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## Chapter 1

I'm sitting here in my cell, thinking about what's happened over the past few days, and as always happens, that makes me think about how I got to be here in the first place. But now, to the situation at hand, I found out yesterday that I was supposed to die tomorrow. It's not like I was planning on dying anytime soon, but I guess they finally got tired of me, and decided that it was time to get rid of me. I mean I can understand their point. I am a VERY high security risk, being who I am and all. Adam (no last name), the genetically engineered freak, or as they like to call me... the perfect military weapon.

Last night, Dr. Janet Hayes came into my room. She really looked like shit, which caused me concern as she is my only real friend here. She even once told me to call her mom. I have another friend, but I've never met him. His name's Logan, and he's Dr. Hayes' son. He's about my age, and I've been able to watch him grow up through the pictures that she's brought me. Through Dr. Hayes, I know everything about him. Or at least how a "normal" kid should grow up. NO! I don't need to get upset about that again.

I knew something was wrong, just from the way she was looking at me. It was like she was looking a condemned person. (If I only knew how right I was.) "Adam, why don't you have a seat, I have some bad news for you." I knew it was bad then, she never tells me to sit. Even when she had to break the news to me that it was time to test how well I heal. This of course meant, they wanted to hurt me, and see how long it took to get better. And, boy, did they hurt me; Everything from broken bones, to cuts, to bullet wounds. All in all, it sucked.

I took a seat and said "what's wrong, Janet? You look like your dog died or something." I was trying to lighten the mood a bit; didn't work. "I need to tell you that Dr. Marcus got a visit from the Military today. They were shut up in his office for 5 hours... talking about you." She looked me in the eye with that last part, and I felt a shiver go up my spine. I thought about what it could mean, and only one thing came up, deployment. "But..." I asked stuttering. "I'm not ready to be deployed yet. You said so yourself. "Their not going to deploy you, Adam." she said, as she looked down. "They want to terminate the project." I sat there stunned for a few minutes, until I looked up and could see tears falling down her face. I had two options at that point. Part of me wanted to break down and cry my heart out. But another part told me to do what I was trained for. To quote from the Marine Corps. "Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome." So that's what I would do. I took a second to gather my thoughts, then I walked over to the full length mirror in my room. I stood there and stared at the person staring back. Fourteen years old, about five foot three inches tall, maybe a hundred pounds, soaking wet, long black hair, which was pulled back, and steel gray eyes; all in all, not too bad looking, if I say so myself, not that it matters right now.

I took a deep breath, and turned back to look at Janet. She was just staring at me, waiting to see how I would react. "First off Janet, please tell me. Is this another one of those tests? To see what I would do?"

She just sighed and said, "I wish."

"Okay, then I need to know if you will help me escape." I said, going into full command mode. She looked up at me, as if she were trying to see what I had in mind. Before she could respond, I went over, and took her hand. "Before you decide, let me tell you exactly what it will mean. You will be breaking the law. You will be hunted. Not just you, but Logan as well. If you decide to do this, you'll

have to go with me. Wherever that might be. Basically, if you help me, you WILL be giving up, not only your life, but Logan's as well. Think on that before you answer."

After I had my say, I took the notebook off the desk, sat down on the bed, and started to write out a list. For the next few minutes, I sat silently, writing my list, as I let her decide. When I looked up, I saw she was deep in thought, so I went back to my list. Finally, she said "Adam, I know what it would mean for me to help you. I... I just couldn't live with myself if I didn't try to help." She looked me in the eyes with a look of determination in hers. I took the list I was writing, tore it off the notepad, and handed it to her. I said. "Okay, then this is what you'll need to do. You'll need to pack everything you and Logan want to keep. Remember, we'll be on the run, so keep it light. Second, you'll need to get your hands on as much cash as possible. No need letting them know where we went, by tracing your credit cards, and bank transactions. Third, you need to take that cash and buy a vehicle. Old, and non-descript would be best, but make sure it runs well. You'll need to pay for it in cash, with no receipts, or at least nothing with your name on it. Fourth, there's a number on the bottom there. That's for Capt. Michael Casey. He's an Army Ranger who should be out by now, he told me last year that if I ever needed help, to call him. He won't be any help getting me out of here, but he can help once I AM out. Just let him know what's going on, and don't call from your house. Go buy a pre-paid cell phone from a store. Again, use a fake name if you need to. Actually get 2 of them from one store, and 2 more from another. Make sure to use cash." I sat there ticking off the points from the list, and she just stared at me, with her jaw on the floor. I finally noticed her, and couldn't help but laugh a little. "Sorry, just slipped into "Command Mode" for a little. Can you do this?" Again, she looked at me with determination. "Yeah, honey, I can do it. Yeah..." She said trailing off.

"Any idea how they're going to do it?" I asked, not really wanting to know the answer, but knowing I needed to. "Yeah, they've decided to be nice, and do it during an exercise. Tomorrow night." I just looked at her with a grin forming on my face. "Going to let me go down fighting, huh?" I had to laugh a little at that too. That is the wrong thing to do, if you want to kill me. "Well, according to Dr. Marcus, it'll be his one last hurrah. His last chance to get on tape what "his" creation can do." She spat that last part out, and I couldn't blame her. I couldn't stand the man. "Okay, you'd better get going," I told her "I have some things to get ready." I went over and pulled her into a warm hug. "Will you be okay with this?" I asked, as I hugged her. "Some people will have to die tomorrow to make sure I don't." I felt her stiffen, as I knew what she thought about what they made me for. "I know" she said in a strained voice. "I know... I don't have to like it, but I just have to do it" I chuckled a bit, and used the old military saying. "Ours is not to wonder why, ours is but to do or die." With that I broke the hug, and shooed her out of the room.

I lay down on the bed, and started to think back on how I got here. I was abandoned to live on the streets, at the tender age of four. One of the homeless guys took me under his wing, so to say. It worked out well I thought. He would watch my back, and I would get the money. I mean, who can say no to the puppy dog eyes a 4 year old can give? Anyways, things were going well, relatively speaking of course, until the time I was about six. Then all hell broke loose. One night while Jim, that's the guy that was watching out for me, and I was getting ready to go to sleep in one of the city's many abandoned buildings. About a block away, a van pulled up; three guys jumped out, one grabbed me, while one of the others shot Jim three times in the chest. He was probably dead before he hit the ground. They held me down while the third one put a needle in my arm, then it was lights out.

I woke up, what I later found out was, more then six months later. I had a splitting headache, and things were different. I didn't know how much different at the time, but they were. Things just felt all different. I woke up in a little room, which later became my permanent room while I was here. It was

about ten foot by ten foot. It had a small bed, a small desk, a dresser, and two doors; one on the left, and one straight ahead from the bed. I found out the one on the left was a small bathroom, while the one straight ahead was locked. I sat back on the bed, and started to take stock of what was going on. It was then I noticed I was clothed only in a hospital type gown. I noticed that I had a lot of scars all over my chest, and from what the mirror showed, all over my back. I was sitting there looking at all the scars when I heard the door unlock and then open. What I saw then I can honestly say, scared the shit out of me. Into the room walked probably the biggest hulking man I have even seen. He was dressed in a military uniform, carrying a machine gun, and he had another, smaller hand gun, in a holster on his side. He looked around the room, then right at me. "Don't give me any trouble now... you hear me?" He asked, in a gruff voice. Then the weirdest thing happened. I started to smell something, and it brought up some very strange feelings. I can now look back on that, and tell you what it was. I was smelling fear from this mammoth man, and my reaction to that fear was, that I wanted to hurt him. I wanted to attack him. Of course at the time, it made no sense to me, at all, so I just swallowed hard, and nodded to him. He just gave me a nod, then he backed out of the room.

The person who came in after him was a middle aged woman with short auburn hair, and a disarming smile. I just took one look at her and I felt myself relax, some. She walked into the room, and put the tray she was carrying down on the table. It was then that I realized just how hungry I was. The smell of the soup she had brought in was almost driving me crazy. Dr. Hayes must have seen the look in my eyes, because she just chuckled and said "Go ahead, Adam, go ahead and eat." And eat I did. That soup didn't last more then a few minutes with me trying to inhale it the way I was doing. She just laughed and left the room saying she would be back in a little while. After I was done ravaging what she had brought me, I sat back down and thought about a few things that were strange.

First, there was the feeling I got when I saw that guy. Once I thought about it, I just knew that what I had smelled was fear. I'm not sure how I knew that, but I did. Then there was my reaction to it. I wanted to taste his blood. That's what it was. I thought about it, and I thought that his blood probably tasted better then the soup I just ate. Doesn't that just brighten up your day? The food was also different. It was like the taste had been amplified somehow. I'm not really sure, but it was like it was more... there, than anything I had eaten before. I finally figured out that somehow my senses were better. I mean I was smelling things I couldn't have smelled before. I was tasting more then ever before. And I realized my hearing was better too.

I was roused out of my thoughts, by the door being unlocked and opened again. This time the big guy outside just stuck his head in, and glared at me. Almost as if he was challenging me to do something wrong. After a second, he grunted, moved out of the way and Dr. Hayes walked in again. She moved gracefully over to the chair at the desk and sat down. She just sat there staring at me for a minute or two. Finally she said "it's good to see that you're awake. We weren't sure there for a bit. I'm sure you have lots of questions, but if you could just hold them for a minute, I may actually answer a lot of them before you even ask, Okay?" I just looked deeply into her eyes, and saw caring in them. I figured I had nothing really to lose by listening to her, so I just nodded for her to continue.

"I'm not really sure where to begin, so I'll just start at the beginning. I'm a genetic researcher. What that means is I study what makes you... you. Everything in your body is made up of genes." She must have seen my look, because she started to laugh and said. "No, not those jeans, DNA. The building block of creation as it were. Anyways, what I do is study, what genes make a certain thing happen in the body. Now I'm sure your wondering, what exactly you're doing here with me. Well, that's both easy and hard. First off, you're in a research laboratory created and funded by the United States government. We are doing research here to try and help the military make better soldiers. That's where you

fit in. Now, to be honest, I do not like the way that you came to be here. When I signed up, I was told that all subjects were to be volunteers with no family. I found out how you came here mostly by accident. However, it's way too late to change what's happened, so I'll just let you know that I'm going to do the best I can to make this as easy as possible for you." She stopped to catch her breath, and I just decided to stay silent. Maybe that way she'll say more than she has already. "Basically, what's happened to you is that we have preformed a number of genetic resequencings on you. Now, that's a five dollar word that means that we went in and changed your genes. We're not sure yet if it worked, but if it did, you should be a lot different then you were before you got here. If everything worked out, you should be stronger then you look, faster then you should be, and you should heal a lot quicker then anyone else. Now, we're not sure yet, but everything seems to have gone according to plan. Do you have any questions so far, that I haven't answered?" she asked, as she sat back in her chair. I thought about it for a long moment and decided to ask only a few questions. I was still not very sure on how far I should trust her. "So, you're saying that I'm faster, stronger and tougher then anyone else? Is there anything else that was done?" I asked trying to see just how much information she'd give me." She leaned forward, looking at me intently. After a second or two, she leaned back and exhaled sharply. "Well, you're definitely taking this better then we thought you would. To answer your question, yes. That should be the extent of what was done. However, it will take many tests to see just what was accomplished with this. I can say that we did a few things that we hope will make a difference, but we'll only be able to tell if those happened with time." I looked at her with a question in my eyes, she just sighed and said. "Mostly, they are just things to do with your mind. Things like better memory, faster reflexes, better senses; things like that. Well, I can tell you're probably tired, and I know tomorrow is going to be a long hard day. Why don't you get some sleep and we'll see you in the morning." With that, she got up and walked out without a word, leaving me there all alone, with nothing but my thoughts and an empty room.

That was my introduction to the "Institute" as I have come to call it. For the next seven and a half years, I had an intensive education into the arts best left forgotten. To put a not too nice of a face on it, I was schooled in how to kill people. I was taught everything from guns, to explosives, and hand to hand combat. All throughout the training, I had to endure being poked and prodded, as they tried to figure out just how much I could do. I know what the worst part was. You remember when I told you that I had better healing abilities then a normal person? Well guess how they tested that? I think I have been shot a total of five times, had most of my bones broken, and so many cuts, and scrapes that I can't even count them all. And while I may be able to heal fast, it still hurts like a son of a bitch.

I decided early on, that I needed to keep a few things to myself. It would do me no good to let them know everything. There were a few things that they wanted to have happen that they don't think they got, such as my photographic memory, my heightened senses, etc, and they don't really know how strong I am. I mean they are impressed with a twelve year old kid that can bench press close to twice his body weight, but what they don't know is that while it may look like I'm struggling with it, I'm not. I know for sure, I can do almost half again that much, but there was something that even took me by surprise. About the time I turned 11, I found out about two other very interesting abilities. I found out that I'm able to regulate my body temperature, as well as see perfectly in the dark.

What we call the gym is actually a room about the size of a football field. On one end you have the firing range. The rest is used as a very complex maze, in which I practice E&E (escape and evasion) tactics, as well as search and destroy. As often as not, they bring in military teams for me to go up against. Well this was to be my first time going up against a team in the dark. We were all issued night vision gear. I had been recently training with it, but this would be my first time actually using any of it. The basics of this mission were simple. I was given a three minute head start, and my orders

were simple. Kill them before they killed me. We had some very realistic paint guns, and the way it worked was simple. You got hit, you're dead. Well, I went out there, and got into position. Just as the buzzed sounded; signaling that the other team was about to enter play, my night vision gear went to hell on me. I took it off, and for a minute, I thought that they had forgotten to turn the lights out. It was then that I realized that the other team that had split up into four groups of two were all still wearing theirs. I sat there in confusion for a moment, then I realized that one of them was looking right at me. He started to raise his weapon, and then he stopped. His partner asked him what was going on and I heard the other guy say he thought he saw me, but then I was gone. This really made me wonder as I knew he was looking right at me. I tested this out a few times in the session, and every time, I came out of hiding, I was not noticed. I have figured out that like a lot of my "special" abilities, it kicks in automatically, when I need it, I have also figured out, that if I concentrate, I can shut it off. Everyone was very surprised when I took out the entire team without them ever once seeing me. I told them it was all just luck.

There were two people there that helped keep me sane through all of this. Dr. Hayes, who I was told to call mom, when no one else was around, and her son Logan. Logan is about a year younger than I am, but it really feels like he's my brother. There were many days when Janet and I would just talk about anything, and I would always bring up Logan and talk about him. I knew just about everything I could about him. I knew the first time he got into a fight, and I even knew when he got hurt, and how. I knew his likes, and his dislikes. I knew his favorite foods, etc. I just wished that he knew about me, but as Janet said, I'm not even here. She has helped me through everything; even staying late on the nights that I just needed a mom to cuddle.

After about four or five hours of thinking about it, I decided I had the best possible plan there was. So I decided to try and get some sleep. About three hours after I fell asleep, I was roused by the door opening. Dr. Marcus, the lead researcher, and my personal Satan, walked in and looked at me with a cruel smile. "Well, Adam, it seems that the military would like you to put on another one of your fine performances. It seems that they want to see just how good you really are. They have sent in a full team (eight) Navy SEALs (Sea Air Land) for you to go up against. What do you think?" Well, of course, I decided to play along, and do what I have always done, play the dumb kid, a little too energetic and brash for my own good. "Well," I said with a grin, "It sounds like they should've brought more." He laughed, looked at me, and with a grin said. "They even decided to let you come up with the scenario." That took me by surprise, because it basically meant that I got set the rules. "Well, what do you think? Got anything special in mind for your greatest challenge yet?" Marcus asked me, as he took a seat at the desk. He started to go through my things as he always did. God, I hated that. I mean to everyone here except Janet, I'm nothing more than a specimen. Just once I wanted to shout at people that I'm a god damned person. I FEEL everything they do to me. Every time they treat me as a non-person, it hurts. I guess Janet is the only one who figured that out. "I asked if you decided what you wanted to do." Marcus asked, bringing me out of my thoughts. "Yeah, I was just thinking about that." I recovered quickly, and thought for a second. "Well, I guess I would like to beat them at their own game." He looked at me with surprise. "I would like a night time scenario, with heavy fog. I think getting out the paint ball guns would be best. No laser sights. Too easy. And see how they feel about doing it with no night vision. Let's see what kinda balls they got." I said with an evil grin, trying to make it look like I was being a smart ass. Hopefully, I will piss off the SEALs enough to where they'll take me up on the challenge. Marcus just looked at me for a moment, while I grinned evilly, huffed and got up. Moving towards the door, he said, "Well, if you think your up to it, I'll tell the SEALs, EXACTLY what you said, and we'll see what they think," Still playing the dumb kid, I just nodded and grinned. And with that, he left the room.

## Chapter 2

I sat there thinking about my good luck and still couldn't believe what was going on. Here I am, only fourteen years old, and about to be put into the fight for my life against Eight Navy SEALs. Talk about unfair... they should've brought more. Everything is pretty much in place right now. With Dr. Hayes's help, and hopefully Capt. Casey's, I might actually make it out of here alive. Being honest with myself, I'd have to say I am more worried about Janet and Logan than about myself. I hope they'll be ok with what has to happen.

I didn't see many people during the day, I wasn't at all surprised when my normal "rec" time came and went with out me going. I hate to say it, but I really did enjoy the two hours a day they let me out of this room. It's not much, but when that's the only time you're allowed out, except when they want to do some test, then you really get to enjoy it.

It was about two hours before the time of the "test" that they brought in my equipment. I thanked the guy who brought it, and went through what he brought. Just to see if anything was missing. Standard body armor, 1 standard H&K (Heckler and Koch) Mark 29, pistol, with the specially modified rounds that shoot paint balls, a standard H&K MP5 sub machine gun with the same rounds. I was somewhat surprised when they included my sword, being that I was supposed to die in this test. I guess they didn't want me thinking anything was wrong. I was very happy they allowed me to have my sword, it's rather special to me. Not very many people can get a traditionally crafted Katana to call their own. I also had my full compliment of thrown weapons. three throwing daggers, a set of ten throwing spikes, which I set aside for the moment, and 5 throwing stars.

I sat down with my Armor, and my throwing spikes, and started to modify my armor a bit. I found out a couple months ago, that with the right equipment, I am strong enough to hold myself upside down attached to the ceiling by nothing more than daggers. So I sat down to modify my armor with the spikes. Trying to see if I could attach them to the ends of my hands in such a way as it would allow me to hang with out the knives needed.

It took me about forty five minutes, but I think I got it to work. Only one way to find out, so I put the armor on, alone with all my other equipment, went over to the wall, and started to climb it. Thankfully the spikes held, now I'll just need to see how they work in actual use. After I got all that done, I just sat down, and started to meditate. If there was ever a time I need to be fully centered, and fully in control of myself, now was it.

There came a knock at the door which brought me out of my meditation. I looked up to the door, and said "come." The huge security guard stuck his head in and said in his normal gruff voice. "You have fifteen minutes to get ready. The test is about to start." I nodded my understanding, and got to my feet. He looked me up and down, then said something I never heard him say before. "Good luck." With that he turned and shut the door.

I just let his comment go, and started to get myself ready. I put on my standard issue combat boots, but this time I didn't double knot the laces. Most of the time I would, because nothing ruins your day more than being in the middle of a test, and having your boots come untied. One time it cost me the match. That was last time I went in with out them double knotted. This time I didn't do it, because I planned on taking the boots off as soon as I could. It's real hard to sneak around when you're wearing seven pounds each of combat boots. I slammed the clips home in both the sub-machine gun, and the

pistol. Not that they would see much use, but I had to keep appearances up. I put my throwing weapons where they go, and slung the sword over my back. After slinging the sword, I went so far as to tie the bottom of the sheath to my back that way it wouldn't move. I then sat and waited for what had to be the longest ten minutes of my life so far.

Finally the guard came back and said "let's go." He never was one much for words, so I just put on my game face, which was a goofy grin, hoping not to betray the anxiety I was feeling. I followed him to the control room that over looks the gym. There was something strange going on as we got to the door to the control room. It was guarded by two men in military uniforms. My guard just saluted then, and they opened the door saluting back when they were done. I walked into the guard room and took stock of who was there. It was fairly crowded.

There was, who I figured to be the "Team of SEALs." After being around Special Forces for a while, you can kinda just tell who's an operator and who isn't. Also in the room were most of the researchers I've known over the past years. There was also some older guy dressed in a military uniform. I could tell by the way he wore his dress uniform, with all his ribbons that he was someone important. That was given away by the two stars on his shoulders. I could also tell that while he wore all the medals and makings of a Navy SEAL, he was not an operator. I could just tell that he was one of those guys that likes to see his own medals shine, and didn't do shit to earn them.

I came to attention in front of the General and snapped a salute. "Lieutenant Adam reporting as ordered. Sir" I slapped out the sir as crisply as I could. I could see the confusion in his eyes as he returned the salute. "At ease soldier." I instantly took a dislike to the man, because while I plainly wore my officer insignia, he chose not to recognize me by my rank.

Dr. Marcus stepped up and said, "Adam, I would like you to meet General Pinkerton, he is the Military officer in charge of our little project here." I had to fight to suppress a predatory grin, as I thought to myself. "Good I'm glad you're here. You get to die too." To cover my grin, I just said "good to meet you sir." He just nodded, and didn't respond. "Next we have Capt Roberts" Marcus went on indicating the Captain that was with the rest of the SEALs. "He is the commanding officer of the SEAL team that will be your opposition in tonight excessive." I went over and extended my hand to the captain. "Captain, nice to meet you." I said with another one of my grins. "I hope you won't be too mad what a little kid takes out your entire team." I couldn't help but taunt them a bit as I laughed. He took it rather well, and said. "Don't worry kid, we'll try not to bruise your ego too much" grinning.

Again Dr. Marcus had to but in. "Adam, the SEALs heard about your request, however, they have insisted on the night vision gear, safety reasons of course." I just nodded, knowing that my luck had to run out sooner or later. It wasn't a terrible blow, but it still would have helped. "Ok guys, let's get going then, shall we?" I turned around, and went through the door going into the gym.

Once we got out into the gym, I took the time to go around and shake the hand of every member of the team. This served two purposes, one, it let me get a feeling on how they handled me. It's amazing what can be seen in a handshake. If they shook it limply, it would mean that they do not consider me worthy of using any energy on. If they were very rigid about it, it usually means that they are nervous. But if, like they all did, they shake it with a firm grip, and a nod of acknowledgment, it means that they respect you enough to bring you up to their level. That was not really what I was expecting since these were the guys that were supposed to kill me. The second thing getting that close did was let me smell them. Now I don't mean get their scent, what I was doing was seeing if I could smell gunpowder. If they were using the practice rounds like they should be, I would smell paint, if they were



using real rounds, I would smell gunpowder. This time I smelled gunpowder. These guys were carrying live ammo into this test.

I asked for a moment to "prepare myself" as I thought about this new twist. I didn't like what I came up with. These guys obviously don't know that they are here to kill me. They must think this is a test, just like I was told it was. I don't like that because it means I either have to kill people who don't know why they are dying, or, I need to take them all out without killing them. Much harder to do, but since they are not involved more than just hired guns, then I can't kill them. It wouldn't be right.

"I finally turned around towards the SEALs and asked. "Ok, do you guys know the rules?" They indicated they did, but I wanted to go over them again. "Well since you already know, I'll just hit the high points. If you look to your left, you'll see a red button on the wall. There are many of them scattered through the gym. When the exercise is over, that's what you hit to bring the lights back up. Before I leave, I will hit the button to start the test. In 3 minutes, a buzzer will sound, that's your signal to begin. If you get hit with a paint ball, it means your dead. Stop where you are, move to a wall, and wait for the test to be over. I also have some small paint capsules, if I bring you down up close and personal, I will smear that on you. That again means your dead. If by any chance, you guys hit me, I will let you know, and the test will be over. Any questions?" I waited around to see if there were any, and since there weren't, I said. "Ok, let's do it." I went over, hit the button on the wall, and headed off into the practice area.

I ran in at a trot, and quickly got to the place I wanted to. A wall that when I got on top, I would have a good view of the entrance to the practice yard. From there, I could see who goes where, and how they split up. I extended the "claws" on my armor, and quickly pulled myself up to the top of the wall. Crouching down, I silently work my boots off, and then put them off to the side. I then take off the guns, because with the paint ball bullets, they would be next to worthless. While I may be able to with the test with them, it would not solve the problem that they mean to kill me. I need to escape.

I silently took the sword from its scabbard, just as the buzzer went off signaling the beginning of the "test." I watched, perched from my wall, as they entered the area, and the commander break the group up into 2 man teams, then using hand signals, pointed them off into the areas he wanted them to cover. I was hoping this would happen, as he and the man with him came towards me. I waited and watched, knowing that even though they had night vision, they wouldn't be able to see me. I watched as they got closer, and then took a look to see if any of the other groups would be close enough to see what was going to happen. Confident that no one would know, I got ready to go into action. The commander was on point for his two man team, and I knew he would also be with the least experienced member of the team.

I watched the newer guy and noticed he was right handed. That means if you surprise him from behind, he would spin to his left, bringing the gun to bear as he did. They passed, and I waited just long enough for the back guy to get about 3 feet ahead of where I would land. When he was there, I dropped down off the wall. I knew he would hear me when I landed so as soon as I did, I immediately went off to his right. He did exactly as I thought he would, and spun to his left trying to find me. But by this point, I was right behind him. The commander also spun hearing his back man so the me. The newer guy turned back towards the officer, and indicated there was nothing there. The commander nodded, and turned around to continue, muttering about "fucking rookies." When he turned around, I struck. I used the pommel of my sword to hit the newer guy in the back just below the neck. It knocked him out cold, and I caught him as he fell. The commander obviously heard that, but

before he could turn around, I was on him, and had my sword to his throat. In nothing more than a whisper, I said to him.

"You know you were set up?" He looked up at me, and noting that I did not lower the sword, he looked at it, then back at me with a question in his eyes. "You guns have live ammo in them, you were sent in here to kill me." A look of utter shock came across his face as he looked down at his MP5. "Drop your guns, and we can talk if you want. But don't take long; I don't want the rest of your team finding me." He looked at me, then at my sword still pressing into his neck. Finally he silently let the gun fall to the floor. He looked back to me as I withdrew the sword.

"How do you know about the guns?" He asked looking over to his fallen companion. "I was informed that they were going to terminate the project, which means kill me. And this is how they were going to do it. But I was told about it, plus I can smell the gunpowder in your bullets." I said with a grin. He still looked like he didn't believe me, so with lightning fast speed, I bent down, took his gun from the ground, pointed at the wall, and fired a silenced shot into it. I then turned back towards him, and saw a look of shock on his face as he looked at the wall with the bullet hole in it. Over the radio he was wearing, I heard his team mates call to see "what the fuck is going on." After a second or two, he shook his hand, moved his hand to his neck, and depressed the transmit button. I heard him whisper over the radio, "no problem, the damned rookie got a little over excited, anyone find anything yet?" They all replied negatively except one guy who said. "I don't know where this fucking kid is, but it's like he's disappeared. He's gotta be good to stay hidden this long."

The commander ignored the comment and looked to me. "Ok, so what are you going to do about this?" "Well" I said as I sling his sub machine gun over my shoulder. "I don't plan on letting your buys kill me. After that, there are a few people here who are going to die. Then I plan on escaping." The look in his eyes said it all. "I can't allow you to do that. If you want to, I can stop this, and talk to the General. He'll straighten this all out. And if he can't, I'll go above him." I shook my head and said. "Sorry, it was the General that ordered this, and I don't want to take my chances with your higher ups." Just as I finished, I spun and delivered a round house kick right to the side of his head. He went down like a ton of bricks. "Sorry about that, I hope there are no hard feelings." I muttered as I spun away and ran to find the next ones.

I slowly made my way through the rest of the team, and about ten minutes later, they were all out like a light. I think there is only one of them that may have some off time coming. I think I hit him a bit hard and broke his shoulder. Oh well. When I was finally done, I made my way back to the control room. I saw that the two guns guarding the room were still there, so I just walked up to them with the sword out. "Hey guys, test is all over." I said as I walked up to them. "Where's the rest of the team?" Asked the one on the right. I could smell the fear coming off of them. They knew what was going on. I had no problems with what I did next. Jumping forward, I plunged the sword into the neck of the one, and then spun around and like lightning, I took the head off the second one, and before the first one even fell. Neither one of them uttered a sound.

I cleaned my sword off on the one's shirt, and then sheathed it again. I took both their pistols, and put them in my holsters after making sure they were load, and a round was in the chamber. I then walked calmly into the control room. When I walked in I heard gasps from all around, and the General curse as he tried to draw his weapon. I was faster, and with a quick shot from he, he was falling to the floor with a hole dead center between his eyes. I held the gun out looking around at everyone else and said in the most menacing voice I could. "Anyone else want to try something foolish." No one else said anything, so I looked over to Hayes and nodded. "Tie them up." And with that she took the plastic

straps that I had in my pocket and went around tying everyone in the room up. When she got to Dr. Marcus, I saw him getting a bit excited, I looked over at him, and with the biggest grin I could manage I said. "Please Dr. Marcus... Please give me a reason to kill you." He just looked shocked at my words, and then got a guilty and almost hurt look on his face. "Adam, I am truly sorry for what has happened to you here. If I don't miss my guess, you and Dr. Hayes are going to be leaving here. Before you do, there are a few things you need to know." I looked at him strangely; this was not the reaction I had expected. Janet also seemed to be puzzled by his reaction. "There is a lot of information you need to have, before you leave...." He was cut short by the sound of a gun shot, and the look on his face was that of utter surprise, as he looked down to see red start to stain his white lab coat. I reacted immediately, and spun around to see who had shot him. I turned just in time to see General Pinkerton slump back to the floor and the pistol in his hand clatter to the floor. One look at his now lifeless eyes, told me there was nothing else to worry about from him. I turned back to Dr. Marcus and ran to his side. He had slumped down to the floor, and was slowly fading. He motioned me close to him, and whispered a few words into my ear before he slumped fully to the floor, dead. It only took a moment for me to process what he had said, and I turned around and ran from the room, shouting for Janet to come on.

She had a hard time keeping up with me, as I wound my way around the complex, finally coming to a stop in front of Dr. Marcus's Office. Janet caught up to me just as I kicked in the door. I started to frantically look around the room, until I saw what I was looking for. A large wall mounted picture of two young boys in cowboy outfits. I ran over to it, and pulled it down. Behind it I found what I was really looking for; a safe that had been concealed behind it, in the wall. Janet walked over to me as I started to spin the combination into it. "What's in there?" she asked, as I turned the handle that opened it. When it was opened, I saw a large stack of papers, and what looked to be a writing note book, as well as a CD Rom Disk, in a case, with my name on it. "Dr. Marcus said I needed to get this stuff, out of the safe and take it with me." I told Janet. "He started to tell me why, but he lost too much strength, and just told me the combination." We had turned and started to leave the room, when the alarm started to sound, so I grabbed Janet's hand and we ran out of the building, as quickly as we could.

Once we were in her car, and safely out on the road, I looked at the papers I had in my hands. I only got about half way through the first one when I was just too pissed to keep reading.

#### Internal progress Report.

All subjects progressing as expected save for subject named Adam; he seems to be lagging behind his peers in all the physical fields of development. Immediate termination is recommended. Joris, Chang, William and Juan seem to be coming along nicely. They are all excelling in their separate fields of study. They should be ready for activation in under a year....

## Chapter 3

I don't remember much on the way home, I was still trying to digest what I found out. I have a family. Or at least those that are like I am. I can't remember much of what I thought about except that I had to save them. I looked back down at the list. Joris, Juan, William, Chang. Something inside me stirred with those names, but I can't put my finger on what it is. It's almost like I knew them, but I never even knew they existed before.

I didn't have much time to think about it, all too soon, we pulled into the driveway of a nice little two story, in a somewhat rural neighborhood. I took a look around, and was pleased to see that the closest neighbor was a little way down the road. It looked like we had some privacy, for that, I was thankful.

Janet pressed a button, and the garage door started to open, and she moved to pull in. "Who's that?" she asked, as she noticed there was already a vehicle in the garage. How it fit in there is puzzling. The garage usually only had Janet's small little car in it. Sitting in there now was a large four door pick up truck with a long bed. There was a lot of stuff piled in the back, and it had a tarp over it. Just as she put the car into gear, and we got out, I heard the front door open and shut. I turned around slowly; I already knew who it was. There was only one possible person who could smell like that, here. There's only one person who would smell like a kid. I was somewhat worried about how Logan would take to me, seeing as it's basically my fault that he was being ripped from his life like this. I finally turned completely around, but I was not at all prepared for what I saw. I had seen Logan's pictures all my life. I got to see him grow up, and I knew very well, what he looked like. That still didn't prepare me for the angel that was standing before me. He had very long, mid back length, sandy blond hair that he wore loose. His face was something that I would think to see on an angel. But what captivated me the most were his eyes. They were so blue, and so... alive. I read somewhere that the eyes were windows to the soul. Staring at his eyes, I had to believe that if that saying were true, I was looking at someone who was not only beautiful on the outside, but was beautiful on the inside as well. Thankfully, I was saved from staring at him, by Janet's stepping up and saying. "Adam, I would like you to meet Logan, my son. Logan, this is Adam, I told you about him, last night. I extended my hand, and he took it. In just that little touch, so much was conveyed; it was like we were able to share everything in that touch.

### *Logan's Point of View*

I couldn't believe it, I was finally meeting Adam. Yesterday at this time, I was sure I was going to have another boring week, month, year, what ever. It's all boring. Ever since I was in first grade, and they told me that I was a genius, everything has been screwed up. I mean how many thirteen year olds have actually already graduated high school, and have to worry about where to go to college. Everyone is always treating me like I'm something special, everyone, except mom that is. She's always been able to bring me back down, when I start ranting and raving about the stupid idiots at school, thinking I'm some sort of freak because I am smart. I mean it's not bad enough that I graduate high school at thirteen, but I had to also be the fucking valedictorian. Now that I'm finally out of high school, I can look towards college. I finally talked mom into letting me take a few courses on line, so I wouldn't have to worry about actually going somewhere. I may be a genius, but I'm still thirteen. I wish people would remember that.

I was thinking about all this last night, when mom came home. I knew something was wrong, and she had been crying. "Mom, what's wrong?" I asked, as I pushed away from the computer. "Logan, we need to talk." Oh no, I knew it was bad. The last time she said "we need to talk" was last year when she found out I was gay. She figured out that I had been to gay porno sites on the Internet. I thought she was going to kill me when she told me what she found. I actually just got the "talk." God, talk about embarrassing. Anyways, I got up, and we went into the kitchen and sat at our places at the table. She sat there for a minute, but finally got up and started to make herself a cup of coffee. "You want anything while I'm up," she asked, as she was pouring her coffee. "Nah, I'm fine." I just wanted to figure out what was wrong. Finally she sat down, took a sip of her drink, then looked up and started. "Logan, how much do you understand about what I do at my work?" I got a really confused look on my face. This is not what I expected. "Um mm.... not much, I mean, I know you're a cist. But other then that..." I trailed off, not knowing where she was going with all this. "Well," she started, "after your father died, I was offered a job, here in Omaha, that I was told, had the chance of solving a lot of things that are important to me; birth defects and the like." I nodded, I knew she was working to try and figure out why people got sick, and what could be done to prevent it. "Well," she continued, "when I got here, I found out that I was not told everything. It seems that they had taken things much farther then I thought they had, and they were actually testing the genetic alterations on people." My eyes got wide, as I thought about that. "Now, I was told that all the subjects were volunteers, and were being paid for this. I, however, found out about one that wasn't. He was a six year old little boy, who had been found on the streets of LA. He was a homeless child whom, it seemed, no one would miss. By the time I found this out, he had already been through a good deal of genetic resequencing. I vowed, at that point, that I would try and help him as much as I could, and finally got transferred to his personal team. That's when I found out the particulars of his being there." She paused there, and took another sip of her coffee. I knew this had to be bad, because she's usually not this timid about things. Finally she took a deep breath, and continued. "What I found out disturbed me greatly, but it also made me even more determined to help this boy. It seems that we were also being funded by the military, to create soldiers." I sat back in shock, and she stopped to let that sink in. My mother was involved in creating genetically altered people. From what I knew about genetics, that shouldn't be possible, yet. I started to ask a question, when she held up her hand. "Let me finish, please. I might actually answer your questions, before you ask them." I nodded, and let my mouth shut. I leaned forward again, and indicated I wanted her to continue.

"What we created, was, someone who was stronger, faster, tougher, etc. the perfect weapon. However, and you may be able to relate to this, he's just a kid. About a year younger than you, and he's a really great kid, at that, even in spite of what he's been through." She must have seen the questions in my eyes, and said. "No, you'll have to ask him, I will not tell you what he's been through. It wouldn't be right." I nodded, and she continued. "When I got to work today, I knew something strange was going on. The Military was there, to get an update on Adam, the subject of the experiments, and I guess they didn't like what they found. When they left, they gave specific orders that the project was to be "terminated". I gasped at that. Not knowing what was going on, I just kept my mouth shut, as the tears started to flow down mom's eyes. After a few seconds, I thought she was going to loose it completely, and I knew I had to say something. "Mom, what're you gonna do? You can't let them kill him." I said, with as much force as I could. "Logan, you don't understand. If I help him, and, by the way, he's already asked me to, it means we would have to leave here permanently. Not just that, either. We would be on the run from the military. We would never be able to show our faces in this town again, and... and... and I don't know what to do about... you. This could ruin your life. She was about to keep going, when I cut her off. "Mom, listen to me for a second, will you please? I may be only thirteen, but you said it yourself, I'm a genius, who could do anything I wanted. Well, **I want to do this.** We can't allow them to just kill him. We have to do something!" I just couldn't stand the thought that they

would kill this kid for nothing more than just not being what they made him. Mom studied me intently for a few seconds, then she seemed to gather herself. "Okay, if we're going to do this, then we really have a lot of work to do." Over the next half hour, we put together our game plan, on what needed to be done. She left the house to go gather supplies, and I started to pack everything we would need.

Now, I finally got to meet the kid who changed my life, and what did I do? I just stood there in shock. He was easily the most beautiful boy I'd ever seen. He had long black hair tied back, and the most amazing Grey eyes I've ever seen. He was a bit shorter than I was, which surprised me, for some reason. He really didn't look like he could possibly be all that dangerous. But then, I thought, that was probably done on purpose. He really didn't look like a living weapon.

I was interrupted again, by someone coming out the door behind me. I turned around to see the guy that showed up this afternoon. Mom told me last night she called someone named Joseph Casey, a retired Army Ranger, who had promised to help Adam, if needed. When he showed up, I was scared at first, but then he made me feel better by asking me what I had gotten done and then by helping me with everything else. I really liked him, because he treated me like a person, instead of just a really smart kid.

#### Adam's Point of View

I finally pulled my eyes off of the angel that was standing in front of me, and I saw who was coming up behind him. "Joe!" I said, with a huge grin, "thanks for coming." I ran up to him, and stuck out my hand. He pushed it aside, and pulled me into a warm hug. I just sat there stiffly, in shock. Other than Janet, no one had ever hugged me, and it was a bit weird, but God, it felt so good, but it was still weird. He must have felt my discomfort, because he broke the hug, he dropped his arms and slowly stepped back and said. "Adam, you sure do know how to start a shit storm, don't you?" I just giggled a bit and nodded. "Okay, we can get caught up, on everything that has happened once we are on the road, but now, we need to leave," He said it with such force that I blinked. Then it was back to business mode, for me. "Your right, Joe," I said, as I turned back to Janet, "Did you get all the stuff I asked for last night?" She nodded and I said "good, thanks, then let's hit the road. Did you guys get everything out of the house?" I asked, turning back to Logan. He nodded and said,

"Yeah, everything's packed; we just need to get out of here."

"Good, you guys get loaded up, I want to make one last check of the house," with that, we broke up. The three of them heading to Joe's truck, while I went inside. I wasn't really interested in looking around the house, but I knew that neither Janet nor Logan were professionals, at covering their tracks. And Joe hadn't been there long enough to make sure they didn't leave any clues about where we were going. I really didn't have the time to look for them, either, so I did the next best thing. I quickly walked over to the stove, and pulled it away from the wall. With one good yank, I pulled the gas line out of the stove, and heard the hiss of it pouring gas into the air. I could smell the pungent odor of the nasty chemical that gas companies use to make it so nasty that no one could easily forget it was left on. I figured it would take about 10 minutes for the gas to reach the furnace's pilot light, and when that happened, I wouldn't have to worry about any evidence being left behind. I ran back outside, and climbed into Joe's truck. I settled comfortably into the back seat, with Logan next to me, and said, "Let's go!" Joe looked at me with a question in his eyes, and I just shook my head saying, "I'll tell you later." He nodded, and we took off down the road.

I took out the papers that I had pulled out of Dr. Marcus's wall safe, and started to go through them. The shock that I felt, was deepening with every page I read. In front of me, I had the full files on each of the five kids involved in what was called "project Genesis." I'm not sure how long I was going through the papers, I suppose it was quite a while, but I was pulled back to reality by Joe, saying that we were here. I looked around and was somewhat surprised by what I saw. We were somewhere deep in the woods, at an old rustic cabin. The thing looked like it had seen better days, but I can say after not remembering what anything looked like outside of the research center, it looked kinda rough to me. We started to unload all the gear that Joe brought with him, into the cabin. It was a lot nicer on the inside than it looked from outside. There were three bedrooms, a rather large living/dining room, and a nice sized kitchen. After I made my third trip from the truck into the house, Logan called me over to the truck. He was having some trouble pulling a long case out of the bed. I went over, rather effortlessly lifted it out, and put it on the ground. He just giggled and remarked,

"Boy, Adam, it must be great being that strong." I just grinned and nodded.

"It comes in handy sometimes."

"What's in there," he asked, pointing to the case, I shrugged, bent down and opened it up. Once it was opened, I gasped in surprise. Inside was probably the nicest rifle I had ever seen. Almost in a trance, I picked it up out of its case to look at it.

Logan must have seen how I was looking at the rifle, not really knowing what it was, he asked,

"What's so special about it, it's a rifle?" I looked over at him like he had six eyes.

"A rifle?!?! Man, this isn't just a rifle; this is a Barrett M107 sniper rifle." I said, almost reverently. "It has a twenty nine inch barrel, and a recoil suppression system that's good enough that **you** could probably fire it, without breaking your shoulder. This fucker could put a bullet into the engine block of a truck, at two thousand meters. That's roughly six thousand five hundred feet, or just about one and a quarter miles." Joe must have come out while I was talking to Logan, because I heard him laugh behind me. "Don't worry, Logan, he gets like this sometimes, but he's right, that baby right there is probably one of the finest pieces of equipment you'll find in the Army's arsenal." He walked over and patted me on the shoulder. "Happy Birthday, Adam. I know I was never there before, for you, but I hope to be there for you, if you ever need me in the future." I was looking at him with wonder in my eyes. I had no real idea what he meant. He just looked back, and smiled, sadly. "You don't even know what today is, do you?" I thought about it for a second, and shook my head. He sighed again, and said. "Adam, today is your birthday. You're thirteen years old today. I know you haven't gotten anything for it, before, but I wanted to give you something. This was all I could think of that I had, that you would really appreciate." I looked at him with shock, and I stuttered. "I... I... I can't take this. It's yours, and it's really expensive... and..." I just trailed off, totally at a loss for words. He just put his arm over my shoulder, and said. "Adam, it's for you. I'm sorry to have to say this, but, unfortunately, I think you're gonna need it." I looked up at him, and suddenly, I was overcome with emotions. I quickly put the gun back in its case, before I dropped it. I don't know what came over me, but suddenly, I was crying my heart out. Joe wrapped me up in a hug, and was trying to comfort me. I just couldn't get myself to stop crying. When I felt Logan join in the hug, I totally lost it, and I must have passed out or something, because the next thing I remember was waking up in a bed, and it was dark out.

