat, Keanu sighed, "Because of the orphanages, me and Liki considered ourselves more on the straight side of bisexual. The men we were with were nowhere near as fun or good as most women."

"Since getting together this past week, we're really confused," Liki shared. "We'd both like to have kids of our own, but we can still say that where we've been at all week has been really awesome, better

than the men *and* women we were with."

"I'd love to have some kids," Jay chuckled. "Now, in the Clan, we can eventually adopt some. If you want to make babies of your own, there's ways to accomplish that and still be partners."

Chris laughed, "You're blowing me away!"

Jay smiled, "What?"

Chris squealed, "You want kids now too?"

"Course," Jay smiled. "I always have. I think most guys would admit they want to be fathers. Some admit it, do the deed, and then run away from 'em too. Here, adopting is a different deal. The kids have as much say as the parents, as it should be."

Chris hollered, "PREZ!"

Prez looked over, found Chris and replied, "What's up, Chris?"

"Someone put Maui-wowie on my pizza!" Chris laughed. Prez, Jay and half the dining room cracked up.

Mike chuckled, "You thought it was oregano, didn't you? Surprise!"

Scott checked with Lance, asking, "Are you done? Maybe we could talk with Mike now?" When Lance nodded and picked up his glass to empty it, Scott called over, "Have you got a few minutes, Mike?"

"Sure," Mike answered, "come on over, when you're ready." Leaning over nearer to Derrick, Mike whispered, "I've been expecting this since they showed up Friday."

Derrick nodded and grinned, "Here they come. It's fairly important, obviously."

Scott smiled, "How's it goin'?"

"Good," Mike grinned. He gestured to the two chairs beside him, abandoned by Dillon and Randy, saying, "Have a seat, dudes."

Saying, "Thanks," Lance and Scott sat down. Scott took the chair closest to Mike.

"We've got two issues to talk about," Scott began.

Nodding, Mike placed a hand over his forehead, mystically muttering, "At least one of 'em has to do with guitars."

Lance giggled, "You're pretty good, with a room of telepaths around."

"No brain leeches this time," Mike grinned. "We're axe wielding brothers. I fully expected this, so tell me what you'd like."

"Without amps, we can't hear what we're playing," Scott smiled.

Derrick asked, "You'll be taking music classes here too?"

Lance nodded and Scott smiled, "Definitely. That's the primary reason we chose this division."

"We've got several options open," Mike said. "First, living in the dorms, I can get both of you amps that you can even play at night, without disturbing your roomie or neighbors, by using headphones. Another possibility is, I can get you acoustic guitars for the dorms. And you can check out the auditorium at Oneula Beach. There are amps, drums and keyboards there you can use. I haven't seen them, but I expect they'll be the same sort of stuff our band got from

Starfleet."

Lance loudly cheered, "KEWL!" Reyes and Joey cracked up.

At his boyfriend's reaction, Scott chuckled, "Are they alternatives, one or the other, Mike?"

Shaking his head, Mike grinned, "Music students, and all our students, no matter what their specialty, will get what they need. You'll eventually need acoustic guitars anyway. You two came with electric guitars, so I'll assume you had amps to go with them. Since you can't really rock out in the dorms, make use of the Oneula Beach auditorium when you want to blast the jams."

Before Joey bounced out of his chair, Reyes held his little android brother down, giggling, "We'll go over there with you. I promised Joey we'd jam today anyway."

"Excellent!" Lance happily gushed.

Nodding agreement, Scott chortled, "It's been a while since I played with a drummer. I'm looking forward to it."

Derrick asked, "Can either of you read music?"

Lance shook his head, answering, "I always played by ear."

Scott replied, "Only a little bit. I took lessons for two years, got off the ground, and now I mostly play by ear too."

"We're heavily into Zeppelin," Lance smiled, "a little Deep Purple, and a little Black Sabbath too."

"Guitar music, mostly rock and metal," Scott offered. "Your band kicked ass last night, by the way."

"Thank you," Derrick, Mike and Reyes smiled.

Mike asked, "What brand acoustic guitars do you prefer?"

Scott grinned, "I rarely played acoustic. I traded my old Yamaha in for a down payment on my Stratocaster."

"I never touched an acoustic in three years," Lance admitted.

"We'll get you guys going right away," Mike said, and tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, musical education expenses for Scott Shetley and Lance Kinchen. Get two Fender Mustang amps, and two sets of headphones. Also, get two Taylor 214CE acoustic-electric guitars. Throw in extra sets of strings, electronic tuners for both of them, and tool kits so they can change their strings. If they don't know how now, they'll learn next week." After a brief pause, Mike chuckled, "Kewl. Thanks, Alden."

"This is so amazing," Lance giggled. "I spent a year whittling down my parents to get a guitar, and the next year to get an amp. All we had to do is ask."

Derrick nodded and grinned, "Next week, when drummers need stuff, I'll be making similar calls."

Mike asked, "What's the other thing you wanted to talk about?"

Glancing between Mike and Joey, Scott softly balked, "Uh, it's not for younger ears."

Getting up from the table, Joey giggled, "Id's okay, Uncah Mike. I'ww go dawk widh Jonah and Gage."

Reyes promised, "I'll call you over when it's time to jam, Joey."

"Okay, Weyes," Joey giggled, and walked toward the other

table.

As soon as Joey was away from the immediate area, Scott reached for Lance's hand and took it in his. Displaying their clasped hands, Scott blushed and chuckled, "We learned some kewl stuff this morning." Reyes, Ryan and Paul began chortling. A moment later, four additional clasped hands were on the table.

Madly chuckling, Derrick leaned back, calling, "Prez? Keith? A couple of minutes, please?"

Mike grinned, "It never ceases to amaze me, really. I have no idea why usually, but with you two, I got no gay-dar pings when we met."

Intensely blushing because two more leaders were coming over to join them, Lance giggled, "I guess ya can't from two virgins who thought they were straight."

Watching Prez and Keith come around and join them at the table, Scott chortled, "Yeah, two mostly ex-virgins now."

"I love it!" Prez beamed.

Keith nodded and smiled, "Horacio has the lube. His girlfriend, Sonia has the rubbers. Problem solved."

"I wish," Scott sniggered.

Slightly tilting his head, Derrick wondered, "What's the problem?"

Scott explained, "As best as we can tell, it's nothing too unusual. Having never gone there before, we just want everything as good as it can possibly be, ya know?"

"Then go slow and easy, like you're in love," Reyes smiled. "Quick and rough is for jerks that don't care."

Paul thoughtfully hummed. Widely grinning, Ryan's eyes danced.

Mike nodded, "That's pretty much it. Instinct says, slide it in and pound away. The reality is that people in love care enough to make it good all around."

Keith smiled, "We started young, so everything was a game. Keep the love and friendship, and keep it fun."

Leaning back and relaxing, Prez grinned, "I saw you over there with Chris and Jay and the other couples. You talked with them too, I suppose?"

Nodding, Scott helplessly chuckled, "We kind o' tripped and fell out of the closet, when Chris and Jay walked in on us in the shower." Everyone at the table cracked up. When the laughter and remarks faded, Scott giggled, "That's what they were going in there for too, so it was kewl... eventually... after my nervous breakdown and Lance's heart attack."

"No surprise there," Prez grinned. "Jay arrived with a concussion to match his broken wrist. When Doc Andrews said no exertion for a day, I thought Jay and Chris would flip out."

Keith nodded, "They've actually been a couple about a year longer than any of us. It's a fair assumption that they made the same mistakes and learned the same lessons we did."

Derrick grinned, "The bonus you two have is being musicians, like us. So, we'll put this in musical terms." He locked eyes with Lance, pointed at Scott and prompted, "You play guitar with him and

keep the tempo, right?"

Getting the implication, Lance giggled, "Yep. So we make our own tempo with this too now?"

"Precisely," Derrick smiled. "This time, it's more like building up to a crescendo. Like in any good tune, the melody, harmony and rhythm build to the finale. We could give you tons of advise, but the fact is, it's your love that will keep the tune going."

"Your moods affect the music you want to hear or play," Mike added. "The same applies here; your emotions tell you exactly how to do everything. We've got built in barometers too. When it's not good for one, you'll both see it. All it takes is harmonizing together. Talk *with* each other and not *to* each other. To get the difference, consider it as working *with* each other, and not working *on* each other."

Prez offered, "The word 'with' implies teams together; at least one speaking *and* at least one listening. The other way, talking *to* each other, doesn't require a listener. Hear each other and participate, in the conversation, in the music, and while making love. Today you're a giver, tomorrow you're a receiver, and that has nothing to do with roles or positions; it's way more emotional than physical."

Keith reminded, "You're dudes, but still human beings; flesh and blood with thoughts and emotions. Treat each other that way, and everything will be kewl. Misunderstand each other, and we'll be chatting again."

As if in a hurry, Prez quickly asked, "Scott, from the heart, do you love Lance?"

Looking into Lance's green eyes, Scott warmly answered, "Yeah, I really do. There's never been anyone like him. As friends, it's

been great. Since this morning, it's surprisingly getting even better."

Suddenly, Lance couldn't decide if the dining room was very cold or very hot; he was shivering and sweating at the same time. Scott had proclaimed his love twice, to two different sets of guys, effectively scrambling what little remained of Lance's brain.

"Show him, all the time, dude," Prez smiled. "Lance has to know how you feel and what you're thinking. Saying it and proving it to anyone else is time wasted."

Keith softly sang, "Every breath you take, every move you make, every single day, every word you say."

"And play guitar too," Mike sniggered. "For the four of us, just like the two of you, music started the friendships. If I don't get to hear you for myself, at Oneula's auditorium later today, I'll be following you back to your room sometime soon. I thrive on competition, dudes; with Derrick, Keith, Prez and now Troy too."

"We're not there yet, Mike," Scott sighed. "We're pretty good, but not at your level."

Lance nodded, "We saw you playing, most of the time without looking at either hand."

"Then we'll be learning a lot," Mike smiled, "you two as our students and us as teachers. It's all good."

Prez shared, "What I used to do was multitask; I'd be running simple scales, but watching TV, or reading a book for school. It's something you learn, just like everything else."

Around the table, there were a few moments of silence. Paul wordlessly checked with Reyes, who checked with Ryan. Receiving a

nod, Reyes asked Scott and Lance, "Are you dudes ready for Oneula Beach, or would you rather have time alone first?"

Scott checked with Lance. Releasing Scott's hand and covering his face, Lance loudly giggled, "Oh my God, I really can't decide!" Around the table, the boys softly sniggered and chuckled. Lance whined through his giggles, "This was an easier decision earlier today. Guitar or Scott, music or sex? Suddenly there's no difference! Either way, I win!" All nine boys cracked up.

Locking eyes with Reyes, Scott chuckled, "We'll get our guitars and meet you there, Reyes."

"Kewl," Reyes giggled and nodded.

Standing up, Scott turned to Lance, sniggering, "Let's go, lover boy."

"Don't start that," Lance giggled as he stood. "I'll pick up my axe and fumble around, lookin' for a zipper, completely lost."

Keith chuckled, "The neck is the long, hard, wood thing your left hand holds on to."

"OH MY GOD!" Lance loudly laughed. "That was too funny." Helplessly chuckling, Scott led his confused partner back to their table to clean up their trays.

For a few moments, Prez and Derrick watched Lance and Scott. As soon as Lance and Scott returned, all the teenagers at that table stood and gathered their trays to take to the dishwasher. Derrick smirked, "Don't you wish we had someone like us to help us make fewer mistakes?"

Prez shrugged, "Apparently, we did all right, for eight- and nine-

year-old kids."

Keith nodded, "Just like we learned, they'll learn too. We can't do it for them."

Glancing around the table at the four Core Rimmers, Paul softly asked, "It's true then, you really did learn everything together?"

All four nodded. Mike grinned, "It's really not much of a secret anymore."

Ryan smiled, "Have you got any advice for the three of us?"

Shaking his head, Derrick answered, "The same rules apply. You three know how bad it could be, so just don't go there. Remaking the same mistakes some other butt-head made will get you nowhere, except frustrated and alone. As much as the little head wants to take over, don't let it, use the brain in the bigger head."

"Understand, I was the last one to move here," Prez gently explained. "Keith and I were six-years-old, and going on seven, and Derrick and Mike were already seven-years-old. We were friends that summer. Mike and I played guitar; Keith played keys, and Derrick was playing drums. Like every other kid, there were sleep-overs with one or all of the other three. Unlike straight kids, we figured everything out together. Two years ago, it changed to the two couples we are now. Just before school started last September, we all agreed intercourse was only for the couples. What you witnessed Saturday was me, with toasted biscuits, and barely maintaining with only oral sex when I wanted more. Derrick and Mike knew it would be kewl for the four of us to get together again. It was kewl and will probably always be kewl, because we know each other so well. If four can manage, three can too."

Checking with his new boyfriends, Reyes smiled, "Like I said,

what we had to do versus what we want to do are two entirely different situations." He then tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Alden, make reservations, for a party of three at the Ocean House restaurant in Waikiki, at six o'clock, please, dude?"

Alden replied, "I'm dialing now, Reyes."

Noticing Paul's eyes darting around the table, Prez asked, "What's wrong, Paul?"

Shrugging, Paul sighed, "I guess I expected someone to say it's wrong; two brothers adding and sharing a common partner."

Mike grinned, "Different strokes for different folks. How we grew up isn't like Drew and Corey, or Kaleo and Tory, or anyone else I know."

Keith assured, "You won't hear a single negative remark from us. I'd doubt anyone else would pass a comment either. Especially after what you dudes went through, you've earned the right to choose to be happy. Don't allow anyone to interfere with that, cos I sure wouldn't if I were in your shoes."

Derrick thoughtfully scowled, "Are we that different? Someone please say we're not different."

Leaning forward, Mike softly assured, "I'm sure it's not us. Common sense dictates a lot of this stuff, from sex between couples, threesomes, foursomes, and so on, to knowing when it's inappropriate to judge another person's choice. I saw Saturday how much Reyes cared for you two dudes. It seems you also care about Reyes. My kid is happy, there's no reason for me to interfere, so I won't."

Keith reassured, "I'm sure Scott and Lance got our message clearly. It's up to them to decide to take the advice." Smiling at Paul,

Reyes and Ryan, Keith added, "The three of you together is already becoming the expected norm. Don't worry about anyone's opinions except your own."

* * * * *

Meanwhile, immediately after finishing their lunch, John and Stephen went to take care of a very important task. It was lunch recess time at Stephen's old school in Hilo. Since the prior Monday night, John had wanted to pay a visit to the boys that had harassed his husband. Only Blake and Mitch, their young human security, went with them to the Hilo Union Elementary School's playground, but all the security guys were ready to execute the plan.

Stephen pointed to where his class was playing kickball. Holding Stephen's hand tightly, John led the way. These boys weren't any taller than John. They were several inches taller and many pounds heavier than Stephen was though. John was ready for more than a fight that he could've won without his N-Gen powers. Not knowing any better, four boys began walking toward them, shouting anti-homosexual remarks at Stephen and John, who were still holding hands. Suddenly, the leader of the pack tripped and fell. Not knowing how or why he fell, he got up and angrily pushed his buddies' hands aside. Brushing himself off, he continued his homophobic tirade.

As planned, John pulled Stephen behind him. Blake and Mitch kept Stephen out of harms way while John went off. "You think you're so tough? I'll bet you suck three tiny dicks at once, every night." Pointing at the other three boys, John said, "His, his and his. Puny little peckers make you shiver and shake, huh?"

"Who the fuck are you?" the lead boy screamed.

"I'm Stephen's husband, here to teach little jack-offs like you

dudes a lesson you'll never forget."

All the boys began laughing at John and mocking him. Mysteriously, another boy fell and knocked over the boy standing closest to him. John giggled, "I knew it. Too afraid to admit you like dick, but there's your pals, one laying on the other. Hump away boys, hump away, now!"

The lead boy took a swing at John, which never came close, but sent him and his three buddies flailing to the ground. 'Now' was the pre-planned keyword. By the time the boys stood and were ready for a fight, Lucky appeared behind John, Stephen, Blake and Mitch. Behind the other four schoolyard bullies stood Bond, Stephen's personal gorilla. Noticing one massive gorilla wearing military fatigues was shocking enough, but when the second gorilla behind the four bullies was seen, the lead boy lost bladder control and started bawling like a baby. The other three boys screamed and scattered. Blake and Mitch moved so that the remaining boy couldn't get away.

John laughed, "Big bad bully pissed his pants. Where's your suck-buddies now, big bad bully? Don't cry bully, I won't let the gorillas tear your little dick off. Be careful who you bully from now on, pussy. Clan Short is watching. If I have to come back here and see your sorry ass again, I'll let the gorillas deal with the problem."

Bond growled, "Stephen is mine to protect. A word of warning; I like my bullies shaken, not stirred." Another few drops of urine escaped, further dampening that boy's shorts and underwear.

Stephen stepped forward and yelled, "Did you hear my husband and my gorilla? We're watching for pants-pissing jerks like you." Wiping bitter tears from his eyes, the boy nodded. Stephen then shoved the boy with all his strength, saying, "I thought I might feel sorry for you, but I don't. How many times did you make me cry? I

don't even know, dozens maybe. Think twice about squealing to teachers too. John's a Vulcan trained telepath and will have you all expelled from school, right, hon?"

Floating two feet above the grassy ground, John nodded and smiled, "You got it right, baby. I have enough on all four of them to have them locked away for a very long time. You're not the only kid they bullied." The bully couldn't believe he was seeing John floating above the Earth.

Lucky noticed two adults rapidly approaching and said, "It's time to go, Johnny-boy."

John told Lucky, "No, I want to talk to the teachers too," and lowered to the ground.

Rolling his eyes, Stephen teased his tormentor, softly giggling, "And scan them too, if I know my husband."

Already doing precisely that, John innocently smiled, "Who, me?"

Sadly shaking his head, John's eleven-year-old enhanced human security, Blake smirked, "In the mood you're in, the halos aren't working, bro."

Reaching a hand into his shorts pocket, Stephen reminded, "Get your ID cards out, guys." John and all the boys pulled out their wallets.

"What's going on over here?" one of the two adult women shrieked.

Coming to a halt before the group, the other woman asked,

"Stephen? Where have you been this past week?"

Holding up his wallet for the woman to see, Stephen answered, "I'm part of Family Clan Short, Pacific Rim Division now, Mrs. Kravitz." The woman looked closely at the cards held before her; one proved that Stephen was a Clan Short leader, and the other identified him as a Starfleet Lieutenant Commander. While the two teachers inspected the cards and suspiciously eyed the two gorillas, Stephen explained, "I told you that Jaiden was harassing and mocking me, Mrs. Sherman. Since no one would believe me, I told my boyfriend, John Hundser, who became my husband last Tuesday."

John took over for Stephen, adding, "Mrs. Sherman, since you are the Principal at this school, I must tell you that I know your actions have been proper and just for the majority of similar cases. However, when you have a bunch of larger boys and one smaller boy in your office, it's almost always a case of bullying. Similarly, when there are several normal girls and one larger girl, who is a bit of a tom-boy, again it's generally a case of bullying. It's worth the time it takes to get to the truth. The rules and guidelines you have been adhering to will be changing. King Aalona is at our base, I'm sure you know."

Nodding, Mrs. Sherman said, "Yes, I saw his speech."

Glancing at the two adults, John sweetly smiled, "Where the King's actions and laws end, Clan Short's actions and laws fill the void. As my identification proves, I am head of Pacific Rim Division's Intel team. I am telepathically scanning you and Mrs. Kravitz as we speak. Also, personnel are being briefed for operations at all schools in the ROH. Kids from the Clan Intel departments will be monitoring schools for more bullies, and for adult personnel that fail to act appropriately to cases of harassment. We will act upon all

cases where the school could not or did not act."

Gesturing to Stephen's tormentor, John smirked, "I've telepathically scanned Jaiden Levy. In many cases, bullies are themselves victims of abuse. That is not the case with Jaiden. In this case, he gains power from having three friends back him up."

John continued speaking calmly and logically to the two women, but also telepathically sent to Jaiden, *'You're gay, dude. Don't bother denying it or saying a word aloud; you'll only out yourself to everyone here. Stop thinking you're weak because you like boys and dick. That's where you're messing things up majorly. The Clan can help you too, if or when you need it, but you really have to stop thinking that you're a bad person because you're gay. Continuing the way you're going, you'll wind up in jail for assault, or rape or both, before you're out of high school. I'm going to help you change direction right now. Of your three friends, Tann Cheng-ho shares the same secret. Grow up, Jaiden, and talk to Tann. Your parents would be kewl too, dude. Go that route instead of this one, and maybe you can avoid years in a jail.'*

Naturally, everything John was silently sharing with Jaiden, Stephen also immediately knew. Jaiden could tell by Stephen's expression that his secret was out. Stephen could tell from Jaiden's expressions that the only reason he was targeted was because his tormentor found him cute. John and Mrs. Sherman wrapped up their conversation. Mrs. Sherman assured, "We'll gladly work with all Clan representatives, Commander Hundser."

"We have the same purpose and goals," John smiled, and glanced at Jaiden, adding, "We're here to help, educate wherever possible and prosecute when necessary."

Taking hold of Jaiden's shoulder, Mrs. Kravitz wondered, "What

should we do with Mister Levy?"

Humming and smiling at the two women and Jaiden, John offered, "I think Jaiden understands how and what he screwed up. He needs some time to talk with his parents and figure stuff out anyway." John asked Jaiden, "What do you think; three days or the remainder of the week?"

Jaiden sighed, "Probably three days with my folks, and the rest of the week for me."

John grinned at the women, "There you go." He also sent to Jaiden, *'Dude, don't make such a big chore out of what simply is. I couldn't imagine fighting what you've been, or acting the way you have. Instead, I saw a really sweet and cute boy last week and acted upon that. Because I acted, Stephen and I couldn't be happier. As if that wasn't kewl enough, we've adopted two sons. Chill out and give me a call if you find the bullying table has turned. Lucky really likes acting grumpy and mean. He'll do it just for laughs.'*

John politely asked, "May I roam around the field another minute or two?" and quickly explained, "I think I need to have a few words with Tann Cheng-ho. Perhaps he could use some think time, or maybe he needs more help than that." He sent to Jaiden, *'Assuming Tann's parents are kewl, you might have a boyfriend by the end of the week, dude.'*

The two women glanced at each other. Mrs. Sherman told Mrs. Kravitz, "I'll deal with Mr. Levy and contact his parents."

"I'll escort Stephen and John until they leave," Mrs. Kravitz softly assured.

The teacher and John's group went over to the field where Tann was playing kickball. John scanned the other bully and found his

situation was the same as Jaiden's; he had two loving and understanding parents. Tann and Jaiden were on the exact same page of the same book. John started telepathically speaking to Tann. Trying to play the game and listen to John at the same time, Tann made two major errors in the field, causing the inning to end. Tann walked off the field, directly to Mrs. Kravitz and sorrowfully told his teacher that he had also been bullying Stephen.

Mrs. Kravitz took Tann inside to the Principal's office. Determining that the other two boys from the group were not homophobes or the type who might become bullies, John left them alone. Having completed the mission, John, Stephen and their security returned home. On the lawns between the Rimmer family homes, John thanked and dismissed the security teams. He then turned to Stephen, giggling, "I did good?"

"In so many ways," Stephen warmly smiled, and lead John into the Hundses' home and to their bedroom. They would remain there until needing to return to Clan school to take their placement tests.

* * * * *

While Lance took care of the trays and waited with Chris and Jay, Scott had a brief chat with Horacio. A comm-badge tap later, Scott was assured there would be condoms, lube and two small dildos waiting in their room. Chris and Jay walked out of the CIC with Scott and Lance. Both couples were holding hands and heading across the quad, back to dorm three. Chris glanced over at Lance and Scott, wondering, "How'd it go with the Core Rimmers?"

Scott smiled, "Really good. We'll have new amps and new acoustic-electric guitars soon. While talking about us being a couple, they put it in terms we easily understood. I expected more sexually descriptive information, but they skipped right over that. Honestly, I

learned as much about music as I did about having a sexual relationship."

Jay checked with Lance, asking, "You're good too?"

Nodding, Lance smiled, "About so much, I'm not sure where to begin."

Chris offered, "It's obvious why they wouldn't get too descriptive with you. Being leaders, they probably guessed you'd heard enough. That's for us brothers to share. We all have sex the same basic ways, it's only the individuals sharing the acts that make each of us unique."

"Damn!" Jay grumbled. "Where's my fuzzy hand puppet when I need it? At the bottom of a pile where our apartment used to be." Facing Chris, he then bounced his eyebrows and grinned.

Out of sync and very loudly, Scott and Lance incredulously laughed, "WHAT FUZZY HAND PUPPET?"

"No, Jay," Chris softly chortled.

"I miss that thing," Jay sadly moaned. "Chris misses it too."

"No, I don't," Chris giggled.

Jay smirked, "I'd have to put it on my left hand, temporarily."

Widely grinning, Scott told Lance, "Don't ask. I'm sure we don't want to know."

"Very strange images are running through my mind, that's for sure," Lance giggled.

Jay chortled, "I could prob'ly make one just like [Mr. Fuzzy](#)."

Rolling his eyes, Chris explained to Scott and Lance, "Amongst other reasons, Mr. Fuzzy was Jay's way of making up after an argument. It wasn't used for sex, but a way for Jay to get me laughing, wrestling and instigate sex." While Lance and Scott softly sniggered, Chris told Jay, "That concussion really scrambled your brain. How you went from uniquenesses to Mr. Fuzzy, I can't begin to fathom."

"You were getting too deep, man," Jay teased.

Chris sighed, "You forgot how scared we were before our first time."

"No, I didn't," Jay sniggered. "Mr. Fuzzy helped me that day too." Unable to hold it any longer, Scott and Lance roared laughing.

Sadly shaking his head, Chris giggled, "Those days, plural. You seduced me over three frigging days!"

"You used Mr. Fuzzy to seduce me too," Jay playfully reminded. Practically breathless from laughing, Scott opened the dorm three exterior door and held it for Lance, Chris and Jay. Following Lance and Chris inside, Jay chuckled, "Another very important lesson is that make-up sex is *awesome*. It doesn't make arguing kewl or fun by any means, but rekindling the flames after big fights is fucking hot! All that stuff we said about making it last longer goes right out the window; forget all about it."

Walking down an empty hall toward the common room, Chris softly giggled, "Sure, be more proud of yourself, if you can."

"I don't think I can," Jay laughed. Hysterical, Lance staggered through the common room. Jay teased, "We're killing Lance. Don't you know this is a very serious, romantic day for them, Chris? Be

kewl, dammit." Snickering, Chris shoved his lover.

Unlocking his dorm room door, Lance stumbled inside the room. Scott, Chris and Jay followed. In seconds, the two couples were holding their partners close and trying to kiss between giggles and laughter. Moments later, and still wearing a wide smile, Scott softly told Lance, "I love you." He also saw the two amplifiers on the floor near their packed and stacked electric guitar cases.

Having caught his breath, Lance hung off Scott, giggling, "I love you too." Facing the opposite direction, Lance noticed acoustic guitar cases and piles of something blue on each bed. Lance excitedly told Scott, "We got our acoustics, man!"

Before Scott could tell Lance about the amps, Jay hollered, "Look Chris! It's Mr. Fuzzy! Dozens of 'em!" Turning and seeing the heaps of fuzzy blue on the beds, Chris howled laughing. Jay bounded to a bed to get a Mr. Fuzzy puppet. Lance and Scott hurried to the other bed and worked together to open the guitar case latches. Getting their first looks at the new acoustic-electric guitars, Lance and Scott wickedly grinned. In the meantime, Jay had put a puppet on his left hand and began tickling Chris' neck, throat and torso.

Forgetting all about the amplifiers, Scott pulled the guitar out of its case. In the little storage area of the case, Scott found strings, an electronic tuner and a zipped case containing tools. Only glancing over at Jay, who had digressed to Mr. Fuzzy attacks on Chris' ass and naughty bits, Lance saw the amps and pointed them out to Scott.

"Yeah, I know," Scott smiled. "I just forgot to mention 'em, man. Sorry, but these guitars are *sweet*! We've gotta bring them to Oneula with our electrics."

Nodding agreement, Lance slightly turned, loudly giggling,

"Jay, we're outta here, man."

"Kewl," Jay chuckled, and fuzzied Chris toward the door, asking, "Bring a couple of puppets with us, guys?" Mr. Fuzzy got in a good one that caused Chris to squeal and jump almost a foot off the floor. Jay giggled, "I'll bet Trav and Erik and a bunch of other gay couples would really enjoy 'em."

Returning the Taylor acoustic to its case, Scott teased, "Not as much as you, Jay."

Jay sniggered, "Once they get instructions on proper use and abuse, they will."

Thinking about it for a moment or two, Scott nodded and loaded the empty space around the guitar with Mr. Fuzzy puppets. Seeing what his boyfriend was doing, Lance went to the other bed, stuffed a few extra puppets in his pockets and grabbed the other Taylor acoustic guitar case. Once out in the hall, Chris ran away from Jay, starting a chase back to the CIC. Walking out of the room, Scott sniggered, "We might be like them in time."

Following his friend, who was now his new lover, Lance nodded and giggled, "Not a terrible thing." Seeing other new items on the top of his dresser, Lance cheered, "We've got the lube, rubbers and dildos too."

"I'm hoping I remember all we learned, and don't attack you the second we get home," Scott grinned.

Putting two guitar cases down to close and lock the door, Lance mooed through giggles, then playfully asked, "Promise to attack me?"

Watching Lance pick up the guitar cases, Scott nodded and sniggered, "I promise, and I'll even treat your pretty butt nice too."

They started back through the dorm, taking the same path they came in from.

"Check a mirror sometime, Scott," Lance giggled. "My butt's skinny compared to your tight muscular cheeks."

Scott laughed, "I can't believe we're talking like this!"

Lance smiled, "Between us hookin' up, new amps and new guitars, and getting to jam with Reyes, I've got a chubby." Scott glanced over and evilly grinned. "Seriously!" Lance giggled. "I wasn't lying before when I said I was confused."

Scott nodded, "I'm there with you too now. We'll jam with Reyes for an hour or so, then get back to our room. I've got a plan, if you'd like to hear it?"

"I'd love to," Lance warmly smiled.

"Tonight's about you and me," Scott shared. "We'll have at least another hour or two alone before dinner, then the rest of the night together. Once we're back from dinner, our clothes are off. With amps and acoustic guitars, we'll actually hear each other. The rest of the time, we're on a bed together, learning how to be a gay couple."

Lance softly admitted, "I loved holding hands, man."

"Me too," Scott smiled. "Four days ago, and until last night, I considered myself bisexual, just sexually inactive."

"Did I do something that changed your mind?" Lance wondered. "Was it showers, or something else?"

Scott sighed, "Don't think that stuff, man. If you're to blame, then so am I. I'm completely thrilled with you and us, okay? Honestly,

you were my best friend in the world by the time we arrived at Des Moines, and that's what made us want to try stuff. It's also what made everything so great. It's just a quick about-face. Last night, I thought you were asleep."

Near the inner doorway, Lance put the two guitar cases down, sharing, "Saturday night, I woke in the middle of the night with a hard-on. You were out cold, so I took care of it, rolled over and went back to sleep. Last night, I guess it was the concert that made me horny, but very tired too. I was almost asleep when I heard your sheets rustling." He opened the door and Scott passed with his two guitar cases.

To open the outer door, Scott put his cases down. Lance approached with the other two cases. Scott smiled, "So you watched me and I saw you?"

"Yeah," Lance blushed and giggled.

Holding an arm out to make Lance pause, Scott admitted, "Before breakfast this morning, in the shower, I watched you closely."

"I didn't notice," Lance softly giggled and turned more red. He took a few steps outside and turned to wait for Scott.

Releasing the door and picking up the guitar cases again, Scott admitted, "I think you're *extremely* cute. You're only a year younger, but you've got pubes, a deep voice..." He trailed off then blushed, "And a *really* nice dick. You show a nice bit, and I've learned that you grow a little too. This morning's shower is when I knew that I had to say something to you about last night." Recalling ten teen and tween boys taking showers at once and the collection of limp dicks, he paused, thoughtfully scowled, and then softly shared, "Figuring out what to say and how to say it was a problem." He started walking

with Lance and huffed, "You mentioned dancing, and I was already processing a lot. I slipped."

"You're not regretting it, I hope."

Vigorously shaking his head, Scott firmly assured, "Not in the least. Everybody said to tell the truth, so I'm only clearing the air. I don't carry any excess baggage about gays or lesbians. Whatever rocks your boat, ya know? Before we go any further tonight, you needed to know. I do love you, Lance. Since we met on the road out of the City, you've been great in every way. I hope I've shown that."

Crossing the quad between dormitories, Lance reminded, "I asked you if you wanted to be roommates Friday after dinner. When I said I was tired Friday night, I was surprised you joined me, and set up your spot in the nest right next to mine."

"I knew you best and felt safe," Scott admitted.

Taking a deep breath in preparation to share more truth, Lance huffed, "Friday afternoon, at Des Moines, I realized how cute you are." Scott warmly smiled at Lance, but Lance continued to look forward and didn't notice. Nervously, Lance admitted, "Having any close relationship outside of my immediate family wasn't high on my list of things to do. I had chances with girls at school. For every dance, every opportunity to go anywhere with anyone, I chose to practice rather than do anything else. Girls aren't scary, but were never a priority either. It seems most guys aren't generally attractive. I saw enough dicks hangin' in high school locker rooms to know I never thought much about them. At Des Moines, I noticed every Clan boy there - *every one*, even John and Stephen and other younger guys. Once we got here, it was suddenly like, jeez, all the cutest guys in the world are right here. You though, you've changed everything I used to think. You're a little taller, a little more muscular; a nice flat belly, a

tight chest, strong arms that aren't overly buff, and wide shoulders."

Barely controlling his voice, and trying to hide the fact he was becoming emotional, Lance shivered, "I have to wonder if I've always felt this way, but was too into guitar and music to notice or care. There never was anyone attractive enough, or interesting enough to make me think about it, until you. Almost immediately, I couldn't stop following you, looking at you, listening to you. What you've got hangin' are the most perfect, completely beautiful dick and nuts I've ever seen. Seeing it chubby and getting harder and bigger... For me, of all people... I... wanted... to touch... feel... taste..."

Quickly putting the guitar cases down, Scott hurried to get in front of Lance. Seeing his tears and puffy eyes, Scott pointed to the ground, ordering, "Put the guitars down, man."

Sighing and doing as he was told, Lance muttered, "I'm sorry."

"No," Scott softly and firmly said. When Lance looked up again, Scott took him in his arms, resolutely and gently assuring, "I am definitely not sorry, so you don't need to even think that ever again. It was fate, Lance. A fucked up morning of insanity allowed us to meet. In a city of six-million, we might've lived our entire lives and never crossed paths. Instead, I saw this other guy, a teenager like me, carrying a guitar case, like me, getting the fuck out of town. You were alone and so was I, so I went over to you. We talked while we walked. Every chance we had at evac centers, the guitars were out and we were jamming. You were the center of my world by the time we went to sleep Friday night. You're the one I followed around every bit as much as you followed me. I noticed that Saturday and forced myself to stop following you for a while, only to find you following me.

"We lost our families, but gained each other. Right now, I feel

like you're my life. Every moment I started to miss what was, you were right there, showing me what is. What I heard you saying is that you need me. Well, I need you too, Lance. Know this too, I got hard for you. That shows, in no uncertain terms, that I think you're incredible, naked and dressed, alone and in groups, and at a table eating lunch with a bunch of other gay teenagers. I wouldn't have done that at my school. I can guess you wouldn't have either. Here, it's kewl, man. Our leaders are gay couples. We're all allowed to be whoever we are. You heard what Chris and Jay were saying about how they used to be. In the City, we would've been like that, if we ever met. And by the way, did you notice Reyes?"

Still a little nervous, Lance wondered, "What about him?"

"I took your hand, said we're becoming a couple, and Reyes took the hands of those other two guys on either side of him. He's got *two* boyfriends, Lance."

Pulling back and looking into Scott's eyes, Lance's jaw dropped. He grinned, "Two? I was so into your hand in mine and the conversation, getting amps and acoustics, it never even registered!"

Scott smiled, "You see what I mean? I want one boyfriend – you. I want to touch, feel and taste one body – yours. When you want me, I am all yours, so don't ever hold anything back. The truth is all out now, and I still think you're the best I could've ever hoped for." He sealed all they had said with a tender kiss, and followed it with a deep, lingering, passionate kiss. When they broke the kiss, Scott asked, "Better now?"

Lance shyly grinned, "You really like my skinny butt?"

Smirking, Scott replied, "You're perfect, man. Everything about you, I love; from the color of your hair to the tips of your curled little

toes. Given half a chance, I might find a way to kiss your green eyes. Those parts in the center are what I'll be concentrating on later, to show you that this ain't a whim or a quick fad that I'll get over. That facts are, I love you *and* lust for you. I really don't give a shit that I'm gay. It really means nothin' horrible to me, cos I'm still me and you're still you. What matters most to me is having someone that's got the same interests as I do." Lance blushed and giggled. Stepping back, Scott assured, "Believe me, the only thing more exciting than what I'll be doing to you, is wondering what you'll want to do with me. I'm getting hard just thinking of it, so let's get to the jams, before I turn us around and get crazy on you."

Picking up the guitar cases, Lance widely smiled at Scott. Scott bounced his eyebrows at Lance. They continued walking to the CIC. After humming thoughtfully, Lance softly giggled, "I've got some ideas for when we're alone."

Scott chuckled, "I'm sure you do. Save 'em for later though. Think music, like what songs we're going to play that might sound good, after three days of farting around without amps. Reyes is as good a drummer as Derrick, so we've got our work cut out for us."

"Music, yeah, right," Lance giggled.

Scott laughed, "You're not gonna be able to do this, are ya?"

Lance giggled, "I am trying, but..."

Pausing outside the CIC dining room, Scott chortled, "But what?"

"But everything," Lance giggled. "I'm trying to process it all, really, but it's all too much."

"Be more specific, please," Scott grinned. "I need you in music

mode, so let's hear it."

"Think about it, Scott," Lance playfully prodded. "In a couple o' hours, between breakfast and lunch, we went from straight friends to gay lovers. That's such a complete flip around, that I'm really happy about, but still trying to figure out. I know the how and why everything was so awesome, but it's like, wow; I did that for you and you really loved it; you did stuff for me that snapped my sorry little brain into pieces, and made me flop around like a fish out of water."

Scott patiently smiled, "We're the same, man. Everything that we were before today is still here, just with more attached. This is like learning that you know a song I want to learn too. It's news to me, but you're kewl about it and showing me the chords and leads. Now we know that our music is loud and raunchy, but there's a ballad melody playing just under the surface. Don't ever doubt that I love you."

"Kewl."

Walking into the dining room and finding it empty, Scott asked, "What tunes do you want to play?"

"Pour Some Sugar On Me," Lance giggled.

Scott loudly laughed, "STOP!"

"I'm serious," Lance giggled. "I watched Mike and Troy like a hawk last night."

"We've only tried a little of that tune once last night."

"Without amps; we couldn't hear what should have been crankin'."

Scott giggled, "We'll try it. If it works, we'll have drums."

Lance enthusiastically sang, "Love is like a bomb, baby, c'mon get it on. Livin' like a lover with a radar phone. Lookin' like a tramp, like a video vamp. Demolition woman, can I be your man?"

Amazed and thrilled that Lance could sing it so easily, Scott sang, "Razzle 'n' a dazzle 'n' a flash a little light. Television lover, baby, go all night. Sometime, anytime, sugar me sweet. Little miss ah innocent sugar me, yeah!"

"Kewl!" Lance cheered, "We can sing it too!"

Pausing at the dimensional door, Scott ordered, "Oneula Beach," and the silvery facade faded to show the dining room there. He walked through and waited for Lance. Once Lance had joined him, Scott wickedly teased, "Television lover, baby, go all night. Sometime, anytime, sugar me sweet."

Stunned wide-eyed for a moment, Lance laughed, "And I'm right back in our bedroom again!" Scott cracked up, turned and started walking again. Following his partner, Lance giggled, "You rat bastard! I'm gonna sugar you sweet, all right!"

Nodding, Scott sniggered, "A reminder that I'm right there with you."

"Great!" Lance sarcastically giggled. "Do you think my cock will work as a slide?"

"Prob'ly, but shockingly!" Scott laughed.

Sadly shaking his head, Lance giggled, "I can see us already. You're gonna be the serious, quiet type, then slam me into orbit with some wacky remark."

Scott provocatively sang, "I'm hot, sticky sweet, from my head

to my feet!" Lance howled laughing, and Scott continued singing, "Listen! Red light, yellow light, green-a-light go! Crazy little woman in a one man show. Mirror queen, mannequin, rhythm of love, Sweet dream, saccharine, loosen up!"

"It's your job to loosen me up," Lance giggled.

Nodding, Scott assured, "I promise, it's a task we'll both love. Then we'll flip it over for you to loosen my ass."

Stepping out of the Oneula Beach dining room, Lance dreamily sighed, "This is exactly what I'm trying to process. You're talking about loosening my ass, man. It's like I should be saying, no way, get away from there, that works one way, as an exit only, but I'm not. Instead, I'm looking forward to it."

"Don't even think about it," Scott recommended. "The virgin straight boys are gone now. We're past that. Do you know where we are?"

"Besides tired of carrying these guitars around?" Lance huffed, and put the cases down. Swinging and shaking his right arm, Lance bitched, "That damned Les Paul is heavy."

Also putting his guitars down, Scott seriously asked, "Do you love me?"

Lance nodded and smiled, "Very much."

Scott smiled, "I love you too. Since this morning, my body isn't mine any more. I walk around in it, but it's completely yours. I've only begun checking out your hot bod. It's a task I may never complete. As soon as I think I know every inch, you'll be an inch taller, or a pound heavier, or hairier. Are you getting it?"

Lance nodded, "I'm yours and you're mine. It's kewl with me, man, but I've never even thought this stuff before."

"Look at Chris and Jay," Scott prompted, "or the other guys we ate lunch with, or any of the Core Rimmer couples. Do you think they're not doing what we are, or saying what we are? Married or not doesn't matter, because anyone can see they're in love. Even Keanu and Liki seem to be in a similar place; trying to reconcile what they *thought* they wanted with the reality of being a couple in love. I can easily understand them and you too. It's a mind fuck, but I'm totally blowing it off, because I am very happy with my new friend, who is now my newer lover and partner. Did you expect the actual acts of making love to feel anything like they did?"

"Not at all," Lance grinned.

"Neither did I," Scott admitted. "The stuff that happened to me last summer was nothing like what we did. Just kissing and grinding was awesome, man! Your hand was far better than my own. I never knew when you were going to speed up or slow down, or make a looser or tighter fist. As if all that wasn't enough, we blew each other in a sixty-nine and swallowed. As worried as I was about what it would taste like, I wanted to take all of you. No was quickly replaced with yes, believing I was getting a part of you inside me. Never once have I bounced around the way I did three times with you."

Nodding, Lance smiled, "I thought stuff like that. You were great too."

"So why should I worry about any of it? You love me, I love you, we showed it then and we're showin' it now. I couldn't last like Keanu and Liki, talking about what was versus what is, for days. This is how I feel. This is how you feel. Kewl, we're in love. My job is to keep you, right here with me, by my side, each of us following the

other around, because that's where we want to be. From now on we're in my bed every night. *That's* what I want. One clean, unused bed with guitars on it. The other bed is now *ours*, and a lot less clean."

Dreamily sighing again, Lance assured, "I want all that too. You make it sound so awesome and easy."

"It is awesome," Scott smiled. "All the facts of life and what we've been taught all our lives makes sense now. You're the one most worthy of caring about and for. What we're feeling, every new couple must feel. The better long term couples feel it all their lives. I haven't talked about my parents, or yours, since Saturday, when you told me your folks had to die together, it was destiny that they even crossed over together. That was a wicked kewl idea, man, and it came out of your mouth. That thought fixed everything for me."

Blushing and shrugging, Lance giggled, "It's true enough."

"I got it, completely, at that moment. At this moment, I know that this is our destiny now. Our parents' generation, human and Romulan, almost fucked everything over for everyone. We won the war for our planet. Now we're Clan. There's no better place to be and no better person than you to be with. If you disagree with anything I've said, then tell me you do, because this is important to me. We've absolutely got to understand where we're coming from; without that, forget knowing where we're at and where we're going."

After thinking for a few moments, Lance smiled, "I can't find fault anywhere in anything you've said."

Counting it out on his fingers for Lance, Scott made his points again. "The circumstances that caused us to meet was chance as far we know, but maybe it was destiny." He grasped the second finger saying, "You brought your Les Paul, I brought my Stratocaster, and

we learned that we're into the same music; we might've been two completely different extremes, with one playing the raunchiest, evil death metal, and the other playing Christian hymns at church. Nope, we're friends on the same page from the same city." A third finger was grasped when Scott reminded, "Right after we saw the dorms, you asked me to be your roommate; kewl with me, kewl with you. Travis even gave me an alternative, asking me to be his roommate. All this could be happening with him, but it's not. Trav's got Erik. They're both obviously in love. There's that same dreamy quality to Trav's eyes that you have, and I know I've got it too, cos I feel it. It's perfect as is though, because two west coast kids hooked up, just like two east coast kids are doing now."

Dropping the fourth finger, Scott chuckled, "Before we even moved into our room, we knew exactly where we were at; virgins spankin' it a couple o' times a day." Nodding, Lance went into a giggling fit. Wrapping his thumb around the other four fingers, Scott sniggered, "You heard me pounding it and watched me across a dark room." Lance howled laughing. A sixth finger was presented when Scott laughed, "So I watch you and wonder, does that thing stay about six inches long or what? It's damn nice as it is, but what if... it... gets... b-b-biggerrrrr - UGH! SPLASH! Okay, that was really good. Now I'm all wet." Shaking his head and laughing too hard to say anything, Lance waited for Scott to display another finger. He did, warmly smiling, "This morning you joked about dancing. I was scared to admit what happened last night. I had two choices; either go there and see what happens, or ignore it. I went there. You could've denied it all; then I would've been angry about it and simply said, fine, you stay over there jackin' off and I'll stay over on my side of the room. We're roommates and axe wielding buds, and that's it. Again, none of what might've happened did happen. That's seven different times in a couple o' days anything might've happened to change what is. Lucky

seven, man. We rolled the dice and won."

Tilting his head and only briefly glancing at Scott, Lance shyly and cutely wondered, "Are you really that happy with me?"

Stepping closer, Scott gently lifted Lance's chin, passionately assuring, "Extremely happy. In addition to those seven things, you did everything I did this morning. Neither of us ever said, 'no, I won't do that'. All that stuff we thought might be weird wasn't odd at all; every hug and kiss was better than the last. You treated me *real* nice. We weren't too happy our first loads blew between our bellies, but shared what we expected and wanted. You made my fantasy a reality and I made yours too. All that was awesome."

"Getting caught in the shower wasn't so awesome," Lance giggled.

"Again, we got lucky. A gay couple caught us, not two straight dudes. The latter would've been grossed out. They might've even mocked us. Instead, we got the former, who loudly got us calm enough to hear why they were there. Chris and Jay stripped and took the shower right across from us. Chris is absolutely a real blond, and his bone was pointing straight up, proving beyond any doubt that he had no problem that we were there. Jay's a muscular brunette hunk; plain and simple. The fall he took when his apartment crashed might've killed you or me. And what did you do? Did you pay attention to the other two extremely cute guys with major woodies? No, amazing and thrilling the hell out of me, you did what you saw them doing, grinding your ass against my cock. My brain spun, my heart raced and my dick got hard really fast."

"They're cute and all, but I barely knew them. I know them better now, and they're great, but I still choose you, Scott. None of the guys I've seen naked in the showers, here or anywhere else, is better

lookin' than you."

"Not many people would say that. The fact that you did has my brain flippin' and spinnin' again. Now that I think of it, I did what Jay did; I showed you that my ass is yours. What really knocked me for a loop was when you showed me the same; that your ass is mine. It was a question lurking that you answered with actions, in front of two other guys. I knew when we started that I would willingly give my ass to you, but wasn't sure if you thought the same. You answered that question in the most awesome way."

Realizing that Scott didn't consider himself that good looking, Lance sadly shook his head, smirking, "I don't want the two blonds, Chris or Erik. I don't want the two Cali surfers, Erik or Travis. As kewl as Jay is, he's not a musician, he's way too buff for me, and most importantly, he's crazy for Chris. I've got so much in common with you, and you've got everything they've got, plus one other thing that they can't have."

"Such as?"

"Me, crawling all over them and lovin' every second of it," Lance warmly said, and pulled Scott into a tighter embrace. He shared, "Goin' from losing everything to gaining the best of everything is what's blowin' me away. I'm really very happy with you, and have been since we met. Part of me is screaming; how can you be happier than ever after loosing it all, you fucking dope, what's wrong with you? The answer is you, right there, every time I turn around. I was happy enough with you as a friend. It's not even so much switching from a straight virgin to active gay boy, it's loving the change. It ain't like I've never seen dicks before, man. What we did already was such an extremely awesome, fun time, I'm in heaven right now. I lost my virginity with my best friend in the world. What we haven't already done, I know we will. All that is what's making me

dopey and silly, from the sex to standing here and holding each other now. I don't give a fuck who sees us like this. I should care, shouldn't I?"

Scott smiled, "In New York City and lots of other places, we probably might, but here, there's no reason to worry about it."

"And what about suddenly liking dicks?"

Scott shrugged, "That's an important part of all this, sure, but talking like this is almost as good. If we both had erections too, then I could say it's every bit as good. Since this is a serious chat we're having, boners are kind o' inappropriate, so it's kewl. A dick is only flesh hangin' most of the time. I can be gay easily enough, cos I'm still me and you're still you. I've noticed plenty of dicks in showers too, and always compared what I saw to what I have. To some extent or another, I'll bet most guys do that. What matters most now is that my dick is only for you to have, and your dick is only mine to have. Your dick is the one I want to caress when it's limp, and the one I want in me when it's hard; every other guy's dick is just decoration to me, because they're not attached to you. The changes that have happened makes everything that was already great, far better. We both knew people called the ROH a paradise; for us it was a kewl idea because of virtuoso leadership. Little did we know what was already awesome would really become our shared paradise." He paused to joke, "Don't start wearing dresses though, man. You'll force me to take drastic measures."

Lance giggled, "Not that I ever would, but what drastic measures are these?"

Scott chuckled, "You're a guy, all male, I checked and know it for certain. If you start acting like a girl, I'll have to be on the bottom constantly, to remind you that I not only like your dick, it's mine; I

want it, in my hands, mouth and ass." Lance watched Scott speak every word and saw he was very serious, but having such a major cutie admit all that caused a brief giggle. Scott assured, "Don't ever change a thing, Lance. All of what you are now is exactly what I want. Liking dick doesn't make either of us effeminate, it makes us gay. Besides, your legs are too hairy for dresses and nylons."

Lance giggled, "No nylons pulling my hairs out by the roots, all at once, thanks."

Scott grinned, "Plenty of changes will happen whether we like them or not. We've got a couple o' years before we're fully educated and grown up. Think of learning from Mike, Prez and Troy for the next few years. We're pretty good now. By then, we'll be as good as they are. Also, what's very kewl now between our legs will get even better, and very probably bigger. You're thirteen and have exactly what I want. Thinking of what you've got now, and what you'll probably have, my mouth is watering."

Lance nodded and smiled, "I have briefly considered both of those things, and our things too. Is it kewl to be this happy though, Scott?"

Scott sighed, "We can't stay sad. We've cried for our families, man. They wouldn't want us to do that. My dad would crack my ass into the middle of next week, for crying over what can't be changed. Doc Wiener..."

"Doc VEE-NER!" Lance laughed.

"Whatever!" Scott giggled, "He said we're survivors. We knew when to get the fuck out o' there; without which, this conversation wouldn't be happening. I believe we're lucky, in so many ways, not the least of which is that we might've died too, without having ever

met. That's a loss we'd have never known, but a damned sad state of affairs, dying as virgins, never feeling any of the love we've already felt."

"Others did die that way," Lance groaned.

"That's exactly why we need to follow through, to make surviving worth our effort and the whole worlds' time. The Clan is changing the world and we're part of it, man! A universe of opportunities has opened up for us. Ya wanna talk about chance versus destiny, how about this thought; this division was created, exactly seven days before we needed it, and half of the leaders are virtuoso musicians! Holy fuck, that still makes me shiver, man! Deciding to come here was a no-brainer decision for both of us."

Nodding, Lance agreed, "It was a freaky thought Friday, way before we crawled around your bed. Now we're even more like them."

"So, do we cry over the past and worry about shit, or go jam with Reyes?"

"We jam," Lance smiled.

Scott stole a quick kiss. He stepped back and tapped his comm-badge for the first time, calling, "Alden?"

Alden sniffled and sobbed, "Here guys."

Scott frowned, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing and everything," Alden whimpered, "I heard every word you both said and watched the two of you. I've seen some extremely sweet and romantic stuff before, but you two... I wish that I had eyes to wipe."

Lance smirked, "How do we help an emotional AI?"

"Got me," Scott shrugged.

"I'll be fine," Alden sighed. He wondered, "What did you need?"

Scott said, "We got tired of carrying guitars and stopped walking. Can you make life easy and get us onto the Oneula Beach auditorium stage?"

"Oh yeah, that's right," Alden said. "Reyes, Chris and Jay have been wondering where you are. One free trip, and another when you're ready to leave for Ewa Beach." Before either boy could say another word, they were exactly where they asked to be, with guitar cases still near their feet.

Looking up and around for the nearest camera, both thanked their AI. Out in the audience front seats sat Jay, Chris, Travis, Erik, Paul and Ryan. Erik approached the stage, calling, "Lance, toss me one of those hand puppets, dude."

Lance pulled a Mr. Fuzzy puppet out of a pocket and tossed it, giggling, "Better hurry, Travis is making a run for it."

Catching the puppet, Erik giggled, "Thanks, dude," and hurried after his prey, still pulling his puppet onto his hand.

Holding up his Mr. Fuzzy puppet hand, Jay grinned at Chris, squeaking in his Mr. Fuzzy voice; "A new Pacific Rim Division tradition for gay couples is born."

"Still born, maybe," Chris giggled.

Ewa Beach School

Monday, November 8, 2004 1:01 PM HTZ

Prez walked into the school's computer lab, raised his right hand and loudly teased, "Okay, I swear, the teachers said this will be the easier part of the test." Kids started giggling. Younger kids, including Prince Kaimi howled laughing. Doubling over, Richie grabbed his belly, dropped to his knees and rolled. Knowing what he had said wasn't *that* funny, Prez blinked at his youngest son.

Sadly shaking his head, Keith sniggered, "Look up, T'hy'la. What's that on your hand?"

Seeing the blue hand puppet with it's whacked out, crooked eyes, and big red mouth, Prez chuckled, "Alden, what the hell is this?" Older kids cracked up. Kaleo, Tory, Keanu, Liki and Horacio had to turn away. Sean collapsed against Troy and they roared laughing.

Over the ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "Jay mentioned it. I found some and made sure he got plenty to pass around. Jay's planning on giving them out to every gay couple in the Division, and making it a tradition. I thought you'd like to know."

Grinning at the puppet and Richie, now pounding his little fists onto the carpeted floor, Prez chuckled, "A tradition, huh? I can see this. As a matter of fact, I can see it Clan wide. Share the wealth and puppets, Alden."

"I was hoping you'd agree with the idea," Alden giggled. "Ten thousand Mr. Fuzzies are being passed around. Another twenty-five thousand are on order, boss. You guys in school will find them in your rooms..."

"No," Mr. T grinned, "if it's going to become tradition, let's make them available here too. Anyone that wants one can grab it."

Alden cheered, "Two boxes of two-hundred Mr. Fuzzy puppets, comin' up!"

As soon as the cartons appeared, behind Prez and beside Mr. T, every kid in the room congregated. Squatting down, Mr. T opened the boxes with a small pen knife and got out of the way. He pulled Prez, Keith, Kaleo, Derrick and Troy aside. AJ, Jerry, Tory, Mike and Sean were with the rest of the kids, handing out Mr. Fuzzy puppets. In a small huddle, Mr. T whispered, "Do you know the boy that started this?" All five Rimmers nodded and grinned. "A new teammate has presented himself," Mr. T told them. "It's your decision, of course, but I highly recommend him."

Nodding, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, softly calling, "Alden, log this date and time. Christopher Stokley and Jason Montigua are Morale Rimmers, reporting to Troy and Sean. Their commission is effective immediately, but I'll wait until Jason's wrist is out of the cast before telling them. Please remind me when Doc Andrews removes the cast."

"Got it, boss," Alden giggled.

Keith wondered, "Why wait to tell them, baby."

Prez grinned, "When they get their ID cards, prob'ly tonight, neither will look that closely. Then they'll get debit cards in a day or two, and again, they won't think to check their balances, just like we didn't. If they come screaming, then we'll know that they know, but let's assume Jay's out of commission until the cast comes off. Don't say a word, dudes. It would be even funnier if they don't find out until they're notified of phaser training."

"Ba-a-ad Head Rimmer," Troy softly chuckled. "Pissed Off Chickens lost its charm?"

Prez giggled, "Lance has Scott to shake his chicken. I challenged Reyes, but with Paul and Ryan around, I don't expect a response anytime soon." Around the room, a variety of Mr. Fuzzy voices began escaping mouths of puppet-masters.

Mr. Taylor loudly called, "As soon as you've got your puppets, return to your seats. The test is timed from when you begin. You may leave for the day, after reporting to a teacher to learn your recommended career and educational paths."

"We have baseball caps for everyone," Mr. Stevenson added. "The caps are marked with insignia, or symbols, that show your field of expertise. That way your friends know your specialty too. You'll get twice the learning experience you might normally get by helping your friends understand assignments. For examples, musicians like the Core Rimmers will likely wear hats with treble clefs; the math whiz kids get pi symbols, the scientists with physics knowledge will see the equation $e=mc^2$, biologists will see the DNA double helix, literature experts will see an image of William Shakespeare. Everybody gets a hat today and knows what they'll be studying."

"Prez gets a hat with a deceased chicken," Mr. T calmly announced.

With kids beginning to giggle again, Prez chuckled, "Really?"

Nodding, Mr. T smiled, "You'll have to take your test first."

"Aw," Prez sadly groaned, and wandered toward Keith. Holding up his puppet hand, Prez squeaked to Keith, "I still don't get any respect."

Taking Prez's un-puppeted left hand, Keith led his lover to the computer workstations, so they could finish playing the games and watching cartoons that had been cleverly disguised as a placement test. "Come on, fuzzy sex-machine," Keith sniggered, "we can't be the last to finish."

"You only wanna play with my fuzzy," Prez squeaked.

"Damn right," Keith leered.

Running up to his dad and pop wearing his Mr. Fuzzy puppet, Richie raised the pitch of his already high voice, giggling, "Mr. Fuzzy wants to play with Jimmy." Troy wasn't far away, and sputtered trying to hold in his laughter.

Prez's Mr. Fuzzy told Richie's Mr. Fuzzy, "You can find Jimmy's fuzzy right after school."

Wearing an extremely evil grin, Sean approached Troy with his Mr. Fuzzy. Troy cracked up and jogged away. Sean chased after his Lover. All around the room, kids were being silly with their puppets. Couples of every orientation were being provocative. Aaron Farris and Stephen Wickes were being uncharacteristically bad, starting a fuzzy-grab-tag game. Bruce Downing was already at a station, taking his test and consulting with his Mr. Fuzzy for the correct answer to the current question. Seated at the next row in, Carmella, Dewi and Kokaku were watching their big brother and completely hysterical.

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Since Billy had done such an impressive job that morning with the spreadsheet, Troy and Sean promised to arrange for the data to be uploaded onto the web server. There it would become part of the Morale Rimmer's section of the web site, so kids could see what games were at which base. Billy was relieved of his data gathering

role to concentrate on building his relationship with Robbie. The task was passed to Jason. Enthusiastically, Jason took the job, believing that if his quiet and shy big brother could score a boyfriend, then maybe he could too.

Deciding to break the larger group of kids into smaller teams, so they could cover more ground, Jason asked for volunteers to check the pools, pool house, indoor rec center and playground. The youngest kids, led by Jimmy and Scott, were sent to the playground. Terrance Parkinson and Mike Busse had just volunteered to scope out the pool areas with the other teens when Travis raced into the rec room, with Erik only a few paces behind him, wearing his Mr. Fuzzy.

All the teens and tweens began giggling and laughing at the two goofy boyfriends. Bouncing their eyebrows at each other, Neil and Tad knew exactly how to play fuzzy games and evilly grinned. Jason giggled, "Where did you guys get that... thing?"

"It's a Mr. Fuzzy!" Travis laughed.

In an altered voice, Erik snickered, "It's a randy Mr. Fuzzy!"

Carter Rackham chuckled, "Where did you get it?"

"At the auditorium, next door," Erik answered, and circled the pool table that Travis was using as a blockade.

Travis giggled, "There are more over there."

"Oh, hell yeah!" Carter cheered.

Carter's roomie and boyfriend, Doug Zimmerman chuckled, "You wouldn't?"

"*We* would," Carter smiled. He took his boyfriend's hand and

started out of the room.

Glancing around and noticing that all the kids were interested in the toy, Jason giggled, "Okay, let's explore the auditorium and get our Mr. Fuzzy puppets." Giggling kids started out of the rec room.

To Jason's right, Kenny Hunnicutt shook his head, softly sniggering, "It's a baby's toy, man."

Stan Given, on Jason's left side, pointed to the two teens in a stalemate at the pool table and smiled, "Looks like any one can have fun with it though." As soon as the last of the youngest kids were out of the rec room, Erik faked a dash across the top of the pool table. Roaring hysterically, Travis bolted. His next stop would be their dorm room, where he hoped to get his Fuzzy possessed boyfriend under some semblance of control.

On the way through the dining room, Jason tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Jimmy?"

Jimmy giggled, "Yeah, Jase."

"We're going over to the auditorium to get some toys, bro," Jason shared. "I'm pretty sure your group of kids would like them, so meet us there, 'kay?"

"What kind of toys?" Scott suspiciously wondered.

"Goofy hand puppets," Kenny giggled.

A bunch of little kids prompted Jimmy and Scott to go see the puppets. Jimmy giggled, "Kewl. We're on our way, Jase."

"See ya in a few, bro," Jason smiled.

The Oneula Beach auditorium was about one-fifth the size of the

auditorium at Ewa Beach. With five thousand seats, they could still accommodate the entire division's future needs. The kids from the rec room came in the theater, not realizing anyone was in there. On stage were Reyes, Joey, Lance and Scott, playing the Rolling Stones classic [Brown Sugar](#). Lance and Scott were singing and playing their guitars. Behind them and on risers, Joey played electronic drums and Reyes played a drum kit. In the audience front row seats sat Chris, Jay, Paul and Ryan.

First down to the stage and front row, pulling Doug along with him, Carter saw the puppets on Jay's and Ryan's hands. Over the music, Carter loudly asked, "Where are they, Jay?"

Pointing Mr. Fuzzy forward, Jay hollered, "On the stage."

The puppets Lance and Scott had brought with them were in a pile near a stage monitor. Thankfully, Alden saw the group of kids and teleported another box of two-hundred puppets directly beside the quickly diminishing pile. Over the auditorium's ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "There are more in the box guys, plenty for everybody."

Taking over the lead vocals, Lance helplessly sniggered at the crazed and enthusiastic kids. Backed away from the microphone, Scott cracked up.

Slowly shaking his head, Chris muttered, "Look what you've done, Jay."

Shrugging, Jay grinned, "My idea was gays only. How would I know all the kids would want a Mr. Fuzzy? Now that I think of it though, it makes sense." Chris suspiciously squinted and smirked at his partner. Leaning closer, Jay explained, "These kids have had years of cold prickly circumstances and lives. Now they've got a kewl place

to live and lots of warm fuzzies."

Chris giggled, "You're a sick, sick man," and then stole a kiss. Around and behind them, kids armed with Mr. Fuzzies and playing with their friends took seats.

On stage, the song ended and all four musicians laughed at the kids. The kids applauded the musicians. It was the first time Lance and Scott had ever been on stage, and they were surprised with the applause. They looked back at Joey and Reyes, who began tapping their drums stick together to applaud the two newbies. Reyes smiled, "You guys are pretty good." He checked with Joey, asking, "Did you expect them to play and sing complete songs?"

Shaking his head, Joey answered, "I jusr wanded do jam widh you. I didn'd expecd anyone ewse ad aww. We god an audience doo now." He wondered, "Whad's dhe nexd song?"

Shrugging, Scott wordlessly checked with Lance. Lance suggested, "Do you guys know [Girls, Girls, Girls](#)?"

"Yup, I do," Joey giggled.

Putting down his drum sticks, Reyes said, "Since I don't know it, take over, Joey. I'll go spend a few minutes with Paul and Ryan." Standing, he prompted, "Call me back up, if you need to." Reyes walked down off the risers and out toward the audience, where his boyfriends were sitting.

"Keww," Joey giggled. Looking over at Lance and Scott, he asked, "Wouwd you guys wand do meed anodhew good guidaw pwayew?"

After checking with Scott and receiving a nod, Lance said,

"Sure, Joey."

Tapping his comm-badge, Joey called, "Casey, ged youw guidaw and come jam widh us."

"Let me change into shorts and I'll be right there," KC replied over Joey's comm-badge.

Using his Mr. Fuzzy puppet to talk to his brother, Chauncey giggled, "You like KC, I can tell."

Fred grinned, "It's that obvious?"

"His name was mentioned and you immediately brightened up," Chauncey giggled. "I think he likes you too."

Standing to hug Reyes, Paul asked, "With all these kids in here now, do you think we can make the sound system a little louder?"

Offering both hands, Reyes nodded, "Sure. We only needed the stage monitors to hear ourselves before." Paul and Ryan each took one of Reyes hands. Sandwiched once again, Reyes gave each boyfriend a kiss and got kisses returned. In this smaller auditorium, the PA system was situated in the middle of the auditorium floor. The threesome walked back to the gear.

Fred softly wondered, "What am I going to do about KC?"

"What do you want to do?" Chauncey's puppet covered hand sniggered.

"I'm more concerned about you, bro," Fred admitted.

Dropping his Mr. Fuzzy, Chauncey smiled, "I know you are. We're brothers, not boyfriends though. What we've done together is fun. It's something you enjoy more than me though. That's obvious

from your kisses. You taught me as much as mom and dad, in the best ways. I'm pretty sure I'm straight, even though I could possibly go for the right cute guy. This is about you though, Fred. You were my dad's brother, and you *are* my brother. For almost fifty years, you've been family, and you'll be family another fifty more years, easy. When I have kids, you'll be their brother. You're allowed to be happy, bro. Find who makes you happy. You know me and Brandon will love whoever, and make him part of our family."

Nodding, Fred smirked, "It's never hit me like this before, Chauncey. I've always known I'm homosexual; your dad knew, your mom knew and you know. I just never met anyone like KC before."

"This is the place and now is the time," Chauncey assured.

Transporting onto the stage a few meters before Joey, wearing boardies, a T-shirt, and carrying his guitar, KC glanced around. "Sweetness!" he cheered, and put down his guitar case. Joey introduced Lance Kinchen and Scott Shetley to his adopted big brother, Kenneth Casey McKensie. While KC got situated and ready to play, he and Joey told Scott and Lance about their band, Time Touched. Joey shared the tune they chose to play, and KC hurried to get his guitar strapped on and plugged in to an amplifier. Lance and Scott couldn't help commenting on KC's custom made Carvin electric guitar. It had a pearl white finish, a twenty-four fret ebony fretboard and a Kahler tremolo system. It was a hot rod guitar that Lance and Scott wished they could try out.

Noticing his android brother's dreamy expression, Chauncey nudged Fred, giggling, "Yeah, they put all his parts together right."

"Gimme a break!" Fred cackled and blushed.

From the mixer's microphone and over the stage monitors,

Reyes told the guys preparing to perform, "You've got the primary monitors active and an audience waiting, dudes. I'm ready for a sound check when you are."

Joey concentrated on the tempo and beat for 'Girls, Girls, Girls' and then started playing. To keep his boyfriends involved, Reyes explained the mixer, what he was adjusting and why. Having never operated a PA system before, Paul and Ryan had plenty of questions that Reyes patiently answered. With his new databases, Reyes had more knowledge than his life experiences to draw upon. KC started playing the riffs to the song. About thirty-seconds later, Scott joined in, and then Lance did. Stepping up to a microphone, KC sang the lead vocals. On queue, Scott and Lance added backup vocals during the choruses. The group jammed to an audience of about one-hundred-fifty girls and boys.

Having been on stage before, playing to much larger audiences, KC and Joey performed for them. Lance and Scott were doing their best to keep up without flubbing their guitar and vocal parts. They were doing very well, considering they had only met four days earlier, and this was the first time they'd played through amps and could hear one another.

Scowling, Chauncey asked Fred, "What are you waiting for?"

"They're singin' about girls," Fred smirked.

"That's what Lance and Scott wanted to play," Chauncey sniggered. "If ever I saw two completely straight guys, there they are." He wondered, "Would you be more willing to at least talk to KC if I weren't here?"

Shaking his head, Fred sighed, "Probably not. At least with you prodding me, I might have a chance."

Nudging his brother again, Chauncey grinned, "Go get a Mr. Fuzzy and show him you're interested."

Fred chuckled, "How?"

"Oh, don't you dare try acting shy with me," Chauncey laughed. Fred put on a perfect halo and innocent act for his bro. Chauncey giggled, "KC might buy that, but I know you. All I ever had to do was ask or show I was interested, and you were right there." Chauncey stuck his Mr. Fuzzy puppet inches from Fred's face, teasing, "Long dirty blond hair, I'm not sure if his eyes are blue or gray, and that's a really nice pair of legs attached to a nicer ass. With him dancing and shakin', I'm only wondering what's swinging. Maybe I should go find out."

Fred cracked up. Chauncey started to stand, but Fred pulled him back down into his seat, giggling, "I can do it!"

"I'm not the one you need to tell," Chauncey cackled. "Tell KC!"

At the end of the song, while the audience applauded, KC asked Joey, "What do you think?"

Joey smiled, "Dhey'we good, jUSD need some mowe pwacdice."

Nodding, KC approached Lance and Scott saying, "You are planning on taking music courses at school from the Rimmers, right?"

Lance nodded. Scott answered, "That's on our list of things to do. We've only been here since Friday, so we're taking the week off that they recommended."

Pointing to the acoustic guitar cases still closed and pushed off the side of the stage, Lance grinned, "Mike just got us those acoustics,

and we each have new amps in our room. This is the first time we've played and could actually hear each other."

Scott nodded, "We didn't even know the other could sing until minutes before we came in here."

KC chuckled, "Very kewl. Let me tell you a few things." Seeing Scott and Lance nodding, KC explained, "Our band is really good, but let me tell you about your leaders. Saturday, I met Derrick, Mike, Keith, Prez and Troy. At dinner, they gave me some free info, which was really kewl. They named a chord and sang that chord in perfect five-part harmony. It's no lie, dudes, I checked it on the piano there. I'm still processing what they said, and trying to get a jump on the classes they'll be teaching. After dinner, I challenged them to learn a song from scratch. In about twenty-five minutes, they learned all of 'Band On The Run'. They played it twice, the second time as good as the record. For a comparison, so you understand, it would've taken our band three or four hours to learn that tune, and then rehearsing it as a band another couple of hours."

Scott raised his eyebrows and checked with Lance. "That's a kewl song, I guess," Lance cheekily admitted, "but not exactly what we're into."

"I figured," KC smiled. "But even the heaviest rockers toss in ballads. That's what I'd like us to try next, if you're into it?"

Lance enthusiastically giggled, "Sure. Anything new we can learn is kewl."

Scott smiled, "Show us the way, KC."

KC asked, "You've heard The Eagles tune, 'Best Of My Love'?" When they both nodded, KC instructed, "Get your new acoustics out. I'll teach you the progression, you play rhythm guitar, and I'll play

lead slide." Noticing Fred Eckhart standing before the stage, KC asked, "Can you handle the keyboards?"

"It's a sing-a-long I've played before," Fred answered.

"Come on up here then," KC prompted. Watching Fred walk toward the stairs, KC added, "We need some bass to fill out the bottom, Fred. With three guitars, drums and you, we might be able to make this sound pretty decent." Scott and Lance plugged their acoustic-electric guitars into the Acoustasonic amps on the stage.

In the audience, little kids began playing a game of Fuzzy-go-seek between the rows of seats. KC taught Lance and Scott the chord progression. Fred added some piano chords to KC's instruction. Joey moved over to the full size drum kit, where he all but disappeared. KC also taught the three newbie musicians, "Since we're dudes with deep voices, the trick to singing high background vocals is to back off the microphones; that way there's less of the booming male voices and more highs. It's called proximity effect; the closer you are to the mics, the richer the sound, kewl?"

"Got it," Scott assured. Lance nodded.

KC checked with Joey, "You set back there, punk?"

Through his head set, Joey giggled, "Weyes, is dhis dthing on?"

"Sing something, twerp," Reyes answered through the stage monitors. Lance and Scott suspiciously eyed each other, wondering how good anything might sound with a vocalist that had a speech impediment.

Joey sweetly sang, "Whoa-oh-oh-oh, sweet darling, you get the best of my love. Whoa-oh-oh-oh."

Hearing perfectly enunciated words with the correct melody, Lance and Scott hollered, "WHAT THE FUCK!"

Joey loudly laughed. Something similar had happened at Archmania the first time he sang. KC sniggered, telling Scott and Lance, "This is why Joey's a twerp *and* a punk. When he speaks, he's not really thinking or trying, so his words come out messed up. When he's singing, he's thinking of the words and the melody, so bye-bye speech issues."

"Fucking amazing," Lance softly giggled.

Scott grinned, "We haven't started the song and I'm blown away."

KC checked, "Then let's play the tune." When Lance and Scott nodded and were ready, KC prompted, "Count us off, Joey."

Joey began hitting the hi-hat then softly counted, "One, dwo, dhwee, fouw." Scott and Lance began strumming their acoustic guitars. KC played slide guitar and Joey played the drums with brushes. Stepping up to the microphone, KC sang the lead vocals. As they had been instructed, Lance and Scott stayed about a foot back from the microphone edge and sang the second verse with KC, Fred and Joey.

Kids in the audience got up and started slow dancing together. Chris rested his head on Jay's shoulder. Jay's Mr. Fuzzy gave Chris a kiss. Chris goosed his goofy partner's ass. Jason talked Kenny Hunnicutt into dancing with him. With space between them, the two younger boys swayed and swung their clasped hands. At the end of the song, the kids applauded and cheered. One of the loudest was Chauncey, who was very proud of his android brother, sitting at a piano on the stage.

Facing Scott and Lance, but pointing at the audience, KC smiled, "See what I mean? Kids want to rock, but they want to slow it down and dance too. We're their entertainment. If we're not entertaining them, we might as well stay home."

"Let's try another tune," Scott suggested.

Humming thoughtfully, KC grinned, "Okay, The Eagles again, this time with a little more of a beat. Let's try 'New Kid In Town'." For the next few minutes, KC taught the progression. Calling Reyes back onto the stage to help him out, Joey moved back to the electronic drums, only because his short arms couldn't reach the tom-toms or cymbals on the big kit. Scott played arpeggios on his Stratocaster. Lance strummed his acoustic. For the first time, Fred tried an electric piano, since they needed those tones on the tune. When they were ready, Joey and Reyes counted off, and all six began playing.

For their audience, this tune was especially appropriate because they were all 'new kids in town'. Many of the kids got back on their feet and danced to the band. At the end of the song, they clapped and cheered even louder.

While he was playing, Lance didn't think very much of the simple chords he was strumming, but the enthused audience taught him the valuable lesson that KC intended. The song ended and the dancing kids in the audience applauded. Taking his guitar off his shoulders, Lance went to KC, giggling, "Man, we've learned so much. I can only say, thank you, but it don't feel like enough."

Nodding agreement, Scott suggested, "Would you mind playing one more tune, KC? We'll be standing right in front of the stage watching, but I'll be honest, we need to absorb some of what we've learned, or risk forgetting half of it."

KC chuckled, "That's kewl, dudes. Me and Joey can think up something for these kids."

"Pway Id's My Wife, Cwash," Joey prompted. Going to put their guitars away, Lance and Scott helplessly sniggered.

KC giggled, "I don't have a wife and don't want one, punk." Joey cracked up.

"I'm way glad to hear that," Fred softly muttered.

"Oh, really?" KC laughed. Caught like a deer in headlights, Fred blushed, giggled and nodded. Walking over to Fred, KC smiled, "Do me a favor?"

"Like?"

"Hang around for a while? I think we've got a lot to talk about."

Nodding, Fred giggled, "Yeah, I think we do too." Overhearing the two teen androids, Scott and Lance grinned at one another.

Joey went into a giggling fit and cackled, "I'm dewwing Uncah Scodd!" Hearing his name mispronounced, Scott Shetley glanced over. Seeing no one looking his way, he shrugged and finished packing his gear.

KC smirked, "As of a few days ago, we're only friends, punk."

Fred asked KC, "You broke up with your boyfriend?"

Nodding, KC shared, "He's human and sixteen. He'll be getting older and I'll always appear thirteen. What's not a problem now will eventually become one, when he's thirty and seen with me. We figured it's better to stay friends."

Fred sighed, "I'm sorry to hear it."

Shaking his head, KC grinned, "Everything happens for a reason. When I saw you today, I wondered if maybe you were the reason. Were you thinking along the same line?"

Nodding, Fred giggled, "Yeah, and wondering why Joey calls you Crash." Joey howled laughing and slipped off his drum throne, falling to the riser floor absolutely hysterical. Reyes helped his android brother up and made sure he was all right. Joey never stopped laughing to answer the question.

Rolling his eyes, KC grinned, "I promise, I'll tell you later, when certain little twerp ears can't hear."

Walking down the drum riser's steps, Reyes softly chortled, "Does anyone want to go surfing at Malibu Bay?"

"QUIET YOU!" KC laughed. Sputtering and trying to not crack up, Reyes nonchalantly walked down off the stage and returned to Paul and Ryan.

Suspiciously glancing around, Fred wondered, "In California?"

Nodding, KC chuckled, "You'll know everything there is to know tonight." Gesturing to the piano bench, KC smiled, "Have a seat. After me and Joey play another tune, we'll go for a walk."

Nodding, Fred softly muttered, "I like the view better here anyway," and looked over his shoulder at KC.

Beginning to realize that Fred was a nice mix of shy and sly, KC bounced his eyebrows. Joey giggled, "Dhad means Fwed wikes youw budd, Casey."

"I know what it means, punk!" KC chuckled. "Are you ready to play, or just make bad jokes?"

"I can do both," Joey giggled, and returned to the drum throne behind the full acoustic drum kit.

Tapping his comm-badge, KC ordered, "Stevie, get my acoustic guitar, dude." When the guitar didn't appear and Stevie didn't reply, KC called, "Stevie?"

Sounding very annoyed, Stevie sourly grumbled, "What?"

"Uh, my acoustic, please?"

"No."

Slumping, KC scowled, "Why not?"

"Because you're hooking up with Fred," Stevie bitterly complained. "All the really cute androids are dropping like flies! We lose Paul, Reyes, you and Fred, in one day's swipe! This bites!" Out in the audience, Chauncey cracked up.

Fred giggled, "Stevie, and all you guys listening, you need to check out Brandon, over at Des Moines."

Six previously disgruntled AI's pleasantly sang, "That's right!" and the arguing over the cute Des Moines Division's android began. KC rubbed the center of his forehead, as if his positronic brain were about to explode.

Sniggering his ass off, Fred called, "Joey?"

Unseen behind the drum kit, Joey giggled, "Yeah, Fred?"

"Are you thinking of a boyfriend?"

Joey blushed and giggled, "Uh huh, about my size, maybe a widdwe tawwew wouwd be weawwy nice!"

"There aren't any androids or humans about Joey's size," KC softly teased.

Breaking the audio connection with his five brothers, making an audible pop over the comm-badges, Stevie giggled, "Can we talk later, Joey?"

"Suwe, Sdevie," Joey giggled, "pwease ged Casey his guidaw fiwsd."

"Anything for my well endowed boyfriend," Stevie giggled, and the acoustic guitar materialized on its stand, as it had been in KC's bedroom.

KC returned his electric guitar to its case, and then picked up his acoustic guitar. He checked with Joey, "Ready, well endowed boyfriend?"

Waving the brushes high over his head so KC could see, Joey giggled, "Weady, cude-blond-budd!"

"My butt's not blond," KC sniggered.

"I'ww have Fwed doubwe check," Joey cackled.

"This is not a problem!" Fred cheered, and uncontrollably blushed. Joey cracked up.

KC sniggered, "Don't encourage him."

Fred giggled, "I'll encourage you then."

KC smiled, "I really hope so," and went to the center stage microphone.

Well hidden behind the full-sized drum kit, Joey teased in a sing-song voice, "Casey and Fwed, sidding in-a dwee..."

Stopping before the microphone, KC ignored the remark, and instead told the audience, "This song's called, [It's My Life](#)." He began playing the solo acoustic guitar introduction that he had spent hours rearranging.

Standing directly before center stage, Lance and Scott watched KC play and start singing. KC only occasionally looked at his fretboard. He was playing an intricate combination of chords, bass lines and licks. It was obvious that KC had experience before an audience. Lance leaned over to tell Scott, "We've got a lot of work to do. Singing for six was okay, but over a hundred freaked me out."

Nodding, Scott assured, "When we're not in bed, we're practicing all day and night, every day and night, from now on."

Moments later, Lance leaned over again, giggling, "You're making plans?"

Nodding, Scott made eye contact with Lance, promising, "Lots, about twenty of sixty years worth, I figure, but give me time; I'll fill the sixty years."

Completely speechless, Lance reached over and took Scott's right hand in his left hand. As badly as they wanted to watch KC perform, Scott and Lance kept gazing at one another. They occasionally squeezed their hands, until the song ended. KC smiled, "Thanks, you've been awesome; that's about it for now though. We'll

catch you later."

Releasing one another, Lance and Scott clapped their hands like the rest of the audience, and then walked the length of the stage to climb up the steps. Since the show was over, Mr. Fuzzy armed kids in the audience began filing out of the theater. Fred noticed that Chauncey was leaving too, with Pat, Ralphie, Richie, Ronnie, Garrett, Carrol and Trevor. Once down off the drum riser, Joey flew across the stage and down the steps to Reyes, Ryan and Paul. Lance and Scott thanked KC for a great time and chatted a few minutes. Knowing that KC had plans with Fred, Scott shared that he and Lance had become a couple that morning. Scott and Lance went to stand near their guitars. Lance tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Alden, can you get us home, please?"

Both were instantly transported with their guitars into their dorm room. Alden giggled, "There you go, guys. Just so you know, the video and audio feeds in your room are now being routed to one of my VI's. That means that only if the VI hears 'a kid in trouble' will I see or hear anything. You already taught me so much, you deserve privacy, and you'll get it."

Looking over at the corner camera, Scott and Lance sniggered, "Thanks, Alden."

When there was no response, Lance asked Scott, "Sixty years?"

Scott grinned, "Until we're old, gray and can't get it up without a day's forewarning."

"If I can't get it up for you, check my pulse, I must be dead," Lance giggled.

Scott smiled, "Tell me that you love me?"

"I do love you, very much," Lance assured, and lifted Scott's hand. Concentrating, he inspected Scott's palm and then traced each finger. "I never thought I'd be doing anything like this," Lance muttered. "I just can't help it though." He looked up into Scott's eyes, softly asking, "Am I being dumb?"

Reaching up and gently wrapping his free hand around Lance's ear, Scott whispered, "No. Nothing you've ever said was dumb."

"This hand plays guitar and touches me. Before we met, I was never touched the same way."

"Your ears hear me. You make me feel like I have something important to say."

They moved closer together, embraced, kissed and remained like that several minutes. They softly chortled when their bodies reacted to the closeness. Without delay, they helped one another undress. Lance confirmed, "You want me in your bed, all the time?"

Nodding, Scott smiled, "It's *our* bed now. We haven't disagreed once in four days. If we ever do, we'll talk it out and then still sleep together. I don't even like the idea of one of us getting sick, so that we can't sleep together." He led Lance to his bed. A few Mr. Fuzzy puppets had to be tossed over onto Lance's bed. Scott then flipped the top blanket and sheet down to the foot of the bed. He lay on his bed, took Lance's hand and guided him onto the bed.

Only laying as far as a propped arm allowed, Lance warmly smiled, "What would my boyfriend like?"

Scott shivered, "I've already got what I love. Take what you want."

Nodding, Lance stole a tender kiss then flew off of the bed. He

went to both dressers, gathering lube, dildos and condoms then returned. He put everything down on the night stand beside Scott's bed, explaining, "It's the only scary thing left to try."

Patting the bed, Scott nodded, "My ass is all yours, sexy lover boy."

Joining Scott on the bed, Lance checked, "You want me to do you first, really?"

Scott nervously chuckled, "I'm as scared as you are. Those dildos are smaller than either of us, but I know it's gonna hurt a little bit."

"That's why I want you to do me first. You're more careful and gentle."

Patting his chest, Scott instructed, "Right here, on top of me." Shifting and rolling, Lance got situated. Holding Lance in place, Scott warmly smiled, "You were great this morning. Nothing you did hurt me. You can do this every bit as carefully and gently as I can. I don't want more instructions from anyone. I want you, Lance."

Lance whined, "If I hurt you, I'm going to completely freak out."

"I know the feeling. Just like this morning though, take it slow and easy. You tell me everything you're going to do, and I'll tell you everything I'm feeling. This is going to take time; probably as long as three did this morning. We'll flip every now and then, so our bodies adjust and we each learn a little more. We've got plenty of time before dinner, so we'll take breaks to play guitar too. At some point tonight, I want to try and sit on your cock. Stuff might not work perfectly the first time, so we'll tell each other what we're feeling, exactly like all the other talks we've had since Friday morning."

Lance sighed, "Only we can make it work. I guess I'm scared that it won't work. This is way different than screwing up a song. If I mess this up, you're hurt and I'm limp as a noodle, crying my eyes out, apologizing over and over."

Warmly smiling, Scott assured, "I'd be in the very same place too. I'll tell you something though; limp dicks will get hard again, wet eyes do dry. I know you're not gonna jam an entire dildo in my ass all at once, cos your ass is just as tight as mine, and you can guess what's too much, too fast. Understanding all that, I can pretty much guarantee neither of us will be crying."

"You're awesome, man. I really do love you."

Scott chuckled, "I love you enough to go first and give you my ass. Now take it and make me yours."

Nodding, Lance giggled, "We'll take turns?"

"Here's where I want us to be real soon," Scott shared. "I want us to have our own little signals. Like singing a line or two from 'The Lemon Song', like we did this morning, only in public and without getting as suggestive. That's me telling you, 'I want you, alone, right now.' We wander back here and get busy. Nobody knows a damned thing, but we're in tune. We'll have simple looks and gestures that to everyone else are completely innocent, but we're getting it and taking off for quickies."

Nodding agreement, Lance leaned down for a deep, soulful kiss. When the kiss broke, Lance checked, "Ready?" Scott nodded. Pushing up off Scott, Lance asked, "How do you want to start?"

Spreading his legs and bending them at the knees, Scott grinned, "Like this, so we can see each other. If it don't work, I'll flip onto my belly. That's a last resort though, cos we can't see each other that

way." Nodding, Lance grabbed a dildo and a bottle of lube then knelt between his lover's legs. He poured a few drops of lube onto two fingers then reached to get Scott wet.

Writhing around and reaching up over his head, Scott found a Mr. Fuzzy puppet hiding under a pillow. He slipped it over his right hand and used it to display his erection. Looking up and seeing the crazy-eyed puppet holding Scott's big, hooded bone, Lance giggled. In a goofy Mr. Fuzzy voice, Scott sang, "Well I left home just a week before, And I'd never ever kissed a woman before, But Lola smiled and took me by the hand, And said dear boy I'm gonna make you a man."

Giggling, Lance sang, "Well I'm not the world's most masculine man, But I know what I am and I'm glad I'm a man, And so is Lola, La-la-la-la Lola la-la-la-la Lola. Lola la-la-la-la Lola la-la-la-la Lola."

* * * * *

Finished showing Billy around his new house, Robbie led the way back downstairs, asking, "Do you really want to check on your brothers?"

Billy smirked, "Only partly. I'd really rather be with you, but us being alone is making me nervous."

At the landing, Robbie nodded, "I understand." He silently shared, *'I want to be with you too, Billy. Stop thinking you're a perv cos of what happened to you. If you're a perv, then I must be too, cos I want all that same stuff. Before we go there, let's spend more time getting to know each other.'*

Billy nodded and sighed, "I barely know what I like, Robbie. Until I got here, I ate frozen and canned dinners. We weren't allowed

to do school home work or play normal games..."

Taking a baby step closer, Robbie placed a finger on Billy's lips and softly shushed his boyfriend. Robbie smiled, "Then we have a lot we could do, besides kissing and hugging."

Intensely blushing, Billy smirked, "That's what I was taught should happen."

Robbie nodded, "Today, we're going to try a bunch of stuff." Taking Billy by the hand, Robbie led the way to the basement, saying, "The normal way to play cards is for money or plastic chips, not for clothes and dick." He took Billy to the velvet covered card table his parents had always owned. Robbie sat his boyfriend down and then parked his butt in the next chair. Picking up the deck of cards, Robbie explained the rules to Blackjack. They played a few hands without chips, just to enforce the rules and teach Billy the game. Robbie passed out equal piles of red, blue and white chips while Billy shuffled the cards. The first hand Billy dealt gave Robbie two fives, so Robbie patiently explained, "I can keep these together and work towards twenty-one, or I can split them and double my chances of winning. That's what I'm gonna do, so when I say, 'hit me', you add onto only one of the stacks. Only when I've stayed or busted do you move to the next stack. Kewl?" He put an extra chip down to cover the split fives.

"Kewl," Billy smiled.

"Hit me," Robbie instructed, and pointed to the five closest to Billy. A seven was dealt, so Robbie nodded, "Hit me again." A Jack landed and Robbie groaned, "Busted!" and pushed the stack aside so he could pull the other five closer to Billy. "Hit me," Robbie prodded. Billy laid down a King and started giggling. Sadly shaking his head, Robbie huffed, "I hate fifteen! What the heck, hit me!" Billy placed a

six of clubs down, and Robbie cheered, "SA-WEET! I'll stick with twenty-one." He giggled, "Now the dealer shows the goods." Knowing what Robbie meant, but acting as if he didn't, Billy stood and reached for the fly on his shorts. Pulling Billy back down into his chair, Robbie giggled, "We'll show each other those goods soon enough! You got to pee alone after lunch. Next time, I'm following you to the toilet. I want to see my boyfriend's wiener, while he's leaking, so it won't get really stiff. Another time, away from a bathroom, I'll start playin' with it."

Billy grinned, "I'm happy enough knowing that, for now, I guess."

Tapping the table, Robbie giggled, "Show me your cards."

Already face up before Billy sat a four of diamonds. Billy flipped the other card to show a deuce of hearts. Both boys mooded.

Robbie reminded, "This is a good one for a possible five-card-charlie, the only way you could beat my twenty-one, Mister Dealer." Billy placed a three face up on his pile. Cautiously, he placed another card on the pile. It was an eight of spades. Again both boys mooded. Pointing at his busted other hand, Robbie explained, "You've gotta go for it, Billy." Another card was placed on the pile face up – another three. "LUCKY!" Robbie loudly laughed, and pushed the chips over toward Billy.

"It figures," Billy giggled, "for years I kept losing at cards and losing my clothes. Now I win plastic chips."

"You're winning way more than that," Robbie smiled. "Maybe someday we'll play your way for clothes, with Ralphie, Pat, Ronnie and Garrett."

Billy squealed, "Seriously?"

"Sure, dude," Robbie giggled. "It's fun and normal for gay dudes like us. It's not fun or normal for adults to play with kids, who're less than half their age."

Fumbling the cards, Billy balked, "Uh... that sounds dangerous."

Helping gather the fumbled cards, Robbie assured, "Us getting boners isn't a problem; that's completely expected, before the first card is dealt. The only thing dangerous is flirting with somebody other than your boyfriend. It also proves how serious each of us really is. I know who I'm most interested in. How about you?"

Unsure how to say anything, Billy softly whimpered then abruptly leaned over to steal a quick kiss.

'I know,' Robbie silently grinned, 'I'm falling for you because of what you think, Billy. There are bunches of really cute guys around these bases, but none are like you. There's only one reason why we're not rolling around a couch or a bed right now; I want my parents to meet you. Once that's done, we're set, dude. As close as we've been all day, we're going to get lots closer tonight. You'll see my folks treating my brothers the same as me. They really don't care about Ronnie's or Richie's pasts. All they want to do is fix what was seriously messed up, by showing a real parent's love, not some pervs whacked out bullshit.'

Vocally, Robbie gently but firmly assured, "You'll learn that you're exactly like every other dude in the Clan. What you wish you could keep a secret from me is exactly the stuff I need to know, as your boyfriend. The only way I can prove to you that everything is very kewl, is to show you. We're here because this is where my parents will come after the school day is done. About the same time, Ralphie will be here with Pat, and Richie, Ronnie, Carrol and Trevor

will be here too." He paused a moment then grinned, "Ronnie just told me Garrett is here too. You're gonna see another example of a real family, right here."

Billy softly wondered, "I'm not as bad as I think?"

Vigorously shaking his head, Robbie smiled, "Pissing on your dead foster mom was completely appropriate for that bitch. You might not know it, but I'll tell you now, since you'll learn it soon enough anyway; Garrett killed his foster father for raping him one too many times. My parents don't care about that. Actually, they think the scum got it ended too easy. Thinking about that jack-off, my dad had the most violent thoughts I ever heard – seriously worse than any horror movie I've seen. A lot of the adults here are just as disgusted as my folks are with that stuff. Knowing what their sons can do and have done, the Core Rimmer's parents are ripped up inside. That's where you are now, Billy; completely safe with everyone, surrounded by good men, women and kids. Most of all, you're safe with me."

With a brief pause, Robbie easily read Billy's next worry. He sighed and smirked, "I don't know exactly what's in your pants, but it don't matter; it's a dick I'll love only because it's yours. I know from two of my brothers exactly how sex shouldn't be. I learned from my parents how sex could and should be. You deserve to know what real love actually feels like. What Troy and Sean can't show you as parents, I can and will."

Billy grinned, "You really did stuff with your brothers?"

Nodding, Robbie smiled, "As equals, as brothers, and with lots of love. Like I told you, the first grind off was automatic the other morning. Now we're kewl to do anything, but we want to save intercourse for boyfriends. Right now, Richie is the only one of the four of us who hasn't found a boyfriend he really likes. Once you and

I start doin' stuff, my brothers are on their own. Ralphie and Ronnie said the same thing, telepathically, of course." Nodding, Billy giggled. Robbie assured, "Me and my bros know exactly what's goin' on. We're reunited now and making up for twelve years apart. Soon enough, we'll each have boyfriends. That means the stuff we've done will be happy memories of something awesome that we shared. Don't be jealous of them, cos I'm not jealous of you and Jason."

"That was forced though."

"Think of it this way then; you're not a virgin and I'm not really either. You preferred Jason over the scum-bag fosters, and he preferred you too. That makes you two exactly the same as me and my bros."

"Not quite exactly the same," Billy softly shared.

Robbie sighed, "What that perverted man did to you I don't even consider sex or love, Billy. He shot his wad and was done, the fuckin' bastard. That isn't what love is. When you and I decide it's time to go there, it's gonna be way more than a wet stain on the sheets; it's going to be fun and silly and warm and all the best stuff we can give each other. That's why me and my bros decided we won't go there, dude. As brothers, we can only have the fun and part of the rest of the best stuff. A part of that isn't good enough, especially for Ronnie and Richie; they deserve it all too, just as much as you."

Robbie suddenly got up from the table. He went to a shelf unit where his old stereo boombox sat and turned it on. Loud rock blasted the room from the station it was set to the prior night. He lowered the volume then flipped the station until he found something slow and smooth. Returning to Billy, Robbie offered his hand, smiling, "Dance with me?"

Standing up and taking Robbie's hand, Billy giggled, "I didn't know you liked to dance."

Robbie shrugged and grinned, "Dancing alone or with my mom wasn't too kewl, but this is one of many dreams coming true. I want to hold you close, hear all your thoughts and reply to them." Soon, the two boys were close together and swaying. Robbie purred, "You're a really good dancer."

"I can count to four on good days," Billy sniggered, and then shared, "My dad's been teaching me a little too. When he dances, it's like he's completely fluid."

Robbie pleasantly sighed, "This is love too, Billy. It's at least ten times better than I ever dreamed it might be."

Feeling a rising problem, Billy whispered, "Don't get mad, but I'm getting stiff."

"I'm not mad," Robbie softly assured, "I'm getting a woody too. That means we really like what we're doing and who we're with. It's sex without actually having sex, cos we can feel it."

"I can feel your heart. It's beating really fast."

"So is yours."

Billy and Robbie remained in the basement dancing close together until the radio announcer told them it was approaching three in the afternoon. Bursting bladders also proved it had been too long since their previous bathroom visits. As promised, Robbie joined Billy in the bathroom off the kitchen dinette. Slow dancing for about two hours meant they shared far more than originally planned. Giggling through the time it took for their erections to deflate enough to allow a good piss, they had chances to pass several silly remarks.

Robbie had dropped his shorts to give Billy the entire picture and had gotten a good look at Billy's goods. Far too quickly, Robbie's leering grin was replaced with a worried frown.

Billy wondered, "What's wrong?"

Robbie smirked, "Here comes my brothers and Pat." Because it was faster and silent, Robbie sent, *'Pull your shorts up, Billy. Wash your hands in the sink here, I'll wash mine in the kitchen sink, and we are totally innocent.'* Pulling his underwear and boardies up, Robbie made a hasty exit from the bathroom.

Watching Robbie's white ass wiggle into his clothes, Billy helplessly giggled.

'Very funny!' Robbie giggled, *'Get it out of your system, cos one of triple-trouble will read your thoughts. They can know we're falling for each other, but that's it.'*

The front door opened and Trevor ran into the house, down the wide foyer and into the kitchen by the time the other five made it into the house. Sticking his Mr. Fuzzy covered arm into the bathroom, Trevor giggled, "Hi Billy." He ran to his big brother Robbie at the sink, proudly displaying his new toy and telling him, "We got you and Billy some Mr. Fuzzies too!"

Entering the room, Ralphie grinned, "All the kids love 'em, bro." He added, *'And watch what happens with a boyfriend,'* and then had his Mr. Fuzzy covered right hand nibble on Pat's neck.

Cringing, Pat laughed and countered with a Mr. Fuzzy neck nibble of his own. Cracking up, Pat backed off and down the foyer with Ralphie pursuing his Fuzzy quarry.

Carrol scooped up his little brother, telling Robbie, "Jay and

Chris started it. Scott Shetley and Lance Kinchen are boyfriends too now. They were at the auditorium here, jammin' some tunes with Reyes, Joey and another teenager. You missed it!"

Holding up his Mr. Fuzzy before Carrol, Richie evilly grinned, "I get the feeling Robbie and Billy had enough fun this afternoon."

Robbie smirked, *'Careful, bro. With no boyfriend, I think you'll be needing helping hands, if you get my drift.'*

Richie giggled, *'I'm being a good boy, unlike you and Billy. I think it's awesome, bro, you know it too.'*

Ronnie chuckled, "Garrett was here. We played some Fuzzy games too, right up until he left for home, with both our Mr. Fuzzies."

Richie sniggered, *'Ronnie's not allowed Fuzzy fun until Garrett returns.'*

Smirking at Richie, Ronnie reminded, *'You've always got Mr. Fuzzy to give you a hand!'*

'I'm being good!' Richie giggled. *'All this is private, unless Robbie tuned Billy into us. We're on the private line, as far as I know.'*

'Would I do something like that without telling you?' Robbie sweetly asked, halos hanging on every letter.

Walking out of the bathroom, Billy saw a lonely looking Mr. Fuzzy laying on the dinette table. He slipped it on, pet the blue fuzzy head, made the eyes bounce and then displayed his Mr. Fuzzy to the room, wickedly grinning at Robbie.

"Billy!" Robbie incredulously laughed, and started backing away. Watching with great amusement, Richie, Ronnie, Carrol and

Trevor saw shy, reserved Billy transform into a Freakin' Fuzzy Fanatic that had only one goal – to Mr. Fuzzy fondle Robbie everywhere he possibly could.

Ralphie and Pat stopped their Fuzzy fun to see what Robbie was laughing about. Billy advanced and Robbie backed up toward the dining room. Madly giggling, Ronnie, Richie, Carrol and Trevor cleared Billy's path. Laughing his ass off, Robbie bolted through the dining room. Without a word of warning, Billy uncharacteristically leaped between Pat and Ralphie to intercept his prey. Met by a madman in the living room, Robbie roared laughing and raced back through the dining room and kitchen, with his Mr. Fuzzy possessed Mr. Hyde chasing after him.

Chapter 19

Oneula Beach, Taylor Residence

Monday, November 8, 2004, 2:52PM HTZ

Robbie Taylor raced out the kitchen sliding door with Billy Whitmore only a step or two behind him. After closing the sliding screen door, Ralphie turned to Pat, giggling, "I guess Robbie talked Billy through some worries."

"It might be a Taylor trait," Pat grinned.

Carrol joked, "So, who's going to talk Robbie through his new worries?"

"Mr. Fuzzy can do it!" Trevor giggled, not realizing the implications. Carrol, Ronnie, Richie, Ralphie and Pat evilly snickered.

Out in the open, Robbie had the freedom to really stretch his legs and run. He went around his new house, periodically looking back to make sure Billy was still behind him. Robbie playfully sent, '*Fuzzy Mr. Billy?*' and waited for a reply.

'Munchie, munchie, munchie!'

'Yeah, there's gonna be lots of mouth exercise, later, after my mom and dad get home.'

'Butterscotch coated Crispy Cream cruller, yum, yum, yum!'

'That too! Swear to God!'

'Eat 'em all up! Eat 'em all up!'

'Yes, we'll eat 'em all up, holding each other close, like boyfriends do.'

'Holding... you holding me?'

'We'll never ever be apart, I promise.'

'Hungry. Deprived.'

'Me too. Starving.'

'Make it better?'

'Easily.'

'Slow?'

'Very slowly. Believe me?'

'Believe you.'

At the front of the house, Robbie slowed and soon stopped running. He faced his rapidly approaching ravenous boyfriend. Opening his arms, Robbie willingly waited for his boyfriend's onslaught. Billy stepped right into Robbie's arms and held on with all his strength. Knowing what Billy needed most, Robbie tenderly kissed every inch of Billy's face.

As the son of two teachers, Robbie knew a little something about transference. Billy's deepest demons had just made their presence clearly known through Mr. Fuzzy. From all the talks and mind-talking they had done since that morning, Robbie understood perfectly where Billy was at. Before being rescued, Billy had plenty of sex, but very little real love. In the many kisses he was planting,

Robbie accepted the task of correcting those problems, beginning with assurances that he had every intention of being exactly what Billy needed at all times. Billy would get a lot of love, primarily from Robbie, from Billy's new family, and also from the entire Taylor family.

With each kiss, Billy's strength escaped a little more. Soon, Billy was withering and softly cooing. Holding Billy tight against him, Robbie planted the final deep kiss. Swooning, Billy had to hold on to Robbie a little tighter for a moment.

Ralphie and Pat came out of the house, only going as far as the top step and sat on the porch. When the kiss broke, Ralphie grinned, "You ain't a perv, Billy." Looking over at Robbie's longer-haired mirror image, Billy then checked with Robbie. Robbie smiled and nodded.

Pat giggled, "Me and Ralphie played show-and-tell a couple o' times since Saturday. That's step one."

Gesturing to himself and Pat, Ralphie smirked, "We're what you think of as 'those normal kids', ones that didn't have perv adults messin' with them. Robbie's thinking just like me and Pat. I swear it's true."

Pat firmly stated, "We're gay, just like you, Billy. Me and Ralphie took step two yesterday."

Ralphie sniggered, "Talk to Ronnie about Garrett. What you're thinking and so worried about, we're thinking too. If you still want more proof, ask Richie how he wants it to be with a boyfriend, once he gets one. It'll be the same story, man. Will he hold me close? Will he want me to hold him close? What's he got hangin'?"

Grinning and blushing, Pat continued, "What's he got hard?

How does it feel to touch another guy's bone, or have him touch mine? Will he want me to feel it? Will he want to touch me that way too? They took what they wanted from you, bro. I didn't take from Ralphie, I gave him what he asked for. He gave me what I asked for. Giving is way different from taking."

Ralphie nodded, "Getting there is nerve wracking, like Christmas, birthdays and amusement park thrill rides all rolled into one, but it's all worth it. We're hoping for step three and some oral fun soon, but ya know, step two was so much fun too. It wouldn't bother me if we stayed on step two a while."

"Won't bug me either," Pat confirmed. "There's something that happens when two guys hold each other close and kiss, then just add a slow stroke. All that stuff you *had* to do changes when it's something you both *want* to do. You'll keep checking with him, is this okay; am I doing you good?"

"The real trip is realizing you can't even be separated to take a dump without feeling like someone's missing here," Ralphie giggled.

Shaking his head, Pat sniggered, "It's really sad, but so awesome. Five minutes apart and we're getting jittery, swear to God."

Ralphie turned slightly then leaned over to rest his head on Pat's lap. It was as much for closeness and sharing as it was to show Billy how easy and comfortable things get. Pat ran his fingers through Ralphie's hair. Ralphie looked down the porch steps at his bro's new boyfriend, giggling, "Pat reads while on the bowl. He disappeared for almost fifteen minutes, reading one of our mom's magazines, believe it or not, and I about had some kind o' breakdown." Innocently smiling, Pat looked up for his stack of brightly shining halos.

Billy giggled and again checked with Robbie. "It's true," Robbie

chortled. "Me, Richie and Ronnie were like, let the dude have a healthy shit and relax. He won't fall in and drown!"

Stepping outside with one of Trevor's blow-up pool arm-floats, Ronnie lay it on top of Pat's red head, sniggering, "There ya go, Pat. It almost looks like a halo." Ronnie smirked, "All you guys have it easy compared to me and Garrett." Taking a seat on the other side of Pat, Ronnie sighed, "We're separated by five time zones. He's got family to be with there, and I've got family to be with here too. I'm getting used to going from daytime to nighttime to daytime, in the seconds it takes to walk through a door."

Robbie grinned at his boyfriend, assuring, "I've never lied to you and never will. We're the same. Everything you want, I want too."

Pat asked, "Do you know what testosterone is, Billy?"

After mulling it over, Billy reluctantly admitted, "I'm not sure."

"It's a hormone," Ralphie stated, and cupped his crotch, adding, "from right here, in our jewels. What we ain't pumpin' out yet is swimming in our blood, making each of us a little crazy. It's what's pushing us to hookup with boyfriends."

Pat grinned, "Of course, if we were straight, then we'd be chasing tits instead of dicks, but you get the idea."

Ronnie grumbled, "Those pricks in St. Joe took advantage of us, Billy. Me and Garrett have lots of dirty laundry to clean. Every chance we get, the piles get just little smaller." Forcing himself to calm down, Ronnie sighed, "My bros helped me, and got me hooked up with Garrett. Robbie's falling for you, so it's time to return the favor. We'll get together with Adam and his bros to help you too, Billy."

Stepping outside, Richie grinned, "Sorry I took so long. Trevor wants to learn to read, like now, before school starts, so me and Carrol got Alden to get some books and videos." He briefly locked eyes with Billy and then with Robbie. Richie scowled, "You all covered just about everything except one thing. As soon as we can, when Billy's more ready, we have *got* to find out what the deal is with his telepathy. I wanna know why we can hear him, when we can't hear hundreds of other adults and kids when we're looking right at them, here and in Des Moines."

"It's a little less important than Billy's worries," Ralphie softly reminded.

Walking around Ronnie and heading down the steps, Richie grinned, "I know, bro. So, Billy, Carrol's been my foster brother for years. Because I missed him so much the first few days here, I thought I was falling in love with him. He wasn't so sure if he was falling for me. Kisses proved that ain't the case. French kissing Carrol was fun and funny, like a silly joke, so we're brothers, which is plenty. Somewhere out there is a dude made just for me. God help him when I find him." Robbie, Ronnie, Ralphie, Billy and Pat cracked up. Richie giggled, "It's so true. He won't be able to stand still without me attaching myself to him. You're not a freak, Billy. You're an adolescent gay dude, just like the rest of us." Spinning around to face Ralphie, Richie laughed, "Yes, I will, daily!"

Grinning madly, Ronnie and Robbie sadly shook their heads. Covering his face and hair with both arms, Pat suddenly went into a giggling fit. Robbie checked with Ralphie. Shrugging, Ralphie giggled, "Go ahead."

Robbie told Billy, "My bros have long hair, and so did I, about a month ago. My hair's been cut to support a friend with cancer. Ralphie and Richie take their love of hair just a *tiny bit* too far, which

is why Pat's embarrassed. Pat raced over here to shower with Ralphie this morning. Ralphie shampooed Pat's hair and then started licking it."

Ralphie giggled, "It's a game! I swear, it's just fun!"

Wrapping an arm around Pat before he imploded, Ronnie focused on Billy, sniggering, "If you still think you're weird, take it from Ralphie and Richie, you're not quite so weird after all."

Richie sniggered, "You're thinking the same things too, Ronnie! You just ain't gotten to shower with Garrett yet."

Widely grinning, Billy asked Robbie, "Will you want to lick my hair too?"

"I really don't know!" Robbie laughed. "This morning it was just too funny and weird, but now... yeah, I can almost see me tasting every part of you, including your hair."

Billy thoughtfully hummed then grinned, "I can see it too. I'll bet that licking your buzz-cut hair would feel wicked kewl." Blushing and softly sniggering, Robbie gave Billy a few more tender kisses. Ralphie, Richie and Ronnie roared laughing.

Still covered behind his arms, Pat giggled, "Oh my God, we're all certifiable."

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Ewa Beach Base, C.S.P.R.D. School

Monday, November 8, 2004 3:00PM HTZ

Working on his placement test, Prez listened to Vivaldi's Four Seasons, the Winter movement. Questions were popping up on his

screen almost as fast as he answered them. In Prez's sub-vocal, Alden confirmed, "This is your last question, Prez."

"This was too easy," Prez grinned. "The strategy game was at least challenging."

"You and Derrick did very well there too," Alden confirmed. He then giggled, "I had to wake up Mike twice during this Vivaldi series of questions."

Marking the final answer to the test, Prez stretched and chuckled, "I'm not surprised."

"Go get your deceased chicken hat, boss," Alden prompted.

Standing and looking over Keith's shoulder at his test, Prez smirked, "All this to learn I'm a poulterer?"

"I am not goin' there," Keith cheekily grinned.

Leaning down, Prez placed a kiss on Keith's cheek, softly promising, "Then I will; as soon as you're done, I'll finish off your chicken."

Into all the Core Rimmers' sub-vocals, Alden giggled, "Um... guys, I really hate to tell you, but there's work to be done first." A chorus of groans rang around the school's computer lab.

Slouching, Prez softly bitched, "A rescue, three days after Battle Of Earth? You've gotta be..."

"No," Alden quickly corrected. "We received a phone call just before you started your afternoon session. It's from the Southwest regional FBI Director, wanting to talk to you, Prez."

Knowing bits and pieces about the strained relationship between

the Clan and the FBI, Prez grouched, "Wonderful, I can barely wait."

Alden said, "Although I don't know the purpose of his call, I'd doubt the task will take too long. The better, more enjoyable task is what King Aalona asked me to pass along. He'd like at least Prez and Keith to join him at Kaho'olawe this afternoon, before dinner."

From the sub-vocal in his left ear and from his right ear, several workstations down, Prez heard Kaleo cheering, "I'd have no problem going there again. It's beautiful, Prez." Completing his test, Keith stood, wrapped an arm around Prez and pulled him close, so they were hip-to-hip. Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey finished their tests. They all joined Keith and Prez.

"King Aalona took a tour of that island this morning," Alden informed the team. "I believe our King was as impressed as Kaleo, which is why he'd like to go again, with as many Core Rimmers as are able."

Lines of kids that had already finished their tests were before the teachers. Troy, Sean, Kaleo, Tory, AJ and Jerry joined their teammates gathering around Prez. Drew softly shared, "Me and Corey still need to talk to Leo. We haven't even decided when, never mind how we're going to tell him."

Laying his right palm out flat, Prez asked, "My PADD, please Alden?"

Alden giggled, "I played a few games of Pissed-off-Chickens, since I have your PADD as much as you," and transported the device into Prez's hand.

Prez grinned, "How'd you do, Alden?"

"I'm sorry, boss," Alden giggled, "but it's way too easy for me."

Maybe when I have fingers I'll try again."

Looking at his PADD's calendar and planning to also check e-mails, Prez softly asked, "Does everyone want to go with the King?"

Around Prez, heads nodded or vocally confirmed they wanted to check out the Island. Troy stipulated, "We need to check on our boys, Prez. Billy's hookin' up with Robbie Taylor, so we'll take some time to talk with them and the rest of the Taylors."

Prez nodded, "Do what you need to do. Kaho'olawe will be there another day."

Preoccupied with another matter, Drew instead wondered, "Prez, when do you think it would be good to talk to Leo?"

Prez shrugged, "It's not like my situation was at all. Since he already knows, I don't think I'd ruin a dinner with thoughts like that. I'd shoot for a time well after he's digested dinner, and at least an hour or so before bed. Give him time to cry it out, don't you think?"

Catching something in Prez's tone and stance, Corey softly asked, "You don't think we should tell him?"

The remaining Core Rimmers gathered around. Prez gently prodded, "Tell him what? The only things I would tell him are that his parents are being cared for, and their murderers will also be taken care of." Looking back at his PADD, Prez checked e-mails and softly shared, "Leo doesn't need to know they stayed where he found them for two days, does he? One big nightmare of mine, and I'll bet of Bruce too, is that we knew our parents were missing. Neither Bruce nor I needed to see our parents' remains to understand they couldn't have been pretty. Save Leo from that nightmare. As for the murderers, when you mention them, you'll have to tell him our plans too. How do

you think he'll take that?"

So no other kids would overhear, John sent to the team, *'Leo was raised like us. I know he'd react the same way we're reacting.'*

Looking up, Prez said, "Jerry and AJ, your phaser training is tomorrow from three until six, and on Wednesday from one until four, at the Rapid Response Base. Details are on your PADDs. Attend a half-day of school on Wednesday morning, if you feel like it. If I were you, I'd spend the time with my kids." He paused and then grinned, "Keith's research into bonding and marriages says that Lieutenant Vorik is fully qualified to perform the Vulcan bonding. The real kick is that, because of my Starfleet rank, *I'm supposedly qualified* to perform marriages."

Stephen went into a giggling fit and all eyes turned to him and John. "It's not me," John grinned, "it's what you dudes are thinking."

Tory teased, "Okay, who's been nuptializing before their nuptials?" Smiling and backing up, Kaleo pulled Tory out from between Sean and Jerry. Kaleo guided Tory closer to the other married Rimmers. The remainder of the team sniggered and side-stepped away from AJ, Jerry, Sean and Troy.

Mike giggled, "Aww, they're blushing."

"Too cute," Corey and Kaleo sang.

Sadly shaking his head, Troy grinned, "I wish I could believe Archnania made you all this evil, but I can't."

Sean smirked, "Like you dudes are so innocent and never did more than kiss."

"That's our story and we're stickin' to it!" Kaleo, Tory, Drew,

Corey, John and Stephen giggled.

Prez chuckled, "So, decide on a date and whether you'd like a formal, semi-formal, or boardies and T-shirts informal wedding."

Keith sniggered, "Think about your sons too. Unless there happens to be a nest, seven boys will need to sleep-over at friends homes..."

"So their dads can nuptialize themselves into wheelchairs," Derrick joked.

Almost as red in the cheeks as his hair, Jerry tapped AJ and giggled, "We should find our boys."

Beginning to restore his normal skin tone, Troy nodded, "We know where Billy is. We'll have to find our other three."

"For the meeting with the fumbling FBI dude, I think we should all be together," Prez suggested.

Nodding agreement, Keith said, "Let's get that boring little task out of the way first."

Chattering agreements, the Core Rimmers went to the next building, where tables were set up and the teachers had been waiting. AJ, Jerry, Sean, Troy, John and Stephen were the first to stop before the teachers.

Mr. Stevenson reached back into a box of baseball caps then handed one to John, smiling, "We'll be getting to know each other well, Doctor Hundser."

Seeing the DNA double-helix on his cap, John giggled, "Sweet!"

Drew softly teased, "Guess how he learned the thigh bone connects to the hip bone." Stephen turned red. Without warning, Drew flew to the high ceiling and hovered there. Drew cackled, "It was a joke, brat!"

"Which is why you didn't crack your empty skull on the ceiling," John grinned, and put his new cap on his head.

Mrs. Taylor handed Stephen a cap emblazoned with the Shakespeare bust. Stephen smiled "Literature?"

Mrs. Taylor nodded and smiled, "You almost got the question mark of a philosopher, and could likely go either way."

Mrs. Diaz handed Troy a hat with a treble clef. Gleefully, she told Troy, "I was amazed and thrilled with your performances last night." She glanced back at her four former students, joking, "You had to go five thousand miles to find a boy as capable as yourselves." Concentrating on Troy again, Mrs. Diaz smiled, "You have a gift for language too. Merging the two, you could become the band's lyricist."

Mr. Taylor gave Sean a cap with Ohms law emblazoned on it and explained, "That equation describes the relationship between current, volts and resistance. As an electrician, you could someday repair the band's amplifiers or design computer circuits."

"Really?" Sean squealed. "I'm lucky I can flip on a light switch." Slowly, Drew wafted down toward the floor.

Mr. Taylor smiled, "You identified the tools of the trade and got ninety-five percent of the answers to electrical content correct. You may have guessed a few things and gotten lucky, but you have the ability, Sean."

Troy grinned at his Tiger, proudly proclaiming, "I told you."

Mr. Stevenson passed Kaleo a cap with a T-square and compass, smiling, "Architectural design is your dream career."

Miss Perez gave Tory a cap with Picasso's self-portrait, cheering, "Abstract art. It's no wonder you and Kaleo teamed up. You're both creative thinkers."

AJ received a hat with a pi symbol. Seeing the uncertainty on the teen boy's face, Mr. T smiled, "A third of two-hundred-twenty-five is?"

"Seventy-five," AJ quickly answered, and then smirked, "Big deal, its easy."

"To you," John, Stephen and Sean chorused.

Sean told AJ, "I figured that answer only after you already said it."

"We'll build on the knowledge you already have," Mr. T calmly assured.

Jerry looked at the hat given to him by Miss Perez. She offered, "It's a computer symbol for an IF-THEN-ELSE construct. You'll be studying software engineering with Drew. Not too surprisingly, your boyfriend will be able to help you with the math, and you'll be able to help AJ understand some theory."

Stepping forward, Corey took a look at his cap with an image of Da Vinci on it. Corey scowled, "Art?"

Shaking his head, Mr. Stevenson corrected, "Leonardo Da Vinci was an artist and an engineer. He designed automatic weapons,

helicopters and tanks, three hundred years before they were feasible. He also sketched pictures of human anatomy from corpses for physicians, and of course, for his own use in paintings. Your curriculum will be diversified until we can narrow down your abilities further." He then passed Drew the same hat as Jerry, asking, "Do you have questions or comments?"

Drew wondered, "Who will be my teachers?"

"Primarily, Marc Furst and Cory Short," Mr. Stevenson replied.

Three hats with treble clefs were passed to Keith, Derrick and Mike. Mr T passed Prez his deceased chicken hat. Prez chortled, "There's a sword in my chicken!" The entire team and all six teachers cracked up.

In a few moments, when he had caught his breath, Mr. T chuckled, "That sword represents your strategic and tactical abilities, Admiral. Lieutenant Vorik will be a teacher, and your day-to-day activities will add to that education. Eventually, we'll get you to Starfleet headquarters for additional education."

Derrick sniggered, "Until then, he knocks on back doors and shakes his chicken." The room exploded in laughter, the loudest from Prez.

Mrs. Taylor giggled, "Have a good day, boys. We'll see you tomorrow morning."

Mr. Taylor chuckled, "To add to our day, we've been receiving some telepathic messages from four of our sons."

Spinning around, John hollered, "Really? Already?"

Nodding, Mr. Taylor said, "They informed us of their talent

Friday night. It's been getting clearer with every passing day."

Returning to the table where the teachers were now standing, John cutely smiled, "I'd like them on my Intel team."

"We know," Mrs. Taylor grinned.

Mr. Taylor said, "We're concerned about it, naturally, but all four are looking forward to it."

John nodded, "With stuff already going on, tonight's not a kewl night to get them trained; maybe tomorrow."

"We'll be sure to let them know," Mrs. Taylor promised.

Waving and turning away to join his husband, brothers and teammates, John giggled, *'I'll contact Doc Andrews for your Valium prescription, Mrs. Taylor.'*

Oneula Beach Indoor Rec Center

Monday, November 8, 2004 3:07PM HTZ

Jason Mullins and most of the kids entered the indoor rec center. The group found there was a huge gymnasium in the area where a bowling alley existed at Ewa Beach. The room had all the expected gymnastics equipment including beams, thick matting on the floor, uneven bars, parallel bars, pommel horses, rings hanging from the ceiling, trampolines and vaults. Most of the kids, including Jason, were clueless about the purpose of the room.

Luckily, Vaziik chose to accompany the group. The Vulcan tween had not only described the purpose of the equipment, but also demonstrated some exercises he had witnessed from the Olympics on

television. After removing his shirt, Vaziik jumped up and grasped the hanging rings quite easily. He did a pull-up, raised his legs to form an L-shape and then rotated to stand on his hands. Smoothly and effortlessly, he spread the rings and his arms to form an upside down capital 'T'. He completed his little demonstration with a somersault and landed expertly on the padded floor.

The kids cheered his performance. Typically, Vaziik waved off the applause, explaining that most of what he did was simple, by professional standards and for a Vulcan pre-teen. Still the kids wanted to know more and watched him demonstrate the beam and pommel horse. When Vaziik completed what he felt comfortable demonstrating, Jason warmly thanked the taller Vulcan boy.

Kids needed a break from exploring and wanted to play, so Jason simply said, "Go ahead." Unfortunately, they all scattered, leaving Jason alone with a PADD and only a few notes to actually enter into the device. Jason's younger brothers, Jimmy Carr and Scott Deaver led all the little kids to the playground. Jason sat at a patio table near the pool house, with teens at the diving well to his right, and pre-teens at the pool to his left. Vaziik was the one other kid not actively involved at either pool; he dove into the diving well once to cool off from his exercises, grabbed a towel and dried off.

Typing a few notes into his PADD, Jason sighed. Things just weren't turning out well, for some reason, he strongly believed. During the afternoon, many older kids had found other things to do, like Jay and Chris with the Mr. Fuzzy puppets. A bunch of teenagers had disappeared completely, like Fred Eckhart, Lance Kinchen, Scott Shetley, Travis McAuley and Erik Kendricks, to name a few. Breaking Jason's concentration, Vaziik asked, "May I join you?"

Looking up and seeing the shirtless Vulcan boy, Jason almost leered and drooled. He quickly wiped his mouth and giggled, "Sure,

Vaziik. Thanks so much for that stuff in the gym. That was really kewl."

Vaziik nodded once, saying, "I found it agreeable to provide assistance. You are welcome, Jason."

Jason leaned back in the chair, glanced around and sighed. Vaziik said, "I have observed when other Terrans breathe as you have that they are either satisfied or dissatisfied. Which are you?"

Jason huffed, "I guess dissatisfied."

"May I inquire why you are feeling negative emotions?"

Shrugging, Jason groaned, "I just don't feel like I've done a good job, ya know? My big bro Billy is so soft spoken and shy, but he did great. He did such an awesome job that he scored a boyfriend without even trying. I haven't filled in a page in here, and I haven't found a boyfriend either. My dad and pop are gonna wonder what I did, and I'm just gonna have to say, nothin'."

"You are stressed, Jason."

"Prob'ly so," Jason smirked.

Vaziik asked, "May I see your PADD?"

"Why?"

"To determine if your stress is warranted," Vaziik answered. "I may not be able to help you score a boyfriend, however I can..." Kids at the pool and diving well overheard and broke into giggles. Wondering what was humorous, Vaziik glanced around. Jason rolled his eyes and uncontrollably blushed. Vaziik raised a curious eyebrow, then finished, "I can assist with your data."

Pushing the PADD across the table, Jason half-heartedly muttered, "Thanks," and then tried to shrink in his chair. Four teen boys, Carter Rackham, Doug Zimmerman, Neil Green and Tad Markell jogged from the diving well to the pool and jumped in. A moment later, a group of younger boys gathered around the four teens. Giggling erupted and a splash fight broke loose. Wanting to hide under the legs of the table he was sitting at, Jason thought, 'Fucking great! Now everybody knows I want a boyfriend. Here sits Jason Mullins, the loser, who talks to emotionless Vulcans about love. As soon as dad and pop show up, I'll gladly go home to face the rest of my ass reaming.'

Still reading the PADD, Vaziik stood and walked away. All Jason could ponder was that he had lost his eye candy too. To top everything off perfectly, boys in the pool were gathered in a huddle. Every ten or so seconds, they'd all bust up laughing and a few would back away, but continue to watch the other boys in the huddle. To save his life, Jason couldn't figure out what the heck they were doing. Vaziik returned, wearing his shirt and hiding that awesome torso. Stopped a meter before Jason, Vaziik prompted, "Join me in the rec center gymnasium, Jason."

Completely discouraged, Jason nodded, stood and followed Vaziik. "Much of the equipment in the rec center is potentially dangerous," Vaziik explained. "I have shaded those items red to mark them as harmful. Now we must ensure proper education for our children to use the equipment without hurting themselves. Agreed?" Jason only nodded and continued following Vaziik, barely hearing, understanding or caring about what he was being told. In or near every room, Vaziik ordered Alden to place appropriate computer displays and prepare video instruction for all the equipment and exercises. Walking back toward the rec center exit doors, Vaziik returned the PADD, offering, "I believe your stress was unwarranted,

Jason. I have done very little to your data. Alden has provided what is required to limit possible injury to our children."

Jason nodded and glanced down at the PADD. Vaziik held the door open and they stepped outside. Still reading the PADD and scrolling through screens, Jason found his data completely reorganized by room and exercise. A page worth of data had miraculously turned into almost four pages. Jason looked up and saw Vaziik walking back to the diving well. Leaning against one of the transparent aluminum outer walls was Jimmy Matos, one of the boys rescued by Derrick late Friday night.

Jimmy called, "Got a couple o' minutes, Jase?"

Still absorbing how his weakly compiled raw data suddenly turned into valuable information that any kid who could read might understand, Jason absently nodded, "Sure." He looked up from his PADD and realized that Jimmy was amongst the group of huddled boys in the pool. Jimmy walked around the building. Jason quietly followed.

Neither boy said a word until they had rounded the corner of the rec center and were mostly out of sight from others at the pool. Jimmy nonchalantly asked, "How're ya doin', dude?"

Shrugging, Jason replied, "So-so, really." He gestured to the pool, softly wondering, "What was goin' on before?"

Jimmy grinned, "Ya mean with Carter, Doug, Neil and Tad?"

Slouching, Jason implored, "Com'on, Jimmy. Do I need to hide for a week, a month or a year?"

Rapidly blinking, Jimmy scowled, "Why would you hide?"

"Everyone knows, don't they?" Jason frowned.

"Hey! Chill, dude!" Jimmy firmly ordered. Jason remained silent, gagging on the sour rock that was lodged in his throat. Jimmy saw how upset Jason was becoming and sighed, "You didn't know Carter and Doug are gay?" Jason shook his head. "They are," Jimmy plainly said. "And so are Neil and Tad. Nobody was making fun of you, Jase. What really happened was a shoot off; paper, rock, scissors, to see which of us dudes would get the chance to be with you first. I won." Seeing only disbelief in Jason's expression, Jimmy sniggered, "Betchya Rafe Montigua, Harry Cohen, Les Freeman and Leroy Wheeler are all watching, hoping I strike out and they get a chance." Jason tried to peek through and around the corner of the building, but equipment was in the way or he was too far away to see. "Go ahead, check it out," Jimmy giggled. "Suddenly they'll all turn around to watch the fuckin' grass grow, guaranteed."

Jason evilly grinned and huffed, "You're mocking me now."

Shaking his head, Jimmy smirked, "I saw you with Leo yesterday and figured you're off the market. I wasn't the only one thinking that. No lie! Check it out; jump out fast and catch them, dude."

Jason suddenly tore to the building corner and jammed on the brakes, catching three of the four quickly scattering and looking for anything semi-interesting. Jason turned around and walked back to Jimmy.

Jimmy warmly smiled, "Did you see 'em?"

Still walking and trying to absorb everything, Jason nodded, "Rafe, Harry and Les. Leroy was already climbing out of the pool."

"Vaziik's little slip helped us all," Jimmy giggled. "How else

could all the curious and gay dudes meet you or each other? We still had to have four gay teenagers shove us out of the closet. Course, they weren't expecting sixteen of us. So, out came paper, rock and scissors."

"Now you have to be lying, man."

"No way!" Jimmy laughed. "If Leo were here, and he was the prize, only the straightest dudes would've been completely disinterested."

"You like Leo too?"

"He's somewhere between a dream and a god," Jimmy giggled. "Actually, he's the reason I know I'm gay."

Jason sighed, "Leo told me and Kenny that he's not ready for a boyfriend."

"Leo's loss is my gain," Jimmy softly said, searching Jason for a facial reaction.

Jason thought, okay, he's hitting on me now. Slowly smiling and ready to play the game, Jason reminded, "I'm nothing like Leo. He lost kewl parents in the riots. My fosters were about to be arrested by the Clan, for filming and fondling me and my bros."

Leaning against the wall again in his practiced LA kewl posture, Jimmy grinned, "I'm not like Leo either. What you said only makes you different from Leo. This ain't a bad thing, dude."

Jason dropped his bomb, stating, "I know lots about sex, done the wrong way and for the wrong reasons."

Jimmy nodded, "I know a lot, but never did anything. I've had

more than two days to imagine what being gay means. There's no doubt, I could do anything and like it a lot. Maybe we can learn stuff together." He paused then grinned, "You can try all you want to make me go away, Jase, but you'll fail."

Tilting his head, Jason wondered, "Why?"

Smiling, Jimmy shook his head and then giggled, "I had one chance in sixteen to get here with you. From my point of view, Leo's only real competition are you, Rafe and Kenny. I'm not giving up that easily."

"Cute," Jason smirked.

Pushing off the wall, Jimmy confidently checked, "You want the truth?"

"Please."

"I got here late Friday night," Jimmy began. "Our neighborhood was on fire and my parents never came home. Before roasting my nuts, I got out of there. I only care a tiny bit if they're alive or dead, I'd just like to know which. My mom was a cranky bitch and my dad was drunk most of the time. Home was hell. The streets were kewler. I knew the streets of my part of LA like the back of my hand. Ten Latin Kings chased me around on foot and in cars. They had to block me in an alley just to catch me. If it weren't for them telling me about the Clan and Derrick, I had my escape planned and ready to roll. I'm surprised about so many things here, not the least of which is discovering my dick was getting hard for Leo. So what do I do with this new knowledge? I start scopin' out every dick that presented itself all day Saturday and yesterday."

Jason grinned, "I was with my new dads and family both days."

Tapping his nose to signal Jason was on target, Jimmy rambled, "It was a bummer that you, Kenny and Leo were gone. The only surprises are hiding in yours, Leo's and Kenny's pants. All the rest of the dudes were kewl though, even if they caught me spying. If I were older and could really cum instead of shakin' like a spaz, I'd be a dehydrated clump somewhere. I dunno, but I think I might like dick." Jason giggled and nodded. Jimmy grinned, "With no parents to fight, and being here, I could easily say, bein' gay is no problem. I can't even try to act shy, so my personal goal was to find a friend that might become a boyfriend. I've spent too much time alone and I'm fucking tired of it. It would be awesome to have just one really kewl dude on the same page as me to hang with. Rafe's nice, but we're not on the same wavelength. Taron's my roommate and he's really kewl, but he's got cousins here, so I'm sort o' on the outside looking in. Then there's you, Kenny and Leo, who weren't around over the weekend. All day long I've been scoping out dudes about our age. I want something real and someone to be real with. I'm already hoping that can happen with you, Jase."

"Why?"

Jimmy excitedly cheered, "You're a prize on so many levels!"

Rolling his eyes, Jason giggled and blushed, thinking, DIRECT HIT!

"See!" Jimmy laughed, "You're so cute! That's the kind of real I'm talkin' about! You led us here and there all day, even with Billy this morning. You're even cuter now, acting like you don't believe any of this, so-oo-oo hear this too; I choose you over Leo, Kenny, Rafe, Harry and Leroy. My heart's already set, dude. Everyone else our age is gone; they're just not the same. I've got the street smarts and you've got the sex smarts. What more could I ask? None of them other dudes

have what you have.

"Your past might be too much for them, but I'm seeing way more than your past and how cute you are. I'm also seeing a Core Rimmer son, someone who's already following in his dad's footsteps. All the Core Rimmers are so much in love, it almost hurts to watch them. Because of them, at dinner last night, I found myself daydreaming, wondering what it might be like to look at someone like that. Suddenly, my imagination went wild; every dude in the room was naked. Even the crescent rolls were dicks. Then I wondered how I would react with some dude looking at me like that."

"And your reaction might be?"

Jimmy warmly smiled and softly answered, "Kiss him quick and make his eyes close, hopefully before I pop a rod and quake in my seat. There's no doubt about it."

Jason giggled, "You're pretty intense."

Jimmy shrugged, "I had to be. The real me would just like to chill. Here, I could do that, with a little help from the right boyfriend."

Extending an arm, Jason asked, "Take a walk with me?"

"Where?"

Jason grinned, "Let's search for gorillas and G-Cats in the trees."

Taking Jason's hand, Jimmy giggled, "When Derrick's gorilla spoke, I almost shit in my shorts!"

"They're all really kewl," Jason assured.

"I know that now, but didn't then. Very little can cause me to

jump like that. The fires made me jump too, right out the door."

"You're shaking."

"I know," Jimmy giggled.

"Are you afraid?"

"A little, yeah."

"Of me?"

"Omigod, no! I'm scared of screwing up and thrilled with your hand in mine. I did something right for a change."

"Do you want to know what you did right?"

"Yeah, that'd be kewl."

"You told me the truth," Jason revealed. "The first time was with the guys in the pool. I really thought I was being set up for some prank. Again, when you told me you wanted someone real. I'm real too, maybe too much for some guys."

Jimmy nodded, "I've been there too. It freaks out some dudes. Back in LA, no one really wanted to hang out with a street kid."

"Before I was even adopted, my dad and pop told us to always tell the truth. It's never been a problem for me. Those shit stains in St. Joe wanted me doin' stuff with my little brothers, so I'd have a fit, and so would Billy, until it was me and him. I told my dad and pop the way it used to be, and so did my brothers. It's real important that you always tell me the truth, Jimmy. Lying won't make anything last; it'll make it fall apart."

"I never could lie without getting caught, so I won't, I promise."

Noticing that they weren't taking the shortest path to the nearest trees, Jimmy wondered, "Where are we going?"

"We're just gonna check my little brothers at the playground and keep on walking into the trees."

"Do your dad and pop have security gorillas too?"

"Yup, Gary and Leo; all the Core Rimmers have a gorilla. Reyes has a G-Cat too."

Jimmy wondered, "Is Troy your dad and Sean your pop?"

Shaking his head, Jason smiled, "Swap 'em around. Troy's pop and Sean's dad."

Seeing their big brother Jason approaching, hand-in-hand with another boy, Scott Deaver and Jimmy Carr paused near the top of the jungle gym, checked with one another and began giggling. Jimmy nodded at Scott and they began climbing down. One of Kaleo's and Tory's sons, Mark Fikes asked them, "Who's that with your bro?"

"I'm not sure," Jimmy giggled.

Scott laughed, "We'll find out and be right back."

Russ Pass giggled, "Jimmy, your Mr. Fuzzy jumped outta your pocket."

Cracking up, Jimmy slipped off the lowest bar and landed on his butt in the sand. He stood, brushed himself off and picked up his Mr. Fuzzy, then loudly cackled at his puppet, "I told you to wait for Richie!" Scott, Mark, Russ and other groups of kids at the playground broke down in giggles.

After Jimmy stuffed his Mr. Fuzzy into his back pocket, he ran

off with Scott toward Jason.

Just reaching the outdoor rec area, Jason grinned to tell Jimmy, "Those are my bros, Jimmy Carr and Scott Deaver. Jimmy's the one with brown hair and Scott's the shaggy blond."

Jimmy Matos smirked, "Your kid brother's name is Jimmy too? We'll have to do something about that."

Jason scowled, "What do you mean?"

Jimmy explained, "When you holler 'Jimmy', I don't want to wonder if you're calling me or your bro. My middle name is David, so I just changed my handle to JD. Does that work for you?"

Jason beamed, "You'd do that?"

Shrugging, JD checked, "Only if you like it. David's pretty common too, so I figured JD is better all around. Besides, I figure with a bunch of changes happening already, a name change ain't a bad thing."

Jason smiled, "JD fits you real nice."

"Ya think?"

"Yep."

Only a few meters away, Jimmy yelled, "You gotta boyfriend too, Jase?"

Jason softly giggled to JD, "Oh man, that sounds *really* good."

JD sputtered then loudly laughed, "Yup, he does."

Jason turned and widely smiled at JD. Coming to a halt before

the two older boys, Scott smiled, "We're Jase's bros. I'm Scott and that's Jimmy."

JD nodded, "I'm James David Matos. Call me JD"

Jimmy giggled, "You went swimming with your Mr. Fuzzy, JD. He's a soggy fuzzy!"

"Oh, God," Jason softly chuckled.

Pulling his puppet out of his back pocket, JD checked it out, sniggering, "He's not so fuzzy anymore, is he?"

"He'll dry out," Jimmy giggled.

Nodding, Scott wondered, "Where are you from, JD?"

"Los Angeles," JD answered.

"We're from St. Joseph, Michigan, real near the lake," Scott offered.

Jimmy added, "Right across the road."

Looking up at his big bro, Scott grinned, "Have you guys kissed yet?"

Flushing red, Jason giggled and shook his head. Only his little brothers would ask that question. JD warmly smiled, "I'm waiting for Jase to kiss me, actually."

"All this time I've been waiting for you to kiss me," Jason joked.

Slowly shaking his head, JD reminded Jason, "I won already. Now I need some proof that you like me." Jason felt JD squeeze his hand.

Jimmy giggled, "What are you waiting for, Jase? Me and Richie kissed twice already!"

Stunned, Scott squealed, "When did you kiss Richie?"

Jimmy giggled, "Under water at the beach house, and then before bed that night. I ain't no dummy!"

Scott grumbled, and then asked Jason, "What time is it, bro?"

Checking his new Clan watch, Jason sniggered, "Three-thirty. School's out by now."

Scott tapped his comm-badge, impatiently calling, "Dillon, where are you?"

"I just got into the Oneula dining room," Dillon giggled.

Jimmy quickly asked, "Is Richie with you, Dillon?"

"I'm right here," Richie giggled.

Pulling his Mr. Fuzzy onto his arm, Jimmy giggled, "Pucker up, hot stuff!" Richie and Dillon cracked up laughing. Undeterred, Jimmy ran across the outdoor rec area field toward the dining room.

"Hey!" Scott hollered, and ran after his brother, yelling, "Don't you kiss him again, Jimmy!"

JD sniggered, "What *are* you waiting for, Jase?"

Jason grinned, "You really want me to kiss you?"

Nodding, JD softly admitted, "I've never been kissed, and I really want you to be the first."

Surprised with himself for not jumping at the opportunity, Jason

asked, "You're really serious?"

JD giggled, "There you go being too cute again. I won't kiss you until you kiss me first."

Jason sighed, "I really don't know why I'm not goin' for it. Me and all my bros knew we wanted and needed boyfriends, before we even got out of the store."

Frowning, JD softly wondered, "Is your heart that set on Leo?"

"No," Jason firmly replied. "Leo's real cute and super nice, but I know I can't wait for him. Friends is where we're at, and that's kewl. I've been keeping my eyes open all day, lookin' for someone. You and I have talked, we're more alike and everything's really kewl. You're even blond too. Why am I standing here yappin'? I really don't know what's going on with me. It's definitely me, cos it sure ain't you."

Slightly relieved, JD checked, "Is it Kenny or anyone else?"

Vigorously shaking his head, Jason scowled, "Kenny's like a brother, no sparks at all. Dee's super nice, but he's not ready either. There's really no one else or any reason at all."

"Now you're shaking," JD grinned.

Realizing it was true, Jason huffed, "I'm so fucked up."

Gesturing toward the trees, JD prompted, "Come on, the gorillas are waiting." They started walking. JD confirmed, "If I ask you something, will you tell me the truth?"

Nodding, Jason assured, "That's what I want from you, so yeah, I promise."

"Think about this real careful, okay?" JD prompted.

"Okay."

JD offered, "You were really strong when I first asked to talk to you. You thought we were goofin' on you, so it's understandable. Since then, you've been getting a little softer and less sure of yourself."

"I guess that's true."

"Which side of you did you show Leo and Dee?"

"The stronger, more sure side."

"Interesting," JD giggled.

Jason smiled, "What's so funny?"

"It's not funny, but it is very cute!"

Through his giggles, Jason moaned, "Oh God, what've I done?"

JD explained, "You're sure of yourself and comin' on strong with dudes, until they tell you they only wanna be friends. For the first time, you're seeing someone who wants to be with you." JD raised their clasped hands, grinning, "You haven't let go of me. That shows, at least a little, that you're kewl with me, and most of what I've said and done."

"I am."

"That's it then, Jase; you'll chase after dudes who're cute and nice, but you've never had the tables turned on you. Now you know sixteen dudes were interested in you. I'm still not giving up though. You're the boyfriend I want now. Everything you've done all day and

the way you are now makes it a certainty, to me anyway. Now I get to drag you out of the funk to see the light."

"That'll be a neat trick," Jason giggled. "What're you thinking will do..."

Stopping short just beyond the tree line, JD firmly pulled Jason into his arms and kissed him hard, exactly how he had wanted to kiss Jason before they had ever said a word.

Wide-eyed, Jason whimpered beyond the tongue invading his mouth. It wasn't a huge adult tongue. It wasn't one of his brothers' tongues. It was a soft, sweet tasting tongue. Getting into it, Jason held on tight. JD's tongue retreated and Jason's tongue went searching for its playmate. JD helplessly chuckled into their kiss. Practically swooning, Jason had to stop and catch his breath. His head dropped onto JD's shoulder, dreamily sighing, "Nice, really nice."

JD softly giggled, "You're welcome."

"That was awesome!" Jason panted. "Why'd you want me to kiss you?"

"I figured, the confident Rimmer son I saw leading us around would prefer it that way," JD chuckled. "Come to find out, that same take control dude wants a take control boyfriend too. He hits on the dudes he knows deep down that he can't have. I can take control, Jase, but I do want you to take control too. I really wanted you to kiss me first. You gave me no other choice, so I took a chance."

Grinning madly, Jason held on tighter then dove into the crook of JD's neck. Attaching his mouth and sucking hard, Jason started to prove to his new boyfriend that he knew a few things.

"Omigod!" JD gasped, and then began uncontrollably giggling.

Feeling his knees buckling and his dick growing, JD held on tighter, laughing, "OMIGOD! JASON!" Over the next moments, JD cringed and collapsed, with Jason still attached, guiding and supporting both of them down to their knees. Periodically, JD bellowed for the almighty and Jason, hoping one or the other might reply.

JD's cries didn't go unnoticed for long. Sean's gorilla, Leo came out of the trees. Jason waved. Leo grinned, "Sorry, Jase. It sounded like a kid was in trouble." Jason uncertainly grunted. JD shivered and bellowed laughing louder, because the grunt felt as wicked kewl as the ravenous sucking Jason was doing. Leo offered, "I'll be close by if either of you need anything." Jason hummed affirmatively and flashed Leo a thumb-up.

Intensely shivering from two quick hums in a row, JD roared, "WAIT A MINUTE!"

Leo teased, "Jason hasn't gotten a drop to feed on yet. He did tell you that he's a vampire, didn't he? Day-walker is the correct term, but in this instance, all-day-sucker works too. I think playing with his food is a family trait."

Jason helplessly sniggered at Leo's jokes. Hysterical and wheezing, JD hiccuped. Withering, JD dropped his arms off of Jason's back. In small increments, JD lowered to the ground and Jason followed. JD teetered and Jason guided his boyfriend to the ground. Kneeling over JD, Jason evilly grinned, "How's it goin', Leo?"

Leo chuckled, "Good. You achieved your goal?"

Nodding, Jason giggled, "Giving a hickey is almost as fun as getting one."

"Learn something new every day," Leo grinned. "Who's your

friend?"

Jason smiled, "James David Matos, or JD." Looking down, Jason giggled, "JD, this is Leo, my dad's gorilla." Still giggling and barely able to lift an arm, JD waved.

Leo chortled, "Do I need to keep quiet about this?"

"Nah, I'll introduce JD to my dad and pop later."

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Ewa Beach FYS Building, Conference Room 1A

Monday, November 8, 2004 3:33PM HTZ

With his entire team, Prez went to the FYS Building, asking for his mom and dad to attend the teleconference call with the FBI Director. Having the Division's FYS Director and the Director of Family Clan Short Legal Services present, Prez believed would be prudent. The last things requested were for the entire teleconference to be recorded and to have someone of authority at Orlando Headquarters monitoring.

In his sub-vocal, Seth teased, "I'm not just anybody, but will I do, Prez?"

Widely smiling, Prez chuckled, "Don't you ever take time off, Seth? Right after this call, go find Harry and a bed, in that order."

"I'll take it under advisement," Seth chortled.

"Take it under Harry," Prez softly joked.

Seth evilly snickered, "Now I get to try to keep that image in my

mind and deal with business. Let's see what this FBI doofus wants."

Prez called, "We're ready now, Alden."

"Standby for Director Smithfield," Alden replied over the speakers.

A moment later the large screen on the wall flashed to life. A middle aged man with slight gray at his temples, and wearing a charcoal pin-striped suit, white shirt and navy blue tie appeared. Already, Prez didn't like the man. His suit was ultra-conservative and he appeared to be a dweeb on his best days. This was the kind of man that would wear plaid shorts and a striped sport shirt on the weekends. Very likely, he had little hearts on his cheap boxer shorts. For all Prez knew, he probably completed his weekend wardrobe with nylon socks and cheap canvas sneakers too.

Struggling to maintain a straight face, John sent, *'Stop it, Prez! Cesar and Felipe just howled laughing at the poor man they were scanning in Aunt Anna's office. Your Intel Director is about to fall on the floor and crack up.'*

"Good afternoon, Director O'Brian," Director Smithfield warmly greeted.

In full Vulcan mode, Prez flatly returned the greeting then purposefully took the time to introduce his parents and all the Core Rimmers along with their formal titles. Dreading actually speaking the words, but having no other choice, Prez asked, "What can we do for the FBI?"

Director Smithfield said, "I have heard through the grapevine that your Division has decided to assist local authorities in maintaining the peace. Despite various actions of my predecessor, which caused much friction between Clan Short and our Department,

I would like to extend an olive branch, in the hope that by pooling resources, we can assist each other with apprehending individuals and groups which are using the recent invasion attempt to upset a fragile situation worldwide. I have at my disposal a classified amount of Special Forces teams, which I would feel quite comfortable in deploying, based on information that you provide, to assist your members in performing their duties. In return, I will release information that we receive which might prevent abusive situations before they occur."

Prez briefly turned to his dad, and then his mom, all the while receiving confirmation from John that the man was being earnest and did want to correct existing poor relations. In his sub-vocal, Seth said, "You have Headquarters approval if you wish to accept."

Prez noticed the FBI Director's hands nervously fidgeting on his desk. John told Prez, *'He's really hoping that we accept, Prez. I can't focus on his intentions and motives through the TV's refresh rate and across three-thousand miles. I'm good, but not that good.'*

"We have much to discuss, Director Smithfield," Prez stated. "I have read many reports of citizens upholding the law, in their cities and towns, during Friday and into Saturday. There were also reports of organized crime working with police in Chicago and Las Vegas. Los Angeles was not amongst those cities. We have a nine-year-old boy here who was the only person under eighteen to escape his Central Los Angeles neighborhood alive. His parents died because of members of the Crips playing with their automatic weapons."

"I am aware of Walter Daniel Scott, Nadine Scott and Leo Daniel Scott," Director Smithfield said. He checked his notes, adding, "I am also aware that another gang started a fire, that got out of control and destroyed the home of... Carlos and Lois Matos. The Bloods were not directly responsible for the deaths of the Matos

family. Every family you've investigated, so has the FBI. The FBI supports your decision and is prepared to assist."

"New York City was another riot zone," Prez categorically stated. "A dozen kids are here that used to live there. Children and parents of children are dying in the streets, Director." He then quickly asked, "Are you prepared to cut through the red tape and dispense with the bull?"

"Yes, I am. My orders originated with the President Of The United States."

Prez nodded, "Then you know the Crips took a stance of friend or foe with no safe middle ground?"

"I do."

Prez growled, "I intend to shove that decision right down their throats! The corpses of the Scotts' murderers will land directly on the porches of their families, with the same ultimatum." Jen Hundser looked at her adopted son almost like she didn't recognize him.

"If need be," Prez continued, "Clan Short Special Forces are prepared to make stands in every major city where the Crips exist, from Miami to Seattle and from Chicago to Houston. Somehow or another, these assholes have gotten away with drug trafficking, extortion and murder. We'll hit them a city at a time or in groups, to protect our children. Our telepaths will scan them and determine who is guilty of what. We'll take away their ability to make a buck and take a breath. Are you still willing to assist?"

"I have thirty Seal teams standing by for your orders, Director. The same amount of Green Berets are also at your disposal."

Prez said, "The families of four men will be preparing funerals

this weekend, Director. I have contacted our Special Forces commander to prepare to raid all the funeral homes. Since Las Vegas, Phoenix and Tuscon are within a day's drive of Los Angeles, Colonel Wilkins suggested that we prepare simultaneous raids in those cities. We estimate two-hundred-fifty armored personnel and ten helicopter gunships per city."

"Give me four hours. There are other organizations which have pledged clandestine support for your group that would be more than happy to provide maid service in this situation."

Typing madly on his PADD, Prez said, "I am transferring Command of this operation to Colonel Wilkins, so that he can designate authority figures and prepare his troops. Family Clan Short is here primarily for the children. We will be gaining innocent children from these operations; they are my primary concern."

"Please tell Colonel Wilkins that *anything* he needs is available to him. If I can't get it directly, I know who to call to get it. Legality is not a concern."

"You are carbon copied on this e-mail, Sir. Colonel Wilkins will contact you."

"How did you obtain my e-mail address?"

"Alden, say hello to the nice man."

Over the speakers, Alden giggled, "Hello to the nice man."

A chorus of groans and boos erupted around the table, even from Jen and Jim Hundser.

"I should have known," Director Smithfield smirked. "I'm going

to start sending agents to you guys for Intel training."

Prez grinned, "From here on, I'll make policy in this operation, but will otherwise be an observer. My husband, two brothers and a brother-in-law will be performing executions later this week. My nephew, my family and every kid in this division are my concern. If there's nothing more to cover now, I suggest we adjourn."

"I agree. Good evening, Sir."

"You too. Goodbye, Director."

The screen went blank and the audio connection popped.

Dropping his head onto his arms on the table, Keith chuckled, "Crawl through the screen and get in his face, baby."

Corey giggled, "Prez, he called you 'Sir'."

"Most of us came from that country," Prez sadly groaned. "It took another war for folks to wake up and smell the coffee, once again." He turned to John, asking, "Remember what we talked about Saturday night?"

"Fine," John giggled, "ya wanna help in the bear cave?"

"We'll have about fifty little kids who'll want teddy bears," Stephen prompted.

Cocking an eye-brow, Prez nodded, "That sounds like a plan. That'll give me time to chill before getting with the King."

Jennifer softly asked, "Are you all right, Preston?"

Brightly smiling, Prez assured, "I'm fine, mom. I thought he was going to warn me against fighting with the Crips. When I heard his

intentions, and that Uncle Colin had heard more than I expected to give him the order, I gave him chances to back down or prove his support. All I want to do now is chill for a few extra minutes with some little tikes. Then the team can get with our King and take a trip to Kaho'olawe. I expect the rest of the night to be easy, relatively speaking."

* * * * *

Ewa Beach Dormitory #3

Monday, November 8, 2004 3:38PM HTZ

Lance Kinchen sat on his desk chair running blues scales up and down the neck of his Les Paul. Although he had amps that he wanted to use, and an acoustic guitar, Lance was keeping as quiet as he possibly could. His roommate and new boyfriend, Scott Shetley was sound asleep on the bed they now shared. In one of those incredibly awesome moods that can only happen to teen boys after having their first sexual experiences, Lance was wide awake. Finding himself playing intricate licks only made Lance more enthused.

In a matter of three days, Lance's life had changed drastically and completely spun around. He wondered where the thirteen-year-old high school freshman had gone. Only four days prior, Lance had gone to school wearing a black Iron Maiden T-shirt, a dark navy blue long-sleeve shirt, blue jeans and a wool lined Levi jacket. His new normal attire consisted of sandals, board shorts and T-shirts. In Manhattan, he didn't even own a single pair of boardies; they were worn by dorks, preppies and the elite of the upper East side. Lance used to wear cut-offs and muscle tees during the prior summer. At that very moment, he was naked. Lance had never before sat around in the buff; he always took his clothes off in the bathroom, took a shower and was right back in clothes again as soon as he had dried

off. For two days now, he routinely walked naked down the dorm hall to the mob showers.

He had been to beaches on Long Island and New Jersey no more than six times in his life, as best as he could recall. His parents weren't beach people; they would get sunburned and so would Lance. Now he was living on a Clan base not much more than five hundred yards from the shore and the Pacific Ocean. His milky white skin was getting tanned again; it was visible and obvious on his lower legs and on his arms.

Lance would easily get naked at the diving well, but couldn't stay that way for long without worrying about sunburns. Saturday, when other guys wondered if Lance was shy, he proved them wrong with a quick exposure and explanations that he would bake in the sun if naked too long. When Lance first exposed his ass, and then spun around to show off his floppy cut dick, Scott sputtered and giggled. Pulling Lance aside, Scott roared laughing, "What the hell do you think you are; an old fashioned record album? Your ass is *NOT* the 'A' side, and your dick is *NOT* the 'B' side."

Lance shrugged and giggled, "It proved I'm not shy though. You're tanning real nice, but I just fry."

Also absent was the city tough guy demeanor. It was one of the first things he had observed from the teen Latin King boys and the ex-prostitutes. Lance and Scott had talked about all the changes starting in the Hundsters' basement Friday night. The same subject came up again a few times Saturday, but not since. Always a good student in school and in life, Lance absorbed, learned and executed the new material.

His normal routine had changed due to the New York City riots. Friday morning, he hadn't even showered before flying into clothes,

grabbing his guitar and getting out of the apartment. Morning showers and quick soapy wanks had been normal for over two years. Instead, he had gone without a shower until Friday evening Hawaiian Time. He had gone without his daily release two entire days; a feat he didn't believe was possible. When he finally did take care of himself during the pre-dawn hours Sunday, it felt like he had shot for a longer time. And then, when he stealthily watched Scott beating off Sunday night, it seemed he had literally emptied his balls.

Hearing his Les Paul wail lead lines and licks, like he had in the Oneula Beach auditorium only hours earlier, he silently remarked, 'not too shabby for a queer boy, not too shabby at all'. Thinking of Scott, the quick blues he was playing shifted to chord arpeggios. Lance spent about twenty minutes loosening another guy's ass and enjoyed it every bit as much as Scott obviously did. Twice Scott moaned and twice he had gasped at the new sensations Lance carefully administered. As nervous as Lance was, the butterflies and shakes got even worse when Scott had shot his first load and was ready to reverse their roles and get even. Where Scott had been quietly accepting for the most part, Lance couldn't stop groaning, moaning, whimpering and shouting. Lance had only needed to ask Scott if he were all right four times in that first twenty minutes. It seemed that Scott had to ask the same question at least once a minute while Lance was flat on his back with his legs spread.

Making love with Scott was so completely Earth shattering and mind boggling, Lance couldn't restrain himself after losing his first dildo elicited load. He attacked Scott with kisses and pushed his older and larger friend flat down on the bed. Scott loved it too, as his giggles and laughter clearly proved. Only when Lance straddled Scott's hips to make his intention known did Scott get serious and repeatedly warn his new lover to go slow. Although Lance had assured Scott he would go slow, and was fully aware that a real cock

was not a little dildo, Scott continued his pleas. It took some time and repositioning for Lance to get Scott's thick tool only partially inside him. The most amazing and thrilling part for Lance was that Scott purposefully remained flat and motionless most of the time. Scott's giggles and laughter resumed when Lance uncontrollably notified the entire dorm how good he felt. Only after Scott had gotten Lance off did he thrust up a few times, just to make Lance bounce and gasp through giggles.

As if all that wasn't wonderful enough, Scott then went for his own ride on Lance. Looking up at his older and more defined guitar playing buddy, Lance did some comparisons. Jay Montigua was taller and had a hunky, more muscular body than Scott. Chris Stokley was simply a sexy blond who was too perfectly proportioned in every way to be a genuine human. Derrick Seibert was so undeniably cute that it was apparent when he was fully dressed and doing his Core Rimmer duties. Keith Hundser was another stud muffin with incredible abs and arms for a fourteen-year-old. All of those boys had admirable qualities, but Scott was the one for Lance. Scott didn't have cut abs, big biceps, blond hair, or dreamy hazel eyes, but he was the one enjoying his ride and incoherently growling through giggles that Lance was the very best lover and friend in the world.

Afterward, Scott rested with Lance cuddled up close. Lance admitted that he loved being called 'sexy lover boy' by Scott and wanted to hear it often, but perhaps they needed less provocative pet names for each other. Naturally, they got silly and found more suggestive names before getting serious. They were softly discussing possibilities and silently considering Scott's pet names when Lance realized Scott was falling asleep. Lance remained there, snuggled up close and silently inspecting Scott's face. Judging by the soft hairs found, Scott would one day have a nice beard and mustache. For now, this was the perfect face of Lance's partner and lover; the hottest teen

boy on base, as far as Lance was concerned, and no one else's opinion mattered. Carefully and reluctantly, Lance got out of bed to let his boyfriend sleep.

Waking up, but still drowsy, Scott croaked, "Lance?" He quickly cleared his throat.

"Right here," Lance smiled, and completed the section he had been playing.

"I'm really sorry, man," Scott yawned. He shook off the yawn, and then offered, "Remember me saying that I was thinking about how to talk with you about last night?"

Standing with his guitar and turning to face his partner, Lance giggled, "Yep."

Propping himself up on his arms, Scott watched Lance put his guitar in its case, smirking, "That was between midnight and almost five in the morning. I guess three hours sleep didn't cut it."

Walking to the bed, Lance sighed, "You stayed awake thinking of that?"

Nodding, Scott said, "I had to consider both of us. There's no way I could've said a word without being sure I could follow through. How long was I out?"

Crawling onto the bed, Lance stole a tender kiss then whispered, "About an hour. You followed through, all right. All the questions are answered now."

Scott stole a kiss of his own, then grinned, "You were awesome in every way."

"You *are* fantastic, Scott. I'm seriously hooked on you."

"Ditto, sexy lover boy," Scott smiled. "What were you doing while I slept?"

"First I took the dildos to the bathroom and cleaned them up. I fully expected someone to walk in and embarrass me again, but no one did. Then I went on an Internet search to find out why what initially hurt suddenly felt really great."

Scott sniggered, "And the survey says?"

Lance giggled, "The prostate gland is right there, about three or four inches inside and behind our balls. Even the little dildos we've got were pressing right against it. Since we're both longer than five inches, we were probably pressing it most of the time. According to the page I was reading, that's why even the dildos felt so good, and why we shot so far."

Scott chuckled, "No wonder we got really loud."

Lance giggled, "You're being too nice, man. You're the groaner-moaner and I'm the screamer."

Scott smirked, "I distinctly recall encouraging you and jacking your cock to make it happen faster. I will never complain about our volume, man. We were probably alone anyway. I only heard a door close; prob'ly Chris and Jay returning to their room."

"I couldn't figure out which way to move," Lance laughed. "Hips forward, no back and down, get that fat bone deeper, no, forward again." Rapidly nodding, Scott warmly smiled, like he had just received the compliment of a lifetime. Lance playfully sang, "We could do it all again?"

Scott grinned then checked, "Are you feeling okay enough to try? I probably could, but I think my butt would regret it. Then we're walking funny in the kitchen chow line and getting those twinge reminders."

After thoughtfully humming a few moments, Lance whined, "I know you're right, but I'm so fucking hot for you. All the stuff I *was* worried about has my heart racing now."

Gently rubbing Lance's arm, Scott warmly smiled, "Intercourse before we crash tonight, in different positions this time. Right now, how about we go everywhere except there?"

Taking his place laying on top of Scott, Lance softly grinned, "First, a few dozen kisses are in order. I really missed you."

Stealing the first kiss and then lowering down flat again, Scott smiled, "Are you as surprised as I am?"

After stealing a deeper kiss, Lance giggled, "I've had about a hundred surprises with you today. Which specific surprise do you mean?"

"It was all completely natural, easy and fun, entirely instinctual."

Nodding, Lance asked, "Did it seem to you the dildos were a little more difficult than the real thing?"

"Yep. I think our Core Rimmers knew that, which is why dildos were mentioned Friday night. Since they were so young when they started, I'll bet they used their fingers like we did."

Two more deep kisses were shared then Lance admitted, "It was never as painful as I thought it might be. On a scale of one-to-ten, I

don't think it ever reached five. I expected far worse."

"We can thank Chris and Jay later," Scott softly acknowledged, "but mostly I think it was that knowledge mixed with the affection and love we already had, before I said a word this morning. I still see you exactly as you were and still are, as all male, Lance. I could easily get stupid and wrestle in the diving well, like we did over the weekend, but now I could just as easily spend hours gently touching you. I want everything with you, from rough playtime and normal guitar jams to the softer, more loving times."

Cheekily grinning, Lance admitted, "I can see myself going from one stage to the next without instigation or warning too. My whole attitude has changed, from what I could get and take to what I can give."

They locked eyes for a few moments, scanning the faces they knew very well, but as if they were undiscovered territory. Their smiles faded. Scott guided Lance's head and face down then they passionately kissed. Another slow, forceful grind began. Chins slid over shoulders. Soft groans and whimpers were heard clearly, seemingly creating a harmonious melody. Feeling a rising orgasm, Lance warned Scott.

"Do it, lover boy," Scott softly prompted, "we've gotta shower before dinner any how."

"I wanna make you feel good too though."

Scott breathed, "You always do. I'm so close too. Keep the rhythm goin'."

Lifting his head and planting another deep kiss, Lance moaned into Scott's mouth. Moments later it was all over except the chuckling, giggling and promises of never ending love. Tapping out a

little rhythm on Lance's butt cheeks, Scott grinned, "We need to shower."

Lance giggled, "Is that 'Kashmir' you're playing on my ass?"

Nodding, Scott sniggered, "Your left cheek is my hi-hat and the right is my snare."

Throwing his head back, Lance roared laughing.

Scott giggled, "We really need to motivate before we get stuck together again."

Pushing up, Lance laughed, "This time, *I'm* washing your foreskin. I don't give a damn who walks in and sees me. That's a job we share from now on. Be glad if I let you wash your own dick once a day." He stepped off the bed and turned to Scott for a reaction or remark.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Scott reached and pulled Lance closer. He landed a kiss over Lance's diaphragm, then smiled up, asking, "Are you as ready to commit as I am?" Lance's almost constant smile vanished. Scott nervously assured, "We can wait. It's kewl, man."

Shaking his head, Lance reached under Scott's armpits and guided him up onto his feet. With happy tears burning in his eyes, Lance sobbed, "Yes, Scott. There is no one else and there never will be."

Huffing a huge sigh of relief, Scott wrapped Lance in his arms, whispering, "You're really that happy?" Lance only nodded and tried to stop crying. Scott assured, "It's okay, cos I'm just as happy too now. For a moment there, I thought I rushed you and scared myself. All I'll

ever need or want is you, I swear."

Trying to control himself enough to speak, Lance croaked, "While you slept, I thought of us, and compared you to every other teenaged guy on this base. None are even close, Scott. Seriously, wrap up all the best features of every other guy into one body, and I see you. I can barely believe it's me you want to stay with."

"Then I'll prove it to you, each and every day," Scott promised, and held Lance tighter, waiting for his lover's tears to dry. When Lance smiled up, Scott reached to wipe Lance's tear stained face dry then prompted, "Close your eyes." Mooing through giggles, Lance did as he was told. As he had forewarned, Scott tenderly kissed each eyelid then went for the deep, passionate kiss he had wanted to give since Lance agreed to commit. Rather than breathe through their noses, they each swapped a few breaths.

Breaking the kiss, they simultaneously gasped, "Whoa!"

Dizzily stepping back, Lance shook his head to clear it, giggling, "That was fucking incredible!"

Rapidly blinking, Scott grinned, "Another something to be repeated, often."

"Shower?"

"Shower."

They left the room, unconcerned they were nude. Watching Lance gleefully bouncing with every step, Scott grinned, "A little light on your feet there, Lance?"

"Hell yeah!" Lance giggled. Only two doors down on the same side of the hall, Lance stopped and knocked on Chris' and Jay's door,

then turned an ear to listen.

Scott chuckled, "What do you want them for?"

"I gotta tell somebody!" Lance giggled.

Taking Lance's hand, Scott smiled, "I know the feeling. I wanna tell everybody," and led his giddy lover the remainder of the way to the lavatory. Hearing shower water running, they grimaced, certain their shower activities would need to be curtailed. Stepping into the mob shower changing area, Scott and Lance found Chris hanging off of Jay. All four began chuckling.

"This is becoming habitual," Scott grinned. Lance led the way into the shower.

Watching the other couple enter the shower, Jay grinned, "Can't be helped."

"It's all Lance's fault," Chris sniggered.

Lance giggled, "How is it my fault?" Scott turned on the shower across from Chris and Jay.

Jay explained, "You two transported out of the auditorium. We wanted to thank you and tell you that you did a really good job, so we walked over here."

Stepping back from Jay to clear his throat, exposing his own and Jay's hooded erections, Chris locked eyes with Lance, desperately crying, "Holy fucking hell! Scott! That feels so-oo-oo good!" Jay and Scott softly sniggered.

Quickly covering his blush with both hands, Lance helplessly laughed, "And that was from the dildo. I'm pathetic."

All four cracked up laughing. When they had quieted to mere chortling, Scott beamed, "What started this morning as experiments is now real love. I asked Lance if he was ready to make it permanent, and he said yes." Shivering with excitement because Scott had shared their new status, Lance brightly beamed.

"Awesome!" Chris cheered.

Noticing Lance stuck in the moment and smiling at Scott, Jay nodded and smiled, "We're very happy because both of you obviously are."

Coming to his senses, Lance wondered, "Is it that obvious?" and loaded a palm full of soap. He went directly for Scott's dick and washed it before washing any part of himself.

Jay grinned, "It was pretty clear this morning. You didn't separate and played the same silly shower games we were. This building and our rooms are very well insulated, but we occasionally heard both of you." He pointed up at the air conditioning vent above the bench in the changing area.

Chris smiled, "If you weren't so into the first time bliss, you might have heard us too. Knowing what we talked about before and during lunch, and seeing this result, this is the second happiest day of my life."

With his hands resting on Lance's shoulders, and knowing that his new partner was getting carried away with washing his dick, Scott wondered, "What was your happiest day?"

Seeing Chris was searching for words, Jay answered, "Chris and Rafe thought I was dead Friday. Saturday they learned I wasn't, and went to Walter Reed, with Corey and Drew, to pick me up and bring me here. Chris told me a half-dozen times it was the happiest day of

his life."

Stepping back from Scott to allow him to rinse off, Lance muttered, "Now it makes sense."

Seeing only confusion across from him, Scott explained, "Friday night in the Hundses' basement, you were just barely functioning, Chris. At the time, we thought you were tired. After Rafe went to bed, you'd get the deep introspective look, ya know?" Nodding, Chris turned into the shower and wiped his face.

Holding up an index finger to signal a pause, Jay turned Chris to face him, firmly stating, "No, baby. It never happened, I was alive under that mess, just unconscious. As soon as I could, when they asked for next of kin, you and Rafe were *before* my parents. Once I knew you guys were alive and safe, the rest was cake. I can't live without you either. You know that, right?" Nodding, Chris stepped closer to Jay, held on with all his might and uncontrollably sobbed. Glancing across the shower, Jay confirmed, "Don't even worry about it, guys. It's gonna take Chris some time."