I looked around the room, and saw Logan on the other side of the room messing with a stereo. He put on a pair of headphones, and sat down at the little desk in the corner. Because of my enhanced hearing, I was able to hear the drums start on a song, even though he was wearing his headphones. I listened to

his angelic voice, as he started to sing along with the beautiful song that was playing. It was a song I had never heard before, but I knew I would always remember the words, as he sang them.

### **"Holding Out For A Hero"**

Where have all the good men gone  
And where are all the gods?  
Where's the street-wise Hercules  
To fight the rising odds?  
Isn't there a white knight upon a fiery steed?  
Late at night I toss and turn and dream of what I need

*[Chorus]*

I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night  
He's gotta be strong  
And he's gotta be fast  
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light  
He's gotta be sure  
And it's gotta be soon  
And he's gotta be larger than life

Somewhere after midnight  
In my wildest fantasy  
Somewhere just beyond my reach  
There's someone reaching back for me  
Racing on the thunder and rising with the heat  
It's gonna take a superman to sweep me off my feet

*[Chorus]*

Up where the mountains meet the heavens above  
Out where the lightning splits the sea  
I would swear that there's someone somewhere  
Watching me

Through the wind and the chill and the rain  
And the storm and the flood  
I can feel his approach  
Like the fire in my blood

*[Chorus] \*\*\**

When the song finished, I silently got out of bed and made my way to the bathroom. After I was finished, I went out to the living room where Joe and Janet were quietly talking while sitting on the sofa. I waved to them as I passed, and went into the kitchen. I grabbed myself something to drink, and I went



back to the living room and found the stack of papers I had been going through. I noticed that sitting on top of the pile, was the CD that Dr. Marcus had made, which had my name on it. "Janet, do you have your laptop here? There's a CD here that was with that stuff I got from Marcus's office. I want to look at it?" She pointed to the desk, where the laptop was already set up, and I went over to it. I loaded the CD, and sat there, as I watched the face of Dr. Marcus appear. I listened closely as Dr. Marcus talked from the screen. After twenty minutes, I sat back heavily in my chair, in absolute shock. Joe must have seen the look on my face, cause he got up and walked over to me. "What is it, Adam?" He asked, as Janet made her way over there too. "I just can't believe it. Here, you have to see it for yourself." With that, I restated the CD, and sat back again to listen to what the Doctor had to say.

Dr. Marcus was sitting at a rather large, very expensive desk. He was wearing a white lab coat, over a well tailored suit jacket, and had a very weary look on his face. "Hello, Adam," he started. "If you're listening to this, then I can only imagine that I didn't survive your escape attempt. Yes, I knew you would try. I figured out quite a while ago, that you were holding back on what you could do." Janet looked over at me, with surprise, but I didn't react, and she turned back to the screen. "Earlier today, General Pinkerton stopped by to get an update on your progress, and was not pleased by the results. He went on a tirade, saying that I must have made a mistake somewhere, as you were showing as being physically less advanced than your brothers were. Yes, you have brothers out there. They are not related by blood, but they are intended to be your family. I'll get to more of that later." He sat back in his chair and continued. "I kept the fact that I knew you were holding back to myself, hoping you would figure out a way to escape. I even helped you out, where I could, by letting it slip to Dr. Hayes, what was going on. I hoped, against hope, that she would break the rules, and inform you, as to what was going on. I know you probably won't believe this, but I am not quite the evil monster you think I am. When I started on this project, it was in the hope, that I could find a way to cure cancer. You remember the picture that the wall safe was behind? The picture of two young boys, dressed as cow-boys? Those two boys in that picture were myself and my twin brother Michael. It was taken when we were ten years old. One year later, he was diagnosed with lymphoma, a terrible type of cancer. He died less than two years later. The day that he died, I made a promise to him, that I would do what ever I could to find a cure. I know that none of this is a good enough reason to put you through what you have been put through. I realize that you probably will never understand why I did what I did, and I am not asking you to."

He leaned forward once again in his chair, and looked intently right into the camera. "Adam, I think you already know that you have a responsibility to the other children that have been altered. You are to be their commanding officer, and more than that, you are their older brother. They each have the same abilities that you do, and they have the same basic training as you do. However, they each also have a different area of expertise. First, there's Juan, who is in Los Angeles; he is trained in heavy weapons use, and is also trained as a sniper. Then there is Joris, who is in Syracuse NY. He is the demolitions expert. Chang is the doctor, who's in Seattle Washington. Lastly, we have William, who is in Orlando Florida. His training includes both piloting, and electronics.

He sat back in his chair, one last time, and said, "Adam, I wish I could change the way things have gone, but I think I did the best I could, to make you ready for this. The only thing left, now, that I can do is this. At the end of this disk, you'll find a bank account number, and the bank routing number. That is keyed to a secret, off shore bank account, in a fake name. It is completely untraceable, and I set it aside for you to use, when the time is right. By now, there should be just over fifteen million dollars in there. Please use that to help you and your brothers, survive. Good luck, Adam, and I pray that God holds you close to his side, as you face the troubles you will encounter in the coming days." The screen went blank.

## Chapter 4

Janet and Joe both just stared at the screen for a few moments. From the looks on their faces, I would say they're just as shocked as I was. Here I thought Marcus was nothing but an ass who deserved to die. Now I'm finding out that he helped set up my escape. Janet finally looked over at me, and said "so what's gonna happen now?" I just looked at her with a 'duh' in my eyes and said casually. "Now, I go find my brothers. You always said you wished you could have more kids... well looks like you got 4 more coming." I said, laughing and she got a stricken look on her face for a second, then broke out laughing. "It's not quite what I signed up for, but "it's not mine to wonder why..." all three of us laughed at that, then Joe said, "we'll deal with that in the morning, for now, I think we all need to get some sleep." I didn't bother to tell him that I go for days without sleep, and just waved when the two of them split up to go to their rooms. I spent the rest of that evening, going over everything that Marcus had given me. If I thought I was shocked by the video, I was mistaken. Marcus had managed to surprise me a few more times before morning came around.

About seven in the morning, I figured I needed to take a break, so I went and got the case that the M107 was in. I set it down on the table, and lovingly started to disassemble and clean its various parts. I still could not get over how Joe just gave this to me. No one had ever just given me something like this... just for the hell of it. I had just finished putting it together, when I heard the door to the bedroom that I was sharing with Logan, open and he walked out. I looked over, and once again, I was struck speechless by his beauty. He was only wearing his boxers, and I got a good look at the rest of his body. He had milky white skin on his chest from obviously not seeing the light of day much, but it was starting to develop nicely. His arms had a fine sheen of hair on them, and was starting to develop real muscle tone. I knew from his mother that he didn't work out at all, so this was all natural. I knew then that Logan was probably the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. I finally pulled my eyes from his body, and looked at his face, the look on it was so funny I couldn't help but bust out laughing. He mumbled something that sounded like "shuut upp.... I..I hate mornin's." That just made me laugh even more, as he went over and poured himself a cup of coffee from the pot that I had been working on all night. I figured I'd better hit the shower, while it was open, so I said to Logan. "I'm gonna go hit the shower, be back in a bit." He just nodded and mumbled. "Don't hurt it." I laughed as I went into the bathroom. Twenty minutes later, I walked back into the living room dressed and ready to go for the day. I saw that everyone was there, and dressed. Janet was at the stove; making breakfast. Logan was on the computer, and Joe was going over the information on the facility near LA. I walked over to Joe, and said. "The one in LA seems like it would be the easiest for me to get into, and break Juan out. Plus with him being a trained sniper, he would be a very big help for the rest of them. Joe was nodding, and he answered back to me. "You got it mostly right." I looked at him with a question and he just sighed and said. "WE'LL both be going. I have no doubt that you could do it yourself, but it would be easiest with the two of us." I grinned as I nodded, and remarked, "I wasn't sure if you would want to get into this. I have to, because they're my brothers, but you don't." I cut him off before he could reply. "What I'm saying is... thanks." He just nodded, and turned back to the papers.

"I figured what we could do is this." He started as he indicated something on the map. "If we do this at night, I can sit back with the M107, and cover you. You'd have no problem getting over the fence and up to the building, especially if I take out the transformer that's on this pole," he said, indicating the map. "That way they would be trying to see you in the dark, which gives you the advantage. The problem's going to be this. Once I cut the power at the transformer, the only things that will still have power will be the internal emergency lights, and the security system that operates the keypads on the

doors. They're all on emergency back up power. We need to figure out how to get in." I grinned and went over to where I kept the rest of the papers.

"No problem," I said, barely suppressing a laugh. "Marcus gave me the master code for the facility," I said, as I handed Joe a piece of paper. He studied it for a moment, and said "Damn! That'll make things a lot easier. Okay, once you get to the door, I'll need you to cover me, as I make my way to you. Then we'll head inside and..."

For the next two hours, we discussed all the possible scenarios, while we ate our breakfast. About the time we finally decided that we had everything covered, Logan exclaimed, from in front of the computer. "YES!!!! I finally got it." We all looked over at him as he ejected a disk and ran over to us. He stopped right in front of me and looked as if he were about to jump out of his skin with ment. "Adam, you're gonna be going into one of the facilities, right?" I just nodded and he thrust the disk into my hand. "When you get inside, copy the program on this," He tapped the disk, "into the main computer in there. I just wrote a program that should give us an untraceable back door, into their system. With any luck, we can see what info they have on us, and what they're planning on doing next." He was so excited that I couldn't help myself. I jumped up out of my seat and pulled him into a big hug. I quickly broke it, blushing, wondering what the hell I was doing. I've never had much physical contact with other people, and in the last day, I have had more then I can handle. He just grinned, oblivious to my situation, and went to fix his own breakfast. I sat back down and passed the disk over to Joe.

I sat there in a daze, for a few moments, but I was pulled back when Joe asked me. "When do you want to do this, son?" I looked over at him, considering the question. Finally I said, "How quick can we get there?" He nodded as if expecting that question, and replied. "Let me make a few calls. I have a friend that has a private jet. I'll also try to see if we can have some extra equipment waiting for us when we land." He went off to use the phone and I sat there for a moment, then I looked over at Janet. "I'm gonna go take a walk." She just nodded, as I got up and walked out the front door.

I wandered around in the woods for a few hours, till I came to a cliff that overlooked the forest below. It was such a peaceful sight, that I just sat down with my legs hanging over the side and got lost; looking out over the scene before me. I was brought back to reality, a few minutes later, upon hearing someone slowly walking up the trail behind me. I waited till he got close enough to here me, and without me turning around, I said "hey Logan." As he sat down beside me and looked out over the valley. "It's beautiful, isn't it?" he said. I simply nodded in response, and we sat in silence for a little while. Finally he looked over at me and asked in a soft voice. "So... what was it like there?" I sighed, and leaned back, resting my weight on my elbows. "I don't remember much, before I was there, but I know I was homeless; living on the streets. There was a guy who took care of me and we did alright until they took me into the program. When I first got there, it wasn't all that bad. I spent most of my day just doing stupid things. I found out later that it was because they wanted to see how much of a change they had made in my physical make up. They found out I was stronger and faster than I should be. I mean, what six year old should be able to pick up an adult and carry them around?" I said, chuckling, which caused him to laugh and lean back next to me. Normally, having someone this close to me would be disturbing. He was leaning back with his shoulder touching mine, but for some reason, it didn't feel bad at all... in fact, it felt kinda good, and I couldn't quite explain the feelings that I was having. I had never had them before and didn't know what to make of them, but they were nice, and scary, at the same time. I just didn't know what to do, but for the moment, I decided to just sit back and enjoy them. "About the time I was eight, they started my actual training. That wasn't too bad. I guess it would be like going to school would be for you. It was then that I started learning what I know about

the military. I also found out then, that I had an amazing aptitude for learning. That put me on the genius scale... whatever that means.” Logan laid his head back on the ground and groaned. “I know what that's like, but mine's natural. I spent my whole damn life being smarter then everyone else around me, except of course, Mom. Hell, I just graduated high school at age thirteen. I am about to go to college, to get my degree in computer programming. I could probably pass most of the classes for that, right now. The kids at school used to call me a freak, because I was that smart.” I looked over at him, shocked at what he had just told me, and said. “You're not a freak, if anyone here is, it's me.” I said, as I hung my head. “Hey, Adam, you're not a freak, you were just made to be different. That's all.” He said, “I never got to be a kid” I said softly “They trained me to kill, and if it hadn't been for your mom...” I finished lamely,

“I kinda know what that's like, Adam, I never got to be a kid either.” he replied gently, as he took my hand. I looked over at him, and was suddenly lost in his beautiful eyes. I felt myself drifting closer to him, as the feelings I had been having seemed to increase. I had never felt things like this before and didn't even know what they were. All I knew was that his hand in mine felt so good and more; so right to me. I am not sure what would have happened if what did, hadn't, and I was kind of afraid to find out, as, suddenly the silence was broken by Janet yelling from the cabin. “Boys, you need to come in. It's time to get going!” I quickly got to my feet and started walking towards the cabin. Logan got up and walked along next to me on the way back and it felt so good to have him there. Both of us were obviously lost in thought, me about what had just happened and hopefully, him not thinking I was weird or something, because of it.

When we got back to the cabin, Joe and Janet were sitting at the table, and they motioned for us to join them. We both sat down, and Joe began. “Okay guys, here's what we've got. My friend's gonna meet us at the Kansas City Airport, tonight at 3:00 AM. We'll fly into LAX, and land there at about 7:30 in the morning. From there, someone will pick us up and take us to his house. There, he'll have some equipment ready for us, including light body armor for both of us, as well as some weapons. Since we're taking a private jet,” he looked at me, “you'll be able to take your rifle. We'll need it, as I can't swing getting another one for this operation. Logan and Janet will wait at the house, while he drives us out. Once there, he'll wait for us, unless it gets too hot for him. Once we're back at his house, we'll figure out what to do from there. Any questions?” he asked, looking around at us. I shook my head, and so did Logan. “Okay, good, go get packed, we have to leave soon if we wanna make it.”

Two hours later, we were packed and heading down the road. After quite a while, we found ourselves just outside Des Moines. Joe was driving, Janet was sitting next to him, and Logan and I were in the back seat. Joe had turned the radio on, a little while earlier, and I was enjoying listening to Logan sing along with the songs. He really had a great voice. A break came in the music, and we were talking quietly in the back when Joe suddenly sat up in the seat, reached down and turned the radio up. “.... is wanted for both Arson and murder. She is considered dangerous, and if you spot her, please call your local law enforcement agency. Again, this is a special report. Dr. Janet Hayes, seen here, is wanted in connection with an explosion that destroyed her home, and killed a law enforcement agent, that was coming to question her about the disappearance of her son. It is feared that she may have killed her son, then fled. Again, if you see her, please call your local law enforcement agency.” Joe reached down and shut it off. The rest of us just sat there in shock. I was the first one to find my voice and said. “I knew they would do something like this. They couldn't just say you were wanted in connection with my escaping from an illegal lab run by the military.” She nodded, and then looked at me. “But... what did they mean about an explosion?” I looked down sheepishly and said. “That's my fault. When we left your house, I didn't have time to make sure nothing was left that might indicate where we were going, so I did the next best thing. I pulled the gas line out of the stove and let the gas

fill the room. I didn't think anyone would be there when the gas finally hit the furnace. Guess I was wrong." I said with a shrug, knowing that the "law enforcement agent" was really a military officer, looking for her. She nodded at my explanation, and turned back to stare out the window. Soon I was likewise lost in thought, and all too soon, I must have fallen asleep.

I awoke sometime later to find that it had become dark outside as Joe pulled into a dark area of a truck stop away from anyone else. As he put the pickup in park, he asked Janet through a yawn, "Do you think you could take over, for a while? I'm beat." She just nodded and got out of the truck to exchange positions, as Joe exited his side, telling her, "I'm going to run inside and grab some stuff, I'll bring a coffee back for you," causing Janet to smile and say, "Thanks" I looked over to Logan, and asked, "I gotta go to the bathroom, you wanna come?" He just nodded, so we got out and went inside. Once we were done in the bathroom, we came out and began walking around the store, looking at everything they had available there. Soon we spotted Joe, getting some coffee and at about the same time he noticed us, saying "hey boys, think you can take this out to your mom while I grab a few other things?" He handed the coffee to Logan, as we nodded. "Sure, see ya out there." We were going out to the truck pushing each other back and forth and giggling, when suddenly; Logan dropped the coffee, and took off like a bat out of hell for the truck. I looked over to see what was going on, just in time to see some strange guy push Janet into the truck and try to get in it himself. I took off running as well, and saw Logan get there a few seconds ahead of me. He tried to grab the guy, but the guy had a gun. He hit Logan across the head with the butt of the gun and Logan fell like a sack of potatoes.

I can't explain the sudden fury which encompassed my entire being, at seeing what this man just did to Logan. I came up to the truck, just as the man shut the door behind him, after crawling into the cab. But the fury was unlike anything I had ever experienced before, and it went counter to all my training. Without thinking, I pulled back my fist and smashed it through the driver's side window grabbing the man by his shirt, and bodily pulling him back through the now open window. As he came flying out, I threw him to the ground and just started striking him with all the fury that was coursing through me. All I could see, over and over again in my mind, was this piece of shit hitting Logan across his beautiful face. All reason was gone from me at that moment.

The next thing that I was aware of, was someone grabbing onto my shoulder, and without thinking I swung around, sweeping my arm out and knocking the attacker to the ground as I pounced upon the offender my hand coming back to strike a killing blow to the throat. That was when sense came back to me, as if a bucket of ice cold water had been thrown over my head, and I realized that the killing blow I was about to deliver was to Joe, causing me to sink back down onto my butt on the ground, shaking with the realization of how close I had come to killing my friend.

"Adam." I heard, softly, from Joe, as I looked up and saw him sitting up slightly, with a wary look on his face, as I broke down in tears, and said, "I'm sorry, I...I'm sorry"

He reached over and put his hand on my shoulder, then pulled me into his lap hugging me to him as he asked, "What happened?"

"I saw this man pushing Janet into the truck, and Logan ran after him and then he hit Log..."

"LOGAN!!!" I said, suddenly pushing myself out of his lap and running to the truck where Logan was just pulling himself up into the cab. I grabbed onto him and helped him up into the vehicle, asking, "Logan, are you alright? Are you okay?"

Joe came over, and got back in on the driver's side, asking, "Janet, are you alright?" as she shakily nodded and said, "Yeah, I think so, he didn't hurt me. He just scared the hell out of me."

"Good." Joe said, as he looked at me with a strange look, before saying, "We'd better get out of here, before someone sees this mess," and he started the truck, backed up, and pulled out of the truck stop.

I looked over at Logan and he was looking at me with shock in his eyes. I looked down at the floor, and back to him. God what must he think of what I had done, I certainly couldn't even explain it to myself. "Come on; let me look at your head." I said quietly, as I grabbed the first aid kit, and started to patch the cut on his head. After I was done, he took my hand and looked at it. That was the first time I even noticed that I had cut up my hand, when I smashed it through the window. "Your gonna need stitches for that." he said, as he started to clean the blood off it. "No I won't... watch." He watched closely, as I pulled the chunks of glass out, and then watched as the wounds started to visibly close. He looked on in amazement as less the five minutes later; the only indication that I was hurt was a slight reddening of the back of my hand. He giggled and said, "Damn, that's useful." I laughed, "Yeah it is."

I turned and looked out the window as we both fell deep into our thoughts. I knew for sure that I scared him with what happened. I wouldn't be at all surprised if I killed that guy. But when I saw him hit Logan, I just went nuts. I need to figure out what's going on with me soon, or I might do something to hurt everyone. I was still in a bit of a daze later on when we got to the airport and loaded into the plane. I didn't say much the entire ride there, and everyone gave me my space.

"You want to tell me what happened back there?" Joe asked, as he walked up to where I was sitting in the back of the plane.

"I don't know." I answered quietly.

"Adam, you were out of control back there, you didn't even hear me approach, and it could have been a knife in my hand instead of nothing." he said to me, with worry clearly present in his voice.

"I know that." I said, anger lacing mine. I didn't understand why it had happened. With all my training, it never should have. I should have been in complete control, deciding what did or didn't happen and I wasn't and I didn't know why.

"Look Adam, I'm not trying to give you a hard time, but something happened back there." he said.

"I know that Joe, I can't explain it, but I know that." I said, in a resigned tone.

He didn't say anything, but I knew by the way he sat there looking at me, that he expected some sort of explanation but I didn't have one for him though.

"Joe, I'm not trying to be evasive about it, but I really don't understand what happened." I said, looking at him forlornly.

"Why don't you just tell me about it, and maybe we can sort through it together." he said to me.

"I...I just snapped. When I saw that thing strike Logan with his gun, and Logan began to fall to the ground, all I felt was rage, blind rage, and it filled me in an instant. All I wanted to do was make him

pay, pay for what he had done to my...to Logan." I said, scared by what I had almost said, as I looked up at Joe.

I could see his expression soften as he said "You like Logan, a lot, don't you Adam?" and I thought the question contained more than it seemed to, but I simply answered "Yes."

He surprised me when he pulled me into his arms, and at first, I was stiff in his embrace, but I soon found myself melting into them as I realized that it felt so good to be held like this.

"Sometimes, Adam, when we care for someone, we can let our emotions cloud our judgment. It's a normal response, and nothing to be ashamed of, but you are going to have to learn to control that response, or you might hurt someone you don't mean to." he said, and I knew he was talking about how close I had come to actually killing him.

"I'm sorry, I almost...I..." but I couldn't continue, as I felt something unusual falling down my face.

"You didn't though, and now you can learn from what happened and next time be prepared for it." he said.

"What happens if I'm not?" I asked, fearfully, but he didn't answer me, he didn't have to. Next time, the results might be worse, much worse. I can NOT allow myself to not have control. Maybe I need to put some distance between Logan me. I'll have to think of this more, after we get Juan.

We landed at LAX, and met Joe's friend. He helped us load our gear into his van, and we were off. When we got to his house, he showed us the gear he got for us. Joe and I spent the next few hours going through everything. By the time we had everything ready, it was time to go off to the lab and rescue my brother. The three of us piled into his van and soon we were off. I started going over my gear in my head, as we drove to the lab. I had decent body armor, a H&K (Heckler and Koch)\*\*\* MP5SD sound suppressed sub-machine gun. It fires 9 mm rounds with a nineteen bullet clip. I also had ten extra clips for it that I used a roll of duck tape, and duck taped the clips together top to bottom. It's something called "Banana clipping." What that does is make it easier to change clips, cause a full one is right there when you need to change them out. I also had two H&K\*\*\* Mark 23 Silenced pistols. It was good to see this guy had some taste. The Mark 23 is one of the best pistols you can get. Not only is it one of the few .45 cal pistols in use by the military, it also has a twelve round clip, and can even have a round in the chamber and still be safe. This pistol can even fire after coming up out of the water. All in all, it's my favorite pistol to carry on an operation. After checking my guns, I made sure my throwing knives and sword were in place and secure. Once that was done, I tested our communications. We both had Special Forces issue throat mics that are used by pressing a button on the mic, that's attached around your neck. Coupled with a small ear bud that goes right into your ear, it's meant to be used so you can whisper into it, and the other people can hear you fine. When that was all set, I sat back to go over our plan once more.

We arrived a little ways away from the lab, and Joe and I got out. After making sure Joe's friend was still going to be here when we got done, Joe and I moved off into the woods. By now, it was fully dark and I noticed Joe having a bit of a hard time keeping up with me, so I slowed down a bit. "Just a bit further" I whispered over my shoulder to Joe, and a short time later we were staring at a ten foot high fence that had razor wire on top. We took a few minutes to figure out what the guards' schedules were. Over my ear piece, I heard Joe ask me. "You think the fence will be a problem?" I looked up at

the fence, the over to him pressing the button on my mic. "Not a problem, I can clear that easy." The look he gave me was one of surprise, and I just grinned at him. "Okay," he said, "let me get into position and get ready to take out their power. I'll let you know when I'm ready." With that, he moved off, and I went to triple check my gear. You can never check your gear too much, especially since my life depends on it. A few minutes later, I heard, over my radio; "Eagle Eye in position, Ready when you are." I grinned at his name for himself, and radioed back. "Eagle eye, Kangaroo is Go for operation liberation." I thought for sure I heard a chuckle come from a little ways away, and then two short silenced gun shots. Suddenly, all the lights on the outside of the facility went out. I took a few steps back, and got ready to run. I took a deep breath, and then launched myself at the fence. About ten feet from it, I sprung into the air, and sailed over the fence with about two foot clearance. I hit the ground, rolled, and came up with my MP5 at the ready.

I heard dogs barking in the distance, but a quick scan of the area showed nothing. I was about half way to the building, when I heard a dog bark close to me. Then the dog yelped and went quiet as Joe took a shot at it from the trees. "SNIPER in the trees," I heard one guy shout, as he hit the ground and started firing blindly into the woods. This was probably the worst thing they could do cause they didn't have suppressed weapons. Soon the muzzle flashes from their guns not only told Joe exactly where they were, but it also blinded them to me, as I slipped past them. I heard five more shots from Joe's rifle, and three more dogs, and two handlers went down. I finally made it to the door, turned around, and with my back to the wall, I waited for the reinforcements I knew would be coming.

I was not to be disappointed, as about thirty seconds after I pressed up to the wall, the door opened, and five more guys came running out, carrying M16 rifles. I waited till they were all past me, then I emptied my clip into them. They all fell and not a single one of them made a sound. Suddenly, it was very quiet, and I heard, over the radio. "Kangaroo, Eagle Eye reports all clear. What's your status, over?" "Eagle Eye, Kangaroo reports same. Ready for the Calvary. Over." All I heard over the radio was a click of the transmit button telling me he heard and understood. I waited for two more minutes before I saw him running in, half stooped across the open field. He hit the wall next to me, and nodded. I moved to the other side of the door, and started to punch in the code to open it.

The door opened, and we moved in, carefully. Two things hit me at the same time; first was the fact the entire hallway was bathed in a red light. Second was that there was some sort of music coming from everywhere, it seemed. It sounded like a haunting cello, with the piano, the music drew soo much emotion out of me, I had to stop for a second. Joe looked over at me with a question. "The music, it's..." that's all I got out, when suddenly there was gunfire from down the hall. Joe returned fire, and it was enough to bring me out of my haze, the music was still there, but I pushed it aside for now.

*Playground school bell rings - again*  
*Rain clouds come to play again*  
*Has no one told you she's not breathing?*  
*Hello, I'm your mind giving you someone to talk to*  
*Hello*

Joe and I ran down the hall, weaving our way in and out of doors, as we fought to get to where they were keeping Juan. All throughout, I was hearing this hauntingly beautiful female voice, singing. It was so powerful, that I found I really had difficulty concentrating on what was going on.

*If I smile and don't - believe*  
*Soon I know I'll wake from this dream*



*Don't try to fix me I'm not broken*  
*Hello, I'm the lie living for you so you can hide*  
*Don't cry*

Finally, after about two minutes of fighting our way through the lab, we got to the area where Juan was being held. So far we hadn't run across any of the researchers, so I was guessing they were holed up somewhere. I was rather glad for that fact, as it meant we didn't have to kill them if they got into our way. I really didn't want to kill anyone that we didn't have to.

*Suddenly I know I'm not sleeping*  
*Hello, I'm still here*  
*All that's left of yesterday\*\**

The song's final piano notes faded as we found Juan's room. I looked over at Joe. "Go get your brother, I keep a watch out." I nodded, and took a deep breath. I stepped back, and with all the force I could muster, I kicked at the door. It almost exploded inwards, and I followed it through, sweeping the room to see if there was anyone in here besides Juan. What I saw, almost sent me into a blind rage. There was a small kid, I knew was Juan, huddled up on his bed in the corner. He had his knees drawn up to his chest, and was silently crying.

"Juan?" I quietly called to him. He looked up at me with tears running down his face. "A... Adam?" He asked, in a small voice. "Is that you?" I just nodded, and motioned for him to come to me. This was not what I had expected of the boy that was supposed to be our heavy gunner/sniper. He slowly unfolded himself from the corner, and almost tentatively started towards me. "I don't believe it, he said you would come, but I didn't believe him." I was about to ask who he was talking about, when I heard gunfire out in the hall, then Joe yelled. "Come on Adam, we gotta get outta here." I turned back to Juan, and took his hand. "Come on, we gotta go."

As I was turning to go out of the room, something caught my eye. When I walked into the room, Juan looked like a normal young kid with Hispanic heritage. Dark hair and eyes. What I saw now, startled me, I turned back to him, and saw that his eyes had changed to Yellow, and he was grinning like a madman. Before I could react, he pushed me aside. As I fell, I felt him unsheathe my sword, and I turned just in time to see him run out past Joe with it in his hand. It was about this time that I noticed the music start back up again. Only this time it wasn't a hauntingly beautiful song. This time, it was a very loud guitar that almost left me deaf. I pushed it out of my head, as I quickly got back to my feet, and ran after him. When I passed Joe, I called out "Come on, Joe, we gotta catch him." Joe just fell into step behind me.

*I'VE TOLD YOU THIS ONCE BEFORE,*  
*CAN'T CONTROL ME*  
*IF YOU TRY TO TAKE ME DOWN*  
*YOU'RE GONNA BREAK*  
*I FEEL YOU'RE EVERY NOTHING*  
*THAT YOU'RE DOING FOR ME*  
*I'M THINKING YOU OUTTA MAKE YOUR OWN WAY*  
*I STAND ALONE*  
*INSIDE*

I was worried that we would have to search this entire place for him, but when I got to the next intersection, I saw that there was a guard down the hall trying to hold his guts in. As I passed him, I saw him fall. Juan had nearly cut him in half at the waist. I heard a scream come from further down the hall and I took off running. After that, it wasn't hard to follow him; all we had to do was follow the blood trail.

**YOU'RE ALWAYS HIDING BEHIND YOU'RE**  
**SO-CALLED GODDESS**  
**SO WHAT? YOU DON'T THINK**  
**THAT WE CAN SEE YOUR FACE?**  
**RESSURECTED BACK**  
**BEFORE THE FINAL FALLING**  
**I'LL NEVER REST UNTIL**  
**I CAN MAKE MY OWN WAY**  
**I'M NOT AFRAID OF FADING**  
**I STAND ALONE**  
**FEELING YOUR STING DOWN INSIDE ME**  
**I'M NOT DYING FOR IT**  
**I STAND ALONE**  
**EVERYTHING THAT I BELIEVE IS FADING**  
**I STAND ALONE**  
**INSIDE**

The music got so bad in my head, that one time I actually doubled over clutching my head. "Adam? What's wrong?" Joe asked, with obvious concern. What ever response I was going to give was drown out by a woman's scream from down the hall. I just shook my head, gathered myself, and ran towards the scream.

**AND NOW IT'S MY TIME,**  
**IT'S MY TIME TO DREAM,**  
**DREAM OF THE SKIES**  
**MAKE ME BELIEVE THAT**  
**THIS PLACE ISN'T PLAGUED BY THE POISON IN ME**  
**AND HELP ME DECIDE IF MY FIRE WILL BURN OUT BEFORE YOU CAN BREATHE INTO**  
**ME\***

We got to the place where we heard the scream and a woman was slumped against the wall. When I got close to her, I could see that about a third of her head had been cut off, and brain was exposed. I fought down the bile, and saw that there was only one place Juan could have gone, and the screams we heard from behind that door confirmed where he was. Slowly, I walked up to the door, and opened it. What I saw, when I opened the door sickened me to the Point that I almost threw up right then and there.

Juan had a guy, who I recognized from Marcus's files, as Dr. Drake, the head researcher here. Drake was strapped to a table and Juan was standing over him. Juan had a razor sharp knife out, and was slowly peeling the skin away from Drake's testicles. Once I got myself under control, I ran over to Juan, and physically tossed him aside, and turned to face him. When he got back up, he looked right at me. What I saw shocked me to my very core. Juan was standing there covered in blood, but had a se-

rene look on his face. He looked at me with those amazing yellow eagle eyes, questioningly and asked "What? Did I do something wrong?"

\*Godsmack "I stand Alone" from the Faceless Album 2003

\*\*Evenecence "Hello" from the Fallen Album 2003

\*\*\* <http://www.hecklerkoch-usa.com/>

## Chapter 5

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My jaw hit the floor, as I stood there watching Juan, not believing what I was seeing before me. It really looked as if he saw nothing wrong with what he was doing. Before I could recover enough to say anything, he looked down and noticed my sword lying on the floor. He blushed slightly and mumbled, "oh, sorry..." as he bent over, picked up the sword, and walked over to where Drake was lying; sobbing on the bed. When Juan got close to him, the man began to scream again, as Juan looked on with a small smile playing across his features. I watched in fascination, as Juan calmly reached out, cleaned off the sword on Drake's bloody lab coat, and then turned to me, spinning the sword around, so he was holding the blade, extending the hilt out to me, all without saying anything or taking his yellow predator's eyes from his prey. Still in shock, I numbly took the sword from him, and then, with some trepidation, watched as he got a cloudy look on his face. He walked back over to the doctor, and with pure venom in his voice, which belied his age said, "Oh, will you just shut the fuck up," in exasperation, as he calmly, and with the barest hint of effort, reached over and grabbed Drake by the neck, snapping it in the process. He then looked at me before letting his gaze drift over to Joe for a moment, and then returned it to me, saying, "You think it's over boss?" I couldn't do much more then nod that I thought it was, then he grinned at me with a feral expression, looking at me with those yellow eagle eyes, before something totally amazing happened. I watched, as he closed his eyes, then reopened them and looked down at the floor, seeming to physically deflate, before my eyes. When he looked back up at me, I got another shock, because it was with normal looking, brown eyes, and a frightened expression on his face. The boy I originally saw was back.

Juan looked warily around at the room and it's occupants, with his eyes finally coming to rest on the recently deceased body of Dr. Drake. At which point, he let out a horrified squeak and ran over to the trash can. I heard him throwing up, as I looked over at Joe. I am sure my face mirrored the look of astonishment, and confusion that was on his. Joe shook his head to clear it, obviously at a loss for words, glanced over to Juan and then back to me, before saying, "Adam, you take care of Juan, I'll go load Logan's program." I just nodded, what else could I do? I watched as he left the room before turning back to where Juan was. Juan was just kneeling down in front of the trash can, panting and looking lost, so I walked over to him, and knelt down beside him. "Juan?" I asked, with a question in my voice. He looked up at me with tears still brimming and a scared look on his face, as he wiped off his

mouth with the back of his shirt, which only managed to smear blood in with the vomit. I quickly took off my outer shirt, and handed it to him, watching as he took it, and started to clean himself off, while I stood back up, adjusting the fit of my armor. He looked back up at me, with that same frightened look, still kneeling there on the floor, after he cleaned off his face, before looking down again and muttering almost too softly for even me to hear, "Sorry about that. I'm still not used to seeing what HE does!" After he was finished talking, he looked back up at me with a look that showed a mixture of fear and slight hope, as I asked, "he who?" He considered what I had said for a moment, then looked back at the floor and said "The other Juan, the part of me that can handle doing that stuff," leaving me even more confused than I was before.

I had a million questions and then some, that I wanted to ask him, but Joe came walking back in right then and said. "Okay, it's done, let's get out of here." I glanced over at him, then looking back toward Juan, I extended my hand, to help him up, but when I did that, he just cowered and rolled into a ball pleading with me not to hurt him, for letting the "bad kid out" shocking me again, as I knelt down, cradling him into my arms, and whispered. "It's okay Juan, I'm not gonna hurt you." I just kept repeating that, over and over again, as I held onto him while my heart broke in two, for this, not so defenseless, little guy. It was hard to believe that this was the same kid I saw a few minutes ago, it was like two different people. Slowly he snapped out of it, and I helped him to stand as we quickly made our way out of the building, and to the waiting car. On the way there, I made sure to grab every weapon I could, and put them into the duffel bag I had brought with me. Who knows when we might need some extra weapons in our fight to rescue my brothers? One thing I did notice was that every time we got near a dead body, Juan would either look the other way, or squeeze his eyes shut, not being able to take the sights he was seeing. This reaction by him was not at all what I had expected to find here to say the least.

About half way back, I suddenly stopped. Joe and Juan stopped as well and looked at me. "Joe, did you hear that music in there?" The look of confusion on his face answered my question, and I turned to Juan. He looked down at the ground sheepishly, not daring to lift his eyes to meet mine. "It's okay little guy, was that you?" He ever so slowly nodded his head, and I thought quickly about what it meant. The realization hit me quickly, and I understood. I walked over to Juan, and lifted his head so I could meet his eyes. I concentrated hard, and tried to send my thoughts to him. 'Juan, can you hear me?' He lit up like a Christmas tree, and bobbed his head up and down. 'Isn't this so cool Adam?' I still had a million and one questions, but they would have to wait. "We'll have to talk about this later little guy, let's get outta here."

We thankfully made it back to the car without encountering any problems. It was as we got to the fence that I was able to determine that Juan had undergone all the same physical changes as I had, when, with a squeal of joy, he easily leaped the fence in front of him. I guess he didn't get out much, not that it surprised me; I never did either. Nothing was said during the entire trip, back to the house where we were staying, and I could easily feel the tension radiating from Joe as he tried to figure out what the hell was going on with Juan, and to be honest, I had no clue either. This was beyond weird, and I was very worried for the little guy. Something sure wasn't right. We got back to the house, and Joe's friend very coldly, just dropped us off, and told us he would be back tomorrow and he wanted us gone by the time he got there. "You can't really blame him Adam, as far as he knows, we just kidnapped some kid and God knows what else." Joe said, by way of an explanation. I looked over at him warily, and said, "I suppose not, but will he become a problem?" clearly indicating that I would deal with it if he couldn't. Joe took a deep breath before saying, "He may not like it, but he won't become a problem." I didn't say anything, I just looked at him until he said, "Come on, Adam, we need to get inside," to me, and I let the issue drop, for now.

Once inside, I walked into the kitchen, to find Janet and Logan sitting at the table. Logan started to get up, but then he noticed my troubled face, and just asked, instead, "What's wrong?" I shook my head, not wanting to go into it right there and then, before saying, "Janet, Logan, I'd like for you to meet Juan." By way of introduction, but I felt Juan pressed tightly into my back, I could feel that he was trembling, and he almost seemed to wilt when I turned around and looked at him. "Juan, it's okay. Everything will be alright," I said, as I bent down to be on his level. "These are our friends." I slowly turned him around, so he could see the people in the room, and they could see him. "Juan, I would like you to meet Logan Hayes, and his mother Dr. Janet Hayes." As soon as I said Janet's name, I realized that I had made an error, as I watched Juan stiffen and let out a whimper of fear. As I looked over at him, I was confronted with those eagle eyes again, and fear coursed through me as to what might happen next. The change that came over him was like night and day. The shy withdrawn boy, who was just, a moment ago, cowering behind my leg, was now, looking at me with a much stronger look than I had seen before. "What the fuck boss," he said, in a loud voice. "Why the hell do you got one of them doc's here?" Spitting out the word Doc, like it was a curse word.

I had a feeling that this was going to be a critical moment in the Unit, and I had to handle it just right. I decided I needed to assert myself as the commander, so I stiffened, and in my most authoritative voice, I said. "At Ease Juan," he almost fell over himself as he took the parade rest stance, "Dr. Hayes is the ONLY reason I was able to escape. Both she and her son have sacrificed greatly to see that all of us are able to be rescued, and brought together. I will NOT allow you to disrespect either of them. Do I make myself clear?" Those yellow eyes stared straight ahead, as he barked out. "Sir; Yes sir." "Good, now, this is what's about to happen. You will follow Dr. Hayes, into the other room, so that she may give you a complete physical. You will do what you are told, and will not argue with her. When that is done, you will return here, and we will sit down and go over what we know about our other brothers. Any questions?"

"I will not allow her to hurt..." Juan started to say, when I interrupted and said loudly, "You will allow what I tell you to allow, is that clear?"

I was surprised when he broke etiquette and glanced up at me with fury and defiance in his gaze.

"IS THAT CLEAR" I practically yelled and watched as the training overcame the defiance, and I watched as it flowed out of him, and as his eyes returned to face forward and in a somewhat cowed voice I heard, "Sir yes sir"

It was clear he wasn't happy, but it was also clear that he would obey albeit reluctantly.

I watched as the yellow eyes disappeared, and the deep brown ones returned. He still stood at parade rest, but I saw he was fighting not to let his bottom lip quiver. "Sir..." he said, in a whisper, "you won't let her hurt me, like the others did, will you?" I almost broke down right there and hugged him, but I knew it was important for me to be the commander right now, not the caring brother, so I didn't, although. I did allow my voice to relax some as I said, softly. "No Juan, she isn't going to hurt you, I promise. Trust me; I had her do the same to me. She is going to need to draw some blood, but that's it. I promise you, she really cares about us."

I watched as my words seemed to relax him a little bit, before he nodded to me that he understood, and said "Yes sir" then looked over to Janet and taking a deep breath, told her "Ma'am, when you're ready, I am ready for the physical." Janet slowly got up, with the questions on her face apparent, but I just shook my head and she sighed, before saying "Okay Juan, please follow me, and we'll get this over

with." I watched as Janet headed for the door, grabbing a bag from the counter, as Juan turned back to me, went to attention, and saluted. I returned it, and he spun on his heel, and followed Janet out of the room for all the world looking like a condemned man, going to the executioner's block.

Once he was gone, I went over to a chair and collapsed into it wearily asking of no one and everyone. "What the FUCK is going on here? Can someone please explain it to me?" I looked over at Joe hopefully, but he just shrugged, ending any hope of an explanation from that quarter. I bent forward, and rested my head in my hands, in defeat, when I heard Logan pipe up meekly.

"Ummm... I think I may know what's going on." My head shot up and I stared at him. He stared back, and after a second, I said, none too kindly "Well?" He shook his head not letting my tone get to him and began, "Well, I guess it would be safe to say that he was treated about the same way you were, or maybe even worse, if his reaction to mom was any indication?" I just nodded. "I think he may suffer from Multiple Personality Disorder." He must have picked up on my lost look, so he continued. "Basically, what I think happened, is his mind couldn't take the abuse anymore, so his mind split. He made another person who dealt with the pain. That's the person who has the funky eyes. If I guess correctly, he comes "out"; I guess would be the right way to put it, when he's in a situation where he thinks he might get hurt." Logan said, with a shrug, but I just stared at him, then looked away and stared at the wall. "That almost makes sense." I said, in a whisper. "It would explain what happened at the lab."

For the next twenty minutes, Joe and I related to Logan what happened, and mostly how Juan acted, throughout the encounter with the people in charge of the facility. The final question being what we could do about it, but Logan didn't seem to have the answer to that one.