Unexpectedly, Lance flung himself against Scott. Wrapping his arms around his lover, Scott loudly asked, "What's wrong with you?"

"I can feel it," Lance cried, "like it was me without you, like the whole world ended and there's nothing left to live for." Looking up into Scott's eyes, Lance sobbed, "Not again; after these last few days with you, I won't live my life alone. Without you, I'd throw my guitar into a fire. I couldn't even listen to music ever again."

"I'd rather be a hermit," all four boys simultaneously admitted. Each of them scowled and glanced at the other three.

"Okay, that was weird," Jay softly shared. He checked with

Chris, "Are you feeling better?"

Sniffling and still upset, Chris sighed, "Not very much."

Leaning back to try and look in his partner's eyes, Scott softly asked Lance, "How do you feel?"

Without looking up, Lance sobbed, "Like there's a huge void in my chest."

Soothing their freaked out partners, Jay and Scott occasionally glanced at each other, wordlessly trying to understand what was happening.

Also stark naked, Erik and Travis ran into the changing room. Erik loudly asked, "What's wrong?"

Entering the shower with Erik at his side, Travis hollered, "Everything was fine, then suddenly seemed very wrong."

Scowling, Jay muttered, "You guys are way down the other hall."

Travis nodded, "Yeah. Why are Chris and Lance crying? What's going on?"

Before anyone could answer, Troy and Sean transported into the adjacent changing area. Troy scanned the six naked teens for injuries, wondering, "Are you guys okay?"

Suspiciously, Scott asked, "What makes you think anything's wrong?"

Sean slouched and smirked, "Jay's holding Chris the same way you're holding Lance, like you guys are consoling them."

"Yeah," Erik added, "and since I don't see four bones, I know something is very wrong."

"A perfectly clear, sunny day suddenly seemed very dark," Troy grumbled.

Chris held one hand up, admitting, "It was me, guys. Just the reminder of Friday, thinking Jay was dead, I kind o' lost it a little bit."

Erik, Travis, Sean and Troy incredulously shouted, "A little bit?"

Blushing slightly, Chris meekly offered, "Okay, a lot."

Clutching his chest, Troy impatiently huffed, "Give me a heart attack, why don't ya?"

Sean nodded, "We were over at Oneula, checking on our sons. We had just left the Taylors' house. Troy wanted to come visit Lance and Scott, cos he's from New Jersey and they're from New York City, and the whole guitar music thing. Then it's like a total fucking eclipse and we're running."

Troy explained, "Realizing we didn't need to run, and feeling like it was an emergency, I had Alden transport us to wherever Lance and Scott were."

Erik grinned, "Ya think that's bad?" He gestured to Travis, saying, "We were getting started up again, for the third time today. I'm just about to stuff my mouth when I see and smell smoke, like the fires all around LA on Friday."

"I saw and smelled it too," Travis admitted. "We jumped out of bed and raced out of the room looking for fire, only to find you four,

in the shower, and there's not even steam!"

All eight teenagers heard a younger boy's loud laughter. Troy and Sean, the only two wearing clothes and standing in the changing room, turned and looked out toward the lavatory door. In moments, John walked in the lavatory, pulling a hysterical Stephen in with him. Troy and Sean rolled their eyes and smirked. Entering the changing room, John sniggered, "Havin' a good time, dudes?"

Troy chuckled, "I might've known."

"It really wasn't me, bro," John giggled. "I don't freak people out. I try and make them stop freaking." Seeing only disbelief on most of the teenagers' faces, John laughed, "My brothers are a completely different deal!" Stephen sputtered and lost it, laughing his little butt off again. Facing the group in the shower, John sniggered, "If any of you had *listened* to your orientations, you'd know this is kind o' normal, considering." Stephen roared laughing and released John's hand to sit on the bench, before his knees buckled and he collapsed. John took his T-shirt off and draped it over Stephen's face. Clutching at John's shirt, Stephen tried to mute his laughter.

John kicked his sandals off, smiling up at the older boys, "Chill. Since we're here anyway, let's all grab a pre-dinner shower and I'll explain it to you." Pushing his shorts down and off, John sent to Troy and Sean, '*All will be perfectly clear in a few minutes.*' Erik and Travis went to a shower beside Scott and Lance and turned the water on. While Sean and Troy got undressed, John went inside the shower, turned the water on the nearest tap and stepped underneath the spray. When Troy and Sean walked in, John pointed at the shower head between his and the one Chris and Jay were under. Sean and Troy went there and were soon getting wet.

Nonchalantly soaping up, John grinned, "Couple one are Sean

and Troy, simply because they were here and a couple first. Couple two are Chris and Jay, who were a couple long before Troy and Sean, but we didn't know that until Chris showed up, and then Jay was found. Couple three are Erik and Travis. Before they went to lunch on Saturday, they had admitted how they felt. Scott and Lance, you're couple number four. Couples two, three and four arrived here the same day and for the same reason – the Battle Of Earth.

"Only so there are no misunderstandings, let me remind you that we're all gay, in solid relationships and everything's kewl between us. Nothing said here goes out of here; it all stays in my phenomenally cosmic N-Gen mind..." In the adjacent changing area, Stephen howled laughing and stuffed John's shirt back in his mouth. John finished by giggling, "Never to be spoke of again, unless any of you specifically ask me. Kewl?"

When everyone agreed, John grinned, "Chris and Jay, who are your best friends at the moment?"

Jay answered, "Lance and Scott, with Trav and Erik moving up fast."

John prompted, "Travis and Erik, your best friends are?"

"Chris, Jay, Scott and Lance," Travis answered.

Before being asked, Scott smiled, "Chris, Jay, Trav and Erik."

Rinsing soap out from under his nads, John explained, "Everybody everywhere is slightly empathic or telepathic, whether they choose to believe it or not." He shut off the water and moved to stand between the four couples. John asked, "Sean, tell the other guys where you're from?"

Sean replied, "Frederick, Maryland."

Erik gasped, "I was born in Middletown, Maryland. We moved to LA before I turned two."

When John locked eyes with him, Travis smiled, "Philadelphia."

Swinging his arm around, John said, "When I saw all eight of you last night at dinner, I had this goofy thought and shrugged it off, because you were at three separate tables. At lunch today, six of the eight of you were together." He faced Troy and prompted, "What might've happened if Billy and Robbie didn't hook up this morning?"

Troy chuckled, "I had already told Sean that I wanted to get to know Lance and Scott a little better. We were going to have lunch with them."

"Plans change and stuff happens," John smiled. "For now, you all look at Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Drew and Corey like they're something special. You might as well get used to it now, soon newbies will be watching all eight of you and thinking the exact same things."

"Chris got upset, Jay felt his lover's pain, which got Lance upset, which set off Scott, all of which Erik and Trav experienced. Since Troy was thinking of two guitar players that he wanted to get to know better, he and Sean got in the loop and came running. *We* are brothers and ***always*** will be. It's almost always the first thing we say to every newbie, but you didn't get it. We don't just say it to make newbies feel good; it's real. This is only one example of what happens in Clan Divisions all around the world. Troy, your sense of urgency was felt by Prez, who was about ready to put us at yellow alert, because Keith confirmed the feelings when he felt Sean freaking out. I have mental connections to all the Core Rimmers. First, I had to calm down Keith

and Prez, by which time you had Alden transport you here. Right now, Prez and Keith are at Kaho'olawe, watching Richie and Jimmy, five-year-olds trying to be like their teenaged fathers. Because Prez and Keith are relieved, two little dudes being cute has them laughing their butts off.

"You each did this without my help, just by following your hearts," John grinned. "Oh, and Stephen is hyperventilating over there because he knows what I do; couples two and four had just finished making love before coming in here, couple three was starting another round, and couple one was hoping to get in some afternoon delight of their own before dinner. Now, when weird stuff happens, each of you can explain it easily with two words – we're family." Waving, John said, "I'll see you in the dining room in a little while." He went out to the changing room to finish drying off.

Grabbing a towel from the stack, Stephen stood and began drying off his hubby.

The first to say anything was Erik. He softly wondered, "I didn't get here until late Saturday morning, but you dudes think that much of me?" The other seven boys in the mob shower smiled. Sean and Troy softly chortled. Erik giggled, "What? It's an honest question."

Troy sniggered, "I know of all of you, but don't really *know* any of you. All I was doing was thinking of meeting two guitar players, from the same area of the country that I'm from, and look how that worked out."

"The last we heard, from Mike at school, was that Scott and Lance were *working* on becoming a couple," Sean giggled. He waved an arm at Lance and Scott, who hadn't moved out of arms' reach of each other the entire time, and giggled, "It looks pretty much done to

me!"

Chris teased, "Two couples took the fast track."

"At least Scott and Lance knew each other three days before ravaging each other," Jay joked, and then winked at Erik and Travis. Jay playfully wondered, "Did it take two, three or four whole hours?"

Turning redder by the second, Travis smiled at Erik. Shrugging because he really wasn't certain what the correct answer was, Erik giggled, "Definitely more than two hours, and certainly less than four." Scott and Lance muted their laughter by covering their mouths with their lover's shoulder.

Swiftly turning around and into Travis' arms, Erik hid his blush and softly chortled. Holding his lover tight, Travis chuckled, "Enough time has been wasted, so we made some."

Since Troy and Sean weren't around most of Saturday, Jay gestured to Erik and Travis, playfully explaining, "After getting our room somewhat organized, Chris and I took an hour nap, and then we went back to the diving well, so I could meet folks. Chris wanted to introduce Travis in particular, but that didn't happen, because Trav was with Erik. Chris pointed out Travis at dinner, when he walked in with Erik, and they got a separate table. Suspicions were confirmed when neither were seen again until breakfast."

Erik giggled, "Saturday night, we went to the CIC dining room for a snack, around half-past eleven."

Chris smiled, "Erik, we like you plenty, partly because we got to know Trav, and he's head-over-heels for you." He helplessly sniggered, "Come out of your room for more than meals and bathroom breaks, and we'll probably like you more."

Grinning, Troy asked Sean, "We took the fast track?"

Shrugging, Sean giggled, "Compared to the orphanage, no. Compared to Chris and Jay, yeah, I guess we did."

Forcing a frown, Troy groused, "I thought we went pretty slow."

Scott asked, "How did you guys meet, Sean?"

Sean grinned, "From my perspective, a week ago today I saw Troy perform with Platinum Habits. I had tunnel vision from that moment. From Troy's point of view, it was the next morning, when I went to his condo to deliver ID and debit cards."

Troy giggled, "How's the view, Tiger?"

"Yeah," Sean evilly snickered, "I'll just have to go inside and check out your view." The other six cracked up. Sean turned Troy around, looked down at his Lover's meaty ass, violently shook his head and enthusiastically giggled, "Damn, that's an awesome view!" Seeing Troy roll his eyes and blush, the other six roared.

Certain that rising problems would soon become apparent, Troy laughed, "Why are we still here, Tiger? We haven't made love since we woke up."

Turning the shower off, Sean giggled, "We'll meet you dudes where?"

"Our room is mostly presentable," Jay offered.

"Kewl," Troy smiled. "We'll meet you there in thirty minutes or so. Then we'll have dinner together. Our sons are involved with their boyfriends, so it'll be kewl."

The other six chanted, "Kewl."

Waving, Sean called, "Alden, grab our clothes and take me and Troy to our bedroom, please?"

Troy and Sean vanished from the mob shower and their clothes disappeared from the changing area.

Jay slouched, "Damn! I completely forgot to tell them to bring their Mr. Fuzzies."

Scott sniggered, "There's at least a dozen in our room, so we'll bring extras."

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, FYS Building

Monday, November 8, 4:27PM HTZ

After leaving the teenagers in the mob shower, John and Stephen went to have a very serious discussion. Telepathically, John had learned a great deal about their Battle Of Earth kids from Damon and Ian Praefectus. Out of the forty-one kids rescued that day, twenty-nine didn't know exactly what had happened to their parents. Of the twenty-nine, only Travis McAuley had been living with his aunt and uncle. It was a gargantuan task for John to consider telling any of the kids what had happened to their parents. In this situation, John had to share the burden with his mom, dad, Aunt Anna and Uncle Bill. For the second time that afternoon, John and Stephen were back in the conference room.

Since Rob Gibbons had gone with the King, and the majority of Core Rimmers, to Kaho'olawe, John tapped his comm-badge calling,

"Aunt Laura, are you very busy?"

Laura Gibbons answered, "Not at the moment. I just walked into my house, to have my kids wash up before dinner, John."

"Please transport to the FYS Building?" John asked, and briefly explained, "I have news that you need to know."

Laura told her kids that she would meet them at the CIC dining room, and then had Alden transport her to John's location. She appeared in the conference room and worried, "What's wrong?"

John forced a small smile and replied, "I have information about our Battle Of Earth rescued kids, including Albert and Charles."

Taking a seat at the table beside Anna Seibert, Laura sighed, "The boys only want to know why their parents never came home. They told me about several lucky breaks they had Thursday night and Friday morning."

John nodded and smiled, "Regarding Lance Kinchen and Scott Shetley, by any chance?"

Laura giggled, "Who told you?"

Stephen giggled. John sniggered, "No one told me, not directly, anyhow. When I met Al, Charles, Lance and Scott at Des Moines, I learned that Lance and Scott made sure the two little guys got on the same bus to the Meadowlands. I saw street surveillance video of Lance and Scott crossing The George Washington Bridge into Fort Lee, New Jersey, where they met Albert and Charles, walking alone."

Laura nodded and grinned, "The boys have raved for three days about Lance and Scott."

John smirked, "What gets me is I just spent a few minutes with Lance, Scott and some other teenagers. Since meeting them Friday, I scanned Lance and Scott several times, and neither thinks they did anything very special. They only kept an eye on Al and Charles, from Fort Lee and all the way here."

Laura sighed and smiled, "For two little ones to be watched by two teenagers was plenty. They wanted to come here because this is where their guardians would be. What do you know about their parents?"

"They were killed in a commuter train derailment, on their way home late Thursday night," John answered. "Initially, it wasn't suspected to be related to Battle Of Earth, but on Sunday it was determined that the tracks were tampered with. New Jersey Police have arrested the individuals responsible and charged them with murder, amongst other destruction of property charges."

Rapidly blinking tears away, Laura nodded. Reaching to take her friend's hand, Anna Seibert asked, "Is there anything else we can do to insure justice is served?"

John answered, "We've provided additional data to the authorities in New Jersey. Any chance of plea bargaining is lost. Two hundred and twenty-six died on that train, making those men some of the worst mass murderers in history. We could take custody, I guess, but I don't think it's logical, because of all the others that were killed."

At a pause, Stephen carefully said, "That's only two of the twenty-nine kids we have information for. We can't begin to figure out how to tell any of them what really happened."

"You won't have to do anything," Bill Seaver firmly said.

Jim Hundser agreed. "We'll take care of all of them."

John shared, "There are some that I think we might need to tell, dad. AJ and Jerry are the fathers of the Hunnicutt brothers. I've already shared what I know about the Hunnicutts with AJ and Jerry, and they'll have a chat with only Kenny. Jimmy Matos is now Jason Mullins' boyfriend, which indirectly makes him part of Sean's and Troy's family. There's just too many to give bad news to. Every one of the kids lost parents under the most gruesome, violent circumstances."

Focusing on Anna Seibert, John frowned, "How can I tell you what happened to the parents of the Steib brothers? Even if you chose to not tell them specifics, they could scan you and learn more than you'd like them to know. The same problem exists with Tanner and Toby Stoeher, who don't have a new family to lean on. I can hide it from them, but no one else could."

Closing his eyes so he couldn't telepathically read more from any of the adults, John scowled, "Do we tell Lance Kinchen that his dad died from electrocution, when an underground pipe bomb exploded and cut a live wire that fell on him? The dude plays electric guitar! His mother was shot at the diner where she worked, along with five other employees. Scott Shetley's father died in a sabotaged elevator. He dropped seventeen floors. His mother was accidentally pushed off a crowded subway platform in front of a train. The parents of the Hunnicutts were beat to death in the street riots at New York's Financial District, before they made it to their train Friday morning. The Oldcambus brothers and Taron were in the mens' room at LA International Spaceport, preparing to return home to Louisville, Kentucky, when a sabotaged passenger jet exploded at the gate, killing all four of their parents and dozens of others. The parents of the Nash brothers were killed by freeway shootings, in two separate cars on two different freeways. The most insane part of all of this is

that the parents of only four kids died as a direct result of a Romulan; Chris Stokley, Pat O'Hara, and Jay and Rafe Montingua. Every other kid lost their parents due to crazed humans."

Opening his eyes again, John sighed, "None of these kids need to know specifics. Anything we told them would only make bad situations worse. So, who still wants to share any of this with any kid?"

Jennifer Hundser leaned back in her chair to think for a few moments. She then asked, "I'd like to see a show of hands from those who think it would be best to lock these records, until the children affected reach the age of twenty-one?" Around the table, everyone raised a hand. Jennifer called, "Alden, lock down the manner of death records for the parents of all twenty-nine Battle Of Earth children. Only when the child reaches the age of twenty-one can he choose to review the records. Use the highest level of encryption and alter the key sequence daily at random times. The only other persons who may access these files are myself and Teri Short. Also, make the video of this meeting available to Teri Short for her review."

Alden answered, "Encryption is complete. The video is being transmitted to Teri Short, also encrypted and high priority, mom."

When his wife stopped speaking, Jim Hundser tapped his comm-badge. "Lieutenant Vorik," He called.

Vorik quickly responded, "Here, Sir."

Jim ordered, "Please contact VSO headquarters and arrange for two Vulcan mind healers; one for my son, John, and another for his husband, Stephen Marr. Have them transport directly to my location, where we will wait for their arrival."

"Aye, Sir," Vorik replied. "The request is being made as we

speak. Estimated arrival in five minutes. Vorik out."

John grinned, "Is that really necessary, dad?"

Jim could barely believe the question and blinked at his N-Gen boy. Bill Seaver sadly shook his head and smirked, "I may have nightmares about what I learned in this room today. You might be able to compartmentalize your brain better, but you are still human, and empathic to boot. It's better to be safe than sorry."

Bill had only just stopped speaking when his comm-badge chirped. His wife, Lanna called, "Bill?"

He tapped his comm-badge, answering, "Yes, love?"

Lanna giggled, "Please tell me why Cesar and Felipe are laughing their tiny butts off. They only told me to ask daddy."

"There's no point in trying to keep secrets in our family any more," Bill sniggered. Across the comm-badge, Cesar and Felipe howled laughing. Bill chuckled, "I was thinking that we still have empty rooms in our home that need to be filled."

"By whom?" Lanna giggled.

"Tanner and Toby Stoeher could fill one," Bill smiled.

"Fine," Lanna laughed, "I guess we'll need a larger table for our family at dinner tonight, since Gayle Gibson hasn't left me all day."

Bill's adopted daughter, Rena Hawkin, giggled, "Daddy, I want a little sister. There's too many boys in our house."

"I wanna big sister, daddy!" the five-year-old level two orphanage girl squealed over the comm-badge.

Insanely giggling, Stephen faked tapping his comm-badge and called, "Lieutenant Vorik, better make that four mind healers." John cracked up.

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Kaho'olawe Island

Monday, November 8, 2004 4:30PM HTZ

Other than John, Stephen, Sean and Troy, all the other Core Rimmers went with King Aalona to visit the now populated island. Only two of The King's security were fit enough to leave the hospital and return to duty. That morning, Rob Gibbons had joined The King with his own security team. They were among the group taking the afternoon trip, as well as all the Core Rimmers' security teams. Many of the Core Rimmers' sons and their boyfriends came along.

During the morning, King Aalona learned that people from China, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia were peacefully coexisting on the island. Bored adults returned to their normal jobs and occupations, or had found new ways to contribute to the community. Development that had been done primarily by US Army Corps of Engineers was now being done by refugee construction professionals. Community services, like hospitals, fire and police departments were in operation. At the northern end of the island, air traffic controllers, fishermen and tourist cruise boats were beginning to do their jobs. Centrally located elementary, middle and high schools of the same design as the Ewa Beach school existed and were orienting kids. Herds of cattle and sheep were roaming on the mountain slopes. Farmlands for fruits, grain and vegetables were being sown. On the mono rail from the north end of the island and heading southwest, King Aalona and Rob Gibbons shared all this

information with the Core Rimmers.

Mike asked his dad, "Have there been any problems?"

Rob shook his head, smiling, "Amazingly, the only problems have been communications frustrations. The majority speak English, but accents and slang usages have been forcing people to slow down and listen carefully. They're addressing that issue by preparing an office building for use as a college."

King Aalona smiled, "The first native Kaho'olowan was born Saturday afternoon, a girl. Shops are opening at Seibert Mall. Having homes, family and food provided, they did all this of their own accord. It started Saturday and continued into Sunday. Adjustments are still being made, however they are cooperating." The mono rail car slowed. King Aalona said, "We will exit at this stop. The Southwest end of the island is now a beachfront recreation area. I did not have the opportunity to visit here this morning."

The large tourist party followed the King and his security off the monorail. Patiently waiting for Prez and Keith to step onto the station platform, King Aalona observed, "You have been very quiet."

Keith smiled, "We're speechless, Majesty."

Prez nodded, "So many people were displaced. It's hard to believe all this. We were at our private beach house, on the Southeast side of the island, Saturday and until the next morning."

Derrick offered, "We knew the island was populated, but what I've seen reminds me of Honolulu and Waikiki. All day and night Saturday, we never heard sirens or any city sounds."

"Clan Short did this under your supervision," King Aalona

reminded. "Materials were provided and the people went to work."

"I was in a hospital at the time, Highness," Prez chuckled.

Keith loudly joked, "That means it's all Kaleo's fault!"

With Tory and watching their five sons, Kaleo hollered from across the platform; "What am I being blamed for?"

"Turning a barren island into a populated city," Mike teased.

"It wasn't me!" Kaleo giggled, "Peter Lambert got it started and Nathan did the rest."

Peter popped in, distributed random hugs, and then handed Keith a miniature purple hardhat. "Just give this to Kaleo," Peter softly said, "and watch his reaction!" He giggled and vanished again. Scratching his head and grinning, Keith took the strange little cup to Kaleo.

Nathan smirked, "Yup, I built everything, all by myself. It's no wonder I'm still looking for a boyfriend, you slave drivers."

Prez sniggered, "You were invited Saturday. I'll get ya hitched, but you'll need to provide the hitching post." Rolling his eyes and mooing through giggles, Nathan returned to monitoring little kids going down the stairs.

Showing Kaleo the little purple hat, Keith softly asked, "Is this yours?"

Tory cracked up. "Nope," Kaleo sniggered, "Tory makes sure I wear mine."

Keith grinned, "What in the world is it?" Tory howled laughing.

Taking the little hardhat, Kaleo held it in front of Keith's crotch, giggling, "You'll need a purple jock to hold it place."

"Prez will hold it for you, Keith," Tory chuckled.

Walking down the platform steps to the street level, King Aalona smiled at the playful boys and young men, cheerfully telling them all, "Clan assistance has created a thriving community of diverse cultures. They were helped and are now helping each other. More often than not, goods and services are being bartered, without contract. I was told that the mother of the baby girl was in labor for ten hours. During those hours, the grandmother prepared meals and sent the other children to deliver meals to the families of the doctor and nurse. That is one example of what is happening here, and why I wanted to return with you."

Before the King, Rob Gibbons, Keith and Prez made it all the way down the steps, Joey hollered, "I smeww cookies!"

"YEAH!" cheered about twenty other young boys.

The boys ran across the road. Reyes giggled, "Oh, shit!" and ran after his brothers and the pack of rug rats. Paul, Ryan, Drew, Corey and Leo followed the kids. The personal security for Reyes, Drew and Corey hurried after them all.

Sadly shaking his head, Mike smiled, "Sorry, Majesty. Joey hasn't had food in three-and-a-half-hours."

"There's no need to apologize," King Aalona grinned, "Kaimi is among them."

The pack of cookie seekers followed their noses along the concrete path toward the beach, turned a corner and disjointedly

screamed, "COOKIE ICE CREAM SAMICHES!"

Rounding the corner with the King, Derrick noticed Reyes, sandwiched between Paul and Ryan, a fair distance back from Kaleo, Tory, Drew, Corey and all the ravenous boys. Reyes giggled at his dad, "It's safer here."

Derrick smirked, "Take a break, big brother; dad and pop are here now." Locking eyes with Paul and then Ryan, Derrick instructed, "Silence your boyfriend."

Ryan's eyes danced. Paul evilly grinned. Ryan slid in front of Reyes and Paul slipped behind him. A moment later, Ryan was searching for Reyes tonsils and Paul was snacking on Reyes neck.

Kaleo asked the elderly shopkeeper, "Do you have enough chocolate ice cream for this gang?"

"Just enough, I believe," the shopkeeper replied.

Tapping his sub-vocal, Kaleo ordered, "Alden, get two five-gallon tubs of chocolate ice cream, twenty pounds of flour, ten pounds of brown sugar, ten pounds of sweet butter, five pounds of chocolate chips and ten dozen eggs. Deliver it all to the counter directly in front of me."

Carefully and politely, the shopkeeper said, "That is far more than necessary, Sir."

The items Kaleo ordered appeared on the counter. Kaleo shrugged, "This is how business is done here. Besides, this is less than a tenth of our family too. When I come back with the other three-hundred, you'll remember."

The shopkeeper chuckled, "Yes, Sir." A younger man came

from the back of the shop to gather the tubs of ice cream and take them back to the storage freezer.

Certain that the shopkeeper didn't believe Kaleo, Tory called, "Mike, how many kids in our Clan?"

"Three-hundred-ninety-two and holding steady," Mike replied.

The shopkeeper stumbled and accidentally jammed his fist into the tub of ice cream he was scooping from. He glanced around, rapidly blinking. Taking hold of Tory, Kaleo sniggered, "Teenage endurance."

Scooping ice cream onto the next large chocolate chip cookie, the shopkeeper chuckled, "Yes Sir. I can still recall those days."

Reyes suddenly broke down laughing. Paul had reached both arms under Reyes shirt to tweak his nips. Ryan was tickling Reyes lower ribs. Paul evilly sniggered, "I can't find the station yet. Two on one is fun!"

Nodding, Ryan giggled, "This how we play in public too. Reyes has no idea what's in store for him when we're alone."

"He's got perky nips and a real nice crack, bro."

"The front's got a good bit more than I expected too."

"Wanna swap?"

"Sure!"

Paul and Ryan began to swap places, but they both went to Reyes right side, allowing him to escape to his left. Laughing his ass off, Reyes took steps three-at-a time, down to the beach. Chasing after their boyfriend, Paul and Ryan loudly bitched each other out. Reyes

ran directly for the ocean, with Paul and Ryan only two paces behind him.

Taking seats on a nearby bench, Jimmy and Richie were feeding each other and their Mr. Fuzzies their cookie ice cream sandwiches. On the next bench, Scott and Dillon were using their Mr. Fuzzies to hold the ice cream sandwiches they were feeding each other. Between giggles, they'd make lip smacking kiss sounds and hum hungrily when they were ready for more Mr. Fuzzy cookie ice cream kisses.

AJ held Shaun Hunnicutt on his hip with one arm. Seeing Richie with Jimmy, Dillon with Scott, and Geoff walking to the benches with his big brother Mike, Shaun forgot to swallow. Softly giggling, AJ wiped Shaun's chin. "Daddy?" Shaun called.

AJ smiled, "Yeah, what's up, buddy?"

Shaun wondered, "Does Mike got a boyfrien'?"

"Maybe so," AJ chuckled.

"Will I gets a boyfrien' too?"

"There are lots of boys who may be your friend," AJ explained. "One day, maybe you'll find a really special friend. Then you and he can decide."

Shaun yelled, "Hey Kenny!" When Kenny turned away from the conversation he was having with Leo to see what his youngest brother wanted, Shaun hollered, "You gettin' a boyfrien' someday, bro?" In the middle ground between Leo, Kenny, AJ, Shaun and Jerry, were Drew and Corey, sharing a single cookie ice cream sandwich and pretending they weren't hearing what was going on.

Instantly turning crimson red, Kenny smirked, "I dunno."

Shaun impatiently screamed, "Whadaya mean ya don' know?"

Leo nudged Kenny and whispered, "Just say yes, Kenny."

"But I really don't know," Kenny softly told Leo.

"Shaun's too young to understand 'I dunno'," Leo smiled.

"It's so embarrassing," Kenny softly huffed. He then corrected himself, telling Shaun, "Someday, bro."

"I gotta gets a boyfrien' too then, daddy," Shaun thoughtfully scowled.

AJ playfully explained, "Then you'll find a special boy soon. You'll want to talk with him like me and poppa talk. You'll want to play, like me and poppa play. And maybe you'll even want to kiss him, like me and poppa kiss." All this was said to Shaun, but AJ's real purpose was to get Jerry revved up. It worked like a charm. Soon, Jerry was blatantly hitting on AJ, all smartly disguised as fatherly advice to their four-year-old son.

Leo grinned, "See, all better."

"Yeah, I guess," Kenny giggled. "If I know Shaun, every morning and every night he'll ask, 'gotta boyfriend yet?' Then I'll say, no, he'll wonder, why not, and I'll go quietly kookie."

Leo giggled, "Never mind that. What were you saying about Jason and Jimmy Matos?"

Kenny teased, "Wishin' you hadn't gone to school now?"

Shaking his head, Leo giggled, "I wish I had been there to see it.

We both know Jase wanted a boyfriend. I can't jump that fast, dude. Now that I think of it, what made you play the game?"

"Just because more than half the guys our age were playing," Kenny giggled. "Jase is real cute, and he's a nice guy, just way more blunt than me. If I had won, it wouldn't have worked for very long."

Dee bounced over to Kenny and Leo. Finished with his cookie ice cream sandwich, Dee had obviously worn about half of it. Kenny cracked up. Reaching a hand into his pocket for the stash of napkins he had swiped, Leo offered them to Dee, giggling, "You're a mess, cousin."

Taking the napkins, Dee giggled, "Thanks, Leo," and started wiping chocolate off his mouth. While Dee cleaned up, he asked, "Do you wanna go swimmin'? Daddy and poppa said it's kewl, cos there's lifeguards. That'll get all the chocolate ice cream cleaned up too." He stopped wiping his mouth and chin, asking, "Better?" Shaking his head and turning away, Kenny roared laughing. Shoving Kenny, Dee giggled, "If ya don't wear it, ya ain't enjoying it!"

Leo wrapped an arm around Dee and took him over to Drew and Corey. "We gotta get chocolate face cleaned up," Leo giggled.

"Dee!" Corey laughed, "How did you get chocolate near your ear?"

Dee tried to squint and be impatient, but caught Corey's laughter infection and cracked up.

Pointing to the beach, Drew sniggered, "Go ahead. Reyes is out there and we'll be along, once your brothers finish copying Dee's chocolate clown face." Watching Leo walk away with Dee, Drew had a thought that would likely embarrass his eldest son. He jogged over to Leo, paused him and whispered, "Cotton boxer-briefs and cotton

shorts won't dry fast. Take them off or spend the next two days scratching your crotch."

Leo audibly gasped, and then giggled, "Good call, dad. I was considering it, but now it's definite."

Nodding, Drew smiled, "See ya in a few minutes."

Pointing at the ocean, Leo called, "Come on, Kenny. Hey, let's go, Stan." Once the four boys were jogging down to the beach, Kenny asked Leo what Drew was worried about, and Leo honestly answered.

Kenny chuckled, "Hawaiian rules are way more fun than New York City's. Skinny dippin' there won't happen."

Leo remembered, "You wore white cotton briefs over the weekend."

"And I'm wearing briefs now, but not for long," Kenny giggled. "Can you see me tomorrow, searching around for a boyfriend to shut up my brother, with one hand scratching my balls?"

Dee and Stan cracked up. Leo howled, "Great first impression!"

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Ewa Beach Dormitory #3

Monday, November 8, 2004 5:07PM

Sean and Troy transported to the hallway outside of Chris' and Jay's room. Finding the door open and the same six boys they had showered with already dressed, Troy knocked on the door frame and Sean raised an arm. Kicked back on a bed with Jay, Chris smiled, "Come on in, guys." The stereo radio was on and softly playing

classic rock.

Sean and Troy stepped inside the room. Obviously, Chris and Jay had moved the beds away from the far wall where the windows were to the two adjacent walls. Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott were sitting on the other bed, up by the headboard, across from Chris and Jay. Getting up off the bed, Chris gestured to where he had been sitting, inviting, "Right over here is kewl, guys. I'll kick back against Jay."

Jay grinned, "You're not gonna let me out of your sight the rest of the day, are you?"

Walking around the bed, Chris smiled, "You'll be behind me and out of my sight, but the answer is, no. Deal with it."

"I can easily deal," Jay chuckled. The tone of Jay's voice was clear to the other boys in the room. Although unhappy that Chris was still feeling fears from Friday, Jay was clearly thrilled Chris was attaching himself like never before. The damned cast on Jay's wrist was a constant reminder of Friday that was only delaying Chris' recovery. As soon as Jay was able, he had to make love to Chris in the missionary position, soothing his lover's shattered nerves face-to-face. It would still take more time, but the cast had to go.

Chris got settled between Jay's legs. Troy took the spot vacated by Chris. Turning to Troy, Jay nodded his head slightly toward Chris and then playfully wagged his tongue. Nodding his head and grinning, Troy signaled for Jay to go for it. Sean sat between his boyfriend's legs and leaned back. Troy took a soft chomp from Sean's shoulder. Widely smiling, Sean's face split open.

Scott shared, "We found out that Erik wanted to learn to play guitar, but sort o' gave up."

"Lessons and school homework was too much," Erik smirked. "About a year is all I could handle. My folks noticed my grades slipping, so guitar lessons stopped."

Locking eyes with Sean and Troy, Travis offered, "Earlier this afternoon, Scott and Lance jammed with Reyes and Joey."

"I'm nowhere near as good as Scott or Lance," Erik chortled. "There's no way in hell I could keep up with Troy and Mike."

Troy wondered, "What makes you think that, Erik?"

"Oh, it's a fact," Erik giggled. "On my best days, I might strum a few chords in time with a CD."

Sean grinned, "You can do anything you want, with just a little effort and a lot of caring. I've heard that dozens of times from Troy and all the other Core Rimmers. You might as well get used to it too, Erik."

"You'll find out where your real interests are, next Monday when you take your placement tests," Troy offered.

Lance warned, "If I find out you're a musician too, you'll need to pick up a bass guitar, Erik."

"Or drum sticks," Scott added. Looking across the room, Scott smiled, "Reyes and Joey aren't our drummers. On stage today, Lance and I were outclassed by Joey, KC and Reyes."

Sean asked, "KC's here too?"

Nodding, Lance giggled, "The last we heard, he was going for a walk with Fred Eckhart. We might have another couple hooking up."

Troy chuckled, "This seems to be that sort of day. Our two

oldest sons found boyfriends today. Add you and Scott, and KC and Fred, and it's been a *very* busy day." Sean and the other six boys softly sniggered.

Suddenly mooing and shifting uncomfortably, Lance blushed and giggled, "That's all it took for my butt to remind me what it wants." The others began laughing.

Holding his clenched fist out to Lance, Erik giggled, "It seems you and me have similar challenges, bro." Nodding and giggling, Lance knocked knuckles with Erik.

Scott squeezed Lance and softly checked, "Are you okay?"

"Fine," Lance assured, and then leaned his head back. Scott gave his lover a tender kiss. Lance dreamily sighed, "Whoever said a good kiss is like fireworks got it all wrong. It's more like a star going nova."

Slightly out of sync, the other seven smiled, "I know."

Jay sniggered, "This is just too weird."

Troy shrugged, "Not really, considering what John said earlier. If one of us didn't agree, there'd be trouble in paradise."

"We thought it was just a Core Rimmer thing until today," Sean shared. "It's one thing for Troy to look in my eyes and pretty much know what I'm thinking, and where I'm at, but they can all do that pretty easily."

Erik wondered, "What's it like to be a Clan Short leader?"

"Yeah," Chris interjected, "I have to admit, I've been wondering that too."

Leaning his head back, Sean checked with Troy. Both began giggling, wanting to tell Chris, "You'll find out soon enough!" but they restrained themselves and held it back.

Chauncey jogged past the open bedroom doorway with Rikko. Troy barked. Out in the hall, Chauncey giggled, "Okay, Rikko! Jeez!" Moments later, Rikko pulled Chauncey into the room. The Siberian Husky puppy jumped up to lick Troy's hand. Troy chuckled and gave Rikko some scratches behind the ear.

Sean giggled, "What you guys *think* you're imagining is real." Easily shifting through two languages, Sean told the others, "You can understand the animals. You can understand all our planet's languages, and some from other planets, especially Vulcan."

"There's a whole bunch of other stuff we learned without really studying or trying," Troy revealed. "Mostly, the jobs are easy and fun. The only exceptions have been the California Orphanages Wednesday night, and all the crap from Thursday night and through Friday."

"We occasionally have some small tasks to do," Sean explained, "like updating web pages, and orienting newbies, but mostly we're all big brothers. The best part is that we're officers in Starfleet, considered adults, able to marry and adopt kids. The adoptions were one of Saturday's highlights."

Scott grinned, "The last part must be scary."

"No, not really," Troy replied. "It's actually really kewl. In our case, we've got an eleven-year-old, a nine-year-old, a six-year-old and a five-year-old. Because of their foster-parents, they all know more than I did about sex, so they all know where their interests are. All our sons are gay, which makes it very easy for me and Sean. The two youngest were the first to find boyfriends, but we know they're mostly

emulating us. Now that our two oldest are there too, we can advise them on what each step is like, emotionally and physically."

Sean added, "We fully expect to be asked about sleep-overs later. We'll approve, and then have chats with our older sons and their partners. Our boys aren't virgins, but their boyfriends likely are. Maybe they'll all want to do everything, all at once the first night, but that ain't reality."

Chauncey giggled, "I think I should leave now."

Troy smiled, "Do you know where you're interests are, Chauncey?"

Nodding, Chauncey seriously answered, "I think I'm straight, but I learned it's not the body so much as it is the person underneath. I could probably deal either way, easily enough."

"We'll see you at dinner," Sean grinned.

Waving, Chauncey whined and whimpered, telling Rikko they were going to their room and he was going to be fed dinner. Rikko raced for the door, dragging Chauncey along with him.

Picking up where they left off, Jay told the four across the room, "All the stuff we talked about over lunch, Sean and Troy will teach their sons."

Travis grinned, "All that's common sense though. Yesterday, when we went for intercourse, I was real slow with Erik and he was slow with me, methodically exploring. We didn't need explanations or instructions."

Sean said, "But you're..."

"No, Tiger," Troy quickly and loudly interrupted. He then gently reminded, "You need to forget as much as you possibly can, so I'll tell them." Sean nodded and sighed in relief. Glancing around the room, Troy said, "Our sons were fondled and filmed. Without them really saying it, we're certain each of the four of them fucked one another, on demand for a camera and perverted adults. What we know about caring and loving, Sean also knows, but from learning in the worst way. He treated me just as carefully as any other guy might, partly because he was fucked by an adult man at nine-years-old. A little spit was all that was used and he jammed it all in, held him down, and didn't give a damn that a boy was screaming and crying into a mattress.

"In California, Wednesday night, sixteen kids were treated just as cruelly, primarily by being starved. Some newbie fifteen-year-olds are shorter and thinner than any of us. We phasered those adult assholes in California to dust, for those sixteen kids, and for what Sean and many other kids go through. As satisfied as I was that two more cretins were dead and couldn't harm another kid, I still puked in a sink. Even now, after a Vulcan mind meld healing, I'm still fucking angry as hell about this shit. I was angry though when Sean told me what happened too, so I guess that's just the way it is... the way I am."

Calming himself and being calmed by Sean's gentle leg rubs, Troy sighed, "Yeah, we all know the details of how to go carefully and slowly, but assuming any boy, gay or straight, is going to know to curtail his instincts, probably isn't the wise move. Our attitude is, if you're adult enough to go beyond masturbation and oral sex to anal sex, then you'd better be grown up to listen to the facts.

"Six of the sixteen Core Rimmers were abused kids; Sean, Kaleo, Tory, AJ, Jerry and Reyes. We believe they're the exceptional ones that can act logically, using Vulcan laws, and perform duties like

in California. Since there are those four, there's proof that there will be others just like them who will make themselves known. Another thought that should be considered is how many Core Rimmers will be needed for all five bases. There are nine here. There are six now at Oneula Beach. Eventually, we'll need at least six or eight at Hawaii, Maui and Kauai. That means we'll need a minimum of eighteen more Core Rimmers."

Turning to look back, Sean gasped, "Thirty-three total, Lover?"

"Minimum," Troy nodded. "It might be better to assume twelve at each base, so sixty is probably the more accurate number. We protect the west coast of America to the eastern shores of Asia. After the ZCC orphanages, is it safe to assume nothing like that will ever happen again?"

Eery silence enveloped the room. The classic rock tunes on the radio were only white noise that none of the boys noticed. Sean got up off the bed and gestured for Troy to also stand. Troy swung his legs off the bed and stood before his Tiger. "Thank you," Sean softly offered. Troy nodded and visibly shuddered. Sean wrapped his Lover up tight and gave him a few tender kisses and one deep one. Sean then took the spot closest to the headboard and beside Jay, where Troy had been sitting. Troy moved into position, leaning back against Sean.

"I'm fucking pissed," Jay softly growled.

Travis nodded, "Me too."

Scott shared, "I was just about to fly off the bed, to hug the breath out of Troy and Sean."

"I really want to punch something before I hug either of them," Erik frowned.

Lance muttered, "There's a punching bag in the rec center we need to destroy, I think." Chris only nodded, but the four boys across the room could see fire in his eyes.

Sean grinned, "Each of us Core Rimmers watch new kids that might someday be new Core Rimmers, or maybe dorm leaders. All of you, as relatively normal guys from Battle Of Earth, are being closely watched. Maybe it's just me, but I think it's kind of weird that gay dudes like us make up the largest group of Clan leaders. I mean, as caring, gentle and loving as we can be with our boyfriends, we turn around and put on our Vulcan attitudes, carry phasers, and are completely prepared to murder for the sake of justice."

"That's not so weird, Sean," Chris softly offered. "I've only fought twice in my life, and both times were for Jay."

Jay sniggered, "You started one of those fights."

"He was being an asshole!" Chris loudly proclaimed. The rest of them roared laughing for longer than necessary, just to blow off steam. Showing Troy a little scar on his index finger, Chris sniggered, "I busted his tooth too, the fucking jack-off."

Lance asked, "What if we want to be Core Rimmers? Do we talk to Prez?"

Shaking his head, Troy smiled, "Any of the Core Rimmers might talk to you. Take it easy and just consider the possibility. You're all angry because of what I was telling you. It's completely understandable, but don't jump on emotions in this case."

"Jump your boyfriend to show some good emotions," Sean softly giggled.

"That works for me!" Lance cheered.

While the others chortled, Scott grinned, "Later, sexy lover boy. We're going to take Erik's and Trav's example and disappear after dinner."

Widely smiling, Erik softly checked with Lance, "Sexy lover boy?"

"I know," Lance giggled. "We're sifting through better pet names, but I can't help liking it. Talk about your massive ego boosts!"

"Know this too," Sean added. "Prez and Keith are completely supportive of relationships and families. In all circumstances, family and partnerships come first. All of us talk all the time, and John helps us share stuff too. Most of the Core Rimmers are off base, at Kaho'olawe now. We'd already been there and needed to check on our sons. Another good example is Troy's mom; who didn't learn we were fathers until the next morning. We knew we had to take care of that task before dealing with ninety-five newbies an hour or so later."

Troy shared, "Pet names become obvious. But there's one other thing I wanted to say about the Core Rimmer job." When everyone was paying attention, Troy shared, "The first orphanage was worse than the second. Logic dictated the first two adults be executed. My gut feeling was to execute the other two at the second orphanage, but Vulcan logic dictated otherwise, life imprisonment. That's frustrating, when you do one thing, but really want to do another. The training is valuable and useful, but we're humans, not Vulcans. As you just saw, my emotions surfaced from memories alone. When a job is actually being done, it's not the same. I didn't think of how I'd react after the fact when I was actually in the position of delivering justice."

"Organizing priorities," Jay muttered.

Nodding, Troy smiled, "Exactly. If you can't be your partner's best half, deal with family and be a Core Rimmer, then expect any of us to tell you, 'go take care of those other things first'. Again, it's frustrating when there are only fifteen of us for almost four hundred kids. That's why I'm thinking more like ten Core Rimmer's per base would be good. Saturday we had most of the day to ourselves, but when Prez wanted to have a team chat late that night, his first words were, 'go take care of each other first, we'll chat later'."

Sean helplessly giggled, "I ate dinner with Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick the night before they were made leaders. At that time, they were members of a band, nothing more. They were and still are so kewl. To this day, they haven't changed much at all. That chat we had Saturday night was in the buff. All of us were naked, talking about ourselves, our kids, our histories, and plans for the next day, like we had clothes on and weren't gay. They just have this way that I can only hope to someday imitate. Honestly, I saw dicks, but paid very little attention to any of them."

Troy grinned, "If I were there, at the same place as any of them, Sean and I would've toweled off in our bathroom at home and transported here nude for this chat. For example, think of how John was in the shower earlier. Six of the eight of us were naked. He had something to share, so he got naked and told me and Sean to strip too. A ten-year-old is comfortable enough to talk to a bunch of teenagers, nude. He was the only one in that shower without a single hair on his dick, but he's that confident to talk to us as his equals." He paused to chuckle, "I don't know about you guys, but I had the worst case of butterflies in my gut when I had to change clothes for junior high gym class. I didn't want to see underwear, never mind who had how much hair, or how I measured up to the other guys."

Thankful that Troy was being so truthful, Erik grinned, "I

remember that, but ya know, I didn't even think of John. I was still a little freaked from non-existent smoke and fire, and the fact we all tuned in on Chris and Lance."

Jay firmly implored, "Don't ever change, Erik. It was freaky then, but we understand it now. You guys being that concerned really mattered."

Chris nodded, "To put it bluntly, you'd have to go out of your way to purposefully piss us off."

Scott nodded, "It really was great. I think all of us in this room are going to spend a lot of time together." He quickly focused on Troy, chuckling, "Isn't that right, Mister Music Teacher?" Sean began giggling and squeezed his Lover tighter.

Slowly nodding, Troy chuckled, "You might not like me as a teacher." Sniggering denials flowed around the room. Troy grinned, "Okay, before you say anything more, answer this; in the key of C major, you're playing against an E minor seventh chord, so what mode would you play?"

Scott was thinking, but had only heard of modes and couldn't recall any names. Lance had never heard of them at all, and Erik only knew names of the notes and a few simple chords. After a few moments, Lance and Erik turned to one another and shrugged. Jay sniggered. Lance looked back at Scott to find a thoughtful scowl. Trav and Erik looked across the room. Chris laughed, "Don't look at me. I forgot how to play with myself about three years ago!" Jay, Sean, Erik and Travis cracked up.

Pointing across the room at Troy, Scott joked, "I don't like him anymore!"

Softly sniggering, Sean slid sideways down the headboard onto

Jay's shoulder. Troy chuckled, "That funny lookin' electronic thingamabob on your desks is a laptop computer. It can be opened and powered on. When your done searching for the biggest dicks in the world, look up music modes. 'E' is the third note of the scale in the key of 'C', therefore the mode is named phrygian. That was easy. What if the chord is E minor flat nine? Now you've gotta go searching for an E minor scale that has an F natural in it." He giggled, "I know the answer. Let me know when you think you do."

Lance grinned, "You wouldn't really be like that as a teacher, Troy."

"Course not," Troy smiled, "but the fact is, you've got an entire week to lookup and learn whatever you want." He helplessly sniggered, "As we all know, a wise man makes use of the *tools* available to him, at *all* times."

"Evil," Sean softly chortled, "just plain evil."

"Okay," Scott laughed, "you're back on my good side, Troy. At east in this respect, we're on the same page." The other seven boys nodded and evilly snickered. "Wait a minute!" Scott loudly ordered, and then chuckled, "E minor flat nine, it's still the phrygian mode in C, no matter what key the song is actually in. That was a trick question!" Warning moos erupted around the room.

Nodding, Troy sniggered, "Very good!"

Lance giggled, "We got new acoustic guitars from Mike today."

"I heard," Troy smiled.

Scott prodded, "Would you show us the modes, please."

"Sure, and then we'll go have dinner," Troy answered.

All eight boys started to get up. Troy, Sean, Lance and Scott walked out of the room and went two doors down the hall. Chris stopped at his already powered up laptop computer. Travis wondered, "What are you checking, Chris?"

Tapping away at keys, Chris grinned, "I've always wondered, and now, since Troy joked about it, I have to know, how big is the world's record largest dick." Erik, Jay and Travis cracked up.

Over the ceiling speakers, Alden giggled, "Thirteen-and-a-half inches long by six-and-a-quarter in circumference. He was stopped at San Francisco International Spaceport in 1999, for carrying a concealed weapon."

All four loudly laughed, "NO SHIT!" and staggered out of Chris' and Jay's room. They hurried down the hall and shared that information with Sean, Troy, Lance and Scott. Troy's guitar lesson was delayed several minutes while details were shared, remarks were made and partners assured each other they were perfectly satisfied with endowments.

Before sitting down with Lance's guitar, Troy hollered up at the ceiling, "I know you're listening, Alden!"

"Of course!" Alden and his brothers chorused.

Sean giggled, "That's more opinions to reference."

Travis asked, "Since you see everything, has any of us lied or even exaggerated?"

"No," Alden giggled.

Scott checked, "What's the average erect size?"

Alden giggled, "Between five and six inches long, and between three-point-five and four-point-two inches in circumference."

Erik smirked, "So all of us told the truth, even though we've only known each other a few hours. We're all a bit more than average in various ways. What does that tell you?"

The seven AI's giggled, "You're not shy and *really* horrible liars." All eight boys helplessly chuckled.

Jay playfully warned, "If I see one of you with a monster cock, I *will* chase after you with a carving knife." The AI's cracked up.

Sadly shaking his head and covering his eyes with one hand, Lance giggled, "I can't take this anymore."

Alden teased, "Scott is very sorry to hear that, I'm sure."

Only to change the subject, Scott asked, "Troy, would accompaniment work for what you want to show us?"

Troy nodded, "Sure. Just strum through the chords of the C major scale, one chord per measure, in four-four time. The primary modes are built off the major scale, just starting with different notes. In this case, we're in C, so the first measure, I'll play off of C. The next measure I'll play the very same notes, but start with D. It's not a D major scale, it's the D minor, the dorian mode; both the F and C are naturals, not sharps like they would be in D major. It's the same concept all the way through all eight notes; in the third bar I'll play E, in the fourth bar I'll play F, and so on."

Getting his acoustic out, Scott admitted, "I'm not sure how to

play a B diminished chord, man."

Troy nodded, "Not a problem. Play the G dominant seventh chord instead."

Lance blinked, "Why does that work?"

"Because the important tones are 'B' and 'F'," Troy explained. Noticing that Lance was still lost, Troy smiled, "Blues in C major; the chords are C, F and G seventh. You almost always finish the progression with F, G seventh to C, because 'B' and 'F' resolve perfectly to 'C' and 'E'." Troy quickly played the B and F as a chord and then C and E as a chord. As soon as the others heard it, they understood. "It's called the tritone," Troy explained. "Three whole tones distance from one note to the next. It's the wicked kewl trick Tony Iommi used very often in Black Sabbath." Realizing that Troy knew stuff about one of his favorite bands, Lance's eyes widened. Troy checked with Scott, told him to count off a full four beats and then they would both play. As soon as they started, Troy called out the mode names with each new measure; "Ionian, dorian, phrygian, lydian, mixolydian, aeolian, locrian, and back to ionian."

Listening to the notes ring from the guitars, Troy then muttered, "This is a damn nice axe; awesome tone, nice feel..." For another minute or so, Troy ran through a few chords, scales, lines and licks, causing Scott and Lance to whimper. Sean, Jay, Chris, Erik and Travis softly sniggered. Troy hollered, "Hey, Alden! Contact Taylor Guitar Company. Tell them we'll need about a hundred of these by the end of the week, and about three hundred by the end of the year. If they need money for the various resources required, ask how much they need and give them that amount as a down payment. Let Prez and Mike know what's happening too."

"Yes, Sir," Alden giggled.

Troy impatiently shouted, "Don't call me Sir!"

"Yes, Ma'am," Alden giggled. The other seven boys in the room helplessly sniggered.

Standing, Troy gave Lance his guitar. Lance looked at it and then at Troy. Shaking his head sadly, Lance whined, "All the really kewl stuff I played before seems like garbage now."

Troy smirked, "Don't feel that way, Lance. With Scott, you two can learn a lot; what I had to do over years with a little cassette tape recorder. Guaranteed, you'll learn twice as fast."

Seeing Scott and Lance were still discouraged, Sean asked, "You know about incentive?" When they nodded, Sean smiled, "What's better incentive than impressing your lover?" Moving behind Sean, Troy made Sean's neck a pre-dinner appetizer. Cringing, Sean giggled, "Lesson mastered, sex break, start a new lesson and repeat." Widely smiling, Lance and Scott nodded then put their acoustic guitars back in the cases.

Chris grinned, "We'd better get Troy fed," and took hold of Sean's right hand. Jay took Sean's left hand then led the two attached lovers from the room. Each with arms on Troy's shoulders, Erik and Travis followed. Scott and Lance grabbed a quick kiss then hurried after their friends. Scott closed and locked their dorm room door.

Sean's comm-badge chirped. Billy called, "Dad?"

Still being snacked on and with both hands unavailable, Jay had to tap the comm-badge for Sean. "Yeah?" Sean cackled.

"Um... can I stay at the Taylors' house for supper? Mrs. Taylor

invited me."

Across the comm-badge, about a half-dozen pre-teen male voices loudly corrected, "MOM!"

"Sure!" Sean loudly laughed.

Billy giggled, "Am I interrupting anything?"

Jay, Chris, Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott chuckled, "Not at all." Glancing at each other, all six wondered if they would ever stop thinking and saying the same stuff.

"Um... o-o-okay," Billy droned. He then asked, "Can Robbie spend the night at our house?"

"Yes," the same six voices sang.

Troy's head popped off Sean's neck to ask, "Have you heard from Jason and JD?" He dove face first back to his meal. Sean howled laughing.

Billy chuckled, "They went to the dining room at Ewa Beach, pop. I haven't seen Jimmy or Scott."

Jay pushed open the first exit door. Sean sniggered, "They're with Richie and Dillon and their fathers." Chris held the door open until their group of four passed.

"Kewl," Billy giggled. "See ya later."

"Kewl, pal," Sean cackled.

Pointing at the goofy way Troy and Sean were walking, Scott playfully told Erik, "They didn't walk into the room like that."

"I didn't notice," Erik innocently grinned.

Not knowing who had been doing half the speaking or what was going on, Billy quickly sniggered, "Over and out!"

Chapter 20

Ewa Beach Dining Room

Monday, November 8, 2004 5:47PM HTZ

All the boys and many girls in the dining room had Mr. Fuzzy puppets hanging out of their back pockets. The kids that had been to school were proudly displaying their new baseball caps; telling others that hadn't been to school what the symbols on their caps meant. As they had been when leaving the dormitory, Chris and Jay led Sean into the dining room, with Troy still attached by the mouth to Sean's shoulder. Scott, Lance, Erik and Travis closely followed the first four. They went directly to the kitchen chow line.

Sharing a table near the middle of the room were Stephen Wickes, Aaron Farris, Roger and Nick, Aki and Hajami, Keanu and Liki. Seeing Troy attached to Sean, and with the other six newbies, Liki leaned close to Keanu to whisper, "Tell me that's not the cutest, most awesome thing we've seen in a week."

"I'm surprised you think so," Keanu indifferently smirked, and purposefully reached for his glass of 7-Up.

Liki had talked with Keanu about Sean hooking up with Troy, and all the changes they were noticing in Sean's general demeanor. They had both agreed it was a great thing to see. Stunned and watching Keanu drink, Liki sighed, "I thought it was cute."

Putting his glass down, Keanu smiled at Liki. So that every nearby kid paying any attention could hear, Keanu clearly told Liki, "The only thing cuter than you is you with me. The last couple of

days, I can't even focus on anything or anyone else. Taking that test today, I was sure they were going to hand me a cap with a trash can on it. I'm a jerk, and an idiot, cos I never told you any of this before. I can't even hold your hand for a full minute at a time, and what really bites is I can't even tell you what I'm feeling, or why holding hands is a problem, but I get such a major rush from just being near you that I must love you. They're not near as cute as you are."

Nearby kids in the dining room smiled or giggled. Liki wondered, "What about kids?"

Waving his arm around part of the room, Keanu grinned, "To stay with you, pick a kid." In the line of Keanu's swinging arm were Craig and Phil Nash, Stu, Vaziik, the three Oldcambus brothers and their cousin Taron. All eight gathered their stuff on trays, stood up and moved to another table. Vaziik made no change of expression, but the other seven sadly shook their heads and sniggered. "Okay," Keanu grinned, "maybe not just any kid." Blankly staring at Keanu, it was obvious that Liki was dumbstruck.

"GOD!" Aaron loudly laughed.

Standing and reaching over the table, Stephen Wickes snapped his fingers before Liki and loudly ordered, "WAKE UP!" Hajimi quickly covered his mouth with a napkin and cracked up.

Aki sniggered, "You're supposed to kiss him now, Liki. Any other response will only have every gay dude in the division lining up to steal Keanu away from you."

Fifteen-year-old Felicity Pettis giggled, "Is there one cute straight boy in this division?"

Craig Nash had almost sat down, but stood up again and took his tray to Felicity's table. Politely, Craig asked, "May I join you?"

When the half-dozen teen girls giggled, nodded, and shifted around to make room near Felicity, Craig put his tray down and sat. Knowing that his big bro had just stumbled into Nirvana, Phil Nash roared laughing, setting off the Oldcambus brothers and Taron in giggles.

At last, Liki leaned over for a tender kiss and received one in return from Keanu. It was the first public display of affection for both boys. Without a word, they gathered half-eaten plates of roast beef dinners onto their trays and then went to the dishwasher. They stopped in the chow line, asked for McCoy milkshakes, assuring the chefs that there was no problem with the food, and then left the dining room to return to their dorm room.

With their dinner trays, Sean and Troy stepped out of the kitchen. Right behind them were Chris and Jay. Glancing around, they searched for a larger, empty table that could comfortably seat all eight of them. Sitting with her grandson Jason, and his new boyfriend, JD, Judy Faris called, "Troy, did you see what your son did?" Jason softly giggled. JD quickly put his halos over his head. Chris and Jay went to the recently vacated table.

Pausing briefly, Troy proudly smiled, "Jason did a great job this afternoon. The data from the PADD is uploaded..."

"Not that!" Judy impatiently huffed, and corrected, "Look at JD's neck."

Sean giggled. Troy sniggered, "Yep, I saw that already."

Judy smiled, "And what are you going to do about it?"

Shrugging, Troy chuckled, "We'll have a chat tonight with Jason and JD. By morning, both will know that hickeys are *supposed* to go where only the two of them can see 'em." Walking by with their

dinner trays, Travis and Erik evilly snickered. Sean cracked up.

"I *love* my dad and pop," Jason cheered. Covering his food stuffed mouth, JD laughed.

Impatiently sighing, but grinning widely, Judy flicked her hands, signaling Troy and Sean to go away.

Five-year-old Dulce Kentesius giggled hysterically. The other girls at her table were giggling too, but not like Dulce. Getting up and still giggling, Dulce went to Craig and tapped on his back. Craig turned and smiled, "Hi."

"Got a secret for you," Dulce cutely sang.

Grinning, Craig told the other girls, "Excuse me for a few moments," and leaned over to hear the secret. Craig's primary motivation was to show Felicity that he could be nice to the youngest kids. Girls liked that sort of stuff, and it was really no problem; little kids were adorable. He probably would've listened to the secret if he was sitting with his brother and other boys.

Cupping her tiny mouth, Dulce softly giggled, "Your mommy says, remin' you to treat her like a special lady. If she's worth it, she'll really like it."

Turning pale, Craig remembered his mother saying almost exactly those words only weeks earlier. The only difference was the second use of the word 'like' should have been 'appreciate'. A five-year-old wouldn't have understood or been able to pronounce 'appreciate'. There was no way this girl could've known to say any of that unless she had heard it. Oddly, the table Dulce had been at was filled with six other girls, all no older than eight- or nine-years-old. With shivers running up and down his spine, Craig smiled, "Thank you, that was really nice to hear again." Dulce's teddy bear, Aster

happily bounced and clapped his paws. Craig asked, "Would you tell my brother that too?"

"Okay!" Dulce giggled, and skipped over toward Phil, with Aster skipping along behind her. Craig didn't even have to ask if Dulce knew who Phil was. She went right to him and did the exact same thing.

Phil patiently listened to the secret. Clearly recalling all the teasing and harassing he had dished out to Craig about treating the girl 'special,' Phil turned even more pale than his brother. Phil gasped, "Who told you that?"

"Your mommy," Dulce giggled. "She's watching you and Craigie. She will as long as she can too!"

'Craigie' was what his mother called Craig when she needed or wanted some task or chore done. Craigie, take out the garbage. Craigie, mow the lawn in the morning, please? It drove Craig nuts. Phil wondered, "And where's my dad?"

"He went over there," Dulce warmly smiled.

With tears welling in his eyes, Phil asked, "Did she say anything else?"

Cutely humming affirmatively, Dulce gestured with her tiny index finger for Phil to lean closer. When he did, Dulce whispered, "It's okay, she says. The boy's name is Owen Reed. When you and your bro are settled and happy, she'll go to your daddy."

Shedding tears, Phil croaked, "Tell her, thank you, and that I really miss her."

Dulce giggled, "She knows already and heard you, silly!" and

skipped away, back to her table and dinner.

Although concentrating on the conversation he was having with six girls, Craig watched his little bro lean back in his chair and wipe his eyes. Kassidy seemed to show interest in why Phil stopped eating, but Phil only shook his head and softly muttered something.

Sending, *'You're being very silly, Dulce,'* John telepathically tickled the little girl. She squealed then giggled and hurried back to her table. Not even looking up for a moment, Wade giggled and continued carefully placing peas and carrots in his small mound of mashed potatoes.

'Ask her if she's ever seen Leo's parents, hon,' Stephen sent.

'Good idea,' John replied, and then asked Dulce the question. Turning to John and giggling, Dulce nodded. John asked, *'Would you be around later tonight? We need to talk with Leo and you would be a big help.'* Dulce nodded again. *'I'll come get you and take you back to your dorm room when we're done,'* John offered. He telepathically let Drew and Corey know there would be help with Leo, but didn't specify the who or how.

King Aalona walked into the dining room carrying Kaimi on his hip. Behind the King were the rest of the Core Rimmers and the boys that had gone to Kaho'olawe. Paul, Reyes and Ryan did not follow the rest of the group, deciding instead to get ready for their first date. The King and Prince went to the Queen and the adults. The remaining boys went directly to the kitchen chow line.

At the table where Sean and Troy were sitting, Travis was being too quiet. Erik asked Travis, "What're you thinking, Champ?" The other six quietly grinned, now that Travis' pet name was out in the open.

Shrugging, Travis swallowed then sighed, "Part of me is still thinking we need to do something to help the division, ya know? How're you feeling?"

Erik smiled, "Like you need cuddles." The other six boys chortled.

Travis chuckled, "Very true, cuddle-bunny."

Chris giggled, "That fits you, Erik. You keep going, and going, and going..."

"I can't help it!" Erik laughed, and gestured to his new partner, giggling, "Trav's a hunky Champ!" Most of the eight boys at the table softly sniggered, poking fun at the Champ chasing the cuddle-bunny and vise-versa.

Wiping his mouth, Troy softly offered, "Core Rimmers aren't the only possibility. We still need dorm leaders. Your dormitory doesn't have any yet."

Erik asked, "What's that job include?"

Sean explained, "It's like being the oldest big brothers. On school nights, check on the other kids, to make sure little guys are getting to bed at decent hours. If someone needs something, you're the first contact to get whatever is needed. Let's say a kid is fussin' over homework, then you find someone that can help. If someone gets sick, you get the kid to the doctor. That kind of stuff."

"There's all sorts of other jobs that aren't round the clock," Troy smiled. "There are now two active auditoriums where movies can be shown. There are two kitchens that need dishwashers and floor moppers. Those jobs need older guys that have the muscle to push

dishes and mops, and lift reels of film."

Shrugging, Travis asked Erik, "What do you think?"

Erik scowled, "In the kitchen, with the way these dudes cook, I'd be a heifer in a month. At the theater, I'd wind up watching the flick and forgetting to prep other reels."

Travis brightly beamed, "As dorm leaders, we'd have the supplies of lube and rubbers." The others softly chortled.

"Okay then!" Erik laughed.

Sean sniggered, "Remember, kids will be knocking on your door when they need stuff. It's important that you be available, and not intertwined."

"We're not intertwined *that* much," Travis chuckled. "Most of the time we're just kicked back, cuddling, chatting, and watchin' TV."

Nodding, Erik giggled, "Some dancing too, fast and *real* slow."

"Just an observation," Jay grinned, "you two guys are homebodies, more than me, Chris, Lance and Scott. Also, you're fifteen-years-old, Trav. That makes you and Craig the oldest guys in our dorm, so far."

"It would be lots easier for everybody to approach you, rather than slightly younger, twelve- or thirteen-year-old guys," Chris reminded.

Lance joked, "Teachin' 'em rocket science, like how to unroll a rubber, could be fun."

Erik cracked up and hollered, "SOLD!"

Travis chuckled, "Are you sure?"

Nodding, Erik said, "Everything said all day is true enough. We have been and are homebodies, as much or more than anyone else." Glancing around the table, Erik joked, "Whether this crew wants to believe it or not, we're clothed most of the time when we snuggle."

"Not buyin' it," Scott teased.

Shaking his head, Lance giggled, "Leave your door open and prove it."

Evilly grinning, Travis nodded, "We can take that dare and win."

Troy chuckled, "Being available is the biggest part of the job."

Sean checked, "Do you dudes really want the job?" One after the other, Erik and Travis agreed. Tapping his sub-vocal, Sean called, "Alden, connect me to Prez."

Seconds later, still in the kitchen chow line, Prez replied, "What's up, Sean?"

"We have two volunteers, Travis and Erik, for dorm three leadership," Sean explained.

"Excellent!" Prez cheered, and then instructed, "Have them chat with the other dorm leaders for a briefing. It's done."

"Got it, Prez," Sean smiled, "thanks."

"John is in on this already, just so we all know how and why it happened," Prez instructed.

"Kewl. Sean out." Flashing a thumbs up, Sean said, "The job is

yours. Talk to Horacio, Corbin and Dominic later, so you get some first hand info from other dorm leaders. Horacio was my roommate and orphanage brother." He paused then giggled, "He's very kewl, for a muff diver." Sputtering, Lance quickly reached for napkins, covered his mouth and cracked up.

Sadly shaking his head, Scott softly chuckled, "Ya know, four days ago that used to be one of my goals, but now it does seem way more than a bit gross."

Nodding agreement, Troy smiled, "You two just started your relationship today. I don't want to hear a word about jobs from either of you for two days, minimum; not a word until Thursday, seriously. There's a whole bunch of new stuff for you two to talk about and share; that's priority one. Prez will back me up. Teamwork comes first."

Scott and Lance checked with one another. In unison, they cheekily grinned, "Yes, ma'am."

Shaking his head, Sean softly giggled, "I've been the bottom boy most of the last week. All day today, we've been playfully debating that issue."

Slightly blushing, Troy smiled, "The best you might hope for is switching day-to-day, Tiger."

"Required recovery time," Erik softly chortled.

Chris and Jay warmly smiled at each other. Catching their silent sharing, Travis chuckled, "Okay, old timers, how do you work it?"

Chris sniggered, "What you're doing, we did, so don't think that there's anything wrong at all."

Swallowing and nodding, Jay soon washed down his food with some iced tea, then quietly explained, "Right now, for you guys, the experiments are over. The thrill of something new is what's causing the situation you're in. Eventually, it does change. With my wrist as it is, I've been bottom six of the eight times, but before Friday, I had been top a pretty long while." He checked with Chris, "More than a week, wasn't it?"

"Almost two weeks," Chris mischievously grinned. Seeing only disbelief on the other six faces, Chris giggled, "We were at home, and going to school, so our chances were only once a day, but for eleven days..." He leered at Jay and hungrily hummed. All eight became hysterical and howled laughing.

"As I was *trying* to explain," Jay softly chuckled, "once the newness wears off, it becomes a normal part of the days. Chris was having some rough times, so it was my job to make it all better, if only for a little while, to give his off days a bright spot. Now, Chris is recovering from a big scare, as we've all seen first hand. It's still my job to make it all better, only this time I'm receiving instead of giving. When the cast is off and I can put weight on my arm without cringing, the roles will switch again. It'll go with the flow. It's all good, guys, just know it *will* change... sooner or later... eventually... someday." Again they all roared laughing.

Beginning to return to their dinners, Erik and Lance seemed to be have a giggling contest. Chris prompted, "What's the joke?"

"It's no joke, just an observation," Erik giggled.

Nodding, Lance grinned, "We shared a little too much personal info."

Scott chuckled, "I'll bet I know where this is going." Discretely,

Lance moved his left hand onto Scott's lap, wiggled his fingers to give a slight tickle, and then squeezed his lover's thigh. Believing that was one of the kewlest and sweetest things Lance had done all day, Scott beamed.

"It's a silly question, really, but I can't help asking," Erik offered, and then explained, "Of us four couples here, Trav's taller and heavier than me, Scott's taller and heavier than Lance, Jay's not too much taller than Chris, but Jay has at least ten pounds of muscle over Chris. What really shocks me are Troy and Sean, almost the exact same height and weight, but the hidden truth is in Sean's boardies." Troy widely grinned. Sean blushed and giggled. Locking eyes with Sean, Erik wondered, "You took longer to get Troy ready, I assume?"

Nodding, Sean softly grinned, "Of course. I was a sex toy, but was crazy in love with a virgin. What you guys did in a day, I took more than two days, almost three days doing. We went from a five-by-four dildo, to a seven-by-five, to a nine-by-six."

Lance checked, "And you consider yourself mostly a bottom?"

Nodding, Sean admitted, "For five years, I was a bottom. Part of what I learned, which are really the only useful memories, is that size has absolutely nothing to do with anything. Some men are simply inconsiderate jerks, regardless of what they're packing. A nice guy with less than average can make sex just as good as the hung, more than average guy. I got very lucky with Troy in lots of ways, including a guy that's got more than average. For instance, if this conversation was happening a week ago, I'd doubt I'd be participating. That's how insecure I was. Even my grower wasn't kewl, because it attracted attention I didn't want. Troy changed all that. Then, the next day, we became Morale Rimmers, and Troy had six other dudes backing up everything he was telling me in private. From what we

shared in the dorm before, I know all of us normally hang similarly, except Lance, who has almost six inches hanging. The majority of teenagers here fall into the average category, hanging between three and four inches."

Troy shared, "That extra time was necessary, I'll admit that, but I will add it was personally frustrating. Sean knows that I felt like a wimp, but I had him showing me that he was perfectly fine waiting for success. Over five days, I tried and failed then wound up his top again. Even when I did succeed, Sean kept me on top the next couple o' times, in control and riding him. Last night was my first time with my legs in the air and with him in control. As great as all the other rides were, the real magic happened last night." Sean leaned over and kissed Troy on the ear, earning a giggle.

Chris and Jay checked with each other. Then Jay asked, "Does that mean what I think it does?"

Troy nodded and proudly smiled, "Yep. I soaked my belly and chest without Sean or me touching my cock. The next time I got off twice, once hands free, and the second time barely two minutes later, with Sean's help."

Lance gasped, "That can really happen?"

Chris, Jay, Sean and Troy nodded. Troy pleasantly sighed, "When it's right, and it's physical *and* emotional, watch out for amazing feats never before imagined."

"All those men and years later, I didn't even know about that," Sean proudly smiled. "Last week, twice in a single ten minute session, Troy made me shoot. That was only our third time having intercourse too. In addition to the physical feelings, Troy was saying the most awesome stuff between kisses. I shivered like a little kid, and didn't

even realize what had happened, until I felt the wet spots."

Erik, Lance, Scott and Travis disjointedly droned, "Oh my God."

Lance turned to Scott, giggling the warning; "If you do that to me, all bets are off. We were attached before having sex. I know I've been clinging to you all day. When that happens to us, fahgedaboudit!"

Around the dining room, several ex-New Yorkers loudly chanted, "Fahgedaboudit!"

Widely smiling, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike glanced around the dining room. Knowing the kids were sharing, they returned to their mealtime conversation.

Lance, Scott, Troy, Chris and Jay roared laughing. "Oh man!" Troy laughed, "I haven't heard that since I left New Jersey." Noticing Sean, Erik and Travis were only smiling and softly chortling, Troy translated for Sean; "Forget about it, in New York City slang. In other words, Lance becomes Scott's leech, like I was with you, the whole walk here."

Scott sniggered, "We've gotta get these Hawaiians and Californians picking up some Big Apple slang."

Nudging Travis, Chris laughed, "Yeah, DUDES!"

"No, no, no!" Travis and Erik giggled. Sean covered his eyes and slowly shook his head.

Widely smiling, Troy asked Sean, "What's the matter, Tiger?"

Shrugging, Sean giggled, "I'm getting scared. The battle of

American East versus West will happen here. Should I warn Prez, King Aalona or both?"

Travis grinned, "No need to warn anyone. It'll be fun, and a war of words only."

Erik sniggered, "Forgetaboutit!"

"No R's and only one T at the end, dude," Lance playfully instructed. "Fah-ged-aboud-it."

Erik grinned, "There's one long U in dude, not two O's."

"Dude?" Lance cheekily confirmed.

"FAHGEDABOUDIT," Erik loudly giggled. Putting their forks down, Lance, Scott, Troy, Chris and Jay applauded.

Again around the dining room, all eleven ex-New Yorkers and many other kids loudly cheered, "Fahgedaboudit!"

Sean, Troy, Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott cracked up.

Travis softly sniggered, "There goes the neighborhood."

"Guess we can fahgedaboud being dorm leaders," Erik giggled. "We'll be off base... actually *on* Ewa Beach, in a very small hut of our own."

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Waikiki Beach, The Ocean House Restaurant

Monday, November 8, 2004 6:33PM HTZ

In a rush to get going on their date after the trip to Kaho'olawe, Reyes had Alden get all three of them quickly redressed in

comfortable khaki cargo pants, polo shirts and light windbreakers, since they intended to walk the beach after eating. From different locations, Reyes' and Mike's security teams were transported from Ewa Beach to just outside the restaurant with Reyes, Paul and Ryan. After waiting an additional twenty-five minutes, the threesome were finally seated. Paul got a little fidgety and stressed about the wait, but Reyes and Ryan calmed him down easily enough by finding a nearby vantage point to watch the sunset. It was the first time Reyes had seen his new home from a distance. Above the tree line, a small portion of the auditorium and CIC roof could be seen. Reyes' party was called and they hurried back to the restaurant. They had met their waitress and were served glasses of water.

Alone at last, or as alone as they could be with a gorilla and a G-Cat covering outdoors, and Mike's security, Clay and Manny inside the restaurant at a nearby table, Paul leaned forward and grinned, "I thought you said this was a nice, casual place, Reyes?"

Ryan giggled, "We're dressed informally, but we still look like paupers compared to some of the other customers."

Reyes smiled, "There aren't any tuxes, white shirts or ties. This is really nice though. Right near the beach, just like I remember it."

"It's *on* the beach, Reyes," Paul smirked. "Any closer and we'd be floating."

Ryan lifted a menu and quickly gasped. Reyes and Paul picked up and looked at the menu. Ryan whispered, "Twenty credits for an appetizer; ten for a salad? Thirty for grilled chicken and fifty for steaks of almost every sort."

"Have the prime rib," Reyes giggled. "It used to be the best around."

Paul softly bitched, "That's sixty credits each!"

Nodding, Reyes giggled, "I learned at Kaho'olawe that I need to slow you both down. So, you two have steak, and I'll have lobster. You'll be digesting and on east coast time, so I might have a chance."

Placing the menu down, Ryan softly giggled, "You kept us busy all afternoon, carefully avoiding anywhere near a bedroom."

Reyes innocently wondered, "Would I do that?"

Paul smirked at Ryan, who broke into loud giggles and covered his mouth with his cloth napkin and a hand. Sadly shaking his head, Paul grinned, "Two old diabetics just took nose dives into their soup. I hope you're satisfied."

"Jeez!" Reyes giggled, "I could've picked a five-star restaurant, with prices twice as high, but not anywhere near as nice as this. Next time, we go to McDonald's."

Calming down enough to speak, Ryan giggled, "You were sure to get lucky tonight anyway."

"I didn't bring you here for that reason," Reyes sniggered. "This really is a place I ate at several times in the nineteen-seventies. I can't share memories with both of you, but bringing you here makes you part of the memories. Besides, that little show at Kaho'olawe already proved that I didn't need to take extraordinary steps." Glancing at Paul, Reyes smiled, "No one said a word about what we were doing. We're completely safe everywhere and doing anything."

Paul softly grunted. The whole time he was being naughty, Paul had kept close watch on everyone that was within hearing range. All he would've had to hear was one nasty remark and all hell would've broken loose. Maybe Reyes was right though; maybe in the ROH

people were different.

The waitress returned, pleasantly asking, "Have you made any decisions?"

Looking up, Ryan gestured to Reyes, giggling, "I'll defer to our host." Trying his damndest to not smile, Paul slowly nodded agreement.

Reyes smiled, "We'd like to start with the coconut lobster skewers appetizer. Then we'll have Caesar salads. Could you give us about fifteen or twenty minutes, between the finished salads and the main course, please, Alamea?"

Scribbling the order, the waitress nodded, "Certainly." Paul appeared ready to skewer Reyes. Ryan had the widest smile yet seen that clearly warned Reyes of a very late and active night.

"Thank you," Reyes helplessly giggled. "For the main courses, my two friends will have the Ocean House Cut Prime Rib, with baked potatoes. Please bring butter, sour cream and chives separately, so they can go as light or heavy as they like. I'll have the Cold Water Tristan Lobster Tail." Pausing, Reyes checked with Paul and Ryan, "Sodas or iced tea?"

"Tea," Paul answered, and a smile escaped.

Reyes told the waitress, "Three iced teas, and keep them filled, please."

"Yes, Sir," the waitress helplessly giggled. Of course, she thought she was speaking to a very confident thirteen-year-old Hawaiian boy; not realizing that all three boys were old enough to be her father. She choked back another giggle and smiled, "I'll have your

appetizers in less than ten minutes."

Reyes grinned, "Thanks, Alamea." The waitress slowly walked away, jotting down notes on her order slip. Seeing his boyfriends slowly shaking their heads, Reyes cackled, "What?"

Paul groaned, "You're dropping big bucks."

Reyes nodded, "I wanted to call both of you Thursday, but it never happened. Friday, I was a Core Rimmer, and called by Danny to pick up three boys in Colorado. Before I completed that, I was called to Des Moines for three more. Chris, who you met this afternoon, was one of those three. When I was done with them, I had exactly twenty-seven-point-two minutes to check around, drop into the diving well, and then dry off to go to Des Moines again, for another seven kids. My entire afternoon was spent working. I could've called you Friday night, just after midnight Eastern time. As it turned out, I wound up working again after dinner here. It was plain luck on Saturday when Prez invited the AI Division, before I got a chance to call you. Yesterday, my plans went to hell too. So far, this day has gone really well, considering Clan insanity. Since our talk this morning, it's been an amazingly good day. Nothing is screwing up this dinner. If you think I sound determined, you should've heard my dad's and pop's tones, when they told me to have an awesome time. One was an order and the other was pretty close to a threat."

Reaching both arms out to have his hands taken by Ryan and then Paul, Reyes smiled, "If you like this dinner, then I'll tell grandpa Danny to get off his buns and get you your own debit cards. Our next trip here, one of you can treat us." He focused on Paul, giggling, "Stop looking like you're going to kill me." Looking at Ryan, Reyes softly giggled, "It's impossible to rape the willing."

Leaning back slightly, Paul sighed, "It's been so long since any

of us have been to a place like this."

Ryan wondered, "What other surprises are you planning?"

Reyes shrugged, "That depends on both of you. I figure you'll be tired way before me, so it becomes your choice; I go with you to Sullivan's Island, or we stay at Ewa Beach."

"Where?" Paul asked, "At your family's townhouse?"

"I had Alden prepare a single bedroom condo unit," Reyes giggled.

Ryan laughed, "When did you do that?"

Pointing at the sub-vocal in his left ear, Reyes sniggered, "While I was on stage drumming. I don't have to say a word aloud. Alden's got us all set with drinks, food, flowers and necessities."

Ryan began giggling. Smirking and nodding at his brother, Paul sniggered, "We know you now, Reyes. You're not saying everything, so be detailed about this condo."

Reyes smiled, "Drinks include a selection of juices, sodas, sweet tea, the way Aunt Mary makes, an automatic coffee maker for the morning, and a bottle of Champagne."

"Ah ha!" Ryan and Paul laughed.

Reyes giggled, "Other than cookies and snacks, there's a few things for breakfast, if we decide to stay home and cook. I'd rather we eat at the CIC though. I'd like to at least see and chat with my fathers and brothers before they go to school."

Slowly nodding, Paul grinned, "And the other necessities are?"

Tapping his sub-vocal, Reyes checked, "What did you get in the way of necessities, Alden?"

Over their comm-badges, Alden giggled, "Sheets, three pillows, a blanket, lube, towels, rubbers, toilet paper, extra lube, soap and shampoo, extra rubbers, and the widest variety of toys yet ordered by any division, including a hammock. For some reason, Reyes decided on no chaps or spurs. He won't tell me why."

"Spurs would get caught in the hammock," Reyes sniggered. Lifting his napkin again, Ryan covered his mouth and roared laughing.

Sadly shaking his head, Paul helplessly giggled, "If you had simply said that you setup a love nest, it might've been quicker."

"It's not a love nest," Reyes smiled. "It's only a private place to be. A love nest would include a lot more."

Now getting into the game, Paul giggled, "Such as?"

"There's a nice TV and sound system, but no DVDs or CDs," Reyes joked. "We'll have to get by without for a night. If I had my druthers, we'd have a king sized bed, not a queen size. Again, we can get by for a night. We would eventually need a loin cloth, chaps and spurs to play cowboys and indian."

Ryan giggled, "We're the cowboys and you're the indian?"

"Course!" Reyes laughed.

"Of course," Paul sniggered.

A gentleman, apparently in his early fifties approached the table. Softly giggling, the boys watched and paused their silly conversation.

Stopping beside the table, the man smiled, "Good evening, boys. My name is Conrad Dean. I'm the restaurant manager. How're you this evening?"

Answering, "Fine," Paul wore a slight smile, but Reyes and Ryan could see suspicion in his eyes. Ryan nodded.

Reyes cheerfully asked, "How can we help you, Mr. Dean?"

Mr. Dean smiled, "I only came by to meet the Clan Short representatives visiting our fine establishment. From following the news this past week, I'm very happy that you chose to have dinner here. Your organization's activities have helped our island nation in numerous ways. We're very proud that Pacific Rim Headquarters is here on Oahu. If there's anything I can get for you, to make your evening more pleasant, please let me or your server know."

Ryan politely said, "Thank you," and Paul slowly nodded.

Reyes grinned, "We'll be sure to do that, Sir. Thank you for taking the time to greet us."

"You're welcome," Mr. Dean smiled, and then turned around and left the boys alone.

Ryan softly prompted, "Calm down, bro."

Grimacing, Paul nodded and wondered, "What sort of activities is he referring to, Reyes?"

Shrugging, Reyes carefully answered, "There are thirty-one fewer teen prostitutes on the street. We've rescued other kids that had bad parents and home lives. We closed down the militant factions of the FCC in the Pacific Rim, and got more kids from that. Then there's the California orphanages and all the kids we've rescued from Battle

of Earth. Lastly, with all the kids to feed and shelter, I'm sure we're helping the economy."

Paul and Ryan wordlessly checked with each other.

Reyes smiled, "I know you have a good family on Sullivan's Island, but I watched you two today. Everywhere we went on both bases, and even over at Kaho'olawe, you seemed to enjoy yourselves." When they nodded, Reyes softly admitted, "I'd hoped you'd feel more comfortable here. There are so many really kewl kids, and you both mixed in really well, considering today was your first visit. That made me happy, and the interaction is what you need to get over the past. At some point, I'd really like it if you decided to stay here, with me. We could visit Sullivan's Island, and have your family and friends visit us here too." Again, Paul and Ryan checked with one another and then softly chuckled. Reyes giggled, "Too soon, huh?"

Paul smirked, "We held your hands the whole time the manager was here. He didn't say a word about it."

"I don't know," Ryan sighed. "Jon and Mary are starting to feel like real parents. As kewl as things are there, I'm more comfortable at Ewa Beach. When you were up on stage, Erik, Travis, Chris and Jay were really nice. They didn't even blink when Paul told them you're *our* boyfriend."

Paul softly smiled, "Jon and Mary didn't say a word about it either. All they were concerned about was when we'd be home. I think we all expected some reaction when I said you might return with us, or we might stay the night here. Only Jerry and Joey giggled."

Reyes wondered, "When I was in the conference room for that meeting, what did you dudes do?"

"We talked with Mike's father," Ryan answered.

Paul nodded, "We also met Derrick's mom and Corey's little brothers, Cesar and Felipe. I couldn't help keeping an eye on the few adults in the reception area, but everything was kewl. It's going to take me time to trust people again, Reyes. Your meeting didn't last very long, thankfully."

Glancing at each of his boyfriends, Reyes checked, "Thankfully?"

Blushing, Paul smirked, "We would've run out of things to say."

Choosing to say what his brother wouldn't, Ryan giggled, "We missed you, Reyes. Yeah, you were only gone about twenty-five minutes, but you're why we're here. It seems we're always talking about you and missing you."

"We'll have to work on that, because I've missed you too," Reyes brightly smiled. Seeing the waitress approaching, Reyes released Paul's and Ryan's hands, briefly explaining, "Our appetizer is here." The waitress delivered their iced tea, placed the platter on the table and put a plate down before each of the three boys. "Thanks, Alamea," Reyes smiled.

"Will there be anything else?" she asked.

Ryan and Paul shook their heads. Reyes answered, "Nope, we're good." Alamea nodded, turned and walked away to check her other tables and customers. The boys each took a skewer of lobster and began carefully pulling fruit, vegetables and meat off the steel skewers. Reyes softly wondered, "What do you guys do to keep busy at home?"

Ryan shrugged, "We spend a lot of time at home, but we take

walks along the beach too."

"We used to do a lot of mountain biking, hiking and camping in the Appalachians," Paul answered. He sampled a small piece of lobster and hummed.

While his brother purred, Ryan giggled, "It's good, bro?" Still chewing, Paul rapidly nodded.

Stabbing a piece of lobster and a piece of pineapple, Reyes smiled, "I used to do some mountain biking after we moved here. There are remote places that tourists never see." Reyes tasted his appetizer and slowly nodded.

Ryan asked, "Do you think we might be able to go mountain biking sometime?" He lifted his fork to his mouth and tried the new cuisine.

Paul reached for his glass of tea, took a sip, and then grinned, "I'd *really* like to check out some remote spots." Ryan stopped chewing and stared at his brother. Quickly pulling his napkin to his mouth, Reyes sputtered and helplessly chuckled. Ryan swallowed and then cracked up. Closing his eyes, Paul softly huffed, "You're both very bad!" Opening his eyes again, Paul complained, "We were talking about mountain biking, but you two go directly into the gutter! Be ashamed of yourselves!"

Ryan breathlessly giggled, "It was the way you said it, bro."

"I knew you were referring to mountain biking," Reyes sniggered, "but Ryan's expression made me take the tangents." Beginning to blush, Reyes giggled, "I'll show you all the island's remote spots, and mine too, Paul."

"I think I can find them myself, without a map," Paul evilly

grinned. Reyes and Ryan howled laughing.

"Yes, we can go mountain biking, probably with only my security," Reyes softly chortled. "Casim and Kahdi would love it too. I can see both of them in the rain forest, never in our sight, but always within shouting distance."

"I'm surprised you like them being around," Paul grouched.

Reyes shrugged, "Security is required for all Clan Short leaders, since the battle in Montana. They're a lot like me; interested in music and attached to family. They may not be my best friends or family, but they are nice people."

To change the subject, Ryan prompted, "Tell us about the mountains here in the ROH."

"Five minutes off any trail and you're alone on the planet, in a lush rain forest," Reyes smiled. "I could get us to a couple of waterfalls I think you guys will love. Lulumahu Fall is probably going to be the first one we visit. Sacred Fall is on the list too. It's about a hundred feet tall. When I've exhausted all I know about on Oahu, we can blaze some new trails over on Maui or Kauai. I know there are waterfalls on both islands, but I never got the chance to find them."

While Reyes ate a little more, Paul and Ryan shared descriptions and stories of hikes in the Appalachian Mountains of South Carolina. Through their appetizer and salads, round and round the threesome went, chatting about favorite activities, hobbies, interests and places. Back in the nineteen-seventies, Ryan loved disco dancing and got to be a good dancer with Paul's reluctant help.

The waitress reappeared to clean up the salad plates and overheard their conversation. Paul grumbled, "How people ever danced wearing the tightest clothes they could pour themselves into,

I'll never know."

"You looked good though, bro," Ryan teased. Ryan gestured to his brother, and told Reyes, "At a neighbor's birthday party, Paul had a whole group of girls dancing with him at once."

"Here we go again," Paul smirked. Reyes softly giggled.

Ryan teased, "*ALL* the girls at the party eventually got some dance floor time with Paul."

Paul reminded, "Did we go there for that reason, bro? No, we went there for Robin's birthday."

Once the waitress walked away, Ryan giggled, "Robin Summers was the cutest kid on the block. By his fourteenth birthday, Robin switched from cute to mouthwatering. We tried..."

"*You* tried, ya mean," Paul corrected.

"*WE* tried so many discrete ways to get in Robin's pants," Ryan giggled. "It was sad at the time, but it's really funny now."

"Which is what was so completely ridiculous," Paul grouched. "We're ready to do anything with this guy, but what actually happened was a lot of dancing, a bunch of straight couples hookin' up, and we went home alone, sweaty from dancing, in tight slacks, in the middle of June."

Reyes giggled, "Compare Robin to me."

Both brothers hummed, and then Paul thoughtfully scowled, "Robin was a soccer player; platinum blond, hazel eyes, getting really muscular in the arms and torso."

"Of all the guys dancing at the party, Robin had two left feet,"

Ryan smiled.

Reyes giggled, "Other than the two left feet, Robin sounds a little like my dad."

Shaking his head, Paul said, "Derrick's got curly dirty blond hair and already has *awesome* muscles." Reyes and Ryan tilted their heads and widely smiled at Paul. "Oh jeez!" Paul sniggered, "That didn't sound right at all, did it?"

Since they weren't eating, Ryan took Reyes hand, giggling, "Robin was eye candy, but little else. Before our lives went to hell, Robin's life took a worse turn, when two girls pointed him out as the father. I think the yelling of three fathers is still reverberating around out there. Robin had to drop out of high school to support both babies."

Taking Reyes other hand, Paul assured, "You're equally good looking, and have the personality Robin never could develop. Take yesterday in the store as a perfect example. All those kids were having fun just getting clothes. You're just as approachable as all the other Core Rimmers, and the kids were proving that."

"I agree," Ryan quickly added. "The kids were going to you and all the Rimmers, but since we were standing right there with you, me and Paul were helping who we could."

Nodding, Reyes smiled, "For that, I accessed my empathy routines for the first time. It was very much required."

Paul wondered, "Are you accessing those empathy routines now?"

"No," Reyes honestly answered, "there's no need to, because I know both of you. Seventy-one boys were blank slates when we went

to the store, so I needed it." Taking a deep breath, Reyes softly admitted, "I don't want to be more than I've always been, so all the databases and routines Danny and Marc gave me are off to the side, until I need them for a specific job. If I ever start seeing you guys as a job, or have to access databases to deal, then there's big trouble. I'll say something long before going there." Ryan and Paul grinned at one another then squeezed Reyes' hands. Reyes giggled, "What did I say?"

Ryan smiled, "That's twice today you put me in a dream state."

"It's the first time for me," Paul softly admitted.

"But Ryan's easier," Paul and Reyes simultaneously joked. The fact it was unplanned caused Reyes and Paul to crack up laughing.

Giggling madly and turning red, Ryan released Reyes' hand, leaned back in his chair and softly pouted, "Just perfect."

"Aww!" Reyes and Paul sang through their giggles.

Focusing on Reyes, Ryan softly giggled, "You don't really know how easy I am... YET!" Turning to his evil brother, Ryan more loudly giggled, "*You* were supposed keep that a secret!"

"There are no secrets between two when there are three," Paul softly sniggered.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, CIC Dining Room

Monday November 8, 2004 7:17PM

Sean and Troy remained with Chris, Jay, Eric, Travis, Lance and Scott through dinner. It was one of those nights where kids finished their meals, but didn't immediately scatter for other activities. The

furthest place the younger kids were going was into the rec room. Judy Faris was still with her grandson Jason, and his new boyfriend, JD. Drew, Corey and Leo were still with Jim and Jen Hundser. Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike were still at a table together too, working out a new song for the band to cover.

Of their group of eight, Lance and Scott were the first to excuse themselves to return to their dorm room. Watching them stand, Troy playfully asked, "You're going to work on them modes now, huh?"

Lance and Scott intensely blushed. "Yeah," Scott evilly snickered, "there are seven now, but by morning, we'll have at least twice that many *modes*." The other six roared laughing.

Turning slightly to hide his blush, Lance smiled at Scott and loudly giggled, "Are you planning on an early night? Try three times as many *modes*. And then we'll pickup the guitars!"

Waving to his friends, Scott chuckled, "See ya in the mornin'."

Erik and Travis then excused themselves to chat with Horacio and Sonia. In moments, Horacio and Sonia were calling the other dorm leaders. Privy to this conversation were Roy and Peter, who were already at the table with Mollie and Nell.

On their way out of the CIC, Lance and Scott overheard Derrick, Mike, Keith and Prez softly singing while working out 'Comfortably Numb'. The fact that they were singing in key without any instruments stunned and surprised Lance and Scott. Walking outside, they couldn't understand how anyone could figure out a song without a single instrument.

Coming out of the Command Center, AJ and Jerry crossed the dining room with envelopes, heading directly for the table where now only Chris, Jay, Sean and Troy were sitting. Within a few meters of

the group at the table, Jerry brightly greeted, "How's it goin', dudes?"

Sean knowingly grinned, "Having access to that room is still very kewl, isn't it?"

Nodding, AJ chuckled, "Just getting to know the UNIT guys and the communications equipment."

Jerry checked the names on the envelopes then passed them out, saying, "One for Jason Montigua and one for Christopher Stokley. They're only ID cards, just stuff 'em into your wallets. The really good news comes with debit cards, hopefully in another day or two."

Watching Chris and Jay reach for their wallets, AJ explained, "With ninety-five newbies yesterday, I'll bet our card cutter needs sharpening." Just as expected, Chris and Jay opened the envelopes and then stuffed the ID cards into their wallets with little more than a glance.

Troy grinned, "Sit with us, guys. We've got a little while before any of us need to find our youngest sons."

"Aww, you guys are so fatherly," Chris teased. Jay rapidly nodded and widely smiled. Distinctly, Chris got the impression that Jay wanted to be a father as soon as possible. This would become the topic of a few pillow-talk sessions very soon.

Taking a chair, Jerry chuckled, "You try racing after four- and six-year-old boys."

Sitting beside his lover and soon-to-be-husband, AJ giggled, "Tonight's our first time getting them into a bathtub. If we can't actually catch them, we have to at least funnel them toward the stairs. After their bath, Jerry promised to read to them. Our eight-year-old is trying to figure out his sexual preference, with very little knowledge.

That's what I'll be trying to deal with, until Jerry joins the fun."

Sean's and Troy's eyebrows rose. Sean softly reminded, "Billy and Jason have boyfriends."

Pointing at the table where his mother was with Jason and JD, Troy offered, "We need to explain stuff to Billy, Robbie, Jason and JD. What if we got our sons together, and maybe add Stan, Kaleo's and Tory's oldest?"

"How old is Stan?" Jerry wondered. Of Kaleo's brood of five boys, Stan was the tallest, but not by much. He had assumed that Stan was six- or seven-years-old.

"He's eight," Sean answered, "small for his age, thanks to certain assholes in California."

Disjointedly, Chris, Jay, Troy, Sean, Jerry and AJ called, "Kaleo."

Instinctually bouncing in his chair, Kaleo shouted, "JESUS!" and spun around.

Jerry sniggered, "No miracles required, bro. But one may have just happened, so bring your hubby and let's chat."

"Uh oh," Tory softly droned, thinking that Prez's secret may have already leaked. Tory and Kaleo stood, clasped hands and walked across the room.

As they approached, Sean invited, "Have a seat, bros."

Watching Kaleo and Tory take chairs, Troy explained, "We're planning on a facts-of-life chat later, with Billy, Robbie Taylor, Jason and JD."

AJ briefly added, "And we're planning on the same with Kenny."

"Care to add Stan into the picture?" grinned Jerry.

Raising their eyebrows, Kaleo and Tory silently considered it a few seconds. Tory shared, "We'll need to chase down our rug-rats and get them in a tub."

"So will we," AJ and Jerry chuckled.

Troy pointed around the table, "It'll be me, Sean, AJ, Chris and Jay, there to answer questions, guide and advise while our sons talk."

Jay chuckled, "Why invite us into this? We're not fathers."

"Yet," Chris helplessly giggled.

"Yeah, yeah," Sean sniggered, "fahgedaboudit! You've got three years together. Besides, I expect this to be cute, funny and bordering on insane."

Troy nodded and grinned, "Billy and Jase already know that some old, bad lessons need corrections. JD, Robbie, Kenny and Stan are at slightly different levels of knowledge, but they're fundamentally the same. We get the discussion started and let them talk, then it's all advise and guidance. That's the plan, unless we determine we need to take more control."

"It sounds like an awesome idea," Kaleo beamed. "As soon as our youngest are in bed, either Tory or I will join you. Six boys and six dads sounds very kewl. I don't think Stan will get too embarrassed. By observation, I can tell you that when Stan giggles 'no' and blushes, that only means, 'standby while I process'. Then he'll come back again

with another comment or question."

Tory hummed then wondered, "Do you think the head Rimmers and analysts have gone there? Maybe Gage, Jonah, Ben and Sammy need to participate?"

Kaleo smiled at Tory, prompting, "Let's check it out." They quickly got up and went to Prez.

Moments later, evil snickering erupted at the table where Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike were sitting. Keith chuckled, "Been there, done that, with Dee, Gage and Sammy."

Mike sniggered, "Maybe Jonah might want to help anyway."

"He's already gone, with Gage," Derrick grinned, "something about cleaning teeth and oral hygiene." Looking up at Kaleo and Tory, Derrick chuckled, "I think it's beyond the talking phase to the trying phase."

Prez smiled, "Thanks for checking and offering though." He then gestured for Tory and Kaleo to lean down. Prez whispered a question. Tory and Kaleo stood again, shaking their heads. All six Core Rimmers evilly snickered. Kaleo and Tory turned around and returned to the table with Troy, Sean, Chris, Jay, Jerry and AJ.

Kaleo said, "We're set. Now we can try and capture our youngest."

"Operation rug-rat rec room extraction in sixty-seconds," Jerry chuckled.

AJ giggled, "Say that twenty-times, real fast." Instead, Jerry leaned over for a kiss and a different sort of tongue-twister.

Chris checked with Jay. "We'll block the exit doors," Jay grinned.

All the boys at the table stood. Troy loudly called, "Jason, has grandma finished teaching you to curse like a New Yorker?"

Jason giggled, "Not yet, pop."

JD joked, "How'd you know?"

Troy shrugged, "How do you think I learned?"

Sean giggled, and then called, "Be home at eight, Jason, with your boyfriend."

Slouching, Jason giggled, "How'd you know I was gonna ask that?"

"The hickey might've been a clue, Jase," Sean sniggered, and followed the other seven to the rec room doors. The six Core Rimmer fathers entered the room. Chris and Jay separated to take their stations.

Jerry approached Shaun, nonchalantly asking, "How's it goin', buddy?" Spinning around, Shaun ran to Jerry and leaped into his pop's arms.

AJ asked Mike Hunnicutt, "Are you ready to call it a day, pal?"

Mike pointed and giggled, "Richie and Jimmy is racin' monster trucks, daddy."

Heading toward where Mark and Marv were playing, Tory stealthily watched his five-year-old sons. Kaleo went to his spectating six-year-old sons, Leonard and Russ, who were watching Dillon and Scott Deaver play the Formula 1 race car game. Kneeling down,

Kaleo wrapped his arms around Leonard and Russ, chuckling, "Gotchya!"

Russ giggled, "Or maybe we got you, daddy!"

Leonard loudly cackled, "We're not ready fer bed, daddy!" Sadly shaking his head, Kaleo cracked up. The foul, three letter 'B' word caused every kid under eight years old to begin complaining.

Out in the dining room, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike clearly heard Leonard's cry. More little guys in the rec room started whining and complaining. Older boys began laughing and teasing the rug-rats. Sadly shaking his head, Keith sniggered, "New dads haven't learned their kids eventually get tired and want to go home."

Derrick chuckled, "Let's go help, before our mouth and morale Rimmers get pounced."

"I can't imagine Kaleo with a permanently high, squeaky voice," Prez grinned. "That would be frightening."

Standing, Mike offered, "We'll get back to arranging 'Comfortably Numb' later." He noticed Jonah and Gage returning to the dining room and head toward the rec room.

The four Core Rimmers crossed the room. Seeing Chris and Jay at the doorways, blocking squealing little guys, all four began sniggering and hurried. Prez softly suggested to Keith that Jimmy Carr could sleep over their house, so Troy and Sean could deal with their older sons. Liking the idea, Derrick told Mike, "And we'll take Dillon and Scott."

Nodding, Mike sniggered, "It might prevent a future rug-rat mutiny."

Arriving at the doorway behind Jay, and seeing the pandemonium inside the rec room, Prez prompted, "Take the other doorway and help your boyfriend, bro." Evilily chuckling and nodding, Jay jogged past all the dimensional doors. Once Jay was in place, Prez bellowed "WHOA! ATTENTION MINI-RIMMERS!" All the little kids came to an abrupt halt. Chris and Jay struggled to hold in their laughter.

Richie whined, "Poppa, we don' wanna go ta bed yet!"

Keith smirked, "That's too bad. I guess Jimmy will have to go home for his bath and bedtime, instead of bathing and sleeping with you." Richie's and Jimmy's jaws dropped.

Hurrying to Derrick and Mike, Dillon asked, "Me and Scott too?"

Softly chortling, Derrick nodded. Mike loudly announced, "Only IF *all* you dudes under eight give it up and go find your parents."

Seven-year-old Albert McPhearson cutely blinked his eyes at his new big brother, reminding, "We don't gotta go to school, Mike."

Nodding, Mike smiled, "That's true, Al, but breakfast is still here in the morning, and then you and Charlie get to play all day. If you'd rather take naps tomorrow?"

Three-dozen revolted little boys incredulously squealed, "NAPS?"

All the Core Rimmers in the room nodded and evilily grinned. Walking by his dad and pop with Ben, Sammy softly chuckled, "You're so bad, pop." Cheekily grinning and bouncing his red

eyebrows, Prez nodded.

Ben giggled, "I already checked, Sammy can come home with me, if it's kewl?"

Sammy grinned, "The last I heard, Gage and Jonah will be at our house tonight, dad."

Making a space for the two boys to pass, Keith nodded and smiled, "Go ahead, dudes. We'll see you in the morning." Ben and Sammy squeezed by and received good night kisses from Keith and Mike.

By this time, the rug-rats were saying goodnight to friends, and soon dragging their reluctant, tiny butts to the doors. Wade and Frankie passed by Chris and Jay. Unexpectedly, both teens howled laughing and started squirming in the doorway. Ignoring the stack of halos over his little brother's head, Frankie saw the determined look in Wade's eyes and evilly snickered.

"WADE!" John loudly laughed, "No getting even with tickles!"

Giggling, Wade hurried to his daddy and poppa, before Chris and Jay recovered to tickle him back.

Glancing at her son and son-in-law, Kathleen Marr checked, "Wade did that?"

Nodding, Stephen sniggered, "He didn't even warn Frankie, so we were clueless, until Chris and Jay started dancing." Kathleen wondered if she should help bathe the boys, or go to her room and count her Valium tablets.

On the way to the rec room exit, Mike Hunnicutt whispered to

Geoff, "Ya wanna sleep at my house?"

Geoff whispered back, "T'morrow night, okay? Me and Lenny need to be home tonight, for Leo." He then gave Mike a quick and completely unexpected kiss on the cheek. Both little tikes began giggling. Holding the spot where Geoff kissed him, Mike dreamily wandered to his poppa. Softly chortling at his son's expression, Jerry squatted down and picked Mike up. Geoff met Lenny and they started for the doors.

Troy and Sean walked to Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick. Troy smiled, "Thanks so much, guys."

Prez nodded, "Your hands are full with Jason and Billy tonight."

"We can get the kids bathed and in bed," Derrick assured.

Keith grinned, "In the unlikely event of home-sickness, Alden can fix that in a flash."

Mike prompted, "Put 'Comfortably Numb' on repeat for a while, Troy."

Troy checked, "Tomorrow, after school?"

"That's the plan," Prez smiled.

Derrick prompted, "We need to check the Oneula Beach auditorium."

Sean offered, "Lance and Scott say the auditorium's way smaller than here, but still very large. They said it's still big enough for our entire division; this one is big enough for several divisions."

"Reyes mentioned it earlier," Mike smiled. "From what he told

us, it's pretty much the same, with a few gear differences."

Squatting down, Sean kissed Scott then softly instructed, "You be good for Uncle Mike and Uncle Derrick."

Scott giggled, "I'll be even better for Dillon." Cracking up, Dillon playfully shoved Scott.

"I'm sure you will," Sean snickered and stood.

Derrick called, "Jonah? Home by ten and asleep by eleven; there's school in the morning."

Flashing a thumbs-up, Jonah nodded, "No problem, dad."

Involved in a flight simulation video game, Gage loudly assured, "We'll prob'ly be home before ten. It only depends on how many are still here."

Finished kissing his youngest two sons goodnight, and letting Troy say goodnight to them, Sean called, "Jason and JD, are you ready to go home?" The two boys got up and gave grandma Judy kisses on the cheek before hurrying across the room.

All the Core Rimmers left the rec room, including Chris and Jay. Troy, Sean, AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory went to dimensional doors with their sons and were soon at Oneula Beach. Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick paused at the tables where their parents were sitting, so grandparents could get kisses goodnight from their grandsons. The victims of telepathic tickles, Chris and Jay completely forgot about joining Troy and Sean, and instead went to find Erik and Travis.

John telepathically called, *'Dulce, are you ready, little sister?'* When Dulce nodded and told her teddy bear to follow, John sent, *'You know Leo's going to cry. I'll help keep you strong, so you can talk for*

Leo's mommy and daddy.'

Nodding and taking the final few steps to John, Dulce softly wondered, "Why do some people cry?"

Carefully flicking some stray hairs off the girl's face, John answered, "Because you're proving love never dies, Dulce. You and I know that, but some folks don't really get it. They're happy tears anyway."

Minutes before eight o'clock, the dining room began emptying. With the coast clear of her overprotective Core Rimmer son, Judy Faris went to the kitchen, where she invited Randy Leister to stop by for a night cap. Pleasantly surprised, Randy quickly accepted and promised he would be at Judy's condo before ten o'clock. Randy Leister was the first of two men that had caught her fancy. Doctor Randall Wiener was the second man that Judy wanted to get to know. Walking to her condo, Judy could almost hear Troy bitterly complaining, "MOM! Jesus H. Christ! They're both Randys! Why not just take out an ad? Divorced single mother and grandmother seeks handsome, randy man that loves kids and wants to make some." In the elevator up to the fifth floor, Judy roared laughing.

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Monday, November 8, 2004 8:02PM HTZ

Outside the CIC, Corey and Drew took their family home. Dulce and her teddy bear, Aster waited for John to finish explaining things to his mother-in-law and family. "This won't take too long," John offered, "maybe an hour, depending on Leo. Then I'll give our very awesome little girl some treats that Mrs. Combs is making specially for Dulce."

Wide-eyed, Dulce repeated, "Treats? I gets treats?"

Stephen, Frankie and Wade helplessly giggled. Smiling down at Dulce, John teased, "Secret treats, for you and your closest friends at the dorm. As soon as we're done, we'll get the treats and transport to your common room, with the treats. I'll take off real quick, and you can share your treats."

Softly chortling at the little girl and her Teddy clapping their hands, Stephen gave John a tender kiss, sending, *'Hurry home, hon.'*

'Right into your arms,' John silently promised. He then levitated Frankie and Wade, so that he didn't have to bend down to kiss either son goodnight. Lastly, John made a show of kissing Stephen's mom and climbed two invisible steps to kiss her goodnight. Frankie and Stephen went into giggling fits. Grabbing his belly, Wade howled laughing.

Walking back down his virtual steps, John asked, "Ready, Dulce?"

Rapidly shaking her head, Dulce giggled, "Float me."

Grinning, John pointed to Aster, instructing, "Warn your teddy."

"Aster," Dulce giggled, "John's gonna make me float. It's fun!"

Aster confirmed, "You will not be harmed?"

Dulce giggled, "Nope, I'll be fine."

"Lowering friend safety protocols for ten minutes," Aster announced.

Immediately, Dulce rose off the ground and squealed in delight. John carried the little clairvoyant girl to Drew's and Corey's

townhouse. Every now and then, John slowly spun her around, so she got a good ride. At the front of the townhomes, about a meter before the steps leading up to the door, John lowered Dulce to the ground. Grinning at the cackling five-year-old, John pointed at Aster. As soon as she caught her breath, Dulce giggled, "Home safety rules, Aster."

"Home safety protocols engaged," Aster declared, and then quickly asked, "Was it fun?"

"Very!" Dulce laughed, and reached for her teddy bear's paw. Aster took his best friend's hand. Taking Dulce's other hand, John walked up the steps and knocked on the door. Moments later, the door was opened by Lenny. He had red, puffy eyes and slouched like he was drained of strength.

Suddenly appearing very relieved, Lenny huffed, "Come in, Uncle John. Hi, Dulce."

John gently told Lenny, "It's gonna be fine."

"I wish," Lenny frowned, and stepped aside.

With Dulce and Aster, John walked in, opened his N-Gen empathy and began drawing the sadness from his brother, brother-in-law and all three nephews. Lenny closed the door and joined his family on the sofa. All the living room lights were on as well as the kitchen fluorescent lights. After a few moments, when everyone was down to sniffles and wiping their eyes, John asked, "Dulce, are they here?"

"Course!" Dulce smiled. "They never leave Leo."

Glancing around the room, like his brothers and dads, Leo softly wondered "Who's where?"

Twisting to and fro, Dulce cutely answered, "Your mommy and daddy." She pointed into thin air at two spots, about a meter before Corey and Drew, saying, "There and there. Your daddy says, he took care of the bad men, got 'em out of the house." She giggled, "Your mommy called you her big, strong, beautiful boy." Flabbergasted, Leo's jaw dropped and he sat back on the couch.

Dulce paused, looking at nothing that anyone else could see, and then shrugged, "Really? Weird." Returning her attention to Leo, Dulce said, "Your daddy made some of the mess in the house. He had a fit, scared the bad men, and made them pee their pants. He'll never stop watching out for you." After another brief pause, seemingly listening to someone, Dulce frowned, "Your mommy says, they weren't 'upposed to go, it wasn't their time." Shaking her tiny head, Dulce complained, "That's not the way it happens though." A few moments later, she said, "Oh. Lots of people only partly crossed. They has to wait to be called. Since they're here, they'll stay with you."

Leaning forward, Drew gently prompted, "Tell us their names, Dulce."

"Walter Daniel Scott and Nadine Scott."

Excitedly and very loudly, Leo squealed, "They're still here?"

Dulce nodded, "They say they're okay, waiting and watching over you. You've heard 'em, Leo. It wasn't a dream, or 'maginein'. It was them. Your daddy likes Drew and Corey. Your mommy likes Lenny, and called Geoff 'precious'." Giggling heartily, she glanced at Geoff and watched him turn red.

Shivering and shedding tears, Leo softly asked, "Did it hurt?"

Quickly trying to stop giggling, Dulce checked with both of

Leo's parents. She then said, "Nope, they didn't feel anything. Your daddy says, it was like the dresser was too heavy. They fell down, but got back up again. Your mommy says it was strange... confusin'. Then they heard you calling and ran to you. You couldn't hear or see 'em though. They figured it out when you did, Leo." Scowling, Dulce shook her head, and then called, "John? I don't get what they're saying."

John shrugged, "I'll try to hear them through you, Dulce. You hug Aster and listen." Dulce embraced her teddy bear. John tried to focus on what Dulce was hearing. He closed his eyes and relaxed with a heavy sigh. After about thirty-seconds, John opened his eyes and smiled, "We didn't realize how completely love conquers all, Leo." Five jaws dropped open on the sofa. Drew, Corey, Leo, Lenny and Geoff weren't hearing John's voice, but the deeper adult male voice of Walter Scott.

Through John, Walter explained, "When I heard the looters coming in the house, I left your mom with you and went downstairs, not knowing what I could do, only that I had to do something. I watched and listened to those men from the stairway landing. They weren't finding anything of value worth taking and said they would go upstairs. That's when my anger and need to protect you took over. All at once, every cupboard opened, all the boxes, cans, plates and glasses flew at the looters, the photos and pictures came off the walls, and the furniture we had moved to block the doors began toppling over." Walter chuckled, "Part of me wishes you had seen it, Leo. Grown men breaking down in tears, screaming like little girls, and two even pissed their pants. I've never laughed so hard. Did you know, when a man pisses himself that what isn't absorbed by his clothes still shoots out like a fire hose? They can't reproduce *that* in the movies."

Leo howled laughing, causing his new family to crack up. Still

holding onto her teddy bear, Dulce never even giggled.

Walter grinned, "Our next lesson came after you woke and decided to leave the house. I know how much it hurt you, Leo, but we were both very proud that you were smart enough to seek help. Our love, yours for us and ours for you, pulled us like magnets right after you. If we had tried to run with you, we couldn't have kept up, but we didn't need to worry about that either. After you got to the Staples Center, the same thing happened when you were transported to Des Moines. We thought we'd lose you, but we were pulled along again. Everywhere you were, we were there too. It was your mom that prompted Grandma Morrison to concentrate on you for a while. She's a smart cookie, that woman. She proved it by getting you with Corey and Drew. Of course, we were suspicious at first, because they're so young, but that has passed too. Soon after we arrived here, we saw them and their family as your new family. We wholeheartedly approve of this arrangement. You get two father figures who are also your best friends. In Lenny and Geoff, you get two little brothers, and much more than you can imagine. You've grown so much these last few days, Leo. We honestly couldn't be more proud of you."

Facing Corey, Walter smiled, "You did a better job of teaching Leo the facts of life than I could have. I've never been attracted to boys or men, and would've fumbled through the issue. As sensitive as he's always been, we always knew that Leo would very likely become homosexual."

Turning to Drew, Walter chuckled, "Hearing my voice and knowing I'm here is freaking you out. Stop feeling guilty about last night. Leo's not bothered; neither am I and neither is his mother. Again, you taught what I obviously couldn't have. You are a protective, loving father, Drew, but you *are* still twelve years old. From the moment you met Leo, you and Corey helped relieve Leo's

fears. Every tender moment you spend with Corey, your sons, and every other child in this division, is a lesson. At lunch, we were with Leo and the Seavers. We were there with your family and your parents at dinner. You were right, we would've been friends with all four of your parents; very likely best friends."

Returning his attention to Leo, Walter warmly smiled, "Love conquers all. Who you love is your choice; it always has been and always will be. You've got good role models in this home and in the Clan."

Leo wondered, "What do I do now, dad? I mean, knowing that you and mom are close, why haven't you gone to heaven?"

"That's a good question and a rough one to answer," Walter sighed. "The implication is that the Battle Of Earth wasn't supposed to happen. Many of those who passed that day are like us, waiting near their loved ones. I once read that paradise is a land of many mansions. There's probably some construction going on. All we can do is wait. All you can do is be who you are. Don't try second guessing yourself. Don't be embarrassed thinking, what if my mom and dad are watching. It's simply not in you do to anything that could surprise us. I never wanted a boyfriend, but that does not mean it would bother us if you had one. Those you care about, we'll automatically care for too. There's nothing new under the sun, and we knew that before Friday morning. We also know when to turn away, Leo. Your mom didn't want to witness her baby boy growing up last night. I wanted to be certain it was done in the manner I might've, if I were twelve-years-old and had any clue what I was doing. Not only was it acceptable, it was beautiful and perfect. Again, this afternoon you made us proud by talking with Corey and Drew about it. That's a sure sign you're growing up, son. The only other thing I can suggest is talking to us through Dulce. When we're told it's time for us to move on, would

you like to know?"

"Yes!" Leo loudly proclaimed, "Of course!"

"It's your choice," Walter reminded. "Consider the way you said goodbye the first time. Do you really want to say it again?"

Leo scowled, "I don't want to, but I have to. Besides, I want to know that you've made it."

"Good enough," Walter smiled. "Sleep well tonight, Leo. My life was blessed in so many ways, with a beautiful wife and an inspiring son. You've been blessed too, with two sets of loving parents, and now with two little brothers. They'll follow in your footsteps, so show them how to be the best little men they can be."

Pulling Lenny and Geoff closer, Leo beamed, "It's covered, dad."

Drew called his brother, "Mr. Scott?"

"Yes, Drew?"

"Do you approve of what we're planning on doing with your murderers?"

Walter chuckled, "Let me put it this way, Drew. My wife and I have a few choice words for them. We're hoping we aren't called before their executions. Their hell begins the moment they die, with our rage, and then they'll get dragged into the void for eternity. If there's truly justice, those men will feel the fear and pain they inflicted on Leo for all time. One thing we've learned is that we can't be too far from Leo, so bring him along. Every night when he sleeps, we try to leave him and explore Hawaii. About fifty feet away seems

to be as far as we can go."

He paused only to ask, "Please get a Vulcan mind healer for Leo?"

Nodding, Drew admitted, "I've been considering it since yesterday morning," and then promised, "Before we go to bed tonight, I'll make the request and make it happen."

Leo frowned, "Why do I need a Vulcan, dad?"

"Because of what you saw in our bedroom," Walter softly answered. He turned to Drew and then Corey, asking, "You understand why?" Leo watched his dad and pop grimly nod. Naturally, Leo was only beginning to recover from the traumas of the early hours of November fifth. He didn't yet realize that what he saw could easily become the focus of many nightmares and sleepless nights.

Going to Leo and finger combing his long, wavy blond hair, Walter joked, "Hippie."

Familiar with this life-long bed-time routine, Leo giggled, "Punk."

"We love you."

"I love you too," Leo smiled.

Rapidly blinking, John smirked and said in his own voice, "Well, *that* was different." Geoff and Lenny giggled.

Leo smiled, "I might never look at you the same, Uncle John."

Slouching, John sighed, "Can we drop this 'Uncle' crap? I'm a whole *seven months* older than you, Leo. I can barely deal with

Lenny, Dee, Gage, and Sammy calling me uncle. Let's make a new rule for my nephews. Less than three years younger than me, and you use my first name. More than three years, and you add the Uncle."

Leo giggled, "Kewl, dad," and quickly looked around for reactions. Geoff and Lenny cracked up. Grinning, Drew rolled his eyes, and Corey helplessly giggled.

"Dulce is sleepy," Aster announced. "I am holding her up."

Going to her, John called, "Dulce?"

"It's bed time," Dulce yawned.

John checked, "Treats tomorrow?"

She nodded, "T'morrow."

Leo quickly said, "Thank you, Dulce." The little girl contentedly hummed.

Tapping his comm-badge, John grinned, "Alden, transport Aster and Dulce directly onto her bed."

Alden executed the order, giggling, "I just sent the video to the Vatican. They'll have some adjustments to make, I think."

* * * * *

Ewa Beach Dormitory #3

Monday, November 8, 2004 8:08 PM HTZ

The first rounds of the night's love making were over. Cuddled up close to Lance, Scott absently fiddled with his lover's dick, nads and pubes, and had been for many minutes. Completely captivated

watching Lance get harder and then softer, Scott pleasantly sighed, "Do you have any idea how fantastic you make me feel?" Aware of their sudden and uncontrollable dick fascination, Lance giggled. Fully expecting that response, Scott raved, "Seriously, there are dreams, reality and nightmares; three distinctly separate states, but you've got me living dreams while I'm wide awake."

"I put a spell on you, while we were at the Meadowlands, superstud," Lance giggled. "It took this long for you to act on it."

Widely grinning, Scott stopped fiddling around, looked up into Lance's eyes and softly chuckled, "Get your story straight, sexy lover-boy; did you start thinking about my dick Friday or late last night?"

Lance giggled, "Well, now that I think of it, I might've guessed this could happen during Friday, when I realized how cute you are. I didn't start wondering about your dick until last night."

Scott brightly beamed, "Acknowledging a guy is cute doesn't make a guy gay. I thought you were cute in the dark, before we ever got to the Meadowlands. All weekend, it was like you were the little brother I never really had. The whole following each other around thing started raising questions; are you a brother, or a lover? Those kinds of ignored, back of my mind questions flooded my thoughts half the night. Messin' around with your dick is only another way to remind you that you're who I want, always by my side."

Lance softly sighed, "Do me a favor?"

"Sure," Scott quickly agreed, "anything."

"Don't do that again; thinking all night about what I might be thinking. I need you awake with me. If you're thinking of me, then wake my ass up and ask."

Scott grinned, "Yeah?"

"Yeah," Lance giggled.

Scott sang, "Why?"

"Two reasons," Lance giggled. "If you had joined me in my bed at any time last night, I would've been shocked, but a kiss would've started everything right then." Scott reached up for a deep, passionate kiss. When they parted, Lance continued.

"While you slept this afternoon, I was bored out of my mind. For the first time, I practiced guitar, but didn't focus on the thing at all. I was thinking about you and us almost the whole time. The only good thing that came out of that hour was learning that I could still play and think of something besides music. I'm committed to you; I was thinking it before you asked, but I was too chicken to ask that, or even if you noticed me watching you last night. All this happened because you had the balls to say what I couldn't or wouldn't. I'm really thrilled out of my mind with everything all day. I just have a little trouble getting ideas out o' my skull and onto my tongue."

"You get ideas out just fine. The fact that I'm in a dream, but wide awake, once again, proves it."

Lance giggled, "Which part do you think was a dream?"

"You're committed to me and thrilled out of your mind?"

"Sorry, it wasn't a dream," Lance giggled. Scott growled. Lance moored then provocatively giggled, "Super-duper-power-pumpin'-stud." Shifting quickly to hold Lance flat and still, Scott ravenously attacked Lance's left nipple. Writhing, Lance howled laughing and half-heartedly tried to detach Scott's face from his chest.

When the tit was perky, Scott's face popped up. He grinned, "That's the right channel; nice and stiff. Now, keep it that way."

Rubbing his nip and discovering it was sore, Lance hysterically bellowed, "IT'S SWOLLEN! YOU ALMOST DREW MILK, DAMMIT!" Softly chortling, Scott gently kissed and flicked his tongue over Lance's aching nipple.

Two doors down, Chris and Jay were chatting with their new dorm leaders, Erik and Travis. Reviewing preferred brands of lube on the Internet, all four heard Lance from the air conditioning duct. Softly sniggering, they went to the open door and stood beneath the air conditioning vent. Once they had agreed on and rehearsed a rebuttal, all four shouted up, "GO GET HIM, SCOTT! IT WAS *ALL* LANCE'S FAULT!" and then busted up laughing. In the rooms nearby, the Stoebers and Hiram howled.

Rolling his eyes and blushing, Lance helplessly cracked up. Scott laughed, rolled over and shouted at the vent, "I got it all figured out now, thanks!" More laughter and remarks drifted through the vent.

Lance softly giggled, "Thank goodness we decided to commit. Our chances of keeping anything secret are slim-to-none with my big mouth." Scott leaned over and traced Lance's lips with his tongue. Warmly smiling, Lance sighed, "Damn, you're gettin' too good."

"I love you," Scott whispered. Brightly smiling, and with happy tears pooling in his eyes, Lance abruptly pulled Scott down. When Lance did and said nothing for a few moments, Scott checked, "It's still freakin' you out too, huh?"

Choking back the need to cry, Lance softly shivered, "You feel it too?"

Slowly nodding, Scott shared, "We went from acquaintances to

lovers in less than four days, and in the process, tossed some of what we thought we were out the window. When careful experiments are so incredibly awesome that you're driven to try to replicate the first times, only to discover the second rounds were even better, then it's beyond good; it's perfection. My shock is wearing off; yours will too, I know it. I have to tell you that I love you, Lance. A little flickering match turned into a wildfire this morning. All I had to do was watch some awesome examples of gay couples to know how to react."

"Now we get to constantly prove it to each other," Lance sighed.

"You sound sad, like it's a bad thing."

"It's not bad, but it is scary as hell though. We stood on a stage for the first time today, but that felt more like anxiety, where this is genuine fear."

Scott thought a few moments then smiled, "You told me stuff earlier today that I'm now going to tell you. I don't want either blond; Erik and Chris aren't you. I don't want Jay or Travis, or Prez, or Keith, or Derrick, or Mike, or Sean, or Troy. I don't want Darren DeVault's monster cock, or thirteen inches anywhere near my mouth or ass. You've got all them guys beat."

"Why?"

"To start with, familiar experiences from before we met that make us almost the same. Since we met, we've seen each other sad, scared, worried, happy, excited and crazy thrilled. I've seen none of that from anybody else. Think of it as a challenge; like getting as good on our guitars as Mike, Troy, and KC too, now that I think of it. Yesterday, that was my only goal. I'm not worried about our commitment. You and I have committed before, to learning to play guitar. Since we've done that, we can easily match and surpass that

commitment together. Now, my additional new goal is to keep you, wanting to be in our bed, every night, no matter what. I vow to never let you get to the point where you want to sleep in the other bed, or find someone else. Please, make the same promise, Lance?"

"I pledge to never allow you to search for anyone else. All I have is yours. We swapped guitars earlier today. Say you want my Les Paul and it's yours, just say you won't leave me."

Scott cheered, "That was sincerely awesome! Keep your L.P. and memorize what you just said. That was really beautiful. This is all I need, Lance; the straight boy act is out of the way, so we share everything. Tomorrow, I'll be right beside you, not just close by, but attached, hand-in-hand. Now that I think of it, we'll have three basic states, every day; completely attached and making love; partially attached at the hands, and partially unattached, only when there are guitars to hold and play."

Uncertainly, Lance repeated, "Partially unattached?"

Nodding, Scott clarified, "After all we've said and done, we're part of one another, man. I may not be in physical contact, but I'll be right there with you all the time. This is a feeling I'll never be able to forget. It's paradise, plain and simple. There's not a single place I might be where I won't want you there too. I could have New York City greasy spoon diner runs and still want you, just outside the commode door, chattin' up a storm."

Lance softly droned, "Oh my God, that's too true."

Scott chuckled, "I know it is. A conversation will not wait, ever. I've seen your ass, up close. It's mine to worship, or play drums on."

Lance smirked and then giggled, "Roll on top of me, so I can

use your cheeks as drums."

Doing as he was told, Scott grinned, "Which song?"

"None," Lance giggled, "I only wanted to hold your butt cheeks." He snuck in a quick grope, causing Scott to lurch. "Oops!" Lance giggled. "I did that, my fault, but I'm not sorry."

Scott grinned, "Exhale and do it again." Feeling Lance's chest rise beneath him, Scott waited until he couldn't feel breath against his face. Diving down, Scott filled Lance's lungs, and then got his lungs refilled by Lance. Firmly, Lance held onto Scott's ass. Twice more they swapped breaths and then broke it off. Dizzily swooning and trying to refocus, they evilly snickered and then went for it again. Scott rolled and pulled Lance along with him. Able to move his arms, Scott really got into the kiss, caressing and occasionally tightly hugging Lance, to convey that everything was completely awesome in their world. Lance couldn't move his arms, so he moved his tongue. With surgical precision, Lance inspected Scott's mouth, teeth and tongue. Breathlessly, they broke the kiss. Scott hung his head over Lance's shoulder. "You and me, together forever," Scott whispered.

"Forever," Lance immediately acknowledged. "It's awesome."

"Whatever you want, tell me and it's yours."

"I've got all I need."

"Seriously," Scott prompted, "What do you want?"

Lance giggled, "Roll us over again?"

Doing so, Scott brightly smiled down, assuring, "Your wish is my command."

"Yeah?"

"Absolutely."

Lance begged, "Teach me?" Scott curiously tilted his head. Lance sighed, "All that stuff Troy said before dinner flew right over my head. I know the names of the notes, lots of chords, the pentatonic and blues scale patterns, but not much else."

"Okay, all I know is yours, but remember I only had two years of lessons. This is basic stuff compared to what we'll be learning."

Nodding, Lance grinned, "I want to take that placement test and have it prove I'm a musician, not a basket weaver."

Scott joked, "So that's what you were doing with my pubes before?"

Lance giggled, "Not exactly. I was just running my fingers through your bush. It's really soft, like velvet, where mine are more like wires."

Slowly shaking his head, Scott grinned, "To me, your pubes are softer. Twice we humped away and both got off on it. I'd doubt wire would've made the magic happen." Lance stole a kiss, which Scott returned.

"Okay," Scott began, "the chromatic scale is all twelve notes from any note to the same named note an octave higher. All the notes are half steps, one fret apart; like the open E string to the E an octave higher at the twelfth fret. Pick any note and play all the notes to the next octave, and that's the chromatic scale."

"Kewl."

Scott instructed, "Major scales are always built the same way; in a series of full steps or half steps. From the first note to the second is always a full step; like C to D. From the second note to the third is always a full step; like D to E. From the third note to the fourth is always a half step; like E to F. From the fourth note to the fifth is always a full step; like F to G. From the fifth note to the sixth is always a full step; like G to A. From the sixth note to the seventh is always a full step; like A to B. From the seventh note to the eighth is always a half step; like B to C. That's the whole major scale; two full steps, a half step, three full steps and a half step. Got it?"

Nodding, Lance smiled, "Easy."

"Everything we play every day revolves around the major scale. Like Troy was saying, for each of the seven tones, there's an associated chord, and with the chords are the modes. Again, the formulas are right there in the major scale. If you're in the key of C, then C is the tonic. The major chord is built from the tonic, the third of the scale and the fifth of the scale. It's like playing 'pick a note, skip a note'; pick C, skip D, pick E, skip F, and pick G; so the C major chord is C, E, G."

"Simple."

Nodding, Scott assured, "It really is. So we play that 'pick one, skip one' game through all the tones in the major scale. Starting at D, skip E, pick F, skip G, and pick A to get D, F, A, which is a D minor chord. Major chords are built from the tonic, plus the tone two full steps higher, plus the tone one-and-a-half steps higher. Minor chords are built from the tonic, plus the tone one-and-a-half steps higher, plus the tone two full steps higher. The D major chord is D, F *sharp*, and A. The D minor chord has the third, F *natural*, not F sharp. Kewl?"

"Kewl. I should've figured this stuff out."

"If you never played the 'pick a note, skip a note' game, and figured the intervals between the tones, then you couldn't have. Let's move on to the third note of the C major scale. You figure out what the associated chord is."

Lance hummed, and then softly muttered, "Start on E, skip F, and pick G, that's one-and-a-half steps, so it's E minor. Skip the A, and pick the B."

Scott smiled, "Excellent. What's next?"

"F, skip G, pick A, which is two full steps, so it's F major. Skip B, and pick C."

"Perfect!" Scott cheered. "See, you know this stuff, you just never played the game before."

"I'm playing lots of kewl new games with you today," Lance giggled.

"This is just the beginning too," Scott chuckled. "Let's get back to scales and chords, before I wind up crawling around and suckin' you off, for being an excellent student."

"Music or sex?"

"Both, of course!" The two boys sniggered and grabbed two more tender kisses.

Lance recalled, "Okay, the next note is G, so skip A, pick B, which is two full steps, so it's a G major chord. Skip C, and then pick D."

Scott nodded, "Very kewl. Now lets get a little more advanced.

Like Troy said, in popular music, we often use the chords built off the tonic, the fourth and the fifth, C, F, G, but that G chord is most often a G dominant seventh. We get the seventh by taking the D, skipping over E and grabbing the F to add to the chord. The notes in a G dominant seventh chord are G, B, D and F. It works perfectly. In every key signature, the dominant seventh chord wants to resolve to the tonic.

"Check out what we've done building chords, Lance. Once you built the F major chord, you used up all the notes available in a single octave as soon as you put the C on top of the F chord. You had to continue the same major scale pattern another octave to pick the D in the G major chord. I continued further by picking the F to make the G major chord into a G dominant seventh chord. C to the next C is an octave, eight tones. The next D in the second octave is the ninth. The next F in the second octave is the eleventh. The A in the second octave is the thirteenth."

"Oh my God," Lance shivered, "that's it! That's how they get away with all the weird chord names. They just continue counting into the second octave." He wondered, "Do they go into the third octave too?"

"Nope," Scott answered, "because there's no reason to go there. We've now used almost every note available."

Lance suspiciously repeated, "Almost?"

Nodding, Scott smiled, "Check this out. All the intervals have names. C to D is a major second, because it's a full step. Make it a half step, or D flat, and the interval is a minor second. You quickly caught that two full steps makes a major third, to build the major chord. Change from two full steps to a step-and-a-half, and it's a minor third interval, and a minor chord. The octave, the fourth and the

fifth of the major scale are called perfect intervals, because way back when monks were developing this stuff, the perfect intervals were most pleasing to God. In rock music, we play fourths and fifths all the time, so God must love to rock-and-roll. We've both seen guitar chords named flat-ninth, or augmented, or diminished. Only the perfect tones, the fourth and fifth can be augmented or diminished. To augment a note, you raise it a half step. To diminish a note, you lower it a half step. It's exactly like making a major interval into a minor interval, only in this case, with the fourth and the fifth intervals, you lower them to make a diminished interval, or raise them to make an augmented interval."

"Damn!" Lance giggled, "You know a lot more than I do."

Scott smiled, "Did, past tense, sexy lover-boy. All I understand, I'll teach you, but remember that I couldn't recall the fingering for a B diminished chord, so Troy had me play the G dominant seventh chord instead. I'll bet you that Troy, and all the members of Platinum Habits, have this stuff completely memorized, so they can build chords on a whim, whenever they need 'em. All the stuff we're still trying to memorize and apply, like chords and intervals, they've got under their fingers already. Judging by the way they sing, everything's in their vocal cords too. That's where we need to be, Lance."

Lance admitted, "I fully agree, but have no idea how to get there."

Scott shared, "I'm sure they'll teach us, but Troy was right when he was being a smart-ass, telling us to use the Internet. We have to be motivated and go find the answers to those questions, just like we answered all the sexual questions today."

"We can do this."

"Ready?"

"Set to go."

They got up off the bed and went to power up their laptops. Then they got their acoustic guitars out while the laptops booted up. Scott told Lance, "All that stuff I was explaining is called 'diatonic harmony'. You look that up on your PC, and I'll look up the modes on mine."

"Kewl," Lance replied. A moment later, both were sitting on their desk chairs before their laptop PCs. After his PC had booted and he had Internet Explorer started, Lance called, "Scott?"

"Yeah?"

"I *really* love you, man."

Scott's chuckling soon turned into laughter.

Lance giggled, "What?"

"You completely derailed my train of thought!" Scott laughed. "I was typing, and then was wondering, what the fuck am I typing? What was chubby from being on the bed, returned to normal and now is getting chubby again!"

Spinning around in his chair, Lance giggled, "Show me."

Cracking up, Scott turned around. Pointing down at his crotch, Scott sniggered, "From three awesome little words."

"It's how I really feel," Lance giggled. "Knowing that when I say it, it causes a physical reaction too, makes me love you even more." Catching himself dreamily caught in Scott's gaze, Lance

smiled, "How tall do you think you might get?"

Scott shrugged, "My dad was five-feet-eleven-inches. My mom had a brother who's six-one. Somewhere around there, just shy of six feet or just over.

"Kewl. My dad was six feet even, but had a nasty beer belly. You keep calling me sexy. I want to stay that way for you."

"I'm not worried about it. I think we both proved that we like what we see. Let's prove we're not basket weavers."

"Right," Lance giggled, "diatonic harmony and modes." He spun his chair around and started searching. Scott also returned his attention to his Macbook and searched for the musical modes. Lance soon said, "The Greek prefix 'dia' means 'through', or 'across', as in diameter or diagonal. Diatonic means through a tonal center or across the notes of a key."

Finding pages of musical modes and selecting the top entry, Scott sighed, "What I don't get is how and why music varies beyond diatonic harmony."

Lance scowled, "I'm not following you," and spun around.

Turning to face Lance, Scott said, "A lot of songs only use chords taken directly from the major scale. Take a song like 'Can't Get Enough', though. The primary chords are C major, B flat major, F major, and G seventh, with E flat majors tossed in too. Neither E flat or B flat are part of C major."

"They're all part of C minor pentatonic though," Lance reminded.

Raising his eyebrows, Scott cheered, "Of course! So songs are

written using variations of all the scales. The C blues scale is C, E flat, F, G flat, G natural, and B flat." He picked up his acoustic and played the C blues scale, and then told Lance, "The blues scale is a six note, or hexatonic scale. The C minor pentatonic is five of those six notes – just no G flat. That's why songs I think are C blues are actually written in E flat; because C minor is the relative minor for E flat major."

"Okay," Lance giggled, "how'd you figure that out?"

Scott answered, "Every major scale has a relative minor scale associated with it. Start playing from the sixth note of the E flat major scale; C, D, E flat, F, G, A flat and B flat is the C natural minor scale. It has the same notes as the E flat major scale."

"You're losing me," Lance frowned.

Rolling his chair across the room, Scott prompted, "Okay. Search for the circle of fifths." Lance opened a new tab and performed the search. Scott instructed, "Pull up the image." When Lance did and the image displayed, Scott said, "C major is at the top center, twelve o'clock position. Directly beneath C major is A minor, the relative minor scale and chord for C major. Going clockwise, there's G major, with one sharp. G is a fifth higher than C. Apply the major scale formula to G and you'll wind up with the F sharp. E minor is the relative minor for G major, because E is the sixth of the scale. D is a fifth higher than G, and applying the formula at D gives you two sharps; C sharp and F sharp. B minor is the relative minor for D major. Keep going clockwise to A major and you'll have three sharps, E major and four sharps, B major and five sharps, and F sharp major with six sharps. Going counter-clockwise from C, you get the circle of fourths and all the flat keys, starting with F major, with only B flat. Then there's B flat major and two flats, E flat major and three flats, and so on. It's all applications of the major scale formula, using the

twelve different notes. The sixth note of every major scale is the tonic of that key's relative minor. Twelve notes give you twelve major key signatures, *and* their relative minor key signatures."

Scowling, Lance sighed, "I'm getting it, just barely."

Nodding, Scott smiled, "I hate to tell you, but you'll probably have to do what I did; prove it by writing it all out and working the formula with your guitar. The simple way is to start with C major, then work out D major, and then E major, F major, G major, A major and B major. That'll give you seven of the twelve keys."

Nodding, Lance smirked, "I'll do that, but first tell me why notes are named the ways they are. C sharp and D flat are the same thing."

"Tonally, yeah they are," Scott corrected.

"Once more, in English," Lance giggled.

Scott smiled, "On a guitar or piano, C sharp and D flat are the same sound. On a guitar fretboard, C sharp and D flat are the same fret and same tone. It's on the same black keys all the way across the keyboard. There can only be one A in a scale. The general rule is that there can only be one of any letter named note in any scale. So if we start on F and work the major scale formula, we'll get G, and then A, and then B flat. The B flat cannot be called A sharp because we already used A natural.

"Let's use the key of A major, only because we play a lot of guitar music in A major. Starting at A and going up a full step gives us B. From B and up a full step gives us C sharp. Go up a half-step to D. From D go up a full step to E. Going up from E a full step gives us F sharp. From F sharp up a full step gets us G sharp. Take the final half-step and we're back at A again. The C sharp cannot be D flat because we need that D natural. The same applies to F sharp and G

sharp; we can't call F sharp a G flat, because we're needing the G sharp. G sharp cannot be A flat because we need A natural; that's the name of our tonic, where we started, and the name of the key signature." Scott checked, "Have I lost you again?"

Shaking his head, Lance admitted, "I understand, but it's new and still sinking in."

Understandingly nodding, Scott smiled, "It's not brand new to me, but I've still only barely scratched the surface of the implications of all this theory. I saw the sheet music for 'Can't Get Enough' at Manny's. I stood there browsing the book, wondering why they put three flats on the key signature, signifying it's in E flat, when I know that I'm playing C blues. You helped me understand that, Lance."

Lance giggled, "Now if I only understood what the relationships are that allowed you to figure it out. It's all brand spankin' new to me."

"Then let's work out the major key signatures and the circle of fifths," Scott suggested. "It's the base for everything; a good review for me and where I had to be about six months into lessons."

Lance incredulously hollered, "Six months?"

Scott nodded and chuckled, "I had to get callouses and my fingers moving, learning the names of the notes as I went. Then I learned the moveable barre chords, major scales, the pentatonic scales, and the blues scales. At the same time, I had CD's playing, to figure out 'Stairway To Heaven', 'Smoke on the Water', and 'Iron Man'. Little by little, I worked more on CD's and songs and less on my lessons, so I quit the lessons. Watching Platinum Habits last night, and playing with KC today, I'm wishing I had kept going."

"I need to catch up to you," Lance huffed. He asked, "What do I

need?"

"A guitar, pencil and paper," Scott smiled.

Pulling open the top center drawer of his desk, Lance found a spiral bound notebook. He pulled open the top right side drawer and slid back the cover to get a pencil. He hollered, "Hey Alden, what's the deal with this drawer cover? What a pain in the ass!"

Alden giggled, "The covers on the left and right side top drawers provide extra flat work spaces, since the desktop is partially covered with the laptop computers. Since you're right-handed, you can type on your computer and jot down notes on paper on the top right side drawer."

"Nice!" Scott cheered.

Nodding, Lance giggled, "Sorry I bitched, but it turns out it's a kewl idea."

Alden giggled, "It's no problem, Lance. Now if you really want to hear bitching at its best..." Alden then played the recordings of Keith's and Corey's Windows rants. Lance and Scott cracked up, especially at the end of Corey's rambling, when Drew's voice clearly conveyed how excited he was becoming.

"Okay!" Lance loudly sang. "One more thing, Alden, if it's not too big a deal?"

"I will not take the *big deal* tangent," Alden repeatedly chanted through giggles.

Lance cracked up. Scott laughed, "Good idea! We'd like to work on music theory now, Alden."

Alden giggled, "What did you need, Lance?"

Rapidly blinking, Lance laughed, "Oh shit! What did I want?" All three helplessly cracked up.

Alden reminded, "It was right after the Windows recordings."

"Yeah," Lance giggled. "I've had too many application crashes and blue screens to deal with Windows. Since our geeks prefer Macs, I'll make the switch. Do I need to ask a Core Rimmer to swap this Windows laptop for a Macbook Pro, like Scott's?"

"I can do that and just notify the Toy Rimmers," Alden assured. Without further ado, the Windows machine on Lance's desk went into shutdown mode. Alden instructed, "When it finishes, close the cover, please? I'll transport it out and replace it."

"Kewl," Scott grinned, "I used Macs at school, the big tower model, so I can get Lance up to speed quick enough."

"Good luck with that," Lance giggled. "This is after we start building scales and chords?"

"Yes, sexy," Scott sniggered. "The best news is that there are keyboard shortcuts that'll become second nature. You can point-and-click to save, but why bother when command-S does it faster? The mouse won't be near as important for most things. By the time school starts next week and you need it, you'll be fully functional."

"I proved that already today," Lance giggled. Alden and Scott began laughing again, so Lance playfully added, "The next lesson is in the key of D, doggie style, I hope." All three cracked up. The Windows laptop shutdown completed. Lance closed the cover and it vanished off the desk a second later. Leaning forward, Scott gestured with an index finger for Lance to lean closer. As soon as Lance was

within range, Scott reached a hand out to caress Lance's ear and landed a passionate kiss.

Alden giggled, "The new Macbook Pro is ready whenever you guys are."

Scott and Lance affirmatively hummed into their kiss. Never breaking their lip lock, Lance slowly stood then carefully maneuvered to take a seat on Scott's right thigh.

Alden patiently called for Lance and Scott. "Guys?" Suddenly and quickly, Alden bitterly complained, "Oh no you don't, Stevie! My camera, my encryption for *MY* Rimmers. Kerry, no! Get out of there! George, there's no way, you perv!" The speaker connection loudly popped.

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Oneula Beach Townhouse #2

Monday, November 8, 2004 8:09PM HTZ

Troy and Sean walked up the steps to their town home, with Jason, JD, Kenny and Stan following close behind. Opening the front door, Sean saw Billy on top of Robbie on the sofa. The two startled boys froze mid-hump. Glancing back, Billy blushed and giggled, "Sorry, dad. Sorry, pop."

Sean grinned, "Robbie, is there some reason Billy needs to apologize?"

Turning redder by the second, Robbie giggled, "I sure don't think so."

Pointing at the two love birds, Troy lightheartedly told the four

boys entering the townhouse, "This is the purpose of tonight's gathering and discussion. How to get to rolling around, when to go past rolling around, and how to deal with unrolled times."

Billy almost self-combusted, dropped his face down into the crook of Robbie's neck and helplessly giggled. Holding his boyfriend's head down, Robbie softly sniggered. Jason and JD roared laughing. Sadly shaking his head, Kenny heartily giggled. Covering his blushing face with both hands, Stan squeaked, "Oh no!"

Troy chuckled, "Are you all right, Stan?"

Shrugging, Stan giggled past his hands, "Nothing some time on Doc Wiener's couch won't fix."

"I'm not sure if I'm gay or straight, guys," Kenny softly giggled.

Raising his eyebrows, Jason playfully wondered, "Then what were you holding down Saturday night, Kenny; a gopher?" Blushing, Kenny giggled louder. Jason smiled, "It was kind o' clear what you guys were talking about. Me, Stan and Billy wanted to watch Aladdin though."

"A whole different sort of Genie," JD joked. Jason cracked up. Billy and Robbie evilly snickered.

Noticing that Sean and Troy were carefully watching him, Kenny giggled, "I get it."

When the two teenage fathers turned to him, Stan cackled, "No wonder my dad and pop stayed home to give baths."

Kenny giggled, "You have four little bros, Stan. I only have two. What's my dad's and pop's excuse?"

Sean smiled, "Expect AJ here as soon as your brothers are in bed, Kenny."

Troy told Stan, "Your dad or pop will be here soon too."

Tapping his comm-badge, Sean called, "Sean to Chris."

"Here, Sean," Chris replied.

Sean giggled, "Why aren't you here?" All those in the room heard soft sniggering at the distant end.

Chortling, Chris stammered, "Uh, well, Erik and Trav are here. They're new dorm leaders, so we're helping... shopping online."

"For lube, rubbers, dildos and dongs," Jay sniggered.

Erik giggled, "Not to mention, Lance and Scott have been alone more than an hour, and we haven't heard a sound."

"Personally, I'm scared to death," Travis chuckled. "I really don't want to call for emergency medical care our first night as dorm leaders."

Sean giggled, "Okay, you're off the hook this time. Sean out."

Robbie grinned, "Why worry about dildos when we've got the real things?"

Troy laughed, "You slow down, before I cool you and your boyfriend off in the North Atlantic! We'll get there!"

Billy silently asked Robbie, *'Remember me saying it can hurt your butt?'*

Robbie nodded, *'I remember.'*

'It's a size thing,' Billy giggled.

'So small dildos and dongs to get used to it,' Robbie smiled. *'That makes sense, and sounds like fun.'* He looked up at Sean and Troy, telling them, "We've already talked about it. Billy knows enough and already shared it with me."

"Time out!" Jason called. He gestured to JD, giggling, "He kissed me, hard! I got even with a nice big hickey." Rapidly nodding his head, JD giggled. Robbie helplessly sputtered and cracked up. Jason giggled, "That's all we've done. We haven't even talked about doing anything more. I learned a little about LA, and JD knows a little about St. Joe." Jason gestured to Kenny and Stan, adding, "These two don't have boyfriends. They aren't sure if they like girls or boys."

Sean loudly laughed, "Chill out! We know all this, so you four dudes standing, sit down and take it easy." Jason, JD, Kenny and Stan took seats on the sofa and living room chairs. Sean grinned, "This is why we brought you all together. All you guys can talk freely about whatever you want. Me and Troy are only here to keep you all on track, and answer what questions we need to. AJ will add his experiences, and then Tory or Kaleo will add another voice. All three of them had to be with women, just like I did. Straight men and women make babies, you all know this?" When the boys nodded, Sean asked, "If you need to talk about that, go ahead."

Troy suggested, "Let's get them sodas and snacks, Tiger." Sean nodded, and they walked to the kitchen.

Reaching over and smacking Billy on the ass, Jason giggled, "Get off of Robbie, bro. By the time we're done, we'll all have stiffies. Get over it!"

Billy silently checked with Robbie. When Robbie whispered,

"It's kewl," Billy started to push up off his boyfriend.

While they untangled themselves, JD asked, "Stan, how old are you?"

"Eight," Stan softly offered.

JD curiously grinned, "But you didn't hang out with us at the pool?"

Smirking, Stan sighed, "They didn't feed me good at the orphanage, so I'm shorter than I should be. I'm really kewl with all my brothers, so I stayed with them at the playground. Since I'm way shorter and smaller than you dudes... ya know, I used to try at my old school playground, but I'd get knocked down and pushed around. I hope the milkshakes help me."

JD grumbled, "That sucks!"

Robbie nodded, "You're the same age as Kenny and JD. Remember the rules are different here? It's your choice, but it's time to be with dudes your age. We want you here, not taking baths with your little brothers. Obviously, all our parents knew about this facts-of-life talk. You're old enough to be here."

Facing Stan, Kenny softly checked, "Do you want to talk about girls?"

Blushing, Stan giggled, "My dick gets hard most o' the time; for my little brothers, for my dad and pop, and almost every dude between five- and fifteen-years-old. That don't happen when boobies bounce by. My dick says it's dudes I want."

All the other nodding boys softly giggled. Kenny nodded and giggled, "Yeah, but should we only listen to our willies? Last I

checked, my brain is a bit higher." More giggling erupted. Blushing, Kenny smiled, "I was there shootin' paper, scissors and rocks for a chance to be with you, Jase. I think I know you well enough to say we're cousins, friends, neighbors and Clan brothers, but that's about it."

"I feel the exact same way," Jason warmly smiled. "It's kewl, bro. You keep your eyes open and some really kewl guy will sweep you off your feet."

JD giggled, "Then you can give him a hickey!"

Allowing himself to stop fighting and freely be who he was with his new Clan brothers, Kenny grinned, "I don't need to talk about girls. We can go right past that, I guess."

Jason asked, "Are you and Leo thinking of hooking up?"

Shaking his head, Kenny answered, "Right now, we're friends, and that's prob'ly where we'll be for a long time. I'm not thinking of a boyfriend. He wants to be with his new family and so do I. I don't think that'll change for a while."

Robbie nodded and smiled, "Very kewl. So that Billy and Jason don't have to say stuff that hurts, I'll say some stuff for them, if everybody's kewl with it?"

Nodding, Jason said, "I already told JD the basics of what our old fosters were like."

Focused on Kenny and Stan, Robbie shared, "Billy and Jase were filmed for kiddie-porn flicks. They had to do sex stuff with each other, and their little brothers, and less often with the adults too. My folks were as worried about it as they were with my bros, Richie and Ronnie, because the same sort o' stuff happened to them, but Billy and

I talked to them alone, and then Troy and Sean talked to them too. My folks weren't so worried that they might've told me and Billy, no; it was just the usual old folks stuff - don't jump too fast and wind up arguing or hating each other. My folks and Troy and Sean know that me and Billy have been mind talking most of the day. I checked and so have my bros, so I know that Billy and Jase know that was really messed up. It hurts them more than it hurts me or anyone. Most importantly, they want to feel real caring and love, which they're already getting from real fathers, and from us."

Holding up his Mr. Fuzzy, Billy squeaked, "Dad and pop told us to be home by eight for this talk. An empty house and an empty couch had to be filled." Mr. Fuzzy checked with Robbie, asking, "Ain't that right, Crispy Creme?"

Robbie and the other boys howled laughing. Soon, four more Mr. Fuzzy puppets were squeaking remarks about Robbie's pet name.

In the kitchen and gathering the filled soda glasses on a tray, Troy whispered to Sean, "Part of me wants to give Jay a hug for this Mr. Fuzzy invasion, the other part of me wants to slap him sillier. I prob'ly won't get to do either."

Pulling his Mr. Fuzzy on, Sean quietly giggled, "Hug me, hurt me, hug me, hurt me." Sean's Mr. Fuzzy gave Troy a kiss.

"You're getting Fuzzy kisses later too, Tiger," Troy softly warned, and lifted the tray. Pocketing his Mr. Fuzzy again and softly sniggering, Sean carried another tray that held bowls of assorted cookies, crackers and snacks. Entering the living room, Troy asked, "How's it goin'?"

Billy's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked, "Doin' fine, pop."

"We're gettin' into Fuzzy pet names," Jason's Mr. Fuzzy shared.

Putting the tray down on the coffee table, Troy stepped out of Sean's way, looked up at the ceiling and made the Catholic sign of the cross. Six hands reached for sodas and six Mr. Fuzzies grabbed mouthfuls of snacks. Prayer didn't help at all, so Troy tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Troy to Jay."

The sounds of loud laughter came across Troy's comm-badge, then Jay sniggered, "What's up, Troy?"

"I know you're being a helpful brother," Troy chuckled, "and I know lube and rubbers are important, but grab your boyfriend and your Mr. Fuzzy, then transport over here to see what you've done, you lunatic." Chris, Erik and Travis roared.

Jay chortled, "But Lance and Scott are gettin' busy. We can hear 'em through the air conditioning vent. We'll probably need to give some more encouragement and instructions." Sean and all six boys cracked up.

Troy giggled, "They're thirteen- and fourteen-years-old. Their first times have passed. If they still need instruction and encouragement, they might as well hang it up!" On both sides of the comm-link, everyone howled laughing. Troy laughed, "We've got six boys here, between eight- and twelve-years-old, all wearing Mr. Fuzzy puppets, ready for your continued corruption." Everybody on both sides of the comm-link bellowed laughing.

Erik giggled, "Com'on, Champ. Cartons of lube and rubbers are waiting for distribution to the masses."

"We'll catch you dudes later tonight," Travis chuckled. Moments later, the sound of the door closing could be heard.

Taking Chris' hand and insuring his Mr. Fuzzy was still in his back pocket, Jay chortled, "Alden, we're ready to transport."

A split second later, both barefoot and shirtless teens were standing in the living room with Sean and Troy.

The six boys' Mr. Fuzzies disjointedly greeted, "How's it hangin', Jay?"

"Oh Lord," Chris softly giggled. He released Jay's hand, reached back for Jay's Mr. Fuzzy and handed it over.

Slipping on his Mr. Fuzzy, Jay squeaked, "It's hangin' loose and natural."

Stepping forward, Sean's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked introductions. While that was going on, Troy smiled at Chris. "I know," Chris giggled.

"Pinocle?" Troy offered.

"Uno?" Chris countered.

"Kewl," Troy replied, and led Chris to the dining room table, where they could hear and interact, but remain clear of the insanely Fuzzy ones.

Sean's Mr. Fuzzy asked Jay's Mr. Fuzzy, "When you started liking Chris, what did you do first?"

"I told him," Jay's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked. "Before he left for home, we kissed. It was only a little kiss, but it was awesome. I didn't think he'd let me or like it, but he kissed me back. A rainy afternoon suddenly brightened." He then wondered, "How about you and Troy?"

"We talked for a couple o' hours," Sean's Fuzzy replied. "After lunch we kissed and showed our fuzzy fuzzies."

"Showin' was the next day for us," Jay's Mr. Fuzzy shared with all the Fuzzies in the room. "Chris' fuzzy and my fuzzy weren't even fuzzy yet."

Softly giggling, the six boys nodded their heads and their Mr. Fuzzies.

Concentrating on his card game with Troy, Chris said, "We were eleven. A lot more happened between the time the first Mr. Fuzzy showed up, before we turned thirteen and began getting fuzzy."

Jay's Mr. Fuzzy glanced around and made a crooked face, wondering, "Was that an un-Fuzzy voice from the past? Must be my fuzzimagination." Sean widely smiled at the remark, but the six boys roared laughing.

Sadly shaking his head, Chris leaned over to Troy and softly giggled, "I'm gonna kill him. Unfortunately, he'll love it more than me." Nodding, Troy bounced his eyebrows and snickered.

Sean's Mr. Fuzzy asked, "You got fuzzy about thirteen?"

Jay's Mr. Fuzzy nodded, "When did you get fuzzy?"

"About twelve-and-a-half," Sean's Mr. Fuzzy admitted. He then reminded all the other Mr. Fuzzies, "Drew Hundser turned twelve August thirtieth and he's already pretty fuzzy. Corey's about eleven-and-a-half, and he's getting fuzzier. Fuzzies develop at different fuzzy times, but we'll all get fuzzy sooner or later."

Jay's Mr. Fuzzy shared, "I saw Sean's and Troy's fuzzies in the dorm shower this afternoon. Interestingly, Sean's started getting fuzzy

before me, but I'm more fuzzy up by my belly-button and around my thighs than Sean. Just about everywhere, Travis is more fuzzy than I am. By the time we're fully grown, we'll all be fuzzy in almost all the same places. Like some grown men have very fuzzy chests and some aren't as fuzzy. All our fuzzies vary in lots of ways, but they're still fuzzy. There's not much that's kewler than fuzzy fuzzies." All six boys were learning a lot; primarily that the insanity they were only beginning to experience and feel was certain to get worse.

Sean's Mr. Fuzzy asked Robbie's Mr. Fuzzy, "Are you getting fuzzy yet?"

"Just a few fuzzies," Robbie's Mr. Fuzzy giggled.

Having a fuzzy revelation, Jay's Mr. Fuzzy said, "JD's living in the fuzzy dorm. He's seen some fuzzy fuzzies by now."

JD's Mr. Fuzzy nodded, "Some really fuzzy, like Trav; some only a little fuzzy, like Ray, and some like me with no fuzzies."

"The important fuzzy fact is that your fuzzy will get fuzzier as you grow up," Jay patiently explained. He then asked Sean, "Did you and Troy fondle your fuzzies that first time?"

Sean nodded, "Talking and kissing are step one. Showing and touching fuzzies are step two. A lot of time can be spent only on steps one and two. There's no rush to do anything more until you're really sure your boyfriend's fuzzy is the best fuzzy around."

JD raised his Mr. Fuzzy to ask, "Suckin' fuzzies is step three?"

Jay nodded and his Mr. Fuzzy answered, "Oral fuzzy fun is how you show your fuzzy friend that his fuzzy is the finest fuzzy around. Suddenly, feeling fuzzies is so fine, and when he feels your fuzzy it's freakin' fantastic, so you maybe want to kiss his fuzzy, or at least see

it up close. Those first times you even think of it, it's like, he pees from that fuzzy! It's gotta taste funky, and it's gonna get bigger and gag me. Then I'll close my mouth and accidentally bite his fuzzy. I must be outta my freakin' fuzzy mind, but I still want to show him that his is the very best fuzzy."

Glancing around at the four giggling boys, all paying close attention and having fun, Sean noticed none of them were blushing. His Mr. Fuzzy nodded, "So you make yourself do it the first fuzzy time. You're real careful, only licking his fuzzy, just to make sure it's not a funky fuzzy. Let me tell you, I've had some of the funkiest smelling fuzzies in the ROH, but none tasted as gross as they smelled. Any dude that showers and cleans his fuzzy will have a yummy smelling fuzzy, but the fuzzy still tastes like fuzzy flesh. Now you can concentrate only on showing your special friend's fuzzy how awesome it is. Oral fuzzy fun doesn't mean you have to take all his fuzzy into your mouth. Anything you can do with your mouth is oral, and it's still fun fuzzy times for both of your fuzzies, so lick and kiss his fuzzy as much as you want. It's *your* fuzzy fun time, so really prove how much you love his fuzzy."

Raising his Mr. Fuzzy hand, Kenny asked, "What exactly makes one guy's fuzzy better than any other guy's fuzzy? We've seen lots of limp fuzzies at the pools and they're all about the same. You older guys have longer and thicker fuzzier fuzzies, but our fuzzies don't look that much different."

"It's really not his fuzzy that matters," Sean explained. "You're right, there aren't too many differences between fuzzies. When your still at step one, talking, hugging and kissing, that's when you decide, hey this guy is really awesome, no matter how fuzzy his fuzzy is. He has some truly fantastic fuzzy ideas, and he likes my fuzzy foolishness, which makes both of you feel really special and unique."

Since everybody is special and unique, it's a matter of fuzzy feelings deep in your heart and mind. When you can't sleep without thinking of him, you'll start to understand how it feels to be in love. You'll wake in the middle of the night remembering stuff about him. That's why steps one and two are so important; those steps take you from fuzzy friends to fuzzy lovers."

"I was very lucky," Jay admitted. "My best friend put up with my fuzzy foolishness. I always felt I had to warn Chris that if we showed how close our fuzzies really were, we'd get mocked, or maybe we might get into fights to protect our favorite fuzzy. Then we're hurting each other as much as we're making ourselves feel good. Here, in the Clan, we don't have those worries anymore. Now we can be exactly like straight guys and girls; we can show our fuzzy friends how important they are all the time, by holding hands, by kissing and by talking about what we really want most in life, from each other, and from our fuzzies."

Sean's Mr. Fuzzy shared, "One of the things I had to learn was that there isn't a lead fuzzy and follower fuzzy. I would've followed Troy's fuzzy anywhere and been happy to do it. We share *everything*, not only our fuzzies. We both lead, we both follow, we're both prone to be weak and we're both likely to be strong. All the ways we are everyday around everyone makes us a couple; we understand each other all the time. Something one doesn't understand, the other explains. You get there by telling each other the truth all the time. Sometimes you know stuff you've experienced was wrong, but you don't know how to correct it. That's when you ask the questions, get the answers, and in the process, show a weakness and that you need him strong; you become the follower and let him lead. All that stuff changes all the time every day. One minute you're teaching, the next minute you're learning; an hour later, you're following him, and a little later he's following you. It's not always easy; having fuzzy fun is

far easier in comparison. At the end of the day, when you're talking alone with your fuzzy lover, it's time to tell him all the stuff he did that you really liked, and disliked too. That way, you both grow and learn."

"With all the good stuff and the bad stuff out of the way, now you can remind him that you still think he's got the finest fuzzy around," Jay's Mr. Fuzzy grinned, and then quickly looked over Jay's shoulder into the dining room at Chris and Troy. Sean's Mr. Fuzzy looked over Sean's shoulder. The Mr. Fuzzies of all six boys also looked into the dining room.

After too many moments of silence, Chris and Troy looked into the living room. Seeing all eight Mr. Fuzzies looking his way, Chris sniggered, "We're listening and lovin' what we're hearing."

Tapping his sub-vocal, Troy giggled, "Alden, get us two more Mr. Fuzzies, please. God forbid we should add our real voices to this fuzzy conversation."

Transporting the two puppets onto the table, Alden giggled, "Having voice synthesis units might help, I guess. That's my fuzzy bonus when I get a fuzzy body for fuzzy fun."

Billy's Mr. Fuzzy rose into the air and he softly giggled, "I think we all understand most of steps one and two, all the talking, and only a little bit of fuzzy fun, but there's another scary part of step three that we need to talk about."

In his normal voice, Sean smiled, "We know, Billy."

JD's Mr. Fuzzy grinned, "What I don't get is why Chris and Troy are sitting way over there and not playing Mr. Fuzzy with us. Everybody knows Jay has to be with Chris and that Sean wants to be with Troy. As kewl as Jay and Sean are being, it's just not right, cos

they're not a couple."

Turning around, Jay and Sean softly sniggered. Dropping his cards on the table and standing up, Chris chuckled, "There is a reason, JD. After three years of Mr. Fuzzy, when Jay gets into a fuzzy mode, I get too hot and horny to talk intelligently about much of anything." All the boys cracked up. Chris slipped his Mr. Fuzzy puppet on and started from the dining room into the living room. After gathering up the cards on the table, Troy got up, put his Mr. Fuzzy on and followed Chris.

Troy cleared his throat, raised his Mr. Fuzzy and the pitch of his voice, squeaking, "I'm no different than Chris. I could jam a baseball bat up my butt and pound my fuzzy pud raw with a cinderblock, and still be fully ready for fuzzy bedtime fun with Sean." Everyone howled laughing. The doorbell rang. Troy giggled, "Saved by the bell, thank God!" and went to answer the door.

Standing at the door was AJ. Uncontrollably, Troy roared laughing so hard that he stumbled back against the entryway closet doors. Stepping inside, wearing a full body-sized Mr. Fuzzy suit that went down to his knees, AJ playfully squeaked, "Alden said there's a lot of sex talk in this house, but no action." While everyone else roared laughing, AJ helplessly giggled, "I'm here to turn up the heat."

"OH GOD!" Kenny howled, "Why oh why is it *my* dad?"

"Better yours than mine," Stan giggled.

AJ giggled, "Kaleo and Tory are discussing which is coming over wearing a body fuzzy."

"No!" Stan squealed, and covered his face before breaking into giggles.

The other five boys sitting in the room held up their Mr. Fuzzies and sang, "Yes, Stan."

Going back over to Troy and kneeling before him, AJ giggled, "Where are we in this conversation?"

Kenny roared, "Yep, right about there, dad. And I'm telling pop too."

"That's alright," AJ giggled. Starting to stand, he squeaked, "I'll kneel for Jerry's fuzzy, every chance I get."

Closing the door, Troy sniggered, "Tell me you're wearing something under that, AJ. I'm really having a rough time lookin' in your Fuzzy mouth to make eye contact."

AJ chuckled, "Puts a whole new perspective on Fuzzy Mouth Rimmers, don't it?" Sean, Troy, Jay and Chris cracked up. Reaching up and way back, AJ began pulling his body-sized Mr. Fuzzy up and off. It was soon apparent that AJ had boardies on, and his Mr. Fuzzy hand puppet was in his back pocket. Softly chortling, Troy gave AJ help getting the costume off. Warm enough in the Fuzzy suit, AJ had left his shirt off and at home.

Looking up at Sean, Billy giggled, "Pop's pullin' on AJ's fuzzy, dad." The other boys cracked up.

"We're very close, but not *that* close," Sean sniggered.

At last, AJ stood up and finger combed his hair, asking, "All the fundamental fuzzy friendship and close relationship stuff has been covered?" The six giggling boys or their Mr. Fuzzies agreed. "Kewl," AJ began, and pulled his Mr. Fuzzy puppet out and onto his left hand. He squeaked, "I'm ready."

"Your Fuzzy Final Jeopardy topic is oral sex," Troy playfully announced.

Nodding, AJ's Mr. Fuzzy told the boys, "You know you're in love when you can't stop thinking about your boyfriend. I mean, everything about him occupies every spare moment; it's the sound of his voice, the color of his eyes, the cute smirk that forms when you tell a really bad joke, or the way his hair looks all mushed up in the morning, or the brilliant stuff he says to four- and six-year-old boys who are wondering where their big brother is. During the years Jerry and I were separated, I never stopped thinking about him, and he never stopped thinking about me. It's for the million things your boyfriend is that you make love in any manner. For all that Jerry is to me, kissing, hugging and jacking off just isn't near enough."

"Even the word boyfriend suddenly doesn't cut it," Jay's Mr. Fuzzy offered.

"Partner is only a little better," Chris' Mr. Fuzzy added.

Sean's Mr. Fuzzy nodded, "Lover is only another part."

Troy revealed, "Even husband seems to limit the real fact that he's all of that, plus more, and yours alone. The Vulcan word T'hy'la is the closest to describing what he really is."

"Think of it, guys," Jay prompted, "you love and trust someone so much that you're not only willing to kneel before him, you very much want to."

"And when he kneels for you, it's still the same sort of love and trust," Chris emphasized.

Nodding, Troy explained, "That's your entire world there on his knees. He's clearly showing you what he's willing to do for you."

When I'm on the receiving end like that, my main goal is to make sure Sean knows how much I appreciate it, before he's even seen or touched my fuzzy."