After we explained it all to Logan, he went off to check on things on his computer, and I walked outside with Joe, I had a feeling it was time for our "talk." "Adam," Joe began, as we sat down on the porch, "I think it's time for us to have a bit of a talk." I just nodded, and settled back in my chair. "I think I may know what's going on with you." I just looked at him and begged with my puppy dog eyes, to make him go on. "Adam, you've never been around other people before, save for the people in the lab right?" I nodded, not really understanding what he was trying to get at. He sighed, looking like he was trying to figure out where to go with this. "Adam, do you know what it means to be gay?" I cocked my head, and looked at him weirdly. "ummmmm... yeah, it means someone's happy." I told him. Joe just shook his head, and looked off into the woods for a moment, before saying. "Adam, being gay means the same as being homosexual" then he looked at me, to see if I understood. When he saw my blank look that I didn't, he just groaned and went on. "Okay, it's like this. Most of the time, when a kid gets to be your age, they start to have changes to their bodies, they start to get hair in places they didn't have it before, and they start to have some feelings that they never even thought of before. Do you understand what I mean?" I nodded hesitantly, before saying, "well for the most part I do, I mean I know I've been growing hair around my penis, as well as under my arms, but I'm not sure what feelings you mean." He got a rather pained expression on his face, before saying, "Adam, there are a lot of feelings, that go with the changes that are occurring in your body. Your penis gets hard, and you may find yourself...ah...touching it more than you used to, for instance. You may also start feeling a lot of feelings that make your penis hard that you never felt before, and some of them may include romantic feelings." again I was lost and told him so, adding "If you mean masturbation, I do that frequently as I was told it was important for my physical well being, not to mention it relieves stress and is quite pleasurable," which got Joe to choking for a moment. Finally with a sigh, he said, "Okay, let's start over. I don't mean just masturbation, when boys get to be your age, most of them start to think about sex, ah...you do know what sex is, right?" I laughed, and just gave him my best "duh!" look, and he laughed too.

Okay most boys start to have feelings about wanting to have sex, a lot of them, matter of fact it is a major preoccupation of the thought processes of the average teenager, but you've never had to deal with those before, because you grew up in a very controlled environment. Now that you're out of that environment, I think your starting to feel those feelings, but you have no frame of reference for them. While masturbation is certainly a component of sex and even doing sexual things with others is part of sex, romantic feelings are not just about sex, but a lot more. They are about love and caring for another person, and also may include sex, but the sex isn't the most important part of it. Adam I think you are falling in love with Logan." He finished, and when he said that last, I collapsed back in my chair, and got lost in thought. 'Could I be in love with Logan, I mean it makes sense, he's beautiful, he's smart, he's perfect. But could I really be in love with him? Hell! First I need to figure out what love is.' I looked back over to Joe, "but... but what's love; and how do I know if I am in it?" He just laughed and said, kindly "that, my friend, is a question many people have tried to figure out, and no one has yet. My only advice for you is to follow your heart, and it won't lead you wrong." He told me, as he got up and left me alone with my thoughts and these things called emotions that were swirling around in my body and mind. I think things were easier before I escaped.

Some time later, Juan came walking out, and shyly looked over at me. "Have a seat, Juan." I said, indicating the chair that Joe had been sitting in before. "Yes sir," he mumbled. I sighed, and sat back. I really didn't need this on top of what was going on with me and Logan. "Juan, you don't need to call me sir all the time, I would prefer that we were friends and brothers first, Unit members second, can you do that?" He nodded, and visibly relaxed. "Good, now, can you please tell me what's going on with your eyes, and your personality shifts?" He nodded; looking a bit frightened, took a deep breath, and started.

"It all started about 5 months ago." he pause for a few seconds and seemed to gather courage, then he continued "I had just finished some time on the range, and was getting ready for bed, when Dr. Drake walked into my room. He said it was time for me to learn something new. So I said okay. He came into the room and sat down on my bed." He stopped again for a minute, and I thought I would have to prod him to continue, but then he took a deep breath, and started talking again. "He said it was time to start training me for what would happen if I got captured and questioned. He had me strip down to my underwear, and lie on the bed face down. Then he got some chains out, and strapped me to the bed." He stopped, and I could hear him snifle. I put my arm around his shoulder, and pulled him into me. He melted into my side, and continued, while trying to hold back his tears. "He.... he then whipped me... and it hurt so bad... I just screamed, but no one could hear me. I screamed until I passed out. I woke up some time later when he.... when he pushed his thing into my butt. He kept telling me to scream, and that son of a bitch liked it when I did that." The little guy could barely talk through his tears and sobs, but the little trooper kept on telling me what happened. "He... He said that I was just a freak who deserved this." He stopped again for a second, took a deep breath, and then went on. "He did that every night after that, then, a week ago, he said he wanted to see just how quick I could heal. So after he got me tied down, he... he took a knife... and started to cut me... down there. He... he cut them off." I stiffened in barely suppressed rage, but softened when I heard Juan crying, full out. I just held him close, trying the best I could, to sooth his pain. We sat like that for about 20 minutes, until he cried himself out, and I saw that he was asleep. I then carried him up to my room, and placed him in the bed. I sat down in the chair at the desk, and lost myself in my troubled thoughts.

I must have fallen asleep in the chair, cause the next thing I remembered, I was being woken up by Juan, crying in his sleep. I saw that it was dark out, and Logan had fallen asleep in the other bed. Juan was twisted up in the sheets and was crying in softly. He must have been reliving a few things from the lab. I got up, and quietly walked over to the bed, and crawled in beside him. I took him into my arms, and started trying to sooth his nightmares.

What happened next, I had no explanation for, as suddenly images and more assaulted my mind; knives heading toward forbidden places, pain, searing, burning, tearing agony, fire across my back, and over it all; a laughing man who took pleasure in inflicting said pain. I writhed, as I felt all the pain and humiliation this man had brought to Juan, and somehow I knew that I was experiencing the acts that were giving Juan his nightmare. I couldn't explain it, but I knew that somehow, as I tried to calm him, I was also sharing his pain. I attempted to take some control, and tried to broadcast reassurance to the small boy in my arms, and it must have worked, because he soon quieted down, and fell back into a more peaceful sleep. I made a vow to myself then and there, that I would look after my brothers with everything I had, and protect them, so that they never had to undergo anything like that again.

The next afternoon, had us back on a plane, heading for home. I managed to get Juan to sit and talk with Joe, while I pulled Logan to a row of seats in the back. I needed to talk to him. Once the plane was in the air, and we were on our way, I turned to Logan. "Logan, can we talk for a few minutes." He nodded, while closing the lid of his laptop, and then he turned to look at me. "What's up, Adam?"

"Well," I began, "I wanted to ask you about the other night at the truck stop." His face clouded up, but he nodded for me to continue. "I'm not really sure what happened there, but I do know I lost control. Joe and I talked about it, but... but I don't really know what to think about what I figured out." I told him, hesitantly. "Okaaay," he said, wanting me to continue. "Well... I don't know exactly how to say it... but... I think I lost control, when he hit you... because... well see.... I think it's because... I love you." I said that last part as quick as I could, while I stared down at the floor. I heard Logan gasp, when I said that, not daring to look up, thinking the worst. I thought he was going to hate me for what I did there and what I had just told him. He was silent for a few moments, and not being able to take it anymore, I risked a glance up at him, to find that he was staring at me with an unreadable expression. "What did you say?" He asked softly. This was the moment, and I was so scared, as I gathered my courage, and said. "I said, that I think I reacted the way I did, because I saw him hurt you. It made me soooo angry when he hit you that all I saw was red, and I think it did that because I love you." I started to look back to the floor, when he reached out and took my chin. He raised my head back up and stared into my eyes, smiling gently as he said. "Its okay, Adam, I think I love you too." I was stunned by what he said, and stared at him with open mouthed shock, that didn't even begin to compare to what I felt at what happened next as he leaned forward, and I suddenly had his lips covering mine. I don't know how long we stayed like that, but finally he leaned back, and looked at me, with an impish smile on his face. I was blown away by what happened, and couldn't say anything, but I was sure thinking that Joe's comments about feelings didn't even come close to what was going on in my body and mind right at that instant. He just giggled at my predicament, glancing downward briefly, before turning back to his lap top, leaving me to my thoughts, with my body on fire with no idea how to put out the flames. This has been one hell of a week.

The next morning, I woke up just as the sun was about to rise. I thought it'd be best if Juan and I could do something, together, to take his mind off of everything, so I gently woke him up. When he awoke, he looked over at me and smiled. "I thought you were just a dream." When he said that, he reached out and gave me a big hug. "No Juan, I'm not a dream. I hope you can wake up every morning from now on, in this kinda mood. Now, up and at em, we got some runnin' to do. He jumped out of bed, and we dressed quietly so as not to wake Logan. Together, we went outside, and warmed up for our run. After twenty minutes of warm ups, we were off. We decided on a nice easy 10 mile run, and we were back about an hour later.

Over the next two days, I was kept rather busy, what with getting to know Juan, cleaning and going over the weapons we liberated during the raid, and basically trying to figure out what my feelings were.



There were so many different feelings, and Joe had been right that I had never been exposed to most of them before. Ironically, the easiest of them was simple physical relief, and I certainly took care of that, but the stuff inside I couldn't relieve nearly as easily. It was all a confusing jumble, and about the only thing I knew for sure was I loved every second that Logan was near me, and felt somehow empty if he wasn't, even if he was in a nearby room. This was all too weird. I had the table covered with guns, and parts of disassembled guns, when I heard Logan shout from upstairs, and seconds later I heard his pounding feet as he ran down the steps. He ran into the kitchen waving a stack of papers in the air. "Here!" He said breathlessly as he shoved the papers into my hands. Everyone else came running in, while I was reading the papers. I couldn't believe what Logan had found, and I looked up at him. He had this silly shit eating grin on his face. I couldn't help it; I took him in my arms, and kissed him as hard as I could, not caring that everyone else was in the room. It just felt so good to hold him in my arms and even better to kiss him again. Joe cleared his throat, and it brought me back to earth. I blushed as I released Logan and looked around. Joe and Janet were smiling at us, but Juan had this really weird look on his face (that concerned me for some reason). Joe said "What's all the excitement about, Adam?" I looked back over at him, forgetting for the moment about Juan's expression. "The stupid assed military did it again." "What?" Joe asked, clearly confused. "I grinned at Logan again and said, 'I'll let Logan tell you, since he found it.'" I was so proud of him

"Ookay, Logan... what's going on?" Joe asked

"Well.... you remember that disk I had you load into the computers at the lab?" Joe nodded his head.

"Well, it seems that the military has set a trap for Adam and Juan. They've increased the security at the labs where the other kids are at, but, the other guys aren't there any more. The military moved them to another facility, to try and hide them, and the new facility has minimal security, but the best part..." he stopped, looking at everyone with a big grin on his face, "All three of them are at this new facility. We can rescue the rest of the unit at one time, and it shouldn't even be that hard to do."

Joe just walked over, and took the papers out of Logan's hands. He read them quickly, and then handed them to Juan, who did the same. No one could believe the government could be that stupid, but guess what; once again, it seemed that they were. Once everyone was done reading, Logan said. "There's only one slight problem... I've got to go with you," instantly getting everyone's attention.

## Chapter 6

Adam's head shot up when he heard this, with fear clearly evident on his face as he said, "No way, Logan! There is absolutely no way in hell you're coming with us," in a voice that brooked no argument, but that all could hear contained the fear that he felt. Logan just stared back at him, defiantly; not understanding, Adam, I have to go! They're in a secure bunker that can only be accessed by a single door into the facility. The only way to get through that door is if you have the password, and the only way to get that password is through me. Logan said angrily, as if this should solve the problem, but Adam wasn't buying it. . "Okay, Genius, so hack it from here." Adam shot back, the fear making it sound like anger, as Logan slowly shook his head with a small smile on his face, and said. "If I could, Adam, I would have it already. It's a closed system; the only way to hack it is to be physically there." Janet decided that she needed to make her presence known as well as this was not going well. "Logan, you're not going to go there, and that's final." she said. Logan turned around to his mom, knowing that she was going to object, but, at the same time, somehow hoping that she wouldn't, and said, in a very cold voice. "Mom, you always said that I'm mature enough to make adult decisions. Well, now, this time, I'm making one. You said yourself that we need to help these guys, so I'm going to do what has to be done. I'm the only one who can do it, and I'm GOING to do it." Logan stared at his mother defiantly for the next several seconds and his look was returned in full measure. Adam wasn't really sure who would look away first, so he did the only thing he could think of to break the tension. He certainly wasn't happy with this, but he also didn't see any alternative.

"Logan, you're absolutely set on going, aren't you?" Adam asked, breaking the spell that Logan was under. Logan looked over at Adam and nodded, determination filling his eyes. Adam sighed heavily, shaking his head, then he said. "Okay, Logan, you can go..." but before he could finish, Logan shouted for joy, at the partial statement that he heard, Janet started protesting, but Adam cut her off, as he pushed Logan out to arms length, saying, in a loud voice. "...BUT, you definitely need to have more than a bit of training, first. We can't have you there with us, with you not knowing what you're doing. Do I make myself clear?" Logan started to nod, 'I'm willing to do anything,' he thought, but Adam stopped him abruptly, saying. "Logan, I don't really think you understand exactly what I mean." shaking his head and then continuing, as Logan watched him intently. "I figure it this way; we can take a week to train you. IF you agree to the training, then there are a few things I can promise you." Adam said, as he moved Logan over to sit at the table. While doing that he shot a look to Joe, who took the hint. "Come on with me, Janet, I think we need to talk." Joe said to her, as he took Janet's arm and started to lead her out of the room. Janet started to protest, but Joe just kept pulling her, until she was out of the room. As soon as they were gone from the room, Adam motioned to Juan to sit down at the table with them.

This was going to be hard, but with steely resolution, Adam took a deep breath and started in on the boy he loved.

"Logan, the training I'm talking about is going to be hard. No, correction, not hard... It'll be grueling. I'm going to put you through six weeks worth of intense training, in just one week. Please remember that I love you." Logan started to interrupt, but Adam stopped him. "Your training starts right now; I AM your commanding officer. As such, you will not interrupt me, you will only speak when spoken too, and everything you say to me had better end with Sir. Is that understood?" Adam said, in a cold voice. Logan looked taken aback for a moment at Adam's statement, but he finally nodded. "What was that, Private?" Adam asked, in a loud voice. Logan's head snapped up and he stared at Adam for a second, with hurt and shock warring across his features before he said, "yes sir."

"Good," Adam said, with a small smile. "Now, Logan, I want to explain a few more things to you, before you accept this. One, I WILL make you hate me, over the next week. I WILL do my best to break you, both physically and mentally. You will be completely exhausted the entire time. You will be hurt, and bruised, and I will keep pushing you. I will push you till you collapse; then, I'll drag you back to your feet and make you keep going. I will shoot at you, and will scare the living shit out of you. I WILL break you. Do you understand what I am saying?" Adam said, trying to make Logan understand what he was asking for, but knowing sadly, that there wasn't really any way to do that.

Logan thought it over for a few minutes, and then looked up, and with iron in his voice, said, "Adam, I know you'll only do what you have to; to make sure I'm ready. I know it'll be hard, but this is something I want... no, I NEED to do. I hope you understand." all with an expression pleading with Adam to understand what he was trying to tell him Adam nodded that he did, and replied sadly, "then I hope you will forgive me for what I'm gonna do to you." All Adam could do was hope that he would Logan got up, went over, and hugged Adam saying. "I know you're doing it for my own good." Adam just nodded then said, "You better go relax then. I'll be getting you up at 0530 and then you will know hell." Logan nodded, and went off back to his room. Leaving Adam wondering and hoping that Logan truly understood what he was getting into and that he would remember this conversation when the week was over. He really didn't know what he would do if Logan ended up hating him.

Joe led Janet from the room, leading her out onto the porch, where Janet turned and confronted Joe angrily "Joe, I can't believe you're not stopping this." she said once there. Joe just looked at her to see if she was finished and when it was clear she expected a response replied "Janet, think about it for a second. What would happen if we put a stop to this?" Janet looked at him incredulously and snapped. "Logan wouldn't get hurt, that's what'd happen?" "Logan wouldn't get hurt?" Joe asked while staring at her. "I think Logan would get really hurt. He has no training of any kind right now and this is the only way that he stands to get any before going into a combat situation. If you deny him this training then you place him in even more danger because he is going to go **Think** about it, you have told me many times that Logan's very mature for his age. You said that Logan's been really unhappy lately because he doesn't fit in. Well, I think he's found a group he can fit in with, and if this is what he needs to do to fit in, then we can't stand in his way." this training will let him become part of the group and more so give him a fighting chance out there in the field Joe said looking her in the eyes. Janet just stood there thinking about it for several minutes before sighing in resignation. "I just don't want to see him get hurt." Janet said plaintively trying to hold in the fear for her that she was feeling. "Janet, he could get hurt no matter what we do. All we can do is be there for him when it's done. and with this training he at least will be much better prepared to escape injury than if he didn't have it If Adam is doing what I think he is going to then, Logan's gonna need us over the next few days more than he ever has before. Joe said as Janet gave him a now increasingly worried look causing Joe to quickly reassure her "Don't worry; I'll keep an eye on Adam to make sure he doesn't go too far." and Joe thought to himself, to make sure he goes far enough.

Adam watched pensively as Logan left the room, then looked over to Juan. He was curious to see how this telepathy thing worked, so he gave it a shot, concentrating on sending a thought to him. '*Juan, can you hear me?*' Juan looked at Adam, surprised, and then smiled. '*Yeah, I can hear you. Ain't this telepathy thing cool?*' Juan asked back, with a grin, and then turned serious. '*Are you sure you want to do this?*' Adam sighed, but slowly nodded his head. He didn't want to do this, but he also knew he had no choice. '*He's probably right; he'll need to be there. I just want to try and make sure that he can handle it. Juan nodded before saying, I don't think he can, he's not one of us, and I don't think it's right for him to be with us on an op.*' Adam looked at Juan for a moment, then thought to him. '*Juan, he is one of us. I haven't made it official, yet, but he's gonna be our Intel officer. We don't have one of them, and we'll*

*need one. Plus with what he's already done, hacking into the military computers, he's the perfect choice. But, I'm gonna need your help with this; I can't do this without you. Will you help me?'* Juan studied Adam for a few moments before finally replying slowly. *'I still don't think it's a good idea, but if you want to, I'll help out.'* Adam nodded, satisfied, then he got up and left the room in search of Joe.

Adam found Joe outside; looking out over the woods seeming deep in thought. "Joe?" he said, trying to catch his attention. Joe looked over at Adam, smiled slightly, and motioned for Adam to take a seat.

"So, Adam, trying to figure out if you're doing the right thing?" he asked the boy.

"Yeah, I am... Joe, I just don't know if I can do this. Part of me is worried that I'll push him too hard, and the other parts worried I won't push him hard enough. They never trained me for this shit." Adam replied. Joe laughed while taking a seat himself.

"Adam, there's no easy way to do this. Just remember a few things. Logan may be just as smart as you are, but he's definitely not as physically developed as you are. You need to keep that in mind. You also need to watch him. Push him farther than he thinks he can go, but don't push him so far that he hurts himself. I'll help you out, the best I can, but I really think it's important for you to do this yourself." Joe told him. Adam just nodded, and became lost in thought for a few moments. After about five minutes, Adam turned to Joe. "Joe, I need to know if you can go pick up a few things?" Joe nodded, and Adam rattled off a list of things that he needed.

After Joe had headed off to round up the things on the list Adam had given him, Adam began to set up the things that were needed for Logan to use. First on the list was the firing range, where Logan would receive his training, in firearms and their use. Second up was the obstacle course, followed by the running course. Both of those would be terribly difficult for the younger boy, but Adam wondered, not for the first time recently, who, exactly, it would be hardest on, and that was especially true as he came to the hardest thing to set up. When he was looking around the other day, he noticed that the back porch had an old style bell hanging on a string. Adam thought it was there to ring when it was time for the children to come inside. Tonight however, he was setting it up for a much different purpose. He dug a hole in the front lawn and placed a large pole into it from which he hung the bell, along with a sign which read "Ring me to escape hell," because that was what he was going to put the boy he loved through, and it would be starting early the next morning.

Adam woke up at 05:00 the next morning, and headed to get a shower. He was still very troubled by what was going to happen to Logan over the next few days, but if Logan felt strong enough about wanting to go, he'd do everything in his power to make sure that Logan was ready. While Adam was in the shower, he spent the time going over in his mind what he would be doing. He was so lost in thought, that he was surprised to hear the bathroom door open; but he was able to smell that it was Logan who walked over to the toilet to relieve himself. Adam didn't pay any mind to it considering the way he was raised and when he finally turned off the water, and stepped out of the shower. Logan was brushing his teeth, and nearly choked upon seeing Adam walking out of the shower, as if it was the most normal thing in the world. Not noticing Logan's problems, Adam simply started to dry himself off; but Logan was staring openly at Adam still in shock. When Adam finally noticed Logan staring, he asked, "What? Is something wrong?" Logan blushed furiously, and turned around to face the sink; and it was only then that Adam noticed the slight problem Logan now had besides his blushing face as Logan stuttered "Umm... n...no... I'm just not used to seeing other guys naked." Adam frowned at that, but said, "It's nothing new to me. I had doctors looking at me all the time. I guess I Just never really thought about it. I can cover up from now on, if you'd rather." Adam said, shrugging his shoulders and

not understanding what the big deal was. Logan looked back at Adam, finally getting himself mostly under control and said with a grin, "Nah, I think I can get used to it."

Adam just nodded, and then he said, "You'll find clothes laid out on your bed after your shower. I want you dressed and out in front in 30 minutes. Eat if you have time. If you don't, it's your problem; Understood!?" Logan nodded, and started to strip out of his boxers as Adam left. Adam couldn't help but take a peak as he walked out, thinking. *'Boy I need to get control of these feelings, if I plan on being any good to either of us.'* As he headed down to the kitchen realizing that Logan wasn't the only one to have a slight problem now.

Adam was slightly surprised to see that everyone else was already awake and eating breakfast by the time he got down there though. Joe looked up from his coffee and asked, "you all set for today?" Adam sat down after grabbing himself some coffee and replied in a pained voice. "No, I don't want to do this to him. I don't want to put him through this, but I don't see what else I can do." Joe just nodded and told him, "Just remember you have us here to help." Adam simply nodded as he took a sip of his coffee, and was soon lost in thought.

Logan got out of the shower and went back into the room he was sharing with Adam. He was still unsure of what today would bring, but he knew he had to face it. He knew that the only way that Adam and the others would accept him was if he was one of them and this was the only way to do that. He also knew that he loved Adam, and he was willing to go through anything for that, anything at all. Looking around, Logan saw that Adam had laid out a set of "BDU's" (Battle Dress Uniform) and a set of boots, similar to the ones Adam wore all the time. He took a moment to look over the clothes before he put them on, and was surprised by how well the clothing fit, but then he realized that this must be one of Adam's extra sets. He was also pleasantly surprised by how comfortable the boots were. He had kind of thought they would be really uncomfortable. Finally when he was dressed, he looked himself over in the mirror before heading downstairs to face what was to come, thinking, *'Boy do I look out of place in this stuff.'* He walked into the Kitchen, and saw everyone looking at him. His mother had a look of concern, while Joe and Adam looked supportive. Juan's expression was totally unreadable, but Logan thought that Juan was difficult to understand most of the time anyway.

After Logan got his breakfast and sat down, Adam spoke up. "Logan, you are about to start the most difficult thing you have ever done. I give you credit for even trying this." Adam had slipped into commander mode by this point, as that was the only thing that was going to get him through what was to come. Then continued; "But before we begin, there are a few things you need to know, and a few rules we need to follow, okay?" Logan, who was watching him throughout all of this, nodded while giving a barely audible "yes sir." Adam nodded and smiled trying to put Logan somewhat at ease. "First, I want to apologize upfront, for the bastard I will have to be. Please understand; I am going to be that way to make sure you get the skills you need. Most of what I will teach you is not physical, but it will seem that way. Once you figure it out, things will go a bit smoother for you. Second, there is a bell outside the front door. If, at any time, you feel you can't go on, you ring that bell, and it's over." Joe piped up at this point saying. "Logan, we had the same thing when I went through the Ranger training. Don't feel bad if you can't handle this. My crew started out with over forty people in it. Before the first week was out, there were only eighteen of us left. What I'm saying is this, there are many grown men who couldn't handle what your about to try, so don't feel bad if you can't do it." Logan nodded his understanding but had a set expression that said he was determined to never ring it, and Adam felt like this was a good time to head outside. "Private, you have ten minutes to muster outside. Have either Joe or Juan go over your uniform. I will inspect you when you get outside. Every morning till this is over, you

had better be presentable. Understood!?" Adam barked as Logan gave a "yes sir," Adam simply nodded and went outside.

Logan appeared outside ten minutes later, and walked up to where Adam was standing. He couldn't help but think that Adam looked hot even in his BDUs. He stepped in front of Adam, then came to attention trying to put such thoughts out of his mind. Adam gave him the barest hint of a smile, and then proceeded to walk around him. "Tell me Private, do you know why it is that you must be fully presentable at the start of each day?" Adam said in a voice that made it clear he was in Command mode. Logan stood at attention staring straight forward and gave a crisp "No Sir."

"The reason is quite simple. There must be no difference between you and any other soldier out there. You now represent this Unit, and you will look the part at all times, is that understood?" Adam told him crisply. Logan responded with a "Yes sir." Adam came back around to face him, and any hint of a smile was now off his face. Logan could clearly see that this was not the Adam that he had known. This was someone else and it almost frightened him, maybe even did. "Now, let's start this off easy. Drop, and give me fifty push ups." Adam said, smiling predatorily. Logan hesitated for only a second, but it was all Adam needed. He got right into Logan's face and screamed at the top of his lungs. "I SAID DROP, MISTER!" Logan dropped and started his push ups. Adam stood right over top of him the entire time. "During your training, I am your God. You do not eat, you do not sleep, you do not PISS without me saying it's okay. Do you understand, Private?" Adam bellowed. Logan gave a soft "Yes Sir," starting to wonder if he bit off more than he could chew; as Adam added coldly, "Now for not obeying my order as soon as I said it, you can add another ten on there."

Ten minutes later, Logan finished his push-ups, and he thought his arms were going to fall off. He was hoping for a break, but that was not to be, because as soon as he stood up, Adam looked at him and said. "Good, now follow me and don't fall behind." as Adam started off down the road at a jog. Three very, very long, seemingly never-ending hours later, they arrived back at the cabin. When they got there Logan wasn't sure what pissed him off more, the fact that Adam kept screaming at him to keep up, or the fact that he was barely winded. Logan collapsed onto the ground in exhaustion the moment Adam stopped jogging, which caused Adam to spin around and scream at Logan. "Did I give you permission to rest?" Logan looked up at Adam with complete shock on his face, but was able, barely, to pull himself up while saying, "No... No sir." Adam just snorted with disgust, walked over to the table where there was one of the MP-5s, and handed it to Logan, saying. "Take this, hold it over your head, and jog in place." Logan did as he was instructed, holding it above his head, and started to jog. "Don't stop till I tell you to." Adam added. Logan nodded and watched in disbelief as Adam walked back to the house, grabbed a bottle of water, and a chair. He brought them over, and sat down a few feet in front of Logan. He made quite the production of sitting down and relaxing, as he opened the bottle and took a long swig; saying "Ahh that hits the spot," before going on, "Now Logan, the weapon you are holding is a Heckler and Koch MP-5SD. It is one of the premier sub machine guns made. Remember what I am about to tell you, because I will be asking you about this later, and you had better be able to answer correctly. The MP5SD is a full time sound suppressed sub machine gun, with a nineteen round clip. What makes a sub machine gun different from a full machine gun, are two things. A full machine gun is rather large and bulky, used primarily as a squad support weapon, or mounted on vehicles or helicopters." Adam was explaining all of this, while Logan jogged in place. Logan was somewhat surprised to figure out that when he concentrated on what Adam was saying; the jogging wasn't as bad as it was before. Adam continued, "It has three different settings, single shot, two round burst, or fully automatic. The MP5SD can fire approximately eight hundred rounds per minute. Now, let me ask you this, if it can fire eight rounds per minute, then how long would a nineteen round clip last... assuming of course,

you had a round in the chamber?" Logan struggled to think about that. He wasn't expecting to have to do hard math problems, while being totally exhausted, his arms burning while he held a gun high over his head, jogging in place. Adam gave Logan about thirty seconds to figure it out, and when he didn't; Adam got up and stood before Logan. "Stop, and lower the weapon." Logan stopped, and stared ahead as Adam looked at him.

"Logan," Adam began. "This training is not just for you to be physically able to handle the stresses of what's going to happen. The main reason for it is to force you to be able to think while in a very stressful situation. That is the most important thing. Almost anyone can be taught to run, jump, and climb ropes and things like that. But you need to be able to think clearly when you are under immense amounts of pressure. Okay?" Logan nodded replying "Yes Sir." "Good, now go take a few hours of rest. I'll come and get you when I'm ready." Logan nodded, and started to walk off dead on his feet. He got to the stairs, turned around, and said to Adam, in a wooden voice filled with exhaustion. "You'd be out of ammo in about one and a half seconds." Logan then turned and walked inside, not seeing Adam grin at his back, as he walked in.

The next six days were sheer hell on both Adam and Logan. Logan's hell was more physical, since Adam wouldn't let him get more than two or three hours of sleep at any one time. Adam kept pushing Logan well past the point where Logan thought he would drop. However, once Logan figured out that Adam was training his mind more than his body; Logan soon figured out that the pain could be set aside. It didn't make it much easier, but it helped a little. Perhaps just enough; Adam, on the other hand, was going through his own hell. He was constantly fighting with himself as to whether he was pushing Logan too hard, and at other times, whether he wasn't pushing him hard enough. He needed to make sure that Logan was ready for what happened, but it was killing him to see Logan hurting. At one point, he even broke down crying after he sent Logan off to bed. Thankfully, Joe was there to help him through it. In the end it was hard to say who had it the hardest of the two boys

The last day turned out to be the hardest on both of them. Adam was pushing Logan really hard, and Logan was starting to falter. Adam was upset that he had taken Logan to the point of failing, and turned to talk to Juan. Juan, for his part, had helped out where he could, but wasn't all that interested in helping Logan. Logan, as Juan saw it, wasn't one of them, and this was proving it. "Juan, I need you to take over." Adam said, nearly in tears, but fighting to hold them back. "Take him to the Range, and show him how to shoot the pistol and the MP5. Okay?" Juan nodded, completely confused. *'Why is Adam crying over this?'* Juan thought to himself; not understanding what was going on, and not understanding Adam's emotions, confusing the young boy even more, as he finally just shrugged and walked over to Logan. "Okay Logan, it is time to take you to the Range."

Juan brought Logan back to the cabin about the same time that Janet was putting dinner on the table. Everyone was too interested in the food to talk about much else. Logan felt he barely had time to eat before Adam would be rousing him to do something else, and he could only hope for a few minutes of rest before that happened, as he shoveled food into his mouth as fast as he could. Every moment spent eating was one less for sleeping. When he finished, he stumbled to his feet and asked if he could get some sleep. Adam simply nodded, and Logan walked off. He didn't even try to make it upstairs; he just dropped on the sofa, and was sound asleep less than thirty seconds later.

Adam watched Logan leave, then turned to Juan. "Well, how'd he do?" Juan couldn't help but grin and said. "Un-fucking-believable!" Joe quickly said. "Juan, watch your language." Juan, clearly not understanding what he did wrong looked confused at Joe. Janet saved him by saying. "It's okay; I've heard that and much worse." Juan, still not understanding what was wrong, didn't bother asking. "That kid is

a natural. All I had to do was explain to him that shooting is almost all mental, then explain it to him; he was shooting like he couldn't miss. Of course he's still not as good as I am, but..." Adam chuckled when Juan said that, and nodded. "So you think he'll do okay on the OP?" Adam asked Juan, who sat there considering. Joe and Janet watched with obvious fascination. It was so hard, at times like these, to remember that Juan was only nine and a half years old, and Adam was barely thirteen. If anyone else were to listen to them, they would say they were adults.

Juan considered the question for a moment before responding. "Well, he has the accuracy. Of course he won't know if he can actually pull the trigger till the time comes." Adam nodded in agreement and said. "If we're lucky, he won't have to. Okay, then I think he's ready. I still can't believe he took everything I dished out." Janet beamed with pride and ran back over to the counter. "Oh! This calls for one of Logan's favorite cakes, "Death by Chocolate"." Both Adam and Juan grinned at that and were soon hurried out of the kitchen so Logan would have something left when he awoke to the boys complaining that they were being starved, even though they had just eaten.

Logan woke sometime later, to a smell that could wake him from the dead, his mother's double chocolate cake, with chocolate frosting. She only made that on very special occasions. Wondering what was going on, he stumbled his way into the kitchen. Adam and Juan were sitting, rather impatiently, at the table, as Janet was finishing up the frosting. Adam saw Logan stumble in, jumped up, and ran over to him, enveloping him in a huge hug, and whispering in his ear. "Congratulations, you passed hell week." Logan beamed back, and couldn't help but give Adam a very passionate kiss pleasantly surprising him. They broke it some time later when Juan giggled and asked Joe, "Did they forget to breathe, or did they somehow tie their tongues into a knot. That made everyone burst out laughing, and effectively broke the special moment Adam and Logan were sharing. Logan responded. "Just wait little brother, when I find you making out with someone..."

They both blushed heavily, and Logan made a comment about little brothers.

Juan burst out into tears when Logan said that, and Logan moved over to him asking with concern. "Hey there little guy, what's wrong?" Juan managed to say between his sobs. "Did... did you really mean it... when you called me your little brother?" Logan pulled him into a hug, and said, "of course I did. I love you, little guy, just like you were my blood brother." Janet went over, and pulled them both into a hug. "Juan, can you look at me?" She asked, gently, and when Juan was finally facing her, she said. "Juan, I've learned something since you guys got here. Family is not just made up of blood relatives; it's made up of people who love each other. I can't speak for everyone, but I can guess that they feel the same way I do. That now you're a part of this family forever." Juan looked around hopefully, at everyone in the room, and was greeted with nods from all of them. He hugged Logan tighter and whimpered. "I never had a family before, I'm afraid I'll fuck it up, and you guys won't want me no more." Logan looked at the little guy in his arms and said with all the emotion he could put in his voice "You listen to me, I love you and no matter what you do, that will never change. You will always be my brother if you want to be" Joe moved over and pulled Juan's face up to look in his eyes. "Juan, family doesn't abandon family when they make mistakes and that goes for me too. I think of you as a son I never had, I think the same way of Adam and Logan, as well as the other three. Of course, that's if you want me to be your dad." Juan looked hopeful, and asked in a shy voice filled with disbelief, "Really??? You mean it?" Joe nodded with a smile on his face and said "**Really**", as Juan looked back up at him with his large brown puppy dog eyes, and asked "can I call you dad?" Joe blinked back tears, but smiled, as he said "I would like that a whole lot." Joe then reached over, and pulled Juan up off his feet, and sat him down on his lap. Juan looked somewhat fearful like he wanted to ask something else, so Joe asked him, "What's wrong, little one, is there something else you want?" Juan just nodded, as everyone else sat down. "Go ahead champ, you can ask me anything." Joe said to him. Juan started to



stutter as he asked. "Well... if you're my daddy... that means I'm your son... and... well... I don't have a last name... and I was wondering if... since your my dad... if I could use yours?"

Joe nearly cried at the hurt in Juan's face, when he asked that, and could feel the tears he had been fighting to contain escape, at what this little bundle was asking him as he said, softly, "Of course you can, Son!" then he looked up at Adam, and said "As a matter of fact, I would be honored if all the boys called me dad, and used my last name... if you and they want to." Joe barely had time to finish that, before he had another boy in his lap crying. Adam joined Juan in crying in Joe's lap; overwhelmed with these new feelings coursing through his body, warm, wonderful feelings that he hoped would never end, as he asked "Are you sure?" With hope in his voice, Joe just nodded, and Adam buried his head back in Joe's shoulder again happily saying, barely loud enough for everyone to hear. "Thanks...Dad."

## Chapter 7

After Juan and Adam were cried out, Janet got everyone's attention by putting the cake she had been working on, on the table. It looked really good to the boys, double chocolate cake with chocolate frosting although it had been a miracle that it made it that far, considering the determined three boys who had been attempting to gain access to it.

Originally, it said "Congratulations Logan," but Janet changed it to say "Congratulations Boys" in light of recent events. Everyone was touched by this bringing some fresh tears to some, including two adults as they dug in, and soon all three boys were covered in chocolate.

Joe and Janet just had to laugh at the sight of two thirteen year olds and one nine year old eating cake and they both thought it was arguable as to whether there was more in them or on them. Janet thought Juan looked so adorable with a small blob of icing on the end of his nose, but she would never dare to say it to him as she held back her laughter.

Finally, the feeding frenzy was over, and Janet cleared the table while the boys went off to get cleaned up, which Janet thought, smiling, would take a while.

As they left, Janet called out, "Weren't you suppose to eat that cake, not wear it?" causing Joe to break out in laughter as the boys just turned and gave her 'the look' kids everywhere reserve for parents, causing her to join Joe.

Once everyone was back in the kitchen, Janet, looking up, noticed that Adam was sitting there with a serious look on his face, and had the stack of papers from Dr. Marcus in his hand, frowning at them. Finally he looked up and addressed everyone, "Okay everyone, this is serious. We need to talk." This got everyone's attention as he watched them walk over and seat themselves at the table. Once everyone was seated, he began. "I think it's time we talked about the other three boys. I know that Juan had no idea there were others, and neither did I, till I was told, so I got their files out, and figured we could all go over them." That got nods from everyone, as Adam started to go through them.

"Okay, first thing's first. I didn't tell anyone this, because I didn't know how everyone would take it." Adam said, carefully looking at Joe before shifting a worried glance at Juan. Joe got the hint, and said. "Juan, why don't you come over and sit with me, son?" Juan got a huge smile on his face at hearing the request and especially that word at the end, as he got up and went over sitting in Joe's lap. He looked ready to start purring as he cuddled into Joe, causing Adam to smile at the sight silently wishing

he could do the same at this point.

Taking a deep breath, Adam began "When I first heard about Juan and the others, I had thought they were like me." But he was interrupted by Juan asking, "What do you mean, like you?" Adam took a deep breath and looked Juan in the eye. "I was kidnapped when I was six, and taken to the lab where I escaped, right before we came and got you." Adam paused asking, "Okay?" of the younger boy, wanting to make sure that Juan was following what he had been saying. Juan nodded yes and Adam took another deep breath to brace himself, before continuing reluctantly. "As I said, I thought you and the rest were like me, kidnapped when you were younger, but according to Dr. Marcus's papers, all four of you were actually born in the laboratory."

Janet gasped in shock when she heard this, while Joe just pulled Juan in closer to him. Juan spoke up, clearly not understanding now. "What'd that mean Adam?" Adam looked over, at a loss, to Janet for help and she got up, walked over, and knelt before Juan. Saying as gently as she could, "what he means honey, is he had a mommy and daddy before he went to the lab, and you and the other three didn't. You were born in the laboratory." Juan still didn't really understand, as was evidenced by his looking around at everyone with a confused expression on his face, which soon cleared as he said with a child's simplicity. "So, I got me a daddy now, what's it matter if I had one before?" Janet had to turn away at that point so Juan wouldn't see her wiping away the tears which had come to her eyes at hearing those words. After a moment, Adam looked around and seeing that everyone else did understand, continued.

"Okay, the first on the list is Chang." Adam said, while passing around a picture of the boy. "As you can see, Chang is oriental in origin, and eleven years old. It says here, he can speak both Chinese and Japanese and is specially trained to be the Unit's Medical Officer. In addition to that, it seems that he was also trained in the use of the sword, as I was. Most of the comments, made by the doctors that work with him, say that he is learning the Bushido Code." As he looked around the table, Adam was met with mostly lost looks, so with a sigh he explained. "The Bushido code is the code of the ancient Samurai. It is a way of life and of living. I can get into more detail about it later, if you want, okay?" Everyone nodded their assent, and he continued.

"Next on the list is Joris," Adam said, again handing around a picture of another boy this time one of a nine year old. The boy in the picture was sporting short cut blond hair and had the most beautiful emerald green eyes sparkling up from the photograph. "Joris is the demolitions expert. It says here that he has been trained to make bombs out of everyday materials, and he even has knowledge of bomb disposal. He is fluent in both Russian and Czech of languages that he can speak. The highlights from the doctor's comments say that Joris is very fun loving, and he acts like a normal nine-year-old boy, but it also states that he may have some mental problems." This caused both Janet and Joe to raise their eyes from the picture to stare at Adam in question, and with some worry evident in their looks. "Ummm... it says here that he may have a form of pyromania. The doctors say that he almost has a need to set off explosives as frequently as he can." Adam replied and couldn't help but snicker a bit at that, which caused Joe, Logan, and Juan to join in, while Janet didn't look all that amused at the news.

Seeing this, Adam quickly went on, and handed out another picture, this one being of an eleven year old boy, who had short red hair, except for a small pony tail, and blue eyes. He was dressed in a flight suit, wearing sunglasses and standing next to a helicopter with his arm leaning against it. "This is William, and he is trained to be the Unit's pilot. It says here, he can fly just about anything. He also has extensive training in the electrical and mechanical systems of flying machines." Adam said, pausing and looking up at Janet before continuing with a smile on his face. "Ummm... it says here in the comments section, that William has a habit of trying to make his flight instructors sick." Janet didn't look particu-

larly amused by this revelation either, so Adam tried to keep from snickering, but the others weren't quite as in control which earned reproving glares from Janet before Logan added, "Come on mom, it'll be fun" which made everyone lose it.

A few moments later, Adam finished passing around the information on the boys and waited for everyone to get done reading it before speaking up. "Okay, we need a plan. Logan, I want you, as the newly installed Intel officer, to dig up everything you can find on this place; then we'll figure it out. Juan, I want you to go through all the guns we have, and make sure they're all ready to go, and pack all the clips you can." Juan nodded, gave Joe a hug, then slid off his lap to go to work, followed by Logan who also went off to do what he had to.

Meanwhile, Adam went, and dressed in something no one had seen him in before. When he came back down the steps, he was wearing a martial arts style gee, with a sword strapped to his side. Joe and Janet paused in their conversation as Adam walked outside.

About twenty minutes later, Joe's curiosity got the best of him. "I wonder what Adam's up to?" Janet just shrugged, and they both got up at the same time, and walked out to the front porch.

Standing about fifty feet in front of the porch, Joe and Janet saw Adam there with his sword out going through some sort of Kata. It was obvious to both of them that Adam was highly trained in the use of the sword, and what he was doing now looked almost like a dance. They both watched in fascination for about twenty minutes, before they went back inside. About forty five minutes later Adam came back in and, without a word, went up and soon they could hear the shower going.

They all sat down again about three hours later, to go over what Logan found out. "Okay, here's what we got." Logan started. "The facility is located on the outskirts of Salt Lake City Utah. Officially, it's a research facility studying the behavioral patterns of large cats. However, according to the message traffic I got off the military computers, thanks to the program that was installed, we know they moved the boys there three days ago. They are being held in a secure part of the facility, but the good news is, that they don't have much in the way of security there, other than rent a cops, so it should be no problem at all for us to get in there and out again." The entire time that Logan was speaking, Janet was just staring at him, wide eyed. She had never seen this part of Logan before. It was almost as if the same switch that Adam and Juan had, the one that let them be kids one second, then sound like adults the next, was installed in Logan.