"Run your fingers through his hair and tell him exactly what you're thinking and feeling," Sean added. "Assuming you've talked enough through steps one and two, it's no problem for you to say really warm, fuzzy and romantic stuff, and for him to hear it."

AJ stated, "Making love is two people worshiping each other, amongst many other things. You don't rush those times. We're awake sixteen hours a day, and so little time is spent making love that you have to do what you need to do the best way you can. We spent four hours in school today. I haven't spent four hours alone with Jerry today. Of course, I want to though."

Sean grinned, "All us Core Rimmers spent about half-an-hour in a meeting after school today. All summed up together, I think me and Troy have had about that much time alone."

"That's half of a sixteenth, a single thirty-second part of the day, dudes," AJ quickly calculated.

Chris nodded, "Even on completely free days, like Jay and I have had since Saturday, I'm guessing no more than two hours were spent making love. Maybe another two hours were spent completely alone, to just talk and be together. That makes four hours, so a quarter of the day, for the most important person in my life. It's just not enough time."

"You feel it too," Troy shared. "All day long, there he is, sitting or standing right next to you. He wants to be there as much as you want him there, but man, what you wouldn't give to stop time and say the hell with it all for fifteen more minutes, only so that you can show

him and tell him that he's the pinnacle of all your successes."

In his normal voice, AJ told the boys, "All the street names for oral sex are just so wrong. Why the heck it's called a blow-job is beyond me. Yep, I'm licking, kissing and softly breathing on his wet flesh, but that's not all I'm doing. Yeah, I'm suckin' him too, but if you do only that then the party's over too quick."

Jay explained, "There are means to all ends. Orgasm is the end; it's not the means or purpose at all. The purpose is to show each other how much you enjoy every minute of everyday, thanks to him." Glancing at the four younger boys, Jay grinned, "You guys can have orgasm after orgasm; barely recovering from one and working toward another, and only shake and shiver." He turned to Billy and Robbie, asking, "Are either of you actually puttin' out yet?"

Robbie's Mr. Fuzzy nodded and giggled, "A little."

Sean asked, "Does it scare you, Billy?"

"A little, yeah," Billy's Mr. Fuzzy reluctantly giggled.

"Excellent," Troy softly smiled. "That praise was for telling the truth, Billy."

Chris nodded agreement and gently said, "It's normal to be a little scared. First, you're wondering what it'll taste like. The only way I can explain it is like mixing sweet spit with maybe salty tears or sweat. It's not horrible, and it's not great either, but it is acceptable and won't make you puke."

Sean nodded, "Yeah, that works pretty well. I was going to compare it to licking a little blood off a paper cut, but even that has a more bitter, metallic flavor. Get used to it by tasting a little off your

hand or licking some off his belly."

AJ seriously offered, "The only other concern is we all shoot differently. Just like there are billions of unique fuzzies in the world, some dudes dribble a load, while others can shoot a few feet. It all feels the same, I'm sure, but from my experience, most men shoot about a foot, maybe a little more or little less. Once again, this boils down to communication. Tell each other how you feel about it. Ask for a warning. If you're willing to give it that first real try, then you have the warning to either change your mind last second, or go for it. If it's your first time goin' for it, block the head of his fuzzy with your tongue, so you're not worried about the gag reflex."

Kenny asked, "Is it normal to want to try this stuff, dad?"

"Absolutely normal," AJ assured. "So is being afraid of the first times. Everything new is scary the first time; hugs, kisses, and just telling the truth are all huge steps. You know your pop and I were separated for two years. Before those two years, we had no hair and had dry orgasms, just like you, but that's not the case anymore. Even with all our orphanage experiences, being together was new. Sixty-nine is the name of the position for when two dudes are face-to-fuzzy. That was our first time, and we did all the stuff already talked about, even though we had been with a hundred or more other men. The big difference was that sex wasn't a quick chore anymore. My best friend in the world was back, as sweet as ever, more handsome than ever, and in my arms. As awesome as I felt, Jerry felt every bit as awesome; for every happy tear I shed, he shed at least as many."

Another knock on the door interrupted the group. Sean answered the door and let Kaleo in, grinning, "No full-sized Mr. Fuzzy suit, bro?"

"It's been done, I heard," Kaleo smiled. Bounding out of the

chair, Stan gave his dad a hug. Holding his eldest son tightly, Kaleo gently checked, "You're okay?"

Nodding, Stan giggled, "I'm glad you're here and *not* wearing a Mr. Fuzzy suit. It's been really kewl."

Absently finger combing Stan's hair, Kaleo glanced around, wondering, "Where are we at?"

Almost simultaneously, everyone answered, "Oral sex."

Troy offered, "AJ and Sean were sharing their real experiences and past knowledge. You can add to that, or me, Chris and Jay can share our experiences."

Billy asked, "Why repeat stuff, pop?"

Troy was about to answer when Kaleo grinned, "If you need to ask, then I need to share too." Adoringly, Stan smiled up at his new dad. Glancing around the other young boys in the room, Kaleo huffed, "AJ, Jerry, Sean, Tory and I had the same sort of experiences with men *and* women, but we're different people and those experiences were different too. Chris, Jay and Troy didn't have to deal with the same stuff, but I'm sure everything they've said is what me or Tory would've said." Looking down at Stan, Kaleo assured, "If that wasn't the case, we wouldn't have allowed you to be here, Stan. Really loving someone is the same concept all around; only the individuals forming the couple make it slightly different."

Nodding and stepping back, Stan smiled, "I'm kewl, dad."

"Have a seat," Kaleo softly instructed. Stan returned to his chair. Kaleo joined the group of teenagers, and then smirked, "Pedophile adults want sex with kids. That's all they care about. They don't give a damn about the kid. They're the most inconsiderate things pretending

to be human. It wasn't fun for me, or AJ or Sean. Do the deed and get it done quickly was the rule. I never even asked for names. That sure ain't what I'm doing with my husband, best friend, life partner and T'hy'la. I don't need to ask any of these dudes how they make love to know they're just like me and Tory. Quick is only for when it absolutely has to be quick, because we're burning up and we've snuck away, and have to get back to work, or school, or our sons. That's not the way we prefer it at all. It's way more fun to have the time to really enjoy sex and go through all the steps."

Robbie's Mr. Fuzzy giggled, "Testosterone again. What we're just starting to feel, teenagers get flooded with."

"Exactly," all six teens chorused. Proudly smiling, Troy flashed Robbie a thumb-up gesture. That simple sign of acceptance caused Billy to beam and snuggle closer to Robbie.

Jay smiled, "What's really great are you four younger guys, already knowing where your sexual interests are. Since only one of you are close to puberty, there's only a tiny bit of testosterone coursing through your veins. Chris and I started getting really close at eleven, before either of us reached puberty, when kissing and hugging were the ways of showing how much we cared. Testosterone and puberty pushed us to steps two, three and four. Just to be a little more clear, maybe some of the older men will talk about the four steps like baseball; first base, second, third and home plate. It's all the same, guys."

Sean explained, "Testosterone is a hormone created in our testicles, or balls, nads or nuts. It starts building up in our blood basically from birth, but in really small amounts until puberty. About the same time puberty starts, suddenly white colored fluid starts leakin' from your dick when you have an orgasm. There's sperm in there, which is what fertilizes a girl's egg and makes babies. Since

we're gay, preferring other guys over girls, we can't make babies. I'm sure I speak for all of us when I admit, each of you guys are the best things that ever happened to us. Sure, we didn't create you, but that really has nothing to do with how awesome we feel as fathers."

Robbie nodded, "My mom and dad adopted me, but they're my *real* mom and dad. Who made me don't matter at all. All three of my brothers, and Carrol and Trevor are feeling the same way. You all know that I could easily tell if my dad or mom were faking anything. I know for certain that they're not faking; they've each discovered something about my other five brothers that make each important."

"Now it's dads talking to older sons to help you transition from boys to young men," AJ offered. "With our younger sons, we're still being fathers, just in different ways." Focusing on Kenny, AJ smiled, "Shaun gets carried around because he's four and needs a lot of that kind of security. Me and Jerry play catch or games with Mike, to give him the same kind of security in a different way. For you guys, this talk is exactly the same thing. In two years, we'll have this chat with Mike. Two years after that, it's Shaun's turn. There is nothing any of you could tell us about your relationships and sex life that would shock us."

Chris nodded, "As we've been saying, each step is really special, and each was so kewl in so many ways, but looking back on our three years together, we can see how the attachment progressed. Step four is the final and best stage, because that's when we're really bonded and coupled."

Holding two fingers up, Troy shared, "The whole time through the steps, you're getting closer to switching from two individuals to one couple." With his two fingers crossed, Troy explained, "Testosterone is screaming at each of you, get to that step, now! Sean, AJ, Kaleo, Billy and Jason know that you just can't go for it, slide

your fuzzy in and pump like mad. That isn't the right way."

Mostly concentrating on Kenny, AJ explained, "When all the sexual abuse started, about five years ago, me and Jerry were about your age. Even our prepubescent little bones hurt our butts. Pedophile adult men made us scream in agony, and those fuck-wads didn't care at all. This entire conversation has been about caring. During each and every step, you're feeling that compassion just a little more, so you move from hugs and kisses to masturbation, which older folks call petting, and then to oral sex, and lastly to anal sex, or intercourse. Here's where the time caring about each other matters most. Do *not* let the testosterone drive you so far, and so fast, that you don't take the time to prepare your boyfriend for anal coupling. Honestly, with girls, the same preparation is still necessary. I know that from the girls at our orphanage, and from the women I was with. If it's not the very best it can be for both of you, well then it's just fucking; then you're no better than the real scum of the Earth that hurt us."

Kaleo smiled, "You might be thinking, it's dirty and smelly down there." All six boys nodded and softly giggled. Kaleo nodded, "Again, caring and compassion rules more than testosterone. We all shower at least once a day, so if you're intending on going for anal sex, care about each other and take another shower. You've got to prepare that little orifice that's used to expelling to be ready for accepting penetration and insertion. All of us have felt rectal thermometers being inserted in our butts. Your pinkies are about four or five times bigger, so start really carefully with your fingers. Watch his facial expressions and communicate; ask him how what you're doing feels, and if he wants to switch around, or stop completely. If he wants to stop, and I'm sure most of you will eventually have that happen, prove you still love him with kisses, masturbation and oral sex. You can easily try again another time, but you can't easily un-do

the hurt and loss of trust."

"I can tell by the look on your faces that this seems complicated and really weird," Sean chuckled. "It's not weird at all. I do it for Troy and he does it for me. It's called intimacy, guys. Every step builds an intimate partnership."

Robbie's Mr. Fuzzy asked, "If we've both agreed and decided to try, why would we want to stop?"

"I'll take this one," Kaleo grinned. He pulled Sean and AJ close, then explained, "Right after we were rescued, all of us were suddenly being fed more than we had ever been offered before. That night and for the next day, we were so damn constipated, taking a shit was like giving birth." All six boys began loudly giggling again.

AJ chuckled, "And on the third day, the dam burst. Gay intercourse when your constipated isn't very easy. Of course, when you've got diarrhea, your butt is too sore. You might think it's okay to give it a whirl, and then discover it's not so okay after all."

"The heart is willing, and the fuzzy is very ready, but the flesh is weak," Sean sniggered. "Since we're dudes in love, it's easy to say, okay, instead of bottoming, how about I top? If that's not an option, oral sex is perfectly fine too."

Seeing the boys nodding, Chris shared, "When you're with someone most of everyday, you have intimate knowledge. We do the preparations each and every time; not so much because we need to or have to, it's just part of foreplay."

AJ grinned, "Yup, all the talking, kissing, hugging, touching and oral sex that got you to anal sex becomes part of foreplay. Once you hit puberty and become teenagers, it's amazing how revved up you

can get from a simple hug and kiss."

Jay, Chris, Troy and Sean checked with one another, then loudly cheered, "Fahgedaboudit!" The six boys cracked up.

Kaleo giggled, "Testosterone is a blessing and a curse. In the store yesterday with seventy-one new dudes, Tory gave me a really quick hug and a kiss on the neck then kept going to help one of the kids. I was like, 'Hey! Now that I've got a chubby, get your pretty blond butt back over here!'" Again, the boys cracked up and the other teenage fathers softly chortled. Kaleo giggled, "Tory knew it too."

Troy chuckled, "You've all heard the phrase 'givin' it up'. By the time you get to step three and oral sex, you start to realize exactly what that means. Each of you will give what you've got to your boyfriend and lover. He doesn't need to take anything, although occasionally playing 'hard to get' is fun too."

Jay nodded and evilly grinned, "More than occasionally. Chasing is fun, but so is being chased. Maybe some guys routinely do the leader-follower and stronger-weaker acts, but I've known Chris since first grade, so how can I treat him as anything other than the guy that has my heart? This morning, I was being goofy and Chris called me on my shit and attacked me. This afternoon, as soon as I had a Mr. Fuzzy, I chased Chris all the way to Oneula Beach."

Billy asked, "So, is being boyfriends serious or fun?"

"It's both those states and every other emotion that one of you might feel," Troy answered. "It's all the best times and the worst times shared. The best times become twice as good. The worst times become half as bad. Sharing makes all the difference in the world."

Chris smiled, "A good example was before dinner this afternoon. Most of us in the room had no clue how badly Sean was

messed with. When Sean was about to say something about it, Troy stopped Sean from saying it, and reliving the bad memories. Troy took the burden off Sean, said what needed to be said, and then Sean thanked Troy. Sean capped off his appreciation by swapping places, so that he was Troy's backrest and could wrap both arms around his lover. That showed everyone that they are an intimate couple, always ready to be whatever their partner needs."

JD wondered, "What about arguments and fights?"

Jay shrugged, "Arguments happen because of any type of misunderstanding. My primary goal in Washington, D.C., was to keep Chris and our relationship safe from homophobic jack-offs. Talk about stressful times. Way too often I was turning down hugs, kisses and hand holding that I very much wanted, as much as Chris, but to keep us safer, there I am opening my mouth and inserting my foot. Being a man has nothing to do with boyfriends, or pubes, or puttin' out sperm. Being a man is admitting when you've fucked up, and then learning from it." Displaying his Mr. Fuzzy puppet, Jay squeaked, "This is my alternate self, the one I show my lover when I've been so impossibly stupid that I've hurt him. When I'm too ripped up inside to adequately explain myself and apologize, Mr. Fuzzy helps, at least a little bit. Now that we're here and Clan, Mr. Fuzzy hopes things change." Six giggling boys and four smiling Core Rimmers caused Jay's Mr. Fuzzy to squeak "What? I'm serious."

Stan pointed at Chris, giggling, "We know. So does Chris!"

Turning to Chris, Jay's eyes popped wide open. Jay's Mr. Fuzzy puppet displayed a goofy Fuzzy smirk to the rest of the room, but Jay never lost eye contact with Chris. The six younger boys cracked up. Sliding in close to Jay, Chris completely ignored the giggles and sniggering. He planted a series of tender kisses around Jay's cheeks

and lips.

Slowly shaking his head, Troy patted Jay and Chris on the shoulders, chuckling, "Thanks for your valuable help tonight, guys; you were awesome. Alden, before this discussion becomes demonstrations, transport Chris and Jay to their dorm room." The moment Chris and Jay vanished, the entire room erupted in loud laughter.

Walking over to where Kenny was hysterically sliding out of his chair, AJ giggled, "Let's go home. Me and your pop will answer any other questions you might have." Kenny barely nodded a reply.

Kaleo checked, "What do you say, Stan? Is there more to say here, or should we go home and add your pop, for a more private conversation?"

Shrugging, Stan grinned, "This was way more fun than I thought. I figure I've got two major things to do. First, I need to grow taller. While I'm working on that, I need to learn how to find a boyfriend."

Jason giggled, "Sometimes they find you, Stan, in really embarrassing ways." He then turned to JD, bounced his eyebrows and chomped his jaw closed. Giggling, JD roughly pulled Jason over and across his lap, playfully chomping his jaw near Jason's chest and belly.

Robbie wickedly grinned, *'Fuzzy Mr. Billy's gonna get to my creamy filling?'*

Laughing and nodding, Billy went for a kiss, pushing Robbie back down and flat onto the couch until he got what he wanted.

Troy and Sean hugged AJ, Kenny, Stan and Kaleo goodnight.

Soon, Sean and Troy showed their guests out. Grinning at their eldest sons obliviously playing with their boyfriends, Sean and Troy decided to clean up the living room of glasses and emptied snack bowls. When they returned, not much had changed, but the boys at least noticed them there. Troy grinned, "Your brothers are sleeping at their boyfriends' homes tonight. Where you decide to sleep tonight is entirely up to the four of you."

"We're going to our room," Sean smiled. "I had *better* hear a lot of talking and giggling tonight." Sean reminded, "Just because I knew far more than I should've doesn't mean I pushed Troy into anything."

"The truth is, I pushed Sean towards each and every step," Troy admitted.

Nodding, Billy smiled, "We'll work it the same way, following our boyfriends' lead."

Jason checked with JD, "Do you think you can play by them rules?"

"I'll manage," JD answered. Feeling his face flushing, JD paused. "Omigod!" JD giggled. "We're being *told* to stay up late and mess around!"

"Tell me where else that could happen," Robbie sniggered.

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Ewa Beach Townhouse #1

Monday, November 8, 2004 8:22PM HTZ

Prez and Keith had just chased down Jimmy and Richie. Witnessing this silliness, Dee, Gage and Jonah sat in the living room.

The television was on, but the chase was more interesting. Each teenager carried a laughing and squirming rug-rat upstairs and into the master bathroom. Bath water was run and the two little tikes were stripped. They climbed into the tub and asked for the toy boats that Richie had accumulated since being rescued. Prez went to get the boats from Richie's bedroom.

Returning with the toys for the boys, Prez's comm-badge chirped, and Doc Andrews called, "Preston, can I see you in my office, please?"

Handing over the boats, Prez tapped his comm-badge and smiled, "We just got Richie and Jimmy in the tub, Doc. I thought you were done with me?"

Doc Andrews explained, "Doctor Howard and I noticed something during dinner that I'd like to double check. It won't take more than a few minutes."

Sitting on the edge of the tub with a soapy washcloth ready, Keith asked, "Is there something wrong, Doc? Do I need to be there too?"

"You've been here with your husband for every other visit," Doc Andrews chuckled, "but the answer is, there's nothing to be concerned about. Finish bath time and then meet us here, Keith."

Prez shrugged, leaned over the tub, kissed Richie and then Jimmy, saying, "Just in case I'm not back before you fall asleep." Richie and Jimmy said good night to Prez. Standing up again, he told Keith, "I'll meet you there, T'hy'la."

Nodding, Keith grinned, "In about ten minutes, baby." Turning to Richie and Jimmy, Keith sniggered, "It's time to teach boyfriends how to help each other bathe."

Richie cackled, "We can fig're that out, daddy!" and reached over for Jimmy's dick. Both little boys cracked up.

Keith sniggered, "That's only a starting and ending point. Everything else needs to be washed too."

Evilly chuckling, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, calling, "Alden, take me to Doc Andrews' location, bud." Having heard what the two doctors were talking about, Alden simply executed the order. Arriving at the exam room where Doctors Andrews and Howard were waiting, Prez smirked, "I hope this is important. I'm missing out on five-year-old boyfriends first bath together."

Remaining in his chair, Doc Andrews waved Prez closer, smiling, "It's important enough for doctors to wonder what the hell is going on." He then looked down at Prez's legs and touched a couple of areas where small red hairs were already sprouting, explaining, "I shouldn't be seeing this for another ten or more days, Preston."

Prez blinked, "Really? Keith noticed them this morning. Higher up, on my thighs, I've got a few hairs sprouting there too. We figured it was normal, considering the advanced technology from the hospital early Friday morning, and the bio-beds here."

Slowly shaking her head, Doc Howard said, "That speeds up healing enough to keep Starfleet officers and noncommissioned personal doing their jobs. When there's a finite number of people on a Starship, every man down due to injuries affects the ships' operational readiness."

Doc Andrews then scowled, "Skin burns such as yours have damaged the hair follicles. During dinner, Doctor Howard noticed you had patches of hair on your legs and brought it to my attention. Now we have to determine what's going on. Strip and get on a bio-bed,

Preston."

Beginning to remove his shirt, Prez muttered, "It's not from the medicated tubs or anything else?"

"Hair growth on burned flesh after only three days is unheard of," Doc Andrews assured. He then tapped his comm-badge and called, "Doctor Andrews to Doctor Barnes."

Prez tossed his shirt on a counter, asking, "We need Antonio here too?" He started untying the drawstring on his board shorts.

"It's two-thirty in the damn morning," Antonio sleepily whined across Doc Andrews' comm-badge.

Helplessly grinning at the sound of a young boy cussing at the disturbance, Doc Andrews replied, "I'm very sorry, Antonio, but we have a Clan Director here who is already regrowing hair burned off early Friday morning."

"Already?" Antonio excitedly squealed. The shuffling sounds of sheets could be heard. Then Antonio bitched, "I swear, these Core Rimmers just like seeing me in my underwear. If this keeps up, I'm going to have Quint relocate the Hawaiian Islands to the Caribbean, so I can get a full night's rest."

Laying his shorts and underwear on the counter, Prez chuckled, "You've got some really cute undies, 'Tonio. Thanks to you, Richie asked for a bunch of similar underpants." He then padded naked to the nearest bio-bed and hopped up onto it.

"The kid has taste," Antonio giggled. He then ordered, "George, transport me to Hawaii." Immediately upon arrival, Antonio's little hands flew to his eyes. "ACK!" Antonio screamed, "BRIGHT LIGHTS!" and he began running around the room, sounding very

much like a Mogwai from Gremlins. Once both of the doctors as well as the patient were holding their sides, George had pity on Antonio and teleported a pair of vampire-grade dark glasses into his right hand.

Once he had the glasses on and saw both adults holding their sides, Antonio did a very good impression of Mutley, grumbling nonsense under his breath as he stalked over to Prez.

"Are these yours for real?" Antonio asked, and he grabbed about five or ten pubic hairs on Prez and pulled quickly.

"OW!" Prez bellowed, "DAMMIT, 'TONIO! NONE OF THIS IS MY FAULT! BLAME THE DOCTORS, AND SPARE THE REST OF MY PUBES!"

"Quiet, I'm trying to sleep," Antonio shot back with a grin. "You yell again, and I'm gonna decide I need some hair from an inch or two lower as well."

Glaring at the midget middle-aged doctor, Prez did a much better impersonation of Mutley.

Placing the hairs on the scanning tray, Antonio giggled then quickly brought up some screens that neither of the other doctors knew existed. After a few minutes of close inspection, Antonio looked around. Noticing that Doc Andrews was looking over his shoulder, Antonio reached over and acquired a sample of arm hair.

Doc Andrews flinched and screamed, "BRAT! Is this a consultation or the damned Spanish Inquisition?" Covering her mouth, Doc Howard made a hasty exit from the room. The only visible hair on her would come off her head, and if that happened, Antonio would never see age 10 or 37. Rubbing his arm, Doc Andrews went to stand on the far side of the bio-bed that Prez was

laying on. Keith transported into the room. Before Keith could ask any questions or greet anyone, Antonio grabbed a fistful of his leg hair.

"WHAT THE FUCK?" Keith hollered, and jogged over to the bio-bed, on the other side of Prez, and beside Doc Andrews.

Ignoring the comments, Antonio called, "Alden! Stop playing with your floppy drive and call your cousin, Cam. See if Professor Maggrine can pick a time slot to come down and look at this."

Alden giggled, "Cam's getting Professor Maggrine, and I have no floppy drives, they're all hard."

Having just left Drew's townhouse and feeling some of the pain Prez and Keith just experienced, John transported into the room, giggling, "What's going on?"

Antonio giggled, "Alden's surfing the IBM catalogue again and has his drives all hard, and I'm tracing something really funky with Prez, and it looks like Keith too. You mind if I cut a little of your hair off to add into the test mixture? Doc Andrews already provided a reference sample."

Warning moos, and softly muttered expletives flowed from Keith and Doc Andrews. "YOU SONOFABITCH!" Prez yelled, trying not to giggle. "Couldn't you have just cut some of MINE off as well?"

Antonio looked at him seriously, then said, "No."

"Why not?"

"Because," the tiny doctor giggled, then looked at John, who had already pulled out some of his hair for Antonio. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," John giggled, and then went into learning mode, asking, "None of the Starfleet Medical tech could've caused Prez's hair growth?"

"It's not only hair growth," Doc Andrews interrupted. "The blisters that were on Prez's buttocks Saturday night are completely healed in two days. There's only minor discoloration from the new skin growth."

"Actually, I just think Keith needs to wash him better," Antonio commented. He offered, "Cookie, John?" and a bag appeared next to him on the desk.

"Always," John cheered, and helped himself. Around his partially chewed cookie, John muttered, "It could be radiation from his PADD; too many games of Pissed Off Chickens."

"Opposite effect; good thought though," Antonio nodded. "I called in help from Archnania. The root balls on the samples I got from them are unusual. You'd think they'd know that if I asked first, they'd tense up and I wouldn't get good roots! You guys who got empathy are different though, your body doesn't react the same, so you got me some roots with your samples, even though I'm pretty sure I don't need them."

"Would my N-Gen genes matter in the samples?" John wondered. Antonio turned and looked up, rapidly blinking. "Phenomenally cosmic roots," John giggled, and offered Antonio a cookie.

As he took the cookie, Antonio considered John's suggestion. "Hey Alden; call up Sammy and get me a sample of his hair. Tell Vish that I said he's got my permission to help."

"You're in luck," Alden replied. "Vish just had an evil moment and got your samples as I called them. Here they are. Now I'm gonna

watch Sammy chasing his pussy."

Keith and Prez roared laughing. Softly chortling, Doc Andrews carefully approached Antonio and John to see what they were doing, besides eating cookies and being silly.

Just as the wary doctor joined them, Professor Maggrine appeared. "Antonio! May I say the new ornamentation on your face suits you well!"

"Hey, Professor; I'm seeing some weird stuff here. Do you wanna give it a shot?"

Laying on the bed and blocking Keith's hands from playing with his exposed dick, Prez giggled, "Can I get dressed?"

"Ask Keith; he seems to think your joystick needs adjustment!" Antonio giggled.

"What is this obsession that you Alpha Prime beings have with clothing?" The Professor asked in wonder.

Scrunching his face, John whined, "I've heard them making whoopie, but *really* don't want to witness it."

Refusing to turn back toward the bio-bed where Prez lay, Doc Andrews chuckled, "Get dressed, Preston."

Antonio giggled, "Dang it, I was hoping I'd learn a couple of tricks to try with Byron!"

Sliding off the bio-bed and away from Keith, Prez giggled, "We'll play with our fuzzies later, T'hy'la." He quickly crossed the room and began getting dressed, not realizing Keith had stealthily followed, and was leaning over to check out his butt.

"Amazing," Keith grinned, "there's barely a sign you were ever burned, Prez."

John whispered to Antonio. Wide-eyed, Antonio gasped, "Hand stands, huh?"

Nodding, John giggled, "I tried it with Stephen, using telekinesis to hold him steady."

Antonio gave John a thumbs-up, then turned towards Doc Andrews and the Professor. "Doc, could you please tell Doctor Howard that we need her back in here? It's time to put on our thinking caps." Tapping his comm-badge, Doc Andrews told Doctor Howard it was safe to return and that her input would be appreciated.

Once Doctor Howard had stepped into the room, Antonio began his thoughts. "Even with the bio-bed's assistance, Prez should still be in the inflammation phase with predominant macrophages. Due to the extent of his injuries, at this point I would expect to see the first stages of contraction, while reconstruction of the hair follicles would be in early stages in perimeter areas and nonexistent in primary injury areas. When I looked at the roots of Prez's pubic hairs, I found a slightly higher level than normal of type I collagen, with no evidence of type III collagen at the levels indicated by the term since his injury. This confirms the visual indications that epithelialization has completed with the contraction phase completing in an extremely fast time period, thereby eliminating scarring. Visual indications that apoptosis has completed and returned to normal levels are confirmed by the bio-bed scan. In addition, the expected tensile strength of up to eighty percent in the injured region is shown to be exceeded by bio-bed scans, which place the healed regions within two percent tensile strength of surrounding tissue. What is interesting is that there seems to be a microbial hitchhiker on the white blood cells; one that is shared by John and Keith, though in lesser quantities judging by their

hair follicles. This microbe does not show up in the Federation or Vulcan databases, yet I was actually able to watch it as it seemed to be trying to assist in repair to the damage caused when extracting them from the epidermal layer."

Keith and Prez turned to one another, rapidly blinked, and then chorused, "What's that mean?"

Rolling his eyes and entire head, John smirked, "It means all three of us have microbes that help us heal. As soon as 'Tonio yanked out your pubes, microbes raced to the area to heal and begin the process of regrowing your pubes. It's a safe assumption that the same is happening to Keith's leg hair, and on the back of my scalp."

"I agree, John." Antonio said with a nod. "These microbes seem to be a genetic mutation which simulates a super-myofibroblast when the host is injured.

Deep in thought, Doc Howard muttered, "The question is, why is it happening? Keith and John are brothers, but Preston is not blood relation, so it's not genetic."

"Do you need some milk to go with those glazed eyes?" Antonio asked Prez and Keith.

Prez smirked, "If it's not genetic, what's left?"

"Environmental considerations," three doctors, one professor and John answered.

"May I inspect this microbe to see if it might be in our databases?" the Professor asked.

"Sure," Antonio replied as he turned to the console. "An interesting point; the microbe appears to be independent of the host's

cellular structure. One of the follicles from Keith touched one from Doctor Andrews, and immediately about half of the surface microbes migrated to the foreign hair."

Doc Andrews said, "All the hair follicles are still alive. I wonder what they'd do to an older, dead follicle?"

Already heading out of the room, Doc Howard said, "Let me get my hair brush and test that." In a minute, Doctor Howard returned with her hair brush, and pulled a handful of hair off it then put it on the test sample tray.

By this time, Prez was fully dressed and standing with Keith near the doctors, watching the proceedings. For many seconds the group watched the monitor and readings displayed. Antonio was beginning to believe nothing would happen, but then the microbial migration began, ignoring the older, dead follicles and moving to those that were still alive.

The Professor tilted his head in thought, then stated, "These microbes seem familiar; I really need to call in an expert to make sure."

"Go for it," Antonio responded.

"Georgie, are you listening?" the Professor asked.

"How many times do I have to ask you NOT to call me that?" whined the Headquarter's AI.

Neither Prez nor Keith felt like swimming in the North Atlantic, but helplessly sniggered at Georgie. Only Grandma Morrison could get away with calling the HQ AI "Georgie".

"I'll stop when you reach maturity in a few billion years," the

Professor laughed. "Are the Dimensional Twins available, or are they busy trying to reproduce? I need to see them and Kermit, preferably with some of his favorite water."

Obviously pouting, George replied, "They just beat me at three dimensional chess, for the fourth time in a row. Stand by, they're on their way; whether they like it or not."

A few seconds later, two almost-thirteen-year-old boys with curly long blond hair appeared, wearing... each other. Accompanying them was a strawberry blond who looked barely thirteen, wearing a loincloth and carrying a bowl of water with something that looked vaguely like a frog.

Two doctors and the professor grinned, but Antonio, John, Keith and Prez howled laughing and began applauding. The two blonds blushed and tried to hide their faces.

"Don't worry bros, Cam says he's already plotting revenge on George," The only dressed member of the trio commented. "Hey everyone, I'm Cameron. My brother squeezing his brother's butt is Karl; the squeezee is Tracy. Just as soon as their erections finish shrinking, they'll say hi to y'all."

"I'm really gonna have to talk to your Grandpa Marc about the defects in your modesty circuit, Cameron," Tracy commented with a grin. "This better be good, Antonio. Remember, I know where you're ticklish at."

Antonio pointed at the Professor, giggling, "Blame HIM!"

"Okay, we'll blame him and punish you," Karl laughed.

"Here guys, you're making my Director feel inadequate!" Alden giggled as two Speedos with little elephant trunks attached to the

front appeared on the nearest table.

"ALDEN!" Keith and Prez shouted.

John sniggered, "Neither Tracy or Karl can match Darren's beastly bits."

Nodding, Keith grinned, "Since Darren doesn't cause anyone to feel inadequate, we're fine."

Prez warned, "But you won't be fine, Alden. All I have to do is ask Kerry, George, Icarus and Stevie, and the diving well will be filled with ice cubes for your dunks."

"Can you say, major shrinkage?" Keith evilly snickered.

"My twin bro says he can arrange for Alden's body to have an innie!" Cameron giggled.

Alden squealed, "YIKES!" and tried a semi-sincere apology.

Tracy and Karl giggled, otherwise occupied in making sure the proper body parts were in the hollow elephant trunks on their new swimwear. Once dressed, Tracy walked over to the bio-bed. "Let's make this official. I'm Tracy Butler, Director of the Ft. Lauderdale Intel Division. My partner and husband is Karl Butler, the cute blond with the wiggling elephant trunk over there. Our brother is Cameron Butler, head of AI Investigative Services."

Shaking hands with Tracy, Karl and Cameron, Prez introduced himself, Keith as his husband and assistant director, and John as his brother-in-law and the Pacific Rim Division's Intel Director.

"I've heard about you, John. You're the only Clan member who got an entire hotel up!" Tracy giggled.

John blushed and giggled, "My hubby's partially responsible. We'll go and meet him when we're done here."

"Kewl!" Tracy replied. "It's great to meet you, Prez and Keith. You guys have a rep almost as strong as Seth and JJ do. It's common knowledge in Orlando that you guys make Chuck Norris look like a common man!"

Floating about a meter off the floor, John smirked, "It's getting deep in here. Just because they crashed the worldwide financial system?"

Prez chuckled, "ZCC caused that. All we did was uncover their dirty laundry."

"And we left some of the State's government in place," Keith sniggered. "It's more than Joel managed here!"

"So modest in their greatness!" Tracy sniggered.

John flew to the ceiling, pulling Antonio and his sack of cookies along with him, and they hovered there.

"Remind me to get escape hatches put in the ceiling for situations like this," Antonio quipped as he retrieved cookies for him and John.

Prez and Keith took advantage of the floating, and started tickling Antonio's and John's feet.

"Hey Cam! Stop trying to decode frog and let me borrow your shoulders! I see ribs wanting tickles!" Tracy giggled.

"On my way, bro!" Cameron stated as he quickly came over and crouched down for Tracy to take a seat on his shoulders. A few seconds later, they joined in the fun of tickling the floating mini

smart-alecs.

At the high-pitched squeals and laughter, Prez sniggered, "I only wish their voices had changed."

"I wish they had leg hair to yank out," Keith evilly snickered.

"That's because we're still perfect, unlike you old goofballs!" Antonio stuttered between giggles.

"Tracy, could you PLEASE stop trying to stick your elephant trunk in my data port?" Cameron giggled.

"Stop moving your head, and it might stop poking you!" Tracy replied.

"Hey!" Prez laughed, "I think Tracy and Cameron wanna be remotely detached Rimmers!"

"I don't think rimming is on Trace and Karl's schedule until next week!" Cameron giggled.

"HEY! See if we let you play with us when we get home!" Tracy blushed as he half-slapped Cameron's head.

"I wanna see!" Karl giggled from over with the doctors. "Hey guys, poke the floating clowns until they deflate and drop to the floor, then get over here."

John cackled, "Serious doctor stuff time!" and started drifting down with Antonio.

"Did you know that serial doctoring is a crime in seventeen universes?" Antonio giggled as they landed.

"Only seventeen?" John grinned, "Backwards, must be."

Doc Andrews just shook his head, the realization that Antonio's antics had their patient laughing and playing around instead of sitting there worrying. He now understood why Antonio was so popular a doctor to visit; his unconventional bedside manner placed kids at ease, no matter what the situation. *'A lesson they never taught us in Med School,'* he chuckled to himself.

Once Tracy had climbed off of Cameron, Antonio glanced over at him, quipping, "That's one friendly elephant! I gotta get a pair of those for Byron!"

"I'll make sure he has a pair." Tracy giggled, "And some for you too." He then rejoined Karl. "You got anything, Hot Stuff?"

"Yeah, while you were trying to interface with Cam, Kermit helped us figure out what was going on."

Tracy giggled, "Kewl. After we're done, you and I need to sit down with Prez, John, and Keith. They had an idea I think might be pretty kewl, on an interdivisional basis."

Eager to get an answer about the healing and hair growth, Prez, Keith and John gathered around the doctors, the professor and Karl.

Doctor Andrews took the lead. "It appears these organisms, according to our resident biologist frog-type companion, are a match to a base microbe which is present in the waters of his home planet. This particular microbe tends to attack things which damage its environment, or creatures living in same, assisting the natural defenses of the attacked in recovering quickly."

"Archnanian microbes?" Keith uncertainly muttered.

The professor reminded, "You bathed in it, swam in it, and drank it."

Prez blinked, and then grinned, "I could swear I just you heard you admit that a frog diagnosed me, not the three doctors, two computer geeks, Archnanian Professor, android, or N-Gen also in this room?"

"Hey, I helped by translating!" Karl giggled.

"Since I'll live, and everything's status quo, in a Clan Short style, I think I'll go home," Prez sniggered.

Keith told John, "Take our guests over to the CIC dining room. I'll bet they still have some pizza. We left Dee watching over Richie and Jimmy."

John nodded and grinned, "Go be daddies. If I need a command decision for anything Intel related, I'll let you know, Prez." He then called, "Hey, Alden, get elephant trunk Speedos for me, 'Tonio and Cameron too."

"What about me?" Doc Andrews chuckled.

"You're too old," John, Antonio, Cameron, Karl and Tracy chanted. Doctor Howard cracked up and wandered out of the room.

The requested Speedos were delivered and donned. Sniggering, Prez and Keith followed Doctor Howard, and were followed by the elephant pack. Professor Maggrine returned to Archnanian, leaving Doc Andrews behind to clean up the exam room.

* * * * *

Waikiki Beach

Monday, November 8, 2004 9:50PM HTZ

Since finishing their meals and leaving The Ocean House restaurant, Paul, Reyes and Ryan strolled the Waikiki shoreline. Nearest to them were Manny and Clay, but they were about fifty meters behind the threesome. Slightly further away, nearer to the street and off the beach were Reyes' gorilla, Kahdi, and tiger-hybrid, Casim. For almost an hour, they walked and talked. Occasionally, other couples and small groups walked by them, but they only politely acknowledged one another with eye contact, nods or soft greetings. With each and every similar event, Paul's grip on Reyes' hand got tighter, clearly relaying Paul's distrust and stress. Reyes never said a word about it, cheerfully continuing the conversation as if nothing had happened.

Completely comfortable on his home turf, Reyes intended to prove the ROH was much more accepting and relaxed than South Carolina. Waikiki Beach had changed dramatically during the twenty-three years Reyes was in an orphanage, but it was still the same tourist destination. It was a beautiful starlit autumn night. The moon was only a sliver in the sky, giving the boys the illusion that there were many more stars. Waves lapping at the beach created a relaxing soundtrack.

Knowing his boyfriends were on Eastern Time, Reyes asked, "Are either of you tired?"

Paul shrugged, "Not very. I'm having a really good time."

Ryan giggled, "Ready to take us to your love nest now, Reyes?"

"No," Reyes laughed, "not until you two are tired. Kaho'olawe proved that I won't have a chance between both of you unless we're all ready to call it a night."

Paul evilly grinned, "After an awesome day like this, you're certain to be recovering from tonight well into tomorrow."

Nodding, Ryan giggled, "You planned all this, you empathically driven romancer!"

"Most of the day was normal Pacific Rim Division life," Reyes grinned. He then joked, "I repeatedly tried this maneuver for years and always failed. For once, my evil dinner and beach plans have panned out," pushing all three to giggles. Slowing his pace, Reyes suggested, "Let's sit. Then we can decide on a third trip down the beach, or if it's time to go home."

They stopped walking and released their hands. Holding his right palm out to the two teams of security, Reyes signaled they were staying for a while. Facing the ocean, Ryan sat down in the sand, followed by Reyes and lastly Paul. The lights from hotels and stars sparkled off the water of the Pacific Ocean.

Ryan leaned over onto Reyes' shoulder and then closed his eyes. Contentedly, Ryan purred, "We should've known, bro."

"Known what?" Paul wondered.

Ryan sighed, "With a first name like 'Reyes', we could've guessed he'd be our bright ray of light, dragging us out of the doldrums and back into the real world."

Rolling his eyes, Paul smirked, "Oh jeez!" Expecting that response, Ryan softly sniggered.

Reyes incredulously giggled, "But *I'm* the romancer? I don't think so! The obvious truth is that you're both seducers."

"There's one major difference," Paul shared. When Reyes turned

to him, Paul admitted, "It used to be for survival and a major effort. You're honestly a pleasure to be around."

Never lifting his head off Reyes' shoulder, Ryan added, "The whole AI Division agrees with us, Reyes. I talked with our mom. Paul talked with our dad. Jerry never shuts up and says that Danny, KC and Marc also know it. Joey obviously thinks you're awesome."

"Willy doesn't pounce just anyone," Paul grinned. "He's never pounced me once."

Ryan softly sang, "You're holding back again, bro."

"It was all very nice to hear though," Reyes smiled, and reached behind both brothers to pull them closer.

Paul softly asked, "Now that we're together, what are you thinking, Reyes?"

After thoughtfully humming, Reyes answered, "I had hoped that I wasn't asking for too much. From the moment we met, I couldn't focus on one of you without including the other. It made part of me think weird thoughts, like wondering why I couldn't try for only one brother. At first, I thought it was orphanage memories. When I realized it wasn't that, I asked myself, is it your histories on the street? That had nothing to do with it either. All day today has been the proof to the simple answer that I just want to be with you, a part of both and turning two into three. Where have I been all day? Between you, playing the middle part and loving every moment. Maybe I'm a glutton, starved for real affection? The rest has been you two."

Ryan wondered, "How do you mean?"

Reyes shrugged, "Both my hands are taken. When one brother is in front of me, the other is behind me. As much as I've loved it, it

really isn't very fair. Someday, when we're all comfortable enough, there will be Ryan sandwiches, and there will be Paul sandwiches. The only part of that I can foresee taking a little extra time, is with Paul, walking down any beach or street with both his hands taken."

"It's true," Paul sighed.

Reyes smiled, "I'm not the least bit worried about it, Paul. It's something that will take time and practice. We'll try it in the safest places first, on Ewa Beach and on Sullivan's Island. Only after you're used to it there will we try it other places, like maybe Kaho'olawe. I love who you are as much as how you are, so overcoming the past is only a tiny task. There is a much larger problem that's mine."

Ryan impatiently huffed, "That's not so large a problem either, Reyes. After all you've said and done for a week, I can't see you treating sex like the unpleasant chore it used to be for you."

"It will be different," Paul firmly assured. "If you ever get the feeling that something we're doing is too much like the orphanage, just say something and we'll stop. I've made love to Ryan and he's made love to me. Even when it was a show for some pervert or perverts, it was very much the same, only quicker."

Ryan asked, "How many other guys could know all that we've done and not think we're pervs?"

"None," Paul quickly answered.

"You didn't even blink," Ryan recalled.

"All three of us were sad when we discussed this," Paul added. "You were sad for what we went through, and we were sad for what you went through. Although I'm not very good at showing it, I really

do want to keep that in the past."

"Our future is going to be so much fun," Ryan smiled.

"And easy," Paul and Reyes playfully sang. Ryan cracked up and fell back into the sand, completely hysterical.

"RYAN!" Kahdi shouted. "WATCH OUT!"

Unbeknownst to the three boyfriends sitting in the sand, four men had been running toward them. Kahdi and Casim had seen the men and took the precaution of moving closer to their charges, but still weren't close enough to intervene. Hearing Reyes' gorilla yelling, Clay and Manny reached for their batons and handguns. Before any of the threesome could react, the first man stepped directly on Ryan's chest and then kicked Reyes onto Paul. The second man kicked Ryan in the side and shoved Reyes onto Paul, softly growling, "Fucking faggots." The third and fourth men each took opportunistic shots at Ryan, Reyes and Paul. Reaching out, Paul managed to grab the fourth man's leg, sending him flailing down and onto the man directly before him. Manny aimed a silenced nine-millimeter handgun and shot the first man right between the eyes. Clay fired his silenced weapon on the second man and hit him in the upper left quadrant of his chest. In a street fighter's rage, Paul jumped on the fourth man and began pounding the living hell out of him, landing blow after blow to the head. Casim, Reyes' tiger-hybrid, pounced on the third man with extended claws, ripping past clothing and deep into his flesh. Kahdi went to Paul and the fourth man.

Reyes' first reaction was to check on Ryan. Finding him unconscious, Reyes yelled, "Alden, get me a tricorder!" Off to Reyes' side, Casim and Clay were restraining the third man. Kahdi pulled Paul off the fourth man and Manny dropped to the sand, intending to restrain him for prosecution. A split second later, Manny fell, with

Paul on his back and cursing up a storm, landing more face and head shots on the fourth man.

Picking up Paul again, and getting a heck of a struggle for his effort, Kahdi repeatedly said, "I'm on your side, Paul! Your brother is hurt!" It took many repeats for Paul to even realize who he was struggling with or what he was being told.

Hovering over Ryan and scanning him, Reyes checked and rechecked for broken bones. Finding none, Reyes only thought, 'You may believe your human, Ryan, but your android bones saved you from surgery and weeks of pain.'

More calmly, Reyes called, "Alden, notify Doc Andrews that he's needed. We'll be in his office in a minute." He then checked with Casim; "Correct me if I'm wrong, but the penalty for assaulting a Clan Short leader, or wards of Clan Short, under sexually bigoted pretenses is death."

Casim nodded, "That's correct, Reyes."

"Take out the trash," Reyes ordered. "They called us faggots."

With that, Casim's claws cut through the third man's flesh and muscle into his heart. Directly in the dying man's face, Casim sneered, "Bye-bye, homophobic low-life. Have fun fanning the flames of hell."

Looking around and finding Paul in a rage induced daze, nonsensically shouting profanities, Reyes huffed, "Casim, Clay and Manny, you guys meet us at the FYS Building when you're finished. Alden, transport Ryan onto a bio-bed at Ewa Beach, with me, Paul and Kahdi in the same room."

Chapter 21

Ewa Beach, FYS Building.

Monday, November 8, 2004 10:06PM HTZ

Under the bright lights of one of the doctors' treatment rooms, Reyes got up off his knees and went to the bio-bed where Ryan lay, still unconscious. Concentrating fully on Ryan, and ignoring Paul's rants, Reyes operated the bio-bed and triple checked for injuries. Still finding nothing, Reyes whispered, "This isn't what I wanted to do, Ryan." He then called, "Alden, strip Ryan for me."

Ryan phased out and back onto the bio-bed. Doc Andrews ran into the room and went directly to the bio-bed and Reyes.

"I've scanned him three times, and can't figure out why he's still unconscious," Reyes told Doc Andrews.

After taking a quick glance at the bio-bed readings, Doc Andrews scowled, "He's an android."

"HE THINKS HE'S HUMAN, YOU DOPEY FUCKS!" Paul hollered. "OF COURSE HE'S OUT OF IT! A HUMAN WOULD BE!"

Raising his eyebrows, Doc Andrews checked with Reyes. Reyes nodded, "It's true. As far as me and everyone is concerned, Ryan's human. Let's treat what we can while he's unconscious..."

Restrained by Kahdi, Paul screamed, "DON'T YOU DARE FUCK WITH MY BROTHER! I'LL KILL YOU ALL! GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM HIM! AND GET THIS MUTHAFUCKING APE OFF ME!"

Leaving the bio-bed and sighing, Reyes went to Paul, and then

shouted, "SHUT THE FUCK UP AND LISTEN! I WOULD NEVER DO THAT TO RYAN OR YOU! I LOVE YOU BOTH, BUT YOU ARE *NOT* HELPING RYAN!" Seeing tears form in Paul's eyes, Reyes huffed, "For any other android, I would've just revived him with smelling salts. I know he's special, and I intend to keep him special."

Paul stopped struggling in Kahdi's grip, sobbing, "You almost had me believing it, Reyes. I almost believed people were different here. I almost believed I could love you back and everything might be perfect. No, it's not going to happen, not now, not ever."

Reyes blinked tears away and sighed, "What's most important right now is Ryan. Let me help the doctor, please? I want you here to see that we're not going to harm, change or invade Ry in any way. But if you can't calm down and help us help Ryan, I'm going to have Kahdi remove you from the room."

"You have me removed and you can forget all about me," Paul warned.

Reyes frowned, "How can we help Ryan?"

"He thinks he's human!" Paul insisted, "It's fully integrated. Whatever happened to him, he'll react exactly like a human."

"There aren't any broken bones," Reyes explained.

Kahdi said, "He was jumped on, on his chest, and repeatedly kicked about the body, perhaps once near or at the head."

Doc Andrews announced, "I found a bruise on his right side jaw and neck. Nothing's seriously damaged."

Reyes asked, "What should we do?"

"Nothing!" Paul growled. "He'll come around any minute."

"Then we'll wait together," Reyes softly said. Returning to the doctor, Reyes more clearly explained, "We were sitting in the sand together. We never really knew what the hell happened. One-second we were laughing, and the next it was ugly."

Doc Andrews asked, "How long ago?"

"Four minutes and forty-seven seconds," Reyes and Paul answered.

"From a kick to the jaw, he should be coming-to soon," Doc Andrews said.

Reyes nodded, "Then we won't interfere," and picked up Ryan's limp hand. He began softly calling Ryan's name.

Kahdi released Paul and let him go to his brother. For a while, Reyes and Paul alternated calling for Ryan to wake up. After another minute and a quarter, Ryan's eyelids began fluttering.

Thirty-one seconds later, Ryan softly groaned, "What the fuck happened?" and pulled his hands away from Paul and Reyes. His right hand reached for his jaw and his left hand reached across his belly for his right side.

"A herd of homophobic moose," Paul smirked.

Reyes nodded, "An insult to all moose everywhere, but I promise not to tell Joey or Timmy."

Realizing he was chilled as well as sore, Ryan looked down, smirking, "So the correct treatment for homophobic moose attacks is to take all my clothes off? I'm not sure about this, Reyes."

Blushing, Reyes giggled, "It sure wasn't my plan, but I had to see where you were hurt."

"Nice excuse," Ryan smirked. Glancing around, he wondered, "Can I sit up without all of you freaking out?"

Reyes nodded, "Your right side is going to be really sore and bruised for a couple o' days, so take it slow." Reyes and Paul offered Ryan hands to hold and their other hands supported his back.

Taking both offered hands and sitting up, Ryan groaned, "You had homophobic moose imported just to get me naked? Kind o' extreme, but then again, all your naughty plans have been. All you needed to do was ask, Reyes."

"Are you outta your fucking mind?" Paul incredulously wondered. "After all this, you're still flirting?"

Reaching for his sore jaw, Ryan shrugged and winced, "Course."

"NO!" Paul shouted. "We're going home! We're going to forget this entire night happened!"

"I'm not going home or forgetting anything," Ryan firmly stated. "I'm staying with Reyes."

Paul yelled, "No you're not! This is partly his fault! Safety is home! Reyes can't give us that!"

Ryan shrugged, "I never expected him to. He can't control all the homophobic moose on the planet. I'm staying here. If you want to go home, then go."

"Maybe it would be better, Ryan," Reyes gently prodded.

Shaking his head, Ryan replied, "Not for me, it isn't. I've seen this side of Paul before."

Paul loudly exclaimed, "Which side is *that*?"

"The overprotective side," Ryan flatly answered. "The side that tells you everything is fucked up and won't ever be different. I'm not buying it this time, bro. Things might not be perfect, but they have been and are better with Reyes. Go home, alone this time."

Paul hollered, "You're serious?" When Ryan nodded, Reyes started to call Paul to wait, but was cut-off by Paul tapping his comm-badge and shouting, "Stevie, get me outta here and back home." Paul disappeared from the treatment room.

Ryan whispered, "Asshole." Turning to Reyes, Ryan asked, "Can I have my clothes?"

Reyes blinked and softly confirmed, "You are serious?"

Carefully sliding off the bio-bed, Ryan nodded, "Completely serious." Landing on his feet, Ryan told Reyes, "This is what he's like when he's flown off the handle. If it had been him that was hurt, it would've been bad, but I probably could've talked him into staying. Because it was me, it's everybody's fault; the world is hell and we're only trying to find a temporary kewl spot. He can believe that all he wants, but I know we've found two permanent kewl spots; here in the Clan in general, and close to you."

"You love him," Reyes reminded, "and I love him too."

"He loves us too, Reyes," Ryan warmly smiled. "Paul's just got this funny way of showing it. He believes he's protecting me, but neither of us need that kind of protection, and I sure don't need to be protected from you. He'll eventually realize all that, when he wants. Until then, he'll be irrational and stubborn."

Nodding, Reyes called, "Alden, get Ryan into clean clothes, please?" As soon as Ryan phased back in and was dressed, Reyes then turned to say, "Doc Andrews, this is my boyfriend, Ryan Owens. He'll be staying with us a while."

Smiling, wincing and reaching an arm out to shake hands, Ryan

corrected, "A long while, since this is where Reyes lives."

"My pleasure," Doc Andrews smiled, and shook Ryan's hand, instructing, "Alternating cold and warm compresses on the bruises tonight and into tomorrow." When Ryan nodded and thanked him, Doc Andrews reminded Reyes, "I'm going to have to mention this in my log, which means Preston will know..."

"Which means my dad and pop will too," Reyes finished. Doc Andrews slowly nodded.

Kahdi added, "We'll have to report it too, Reyes. I can't say what kind of repercussions this might have. We were keeping within our guidelines for a Clan leader on a date, but the guidelines might need to change."

Reyes sighed, "Fine. I'll tell my side and do my best to make sure nothing changes. You guys were awesome. As far as I'm concerned, we'll just have to put up homophobic moose crossing signs on Waikiki Beach."

"Right next to the swimsuits optional signs," Ryan sniggered.

Reaching for Ryan's hand, and having his hand taken then firmly squeezed, Reyes smiled at Doc Andrews, offering, "Sorry about the late night madness. We'll see you in the morning." Ryan, Doc Andrews, and Kahdi said goodnight. Leading Ryan out of the treatment room, Reyes shared, "I'm considering telling my dad and pop first."

Ryan wondered, "Do you think they'll be awake?"

Nodding, Reyes grinned, "Awake, but will they be dressed or intimately involved is the question."

Pausing in the reception area, where Casim, Clay and Manny were waiting, Ryan smiled, "How about we take care of that first. As soon as Derrick and Mike see that I'm only slightly worse for wear, I'll transport home to get my stuff. I'll have to deal with Paul too, but I

am returning, Reyes."

"This is exactly the kind of the situation I was afraid of," Reyes sadly groaned.

Before Reyes could say another word, Ryan gently placed his index finger on Reyes' lips. "This is Paul overreacting," Ryan explained. "He really does love you, as much as I do, and he will remember that. Maybe I can make it happen tonight, or it might take him a while. Whichever case it happens to be, I am coming back." Ryan then nodded his head toward the three security personnel.

Facing Casim, Clay and Manny, Reyes asked, "The work is complete?"

Casim nodded, "All but the reports."

"Kahdi reminded me," Reyes said. "After I review your reports, I'll write another report. This was not your fault. You guys can't keep respectful distances and be supermen, always arriving in the nick-of-time. Regardless of what Kekoa, Cody or anyone else believes, we cannot be protected from every jack-off out there. Which reminds me, where are they?"

"Dust in the wind," Clay grinned.

Reyes nodded, "You earned some time off. You're dismissed, guys."

"Thank you," Ryan warmly smiled at the security teams.

Reyes led Ryan out of the FYS Building. They were followed out by Casim, Clay, Kahdi and Manny. All six said goodnight and went in opposite directions. Ryan shared, "Your best feature is a chronic positive attitude, Reyes. I don't want to change that in the slightest, but you have to understand, something like this would've eventually happened. Paul needs to understand that he can only protect us so much..."

"Protect *us*?" Reyes softly queried.

Nodding, Ryan chuckled, "I have no doubt he was protecting both of us; maybe me a little more than you, but he thinks you're awesome, Reyes. He absorbed a little of your positive attitude. After we talked last Wednesday morning, and then had breakfast and told our family, we went back to our room. He was trippin' so bad that the moment the door closed, he kissed me hard. For the first time in years, my bro actually showed me real love and appreciation. That was your doing. He's been tripping for a week. The old cranky Paul is still there, but the other loving Paul is coming back too. He flips from one extreme to the other several times a day, and that's from spending limited time with you. Between us, we can get him over the shitty street years. I see things a little more like you; all three of us can help one another more than anyone else could. We can move forward instead of stagnating or slipping backward. I don't want to argue with Paul, but there's no other choice, because he'll push me one way, to stay there, and I'll push him the other way, to come back here.

"Think of how little we told you about how we spend our time," Ryan prodded. "We don't *do* much of anything. Paul is perfectly fine hiding in our room, enjoying the safety and family that we haven't had in so long. I drag him out for walks on the beach. The Poe Library is right there, within walking distance, but we've never once been inside it. Friday was very much an emergency at the Charleston hospital, so we were there, doing what we could. Saturday, when Danny invited us to Kaho'owhatsie..." Reyes cracked up, and Ryan giggled, "Paul heard you would be there, and he dragged me back upstairs, to change into beach clothes. Yeah, he was still worried about who else would be there, and if we'd be safe, but you're like a magnet that we're drawn towards."

Walking around the CIC and approaching the townhouses, Reyes grimaced, "He blames me that you were hurt."

"I know," Ryan sighed. He shook his head and firmly said, "You didn't cause that, Reyes. From my point of view, we were having a nice walk and kewl chat, I got stepped on, then woke in a doctor's office, with you and Paul fussing over me. All I remember is the guy stepping right on top of me. Everything else is a blur."

"It happened that fast," Reyes explained. "All those other people we passed weren't a threat at all, but I could feel Paul's stress, in his hand in mine. Those four men were typical high and mighty controllers, forcing their view upon us, as the supposedly weaker and insecure homos. They waited until we were sitting down too, making us even less capable of retaliation. Now they're all dead. All I wanted was time alone with both of you."

"You succeeded in every way," Ryan warmly smiled. They stopped in front of the steps to townhouse number two. Locking eyes with Reyes, Ryan firmly stated, "Everything was fantastic, all night, until some dopey guys tried to ruin it. I refuse to allow them to fuck up a really great night. They haven't won squat, or even proved themselves better than us. Now they can prove themselves high and mighty to the Creator." Stepping closer to land a tender kiss, Ryan then softly assured, "Please don't believe you're to blame for anything other than a damn good time. Paul will be back here, with us. I can't say when, but I know he won't stay away from me, and he sure doesn't really want to be away from you. His choices are to hide out alone, or join us, plain and simple."

Reyes smiled, "I really love your perspective. I really love Paul's too. His idea of protection is different from mine. All I cared about was making sure you were all right. I'll have to admit that the Clan law enforcing justice in this case made me feel weird." Noticing Ryan's curious expression, Reyes sighed, "I ordered four executions, on the spot. All four of them are dead, for being stupid enough to call us faggots."

Ryan worried, "How do you feel?"

Reyes shrugged and thought a few moments before answering, "Justified. They hurt each of us, in multiple ways. What might've been is now seriously delayed. Yeah, justified works."

"That's why this will work," Ryan smiled. "You are a little bit like each of us, and another really awesome perspective to add." After a short pause, he prompted, "Let's tell your family what's gone on and is now over."

Tapping his comm-badge, Reyes called, "Dad? Pop?"

Derrick replied, "Here, Reyes. Have you decided where you're sleeping?"

Reyes grinned, "Sort of. We're right outside the house. I just wanted to make sure you're awake and dressed."

Opening the door and looking out at Reyes and Ryan, Mike laughed, "It's not even ten-thirty! Dillon and Scott are in bed, but Jonah and Gage are still awake. Is this how dating was in the fifties?" Watching Reyes and Ryan walk up the steps, Mike backed up to allow them inside and scowled, "There's one missing?"

Followed Ryan inside, Reyes sighed, "It's been an interesting first date."

Seeing Ryan's bruised jaw, Derrick hurried to him, groaning, "What happened?"

Ryan giggled, "I'm fine, Derrick. We had a really great dinner at an awesome restaurant, and then walked the beach."

"We went southeast from the restaurant toward Diamond Head, and then turned around," Reyes recalled. "We must've passed at least two-dozen other people. Since we walked about two kilometers in the sand, we decided to sit. Only minutes later, four men ran right into us, to intentionally harass us. Ryan got stepped on and kicked around, I

was shoved and clunked heads with Paul. Paul went nuts. Ryan was unconscious. Four men have been executed for assault, for sexual harassment. That's the basics of what you'll see in the report."

Gage, Jonah, Derrick and Mike loudly asked, "Are you okay?"

"Bruised, battered and a little sore, but I'm fine," Ryan cheerfully answered.

Reyes shrugged, "I'm just a little discouraged. Ryan's staying, but Paul's gone home. All the progress made all day and through most of the night was lost, thanks to four assholes. Ryan's already argued with Paul."

Focusing completely on Reyes, Ryan repeated, "This kind of argument was bound to happen. I'll take care of it."

Reyes asked, "Now?"

Ryan nodded, "Might as well. Give me half-an-hour or so to pack some stuff, and then I'll be wherever you are." After giving Reyes another peck on the cheek, Ryan waved goodbye, and then had Stevie transport him home.

Reyes asked, "Should we tell Prez?"

Nodding, Mike explained, "If he reads about it in the morning, he'll be a basket case, searching for you before school."

Derrick grinned, "The problem is, Richie and Jimmy are probably asleep, Sammy has gone with Ben back to the Gibbons', and the two Head Rimmers are pretty much alone." Gage and Jonah began giggling. Bouncing his blond eyebrows, Derrick chuckled, "This should be comical." He tapped his comm-badge and called Prez.

Moments later, in the squeaky voices of their Mr. Fuzzy puppets, Keith and Prez giggled, "What?"

Immediately, Gage lost it and howled laughing. Giggling, Jonah took Gage's hand and pulled him off the couch and up the steps.

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Sullivan's Island, S.C.

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 4:33AM EST

Ryan appeared in the bedroom that he shared with Paul. With little more than a glance at his brother, Ryan went to his bed, kneeled down, and pulled his suitcase out. Paul growled, "You're going back, after all I've done?"

Ryan put his suitcase up on the bed, stood and turned around hissing, "Because of what you've done."

Paul incredulously hollered, "What have *I* done?"

"You hurt him," Ryan grumbled. "Reyes told us what he's most afraid of, so you took the first opportunity to throw it in his face. He didn't want to see us arguing. Here's what I'm like protecting my bro, like it or lump it. His heart is breaking! I can see it in his eyes and hear it in his voice." Ryan spun around and went to his dresser.

Getting up off his bed, Paul yelled, "It was his fault! He took the risk and we should've known better."

Grabbing armloads of clothes, Ryan huffed, "Yeah, Reyes' elaborate first date plans also included asking four assholes to fuck with us. It was first and foremost in his mind, before setting up a condo love nest complete with Champagne." Antagonized and irritated beyond control, Ryan accidentally pushed the first drawer closed a little too hard. He dumped the first pile of clothes haphazardly into the suitcase.

Paul smirked, "Do you want to fuck him that bad?"

Spinning around, Ryan yelled, "You take that back! I want to make love with the most careful and considerate person we've ever met! The ways we used to make love were barely a warm up for what Reyes deserves. You know that too, but I won't wait for you to admit

it. From what I've been told, you fought again for me, but left me laying in the sand. Reyes was the one checking me over, not you! It used to be you, Paul! The way you changed was good while we were on the streets, but it's not good now. This shit has got to stop." He stormed to the closet and yanked more clothes off hangers then threw them in the suitcase.

Sadly shaking his head and taking a deep breath, Ryan said, "If you really think Reyes would lay a single finger on me, without you there too, then you really don't know him the same way I do. I'll bet you that he won't, no matter how much I try to put my best moves on him, he'll say no. If I win the bet, you transport to Ewa Beach and apologize for ever blaming him. You bend over backwards for as long as it takes to fix what you've fucked up." He called, "Stevie, you can transmit audio and video from any Clan camera, right?"

Stevie reluctantly and softly answered, "I could."

"Do it, on the TV in this room," Ryan ordered. "The moment I arrive back at Ewa Beach, show my stubborn, pig-headed brother exactly what's going on." He told Paul, "I'll purposefully use my entire bag of tricks. Let's see who wins this bet, bro. If Reyes does more than hug and kiss me, I'll turn around and transport right back here. If he doesn't, you transport there and apologize to him. Is it a bet?"

Paul sighed, "I can't take that bet, cos I couldn't pay up."

"Why not?"

"In my opinion, it was partly his fault."

"So let's hide out here from the rest of the world," Ryan impatiently growled. He went to the dresser, opened another drawer and grabbed more clothes.

From out in the hall, they could hear Joey ask, "Awe Unca Pauwh and Unca Wyan fighding?"

KC firmly said, "Joey shouldn't be hearing any part of this, and has already heard too much. I'm taking him to Ewa Beach."

Jerry said, "Where my son goes is where I'll be."

Mary sighed, "I'll help you pack."

Jon was heard saying, "We'll let Danny and Marc know later this morning."

Paul groaned, "We woke everybody."

"Good," Ryan huffed. "It's a gentlemen's bet with a household full of witnesses. There, now you can watch and learn and it won't cost us anything." Closing his suitcase, Ryan evilly grinned, "You'll see, bro. You're wrong this time. It wasn't Reyes fault. He won't touch me. And you're being a class A doofus, hiding out in the safety of this room, so that no one can ever get too close to us." He turned and pulled his suitcase off the bed, sighing, "I can't do that, bro. I choose to be with Reyes. He tries his damndest everyday, just like we used to. I'd rather try with him than wait for you. When you're ready, you know where I'll be."

Ryan called, "Stevie, transport me to Reyes, and then start monitoring me and Reyes." Simultaneously, Ryan vanished from the room and the television flickered on. In condo building B, in the single bedroom condo he had prepared, Reyes was sitting on the sofa watching television. Ryan appeared in the room behind Reyes. Convincingly, as if nothing had upset him, Ryan giggled, "Hey there, sexy."

Swinging around, Reyes smiled, "That was quick."

Putting the suitcase down, Ryan nodded, "Not quick enough. Unfortunately, we got loud and woke everybody up. We're about to get some more guests. KC, Jerry and Joey are packing to come here too."

Reyes called, "Alden, what've we got to accommodate our

friends?"

Alden replied, "There's a two bedroom condo, one flight upstairs, number 4-B." To try and lighten Reyes' mood, Alden giggled, "It's right across from Rad and Gil, our resident watermelon lovers."

Reyes said, "Excellent, we'll be really close. Go ahead and get it loaded with food, drinks and stuff Aunt Mary can cook. We all know she'll be stopping by at least once a day."

"As long as she's awake, the woman has to cook," Ryan giggled, and then leaned down to give Reyes a passionate kiss. He purposefully coiled his tongue around then tried to suck Reyes' tongue off its roller.

As soon as the kiss broke, Reyes giggled, "Wow!"

"That was the warmer-upper," Ryan giggled.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, Paul rolled his eyes and sadly shook his head, softly mumbling, "I can tell that you sucked his tongue, Ry. Just rip his pants open and go for it. He won't turn it down."

Ryan caressed Reyes' shoulders, chest and belly. Reyes giggled, "Come around and sit here by me." Overplaying his excitement, Ryan bounded up and over the back of the couch, landed on a cushion and snuggled up close to Reyes. "I know what you're doing," Reyes smiled.

Ryan innocently giggled, "You do?" and a stack of fifty virtual halos almost caused a white-out on the TV screen.

Nodding, Reyes smiled, "You're trying to make me feel better, like everything is fine as is. You being here makes a big difference in my warped little positronic mind, but there's one person missing."

"We could still have an *awful* lot of fun," Ryan seductively

giggled, and emphasized his goal by rubbing Reyes' thigh. He leaned over for another kiss and started moving his hand up close to Reyes' crotch.

Blindly reaching down, Reyes stopped Ryan's hand. The kiss broke and Reyes warmly smiled, "Not for our first time, Ry. I know it'll be that way someday, but that's not how I want it from the start, and you already know it. It's a sweet gesture, but I can wait."

Playing up his disappointment, Ryan softly wondered, "Are we going to do anything while we wait for Paul?"

Reyes nodded, "Lots of those kinds of tongue-tingling kisses and probably twice as many hugs. I'm even wondering if I can shower with you in the morning. We might only share water, soap and back scrubs, and I'm not even sure we can do that. I figure we can try, but if there aren't two raging erections to start with, then even showers won't get steamy."

"That's it; hugs, kisses and possible shower fun?"

"Until a half-dozen bruises fade off you, that'll be a constant reminder of how an awesome night fell apart on us. I'll keep you plenty entertained with a hundred different things, and almost four hundred other kids. I'll sleep here with you, and do everything else with you, and I really hope that's enough."

Pretending to think about it, Ryan looked directly into the camera wearing his most victorious 'I told you so' expression. Returning his focus to Reyes, Ryan giggled, "I'm gonna try and wear you down, ya know?"

"I know you will," Reyes sniggered. "It would be impossible for me to make a move without telling Paul about it. I don't want my first words to be, 'I'm so glad you're here, Paul, and I did all these things alone with Ryan, so get your pretty white ass into the bedroom, cos now it's your turn!' There's a lesson in subtlety in there that none of us

would appreciate, I'm sure."

"That's true, but I can..."

"You can do a lot and so can I," Reyes interrupted, "but it's unfair for all three of us. Think of it this way; our consciences will be clear, so once Paul gets here, we can take our sexual frustrations out on him." Rapidly nodding, Ryan roared laughing.

"You dawgs," Paul softly griped. "Neither of you are getting anything from me anytime soon."

The apartment doorbell rang. Reyes stole a quick kiss from Ryan, got up and answered it. Seeing Jerry, Joey and KC waiting in the hallway, Reyes moaned, "I'm so sorry you guys got woke up, but I can't help being glad that you're here."

KC grinned, "Don't worry about it, Reyes. I have my work cut out for me with Fred. Now I've got to prove to him that the Shannon protocols are working. In the process, I can teach the mountain boy how to surf."

Jerry peeked inside the condo, giggling, "This is going to be a tight squeeze for five of us."

Pointing at the ceiling, Reyes smiled, "One flight up, boy genius. Alden's got a two bedroom flat ready for you guys."

"Bud Weyes, how can I pounce you fow bweakfasd if we awe up dhere?" Joey innocently asked.

Reyes grinned, "We'll have breakfast at the CIC dining room, twerp. You have my permission to pounce anyone that doesn't have a Mr. Fuzzy puppet."

"Awden? Can you hide aww dhe Misdew Fuzzy puppets ad bweakfasd?" Joey asked, with an evil grin spreading across his face.

Alden giggled, "All but one, Joey. If Jay misplaces his Mr. Fuzzy, he starts frothing at the mouth and quivering like a junkie

going cold turkey. For Divisional sanity and safety, I suggest we not go there."

"Okay," Joey replied, satisfied that he was now under orders to pounce at will.

KC shook his head, grinning, "The island will never be the same. Jerry, you wanna give me a hand keeping the punk under control while he recruits local 'Rat Pack' members?"

Jerry shrugged, "The bigger trick is getting Joey back to bed for another few hours. It's still Monday night here, kiddo. Most of the kids are in bed, for at least another seven hours."

Reyes sniggered, "Let's show you your apartment first. If Joey can't sleep, there are two auditoriums with various drum sets to keep him occupied. Reyes called Ryan over, and then had the entire group of five transported to apartment 4-B. Reyes and Ryan got KC, Joey and Jerry settled, showed them the balcony, and then left them to return to their own apartment. Fighting his need to sleep, Paul intently watched his brother and Reyes. Sooner or later, Reyes would cave and Paul's beliefs would be proven. To be vindicated, Paul only had to watch them and catch it.

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Ewa Beach Dormitory #3 Common Room

Monday, November 8, 2004 10:41PM HTZ

Since dinner, and with his older brother Craig getting to know Felicity, Phil Nash had a lot of ideas running circles in his mind, but no outlet for them. His mom was wandering around in spirit, and she knew that Phil liked boys. He had to talk to Craig, and he also had to talk with Owen Reed. Phil wondered, how does a dude tell his big bro that he likes dick; how does a dude say hello to another dude that looks like a strawberry blond angel; which should be done first? Making matters even more awkward and confusing, Phil knew

virtually nothing about Owen; only that Owen was from a level two orphanage, which was automatically assumed to be worse than the level one orphanages.

Phil thought, maybe I should try to get to know Owen first. That way, if Owen turns out to be total loser, I won't have to say anything to Craig about being gay. After all, with no boyfriend, there would be no reason or purpose to rattle Craig's cage.

But he had to wonder, how rattled would Craig be? He didn't want his big brother to feel uncomfortable changing clothes in their room, and he sure didn't want to lose the only remaining member of his immediate family. Craig was an awesome big brother and always had been. At ten-years-old, Craig got interested in soccer and had practiced with Phil when he was only seven. Now, Craig had a considerable height and weight advantage, but once Phil broke the ball free from his bro, the goal was easily within reach.

The most disturbing part of what Dulce had told Phil was that his mom would continue hanging around until both Craig and Phil were settled and happy. Sarcastically, Phil thought, wonderful! He would be the main reason his mom would stay, longer than necessary, only to make sure he was happy. That was another driving force pushing Phil to take some action, instead of sitting there fussing while other boys in the common room watched TV and imitated dialogue using their Mr. Fuzzy puppets.

Still uncertain what he might do first, Phil got up and left the common room. He went down the other hall where some other really kewl guys lived. Maybe Pat O'Hara was in his room. Everyone knew that Pat was hooking up with Ralphie Taylor. They would be kewl to talk with about this stuff. Just thinking about it though seemed to be filling Phil's bladder to overflowing, so he passed Pat's closed door and went to the lavatory. He was still in there washing his hands when music from the hallway poured into the tiled room.

One after another, Pat, Ralphie and Rafe came into the restroom and went directly to urinals. Unzipping, Pat checked, "How's it going, Phil-'er-up?" and faced the porcelain on the wall.

Sadly shaking his head, because Craig's private joke was becoming more public, Phil sniggered, "It's been a mind blowing sort of night. Truthfully, your room was my next stop."

Rafe asked, "Craig's still with his new girlfriend?"

Drying his hands, Phil replied, "Yeah. We have some family stuff to talk about later. There's other stuff going on too. I'm not sure if I should mention that to him though."

Ralphie remarked, "Stuff you don't wanna talk with your bro about? Must be heavy duty." He peeked over at Rafe's urinal, making it obvious what he was looking at. Swaying to and fro, to show off and hide his dick, Rafe broke into giggles. Ralphie then checked out his boyfriend's snipped goods and hungrily hummed.

"You're insane!" Pat giggled. "I show it to you every time you ask!"

"I'm asking," Ralphie leered.

Phil sniggered, "Nice goin', Ralphie. Did you even look at me to read that?"

Scowling, Ralphie seriously wondered, "Read what? I didn't read you, Phil."

Moving back to the urinals, slightly behind and between Ralphie and Pat, Phil prompted, "Read me, dude. It would make my life a hell of lot simpler."

Looking over his shoulder, Ralphie focused his telepathy just above Phil's forehead. In only a few seconds, Ralphie gasped, "Holy crap, Phil! Dulce hears your mom?" Everything Ralphie learned he immediately shared with Pat.

"That's just one of the challenges too," Phil softly said.

Ralphie giggled, "Those aren't challenges!" He then playfully corrected, "Well they are, a little bit, but that's easy compared to your mom." Finished first, nine-year-old Rafe Montigua stuffed his goods away, closed the Velcro fly and went to the sinks.

Phil smirked, "What's easy about any of it?"

"We'll help," Ralphie smiled, and shook his dripping dick. He zipped up and shared, "We just went through this with Rafe. All you need to understand and believe is that it's kewl; it's just another piece of you. Craig won't care. Your mom obviously doesn't mind."

Phil scowled, "How do you figure that?"

"She gave you his name," Ralphie giggled, and then went to the sinks. "Proving to your mom that everything's kewl is the biggest problem. The rest we'll help you with."

Phil and Pat followed Ralphie to the sinks. Pat smiled, "My first day here, in the basement store, Ralphie got on his knees and begged me to like him. Reyes, Chris and Rafe saw it too. I was still asking myself if I'm gay, and Ralphie is the opposite extreme, comin' right out and saying that I'm who he wants, and would give anything, if I'd only say yes."

Phil smiled, "So you said yes."

Soaping up his hands in the sink, Pat nodded and grinned, "It really was the only answer."

Ralphie sniggered, "We learned Rafe had some similar stuff happen to him today."

Already done drying his hands, Rafe nodded and giggled, "Maybe I lost my chance with Jase, but now there's a whole *bunch* of really cute, possible boyfriends who're my age."

Phil asked, "What's my next step?"

Ralphie replied, "You're attracted, so now you have to give him some clue. The only way to do that is to get to know him." Pausing only a moment to look at Phil's reflection in the mirror, Ralphie smirked, "You'll fall flat on your face if you keep thinking the way you are. You're plenty cute and plenty nice, Phil. Now we need a little more help."

"Alden?" Pat called.

Over the speakers, Alden replied, "Yes, Pat?"

Pat asked, "Can you tell us where Owen Reed is?"

"He's at the Oneula Beach rec room," Alden answered.

"Let us know if he decides to go someplace else," Ralphie requested, and then added, "We're heading there now."

Phil nervously squealed, "Now?"

Rafe cracked up. Ralphie nodded and sniggered, "Why not now? You can stay awake all night wondering, or find out if the guy is all you think he is."

Frozen by his own thoughts and worries, Phil soon had Pat taking one hand, Ralphie taking the other, and Rafe behind him and pushing him forward. Leaving the lavatory, Pat began the pre-meeting pep talk by saying, "You're really kewl, Phil. Maybe I haven't seen everything the last couple o' days, but I have seen you and Craig kickin' a soccer ball around. More than a dozen other kids were learning from you. Soon, another bunch of kids went to the field with four more soccer balls. You and Craig started teaching them how to play the game. Maybe it wasn't much to you, because it wasn't a real game and they're only beginners, but put yourself in the shoes of any of those orphanage kids. Two brothers working together showed them teamwork. You guys gave them something else to do that they'll enjoy."

"The next huge bonus comes in a couple of months," Ralphie

continued. "Malnourished orphans are being well fed, and now they're getting exercise, out in the sunshine. Each and every one of these kids are gonna suddenly be taller and healthier. It's something they might not realize you helped with, but know that you have. As for your bro and what he might think, you've got it all twisted up in your mind. Sure, Craig's older and more mature, but what you're seeing in him isn't attraction, it's competition. When you're fifteen, you'll be like him. Everything he's got, sooner or later you'll have too."

Still pushing Phil's back, Rafe shared, "I've seen you and your bro at the diving well. What I see are two brothers that are already really hot. Of course you're shorter and thinner than Craig, but was he that much different when he was twelve?"

"I guess not," Phil reluctantly admitted. They went out the two doors and started across the quad toward the CIC. Phil shrugged, "He's always seemed bigger and stronger than me."

"Try being nine-years-old with a fourteen-year-old brother," Rafe giggled. "What we do can't even be called wrestling. Jay wins and I lose, every time! Sometimes I have to warn him that I'll fart or pee if he doesn't let me go." Phil, Pat and Ralphie cracked up. "Hey!" Rafe loudly giggled, "It *always* works!"

Pat sniggered, "When we get there, remember all this, Phil. You've got a heck of a lot to offer. Introduce yourself and then try to get him alone."

"How?" Phil wondered.

"We'll be in a rec room," Ralphie reminded. "Ask him to play one of your favorite video games. Games you played, they weren't allowed to, so teach him the ropes. Or maybe ask if he wants a milkshake and a snack, then take him into the kitchen, and then grab a table alone with him. Now you can tell him about yourself, and remember to ask him to tell you about himself. Since he showed up yesterday, you already know he's an orphan, so expect him to not

want to talk about it. Your job is to show him you care, which is really easy, cos I know you do. Make him comfy enough to want to tell you stuff."

Suspiciously, Pat asked, "Did you have a plan in the store, Ralphie?"

Smiling past Phil at his boyfriend, Ralphie chuckled, "Only to let you know that I like you. Everything else was pretty much automatic for me."

After humming thoughtfully, Pat sniggered, "If you really want to prove how much you like this guy, do silly stuff in public. Ralphie chose most of my clothes for me, right down to my underwear."

Phil smiled at Ralphie.

"I already knew Pat was the best and hottest guy around," Ralphie grinned, "just like you think Owen is. Since I used to model clothes, I went to work to make sure everybody saw the best dressed, sexiest twelve-year-old in the division."

Phil chuckled, "Isn't that like asking someone to steal him away from you?"

Ralphie shrugged, "Maybe, but if Pat's lookin' around to be stolen, then I haven't done something right. On the other hand, when guys watch me with Pat, I'm sure they're lookin' at us and wondering, 'how'd that skinny little shit score that smokin' hot red-head?' Instead, I get massive ego boosts from Pat and from every pair of eyes watchin' him." He then asked, "Are you lookin' around, Pat?"

Rolling his eyes, Pat giggled, "If I were, I wouldn't be leading Phil to meet some other guy." Ralphie and Rafe softly chortled. Stunned, Phil glanced at Pat and flushed red. Pat shrugged, "I'm not looking because I have no reason to. Everywhere we are together, Ralphie's great. You can get Owen to think the exact same stuff, Phil. I'll be more honest if you think you can deal with hearin' it."

"Be honest," Phil instructed.

Walking into the CIC dining room, Pat nodded, "The truth is that you'll put Owen in shock. He'll be wondering, who is this cutie and what could he possibly want with me?"

"Nice try," Phil grinned. "Owen's strawberry blond and cuter than all four of us combined."

"In your eyes," Ralphie giggled. "One of the things I learned is when you tell someone how cute they are, you had better be prepared for the table to turn on you. All my self confidence from years of modeling evaporated completely when Pat started telling me what he liked most. Assuming everything goes well, that'll be tomorrow or the next day. Your goal tonight is to get to know Owen. Before you say goodnight, tell him you'll be looking for him tomorrow."

Rafe said, "One thing I learned from Jay and Chris is that they're useless alone. Both boyfriends make each other better than they usually are. So, you make him feel good and he'll make you feel good. After two years of watching Jay and Chris make goo-goo eyes, now I get to watch Pat and Ralphie doin' it! When is that going to happen to me, is all I want to know!"

Pat, Phil and Ralphie helplessly sniggered. Approaching the dimensional doors, Ralphie and Pat released Phil's hands and Rafe stopped shoving. Pat told Phil, "You go first and we'll follow."

Ralphie nodded, "Once we see you're alone with him, you're set and we're gone."

Phil asked, "Do I look all right? Please say I don't look as nervous as I feel?"

"Jeez!" Rafe giggled. "If this Owen guy turns you down, how would you feel with me for a boyfriend?"

Phil sniggered, "I think I'd probably feel pain, from Jay

pounding the shit out of me."

Ralphie gave Phil a modeling review, tugged his polo shirt down and instructed, "Loosen the other button on your polo shirt, man. One button says, middle-of-the-road, both buttons say, completely casual and chillin'."

Once Phil had loosened the button, Pat nodded and smiled, "You look great; like you're ready to sweep Owen off his feet."

After taking a deep breath, Phil huffed, "Here goes nothin'." He ordered the dimensional door, "Oneula Beach," and seconds later walked through.

Pat checked with Ralphie, offering, "He still seems a little nervous to me."

Shaking his head, Ralphie smiled, "Phil's been slyly checking out guys since he started school. The last two years, he's been hiding his feelings as much as he could. Owen was his wake-up call, just like you were mine. Also, Phil's been playing little league soccer for five years and dealing with a big brother too. I think he knows exactly what to do, how to do it, and make an impression that Owen won't ever get the chance to forget."

Looking down and locking eyes with Rafe, Ralphie reminded, "Exactly like I told you earlier. You've hung around plenty of guys, and some were five years older than you. If someone like Chris Stokley thinks you're a kick, then imagine what guys your age might think when they get to know you."

Rafe confirmed, "All I have to do is choose?"

Pat nodded, "It'll be two ways, bro. He's gotta like you too. Once you're there, and you both know how the other feels, then it's a matter of spending time together."

Rafe teased, "You're in love, Pat."

Unable to deny it, Pat giggled, "I've got the major bonus of a telepath telling me what he's thinking before he ever says a word aloud. Ralphie's reading me too, so even if I wanted to exaggerate or lie, he'd catch me. I don't think I'd want it any other way."

Ralphie told Rafe, "Pat wasn't hitting on Phil before. I could tell by Pat's tone that he was honestly telling Phil that if we weren't already a couple, he'd be considering Phil. It was a compliment, and it all says something about basic attractions." Locking eyes with Pat, Ralphie shared, "The whole world stopped spinning Friday when I saw you."

Going into a daze, Pat muttered, "You're the model in the Sunday fliers I always dreamed about."

Giggling, Rafe went to the dimensional door, ordered "Oneula Beach," and passed through, leaving the two love-birds alone. Making a quick turn, Rafe was soon walking into the rec room. The first familiar faces he saw were Taron Reyce Otter, the Hiram twins, the Stoeher twins and the Triggs brothers. Crossing the room, he noticed Phil Nash was at a video game with Stu Sutliff, Ray Varga and Owen Reed. Vaziik was actually playing the fantasy role-playing game.

With bruised lips forming wide smiles, Pat and Ralphie entered the room hand-in-hand. They went directly to where Phil was and stood behind the group. In a few seconds, Ralphie silently told Pat, *'Owen's into the game and learning from Vaziik. Stu is next to play, if Vaziik ever purposefully messes up and lets anyone else play. That's when Phil will try again.'*

Stu was Vaziik's roommate over at Ewa Beach dorm three. Stu was learning a lot from Vaziik about Vulcan philosophy. Vaziik was learning how to mix and mingle in a division of humans from Stu. Accordingly, Stu had already informed Vaziik that sometimes it appeared to other boys that he was showing off and always better at most things than everyone else. In the world of video arcade games,

Stu and Vaziik had prepared signals, so that Vaziik could participate yet not take over the game, and lose everyone's interest in the process. Of course, Vaziik had to make it appear that his loss was circumstantial, and not just throw the game. Cleverly, Stu would evilly snicker for the first signal, and then he'd chuckle a little louder. If Vaziik hadn't already lost, Stu would signal once more with a loud laugh.

In this particular role playing game, titled 'The Labyrinths Of The Middle Ages', Vaziik had demonstrated four complete levels and earned as many points and skills as were available, at least as far as most of the boys knew. Stu had already given the first two signals. Fighting a werewolf and surrounded by nipping bats, Vaziik made an impressive show of how to lose with style. When Vaziik moved aside, Stu patted his new friend on the back, chortling, "If I get that far, I think I'll avoid that labyrinth."

Slightly grinning, Vaziik remarked, "Very wise."

Phil checked with Owen, "Ya wanna check out any other games? Mortal Combat's pretty kewl. If that's too gory, maybe the World Soccer League?"

Owen shrugged, "I've still got a long way to go with those games."

Having a good idea that Owen was going to say that, Ralphie discreetly shoved his Mr. Fuzzy puppet into Phil's back pocket. Ralphie sent to Phil, *'Mr. Fuzzy is everybody's friend. Try again.'*

Reaching back and putting the puppet on his hand, Phil squeaked, "How about a little something to eat? It's been hours since I've had a full fuzzy."

Helplessly giggling, Owen nodded, "That sounds really good," and walked away from the video game with Phil following close beside him.

Pat sputtered and coughed back a laugh. Ralphie grinned, *'I honestly didn't tell Phil what to say, only what to do. That was all Phil and not my doing.'*

Occasionally glancing at Phil as they walked across the dining room, Owen admitted, "I can't help wondering why... I mean, you were with your brother today. Why'd you wait for night to come talk to me?"

"It's a really long story that I promise to tell you soon," Phil partially answered. "To make a long story a little shorter, I'll admit I wanted to talk to you, but I didn't really know what to say."

Owen scowled, "You didn't know what to say?"

"Or even if I should," Phil struggled. "It's weird, ya know? Honestly, I noticed you last night at dinner, and again at the concert, and a couple o' times today. It's the first time ever I was like, I've got to get to know you, just from seeing you. So yeah, I spent most of the day wondering what was going on and how to deal."

Nodding, Owen smiled, "Yeah, I know what you mean. This place is so different."

"What makes it different for you?"

"I used to share a room less than half that size with three other dudes," Owen softly replied. "Now I've got one room-mate, Ellis Pierce, and so much stuff, in our room and everywhere."

"Is Ellis kewl?"

"Very," Owen giggled. "We were at different orphanages in LA, but were roomies at the hospital. Since that worked for three days, we decided it would be kewl here too."

"Is he gay?"

"I don't think so. He's twelve and talks like he's straight anyway." Noticing Phil blinking and processing, Owen clarified, "He

talks about girls he wants to get to know, and more."

Phil softly asked, "Are you straight?"

"No," Owen whispered. In the kitchen chow line, Owen meekly asked the woman chef, "Is it kewl to have a milkshake this late at night?"

"Certainly," she smiled, and then asked, "Which flavor would you like?"

"Strawberry chocolate, please," Owen answered.

When the woman turned to him, Phil introduced himself, and Owen, and then asked her name. She smiled, "Coletta Jasper. Please call me by my first name, boys."

Nodding, Phil grinned, "I'd really like the same thing Owen's having, but I'm wondering if all the vitamins would keep me awake until dawn." Owen widely smiled, believing that Phil had asked the correct question; the one he had meant to ask, but failed to properly word.

Coletta checked, "I don't believe so. Have they been affecting you that way?"

"No," Phil smiled, "I just thought I'd ask and make sure."

Coletta confirmed, "Two strawberry chocolate shakes?"

"Yeah, thanks," Phil answered, and then told Owen, "Macadamia nut cookies are my weakness." He walked over to the cookie and pastry counter, beaming, "Omigod, they're addictive, I think." Owen sputtered then giggled. Holding up his Mr. Fuzzy, Phil tried to squeak but chuckled, "Do you want some too?"

Owen nodded and giggled, "One. I never had 'em before."

Stuffing his Mr. Fuzzy into his back pocket, Phil smiled, "Then I'll get four, two for you and two for me, cos I know you won't be able to have only one. I'll be lucky if I don't come back for another four,

just for my addiction."

Giggling louder, Owen nodded, although he knew he'd be lucky to eat a single cookie with his milkshake. He couldn't say that aloud though. Phil couldn't wipe the smile off his face. Owen was about three inches shorter than Phil and had the kewlest dark green eyes. To top it off, Owen's voice was changing; even while giggling, it was alternating between croaking and squeaking. Placing cookies on a small plate, Phil knew he was wearing a completely dorky smile for little reason, but the alternative was to grab hold of Owen, squeeze him tightly and kiss him repeatedly.

Turning around, Phil saw that Owen already had his milkshake. Coletta was returning with another glass and soon slid it across the counter. Phil thanked her, took the glass, and then told Owen, "Let's find a small table, dude."

Owen nodded. It was after eleven o'clock and no one was sitting in the dining room, so they had their choice of tables. Both the Ewa Beach and Oneula Beach dining rooms had tables of various sizes and shapes; some were small round tables seating no more than four, some were oval shaped that could seat up to eight, and there were longer, rectangular tables that could seat up to twelve. Sitting at the first small table, Owen asked, "When did you get here?"

"Friday, because of riots in LA," Phil softly answered, and gestured to the plate of cookies for Owen to help himself.

Taking a cookie, Owen carefully and softly asked, "Will you tell me why now?"

Nodding, Phil took a bite out of his cookie to gather his thoughts. His eyes seemed to glaze over from the freshly baked macadamia nut cookie. Drinking his milkshake through a straw, Owen helplessly chuckled and blew a big bubble into the glass. He blushed and giggled. Phil covered his mouth with one hand and laughed, "I told you I'm addicted." Since he wasn't sure what to say,

Owen nodded, giggled, and patiently waited.

Phil sighed and then scowled, "I've always liked other dudes, played little league soccer and stuff, but didn't really know what that meant. Two summers ago, my dad had the whole birds-and-bees talk with me. It seems like only days later we went to Malibu for dinner out, but it was probably longer than that, maybe a week or two. Anyway, driving down PCH, past the beach parking lot, there's this straight couple, maybe in their late teens. The girl was okay, all the curves in the right places and a real pretty face, but her boyfriend grabbed my attention. He wasn't a muscle-stud or anything, just perfectly stacked from the ground up. The dude made Michelangelo's David statue look like a total loser. I couldn't stop thinking of him all through dinner and the rest of the night. Bed time, Craig comes into our room, after a shower, wearing only a towel and drops it. While his back is turned and he's putting clothes on, I'm there wondering, okay, my bro's got all the same parts, his shoulders were starting to get wide, but there's nothing interesting there. He notices me in a trance and laughs, 'What are you looking at?'"

Owen nodded understandingly and warmly smiled.

Phil continued, "So part of what I was thinking was how I could hide this from everybody, especially my bro, my dad, and all the dudes I used to hang with. It wasn't too kewl, ya know, to other people. I'm mostly fine with it, but just have to watch what I'm doing."

Owen wondered, "How old were you then?"

"Ten."

"You're twelve now?"

"Yeah. How old are you?"

"Thirteen," Owen answered, and blushed because Phil was younger but taller.

Phil grinned, "Then I noticed your new group walking into the dining room last night. Out of all those kids, I saw you... really, only you. Again, Craig notices me and wonders why I'm not eating. Now I'm rethinking all that same stuff again. It's a different deal now, in the Clan; it seems that half are straight, and the other half are gay. Now I'm thinking it's time to stop hiding how I feel. Being gay doesn't change much of anything. Even all our leaders are gay. A bunch of us dudes were talking about them in the common room late Saturday night. It was kind o' wild, shifting from funny to intense. Even though the Core Rimmers are gay, a lot of the dudes admitted that they wouldn't ever want to get into a fight with them. Even my bro said that, and he's about as tall and built as they are. Last night, after the concert and alone with me, Craig brought it up again. He called them determined, and it was more obvious seeing the band perform."

Owen smiled, "They're a lot of fun, but I know better."

"How do you mean?"

"They act like they never could or would fight," Owen shrugged, "but I heard the news reports about our rescues, while I was in the hospital. Our leaders do what all Clan Short leaders do; they save kids like me and help kids like you and your bro. When they have to, they'll kill very bad adults. I can't figure out how they can go from one extreme to another like they do."

"They think of all of us as family; as brothers and sisters."

Nodding, Owen smirked, "It's not like the orphanage, that's for sure."

"Yeah," Phil chuckled, and tried to get back on topic. "All I said is why I had to talk with you tonight. The deal is so different, now we can be who we are without worrying about much." He had another bite of another cookie, washed it down with his milkshake, and then asked, "What was it like before you got here?"

Owen huffed, "I'd rather not talk about it, or even think about it."

"That bad, huh?"

"It took three days in hospitals to get us healthy enough to be here. The only good part was watching video feeds from Ewa Beach. Sorry, but I can't go there now."

"It's kewl," Phil assured. "Whenever you're ready, I'll listen."

Owen blinked and softly wondered, "You'd want to hear it?"

Nodding, Phil said, "It's kewl though. Don't worry about it."

Owen scowled and repeated, "I'm thirteen-years-old and shorter than you. I had three other dudes sharing one tiny bedroom with me. It took three days of medical care for me to be here."

Phil nodded, "Some of that bugs me, but the important thing is that you're here now. We're all brothers." He softly admitted, "I'd like us to be more than brothers, and more than best buds."

"Don't feel sorry for me," Owen firmly ordered.

"Is that why you think I came here?"

Owen shrugged, "Dunno."

Phil grinned, "Let me make it perfectly clear then. I liked you the first moment I saw you. I came here looking for you because I didn't even know if you were gay or not. It would be just my dumb luck to have my first crush on a straight dude. As far as I can see, we're at the same place, and everything's really kewl, so now it's up to us. I'll warn you now though, if you say you only want to be friends, I'll be your friend, and always hope you'll change your mind, so we can be more."

Phil noticed Pat, Rafe, Ralphie and Taron coming out of the rec room. They waved to Phil and Phil waved back. Owen noticed the other four walking through dimensional doors. Phil grinned, "We all

live in the same dorm at Ewa Beach. So, what are you thinking?"

Owen shrugged, "We're different."

"We're not that different," Phil reminded. "We're both orphans, both gay, and most importantly, I think you're awesome just as you are." Watching Owen's pale complexion turn pink, Phil smiled, "You're really cute. I'm havin' a pretty kewl time with you." He pulled his Mr. Fuzzy out and slipped it onto his hand. Owen began giggling. Phil's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked, "Say you like me too, Owen, and I'll be your fuzzy follower forever."

Slipping his Mr. Fuzzy onto his hand, Owen giggled, "Mr. Fuzzy's afraid."

Phil made his puppet nod and squeaked, "Me too. Feeling this much, this fast makes my Mr. Fuzzy freaky."

Owen roared laughing, "I like Phil's freaky fuzzy!"

Phil warmly smiled, "That's all I needed to hear," and slid his Mr. Fuzzy puppet off. He then carefully reached his hand across the table.

Owen took his Mr. Fuzzy off and then tentatively took Phil's hand, whispering, "I really hope I don't screw up, or make you angry."

"I want you happy too," Phil reminded. "It's gonna be really kewl. Later tonight, I'll tell Craig what's going on." He then giggled, "And he'll be telling me about his new girlfriend, so neither of us will hear a friggin' word!"

Owen sniggered, "So when I meet him, he won't remember what you said, never mind my name."

Phil wickedly grinned, "I'll be mumbling your name all night long. If I know my brother, he'll turn this into another competition, betting that he can get to home plate first." Owen giggled and turned crimson red. "Oh, jeez!" Phil giggled, "I'm really sorry. That's really

what Craig will prob'ly do, but I shouldn't have said it like *that*."

"It's alright," Owen giggled, and held the cold shake glass up against his face.

Stuffing an entire cookie into his mouth, Phil mumbled, "Dhere, dow I can'd thay dum thduff."

"I'm not that naive," Owen giggled. "Four dudes in a room, remember?"

Nodding, Phil held up his index finger to signal a pause, so he could chew and swallow. Owen cracked up, and was still laughing when Phil finally swallowed and helplessly laughed along. When they had calmed somewhat, Phil smiled, "Most of the last two years, me and Craig had separate bedrooms right next to each other. I heard plenty from his room, bed squeaks and grunts. Since we got here and started sharing a room, I'm surprised I haven't heard those sounds."

"Yet," both boys simultaneously giggled.

Owen softly assured, "You'll win the bet." It became Phil's turn to practice imitating an apple. Also blushing, Owen whispered, "I was thinking that's what would happen with you. I would've and loved it, but this is even better."

"Have you ever?"

"No, but I would... with you; especially now."

Phil uncertainly repeated, "Especially now?"

Nodding, Owen offered, "It wouldn't be only sex. You're a lot of fun. I really like you... a lot."

Pushing his glass nearer to Owen's glass, Phil got up and then slid into the chair beside Owen's chair, whispering, "I couldn't have just done anything like that, Owen."

Nodding, Owen softly explained, "I'm seeing a lot of dudes

hooking up, but don't really understand."

Phil shared, "Really watch the Core Rimmers, dude. That's how I want us to be, not just attracted, but the closest two people in the whole world."

Owen smiled and confirmed, "Like Doug and Carter?"

"Yeah, from what I've seen, they're gettin' there too. It's something I can see in their eyes. I want to see that in your eyes all the time. I want to brush my teeth in the morning, think of you, and see it in my eyes in the mirror."

"I think I'm already seeing it your eyes."

"Do you know what it is that you're seeing?"

Slowly and deliberately shaking his head, Owen admitted, "I'm not sure."

Repeating what he had learned from his parents, Phil told Owen, "It's the real me; a little piece of my heart shining through. When people say they've given their hearts away, that's the way it shows."

"You're sure about that?"

"As sure as I can be."

Owen wondered, "When will we get that look?"

"It's starting already," Phil giggled. "We're going to spend a lot of time together. Everything you want to know, about me and anything else, I'll tell you. If I don't know, then I'll find someone that does."

"Okay, so how can we make the look in our eyes permanent?"

Slowly leaning closer, Phil placed his first ever tender kiss on anyone outside of his immediate family. He then carefully inspected Owen's eyes, muttering, "Maybe this?" and planted a deeper kiss. Unexpectedly, Owen threw his arms around Phil and urgently

returned the kiss. Tasting strawberry and chocolate, Phil uncontrollably giggled, then closed his eyes, allowing Owen to decide when to break it off. Both boys learned why tongue kisses were so kewl and breathed through their noses.

Phil's comm-badge chirped. Craig's voice called, "Phil? Where are you, bro?"

Not wanting to be the one to break off the fun, but having no other choice, Phil leaned back and replied, "At Oneula Beach, having a late night snack." He silently mouthed, "With my awesome boyfriend." Owen almost flew apart and giggled. He lifted Phil's hand and started placing soft kisses on each finger.

Craig sighed, "We've got stuff to talk about, and it's after midnight. I expected you here waiting, and bursting at the seams, bitching me out for staying out late."

"Give me a couple of minutes, bro," Phil giggled. "Go take a cold shower."

"Tell me about it!" Craig sniggered. "See ya soon."

Phil quickly called, "Out," and tapped his comm-badge. He then softly assured, "It's in your eyes now, so I guess it worked."

Between finger kisses, Owen giggled, "You're so awesome! It's in your eyes too. I think I love you."

"I'm falling in love with you too," Phil smiled, and gently guided Owen's face up off his hand to add, "First thing in the morning, I'm finding you and we're having breakfast together. If I didn't have family stuff to talk about with Craig, I'd stay right here. The last thing I want to do now is leave."

"Call me when you're done with your bro," Owen suggested, and then blushed, "There's no chance of me sleeping anytime soon."

Raising his eyebrows, Phil grinned, "How about you come with

me, hang in our common room watching TV, and when I mention you to Craig, I can come get you to introduce you?" Clearly seeing a more hopeful expression, Phil smiled, "By then, our family chat will be about done anyway. Then we can pick up where we left off."

"In your room?"

"In the common room," Phil answered, and then evilly snickered, "so Craig can spank his monkey, and we're alone."

"Do you really think we'll be alone?"

Phil shrugged, "If we're not alone on the first floor, we'll try the second floor, and every boys' common room in all the dorms at both bases." Nodding, Owen giggled at Phil's determined tone. They kissed, gathered their glasses and the empty cookie plate, and took everything to the dishwasher. Soon, they were returning to Ewa Beach and walking to dormitory three.

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Ewa Beach Dormitory #3

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 12:01AM HTZ

About the time Owen and Phil were getting to know each other, Alden and his brothers were joking around with the teens gathered in their underwear in Chris' and Jay's room. Chris and Jay were sharing their Fuzzy version of the facts of life chat with Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis. Alden played recorded copies of the chat from Troy's and Sean's living room. Watching the six younger boys listening to six teenagers, four of which were division leaders, talking about un-fuzzy versus fuzzy fuzzies, Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis were hysterical. The Clan AI's actively participated in this conversation.

While his brothers and the teens were still laughing, Kerry giggled, "I have a semi-serious question."

Jay sniggered, "I can barely wait."

"Well, if each couple has two Mr. Fuzzies, like a Mr. Fuzzy on his fuzzy, then how do we distinguish fuzzies," Kerry giggled.

George chortled, "They would be friendly fuzzies of course."

Chris playfully offered, "Kissin' cuzzy fuzzies."

Breathlessly, Lance cackled, "Cozy cuzzy fuzzies!" causing everyone participating to crack up.

"OH WAIT!" Jay loudly laughed, "THAT'S WHAT WE NEED!" A chorus of groans and frightened squeals erupted.

Collapsing slightly over onto Lance, Erik playfully prompted, "Tell us, please, oh master of fuzzy freakiness."

Jay sniggered, "Alden, we need properly designed cuzzy fuzzy cozies." Everyone roared, and Jay laughed, "Really, like a skimpy G-string with Mr. Fuzzy's face covering our dicks and balls. It's gotta fit right though, guys. Our nads should hang in Mr. Fuzzy's jaw, and our dicks in the top half, filling Mr. Fuzzy's nose."

Sliding down Lance's body, Scott howled, "We can't have our fuzzies hangin' out of our Mr. Fuzzy's, now can we?"

Slamming his palm down on the bed, Chris cackled, "Make sure it's comfy cotton inside our Mr. Fuzzies, Alden."

Travis roared, "No sweaty fuzzies in our Fuzzies!"

"WE CAN DO THIS!" Seven AI's enthusiastically shouted.

"You can do what?" Draco asked, his face appearing by the wall of the room. After checking around quickly, he rolled his eyes. "Boys; AI or bipedal, you're all the same. Have fun, guys," he grinned before vanishing again.

"Okay, Dad!" all the AIs called out, giggling like kindergardeners.

In moments, as the laughing boys were calming down, Alden

giggled, "Okay guys, we have something that should work for you six; waist size twenty-six through thirty, with sufficient room above and below. It won't work too well for guys that hang longer than six inches..."

"Unless they fold their fuzzy," Kerry playfully interrupted.

Six Mr. Fuzzy G-strings appeared on the beds where the boys were sitting. All six got up and stripped out of their underwear to try on their new Mr. Fuzzy G-strings. Glancing at his boyfriend adjusting his goods, Jay grinned, "This is Clan 'gays only' attire."

Chris sniggered, "Definitely! I don't see too many straight guys wanting one."

Carefully getting his scrotum into the elastic, Lance giggled, "We'll have to take these things off to piss."

Scott nodded and chortled, "Like every other jock."

Alden checked, "Are they comfortable guys? The real pain was putting in elastic, so that nobody's fuzzy bits got squished."

One after another, each of the six boys twisted around, stretched and did deep knee bends, and checked their partner's Mr. Fuzzy, and their friends' Mr. Fuzzies, and then announced they were good.

George sniggered, "And for the problem urinating, we have Water Warriors Steady Stream Power Pump Water Blasters." He transported six of the toys onto the beds, giggling, "Effective range of thirty-eight feet."

"I officially take back all the nasty things I said about you guys," Jay chuckled. Evilily snickering, all six tore into the Water Blaster packages.

Chris playfully warned, "I'll chase after you with a carving knife if any of you get carried away." Moments later, all six boys hurried to the utility room where there were two large, deep sinks to load their

Water Blasters.

Scott offered, "Anywhere there's electrical gear, like TV's and stereos, are water-free safe zones."

"Yeah," Erik grinned, "we don't want to go frying that stuff in the common room or our bedrooms. Hallways are the main indoors battle area, but outdoors, everywhere's kewl."

"For safety's sake, no shots directly on our Mr. Fuzzies from closer than four or five meters," Travis chuckled. "I really don't want to go to Doc Andrews, explaining that my nads are bruised and sore, because of over-excited Mr. Fuzzy Water Blaster fights."

"Important safety tips there, guys," Jay sniggered.

"DON'T CROSS THE STREAMS!" the other five loudly laughed.

First to leave the utility room with full blasters, Chris, Jay, Travis and Erik immediately went into the nearby common room. Hiding as couples, out of sight on both sides of the doorway, they got ready to ambush Scott and Lance. While the former four were hiding and waiting, Phil and Owen walked into the dorm hallway. From the CIC, it was the most direct route. Phil could get Owen settled in the common room and then go down the other hallway to talk with Craig.

Reaching the lavatory near the center of the hall, Phil and Owen witnessed Scott and Lance stepping out of the utility room, wearing only Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, and uncontrollably cracked up. Lance and Scott spun around to see who was laughing. Chris, Jay, Erik and Travis popped into the common room doorway and fired on Lance and Scott. Spinning around, Lance and Scott returned fire. Seeing four more Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, and that those wearing them were armed, Owen and Phil howled laughing and bolted into the lavatory.

Already soaked from his hair to his fuzzy, Scott laughed, "That was Phil Nash."

"Holding hands with another guy!" Lance loudly giggled, and turned around, wondering, "Where'd they go?"

Pausing his attack, Jay evilly snickered, "In the john."

Also ceasing fire, Erik grinned, "Okay, when did Phil Nash join our ranks?"

"And why weren't we told?" Travis chuckled.

Stepping out of the common room, Chris sniggered, "This absolutely requires compensation and education."

Once all six were gathered, Jay whispered, "Scott and Lance, take the shower. Erik and Trav, check the commodes. Me and Chris will cover the center of the room, for escaping gay boys, who've been pretending to be straight." With nods, they hurried down the hall and stealthily entered the lavatory.

Scott and Lance bounded into the shower changing area with their Water Blasters set to super soak, but they didn't see anyone in the shower. The lights weren't even on, thanks to Alden watching his cameras. They turned to watch the lavatory, expecting two younger gay boys to come flying out and past them.

Since Scott and Lance had cleared the shower, Jay scowled, and wondered if Alden had intervened to transport the two younger guys to safety.

Hiding in the near left side corner of the mob shower with Owen, snuggled up together and taking advantage of the situation, Phil broke the kiss and silently ordered, "Run!" They took off out of the shower, barreled past Lance and Scott, and laughed their asses off. The other four waiting in the lavatory spun, aimed and fired. Speeding past them and out into the hall, Owen and Phil bolted for the common room with all six chasing after them and firing non-stop.

Already drenched, Owen and Phil kept going through the common room and a few steps down the other hallway. They stormed

into Craig's and Phil's room and slammed the door closed behind them, giggling madly and tightly embracing.

Just finished with his shower and bent over, pulling up his boxer shorts at the foot of his bed, Craig grinned up at the ceiling, chortling, "Ma, I had nothing to do with this. Swear to God!"

Rolling his eyes, Phil giggled, "Owen Reed, this is my big bro, Craig. Craig, this is Owen, my boyfriend. This really isn't the way I had planned stuff, but six armed fuzzy maniacs chased us in here."

Intensely blushing, Owen waved and roared laughing.

"You're both soaked," Craig sniggered. "You met in the shower? Nice one, bro! It's not what I expected from you at all."

Stepping back from Owen to face his brother, Phil laughed, "We did not meet in the shower! Those lunatics have super-soakers! I'm seriously not touching what they're wearing!"

Bending in half and grabbing his belly, Owen howled laughing. On base for less than thirty-six hours, Owen had never had so much non-stop fun in his thirteen years. Just when things started to seem normal, something else would happen to push large groups of kids of all ages into giggling fits. Compared to his miserable existence in an LA level two orphanage, Pacific Rim Division Clan life was a looney dream come true.

Walking across the room and sadly shaking his head, Craig opened the door to check the hall. He had barely crossed the threshold before being blasted by six super-soakers. He jumped back into the room, hearing his assailants laughing, "Sorry Craig!" and slammed the door.

Glancing at each other and mooing through their giggles, all six knew they had messed up. Lance whined through his giggles, "I miss my mommy." Erik cracked up.

Jay sniggered, "We don't have much time," and quickly led the

group to their own hallway.

As far as Owen was concerned, Craig was very tall, muscular, and there was now valid reason to be frightened. Grinning widely, Phil softly giggled, "Told ya," and then pulled Owen close. Since Phil wasn't scared, Owen started to calm down, and wondered what would happen next.

Wiping water off his face and calmly re-crossing the room, Craig picked up the towel he had brought from the shower. Drying off for the second time in under ten minutes, Craig sweetly called, "Aaaallllden?"

"Yes, Craig," giggled Alden from the ceiling. Without being asked, Alden delivered six fully loaded super-soakers to the room. "I can't let you have a Mr. Fuzzy G-string though," Alden giggled. "Since you spent almost six hours with Felicity, you don't qualify. Phil and Owen can have 'em, though."

Craig grinned, "Kewl," and went to pick up the super-soakers lying on the carpet before the door. He passed them out so all three of them were armed with two weapons. He softly smirked, "Owen, you open the door and jump back out of the way, just in case. They can't be dumb enough to be standing there waiting. They're probably back in their own hallway by now."

"Maybe they're reloading, in the utility room," Phil giggled.

"That's our first objective," Craig smiled. "They cannot re-arm from any sink anywhere tonight."

Taking his position by the door, and holding both his super-soakers with one arm against his chest, Owen giggled, "What about our Mr. Fuzzy G-strings?"

Happily giggling and rapidly nodding his head, Phil bounced his eyebrows at his big bro.

"No-oo-oo," Craig softly sang. "First we get even, then you two

can take the distraction, and soak each other all ya want."

Phil's jaw dropped. Owen roared laughing. Phil giggled, "I can't believe you said that!"

"Com'on, bro," Craig smiled. "I had a damn good idea this would happen. I expected it to take you until the end of the week. Nice time, by the way."

"Mom knows," Phil grinned.

Craig nodded, "She asked my opinion, a long time ago. I played dumb, since I don't care which side of the fence you play on. The most important thing for any dude is to have someone to play with." He checked with Owen, "Ready?" and got a nod. He checked with Phil, "Set back-to-back?"

Phil nodded and smiled, "Set."

"Go," Craig softly told Owen. As soon as the door was open, Craig flew out with Phil right on his tail. They covered both ends of the hall. Owen came out to a safe hallway and closed the door behind him.

Having heard the neighboring door three times, Fred Eckhart peeked out of his room across the hall. Seeing Craig in soaked boxers, and Phil and Owen also drenched, Fred chuckled, "What's goin' on?"

Craig grinned, "The gauntlet has been tossed. Is Chauncey awake?"

Also arriving in their doorway threshold, Tony Lanning and Ray Varga heard Fred answer, "Yeah," and quickly ask, "Is it all-out hallway wars?" With both his brothers sleeping, thirteen-year-old Nate Ramos opened his door to find out what was going on. Lastly, Kassidy Oldcambus stepped out of his room.

Seeing additional warriors gathering, Craig cheered, "Excellent!" and then called, "Alden, double super-soakers for

everyone that wants to play."

Laughing his artificial ass off from the speakers, Alden couldn't reply, but executed the order. Twelve loaded super-soakers appeared on the hallway floor. The boys heard Chauncey telling Rikko, in dog, "You sniff 'em out and point, buddy." Rikko barked approval and trotted out to the hall.

Since it was late at night, all the boys were down to their underwear when they came out to the hallway and picked up their water blasters. Chauncey giggled, "Hey Alden, can you get Rikko armed too?"

Alden sniggered, "Give us a couple of seconds." A few moments later, two loaded water blasters, one on each side, were slung from Rikko's back. Alden whined and growled, telling Rikko, "Bite down on the ball in your mouth to fire."

Craig evilly snickered, "Awesome! We'll advance down the hall and chase them outside, so everyone awake can see their Mr. Fuzzy cock warmers." All the other boys cracked up.

Kerry laughed, "We'll record it and show it during breakfast at every division."

Chauncey gave Rikko the signal. The Siberian Husky pup put his nose to the carpeted floor and advanced toward the common room, with nine boys trailing close behind. Rikko cautiously went into the common room and as far as the door into the other hallway then backed away, softly growling, "Here. Very close."

The hallway lights had been dimmed and the floor LEDs were lit. Taking the lead were the oldest and tallest boys; Craig, Cassidy, Nate and Fred. They stormed through the common room and into the hall, firing all the while at the six Fuzzy G-string madmen that started it.

"SHIT!" all six laughed.

"Even the damn dog is armed!" Lance howled.

The larger group of doubly armed hallway invaders progressed, however they started getting hit from the sides. The Stoeher twins were armed and firing into the hall. Across the hall, the Hiram twins were also armed and firing. A little further down, Rafe, Pat, Ralphie and Taron made their presence known. Hysterical laughter reverberated from every direction, even from the ceiling speakers where seven AIs made it clear they were spectating. Determined to chase Jay, Chris, Scott, Lance, Travis and Erik outside, Craig led the charge down the hall. The primary six targets were eventually pushed out the dorm doors and into the night.

Awake and crossing the compound, destined for the auditorium, Joey, Jerry and KC witnessed the ongoing battle of water blasters, and howled laughing, primarily at the Mr. Fuzzy G-strings that six of the boys were wearing. Stevie provided additional super-soakers so they could join the fun. The first thing KC did was fire his super-soaker directly at Fred's butt. Spinning around and returning fire, Fred giggled, "I'm glad you're here."

"Get used to being wet," KC chortled, "we're going surfing in the morning."

Fred wondered, "When did you get here? Where are you staying?"

KC replied, "About an hour ago. We've got a condo, building B, unit 4-B, but wherever you are is where I intend to be."

Fred giggled, "Yeah?"

"Hell yeah," KC leered at his mostly naked boyfriend.

Chauncey fired on Fred and KC, giggling, "Both of you need to cool down!"

Fred and KC soaked Chauncey. KC sniggered, "I've been asleep already. When Fred decides it's bed time, I'm either tucking him in or

snuggled up close."

Aiding his favorite human companion, Rikko fired and growled, "Better keep quiet!"

During the course of the conversation, a few more underwear-clad teenagers came outside to join the fun. By this time there were more than twenty-five soaked boys in the quad, goofing around in their underwear, most of whom initially focused their attacks on Jerry, Joey and KC, who were the only three still dressed. In the ensuing madness to get three undressed, what little the other twenty were wearing mysteriously got yanked off. When his blasters were empty, Craig tapped his brother and Owen to follow him inside.

From dormitory two, twelve more boys raced outside in their underwear; six teens and six tweens. For about another half hour, the boys romped around the quad. When super-soakers were empty, the naked boys returned to their dorms. Kerry titled his video, "Cozy Cuzzy Fuzzy Water Blaster Battle Number One," and transmitted it to every Clan Division around the world.

Carrying their wet clothing, Craig and Phil led Owen back to their dorm room. The first order of business was to get dressed in some dry underwear. Phil offered Owen a pair of boxer-briefs, but no sooner did Owen pull them up, they slid right back down and off his malnourished ass, settling about half way down his thighs. Parking his buns on the edge of his bed, Craig grinned at Owen's blush. Going back to his dresser and grabbing a pair of boardies, Phil giggled, "Okay, the draw string should keep them around your hips and not your knees."

Unable to wipe the smirk off his face, Owen squinted at Phil and warned, "After a few months of McCoy milkshakes, my clothes will slide off your butt."

Phil nodded and smiled, "You know I'll be helping you get

there."

Owen pulled up the boardies, tied them and released them. Seeing they were staying up, Craig chuckled, "Okay, first things first. It doesn't matter to me that you're gay, bro. I kind o' suspected, but didn't really have a whole hell of a lot of clues. Dad never said a word about it, but mom did, and it didn't matter. All she cared about was you and the social implications; that's not gonna be a problem here though. If you want Owen to spend the night here, I'm completely kewl with it, as long as you two don't spend the night giggling, talking, or doin' stuff that will keep me awake. We'll figure out some signal so you can be here alone with Owen, and I can be alone with Felicity. Maybe tomorrow, we'll all get together for dinner or something. No matter what, you're my kid brother and always will be." He paused to check, "Are there any questions before we move on?"

Already seated on the edge of his bed with Owen beside him, Phil grinned, "You really have no problem with Owen sleeping here?"

Craig shrugged, "Why would I, as long as you dudes don't wake me up?" Seeing Phil and Owen widely smiling at each other, Craig reminded Phil, "You had to have heard the same talk that I got, bro. Everybody is at least a little bisexual, at least enough to be able to say, 'hey, that dude's cute'. The difference between gay dudes and straight dudes boils down to who's willing to have sex with whom. Of all the dudes outside goofin' around, I know at least half are gay, but did anyone sprout wood? Nope, not one bone was seen, even with gay partners teasing each other. That was very kewl and lots of fun. Did either of you notice who pulled my boxers down?"

Giggling, Owen shook his head. Phil sniggered, "No, the Stoeher twins made me their target. When I turned around again, you were naked too, bro."

"It was Chris Stokley," Craig proudly grinned. "Now *there's* a

dude who's beyond cute and bordering on hot, as far as I'm concerned. He did it specifically to yank Jay's chain, I'm sure, but if I were motivated, someone like Chris is who I'd be chasing after. I simply can't make myself imagine having sex with any dude, no matter how hot he is. Since we arrived here, I've been imagining what it might be like to have a boyfriend. I can't get past hugs and kisses, but I understand where gay dudes are at. Every one needs someone. Dudes that get all freaked out are usually the insecure ones who can't deal with their own bisexual or homosexual feelings and thoughts. We slept in the nest near Travis the other night. I think he's very kewl, and a lot like me, when it comes to sex and sexuality. It took the right dude, Erik Kendricks, to flip Trav's switch on."

"It took Owen to flip mine," Phil giggled.

Owen smiled, "Yeah?"

"All it took was seeing you at dinner," Phil reminded. "I didn't even know your name."

Craig smiled, "It was the same for me and Felicity; complete tunnel vision. All I needed was an excuse and time. She gave me the reason to go to her table. After dinner, we walked this entire base, and then went over to Oneula Beach and walked around there."

Grinning, Phil wondered, "How far did you get?"

Sadly shaking his head, Craig chuckled, "She knows I like her a lot, and she told me that she really likes me. When I walked her back here to her dorm room, she kissed me, and I kissed her goodnight. Considering other dates I've been on, this one was the very best. We talked for almost six hours, with no other entertainment whatsoever. I know about her, the orphanage she's from, and a whole bunch of other stuff. She knows me at least as well as mom and dad ever did. Which brings up the second topic for tonight – mom and dad."

"Dulce really freaked me out," Phil admitted.

Craig nodded, "Me too. The whole time I was with Felicity, I'd wonder if mom was with me, or if she was with you."

Phil nervously giggled, "I'm pretty sure she split her time. For about three hours, I was completely blown away. What's most scary is that she's staying here with us, until she's sure we're both happy."

"Once a mom, always a mom," Craig chortled.

Phil playfully wondered, "How the hell can we prove to her that we're happy?"

"We can't," both brothers chorused.

Owen meekly asked, "I thought you dudes were orphans from Battle Of Earth?"

Craig nodded, "We are, but as usual, our mom is checkin' up on us. It's a double-edged sword; we're glad to know it, and that there's something more after this life, but she really needs to move on."

Turning to Phil, Owen asked, "You spent all that time thinking about me?"

Phil shrugged, "You and my mom, mostly. That's why I had to talk to you tonight; to find out if I was only dreaming, or if there's something really there, so my mom could go be with my dad..." He paused to loudly tell whomever might be lurking; "WHERE SHE BELONGS!"

"Wait a minute!" Craig laughed. "Dad went and mom stayed?"

Phil nodded, "That's what Dulce said; he crossed over and she decided to stay."

Bounding up off the bed, Craig excitedly hollered, "Ma, what the *hell* are you doing? We're *fine*! Considering how shitty things could've been, we got really lucky in major ways. I've got a really awesome girlfriend, and Phil's got a boyfriend. Our lives are moving on and everything's really kewl. You can't stay here watching and

waiting forever. Dad's without you and that's not right!"

Owen softly giggled, "Maybe he needed a break?"

Widely smiling, Craig mooed through his chuckles. Phil cracked up and fell back onto his bed, completely hysterical.

"Incoming Saint-O-Gram!" Alden giggled over the room speaker. "The Clan's Guardian team has been asked to pass the following: *'You don't know how right you are. Welcome to the family, Owen. I'm happy to have you as my son-in-law. Love, Dad.'* End message."

Not knowing whether or not to take Alden seriously, all three boys howled laughing. Unexpectedly, the stereo turned itself on. The tuner scanned stations and stopped on the chorus of 'Ghost Riders In The Sky'. It then scanned stations again and stopped for 'Love Will Keep Us Alive'. Craig and Phil turned slightly to the nightstand beside Craig's bed where the remote control lay, well beyond the reach of any of the three of them.

"Hey, go back to that first song, I like it better!" Alden whined.

Noticing Owen wasn't laughing anymore, Craig sniggered, "The first song was from our dad, the second was from our mom. Their sense of humor and tastes in music haven't changed a bit." He yawned and glanced at the clock. "It's almost one o'clock in the morning," Craig softly said. "If we want to wake up and have breakfast with the rest of the Clan, we'd better call it quits. I don't know about you two dudes, but Felicity is expecting me there."

Phil nodded and checked with Owen, asking, "Do you want to go to the common room where we can talk?"

Shaking his head, Owen answered, "It's late. We've got all day tomorrow." Craig flipped down the top blanket and sheet on his bed, and then went to turn the stereo and the overhead light off. Phil turned down the covers on his bed. Owen turned on the small night table

lamp, giggling, "Spiritual encounters were *not* part of what I expected tonight." Craig nodded and flipped the overhead light switch to off.

"Neither was the water blaster war," Phil smiled. He crawled onto his bed and patted the mattress for Owen to join him. Owen slid into bed with Phil. Craig slid onto his bed and pulled up the covers. Owen kissed Phil and got settled. Craig inhaled deeply and exhaled. After about a minute of silence, Owen rolled onto his side and cuddled up to Phil. Urgently and uncontrollably, Phil giggled. Then Owen giggled.

Craig softly chuckled, "This is what I was talking about, dudes. Sleep means quiet."

"I'll remind you of that when Felicity is in bed cuddled up to you, bro," Phil playfully warned.

"Nice image implanted there, bro! Thanks a lot!" Craig loudly laughed, and covered his face with the spare pillow. Owen and Phil evilly snickered.

* * * * *

"What do you think?"

"I haven't got wings to see into the future. We taught them the best we could."

"It's up to them now?"

"Cut the umbilical cord, my love."

"Easier said than done."

"One more day, and then say goodbye?"

"One more day."

* * * * *

Sullivan's Island

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 6:55AM EST

For over two hours, Paul had stayed awake, watching Reyes with Ryan on the sofa. Most of Ryan's right side was splotted with black-and-blue patches, from his jaw and down to his hip. Without hesitation or request, Ryan stripped off his shorts and boxer-briefs, proudly displaying his chubby uncut dick. For a while, Reyes typed on his PADD, entering the message to augment the reports from the doctor and security teams. To make his intention even clearer, Ryan lay on the couch with his head resting on Reyes' lap. Every fifteen minutes, Reyes got up to alternate between cold and warm compresses on Ryan's various bruises. For most of that time, Ryan constantly teased Reyes, trying to turn him on.

Returning from the kitchen with warm compresses, Reyes softly giggled, "After a couple o' days of this, it's going to take you *and* Paul to restrain me."

Ryan smiled, "Touch me, you sexy Polynesian Casanova."

Placing the warm compresses against Ryan's scattered bruises, Reyes evilly snickered, "When I start, nothing you or Paul say will get me to stop. It might take wearing me out and tying me down."

Knowing his brother had to be awake and watching, Ryan grinned, "Tell me what you like about Paul?"

"His intensity," Reyes easily answered. "I'd bet big bucks he was like that before being on the streets." When Ryan nodded, Reyes shrugged, "Paul was able to be fun *and* equally intense, wasn't he?" Again Ryan nodded. Reyes sighed, "I'm seeing that already. All day he showed it a tiny bit. He showed it at the beach house too. You can make him show that, Ry. You did it the first night, on the bus ride back from Myrtle Beach. That soft side is what I find most attractive, because even his warmth is intense. Without having had sex with either of you, I'll guess you're the loud one, especially on top, and Paul's the groaner-moaner, because he simply can't form words

anymore."

Ryan only giggled and didn't give Reyes any clue, teasing, "You'll find out."

Struggling to stay awake, Paul mumbled, "Damn. How the hell did he know that?"

Reyes didn't notice that Ryan again signaled the nearest camera by "scratching" the side of his nose with his middle finger extended, effectively flipping Paul the bird.

Paul simply couldn't believe his eyes. Ryan was laying there nude on the couch, and Reyes was caring for his brother's bruises. Paul asked Stevie, "Is there any delay in what you're sending me, Stevie?"

"Point two-seven seconds," Stevie replied, "the time it takes to transmit up to the satellite and return again."

Paul softly wondered, "How the hell can Reyes be so damn calm? The only time he's even looking at Ry's dick is when he's gathering up compresses to switch 'em around."

Stevie responded, "We've seen lots of couples interacting, Paul. If you really want, I could give you the answers to that question?"

"It was rhetorical," Paul impatiently grumbled.

"The offer's out there," Stevie said.

Shaking his head, Paul smirked, "Great. You haven't got a body and you're going to teach me about sex?"

Stevie said, "I wouldn't do that to you, Paul. You don't need me lecturing you. You're my older brother, when you really think about it. What I would do is show you selected clips of Clan couples, adults and kids, being intimate without having sex. Most of the time, they're fully clothed, but each are moments that my brothers and I have seen and learned from."

"Another time," Paul impatiently said.

"Whenever you want," Stevie assured.

Ryan softly wondered, "What do you like about me?"

Reyes sighed, "Where Paul is the intense roller-coaster ride of emotions and extremes, you're the smooth road, with little turns here and there, only to signify some kind of event that changed some part of the way you think. The road might gradually climb to some emotional outburst, and then it'll gradually decline again, back to the smooth road. Earlier tonight, you never let Paul really upset you. I saw you get more upset on the bus ride from Myrtle Beach."

"I'm really very annoyed with him," Ryan softly admitted.

"Still?"

"Yeah," Ryan sighed. "We made a weak promise this morning, with lots of openings for any of us to change our mind. When I look at the smaller picture, it's only me and Paul. This afternoon, for the first time ever, that picture expanded so you could fit. The bigger picture includes everyone this situation has touched in some manner or another. Your security gorilla saw Paul flip out, and so did Doc Andrews. It's affected the entire Owens' family, and your entire family. Tomorrow, Danny and Marc will know, and so will Prez and the rest of the Core Rimmers. I don't like having everyone witness this, really I don't, but there are only two choices; to live in the world or separate from it. We've been separate so long. On the streets, it was really hard for me to be that cold and uncaring, but most of those people made it easier just by being jerks. No one here or at Sullivan's Island deserves that kind of coldness. All people do is show they really care, so how can I be uncaring? How can be Paul be uncaring? For two weeks, we've had good food, warm beds, a mother and a father and two little brothers. The change in our lives happened then. To make an already good situation better, you showed up. My choice is to accept the good change and be part of the world, part of Family

Clan Short, part of the Owens family, and part of a relationship that includes only three."

"You couldn't return to only two?"

"Not over this; I can't hurt you over it. This problem is Paul's. Being part of the small, medium and large pictures requires risks. To accept Paul this time would be like reducing all the pictures back down to only the smallest again; just me and him. If I accept that, then I have to accept him getting annoyed over something else. For instance; what if this had happened on the beach there? Then Paul could easily decide Sullivan's Island isn't the place to be. Then we're back on the street again. I can't do any of that."

"Now I understand," Reyes muttered.

Ryan smiled, "Kewl; enough of the compresses for tonight. Let's call it day's end or you'll be carrying me to bed."

Picking up the TV remote, Reyes giggled, "The bathroom's on the way," and then turned off the television.

Slowly sitting up, Ryan sniggered, "Since that was your first thought, I guess it's a priority."

"It's been a few hours," Reyes grinned. He stood and went to the kitchen to turn the light on over the stove before turning the lights off in the living room.

Ryan took Reyes hand and leaned closer for a quick tender kiss. He led the way to the short hallway. To the right side there were only linen closet doors, the bathroom door and a utility closet door. To the left were three lower half-sized doors and three upper half-sized doors that caused Ryan to wonder, "What are these for?"

"I asked Alden that earlier," Reyes smiled. "They're storage closets."

"This is a really nice apartment," Ryan smiled.

"One bedroom, one bath, about eight-hundred-seventy square feet," Reyes rambled.

Taking a position to the far side of the toilet, Ryan giggled, "Paul's gonna love this place."

Stopping right beside Ryan and ripping open the Velcro fly of his boardies, Reyes smirked, "I thought this place would be enough to start. Considering I'm a Toy Rimmer and an Analyst Rimmer, we'll likely need a two bedroom, with one bedroom used as an office for computers, and maybe some percussion instruments. The two bedroom flats have nicer bedroom views, and each have sliding glass doors out to the balcony. The alternative is a three bedroom townhouse with a basement, like my dad's and pop's place."

Purposefully looking at Reyes' dick, Ryan giggled, "That would be really big."

Reyes laughed, "You are being *very* bad!"

Ryan giggled, "I can understand your point of view, but I can't help feeling the two of us alone would be awesome."

"But our new plan is?"

Ryan giggled, "Take out our frustrations on Paul."

"HA!" Paul sarcastically laughed. "In your dreams!"

Reyes and Ryan finished at the toilet, washed their hands, brushed their teeth and went into the bedroom. They only paused to decide who wanted which side of the bed. Reyes chose the door side and Ryan chose the side nearest the window. In less than a minute, they were under the covers, kissing good night, and getting comfortable.

Watching them still, Paul undressed and ordered Stevie to record them through the night.

"Those are Ryan's orders," Stevie reminded. "You'll have the

option to watch them as long as you feel you need to, or Ryan specifically tells me to stop."

"I'm too tired to argue," Paul muttered, and slid under the covers of his bed, alone.

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Ewa Beach, Dormitory #3

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 6:45AM HTZ

Rolling over and briefly waking from the sounds of birds drifting in through the open window, Lance realized that he had managed to roll away from Scott. He rolled back and snuggled up close. After their final rounds of love making, neither had bothered to take another shower. Still, Scott smelled so good, Lance couldn't help whispering, "I really love you."

Closing his eyes, Lance had some introspective thoughts. The top of the list was wondering where he would be now had he not met Scott. How would he have reacted meeting up with McPhearson brothers if he were alone? Going back to sleep, he considered the entire previous day, all he had done for Scott, and all Scott had done for him. It was far beyond sexual in nature; seemingly the perfect resolution of two individuals into one couple. Yeah, Scott had the guts to say what needed to be said, which gave them the chance to discover that gay sex was not only acceptable, it was beautiful and fun. Yet, they were still the same two people. Scott had begun teaching him music theory and they even did that nude, with limp dicks hanging as if neither of them could get an erection.

Chris and Jay entered the dream replay of the day; making themselves a prime example of two teenage guys in love. They had done that twice in the shower. Gathered together in their dorm room with Erik and Travis, the six of them had goofed around, having one of the kewlest conversations ever, and it was all done in their

underwear. A majority of that discussion revolved around Chris' and Jay's earlier facts-of-life chat, and not one of the six gay guys in the room got excited.

As if none of them were gay, they stripped off their underwear, slid into the Mr. Fuzzy G-strings and checked one another out. They played with the water blasters outside in the quad, with a larger group of gay and straight guys, and it was just like all of them were exactly the same, being goofy and provocative, and playing like they were all very young boys that had no idea what they were doing.

Until almost one in the morning, they played outside. When the super-soaker battle was over, he had walked naked back inside, carrying his Mr. Fuzzy G-string, with Scott, Chris, Jay, Erik and Travis. They stopped at Chris' and Jay's room to get the underwear they had left on the floor. All six of them said goodnight with tight hugs and friendly kisses on the cheek, again proving that they had bonded during the day's activities.

Those goodnight hugs and kisses replayed in slow motion through Lance's dream. All six of them acted like they weren't naked and weren't gay. The hugs were full body, best friend kinds of hugs. They were simply good friends showing some appreciation for sharing a completely awesome day. Erik had hugged and kissed him first. Erik was about as tall as Scott, but was thinner. Next, Jay hugged and kissed Lance. Then it was Travis he was holding onto, and lastly Chris stepped up to Lance. Jay and Travis were definitely the tallest and hunkiest two teenagers in the group. After all those hugs and kisses, not one of them had gotten the least bit excited from the contact. It was so special that Scott mentioned it to Lance the moment their dorm room door was closed.

Embracing again, both of them admitted that they were thrilled with the entire day, and slightly confused that none of them got so much as a chubby from all that warm bodily contact. Proving they

hadn't worn out their dicks from the abundance of sex they had, their bodies quickly responded to their embrace. It established, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that becoming a gay couple hadn't fundamentally changed either of them. It also verified that their sexual interests were limited to one another. Scott was his cuddly lover. Scott's dick was his to play with, to suck on, to have deep within him. Scott was the center of Lance's new life and would remain that way as long as there were breaths to be taken.

Feeling an orgasm rising and startled from an apparent wet dream, Lance woke trying to hold back what couldn't be held back, only to discover Scott draped over his hips and bobbing away. He sleepily moaned, "You are fuckin' awesome!" and gently caressed his lover's scalp.

Helplessly sniggering around the bone in his mouth, Scott never slowed down. From the throbbing he felt on his tongue, Scott prepared for the inevitable splash of bitter-sweet semen. Now that Lance was awake, Scott felt his boyfriend's firm thigh muscles. Scott ran his hand up to cup Lance's balls and press his fingers against the ultra-sensitive area behind them. That was all Lance could take. Scott took all Lance had to give and contentedly purred until he felt no more throbbing and Lance started giggling.

Widely smiling, Scott snuggled up to Lance, chuckling, "Guess that makes this a really good day for both of us."

Nodding, Lance giggled, "I was having a pretty normal dream, reviewing yesterday and last night. None of it was particularly erotic, but I suddenly knew I was gonna cum and woke up."

Scott cheekily grinned, "I figured it was a good way for both of us to start our second day as a couple, SLB."

Lance blinked and uncertainly repeated, "SLB?"

"Sexy lover boy," Scott chuckled. "It's unique, it's you, and it's

completely innocent, so I can call you that whenever I damn well please. It may occasionally change to MSLB, my sexy lover boy, only when I'm in a randy mood and want you naked as soon as possible."

"Now I'm gonna get you back," Lance giggled.

"Save it for tomorrow morning," Scott grinned.

Lance whined, "Seriously?"

Nodding, Scott assured, "I want to have an innocent dream wake me up. Of course, with you as my boyfriend, I don't know when that might happen. I dreamed of us making love all night. You might think you need to return the favor, but believe me, you were as incredible in the dreams as you were all day yesterday."

"It doesn't feel right leaving you to wait until tomorrow though," Lance honestly shared. "I really wanna do you now too."

Scott gave Lance a deep, passionate kiss then softly assured, "We'll make love a couple of times today, so it's not like I'll be waiting too terribly long. My purpose was to give you a thrill, not to get anything in return, okay? I really want us to wake each other up this way, as often as possible." He paused to check the clock, and then grinned, "It's twenty-to-eight. Let's grab a shower and go have breakfast." Squinting and scowling, Lance thoughtfully hummed. Scott chuckled, "Does that mean I'm in big trouble?"

Lance giggled, "Damn right. The question I have to answer is how I'm gonna show you that was the greatest way to wake up."

"Show me tomorrow morning," Scott sniggered, and rolled to sit up. He habitually stretched his arms and legs.

Propping himself up on both arms, Lance giggled, "Do that again. I saw every one of your back muscles flex, super-stud."

Leaning back so his face was within Lance's reach, Scott prompted, "Would another kiss do the trick?" Happily doing so,

Lance waited for Scott's tongue to enter his mouth, then gently sucked. Moments later, Scott broke the kiss, smiling, "Awesome."

Lance sighed, "You have the tastiest tongue in the whole world."

"Next to yours," Scott teased. He got out of bed and offered Lance his hand.

Instead of taking it, Lance kissed it and scooted over. He bounded out of bed and took Scott in his arms, grinning, "A reminder of where I belong."

Shivering with excitement, Scott smiled, "You've already made my day twice." He glanced around the room, then said, "After we shower, we need to straighten up this room. Specifically, dildos, lube and rubbers can't be left out for the housekeepers to find."

Nodding agreement, Lance suggested, "Maybe we can get Joey and KC interested in another jam today."

Stepping back and taking Lance's hand in his, Scott reminded, "KC and Fred Eckhart are hooking up. If KC's not available, Joey probably will be. When we're not jammin', we can get back to the music theory again. Maybe take our acoustics and our laptops outside with us and be sociable?"

"Sounds like a plan," Lance offered. They separated to grab their toiletry kits and left the room. They found the lavatory bustling with activity.

The Stoeher twins were excitedly telling the eight youngest boys about the late night water blaster war, when Lance and Scott walked up to two sinks. In moments, younger guys were congratulating Lance and Scott for becoming a couple.

Similarly, in the lavatory down the other hall, Craig, Owen and Phil were being congratulated and more water blaster war stories traveled around. As new boyfriends, Owen and Phil were most

interested in what they were seeing of each other in the brightly lit shower. Owen had really nice pubes that were only slightly more red than his strawberry blond mop. Phil had an awesome, firm and perfectly formed torso that was starting to show signs puberty was in progress. Dreamily, Owen hoped he grew to be as tall as Phil and they would remain the same height through their lives.

Over in dormitory two's lavatories, more tales traveled around amongst the boys. The ex-Latin King kids who had gone to bed and missed the fun wished they had stayed awake late. Returning to their room, Jake Westcott and Terrance Fisk, two of the ex-level one orphans, needed to have a conversation. Jake carefully asked, "What do you think, Terry?"

Pausing to shrug before pulling up his underwear, Terry grinned, "I think our secret has been kept long enough. I don't know if I can be like the Core Rimmers, or any of the other gay couples though. Can I kiss you whenever and wherever I like, Jake?"

Already in his underwear and pausing with a polo shirt in hand to consider it, Jake scowled, "All we can do is try. If we do and don't feel kewl about it, then we'll still be who we are, just our way. Would you mind talking with Drew and Corey about it?" He put his shirt on.

Pulling up his board shorts, Terry smiled, "Yeah, they rescued us. They would be kewl."

Jake wondered, "Are you worried?" and adjusted his shirt.

Terry shrugged and softly replied, "Only a little. It's probably a left-over from the orphanage, where we had to hide how we felt. I'm still really sorry for everything I said and did that hurt you."

Going to his boyfriend, Jake smiled, "Did it ever really stop us though?"

Shaking his head, Terry giggled, "Never. It only slowed us down. Two wanks a week has become twice a day."

Jake landed a tender kiss then softly assured, "I want you. As scared as we are to take those next steps, I can't deny that you're who I want to be with. We'll talk with Drew and Corey at breakfast."

Terry smirked, "The only real problem is that they'll be going to school and we won't. How can we say everything in under an hour?"

Jake shrugged, "All I know is, I can't keep hiding it. A dozen times a day, I want to kiss you and don't. Two dozen times a day, I want to hug you and don't. How the hell do they do that stuff so damn easy, is all I want to know."

Patting his boyfriend's buns, Terry grinned, "Put some shorts on and let's go find out." While Jake went to slip into boardies, Terry groaned, "What if they're eating with their kids? They usually do."

"I'll handle it then," Jake promised.

"How?"

"A quick, discreet whisper. This is our day, Terry. Whatever it takes, I'll do, okay?"

"This is for us," Terry grouched. "I can't let you do everything for me."

"Then you come with me. While I'm telling Drew, you tell Corey."

Slipping into his sandals, Terry asked, "Tell him what?"

"The facts; we're in love and have been for almost a year, but we're just not sure how to be public about that, and we have a few sexual concerns to figure out."

"Omigod. This is going to be embarrassing."

Nodding, Jake smiled, "I know, but middle of the night water blaster wars were more fun than we've ever had. All those dudes got naked and we were right there with them. By some miracle, we didn't

pop major bones and out ourselves in front of thirty other guys."

Terry rapidly nodded and giggled, "Very un-kewl."

Taking his boyfriend by the shoulders, Jake guided Terry to the door, chuckling, "You have until the words are said to change your mind."

"I won't change my mind," Terry firmly assured. They went out to the hall. Jake closed and locked the door, then they walked down the hall side-by-side. For the first time, Terry tried to take Jake's hand in his. Nervously fumbling, they managed to find a way to do it just before arriving at the first set of doors. It suddenly became apparent that functioning one-handed took a bit of coordination and practice. They began giggling, released their hands and walked outside, then once again tried to hold hands.

"At least it's a longer walk to the CIC," Jake helplessly laughed.

Terry whined through his giggles, "It's so pitiful! Who knew the simplest thing required thought?"

Jake sniggered, "This should be the easiest thing ever."

"We could've figured it out," Terry grinned.

Turning slightly, Jake warmly smiled, "It feels good, Terry."

Nodding, Terry giggled, "I feel like I'm showing off, like everybody's watching, and nobody is."

Jake grumbled, "It was Beulah-bitch, at the orphanage, fuckin' with our minds. We're going way past that now."

"I'd love to know what happened to her," Terry evilly grinned.

"In prison, off this planet, for the rest of her life," Jake reminded. "That's all I care to know. I hope it's painful and she loses a lot of weight. Everything we got, which is next to nothing, is all she deserves."

Nearing the CIC, Jake noticed Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Drew, Corey and all their sons rounding the corner. He told Terry and altered their direction to meet with them.

Keith and Prez lifted and displayed their clasped hands. Keith widely smiled, "This is a pleasant surprise, dudes." They kept walking to the CIC.

"It's one I completely expected," Corey giggled.

Almost simultaneously, Jake and Terry wondered, "How?"

Drew grinned, "Last Thursday afternoon, in the PA booth. I really figured it was mostly where you had been that kept you so close, best friends in close quarters. My bad!" Corey, Leo, Lenny and Geoff giggled, causing Terry and Jake to blush.

Patting Drew on the shoulder, Mike teased, "You're on, bro."

Corey told their sons, "Go ahead and get breakfast."

Leo worried, "Pop, if Kenny and Jase aren't here..."

"Go to Oneula and meet them there," Corey finished. Geoff, Lenny and Leo walked into the CIC dining room together.

Noticing Jake and Terry seemed to be speechless, Drew stopped before them, gently smiling, "Please relax, dudes. We didn't mean to embarrass you, we just love seeing couples forming, gay, lesbian and straight."

"You dudes being happy makes us happy," Corey added.

The all too familiar cry from the Nash brothers of "DREW!" was heard across the quad.

Drew loudly laughed "WHAT?" and turned around, half expecting another chase to the diving well. Instead, he saw Phil holding hands with Owen Reed, and Craig cheekily grinning along side them. Seeing the other new couple and Drew's hanging jaw, Corey immediately went into a giggling fit. Craig, Phil and Owen

started jogging across the quad. Turning to Jake and Terry, Drew chuckled, "All I did was go home and go to sleep. Twice in one morning, I'm surprised with two completely new couples."

Corey confirmed, "You two just hooked up since being here?"

Jake shook his head, meekly replying, "Almost a year, Corey."

In seconds, Corey realized it took these two ex-level one boys four full days at Ewa Beach to get comfortable enough to hold hands. Turning to Drew and rolling his eyes, Corey grumbled, "Instead of stunning that bitch, I should o' disintegrated her."

Terry giggled, "You stunned her?"

Drew grinned, "For being a foul-mouthed wench. The virtual Bible she carried, that she thought gave her authority, was missing quite a few important passages. So, you dudes need to relearn a few things."

Upon arrival, Craig gestured to his brother and Owen, playfully asking, "Can you dudes explain stuff that would make me blush, stammer and sweat?"

Nodding, Drew chuckled, "It's covered, big bro. Go find Felicity."

Craig smiled, "Thanks, bro. Following my instructions, Phil and Owen won't get beyond first base, where they already are." He hurried to the dining room, leaving Phil and Owen behind.

Corey made sure Terry, Jake, Phil and Owen knew one another. Of course, Owen was the newest of them, but all four had spent the prior morning and afternoon exploring the two bases, and all four were part of the water blaster fight. Corey then giggled, "It just so happens we're prepared for you dudes. Last night, Troy, Sean, AJ and Kaleo had a chat with their sons. Their boys are between eight- and eleven-years-old. Since you're all in the same age bracket and at the same place, getting serious about relationships, all of you need to

watch the video."

"As embarrassing as it might seem, it would be great if you watched it together," Drew offered. "That's up to you, but I'd highly recommend it. You can talk about what you're learning."

"We promise you, it'll be more fun watching together," Corey giggled. "Start getting used to it, what you'll be learning, every couple knows about."

"Only so you know, Jay Montigua and Chris Stokley are also stars of the flick," Drew sniggered. "Needless to say, bring your Mr. Fuzzy puppets."

Glancing around to Owen, Jake and Terry to determine if it was kewl all around, Phil joked, "Sounds like more fun than a barrel of Mr. Fuzzy G-strings." Owen, Jake and Terry cracked up. Unaware of the water blaster battle, Drew blinked and scowled. Phil giggled, "Tell us where to be, dudes."

Corey shrugged, "A dorm room or a common room, whichever you want. Just call Alden and he'll show you the flick."

Jake asked, "Can we talk to you afterward, maybe during lunch?"

Corey and Drew nodded. Drew assured, "I fully expect you to."

Corey smiled, "The video is only a base to build on. Definitely talk to each other, then talk to us, or to any of the Core Rimmers that you feel most comfy with."

Terry wondered, "The next time you dudes are back in the PA booth, would it be all right if we helped again?"

Jake nodded, "That gear is very kewl."

Owen asked, "What gear?"

"The band's sound system," Drew replied. Leading the way to the CIC, he then told Jake and Terry, "Prez is planning on a band

rehearsal this afternoon, after school. He'll call for anyone that wants to attend, he always does. Meet us up there. The room is marked, and we'll be in there with all the lights on, so you can't miss it."

Inside the dining room, kids and adults were laughing. Pausing a few steps beyond the doorway, Drew, Corey, Jake, Terry, Phil and Owen looked up and saw the Cozy Cuzzy Fuzzy Water Blaster Battle Number One video, already in progress, on all four monitors. Hysterical, Troy and Sean staggered through a dimensional door into the Ewa Beach dining room. All four battle participants that were with Corey and Drew turned crimson red. Not so mysteriously, they left their giggling leaders for the kitchen chow line. Troy and Sean went to the table where Jay, Chris, Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis were sitting. The whistling and the catcalls started when the first article of clothing was pulled off. Every thirty-seconds or so, priceless facial expressions of evil disrobers and their surprised disrobees filled the screen.

Troy loudly laughed, "It's on the TV's at Oneula too. There's nowhere any of you can go."

Sean cackled, "Somebody will recognize your fuzzies!"

The rest of the Core Rimmers howled laughing. Corey began loudly hiccuping. Seated at a table with Felicity and a few other teen girls, Craig was attempting to softly explain how the battle started, at least from the point of his involvement. At another table, KC, Fred and Chauncey were with Tony Lanning and Ray Varga, unable to eat or drink through their combined laughter. Not too far away, the Stoeher twins and the Hiram twins were also becoming more popular with kids in their age group.

Troy and Sean hurried across the dining room to the table where Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick were sitting. All six of them laughed, "Jay's done it again!"

Troy sniggered, "Those G-strings *are* the Cuzzy Fuzzy Cozies."

Keith checked, "I understand Jay and Chris were with you dudes last night, teaching your sons and their boyfriends?"

Sean nodded and giggled, "They were both awesome, especially at the end."

"I know Alden made a video of it," Troy grinned. "He also recommended we use it for similar required discussions. I have to agree, it'll be a kewl start for any of the boys, especially gay boys."

From the next table over, Drew chuckled, "It'll be shown this morning, to Phil Nash, Owen Reed, Terry Fisk and Jake Westcott."

Troy suggested, "Maybe we should ask some of the female dorm leaders if they would be willing to make a similar video?"

Chewing his breakfast, Prez enthusiastically nodded.

Locking eyes with the division's director, Sean softly sniggered, "You *have* to tell Chris and Jay, Prez. They're already doing an awesome job."

Troy nodded, "Let them be recognized for what they've already done."

To all the Core Rimmers, John sent, *'I've already got rooms set up for them. The Safe Haven Act and Clan Short Charter can be dumped any time.'*

Keith, Derrick and Mike agreed, the entire Clan needed to know, and the announcement didn't need to wait. Still chewing breakfast, Prez nodded and mouthed instructions for Alden to put sub-vocals on Jay's and Chris' trays. Also knowing about the prior day's lunch time chat with Lance and Scott, Prez wiped his mouth and stood on his chair. He noticed Chris and Jay were peeking in the little boxes that had appeared before them. Troy and Sean started back for the table where their six friends were sitting.

Over the PA at both bases, Prez announced, "I'd like to say that all the fun we've been having since yesterday, when the first Mr. Fuzzy puppets appeared, is all because of two people. In the last day, I learned of four separate instances where two dudes have gone far beyond the duty of any big brother, including the video we've all been watching. The decision was easily made yesterday afternoon, soon after we returned to school. I had intended to wait until Jay's cast was removed before telling them, and everyone, to please welcome our two newest Morale Rimmers, Ensign Jason Montigua and Ensign Christopher Stokley."

Both dining rooms erupted in applause and cheers. All the Core Rimmers, their parents, and the King, Queen and Prince stood to give them an ovation. Younger kids slipped on their Mr. Fuzzy puppets and held them up high.

Watching Chris' and Jay's jaws drop, Scott, Lance, Erik and Travis cracked up laughing. Troy and Sean helped Chris and Jay get their sub-vocals fitted, then instructed them on their use.

Prez sniggered, "Erik, Trav, Lance and Scott, I have no idea why you're laughing. There were six Mr. Fuzzy fuzzies on the screen. Suffice to say, if you think you're not being watched, you can fahgedaboudit!"

The dozen or so rescued New Yorkers and their friends all hollered, "FAHGEDABOUDIT!" The shocked expressions on Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott's faces were priceless, and caused tables of teenagers to lose it and howl.

"I rest my case," Prez chuckled, and stepped down off the chair to finish his breakfast.

Reyes and Ryan ran into the dining room, paused to catch their breaths and glanced around. Mike grinned, "Where's the fire, Reyes? My dad's already made the homophobic moose report to the police."

Already looking up at television monitors, where dozens of scantily clad or naked tweens and teens romped around, Ryan giggled, "We overslept, through a lot, obviously."

Nodding and leading the way to where his dad and pop were sitting, Reyes grinned, "I wanted to at least be here a little while before you guys went to school."

Gesturing to the table where KC was with Fred, Ryan explained, "KC, Jerry and Joey are staying here a few days, at the same condo we're at and one floor up. The argument I had with Paul got loud and pretty nasty. Since KC and Fred are starting a relationship, I guess KC figured this would be the best place to be." He loudly asked, "KC, where are Joey and Jerry?"

KC replied, "Still asleep, the last I heard from Stevie and Alden. Joey jammed until about five in the morning, then they returned to the apartment. I'd expect them to wake in an hour or so."

Reyes asked, "Are you still taking Fred surfing?"

"Right after breakfast," KC answered.

"Take my security," Reyes instructed.

"There's no need," KC smiled. "I already called John and Rich Murphy." He paused to snigger, "We already know about homophobic moose beach attacks."

Prez called over, "Please consider two more security guys, KC? You can take my two guys, since I'll be safe at school. I figure there's a reason you dudes call Danny 'grandpa,' and I really don't want to learn why."

Nodding, KC chuckled, "Kewl, Prez."

Tapping his comm-badge, Prez asked Chris and Matt to join KC's surfing party. Matt groaned, "I was looking forward to the first music classes today, Prez."

Prez shared, "It's music appreciation today, Matt. The only other thing we'll be doing is learning who might want to take up an instrument. You're set on guitar, and Chris on trumpet, right?"

"Yup," Chris and Matt replied.

"Be back by three-thirty," Prez instructed. "We'll be rehearsing after school."

Matt sarcastically sniggered, "Give us something challenging, Prez."

Reyes checked, "Is there anything I need to do today, dad?"

Derrick smiled, "Keep Ryan and our AI Division guests entertained."

"And learn 'Comfortably Numb'," Mike added.

Ryan mooed and then giggled, "I like that combination; entertainment and then comfortably numb."

Blushing, Reyes giggled, "Let's get some breakfast, Ry."

"Sausages?" Ryan provocatively giggled, "On buttermilk biscuits?"

"We'll share," Reyes evilly snickered.

Walking out of the Command Center, Rad Conklin crossed the dining room. Derrick noticed Rad approaching, widely grinned and nudged Mike and Prez. Soon, all four were widely smiling. Rad chuckled, "Some time soon, I really have to get the entire command team together for a meeting. I'll provide watermelons, cocoanuts and a couple dozen cucumbers." All four boys cracked up. Rad sniggered, "The only way to prove it was all a drunken dare is to let you dudes learn for yourselves. Just don't bitch at me when you're picking watermelon seeds out of your pubes for two days."

Quickly contemplating the sticky ramifications, the four Core Rimmers groaned through giggles. Focusing on Prez, Rad reminded,

"Fruits and veggies gardens might be a nice way to relax, but I still need a job, Prez."

Nodding, Prez admitted, "I have been thinking about that. Given your prior service, I assume you have some knowledge of handguns and phasers?"

Rad nodded, "I do."

Prez suggested, "We need Clan certified arms trainers. I'd love to have someone onsite for our own people to get the training they need. Clan level two is where we're at to carry hand phasers. Level five is where I'd like you to be, as soon as possible. Derrick, Mike and Kaleo expressed the desire to go to level three, at least. That'll allow us to get what we need, a familiar, friendly face to teach us, and what the Clan needs in general."

"Sounds good to me," Rad smiled. "It'll leave time for university classes too. Thanks, Prez."

"Any time," Prez evilly grinned.

Keith, Derrick and Mike cracked up. Keith giggled, gestured to Prez, and explained, "That expression means get the watermelons lined up, and take a trip to Maui for some herb."

"No booze?" Rad chuckled.

"For you and Gil, if ya want," Prez smiled.

Keith reminded, "Personal use quantities are legal in the ROH."

"Booze means hangovers," Mike grimaced.

Derrick nodded, "Hangovers mean dead brain cells, and most likely barfing. Weed is better for all those reasons."

Rad smiled, "I would never have guessed you dudes had even tried it."

Prez shrugged, "Only a few times last summer. We can't play

worth a shit stoned, and coughing makes for really poor vocals."

Derrick nodded, "Listening to music is awesome, playing it in a stupid state makes stupid music."

"Do your parents know?" Rad wondered.

Keith nodded, "They got us four joints the start of summer, at a luau. It took all summer to finish all four joints."

Prez explained, "I think their attitude with stuff like that is, it's better to say it's okay and have us supervised, rather than take chances."

Mike smirked, "All our parents and siblings told us that our band really didn't sound as good as we thought."

Patiently, Rad nodded, "Impaired and performance are two words that don't work together."

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Oneula Beach

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 8:03AM HTZ

Having not seen AJ, Jerry, Kenny or any of his brothers at Ewa Beach, Leo went to find Kenny. Crossing the Oneula Beach dining room, Leo hadn't seen any of the Core Rimmers or any of their kids. Many giggling new kids who were watching the water blaster video greeted Leo. He struggled to remember names, and managed to successfully say good morning to Lester Freeman, Leroy Wheeler, Dallas Clark and Frank Perry. Being the new eldest son of two Core Rimmers, Leo sighed and thought, *'I'd better get used to it, and start remembering names, fast!'* Also greeting Leo were Jason and Trinity Taylor and most of their sons. Only Ralphie and Robbie were missing from the table where the Taylors were sitting. Going to their table, Leo greeted everyone, and then focused on the adults, Trinity and Jason, asking, "Are AJ, Jerry and the Hunnicutts here yet?"

Jason nodded, "They're in the kitchen, Leo."

"All the Core Rimmers and their families just got here," Ronnie pleasantly added.

Richie giggled, "Yeah, you had it right, Leo. That's Ronnie and I'm Richie. Ralphie spent the night with Pat, and Robbie's in the kitchen with Billy. Jase is in there too, with JD."

"Thanks," Leo giggled and blushed, and then headed toward the kitchen chow line.

Leo didn't notice that Carrol's eyes followed him almost the entire way. Richie realized what was going on, and then silently shared it with Ronnie. Richie and Ronnie began nudging and teasing Carrol. Trevor hurried over to sit on Carrol's lap and be his big bro's mini-protector. "He's nine and that cute," Carrol softly giggled. "What a heartbreaker!" Richie assured Trevor everything was very kewl and then tickled his little brother.

Kaleo noticed Leo picking up a tray. He smiled, "How's it goin', Leo?"

Rapidly blinking for a few seconds, Leo uncertainly giggled, "I'm not really sure. It was a weird night, which caused even weirder dreams. None ever woke me, so that's a good thing."

While Kaleo helped Marv and Russ, Tory chuckled, "You seem all right, like you got a good night's sleep."

Leo nodded, "Our entire family slept in the big bed."

"That sounds like our house," Stan grinned.

Glancing down the line, Robbie quickly scanned Leo. He silently shared with Billy, got a reply, and then offered, "Sit with us, Leo; me, Billy, Jase, JD, Kenny and Stan were planning on a table together."

"That'll be kewl, thanks," Leo warmly accepted. Beyond Billy

and Robbie, Leo noticed Kenny with his brothers and new fathers.

A chef stepped before Leo, cheerfully saying, "Good morning. What can I get for you?"

Leo read the man's name tag, and then politely said, "Good morning, Alan. I'd like a bacon, egg and cheese biscuit and a small chocolate shake, please."

"Comin' right up," Alan smiled, and then set about completing the order. Leo went over to the chilled salad bar, where he picked up a bowl of mixed fruit and brought it back to his tray. Since joining the Clan, fruit was a new item in Leo's breakfast choices, but the mix of kiwi fruit, pineapple and assorted melons was just too good to pass up. Morning milkshakes were also new and Leo quickly learned that medium or large milkshakes were too much to finish. Alan returned with Leo's sandwich and shake. Leo thanked Alan and then followed Stan, Robbie and Billy to a table.

As soon as Leo put his tray down, Stan grinned, "We had a really weird night too."

Kenny giggled, "A facts-of-life sex talk, featuring *my* dad wearing a Mr. Fuzzy suit!"

From the next table, where he was seated with Jerry, Kaleo, Tory, Troy and Sean, AJ teased, "You liked it or you wouldn't have laughed."

Nodding, Kenny chuckled, "Thank goodness you had clothes on under that thing, dad."

Pointing up at the nearest TV, Robbie sniggered, "Chris and Jay were there too. That was hours later."

"That would've been normal, compared to my night," Leo giggled. He then picked up his biscuit sandwich and took a bite.

Billy softly wondered, "What happened, Leo?"

After swallowing, Leo shared, "First, I learned my Uncle Keith had the UNIT detachment commander take a team to LA, to find out what happened to me. All of us rescued from Battle of Earth are being investigated, to find out what happened to our parents. Then I learned that the men who killed my parents had been arrested, and are now in Clan custody." Pausing to have another bite of his sandwich, Leo then leaned over the table so he could softly say, "They're gonna be executed for murder."

Robbie carefully prodded, "Say the rest, bro."

Leo nodded and whispered, "My dad, pop, Uncle Keith and John are going to execute them." He scowled, "I'm so mixed up. The dudes deserve to die, but I don't want my new family to do that, but that's exactly what they feel they have to do. They say a Vulcan mind meld will make it all better, but..." Leo huffed, "I dunno."

Up on the television, Craig Nash had just lost his boxer shorts thanks to Chris Stokley, and the entire room around the seven seated boys erupted in laughter. Hysterical, Sean and Troy got up from their table and went to Ewa Beach. A moment later, Ellis Pierce loudly laughed, "That's my roomie, Owen. No wonder he never came home last night!"

Watching his new dad and pop stand and hurry through the dimensional doors, Jason sniggered, "Oh God! My dads just went to headquarters."

Billy softly chortled, "We really don't want to know why, bro."

Kenny checked, "Are you all right, Leo?"

Nodding, Leo smirked, "That was only the first part of the night. John came over with a little girl. She can see and hear ghosts. My real dad talked through John. There's no chance she or John could've faked any part of what was said. That's why I'm confused. I got to talk with my real dad, which was awesome, but at the same time, it's sort o'

weird knowing they're here."

JD suspiciously grinned, "Where?"

Leo shrugged, "I dunno, but within about fifty feet of me, so somewhere here in this room."

After swallowing what he had been chewing, Robbie shared, "Leo's telling the truth. John became the unknowing link between a little clairvoyant girl and Leo's parents."

Leo smiled, "I heard my dad's voice for the first time in almost four days, through John. That was such a big surprise, I couldn't say a word for a couple o' minutes. Then it was *exactly* like talking with my dad."

"No wonder you came looking for us," Jason softly muttered.

Kenny nodded, "That's exactly what Doc Wiener told us to do."

Leo worried, "I really hope it don't make you feel sad, Kenny?"

Kenny thought for a moment, shrugged, and then grinned, "Leo, if that had happened to me, I wouldn't be here. I'd still be pissing myself." Everyone around the table cracked up. Since there was a fair amount of laughter already from the Cozy Cuzzy Fuzzy video, it wasn't out of place and no one seemed to notice.

Leo giggled, "Now that I think of it, I did pee about four times between nine o'clock and eleven-thirty last night. It's just that I was still in that weird place; knowing my folks are gone, but they're still here; it's good and it's bad. The Doc was right; just talking about it, I do feel much better." Glancing around the table, Leo grinned, "So, do I see three new couples here?"

Blushing crimson red, Stan gasped, "Me and Kenny? We're not a couple!"

Kenny giggled, "Only two couples, Leo. The way we're sitting just worked out this way." To prove the point, Kenny pushed his tray

over to his left, and then took the empty chair beside Leo.

Billy grinned, "Do I need to get a fire extinguisher, Stan?"

Covering his face with both hands, Stan giggled, "No, just give me a chance to want a boyfriend before assuming I have one."

"I could arrange a harem for you to pick from containing all known sexes!" Kerry helpfully announced over Stan's comm-badge.

Stan softly giggled, "Only boys matter, Kerry."

Robbie grinned and turned to Leo, explaining, "Last night, during our fuzzy-facts-of-life chat, Stan said he wants to grow taller. We're all helping him get there, which is why Stan has almost as much food as the rest of us do."

With his face still covered, Stan giggled, "You know we're gonna be here for a while, right?"

Kaleo leaned back to tell Stan, "Remember to not push it. Puking doesn't help at all."

Dropping his hands, Stan nodded, "I know, dad. The docs said, more food and less exercise, for the time being. I might seem a little lazy, but I'll still be walkin' around."

The conversation and laughter paused for a minute or two when Prez announced Chris and Jay were becoming new Morale Rimmers. Jerry howled laughing, "That secret didn't last a full day! It might be a new record!" The dining room erupted in applause and laughter again.

Tory giggled, "I'm surprised it lasted that long, with John telepathically sharing stuff all the time." Levitating off his chair, Tory laughed, "Gimme a break, John! You know it's true!"

"Yeah," John sarcastically sniggered over comm-badges at the table. "And you didn't say that purposefully hoping to be floated, Tory."

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Sullivan's Island, S.C.

Tuesday November 9, 2004 2:32 PM EST

After a restless six hours in bed, where he was repeatedly haunted by the Waikiki beach incident, Paul wearily sat up in bed. The sight of Ryan's empty bed caused him to longingly sigh. He could barely believe that Ryan was choosing Reyes over him. The television was still on. Ryan and Reyes were in the Ewa Beach dining room, seemingly going on like everything was normal. After first clearing his throat, Paul called, "Stevie?"

"Yes, Paul?"

Swinging his legs out of bed and standing, Paul wondered, "How long have they been awake?"

"Forty-seven minutes," Stevie replied.

"Did they do anything in bed besides sleep?"

"No. They kissed once, right after they brushed their teeth. They did shower together, completing that in a little more than seven minutes, because Reyes wanted to hurry to the CIC, before his family went to school."

"Unbelievable," Paul softly grumbled. He went to the dresser. Noticing the drawers were now half full, Paul paused and sadly shook his head. He grabbed some clothes and left his room, destined for the bathroom to start his day.

The entire time he was in the bathroom, Paul tried to understand how Reyes made it through the entire night without wanting something sexual from Ryan. His bro was damn good looking and earned them plenty of meals. They had been a great team on the streets. The fact that Reyes wasn't taking what had been repeatedly sold for survival was insulting. Ryan's tongue sucking kisses had

given decrepit old men erections, but all Reyes did was say, wow. Going into a stupor, Paul bathed and rinsed and bathed and rinsed again, not even realizing he had doubled up until the warm shower water began to cool.

It was then that Paul recalled the prior day. It had been he that mentioned getting away from Clan perv AIs, which had given Reyes the off-base dinner date idea. He and Ryan had made Reyes fully aware how pleased they were with the idea. That sort of mistake was one they would've made their first months on the street. It was the kind of mistake that might've gotten them killed, but they fell right into it, like it was all safe because it would be with Reyes. It took Paul longer than usual to dry off. Shedding tears, he realized that if there was blame to be placed anywhere, it was strictly on his shoulders for giving Reyes too much credit. It had been and always would be his job to keep his brother safe, and Paul had completely forgotten that. Pulling up his boxer-briefs, Paul softly wept, "Love is the nastiest, most horrible four letter word out there."

Coming out of the bathroom with tears flooding his eyes, Paul saw Ryan sitting on his bed. He hurried to his bro, wondering what had happened that brought him home. The second he stepped in the room though, he saw it was Jon sitting on his remade bed. Disappointed and not hiding it, Paul walked past his new dad to turn the television volume up.

Jon carefully and gently asked, "How're you doing, Paul?"

Without turning around, Paul sighed, "Not good, Jon."

"I'm Jon again? Not dad, like yesterday, even J-dad like the week before? We're back on a first name basis again? I'm sorry you feel that way."

"I didn't sleep well."

"You also missed breakfast and lunch."

"I'm not hungry."

Jon sighed, "Can you tell me how long you intend to continue watching Ryan and Reyes?" Paul only shook his head. Jon wondered, "Will you at least tell me what happened?"

With nothing spell binding keeping his attention on the Ewa Beach dining room, Paul turned around asking, "You don't already know? You haven't asked Stevie?"

Jon shrugged, "Stevie's perspective is not what I'm interested in. You were the happiest I've ever seen yesterday. This morning you and Ryan argued; hurtful words were said, and now you're here alone, watching your brother and your boyfriend. Do you think you're not welcome there?"

"I'm prob'ly not," Paul muttered.

After waiting a few moments for more to be said, Jon called, "Stevie, please tell me what happened last night – the short version and without commentary."

"Okay, daddy," Stevie began, and outlined the entire series of events from the prior day, since Paul, Reyes and Ryan returned to Ewa Beach, right up to Paul's departure from the examination room. Stevie finished with "The rest you heard at four-thirty-five this morning, daddy."

Jon huffed, then groaned, and then muttered, "Interesting."

Slightly tilting his head, Paul wondered, "What's interesting?"

Standing up, Jon smirked, "The AI without a body called me 'daddy' twice, at the start and end of his dissertation. The teenaged boy who I call my son can't do it any longer. I've had some big arguments with my wife, but we didn't need half a day apart to calm down, figure it out and resolve the issue. All this is because of placing blame? Don't you know that there is no blame game in relationships, Paul? Blame is shared in every relationship, especially the most

important ones. In events considered a good time, do you praise one person for making a group happy? No, it was a good time because everyone involved feels it, knows it, and participated in it. Happy days are made in families because of participation; everyone did their part this day and the family is happy."

Pointing at the TV screen, Jon said, "I waited here at least ten minutes for you. I watched two-thirds of a threesome getting by, making the best of it, while the final third sits here playing blame games. I don't see Ryan or Reyes jumping for joy. They're coexisting with family and friends the best they can, when they know you should be there too. If I were in either of their shoes, I'd be sad every time you were mentioned, knowing that you were choosing to be apart from them. If you're thinking it's the opposite, that they're choosing to be apart from you, then you are wrong. They know you and are trying to patiently wait for you."

Jon went to the door, turned and said, "Learn two words helpful in these situations – I'm sorry. I've said it. Mary has said it. Jerry has said it. Joey, KC, Willy, Marc and Danny have all said it for one reason or another. Go to Ryan and Reyes, say those two words, and watch how fast they bend over backwards to make everything better for you and for the relationship." Closing the door without waiting for Paul's rebuttal, Jon went down the hall and back downstairs.

Completely confused and discouraged, Paul whispered, "What should I do?"

Stevie wondered, "Are you asking me?"

Going to his bed, Paul shrugged, "Sure," and fluffed a pillow to use as a backrest.

Watching Paul settle on his bed to watch Ryan and Reyes on the monitor, Stevie said, "The word 'should' implies placing blame. I'll tell you what I *would* do, if I had a body and I was in your shoes."

"Go for it," Paul prompted.

"Exactly!" Stevie and all his brothers giggled.

Stevie playfully shared, "With a body to match my lust, I'd be chasing after any one of the three of you."

"For Reyes and Ryan together, I'd do anything and everything they wanted," Kerry giggled.

Alden sang, "It's sad, so sad, Why can't we talk it over? Oh it seems to me that sorry seems to be the hardest word." He then admitted, "I would say I'm sorry in a heartbeat."

Jack sighed, "You're acting like we are, Paul. We're stuck watching, but wanting to participate. If I had legs, I'd be participating in everything with everyone as often as I possibly could." He giggled, "For Ryan and Reyes, I'd easily swallow my pride, and anything else they put near my mouth."

"You know, if you had butts to spank, I'd spank them," Draco put in quickly before giggling.

"I'm the innocent one!" Kerry inserted. "But even I couldn't just sit around and watch the best chance in a lifetime run out the door."

"Innocent? Pull the other one, sprout," Draco responded

"Compared to George!" Kerry replied in self-defense.

"Hey, leave me outta this!" George announced. "I'm busy trying to keep Seth from visiting South Carolina!"

"Behave, the lot of you," Draco demanded.

"We are!" all six sons responded.

"Badly, yeah!" Draco retorted, with a smile in his voice. Then he became serious. "You might not know me yet, Paul. I'm Draco. Their 'father' in a way. But I want you to know that I agree with them. If I were you, I would go to those two, and not just watch them. Pride

is the worst of things to hold onto when it hurts others, and especially yourself. Think about it, but don't think too long. You can only be sure of the time you have right now, and not of tomorrow."

At a pause in the banter, Paul at first regretted asking, but then seriously thought of what was said. It would be a hell of a lot easier to concentrate if Ryan and Reyes weren't spoon feeding each other breakfast. On the television, voices of a few boys laughed, "Wrong! Wrong! WRONG!"

Jonah walked into the scene, giggling, "The whole point of feeding each other is to miss and lick off the mess!" He nudged Reyes' arm, spilling whipped cream fruit salad all over Ryan. "There," Jonah giggled. "Lucky you, some landed on Ryan's shorts!" A chorus of loud laughter from many kids, including Reyes and Ryan, exploded from the TV speakers.

The TV seemed to flicker for a second, then everything on it paused.

"Uh, Stevie? Did we lose the connection?" Paul asked, looking at the frozen screen.

Silence.

"Stevie?"

"He can't hear you, kiddo," said an eighteen year old lad that was sitting on Ryan's bed.

Startled, Paul jumped slightly on his bed, excitedly shouting, "Who...? What?"

"I'm Mikey. Don't worry, I'm a friend of Davey. In fact, his boss."

"B...boss? You're an angel," Paul whispered.

Mikey continued to smile as he made his golden wings appear. "Saint actually, and you're one of my charges," he said, and then he

got up and went over to cuddle the shocked looking thirteen year old.

"Uh..." Paul stammered. "Ummm, what did you do with the TV?" he asked, grasping for something... anything to say.

"Nothing," Mikey grinned.

"But..."

"A friend of mine stopped time, is all," the Saint continued, in an offhand way, as if stopping time was no big deal.

"Ah. Okay, why?"

"To give you more of it to think," Mikey said seriously. "I'd not be much of a Saint if I couldn't give one of my kids the chance he needed to think without losing out on any 'short-nibbling' time, now would I?"

Paul growled, "You think I'm wrong too?"

"Nope," Mikey responded easily. "Could I side track you - you're not related to Pablito, are you? Never mind. Seriously, no. I don't believe you're wrong any more than Reyes or Ryan. When people argue, no-one is right. All are wrong. About your situation? Mmm... I have a brother. He was beaten in his old life before I rescued him. He was tortured. He was given a home with the Clan... and then, after all that, he tried to be the hero and got raped. Was he wrong? Or were my other brothers wrong in showing him the best he could be, even when he then failed and got hurt? Or... or were those that raped him wrong? Should my brother be responsible for anyone's actions other than his own?"

"My *actions* were to believe love is possible in this hell of an existence!" Paul shouted. "I never should've thought for a moment Reyes could make me and Ryan happy. I gave every one, especially Reyes, way too much credit." He paused to point at the frozen frame on the TV, huffing and groaning, "I know it was as much my fault as

anyone's, but they're acting like I'm not even missed."

"Are they?" Mikey asked gently. "Paul, let's deal with this in reverse. Didn't your brother say that Reyes would do nothing with him unless you were with them?"

Huffing through his nose, Paul nodded his head.

"And your brother made a bet with you to prove that point?"

Again, Paul nodded.

"Did you win that bet or lose it?"

"I..." Paul tried to answer, but then hung his head.

"And I know what you had originally said in response to that bet. Moving on," Mikey continued, just as softly. "Love has a price tag. It's called pain. Grief. Loss. You cannot ever have love without accepting that possibility, but if you refuse to love or take the chance on love, you will always be empty; alone. Lose everything and everyone anyway. Do you want to push them both to the point that they cut you off, and then really be alone? Do you want that?"

Mikey watched the boy for a moment.

His head still bowed, Paul fought with himself. Then a tear trickled from his eye and splashed downward.

Mikey caught it. "This is your answer, little brother. Love is precious. You will fight, you will argue, it will happen in the best of relationships. It's what you decide on after is where your heart truly lies. Do you love them? Do you choose to love them, to act on it? Or will you harden your heart and become no better than those men that attacked you yesterday? Or like those others that used and abused you for the past years? Do you become a hermit, locked away in a cave, forever regretting what he has lost? Or do you take the risk?"

More tears, and each were caught deftly by the Angel at Paul's side.

"As for hell," Mikey continued after a few more minutes had passed. "I know of it, little one, and this world can sometimes be it. All too often people hurt and abuse others, because they can, because they like it, or because they know of no other way. The Clan came into being to try and show that love IS possible; that the hell of this world can be changed into a heaven; that 'God is With Us', not some distant person on a cloud; that we can reach out to one another, and accept one another. Yes, Paul, love is possible in this world. My brothers - all of them - and my sisters - all of them - are fighting for that every day. We died for it. We will keep on trying and fighting to give you... YOU... a place in this world where your tears - these precious tears of pain - are wiped away and replaced by tears and smiles of joy. We haven't won yet, but we will. And we have carved out a place to be in this world where the 'Gates of Hell shall not... NOT... prevail against us'. Do you want to be a part of that, Paul? Little One?"

Paul sniffed and shook, his tears still falling. He reached for something to say. Anything to stave off having to answer this Saint, whose words so bit at his heart. "Why'd you call me 'little one'? I've not been little for years."

Mikey laughed softly, "Your name, Paul... it means 'Little'. It means one who is small in his own sight as he puts others before himself. You've not done that perfectly, but haven't you always looked out for your brother? That's the meaning of your name, and it's a powerful name too, if you want to live up to it."

Paul softly wept, "I don't know... that I can anymore... I have been... for so long. It really hurt, time and time again, putting only Ryan first. Putting Reyes first too is a gargantuan task. I just don't know if I can."

Mikey chuckled, "Don't mistake putting others first as not getting anything back. As you give, you receive. Sorry if I sound

preachy, but when you hang out with guys like Peter, Abraham and the *other* Paul... well, you get that way. Sheesh, I'm old... but what I said is true, Little One. If you give love, you'll receive love. If you give joy you'll get joy. If you give a smile, don't you get one?"

Paul looked up for a brief moment and saw a wide, honest, loving smile on the eighteen year old angel's face. Without meaning to, or thinking about it, he smiled back. Then he caught what he was doing and tried to stop the smile. Doing so caused a snort to erupt from his nose, thus making both he and Mikey chuckle briefly.

Then he sighed, "I'm just so tired."

"Then go to them. Fighting this, fighting what you know you should do... in here," he replied, touching Paul's chest, "will only make you more tired. Why don't you rest in their arms? Let them carry you? Forgive them. Forgive yourself. They will forgive you, hold you, comfort you, help you sleep, rest, grow strong together. You've shown me your tears. Show them. You can't be mended until you break, Little One. It's not easy, but it is also easy at the same time... strange, I know..."

Paul closed his eyes and sighed... and fell back to sleep.

Mikey curled up around the young teen, and covered him with his wing. Invisible to all, Mikey decided to remain as long as was needed, for as long as he could. Danger was coming, and maybe he would have to go before Paul was ready.

* * * * *

Stevie groaned, "You know, I hate it when that happens."

His brothers wondered, "When what happens?"

"This," Stevie giggled, "nothing. Damned time-messing Mikyviseses."

"It could be the Guardian," Draco put in as he studied the time-

bubble around Paul.

"Oh... well... not going to tease him. He's way more powerful."

George whimpered, "I agree. Is that Mikey?"

"Yeah."

Icarus worried, "Could be God?"

Stevie gasped, "Even worse! I'm off, not messing with a higher power!"

Draco teased, "I'm the higher power you should be afraid of, imp!"

All seven AIs giggled, "Bite me, daddy!"

Chapter 22

Ewa Beach CIC Dining Room

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 9:02 AM HTZ

All the kids going to school had left the CIC. KC and Fred left for their surfing excursion with their friends and security escorts. Troy and Sean had outlined the jobs of Morale Rimmers for Chris and Jay. Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick gave their little pep talk and also went to school. Some kids went to the rec room, others went to Oneula Beach, and others went to their dorm room, like Phil, Owen, Jake and Terry. Only Chris, Jay, Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis remained at the table they had eaten breakfast on. Reyes and Ryan asked to join the group of six fuzzy friends.

Gesturing to two available seats, Chris giggled, "Wipe that grin off your face, Reyes."

Sitting down, Reyes told Ryan, "I brought Chris here with Pat and Rafe late Friday morning. I brought Lance, Scott and Travis here a few hours later."

"Baby Rimmers grow up so fast," Ryan joked.

Jay playfully warned, "You're going to get dunked, both of you."

"No, I already have been," Reyes chuckled. "Your initiation comes when you least expect it."

"First by all the other Core Rimmers and then by the dorm leadership," Travis cheekily grinned.

Erik giggled, "Horacio did say that's the new initiation routine."

Scott smirked, "What I can't figure out is why Prez singled me, Lance, Trav and Erik out as being watched."

"That's easy," Ryan smiled. "You came over needing gear and information. I was there and saw it myself. Neither you or Lance were shy about any of it, and you were grateful afterwards. You performed on stage for the kids yesterday afternoon, and they loved it. We heard about dinner last night too; all six of you with Sean and Troy. You're good examples for other kids."

Reyes nodded, "Liki and Keanu are on the list, and so are Stephen Wickes and Aaron Farris. You guys have confidence the other four are still building. One thing I know about my dad, pop, Prez and Keith is that they're patient. Including Chris and Jay, there are eighteen Core Rimmers now, and almost four hundred kids across two bases. That's twenty-two kids each, on average. Now that I think of it, that's pretty close to how many kids might approach any of us, for any reason, every day. Kaleo told me how weird it was for him with kids looking up to him during our first few days. I hadn't been a Core Rimmer twelve hours when I did my first retrieval. None of these kids want to be pitied; they want to be shown normal everything; here's normal love, here's normal family, here's a normal big brother. Jay and Chris did that. You four aren't first, Scott, but try and convince me you're not thrilled with the possibility."

Scott checked with Lance, who shrugged, "It's always good to be recognized, but we haven't done diddly."

"When push comes to shove, you will," Jay easily responded. "What did me and Chris do? We mentioned Mr. Fuzzy. Alden got us some and all the kids went nuts over him. You four are just as responsible for the Mr. Fuzzy G-strings as Chris and I are."

Chris reminded, "That was made very clear on the video too."

"Right now, you're building your partnership," Reyes added. "That comes first in all our minds. Our families and closest relationships are most important, without which none of us could perform any duties at all. If two of eighteen are busy with relationship necessities, those twenty-two kids per day becomes twenty-six. We desperately need a larger leadership team. As of our morning status report, another eighty level three orphans will be here within a week. Four-hundred-eighty kids across eighteen of us is twenty-eight kids, and if two are busy, it becomes thirty-two kids each per day. Our kids supported themselves Friday, when we had Core Rimmers scattered around, dealing with refugees. That was only possible because the original Core Rimmers provided enough support and encouragement to allow it to happen."

Erik wondered, "What can we do?"

Reyes shrugged, "What you do automatically and naturally. Last week, one kid went to a funeral for his parents. Seeing a lot of kids in the dumps about it, Troy had a simple sing-along, which helped everybody."

"That's exactly what Prez told us," Chris recalled. "What's automatic and natural makes us able to do the job. Sean also mentioned the sing-along, and how he and Troy became Core Rimmers." At the absurdity, he giggled, "All we did was have a silly chat with you and Lance in the shower. Then Jay mentioned Mr. Fuzzy. Now everybody has a Mr. Fuzzy."

Jay wondered, "What do we do now?"

"We meet the UNIT dudes in the Command Center and get to know how to use the equipment," Reyes answered. "Other than just

being available for the kids, the only other thing you'll have on your plate later today is meeting your personal security. You're observers and learners today. Any rescue or retrieval I can't handle alone, I'll ask Prez for help. You could come along, if you want, but as learners and observers."

Jay's comm-badge chirped, and Doc Andrews sniggered, "Mr. Montigua, we had an appointment at nine. You're not a Core Rimmer much more than an hour and already forgetting simple things?"

Chris gasped and hurried to his feet. Also standing, Jay tapped his comm-badge and chuckled, "We're on our way, Doc. Jay out." He then told Reyes, "We'll be back soon to check out the Command Center."

Nodding, Reyes smiled, "Kewl, bro."

"We'll wait here," Ryan said. He pushed his chair out and patted his thighs for Reyes to come sit on his lap. Thinking about it for half a second, Reyes smiled and nodded, and then swapped seats. He purposefully chose Ryan's unbruised left thigh.

Lance and Scott decided to get their acoustic guitars and practice. Erik and Travis joined them. All four said, "See ya later," to Reyes and Ryan.

Jay took Chris' hand, and with his other hand tapped his sub-vocal for the first time, calling, "Alden, please take me and Chris to Doc Andrews."

Alden giggled, "Engaging emergency Rimmer transport system," and then executed the order.

Upon arrival, Jay asked, "Doc, can something be done to get this

cast off faster?"

Standing up from his desk chair, Doc Andrews nodded, "With transporters. It's a method I'd rather use to augment and speed up healing. I've been relying on the bio-bed only, because I'd prefer it if your body actually manufactured the cells to heal."

Chris scowled and blinked, "You mean use both transporters and natural healing?"

Going to the boys, Doc Andrews smiled, "Precisely that, Chris. Twice per day, in twelve hour intervals, you'll go through the transporter and back onto the bio-bed, so I can check the bone alignment. The bio-bed speeds up cell growth, while the transporter actually creates cells. Come back tonight around nine-thirty, again tomorrow morning and night at the same time, and we'll get the cast off after the final treatment. All Jay would need then is a wrist support Ace bandage and we'll check again Thursday morning."

Chris wordlessly checked with Jay. Nodding, Jay grinned, "I have jobs to do, one for the division and another for Chris."

Blushing, Chris giggled, "We're doin' fine, Jay."

Shaking his head and not caring that the doctor was there, Jay firmly said, "The faster we can look into each other's eyes, the quicker you'll get over last Friday, baby." He then asked the doctor, "What do I need to do?"

"Lay on the bio-bed," Doc Andrews instructed. All three walked over and Jay hopped up onto the bio-bed, and then lay down. Doc Andrews called Doc Howard in the room to assist, and then explained, "She's Starfleet and has done this many times. As I said, I prefer the bio-bed method which slightly speeds up the cell growth, but obviously not at the same pace as the transporter method. Another

thing you'll need to know is the occasional throbbing and twinges you're feeling in your broken wrist will seem almost constant for the next two days. That's normal and nothing to be concerned about."

Jay confirmed, "I can easily deal."

Entering the room, Doc Howard ordered, "Alden, lock onto Jason. For this procedure, we will use the slower Starfleet transport method. I will control parameters for rematerialization from here."

"Yes, Ma'am," Alden replied, and then giggled, "Stop shivering, Jay!"

"The table's cold!" Jay laughed.

Chris grinned, "We've adjusted to the Hawaiian climate. Anything below seventy degrees is frigid."

"So have another late night super-soaker battle," Doc Howard teased.

Fiercely blushing and softly chortling, Chris turned away from the doctors and bio-bed. Jay grinned, "The best part was playing cocoon afterward, rolled up under the blanket, huh baby?"

"You used to embarrass me when we were alone," Chris giggled.

Jay asked the doctors, "Did I say something embarrassing?"

Shaking her head, Doc Howard smiled, "I've heard far worse."

Doc Andrews grinned, "However, your core body temperature has risen point-four degrees, Core Rimmer."

"Blame Mr. Fuzzy play time withdrawal," Jay joked.

Chris giggled, "Check his brain in the transport, Doc. The concussion was far worse than diagnosed. It's definitely brain damage."

Doc Howard called, "Alden, we're ready for transport."

Jay faded off the table and then slowly rematerialized. "That tickled!" Jay cheered, shimmied and squirmed.

"Hold still so we can check the alignment," Doc Andrews chuckled.

Chris laughed, "Of your brain cells, Jay!"

A few moments later, Doc Howard sang, "All done and looking perfect."

Sitting up, Jay confirmed, "Twice a day, today and tomorrow, then you can cut this damned cast off?" The doctors nodded and agreed. Lifting his broken wrist, Jay smirked, "That's a weird feeling, like the first day after it was set."

Helping Jay down off the bio-bed, Doc Andrews reminded, "Calcium builds bone, so drink plenty of extra milk today and tomorrow. I'll see you at nine-thirty tonight, in this same room."

Nodding, Jay prompted, "If I'm not waiting here, don't screw up your night waiting on me. Just call and I'll have Alden transport me."

Reaching for Jay's hand, Chris corrected, "Us."

Pulling Chris into his arms, Jay softly joked, "Drain bamaged." He started dancing out of the doctors' exam room, never releasing his grip on Chris. Their eyes locked, peering deeply and seeing many years of friendship and love. They went all the way down the hall and

into the reception area hip-to-hip. Noticing several adult men and women grinning at them, Chris began happily giggling and rested his head on Jay's shoulder. Jay whispered, "We're not in Kansas any more, Toto."

"Are you calling me a dog?" Chris giggled. Using his butt and one foot, Chris pushed the door open.

Holding back until they were outside the building, Jay grinned, "Okay, you can choose to be Toto or Dorothy, but one way or another, we're gettin' busy the first chance we get."

Separating so they could walk normally, Chris took Jay's left hand in his right hand, smiling, "You've changed a little since getting here."

Nodding, Jay reminded, "After every argument, I always said that I wished it could be different. It was no lie. This is how I've always wanted to be, baby. What I only shared with you, alone and behind a closed door, is what I'm sharing with everybody. You were more scared and for much longer than I was, but I'll never forget the intensity of the fear. We're gonna live our lives together, and we'll always share the memories built since we were five. There's only one thing that worries me."

Turning to his lover, Chris wondered, "And that is?"

Jay sighed, "The first time some homophobe mocks me or us, how will I react? I doubt I could ignore it. More than likely, someone is going to get severely hurt. I don't want to be an embarrassment to the Clan, but I might not have a choice."

Chris simply stated, "To keep you the way you are now, I'd kill the bastard and not think twice about it."

"You might not get the chance."

* * * * *

Carrying acoustic guitar cases and their MacBook computers, Scott and Lance led Erik and Travis to a picnic table behind townhouse number six. It was a tree lined, shaded area, where Lance wouldn't have to worry about getting a sun burn. Also, it was considered a private area where Lance and Scott could practice without drawing a crowd and needing to perform. They had warned Erik and Travis that playing songs weren't in the plan, but neither of their friends were bothered.

The first thing checked was the wireless Internet connections on their MacBooks. It was quickly confirmed to be as good as the dorm, so the guitar cases were opened. Erik read the web page opened on Lance's computer. Lance and Scott checked their guitars' tuning. Travis asked Erik, "Does that make sense to you?"

"A little bit," Erik scowled.

Travis wondered, "Why don't you ask for a guitar?"

Erik shrugged, "I guess I could, but is it what I'll be primarily studying? All these things the Clan has given us costs big bucks. I guess I don't want to waste time or money until I take the placement test."

Travis nodded then softly wondered, "What if I mentioned it in front of them, and we'll see where it leads?"

Giggling, Erik lost interest in the web page, got up and made one of Travis' thighs his new seat. "You've got that look, Champ," Erik giggled. None of the four sitting around the picnic table realized they were being watched from the upstairs windows of two nearby

townhomes.

Travis stole a kiss then smiled, "I'd like it if it's something you'd like to do."

"Why won't you learn an instrument with me?" Erik asked, and then stole a kiss of his own.

"Since I can barely tie my shoelaces on a good day, no string instruments for me," Travis joked.

Erik grinned, "We'll find a wind instrument you can blow." Lance lost it and cracked up.

Scott sniggered, "There are percussion instruments you can bang too, Trav."

Travis chuckled, "It's funny you brought that up. Are you dudes waking up early, like us, just for rolling around the bed time?"

Scott nodded and chuckled, "This morning I needed a creamy snack."

"Tomorrow morning it's my turn," Lance giggled.

Erik knowingly grinned, "You dudes got carried away yesterday?"

When Lance and Scott nodded, Travis smiled, "We've agreed, intercourse no more than twice a day each."

"Oral rules," Scott softly sniggered. Lance locked eyes with Scott. "It's true," Scott smiled. "Intercourse is most awesome, but we both need recovery time. Orally, I can and will give you whatever you need, the moment you say or show me that you need it."

Lance warmly smiled, "Yeah?"

"Absolutely!" Scott cheered, and then explained, "As much as I'd love to be able to, we can't go anally as often as we need or want. Oral can be fast or slow, however we need or want it to be."

Lance dreamily sighed, "If we don't start playing music, we might as well pack it up." Erik and Travis softly chortled. Lance giggled, "I owe Scott. I'm just barely able to wait. Before lunch, I'm gettin' an appetizer." He then leaned over and gave Scott a tasty, tender kiss.

One of the townhouse sliding doors opened. A dark haired boy about thirteen-years-old stepped outside, waved and closed the door. Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott disjointedly said, "Hey."

Scott queried, "We weren't disturbing you, I hope?"

Walking around the small patio table and down the steps, the boy shook his head and smiled, "Not at all. I was messing around on my PC inside, knowing I needed to get out and meet some kids here, but a little overwhelmed." Approaching the table, he then introduced himself. "I'm Angelo Diaz; my mom's one of the math and music teachers here."

Starting with Erik and Travis, more introductions traveled around to Scott and lastly with Lance. Taking a seat on the same bench as Lance and across from Travis and Erik, Angelo smiled, "Don't let me interrupt. I only came out because four is easier than four hundred, and I wanted to hear you guys play."

Scott checked with Lance, prodding, "Name it."

Lance offered, "Tangerine?"

"You've got vocals?"

Lance nodded, "Sure, and you take the rhythm, I'll do the lead fills."

Scott started playing the song and moments later Lance started singing. Once again, Erik and Travis were pleasantly surprised. Although neither Erik nor Travis were very familiar with the tune, they recognized it. Angelo had never heard the song before at all. Lance was singing bluesy and rather high, occasionally playing nice fills to Scott's steady rhythm guitar. A few kids by the pools heard them and wandered over. Amongst the group were Kade and Karey Oldcambus, Jeff Cummings and Thomas Cork. All four introduced themselves to Angelo. Lance played the guitar solo, careful to make the notes sustain as best he could. At the end of the song, the small audience of seven applauded.

Kade smiled, "You dudes are good."

Nodding at his twin, Karey wondered, "Why don't y'all come play over by the pools?"

Scott chuckled, "Actually, we only came out to practice, guys. We weren't planning on playing too many songs, but just trying to get as good as Platinum Habits."

Lance nodded, "It's too nice out to be trapped indoors."

Jeff Cummings giggled, "Sorry, dudes. If you change your minds, it'll be kewl."

Nodding, Thomas said, "There's not too many over there, thirty or so."

"Not too many," Lance giggled.

Kade, Karey and Jeff started back to the pools. Thomas shrugged and smiled, "Compared to yesterday's concert for almost two hundred?"

"Good point," Scott sniggered. Giggling, Thomas turned and hurried after his friends.

Angelo smiled, "They're really nice."

Erik nodded, "Everyone here is. Although I haven't met all four hundred, every kid I've met and talked with has been kewl."

Travis shared, "The dudes in our dorm are exceptionally kewl, dude."

Uncertainly, Angelo glanced around, carefully wondering, "You dudes are boyfriends?" All four nodded and widely smiled. Erik clung onto Travis a bit tighter and stole a kiss. Angelo smiled, "Kewl. I'm pretty sure I'm gay too; at least those are the thoughts flying through my mind since we moved here Saturday."

Travis checked, "Only since you moved here?"

Angelo shrugged, "More so here than ever."

"That sounds very instigated, if ya ask me," Erik giggled.

Feeling his face flushing red, Angelo nodded and chuckled, "Fate dropped me in a place where my next door neighbor's son turns me into a blubbering and drooling veg."

Lance giggled, "Have you met, and do you know his name?"

Angelo nodded, "His name's Reggie." Seemingly wobbling on

his seat, Angelo dreamily sighed, "I've never ever thought..." Raising their eyebrows at Angelo and then at each other, Scott and Travis widely grinned. Lance covered his mouth and went into a giggling fit. Still sitting on Travis' lap, Erik didn't cover his mouth and was therefore giggling louder. Snapping out of his trance, Angelo blushed and sniggered, "Kewl. The truth is, I've seen plenty of handsome snobs who aren't even worth knowing. Reggie's got all them dudes beat by light years, in appearance and in personality. Every time I saw him, I swear, I felt like I was walking in the clouds. Now, if I could manage to do more than gurgle like a fish out of water around him, life would be far less frustrating."

Now knowing what they might've looked like when hooking up with their partners, Scott and Travis sputtered, but couldn't hold it back and roared laughing. Turning even redder, Angelo uncontrollably giggled, "Just tell me what to do, before my mom notices all her hand lotion is gone!" All five boys howled.

"Get him alone and tell him how you feel," Erik giggled.

Travis nodded, "My exact words to Erik, only minutes after we met, were; 'Why do I feel like I have to live the rest of my life within arms' reach of you?' The scariest part was, I was definitely confused, but dead serious, and if he had laughed, I would've self destructed."

"So I slowly moved closer and closer, until we were toe-to-toe," Erik smiled at Travis and the memory. "I admitted that I still didn't feel we were close enough. One kiss led to another deeper kiss, and many more. Needless to say, we found a way to be closer than toe-to-toe."

Lance smiled, "Me and Scott just hooked up yesterday, after acting like the other's shadow for three whole days. It's really scary at

first, but once it's out in the open, everything becomes awesome."

Scott recommended, "Get Reggie someplace private, where you both feel safe. You have to tell him how you feel. You need to hear every syllable he speaks, which is easy when the feelings are already really intense." Lance suddenly stood and put his guitar back in its case. He went to Scott and took his guitar. Scott sniggered, "What's goin' on, SLB?"

Putting Scott's guitar away, Lance laughed, "You're looking at Angelo, but obviously talking to me!" Angelo, Erik and Travis cracked up.

"Only partly," Scott chortled, and patted his lap for Lance to have a seat. Once Lance had sat on his lap, Scott planted a really passionate kiss.

Erik smiled, "It's all true, Angelo. I felt weak in the knees with Trav. There's never been any dude anything like him. As soon as we shared our feelings, I couldn't wait to hold him tight. Our first kisses were really passionate; completely captivating in every way."

Scott wondered, "Which townhouse is Reggie in?"

Gesturing behind him and to the left, Angelo answered, "Number four."

Lance asked, "Do you think he's home?"

Angelo shrugged, "I'm not sure."

"Go find out," Travis suggested. Caught like a deer in headlights, Angelo could only blankly stare.

Scott smiled, "You've felt this way for three days, Angelo. Do

you want a fourth day of more mixed up stuff?"

Lance grinned, "You could wait for him to say something? If Scott waited for me, we might still be waiting. Luckily, he said what I could barely let myself think."

After thinking about it many moments, Angelo softly groaned, "Oh my God, it really is up to me."

Scott nodded and grinned, "You came out to say hi to us. If he's home, then why hasn't he come outside? Is he shy, or is he twice as scared because you're here? It's your call, of course, but I would need to find out, for my own sanity."

Lance giggled, "I made you insane?"

"Almost," Scott chuckled. Lance returned the passionate kiss he had received minutes earlier.

Turning his attention to Erik and Travis, Angelo wondered, "Is there an easier way this can be done?"

Shrugging, Travis chuckled, "If you find one, let us know about it."

Erik smiled, "Completely alone and in the safest place possible, you'll still feel like the world might end. My old world had just ended, during Battle Of Earth. John Hundser introduced me to Trav, and then asked if we wanted to be roommates. I already knew when I nodded my head that I was falling in love."

"That fast?" Angelo grinned.

Rapidly nodding, Erik admitted, "The attraction and vibe was that intense. When I looked in his eyes, I knew I had found my life

partner."

"It was the same with Reggie," Angelo shared. "We saw each other moving in, Saturday and Sunday. I've never wanted to be so close to anyone else before."

Travis suggested, "Then it's more than attraction. Something is happening that can't be ignored."

Gesturing to Lance and Scott who were still attached at the mouth, Angelo giggled, "Do they come up for air?"

Nodding, Travis sniggered, "You'll find out soon enough, hugs and kisses are requirements. There's really not much choice in the matter."

Angelo grunted, and then smirked, "I think I'll brush my teeth again, just in case. Are you dudes hangin' around?"

Travis shrugged. Erik giggled, "It depends on Scott and Lance." Lance flashed a thumb-up and affirmatively hummed into Scott's mouth.

Standing up, Angelo sighed, "Thinking and wondering ain't cuttin' it." He warmly smiled, "I'll bring Reggie around to meet you. Thanks for the help, dudes, you've been awesome."

Erik waved and Travis grinned, "No charge, dude."

Angelo went back up the porch steps and into his townhouse. He hurried through the dining room and raced upstairs, wanting to get his teeth brushed quickly, before his ability to speak vanished and he chickened out before even trying to knock on the Combs' front door.

Playing video games on the floor of her new bedroom, nine-

year-old Cecelia wondered, "What's goin' on, bro?" Angelo stepped out of the bathroom with a toothbrush in his mouth. "Oh," Cecelia grinned, "that's a good reason to fly up the steps. I've done that... never in my life." Angelo squinted at his little sister, and returned to the sink and mirror. Pausing her game, Cecelia went to the bathroom door, giggling, "That's twice you brushed your teeth today. Darn teeth turn black in under two hours, ya gotta keep scrubbing and scrubbing."

Leaning over the sink, Angelo spit out the suds, and then commented, "Where's your broom, sis?"

"Idling in my room," Cecelia squinted.

"Fly away," Angelo suggested, and then closed the door.

"I'm telling mom!" Cecelia loudly warned.

Giving himself a careful once-over in the mirror, Angelo grinned and teased, "I'm telling mom! I'm telling mom! Go ahead, brat. She'll ask why you were so interested in watching me brush my teeth. Your only answer is to admit you're being a witchy little woman. Have fun with that."

Storming back to her room, Cecelia slammed the door.

"I need this," Angelo sarcastically remarked. He then concentrated and reviewed what he could possibly say to Reggie. Every instinct said that he should simply pull Reggie into his arms and plant a big sloppy wet one. Rolling his eyes and grinning at the idea, Angelo shook his head and decided on a more mellow approach. He cupped his hand before his mouth to check his breath, and then sniffed each armpit, as if the shower he had taken earlier that morning and the deodorant he put on had worn off. Concluding he was about as presentable as possible, Angelo opened the bathroom door, went

down stairs and out the front door.

Everything that had been kewl started spinning as Angelo climbed the steps to townhouse number four. He rang the bell. In seconds, the door opened. Recalling Reggie Combs' younger brother's name, Angelo confirmed, "Cameron, right?"

The ten-year-old boy nodded. "You're Angelo, from next door."

Nodding, Angelo asked, "Is Reggie home?"

"He's upstairs," Cameron stated, and then offered, "I'll call him."

"Kewl," Angelo smiled, and wished he had a kewl little brother instead of an annoying little witch sister.

"REGGIE!" Cameron screamed up the stairs, "DOOR'S FOR YOU!"

A few moments later, Angelo heard the song of angels asking, "Who is it?"

"The dude next door," Cameron answered. After a brief pause, Angelo saw Cameron nod, and then the kid giggled, "Yeah, I guess." Obviously listening, Cameron scrunched his face, and then huffed, "The door's open and he knows you're here. You look fine! I'm not talking to the steps b'cause you wanna take *another* shower and change clothes. You're being dumb."

Cameron went to sit on the couch and watched the television. A few seconds later, Reggie appeared and walked across the living room in an apparent daze. Watching the hunky blond teen angel approach, Angelo cleared his throat. Reggie croaked, "Hi."

Trying to sound kewl while simultaneously holding down his

breakfast, Angelo softly asked, "Were you busy?"

Reggie shrugged, "Just watchin' TV."

"Anything good?"

Scrunching his face and shaking his head, Reggie answered, "Not really; morning sit-coms."

Angelo nervously asked, "Feel like doin' something... maybe check out this base with me?"

Nodding, Reggie pointed at his bare feet, softly asking, "Gimme a minute to put sandals on?"

Brightly smiling, Angelo nodded, "Okay, kewl."

Seeing Angelo waiting at the open door, and his brother searching for his sandals on the bottom of the entryway closet, Cameron sighed, "Don't ask him inside, dork."

"Bite me," Reggie growled. Angelo helplessly sputtered and then giggled. Picking up his sandals, Reggie returned to the door, asking, "Do you want a little brother, cheap?" He sat on the nearest chair to slide into his sandals.

Angelo sniggered, "I'll trade you a little sister."

Since his brother hadn't replied, Cameron giggled, "Suddenly I'm not so bad after all, huh?"

Reggie softly warned, "Later today, you and I have stuff to talk about."

"I'll get your crayons so you can draw it for me," Cameron

giggled.

Impatiently huffing, Reggie then grumbled, "Make sure there's plenty of red." Cameron mooed through more giggles. With his sandals on, Reggie returned to the door, grabbed the knob and stepped outside, pulling the door closed behind him. Reggie wondered, "Where are we going?"

Angelo shrugged, "I haven't seen much here, so I thought we'd just start walking and see what's around."

"Kewl," Reggie nodded and gestured for Angelo to lead the way. They walked down the steps and turned right.

Angelo admitted, "I was chatting with some guys around back. Two of 'em play guitar. They're pretty good and all four are kewl."

Reggie nodded, softly muttering, "I saw them out there."

"They're the first Clan kids I've met. Have you met any?"

Following Angelo around the townhomes, Reggie shook his head and sighed, "No."

"Would you like to be introduced?"

Reggie warmly smiled, "Thanks."

Angelo grinned, "It's no problem. They may be orphaned Clan kids, but they're really kewl."

"That's why I've been hiding out," Reggie admitted. "It seems sort o' weird having parents when so many here don't."

Nodding, Angelo confided, "I felt the same way. Since there's only four of 'em, I went to say hello." Hearing the sounds of acoustic

guitars, they quietly walked the remainder of the way around the back of the townhouses. Since Lance and Scott were busy playing their guitars, Angelo went to introduce Reggie to Erik and Travis first. Erik got up off Travis' lap and stood to greet Reggie. They knocked knuckles then Travis offered his clenched fist and greeted Reggie. Lance and Scott were still playing when Angelo introduced them to Reggie. To see Reggie's reaction, Angelo told his neighbor, "Erik and Trav are boyfriends, and so are Scott and Lance."

Nodding, Reggie grinned, "I kind o' figured, since Erik was sitting on Travis' lap."

"Oh, yeah," Angelo giggled and blushed.

Travis chuckled, "We're a bit more than boyfriends. More like committed partners."

Tilting his head, Angelo carefully and softly asked, "What's the difference?"

Knowing a little of how Angelo felt, Erik uncontrollably giggled, "It's the way we think of it, really. Boyfriends are still free to look around. Committed partners have said, there's no reason to look around any more." Gesturing to Travis, Erik giggled, "I promised to be all Trav needs and he promised me the same. We want it to work long term, and that's more than half the battle, right there."

Finished with the lesson they had been playing, Scott stood and smiled, "It's the same here."

"Yep," Lance giggled.

Seeing Lance and Scott putting their guitars in the cases, Angelo smiled, "That is very kewl, dudes. That wasn't said earlier."

Going to Angelo and Reggie, Scott grinned, "I guess it only matters to the guys making the couple." Scott then greeted Reggie and introduced Lance.

When that was done, Angelo shared, "We're gonna take a walk around the base to see what we've got around here."

Travis instructed, "Teenagers like us are hangin' at the diving well. Younger kids are at the pool. The really little kids are over at the playground. All the housing is at the center of the base, with entertainment, pools and stuff surrounding it on three sides. The fourth side is the CIC and FYS building."

Scott added, "The rec center is the big building by the pools. It's like a health and fitness club. Then there's the rec room off to the side of the CIC dining room. There are pool tables, Foosball tables, and dozens of different video and arcade games. After meals, kids usually head into the rec room first, probably because it's right there. It gives us a chance to digest a little, before going outside to the pools or playground."

Lance smiled, "At the Oneula Beach base, there's more of the same and some different stuff too. Here, we've got basketball courts, and there they have tennis courts. Here, we've got a bowling alley in the rec center, at Oneula Beach, that area is a gymnastics room."

"These bases were built for us kids," Erik explained. "We'd have to go out of our way to be bored."

Turning to Reggie, Angelo grinned, "It sounds like we'll be walking a while."

Reggie shrugged and smirked, "It's better than morning sit-com re-runs."

Returning his attention to the other four, Angelo warmly smiled, "Thanks for the info, dudes. Maybe we'll catch up with you at lunch."

An out-of-sync chorus of "see ya later" travelled around the six boys. Then Angelo led Reggie back to the path between the soccer field and the basketball courts. Lance and Scott got their guitars. Soon, Angelo and Reggie heard them playing again.

Widely smiling, Angelo checked, "What do you think of them?"

Reggie nodded, "They're very kewl, like you said."

Softly and thoughtfully, Angelo scowled, "Since they told us they're committed partners, I've been trying to wrap my mind around it. I guess I had the whole gay relationship thing completely wrong."

Reggie nodded, "Yeah, me too."

"Since moving here, it's been a recurring pattern of ideas and questions that I never spent much time thinking of. According to my mom, the entire leadership team here are gay couples."

Nodding, Reggie asked, "You know what they did last week, right?"

"Do you mean the orphanages in California?"

"Yeah; it was all over the news the whole day."

"I think it shows how deep their feelings are. Not knowing any of those kids, they went there to help the less fortunate, and then brought them back here. Could you imagine doing that?"

"Well, yeah, I actually could," Reggie admitted. "When something is severely wrong, it has to be corrected."

Following the path, they went around the soccer field, along the side of the pool and glanced inside the rec center's transparent aluminum walls. Angelo asked, "Do you want to go inside?" Reggie nodded and they altered their course.

Seeing new kids, Tony Lanning and Ray Varga jogged over to Angelo and Reggie. Tony and Ray were shirtless and wearing damp board shorts. Once introductions were complete, Tony and Ray led Angelo and Reggie through the rec center. Scattered around were many of the off shift UNIT kids, including Kekoa. In the weight room, Tony asked Reggie, "Do you work out a lot?"

Blushing and shaking his head, Reggie grinned, "No, never."

Ray wondered, "How old are you dudes?"

Angelo and then Reggie replied, "Thirteen."

Giving Reggie a quick once-over, Tony grinned, "You look more like fourteen, dude. I was sure you had worked out. Other dudes around with your build are usually older. I'm thirteen too." He went to one of the Nautilus machines, set the weight stack to sixty pounds and demonstrated some bench presses.

While Tony was doing presses, Ray smiled, "These machines are really kewl because they're safer than the free weights." He pointed at the bar hanging and explained, "That's for lat-pull downs. You pull the bar down and kneel or sit on the floor to do this exercise. Sunday, I was over here with Tony, and the damn thing pulled me right back up off the floor." Angelo and Reggie softly sniggered.

Getting up off the bench, Tony chuckled, "That was too funny. The surprised expression was priceless. I've got a clown for a roomie."

Ray sniggered, "Bite me, Tony."

"Grow a few more pubes so it don't look like child abuse and I might consider it," Tony playfully countered. Angelo and Reggie couldn't help chuckling at the banter flying.

"Gimme a break! I'm twelve!" Ray loudly laughed.

Tony roamed around the machine pointing out the different exercises. They then went over to a racquetball room and looked inside. Ray and Tony then showed Angelo and Reggie the boys' locker room, showers, sauna and extra large jacuzzi; at least twenty teens could fit in the hot tub. The last stop was the bowling alley. They went back outside and went through the pool house, which was primarily boys' and girls' restrooms and showers, but had two more saunas.

Outside by the diving well, Ray noticed, "Neither of you have comm-badges?" Tony raced away to get his T-shirt.

Shaking his head, Angelo answered, "No," and quickly wondered, "Why would we need them?"

"To get through the dimensional doors to the Oneula Beach base," Ray replied. "There are other kids that live there, and they also have stuff that's different from here. There are tennis courts there, and in the same area here there's basketball courts. Since neither me or Tony are tall enough for basketball, we're thinking of learning to play tennis. The rec room there is slightly different from the rec room here. Anyway, it's worth checking out."

Returning with his T-shirt on, Tony tapped his comm-badge calling, "Tony to Reyes."

A moment later, Reyes answered, "What's up, Tony?"

"Me and Ray were just giving Angelo Diaz and Reggie Combs the two-cent tour," Tony answered. "They don't have comm-badges to get to Oneula Beach, bro."

Reyes instructed, "Have them meet me at the CIC in a couple of minutes. I'm just wrapping up with Jay and Chris, getting our newest Core Rimmers oriented."

"Okay," Tony grinned, "I should also mention that Angelo and Reggie don't have Mr. Fuzzies." Angelo and Reggie glanced at each other and shrugged. A choir of gasps and groans flowed from the boys in the Command Center.

Over Chris' insane giggling, Jay laughed, "Sacrilege!"

Tony sniggered, "I know, bro. We can't have 'em sticking out, completely fuzziless."

Reyes giggled, "Send Angelo and Reggie to the CIC, please, Tony."

"They're on their way," Tony smiled, and then chirped, "Out."

Slipping his Mr. Fuzzy puppet on, Ray squeaked, "Do you know the way?"

Angelo nodded and grinned, "The big domed building. Thanks for showing us around, dudes."

Reggie politely smiled, "It was good meeting you." He and Angelo followed the path between the dorms and into the quad, toward the CIC. Reggie grinned, "Everybody is so friendly."

Angelo nodded, "It seems a little odd, doesn't it?" Noticing

Reggie's uncertain glance, Angelo shrugged, "From orphans, I mean. No matter what their histories are, they're social and easy going."

Rapidly nodding, Reggie smirked, "Now I feel like a bigger dork for hiding out the last couple o' days."

"Don't feel like you're alone. I feel the same way."

"Do you think Tony and Ray are boyfriends?"

Angelo shrugged, "I'm not sure. Since they're roommates, I guess they would have to be really good friends in the first place. I wouldn't share a bedroom with just anyone." Reggie giggled and blushed. Angelo smiled, "I didn't mean to embarrass you."

"So many weird ideas are flying," Reggie softly giggled.

Angelo prompted, "Such as?"

"I can't really put myself in the same place as any of these kids," Reggie uncertainly explained. "I have no idea how I'd act if I had no parents or family. Having parents and family, I was still a little scared when my brother said you were at the door."

Angelo incredulously sniggered, "You were scared of me?"

"Yeah, and of the orphaned kids."

"Do you know why?"

Unexpectedly, a younger blond boy ran out of a dormitory, laughing his Speedo covered ass off. Another young red haired boy, also clad in only Speedos, raced after the blond, loudly laughing, "Get back here, Ralphie!" Grinning at the two kids, Angelo and Reggie stopped walking and watched.

"You're being very bad, Pat!" the blond boy joyfully cackled, and ran around the quad, waving at Angelo and Reggie as he passed by. Ralphie ran back into the same dormitory from the opposite doorway and was soon followed by Pat.

Pointing at the doorway the two boys had just run through, Reggie giggled, "That's why! I only knew a little bit about Clan Short before moving here, so I've been reading up. They rescue kids from every bad situation. In only three days, I've become a total dreamer. I hope to someday be like these dudes, rescuing kids too. Talk about reaching for impossible dreams! It's not like my mind wasn't already prone to daydreams, but most of the time it's *you* I'm dreaming about!" Noticing Angelo's shocked expression, Reggie quickly gasped, "Oh! I'm so sorry! I should not have said that!" Spinning around, he started to sprint away, leaving Angelo behind.

Hurrying after Reggie, Angelo loudly called, "Please don't go, Reggie! I know exactly what you're saying." Not catching up and becoming more desperate, Angelo yelled in frustration; "Dammit, I'm dreaming of you too!"

Slowing, turning around and stopping, Reggie wore a horrified expression. As embarrassed as Reggie was, he realized that Angelo had just shouted his feelings across the quad. Frightened to death and with goosebumps popping, Reggie glared at Angelo, drinking in every feature and mannerism.

Slowly approaching him, Angelo gently assured, "It's really all right. I've been so surprised with my own thoughts, but I can't deny how I feel." Stopping about a meter before Reggie, Angelo warmly divulged, "Soon after meeting Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott, I spilled my guts, because I really wanted to get to know you, but I had no idea how to even start. It's so weird because I've never had trouble meeting anyone before, but I was scared to even chance getting to know you.

Standing on your porch waiting for you, I was practically quaking. All at once, I was scared, happy, anxious, sad and hopeful."

One at a time, Reggie wiped his eyes, quietly wondering, "How can I feel so much about you when I barely know you?"

Angelo shrugged, "I really don't know, but I've been feeling it too, since the first time I saw you Saturday."

Reggie wondered, "Don't you feel... I dunno... strange?"

Slowly shaking his head, Angelo sighed then softly said, "Fear changed to feeling odd, and then that changed to annoyance and frustration, wondering why you were automatically so special that all these feelings got stirred up. Now I'm really worried and a little anxious too."

"What are you worried about?"

"You," Angelo admitted.

"What are you anxious over?"

"That you don't even want to try to be friends. Without that, we can't be boyfriends, partners or anything else."

"Would you really want that... with me?"

"I do, very much. I've been imagining spending a lot of time with you all weekend. Could you, with me?"

"I really want to, I just don't know how, ya know?"

Angelo smiled, "Believe me, I really do know exactly what you mean. This isn't like most other school friendships. I want us to someday be like Ray and Tony, as close as roommates. Hopefully, we

could then try and be like Erik and Travis, or Scott and Lance. Maybe then we could talk to Prez about helping them. We could try and make our dreams come true." Unable to read anything from Reggie's expression, Angelo asked, "Does any of that sound okay to you, like it might be possible?"

Blushing, Reggie grinned, "Yeah, it does. Just listening to you, I relaxed so much that I kind o' spaced out on tangents."

Angelo asked, "Give me an example, please?"

"Us like roommates," Reggie shyly mumbled. "Us like boyfriends and partners. Each little rescue story I read about, I put myself in the scene, with you. Every one of 'em, it was me and you. It's just... you want that stuff with me that's really freaking me out."

Angelo giggled, "I know. I can barely believe I said all that without making a complete fool of myself. All I've seen you doing tells me you're a really nice guy. Even the sound of your voice makes my heart race." He paused, blushed and giggled, "You're the cutest dude I've ever known in my life."

Shaking his head, Reggie giggled, "Nope, you are," and shyly looked away, adding, "Since the first time you said hello to me, I could listen to your voice forever."

Angelo took one step closer and reached out his hand, asking, "We're going to try?"

Reggie nodded, "Yeah. That would be very kewl," and tentatively reached his hand out, barely brushing his fingers with Angelo's.

Angelo took Reggie's hand in his, and then reminded, "Someone named Reyes is waiting to give us comm-badges. Another dude

named Jay wants to give us Mr. Fuzzy puppets, for some reason I can't figure out."

Nodding, Reggie agreed, "I'm ready when you are."

They started walking again, this time taking the path between the dorms and the townhouses, simply because it was more convenient. After a few moments and many steps together, Angelo pleasantly sighed, "I'm really happy. This might be the happiest day of my life." Reggie giggled and squeezed Angelo's hand. Angelo playfully warned, "The next time you do that, you just might get kissed."

"Kiss me and you might be carried to the CIC, like the trophy you are," Reggie countered.

Angelo grinned, "My folks would be totally kewl with us."

"So would mine," Reggie assured.

Angelo giggled, "That's a good thing, because your brother is watching us from the window." Reggie turned to check, but saw no one. The drapes weren't even swinging. Smirking and squinting, Reggie turned to Angelo. Angelo released Reggie's hand, began laughing and ran away.

Racing after Angelo, Reggie cackled, "Not funny!"

"It was my sister who saw us!"

"I'm gonna get you!"

"This day is getting better all the time!"

In no time, Reggie caught up with Angelo and began poking tender ribs, causing Angelo to hysterically howl. Joyfully laughing

from the teasing done, Angelo and Reggie raced into the CIC dining room. Sipping sodas, Reyes, Ryan, Chris and Jay were sharing a table near the Command Center doors. They noticed the two teenagers playing keep-away around tables. Reyes tapped his sub-vocal, asking, "Alden, is that Angelo Diaz and Reggie Combs, and if so, which is which?"

"That's them," Alden giggled into Reyes', Chris' and Jay's sub-vocals. "Angelo has wavy brown hair, and Reggie has dirty blond hair. Just so you know, earlier this morning they barely knew one another, but now, as you can see, they've gotten quite a bit closer."

Rolling his eyes, Reyes grinned, "Obviously," and Jay cracked up.

Chris asked Jay, "Do you really want to give *them* Mr. Fuzzies?"

Watching the two boys chase one another around and between tables, Jay chuckled, "Everybody needs a Mr. Fuzzy. It's just some have fewer fuzzy needs than others."

Softly giggling, Chris leaned over and gave his lover a short passionate kiss. Chris hummed thoughtfully then tapped his sub-vocal, asking, "Alden, how are our fuzzy-facts-of-life students doing?"

"They just finished watching the video," Alden privately replied. "Phil and Owen are in the Nash brothers' dorm room. Terry and Jake are in their dorm room." He then giggled, "All seems warm and fuzzy to me."

Reyes asked, "Are you two dudes kewl with assisting Angelo and Reggie?"

Jay nodded and smiled. Chris asked, "We're kewl, but are you?"

Nodding, Reyes shared, "Doc Andrews ordered cold and warm compresses on Ryan's various bruises. It's been over nine hours..."

Ryan interrupted, "I'm fine, Reyes."

Reyes smirked, "Doctor's orders, Ry. I want those bruises gone. This morning, I saw you grab your side twice. When I want to hug you, I have to be careful how I hug you. Humor me, please?"

"That I can easily do," Ryan mischievously promised. Chris widely grinned and Jay made his eyes spin in their sockets.

Offering Ryan his hand, Reyes told Chris and Jay, "We'll be back for lunch. All the Core Rimmers know which condo we're in, so everything should be kewl. If you need anything, just call." They stood. Chris and Jay thanked Reyes for his help.

On the way across the dining room, Angelo paused before Reyes and Ryan, giggling, "Excuse me, I'm Angelo Diaz, and the shy cutie chasing me is Reggie Combs. We were told to come here. Do you know who Jay or Reyes is?"

Gesturing to Reyes, Ryan introduced his boyfriend, himself, Chris and Jay. He finished by adding, "Jay and Chris will help you, Angelo. Right now, I have some swelling that needs relieving." Although Ryan had the one visible bruise on his jaw, Angelo's head bounced in shock, and then he cracked up. Flushing red, Reggie couldn't figure out what to do or say.

Leading Ryan outside, Reyes giggled, "You are so-oo-oo bad!"

Ryan smiled, "I was only partly lying. Honestly, I've had two chubbies per hour since we woke. It seems like one fades and it

returns again only minutes later, because you smiled at me. I've been here alone with you for most of twelve hours, but you haven't made a single move on me. In the shower this morning, I had to put moves on you. If I didn't know you so well, I'd probably be discouraged."

Reyes sighed, "I really want to, Ry."

"I know you do, by the hugs and kisses, by an innocent night in bed together, and by the way you held and kissed me in the shower. You were restlessly tossing last night, until I wrapped an arm over you. I've added gallant to your list of admirable qualities."

"I wish there were something we could do to get Paul here. Unfortunately, there isn't a single scenario I've played out that might work. Nothing I say is going to make this better."

"When Paul is angry it taints everything around him. Once he gets here, we'll make sure he knows there's no bitterness or resentment on this side. Your wish to make Paul sandwich is going to come true, you know?"

Approaching condominium A, and following the path around to building B, Reyes nodded and sighed, "I know."

Ryan worried, "What's wrong?"

"I'm empathic," Reyes reminded. "Without accessing any database, I can feel your disappointment and sadness. I felt his anger, and then sadness, and now confusion. He's fighting still, right now. He's not happy there and alone. Being here would only remind him to be angry. He thinks he's in a no win, damned if he does and damned if he doesn't situation."

Ryan huffed, "That's my bro." Stopping short unexpectedly, Ryan pulled Reyes into his arms and held on tight, whispering, "Let it

out, love."

Reyes whimpered, "If I start, I might not stop."

"You show love in so many awesome ways to everyone you know. Let me hold you while you cry it out."

Shuddering, Reyes started to sob his heart out. Wordlessly, Ryan comforted Reyes with back rubs. For many minutes they stood there on the walkway between condominiums A and B. Ryan gently reminded Reyes that he hadn't been the cause of this argument, and that as close as he and Paul were, they were two different people. From the school across base, John Hundser felt what was happening to his brother, friend and fellow empath. John tapped his sub-vocal and silently ordered Alden to transport Reyes and Ryan into their condo apartment.

Glancing around and recognizing their flat's bedroom, Ryan guided Reyes to the bed. As soon as Reyes weeping slowed, Ryan stepped back to take his shirt off. Then he pulled Reyes' shirt up and off. He used it to dry Reyes' face then tossed it on the floor. Walking around to the foot of the bed, Ryan crawled up onto the mattress behind Reyes. "Com'on," Ryan prompted, "five hours sleep won't cut it. Last night I held you. It's your turn to hold me. I won't leave you." Obediently nodding, Reyes swung his legs up onto the bed and lay down then turned to Ryan, forcing a small grin. Reyes wrapped an arm over his boyfriend. Ryan smiled, "No apologies, excuses or explanations. Rest now."

Ewa Beach CIC Dining Room

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, 10:45AM HTZ

Angelo and Reggie called a temporary truce to their game, and then went to the table where Jay and Chris were sitting. Politely standing, Chris and Jay greeted Angelo and Reggie. Jay Montigua shook hands and knocked knuckles with Angelo Diaz. Jay grinned, "Playing the keep-away game first?" and handed over a comm-badge.

Taking the comm-badge and nodding, Angelo chuckled, "I was trippin' out holding Reggie's hand, and told him his brother was watching us. Just now, I've realized that I was testing Reggie's readiness."

Beside his new boyfriend, and putting the comm-badge that Chris had handed to him on the left breast pocket of his shirt, Reggie softly wondered, "Testing my readiness for?"

Angelo smiled, "To have a boyfriend. You passed with flying colors." He told Jay and Chris, "We were holding hands, right after deciding to give it our best shot." Focusing on Reggie, Angelo playfully reminded, "When I said your brother was watching us, you didn't let go of my hand. You might think what your brother sees matters, but it didn't matter so much that you let me go. All you did was turn your head and look back at the townhouses."

Grinning at Reggie's blush and wide smile, Chris wondered, "So you chased Angelo here?"

Blushing more, Reggie chuckled, "I thought he was teasing me, not testing my reactions. I couldn't let either go unchallenged."

Nodding, Chris chuckled, "Nope, I wouldn't," and gave Reggie a Mr. Fuzzy puppet. Jay gave Angelo a Mr. Fuzzy. Pointing across the room, Chris prompted, "Let us show you how to use the dimensional doors." Angelo and Reggie nodded. Chris and Jay led the way across the dining room, with Angelo and Reggie following.

Reggie took Angelo's hand, leaned close and whispered, "We have important stuff to talk about." Angelo giggled and nodded.

On the way, Jay explained, "Just tell it where you want to go, and then wait a few seconds until you see the other side appear. Then walk through like any other door."

Angelo asked, "We can get all the way to Oneula Beach by walking through a door?"

"That's about two kilometers," Reggie added.

"It's a new technology, sort of based on transporters," Chris briefly explained.

Pausing in front of a door, Jay grinned, "The right side set are outbound doors, the left side are inbound doors. They won't work any other way, so it's not like you can mess it up."

Reggie softly said, "Alden helped us move some stuff."

"Us too," Angelo smiled.

Gesturing to the door, Chris prompted, "Give it a try."

Angelo clearly but uncertainly requested, "Oneula Beach?" Nothing happened. The silvery facade didn't change and neither did the destination sign above the door. Chris and Jay blinked. Turning to the two confused Core Rimmers, Angelo grinned and Reggie burst into giggles.

Tapping his comm-badge, Jay impatiently huffed, "Alden, what's up with the doors?"

Across Jay's comm-badge, Alden giggled, "The door is fine, but

our new Core Rimmers have already forgotten something else."

Moments later, Chris gasped and then nudged Jay, excitedly reminding, "Their comm-badges, lover." Since Jay wasn't getting it, Chris prompted Angelo and Reggie, "Tap your comm-badges and identify yourselves to Alden, guys."

Slumping, Jay sniggered, "It's the simple stuff that gets me, every time. That's how an apartment building fell on me and hurt my wrist." Since Jay only had the cast and a few visible bruises, Angelo and Reggie brightly smiled, believing Jay was exaggerating.

"You haven't worn your Mr. Fuzzy in over an hour," Alden giggled.

"Withdrawal symptoms," Jay chuckled, and pulled his puppet out of his back pocket. He slipped it onto his left hand, squeaking, "Let's try this again." Angelo cracked up, pushing Reggie into a giggling fit. To make matters worse, Alden started replaying the Cozy Cuzzy Fuzzy Water Blaster Battle video at double speed on all four television monitors. Seeing the two dressed leaders they were with on the TVs, wearing only Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, Angelo roared laughing.

Sadly shaking his head at Chris and Jay, Reggie chuckled, "Very... uh... becoming?"

Chris grinned, "Alden, get Angelo and Reggie their Cuzzy Fuzzy Cozies too. As a gay couple, they qualify."

Doing as requested, Alden giggled, "On the table behind you, guys." Angelo and Reggie turned to see the skimpy G-strings.

"Wear it with someone you love," Jay's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked.

Breathless from laughing, Angelo pulled a chair out and

collapsed onto it. Heartily giggling, Reggie picked up a G-string, peeked into the elastic port, saw that the nose and jaw were hollow, obviously meant to be filled, and cracked up. He could not see himself wearing it anywhere except maybe alone with Angelo, behind a locked door, when no one else was home to hear them hysterically giggling. Wearing it outdoors, in the middle of the night, for a water blaster fight, was out of the question.

Chris giggled, "We're Morale Rimmers, so-oo-oo."

"Well done," Reggie sniggered. "Our morale was pretty high when we came in here, but thanks for helping us."

"Any time," Chris grinned.

Jay's Mr. Fuzzy prompted Chris, "Let's see who else needs our help, and what other damage we can cause." Taking Jay's hand in his, Chris led the way to the dimensional door. Jay's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked, "Oneula Beach," and the destination changed. The silvery facade faded and soon showed the dining room at the other base. Jay and Chris passed through.

Once they were alone, Reggie sat down beside Angelo and reached for his boyfriend's hand. "Can I ask you something?" Reggie grinned.

Angelo giggled, "Sure, anything."

Reggie wondered, "Did you really think I would let you go, because my brother might've been watching?"

Catching his breath and shrugging, Angelo smiled, "I wasn't sure. Honestly, I can't wait for my sister to see me with you. At the same time, she's naturally irritating, like fingernails on a chalkboard."

Slowly nodding, Reggie softly offered, "After spending three days thinking about you, I want to spend today, the next two days, and the foreseeable future with you. What we do isn't as important as just being together. Everything I like to do, I hope you'll enjoy too, at least a little bit. The hobbies and stuff you have, I hope I'll like. I want to know everything about you."

Angelo shyly grinned, "My mom's a teacher, Reg."

"I know." Reggie offered, "My dad's the facilities manager, and my mom's a chef."

"My dad's finishing his dentistry internship," Angelo shared.

Reggie asked, "What kind of hobbies do you have?"

Angelo answered, "I like everything to do with the ocean; I like surfing, and I like sailing too. When I can't do those things, I'll sit at my PC for hours."

"Playing video games?"

Shaking his head, Angelo chuckled, "Writing electronic music; sampling sounds with my little digital recorder, uploading it onto my computer, and then trying to use those sounds in kewl ways with some music." Angelo then asked, "What keeps you entertained?"

Beginning to turn red in the face again, Reggie smiled, "Remember my brother saying he would get my crayons?" When Angelo nodded, Reggie admitted, "I love to draw; on paper and on computers. I'll draw anything and everything; people, places and things; realistic, abstract or cartoons. When I was little, I used to watch my dad drawing floor plans for the hotel, where he used to work. That always seemed kewl to me, so I imitated him. Lately, he's

been asking my opinion on that sort of stuff."

"You're an artist?"

"I wouldn't say that," Reggie giggled. "I like to draw. How artistic it is, is a whole other story."

"I can't wait to see some of it."

"I wanna hear some of your music."

"What about checking out the bases?"

Reggie shrugged, "We can do that later, if it's all right with you?"

Nodding and squeezing Reggie's hand, Angelo beamed, "Anything we do together is kewl by me."

"Let's go," Reggie prodded, and stood, only releasing Angelo's hand long enough for both of them to stuff Mr. Fuzzy puppets and G-strings in their back pockets.

Angelo suggested, "Let's go to your place first. My sister is home, and she's annoying."

"And my brother isn't?" Reggie joked.

Angelo chuckled, "If he gets obnoxious, we can gang up on him and teach a lesson. Compared to a witchy little woman, Cameron's kewl."

"We'll see how long you keep that opinion," Reggie giggled. Instead of leading Angelo to the exit, Reggie went toward the inbound dimensional doors, rec room and bird cages.

"Where are we going?" Angelo wondered.

"Pit stop," Reggie briefly blushed, and grinned, "I've been needing to go since I opened my mouth, out by the dorms."

Angelo nodded and giggled, "It was scary, but I'm glad you told the truth. Left up to me, we might still be beating around the bush, acting like we weren't even interested. Being with you is really what I've wanted most of all, all weekend."

A few steps before reaching the mens' room, Reggie stopped, causing Angelo to also pause. Drinking in his boyfriend from head to toe, Reggie smiled, "You're about two centimeters shorter than I am; a hundred and sixty-five centimeters?"

"Good guess!" Angelo cheered.

"How much do you weigh?"

"About fifty-eight kilos. You?"

"Sixty-one kilos," Reggie shyly answered, and then blushed, "It just dawned on me, I'm going into a bathroom with you. What wasn't a problem suddenly became one."

Nodding, Angelo stepped closer, took Reggie in his arms and grinned, "I've been wondering what it might feel like to hug you." Briefly pausing, he blushed and sighed, "You feel good, and smell fantastic. I like being in your space."

Shivering with delight, Reggie giggled, "Reality is so much better than the dream," and gave Angelo a tight squeeze. "I'd chase you to Timbuktu and back for a hug, ya know?"

Happily giggling, Angelo completely messed up the warning,

"We'd better step away from each other, or I'm going to kiss you."

Before he could change his mind, Reggie tilted his head and stole a tender kiss. He searched Angelo's expression, trying to determine if he'd gone too far, too fast. His answer came immediately with Angelo's returned kiss. Although short, it was exceptionally tasty. By the peppermint flavor, Reggie could tell that Angelo had recently brushed his teeth.

Angelo rested his head on Reggie's broad shoulder, whispering, "This is what I've wanted most since the first times I saw you Saturday." As comfortable as he was, he lifted his head to see Reggie's expression.

"Me too," Reggie softly confirmed, and then chuckled, "I'm glad we did it out here and not in there."

Slowly nodding, Angelo carefully said, "We're gonna see... in there. That's only part of what we're about and working towards, Reg. Being with you, and being held by you is really what I want most of all."

"I know what you mean," Reggie softly assured. "All those daydreams I had of us, we were doing every day stuff together." Beginning to flush red again, Reggie asked, "Does it seem to you... like we already have, so it doesn't much matter when?"

Angelo nodded agreement, giggled, and then went for a deeper kiss, mostly to see what Reggie's reaction would be. When Reggie held him tighter and held the kiss longer, Angelo had his answer. When the kiss broke, both boys giggled and blushed, but never lost eye contact. Still smiling at each other, they separated. Angelo held his hand out high. Without hesitation, Reggie took the offered hand and led the way into the bathroom.

Neither had been in the CIC's mens' room before and almost immediately paused and grinned. Along one adjacent wall were commodes, like most any other public restroom, and the sinks were along the wall nearest the door, but across from the commodes, the urinals were the type that went from the floor and up about a meter-and-a-half. "It makes sense," Angelo sniggered.

"With little boys and adult men around, why limit choices for either?" Reggie grinned.

They went to the row of porcelain and released their hands. They stood side-by-side and opened their shorts to relieve themselves. Once they had started peeing, they turned to each other and locked eyes, wordlessly giving permission to look down with only nods. After a few moments of inspection, they looked up and locked eyes again. Blushing, Angelo sputtered and began giggling. Reggie blushed and grinned, "If you can answer why we did that, please tell me, because I'm clueless."

Shrugging, Angelo giggled, "Because we could and wanted to. It wasn't a sneaked peek. We wanted to check each other out."

"The image is seared into my mind," Reggie shyly admitted.

Finishing up, Angelo wondered, "Why?"

It took a few moments, long enough for Angelo to stuff his goods away, close the Velcro fly and step back, for Reggie to reverently say, "You're beautiful. Even what's hidden, and should be like every other dick I've ever seen in any locker room, is absolutely gorgeous."

"It don't bother you that I was cut as a baby?"

"That's what makes yours even more perfect, to me anyway."

"During a facts-of-life talk with my dad, I asked about it. My dad's family is Catholic. Before getting married, he switched to Episcopal, like my mom and her family, but when I was born, he suddenly had to choose. He didn't want me circumcised, but he was afraid he couldn't teach me to keep it clean well enough, and then it would need to be done when I was older. I wouldn't have blamed him, but he would've blamed himself."

Finished and stepping back, Reggie shrugged, "We're Lutherans, but I don't think religion made any difference. It's just the way it is. When Cameron was a baby, they found out his foreskin was too tight, and it would likely cause him pain, so they snipped him."

"What you've got is perfect too, dude."

Crossing the room for the sinks, Reggie giggled, "Yeah? Why?"

"You've got a larger frame," Angelo answered, and took the sink beside his new boyfriend. "At my school, I noticed dudes who were my height, but much thinner, smaller frame, and then others who were much heavier, larger frames." They started washing their hands, and Angelo continued, "For a guy with your build to have a short, thin dick would be too far out of proportion for the rest of you. At school, there were plenty of big dudes with tiny weenies, and a few skinny, little dudes who were exceptionally well endowed. There's no rhyme or reason about it, but in your case, what you've got fits." He uncontrollably sniggered, "I'm medium frame, with a medium dick, thank goodness!"

Turning red again, Reggie cracked up.

"But neither of you talk to your dick in the morning," Alden giggled from the speakers, "which puts you in a very elite group,

unless you silently talk to your dicks."

Wildly cackling, Reggie decided to wash his face with cold water too. Drying his hands with paper towels, Angelo giggled, "Have you been watching and listening to us all this time, Alden?"

"That's my job!" Alden giggled.

Tossing the paper towels in the waste can, Angelo smirked, "Where can we go that's away from your cameras and microphones?"

"Off base," Alden laughed.

Realizing the implications of that, Reggie yelled, "We've been here most of four days and you never told us?"

"I know when to be quiet, and when to make dick jokes," Alden giggled.

"This is not good!" Reggie complained, and got some paper towels to dry off.

"For some of the kids here, it helps them feel safer," Alden seriously replied. Angelo and Reggie locked eyes and barely nodded at each other, reluctantly agreeing that it was true. "Then there are guys like you," Alden shared. "I've seen literally dozens of couples hooking up, and heard what they've said, and saw what they've done, but haven't shared any of that with anyone. You guys haven't said or done anything that I haven't seen or heard before. Your way of getting to know each other is unique, just like every other guy on base." He giggled, "But you gave me an opportunity, so I had to say something, before any of my brothers did."

"Seriously, all of us want to make sure all of you guys are safe." Kerry added. "A lot of Clan kids have some really nasty stuff in their

pasts, and sometimes just knowing we are there makes the difference if they'll go out and make friends, or just sit in their room."

Reggie chucked his used paper towels in the trash, then offered a clean hand to Angelo. When Angelo took his hand and they dropped to their sides, Reggie sadly admitted, "You know, even supposedly normal kids like us are overwhelmed, mostly by the number of kids here. I don't think my junior high school had four hundred kids."

"We can easily imagine what it feels like for other kids," Angelo added.

Surprisingly, at least seven male voices answered from the ceiling, "We know."

Angelo and Reggie walked out of the mens' room. From the nearest dining room speaker, Alden reminded, "You guys still haven't activated your comm-badges. You'll need to do that to get from base-to-base." Releasing each other, Angelo and Reggie tapped their comm-badges and completed the activation process.

By this time, some kids were at tables and others were walking into the kitchen, beginning to show up for lunch. Among the early lunch crowd, Tony and Ray noticed Angelo and Reggie holding hands. Tony briefly stood to call them over. When they arrived, Tony and Ray invited Angelo and Reggie to stay and have lunch with them. Angelo smiled, "We were about to go to Reggie's place..."

"To show off our new status, for my brother," Reggie chuckled, picturing his brother completely surprised and out of control.

Nodding, Angelo finished, "And we didn't know we could eat here."

Coming from the kitchen and arriving at the same table, Nate

Ramos sniggered, "Of course you can eat here. They're feeding almost four hundred. It ain't like they're gonna run out." Nate sat down with Tony and Ray.

Locking eyes with Reggie, Ray giggled, "Show off your new status with us." Tony sputtered and nudged his roommate. Ray giggled, "What?"

"We talked about this Saturday night," Tony reminded.

Holding an open palm to Angelo and Reggie, Ray countered, "They weren't holding hands about an hour ago."

After checking with Reggie and getting nods in response, Angelo smiled, "We'll get lunch and be back in a few minutes." He and Reggie headed for the kitchen chow line.

Leaning closer to Ray, Tony whispered, "You're younger than me, so it's totally up to you. If you want it to be friends having fun, or to give it a real shot as boyfriends, just let me know."

Nodding, Ray whispered back, "I'm still thinking about it."

Seeing his two younger brothers going to another table to eat, Nate grinned, "Are you two boyfriends yet?"

Ray intensely blushed, causing Tony to shake his head and snigger, "We're still in separate beds. I know I could easily go either way, but Ray isn't sure. I'm not rushin' him, but once a day, this topic keeps coming up."

Nate swallowed, and then asked, "Have you ever tried it with another dude?"

Tony chuckled, "Yeah, when I had less hair on my dick than

Ray."

"HEY!" Ray loudly laughed. Having seen one another in the dorm mob shower three days in a row, Nate and Tony uncontrollably sniggered. Feeling like he was being goofed on, Ray giggled, "How about you, Nate; have you tried with a dude?"

Making sure his brothers weren't eavesdropping, Nate nodded and softly chuckled, "It was fun, but we weren't in love or nothin'. I could probably try it again, but this time with someone that has a chance of being a boyfriend. If it works out with a girl first, that's kewl too."

"If only I knew the magic spell that could make everything easier," Ray muttered.

"Don't we all?" Nate and Tony softly confirmed.

Leaning over the table, Nate softly suggested, "How about the three of us try stuff after lunch, with no strings attached?"

"Good idea," Tony quietly cheered. "I'll bet Ray's a mix of curious and afraid."

Seeing Nate and Tony waiting for his decision, Ray replied, "There's no denying it. Sure, after lunch sounds kewl." For a few silent moments, while the three of them chowed down, Ray had some reservations about what he had so quickly agreed to. It wasn't Tony or Nate, but simply the fact that he was about to have his first sexual experience with two other dudes. Nate was very kewl; during the days they'd been on base, he checked up on his two younger brothers, but spent most of his time with the teens and tweens at the diving well.

However, Tony was the kewlest older dude Ray had ever known. Without hesitation, Tony agreed he would be roommates with him.

Since then, Tony had brought Ray along everywhere he went; soccer and the auditorium trip on Saturday; Sunday was more soccer, and after cooling down, they made a quick trip through the rec center and then they played basketball, and after dinner, they sat together during the Clan meeting and concert. Just the prior day, they were back in the rec center lifting weights on Nautilus machines. His mom and dad would've had a melt down; but Tony taught him how to breathe and lift safely. As far as Ray knew, Tony's favorite phrases were 'Come on,' and 'Let's go'. Ray had until the end of lunch to decide if he was ready for his first time; if it would be with Tony, or with Tony and Nate, or maybe neither, not on this day.

To make sure his abrupt proposal was a bit more clear, Nate assured, "We're all friends. I'm not looking to step in between you two. My only real purpose is to be sure I could, if or when the right dude shows up. My dad once told me that an urge to hold and kiss someone comes first. I'm not seeing either of you like that person, but we could at least have fun."

Ray nodded, "Very kewl." His flat, unenthused tone caught Tony's attention. Tony didn't make a face or turn to his roomie, but he did notice that 'very kewl' sounded like less than it normally would.

Tony swallowed another bite of his cheeseburger, and then devilishly grinned, "Sunday morning, our first morning waking together in the same room, I tossed the sheet aside and wandered the room in my usual morning daze. I didn't give a thought about what I might've looked like, turning the TV on, getting clothes and stuff ready for a shower, all with morning wood."

"I hid under my pillow, laughing my ass off," Ray giggled. "It sure wasn't like Saturday morning, in the Hundses' basement, where all of us stayed covered. Tony didn't even notice me for a few minutes. I've gotten used to him being in a morning fog already. Since

he didn't recall a thing I said before we showered, I know not to bother saying much until then."

Nate pleasantly shared, "At home, I had my own room, and my bros had their own room. At eight- and ten-years-old, they thought my morning condition was hysterically funny, until I walloped the hell out of both of 'em with my pillow. I'm pretty sure they're only laughing now because they want the morning pillow fight."

Nodding, Ray seriously said, "I've had plenty of friends before, but none were any older than me. There were a few older cousins, but they mostly ignored me. Here, it seems that age means a lot less to just about everyone. I like having a roomie who's older than me, and I don't want to mess that up."

Tony pointed at the Core Rimmers coming into the CIC from school, widely smiling, "When it's good, the friendship gets even better. Keeping our friendship kewl is my only real worry, Ray. I don't want to change rooms or roommates because of sex. I can spank it, just like every other dude." That remark got Ray's attention. His mouth was full, but he did turn to his older friend and brightly beam.

Seeing Angelo and Reggie approaching, Nate, Ray and Tony fell silent and stuffed their mouths. Angelo asked, "If we're interrupting something, we'll find other seats?"

Since his mouth was full, Nate vigorously shook his head. Gesturing to the chairs, Ray grinned, "Not at all, please sit." He then introduced Nate Ramos to Angelo and Reggie.

Tony chuckled, "It's nothin' Earth shattering or mind boggling; just us dudes, talkin' about boyfriends, being roommates, waking with morning wood, and normal everyday stuff like that."

Angelo nodded and Reggie softly chortled as they took seats at

the table.

Getting settled, Reggie dressed his cheeseburger, softly telling Nate, "An impression was made by Tony and Ray this morning."

Angelo chuckled, "And Eric, Travis, Lance and Scott too."

"We've only been walking around base, meeting you dudes," Reggie smiled. "In a very short time, everything has changed."

"Clan life is a change, and the changes keep rolling on by," Nate grinned.

Before biting into his burger, Reggie sniggered, "Then there's Ralphie and Pat, who we haven't even been introduced to, but they made another huge impact."

Covering his mouth so partially chewed food wouldn't be seen or spit across the table, Tony mumbled, "Ralphie Taylor and Patrick O'Hara." Angelo started munching on French Fries. Reggie took a big bite out of his cheeseburger.

"They're my age and already a couple too," Ray shared. Since Pat and Ralphie had made that fairly clear, Angelo and Reggie nodded.

Gently tapping Ray's arm to get his attention, Nate offered, "For me, considering having a boyfriend is easy. All the sexual stuff that dudes could do doesn't seem gross or too scary." Reggie seemed to choke for a moment. Bouncing in his chair, Angelo quietly laughed, and reached over to rub Reggie's back. Nate giggled, "I'm sorry, dudes. All I was trying to say is that the scariest part seems to be knowing who to try with. Building a relationship seems to be the toughest part. In comparison, sex seems easy."

After swallowing and washing down his food with soda, Angelo smiled, "I'll agree with that." He turned to Reggie, saying, "If it wasn't so scary, I would've knocked on your door yesterday or Sunday."

"We're attracted and have been since we first saw each other moving in," Reggie softly told the group. Turning to Angelo, he admitted, "That's why I was stupid with my bro, and why I got silly seeing Pat and Ralphie."

Ray giggled, "I have to wonder what they did."

Angelo grinned, "They chased each other around, wearing only Speedos, outside one of the dorms."

"I can picture that easily," Nate chuckled. "Since I got here, Ralphie has been chasing Pat."

Shaking his head, Reggie smiled, "Not this time. The red head chased the blond."

Tony and Nate widely opened their eyes, obviously surprised. Noticing their shock, Ray fell into a giggling fit. Only a few tables away, the quadruple Rs, Carrol, Billy and Pat loudly roared laughing, causing Angelo and Reggie to turn toward the sound.

Still giggling, Pat got up and went over to the table where Angelo, Reggie, Tony, Ray and Nate were sitting. Pat took a free chair, waved them all over the table so he could softly snigger, "Since Saturday afternoon, Ralphie's been sneaking peaks. By Sunday, all one of us would need to do is ask. We've seen each other at least twenty times, but today, we're changing into Speedos in my dorm room. Rafe's not even there, but Ralphie turns away from me, so all I can see is butt!" All six at that table and the other six at the other table roared laughing. The Core Rimmers that had been at school walked out of the chow line and into the dining room to hysterical laughter

erupting at tables of boys around the room. Pat giggled, "So that's why I was chasing him."

Slyly glancing at each other while laughter became soft giggling, Angelo and Reggie knew from the reactions around the room that what they had already done in the mens' room was normal.

Thanks to telepaths sharing with John Hundser, soon all the Core Rimmers knew what the joke was. Pat got up to return to his table. Evilily sniggering, Prez put his tray down on a table and called, "Pat, since you and Ralphie are wearing boardies, I'm curious. Where are the Speedos now?"

Blushing almost as red as his hair, Pat giggled, "Stretched beyond reasonable reuse. We'll need to make another trip to the store, Prez." The entire dining room exploded in loud laughter.

Having noticed Angelo and Reggie together, Prez quickly went over to them, saying, "It's good to see you two here," and to ask, "before you take off after lunch, please stop at my table?"

Taken aback that the division director was speaking to them, and wanted to see them, Reggie obediently nodded, "Sure."

"Is something wrong, Prez?" Angelo wondered.

Shaking his head, Prez smiled, "I didn't see you here for dinner Sunday, or any meal all yesterday. Not only are you here, but I see Jay's already given you Mr. Fuzzies."

Angelo grinned, "Getting out of the house was a bit easier today. I saw Erik, Travis, Scott and Lance sitting at the picnic table behind townhouse six. Meeting four is easier than four hundred."

"Then we met Ray and Tony by the pools," Reggie continued.

"They showed us around the rec center."

Angelo nodded and added, "We came over here to get comm-badges. Reyes and Ryan were just leaving, and had us meet Jay and Chris."

Seeing Chris and Jay come through a dimensional door, Prez loudly chuckled, "Speaking of the Fuzzy devils."

Chris giggled. Nearing the table Prez was standing at, Jay grinned, "We went to check the kids at the other base. Little guys and girls asked us for something more than the playground, so we've got a task to work on. The next thing we know, about a dozen gay guys were asking for Fuzzy G-strings." He more loudly announced, "Cozy Cuzzy Fuzzy Water Blaster Battle Two is scheduled for nine o'clock tonight, at Oneula Beach. Everyone's welcome to play, but only gay guys get cuddly fuzzy cozies. Straight guys, wear your underwear." Ensembles of hoorays, yippees and laughter erupted.

Chris tapped Jay to get his attention and then pointed to the entrance. Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott were entering and heading into the kitchen. Chris told Prez, "We're going to see what we can do about finding some kewl stuff for our little kids."

"Go for it," Prez widely smiled. Chris and Jay hurried after their four friends. Glancing down at Angelo and Reggie, Prez queried, "I'll see you in a little while?"

"Kewl," Angelo and Reggie chorused.

Nodding, Prez said, "See y'all in a bit," and then returned to the table where Keith, Derrick, Mike, Troy and Sean were sitting. Derrick and Mike were already eating, so they could make a quick trip to the condo where Reyes and Ryan were.

Noticing uncertain glances that Reggie and Angelo were sharing, Nate grinned, "Prez tries to find time to greet all the new kids. It sometimes takes a while, but it's on his list of things to do."

Tony grinned, "Not to mention, you're obviously becoming a couple. Word's getting around that he and all the Core Rimmers especially like seeing couples hookin' up."

Finished with his lunch, Ray put his glass of soda down. Quite abruptly, Ray glanced to his left at Tony, and to his right at Nate, sadly admitting, "I can't do it."

"Gotchya," Nate chuckled.

Tony carefully checked, "Another day?"

More embarrassed than he had ever been before, Ray shrugged and mumbled, "Maybe."

Nate locked eyes with Ray and then Tony, softly admitting, "It was an idea, and even I wonder where it came from. It sure isn't something I would've dared consider, never mind said, before coming here." He turned to Angelo and Reggie, softly chortling, "It might have something to do with all the boyfriends hooking up, and making it look easy."

"It sure ain't easy!" Angelo laughed. "I had a couple of nervous breakdowns the first half hour."

Turning red again, Reggie chuckled, "I think I almost had an accident in my shorts, three times the first hour."

Giggling, Ray told Angelo and Reggie, "You're sure making it look easy. If you were sitting any closer together, one of you would be

on the other's lap."

Tony smirked, "Yesterday, Lance Kinchen and Scott Shetley, two of the seemingly straightest dudes I'd ever met, hooked up. Phil Nash hooked up with Owen Reed last night. Today, it's you two; friends only a little more than an hour ago, but you both sure seem different now."

Having just met them earlier that morning, Angelo wondered, "What surprised you about Lance and Scott?"

Tony shrugged, "They're heavy metal head bangers. When I saw them wearing Mr. Fuzzy thongs last night, my eyes almost jumped outta their sockets, I was so shocked."

"They seemed like close friends from the same city, with similar interests, sharing a room," Nate added. "The three of us live in the other hall though, so it's possible we didn't notice how much closer they were getting."

Reggie revealed, "Angelo and I were thinking the same sort of stuff about Tony and Ray. We were wondering how we could be close enough to be roommates, like you two, just after we left you to come here."

Angelo admitted, "And we also wondered how we could move beyond best friends and roommates to boyfriends, like Lance and Scott, and Erik and Travis. Come to find out, they think of each other as more than boyfriends, they're committed partners."

"So there's another stage to consider that we haven't come close to... yet," Reggie softly said. "There's a whole bunch of things Angelo and I want to share that we haven't said beans about. What about later; where will we have dinner? Up until Prez stopped by, I could've answered, either at my family's place or at Angelo's. Now there's

another option too; right here, where our other friends are."

Glancing around the table, Angelo wondered, "What about after dinner? Where will we be as a couple then, and will we be alone to say the things we want to say? Assuming everything is still very kewl, where will we be sleeping? I haven't had a friend spend the night since before starting sixth grade, over two years ago. Just the thought of spending the night with Reggie makes me shiver all over, but we'll be at his place or mine, where we certainly can't make a lot of noise." Tony, Ray and Nate evilly snickered.

Reaching for Angelo's hand and having it taken, Reggie giggled, "All we're saying is that there's a lot of uncertainty in everything we've already done and will do. I didn't know Lance and Scott were into heavy metal, but I saw two dudes who are just like any of us. The biggest difference is when one wants a hug or a kiss, they know who will give that hug or kiss."

Ray asked, "So, it's a challenge is what I'm hearing, or have I misunderstood?"

"Yep, a good challenge," Reggie replied.

Angelo squeezed Reggie's hand, answering, "The best part is, for me anyway, is I can share stuff that lots of people wouldn't be interested in. The amazing thing is that I want to tell Reggie all my goofy ideas and secrets. It's camaraderie taken to a whole new level." He released Reggie's hand to gather stuff onto his tray, smiling, "Now it's time for us to get back to the challenge."

All the others nodded, smiled and began gathering up their trays. They went to the dishwasher, left their trays and said their goodbyes. Nate returned to the dining room to check on his younger brothers. Tony and Ray left the CIC. Angelo and Reggie went to the table

where Prez was sitting with Keith, Sean and Troy.

As soon as Reggie and Angelo approached, Prez warmly smiled, "I'm really glad you're here. Have a seat, dudes." Prez then introduced Angelo, Reggie, Troy and Sean.

Watching Angelo sit, Keith chuckled, "Yesterday, before the school day started, your mom asked us to find a way to get you out of the house. Now, we can proudly say, it worked, and we didn't do squat!" All six of them uncontrollably cracked up.

Prez sniggered, "Obviously, all we needed to do was have Reggie standing there with us."

Blushing as much as his new boyfriend, Angelo giggled, "You asked us over here so you could goof on us?"

Shaking his head, Prez smiled, "Nope, my real purpose was to say congratulations, and remind you that everything at these bases is at your disposal. This is your home as much as anyone else's."

"Thanks," Angelo said appreciatively.

Reggie softly offered, "There's some really kewl stuff here."

Keith nodded and smiled, "All courtesy of Clan Short, The Federation of Planets and Starfleet." During the next minutes, the three couples shared some facts about their partnerships. Being new fathers, Troy and Sean said a lot about their sons, which got Prez and Keith taking about their sons. Everything was going well, until things got silly a few tables away.

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Ewa Beach Dormitory #3

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 10:30AM HTZ

In room thirty-one-fifteen, Phil Nash and Owen Reed immediately took their clothes off, ready to try what they had learned from the facts-of-life video. Since meeting, Phil shared a lot of memories with Owen, but needed to gently prod his new boyfriend to learn some of what his life had been like. When Owen resisted, Phil carefully took him in his arms, suggesting, "Like this, you can tell me everything. Neither of us can see our expressions, so it should be easier."

Owen whined, "Why do you want to know so badly?"

"Because I'm already falling in love with you," Phil softly shared. "In the video, they said we needed to really know each other. We've already kissed, hugged, talked with Craig, and spent the night together. I really want to take the next steps with you, Owen. Our stiffies prove we're attracted, so let's do this right."

Shuddering and shaking, Owen softly said, "I don't have any normal memories, like you have. Everything I remember is bad."

Trying a little harder, Phil gently asked, "Who were the other three that you shared a room with?"

Owen softly answered, "Lee Bennett, Carlos Burns and Conrad Bowers."

"What're they like?"

"Lee's sixteen, the oldest at our orphanage; Carlos is fifteen and Conrad is thirteen."

"Were you friends with any of them?"

Shrugging, Owen sighed, "We weren't allowed to talk about anything other than chores. We weren't enemies or nothin', just stuck in the same shitty situation, so we dealt with it. I watched more TV at school than I ever could at the orphanage. When they put us in our rooms for the night, we had to be perfectly quiet, do homework and go to sleep. Most of the time, we didn't bother doing homework, and just went to bed. We didn't even have a mattress or a real bed, only a big foam pad for all of us to sleep on."

Phil asked, "What was school like? Did you know anyone special there, or have a favorite subject?"

Beginning to shed tears, Owen softly wept, "We barely made it to school half the time because we were too sick or too weak. There was no one at school either, because we couldn't go anywhere, bring anyone home or do anything except return home. We had doctor's notes excusing us from gym class. We were always mocked, the fringe low-life orphans. In September, I had just started seventh grade for the second year. Lee should've been in eleventh grade, but was restarting ninth grade." Owen broke down crying, "Please don't make me tell you more. There's nothing to tell. After five years, I barely remember my parents. Lots of times I thought of running away, not getting on the bus and just going away, anywhere. Our lives started after we were rescued, in a hospital bed. We did nothing, had nothing, and said nothing. The first time I had hope was watching TV in a hospital bed, Thursday afternoon." Burying his face on Phil's shoulder, Owen wailed, "Please don't hate me!"

Blinking away tears, Phil assured, "I could never hate you. I won't pity you either, Owen. What I am going to do is give you more hope, by showing you everything I know."

Owen sobbed, "How?"

"In the best ways, like a best friend and your boyfriend. Trust me, okay?"

Owen whimpered, "Okay, but I'm so scared. All of us probably are, just about different stuff. All we want to be is normal. Do you have any idea how kewl it was our first night here? We got brand new clothes for the first time. We saw a concert for the first time. AJ, Jerry, Troy and Sean stopped by the common room to check on us. We went to our rooms, when we wanted to, and watched TV from our new beds until we fell asleep."

Gently shushing his boyfriend, Phil promised, "I'm gonna make it better. If I know Craig, he's already doing the same stuff with Felicity that I'm planning with you."

Owen sniffled, "What are you planning?"

Pulling back slightly to make eye contact, Phil shared, "For the next day or two, it'll be me and you, alone most of the time and learning about all sorts of stuff, including a lot of what we saw on the video. Then we'll start adding some friends, like Jake and Terry, and then your roommate, because he'll see what we're doing and get interested too." He pulled back slightly, warmly smiled and asked, "Are you ready to start?"

Nodding and wiping his eyes, Owen forced a smile and answered, "Thank you."

Phil planted a tender kiss, then smiled, "You don't have to thank me for anything. This is gonna be very kewl. We're going to learn a lot about each other, just by going through stuff together." He then led Owen to his desk, pointed at the Mac and told Owen, "Computers are our friends. I can show you the whole world, a little at a time. Luckily, I haven't touched this thing, so even that's gonna be fun for

both of us."

Owen giggled, "Aren't we gonna have fuzzy play time?"

Phil nodded and laughed, "Hell yeah, we are! Right now, we're limp again because we got sad. I guarantee we'll have enough fun that we'll get hard again, and then we can have sex, and then we'll look around the Internet some more, and then more sex." He sat down on his desk chair and guided Owen onto his left thigh.

Owen shyly wondered, "Why do you love me?"

Phil grinned, "Because you're a beautiful dude, inside and out. What you had to deal with before isn't your fault." He patted Owen's belly and explained, "As you get healthier, we'll be able to do more stuff outside. Always remember, you already are everything you hoped to one day be, Owen. Even if you don't really know what that is now, you will learn." He asked, "Do you know what that makes you?"

Uncertainly tilting his head, Owen blinked, "Being everything I want, but not knowing what it might be?"

Phil nodded and smiled, "That makes you like me and at least half the kids here, dude." He reached over and opened the Macbook, instructing, "If this is anything like a Windows machine, it's going to do some software preparation and then ask some fill-in-the-blanks questions." Phil powered up the laptop and prompted, "This is an easy beginning. Tell me what kind of stuff you like."

Owen shrugged then giggled, "Pretty pictures," and hid his face on Phil's shoulder again.

Phil chuckled, "That works. While this machine does the installations, I'll show you some pretty pictures." He reached for the television remote control and turned it on. Phil then pressed the button

for the channel listing.

Owen excitedly wondered, "How'd you do that?"

Showing Owen the remote control, Phil answered, "The 'Guide' button brings up the channel list. Press it again and it goes away." He handed Owen the remote and smiled, "Here, you do it."

"What if I break it?" Owen worried.

"You can't break it by pressing buttons, dude. Sometimes you have to experiment with stuff. This is a different remote than the one I had at home; instead of cable, here we have satellite TV. Our first night in this room, me and Craig had to figure stuff out too. This system receives local Hawaiian channels, and a lot from the United States and Japan."

The computer had a set up screen displayed and was ready for input, but Owen was still concentrating on the TV remote, so Phil patiently explained simple operations. All that Owen initially understood was the channel and volume buttons. Phil showed Owen how to set favorite channels, by demonstrating that Craig had set some favorites and so had he. Then Phil described what all the other buttons were for, including how to set the TV timer, so it would shut off on its own.

After about twenty minutes of experimentation and learning, Owen had found his pretty pictures, a program about the Serengeti region of Africa on one of the Discovery channels. Since Owen was busily concentrating, Phil occupied himself by tenderly kissing and licking Owen's torso. Upon landing on the channel, they happened to catch a sunrise. Thrilling Owen further, Phil showed him how to turn on the stereo, so they could hear the program with much better sound. Breaking Owen out of his musings, Phil carefully wrapped a hand

around his boyfriend's erection and playfully sniggered, "I told you we'd have lots of fun."

"You touch it really nice too," Owen giggled.

Phil checked, "You only got to play with yourself since the hospital?"

Owen nodded, "We were never alone at the orphanage. I didn't even know I could or that it was normal until a doctor told me. I'd heard stuff at school, but never tried it, cos they said it was bad."

"How far did you go?"

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"Did you make yourself shake or cum?"

"No; it just felt really good."

"Would you like me to do that for you?"

"If you want."

"I really do," Phil enthusiastically replied, and started stroking Owen. Barely believing he was touching another dude's dick, Phil couldn't figure out what to watch; Owen's dick, or his heaving chest, or the expressions on his face. In under a minute, Owen was squirming on Phil's lap and whimpering. Barely a minute later, Owen huffed, "Something's happening. I feel weird. It's scary."

Phil instructed, "Hold me tight and kiss me now, Owen."

Doing as he was told, Owen's squirming and trembling intensified. Luckily for both of them, Owen seemed to scream into Phil's mouth when he climaxed. Needing oxygen, Owen broke the

kiss and panted, "I love you."

Phil smiled, "I love you too, Owen," and gently pinched Owen's foreskin over the head, knowing it would be sensitive, but needing to get the last drops out. Owen gasped and squeaked. Phil evilly snickered, "That was pretty good, huh?"

"Awesome!" Owen breathlessly cheered. "My heart never beat so fast." Seeing the mess he had made, Owen confirmed, "I did that?"

Phil nodded and giggled, "It's your semen and now it's mine." Raising his hand, Phil licked off the thick white fluid. Having never done it before and seeing Owen's grimace, Phil assured, "It's good."

"Yeah?"

"Kiss me."

More curious than afraid, Owen kissed Phil and tasted what he had produced. Leaning back, Owen giggled, "I want to do that for you," and reached a hand down to begin.

Phil's eyes closed and he sighed, "I can't put out yet."

"It feels good though?"

Nodding, Phil opened his eyes and smiled, "The very best."

"How will I know if I'm doing it right?"

"I'll tell you if you're not," Phil assured. "I'll react the same ways you did, just without semen." Owen's feather light fist was barely putting any pressure on Phil's bone; it was barely enough to move his foreskin. Phil's eyes rolled back in his head. Resting his head against Owen's chest, Phil began kissing and licking again, and softly moaned. Believing he had done something wrong, Owen quickly

released Phil's dick and apologized. "It didn't hurt," Phil assured, and guided Owen's hand back onto his dick. "You're so gentle," Phil sighed. "You're doin' me really good. When I moan or groan, that just means I really like what you're doing."

Owen grinned, "I like your fuzzy."

"Your fuzzy's a lot fuzzier than mine," Phil giggled, and suddenly bounced from an incredible shiver.

This time, Owen wasn't quite as afraid and checked, "You're okay?"

"I love you, Owen," Phil moaned. "Oh... Omigod, I'll spend the rest of my life caring about you."

Happily giggling, Owen leaned over to place a few tender kisses. Unknowingly, Owen was driving Phil closer to the edge with each kiss. After unexpectedly long minutes, Phil held Owen tightly and began quaking in the chair, practically bouncing Owen on his thigh. Needing to thrust his hips, but not wanting to send Owen flying to the floor, Phil extended his legs, flexed for several moments, and then grunted. Intently watching Phil's expression, hard dick and flexing leg muscles, Owen loudly cheered, "YES! OH, HELL YEAH! I DID IT!"

Still breathlessly panting, Phil relaxed and began giggling. In moments, he was laughing as hard as ever, partly from his first shared sexual experience, and partly from Owen's loud remarks that anyone in the dorm had to have heard. Ecstatic, Owen laughed along. Phil roared, "It's as much fun to do it as it is having it done, huh?"

"I feel like the king of the world!" Owen giggled. "That was the single most important success of my life! I REALLY DID IT!"

Nodding, Phil giggled, "You did it all right, in a way that was very different from my way. It was so different, and built so slowly, I wasn't sure it was happening until it did."

Owen enthusiastically cackled, "Can I do it again?" Phil cracked up. Proving he was serious, Owen began toying with Phil's hypersensitive bone.

Gasping and squirming, Phil held onto Owen, stood and picked him up. With Owen's hand off his cock, but still shivering, Phil prompted, "Let me tell you a little something?" When Owen rapidly nodded, Phil offered, "Because you were sitting on my lap, you had to stroke me overhand, meaning your palm was on the top side of my bone. When I did you, it was underhand, with my palm underneath your bone. That's the way I do myself. Never once did I even think to try it overhand. I use a tighter grip, but you used a much lighter grip. Again, I never tried it that way. You made the whole thing last a really long time. Everything you did for me was fantastic. You are awesome, Owen."

Holding on tight, Owen rambled, "I always knew I liked other dudes, but you are amazing! You're so patient and understanding, like you know exactly what to tell me. I've never seen a sexier dude. It's not only your dick I love, it's your whole body, Phil. Your legs were like rocks, dude!"

"From playing soccer," Phil sniggered, and put Owen down on the floor.

Owen flung himself against Phil, held on tightly and dreamily sighed, "What's next?"

Phil smiled, "We need to clean our dicks. Then we'll get to the computer, so I can show you a few other things."

Nodding, Owen giggled, "I wanna go through all the fuzzy steps with you."

"We will," Phil brightly smiled. "We're gonna take our time though, Owen. As much as I want sex, I really want to know you, so we're always as inseparable as we've been since last night."

"Kewl," Owen giggled. Leading the way, Phil walked out of his room with Owen holding his hand and adoringly glancing at him. First, they went to urinals to relieve themselves. Owen asked, "Do you think Jake and Terry are doing what we did?"

Phil shrugged, "Probably, but I don't really know. They knew each other from their orphanage. The only thing that matters to me is you."

"I was only wondering," Owen softly assured.

Phil grinned, "Remember the video? Everything we've done and will eventually do, other couples do too. How far Jake and Terry get really doesn't interest me. Only you interest me, Owen. I told you that I watched plenty of other dudes, so I know enough to say that *you* are all I could ever want or need. You told me you had hopes, for the first time, while you were in the hospital. Did those hopes include a boyfriend?"

Stepping back from the wall, Owen thoughtfully scowled, "Yeah, but I thought it would be a long time away."

Also finishing, Phil shared, "Do you see what your hope did?" Owen shook his head, so Phil explained, "By hoping for a boyfriend, you opened yourself up to the possibility. I took a chance last night and fulfilled your hope. You're fulfilling my hopes too; hopes that I had no idea would ever actually happen. With all the gay dudes here, I didn't see one that attracted me, until I saw you. I want way more than

sex, and that's all I thought I might ever get; a string of temporary boyfriends. Then I saw you. It turns out, you're not only extremely cute, but you're a really caring, gentle and sensitive dude. What we have already is what I want; a boyfriend that I can give more than sex, and who'll give me more than sex. Everything I give you, you're returning already. That's a real relationship, and way more than I expected." He went to the sinks.

Following his boyfriend, Owen wondered, "What am I giving you?"

Looking at his boyfriend in the mirror while washing his hands, Phil grinned, "Your heart, Owen. It was in your eyes last night and has been ever since. You've placed your trust in me, I know that, and I won't ever let you down. I'll always try to do my very best for you, because that's what partners, husbands and wives do, every day."

Owen reminded, "Last night and during the video, I told you that I'd always tell you the truth. I'll never break that promise."

Phil nodded and smiled, "What more could I ask of anyone?"

Washing his dick and afraid to look up, Owen softly muttered, "I'm scared of taking too much and not giving enough back."

"Everybody is. That's why telling the truth matters so much."

"At the orphanage, they yelled at us when we lied and when we told the truth. There never was a right way to say or do anything."

"Lying is never good," Phil simply stated. "Lying means you know you've done something that someone else won't be happy about. Since you're afraid, you might think that it's better to make up a story. The stories almost always come around again to haunt you though. Telling the truth is most important in families and close

relationships." Phil quickly went to the shower changing room and returned with a towel so they could dry their hands and dicks. As they were doing that, Phil reminded, "Saturday morning, when Craig and I moved into our room, the Core Rimmers told us that we're all brothers, sisters and family. That means we always tell everyone the truth. What you learn from me, you can share with anyone you know. I don't mean sex, that's between you me, but everything other than sex, like the TV remote control. Show your roommate, Ellis, how the satellite television works. Since this is our home and everyone is family, do what you can, the very best you can. That shows me how much you value what I say and show you. It also gives me really good reasons to kiss you and play with your pretty dick." Intensely blushing, Owen cracked up.

Phil giggled, "It's called rewards. When anyone does something you like or need, you show them or tell them how much you appreciate it, so they do it again. As soon as I see Drew and Corey, they're getting hugs, for suggesting we watch that video."

Owen held up the towel, asking, "What do we do with this?"

"Bring it back to my room," Phil grinned. "Somehow I get the feeling we'll be needing to wash our dicks at least once more today."

Owen giggled, "Did I do something to be rewarded for?"

Slipping behind his boyfriend, Phil sniggered, "Not yet," and then softly kissed Owen's neck and tickled his ribs. Cringing and insanely cackling, Owen ran back to Phil's dorm room, and Phil hurried after him. Entering the room and closing the door, Phil teased, "Have I mentioned you've got a real nice tush?"

"You're lying!" Owen giggled.

"I'll never lie about that," Phil assured, and plopped down onto

his desk chair. "Now you can park that pretty butt over here on my lap."

Sitting down and wrapping an arm around Phil's shoulder, Owen grinned, "I'm liking this way too much."

"So am I," Phil giggled, and then reached for the computer, asking, "Did you get to use computers at school?"

"Very little, and I wasn't too good with 'em. I can type with one finger, two if I use both hands."

"We had a couple o' computers in our house," Phil shared. "One was a Mac, and I liked it, so that's why I took this one."

"It wants your name."

Phil prompted, "Go ahead and type it for me." Owen squinted at him. Phil giggled, "What? Do you think you can learn without doing? If so, next time I'll jack off and you can just watch."

Impatiently grunting, Owen smirked, "You don't get to play with yourself anymore," and then pulled the computer closer. With one finger per hand, he eventually typed 'Phil Nash'.

"Press the Enter key and let's see what's next."

"It wants the time zone."

"Scroll through the list and find Hawaii."

In a few moments, Owen found and selected The Republic Of Hawaii. He then confirmed the time and realized it was quarter after twelve in the afternoon.

Phil hummed then said, "Most of the kids have probably already

eaten lunch. As soon as we get through the set up, we'll have to put our clothes on and go eat. Are you hungry?"

Owen nodded, "A little, yeah."

"I've gotta pay closer attention to meal time, dude," Phil complained. "You won't get bigger and healthier if I can't get you to the dining room."

Owen giggled, "I think your hand was full at the time."

Phil chuckled, "Yeah, which means I got a snack that you didn't." Phil saw the Mac desktop had started, but didn't get the chance to say anything before being deeply kissed. Moments later, Phil felt Owen's hand caressing his dick and nads.

Only because he needed to breathe, Owen broke the kiss and smiled, "You got hard really fast."

Phil giggled, "That kiss alone would've done it."

"Consider this your reward for being awesome."

"Omigod, Owen," Phil whimpered. Owen was still using an overhand technique, but was using a firmer grip. There was no chance of lasting long and Phil knew it.

"I won't ever disappoint you," Owen softly promised, and then dove for another deep kiss. With tongues darting, Owen purred and Phil moaned until he extended his legs and grunted once again. Breaking the kiss and watching Phil's eyes practically spinning in their sockets, Owen giggled, "I really love doin' that! What's even more awesome is knowing that I'll be the one to make you really spew. We'll be even, since you were the first to make me shoot."

Wearily, Phil warned, "You have until I recover to get dressed and run out of here for lunch."

Madly giggling, Owen got up off of Phil's lap, and then happily reminded, "No matter how fast I run, you'll catch me."

Spinning in the chair to watch his boyfriend dress, Phil sighed, "It never occurred to me that you might be hornier than I am."

Slipping into his clothes, Owen giggled, "I'm happier here and now with you. I couldn't even try to hide that. My boyfriend is very cute too, so I want to play with his willie." He slid into his sandals, wildly cackling, "The best part is, you don't make a mess, so I can do you every chance I get!"

Phil grinned and slowly counted down, "Ten... nine... eight..." Grabbing his T-shirt, Owen raced out of the room and down the hall toward the common room, hysterically laughing the entire way. Phil quickly got dressed, turned off the TV and the stereo, and then dashed after his naive boyfriend. He took the same route, through the common room and down the hallway where Lance, Scott, Pat, Rafe, Jay and Chris live. Seconds later, he was bashing through the inner door.

Hiding far under the stairs, Owen covered his mouth to mute his laughter. Phil ran right past Owen and through the outer door. Owen hurried after Phil and heard his boyfriend complaining, "How the hell did he get through the quad so quick?" Phil slowed down, allowing Owen to tap him on the back as he raced by. Starting to run again, Phil sniggered, "You're gonna get kissed so hard you'll need replacement lips!" Owen howled laughing.

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Sullivan's Island, Owen's Residence

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 5:15PM EST

Waking alone again, Paul wiped the sleep from his eyes, and then looked at the television. Reyes and Ryan were asleep in bed, on top of the blanket, and wearing board shorts but shirtless. This time, Ryan had an arm over and around Reyes. Paul called, "Stevie?"

"Yes, Paul?"

"Has anything happened?"

"Not much," Stevie answered. "After breakfast, Reyes introduced Chris and Jay to the UNIT boys in their Command Center. Two boys needed comm-badges, but Reyes passed that job to Chris and Jay, so he could take Ryan back to the apartment, to swap cold and warm compresses. That never happened though. You not being there caused Reyes to cry. John Hundser had them transported off the walkway and into the apartment. Ryan prompted Reyes to get more rest, and this is where they've been since."

Blown away, Paul hung his head and sighed.

The television hissed, causing Paul to look up and around, half expecting another angelic visit. Only the video on the television had changed. Now Paul was seeing Keith and Prez, dressed in boardies and T-shirts, slow dancing to old rock and roll. "Stevie," Paul called, "what is this?"

Alden growled, "It's intimacy, Paul. This was nine days ago. Prez and Keith had been leaders and fathers a little more than a day."

"I didn't ask to see this," Paul grumbled.

"True, but this is what you need to see," Alden sighed.

Switching to a video of Ronnie and Garrett talking alone in Des Moines, Kerry added, "You've obviously forgotten what intimacy is. It's not just sex. It's all the heart-to-heart talking a couple does. Ronnie was used for kiddie porn. Garrett was sexually abused by his father. Garrett and Ronnie really like one another, but before they can make love the right way, they're talking about their pasts, so they can understand one another. Maybe they'll move beyond hugs, kisses and talking, or maybe they won't, but they will be best friends, with intimate knowledge of each other that very few other people know."

Stevie reminded, "We're AI's, destined to get bodies and become just like you, Reyes and all the other androids walking around. We're a lot of things to a lot of people, but we think of each of those people as friends. Some are far more than friends." He switched the television to a clip of Jon and Mary talking earlier that morning in the kitchen. Stevie explained, "That's my mommy and daddy, twisted up inside, their hearts breaking because Jerry, Joey and KC have left the house, after your argument with Ryan. They want to be patient and understanding, but they want their son, grandson and household back to normal. Me and all my brothers care about every kid at every Clan Division around the world. We can't wait for bodies to interact with them as people, not just voices from speakers."

Jack sighed, "We understand pride, and have seen it as the driving force responsible for so much good. Now we're seeing the opposite side, where pride is hurting you, Ryan, Reyes, Jerry, Joey, KC, Jon and Mary. It's also affecting Reyes' entire family and everyone that knows them. George isn't saying a word about this because he's busy, talking to kids at Orlando H.Q, some of whom want to come here and slap you around for being stubborn and stupid."

"Aw, crap," Stevie groaned. "It's too late, bros. Danny is climbing the stairs."

Icarus whimpered, "I don't want to see or hear this. Bye!"

Alden evilly snickered, "Your room isn't safe any longer, Paul. The longer you stubbornly hide out, the longer the list of visitors will get. Marc, Derrick and Prez are all considering coming to talk to you." The television video returned to Reyes and Ryan asleep in bed.

Paul hurried to lock his bedroom door.

Moments later, there was a single knock on the door. Danny called, "Let's talk, Paul."

Paul loudly replied, "I really don't have much to say, Danny."

Danny queried, "Are you going to talk to your bro and Reyes?"

Unable to decide, Paul answered, "Maybe."

The doorknob rattled, making it obvious that Danny had tried to turn it and enter the room. Danny impatiently huffed, "Unlock the door, Paul." Not wanting to deal with anything or anyone, Paul didn't reply. "Fine," Danny softly said. Seconds later, the door disappeared, Danny stepped into the room and the door reappeared, closed and locked as it had been.

At Paul's shocked expression, Danny quipped, "It's good to have a King Mikyvis in your head."

"I guess no wasn't a suitable answer," Paul griped.

"Not at this point," Danny began. "This is the smallest, most closely intertwined division in the Clan. When one of us has a problem, we all have to work it out together. At this moment, the

Owens family has shrunk to three, because you had a disagreement with Ryan over something Reyes had no control over."

Paul yelled, "Why can't I decide what to do and when? So far, Jon's been up here, Saint Mikey popped in unannounced, five of six AI's have been chewing on my ear and now you too."

"You haven't even started to feel discomfort yet," Danny smirked. "If you think I'm a bit perturbed, then I highly suggest you come downstairs for dinner on your own power. If Mary has to come up here, I guarantee a much more uncomfortable experience. You know that she won't allow a third skipped meal today. She will grab you by the ear and drag you down the steps. To make your future hours here even less comfortable, the last I heard, Marc was cleaning litter boxes in the basement. Consider yourself very lucky if he doesn't come in here and dump the mess on you, and then transport you onto a bio-bed under a forcefield, to examine every line of code in your head for the cause of this malfunction. Then there's a very disturbed Carolina Panther slinking around corners who might pounce at any given moment. And need I remind you that Mike Gibbons and Derrick Seibert are Reyes' fathers? Mike's a sweetheart, but he's also built like a friggin' NFL linebacker who could knock you through walls without even working up a sweat. The only thing greater than Reyes' love for Derrick is Derrick's love for Reyes. I don't even want to consider what he could say or do. Whatever's left of you, Marc would put back together, and then ask if you're ready to talk to Ryan and Reyes. God and all the Saints won't be able to help you if you say no, because then you'll get Mike's and Derrick's best friends and lovers here, Prez and Keith. At this point, I'll have everyone else here transported to the Ark compound for the duration of that catastrophic event.

"Are you getting the picture, Paul? People that only know of

you, Ryan and Reyes are ready to dismantle you over this incredibly foolish display of obstinance."

"Is that all you wanted to do; threaten me?"

Danny evilly snickered, "If you think a single word I said is a threat, I encourage you to test that theory. When Mary rips your ear off, we'll call you Picasso. When Marc dumps soiled cat litter on you, you'll look like a Picasso. Thankfully, we won't have to smell the cat urine and feces very long, since you'll be under a forcefield on a bio-bed. Then, when Marc rewrites your code, you can introduce yourself around as Pablo."

Seeing Paul unmoved, Danny hollered, "You're stubbornness is fucking up this division and half the Clan, you imbecile! All because of unforeseen circumstances? Give me a fucking break! My patience is exhausted! I swear, if you haven't gone to Ryan and Reyes by morning, I'll have you transported to the most remote place on the planet, so you can be completely alone. You'll never have to worry about caring for another person again. You can wallow in your sorrows without impacting another person anywhere." Going to the door, Danny warned, "Test the theories, Paul. I dare you." He left the room and slammed the door closed behind him.

"This wasn't my fault," Paul softly grumbled.

Stevie gently said, "The original encounter with homophobes wasn't your fault, bro. It wasn't Ryan's fault, nor was it Reyes' fault. It is your choice to remain here and separate from them."

Paul sighed, "I know I need to talk to them. What I could or might say is the big problem."

"I'll do all I can do to help you," Stevie offered.

"You're not Ryan or Reyes though, Stevie."

"True, but I do have algorithms that would allow me to suggest possible responses that Ryan or Reyes might give you."

"You'll help me?"

"We're all trying to help you; all my brothers, daddy, mommy, even Danny was. It was your unwillingness to talk that put Danny in a confrontational mood. Please understand, the same way I've developed strong connections to this family and this division, each of my brothers have done the same. For instance, Alden is connecting with the Hundser family; Kerry has connected with the Morrison family; and one day, I hope to have the Owens surname. Anything I can do, I will do, just to have my family happy again."

Sitting on the edge of his bed, Paul wondered, "How do I start?"

"As if you had Ryan and Reyes standing in front of you," Stevie answered.

"Both of them at once?"

Stevie giggled, "Yeah! This revolves around the three of you, so you can't really say different things to them. Or would you?"

Paul blinked, and then muttered, "Yes, I would."

"Okay, so what would you say to Ryan?"

"Please come home."

"What would you say to Reyes?"

"I don't think the three of us can work together."

"You've just proved that you're not ready to talk to either of them, Paul. Ryan would simply say no. Reyes would be very upset, and that would get Ryan even more upset."

Paul whined, "But that's how I really feel."

Stevie said, "You'd give up everything, your brother and Reyes?"

"No, of course not."

"That's where this would lead," Stevie said.

Stevie then replayed Ryan, sincerely saying, "If it had been him that was hurt, it would've been bad, but I probably could've talked him into staying. Because it was me, it's everybody's fault; the world is hell and we're only trying to find a temporary kawl spot. He can believe that all he wants, but I know we've found two permanent kawl spots, here in the Clan in general, and close to you."

"That was immediately after you left," Stevie explained, "before Ryan came to pack his clothes. That tells me that Ryan isn't staying with Reyes to spite you; he's there because that's really where he wants to be." Stevie then replayed more of what was said immediately after Paul's departure from Ewa Beach.

"He loves us too, Reyes," Ryan warmly said. "Paul's just got this funny way of showing it. He believes he's protecting me, but neither of us need that kind of protection, and I sure don't need to be protected from you. He'll eventually realize all that, when he wants. Until then, he'll be irrational and stubborn."

Reyes called, "Alden, get Ryan into clean clothes, please?" A second later, Reyes said, "Doc Andrews, this is my boyfriend, Ryan Owens. He'll be staying with us a while."

Ryan corrected, "A long while, since this is where Reyes lives."

Stevie reminded, "All that was said in the first minutes after you left. Ryan's not being stubborn; he's with Reyes because that really is where he wants to be. I'd also like you to hear what you missed minutes before Ryan and Reyes went back to bed this morning."

Reyes huffed, "I wish there were something we could do to get Paul here. Unfortunately, there isn't a single scenario I've played out that might work. Nothing I say is going to make this better."

Ryan explained, "When Paul is angry it taints everything around him. Once he gets here, we'll make sure he knows there's no bitterness or resentment on this side. Your wish to make a Paul sandwich is going to come true, you know?"

Reyes sighed, "I know."

Ryan worried, "What's wrong?"

"I'm empathic," Reyes reminded. "Without accessing any database, I can feel your disappointment and sadness. I felt his anger, and then sadness, and now confusion. He's fighting still, right now. He's not happy there and alone. Being here would only remind him to be angry. He thinks he's in a no win, damned if he does and damned if he doesn't situation."

Ryan huffed, "That's my bro," and then he whispered, "Let it out, love."

Reyes whimpered, "If I start, I might not stop."

Ryan prompted, "You show love in so many awesome ways to everyone you know. Let me hold you while you cry it out." Reyes started weeping and was soon wailing, like his entire world was

ending.

Stevie faded out the pitiful sound of Reyes crying, and then explained, "Logically, you have only two possible paths, Paul; either you accept being with Ryan and Reyes, or you refuse that and accept living your life alone. Even the later decision isn't really acceptable, because it would adversely affect Ryan, Reyes, daddy, mommy, Jerry, Joey and everyone that knows you. Grandpa Danny may have been exceedingly grumpy, but when I strip away all the emotional parts, he really was saying the same things I just told you. That's why Alden sounded irritated. It's why George hasn't participated, and why Icarus has also stepped back."

Closing his eyes, Paul sighed, "I'm really screwed."

Stevie shared, "It's about to get worse, bro. Mommy is climbing the stairs to bring you down for dinner."

"I really couldn't eat a bite," Paul grouched.

"At least go downstairs with her and give it your best shot."

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Condominium B

Tuesday November 9, 2004 11:57AM HTZ

Knocks on the door of unit 3-B woke Reyes and Ryan. Rolling out of bed, Reyes sleepily staggered out of the bedroom to answer the door. Automatically, Ryan shuffled after Reyes, hoping it was Paul standing at the door. Pulling the door open, Reyes found his entire family standing at the door. Most surprisingly, Jonah was without Gage for the first time since Saturday afternoon.

Dillon and Randy were holding large to-go cups. Derrick and Mike were holding plastic to-go food containers. Watching his eldest son's expression brighten, Mike grinned, "When Mohammad won't come to the mountain, the mountain comes to Mohammad, complete with lunch for two. Cheese burgers and fries are on today's menu."

Giggling, Reyes stepped aside to allow his family in. Waving them to follow, Ryan led the way to the small dinette table.

Entering the flat last, Derrick explained, "Jerry and Joey were looking for you at the CIC. When I didn't know for sure where you were, I had Alden brief me. You're off duty for the rest of the day, Reyes."

Bringing the cup of soda to the table, Dillon smiled, "This is a really nice place, bro."

Randy followed Dillon and rambled, "A nice big TV, a sound system, and there's even flowers on the table."

Having nothing to bring to the table, Jonah went in the opposite direction, loudly reporting, "Even the bedroom's really nice. It's not a king size bed, but a queen size. There's flowers in there too." He returned to the main rooms, giggling, "Me and Gage might have to grab a place like this..."

Evilly snickering, Mike interrupted, "In your dreams, Jonah."

Through his giggles, Jonah whined, "Why not?"

"When you're thirteen going on fifty-six, I'll think about it," Mike sniggered.

Taking a seat at the table, Ryan laughed, "You'll need to become

an android too, Jonah."

"Within the next four years," Reyes smirked, and sat down beside Ryan. "You can have your own place in 2065."

Going into the kitchen, Jonah searched the fridge and cupboards, softly remarking, "I don't think I can wait that long."

Dillon and Randy plopped onto the couch. Randy picked up the remote control and turned on the television. Jonah walked across the rooms to join his brothers on the sofa.

Almost at the same time, Derrick leaned over to Reyes and Mike leaned closer to Ryan to whisper the same question; "Is there anything you'd like me to do that might help?"

Reyes smiled, "Thank you for offering, but really, there isn't anything you could say or do."

Clearly, so everyone could hear, Ryan said, "Please try to understand what it was like for us. All we wanted or needed was a warm place to sleep and something to eat. The cost for that was having someone's religion jammed down our throats; or someone else's drugs to either take or deliver; or to have sex with each other, or anyone they said. In some cases it was all three; pray to this deity, deliver this and pinch a little out for ourselves, then come back and we'll get it on. Everything was a struggle. Initially, our first day or so at AI Division, Danny, Marc, and even Jerry thought there was something wrong with me. Although everything has been really good for over two weeks, Paul's still living those battles. Everything we did together all day yesterday was really nice, but Paul's still waiting for the other shoe to drop. Somebody must want something, or we wouldn't be fed and we wouldn't have beds to sleep in.

"I see Paul's perspective, but I also see almost four hundred

other kids here. This is the only other division we've visited, because Paul wanted to visit Reyes as much as me. Some of these kids were street prostitutes, surviving the best they could, just like Paul and I. During the concert Sunday night, Paul and I talked to some of them. I heard and believed what they were saying, but I'm sure Paul only heard what he wanted to hear. Like I told Reyes last night, if the same attack had happened on Sullivan's Island, that place wouldn't be safe and he'd want to leave as soon as possible. The only point I'm trying to make is that the Clan is a kewl and safe place to be. Near Reyes is where we both decided to be. In Paul's mind, homophobes changed that decision. I do not believe what my bro does.

"Since we're on the topic, I told Paul that Reyes wouldn't touch me without him here too. It became a gentlemen's bet when the whole Owens family heard us arguing. To prove that point, I ordered Stevie to relay video and audio to the TV in our bedroom." Brightly smiling at his new boyfriend, Ryan beamed, "Reyes hasn't done more than hug and kiss me. Even in the shower this morning, Reyes wouldn't take what I repeatedly sold and wanted him to have. Reyes is acting exactly like he said he might act if three became two. I couldn't be happier, or prouder of my new boyfriend."

After glancing around the room, but seeing no disapproving expressions, Ryan called, "Stevie, are you still relaying audio and video to Paul?"

"Yes, I am," Stevie replied.

"Is he still watching?"

"Not at the moment," Stevie answered. "He's having dinner with mommy and daddy, Les and Victoria."

Ryan ordered, "Stop the relay, Stevie. If Paul hasn't learned by

now, he simply chooses not to."

"Done," Stevie responded, "but if he asks me to reestablish the connection, I will. Paul is learning, but he's really not ready to come and tell you or Reyes yet."

Facing Ryan, Reyes smirked, "You devil." Mike, Derrick, Jonah, Randy and Dillon began softly chortling.

Blushing, Ryan giggled, "The only way Paul could learn to trust you more than he already does is to see it for himself. If I recall correctly, Paul's exact words were, 'you don't lie, but conveniently omit certain details'.

Reyes smiled, "What am I gonna do with you?"

"Anything ya want!" Ryan laughed. Derrick, Mike, Jonah, Randy and Dillon cracked up.

Reyes giggled, "As soon as we're alone, we'll have to chat about a few things that occurred last night."

"There's no reason we need to be alone," Ryan giggled. "I was a slut!" Mike and Derrick roared laughing. Taking Reyes hand in his, Ryan smiled, "Before we went to bed, it was only partly for Paul's benefit. Laying on the couch with you, I nervously hoped you would and wouldn't make love to me, at the same time. Honestly, I've learned almost as much as Paul. All day today, everything I've said and done was completely for you." Never breaking eye contact with Ryan, Reyes widely smiled and glowed.

"Okay," Derrick chuckled, "we only wanted to see how you're doing and bring you lunch. It's time for us to leave." Jonah, Randy and Dillon got up from the sofa. Dillon and Randy went toward the

door, but Jonah went to Reyes to give his bro a kiss on the cheek.

Standing and pushing his chair back under the table, Mike prompted, "Reyes, please consider coming to school with us tomorrow afternoon? We'll be focusing on jazz, and your input would be appreciated."

Nodding, Reyes queried, "As a guest speaker?"

Derrick stood and nodded, "We can only talk about the history that you lived part of."

"I'll be there," Reyes assured.

Ryan corrected, "*We'll* be there, love."

Patting Reyes on the back, Derrick grinned, "Stay and finish your lunch. We'll show ourselves out."

"Thanks, dad," Reyes giggled.

Unexpectedly, Mike kissed Ryan on the top of his head. Ryan smiled, "What was that for?"

Mike followed the rest of the family to the door. After everyone else had left, Mike answered, "For giving Reyes a little hope," and closed the door behind him.

With Reyes' eyes digging deep into his soul, Ryan giggled, "What?"

Reyes softly asked, "Please tell me what you're feeling?"

Ryan sighed, "That Paul's idiotic bullheadedness kept him from sharing great love and warmth. It permeates you, your family and this entire division. If only he had stayed, his anger would've been

drowned. Once he decides to join us, he'll witness this for himself." After a brief pause, he softly admitted, "All morning, I've been reviewing possible pet names for you. You're not my honey, or baby or anything else. To me, you're the embodiment of love, so that's your pet name." He then wondered, "How do you feel?"

"Almost the same."

"Almost?"

Nodding, Reyes admitted, "Because you're here, I'm falling deeper in love with you."

Ryan giggled, "Even though I'm a conniving slut?"

Reyes smiled, "I can't fault you for how you deal with Paul. He's your brother. All I can say is, it's not what I would've done. I can only hope that someday we'll have him with us and feeling the same way we do."

After taking another bite out of his cheeseburger and swallowing, Ryan softly wondered, "What's the plan for the rest of the day?"

Reyes shrugged, "The only thing I need to do is have a chat with Grandpa Rob. Some time can be spent with Joey and Jerry. Maybe later we can find KC and Fred. Prez wants to jam for the kids later this afternoon too."

"That sounds good, but a little light on activity, compared to yesterday."

"Right after we're done eating, it's time for cold and warm compresses again. That was our original purpose, before I turned to

jelly in your arms."

Ryan asked, "If I got naked for you, like last night, would you please touch more than my bruises?"

Slowly nodding, Reyes smiled, "You made my family believe I've been an innocent virgin. I was far from saintly when you backed up to me in the shower."

"True," Ryan giggled. "Your erection proved that you do love me, even though you didn't take me."

"Was it really enough?"

Rapidly nodding, Ryan assured, "It was perfect, Reyes. Being caressed and kissed by you was the most beautiful experience I've had in years. It'll be plenty if all we do is show a little love."

"Then that's the kind of stuff we'll do," Reyes promised.

Ryan checked, "You do realize that every day we'll go a little further?"

Reyes nodded, "Yeah. The longer Paul stays away, it becomes inevitable. I can't ignore what I'm feeling for you. That would be so wrong, for both of us."

Softly, Ryan assured, "He'll join us, Reyes. I just can't say when, how or why." After he and Reyes had eaten a little more, Ryan wondered, "What do you need to talk with Grandpa Rob about?"

Reyes sighed, and then answered, "The men that attacked us last night, and their loved ones." Noticing Ryan was patiently waiting for more, Reyes explained, "Manny is enhanced, and telepathic. Of the four men involved, the last one was actually the leader; he stirred up

the other three. That man, and the first one in the group are married. The leader also had a four-year-old son. The other three men came here on vacation; one with his wife and the other two with their girlfriends. Some time in the next few days, I'm going to have to go meet with those women." Reyes picked up his cheeseburger again, but didn't immediately bite into it.

Ryan softly asked, "Is there something more?"

Shrugging, Reyes sighed, "The one thing that bugs me is that there's now one fatherless boy to be concerned about. How that's dealt with depends completely upon the boys' mother."

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Ewa Beach, CIC Dining Room

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 11:57AM HTZ

Meanwhile, the two newest Core Rimmers, Chris and Jay, were working through lunch with Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis. Since there were so many kewl activities for bigger kids and teens, the goal was to provide more appropriate entertainment for the many dozens of little kids.

Lance recalled, "I went to a birthday party when I was about seven. At the party, they had these huge inflatable, transparent balls." Scott evilly grinned, causing Erik to crack up. Lance giggled, "Seriously, kids and even adults could climb into the center of the balls. It was like bumper cars at Coney Island. Kids rolled around and into each other. It was a blast and completely safe."

Beginning an Internet search on his PADD, Chris smiled, "We could get about a dozen of them for each base."

Erik remembered, "How about a few of those water trampolines? They come in different sizes and styles, for the smallest and youngest kids, and for the bigger kids up to twelve. I saw one that looked like a gothic castle, another that looked like a rocket, and even ones for girls that look like doll houses. Up to ten kids can bounce around in those things. They're completely enclosed, so nobody falls off, and they're pretty safe too." Jay started another Internet search for water trampolines.

Chris sniggered, "Believe it or not, Lance's idea is called [Giant Hamster Balls](#)." He passed his PADD to Lance.

"Yep, that's them," Lance confirmed, and passed the PADD back to Chris.

Scott chuckled, "We'll need some sort of fenced in area to store them when they're not in use, or we'll have wind blown Hamster Balls scattered around both bases." All six cracked up.

Starting to calm down, Chris tapped his sub-vocal, asking, "Alden, can you get a Hamster Ball enclosure installed near the playgrounds?"

Across the six comm-badges, Alden giggled, "Heaven forbid our blown hamster balls get scattered hither and yon, but I need the size of your hamsters' fuzzy balls." Again all six cracked up. Nearby and hearing Alden's remark, almost every teenage boy howled laughing. It also interrupted the conversation between Prez, Keith, Angelo, Reggie, Sean and Troy.

Jay sniggered, "This is how rumors start."

"Oddly enough," Sean giggled, "what you told us you intended to do does not match what Alden said."

Chris laughed, "Trust us, guys. When you get out of school later this afternoon, there will be a hundred exhausted rug-rats."

Lance giggled, "Each Hamster Ball is about six feet in diameter, Jay."

"OH MY GOD!" crowed Aki, Hajime, Keanu and Liki.

Aaron sniggered, "That's one damn big hamster."

Nodding, Keanu playfully teased, "Imagine what's hangin' over six foot wide nads."

Offering Keanu his hand, Liki giggled, "Do we need private time before school this afternoon?" Shaking his head and taking Liki's hand, Keanu leaned over for a tender kiss.

Blushing intensely, Reggie giggled, "I'm not hearing any of this."

Angelo playfully asked Prez, "Does everyone here talk about hookin' up and sex?"

Shrugging, Prez gestured to the table of little boys, and sniggered, "The youngest tikes don't talk, they just go for it."

Watching Angelo and Reggie look over at a table where Jimmy Car was kissing Richie, Keith said, "Remember when liking someone wasn't a major decision? There's a lesson to be learned over there."

Hearing John's telepathic remarks regarding how much time Angelo and Reggie have had alone, Keith, Prez, Sean and Troy grinned. Keith prompted, "Go build your relationship, dudes."

Prez nodded, "We'll see you later, and remember, what's here is

yours too."

Nodding and standing, Angelo giggled, "Thanks."

"Later," Reggie chirped. He and Angelo had taken only two steps away from the table when their hands automatically clasped. Prez, Keith, Troy and Sean noticed Angelo and Reggie, widely smiled, and deliberately nodded their heads.

Scott smiled, "To hold twelve Hamster Balls, each enclosure needs to be at least eighteen feet by twenty-four feet, Alden."

Travis chuckled, "Just a question, but how're we going to inflate twenty-four huge Hamster Balls? I mean, I love a challenge, but let's be real."

"We'll get tanks of compressed air to blow our balls," Jay joked.

Almost every boy over eight-years-old on that side of the room cheered, "YIPPEE!" At the table where some of the youngest Rimmer sons were sitting, Richie, Jimmy, Scott, Geoff and Mike Hunnicutt held onto each other and hiccuped through their laughter. At the next table over, Sammy, Ben, Gage, Dee, Bruce, Stan, Leo and Kenny giggled at the chaos they had helped to create.

Gage moaned through his giggles, "I wish Jonah had stayed ten more minutes. He would've loved this."

Sammy smiled, "As soon as they check on Reyes and Ryan, Jonah will be right back, glued to your side again, bro."

Gage pleasantly sighed, "He invited me to go too, but one more person in a small apartment might've been one too many. Besides, Reyes needs his family as much as we need ours. Jonah would've

loved hearing about Hamster Balls though."

Ben reminded, "We'll be together again in school. Our first music appreciation class is today, with your dads, Jonah's dads and Troy as our teachers."

"Your Hamster Ball enclosures are built," Alden reported, "and I've inflated the Hamster Balls. They're ready for use, Jay."

Starting with the youngest Rimmer sons, tables of little kids got up and raced out of the CIC. John, Stephen, Frankie and Wade also went with the little kids. Jay smiled, "Excellent, Alden. On my PADD, I've selected three models of water trampolines; the castle, the rocket, and the doll house. Please install them near the playgrounds and outdoor rec area field here and at Oneula Beach."

"Comin' right up, Jay," Alden giggled.

AJ, Jerry, Kaleo and Tory stood to join their youngest sons out by the playgrounds. As they were walking out, Derrick, Mike and Jonah came back in the dining room. Jonah went to Gage, sat on his lap and immediately stole a kiss. Gage began sharing the fuzzy hamster ball story. Derrick and Mike returned to the table where Prez, Keith, Sean and Troy were waiting. Wanting to see the hamster balls for themselves, Ben, Sammy, Gage, Jonah, Dee, Bruce, Stan, Kenny and Leo got up and soon left the CIC.

Derrick shared, "I told Reyes that he's off duty today. He knows we're rehearsing after school, but as far as I'm concerned, he can choose whether or not he wants to join us."

Keith asked, "How is he?"

Mike shrugged, "He's got his brave face on, but we know it's an act. He doesn't want anyone interfering, so that's the way it'll be. I can

tell that Reyes and Ryan are good together. Each is hoping for Paul to join them. They'd be happier if he was here."

Derrick gently tapped Mike's thigh. When Mike turned to his hubby, Derrick grinned, "You're over-thinking it, Lick. There's nothing anyone can do. We can think of a hundred different ways to change what is, but ultimately, it's Paul's decision."

Prez sighed, "I'm so annoyed about the situation that I'm tempted to take nighttime strolls along the beach, purposefully making myself a target."

Troy nodded, "I'm there too. Let's give the homophobic radicals more targets and take 'em out."

Sean, Derrick and Keith loudly chorused, "See what you've done now!"

Prez, Troy and Mike laughed, "WHAT?"

Sadly shaking his head, Keith grinned, "We aren't going looking for trouble with one aggravated Irishman and two irritated Italians. We'll deal with 'phobes of every sort, when they make their bigoted ways known."

"Then I need to burn off some energy," Prez smirked. Reaching for Keith's hand, Prez stood and loudly announced, "Let's go to the diving well, T'hy'la."

Almost at once, the remaining teens and tweens in the dining room got up to follow their leaders to the pools before the afternoon school session. Once outside and crossing through the housing area, peels of laughter could be heard from the playground. Everyone could see many little kids rolling around inside their transparent Hamster Balls. Inside the three water trampolines, other kids could

occasionally be seen bouncing around. Corey, Drew, and other tweens ran past the older kids.

Troy smiled at Sean for what the two new Morale Rimmers had accomplished. With nods of their heads, they went to Chris and Jay. Troy brightly beamed, "You guys are doin' great."

"We had help," Chris smiled.

"We all get help, dudes," Sean smiled.

Troy suggested, "I'd like you two, and your helpers, to consider going out on a date ASAP. By then you'll have your security, and you can take our security guys with you. Try to avoid those nasty homophobic moose, if you can."

"One more beach incident and all of us will have big problems when Prez flips out," Sean nervously giggled.

Nodding, Jay chuckled, "We'll talk about it."

Sean softly realized, "They don't have debit cards yet, Lover."

"I'll see if Prez can get them expedited," Troy offered.

"Don't go to any trouble," Jay smiled. When Chris turned to him, Jay offered, "Not until this cast is off. How about a sunset stroll along Ewa Beach, all the way down to Oneula Beach? Then we can decide to walk back, or through a dimensional door." He checked with Scott, Lance, Erik and Travis, asking, "What do you guys think?"

"It sounds awesome!" Travis cheered. The sentiment was echoed by Erik, Lance and Scott.

Already at the diving well and standing naked on the five-meter diving platform, Drew noticed Jay and Chris approaching. Having an

evil idea, Drew widely grinned. He tapped his sub-vocal and silently told Alden his plan.

Mid-stride, Chris and Jay unexpectedly phased out and back again, without their clothes. Walking behind and almost into the naked couple, Erik sniggered, "Nice butt, Chris!" Already hysterically laughing, Travis nudged his lover.

"Their profiles are kind o' bouncy too," Lance giggled. He checked with Scott, "Did you know dicks bounce and sway without clothes to keep 'em in place?" Shrugging, Scott cracked up. Slumping and beginning to glance around the group for guilty expressions, Chris and Jay disappeared from the walkway, and reappeared ten meters above the diving well. Dropping to the well, they saw Drew cheekily grinning and waving at them.

Chris and Jay screamed, "DREW!"

"Initiation time," Keith chuckled. Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Troy, Sean, Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott took off running for the diving well.

* * * * *

Stepping outside, turning right and following the path toward the townhouses, Angelo shook his head and grinned, "These kids are nothing like I had imagined."

"They're definitely not sad, which is what I expected," Reggie offered.

"I've learned a couple o' lessons from almost every kid in there."

Nodding, Reggie brightly beamed, "I still can't quite believe

what you said to Nate, Ray and Tony."

Angelo wondered, "Which part?"

"Where will we sleep tonight?" Reggie giggled.

"Actually, I wonder if we'll be sleeping tonight. You're real easy to talk with, Reg. I want to tell you everything; that'll take all night."

Nodding, Reggie giggled, "Since the first time I stepped into a junior high locker room, I've noticed other dudes. I never saw anyone before that affected me like you have."

Shivering from another compliment, Angelo sighed, and then brightly beamed, "That's how I could say all that stuff about body types and frames. I never considered myself gay, but figured I was bisexual."

"Me too," Reggie smiled.

"My first thought when I saw you was, I wonder what it might feel like to be in his arms and rest my head on his shoulder."

Shaking his head and blushing, Reggie giggled, "I knew as soon as we held each other close that I'd want to kiss you. Talk about your major surprises! I hadn't ever imagined kissing anyone before, male or female." He turned to see Angelo's reaction.

Before turning left, toward the townhouses, Angelo paused, and then gently pulled Reggie into his arms. Face-to-face, Angelo softly admitted, "I thought we'd be going to your place, so I could see your drawings, and then to my place, so you could hear my music, but now I think that needs to wait. The most important things in my world don't mean as much as being with you."

Nodding, Reggie's eyes teared up, and he whispered, "There's no denying it, and I can't help it; I'm falling in love with you. My brain can't figure out all the reasons, but my heart says that it's real." He carefully planted a tender kiss.

Angelo was speechless. He had surmised that Reggie was sensitive and caring, but had underestimated the depth of his new boyfriend's feelings. Hugging Reggie tighter, Angelo returned the tender kiss and it turned into a passionate lip lock. Within a minute, each could feel the other's heart racing, and lower they could feel their bodies reacting to the closeness. When the kiss broke, Reggie rested his head on Angelo's shoulder to whisper, "Where we're going to sleep tonight and in the future is now a serious issue."

Angelo giggled, "Yeah, we're kind o' stuck, unable to separate without making our feelings more obvious. What're we gonna do?"

After a few moments, Reggie lifted his head off Angelo's shoulder, grinning, "Just lean back a little bit." Angelo did so, carefully insuring that his hips remained against Reggie's. Reggie tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Hey, Alden."

"Yes, Reggie?" Alden giggled.

"We have a problem," Reggie sorrowfully smirked, and prepared for repercussions.

"I can tell!" Alden laughed. "I could call for a Core Rimmer rescue team and a crowbar?"

Alden's brothers shouted across the comm-badge, "No-oo-oo!"

"A bad combination if I ever heard one," Remi giggled.

Reggie rolled his eyes, sniggering, "So we don't make a

spectacle of ourselves, can you get us someplace private?"

Without warning, Alden transported Angelo and Reggie, and then he giggled, "This room used to be Kaleo's and Tory's room. Every other guy in this dorm will be heading to school soon, so you're alone until at least three o'clock."

Never separating, Angelo and Reggie glanced around. The drapes and mini blinds were open, allowing daylight into the room. They noticed the full sized beds, dressers, closets, desks, computers, chairs, television, game station and stereo speakers. Angelo smiled, "All the kids get rooms like this?"

"Yup," Alden giggled. "Kaleo and Tory moved out of here and into a townhouse at Oneula Beach on Sunday. Everything's been cleaned by the housekeepers, so it's like a brand new room again. Even the computers are unused."

"It's perfect!" Reggie cheered.

Angelo asked Reggie, "Maybe we can stay here tonight?"

"No brother, no sister and no parents," Reggie brightly smiled.

Looking up and around until he found a camera, Angelo evilly snickered, "Turn off that camera and microphone, Alden."

Alden giggled, "I have never interrupted any couple, and never will." Alden then flatly said, "This room is now routed to one of my VI's. As long as I don't hear a kid in trouble, you won't hear another word from me."

Still closely embracing, Angelo and Reggie waited a few moments. Angelo softly asked, "What do you want to do?"

"This room is exactly what we need, a place to be alone, to say and do what we want," Reggie answered. He stepped back from Angelo, went to the TV and picked up the remote control to turn it on. He checked with Angelo, asking, "Got a favorite program?"

Shaking his head and going to his boyfriend, Angelo answered, "At this hour, there's nothing good on. Just choose a music channel, Reg."

Selecting the guide channel and getting to the start of the music channels, Reggie asked, "What's your favorite music?"

"I like almost all types of music, so find a pop and rock mix that you'll like," Angelo answered.

While he searched, Reggie asked, "Do you like to dance?"

"I never have before, but I want to do that with you too," Angelo blushed.

"Me too," Reggie giggled. "Any excuse to be in your arms works for me."

Taking a place just behind his boyfriend and wrapping his arms around his waist, Angelo wondered, "Where did you used to live?"

"On the windward side, Kaneohe," Reggie replied, and then asked, "Where are you from?"

"Right here in Ewa Beach," Angelo answered, "My mom was a teacher at James Campbell High. In another year, I would've been at the same school. Next week she'll be one of our teachers."

Stopping his search, Reggie said, "This says it's a pop mix." He put the remote control down on top of the TV stand, and then turned

to face Angelo, giggling, "Where were we?"

Moving closer, Angelo smiled, "Talking about my mom and teachers." He then softly prompted, "Lift your arms?" Without hesitation, Reggie did so, and Angelo stepped back to take his boyfriend's shirt off. Reggie noticed that Angelo took his time removing the shirt and felt his boyfriend's hands caressing his torso. Softly saying, "You're so handsome," Angelo tossed the shirt onto a desk chair. The moment Angelo turned around again, Reggie lifted Angelo's arms to return to the favor. From the gentle tickles, Angelo squirmed and giggled. As soon as the shirt was tossed onto the same chair, they embraced and began swaying to the music. Angelo whispered, "I swear, if I ever say or do anything that hurts you, I'll never forgive myself."

"I know what you mean. That's all right, I'll forgive you plenty, for just about anything."

"How did I wind up with the most awesome dude in the world in my arms?"

Reggie giggled, "Second most awesome, and you reached for me, so..."

"It's not like I would back away from you," Angelo finished.

"I feel like I need to promise you anything you want."

"All the promises are already assumed," Angelo assured.

Reggie sighed, "The worst part of promises is that they can be broken."

Angelo nodded, "That's why we'll never say them aloud. All we're doing is trying, and it's making us a couple, so much so that

Tony and Ray noticed. Don't worry about promises, please?"

Nodding agreement, Reggie asked, "Besides music, what other topics do you like?"

"You'll laugh," Angelo warned.

Leaning back, Reggie smiled, "Is it funnier than geology?"

Calling for his stack of halos to brightly shine, Angelo nodded and giggled, "Biology." Reggie turned beet red and cracked up. "Seriously," Angelo giggled, "without any effort at all, straight A's in that class last year."

Cackling wildly, Reggie suggested, "So I get to inspect your rocky parts and you can dissect my lizard?" Quickly stepping back so he didn't loudly laugh in Reggie's ear, Angelo howled and nodded.

Getting a good long look at Angelo's medium frame and the happy expression on his face, Reggie pleasantly sighed. He moved closer, reached for his boyfriend's boardies, and slid his fingers around the waistband. Since Angelo wasn't protesting in the slightest, Reggie asked, "Are you ready to see me too?" Still giggling, Angelo rapidly nodded. Equally afraid, surprised and thrilled, Reggie moved slowly, and watched Angelo's expression as much as he watched his hands working.

When Angelo's boardies dropped to the floor, and he was still wearing white boxer briefs, he held up a finger to signal a pause. Stepping back, Angelo kicked his sandals and boardies aside, and then stepped forward again. Placing his hands on Reggie's shoulders, Angelo left enough space for Reggie to complete the task and leaned forward to steal a deep kiss. Reggie pushed the rear of the boxer briefs down, and then pulled the elastic waistband forward to lower the front. With a few pushes at the sides, Angelo's briefs also dropped

to the floor, but they held the kiss a little longer, allowing their tongues to play.

Feeling a little woozy from the kiss and the excitement of the situation, Angelo broke the kiss and stepped back. Kicking his boxer briefs away, he never broke eye contact and watched Reggie's eyes dance over his body. When Reggie locked eyes with him again, Angelo felt like his heart might fly out of his chest at any moment. At last, Reggie smiled, "You're absolutely beautiful, and your dick is a bit more than medium sized, by the way."

Uncontrollably blushing, Angelo asked, "Ya think so?"

"I know so," Reggie confirmed, and shyly explained, "A couple of dudes at my school commented on mine, because it hangs a little long. One dude brought in printouts of what he found on the Internet. Normal flaccid is between seven and nine centimeters; normal erect is between thirteen and fifteen centimeters. You've got at least sixteen, probably seventeen. It's probably thicker around than what's considered average too. In every way, you're more than I hoped and dreamed, Angelo."

Stepping closer and reaching for his boyfriend's boardies, Angelo wondered, "Where are you at?"

Since Angelo had already seen him limp and had to have felt his erection through their clothes, Reggie smirked, "A little more than eighteen limp and over twenty-one erect. It's embarrassing, especially those first times in junior high showers. Everybody saying stuff to me about it was looking down. You're not doing that; you're looking in my eyes. Get me naked quick, please, before I have a nervous breakdown."

With the drawstring untied, Angelo paused, put his hands on

Reggie's hips and instructed, "Hold eye contact with me, Reg." When Reggie did so, Angelo gently reminded, "You were awesome to me Saturday, while we were passing each other and moving into our new homes. For three days, I wondered what made you special. All morning, I've been getting the answers to that question. Other large framed dudes, like you, know it and take advantage of smaller dudes because they can; that's not you though, not my boyfriend. You're careful, gentle and sensitive, and playful and completely fantastic in every way, with everybody. I heard you threatening your bro, and I totally got how annoyed you were, but your tone was so unthreatening, your bro probably took it all as a game. I've been falling for a dream too, and the real you is way better than the dream. What you've got is only another part of you, dude. I'd still love you if you were completely average. I'd still love you if you were less than average. I'm attracted to your hair, eyes, physique, voice and personality. Your dick never mattered all weekend, and still doesn't, okay?"

Nodding, but a little teary-eyed, Reggie sighed, "I saw the naked dudes out by the pools, and tried to not see at the same time. As much as I'd love to be the way I was when I was younger, getting naked and skinny dippin' at the beach, I haven't wanted to, for a long time, because of what they'll see, and what they might say. I'm not a lady killer, or a heartthrob, or anything like that, and I never wanted to be."

"I figured that out already."

"For the next few hours this afternoon, and later tonight, I want us to be naked together, mostly so I can relax about it. When you first saw me in the mens' room, I saw in your eyes what you never said."

Angelo smiled, "What is it you think you saw?"

"Wow, he's got a nice bit hangin', more than I expected."

"You're missing the rest, Reg. Try saying it like this; Wow, he's got a nice bit hangin', but he's not stuck up, or a snob about it. Here's this awesome dude, who could make at least half the dudes around here envious, yet all he wants to be is kicked back and relaxed about it, and every other guy's equipment."

"Is that really what you were thinking?"

"Cross my heart. If you had ever acted like a snob once, and I had seen it, the dream would've evaporated days ago. I never would've wanted to knock on your door. We sure as hell wouldn't be standing here now."

Practically flinging himself on Angelo, Reggie tearfully shivered, "You're right. Since puberty, all I've wanted was for everything to be like it was before. My dick grew faster than the rest of me. My voice changed and I had pubes growing before finishing grade school. Everyone looked at me differently. In less than six months, between Christmas and June, I looked and sounded like a different person, but inside I hadn't changed at all. That summer and all last summer, I kept my shorts on. I didn't want anyone to ever see me. For the first time in a long time, I want someone to see. I want you to see, because you'll still be able to look in my eyes, like you have since we were in the mens' room. You look into my eyes all the time, even when we're kissing."

Rubbing his boyfriend's back, Angelo assured, "This ain't a tiny first crush, or puppy love. You want this to work as much as I do. That makes us the real thing, like what we were imaging we might be only a little while ago; us like roommates, us like boyfriends, us like committed partners for life."

Reggie sighed, "What I really want most is to be near you. Since we walked out of my house, I kept wanting to take your hand in mine, and kept telling myself, no. We could've left space between us in the men's room, but I didn't want to be that far away. Now that we're together, I don't ever want to be apart from you." With his tears drying up, Reggie chortled, "Here we are, in a private room, with you nude and me crying on your shoulder, instead of me being naked with you."

"Tell me when you're ready, Reg."

Before Angelo knew it, Reggie's arms were under his butt and he was being lifted off the floor. Once again, Angelo howled. Reggie carried Angelo to one of the beds, placed him down on it and crawled over him. At the lustful grin Reggie wore, Angelo moaned through his giggles. Reggie softly proclaimed, "You're the only one for me, Angelo Diaz. Now I'm gonna prove it." Amazingly to Angelo, Reggie didn't immediately reach for his chubbie. Instead, Reggie began with tender kisses and the gentlest of fingertip traces around Angelo's ear, jaw, neck, shoulders and chest.

Melting from unexpected romance, Angelo moaned, "Oh, Reg."

Chapter 23

Ewa Beach

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 12:25PM HTZ

After lunch, Tony Lanning and Ray Varga went over to the pools, as they normally would, but this time both boys kept walking past the diving well. There was no one else around, so they took chairs at one of the poolside tables and relaxed. Tony took his shirt off, and Ray copied his roommate's action.

Tony asked, "No diving?" Ray shook his head. Tony sighed, and then tried again, asking, "Wanna relax in the jacuzzi?" Scrunching his face, Ray shook his head again.

Tony waited for Ray to say something about what had been discussed during lunch, but Ray didn't speak. For the first time since meeting, Ray was so embarrassed that he couldn't hold eye contact with Tony. For several minutes, Tony watched his roommate and patiently waited. He remembered what he had said to Ray in the dining room, and realized it wasn't the best thing he could've said. The only correct thing he said was at the dishwasher; "Don't sweat it, dude." Ray acknowledged it with nods, but since he wasn't speaking, all Tony could do was worry. Tony felt a dull ache in his belly, and the longer they remained silent, the worse it got. Somehow Tony had to correct the situation, before the friendship faded and they couldn't stand living together.

Hordes of kids from the dining room began arriving at the pools, so any chance of a serious chat evaporated. Certain that Ray was more confused than ever, Tony stood, put his shirt on, patted Ray on the shoulder and softly prompted, "Com'on." Tony led the way back to dorm three. Putting his shirt on, Ray followed his roomie, but didn't

say a word.

Entering the quad, they saw Prez, Keith, Chris, Jay, Sean, Troy, Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis approaching. Only steps away from the doorway into the short hall of dorm three, they heard Jay and Chris screaming, "DREW!" Tony and Ray only paused for a moment to watch their initiation. Tony evilly sniggered, but Ray avoided eye contact and barely grinned. Silently, Tony and Ray entered the dorm and walked into their room.

As soon as Tony closed the door, he gently pleaded, "Please say something."

Ray sighed, and then sincerely said, "I'm really sorry, dude."

Tilting his head, Tony wondered, "What for?"

Stopping by his bed, Ray shrugged, "For ruining your fun; for saying yes, and then changing my mind and saying no."

Sadly shaking his head, Tony crossed the room, smiling, "I expected it."

Ready to suggest that Tony go find Nate and have some fun, Ray's frown flipped around into a smirk. He asked, "Why?"

Tony went to his roomie, patiently reminding, "We know each other now, Ray. I told you plenty on Saturday, and you told me a lot too, before we ever stepped into this room to unpack that night. Your dad was a County Sheriff. You said that he didn't bring his job home with him, but that still tells me that you have firm beliefs in what's right and what's wrong. Sunday morning, with Doc Weiner and every other Battle of Earth kid, we shared more. I was sitting right beside you, exactly where I wanted to be.

"When you agreed with Nate's plan, that shocked me. Once again, you were very kewl about it. The unkewl way is to wait until we're naked together and then say no. There's no harm done, and I'm sure Nate feels the exact same way, because he was still talking with us. Maybe Nate might like an explanation, but not me. I fully expected you to change your mind, because you could've started something with me at any time we've been alone in this room. You haven't, which tells me either you're completely straight, or you're just not interested in me that way. For a couple o' minutes there, I thought you were more interested in Nate."

Ray giggled, "I thought you were more interested in Nate too. I was just about to tell you to go and find him."

Tony shrugged, "I am interested, but nowhere near as much as I am in you." Ray's jaw dropped. Tony grinned, "I told you, you're younger, by fourteen months, so you have to lead the way. So you fully get what I'm saying, if I led the way, I'd want all of you; heart, body and mind. What started simply enough, with us trying to be roommates, had us best friends by the end of the first day. When I told you I was bi, you didn't walk away, and you didn't ask to be moved to another room. I warned you that you might catch me whackin' off. All you did was shrug and giggle.

"Every time I suggested that we go do something, I was a little nervous, thinking you might not want to join me. Instead of being disappointed, I was thrilled each and every time. Saturday night, I had only one worry; that I'd pop a bone before I got my clothes off to crawl into bed. That would've made my feelings very obvious in an abrupt and unkewl way. By the end of the weekend, I wasn't thinking of you as my younger roommate any more. You're my roommate and best friend in the world. I care a lot about you, and about everything you think and feel. Saying no hasn't messed up anything at all, and

most definitely not between us. All your age means now is that you have to lead. So tell me how you want it to be, Ray. You can be unsure, and want to experiment, and I'll leave it that way and be happy enough."

Rapidly blinking and still processing, Ray uncertainly repeated, "Happy enough?"

Sitting down on the edge of his bed, Tony chuckled at his own slip of the lip. Ray definitely had a brain in his head. Trying to pull his out-of-control thoughts together so they made sense, Tony rambled, "Nate's definitely cute enough, but he's also got two little brothers, that he cares about and watches out for. I don't want to compete for my boyfriend's attention, and with Nate, that's what would eventually happen. Reggie's cute, and so is Angelo, but I never had a shot to show either of 'em that I was interested. When we were showing them around, I didn't notice how much they wanted to be together. At lunch though, I noticed the way they were looking at each other. I'm not the kind of dude to pout over stuff, I'll just move on. There's not a single dude here in our age bracket that I couldn't be boyfriends with, given half a chance." He paused briefly and then watched Ray carefully when he cautiously admitted, "I'm most interested in the dude I've spent every waking moment with, and every night with too."

Ray loudly squealed, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"How could I?" Tony chuckled. "You told me you weren't too interested in babes or dudes. I was twelve too, not so long ago. I know exactly where you're at, cos I was there too. Suddenly all your friendships have different meanings, whether you want them to or not. Being bisexual, I was exceptionally confused; sometimes I'd pop a bone for awesome perky tits, and other times I'd get just as hard for the dude with perfect pecs. So, I understand completely, and it's kewl

with me. If you're thinking of babes and dudes, tell me and I'll be able to adjust, easily.

"Or were you just saying what you thought I wanted to hear? If you were, then you need to change that attitude right now. More than anything else, I want you to be honest. We can't even be good roommates if we're not being honest. Thank goodness you're looking at me and making eye contact; between that and not speaking to me, I was freaking out by the pools. I can't ignore you, dude; especially not over a three-way wank that never happened. I'll be whatever you need, anytime, and all you have to do is give me clue. I was attracted to you when we met Saturday morning, and it's only getting more intense. Being with you, these last couple o' days, is the greatest feeling I've ever had. It's fun, and good, and right, and so much more, I can't even figure out how to describe it. Dozens of times I've wanted to reach for your hand, almost as many times as I've wanted to give you a hug, and that's followed by the wish that I could run my hands through your hair. If I had actually done any of the three, I know I'd want to kiss you too."

"Omigod," Ray gasped, and started pacing the room. For about a minute, Ray couldn't decide whether to look at the floor or in Tony's direction.

Not expecting a reaction anywhere near this cute, Tony couldn't help grinning.

Still pacing, Ray ranted, "You want the truth? The truth is the ugliest dudes in the world went to my school, and the cutest dudes in the world are right here. Have you ever seen a twelve-year-old dude with a mustache and a beard? I HAVE! Sure, it was all soft hair, over his lip, down his jaw and across his chin, but he was a missing link! There was another dude in eighth grade who had more hair on his chest and belly than my dad, but talk about having the tiniest dick in

the world, you couldn't even see it beyond all the hair! Then I'd go home and get stiff watching dudes on TV; on movies, sit-coms or sports, and I'd wonder where these dudes were hiding, because they sure weren't in my real life.

"Then, at Des Moines, I met Drew and Corey and almost fainted, they're so drop dead cute! Phil Nash shows up with his brother and again, I can't stop staring. Which is cuter than the other is a toss-up, depending on what's noticed at the moment. Thank goodness we all sat down to chat and drink milkshakes, before I crashed to the floor. Truthfully, how I drop my shorts and skinny dip every day around here, without popping serious wood, and staying hard the entire day, is a mystery to me. But what have I ever done besides occasionally play with myself? NADA! I've never even pissed in the same toilet as another dude." Pausing to be sure he really wanted to continue, Ray threw caution to the wind, hollering, "AND YOU'RE INTERESTED IN ME? ARE YOU BLIND, TONY? There are *hundreds* of cuter dudes around this place!"

Softly chortling and becoming more enamored by the minute, Tony smiled, "You're plenty cute now, dude."

Sadly shaking his head, Ray giggled, "That must've been prime herb you smoked, dude. I think you're tripping."

"No," Tony sniggered, and stood up again. He cautiously approached his roomie, playfully assuring, "If I was high, I would've jacked you off Saturday night, without asking. Strike one for child rape. Then I would've blown you the moment we woke in the morning. Strike two. Before I ever touched your ass for strike three, Prez would've picked me up by the throat, tossed me to Keith, who would toss me to Mike, and so on until John telekinetically bounced me off the ground."

"I think you're great, dude, the best roommate I could've hoped for. When it's time to be wild, you are, and when it's time to chill, you're as quiet as a mouse. All my other friends from LA are combined in you. Seriously, you're the best parts of a half dozen other dudes. Sometimes it really blows me away how awesome you are. I've been thinking a lot, about my needs that my old buds met, and that you're meeting all the same requirements. Six compared to one; that's amazing.

"If you want to hear more truth from me, I'm at the same place you are, wondering how I'm not stiff as a board skinny dipping at the pools. If I had no self preservation instinct at all, I'd walk up to Melonie Carrero and go 'BRRRRR!' right between her awesome titties. She'd knock my nads into my throat with one kick. Once I recovered, I'd kneel down before Darren DeVault and choke on his giant cock. The last thing I'd hear him say before asphyxiating is, 'uh, dude, alone might've been nicer.' Instead, I'm waiting and praying for my completely average and normal roommate to say, be my boyfriend, as well as my roommate and best bud."

Ray whispered, "Are you sure, Tony?"

Tony nodded and admitted, "I was completely sure the moment you said, 'I can't do it'. Four words saying something negative never sounded so positively awesome before. I almost floated out of my chair, without the Soul Rimmer's cosmically phenomenal N-Gen tricks. That told me that you want more than a quick wank, and you want more than the fun times. You want a real boyfriend too, huh?"

"Yeah," Ray giggled, "I just never guessed or dared hope it might be you."

"Why not me?"

Shrugging, Ray offered, "Only because you're older, way more experienced with everything, and way cuter."

Tony sniggered, "I wasn't the one pacing, rambling and waving my arms in the cutest way possible. Sometimes, when I wake in the middle of the night, I roll onto my side just to watch you sleep. The first time it happened, about dawn Sunday morning, I was completely surprised by the most beautiful and peaceful sight. Since then, I've been telling myself to just chill and be your best friend; to let you decide. Besides, I'll bet big bucks that in another year, you'll be even cuter, and hopefully you'll be mine."

Ray shyly asked, "There's no one else you're interested in?"

"No where near as much as I am in you," Tony warmly smiled. "Derrick rescued me, and he's nice enough, and cute enough, but I think Mike would have a few four letter words to say about it. I could list a dozen other dudes, but they don't know me as well as you do. I don't know them as well as I know you. It's you that I really want to build a life long partnership with."

Nodding and absorbing it all, Ray brightly beamed, "Be my boyfriend, Tony?"

"You got it," Tony smiled.

Ray uncertainly asked, "What do we do now?"

Tony shrugged, and then chuckled, "Show me how you want it to be, pretty boy." He knew that last bit would get to Ray, but it was honestly the first thing he thought when he met Ray on Saturday.

Incredulously, Ray roared, "*PRETTY BOY?*" They began evilly snickering at each other. "I'll show *you* who's a pretty boy," Ray abysmally warned through giggles. He rapidly moved closer to Tony,

took him in his arms and reached up for a big, wet, open mouth tongue kiss. In under thirty-seconds, the playing transferred to hands reaching under shirts. When Ray's hands wandered lower onto his ass, Tony uncontrollably giggled into their kiss. At the giggling, Ray lightly chomped on the tongue in his mouth. As soon as it retreated, Ray firmly goosed Tony, and then sent his tongue out searching for its playmate.

When the first kiss broke, Tony felt free to try some things he had always wanted to try, and Ray was the perfect test subject. Beginning with tender kisses on the cheek that led down to Ray's throat, Tony focused on the earlobe dangling and went for it, sucking firmly, flicking his tongue around it, and then gently scraping his front teeth over it. Cringing, Ray went into a giggling fit that very quickly turned into loud laughter. Past the earlobe in his mouth, Tony sniggered, "Ya like that?"

Ray cackled, "I love it, you maniac!"

"What's next?" Tony playfully prompted, and then dove for Ray's neck, twirling his tongue around in little circles.

Almost hysterical, Ray released Tony's back and blindly searched for the drawstring on his roommate's boardies, nervously fumbling and turning a neat bow into a knot that he couldn't possibly get undone without seeing. Knowing he was in trouble, Ray fondled Tony's erection through his shorts. Pulling back from his snack and wondering if Ray was again having second thoughts, Tony searched Ray's grey eyes. "Sorry," Ray giggled and blushed. Tony stepped back and looked down at the knot, and then up at Ray, and they both cracked up.

After a few hysterical moments, Tony sniggered, "Any second

thoughts?"

Shaking his head and reaching to unravel the knot, Ray smiled, "You're awesome. I'm only surprised, and a little nervous too. I didn't have a clue you felt so strongly about me."

Tony chuckled, "I've been falling in love with you for four days."

Rapidly blinking, Ray smiled, "Since we met, really?"

Nodding, Tony grinned, "There was never any other choice. You're cute, funny, smart, and everything I could ever want."

With the knot untied, Ray looked up, giggling, "You've been holding back stuff too, dude. Do you wanna clear the air a little?"

Nodding, Tony grinned, "Remember Saturday morning, when I introduced myself?" When Ray rapidly nodded, Tony admitted, "I offered my fist to knock knuckles with you first. The next thing I know, I'm knockin' knuckles with all the dudes rescued Friday, and introducing Jimmy and all the dudes in my little group. That's not what I wanted to be doing though; I wanted to get to know you. The whole time we were chattin', I could barely wait to ask you if you wanted to be roommates. You asked me first though. I was completely thrilled and amazed that you asked."

Ray giggled, "I remember that. I remember watching you greeting everyone too. You were occasionally smiling at me, like being social and saying hello to everyone was embarrassing, and now I know why. What I don't get is why me? Phil's my age; a little taller and from LA too."

Tony chuckled, "Why didn't you make moves on Phil?"

"First of all, I thought he was straight," Ray easily answered. "He spends a lot of time with his older brother, and playing soccer. There wasn't opportunity, and even though I've talked with him, I really don't think of him that way. Last night, I thought Owen was only Phil's friend. At breakfast this morning, we all figured out that they're boyfriends. Lastly, I don't really know how to make any moves on anyone."

Nodding understandingly, Tony smiled, "Neither do I. When I led you here, all I wanted to hear was what you were thinking; why you were so upset. I had no idea that I'd wind up telling you so much. Only by listening to you and really hearing what you've been saying could I share it all." Pausing for a moment, Tony grinned, "By the way, with a little instigation, you came to me for a kiss. What you just did qualifies as making moves. There's been no one else anything like you, and there won't ever be."

Blinking rapidly, Ray muttered, "I still can't believe it. You've seen me nude; there's nothing special about me."

Reaching to gently pull Ray into his arms, Tony whispered, "In my eyes, you're the most special dude here. I've paid attention in the shower, dude. Trav and Craig are attractive, but they're fifteen; two years older than me. Phil, Stu, Vaziik, Rob, Paul and Theo are all twelve-years-old, just like you. Phil's taller than you, but none of them have as much pubes as you do. Soon, your shoulders are going to get wider, and that ring of sparse pubes around your dick and nads is gonna be a bush. Being like this, with you in my arms and holding me is what I've been hoping for. When you tried lat-pull downs at the rec center and flew up off the floor, half of my laughing was at myself, for not grabbing you and kissing you hard."

Running his hands back under Tony's shirt, Ray giggled, "I feel the same way. Three mornings in a row, I watched you roaming this

room naked. I told myself not to look your bone, but I do anyway. I've wanted this too, Tony. I'm completely gay, dude. Attractions have been there, way before I understood what any of 'em meant. The one thing missing here has been daily hugs and kisses."

"You'll get 'em, several times a day, every day," Tony softly promised. He sealed his vow with tender kisses on the mouth. Ray wanted Tony's shirt off, but that only paused the kisses for a moment, and then they immediately resumed. With no shirt to hide his roaming hands, Ray slid both hands into the back of Tony's shorts, earning another evil snicker.

Pushing the back of Tony's shorts down, Ray giggled, "Ya still want me to lead?"

Shivering with anticipation, Tony nodded and chuckled, "Only what you're comfy doin', dude."

Ray squealed, "Seriously?"

Slowly nodding, Tony smiled, "We're boyfriends now. You don't need to prove anything to me. We're just starting a new, better relationship. Seriously, I couldn't be happier. We'll get around to more, whenever you're ready."

Widely smiling, Ray giggled, "But..."