She wasn't sure she liked that, it bothered her for some reason. Maybe just because she felt they shouldn't have to be adults at all. She didn't know quite why, but it still troubled her, as she watched her baby.

Adam took a look at the photos that Logan was passing around and was very happy at the detail that Logan went into. "Good job Logan." He told him and Logan absolutely beamed with pride at the praise. Adam was happy to make Logan happy, but quickly went back to work and proceeded to study the pictures without saying anything, for about five minutes, before he stood up and said.

"Okay, here's what I have in mind. Joe, I think it would be best if you played sniper again." Which caused Juan to look dejected, and Adam could see that he was about to comment when Adam looked at him, and said. "Juan, I need you with me, in case there's something that happens with the other three. I want you by my side when we meet them." Joe simply nodded, but upon hearing that Adam wanted Juan with him, Juan got a beautiful look of pride on his face that didn't go unnoticed by anyone there, nor did seeing it leave Adam unmoved. Swallowing a lump in his throat, he continued, "Janet, I want

you to drop us off about five blocks away, and wait. You'll have a radio, so you'll know when to come in and get us, alright?" Janet nodded, looking a bit more relieved at this news.

"Juan, you and I get to go in with the equipment bags. I want to bring in a side arm and a rifle for each boy, just in case. Also, Logan, you get to carry in your laptop, and I would suggest figuring out a way to cushion it on the way in. Any Questions?" Asked Adam, as he looked around to see if anyone had any, but all he received were nods, from those assembled, as he got up from the table saying. "Okay, we'll leave at 08:00 hours tomorrow. I suggest getting some rest as we'll need to drive straight through and it will take about twenty hours to get there." With that, everyone headed off in different directions.

Two days later, they were driving through Salt Lake City, after having driven by the Laboratory twice now, and getting the same impression, there wasn't much security present. That worried Adam somewhat, in case it was a trap, but he figured there was nothing he could do about it, other than hope things went well. It was getting close to 03:00, the time which they had decided upon for their hour of attack, and Janet dropped them off, a few blocks away from the facility. She gave a big hug to all her boys, Joe included, and then the guys took off to, hopefully, effect a rescue of their brothers.

Joe split off from them just before they got to the laboratory, so he could get into position, then the three boys waited in a dark alleyway for Joe to let them know when he was ready. Adam nervously went over his gear, again, and then he started on the other two, for the umpteenth time.

"Awww Jeez Adam, do ya need to go over me again?" Juan asked, with a bit of exasperation." Adam just shot him a look, then moved over to Logan.

"Get used to it Juan, I think Adam takes the big brother thing a bit seriously." Logan giggled, as Adam was now examining his gear. Adam gave him a glare, then a kiss, smiling softly.

"Hey, I can't let my boyfriend or my brother forget anything. That wouldn't be seemly." He tried, in his best British accent, which just got the boys laughing and it helped break the tension somewhat.

Joe decided to break the mood, for better or worse, "Alpha Leader, Eagle Eye in position, reporting clear playground."

"Received, Eagle Eye, the kids are heading into play, meet you at the sliding board later." Adam spoke softly into his mic, and looked over to Juan, just in time to see his eyes change to that funky yellow color. He now knew for certain that Juan was ready to go, so he looked over to Logan and got a nod in response.

Adam looked back to Juan, and gave him a nod; motioning him forward with his hand. Juan for his part just grinned, a grin that sent shivers up Adam's spine. That grin was one of pure, evil intent, as Juan took a few steps back, then sprinted across the street, jumped into the air, and sailed easily over the 8 foot fence.

Juan hit the ground rolling, came up in a crouch, and scanned the area, MP5SD at the ready. "Clear," was all Juan said, and Logan took off at a run following his younger brothers' route of seconds ago. Obviously, he wasn't able to jump over it, but he did scamper over the fence rather quickly, landing on the other side, pausing only a moment before moving to a little ways away from Juan and taking up the same position before calling "Clear." When Adam heard that, he slung his weapon on his back, took a deep breath, and ran to the fence. Jumping over it, he hit the ground on the other side at a

run, and was soon pressed against the side of the building; scanning for any movement. After several moments, when he was sure that he didn't see or hear anything, he motioned for the others to join him.

“Okay Juan, I want a zero body count on this one. Aim for legs and arms unless I tell you different.” Juan looked at Adam, in shock at the order which contradicted all of their training in the use of a firearm, but he knew that this wasn't the time or place for a discussion about it, so he reluctantly nodded in understanding.

Adam, meanwhile, had seen the look and in the end, the disapproval emanating from the younger boy, but as he knew it would, training and compliance with orders took precedence, and Juan acknowledged the order finally, albeit reluctantly.

He knew that breaking through the conditioning that had been drilled into all of them was something that must be done, and this was a first step in that direction. He didn't expect it was going to be easy and knew that there would be a discussion about it, soon after completing this mission, but for now Juan would obey like the good soldier that he was.

Logan, in the meantime, was setting up his laptop and hooking some sort of cable into the keypad by the door. After a few moments of furious typing, he sighed contentedly, and with a smile, looked back to Adam and told him. “We're in.”

Adam nodded, “Eagle Eye, command, the bell's rung, Recess is over” which got a single burst of static in reply as Joe pressed his transmit button once, in acknowledgment.

Adam nodded to Logan who pressed a combination of numbers on the keypad, and with that the doors slid open. Juan was the first one through the door, and they heard a bit of scuffling, but by the time Adam and Logan got through the door, they found that Juan had a security guard on the ground unconscious.

They moved cautiously but rapidly forward through the facility, and only met five other guards that either Juan or Adam took down. Logan meanwhile was fascinated by all this. Sure he'd been trained to do the same thing, but being trained to do something and actually doing it were two vastly different things. Now he was seeing that training put into practical use and he was enthralled by it.

They finally made it to the door that held the secure lab, and Logan went to work. Almost immediately after he hooked up to the keypad Adam heard him quietly swear and moved over to him asking. “What's wrong?” Logan looked up briefly, then back down. “This is a bit harder then I expected. It'll take me at least 2 minutes to break it.” Adam just nodded, and motioned to Juan to take cover at the door and keep watch.

After an agonizingly slow two and a half minutes the door silently popped open as Logan breathed a sigh of relief and began putting his gear away. While Logan was doing that, Adam began an entry, being first through the door to scout the way ahead, before motioning the others silently to join him upon finding the hallway empty.

Unbeknownst to Adam, who was keeping watch, and Logan who was working to gain them entry; Juan, during those minutes, had decided to try something. He concentrated his thoughts on the face of Joris that he had seen in the pictures he had been shown earlier. *'Joris, are you there?'* He sent. A few seconds later he heard in his head. *'What? Who's there?'* Juan beamed with pride at his accomplish-

ment and thought. *'It's your brother Juan; we're here to get you out.'* There was silence from Joris for a few moments, but then he said, *'my brother? Does that mean you're like the rest of us? How many are there? What's going on?'* all in a flurry of excited questioning before Juan could stop him, until finally Joris wound down enough for Juan to send.

*'Jory, calm down, Adam and I are out here with a friend. Yes, we're like you three, Adam's the leader, and I'm the sniper/heavy gunner. We came to get you out, so get ready, I gotta go, we'll be there soon so hold on.'*

To their surprise, they found that there was no security in here, and soon they were at a door marked "Secure Lab, Authorized Personnel only." Logan started to get out his lap top again, when Adam put a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. Logan looked up at him questioningly as Adam shook his head and motioned him to stand clear.

"Juan give me a hand here. On three, kick with everything you got, okay?" Adam said. Juan just looked up at him with those weird eyes of his, and a quirky grin, as they both got into place, and Adam counted to three before both boys kicked at the same time, causing the door to splinter and break inwards with a loud crash.

They all charged into the room, ready for whatever might confront them inside, but they soon came to a halt as they stared in shock at what faced them. They were in a large holding area, with cages lining the walls. In most of the cages various types of large cats resided, most, but not all. To the boys' horror in three of the smaller ones, sat Adam and Juan's Brothers, caged like the animals were.

All three of them were bound with their hands tied behind their backs, and their feet shackled together. The animals had greater freedom within their captivity the boys thought as Juan gave an enraged, almost feral growl, and ran over to the cage holding Joris. The little nine year old in the cage looked up at Juan, with bright green eyes that were almost hidden by his soft blond hair, but which now contained hope warring with despair. A soft, "Juan?" Came whimpering from Joris's lips, as Juan ran up to him, stopping outside the cage and then looking at the small form that was trapped within.

Juan had paused for a moment upon reaching the cage to look at the occupant within, but at the soft inquiry from the boy, Juan wasted no more time as he reached out and took hold of the cage door, ripping it off in one swift motion, and then reached and grabbed Joris helping him to stand in freedom.

Although the children had no way of knowing it, the Military had decided on one last failsafe warning system, as the children were about to discover; as suddenly, an alarm began going off inside the building.

Adam swore as Joe came over the radio with. "Command, Eagle Eye, You've been busted, I would suggest playing hooky before the Principal arrives."

Adam responded over the radio, after he got William and Chang out of their cages, "Received, Eagle Eye, advise if situation changes."

"Acknowledged." was all that was heard, by way of reply as Adam bent down to see if he could get the bindings off of the other boys. Finally, he decided the only way to get it done was to shoot them off, so he took out his pistol and shot the chains that held the boys' legs together. Then stood up, and was about to shoot off the chains on the boys hands when Logan spoke up.

“Ummmm... Adam, would these help?” Adam looked up, just as Logan tossed him a set of keys. They all chuckled at Adam's reddening face, as Adam proceeded to use the keys to unlock the chains on the other three boys.

“Okay, introductions quickly, and then we gotta get the hell out of here. I'm Adam; the little guy over there is Juan. Both of us are like you guys, and after they decided to terminate me, I got the fuck out, and after finding out about you, I came to get you guys.” William looked on with his bright blue eyes, and said to Adam. “I'm Will, and I agree, let's get the fuck outta here, but, who's that?” He asked, pointing to Logan.”

That's Logan, he's a friend, I'll explain more later.” Will nodded his acceptance to that and was about to speak again when Joe came over the radio.

“Command, we got problems. Three Black Hawk Helicopters inbound, two Troop Transports, and a Gun Ship. Recommend you get the fuck out, NOW!” Adam swore and said.

“Copy, we got the rest, and are moving your way.”

William looked over to Adam saying quickly. “Sir, if I may?” Adam nodded. “I couldn't help but overhear. Perhaps we can get away in a different manner. When they brought me here, they had me fly my Black Hawk over. It's sitting in the hanger on the east end of the facility.”

Adam grinned, “Sounds like a plan to me, and I got another idea too. Guys, start opening these cages, and letting the cats out. That should cause one hell of a disturbance.”

The other boys grinned, and started to open the cages, letting the cats out. They all ran out the door, except for one. He ran to a door at the other end of the room, and started to scratch at it. The Jaguar then looked back over its shoulder and stared at Adam. Their eyes locked, and Adam swore the cat was asking for help.

He swore under his breath, and started to run for the door. “Come on, this way.” As the others quickly fell into step with him, just as Adam crashed through the door. The cat quickly ran ahead of them, and went to another door. Adam crashed through that one as well, and was greeted with another room, although smaller. This one only had one cage in it, bigger than the others, and that held only one occupant, a small boy who looked to be about seven years old. Once Adam was through, the Jag came in after him and ran to the cage.

“Fluffy!” Came the excited cry from the little boy, when he saw the giant cat run up to him. The other boys just stood in shock at what they found and watched as the little kid ran over to the giant cat and started to pet him through the bars.

He looked up at them after a second or two, “Adam? Fluffy here says you can get me outta re. Would ya please?” The little guy begged, while petting the cat, and looking at Adam with pleading eyes.

Adam stood there so confused by this turn of events, he looked at the cat named Fluffy, and the giant cat was looking back at him. Their eyes locked for a second, and Adam almost thought he heard the cat say *'Fluffy, that is so undignified'*. Adam shook his head to clear it, and walked over to the ca-

ge. He tried to pry the door open without much success but soon Chang came over to help, and between the 2 of them, they opened the door enough for the little tyke to slip out.

He then ran over and gave the cat a huge hug. "Thanks Fluffy, I knew you'd save me.

Logan looked on in utter amazement for a moment, but then shook his head saying. "Adam, we gotta get outta here... like... now."

Adam nodded, and they took off again. 'Seven boys and one Giant Fucking Cat.

Joe's gonna fuckin love this' was all he could think.

They finally made it to the hanger, and Adam was impressed by what he saw. There in the middle of a large hanger, was a Black Hawk helicopter. It was obvious that this one was not a Gun Ship, but it did have two 50 cal. machine guns mounted on the doors. William ran over to it, and pulled out a big box. "Short sit rep for you guys, this is a modified UH 60L Black Hawk. As you can see, it's painted flat black, with a radar absorbing coating on the outside. It's modified to hold an Apache style 30 mm "Rail" Gun. Loaded in those containers on the bird, are the detachable wings, which can hold two canisters of hell fire, anti-armor missiles, eight on each side. Unfortunately, it would take too long to load those right now. Those wings can also be used to hold external fuel tanks, which will increase the range, to roughly a thousand miles." William said, as he then started shouting out orders to the others while shrugging into his flight suit. "Adam, help me get the turret loaded. Juan, in those cases is the ammo for the 50 cal's, load them up. They're belt fed, so teach someone how to reload 'em." Once they had everything loaded, they realized that they could now clearly hear the three helicopters outside and they were close; this was confirmed as. Joe came over the radio telling them, "Two teams fast roping down, gun ship is providing cover. There are fourteen on the ground, repeat, fourteen heavily armed troops on the ground. Where the hell are you guys?"

Adam keyed his mic, "Eagle Eye, this is command, new ex filtration plan. We'll be flying the friendly skies from the east side and when we come out, we'll cover you, as you haul ass for the bird."

"Understood just don't count on the skies being very friendly tonight," was all Joe said, as the boys readied the helicopter for take off.

Once everything was loaded, William got in the pilot's seat, and started to strap in. "You guys better buckle up back there, this is gonna be a bumpy flight." he yelled to the back.

Adam moved over to the side where the door controls were, while shouting orders. "Juan and Chang, hook up to the 50's, Jory and Logan will be feeding for you guys. Logan, get the kid strapped in, and figure out a way to get the cat secure."

Logan looked from Adam to the cat, who was disconcertingly looking right back at him as if he understood what had been said, when Adam noticed the incredulous look on his face and snapped "Just do it," and Logan could have sworn that the cat was smiling at him.

After that, conversation was not possible, as the rotors on the Black hawk came to life. With a nod from William, Adam pushed the button to open the hanger doors, and then he ran back to the black hawk. He took up position next to Juan, with his MP5, to help target the soldiers. "Remember, don't kill if you don't need to, **understand?**" Everyone gave a nod that they did.



William gave the bird some juice, and was soon a few inches off the ground, and moving out of the hanger. As soon as they cleared the hanger, Chang and Juan opened up with the 50's, making sure to go easy on the ammo so as not to melt the barrels down. There was one Black Hawk that had already landed on the pad, and another that was about to touch down. The third one; the Gun Ship, was circling over head, providing cover for the others. Juan gave a few short bursts at the one in the air, and it quickly moved away. He knew that they would never fire at a bird that was hovering just a few feet above the ground with friendlies all around.

William had opened up with the turret, and all sound was drowned out by the sound of the Gatling Gun firing. William was targeting the Black hawk that was on the ground, which the military troops were using for cover. Soon, the black hawk that was on the ground exploded in a huge fireball and William stopped firing the turret.

As soon as anyone could hear anything again, Jory whined. "Dammit Will, I wanted to blow it up." William simply chuckled and pivoted the helicopter.

Adam soon shouted, "Cover him!" And was firing off his MP5 as Joe came running across the field towards them, shooting and ducking fire as he went. Juan was keeping the 50 cal. going as much as he could without risking the barrel, and Logan was having a hard time keeping up with him. William moved the helicopter down to pick up Joe, and used the helicopter to cover Joe as much as possible.

Adam had just taken aim, and fired, when he heard Juan scream, "DADDY!!!!" Adam looked over and felt his heart seize in his chest, as he saw Joe fall and then Juan opened up fully with the 50 cal machine gun, while tears streamed down both their cheeks, and Adam took aim once again.

## Chapter 8

Adam stared in disbelief; he watched, in slow motion, as Joe went down, and went down hard, tumbling several feet before lying there, unmoving.

"Cover me!" Adam shouted, and was off like a shot. He threw the MP5 over his shoulder, where it landed on his back due to the strap he had attached to it. In a situation such as this, he still needed to have access to his weapon, but the strap allowed it to not get in his way, while maneuvering.

William heard Adam's shout, and turned to see what was going on; muttering a heartfelt "Shit!" as he pivoted the Black hawk, just enough so that he could open fire with the turret. William worked on keeping everyone on the left of Joe pinned down, leaving the right side to the other boys. Soon, nothing could be heard but the scream of the turret firing, as he cooked off nearly a thousand rounds in continuous firing. The impact of those rounds chewed up everything it touched in its wake.

In the meantime, Juan was laying down covering fire to Joe's right, in an attempt to keep those soldiers there pinned down, to give Adam time to get to Joe. It was after about the two hundredth round being fired from Juan's .50 cal. that disaster struck, the Damned thing jammed.

"FUCK!!!" Juan screamed, as he let go of the .50 cal, picking up his MP5 to be joined by Logan. Soon they were both firing, in an attempt to lay down enough cover fire so that Adam could reach Joe to rescue him.

Adam finally had reached Joe and, grabbing him by his shoulder harness, began to pull him towards the helicopter, not having the time to assess his injuries at this point. He had brought the MP5 back around and with his other hand he was aiming it at the enemy, firing with precision, not caring one bit about his previous order not to kill, but only to wound. They had shot Joe, and they could all go straight to hell, for all he cared at this moment. As he reached the helicopter, he gave Joe's body to those waiting, turning and concentrating his fire on the center, while Juan covered the right and William the left. That left Logan who had dropped his weapon, and was pulling Joe into the bird, trying to get him to safety.

As soon as everyone was loaded, William started yelling back to them. "Close those damned doors; we gotta get the fuck outta here." The boys quickly scrambled to obey, and once they had them closed, William wasted no time in accelerating while climbing away from there at the same time.

Adam quickly gave a look around to make sure everyone was strapped in, only now noticing, with a worried look, that Chang was tending to his father, but he couldn't tell how bad it was. He didn't have time to deal with it right now and pushed his terror, at losing what he had just gained from his mind as he climbed up into the co-pilots seat, alongside William. He took a quick look around to see what the situation was, and noticed that the remaining two Black Hawk helicopters were in hot pursuit. William was still keeping low to the ground, but it was obvious that they were in a bit of trouble.

"Okay boss, your call, City, or mountains?" William said, as he stole a glance over at Adam. Adam shot him a look that said he didn't understand, so William explained "here's the score then... we hit the city, they won't shoot at us. We go into the mountains, they get clear fire, but we might be able to loose them. Your call?"

Adam thought about it for a second, and said "Mountains, I don't want to risk the attention of going through the city."

William nodded, and said "Well, we gotta go over the city, somewhat, but it won't be bad." as he pushed the throttle all the way forward, and banked the helicopter into a new direction, and soon they were flying low and fast right towards the mountains. For the next few minutes, William dived, ducked, weaved, and generally did everything he could, to not only lose the two helicopters following him, but to see which ones of his brothers, had strong stomachs. He took a second, when he finally lost the other helicopters, to see how everyone else was taking the little stunt show.

Adam, for his part, was fine, Jory and Juan were grinning like the little kids they were. Chang, the kid with the cat, and Joe looked a little green. Finally, when he was sure they were okay, William spoke up. "Okay, it looks like we lost 'em, so now where do we go?"

Adam asked, "Are we really clear of them?" to which William responded, "Oh yeah, they can't keep up with me," with a big shit eating grin on his face.

Adam breathed a sigh of relief, which was quickly replaced with one of shock and concern, as he heard Joe speak up, from the back.

Before Joe could say whatever it was that he wanted to, Adam was up and out of the co-pilots seat, crying, "DADDY!!" as he launched himself back to his father and was soon followed by Juan and Logan.

As all three came crashing down alongside Joe, he sought to quickly reassure them.

"Easy guys, it's just a small wound in my leg."

"You sure you're okay?" Juan asked suspiciously, his voice mixed with worry and fear, which was echoed by his brothers asking, "Yeah are ya sure?"

"Jeez guys, it's just a scratch." Chang said disgustedly, as all three boys turned and glared at him.

"Hey, he's right now, I'm okay, really I am." Joe said, which brought the boys' attention back to him now, and with that pronouncement, he found three boys on top of him crying and hugging him for all they were worth, as he felt tears running down his cheeks at realizing how much they did care about him.

"Hey, guys, I hate to break this up and all, but we can't fly around up here all night ya know." William called back.

Joe spoke up at that point; "Give me a sec, I know a place. Umm... start heading north; I'll let you know in a sec."

Joe grabbed his cell phone out of his pocket, and dialed a number. No one could hear what he was saying over the sound of the helicopter, but after a few minutes on the phone, he shut it and looked up at Adam.

"Okay Adam, the place I know of is an old abandoned gold mine. I actually own it, but I've never been there before. From what little I do know of it, there should be enough room to hide this thing, in one of the caves, and there are still some buildings there too. I'm not sure what shape they are in, but I guess we'll find out when we get there. I just spoke to Janet, and she'll meet us there.

Adam nodded, and got the directions on how to get there. After he relayed them to Will, he spun around in his seat, and looked to the strange boy that was holding onto that monster of a cat. He had to just look at them for a minute, it just looked so wrong. Here you had a young kid, maybe seven or eight years old, quietly talking to, and petting this mammoth jaguar, which incidentally seemed to be named Fluffy. Fluffy simply did not fit what this cat looked like. Adam had never seen a jaguar up close, but he had studied them, like he had most large prey animals. From what he knew, Jaguars were large cats, but not this large. "Fluffy" had to weigh in at somewhere between three hundred fifty, and four hundred pounds. He was easily seven foot long, without the tail. Sitting there on the deck of the helicopter, you couldn't see the kid behind him. Adam locked eyes with the cat, and he just couldn't shake the feeling that the cat was a lot smarter than he should be.

Adam finally just shook his head to stop staring at the cat, and looked behind him at the boy. "Hey there little guy, I know you're probably scared, but everything's gonna be okay now."

The kid looked back at Adam and said, almost in a shout, so he could be heard over the sound of the engines. "I'm not scared; Fluffy said you guys are okay, and anyways, I got Fluffy to protect me." As he leaned forward and hugged the big cat. Adam watched in disbelief, as Fluffy actually started to purr. Of course, a purr from that monster was almost as deep of a rumble as the engine of the helicopter.

"Okay," Adam, shaking his head, began, still totally confused about the kid and his cat. "What's your name then, Tarzan?" The boy just gave him a confused look.

"My name's not Tarzan, silly, my name's Tommy. And I ain't no little guy, I'm eight years old." Tommy stated in such a way that only an indignant child could pull off.

Adam chuckled at that, and then went around introducing everyone else. "Well, Tommy, as you know, I'm Adam, I'm thirteen, and the commander of The U.N.I.T. Sitting next to you, with the long blond hair, is Logan, he's also thirteen. Logan is the Unit's Intelligence officer."

This got a few looks from the other boys, who just met him, but Adam quickly filled them in on Logan through the telepathic link. "The little guy next to you on the other side is Juan, he's nine. He's the Unit's Sniper, and heavy gunner, which means he gets to play with all the big toys." Juan grinned a mile wide at that, and patted the M60 that was next to him.

"Across from you is Joris, or Jory, as he likes to be called. He's also nine years old." Adam continued, indicating the slightly large kid sitting next to the door. Jory smiled widely, which just showed off his platinum blond hair and green eyes even more. "Jory is our resident "Blow-Shit-Up" artist. In other words, he's the guy that likes to play with bombs."

"Chang is the eleven year old sitting next to Jory. He's the doctor of our group. He's also, if I have my information right, trained as a full Samurai." Chang looked over at Tommy, and half bowed.

"The old guy next to me, who happens to be bleeding all over the place," Adam couldn't help but chuckle which got him an elbow in the side from Joe that made everyone else laugh too. "Okay, let me rephrase that, the old MEAN guy next to me, is Joe. He's kinda like the father of our group."

Joe decided to save what little dignity he had left, by cutting in. "First off, I'm not old. Second, don't listen to anything Adam says, I think the doctors forgot to put his brain back in, at some point." This got everyone to laugh, while Adam shoved Joe a bit, for that comment.

With a put upon sigh, Adam looked back over to Tommy, who had a smile on his face, and was giggling a bit at the madness around him. "Lastly, but certainly in no way least, we have Will. He's the guy that's flying this hunk of steal. As you probably guessed, he's the pilot, but he's also the electronics expert. He's eleven too."

William waved over his shoulder back to Tommy and grinned, as he shouted back. "Hey Tommy, it's cool to meet you. Can you do me a favor and make sure Fluffy there doesn't get hungry, and decide that I look tasty."

Tommy laughed out loud at that, and shouted back up to William.

"Don't worry, Will. Fluffy don't eat no one I don't tell him to. Besides, he says you'd probably taste really bad."

At the hurt look on Will's face, Tommy was almost falling over with the fit of giggles which had overtaken his body.

"Excuse me. I think I taste rather good, thank you." Will said, as he pretended to take a bite of his arm. Of course, this made everyone crack up, along with Tommy.

Joe couldn't help but laugh, himself, at the antics going on. "You know it's kinda hard to believe that you guys are as deadly as you are, when you act like this."

Adam just grinned and was about to make some type of smart assed remark, but Joe continued, not giving him time. "By the way, what's this U.N.I.T thing? I didn't know they had an actual name for you."

"They didn't, but you can thank Juan for coming up with it. I think it sounds pretty cool. It stands for Universal Next-Generation Infiltration Team." Adam said proudly. Joe was about to comment, when William spoke up.

"Okay guys, I think we're getting close."

Everyone started looking out the windows to see what was out there.

What they saw was a large Box style canyon, with huge shear cliffs on three sides. The fourth side was comprised of a rather small and narrow entrance.

Adam noticed right away that the only way for anyone to get into this canyon was either by air, or by that small opening.

He immediately liked what he saw.

"Okay Will, why don't you circle the canyon once, I wanna see what the rest of this looks like, although I like what I see so far."

William did as instructed, and the more Adam saw, the better he liked it.

Inside the canyon, there were four slightly run down buildings, one of which was obviously a bunkhouse for the workers. While two of the others appeared to be supply buildings, and the last one looked like a nice sized office building.

There was also an entrance to a rather large sized cave, and it was easily big enough to hide the helicopter in. Adam told Will to set the chopper down near the entrance to the cave, and Will proceeded to bring it in for a nice soft landing before he started the shutdown sequence.

It was as they were disembarking from the helicopter that Fluffy suddenly let out a low rumble.

Adam immediately started to look around, and what he saw shocked him.

Coming out of one of the buildings were five people, two of them were older, and dressed in military fatigues, probably around their mid fifties, but the other three, however, were in their late teens at the most. The youngest, looked like he couldn't be more than fourteen and Adam could also see that they were all armed.

The older guys were carrying Vietnam era rifles, while the younger guys were holding shotguns, or hunting rifles. Looking about them, Adam also noticed that everyone in his group had the tell tale little red dots on them that indicated laser targeting sights.

This was not at all what he had expected to find here.

The members of the Unit reacted instantly.

Juan grabbed the .50 cal off the chopper, and made himself ready to open up with it.

If the situation were different, Adam might have laughed at what he saw before him. There was little Juan, holding this huge machine gun. It was obvious why he had his foot planted tight up to the skid of the helicopter, if he had to open up with that thing, he would get pushed back if he wasn't planted against something. Being what it was though, Adam didn't.

William almost automatically, was back in the cockpit, and was powering up the turret. The rest of the boys had grabbed their respective weapons, and were trying to set up a defensive posture.

“HOLD IT RIGHT THERE. PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPONS, AND NO ONE WILL GET HURT.”  
Came the shouted command from one of the older guys.

The five of them had stopped walking, and were pointing their weapons at the kids.

Adam didn't have much time to calm this situation down.

He started to look around to see what could be done.

What he found, surprised the hell out of him. He kept looking around to see if he could confirm what he saw, as one of the men shouted out. “THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING. PUT DOWN YOUR GUNS, AND PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR.”

Joe was watching everything nervously, trying to figure a way out of this, but not seeing one when, he noticed Adam looking around, then the other four boys, not including Logan, swung their heads to Adam, before starting to look around themselves. Joe figured Adam was talking with them telepathically, and hoped that he was coming up with a plan, but he was not at all ready for what happened next.

Joe watched in shock and amazement, as Juan, Adam, Chang, and Joris lowered their weapons. He could hear the turret powering down, so he knew that Will was doing the same, on his end. The biggest surprise though happened next, Juan started to snicker a bit, followed by Joris, and soon Adam was joining them in full-blown laughter. William, not to be outdone stumbled out of the helicopter almost falling over because he was laughing so hard.

Joe saw that everyone had stopped, and were staring at the boys in shock as they were lost in uncontrollable laughter.

Finally, Adam started to get himself together, and looked back over to the older guys. “Awwww... that's great.” he laughed a bit more. “I gotta remember that one.”

And with that, all five of them lost it again.

“WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU LAUGHING AT, KID?!?!” The old guy shouted as he moved a bit closer. Obviously, he was not pleased at what was going on, and watching the boys laugh hysterically was just pissing him off that much more.

Adam finally regained his composure again, stood up straight, and looked at the old guy. “You know, I gotta give you credit. If someone didn't know better, you could have pulled it off.”

This really upset the guy, and for the first time, he lowered his rifle off his shoulder and pointed it at Adam. “What are you talking about kid?”

Adam had fully regained his composure by this point, and set his MP5 on the ground. He then motioned for Joe to do the same. When Joe's weapon was on the ground, Adam started walking towards the older guys, with Joe following, hoping he could finally figure out what was going on.

“First off sir, my name is Captain Adam Casey, Commander of this Unit.” Adam started, as he saluted one of the older guys. The two guys looked at each other as Adam held the salute. Finally, one of them returned the salute, and dropped it; Adam dropped his salute as soon as the older guy dropped his.

The older guy looked Adam up and down before he said. “I'm Retired Major Jackson Bryce, Commander of this camp. Please state your business here.”

Adam nodded, and indicated Joe, as he made his introduction. “With me is Retired Capt Joseph Casey, of the Army Rangers. According to our information, he is the rightful owner of this land.” Adam saw the guy turn to look at Joe, with a bit of a worry in his eyes. “However, Major, I must commend you on your tactics. I never would have thought about it.”

By now, Joe was thoroughly confused and decided he was gonna get answers. “Adam, what are you talking about?”

Adam looked at Joe and grinned. “Okay Joe, I know your eyes aren't good enough to see what I did, so I'll just tell you. First off, the only weapons we can see, are the ones these five are carrying. Now, look real close and tell me what's wrong with them.”

Joe looked from Adam to the Major, who, for his part, started to blush a bit, and that just made Joe even more curious. He started to look intently at the rifles they were carrying, when it finally dawned on him.

Adam giggled, as realization dawned on Joe's face. “Good, you see it too. First off, the two M-16's have very rusted barrels. I doubt they've been fired since Vietnam. Second, you have two hunting rifles, and a pump 12 gauge shotgun. Neither of the rifles are loaded, you can tell that, by the ejection chamber being open. Now, the shotgun is another story. You can't really tell if it's loaded or not.” Adam looked over at the youngest kid there, holding the shotgun. “Now, I don't mean any offense, but, if you're gonna use a shot gun, it's best to only pump it once. The first time, I thought you were chambering a round, but when you did it the second time, and a shell didn't pop out, I knew it wasn't loaded either.

Joe was just about dumbfounded at what Adam was saying. It was easy to tell from the looks of everyone else, that they were equally impressed. “However,” Adam continued, “the kicker of it all. And the most impressive part, were the laser sights. To someone who doesn't have our senses, they would

have appeared just like the ones that are used on weapons. But, to someone who knows what to look for, I could tell that they were only the lasers from the cheap, supermarket brand, laser pointers.” Adam giggled again, as he saw everyone around him with their jaws on the ground.

“Now, Major, we’re here to hide out for a bit, and I’m guessing your hiding from something, as well. So why don’t we go somewhere, sit down, and talk about this?” The Major looked around, and then over to the younger guys with them. Danny, Kane, Kelly, why don’t you go introduce yourselves to the new kids, and show them around.” They nodded, handed their rifles to the older guys, and went off to where the rest of the Unit was hanging out. Once that happened, Joe was astonished to see kids, of all ages and sizes, come out from behind things, and head over to the group. There had to be twenty or thirty kids here.

The major turned around, and started to head back to the main office building, with the other older guy in tow. Joe and Adam quickly followed, and soon all of them were inside.

Logan watched, as the three boys broke off from the older guys, and started to walk over to them. The two older guys, Adam, and Joe were quickly walking into one of the buildings, when Juan whispered over to him.

“Adam says he and Joe are gonna talk to the Major and his friend. Adam also says that we should follow your lead here, so as not to give away too much info.” Logan nodded, and stepped forward to meet the kids walking towards them.

Logan took a second while they were walking up to him to study the three boys. He was able to overhear their names, and he had to admit to a lot of curiosity as to why they were here. Danny, looked to be about sixteen, with brown hair, brown eyes, and rather rough features. He definitely looks like he’s been in a few fights in his life. Kane was a bit younger, with jet-black hair, dazzling blue eyes, and rather soft features. Kelly was the youngest of the three, at maybe thirteen or fourteen, and it was very clear that Kelly and Kane were brothers.

“Hey guys.” Logan started, not really knowing what to say. Danny didn’t look too happy to be there, but both Kane and Kelly had grins plastered on their faces.

“Hey there, I’m Kelly; this is my brother Kane, and our friend Danny. So you guys gonna hang out here for a bit?” Kelly was definitely way too happy Logan thought.

“Yeah, I guess. But I gotta ask, what are you guys doing here?” Logan asked while trying to figure out what was going on.

“Well, tell you what, I’ll tell you my story, if you tell me yours,” Kelly laughed. “I mean, it’s gotta be a good one, your what, twelve, thirteen, and your standing there in a military uniform, holding a gun, and flew in on a helicopter. That’s a story I gotta know.”

Logan couldn’t help but laugh at the kid’s enthusiasm. “Okay, I can live with that. Lead the way, and I’ll introduce you to everyone.” With that, they all went off to look around the place.

Logan looked around to the others trying to gauge their reactions, and got nods from the other boys. “Well, I guess I’ll start. My name’s Logan and I’m thirteen. There’s Juan and Jory, they’re both nine. And then there’s Chang and Will. They’re both eleven.



While they were walking around the camp, he continued saying, “We landed here because of Joe owning the place, and we were in a bad salutation and were getting away from the authorities.”

“Does that mean we have to leave here?” Kelly said, with the look of fear and hopelessness in his eyes.

“I don't think so, but we need to wait and see what Adam, Joe and the rest of the adults figure out.” Logan told them, as they continued walking around the camp heading into the cave.

“Okay, now it's your turn. I don't mean to be rude, but it seems funny, that there would be a lot of kids hanging out in an old abandoned gold mine.

Kelly took a deep breath, “well, it's sort of a long story. I can't tell you anyone else's story, just my own.” Logan nodded, and the rest stood around to listen. Their voices seemed to echo off the walls of the cavern that they just walked into.

Logan was shocked to see that there were close to twenty kids in here. Some older, some very young. Boys and girls, of almost every imaginable variety. There was even one boy of about twelve, in a wheelchair. Logan was brought back by Kelly talking, and in here, it would be easy for everyone to listen in. Logan was sure then, that everyone else knew Kelly's story here. And from the looks he got from some of them, it was probably a pretty bad one.

“Kane and I grew up in a little town somewhat south and west of Salt Lake City.” He looked briefly over to Kane, who just gave him a nod, and walked off with Danny. “Danny doesn't really like hearing the stories, again.” Kelly said in way of explanation. “Anyways, our parents were a part of a fundamentalist Mormon church. I'm not sure what you know of the Mormons, but they used to practice polygamy.” He stopped to look at us to see if we knew what that meant, and was surprised to see all of us nodding understanding. Logan was pretty sure he knew where this was going, but wanted to let Kelly get through it.

“Well, the mainstream Mormon church abandoned polygamy a long time ago. Some of them however, didn't like the idea, and split off from the main church. The problem then becomes that there needs to be more girls than boys. If each man gets to have many wives, then there has to be fewer guys.” Kelly again looked around to make sure everyone was with him so far, and continued with a sigh, when he saw that they all still were.

“Unfortunately for us, the women were still giving birth to boys. So they had to figure out how to get rid of the boys so that they could save the girls for themselves.” Kelly sighed again, and looked down at the floor. “Some of the boys were thrown out on the streets for simple things like watching TV, or reading a book they weren't supposed to. Others weren't so lucky. Kane and I found out that they were actually killing some of the boys, and we were next. We found out, and tried to leave. They caught us on the way out, and there was a fight. We escaped, but not before, hurting one of the Deacons real bad. Since then, they've been hunting for us.”

Kelly looked back up and into Logan's eyes. He saw nothing but caring and sympathy there. He took a deep breath to calm his nerves, and then laughed a bit, to relieve the tension. “But anyways, we can talk all about that later on, I'm supposed to be leading you around, and introducing you to people.”

With that, Kelly led them off to where everyone else was gathered, up against the back wall. Kelly was about to say something else when Juan stopped them. “Hey, you hear that?”

Logan and Kelly both looked at each other, not hearing anything, but William spoke up almost right away. "Hmmm. Sounds to me like it's a Truck. Probably a Ford, and I would guess large."

Logan was surprised by that, but he knew that those boys had better senses than he did. "That's probably my mom." He said. He then took off at a run to meet his mom, and let her know what was going on.

\*\*\*Meanwhile in another part of the camp\*\*\*

Major Bryce led the way into the main office building of the camp. They kept their silence as they walked through the building. Adam was noticing every little detail throughout the place. The entire place was run down, but well cared for. Many of the old offices were turned into storage spaces, packed floor to ceiling. Adam was sure that this place could hold a lot more than the twenty or so people he saw outside. Finally, they were lead into a large conference room.

The major sat down in a seat and motioned for the rest to have a seat. "Well, gentleman, to be totally honest, I don't really have much use for formality. So let's do this. In here, we can drop rank. Please, just call me Jack. And if I remember correctly, your Adam and Joe?"

Joe nodded, while leaning forward; he spoke to the other two. "Well, if we're gonna put all our cards on the table, I guess you should know a few things. First off, I know you probably think that I'm the one in charge here. Well, I'm not. Adam is the leader of the U.N.I.T, and I just help out.

Jack's eyebrows kinda arched at that, and he turned his full attention to Adam. Adam took a deep breath to calm his nerves. This really would be the first time he had spoken to an adult as the commander. He was trying to figure out exactly what to say and what not to. Jack must have figured out what was wrong, and decided to break the ice a little bit.

"Adam, before you begin, I would like to introduce you to David Hathaway. Former Sergeant First class, of the US Army. He is also second in command of this compound."

Dave reached over, and not really understanding what's going on, but deciding to play along, offered his hand to Adam, first. He then offered it to Joe, "Call me Dave," he said, laughing a bit, trying to lighten things even more. "Only my mother and Jack call me David."

Once Dave sat back down, Adam leaned forward. "Okay, I guess I should just lay it all out for you guys. First off, the U.N.I.T. stands for the Universal Next-Generation Infiltration Team. We were created by the United States Military to be able to go anywhere in the world, and operate in almost any conceivable situation. We were genetically engineered to be a fully operational Special Forces Unit, at a very young age." Adam continued to explain everything to Jack and Dave, while they tried valiantly to keep their jaws off the table.

Adam really wasn't going to tell them everything, but after the report he got from Juan and William, he figured honesty would work best here. Adam had barely finished with his explanation, when he heard the unmistakable sound of Joe's big pick up truck with its trailer pulling up on the road outside. He got up from his seat, and moved to the door saying "Doctor Janet Hayes is here, and she's one of us." Dave and Jack followed Adam and Joe, as they went out the door.

## Chapter 9

Adam and Joe reached the helicopter at the same time that the boys did, and at the same time that Janet drove up the drive, bringing the truck to a stop near them. Adam looked around and saw, what must have been the rest of the kids, about thirty five in all, had come out to join them. He noticed that most of them stood a good ways back, and that most of them were staring at Fluffy and not Janet. That was certainly something which he could understand. There was Tommy, all of eight years old, about four foot four inches tall, and weighing maybe sixty five pounds soaking wet, and sitting next to him like an obedient dog was Fluffy. Fluffy was actually taller than Tommy, by quite a bit, with the top of Tommy's head barely coming up to the cat's shoulders. It was just a very weird sight.

Janet must have thought so too, when she got out of the truck, as she couldn't help but stare at Tommy and Fluffy. After a minute of staring, she shook her head and looked around at the other kids that were there, then finally at Adam and Logan, with the other boys from the Unit. She just shook her head again, then looked at Joe. "What the hell, Joe, did you suddenly come down with "Add a Kid Disease?"

That easily broke the tension, and everyone laughed. The next twenty minutes was spent introducing everyone that was there, and Adam was more glad than ever that he had a photographic memory which allowed him to remember everyone's name.

"Why don't you guys grab your gear, and I'll show you where you can stow it." Dave said. The boys split up at that point with Logan, Adam and Juan going to the truck with Joe and Janet, while William, Chang and Jory went to the helicopter.

Kelly walked over to the group from UNIT and with a few of the other "local" boys to assist, grabbed the Unit's gear and helped them carry it. "Come on, I'll show you where you guys can stay. We got a large room with ten beds, I'm sure you guys can use it, since it's empty right now, and it will give you guys some privacy too.

Adam just nodded, grabbing some gear himself, while he made sure that the Unit Members grabbed the bags with the weapons in them.

While they were doing this, William noticed two boys of about ten and eight, one of whom was in a wheelchair, with the other pushing it. Because of William's enhanced hearing, he was able to pick up the conversation going on between the two boys.

"Come on Ronnie, I want to take a closer look," the one in the wheel chair was saying.

"But Bill, I don't know if they'll want you looking at their helicopter." The one pushing, Ronnie, argued back, but never stopped pushing.

"Come on Ronnie," the boy whined, "I don't know if I'll ever get to see an actual Black Hawk up close again."

Ronnie just moaned, but kept going, and soon they were up next to the pilot's compartment, and William moved to be able to overhear what they were saying, and still keep an eye on his most prized possession, but he stayed far enough away that they wouldn't think he was spying on them.

"Just what I thought, it's a modified MH60L version, used primarily for special operations." The wheel chair bound boy was saying, as he started to push himself under his own power to look at things. By this point, it was clear he was oblivious to anyone else around, and was just rambling. "It's got the dual 50 cal. door mounted machine guns, and it's even got an Apache style 30 mm "rail" gun turret in the front." He looked up at Ronnie with excitement almost bubbling from him. "This is one hell of a machine here. I mean it's fifty feet long, seven feet nine inches wide, sixteen feet ten inches tall, and with the rotors turning, it's sixty four feet 10 inches long. It can hold about seventeen thousand five hundred pounds of weight while on a mission, and it can cruise at one hundred and seventy eight miles an hour. This baby can even do a three thousand foot a minute vertical climb. Okay, so it's no attack bird, but it can play many different roles, this thing is the back bone of the Army's helicopter fleet, and I'm sitting next to one."

William was floored by what he heard. He couldn't help it; he had to talk to this kid. William walked over, and stood behind him, while the kid rambled on, spewing out stats on the helicopter like a veteran pilot.

Bill, then strained to reach up and touch the helicopter, saying reverently "but, I wonder, is this baby equipped with the new radar absorbing material that I read about?"

William couldn't keep quiet any longer. "Yep and now I'm officially impressed." Bill spun his chair around, and stared at William in almost wide eyed horror

"I'm....I'm sorry sir. I didn't mean to touch it." Bill was almost in tears by this point and William had no idea what was going on. He knelt down to be on the same level as the kid in the chair, just as Joe and Ronnie moved over to them.

"Hey Billy, it's okay if you want to touch it. Hell if you want, maybe I can take you up sometime." William said with a grin, doing the only thing he could think of to try to get the kid talking about the helicopter again. It seemed to work as the kid appeared to calm down some.

"Really?" Billy asked, with a mixture of surprise and hope in his voice. William nodded, as Joe spoke up for the first time.

"I'm sure we can work something out, but for now, we really need to get things off loaded and put away since it looks like we'll be here for a while."

Everyone nodded, and moved off to where they needed to go, with Adam stopping long enough to give a meaningful glance to Joe who nodded back with a look that clearly said "We need to talk" written on his face. Adam merely nodded in return before taking off with the rest of the boys.

Kelly led the boys inside to a large room that appeared to be set up more like a barracks than a bed room. There were ten beds lining each wall, with a foot locker at the end of each. Next to each bed on the right side was a small nightstand/desk; while on the left side was a stand up closet, where they could hang a few clothes. While the beds were made it was obvious that they had used military surplus supplies to accomplish it but Adam just got a small smile on his face upon seeing the effort they had made

Kelly stepped up next to Adam, "I don't know if you would want a room like this, but I noticed that you guys look military, even though you're nothing but kids, so we did it up for ya. I hope y'all like it?"

Juan glanced over to Kelly and chuckled, "Well we are kids, but we're a lot more than that too."

Adam quickly stepped in telling the boy "We love it thanks"

William got a nod from Adam, and took over for Juan. "Since it looks like we're gonna be here a while, I'll tell you everything I can, later on, but for now, we do need a bit of privacy." Kelly nodded, taking the hint and walked out, shutting the door behind him. That only left the five boys from the Unit, Logan, Tommy, and of course Fluffy.

"Okay guys, pick a bunk, and stow your gear. You'll be allowed to carry your sidearm, but I want all rifles left here. Also, until we get to know these people better, I am going to set up a rotating watch schedule on this room. Someone will be in here at all times, until I say differently. Okay?" Adam said as he walked up to the bunk closest to the door, and put his bag on it.

Everyone else gave nods, and moved off to pick a bunk and put their stuff away.

About twenty minutes later, there was a knock on the main door. Logan being the closest moved to answer it, only to find Joe and Janet standing out in the hallway. They had both changed clothes, but all could see Joe limping along with the dressing sticking out from under the leg of his shorts. Considering he was with Janet it wasn't too hard to figure out that she must have finished treating him and released him to move about.

Logan moved aside so they could come in, but as soon as Joe walked into the room, he had his arms full of a sobbing 9 year old. "I...I was... so scared daddy. I thought you got killed" Juan sobbed out, while burying his head in Joe's shoulder. Joe just held onto him and tried to sooth the little boy that was in his arms, telling him over and over again that he was here and that he was alright.

Janet still couldn't get over the dichotomy that the boys continually showed. She could imagine quite easily what Juan was like during the rescue, having heard it all over the radio Adam had given her. She could see, in her minds eye, Juan's blood thirsty look while he was shooting the big machine gun that was located on the side of the helicopter. She had heard the comments that were made as the boys were fighting their way out of there. She remembered the anguish filled scream from the boy, when Joe got hit, yet she also remembered that the firing never let up. Yet, in front of her now was not the "blood thirsty psycho" that she heard over the radio, but a scared little nine year old, who was afraid that his "daddy" had gotten hurt.

She looked around slowly at the other boys in the room, Adam and Logan were holding hands, each drawing strength from the other, and she could tell that this had affected both of them as well. The other three boys were a different story. She could see the confusion in their eyes as they watched Juan sobbing, and clinging to someone they didn't know. Yet she also noticed a look of longing in their eyes, and realized, that they wanted to be held like that as well, but were unsure of how to go about doing it.

All of this just made her feel worse, for her part in the "Genesis Project". Sadly, she wondered just what they had done to these children, and more importantly, what had they cost them?

Once Joe got Juan calmed down, he addressed Adam. "Okay Adam, this is your show, and your crew, why not introduce us to them." Everyone knew that Joe was saying this more for Janet's benefit than his own, as he had already gotten cursory introductions to everyone during the op.

Adam nodded, and moved over to stand next to the four new boys. "Okay, let's start with the youngest. This here is Tommy," Adam said, as he ruffled the little kids mousy brown hair, "He's eight, and I guess he can talk to animals. That's his cat over there; Fluffy." Adam finished, giggling slightly, as he told her Fluffy's name.

Janet had the grace to not laugh, but it was hard, as she said. "It's nice to meet you Tommy, and you too Fluffy, but, where did you come from? I know the place where the other boys were, and it was supposed to just be a research facility for animals."

Tommy, at hearing the questioning, wrapped his arms around the giant cat, and looked up at Janet with fearful eyes. "The bad people took me there 'cause I can talk to animals. Your not gonna make us go back, are ya?" Tommy asked, while squeezing Fluffy harder; Fluffy surprised Janet because she looked like she knew what was going on, and tried to comfort Tommy, while also making sure everyone knew that she would fight to protect her little friend.

The look on the young boy's face about broke Janet's heart, as she debated what to do.

Janet knew she needed to reassure Tommy, but she was slightly afraid of the big cat, so she squatted down where she was, and looked Tommy in the eyes. "Tommy, I want you to listen to me for a minute. We're not going to send you back there, or anywhere else, for that matter either. None of these boys have any family other than themselves, so we're all a family now. Two of them have even allowed me to be their mother, and if you want I would be happy to be your mom too." she said.

Tommy had a look mixed of surprise, fear and uncertainly etched across his face as he stood there staring intently at Janet, seeking the truth in her eyes. Janet met his gaze and apparently satisfied with what he saw, he slowly unwrapped himself from around Fluffy, and moved over to her. Then when he got close, he almost threw himself into her arms, and started to sob on her shoulder. "I don't have a mommy or a daddy since they died two years ago. Are you sure you don't mind being my mommy?"

No, I don't mind honey, I'd really love to be a mom to you too" Janet replied with tears in her eyes.

Joe moved slowly over to them, with Juan still attached to him and joined the hug, assuring the boy that he was wanted there. Adam and Logan certainly weren't about to pass up the loving and shortly joined them, soon to be followed tentatively by the remaining three boys who were brought into the group hug and given reassurances as well. Before it was over, all of them were shedding tears of joy in finding something they never thought they could have before now, a family.

Eventually the mass hug ended and the parties separated, each going to sit on a bed as the introductions were started again with Adam looking over at William.

"Janet, this is Will, he's the pilot, and electrical engineer." Will nodded to Janet in greeting, as Adam moved on to the next one. "Sitting on the bed next to him is Jory. He's the demolitions expert." Adam said, suppressing a grin as he watched for Janet's reaction.

He didn't have to wait long.

"Jory, come here and sit next to me will you?" Janet asked while patting the spot next to her. Unsure of what was going on; Jory slowly moved over and sat down next to her. She wrapped an arm around him, and pulled him close. "Jory, honey, Adam's shared some of what he knows about you guys while we

were making the plans to get you boys out. One of the things he said was that you have a little problem with having to set off bombs.” Janet said, while Joe, Adam, Logan and Juan all tried rather unsuccessfully to stifle giggles that is until they got the death glare from Janet, which did wonders in helping them accomplish that task.

Jory looked up at Janet with the blissful innocence of youth and said, “I don't have any problems with setting them off, they work fine.” This was too much and got the others laughing out loud, with even Janet losing control and having to laugh a bit herself.

“No, Jory, that's not what I meant, I meant, that the report said that it seemed you almost HAD to set off bombs, almost like you couldn't help yourself,” she told him.

Jory looked at Janet for a second, then spoke up. “Well, I don't have to... I just really like setting them off.”

Janet nodded at that, then asked “Okay Jory, I understand that, but could you do me a favor, please, and make sure that you talk to either Joe, Adam or myself before you do?.”

Jory looked confused for a second and a bit unhappy, looking over to Adam. But Adam just nodded his head in agreement with what Janet had said, causing Jory to start to pout. “But, I really like blowing stuff up. It's lots of fun.” He said plaintively.

Janet had to hide a smile at the innocent way he was talking about it. Almost as if she was asking him to not do something as simple as running in the house. “I am sure it's fun, but there are other people here who may not know about what you like to do, and they might get scared. Will you promise me that you will ask one of us first. I promise that we will give you lots of time to play with your bombs.” Janet asked of him.

Jory nodded while sticking out his bottom lip in a pout. “Okay, as long as you promise you'll let me blow things up sometime.” He reluctantly told her.

Adam spoke up at this point, “We promise Jory, I'm sure we'll find plenty of things you can blow up,” which caused a big grin to appear on the young boy's face as Adam said, “Now, moving on. The boy sitting next to Logan is Chang. He is the Unit's doctor, and, if I don't miss my guess, martial arts expert.”

Chang nodded to Adam, then stood up and gave a Japanese style bow to Janet. “It is a honor to meet you, mother of my brothers. Would you honor me by allowing me to call you mother, as well?”

Janet was momentarily taken aback by the formality that Chang showed, but quickly recovered. She had come to know a few Japanese people while working on the project, and tried to answer Chang in a way he would feel comfortable with. “It is I who would be honored if you would call me mother.” She said formally, while standing to bow back to Chang.

Chang broke out into a smile and then moved to hug Janet. She was only slightly surprised when she hugged the boy to find that she felt nothing but muscle underneath his shirt.

“Okay everyone, we have some time, so let's get some stuff done.” Adam said breaking the mood a little bit. “Logan, I want you to get your computer up and running, and see if you can get any signal out

here. If you can, I want you to do your magic and see what the military has to say about our latest actions.” Seeing Logan nod at that, and move off to get his lap top, Adam turned to William. “You think you can get the bird into the cave? I'm sure they're looking for us, and we don't want them catching the heat signature.”

“Yeah, shouldn't be a problem, I'll need someone to go with me though, to watch the walls and ceiling.” William said while getting off the bed, and zipping up his flight suit. “I also want to go over it and make sure there was no major damage from the gun fire,” he added.

Adam nodded, and looked over at Juan who was still in Joe's lap, and did not look too keen on moving. He was about to tell Juan to go with Will regardless of that fact, when Jory spoke up.

“I'll go with him; I need to grab my other bag anyways.” He giggled a bit, before adding with a mischievous grin. “I don't think you want anyone else getting that bag anyway, it's got about five pounds of C-4 in it”

Both Joe's and Janet's head snapped up in shock at that and Jory couldn't help but giggle louder. “Don't worry, mommy, it's safe, I just made it last week.” He said, as he reached into his back pack and pulled out another bag, opening that one up, he pulled out and held up a small box with a little antenna on it. “Come on mom, I got the detonators right here.”

And with that pronouncement Jory tossed the detonator to Joe who caught it while Janet let out a loud gasp. Laughing hysterically now at their reactions he said. “Jeez mom, that thing don't even go boom. That just sets it off.” The others joined Jory laughing until the look Janet gave them expressed just how pleased she was by this.

They all knew that they had their work cut out for them in giving 'mom' a proper sense of humor.

While this was going on, Joe was inspecting the detonator. “Jory, did you build this yourself?”

Jory beamed with pride while nodding his head, and said. “Yup, I did that one about 2 months ago. It's got about a three mile range on it, depending on terrain, and works every time.”

Joe nodded, clearly impressed, and said. “You did a great job,” and Jory ate up the praise while he to got ready to go. Soon Jory and William were ready to go deal with the helicopter. As they reached the door, Adam spoke up again. “You guys armed?” Both Jory and Will nodded, while patting their shoulders, so Adam could see the bulging shoulder holsters under their jackets. Adam just nodded, and they went out the door.

“Adam, do you really think they need to be armed?” Janet asked, while looking seriously at Adam.

“Yes I do.” Adam said, looking just as seriously back at Janet. “While I agree the chance of danger here is small, we don't know these people, or how they will react to us. Plus there is always the chance that the military will find us here. I don't want anyone unprepared. I already told the boys, that they are not to leave this room with out a side arm, and that someone was to be here with the rifles at all times.”

“He's right Janet, it's standard operating procedure in such situations and ultimately it's always better safe than sorry” Joe added.



Janet still looked unsure as she glanced around at the boys and back to Joe but remained silent.

So Adam continued while looking at Juan, Chang, and finally Logan. "This goes for you too Logan. I'll set up a rotating schedule for who's to be on duty here. Logan, for the time being, some one will be remaining here with you. During that time, we'll continue your training as much as we can." Logan just nodded at that, and Janet was once again surprised by how these boys, her own son included, could seem to go from being a kid to being an adult in an instant. Almost like flipping a switch.

Adam then looked over to Chang, and said "For now Chang, why don't you get changed into something more comfortable, then you and I can go look around. Juan, do you mind standing first watch?" Even though Adam phrased it as a question, the tone of his voice said it was not, and Juan just nodded his agreement. "That way," Adam continued, "you can let me know if Logan finds anything, also, if you would, run Logan through the rifles he may not know, I want him comfortable with everything we may use." This got a nod from both the boys, and Chang moved over to his bunk to get changed.

Janet stood up after Adam finished, and looked at the boys saying, "well I'm gonna go and see what I can get for everyone to eat here. You want me to bring you something back Joe?"

Joe just shook his head, and replied "Nah, I think I'll join you, I need to work out this leg some. You wanna come too Tommy?" Tommy eagerly nodded his head, and jumped off the bed, grabbing Janet's hand.

"Can fwuffy come too?" He asked timidly as Janet looked down at the little boy that was holding her hand.

"Of course he can." She replied while looking over at the huge cat.

"Mooomy. Fwuffy's a girl, duh!" Tommy whined, with all the indignation at such a slight that only an eight year old can pull off.

"Sorry Tommy, yes, SHE can come with us." Janet snickered at the thought that she was being rebuked by the little guy, Tommy, for his part, just smiled, and motioned for Fluffy to come with them, as the four of them strolled out of the room.

As they reached the door Tommy added "Sides Fluffy says boys can't have kittens"

Tommy kept walking until his hand was pulled sharply backward due to the sudden stop of the adults that he hadn't noticed and he turned to find Joe and Janet standing there with their mouths open.

"What?" Tommy asked with a bewildered look on his face.

"K...Kittens?" Janet mumbled in shock as the cat looked on with what Janet could swear was a grin.

"Umm hmm" the boy said shrugging his shoulders followed by "Can we go eat now, I'm starving"

"Kittens" Janet could be heard mumbling as she allowed herself to be pulled out of the room by the starving child to the snickers of the boys left behind.

Adam just shook his head, then looked over to Chang; he was dressed a little differently than Adam would have thought. Adam was expecting him to dress in the BDU's that were common for most military. Instead, Chang was dressed in very loose fitting and flowing pants, with a shirt that tied closed in the front. He looked very much like a Samurai of old.

As Adam watched, Chang went to a large case that he brought up with him from the helicopter. Opening the case, Adam saw that it held three weapons. Chang spoke softly in what Adam guessed was Japanese, then picked up the largest of the weapons. Adam noticed immediately that this was a traditional Samurai Katana. Chang gently slid it into the silk belt that he was wearing, then reached into the box again. Again, he spoke briefly, and pulled out the middle weapon, this one was a smaller version of the Katana, called a Wakizashi. He put this one right above where he put the Katana, then moved them around till he was comfortable with how they sat. Next he picked up the smallest weapon, this one being only slightly bigger than a knife, called a Tanto. He slid this one on the other side, and moved his robes around so that it was completely hidden. Once Chang was done with that, he bowed to the box, shut it, then placed it back under his bunk.

Not wanting to get caught watching, Adam moved over to his bunk while Chang was putting the box away. There he slipped on his own shoulder holster, and put his jacket over top of that. Next he took out his own Katana, and secured it on his back. Chang nodded his approval to Adam, upon seeing the sword, and then motioned for Adam to take the lead. "We'll be back in a bit. Let me know if anything comes up." Adam said as they made their way from the room.

William and Jory walked down to the main floor, then outside to go to the helicopter. Once they got close, they saw that Ronnie and Billy were once again by the helicopter, and talking in hushed tones. It was very easy to tell that Billy was still going on about the helicopter.

William couldn't help but grin as he saw this, and once they got close enough he spoke up. "Hey guys."

Bill looked over his shoulder, while Ronnie turned around and looked at them. "Hey Will, you don't mind that I'm looking at the helicopter again do you?" Billy asked with hope in his eyes.

Will flashed a huge grin at the boys. "No, not at all. Tell you what; I need to move this beast into the cave. You wanna help?"

Both boys looked excited now; as they looked at each other, then back at Will. "Sure Will, what do we need to do?" Ronnie asked for the both of them.

"Well," William started while moving over to the open back doors of the Black Hawk, "Ronnie and Jory, you two need to put these on." He said while, handing both boys headsets to put on. "I need you to go into the cave, and make sure everyone knows to stay out of the way as I am going to have to fly it in."

Both Bill and Ronnie gawked at that announcement. "But.... but isn't that dangerous?" Bill managed to squeak out after a minute.

"Nah... not if you know what your doing. What I need you two to do is let me know when it's clear, and then I need both of you to each watch a side and let me know if I get too close to the walls." William explained while hooking both headsets to a battery pack, then making sure Ronnie knew how to wear it and which button to push to transmit. He then reached back into the helicopter and pulled out two pairs

of goggles. "Here, you'll need these too. It'll probably get a bit windy in there." They both nodded while grabbing the goggles.

"Ummm... Will, what do ya want me to do?" Bill asked looking up from his chair.

Will shrugged a bit. "Your part's easy Billy. I need you to sit in the left seat and watch from there."

Bill almost choked when he heard that. "You mean... you want me to sit in the co-pilot's seat?!?!"

William just chuckled while nodding. "Well, yeah, I mean you can't look out the window with out being inside it, can you?"

Bill was blown away by this, but then his face fell. "But, I can't even get into it being stuck in this damned chair. I guess everyone's right. I'm never gonna be able to do anything anymore." He looked like he was ready to cry at this point, as he realized his dream was about to crash and burn before it even got off the ground.

Will just looked at him funny, then moved over and bent down slightly so he could look Billy in the eyes. "Billy, I don't know who told you that you couldn't do things, just cause you can't walk, but I happen to know that you can. One of the guys that taught me to fly was in a wheel chair. They modified his helicopter so he could do it, and let me tell you what; he was one of the best I've ever seen. When we had simulated dog fights, he beat me more then half the time, and I was MADE to fly these damned things. So I don't want to hear you say you can't do anything you want to do. Okay?"

Billy looked in William's eyes trying to see if he was lying. "You really mean it? I could actually fly this thing?"

William stood up and laughed a bit. "Well not right now Billy, I would need to do a bunch of modifications, but if Adam agrees, and I can get the tools, I could start working on it. Until then, why don't we just get this thing inside, then later on, I can go over everything with you, and see how much you already know. What do you say?"

Bill wheeled himself closer to William, and threw his arms around the younger boy and hugged him tight. "Thank you Will. This has been a dream since I was like six." He said before pausing and looking down for a moment. "What's up?" William asked gently. "Could you not call me Billy please?" Bill asked tremulously of the other boy who was looking on in confusion now. "But that's your name," he finally responded. "No, it's not, it's Bill." the boy said, with some vehemence as he looked at William. "Sure then, Bill it is" William replied, smiling as the child reapplied his hug on a startled pilot.

William untangled himself from Bill a few moments later, still not entirely comfortable with displays of affection geared in his direction, turned Bill around and pushed him over to the open door of the Black Hawk. "Okay Jory, I'm gonna need your help with this." William told Jory as he hopped into the helicopter. "Just pick him up and hand him to me."

Bill looked shocked at this idea, thinking there was no way that this little nine year old could possibly pick him up let alone lift him into the helicopter. Hell he wasn't even sure that William could hold him if Jory somehow managed to get him up there to him. He just watched as Jory walked up to him and then, surprising the crap out of him, bent over, placed his arm around the younger boy's shoulder and, as if he weighed nothing, lifted him up to the waiting pilot. William grabbed a hold of him and effort-

lessly placed him into the co-pilot's seat in the left side of the aircraft. While Bill just sat there with a stunned expression on his face as William handed him a headset and plugged it into its jack before taking his own seat, where he put on his own headset and settled into preparations for the upcoming flight.

William looked over to Bill and gave him a wink. Before asking the still speechless younger boy, "You ready for this?"

Bill, for his part, just nodded nervously, still not believing what had just happened and said. "Yeah, I think so. What do you want me to do?" If Bill was shocked before he was even more so when William just started, pointing to switches and telling him to flip them. Soon Bill could feel the rotors starting to spin, and the helicopter start to vibrate while William just kept pointing things out for Bill to do.

"Okay, what do you think?" William asked, over the headset. "Should we just fly this thing into the cave, or take it up a bit, and let her spread her wings for a while?" William was sure he knew the answer before he asked, and the bobbing of Bill's head gave him all the answer he needed. As he chuckled and said, "Cool, lets go, then."

Before Bill knew what was happening, William cranked the throttle up, and the helicopter lifted off the ground. Once they gained enough altitude, William banked the helicopter, and started out of the canyon. For the next few minutes, he gave Bill a ride that would be the envy of every roller coaster enthusiast in the world. He had three reasons for doing this, one, of course, being that he loved to fly. The second reason, though, was that he wanted to give Bill at least one ride, just in case Adam said no to the teaching of him to fly. The third was all boy, and that was to see if Bill could actually handle helicopter flight or more precisely, William's version of it. He was not disappointed as Bill appeared to absolutely love it. That is if the hooting and hollering were any indication.

Finally, though, much to Bill's disappointment, William had to bring it down, and they flew towards the mouth of the cave. With the three lookouts, there was no problem putting the helicopter down inside the massive cavern. William again just pointed to switches, and Bill flipped them to shut the helicopter down. While they were shutting down the helicopter, William was getting to know Bill a little better. "So, I gotta ask. Your legs, do they work at all, or do you have like no feeling in them?"

Bill was a bit embarrassed by the question and hung his head for a moment before carefully looking up into William's eyes. After looking at the older boy for a moment, who just returned the gaze steadily, Bill realized that there was nothing there but curiosity along with care and concern. It felt good to the younger child and he got up the courage to shake his head in answer as he said "Nah, I can't feel anything from the waist down, nothing works." In a voice tinged with bitterness he added "My little brother's sperm donor did a real good job on me" He wasn't expecting the laugh that met that pronouncement and was hurt by it. William meanwhile hadn't meant to laugh but the way the boy said it made him not be able to help himself and he quickly said "I'm sorry, Bill, it's just the way you said that," as he laughed again. Surprisingly Bill started laughing too, at seeing the older boy losing control and realized that it felt good to laugh again, something he hadn't really done much of since his father shot him in the back in a fit of rage, it felt real good he thought, as he smiled at the older boy.

"Wait a minute your little brother's sperm donor, I don't understand?" William said, deciding to not go into the whole thing about him getting shot.

Bill looked down then said "I guess he's not really his sperm donor but Ronnie is my brother."

William still didn't understand, but he noticed how uncomfortable Bill was with the topic, so he decided to drop it, and come back to it later.

After getting Bill down with the help of the other two, and had having him firmly back in his chair, they all started to head back outside. Bill was talking a mile a minute, and enjoying the celebrity status that the others now cast upon him. While he and William were flying the helicopter in, most of the other kids, as well as the four adults, came to watch.

Jack and David were talking to Janet and Joe about how well the eleven year old William could fly, and that the normally shy and reserved Bill, was seeming to come out of his shell, when David spoke up interrupting the others.

"Oh shit, this is the last thing that we need right now." He said while looking over to where the kids were gathered around William, Jory, Bill, and Ronnie.

Joe looked up to see what was going on, and noticed three of the larger boys pushing their way through the crowd to get to the foursome. "Are they trouble?" Joe asked, while getting ready to interfere if needed.

Jack sighed, "Yeah, they think they run this place, and the biggest one, Donny, thinks he can do no wrong. They seem to like to bully the younger kids, and nothing I do seems to be able to stop it."

The four adults started to move forward when they heard a voice from behind them. "Let the boys handle it." Adam said while he and Chang moved up beside them. "We need to see how they can handle themselves with other people, and this will be a good opportunity."

The four adults didn't seem to like the idea, but they remained where they were.

"I don't like this." Janet said, into the group.

"Don't worry mom, they can handle anything that comes up." Adam replied.

"You don't know those three, they'll hurt your boys" David said, as Jack added "He's right."

"No they won't; just watch." Adam said in response.

"Trust them, Janet." Joe told her, as she nervously watched the scene unfolding in front of her.

While the adults were talking, the three older boys finally made it to the 4 younger kids in the middle. William and Jory were the first of the four to see what was coming, and instinctively, they moved themselves in front of the other two.

"So, what do we have here, freaks playing at being bad asses?" The apparent leader snidely remarked, while the other two laughed with him. Bill and Ronnie, dropped their heads, as they were very used to being bullied by these three, and they knew that nothing could be done but accept it.

William looked at Jory with a big grin on his face before turning back to the three toughs and said, "Well, I guess we could be considered freaks, and we are defiantly bad asses."

Jory smiled and nodded his agreement, before asking with glee in his voice, "Do you think they actually want to fight?" And you couldn't mistake the hope and yearning in his words.

William made an exaggerated facial expression of consideration, while he looked the three up and down. Before saying slowly "Hmmm... maybe, but you know, three of them, two of us, it would just be so unfair. Tell you what little bro, I'll sit this one out, and let you have some fun," and with that comment, he looked back at Bill and Ronnie, gave them a wink, and hopped into Bill's lap, leaning back on the younger boy with a predatory smile on his face.

This was obviously not the reaction the three bullies were expecting, as they just stood there for a second obviously just as confused as everyone else was by this. Bill was staring open mouthed at William, who was now cuddled up in his lap, who couldn't resist laughing as he looked at Bill, and said. "Hey, don't worry; I'm sure Jory won't hurt em too bad. By the way, you got any popcorn? This should be good."

Jory just looked at the three bullies with a huge grin of anticipation on his face. "So wadda ya say, guys, you really wanna find out what kinda bad asses we are?"

This brought the three bullies back to the present, and they looked down in utter disbelief at the little nine year old that was defiantly staring them down. Not only were they not used to having anyone but the adults confront them, but to have it be done in such a manner, and by little kids at that, was just too much for them. They didn't know what to do, as they looked back and forth at each other. Finally the oldest one looked at Jory and spoke. "I ain't beaten up a little shit like you."

Jory gave them a feral grin that could have melted a snowman, and said, in a voice that was almost a growl. "com'mon, I promise I won't hurt you... much. Com'mon!"

Everyone there was staring in shock, at how the young boy was treating the bullies, but none more then the bullies themselves. Finally the older one spoke in a sneer. "You don't wanna mess with us, or your gonna get hurt real bad," and with that he shoved Jory.

What happened next happened in a split second.

Jory grabbed onto the arm, and used it to jump up, kicking one of the bullies in the face with both feet, sending him flying back. Jory continued using the momentum of the kick, and the arm he was hanging onto, to wing behind the one who shoved him, hitting him with both feet, one in the back of each knee. This brought the oldest one down to his knees, and Jory held onto his arm, twisting it up into a painful hammer hold.

Jory then reached out with his leg, and smashed the third one in the knee, bringing him down to the ground, and one more kick from Jory to his head knocked him out fully. Jory then leaned forward and spoke into the ear of the boy that had tried to shove him. "Does this answer your question? We are the baddest asses in this place. You're just lucky I was told not to kill you." With those few words, Jory pushed the kid onto the ground, and stepped over him to go back to the other three. Everyone that saw what happened stared with open mouthed amazement in compete shock.

William reached up and closed Bill's mouth before laughing and jumping off him. "Well, that was fun, but you need to work on your kicks. You almost missed the second one."

Jory just laughed as he looked to the kid that was slowly picking himself off the ground rubbing his jaw. "Hey, it worked, anyways, almost only counts in horse shoes, and hand grenades." He said, as he gave William a high five, and together they walked back to Bill and Ronnie.

The two bullies that were able to, made it slowly back to their feet and looked almost like they wanted to try something else. William just stared at them and finally said, "You must really like pain, I guess," as he stepped towards them, but that was when Jack and David took that moment to decide to step in and put a stop to things.

"Okay, that's just about enough, I think. Break it up. NOW!!!" Jack hollered, as he made his way through the crowd of kids before continuing. "Donny, what the hell do you think you're doing. That's no way to treat the son of the guy that OWNS this place."

Donny looked shocked at that announcement, as did a lot of the other kids there.

Adam moved up next to Jack who was staring at Donny. "Donny is it?" Adam asked, while sticking out his hand. Donny was thoroughly confused by this point, so he tentatively reached out and grasped Adam's hand.

"I would apologize for Jory, but you had it coming to ya." Adam told the teenager, before lowering his voice to one that only Donny could hear, as he said. "Fuck with me or my brothers again, and it just may be the last thing you ever do. Be nice to us, and you may just get to join up."

Although Adam had spoken the entire time with a warm welcoming smile on his face, the fact that Donny's had gone as white as a sheet, let everyone know that his words hadn't matched his expression.

Adam held onto his hand for a few seconds longer than necessary to make sure his point had been gotten across, but he finally released Donny's hand, then turned to face everyone else, telling them in a loud voice. "Okay everyone, show's over. But there's a few things I need to go over. First off, I would ask that everyone stay away from the helicopter. The guns are loaded, and I don't want anyone getting shot."

Adam looked around to make sure everyone understood, then he walked over and hopped into the deck of the helicopter, so everyone could see him. "I learned from Jack that many of you are here because it's not safe for you to be out in public. Jack also said that they were planning on moving from here soon, because he's worried that some of the people that are after you will find this place." This caused a ripple of concern to go throughout the crowd, and Adam guessed Jack hadn't let any of the kids know about this.

After about a minute, Adam held his hand up to try and silence the group, and continued. "I was going to talk to Jack about this, but seeing as it's your lives here, I think you should all get to have a voice in this. I am willing to offer our services to help protect you. However, there are a few things you need to know about us first. Every member of the Unit, except one, was genetically engineered by the military. I won't go into the specifics, but let's just say that you have one of the best Special Forces Teams in the world right here."

That caused a lot of chattering among the kids that were there. Adam let that go on for a minute, while he looked over to Janet and Joe. Joe saw him looking at him, and nodded his approval. Adam was worried about how Joe would take this as he had not mentioned any of this to him before now. After the

kids quieted down a bit, Adam continued. "However, this is not something we will do without you all working with us."

This caused another disruption as the kids started talking again, and one of them shouted up. "What can we do, we're just a bunch of kids, we ain't got the training you do?" This question brought lots of agreement from the others.

Adam grinned at that question, as he was hoping someone would ask it like that. "Your right, you don't...yet. If you're willing, we will help train you guys to protect yourselves, and then perhaps you can leave here, and be able to protect others."

One of the younger girls, maybe eleven or twelve, spoke up, once everyone else had quieted down. "But, what about those of us who can't fight? I don't wanna have to try and shoot a gun or nothing." This comment was met with agreement from a lot of the younger kids and the few girls that were there.

Adam just grinned as this was really going better then he had planned. First of all, you can do whatever you want. Don't think just because you're little or a girl, that you can't fight, cause ya can. That's what the training is for and it's not all that hard to shoot a gun. As to the other, "That's easy, for those that either don't want to fight, or can't, for whatever reason, there's A LOT of other things that you can do. An example for you, Bill, do you think you would be able to pick up a rifle, march for a few miles, and then kill someone if you needed to?"

Bill looked up at Adam like he was dumb or something. "Of course I can't, not being stuck in this fucking chair." Bill snarled, really looking pissed that Adam had singled him out, and asked him a question that again spotlighted the fact that he was in a wheelchair.

Adam nodded, and grinned saying. "Well of course you can't, but I'm willing to bet that in a short time, William will have you flying the Black Hawk like you're a pro." Bill looked like he was about to explode from the excitement Adam's last statement caused, so Adam pushed on, before the younger boy started to babble incoherently.

"See, there's other things we can teach you to do, but only if you want it. Why don't you guys talk it over outside and the rest of us will stay in here, and you can let us know what you come up with." With that, he jumped down from the helicopter and moved over to where Joe and Janet were waiting with the three younger boys, while the other kids, Jack and David moved out of the cave.

Joe just grinned, as Adam got to him, and grabbed the boy up in a big hug. "Adam, I'm so proud of you for offering to help them. That was a really nice thing to do." Adam grinned sheepishly at the praise and quickly tried to change the subject, saying,

"Come on guys; let's look around here a bit, while they're out. This is a pretty big cave, even though it doesn't go very deep." With that, the boys split up and started to move towards the back of the cave. Joe and Janet moved over, and sat on the deck of the helicopter to wait and see what would happen.

A few minutes later, Jory's voice split the relative quiet in the cave. "Hey guys, come here and check this out!" The little guy shouted, which caused the other three boys, as well as Janet and Joe to go see what he had found.



When they got there, Jory was on his hands and knees looking at something on the wall. "What do ya got Jor?" Adam asked as soon as he was there.

Jory looked up and spoke while pointing to the wall. "I think this is a fake wall. I noticed a crack by the floor, and when I looked closer, it looks like there's a seam in the wall. That and I can feel air moving through." The other's bent over and looked, and sure enough, there was a seam there that made it clear this was a fake wall.

"Okay guys, lets spread out and see what we can find. There's got to be something to open this up somewhere, if not, we'll have to figure out something else." Adam said, as he got up, and started to look around.

Jory spoke up almost right away with a big ole grin on his face. "Adam, if we can't find a way to open it up, I could always blow a hole in it. I still got some C-4 left." He said, with hope in his voice.

Adam had to stifle a chuckle at the little guy's obsession with blowing things up. "We'll see, Jory, lets just see what we can find," He told him.

The next few minutes were spent searching the walls; finally it was Chang who called out.

"Hey guys, I think I got something over here." He said, as the rest moved over to see what Chang had found. When they got there, Chang pointed to a raised area of the wall. They really had to look to see what it was, but finally, they figured it out.

It was a raised area, with a depression in the middle of it.

Adam looked at it closely for a minute, then reached into his shirt, and pulled off the cross that he wore. It was a fairly elaborate and detailed Celtic Cross. He looked at it, then back at the depression in the rock. Finally he put the cross up to it, and it fit in perfectly. Adam then pushed, watching as the 'door' easily pushed back into the wall. Less then a second later, a rumbling started from deep in the earth, and the wall started to shake. They all had to take a few steps back as they started to feel air rushing into the now opening area behind the wall.

Janet looked at Joe, who had gone a pale white and was visibly shaking. "Joe, what's wrong?" She asked, with obvious concern in her voice.

It took Joe a few seconds, to recover, and then he looked over at Janet. He started to speak, but nothing could really be heard over the rumbling of the wall, so she pulled him a few feet away. Once they were away, she looked at him again, and asked, "Joe, what's going on, you look like you've seen a ghost?"

The boys were too wrapped up in what was going on, and were not paying attention to the two adults. Joe was finally able to look at Janet. And said, "I... I haven't seen that amulet in years. How the hell did he get it?" His voice just slightly above a whisper, full of tension, and his hands visibly shaking.

## Chapter 10

Everyone that had been outside came running back in when the loud rumbling started along with the ground shaking, and soon there was a large crowd standing just a few feet away from the slowly lowering wall. Janet meanwhile, concerned, had pulled Joe off to the side, away from that growing crowd.

"Joe, what the hell is going on?" Janet asked, with the concern evident in her voice, but Joe didn't respond, other than to take her by the arm and lead her away to somewhere with a bit more privacy and where, hopefully, he would have regained a little bit of control before the explanations began. Nothing was said between the two of them, which only increased Janet's concern, all the way up to the room that the boys were sharing together. Joe found that he was a little bit more in control of himself by the time they got to the room, at least.

Then they were nearly run over by Juan as they entered. They looked at Juan who had several of the large bags they used to transport rifles in his hands, with one of them even slung over his shoulder, as he left the room in a dead run, yelling back over his shoulder, "Hey guys, sorry, gotta go, Adam needs me," as he rushed down the hallway towards the staircase.

Janet looked over at Logan with a questioning look. But she only got a shrug of his shoulders as he said, "no clue, about 2 minutes ago, while we were going over one of the rifles, he looked up like he was listening to something, then just started tearing ass around the room, saying that Adam needed him, the rifles and radios, then he said something about a hidden room and nothing else. What's going on?" Logan asked, beginning to get frightened when he finally saw Joe standing there, pale as a ghost, and visibly shaking.

Joe just shook his head, and went over to one of the bunks. Dropping down onto it, and burying his face in his hands. Logan, seeing that, now looked very upset, and turned to face his mother, asking worriedly, "Mom, what's wrong, what is it? Is Adam alright?"

Janet, not saying anything, looked at Joe for a moment and moved to take a seat on the bunk next to the one Joe was sitting on, then looked at Logan.

"Mom?" the boy asked, with increasing dread, as Janet said,

"Logan, honey, Adam is just fine, why don't you come over here and sit next to me."

Logan was still not sure what was going on, since Joe still hadn't looked up from where he was sitting, but he did as his mother had requested; breathing a sigh of relief at the news that Adam was okay, but the look on Joe's face still scared the heck out of him, as he moved to sit next to her.

"Logan, have you ever noticed an amulet that Adam wears around his neck?" Joe asked in a voice devoid of emotion, without raising his head, Logan hesitantly nodded that he did, saying a soft "Yeah," but not understanding why he was asking about it, as Joe continued. "Has he told you anything about it?"

Logan looked off into space for a second, thinking back to the pain filled memories that Adam had confided to him. "Yeah, he said his mother gave it to him, the night she dumped him on that street corner in Los Angeles."

Logan was startled when Joe's head shot up and he looked at Logan with a very intense look. "His Mother? Did Adam say where she got it?" Joe asked softly, but with a voice filled with intensity.

"Ummm...if I remember correctly what Adam told me, he said his mother got it from his father, just before he ran out on them. His mom told him that his father said something like, 'Here's something to remember me by.' It was the same thing she told him when she gave it to him. Why?"

Joe didn't answer him but, instead, got up and walked over to his bag, where he rooted around in it for a second. When he was done, he had pulled out two items. One was another Celtic Cross on a chain, very similar to the one Adam wore. While the other was a flask; out of which he took a long pull, before he went back to sit down. "I want to tell you both a story, but I also need your word that you won't say anything to Adam, until I talk to him." Joe said, as he sat there nervously fingering the cross that he now held in his hand.

Janet and Logan both agreed, but Logan had to ask a question. "I don't think I understand, what's going on, and what does this have to do with you and Adam?"

Joe took a deep breath before answering. "I'll explain what I think is the 'how' in a minute. But the 'what' is this," he took another swig from the flask before looking at Logan and softly saying, "I think Adam is my biological son."

Logan just sat there with a completely stunned look on his face by what Joe had just said. Joe, meanwhile, took a moment to collect his thoughts before he started his story.

"It all starts with a story that's been in my family for many years, and how it was, that my grandfather was a multi billionaire, who somehow, in the end had nothing. According to the story, this gold mine had been in my family since the west was starting to be settled. My forefathers settled here in this part of Utah, and claimed this canyon as theirs. When it was discovered that there was a lot of gold under the ground, they became enormously rich, over night. With the amount of gold they were able to pull out of here, it made them rich even by today's standards, which of course meant they were filthy rich by the standards back then. The land was passed down through the family for many generations, until the late 1920's when the mine dried up, and my great grandfather sold it to the government. They still had a lot of money though, and that was passed down to my grandfather when his father died.

I was very close to my grandfather, as my parents were too wrapped up in doing the social thing, and protecting the "Casey name," to be parents to me. They even named me Joseph Alexander Casey III, to honor my grandfather, they said, although it was more like kissing up to him. My grandfather was more like a father than a grandfather to me, and my parents didn't mind at all, because it was obvious I was his favorite out of all the grandchildren, and they thought that it would mean that when he died, they would get a bigger share of his wealth. When I was in high school, he started to suffer from Alzheimer's, and he was eventually forced into a nursing home, after my parents, along with my aunts and uncles, forced the courts to declare him incompetent. I was furious with their greed, but my grandfather told me not to worry, as he had everything taken care of. I had assumed this to mean that he had a solid will that could not be contested. But it was still a very difficult and sad time in my life, to see what they did to him.

The anger I had, though, was nothing compared to what my family had when they found out somehow that my grandfather had spent almost every cent that he had. They were even more pissed when they found out the only thing he had was this mine, and that he had left it to me. My oh so loving and caring

family even tried to contest that part of the will, but were not able to get around the will my grandfather had left. He and I had many good laughs at everything that was happening, as my family tried to figure out where all the money went to. But they were never able to figure it out before he died.

My grandfather was the one who encouraged me to fulfill my dream which was nothing even close to what my parents wanted. They wanted me to be a "successful member of society, and I wanted to join the military. I visited my grandfather for the last time the day before I was to ship out for advanced training.

**\*\*Flashback\*\***

Nineteen year old Joe Casey walked down the halls of the "Retirement Home" in his brand new military uniform. He wanted to show it off to his grandfather, before he shipped out the next day for advanced training, having already completed basic. He walked up to the door to his grandfather's room, hoping that this would be one of those days where his grandfather still had his wits about him. To his relief, it was.

"Hi Granddad." Joe said, as he walked into the room. Joseph Casey Sr. looked up from the book he was reading and beamed, as Joe walked in.

"Ahhh, if it isn't my little soldier. Come here, Joey, and give this old man a hug." The old man said, and Joe was only too happy to comply as they sat talking for almost an hour, before Joe said that he had to get going so he could pack up.

"Joey, before you go, I have something here for you." Joe Sr. said, when Joe announced his impending departure. "I'm not sure how much longer I'll be around, and I wanted to give these to you, before you left, that way no one else can get their greedy hands on them."

"What's that, Granddad?" Joe asked, while moving to the side of the bed.

Joe Sr. reached over into his night stand, and retrieved two gold chains. Attached to each chain was a very intricately designed Celtic Cross. Joe knew right away that, while these were not all that expensive, they must have held much sentimental value, just by the way his grandfather was holding them.

"I don't remember if I ever told you the story of how I met your grandmother." Joe Sr. said, his voice echoing memories from the past, as a soft smile came across his face. "I first met her in school, where we fell deeply in love, and our first date was to this traveling fair that was going through town. It was there that I saw these two amulets on sale. I bought them both and gave one of them to your grandmother, while I wore the other. They weren't much, but they symbolized the love that we had for each other. We never took them off till the day she died. I kept them, thinking I could give them to one of my boys when they found their true love, but none of my boys were worth getting these, so I want them to go to you, but you must promise me something."