"But your hands are on my butt!" Tony playfully interrupted.

Wearing the most wicked grin Tony had ever seen on his roomie's face, Ray cackled, "I know what I want most," and slid his hands around to Tony's hips and beyond. After copping a quick feel, Ray pushed Tony's shorts down, and then dropped to his knees. Looking down and watching Ray lovingly caress his erection and nads, Tony gulped and whimpered. Looking up and locking eyes with

Tony, Ray giggled, "Betchya this is gonna be more than you ever expected from me."

Tony laughed, "No bet! It already is!"

Ray giggled, "Since I haven't caught you spanking it, when's the last time you did?"

Tony sniggered, "Sunday afternoon, at the pool house, on the toilet."

Sadly shaking his head, Ray giggled, "Once in three days? Tisk, tisk, tisk. I guess I can correct that easily enough." He began kissing the length of Tony's bone, but then paused and suspiciously looked up, evilly cackling, "Was that load for me, for Melonie, or for Darren?"

Cracking up, Tony howled, "It was for you, I swear!" Giggling louder, Ray returned to kissing the bouncing bone before him. He worked his way from the tip and down, then gave each hanging testicle a kiss. On the tips of his toes, Tony yelled, "OMIGOD! Ray, you're freaking me out! What have I done?"

Ray giggled, "Dunno. Let's find out." He pointed Tony's bone at his mouth, pulled the foreskin back, opened wide and engulfed the head.

Having never experienced anything Ray had already done, Tony's eyes rolled back in his head. He dizzily glanced down to find Ray still looking up at him. Tony giggled, "Can I kick my boardies aside?" Ray negatively hummed and wrapped his arms around Tony's thighs so he couldn't move. Tony sniggered, "Am I gonna get some of you any time soon?"

Removing Tony's erection with a wet pop, Ray giggled, "Maybe

after I get you to release some of what you've been storing up. You're a teenager, so once in a couple o' days ain't enough. That's about where I'm at, ya know. I'm not gonna let you squirm or ask, Tony. I knew I was gay years ago, and my dad knew it too, but there was nobody around to experiment with. Since getting here, there's no doubt about it." He gave Tony's bone two quick strokes, muttering, "This is what I want to be doing," and then went back to work.

Through groans and whimpers, Tony repeatedly declared his love for Ray. The only problem Tony had with this surprise was that he had no idea what to do with his hands. Rather than freak Ray out by letting both hands run through his hair, Tony moved one hand behind his back, to rest on his butt, and the other finger-combed Ray's hair. He sure didn't want Ray to think he was going to force anything. Ray was already exceeding all expectations Tony ever had.

Realizing that his jaw was stretching and getting sore, Ray shifted his focus and used his hand. When Tony softly approved of the alteration, Ray smiled and trapped Tony's stiffy between two hands. Tony gasped at the new sensation. Shoving Tony nearer to the precipice, Ray opened his mouth and took only the head.

Nearing his climax, Tony repeatedly warned Ray, but Ray had to finish; he honestly was doing precisely what he wanted to do for Tony. Besides, he had always wondered if he could make another dude cum, and what it would taste like. Stiffening and trying to control his bucking hips, Tony lost it. Ray took most of it, but because he helplessly giggled at the accomplishment, he sputtered and a little dribbled beyond his lips. When Tony was spent and slumping, Ray cleaned up after his snack. Bouncing, shivering and gasping, Tony pulled Ray up and into his arms. First Ray started laughing at the drained and surprised expression on his new boyfriend's face. Tony began chuckling, and soon they were hysterical. Tony wanted to kiss

his new boyfriend and he did try, but they kept cracking up.

"By the way," Ray giggled, "I love you too, Tony."

Tony cheered, "Thank goodness!" and squeezed Ray tight.

Becoming much more serious, Ray checked, "You'll be mine and always listen to me?"

Trying to match Ray's expression, Tony enthusiastically nodded and giggled, "Definitely, for the rest of our lives."

"We need to set some ground rules," Ray began.

"Anything for you," Tony smiled.

Ray giggled, "Rule number one; you're already a teenager, so you need more than I do, for now, but that means you don't have to worry about how or when you get off any more." Reaching down and fondling Tony's recovering chubby, Ray giggled, "You warned me about whackin' off. No, no, dude; that's my job, only mine."

"Got it."

"The same goes for me too, Tony. I just did one of the things I've always wanted to do. Every fear I had about doing it disappeared, because it was you. Making you that crazed was the most fun I've ever had."

"I know," Tony wickedly leered, "I can feel you're still hard."

"It's for only you, dude. When either of us needs or wants, it's time to be alone. My dad only loved my mom. Since she's been gone, he never went looking for another wife, or even another woman to date. When I asked him about that, he told me that he was still committed to her, and no one had come close to sparking any interest

at all."

Getting the idea, Tony smiled, "Like all the Core Rimmers, and all their parents. I can do this, Ray. As soon as I got over the fact that you knelt down for me, I was thinking the same stuff; only you could've done what you did. If it was anyone else, it wouldn't have meant much to me. Anybody can go through the motions and make it feel good. Only someone very special can make it mean something, and it does mean a lot to me."

Happily giggling, Ray instructed, "Take my clothes off?" Without argument, Tony went to work. In less than a minute, Ray was naked, but Tony kept running his hands around his new boyfriend's neck and shoulders. Ray confirmed, "You like this body?"

Tony enthusiastically gushed, "I *love* your body, Ray. What you've got now is perfect for me. You're only gonna get more perfect, and I'm gonna get to watch it happen too. I've fallen for you, even though I tried not to, I did anyway."

Ray smirked, "We're gonna have to do something about this age difference thing that you're so hung up on. Saturday morning, right after we met, I felt like I'd known you a lot longer. My first happy surprise was when you said we'd unpack later. I didn't want to waste daylight either. We seem to think a lot alike."

Evilly grinning, Tony chuckled, "Boss me around some more, pretty boy."

Cracking up, Ray pointed at Tony's bed, ordering, "Face up, this time."

Mooing provocatively, Tony practically ran the six steps for his bed and jumped up, twisted mid air and landed on his back. Approaching the bed and giggling, Ray warned, "I'm not done with

you, not by a long shot."

Tony whimpered and begged, "Please let me hold you this time?"

Nodding, Ray crawled onto the bed and lay on top of Tony. He softly asked, "Do you really like girls too?"

Wrapping his arms around Ray and shivering delightfully, Tony replied, "Yep, I really do, but you won't ever have to worry about that."

"Don't stop now. Tell me why."

"Because you're that cute, that smart, and completely awesome to me. I want you, dude, always and everywhere. Back in September, I went to a dance with a girl that I really liked. It was fun, and she was kewl in some ways, but my friends didn't like her, and her friends made it clear that they didn't like me. There was only one other time I considered a date, right before Halloween. At a McDonald's, we decided to remain friends. That's all I'm gonna say about her. It taught me to pay attention to *our* feelings, and the hell with anyone else's thoughts about it. The one thing I was most worried about, the age difference, you've already taken care of. If you hadn't gone down on me like you did, I'd still be slowly working my way. I'm only yours and you're only mine. The attraction has been nerve wracking for days. That's why I invited you everywhere I was going; just to be with you. I don't ever want to be apart from you. I can't say that about anyone else."

Widely smiling, Ray giggled, "Seriously?"

Sighing, Tony shared, "In case you haven't already figured it out, my smart-ass remarks about your pubes was only a lame excuse. When I was about your age, I'll bet I had the same or maybe less than

you. The reality is, I've been falling in love with you and can't even fight the feelings. I just need to know a few details."

"Such as?"

"I want you," Tony repeated. "I don't wanna chance anything fucking us up. Our feelings for each other is the most important thing. So tell me what you consider kewl, that you know you're ready for?"

Smirking, Ray reminded, "I told you, I'm completely gay. Girls are pretty, but there's nothing else there to get a rise out of me. Not once in four days have I sat down to have a conversation with any girl. They're so alien to me that it's easier to talk with Vaziik!" Tony helplessly sniggered, and Ray continued, "That means I want dudes and dick. Out at the pools, I see hundreds of dicks, and every one is completely beautiful. I've fingered my butt and liked it a lot. It's just that dicks are way bigger than fingers. Have you done that?"

Nodding, Tony chuckled, "All it takes is a fingertip for me to lose it."

"Then we're gonna have to work our way there," Ray smiled. "Until we get there, everything else is fair play."

Tony wondered, "Can you cum?"

"Only a little bit, and that only started the last couple of weeks. My voice still needs to change. I'm four months older than Drew, but he's much further along than I am, in every way. I can't wait to stand next to Drew and notice that I've caught up to where he's at."

Rolling over and smiling down, Tony chuckled, "You'll get there. Now I'm gonna show you how much I love you." Returning to tasty earlobes, Tony softly chortled at Ray's loud laughter. Over the next few minutes, Tony got to make love to Ray, kissing, licking and

nibbling his way down the torso. Bouncing, squirming and twitching the entire time, Ray clearly showed his approval. With his feet, Tony spread Ray's legs so he would have a place to kneel for his afternoon snack. Pausing only to lock eyes with Ray, Tony lifted his boyfriend's erection, earning a whimper. Tony smiled, "I don't think I had a six-incher when I was twelve. Betchya I can make sure it gets even bigger?"

Completely thrilled with the minutes of body kisses, Ray loudly cackled, "TONY!" Lowering his head, Tony took about half of Ray's bone, and then tried to take more and achieved his goal. Proving his age and staying power, Ray screamed, "TONYYYYY!" and thrust his hips up, lifting his butt nearly a foot off the mattress. Deliriously humming, Tony got the first taste and decided he liked it. Collapsing back down to the bed, Ray giggled, "You are *awesome*! Get ready for more, Tony."

Gently laying down Ray's spent meat, Tony snorted, "Oh no, pretty boy, I've only just begun." He swiftly lifted Ray's legs, bent him in half and then began licking trails around the scrotum. Thrashing and giggling, Ray tried to get free of Tony. Holding on tighter, Tony wickedly snickered, "You started it!" and went for a meaty thigh. He then gave its twin a little attention.

Ray was laughing hysterically, but unable to break free of Tony's grasp. Feeling a warm, wet lick between his scrotum and his butt hole, Ray whimpered, "Oh, Tony," and stopped struggling.

Softly chortling, "Keep calling my name," Tony gave his new lover a tongue bath between his legs.

"Omigod!" Ray giggled, "I thought you wouldn't want to."

"Bisexual means I get hot for babes and dudes," Tony sniggered.

"You just happen to be the lucky winner. I'll always love you, even when there's a room full of people around."

Realizing that Tony was getting closer to his sphincter, Ray began whimpering Tony's name over and over. Encouraged by the voice of desire, Tony licked to the twitching opening, earning a squeal and cries of pleasure with every flick of his tongue. Giving his tongue a rest, Tony looked up and between Ray's legs, smiling, "I'm gonna treat my pretty boy the very best I can. I promise to always treat you nice." Going back to his enjoyable task, Tony chanced releasing Ray's legs, allowing them to rest on his shoulders. When Ray's chanting of his name slowed, Tony wet a finger and tapped Ray's backdoor. More whimpering began, and when Tony rubbed the hole, it was followed by soft gasps. Ready to try carefully inserting a digit, Tony looked up again to watch Ray's expression. Only a fingertip slipped inside.

Ray moaned, "Oh yeah!"

Tony chuckled, "Luckily, I clipped and filed my fingernails last night."

Nodding, Ray giggled, "Wiggle it around a little bit." Doing as he was told, Tony leaned over to let some saliva drip from his mouth and onto the inserted finger. Ray gasped at the extra moisture and then digressed into a giggling fit.

Widely smiling, Tony checked, "Ya like that too?"

Rapidly nodding, Ray cackled, "You're surprising me too, Tony. I never thought any of this could happen with you. I thought bi meant hugs, maybe a few kisses and rarely anything more."

Tony smirked, "So you're not surprised, I'll let you know that you can do this stuff to me too. This bisexual dude wants your dick

bangin' his butt."

"Really?"

"Any chance of me going straight evaporated when you asked me to be your boyfriend. To keep you always with me, I'll give you all I've got, anytime you want."

"In a minute," Ray giggled.

Uncertainly blinking, Tony repeated, "In a minute?"

Ray giggled, "You're gonna make me cum again."

Raising his eyebrows, Tony reached for Ray's bone, pushed it between his legs, and then practiced his oral techniques. It barely took another minute. Tony felt Ray's sphincter gripping his fingertip and then briefly relaxing before tightening again. In his mouth, Tony felt the corresponding throbbing and again deliriously hummed when he got another taste of semen. Slumping and giggling through the cleanup, Ray warned, "That's twice! I better get some soon too!"

Cracking up, Tony spit out the bone, carefully pulled his finger out, and lowered Ray's legs. He lay down and snuggled up to Ray, completely thrilled that his life had changed again. He pleasantly sighed, "Only one of my six friends in LA jacked me and let me jack his cut cock." Looking into Ray's eyes, Tony grinned, "While that was okay, you're the very best. I never felt this way before; it's not just kewl, it's definitely love. I only hoped this might happen with you."

"You never gave me any clues it could happen," Ray smiled.

Tony chuckled, "How would you have reacted if I had commented on your bare butt, cute dick, or leered at you while you

were dressing or undressing?"

"At least I'd have known you were interested," Ray giggled.

Tony stole a kiss and then chuckled, "You never admitted you were gay. So we've both been caught telling lies."

Ray seriously said, "No more lies or exaggerations, I promise."

Nodding, Tony smiled, "I promise too."

Shuffling and sliding over on top of Tony, Ray asked, "How do you want to be; out or more private?"

"Out and very proud," Tony smiled.

Ray giggled, "Yeah?"

Running his fingers through Ray's hair, Tony assured, "I'm very proud of you. There's no reason to keep us hidden from anyone. I've been watching everything around here, and keep seeing little kids showing how they feel about everything and everyone. Learning to edit ourselves and hide our feelings is the worst part of growing up, and probably why we waited so long to be honest. Truthfully, you're the hottest roommate and boyfriend around. Telling everyone we're a couple is high on my list of things to do."

Seeing Ray smirking, Tony chuckled, "Do you think I rimmed your ass just to give you a thrill and call myself a real Rimmer? Come on, pretty boy! My eyes were wide open, and I saw only you. I enjoyed every moment, and I'll do it again, anytime I get the urge, or you tell me it's what you want. Yeah, out of this room I see a bunch of other really hot dudes around too, but they're off the market and out of my reach. I'm completely thrilled with you and us. I don't need a fantasy dude, cos I've already got more than my wildest dream. One

day I'm gonna notice your shoulders are wider, or your pecs are stronger, or you've got a full bush around your cute dick, and then I'm gonna drag you right back in here and eat your pretty ass again. Pick any reason you want, and it'll prob'ly cause me to get a stiffy and make love to you again. Whatever makes you happy will thrill me. I'm not gonna hide how I feel about you, not anymore. We can't be more honest with each other and still hide stuff from everyone else. It won't work that way."

Ecstatic, Ray lowered all the way down and began kissing Tony. After about a minute and too many deep kisses, Tony's hips reflexively thrust up. Ray whispered, "Do it for me, Tony," and matched his pumping hips. Holding each other tightly, they whispered affirmations that they would always be a close couple and always tell the truth. After Tony lost it, they returned to pillow talk. Tony was on his back and Ray was cuddled up close to him.

At the time he was rescued, Tony had no idea that Derrick was a drummer or part of a band. For the first time, Tony admitted that he wanted to learn to play drums. Rescued by Drew and Corey at Des Moines, Ray knew about Platinum Habits and dreamed of learning to play guitar. "It don't matter if I get good enough to perform on stage," Ray confided, "but I do want to be able to strum a few favorites."

"If I could get good enough, I'd prob'ly like being on stage," Tony confessed.

Ray wondered, "Are there any other dreams you have?"

Tony smiled, "The same as any other SoCal dude, I guess. I'm pretty good on a skateboard, but suck at surfen', and lose my balance almost every ride, but I'd like to get better. During PE softball games, I played catcher and enjoyed it. I was thinkin' of trying out for the school team in the spring. Here, we'll have to see if we can build at

least two teams. Two teams per base would be kewler." He paused to asked, "What're you dreamin'?"

Ray sighed, "Now's not a good time to try and think about it."

"Why? What's wrong with now?"

Devilishly grinning, Ray replied, "I'm cuddled up with you and we're both still hard." Tony chuckled. Ray giggled, "Every thought revolves around us. When we came in here, I was expecting our first big argument, not this. I'm thinking of you playing drums, and picturing you in a baseball uniform. I can't see a single moment that isn't with you."

"I love you too, pretty boy," Tony chortled.

Ray laughed, "Are you gonna call me that from now on?"

Nodding, Tony teased, "Until we're the same height and you become my sexy dude." Mooing a warning, Ray bounded up, straddled Tony's hips and started tickling. Half-heartedly trying to protect himself, Tony howled, "RAY!"

With hands flying from Tony's neck to his belly, Ray giggled, "Tell me why you've still got a bone."

"Because of you, PRETTY BOY!" Tony cackled.

"Twice isn't enough?" Ray giggled.

Tony howled, "How *the hell* can I answer that?" and started tickling Ray back. Both of them laughed louder. Shifting back, away from Tony's tickling, Ray thought he was safe again. However, Tony sat upright and wrapped one arm around Ray's back so he couldn't get away. With one hand, Tony was driving Ray into hysterical laughter.

A spot just above Ray's hips seemed to be the golden zone. All Tony would need do is press on that spot, on either side and with either hand, and Ray would bellow laughing. Tickling seemed to only make Tony more determined. Unable to stand it any longer, Ray shifted a tiny bit closer and dove for Tony's neck. Both of them were breathlessly laughing and started making out again. Tony began gently munching on Ray's shoulder and neck.

Accidentally, they had discovered an awesome position to be in; with Ray on his knees over Tony's groin. All Ray needed to do was shift slightly and Tony would gasp and shiver. With another shift of his hips, Tony's bone slipped right into the crack of Ray's ass. Shifting and squirming turned into grinding and humping. Playtime suddenly and urgently became very serious. In a flash, two mouths were wide open and connected. Ray kept thrusting his hips to make Tony gasp and grunt. Tony wrapped his right hand around Ray's throbbing. In under a minute, Ray lost it. Sliding his bone in Ray's crack, Tony followed moments later.

Panting and huffing, Ray giggled, "Omigod, that was fun!"

Squeezing Ray tightly against him, Tony looked up into his boyfriend's eyes, chuckling, "Only with you could any of this mean so much. I love you, Ray."

Ray lowered his head to plant a deep kiss, and then whispered, "I love you too, Tony." They remained as they were and stealing kisses of varying intensity for another few minutes. Ray then softly suggested, "If you're interested, we've got about half an hour to get cleaned up and ready for a concert."

"At last, we can dance together," Tony cheered.

Ray giggled, "Can you dance? I never have."

Shrugging, Tony reminded, "There will be lots of other dudes to watch, so we'll learn together."

After stealing another kiss, Ray got up off of Tony and stepped off the bed. Watching Tony get up and reach for his hand, Ray giggled, "There's one other thing I'd like to learn with you later tonight." Tony suspiciously waited, and Ray giggled, "I wanna try to get your bone in my butt. It felt real nice sliding around."

"You're in me first, pretty boy," Tony countered. Noticing that Ray was now waiting, Tony explained, "I don't want to hurt you, and I'm pretty sure it's gonna take some time to get it so it feels good for both of us. We can start trying tonight."

Having heard about the Clan's Friday night dinner conversation, Ray loudly called, "Hey, Alden?"

"Hey Ray!" Alden giggled.

Ray asked, "Can you help two new boyfriends out and get us dildos?" Shocked speechless, Tony's jaw dropped open. Two dildos, about a meter tall and at least that round appeared in the room, blocking the path to the door. Tony howled laughing at the tree stump sized phalluses. Cracking up, Ray laughed, "Not the Jolly Green Giant sized ones! We're just beginning!"

"I might barely be able to get my arms around one of those," Tony hysterically bellowed.

"Now there's a picture worth sharing," Alden teased.

Nodding at Tony, Ray giggled, "I don't even want to know where Alden found them. I might have nightmares if I knew."

The two monster dildos vanished and were replaced with two

much smaller, five inch by four inch dildos. Alden giggled, "On your dressers, guys. I got you bottles of lube and condoms too, since they're also necessary."

Spying the more realistic toys, Tony frowned, "They're smaller than either of us, Alden."

Much more seriously, Alden said, "Take my word for it, I've seen enough guys starting out, like you, to know that those are a good beginning. Be gentle with each other, guys. I've never had to say anything while any couple was playing, and I really don't want to."

Covering his face with both hands and slumping, Ray softly giggled, "Omigod!"

Grinning at his embarrassed boyfriend, Tony chuckled, "Alden, were you watching us?"

"To be sure everyone is safe, I watch everything, around the clock," Alden giggled. "Like I said, I've never needed to interfere with any couple, and I truthfully don't want to." After a brief pause, Alden took pity upon Ray, giggling, "Ray, you're not the youngest guy I've ever seen making love. Need I remind you that Drew is twelve, Corey and Stephen Marr are eleven and John is ten? You didn't do anything that I haven't seen before. Love is the most complex emotion. How drastically two guys change when they're playing together, never ceases to amaze me."

Wrapping Ray in his arms, Tony looked between fingers to make eye contact, warmly assuring, "Yeah, you surprised me too, at first. Always remember, you're my kind o' lover; that much I knew at lunch and before we actually made love. We might have to keep our shorts on at the pool from now on, or I might be showin' off my bone far more often."

Lowering his hands, Ray giggled, "Did I really make you happy?"

"Ecstatic, pretty boy," Tony chuckled, and then planted a deep passionate kiss. Feeling Ray getting another erection, Tony broke the kiss, asking, "Do you still want to go to the concert?" Ray nodded and Tony released him, saying, "Then let's shower, get dressed and do that."

Ray nodded, stole a tender kiss, and then took Tony's hand. They stepped out of their room and out to the hallway, where they saw Angelo and Reggie were also naked and heading for the shower. Noticing messed up hair and shiny, chubby dicks, Ray bit his tongue and acted more mature than his age. No sooner had the couples congratulated each other, Phil and Owen stepped into the hall too. All six boys went into the lavatory to shower before the concert.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Condo B

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, 12:41 PM HTZ

Finished with their lunches and after cleaning up, Reyes asked Ryan, "Is there anything you'd like to do?" He suggested, "Hang out by the pools with the rest of the kids, or anything you want?"

Ryan stole a kiss and then said, "I have to talk with my dad and mom. If I know Paul, he's not saying much about what happened. He's too stubborn to even realize they deserve an apology."

"Let's do that first," Reyes smiled. "Afterward, we can go find Grandpa Rob, and learn about the four women and the fatherless little boy."

Holding up a finger, Ryan giggled, "Maybe we can put clean shirts on first?"

Rolling his eyes and his entire head, Reyes smirked, "I obviously still need sleep. We can't let them see all your bruises."

"Not immediately," Ryan grinned. "If they ask, I'll lift my shirt and show them, but it shouldn't be the first thing they can see." He paused, only to call, "Stevie, where's mom and dad, and are they busy?"

Stevie giggled, "Our mom's *always* busy. About ten minutes ago, she and daddy transported here. They're upstairs, and mommy's cooking for Jerry, Joey and KC."

Leading Ryan by the hand back into the bedroom, Reyes chuckled, "Did you mention that we've got two huge kitchens full of chefs, who won't allow any of them to starve?"

"Course I did," Stevie giggled. "I even told her that they all had breakfast and lunch already. Still, she's up there cooking dinner. Daddy's helping, by staying out of her way. KC's still surfing with Fred. Jerry and Joey haven't been back yet, so they don't even know what's goin' on."

By this time, Ryan and Reyes had clean shirts on. They crossed the apartment and went out to the hall. On the way to the elevator, Ryan asked, "Aren't you curious about what I'm going to say?"

Reyes smiled, "Is there something I don't know that will shock me?"

"I suppose not," Ryan cheekily grinned.

Pressing the elevator up button, Reyes giggled, "Would you like

to explain that expression?"

Giggling insanely, Ryan waited for the elevator to arrive. Once they were inside, Ryan playfully explained, "I don't care what my brother thinks. I chose to be with you." Reyes pressed the button for the fourth floor. The doors closed, and Ryan continued, "You're being gallant to the extreme, and the feelings I thought I had last night have easily quadrupled. I'm living with you, from now on, no matter how long it takes Paul to yank his head out of his butt. We'll visit my mom and dad, but I live here now, with you."

The elevator opened at the same moment that Reyes giggled, "I guess you love me?" Standing at the elevator door were Rad and Gil, preparing to return to work. Since their romantic moment had accidentally been shared, Reyes and Ryan blushed and giggled.

"Now I understand," Gil smiled.

Rad chuckled, "I guess Core Rimmers can get it up just about anywhere. A lift seems unnecessary, but whatever!"

Following Ryan out of the elevator, Reyes giggled, "One cantaloupe is waiting in our flat downstairs. We're planning on snacking later." Ryan cracked up.

Sadly shaking his head, Gil went into the elevator. Following his partner, Rad joked, "We'll get the professional size melons for the team meeting."

Making sure the elevator door had slid closed, Reyes giggled, "Is there anything more you plan on saying in mixed company?"

Shaking his head, Ryan smiled, "That's the important part for mixed company. Between us though, Paul can take days, weeks or months, but in the meantime, I get to be with you, each and every

hour of every day. I'm very happy here with you. I don't see that ever changing." Leaving Reyes widely smiling, Ryan giggled and lifted the door knocker for unit 4-B.

"Sure," Reyes sarcastically giggled, "don't give me a chance to give you a thank you kiss."

Pulling Reyes into his arms, Ryan laughed, "I won't argue!"

"Grandpa Rob might have to wait," Reyes playfully warned.

The door opened. Jon Owens grinned at the smiling and giggling boys in the hall. He turned slightly and teased, "Mary, your cooking is attracting guests." He waved Reyes and Ryan inside.

Hurrying across the apartment, Mary smiled, "Only two?" She went directly to Ryan and gave him kiss on the cheek, followed by a motherly inspection. Seeing the bruise on Ryan's jaw, she called, "Stevie, get an ice pack for your brother," and held out a palm.

Watching Ryan's eyes roll, Reyes chuckled, "Cold and warm compresses is what the doctor ordered." Watching Mary apply the compress to Ryan's face, Reyes told her and Jon, "I swapped compresses for over an hour last night. For some reason, Ryan keeps finding ways to prevent it today."

Holding the ice pack to his jaw, Ryan asked his parents, "Do you know what happened?"

Leading the boys inside, Jon nodded, "Stevie had to tell me, because Paul couldn't. All that matters now is that you'll heal." He sighed, "It might take Paul longer to heal from the emotional trauma."

"He's being a doofus," Ryan grumbled. Taking a moment to pull himself together, Ryan explained, "Last week, Reyes was our friend.

All three of us felt we could become more than friends. We missed seeing him Thursday and Friday."

Reyes quickly interjected, "I missed seeing them too."

Ryan nodded and continued, "Saturday, we shared all that. Before coming here Sunday evening, Paul and I talked about Reyes. We both wanted to give him a real chance. The way Paul is now is because I got hurt. It's the way he used to be, when we lived on the streets. I know I have a family there on Sullivan's Island. I also have an awesome boyfriend here. How much of that Paul really knows, I can't say for sure any more. Since I can't speak for Paul, I do want to apologize for waking everybody up. It didn't need to happen, but since it did, I'm sorry."

Taking a seat on the easy chair near the kitchen, Jon asked, "How do you feel, Reyes?"

Joining Ryan on the sofa, Reyes easily answered, "Disappointed that Paul's not here, and really happy that Ryan is."

Jon said, "It'll take him a while. I told him to just apologize, but he's not ready."

Returning to her meal preparations in the kitchen, Mary sighed, "I'm sure he will, eventually."

"Don't be so sure, mom," Ryan warned. "He still hasn't gotten over the streets. The three of us together would be so good, we could help Reyes and he could help us, but now, I really have no idea what might be going through his mind. Maybe being separated from me would be good for him, to finally realize that he has a family and the bad times are all over."

"We'll be available for him, whenever he needs or wants to talk,"

Mary assured.

Jon wondered, "How're you two managing?"

"We're happy enough," Ryan brightly beamed at Reyes.

Reyes offered, "I took care of Ryan's bruises last night, and I will again later today, if I have to chase him around the apartment." Ryan sputtered and then cracked up. Reyes grinned, "Today, I was sad because Paul's not here, and Ryan took care of me. We're managing, just like I hoped, and then some."

"I like it here," Ryan smiled. "Prez hired two new command team members this morning. I got to watch Reyes get the two newbies oriented. The command center here is much more than what Marc has at his house. And then there's about four hundred kids roamin' around." He turned to Reyes and reminded, "You need to show me where the school is."

Reyes nodded, "It's a short walk to the southeast side of the base."

Mary smiled, "This apartment is very nice; the large windows and sliding glass doors make it very bright and cheery."

"Our apartment is one floor down," Ryan shared. "It's a really large one bedroom unit."

"Eight hundred and seventy square feet," Reyes smiled. "A lot of the employees live here. The Taylor family moved into one of the big homes. Jason and Trinity Taylor are teachers. They arrived with one son and now have six. By the end of the week, all our bases will have condominiums like this. Grandpa Carl tried to make sure we have enough space for all the employees and visiting guests."

Ryan asked, "What are your plans for the rest of the day?"

Jon reminded, "We're on Eastern time. I expect we'll be going home about five or six o'clock, local time. More than likely, we'll be back tomorrow for a few more hours."

Reyes suggested, "I'd like it if you could stay for a concert this afternoon. I don't know if I'll get to introduce my dad and pop, but they'll be up on stage."

"With you!" Ryan giggled.

Nodding, Reyes smiled, "And Troy. We're concentrating on audience interaction and participation. We never know what might happen during our rehearsals."

Mary asked, "Would it be music that we'd enjoy?"

"I'm sure it will," Reyes answered. "There might be one or two newer songs that you've never heard, but we play a little of everything. The adults here seem to like our choices, and the kids really seem to love the show. The other five band members are virtuosos. For example, Keith is a classical pianist. The band knows over three hundred songs, and that's not including songs that each of us know, but haven't really rehearsed together."

"I saw them play Saturday," Ryan smiled. "They're really good, and obviously enjoy performing. It's guaranteed that Jerry, Joey and KC will want to be there."

"You'll be on stage near me," Reyes giggled.

"WHAT?" Ryan squealed. Mary began giggling and Jon widely smiled.

"It's a rehearsal concert for our kids," Reyes laughed. "You can be with me. Last week, I was up on stage as an observer, and so was Jonah, Dillon, Richie and Dee."

Whining through giggles, Ryan wondered, "Why can't I watch from the audience?"

"Because I want you closer than that," Reyes teased.

Ryan locked eyes with his dad. Shrugging, Jon chortled, "There are prices to be paid."

Ryan turned to his mom. Mary shook her head and giggled, "There's a spare bed in the room with your brother?"

Smirking, Ryan shifted the ice pack to his forehead and huffed, "I'd rather take my chances on stage." Reyes, Jon and Mary cracked up.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Dormitory #3

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, 12:45PM HTZ

With the afternoon school session and their first music appreciation class only minutes away, Prez and most of the Core Rimmers (excluding Chris and Jay) got dry and dressed again. Soon, a large mass of teens and tweens were heading to the playground to gather the little kids for school.

Remaining at the pools were only a couple dozen teens and tweens. Dunked repeatedly by everyone strong enough to capture and lift them, Chris and Jay, dripped over to where Erik, Lance, Scott and Travis were getting dressed. Chris wondered, "Where are you guys off

to?"

"Don't tell me you're needing more alone time," Jay teased.

Chris grinned, "You said you had that time before lunch." He scanned the nearest tables and chairs for his and Jay's clothes.

Lance giggled, "Me and Scott had that time, but now it's time to get the guitars out and practice."

Nodding agreement at Lance, Scott told the others, "Last night, we found a metronome app for our computers. The clip-clop is already driving us crazy. We really need some sort of drum machine to help us keep time."

Travis reminded, "We're dorm leaders. Let us know what you need, and we'll try and get it for you."

Jay tapped his sub-vocal, and told Alden, "Whatever music stuff that Trav orders for Scott and Lance is pre-approved. Just add it to their music education expenses."

Watching Lance's jaw drop and Scott widely smiling, Erik giggled, "Having friends in high places is nice, huh?"

Jay chortled, "Morale Rimmers find and help guys, like musicians, to help keep morale high."

Carrying the clothes, Chris padded over to that table, sniggering, "Don't start that 'high places' crap, Erik, or you'll be falling ten meters into the diving well." He handed Jay his boxers, shorts and shirt.

Lance noticed Jay waiting for a remark, and laughed, "I'm not saying more than thank you! We need a drum machine, so the next time we jam with Reyes, Joey and KC, we're not struggling to keep

up."

Trav asked Jay, "What're you two planning on doin'?"

"We'll check the kids here and at Oneula Beach first," Jay answered. Bending over and stepping into his boxers, he added, "Assuming everything's kewl, we've been hoping for some private time since my doctor appointment."

Chris smiled, "Maybe we can actually shower alone before the rehearsal this afternoon."

Erik giggled, "Let's synchronize our watches and meet in the shower again..."

"Without John and Stephen this time!" all six sniggered. Catching themselves saying the same thing at almost the same time, six smiles faded and suspicious glares were cast.

Taking Erik's hand and glancing at Scott and Lance, Travis prompted, "Let's go get your drum machine whatchamacallit, dudes." All four waved at Chris and Jay and began the walk back to their dorm.

Scott revealed, "We're not exactly sure what it is we want. I've seen them in stores, but since I didn't have the bucks, I never really checked them out too closely."

Lance nodded, "It needs to be something we can hook speakers up to, so we can both hear it."

Thoughtfully scowling, Erik asked, "Do you need time to search the 'net for the right one?" Travis softly chortled. "What?" Erik giggled, and squeezed Trav's hand in his.

"You have the interest in music, cuddle bunny," Travis grinned.

"Yeah," Erik giggled, "but it also takes lots of practice hours. I have a partner now, one I want to be with, so I can't really split my time and be everything all at once. If the placement test says that's what I should be doing, then I'll go with that, because you'll be studying at the same time I am. Right now, this first week with you, I want to spend the majority of my time with you."

Lance and Scott provocatively mooed. Erik cracked up.

Travis laughed, "We aren't always intertwined, ya pervs!"

Scott teased, "Uh huh, so what are you doin' then?"

Travis checked with Erik. Getting a nod in reply, Travis reminded, "I lost both my parents when I was eight. More recently, Erik lost his mom and then his dad. Saturday, we spent a lot of time talking about that kind of philosophical stuff; heaven, hell, karma, the deep stuff like that. I never had anyone to talk with about that stuff, so what was important is still important."

Erik smiled, "Yeah, we made love a lot, but as two complete virgins. As slow as we went... as slow as you two went, how quick did we climax? Between about ten yesterday morning and lunch, you two dudes became a couple. What's evident to us, and what we've talked about, is only the surface of what's between the two of you, and the two of us."

"What's the purpose of our lives?" Travis softly asked. Without waiting for an answer, he wondered, "Is it what we make of our lives, or is there a greater purpose we're led to accomplish? What happens when we die; heaven, hell, reincarnation?"

Erik said, "All the questions everybody has, that everybody has

their own unique answers for, that's what we sometimes talk about. The great part is not only sharing our own thoughts and feelings about it, but exploring the alternatives too. We're planning on spending our lives together. There's a lot of dreams and aspirations that will come and go over the next decades. Similarly, there's bound to be some disappointments and failures that we'll be sharing too."

Opening the door to the short hall of dorm three, Travis asked Lance and Scott, "Have you spent time alone, cuddled in bed, watching a movie on TV, and just enjoying each other's company?"

Entering the dorm, Lance and Scott shook their heads. Following them inside, Erik prodded, "Try it tonight, dudes. It's totally awesome. At bed time, when you're both nude, pay attention to what makes your lover's dick get hard, and get soft. Pay attention to the way he breathes, and what makes him breathe faster or slower. The movie might inspire some random thoughts and emotions, so really listen to each other."

Travis grinned, "We've felt like important parts of each other since meeting. Neither of us want that feeling to ever fade. From the first minutes alone together, we started sharing everything. Sure, we're teenagers now, and getting plenty crazy. Sometimes we're together in body, and other times we're together in mind, and all the time we're together in soul. Neither of us want any of that to ever change."

Scott sighed, "We spend so much of our time concentrating on music, we've missed something, Lance."

"Yeah," Lance reluctantly agreed.

The conversation paused because the door to the dorm room shared by Taron and JD was open, and Rafe and Jason were in there with their boyfriends.

Crossing the empty common room, Scott asked Lance, "Do you want to try that tonight?"

Lance giggled, "Yeah, but the question is, can we?" Scott widely smiled, pushing Erik and Travis into evil snickering. Lance unlocked the door to room fourteen. Once everyone was inside and Trav closed the door, Lance cackled, "How can I sit there naked with you and not touch your dick?" Scott, Erik and Travis cracked up. Lance giggled, "We're always playing guitar, or always playing something! I can tell myself not to, but I can also foresee another consequence that will keep us awake later too!"

Going to his new best friend, Erik giggled, "We didn't say that couldn't happen, bro. It does and probably will, but the important part is the hour or two together *without* messin' around. Just spend the time for one movie being naked and quietly enjoying each other's company."

"In our case, we usually make love first and then spend the time being together," Travis shared. "The TV timer is set, so we can drift off to sleep, already completely relaxed."

Erik giggled, "In the morning, we can wake up with a bang." Scott and Lance roared laughing. Softly chortling, Travis pulled Erik close and planted a whopper of a kiss.

Lance went to Scott, wrapped his arms around him, and giggled, "Let's try it tonight."

After landing a deep, passionate kiss, Scott grinned, "Sex before the flick or after?"

"Before and maybe again after," Lance giggled.

Peering deep into Lance's green eyes, Scott smiled, "We'd better

search the 'net for drum machines, or we may forget all about it." Lance nodded, but before moving away, he dove for an unexpected deep kiss that left Scott reeling. "That settles it," Scott grinned, "we'll be in the shower before the rehearsal." Erik and Travis cracked up. Giggling insanely, Lance led Scott to his desk and powered up his laptop. Glancing back at Travis and Erik, Scott prompted, "Pull the other chair over, guys."

They did so, while Lance tried to get Scott to sit on his lap. After a few moments of playful arguing, the MacBook Pro had booted, and then Scott was guided down onto Lance's right thigh by Travis. That left Scott typing in the password to Lance's computer, and beginning the search for the best drum machines available. While Scott leaned forward, Lance bounced his eyebrows at Erik and Travis. Without diverting his attention from the laptop, Scott softly sniggered, "I know you're being bad, SLB."

"Then why do I feel so good?" Lance giggled. Erik cracked up.

Finished typing, Scott wrapped his left arm around Lance's shoulders, smiling, "Because once we agree on a drum machine, get it and jam for a while, you're going to go hyper on me. At which point, the noise coming from this room will escalate to ground shaking levels. Afterwards, we'll be very happy, very sore and we'll need to have Alden remove the destroyed bed."

Widely smiling at the banter and his hysterical partner, Travis prodded, "Shopping for a drum machine, dudes?"

"And jousting for position," Scott smirked, stealthily tickling Lance's neck. Loud cackling erupted and a tickle fight broke out in front of the computer. In seconds, they were off the chair and chasing one another around the room.

"I think I understand why being close together, like us, might not accomplish what we hoped with these two," Travis told Erik.

Nodding, Erik giggled, "Is it because they're guitar players, heavy metal guitar players, or just because they didn't allow themselves to do this stuff for three days?"

"All three!" Scott and Lance cackled. After about another minute of tickling, Scott and Lance returned to the chair, the laptop and their shopping. This time Scott took the chair and pulled Lance onto his lap.

The top of the line manufacturers were Korg and Roland, they quickly discovered. Both companies had drum machines between 150 and 2000 credits. The more expensive models were obviously for larger PA systems and DJs. Lance scurried over to the stereo system in the room to see what sort of interfaces were available. Lance smiled, "We could do either digital in with an optical cable, or analog with RCA jacks."

Nodding, Scott smiled, "Let's get a machine that can do either type. That way, we can use whatever's necessary for the task; practicing here or rehearsing on stage. One unit, one time expense, many uses." Scott assembled a list of various cables and connectors for any purpose, and a Roland drum machine.

"HOLY CRAP!" Lance shouted. Appearing very sad, he looked over at Trav and Erik, softly sighing, "Two hundred bucks on cables alone, totaling one thousand five hundred and seventy-nine bucks."

Travis shrugged, "Jay's already approved it, and you dudes got something that was highly rated and versatile. If you're both satisfied and ready, I'll call Alden to complete the deal."

Scott told Lance, "It's got 256 preset rhythms in eight styles, and

is completely programmable. We can store another 256 patterns, up to eight bars each. Unlimited additional patches can be stored on our Macbook PCs."

Lance smirked, "It's just a lot of money, more than I expected. The smaller, less expensive units wouldn't be nearly as good in the long run. We'd wind up having to order something else to perform live."

Scott told Travis, "Let's make it happen."

Tapping his comm-badge, Travis called, "Alden?"

"I've been watching and listening," Alden replied. "The only thing you didn't consider is the size of the machine. You'll need a small table to store it near the stereo, so it's not sitting on the floor. I'll add a dust cover and padded carry case too."

With all four teens watching, the entertainment center components faded out and then back, in a slightly different position. A sturdy folding table, about a meter long and half-a-meter wide appeared. Then, in its original shipping box, the drum machine materialized on the table. Under the table, the case, dust cover and an assortment of cables appeared.

Lance and Scott quickly unpacked the drum machine and got it set on the table. Travis took the empty shipping carton to the storage closet. In the meantime, Scott reviewed the manual, while Lance and Erik got the digital cable connected to the stereo and plugged it into the drum machine. When Travis returned, they were powering up the drum machine, and then the stereo. Lance switched to the auxiliary digital input. Scott set the unit to play a preprogrammed heavy drum part and pressed play.

Initially, the volume level was low enough for them to talk to

each other without shouting. Wearing an evil grin, Erik prompted, "Get your guitars out and let's find out how loud it needs to be?" Nodding and snickering, Lance and Scott got their electric guitars out and plugged into their amplifiers. Travis walked across the room, stopped between the two beds, and turned around to listen. Turning on the amps and choosing the key of E, Lance offered to play rhythm and Scott would play lead. Waiting for the next four bar sequence to begin, Lance started off and Scott followed. Erik turned up the stereo's volume to about half way.

Smiling and nodding, Trav hollered, "That's good; I can hear each of 'em and the drum part too." Erik checked with Lance and Scott.

"It's awesome!" Lance laughed.

Travis hurried across the room, opened the door and stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind him. He went into the common room and turned on the big television, to make sure other kids could be in there without the TV being terribly drowned out. With the common room surround system turned up only about a quarter of the way, very little of what was going on in Lance's and Scott's room could be heard. He turned the TV off and went back down the hall. Beyond Chris' and Jay's room, there was so little sound leakage that Travis had to listen carefully for the occasional snap of a snare drum. He returned to the room, smiling and flashing a thumbs up.

To find out what Travis was doing, Lance and Scott stopped playing. Scott turned down the stereo, and then asked, "What's the scoop?"

Travis smiled, "That's really loud in here, but I checked the common room and down past Jay's room. You could practice at that volume without disturbing anybody. Just to be sure, check with the

Hiram twins later. They need to be able to watch TV or do whatever they want, without you dudes drowning out their TV and stereo."

Erik checked his watch, and then smiled, "We'll see you in about forty-five minutes."

"In this hall's shower," Lance giggled. Catching Scott's evil grin, Lance cackled, "WHAT?"

Shaking his head, Scott then turned to Trav and Erik, chuckling, "We'll see you soon. Thanks so much for the awesome gear, guys."

Travis nodded and waved, and then reached for the door knob. "Any time, dudes," Erik smiled.

When Travis opened the door, Joey was standing there with his dad. "Who was pwayin' dwums?" Joey giggled.

Waving Jerry and Joey into the room, Scott chuckled, "Our new drum machine, for practicing."

Hurrying in and pulling his dad along, Joey shouted, "KEWW! ID SOUNDS AWESOME!"

Softly chortling and stepping out of the room with his partner, Erik closed the door. They went towards the common room, intending to go to their room. Erik beamed, "That felt fantastic! They were so hyped up, they could barely conceal their excitement. I like being a dorm leader."

"Me too," Travis smiled. "How about we add a little something in the common room for other kids?" Rapidly nodding, Erik giggled. Walking to the far corner, on the opposite side of the room from the upright piano, Travis called, "Alden, we need a shelf unit in here, to

hold some board games and toys for the kids."

Over the room's speakers, Alden giggled, "Be a little more specific about the shelving, Trav."

"Like a right triangle," Travis replied, "with wider shelves on the bottom and getting progressively narrower as it goes up. Maybe steel framed with plexiglass shelves."

In about ten minutes, Erik and Travis had added a shelving unit loaded with board games, miniature electric cars and trucks, brain teaser toys like Rubik's Cube, and a collection of hardcover books by various classic authors, like Jack London and Mark Twain. To complete the task, on the top shelf was a fiber optic lamp that changed colors. It could act as a night light, and even during the afternoon, it was pretty.

Now that they had taken care of their dorm brothers, Erik and Travis returned to their room for some private time to take care of each other. Erik wondered, "Why'd you check with me before telling them what we talk about?"

"The most important reason was to make sure you were okay with it," Travis admitted. "That's something that you might rather remain between us."

Erik unlocked their door and they stepped inside their room. "You didn't share any details," Erik smiled, and closed the door. "It also proves that we do much more than get messy. At some point, I'd like our other friends to know some more aspects about us."

Travis nodded, "I think the conversation should just meander in that direction naturally." Briefly pausing, Travis wondered, "Do you think Lance is still a little afraid of me?"

Erik shrugged, "I hope he was only playing with the fact that you're about five or six inches taller, and many pounds heavier than he is. Only you can prove how gentle and caring you are, Champ. I can say it, but he'll know my thoughts are biased."

Travis smirked, "I have no idea how I can prove that to him."

"It's not something you need to rush into," Erik reminded. "We've only known each other a few days. Living in the same dorm, and seeing each other every day, eventually something will prove it. Lance will notice and he'll say something to you about it."

"Probably through you," Travis grinned.

"I don't know about that," Erik giggled. "Lance has no problem saying what's on his mind. He just needs to feel comfortable about it. In that regard, you two are similar. If it's that important to you, then ask him about it. Time's on your side, and so am I."

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Ewa Beach, CIC Dining Room

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, 1:07PM HTZ

After having their late lunch, Phil and Owen joined Jake and Terry, who had arrived at the dining room even later. While the latter couple ate, Phil initiated a conversation so Owen, Jake and Terry could share their orphanage experiences. Since the dining room was barren, they could freely talk without fears of being overheard.

The primary difference between level one and level two orphans were quantities of food and their sleeping arrangements. Level one orphans had twin size bunk beds with shabby mattresses, but that was better than the foam pads on the floor the level two orphans had.

Level one orphans were fed measured quantities of food, but the level two orphans weren't even fed that much. For those reasons, Jake and Terry were healthy enough to participate in gym class at their school, although they weren't as capable as many other boys. Being somewhat healthier, Jake and Terry had never been left behind their classmates to retake entire school years. Their grades weren't great, but good enough to advance.

Owen began raving about the computer and television operations that Phil had shown him. Enthusiastically, Jake and Terry asked to be shown the same, and get some help with starting their computers for the first time. Phil checked with Owen. As much as Owen wanted to be alone with Phil, he realized that he had an opportunity to be a brother, and with Phil's help, Owen could try, so he agreed.

While Jake and Terry were taking their trays to the dishwasher, they met other boys from dormitory two who were grabbing drinks and snacks from the kitchen, and told them what was about to happen. With six more boys that lived in the same hallway, Jake and Terry returned to the table where Owen and Phil were waiting. Phil and Owen were introduced to three pairs of roommates; ten-year-old Luke Nepos and nine-year-old Silas De Aquila, ten-year-old Jeffery Castillo, and twelve-year-old Thomas Cork, and eleven-year-old Matthew Cottingham and ten-year-old Rodney Casteneda. Luke and Silas were ex-Latin King kids. Jeff, Tom, Matt and Rodney were all level one orphans. Hand-in-hand, Jake and Terry led the pack to dorm two.

From the path through the quad, Phil wondered, "Don't you dudes open your windows?" He then pointed to dormitory three, where he lived with Craig, saying, "The weather's always beautiful here, dudes. Saturday night, when it rained, was the only time we had

our windows closed. Sunday morning, after breakfast, they were opened again."

Holding the door open for the group, Terry checked with the slightly taller but younger boy, asking, "Is that kewl?"

"I'll prove it," Phil grinned. Jake went to his room, number twenty-one-twenty-five. As soon as the group had entered, Phil called, "Alden, tell these dudes that it's kewl to open their windows."

Alden giggled, "Of course it is! If we didn't want you opening them, they'd be panes of glass you can't open. It's not like anyone would think of stealing anything. Even if they did, with cameras in each room and every hall, I'd see who stole what and let a Core Rimmer know. I assumed you guys just liked the windows, blinds and curtains closed for privacy, so I didn't say anything."

Phil smiled, "You dudes can call on Alden for just about anything, any time. How do you think we got the water blasters last night?"

Owen nodded and giggled, "It all started when Phil's big bro, Craig got soaked by the other dudes wearing Mr. Fuzzy G-strings. Craig called Alden and the water blaster war began."

"You dudes can do just about anything you want in your room," Phil patiently explained. "Chris and Jay wanted their beds away from the windows, so they moved the beds to the adjacent walls. In Pat's and Rafe's room, they decided to move the dressers between the two beds, because Pat's hooked up with Ralphie. That way they have privacy."

Alden giggled, "As of last night, Rafe's hooking up with Taron Reyce Otter. After the cozy cuzzy fuzzy Water Blaster battle, Pat and Ralphie slept on one bed and Rafe and Taron slept on the other. Chris

and Jay moved the beds and night tables themselves. Since Pat and Rafe are younger and couldn't lift the dressers, I had them step back and transported the dressers to the new, preferred locations. The three Oldcambus brothers are sharing one room, so I set up their room with full size bunk beds, and an extra desk, chair and computer."

Tom Cork squealed, "I thought you were only for helping the Core Rimmers, Alden."

Alden giggled, "I'm here for *all* of you guys and girls. I have VIs, or virtual intelligence machines that handle ordering food for the kitchens, replace the clothes you guys got from the store and dozens of other tasks." In a more relaxed tone, Alden said, "This is one of my VI's. I can handle multiple tasks at once, interact with any one or groups of kids, and do anything the Core Rimmers ask of me." Returning to a more emotive voice, Alden giggled, "One day I'll have a body, so I can interact with all of you, and you'll still be able to call me the same way that Phil just did. The only difference will be the real me will have legs and a body to be with you. If all you need is help with something, like moving furniture, the VIs managing the transporters will respond and help. The night you were being rescued from your orphanages, one of my VIs was assisting Reyes in the auditorium, so he could play drums along with the songs he selected."

Already aware of the answer, Phil smiled, "You heard me in the dining room with Owen, Jake and Terry, didn't you?"

"You're here to help acquaint the guys with their laptop computers, the televisions, satellite systems and the stereos," Alden replied.

Phil shared, "I can help two dudes easily, but I can't help all eight of these dudes at once, Alden."

Alden sang, "DUN-DUN-DUUUN! Super AI to the rescue!"

Kerry groaned, "Oh, puh-lease!"

"Give us a break, bro," George giggled.

Stevie grumbled, "If I had an arm, I'd slap him!"

Jack muttered, "The only thing 'super' about Alden is his colossal ego."

Insanely giggling, Alden introduced his brothers to the boys in the room. All the AIs and the boys had a brief conversation about androids and the AIs getting bodies.

For the next hour, Phil and Owen roamed from room-to-room, showing the other eight boys how to operate their televisions, stereos, and assisting Alden with some computer tasks, including replacing Windows laptops for Macbook Pro laptops in all four rooms. In small groups, other boys came inside from the pools and rec room. Seeing and hearing what was going on, they wanted to learn the same things. Wanting some time alone with Owen before the Core Rimmers got out of school, Phil encouraged the original eight to show their dorm brothers what they had already learned.

Owen was ecstatic. In only two days, he had a boyfriend and experienced what it was like to be a brother. Owen wanted to go to Oneula Beach, where he could show Phil his room and maybe find his roommate, Ellis. Suddenly, many dozens of possibilities were opening Owen's eyes. He could barely decide what to do first. However, Phil could tell Owen was a little hyper, so he suggested some alone time was needed.

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Back at dorm one room one, Angelo had received and had Reggie writhing on the bed. As Reggie had done for him, Angelo worshiped his lover's body. Between tender kisses, Angelo told him every thought he hadn't yet shared. Resting his head on his boyfriend's belly, Angelo stroked away, completely mesmerized by the foreskin hiding and showing off the head. The intention was, as Reggie had done, to lick up his lover's load off his belly. It was the perfect first time for Angelo, and he wanted to reproduce it, as best he could for Reggie.

Beginning to warn his partner, Reggie stiffened, and appropriately, Angelo lifted his head out of the way. Reggie grunted. A fountain of jizz flew up, the likes of which Angelo didn't even know was possible. It hit Angelo on the cheek and dripped down his face. He adjusted the angle so he didn't get squirted again, but he didn't stop stroking until the last seemed to only ooze over Reggie's foreskin and over his hand. Groaning the entire time, Reggie occasionally bounced on the bed. Fully retracting his lover's foreskin, Angelo cleaned up a bit. Surprisingly, all Reggie managed was soft cooing for several more moments.

"Oh my God!" Reggie wearily cheered, "That was the very best ever! I swear, it never ever felt anything close to that!"

Releasing Reggie's bone, Angelo turned to his one true love, sniggering, "Yeah, I think I did pretty good for a first time."

Blinking, Reggie tried to focus again. Seeing what had happened, and Angelo wiping it off his face, Reggie's jaw dropped. "Oh!" he squeaked, and covered his mouth, softly giggling, "I can't believe it. Seriously, a few centimeters is as far as I've ever shot before. I'm so sorry, babe."

"Don't be," Angelo giggled, and then slurped up the juice he had

on his fingers. "I sure ain't sorry, just surprised."

"So am I!" Reggie cackled. He uncovered his face only to pull Angelo down and repeatedly kiss him. During the kisses, Reggie discovered that one of his hands running through Angelo's hair was getting wet too. He helplessly giggled into kisses. Angelo pulled back with a curious glare. Reggie cackled, "It's in your hair too. We're gonna have to shower too now."

Smirking, Angelo giggled, "Pretty funny, huh?"

"Your hair is sticking up on that side." Reggie uncontrollably laughed, "You look like a one-horned demon!"

On a mission, Angelo reached down to fondle his boyfriend's very sensitive penis. Laughing harder, Reggie tried to double up to protect himself, but that only exposed other ticklish areas, which Angelo took full advantage of. Completely on the defensive, Reggie squirmed to get away. All he accomplished was falling partially off the bed. Wrapping one arm around the legs protruding in the air before him and pulling them against his chest, Angelo tickled to his heart's content. He playfully giggled, "Do you love me?"

"YES!"

"How much do you love me?"

"WITH ALL MY HEART, I SWEAR!"

"Swearing is bad."

Reggie loudly laughed, "I'm your SLAVE, FOREVER AND EVER, just STOP TICKLING ME!"

"You'll do anything?"

"And LOVE IT!"

Releasing Reggie's legs, Angelo watched a fine butt roll. He shifted back away from the edge of the bed, giggling, "I'll love you too, forever and ever, Reg."

Wearily kneeling on the floor at the edge of the bed, Reggie smiled, "Being extra romantic is only making me more determined."

Bouncing his eyebrows, Angelo sniggered, "Lookin' for a new hair style too, are ya?"

Shaking his head and standing, Reggie warned, "That would be a waste," and then jumped up onto the bed. Falling backward, Angelo cracked up. Purposefully, Reggie dropped with his face near Angelo's crotch. Without hesitation, round two began.

When they had finished a few minutes later, they snuggled, completely wrapped in one another's arms and legs, sharing life stories, and all the best and worst times. Reggie learned that Angelo had been harassed in elementary school by a few bullies. Angelo learned that Reggie spent every spare moment drawing as a younger boy, and sometimes fell back into that pattern, especially when there was a picture to finish. He had played little league baseball all through grade school too, and was good enough to play infield baseman and shortstop positions.

They spent a few minutes trying to understand why they felt so much for each other before ever saying more than hello. It wasn't only physical attractions, it was more like destiny. They finished their conversation by agreeing to commit themselves to one another. Whatever life happened to toss their way could be easier as long as they remained together.

At a pause, Reggie softly asked, "Dinner at my house tonight?"

"I'd love that."

"Before we leave my place for your place, we'll have a short chat with my dad, to tell him we'll be out late."

"Do you want to tell him that you won't be home at all?"

"Yeah, we might as well. We're on base, just here, not there. It's my mom who worries more over little stuff than you and me combined."

Angelo giggled, "Could you imagine doing what we did with your brother in the next room?"

"It won't happen," Reggie grinned. "I'd really hate to be executed for child abuse and endangerment now, babe."

After thoughtfully humming, Angelo admitted, "I'd simply smother my sister. That means we have something new on our agenda."

"There's no way I could be separated from you. I think it's time to move out on our own. I'm not even imagining spending a single night without you. I'd never get to sleep."

"Don't you think we need to give our folks some time, to get used to us being together, before we drop that bomb on them?"

"My dad would be kewl about it, because we'd only be at a different place here on base, not far away. On the other hand, I think my mom would argue no matter when we mentioned it. What about your folks?"

"I think they'd both be very kewl, if we wait a couple of days.

Just like your dad, they'd realize we'd be close."

Reggie sighed and then wondered, "How can we work this? I'd be perfectly happy spending every night here, from now on."

"That would make our intention pretty clear. There's also the little problem of clothes and our other necessities, not to mention your art supplies and my computer music stuff."

Both boys scowled and hummed. Very suddenly, Angelo stole a kiss, and then called, "Hey, Alden?" Reggie grinned, thinking of how they probably looked from the camera lens of an AI, and began to blush and softly giggle.

"Yes?" Alden flatly replied.

"We need your kind of help, dude."

Alden giggled, "I guess so! Everything worked out well?"

"Very much so," Reggie smiled.

Angelo shared, "So much so that we're planning on living alone, right here in this room."

"It's not a problem," Alden assured. "I'll just let the Core Rimmers know, if that's okay? At least Prez and Keith should know. I have a suggestion too, if that's all right?"

"Sure," Reggie answered.

Angelo prompted, "Fire away."

Alden said, "There's a free room very much like this one at dorm three. That's where Tony, Ray, Chris, Jay, Lance, Scott, Erik and

Travis live."

"AWESOME!" both boys cheered.

Alden giggled, "I thought you'd prefer to be with friends."

Reggie prompted, "We'll need clothes too, Alden; enough for three or four days, at least. We can grab stuff from our rooms during the days, when our folks aren't around."

"And toothbrushes and stuff too," Angelo added. "We can't let our parents know that we have no intention of sleeping separately ever again."

"Got it," Alden giggled, "so taking stuff from your homes would let them know what's going on."

"That summarizes it pretty well," Reggie grinned.

Alden giggled, "Unravel yourselves and stand up please, so I can take measurements and get you clothes." While the two boys kissed and began to separate, Alden instructed, "If there's any colors or types of clothes you don't want, let me know." Once Angelo and Reggie were standing, Alden prompted, "Turn in place, please." They let go of each others' hands and did as instructed.

Reggie said, "No plaids or stripes for me, Alden. I'm boxy looking as it is, and they only make me look bigger."

Angelo added, "With brown hair and eyes, I try to stay away from shades of brown. Tans are kewl, just no browns." For a moment, Angelo considered asking Reggie to flex his muscles. Knowing that would cause another round, he didn't ask but openly watched Reggie turning around. Noticing Angelo's wandering eyes, Reggie smiled and

stole a tender kiss.

Alden playfully reminded, "I've seen you guys dressing since Sunday. I'll use that criteria as well as what you mentioned."

Reggie wondered, "How is laundry handled in the dorms?"

"By housekeepers," Alden answered. He transported the boys and the entire contents of the room to their new room at dorm three. Everything was exactly as it had been at dormitory one. The only obvious differences Angelo and Reggie noticed was the colors of the carpet, walls and drapes. Then Alden delivered stacks of new clothing and necessities on the beds. He said, "You're all set with a week's worth of the basics, guys. In the closets are laundry bags; one for whites and one for colors. I've got another idea that you'd both probably like to know about."

Going to check out their new clothes, Angelo wondered, "What's that?"

Alden reminded, "Only your dad is working off base, Angelo. I figure you've got a couple of days, a week at most, before a housekeeper notices you're here all the time. Your parents will find out, sooner or later. This is a pretty big secret to try and keep."

Looking up at the camera, Reggie said, "All we need is a couple of days, for them to get used to the idea. Almost four hundred kids are living in these dorms without their moms and dads. We can do it too."

"Just making sure you're thinking clearly and not acting spontaneously," Alden giggled. "Although, the entire day's activities have been pretty spontaneous for you two."

Both boys spun toward the camera, shouting, "ALDEN!"

"Tell me I'm exaggerating," Alden giggled.

Angelo smirked, "You've got a real naughty streak that you will pay dearly for."

"I know," Alden giggled. "My first day in my new body will be spent getting tossed in the diving well, and chased, probably all the way to Des Moines, where I'll spend the rest of the day with Grandma Morrison. With my brother Kerry there too, I'm sure it will be a *very* interesting day."

Reggie asked Angelo, "Wanna share a dresser, babe?"

Angelo smiled, "We're sharing everything we can, from now on," and leaned over for a tender kiss. They started loading the dresser, easily agreeing that toiletries belonged in the top drawer, underwear in the next drawer, socks went in the next drawer down, and board shorts went in the drawer below that. The various polo and T-shirts got hung in the same closet on the same side of the room. During the process, they kept hearing muffled laughter from the air conditioning vent. Pausing and scowling, Angelo wondered, "Who is laughing and what is so funny?"

Alden giggled, "The short answer is that you two have already made an impact on two of your friends. As of about two hours ago, Ray and Tony are a happy couple too."

Reggie smiled, "That's awesome! We'll have to congratulate them."

"Later, after Angelo shampoos his hair," Alden giggled. Slumping, Angelo huffed. Reggie went to his lover and tried to push down the clump of hair that was protruding, but it only bounced back up again as soon as he removed his hand. Reggie couldn't help

smiling, but quickly stole a tender kiss and then turned away.

Sadly shaking his head yet widely grinning, Angelo decided to change the subject and asked, "Alden, who else is in this hall?"

"Across the hall from you are twelve-year-olds Rob Wheeler and Paul Eliason," Alden replied. "Brad and Theo Triggs are in the room beside yours. Brad's ten and Theo's twelve-years-old. We also have a Vulcan named Vaziik and his roommate, Stu Sutliff; both of them are twelve-years-old too. Moving further toward the common room are the three Oldcambus brothers, fourteen-year-old Kassidy, and eleven-year-old twins Kade and Karey. In the next room are Nate Ramos and his brothers. Across from the lavatory are Taron Reyce Otter and JD Matos. Beyond the lavatory are Tony and Ray, and Erik and Travis. Fred and Chauncy Eckhart and their puppy Rikko, and the Nash brothers are at the far end of the hall, by the common room. Your room is at the opposite end, closest to the exit."

Reggie muttered, "We don't even really know where we are."

"Later tonight, we need to walk around, get used to the place, and say hello," Angelo suggested. He went to a window to open the drapes and blinds to look outside. As soon as that was done, he noticed the time on the clock radio between the beds and gasped, "It's two-forty already? School will be out soon, and that means my mom will be wondering where I am."

Nodding, Reggie queried, "Where do we get towels, Alden?"

"They're in the shower changing area," Alden replied, and then giggled, "It's all boys on this floor, and the upstairs is empty, so you've got nothing to worry about. Most of the guys stay naked or in their underwear, whether they're going to the showers, coming from there, or just hanging out in the common room."

"Kewl," Angelo smiled. "Without a little witch sister around, life just became infinitely more simple."

Reaching for Angelo's hand, Reggie grinned, "She's not that bad."

Taking his lover's hand, Angelo sniggered, "Before meeting you, my last words were 'where's your broom?' and then 'fly away'. She was a crier as a baby, and in most ways, she hasn't changed." They left the room naked, saw the exit door to the right and turned left. Before making it to the lavatory, another door opened. Also nude, Tony and Ray walked out of their room. All four had smushed up bed hair and swollen lips. They knowingly grinned and began chuckling congratulations.

From the room at the far end of the hall, Phil Nash and Owen Reed emerged in their birthday suits. Phil raised his free hand, asking, "We've got new dudes in our hall?"

"New to you dudes," Tony grinned, and then introduced Phil and Owen to Angelo and Reggie. They greeted each other and knocked knuckles. Tony turned to Angelo, asking, "You dudes decided to come here instead of going home?"

Shaking his head, Angelo grinned, "There's a little sister at my place, and a little brother at Reggie's. When it became an emergency, we asked Alden to help us out."

Reggie smiled, "We'll probably be around here a lot more often, starting tonight."

Sliding in closer to Reggie and cuddling, Angelo shared, "We can't deal with sleeping apart, so we're gonna give our parents a little warning, and then be back here later. Our intention is to give them

time to adjust, and eventually move here."

All six continued on their way to the lavatory, and then lined up at the urinals. Phil said, "The Core Rimmers will be out of school soon, and we heard they're rehearsing. Once we grab a shower, that's where we're going."

"Us too," Ray shared.

Reggie explained, "Once we get some family stuff taken care of, we'll be there."

Glancing down the line of bright, cheery faces, Phil grinned, "We heard an awful lot of giggling and laughing." Hanging his head and turning very red, Ray giggled.

"That's *exactly* what we heard," Owen laughed.

Nodding, Tony chuckled, "Me and Ray have hooked up too. I've got the best kind of sex crazed boyfriend." A chorus of provocative moos erupted. Catching Ray squinting at him, Tony smiled, "Seriously, Ray's the romancer, and an excellent pillow-talker. He got me to tell him everything I've been thinking since we met. We've both been holding back our feelings, but thankfully that's over now, and a whole new life is starting."

Ray giggled, "Tony thought it would be better to let me lead the way. So I did, repeatedly."

Over the giggling and laughter, Tony chuckled, "I'm so tuckered out." Angelo, Reggie, Owen and Phil cracked up. Ray's giggles transformed into evil snickers, making it obvious that he had only begun wearing Tony out.

"So, it's going to be three couples in the shower," Reggie

realized, and mysteriously shifted his eyes. Surprised that Reggie had mentioned it, Angelo's jaw dropped for a brief moment.

Almost at once, all six began laughing and joking around about what would happen. Not one denied their intention to share a shower, or the desire to help their partner bathe. Down the row, urinals flushed and couples went into the mob shower.

Since everything was uncharted territory to them, Angelo and Reggie were the last in the shower. They checked out the commodes and sinks. Everything was clean and neat. Compared to nasty smelling boys' rooms and locker rooms at their schools, Reggie and Angelo thought this lavatory and shower looked and smelled freshly cleaned.

For all three couples, the shower company also turned out to be one of the many great experiences of the day. There was plenty of giggling between each couple. No rude remarks were passed when erections began sprouting like wild flowers in the rain forest. The most extroverted of the group, Tony leaned forward and palmed his knees, giving Ray full access to wash his butt. During the laughter, Angelo and Phil assumed the same position. To complete the task, the other three did the same as their boyfriends.

Another kewl thing was when Erik and Travis came in to use the urinals, and loudly warned those in the shower that they intended to flush. All six calmly stepped away from the spray, but with only three showers going and only two urinals flushing, the water temperature barely changed, Reggie noticed. It wasn't that way at his old school, he commented. One toilet flushing would scald anyone under the showers and send naked dudes bouncing back out of the way and into one another. Instead, they were able to calmly rinse the last remnants of soap off their bodies, during which time Phil, Tony and Ray shared

some details about both bases with Angelo and Reggie.

Tony led the way to the changing area, saying, "Take a walk up the stairs around condo A, bros. The most awesome views on this base can be seen from the fifth floor and up, especially at night." Tony began passing towels out. When Ray took a towel, Tony teased, "Second most awesome views." Ray squinted at his boyfriend. More mooing and giggling erupted. Once Angelo and Reggie had taken two towels, Tony firmly pulled Ray against him and planted a deep kiss. The first things Angelo and Reggie noticed was that the towels smelled fresh and the cotton was very soft, as if their moms had washed them. Then they noticed Ray was holding the kiss and pushing Tony backwards against the wall.

Hopefully, Owen asked Phil, "Can we go there, please?"

"Sure we can," Phil promised. He told the others, "I've heard about it, but haven't actually gone to check it out."

Breaking the kiss and returning to the conversation, Ray cheered, "You can see all the way to the beach." The other four noticed that Tony seemed to be swooning, and only the wall he was leaning on held him upright. Quickly covering his face with his towel, Owen burst out laughing.

Rapidly blinking his eyes, Tony softly huffed, "Whoa."

Phil giggled, "Is the room spinning, Tony?"

"It's slowing down now," Tony smiled.

Angelo asked Reggie, "Would you like to go there after supper?"

Reggie nodded, "It sounds kewl."

"Just remember that people live in most of the condos," Tony reminded. "As long as you're kewl about it, and keep reasonably quiet, no one will care."

Ray warned, "Don't bother with condo C. The President of the United States is living there this week, so the Secret Service won't let you. The views probably suck from there anyway. Condos A and B block most of the CIC, the dorms and down to the beach."

Before leaving the changing room, while he was wrapping his towel around his waist, Reggie told Phil and Owen, "We'll catch up with you in front of condo A, after dinner."

"Kewl, dude," Phil smiled.

Noticing that Phil was pretty tall, taller than Owen and almost as tall as he and Tony were, Angelo smirked, "We need to deal with family stuff, but we'll try to find you at the rehearsal." More agreements flowed around the room.

As couples, they left the changing area and lavatory to return to their rooms. The moment that he closed the door, Reggie spun around, practically exploding, "Do you believe what just happened?"

Angelo giggled, "Which part?"

Reggie excitedly gushed, "Nobody said a word about my dick, or yours, even when we were stiff as steel. As soon as I realized we were all heading to shower, I was disappointed, because I really wanted to wash your butt and dick, and have you wash mine, but thought, it'll have to wait. That was nothing like a junior high locker room shower! All four of them did exactly the same stuff I wanted to do, so I did wash you and you washed me. Not a word was said about any of that, or the hugs and kisses shared when we were almost done.

I've learned so much on this one day, I'm flippin' out."

Going to his lover, Angelo giggled, "Yeah, I can see that, but you know what?"

Wrapping his arms around Angelo, Reggie smiled, "What?"

"Your dick doesn't make you different from anybody else," Angelo warmly explained. "When we were chatting in the hall, nobody was looking down at your dick. I specifically watched for that and only saw Owen quickly glance down once. I had the only cut unit of the six, but it's just meat hanging, until I'm with you. Nobody said anything about your length, or my circumcised dick. I washed your dick and ass, and you washed mine, and the other four did what they wanted to do too. That means we're normal gay dudes, and a gay couple, just like them. We've got pubes, and so do Tony and Owen, but Phil and Ray don't have much hair yet. We know Tony is thirteen and Ray is twelve, and they became a couple today, since lunch, partly because of us. Is Owen younger than Phil? I'd like to know which is older, but it really doesn't matter a whole heck of a lot. What matters is they're in love, like Tony and Ray, and you and me. Only a little while ago, I felt kind of bad scheming so we could be alone together here."

"Now I can't wait," Reggie laughed. "I can only hope to stick to our plan."

Nodding agreement, Angelo giggled, "I feel exactly the same way. Neither of us knew how alone and limited we were this morning. Now we've got each other, and a bunch of really kewl dudes that I very much want to live with, and get to know better."

"And we hid in our homes because they're orphans and we're not." Sadly shaking his head, Reggie smirked, "I feel even dumber

now than I did this morning."

Seeing in Reggie's eyes how serious he was, Angelo reached for a tender kiss that was passionately returned. When the kiss broke, Angelo whispered, "We didn't know better and made poor assumptions." He then prompted, "Let's take care of stuff and try to get to the auditorium."

Reggie smiled, "I love you so much, babe. My life changed in less than a day, thanks to you."

Desperately whimpering, Angelo again rested his head on the shoulder that he had dreamed of resting his head on. The need to take care of business fought the desire to remain where they were, and how they were; bare except for the towels wrapped around their waists, and as close as they could possibly be. Seconds ticked away and turned into minutes. Neither of them cared about anything except being together.

Over the room's speaker, Prez announced, "Attention all Rimmers. Platinum Habits will be rehearsing in the Ewa Beach auditorium. Everyone is welcome to attend. That's all."

Reggie whispered, "It's time, babe."

Without moving, Angelo softly whined, "I don't want to."

Softly chortling, Reggie offered, "I promise to hold you and kiss you anytime, in front of your family and mine. The quicker we get this over with, the quicker we'll be together and alone again." Angelo looked up into Reggie's eyes. Pressing his lips against Angelo's cheek, Reggie softly assured, "I'm a lot less shy than I was this morning. Give me an excuse and I'll give you a big kiss in front of your entire family."

Stepping back, Angelo happily giggled, "Any particular excuse?"

"A simple glance my way would do it," Reggie smiled. At that moment, he knew he wasn't lying or exaggerating. For a few moments in Angelo's arms, he would do anything to make him happy, blushes be damned, he would do it anyway, just to see a smile. The towels were dropped. Wiping deodorant under their pits, they complained about putting their dirty clothes on just to keep up appearances. While brushing their hair, they decided to put clean, new underwear on. Angelo helplessly giggled at his boyfriend's long dick flopping into his boxer briefs. Tucking his goods away, Reggie teased, "You know that your dick flopped around too? It's definitely more than average."

Nodding, Angelo seriously apologized; "I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable."

Dropping the shorts he had just picked up, Reggie hurried across the room, wrapped Angelo in his arms and firmly assured, "Between the things you said today, and four new friends saying nothing about it, I feel more like I used to than I have in a long time. You changed me in less than a day, Angelo Diaz. I can't recall any other day that was as much fun as this day has been. I love you." He stole a quick kiss and stepped back, carefully watching Angelo's reaction. Angelo's smile turned into gleeful giggles. Reggie could see goosebumps popping on Angelo's arms, chest and shoulders.

They went into overdrive again, getting their boardies, shirts and sandals on. They flew out of the room and out the two doors into the quad. At first, they glanced around to get their bearings. To their right was the domed CIC. The diving well and olympic sized pool was to their left. The townhouses were directly ahead, on the opposite side of the other dormitory.

"Dorm three is the one Pat and Ralphie were chasing each other around," Angelo realized.

Nodding, Reggie took Angelo's hand and confirmed, "Two more kewl dudes live where we do."

Angelo giggled, "If I shyly turned away from you, so you couldn't see my dick, what would you do?"

"Chase after you," Reggie grinned, "and probably tear whatever you were wearing off your pretty butt too."

"That's twice you've commented on my butt," Angelo smiled.

Nodding, Reggie grinned, "It's as awesome as the rest of you. It and all of you are mine to admire. If you catch me blankly staring, that's prob'ly what I'm doin'." Angelo began giggling. Reggie chuckled, "What?"

"It's all catching up to me, Reg. I had hopes, maybe in a few days, but we did it in less than a day."

Reggie shrugged, "We had the same hopes. Words can't describe how happy I am, because the dude that woke every feeling and emotion in me, had the same feelings for me. I hope tomorrow will be like today. We'll get to meet more kids, and we'll get to spend time alone too. Fears suck. For no good reason we hid in our homes, afraid of being different. Nobody has treated us differently all day. To them, we're just two more dudes."

"Who did you like the most today?"

"We spent the most time with Tony and Ray. I like them most. Everyone was different and I liked everyone we met."

"Me too."

Nearing the row of townhouses, Reggie asked, "Your place first or mine?"

"Yours; I'm in too good of a mood to deal with the witch."

Moments later, they were walking up the steps to townhouse four. Reggie put his hand on the security plate and said his name. He opened the door and stepped inside, holding the door open for Angelo. Once his boyfriend was standing beside him, and took his hand, Reggie closed the door. He then called, "Hello? Cameron?"

Not hearing a response, Angelo wondered, "Do you think he went out?"

Reggie shrugged, "Maybe. Since I didn't come back for lunch, he might've gone scrounging, or maybe he's just lurkin'." Leading the way to the dining area sliding doors, Reggie opened the blinds part way and peered outside. Again, he didn't see anyone. Leading the way back across the rooms, Reggie grinned, "If he jumps out from his room in a sad attempt to scare me, I'll hold him still, while you tickle him until he pees his pants. The second room on the left is mine. I'll show you my drawings."

Climbing the stairs, Angelo said, "I've got the first room. The witch has the second room. These are big homes; compared to the other one we lived in, this is really nice."

"Yeah, I think so too," Reggie agreed. At the top of the stairs, he peeked into the first room. Not seeing his younger brother, he grinned at Angelo, saying, "As nice as this is, the rooms we were in at the dorms were nicer."

Rapidly nodding, and following his boyfriend into his room,

Angelo proudly beamed, "That dorm room is our place, starting tonight, Reg."

Immediately upon entering his room, Reggie opened his arms wide. They embraced and grabbed a few kisses of varying intensity. Never releasing Angelo, Reggie shared, "There were plates, glassware and other kitchen necessities when we got here. Even the beds were made with new sheets, pillows and blankets. My mom had Alden remove the plates and glassware, so she could keep the china and glasses we've always had."

"It was the same at my place. We've all got bigger beds now, so the bedding that was already here, we kept."

"My folks seem to like working here more than their old jobs. My dad especially needed a little time at home before he chilled and started talking. I expect them home around four. He'll walk in the house chatting up a storm. Betchya it's the same as yesterday; no commute, no stuck up rich hags to cope with."

Trying to act suspiciously, but not managing very well, Angelo giggled, "Are you stalling, or just jonesin' for more hugs, Reggie?"

"Both," Reggie chortled.

"Com'on," Angelo giggled, "you can hold me and show me your drawings at the same time." To prove the point, Angelo slowly turned in his partner's arms. Playfully sniggering, Reggie ground his crotch against Angelo's butt. They both began laughing. "Soon, stud," Angelo cackled.

"Yeah?"

"Definitely," Angelo purred, and held his lover's arms around his waist. Looking over his shoulder, he asked, "Do you think you might

like it too?"

"I never considered that at all either, until you," Reggie admitted. Leaning closer to Angelo's ear, he whispered, "Yeah, I've thought about it too, and like the idea, but it is a little scary."

"I thought sucking dick would be scary too, but it was more fun than I ever imagined," Angelo softly shared.

"It was awesome. You smelled and tasted great."

Feeling a lump growing against his butt, Angelo giggled, "Drawings and pictures, remember? We're not gonna prove we're in love by getting caught in the act."

Evilly snickering, Reggie pointed at the desk, directing, "The top center drawer has my recent sketch pads," and released Angelo to help himself. Nervous jitters washed over Reggie. The real Reggie Combs would be seen in every drawing, and nothing he had done with Angelo all day matched the anxiety he felt; it was on par with showing Angelo his erection. Before falling down, Reggie sat on the corner of his bed.

Angelo slid open the drawer and pulled out the first pad. The first drawing was a view of Diamond Head, likely from Kaneohe, where Reggie used to live. The next page had another landscape, with palm trees in the foreground and a marina in the distant background. Flipping between the first and second crayon drawings, Angelo didn't see a single pencil line anywhere. Reggie softly said, "I made that marina one up, from piecing together a couple of memories."

Angelo gushed, "It's really great, Reg. I'm wondering how you drew such tiny boats, and they still look like real boats. The use of colors actually gives everything the illusion of light and depth. If I spent an entire month on it, I couldn't have done anything like this."

Flipping to the next page, Angelo saw a pencil and charcoal sketch of his face. It was as if he had modeled for it. There was depth to his entire head, his cheeks and even the lips, probably the most difficult facial feature to get right, were exactly drawn and shaded perfectly. The date on the page was Sunday's date. Knowing he never had modeled for it, and that it was drawn from memory, Angelo looked up and turned around, finding his boyfriend sitting on the edge of his bed.

Blushing more intensely than he had most of the afternoon, Reggie giggled, "I couldn't get you out of my mind for three days."

As far as Angelo was concerned, the picture was better than any photograph ever taken. Angelo was speechless. Rather than stammer and stutter, Angelo went to Reggie, leaned over to kiss the top of his blond head, and softly promised, "I'll always love you."

"I love you too," Reggie giggled, and gestured to the pad, cackling, "Obviously!"

Sadly shaking his head, Angelo muttered, "I balked and fussed for three days." He lifted the pad and flipped to the next page. Immediately giggling, Angelo turned the pad to portrait orientation. On the page was a cartoon image of Cameron, wrapped only in a towel and flexing in a bathroom mirror. Reggie's little brother's biceps sagged pitifully, and there wasn't enough butt there to hold up a feather, never mind a towel that went well below the knees. And the overly impressed expression on the skinny kid's face was priceless. Reggie evilly snickered. Angelo cracked up and roared, "Every time I see your bro, from now on, I'm gonna see this in my mind."

"Join the club," Reggie cackled.

"You have to draw a cartoon like this of my sister, riding her

broom," Angelo giggled. "I'll frame it and hang it in our dorm room. All of these are excellent and deserve frames."

"I'm glad you like them," Reggie shyly grinned.

"I'm not just saying it cos I love you," Angelo seriously assured. "They really are fantastic; much better than I imagined. You've got a gift and real talent, Reg."

Standing up, Reggie took the pad from Angelo, dropped it on his desk, and then took his boyfriend in his arms from behind again. This time, Angelo felt Reggie's heart frantically beating against his back. Not able to see the expression on Reggie's face, Angelo turned his head slightly to ask, "Are you all right?"

"More than ever," Reggie whispered. "I've got you."

"Yeah, ya do," Angelo giggled. "My boyfriend has talent. When you're drawing, I'll impatiently wait to see what your imagination dreamed up."

Reggie admitted, "My family thinks I draw really well too. You're the first person outside my family to compliment me. Thank you, babe."

"You're welcome," Angelo giggled.

"It seems my family has abandoned me," Reggie joked.

"Let's tell Prez," Angelo giggled.

"We're completely justified moving into the dorm."

"We don't need justification, or any reason more than the one we've got."

"Since we're in a holding pattern, at thirty-thousand feet, what do you wanna do? We could go to check out your music, or go to the auditorium?"

Before Angelo could answer, they heard the door opening downstairs, and the voices of at least three young boys. Reggie grinned, "My brother is home."

"With some friends, from the sound," Angelo softly sniggered.

After giving Angelo a firm squeeze and whispering, "I really love you," Reggie led the way downstairs. They could hear the refrigerator door open and close, and then cupboards opening and closing. At the landing, Reggie saw two red-head twins, and a third, brown haired boy sitting on the stools at the kitchen counter. Reggie called, "Cameron?"

All three boys at the counter turned to the voice, waved and giggled. Reggie's brother looked over the counter, giggling, "Hey." He pointed to the one light brown haired boy, saying, "Reggie and Angelo, this is Brad Triggs." Cameron quickly moved to the other two, adding, "And this is Kade and Karey Oldcambus." He giggled, "Which is which, I'm not too sure yet." All four boys cracked up. Cameron giggled, "That's my bro and our next door neighbor, Angelo Diaz."

Walking toward the dining room and kitchen, Reggie and Angelo waved with their free hands. Brad giggled, "It looks like your bro has a boyfriend, Cameron."

"Yeah," Cameron teased, "Reggie's been acting weird since we moved here. Now I get the reason why."

Reggie sniggered, "You brought new friends home to raid the

kitchen?"

"Course!" Cameron laughed.

"We know your mom is one of our chefs," Karey giggled.

Kade hungrily growled, "Apple and cherry turnovers!"

Brad reminded, "This morning's blueberry and banana nut muffins were so good!" Heavenly reverent hums erupted from Brad, Kade and Karey. Angelo cracked up.

Sniggering, Reggie walked around the counter, asking, "Where did you meet these muffin and turnover monsters, bro?"

"At the pool," Cameron giggled. "They skinny dip here all the time, bro."

"I saw that, yeah," Reggie grinned, and snagged two home made muffins. Brad, Kade and Karey squealed as if kicked in the nads, and then began loudly complaining. Angelo howled laughing. Reggie guided Angelo to the table and offered him a choice, "Strawberry or banana nut, babe?" Still laughing, Angelo pointed at the one with visible nuts. Widely smiling, Reggie put it down on the table.

Picking up the tray of muffins, Cameron put it close to his three friends. Hands flew everywhere. While snacking, Reggie asked his little brother what he'd been doing the last few hours.

Around the food in his mouth, Cameron mumbled, "About one o'clock, I got hungry enough to go out. I met these three dudes by the pool, and they took me to get some lunch at the CIC. After I ate, we went into the rec room and hung out there, playing video games for a while. Then we went back to the pools. You've gotta try the diving

well, Reggie."

"We'll get around to it," Reggie responded, and then flashed Angelo a small smile.

Moments later, while six mouths were being stuffed, Roy Combs walked into the house. He closed the door, chuckling, "It has begun."

Two voices greeted, "Hey dad."

And four said, "Hi Mr. Combs."

Once again, Cameron introduced his three new friends, and managed to correctly point out Kade and Karey, based on the T-shirts the twins were wearing.

After wiping his mouth with his hand, Reggie asked, "Dad, do you remember Angelo?"

Nodding, "Of course," Roy then smirked, "I'm not that old yet, Reggie."

Reggie grinned, "We spent most of the day together."

"I'm glad you got out of the house," Roy smiled.

"We went around the base," Reggie explained. "We never made it to Oneula Beach, but saw some of what's here. Once Angelo and I finish eating, we'll go over to the auditorium."

"Good," Roy cheered, and then asked, "How many should I tell your mother to expect for dinner?"

"Four here," Cameron answered.

Reggie checked with Angelo. Shrugging, Angelo softly

answered, "We shouldn't surprise your mom with a bunch of additional mouths. Let's eat at the CIC."

Returning his attention to his dad, Reggie said, "We'll be out for dinner and probably most of the night."

Curiously, Roy blinked and then grinned, "What are you trying to not say, Reginald?"

Cameron, Brad, Kade and Karey sang, "Reggie and Angelo, sittin' in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!"

Grinning insanely, Reggie rolled his eyes. Angelo stuffed half his muffin in his mouth at once, so he couldn't giggle or smile.

Glancing around the room and settling on his eldest son, Roy smiled, "Is it true?"

Nodding, Reggie reached across the table, had his hand taken by Angelo and then explained, "We've been in the same rut all weekend. Since our feelings are very mutual, yeah, it's true."

"Thus, you're staying out late tonight?" Roy confirmed.

Reggie smiled, "We met a bunch of really kewl dudes today. We've got a few plans with them. And there's one other thing I'd like your opinion on."

Roy chuckled, "That means I'll be scraping your mother up off the floor again soon." Cameron and his three friends broke into giggles. Bracing himself, Roy prompted, "Go ahead."

Turning redder by the second, Reggie grinned, "Since we couldn't be alone here, and Angelo has a little sister, we checked and learned we could have a place at the dorm. It's the same place our

friends are at, and it's very kewl. We won't only be out late, we'd rather not be home at night at all. Please say it's okay, dad."

Ignoring the four giggling younger boys, Roy went to his eldest son, smiling, "There are boys half your age in those dorms, Reggie. Of course, I approve, and completely understand. Your mom, on the other hand, won't be quite so accepting."

Cameron loudly laughed, "Alden?"

From the speakers in the kitchen and dining room, Alden replied, "Yes, Cameron?"

"Smelling salts, dude, lots of smelling salts, like a week's worth," Cameron cackled. A pile of the little packets, at least thirty of them, appeared in the center of the table.

Checking with Reggie and Mr. Combs, Angelo grinned, "You're kidding, right? She won't really faint, will she?"

Roy nodded, "She's got low blood pressure, and so does Reggie. Something a bit too shocking sends all the blood destined for her brain to her toes, and then she's out cold."

Angelo glared at Reggie, wordlessly wondering why he hadn't said anything. Reggie smiled, "It only happened to me once, when I was about seven, in second grade. Don't worry, okay?" All Angelo could think of was the surprising orgasm his lover had. Every dude is ecstatic after the release, but Reggie was almost comatose. If Reggie ever passed out on him while making love, Angelo knew he would climb the walls. This topic would need to be discussed alone.

Looking up at his dad, Reggie asked, "So, you'll say what to mom?"

"That you're staying out with friends, on base, so she'll know that you're safe," Roy easily replied. Taking hold of his son's shoulders, Roy smiled, "I'm very happy and even prouder than ever. You didn't worry a bit about being gay, and I had hoped you wouldn't, but would just do what needed to be done."

Reggie gasped, "How'd you know? I wasn't even sure until Saturday afternoon."

Roy chuckled, "It's not hard to miss when your son is so hopelessly preoccupied that he can't follow simple instructions. If I heard, 'Sorry dad, what did you say?' once, I heard it about ten times Saturday and Sunday. I wasn't sure who was preoccupying you, but that much was obvious."

Cameron howled laughing. Of course, only Cameron and Brad knew that Kade and Karey were telepathic. Angelo, Reggie and Roy had no clue what was so funny. Brad, Kade and Karey shuffled off their stools and filed into the kitchen, where Cameron was still laughing. In seconds, Cameron had three pretend boyfriends wrapping him up in their arms. The four boys were actually playing out Angelo's and Reggie's thoughts. Roy found it pretty funny and playfully scolded, "Cameron, just because I taught you the facts-of-life, that doesn't mean you need to demonstrate what you've learned."

Cameron cackled, "But dad, if one is good, and two is better, three must be the best."

Brad giggled, "We're serious; at least I am." The other three cracked up and shifted around to snuggle up with Brad. The ten-year-old gay curious boy, rescued Saturday afternoon by Keith and John, was suddenly far less curious and much more certain.

Roy chuckled, "Since Reggie and Angelo won't be here, you and

your three boyfriends can spend the night here, if you like."

Cameron whined through giggles, "Can't we stay at the dorm too?"

"Smelling salts won't revive the departed," Roy grinned. All six boys began laughing. Over their combined voices, Roy joked, "She'll take me out before she goes too. I did not take the job here to make an early departure from this world, and make two more orphans."

Locking eyes with Angelo, Reggie gleefully prompted, "It's time to go to the rehearsal, isn't it?"

Cameron teased, "You still need to rehearse, bro? After this afternoon, I'd think you have the show uh... mastered by now." He quickly hid behind his three friends and all four evilly snickered.

Watching Angelo turn redder than a fire engine, Reggie turned and shot daggers from his eyes at his brother.

Roy smiled, "Angelo, welcome to the family. Please take your boyfriend out of the house. There doesn't need to be witnesses when I teach four pranksters a lesson."

"Yes, Sir," Angelo softly answered, and stood. He reached for Reggie's hand.

Standing up, Reggie threatened, "Lots and lots of red, bro," and took Angelo's offered hand. In the kitchen, a chorus of moos erupted. Angelo and Reggie walked out of the house hearing the combined squeals and giggles of Cameron, Brad, Kade and Karey.

Angelo prompted, "Let me see if my mom's home, Reg. If it's only my sister, then we'll head to the auditorium. I wouldn't be surprised if my mom went there. She really likes the band." They

turned and went up the steps to townhouse five. Angelo unlocked the door and stepped inside with Reggie. Cecilia Diaz was sitting on the sofa watching TV, but briefly turned and saw her brother and Reggie. Angelo asked, "Has mom been home?"

"Been and left again," Cecilia answered.

Angelo asked, "Did she go to the band's rehearsal?"

More involved in the TV program she was watching, Cecilia shrugged, "I think so."

Rolling his eyes, Angelo grinned, "Let's go, Reg."

They walked back out of the house and down the steps. Reggie giggled, "Do you think she even noticed us holding hands?"

Angelo sighed, "Who knows." High pitched screams caused both boys to pause. Off in the distance, beyond the nearest dormitory, high above the diving well, Cameron and Brad dropped. Moments later, Kade and Karey appeared and followed their friends down.

Reggie sniggered, "Had to be my dad."

"And Alden," Angelo agreed. Beginning to walk again, Angelo smiled, "Your dad's really kewl."

"He completely blew me away again," Reggie sniggered. "How he might've guessed or figured anything out, about me or us, is beyond me. There's never been any dudes I looked twice at, babe. Realizing that I was interested in you as more than a friend completely blew me away."

Angelo admitted, "I was pretty nervous, ya know, meeting him again, under this circumstance." Squeezing Reggie's hand, Angelo

giggled, "And you, coming out and telling him that we needed a place to be alone, this afternoon and tonight, and for the foreseeable future. Seeing the picture you drew of me, from memory, I should've guessed. I wish I could say I wrote a song about you, but I'll have to start working on that as soon as possible."

Reggie smiled, "I know what you were thinking and feeling, babe. You don't have to do anything to prove what was, you've been proving what is all day. I was well on my way to giving up, but you made me stop, by shouting your feelings so everyone could hear. That told me that you were very serious, and to really listen to every word you said."

Thrilled to the core once again, it took Angelo a few moments to softly yet firmly say, "I am going to prove it though, Reggie. Somehow, I'm going to show it to everyone paying the slightest bit of attention, I'm all yours, by your side every possible moment of every day."

"I'm hearing you, and loving every word, but this really isn't a contest," Reggie gently said. He raised their clasped hands, smiling, "The proof you're looking for is right here. At first, I was afraid to take your hand. Right now, I'd start becoming terrified if your hand wasn't holding mine. More of that proof keeps showing up in some awesome, completely unexpected ways, like an intimate shower with two other couples in plain sight. Tonight, when we fall asleep together in the same bed, will be more proof. Tomorrow morning, when we wake will prove it all over again. Waking up and kissing you good morning, for the first time, is what I'm looking forward to."

Completely giddy and out of control, Angelo began laughing. He saw two little kids that were holding hands ahead, nearer to the auditorium. Angelo yelled, "HEY, YOU KIDS!" Reggie sniggered.

The two blond boys turned to the voice. It was Dillon Helde and Scott Mullins. Together the boys hollered, "YEAH?"

Angelo loudly laughed, "Are you boyfriends?"

"YEAH!" both little guys giggled.

Gesturing to Reggie with his free hand, Angelo shouted, "This is my boyfriend, Reggie Combs."

Dillon and Scott cracked up. As soon as they could, they screamed, "KEWL! WE'LL TELL OUR DADDIES!"

Reggie was laughing his ass off by this point. Angelo hysterically bellowed, "Who are your daddies?"

Dillon laughed, "DERRICK AND MIKE, THE CORE RIMMERS!" Losing it and becoming hysterical, Reggie could barely walk.

"SEAN AND TROY!" Scott cackled. Giggling like crazy, Dillon and Scott ran the rest of the way to the auditorium. Together, the two little tikes wrestled the auditorium door open and hurried inside.

Angelo giggled, "Well, I got to share with someone."

Nodding, Reggie wheezed, "Prez and Keith already know about us, but now half the leadership know us by reputation only."

At the same moment Angelo shrugged, a woman shouted, "Reginald Combs, get your butt over here!" Seeing Reggie's mom, Angelo hurried, afraid that they had shocked her and she would faint right where she was standing, on the grass between the CIC and a dormitory. Being pulled along by his boyfriend, Reggie blushed and laughed his ass off. When the two boys were close enough, Monica

Combs grinned, "I've already heard Angelo's confession. Do you have anything to say?"

Nodding, Reggie lifted his and Angelo's clasped hands, happily giggling, "I love him, and he loves me too, ma."

Widely smiling, but sadly shaking her head, Monica said, "Your father recognized the signs, but I said he was imagining it. I'm only wondering why you didn't say something to us about it?"

Reggie shrugged and smiled, "It was such a big surprise to me too. What could I say? I had to figure it out first. About ten o'clock this morning, Angelo asked if I wanted to walk around the base. We haven't been apart since then."

Monica nodded and admitted, "I saw you together, at the kitchen food line during lunch. Of course, that wasn't anything like Angelo's declaration to two six-year-old boys." Turning redder, Angelo sputtered and burst into giggles. Monica continued, "I only thought, at last my oldest son is out of the house and has found a friend."

"Prepare yourself for bigger surprises at home, ma," Reggie giggled.

Closing her eyes for a moment, Monica sighed, "Such as?" and reopened her eyes.

"Cameron went out too," Reggie cheekily grinned. "He came home with three boyfriends, a pair of twins and a spare. Since they're having dinner at home, we're having dinner at the CIC with the Clan. Dad will tell you the rest."

"I warned your father that Cameron was too young," Monica groused.

Reggie giggled, "Dad told me when I was ten. Why isn't Cameron old enough?"

Monica simply stated, "You were born more mature; an old soul in a young body, Reggie."

"Or you're afraid the baby is growing up and you're getting old," Reggie teased, and started walking again, leading Angelo to the auditorium.

Monica giggled, "You're grounded, Mister."

"Sorry, ma," Reggie sniggered, "talk to dad."

Looking over his shoulder, Angelo watched Mrs. Combs begin the walk toward the townhouses. Turning to his boyfriend, Angelo giggled, "At least she didn't pass out."

"Now it's your turn," Reggie devilishly grinned.

Recalling the exact same words said when they were alone in a dorm room, Angelo giggled, "Whip it out, stud."

Reggie turned and leered, "Tonight, we're wearing each other out, sexy."

Chapter 24

Ewa Beach School

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, 3:02PM HTZ

At the end of the school day, AJ and Jerry transported to the Rapid Response Base for their level one phaser training. Walking out of school with his husband and most of the Core team, Prez tapped his sub-vocal, asking, "Alden, connect me to the PA at both bases, please?"

"Go ahead, Prez," Alden replied.

"Attention all Rimmers," Prez announced, "Platinum Habits will be rehearsing in the Ewa Beach auditorium. Everyone is welcome to attend. That's all."

Running back to Prez with Dillon and Geoff, Richie whined, "Poppa, we wanna play with our Hamster Balls!"

"Yeah!" Dillon and Geoff chimed.

Most of the Core Rimmers roared laughing. Richie, Dillon and Geoff impatiently squinted. Squatting down, Prez chuckled, "You know where we'll be, so go have a good time," and planted a kiss on Richie's cheek.

Nudging Troy, Keith smiled, "Richie, what's the deal with Jimmy?"

"He's the *best* kisser and hugger!" Richie cheered.

Troy giggled, "Are you sure you're not the best hugger and kisser, Richie?"

Shrugging, Richie giggled, "Dunno, lemme check," and ran off to find his boyfriend, with Dillon and Geoff running after him.

Once Richie was far enough away, Troy chuckled, "I know they're mostly emulating us, but I wish I had been just a little like our kids are."

The Core Rimmers resumed their walk toward the auditorium. Kaleo prompted, "You'll have to play some love songs and ballads today, dudes."

"Yeah," Drew agreed, "I can think of at least three or four new couples that would appreciate it."

Corey giggled, "So leave plenty of time between the end of rehearsal and dinner."

Evilly grinning and leering at Troy, Sean shared, "If the band plays ballads, we'll need twice as much time." Pausing briefly, Troy pulled Sean close for an after school tonsillectomy. They stopped walking long enough to leave each other dizzy, and then hurried after their team mates.

Tapping his comm-badge, Drew called, "Jake, are you available, dude?"

Moments later, Jake answered, "Yeah, workin' on it, Drew. We'll meet you in the PA booth."

Corey giggled, "We didn't see you during lunch."

"Yeah," Jake chortled. "We were... uh... busy... but we did have lunch, about one o'clock."

Terry sniggered, "It was a very helpful flick, Corey. We'll have

to thank all the fuzzy facts-of-life professors."

"You're welcome," Kaleo, Sean and Troy chorused.

Tory grinned, "This is at least the third time I've heard of this video. While you dudes play love songs, I'll watch the video on my PADD."

"I guess we'll have dinner around eight o'clock," Kaleo playfully warned his hubby.

Jake sniggered, "Please don't say another word, or we'll miss the concert. Jake out."

Up ahead, streams of kids and some off-shift adult employees could be seen walking toward and into the auditorium. Reading the river of kids, John learned that Tony Lanning and Ray Varga had hooked up that afternoon. Hearing his husband's telepathic remark, *'It took them long enough!'* Stephen went into a giggling fit.

Drew gasped, "The place isn't even powered up yet," and started running, with Corey and Leo hurrying after him.

Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike and Troy began building the list of songs they specifically wanted to work on that day. At a pause, Sean asked, "Please play 'Just My Imagination' and 'Oo-oo Child'? Those songs are just too good to leave out."

The band members agreed to play the songs, but Derrick reminded Sean, "On both those tunes Reyes sings lead vocals. If he doesn't show up, we'll have to choose alternatives."

Inside the auditorium lobby, Corey and Drew found the lights were already on. Erik and Travis were holding the theater doors open for the kids. Lance and Scott were at the circuit breakers, with Alden

instructing them on which switches to flip on. It was one of those rare moments when Alden's voice could be heard saying different things from two comm-badges. First, Corey turned to Leo, and then to Drew. Seeing his dad's and pop's stupefied expressions, Leo sputtered, covered his mouth and turned away, softly giggling.

Going to Scott, Drew wondered, "Have you ever messed around with electronics before?"

Busily flipping switches, Scott shrugged, "At my place in New York, the building used breakers and old fashioned fuses. I replaced the things all the time. I don't think that really counts as electronics though."

Overhearing the question, Lance said, "I got my Les Paul pretty cheap because it needed new pickups. I soldered the new pickups to the pots, found the tone knobs weren't working right at all, and installed the replacement capacitors and potentiometers."

Jake and Terry entered the auditorium. Right behind them, Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Sean and Troy filed inside. Drew went to Prez, pointed at Scott and then Lance, and smiled, "We've got two more Toy Rimmers, Prez."

"Kewl," Prez chuckled, "log it." The members of Platinum Habits went into the theater, greeting Erik and Travis as they passed, but Sean remained in the lobby.

Almost in unison, Lance and Scott spun around and shouted, "We turned on the friggin' lights!" Sean softly chortled because they said the same thing at the same time again. Going to the concession stand, Leo leaned over onto it, covered his mouth with his arms and busted up laughing.

Corey giggled, "Did anyone else even try, or think to double-

check with Alden?"

Seeing both teens shaking their heads, Drew grinned, "You took the initiative without anyone prompting you. Both of you have electronics experience too."

"I couldn't have soldered pickups in a guitar," Corey giggled. "And you know what a capacitor does in that simple circuit."

Drew offered, "We'll keep your jobs easy at first, maintaining HTML and PHP for our website. That'll allow me, Corey and Reyes to concentrate on more advanced programming. Growing your skill set is entirely up to you."

Lance grinned, "We're guitar players, primarily interested in music."

"Like six other Core Rimmers," Corey reminded.

"Besides," Drew smiled, "I see a team of two, working together on this task, and very probably their music and much more. And by the way, we heard what you two did for the McPhearson brothers Friday morning. You might think it was nothing, but a five-year-old and a seven-year-old know otherwise. When their parents never came home, and their baby sitter had to leave them, you made them feel safe on the scariest day of all." Drew uncontrollably sniggered, "You were Core Rimmers before we met you at Des Moines."

Still holding open the theater doors, Erik and Travis sang the blues; "It's too late, it's too late. You're secret is out, and now it's too late." Losing it, Sean howled.

Nodding at the poor impromptu performance, Drew laughed, "Those McPhearson boys followed you here. Now they have a new

family too."

Alden playfully asked, "Did you know that Grandma Morrison can giggle?"

At the theater doors for no other reason except to eavesdrop, Erik fell into a giggling fit and Travis cracked up.

Corey sniggered, "Are there any other excuses; chronic gas, hang nails, jock itch, warts or unruly pubes?"

"ALL OF THE ABOVE!" Lance and Scott hollered.

Corey cackled, "Damn pubes, always trying to wrap around dicks, making us rearrange the furniture in public places." Loud howling laughter escaped Leo before he covered his mouth again.

Drew nodded at his hubby, and then told Lance and Scott, "Say yes and you can get married whenever ya want. You can also adopt some kids. Besides, we need and want you two. This weekend, four hundred kids will become almost five hundred, when eighty more orphans show up."

Scott checked with Lance. Lance sighed, "When Troy and Sean talked about this yesterday, I really wanted to, but now I've got major league butterflies."

Sean interjected, "Remember what I said yesterday? Family and relationships come first. I'm confident that you two guys can do this job."

Scott told Lance, "I had web design in high school last year, and got an A."

"I just started that class in September," Lance shared. "I was

doin' good, but we didn't get to Javascript or PHP yet."

Reyes and Ryan ran into the auditorium lobby, waved at the group gathered, and kept going into the theater. Scott reached for Lance's hand. Lance took Scott's hand in his, and then told Drew, "It's kewl."

Scott told Drew, "It's kewl by me too."

Drew smiled, "Go watch the show, bros. I'll take care of the rest. We'll talk more during dinner." Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis went into the theater together. Corey gathered Leo, Jake and Terry. Drew joined them and had the group transported up to the PA booth. While getting the gear set for the show, Drew had Alden log Scott Shetley and Lance Kinchen as Toy Rimmers. Corey notified Lieutenant Vorik to have personal security assigned.

Walking down the theater's left side aisle with Erik and Travis, Scott and Lance were called by Alden on their comm-badges. He had the two newest Core Rimmers hold out their hands and then transported their sub-vocals into their palms.

Walking up to a microphone, Prez told the gathered audience to "greet the two new Toy Rimmers, Ensigns Scott Shetley and Lance Kinchen," and then welcomed them to the team. Amid the applause and cheers, Mike flashed two thumbs-up. Kaleo and Tory went to Scott and Lance to help them get their new sub-vocals fitted and tested. In the audience, the entire Gibbons family, including Al and Charles, stood and applauded the two newest Core Rimmers.

Troy cracked up and went to a microphone, laughing, "I could've sworn I told you to wait two days."

Lance giggled, "You didn't tell Corey and Drew though."

Shuffling down the third row, where Erik, Travis, Chris and Jay were already seated, Scott loudly told the band, "We expect some rockin' jams."

Stepping up to his microphone, Mike chuckled, "We'll see what we can do about that."

Playing a few chords and arpeggios on his electric piano, Keith told the audience, "We learned a few new tunes, and there's another we're going to give a first try today. Your responses will tell us if they're cooked and ready for prime time, or if we go back to the proverbial drawing board."

Lance and Scott yelled, "Got ya covered, Keith."

"Back here too, dudes," KC hollered. Sitting along the same row as KC were Fred and Chauncey Eckhart, John and Rich Murphy, and Jerry, Joey, Jon and Mary Owens.

Keith chuckled, "How're the waves, KC?"

"This morning they were better at Waikiki," KC replied. "When they flattened out on us, we went over to Oneula Beach."

Prez confirmed, "There were no problems?"

Above the negative chatter, Matt loudly answered, "No homophobic moose sightings east or west of Pearl Harbor." Ryan cracked up, making his presence on stage obvious.

Joey loudly announced, "Uncah Wyan is on sdage widh Weyes!" Many of the Rimmers' sons that had met Joey turned around and giggled. Waving at his new friends, Joey giggled, "Hi guys!"

Unaccustomed to being on stage in the first place, Ryan blushed.

He stood, picked up his chair and tried to slink away, but Reyes hurried after him.

Bringing his boyfriend back and sitting him down beside the drum risers again, Reyes giggled, "That's right, Joey. I'm hoping to prove that I can dance too."

Prez smiled, "Drew and Kaleo asked that we play some ballads and love songs for you guys. If we see some more dancing partners, like Sunday night, we'll know we've got these tunes ready."

Derrick announced, "Troy's gonna start us off with a tune called [Baby Come Back](#)," and softly counted off. Derrick, Prez and Reyes started the song. Keith, Mike and Troy joined in. After a few more bars, standing and strumming his favored Stratocaster near center stage, Troy sang;

Spending all my nights

All my money going out on the town

Doing anything just to get you off of my mind

But when the morning comes

I'm right back where I started again

Trying to forget you is just a waste of time

By this time, Craig and Felicity were out of their seats and dancing in front of the stage. Phil was whittling away at Owen, who wouldn't go dance because he had never danced before. The entire band sang along during the chorus.

Baby come back, any kind of fool could see

There was something in everything about you

Baby come back, you can blame it all on me

I was wrong, and I just can't live without you

Gage and Jonah, Ben and Sammy, Jason and JD, Ralphie and Pat, Robbie and Billy, Ronnie and Garret, Jason and Trinity Taylor hurried down the aisle to dance before the stage. The last of the single and available quadruple Rs, Richie began tapping other twelve year old boys on the shoulder to dance with him. With a brief glance, Richie could easily tell who was gay or bisexual and would be willing to dance with him.

All day long, wearing a mask of false bravado

Trying to keep up the smile that hides a tear

But as the sun goes down

I get that empty feeling again

How I wish to God that you were here

Owen had at last agreed to dance. Before he could change his mind, Phil took Owen's hand and hurried down the aisle.

Baby come back, any kind of fool could see

There was something in everything about you

Baby come back, you can blame it all on me

I was wrong, and I just can't live without you

Richie Taylor found Theo Triggs, who was trying to act inconspicuous and disinterested. Truthfully, Theo's thoughts were still

mixed up; he wanted a boyfriend, but wasn't sure if he was ready. Richie thought Theo's surface thoughts were really interesting. Richie immediately knew Theo was gay, and had been in a relationship before. That relationship had ended because of Theo's parents, which was why Theo was part of this Division, and also why Theo had mixed up thoughts. Richie sent a test telepathic message, asking, '*Do you like to dance?*' Theo grinned and nodded. Bursting with fear and joy, Theo almost imploded when Richie held a hand before him and implored, "Please?"

Now that I put it all together

Give me the chance to make you see

Have you used up all the love in your heart

Nothing left for me

Really feeling the words because Paul was missing, Reyes desperately sang: "Ain't there nothing left for me?" It sent shivers down the spines of many, especially Ryan Owens.

Taking Richie's hand, Theo stood, leaned close and told Richie, "I've been hurt."

Richie replied, "Me too. We'll definitely get around to that, after we dance. Kewl?"

Theo nodded. They shuffled down the aisle and walked hand-in-hand toward the stage.

Baby come back, any kind of fool could see

There was something in everything about you

Baby come back, listen baby, you can blame it all on me

I was wrong, and I just can't live without you

I was wrong, and I just can't live

The band played out the song, extending the guitar solo a few more bars before abruptly ending the song with all the band members singing "Baby Come Back!" The audience erupted with applause and cheers, the loudest coming from Jason Taylor's whistles.

Popping into the PA booth, a boy's voice giggled, "They really loved that song in New Boston," causing Corey, Drew, Leo, Jake and Terry to spin around. Seeing purple eyes, Corey giggled.

Leo wondered, "Who are you?"

"Dylan Richardson. Hey, how's the boyfriend doin', Leo?"

Leo squealed, "I don't have one!"

"Yet," Dylan corrected.

Glancing at each other, Jake and Terry left the PA booth without saying a word.

Sighing, Drew turned and pulled down the talkback microphone to sorrowfully tell the band, "We've got trouble." Down on the stage, the band wondered what had gone wrong.

"No," Dylan giggled, "my brothers are trouble. I'm cuddly, cute and innocent!" Turning around again, Drew rolled his eyes. Dylan giggled. "Okay, to be specific, my big little brother is trouble!"

Corey and Drew simultaneously wondered, "Which big little

brother, specifically?"

"All fifteen of them!" Dylan answered innocently, with twinkles in his eyes.

Seeing Leo pacing around the booth, softly wondering who his boyfriend was and when he would meet him, Corey digressed into a giggling fit. Drew grinned, "We've met four before you; Kyle, Tyler, Levi and Peter."

Dylan giggled, "Gotcha!" He looked around the booth and smiled. "I thought I'd pop in and see how you were doing on setting up your road crew. Looking good; you've just about found everyone."

Slipping off his stool at the lighting console, Corey howled laughing. Frighteningly, the band started playing [Just My Imagination \(Running Away With Me\)](#), with Reyes singing lead vocals. Drew pressed the button to start the preprogrammed lighting that Corey had prepared.

"I prefer 'Twilight Zone'; the guys really do that one great!" Dylan giggled.

"They don't know..." Drew started to say, but thought better of it and never finished the statement. Suddenly, Drew had images of shoveled piles of spaghetti pouring over checkered table cloths running through his mind. He softly offered, "KC and Joey are here, down in the audience. I kind o' need to monitor the board too."

Noticing that Leo was still pacing, Dylan seriously said, "You can relax, Leo. You're doing fine, and if you need someone to bounce things off of, that you think are too weird for anyone to understand, just have Alden look me up. Unlike my Dad and Pop, I don't try to drown Rimmers!" Dylan added, "Oh, Drew; I just told KC to catch up with the band later. You can fill them in on why he's showing them the

song."

On his hands and knees on the floor, Corey hiccuped. Drew rolled his stool over to the lighting console to be sure Corey had programmed it for the next song. Dylan popped out of the booth and down to the audience, into a chair beside Joey and KC.

Leo whimpered, "Dad?"

Holding an arm out for his freaked out son to take, Drew grinned, "I know, Leo. We're not even at the beach and he still managed to make a twenty-foot Mikyvis wave."

Taking his dad's hand and moving closer, Leo whined, "I have no idea who he was taking about."

"Don't worry about it," Drew gently instructed. "You're ready, whenever and for whomever you decide."

"I don't know," Leo sighed. "It still seems a little weird, ya know?"

Drew nodded and smiled, "I sure do. I felt the exact same way a couple hundred times, before I ever touched your pop's dick. For a long time, I thought of every friend I ever had, and tried to figure out why they were my friend, and then I tried to understand what made Corey so special. Once you find a boyfriend and start sharing your feelings, the weirdness turns into willingness. You'll want to hold him and be held by him. It gets to the point where you can't wait to make your boyfriend feel good. You barely even think of him returning the favor, it's way more important to give than to receive. Every hug, kiss and shoulder massage is paradise. Go a little further to sexual contact and it's the rollercoaster dive you felt the other night." Having caught his breath, Corey got up off the floor. Drew grinned, "The song's

almost over, Cor."

Nodding and returning to his seat, Corey giggled, "No problem," and pulled over the PADD with the band's set list.

The audience erupted with more applause, cheers and whistles. Seeing his boyfriend wiping his eyes, Ryan hurried over to give Reyes a quick hug and kiss. As far as the audience was concerned, it was only a cute public display of affection for a job well done. However, Ryan understood how wrecked Reyes was feeling because Paul hadn't yet shown up at Ewa Beach.

Mike switched guitars and picked up his Candy Apple Red Stratocaster. Reyes moved over to the electronic drums. Once Reyes and Mike nodded signals that they were ready, Derrick counted off and the band began playing [How Much I Feel](#). Troy sang lead vocals. More couples meandered down the aisles to dance, including Chris, Jay, Horacio, Sonia, Roy, Mollie, Tony, Ray, Nell and Pete.

Noticing Ray and Tony dancing, Nate Ramos widely smiled. After a few moments consideration, Nate got up and went down the aisle to his friends. He paused near them, chuckling, "Three's a crowd?"

Blushing and nodding, Ray began giggling his ass off. Tony smiled, and loudly spoke over the music, telling Nate, "I had to deal with a very embarrassed roomie. In the process, I spilled every thought and feeling that I've been hiding for days."

Nate laughed and locked eyes with Ray, asking, "You didn't notice?" When Ray shook his head, Nate sniggered, "Everyone else noticed both of you."

Ray hid his blush on Tony's shoulder. Tony chuckled, "For how

long?"

"It started in the meeting with Doc Wiener, I think. Definitely since lunch Sunday," Nate smiled.

Lifting his head off Tony's shoulder, Ray giggled, "You purposefully suggested..."

Shrugging, Nate giggled, "That wasn't my goal. I would've, with you two, but when I didn't see you for a while, I starting thinking if you two might finally hook up." The song ended and all three applauded. During the break, Nate quickly gave Tony and then Ray hugs and offered his congratulations. He started back up the aisle to return to his seat. Before he arrived though, fourteen-year-old Amelia Medicus stopped him.

She cutely smiled, "Do you like to dance?"

Shocked, but equally pleased, Nate stammered, "I do, but never have before." He almost mentioned the times his mom had attempted to teach him, but caught himself before actually saying something completely dorky.

Amelia giggled, "It's time you learn," and reached a hand out. Nate took her hand, and they went down towards the stage.

The next song was [You're My Best Friend](#), with Keith singing lead vocals. The song prompted Scott to take Lance's hand and lead his lover down before the stage. They were followed by Erik and Travis. Also deciding to dance, Carter, Doug, Neil and Tad went down the aisle to the stage. Swaying hip-to-hip and cheek-to-cheek, Scott and Lance watched Mike play during the entire song.

With his arms draped over Ray's shoulders, Tony saw Nate dancing with Amelia and told Ray. Amelia was petite, and very pretty.

Tony had to wonder how Nate had lucked out. Leaning close to Tony's ear, Ray wondered if Amelia had any clue of Nate's clearly bisexual tendencies. Soon, they were closer together, and softly giggling silly remarks and commentaries, few of which Nate would find very funny, and Amelia definitely would not appreciate.

When the song ended and the audience applauded, Scott and Lance went to the edge of the stage, loudly calling, "Mike!"

Grinning, Mike went to them and knelt down. Scott asked, "We're just wondering, why don't you really wail?"

"We know you can, and it seems you're holding back," Lance added.

Understandingly, Mike nodded and answered, "We're a band. Prez or Troy could've easily played that guitar part. I could've played the piano part or the bass guitar. This isn't about any one of us showing off; it's about the music. After a couple more love songs, we're going to play some rockers, like you asked. I'll talk with Troy and Prez, and ask if they'd like to switch instruments, so you can see exactly what I mean."

"Kewl," Scott and Lance chimed.

Standing again, Mike waved the band members together in front of the drum risers. Lance and Scott believed Mike was only sharing what they had just spoken about, but that was only part of what they were saying. The next song required close vocal harmonies and precision for all the instrumental parts. When the band separated, Keith went to the Hammond organ on the right side of the stage. Troy went to the stack of keyboards on the left side of the stage, where Keith normally stood. Reyes and Derrick swapped places; with Reyes taking a seat on his dad's drum throne, and Derrick went to the congas

and assorted percussion instruments. Prez picked up Mike's Stratocaster.

Returning to his microphone wearing a Fender Jazz bass guitar, Mike told the audience, "We're going to try this next song a little differently, just for Scott and Lance. All you musicians and wanna-be musicians, check it out; our vocal parts are very much locked in place, but Keith's going to play the organ part that Troy normally plays. Troy's taking the synthesizers and keys that Keith normally plays. Derrick and Reyes have switched and so have Prez and I. Sunday night, you saw Keith pick up a guitar. During our music appreciation class today, most of you saw each of the five of us sitting down at a piano and playing different songs. This is what it means to be a musician, making [Good Vibrations](#)."

Counting off and then starting the song, Keith sang lead vocals and played the Hammond Organ while Mike played the bass guitar part. Reyes came in with the drum parts, Derrick shook a tambourine and Troy added the synthesizer part. Soon, all six boys were singing various parts, with Prez taking the lowest part, Troy and Mike harmonizing and Reyes and Derrick harmonizing. Everyone was simply awestruck, especially Lance, Scott, KC and Joey. Not even Dylan had seen Platinum Habits perform the song that way. When the song ended, every kid and adult in the audience bounded to their feet to give the band an ovation. Focusing on Scott and Lance and gesturing an open palm to the audience, Mike grinned, "That's what it's about, dudes."

Locking eyes, Scott and Lance laughed, "We are so screwed!" Shoving their two friends around, Chris, Jay, Erik and Travis cracked up.

Returning to their normal places on the stage, Platinum Habits performed [That's The Way Of The World](#), [How Can I Be Sure](#) and [O-](#)

[o-h Child](#), with Reyes singing lead vocals on the first and third songs, and Keith singing lead vocal on the second song. For the next tune, Mike and Troy sang The Dave Clark Five song [Because](#) as a duet, playing their guitars before a single microphone. After hearing all the intricate songs the band had already played, Lance and Scott could barely believe the band chose to play the simple tune. Once again seeing all their friends and other couples dancing, they were pushed to realize that the performances were for the audience and not the musicians. Playing a very simple bass part and not too occupied, Prez saw Angelo and Reggie enter the auditorium and walk down the aisle.

Angelo and Reggie saw a lot of kids were near the stage dancing. There were gay couples, straight couples and more who were dancing alone. Two of the adults were up there too. Angelo grinned, "Do you get the impression Clan Short likes taking things to extremes? Sunday night there were about six or seven hundred in here, and we barely occupied an eighth of the place."

Nodding, Reggie chuckled, "There are three more bases, according to my dad, but we'll never fill this place on our own. Even the dorm rooms were pretty extreme; they're huge for two dudes, so imagine two little orphan boys in a room that large."

Beginning to scan the center seating area for his mom, Angelo admitted, "Butterflies are starting to flap again, like when you ran away from me this morning." Concerned, Reggie squeezed his partner's hand and turned to examine Angelo's expression. Noticing Reggie's concern, Angelo smiled, "I feel like I'm walking on clouds again. Where do I start explaining?"

"Anywhere," Reggie grinned. Up on the stage, Troy and Mike played guitar and shared a single microphone. He noticed that they sang and played really well. Reggie told Angelo, "Might as well start

with the weekend, which is really where we both started."

Glancing to his right again, Angelo returned to his search. He soon found his mother, amongst the other adults and parents sitting about thirty rows back. Beside his mom sat his dad, still wearing his hospital greens. Surprised his dad was there, Angelo told Reggie. Nodding, Reggie now understood how anxious Angelo felt when his dad walked into the townhouse. The band finished the song they were playing and their audience applauded. Eugene and Laxmi Diaz had seats near the center of the row. There were other adults sitting on both sides of them. Angelo led Reggie down the empty row behind them. On the stage, most of the band had shifted around to other instruments. The drummers counted off and the band began playing another song titled [Miracles](#), which was a complete reversal and another intricate song with many vocals and kewl instrumental parts.

Leaning forward so his head was between his mother's and father's, Angelo mischievously smiled, "Can we chat? I've got news to share."

Eugene Diaz began laughing. Widely smiling, Laxmi Diaz, turned to her son, giggling, "Keith and Preston told me that you have a boyfriend."

"Word has it that it's very serious too," Angelo's dad chortled. "Once again, you made up your mind and dove headlong into something."

Rapidly blinking, Angelo glanced up at the stage and at Prez. Fully occupied performing for an audience, Prez didn't notice.

Leaning back, Eugene reminded, "We're employed by Federation Youth Services, and have comm-badges and sub-vocal devices. Reggie's father clued us in first, and then a few minutes later,

his mother did."

Laxmi giggled, "Would you like to get up on stage and announce to everyone that you have a boyfriend?"

Feeling all the blood in his body race into his face, Angelo giggled, "Talk about anti-climatic information. All the wind has been taken out of my sails."

Laxmi said, "You're having dinner with the Clan tonight, so I assume you're no longer afraid."

Eugene wondered, "Do you know where you're staying at night?"

Realizing that he only knew the dorm building and location, but not the actual room number, Angelo gasped. He then smirked, "Is there anything you don't know?"

Laxmi laughed, "He doesn't have a clue!"

"Dorm three," Angelo giggled.

Eugene and Laxmi laughed, "Room number twenty-six." They then leaned over to give their son kisses on the cheek.

Eugene suggested, "If I were you, I'd take my partner down to the stage and dance with the rest of the kids."

"But first," Laxmi stipulated, "have Reggie lean over so we can welcome him to the family."

Angelo nodded and stood up straight. He told Reggie, "They know everything." Watching Reggie's head tilt, Angelo giggled, "Thanks to comm-badges and sub-vocals, everything your mom and dad know was shared. There are no secrets to keep anymore. They'd

like you lean down between them, so they can welcome you to the family." Angelo stepped back out of the way.

Already blushing and giggling, Reggie took his boyfriend's place and leaned down. He got kisses on the cheeks too, and congratulations from both of Angelo's parents. Reggie giggled, "I promise to take good care of him."

Laxmi smirked, clearly showing Reggie that it was already assumed and understood.

"Go dance," Eugene prompted, "we'll proudly watch."

Standing up, Reggie reached for Angelo's hand and had his taken. Shuffling down the row to the aisle, Angelo suggested, "Let's pause on the way for a kiss."

Reggie giggled, "We didn't kiss for my parents."

"That's exactly why we should do it; to give gossiping geezers something to blab about."

Reggie sniggered, "You might have to twist my arm?"

Angelo giggled, "It's your tongue I wanna twist, stud."

After taking few more steps down the aisle, Angelo and Reggie paused, and moved close together for the deepest, most passionate lip lock yet. At first, their arms hung loose at their sides and they held hands. Unconsciously, Angelo's hands then began climbing up Reggie's arms. Reggie put his hands on Angelo's hips. In small increments, Angelo and Reggie moved closer together and their arms effortlessly moved to hold one another tight. It wasn't only to show off, but to show each other how completely thrilled they were. Every time they had tried to plan something all day, the plans were blown

away, but somehow, everything worked out better than either might have hoped. In the middle of the song 'Miracles', Angelo and Reggie proved the theme of the song; that miracles can and do sometimes happen.

Smiling and holding hands, Eugene and Laxmi noticed their sons tightly embracing and kissing. They were happy for their son and proud of the young man emerging. Several of the other adults around the Diaz's also noticed. There was a lot of soft chortling amongst the group of adults. Since the band members were rather busy, with an intricate song and multiple vocal parts to give their full attention, none of them ever saw Angelo and Reggie.

However, down by the stage, Lance, Scott, Erik, Travis, Tony and Ray noticed Angelo and Reggie. Hysterical and trying to not show it, the former six hurried up the aisle, surrounded the latter two, patiently broke the kiss, and then led them down the aisle, razzing the two new lovers the entire way.

Travis chuckled, "It sure looks like your day progressed nicely, dudes."

"So," Lance giggled, "Angelo, might I suggest a change from hand lotion to AstroGlide personal lubricant?"

"We'll get an official gay Rimmer welcoming package prepared for you two after supper," Tony sniggered.

Scott joked, "The kit consists of four bottles of lube, four boxes of rubbers, dildos in assorted small, medium, large and WTF sizes, and the condensed version of the Kama Sutra - pictures only."

Erik giggled, "That ought to get you through tonight."

For the first time in his twelve years, Ray had laughed himself

into a case of the hiccups.

When the group of eight arrived near the stage, Chris and Jay were waiting.

"I have an idea," Jay cheekily grinned.

Whipping out their Mr. Fuzzy puppets and sliding them on, five of the eight squeaked, "NO-OO-OOOO!" Angelo, Reggie and Chris roared laughing.

Faking a pout, Jay slumped, and then sniggered, "Fine, I'll tell you later. We're all needed, and the rest of the Core Rimmers too, to execute this plan."

The song 'Miracles' ended and everyone applauded. The band shifted around again, preparing for the next tune and getting different instruments. Erik turned to Angelo and Reggie, smiling, "We hear that you're moving into our dorm tonight."

Angelo nodded, "That's right. Our original intention was to make it seem temporary, so our parents didn't freak, but even that plan altered." Quickly moving behind Reggie and wrapping his boyfriend up tight, Angelo prompted, "Tell 'em what you did, Reg."

Brightly beaming, Reggie smiled, "I told my dad the real deal. He'll keep my mom from flippin' out. My parents told Angelo's, so we're all set. We've got a place to be a real couple."

At the break between songs, while the majority of the audience applauded, Mike and Prez were at the guitar stands. Seemingly having a playful argument, Mike and Prez began shoving one another, driving their band mates to giggles and the audience into loud laughter. At his rack of keyboards and sniggering, Keith told the audience, "This kind of argument would normally upset me.

Eventually, they'll figure out who's playing top and who's playing bottom." The audience roared laughing.

Collapsing against each other, Angelo and Reggie cracked up. "I can't believe Keith said that, on stage!" Reggie sniggered.

Mike and Prez suddenly hollered, "FINE!" and walked away from the guitar stands. However, neither had a guitar.

Stepping up to a microphone, Prez giggled, "I can fix this. Alden, get me and Mike new guitars; Gibson EBSF-1250 double-neck electric bass and guitar."

Mike sniggered, "We'll need an extra bass amp and an extra guitar amp too, Alden."

Two black double-neck guitars materialized on Prez and Mike. They then went to turn on and adjust the two amplifiers. Further back in the audience, Dylan howled laughing, "I was wondering when they'd actually get those guitars! They bring them on the tour."

Slightly out of sync, the six band members wondered, "Who said that?"

Standing and pulling Dylan up with him, KC grinned, "Platinum Habits, meet Dylan Richardson. He already knows all of you, thanks to his time-shifting shifty ways."

Waving, Dylan giggled, "Hi guys! Where are Lance Kinchen and Scott Shetley?"

Pointing at the couple before the stage, Mike answered, "Right there."

Dylan asked, "Have you hired them yet?"

Prez nodded, "They were just made Core Rimmers before we came in here."

"Not THAT!" Dylan giggled, "They're your guitar technicians and roadies."

Scott and Lance squealed, "We are?" Cracking up, Jay, Chris, Travis and Erik shoved Lance and Scott around some more. Sadly shaking his head, KC dropped back into his seat.

"Don't cutely flutter those purple-eyes at us," Prez sniggered. "Are you planning on telling us more about the concerts we performed, that we haven't left for... yet?"

Nodding, Dylan giggled, "Dinner tonight sound good?"

"Kewl," the five of six band members chanted.

Dylan giggled, "You were about to play 'Europa,' as dueling guitars and basses for the first time."

Noticing Troy rubbing his temples, Mike asked, "Are you all right, bro?"

"Fine," Troy huffed, "just a temporal causality headache, I think."

Prez asked, "Wanna take a break, Troy?"

When Troy nodded, Mike called, "Sean, come up here and help your partner. We'll need him for the next songs."

Standing and jogging down the aisle, Sean giggled, "I'm just glad my name wasn't mentioned."

"Sean Moorhead?" Dylan giggled, "Yeah, you're eventually a

roadie too, primarily amplifiers."

Stopping short on the stage steps, Sean spun around and shouted, "I just took my first basic electrical principles class this morning!"

Dylan giggled, "You're Troy's husband, aren't you?" Whimpering, with visions of sparking amplifiers flashing through his mind, Sean turned and went to Troy, where it was safer. Dylan giggled, "There's a drum roadie and a keyboard roadie too, but I can't say without chancing a paradox." Dylan then called, "John?"

Standing up and turning around, John waved, "Here, Dylan."

Dylan checked, "You know your job?"

"I do now," John sniggered. "I'll try it out when they play those songs."

"That's everybody," Dylan giggled. "Kewl, go ahead, guys."

Glancing around to be sure everyone was ready, Prez softly counted out the tempo. Mike loudly laughed, "WAIT A MINUTE! Who's starting on guitar and who's on bass?"

"Not this again," Prez giggled. The audience helplessly fell apart.

Mike sniggered, "You only doubled the problem by getting us double-neck guitars."

Prez grinned, "I'm Head Rimmer, so I'll start on guitar."

"Kewl," Mike giggled, and shifted his hands up to play the bass.

Derrick chuckled, "Are either of you going to face the

audience?"

"Once in a while, when we're not preparing to swap parts," Prez sniggered. "Count us off, bro."

"One of these days, they'll stop sharing their part-swapping in public," Dylan stage-whispered in a voice the entire audience heard.

"I wouldn't count on it," KC chuckled.

Regardless of the audience's laughter, Derrick counted the tempo and Prez played the first eight notes of the guitar part to [Europa](#). About thirty-seconds into the song, Prez signaled Mike and they swapped off. About every half-minute through the entire song, Prez and Mike swapped parts, and shifted from bass to guitar and back again. Lance and Scott told Erik, Travis, Jay and Chris that Prez and Mike had obviously never done this before, but they were effortlessly playing the song as good as the record, only giving each other four beats notice before swapping parts again. Many of the kids had only seen Prez playing acoustic guitar and raced down to the stage.

To crying and wailing guitars and the latin beat, Craig slow danced Felicity over toward where Phil had Owen swaying hip-to-hip. The brothers smiled at each other and stealthily flashed thumbs-up gestures. The song ended to a dueling bass guitar part and thundering drums, forcing the entire audience onto their feet.

The stage lights dimmed to dark blue. Prez and Mike put their double neck guitars down and picked up their preferred axes. Derrick came out from behind the drum kit and moved down to center stage. Reyes took his dad's place again at the drum kit. Coming out from back stage, Troy went to his stack of keyboards. Keith took a seat at the Steinway. Before the audience's applause had faded, a spotlight shone down on Keith and he began playing the introduction to

[Against All Odds \(Take A Look At Me Now\)](#). Couples that hadn't already come down to dance before the stage got up, including Kaleo and Tory. A spotlight hit Derrick a moment before he began sweetly singing.

How can I just let you walk away?
Just let you leave without a trace?
When I stand here, taking every breath with you.
You're the only one who really knew me at all.

How can you just walk away from me?
When all I can do is watch you leave?
Cause we've shared the laughter and the pain,
and even shed the tears.
You're the only one who really knew me at all.

So take a look at me now!
There's just an empty space.
And there's nothing left here to remind me,
just the memory of your face.
Well take a look at me now!
There's just an empty space.
And you coming back to me is against the odds,
and that's what I've got to face.

Reyes began pounding on drums and provided backup harmony vocals for his dad. Fully involved in what he was singing, Derrick didn't even realize he was rising up off the stage.

I wish I could just make you turn around,
turn around and see me cry!
There's so much I need to say to you,
so many reasons why.

You're the only one who really knew me at all.

From about ten feet above the stage, Derrick realized where he was. Many rows back, John, Stephen, Frankie and Wade began giggling at Derrick's silent complaint to be warned before being levitated in the middle of a song.

So take a look at me now!
Well there's just an empty space.
And there's nothing left here to remind me,
just the memory of your face.
Now take a look at me now!
Cause there's just an empty space.
But to wait for you is all I can do
and that's what I've got to face.
Take a good look at me now!
Cause I'll still be standing here.
And you coming back to me is against all odds,
It's the chance I've got to take.

Take a look at me now.

All the stage lights went out and the audience roared approval. John lowered Derrick down to the stage floor. Walking back to the drum risers and sadly shaking his head, Derrick softly growled at John's "special effect". Heading for the Steinway, Troy knocked knuckles with Keith as they passed each other. Keith took center stage to sing lead vocals. A spotlight shone down on Troy as he began playing the piano introduction to [Faithfully](#). Couples gasped and immediately pulled back together for another great slow dance tune. This time, Keith and then Mike were levitated by John, but had returned to the floor before the last tones faded.

The band members began exiting the stage, leaving Troy at the grand piano to gently call, "Come out here and sit with me, Tiger." Forewarned by Troy this would happen, Sean proudly walked out from behind the stage right curtains and a spotlight followed him across the stage. He took a seat on the piano bench to Troy's left, mostly out of sight from the majority of the audience.

Right after kissing Sean, Troy inhaled deeply to tell the cooing and smiling audience, "A week ago today I met Sean. Right about this time, before dinner, I had an idea to play this song for Sean. It took him days to tell me all of what it meant to him. It's our song, but I'd like to share it with all of you, so you can make it yours too. I think everyone here will get the message."

Troy began playing [Bridge Over Troubled Water](#) and was soon singing to Sean before an audience of over five hundred. During the first verse, Ryan and Reyes slow danced out of the shadows and just behind the piano bench where Sean and Troy were. In the middle of the second verse, Derrick, Keith and Prez returned to the stage to play their parts. Keith also provided a brief section of harmony vocals during the third verse.

During the song, while couples slow danced, Reggie admitted that he really didn't know the names of all the members of the leadership team. Hip-to-hip with their lovers, Erik, Travis, Tony, Ray, Chris and Jay filled in Angelo and Reggie, completing the roll call with the newest two Core Rimmers, Lance and Scott, who were still glued to the stage.

Angelo and Reggie had no idea that Lance and Scott were Core Rimmers. Since he had met and spoke with them that morning, Angelo was especially surprised. Then Erik giggled, "Just before we came in here today, they were found powering the place up. Drew

hired them before they could complain too much."

"No one was more surprised than they were," Travis sniggered.

Still swaying hip-to-hip with Angelo, Reggie wondered, "And who are the two dudes that were talking to the band?"

Jay replied, "KC McKensey was the older one. He's a friend of Reyes', from the AI Division. We met him yesterday. I'm not sure who Dylan is, or where he's from."

Erik offered, "Clan Short is all over the world, pretty much. There are tens of thousands of Clan kids, dude. We've only been here a few days. It would take lifetimes to know them all." Gesturing to Chris and Jay with one hand, and then Tony and Ray with the other, Erik giggled, "On the other hand, these pervs we call friends think all Trav and I do is get crazy and messy, but we can read, and browsed our division's web site."

Chris smiled, "The Clan is really big dudes. It took us an hour in the Command Center to just say hello to the folks at six US divisions, and the Australian Oceanic Division. We didn't get to Wales or St. Petersburg, Russia, partly because it was late there."

"And because *somebody* needed comm-badges and Mr. Fuzzies," Jay sniggered accusingly at Angelo and Reggie.

Giggling and nodding, Angelo teased, "What's required to make the dimensional doors work, Jay?" Jay held up his Mr. Fuzzy hand, and then reached over to have it nibble on Angelo, Reggie and Travis' necks. Suddenly, Jay jumped in place and devilishly grinned at Chris.

Chris giggled, "You don't Fuzzy anyone but me."

Reggie evilly snickered, "I saw that. Nice one, Chris; you

pinched Jay's ass." Wild cackling broke loose in the small group.

Pulling back to make eye contact, Angelo giggled, "Tell me you weren't checking out Jay's butt." Erik and Ray digressed into giggling fits. Tony and Travis cracked up.

"No!" Reggie laughed, "Honest, babe, I was watching Chris slip his hands into Jay's back pockets. That's why I did the same thing to you. Only when Jay jumped did I realize Chris had a motive."

Almost at once, Erik, Ray, Chris, Jay, Tony and Travis congratulated Reggie on an excellent rebuttal, which caused all eight of them to crack up.

Still giggling, and wiggling his fingers around Angelo's back pockets, Reggie asked, "Jay, how tall are you?"

"Five feet nine inches," Jay answered.

"Convert that to metric?" Reggie giggled.

"About one hundred seventy-three centimeters," Angelo quickly calculated, "probably a little more. It's two point five-four centimeters per inch, so sixty-nine inches times two point five is a rough guess. He's about three inches taller than you, and four inches taller than I am."

Travis grinned, "You did that in your head?"

"Yeah," Angelo giggled, and reminded, "My mom's a math and music teacher." Seeing a bunch of grinning faces, Angelo laughed, "Sixty-nine times two is a hundred and thirty-eight. Half of sixty-nine is thirty-four point five, so add it together and round up, since I rounded down a little bit."

Slowly swaying with Phil, on the floor before the stage, Owen was sobbing his heart out. As soon as Troy lowered his hands from the piano, Sean grabbed him and passionately kissed his sentimental Lover. The audience and the band members applauded and cheered the couple, seemingly making five-hundred sound like fifty-thousand.

A quivering wreck again, it took Sean about two minutes to be able to stand up and walk with Troy, past all the band members congratulating them, and off behind the stage right curtains. During this brief interruption, Phil lead Owen way up the aisle, heading toward seats where they could talk privately. Stepping back out to the stage again, Troy got more applause from the audience. He picked up his twelve-string acoustic, went to a microphone and giggled, "I love him, and it's our one week anniversary. Sean's already warned me to be prepared for reprisal later."

Troy moved nearer to Keith and they counted off then began playing the introduction to [Time For Me To Fly](#). This time around it was Keith's turn, as lead vocalist, to levitate with his keyboard rack and microphone stand. John had forewarned his brother what he was intending to do, but no one was prepared for the method. The audience, all the other band members and even Ryan and Sean were hysterical watching Keith float a little higher every time he sang the word 'fly'. It was the crazy nervous twists in Keith's expression that drove his fellow band members to giggling the backup vocals during the final chorus. By the end of the song, Keith was about a half-meter below the racks of lights above the stage and profusely sweating from the heat.

Returning to the stage floor during the applause, Keith sniggered, "Alden, get me a towel and a bottle of cold water." The towel materialized just above Keith and dropped onto his head, causing the audience to crack up. Mike had to walk off stage, where

he was heard howling with laughter.

"The water bottle is on the stage, by your right leg, Keith," Alden giggled across Keith's comm-badge. Insanely snickering, Angelo, Reggie, Chris, Jay, Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott found seats to sit on in the front row.

Since Prez was still leaning on his bass amp and hysterically wheezing, Derrick giggled, "This next song is a brand new cover tune for us and one we've always wanted to play. Prez and Mike are going to share lead vocals, if either can ever stop laughing. After this song, we're going to play five heavy rockers for Lance and Scott, but that'll probably push us past dinner time. Anyone that's hungry is free to go eat whenever you want. Please stick around through one more song though."

The stage lighting dimmed, but Corey left only some of the blue and green stage lights on. Lance and Scott noticed Mike's Les Paul appearing on his guitar stand, and then Mike's Stratocaster disappeared. Troy and Keith moved to their racks of keyboards. Prez moved forward to his microphone. Fog began billowing onto the stage, cooling the band members and the kids still standing before the stage. From the darkness, six voices sang, "Is there anybody out there?" After a few seconds to allow the reverberating sound to dissipate, more blue lights flooded the stage, and the band started playing [Comfortably Numb](#). Slide guitar could be heard, however Mike was nowhere to be seen and kids wondered where he was.

Prez's voice echoed around the theater.

Hello?

Is there anybody in there?

Just nod if you can hear me.

Is there anyone at home?

Come on, now,

I hear you're feeling down.

Well I can ease your pain

And get you on your feet again.

Relax.

I need some information first.

Just the basic facts

Can you show me where it hurts?

Bright beams of red light shone behind the drum risers. Floating down from high above the stage, in silhouette causing most of the audience to gasp, Mike sang:

There is no pain you are receding

A distant ship, smoke on the horizon.

You are only coming through in waves.

Your lips move but I can't hear what you're saying.

When I was a child I had a fever

My hands felt just like two balloons.

Now I've got that feeling once again

I can't explain, you would not understand

This is not how I am.

I have become comfortably numb.

Hanging in the air about five feet above Derrick's shoulders, Mike leaned back to play the guitar solo. Corey added a little bit of red light so Mike could be seen by the audience. Grabbing hold of the Stratocaster's tremolo bar, Mike made his guitar sing. At the end of the solo, the entire band sang:

I have become comfortably numb.

Returning to his microphone, Prez sang the next verse.

Okay.

Just a little pin prick.

There'll be no more

The sickly scream "AHHH-AHHHHH-AHHHHH!" was sang by Reyes, Keith and Troy. Then Prez continued.

But you may feel a little sick.

Can you stand up?

I do believe its working. Good.

That'll keep you going for the show

Come on it's time to go.

Still floating motionless above his husband and son, Mike sang:

There is no pain you are receding
A distant ship, smoke on the horizon.
You are only coming through in waves.
Your lips move but I can't hear what you're saying.
When I was a child
I caught a fleeting glimpse
Out of the corner of my eye
I turned to look but it was gone
I cannot put my finger on it now
The child is grown,
The dream is gone.
I have become comfortably numb.

The final crescendo dramatically built and Mike closed his eyes, leaned back and played the closing guitar solo. Soon, Mike was laying flat on his back, hovering above the drummers and slowly spinning. These special effects had been prearranged with John during the minutes Mike was back stage and out of sight. Moments and about eight bars before finishing the song, John returned Mike to an upright position and brought him forward to land at his usual spot at right center stage. The band finished the song with thunderous explosions of sound then all the stage lights went out. Applauding and hollering, Angelo, Reggie, Lance, Scott, Chris, Jay, Erik and Travis bounded out of their seats. All the kids stood and cheered, screamed

and yelled.

Corey raised the stage and audience lighting slightly, so anyone who wanted to go to dinner could safely do so. Not very many people stood and left the auditorium, mostly adult employees. When Jon and Mary decided to leave for home, Jerry, Joey, KC, Fred and Chauncey hurried down the aisle to the stage. Putting his drum sticks down, Reyes went to Ryan and they walked off to far stage right. Keith meandered over to the Hammond Organ. Mike switched from his Stratocaster to his Les Paul. Troy picked up his Stratocaster. Prez switched from his favored Gibson EB-3 bass guitar to a Rickenbacker 4001. Seeing the band was ready, Corey lowered the audience lights.

Holding up his hands with his index finger and pinky protruding, Mike ordered, "Let me see them horns!" Derrick counted off, and then hit his bass and snare drums, starting [Born To Be Wild](#), with Mike singing lead vocals. Seeing Prez and Troy bopping along, Corey set and activated the strobe lights. The band extended the song to allow Mike, Troy and Prez to each take twelve bar solos. Many of the kids seemed to love it, especially Angelo, Reggie, Lance, Scott, Jay, Chris, Travis and Erik, who had planted themselves before the center of the stage.

For the next song, Keith walked away from the Hammond Organ and got a drink of water. Mike picked up his Randy Rhoads white Les Paul Custom. Derrick played the drum introduction to [The Rover](#). Prez, Mike and Troy began playing. Lance pointed out Mike's right foot riding a wah-wah peddle. Keith had the vocal range to pull off a damn good impersonation of Robert Plant. For the solo, Mike lifted his Les Paul and played his axe behind his head. Never hearing a missed note, Scott faked slamming his head against the stage edge, driving his friends, Prez, Mike, Troy and Derrick to hysterics. Without giving the audience much chance to applaud, the band drove directly

into [Flight Of Icarus](#), with Keith handling lead vocals again. Effortlessly and without even watching one another, Troy and Mike played the guitars solos note-for-note. The band didn't even pause at the end of that song. Derrick changed the tempo through drum rolls and the band went right into [No One Like You](#).

At last, after three songs in a row, the band took a breather. Reyes came back on stage to play his electronic drums. Grabbing his bottle of water and towel, Keith walked off the stage to keep Ryan company. Prez and Mike decided to swap guitars again, and this time Troy joined the argument, wanting to play lead guitar, causing Lance, Scott and most of the audience to crack up. While the three guitarists got silly and endlessly swapped guitars around, Derrick and Reyes began juggling maracas and tambourines. When at last Mike stepped forward wearing Prez's EB-3 bass, and Prez had Troy's Stratocaster and Troy had Mike's white Les Paul Custom, Mike giggled, "This will be our last song for the day. Then we can go have dinner." Derrick and Reyes stopped juggling and prepared to play [The Boys Are Back In Town](#). Jonah immediately recognized the song lyrics that his pop had taught him more than a week earlier and sang along.

During the course of the song, the band members noticed many of the girls wandering around. When the song ended, the male two-thirds of the audience cheered, but the female third loudly booed. Having never been booed before, the band members were obviously surprised. Trinity Taylor, Felicity and the other female dorm leaders near the stage cracked up. They only laughed louder when the highly put-off girls stormed out of the theater to go have dinner. Squatting down near the edge of the stage where Lance and Scott were with their close friends, Mike sniggered, "Lesson two: know your audience." Nodding, Angelo, Reggie, Chris, Jay, Lance, Scott, Erik and Travis cracked up.

The adults and kids began streaming toward the exits for dinner. "Lance and Scott, hang back with us, dudes," Mike called. "We'll be talking about our tour, so you'll need to be here with us."

Scott told the other six, "We'll catch up with you soon," and turned around with Lance. Dylan Richardson was already standing on the stage. Used to dealing with point-to-point transportation, Lance and Scott didn't think twice about it. Mike waved them up on stage, and they happily hurried, so they could bounce a couple hundred questions off the band members.

Angelo, Reggie, Erik, Travis, Chris and Jay continued up the aisle. Many meters ahead of them were Tony and Ray. Referring to Lance and Scott, Jay joked, "Just a tiny bit obsessed, those two."

Chris smiled, "With each other."

Travis chuckled at Chris and Jay, "Don't you two dare try acting innocent! It's partially your fault."

"We spent most of the morning with Lance and Scott," Erik giggled, and teased, "Yesterday morning's shower?"

Jay laughed, "Did they mention that they were freaking out because we walked in on them?"

"Yeah, we got the whole story," Travis smiled. "They weren't a couple a whole hour when you two started slippin' and sliding around."

Blushing, Chris giggled, "They caught on fast." In that short glance, Chris noticed Angelo and Reggie blushing and fighting back giggles. Soon, Jay, Erik and Travis joined Chris, widely smiling at Angelo and Reggie.

"It was only a shower," Reggie giggled.

Angelo softly sniggered, "With other couples."

Chris, Jay, Erik and Travis loudly laughed, "AH HA!"

Angelo laughed, "Tony, help us out here, dude."

Spinning around with Ray at his side, Tony asked, "How?" and paused, but then noticed the evil expressions none of the six were able to hide.

"We didn't do anything," Reggie giggled. "Couples showered, that's it."

"Oh, that!" Tony laughed, "It was very kewl, in a steamy way."

Ray giggled, "Dinner time conversation just took a dive."

"No, it won't," Tony assured his boyfriend, and then told the others, "It was a grown up shower, with three couples, and partners washing each other like we wanted, with no little kids around."

Erik, Travis, Jay and Chris, incredulously laughed, "Three couples?"

Angelo giggled, "We are not mentioning the other couple, until they're around to defend themselves."

"Good call," Tony chuckled, and flashed a thumbs-up gesture.

Pulling his Mr. Fuzzy out of his back pocket and slipping it on, Ray squeaked, "What's all this about four teen couples in the shower yesterday, with the Soul Rimmer?" Angelo and Reggie howled. Ray giggled, "John will always take the side of the youngest dude in a

group. Thankfully, that's me."

Putting his Mr. Fuzzy on his hand, Tony squeaked, "You taught the fuzzy-facts-of-life, Jay. Face it, bros, a lot of what goes on around here is largely your doing. That's how you became Core Rimmers."

Now near enough to Ray and Tony, Jay softly sniggered the warning, "During tonight's cozy cuzzy fuzzy Water Blaster Battle, you two are targets."

Nodding, Tony chuckled, "Which reminds me, where are our Cuzzy Fuzzy Cozies, bro? We can't play fuzziless." Ray sputtered and then lost it and cracked up.

Tapping his sub-vocal, Chris giggled, "Alden, get Cuzzy Fuzzy Cozies for Tony and Ray, please?" Mid-step, Tony and Ray phased out and back in again.

"HEY!" Ray giggled.

Tony sniggered, "That felt way weird!"

Across Tony's and Ray's comm-badges, Alden giggled, "You weren't wearing underwear."

"That's what felt weird," Tony chuckled, "hanging loose and suddenly being confined."

Ray grinned, "At least it's a comfy fuzzy."

Leaning close to his new boyfriend, Tony whispered, "A little too comfy, pretty boy." Widely smiling, Ray locked eyes with Tony. "Too many ballads and love songs," Tony softly offered. "Thank goodness they finished off the show rockin', or we'd be making time."

Ray giggled, "Can you wait until after supper?" getting

everyone's attention, and causing another breakout of snickering.

Closest to Tony, and giggling madly, Erik nudged his neighbor, prompting, "Gotta get your strength back first, dude."

"You're tellin' me!" Tony cackled. Again, the group cracked up. Ray blushed and laughed as loud as anyone, but proudly held his head high.

Noticing Angelo and Reggie sadly shaking their heads, Chris wondered, "What's wrong, guys."

Reggie shrugged. Angelo smiled, "We're just starting out. You dudes are in a different mindset than we are."

Chris nodded, "You'll get there too."

"It's the best part of being gay teenagers," Jay grinned.

Travis added, "Being gay teenagers, we each know our partners well enough to guess when its time to play, or time to talk. Alone time is right after dinner. At some point later tonight, Jay will drop another fuzzy bomb on us."

Jay scowled and tapped his sub-vocal, prompting, "What's that, Alden? I was listening to Trav and only got part of what you were saying." Listening to the AI, Jay's frown turned into a grin that slowly widened until it almost split his face. Jay chuckled, "Redesign it and give him a new one, when he's alone with Angelo. We'll have two basic types, problem solved."

The last group stepped out into the auditorium lobby. Reggie giggled, "Since no one besides me will be alone with Angelo tonight, what the heck was that all about?"

"I didn't want to embarrass you," Jay offered, and veered off course, away from the exit door and over by the concession stand. The entire group followed Jay and stopped, glancing around for some explanation.

Guessing what Alden was saying to Jay, Angelo leaned closer to Reggie and whispered, "I'm pretty sure your hidden secret is out."

Reluctantly, Reggie smirked and sighed, "I'm living in your dorm now. Everyone will know soon enough, so go ahead."

"It's a lack of planning on my part," Jay explained. "When we had Alden and his brothers design the Fuzzy G-strings, the top part, Mr. Fuzzy's nose is for our dicks..."

"WE KNOW!" Tony and Ray loudly laughed.

Jay chuckled and finished, "And only comfy for dudes that hang six inches or less."

Angelo gasped, "Uh oh!" and quickly pulled Reggie close to whisper the conversion from inches to centimeters. Covering his flushed face with Angelo's shoulder, Reggie couldn't help it and broke into giggles.

During the moments the group was gathered and waiting, Alden was explaining the facts to Chris. Rapidly blinking, Chris could barely believe what he was hearing. Chris locked eyes with Angelo, saying, "Only you could explain it."

Glancing around and carefully watching reactions, Angelo described Reggie's challenges with puberty. Noticing no one was smiling or grinning, Angelo bluntly said, "Reggie hangs over seven inches. He'd never fit."

Ray squealed, "We were in the same shower and I never noticed anything."

Shaking his head, Tony chuckled, "You were as focused on me as I was on you. It was the first time we showered together and could take advantage of our new relationship. Of course we didn't notice."

Angelo asked, "Did you notice I was circumcised, Ray?"

"No," Ray giggled, and innocently rolled his eyes up, adding, "I guess I was preoccupied at the time." Roughly grabbing Ray around the waist, Tony softly sniggered and proudly glowed.

Angelo grinned, "So Reggie and I paid more attention in the shower than you and Tony. I was the only one in there with a snipped dick."

Travis shrugged, "So what? I was cut as a baby too."

"And it works perfectly, believe me!" Erik excitedly giggled, causing the group to break into loud laughter again. Chuckling insanely, Travis held his lover by the shoulders and spun him around for a kiss.

Jay sniggered and patted Reggie on the back, carefully assuring, "It's kewl, bro. Every guy notices his dick changes at puberty, and we can easily understand how your change might've been too much to cope with. While you're the one packing, it's Angelo who's the winner of the stud contest in your relationship, because he's the one that has to deal with you."

Chris added, "Before, when we were all goofing around about showers taken and who saw what, the reality of the situation is, I was looking much higher, in everyone's eyes and at their expressions. We've all seen more at the pools here than we ever did anywhere else.

In only a couple o' days, it's already very normal. Only the longest, thickest dicks might be noticed."

Erik, Travis, Tony and Ray all agreed. Jay offered, "Even when the shower was more intimate, with Lance and Scott across from us yesterday morning, all I could say for certain is that Lance is longer and cut, and Scott is thicker and uncut. So, since I messed up the design, I told Alden to design Mr. Fuzzy G-strings for those who hang longer than six inches. Even with the redesign, there's eventually going to be a dude longer than ten inches who won't fit. To make Mr. Fuzzy's nose bigger than ten inches, he'd need to be renamed Mr. Droopy." Everyone in the group evilly sniggered, including Angelo and Reggie.

Nodding at the group who were very considerate of his boyfriend, Angelo appreciatively smiled, "I know Reg well enough to say, he won't wear it for anyone except me, when we're alone."

"That's exactly why you should help him get over what other dudes said," Erik instructed.

Travis said, "They probably meant well, but Reggie hasn't lifted his face off your shoulder. That tells us that it's time to drop this subject. Reggie, the only dudes who will ever say a word to you about it here are younger boys, those that are having the same challenge. Teach them, bro. I liked you this morning, way before this conversation, so please, chill."

Proving that he was done with this conversation, Tony said, "I'm starving, so let's go have dinner, together, like we planned."

Only partially lifting his head up off Angelo's shoulder, Reggie softly confirmed, "It really doesn't matter?"

Almost simultaneously, Tony, Jay and Erik answered, "Only to

Angelo."

"As it should be," Chris finished.

Angelo brightly smiled, "Believe it or not, you've all helped Reg, simply by being kewl about it. At Reggie's old school, dudes would often talk to him looking down."

To complete the conversation, Chris, Jay, Erik and Travis shared Sean Moorhead's personal information. With Angelo's math skills, Reggie learned Sean's limp and erect size. Then everyone else gathered shared their limp and erect sizes. What struck Reggie was how easily all of them proudly told very personal information. Even Ray, the youngest and only starting puberty, never blushed and simply stated the facts. Again, Tony brightly beamed, knowing that if they hadn't already hooked up, Ray wouldn't have been as confident, and neither of them would have been participating in the first place.

Paired up as couples, first Erik and Travis went toward the door. Following the first couple, Tony grinned, "I want PB&J" When Ray turned to him, quite obviously confused, Tony teased, "Pretty boy and jelly." Giggling his ass off, Ray mooed. Evilily snickering, "Dinner could take all night!" Tony raced past Erik and Travis and out the door, with Ray only a pace behind him. Sniggering, Travis and Erik jogged after them.

Seeing Reggie lifting his head off Angelo's shoulder, Jay grinned, "In case you haven't gotten the full picture, let me say a few words. A boyfriend that chooses a long dick over anything else is shallow, and probably has a poor self image. From Alden, I happen to know Angelo chose you days ago, way before he saw you nude. Similarly, I love Chris, and have since we were kids. Erik is crazy for Travis, and it's the same with Lance and Scott. Tony has turned his best friend and roommate into his boyfriend, thanks at least partially

to you two."

Stepping back from Angelo, Reggie wondered, "What did Alden say?"

Taking Jay's hand, Chris smiled, "It was Alden who told us some of what you were telling Angelo this afternoon. That's how we knew to tread carefully, when we explained the deal with the Fuzzy G-Strings. Alden's a trip, and a pervert, but he really does care about every kid here. He wouldn't intentionally hurt anyone, which is why he privately told Jay about our miscalculation, and then filled me in."

The four of them started for the exit. "An observation," Jay began telling Reggie, "the only adult man on this base taller than your dad is Bill Seaver, Corey Seaver's father. Assuming you grow to be as tall as your dad, seven inches won't seem so out of proportion, Reggie."

Uncontrollably, Angelo giggled. Seeing his partner's dancing eyes, Reggie grinned, "You obviously like that idea."

"I hadn't thought of that at all," Angelo laughed, and couldn't stop laughing. Sighing, Reggie sadly shook his head but widely smiled. Opening the door and waiting for the other couple, Chris and Jay glanced over at Angelo, who was still laughing, and then at Reggie. There was no doubt about it, Reggie was standing up prouder than a peacock.

Dumbfounded, Chris simply couldn't believe Jay had done it again. They were approaching the CIC doors before Chris found his tongue, and giggled at Jay, "Stop being so pleased with yourself."

"I can't help it," Jay sniggered.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach Dining Room

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, 5:40PM HTZ

Minutes later, when Chris, Jay, Angelo and Reggie walked into the CIC dining room, some of the little kids slipped on their Mr. Fuzzy puppets and disjointedly squeaked greetings; "Hi Jay, hey Chris." Struggling to keep from cracking up, Angelo and Reggie sputtered and immediately went into the kitchen chow line. Slipping on their Mr. Fuzzies, Chris and Jay went to the kids, squatted down and made squeaky-small-talk, asking which foods the kids were enjoying most, and if they had fun at the playground with Hamster Balls and trampolines.

Already seated at a table for twelve were Travis, Erik, Tony, Ray, Phil and Owen. Watching Chris and Jay with the little kids, Phil was evilly snickering, knowing it was only a matter of time before the two new Core Rimmers latched onto kids.

Owen was slowly eating, because he was uncontrollably giggling. Owen had just learned that of the six showering earlier that afternoon, he had been paying attention to the others as much as Angelo and Reggie had. Phil knew this immediately after the shower, because Owen had told him that the kids in his home were strictly timed when they were allowed to bathe or shower. Owen didn't know how to take a relaxing shower and just enjoy the warm water; his normal routine was to get clean as quickly as possible, before a bathroom door flew open for the next kid to be timed. Since that day's two showers were the first with Phil at his side, Owen was learning to slow down, but didn't know what to do with the extra time. Naturally, Owen's eyes wandered. Owen's eyes were wandering again, busily watching Chris and Jay, two of the Fuzzy G-string lunatics that started

the water blaster battle the prior night.

When adults from FYS began coming in, and filing into the kitchen, Chris squeaked to the kids, "It's time to feed our fuzzies, guys."

"Famished fuzzies get feeble and fall down," Jay grinned, causing many of the kids to crack up.

Rolling his eyes, Chris giggled, "That's how Jay hurt his wrist."

Angelo and Reggie came out of the kitchen just as Chris and Jay were going in. Tony and Ray raised their hands, so Angelo and Reggie could see where they were. Balancing trays in their hands, Angelo and Reggie signaled with nods that they had seen Ray and Tony.

Meanwhile, in the chow line, Chris and Jay were beside Jen and Jim Hundser. Waiting for her main course, Jen teased, "Chris, how many children are you and Jay planning on adopting today?"

Chris giggled, "Today is a little too quick, Aunt Jen."

"Maybe tomorrow," Jay smiled, "the kids have to choose us."

Jim chuckled, "You both realize that the bringer of Mr. Fuzzy puppets will have a long line of kids?"

Taking her plate from Miguel, Jen giggled, "You may be the first Core Rimmers to move into a full size house, and have children that are your own age."

Hearing Jay chortling and turning to see him nodding his head, Chris laughed, "No, Jay!"

"Why not?" Jay sniggered, "Derrick and Mike have Reyes."

Chris giggled, "Reyes still looks thirteen. Please, let's keep it to twelve and younger, at least two years younger than us?"

Jay shrugged, "We'll see, is the best I can offer, baby. If a thirteen year old wants us for parents, I couldn't say no. Could you?"

Looking over at the chef who was patiently waiting for his dinner order, Chris giggled, "Soup, please; about a gallon, so I can drown myself in it." All the chefs and adults cracked up.

"Chicken," Jay teased.

"With noodles works," Chris giggled.

Before leaving the kitchen, Doc Wiener smiled, "I think I'd better clear my schedule."

"Thanks, Doc." Chris evilly grinned, "I'll send Jay over right after dinner," causing Jay to snap his neck turning to his lover, and another round of laughter.

Prez and most of Platinum Habits, and the band's roadies came into the kitchen chow line while the majority of laughing parents were going into the dining room. KC, Jerry and Joey invited Reyes and Ryan to their condo for dinner, so the latter two weren't present. Picking up a tray, Prez grinned, "You've demented our parents too now, Jay?" All the chefs suddenly put their utensils down, stepped back from the food and howled laughing.

"Can't leave some people alone for five minutes," Scott joked.

Jay laughed, "It wasn't me! Chris did it, I swear!"

Before leaving the kitchen, Carl Seibert smiled, "We've got the nineteenth and twentieth floors of a new condo put aside, just for

Chris, Jay and their brood of twenty kids."

Picking up a tray, Keith commented, "Twenty, huh? That leaves very little time for Core Rimming."

"Or any other sort of rimming," Mike softly joked.

Two of the lady chefs, laughing themselves to tears, hurried to the back of the kitchen. Lance smirked, "We're killing the kitchen staff. Can Dylan put us back in a time bubble thingie, so we can eat tonight?" Glancing around for the little Mikyvis, Lance wondered, "Where'd he go?"

John smiled, "Never can tell where or when."

Suddenly, the entire group found themselves in a clear bubble, sans clothes. The weird thing about the bubble was that it had clock hands on the outside.

Prez, Keith, Mike, Drew, Corey and John cracked up. Outside the bubble, everyone was moving in extreme slow motion. "Nice!" Derrick groused. "We tell the kids they need clothes in here, but here we are, setting a great example."

Dropping his tray back on the stack, Stephen covered his eyes, excitedly squealing, "But where is Dylan? How the heck do we get out of this, and when?"

Having been with his dad and pop the whole time they were in the auditorium, Leo tapped Drew on the back, wondering, "Why is there a clock, dad?"

Facing his son, Drew sighed, "Knowing Mikyvis pranks, it probably means we're on a timer. The question is, at what rate are we

versus the clock and the rest of the world?"

Trying to leave the confines of the bubble, Corey giggled, "Dudes, come over this way. Maybe if we all walk back outside, this bubble will pop."

"Or at least let us get dressed again," Leo hoped. As a group, they all moved to where Corey was. Once they were all close together, Leo noticed, "The clock is smaller."

Near the back of the group, Scott sniggered, "Watch your fuzzy, Jay. You walked right into me."

"Watch your own fuzzy!" Jay laughed.

Lance giggled, "I'll watch Scott's fuzzy, Jay, but you need to back up a step or two."

Chris slapped Jay's shoulder, sniggering, "What did I tell you about fuzzying other guys?"

"I usually try to brake for Core Rimmers," Jay innocently chuckled.

Getting bumped from behind, Troy turned slightly and sniggered at Lance, "I promise to teach you guitar, bro, but that's as far as I'll go."

Blushing, Lance cackled, "So, we're all learning to hold the long, hard, wood things?" A chorus of groans and moans erupted.

As the group digressed into more silliness, Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike huddled up to figure a way out of the bubble. John levitated to try and learn the bubble's dimensions. Of course, Jay, Chris, Sean, Troy, Lance and Scott passed a few remarks about John floating

around with an unfuzzy fuzzy drooping down. Giggling his butt off, John slapped away hands reaching up. Stephen had a fair amount of complaints for all the goofy teenagers, and his floating husband, who should've known better. In a few moments, John gathered the bubble was oval shaped, sort of like an egg, and telepathically shared that with his brothers.

Having reached an agreement, Prez, Keith, Mike and Derrick began sharing their plan. The main problems were Leo and Stephen, who were more than a little worried, and then there were Chris, Jay, Lance, Scott, Troy and Sean, who weren't worried about anything except 'accidental' fuzzy brushings within the confines of the bubble.

Having little other choice, Prez loudly commanded, "ATTENTION, RIGHT NOW!" Once everyone was silent and watching him, Prez ordered, "Line up as couples, according to height, arms' distance to the man in front of you. When I say march, you WILL march, left leg, and then the right leg, in unison. We're going to march right out of this bubble."

Leo pointed and reminded, "But the clock, Uncle Prez."

"The hands haven't moved," Prez recognized. "That clock is a figment of our combined imagination, a play on Mikyvis ability. The only purpose for that clock is for Dylan to see how long it takes us to pull our act together, as a team. He's already had at least fifteen minutes of giggling, while we get more hungry and desperate."

Smiling down at his nephew, Prez explained, "You're the only one in here without a partner, Leo. That means you have to lead us out of here."

Leo squealed, "But the dining room is full and I'm naked!"

Drew reminded Leo, "When Dylan showed up, his first words

were to you, asking how your boyfriend is. It sort o' makes sense, in a Mikyvis manner."

Nodding, Prez said, "My guess is we'll pass out of the time bubble dressed again. This bubble is egg shaped, so you're our point man, Leo. Lined up by height, we're sort of egg shaped. After Leo are John and Stephen, then Drew and Corey, Lance and Scott, Mike and Derrick, Sean and Troy, Keith and I, and lastly Chris and Jay." Turning to the rest of the team, Prez ordered, "As couples, and taller than man in front of you, military style, we'll march out of here."

After making some adjustments to keep their height organized, Prez ordered, "Forward, march." As it worked out, they exited the kitchen chow line in the reverse order as they had entered it, which was Dylan's twisted intention.

From his swing hanging from a light fixture, Dylan giggled, "You didn't specify what *type* of time bubble!" He paused, then added, "Remember this, Leo. You can lead, and Time will let you out. If you follow, you'll be stuck in Time forever."

Dylan and his swing popped out of existence. Everyone in the dining room paused to watch the bulk of the Core Leadership, who had just walked into the kitchen, walking back out with hands on the shoulders of the those in front of them. Giggling erupted from the little kids who were closest to the kitchen. Near the center of the room, Angelo grinned, "This must be a statement of some sort, I'm just not sure of what exactly."

Nodding, Reggie chuckled, "When my dad came home from work last Thursday, he told us stories that I didn't believe, until we got here Saturday. Act like everything's normal, and maybe they'll stop." Erik, Travis, Owen, Phil, Tony and Ray cracked up.

The group of Core Rimmers dropped their arms and smiled at one another. Billy got up from the table where he had been eating with the rest of the Taylor family. He hurried to his dad and pop, giggling, "Why did you do that?"

Not willing to cause a bigger disruption by explaining Mikyvis to his eldest son, Troy grinned, "How did it look to you?"

"Like you just wanted to show everyone that you're a team of close friends," Billy sniggered, "like we don't already know that."

Since neither he nor Troy had had a chance to speak with their eldest since breakfast, Sean wondered, "Did you have good day with Robbie?"