Joe just nodded, not really sure what, if anything, he could say to what he had just learned. His grandfather had to take a break from this for a second, and Joe helped him take a sip of water before he continued.

"Joey, I want you to promise me that when you find your true love, the woman you want to marry and spend the rest of your life with, when you find this woman, I want you to give one of these to her."

Joe nodded as he took the two amulets from his grandfather, promising the old man he thought of as a father, much more than his own, that he would honor that request, then he hugged him goodbye for what, sadly, would turn out to be the last time. Two months later, while he was still at advanced training, he got word that his grandfather had passed away.

Eight years later, he finished his tour of duty with the Army Rangers, and moved into civilian life, electing to settle down in Barstow California, where he took a job in a security firm. It was there that he met a wonderful young woman named Lisa Arpin. Even though she was only twenty, and Joe was older at twenty-seven, they hit it off rather well, and within a year's time, they were dating steadily.

Things were going very well for them, and Joe was just about to ask her to marry him when the shit hit the fan over in the Middle East. August 2nd of 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait; thus starting operation Desert Shield. Joe was watching what was going on with great interest, and on the 22nd of August, President Bush authorized the first call-up of Selected Reservists to active duty for ninety days. The next day, Joe got a phone call telling him that since he was an Officer in the Rangers, he was being re-called to active duty, and needed to be ready to ship out in two days.

Of course, this threw Joe and Lisa's plans to the wind, and after he told her about being re-called, he dropped to a knee and proposed to her. They were married the next day, by a Justice of the Peace, and planned to have their honeymoon after Joe got back. The night before he left, as they lay in bed after a serious love making session, Joe came to a decision and got out of bed, walking over to his packed bags. He withdrew one of the amulets that his grandfather had given him, looking over it and thinking back to the promise he had made to his grandfather before going back over to lie down next to Lisa, and telling her. "Lisa, I want to give this to you, it was my grandmother's. My grandfather gave it to me before he died, and he told me to have the one I love and want to spend the rest of my life with wear it; that, my beautiful one, would be you. I want you to wear it, and remember my love for you every time you touch it." This brought tears to Lisa's eyes, and soon they were lost in their passion again.

**\*\*End Flashback\*\***

Joe had been staring off into space for most of his story, lost to time and his memories. Janet and Logan had simply sat there transfixed with the tale as Joe softly told it to them. Finally he shook his head to clear it, looked at the amulet in his hand, then at the now nearly empty flask, and with a quick motion, drained the last of the flask's bitter alcohol, setting it down next to him, and then continued.

"I shipped out the next day, and by the time I arrived in the Middle East, there was already a letter waiting for me from Lisa. We wrote back and forth every day for the next 2 months, when suddenly, the letters just stopped. At first I wasn't too concerned, figuring that either the mail was slow, or she decided to only write once a week or something. After two weeks of no letters though, I started to wonder what was going on. I tried to call the apartment that we had rented, but all I got was a message that the phone had been cut off. I tried to get a hold of one of my friends, but it was almost two more weeks before I could get him and ask him to look into things for me. When I called him back a week later, he said that there was no one at the apartment, and when he asked around, he found out that Lisa had moved out about three weeks previous, and had left with another man."

"I was broken hearted, and did the only thing I could think of; I buried myself in my work. I couldn't face it. The woman I had given my heart to just walked away with someone else. When it came time there wasn't really any reason to go home anymore so, I decided to reenlist. After eight more years' ac-

tive duty, I got offered a position to help train someone." Joe said and a small smile came across his face. "That someone turned out to be Adam. I rode out the last four years of my time there, and retired last year."

Something seemed to occur to Joe at this point and he looked up at Janet. "Janet, something I don't understand. I was helping to train Adam for almost four years, yet I never saw the amulet before this?" He let his voice trail off as the question was obvious in his statement.

"I was there the first night they brought him in, and I saw it then. I figured Dr. Marcus wouldn't want something to remind Adam of his life before, so I hid it for him so Marcus couldn't take it. After Adam woke up, I gave it back to him, and asked him what he wanted to do with it. He decided to hide it, and only bring it out when he was alone." Janet said simply.

**\*\*Meanwhile back in the Cave\*\***

Everyone stood in shock as the wall came down fully opening up to a very large, but very dark cavern. The rumbling of the wall moving down had just subsided when another, however, quieter rumbling started. A few seconds after that happened, lights started to turn on in this cavern, showing them that it was indeed a massive structure. They stood there in opened mouth shock as they looked into the now lighted area before them. It was easily the size of two football fields stacked next to each other, with the ceiling being close to one hundred feet above them. They also noticed that the area was bigger than they first thought, as they saw what appeared to be another large doorway at the other end of the huge open space. That door was open, and the lights were on there as well. Looking in there, everyone could see many doors and possibly side passages moving off.

But the thing that surprised them the most was what was sitting on the ground off on the right hand wall. "Oh my fucking God," breathed William, "Is that what I think it is?" He started to move off towards the object of his astonishment when Adam stopped him.

"Hold on, we wait for Juan with the weapons and radios, I don't want to go in here with out a little more firepower than the sidearms we have." Adam said while trying to shake off the dust that the wall moving had caused to cascade down on everyone. He slipped into command mode as soon as it started happening, not knowing what was back there, but knowing it had to be rather important to be hidden the way it was. It never did occur to him to think about why, the only thing that he had left from his mother, was the key to opening this new area. He was still staring wide eyed at what was before him, when he heard a loud thud behind him.

"What the fuck.. over?" Juan said as he came to a sudden stop and the bag he was holding slipped from his hand causing everyone who had been gawking to jump in surprise.

"Juan, get your ass over here and get that bag open." Adam barked as he spun and looked at Jack. "Jack, how many of your kids can handle either pistols or rifles?"

Jack looked surprised at the question, but then seemed to understand. He quickly looked around, and then called certain boys up to him. "These guys can handle either one."

Adam just nodded and looked the boys over. "Okay guys, here's how it's gonna work. We go in there in groups of three. Each group has at least two weapons, and a radio. Jack if it's okay with you, I want at least you to stay here and coordinate with everyone else." Jack looked kinda surprised for a second, but Adam continued, already knowing what Jack was going to say. "The reason I'm asking you is because if we find anyone in there, and they try to escape, I know you won't have trouble pulling the trigger if needed."

Jack slowly nodded at that plan. "Yeah, okay, you're right, Dave and I will stay up here, along with Tommy, and hi..., ummm, cat, and direct everyone by the radios." He then turned and looked at the kids. "Alright, listen up. We're doing as Adam said, but I also want a few more things. First, you're to check in at least every five minutes, if you don't I will move another one of the teams to where you last reported in, to search. Whoever uses the radios, I want you to report only the relative facts about what you find, and where it is, I don't want a bunch of chitter chatter on the air. If you run into any problems, I want you to back off and wait for help. Do NOT confront anyone you may find by yourselves. Is that understood?"

Everyone nodded that they agreed, then Adam and Juan started to pass out the weapons and radios, while Jack sent one of the kids running off to get a notepad and a couple of pens.

Once everyone was ready, they headed into the cavern. William, Bill, and Ronnie were going to check out this large room first, since Bill would be able to help even in his wheelchair. William was slightly surprised when Bill took one of the pistols, ejected the clip to make sure it was loaded, then chambered a round. The way he did it left no doubt in William's mind that Bill had some experience with hand guns before.

Now that they were ready to go, they went directly to the thing that caught William's attention at first. Soon they were standing in front of a large, two rotor helicopter. William let out a little whistle of astonishment, then turned to Bill. "Do you know what this is?"

Bill looked up at him with nothing short of astonishment in his eyes. He took a moment to formulate his answer. "Ummm, yeah... it's a Boeing MH-47 Chinook helicopter." He looked it over for a few more seconds, before saying, "Actually, I think it's the 47E model. The Special Forces version; if I'm not mistaken though, I think this is the prototype."

William was now definitely impressed, he hadn't even thought it was the prototype, until Bill mentioned it, but after looking it over a bit closer, he realized that the older boy was right. "Okay, let's look around here and see what else we can find. Bill, you and Ronnie look on the outside, and see what there is to see. Don't go too far away, until I get done checking the inside." He got nods from the other two boys, then went to go inside the helicopter. While he was climbing in, he was able to hear Adam and the other's clearing the other rooms, and seeing what's inside of them.

Adam was slightly worried about his group, as he had Donnie, and one of the other bullies, but he figured he could control them, and with what was going on, they would be more wrapped up in what was happening than any thoughts of retribution they might have. They were the last group to head out, and thus they were the ones that went the farthest into the cavern before finding an area to search.

They came to a doorway at the back of the hallway, and with Adam covering him; Donnie opened the door, then moved back. When Adam entered, he found himself in a stairway, both leading up and down. Adam made a quick decision, and started to go up the stairs. When they reached the next lan-

ding up, there was only a door as this must have been as high as this new complex went. They went through the same procedure as before with Donnie opening the door as Adam covered him, then Adam moved out into the room. What he saw was a huge room easily twice the size of the one they found below, and it was obviously meant to be a hydroponics area, as there was nothing but area's to grow plants, and other such things. Adam had the boys spread out, but made) sure they were able to keep everyone else in sight, and they went about searching the place.

Jory and his two companions were the next ones to reach the stairway having found nothing but office space in the rooms that they had checked out. Hearing Adam and his crew up the stairs, Jory decided that his group was going to go downstairs. When they reached the landing one floor below them, they were surprised to see stairs going down further. After consulting with Jack over the radio, they got the go ahead to go down to the lowest level they could find. They ended up going down two more levels until they reached the third one down. Once they radioed in how far they were, they proceeded to enter and start to search this level.

They were all shocked when they moved into the area, because they were in what looked to be a locker room area. Moving through here, they soon found themselves looking into two different rooms. In one room was a set up that would have made any fitness club envious, while in the other room was an Olympic sized pool, complete with diving boards. They moved on from there, and were soon looking into the other rooms on this level. They found a rather large library, and room, that looked to be set up to be able to record music, as it had a "sound" room, and enough instruments of various types to outfit a high school band. The biggest shock they got on this level though was the last room they came to. It had a very large and thick door on it that took Jory's full strength to open. When he did finally get it open, they were looking at a room that brought back many memories for Jory. The room they were looking at could easily be identified as a chemist's laboratory. As they searched through this room, they found that it was fully stocked with many chemicals. Jory was aware however, that many of them would probably be useless by now, as some of them had a very short shelf life, and it was obvious that this place had not been opened in many years.

Juan's was the third group to reach the stairs, and after getting word from Jack, they moved down two flights of stairs, and entered into the second level down of the compound. What they had found up to this point was not very exciting as they seemed to have only discovered housing units on the ground level. They were soon finding things on this level that were a bit more exciting. The first room they came upon looked to be a security room. After contacting Jack with what they found, they soon moved on, with Jack saying he would send someone else down to check that room out as it had many monitors that were probably hooked up to various cameras spread throughout the complex.

Next they found what were probably offices for many different people, as well as one large office that could only be accessed by a "secretaries" area. Another room they found looked to be a somewhat high tech conference room that Juan could only equate with a "situation" room. After searching through many other rooms that were all about the same as the ones they already found, they came to the end of the hall. There they found a very large and thick door that was locked. After searching for a few seconds, they found a key hanging on a peg nearby. Using the key, they were able to open the door, and Juan's jaw hit the floor.

What they were looking at was obviously the main armory for this complex. There were rows upon rows of rifles stacked up on one wall, along with many unopened cases lining the other wall. In a case in the middle of the room were many different styles of hand guns. There was also a long table in the middle of the room with an assortment of tools. They went through and Juan was able to identify al-



most everything they saw. The little boy was almost giddy with this find and he was bouncing around like a kid on Christmas morning as he went around and told the other two boys what he found. At one point he stopped short and just stared at what was before him in complete awe. On one of the racks, he even saw an assortment of missile and rocket launchers ranging from LAW rocket launchers to even a few Shoulder mounted Surface to Air missile launchers.

Juan actually thought that nothing could make this any more exciting, till they came to the back of the room, and found another closed and locked door. When they found the key, and opened this one up, none of the three boys could speak for several minutes as they took in what they found. The room was rather small compared to what they had seen so far, being only about thirty feet by thirty feet, but it was absolutely filled with valuable items. They saw stacks of gold bars, along with other precious metals. When they finally moved in, and started opening the drawers they found that were mounted to the walls, they found those filled with precious gems of all sorts. They decided not to radio this in, as they weren't sure if it would cause the others to stampede down here and look for themselves. So instead, they each took a few items to take back with them.

Chang and his group were the last to reach the staircase and descend. They only had to go down one flight of stairs and soon they were cautiously making their way through what must have been more berthing areas, and offices. Once they had those rooms cleared, they moved on and soon found a hospital of sorts. They saw one large room that was meant to hold non critical patients, as well as a room set up as an ICU. They also found three rooms that were obviously meant to be operating rooms, and a room that was meant to be an emergency room. What really surprised Chang was how well equipped the rooms were. Obviously some of the equipment was outdated, and had been replaced by either better, or smaller versions, in modern hospitals, but all in all this set up was one that could easily handle most medical situations. The biggest shock though, came when Chang went over to a cabinet that housed medications. When he took out one of the bottles, he saw the expiration date on that was for 1984. Chang knew that that particular drug had about a two to three year shelf life, so that meant this place was stocked either in 1981 or 1982. They were about to keep going, when they heard another large rumbling coming from somewhere down the hall, and they quickly moved to investigate.

William was just getting to the cockpit, when Bill called out to him from outside the helicopter. "Hey Will! You gotta come see this." William quickly made sure the cockpit was empty, and then he made his way to the back door and out. He quickly spotted Bill and Ronnie looking at something, and jogged over to them.

"What d'ya got?" He asked when he got over to them. Bill was holding what looked like the controls to a large elevator, and looking around, William quickly saw that there was a large elevator set into the floor. The thing was easily big enough to fit the Chinook on. He looked over to Bill, then moved onto the elevators floor, and raised his rifle to a ready position. "Okay Bill, hop on and let's see where this goes."

Ronnie wheeled Bill onto the pad, and then Bill pressed the button to start them descending. Once they started moving down, and cleared the floor of the first level, they saw another large open area, about the same size as the one right above them. William thought that he was ready for just about anything after seeing the Chinook upstairs, but he was soon proved wrong. Standing against the far wall were five more helicopters. Against one of the other walls, they saw five military style Hum-Vee's as well as two bigger troop transport trucks. Next to those, were five early eighties style black SUV's. As they off loaded and started to look around, they also found that there were a few different fuel pumps marked with Diesel, Gasoline, or A-V Fuel. They also saw that this place was set up with everything that

would be needed to work on the helicopters including both tools, and many spare parts. However, the most surprising thing was the large table that sat in the middle of the cavernous room. On it was numerous backpacks that obviously held parachutes. Hanging from the ceiling were many more parachutes that were hanging there in preparation to be loaded into the backpacks.

William was shocked, but still had his wits about him enough to question Bill. "Okay Bill, what kinda birds are those?" He asked while pointing to the helicopters lined up against the far wall. Bill took one look at them, and then looked back at William with a "Duh!" expression.

"Oh come on Will, give me a tough one why don't you. Those are Bell UH-1H Hueys. Only the most numerous produced helicopter in the world." Bill said almost with a bit of scorn in his voice, but moved over to them as quick as he could and started looking them over.

About thirty minutes later, all the various groups met up back at the entrance to this new compound and were talking rapidly about what they had found. Obviously it was Juan's group that got the most attention as everyone wanted to see the gems that the boys brought back up with them.

This was the sight that greeted Joe, Janet and Logan as they made their way into the cave from the outside.

Juan was the first one to notice that they were there, and quickly yelled, "Daddy, look what I found," as he ran up to the trio, and thrust out his hand, holding a rather large sized diamond.

Joe barely gave it a glance, and ruffled his hair, saying absentmindedly. "That's nice Juan." He looked up and saw Adam looking at him with a look of concern on his face. Joe had to wipe his eyes, to clear away the tears, and then taking a deep breath said to Adam. "Adam, I need to talk to you for a minute, please."

Adam just nodded, concern written clearly on his face, as he walked over to Joe, and asked. "Joe, what's wrong?" Joe didn't answer him right away, but put his arm over Adam's shoulder and led them to the entrance of the cave.

Everyone watched as Joe led Adam away, and Juan moved over to Janet for comfort knowing somehow that something was not right.

"Mom, what's going on?" Juan asked as he slid under Janet's arm forcing her to hold him close.

Janet didn't answer right away as she looked down at Juan, but then after gathering her thoughts, she spoke in a very soft voice. "Juan, honey, Joe has some news for Adam and he's not really sure how Adam's gonna take it. And to be honest, I don't either." She said as she watched Joe and Adam.

Juan was about to ask another question when he heard Adam shout in a voice filled with a mixture of pain and anger. "What the fuck do you mean you're my father?"

This of course caused everyone to look over in their direction again as some of them had gone back to talking about what they found below before the outburst.

Joe was trying to keep Adam calmed down, as he told him what he thought he needed to and with tears in his eyes said.

"Adam, I don't know how to tell you this, I just found out, but your mother....your mother and I were married, we...it was just before I deployed on active duty and....Adam....she must have been pregnant when I left but please believe me, I swear I never knew..."

Adam had been staring with increasing disbelief as Joe spoke, but now tore himself out from under Joe's arm and stood there staring at him; the anger plainly visible. "That's fucking bullshit!" he shouted at the top of his lungs, "Mom said that you left us, and ran off with another woman, that you didn't care about me, and ran off after you found out she was pregnant." Adam had tears in his eyes too, but they were not the same tears of sorrow that Joe had in his. "You left me, and 'cause you did, mom couldn't handle it, and she dumped me on some street corner like ya would the trash. It's your fault she did that, and.. and if you hadn't I wouldn't have been made into this.. this... FREAK!" Adam screamed that last part out, which shocked everyone, but what he did next no one could have expected. As Joe said in an anguished voice "Adam no...." Adam lashed out with a punch to Joe's chest that sent the larger man flying back and into the wall of the cave. Joe had barely hit the ground when Adam was on top of him throwing punches to anything he could hit.

Everyone stood in shock as Adam hit Joe, and he went flying. Then it took a few more seconds, before anyone could react. Juan was the first one that moved, and he ran over to Adam screaming for him to stop, almost begging, with his own tears in his eyes. Adam couldn't or wouldn't hear and just kept hitting Joe, over and over again completely lost in his rage and pain. All the years of pain, hurt, anger and loneliness were coming out in one massive tidal wave that the young boy, for all his ability just wasn't prepared for and couldn't handle, while Joe was just trying to cover his head and face from the vicious attack that Adam was giving him. When Juan got to Adam, he literally grabbed the older boy, and threw him off of Joe sending him flying.

Juan quickly looked at his father and whispered in horror at the sight before him "Daddy" as a sob escaped his throat.

Juan had thrown Adam a good 20 feet away, but Adam was able to twist in mid air, and land on his feet. Seeing this Juan moved quickly to stand between Joe and Adam then looked at Adam with fear and confusion in his eyes, yelling but in a voice that was filled with those emotions, "Adam, what...what are you doing?" Adam just looked back at him with nothing but feral rage in his eyes.

Seeing that scared Juan more than anything had up to that point, but he was determined not to let Adam hurt his daddy anymore even if he had to hurt Adam to stop him.

"Don't get in the way Juan; I will go through you if I have to." Adam said in a snarl, as he started to move towards Juan and the now unmoving man lying on the floor.

Juan stood his ground, and soon everyone could see his eyes shift from his normal brown eyes, to those eerie Yellow Eagle ones. "You want him, Adam; you'll have to go through me to get him." The young boy said with a firm if reluctant determination evident in his voice.

Adam for his part didn't react except to charge the younger boy, and try to tackle him to the ground. Juan side stepped at the last second, and used Adam's own momentum to throw him further away from Joe. Juan didn't give Adam a chance to recover as he went after him.

Tommy was standing there and staring in shock with tears running down from his eyes. He looked in a daze over to Fluffy who had been "talking" to him, and just nodded. Fluffy then let out a very loud cat "scream" and launched herself towards the fight, to the gasps of the others, but, right before she got to the two combatants to everyone's surprise, she launched herself high into the air, and easily jumped over the two boys, landing right next to Joe. She then placed herself over top of the now unconscious man and waited there in case she had to protect him.

Meanwhile the fight between Adam and Juan was truly a titanic battle as the brothers who, moments before would have died to protect one another, were now hitting each other with blows that could easily have broken normal people's bones, if not kill them out right. However, Adam was stronger and faster than his little brother, and soon, Juan was on the ground, and struggling to get back to his feet from the many blows his brother had delivered. Adam spun and saw Fluffy now standing over the prone Joe, and started to walk towards her. Fluffy gave a growl of warning, but Adam was too far gone to care. He was almost there, when he felt someone put their hand on his shoulder. Adam reacted instinctively; as he spun around, and delivered a crashing blow to the head of what he thought was Juan. As nothing else could have Adam was shocked out of his rage as he saw Logan go flying back, and hit Juan who had just got back to his feet, sending both boys sprawling to the floor. Because Adam thought it was Juan, he had swung low to try and hit the smaller boy in the face, but since Logan was a bit taller than Juan, Adam had hit him right in the shoulder, and he had heard the sickening crack as Logan's shoulder snapped under the assault.

In absolute horror Adam just stood there looking at Logan on the ground as his friend, no, his lover, lay there writhing in pain from what Adam had done to him. The one person who meant more than life itself to him, and he had just hurt him terribly and could have just as easily killed him.

Gasping, Adam whispered, "Lo...Logan" as he looked up at everyone and saw the looks present on all their faces and in their eyes.

Spinning around Adam then looked over and saw the crumpled form of Joe, lying on the ground, and a small puddle of blood running out from under him.

His...His Father...and...and

It was all too much and a now very dazed, confused and scared little boy, horrified at his actions, shaking his head, cried "Noooooooooooo" in a mournful voice, as he stumbled away from the sight before him muttering in tears through the sobs racking his body, "I..I'm soooo sorry" as he broke out into a run in the direction of the newer section of the cave and was soon gone from sight.

## Chapter 11

Chang watched what had just happened with something between utter shock, and the detached observation of a doctor. He watched as Adam first brutally assaulted Joe, who somehow seemed to be Adam's father. He then watched as Juan stood up to Adam and forced Adam's attention on himself, rather than Joe. He was actually rather pleased at how well Juan fared against Adam, who had four years of age on him, more than just a couple inches and more than thirty pounds, not to mention more experience.

The part of Chang that was a highly trained martial arts expert watched with a critical eye as Adam had made a few mistakes which should have ended the fight much sooner than it had; then again Juan hadn't seen them to take advantage of it either. He now knew first hand why his instructors had always said that keeping control of your emotions is so very important.

As soon as Adam left, the doctor in Chang took over, and he rushed forward to where Joe was lying. He saw that Janet had moved to her son, so Chang only had to deal with Joe. He quickly knelt down next to the now unconscious man, and gently started to check him over. He saw that Joe looked a lot worse than he really was which was a very good thing, because he looked quite bad. He looked around and saw Jory standing there watching what was going on, and sent him a quick mental message to get his med bag from their room. Jory quickly nodded, and ran off to fetch it.

About ten minutes later, Chang was sure that Joe was going to be okay once he had a chance to rest. As he sat back, he heard a loud "pop" followed by a scream, and looked to see that Janet had just popped Logan's arm back into his socket. Chang was rather pleased to see that Logan only suffered from a dislocated shoulder, and was not hurt worse. Knowing what he knew of Adam's strength that had been a distinct possibility.

Chang looked around and noticed his "brothers" watching what was going on, and trying to keep a general sense of order in the cave. The other children in the area were not taking what just happened very well, and Chang could not really blame them. He took a deep breath and then rose to his feet. Chang was rather disturbed by the noise in here though, it seemed like everyone was trying to talk at once, and some of the children were even crying. For the moment, Chang was actually glad he was not one of the "normal" ones, if this is how they reacted to a small show of violence.

He got the attention of his "brothers" and together they all moved over to where Logan was sitting against the wall with Janet still trying to fawn over him. "Excuse me Dr. Hayes, but we need to speak with Logan privately." Janet looked up rather surprised as this was the first time Chang had said anything to her outside of the time when they first met. The formality in which he made his request made her wonder exactly what was up. She looked down to Logan, who just nodded and struggled to his feet. She helped him to stand, and then re-settled the sling on his arm. She then looked over at Chang and nodded, "I think I need to go find Adam anyways."

Chang looked at her and spoke softly. "I am not sure that is a very wise idea right now."

Janet shook her head and said, "well I do, wise or not;" and then she was gone heading in the same direction Adam had gone.

Chang took a long deep breath, and let it out while looking directly at Logan. "Adam says you're one of us, and Juan agrees. That is enough for me, however, you must understand, that you are not physi-

cally able to do what we do, and getting into a physical confrontation with any one of us, including Juan or Jory would be a very large mistake on your part."

Logan looked rather shocked at what Chang was saying, and was about to protest when Juan spoke up. "He's right Logan, your just as much a member of this team as any of us, however, you are not trained as we are, and thus can't match us. This will change, if you wish, but for now, know that what you did was not a smart thing to do."

Logan's jaw was on the floor as he listened to the little nine year old boy speak as if he were an adult. He knew that the kids could act grown up if they needed to, but seeing this, he almost thought that it was the other way around. That they were actually grown up, but could act like kids if needed. He didn't know what to say to this, so he just nodded slowly.

Chang nodded and moved on into what he thought must be done now. "Logan, there are a few things you do not know about the Unit, yet. Although it is true that we never knew about the others, we were always drilled with a slightly different set of rules than the normal military uses. While we are dealing with only those in the Unit, those are the rules we follow. When there are others involved, we follow those rules, except within our own group. Do you understand what I mean?"

Logan thought about it for a second, and nodded that he understood. "Basically you mean you have a different set of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) than the rest of the military, but when you operate with the military, you follow theirs." The boys just nodded their heads and Logan knew he got it right.

"The reason I bring this up now," Chang continued, "is that we need to bring you up to date on them, cause we now have to decide what to do." Logan looked confused at what Chang had meant, but before he could say anything, Chang went on. "What happened here was an example of our different SOPs. I think I have a pretty good idea as to why Adam attacked Joe, based on what was said, and what Adam was thinking right before it happened. According to our rules, Adam was in the wrong for attacking Joe the way he did. However, both you and Juan were also in the wrong." Logan looked up sharply when Chang said that, and was about to speak when Chang held up his hand, and Logan bit his tongue.

"You have to understand, we are warriors. That is what we are made to be, that is what we do. As such, we have adopted a very physical system of rules. Adam is in command; however, there are two ways that he can be replaced as commander, even if only for a short time. The first way is for either Jory, William or Juan to challenge him. The challenge is always a fight to submission, or till one can not continue. When Juan stepped up to face Adam, he challenged him for leadership, and Adam reacted as he should." Chang explained while giving a sharp look to Juan who just stood there with his head high.

Chang sighed and was about to continue when Logan broke in. "Two questions quick." Chang nodded his head, and Logan went on in a rush. "You said there were two ways, and you didn't mention yourself as someone who could challenge for command."

Chang gave a brief smile and a nod. "I see that Adam was correct in saying that you were highly intelligent, however, I will explain both of those at once. The second way for Adam to be replaced, is for him to be medically unfit for command. As the doctor, I am the ONLY one that can force him to step down in that circumstance without a fight. I can declare him medically unfit for command, and then either I or someone else I say, will take over command. I would not fight Adam as it would not be a

fair fight as I am more highly trained than Adam, and my loyalty is to him, or whoever is in command."

Logan nodded that he understood, but was still slightly confused. "Okay, but why are you telling me this now?" Logan was sure he knew why, but he was afraid of what it would mean.

Chang took a deep breath then looked all his brothers in the eye. "I am telling you this, because I am declaring Adam unfit for command, due to emotional trouble that would interfere with his duties as commander." Chang spoke officiously, and then met everyone's eyes again. "Does anyone wish to log an objection to my ruling?" When no one answered, Chang just nodded, and continued. "Okay, then due to the fact that we will have to start training the children here, if they wish that, I will hold command until such time as Adam is mentally fit. Any objections to that?" Chang asked, again looking at each of his brothers in turn. They all just shook their heads saying they had no objection, and Chang nodded yet again. "Good, then there is lots of work to do." Chang said as he turned around and noticed that everyone was staring at them, wondering what was going on. Chang moved over to where the helicopter was, and got up into it the way Adam had a few times before. His brown eyes took in the features of everyone, as a hush fell over the area.

"I know that many of you may not know who I am, other than the fact that I am a member of The UNIT. My name is Chang, I am the doctor assigned to the UNIT, I am also the XO or executive officer. In other words, I am the second in command of the Unit and in charge when Adam is not here." Chang stated calmly, and although he did not like to lie, he knew that the others did not need to know the he had assumed command from Adam for the time being.

"My brothers and I have spoken, and we have decided that the offer to train you all, so that you may defend yourselves, is no longer valid." This caused a great deal of commotion to rage through the cave. Probably the most surprised was Joe, who was struggling to get to his feet after Chang's announcement. Chang raised his hand in an attempt to silence the crowd. It took a few moments, but everyone did finally quiet down.

"I am sorry, but with the reevaluation of the cavern, simply training you to defend yourselves would be a waist. What we would like to propose is this." Chang took a deep breath, and ordered his thoughts, he knew that a lot would hinge on what he was about to say.

"What we would like to propose is that over the next few months, we train all of you to use the various equipment found in the cavern. We propose to separate you into different groups, based on what you express an interest in, and train you in that field. When the training is complete, and all of you have your assignments, we would then start operations based out of this location." Chang paused to gage the reaction of the children here. He was pleased to see that he did not see any looks of dissent. What he saw was many looks of confusion, and even some of wonder.

"Instead of just training you to defend yourselves, we are now offering to train you to take the fight to those who would harm you, or harm those who cannot protect themselves. As I am sure you know all too well what happens out on the streets to children who have no one to look out for them. You probably know this better than we do. I have only heard a very little of the tales that could be told by those present. I am sure, however, that those tales are horrendous. I am sure that every single one of you could tell me stories that would make my stomach turn."

Chang took a break there as he saw many of the children nod in agreement with his words. He also saw that the four adults there were looking at him appraisingly. He took another moment to gather his thoughts before he began again.

"I want each of you to think back on the adults that have hurt you. I want you to think back and remember the looks in their eyes as they either beat you, threw you out to fend for yourselves, or maybe even the look in their eyes as they raped you." He paused again as he saw many of them close their eyes, and more than a few of them fought back tears as their minds took them back in time. "Now, I want you to imagine how many other kids have seen those looks. I want you to think about how many kids get abused each and every day." Chang paused as he saw many more tear filled eyes. "I would like everyone to answer my next questions with a show of hands. How many people here believe in God?" He noticed that many hands went up. "How many of you believe that God has a plan for us?" Most of the hands went up that time.

"Good, because I do, as well. I believe that God has put all of us here for a reason. I believe that God gave us all hardships to deal with, so that we could be at the point we are now. And I believe that God has given us what is here, so that we can do something with it." Chang was sure that he had gotten their attention now, and the references to God had been a good idea, now it was time to sell them the plan.

"How many of you would like to be able to do something about all the people out there that are hurting kids?" Most of the hands shot up quickly. "And how many of you would like to make sure that kids don't have to worry about being abused?" All the hands went up that time. "Now for the big question. How many of you would be willing to go through the training that we could provide, and DO something about the people hurting kids?"

Jack was standing in the back watching what was going on, and he was highly impressed with what Chang had said so far, but at his last statement, he decided he needed to step in. "Okay, hold on, Chang." He said, as he walked quickly to the helicopter, but didn't climb into it like Chang had done. He did indicate with a quick friendly smile that he did not oppose what Chang had said. "I think that before we all answer that last question, we all need time to think, and discuss what you have said." Chang gave a small nod, and Jack turned to face the crowd of children. "Here is what I propose. We have a whole new area we need to investigate, and with the way it is set up, I think we may want to move our stuff in here and pick out rooms for everyone." He glanced over to Joe just to make sure he wasn't over stepping his bounds, Joe gave him a nod and Jack continued.

"Why don't we all take the next two days to explore what we have here, talk amongst ourselves, and then we can respond to Chang's offer. Being in the Military myself, I know what he is offering is not going to be easy for anyone, so I would suggest you think long and hard about that." He then turned, and extended his hand to Chang, and the group broke up. Some to explore, and the others to start lugging their meager personal belongings down to the complex.

Chang, Jory, Juan and William all went off in search of Adam. Logan was told to stay there, and help Joe. This was something that the other boys had to handle, plus they were unsure of what was happening between Adam and Janet, and didn't need Logan in the way if things went bad.

Janet got lost a few times in her search for Adam, but finally managed to find him in the music room. At first she was rather impressed with the room as it seemed to have just about every musical instrument imaginable, and they all seemed to be in good working order.



She looked over to see what Adam was doing, and noticed that he was strumming on a guitar. She smiled slightly to herself, as the sight of Adam playing the guitar brought back memories of the first time he had picked up a guitar.

They were "celebrating" Adam's eighth birthday, they had to do it just the two of them because Dr. Marcus had decided from the beginning that Adam was not to be treated as a child, only as a lab subject, hence he didn't have birthday presents. Janet had fought long and hard for Dr. Marcus to agree to allow her to give him the guitar, she finally won by saying that it would be good to see if he was able to learn the guitar as fast as he learned other things. Plus it would keep the "subject" happier, which was good for the best test results. She was happy with herself for being able to come up with such a bullshit story, and even more so for being able to make Marcus believe it.

She was brought back to the present by Adam's voice. He had not turned around to look at her, and it always amazed her how he was able to tell it was her, even when he didn't see her. "Hello Janet," Adam said, while slowly turning around. She could see the tears in his eyes, and the ones in her own matched them. She could tell that he was in a lot of pain, that and the fact the he had called her Janet instead of mom, something he hadn't done in a very long time.

Janet moved over, and sat down on a stool next to Adam while he put the guitar down on the floor. When he looked back up at her, and their eyes met, Janet took a deep breath and asked quietly. "You wanna tell me what happened up there?"

Adam looked down at the floor, and was silent for almost a full minute. Janet knew that he wouldn't say anything till he was ready, so she just waited. "I... I just lost control again. When Joe said he was my dad, all I could think about was how it was his fault that everything had happened to me. If he had stuck around then I wouldn't have been turned into this... this... FREAK!" Adam lost control of his emotions again, and by the time he shouted out the last word, he had dissolved into anguished sobs again.

Janet tried to wrap her arms around him to try and comfort him, but the second she touched him, Adam pushed her arms away, jumped up and ran out of the room. Janet sat there stunned for a moment, and then she too dissolved into tears. The accusations were thick in his voice when he called himself a freak. She was partially to blame for what had happened to him.

Adam ran again, still not seeing where he was going, he was surprised to find himself in a full sized gymnasium. There were basketball hoops on both sides, and a full set of bleachers in the room. There was an open door at the back of the gym, and when he walked through the door, he couldn't help but smile slightly. He had walked into a fully stocked weight room, with an attached area that had mats on the floor, and well as a punching bag hanging from the ceiling. He slowly walked over to the bag, thinking he could use it to release some tension. He stripped off his shirt, and gave the bag a few experimental jabs. He knew unless it was a very well made bag, that was anchored properly, he would break it if he used his full strength. He was pleasantly surprised to see that it was a very well made bag.

He set himself up, then started to work on the bag. He was taken back to his work outs while he was in the lab. His teacher, Mr. Takamora, had always worked with him on the bag, always telling him what he was doing wrong.

"Adam, fighting is not about strength of arms, but strength of mind. One does not defeat an opponent by being stronger, but by being smarter." Mr. Takamora had often said while holding the bag so that Adam could hit it. "Do not strike the target on the surface, always aim your strike below the surface. That way you strike with full force."

Adam had always taken that lesson well, and he had destroyed many bags while he was practicing. Finally Mr. Takamora had gotten him a log to hit, saying that it would not break as easy as the bag. He was right, and many times, Adam had broken his hand on the damned thing. He refused to believe that he could not break it, and Mr. T, as Adam had taken to call him, had told him once, that he would be able to break the piece of wood. "But not with your fists alone and not with your anger. Your anger is your downfall. Do not let your anger control you; you must learn to control it. Anger has no place in a fight."

Adam had no idea what the man was talking about until about a month later. Adam had to take four days off from his lessons while his hand healed from the time he got upset at not being able to break the piece of wood. He had hit it with everything he had, and instead of the wood breaking, he felt the bones in his hand give way. All Mr. T had to say about it was to use the time he was not training, to think about how to do what was needed. Adam was furious and screamed, "Well if it's so fucking easy, why don't you do it?!" Mr. T just looked at him, and then down at the log, then back at Adam, he sighed, and gently moved Adam out of the way. He took a deep breath, and seemed to gather himself. Then with a loud exhalation of breath, he raised his hand high, and brought it down on the log. The log seemed to explode when Mr. T hit it, and Adam was dumbfounded. He knew for sure that his teacher was not physically stronger than Adam was, but in one hit had done what Adam had tried to do for the last several weeks.

When Adam came back four days later, there was a new log in the holder, and Mr. T didn't say a word, just nodded to the board. By this time, all the anger Adam had was gone, and the answer just seemed to hit him like a ton of bricks. Adam smiled, and walked up to the log. He looked it over for a few seconds, then he took a deep breath to center himself, and let go with a hard hit to the log. The log shattered, and Mr. T gave Adam one of his very rare smiles.

"Tell me young one, what did you do differently, this time than all the others." Adam was staring at the shattered log, and had to shake his head to bring him back to the present. He looked back to where Mr. T was standing, and turned to face him full on.

"Well, I realized that the wood did not want to break the way I was hitting it. So I had to find a place where it would break. I had to think about how wood is made, and where its weak points are. I realized that I was hitting it against the grain of the wood, hence it wouldn't break. All I had to do was figure out which way the grain was going, and hit it there, along the grain."

Mr. T nodded, and spoke in his soft voice. "Very good young one, remember that everything is like the wood. Everything has a grain to it in some form or another. However, you were too angry to think about it. If you had, you would have figured it out right away." Adam vowed to himself at that point, to keep his temper under control, and it wasn't until recently that he couldn't help but lose it. He figured it had something to do with him being in the middle of puberty. One of the medical books he read one time said that a child in the throws of puberty feels emotions much more intensely than an adult would. He hadn't realized till now exactly how true that statement was.

When Chang and the other boys found Adam later on, Adam was covered in sweat, and going after the bag for all he was worth. They stood and watched for a few moments, as Adam ducked, kicked, jumped, and punched like he was in the fight of his life. Chang was the first one to move, and he went to the back of the bag, and positioned himself behind it, using his own weight and strength to hold the bag steady for Adam. Adam barely gave a nod to Chang as he went into high gear, and started hitting the bag even harder. Finally with one massive hit, he pushed his hand into the bag, breaking it down the middle. Chang just grunted and let go of the rapidly deflating bag, as it spilled its contents all over the floor. Adam looked up from the growing pile and stared Chang in the eye. Neither one of them broke eye contact and soon enough it was a stare down.

Surprisingly, Adam was the first one to look away. As Adam turned to leave, Chang spoke up. "I have relieved you of command, until such time as you gain control of yourself."

Adam didn't even pause as he went out the door, throwing a "Yeah whatever" over his shoulder as he went out.

Chang shook his head after Adam left, and then turned to the other boys there. "Okay guys, we need to move our stuff in here as well. You guys go grab it, and I will find Jack and find out where it's all going." The other boys nodded, and went out the door, with Chang following. He didn't have to go far to find Jack.

Jack was walking down the hallway when he was passed by the boys. Chang stopped in front of Jack and came to attention, while he crisply saluted. Jack returned the salute, then spoke. "At ease Chang, what can I do for you?"

Chang dropped his arm, placing both his hands behind his back, and spreading his feet slightly. He was in the universal "at ease" position. "I was wondering, sir, if you had decided what the housing assignments would be?"

Jack looked down at the little boy, and was once again amazed at how easy they maintained military decorum. He had not seen such displays from anyone who was not career military. "I have not thought about that as of yet, would you have a suggestion to offer?"

Chang nodded his head, and then spoke. "Sir, I believe it would only be appropriate for you and your mate, David, to take the presidential suite. I would then suggest that since there are enough single rooms, that every person here should be assigned to one of the singles, unless they prefer to have a larger room. I would also suggest that myself and my brothers take the rooms closest to yours. That way we can protect our commanding officer as much as possible."

Jack was rather surprised by the boys' last statement. "And do you think something would happen that would require me to need protection?" He asked, not really sure he wanted to know the answer, but wanting to see just how this boy's mind worked.

"Sir, I do believe that would be prudent, for many reasons. One, you have made it your mission to protect children that are potentially being hunted by dangerous people. Second, I am sure that as soon as the military finds out that we are here, they will more than likely decide to try and re-capture us. I can speak for my brothers as well as myself when I say that we will not be taken alive." Chang answered in a very cold voice.

Jack saw the look in Chang's eyes as he said that last part, and knew that unless something strange happened, the military would never get their hands on these boys alive. With what little Jack had seen so far, he was rather sure that if the military did try to capture them, the body count of such an operation would be high.

Chang had stood there while those thoughts ran through Jack's mind, and waited for an answer. He had not meant to trouble the man with his words, he was just stating the truth, but he would not lie. Finally Jack came back to the present. "Chang, I agree with your assessment of how the rooms should be assigned. If you would, please see that it is carried out as soon as possible." Chang came to attention and snapped a salute at the obvious dismissal, turned on his heel, and strode away towards the level with the large rooms on it.

Chang let his brothers know what was going on with the rooms, while he was walking to the larger rooms. He was still getting used to having four other people in his head, but he knew that it would be very useful when it came time for the five of them to put their training and skills to use. While he was walking, he ran his fingers lovingly over the hilt of the sword on his side. While he knew how to use many different weapons, none of them came close to the feeling he got just being able to touch the sword. It was more than just a weapon to him, it was a part of him, and extension of his soul as he thought about it.

A few minutes later, the other boys, with Logan, came walking into the room, all of them carrying equipment, and bags. Logan came in last, and all he was carrying was his lap top bag as his right arm was still in a sling. Chang knew this was going to be hard on the new boy, but knew that with the way Adam was right now, it was probably the best thing to do. He went over to Logan, after the older boy had put the bag on the floor, and placed his hand on his uninjured shoulder.

"Logan, I know that you probably want to share a room with Adam, but for right now, I think it would be wise to give you each your own room. When Adam comes back to his senses, you can always move your stuff into his room." Chang said softly, hoping not to increase the boy's pain anymore than needed.

Logan looked at the floor, obviously trying to fight back the tears that were threatening to drop, and was able to nod his head, not trusting his voice. Chang reached down, and grabbed Logan's lap top bag, and gently escorted him to the room next to the one he had picked out for Adam. He still did not understand inter-personal relationships, but he knew enough to know that Logan was hurting right now, and he also knew that no matter what Adam might say, he would want Logan to be helped as much as possible.

Chang escorted Logan silently into a rather large and well appointed room. While there was still plastic on all the furniture, and no linen anywhere, Chang could still see that, when finished, this would be a very nice room. He led Logan over to a large desk that was obviously used to hold many different computers, even though right now they were just empty slots. "Logan, I figured this would be a good room for you, from the looks of things, this was supposed to be for whoever was in charge of the computer systems throughout the complex. I think you would be the logical choice to fill that role."

Logan barely gave a nod as he looked around at the huge room. While he was looking around, the other three boys rushed into the room, and started the process of "opening" up the room. William went over to the far wall and a panel that held five switches, he flipped them all, and soon the room was fully

lit, and Logan could hear the fans kick in as air started to move for the first time in many years in this room.

Chang led Logan out of the room, and back to the one that he was using, which was quickly becoming the group room. "Why don't you see if you can get someone to help you bring the rest of your stuff down here? By the time you get back, the room should be ready for you, and then I have a project for you, if you think you can handle it." Logan looked at Chang with a question in his eyes, but just nodded and went off when Chang didn't say anything else.

Logan was back with two bags in his one good hand, and Chang had to raise his eyebrow at that seeing as he was sure there were people who could have helped Logan with his bags. One look in Logan's eyes, told Chang what he wanted to know. Logan would be damned if he needed help with something like this. Chang nodded his approval when Logan passed him, and followed the older boy into the room he would be using. Once Logan had his bags on the recently made up bed, he turned towards Chang and said, "Okay, what's this project you have for me?"

Chang took a deep breath before he began. "I am sure you have noticed that the people here lack much in the way of supplies. I am sure you also know that it will take much to get this complex up and running, and from looking at the food stores that they already have here, I would imagine that the sooner we start getting supplies in here, the better."

Logan was nodding and seemed deep in thought for a few minutes after Chang finished. "Are there any stipulations to how you want it done?" Logan asked, trying to figure out just how to do what Chang had asked. He too had seen the sorry state that these kids were in, threadbare clothes, and not much to eat, and knew that something had to be done about it.

"The only things that I think you would need to keep in mind are that it should not be traceable to us, and I would prefer to try and keep it legal. Other than that, we just need to get it." Chang said, knowing he was asking for something that would test Logan's abilities to the limit.

Logan nodded to the stipulations, and then went over to the desk that already had his lap top set up on it. He was pleasantly surprised to find out the he was actually able to get onto the Internet here. He dove into the work so fast, and so thoroughly, that he did not even notice Chang leaving.

Logan was totally into his work, and didn't notice how long he spent there, till he felt someone put their hand on his shoulder. "Here you go; you look like you could use this." Joe said, as he put a large cup of coffee on the desk next to the computer.

Logan leaned back, and rubbed his eyes, trying to get them to focus on something other than the computer screen. When he finally could focus, he looked at the clock and was surprised to see that several hours had passed. He grabbed the cup of coffee and took a sip. He smiled when he found out that it was prepared just the way he liked it, lots of sugar and milk.

Joe had to laugh at the look of contentment on the boy's face when he sipped the coffee. "I personally thought your mother was killing the coffee when she was fixing it, but then she said it was for you. She said something about this being a substitute for when there was no Jolt Cola around." Logan couldn't help but bust out laughing, and Joe smiled seeing him laugh like that. "So what have you come up with?" Joe asked, already having been briefed by Chang on what he asked Logan to do.

"Why don't you go grab Jack, David, Chang, and Mom, and I'll explain it all at once, I am just about done, and by the time you have them all in here, I will be." Logan said, as he took one more sip of the coffee, and then turned back to the computer. Joe didn't bother responding, as he knew it would be lost on Logan right now.

Five minutes later, they were all coming through the door, when Logan sat back, and thrust his arm into the air. "YES!!!! GOD DAMN I'M GOOD!" He practically shouted, but stopped and blushed when he saw his mom standing in the room, along with everyone else. "Sorry mom." He mumbled into the floor, and everyone burst out laughing, including Janet.

"You know kiddo," Janet said while she walked over and ruffled his hair, "the last time you were that excited was when you crashed the school's computer when you were eight, because you wanted a longer vacation." Everyone had to laugh at Logan as he blushed from head to toe when Janet said that. Jack decided to take pity on the boy, as he stepped forward a bit. "Okay Logan, why don't you tell us what has you so excited?"

Logan sat back again with a huge grin on his face, and spun himself around in the chair a few times before stopping, and draining the rest of his coffee. Finally he stood up and went over to the bed, to sit down there. "Okay, here's what I got so far. I accessed the money Dr. Marcus left, which by the way, he was mistaken about; it's just over twenty five million." He paused to let that sink in, and to let Joe explain to Jack where that money came from. When Joe was done, Logan continued. "Now, here's how things need to work. First thing tomorrow morning, Jack, you need to head into town, and go to the Mailboxes etc. store, we have a box there now, and by tomorrow morning, it will be full. Here's the long and the short of what I spent the last couple hours on. First off, Jack, you are now listed as owner and CEO of the Canyon corp. They are a distribution and warehousing company, based out of Salt Lake City. They were bought out for a steal at five million, but don't worry, that will be recouped in 2 years with the new orders the company will be getting."

Logan sat back a bit, and let the first part sink in, when he felt everyone was ready to keep going, he sat back up. "Second part of this is the fun one. I have hacked into the hospital's mainframe, the local school district's computers, and the local Wal-Mart distribution Center's computers. Basically what will happen is this. You tell me what we need, and I place an order from one of those companies to get what we need. If they don't have it, I will find some place else to get it. The product will then be delivered to the warehouse that's nearby in Ogden. From there, it will be loaded onto a truck that I just bought. One of you will need to drive that to wherever we need it to go to get it here. Then, I will go back in, pay for everything, then make it disappear, by making it look like it was ordered by other companies, and shipped to them. If anyone actually tries to track a load, they will run into a black hole, where the things just disappear."

When Logan finished, he looked at the astonished faces of everyone there, and giggled. He couldn't help it, and said through his giggles, "As I said, damn I'm good." That broke everyone up, and it was at least two minutes before everyone calmed down. Jack was the first to recover.

"Okay Logan, I am impressed, but I don't understand one thing, why do I need to go into town tomorrow, and what's waiting for me there?" Jack asked, while Logan went back over to his computer.

"Well, that was the tricky part. But tomorrow, you will need to fill out the paperwork transferring ownership to yourself. Also, you need to pick up the credit cards that are issued in both yours and David's names." Logan then looked up to see a shocked look on Jack's face and giggled as he turned to Joe and

Janet, while still addressing Jack. "You will also have to pick up the credit cards and new ID for both Janet and Joe. I gave them new identities, everything from Birth certificates, to high school transcripts to college records, etc. I hope you guys don't mind, but I figured your real names wouldn't be good to issue credit cards in." Logan snickered as he now had everyone's jaw on the floor. He had intentionally waited to tell them the last part until he had them thoroughly impressed. "And the best part is, the first three truck loads of food arrive in two days."

## Chapter 12

Logan stared at his screen in total disbelief. It took him almost five minutes to snap out of the daze he was in; he couldn't believe what he had just read. It had been five weeks since the night they found the complex behind the wall of the cave, and the time had been a busy one. So busy in fact, that this was the first time that he had a chance to get back to the data that he had hacked from the main frame that Dr. Marcus had used. Now he was kicking himself for not taking the time to look earlier.

He hit the print screen button on his computer and ran over to the brand new laser printer that was just delivered yesterday in one of the loads that had been coming into the compound ever since he put his supply scheme into play. Since the day they had received their first loads, they had gotten at least one, but more often than not, two or three loads each day. They got loads of everything from food, to clothes, to bullets for the guns, to the load that Logan loved the most. He had managed to get a large quantity of computers and other electronic equipment. It included a laptop for everybody that was here, as well as the various office equipment that was needed. It took a lot of man power to handle those loads, since they first had to be loaded onto a truck at the warehouse. That was done by the dock personnel so that wasn't a big deal, but then the truck, driven by Joe, went to the outskirts of town, where it met up with Will and Bill in the Chinook. Thankfully, Logan was smart enough to get a trailer with a roller floor, but they still had to move all the pallets full of various things, to the end of the trailer, where it was picked up by Joe and the fork lift that they had also gotten. He then took everything into the Chinook. Once that was loaded, Will and Bill took it back to the base, and then everyone would help unload it. Logan was also surprised when he figured out just how many kids were actually here. He originally thought that there were only like twenty or twenty five kids living in the compound, but it turned out that there were actually more than thirty five kids here.

On top of everything else, the kids had still gone through basic firearms training in the first two weeks The Unit had been here. Adam was insistent that everybody have at least basic handgun training, including the four youngest boys, Tommy, Ray, Ronnie and Frankie. They had also started the physical training of everyone, as well as beginning to break everyone up into the different areas they would "work" in. Logan found out early on that it was a good thing that David was around. It turns out that David was a cook in the army, and was used to cooking for large groups of people, without him, things would have been a lot more difficult in the feeding the masses department. There may have only been about forty-five people here, but since most of them were kids, they usually ate twice as much. David even found out that three of the kids here wanted to learn how to cook, and really enjoyed it, so with them, he had his cooking team. Now they handled a lot more than just cooking. As David described it, they were the "Domicile Staff," and handled everything from cooking, to laundry, to making sure all the rooms were set up for the people here. David and his crew had become very busy, very quickly, once things started to happen.

Not only were the kids being trained in basic hand gun safety, but they were also being taught basic hand to hand combat skills. Chang was also giving an advanced class for those that wanted it. So far

there has only been one of the kids that Chang had decided to train personally, and that was Emily. She's a rather petite girl of sixteen, with long auburn hair, and deep green eyes. She has a face like a doll, and according to the straight kids, she's beautiful. Logan could see it, but wasn't really interested.

The other surprise was Bill's little brother, Ronnie. Ronnie's only nine years old, but that kid has a mind like a steal trap. He also had the best organizational skills of anyone Logan had ever met. Ronnie had started out helping to organize the supplies that were brought in, but within a week, he was running everything. He knew where everything went, where it was, how many they had of any given item, and ran the supply room with an iron fist at times. Jack and Adam quickly picked up on this fact, and named Ronnie the group's Quarter Master. Ronnie beamed with pride the night that Jack made that announcement at dinner. And since then, he had proven himself up to the task. Logan found out from Bill that part of the reason Ronnie was so good at it was that the little boy had a photographic memory.

Logan was brought back to the present by the printer finishing up printing the twenty some odd pages that Logan had sent to it. He picked them up and ran down to the main hanger, which is where Adam was supposed to be desperate to find him, now that he had seen exactly what he had. Adam and Joe were supposed to be taking another group of kids up for their first solo jumps. It was decided that anyone who wanted to learn how to parachute, would be allowed to. Logan didn't join in however, as he didn't see why anyone would want to jump out of a perfectly good helicopter.

Adam was a sore point right now anyways. Ever since the incident, where Joe told Adam that he was the boy's father, Adam had been distant. He was still polite to everyone, and trained the kids like he said he would, but that was as far as it went, and on top of that, Adam had barely said two words to Logan outside of "business" since that night. Logan could also tell that he was still pissed at Joe. Anytime Joe would show up somewhere that Adam was, he would leave if he could. He wasn't openly hostile to Joe, but he wasn't friendly either. Juan was taking it the hardest out of everyone, because he was close to the both of them. He felt torn between his brother and his father. Adam had officially taken command back of the Unit, but it was Chang who did a lot of the training. Logan could see the pain in Adam's eyes even if others couldn't and it broke his heart but he didn't know what to do about it. He had been warned to stay away and give Adam some time so reluctantly that was what he did while he watched Adam going the motions of living while not really doing so and consumed with his anger and pain.

When Logan reached the main hanger, he looked around and spotted Donnie and Ray. Donnie had made an amazing turnaround from the first time they had met when Jory showed them that the Unit doesn't take shit from bullies. He quickly became one of the best students that the Unit boys had. He also took the youngest kid in the camp under his wing. Ray was a cute little seven year old that had a really hard life so far. Logan didn't know that whole story, and was sure he didn't want to, but so far, the only people that Ray would even talk to were David and Donnie, and he was all but glued to the older boy's side. That is, when he wasn't in the kitchens with David. Ray's a cute little imp, with fiery red hair, and freckles covering him from head to toe. The first time the little guy was at the firing range was a surprise too. It seemed the little seven year old was a crack shot with the pistol. As long as it was braced of course, he still has a bit of a problem with the recoil, even on the smaller guns.

Logan ran over to Donnie and Ray, causing a bit of concern to come across the older boy's face, as running in the hanger was not something that was done. Even the smaller kids knew that. Safety was something that was very important and it had been drilled into everyone from day one. "Donnie," Logan said, out of breath by this point, "Where's Adam and Joe?"



"They just left about five minutes ago, why, what's wrong?" Donnie asked, putting the gear down that he was working on. Donnie had been promoted to the Alpha Team Leader, and as such had to make sure all his team's gear was in order in case something happened. Ray, even though he was technically assigned to the Domicile Staff, was often seen helping Donnie out when he wasn't needed in the kitchen, or in one of the other various tasks that Domicile had to perform.

"Here." Logan said, while thrusting out the papers he had, to Donnie. Donnie started to look them over, but after he got through the first paragraph, he looked up to Logan in shock and asked. "Is this shit real?"

Logan just nodded his head solemnly, and motioned for him to keep reading. It took Donnie nearly ten minutes to read through everything that Logan had given him, and you could see him get redder and redder in the face as his got more and more angry.

While Donnie was reading that, he walked over to where Sarah and Dennis were working on one of the Hueys. These two, along with Bill, had been working with William on training to be pilots for the helicopters. As William once put it, "you three are about to be immersed in a LOT of SHIT. Shit being Super High Intensity Training." That comment of course brought about a round of laughs from everyone who was around, but William was right. After only four weeks of work, they had already gone through all six helicopters that were here, and checked them all out. All but one of them was found to be flight worthy already. William was splitting their days, with half of it being spent teaching them how to fly, and the other half teaching them helicopter maintenance. Thankfully, all three of them learned very quickly.

They of course, did have some help. That came in the form of Collin, Conner and Vic; the helicopter ground crew. They had a variety of tasks, ranging from making sure the helicopters were full of fuel at all times, and that they had at least one on the pad ready to go at a moments notice, to being responsible for arming the helicopters and making sure everything worked properly. When one of the helicopters went out on a flight, at least one of them was on board, acting as the crew chief. That being the person responsible for making sure everyone is belted down, that all cargo is secure, and if they had to go into a "hot" zone, that person would also act as a door gunner.

Logan reached the Huey, and touched Sarah on the shoulder to get her attention. She had her head stuck most of the way inside the engine compartment, working on something. She angrily snapped "Yeah, what do ya need?" Not a little irritated to have her work interrupted, then upon pulling her head out from underneath the engine and seeing who it was, cried, "Oh shit, sorry Sir, how can I help you?" All the while blushing a bright red, which contracted nicely with the smudge of grease that was on her cheek. Logan still had to get used to being called Sir, as Joe and Adam had both agreed that if they were going to teach these kids military stuff, then they should learn how military decorum worked and follow it. They said it not only helped build discipline among the kids, but it also taught them to respect others, which was something that would help them later in life. Of course, that meant that Logan had to get used to his new title of Lieutenant in charge of Intelligence and Administration, which meant he got to play with the computers.

"Specialist Martin, is the Radio working in this helicopter?" Logan asked, remembering the fact that a lot of these kids never really had anything to make them feel special. For most of them, calling them by the rank which they "earned" really made them feel good. Of course they didn't earn the rank in the traditional way, more that they were assigned their rank by Jack, since he was the highest ranking person on the base, hence the title of base commander.

However, Jack only assigned the ranks to those that deserved them, so they really did earn them. It would have just taken a lot longer if they were in the actual military to obtain them. Sarah was no different than any of the other kids, she was 15, and from what little Logan knew of her background, he knew she had gone through the loss of both her parents, and then sexual abuse while in the foster care system. She had finally decided that the streets couldn't be any worse than where she was, so she left. Now she was getting the chance to fly helicopters, and had her sense of self worth boosted by being given a higher rank than most of the other kids. She earned that because of how much time and effort she put into everything she did, and with the exception of Will, it was a toss up between Bill and her as to who was the better pilot. Bill had the knowledge base that she was just learning, but according to Will, Sarah had better instincts than Bill.

"Yes sir, the radio is in operational order. If you want to contact Viper lead, they are using channel Beta 3." Logan still loved the call sign that William had adopted for himself, and of course, the other pilots used it as well, but Will was always Viper lead. Logan thanked Sarah for the help, and then climbed into the pilot's seat. He grabbed the radio off the holder while Sarah reached in and turned on the batteries before reaching across his chest and dialing in the proper frequency on the radio. Mouthing a thanks to her, Logan hit the transmit button.

"Canyon Base to Viper lead." Logan spoke into the microphone. He still had to get used to the radio lingo that was used, but he was sure he could get this conversation done without needing to pull out his cheat sheets.

Viper Lead on, go ahead Canyon Base." Will's voice came back over the radio. It struck Logan as kind of odd that Will had responded directly, because from what he had been told when Will was training him on how to talk on the radio, and procedures that happened, he knew that usually the co-pilot was the one who monitored the radio, and if needed he patched a caller into the pilot. Either Will was breaking with procedure, or he was letting Bill be the fly the chopper while he acted as the co-pilot.

"Viper lead, what is your ETA to the drop point?" Logan asked trying to figure out how long it would be till they were in position to let the people jump from the Chinook.

"Canyon base, ETA to drop point is one zero minutes." Will came back over the radio, and Logan nodded, knowing he had ten minutes to get to the LZ if he wanted to catch Joe and Adam, and with what he had, he needed for them to see this as soon as possible.

"Roger that Viper Lead, after drop, please land at the LZ instead of coming back to base, your presence will be needed." Logan said, hoping that Will would not argue with the break from procedure.

"Roger that base, Viper Lead out." Will said after a second, and Logan nodded in relief, and took off the head set. Sarah turned everything off for him, and then shut down the batteries as Logan got out of the pilot's seat. "Everything okay sir?" She asked as he climbed down.

Logan just nodded at her, and went off to where Donnie had just finished reading the pages Logan had handed him. Before Logan could say anything, Donnie spoke up. "I take it you wanna go to the LZ and let them see this as soon as you can?"

Logan nodded, "Yeah, I'd think I better, don't you?"

Donnie just shook his head in wonder, while glancing back at the pages. "I think if you waited to give this to them, they'd hang you by the balls. Come on, we'll take one of the hummers. I'm driving" Donnie said, saying the last part with a grin.

Logan couldn't help but chuckle as he remembered back to when they tried to teach him how to drive one of the hummers. It was comical to say the least.

Donnie, Ray and Logan loaded up into one of the hummers, and Donnie drove them out of the canyon. The LZ was only a few minutes away, in the next canyon over. It was wider than the one they were in, and was a lot more level, which made landing a lot easier as well. Getting over there was fun for the boys, as there really were no roads between the two. There was one "path" that lead down to a road, but that was really only used when they had to head into town. And that "path" was what was left of the road that they had used to get all the equipment in here.

They spotted another hummer sitting off to the side of the canyon in the shade. Standing next to it were Jack, Janet, Chang and Juan. Jack had a laptop set up on the hood of the Hummer, and Logan was sure he knew what that was. In a load that came in about a week ago was a box of twenty barographs. They were little things that strapped to the wrist of a jumper, and what they did was record altitude, speed, and position of the jumper. With the laptop that Jack had set up, he could keep track of all the jumpers with out having to be able to see them. When Logan's group got up to the other Hummer, Logan jumped out and ran to his mother. He knew that Janet and Chang were there in case anything went wrong on the jump, but so far all they had to deal with was a sprained ankle.

"Mom! You gotta see this!" Logan almost shouted as he jumped out of the hummer once it had come to a stop. He ran over to his mom, and thrust the set of papers into her hands. Wondering what could have gotten her son so riled up, she took the papers that he had given her and started to read them.

Janet looked tired, and Logan knew she was. While she wasn't the oldest adult there, she wasn't used to keeping the kind of schedule that they had been going at for the last month. Not only did she have to go through the med level with a fine toothed comb, she and Chang had had to go through all the medications and figure out what needed to be replaced. It took them, along with their new assistants Paul and Bruce, almost two weeks to get the med level set up right. Janet knew that they would more than likely be dealing with abused kids at some point, so they had gone so far as to redecorate a part of the med level to look like a kids ward in a major hospital. It was re-painted to look brighter, and less threatening with teddy bears, balloons, horses and other kid friendly images on the walls. They had installed a new TV in every room, as well as an X-Box when the load of a hundred of them showed up. She knew that every little thing would be of a help to kids coming to them who, in addition to everything else they had been through, were now in unfamiliar surroundings and injured.

It was decided that each "Pod" would have a large screen TV and a video game system set up in it. A Pod was a group of ten rooms that shared a large common room. Right now, each one of the "rapid assault teams" had their own Pod, with the other Pods being split up by the various sections, and who wanted to share with someone else. The rooms off the pods were all single rooms, so that each person had some privacy, and those rooms were set up really nice.

Adam had made the comment when they started that he wanted to make sure that these kids had opportunities that they never had before. Because of that, they had spent a lot of money to make things very comfortable in the rooms. Each room had a double sized bed that was there before they found it. But they allowed each person to pick out their own furnishings, within reason of course, and from the stuff

Logan could find that he could order. Each room was also set up with a desk, a dresser, two end tables, a book shelf, a stereo system that was able to play both CDs and tapes, and a closet. The kids also were issued five pairs of BDU's as well as whatever they wanted that they could order from Wal-Mart. Each section had a specific day where they could fill out a request form that was given to Logan's team, to see if they could obtain what the kids asked for. If it was something that was not too extravagant, and was doable, they would add it into the next order. So far they had gotten requests for everything from a huge teddy bear, that Donnie had ordered, as a surprise for Ray, to models, posters for the walls, to certain CD's that the kids wanted. The one thing that Logan really hated though was, having to wire the entire complex for Wi-Fi. They had gotten a laptop for each of the kids, and it was Logan's job to not only help the kids set them up, but to also set up the network, which meant he had to do that before handing the computers out to them. That in itself was a task, because they were very worried about security. He didn't think the kids would intentionally break security, but not all of them knew what could, or couldn't be traced. He had it set up that every kid would have his or her own user name and password. He then set up their accounts based on their needs. The only people who would have unrestricted access were the adults, Logan, and the other officers. Everyone else had very restricted access, which limited them to approved sites that helped them with the primary use of the laptops.

The laptops served as the primary resource, as Janet was also using them for her "other" job. She had taken it upon herself to start up the education of the kids here much to their chagrin. She had spoken to Joe, Adam and Jack, and they all agreed that the kids needed to continue their education. Janet had spent a lot of time getting aptitude tests, and then running each kid through a test to figure out what they needed to learn. The laptops were very useful in that regard, as she was using the computers to help with the education. The "classes" started up last week, and everyone's day was split into two parts. The first part was for school work, in which they had a set schedule of classes. In most of the classes, they would work individually on their computers, with one of the adults walking around and helping anyone who needed it. The other classes were more hands on, with different people teaching what they knew. The most fun class, as far as most of the kids were concerned was the chemistry class that Jory taught. It was more like "what are we going to make today with a bunch of different chemicals?" Janet was more than slightly concerned when Jory told her that he could teach the chemistry class, thinking that he would be teaching them only how to make things that blew shit up. Jory knew better then to start with the hard stuff though, and the first day, he had only taught the class how to make slime much to the dismay of the adults who thought to themselves that it may very well have been in revenge for the resumption of schooling; of course the kids loved it, especially with the adults' reaction to it. For some strange reason, the kids couldn't fathom, the adults didn't much care for the surprise slime fests which consisted of a kid jumping out saying "HI!" as he inundated the poor adult with said substance. Slime is a malleable green substance, that looks and feels like real slime, but is completely safe. Most of the kids didn't really realize that they were learning a lot of things in Jory's class, the biggest of which is advanced math. All they knew was that it was lots of fun, at least to them, the adults weren't too sure, especially with some of what followed, which they liked even less. The poor children though were more than happy.

There was one main incident with Jory teaching that had become legendary around the complex. It happened when Jory was teaching his class and noticed that Janet was passing by the room. He had said something to the effect of, "Okay class, that's enough for today, tomorrow, we'll learn how to make napalm." Everyone looked up as he said that, and then towards the door when they heard someone choking outside.

Janet walked back to the door, and stood there with her hands on her hips. She looked daggers at Jory and said, "Excuse me?!?!". Jory just grinned at her and said, in his best innocent child ce. Whaaaaat? Before breaking down in laughter and saying, "Gotcha!"

Once again it was one of those things that the kids found immeasurably more funny than the adults, and Janet in particular, who if looks could kill would have resulted in one less nine year old in the complex.

Logan was glad that he was exempt from the classes as he already had his high school diploma, and was working on his doctorate, when everything started. He knew he would have enough time later on, to get it, as the doctorate in computer sciences, didn't really seem like the big thing it had before, anymore. But since he wasn't involved with the schooling, that just meant that he had more time to do his supply, and administration duties. He was surprised at how much paperwork Jack, Joe, and Adam wanted, but when they all told him laughingly that the Military survived on their paperwork, he began to understand. Plus, no matter how much he would bitch about it, he did see the need for it all, and surprisingly, he actually enjoyed it, not that he would admit it to anyone if they asked.

Logan was brought back to the present by his mother's voice, crying "Is this shit for real?" Which caused everyone's jaw to drop, as no one, including Logan, had ever heard her say anything stronger the "hell" before. All Logan could do was nod to her question, and drop his jaw even further when she exclaimed, "Son of a BITCH, I think it's about time to let Juan loose on this motherfucker!" Janet reached over and ruffled Juan's hair after she said that, and handed the papers to Jack. Chang moved over behind Jack to read over his shoulder. Juan had snuggled into Janet's embrace, and was almost purring in contentment. That purr soon stopped, and was soon replaced with a growl as it was obvious that Chang was relaying what he was reading to the younger boy. Janet just pulled Juan closer into her as soon as she noticed the change in the younger boy, and when Juan's eyes changed to the yellow eagle's eyes, Logan knew he was pissed. One look at Chang would not have given anyone who didn't know him a clue as to what he was thinking. Logan, however, had spent a lot of time with the younger boy, and knew how to read his expression. The rigid way he was holding himself, and the intensity in his eyes showed his anger just as clearly as if he had Juan's ability to change his eye color.

"Mother, I believe you are correct in your suggestion about letting my youngest brother deal with this person. However, I would have to insist that I be allowed to help in some manner." Chang had spoken in his formal mode which was another indication of just how upset he was. Since that first day when he had introduced himself formally to Janet, he had rarely showed that formal side of himself. He wasn't as relaxed and fun loving as Juan and Jory or even William, but he wasn't formal all the time either. The only times that Chang was really that way anymore was when he was doing something in his capacity as either a doctor, or as a Unit member, and that was only when he was dealing with someone of higher rank than himself. The only people who were of higher rank than Chang were Adam, Joe and Jack, because he had been given the rank of 1st Lieutenant, befitting the fact that he was second in command of the Unit. Logan, Juan, Jory and William were all considered 2nd Lieutenants.

They were interrupted by a voice coming over the radio. "Viper Lead to LZ, you ready for us down there?" That voice belonging to William signifying that they were about ready to let the people on board jump. Jack handed the papers back to Logan, and went over to the Radio. "Affirmative Viper Lead, we are ready and in place. Also could you ask both Captains to see me as soon as possible after they land?"

"Roger that LZ, message relayed, get ready for it to start raining people down there." William ended the last part with a chuckle, and everyone on the ground had to laugh a bit too, even with the tension

that surrounded everyone. Jack had turned back to the computer and hit a few keys, "Okay, they're about a mile from the drop point, they should be jumping in about thirty seconds, and will be jumping from a height of fifteen thousand feet MSL, giving them roughly eight thousand feet to get to the ground. Juan, you wanna set off the smoke so they know where to land?" He asked the boy. Juan immediately took out a smoke grenade from the hummer he had come in, pulled the pin, and threw it out into the center of the canyon, as soon as it hit the ground, it started to spew out a bright green smoke, that would help guide the jumpers to the LZ.

Juan then reached back into the truck, and pulled out binoculars, handing them out to everyone. They could now hear the helicopter in the distance, as it started to make its pass through. Jack was keeping a running commentary about the jump, more to help keep Janet calm as she never really liked the idea of the kids jumping out of the helicopter in the first place. He was also doing this as an official log into the computer, one that would be used later, when they debriefed the jumpers.

"Okay, this is the first solo jump for Delta team. This is a static line jump, so none of the team needs to worry about pulling rip cords. First out of the chute will be Captain Joseph Casey, followed by the members of Delta team, lead by Sergeant Emily Larson. Jump master for this exercise is Captain Adam Casey, as well as being the last to jump. Pilots for this exercise are Specialist Bill Tompkins, and 2nd Lieutenant William Casey, acting as co-pilot. Crew chief on Viper one is Private First class Collin Fredericks."

Jack, having finally gotten done with the official part of the log, now turned his attention to the read outs, so he could tell everyone what was going on, while they watched through the binoculars. He also kept a running commentary so that if he noticed anything that someone did wrong, it would be recorded, and they could talk about it later. "Okay, they are just about over the drop zone. There they go, and we have one open chute, two, three, four good chutes, five, six, seven..."

Everyone could see why Jack paused there. The last person to come out of the helicopter was Adam, and when he got to the end of the static line, his chute opened up, but the second it did, they knew there was a problem. Adam started to swing wildly as his chute got tangled up when it came out of the pack on his back. Juan staggered, as he felt the panic that Adam was feeling in the fall. Even Chang reacted but with better control and it took the both of them a moment to block out the link with Adam. Logan let out a strangled gasp as he watched in horror while Adam was frantically trying to grab his canopy release cable. All the while they all could hear Adam screaming and calling for help over the radio saying he couldn't reach his release wire. Jack's face had taken a grim set as he watched the events unfolding and Janet had unknowingly imitated her son's strangled gasp adding "Oh dear God" as her face reflected the same horror for her boy who was now in desperate trouble.

William and Bill had been heading outbound away from the drop point and then they were going to turn around and return on a safe path to land near the LZ as Logan had asked, when Will felt and then heard Adam's screams over the radio. "What the fuck?" he asked, he had blocked Adam's telepathic link because he knew the exhilaration of the jump would interfere with his flying, but even so he couldn't block the sheer terror emanating from his brother striking him although he didn't know the cause as of yet. He reached up and pushed the ear phone closer to his ear. After a second of listening, he screamed "Oh shit, Bill I got the controls, tell the crew chief to strap the fuck in cause we're hitting the deck fast" as he grabbed the controls from Bill and proceeded to turn the big bird on a dime. William had just gotten the Chinook spun around and was now able to see what was going on.

"Oh fuck!" Bill gasped crying out as he saw what was going on with Adam. Collin radioed up from the back that he was strapped in, and Will really hoped so cause he hadn't waited to find out and never hesitated, as he pushed the stick forward as far as it could go, turning the throttle up all the way. Within 3 seconds, the Chinook was heading at a seventy five degree down angle, and Bill could see the ground rushing up at them quickly.



Joe was gliding by the time everything started happening, and managed to look up just as Adam started to scream. What he saw made his blood run cold and terror to fill his heart. Joe had jumped out of enough planes to know that Adam was in serious trouble, the fatal kind. "Come on kid, you can do it. Pull that damned cord." Joe was muttering to himself, but he could tell that Adam was trying the best he could, and he wasn't able to get it. Joe also knew from experience, that Adam was in serious trouble of having what they call a red out. That's when the jumper is spinning so hard that the blood fills their eyes and they can't see anything other than red, right before they pass out. In Joe's estimation this was going from bad to worse by the second and all he could do was pray that his son would pull it off. Watching him fall to his death was not something that Joe could stand to see. They may not be getting along, but damn it, he was his son he thought as he watched the horror unfold and felt the tears falling.

Everyone stood on the ground transfixed in a combination of horror and disbelief as they watched Adam spin out of control. Jack was absentmindedly, calling out the altitudes as Adam passed them. Everyone gasped as a group when they saw the Chinook spin around almost like it stopped in mid air and was rotated, and then it dove for the ground. Logan was so scared at this point that he

couldn't even believe what was going on, he didn't want to believe or maybe couldn't let himself believe. It couldn't be happening, not his Adam, it just couldn't. He couldn't take his eyes off his spinning lover as he watched that love fall inexorably to his death, coming closer second by second.

Joe cursed under his breath when Adam passed him going down. Joe had had to pull hard on one of his risers to make sure Adam didn't collide with him, but he was relieved to see that the others had all scattered doing what they were told to do when an emergency happened, and get as far away as they could from the person in trouble. It was not going to end this way, he wouldn't, and couldn't let it and with that, Joe made his decision within a split second after Adam had passed him. He pulled the release on his chute, and dove for Adam. He knew he would only have one shot at this, and if he missed Adam in his dive, they wouldn't have enough time to try the rescue again before Adam hit the ground doing in excess of one hundred and fifty miles an hour. If he didn't get it right the first time then he was condemning his son to death. As Joe was diving, he glanced quickly at the barograph on his arm. He knew that he had to get to Adam, jettison Adam's canopy, pull Adam's reserve chute, kick away and pull his own doing it all before they fell below sixteen hundred feet. If it happened after that, the reserve chute wouldn't have enough time to deploy and slow him before he hit the ground less than seven seconds later. He cursed when he saw they were just passing twenty five hundred feet, and falling fast. He knew there just wasn't enough time, just not enough but he kept going anyway it was the only chance his boy had.

Joe slammed into Adam just as they reached two thousand feet, and the impact knocked the wind out of both of them, sending them spinning even more wildly. No time, there was no time was all that ran through his mind as he worked frantically to try and grab the release cord, and finally got his hand on it. He pulled with all his might, and was relieved to see the chute flutter away. He knew Adam was in no condition to pull his reserve as Adam was fighting hard to just stay conscious at the moment. Joe reached over, and at the same time he pulled Adam's reserve chute, kicked off, trying to get enough room between himself and Adam so that he could pull his own.

Joe looked down and saw the ground was coming up quick, too quick, and he was a lot closer then he would like. As he pulled his reserve chute, he glanced at his wrist. The last thing he saw was the reading of twelve hundred feet, and feeling the jerk as his reserve chute opened up, at least his son had a chance. He closed his eyes, and tried to roll himself into a ball upon hitting the ground. All he remembered of the landing was pain, pain worse then anything he ever felt before, then blackness.

Adam hit the ground hard, since his chute had been deployed at the last moment. He was still fighting the effects of the spin, but was able to roll when he hit the ground so he didn't get hurt too badly. All he could think of was that Joe, his dad had saved him, after everything he had saved him. He felt the tears as he frantically scrambled to his feet, and looked around to see where Joe had come down. He noticed that there were two hummers tearing ass towards them but didn't pay them any mind as, he spun around and saw Joe laying in a heap about twenty feet away, and his breath caught in his throat as the sight before him, no, please no he thought as, he hobbled over to Joe as fast as he could, and fell down next to him. Adam was pretty sure his leg was fucked up as he could barely put any weight on it, but at this moment he didn't care. When he finally got to look Joe over, he saw it was bad, real bad, both of Joe's legs were obviously shattered, and by the way his left arm was angled, he was sure it was broken as well. But it was Joe's coughing and the blood burbling up at his lips, red and frothy, that really grabbed Adam's attention and made his heart freeze in his chest. "D... Dad... are you okay?" Adam asked almost begging, while grabbing up the hand that wasn't injured. Joe surprisingly



was conscious and gave Adam a weak smile as he struggled to talk. Tears running down his face, Adam leaned down so he could hear what Joe was trying to say.

"Ad...Adam.... I'm glad your okay..... son." Joe breathed out, coughing again with the effort even though he managed to try to reassure Adam, with a small smile, not being able to talk very loud. "Shh... Dad.... don't try and talk." Adam said, as he heard the first hummer come to a halt next to them. Adam was about to look over his shoulder to see who was there, hoping it would be Janet and Chang when Joe squeezed his hand and barely got out in a whisper. "I love you son," as his hand went slack, at the same time that a hand fell on Adam's shoulder and gently tried to pull him out of the way. "NO! DAD!!! Please don't" Adam cried.

Jack pulled the young boy up to his feet; he had to support Adam as it was clear that his left leg or ankle was broken, as Adam couldn't put any weight on it. Once Adam was standing, he turned and collapsed into Jack's arms, crying, and burying his head in the man's shoulder crying over and over again, "No, please no, stay with me daddy, please stay.

Jack watched sadly as Chang and Janet ran over to Joe with their bags; he knew it was over; you just didn't survive that kind of fall. They each fell to their knees on either side of Joe, with Chang quickly checking for a pulse as Janet went and stabilized Joe's neck, trying to make sure that if there was any damage to the spinal cord, it wasn't made worse.

Surprising everyone was Chang's announcement of "I got a weak thready pulse," as he handed Janet a neck brace, which she carefully put on Joe, while Chang was getting ready to put in an IV. All Janet could do was to bury her feelings and operate on autopilot as she quickly said "Get a second one going as well, both wide open with Ringers" to which Chang simply nodded as that was what he had planned on doing anyway. He knew that Joe had internal bleeding including a punctured lung not to mention the external injuries which were bleeding and that every second counted if they could save him at all. Janet then added "I want a MAST suit on him right now too."

About that time, the other Hummer got there, and Juan didn't even wait for the thing to come to a stop. He dove out of it, hit the ground in a roll, and sprang back to his feet already in a dead run, screaming "DADDY!!!!!!!!!" The tears running freely down his face as he ran towards the group gathered around Joe.

Jack barely had time to grab Juan as he ran passed. "Hold on Juan, you gotta give them room to work." He told the distraught nine year old as he pulled him into his chest next to Adam. Jack did not expect what happened next.

Juan barely came to a halt as he hit Jack's chest and wrapped his arms around the man but almost immediately he released his hold on him and pulling back grabbed Adam who was staring, eyes locked on Joe, around to face him yelling with pure hatred "This is all your fault" at the older boy. Adam just stared blankly at the younger boy in shock at what had happened, from his injuries and at what was being said as Juan savagely told him in a low voice through his tears and sobs "Are you happy now? This is what you wanted after all." That seemed to bring Adam back as his mouth began to move although nothing came out. Before it could, Juan screamed "He loved you!!!" then cocked his hand back and struck Adam with full force in the face which drove the older boy from Jack's arms and into the air a good five feet before he fell to the ground. Jack, shocked at what had just happened still managed to quickly grab Juan to prevent him from going after Adam, but it didn't matter because the little guy immediately threw his arms back around the man and buried himself into Jack's chest crying and sobbing

for all he was worth, now just a little boy devastated by what had happened to his daddy. A little boy lost and alone and very hurt right now. Jack just wrapped his arms around the young child and held him close, giving him all the love he could. Adam meanwhile must have been knocked unconscious from the punch, because since he hit the ground he hadn't moved, and Jack couldn't help thinking that maybe for now, that might be the best thing for the child.

Logan ran over to where Adam lay on the ground with Donnie and Ray right behind him, gently rolling Adam onto his back, and making sure that Adam was indeed just knocked out, and not more seriously hurt. Logan, being his mother's son, knew that they had to get Adam onto a back board and into a C-Collar. He didn't think anything was really wrong with Adam, other than the hurt leg, but he knew not to take any chances.

He knew that his mother, Becky, and Chang, were busy working on Joe, so he took over helping Adam. It was probably a good thing that Adam was unconscious, as it made things a lot easier, and this gave him something to do that would help him not think about his dad lying over there. It had been over a month since Joe had told Logan to call him dad. Logan had slipped one time, and started to apologize, but Joe just smiled and told him to go ahead and call the man "Dad."

By this time, Delta team had landed, and Emily was busy barking orders. "Sean, Shane, Zach, secure the area! Sam, contact base, and let them know to expect a critical patient. Have a stretcher brought to the hanger. Becky, get over there, and help the docs." The others immediately followed her orders, and she looked around to assess the situation. She looked up and her Jaw dropped as she saw the Chinook coming in almost vertical, and coming in fast. She looked around and spotted Donnie, Ray, and Juan standing by Jack. She knew none of them were thinking real clearly right now, so she decided that if they bitched about her taking command, they could deal with it later.

"Juan! Get rid of that smoke canister. Will's coming in hot; we don't need the smoke blowing all over the place. Donnie, Ray, grab one of the chutes, use it to block the wind and dust from the docs. I'm sure they don't want the dust blowing in their eyes as they work." She was glad to see that everyone jumped to obey her orders, and she ran over to make sure the LZ was clear enough for the Chinook to land.

Emily took two flares out of her leg pockets and with a quick jerk, had the tops off, and ignited them. "Viper Lead, clear LZ, land on my flares. Get ready to do a hot Med-e-Vac."

Bill came over the radio, and you could hear the tension in his voice, as Will started to pull out of the dive. "Acknowledged Delta Leader, stand clear of LZ."

Emily threw her flares out to mark what would be the LZ, then jogged back a few steps. She put her goggles back on so that the wind and blowing dust didn't get in her eyes. She glanced over to where Joe was being worked on by the doctors and their team medic. She said a silent prayer as she saw that they were now performing CPR on the man. She was only able to watch for a second, as Donnie and Ray moved a parachute in front of them to block the wind.

She looked back just in time to see the Chinook pull up hard, and settle on the ground with only a little bounce. She was running towards it, before it finally settled down, and ran up the ramp into the back. She noticed the Collin looked a little white, and could only guess at what the ride was like for him. She helped him unlatch one of the stretchers from the rack. They were joined by William, and together the three of them ran with the stretcher out the back of the helicopter, to where they were wor-

king on Joe. Bill stayed in the cockpit to keep the rotors going, and make sure they were ready to take off as soon as they had Joe loaded.

When the three of them got there, they stopped in shock as they heard Chang shout out "CLEAR!" and a second later he pushed the paddles from the defibrillator onto Joe's chest, and causing his body to jerk a bit from the shock. Chang looked over to the monitor they had set up, seeing a rhythm although not much of one and said. "Okay, we got him back. Lets get him loaded up; we need to get him out of here now!"

Chang, Janet, and Becky quickly got Joe secured to a back board, then got him loaded onto the stretcher. Donnie dropped his end of the parachute, and grabbed one of the corners of the stretcher. He looked over to William and had to shout to be heard over the rotors of the helicopter. "Will, get in there and get ready to go. As soon as we're on, get us back to base!" Will looked up from where he was helping to secure Joe to the stretcher, nodded, and took off at a dead run. Donnie grabbed one corner, while Chang, Jack, and Emily each grabbed one of the other corners, leaving Janet and Becky to each grab a bag of medicine that was being pumped into Joe's I.V. Together they lifted and soon were jogging carefully towards the helicopter.

By this time, Logan had Adam secured to the back board, and his leg immobilized. He got some help, and they got Adam put in the helicopter just before Joe got there.

Collin ran ahead and made sure that the racks were ready to secure Joe to them, and once the four were in the back, he started to close the back door. Collin was very smart to do that, as they didn't need everyone else on the helicopter with them.

Once the door was shut, Will gave the Chinook some power, and soon they were lifting off. Emily stepped back, and grabbed her Radio as the doctors went back to work on Joe making sure he was going to make it long enough to get them back to the medical facilities at base. "Sergeant Larson to Corporal Patrick." she said over the radio calling her second in command, Sean Patrick. "Patrick here, go ahead Sergeant."