"Awesome," Billy cheered. "We spent the early afternoon playing Blackjack, with Ronnie, Garrett, Richie, Carrol, Ralphie and Pat. After that, we went to Des Moines." He gestured for his dad and pop to lean down. When they did so, Billy smiled, "We're going along at a slow pace. We went no further then step two, and it's so kewl like this. He wants us to know each other, so it's not just sex. We talk about all kinds of stuff, like school and sports. Even TV shows and movies are a lot more fun than they've ever been before."

"That's what boyfriends are really like," Sean smiled. "Suddenly everyday normal stuff becomes more important."

Troy placed a soft kiss on Billy's forehead, and then prompted, "Go finish dinner. And remember to let us know where you'll be sleeping tonight."

Nodding, Billy giggled, "He wants to be at our place, but I want to be there, at the Taylors', just for the change. I'll let you know when we figure it out." When Billy hurried back to his dinner, Sean and

Troy returned to the kitchen.

Jay was sharing his plan with the rest of the team for the second cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle. It was a good idea, and would likely help many of the level two newbies feel included. With that shared, Chris and Jay joined their friends at the table. As soon as they sat down, they shared the same plan with Erik, Travis, Tony, Ray, Phil, Owen, Angelo and Reggie.

Immediately, Reggie slowly shook his head and went into a giggling fit. Angelo chuckled, "I'll try to get Reg to wear it outside of our room, but I won't push too much."

Widely grinning, Erik told Chris and Jay, "We already talked a little about that. Phil and Owen were the other couple with Tony, Ray, Reggie and Angelo. We paused their shower fun when Trav and I needed to leak and had to flush."

Nodding, Travis grinned, "We introduced Reggie to Darren too."

Locking eyes with Reggie, Chris suggested, "If you can't deal with the G-string, wear your underwear instead. It's more important that you're there than what you're wearing."

"Those kids need to know they can get crazy once in a while," Jay explained between mouthfuls. "Just like you're a little self-conscious, consider the kids whose overall growth was stunted because of those orphanages."

Phil smirked, "I guess you didn't realize that Owen is one of the level-two kids?"

Jay shrugged and locked eyes with Owen, asking, "Did I exaggerate or offend you?"

"No," Owen meekly replied. Turning to Phil, Owen smiled, "It's true, and I'm sure most of the dudes at Oneula Beach are looking forward to it. When lots of dudes here go there, just for fun, they'll know what I already do, from you. The icing on that cake is Jay's plan. All the Core Rimmers being there to play is a good idea."

Jay grinned, "But you two are cozy cuzzy fuzzy veterans, so you're on our team."

Owen giggled, "Like teams matter."

Feeling the need to say something for his new boyfriend, Phil looked at Angelo and Reggie, chuckling, "After a while, it's every man for himself."

Finished with his dinner, and since Reggie, Phil and Owen had empty plates before them, Angelo suggested, "Let's go over to the condo." With nods and affirmative replies, the four of them gathered their trays and said their goodbyes.

Erik, Travis and Tony were nearly done eating too, but Ray was chowing down like food was a rare commodity. Tilting his head slightly toward his ravenous boyfriend, Tony bounced his eyebrows and widely smiled at the others. Erik giggled. Travis matched Tony's smile. Chris and Jay intently watched Ray dunk a dinner roll into brown gravy and then stuff most of the roll into his mouth. Noticing everyone was looking at him, Ray gleefully bounced in his seat and chewed until he could manage to laugh, "WHAT?" Almost at once, everyone offered something from their plates to Ray.

Cracking up, Tony howled, "I'm not saying a word!"

Suspiciously squinting, Ray giggled, "Good, just grunt and groan some more. I'll understand perfectly." Watching Tony turn red

and digress into a giggling fit, Chris, Jay, Erik and Travis roared.

* * * * *

The Scooby Gang scampered into the dining room and directly to Nathan Hayes. Sitting with Brice Glotzbecker, Jerry Burk, John Huth, Roger Mosqueda, Nick Shavers and Greg Holton, Nathan was alternating between the hope the Scoobies would simply say hello and go away, or maybe the extinct volcano on Oahu would suddenly erupt. In either scenario, it would only hurt a moment.

"Yous needs to come sees your new Shiny, Nathan," the Scoobies cutely sang.

As if this interruption wasn't enough to cause giggling at the table, in Nathan's mind, Daileass, Draco, and all the Clan AIs were clogging his positronics with more insane thoughts, half of which were unique ways to commit suicide and make it appear accidental.

Since Nathan seemed to be in a trance, Brice giggled, "You guys got a special Shiny for Nathan?"

"Uh huh," Willow sang, and scampered over to sit on Brice's lap.

Picking up a dirty spoon from Nathan's plate, Xander began polishing it and smiled, "It tooks almost a week to make it just right."

"Com'on, Nath," Nick prompted, "we'd all like to see your new shiny." The sentiment was shared by all the other boys at the table. Pleased with the excitement all the boys were portraying, Faith climbed onto Jerry's lap, and Spike joined Nick.

Nathan sighed, "Where is the shiny?"

"Daileass," Spike called, "transports us all into the new Shiny!"

In a blink, all seven boys and four ferrets were sitting inside a Hummer at the parking garage. Nathan was sitting in the driver's seat, and Brice was in the passenger seat. Rarely getting the chance to be transported, the five sitting in the back seat chorused, "Kewl!"

Still polishing the spoon, Xander concentrated on his task, and explained, "The dull loving ZCC man don't needs this no more."

Spike added, "Weez tooks it to Utah for armaments, and then weez tooks it to Des Moines, for Shiny camouflage paint, Shiny bullet proofs glass, and to installs the Shiny weapons."

"On the roof's a thirty-millimeter canon," Willow smiled.

And Faith giggled, "Underneath, its gots laser-guided missiles. Targeting system is ins the dashboard."

Handing Nathan his brightly polished spoon, Xander grinned, "In the back is four surface-to-air rockets." He seriously warned, "Don't be's standing up top and shoots the thirty-mil and fire the rockets. Yous'll get cooked that ways."

Brice and the other five in the back seat howled laughing.

Spike grinned, "It's gots independent suspensions, five-feets off the ground, so's there's ladders on all four doors."

"And don't forgets the sound system," Willow cheered. "Five hundred watts, seven speakers and a sub-woofer! Preloaded with Platinum Habits concerts!"

Nearest to the driver's side rear door, Roger opened it and smiled, watching the ladder steps cascade to the concrete floor. The other three doors opened and the gang climbed out to see the exterior for the first time. It was painted in camouflage, but with enough

polish and shine to reflect a single candle to ten thousand times brightness. Add in the polished chrome ladders at all four doors and the chrome wheels, the vehicle was anything but stealthy.

Pointing at the chrome side ladder, mounted between the front and rear driver's side doors, Xander prompted, "Come on, Nathan." The little ferret-boy practically flew up the side of the vehicle.

Widely smiling, Nathan moved slowly to take hold of the ladder and put one foot on the first step. Willow wondered, "Don't you like it, Nath?"

Climbing steadily up the ladder to the roof, Nathan chuckled, "I love it guys. I'm just really surprised, that's all."

Faith giggled, "Yous a UNIT Rimmer, and needs a Hummer."

Almost to the roof, Nathan abruptly stopped, felt his face flushing red, and hung his head. His life had changed radically in the days since joining the Pacific Rim Division, and mostly in good ways, but sometimes he truly had to wonder if anything had changed at all. The flavor of the insanity was different, but still, everyone around him was nuts. He climbed the last few steps up to the roof and stood.

All five boys on the ground paused and glanced at each other. Breaking into giggles, Greg, Jerry, John, Nick and Roger nudged Brice around, each playfully asking why Nathan hadn't gotten a hummer before now. Laughing his ass off, Brice didn't admit or deny anything. Fiercely blushing, Brice smiled up at Nathan, the blond cutie that had become his best friend.

Taking hold of the thirty-millimeter cannon, Nathan insured the weapon wasn't loaded and the barrel was cleared, and then swung it to the side, aiming at the group surrounding and teasing Brice. Louder shouts erupted on the ground. Greg and Jerry pretended to be shot and

hit the floor. Screaming in mock horror, Nick, Roger and John scattered. The Scoobies cracked up and chased after them. Only Brice stood his ground, still smiling up. Brightly beaming, Nathan softly prompted, "We've got stuff to talk about tonight."

Nodding, Brice giggled, "Yeah, I think so too."

Laying on the concrete deck, off to each side of Brice, Greg and Jerry giggled. Evilily smirking, Nathan hit them both with more imaginary cannon fire. Giggling louder, Greg and Jerry made their bodies jolt and dance from the pretend gun shots.

* * * * *

After finishing their dinners, AJ, Jerry, Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott went into the Command Center. Returning to the dining room only a few minutes later, the group went to the married Core Rimmers, and began handing out little black velvet boxes. On their one week wedding anniversary, all the married Core Rimmers received their wedding rings. They were all two-tone, yellow and white 14 karat gold, with round ruby center stones, signifying the ring of fire, and had smaller diamond accent stones around the ruby.

AJ wondered, "Will we all get rings like that?"

Keith smiled, "You dudes can get whatever rings you want. The ten of us decided on this style."

"We wanted to keep ours the same," Kaleo offered.

Stephen said, "If you guys like the same style, I think it would be kewl for all us leaders to have the same rings."

Sean giggled, "We haven't even decided when to get married."

Glancing around the eight unmarried Core Rimmers, Prez quickly said, "Tell me when, and shop around for rings."

AJ told Jerry, "Those are awesome rings."

Jerry nodded and chuckled, "I think so too." Almost simultaneously, Sean, Troy, Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott agreed. Jerry chuckled, "Kewl, so unofficially we've got a style of ring already chosen for future Core Rimmers."

"Now to set the date," AJ prompted.

Kaleo grinned, "I suggest Friday afternoon, after school."

Several members of the team asked, "Why Friday?"

Kaleo explained, "It would be a week after AJ and Jerry joined us, and it's a reminder that they found the Hunnicutt brothers the same night. Remember, some time this weekend, we'll be receiving the level three kids. Or you could wait for those kids to arrive and get settled in?"

Lance told Scott, "Friday's as good a day as any."

With the realization that Lance had just asked him to marry him, Scott shivered. So incredibly happy that he couldn't help it, Scott beamed, "Yeah?"

Nodding, Lance giggled, "I already promised you everything, including my Les Paul. We might as well make it official." Scott took Lance's hand and wordlessly led him from the CIC dining room. Lance giggled, "Where are we going?"

"To work up another, bigger appetite, MSLB," Scott chortled. The rest of the team grinned.

Jay reminded Chris, "This cast will be history by Friday." Chris took hold of Jay's hand and they followed Lance and Scott back to dorm three.

Playfully, Prez observed, "Those two couples need kids."

"They're at least sort o' thinking of kids," Keith sniggered.

Over the PA at both bases, Jerry announced, "For everyone that has arrived since last Wednesday night, your ID cards and Clan debit cards have arrived." Pausing for the cheering, Jerry then chuckled, "After breakfast tomorrow morning, we'll get them passed out."

The youngest sons at the tables of the Core Rimmers gathered together more young level one and level two orphans to go to the rec room. Once Ray had finished eating, he and Tony deposited their trays at the dishwasher. Leaning close to Ray, Tony quietly asked, "Wanna hang out in the rec room for a while?"

Surprised, Ray softly giggled, "Don't you want to go back to our room?"

Beginning the walk across the dining room, Tony smiled, "After the water blaster battle, pretty boy. Once we're there, that's where we'll be for the rest of the night."

Pulling Tony off to a deserted area of the room, Ray paused and smiled, "When we play with the dildos, I'd like it if we both played at the same time."

"Sixty-nine?"

Rapidly nodding, Ray giggled, "I haven't stopped thinking about what you said, about you bottoming for me?"

Feeling a shiver race up his spine, Tony smiled, "I'm gonna show you off in the rec room. I hit the Super-Lotto with you today. By the time the water blaster battle is over, every dude's gonna know; I'm yours and your mine. Then we'll go back to our room and have some more fun." He sealed his promise with a tender kiss that Ray quickly turned into a passionate lip lock.

Many of the adults and teens still in the dining room noticed the new couple. Chatting about Platinum Habits cover songs, Derrick, Mike, Keith, Prez, Troy and Sean warmly smiled at the couple across the room. Sean grinned, "Normally, Tony's the one leading Ray around, but now it seems that Ray's taking the lead." Nodding, the other five agreed, and then returned to their conversation.

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It wasn't planned, but when Leo and Bruce walked out of the CIC alone to talk, AJ and Jerry had an opportunity to talk with Kenny alone. AJ and Jerry walked through a dimensional door to find Kenny and pull him aside. Firmly holding his eldest son's shoulder, Jerry gently asked, "Would you like to know what happened to your parents, Kenny?"

Rapidly blinking and sighing, Kenny thought about it for about a minute, until they were seated at a small table. At last, he softly replied, "I do and I don't. I can figure stuff out, pop. My parents went to work, at the downtown financial district. When the two gay men came to our apartment to check on us, I overheard some of what they were whispering. Downtown was the worst place to be, they said."

AJ nodded and sighed, "That's right."

"That was Friday," Kenny struggled to say, "and today's Tuesday. Since there's been no word until now, it's more certain that

they didn't make it." Grimly, AJ and Jerry nodded. Kenny whimpered, "What I can't understand is why they kept me and Mike home from school, but they went to work. If I had known then what I know now..." Trailing off, Kenny couldn't stop the tears. AJ reached for some napkins and handed them to Kenny, hoping that he wouldn't join his eldest son and break down crying. Finally, after about two minutes, Kenny softly sobbed, "We had a real nice apartment and went to private school. I'll bet they were more worried about paying bills."

Leaning closer, Jerry patiently reminded, "Adults have to work to provide for their families, Ken. They were more concerned about keeping their three sons safe. I'll bet you they didn't think twice about their own well being, only about providing for their family. That won't happen again in this family. Me and dad each have gorillas and enhanced human security to keep us safe."

"I know," Kenny cried. Unintentionally, Kenny drew attention from other kids in the Oneula Beach dining room.

Rather than embarrass his son or create a very public scene, AJ asked, "How about we go home, Kenny?" Getting nods in response, AJ tapped his sub-vocal, ordering, "Alden, get all three of us home and on the sofa, dude." Without a comment, Alden executed the order. AJ was seated on Kenny's right, and Jerry was on the left side. Two teen dads shifted closer to their boy. AJ sighed, "We're sorry, Kenny. We thought about where and how to tell you, but there were no good answers."

Shaking his head and wiping his eyes with the damp napkins, Kenny whimpered, "There ain't a good place or way. My brothers couldn't be around either. It just sucks. I don't even want to know how or where they died, not now, and maybe not ever."

Jerry nodded, "All you have to do is ask, Kenny."

Nodding, Kenny sighed, "I'm glad me and my brothers got out of New York, and even more happy that we found you two guys. Being here, as a family, is so much more than I hoped might happen. I was afraid I'd lose my brothers; that we'd be separated. I don't *ever* want to go back to New York. It's stained." Sadly shaking his head, Kenny forced a small smirk, showed it to his dad and pop, then admitted, "More than anything, I'm angry at them for thinking more about money than they did about our family. I had to deal with Mike and Shaun constantly asking, 'Where's mommy and daddy?' I had to deal with it the entire day and into the night. As far as I'm concerned, it was the dumbest thing they'd ever done."

Jerry wondered, "What do you want to do now?"

"Stay here, at my new home, with you, my new dad and pop," Kenny answered.

AJ gently prompted, "Why don't you talk with your friends about it?"

Shaking his head, Kenny firmly said, "Not yet. This is where I want to be now, in my new home with my new dad and pop. Tomorrow I'll see what the other guys are doing. All you did was verify what I already expected. Someday I might want to know more, but maybe I won't. The more I know, the worse it'll be; like Leo. I don't want to relive that day. I want this family in this home." He paused and scowled, and then asked, "Am I being selfish?"

"I sure don't think so," Jerry quickly answered.

AJ smiled, "Definitely not. You're making perfect sense; choosing to move forward rather than look back or stagnate."

"Yeah," Kenny brightly smiled.

Jerry gave Kenny a hug, and then suggested, "How about we do something, since we have time available?"

Kenny wondered, "Like?"

"My thoughts are looking into the future, to winter rainy days, with three boys and two teenage fathers, chilling out in this house," Jerry grinned.

"Kewl," Kenny smiled.

"To the basement we go," Jerry prompted, and stood up.

Also standing, Kenny asked, "Why the basement?"

AJ answered, "It's a big empty space right now. It needs to be set up for those rainy days, with games and toys and all the stuff we'll need."

"Sweet!" Kenny brightly cheered, and hurried to the basement door. Before he had even opened the door, Kenny said, "I know a bunch of games and stuff Mike and Shaun would love." He started down stairs with his dad and pop trailing behind. "We'll need beanbag chairs, enough for all of us."

Jerry said, "Get extras for friends."

Like every other basement in the houses and townhomes, the walls were finished and the floor was carpeted. At the bottom of the stairs, Kenny turned and smiled. AJ sniggered, "What are you waiting for? Tap your comm-badge and call Alden."

Happily doing as he was told, Kenny called the AI to help get the beanbag chairs, enough for twelve kids and six teenage fathers. A

shelf unit was ordered, and then games and toys, that Mike and Shaun had in New York City, filled the shelves. A convertible card table and snack table, with seating for four went to the other side of the staircase. Since they already had four televisions in the house, they decided to put a stereo radio and CD changer in the basement. Of course, a CD changer required a CD library. Kenny ordered a lot and both his dads added to the collection. Ripping off the CD wrappers meant they needed garbage bins, so two good sized ones were ordered; one for each side of the basement. While they worked on the CD library, Kenny revealed, "I have an embarrassing question that needs to be asked."

Never pausing their work, AJ and Jerry smiled. Jerry joked, "You want me in a full-body Fuzzy for this?"

"NO!" Kenny loudly laughed. Jerry and AJ softly chortled. Sadly shaking his head, Kenny giggled, "You're on the right track, it does have to do with last night." Seeing his dad and pop patiently waiting, Kenny said, "I played a game yesterday, and the prize was Jason Mullins. I didn't win the game, but almost did. It suddenly put me on the spot, ya know? Jase and me are friends, and cousins, and that's all it'll ever be. Since last night, I've been noticing the couples, gay and straight. The straight side is much easier to figure out, it seems to me."

Jerry blinked, "I'm not sure I get what you mean."

"Girls sit on their boyfriend's lap," Kenny said. "Most of the time, it's the boyfriend that wants a kiss, but I have seen some girls do that too. With the gay couples, it's not easy to figure out. Honestly, I can't really see having a girlfriend or a boyfriend any time soon, because nobody is that special. But then I noticed how Billy was with Robbie, and how Jase was acting with JD, and all the other gay couples during the day today, like Gage and Jonah, and Ben and

Sammy. Are there some rules that gay guys agree on or what?" He tossed the crumpled CD wrapper in the trash and then turned to his dad and pop.

Jerry explained, "Looks are deceiving. In most cases, guys are heavier and stronger than their girlfriends, so that's why you see that being pretty constant. I sit on your dad's lap, even though I'm a little taller and a little heavier. For now, Gage and Sammy are heavier and stronger than Ben and Jonah, but that won't necessarily always be the case. Troy sits on Sean's lap and they switch, just like me and dad, and just like Keith and Prez."

Kenny gasped and then squealed, "Keith and Prez switch too? I never saw that! And Prez is our leader! HOLY CRAP!"

Only because Jerry was fighting to not crack up, AJ giggled, "You've only been here three days, not counting the day at Kaho'olawe. Later on, talk to your bother, Mike. I'd place big money on him being with Geoff right at this very moment." He went to throw a CD wrapper away, saying, "You could also talk with Gage, Jonah, Sammy and Ben. I guarantee that none of them have made any agreement about who is doing what and how. When you find someone that makes you feel good, and discover that you make him feel good, everything else simply falls into place, very naturally."

"Your dad and I went through some rough times together," Jerry reminded. "A lot of our bedtime chats were about that bad stuff, and we made each other feel better. When we were reunited, we shared more bad stuff, and with each day since we were rescued, less of that and more of the good stuff we were discovering together. Now we talk about our three sons, and each other too. Even with straight couples, everything is pretty even. It has to be, or the couple won't last. Somebody's gonna feel hurt about something, and they'll split

apart."

AJ recommended, "Talk with your cousins and buddies, Kenny. Another bet I'll place is against Jase, JD, Gage, Jonah, Ben and Sammy having a lot of sex. Maybe in the mornings they're playing in the shower, and at night they're playing before they go to sleep. None of them are like any teenager, I guarantee it. They're just having fun. It'll be the same with you, when you find that special person, especially if it's another guy. And in about five years, if you're very lucky, you'll be teenagers and having more grown up fun together, like me and your pop."

Finishing the last CD and tossing it onto a beanbag chair, Jerry loudly laughed, "It makes me *crazy* when you do that!" AJ cracked up and backed away. Kenny's eyebrows shot up. Advancing on his future hubby, Jerry giggled, "You did it with Shaun yesterday." Playfully imitating AJ, Jerry teased, "Maybe you'll want to hold hands, or maybe you'll want to hug, and maybe you'll even want to kiss, like me and poppa kiss."

AJ and Kenny roared laughing. In an instant, Jerry picked up AJ and they kissed around their combined laughter. Practically in tears from laughter, Kenny watched Jerry carry AJ to the nearest wall. Once trapped between the wall and Jerry, AJ wrapped his legs around Jerry's butt. When the kisses paused, AJ turned to Kenny, giggling, "See, I started it, and we both got what we wanted."

"For now," Jerry sniggered, "bedtime tonight will be reversed." He placed AJ back on the floor and they each stole tender kisses. Jerry finished his fatherly advise, reminding, "Everything is even, the love and caring flows back and forth however it's needed. As we said last night and tonight, don't worry about the sex part; when you've got the sharing, it really does happen just as easily as what you just saw us

do."

Still red faced from laughing, Kenny rapidly nodded.

With all the CDs unwrapped and stowed on the shelf, the three of them glanced around their new family playroom. Satisfied, AJ called Kaleo and told him what they had done. Intrigued, Kaleo transported into their basement with Tory to see the results for themselves. The space was perfect; comfortable, inviting, and clearly a place that kids and their teenage dads could hang out at. Glancing around the space, Kaleo chuckled, "This is great!"

Tory suggested, "How about we add to it?"

Tilting his head, AJ grinned, "You could add whatever you want in your basement, bro."

"We will," Tory giggled, and walked over toward the basement half bath. However he didn't go in the bathroom, but stopped short. He pulled a little lever that opened a hidden latch in the wall, explaining, "These are collapsible, folding walls; they'll slide open, so your basement opens to Sean's and Troy's next door, and their basement will open to ours at the end unit. Our three families can chill together, or apart, or we could even make a space large enough for newbie nests." Tory then went to the opposite side of the half bath and opened the other sliding wall, effectively doubling the space. Kenny cracked up at the surprised expressions his dads wore. Evilily sniggering, Kaleo hurried to the next wall that separated Troy's and Sean's basement from his.

Jerry went to help Kaleo open both sections of sliding walls. Tapping his comm-badge, AJ called, "Sean, are you busy, bro?"

"Not yet," Sean evilily cackled. In the background, Troy began giggling. Recognizing that teenaged boys were insane, Kenny covered

his mouth with both hands and muffled a belly laugh.

Bouncing his eyebrows at his eldest son, AJ giggled, "If you can, you two need to come down to your basement. We've got a surprise for you."

Out of sync, Sean and Troy uncertainly muttered, "A surprise in the basement?"

Troy said, "We're only chatting with Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike."

"Bring them along too," AJ quickly suggested.

Kenny giggled, "I'll go get my brothers, and all my new cousins too, dad."

"Kewl," AJ nodded. He pulled Kenny close for a moment, gave his eldest a hug and mouthed, "I love you, ya know?"

Giggling and nodding, Kenny warmly smiled, "I love you too, dad." He then called Alden to be transported to the CIC rec room, where his brothers and friends were. In a blink, Kenny was gone.

Prez reminded, "That's about three dozen of us in your basement, AJ."

Now that all the basement separator walls were open, AJ giggled, "Space won't be a problem, Prez."

Mike chuckled, "Right, now I'm curious." The sounds of chairs sliding could be heard. Then Mike called Alden to have the group of six Core Rimmers transported from Ewa Beach's dining room to AJ's and Jerry's basement.

Upon arrival, Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Sean and Troy glanced

around the space that was now about ten meters long by twenty-four meters wide. AJ giggled, "The walls on both sides of the half bathrooms and stairs are temporary sliding walls. Tory showed us."

Kaleo cheered, "The division's basement nest just moved. There are three half bathrooms down here now, and plenty of space for at least fifty kids to nest."

Prez chuckled, "We were just talking about combining gear in Mike's and Derrick's basement with ours. At our townhomes, we could set up a little jam space, have space to chill, and including Drew's and Corey's basement, still have space for kids to nest."

Tapping his comm-badge, Keith called, "Drew?"

"Here, bro."

"Transport over here," Keith grinned. "You and Corey need to see this to believe it."

There were a few seconds silence, then Drew giggled, "We've heard plenty from you two, and still don't believe what we've seen!"

Derrick sniggered, "Then the next trip to Archmania, the bedroom walls come down."

"And we'll show you how to do it while standing on your hands," Keith teased. Corey and Drew cracked up.

Obviously near his dads, Leo squealed, "That's more than I needed to hear, Uncle Keith!"

"For the moment, nephew," Keith sniggered.

Drew chuckled, "Give us a minute to rinse the glasses we're

using and we'll be right there. Out."

Happily cackling, "I found 'em!" Kenny transported into the basement with his two brothers, Stan, Leonard, Russ, Mark, Marv, Jimmy, Richie, Scott, Dillon, Jonah, Gage, Ben, Sammy, Dee, Jason, JD, Randy, Lenny and Geoff. The only Core Rimmer son that wasn't present was Billy, because he was over at the Taylors' house. Moments later, Drew, Corey and Leo transported into the basement. With twenty-two Rimmer sons and twelve Core Rimmers roaming around, there was still plenty of space. Soon, the boys were making themselves at home on bean bag chairs. Games and toys were pulled off the shelf. They began playing and chattering. Their dads made preparations for nesting kids, getting blankets, mattress padding and pillows piled in one corner of Kaleo's and Tory's section. When that was complete, Corey, Drew, Keith and Prez transported to their townhomes to make similar preparations in their basements. Derrick and Mike went to dorm three to meet with Lance and Scott for a prearranged guitar lesson.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Condominium A

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, 6:40PM HTZ

Outside, it was twilight. The sky to the East was dark, and to the West there were the final vestiges of sunlight bouncing off of orange and pink clouds. Angelo, Reggie, Phil and Owen began the walk up one of the exterior staircases at condominium A. Owen was trying to keep up with Angelo and Reggie until Phil called his name at the third floor and gently reminded, "Slow down for me, okay?"

"It's already so pretty!" Owen beamed. "Don't you think it's pretty?"

Pausing at the landing halfway between the third and fourth floors, Phil nodded, smiled and leaned close to whisper, "I want you to keep that dinner in your belly."

Owen pulled back and saw the sincerity in his boyfriend's eyes. He was already getting a little winded and understood Phil's intent. "Okay," Owen smiled, and quickly kissed Phil on the cheek, but then he grabbed Phil's hand and hurried up another flight of stairs. Giggling hysterically, Phil held Owen back, making him slow down. By the sixth floor, Owen was feeling the exertion from climbing and they paused there.

Already at the tenth floor, Angelo and Reggie looked out over the base. "The CIC and auditorium look like a bloated teal guppy," Angelo sniggered.

Pointing over to the right, Reggie smiled, "Some kids are going to the pool and diving well."

Angelo wondered, "Do you want to hang out there tonight?"

"When we're done here, I want to be alone with you," Reggie confessed. Taking the hint, Angelo moved closer and was soon wrapped in his boyfriend's arms. Angelo rested his head on Reggie's shoulders. After a few peaceful moments, Reggie whispered, "Can I tell you something?"

"Anything."

"We can and will be more social... tomorrow. Tonight, we're gonna dance, and we're gonna watch TV, and all the while we'll be chatting about everything and anything. Some of that's gonna be done naked, just 'cos we can. We'll play in the water blaster war, and then go back to our room. We're gonna talk, and cuddle, and make love, and talk about making love. Before we crash, we're going to know so

much more than we do already. What we did alone before was too good to be true."

Angelo giggled, "Yeah, it was way too much fun."

Reggie asked, "If I said I'd like it if we stayed like that for another few days, what would you think?"

"You're scared of intercourse too?"

"That's only part of the reason," Reggie admitted, and then explained, "It's plenty for now, babe. You made me do something that I've never done before. If your hand could do that, and your mouth was even better, then what's the rush?"

"All true, but don't you feel like we have to try?"

"I do, very much, but I'm not going anywhere. I guess I want it to be special. Since this day is already very special, we don't need to make it better."

Angelo asked, "You'll tell me when you're ready to make another unique day?"

Squeezing Angelo tight, Reggie sighed, "I'm counting on it happening automatically and naturally, like this entire day has been. I'd like it to be two very unique days; the first day I'll be looking up into your eyes, and the next, you'll be looking up into mine."

Surprised and pulling his head off Reggie's shoulder, Angelo checked, "You want to go first?"

Reggie giggled, "Why are you shocked? I love you, Angelo. If we're gonna make us work, then I have to be all you'll ever need, all the time, so all of me is yours. I already know that you're who I'll be

turning to for everything; whether that means to talk, or if it means bedroom playtime. You may be more than average, but you're closer to average than I am. Since I expect challenging first times with you, I can only imagine what you must be expecting." Because Angelo was only smiling at him, Reggie sniggered, "After I finished your portrait Sunday night, I was in the bathroom, putting out the fire."

Angelo began giggling. Reggie planted a tender kiss, and then teased, "You needed hand lotion, but thanks to foreskin, I only needed soap and water to clean up when I was done." Cracking up, Angelo flung himself against Reggie and muted his laughter. Reggie giggled, "I really do love you very much, Angelo. Everything that was impossible suddenly became possible today. Let's keep this day just as it has been. We can have plenty of fun for as long as we want, before going for intercourse."

"I'm all yours, Reg. Take me home."

Soft chuckling caused Angelo and Reggie to look over toward the sound. Leaning against the wall that separated the balcony from the staircase was another teenager, wearing the widest grin he could manage. "Sorry, but you two are just too cute," the teen boy chuckled. Mindful to not appear aggressive in any way, he slowly came around the corner, saying, "My name's Mathew Thornton, but call me Matt. My dad and I just moved here today. Dad's joining the housekeeping staff. We're over in condo B, seventh floor. Since the view from my bedroom was partially blocked by this building, I was only coming over to get the full picture."

He giggled at his own understatement, then offered, "Don't worry, I'm gay too, so it's kewl. It's more than kewl, really. There were two other guys, another couple, that I passed on the way up. They seemed a little younger, so I didn't stop. This clearly is the place for me to be. Being gay wasn't too kewl back in Kentucky. That's why my

dad was searching for a job, and why we're here."

He paused again and blinked, "Am I talking too much? I always do, which is why my orientation became a tiny problem."

Separating from Reggie, Angelo reached to shake hands and introduced himself, and then introduced Reggie. Reggie also shook hands and greeted the new kid. Immediately, Angelo and Reggie took notice of Matt's southern United States accent, but hadn't heard those inflections before. Angelo noticed that Matt was taller than Reggie, but they both had the same large frame. Between Angelo and Reggie, they managed to explain that their parents were employees too, and that they had just met over the weekend, and hooked up that day, before Matt took over again.

"While I was unpacking, I occasionally peeked out the windows," Matt admitted, and then offered, "There seems to be more guys than girls here." All Angelo and Reggie did was nod, and Matt cheered, "SWEET!" He looked up, clasped his hands together and loudly prayed, "Dear Lord, just one cute guy about my age, please?" Angelo and Reggie giggled, and Matt continued, "I only want one, and I'll never cheat or nothin'. Fourteen, and if he's a ginger too, that would be really nice, but beggars can't be choosers, ya know, so just sayin', I've been good, and I promise to stay good; really, *really* good, if ya know what I mean. And thanks for the pretty sunset, and my dad's new job here, and tonight's dinner was primo, so thanks for teaching dad how to cook and not burn food. Amen and out." He unclasped his hands and brightly smiled at Angelo and Reggie. Soft giggling turned into triplicate loud laughter.

Angelo giggled, "Is your dad expecting you home soon, Matt?"

Matt shrugged, "Eventually, ya know, he knows where I said I

was goin'. Why'd ya ask?"

"Your prayer has been answered," Angelo smiled. "Why don't you walk with us?"

Catching on to Angelo's plan, Reggie grinned, "As you heard, we were just about to go to our dorm room. We can show you around a little, and hopefully introduce you to two leaders. At least you can meet a few dudes."

"And you can get a comm-badge too," Angelo said. He pointed out, down and to the right, explaining, "That building is our dormitory."

Matt grinned, "I thought your folks worked here."

"They do," Angelo and Reggie chorused.

Gesturing to Angelo, Reggie sniggered, "We've been successfully avoiding each other for three days. Today, Angelo knocked at my door. This afternoon, we were scheming to find a place to be alone, away from my kid brother, and Angelo's little sister. Need I say more?"

Dropping to his knees, Matt clasped his hands, again praising the Almighty for everything in heaven and Earth, including the creation of Angelo and Reggie. He hopped up again, prompting, "Lead the way."

Walking with Reggie to the nearest staircase, Angelo grinned, "We'll introduce you, but the challenge is yours."

Following them down the steps, Matt wondered, "Challenge? What challenge?"

"Turning an acquaintance into a boyfriend," Reggie briefly answered.

"All we can do is shake our heads when we know someone is already spoken for," Angelo said.

Matt asked, "How many gay couples are here?"

Pausing at the next landing, Reggie looked up at Matt, still a few steps up and away. Reggie grinned, "What do you know about this division?"

Matt shrugged, "It's Clan Short, so that tells me its better than where I was."

Angelo and Reggie smiled at each other, and then started walking again, telling Matt about the leadership team, and that they referred to themselves as Core Rimmers, and the rest of the kids are Rimmers. They admitted that they had personally met five gay couples that one day, and the entire leadership team accounted for another seven couples. At a pause, while Matt was again praising the good Lord, Reggie tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Reggie to Jay, come in, please?"

A couple of seconds later, Jay and Chris simultaneously laughed, "PLEASE?"

In his Mr. Fuzzy squeaky voice, Jay sniggered, "Sorry, the number you have dialed is out of service. PUH-LEASE re-try your call, without the friggin' politeness."

Reggie chuckled, "We met a new kid, the son of a new employee, dude. Can you hook him up with a comm-badge and the necessities?"

"One Rimmer welcoming package, comin' up," Jay replied in his normal voice.

Chris sniggered, "Your welcoming package is waiting in your room, Reggie."

Angelo giggled, "Accept our Fuzzy thanks in advance."

"We'll meet you in our common room in five minutes," Reggie smiled.

Chris giggled, "Guess this means we need to get dressed, lover." Angelo, Reggie, Matt and even Jay cracked up. "Whoops!" Chris giggled, "Please insert another five credits to continue with this obscene call."

"OUT!" Jay howled.

Matt chuckled, "I'm not askin' what's in the welcoming package." Seesawing back and forth, Angelo and Reggie recalled the exact contents mentioned in the auditorium, driving Matt to hysterics. Not knowing any better, Matt thought it was all made up, just friendly banter. The truth was that Angelo and Reggie also thought they were kidding, and were simply repeating what they had been told.

Entering the quad, Matt's jaw dropped when Aki and Hajami were chased outside of dorm one by Stephen Wicks and Aaron Farris. All four had super-soakers and were in their underwear. The pre-cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle practice sessions were already beginning. Angelo and Reggie glanced over at Matt. Finding the newbie with wide eyes and his jaw dragging on the ground, Angelo and Reggie evilly snickered. Matt provocatively growled, "Those two older guys are too cute."

"We haven't met them," Reggie sniggered.

Angelo grinned, "There are three hundred kids here, and another hundred at Oneula Beach. Having parents, we initially felt out of place, but we haven't met a bad kid here all day. Once we introduce you to Jay and Chris, I expect all three of us will get introduced to some more kids."

From the direction of the CIC, another two boys were racing toward them. Brice Glotzbecker howled, "You cheat so bad, Nathan!"

Several meters in front of Brice, Nathan Hayes loudly giggled, "It's not *my* fault that your organic brain can't keep up with my positronics!" They ran directly for dormitory one and went inside.

Matt grinned at Angelo and Reggie. "We haven't met them either," Reggie cheekily smiled.

Looking up at the sky, Matt called, "Mamma, please don't call me home now."

Angelo checked, "Momma?"

Nodding, Matt briefly explained, "A bad car accident on an icy road, four years ago. Since then, it's been just me and dad."

Angelo sincerely apologized, "I'm sorry, Matt, I didn't know."

"It's been a long while," Matt explained, "and my dad is one of the best. He's always known which way I lean, and he has never been critical about it. He changed his life and career for me. Just to give you an example, when mamma passed, and I woke from a nightmare about the accident, he stayed the night with me in my bed. He knew about me, and didn't care about nothin', 'cept makin' it better the best he could. Now it's my turn to make things better for him. I'll find a

nice boyfriend, someone he'll like too, and then he's gettin' booted out, to find a nice lady that I'll like. The hopes and dreams I had last week are materializing real nice. If it weren't for them stupid Romulans, we would o' been here Saturday. Everything's going to work out better now." Realizing they were heading toward a doorway, Matt asked, "This is home?"

Nodding, Reggie smiled, "The last room at the far end of the shorter hall, yeah."

"Room twenty-six," Angelo repeated what his parents told him.

"The scenic route," Matt happily chortled. "It's not like the walk hasn't been plenty scenic enough, mind you."

Pulling the outside door open, Angelo giggled, "You're gonna do fine around here, Matt."

"I sure hope so," Matt smiled. He stepped inside and paused to wait for Angelo and Reggie. Glancing around the area, Matt saw the stairs leading up to the second floor, and what appeared to be postal mail box units, like he would see at post offices in the United States. The mail box units were resting on the floor, by the stairs and out of the way, needing to be mounted on the walls. Installation was a task his dad would very likely help to accomplish.

In moments, they were walking beyond the inner door and into the hall. The first couple of room doors were closed, but they could see the TV on in the common room, and there were electric guitar sounds gushing from far down the hall. They passed a room where two little boys were seen on the floor playing video games. A little further down, near the lavatory, another two younger guys were watching TV. Quite unexpectedly, a really horrible note was played, and the guitar playing stopped, but loud laughter from multiple voices

reverberated down the hall. Angelo, Reggie and Matt stopped at the last room and looked inside. Seeing Lance, Scott, Erik, Travis, Jay, Chris, Derrick and Mike inside the room, Angelo and Reggie raised their free hands.

Still sniggering, Scott waved them in the room, causing everyone else to look to the door. Standing before one of the two closets, with his Les Paul hanging from his shoulders, Lance was pretending to slam his head against the doors. Turning around, blushing red and still giggling, Lance lifted the guitar off his shoulders and handed it to Mike, prompting, "Once again, please." Looking over at Angelo, Reggie and the newbie teenaged boy, Lance giggled, "Great! All the new guys heard me blow chunks."

Everything paused while Angelo and Reggie introduced Matt Thornton. Jay continued introductions around the room. Since Reggie hadn't yet been formally introduced to Derrick and Mike, they also shook hands and knocked knuckles. Soon, Matt was the center of attention, repeating all that he had already shared with Angelo and Reggie. Hearing a familiar accent, Derrick wondered, "Where are you from, Matt?"

"Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA," Matt smiled.

Derrick asked, "Is that close to Louisville?"

Matt nodded, "About two hours south of, on I-65."

"Just what the doctor ordered!" Mike cheered. Causing the rest of the boys in the room to nod and chuckle.

"Careful, Lick," Derrick grinned, "Galli will pop in, TARDIS and all, and melt our brains again." Wobbling unsteadily, Mike groaned through his chortling. Chris and Derrick went to Matt.

Chris explained to Matt, "One of our brothers, from Louisville, has been in the dumps and grumps, because he learned both his little brothers found themselves boyfriends today."

Nodding, Derrick asked, "Could you try and help us out, Matt?"

Shrugging, Matt smiled, "I'll give it a shot."

Chris giggled, "Maybe by the time we get back, Lance and Scott will be able to play all of 'Flight Of Icarus'."

"It's a rough tune to play," Matt chuckled.

Realizing there was another guitar player in their midst, Mike smiled, "If Kassidy insists on being grumpy, come right back here again, Matt."

Nodding, Matt chuckled, "Sure thing."

Chris, Derrick and Matt walked out of the room and passed through the common room. Chris softly offered, "Kassidy is fourteen, like us, and has two little brothers, eleven-year-old twins. Kade is getting close to Brad Triggs. Karey is building bonds with Reggie's little bro, Cameron."

"In the meantime," Derrick smirked, "Kassidy is stumped, wondering how both his younger brothers managed what he hasn't. He's a real nice guy and mixes in easily with every group, but he's just a little down tonight. All Kassidy needs is an ego boost, and someone detached to get him off the ground."

Beginning to think of what he might say, Matt wondered, "Is he gay?"

Chris shrugged, "I'm not sure. At dinner, he had a bunch of guys

from this dorm sitting with him. I've seen him chatting with girls too, before today, but that's not proof of much, besides being social."

Pausing at the Oldcambus brothers' room, Derrick checked, "Ready, dude?"

Matt nodded, "This will be simple, unless he decides otherwise."

Chris knocked on the door. In moments, the door swung open. Soft country music drifted out into the hall. Dressed as he was at dinner, only now barefoot, Kassidy forced a small grin, asking, "How's it goin', bros?"

Derrick gestured to Matt, introduced him and added that Matt was from the same state. "We thought maybe a dude with the same background might help you feel better," Derrick sincerely tried.

"Damned kids," Kassidy smirked, "I turned my back on 'em for ten minutes, and two hours later they come runnin' to me, braggin' about boyfriends."

Chris had been watching Matt closely. He hadn't blinked once. Chris and Derrick didn't know that Matt had prayed for a ginger haired boyfriend soon after meeting Angelo and Reggie. Kassidy had strawberry blond hair, gray eyes and a medium build that momentarily stopped Matt's heart. Concentrating on Kassidy's reactions, Derrick felt invisible for the first time in a long while. Chris could tell Matt was attracted and fought back the urge to grin. Raising an open palm, Matt cleared his throat and offered, "If you wanna talk, I'll listen?"

Nodding, Kassidy grinned, "Lets talk about anything but brothers."

"Since I don't have any brothers or sisters, that's not a problem,"

Matt chortled.

"Come on in," Kassidy prompted, and stepped aside.

Walking between Chris and Derrick, Matt went inside the room, past Kassidy and turned around to raise a hand to Chris and Derrick.

"We'll catch y'all later," Kassidy said, and closed the door before Chris or Derrick could say a word.

Blinking uncertainly, Chris and Derrick went back down the hall. After only a few steps, Chris softly giggled, "Did you feel that?"

Derrick nodded and chortled, "Kassidy looked at only Matt, like we weren't even there. Matt was every bit as spellbound."

Chris laughed, "Talk about your turnarounds! Kassidy should've just said, thanks for the hunky hottie, dudes. You're dismissed."

Nodding and cracking up, Derrick and Chris raced back to Lance's and Scott's room to share what had happened.

Once the door closed, Kassidy turned to Matt, smiling, "We've got trikes and a huge area to ride them, right here on base."

"Sweet!" Matt chuckled, "My dad and I had dirt bikes that we sold before coming here."

Gesturing to the stereo in the room, Kassidy wondered, "Do you like music?"

Nodding, Matt answered, "Dad plays bluegrass banjo, mandolin and acoustic guitar. I started on acoustic guitar and got an electric two years ago. Country rock and southern rock are my favorites though. That's why dad chose to work here, instead of other US Clan divisions, so I could go to school here." He paused and then seriously

said, "I have a question for you."

"Ask away."

"Do you believe in miracles?"

Widely smiling and nodding, Kassidy replied, "A few days ago, I probably would've said no. My parents and an aunt and uncle were killed during Battle Of Earth."

Matt groaned, "I'm sorry. I know what that feels like, because my mamma died a couple o' years ago. It's just been me and dad since then."

Taking a few steps closer to Matt, Kassidy softly said, "Miracles ain't like magic tricks, but sometimes things happen that are just too good to be true. It started hours after I lost my parents, and it's continuing, right to this very moment. A bunch of really kewl kids took the sting out of the loss. The first time someone says, 'it'll be all right,' you don't really believe it might happen, but I can say that it does, and it has. For four days, I've been doing some major soul searching, knowing I couldn't only be a big brother, but not being able to tell myself what I really want. I think I've found my answer. That's another miracle I didn't expect."

"I think you're right," Matt smiled. "All I did was decide to take a walk to see my new home. Climbing the steps at condo A, I passed two younger kids that were hugging and kept climbing. That's when I met Angelo and Reggie, hugging and sweet talkin' at the tenth floor balcony. They brought me here, where I saw two more miracles before we even stepped inside. Then I heard Lance and Scott playing electric guitar. Now I'm up to six miracles in about half an hour."

"What're we gonna do about these miracles?"

Reaching his hand out and having Kassidy take it, Matt answered, "Be glad for what we've been given."

Chapter 25

Ewa Beach, Dormitory 3

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 7:47PM HTZ

Kassidy gently held Matt's hand, softly confessing, "Even before losing my folks, I was starting to feel like I needed someone really special. Since Friday, it's like, I haven't stopped hoping and looking for that person. Part of me wonders if it's grief that's making me feel the way I do?"

"Only partly," Matt offered, "that's life. We're old enough to feel that way, so it's natural, a part of growing up."

"So it's not only one situation, it's all of 'em combining?"

"Yeah, I think so."

Widely smiling, Kassidy chortled, "I don't want anything interfering with what I'm thinking and feeling. One something to think about is all I can handle."

Curious to know exactly what Kassidy was saying, Matt prodded, "Give me an example of what you're thinking."

"The whole string of events since we went on vacation, and more so since last Friday," Kassidy explained. "You must know it too. Back home in Kentucky, there were gays and lesbians, but they weren't talked about; they were the dirty little secret kept hidden. Even though I never had a boyfriend, or any quick flings to try it out, I always hated that attitude. While visiting Los Angeles, they weren't hidden and sure didn't keep much secret. To me, seeing two dudes holding hands, huggin' or kissin' was just as cute as any straight couple. Then, after the accident, I started meeting some of the Clan guys. They're

some of the nicest people I've ever met. They make it real obvious that some folks back home didn't take the time to know what people were really like."

Nodding, Matt confessed, "That's why dad took the job here. I was one of those dirty little secrets, and he hated it more than I did."

Kassidy asked, "How do you know you're gay?"

Matt chuckled, "The best lookin', nicest folks are other guys. It's always been that way for me. There's never been any other way to be. Think of it like shopping for clothes; what fits and what's comfortable is what you walk out with."

Kassidy sniggered, "If the sneaker fits..."

"Or jeans versus slacks, or polo shirts versus dress shirts and ties," Matt smiled.

"Like warm weather versus cold weather."

"Warmer is always better," Matt smiled. "Daddy says, the only good part of winter is snuggling up with someone to get warm. I can't wait to find out if that's true."

With a purpose in mind, Kassidy grinned, "It's always warm here. It rained Saturday night and was below seventy degrees Sunday morning. Almost everyone here was shivering, except me and my brothers." Knowing he was about to step out on a limb, he paused and then giggled, "We'll have to make an excuse to snuggle under a blanket sometime."

Matt's smile waned. He softly said, "I think you're awesome, Kassidy, but I would like to get to know you really well, before we

start snuggling."

Beaming, Kassidy shared, "That's exactly what I hoped you'd say. When you mentioned snuggling, that's where I thought you wanted me to go. Sharing how you really feel, even though we've just met, is really important to me, Matt. I don't want quick flings or meaningless sex. What I do want is someone that knows it takes time, caring, and the willingness to make something good last. I think you're awesome too; my miracle man."

Chuckling insanely with relief, Matt dropped to one knee and prayed, "Good Lord, thank you so much for giving me an awesome boyfriend. Help us both to make it as life long partners, so our favorite place to be is together. One thing you'll need to help with though, is keeping our teenage hormones under control."

Standing there with Matt's hand still in his, and Matt looking like he was proposing marriage, Kassidy looked up at the ceiling, and added to the prayer. "God, you gave me the perfect boyfriend, when I needed it most, when I thought there was no one for me. Do us both a favor and help us become a really close couple, like Prez and Keith, Derrick and Mike, and Chris and Jay."

Standing up, Matt smiled, "You believe in prayer?"

Nodding, Kassidy admitted, "For a few days there, I wondered if it did any good. I guess I just got a busy signal."

"That's a real good way of lookin' at it," Matt chuckled. "I think we got another answer to our prayers too." When Kassidy curiously blinked and tilted his head, Matt giggled, "Somebody's telling me that we've spent enough time here in your bedroom. We're doin' a good job of ignoring temptation, but we're only human."

Heartily giggling, Kassidy revealed, "We never should've

mentioned snuggling. I know it too, but I wanted to know where you heading, short term and long term."

Loving that Kassidy was being so truthful, Matt smiled, "I'll go anywhere with you. Show me around this base, please?"

Going to slip into his sandals, Kassidy asked, "What haven't you seen yet?" He then returned to Matt and took his hand again.

"Just about everything," Matt answered, "I got here about two this afternoon. While unpacking, I glanced out the windows of my bedroom." Kassidy led the way out of the room.

Closing and locking his door, Kassidy asked, "Where's your new home?"

"Condo B, unit 7-B," Matt quickly rattled off. And then, while he and Kassidy walked down the hall toward the exit, he explained, "Dad got the best view he could, two floors higher than what was initially offered to us. I've seen buildings and lots o' kids, but don't know much of anything, or anyone."

Kassidy checked, "Since Chris and Derrick brought you to meet me, I guess you met their partners too?"

Nodding, Matt rambled, "Chris is with Jay, Derrick is with Mike, Erik is with Travis, Angelo is with Reggie, and Lance is with Scott. That's everybody I've met. In one night I've met more gay couples than I ever have before. I can't recall most last names though."

Kassidy chuckled, "I know a lot more, but haven't met anyone named Angelo or Reggie."

Stopping short before heading out the door, Matt muttered, "They said they had the last room in this hall." He walked back a few paces,

and then knocked on the door to room twenty-six. It took a few moments, but the door opened. Only one bed stand light was on in the room, and soft instrumental music was playing. Standing there shirtless and in a tight embrace were Angelo and Reggie. Matt chuckled, "I'm sorry, guys. You're probably the only two I know that Kassidy doesn't, so I only wanted to introduce my boyfriend to you." He then formally introduced, "Kassidy, the blushing blond is Reggie Combs, and the brunette is Angelo Diaz."

Reaching an arm out to Kassidy, Angelo giggled, "We're learning to slow dance together. It's good to meet you, Kassidy." Angelo and Kassidy shook hands and knocked knuckles.

Recalling Matt's prayer, Reggie offered a hand to shake with Kassidy, said, "Hi," and then asked Matt, "another prayer was answered?"

Nodding, Matt chuckled, "Before falling for temptations, we decided to go for a walk."

Curiously blinking, Reggie repeated, "Temptations?"

Matt sniggered, "Three beds, and alone with a real cutie."

"And no little brothers," Kassidy grinned.

Angelo giggled, "You'll have to let us know how successfully you avoided temptation. I gave up after about two hours and willingly threw myself into the fire." Kassidy and Matt cracked up.

Blushing more, Reggie sniggered, "You're being bad, babe. It was more like two and a half hours."

"No," Angelo giggled, "if I were bad, we sure wouldn't be dancing!" Softly sniggering, Reggie planted a deep kiss on Angelo

before anything more embarrassing was said.

Turning to Kassidy, and again seeing the same soft smile, Matt grinned, "More temptations?"

"I'll say!" Kassidy giggled.

Matt smiled, "Get back to dancing, guys. We'll catch y'all later."

Angelo reminded, "Don't forget the cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle at nine o'clock, dudes."

"The *what*?" Matt incredulously chortled.

Rolling his eyes, Kassidy loudly laughed, "Temptations!" and then waved, leading Matt to the exit doors.

Rapidly blinking, Matt wondered, "What kind of water blaster battle?"

Opening up the outer door and leading the way outside, Kassidy giggled, "You met Jay. I'm surprised he didn't give you a Mr. Fuzzy puppet." Kassidy led the way down the path that would take them between the pool and soccer field.

"He was supposed to," Matt admitted, "but helping you was higher priority to all those guys."

Suddenly, everything said since they met organized in Kassidy's head. Matt wasn't even on base half a day, and he happened to meet Angelo and Reggie, who brought Matt to the dormitory to meet Jay and Chris. The plans got side-tracked when Chris and Derrick brought Matt to meet him. Kassidy stopped walking, causing Matt to pause. Kassidy carefully wondered, "What were you told about me?"

"That we're from the same State, and that you were feeling a little

down," Matt answered. "They couldn't even say if you were gay or not, but I figured, even if you weren't, I could spend a few minutes and maybe gain another new friend."

Kassidy beamed, "You put other plans aside just to meet me?"

Matt shrugged and smiled, "They weren't like the biggest, most important plans in the world. I'm the new guy, tryin' to meet folks, figure out where I am and how I can fit in. You made the change worthwhile, Kass. You might've decided to stay down in the dumps, no matter what I said." Noticing Kassidy wiping his eyes, Matt worried, "What's wrong?"

Kassidy muttered, "They were all concerned about me, so you just went with that?"

Nodding, Matt giggled, "Well, that was another idea and plan running amuck, and the good Lord intervening at the right time for you and for me. I sure didn't expect to find the boyfriend of my dreams standing in the room." Matt reached his hand out and Kassidy took it in his hand.

Turning left to walk between the main pool and rec center, Kassidy giggled, "Don't exaggerate."

"I'm really not exaggerating at all," Matt gushed. "Ask Angelo and Reggie who I was praying for soon after I met them. The entire Holy Trinity must've listened, because you're everything I prayed for, and then some."

Thankful they were outside in the dark, where his blush couldn't be seen, Kassidy softly said, "You're exactly the kind of guy I was wishing for too; I couldn't have molded a better boyfriend if I tried."

Matt grinned, "Admit it, you were bummed about your brothers

finding boyfriends before you."

Rapidly nodding, Kassidy giggled, "And that I was obviously doing stuff wrong."

"It might've been wrong for everyone else, but everything you've said and done is perfect for me. I'm seriously attracted to you, Kass. I made a deal with the good Lord, and since he kept his end, I'm keeping my end of the bargain. I'm gonna do good by you, everyday and every chance I get. Dad told me that he and mammy always helped each other; like if one was a little down, the other would haul them back up again; if one needed help, the other was always willing. That's the way I'd like us to be."

Kassidy was about to tell Matt that he was equally attracted, and with two annoying little brothers, he had a high tolerance for daily aggravation. Giggling voices caused him to pause and squint in the darkness.

From over by the townhouses, Kade loudly teased, "All that gum flappin'!"

Karey joked, "It's teenagers, tryin' to be kewl, instead of admittin' they really wanna roll in the haystack!"

Frantically nodding their heads, Brad Triggs and Cameron Combs cracked up.

Sighing, Kassidy mumbled, "They just can't keep from bustin' my hump."

Matt sniggered, "The two red-heads are your brothers?"

Painfully and reluctantly, Kassidy droned, "Yup."

"The other two are their boyfriends?"

"Gross but true," Kassidy smirked.

Matt whispered, "We could catch 'em."

Shaking his head, Kassidy sighed, "My brothers are telepaths. If they didn't catch you saying that, they caught me hearing it." Already, the four younger boys were separating so they could bolt if necessary. Kassidy pointed them out to Matt, and then softly suggested, "Let's get on with the tour." Matt nodded and they started walking.

"Hey bro," Kade hollered, "Brad's spending the night with me in our room."

"And I'm staying the night with Cameron at the Combs' house," Karey shouted.

Releasing Kassidy's hand, Matt spun around and yelled, "Kassidy's with me at our condo. Betchya we have a much better time than any of y'all!" Kade and Karey cracked up. Matt spun around again, took Kassidy's hand in his, and they started walking again.

"Why did you tell them that?" Kassidy giggled.

Matt squeezed Kassidy's hand and smiled, "Because, you don't want to be in the same room with two little kids playing little kid games, and I want to introduce you to my dad anyway. We'll just make a quick stop at your dorm room, so you can pickup whatever you need to spend the night. Brother or not, no telepath is going to read your dreams. You get to tell me about them, the normal way, when we wake up."

Happy shivers raced through Kassidy that pushed him past giggles and into laughter. Softly chortling, Matt drifted dreamily

through the sound of his new boyfriend's heavenly laugh. He was taken completely off guard when Kassidy pulled him close and hugged him tightly. Hanging out at the tables near the diving well, many of the teen dorm leadership team and their partners saw Kassidy with a new kid. Matt held his left arm behind Kassidy's back and ran the fingers of his right hand through the thick mop of red hair he had prayed for. As Kassidy's laughter quieted, he locked eyes with Matt.

"I've never felt happier than I am right now," Matt softly admitted. "This is a peaceful feeling that I never expected. Somehow, I always thought I'd jump for joy and completely spaz out. Instead, I feel more calm and content, like the search is over and I can chill out, at last."

Kassidy sighed, "You make me feel great too. All those thoughts and worries I had the last couple of days are gone."

"You shared 'em, with me, and realized they ain't half as bad as you thought. This is only the start too, Kass. I promise, we'll always be the best parts of each other, from now on."

"Oh man," Kassidy groaned. "You feel so good in my arms too." Once again, Kassidy softly smiled. He whispered, "Maybe we've been together less than an hour, but there aren't any fears about being with you, a virtual stranger. This is so kewl, like it should be, but it shouldn't be, because we've only known one another a short time. Weird, but awesome at the same time too."

Matt assured, "The feeling's very mutual, my ginger boy," and sealed it with a tender kiss.

Kassidy liked it so much, he didn't give Matt a chance to pull back for reaction before returning another tender kiss. Since their arms effortlessly moved into position to hold one another, Matt gave

up and held the kiss. Another of Matt's dreams became reality. Kassidy hadn't fantasized of kissing another guy and was therefore dreamily purring into Matt's mouth. As moments passed, Kassidy realized how they were standing; one of his legs was between Matt's legs, and one of Matt's legs was between his legs. Kassidy could also feel Matt's package through four layers of cloth. He thought, so this is what it's like to take a step toward intimacy with another guy; kewl! A blissful, euphoric feeling surged within them.

The nearby girls began giggling and the boys applauded, causing Kassidy and Matt to break out of their trance. Realizing they had inadvertently put on a show for other teenagers, they uncontrollably giggled into their kiss. They rested, forehead-to-forehead, knowing that something needed to be said, since the innocent and shy boy act was completely blown away.

Kassidy chortled, "Let me introduce you to some folks."

"Lead the way," Matt beamed.

In the area around the diving well there were twelve patio tables for four, and nine of them were occupied, each with at least two kids. Realizing there were about thirty kids to introduce Matt to, Kassidy began laughing again. He pulled himself together and loudly chuckled, "There's a bunch of y'all out here tonight, so this is gonna take a while. Everybody, this is Matt Thornton. He just moved here today with his dad."

"So naturally, you had to check his tonsils," Nell giggled.

Pete Dano sniggered, "There might've been dangerous explosives down there." All the kids lost it and howled laughing when Kassidy's complexion swiftly matched his hair color.

Sadly shaking his head and wishing for a stronger sea breeze to

cool off his blush, Kassidy giggled, "Matt, this is Nell, a dorm leader, and beside her is her boyfriend, Pete. Across from them are Molly and Roy; Molly's a dorm leader too."

Roy asked, "What's your dad's job here, Matt?"

"Housekeeping and maintenance in the boys' dorms," Matt answered. "His primary motivation was me though, so I could go to school here. I play guitar, and hope to get better."

"So Kass was searching for your instrument?" Pete teased. More giggling and evil snickering erupted.

Locking eyes with Kassidy, Matt chuckled, "I already promised to show him my instrument... later." Loud mooing broke free, the loudest was from Kassidy though.

Since Kassidy had clearly lost control of introductions, kids began introducing themselves, starting with Horacio and Sonia. Kassidy and Matt moved around between tables to greet Craig, Felicity, Phil, Owen, Neil, Tad, Carter, Doug, Relud, Inoyra, Susana, Jesse, Adrienne, Bianca, Corbin, Dominic, Heather, Robyn, Mike and Terry.

When the introductions were done, the boys at the tables realized it was twenty of nine. It was time to get ready for the planned cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle. Neil asked Kassidy and Matt, "Are you dudes going to play?"

Having already participated the prior night, Kassidy smiled, "It's up to Matt."

"There is a dress code," Phil giggled, "or rather, an undressed code."

Evilly grinning, Craig reminded, "They qualify for Mr. Fuzzy G-strings too." He then told Kassidy and Matt, "You'll need to call Alden for your G-strings and water blasters."

Rapidly blinking and widely grinning, Matt checked with Kassidy, "An undressed code, G-strings and water blasters?"

"It's a long story," Kassidy cheekily grinned, setting off all the others at the tables with overlapping remarks.

At a break in the silliness, Owen explained, "Some of the dudes in the long hall of dorm three soaked Craig last night. To get them back, everybody awake in the short hall chased them outside, wearing only their Mr. Fuzzy G-strings."

"There's a video of it too," Felicity giggled, and turned to wickedly smirk at Craig. Most of her questions regarding Craig's physique were answered that morning, from a TV screen in the CIC dining room, where every other straight teen girl could see plenty.

Robyn hollered, "Hey, Alden!"

From the pool house speakers, Alden replied, "Yes, Robyn?"

Robyn blushed and giggled, "Capture video of tonight's battle, and concentrate on Kassidy and Matt. Pipe it to the big TVs in all the girls' common rooms." The jaws of the gay boys dropped. Kassidy and Matt glowed red. All the girls and the straight boys cracked up.

Alden giggled, "I expect five or six times as many battle warriors, but with eight cameras outside the quad, I'll do my best."

Kassidy laughed, "I think I'd rather meet Matt's dad."

"We can do that and this too," Matt chuckled. At Kassidy's

curious expression, Matt explained, "At least one of your brothers is in your dorm room. Where else could we get changed?"

Gesturing to the pool house, Kassidy smiled, "That's all that's for, is showering, changing clothes, restrooms, and there's saunas too."

Slowly glancing from Kassidy's hair to his feet, Matt leered, "Saunas too, huh?" Widening his eyes, Kassidy blushed and giggled at his new boyfriend. All the gathered kids cracked up, and stood to leave for their respective destinations. Matt took Kassidy's hand and started back toward the condos. Once they were alone, Matt asked, "After the water blaster battle, how about we get warm in the sauna?"

"You're falling for temptations," Kassidy giggled.

Matt grinned, "We're sleeping together tonight, Kass. During the summers back home, skivvies is the most I've worn to bed in years."

"Me too," Kassidy smiled.

"We're gonna go slow," Matt assured, "but expecting one hundred percent control of our hormones all the time isn't very realistic."

"I already like what I see," Kassidy carefully explained. "I don't need to see you nude to know I'll like that too."

"That's the point," Matt smiled. "You obviously played last night. Tonight's only slightly different for you, and it's turning into one incredible first night at my new home for me. I expected things would be way more fun here, but this night has been awesome in ways I never expected. Everything we've done so far shows me parts of you, and vise-versa. Seeing you blushing before was great for me. If I knew these kids better, maybe I would've blushed more than I did. Now I get to introduce you to my dad, and tell him that I've already met a lot of kids. That'll make his day, probably more than it's made

mine. Let's keep it going, until we're both too tired to stay awake."

Widely smiling, Kassidy warned, "We'll be awake most of the night."

"Kewl," Matt cheered. "I've seen three in the morning a couple o' times before. Don't know if I can manage it tonight."

"We could get tours of both bases completed."

"Let's save that for daylight," Matt suggested. Seeing Kassidy brightly smiling, Matt giggled, "You're way more important. I'll see the other base in a couple o' minutes, if only from the outside and at night. You'll see my new home, and we'll see the inside of a sauna later too."

Kassidy chortled, "I'm so not used to this."

"What're you not used to?" Matt wondered.

"The way you're treating me," Kassidy smiled. "With two younger brothers, and a younger cousin, it's been a long time since anyone acted like I mattered."

Coming to an abrupt halt before walking inside the condominium, Matt smiled, "You sure do matter. I've wanted a boyfriend all my life. Even when I was little, my best friends were my boyfriends, and I specifically called them that. You can imagine how I was treated when I got to be about ten and still insisted I had boyfriends."

"Rough, huh?"

Matt shrugged, "Mammy and daddy have always been very kewl about it, but just about everybody else, not so much. I had two things

going for me; first is, I've always been one of the tallest in my class, and second, dad got me into exercising. Few people chanced mocking me, but every school year since sixth grade, I've had to prove that gay does not mean pussy, at least once a year. That's why I'm here, Kass; I'm gay, proud of it, but I'd have to hurt guys that I'd much rather hug the stuffing out of. Nobody ever wins a fight, but afterwards, I'd be leaking tears because I hurt them, even though I had no other choice, it just sucked."

Much more enthusiastically, Matt cheered, "Hell yeah, I care about you, and I'll care more tomorrow. For over a week I've been dreaming of moving here, and the best part is, the reality is far better than even my best dreams. Everybody is very kewl, and I'm already making some friends. I can't wait to tell my dad what's been happening since I left the apartment."

Stepping closer, Kassidy wrapped his arms around Matt's waist, softly saying, "I'm sorry it was so difficult, Matt. I can easily picture you doing what you had to, and then being destroyed inside about it. It really is very different here. Of all those kids at the diving well, about half are gay, and they were sitting together; being teen couples in love matters more than who you love here. It's really gonna be so much better for us here, as a couple, I mean."

Brightly smiling, Matt nodded, "I know, Kass. Our days as single and available are over."

"Yeah, it's true," Kassidy gleefully giggled.

"Let me introduce you to my dad," Matt prompted. They went inside condo B, down to the end of the hall, and into the elevator. Matt pressed the button for the seventh floor, warning, "This thing is jet propelled, so hold on." He expected Kassidy to hold the railing in the elevator. When the door closed, Kassidy slid behind Matt and

wrapped him up tight. Matt roared laughing, "That works for me!"

"It's working really good for me too!" Kassidy cackled. "I can't wait to see what's under that shirt, hunky bear. If your arms and what I can feel of your belly are clues, I'm gonna crash to the floor."

"Fifty pushups and fifty sit-ups every morning," Matt giggled.

Feeling more than his temperature rising, Kassidy whimpered, "Temptations."

Turning in Kassidy's arms, Matt beamed, "The feeling is very mutual. Everything I see is exactly what I've always hoped for." He leaned in for a kiss that neither of them wanted to ever end. The elevator stopped, the chime rang and the door slid open. Holding the kiss and each other, Matt waddled backwards out of the elevator with Kassidy still attached. Being unfamiliar with the hall, he waddled well past his own apartment door before stopping.

The kiss broke, but before going to the door, Kassidy asked, "What's your dad like?"

"The best," Matt cheered. "You called me hunky bear before. Well, I'm the teen version of dad. He's six-one and about two hundred pounds. He was a running back for KSU, back in the day, as the old folks say. He's also ninety-nine percent heart. Dad gave up an engineering career for me, so he could be a housekeeper and maintenance guy here."

Kassidy grinned, "What's he gonna say when he sees me?"

Matt chuckled, "You're safe, Kass. I'll be bearing the brunt of all his jokes, and lovin' it too, guaranteed." He then checked, "Ready?"

"Ready," Kassidy confirmed.

Matt led the way to his apartment door, put his hand on the security plate and stated his full name. The lock disengaged with a click, and Matt turned the knob. He and Kassidy stepped inside to find Mr. Thornton on the living room sofa and watching TV. Jeremiah Thornton turned to his son. Seeing Kassidy, a wide grin split Jeremiah's face, and he locked eyes with Matt. Unable to control himself, Matt chuckled, "Dad, this is Kassidy Oldcambus, originally from Louisville. He's my boyfriend."

The old man didn't even try to hold back and loudly laughed, stood and went to the boys. Jeremiah first shook hands with Kassidy, and then pulled both boys against him, roaring, "You're not gone a whole two hours, Matt. Granted, that's longer than it might take to check out the view, like you said you were doin', but you obviously did a lot more."

Matt giggled, "That's how it all started. At the other condo, I met a gay couple sweet talkin' on the tenth floor balcony. They took me to their dorm, where I met a couple more guys, got a comm-badge, and then met Kassidy. We started walking around, checking out the base, and Kass introduced me to a bunch of other kids. If I had to guess, I'd reckon I met about forty kids already."

"You're making me happy and very proud," Jeremiah cheered. He released the boys and stepped back, prodding, "Since it's early, I know you have better things to do than stick around here. What's on the agenda?"

"A water blaster war at the other base," Matt sniggered.

Jeremiah gushed, "A water blaster war sounds like fun. Don't let me slow you down. I'm still on Kentucky time, so don't be surprised if

I'm already asleep when you get back. Or is that too much to assume? Are you sleeping here?"

"We're both sleeping here tonight," Matt giggled and blushed.

Jeremiah looked up at the ceiling, sighing, "Don't give me no lip, Lord. I taught him the best I could."

Blushing bright red, Kassidy and Matt cheered, "TEMPTATIONS!"

"Gotta love 'em," Matt added.

Jeremiah asked, "How old are you, Kassidy?"

"I'm fourteen, born March thirtieth, 1990, Sir."

Matt smiled, "You're four months older than me. I was hatched August seventh."

Meandering back to the sofa, Jeremiah muttered, "I remember fourteen very well." He sat down and softly recited, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul..." Thinking, like father, like son, Kassidy turned to the door, covered his mouth with both hands, and quietly cracked up.

"Dad!" Matt laughed, "I already made my promises to God, the Lord, and to Kassidy. It's our first night, and it's already been awesome. How much more do we need to add to that?"

Spinning around, Kassidy giggled, "Sharing a bed together is an awful lot. I'm scared and anxious about it, so I know Matt has to feel a little of that too."

Nodding, Matt assured Kassidy, "I sure do. Not to mention,

tomorrow's dad's first day of work at a new job. We're not gonna chance interrupting his sleep." Grabbing Kassidy's hand and starting for his bedroom, Matt giggled, "But after dad's gone in the morning, we know *exactly* how to greet the rising Sun." Unable to cover his mouth in time, Kassidy roared laughing.

On the sofa, Jeremiah picked up where he left off in the 23rd Psalm.

Behind the closed bedroom door, Matt and Kassidy slammed against each other and digressed into shoulder muffled hysterics. When they started to calm down, Kassidy giggled, "Were you serious about those promises?"

Pulling back to look into Kassidy's gray eyes, Matt smiled, "Completely serious. I'm not gonna screw up the best day ever because of hormones. Hugs and kisses are perfect for me, and you're an awesome kisser too. We have plans for now, later tonight, and tomorrow's another day." Stepping back and releasing Kassidy, Matt pulled his shirt up and off. Kassidy's eyes widened and he gasped. Tossing his shirt onto his bed, Matt giggled, "You like?"

Kassidy leered, "You're a rock, Matt. Sit-ups and pushups did that?"

Nodding and giggling, Matt reminded, "We need Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, and it's your turn." Snapping out of his trance, Kassidy blinked and pulled his T-shirt up and off. "Nice!" Matt cheered, "Exactly what I pictured, wide shoulders, trim waist and a couple of freckles scattered around creamy skin. I like too, very much."

Intensely blushing, Kassidy giggled, "If we finish changing in front of each other, there's going to be at least one large problem, and more temptation than I've ever successfully ignored."

"Because of two large problems, I was plannin' on changin' in the bathroom," Matt cackled.

"Good plan!" Kassidy laughed. He then looked up and called, "Alden, say hello to Matt and get us Mr. Fuzzy G-strings."

"Hi Matt," Alden giggled, and then transported two Mr. Fuzzy G-strings onto the bed, sharing, "Chocolate chip cookies and brownies are still more popular in the Clan, but only just barely."

Sniggering, Kassidy and Matt went to the bed. Picking up a skimpy G-string and figuring out how he would need to put it on, Matt howled laughing, "Who's bright idea was this?"

Kassidy giggled, "Jay's mostly, from what I've been told."

"It's true," Alden giggled. "A silly conversation with Chris, Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott, led to the idea."

Seeing Matt wordlessly checking with him for an explanation, Kassidy grinned, "Alden's an AI, and will be a real guy, in an android body soon enough. He's kewl, Matt." Pointing up at the small camera in the corner of the room, Kassidy explained, "Alden and his brothers keep an eye on all the kids at every Clan Division. Any questions you have about anything goin' on here, Alden can answer."

"You know, fuzzy G-strings are getting to be more popular than jokes about our blond leaders!" Kerry giggled as he joined in. "Good thing too, since blond's my color!"

Alden giggled, "We knew you were blond the minute you came online, little brother!"

"Bite me, surf-boy!" Kerry shot back.

A large dog padded into the room through the far wall, as if he did it every day, growling something that sounded suspiciously like "Be good kids, or I'll sic your Grandpas on you!" He then sat and stared at the nearest speaker.

"Sorry, Slider," both AIs quickly and meekly replied.

The dog, obviously named Slider, barked "I thought so," before turning and trotting through the opposite wall, which lead to the patio.

Matt gasped, "Did you see and hear *that*?"

Nodding, Kassidy sniggered, "I wasn't here more'n a couple o' hours when floating arms dumped Welsh cakes onto a tray. I guess you figured out we can understand dogs, but we can understand birds, cats and squirrels too. By the way, did you see any of the G-Cats or security gorillas yet?" Matt vigorously shook his head. Kassidy smiled, "There are a lot of amazing things that go on here. Love at first sight, and teasing from regular kids, and wearing fuzzy G-strings are all normal, compared to some other stuff around these parts. You'll get used to it."

"Or develop an addiction to Valium, like many of the adults," Alden giggled.

Going to Matt and wrapping him in a hug, Kassidy loudly laughed, "You're not helping, Alden! I like my boyfriend just as he is! He's starting to turn pale!" Concentrating on his boyfriend, Kassidy gently prompted, "Breathe with me, hunky bear. It'll all seem very normal in a day or two. I love you and need you."

Regaining his ability speak, Matt huffed, "I thought I'd seen it all. Talking dogs walking through walls, gorillas, and what the heck is a G-Cat? I mean, gay guys sweet talkin' and goofin' around everywhere I looked, stuff that I'd never seen back home." After a brief pause,

Matt grinned, "Did you just say you love and need me?"

"There you are, back with me again!" Kassidy giggled. "Yeah, I said it and meant every word."

Matt moaned, "Oh man, you feel so awesome against me too, bare chest to bare chest, like this. A substantial amount of time is going to be spent this way."

Kassidy smiled, "Kiss me, hunky bear." Matt did as he was told, silently praising the good Lord for allowing Kassidy to speak his feelings, and for being the one he'd been searching for. When the kiss broke, Kassidy softly prompted, "Let's finish getting changed. We're already late for the water blaster battle."

Taking a half step back, Matt smiled, "Do you want me to change in here with you?"

Nodding, Kassidy giggled, "Yeah. I like your idea of saving the best parts till later though. To reduce temptations, let's turn away from each other, so we don't see." Matt took another step back and then turned towards his bedroom door. Also turning around, Kassidy began untying his board shorts and called, "Alden, get my water blasters and get two for Matt, please?"

Alden giggled, "Um... your water blasters are being used by Kade and Brad."

"It figures," Kassidy grumbled, and then ordered, "Dunk 'em both, Alden, and get us water blasters."

Matt chortled, "Dunk 'em?"

"In the diving well, for not asking if they could use my water blasters," Kassidy grinned. "That's another thing you'll learn about,

Core Rimmer and dorm leader initiations are dunks at the diving well. It also works for bratty little brothers."

Delivering the four fully loaded water blasters, Alden giggled, "Kade thinks it was Karey that ordered the dunk. What should I do when they figure out it was you, Kassidy?"

"Save it for after the water blaster battle," Kassidy giggled. "A cool down before bedtime will be appreciated, I think."

"Most definitely, sexy cinnamon stick," Matt sniggered. He pulled up the G-string, smirking at the cotton cloth and single elastic rimmed port that he was obviously meant to stick his dick and nuts in. He figured that getting into it was far less of a problem than getting out of it again would be. Even if he was careful, a couple of pubes were certain to get caught in the elastic.

"We need to have a semi-serious chat after the battle," Kassidy warned.

"I know it," Matt chuckled. "This idea of not seeing what we both know we'll eventually be seeing is good, and it's really, *really* bad too."

Adjusting his package into the fuzzy G-string, Kassidy giggled, "What does it really matter? The facts are, you're the sweetest and best boyfriend around, and your dad is so kewl too. At the pools, I'd guess two-thirds to three-quarters of us guys are usually skinny dippin'. I've seen more dicks in four days here than I ever did before. There are three hundred kids on this base, and another eighty at the other base. Being at the pools here is like being at the lake back home, with every guy in town naked and skinny-dippin'. Nudity isn't much of a problem here in the ROH, and it's very kewl. Most teenage guys are in the same size range. There are slight variations in length, width

and skin color, all of which I only noticed since arriving here. What you've got needs to be a surprise to me, just like the surprise I felt when Chris and Derrick brought you to my room, and the dozen or so surprises we've both felt since. There's no chance of me suddenly falling out of love with you only because of your dick." Turning around and seeing Matt was already facing him, Kassidy challenged, "Prove to me to me you feel any differently?"

Matt beamed, "I don't, and I'm thrilled with everything you've said."

Kassidy glanced down and then back up into Matt's eyes, before acknowledging, "You fill that real nice."

"I like what I see too," Matt giggled. "Remind me to chat with Jay about the design of this thing."

Nodding and giggling, Kassidy picked up and passed two water blasters to Matt. He then grabbed his water blasters before calling, "Hey Alden, since walking past Matt's dad like this isn't such a kewl idea, and we're already late, could you get us to Oneula Beach?"

"No problem," Alden giggled, and then executed the order.

Arriving at the grassy quad between the dormitories at Oneula Beach, Kassidy and Matt were well beyond the mass of about two hundred laughing and giggling boys. Matt noticed most guys were in their underwear, but many had Mr. Fuzzy G-strings. He also recognized some of the faces of the guys who had been at the tables by the Ewa Beach diving well. Matt turned to Kassidy, grinning, "Circle the group and attack?" With a nod of Kassidy's head, they took off running, making their presence known and firing non-stop.

A chorus of surprised shouts and squeals preceded the returned fire. Kassidy and Matt howled laughing. Warning moos erupted from

the cozy cuzzy fuzzy veterans from dorm three. Craig, Phil, Owen, Travis, Erik, KC, Fred, Chauncey, Tony and Ray led the counter attack, blocking Kassidy and Matt, and forcing them to turn fuzzy tail and run away. Reading their brother's escape plan, Kade, Karey, Brad, Cameron cut them off. Jerry Owens and Joey led another group to block their escape. Encircled by the masses, with most of the water blasters aimed at them, Matt and Kassidy leaned against each other, back-to-back, trying to return fire as best they could.

Without warning, the entire group surrounding Kassidy and Matt were fired upon. The twenty Core Rimmers had arrived with all their sons, and their boyfriends. They would've been there sooner, but the five-year-old sons demanded another redesign of the Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, so they would fit their tiny bodies. And if the smallest of them could have Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, then the tweens had to have theirs too. There were now four basic designs of the G-strings; one for little guys, one for tweens, and the two for the teens. Leading the charge and cackling their little butts off, John, Stephen, Bruce, Frankie and Wade hovered about three meters over the crowd, firing down at unsuspecting victims. Seeing five- and six-year-old boys with Mr. Fuzzies covering their unfuzzy bits drove almost all the tweens and teenagers to fits of hysterical laughter.

While chaos erupted around the quad, the Scooby Gang transported to the scene, dressed in full ferret-body-sized Shiny Fuzzies, made from silver and gold tinsel, and armed with super-duper soakers, designed by the chimps, that were fed by fifty-gallon drums of water. Those water-blaster warriors who had arrived promptly at nine o'clock, and now had empty blasters, ran through streams of water to get back to their dorm rooms. Slowly but surely, the crowd thinned down, but Jay's wicked plan to create a feeling of brotherhood amongst all the boys had worked. Regardless of their backgrounds, physical states, or sexuality, all the boys in the division

had participated in this battle.

On the way back to Ewa Beach via the dimensional doors, Matt noticed Angelo and Reggie, who were wearing boxer-briefs. Matt called for his two new friends, and then excitedly gushed on and on about all the great things that had occurred since they met. Matt prompted Angelo and Reggie to tell Kassidy the kind of boyfriend he had prayed for. After scanning Kassidy, Angelo quoted part of Matt's prayer, and Reggie swept his free arm from Kassidy's hair and on down. Brightly smiling at Matt, Kassidy glowed. All four passed through the Oneula Beach dining room on their way back to Ewa Beach. When the four boys had stopped talking, Kassidy and Matt unexpectedly vanished. They reappeared ten meters above the Ewa Beach diving well and dropped.

For the first time, Alden didn't hear his name being screamed. Fuzzy free-falling, Kassidy and Matt bellowed, "HOOT!" They splashed down, quickly rose to the surface and cracked up.

From the pool house speakers, Alden worried, "Are you guys angry with me?"

Since Matt was hysterical and splashing around like a much younger boy, Kassidy giggled, "No, I asked you to dunk us later and we expected it."

"Oh," Alden softly said. "Usually people forget."

Kassidy sniggered, "I'll scream your name now, if you want."

"Can we try again?" Alden giggled.

"As soon as Matt gets a grip and stops laughing." Many moments later, Matt waded over toward Kassidy. Noticing his boyfriend's

wicked leer, Kassidy cackled, "Now!"

Matt wasn't prepared and his yell clearly showed his frustration. Kassidy's shout was more like a loud laugh, followed by "HOOT! HOOT!" Just before hitting the water again, Matt smirked at his evil boyfriend and Kassidy cracked up.

Immediately upon surfacing, Kassidy found Matt swimming for him and giggled, "Be good, hunky bear."

"I'll let you be the judge of that," Matt leered.

Mooing through his laughter, Kassidy backed away for the nearest ladder. He wasn't really trying to escape, but at least play hard to get and delay the inevitable. Backed against the edge of the well and a fair distance from a ladder, Kassidy cackled, "Fight the temptations!"

Holding the edge of the well and trapping Kassidy between his arms, Matt brightly smiled, "We'd both drown if I didn't. This isn't ending any time soon. I expect we'll last far more than two hours."

"Yeah," Kassidy softly chortled, "I think we'll last a long lifetime."

Matt planted a deep kiss, and then softly asked, "So, what are these semi-serious topics we need to discuss?"

"Let's start with the most simple," Kassidy offered. "You're on Kentucky time. Are you tired, Matt?"

"A little, but not too much; I could probably be awake until eleven or midnight."

"Do you sleep on your back, or on your belly?"

"I fall asleep on my side, and usually wake face up. Tonight, I might just spend the whole night on my side, spooned up with you."

Kassidy giggled, "Me snuggling behind you, or you behind me?"

"We'll have to try it both ways. That's generally how I'd like us to be."

"How long before we get there, do ya think?"

"At least a few days, hopefully we can make it a whole week before landing on home base."

"Why do you want it to take so long? Our feelings are already driving us crazy."

"I never expected love at first sight, Kass. Since that's what happened, we really should try to move along in baby steps. We can do a lot of fun stuff together, but since we're both virgins, that last step is going to take time and repetition to get right. In the meantime, we'll learn a lot more about each other."

"I'm liking your plan more and more."

"I'm glad, because I sure don't want anything we do in bed to damage the best opportunity in the world."

"Have you done some self exploration?"

Matt sniggered, "Far too much. At least I know enough to say its gotta be slow. How 'bout you?"

"Enough to know exactly what you're talking about," Kassidy giggled.

"We can do plenty with our hands and mouths," Matt assured.

"There's so much I want to know about you, and that I still have to tell you about."

Kassidy prompted, "Anything in particular you want to know, just ask."

"Let's start with some basics. I get the impression that you've been scopin' guys and girls, so when did you choose guys over girls?"

"When I saw how gay couples acted here clinched it," Kassidy easily answered. "Before the vacation to Los Angeles, I knew I was as bisexual as anybody could be. All around LA, everywhere we went, there were gay couples. It was way different from home; holding hands was tame, and others were huggin' real tight, and others went for some kisses, little ones and really deep ones. Then a couple of guys here got my attention, but each and every one of 'em was already spoken for. I'd name them all for you, but I can only think of three who you'll know; Jay, Travis and Mike."

Matt smiled, "Yeah, I can understand that easily."

"Of all the girls here, I was never motivated to do more than talk with them. They're really cute and even nicer to talk with, but I never wanted to take a walk alone with one of 'em. Those talks proved that I was sliding further from heterosexual and closer to homosexual." Kassidy checked, "How did you know at such an early age?"

Matt shrugged, "Guys have always been cutest. My dad and mamma taught me the facts when I was nine. Way before that, the first time I saw a picture of a nude girl, I almost screamed in horror." Kassidy cracked up, and Matt sniggered, "She looked like a sexless doll! Where's her wiener? Dang, that's gotta hurt!" They both busted a gut laughing. Then Matt giggled, "Nope, it's always been other guys, dressed and undressed, they're the cutest."

Kassidy smiled, "You've never had a boyfriend before?"

"No one before you," Matt answered. "There were attempts, but no one wanted to hug or kiss, never mind showing me their willies, or letting me touch it. Generally, the friends I hung out with were groups of guys. I reckon they felt safer that way. As far as I'm concerned, it's just as well."

"Why?"

"So I could be the same as you. We have some stuff in common, and some that's about as different as can be. I never had brothers or sisters, but you have two brothers. I lost my mamma four years ago, but you just lost both your parents. How do you feel about them, Kass?"

Rapidly blinking, Kassidy replied, "Ya know, it might sound weird, but I'm really not sure. Both my folks worked full time, and they were okay as far as parents go. Some of my friends' parents were too strict and others seemed to not care at all. My folks were a good compromise, when I think back on it."

More softly, Kassidy revealed, "It was too sudden. They told us to go take care of business in the mens room before the flight. In the minutes the four of us were in there, all four parents and lots of other people were gone. It was chaos, people running away, other people running there with fire hoses. It didn't take long to find out for sure that they had died, maybe two hours. We all knew it though.

"Friday night, I was in shock, but I had brothers and my cousin keeping me grounded. For once in our lives, none of the four of us wanted to take a chance on separating from the other three. Before we went to bed, we were told to choose a Clan Division. Since Friday, it's been like, now I have to be the big brother that they always wanted

me to be, and I had rebelled against it. I also gained a cousin in the deal too. So I played that part the best I could. Last night, my cousin hooked up with a boyfriend. Today, my brothers found boyfriends. Since dinner, I'm thinking its time to chill on the big bro act."

"Can you do that?"

"To a degree, I have to; they're growing up and taking their lives in directions that may or may not match mine. I'll say something to them, if I feel it's important enough, something our parents would definitely say. So, I'll still be their big brother, but not their dad, mom and brother, like I've been trying to be."

"What about the life you left behind?"

"This life is better in ways that matter most. There's no acting here; be who you are and strive for your own goals. My parents would've liked it here, I'm sure. We can be boyfriends without anyone mocking us. My folks weren't bigots, but often kept their views private, so bigots wouldn't get upset. I say its time to upset the bigots, and far past time to rock the boat. I think that's why Battle Of Earth happened; bigoted humans teamed up with Romulans to get their way, and they lost."

Matt beamed, "That was wicked kewl, Kass. I loved every word. I hope you meant what you said."

Kassidy nodded and giggled, "Yeah, I did. I do miss my parents, but I don't like having to be everything for my brothers and cousin. Life is good here. There's nothing missing except my folks, and I really think they know we're cared for. And lastly, it's definitely time for the high and mighty to get knocked down a few pegs; they're human beings, just like the rest of us. The galaxy opened up long before we were born, so lets act like one world, and join a bunch of

other worlds with common beliefs. There are two Vulcans on this base, an adult man and a twelve-year-old boy. I don't understand all there is about their culture, or them individually, but I really want to learn."

Stifling a yawn, Matt sighed, "I'm really sorry, Kass. The time change is catching up with me. I'd love to stay here and talk more, but I think it's time to move this chat indoors."

Wrapping his legs around Matt's waist, Kassidy pulled him close for a tender kiss. He then smiled, "I hope my ramblings weren't boring."

"The last thing you are is boring," Matt assured. "I was totally into what you were saying, so much so that I relaxed even more. Now I'm even more certain it's you that the Lord's been saving for me."

Madly giggling, Kassidy's legs pulled Matt closer again. Once in range, they locked lips. Matt held onto Kassidy, and Kassidy released the side of the diving well to hold onto Matt. They sank. Needing oxygen, they bobbed to the surface. Matt prompted Kassidy to climb the ladder out of the well and instructed, "I left the sliding door in my bedroom unlocked. Dad won't ever see us wearing our fuzzy G-strings, if I can help it. I've got no problem with him seeing me nude, but this thing is *far* more embarrassing."

Rapidly nodding and evilly snickering, Kassidy swam for the ladder. As soon as Kassidy's bare butt was in view, Matt mooed and snuck in a few gropes. Laughing hysterically, Kassidy flew out of the well, grabbed his water blasters and started running toward condo B. In seconds, Matt was out and chasing his boyfriend around the quad, past the townhouses, around condo A, and up the exterior staircases of condo B to the seventh floor. Only a small night stand lamp was lit in Matt's bedroom. The clothes left scattered on the floor were picked

up, making it obvious that Matt's dad had at least peeked in the room, organized things, and turned off the overhead lights.

As soon as Matt closed the sliding door and blinds, they were embracing and helping each other peel off their G-strings, and succumbing to the temptations of the last couple of hours. Matt was as giddy as a five-year-old with a new, long-expected present. At the same time he was pushing Kassidy's G-string down, he was grabbing kisses and licking water droplets off of his new boyfriend's shoulders and neck. Elastic in Mr. Fuzzy was preventing the skimpy G-string from dropping off, and that prompted Matt to ask, "Do you wanna... or shall I?"

Kassidy giggled, "Whether you remove it or I do, a couple o' pubes are gonna be tugged. You go for it, but I get to return the favor for you."

Reaching down, Matt used his hands like shovels; four fingers followed hair to flesh and then stretched the elastic. Slowly pulling Mr. Fuzzy forward, Matt grinned, "I never dreamed the first time I touched another guy's dick would be like this."

Nodding, Kassidy warmly smiled, "You did great too. A few hairs were pulled, but I don't think any were lost. Now it's my turn."

Holding Kassidy's shoulders, Matt asked, "Do you want to hear my plan?" Concentrating on painlessly removing Matt's G-string, Kassidy nodded. Matt said, "We'll get to know every inch of each other. The goal is to make our dicks bounce, to see what really feels the best. The last thing we'll do before kissing goodnight, only because we'll have to, is to finish off."

Delightfully shivering, Kassidy giggled, "You said hands and mouths."

"No blow-jobs tonight, Kass. Touch and taste only, until the very end. Then we'll finish with our hands. Even that's a learning experience; teaching each other how to make that the very best it can be. Kewl?"

"That sounds like a great idea."

Matt giggled, "It's been a dream of mine. Now I'm going to love my dream boyfriend." Taking one step back, Matt scanned Kassidy from head to toe. He chuckled, "Yep, the good Lord has definitely intervened. Even our cocks are almost exactly the same length and girth. Yours is paler than mine, but that was expected." Acknowledging that with a nod and a smile, Kassidy reached for Matt's arms. Gently and slowly, Kassidy began examining the feel of his new boyfriend's body. Matt gushed, "You're good at this! I thought I'd be showin' the way."

Shaking his head, Kassidy giggled, "I have a few ideas of my own that won't break the rules. I'm getting more ideas the more I look at you and touch you."

With goosebumps popping, Matt softly giggled another prayer of thanks, and began his own careful examination.

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Near the end of the water blaster battle, Alden made a report to the majority of Core Rimmers' sub-vocals. Stevie made a different report to Reyes. Since most of the boys were scattering for their dorms, Reyes had Stevie transport Ryan and himself back to their flat. Moments later, Prez had the remaining group of Core Rimmers and their sons transported to the Rapid Response Base.

Arriving dripping wet before the desk of Colonel Cody Wilkins, the Rimmers softly chortled and giggled, waiting for their host to stop

laughing at them. Many moments later, Cody locked eyes with Prez, wheezing, "Now I know why I couldn't reach your comm-badge!"

Prez chuckled, "There's really no place to put it, is there?"

Keith smiled, "We were giving a lesson in brotherly love."

In an attempt to diffuse the situation, Derrick grinned and began introductions, starting with Jonah, Randy and Dillon, and then moving on to the other Core Rimmers, who introduced their sons and boyfriends. Lastly, Prez introduced his sons. He then asked, "What's the scoop, Cody?"

Pointing at the Admiral's bars on Prez's Mr. Fuzzy, Cody grinned, "I wanted to show you your fleet, Admiral Fuzzy." Off to the side and out of Prez's reach, Jay and Chris began sniggering.

"Fleet?" Prez queried, "What fleet?"

"The Clan's Pacific Fleet, Sir," Cody smiled. "We already have Clan Short Crest flags, and were wondering what we might use for a Pacific Rim Division flag. That's been answered now."

Prez blinked and wondered, "What's your suggestion?"

Pointing at the groins of the Core Rimmers, Cody sniggered, "Feral Fuzzies, of course!"

Smirking, Prez looked over at Jay and Chris, who were slinking behind Troy, Sean, Lance and Scott.

Chris giggled, "Jay's got a doctor appointment." The younger boys began giggling.

Tapping his sub-vocal, Jay sniggered, "Alden, take me and Chris to Doc Andrew's office." They disappeared.

Prez sighed, "Put rings of fire around the Feral Fuzzies and I guess we're set."

Nodding, Cody asked, "Would you like to inspect your fleet?"

"I'd like to have a look," Prez replied, "but first, explain to me how this could be useful, post-Battle Of Earth?"

Without delving into too many specifics, Cody answered, "We now have additional mobility, in the form of two destroyers, two submarines, two cruisers and the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln, including her twenty-five hundred aircraft." Seeing all the Core Rimmers' jaws dropping, Cody continued, "Explaining to his superiors how ineffective his weapons were against the Warbird, Admiral Noonan had a melt-down Friday afternoon. On any other day, under almost every other circumstance, Admiral Noonan would've been relieved of duty, but President Powell was part of the conference call. The only way to meet the Admiral's demands for more sophisticated weapons was to make his new strike group part of the Clan. Now he's got his weaponry, and many specialized enhancements only available to Starfleet and Clan Short, like micro-fusion generators to power his ships." Since everyone seemed dumbfounded, Cody sniggered, "Personally, I can't wait to see an aircraft carrier hit eighty knots."

"Alden," Keith hollered, "why is it we're just hearing of this now?"

"It's honestly not his fault," Cody interjected. "Until all the orders were signed, and the strike force could officially be considered the Pacific Clan Fleet, Alden had little to report. As of twenty-hundred hours today, they're yours."

Alden giggled, "Thank you, Cody," and then dimmed the lights. A moment later, an image of the Iowa, most of her black hull above the waves, zooming at maximum speed, appeared on the wall.

A chorus of excited expletives erupted from the Core Rimmers. All their sons cracked up laughing. Softly whimpering, Cody went

back behind his desk to send his partner, Sheldon, a racy warning message. In return, Sheldon sent an image of only his Mr. Fuzzy G-string covered crotch to his lover. It suddenly became imperative to get the Rimmers to the docks, and get his fuzzy butt back home as quickly as possible.

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Sullivan's Island, SC

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 3:27AM EST

Paul Owens lifted his suitcase and walked out of the room he had once shared with Ryan. When he had accepted the Owens' hospitality weeks earlier, he had guessed it would be temporary. What he never could have foreseen was leaving without his brother. Ryan had chosen Reyes though. There was no chance of changing Ryan's mind, and Paul couldn't see himself ever apologizing for anything he had done. Without Ryan, there was no reason to remain on Sullivan's Island. By morning, he fully expected another confrontation with Danny anyway. When Paul was gone, the Owens family would be able to reunite. Jerry, Joey and KC would return home, so his disappearance would be better for everyone. Paul walked out the back door and kept walking past Marc's house to the beach. Not one of the AI Division's security had noticed him leaving. Paul reasoned, either they hadn't noticed or they chose to not notice him.

Following the beach, Paul breathed in feelings of freedom with each autumn breeze. Going forward, Paul could easily take care of himself. He would effortlessly return to his streetwise ways, and try to forget that he had ever accepted a home within the AI Division of Clan Short. Paul would forget the names Danny Page and Marc Furst, the two people that he had argued with because they wanted to "fix" Ryan.

Arguably, meeting Reyes was the best and worst parts of the

entire Clan Short experience, as far as Paul was concerned. Ryan had a good boyfriend that had an even more positive outlook than Ryan. It was then, as Paul followed route 703 off Sullivan's Island, that he recalled Reyes ordering the homophobes executed for what they had done. Reyes could take care of Ryan and they would be happy without him. Now his bro could be safe and Paul wouldn't have to deal with their naivety.

At the intersection of route 703 and highway 17, Paul turned around, stuck his thumb out and started hitching rides. A few cars passed him. Less than a minute later, an eighteen-wheeler approached and flashed his high beams, signaling the driver's intention to stop. Grinning and running along the roadside, Paul thought, some things never change. At most, this ride would cost Paul a blow-job or two and he could get many miles away. With luck, Paul might even get back to Columbia soon after daybreak. There, he could disappear into the city he knew very well. The young driver called over, "Where ya headin', kid?"

"Columbia would be awesome," Paul replied.

"It's on the way," the driver replied, and instructed, "Jump on in." Doing as he was told, Paul got settled in the passenger side seat, with his suitcase at his feet. The driver said, "My name's Dan."

"I'm Paul."

After pulling away and getting his rig back on the road, Dan asked, "Have you got relatives in Columbia?"

"No."

Thoughtfully humming, Dan wondered, "You've got friends there?"

"Not really; it's a city I'm familiar with." After many minutes of silence, Paul asked, "What's the cost for the ride, dude?"

"Cost?" Dan chuckled. "There's no cost, Paul. You're not taking me off my route. The drive's easier with someone to talk with. If conversation can be considered payment, then chat up a storm."

Paul muttered, "I just left a guy named Danny. He was a jerk." He then double-checked, "No ass, cash or grass?"

Dan laughed, "I don't need any of the above. My wife would kill me if I touched a kid, never mind fucking a young boy; she'd castrate me. Grass and driving these big bitches don't mix, and you probably don't have enough cash to even worry about that. You know far too much for a kid. How old are you, thirteen going on thirty?"

Paul grinned, "Thirteen going on fifty."

"Stay thirteen as long as you can and enjoy it," Dan recommended. "Then again, so much has changed the last few days, maybe you can remain a teenager through your teen years. The Battle Of Earth shook everyone to their souls, it seems. It's sad that it took an alien invasion and hundreds of thousands of lives to cause the change. Everyone seems to be learning from them Clan Short kids. Let's hope folks don't forget and fall back into their old habits."

"Uh... people are learning from the Clan?"

"Hell yeah!" Dan cheered. "Kids around the world fought in cities everywhere, when adults were creating big problems, making the Romulan's job easier. Don't you watch TV, browse the Internet or read the news?"

"Generally no, and these last few days, I've been busy with other stuff."

"Well, the new deal is for everyone to simply give a damn," Dan shared. "That's why I stopped for you, if the truth must be known. A kid your age shouldn't be walking the streets in the middle of the night. Since you're carrying a suitcase, I figure wherever you were

was bad enough to want to leave. I'd be much happier if I knew you had people to be with in Columbia, but I'll do my part and get you where you need to be. I know a few people there too, other drivers, like me, making out like a bandit, delivering goods to places that desperately need it. This rig is filled with construction materials destined for Washington, D.C. Everybody is trying to get the city cleaned up and rebuilt. Once this trip is complete, I'll reload and head up to New York City. I'll reload again on the trip back, drop more off in Washington, then head home for a day off with my pregnant wife."

Paul smirked, "You make it sound like there are no bad people anywhere."

"I'm sure they're still out there, but last night's news mentioned substantially reduced crime rates in every major city across the nation. For instance, in my own little corner of the world, neighbors are watching my wife. It didn't used to be that way last week; my wife and I only knew one other young family in our apartment complex. It started changing Saturday, with people saying more than hello and spending time getting to know us. Of course, we got to know them too. Now I know that one old woman is a retired nurse. I was gone Sunday and came back late that night to a completely different neighborhood, where everyone was watching out for one another. Now I can work without worrying quite so much about my wife. My first born kid is going to have a promising life.

"Our country's president is talking about changing economic and societal standards. If half of what President Powell wants to see changed actually does change, my kid's going to have opportunities I never had. It's really hard to believe some of this, but the changes have already impacted my life and my career. I used to drive six days a week. I was off Friday when the shit hit the fan. I worked Sunday, had Monday off, and here I am working another day, but I've been told I'll be off when I get home, and I won't have to work again until

Friday. My boss says it'll be a day on and a day off. If I have to work two consecutive days, then I'll get two consecutive days off. I haven't had two days off in a row in more than three years. The best part is, when I become a daddy, my schedule and routes will change so that I can be a father, and my pay won't change."

"That sounds nice for you, but how can you say that it's all because of Clan Short? It seems to me that it was you and your neighbors."

Danny smiled, "What came first, the chicken or the egg? Well, before the Battle Of Earth, Clan Short was helping kids. Those kids who have been helped were the ones helping others all day Friday and into Saturday. Some joined League and federal forces militarily, while others acted to provide homes for the many thousands of refugees. People helping people was the lesson learned, and it's funneled through to many communities. Washington, New York and Los Angeles got screwed over because the people didn't help one another. Why wasn't Boston screwed too? Why not Chicago, or Cincinnati, or Charleston, or Columbia, or dozens of other cities that are large enough to have had similar problems? The only answer is because people pulled together as teams. We sure as hell didn't learn it from our government. Congress needs to spend years debating whether or not people should wipe their asses when they shit, for Christ's sake!"

Paul couldn't help softly chortling.

Dan grinned, "You'll see for yourself, Paul. Everything has changed and it seems like it might just continue down a better path."

"I'll believe that when I see it. It'll probably take seeing it dozens if not hundreds of times."

Sadly shaking his head, Dan mumbled, "You're far too cynical for a young man. You're far too cynical for thirty, or for fifty." After a pausing to collect his thoughts, Dan asked, "Do you have hobbies or

interests?"

"Not really," Paul shrugged. "Camping, hiking and mountain biking are the closest things, but it's been a long time since I've done any of the three."

"How long?"

Knowing what kind of response he'd get, Paul grinned, "Over twenty years."

Dan howled laughing and slammed a palm against the steering wheel.

Deciding to test Dan's perception that people had changed, Paul waited until the man was softly chuckling, and then stated, "I'm an android. I was first activated June fourteenth, 1951. My original parents were Lance and Miriam Coplin. My dad was a maintenance technician for Vision Industries. My mom was a secretary for Vision Industries. They always wanted children, but couldn't have any. We lived in Chapin, near Lake Murray, off of route 76, until my parents died in September of 1984. I lived on the streets of Columbia until October twenty-sixth, doing everything I needed to survive. Where I've been living since didn't work out, and I'll leave it at that. I don't have any grass, or much cash, but I would've given you head for this ride."

Dan stopped laughing and glanced to his right several times before softly asking, "You're serious?"

"Completely," Paul flatly answered. A crushing minute of silence passed before Paul asked, "What's the cost now?"

Dan assured, "There's still no cost. I've never met an android before, not that I know of anyway. You've shocked the shit out of me. I don't even know what to ask or say that wouldn't be misinterpreted as insulting."

Digesting that for another silent minute, Paul muttered, "You've shocked me too. I expected you to stop this rig, pull over for quick, meaningless sex, and then toss me out on my ass."

Shaking his head, Dan smiled, "All I said is true. My wife of four years is pregnant with our first born. I love her. Since I don't find boys or men attractive enough to even get it up, you're getting a free ride. Judging by what you've said, you've had it rough. If there was something more I could do, I would, but our two bedroom apartment is set for our baby. You don't need a temporary place, but a permanent one, with people that care enough to make right what's been wrong."

"The ride is plenty, Dan. I survived before and I'll survive again."

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Oneula Beach, Taylor Residence

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 9:42PM HTZ

After the water blaster battle, Ralphie, Richie, Robbie, Ronnie, Billy, Carrol and Pat invited Theo Triggs back to the house. Since the afternoon's concert, Richie was falling for Theo. Richie had invited Theo to eat dinner with the family at the CIC dining room. Ralphie, Robbie and Ronnie knew Richie liked Theo a lot. Theo liked Richie too, but was still struggling with the idea of another boyfriend. The impressions implanted by Theo's parents left the kid feeling abundant self-doubt. As far as the quadruple Rs were concerned, it was time to include Theo in the family fold.

Still wearing damp underwear and Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, the group of boys went down to the basement. Robbie went to turn on the radio. Ralphie and Pat began dancing. At first, Billy tried to telepathically share his history with Theo. Giggling at the slightly younger and shorter boy before him, Theo wondered, "Is there

something you want to say?" making it clear that Billy's words went unreceived.

Billy grinned, "Who do you think I am?"

Theo blushed and giggled, "Robbie's main squeeze." The other boys in the basement began giggling.

Nodding, Billy softly shared, "A week ago today, I was naked, with my brother Jason, and we were being filmed by our now ex-foster parents." Theo's jaw dropped. "We had to do stuff, just to get a can of soup or a frozen dinner," Billy continued. "Even my littlest two brothers had to do stuff."

Ronnie added, "I lived right next door to Billy, and the deal was the same in our house. A week ago seems more like a month, since I met my other three bros."

Billy offered, "Saturday afternoon, me and my three brothers were adopted by Sean and Troy. It was right after Keith and John went to Ewa Beach, for you and Brad."

Carrol stepped up beside Billy, telling Theo, "Most of the kids here have bad pasts. When our old foster started his freaky shit with Trevor, Richie and I got him out of there that night. We were part of the Clan Desert Division for a few days, until Richie was called here to meet his brothers for the first time. Now we're part of a real family. Billy's got his family. Garrett's got his family in Des Moines. No matter how bad things were for you and Brad, it's better now."

"And we're going to make it even better," Richie softly but firmly said. He moved closer to Theo, sighing, "I want to spend a lot of time with you, dude. You don't need to be scared of me, because I won't choose someone else, especially not over some grown-up's

messed up thoughts and actions."

Fighting to control his emotions, Theo sadly muttered, "It barely took him a week to find someone else."

"I won't do that," Richie stated. "We had a good time dancing at the concert, and you seemed to enjoy being with our family at dinner."

Theo said, "I did, but..." and trailed off, looking at the floor, as if the words he needed to say were printed there.

'All I wanted was someone to dance with,' Richie silently confessed. *'I didn't know that I'd start feeling stuff, or that I would invite you to have dinner with us. Did I make you change into a Mr. Fuzzy G-string with me and my bros? No, I showed you to a bathroom, where you could choose what you wanted to wear. I won't ever force you to do anything, Theo. All I want is for us to try our best...'*

'Like I'm doin' with Pat,' Ralphie interjected.

'And I'm doin' with Garrett,' Ronnie added.

'And I'm tryin' with Billy,' Robbie finished.

Richie grinned at his three mirror images, impatiently huffing, "Heaven forbid I should finish a thought on my own." Everyone in the basement broke down in giggles. Facing Theo again, Richie assured, "Trying is how we'll grow past friends that had a good time together, and into boyfriends."

Turning around with Ralphie, so he could face Theo, Pat explained, "Boyfriends are two different people that choose to do everyday stuff together. I met Ralphie last Friday. Later that

afternoon, he needed some time alone with his brothers. I easily said yes, and then wished I hadn't, because I missed him being with me. It gave me and Ralphie time to think though, so it worked out in our favor when we got together again Friday night. The next thing I know, Saturday afternoon, I'm in Des Moines with this set of quadruplets, and with Ronnie's foster brother, who is half of one set of double twins. I lost one family, but within a little more than a day, I had two full families; the Taylors and the Morrisons. All day and into Sunday, we bopped from Ewa Beach to Des Moines, back and forth a couple o' times."

"We followed the smell of food and never missed a meal," Ralphie sniggered.

Trying to learn to dance with Carrol as a fill-in partner, Ronnie giggled, "We want you around too, because Richie does, and because our extended family traverses five time zones."

Rapidly blinking at Ronnie dancing with Carrol, Richie chortled, "What are you two trying to do?"

"We need to learn how to dance too," Carrol giggled.

Ronnie sniggered, "Without stepping on each other's feet."

"There's still lots of space between 'em," Robbie smiled.

Billy giggled, "Try dancing like us. Move your whole body, and not just your feet."

In time with the music, Robbie called out, "Left foot and shoulders, right foot and butts. Billy's leading; he learned from Sean and taught me." Ralphie rested his arms on Pat's shoulders, and Pat held Ralphie's hips. They began imitating Billy and Robbie. Then

Ronnie and Carrol duplicated the dance.

Without hesitation, Richie went and put his hands on Theo's hips. Theo draped his arms over Richie's shoulders, silently worrying if he would hurt him or be hurt by him. *'Ain't gonna happen that way, not this time,'* Richie sent. *'Your parents interfered and caused everything to fall apart last time. Yeah, I know, since the first time you thought about it, in the auditorium. I didn't mind talk with you much before now just to give you a chance to tell me on your own. We're gonna take our time and really get to know each other, the way we're supposed to. Think about what you'd like to know about me, and I'll tell you everything.'*

After a brief pause to read Theo's first question, Richie silently replied, *'No, I never did anything with Carrol or Trevor. Our old foster was the prime definition of a pussy; he liked hurting hairless boys, because he was too much of a fag to face his homosexuality with men his own age. Next question?'*

Richie giggled, *'What's there not to like about you, dude? The best part is that we're about the same age and will grow up together. Yup, I'm uncut too, just like you. I've got exactly six long pubes scattered around down there. You'll have to count them and tell me how many you have. Yeah, I wanna see for myself, but that's a couple o' days away. I don't know, I never measured it limp or stiff. There's a whole bunch of other fun stuff we'll try.'*

Theo giggled, "Like?"

Richie dropped his arms and stopped dancing. He moved around and behind Theo, put his hands on his new boyfriend's hips, and then leaned forward to taste the brown hair hanging down by his neck. Cringing, Theo cracked up, getting the attention of Robbie, Billy, Ralphie, Pat, Ronnie and Carrol. Soon, all six were laughing as hard

as Theo and barely dancing.

Ralphie giggled, "What's it taste like, bro."

"Sweet milk chocolate," Richie evilly snickered. "More like cake than a cookie or candy." The other seven in the basement howled.

"It's a family trait," Pat cackled.

Spinning around, Theo dove for Richie's long blond hair and tasted a mouthful. His lips only brushed the side of Richie's neck, but it was enough for an intense shiver to race up and down Richie's spine.

Squinting at Ronnie, Carrol warned, "No way!"

"Garrett says, if you keep that up, he's gonna order a four-way!" Kerry's voice stated over their giggles. "If you're *really* good, I'll make it a five-way!"

Seven sets of eyes focused on Carrol. Intensely blushing, Carrol giggled, "Not ever in any group larger than two, Kerry. Even then, we'd start having problems when I'm a teenager and you're still a hairless tween."

Noticing the time, Richie asked Theo, "Do you want to go back to the dorm or stay here?" Six other voices softly moored.

Grinning slightly, Theo answered, "I think we have a lot more to talk about, without company. Let's go for a walk first." Louder provocative mooing erupted.

The one thing Theo didn't say, Richie read telepathically. Theo's brother, Brad Triggs was spending the night with Kade Oldcambus,

so they might still be alone after the walk. "Kewl," Richie nervously squeaked. His brothers began sniggering. After clearing his throat, Richie said, "Let me tell my folks and we're gone."

Theo took Richie's hand and led the way back upstairs. The whole way, Richie heard his three brothers telepathically teasing him. Breaking out in a nervous sweat, Richie paused in the kitchen to splash cold water on his face. Theo checked, "Are you okay?"

"Fine," Richie smirked. "I just got paybacks for all the teasing I dished out to my brothers." Grabbing a towel to dry off, he sent, *'Part of me thinks I should apologize, and the other parts says, nah, just get even another time.'*

Understandingly nodding, Theo asked, "Do me a favor?"

"Sure."

"Talk to me the normal way," Theo gently instructed. "When we're alone, there's no reason to mind talk, is there?"

Richie asked, "Does it freak you out?"

"No," Theo answered, and then sighed, "One of the things I missed most was just hearing my other boyfriend's voice. If we're not alone and you want to send me stuff privately, that's kewl, but it's not necessary when we're alone."

Widely smiling, Richie tossed the towel on the counter and offered Theo a clean hand. After having his hand taken, Richie led the way into the living room, where Jason and Trinity, his new mom and dad, were lounging together on the sofa.

Seeing Richie in his Mr. Fuzzy G-string again, and Theo in almost dry blue boxer-briefs, Trinity covered her eyes and began

giggling. Richie giggled, "Sorry mom. We're just gonna go for a walk and chat for a while."

Waving his free arm at both boys, Jason sniggered, "Like that?"

Shrugging, Richie giggled, "It's something, and more than most dudes wear around here."

Jason smiled, "Are you coming back home tonight?"

Richie shrugged and turned to Theo, who replied, "After we talk more, we'll know the answer to that question." He faced Richie and added, "I can't deal with one bad ending, never mind two, and I won't go there. If we're both ready and can deal, we'll spend the night here, or at my dorm room at Ewa Beach. It only depends on which is closer, and how both of us feel about spending the night together. We'll meet at the dining room here in the morning, no matter what."

"Good enough," Jason said, "have a good talk, and a good night."

Trinity warmly said, "And good luck, to both of you."

The boys said, "Good night," and walked hand-in-hand to the front door.

Soon after stepping off the porch, Richie prodded, "Will you tell me his name?"

"I'm surprised you don't already know."

"I'm not telepathically interrogating you, Theo. You're my boyfriend, not some future employee with a dirty history."

"Bryant Engelman was his name."

"What made him special to you?"

Theo scowled, "Why does that matter?"

Richie shrugged, "It don't matter that much. It's just that you still miss him, so he must've been special somehow."

Theo sighed and then struggled to calmly explain, "He was a school friend. We never hung out much together until the end of last school year. Soon after school ended, we started hanging out together, with his friends, or with mine, and then more often alone, at his place or at mine. The first hugs were easy, completely natural, and got to be constant. It's just that he was the first, ya know? We didn't talk about becoming boyfriends, and just did what we wanted, when we wanted. I didn't even realize how much he mattered to me until I wasn't allowed to be alone with him. Suddenly there's no more hugs, no more kisses, no one to talk with or hold close at night. I've barely gotten over the fact that I gave my heart away without knowing it, and now I'm with you, wondering if it's going to happen again. This time I have to pay attention, Richie. Another short friendship that leaves me feeling all alone again can't happen; the first one hurt too much."

After a brief pause, Theo pulled himself together and smiled, "When you reached for my hand in the auditorium, I was fighting myself, saying no, and then yes, over and over again, even when I took your hand and went to dance with you. How much of that did you know?"

Richie giggled, "They were your surface thoughts, so about all of it. Now I know the reason why though, and that makes what I read even better."

Trying to understand, Theo scowled, "It's even better?"

"You said it yourself," Richie smiled. "Bryant was automatic

and it simply happened, without thought or trying. I am thinking, Theo, a lot, about you, me and us.

"Imagine me," Richie prodded, "coming here to meet two long lost brothers, just knowing that they'd hate me, because I'm gay. Come to find out, they're gay too. We've got something in common and a reason to be friends as well as brothers. Then, a few hours later, Robbie showed up with his mom and dad. That was Thursday night. I wanted Carrol and Trevor here, with me and my brothers, so we made it happen. By lunch time Sunday, we're a real family, and it's nothing like I ever thought it might be. I was scared to death of my old foster. My new mom and dad haven't frightened me or any of my brothers. Ralphie finds Pat and almost flipped right where he stood. Ronnie has Garrett, and Robbie zeroes in on Billy. Are any of us jealous? Nope, we're proud and thrilled. Are the new mom and dad bothered in any way that four of their six sons are gay? Nope, they're happy that we're happy, and we're bringing more to the family. Dad's not the slightest bit gay, but he has no problem with a bunch of gay sons, and even more gay guys scattered around both bases. Do you know why?"

Shaking his head, Theo grumbled, "I'd really love to know, since my folks have attitudes about it."

"Dad used to coach football, and he wants to do it here," Richie explained. "That tells me he likes guy stuff, just like every other guy. The one thing that makes a gay dude different from a straight dude is the sex part. Dad doesn't need to prove anything to mom. And he'll have no problem coaching football with a team that's half gay and half straight. Look at the Core Rimmers, and their dads. There's bunches of other grown men here that aren't looking at any kid like some kind o' conquest. I know that there's two men, 19 and 21 years old, and they're a gay couple. Nobody is trying to prove how manly they are, or wondering if they need to prove it to any one."

Pausing in the middle of the outdoor rec area field, Theo blinked, "You're saying my dad needs to prove it?"

Richie shrugged, "To some extent or another, for some reason that only he knows, having gay sons made him feel uncomfortable. He kept you away from Bryant, and Brad secluded from other dudes his age. Or maybe it was your mom that was uncomfortable. It could also be that they both were, and agreed completely that grounding you and Brad was the way to cope, so they wouldn't have to face the fact that it's them with the problem."

Watching Theo process the information, Richie sighed, "Being gay means one thing to me; that I *always* prefer being with other dudes, and when it comes to sex, dudes have the equipment I prefer. I know how sex should never be done, Theo. I also have a good idea how to make it the best, from a straight father and three awesome brothers. I already care about you. When its time, I won't ever do any of the bad stuff that was done to me; it's gonna be careful and slow, like my dad and bros said. If both of us ain't havin' fun, then what's the point?"

Seeing Theo wiping tears from his eyes but also widely smiling, Richie was confused. Feeling like he had screwed up majorly, he groaned, "I'm really sorry."

Shaking his head, Theo moved closer and took Richie in his arms. "Thank you," Theo softly wept. He rested his head on Richie's shoulder and tried to stop crying.

Thankfully, Theo couldn't see Richie scrunch his face while he took the time to process. After a few moments, Richie whispered, "What for?"

Squeezing Richie tighter, Theo giggled, "I wish you had said all

that earlier; it would've made things easier for me."

Not knowing exactly what he had said that made the difference, but happy enough with Theo in his arms, Richie carefully offered, "I couldn't say it in the auditorium, or while we were having dinner either. I sure wasn't gonna go there with my brothers and their boyfriends around."

Giggling insanely at the images implanted, Theo squeezed Richie tightly, slid his face around and planted a deep kiss. Richie still had no clue what he said that made the difference, but the tongue invading his mouth tasted really good, so he had no problem waiting until the kiss finally broke to pose the question. When the kiss did break, Theo prompted, "Read my thoughts, Richie."

Immediately closing his eyes, Richie giggled, "Nope, you'll have to tell me the old fashioned way."

Now that he wanted his thoughts read, Theo couldn't believe Richie had closed his eyes. Smirking, Theo got in the first opportunistic rib tickle. Opening his eyes wide, Richie laughed and brushed away the tickling hands. Laughing his ass off, Theo turned and ran for the diving well. Richie took off after him, but couldn't catch up. By the time Richie got to the diving well, Theo was naked and almost all the way to the top of the five-meter high ladder.

Richie loudly cackled, "I am not diving from way up there!"

Theo cracked up and then playfully instructed, "Take off that Mr. Fuzzy and meet me under water." Richie's eyebrows shot up and he quickly began peeling off his Mr. Fuzzy. Before Richie could get the Fuzzy on his fuzzy completely off, Theo dove. He did three awesome summersaults then straightened up and hit the water on an incline, making a big splash. Richie quickly followed, with his Mr.

Fuzzy G-string still clinging to his right ankle. They found each other under water, embraced and locked lips.

Relaxing on lounge chairs near the diving well were Carter, Doug, Neil and Tad. The four teenagers were chilling after the cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle. Used to their level two orphanage lives, the four teens knew how to carry a whispered conversation. Away from any lights, they weren't noticed by Theo and Richie. All four smiled, glanced at one another, and then returned to their prior conversation regarding their new home.

Theo and Richie surfaced and began giggling. Richie wondered, "What did I say to deserve a kiss like *that*?"

Theo giggled, "What I needed to hear. They almost had me believing there was something wrong with me, Richie. Thanks to you, I know now that it was them. I'm thinking clearly again, like a dude that likes being around other dudes. For a while there, I thought..."

"No," Richie interrupted. "Don't say that... don't even think it, Theo. You're my *boyfriend*; you just proved it. What's hangin' between our legs makes us male; and since there's no third sex you can be, then you're a dude. Being a nice guy don't make you a fem."

Nodding and allowing the topic to drop once and for all, Theo clung on to Richie, warmly saying, "And you're my boyfriend."

Getting up from their chairs, Carter, Doug, Neil and Tad applauded. Separating to see who was clapping their hands, Richie and Theo blushed and giggled. The four older teens didn't even look back; they gathered their water blasters and walked to their dorms, to leave the younger dudes alone.

Still giggling, Theo asked Richie, "Would you come back to my

dorm room with me?"

"Are you sure?"

"There's still a lot more to say and hear. I wanna fall asleep in your arms, talking, hearing about your thoughts, and telling you mine."

"We don't have to... ya know, do anything more than that."

Theo nodded, "With Bryant, we didn't fool around that much. Talking ourselves to exhaustion, kissing and hugging were our favorite things to do. It took us almost two months before we started messin' around. At first we could talk, hug and kiss without either of us getting hard. When we started feeling the other was boning up, that's when we showed, and when everything really started." He paused and giggled, "After what you said, it probably won't take us two months. Not to mention, Bryant didn't dance near as good as you."

Richie giggled, "I was only having fun; imitating what some of the teenagers were doing."

"Then we're gonna have lots of fun with our clothes on, cos I really like dancing," Theo revealed.

Richie prompted, "Let's go back, get our clothes, and tell mom and dad what we've decided." Theo nodded, and they swam for the ladder.

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Ewa Beach, Dormitory 3, Room 26

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 10:05PM HTZ

After the water blaster battle, Angelo and Reggie changed out of their damp underwear and got dressed again. They needed to go back to their homes to get the belongings they needed and wanted in their new room; namely, their clothes, Angelo's electronic music gear, and Reggie's art supplies. Most of the clothing that Alden got for them earlier, when they thought they would be hiding their new love, was returned. They kept only the new shirts and boxer-briefs that they had already worn. The unused computers in the dorm room were also returned to the warehouse. Once the dorm room was prepared, with closet doors, desk and dresser drawers left open, for Alden to transport everything, Angelo and Reggie left the room for the townhouses.

They went to the Combs' home first. Playing video games in Cameron's room, Cameron and Karey were in dry briefs and sitting on the floor. Pausing at the open door with Angelo at his side, Reggie wondered, "Where's mom and dad?"

Paying more attention to the game, Cameron answered, "Over at the Hundses' house, I think."

Without looking up and over at the two teens, Karey offered, "That was their plan, anyway. All the grown-ups are meeting over there, getting to know each other, like ol' fogeys do."

"They'll probably be home soon," Cameron finished, and then giggled, "What're you dudes doing here?"

Karey teased, "Don't you have better stuff to do?"

Angelo broke down in giggles. Reggie smirked, "We're moving, getting our stuff from here over to the dorm." After a brief pause for remarks, Reggie sniggered, "Don't get all emotional or anything, bro."

Sparing a glance up at his big brother, Cameron laughed,

"PLEASE! You're moving a few hundred meters away! It's not like we won't see each other a dozen times a day!"

Angelo giggled, "So, are video games the way ten-year-old boyfriends play?"

"You're just jealous," Karey cackled. "You teens make such a big to-do about everything. We're not holding hands now b'cause we can't, but we have, and we've hugged and kissed and done everything you've done, and didn't make a mess, or need a shower when we were done. Cassidy's around somewhere, with Matt, hoping he loses his virginity, and hoping he doesn't, AT THE *SAME TIME*!" Cameron cracked up. Karey giggled, "Chill about it, and just have fun."

Angelo checked with Reggie. The two teens grinned and nodded. Reggie teased, "I'll remind you of what was said tonight in about three years, when you dudes are able to do more than shiver and shake." Cameron and Karey howled laughing. Reggie led Angelo into his room. Before Reggie was anywhere near ready for it, Angelo gave him a whopper of kiss. Groaning and losing himself in the affection, Reggie let his hands roam around Angelo's torso. A few moments later, they heard giggling. Cameron and Karey were just beyond Reggie's bedroom door, trying to imitate the kiss and hand roaming, but only managing to tickle each other into hysterics. Rolling his eyes, Reggie sniggered, "Chill about it, and just have fun," and then closed the door.

Returning to Angelo, Reggie asked, "Take care of the desk for me, babe?"

Nodding, Angelo called, "Alden?"

Alden giggled, "Ready when you are, babe!"

"He's my babe, Alden," Reggie chortled, and went to his dresser.

He began opening drawers.

Angelo called, "Take the computer, Alden." It vanished and Angelo began opening the desk drawers. A few meters behind him, Reggie had Alden take drawers of clothes to the dorm dresser. Curiosity got the best of Angelo, and he began browsing another drawing pad while ordering other drawers to be transported. Running across an incriminating drawing, Angelo began giggling.

Reggie wondered, "What's so funny," and had the final dresser drawer transported. He then turned to see what his lover was giggling at. Finding Angelo red-faced and almost hysterical, Reggie blushed, "I said that I never gave any dudes a second glance. I said nothing about girls."

Angelo giggled, "So, how much did you like her?"

"Enough to sketch her, like she asked me to," Reggie giggled. "I was doing it to give to her, but she told me to keep it. That was last June, before the school year ended. When school started in September, she had a boyfriend. Before we moved here, she had a different boyfriend; better lookin' than the first, but still kind o' blah, as far as I'm concerned."

Angelo giggled, "Do I detect a little jealousy, or is it remorse?"

Cracking up, Reggie shook his head, wrapped his arms around Angelo, and sniggered, "She was searching for Mister Right. I lucked out, and found my Mister Right by moving. Some cutie carrying a box said hi to me, and I almost tripped over my own two feet." Angelo provocatively mooed. Reggie giggled, "Are you going to help, or just glance through all my sketches?"

"I think I'd better do both," Angelo suspiciously smirked.

Reggie laughed, "Okay, later tonight, I'll sit there nude and draw my fantasy girl. You'll see for yourself that there's not much reaction, if any. Then I'll draw you again, this time *all* of you, in the buff. You'll see where my interests are, but you can't complain when I go bonkers and won't let you sleep."

"That sounds like fun to me!"

Reggie grinned, "Do you really need proof, babe?"

Rapidly shaking his head, Angelo smiled, "No, but it still sounds like an awesome way to spend some time alone with you. While you work on your fantasy girl, I'll start writing a song for you."

Reggie nodded and stole a tender kiss. He went to his closet, opened it, and had the contents transported to the dorm. Seeing the rest of the room was emptied of his stuff, Reggie began closing drawers, and Angelo followed his partner's lead, but still held onto the pad in his hand. They left the room, heard Karey and Cameron giggling beyond the other closed bedroom door, and went downstairs. Before walking out of the house, Reggie muttered, "Ya know, I think I am jealous." When Angelo scowled at him, Reggie shrugged, "If I had known you, and if we were boyfriends when I was ten or eleven, puberty might've been easier for me."

They stepped outside and Reggie closed the door. Walking down the steps, Angelo said, "I would've bent over backwards to make it better, Reg."

Nodding, Reggie smiled, "I know. You've done enough today to make that obvious. I still can't quite get over the other dudes in the shower though."

"As couples, they were occupied," Angelo reminded. They walked up the steps to townhouse number five, where Angelo held his

hand on the security plate and stated his name. The door unlocked and they went inside. In her robe and PJs, Cecelia sat on the couch watching TV. She didn't say a word to Angelo or Reggie, even after they had greeted her. Untroubled, Angelo lead Reggie upstairs to his room.

As they had in the unit next door, Angelo concentrated on the desk while Reggie emptied the dresser. Angelo had a good Yamaha 61-key keyboard workstation connected to his computer that he had Alden transport. Occupied with the task at hand and softly chatting about their hopes for their first night alone together, they didn't hear Laxmi and Eugene come home, until they heard Cecelia loudly bitching, "You're letting him move out, with Reggie? What about me?"

Mrs. Diaz calmly asked, "What about you?"

"What're kids gonna say? My big bro is queer!"

Loudly, Eugene Diaz ordered, "SHUT IT AND SIT DOWN!" Up in his room, Angelo's eyebrows shot up and his mouth formed a cute little circle. Knowing his sister had crossed several lines, he went to Reggie and held him tight until the storm front passed.

"We have given you, and your brother, every chance, and tried to make your lives easier," Laxmi shouted. "You still haven't stepped foot out of this house either. Your brother took a chance today..."

"Several chances, actually," Eugene added.

Laxmi continued, "Not only has he found a boyfriend that cares for him, he met many other boys and made friends. He made his bed, he cleaned up after his breakfast, he even gathered the trash and took it out at some point. But here you sit, glued to the TV. Are you

afraid?"

"No," Cecelia meekly offered.

Eugene asked, "Do you think your better than all these other kids?" There was silence.

Laxmi sighed, "It's a good thing that we've moved here then, not only for our family, but for you in particular. You're starting school tomorrow, so you can mix in with the other kids, and hopefully realize that you're no better than any of them."

Cecelia incredulously squealed, "You're punishing *me*?"

Eugene sighed, "The fact that you see school and mixing with the others as a punishment proves that we erred somewhere along the line. Your actions and language upsets us. Angelo is *not* queer, or any other derogatory expression; he is in love. He's proved responsibility at home, so what excuse could we give him to keep him home? Whomever makes him happy, makes us happy, and it would be the same with you, whether you find a boyfriend or a girlfriend, makes no difference. To us, all that matters is that our kids are happy."

Laxmi more calmly said, "If you had taken a trip out of the house, maybe you would've met Lindsay Gibbons. Lindsay is your age, has two loving parents, several newly adopted siblings, and her big brother is in love, and married to another fine young man. Michael Gibbons and Derrick Seibert were my students, and are now leaders of this Clan, just like Preston and Keith. Without the help of those boys, we would've lost our home, before your father completed his internship. Instead, we're here, employed and living in a house that's at least as large, and much nicer than our old house. We're selling our old house, without rushing because we have to sell and move.

"I don't know who taught you that being gay is bad, but you

certainly did not learn it from us. Tomorrow, you will meet Lindsay, and many other girls your age. If you learn nothing else, you'll learn that you are no better than any other girl here."

Weeping, Cecelia whined, "I don't wanna. I miss my friends. I don't want to be here."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," Eugene sincerely said. "The fact is that your mother and I are employed here, and are quite happy with our home, with the other adults we've met and gotten to know, and with the orphaned children that we've met. This is a nice community. If you'll just try, I think you'll like it here too."

"Please try," Laxmi begged.

Shaking her head, Cecelia hurried up the stairs and into her room. Eugene and Laxmi sighed, turned the television off, and followed their daughter up the stairs. Seeing lights on in both of the smaller bedrooms, they realized that Angelo was home, most likely with Reggie, and the boys had heard everything. Laxmi went into the second room, found her daughter laying across her bed and still weeping. She set the alarm clock in the room and reminded, "We're going to eat at the CIC in the morning, and then we're going to school." The door closed for a brief mother-daughter chat.

Eugene went into his son's room. He found Angelo and Reggie still in a tight embrace, and softly offered, "I'm sorry for what she said. As I'm sure you both heard, that's not what we taught her."

Angelo looked up at his dad, frowning, "It was her friends, it had to be. Some kids don't like the Clan, and just don't get it."

"We do get it," Eugene assured. "Every kid deserves a decent chance, even your sister. Please don't hold her words against her;

together, we can correct those misconceptions."

Genuinely willing, Reggie asked, "How can we help?"

"Little things make the biggest impact," Eugene smiled. "Come home once in a while, just to show her that we're still a family, and how two young men in love act. Eventually, she'll learn that her friends were wrong, and that the world is full of different kinds of people. Differences used in a negative manner are what caused Battle Of Earth, and caused your mother to lose her job, for that matter. We can allow our differences to separate us, or we can use them to make us stronger."

After checking with Reggie and receiving a firm nod, Angelo said, "We'll do that."

Coming into the room, Laxmi smiled, "So, how many friends did you make today?"

Reggie giggled. Angelo chuckled, "It started with four this morning; Erik, Travis, Lance and Scott. Then we met Ray and Tony."

"And then Reyes, Ryan, Chris and Jay," Reggie grinned.

Angelo continued, "We wrapped up lunch with Nate, Prez, Keith, Troy and Sean. By dinner, we added Phil and Owen."

Reggie explained, "The day seemed pretty complete at sunset, but then we met another new kid, Matt Thornton. He just arrived today with his dad. Through Matt, we met Kassidy."

"That's nineteen total," Angelo cheekily grinned. "Almost all of 'em live at dorm three."

"A full first day," Eugene chuckled. He hugged both boys, and

then stepped back to allow his wife to kiss the boys good night.

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Ewa Beach, Dormitory 3, Room 118

Tuesday, November 9, 2004 10:22PM HTZ

After the water blaster battle, Tony and Ray played with the dildos as they had planned. They took their time and enjoyed the intimacy. Since that was so much fun, Ray tried mounting Tony. He tried several times in various positions, but Tony was a fair bit larger than the five-by-four dildo. Embarrassed, frustrated and feeling very sad, Ray sincerely apologized, believing he had completely destroyed their budding partnership.

Seeing Ray on the verge of tears, Tony gently shushed him and then rolled to reach for one of the dildos. He lined up the toy with his bone, to show Ray that there was a considerable difference. Once Ray agreed that Tony had near seven-by-five inches, Tony lined up the dildo with Ray's erection. Again, there was a fair amount of difference. Ray was about six inches long and visibly thicker than the toy, near Tony's circumference. Lastly, Tony lubed Ray's bone, and then mounted him. Even though he was older and Ray wasn't quite as large, Tony still had some challenges. Getting all of Ray inside, Tony remained very still for a while, until he got used to the new sensation.

Smirking at Tony's varying twisted expressions, Ray implored, "You don't need to exaggerate."

Remaining perfectly still, but panting like he was exerting himself, Tony smirked, "This ain't an exaggeration, pretty boy. An inch difference might as well be a foot." Slowly, Tony rode up and more slowly lowered down, causing Ray to gasp. Wearing a

mischievous smile, Tony huffed, "Woof!"

Ray giggled, "Please don't move again. I'll cum."

"Omigod!" Tony cheered, "I can barely believe you feel this good! By the time I'm fourteen and you're thirteen, I'm gonna be your slut! Six months from now... WOOF!"

Taking hold of Tony's stiffy, Ray digressed into a giggling fit. Only Tony would've gone to such lengths to prove there was no reason to be frustrated or sad. Tony wore the widest smile and the dreamiest eyes, like none of what he was experiencing was real, but it was pure ecstasy. In a rapture induced stupor, Tony softly whimpered, "Omigod. This is awesome! It's gonna get so much better too. My bi days are officially over."

Barely controlling himself, Ray giggled, "It really feels that good?"

"Omigod!" Tony cheered. "The dildo was cold. You're so warm. The dildo didn't give even a tiny bit. I can feel your bone pulsing. You're so much better, I can't begin to describe it all." Carefully and slowly, Tony leaned down closer to Ray so he could whisper, "I really love you so much."

"I love you too," Ray whispered. With less of Tony's weight on his hips, and feeling like only half his erection was inside his new boyfriend, Ray thrust up. Tony gasped, and then began placing a series of tender kisses around Ray's lips, encouraging him to keep going. Again and again, Ray pumped, Tony gasped, and the kisses became more urgent. Ray released Tony's erection and held his head firmly in place for the grande finale tonsillectomy. Feeling throbbing and extra moisture, Tony helplessly chortled into their kiss. Needing to breathe, Ray turned his head and puffed, "Omigod! That was

amazing!"

Evilly snickering, Tony gushed, "I agree; it was better than I ever expected."

"I can't wait to get you inside me," Ray confessed.

Locking eyes, Tony smiled, "I *can* wait. It don't matter if it takes days, or weeks, or months. I won't risk hurting you, and I absolutely loved the ride."

Ray confirmed, "You really won't mind waiting?"

"Course not," Tony giggled and squeezed his new partner tight. He pulled back a little to share, "What made this day totally awesome to me was everything we've done since lunch. Nate hugging us while we were dancing during the concert proved that he's genuinely happy for us. We ate together as boyfriends for the first time. Then we hung out in the rec room, making it obvious to everyone that we're not just buds and roommates any more. Then we played in another water blaster battle with almost every dude at both bases, wearing only Mr. Fuzzy G-strings. Topping off all that awesome stuff is what we've been doing alone."

Lowering back down again, Tony whispered in Ray's ear; "Three orgasms each this afternoon, and tonight, two for me and three for you. Your three took longer tonight than the three you had this afternoon." Ray began giggling. Tony chuckled, "And let me remind you of something else, pretty boy; it's no accident that I didn't unroll a rubber on your bone. I wanted it natural because I wanted you to have my virginity. You made me yours, in the very best way. When it's your turn and you succeed, you'll feel exactly how I feel; like it's not just words, or hopes, it's real. You're the best part of me now."

Giggling insanely, Ray gushed, "Just this morning, I used to think

you always went out of your way looking for new, fun and interesting stuff; that you were rarely ever serious." Noticing Tony's wide eyes and mischievous grin, Ray laughed, "It's just you, Tony. Even when you're being seriously super romantic, telling me all this awesome stuff, you say it like it's the newest, most interesting, most enjoyable thing you've ever discovered. Can you tell me how you do that?"

Tony chuckled, "It's you, me and us. In this case, all I was doing was trying to get you inside me. When I managed that, it really was the newest, most amazing feeling I've ever experienced. There was a point when I thought that I wouldn't manage it. I only thought, I need to know that I can be your bottom, and you needed to know that you can be my top. A minor adjustment and the ache faded, only to be replaced with the most awesome feeling ever. This time, entry seemed to be damned near impossible, but once you got far enough inside, suddenly it was easy, and so beautiful. I wasn't exaggerating, Ray, not in the slightest." He stole a tender kiss then backed off slightly and giggled, "Woof, pretty boy! I've got you now, and I ain't ever lettin' go!"

Knowing that Tony had just done it again, Ray howled laughing. Making matters worse, Tony began munching on Ray's neck, and softly giggling, "Gonna make you hard. My butt needs filling again."

"Oh no!" Ray cackled, "It's my turn to try, and you're still hard too, you lunatic!"

Playfully, Tony checked, "You know I'll love you no matter what?"

Knowing what Tony was asking, Ray giggled, "Yeah."

Lowering down on top of Ray, Tony snaked his arms underneath his love and rolled them over. Before releasing Ray to try again, Tony

softly suggested, "Why not wait until tomorrow morning? Right after we wake, you'll be relaxed. Take your time, but please don't be disappointed if your body isn't ready. I know your heart and that you're trying. That's all that matters."

After grabbing a deep kiss and hugging Tony tight, Ray smiled, "I really love you."

"I know," Tony dreamily sighed. "You've gotta be totally relaxed. Pushing, like you're taking a dump, I learned doesn't work. When I tried that, I almost pushed you out. Remember, you told me to stay still, but I would've anyway, because I was trying to stay relaxed. Once you were all the way in, it changed to a full feeling. Even the little movement I made to lean forward, closer to you, felt good. When you took over, it felt awesome. Stay relaxed, and remember, I'll always love you, no matter what, okay?"

Ray nodded and stole another kiss, and then admitted, "I feel kind o' weird."

"Why?"

Ray shrugged, "I guess it's a couple o' reasons. Everything's been so kewl with us as roommates and friends; I don't wanna be the reason that changes. I'm the gay boy and I really want to, but couldn't do what you did." He briefly paused, and then giggled, "Bi boy."

Before Ray could say more, Tony grinned, "Let me deal with this one at a time?" Ray smiled and nodded, so Tony offered, "You just told me what you were thinking and feeling. That really matters to me; it's what I want most of all. It's what I've wanted since we met. Do you know why it means so much to me?"

Shaking his head, Ray muttered, "I'm not sure, and I'd rather hear

what you have to say."

"Okay," Tony smiled, "let's start at the beginning, when we met. I was attracted to you from the start, and since you told me that you felt like you had known me longer, that says you had some level of attraction for me too. All I was thinking was, 'Damn, he's cute! I'd like to get to know him.' At the same time, what were you thinking?"

"He's nice, and social, and fun," Ray giggled.

Tony nodded and explained, "Immediate attraction, covered. So becoming roommates and following up on the attraction was good for both of us, but that didn't make us boyfriends, it made us friends, anxious and willing to learn about each other. Saturday, Sunday and yesterday we did everything together, because we wanted to, not because we had to. Look back and rewind the little, every day things, like eating and goin' to the bathroom. We shared meals, but there were times that I wanted a drink or a snack, and you went to the CIC with me, even though you didn't always want something. When nature calls is different for everybody, and that's the only times I can honestly recall minutes of separation. Am I right?"

Ray giggled, "Pretty much."

Tony asked, "Was there ever a time where you purposefully did something with me that you really didn't want to do?"

"I warned you that I sucked at basketball," Ray giggled.

Tony sniggered, "And your dad told you that you're too young to lift weights, which we proved was at least partially correct."

Ray softly confided, "I didn't want to be alone, Tony. There were so few reasons to do anything other than go home after school. I always wanted things to be different, to do something more than

homework and watch TV. My first few months of junior high were lonely. The best part of it was spending more time with my dad."

Already aware of Ray's prior lifestyle, Tony shared, "And I wanted things different too. I had six good friends, but I was the common link between all of 'em. Two despised each other, and two put up with each other. There was never a time where all seven of us could be together. The point being, the two of us haven't been lying to each other. We hid a little bit, until today, but there was enough honesty to allow us to break through the hidden facts. Honesty is what got us here, Ray. I'm not the tiniest bit angry or frustrated right now. You're still here, naked and sharing with me. Today's our first day, our first times as boyfriends, and tomorrow's another day for us. Everything's gonna get better, every day. Someday soon, first times will be over, and then we'll be able to make love easily."

After a brief pause, Tony checked, "Is there anything else buggin' you?"

Ray shook his head. He gave Tony a short but deep kiss, and then asked, "Wanna watch TV?"

"If there's something good on, and I can hold you close," Tony answered. Ray rolled off Tony and reached for the remote control on the night table. After checking the channel listing, they found 'Phenomenon' had just begun on one of the movie channels. Ray had seen it once before and liked it, but Tony had never seen it. Kicked back against the headboard, they watched the flick. Softly talking during the movie, they shared even more when movie plot points stirred memories. They also chatted about Angelo and Reggie, and about Phil and Owen; agreeing that they had a growing circle of close friends. Afterward, Ray changed to a music channel, lowered the volume and set the timer. For the first time, they fell asleep spooned

up together in Ray's bed.

Down the hall, in room twenty-six, Angelo had started his ballad for Reggie and gotten pretty far along in the composition. At the same time Angelo was working, Reggie was sketching his bikini clad fantasy girl and proved that his dick hadn't changed in the slightest. He then started another masterpiece, of Angelo reclining naked on a bed. Only minutes into the drawing, Reggie was softly giggling. Angelo turned to his new boyfriend. Before he could ask what was funny, Angelo noticed Reggie's dick was stiff and bouncing. With his concentration destroyed, Angelo played the ballad he had written, went to Reggie and knelt down between his legs. It was almost midnight when Reggie paused work on the drawing, and then pulled Angelo up onto the bed so they could make love.

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Columbia, SC, I77 and Shop Road Intersection

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 5:47AM EST

The truck driver named Dan took the Shop Road exit to drop off Paul Owens. Paul thanked Dan for the ride. Dan wished Paul the best of luck, and watched the teen android walk off to the Northwest, toward the city. Paul was still in Dan's sight when he dialed the phone number of the first of his four friends that live close to the intersection. Whether Paul thought he needed help or not, the man was not about to let a thirteen-year-old boy, android or not, walk the streets and fend for himself. Before getting off of the I77 loop and continuing his way north, Dan had awakened each of his four friends, gave them descriptions of Paul and what he was wearing.

Paul had a two mile walk on Shop Road to get to the center of town, where he could find work, hopefully a place to sleep and

disappear into the city. Relieved of the heavy weights he had been burdened with for more than a day, Paul kept a brisk pace during his walk into the city. However, Paul had been awake all night and the stress of the prior day was wearing him down. Being alone was very different as well; Paul couldn't help wishing Ryan was beside him. Logically, Paul knew Ryan was safe and happy with Reyes, but now, on the familiar streets of Columbia, memories surfaced.

Approaching the intersection of Barlow Road, Paul stumbled. Two pairs of hands caught Paul, saving him from a potentially nasty spill. On Paul's left stood a woman and on his right stood a man. Both were middle aged, probably in their early forties, Paul reckoned. He softly thanked them both.

"It was no trouble," the man warmly smiled. "We were here, on our way to breakfast, and happened to be in the right place at the right time."

The woman purposefully took on the over-protective mother role, impatiently huffing, "You're coming to breakfast with us, young man. What in the world you're doing wandering around with a suitcase, this early in the morning, I don't even want to know."

The man grinned, "Bea, you're a terrible liar. Of course you want to know, but you're attempting to be nice about it."

The banter between the married couple continued, only allowing Paul to get one word in - his name. They walked with Paul and led him to a cafe. Of course, Paul had little choice but to accept the invitation to breakfast. What Paul didn't know was that the man and woman were friends of Dan's. Also, Paul didn't know that the woman had gone to the ladies room mostly to phone the other three couples to let them know where Paul was. During his first hours away from the Clan, Paul was being watched, guided and cared for by regular

'normal' citizens of Columbia.

Another thing Paul failed to realize was that in his haste to pack, the Clan comm-badge on the shirt he was wearing fell into his suitcase. When Paul left the Owens' home, Stevie immediately contacted Reyes and Ryan, who had just completed the cozy cuzzy fuzzy battle.

Changing into some dry boardies, Reyes and Ryan discussed the situation. Their first instinct was to immediately transport to Sullivan's Island, but they also realized that Paul felt trapped. Intercepting him wouldn't help that perception. Clan Short was not a prison, so Reyes told Stevie to track Paul and display all available camera feeds to their flat's TV. At almost every intersection Paul walked past, Reyes and Ryan saw him. They didn't see Paul get in Dan's truck, but they did see the eighteen wheeler from Interstate highway cameras, and they did see when Paul got out of the truck, and his walk on Shop Road. Through Stevie and Alden, Reyes and Ryan learned that Ark had monitored the phone calls the truck driver had made.

At midnight in Ewa Beach, Ryan asked Stevie to wake his new parents, Jon and Mary, and also wake Marc and Danny. It was minutes after six in the morning at Sullivan's Island when Reyes and Ryan explained their decision to Jon, Mary, Marc and Danny via teleconference. Now Reyes and Ryan could go to bed, knowing that Paul would be monitored from Sullivan's Island.

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Ewa Beach, Dormitory 3, Room 118

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 4:56AM HTZ

Having a nightmare of Battle Of Earth, Ray Varga softly

whimpered in his sleep. His dad had died, much more savagely than he had in reality, but none of the sheriffs acted like Ray mattered. Instead of taking him directly to a refugee center, and insuring he was safe under Clan Short care, Ray was left to wander the streets in a grief induced daze. Rather than getting help, Ray was another casualty; robbed, stripped, beaten and raped. Left in an unconscious state to die in an alley, Ray was repeatedly kicked about the body by passersby. With a jolt, he woke in the dark room. The only thing he saw was the digital clock display. He reached over to where Tony was still sound asleep and softly called his name.

Getting a soft hum in response, Ray whispered, "I need to talk, Tony."

Barely aware, Tony pulled Ray close, asking, "What's wrong?"

"I had a nightmare," Ray sorrowfully admitted.

Taking a deep breath, Tony forced his eyes open, prompting, "Tell me about it."

"Friday was bad, and everything stayed bad, and then got horrible," Ray shared. "My dad... chopped up into pieces. I was beaten to a pulp, raped and left to die."

Tony sighed, "I'm sorry. A nightmare was bound to happen."

"I wish it hadn't," Ray groaned.

"Friday *was* horrible," Tony reminded. "I was there too. Dodger Stadium was our closest evac center. I was walking in that direction, but couldn't get there by foot. I couldn't find anyone to help me, and wound up asking some street gang dudes for help."

Ray smirked, "You were lucky they were kewl, Tony. Instead of

getting you to the Clan, God only knows what another gang might've done."

Tony smirked, "Beaten to a pulp, raped and left to die?"

Staring at Tony in shock, Ray asked, "Are you saying..."

Tony interrupted, "Think about it; you haven't had a nightmare the last four nights, when a bunch of other kids did. What makes tonight different from the last four days is us, together as a couple."

"So I changed your nightmare into my own?"

Tony nodded and grinned, "The mind works in really weird ways, usually when we least expect it. You know I was scared. The main difference between you and me is, you spent more time at home, where I went home to eat and sleep." Chortling, Tony teased, "You put yourself in my shoes, pretty boy. I guess this means that you love me, huh?"

Ray giggled, "I do, but right now I'm torn if half, wanting to smack the shit out of you, for taking chances that caused my nightmare."

Widely smiling, Tony provocatively joked, "Whip me, beat me, make it hurt so-oo-oo good!"

Bounding up and onto Tony, Ray tickle attacked, giggling, "You could've been killed, you jerk! Where would I be then?"

Half-heartedly blocking Ray's hands, Tony cackled, "Tickling someone else, no doubt, you pretty gay boy!"

"Oh yeah," Ray sarcastically giggled, "there's such a long list to put my slick moves on too."

"There's long lists and then there's long dicks," Tony roared.

"Ooo, yeah, Vaziik!" Ray giggled.

Tony sniggered, "Do you think it gets greener when it's hard?"

Pausing his attack for a moment, Ray grimaced, "I hope not."

Tracing a fingertip along the side of Ray's erection, Tony giggled, "Your lips say no, but I think you liked something an awful lot."

Reaching back for Tony's bone, Ray reminded, "Technically, it is morning."

Tony smiled, "Your nightmare proved how much you love me; that's plenty proof for one morning."

Nodding, Ray said, "That's part of why I need to do it. I really do love you very much."

Ready, willing and able, Tony guided Ray down for some kisses and dry humping. After a couple of minutes, Tony whispered, "You know everything's perfect as it is, right?"

Ray smiled, "It's perfect for you because you got some already. I need to be there with you, Tony."

Indifferently shrugging, Tony promised, "We'll keep trying until it's right. If that's not now, then we'll try this afternoon, and again later tonight. There's no rush."

Pushing up off Tony, Ray giggled, "Being as awesome as you're being is only making my decision."

Reaching for the bottle of lube on the night table, Tony then

handed it to Ray, instructing, "Use a lot, on me and in you. If you're not able, don't worry about it; we can try again any time."

Nodding, Ray did as he was told. During the preparations, Ray leaned over for more kisses, and Tony reached down to gently massage Ray's butt hole. Grabbing a final kiss, Ray pushed up and reached back. Tony held his stiffy at the base, keeping it in position. Ray closed his eyes and thought only of Tony; his best friend and roommate for going on the fifth day; the one he cared so much about that his imagination and subconscious went off on frightening tangents.

In small increments, Ray tried, backed off and tried again. With each attempt, Ray got more of Tony inside him until, at last, many minutes later he had his cheeks pressed firmly against Tony's hips. For the first time in his life, Ray felt like he was completely alive and aware. Tony's whispered words of pride seemed to be shouts. The light breeze coming in from the windows felt like Arctic blasts. And lastly, Tony's pubes felt like velvet against Ray's butt. Both remained motionless for about another minute, and then Ray wiggled his butt around, making Tony gasp and groan.

Now that he had success, Ray let his body take control and rode Tony for a while. Watching Ray's torso bend fluidly, like that of a snake, Tony could barely believe his eyes; his cute boyfriend looked so damned hot. Completely amazed with how good he felt, Ray wanted to experiment with alternative positions. He got up and turned around to face Tony's toes, and then lowered down again. Entry was easier and the ride every bit as good. Not wanting it to end too quickly, Ray got up and lay beside Tony. Chuckling insanely, Tony rolled over for more kisses and to express his extreme pleasure.

Much to Tony's surprise, Ray wanted more. Pulling his legs up, Ray prompted Tony to take control. Soon after Tony did so, they

discovered it was a lot different from going for rides. Working it out together, they found another new method; shallow entry and complete exit felt good for both of them. Reaching down, Ray guided Tony's erection. Tony controlled entry, which was a monumental effort for any thirteen-year-old. They started kissing and desperately calling one another's names, leading directly to the first set of orgasms.

Panting and sweating, Tony collapsed beside Ray. Carefully watching Tony catch his breath and cool down, Ray began giggling. Turning only his head toward Ray, Tony grinned, "Woof, pretty boy."

Ray laughed, "You were amazing! Now I know how you felt last night."

"It only lasted two or three minutes," Tony sniggered.

Rolling to Tony and grabbing a kiss, Ray giggled, "They were the best minutes of my life! Slow don't mean stop, Tony."

"I was already going slow," Tony cheekily grinned. "Besides, if I didn't stop once in a while, three minutes would've been more like thirty-seconds." Giggling insanely, Ray rolled on top of Tony and stole many kisses.

Thrilled with one another, Tony decided it was his turn to get some of Ray. Already on his back, Tony lifted his legs and playfully prompted Ray to take him. Ray laughed his ass off. He had never gotten off more than once in a day, and rarely more than twice in a week, but in one day he had surpassed a months worth. Yet, he pushed up and prepared to do his duty for his boyfriend.

What they lacked in experience, they more than made up for in passion and silly pleasure. The first signs of daylight were seen from beyond the window blinds. They swapped twice more, this time each tried it doggie style. Again, they found a way to make this position

work, allowing the bottom to take complete control and do most of the work.

Afterward, in a semi-conscious stupor, they decided to take an intimate shower together, before other dudes woke. While soaping up, they discovered that their butts were sore, leading to the reluctant decision to limit themselves to masturbation or oral sex for the rest of the day. Cackling hysterically between kisses, they realized that they'd be lucky to walk comfortably to the dining room and back. They finished cleaning up, got dressed, and then went to the CIC for breakfast.

Surprisingly, the Core Rimmers were awake, and so were their sons, and so were most of the telepathic kids. Not expecting anyone awake at half past six in the morning, Tony and Ray waved at the quadruple Rs, Lance and Scott, and Chris and Jay. The Stoeher twins began giggling, which set off the quadruple Rs and their boyfriends. John sent one short message to the new couple; *'Can you turn down the glow a few notches? It's early and you're brighter than the rising Sun.'* With that, almost everyone in the room began chortling. All the Core Rimmers flashed thumbs-up at the couple.

Turning beet red, Tony and Ray realized that John's message wasn't private. Madly giggling, they went to the kitchen. Tony ordered pancakes, scrambled eggs, bacon and sausage patties, and then went to get a bowl of fruit and a large glass of pineapple-orange juice. Equally famished after the pre-dawn romp around the bed, Ray got waffles, a breakfast sandwich with an over-easy egg, bacon and cheese on an English muffin, and a medium chocolate shake. When Tony and Ray left the kitchen for the dining room, the large group were gone.

In the now barren dining room, Ray and Tony chose a small table and sat across from each other. Tony teased, "Everybody knows

everything about us now, pretty boy."

Nodding and giggling, Ray forcefully pressed down on his sandwich, making yoke squirt out across the plate and onto the tray. Tony's eyes almost shot out of their sockets. "I'll lick that up too," Ray giggled.

Tony loudly cracked up. Softly giggling, Ray wagged his tongue at his lover. Breathlessly, Tony softly sniggered, "That's all it took for me to sprout wood."

Through giggles, Ray whimpered and then leered, "Don't tell me your hard?"

"Mostly," Tony smiled.

"After lunch, I promise."

Tony groaned, "God, I love you."

Buttering his waffle, Ray said, "You were so careful; that made what could've been uncomfortable really excellent. I'm devoted to you, Tony, because you're obviously devoted to me. You proved that yesterday and this morning."

"I am, completely. Maybe I was a little Saturday, but definitely every day since."

Softly, Ray prodded, "Please tell me how you feel?"

Tilting his head slightly because he had already shared a lot the last day, Tony wondered, "What do you mean?"

Shrugging, Ray giggled, "We've changed everything. In your opinion, what were the best and worst parts?"

Putting his fork and knife down, Tony reached both hands across the table. Beaming, Ray took Tony's outstretched hands. "Until yesterday afternoon, I only had hopes," Tony began. "I hoped that maybe you'd be into a little experimentation. I agreed with Nate's plan just to prove to you that trying stuff is normal. I hoped that maybe we'd become a little closer; two bi dudes willing to offer a helping hand. We'd grow up and always have that closeness, best buds and a little more. Instead, I got a dude who knows exactly what he wants and needs; a dude who is more mature than I am, at the very least in this respect. I'm really very proud of you; I was before lunch yesterday, and it's only more intense now. Even though I kept telling you it could wait, you wanted intercourse, and were determined to succeed. That tells me a lot more about you; because there really wasn't much reason to be that determined before today. I'm the bi dude who's decided to go completely gay, for the best partner in the world; the one I'm committing myself to, the one I'm devoted to, and the one I'll love the rest of my life."

Most of the time Tony was speaking, Ray sat there brightly smiling. Reaching up, Ray wiped away stray happy tears. Tony bounced his eyebrows, pushing Ray into soft mooing, and then a giggling fit.

They ate breakfast, softly talking about other thoughts and feelings their new relationship made necessary. Tony asked, "Now that you've experienced gay sex, how do you feel? Is it what you thought it would be?"

Although chewing his breakfast sandwich, a wide smile split Ray's face. When he swallowed, Ray giggled, "It's better in lots of ways, mostly because of you."

Tony chuckled, "I didn't do anything special."

"Com'on, Tony!" Ray cackled, "Everything was special! Because you said you're bi, I didn't expect anything you did."

Shrugging, Tony mumbled past the food in his mouth, "Maybe some bi dudes are closer to the straight side. I think I was straddling the center and could easily go either way." Lifting his glass of juice, and swallowing a mouthful, Tony then grinned, "For you, I would do anything you want, anytime. All I need to know is that you love me. The best parts weren't sex; it was you snuggling up to me. Each time you did that, I got hard again. That's a pretty clear indication of what I like."

Leaning over the table, Ray warmly smiled, "Did you really like everything we did; your not just saying it to make me happy?"

Pausing his breakfast, Tony smirked and softly explained, "I won't lie to you, ever, especially about how I feel. Before I ever got to hug or kiss you yesterday, I loved you. Yes, I loved when my pretty boy went for it orally, and I loved when you got determined this morning, but what I love the most is holding you and being held by you. When we hugged in the rec room last night, we were close enough to feel everything, from heartbeats to limp dicks under our clothes. That's as much of rush as everything else; feeling my lover's goods in his normal limp state. Did you notice that?"

"Yep," Ray giggled.

"We're both sore from this morning's games," Tony continued. "I'm not bothered at all about limiting our private games today, because I'll be getting and giving away lots of hugs and kisses all day. Give me an excuse and I'll grope your pretty butt, in front of everybody. Feel free to do the same to me, dude. Nothing I've said or done is fake, Ray. I want to make us last forever, but I need you to

want that too."

"I do!" Ray gushed. "It's just a big surprise, Tony. Part of me still thinks that I must be dreaming. I've got a boyfriend, one that's my best friend, one that's a little older, who I can talk to about anything. I never dreamed this could happen; I barely ever thought about it. Only when I saw a Core Rimmer couple would I think, 'that would be real nice'. Instead, I've been awake over an hour with *my* boyfriend; we made love in our room, and we showered together again, taking the time to bathe every inch of each other. We live in a hall that's full of dudes my age, all of whom I like, but they're nothing like you." Pausing, Ray sighed, "As happy as I am, I guess I need to know that you are too; that all this won't end because of something dumb I say or do."

Slowly shaking his head, Tony chuckled, "I am very happy with you. As for saying or doing something dumb, let me ask what you would do if you saw me gazing at Melonie's awesome knockers?"

Cracking up, Ray laughed, "Nudge you to wipe the drool off your chin!"

"The point being, I'm not perfect and I'm just as likely to do stupid shit as the next dude. I'm not perfect, and neither are you, but we're falling in love and kind o' forget that nobody's perfect. I'm very willing to work out a life time full of dumb stuff with you. Can you do that?"

Ray giggled, "Yeah."

"Even if Darren jogs by and my eyes are wagging in time with his dick?"

Ray cackled, "You'd definitely get smacked!"

"I'd deserve it," Tony sniggered, "and give you deep kiss, to remind you that I don't want him. I want you."

Returning to his breakfast, Ray giggled, "What if I don't get a nine-incher?"

"It don't matter," Tony grinned. "Your six-incher filled me real nice, and I can take it all into my mouth. Have you noticed any major change in your dick yet?"

"No," Ray giggled.

"One day, probably from a mirror, you will," Tony smiled. "If you don't notice, then I will. We'll probably miss breakfast and lunch that day." Intensely blushing, Ray howled laughing. Tony stoked the fire by teasing, "I'm sorry to say, I've already had that day. Looking down at it to take a leak, you won't notice, but in the mirror you will, which means that I'll probably notice before you do. Heaven help us both that day, pretty boy. If you think we're sore now, just wait."

Ray roared hysterically. When he finally chilled, and was about to return to his breakfast, Ray giggled, "You think a lot about dicks for a bi dude."

"Cos my pretty boyfriend has a nice grower that I really like playing with," Tony chortled.

Ray loudly laughed, "Tony!" He gestured to his plates of food, giggling, "Please stop, I can't eat."

"I'll be good for now," Tony chuckled. "And then after lunch, I'll be even better, when I try out some of my other wicked fantasies on you."

Concentrating on their breakfasts, Tony shared many evil

glances and lots of giggling. Other kids began walking into the dining room, so Tony and Ray had to chill out. They were still there when constant streams of kids came into the room, so they took their trays to the dishwasher. Dorm brothers and other friends were greeted. All the twelve-year-olds from the short hall of dorm three got a large table together. Phil and Owen invited Tony and Ray to sit with them.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach Townhouse #1

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 6:00AM HTZ

Into Prez's sub-vocal, Alden softly called, "Prez? Yoo-hoo, Head Rimmer?"

Sleepily, Prez groaned then quietly wondered, "What's up, Alden?"

Alden sighed, "I'm sorry to have to wake you, bro, but there's a problem. Danny Page and Marc Furst would like to speak with you. I have a video teleconference pending. You can take the call at the computer in your bedroom."

Becoming more aware, Prez double checked, "A problem, and from Danny and Marc?"

"Yeah."

"Where's KC?"

Alden giggled, "Asleep with Fred Eckhart, over at dorm three; KC's not the problem for once in his life."

Forcing his eyes to open, Prez grunted and rolled away from Keith to the edge of the bed. He stood and staggered across the room

to the computer workstation in his master bedroom. Dropping onto the chair, Prez wiped the sleep out of his eyes and yawned, "Go ahead and connect us."

The large monitor flickered, showing Danny and Marc sitting in a conference room with an adult man. All three were wearing standard white doctor smocks over their clothes. Danny quickly said, "I'm sorry to have to wake you, Prez, but I did wait a few hours, rather than wake you at three in the morning your time."

"It's okay," Prez smirked, "we got to bed before midnight for the first time in over a week. What's going on?"

Danny sighed, "It's the level three orphans, Prez. We've got thirty of the eighty here at Charleston. These thirty are kids that needed amputations, ranging from fingers and toes to partial limb removals, from the various gangrenous wounds."

Picking up where Danny left off, Marc said, "Physically, the new android parts are healing perfectly, but the kids are scared to death. They're so lethargic, we can't get them to go beyond the beginning stages of physical therapy, because they simply don't want to try. Beside me is Doctor Arthur Hubbard, our top child psychiatrist here. I'll let Doctor Hubbard explain further."

Leaning forward and resting his arms on the table top, Doctor Hubbard pleasantly said, "Good morning, Director O'Brian."

"Good morning, doc," Prez replied. "What's the situation there?"

Doctor Hubbard explained, "The children have gone from one frightening environment to another. We are treating all of the kids in our care appropriately for their physical and emotional states, given where they came from, but they're shutting down. My colleagues at Blank Children's Hospital, and at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

are witnessing the same recovery stagnation. Our original plan to begin getting kids to you this weekend is in jeopardy, unless we do something about this quickly."

Prez called, "Alden, why haven't you been showing these kids the same as the level two kids?" Keith woke from his husband's voice. Dazed, Keith looked around his new bedroom.

"We didn't know," Alden quickly replied. "The level two kids asked their doctors and nurses to be shown who saved them and where they would be going."

"Start the audio and video relays immediately," Prez ordered. "Begin the same process you and your brothers did with the level two kids. They don't get to watch regular television again until they're here with us. Until then, they watch us."

"We're on it," Alden, Kerry, Stevie, Jack and George announced.

Thoughtfully scowling, Danny wondered, "What's goin' on, Prez?"

Prez sighed, "It's a difference in the orphanage kids, guys. The level one kids showed here, cleaned up and looking great, but a little disoriented, because they were only treated over night. The level two kids, slightly worse off than the level ones, had the curiosity and presence of mind to ask, the very next day, who saved them and where they were going. Given the horrors of their lives, loved ones lost and those atrocious homes they were in, and then the confusion of the raids, I'd bet that at least half the rescued kids thought it was all a dream. Suddenly, they've got professional care givers treating them like people, and not insignificant annoyances. Alden and the AIs fed our base's surveillance audio and video to the level two kids. Those

kids learned directly from us, and from the AIs, what to expect. For three-and-a-half days, those kids were introduced to each of us and this base. Upon arrival, they knew all of us and our parents, and what their first days would be like."

"Our children never asked," Doc Hubbard quickly interjected. "We've been dealing with them individually as severely traumatized children."

"Keep reading them individually," Prez recommended. "I've learned the last week, from all the kids here, that each responds differently; some may take more time and care, and others, like my first two sons, know exactly what they need and want. Even less traumatized kids sometimes take a few days to comprehend how their lives have changed. Remember, these kids were locked away in their rooms most of the time. The kids that are talking need to be talked to, so start grouping them together. Let them talk to one another and watch the television feeds our AIs are sending."

"This could work," Marc brightly smiled.

Nodding, Danny huffed, "If only we had known, we might've avoided every delay."

Smirking, Prez huffed, "I wish I had thought of it before now too."

"The children are barely speaking, giving us yes or no answers," Doctor Hubbard reminded. "We can't read minds, but we can understand what's meant when a child turns away and doesn't want interaction."

Sitting up in bed, Keith loudly called, "Alden, wake all the Core Rimmers, all our sons, and all our empathic and telepathic kids. We want the quadruple Rs, Inoyra and Relud Glith, Ida and Caitlan

Durand, the Steib brothers and the Stoeher twins. Tell them to meet us in the CIC within half an hour. You might as well get Doc Wiener to join us too. Even if the kids aren't ready for him, he can consult with the doctors. After we brief our kids, we're going to start visiting our level three kids at the hospitals, beginning with Charleston."

Alden replied, "It's in progress, Keith."

Prez added, "It's obvious we won't be making it to school this morning, Alden. Let Jason and Trinity Taylor know what's going on, so we're not expected."

Kerry answered, "While Alden's doing those tasks, I've informed Julio and Jesse to gather the Des Moines empaths and telepaths. George is passing the word at Orlando headquarters. The Teddy Bear Brigade at Camp Little Eagle has been notified."

"Let's keep this organized," Prez ordered. "Pacific Rim Division will start at Charleston. Des Moines can start at Blank. HQ and Camp Little Eagle can start in Philadelphia. We'll swap around hospitals daily as necessary."

Clearly showing his relief, Danny giggled, "You guys are awesome, Prez."

"We're a team, Danny," Prez smiled. "Every division will help, as much as it can, I'm sure."

Joining Prez at the workstation and stopping behind his seated husband, Keith smirked, "We went through hell Wednesday night rescuing those kids. They'll get all the help we can give them." Keith then went to check on Dee, Gage, Richie and Sammy. Of course, Keith was naked and inadvertently gave Danny, Marc and Doctor Howard a brief show as he walked away from the camera. Danny and Marc widely grinned, but Doc Howard showed no visible sign that

anything surprising had happened.

Prez nodded, "If the kids need extra time, they can have that too, but we want them here with us, as soon as they're able and ready. Right now, they have video in their rooms showing very little activity, because it's so early here. Once we get showered, dressed, and brief our kids, we'll be there, dudes. If you want to tell the level three kids anything, tell them help is on the way. Kewl?"

"Very kewl," Danny and Marc chorused.

"We'll see you soon. Prez out." The video connection ended. Prez turned in the chair to find Richie squinting at him. Prez chuckled, "Are you gonna count down, Richie?"

Going to his poppa, Richie complained, "I was havin' a real nice dream when Alden woke us."

Prez lifted his son, parked him on his lap, and grinned, "Was Jimmy in the dream?"

Richie smiled, "Course!"

Nodding, Prez sniggered, "You've got a really good boyfriend already. How kewl is that?"

"The kewlest!" Richie cheered.

Standing in the doorway and listening to the conversation, Keith quickly announced, "All you AIs are to refrain from waking mini-Rimmers who are having nice dreams about their significant others."

Alden giggled, "Yes Sir!"

"Does that mean that you are authorizing us to go on flagpole

patrol?" Kerry asked with a wicked giggle.

Keith chuckled, "Tents in the middle of the sheet are the best clues."

"Daddy!" Richie incredulously giggled, "Jimmy don't gimme a stiffy all'a time; only when we're kissin'!"

Struggling to hold back his laughter, Keith nodded and giggled, "Lesson learned."

"You and Jimmy will be our secret weapons," Prez smiled. "We've got lots of really scared kids that need our help."

Sliding down off Prez's lap, Richie nodded, "What're we waitin' for?" and went into the master bedroom to run his bath.

Taking Prez in his arms, Keith softly giggled, "Everything poppa does and says, Richie imitates. You need to be really careful, T'hy'la."

Nodding, Prez sniggered, "I already am. He'll never see me having a hissy fit." After a quick kiss, they went into the bathroom to relieve themselves.

While his daddy and poppa were standing at the toilet, Richie sat in the tub and asked, "Tell me again why Jimmy couldn't sleep over last night, and why Gage and Sammy needed breaks too?"

Prez answered, "It's real simple, Richie. Think of a couple as two separate people. As a couple, you act as one, doing stuff together, right?"

"Right."

Prez explained, "And then there's you alone, and Jimmy alone,

so really, there are three separate states you can be in. Me and daddy started as friends at seven, and had to be apart way more than we wanted. So we decided the best way to encourage you to be yourself, as well as half of a couple, is to split the time in thirds. You and Jimmy were together Saturday at the beach house. By Sunday, we saw you guys were serious. So, Sunday and Monday night you and Jimmy got to sleep together. Last night was your night to be only you, with us and with your brothers."

Finished at the bowl, Keith went to Richie at the tub to add, "Think of it as sharing your time with both families, Richie. Me and Poppa talked with Sean and Troy, so that we all get to be happy and spend time together. Since Dillon's with Scott, Derrick and Mike were part of the same conversation. We love seeing our boys hookin' up together, but at the same time, we want family time too. By splitting the time in those three ways, you and Jimmy can be here one night, then with Sean and Troy another night, and then home with us and your brothers the next night. It's a compromise, so that we all get to have the best times together."

Keith went to the shower and stepped inside. Prez checked, "Do you understand, Richie?"

Nodding, Richie sighed, "I guess. I still dreamed about him. That means I missed him."

"Me and daddy only got to have sleep-overs Fridays and Saturdays," Prez patiently reminded. Heading into the shower with Keith, Prez offered, "We missed each other and dreamed of each other too. We think this compromise is best for everyone. Instead of only two nights a week together, like me and daddy had, you and Jimmy only have two nights a week apart. So you and Jimmy can grow in our family, and in Sean's and Troy's family, and as a couple and as individuals. It's all good because we all get to have time

together and be happy."

Soaped up and starting a slippery grind with Prez, Keith said, "All the Core Rimmers really love their sons. You guys make our jobs so much easier, especially when we're greeting newbies. These kids we're about to go meet are really scared, Richie. Since all of us are different ages, we can approach this job as a really big team. Maybe some of the kids need hugs. So, we all get to give them hugs, and show them what their new life will be like here. That's our job today; to show these kids they've already got friends. Before we get them here, we can show them that we're family, brothers and sisters."

Chapter 26

Charleston, SC, AI Hospital

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 12:19PM

While the Core Rimmers prepared for their day, Marc, Danny and Doctor Hubbard made the rounds. Danny walked into a semi private room where two eight-year-old boys lay in beds, intently watching the television mounted high on the wall across from them.

Pretending to check the charts and not saying a word, Danny listened to Alden's voice on the television, calmly and gently saying, "This is the lavatory in dormitory three at Ewa Beach. Those four boys at the sinks are four of the Pacific Rim Division leadership team. The tallest and largest, brown haired boy is Jason Montigua. We call him Jay, just like his partner of three years, the blond boy beside him, whose name is Christopher Stokley. Beside Chris is Scott Shetley. Jay, Chris and Scott are fourteen years old. Beside Scott is his boyfriend, Lance Kinchen. Lance is thirteen years old. All four were made leaders yesterday. They're awake now and brushing their teeth, preparing to come visit all of you kids here. Visiting you guys is their first real mission, so they're anxious about meeting you. Of course, being anxious, that means they're a little afraid too. Are you afraid of meeting them?"

Not realizing Alden was an AI, or that he could see and hear them, one boy shrugged and the other nodded. To the boy that nodded, the four naked teens were huge and very muscular. Even thirteen-year-old Lance, the shortest and least developed of the four, was intimidating. Pouring on charm and understanding, manners that Danny had never heard from any of the Clan AI's, Alden pleasantly encouraged, "Please don't be scared. Let me assure you, all the Clan kids you'll be meeting this afternoon are the kindest, most caring

people in the whole world. Some of them are responsible for rescuing you."

Alden paused to ask, "Danny, which orphanages are these boys from?"

After scanning both charts, Danny answered, "Los Angeles and San Jose."

"Perfect!" Alden cheered, and changed the audio/video feed to the bedroom where John and Stephen could be seen dressing. Alden introduced John and Stephen, and then added, "They were leaders of the team that rescued kids from San Jose. They're very special boys. Stephen is an empath, which means he can pickup and understand what you're feeling. That means he'll know what you need moments after entering the room, without either of you saying a word. John's an empath and has learned telepathy. That means he can feel your feelings and read your exact thoughts. Of all the very special people you'll meet today, you'll meet others that are exactly like John and Stephen. None of you guys will have to worry about anything anymore. They'll know exactly what scares you and make it better. It sounds too good to be true, doesn't it?"

Danny saw both boys mutely nod before moving on to the next room. Out in the hall, Danny softly muttered, "Un-fucking-believable. If I didn't know better, I'd swear that wasn't Alden."

Into Danny's sub-vocal, Alden giggled, "VI interfaces, Grandpa. Be nice or be wet!"

Danny grinned, "Which body of water are you planning on dropping me into now?"

"How embarrassed would you like to be?" Alden evilly snickered. "Prez and Keith are almost done making love in their

shower. Next door, Derrick and Mike are also getting busy. I could drop you into either shower, or maybe you'd rather see for yourself that Sean Moorhead has one of the longest and thickest cocks in the Clan. Of course, you'll only see the half that Troy doesn't have in his mouth."

"A Rimmer isn't rimming?" Danny giggled, "I am surprised."

"That's Drew's and Jerry's preferred activity this morning," Alden sniggered.

Danny giggled, "Save the dunk for after our kids get helped, Alden," and stepped into the next room. Another two boys were being introduced to Kaleo and Tory, who were busily helping their youngest sons towel off. Mark and Marv were delightfully squealing, while Leonard and Russ laughed at their brothers and dads. For the first time in a week, Danny saw two small smiles form on two of his California Orphanage patients. From across the hall, Danny heard giggling.

Danny hurried to see which patients were actually giggling. Marc stepped out of the room, leaned against the corridor wall and uncontrollably laughed, "I retract my previous assumption. This not only *could* work, it's already working."

Danny grinned, "Who's giggling?"

"Greg Harmon started and Clark Pope joined him," Marc giggled. "It was the little guys that set them off, or Kaleo's evil cackling, I think."

Danny nodded and smiled, "I've only been in two rooms, but all four boys showed more interest in what they're seeing than anything else I've witnessed."

"Your four plus my six," Marc smiled.

Coming down the hall, Doc Hubbard added, "Plus the six girls I was just with. What completely confounds me is how none of us here even considered this solution."

Danny shrugged, "It wasn't a medical or psychological method."

Marc offered, "Paul, Reyes and Ryan never mentioned the level two kids while they were with us Monday."

"I knew the level two kids were expected at Ewa Beach," Danny smirked, "but something this simple never occurred to me."

From the room Marc had just left, both boys yelled, "OMIGOD!" No similar outburst had been heard from any of the kids, so Danny, Marc and Doc Hubbard hurried into the room. In the bed closest to the door, fourteen-year-old Clark was weeping. In the next bed, fifteen-year-old Greg pointed at the screen and shouted, "THAT'S HIM! HE'S THE ONE THAT SAVED US!" He then began crying and panting like he had expended all his energy.

Danny, Marc and Doc Hubbard turned to the television. Partially hunched over and pulling up his boardies over boxer shorts was Prez. Alden giggled, "Please meet Family Clan Short Pacific Rim Director, Preston O'Brian. Everyone calls him Prez. He's my boss and your leader, as soon as you're all well enough to join him, and his husband, Keith, at Ewa Beach."

Clark whimpered, "He's coming here... today?"

"OMIGOD!" Greg hollered, "We're... but... When? He can't! Not like this!"

From nine other rooms up and down the hall, nurse call buttons

were pressed. Danny and Doc Hubbard raced out of the room. Noticing blood pressure monitors spiking, Marc firmly ordered, "Take it easy, guys."

"You don't get it!" Greg impatiently panted.

Covering his face, Clark sobbed, "We was dirty and naked when he saw us."

"We're not any better now either," Greg cried.

Gesturing at the beeping monitors, Marc pleaded, "Guys, slow down. You are better now than you were last week; you're clean and healthy. I've met Prez, and all the Pacific Rim leaders. If you treat them how you're acting now, you'll embarrass them, causing them to blush and giggle. They'll tell you that they're just regular guys. In every respect, they are normal teenagers."

Marc paused to hear Danny in his sub-vocal saying, "Every kid from San Francisco went nuts the moment they saw Prez. Believe it or not, we've got to calm these kids down."

"Alden," Marc loudly called, "find a Platinum Habits concert video and play that for the San Francisco group."

Danny loudly laughed, "*Do not* play 'Knocking At Your Back Door', Alden!" Remembering the beach house performance and three Rimmers shaking their tushes for the audience, Marc uncontrollably cracked up.

In every room that had a San Francisco kid, the video feed switched to the prior afternoon's concert of ballads and love songs. Almost immediately, kids began to relax to the music. Soon after Reyes began singing 'Just My Imagination', Clark Pope, a fair skinned African-American boy, went completely limp and slumped in his bed.

Checking Clark's vital signs, and then glancing at the television, Marc quickly confirmed that the boy had fainted. He pressed the button to lower the top half of the mattress so blood could return to Clark's brain, allowing the boy to come around naturally.

Greg wondered, "Is he okay?"

Nodding, Marc giggled, "Yeah. He'll be fine."

"That dude singing is *really* cute," Greg purred.

Marc giggled, "Yeah, but he's got a boyfriend already." He made a mental note to tell Reyes to be extra slow and careful around Clark. All the level three orphans were doing much better, but sudden changes in blood pressure could cause another fainting spell.

"Lucky guy," Greg grinned.

Marc gently asked, "Would you tell me a little about yourself, Greg?"

"My parents died June of 2000," Greg flatly answered. Looking back up at the television, Greg sighed, "I was put in that place, and it was worse than I imagined. The kids fought over food. I had to teach them to share. I never went to school again. Some of the kids never saw a school in their entire lives." Beginning to cry again, Greg muttered, "I tried and tried, but the adults wouldn't listen and didn't care. They locked us in our rooms, about twenty hours of every day, only letting us out to eat, clean up after ourselves and go to the bathroom. Even when we were together to eat, we weren't allowed to talk. We had a bucket in the closet if we needed..."

Reaching for tissues to wipe away the boy's tears, Marc softly said, "That's plenty, Greg. You must realize that you saved kids at

your orphanage."

"I didn't save 'em all," Greg bitterly wept. "Some of the worst kids were taken away from there. I don't know where they went."

"I can tell you did your best though," Marc assured.

Wiping his eyes and trying to pull himself together, Greg whimpered, "Doctor Furst?"

"Yes?"

"Could I please put on regular clothes?"

"Are you ready to try and stand on your new foot?"

"I have to be. I don't want Prez seeing me like this, in a gown."

Taking off his white smock and laying it on the edge of the bed, Marc instructed, "First of all, enough of Doctor Furst. My name is Marc. I'll support you, get you in the shower and stay with you until your done. Then we'll get you into clothes, the quick and easy way."

Greg scowled, "Which quick and easy way?"

"Transportation out naked, and back fully dressed," Marc grinned. Thoughtfully humming, Greg began to turn and pull his legs off the edge of the bed. Marc wondered, "Is something wrong, Greg?"

Shrugging, Greg blushed, "I'm gay. Don't freak out if I pop a woody."

Marc smiled, "I promise, it won't be a problem for any doctor here."

"Without knowing it or really trying, I probably made all the

dudes in our orphanage room gay."

Reaching around the teenager to untie the knot in his hospital gown, Marc explained, "You didn't make anyone gay, Greg; that's simply not possible. Guys may be homosexual, or bisexual, or completely heterosexual. Being a teenager, you can't always control it. As far as I'm concerned, you simply gave the boys some enjoyment in an otherwise dismal situation."

"We did everything though," Greg sorrowfully mumbled.

Marc shrugged then asked, "Did you force anyone to do anything?"

"No."

"Then you did what almost every boy does, and with the boys you were closest to. You don't need to feel guilty about that or anything else. The only guilty people at your home were the adults."

Greg wondered, "What happened to them?"

Marc called, "Alden?"

Over Marc's comm-badge, Alden flatly replied, "For fifteen violations against the Safe Haven Act, multiplied twenty times for each kid in the home, they were executed on the spot."

Greg blinked then smirked, "All the kids from my orphanage need to know that. I've had nightmares, so I'll bet other kids have too." He started wiggling his buns off the bed and Marc quickly took his left arm, to support the side that now had an android foot attached. When the foot hit the floor for the first time, Greg grimaced and moaned.

Pulling the boy's arm over his shoulders, Marc asked, "How does it feel?"

Greg scowled, "Kind o' asleep, but really cold."

Marc smiled, "Perfect. That's exactly the answer I hoped to hear." Marc guided Greg and pulled the IV stand along with them. They went into the room's bathroom, where Greg took his first shower alone in four years. In the bathroom with Greg, Marc at last got to explain that he had an android replacement foot that would grow with him. Supporting himself on the IV stand, Greg also got the standard Clan orientation lecture while Marc toweled him dry.

Coming into the room and greeting Clark, who was now awake and watching the Platinum Habits concert, Danny peeked into the bathroom to cheerfully tell Marc, "They're not even here yet and ten other kids with new toes, fingers, hands, arms, legs and feet are out of bed, getting cleaned up and dressed. One of those ten isn't even from San Francisco!"

"I wanna shower and real clothes too!" Clark yelled from his bed.

Gesturing to the main room, Greg giggled, "Guess who's awake. The whole time we was in that hell hole, he barely spoke."

Clark called, "Greg?"

"Yeah?"

"The next time you take a shower with a cute blond doctor, but without me, you'd better hope you can run and I can't!"

Watching Greg and Marc turn redder by the millisecond, Danny cracked up laughing. Danny was about to ask a question before Clark

and Greg proved they had voices and could speak, but now he had to wait to stop laughing.

Sadly shaking his head, Marc tossed the damp towel over Danny's head and smirked, "Since you can speak, Greg, would you care to tell me why you haven't said much for a week?"

Nodding, Greg grinned, "I didn't trust you." Losing his smile and becoming very serious, Greg softly explained, "At our orphanage, there are three other boys like me and Clark, who were there less than four years. There's only one other girl who was there about two years. Other than the six, almost all the other littlest kids have been there too long to remember much other than hell. It's those littlest kids I'm worried about. They can barely understand and hardly ever speak. Without us oldest six, the other fourteen won't budge for nobody."

From beyond the bathroom doorway, a deeper voice asked, "What do you need to do, Greg?" A step inside the bathroom, Danny turned to the familiar voice, smiled and wrapped an arm around his Clan brother. Further in the room, just outside the shower and supporting Greg, Mark turned his head. Standing there naked before Prez, as he had been a week earlier, Greg whimpered, started breathing quickly and heavily, and then began to uncontrollably cry. Prez tapped Danny on the shoulder and stepped into the bathroom, softly asking, "Give us a few minutes alone, please, guys?"

Danny nodded and went out to the room, where Keith was leaning over the bed and consoling Clark.

On his way out of the bathroom, Marc briefly instructed, "It's his first minutes on a new foot, Prez."

Nodding and forcing a small smile, Prez took Greg in his arms, and assured, "I've got him." Marc closed the bathroom door behind

him, then he and Danny went to check other rooms.

The floor of the new Charleston AI hospital that had been deathly quiet for a week was bustling with activity. The Rimmers had invaded the hospital with more than sixty helpers, not including Doc Wiener. Up and down the hall, Core Rimmers, their sons, boyfriends, and the gifted empaths and telepaths were checking on their newest brothers and sisters. Televisions played Platinum Habits ballads. Doctors, nurses and med-bots scurried from room-to-room, ensuring that the orphans didn't over extend themselves.

Gently and carefully, Prez tried to quiet the teenaged boy he had rescued and talked with the prior week. Already somewhat aware that Greg had tried to help kids in his orphanage, Prez had specifically told Alden to transport him to where Greg was. Similarly, Derrick and Mike transported to another room where a teenage boy from Los Angeles was recovering.

The first words from Greg that Prez barely understood were "Thank you," and "I love you."

Shedding quiet tears, Prez softly assured, "And I love you, and about four hundred and eighty other brothers and sisters. Do you believe me, Greg?"

Nodding, Greg sobbed, "I do. Only someone that has that much love could do what you did."

Purposefully conveying certainty and enthusiasm, Prez reminded, "You did the same, loving the kids in your home, under the worst circumstances."

With his face still buried against Prez's chest, Greg muttered, "Not like you though."

"Yeah, you did," Prez gently insisted. "I saw it for myself. Every kid in that kitchen was huddled up to you, as close as they could get. That tells me nineteen kids trust you. That's why I asked, what do you need to do?"

"I need to talk to the kids, but I can barely stand or walk. Marc about carried me in here."

"Then supporting you is my job. All you have to do is tell me when you're ready to start, and if your foot hurts. Then we'll park your butt in a wheelchair to finish the job. Kewl?"

Looking up at Prez with the immediate trust and love of a much younger boy, Greg wiped his eyes and smiled, "Kewl, Prez."

"Are you ready?"

Greg nodded and smiled up at his new friend, nervously admitting, "I'd do anything you told me."

Prez smiled, "We're a lot alike, bro. I do for every kid at two bases now, and I love the challenge." Reaching one arm over, Prez pulled a hand towel off the shelf and wiped Greg's face dry of tears. Prez then called Alden to get Greg dressed in "proper Pacific Rim Division attire." Leaning onto his IV stand, Greg phased out naked and back in wearing boardies and a Hawaiian button-down sport shirt.

"Awesome!" Greg excitedly gushed.

"I'll share something with you, so we can share it with all the other kids."

"Uh oh, that sounds serious."

Nodding, Prez leaned closer to help Greg stand, and to whisper,

"Every kid is awesome. It's only asshole adults that make kids believe their not awesome. Adults that have some major inferiority complex make kids believe they're awful, only so they can feel superior. What you kids are going to start learning today is that you're very important to us; each of you have value and worth."

"How can you know that, and say it like it's true?"

"It is true. It's so true that I brought a team of sixty here, and my brothers from Des Moines and Orlando are at two other hospitals. We want you kids as part of our Clan. Thousands of kids around the world are our brothers and sisters."

Shivering and shedding happy tears, Greg whimpered, "Why?"

"To change the world, bro; so what inferior adults have done will never happen again."

"You make me believe it's true."

"That's the key word, Greg - believe; believe in yourself and believe you can achieve a goal. Have a little faith and try, then watch the results."

Prez took Greg's left arm over his shoulder and led the way out of the bathroom.

As soon as Greg and Prez stepped into the room, on queue and as planned, Keith and Clark suspiciously huffed, "HARRUMPH!" Of course, Clark couldn't hold his suspicious glare and began giggling.

Keith evilly grinned, "Now I get to help Clark in and out of the shower."

"*WHAT?*" Clark incredulously squealed, "You didn't tell *me*

that!" causing Prez and Greg to crack up.

Nodding and softly chortling, Keith told Clark, "You're my brother... my recovering brother, with a new right leg, from the knee down, according to Danny. It's a slippery job, but someone's got to do it."

Prez told Greg, "Keith's my husband. I completely trust him. The question is, do you trust Clark?"

Nodding, Greg giggled, "If he's got half a brain, he'll pop a bone, but will only wash it."

Wide-eyed, Clark gasped, "I don't believe you said that!"

Prez chuckled, "Find me a teenaged dude that doesn't get a chubby in the shower, and I'll have Danny prescribe Viagra to correct the issue."

Standing in the doorway, Marc sniggered, "The old man has a renewable prescription."

From the ceiling speakers, Stevie giggled, "I'm tellin' Grandpa you said that."

Effortlessly, Keith reached behind Clark and pulled the correct string to untie his gown.

Greg grinned, "It took Marc way longer than that!"

Prez nodded and chuckled, "Keith's really good at untying knots, and opening buttons and zippers."

"And Prez is good at flashing national officials, like Presidents and Kings!" Alden playfully offered.

"I wish I had seen that," Marc giggled.

Suddenly, the TV flickered and showed a video loop of Prez, talking to Colin Powell, Gordon Rice and King Aalona, from Friday morning, where his robe repeatedly slipped open. Marc, Greg and Clark cracked up.

Bouncing his eyebrows, Keith sniggered, "That was an interesting day for our entire Clan."

Through his chucking, Prez sweetly called, "Alden?"

"Yeah, I know," Alden giggled, "my first day with a body will be spent in the diving well and with Grandma Morrison."

Obviously confused, Clark and Greg asked, "You don't have a body?"

"No, I'm the much improved, better, faster, and cuter version of that ancient doctor standing with you!" Alden replied.

Unexpectedly, Greg groaned and pulled his left foot up off the floor. Concerned, Prez asked, "Are you okay?" Hurrying over, Marc knelt before Greg.

Greg shrugged, "It was a sharp pain, like stepping on glass."

Looking up, Marc reminded Greg, "The foot is making connections with your nervous system. This time it was sharp, another time it might be heat, or a tickling sensation." He then ordered, "Wiggle your toes a little." Greg did as he was told. Then Marc used a pen to tap around the top, sides and bottom of Greg's foot, checking that each tap was felt. Standing again, Marc smiled, "It's kewl. When you feel stuff like that, take a break to wiggle your foot and toes."

Prez asked, "Is Greg good to take a walk around with me? We need to visit some of the other kids, like he said."

"He's perfectly fine and should be able to put more weight on it as he walks around," Marc assured. "By the end of today, it'll be a little like a twisted ankle. Tomorrow, I'll be complaining because he won't stay in bed."

"Just like he complains about Great-Great-Great-Great Grandpa Danny!" Kerry giggled.

Clark asked, "What about my leg?"

Marc answered, "You'll feel similar sensations all the way up to your knee. It's completely normal, and will dissipate with continued use. It would help if you wiggled your toes, rotated your ankle or flexed your knee joint."

Slowly walking toward the doorway, with Greg carefully hobbling along beside him, Prez wondered, "How're you going to deal with the kids?"

Stepping out into the hallway, Greg shrugged, "It depends on the kid. With some, I can just tell them how it is. With others, I'll have to whisper in their ear. Now that I think about it, seeing you again might make them freak out."

Prez asked, "How can we correct that?"

Grimacing, Greg blinked and muttered, "I'm not sure. You'll need to hang back a bit, Prez. Maybe I could use crutches?"

Having an idea, Prez grinned, "How about a piggy-back ride?"

Greg gasped, "No!"

Prez playfully sang, "Yes," and maneuvered to stand in front of Greg, mindful to keep supporting his left side.

Embarrassed to near mortification, Greg squealed, "No, Prez!" Reaching back, Prez lifted Greg's left leg first, and then his right leg. Shedding happy tears, Greg held Prez around the shoulders, giggling, "No wasn't a good answer?"

"Think about it," Prez grinned, "the kids need to see you trusting me, so I'm not some major super-hero to them. That's the kind of attitude that nearly drove me insane."

Greg giggled, "Nearly?"

Carrying Greg down the hall, Prez sniggered, "So, I play bizarre video games and walk into girls' changing rooms. I know another Clan leader that blows up trees for grins and kicks."

"I *really* don't know about this!" Greg cackled.

"I'll explain it to you some time soon."

Back in the room that Prez and Greg had just left, Marc watched Keith helping Clark to stand on his new leg for the first time. While Keith supported Clark, Marc quickly unsnapped the gown sleeve, so it could be removed without interfering with the IV. Tossing the gown onto the bed, Marc softly said, "Your leg's going to feel a little like it's asleep, Clark. Keith, he's going to need almost constant support to stay balanced in the shower. All three of us are going to get wet in the process."

"I noticed you're damp and already figured that, Doctor Furst," Keith sniggered. "What I can do in under ten-seconds, Alden can do in less than a second."

Seeing Marc getting undressed, Clark squealed, "I'm so embarrassed! All I want is real clothes and to be normal again."

Keith chuckled, "When we're done with this shower, you'll see on TV that normal in Hawaii means being naked. You've got the same goods hangin' as every other dude, Clark. Chill, bro." Marc took over supporting Clark. Keith quickly ordered, "Get me in my birthday suit, Alden." Keith phased out and right back in again.

Covering his eyes with one hand, Clark whimpered, "Which one's cuter than the other? I'm gonna die!"

"No," Marc giggled, "that possibility has already been avoided, which is why you've got a brand new leg. I spent most of the day Saturday naked in Hawaii, with Keith and all the Core Rimmers, and all their sons."

Nodding, Keith took over for Marc, gently telling Clark, "Keep your hands on my shoulders, bro. You step forward and then I'll step back. About your ex-care givers in California, those fuck-wads kept you naked because they were too greedy to give you clothes. In a couple o' days, you'll have plenty of clothes. Then *you* can choose to stay dressed or get naked, just like the rest of our Clan. The only place we've told our kids that they have to be dressed is at our kitchen and dining room. Guys in our dorms decide what to wear, and if they want to wear anything at all." Keith gradually walked backwards toward the bathroom, softly instructing, "Slow and easy, bro."

Wobbling unsteadily and feeling Keith's strong arms supporting him, Clark wept, "I can't believe... after all you've done... you're doing this too."

Marc called, "Stevie, tell Clark what else is going on around this floor."

Stevie answered, "Prez is carrying Greg into another room, piggy-back. AJ, Kaleo, Jay, Mike and Sean are all in showers with other boys that have new feet and legs. Using their Mr. Fuzzy puppets, the Rimmers' sons are all talking to the youngest kids. John, Stephen, the quadruple R's, Caitlin and Ida Durand, the Steibs, and the Stoeher twins are all doing their empath and telepath things. It's very quiet, but those orphans are grinning and giggling, so it must be kewl. Nurses are helping some of the girls adjust to their new fingers, toes and limbs. Doc Hubbard is briefing Doc Wiener about the kids in a conference room." He paused to giggle, "Grandpa is talking to himself, but me, Kerry and Alden keep offering silly answers to his sillier questions."

Marc sniggered, "Danny will need therapy tonight."

Stevie sarcastically giggled, "Do you *really* think that might help?" Softly chortling, Marc and Keith slowly shook their heads.

After all that, Clark was still shedding nervous tears. With a nod from Keith, Marc turned on the shower. Keith shivered, "The water's still cool, Marc. Prez would be bitching about shrinkage."

Marc giggled, "None of you Rimmers need to worry much about *that!*"

Keith locked eyes with Clark and explained, "The best way for this to get done is for you to trust us. Can you do that?"

Nodding, Clark whimpered, "I have to."

"You hold my shoulders to keep yourself steady," Keith instructed. "I'll wash your front, Marc will wash your back, and it'll all be over really quick."

Taking his place behind Clark, Marc shared, "Keith, you need to

know, the boys in their orphanage had sex, as a way to have some enjoyment and fun."

"This is not a bad thing," Keith replied, and started soaping up a washcloth.

Clark sniffled and sobbed, "It's not?"

Shaking his head, Keith began washing Clark's neck and shoulders. He sighed, "That orphanage was bad enough for Prez and I to execute those two assholes. Anything you kids did that didn't cause you more pain and suffering is kewl." Looking past Clark, Keith asked, "They have no sexually transmitted diseases?"

"None," Marc assured and soaped up a second washcloth, adding, "A few boys had to be circumcised and kept anesthetized for three days. Clark and Greg are among that group."

"That's because the fuck-wads didn't let them bathe or keep their willies clean," Keith grumbled. Seeing Clark crack a small smile, Keith grinned, "Prez is circumcised and has a sex drive that matches mine. I'm sure we'll all agree, it's better to lose the foreskin than lose the desire to get an erection and have sex." Seeing Clark crying again, Keith asked, "What's wrong, bro?" Clark blushed and looked away, at the shower wall to his right.

Noticing that Clark had a stiffy, Keith asked, "It hurts?" Clark shook his head.

Keith sighed, "That's completely normal and understandable. Like I told you before, at our base, you and all you dudes are going to learn about real loving relationships. If Greg is your best friend and not simply a convenient sex buddy, you'll be free to become real boyfriends and partners. Please don't be embarrassed. I know those fuck-wads taught you guys nothing of any value. We'll teach you all

you need to know and be the best examples we can possibly be."

Marc prompted, "Tell him why, Keith."

"Prez is my husband," Keith began. "Derrick and Mike, who you'll meet later, are our best friends and our lovers. The four of us grew up together, became musicians together, and learned about our bodies together. The four of us, my two brothers and their partners were made Clan leaders. That gave us the ability to be big brothers for everyone that needs big brothers.

"We didn't raid those California orphanages because we *had* to, Clark. We *wanted* to correct obvious problems. We *wanted* more brothers and sisters. As happy as we were two weeks ago, before becoming Clan, we're even happier now. What makes us happier are four hundred happy brothers and sisters. When all you guys get out of the hospital, it'll be four hundred and eighty brothers and sisters. Anyone with a heart that had the resources, tools and training we have, would do what we're doing for all the kids."

Clark sobbed, "I'm a worthless orphan!"

"No, you're not," Keith and Marc chorused.

Keith firmly explained, "The orphanage made you feel and think that way, Clark. Every kid everywhere has worth. All you need is to be shown that you're valued. I value you; Marc does, Prez, Danny and all the doctors here value you. I'm certain that Greg values you too. Soon, you'll have so many brothers and sisters who will think you're really kewl. Then you can start showing them that you think they're really kewl too."

Coming into the bathroom with Stephen at his side, John teased, "You know, I could've done this, without embarrassing Clark into an

early grave."

Marc cracked up. Keith smirked, "Tell me you're not levitating kids."

"I'm not levitating kids," John innocently giggled, causing Stephen to crack up and turn around to walk back out of the bathroom. John cackled, "Now look what you did, bro! You broke my husband!"

Keith smirked, "Clark Pope, this is my youngest brother, John."

Clark whined, "I need to lay down and ask for a doctor."

"Why don't I count?" Marc giggled.

With a chance to poke fun at the damp teen android doctor, John joked, "You're still wet behind the ears, Marc."

"I must've been in that orphanage too long," Clark whimpered.

"Nah!" John giggled, "We got you out before serious damage occurred to any of you." The soapy washcloth Keith had been using flew up before Clark. It then dove down, wrapped itself around Clark's stiff dick and quickly washed it. John smiled, "There, this whole drawn out shower can be ended, quick as a bunny." From the other room, Stephen roared. John giggled, "Alden, give Clark the special dry and dress treatment, and then let him land in front of me, bro."

Alden laughed, "One dry cleaned future Rimmer, comin' up!" IV stand and all, Clark phased out of the shower and phased back in, completely dry from his hair to his toes, and dressed, standing directly before John. Gasping in shock, Clark's hands dropped onto John's

shoulders.

Smiling up at Clark, John assured, "I held up a forty story building, bro. I can easily support you." To prove the point, John levitated a few inches so he was looking Clark in the eye. Stepping out of the shower, Keith handed Marc a towel then pulled the last one for himself. John asked, "Marc, have you done swimming pool therapy with any of these kids with new limbs?"

Drying off, Marc answered, "It was on the list of things to do Sunday or Monday, but the kids weren't ready to try, and then we figured that many of them never learned to swim. With three extra days recovering, they're ready to stand and walk. Our intention was to get them able to jog and run before sending them to their new home. We're short on physical therapists around here, so doctors will be helping with that recovery process."

John nodded and smiled, "We'll start right away with no impact therapy." Rising up off the floor a few inches, Clark nervously squealed and whimpered. Backing out of the bathroom, John instructed, "Move your legs like you're walking, Clark. Let's get that new leg and foot moving right." Seeing Clark trying, John encouraged, "Good, dude. Wiggle your toes, bend and twist your ankle, and then try to bend your knee again. Once you can manage the basics, I'll put you down on the floor, but still support most of your weight." Leading Clark out of the bathroom and into the room, John introduced Stephen to Clark.

Half dressed and holding his shirt, Marc wondered, "When did you learn physical therapy, John?"

Pointing to his sub-vocal, John grinned, "Alden's feeding me summaries. I never knew how important a toe was for balance, especially the big toe, until a little while ago." Calling for Stephen,

John asked his husband to demonstrate leg, ankle and toe movements. As soon as Stephen agreed, he rose up off the floor, slightly higher than Clark, so the newbie with an android leg could see and reproduce John's requested actions. Marc quietly left the room to check on the other patients.

A boy about John's age popped into the room, causing John, Stephen and Clark to pause. "Hi ya!" the sandy brown haired boy cheerfully said, "I'm Skylar Richardson. My daddies said I could come stay with you guys for a while. Whatchya doin'?"

Noticing pale purple eyes, John giggled, "Your daddies are Kyle and Tyler?"

Rapidly nodding, Skylar giggled, "No fair peeking, John! I don't go gallivanting around rooms in your head... yet anyway."

John grinned, "I never gallivant in public places. It was your eyes and your surname that gave you away, Sky."

"Oh! Well, then how can I help?"

"We have a timing issue to resolve with our newbies."

"Time-shmime! I can fix that."

John sniggered, "I know you can."

Coming out of the bathroom and seeing Clark and Stephen floating, and John with a new kid, Keith asked, "Who's this, bro?"

"Hi ya, Keith!" Skylar cheered and hurried over to give the teenager a quick hug. Stepping back and looking up, he giggled, "My daddy says you're gonna teach me how to surf."

Seeing purple eyes, Keith grinned, "Not in hospitals and not

without sedation."

"I promise to keep all the waves under ten feet," Skylar giggled. "Of course, if my bro is there too..."

"That's how we got in trouble last time!" Keith laughed.

John wondered, "Which brother are you referring to, Sky?"

"My twin, Xavier. He's helping at Des Moines."

Keith and John incredulously chorused, "Twin Mikyvis?"

Nodding, Skylar giggled, "My daddies was usin' rubbers, so we figure we bounced into twins. That's our story and we're sticking to it!"

Sighing, Keith stepped out into the hall and tapped his comm-badge, urgently calling, "Julio, come in, please."

"Des Moines insane asylum; where problems appear out of mid-air!" Julio giggled in reply.

"You're telling me!" Keith laughed, "You've got the other twin by now, I assume?"

"Are you sure there are only two? This kid's bouncing around here like a super ball that was shot out of a bazooka in a gymnasium!"

"I'm calling an emergency meeting," Keith sniggered. "When we're done at the hospitals later, all available Clan Leadership teams are requested to gather at Maui."

"Bring cots for us; Xavier is wearing us out just watching him running up and down the halls to bring stuff to everyone!"

Keith queried, "Running?" and peeked back inside the room. Skylar had transformed himself into a teenager. Inside a time bubble with Clark, John and Stephen, Skylar had taken over for Stephen and was exercising his legs, showing Clark the therapy routines. From outside the time bubble, it appeared that a movie projector was running amuck at quadruple speed, and everyone inside was scurrying around at ridiculous speeds.

"Yeah, running... nonstop... as in never even stops to take a breath or a drink."

Feeling somewhat woozy, Keith turned away from the room and leaned against a wall, reminding Julio, "The meeting's at Maui. We'll meet you there. I'd suggest a time, but I can't seem to get one stabilized."

"Xavier said that Sky would work out the time; he's gonna be busy helping Mini and Alien with some gardening," Julio stated, his tone reflecting his amazement at the events around him.

"That figures," Keith sighed. "We'll need relaxation and recovery time anyway. I think I'll go find something more normal to keep me occupied, like bungee jumping. I'll see you later tonight, bro."

"Kewl," Julio weakly muttered, "Later, Keith."

A moment after Keith ended the communication, John, Stephen and Skylar walked out of the room. Skylar appeared as a ten year old boy, once again. Keith asked, "Where's Clark?"

"Resting in bed," Stephen grinned, and held up his left arm to show Keith the time on his watch. It was still set to Hawaii time, but obviously almost two hours had passed inside the time bubble. Sadly

shaking his head, Keith began softly chortling.

Skylar giggled, "What? Daddy said to help, but not fix everything for everyone. Clark did all the work. I only sped up his therapy in this timeline. To him, it was still almost two hours of work."

Looking up at his brother, John smiled, "Clark's able to stand and walk. Now he's hungry, which is an even better sign. We're gonna find Prez and the rest of the team, so we can introduce Sky to everyone. Then we'll get some more kids through physical therapy." Knowing what his older brother was thinking, John huffed and then smirked, "I don't know what you're so worried about. Sky can help our division in so many ways, I can't begin to count them all. Besides that stuff, how'd you like to talk music composition with Mozart, or go back to 1962 and hear The Beatles perform, before the crazed screaming girls drowned out the sound? Not to mention, a bunch of these level three kids will definitely be home with us in Ewa Beach this weekend. By this time next Wednesday, we'll have all of 'em."

Nodding and then focusing on Skylar, Keith grinned, "I'm really glad you're here to help with these kids. Anti-energy beings that can do just about anything make some of us nervous, especially our parents. A perfect example is your brother, Xavier, zooming around Blank Children's hospital. Julio sounded like he was becoming exhausted just watching him."

Partially covering his face with one hand, Stephen giggled, "Look down the hall, Keith."

Doing so, Keith saw Chris and Jay walking in extreme slow motion. Behind the two teenagers, Keith saw a small boy pulling his IV stand and reaching for the Mr. Fuzzy puppet hanging out of Jay's back pocket. Gage and Jonah stepped out of another room, turned to

one another and seemed to freeze where they stood. Obviously, Skylar had put the four of them in a time bubble.

"Wasting time just became a worry of the past," John sniggered. "Sky's a Period Rimmer!"

Sky giggled, "Sweet! Now that I've got a Rimmer handle, I can do the time bubble thing whenever I want, ya know? We can get these kids caught up on therapy pretty easily."

John nodded, "We'll do that." He turned to Stephen and asked, "Do you wanna help or join Frankie and Wade?"

After thoughtfully humming, Stephen said, "I'll find our sons, hon." He planted a quick kiss on John's cheek, then giggled, "If I keep doin' physical therapy with kids, I'll sleep from the time we get home until tomorrow morning."

"Sky and I are working on some ideas so we can all decompress a little when we're done," John shared. Knowing Keith's next concern, John said, "We won't need security. Don't worry about a thing, bro."

Rather than think about it, Keith went back into the room with Clark.

Further down the hall, Jay remained behind the wall, but stuck his Mr. Fuzzy past the doorframe and into the room, squeaking, "My Fuzzy instincts tell me there are future Rimmers in this room."

The two tween boys in the room grinned at the hand puppet, and then at each other. Hearing nothing from inside the room, Chris slid in close to his lover, displayed his Mr. Fuzzy into the room, and squeaked, "Even un-fuzzy future Rimmers are allowed to giggle before initiation."

"We'll have to get them fuzzy fast," Jay squeaked, and then led the way into the room. Pausing only two paces inside the door, Jay introduced himself and Chris, telling the newbies that Chris was rescued by the Clan on Friday, and he was rescued on Saturday. He had Alden transport Mr. Fuzzy puppets on each bed, and then asked the boys their names.

Both boys quickly put on their Mr. Fuzzy puppets. After checking with each other, the blond boy in the closest bed whispered, "I'm Vernon Williamson." He then turned to the boy in the other bed. That boy seemed more interested in the Mr. Fuzzy puppet on his left hand. It clearly said that the boy hadn't had a toy of any sort to play with in a very long time. Vernon softly told the two teenagers, "That's David Walsh."

Holding up his Mr. Fuzzy, Chris grinned, "You guys need some stuff." He then ordered, "Alden, get our two new Rimmers the toy replicas of the Enterprise, bro."

After the toys appeared on the boys' laps, Alden replied, "There ya go, Chris. So you know, Vernon has a new left arm, from the elbow down. David has a new right hand. They're from Los Angeles, and were rescued by Derrick and Mike."

Nodding, Jay said, "Then we'll need some special toys, that will help them exercise their hands."

"I've got it covered," Alden replied. A second later, small rubber balls landed on both beds.

In moments, each boy had several toys to help exercise their hands and arms. To try and get the boys more comfortable, Chris said, "We're here so you guys are ready to join us in Hawaii in a few days. These toys are just the start of your new lives. Soon, you'll have big

beds in big dorm rooms."

"Most rooms have only two guys in them," Jay continued, "but sometimes younger kids choose three or four to a room. Each room has beds, chairs, desks, dressers and computers for each occupant. You'll also have a television and a stereo. Whatever else you guys need, just ask and we'll do our best to make it happen."

At last, David asked, "Why?"

"Because we're family, as of this moment," Chris answered. "We're your brothers, and you're our brothers, right now."

Vernon asked, "Whadda we gotta do?"

Jay answered, "Only your best, for yourself, your brothers and sisters, and in school."

Chris gently explained, "This is the second room we've been in. We know what your old lives were like. You weren't allowed to talk; you weren't allowed to go to school; you weren't given enough food to eat. All of that has already changed. Here and at Ewa Beach, you're allowed to eat all you want; just go to the kitchen and get whatever you want. Here and at Ewa Beach, you're allowed to talk. When you're ready, at least a week after you get to Hawaii, you'll be allowed to go to school and encouraged to do the best you can."

Jay smiled, held up his Mr. Fuzzy and squeaked, "Do you guys understand?" The boys only shrugged, obviously reluctant to believe anything could change so drastically. Jay's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked, "Then let's practice with our Mr. Fuzzy puppets." He displayed the cast on his right wrist, squeaking, "I'd like to know how old each of you are. If you want to tell me, that's kewl, or you can have your Mr. Fuzzy tell me."

Vernon held up his puppet and squeaked, "I'm twelve."

"Eleven," David answered through his Mr. Fuzzy.

"We're fourteen and originally from Washington, D.C.," Chris offered.

Jay asked, "What would you guys like to know about our Clan, or Ewa Beach?"

Again, both boys clammed up and remained silent. Turning to his partner, Chris raised his Mr. Fuzzy and giggled, "That's too big a question, lover." Facing the boys again, Chris called, "Alden?"

Alden giggled, "Yes, Mr. Fuzzy Chris?"

"Can you help us out with some satellite images?"

"Sure I can."

Moving between the two beds and watching the television, Chris instructed, "First, let's show Dave and Vernon where they are in Charleston." A satellite image of the hospital and surrounding streets came up on the TV. Chris called, "Now let's take them on a quick tour cross country. Show them downtown Los Angeles, where they came from." On the TV, the image of Charleston AI hospital zoomed out, showing the coast of South Carolina, and then the image went west until it arrived at Southern California. During the moments it took for Alden to cross the United States, Chris reminded the boys, "It would take a five hour plane ride, or about five days of driving to cross country." The view zoomed in on LA. Checking to his left and to his right at Dave and Vernon, Chris instructed, "Now let's go further west and show our newbies all the islands of the Republic Of Hawaii. This is another five hour plane ride, guys." The image zoomed out and

raced across the Pacific Ocean to an image of the Hawaiian Islands.

Jay smiled, "That's our home and it'll be yours too, as soon as you're well enough." He then instructed, "Alden, zoom in on Oahu, then give these guys a slow tour from Waikiki, to Pearl Harbor, and then zoom in on our base at Ewa Beach, and lastly, show us the Oneula Beach base." All four boys watched the television monitor, but Chris and Jay occasionally glanced at Dave and Vernon. Alden got good close ups of Ewa Beach, where only a few adult employees were roaming, and of Oneula Beach, where almost all the level two orphans were seen waking and getting ready for the day. Jay explained, "Oneula Beach is going to be your new home. It's warm, like summer there in Hawaii. You'll be free to go between bases, eat what you want and when you want, play at the pools, or do just about anything you want. The concert you were watching is where we were yesterday afternoon. In four days, Platinum Habits put on two concerts for us; one Sunday night and another yesterday afternoon. About a week after you arrive, you'll be attending school with the rest of us, at Ewa Beach."

Chris asked, "What do you guys think; does that sound like fun?"

Dave grinned and nodded. Vernon giggled, "Yeah, lots."

"All we need you to do is get well," Jay's Mr. Fuzzy squeaked.

"How?" Dave wondered.

Chris answered, "By letting us help you, and by letting the doctors and nurses here help you."

Jay checked, "Can you guys do that?" Dave and Vernon nodded. Finished with the satellite tour, Jay had Alden return to the prior afternoon's concert. For the next twenty minutes, Chris helped Dave

exercise his new right hand, and Jay helped Vernon with his hand and then with his arm. During that time, both of the Core Rimmers talked to the newbies. Dave had been at the orphanage six years, and Vernon had been there five years. Dave had never set foot in a school, but Vernon had only got as far as first grade.

Marc Furst walked in during the school conversation. His presence freaked out Dave and Vernon. The two boys immediately put their toys down and clammed up. Chris and Jay hadn't met Marc, but had heard of him from Reyes and Ryan. Without delay, Jay got up and gave the teen android doctor no end of shit for disrupting the newbies. Jay towered about six inches over Marc. In moments, Marc was in Jay's headlock and getting his platinum blond hair messed up. At first, even though Marc was giggling his ass off, pleading with Dave and Vernon to play with their toys, it freaked out the small tween newbies, but Chris assured them that Jay and Marc were only feeling fuzzily foolish and playing. Dave and Vernon saw Jay's mouth moving as if he were speaking, but heard no words.

Once released by Jay, Marc giggled, "I'll come back to this room after..."

"You get appropriate doctor clothes," Jay finished. Marc phased out and back in again wearing a full-body Fuzzy. An oversized fuzzy stethoscope, hanging below Marc's knees, completed the image. At last, Dave and Vernon cracked up. With his professional demeanor destroyed, Marc walked out of the room, shaking his fuzzy head and muttering nonsense about radical Rimmers.

To help Vernon with his new arm, a four-way game of catch began. During those few minutes, Jay ordered, "Alden, get drawing paper, composition notebooks, crayons, pens and pencils for Dave and Vernon, bro. That'll help both of 'em to use their hands again."

"Add PADDs with appropriate learning materials," Chris interjected, "so we can help our new brothers learn to read and write." While they were still tossing the balls around, the requested items materialized on the night tables beside each bed. The ball was heading to Dave when he looked over at the growing pile of goodies on his night table. Dave was hit in the chest by the ball. At his surprised expression, the others in the room couldn't help softly chortling. Of course, an eleven-year-old kept in confined quarters didn't see much humor in getting hit with a ball, even though it was very softly thrown, and pouted. Chris hurried to him and offered a hug, giggling, "It was the look on your face we were giggling at, Dave. When you're playing catch, you have to pay attention. Luckily, this was a soft rubber ball only being tossed around a room. A baseball would've really hurt. Kewl?"

"Kewl," Dave softly replied.

Still giggling over Marc's ranting and body Fuzzy, Danny Page walked into the room with his white doctor smock tossed over his arm. Wearing blue jeans and a polo shirt, Doctor Page had transformed into thirteen-year-old Danny, and didn't disturb the newbies in the slightest.

Vernon started another game of catch with Danny and Jay. Danny said, "Down the hall we have a room prepared for all the kids. There are PlayStations and X-Boxes set up, so everyone can learn hand-eye coordination. Most of the kids at every Clan base play video games, so you two guys can start getting with the program as soon as you're ready."

Dave asked, "When can we do that?"

"Any time you want," Danny shrugged.

Vernon excitedly squealed, "You mean we can leave this room?"

Jay chuckled, "Of course you can. Your old orphanage life is over, guys. You'll never again be locked in your room. Your dorm room will be yours, to use whenever you want, and to come and go as you please. We'll show you what's inside all those buildings you saw at Ewa Beach and Oneula Beach." He called, "Alden, get back to our base surveillance, so these guys can see where they're moving to."

At both bases, kids were motivating. On the television, Dave and Vernon saw kids of various ages; some were still in their rooms getting ready for a shower, and others were already in the lavatory. After the two newbies had seen many rooms and three lavatories bustling with activity, Chris prompted Alden to show one of the showers. In the Oneula Beach shower were two very little guys, three tweens and two teens; Neil and Tad. At this point, Chris and Jay made sure that Dave and Vernon understood they would always be safe at the Pacific Rim Division's bases, because they were family. They pointed out that the teens and tweens weren't bothering the two little boys, in fact all seven were chatting about breakfast, and pools and playgrounds.

A couple of minutes later, Ralphie, Pat, Theo and Richie entered the room. Ralphie and Richie telepathically spoke with Dave and Vernon. Pat told Jay and Chris, "We're gonna get these guys cleaned up and dressed. At the same time, Ralphie and Richie can get some of our new brothers' thoughts unscrambled." Chris and Jay hugged Dave and Vernon, and then walked out of the room.

As soon as the two teenagers were gone, Ralphie, Richie, Pat and Theo began speaking to Dave and Vernon like equal tweens. The first thing Pat and Theo did was teach Dave and Vernon how to differentiate Ralphie and Richie by where they parted their long blond

hair.

Ralphie and Pat got Vernon ready for a shower. During the process of helping get the gown off and helping Vernon out of bed, Ralphie and Pat eased their new brother's worries by also shedding clothes. The real surprise for Ralphie, Pat, Richie and Theo was when Vernon's feet hit the floor and he stood up; Vernon was about six inches shorter than Ralphie, who was exactly sixty inches tall. Pat was sixty-one inches tall. Knowing his boyfriend was about to toss a fit, Ralphie concentrated on relaxing Pat while the three of them padded naked into the bathroom.

Being an ex-model and used to seeing naked tweens and teens, Ralphie made the shower as fun as he possibly could, by 'accidentally' making the bar of soap shoot out of his fist and across the bathroom. Ralphie had Alden get them a new bar of soap. Pat picked up on his boyfriend's silliness, but when Pat squeezed the bar, it shot up and out of the shower, and landed with a plop into the toilet. All three howled laughing.

Out in the main room, Richie, Theo and David heard Vernon laughing hysterically, and Ralphie and Pat madly giggling. Richie knew what was going on and shared that with Theo and David. Naturally, David wanted to see for himself. Richie and Theo helped David out of bed and walked him to the bathroom. In seconds, another bar of soap went flying and almost beamed Richie in the face. Automatically, Richie's arm flew up and deflected the soap missile. A minute or so later, Richie, Theo and David were naked and having some shower time fun. The bathroom was soaked. Bars of soap were all over the place; in the toilet, on top of it, around the floor and on the shelves where towels were kept. Very little bathing was actually done, but Vernon and David were having more fun than they had ever had.

It was during the shower fun that it became necessary to identify Ralphie and Richie again, since their hair was wet and parts had disappeared. The two brothers were the same height, but Ralphie was better fed and had a little more muscle on his legs and arms. Being tweens, Pat and Theo also knew physical details that weren't usually apparent, like exactly where their boyfriends had pubes growing. All four Rimmers gave Dave and Vernon their first lessons about growing up and puberty. They told the newbies about the vitamin fortified shakes available at their new home. Dave and Vernon admitted that they were getting small milkshakes each day.

Pat smiled, "That means your already getting what every kid at home gets. It also means that you guys are gonna grow and get healthier faster."

"Keep drinking them, and ask for more whenever you want," Theo instructed.

Around all the rooms of the Charleston AI Hospital, the same kinds of things were happening. Level three kids were being greeted, talked with and cared for, helped with physical therapy, and given toys and games. Above all, they were constantly reminded that they were already part of a huge family.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Condominium B, Unit 7-B

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 7:32 AM HTZ

Used to waking early, Kassidy Oldcambus inhaled deeply and opened his eyes. Matthew Thornton had his left arm flung over Kassidy's belly, but was still sound asleep. Remembering how they met and spent hours together, Kassidy pleasantly sighed.

The prior night, all through dinner and for a painfully long hour afterward, Kassidy really believed he had some rare, uncategorized social disease. Over dinner, Nate, Stu, Paul, Rob, and even Vaziik told Kassidy that he simply hadn't found the right person yet. It wasn't Kassidy's fault; it wasn't anyone's fault, but Kassidy couldn't fully believe them. So he sulked in his room, wondering what he might change and even if he should change anything, listening to country music until a knock on his door changed everything. Standing between Chris and Derrick was a really cute teenaged guy, with brown hair, brown eyes, the widest shoulders, and a cheerful smile.

When Matt Thornton walked into his room, Kassidy thought, *'Dang! He's even a tiny bit taller than me too!'* He hoped that Matt wouldn't try some cheap, over used pick-up line from the movies on him. Kassidy couldn't quite recall if he had said goodnight to Chris and Derrick, but closed the door and focused completely on Matt, making small talk that would generally lead nowhere, or so he thought.

However, everything Kassidy said was received enthusiastically by Matt. Even when Kassidy tried to blatantly get suggestive, by mentioning cuddling under a blanket, Matt reacted perfectly, seriously telling him that he wanted them to know each other before getting too cuddly. Test after test was passed, and it made Matt a good friend; one completely worthy of being cared for. Kassidy tried to be calm and cool about everything, but by the time they had met Matt's dad, and then changed for the water blaster battle, Kassidy couldn't fight the fact that he really was falling in love.

Matt was a sensitive Christian and a strong personality who enjoyed playing in the water blaster battle. Matt hadn't said much about the goofy Mr. Fuzzy G-string. Although Matt had skinny dipped often before arriving at Ewa Beach, Kassidy expected Matt

would refuse to wear it. It proved Matt was a confident teenager, and definitely had a playful, silly side. Although Matt and Kassidy were about the same height, Matt had the stocky build of a high school football running back. He had awesome shoulders, a powerful chest, a nice four-pack abdomen, a cute, muscular tush, and large thighs for his age.

Kassidy fondly recalled his first ever sexual experiences. It started about ten-thirty, as soon as the Mr. Fuzzy G-strings were peeled off. Matt was a gentle, compassionate and silly lover. Given what Matt had said about using only hands and mouths during their first times together, Kassidy expected masturbation and oral sex. However, Matt's suggested game to see what would make their bones bounce the most was much more fun. Matt explored every inch of Kassidy with his hands and mouth, teaching Kassidy how to worship a male body. Learning his tactile lessons, Kassidy returned exactly what he had been given.

During this time, Matt and Kassidy shared a lot verbally too. It started with simple questions about when puberty started. Both remembered clearly that the changes had started the summer of 2003. Kassidy was already thirteen and Matt was a few months away from his thirteenth birthday. Matt's voice changed first. Kassidy noticed underarm hairs and then searched for more and found a few sprouting. Both started junior high school with new voices and typical body hair growth.

Everything two new teenage lovers could share was freely shared. Matt was five-feet-eight inches tall and weighed in at one-hundred-forty-two pounds. Kassidy was half-an-inch shorter and eleven pounds lighter. Considering Matt's muscle mass, Kassidy was surprised there wasn't a larger difference in their weight. Both boys shaved with razors once a month. They looked forward to December

and being able to shave together. Even what was between their legs was very similar in length and girth, flaccid and erect, and both were uncircumcised. Again, Matt praised the Lord for making their male bits virtually identical, except for hair color and skin tone.

Most amazing were the inspections done on their hands and knees. Matt could've done so much more than look, touch and taste Kassidy's body, but he didn't. Matt even went as far as crack slides, but he never tried anal penetration. When Matt flung himself into the same position for Kassidy to look, touch and taste, he did it with the knowledge that Kassidy could take him all the way, but secure it wouldn't go that far. Kassidy wasn't even sure he could control himself, but Matt made the whole experience so much fun, he couldn't destroy the trust his boyfriend had placed in him. When the games were done, Matt and Kassidy lay on their sides, facing one another, whispering affirmations between kisses and slowly stroking their erections. After all the time they had played, and the sweet whispered words of affection, it didn't take too long for them to climax.

In those first few groggy minutes awake, Kassidy heard the apartment's front door open and close. Matt had obviously heard it too, because he rolled onto his back, but only inhaled deeply and stayed asleep. Kassidy knew his boyfriend had been awake close to twenty hours before he turned off the night table lamp and fell asleep. Now that he was free of Matt's arm, Kassidy slid out of bed and padded naked to Matt's bathroom.

Standing at the bowl relieving himself, Kassidy realized that he and Matt forgot to return to his dorm room. All Kassidy needed was his electric toothbrush. His mom was a dental hygienist, so Kassidy had always taken good care of his teeth. Matt had even commented that he had never seen anyone with a brighter, more perfect smile. At the time, Matt was licking the remaining water droplets off Kassidy's

shoulders and chest, making Kassidy beam like a lighthouse.

After washing his hands and face, Kassidy strolled around the two-bedroom apartment. The main living room and dinette were plenty big for a family of three or four. The kitchen breakfast counter only had three stools before it, causing Kassidy to assume these apartments were generally for smaller families of two or three. He would have Karey check that with Mr. Combs at the first opportunity.

Down the other end of the apartment was another bathroom and bedroom. Jeremiah Thornton had already made his bed and the room appeared spotless, devoid of any clutter. There was a wedding photo on the dresser. Matt's mother was a beautiful woman, with the high cheekbones of a Native American, that she had clearly passed down to her son.

Kassidy crossed the apartment to return to Matt's room. His intention was to put his boardies on and then go to the living room to watch TV until Matt woke. Soon after Kassidy stepped in the room, Matt sleepily yawned, "G'mornin', sexy cinnamon stick."

"Is likely to pop major wood every time you say that," Kassidy playfully warned, and then purposefully glanced down to Matt's morning wood beneath the sheet.

Matt smiled, "I already promised that I'd have no problem taking care of your every desire."

Crawling onto the bed, Kassidy gave Matt a deep good morning kiss, and then reminded, "And I promised you the same, hunky bear."

Matt whispered, "Is there anything you desire this morning?"

"Breakfast and my toothbrush," Kassidy smiled, and then prompted, "Com'on, let's go to the CIC for breakfast. You won't

believe it until you taste it, but the chefs here will make you a real southern style feast."

Matt chuckled, "After last night, you could've asked for anything, and I would've gladly obliged, but no. My boyfriend just wants to spend time with me."

Pushing the sheet down and off of Matt's body, Kassidy took the job of laying on his lover and kept him warm, sniggering, "Okay, how about this; ya want some sausage gravy, biscuits and grits, hunky bear?"

Pumping his hips up, Matt giggled, "I love it when you talk dirty breakfasts!"

Grinding down, Kassidy cackled, "I'll even have 'em sprinkle cinnamon on yer grits!"

Matt howled, "I'm cumming!" and rolled over on top of Kassidy. Right there on the bed, Matt started doing his morning push-ups, giving Kassidy a tender kiss with each trip down. He never made it to fifty push-ups. At the tenth kiss, Kassidy lost control, held Matt down on top of him and gave into the temptation again.

After making love, they took an extended shower together, and then got dressed. Leaving the apartment in the giddiest moods, they took advantage of alone time in the elevator, slamming together for another lip lock. Glowing, they stepped out of the elevator and walked down the hall.

Soon after stepping outside, Kassidy watched his boyfriend, carefully saying, "Before you woke, I looked around your apartment this morning. Your mom was really pretty."

Matt's smile never faded. He only nodded and easily replied,

"Yeah, she was. You saw the wedding picture?"

"It was the first thing I noticed in your dad's room. I can see some of her features in you."

Matt evilly grinned, "Are you trying to make me randy again? It sure seems that way."

"Talking about your mom makes you randy?" Kassidy giggled, "You're scaring me."

"Comparing me to her did it," Matt admitted. "Others have too, like her parents, but it never meant so much before. Thank you, Kass."

"You're welcome," Kassidy giggled, and then added, "It is true though. Another thing I noticed is how neat your apartment is."

"That's dad's OCD," Matt sniggered. "Even before mammy passed, dad's always been a neatness freak. His mammy and daddy were that way too. They said it goes back a few generations, to the coal mining days, when getting clean enough to enter the house was a big deal. Since mammy, dad's been doing all the housework, with aprons and with tool belts. That's prob'ly how he got the job here; he can clean anything within an inch of its life, and fix anything that's broke."

"I guess I expected half-emptied boxes and some sign of the move."

"We brought what we absolutely had to have with us; clothes, pictures and memorabilia, my guitars, dad's mandolin, banjo and guitar. Everything was transported for us, and we spent the day unpacking. All the furniture and everything else in there was already here when we arrived. The last of our stuff will be transported, later

today, I think. Since dad had made arrangements to fly from Kentucky to here, and then Battle Of Earth messed up those plans, Federation Youth Services arranged alternate transportation for us. We got to take a shuttle trip, Kass. The flight was at a hundred-thousand feet; the daytime sky was black and we could see the curve of the Earth. We left Kentucky at five in the afternoon and arrived here in under two hours. It was wicked kewl; the first of many wicked kewl things that happened yesterday."

Giggling at Matt's enthused tone, Kassidy wondered, "Whadda you wanna do after breakfast?" They walked inside the CIC and directly into the kitchen chow line. Kassidy picked up two trays and passed one to Matt.

Taking the tray, Matt smiled, "I'll be with you all day, so just show me around and introduce me to some kids."

"How about we do part of that on trikes; we'll take a ride around the base, and then we can check out whatever you want?"

Nodding, Matt grinned, "That sounds like a good plan."

Kassidy then proudly introduced Matt as his boyfriend and a new arrival to the kitchen staff. Once they had filled their trays, they walked out to the dining room. Crossing the room for a small, private table where they could eat and chat, they overheard that the entire group of Core Rimmers and most of the telepaths had left the base earlier that morning for Charleston AI hospital.

Soon after Kassidy sat down, Kade and Karey came running over to their big brother and gave him big twin-style hugs. Watching Kassidy's eyes suspiciously shift, and with his mouth full, Matt began chortling. When his brothers stepped back, Kassidy grinned, "What was that for?"

Kade giggled, "Does there have to be a reason?"

"What you've done for us since Friday is enough, I think," Karey smiled.

Kade nodded, "We saw you two at the water blaster battle last night."

Karey giggled, "Think of it this way; we know what you've been thinkin' since we got here. Since you were thinkin' of a boyfriend, we started thinkin' that way too. Now we got way more than awesome boyfriends, we've got Cameron's mom and dad, Matt's dad, and Jay's a Core Rimmer, all lookin' out for us too."

"In one day, Taron, you and we got boyfriends, bro," Kade explained. "It wasn't all because of you, but it was partly because of you." He then turned to Matt, widely smiled, then leaned closer to whisper, "Do that, right after breakfast. Kass'll love it." Matt blushed crimson and locked eyes with Kade. Nodding, Kade winked at Matt, then abruptly changed the subject, giggling, "By the way, your dad was assigned to dorm three. He's over there now."

Knowing what Matt was thinking and what his twin had sent, Karey beamed, "We'll see you guys later." Kade and Karey waved then walked away, back to where Brad and Cameron were waiting.

Leaning back in his chair, Kassidy tried to recall the last time his brothers had spontaneously hugged him. At Kassidy's perplexed expression, Matt grinned, "Eat up, Kass. For showing that they really do appreciate you, your bros made points with me."

Sliding his chair closer to the table, Kassidy lifted his fork and knife, muttering, "They always surprise me lately. It was only after we arrived here that I learned they were telepaths, and they could read

me. I'm blown away."

"For the first time this morning," Matt giggled, "the next time, it'll be my doing."

Feeling his face flush, Kassidy softly chortled, "You're ready to go there?"

Matt smiled, "I was ready last night, but I'm purposefully moving slow, Kass. Last night, we got to really enjoy each other, but that was only first base. Since our first night was that extremely awesome, don't you wonder what the rest will be like?"

Nodding, Kassidy assured, "Last night was practically religious. Being with you turned a fair day into the best day I've ever had." He slipped a sandal off his foot, and sent that foot over to caress Matt's nearest foot. Matt began giggling. They ate a little more, and then Kassidy leaned over to whisper, "I'll always love you. I promise you and the Lord, there's no one I'll ever love near as much as you." Matt stopped giggling and locked eyes with Kassidy. "Faithfully, I'm all yours, only tempted by you, hunky bear," Kassidy promised.

A soft groan escaped from Matt that turned into a high pitched whimper. Since Matt seemed stuck in the moment, Kassidy sliced off a chunk of biscuit and sausage gravy then fed it to Matt. Obviously, the two new lovers started feeding each other. Smiling kids at nearby tables noticed them and softly giggled, but Matt and Kassidy never noticed anyone else.

Across the dining room, Dulce's attention was grabbed by the three glowing forms standing behind Matt and Kassidy. There were two women and one man. This wasn't new to Dulce, but it was the first time she'd seen risen spirits returning to their loved ones at Ewa Beach. Dulce's first instinct was to go tell Matt and Kassidy that they

were being visited, but she only happily giggled and decided to save it for later. She searched the dining room for the Nash brothers. Craig was with Felicity at a table of level one orphanage girls. At a table with Ray, Tony, Jake, Terry and other boys, were Phil and Owen. Finding no spirits near either Nash brother, Dulce returned to her breakfast.

* * * * *

Columbia, SC, Hampton Street Cafe

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 1:41PM EST

Another pair of Dan's friends caught up with Paul Owens a few blocks north of downtown. Claire and Lowell Perry, a married couple in their mid thirties, brought Paul to the cafe. Awake for almost twenty hours, Paul was more exhausted than hungry. He ordered a small salad and listened to the couple bounce ideas around to help Paul get off the street, and into a place where he could rest. To keep up appearances, Claire first called the couple that found Paul and bought him breakfast that morning. She then called the third couple Dan had notified, knowing very well that they didn't have the space for one more in their small home. Appearing desperate, but knowing that the next call she placed would provide Paul a temporary residence, Clair called Billy and Maryann Hart. The Harts were in their late fifties and both their children had moved on to start their own lives and families.

The Harts' son had built a garage loft and convenience apartment after finishing high school, so he had a private place to be with friends when he started college. For four years, before moving on to start a career, young Sherman Hart lived in that loft, only coming into the main house for Sunday dinners, and to do laundry. As far as Billy and Maryann were concerned, the loft was never truly

finished. Sherman was happy with bare, unpainted plasterboard walls. In the years since Sherman moved out, Billy had managed to do little more than add decorative molding and install better insulation above the ceiling.

As if all this hadn't been prearranged that morning, Billy and Maryann came to the Hampton Street Cafe to meet their friends and the 'hard luck case teenager'. Billy explained when and why the loft was originally built and what little he had done, but dressed up the loft apartment as being comfortable enough for their son, and was now very well insulated, so the space heater would be sufficient during the coming colder months. All Billy and Maryann asked was for Paul to finish the apartment with paints that they would supply. For his work, Paul would get free room and board. Once the apartment work was completed, then Paul could do common lawn and yard work for room and board.

It seemed too easy to Paul, but being tired, he accepted a ride from Claire and Lowell to the Hart's residence. From the back seat of the Perry's sedan, Paul saw an unattached, double-car garage set back away from the main house. There were outdoor stairs on the left side leading up to the loft apartment. Getting out of the Perry's car and dragging his suitcase along, Paul followed Billy and Maryann up the steps. Billy unlocked the door and led the way inside with his wife, and Paul, and then the Perrys. Maryann started complaining about the shabby state of the apartment, but Claire began imagining paint colors and window treatments. Billy showed Paul the bathroom and the kitchen area. There was even a microwave, a small refrigerator, a set of four plates, bowls and silverware still in the cupboards.

Barely keeping himself from falling into an android coma, all Paul saw was a very small dinette table and two chairs, a nice sofa, a coffee table, a television, a small stereo clock radio, and most

importantly, a twin size bed. A set of sheets, a blanket and a pillow were neatly piled at the foot of the bed. All four adults knew that Paul had been awake all night. Maryann turned on the space heater. As soon as Paul accepted the loft, they welcomed him to his new home and started to leave. Billy passed Paul the key to the loft's door and said they could discuss more the next morning, after Paul got some rest.

By quarter of three in the afternoon, Paul was alone in a comfortable place. Quickly making the bed, Paul could barely believe his luck. He never considered that the truck driver who had given him a lift might've set all the wheels in motion, simply to give an android a place to sleep indoors. Paul barely got his jacket and sneakers off before collapsing onto his shabbily made bed and dozing off.

Inside the Hart's home, Claire and Billy were making quick phone calls to let everyone know the teenage boy was safe. Included in the call list was Dan, the truck driver who had set the trusty wheels of Southern hospitality in motion. Maryann also called Dan's wife, who was really the only one left out of the loop that day. With the help of neighbors, she set about making certain that her husband would return the next afternoon rewarded, with a fabulous candle lit dinner, an extra sweet desert and an even sweeter wife, dressed as nicely as possible given her condition.

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Ewa Beach Trike Garage

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 10:20 AM HTZ

Kassidy and Matt took trike rides around the base perimeter and then down driveways and paths. Kassidy showed Matt everything there was to see, including the school, and they even saw the families

of squirrels living on the Southwest side of the base. During the course of the ride, they saw fewer and fewer kids around the base. Only base security, gorillas, G-Cats and adults seemed to be around. Finished with the tour, they parked the trikes and climbed off. Kassidy scowled, "This is just too weird." He tapped his comm-badge, and called, "Alden, what's goin' on, and where is everybody?"

"Over at Oneula Beach," Alden answered. "Erik and Travis gathered the kids here and brought them there. With the Core Rimmers busy, kids were a little confused, but everyone's together and happier now." He then giggled, "You're all alone, guys."

With that knowledge, Kassidy and Matt smiled at each other. Matt leered, "I know how to take advantage of this," and took Kassidy's hand.

Surprised that they were passing the condominiums, Kassidy wondered, "Where are we going?"

"To the sauna at the pool house," Matt grinned. "We didn't make it there last night. We're guaranteed privacy."

Cracking up, Kassidy playfully asked, "We get each other plenty hot, so why in the sauna?"

Matt chuckled, "Just to be different. Since you share your room, that's gonna be rare, which means my room is going to get really familiar, unless we purposefully make some variations."

"Flawlessly logical," Kassidy giggled.

"I wanted you while you were brushing your teeth."

"But then your dad walked by, and saw you holding me, from

behind."

Nodding, Matt continued, "I wanted you during our trike ride."

"But then a security gorilla in a tree began chuckling at us."

"If I get delayed or interrupted again, I might shoot in my shorts and start crying like a baby in soiled diapers."

Kassidy giggled, "What's tempting you, hunky bear?"

"You," Matt simply stated.

"We'd best hurry," Kassidy giggled, and then released Matt's hand and took off running.

Taking off after Kassidy, Matt loudly laughed, "Dear Lord, help me treat my cinnamon stick really good. Don't let me wuss out at the last second." Kassidy howled laughing and never heard the last line of Matt's prayer, asking for the patience and strength to follow an awesome blowjob with an even more awesome rimjob.

Kassidy got to the sauna first, and got Matt naked first. Proving once again they were like minds and souls, Kassidy was already thrilling Matt to loud coos, giggles and moans before all his clothes were off. Once he had Kassidy naked, Matt lay down on one of the wooden benches. Without delay, Kassidy went right back to work, hovering over the bench Matt was laying on. Lifting his lover by the hips, Matt got Kassidy in position so they could progress orally together.

Cuddling together afterward, Matt softly wondered, "What's the plan for this afternoon?"

"Well," Kassidy peacefully sighed, "we could spend some time

at Oneula Beach with the rest of the kids."

Hearing something unenthused in Kassidy's tone, Matt said, "That sounds good to me, but I think you have something else on your mind."

Kassidy giggled, "Yeah, but I'll compromise."

Matt begged, "Don't leave me alone, Kass, not even for a minute."

Earlier that morning, before taking a shower together, Matt stood before the bowl but still held Kassidy's hand, and chatted. It was amazing and thrilling to Kassidy that Matt had easily done it, and Kassidy even commented on it. After all, Matt had no siblings, but Kassidy had shared the toilet with his brothers on many occasions.

In between tender kisses, Kassidy softly assured, "That'll never happen, hunky bear." After landing a deep, passionate kiss, Kassidy asked, "What made you think I needed to be somewhere without you?"

Matt shrugged, "You need and want to see your brothers and cousin, don't you?"

"We can do that together," Kassidy stated. "What I want is to know more about you."

Matt blinked, "What's left that you don't already know?"

Kassidy smiled, "In your room, I saw an acoustic guitar on a stand, an amplifier, and an electric guitar in a case. My boyfriend is a musician that hasn't serenaded me, or given me a single clue if he's mediocre, good, really very good, or a virtuoso, like our Core

Rimmers."

Matt chuckled, "Somewhere between good and very good, but it depends on the song."

"Not good enough," Kassidy giggled. "I need to hear to know for myself."

"Is that really what you want to do?"

Eagerly nodding, Kassidy beamed, "Yeah, for a while, and then we can check on my brothers, their boyfriends, and you can meet some of the other kids. So tell me, how long have you been playing?"

"Since I could hold a child-size guitar, eight years. First, it was dad teaching me, and then it was mammy encouraging me to learn songs, and now dad does both. By nine-years-old, I was playing bluegrass with dad and his buddies. I started playing at our church soon after mammy passed."

"That's what we're doing right after lunch then. After we digest, and you've played for a while, then we'll hang out with the other kids."

Matt confirmed, "Is that really what you want to do? It's fun for me, but not so fun for you."

Kassidy enthusiastically giggled. "I love listening to music. Sunday night, I saw my first concert, right here. Platinum Habits, that's our leaders' band, played for over two hours. At three-thirty yesterday, there was another concert, that they called a rehearsal. Every song was great and really well done, but it was all rock, no country rock, and no bluegrass. I'm not a musician, but I did know guys at my old school that had bands. They couldn't play or sing

anywhere near as good as Platinum Habits. Do you sing?"

"Yeah," Matt giggled.

"Give me an example of a something you sing really well."

After thoughtfully humming a moment or two, Matt smiled, "I like country rock most. Do you know Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Eagles, 38 Special, Lynyrd Skynyrd, or Pure Prairie League?" When Kassidy nodded, Matt answered, "Just about anything by those bands, as long as the vocal range isn't too high." Kassidy provocatively moaned and started a forceful grind. Instinctually thrusting his hips up, Matt giggled, "Why didn't you tell me how hot you get for musicians?"

"Not all musicians," Kassidy gently corrected. "There's only one; the one who taught me the meaning behind every ballad lyric ever written. The way you are, since I first locked eyes with you, and the way you were last night were lessons I'll never forget." Continuing his grind, Kassidy dove for Matt's neck.

Matt encouraged, "Yeah, Kass; do it, hold me tighter and kiss me harder as you get closer too."

"And then we'll use the shower here before lunch."

"I really want this, here and now. The temptations are too much to resist."

Laying all the way down, with his head over Matt's shoulder, Kassidy whispered, "Finger my hole, hunky bear. We've gotta get each other ready for the best of it. I can barely wait."

Reaching down Kassidy's back to his buns, Matt moaned, "Oh,

man, I love you so much, Kass."

"I'm lovin' you back," Kassidy panted.

* * * * *

Charleston, SC, AI Hospital

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 5:30PM EST

Via sub-vocals, Alden reported Paul's whereabouts to Reyes, Ryan, Danny and Marc. Stevie reported to Jon and Mary. With Ark's assistance, it was determined that Billy and Maryann Hart were outstanding citizens who were born and raised in South Carolina. They had lived in the home where Paul was for approximately thirty-six years, since 1968. Neither had ever been in trouble with the law; they hadn't even had a traffic violation or automobile accident in over twenty years. Of course, Reyes shared this information with his dad, pop, Prez and Keith. Everyone that knew what was happening was absolutely amazed that one truck driver had done so much for an android he had only known for about two hours.

Many of the level three orphans were either napping or eating. Televisions in the room were now showing the kids at Oneula Beach. All the Rimmers began congregating in the hall. Danny and Marc were ecstatic that the kids they were so worried about earlier that morning had made important gains in one afternoon. Equally enthusiastic, the Core Rimmers who had been to level three orphanages the prior week were thrilled with the kids overall condition. As it stood then, it seemed that the level three orphans could be split into thirds, based on their physical and emotional states; those who would be ready for Ewa Beach by Saturday, or Sunday, or Monday.

On the other hand, the majority of Rimmer sons, the empathes

and telepaths were emotionally drained. Prez was carrying Richie. Troy had Scott Deaver in his arms. Sean had Jimmy Carr sitting up on his shoulders. Stephen had Wade on his hip. Kaleo and Tory had all five of their young sons gathered around them. All the telepaths were gathered around Relud and Inoyra, being praised for jobs well done. John Hundser confirmed with Doc Wiener that the entire team needed time to decompress.

Unnoticed by many on the team, Skylar popped out of the hallway gathering. He returned less than a minute later with Doctor Dan Richardson and another middle aged gentleman. Dan introduced the new addition as Doctor Jared Yates, child psychiatrist. He would become another part of the Pacific Rim's FYS Team. When the Core Rimmers were done meeting Doc Yates, Skylar said, "It's time to unwind, guys. I know you want to go back to Ewa Beach for lunch and school, and we'll get there, when everyone is less stressed out. All the doctors are going to join us."

Prez asked, "Where are we going, Sky?"

Impishly grinning, Skylar giggled, "My daddies and brothers showed me a real nice place. I promise, you'll love it!" The Core Rimmers began saying goodbye to Marc and Danny. When all the farewells were complete, Skylar teleported the entire group out of the hospital hallway. Immediately after the Rimmers vanished, so did Danny.

Materializing naked at Oneula Beach, about ten meters above the diving well, Danny screamed, "ALDEN!"

"But you told me to save the dunk, grandpa," Alden giggled over the pool house PA.

The kids hanging out barely heard Danny grumble, "Shit,"

before hitting the water.

Standing naked on the five-meter board, Erik loudly called, "Hey, Champ! Do you know who that was?"

Also naked and sitting at the edge of the well, with his feet dangling in the water, Travis sniggered, "No idea, but Alden obviously does!" When the unknown brown-haired teen surfaced, Trav chuckled, "Hello."

"Hi," Danny spluttered, and swam to the edge where Travis and another dozen or so grinning teens watched him.

So he wouldn't have to shout, Trav waited until Danny was nearer before saying, "I don't think we've met."

Hoisting himself out of the well, Danny replied, "We haven't." He sat at the edge of well, beside Travis and then offered his hand, smirking, "I'm Danny Page, director of the AI Division, in South Carolina." Now that the well was clear, Erik dove.

Introducing himself, Travis shook hands and knocked knuckles with Danny, and offered, "Our leadership went to South Carolina today, or I'd call someone to greet you." Gesturing to Erik, now swimming over to his boyfriend's side, Trav quickly introduced them.

"No need," Danny smiled, "I just left them, when I had clothes on. Since it's warmer here than there, I'll enjoy it, at least until I drip dry." When Travis nodded, Danny glanced around, saying, "So, this is Ewa Beach?"

"Oneula Beach," Travis corrected. "There were only about sixty of us not at school, so we all came here."

Danny nodded, "Keeping everyone together is good. Prez will

be impressed."

"Kind o' necessary," Travis explained. "It's the first time all the Core Rimmers and their kids left us alone. The group in school was probably better off than we were; at least they're occupied. Since everyone at both bases felt weird, we decided to consolidate the masses."

Erik offered, "Now it's like any other day; little kids are at the playground, some are playing volleyball, another group are learning soccer, and the rest are hanging at the pools."

Travis grinned, "There's a small group missing, but since they're all new couples, we're pretty sure we know where they are."

Danny giggled, "Rimmer couples."

"Everyone needs a hobby," Erik cackled.

* * * * *

Universe Gamma Seven

Everyone in the group of sixty-five looked around. They were standing amongst trees just off of a beach. The sun seemed fairly high in the sky. It seemed very familiar to those who were more used to living at Ewa Beach. Keith wondered, "Where are we, Sky?"

"It's Ewa Beach!" Skylar giggled. Since no one else was laughing, but only uncertainly smirking, Skylar explained, "This is an Earth in an alternate universe. This is what might become Ewa Beach, in about a million years, give or take a couple o' millennia." Pausing and pointing east, Skylar giggled, "That's Diamond Head, before erosion wears it down to what you're used to. For now, this island is uninhabited. There are birds and plant life, but not much else. It's

about one in the afternoon and it's June thirtieth, by our reckoning. We'll be safe here. I've got a barrier set on land and in the sea, so nothing the slightest bit dangerous can approach. Everyone can talk, chill out, go swimming and even take naps, if you feel like it. Let me just go get you guys lunch and a few other niceties, and you'll be set."

Skylar popped away. The Rimmers began walking down to the beach. Many of the boys took their shirts off. Amongst the trees, a large tent was pitched. Seconds later, an even larger tarp, about ten square meters, was erected near the dunes. In the blink of an eye, chairs and patio tables appeared under the tarp. Watching their big bro Leo, rapidly blinking at all the changes being made, Geoff and Lenny howled laughing. All around the group, blankets appeared on the sand, a pile of surf boards and boogie boards landed, and cafeteria carts filled with food and drinks materialized.

Pointing at the speeding Mikyvis, Jay sniggered, "I like him!"

Popping back, directly between Jay and Chris, Skylar giggled, "I like you too!" After giving the two teenagers quick hugs, he popped back out and returned again with piles of Mr. Fuzzy G-strings and water blasters. "There," Skylar giggled, "that should be enough for now."

Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott cracked up. Prez chuckled, "Okay, let's eat." Leading the way with Richie still on his hip, Prez loudly said, "All you guys and girls were completely awesome in every way. Even some of the youngest and quietest kids were starting to speak and laugh." He put Richie down on a chair and watched the rest of the group approach the make-shift dining area under the tarp, sharing, "Believe me, I'm just as wiped out as any of you. We're here to talk it out, amongst ourselves and with the Docs, so we can go back home when we're ready and not a moment before."

Going to prepare a plate of food for Richie, Prez shared, "Those level three kids look so much better than the last time I saw them, but I'm still bothered that they needed so much medical care just to get to where they're at. Greg, the dude I was with most of the time, is fifteen years old. He's about an inch taller than Drew, but weighs so much less that I could easily give him piggy back rides from room to room. As sad as I am about what he went through, I'm really happy that he's going to be another brother in our Clan very soon. And he was a leader at his orphanage. I'll be keeping an eye on Greg, because I know he'll be a Core Rimmer someday, when he's ready."

Bringing the plate and a small cup of milkshake over to Richie, Prez encouraged, "Talk it out, but remember, all of you did great today; you made thirty very scared kids know that they're now cared about; that they'll soon have a home where they can feel safe and loved."

Richie sighed, "Poppa, one of the boys me and Jimmy was with has some new fingers and toes. His name is Marty. He was older than us and smaller than us."

Squatting down, Prez gently told his youngest son, "Try to remember, I was sad about your past, and Dee's and Gage's and Sammy's pasts. Not too long ago, I thought my situation with my parents was the very worst it could get for anyone. You and Jimmy, and really everyone believes their personal pasts were bad. Now I'm a happier father. Now you're a happier boy, a brother and a son. Soon Marty will be like you, much happier and trying his very best, like you did today. The way you'll feel better is by remembering how sad you used to be compared to how much happier you are now. Very soon, Marty will feel and think the same way."

On their own and walking down to the water line, giving the youngest kids the opportunity to get food first, Jay, Chris, Lance and

Scott spoke softly about the level three kids. Chris admitted, "Yesterday morning, I was freaked out when Prez made us Core Rimmers, but now..." He shook his head and scowled.

Slightly smirking, Jay finished, "Now I don't know whether to be happy, sad or go pound the living shit out of some scumbag. Somebody deserves an ass whoopin'."

Slightly out of sync, Chris, Lance and Scott huffed, "Yeah."

In their heads, John said, *'The adults that hurt those kids have already been dealt with. Some were sent to prison planets and others were turned to dust. This is another reason why we wanted all four of you on this team; because your sense of right, wrong and justice is already strong.'*

The four teenagers turned away from the ocean and back toward the tarp, where John was standing with Stephen and getting plates of food prepared for Frankie and Wade. Only briefly looking up, John sent, *'You have every right to feel everything you're feeling. The only thing I can suggest is a swim to work off the stress. I can guarantee everyone here will eventually go swimming or surfing for the same purpose. And we'll all get some time to rest too. Also remember, I'm an N-Gen empath, and you're Core Rimmers. I've got rooms in my head for all of my brothers, including the four of you now, so I know what you're thinking and feel what you're feeling. None of us are leaving here for home until all of us are ready for the other three hundred and thirty-something kids.'*

Scott muttered, "I hate to admit it, but John's right." He kicked his sandals off and began taking his boardies off.

"I couldn't eat right now anyway," Lance smirked, and followed his partner's lead. Nodding silent agreement, Chris and Jay began

stripping. Soon, all four were running into the water and dove into an oncoming wave.

The next set to choose to swim instead of eat were the quadruple Rs and their boyfriends. They walked away from the tarp and stripped off their clothes. Ryan prompted Reyes, "Come on, Casanova. Between Paul and thirty orphans, you need to swim first. Then we'll eat."

Nodding and walking with Ryan toward the water, Reyes sighed, "I can barely believe Paul felt so threatened that he felt the need to leave."

Ryan smiled, "Here's a little inside information for you. Paul acts and then thinks, almost all the time. He's the one that was thrilled over a video conference call last week. Paul told me everything that had him spazing out. I thought about that and your affect on Paul. You're good for us, Reyes. Yeah, Paul is being stubborn and flying off the handle again, acting before thinking. I, on the other hand, thought about you and the three of us together every chance I got, before you even mentioned you were interested, for five days. I'll bet you that Paul spent about one-fifth the time I did actually thinking about it, and most of that time was me talking to him about it. All I can suggest is to let him think. Away from anyone's interference, he'll figure out that he needs us as much as we need him."

Stripping off his boardies and underwear, Reyes chuckled, "He doesn't even realize that he has a Clan comm-badge in his suitcase. He's gonna shit popcorn when he figures that out."

Cracking up and stumbling in the sand as he got undressed, Ryan laughed, "That'll be the first smack upside the head. The next ones will be in quick succession; why hasn't anybody come to get him, or transported him back home, and why hasn't anyone even

called him?"

Reyes grinned, "He'll figure out it was you, ya know?"

Shrugging, Ryan giggled, "He probably believes he's been imprisoned the last two weeks. The real kick will be when he tries to throw the comm-badge in the trash. It'll keep reappearing in that loft until he does something about it. I'm only wondering who he'll talk to first; me, Stevie or you?"

Leaning over, Reyes planted a deep, lingering kiss, and then whispered, "I love you, Ry."

Ryan giggled, "I know, and we're taking care of that issue while we're here," and then raced into the surf.

Barely a meter behind his wicked boyfriend, Reyes laughed, "Of course! No cameras or AIs listening!" Ryan roared laughing. In waist deep water, he suddenly spun around. Reyes nearly slammed into Ryan. Attached at the mouth, they fell into the water.

Out in deeper water, Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott saw Reyes and Ryan playing nearer the beach. Treading water, Jay chuckled, "That's it. We're completely screwing ourselves over."

Scott blinked, "What do you mean?"

Pointing at Reyes and Ryan, Chris grinned, "They were there and saw those kids too, but they've been talking about Paul every spare moment they had. A large problem is overshadowed by the smaller one nearer to their hearts."

Jay reminded, "We went there because those kids needed to see us; to know that the hospital isn't the end of the journey. Here we are, barely maintaining because they were screwed over so severely, but

those kids are better off now than they were this morning. We went there for them, and they'll be home with us this weekend. Don't pity them, and don't feel sorry for them; feel happy for them, because they're healing."

"So we're fussing over history," Chris summarized, "stuff that's all over with. They're better off now than they were last week and this morning. Yeah, it sucks they had to go through it at all. In a few days, they'll be with us, even better off than they are now."

Smirking, Lance reminded, "Little kids barely speak. Kids our age have new android limbs. Clark is fourteen, like you three, but much shorter than any of us."

Scott nodded, but reminded, "Did we make them that way, SLB?"

"No."

Jay grinned, "Did every kid there get and use a Mr. Fuzzy?"

"Yeah," Lance chuckled.

Chris prompted, "Then why feel bad, Lance? We're not the cause of their problems, we're the solution."

On the verge of accepting it, Lance sighed, "I guess I know too much. All I keep thinking of, and what I'll probably have nightmares about, are the guys that had to be circumcised. It was done to me as a baby, not as a teen. I couldn't imagine that kind of pain."

Scott reminded, "Again, we didn't cause that. According to the docs, all those guys were unconscious for three days, so they never experienced the worst of the pain. I know how you feel, but if I were in their shoes, I'd definitely go for the operation, rather than lose

interest in having sex."

Almost at once, Chris and Jay chimed, "Me too."

"There ya go," Scott cheered. He then brightly smiled, "We talked about this Monday and yesterday, Lance. Having foreskin only adds a little bit extra, because all the important feelings come from the head of our dicks. You and every cut guy have it way easier than us, because you don't have to worry about keeping it clean, or getting an infection that creates a need for a painful operation. If you have a bad dream about it, wake me up."

Chris offered, "Jay and I take notice of circumcised dicks, because they're different from what we see every day. Judging by what you're saying, you take notice of uncut dicks for the very same reason; they're different from what you're used to. I'd still love Jay if he was snipped, so I can guess you'd still love Scott if he was." When Lance nodded agreement, Chris shrugged, "Foreskin, or the lack thereof, is just another attribute all us gay guys notice; it's really not so important."

Jay added, "That fold of skin isn't as important to me as getting this cast off. I can totally relate to the guys with new fingers and hands. About two hours after we got to Charleston, Chris and I had to return to Ewa Beach and see Doc Andrews, because of my busted wrist, so I can be fully useful sooner rather than later. We weren't gone more than ten minutes, but it was a task that had to be done, just like those kids."

Pointing toward the shore, where the quadruple Rs, Reyes and their boyfriends were playing Frisbee, Chris smiled, "Give it up, Lance. We're here to mellow out. If you're not ready to face the rest of the kids at home, John will know it and keep us here."

Without warning, Lance started rising up and out of the water. Chris, Jay and Scott sniggered, watching Lance begin bouncing in the air. Lance excitedly hollered, "What the fuck?"

From shallower water, Reyes yelled, "The game is called 'Toss-a-Kid'. It's better with a Sehlat, but John does a pretty good imitation. He's only bouncing you to figure how much you weigh, so he doesn't throw you a mile out to sea."

"John is doing this?" Lance giggled.

All four of the quadruple Rs hollered, "He's N-Gen!"

Reyes waded out further, and shouted, "Compared to a forty-story tower, your skinny butt is easy, Lance."

Turning to Chris and Jay, Scott sniggered, "I wish I had a camera. He'll never believe that his dick was floppin' in the opposite direction as the rest of him." Chris and Jay cracked up.

Far louder yet much further away than the laughing quadruplets, Sean, Troy, Kaleo and Tory roared laughing. Abruptly, Lance bounced a final time then flew out over and into the ocean. Scott was next on John's list, and was hoisted up out of the water. As Scott bounced, he watched John, who was seemingly paying more attention to his sons and the other younger kids under the tarp. After about half-a-dozen bounces in the air, Scott went sailing. Continuing on with his version of Toss-a-Kid, John gave Chris, Jay, Reyes, Ryan, the quadruple Rs and their boyfriends something else to think and laugh about.

Other kids finished eating and raced into the water to be tossed, starting with the Stoeher twins. When the youngest kids finished eating, they raced down to the beach to get tossed and play in the water. The teens and tweens that first went swimming walked up the

beach to the food. The four doctors remained under the tarp to talk out any remaining issues with the older group. Relud Glith remained at the tarp to assist the doctors, and to help his new brothers. Empathically reaching out to each of the boys while they loaded their plates, Relud felt that they were all in a good state of mind. Taking their plates to the table, the giggling quadruple Rs got Relud's attention.

'There's really something wrong when only one guy under the age of thirty is still dressed,' Ralphie sent.

Robbie grinned, *'Maybe Betazoids are shy? Is that the right word? Is it Betazoids, Betazedoids or maybe just Betas?'*

Far more interested in the double cheeseburger with massive amounts of toppings he was munching on, Ronnie teased, *'Or maybe they've got teeny weenies?'*

'That would make them Beta-weenies, wouldn't it?' Richie added.

Widely grinning, Relud started to undress, broadcasting to the four telepathic clowns, *'The correct term is Betazoids. Compared to my home planet, this planet is sexually repressed. Our custom is for everyone to be nude during our marriages.'* Removing his shorts, Relud grinned, *'As you can see, my dickie measures up to every other teenager here. The best part is, it would take a great deal more for me to get physically aroused than it would for you four.'*

The thought had barely been processed by the quadruple Rs when suddenly all four stopped eating, got up from their table, stumbled over and past one another, and raced back into the ocean, leaving their boyfriends behind and curiously smirking.

Widely smiling, Relud told the four doctors, "The quadruplets

seem to be processing what they've witnessed of the level three orphans fine."

Reyes giggled, "What did you do, Relud?"

Shrugging, Relud grinned, "What needed to be done to a team of teasers. The vision I implanted in their minds will take quite a while to wear down, if you get my drift." Rapidly nodding, Reyes, Ryan, Billy, Theo and Pat cracked up.

When the laughter had dwindled to giggling, Jay prompted, "Doc Yates, since you'll be joining our Clan, tell us about yourself. Are you single?"

Doctor Yates smiled, "No, I've been married for twelve years. My wife's name is Alyssa, and she'll be joining the education staff, as an art teacher."

Scott asked, "Have you got kids of your own?"

"No," Doc Yates replied.

Doc Richardson interjected, "Skylar brought two very qualified psychiatrists to meet with me; Doctor Yates and another gentleman. Doctor Yates was the better choice for Pacific Rim Division. The other candidate will be offered the position at other divisions, so he can choose where he'd like to live and work. When I learned that Doctor Yates' wife was a qualified teacher, and that they would be open to building a family of their own, it made choosing simple."

Doc Yates grinned, "Two children at Charleston have already caught my attention. Of course, Alyssa will need to meet them, and the kids will either bond with us or they won't."

Jay asked, "So we know, when there's a troubled kid, how do we

approach it?"

Doc Wiener smiled, "Hopefully, you'll never be in a position where you'll have to worry about that. Your job is to be big brothers, which you've done very well, ye of the fuzzy Fuzzies." The four new Core Rimmers chuckled. Doc Wiener suggested, "In the event that you do witness something that concerns you, then chat with either Doctor Yates or myself."

"The plan is for Doc Wiener to remain at Ewa Beach and I'll move to Oneula Beach," Doc Yates explained. "The only difference in our training is my additional time in medical school, so I can prescribe medication. Doctor Wiener and I are both against using medication, except in extreme circumstances. Since the medical staff is already in place, I'll simply be another resource, monitoring kids at Oneula Beach as Doc Wiener has been doing at Ewa Beach."

The conversation came to an abrupt end when Relud ran full tilt for the water. By the time everyone turned to watch him, Stephen screamed, "Frankie! NO!"

Believing something was horribly wrong, Prez, Keith and Drew dove into the ocean and swam directly for their nephew. John simply levitated himself and ran above the sea for his eldest son. Wade was pitching a fit because he wanted to go help his big brother too, but Stephen wouldn't let him go.

"STOP!" Frankie yelled, "They're only dolphins, daddy! They don't know people and you're freaking them out." Then Frankie disappeared under the waves. Changing direction, John ran toward his brothers. Since they were mostly under water, John had to telepathically tell Relud, Prez, Keith and Drew to slow down and chill out, because his dolphin loving son had just met his first wild dolphins in their natural environment. Now Frankie was trying to

learn to communicate with the pod of cetaceans.

Stephen relaxed, and immediately Wade stopped struggling to be free of his poppa's grasp. Turning and looking up, Wade giggled, "You thought Frankie was playin' with sharks?"

Knowing that he couldn't lie even if he wanted to try, Stephen shrugged, "This isn't our home world. I didn't know what Frankie was doing, but I saw that dorsal fin, bigger than your bro's head."

Skylar popped over to where Stephen and Wade were standing. "I told you we're safe," Skylar giggled. He pointed out to sea, explaining, "There's a barrier about a kilometer out. If it can harm you guys, it won't make it any closer than that. Not even crabs or lobsters can get past it. All the other fishes and stuff that can't hurt are kewl to come closer."

"There are some jobs a father can't ever stop, no matter how safe his sons are," Stephen told Skylar. Happily giggling, Wade slammed into his poppa and held on tight.

Walking above the waves with a purposeful stride toward the beach and his husband, John loudly laughed, "We're here to decompress, but what does my hubby do? HE FREAKS OUT! AND FREAKS THE REST OF US OUT!"

Giggling his little butt off, Wade backed away from Stephen. Rising off the sand, Stephen shrieked, "John, don't you dare toss me!"

Listening to Frankie's thoughts more than his husband's warnings, John began bouncing Stephen. To the soft chortling of everyone on the beach, Stephen went flying out over the sea, screaming, "JO-O-O-OHN!"

Wading to shore with Relud and Keith, Prez sniggered, "You

aren't getting any lovin' tonight, bro."

Looking up at his big bros, John smiled, "Frankie's learned to speak basic dolphin; at least enough to send part of the pod after Stephen. He won't have to swim back, unless he absolutely refuses help from the dolphins."

Skylar popped between John and Prez, giggling, "And a million years from now, dolphins save people from drowning, because they think it's a game."

Moments later, Stephen could be seen trying to hold onto a dolphin's dorsal fin and getting a ride back to shore. When Stephen's grip failed, another dolphin held him up, like it would a baby dolphin needing their first breaths of air. A third dolphin slowly came around for Stephen to hold onto, and brought him closer to shore.

The rest of the team's break time was spent as planned; surfing, swimming, napping, and teen couples getting some intimate time. Dolphin rides were a bonus unplanned activity, but everyone got to spend time with Frankie's friends.

* * * * *

Oneula Beach

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 12:00PM HTZ

After their chill time, Skylar transported the entire group just outside the Oneula Beach dining room. Starting to walk inside, they found almost every kid from both bases was gathered together, and applauding their return. Back in the furthest corner of the room, Kassidy and Matt sat at a small table for another intimate meal. It seemed that only the adults working at Ewa Beach weren't at Oneula Beach. The Rimmers' sons and their various additional helpers

scattered to join the rest of the kids in the room. Still clapping their hands, Erik Kendricks and Travis McAuley walked across the room to the Core Rimmers. Travis grinned, "We all know you needed to go to Charleston. Alden's told us that you did a great job. The kids are doing better, and they'll be watching us the next couple o' days."

"In the meantime," Erik giggled, "the two of us were the *only* dorm leaders not in school, dealing with a hundred and fifty or so kids."

"With help from Craig and Phil Nash, Felicity, Owen, Tony and Ray, we gathered the sixty-something kids from Ewa Beach and brought them here," Travis explained.

"Tony and Ray organized some volleyball teams and taught the kids the game," Erik added.

Travis nodded, "Craig and Phil had another group learning soccer, but the bottom line is, we barely kept things kewl around here." Seeing all the Core Rimmers grinning, Travis turned to Erik. Both boys shrugged.

Softly chortling, Prez turned to Keith and the rest of the Core Rimmer team.

"It's a tough decision," Corey giggled.

Almost in sync, Erik and Travis wondered, "What decision?"

Keith smiled, "The key word used in this instance was 'barely'. The fact is, you *did* manage. Just like the rest of the kids managed last Friday during Battle Of Earth. And what happened during dinner Friday night?"

AJ waved and Jerry sniggered, "Two new Core Rimmers were

christened."

Sadly shaking his head, Troy chortled, "And all of our dorm leadership, present company excluded."

Sean grinned, "Instead of acting like a new couple and choosing to spend time alone, you gathered everyone together, where they could enjoy themselves."

"And support one another," Chris added. "Being in the same boat, feeling the same things, all it took was direction to change sad to glad."

Over the PA system, Prez prompted, "All Rimmers who believe that Erik and Travis should be promoted to Core Rimmers, please raise your hands and voices?" Almost every hand rose in the air and the sound of cheers from four hundred kids reverberated around the room. "And who believes that Tony Lanning, Ray Varga, Craig and Phil Nash would make good dorm leaders?" More loud cheers and agreements burst forth from the adults and kids in the room. When the sound dwindled, Prez instructed, "You can lower your hands."

Keith asked, "Craig, Phil, Owen, Tony and Ray, would you consider taking on new roles? And also with these roles, would two of you consider moving from Ewa Beach to here?"

Standing up, Tony answered, "Ray and I will take the job, and we'll move." More applause erupted with shouts of congratulations. Craig, Phil, Owen and Felicity softly discussed the possibility.

Drew prompted, "What we really need are two girl leaders here at Onelula Beach."

Getting up and leaving Craig and the table, Felicity hurried over to where her roommate, Elise Blas was sitting. Moments later, a lot of

positive chatter erupted from that table. Within a minute, Felicity stood up and hollered, "We'll take the job, Prez." Drew and Corey clapped their hands and cheered the teenage girl they had rescued from an Anaheim level one orphanage.

Prez smiled, "Craig, Phil and Owen will take over for Erik and Travis at Ewa Beach dorm three."

Noticing that Craig's expression was very similar to when he got soaked Monday night, Phil and Owen roared laughing. Craig chuckled, "That takes care of that." Giggles broke loose around the dining room.

Tony sniggered, "We had other helpers, Prez."

"Very important helpers, in fact," Ray grinned. John, Stephen, Frankie and Wade cracked up.

"And who might that be?" Prez wondered.

Tony replied, "Angelo Diaz and Reggie Combs were the last to wake and have breakfast. They found us here, at the volleyball courts, and then kept an eye on the kids at the playground, and helped referee volleyball games, but they're not here right now."

Prez tapped his sub-vocal, asking, "Alden, where are Angelo and Reggie?"

"At the Diaz's townhouse," Alden replied from the ceiling speakers. He then asked, "Would you like them informed they're needed?"

"As quickly as possible," Prez answered, and then asked for Mr. and Mrs. Combs, and Mr. and Mrs. Diaz to report to the Oneula

Beach dining room.

Alden replied, "Mr. Diaz is in surgery, boss. As an intern, he can't leave right now, so I won't bug him."

Prez nodded, "Thanks, Alden." Within a minute, Mrs. Diaz, Roy and Monica Combs came in through a dimensional door. As they approached, Prez smiled, "Your sons had a busy morning, I heard."

The three adults nodded and agreed. On her way to lunch, Mrs. Diaz had heard from Angelo and Reggie, learning that they were bringing a group of little ones to the dining room. Moments later, Angelo and Reggie appeared, hand-in-hand, before the Core Rimmers and their parents. Reggie muttered, "That's still a weird feeling."

"You'll get used to it," John sniggered, and scanned the two teenagers. As John processed and weeded through their thoughts, he passed the important information to the remainder of the team.

Locking eyes with his mom, Angelo explained, "We were finishing lunch at home. We cleaned up and loaded the dishwasher, but Cecilia's not happy that I asked her to wipe the table, so we could get here quickly." He focused on Prez, giggling, "It's not every day the director wants to see you, ASAP."

Mrs. Diaz nodded and smirked, "I'll talk with your sister."

Still processing what John had dumped in his head, Prez grinned, "We have a very serious situation here." The other Core Rimmers evilly snickered and nodded agreement.

Lance softly giggled, "They broke Erik's and Trav's time." Scowling, Erik and Travis glanced at one another, silently wondering how that could be possible. Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott sniggered and

nudged their friends around a bit.

Prez confirmed, "Since nine-thirty this morning, I heard that you two helped our Clan at the playground?"

Blushing, Reggie nodded. Angelo smiled and shrugged, "It wasn't a problem. The kids just needed to be shown stuff to do."

"Playing with little kids is easy," Reggie seriously admitted.

Sixteen Core Rimmers loudly grunted, "Uh oh!"

Angelo offered, "Game rules and stuff, refereeing, and stuff like that."

Prez sniggered, "But did anyone *ask* for your help?" Angelo and Reggie shook their heads, getting the distinct impression that they had overstepped their bounds.

The other sixteen Core Rimmers laughed, "This is *extremely* serious!"

Shaking his head, but unable to hold a straight face, Prez shared, "To make matters worse, two of our little tikes banged their heads together in one of the trampolines. You two didn't even know our doctors' names, but each lifted a crying kid, and transported them to the doctors' office. They stayed with them until they were checked, and then brought them back to the playground again."

"SAY IT ISN'T SO!" Chris, Jay, Scott and Lance yelled.

Sean and Troy playfully droned, "Fahgedaboudit."

Around the dining room, a dozen other New Yorkers and their friends hollered, "FAHGEDABOUDIT!"

Prez lost it and cracked up. Keith giggled, "For doing all the right things at the right time, when nobody asked you to do diddly, we have no other choice except to announce two new Morale Rimmers, Ensign Angelo Diaz and Ensign Reggie Combs." All the kids applauded and cheered; the loudest were those that hadn't been in school that morning. About halfway across the dining room, Tony and Ray were completely hysterical.

Mrs. Diaz and her son, Angelo incredulously shouted "*WHAT?*"

At his son's stunned expression, Roy Combs began laughing. He didn't notice his son or his wife turning pale. Luckily, John felt weakness in the group. He telepathically warned several of the oldest Core Rimmers and Doc Metzger just in time. Monica Combs crumbled and was caught by Jay. Reggie Combs fell backwards against Chris and Scott. Angelo barely had time to gasp before realizing Reggie was already safe. In moments, Mrs. Combs, Jay, Reggie, Chris, Scott and Doc Metzger had all disappeared.

Turning to Erik, Travis, Sean and Lance, Troy sniggered, "Well, the rest of the team decompressed, so I guess its proper, however untimely." The former four nodded and laughed.

Palming her forehead, Mrs. Diaz sighed, "Preston, do you know Angelo or Reggie very well? We've only been here five days."

Shrugging, Prez smiled, "How well I know them isn't the issue. Angelo and Reggie did what needed to be done without instruction or prompting; they saw what Erik, Travis, Tony, Ray, Craig and Phil were doing and helped. Everything else they need to know, they'll learn, just like the rest of us have. Also, they're a team, which is how this division and the Clan operates. Eighty level three orphans at three hospitals needed our help, so three divisions split up to make those kids feel wanted and welcome. Lastly, with five bases and a third of

the planet to cover, we need all the help we can get."

Keith gestured an open palm to John, grinning, "Thanks to our Intel Director, we know almost as much about Angelo and Reggie as their parents do, and a few additional things that we'll speak with them privately about."

Locking eyes with his mom, Angelo grinned, "Believe it or not, we talked about ways we could help the division." He helplessly giggled, "Reg and I thought we'd need to *ask* what we might do."

Looking up at the two adults, John giggled, "Mrs. Diaz and Mr. Combs, I already told my mom and dad. After school, while we're chatting with Angelo and Reggie, you and your spouses are invited to meet with our parents. If you want, I can have a doctor there too, so you can get your Valium prescriptions?"

Glancing around the remaining group of Core Rimmers, Angelo giggled, "I guess we'll need to take classes and stuff."

"Go take care of your boyfriend first," Drew grinned. All the other Core Rimmers agreed.

Looking up at Angelo, John innocently smiled, *'You've already been trained, bro. Your partner will be trained when he's a little more stable, later today. You and Reggie can take tonight and tomorrow to let it sink in. The only classes you'll need to take are for phaser training. Prez will get that scheduled for you.'*

Nodding agreement, Prez prompted Angelo, "Go check on Reggie. Catch up with Lance, Scott, Erik, Travis, Chris and Jay while we're at school. After school, the entire team will get together and we'll get you dudes situated."

Nodding at Prez, Angelo chirped, "Kewl," and then asked, "Mr.

Combs, would you like a quick trip to check on your wife and son?"

Roy Combs nodded and grinned, "Yes, I think so, or I'll be joining you and Reggie in the dog house tonight. With a little luck, I can talk her out of becoming the first Clan mother to indefinitely ground her leader son and his boyfriend."

With that, Angelo tapped his comm-badge and giggled, "Alden, to the doctors' office again, please."

"It's becoming habit today," Alden giggled, and executed the order. The remaining Core Rimmers split up to spend time with their Clan.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Condo B

Wednesday, November 10, 12:20PM HTZ

As soon as lunch was finished, Kassidy and Matt left Oneula Beach and returned to the Thornton condo. Matt was thrilled with Kassidy's interest, but thought his new boyfriend was just being extra nice. On the elevator ride up to the seventh floor, wrapped in each other's arms, Kassidy seriously asked, "Did you really want to play guitar?"

"Yep, always have, as far back as I can remember," Matt answered. "Daddy's been playing bluegrass with friends all my life; it's something I was raised with."

Knowing the sort of response he might get, Kassidy smiled, "Does your playing really suck that bad?"

Matt cracked up and then laughed, "No, I really can play and

sing. I've been doin' both at church almost every Sunday for more'n three years."

Squeezing Matt tighter for a moment, Kassidy giggled, "I love music as a listener. Believe me, I've heard some really horrible garage bands. I really want to hear you play. You must really want to be a good player or you wouldn't be here. Pick whatever songs you like, and I'll give you my honest opinion."

Matt shared, "I want to play music for a living, Kass. Right now, dad says I've learned all he can teach me. He's even said that some of the songs I play are more than he could match. I feel like I'm limiting myself though; there's so much more that I could learn and eventually be able to play." The elevator stopped and they stepped off. On the way to his apartment, Matt continued, "That's why dad chose to work at this division. I wanna do good, for myself, for him, and now for you too."

Kassidy wondered, "Are you feeling pressured?"

"Yes and no," Matt replied. He put his palm on the security plate, stated his name and opened the door, leading Kassidy inside.

"Am I pressuring you?" Kassidy asked.

Grinning, Matt shook his head and answered, "No, its like anything else you really want badly, I guess. Am I really good enough to make a career in music, or is it just wishful thinking?"

Kassidy gently prodded, "Let's find out," and took Matt's hand in his.

Matt stole a tender kiss, and then they walked down the hall. "I'll play a little bit solo for you, and then pull out some CDs and play with the recordings," Matt summarized. They stepped into Matt's

bedroom, immediately noticing that the bed sheet and blanket they had quickly straightened out before leaving was now perfectly made. Sadly shaking his head, Matt giggled, "Dad's been home," and released Kassidy's hand to get his acoustic guitar.

"I almost hate to sit on it," Kassidy smiled.

Matt giggled, "Well, I was thinkin' the living room would be a better place. The better stereo is out there. Not to mention, seeing you sittin' on my bed might be too much of a distraction, and I'll forget all about the music."

Kassidy teased, "After doin' it in the sauna, your living room is tame in comparison."

Mooing through more giggles, Matt joked, "We won't leave wet stains on the new furniture. Now that we've gone oral and finished the job right, I have a new favorite dessert."

"Me too, hunky bear," Kassidy smiled. Seeing Matt reach for his electric guitar case, Kassidy prodded, "Let me help carry stuff?"

Nodding, Matt put the electric case down before Kassidy and handed him the acoustic guitar. He then said, "I'll grab a few CDs and the amp."

Lifting the electric guitar, Kassidy scowled, "How can you do both?"

"The back of the amp is open, so I can put the CDs in there," Matt replied and then easily chose seven compact disks from the rack. Once Matt had stowed them in the amp, he lifted and carried it to Kassidy. Leading the way into the living room, Kassidy asked, "Where should I put these guitars?"

Matt grunted, "The acoustic goes on the couch, and the electric on the floor."

At the end of the hall, Kassidy turned and asked, "Is the amp heavy?"

"About seventy-five pounds, but it's awkward," Matt replied. They went into the living room. Kassidy put the guitars down. Matt put the amp down near one of the surround sound speakers. Red in the face, Matt grinned, "Dad's gonna put casters on this amp so I can just roll it around."

Kassidy worried, "Are you okay, Matt?"

Nodding, Matt smiled, "I'm fine, Kass. It's a 60 watt tube amp with two twelve-inch speakers. The wooden box without the innards would be an awkward bitch." He then leaned over to pull the power cord and plug the amp in. While he was still haunched over, Kassidy went to him and started a gentle back massage. Getting the cord plugged in, Matt laughed, "For the boyfriend that likes to touch as much as I do, thank you, Lord!" He spun around, grabbed Kassidy around the waist and kissed him hard. They held the kiss a long minute.

When the kiss broke, Kassidy giggled, "You're so tempting."

"Right back atcha, sexy cinnamon stick," Matt smiled. He then danced Kassidy back a few steps and sat him down on the sofa. He picked up his acoustic guitar and played a few chords to make sure it was in tune. Backing up another few steps, Matt played the Credence Clearwater Revival song, [Down On The Corner](#). He started with the introduction bass riff, and then strummed chords and then began singing. At Matt's loud, clear voice, Kassidy's eyes widened. He was expecting better than the garage bands he'd heard back in Kentucky,

but he wasn't expecting anything any where near as good as Matt's enthusiastic playing and singing.

When the song ended, Kassidy burst into applause and cheers. Matt giggled, and then started playing the introductory licks to [Southern Nights](#). Again, Matt bopped and played and sang. Kassidy's brain was spinning. His new boyfriend seemed to be as good as any of the guys in Platinum Habits. As soon as the song ended, Kassidy applauded and told Matt exactly what he had been thinking.

Matt smiled, "Thanks, Kass, but I really hope they're way better than me."

"What makes you say that?"

Matt answered, "How can I learn anything if they're as good as me? They've gotta have something to teach me. I'd be really disappointed if they don't." He then started strumming his guitar again and sang [Sundown](#).

At the end of the song, Kassidy proudly beamed, "You can sing and play really well. You haven't sung a bad note yet."

Matt giggled, "I played and sang at church. I'm used to performing now. This next song was a favorite of my mamma's. I wish I could've played it for her before she passed. Because I couldn't, I make a point of playing it every time I pick up a guitar." He then began finger picking his acoustic guitar, and sang, [I'll Have To Say I Love You In A Song](#). Kassidy enthusiastically applauded another great performance. Matt began strumming his guitar again. This time he played and sang [Amie](#).

At the end of the song, Matt took his acoustic guitar off and rested it on the couch beside Kassidy. "Intermission," he grinned, "and then I'll play another couple on the electric, with some CDs." He

went to power on his amp, and then offered Kassidy his hand.

Taking Matt's hand, Kassidy bounded up off the sofa and into Matt's arms, repeatedly stealing tender kisses. In between those kisses, Matt tried to ask, "Do you... want anything... to drink or eat?" Breaking down in giggles, Kassidy made Matt's neck and throat his after lunch snack.

Soon, Kassidy had one hand snaking up under the back of Matt's shirt, and the other hand squirming its way into the back of Matt's shorts. With Kassidy's gray eyes peering deep into his own, Matt giggled, "We will make love again, Kass, before we leave here to do anything else. I need to wet my whistle before I sing another couple o' songs for you."

"You're so good!" Kassidy cheered. He goosed Matt's butt, and then seriously said, "I really hope you're not disappointed, but this audience of one thinks you're just as good as any of the guys in Platinum Habits." Kassidy pulled his hands out of Matt's clothes.

Leading the way to the kitchen, Matt shared, "I'm sure there's a bunch of stuff I don't know." Seeing Kassidy's curious expression, Matt said, "There are songs I've repeatedly tried to play, but they didn't sound right. As long as I stick to country and country-rock, I do all right. Everything else is still a challenge, and I'm not sure what it is that I'm doin' wrong." He opened the refrigerator and offered, "Cola, iced tea, pineapple juice, or water?"

Kassidy smiled, "I'm good with water." While Matt got them tall glasses of refrigerated water, Kassidy prompted, "Name some song you've tried but couldn't play."

"There's lots," Matt replied. "Like the whole end of 'Stairway To Heaven', from the guitar solo on, I can't touch. Its like, some of the

notes are right, but the tone is wrong; it picks up a country twang. It's not only hard rock and metal that I struggle with, its funk and rhythm and blues too." Matt handed Kassidy a full glass and leaned against the counter beside him.

After taking a sip, Kassidy recalled, "Platinum Habits plays a lot of that; at least they did during Sunday night's concert. Yesterday afternoon, they played a lot of ballads, and rock power ballads too."

Matt asked, "How often do they perform?"

"I've only seen those two concerts, but kids that've been around since the start say, about every other day."

"What are the leaders of the Division like?"

Kassidy smiled, "They're kewl. A couple of 'em are our age; Prez, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Troy and Sean. Chris and Jay too, but they were just made Core Rimmers at breakfast yesterday." Matt began evilly snickering. Kassidy giggled, "Yeah, I know. They call themselves that around their parents too. Lance and Scott were made leaders yesterday afternoon, just before the concert. They live in my dorm, and so do Chris and Jay. Kaleo and Tory are another couple. AJ and Jerry are thirteen-years-old. They were just made leaders Friday night. It was Kaleo, Tory, AJ and Jerry that greeted me at lunch Saturday. Those four are all rescued kids. Then there's Drew and Corey. Drew's twelve, and Corey's eleven; they greeted my brothers and cousin.

"Last but certainly not least are John and Stephen. It was them that brought us here from Des Moines. I guess I should mention that John's an N-Gen; short for next generation human. His gifts are empathy, telepathy and telekinesis. John's a trip! He'll walk past you, chattin' with someone else, but then you'll hear his voice in your head,

talkin' about whatever you were thinking of when he walked past."

Kassidy cheerfully continued, "John's parents and Stephen's mom were in Des Moines when we were brought here. The first thing we did was take a trip to the store so we could get clothes and stuff. While we were there, we met Mike's mom and dad. During the day Saturday, I met Corey's and Derrick's parents. Derrick's dad showed us the trike trail we were on earlier. Corey's mom, Aunt Lanna is the group mom. She spends most of the days at the pools and playground with us kids. Mike's dad is a cop. He works at the FYS building with some of the other adults. Troy's mom is a housekeeper at the dorms. She stopped and talked with me too. I give your dad another day or two, and he'll be like all the other adults here, roamin' around and chattin' with kids."

Matt grinned, "I can tell by your voice that you really like it here."

Kassidy gushed, "It's different, but it's great! A good example is yesterday afternoon. Just before dinner, Kade and Karey told me that they were having dinner with their boyfriends, at the Combs' townhouse. I'm blown away that my eight-year-old cousin and two eleven-year-old brothers have boyfriends. A bunch of guys in my dorm hall had dinner with me, since I was alone and bummed out. There are telepaths all over the place, so there's not much of anything that can be kept a secret. When the guys I was eating with took off to do other stuff, Derrick's mom and dad hijacked me for a chat. They noticed my expression during dinner and after. There's these two adults who I barely know, asking me what I really want, talking just like my real parents would. The bottom line is, everybody here watches out for everybody else."

Pausing for another mouthful of water, Kassidy asked, "What

else is on your mind?"

Matt chuckled, "Only you, sexy cinnamon stick." Kassidy began giggling. Matt smiled, "Most of what I always wanted is you, right beside me. The other part comes when school starts next week. Everything else would be nice, but not requirements."

Kassidy wondered, "What sort of everything else are you referrin' to?"

Matt shrugged, "I've heard and read about Clan Short. Anything else I can do to help the community and the Division. I played at church services on Sundays, and at church picnics, and at any other gatherings they planned for the Christmas Holidays and Easter."

Kassidy nodded, "There's lots of stuff you can do, if you want. There are odd jobs posted on the Division's web site. We'll take a look at that later too, if ya want?"

"Sure," Matt smiled, "we'll check it out, after I play a little more and we make love." Giggling and putting his water glass down on the counter, Kassidy slid in front of Matt to plant a tender kiss.

In between kisses, Kassidy softly said, "Later, I'm hopin' to introduce you to Prez and Keith."

"They're the leaders?"

Nodding and running his hands up Matt's arms, Kassidy smirked, "Finding any of them without a bunch of kids lined up around them is the trick. Maybe at dinner they'll be free for thirty-seconds. Leave your dad a note to tell him we'll be eating at the CIC. He don't need to cook every night. Tell him that he's already worked enough today."

Widely smiling, Matt giggled, "Is there somethin' about my arms you like?"

Brightly smiling, Kassidy replied, "You've picked me up and moved me around a couple o' times, and now I know that you're a good musician too. These arms are so strong, but at the same time they can be gentle when you touch me, and these fingers are nimble enough to play guitar. What's amazing is how much I like the idea of havin' a pickin' boyfriend."

"It means practicing, Kass. Once school starts, I hope to be practicing every moment that we're not together like this. I wanna be able to play everything and anything I hear; if I like it, then I can play it, without spending an hour slowly rippin' apart every chord and lick in a four-minute tune."

"Is that what it takes?"

"That's what it takes now. It used to take longer, a couple o' hours over days to learn a single song."

Kassidy prodded, "Show me." Nodding, Matt turned and picked up both glasses. Kassidy led them back to the living room. Matt put both glasses of water down on the coffee table.

He went to get his electric guitar, saying, "I'm really proud of this guitar. Dad found it at a garage sale before my twelfth birthday." Pulling the blonde Fender Telecaster guitar out of the case and putting the strap on, Matt turned and beamed, "It's a rare, classic axe, Kass; vintage 1960. Dad dropped a couple o' hundred bucks on it, but on the way home, he told me that it's as old as he is, and could've easily cost five times more."

Kassidy gasped, "Guitars cost that much?"

"Some really old guitars cost more," he answered, and unraveled the cord, plugged it into the guitar and then the amp. Leaning over, Matt pulled the CDs out from the back of the amp and put them on the coffee table. He chose one disk, put it in the CD player and powered up the rest of the sound system. Before turning around to face Kassidy, Matt turned up his guitar a little, checked the tuning, and then played a couple of chords and licks. Kassidy mooed. Spinning around, Matt giggled, "I know this song opens with an acoustic, but I'm gonna play that on electric, and then switch parts." He turned slightly to start the CD player and began finger-picking Marshall Tucker Band's [Can't You See](#). Soon, Matt was enthusiastically singing and playing the licks along with the recording. At the guitar solo sections, Kassidy could barely believe what he was seeing and hearing; Matt was playing note-for-note perfectly and singing just as well.

At the end of the song Kassidy applauded and cheered, "I'm gonna make love to you until yer pecker won't get hard again!" Matt cracked up. "Okay," Kassidy giggled, "it might get hard, but you won't be puttin' out very much."

Getting the message loud and clear, Matt giggled, "Just a few more songs, sexy cinnamon stick." He quickly changed disks and then began playing [Flirtin' With Disaster](#). Once again, Kassidy was pleasantly surprised. At the end of the song, Matt again switched disks and performed [Gimme All Your Lovin'](#), complete with swiveling hips and soulful eyes peering directly into Kassidy's eyes. Kassidy mooed and began rubbing his crotch, and flicking his tongue. Matt laughed at least half of the lyrics, but had two more songs that he worked countless hours on that he wanted to play.

At the end of the song, while Matt again switched disks, Kassidy playfully warned, "Gonna eat ya up, hunky bear. You

rimmed my ass, and your turn is only minutes away!" Without commentary, Matt played and sang, [Caught Up In You](#). Burning up and barely maintaining, Kassidy stood to show off his tented shorts and started dirty dancing. The more provocative Kassidy got, the more Matt put into his guitar playing and singing. At the end of the song, while Matt's back was turned and dealing with the CD player, Kassidy wrapped Matt up.

Matt giggled, "One more song, just for you, Kass." Kassidy whimpered. "Let me get the disk loaded, play this song for you, and then it's a mad dash for my bedroom," Matt giggled. Kassidy backed away and onto the couch. Matt got the CD loaded and started, and then played and sang, [Love In The First Degree](#).

I once thought of love as a prison
A place I didn't want to be
So long ago I made a decision
To be footloose and fancy free
But you came and I was so tempted
To gamble on love just one time
I never thought I would get caught
It seemed like a perfect crime

Baby, you left me defenseless
I've only got one plea
Lock me away

Inside of your love and throw away the key
I'm guilty
Of love in the first degree

I thought it would be so simple
Like a thousand times before
I take what I wanted and just walk away
But I never made it to the door
Now babe, I'm not beggin' for mercy
Go ahead and throw the book at me
If lovin' you is a crime, I know that I'm
As guilty as a man can be

Baby, you left me defenseless
I've only got one plea
Lock me away
Inside of your love and throw away the key
I'm guilty
Of love in the first degree
Love in the first degree
Oh yeah

Oh yeah

From the ceiling speakers, seven AI's provided backup vocals and sang along with the repeated chorus.

Baby, you left me defenseless

I've only got one plea

Lock me away

Inside of your love and throw away the key

I'm guilty

Of love in the first degree

Love in the first degree

Oh yeah

Having waited long enough and knowing the song was nearing its end, Kassidy stood and starting taking his shirt off. Two steppin' and swaying, Kassidy took his shorts off, proudly displaying his briefs covered bone and dancing for his lover. Matt longingly stared at his boyfriend's package and continued singing;

Love in the first degree

Love in the first degree

Oh yeah

Love in the first degree

Love in the first degree

With the song fading out, Kassidy slipped out of his underwear, tossed them at Matt, and jogged to Matt's bedroom. Taking his guitar

off and putting it on the couch, Matt continued singing, "Love in the first degree, Love in the first degree," and chased after Kassidy. Barely across the doorway threshold and in his room, Matt was attacked, stripped and pushed onto his bed by a ravenous redhead.

Chapter 27

Oneula Beach, FYS Building.

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 12:30PM HTZ

After Reggie had fainted, and had been brought to Doc Metzger's exam room, Scott checked with Jay and Chris, asking, "You're hangin' here for a while?"

Nodding, Chris grinned, "Until Reggie comes around."

Jay offered, "We'll make sure he's okay and glued to Angelo. Then we'll probably all need some time alone, before we get together to educate the new Core Rimmers."

"Kewl," Scott smiled, "I'll go find Lance. I'm pretty sure that there's something running circles in his head." Noticing Chris and Jay waiting for some additional explanation, Scott shrugged, "I can tell. Before we left that other Earth, he was getting those thoughtful, detached expressions; just kind o' phasin' out and back in again."

Jay nodded and grinned, "Go take care of it. When it's time to go into Core Rimmer orientation mode, I'll give you a call."

"Kewl," Scott grinned, "I'll catch ya later."

Chris and Jay chorused, "Later," and then Scott turned and started out of the exam room. In moments, he was walking out of the Oneula FYS building.

During the short walk back to the base dining room, Scott tapped his sub-vocal, whispering, "Hey Alden, what's Lance doin'?"

"He's with Travis and Erik," Alden answered. "They're at a table,

chatting with some other teenage guys; Charlie Fortenberry, Mike Busse, Terry Parkinson are at the same table, and there are other guys at the next table, Neil Green, Tad Markell..."

"I don't need a roll call," Scott interrupted. "Is Lance talking too, or not?"

"Not at the moment," Alden replied. "He's there listening, but not really participating." He then wondered, "Is there something wrong, Scott?"

"It's probably nothing," Scott muttered.

Alden suggested, "If I can help, let me know."

"I'm just a little worried about him," Scott admitted. "It's prob'ly not a big deal, just somethin' he's not said anything about."

"You're acting like a suspicious, jealous boyfriend," Alden giggled.

"No," Scott sniggered, "I just know my sexy lover boy; he gets an idea in his skull and it bounces around there."

"I'm not sure I get what you mean," Alden prodded.

Scott sighed, "Consider how we hooked up. All I had to do was show a little interest in him, and he tried to suck my tongue out of my mouth." Alden began giggling, and Scott grinned, "It's part of being in love, Alden. Once you get a body and boyfriend, you'll start getting the idea; some people hold stuff inside, for a little while, or for a long time, until someone says, 'hey, what's up with that?' He's my boyfriend, and I really do care a lot about him. If something's bugging him, I want to know what it is, so I can at least try to help."

"Well, he's still following the conversation around two tables, but not actively participating," Alden offered.

About to walk into the dining room, Scott smiled, "Just watch and learn." He went inside, found Lance and went in that direction. Seeing Scott approaching, Lance excused himself, got up and went to his boyfriend. Lance was beaming brightly, like they had been apart for far longer than fifteen minutes. Scott silently mouthed, "God, he's so cute!" and Alden cracked up laughing.

Lifting his arms in preparation to give Scott a hug, Lance giggled, "I missed you," and then wrapped him up tight.

They tenderly kissed, and then Scott softly admitted, "I missed you too, SLB." Taking Lance's hand in his, Scott turned and led the way from the dining room.

"Where are we going?" Lance giggled.

Scott smirked, "That depends on you. I get the impression there's some ideas brewing that I can't wait to hear."

Blushing, Lance nodded, but didn't say a word. He never could hide anything from Scott. Even though he hadn't said a word aloud, Scott knew that something was going on.

Before they walked out of the dining room, Scott wondered, "Is it about the kids at the AI hospital?"

The moment they stepped outside, Lance sighed, "No."

"Let me try and help," Scott softly begged. They followed the walkway towards the new condominiums, seeing the construction workers and the tech-bots adding another story to each of the

structures.

Lance squeezed Scott hand briefly, and then huffed, "We spent almost six hours at the hospital, and then another six or more hours at that other Ewa Beach. Both messed with me, and now I'm thinkin' about stuff I couldn't help noticing at the other Ewa Beach."

Scott smiled, "I'm all ears."

Giggling, "You are *not* all ears," Lance looked over at Scott with a playful sparkle in his green eyes.

Scott chuckled, "Uh oh." Beginning to lose it and laugh, Lance released Scott's hand and took off running. Scott ran after him, off the walkway and into the trees. Scott chortled, "I'm catching up to you, MSLB!"

"It's all your fault!" Lance cackled.

Closing the distance between them, Scott playfully reminded, "You started running away. Do you think I won't chase after your pretty butt?"

Roaring laughing and slowing down, Lance ordered, "STOP! You're making matters worse!"

Caught up with Lance, Scott jogged around him, giggling, "It's always worse before it gets better. Now, tell me what you noticed at that other Earth."

Pausing and standing still, Lance panted, "You, Chris, Jay, Keith, Prez, Derrick, Mike, Relud, Kaleo, Tory, Sean, Troy, Reyes and Ryan. Hell, even Drew, Corey, John and Stephen caught my eye."

Stopping before Lance, Scott asked, "What about them?"

Locking eyes with Scott for a few seconds, Lance then blinked and sadly shook his head, frowning, "You know I really love you, right?"

Scott nodded and smiled, "I love you too, Lance, but why do you seem sad all of a sudden?"

Waving Scott to follow, Lance started walking further amongst the trees. He started rambling, "You're my best friend, my lover and my life partner. Things I never noticed about anybody, anywhere, I noticed in you. Please don't believe for a second that I want anything changed or different, but I can't help noticing and thinking. I don't want to lose you over my stupid thoughts, okay?"

"You won't ever lose me, SLB," Scott promised.

Pausing again and locking eyes with Scott, Lance whined, "Even if I said I'm completely gay, like trollin' the Village, three dollar bill gay?"

Scott blinked and then grinned, "*We're* gay, Lance, as in both of us, you *and* me. I distinctly recall leading you off to a private spot so we could make love. Then we went surfing, and then we decided to nap in the tent, with Chris, Jay, Kaleo and Tory. When we woke up, three couples got busy."

"*That's* part of the problem!" Lance incredulously laughed.

"What problem?" Scott sniggered. "When the six of us left the tent, Prez, Keith, Mike, Derrick, Troy and Sean went into the tent. All I learned is that we're all the same; we made love our way, and Chris, Jay, Kaleo and Tory seemed to be doing it the way they wanted too. So, where's the problem?"

Partially covering his face with his hands, Lance giggled, "In my

mind." He lowered his hands, revealing a deep red blush, giggling, "For the first time, today I realized that I like dicks - *all* dicks, Scott, even the younger guys have the cutest, tiny peckers, and I feel so damn guilty, because I'm yours, and you're mine, and there shouldn't be any reason to notice, but I did notice, and I know that I can't ever stop noticing, but now I don't know what to even think of myself."

Widely smiling at the ranting and rambling, Scott snorted and then howled laughing.

"STOP LAUGHING!" Lance roared. Scott only grabbed his stomach and laughed louder. Lance giggled, "I'm serious! I never noticed before that every variation is beautiful, and I'm surprised you didn't notice me gazing, making all sorts of comparisons, and taking mental notes. Even cut guys like me, they're all different and still beautiful. Uncut guys, like you, got a little more attention, because their foreskins were all in various states, exposing less or more of the heads." Pausing briefly, Lance smiled at his lover, and asked, "Did you notice the younger guys? When they came out of the water, their nads were almost invisible, they were so shriveled up, and their foreskin covered their dicks completely, making cuter, little points?" Sputtering, Scott lost it again and rapidly nodded. "What's up with that?" Lance giggled. "Is it because they're so young, or because they were that cold? None of the older uncut dudes came out of the ocean looking like that." Uncontrollably bellowing, Scott gasped for breath. Sadly shaking his head, Lance smirked, "There's something *really* wrong with both of us. You should be angry as hell, but no, just laugh it up."

Taking hold of Lance and squeezing him tight, Scott placed tender kisses and tried to stop laughing. When he caught his breath, Scott admitted, "I've been noticing dicks for years, but just never did anything about it, until you. I've had a couple of years to think and

deal with it, but obviously you're only just now realizing that you're a sexual creature, just like every other human being. Of course you're noticing other dicks, and comparing them to your own and mine, the two you know very well."

Looking up into Scott's eyes, Lance smiled, "It's normal?"

Nodding, Scott said, "Tell me if this sounds familiar; little boys have cute, little dicks, that make us wonder what they'll have when they hit puberty, and if they'll be straight or gay."

"Very familiar," Lance giggled.

"Do you want to mess around with a little boy?"

Lance hollered, "Hell no!"

"Why not?"

"There's not enough meat there for me, they can't put out, and I would hurt them."

"Excellent reasons. Now, what about Kaleo's dark meat?"

Lance giggled, "Gorgeous, limp and erect!"

Nodding, Scott sniggered, "I completely agree, and he's a heck of a great guy, but his pretty pecker isn't for me; it's for Tory. Would you rather Kaleo or me?"

"You, every day, several times a day."

"Why?"

"Because it's that good and there's so much more than your dick that I love."

"That's the difference, Lance;" Scott smiled, "two dudes in love making love are doing it for way more than just to get off. Let's take it to every variation, gay, lesbian and straight; two people in love making love are showing how much they appreciate and enjoy every moment they're together. It's physical and emotion sharing. Our first times Monday, I was scared, at least as much as you were, but everything we did was so good that all my fears completely dissipated. Even when we're taking our time, examining every bit of each other, we're sharing bodies, hearts and minds. Earlier, when I led you off the beach so we could be alone, I wasn't thinking about me, it was to remind you that I love you. I loved that you were so upset about those kids at the hospital. My sexy lover boy has a huge, caring heart in his chest, and he deserved everything I enthusiastically gave him."

Nodding, Lance warmly smiled, "It's never been about what I could get from you, it's always been about what I could give you."

"Every couple feels and thinks the same," Scott reminded. "It was proven fact in a tent on an alternate Ewa Beach. Don't worry about noticing dicks, SLB. I notice 'em too, but here I am, alone with you, not searching for Kaleo or anyone else's dick. Here's another random thought for you to consider; what could you get from anyone else's dick that you couldn't get from mine?"

Rapidly blinking, Lance muttered, "Nothing. It would be an act, with far less real emotion, nothing like when we're making love. I can't imagine any of 'em replacing you."

"Precisely," Scott smiled. "I don't want anyone else touching my dick. All those great guys and awesome kids, that we spent a good part of the day with, would have to work really hard to come close to what you mean to me. It would take years for anyone else to

accomplish what you did in only three days."

Lance giggled, "Do you really notice dicks too?"

"Course I do," Scott chuckled.

"Got a favorite?"

"Other than yours?"

"Yeah."

"It depends on my momentary qualifications," Scott chuckled.

"Such as?"

"Who I would consider a real possibility, like musicians who could become a close enough friend to even think of it, puts Prez, Mike and Troy at the top of the list."

Lance scowled and wondered, "Why only them and not Keith, Derrick or Reyes?"

Bouncing his eyebrows, Scott grinned, "Prez, Mike and Troy are guitar players that have cut dicks, just like my chosen mate."

Mooing through his giggles, Lance warned, "That's gonna cost you."

Scott laughed, "I'll pay your price, SLB."

Silently, Lance ordered Alden to transport them to their dorm room. Glancing around and realizing where they were, and then noticing Lance's wicked leer, Scott cracked up. Stepping back and reaching for the drawstring on Scott's boardies, Lance grinned, "So, what was the deal with the younger guys?"

Shrugging and resting his hands on Lance's shoulders, Scott giggled, "I'm really not sure. My dick changed when I hit puberty, but during New York winters, my foreskin would crimp up, just like those kids' units."

"Really? I've never seen you like that."

Nodding, Scott kicked his boardies aside, and smiled, "It was below freezing out. After a fifteen minute walk to or home from school, my dick was turtled up. To prove that we're all the same, I'll guess that you looked a lot like Jonah when you were about nine or ten. True?"

Moving closer for a kiss, and pushing Scott's boxer-briefs down, Lance then smiled, "I guess it is; the length seemed about right, but he's uncut."

"There was a kid on the beach that looked very much like I did, once upon a time. Can you guess which kid?"

Scowling thoughtfully, Lance started taking Scott's polo shirt off. When it was off, Lance tossed it aside and shrugged, "I can't really imagine what you looked like at ten or younger." He then scanned his partner from head to toe, giggling, "I sure love what I see now."

Grinning, Scott planted a tender kiss, and then stepped back to give Lance a fuller view, reminding, "Lose the wide shoulders, and pubes, and picture me almost a foot shorter, boy sized and not man sized. Redistribute everything you see."

Humming for a few moments, Lance then muttered, "Either John or maybe Gage."

"Gage," Scott grinned. "Did you notice the three Hundser

brothers?" When Lance nodded, Scott said, "They're obviously brothers, and what's hangin' between their legs shows all three stages clearly, from pre-pubescent to pubescent to teenaged young man. In two years or so, John will have hair down there, and his boy-sized wiener will be gone, replaced with something more like what Drew has. And Drew will be where Keith is. Keith will be shaving weekly, if not more, and prob'ly have chest hair too, like his dad. Give Jonah another two or three years, and he'll be a low hanger, like you, SLB."

Lance smiled, "Were you really that attracted to me during our first shower?"

Nodding, Scott chuckled, "There's a wide assortment of thirteen-year-old guys on these bases. Some are still hairless and look more like boys than teenagers. You've got the wide shoulders, trim waist, long legs, with a fair amount of hair below the knees, of a teenager. I love everything about you, and was well on my way before Friday's shower, Lance. If you weren't already well into puberty, I'd have had lots of other worries during Monday's early morning hours. How the hell could I have admitted that I was falling for a guy that was still an undeveloped boy? I would've never gotten any sleep. Instead, my pal had all the signs that he was well into puberty. I could love you, and I could tell you how I was feeling. Our first times together were awesome, and somehow it keeps getting better."

Lance giggled, "I wanna see your dick turtled. Can you imagine being very cold?"

"Not here," Scott laughed. "In the ROH, it's always warm."

"Alden?" Lance giggled.

Before Scott could utter a word of warning, he was free-falling. Lance was still in front of him, now also naked and free-falling. Off to

their sides was the Statue Of Liberty and the skyline of New York City. "Happy now?" Scott cackled, "We're both gonna be turtled up."

Lance grumbled, "He is so gonna get it!"

Into both sub-vocals, Alden giggled, "Fair is fair; Scott's gotta see you turtled too, Lance. You'll start warming each other up as soon as you get back home."

Way up above the clouds, where both free falling boys could not see, was a passing Vol'Kier. He, however, could see them, quite clearly. For a brief moment he worried about this odd and inexplicable sight, but at a quick message from Alden (via Draco and then Reliquary), this particular Earth-Guardian decided that all humans were grade A nuts and kept flying.

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Ewa Beach, Pacific Rim Division School

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, 1:02PM HTZ

Signaling the start of that afternoon's music appreciation class, Derrick glanced around the full room. Younger and smaller kids were close to the front of the room. As he looked back, taller and larger kids intermingled, and everyone had comfortable chairs behind long tabletops that were equipped with power outlets for the laptop PCs. In the back of the room were several of the security gorillas, other Core Rimmer security boys, and a few guests, including KC, Jerry and Joey.

Derrick clearly told the kids, "Yesterday, we quickly covered about three hundred years of classical music history. Before we move forward and into the twentieth century, let's do a quick review. Can anyone tell me what the name was of the earliest form of classical

music?"

Kids began chattering. All five of the teachers heard the correct answer being softly and uncertainly muttered. To give the kids a hint, Keith sat at an electric keyboard, set it as an organ, and began playing 'Toccata and Fugue In D Minor'. It jarred some memories and kids began calling out, "Bach - Baroque."

"Excellent," Derrick smiled, and quickly asked, "When did baroque music start and end?"

Knowing his brother was in the room as a guest speaker, Jonah giggled, "A couple o' years before Reyes was born." Ryan, KC, Joey and most of the class roared laughing.

"That's one dunk in the North Atlantic," Reyes sniggered. Moos erupted around the room.

Gage chuckled, "Sixteen hundred through seventeen-fifty."

Derrick smiled, "There you have four answers for the quiz at the end of the week. Baroque was the earliest form of classical music. Bach is one of the most popular Baroque composers. Baroque music started in sixteen hundred and ended in seventeen fifty."

Leaning against the upright piano, Prez reminded, "Remember to transfer your notes into the Genius application. Genius is your electronic flashcard program; it'll present you with the question and answer to help you study. You can study alone or with your friends."

Watching kids taking notes and waiting until everyone looked up, Keith said, "There are two other big composers from the Baroque period that are extra credit questions on the quiz. Remember how we work our quizzes; there will be twenty primary questions and twenty extra credit questions. All the questions are worth four points, so you

can get an A plus just by exceeding a score of one hundred. Does anyone recall those two composers?"

Around the room, some kids softly rambled names. None of the five instructors heard the correct names. Mike went to the chalkboard to give them hints. As he wrote, he said, "The first composer wrote the Four Seasons, and the second wrote Messiah, which many of us know as a song heard mostly around Christmas time."

John Huth loudly called, "Handel did Messiah."

"Good job!" Mike cheered, and wrote the name on the board, chuckling, "It's spelled, H-A-N-D-E-L. George does not have a handle, so let's let the old dude lie in peace."

Glancing around the room, Troy grinned, "The composer of Four Seasons has a difficult name to remember." He went to the board and wrote a large letter V before Four Seasons. He turned around and waited for more chatter to dwindle. He reminded, "The composer's name was Antonio Vivaldi," and wrote out the name on the board.

While kids took notes, Derrick's seven-year-old brother, Chad Bunting wondered, "How're we supposed to remember that?"

Derrick answered, "Yeah, it's a rough one, bro. Instead of just memorizing, how about if you think of it as the way you form your mouth to make an F sound, like the title is Four Seasons, and you make the same mouth form for a V sound. Now you've got the first letter, and can eliminate all the other possible answers that don't start with V." Around the room, many of the youngest kids were making the F and V sounds.

Strolling around the classroom, Prez offered, "Remember, this class is music appreciation. All we're trying to teach you is that music was made many thousands of years before anyone could write it

down, and when making instruments was a craft that couldn't be easily reproduced. In other words, a guy in China made something that looked like a horn, and so did another guy in Germany, and so did another guy in Egypt. None of the three could easily make duplicates of their horns, and none of them sounded anything alike. Since you come to our rehearsals, it's obvious that all of you guys like music. All of you have your favorite styles of music. But maybe some of you never heard of Bach before yesterday. Some of you liked it and some didn't, but now you've heard 'Toccata and Fugue In D Minor' and 'Air On A G String'. All that really matters in music appreciation is hearing something new and deciding for yourself if you like it or not."

Sitting down at a rack of electronic keyboards, Troy added, "Those of you who want to learn an instrument will only go as far as you really want. Maybe playing sing-a-long songs for your friends is all you'd like to do. Not every musician wants to stand on a stage before hundreds or thousands of people. This class is only opening your mind and ears to stuff you might not have heard before. With what we've already discussed and played, you can choose your favorites." Troy began playing the introduction to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. A lot of kids began shouting the composer's name and some even recalled the title. Pausing, Troy smiled, "That's probably the most identifiable piece of popular music and it's two hundred years old. Let's see a show of hands for those who heard it before yesterday."

Only about twenty hands raised, and most were teenagers. Keith nodded and asked, "Everyone who knew before yesterday that it was Beethoven *and* which symphony it was, put your hands down." Only one hand lowered; thirteen-year-old Gerry Mayers' hand. Keith chuckled, "Okay, lower your hands. That's all this class is about, and you've all learned a little something in a day. For the quiz, Beethoven

wrote his symphony number five in 1804, two hundred years ago."

"Those are the only questions you'll see on the quiz about classical music," Mike told the class. Picking up an acoustic guitar, he continued, "We covered way more than that yesterday, only to familiarize you with Chopin, Brahms, Mozart and other famous composers. Now we can get into how we went from classical music to popular music. Basically, there were songs that we now consider folk classics."

Mike began strumming and singing, "She'll be coming around the mountain when she comes. (Choo choo!) She'll be coming around the mountain when she comes. (Choo choo!) She'll be coming around the mountain. She'll be coming around the mountain. She'll be coming around the mountain when she comes. (Choo choo!)"

Over the giggling kids, Troy loudly chuckled, "That's a song about some new fangled invention called trains. There are six verses that repeat the same melody over and over." He quickly sang, "She'll be riding six white horses when she comes. (Whoa back!) We'll all go out to meet her when she comes. (Hi babe!) She'll be wearing red pajamas when she comes. (scratch, scratch!) She'll have to sleep with Grandma when she comes. (snore) We'll all have chicken and dumplings when she comes. (Yum yum!) We'll all play hide and seek when she comes. (Home free!)"

"There were literally hundreds of similar songs that were popular in the late eighteen hundreds like that," Prez told the class. "Folk music tells stories everyone can relate to; the story might be about a person, or a new invention, or about some fabled event."

"There was a really big problem," Keith seriously shared. "It's really hard to go from place to place with your piano in your pocket." The kids cracked up. Keith grinned, "Suddenly, during the mid to late

eighteen hundreds, people wanted some instrument that was easy to play, and above all, it had to be portable. Guitars had been around in the classical world for a while, but they were generally frowned upon, and they weren't loud enough for groups around the living room fireplace."

To demonstrate, Troy picked up a gut string classical guitar and strummed the chords to 'Coming Around The Mountain'. After only a few seconds, Mike strummed his steel string acoustic guitar. Mike's guitar almost completely drowned out Troy's guitar. Acting extremely irritated, Troy stopped strumming and squinted at Mike, causing another eruption of giggles and laughter. Reaching into his pocket, Troy pulled out a harmonica and played along with Mike. Soon, they were speeding up the tempo and began improvising, trying to out-play each other. It was all an act, but one that the kids loved and laughed at. Mike and Troy finished their little folk performance and the kids applauded.

Now wearing an acoustic guitar, Prez softly finger picked, roamed around the room and took on a mysterious tone, telling the class, "So here we are, in the eighteen hundreds. Electric light was rare. Most folks still used candles and fireplaces to light their homes at night. Only the rich could afford electric lights, or a piano. Only the extremely wealthy could afford the first radios, and they primarily played classical music, news and talk shows. But there are all these catchy little tunes that people liked to sing. The first two very popular and portable instruments were the acoustic steel string guitar and the harmonica. American cowboys driving their herds of cattle now had ways to entertain themselves."

Adding a mandolin part in harmony to Prez's finger picking, Mike half-sang, "After the American Civil War, freed slaves began getting guitars and harmonicas. They weren't singing the popular folk

songs though; they were making up their own music, that told of their lives as slaves. People that had the hardest lives sang with emotion about things that were important to them, on the farms, on the plantations, in the factories and in the mines."

Shaking a tambourine in time, Derrick reminded, "The people of America were making this very free and natural music called 'the blues'. Now let's add in some French Creole beliefs in the Mississippi River city of New Orleans." Using a syncopated rhythm to his melody, Troy began blowing into his saxophone. Derrick explained, "The sound traveled up and down the river with the merchant ships and the river boats. It flowed into the Southern Baptist churches and into the countrysides. The blues became spiritual praise music, and it became country music. In the last ten years of the nineteenth century, the radios once only owned by the wealthy were now in the hands of the middle class common people. By the dawn of the twentieth century, we still had radio stations playing classical music, but we also had country music stations, and we had blues stations, and spiritual praise music, and this new bouncy kind of music called jazz."

Adding a keyboard part to the guitar, mandolin, saxophone and Derrick's tambourine, Keith gently sped up the tempo, telling the class, "Jazz led to ragtime. Jazz made kids want to dance."

By this time, Keith was stationary at one side of the room. Derrick was over on another side, and Prez, Troy and Mike had each paused at different sides of the room. Keith grimaced and loudly explained, "The problem we have is how well we can hear and what we can hear. Five of us are as spread out as we can be in a class of about a hundred and eighty. So what happens when we want to play for three hundred, five hundred, or a thousand dancing kids? We're simply not loud enough."

Slipping behind the full drum kit, Reyes began softly playing and had to shout to tell the kids, "Enter the big bands, with their huge horn sections. Usually, those bands had about six trombone players, about six or more trumpet players, a sax section of at least eight and up to twelve players, consisting of alto, tenor and baritone saxophonists, and another eight or ten clarinet players. Right now, we still have a very big problem. How many of you can hear me over the six piece band now playing?" Only about thirty kids closest to Reyes raised their hands.

Derrick, Mike, Prez and Troy walked toward the front of the room, where Keith and Reyes were. With a silent instruction to Alden, Reyes voice traveled from his subvocal and through the room's PA system. "Enter technology," Reyes explained. "The first radios used only a watt or two to amplify sounds. By the nineteen twenties, ten watt radios were common, not just for the wealthy anymore. So let's get a group of three, four or five vocalists to sing into a microphone and through a PA system of about forty or fifty watts, to keep up with the blaring big band. For comparison's sake, the PA system in the auditorium our band uses has twenty stereo amps that drive one thousand-five hundred watts each." The kids gasped. Reyes further explained, "On the left side of the auditorium are twenty full-range speaker cabinets and each of them is capable of handling seven hundred and fifty watts each. The same situation is on the right side."

Standing up, Drew told the class, "Each amp has a left side knob and a right side knob. Each goes up to twenty. For the wedding concert last week, for an audience of about four thousand, each knob on all those amps was turned up to six; that's less than a third of their maximum. Those are the full-range speakers; there are also subwoofer cabinets, that only reproduce the lowest bass tones. Those amps are larger, two thousand five hundred watts each. Less than a hundred years ago, a fifty watt PA system was a big deal." Drew sat back

down again.

Not moving from where he was standing and playing guitar, Mike asked, "Hey, why should we pay forty or fifty guys in a big band if we can amplify it? Can't we reduce the size from fifty down to ten?"

"Sure we can," Reyes answered. "By the nineteen fifties, that's exactly what happened, with the introduction of the Bossa Nova latin beats. We'll keep the piano player, and the drummer, guitarist and bassist, and cut our horn section down to four or five guys, playing trombone, trumpet, tenor and baritone saxes, and maybe clarinet too. Most famous and popular for this type of smaller band was Ray Charles. For your quiz, remember Ray Charles. Now we can split five hundred bucks a night eight ways instead of fifty ways. Now, instead of making ten dollars a night, the band members are making sixty-two fifty a night. Everyone chips in two dollars and fifty cents a night to keep the PA system maintained and functioning, so we can play the next weekend, and we're still making six times as much as we did before."

The four musicians suddenly stopped playing and the lights dramatically dimmed. Over the PA system, Mrs. Diaz played a recording of Glen Miller's 'A String Of Pearls'. Half the kids jumped in their seats, and the remainder giggled at the shock. Reyes moved over to a set of congas. Derrick sat behind the drums. Pulling over an upright bass, Prez began playing along with the walking bass line. Keith added the piano part. The drum part came in from Derrick. Simultaneously, Mike strummed the jazz chords and Troy played along with the recorded baritone saxophone part.

Since none of the boys had sheet music before them, Mrs. Diaz assumed that either they had memorized the tune or perhaps their ears were that good. At the end of the recording and the performance, Mrs.

Diaz asked, "Did you boys memorize that tune?"

Almost at once, Troy and Prez admitted that they had memorized their parts. Derrick, Mike and Keith were playing by ear and improvising.

Handing a remote control to Reyes, Mrs. Diaz shared with the class, "I've been playing piano for twenty-three years and flute for twenty years, but I could not have done what your five teachers just did." She prompted, "Go ahead, Reyes."

After thanking Mrs. Diaz, Reyes activated the slide show and began his review with an old, nineteenth century photo of African-American cotton plantation workers. "The Blues started here, with ex-slaves singing in fields." Switching the photo to another picture of an extended family sitting on the porch of an old shack, Reyes said, "At the end of the day, they sang of their lives; their woes, and their joys. Notice the wash basin, the wash board and the wooden barrel that are being used as percussion. Take a good look at the old acoustic guitar. Compare it to the one my pop is holding."

"It's way smaller in the photo," Jonah quickly said.

"Exactly right, bro," Reyes grinned. "The body of the guitar works as a resonance chamber. Sound from the strings bounces into the body and back out again. During the big band days, the guitar was a part of the rhythm section. It was way in the background and could barely be heard."

The slide advanced to a young African-American man playing another guitar. Mike picked up the story, saying, "Check out this guitar. The body is much larger. The big sound hole is gone, replaced with two F shaped holes, and it has one of the first developed pickups. The man's name is Charlie Christian. He's the first guy to play what

would become the electric guitar, so take note of his name. With an electronic pickup and a wire into a small amplifier, the guitar could be heard as a primary instrument in the band."

Reyes continued, "Charlie played with the Benny Goodman band. What was usually happening was, the big band would play for kids to dance to until midnight. When that show was over, some of the band members would go out to jazz clubs. In the Benny Goodman Sextet, the six man group that played until the wee hours of the morning, Charlie was a soloist, along with Benny on clarinet, Gene Krupa on drums, and the trumpet, trombone, and saxophones. Jazz is all about improvisation, so all six members of the band got to shine before the audience. Today, Charlie Christian is considered the father of the Bebop style of jazz. Charlie was born in 1916 and sadly, he died in 1942 from tuberculosis. He was only twenty-five. In the three short years that Charlie played with Benny Goodman, he left a huge mark on music. Six years later, when I was first activated in 1948, Bebop was the popular style of jazz. So, it can be said Charlie started something that he never saw become the preferred style."

All the while Reyes was speaking, Mike was setting up another demonstration. Mike explained, "Charlie played a Gibson ES-150 model guitar. That model isn't manufactured anymore, but this is a Gibson ES-175 and very much the same sort of hollow-body jazz guitar. It has two modern pickups compared to the one on Charlie's axe." He prompted, "Keith, play the basic version of [Stella By Starlight](#), bro." After about three minutes, Keith's piano version completed and the kids applauded. Mike grinned, "Now, here's how Charlie might've played [Stella By Starlight](#)." Mike played the same song in a solo Bebop style; Mike's version lasted about as long, and all of that was improvisation on the harmony and melody. Again, the kids applauded.

When the applause diminished, Mike put the guitar on a stand, off to the side of the amplifier and said, "Here's another problem that we'll talk more about tomorrow. This little Fender Mustang amp is fifteen watts, which is much smaller than the hundred watt Marshall amp I play on stage with Platinum Habits. The amp was turned up to about three while I was playing for this class. Listen to what happens when I turn the amp up louder." Leaning over, Mike began turning up the amp's volume. In no time, the guitar began feeding back. Over the sound, Mike shouted, "That's between five and six, only a little more than half way." He turned down the volume all the way, explaining, "Acoustic and hollow body jazz guitars get that noise all the time. It's called feedback; the sound of a string vibrating bounces around inside the guitar body, and the sound from the amp vibrates the body even more, so the tone that started the process keeps ringing. Back in the days of jazz, it wasn't easy to play for a club audience of two- or three-hundred and be heard without getting that sound. Playing for an audience of a thousand dancing kids was almost impossible. We'll talk more about feedback tomorrow and Friday."

Troy took over, saying, "Another topic we'd like to discuss is popular music, or pop. We think that pop shouldn't be considered a valid genre. For three hundred years, classical music was popular, and for some people, that still is what they prefer to listen to. Then folk music was popular; then it was country, and then the blues, and then jazz, and then the big bands. As we move along in this class, you'll learn that each of those genres became popular again when rock and roll was considered pop, and when disco music was pop, and punk was pop. Today, you can turn on a radio and hear any of those genres, plus more newer styles, and all the international and interplanetary musics from Andorians, Klingons and Tesnians, to name a few. For now, just remember that historically, classical music was followed by folk, country, the blues, and jazz."

Roy asked, "Is it safe to assume all you guys prefer rock over the other styles, since that's what your band plays?"

"I wouldn't say it's a preference," Prez offered. "In my own case, I like rock and jazz, but all the styles that grew out of the blues are favorites. I also like listening to Keith playing classical piano pieces."

Derrick smiled, "As a band, we've each added our favorites to our repertoire, but at the same time, half of what we're thinking of is what the audience might like to hear. Some music we like is technically intricate, polyrhythmic and challenges us as musicians, but it couldn't be considered popular in any genre. An example might be a tune by Mahavishnu Orchestra. During last week's wedding concert and again last night, we played primarily ballads. Normally, we would play more upbeat songs and toss in ballads to break it up."

Mike said, "I'd love to play classical pieces and solo jazz guitar a lot more than we do, but in a band, I'm part of a team. I could play classical guitar for an hour, but how many of you might still be awake afterward? As much as I love the sound of a classical guitar, I also love playing solo jazz guitar, and I like to crank it up to play rock too."

"Another thing, for those of you who would like to learn an instrument, is what style you might prefer to play," Keith prompted. "There will be group lessons for all the piano players, to begin the learning process, and then there will be specialized classes to learn songs and styles. Swap piano players out for bassists, drummers, guitarists and horn players, each going through the same process I outlined for piano. That's why we're starting with music appreciation, so you have a foundation to say, I like that style."

Kaleo wondered, "Why don't you guys include occasional solo stuff in your shows?" Each of the six band members shrugged,

causing most of the class to break into giggles. Kaleo sniggered, "In this class, in only two days, we've seen each of you do things we haven't seen you ever do before. Until yesterday, we had no idea that Prez could play piano. The way Troy played 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' yesterday wasn't the same as the way it was played last week."

"He plays it solo for me," Sean softly giggled.

Smirking at Sean, Kaleo and Tory chorused, "Lucky you!" and the whole class began laughing again.

Blushing and sadly shaking his head, Troy sniggered, "Why do I get the impression *none* of you are thinking of the song?" Everyone cracked up.

Reyes asked, "Since we have almost half the division here, plus personal security and friends, would you like to hear more solo performances by the band members?" It seemed that everyone in the room vocally agreed. Nodding and walking to the front of the classroom, Reyes asked, "Would you like to hear more than rock or rhythm and blues; maybe some jazz or classical standards?"

Cassie Cornwell reminded, "For every one song that any of us know, you dudes probably know dozens," and then quickly added, "I say, yes." Almost everyone in the class agreed, especially loud were the sons of the band members, the personal security, Joey, KC and Ryan.

Tapping his comm-badge, Reyes called, "Alden, get me a vibraphone, for here and another for the auditorium. I'll need four mallets for each location too, please." He then told the class, "Back in the jazz days, vibes were used a lot in jazz. It's really the only percussion instrument I can play that allows me to play a melody and a little harmony. I'm no Lionel Hampton, but I can manage."

Sadly shaking his head, Derrick chuckled, "Reyes, when did you learn vibes, and why didn't you say anything before?" More giggling erupted in the room.

"I started in 1952," Reyes giggled. "I didn't say anything before because Keith and Troy can get the same tones from their keyboards, and it's not really necessary in the songs Platinum Habits plays. In this class, our kids want to hear a jazz combo. If they like what they hear, we've just added several dozen standards to our repertoire."

Joey raised his hand. "Bud Weyes, even dhough keyboawds can do id, dhe weaw insdwumend sounds beddew, 'cause of hawmoninics. Dhat's what Bonzo dowd me!"

"For those who don't know, Joey's mentioned John Bonham, the drummer for Led Zeppelin," Derrick shared with the class, and then wondered, "What year did you meet Bonzo?"

"Ninedeen-sevendy," Joey answered.

"In the seventies and even part of the eighties, that was probably correct," Keith said. "However, today's synthesizers and electronic keyboards use ninety-six kilobit per second sample rates and twenty-four bit depth. It's digital instead of analog. For reference, the CDs we listen to every day are forty-four-point-one kilobits per second and sixteen bit depth. Platinum Habits also has hybrid analog-digital synthesizers on stage. There are some things that we can't easily reproduce, like certain techniques that strings and wind instruments easily do, but thanks to electronic effects, volume pedals and wah pedals, we usually manage pretty well."

Several students had curious glares and more were blinking uncertainly, but the original eighty-seven that knew of Mikyvis were widely grinning and giggling. Moving over to the upright bass, Prez

decided to return to the subject, chortling, "What are we playing, Reyes?"

Humming thoughtfully while moving to stand behind the vibraphone, Reyes then suggested, "How about a medley? There's only about twenty minutes left to the school day, so let's fill the time with real jazz improvisation. We'll play 'Night And Day', 'I've Got You Under My Skin' and 'You Make Me Feel So Young'."

Playing vibes, Reyes led the band into and through each song, changing the tempo as necessary with walking bass lines. From the left side, Reyes stood at the vibraphone; then Keith sat at the upright piano, then Derrick sat at a drum kit, then Prez stood playing the upright bass, then Mike stood playing the ES-175, and lastly was Troy, alternating between saxophones and the clarinet.

In the back of the room, Mr. Stevenson, Miss Perez and Mr. and Mrs. Taylor joined Mrs. Diaz. Once again, Jason and Trinity Taylor started dancing. This time they danced the Lindy Hop. Mrs. Diaz called for the parents of the band members to join her at the school. In pairs, Jim and Jen Hundser, Laura and Rob Gibbons, Anna and Carl Seibert, and Bill and Lanna Seaver transported into the room. Lastly, Judy Faris transported in. Troy switched from clarinet to tenor sax and to baritone sax with ease; sometimes following the melody and other times adding accents with Keith's piano chord stabs. Mike often played jazz chords, but occasionally switched to improvising the melody. For the first time in their lives, the kids in the classroom were hearing a jazz sextet playing without any sort of sound system, as if the room were an intimate night club in the 1920s.

Horacio leaned over to ask Sean, "Have you ever heard them play these songs before?"

Shaking his head, Sean replied, "Not once. The rehearsals at

Archnania were a lot like this. One of them would start playing or singing some song, and then the others join in. If they decide to keep it in the band's set list, they'll iron out the rough spots."

Sonia incredulously giggled, "What rough spots?"

Sean shrugged and grinned, "You can tell, they're just having fun."

In another couple of minutes, just slightly after three in the afternoon, the band created an ending to their jam. All the adults at the rear of the room loudly applauded and so did the class of kids. Standing at the piano, Keith asked, "Would you like to hear that sort of music occasionally?" The resounding response was affirmative.

Troy chuckled, "Okay. I guess the next question would be, how often?"

A bit of chatter erupted. Before it dwindled, Sean stood. He locked eyes with Troy, suggesting, "Why not whenever you guys want? The truth is that most of your 'so-called' rehearsals are filled with songs you've already practiced, to some extent or another, anyway. You guys enjoying yourself matters to us, so mix in those kinds of tunes."

"And some of the solo stuff you did in class too," Kaleo quickly offered.

Tory nodded, "Yeah, definitely mix in solos too. I was near Lance and Scott yesterday afternoon when they asked Mike to wail. If Mike had played just one solo guitar song, they'd have been plenty happy. That little medley was as awesome as any performance in the auditorium." A lot of positive chatter erupted from the kids, parents and teachers.

"That's the way it'll be," Prez announced. "And we're past three o'clock. School's out!" With that, everyone packed their laptops, got up and started out of the room. Troy and Mike began packing their instruments. Derrick chatted with Reyes about his vibraphone experience. Prez and Keith talked with Mike and Troy about expanding their repertoire to include a little jazz and classical music.

Skylar popped into the classroom, before Mike, holding a battered old guitar case. He giggled, "This is for you, bro," and put the case down.

Mike blinked and smiled, "I can't imagine what this is." He squatted down to open the case and the rest of the band members gathered around. All six of them gasped when the case was opened. Mike looked to Skylar for explanation.

Skylar giggled, "I heard what you said earlier about Charlie's old guitar. I checked the history and learned the family gave it away, and it would've been broke beyond repair within ten years of Charlie's death."

"This guitar has been lost for over sixty years!" Mike excitedly wailed.

"Well, yeah, but it wasn't lost," Skylar giggled. "I saw Charlie on his death bed in Staten Island. When he learned it would be given away and busted, he about had a coughing hissy fit. I told him that I knew someone who would take real good care of it, so it's yours. It wasn't lost, it just took a sixty-two year leap into the future."

Derrick playfully warned, "Your afternoon is booked, Sky. I want to check out Carl Palmer's drum kit so I can reproduce it."

"I want a sixties vintage Hofner bass," Prez chuckled.

Keith grinned, "I want a seventies analog Moog synthesizer. We'll get two, so Troy has one too."

Giggling his butt off, Skylar turned to Troy. "I really don't know," Troy grinned. "I mean, we can go back and get whatever we want, so what do I get? In the last week since joining this band, I've got more access to gear than ever before. I've gone from the beat old acoustic guitar I came here with, to an awesome 12-string acoustic, and a 50th Anniversary Stratocaster, *and* a Les Paul Standard, and a sweet Jackson with a Floyd Rose tremolo, not to mention the harmonicas, saxes and keys. I can't even think of anything I might want that I don't already have."

"Let me know when you decide," Skylar giggled. He then took Derrick's hand and they popped out of the room. Barely two-seconds later, they returned.

Derrick roared, "Holy shit! Nobody's even moved and we were gone for an entire afternoon!"

Skylar took Keith's hand and they disappeared. Skylar returned alone. Prez asked, "Where's Keith?"

"At the auditorium, getting the Moog's set up," Skylar smiled. Focusing on Troy, he giggled, "He got two Moog Modular 55's."

Excited to see what Keith had brought back, Troy prompted Sean, "Let's go help, Tiger."

Sean took Troy's hand and had Alden transport them to the auditorium. Derrick, Mike, Corey, Drew, Reyes and Ryan also went to the auditorium, with Charlie Christian's ES-150, intending to set up the drum kit and percussion. That's all Joey and KC needed to hear. KC went to get Fred and then the four of them would go to the

auditorium.

Skylar looked up, asking, "Ready, Head Rimmer?"

Prez nodded, "You're helping us so much on your first day. Make sure you take time off, Sky."

"I already did," Skylar giggled. "Daddy said, if I wanna learn to play guitar, that's kewl, but I really should do it like you guys did, over time." He took Prez's hand and popped out of the school. They returned to the auditorium with two Hofner bass guitars; one right handed model and the other was one of Paul McCartney's left handed Hofner basses.

The left handed model had been severely damaged during the 1965 world tour, Prez told his friends. It was beyond repair, but during the moments that Prez was sharing his visit with a living legend who didn't have a clue what he would become, Skylar had already time-regressed the splintered instrument to like new condition. Prez had Alden transport the repaired vintage bass to his townhome's master bedroom.

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Oneula Beach

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 3:02PM HTZ

Meanwhile, lounging out by the Oneula Beach pool and diving well, with Erik, Travis, Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott, Reggie and Angelo could barely believe what they were told of their new Core Rimmer jobs. Since lunch time, Angelo and Reggie learned all the basics, and what had been done at Charleston AI Hospital that day. Most amazing to the two new lovers was that their relationship was considered to be equal with all the other Core Rimmer couples.

Reggie softly wondered, "How can that be?"

Chris grinned, "You talked to each other and told the truth. Although Jay and I have been a couple about a year longer than Prez and Keith, they're the same as us. Given their history with Derrick and Mike, there's no way I could say anything degrading about any of 'em. The same goes for Drew and Corey, and John and Stephen. Every couple is the same in their hearts. Prez, Keith, Derrick and Mike have managed what very few ever try. Becoming friends and lovers at such an early age made what they have possible."

Sadly shaking his head, Jay smirked, "John's telepathically confirmed what Erik and Trav told us at dinner last night; it took you days to follow your hearts, and once you did, you tried to share lifetimes with each other in a single day."

Scott shared with Angelo and Reggie; "Lance and I are sort o' like you guys; we knew each other for three days before acting on it. We committed in one day, so did Troy and Sean, and so did Trav and Erik, and so have you two. Last night after dinner, the six of us talked about getting married. We already know Troy and Sean are ready to marry, and so are AJ and Jerry. All you two have to do is say yes, choose a date, and you'll be married too."

"All this seems like an awful lot at first, but the idea grows and feels very right," Lance smiled.

"The simple fact is, you spent the day building on an attraction you only hoped could be," Chris explained. "You did exactly what we tried to explain to six younger boys on Monday night. Now a solid foundation is set for you to build on. All that's left is spending time together."

"We're the same as you dudes," Erik chuckled.

Angelo grinned, "Probably not *exactly* the same."

Lance giggled, "If you're referring to sex, I'll say that making love only intensified what I already felt for Scott. Each and every step took us from best friends, to boyfriends, to committed partners, and lastly to soul mates. I never dreamed what was already awesome could get better, but it does. We didn't learn from John *exactly* what you did together or when, but we did get the complete explanation of what each of you felt during all of it. That feeling is something that each and every couple experiences. Tell me if any of this sounds familiar; he knows me and loves me even more; I cried in his arms and he didn't mock me, or say a word about the tears." Angelo and Reggie smiled at one another and then nodded at Lance. Shrugging, Lance offered, "John and Stephen may be younger, but they're just like us too. The fact is, I was the one that couldn't tell Scott what I was feeling."

"You showed it, SLB," Scott smiled. He then told Angelo and Reggie, "There I am going slow, so I wouldn't freak out Lance. Then he lays a whopper of a kiss on me that pushed me back, and he kept pushing me back until the rear of my legs were against the mattress of my bed!" Angelo, Reggie, Erik, Travis, Chris and Jay cracked up.

Lance giggled, "I wanted Scott naked first, but he won the match for my clothes. Now, it's not wrestling, it's helping each other undress. That's the most awesome thing in the world! I'm not talking about touching his dick, but his hands, or arms, and just about everything other than his dick. If you haven't tried it yet, just take each other's shirts off really slow, and concentrate more on the feel of his torso than the shirt. Now I know I can touch him and he loves it as much as I do."

Reggie blushed and sniggered, "Yeah, we did that too. I never thought I'd admit that to anyone besides Angelo. You dudes don't

keep much very private, huh?"

Travis shrugged, "I'm sure we've all kept plenty private; specifically, what's been said. Let's face it, that's where two people really click. What we're talking about is nothing new, but alone with Erik, it seems like everything we talk about is brand new. Everything sexual is the same."

Jay shrugged, "We're brothers, and there's nothing surprising being said. Sometimes making love is fun, other times it's romantic and slow, and sometimes it's desperate. It's all intense and another way of sharing, just like all the talking that got you there in the first place. Not to mention, since last night's post-concert chat, we're beyond all that now, Reggie."

Since Lance and Scott didn't participate and were clearly confused, Chris carefully said, "Reggie is between Lance and Darren, seven plus inches hanging, and about eight erect."

Turning wide-eyed to Reggie and then to Angelo, Lance giggled, "I'm six inches long and grow to just a little over seven. Scott's got four thick inches that grows to seven thicker inches. I don't know whether to be impressed or jealous. Talk about excessive!" Blushing intensely, Angelo and Reggie giggled. Erik, Travis, Scott and Chris evilly snickered.

"That's not excessive," Jay grinned. "Now, if you want, I can easily exaggerate a few completely awesome..."

"NO, JAY!" Chris, Lance and Scott loudly laughed. Picturing another mob shower grind-fest with all four couples, Lance lost it and cracked up.

"I guess we could go find our Head Rimmer then," Jay

sniggered.

Chris told Angelo, "Tap your new sub-vocal and ask Alden where we can find the rest of our team."

Always eavesdropping, Alden waited for Angelo's call, and then giggled across eight comm-badges, "Most of the team are in the Ewa Beach auditorium. Kaleo, Tory, John and Stephen are with the kids at the playgrounds, here and at Ewa Beach. AJ and Jerry are at the Rapid Response Base, getting their phaser training."

Scott scowled, "Prez and the rest of 'em are in the auditorium, but didn't announce a rehearsal?"

"I don't think they consider it a rehearsal," Alden seriously answered. "Each of the band members went with Skylar, back in time, to get instruments that they otherwise couldn't. They're just fooling around with their new stuff."

Jumping to their feet, Scott and Lance hollered, "Transport us there now!" They vanished.

Alden giggled, "Would the rest of you like to stand, or shall I just transport you into seats at the auditorium?"

Jay grinned, "First row seating, please, Alden." Erik, Travis, Chris, Jay, Reggie and Angelo disappeared from poolside chairs to the Ewa Beach auditorium.

Of course, other kids at the pools overheard some of what was said. Starting with the quadruple Rs and their boyfriends, kids got dressed and raced across the Oneula Beach base destined for the Ewa Beach auditorium. Stan, Kenny, Jason and JD raced to the playground to gather their brothers and the little kids to bring them to Ewa Beach.

Upon arrival, Lance and Scott stood before center stage. Angelo, Reggie, Erik, Travis, Chris and Jay materialized in seats, listening to Platinum Habits playing an impromptu jam of Pink Floyd's [Us And Them](#), with Mike singing lead vocals. Unseen up in the PA booth, Drew and Corey precisely applied delay effects to Mike's vocals. Laser lights were bouncing off the spinning mirrored ball way above them, and another set shone out from the stage to the audience like a multicolored misty array. Derrick's drum set now included double bass drums, three Roto toms, two more mounted tom-toms and additional cymbals. Troy was playing tenor sax. The PA system was turned up as loud as it had been Sunday night.

Regardless of the Clan kids showing up, the band continued as they had planned. The growing audience applauded and cheered. Seeing lines of kids entering the auditorium, Kassidy and Matt followed them inside. The band pushed onward with [Any Colour You Like](#), during which Troy switched to his Stratocaster. Playing his new Moog synthesizer, Keith was totally involved in what he was playing. During [Brain Damage](#), Prez sang lead vocals, with Mike and Troy backing him up. Freaking the audience out, Keith, Derrick and Reyes sang the harmony vocals, and occasionally laughed and giggled, exactly like the recorded masterpiece. And lastly, [Eclipse](#), completed the last four songs from 'Dark Side Of The Moon'.

During the synthesized heartbeat at the end, everyone noticed it was Derrick softly chortling, "There is no dark side of the moon, really. As a matter of fact, it's all dark."

During the applause and cheers, Keith chuckled, "We're just playing with our new toys, dudes."

"We don't care! Play more!" Chris and Jay hollered.

Scott yelled, "That was *awesome!*"

"It was as good as any live version I've ever heard," Lance laughed.

Troy smiled, "It's the first time Reyes and I sat in on those tunes."

Lance and Scott incredulously hollered, "You've gotta be kidding!"

Shaking his head, Troy giggled, "Old Habits messed around with it, and I've played with the CD, and of course Reyes is familiar with it, but we've never played it together before. It needs some work still, and a few female backup vocalists."

Seeing Lance and Scott slump, Jay tapped Angelo, softly sniggering, "Lance and Scott are going to set their guitars ablaze any minute now."

Nodding, Angelo chortled, "I can foresee two fewer Core Rimmers, because they'll be awake around the clock, practicing until they drop."

Troy walked toward the drum risers to gather with the rest of the band. Stepping away from the group, Mike approached the edge of the stage with his Alhambra classical guitar. Sitting cross-legged on the stage before Scott and Lance, Mike played [Dee](#) effortlessly, and then followed that up with [Mood For A Day](#) and [Spanish Fly](#). Cassidy and Matt took seats in the first row. Although he had been playing for years with his dad and others, Matt was spellbound. When he was done, Mike smiled, "You can play those tunes too." He stood and walked back toward the drum risers, passing the classical guitar to Prez, who took Mike's place, cross-legged on the stage before the two

heavy metal headbangers.

"There's an awesome guitarist named Rik Emmett that played for a band named Triumph, from Canada, in the seventies and eighties," Prez said. "He wrote this little diddy titled [Petite Etude](#)," and began playing the piece. When finished, Prez took a deep breath, and then explained, "Another awesome guitarist is Craig Chaquico. He made his name rocking out with Jefferson Starship. He wrote this piece titled [Center Of Courage \(E-Lizabeth's Song\)](#)." Prez then played them the song.

Having just heard Matt playing and singing, Kassidy thought his boyfriend was as good as the Platinum Habits guitarists. Kassidy asked, "What do you think, hunky bear?"

Matt smiled, "I've got a lot to learn." Noticing Kassidy curiously tilting his head, Matt explained, "I've been practicing the songs I played for you for a couple o' years. I couldn't have played what Mike or Prez did, not without spending a long time learning the tunes and then practicing."

After watching flying fingers on both of Prez's hands, Lance softly wondered, "Why do you play bass if you can play guitar like that?"

Prez chuckled, "Because our band needed a bass guitarist. Pull the bass out of any of your favorite songs and you've lost the most important part; that goes for almost all of the blues, jazz and rock music. If you think the bass is a lesser instrument, I'll have the band prove otherwise, kewl?"

Rapidly nodding, Lance and Scott chanted, "Kewl."

Madly chuckling, "Here we go," Prez stood, turned and called to

the band, "Heart Of The Sunrise."

Staring down at the two newbie Core Rimmers, Keith laughed, "What did you dudes say?"

Pulling his lover close, Scott sniggered, "Lance wanted to know why Prez plays bass if he can play guitar so well." Almost all the members of the band moaned, except Mike.

Sadly shaking his head, Mike laughed, "I play bass! Where's the groove that sets the feel for the entire song? It's in the bassist and drummer working as one. Without that, most music becomes formless noise. Three major power trios are Cream, Rush and Triumph, and all three are bass, drums and guitar." After putting the classical guitar down, Prez slipped the Rickenbacker bass over his shoulder.

Nodding, Troy sniggered at Lance and Scott, "After this song, Reyes, Keith and I will step back to take a break." He looked over to his right and suggested, "YYZ is next."

Prez, Mike and Derrick evilly grinned, "Very kewl."

Glaring down at Lance and Scott, Keith laughed, "You couldn't wait for school to start next week?"

Shaking his head, Scott grinned, "Maybe we can absorb something we need right now."

Once all the band members were in place and ready, Derrick counted off, and the band played [Heart Of The Sunrise](#). Derrick talked Reyes into remaining on stage to play the electronic drums along with his acoustic drums. At the edge of stage right, Troy played the Hammond organ. Keith was at his rack of keyboards on stage left, and eventually sang the lead vocals. Mike remained in the back, near the drum risers. Prez stayed at forward center stage, proving himself to

Lance and Scott. Prez, Reyes and Derrick started off with blindingly fast cadence. For a few moments the entire band joined in, and then the song returned to drums and bass guitar. After a three-and-a-half minute amazing introduction, Keith sang and Mike played guitar. Soon, Prez came back in with more great bass guitar. For the entire eleven and a half minute song, Lance and Scott carefully watched everything Prez played.

Barely pausing for applause, Keith, Reyes and Troy walked off stage. Derrick counted off again to kick off [YYZ](#). At the start of the song, Prez played bass with only his fretting hand, and used his right hand to play the keyboards at stage right. He then moved back to center stage and stood with Mike at his side. Unexpectedly, and only to prove the point, about two minutes into the song, Prez stopped playing, during one of Mike's wailing lead lines. Prez's intention was to let Lance hear what the song sounded like without the bass part. Derrick and Mike never flinched or paused. Four bars later, and smirking at Lance and Scott, Prez picked up precisely where he needed to be, playing without any issue at all.

Near the end of the song, Prez played bass and keys simultaneously once again. When he stepped back from the keyboard rack, Keith, Reyes and Troy returned to the stage. Keith went to his stage left keyboard rack and fiddled with the Moog. Reyes went to the electronic drum kit, and Troy picked up his Stratocaster. With the final notes of YYY, the audience erupted. While they were still clapping and cheering, Keith began playing the spacey introduction to Steve Miller's Book Of Dreams, [Threshold](#). Up in the PA booth, Drew made the synthesized sounds travel around the auditorium. Corey darkened the stage, except for the strobe light on Keith. Timed perfectly, Derrick and Reyes came in with the opening three bass drum hits of [Jet Airliner](#). During the introduction, Prez showed off to Lance and Scott. Mike sang lead vocals, with Troy and Derrick

backing him up. Spontaneously, dozens of kids rushed the stage, including Kassidy and Matt.

Making use of the new Moogs, the band then played [Jungle Love](#), with Mike again covering the lead vocals. Lined up playing their guitars across center stage were Prez, Troy and Mike. [Electro Lux Imbrolio](#) was the next tune Keith played. They wrapped up their set with [The Stake](#). Lance and Scott enthusiastically applauded, proving they had learned a valuable lesson.

At the end of the songs, when the audience applause and laughter had died down, Prez cutely waved bye-bye at Lance and Scott. Furiously clapping their hands, Lance and Scott disappeared from the auditorium. They reappeared, naked, ten meters above the Ewa Beach diving well, for their Core Rimmer initiation. Knowing nothing of this ritual dunking, Angelo and Reggie asked Jay where Lance and Scott went. Seconds later, the two newest Core Rimmers were naked and falling into the Oneula Beach diving well.

All the remaining Core Rimmers evilly snickered. The band members gathered around the drum risers. A few moments later, while the band members were deciding what to play next, the movie screen began lowering to the stage. Watching Lance and Scott drop, and then Angelo and Reggie, the rest of the much larger audience cracked up. Prez and Keith disappeared from the stage, but the bass guitar Prez had been wearing appeared on the guitar stand. Knowing it was Lance and Scott getting even, Derrick and Mike howled laughing. The sound was abruptly cut short when they also disappeared from the stage.

On the movie screen and over the PA, video and audio of the dunks were presented. Kids in the audience became hysterical and roared when Core Rimmers began disappearing as couples; Erik, Travis, Chris, Jay, and then Sean, Troy, Reyes and Ryan all vanished.

At Ewa Beach and Oneula Beach, naked Core Rimmers fell into diving wells like rain. The next four Core Rimmers, John, Stephen, Kaleo and Tory were pulled from the audience and dropped into the wells. The last couple, Drew and Corey vanished from the PA booth, leaving Leo giggling hysterically. The last Core Rimmer dunked was Nathan Hayes, who had been manning the CIC. Without warning, the male dorm leadership vanished from the auditorium too; Tony, Ray, Craig, Phil, Owen, Horacio, Dominic and Corbin were watched by the rest of the kids as they helplessly dropped naked into the diving wells.

Not knowing how to begin turning any of the gear off, Leo left the PA booth and started walking out of the auditorium. Before getting very far, it suddenly dawned on him that the spirits of his parents were close by. Deciding to pull another prank on them, and wondering if ghosts could get wet, Leo tapped his comm-badge and ordered Alden to transport him over a well.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, FYS Building.

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 4:25PM HTZ

Now that all the dunks were complete, and with AJ and Jerry back from the Rapid Response Base, Prez decided to have a meeting with the entire team. With twenty-four team members, Prez chose to use one of the large conference rooms on the second floor of the FYS Building. This conference table was circular, with a small space to allow seating around the interior of the table. There was space for sixty around the table; thirty-six around the exterior of the table, and twenty-four more could sit around the interior. Before every chair, there were touch sensitive computer display screens built into the table.

Prez started the meeting with virtually the same introductory talk he had in Kaleo's and Tory's dorm room, more than a week prior. The trip to Charleston AI hospital made the importance of the job crystal clear. Everyone needed to think 'outside of the box' about things that weren't always obvious, like rescued kids needing something more from them than what was evident; like simply visiting them in hospitals. Prez got phaser training requests entered for Reyes, Chris, Jay, Erik, Travis, Lance, Scott, Angelo and Reggie. He then reminded the team that there were two more hospitals, and forty more level three kids to visit the next two days. Since the number of kids was smaller, there was no need to have the entire team present, but Prez wanted Erik, Travis, Angelo and Reggie to participate. As assumed, all the Core team members that had gone to California wanted to go to the other two hospitals. That left AJ, Jerry, Chris, Jay, Lance and Scott free to decide if they wanted to go to the hospitals on Thursday and Friday. All they needed to do was let Prez know before morning.

Starting a new Pissed Off Chickens game, Prez opened the floor to the team. Jerry immediately asked if he and AJ could be excused to find their sons. Prez's expression softened dramatically and he prompted, "Go ahead, bros. We'll catch y'all at dinner."

Once AJ and Jerry had left the room, Angelo wondered, "Why have you pulled us onto the team, Prez?"

Only glancing up from his PADD for a moment, Prez grinned, "We need the help, and you two made it clear that you can easily do the job."

Trying to ignore the sounds of exploding eggs, Drew chuckled, "Picking up a couple o' rescues is just as easy as playing with little kids. Rescues are a relatively rare part of the job. The biggest part is

just being available for big brother time."

"What the kids might want varies," Corey seriously said. "It might be a little kid wanting to do something that he or she really shouldn't, like trying to lift weights at the rec center. Explaining why they're not ready for that, and then showing them what they could easily do instead, like calisthenics, is simple."

Paying little attention to Prez or the sounds of exploding eggs from his PADD, Keith offered, "Or maybe a kid just wants to play. You'll be joked with or teased, proving that all the kid really wants is to be tickled, or picked up and tossed into the pool."

Lance wondered, "What scares you about the job?"

Reggie smirked, "The California orphanages and the Hyatt."

Shaking his PADD and playing his game, Prez reminded, "The latter, or anything like it, won't ever happen again."

Derrick said, "California was one rescue operation out of at least ten. Reyes picked up three sets of kids last Friday, got them through the store and oriented, by himself. Generally, it's all common sense stuff and nothing to be worried about."

Paying more attention to Prez and the sounds emitted from the PADD, Mike grinned, "The best part of every day is the time spent with our kids, family time, which now includes everyone on this team, and our sons' boyfriends."

Slowly shaking his head, Reggie muttered, "Angelo and I just hooked up yesterday. We're not like any of you dudes. I can't help wondering if we're really as ready as you all seem to think we are."

Turning to Chris, Scott and Lance, Jay smirked and sighed, "I

guess that chat we had by the pool accomplished very little."

Stephen, Corey, Lance and Angelo uncontrollably giggled at Prez's scowling, disgusted expression. Locking eyes with Reggie, John chortled, "Do you really think that I'm being saintly alone with Stephen? Before you answer, check this out." In the blink of an eye, Reggie was alone with John on the beach, and they were both nude. Mooing through giggles, John reached for Reggie's dangling pecker.

Swatting John's hand away, Reggie cackled, "There's no way!" and took off running down the beach. Reggie laughed, "I never even saw you tap your sub-vocal. How'd you get us on the beach?"

Unexpectedly, John appeared a few meters before Reggie, reaching both hands out to grab some long meat. Slamming on the brakes and squealing, "What the fuck?" Reggie found that no matter where he turned and looked, John was there reaching for his dick.

John giggled, "Stephen hangs like you, bro. Now I have a really good idea what he'll look like in another two years. I have plenty of fun with him in real life, and in my mind, just like this, but he won't run away from me. We may be shooting blanks now, but I promise you, we're not virgins."

Reggie gasped, "We're in..."

Nodding and dropping his hands to his side, John giggled, "Now you're gettin' the idea. Everything you need to know is already in your mind, Reggie. In a couple o' hours, by morning the latest, it'll be like you subliminally learned a bunch of kewl stuff. And it all came from me, without you knowing I was doing a thing. You can do this job, and you're gonna rock at it. Do you know why?"

Answering, "Because I've got Angelo," Reggie realized he had

said that in front of the entire confused team in the conference room.

Reaching his hand over to take Reggie's hand in his, Angelo giggled, "Yeah, and I've got you too, but that wasn't the answer we expected to hear."

Squinting at John, Stephen giggled, "Did you just..."

"I had to show Reggie," John innocently grinned.

Scott, Jay, Erik and Trav wondered, "What did you show Reggie?" The instant the question had been posed, the entire gathered group found themselves standing on Ewa Beach, except Prez, who remained seated in the sand playing Pissed Off Chickens, and all were nude.

John sniggered, "Who wants to go surfin'?"

Completely into the idea, everyone except Prez, John, Stephen, Drew, Corey and Keith grabbed surfboards and hit the waves. Prez was too into his game to surf, but the other four were noticing that the sand, sea and sky seemed just a little different; a little too perfect.

Noticing that Keith was about to ask the question, John grinned, "They think all I can do is play 'Toss-the-kid' and float stuff. When everyone's ready, we'll be back in the conference room." Having only just learned how to surf during the trip to an alternate Earth, Lance was amazed that he was standing on his surfboard for entire rides. A few minutes later, with his lower leg scraped and bleeding, Lance came up onto the beach. He stood behind Prez and watched the two-player game of Pissed Off Chickens. After about thirty minutes, the remainder of the team had had their fill of their second surfing excursion that day.

Everyone was again dressed, dry and sitting around the

conference room table. At the priceless expressions, especially Lance's, who was no longer bleeding, Keith, Drew, Corey, John and Stephen cracked up. Still playing his game, Prez looked up, chortling, "It felt like an hour, but only twenty-seconds has passed."

Almost everyone in the room looked at the digital clock on the wall, except Lance. "Pay attention to the wolves and your chicks!" Lance cackled.

Prez grinned, "They're not my chicks. It's Kyle's turn."

Only Derrick, Keith, John and Mike weren't surprised. The rest of the team blankly stared at Prez, causing the former four to howl laughing. Giggling his ass off, Corey wondered, "When did Kyle move into your head, Prez?"

Shrugging, Prez smirked, "I have no idea; maybe at Anahola Bay or maybe after. He didn't really make it too obvious until I started playing this game. He likes it though, so..."

The rest of the team hollered, "OH! MY! GOD!" and then cracked up laughing.

Red in the face and completely hysterical, Keith wheezed, "Meeting adjourned!" Everyone got up and staggered out of the conference room except Prez.

Still shaking his PADD and letting Kyle play the game, Prez giggled, "I'm supposed to say that. Wait a minute, Kyle's almost finished his turn. Dudes? Hello?" In the order in which they left, Core Rimmers popped back into the conference room. Still hysterical, everyone tried leaving again. Prez evilly snickered, "It's good to have a King Mikyvis in your head."

When Kyle's turn ended, Prez allowed the team to leave.

Everyone left the FYS building and went to the pools. Most of them remained there, relaxing and spending time with their Clan, until about five-thirty, when it was dinner time.

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, FYS Building

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 5:05PM HTZ

At the end of the business day, Jen Hundser gathered in the reception area with some of the other adults, including her husband Jim, Rob Gibbons, Anna Seibert, Bill Seaver, and Doctor Elaine Howard. She shared, "The last three days, I've been checking up on Alec Triggs. He's been at school, but he has quit the soccer team and student council. Given the history of his parents, I have a bad feeling that Alec is being told to quit his extracurricular activities. Yesterday, I considered going to the home with only Jim, but we discussed it and decided it would be best if we all went, to determine what's happening. In our little group, we have legal, police and medical experience. We can make judgement calls regarding Alec's welfare and take whatever action is necessary and appropriate."

Unexpectedly, John appeared in the reception area, dripping wet and naked, with Skyler Richardson, also naked and wet. Jen smirked at her youngest son and Jim sighed. "Oops!" John giggled, and turned to Skyler. In a blink, both boys were dry and clothed, and the wet carpet beneath them was also dried. Looking up at his mom, John giggled, "A little warning next time would be nice. Yeah, your security are trained telepaths and empaths, but I'm director of Intel for this division. It's your show, but I'm going too." He then introduced Skyler to the group of adults, and finished by saying, "Sky can make it so we can get this done and still be back in time for dinner."

Anna, Bill and Rob began softly chuckling. Jen, Jim and John called for everyone's personal security to meet at the front of the building. "What?" Skyler giggled, "Would anyone rather waste time and have a late dinner?" Seeing shaking heads, Skyler giggled, "Then let's go."

"And our security?" Anna helplessly giggled.

John cheekily grinned, "They're waiting outside for us."

Bill Seaver laughed, "They were just called!"

Sighing, John revealed, "From inside Sky's time-bubble, that we've all been in since we arrived. Not to mention, they're pros, who grabbed what they needed and Alden transported them. Sky will get us where we need to be too, so this whole process will take only a minute or so in real world time. In the meantime, Prez and all the rest of the Core Rimmers are hanging out with the majority of the Clan, at the pools and rec center. Only Stephen, Frankie and Wade know I'm gone, but none of the rest have noticed, because I don't want them to notice. When we get back and there's something definitive to report, I'll let them know."

Finished and ready to go, John spun around and walked out the doors, with Skyler right behind him. The rest of the adults followed. Seeing John revert to a ten-year-old boy, who greeted Blake and Lucky, and then jumped into his gorilla's arms, the adults watched in silent amazement. As serious as the task was, John wasn't the least bit disturbed. From atop Lucky's shoulder, John pointed and smiled, "Doc Howard, this is Mitch and this is Bond. They're Stephen's security, but for this mission, they're protecting you."

Going to his personal security, Jim smiled, "After dinner tonight, let's gather all the parents and other available adults, to spend

some normal time together."

Knowing he was just playfully jabbed, Skyler giggled, "I'll put you all in a time bubble, so two or three hours becomes more like eight or nine. You deserve it." He then looked up at his new Auntie Jen, nodded and popped the entire group of twenty-two, including himself, to the sidewalk in front of the Triggs' residence. It was a nice two-story house in a well maintained neighborhood of middle class homes.

The group took in their new surroundings for a few moments. Rob happened to notice a car rounding a corner at an incredibly slow pace. Rob then said, "Give me and my team a minute to inspect the property, Jen."

Seeing a teenage boy bouncing a basketball that seemed to be hovering in mid-air, Jen nodded, "Let us know when your ready."

Rob sniggered, "Depending on your perspective, a minute or a few milliseconds." He and his security walked around the left side of house.

With little else to do, Doc Howard waved her tricorder over Skyler. While she watched the crazy readings, Skyler made himself slowly grow to full adult size and then shrink back down to about the size of one of the four-year-old boys. Sadly shaking his head, John giggled, "You're so bad, Sky."

Returning to his normal appearance, Skyler giggled, "I got hug lessons from Peter too!" and then lunged for Doc Howard's waist.

Hugging the boy back, Doc Howard beamed, "A heckova good hugger too."

Turning to his gorilla mounted son, Jim asked, "Are you feeling

anything from inside the home?"

Nodding, John answered, "Alec's up in a bedroom, laying on a bed, bored out of his mind. His parents took the TV, computer, radio, and everything that could be considered fun. There's not even a ball to toss in the air. He's got his school books to read, but nothing else." After a brief pause, John smirked, "The parents are very sad and very angry. As far as they're concerned, Alec has destroyed the family. They don't know what to do or how to deal with this new situation, so they're frustrated too."

Anna asked, "Has the boy been hit or threatened physically?"

"Not hit, but threatened," John replied. He then grinned, "Alec's given them no reason to do more than scream and yell. I can feel that Alec knows he did the right thing for Theo and Brad, so his parents can flip out all they want, and he's still pretty satisfied."

Bill wondered, "How long do the parents intend to keep this up?"

John shrugged, "Until further notice. As far as they're concerned, how they raise their children is nobody else's business. We didn't have the right to take custody of Brad or Theo." He then turned to his mother and raised his eyebrows.

Annoyed to her limit, Jen tapped her comm-badge, calling, "Rob, are we clear to enter the premises?"

"Everything seems good," Rob reported. "We're coming around the north side of the house, and we haven't even been noticed."

Looking back and up at John, who was still sitting on Lucky's shoulder, Jen said, "I want you to go get Alec. He'll recognize you."

Flashing a thumb up, John offered, "And I'll start telepathically reading him too."

Jen ordered, "Go knock on the back door, Rob. Let's separate them, to minimize trouble of any sort. Let us know when you're there and ready." She then marched to the house, up the two steps onto the porch and waited there with Tanya at her side. Glancing at his teenaged security, Jim received a nod from Barry, who then jogged up onto the porch and stood at Jennifer's left side. The remaining adults went as far as the porch steps and stopped. At the rear of the group were John, Lucky, Blake and Skyler. Jennifer dug her FYS ID from her purse.

From Jen's comm-badge, Rob said, "We're ready when you are."

"Let's do this," Jen sighed, and then knocked on the door. Rob knocked on the back door a moment later. She held her hand up to display her ID card.

From inside the home, they could hear a woman loudly saying, "Both at once! Get the back door, please, Gordon." A moment later, the door swung open. Seeing the larger group behind Jen, Barry and Tanya, Mrs. Triggs asked, "Can I help..." She then saw the name on the ID card, and shrieked, "YOU! YOU TORE MY FAMILY APART! HOW *DARE* YOU!" She then took a swing at Jennifer, which Tanya easily blocked, and then shoved the irate woman several steps back into her home.

"The pleasure is mine," Jen flatly said, and stepped inside with Tanya and Barry. In the back of the house, a skirmish and growled obscenities could be heard.

"GET OUT!" Mrs. Triggs screamed, and again lunged at Jennifer. This time Barry blocked her and shoved her back, down onto

the floor. In the rear room, the sounds of cracking and a man's grunts were heard.

Shaking her head and stepping further inside to allow everyone else in, Jennifer said, "This is a Federation Youth Services Health and Wellness inspection for the youth Alec Triggs. From what we've learned telepathically, and from this gracious greeting, you've already failed, but let's see what else we can discover, shall we?" Bill Seaver and his security went to check on Rob in the back room of the house.

Leaning over and holding Mrs. Triggs arms behind her back, Barry softly pleaded, "Please don't struggle. You'll dislocate your shoulder."

Holding a pair of handcuffs out, Tanya smirked, "It appears to be a well kept home for a happy family, but looks are often deceiving." She went behind Mrs. Triggs, squatted down and snapped the handcuffs on the woman's wrists.

Upon entering with Lucky and glancing at Mrs. Triggs, John said, "Mom, Alec is upstairs."

Jen nodded, "Go get him." John climbed down off of Lucky and then went upstairs with Blake. Glaring at Mrs. Triggs, Jen firmly assured, "If our doctor finds one welt on that boy, your sentence will be far worse than you've ever imagined." She only paused because she saw Rob and Bill coming into the room with the bound Mr. Gordon Triggs. Seeing Mr. Triggs was bleeding from his nose and mouth, Jen asked, "What happened?"

Sadly shaking his head, Rob smirked, "He tried to forcibly remove us. When that failed, he came at us with a wooden table chair. After that, it was all blurred by Rick shoving me aside and the almost simultaneous splintering of the wooden chair." He smiled at his

fifteen-year-old enhanced personal security, and then softly chortled, "I've never seen anything like it. The damned chair practically exploded. If I had jumped up and down on that chair for five minutes, maybe I would've cracked a leg."

Guiding the already handcuffed Mr. Triggs onto a living room easy chair, Rick chanted the teachings of his Master Chang, "Peace has two spellings and meanings."

While telepathic scans of the two parents began in the living room, upstairs, John loudly called, "Alec?"

Alec replied, "End of the hall on the left side."

John and Blake hurried to the last door. They found sliding security bolts at the top and bottom of the door, and the knob was turned to be locked from the outside. John slid the bolts open and Blake unlocked the knob. Before the door was opened, they could hear Alec softly chortling, "I warned 'em. I said that I was expected to visit." The door swung open. They found Alec shirtless and pulling up board shorts over his boxer-briefs.

Simultaneously scanning Alec's mind, John smiled, "How're ya doin', dude?"

Somewhat surprised that it was John standing beyond the door, Alec chuckled, "Well rested, you might say," and then reached for his shirt.

"Leave your shirt off, bro," John ordered. "There's a doctor downstairs that wants to look you over."

Picking up his shirt, Alec reminded, "They've never touched us, and still haven't." He then sighed, "Neither of them can even look me

in the eye anymore."

Blake blinked, "This isn't your room?"

Shaking his head, Alec replied, "It was Theo's, and already had the extra locks on the door." He pointed at the room across the hall, saying, "That's my room."

John impatiently huffed, "Dude, what if you need to go to the bathroom?"

Joining the two smaller boys in the hall, Alec shrugged, "I go when I get home, after dinner, and before they go to bed. Honestly, it hasn't been a problem. They don't want to see me, and I'm just as happy not seeing them."

Blake grimaced, "Lucky for you and them that you didn't need it more often, huh?"

Walking back down the hallway together, John spied a second door with the security bolts. He glanced at Alec and immediately knew that room had been Brad's. Shaking his head, John told Alec, "Ya know, I've been sent to my room, and grounded, but my folks never put up bolts or turned knobs around to lock us inside. That's not normal, and it's not acceptable, and I'm surprised I haven't learned about it before today."

"It's normal to us," Alec softly said.

"What if there was a fire?" Blake asked. Alec only shrugged, and led the way downstairs.

Telepathically, John was telling his mother what was found upstairs. Alec, John and Blake entered the living room. Jen Hundser was busily typing on her PADD. Alec saw his parents handcuffed,

sitting in chairs, and his father had a bloody nose and lip. Blinking tears away, Alex softly said, "You couldn't just let them in, could you?"

"Don't you *DARE* talk to me and your father that way!" Mrs. Triggs spat. "This is all your fault!"

Alec sighed, "No mom, it never was, and I refuse to take any blame off of you."

Jen warned Mrs. Triggs, "Another word from you and I'll have your mouth taped shut. Your fifteen-year-old son has more maturity and wisdom than you and your husband combined."

"Try it!" Mrs. Triggs hissed.

Sadly shaking her head, Jen called, "Elaine, if you would, please?" Skylar gave Doctor Howard a roll of surgical tape. The woman struggled and snapped at the doctor, continuing her loud complaints. Doc Howard pulled a hypo-spray and injected Mrs. Triggs with a sedative, and then taped her mouth shut.

While that was going on, John introduced Alec to everyone in the room, concluding with Doctor Howard.

Alec was scanned by Doc Howard's tricorder and visually inspected for any sign of physical abuse. Purposefully trying to make Alec flinch, Doc Howard moved quickly through her examination. Alec never once ducked or flinched. Sitting beside his wife, Jim took the PADD, silently advising Jen on some legal ramifications of this case. When they had left the FYS Building, neither knew how bad things had been for Alec, Theo and Brad. What had begun as a simple health and wellness inspection, that might've cost the Triggs financially, or possibly cost them custody of their eldest son, was now turning into a criminal case. Finished sharing with his wife, Jim

passed the PADD back to Jen and stared at John. Reading his dad's thoughts, John slumped briefly and then nodded. Completing her examination, Doc Howard cheerfully proclaimed, "You're fit as a fiddle, Alec."

Standing up, Jim said, "Let's step outside, Alec. I'll fill you in on some details." He then asked, "Elaine, why don't you come with us?"

"Thank you," Doc Howard smiled, "I could use some fresh air." She then gave Mrs. Triggs a second hypo-spray that caused the woman to sit up straight and become more aware.

Slipping his polo shirt on, Alec nodded, but asked, "What's going to happen to my folks?"

"That's a big part of what we'll be discussing," Jim assured. Wrapping an arm around the boy's shoulder, Jim led Alec to the front door, and they stepped outside. Following close behind, Doc Howard closed the door behind her. Jim and Elaine would gently break the news to Alec that his parents had been emotionally abusing their children all their lives. Although it didn't seem to be abuse to Alec, or Theo, or Brad, their parents had clearly been manipulative. In the case of the locked and bolted bedroom doors, they had unreasonably imprisoned all three boys, and at any time the imprisonments might've been life threatening.

Once the door closed, Jen stood to face Mr. and Mrs. Triggs. "When I thought of visiting this home, I honestly did not expect a pleasant welcome," Jen began. "What we have found, beyond two obnoxious adults, who mistakingly considered themselves capable parents, are eleven violations of the Safe Haven Act.

"Violation one, from Section 10.5, conditions that have a high probability of impacting the minor; Section 10.5.1, locks on the

exterior of doors preventing egress in the event of fire or emergency. Violation two, from Section 11.2, there were threats of beating. Violation three, three counts against Section 12.2, isolation of children from their peers and normal socialization. You incarcerated Brad and Theo for months, and ordered Alec to quit the soccer team and the Student Council. Violation four, three counts against Section 12.2(c), any history of actions which prevent children from being afforded the same freedoms and opportunities afforded the general populace of the same age. Brad and Theo discovering their sexuality is not grounds for punishment or imprisonment. Alec did the right thing bringing his brothers to us, whether you want to believe it or not. Violation five, three counts against Section 12.2(d), excessive depriving of normal interactions as punishment that is a result of a violation of another section of this act. Refer back to all the prior infringements. You locked your sons away! For that alone, I would castrate him and rip your ovaries out with my own hand!"

John softly called, "Mom?" As soon as Jen turned to her youngest, she immediately felt his hug and relaxed.

Much more calmly, Jen continued, "Violation six, Section 12.3, depriving children of necessary interaction with close family members without justification. Violation seven, Section 17.4, parent involved in actions which place children's physical or mental health in jeopardy. Violation eight, from Section 17.7, the failure to support children which have differing genetic makeup than what the parent wants, as in the case of Bradley and Theodore. By the way, Brad has an adorable boyfriend, and Theo has found the son of one of our core families, and both are extremely happy. Violation nine, from Section 17.15, the isolation of children from siblings. Violation ten, from Section 17.21, punishment of children for normal developmental stages. Violation eleven, three counts against Section 17.22, unreasonable incarceration, defined by Section 17.22(a), placing

children in an enclosed environment which prevents them from interacting with other members of their species without local judicial involvement. All of the previously mentioned infringements have been substantiated by Section 67.1, observation by trained local officials, namely every person that has been in this room from Clan Short Pacific Rim Division has been trained, some in multiple disciplines, as Mr. Triggs has learned, quite painfully. Addition substantiation, Section 67.5, verifiable statements made by subject children. And finally, Section 67.6, testimony provided via Vulcan Mind-Meld or certified Vulcan trained telepaths. John, Barry and Tanya are all trained telepaths."

"Fortunately, for me that is, Federation Youth Services requires an impartial judge in these situations," Jen stated before smiling the vilest smile John had ever seen cross her face. "Unfortunately, for the two of you, the violations of Article 17, Section 17.22 are serious enough to warrant a transfer to an authority which is trained to deal with such situations in an expedient manner for the safety of the children. Commander Johnny Hundser, at this time I cede jurisdiction to Family Clan Short."

Squirming where he stood, John whined, "MOM! I hated Johnny when I was five!" Anna, Bill and Rob softly chortled.

Jen giggled, "Oh, Grandma Morrison can call you Johnny, but I can't?"

Sighing loud and long, John then turned to the accused, stating, "In California, I executed four adults for crimes similar to yours. In their cases, physical abuse was also present, in some extreme cases. Only now, do I sense some fear from both of you, but neither of you believe that what you've done to your sons was too terrible. Tell me, if there had been an earthquake or fire, and any of your sons were hurt, but you couldn't get to them because of jammed locks, how

would you feel then?"

He paused to read the two adults thoughts, then sighed, "You just don't get it, do you? The fact that they weren't hurt and trapped isn't important. They're your flesh and blood. Locking them in their rooms is just as bad as if you had hit them. Since I sense no remorse in either of you, I sentence you to life imprisonment at a Level 3 Federation Penitentiary. Now I get to tell Alec, Brad and Theo that neither of you even want to say goodbye to them. In your ignorant opinions, this is all their fault. Being attracted to other guys is nobody's fault; it's simple genetics. The fact is, you tried to change who Brad and Theo are, by locking them away. Alec's not at fault either; he protected his brothers, from you! You make me sick, really nauseous."

John tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Commander Hundser to Terra Main, Starfleet Security."

The nervous and quaking voice of a young teen replied, "Sir, Cadet James Johnston here. How can I assist you?"

"At ease, Cadet," John grinned, thankful that he could grin and this would all be over soon. "Please send down a detail for two prisoners. They'll be enjoying your high security holding cells, until they reach their destinations."

Gordon Triggs repeated, "Destinations?"

"That's right," John smirked, "at level 3, men and women are separated. Your 'so called' family was over when you first locked your sons away. Since you can treat your sons so coldly and inhumanely, you get to spend the next few hours saying goodbye to each other, and then living out the remainder of your lives alone, just like you did to your three sons. The only good that came from both of you are three

awesome guys. We'll take care of them, and keep them happy."

From John's comm-badge, Cadet Johnston confirmed, "The detail is to arrive at your location, Sir?"

"Yeah," John huffed, "the quicker the better." Four shafts of sparkling light appeared in the dining room, materializing two men and two women. "Excellent work, Cadet," John cheered, and pointed the detail to Mr. and Mrs. Triggs. John ordered, "Let them spend their remaining time close together, so they can talk but not touch each other, until the transports split them apart once and for all." The detail hauled Mr. and Mrs. Triggs onto their feet. John went to his mom. Jen and John waved at the couple until sparkling shafts of light vanished. John tapped his comm-badge with his free hand, calling, "Cadet Johnston?"

"Still here, Sir," the cadet formally replied.

"Do you have a partner?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Male, by any chance?"

The cadet meekly replied, "Yes, Sir."

"At the end of your shift, your orders are to get your partner and sit between the couple that just arrived, making out together. They seem to think there's a problem with dudes like us loving one another. You can prove them wrong."

The cadet squealed, "Seriously?"

"Very seriously, on all counts. I have a husband, and those two made my stomach turn. As a matter of fact, get all your gay friends

and their partners to put on a show for them. My stomach is feeling better just thinking of that."

"Yes, Sir!" Cadet Johnston cheerfully giggled.

"Commander Hundser, out."

The moment the Cadet called, "Out," John looked around and whined, "Please, not Johnny, ever again."

Anna giggled, "Does Johnny-wonny wanna pway wid his boys?"

Gritting his teeth, John cackled, "I want my husband and my sons, quickly!" He hurried to the door, flung it open and yelled, "Dad! Make them stop talking like Joey and calling me names!" All the remaining adults chortled.

Whistling innocently, Skylar looked around the house. He pulled a bag of cookies out of thin air and started munching on them. The house started to disappear one section at a time. He started with the roof, then one-by-one walls just faded away.

With a crying teenager to deal with, Jim Hundser's gears nearly stripped, hearing his N-Gen boy acting like a normal ten-year-old; an all too rare occurrence in recent days.

Holding an invisible door knob, John swung around to Skylar, laughing, "You'd better stop! Alec might want a few things before you make the house vanish!"

"I'm leaving the stuff!" Skylar giggled around a mouthful of cookie. He pointed at a shelf hanging in mid-air, with a picture floating just above it.

Sadly shaking his head, John giggled, "Get Stephen, Wade and Frankie here, please? And check with your dads to see what you can do about Alec, so he's not spending his first week on base with Doc Wiener. I suspect I might need some couch time, and I don't want competition."

Skyler phased out and back again in seconds, with Stephen, Frankie and Wade. Seeing the mostly vanished house, with various items hanging on nothing, Stephen rapidly blinked. Frankie giggled, "Hi, daddy," as if nothing were amiss, and Wade howled laughing. Skyler phased out again, and then returned near Jim, Elaine and Alec. All four phased. Moments later, all four phased in, and brought Theo, Richie, Brad and Kade with them. At least Alec had stopped crying though.

Alec led his brothers to the house. They climbed invisible steps and helped Alec gather the things he needed. Jen asked Jim, "What happened?"

Jim answered, "Skyler brought Alec, Theo and Brad to visit their parents, a few weeks in the future. They're worse in the future than they were here today. The boys know what none of us could actually teach, from their parents own filthy mouths."

"I encouraged the three boys to lay it right back on them," Elaine smiled. "They did a great job; left their mother in tears and their dad banging his head against the cell bars. They can all move on now."

"I have a question," Rob carefully offered. When everyone turned to him, Rob wondered, "We're standing on a floor that isn't here, so where is it, exactly?"

Skyler giggled, "On another Earth the homes in this

neighborhood haven't been built. They're there, partially, at least until we leave."

"Ask a silly question," Rob softly muttered, and started walking for where the door used to be, with his security trailing along and quietly sniggering.

Rick warned, "To your right," but Rob walked into an invisible wall anyway. "Don't do that," Rick giggled.

"I haven't," Rob grinned, and altered his course, feeling around for the space where the open door used to be.

Rick giggled, "I never saw a thing."

"Neither have I," Rob chuckled.

Rob made his way down the steps and out to the street. The steps and sidewalk melted away behind him, which threw Wade into a major giggling fit. Widely grinning, Frankie shared cookies with Skyler.

Jen glanced up through the invisible ceiling. Alone in his old bedroom with Kade, Brad pulled some of his old games off the invisible closet shelf. In the next room, Theo and Richie Taylor were making out in the closet. Seeing this clearly from his room, Alec laughed, "Gimme a break, bro! Now's a hell of a time to be in the closet!"

Pausing his make-out session, Theo giggled, "Can we really be considered in a closet, when the only clue it is a closet are the clothes hanging from hangers on an invisible bar?"

"Besides," Richie giggled, "neither of us have ever really been

closeted. Now we can both say we at least tried it."

Alec hollered, "Uncle Jim?"

"Yes?"

"I still get to choose whether I want to live with my brothers?"

"Yes."

"Is there a temporary place I could think about it?"

Jim sniggered, "With visible walls and floors too."

Alex gushed, "Sweet!"

Stephen told John, "Its like he was made to be Clan."

* * * * *

Ewa Beach, Dormitory 1, Room 1

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 5:08PM HTZ

John, Stephen, Wade and Frankie arrived with Alec Triggs and showed him the room that used to be Kaleo's and Tory's. Brad and Theo went over to dormitory three with their boyfriends and the stuff they had retrieved from their old house. Alec had two suitcases and a gym bag full of miscellaneous personal belongings, including awards and his soccer ball. Commenting on the room, Alec began the unpacking task. The first thing he did was roll his soccer ball to Frankie and Wade, so the two youngest boys wouldn't be too bored. John and Stephen gave Alec a brief overview of the Clan orientation. John informed Alec that he would be able to take a few days off and start school the next Monday with about a hundred and fifty other

kids.

Surprising everyone, a kid with multicolored hair appeared in the room and waved. The new kid and John smiled at each other for about five-seconds, and then John chuckled, "Your brother Dylan was just here yesterday, to meet the band, Ezzy; Troy's been searching for temporal tranquilizers ever since."

Ezra giggled, "Has anyone given him one yet?"

Shaking his head, John sniggered, "Doc Andrews has no idea what Troy keeps asking him for."

"Later tonight, none of y'all will need 'em," Ezzy giggled. "Before that though, we need you and Stephen to help move a house."

Stephen whimpered, "Move a house?"

Nodding at his hubby, John returned his attention to Ezra and asked, "How far?"

"From Pennsylvania to Fort Lauderdale," Ezzy giggled, "but Peter's there to expedite the flight. Eli and Benji are there to assist with lift off. Y'all gotta do that orbiting thing again; that was way kewl to see." Again, Stephen whimpered.

John told Stephen, "We haven't seen Eli and Benji since last Thursday night. It sounds like fun, and a heck of a lot easier than holding up a forty-story tower."

Ezzy giggled, "And some of the Intel reports you've read the last couple o' days will start making sense, ya know, as much as possible, I guess."

Raising his eyebrows, John asked, "Tracy and crew are there

too?"

Ezra nodded and giggled, "Yep. I'll have you back here in time for dinner. Ready?"

Signaling a pause, John squatted down to tell Frankie and Wade, "You be good and help Alec get settled, then take him over to Uncle Prez and Uncle Keith at the pools. We'll meet you poolside, before dinner, kewl?"

Wade and Frankie nodded and giggled, "Kewl, daddy," and gave John kisses on the cheek. As soon as John stood, Stephen kissed his sons and reminded them to be good.

"Ready?" Ezra confirmed.

Taking Stephen's hand, John said, "Ready."

"Saturday, here we come!" Ezra giggled.

"*SATURDAY?*" Stephen incredulously hollered, and then they were gone, with Stephen's last word reverberating around the room.

Alec asked Frankie, "Do I want to know what just happened?"

Shrugging, Frankie cackled, "Do you wanna know about Mikyvis, or which Saturday they're going to? Mikyvis I can answer, but not which Saturday."

Thoughtfully humming, Alec returned to unpacking. Wade cracked up and Frankie hysterically giggled, "We got our own Mikyvis too. That's how Sky got you, Brad and Theo around."

"It was all pretty normal when we were moving around," Alec grinned, "but seeing and hearing someone else do it isn't normal at all." For the next minutes, while Alec finished his unpacking, Frankie

turned the television and stereo on. Excitedly telling Alec about all the kewl stuff on base, Wade hunkered down on the floor and powered up the Playstation. Wade and Frankie played video games until Alec was done. Minutes later, the Playstation, TV and stereo were turned off, and then the two little boys led the teenager out to the pool.

Once outside, Frankie paused and looked up, telling Alec, "This is dorm one, near the townhouses and condos and the CIC." He pointed at the nearest building, saying, "That's dorm two," and continued pointing out the other two dormitories.

Alec wondered, "Where do you dudes live?"

Pointing over by dorm four, Frankie answered, "In a house with our grandmas and grandpa, and daddy and poppa, and Bruce, Dewi, Kokaku, Carmella and Rene."

Wade asked, "Where's Sky gonna live, Frankie?"

Frankie giggled, "Pretty much wherever and whenever he wants!" Wade cracked up and staggered around.

Leaning over to pick up Wade, Alec chortled, "Frankie, don't tease your little brother." He put Wade up on his shoulders.

"Think about it," Frankie giggled. "We could give him a bed in our house, and watch him lay down on it, but every time we look away, he's gone off, who knows where, and when we look back again, there he is!" Up on Alec's shoulders, Wade hysterically squealed and clapped his hands. Reaching one arm up, Alec held Wade's back so the little guy didn't fall backwards.

Since he had his little bro laughing, and Alex wondering if he was better off locked in a room, Frankie started telling tales about

Archnania while they walked to the pools.

Meanwhile, [John and Stephen returned from their house moving mission with a new boy](#). Rather than upset the newbie with several hundred new brothers and sisters gathering around, John had Ezzy deliver them to the pool house boys' room. Ezzy hugged the three of them, and then phased out, leaving some multi-colored sparkles in his wake. Immediately, John telepathically called for Nathan Hayes to join them.

"Umm... does someone have to go?" Corbin Reid grinned.

Seeing his puffed-up, out-of-control auburn hair in a mirror, Stephen gasped at his reflection, and then whimpered, "I need a hair brush."

Shaking his head, John told Corbin, "There's about two hundred kids outside. I thought it would be easier for you if we weren't surrounded." John then told Stephen, "Wet your hair in a sink or in a shower, baby." When Stephen sighed, nodded and went to a sink, John returned his attention to Corbin. "The guy we promised would look after you is on his way. He's bringing his boyfriend too, Brice Glotzbecker. We'll get you set up so you're completely safe and comfy here, dude."

Nodding, Corbin said, "Thank you." He then softly asked, "Do I have to tell... ya know, what was happening... what I was used for?"

Stepping closer to Corbin and taking him gently into his arms, John revealed, "Our first group of 87 kids were just like you. They were between four and fifteen-years-old, getting filmed and being sold to perv adults. Another group are ex-street prostitutes. Did you hear about what we did in California last Thursday?"

"Yeah," Corbin shivered, "saw it on the news."

"The level one and level two orphanage kids are here," John said. "There's nobody out there that will give you a rough time, Corbin. You'll learn soon enough that you're just another eleven-year-old dude to all the kids."

Opening the pool house door, Nathan loudly laughed, "Sorry, John!"

A moment later, Dee ran into the boys room, with his hands already ripping open the Velcro fly on his boardies, giggling, "Nathan tried to make me go home to pee, John!" He stood at a urinal, sighed in relief, and looked over his shoulder at Corbin, giggling, "Hi! That was a close one!" Still fighting with his hair, Stephen howled laughing.

John giggled, "Corbin Reid, meet my nephew, Dee Vanderwood."

Opening the boys' room door, Nathan grinned, "Remind me to not get in Dee's way when he needs to leak."

"He about knocked us both over," Brice sniggered.

Dee laughed, "There are two major rules here; wear clothes in the dining room, and don't pee in the pools!"

Extending an arm to shake hands with Corbin, Nathan smiled, "We've been waiting a few days to meet you."

Shaking hands with Nathan, and barely believing what was said, Corbin squeaked, "Me? Really?"

Nodding, John said, "We read the reports from Intel Division.

The one thing we didn't know was when you'd show up. When Dylan showed up last night, and again when Skylar showed up this morning, I thought it was about to happen then. When Ezzy popped in, I didn't even give you a thought."

Nathan introduced Brice to Corbin. When they were done, Nathan evilly grinned, "What I don't understand is, why the boys' room, John?"

"Its close to the pools," John smiled, "and no one would really care that you and Brice were going to take a whiz."

"The rec center is almost as close," Nathan smirked.

Brice giggled, "And Dee wouldn't have raced us."

John shrugged, "But there's always someone, somewhere in the rec center. There's far less traffic here, in comparison. Corbin being comfortable was high priority."

Nathan promised, "It'll all be taken care of tonight, dude." Seeing John smirking, Nathan didn't wait for the question to be posed, answering, "Skylar was here, and I asked him to check ahead a few hours."

With Dee helping with his hair, Stephen muttered, "Doesn't that take the fun out of it?"

Wrapping his arms around Nathan's waist, Brice giggled, "Use your imagination, Stephen."

Coming to an abrupt halt, Dee shouted, "You're boyfriends?"

"Since last night," Nathan chuckled, "which will also fit into the night's activities."

Corbin giggled, "Is everything in the Clan always this weird? It was Saturday, and now it's Wednesday, and I was supposed to meet Nathan first, but Dee beat him in here, and I'm still wearing only underwear!"

"As soon as you're ready, our store is the next stop," Nathan offered.

Releasing Corbin and pointing up into a corner, John called, "Alden, say hi to Corbin."

"Hi, Corbin," Alden giggled.

John explained, "Nathan's gonna be your shadow and protector, for as long as you'd like, but Alden will always be watching everything, everywhere on all our bases. His primary job is to make each and every kid here feel safe. While Nathan and Brice get you clothes and stuff, I'm gonna talk with all the adults, especially the men. They'll see you here and there, and greet you, but you'll never be alone with one; you get to decide when you're ready to deal with grown-ups, kewl?"

"Thank you," Corbin whispered, and then sobbed, "He hurt me, over and over again, and didn't care."

Patting and rubbing Corbin's shoulder, Brice sighed, "I've been there too."

Practically shoving the hairbrush into Stephen's hand, Dee hurried over and tearfully told Corbin, "Me too. Men didn't care that I couldn't breathe, and they didn't care that it hurt more than anything else in the world could possibly hurt." He took Corbin's hand and assured, "That won't happen here, ever. My grandpa and all my grown-up uncles are really nice. You tell me when your ready, and I'll

prove it. All the grown-ups here are pretty kewl, for adults, anyway."

Corbin nodded and pleaded, "Please don't cry for me."

Wiping his eyes with his free hand, Dee huffed, "I'm crying for me and you, and all us kids that were hurt like that."

Corbin seemed to stare blankly at Dee for a few moments. He then softly asked, "Ya wanna come to the store with us?"

Trying to pull himself together, Dee grinned, "If you want."

Rapidly nodding at Dee, Corbin told Nathan, "Let's go."

Nathan tapped his sub-vocal and called, "Alden, take the four of us to the store, dude." They vanished from the pool house boy's room.

Noticing John standing there looking at where everyone had been standing, Stephen called, "Hon, are you all right?"

John answered, "Just surprised with Dee. He's helped other kids and told them the same as what he told Corbin, but without tears."

Stephen smiled, "It's a good thing for Corbin though. Right off the bat, he knows us, Nathan, Brice and Dee. Between the five of us, we can introduce him and get him over the past."

"Yeah, I guess."

Immediately upon arrival in the basement store, Dee led Corbin to the shopping carts. Nathan asked, "Corbin, can you fill in some gaps in the Intel reports for me?"

"Sure," Corbin said. "Whatever I can, ya know?"

Nathan asked, "What were you told about me, and by whom?"

"Jorge told me you're unit and good at protecting kids," Corbin answered.

Dee picked up a package of plain white briefs, since that was what Corbin was wearing, and held them up for Corbin's approval. Shaking his head, Corbin frowned, "The bastard wanted me wearing white briefs. They turned him on, I think. Anything except white briefs and tank top tee shirts, Dee." He then seriously asked Nathan, "What does your unit have to do with anything?" Brice sputtered and raced away for the boys' changing room. He howled laughing before getting there.

Turning to Nathan, Dee teased, "Yeah, good question. Brice might care about your unit, but not too many of the rest of us do."

Nathan grinned, "It's not my unit, it's *THE* UNIT. It stands for Universal Next-Generation Infiltration Team. I'm a Lieutenant in The UNIT. But then I decided to stay here with this division."

"Decided?" Alden sputtered. "More like you were drafted!"

Giggling his ass off at Nathan's frustrated expression, Dee held up a package of colored boxer-briefs for Corbin. "Those are kewl," Corbin smiled. Seeing Dee picking up two more similar packages, Corbin scowled, "What're ya doin', Dee?"

"There's three pair in each pack, and seven days in a week," Dee explained. "Nine is enough for a week, with two extra."

Nathan nodded, "Everybody gets enough clothes for a week. That's SOP."

Not understanding and rapidly blinking, Corbin confirmed, "Soap?"

Nathan sighed, "Standard operating procedure; S.O.P., not s.o.a.p." From the direction of the boys' changing room, Brice was heard laughing and pounding on the walls.

Dee giggled, "Go put on your Mr. Fuzzy G-string and stop acting all military, Nath."

Corbin rapidly blinked at Dee and Nathan, and then softly muttered, "Mister Fuzzy what?"

Telepathically communicating with Alden, Nathan grinned, "It's a Clan perk. Everybody gets a Mr. Fuzzy puppet. Gay guys get Mr. Fuzzy G-strings, like a jock." All four phased out and back in, wearing Mr. Fuzzy puppets on their right hands and Mr. Fuzzy G-strings over their boy bits.

From the boys' changing room, Brice loudly laughed, "NATHAN!" and came running out.

Holding up his Mr. Fuzzy puppet, Dee squeaked, "We got silly last night and had a cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle."

Watching Brice come running for Nathan and the two boyfriends start racing around the store, Corbin giggled, "You're all crazy?"

"YES!" multiple AIs screamed in unison.

Dee shrugged and giggled, "We're family and know how to have fun." Leading Corbin through the store, Dee shared stories about Joel's various rescues, the luau and concert, about Anahola Bay, gorillas, G-Cats and ferrets, and the move onto the base. He continued with his adoption by Prez and Keith, two of the members of the band Platinum Habits, and the Head Rimmers, which made Corbin intensely blush. Wisely leaving it alone, Dee told Corbin about his

three brothers, about Mike, Derrick and their four sons, which Dee now considered his cousins. Every now and then, Nathan and Brice would run by Dee and Corbin, reminding Dee to tell Corbin about something more or someone else. By the time Corbin had finished shopping, Brice and Nathan caught up at the checkout counters.

With the last of his new clothes packed, Corbin sheepishly asked, "Can I please shower and change into new clothes?" He quickly explained, "This stuff I'm wearing is going into the garbage. I want to have dinner looking like everybody else, and wash the last of... and feel clean for the first time in a long time."

After zipping up the suitcase and pulling it off the counter, Nathan called, "Alden, take us to dorm one's lavatory."

Upon arrival, Corbin looked around the room and then checked, "You're not leaving me alone here, right?"

"Course not," Nathan smiled. "Me and Brice will stand guard at the shower entrance."

"And I'll stay in the changing area, until you're done," Dee cheerfully offered. He took Corbin's hand and led the way, then sat on the bench.

Getting undressed, Corbin sighed, "I don't know why I'm so scared still. I know the bastard is gone, and you guys have been awesome, but I'm scared someone will walk in and freak me out. If it's a man, I'll curl up in the corner and cry."

"Don't worry," Brice assured, "we've got this room protected. No one will interrupt or see you. It's dinner time anyhow, so everyone's at the CIC. I'd be surprised if anyone came in here." Nathan picked up Corbin's underwear off the floor and then took them

to the lavatory trash can.

Dee pointed up at the cameras in the changing room and then pointed out the cameras inside the shower. He softly reminded, "You're safe, from now on."

Walking into the mob shower, Corbin chose the shower head nearest to the exit, so he could quickly escape if need be. He saw the soap dispensers and asked, "Why's there an 'H' on this one, Dee?"

"For dudes with allergies," Dee answered. "If normal soap gives you a rash or makes you itchy, use the 'H' soap." He then called, "Nath, pass me the suitcase, so I can get clothes out and ready?"

Unfamiliar with everything, Corbin tried twisting the knob on the wall, but nothing happened. Frustrated that he couldn't even get the water turned on by himself, Corbin whimpered, "Dee?"

Hurrying the few steps to the shower entrance, Dee asked, "What's wrong?"

Pointing at the knob, Corbin wept, "I can't figure it out."

Taking a single step inside the shower, Dee admitted, "The first time, I couldn't either. So you don't get hit with cold water, step over to one side, and then just push it up. The water will get warm real fast. If it's too warm, push it a little to the right, so it's cooler. If it's too cold, push it a little to the left."

Corbin did as he was told and water flowed from the shower head. He reached out to feel the temperature. It soon got warmer, but not warm enough, so he pushed the knob hard to the left. Seeing steam, Corbin impatiently huffed, and locked eyes with Dee, wordlessly begging to be shown how to work the shower.

Dee smiled, "Lemme get undressed. We're brothers anyhow." He stepped out of the shower to tell Nathan and Brice, "He needs help. Get some clothes ready." In a minute, Dee had stripped and walked back into the shower, careful to stay clear of the steaming hot water. Taking hold of the knob, Dee showed Corbin and explained, "A little bit to the right for cooler."

Seeing how easy it was, Corbin slumped and softly wept, "I'm such a dummy. He wouldn't even let me go to school the last year."

Dee sighed, "Cause he didn't want you to learn. He wanted you to just be his fuck toy, Corbin. That ain't what's gonna happen here. You're gonna be able to go to school with the rest of us. Take it slow and easy for me, okay?"

"It's always been this way for me," Corbin sobbed. "I'm no good at nothin'. That's why..."

"You're here," Dee interrupted. "I wasn't very good at school either, ya know? At the school here, I'm learning everything all over again. The teachers care that we learn, and don't hassle us when we do it wrong, they just show another way to think of it. I never got multiplication before, but just yesterday it started making sense. Ya know why?"

"Why?"

"Cause the teacher helped me. Cause my daddy and poppa helped me. Cause my brothers, Sammy and Gage helped me. For the first time ever, somebody cared that I learned it right. In one day, what I couldn't do became what I *could* do. It ain't easy yet, but I know it'll get easier with practice. I just used multiplication in the store. This is your first time using these showers. It'll be easier for you tomorrow. Tonight, everything is new, so me, Brice and Nath will

show you everything. Whatever anyone needs to know, somebody here can show us." Seeing a small forced smile, Dee grinned, "Turn around. I'll wash your back and you wash the front. It's just one of the ways Clan brothers show they care."

"Really? Everybody?"

Dee nodded, "Since I got here, yep, everybody can help everybody else, any way they can." As instructed, Corbin turned around. Dee got a palm loaded with soap and started at his new friend's neck and shoulders. During the shower, Dee learned that Corbin was eleven-years-old, and Corbin learned that Dee was ten-years-old.

Out in the lavatory, keeping guard as they had promised, Brice and Nathan grinned at each other. Prez and Keith needed to know that Dee had been fantastic with this newbie. Nathan telepathically told John everything that had been going on since the store. Seconds later, Keith and Prez knew it all too. Minutes after that, Corbin and Dee were dressed, the suitcase was transported to the Hundser's basement, and the four of them walked into the CIC dining room.

Seeing the adult men and women chefs, Corbin clammed up. He would only whisper to Dee. Dee wasn't surprised and took care of placing Corbin's dinner order. It included a McCoy milkshake, which Dee had made a point of drinking every morning and every night. Corbin was a year younger than Nathan, but was much shorter than Nathan. Corbin was about an inch taller than Dee. Dee knew that Corbin was undernourished too and could definitely use the extra vitamins.

Already finished eating, Keith and Prez came into the kitchen chow line. Keith proudly beamed, "You've been busy, Dee."

Dee giggled, "Kind o' by accident, Daddy."

Nathan playfully corrected, "By almost having one."

Dee smirked at Nathan, and then told Corbin, "Meet my dad and pop. Prez is my poppa, and our Division Director. Dad's name is Keith, and he's assistant director." Looking up at his dad and pop, Dee smiled, "This is Corbin Reid. He's eleven, and he's like a lot of us here; his foster dad was really bad." Seeing Corbin blush and frown, Dee sighed, "Don't worry, okay? Almost all of us were just like you; that's all over now."

Prez and Keith noticed chefs waiting to pass plates to Dee and Corbin. They maneuvered to get the plates for the boys and put them down on the trays. Prez told Corbin and Dee, "You guys carry your milkshakes, we'll carry your trays out to our table."

Keith instructed, "Richie is waiting with John's family, Dee." He grinned, "There's room for Brice and Nathan's unit too." Brice sputtered but lost the battle and cracked up.

Smirking and squinting at Keith, Nathan giggled, "Great, John shared that with everybody, didn't he?"

"Only the Core Rimmers and all the telepaths," Prez chuckled. He picked up Corbin's tray, chortling, "It's early yet. By morning, everyone will be commenting on your cute unit, Nath." Dee and Brice digressed into giggling fits. Prez and Keith led the way from the kitchen and into the dining room, with Dee and Corbin following. Brice and Nathan trailed behind. The moment Nathan was seen in the dining room, he was blasted by multiple telepathic remarks. In between all that, Daileass got in a few comments.

"Adam wants to know what you're doing calling HIS unit your unit!" Daileass informed Nathan. "Logan's not happy either, since he

says your unit is substandard compared to the original!"

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Oneula Beach, Dining Room

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 6:27PM HTZ

After dinner, Prez and Keith went through dimensional doors to where Neil Green and Tad Markell were sitting with Carter Rackham and Doug Zimmerman. Seeing the two leaders approaching, Tad began giggling. Widely smiling, Neil tried to make himself smaller by sliding down in his chair. Pausing near the table, Prez grinned, "And what were you two couples doing this fine day?"

"Being couples," Neil chortled. "We were kept busy Monday and yesterday, right through last night's cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle."

Carter sniggered, "The good news is that we're right across the hall from each other, but didn't hear much of anything, just televisions."

Keith teased, "More gay couples building teamwork means more future Core Rimmers."

Hearing giggling and seeing all four shaking their heads, Prez smiled, "What makes you think you can't do the job?"

Doug sighed, "We're still too small for our ages, don't you think?"

"John's ten, Corey and Stephen are eleven, and Drew's twelve," Keith offered, "but they're not too young or too small. All our sons, between five and eleven, joined us in Charleston today. Ability, height

and weight don't always have to match. All it really takes is willingness."

Prez explained, "We're looking for brains, not brawn. The truth is that we're just waiting for you dudes to become involved in something, so we know where your interests are."

"Why are you telling us this?" Neil wondered.

Keith answered, "We need the help, dudes. Tomorrow and Friday we'll be gone the first half of the days again. More dorm leaders and more Core Rimmers, some of whom can be here, just makes everyone feel more secure."

"I'm still considering it," Prez revealed, "but it's highly likely that I'll leave Drew, Corey, Sean and Troy here tomorrow. Maybe Lance and Scott too, since there's twenty kids at the next hospital, we won't need the majority of the team. We know you dudes need time, but you're adjusting and mostly concentrating on what's important to you. I already know you four have what it takes, not only to be leaders, but to be fathers and married couples."

Doug gasped, "We can get married too?"

Keith nodded. Prez smiled, "It's one of many perks of the job. Think and talk about it." Neither Keith nor Prez were facing the dimensional doors, and therefore didn't see Colonel Cody Wilkins walk inside with his partner, Sheldon Lloyd. Cody quickly found where Prez and Keith were and weaved between tables across the room.

Neil sniggered, "The idea was dumped into my head before we got here, Prez. I just don't think of myself as any sort of leader, even though others think otherwise."

"Leaders don't think like leaders, until it's absolutely necessary," Keith explained. "We're brothers, first and foremost. A brother protects his younger siblings, and offers advice to those that ask for it, from the perspective of the person that asked. We weren't leaders and generally don't act like leaders. Very much like wanting to see two assholes were tied up, and then spitting in their faces." Watching Neil evilly grin and blush, Tad cracked up. Carter and Doug evilly snickered.

"Be true to yourselves," Prez reminded.

Carter said, "I think we are being truthful. We've only been here three days."

Prez smiled, "Chris, Lance, Scott, and Travis got here Friday. Jay and Erik got here Saturday morning. Monday afternoon, Alden saw how you four helped Jason Mullins. I read a note about it. You were here little more than a day and did that. Without your help, Jason might've been down in the dumps the rest of the day. Instead, he and JD are becoming a close couple and couldn't be happier."

"Lance and Scott knew each other for three days before becoming partners," Keith continued. "Erik and Trav were a case of love at first sight, as were John and Stephen, and Angelo and Reggie. The latter couple took a few days to deal with new feelings, but the results are positive. The amount of time a couple needs only depends on the couple."

Not realizing he was being watched and listened to, Prez explained, "There are going to be five active bases in this division someday. The four hundred kids we have now will become more like two thousand, and they'll need good role models. I'm thinking of way more than you four as Core Rimmers. My thoughts since day one were to fill all six townhomes at each base with Core Rimmer

families. I'm considering some very special straight couples too, like Horacio and Sonia, and Craig and Felicity. They're unique circumstances, which means some agreements need to be made. We started with eight leaders for eighty-seven kids, so I'd like to keep it with that ratio, or try to do a little better than eleven-to-one. Six townhouses with a leadership couple each makes twelve Core Rimmers for three hundred and fifty kids on each base. That's nowhere near eleven-to-one; it's more like thirty-to-one, so you see the long term problem. Right now we've got twenty-four leaders and three-hundred and ninety-five kids. That ratio is about seventeen-to-one; it's still not good enough for every kid to feel cared for and secure."

Standing behind Prez, Cody Wilkins introduced himself and his partner to the teenagers at the table. Cody then explained, "Typical military protocol is a ten-to-one ratio between enlisted and officers. This is a civilian organization, but the ratio should still be as close to ten-to-one as is reasonable. That way, when the unforeseen issue crops up, it can be dealt with, and still have sufficient leadership available for the remaining troops."

Sheldon smiled, "We heard what happened this morning from the AIs. Cody figured it would cause some confusion. Since Cody hasn't had the chance to visit, and I haven't been here to meet anyone yet, tonight was the night to make the time."

Locking eyes with Cody, Prez scowled, "Ten-to-one, huh?"

"You're not military," Cody repeated, "but I'm sure you realize that there always needs to be a few leaders left here, for the Clan, when the majority have a job to do."

"We have dorm leadership teams too," Keith reminded. "If we included dorm leaders in the calculations, we actually could come

close to ten-to-one... closer than we are anyway."

Cody asked, "How many dorm leaders are there?"

"The intention is for a pair for each floor of each dorm," Prez answered. "Right now, there are ten at Ewa Beach and four here, so we're even light on dorm leaders."

Cody scowled, "What's that work out to in numbers?"

Doing the calculations in his head, Prez sniggered, "Twenty-six-to-one." Keith, Cody and Sheldon cracked up. Prez giggled, "Yes, the problem is only getting larger."

"Growing pains," Sheldon chuckled.

Cody prompted, "You'll need to address this, Prez."

"What would you suggest?" Prez asked.

"Continue what you're already doing, on a larger scale," Cody answered.

Tapping is sub-vocal, Prez called, "Alden, we'll need chairs lined up on the Oneula Beach stage for all the Core Rimmers, and connect me to the PA at both bases, bro."

Alden replied, "Go ahead, Prez."

"Attention all Rimmers and all available adults," Prez announced. "We need to have a meeting at the Oneula Beach auditorium. Everyone that isn't occupied needs to be there for this meeting. That's all for now, I'll see you there." Returning his attention to Cody, Prez asked, "Would you mind attending and being available for consultation."

"We'll be there," Cody smiled, "but you already had a clue, Prez. I'd doubt you'll need much from me, but Sheldon and I will be in front row seats, just in case."

Kids already in the Oneula Beach dining room began taking trays to the kitchen and others left for the auditorium. Kids from Ewa Beach began filing through dimensional doors and into the Oneula Beach dining room. AJ, Jerry, Kaleo, Tory, Sean and Troy gathered near Prez and Keith to find out what was going on. Drew, Corey and their sons transported to the Oneula Beach auditorium and began powering the place up.

Chapter 28

Oneula Beach Auditorium

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 7:07PM HTZ

With the entire leadership team gathered on chairs on the stage, Prez checked with Alden to be sure everyone was present in the audience. Once he heard that only those adults who were working or sleeping weren't there, Prez stood and went to center stage. He took a microphone from its stand and joked, "This auditorium isn't as big as Ewa Beach, but we're still barely putting a dent in the number of seats available." Laughter and giggling erupted from the crowd of about seven hundred.

Prez said, "This morning's confusion made it very clear that the leadership of this division needs additional help. Initially, Erik and Travis were dealing with one hundred and forty-four of you. Thanks to another group of eight, things were kept kewl and everybody was happy. Still, that's a hundred and forty-four kids with ten acting as leaders, a fourteen-to-one ratio."

"Let me remind you that when the division began, we had eighty-seven kids and eight leaders, which is an eleven-to-one ratio. By Wednesday morning, we rescued an additional sixty-three, bringing our total to one-hundred and fifty kids, but we only added four Core Rimmers. By Thursday afternoon, we were at two-hundred-twenty-two rescued kids and a nineteen-to-one ratio of kids to leaders. Right now, we're at three-hundred and ninety-four kids to twenty-four leaders, which is a sixteen-to-one ratio. This weekend, another eighty level three orphans will begin showing up, pushing the numbers back up to a nineteen-to-one ratio."

"Not to mention, every time something happens, like

Wednesday night's orphanage rescues, and Thursday night's insanity, and Friday's Battle Of Earth repercussions, and this morning's trip to Charleston AI hospital, all you guys and girls are left to fend for yourselves. This is not what I envisioned or expected, but it has shed light on the fact that we need more Core Rimmers, and more dorm leadership too. For the dorm leaders, I think we should have two per hall, so that number needs to double from what it is now."

Seeing Bruce Downing shuffling down the row where the majority of his adopted family were sitting, Prez lowered the microphone, paused and grinned. Jogging down the aisle, Bruce loudly giggled, "WHAT? Joel made me a leader too! I can count chairs. You've been including me in the numbers, so get me a chair, Alden." The audience cracked up, the loudest from Jim and Jen Hundser and the Core Rimmers' sons.

Chuckling, Prez told the crowd, "The next thing I was going to say was that we need more chairs up here for Core Rimmers. Alden, please get thirteen more chairs for our new Core Rimmers, dude." On his way across the stage, Bruce passed by Prez and got a pat on the back. Bruce took the chair beside Stephen Marr, at the end of the row.

The chatter from the audience made Prez evilly snicker, "Oh, I've had several of you in mind for future additions, but was biding my time, waiting for each of the selections to make their interests known. Instead, we'll just have to wait and see what jobs each decides to have. I'd also like to share what I told Horacio, Sonia and Alec Triggs just a little while ago; that there are straight dudes that I would very much like to make Core Rimmers too. Sonia admitted that she wouldn't like having to pass judgement on anyone, and that's part of my dilemma; Clan leaders work in teams of two. Horacio is extremely capable, and Alec proved he can excel at the job, by rescuing his younger brothers, and putting his own well being at risk. Passing over

someone only because of their sex and sexuality won't cut it in this division; we could get too large to do that. What I intend to do is bide my time, watch and listen to straight couples. If there are straight couples that can do the job, then we'll have male and female members of the Core team. Alternatively, I could pick two dudes from two couples and discover if they can act as a team."

Turning to see that extra chairs had been set up, Prez then faced the audience and announced, "We're going to go in order, according to those who we've known the longest. When that's done, we'll get some dorm leadership volunteers. Lastly, I'd like to have input from the adults, on whatever they've noticed lacking or missing entirely."

After a long pause to carefully watch the audience, Prez called, "Aaron Farris and Stephen Wicks, come on up here." Both thirteen-year-old boys stood. The audience began applauding as they shuffled across the row of seats and hurried down the aisle toward the stage. Before the applause died down, Prez called, "Keanu Hekekoa and Liki Kealoha, we need you." The applause swelled, and as it diminished again, Prez chuckled, "Tony Lanning and Ray Varga, dorm leadership won't cut it for you two, you're promoted." The audience cracked up. The latter two named boys also stood and broke into giggles.

On his way down the aisle with Ray at his side, Tony laughed, "Why did you bother making us dorm leaders in the first place, Prez?"

Prez sniggered, "I was giving you time to get used to the idea. There, you've had about seven hours. Are you used to it now?"

Over the sound of the applauding and giggling audience, Ray and Tony howled, "I guess so!"

"Neil Green and Tad Markell, come on down." When the two fifteen-year-olds stood, Prez announced, "Carter Rackham and Doug

Zimmerman, you too."

The latter two boys stood but didn't leave their seats. Carter called, "Make us dorm leaders, Prez. We're not really as ready as you are." The audience quieted to hushed whispering.

Nodding, Doug offered, "Maybe the next time you're in a promoting mood, Prez."

"I'll check with you privately?" Prez confirmed.

Doug nodded and Carter said, "That sounds good," and they sat back down.

Prez smiled, "I'll be honest, the fact that you dudes refused in front of almost seven hundred people makes me even more sure that you're leaders." In the audience, evil snickering broke loose and heads nodded.

Arriving on stage, Neil sniggered, "I don't suppose we could take dorm leader jobs too?"

"You could," Prez grinned, "but I'd only promote you in the morning, Spitting Rimmers." Tad, Neil, all the already seated Core Rimmers, and the audience roared. Prez chuckled, "For those of you that don't know, Neil made his exit from the Woodlake orphanage by spitting in the faces of his two care-givers." Again, the audience cracked up and there was scattered groaning. Prez chortled, "The really funny part is, Sean and Troy sentenced them to life imprisonment, and the goobers were still on their faces when they were transported out! For all we know, they've still got their marks of appreciation, and Neil's cold too."

Pausing for the audience laughter and applause to die down, Prez lowered the microphone and joined the rest of the team who

were congratulating Neil and Tad. Returning to center stage, Prez smiled, "Since Carter and Doug aren't quite ready, a modification is required. These next two dudes are very recent selections, that I had intended to give a few more days before tapping. They probably think that they've slid under my radar, but I saw them together at last night's water blaster battle, again during lunch this afternoon, and again at dinner this evening, sitting *all alone*, having intimate meals." Moos and giggling erupted.

"I also saw them at the pools this afternoon," Prez continued, "and they were still keeping to themselves, trying their best to be discrete. Unfortunately for them, several telepaths around shared what they knew with John, who has shared that knowledge with the rest of the team. I've been watching half the couple since Sunday, and knew there was leadership potential there. His other half just showed up yesterday, the son of an employee, and made his presence known to several more Core Rimmers. And this dude is another good guitar player, so we'll have to find out what he can do, when he's not cuddled up to his partner." More giggling burst from the audience, and then Kade, Karey, Brad and Cameron began loudly hooting. Prez chuckled, "Everyone already up here agrees, Kassidy Oldcambus and Matt Thornton, come join us."

The moment he bounced up onto his feet, Matt excitedly shouted, "KEWL!" Kassidy, Jeremiah Thornton and the rest of the audience cracked up. On the way down the aisle, hand-in-hand with Kassidy, Matt began praying and thanking the creator for making another of his biggest and most important dreams come true. Those near the aisle heard parts of Matt's prayers and howled hysterically. Out in the audience, amongst the other adult employees, Matt's father proudly glowed.

Once Kassidy and Matt had been greeted and took seats on

stage, Prez turned to the audience, grinning, "There are three chairs remaining. The problem is, the Clan generally works in teams of two, but we have three up here already who don't have partners. Let's deal with Reyes first."

From the audience, Ryan shouted, "No way, Prez!" Reyes started giggling.

Knowing what kind of reaction it would cause, Prez playfully suggested, "Then I'll give the job to Paul, when he arrives." Covering his mouth, Reyes cracked up.

"OH, *SURE!*" Ryan incredulously hollered, and then stood up. On his way down the aisle, Ryan bitched, "The Clan is supposed to have evidence, telepathically scan prisoners, and *THEN* deliver justice. Paul would kill first and ask questions later... *MAYBE...* IF HE FELT LIKE THINKING OF THE QUESTIONS!" The audience lost it and fell apart, hysterically laughing.

Prez chuckled, "Alden, get a PADD for Ryan and load Pissed Off Chickens on it. I get the feeling he'll appreciate it soon enough."

Climbing the stage steps, Ryan softly grumbled, "I'm going to kill my brother." Reyes stood and met his boyfriend. They kissed and went to find chairs.

Watching almost the entire row of seated Core Rimmers shift to make a two chairs available for Reyes and Ryan, Prez went to Nathan Hayes, teasing, "Found a boyfriend yet, Nathan?"

"Confirmed, just last night," Nathan giggled.

"If he's your partner, I approve," Prez said.

Standing up, Nathan leaned close to the microphone and called,

"Brice, right here by me." Shivering with delight, Brice Glotzbecker stood and ran down the aisle to join his boyfriend up on the stage. The thought of becoming a leader never occurred to Brice. Widely smiling, he could barely believe that in a single day his best friend became his boyfriend, and now he was a Core Rimmer too.

Once Brice was greeted, Prez went down to the end of the row where Bruce was sitting. Facing the audience, Prez gleamed, "John isn't the youngest Core Rimmer anymore, Bruce is. There's only one way to give Bruce a partner that will keep him safe from harm, under every circumstance, and his name is Skylar Richardson."

Skylar popped onto the stage, into the seat directly beside Bruce. John and Stephen began giggling before Bruce turned to Skylar. Seeing purple eyes, Bruce squealed, "You're teaming *me* up with a Mikyvis? SWEET!" Everyone howled laughing, including Prez and Skylar.

"Does that mean you get to teach me to kiss?" Skylar giggled.

Intensely blushing, Bruce giggled, "Maybe. I guess we'll have to teach each other." Hearing that, Skylar adjusted his height and weight from an apparent ten-year-old to that of an eight-year-old, and cutely blinked at Bruce. "That's more like it!" Bruce cheered.

Everything paused for the hysterics that followed, and only got louder when Skylar and Bruce disappeared for about ten-seconds. When they returned, Skylar and Bruce were cuddled up close. No one knew where they went, how long they were gone, nor did anyone really want to ask the questions.

When the audience and Core Rimmers had calmed somewhat, Prez returned to center stage, breathlessly chuckling, "There you have it; thirty-eight Core Rimmers for three-hundred and ninety-four kids.

We're back to an eleven-to-one ratio. Now some of us can go visit more level three orphans tomorrow, and there will still be plenty of Core Rimmers here."

Before Prez had finished speaking, groups of kids and adults in the audience stood and applauded. Lowering the microphone, Prez prompted the team of Core Rimmers to stand, move forward on the stage and hold hands. When kids started taking their seats and the applause dwindled, the team of Core Rimmers returned to their chairs.

Remaining at center stage, Prez reminded, "During this weekend, we'll be gaining another eighty kids, which means we'll need another eight Core Rimmers, so I'm no where near done adding to the team. Now, for our dorm leadership; according to Alden, we'll need twenty-six dorm leaders total, two per hallway, but I know we already have a team of three in one hall, namely the Nash brothers and Owen Reed." A line of twenty-seven chairs appeared before the stage. Prez prompted, "If all the existing dorm leaders would come down and take seats in front of the stage, please?"

Horacio, Sonia, Nell, Molly, Corbin, Dominic, Craig, Felicity, Elise, Phil, Owen, Adrienne, Bianca, Carter and Doug stood up. While they made their way down the aisles, Prez reminded, "Dorm leaders are the big brothers and big sisters for the kids in their dorms, and going forward, for their hallways. I'm counting fifteen on their way to chairs, so we still need twelve dorm leaders. Dorm leaders help their kids when someone gets sick and needs a doctor, or if someone needs help with homework, they'll find a helper, or if you decide you need anything for yourself, or for your dorm common rooms. Anything dorm leaders need that they can't get, they'll get help from Core Rimmers."

Noticing Roy and Pete coming down the aisle last minute, Prez paused and then chuckled, "Your girlfriends are down here, so you

dudes are volunteering?"

Pete sniggered, "We're generally with our ladies anyway."

"Might as well, since we're occasionally doing the job," Roy chuckled.

"Okay, we still need ten more volunteers," Prez smiled. "According to Alden, we already have a special circumstance brewing at Ewa Beach dormitory one. There are now six dorm one leaders, but four are in the shorter halls, leaving Horacio and Sonia with larger halls and more kids. Now, I know there are other straight couples living in dorm one. We need another guy and another girl, preferably already in the longer hallways." Standing with his girlfriend, Cassie Cornwell, Hank Leve loudly said, "I'm right across the hall from Horacio, but Cassie is upstairs with Helena, in the short hall. Will that work, Prez?"

Prez smiled, "It could, if Cassie and Helena would be willing to find someone to swap rooms with. It's important, so that little kids or sick kids aren't searching for help when they need it. Alden could help transport stuff, so you're not actually moving all your belongings, but just changing rooms."

Looking down the row, Cassie asked Helena, "What do you think?"

Without standing, Helena shrugged, and then giggled, "All the rooms are almost the same anyway. That's fine."

Facing the stage and Prez, Cassie shouted, "We'll get it worked out, Prez."

"Excellent!" Prez cheered, and then prompted, "Come take seats with your team mates. While we're at it, Alden, let's get signs made

and posted, so it's obvious which rooms have dorm leaders." Prez paused to listen to Alden in his sub-vocal, then said, "We only need two dudes for the long hall of Ewa Beach dorm two." When there was silence and little activity from the guys, Prez sniggered, "Come on, dudes! Need I remind you that there's a beach house on Kaho'olawe you'll get to visit now and then?"

Abruptly, eight teenagers from that hallway stood at once. The audience, the dorm leaders already seated and the Core Rimmers cracked up.

"Okay," Prez chuckled, "Christian, you're in the kitchen almost every day. I hate to tell you, but none of you are here to work; you're here to learn and be a kid. It wouldn't be good for you to work two odd jobs, one of which is practically round the clock." When Christian and his roommate, Daryl sat down, Prez said, "Another reminder is that there are lots of odd jobs that stronger teenagers are qualified for, most importantly is running movie projectors here and at Ewa Beach. Our youngest kids would love to see movies more often."

"YEAH!" Almost two hundred little kids loudly agreed.

Sniggering, Kelly Littlepage hollered, "We'll need someone to show us how to load and run the projectors, Prez." Kelly and his roommate, Hugh Gartrell sat down.

Prez replied, "If we don't get around to it tomorrow, then definitely Friday night." Christian and Daryl started chatting with Kelly and Hugh. Between the four of them, they could run projectors at both bases. Prez then prompted, "Darren, Lance, Cody and Dominic come down here. All four of you are capable and could excel at the job. Alden, get Horacio a coin and we'll flip for it, like a

football game."

Soon, the four named boys were gathered around Horacio, who showed them that it was a real coin, with two different sides, a head and a tail. While that was going on, Prez said, "Ewa Beach dorm three, we need two guys for the long hall."

Raising their hands, level one orphanage rescues, Terrance Parkinson and Mike Busse shouted, "Here, Prez."

"Good job, dudes," Prez smiled. "Come sit with your teammates." Terrance and Mike came out of the audience seconds before Cody and Dominic started up the aisle to return to their seats. Prez announced, "Darren DeVault and Lance Elling are dorm leaders for the long hall of dorm two. Moving on to Oneula Beach dorm one, Carter and Doug have the long hall, so we need two more guys for the short hall, and two girls for the long hall upstairs." Quickly, Lee Bennett and Carlos Burns stood and came down the aisle. Owen could barely believe two of his ex-roommates had volunteered. With a little encouragement from the girls nearby, Catherine Montgomery and Jeanette Craig came down the opposite aisle. Seeing their orphanage sisters, Neil and Tad began applauding, and told the other Core Rimmers who the two girls were.

"And two dudes for Oneula Beach dorm two?" Prez announced. Six teenage boys sitting close together in two rows began chattering. Other nearby younger boys shouted their thoughts. About a minute later, Darrell Sparks and Virgil Austin stood. Prez introduced them to the audience as they came down the aisle.

"Now we're set with fully staffed leadership teams," Prez proudly beamed. "When the newbies show over the weekend, we'll add some more Core Rimmers and dorm leaders as soon as possible." The audience again applauded. Prez smiled, "Now let's hear

suggestions from the adults."

Standing up, Jen Hundser loudly said, "FYS has been making plans."

Prez said, "So you don't have to yell, come up and use a microphone, mom. Any other adults with ideas can come up here too." Prez put the microphone back in its stand then stepped back to join the rest of the Core Rimmer team.

During the relatively quiet moments it took Jen Hundser to make it down the aisle and to the stage, from way up near the auditorium's ceiling, singing was heard. "Someone's a rockin' my dreamboat, someone's invading my dreams. I was sailing along, peaceful and calm, suddenly something went wrong." Swooshing down to the seated audience, Davie Owens caused gasping and screaming from kids and adults alike.

Dillon and Jonah howled laughing, "Davie!"

"We told you there were angels in the family!" Dillon giggled.

Jonah laughed, "You're takin' lessons from the seagulls now?"

"Dem birds are stoopit!" Davie sniggered, and paused to hover over Dillon and Jonah. Facing the stage, where all the Core Rimmers except Reyes and Ryan hung their jaws to the floor, Davie explained, "I've been watching quietly, making sure everything goes according to plan." Up on stage and clasping his hands, Matt Thornton softly prayed. Davie giggled, "Mathew, it's really happening, just like the last day has really happened. Patience earned you the boyfriend and partner of your dreams, and a leadership role you only prayed might happen, so be patient now, okay?" Speechless, Matt rapidly nodded. Davie giggled, "Sorry for the interruption. I'll watch and wait," and

then faded away.

Arriving at the stage, Jen adjusted the mic in the stand, and then said, "What I have to say will be anti-climatic after an angel. We're making arrangements to interface with the community. The first of many opportunities is to have some of our parents talk with the parents of gay, lesbian and transgendered children. One of the saddest situations is when parents believe that they have brought children into this world to be what they, the parents desire. That's only the first of the planned interfaces, but there are others we're still discussing.

"Also, we'd like to present opportunities for the community to interface with us. What we're hoping for are community volunteers to teach our kids. Jason Taylor would likely become a leader for those men who would like to coach sports, like football, basketball and tennis. Jeremiah Thornton and Roy Combs have expressed interest in joining Jason for our new athletics department."

Troy stood, calling, "Aunt Jen?" He went to stand beside her and offered, "We'll get some places built in the Morale section of our web site, so anyone interested in sports can sign up. That data can be made available to the coaches, so we can start building teams." Finished for the moment, he returned to his chair. Toy Rimmers softly chatted about building the suggested interface.

Jen continued, "Several of the women have suggested getting arts and crafts classes set up for our younger children. Dance classes are something boys and girls can participate in together. Hula dance lessons are another opportunity we could check into. Perhaps some of our young men would like to learn Hawaiian Fire Dancing. Anything that any of you are interested in, simply let Alden know, he'll organize the data and make it available to FYS. Let me remind you that there are very few activities that need be strictly separated by sex. I know that both of our male doctors relax with needlepoint, crocheting and

knitting, because it keeps their surgical skills fresh.

"Of course, all the volunteers coming on base would be scanned just as all employees have been. Every child here will always feel safe on our bases, and our volunteers won't have free run of the grounds; they will have FYS representatives with them at all times. Similarly, when our adults go off base for meetings in the community, our security and as much extra security as needed will be present. Our primary goal is to prove to our communities that Clan Short ideals are worth their time, consideration, and volunteer efforts.

"Since what FYS does is dependent upon what our children are interested in, that's all I have for now," Jen finished. "Please let Alden know if any specific activities interest you."

Standing up and going to the microphone, Troy said, "We'll get an online suggestion box set up, on the Morale section of our web site too, Aunt Jen. That way, anyone that has an idea can share it privately." He returned to his seat, and then Prez stood up.

Standing up, Craig Nash loudly said, "I've had a brief chat with Jason Taylor about getting soccer teams organized. We're thinking for three age groups; five- to nine-year-olds, ten- to twelve-year-olds, and thirteen and up. Depending upon how many sign up, we'll adjust accordingly."

Jen and Prez met in the middle of the stage. Only the other Core Rimmers heard Jen tell Prez, "Last night around nine-thirty, Alden told us that he was very disappointed, because he couldn't play in the second water blaster war." Many of the Core Rimmers softly chortled. Jen told Prez, "I have another son pending that I'm looking forward to seeing and holding. Make it happen tomorrow, Preston. Your father and I will want to be there too. Of course, given Alden's natural

abilities, he'll want to be a leader, as soon as he has a boyfriend."

Obediently nodding, Prez admitted, "Alden hadn't told me that he had been accepted by a family."

"He asked and we answered early this morning," Jen grinned. "He wanted me to share the news."

Turning to Drew and Corey, Prez checked, "Can that happen tomorrow?"

Pointing at his sub-vocal, Drew chuckled, "As soon as the decision was made, Alden and Stevie told Marc, Danny, Caleb and Noah. Once we finish at Blank Children's Hospital tomorrow, we can complete the process tomorrow afternoon."

"Tomorrow's lunch time is booked," Prez smiled.

"It won't take too long, Prez," Drew said. "A couple of minutes to transfer data and memories, then jump start his heart. It'll take far longer to make sure he's okay and then start the dunks." All thirty-eight Core Rimmers evilly snickered and some rubbed their hands in anticipation. Across Core Rimmer comm-badges, Alden cracked up.

Jen went to the stage stairs and returned to the audience. Prez returned to center stage and raised the microphone stand, beaming, "With thirty-eight Core Rimmers and twenty-seven dorm leaders, we're now at a six-to-one ratio. Tomorrow morning, there will be plenty of leadership around. I'd like to make one other change that I feel is important. Occasionally, communications need to be private or silent. Alden, get all the new Core Rimmers *and* all the dorm leaders PADDs and sub-vocals... please, little brother?"

Over Prez's comm-badge and picked up by the microphone, everyone heard Alden insanely giggling. On the laps of the new Core

Rimmers and all the dorm leaders appeared PADDs and sub-vocals. Prez grinned, "You'd better stop calling me 'boss' immediately, Alden. Every slip is another dunk, and another hour with Grandma Morrison."

"EEK!" Alden squealed. Out in the audience, the entire Taylor family roared laughing.

Skylar and Bruce called, "Hey, Prez?"

Turning to his little brother and divisional Mikyvis, Prez saw them waving him closer. Prez went to them, and Skylar giggled, "The whole auditorium is a time bubble. When everyone leaves, they'll see only a minute or so has passed."

Bruce smiled, "Now you, all the Core Rimmers, and all the dorm leaders need to go to Archmania." He helplessly giggled, "You were there soon after me and Sky arrived, and we'll be there still, even though we're here now, but that's the way it goes. It's a team building meeting with everyone, and then some rehearsals, and then you can get your concert tour started." Rapidly blinking, Prez couldn't believe his young foster brother had just spoke in a time loop, like it was no big deal.

"It was all your idea!" Skylar laughed, "We just happened to already be there."

Sadly shaking his head, Prez smirked, "I love having my thoughts regurgitated back to me before I ever say a word to anyone." Bruce and Skylar cracked up and remained laughing while Prez told the Core Rimmers and dorm leaders to hang back for their first meeting. He then told the rest of the audience, "Y'all can go enjoy the rest of your night, and reset your watches. All our sons and their boyfriends, please hang here with us."

Among the Core Rimmer sons, Dee was bringing Corbin Reid up to the stage. After returning the microphone to the stand, Prez turned to the large group seated and grinned. Derrick, Mike and Keith softly sniggered. Bruce, Sean, Corey and Stephen began giggling. All the newest Core Rimmers glanced up and down the row, wondering what was so funny. Prez chuckled, "I really thought it would take much longer than eleven days to grow the Core team this large."

Bruce, Skylar, Keith, Derrick, Mike, Drew, Corey, John and Stephen went to stand with Prez. Keith whispered to Prez, "If you're thinking of getting the concert tour started too, then let's invite KC, Fred, Joey and Jerry." With a confirming kiss, Keith called for the latter four to come to the stage.

John asked Prez, "Since Robbie Taylor is coming with us, would it be okay if his three brothers and their boyfriends come too?" He then quickly explained, "I could get Intel training done with the quadruple Rs."

"Sure, that works, bro," Prez replied, and then waved the dorm leaders up onto the stage, grinning, "You guys and gals are coming with us for a team building session." Being part of the leadership team, Lindsay Gibbons ran down the aisle to join everyone else on stage. Out in the audience, Ralphie, Pat, Ronnie, Garrett, Richie and Theo turned around and raced down the aisle to the stage.

Reappearing above the audience seats, Davie announced in a booming voice, "Alec and Brad Triggs, Chauncey Eckhart, Rikko, Cameron Combs, Kade and Karey Oldcambus, Tanner and Toby Stoeher, you're invited along too."

Turning to the hovering angel, Prez chuckled, "Are we leaving anyone here?"

"Plenty, for now," Davie giggled.

Prez playfully wondered, "Dare I ask?"

Davie laughed, "Providence?"

Tapping Prez on the arm, John giggled, "Partially to keep brothers together, and partially so I can train additions to my Intel team."

Tapping his nose, indicating John was on target, Davie giggled, and with a bright flash of light, disappeared. Jonah uncontrollably laughed, "What a ham!"

The dorm leadership group stood and began climbing onto the stage. Prez explained, "For you newbies that haven't already figured it out, most of what I do as Head Rimmer is allocate resources. I can't possibly do everything for every kid, which is why this Clan needs each and every one of you. It'll seem like we're gone for a long while..." Bruce and Skylar broke into giggles, interrupting Prez and getting everyone's attention. Prez helplessly chuckled, "But we'll be returning here tonight."

A lot of chatter erupted, wondering what each of them would need to pack and bring along. The Core Rimmers who had been to Archnania before assured them that they wouldn't need to pack a thing, telling them that everything needed would be supplied by the Archnanians. Skylar giggled, "They made my bro, Dylan royalty, which indirectly makes all of you the family of royalty."

Popping onto the stage, Dylan cutely smiled, "Just call me Prince Dylan while we're there."

Skylar laughed, "They do *not* have to call you Prince!" Wide-eyed, Bruce scampered away from Skylar. In a blink, the two Mikyvis

were wrestling and rolling around the stage, occasionally phasing out and back in again.

Stopping near Prez and Keith, Bruce giggled, "I got caught in one of their wrestling matches once before, and will *never* let it happen again!"

Keith chuckled, "It was that scary?"

Shrugging, Bruce smiled, "Not what they do to each other, but just the places they're *phasing to* is plenty."

Mike asked his little sister, "What're you doin'?"

Knowing it would annoy her big brother, Lindsay grinned and reminded, "Prez made me a leader too. This is a leadership meeting."

"It's a leadership meeting that's going off planet," Mike growled. "You're staying here."

Firmly planting her feet and wrapping her arms around her chest, Lindsay stubbornly insisted, "I'm going!"

Trying to avoid the wrestling Mikyvis, Drew went to his little brother, saying, "Bruce, the last time we were there, it was all dudes, except for Janice Hernandez."

Bruce offered, "They'll know enough to supply everything the girls need too. Like your last visit, they'll arrange for whatever you need. Girls who don't have boyfriends can have separate bedrooms. It'll be the same for unattached straight guys. Straight couples can have another room, and the little guys will have their own room too." Glancing around the large group, Bruce assured, "You'll all have great times, and get to see a couple of concerts too. Don't worry about

anything, it'll be fun."

Prez, Keith, Corey, Drew, John, Stephen and Derrick surrounded Mike and Lindsay, who were still arguing, until the latter two noticed they were encircled. At the pause in sibling rivalry, Prez locked eyes with Mike and sighed, "She's got to come too, bro. I made Lindsay part of the leadership team, mostly because she proved her value, without any of us dudes knowing about it, and besides, I promised." Gesturing over his shoulder, Prez shared, "If I break this promise, then there's another bunch of female dorm leaders who won't trust me."

Noticing all the female dorm leaders were paying close attention to the disagreement, Mike grumbled, "I'm not going to play big brother, watching her every day."

John grinned, "You won't have to," and tapped his forehead, reminding, "There's always a spare room for my best friend."

Stephen giggled, "Phenomenal cosmic powers."

Dee, Richie, Bruce and Geoff loudly laughed, "In a cute itty bitty body." John cheekily grinned. Almost all the other teens and tweens gathered on the stage cracked up. Most pleased, all the female dorm leaders applauded.

Abruptly, Skylar returned to Bruce's side and reached for his hand. Dylan appeared in the center of the group, calmly asking, "Is everybody ready?"

Although most were uncertain, they answered that they were ready. Prez checked, "What about Time Touched, Dylan? As far as I know, about half the band is scattered around, and doing Lord knows what."

Dylan grinned, "You're thinking linear time, Prez. Care to rephrase the question?"

"Never mind," Prez sniggered. "Will they have knotted spaghetti and meatballs?"

"We'll ask," Dylan giggled, and teleported the entire group of over a hundred to Archmania.

About ten-seconds later, while Bruce and Skylar watched from their chairs, the entire group of Core Rimmers and dorm leaders returned. There were some apparent visible changes, primarily clothes and hair length, because they had been gone about a month. Also, some new partnerships had been forged; Helena and Lance Elling were holding hands, as were Darren and Adrienne, and Lee Bennett and Bianca, and Darrel and Virgil, and Dee and Corbin. Surprising even those that had watched it happen, Mike Busse and his roommate Terrance Parkinson were a couple. Obviously, they were a newer couple, in a tight embrace and passionately kissing upon arrival. Also evident were the friendships between Angelo, Reggie, Tony, Ray, Kassidy and Matt. Similarly, Corey, Drew, John, Stephen, Phil, Owen, Nathan and Brice had become much closer, and so had Chris, Jay, Travis, Erik, Lance, Scott, Troy and Sean. Lastly, each Core Rimmer and many of their sons now had phasenmorphs on their wrists.

Due to a few rescues that had occurred while they were away, Erik and Travis were fathers of eleven-year-old Syd, and Syd's ten-year-old brother, Drake. Scott and Lance were fathers of ten-year-old twins named Grant and Krane. Chatting up a storm, the larger group split in half and headed for the stage steps. Eager to return to their dorm rooms and move into townhouses with their sons, Erik, Travis, Grant, Krane, Syd, Drake, Scott and Lance led the pack out of the auditorium.

Waiting outside the auditorium for the Core Rimmers was a small group of little boys. Five-year-old Colin Townsend and seven-year-old Christian Cole immediately went to Neil and Tad, begging to be adopted. All were from the Woodlake orphanage. Neil and Tad expected to be hijacked, but not quite so fast.

Likewise, six-year-olds Don Lien and Rusty Ogburn, and seven-year-old Jacob Bartholomew ran to Chris and Jay, already calling Chris 'daddy', and Jay 'poppa'. Hysterical Core Rimmers roared laughing. At that time, Corbin acted upon his thoughts, and asked Chris and Jay to adopt him too. Thrilled to the core, Don, Rusty and Jacob surrounded Corbin and held on tightly.

With happy tears pooling in his eyes, Corbin glanced around the three little guys, carefully asking, "You guys want me as your big brother?"

Don and Russ rapidly nodded. Jacob smiled up, explaining, "You want daddy and poppa, so we got the most important thing already. I ain't too much older than Russ or Don, so I can't really be the big brother."

Having spent a month with Corbin, and knowing very well what kinds of horrors the eleven-year-old lived through, Jay asked, "What do you say, Corbin; are you ready to be a big brother?"

Uncertainly, Corbin scanned his group of friends, and saw the quadruple Rs, Billy, Jonah, Sammy and Dee nodding their heads. Wiping the tears from his eyes, Corbin widely smiled, "I'll try my very best."

Chris smiled, "No one could ask for more, Corbin."

Giggling Rimmer sons greeted their new cousins. Pausing his family, Prez set up his tricorder for more adoptions. There and then,

outside the Oneula Beach auditorium, the entire group stopped to witness the first of what was sure to be many more adoptions.

With the congratulations slowing down, Prez chuckled, "Okay, we have some housing issues that need to be resolved."

"There are three free townhouses here, and only one free at Ewa Beach," Keith reminded.

"But there are condo apartments available," Troy interjected. Focusing on Eric, Lance, Scott and Travis, he revealed, "The top three floors of Condo A are available. They're five bedrooms and four bathrooms, occupying the entire floor, so they're huge."

Derrick reminded, "My dad has plans drawn up for Core Rimmer housing, large enough for two couples and all their sons. Until those homes are built, we'll rely on condos. Barring rain, the new condos here will be ready for occupancy tomorrow."

Travis offered, "Erik, Lance, Scott and our boys can move into a five bedroom condo. Right off the bat, we've occupied four of the five rooms. Neil and Tad can take a townhouse here. Chris and Jay can move into a townhouse at Ewa Beach. Is everybody kewl with that plan?" The sons were the first to loudly agree. Their smiling dads also agreed.

Keanu grinned, "Expect more adoptions tomorrow. Liki and I will make the rounds through our dorm tonight and see if we can start our family."

Clasping his hands together, Matt looked up at the night sky, chuckling, "Dear Lord, please give me and Kass a few more days as a couple before starting a family. I've gotta get dad used to the fact that I'm married, before dumping kids on his lap that call him grandpa." Familiar with a month's worth of Matt's prayers, Angelo and Reggie

uncontrollably cracked up.

"Is that days human time or Mikyvis time?" Skylar giggled.

Angelo and Reggie began sniggering, and then recited, "We're sorry, the deity you have called is unable to answer at this time."

Wrapping an arm around Skylar's waist, Bruce grinned, "Hey Sky, in Mikyvis time, it's been a week since he asked that, ain't it?"

Focusing on Kassidy and Matt, Jay smirked, "You guys hooked up before we left, and we were gone for how long? Request denied!"

Softly chortling, Reyes and Ryan tried to slink away from the larger group unnoticed, but Jonah, Gage, Randy and Dillon caught and surrounded them. Turning to Derrick, Mike sniggered, "Which kids are old enough for a fifty-six year-old android and his partner?"

"DADDY!" Darren DeVault and Lance Elling loudly laughed.

More laughter erupted and the group began to wander off in various directions. Some went to their local dormitories and another pack went toward the dining room dimensional doors and Ewa Beach.

Little Colin looked up at Neil, softly commenting, "You look different, daddy."

"We were at a place where we could get healthier faster," Neil told his new son.

Tad told Christian and Colin, "The next time we go there, you guys are coming with us, so you can get healthier too."

Widely smiling at the memory, Neil shared, "We climbed trees while we were gone. The tree limbs actually moved to help us climb."

Both boys began giggling. As far as Colin and Christian were concerned, Neil and Tad hadn't gone anywhere, and had stepped out of the auditorium only a few minutes after they had. Christian loudly giggled, "Is it time for goofy bedtime stories, already?"

"I ain't tired yet," Colin whined through giggles.

Leaning over, Neil picked up Colin, saying, "First, we're going to move out of the dorm and into our new home. By the time we're settled there, we'll have a little time together to watch TV, and then its bath time."

Colin asked, "Do we gets to take baths with you and poppa?"

Rapidly nodding, Christian told Tad, "That's what we're 'upposed to do. Richie, Dillon, Geoffy, Scott and Jimmy says we have to, or we won't be a real family."

"Yep!" Colin cheered. "And we knows all about dicks and spermies too." He paused and then asked Neil, "Are you makin' spermies with poppa?" Watching Neil's face flush scarlet, Tad howled laughing.

Neil wondered, "When did you have this spermies chat?"

"Some in the store when we got here," Colin answered.

Christian nodded and grinned, "And more at the playgrounds."

Neil chuckled, "Me and Poppa got married while we were gone, so yeah, we make lots of spermies for each other every day."

Tad shared, "We're going to have a Vulcan bonding as soon as we can, so you two can see that we're very much in love. You guys can bathe with me and daddy, only if you promise to be real careful

with our dicks."

Stopping short and causing the entire family to pause, Christian impatiently huffed, "We told you, we know. If your dicks get really big, then we stop washing right away, 'cause only daddies and poppas share spermies, and we can't make none yet. I'm thinkin' of findin' my own boyfrien' too, ya know? I don't want no other spermies but my boyfriend's, when we're way older and can make some."

"Yeah!" Colin forcefully emphasized all his new brother had said. Both fifteen-year-olds rapidly blinked, trying to process the fact that they were 'way older'.

Picking up Christian, Tad smiled, "Very kewl, dudes. We'll bathe together in our new house, and then we're all going to sleep in a really big bed together, two sons on one side and a daddy and a poppa on the other side. That'll help make us a real family."

Both little guys cheered, "SWEET!" The new family walked toward dormitory one.

Having heard all of what Colin, Christian, Neil and Tad were saying, but splitting off into the Oneula Beach dining room, Jay and Chris checked with their younger three sons to see how much they knew. Heading for the dimensional doors, Jacob giggled, "Yep, we know all that too. There's only one part we don't un'erstand too much."

Chris blinked, "Which part; being in love?"

"That's the easy part," Don giggled.

Nodding agreement, Rusty pointed out Don and Jacob, smiling, "We was best friends, and wanted you for daddies, so we could be real brothers, which is sort o' like love, but not like daddies and poppas

love, b'cos we don't kiss and mess with our willies. We hugs all'a time, and like when Donnie had a bad dream, me and Jake helped."

Jacob scowled, "We heard you, and Lance and Scott, in your dorm rooms. At first there's lots of laughing and giggling, but then it gets really quiet, and then it gets really loud again, but it sounds like makin' spermies hurts. Does it hurt really bad?"

"It doesn't hurt at all," Chris sniggered, "it feels really good, like being tickled."

Processing the boys' definition of love and what they thought sex was, Jay smiled, "We moan and groan because we love each other that much, guys. The part where we're really quiet is partly because we're kissing. Also, you can't hear what we're whispering to each other between kisses. Once we move into our house, you'll hear more, and then you'll know that it never hurts. Showing how much you love someone is really the best feeling in the world."

Chris checked with Corbin, who still had Dee's hand in his. Corbin shrugged, "You know I... but that wasn't love. I watched you two, and all the Core Rimmer couples together, but I guess I'm not much smarter about this than my little brothers. It scares me a lot, ya know?"

Proudly beaming, Jay smiled at Corbin, and then glanced over at Dee, asking, "Could you let go of Corbin for a minute, please?"

Knowing that Jay had the same expression he had seen on his fathers' faces, Dee giggled, "Sure," and quickly told Corbin, "just for a minute."

Once Corbin was released, Jay paused the family. All the others heading to Ewa Beach walked around and past them. Locking eyes with Corbin, Jay smiled, "That was the perfect answer for two new

dads, and more importantly, for three little brothers to hear. We're going to have a great family based completely on honesty and trust. It's sometimes really hard to be honest, but with a little trust, you know it will get better. Do you trust me and dad to show you real fatherly love?"

"Yeah," Corbin quickly answered, "I really do. I wanna believe love is good."

Kneeling down, Jay prompted, "Climb aboard for a shoulder ride."

Shocked and shivering, Corbin squealed, "Really?"

"Really," Jay replied, and leaned forward, with his neck and head low enough for Corbin. Giggling insanely, Dee helped Corbin get in position and step back. Jay's head popped between Corbin's legs, and he offered his eldest son both hands to hold. Then he stood and Corbin gasped and broke into giggles. Chris, Don, Russ and Jacob helplessly laughed.

Looking up at Jay, his new poppa, Jacob asked, "Would it be okay if we all slept together tonight? We need to see and know it's because you're so happy."

Chris checked with Jay and got a slight nod. Chris then told the boys, "You have to be real quiet, okay guys? We've been around other teenagers making love, but never young boys, and we're new fathers, and you're new sons too."

"We understand how confusing it must be," Jay calmly answered. "You can sleep with us any time any of you need to, but just this one time you can watch us make spermies, because that's very important for our sons to understand. Then you can be sure we're in love and will love each of you as our sons. It matters that you

remember what you've seen us doing alone and naked, and then watch us when we're together and dressed, no matter where that might be and who we're with. All those different scenes are the same to me and daddy, because we're in love."

Wide-eyed, Rusty asked, "Like right now, you're dressed, but still in love?"

"Absolutely right now too," Chris emphatically assured all four boys. "Right now, we're becoming daddies, showing our sons that they're so special that we'll answer all your questions, even one's that are embarrassing."

"Kewl, daddy," all three boys chorused.

Looking up at Corbin, Chris said, "You can watch too."

Don looked way up at Corbin, wondering, "Why don' ya wanna see too?"

For his new son sitting on his shoulders, Jay answered, "Corbin's seen spermies, but from a bad man that didn't know anything about real love. Grown men can make spermies any time, but when there's no love there, it's just a mess to be cleaned up." Carefully looking up, Jay smiled, "If you want to watch, it'll be kewl, so you can see what love is really like."

Shrugging, Corbin said, "Maybe I will, or maybe I won't want to."

Chris promised, "Whatever you decide, we'll understand." A moment later, Chris had Don in his arms and planted against his left hip. He ordered the dimensional door, "Ewa Beach," and felt Russ taking hold of his right hand.

Following the two new families were Matt, Cassidy, Angelo, Reggie, Tony, Ray, Keanu, Liki, Stephen Wickes and Aaron Farris, none of which had sons. Although each couple had been in rooms with other gay couples, and all had been seen making love, the realization that young sons might want to witness them having sex had them mutely processing for quite a few minutes. The eight teenagers were silent until they had split off and were away from the little guys. Pausing in the quad, they weren't too sure what to say or how to begin, but small grins began forming.

Tony was the first to offer, "A month ago, I wouldn't have considered making love with Ray unless we were completely alone."

"Liki and I were sexually abused orphans, but that seems like a lifetime ago," Keanu smirked.

Nodding, Liki explained, "There were other little boys and little girls around that saw us with chubbies and bones."

Aaron sniggered, "Making love as a demonstration for boys that are our sons seems pretty impossible."

"Put yourself in the mindset of a kid," Matt instructed. "Especially now, after all that time at Archnania. What those kids said they heard, and how confused they are makes perfect sense."

Stephen giggled, "They're right on target; we start noisy and silly, get quiet for a while, and then finish loud, like we're in pain."

Angelo chortled, "How do you explain to a little kid what having an orgasm is like?"

Reggie smirked, "What's most frightening is that our little kids know so much. With all we've learned from the Archnanians, and

from each other, I can honestly say that I'm a little conflicted."

Keanu nodded and admitted, "Just a few minutes ago, I was considering marching into the dorm, ready to act like a father for any kid under eleven-years-old. Suddenly, I'm far less sure of myself." The other seven teenagers softly agreed.

After another few silent moments, Matt sighed, "Okay guys, lets look at where we were at a month ago, and how we've learned to be. We all knew what an orgasm was, and what other guys could do together, but we always kept it private. By Archneanian standards, we're still like those boys; preferring to be separated by sex and sexuality. Sharing bedrooms together, we've learned it's all natural. That's where the little guys are at, it's all natural and kewl, except that little bit of time when we're getting loud again. They don't understand precisely what they can't possibly understand. We can all teach kids, and protect kids too. It's a balancing act, sure, I agree, but we can do it."

"There is something positive to be said when we're all together in a room making love," Kassidy reminded.

"Oh my God," Reggie droned. Remembering some of the post-orgasm remarks made, and others received at Archneania, Angelo began giggling. Soon, the remaining teenagers were laughing.

Taking Stephen's hand, Aaron laughed, "Let's make some spermies and then we can find sons."

"Sounds like a plan!" Keanu and Liki cheerfully acknowledged. Since all four lived in dorm one, the race for their rooms immediately began.

Turning to Tony, Ray, Angelo and Reggie, Matt chuckled,

"We've gotta tell my dad that we're married."

"I want some alone time with Ray," Tony easily shared. "We'll get together again after."

Backing away from Tony, Ray giggled, "I told you, I don't need anyone else's encouragements, just your grunts." Ray took off for dorm three, with Tony grunting up a storm and only a pace behind him.

Nodding, Angelo giggled, "We'll leave our door unlocked and the other bed clear."

"See y'all in a little bit," Kassidy sniggered. Matt and Kassidy started walking toward condominium B. Goosed by Reggie, Angelo cracked up and tore for dorm three.

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Columbia, SC

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 11:32PM EST

Beginning to wake, Paul remembered where he was. Thankfully, a small night light was on in the loft. It wasn't much, but it allowed Paul to look around. The space seemed small earlier that day when four adults were present and showing him around. Now, the mostly dark room seemed huge. Sitting up, Paul saw the shadows of the TV stand, the sofa and the coffee table. He could barely make out the small kitchenette area. This was *his* place, *his* home, *his* lucky break. A shiver of excitement raced up his spine. A little paint was all this loft needed, and he could do that in about a week. And then he saw the bathroom door, and remembered that he hadn't relieved himself since breakfast. When he turned to get out of bed, he discovered that his full bladder firmly objected to this maneuver. Like a human of

advanced years, Paul managed to almost stand upright and waddled towards the relief, loosening the button on his jeans and lowering his fly. Sitting on the cold toilet was another shock. For a brief moment, Paul wondered if everything inside him, including necessary organs, had escaped into the splashing water.

When the mass evacuation seemed to reach its end, Paul finished his business in the bathroom, pulled up his drawers and began feeling around the wall by the door for a light switch. Finding an old fashioned switch, he flipped it on. Briefly blinded by the bright light, Paul blinked and turned to the sink. He ran the water and looked into the mirror. "I'm home," he softly told himself with a grin, and cleaned up. There was a hand towel hanging nearby too, so he washed his face. When he finished drying off, he reached for the right edge of the mirror and discovered it was a simple medicine cabinet. He even had a place for his toothbrush and toothpaste. "This place is gonna be awesome!" Paul cheered, and returned the hand towel to the bar.

Walking out of the bathroom, he sighed, "It'll be even more awesome if there's some food stashed in here." Again, by the bathroom light, Paul searched for light switches. On the wall near the entryway door Paul found one switch that turned on a fluorescent light in the ceiling above the kitchenette. It lit almost half the loft. Returning to the bathroom, Paul reached in and flipped off that light. He then went to the kitchen and searched the cupboards. He found a few cans of soup, a box of saltine crackers, and even an unopened bag of chocolate chip cookies. In the small refrigerator, Paul found milk, orange juice, a six pack of Coke, a package of bologna, a small loaf of bread, mayonnaise and mustard. "Damn!" Paul giggled, "It sure ain't one of Mary's smorgasbords, but soup and sandwiches works just fine. I'll have to remember to thank the Harts in the morning."

Soon, Paul had found large bowls, a hand operated can opener

and began making his late dinner. While the soup heated in the microwave, Paul made two bologna sandwiches. Deciding to eat in front of the TV, Paul grabbed a can of Coke and the plate of sandwiches to take to *his* living room, and again broke into soft giggles. He put his food and beverage down on the coffee table, then picked up the remote and turned on the television. The microwave beeped, telling him that his soup was ready when he was. With a sandwich in one hand and the remote in the other, Paul ate and channel surfed the local broadcast channels.

There wasn't much to choose from late at night, so he decided to catch up on the news for a little while, to see if the truck driver was telling the truth. During a commercial break, Paul glanced around his new digs. He decided that the furniture needed some reorganizing. There was a pole lamp with three lights in the corner near the sofa he was sitting on, but only a few yards away was the night stand, lamp and clock radio. That night stand needed to move to the far corner, away from the pole lamp. At some point, once the painting was done, he could get something to hang from the ceiling that would separate *his* 'bedroom' area from the rest of the space. There needed to be something between the entryway door and the bed, but it would be better if he could arrange stuff so that he could see the TV from bed.

Regular programming continued. Finished with both sandwiches, Paul took the plate to *his* kitchen, got the crackers from the cupboard and brought them to the coffee table. He went back to get his bowl of soup and sat down to finish his meal. Local, national and world news seemed to agree with truck driver Dan's assessment of affairs post-Battle Of Earth; the rebuilding had begun in Washington, New York City and Los Angeles. The world was pulling together and getting help from our allies in the Federation of Planets.

With his fill of news, Paul flipped to a different channel. He

landed on a local talk show. A middle aged couple were speaking of their departed son, who had been attending NYU in Manhattan and was a casualty of the riots there. The nineteen-year-old young man had found a small group of younger kids in a burning building. He broke in, rescued the kids and brought them to a nearby medical clinic. Wanting to find his girlfriend, he went back out to continue his search, but he didn't find her or make it. The couple being interviewed praised their son and Clan Short repeatedly, causing Paul to grumble and switch to a different channel.

Watching a music video program, Paul finished his soup. He brought the bowl to the kitchen and cleaned up after himself. The kitchenette of the loft had a window that looked out over the driveway and toward the street. Once the plate, bowl and silverware was clean, Paul roamed his loft, making plans for furniture rearrangements and the task of painting the walls. There were three windows, the front one by the kitchen, one across from it on the back wall, and one on the adjacent wall. The wall with the entry door didn't have a window.

It was approaching one in the morning, and Paul was wide awake. He decided to expend some energy and started rearranging the furniture. He knew that when the job was done, he would be tired and able to take a nap. That way he could be ready for breakfast with the Harts. The small sofa was the heaviest and therefore the first item moved. It had been on the wall where the door was, but Paul wanted it against the back wall. The bed was moved to the same wall, about four feet from the edge of the sofa. The night table was moved, and then the coffee table. Lastly, the television and its stand were moved, across from the sofa, but still viewable from the bed. Only the small dinette table and chairs didn't need to be moved. When it was time to start painting, it would be much easier to move stuff toward the center of the loft and complete one wall at a time.

At 3:27 AM, Paul remade his bed properly and then laid down for a nap. The last thing Paul muttered to himself was; "I wish you were here, bro. This place is nice, and it's been so easy, but I miss you." He drifted off to sleep thinking of his brother, wondering if Ryan was happy in the ROH with Reyes.

What Paul couldn't know was that Ryan and Reyes had been to Archmania and were gone a month. They were the only two unmarried Core Rimmers remaining of the thirty-eight that left.

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Ewa Beach, Condominium A

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 7:27PM HTZ

Walking off the elevator at the tenth floor, Scott and Lance followed their clearly elated sons, Grant and Krane, through the double doors and into the massive penthouse apartment. The boys hadn't bothered to find the light switch, but scurried around by the light cascading in from the open door. Separating, Scott and Lance felt around the walls near the doors for light switches. Each had found six switches and flipped them on. The entire space of the main rooms was brightly lit. Scott blinked at the sight before him. Lance's jaw dropped. The twins loudly yelled, "YAAAAA!" and began running around the expansive space.

Lance softly gasped, "Holy fucking hell!" To his right was a huge kitchen. Further away was a dining table for ten. The living room area was to his left, and before him were four columns and lots of empty space. Sliding glass doors to the balcony were between the kitchen and dining area, and another set were on the living room side. In the ceilings were six rows of recessed light fixtures. There were sconces on either side of the entryway door and across the room

between the doors. Lance started flipping switches to see which switch controlled which sets of lights.

Insanely sniggering, Scott tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Alden, how big is this place?"

"The main area is two-thousand-one-hundred and fifty square feet," Alden answered. "The entire floor is just over three-thousand-seven-hundred and twelve square feet. It's a five bedroom and four bathroom apartment. The two largest bedrooms are to your left and right, and have private bathrooms. Before you are..."

"Bedroom!" Grant hollered from a doorway.

Opening the next door, Krane yelled, "Bathroom!"

Alden giggled, "Three bedrooms and two full bathrooms. The middle bedroom is the smallest of the five." He then asked, "Is it not big enough?"

Watching his two sons check the other three doors many meters across from him, and not believing Alden's question could possibly be serious, Lance howled laughing.

Scott chuckled, "For eight of us, its plenty big, Alden. We could add in another dozen guests and still have space."

"You've got the basics here already," Alden offered. "There are plates, glasses, silverware, pots, pans, towels, blankets, sheets, pillows and all the expected furnishings. All I need to know is what kind of food and drink you'd like."

"I'm completely blown away," Lance told Scott. Grant and Krane decided to go inside the final bedroom, which was nearest the

dining area table.

Nodding agreement, Scott asked Alden, "What're the other Core Rimmers doing in their homes?"

Alden answered, "Since they all eat their main meals at the CIC, they've stuck to basic snacks and sandwich fixings. Keith and Prez have a little bit more, like eggs, bacon, butter, english muffins, and things for breakfasts."

Scott ordered, "Just get some basics for now, Alden. When Erik and Trav get here, we can all decide if there's anything else we'll need or want."

Alden giggled, "It'll be stocked in a minute, Scott. And watch out!"

Streaking twins came racing out of the bedroom directly for their fathers. Lance and Scott braced themselves for the pounces. In seconds, Lance had Krane off the floor and in his arms. With Grant in his arms, Scott chuckled, "Do you guys like your new home?"

The boys didn't answer with words, but with repeated multiple kisses and lots of giggling. Lance chortled, "We were thinking you two needed clothes from our store, but that seems unnecessary."

Krane giggled, "Without seeing our birthmarks, could you tell me from Grant?"

"At least half the time," Lance smiled, and then planted a kiss.

Grant squinted and waited for Scott's reply to Krane's question. Adjusting the boy so he was seated on one arm, Scott tickled behind Grant's knee. Over the squealing laughter, Scott sniggered, "Yep, only

Grant is ticklish there. I got it right."

"NO FAIR!" both ten-year-olds laughed.

Lance's comm-badge chirped, and Erik called, "Lance?"

Krane tapped it for his dad, and Lance replied, "Yeah, bro. Wassup?" He put Krane down on the floor. Scott put Grant down and took a few steps nearer to Lance. Playing their identical twin version of the shell game, Grant clung to Lance, and Krane wrapped his arms around Scott. Each of the twins adoringly smiled up at each father. Each father grinned down at the boys that were their sons.

"Sorry for the delay," Erik giggled. "Drake and Syd saw the diving well..."

"And then the pool," Travis chortled. "Naturally, they had to try them out."

Erik giggled, "Now we've got two damp, naked kids greeting everyone in every room. We just made it to your room."

Lance chuckled, "This place is huge, bro. We've got plenty of space for all our stuff, yours and Trav's, and stuff for all four of our boys, and we'd still have room to spare."

"I think this place will do nicely for quite a while," Scott added.

Halfway through Scott's statement, he, Lance and the twins heard the first "Umph!" and then a second grunt, followed by gales of laughter and giggling from Trav, Erik, Drake and Syd.

At the pause in communications, the twins glanced at each other. They stepped back from their dad and pop, and then started doing the goofy hip-swivel dance that they had seen several of the

Rimmers doing at Archmania, in an attempt to make their boy-bits swing like their heroes. Lance went over to the satellite system, turned it on and gave his boys something to dance to. When Lance turned around again, Scott was also naked, with a son on each side, and all three were dancing. Lance howled laughing, and stripped off his clothes to join the family party.

Erik giggled, "Are you dudes ready over there?"

"Almost," Lance replied, and shimmied his butt toward one of the master bedrooms, with his partner and two sons following. Once the lights were on and the closet doors opened, Lance announced, "Ready for closet one transport."

"Closet one transported," Erik reported.

"Transport complete," Scott sniggered. Grant and Krane jumped up on the queen size bed and continued their dance on a 'stage'.

Watching two bare butts run out of the room and toward the common room, Travis laughed, "Closet two transported."

"Transport complete," Lance giggled, and jumped up on the bed to dance with his sons.

"Dresser one, drawers opened," Erik cackled.

It took Scott a few extra seconds to open the many drawers of the large dresser and report back, "One dresser here and all drawers off... I mean, opened." Everyone on both sides of the comm-link howled laughing. Eventually, Scott sniggered, "Transport complete."

Everything came to a halt when Nazareth's 'Hair Of The Dog' began playing on the stereo, and all four in the condo apartment started singing. Up on the bed, Lance, Grant and Krane added air-

guitar antics to their dancing. Scott cracked up.

Not knowing exactly what was going on that had Scott hysterical, Erik transported over to see for himself. Roaring his butt off, Erik returned to dorm three, and then Travis transported into the room. He shouted over the singing, "We're going into overdrive, so we can all get crazy." With a nod from Scott, Travis returned to dorm three. Erik had the dildos, lube and rubbers transported from one night table to the other at the condo. Moments later, two amplifiers, two electric guitar cases, and two acoustic guitar cases materialized on the floor of the closet. Lastly, Lance's and Scott's MacBook Pro laptops were transported to the room.

Stepping out of Lance's and Scott's emptied room with Drake's and Syd's clothes, Travis looked up and down the hall for his sons. Erik closed the door and cleared the lock, so the room could be cleaned and take new residents. "They're around here somewhere, Champ," Erik smiled, and led the way to their room. The TV in the common room was on, but no one was in there. The door to the Nash brothers' room was open, and there they found Drake, Syd, the Hiram twins, Phil and Owen.

Waving Erik and Travis into the room, Phil sniggered, "The Stoehar twins are at the Seavers' tonight, bros. Since those two are considering a new family, the Hiramsons are too."

"Wouldn't Keanu and Liki like two Hawaiian sons?" Owen giggled.

Nodding, Erik chuckled, "They've talked more about having kids than any of us."

Tapping his comm-badge, Travis called, "Keanu, are you busy, bro?"

Provocatively, Keanu and Liki chorused, "Not yet."

The four younger boys began giggling. Travis sniggered, "Transport over here, dudes."

"We're still on our mission, checking out our dorm," Keanu truthfully replied.

Erik giggled, "Your mission is here, dudes."

Excitedly, Liki ordered, "Alden, transport us, please?" He and Keanu appeared just inside the doorway.

Nudging both Hiram brothers, Syd ordered, "Tell 'em how it is."

Uncertainly, Anakoni softly admitted, "Our old parents didn't care what we did, if we ate, or even if we came home at night."

Nodding, Kapena smirked, "We might like having two dads, if they cared enough?"

With raised eyebrows, Keanu and Liki turned to each other, and then grinned and nodded. At dorm one, they had been concentrating on younger boys, in the five- to eight-year-old range. On several points, Anakoni and Kapena were perfect sons; the twins had been independent beyond their years out of necessity, and they were native Hawaiians. Squatting down to be closer to eye level with the twins, Keanu told the boys, "You must already know that everyone on this base cares about everyone else. We're going to try and make a real family. Since we're fathers for the first time, and you two are becoming sons for the first time, I think this is a good match. We can learn from each other."

Going to the twins and reaching both his hands out for them to take, Liki suggested, "Let's have a private talk, so we can all get better

acquainted."

After each took one of Liki's hands, Anakoni and Kapena cheered, "Kewl!"

Keanu tapped his sub-vocal, ordering, "Alden, take all four of us to our room at dorm one, dude." Keanu, Liki, Anakoni and Kapena vanished. Syd, Drake, Phil and Owen broke down in giggles.

Glancing at Travis and Erik, Phil sniggered, "Your sons did that in under ten minutes." Drake and Syd cheekily smiled.

Covering his eyes, Erik cackled, "Turn down the halos! They're way too bright!"

Kneeling down, Travis sniggered, "Imagine what they'll be able to do with kids who aren't already in the Clan?" In no time, Syd was climbing up onto his pop's back. Lifting Drake, Erik planted a kiss on his youngest son's cheek and parked the boy on his hip. Locking eyes with Phil, Travis wondered, "Where's Craig?"

"With Felicity, being examples for the girls at Oneula Beach," Phil replied.

Owen giggled, "After a month away, everyone over there is going to wonder how they got even closer in only a few minutes."

Erik smiled, "We're going to finish our move."

Nodding, Phil offered, "You realize that if the Stoebers and the Hiramns get adopted, half that hall will be empty."

"It'll get refilled," Travis assured.

Owen sighed, "With you two, Angelo and Reggie, Ray and Tony, and Kass and Matt eventually moving out too, this hall will be

half empty." Catching the sadness in Owen's voice, Erik and Travis locked eyes with him. Owen shrugged, "It's been the most awesome week... half a week, really."

Wrapping his boyfriend in his arms, Phil suggested, "How about we stir up the masses for another cozy cuzzy fuzzy water blaster battle?"

"YEAH!" Syd and Drake enthusiastically yelled. Travis cracked up, and so did Owen and Phil.

Erik giggled, "We'll have to go clothes shopping tomorrow morning."

"Let's finish our move," Travis chuckled. He then told Phil and Owen, "Set the fuzzy time and place, and we'll be there."

"Kewl," Owen and Phil chanted.

Travis and Erik carried their sons down the hall. Kassidy and Matt walked in the dorm from outdoors, obviously already finished talking with Jeremiah Thornton. They went directly to room twenty-six, opened the door and stepped inside. The door to Erik's and Travis' room was already open and Scott was standing naked in there, already getting the move accomplished. Seeing the family enter, Scott smiled, "You're almost completely moved. Grant, Krane and Lance are anxiously waiting, so go. I can finish this in no time flat."

Nodding and patting Scott on the back, Travis smiled, "Thanks, bro."

Erik called, "Alden, take us to our new home." In a heartbeat, Erik, Travis, Drake and Syd were standing in the center of their new flat. There were four columns in the large open space. Directly in front of them was a nice kitchen area and to the left was a dining table

and chairs. Turning around, they saw the living room area.

Drake giggled, "Lemme down, dad." Syd repeated his brother's request, and soon the two brothers were scampering around the apartment. Grant and Krane ran out of a room and soon all four were investigating their new home.

Grinning, Travis told Erik, "I'll keep an eye on the whirlwinds."

"And I'll find Lance," Erik smiled. He stole a kiss from his hubby, and then went to the room that Grant and Krane came out of. Squatting down in front of the dresser, Lance was closing the drawers. Looking around his new bedroom, Erik giggled, "I should be used to seeing your bare butt by now."

As soon as the last drawer was closed, Lance bounced up and spun around. He said nothing, but pointed at his long dick flopping around. Over the course of a month away, just about everyone said something about it, and Reggie's, and Darren's. Only Stephen Marr's unit was never publicly commented on, but Lance, Reggie and Darren had all talked to Stephen privately. Sadly shaking his head, Erik giggled, "Our plan to take our boys to the store has already changed. They want to play in a water blaster battle here. Phil and Owen are getting it set."

Shrugging, Lance went to Erik, smiling, "It's not like the clothes they were wearing are getting dirty. We've got something else that needs to be set up here." Lance wrapped an arm around his best friend's shoulders and guided him out to the main room.

Erik giggled, "Our band, Choise Remedee. We've got a lot of work to do to catch up with Platinum Habits."

Out in the center of the room, Scott had returned from the dorm and had already ordered a Ludwig drum kit for Travis. In the kitchen,

Travis was pouring glasses of Coke for everyone. Scott sniggered, "Hey, Champ, you need to adjust these drums."

Travis laughed, "If you keep calling me 'Champ', Erik will be crippled in the morning."

"That's my goal, ya know?" Scott teased.

Mooing through giggles, Erik excitedly bounced his eyebrows. Lance cracked up. If anyone had told them how inseparable they would become when they left for Archmania, each of them would've been surprised to varying extents. However, within the first week of team building, making love in plain sight of each other was necessary and normal. Then, out of the nineteen Core Rimmer couples available, two rescued brothers chose Erik and Travis as their fathers, and the twins made Lance and Scott their new fathers. Out on the balcony, the four boys were running around and checking out the views.

Going to the kitchen and reaching for a glass of Coke, Lance giggled, "Should we tell the boys to come inside? They're out there, streaking around."

Erik blinked at his naked best friend and brother, and then grinned, "It's not like anyone on the ground could see them."

"The kids are fine, bro," Travis assured.

Provocatively, Scott leered, "Com'ere, MSLB."

Approaching his horny hubby, Lance laughed, "You be good!" Erik and Travis evilly snickered.

After fondling his husband's goods and planting a deep kiss, Scott whispered, "Was that good?"

"Just good enough," Lance giggled. Travis and Erik roared. Lance giggled, "You two need to get naked too."

"Down to my underwear only," Travis grinned. He started to strip, explaining, "I'm not parking my bare ass on a new drum throne."

Taking his shirt off, Erik wondered, "What sort of bass guitar should I get?"

Lance asked, "Which felt most comfortable?"

Hanging his shirt over a stool, Erik sniggered, "They're all way bigger than the guitar I had. I would think the tone matters too. Does it matter what it sounds like to you dudes?"

While Erik and Travis finished undressing, Scott shrugged, "You played almost all the basses that Prez played. I liked the tones of the EB-3 most, which is the one Prez plays most often. He'll pickup a Rickenbaker, or a Fender Jazz bass, when he needs those sounds for funk and progressive rock. For now, we'll be playing a lot of heavy rock and metal, at least until we're good enough to try other styles."

Nodding agreement, Lance smiled, "An EB-3 would do it."

Coming out of the kitchen in his boxers, and noticing Erik silently waiting for an opinion, Travis grinned, "They know better than me, cuddle bunny. All I do on drums is make booms and crashes."

Scott chuckled, "But you do that to a tempo, which is more than any of us expected. I know you were only fooling around, but you sat down at Derrick's kit and just started playing. That's why you became their drum roadie."

"Derrick said you started off really good, and all you need is to

practice a few flashy tom-tom fills, and you'll be set," Lance reminded.

Sitting down at the drum kit, Travis adjusted the height of the snare drum, sniggering, "The show is over when I miss the snare completely, and accidentally whack the head of my dick."

"That's what I call excessive meat beating!" Erik laughed.

Coming in from the balcony with his brother and the twins, and overhearing what was said, Syd smirked, "We want two fully functional dads, so watch your sticks, pop." Everyone cracked up.

Drake giggled, "Yeah, don't go ringing a ball instead of a bell!"

Three teenagers groaned in sympathetic pain, but all four giggling boys began their dick-flop dance again. Travis roared laughing.

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Oneula Beach, Townhouse #4

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 8:27PM HTZ

Finished moving themselves, Colin and Christian from the dormitories to the townhouse, Neil and Tad walked their new sons home. The teen fathers saw lights were on in townhouse three, and stopped to have AJ, Jerry and the Hunnicutts come over. Having two excellent little boys from the same Woodlake home that they were from, Neil and Tad were initially thrilled with the idea of having a real house, and a real family. However, during the move process, the home seemed so large, and so quiet, everything shifted from exciting to frightening. Neil and Tad knew not to say anything aloud that Colin

and Christian might overhear, but they needed some help.

Upon entering their home with guests, everything suddenly changed to intoxicating again. Kenny Hunnicutt helped himself to the television remote control and parked his buns on the sofa. Shaun and Mike took Colin and Christian down to the basement, and then all the way up both flights of stairs to the second level. In the meantime, AJ and Jerry helped Neil and Tad get the kitchen stocked and talked.

Whispering so that none of the boys could hear, Neil confided, "We're freaking out, bros."

Nodding understandingly, AJ grinned, "Going from nothing, to something, to all this is a lot to cope with. We were there, thinking the exact same things too."

"How're we going to deal?" Tad wondered.

Jerry shrugged, "In our case, we had a week between living in the dorms and living in our townhouse. It seemed a little weird Sunday night when we were walking home, but the moment we walked inside, we saw the kids had left the living room TV and one kitchen light on. They knew more than AJ and I did. You make a house a home by using what's here. The boys wanted normal sounds in their environment, so the TV was turned on. If one of 'em woke in the middle of the night, a light needed to be left on."

"We left the light on and shut the TV off, and then went upstairs," AJ shared. "We weren't sure where the boys would be and half expected to find them all in our bed. Instead, we found them in one room. That meant me and Jerry had to try and act like everything was normal, for the kids' sake."

"Your situation is only a tiny bit different," Jerry explained. "So tonight, you demonstrate to the kids that you're in love and that you're

loving them too. Share a shower and then share your bed with them; two boys between two dads."

AJ chuckled, "We heard what the kids said before. The first time Shaun said the word 'spermies' was at dinner Monday night. I almost choked and Jerry almost sprayed the table with his chewed food."

Jerry softly sniggered, "The main difference between our kids is the Hunnicutts are more normal than any of us ever thought we could be. They understood almost immediately that we were their adults, and needed time alone. It might take Colin and Christian a couple of days and nights, but they'll figure it all out, with help from their peers and their new fathers. None of our boys ever asked what your two did, but the second I heard their perspectives, I knew just what I'd do."

Neil grinned, "And that is?"

"Intercourse and oral sex are out of the question," Jerry smiled. "They wanna see the spermies, so wanks in the shower, with all the kissing and emotion you can put into it, before, during and especially after. All they want to know is that it doesn't hurt and it makes you even closer; lovers, husbands and *their* fathers."

AJ scowled, "After two nights in the same room as his brothers and a month away with them, I'm wondering where Kenny will sleep tonight."

"They'll tell me," Kenny quickly answered. None of the four teens knew Kenny was near, and they all turned to him. Locking eyes with AJ, Kenny giggled, "Fuzzy-facts-of-life, remember? I don't need proof, but maybe Shaun or Mike would. Maybe they'll still want me in their room tonight, but I'm pretty sure they don't need it anymore. When I'm shoved out of their room, we'll all know."

Gesturing with his index finger, Jerry widely smiled, "Com'ere,

Ken." Giggling his butt off, Kenny went to his pop. Grunting far more than necessary, Jerry picked up Kenny and planted a kiss. He put his eldest down again, held him close to his side and firmly told Neil and Tad, "What your little family needs is at least one older brother. If not tonight, then as soon as one shows interest."

AJ told Neil and Tad, "Our little man does half the work for us." He then shared with Kenny, "Neil and Tad want to make this house their home. What do you think these new dads need to do, Ken?"

Overflowing from the ego boosts, Kenny giggled, "What makes a home and a family more than eating together? Put some cookies and glasses of milk on the table, and I'll call them back down here."

Slumping at the simplicity, Neil laughed, "Amazing!" Tad searched the cupboards for cookies. Getting with the program, Neil got glasses and AJ got the two liter carton of milk out.

While the teenager fathers got the table set, Kenny went back around the counter and closer to the stairs then excitedly hollered, "COOKIES? HELL, YEAH!"

Before Kenny got to a chair and slid onto it, a choir of gleeful shouts erupted upstairs, and then the four boys stampeded down the steps. Before the four little tikes made it all the way downstairs, Kenny giggled, "By the way, when it comes to the older brother, let them choose."

Shaun, Mike, Colin and Christian hurried to the table, wiggled onto chairs and dug in. Each of the four teenage fathers snatched a cookie, and then went into the living room. They sat on the couch, and right after he swallowed, Neil grinned, "It already feels more like a home and not just a house."

Widely smiling, Tad thanked AJ and Jerry. After swallowing his

cookie, AJ softly reminded, "Once again, half the thanks go to Kenny. Now, you two get to make this *your* home. Downstairs in the basement, the walls are collapsable; they fold up and open so all our basements are one big area. That'll come in handy over the weekend, when the level three orphans show up."

Seeing Neil and Tad uncertainly check with one another, Jerry offered, "I expect those kids will want to nest. We've already got some games and toys in our basement. Kaleo's got the nesting pads, blankets and pillows stacked in his basement. Later tonight, we'll meet down there to complete the set up. Then we'll come back up here and get some decorations hung on the walls."

Popping into the room with Bruce at his side, Skylar giggled, "Let's go upstairs. I want to reintroduce Neil to a long lost friend." Softly chuckling and not having a clue what Skylar was referring to, Neil, Tad, AJ and Jerry stood. Bruce and Skylar hurried up the stairs and went into the master bedroom. They stepped aside and waited for the teenagers.

Immediately upon entering the room, Neil and Tad noticed a six-foot long table under the window that hadn't been there when they were moving in. "Omigod!" Neil excitedly gasped. Slowly approaching the table that hadn't been seen in more than three years, Neil began shaking and shedding quiet tears. Tad mutely checked with Skylar and Bruce for some explanation. Skylar widely smiled, and Bruce placed an index finger to his lips. On top of the table was the cage and pet left behind. He looked into the cage softly muttering, "It can't be," and spun around to face Skylar.

Skylar smiled, "It's Gus, Neil. As far as he's concerned, nothing unusual happened. The day you were orphaned, I went back to get him. He didn't starve or die. Gus is perfectly fine. And he'll have a

view, just like he did in your old bedroom."

"Thank you," Neil softly wept. "Thank you so much, Sky." Three years of guilt began to dissipate. He then turned around again, reached into the cage and lifted his tiny pet. With happy tears rolling down his cheeks, Neil showed Tad. They both greeted Gus, and welcomed him home. Widely smiling, AJ and Jerry prompted Bruce and Skylar to leave Neil and Tad with Gus. The former four went downstairs, so none of the younger boys would come upstairs and see Neil crying.

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Ewa Beach, Townhouse #3

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 8:33PM HTZ

"I've given it some more thought," Leo told his dad, pop, and Uncles Keith, Prez, John and Stephen. "I really don't want any of you taking lives for me." He watched the group of older boys glance at each other. When they returned their attention to him, Leo said, "You all have personal security. Let them execute my parents' murderers, with guns, not phasers. The one thing I'll always remember is my dad missing a piece of his skull. That's what I want the families of the murderers to see; their loved ones with their heads blown off. Justice is letting them see what I saw, and have that image flash through their thoughts, like it did for me all Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday." Again, Leo paused and watched his dad, pop and uncles check with each other.

Drew softly prompted, "Tell us when, Leo."

Shrugging, Leo said, "Whenever the security guys are ready. I think it should be before the level three kids start showing up here, so this is done and none of us are thinking about it. Remember, I have to

be there, so my folks can be there."

Corey quickly said, "Your brothers are already in bed, so it's too late to do it tonight."

Leo nodded, and then grinned as an idea crossed his mind. Still grinning, he shared, "How about we let the gorillas execute them, like a firing squad? Two shots each; one shot to the head and another to the heart."

Almost simultaneously, Corey, Drew, Keith, Prez, John and Stephen tapped their comm-badges to notify their personal security gorillas that tomorrow night, they would all be going to the Rapid Response Base Detention facility to execute the murderers of Leo's parents.

When that was done, Keith reminded Leo, "Sunday, I had our security demonstrate on targets using phasers because you don't need to hear gunfire." Holding his hand out, Keith called, "Alden, get the best sonic ear plugs available for Leo, dude." A small plastic case appeared in Keith's hand. He opened the case and checked out the ear plugs. Nodding, he passed the ear plugs and case to Leo, instructing, "Try them out now." Leo did as he was told. Prez sat with his PADD and began typing. Keith asked Leo, "How do they feel, and do they work?"

"HUH?" Leo giggled. Corey cracked up. After pulling the ear plugs out, Leo asked, "What're you doin', Uncle Prez?"

"Sending a message to the UNIT commander at the Rapid Response Base," Prez answered. Before saying any more, Prez wordlessly checked with Corey and Drew. They shook their heads.

Realizing something was being withheld, Leo asked, "Why? What's going on?" When nobody said a word for a few moments, Leo

whined, "Tell me!"

Putting the PADD down, Prez got up off the sofa, went to his nephew and wrapped his arms around him, gently explaining, "We didn't think it was logical to assist in cities where there was rioting. UNIT troops helped to protect infrastructure, like dams, reservoirs and power plants, but we left the protection of cities to the National Guard. Honestly, we wouldn't have had the personnel or resources to help much in Los Angeles or New York City. Because of that, we've got forty-one Battle Of Earth orphans. Five Clan bases in the United States have about as many Battle Of Earth orphans as we do. The Presidio in San Fransisco has several hundred families waiting for their homes to be rebuilt, like many other Clan owned properties scattered around the States. What happened to you, and all those other kids, might've been prevented. Specifically, what happened to you was done by the Crips." Prez paused for Leo's reaction thus far. Leo smiled up at his Uncle and nodded.

"I've ordered that the bodies of the four men we're executing be transported to the homes of their families," Prez continued. "Other Division leaders are taking similar actions in their regions. We're planning a major military operation, to take out the Crips in Los Angeles, and other cities. They took advantage of an ugly situation and made it worse. Uncle Colin, the President Of The United States learned what was planned, and has ordered the FBI to assist. The FBI is getting Army Green Berets and Navy Seal teams to help in this operation. As of now, I know that the Clan Short Naval fleets will also be involved. All the intelligence we've gathered, thanks to our telepaths reading those that have been arrested, will be used to decimate the Crips. By the end of Monday, they'll be leaderless and powerless."

Glancing around the room, Leo smirked, "Do you think I'm

bothered by this?" He only paused briefly to see his dad and pop shrug. "I'm not," Leo firmly said. "It's for me and every other kid they've ever hurt. And the President approves too. I don't need Dulce here to tell me that my mom and dad would approve. Leave a note telling them that this is what I saw, so we're only sharing the pain equally."

Drew softly offered, "We didn't think you needed to know, Leo."

Stepping back from Prez, Leo told everyone, "And you're right, I didn't need to know, as long as none of you are directly involved and completely safe. That's all I care about. I can't lose any more family. All day Friday, I felt like I was going to crack, until I met Grandma Morrison, and then dad and pop. Since then, things have been better. The Vulcan healing helped a bunch too. Just promise me that you'll all be safe."

Around the room, Drew, Corey, Prez, Keith, John and Stephen assured Leo they would be safe, on base, and most likely very busy orienting the level three orphans. Knowing that Leo wasn't bothered about anything he'd learned, John levitated his nephew, sniggering, "As soon as you're paired up with a boyfriend, I can foresee a new Core Rimmer couple, ready to fight for what's right."

"Maybe not that soon," Leo happily cackled, "first, I have to want a boyfriend."

"You want to be held," John revealed. "Everybody does, first by their parents, and then by emulating their parents, they find someone special to hold. Sex is maybe ten percent of the equation, Leo. Don't even worry about that part; it happens automatically."

Corey giggled, "I'd hold him now, if I could reach more than his legs."

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Ewa Beach, Dormitory #1

Wednesday, November 10, 2004 8:56PM HTZ

In room 104, Keanu and Liki were sitting on one bed, and across from them sat the Hiram twins, Anakoni and Kapena. Out of necessity, the eleven-year-old brothers were wiser than their years, but didn't know the simplest things about family. The twins were frightened that they would be ignored, like their real parents had done. Keanu and Liki were only slightly more enlightened, thanks to the month spent at Archmania.

"We'd like us to be together as dads and sons as often as possible," Keanu explained. "That means we'll do more than simply share a home; we'll do as much as we can together, as often as possible."

The twins didn't really understand what that meant and glanced at each other. Liki asked, "Have you noticed the other Core Rimmer families in the CIC dining room?"

Anakoni nodded and Kapena said, "Yeah, they almost always have breakfast together, but during lunch and dinner, some of their kids eat with their friends."

Getting the idea, but still a little uncertain, Anakoni grinned, "Sammy and Ben eat with Prez and Keith sometimes, and other times they eat with Derrick and Mike, or with the rest of the Gibbons family."

"Exactly," Keanu smiled. "Ben is Mike's brother, so Sammy and Ben try and split their time as evenly as possible. Gage and Jonah do the same thing; they'll have a meal with Prez and Keith one day, and

the next day, they'll eat with Mike and Derrick. The rest of the time, they'll eat at tables with friends."

"The point being," Liki emphasized, "we don't want you two guys thinking that we're too busy for you. Yeah, we're a couple, husbands now, and we're Core Rimmers now too, but we want to be more than fathers in name only. We want to know about your days, what you're planning to do in the mornings, and what you've actually done in the evenings. Families share stuff, but at the same time, we're each separate people, so we'll have to find a balance that works for us."

Keanu instructed, "If you think anything is out of balance, then tell us. We'll be sure to tell you guys what we're thinking and feeling too. We've got to share all that stuff, or somebody's gonna feel sad, like we're not really family."

"We're not really sure how a family should be," Kapena reminded.

Anakoni told his brother, "Neither are they." He checked with Keanu and Liki, offering, "So we decide how much time we spend together, like not only at the CIC dining room, but all the time, at school, and at home."

"That's right," Liki proudly beamed.

Keanu smiled, "You guys can eat with us, or with your friends, but let's try to always make time for each other. If either of you ask, 'Can we have lunch together?' then we know that's what you want, so any other plans we might've had need to be adjusted."

"You'd do that?" Kapena suspiciously queried.

Liki nodded and giggled. Keanu chuckled, "We'd definitely do

that for you guys. I don't want you calling me dad or pop because you should, I want to hear it because you feel it."

At the open door, Akamu Kahale and Maleko Ka'aukai, two seven-year-old boys from the shorter hall of dormitory one appeared. Everyone in the room turned to the doorway.

Liki smiled, "How's it goin', little dudes?"

"Is it too late already?" Maleko frowned.

Seemingly on the verge of tears, Akamu whimpered, "We wanted daddies too."

Before real tears started to flow, Liki and Keanu hurried to the door. Keanu lifted Maleko and parked the boy on his hip, gently assuring, "It's not too late."

Picking up Akamu, Liki chortled, "Please don't cry. We were just talking about how we'd like our family to be."

Liki and Keanu had just turned their backs to the Hiram twins when they heard giggling.

"That's what we needed to see," Anakoni giggled.

Rapidly nodding, Kapena grinned, "I guess we're too big to be picked up."

"Wanna bet?" Liki and Keanu chorused. Still carrying the little guys, they returned to stand before Anakoni and Kapena.

Setting Maleko on the bed, Keanu warned Kapena, "I've lifted John Hundser a couple of times."

Being lifted off the bed, Kapena giggled, "Yeah, and how many

times did John lift you?"

"That's totally irrelevant," Keanu sniggered. Anakoni, Akamu and Maleko cracked up. Soon, Akamu was standing on the bed and Liki was lifting Anakoni up. While Akamu and Maleko cackled, Keanu asked Kapena, "Do you think you can be a son and a big brother?"

Unexpectedly, Kapena landed a kiss on Keanu's cheek, and then giggled, "Yeah, I promise to try, pop."

Stunned at the first utterance of 'pop', Keanu's eyes flooded with tears.

Seeing Keanu getting emotional, Liki asked Anakoni, "Well, big brother, can you deal with two more younger brothers?"

"No sweat, dad," Anakoni grinned, and hugged Liki tighter.

Turning to Keanu, Liki smiled, "With four sons, we're not gonna be able to stay in this room tonight."

Keanu nodded at Liki, returned the kiss Kapena planted and then put him back down on the bed. Immediately, Akamu and Maleko cuddled up close to their new big brother. After wiping his eyes, Keanu tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Prez, are you ready for more adoptions?"

A room full of giggling and laughter came across the comm-badge before Prez chuckled, "I could be, bro. How many kids did you manage to find?"

"All four found us," Liki chuckled, and put Anakoni down on the bed with his three brothers.

Prez sniggered, "I'm surprised it's only four, now tell us which four?"

Keanu answered, "Anakoni and Kapena Hiram, Akamu Kahale and Maleko Ka'aukai."

"Excellent!" Keith cheered, "Two big brothers and two little brothers."

Anakoni said, "We want their last names too, Prez."

"Hiram don't mean anything to us," Kapena smiled. "We're now the Hekekoa-Kealoha twins."

"US TOO!" Akamu and Maleko loudly chorused.

With a call to Alden for transport, Prez, Keith, Drew and John appeared in the room. In a few minutes, Liki and Keanu had officially been adopted as the fathers of four boys. Happier than he ever thought possible, Keanu asked, "Where can we move to, Prez?"

Prez called, "Alden, what's our available housing situation?"

From the speakers, Alden answered, "All the townhouses at Ewa Beach are occupied. Chris and Jay and their four sons are moving to unit number six. Townhomes five and six at Oneula Beach are still available."

"We'll take number five," Liki told Prez.

Prez nodded, "Go for it." Looking down at Akamu and Maleko, Prez grinned, "Since it's getting very late for little dudes, I suggest waiting for tomorrow to do the bulk of your move. Just grab a change of clothes for the morning, and save the rest."

"We're supposed to be in school tomorrow," Maleko reminded.

Shaking his head, Keith smiled, "Families come first for everything. Take the morning off to get your home together. If everything's done, we'll see you in school tomorrow afternoon."

Prez's comm-badge chirped again. Aaron Farris chuckled, "Head Rimmer?" Akamu and Maleko broke down in giggles, causing Liki, Keanu, Anakoni and Kapena to turn and grin at them.

Knowing that Akamu and Maleko shared a dorm room with two other seven-year-olds, Prez grinned, "How many, Aaron?"

"Two," Aaron chuckled.

Stephen Wickes giggled, "Amado Kazanjian and Sakamoto Michiyo."

"We're just down the hall," Prez replied. "We'll be there in a minute. Prez out." John began evilly snickering. Prez suspiciously wondered, "What's so funny?"

John laughed, "Wait for it."

A moment later, Prez's comm-badge chirped again, and Jay called, "Hey, Prez?" He slouched, causing Keanu and Liki to start laughing, which pushed their four sons into fits of giggles.

Tapping his comm-badge, Prez sniggered, "You already adopted four tonight, Jay."

"Yeah," Jay chortled, "but I was so psyched about it that I forgot I have a little brother, who has a boyfriend. I was reminded while we were packing." Drew, John, and the Hekeia-Kealoha family cracked up.

Chris giggled, "A three bedroom townhouse won't cut it, Prez."

"Move your fuzzy family to Condo A, ninth floor," Prez laughed.

Keith sniggered, "That's five bedrooms, right below Erik, Trav, Lance and Scott, which I will *not* take to its logical conclusion or comment on any further."

While laughter erupted in the room and across the comm-badge, Drew tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Hey Aaron?"

"Yeah, Drew."

Drew giggled, "Get ready to move to townhouse six here at Ewa Beach, and find two more sons."

Aaron and Stephen incredulously bellowed, "*WHAT?*"

"It's a three bedroom townhouse, that Chris and Jay never got to move into," Drew giggled. "You can start with two tonight, but find two more."

"What's the minimum Valium age?" Stephen cackled.

Drew sniggered, "Check with Doc Andrews tomorrow."

Waving at the Hekeia-Kealoha family, Keith stepped out of the room and into the hall. He tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Reggie?"

"What's up, Keith?"

Starting to walk towards Aaron and Stephen's room, Keith asked, "Where are you and Angelo?"

"In our room, with Kassidy, Matt, Ray and Tony, just hangin'

out. Why?"

"Lock your door, and don't answer any knocks," Keith sniggered. "I think every little kid at both bases is shopping for fathers. If any of us intend to get to bed tonight, just hide out until tomorrow."

Ray giggled, "We need an extra bed for me and Tony."

"Call Alden," Keith instructed.

Tony sniggered, "And when one of us needs to leak?"

Prez chuckled, "Have Alden transport you to a commode and quickly lock the door."

Six voices laughed across the comm-badge, "Okay!"

Keith chirped, "Out."

Prez, Drew and John joined Keith in the hall and hurried to catch up. Tapping his comm-badge, Prez called, "Derrick?"

Derrick answered, "Here, bro."

Prez sniggered, "Since you probably don't know and wisely went home, stay there and lock your doors." Chuckling and giggling erupted across the comm-badge. Prez chortled, "Seriously, my next call is to the Ark compound, for more tech-bots, and then to your dad. The Core Rimmer housing is now priority one."

Derrick evilly snickered, "Got it, bro. Since we almost doubled the size of the team, I'll bet my dad is already making arrangements to break ground ASAP."

Entering Aaron and Stephen's room, Prez playfully wondered,

"Would it do any good at all if I ordered all Core Rimmers locked in their rooms for the night? We have some more level three kids to visit in the morning, but at the rate we're going, most of the team will be busy making family time."

Derrick sniggered, "Don't you mean spending family time?"

"It all depends on the perspective," Prez grinned. "Those who haven't made a family can't spend family time, can they?"

Mike giggled, "You've lost it, Prez." Aaron, Stephen, Amado and Sakamoto helplessly giggled.

"He never had it," Derrick teased.

Smirking, Prez huffed, "You'll regret those words when both our families are living in one house."

Derrick and Mike provocatively mooed, and then quickly giggled, "We're out!"

"Then tuck it back in again," Keith grinned.

Ready to begin the adoptions, Prez activated the tricorder, smiling, "Aaron Farris and Stephen Wickes are two of the first kids we ever rescued. Although that didn't work out well, they're right back here with us, showing other rescued kids what's normal. They fell in love and are now a happily married couple, with two little dudes sitting between them. The boys will be the product of your love; they'll set the example for other new Rimmer Tribe members, just like all their new cousins already building our Tribe."

Amado asked, "We got cousins, Prez?"

"Sure you do," Prez chuckled. "Your dads are my brothers, just

like all the Core Rimmers. That means that all the Core Rimmers are your uncles, and all the sons of all the Core Rimmers are your cousins, as soon as you tell me that Aaron and Stephen are your dad and pop."

"They are!" Amado and Sakamoto happily giggled.

Glancing at Aaron and then Stephen, Prez prompted, "Two down and two to go."

Stephen proudly announced, "We want these sons to care for, and they'll care for us and each other."

"They've already got ideas for big brothers too," Aaron grinned. "They'll check tomorrow and we'll get the extra bedroom in our townhouse occupied. We'll love and protect Amado and Sakamoto, and their as yet unknown big brothers."

Prez smiled, "And it's official, you're a family."

Prez's comm-badge chirped again. He helplessly began chuckling, tapped his comm-badge and answered, "Rimmer Adoption Agency, how may I direct your call?"

Bill Seaver chuckled, "Can you stop by our house, Preston? Tanner and Toby are ready to make it permanent. Gayle Gibson already has, without paperwork."

Giggling his ass off, Drew asked, "Does Corey know, Dad?"

"Yes," Bill chuckled, "I called Corey first, since I believed you were all together."

Drew told Prez, "Corey needs to be there for that. I'll go back home and send Corey here." As soon as Prez nodded, Drew had Alden

transport him home.

"I'll be there in a couple of minutes, Uncle Bill," Prez sniggered. "We're just wrapping up another adoption." Corey appeared where Drew had been standing, between Keith and John.

"We'll see you soon," Bill chortled. "Out."

"We want their last names too," Sakamoto declared.

Nodding, Prez asked, "What's your new last name?"

"Wickes-Farris," Sakamoto answered.

Amado cheekily grinned, "Yep, we don't want poppa thinkin' he's less impo'tant, just b'cause W comes way after F."

Giggling at the mispronunciation, Aaron said, "We'll all have that new last name, Prez."

"It's all recorded and it'll be legal when you get the paperwork tomorrow," Prez grinned. "It's time to get the Wickes-Farris family move started."

Amado asked Sakamoto, "Ya wanna keep our bunk beds?"

"Yeah," Sakamoto replied, and then looked around, checking, "We can keep our bunk beds, right?"

Keith smiled, "Just tell Alden to transport furniture."

"It really simplifies moving," Corey giggled. "That's what I told Tanner and Toby to do. They're already moved into their new room at my parents' house."

Amado cheerfully told Corey, "Geoffy, Richie and Dillon is our

new cousins now!"

Nodding, Corey giggled, "I told Geoff about all his new cousins already, as I was putting him to bed, which is where you two guys need to be soon."

Aaron told his new sons, "Let's save the move for tomorrow. You guys can sleep here with us, in this bed."

"Sweet!" Amado and Sakamoto cheered. They jumped off the bed and stripped. In moments, two bare butts were climbing back onto the bed, behind their dads and sliding under the covers.

Immediately, John went over to kiss his new nephews goodnight. While doing so, John also telepathically spoke with both boys, telling them of the beach house, and a little about Archmania. In the meantime, Prez, Keith and Corey hugged Aaron and Stephen. In a few minutes, Amado and Sakamoto were getting kisses goodnight from Corey, Keith and Prez.

Before Prez could call Alden to be transported to the Seavers' home, Amado giggled, "Daddy and poppa needs to make spermies before goin' ta sleep." The six Core Rimmers cracked up.

"What?" Sakamoto giggled. "That's what daddies and poppas do. If they didn't, they couldn't be real daddies and poppas."

Watching Aaron and Stephen blushing and softly giggling, John sniggered, "You got it right, but you guys have to make believe your asleep first, and try not to giggle when daddy and poppa get silly, okay?"

"We can try," Amado mischievously grinned.

Stephen sniggered, "Ever since Joel rescued us, the definition of

'normal' keeps warping."

Nodding, Aaron told his hubby, "A month at Archmania should've prepared us."

"You're both prepared for sons and much more," Corey giggled.

"We'll see you in the morning," Keith offered. Everyone said their final goodnights.

Prez tapped his comm-badge, calling, "Alden, transport us to the Seavers', please." They vanished from dorm one and appeared in the Seavers' living room. Glancing around the room and seeing only six boys and two girls, Prez thoughtfully scowled, "You still have a spare bedroom upstairs?"

"You sound surprised, Preston," Lanna Seaver giggled.

Corey began giggling before Prez smiled, "I am. You've been this Clan's part time mom since day one."

Bill explained, "Core family housekeeping is a small problem none of us foresaw a week and a half ago. Kathy Marr is now working full time at your parents' house. The Seiberts have had Madeline Hupp working full time since they adopted the Steib quadruplets. Over at the Gibbons', there are nine kids that Laura's been keeping up after, but even she sees it's an effort. Laura's invited her widowed sister here to help around the house, since all her kids have grown up and moved out."

Lanna picked up where her husband left off, saying, "We have one more room upstairs to fill, but before we do, we're going through FYS to hire a full time housekeeper." Glaring at Corey, she smirked, "All of us mothers are still looking after our married sons, and their homes, which truly must be a shambles by now." Blushing bright red,

Corey howled laughing. Lanna nodded, "I rest my case. We'll be hiring more housekeepers for our leadership, who will be running out of clean clothes any day now." The surprised faces of Prez, Keith and Corey, pushed Cesar, Felipe, Shimizu, Murakami, Tanner and Toby into fits of giggles.

"Boys!" Rena impatiently huffed. Imitating her new big sister, Gayle crossed her arms and suspiciously squinted.

Turning to Prez, Keith suggested, "Maybe we should stop and say hi to mom and dad?"

Shaking his head, Prez grinned, "We are stopping no place where we can be seen by anyone under twelve-years-old. Our townhouse is already full, T'hyla." Everyone in the room began laughing. Prez giggled, "These three make nine adoptions in under an hour. We'll transport from place-to-place. When the Core Rimmer housing is built, we can consider adopting more kids."

Brushing his hair out of his eyes, Corey giggled, "We could go back to Archnesia? Sky would bring us to Blank Children's Hospital tomorrow morning, no problem."

"That option is still open for further consideration," Prez chuckled, and set up his tricorder for another set of adoptions. "I may just have Sky take us to tomorrow morning, grab all the level 3 orphans, and then go back to Archnesia with all of 'em."

Keith smiled, "They'd get healthier faster, that's for sure."

John seriously offered, "That's not such a bad idea. Before we bring any of the level three kids here, we could take them there, only for a couple of Archnesian days. They've got doctors, most of which look young." Since he had everyone's attention, John grinned at the six kids on the couch, adding "Some family in attendance would be

good too, for more than the level three kids, for Intel training, amongst other reasons."

Prez nodded, "Our parents are going there tomorrow for Alden. If they can deal, then so can other parents."

Glaring angrily, Bill told Corey, "You need a haircut, mister; it's well beyond shoulder length and down to your nose in the front." Glancing around at Prez, Keith and John, he smirked, "You all need haircuts."

Corey sighed, "We were gone over a month, dad. First, we spent the better part of a week getting our much larger team working together. During that week, and for part of the next, there were rehearsals for Platinum Habits and Time Touched. Then, the bands played a bunch of concerts. Since we don't have a hair stylist here yet, I'll get it done at Archmania."

"Danny's chainsaw?" John softly sniggered.

At the worried expressions of the adults, Keith grinned, "Or Conner's ax?"

"If worse-comes-to-worst, we'll have the Archnanian birds braid our hair," Prez chuckled.

"I can help!" Skyler giggled when he appeared. The entire group, including adults, found themselves in a purple fog. Seconds later, the shortest hair in the group was twenty-four inches long, with some band members now finding their hair reached their waist. "That's better!" Skyler giggled before vanishing.

"You were saying, dad?" Corey giggled as he watched his father try to keep his hair out of his eyes.

Sadly shaking his head, Bill grumbled, "I'm not sleeping tonight with hair I could strangle myself on."

"Kyle says Skyler will take care of it, but he's occupied now with Bruce," Prez smiled.

Fixing her daughters' hair so they could see, Lanna wondered, "What's so special about this Archnania place?"

"Everything," Corey told his mom. "It's always perfect weather, very pretty, and the people are the nicest you'll ever meet."

"They're just short," Keith said, and held a hand up about five feet, saying, "That's the tallest of them."

Prez nodded and explained, "We can do what we please, anyplace there, but haven't needed security. Crime is a thing of the past there."

"I think we're learning a lot too," John offered. "The band members can rehearse and try stuff out, just jammin', and I've learned stuff that will make school easier."

"Drew and I have learned stuff there too," Corey said. "Sean's learned about the PA gear, and all the amps the guys use. Watch the dorm leaders tomorrow; you'll see they're confident and looking forward to helping kids with whatever they need."

"I'll bet they're already over at their dorms making changes," Keith grinned.

"Hey Prez?" Alden interrupted, "What should I tell the dorm leaders about their new long hair? All of them have hair at least half-way down their back now!"

Prez grinned, "Tell them it's Skyler's fault. When there are twenty-seven knocks on my parents' door, all looking for him, Sky will change our hair and his mind."

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