"Corporal, make sure you get the area cleaned up, and all the chutes back to base. Have someone drive Lieutenants Casey and Hayes back to base, neither one of them is fit to drive. When you get back there, report to me in sickbay." Emily said into the radio, hoping that Juan and Logan hadn't already taken off in one of the hummers, as neither one of them could drive very well.

"I'm already on it Sergeant, Private Davidson is already heading back with them, they should get there right after you do." She was impressed with her second's forethought, and smiled as she knew he would be getting a commendation for his actions today. "Very good Corporal, see you back at base."

She barely had those words out of her mouth when she heard Bill come over the loud speaker. "Get ready for landing, we're coming in hot." No sooner had the words left his mouth than Will pulled up on the stick to slow his speed, he then rotated the helicopter so that the back was facing the open cave mouth. When they were about 5 feet off the ground, Will reached up and shut off the engines, causing them to bounce a little as they hit the ground, and Will was using the emergency brakes to slow the rotors down enough so they could get Joe out of the back with out dust flying all over the place.

In the back, Collin was already lowering the back hatch before they were on the ground, and by the time Will was slowing the rotors, the door was all the way down, and the stretcher was run into the

back. David Keller and Charlie Adams were pushing the stretcher. They were the other two teams' medical personnel, and between the two of them, Becky, and the two doctors, they quickly had Joe and Adam transferred to the stretchers and they were rushing them off the helicopter and down the hall to the elevator so they could get them both to sick bay.

Once the helicopter was shut down, Will came running out of the front, and ran right past Emily on his way to follow Joe and Adam. Bill came pushing himself out of the front a few seconds later, as he had to disengage the system that Will had put into place to hold his wheelchair stable during flight. Emily was the last one off the Helicopter, and was almost run over as the Hummer driven by Juan came to a skidding stop next to the Chinook. He jumped out of the Hummer, and ran full speed into the complex with Logan right behind him.

Emily stood on the hatch of the helicopter for a few seconds; before she dropped down to sit on the hatch. The events of the last few minutes finally catching up to her, and she started to cry. She felt someone next to her pull her into a strong embrace. She looked up through teary eyes and saw Donnie sitting next to her. She wrapped her arms around him, and cried into his shoulder, as she released the emotions that had built up inside.

Donnie let her cry on his shoulder for a few minutes, and when she pulled back from his chest; he saw the look in her eyes. It was a look that said she was ashamed to have broken down like that. Before she could say anything, Donnie spoke up. "Hey Em, what da you say to heading down to the med level, and see how everyone's doing?"

Emily nodded thankful that Donnie had not made a big deal about her crying. She was still astounded at the difference in Donnie since the Unit showed up. Just one short month ago, Donnie was the biggest asshole in the place, now he was shaping up to be someone she could really like. Which is saying a lot, since she didn't really like males after everything that had happened to her, but Donnie was breaking down all the walls that she had built up over the years.

Donnie got to his feet, and extending his hand, he helped Emily get to her feet, then they headed into the complex. Conner and Vic, the other members of the ground crew already had one of the Hummers set up to pull the Chinook into the hanger. They had stayed back until Emily and Donnie were off the ship.

When Collin noticed that they were walking off the Chinook's ramp, he walked up holding a stack of papers. "Umm... Sir, I think you need to have these. We found them inside the Hummer." Donnie took one look at them, and froze, he knew what was on them, and Logan must have forgotten them with the rush to get Joe here. "Thank you Collin," Donnie said, as he took the papers and handed them to Emily.

Emily took the papers with a questioning look and started to read through them. She hadn't gotten past the second page when she dropped the papers to her side, and looked over at Donnie with fire in her eyes. "Adam needs to see these, NOW!" She said, as she started off at a sprint towards the elevator to take them down to the med level.

Adam was sitting on a couch, after being released from the backboard, his leg now in a soft splint. He was cuddled up to Logan and Juan when Donnie and Emily burst into the room. Juan and Adam had patched things up with a silent conversation after Adam woke up, with many tears shed between them.

Adam couldn't believe how much of an asshole he had been, and how much he had almost lost and not just his father either. He ached now with more than just what had happened but how much time he had wasted. Now, it was just a waiting game to see if Joe would survive, and if he did, how badly injured he was, and to pray that he would be able to make up that lost time.

Emily was the first to speak after they entered the room. "Any word yet?" she asked to no one in particular, when all she got were heads shaking she took a deep breath. In a voice that was as forceful as she could make it, while still speaking softly, she said. "Captain Casey, I think you need to look at these."

Adam looked up to see her with a stack of papers in her hand. He then looked over to Logan who was looking at Emily with daggers in his eyes; he did not think this was the time, or the place. After a second, Adam said, "Please give them to Jack, I am sure he can deal with them." He then turned and stared at the wall.

Emily was not about to let this go, "Sir, with all due respect, I think you need to read these...now!" She then thrust them at Adam. Adam sighed loudly, but got up and hobbled over to her. He took the pages from her and started to read.

Not a word was spoken as all eyes were on Adam, everyone in the room knew what was on those papers, and no one knew how Adam would react, not even Juan or William. William having been filled in by Juan when they got down there. As they watched, Adam's face first went white with shock; he then almost fell into the seat behind him. Logan quickly moved over to sit next to him. Soon after that, Adam's face started to get red with anger. As he flipped from page to page, his face got redder and redder. Soon everyone could clearly see the large vein in his forehead pulsing with the beating of his heart.

He looked over to Logan, and all Logan had to do was nod once, and Adam's face showed a rage that none of them have ever seen before, nor did they really ever want to see again. He got ready to say something when Emily spoke up. "Sir, both Delta and Alpha team request permission to aid in the extractions. I have already come up with an increased training schedule for both teams, so that we will be ready when the Intel team gets the exact location." Adam seemed to relax slightly, and nodded.

Neither Emily nor Donnie said a word, as they took seats to wait for word on Joe. They both knew that word about Joe's accident would be, if it hadn't already been, spread throughout the complex. There would be many worried people as Joe had become like a father to most of the kids here. Jack was a good role model, but with him being the commanding officer, he had to keep himself somewhat aloof. Which meant most people looked to Joe for an adult male they could talk to. Adam had considered all of this, but his mind was elsewhere, not only on Joe, but also on the papers that he had just been given. He then took the papers and started at the beginning again.

TOP SECRET

Inter-Office Memo:

Roland  
EYES ONLY

From: Gen. Montgomery

To: Dr. Marcus

Subject: Genesis Project

Date: 13 August 1988

It has come to my attention that we have a suitable donor for your project. His name is Cpl. Joseph Casey III. We have initiated coverage on subject, and have initiated, Phase One of Project Genesis. Will advise.

TOP SECRET

Inter-Office Memo:

EYES ONLY

From: Gen. Montgomery

To: Dr. Marcus

Subject: Genesis Project

Date: 29 September 1988

Subject has started a personal relationship with a Lisa Arpin. Second subject has genetic markers expressed in your initial report as favorable. We have obtained the help of her doctor. Phase Two of Project Genesis is underway.

TOP SECRET

Inter-Office Memo:

EYES ONLY

From: Gen. Montgomery

To: Dr. Marcus

Subject: Genesis Project

Date: 05 March 1989

Female subject has been impregnated by male subject; local doctor has followed instructions, not revealing pregnancy to female subject. Male subject is being re-activated to service. Ready to commence Phase Three.

TOP SECRET

Inter-Office Memo:

EYES ONLY

From: Gen. Montgomery

To: Dr. Marcus

Subject: Genesis Project

Date: 20 March 1989

Female subject has been informed of cover story by planted officer, Lt. Greg Hopkins. Officer will continue with mission objective to have female subject fall in love with him so that they may make secondary test subjects if primary fails. Officer has already initiated pressure to make female subject release control of test subject; code named Adam.

Adam had to stop there, if he didn't he would have hurt something. There was still so much more in these papers, but he couldn't bring himself to read them again. He sat down on the couch and was soon lost in the wait to find out about Joe.

## Chapter 13

Will watched as Logan, Donnie, and Emily left the waiting room. He knew they would probably be waiting for a while. After about ten minutes of silence, he shook himself from staring off into space and looked around at the people that were still sitting there. Juan was cuddled up in Adam's lap, he looked to have fallen asleep while crying. Adam seemed to be staring off into space like he had been only with tears running silently down his face while. Jack was sitting next to him holding Adam tight to his side.

Will had reached down some time ago and grasped Bill's hand in his own. He smiled softly thinking to himself that over the past month, he and Bill had become very close.

It had all started one night, while they were checking out the Chinook, Will had confided to Bill about something that had been bothering him. They were working together checking out the electrical system. Bill was manning the controls, while Will was checking the wires making sure none of them were broken. He had just called a break, and they met up at the back door of the Chinook.

"You know, it's kinda eerily quiet in here tonight." Bill commented as Will brought him a cup of coffee. He plopped himself down on the ramp next to Bill and looked out over the empty hanger. He let out a long sigh, and Bill looked over to him curiously. "What's on your mind Will?"

Will looked up at the older boy with a searching look before saying "You know, I still don't really know how to deal with being outside the lab. I know it's been over a month, but it's still really hard sometimes."

Bill was a little bit shocked at what he was hearing. Will had always been the cool, collected, and sometimes cocky fly boy that could do anything. Now Bill was seeing a different side of the boy he was falling in love with. "What are you having trouble with?" He asked in a quiet voice.

Will looked up at Bill and into his deep eyes, he saw caring and sympathy there, but also something else, he wasn't sure what it was, but it gave him a weird feeling in his stomach, not a bad feeling, just weird and for some reason kinda scary but in a good way, a way that Will wasn't too sure he wanted to explore right now. "Well, to be honest, the thing that's bugging me the most is Adam and Logan. It just doesn't seem to fit."

"What do ya mean?" Bill asked not really understanding what Will didn't get about it.

"Well," Will sighed out not knowing exactly how to put it into words, "I guess I just don't understand how they can be that close. I mean I know that Adam is struggling with the same things I am, but he at least had a few years where he was with other people other than the doctors, and trainers. I guess I just don't understand what's between Adam and Logan."

Bill sat there thinking over what Will had said, when it finally hit him what he must mean. "You mean you don't understand about Adam and Logan being boyfriends?"

"Yeah I guess that's what it is, I mean I was taught about sex, I was taught about masturbation, and the good feeling it produces, hell, I was even shown how to do it, and do it regularly. They said it was needed to prevent a build up of sexual tension that could interfere with an operation. I was taught



about how sex works, and why it feels good, but, I just don't see what the big deal is with it, and mostly I just don't understand why Adam was so upset when he hit Logan. I mean sure, Logan isn't one of us," he looked up at Bill with a grin, "he's what we like to call a squishy. He gets hurt easily. But Adam acted like it was the end of the world, and kept going on about how he hurt the one he loved. I guess that's my biggest question. What's love? I mean besides the love I have for my brothers. I understand that," Will was in a rush by this point trying to get out the questions before he forgot them, "but what I don't understand is what the difference is between how Adam loves us, and how he loves Logan. He says it's different, but even he can't explain how or why."

Bill was kinda blown away by all of this. Will has always been a man of few words unless he was shooting off at the mouth, and he had never seen Will be this serious about something. Not to mention that he now knew just how bad Will had been sheltered in the labs. His casual talk about sex, and masturbation would have had Bill turning bright red, but Will was talking about it as if it was a outta a text book or something not exactly very stimulating as it ordinarily would be. He sat for a second trying to organize his thoughts, and when he was finally ready, he reached down and made it obvious he wanted to take Will's hand. When Bill had it placed firmly in his, he began.

"Will, let me ask you a few questions. First off, what do you feel, inside, when you hold my hand?" Bill asked knowing that he may not get the answers he hoped for, but knowing that if Will wasn't ready for things, it could be even worse.

Will looked up at Bill, then at their hands, then back into his eyes. "I really don't know, it's weird, nothing that I have ever felt before. It feels good, like in my stomach, almost like a contentment, but..." he broke the gaze with Bill, and started to stare off into space. "It's nice, but I don't know why."

Bill let out a breath he didn't know he was holding, and also looked out over the hanger. "You know, people have been trying to define love since the beginning of time, and they still haven't come up with an answer. I don't know if I can answer your questions, but what I can do is explain to you the difference between how I feel for Ronnie, and how I feel for you. I really think I may be falling in love with you, but I'm not really sure how to go from here. Maybe after I explain the feelings, we can figure it out together."

Bill looked back, and noticed that Will was staring at him. He returned the look, deep into Will's beautiful eyes, and began. "What I feel for Ronnie is brotherly love. I don't want to see him hurt, I want to try and make sure he stays safe, protect him, and I want to see him be happy. I'd do anything for him" he said pausing for a moment before adding softly "I already have" then in a louder voice "But when he grows up and goes off on his own...I'd be sad, real sad but it won't be the end of the world...for either of us. We'll go on and still love one another but apart. The thing is, what I feel for you is different. I want to spend every minute of every day with you, I want to grow old, with you. I want you to be in my life forever, but as more than just a friend, I want to share my deepest thoughts, fears, feelings, everything with you. It's more than just sex, I mean you know I have no feeling down there, so sex really doesn't mean much to me. But I want to share everything I am with you. Does that make any sense?"

Will had been looking deep into Bill's eyes the entire time the older boy was talking. He didn't understand what he was feeling inside, but with everything Bill had said, he knew that he was feeling the same. "I still don't understand it, but everything you said... it fits with what I feel too. If that's love, then it scares me."

Bill cocked his head to the side, clearly not sure what Will meant. "Why does it scare you? I thought nothing could scare you." Bill couldn't help but laugh at his last line.

Will laughed a bit to, but it soon faded, and he tore his gaze from Bill and looked back over the sterile empty hanger that they were alone in. "It scares me, because it makes me weak."

Bill's eyes shot back to Will, but the younger boy wouldn't look at him. "Why do you say that it makes you weak?" Bill asked with a bit of a hitch in his voice, not really wanting to know what he meant.

Without looking back, Will said in an almost dead voice. "I was always taught that anything that could distract you from the mission, or anything that you feel is more important than the mission makes you weak. The most important thing is your orders. Nothing else matters. Not your family, not yourself, and certainly not someone who could be used against you. It interferes with your concentration, and getting the job done."

Bill sat there in stunned silence for a few seconds trying to digest what Will had said. He saw that Will was trying hard to fight back tears. He didn't know what to say about that, as he knew nothing about what was going through the boy's head right now. The war seemed to rage across Will's face for a full minute before he said, "I don't know what to think about any of this. But I know this much, Adam says it's not a weakness, it actually makes him fight harder, but he does say it's a constant source of worry, and sometimes pain."

Silence reigned over the hanger for several minutes, while both boys sat there, hand in hand, lost in their own world. Will trying to figure out what he was feeling, and Bill in a war with himself as to what to do about his feelings. Finally Bill broke the silence, he didn't know if what he was about to say would help at all, but he knew he needed to let Will know about his past.

He let go of Will's hand, which caused Will to look up at him with a question in his eyes. "Help me down from here, I want to lean back on the ramp if I can."

Will nodded, and quickly moved to help Bill out of his chair. Once Bill was settled down on the ramp, his legs extended out, and his upper body resting on his arms, as he leaned back against the ramp. Will moved the chair down off the ramp, and re-filled their coffee cups. He took a chance, and did something that he had thought about doing at times, but didn't seem right. He wiggled behind Bill, and supported his upper body with his own. He wrapped his arms around Bill's chest, and was once again surprised by the definition he felt there. Bill for his part, melted back into the younger boys embrace, and almost purred in satisfaction. After a few moments, of just enjoying the feel of another body close to his own, Bill started to think back to the time before he was confined to his chair.

"Adam's right Will it does make you fight harder, it...he's right about everything he said" Bill softly told him which confused Will for a moment not quite understanding but with the next words realized that soon he would. "Will, I really want to tell you about how I got here, but it's kinda hard. I hope it will help to explain what I am feeling, and maybe help you with what you are feeling, but it's not exactly pleasant memories. Just try to bear with me, okay?" Bill felt Will nod into his shoulder, and then he began. "To really understand what happened, you have to go back a few years..."

**FLASHBACK!!!!**

Nine year old Bill came to a skidding halt outside the front door to his house. It took him a few seconds to get his breathing under control as it wouldn't do for him to let his step dad think he had to run the whole way home, just to make it on time. He wasn't supposed to stay after school for any reason, and his stepfather knew exactly how long it took to walk from the school, home. If Bill was even a minute late, his step dad would punish him for not following one of his rules. Of course Ronnie didn't have to worry about the rules, as the rules were different for him. He could stay after school and play with his friends if he wanted to not that Bill blamed Ronnie, no he knew who to blame.

Last month Bill had wanted to try out for the third grade soccer team. When he asked his mom, his mom had said that he had to ask his father. Everyone except Bill and Ronnie called Greg, Bill's father. Bill refused to call him anything other than his stepfather, unless he was speaking directly to Greg, then it had to be father. Ronnie could call him dad, or daddy, but Bill had to call him father. He couldn't remember how many times Greg had told him that "You're not my kid, and dammit I wouldn't want you to be either."

Having gotten his breathing under control, Bill moved up the steps to the house. He quietly opened the door, making sure the screen door didn't slam, and silently closed it behind him. He hoped that he could get past the living room where Greg was with out being noticed. He bent down and pulled off his shoes so they wouldn't make any noise, and started to head for the stairs. He was almost there when Greg thundered from the living room, "Biiiiiillllly, get your ass in here." Damn, not today.

Hanging his head, Bill shuffled off into the living room. He hated the way that Greg always called his name in that damned singsong voice. That was the main reason why he hated anyone calling him Billy. All too soon, he stood in front of the chair Greg was sitting in. "You have any homework?" Greg asked him not bothering to take his eyes off the television.

Bill mumbled an answer, and the next thing he knew, he was laying flat on his back, with Greg screaming at him. "Speak up when I talk to you boy, what do you think, I'm a fucking mind reader or something."

Bill pulled himself up to his feet, not letting the tears fall that he knew were forming in his eyes. Crying would just set Greg off on how much of a baby Bill was, and that would probably end in Bill getting hit some more with Greg screaming things like, "I'll make you into a man even if it kills you."

"Sorry sir, and yes sir, I have homework to do." He said, loudly this time. Greg always insisted on Bill calling him sir.

"Let me see it." Greg demanded from his chair, now turning back to the TV. Bill picked his bag up from the floor where it dropped when Greg had slapped him, and started to rifle through it. Finally he found what he needed, and pulled out his homework folder. He hesitantly handed it to the man, and Greg snatched out of his hand.

For a few tense moments, Bill sat there watching as Greg went through his homework. Finally, Greg shoved it back at him, and with a growl told him to get upstairs and get it done. Bill moved up to his room trying to be a quiet as possible. He walked into the room he shared with Ronnie. Greg had tried to make Bill take the really tiny room down the hall that was little more than a closet, but Ronnie had whined and begged, and finally it was mom that agreed to let them share a room. Greg had argued that he might "taint my boy."

It's always been like that for Bill, he was always the bad kid. He tried as hard as he could to make Greg like him, but nothing he did worked. He finally figured out that no matter what happened, Greg wouldn't like him because he was "a damn bastard kid that I gotta put up with." As Greg would often say.

When he got into his room, Bill finally released the tears he had been holding back and as they fell silently looked over the room, seeing the difference that was apparent even in something like the room. Bill's side of the room was mostly spartan with the only things decorating it being his book shelf where he kept all his books, and a single model Helicopter that he had put together. Ronnie had told everyone that he had done it, and that was probably the only reason Greg hadn't broken it like he had broken all the other models that Bill had put together. Greg also wouldn't tolerate Bill's side of the room to be messy at all. If it was, then there would be hell to pay of a kind you wouldn't want to have.

Ronnie's side of the room was a lot different. His side was littered with dirty cloths, posters on the wall, and of course his TV and game system. At night, Ronnie and Bill would play the thing if Greg was being really bad, but the only time that Bill was caught playing the game system when Ronnie wasn't home, Bill couldn't walk right for almost a week.

It never occurred to Bill to hate Ronnie or blame him for the disparity that existed in their world. Many would but from the beginning Ronnie had always loved Bill, loved him unconditionally, and for Bill that was all the love he really knew in his life, that of his brother and he loved Ronnie more than anything in the world because of it. No Ronnie made life bearable for Bill and he could never hate him. He was just worried that one day Greg would turn on the little boy who made sure Bill shared in everything he ever got. That frightened Bill more than anything else. He couldn't bear the thought of Ronnie suffering what he did.

Bill sat down at his desk and started to work on his homework. He had to have it done as quickly as he could, so that Greg could look it over. He was very thankful that his homework tonight was only worksheets and some reading. Usually if Greg didn't like the homework he had done, which was more often than not, he would end up tearing up the papers. With everything being worksheets, Greg couldn't tear it up, or at least Bill didn't think he would. That was another thing that bothered Bill, if Bill got less than straight A's on his report card, Greg would go nuts, Ronnie, on the other hand, didn't have to worry about it. Truth be told there were a lot of things that bothered Bill and mostly because he just couldn't understand why. He knew other kids who had stepparents and they didn't get treated the way he did, at least he didn't think they did. Ronnie was always so apologetic when he got something that Bill didn't and he could never explain to the younger boy why because he didn't know himself.

Bill had tried to tell his mother about everything one time, but she refused to believe what Bill had said, and had told him that he should be grateful that Greg puts up with him. Of course by the time Bill got up the nerve to tell his mom, Greg had been telling her a bunch of lies about how bad of a kid Bill was. Of course since his mother worked so many hours, and Greg did nothing all day but sit on his ass, his mom didn't really have the time, or energy to deal with the problems. The day after Bill had told his mom, he came home to an irate Greg. Later that night, and after a trip to the hospital, for a broken arm, and some cuts, all of which he got because he was running in the house, and fell down the stairs, he got lectured by Ronnie about not doing anything to piss Greg off although Bill didn't really need to do anything for Greg to be pissed off at him. He even thought of telling a teacher or something but Greg as if sensing his thoughts informed him that that idea would not be a good one, for him. After that Bill did everything he could to not be seen or heard in the house not that it did a hell of a lot of good. Even if Bill made himself invisible Greg would come looking for him anyway.

End Flashback... For Now....

Will could see that this was having a real bad effect on Bill. He didn't like to see his new friend in such pain, so he did the only thing he could. After Bill told him about trying to become invisible, Bill had lapsed into a silence. Will held him tight for a few moments then spoke up. "Hey Bill, why don't we head down to the mess deck and get something to eat. I'm sure someone's down there at this time of night, and will have at least some better coffee on."

Bill nodded his head, reached up and brushed away a few unshed tears this had been even harder than he thought it would be and he hadn't even gotten to the bad part yet. He then gave Will's arms a squeeze before letting go. Will extracted himself out from behind Bill, then picked the older boy up and put him in his chair. He was somewhat surprised when he looked up at the clock and it read 04:30. They had been talking for over an hour, but both of them were too keyed up to be tired. Will decided to try and lighten the mood some, so on the way to the elevator, and down to where the kitchens were, they talked lightly about the helicopters. Will absolutely loved the fact the Bill wanted to know everything he could about them. What really surprised Will was that Bill had started asking questions that really made him think for the answers, and they had only been going at it for about a month so far. The only complaint that Will had about Bill's performance so far was that Bill pretty much flew by the text book. That wasn't a bad thing per say, but by taking that approach, Bill would never be a top flier. Will was beginning to have an inkling as to why though, although he wasn't sure what he could do to counteract it yet.

When they got down to the mess deck, they found the place was mostly deserted, except for a little mop of brown hair that could be seen bobbing up and down behind the counter. When Will cleared his throat, the little mop bounced up, and they could see the youngest kid in the entire place, Ray. "Hey there Ray, you're up early. What's ya doing?" Will asked as he pushed Bill over to the counter, and Ray jumped up onto it so he could sit down and see who was there.

"Hey there Will, just getting stuff ready for breakfast, Dave says we gotta start early to feed everyone. He should be down here soon." Ray said, and Will couldn't help but chuckle at the little guys enthusiasm. He was beginning to think that Joe and Janet were right, all the kids here needed was a little boost in their self esteem, and they would turn out great, and Ray was a very good example of that.

Will nodded, "Yeah you gotta start early to feed all the monsters here, but we're just down here for a snack. We haven't even gone to bed yet. Think you could rustle something up for us?" Ray bobbed his head up and down with a grin on his face, then hopped off the counter and scurried into the back. Will turned Bill around and they headed for a table laughing at the little imps antics.

They had just gotten settled when Ray came out carrying a tray, overloaded with cold cut sandwiches. There was also a couple of coffee cups that were steaming. Ray's face was a mask on concentration, as he walked to them with the tray, making sure not to tip it. Both Will and Bill had to stifle a laugh at Ray's little tongue stuck out the side of his mouth in concentration. When Ray set the tray down on the table his face glowed with accomplishment. Both of the older boys thanked him profusely for his service, and Ray scampered off back into the kitchen letting them know to call if they needed anything. Both boys attacked the pile of sandwiches, and the steaming coffee, until all that was left was the coffee, and a few crumbs. Bill took this opportunity to ask Will about something. "So, what do you think about Logan's idea about the radar?"

Will sighed and leaned back in his chair. "Well, if it works, it'll be great. The idea is simple. To plant a virus into the radar computers that would change the color of our "blip" to the background color. I mean it would be hard for them to miss us, even if we shut off the transponders, but with him doing it that way, they would see us, but they couldn't tell us from the background. Basically making us invisible." Bill nodded, but wasn't really thinking about radar right now, his mind was far away lost in memories.

Bill sighed contentedly, and sat back in his chair. "You know, less then two months ago, I was really worried about what Ronnie and I were going to eat next, now I ain't gotta worry about that. It's kinda nice." Will nodded, as he too sat back in his chair and got comfortable.

They sat in silence for a few moments, then Bill said, "You know, I still have a lot to tell you, and I want to get it out while I can. Think we can go back to your pod or something so we can be a bit more comfortable?" Will only nodded, got up, and cleared their trash knowing that he had to hear the rest of it, that Bill had to tell it to him even though he was pretty sure he didn't want to hear it now. Taking a hold of Bill's chair, he pushed him back towards the pod that he shared with his brothers. He transferred Bill to the couch, when they got there, then wiggled in behind him like he was earlier, and Bill started speaking again.

Flashback!!!

Two years later:

Bill woke up with a start when he heard the shouting going on in the other room. Things hadn't improved any in the intervening couple of years and tonight was no exception. Ronnie was quietly crying in the other bed, which told Bill that his mother and step father had been at it for a while. They had been arguing a lot lately, ever since his mom lost the second job she had, and Greg got caught hitting Bill. Of course his mother never said anything to Bill, like apologizing for not believing him.

Bill got out of bed quietly, and moved over to Ronnie's bed worried about him. He slid in next to his brother, and held him close. Ronnie snuggled back into Bill's chest, and Bill wrapped his arms around his younger brother. "It's gonna be okay little guy, things are gonna work out."

The cries turned into soft whimpers as Bill kept whispering to Ronnie about how things were going to work out, and things were gonna be okay. Finally Ronnie fell back asleep, but Bill stayed awake to listen to what was going on. It was almost an hour later when things went to hell even worse, he just didn't know how much worse yet. Bill was just about to fall asleep when the screaming got louder.

"Fine!" he heard Greg yell with derision in his voice, "take the fucking bastard, but you ain't leaving with my son."

"It's not like it matters, Ronnie isn't your kid anyways!" He heard his mother shout back the fury in her voice evident as well as something else. There was silence for a few moments after that, but Bill felt more than heard Ronnie start to sob again, and he just pulled him in tighter to him. They both jumped when they heard something crash downstairs, then they heard Greg stomping his way up the stairs.

Fear shot through him as Bill jumped out of Ronnie's bed, and barely made it back to his own, when the door burst open and Greg thundered into the room. He flipped the lights on, and looked around for a second. Bill thought he had seen hatred before, like every time Greg had looked at him but now realized he had never seen a look of pure hatred on anyone's face before, and it scared him, it scared him a lot. Greg looked at him snarling, and Bill was sure that Greg was about to come after him.

Greg didn't though, to Bill's horror he moved over to Ronnie's bed, and yanked the nine year old little boy out of the bed by his hair and threw him across the room. Ronnie had started to scream when Bill grabbed him but as he hit the wall, then crashed down to the floor, that screaming came abruptly to a stop. Greg with a savage smile now started to move to where Ronnie lay on the floor in a heap not moving. Bill knew that Greg would either hurt Ronnie real bad, or end up killing him if he hadn't already done one or both. As afraid as he was of Greg, he was more afraid of his little brother getting hurt.

Without thinking, Bill launched himself off the bed and ran towards Greg full force tackling him. He was a big kid for eleven, and his momentum was enough to knock Greg off his feet and out of the room. Bill then slammed the door shut, and locked it. He ran over to Ronnie to see how his little brother was doing. Ronnie wasn't moving at all, and Bill didn't know how bad he was hurt. He knew enough though to know not to try and move him and to check and know that he was breathing but that was all.

Greg started to pound on the door, screaming for Bill to unlock it. Bill was scared shitless at this point and did the only thing he could think of. He ran to his bed, and fell to the floor right in front of it. He reached under the bed to find what he knew would be there it was the only chance they had.

After the beating he got when he told his mom about what was going on, Ronnie had gotten him a pre-paid cell phone. He had used his allowance to get it and Bill was quite moved by the gesture. Bill himself didn't get an allowance, but Ronnie got five dollars a week. Bill knew that Ronnie had to save up for many weeks to have enough for it. Ronnie told him it was for an emergency, and this certainly fit the bill.

Bill was shaking like he had a fever as he frantically grabbed the phone and hit 911, just as the pounding stopped. He was more frightened now than he ever was before.

"911, what is your emergency?" a voice said from the other end of the phone.

"Please I need help! My step dad is trying to hurt us, my brother isn't moving, please." Bill cried into the phone trying but unable to fight back the tears, and hoping that the police could get there in time.

"Okay honey it's going to be alright, what's your name, and where are you at?" The ladies voice said trying to reassure the terrified young boy, and Bill could hear her typing away on a keyboard.

"Please" he begged "He's not moving, please help us," he cried as he stared at the silent door petrified of what he knew was on the other side.

"Honey listen to me you have to tell me your name and where you're at, you have to or we can't get help to you or your brother" the lady said desperately trying to get the boy to calm enough to give her the information.

Those words brought Bill back from the abyss he had been sinking into “My name is Bill Tompkins, and I live at 335 south tenth st...” Bill started, but was interrupted by Greg starting to pound on the door again. Bill whimpered into the phone again “He’s back”, and the lady started to say something when the pounding stopped again. Bill was about to turn his attention back to the phone when a mighty roar sounded through the house, and the door flew in. Bill screamed as he saw Greg there with a gun in his hand.

He dropped the phone, and screamed, “No Greg! Don't shoot!” He then ran over to try and get to Ronnie he had to protect him. He saw Greg raise the gun, and point it at him. He raised his arms to try and ward off the bullet as he screamed “No!!!” Just as he heard his mother scream and then the gun went off. He felt the bullet tear into his shoulder, and incredible pain throwing him back across the room. He hit the wall, and fell down to the floor, where he lay dazed for a few seconds, but his fear and concern for Ronnie overcame the daze.

He struggled back to his feet surprised at how weak and dizzy he felt, and saw that his mom had tackled Greg to the floor. He heard another gunshot as he struggled to get to Ronnie. His only concern right now was for his little brother. He heard another blast from the gun, just as he reached him. He tried to reach down to grab his little brother, but his arm wouldn’t work. He looked down at it not quite understanding why things wouldn’t work right, and noticed that there was blood dripping from his fingertips, and his arm was just hanging there, and he couldn't move it.

He looked back to where Greg was struggling to his feet again, and saw his mom on the floor. Half of her face was missing, and all he could see was blood and some gray stuff on the floor. He felt himself scream, but didn't remember screaming.

His screams made Greg look up from where Bill's mom was laying, and look at him with absolute hate. Bill felt a cold shiver go through him like a knife, feeling a warmth spread down his legs at that look, and it brought him back to what was going on. He saw Greg raise the gun and point it at Ronnie.

Bill screamed then, “Leave him alone!!!” At the same time he heard the front door burst in and voices yelling from down stairs. Greg looked over his shoulder, and Bill could see two police officers, guns drawn, bound up the stairs. Greg had lowered his gun slightly with the noise of the police coming in. When he saw them come up the stairs, he half turned towards them.

“Freeze!” he heard one of the officers yell, and things slowed down with what happened next.

Bill saw Greg spin around raising the gun again in Ronnie’s direction. Bill threw himself over top of his little brother at the same time he heard the roar of the gun. He felt something slam into his back and a burning pain as darkness began to come, then heard the sounds of two other guns going off. The next thing he remembered was one of the officers bending over him asking if he was okay. Bill shook his head, whispering each word distinctly and separately “I...don’t...think...so” and then dropped it onto Ronnie's. With everything he had left in him, he gave his brother a kiss on the forehead, saying, “I love you,” as the blackness overtook him.

Bill was struggling to wake up. He couldn't understand why he couldn't open his eyes, and it was starting to scare him. All he could hear was a “beep... beep... beep” in the background that was driving him nuts. He finally managed to open them a little, and found he was in a strange room. He didn't know what was going on, or why he was here at first, but, then, in a flash, it all came back to him. He tried to sit up, but couldn't. He couldn't feel anything from his waist down. It was dark in the room,



and he couldn't see if there was anyone there. He was starting to panic not knowing where he was, what was wrong and, more importantly, if Ronnie was okay.

“Ronnie!!!” he screamed, hoping that his little brother could hear him. He kept screaming for his brother for about a minute, when the door burst open, and a nurse rushed into the room.

“What is it honey? What’s wrong?” She asked as she rushed over to his bed, and grabbed his hand.

Bill tried to pull away from her, scared of who she was, and not knowing where he was. “Where's Ronnie?” He begged of her, “and where am I?”

“Shush...” She said her heart breaking at seeing the fear there, knowing all he had been through as she tried to calm the scared boy down, “You’re gonna be okay, you’re in the hospital.” She was talking softly, trying to sooth his fears,

“Where's Ronnie, is he okay?” Bill asked again, his voice trembling with fear.

“He's okay, honey, he’s in the other room with your grandparents he’s okay. Do you want me to go get them?” She asked, still finding it strange that the grandparents would spend all their time in the other boy's room, never doing more than stopping in to talk to the nurse about their other grand child.

Bill slumped back with a relief so great he almost thought he was going to pass out from the intensity of it, and barely nodded to the nurse’s question. She bent over and gave him a hug, then left the room. She left the door open slightly, and moved down the hall.

Bill was left with his own thoughts, as he went over and over in his mind what had happened.

The nurse walked down the corridor to the other room and walked inside where she saw the other little boy and his strange grandparents.

"Honey your brother is awake and is asking for you, he's really worried about you" she said

Ronnie immediately sat up and asked "Can I go see him, please"

"Sure you can all go in and see him, I think it'd make him feel a lot better"

"You go Ronnie, we'll wait here for you, don't be too long" the elderly woman said to the boy who simply looked oddly at her for a moment before climbing down off the bed and walking over to the nurse

"Come on sweetie" the nurse said casting one last glance at the cold fish sitting there looking as if they had sampled something bitter. She felt sorry for the boys who were going to have to go live with them, especially the older boy. He was going to have enough to deal with already and certainly didn't need this too she thought as she led Ronnie back to his brother's room.

“Bill!” Ronnie yelled as he came into the room. He immediately ran over to the bed, and started to climb in. The nurse was about to say something, but thought that Ronnie being there was probably the best thing in the world right now for Bill, so instead of saying anything, she moved over, and helped Ronnie get into the bed with out hurting any of the wires or tubes that were going into and out of Bill.

"Bill, I was so worried about you, are you okay? We've been here for two days, and grandma and grandpa have been here too. They wouldn't tell me anything 'cept that mommy and daddy had to go away for a while." Ronnie cried, in a rush, as he buried his head into Bill's good shoulder.

Bill had tears running down his face as soon as he saw Ronnie, he was so glad to see, with his own eyes, that Ronnie was okay. He knew that they would never see mom and Greg again, but didn't know how to tell Ronnie what had happened. He was worried about the fact that Ronnie's arm was in a cast, but the fact that he was alive was all that mattered to Bill right now. "It's okay shrimp, I'm okay, I was just so worried about you. Are you alright?"

Ronnie pulled his head back, and wiped his tears with his arms, "Yeah, I'm okay, the doctor said my arm would be okay after it healed."

"He's right," a voice said softly from the doorway. They turned to see a rather short but fat man standing there wearing a lab coat, with a stethoscope hanging around his neck. He moved into the room, and turned the lights on low, so they could see with more light than what was coming in from the hall.

"Once his arm heals up, he'll be good as new." The doctor added as he moved over to the bed on the side that Ronnie was not on. Both boys looked up at the man, neither looking much like they wanted to trust him. "Hi, I'm Doctor Alberts, but you guys can call me doc. I'm glad to see you're awake Bill." He had heard from Ronnie that Bill hated to be called Billy and was thankful for that bit of information, as he knew it would be tough to get this young boy to trust him after everything that happened to him.

"Sir..." Bill started in a small voice, almost making Alberts lean forward to hear him. "Umm, I mean Doc, is... is Ronnie really gonna be okay?"

Alberts was shocked that after everything Bill had been through, that his first thought would be for Ronnie. He knew from experience, that Bill was probably in an a lot of pain right now, but he didn't let on. He was solely focused on making sure his little brother was gonna be okay. "Yes Bill, Ronnie will be good as new in a few weeks. I'm really glad you're awake now, because the little guy laying next to you was about ready to explode if he didn't get to see you." He said smiling at the two.

Alberts was glad his little joke worked as it got a little giggle from Ronnie, and Bill actually cracked a smile. Bill's smile faded to a grimace of pain, and the doctor got a bit concerned. The grimace vanished almost as quickly as it had appeared. Ronnie leaned in and whispered something to Bill. Bill then looked to the doctor and asked his next question.

"Okay doc, Ronnie says he wants to know about me, and I would too. How bad is it?" Alberts was shocked at how mature Bill was in asking the question, but he wasn't too sure how he would take the answer. He thought about it for a few seconds, then decided to be honest with the boy.

"Ummm.. well... since your grandparents have made it obvious they don't think either of you should know the whole story, I really can't tell you." He raised his hand to cut off the protests, and quickly went on. "However, in my medical opinion, I think you should know, so I am going to tell you."

He went over, and picked up one of the chairs in the room. He brought it over next to the bed and sat down. He took a moment to organize his thoughts, and when he was ready he looked up and met the older boys' eyes. "First off, I need to inform you that the police will be needing to talk to you, and you

would get this information from them anyways, however, I think you might handle it better if I tell you.” He then looked at Ronnie, and said, “the whole story.”

He saw that he had both boys undivided attention, and began the tragic tale. “Ronnie, I am sorry to have to tell you that both your mommy and daddy are dead. They died the same night that you and Bill got hurt.” Ronnie started to cry, and Bill pulled his little brother into his shoulder, with his one good arm, and started to whisper reassurances into his ear.

Alberts waited patiently for Ronnie to calm down. He was only slightly surprised that Bill had not reacted at all. That led him to believe that the police were right when they said that Bill had witnessed the entire event. He knew that the older boy would probably need a lot of counseling to get over all of this.

About five minutes later, Ronnie quieted down, and looked up, first to Bill, who gave him a nod. He then looked over to the doctor and nodded for him to continue.

Alberts took a deep breath then went on. “Bill, you suffered two different gun shot wounds. One that entered your shoulder breaking the bone there. The other one, went into your back, and severed your spine. I know you probably don't understand what that means but...”

Alberts was cut off by Bill saying, “That’s why I can't feel anything from my stomach down, isn't it?” Bill asked with the start of tears running down his checks.

The doctor just nodded, and said sadly “I’m afraid so,” and Bill nodded back. Ronnie looked back and forth between them for several seconds, before settling on his brother. “What does that mean Bill?” Ronnie asked in a very small voice.

“It means, shrimp, that I'll probably never walk again.” Bill said with a hint of finality in his voice. Ronnie quickly looked to the doctor, who just nodded in agreement saying “I’m sorry but there’s nothing we can do”. Ronnie cried out “No!, please Bill, tell me it isn’t true”, looking back at his brother. “I’m afraid it is. That’s one thing they can’t fix can they doc?” Bill said. Shaking his head as Ronnie stared at him with eyes full of hope he did one of the hardest things he had ever had to do and that was say to the little boy “I am really sorry but your brother is right, he’ll never walk or feel anything from the waist down” With that Ronnie started to cry again, but Bill quickly cuddled him close trying to reassure him. He knew that using his nickname for Ronnie helped a bit, but it was gonna be hard on both of them for a long, long time.

Alberts was constantly amazed by the older boy. Here he was only eleven years old, but he was taking this better than most adults he had talked to about this. He’d seen a lot in his years as a doctor but this was by far the most touching of all. The only thing left to tell them was probably going to be the hardest part. He waited for Ronnie to calm down again, then continued.

“The last thing I need to tell you is probably gonna be hard, Ronnie, why don't you lay your head on Bill's shoulder for this, and Bill hold onto your brother tight okay?” they both nodded although Bill flashed him a look that spoke volumes about not hurting Ronnie anymore, and got into the position the doctor told them too. When they were ready, the doctor got up and took Bill's injured hand in his own. He brushed a little bit of hair out of Ronnie's eyes, then took a deep breath.

“Ronnie, I hope you know what kind of big brother you have here and just how much he loves you. I found out from the police, and verified it through the lab here. When your father fired his gun the last time, it was meant to hit you. Bill threw himself over you at the last second to protect you. When the bullet hit him, it severed his spine, but it also deflected... ummm... made the bullet go in a different direction than it was going... and it went into your arm, breaking it instead. If it hadn't been for Bill here, it's most likely, that it would have killed you.” Alberts finished up squeezing Bill's hand, and watching to see if both boys could handle the information they just got.

Ronnie stared at the doctor for a moment, then looked at Bill stunned by what he had just heard. When their eyes met, Bill answered Ronnie unasked question with a nod of his head, and Ronnie squeaked out “Why?”

Bill just squeezed Ronnie closer with his one good arm, and kissed him on the forehead. “Cause your my baby brother, I have to protect you and most of all because I love you.” Ronnie then buried his head into Bill's shoulder crying his eyes out. He now knew that Bill would never walk again because Bill had saved his life. As if Bill knew what was going through Ronnie's mind he softly said but with great force “I wouldn't change a thing little brother, you're here now and you're alright which is all that matters.”

The doctor watched as Bill pulled Ronnie closer into him, and shed a few silent tears. Once he was fairly certain neither boy was going to have a major breakdown, he left them alone surprised to find his face wet as he left the room, damn it you just weren't supposed to let it get to you like this he thought as he walked down the hall towards the lounge, he needed to be alone for a while. They stayed like that for several minutes, before Bill looked down and saw that Ronnie had fallen asleep. He held his little brother for a few minutes, before he looked up at the ceiling, and prayed with tears still running down his face and fear evident in his voice, fear and pleading.

“God, I don't know if you even listen to me anymore, but I need your help. I can't look after Ronnie anymore, and I don't know what's gonna happen now. Please God, I am begging you, please, send one of your angels to look after him. I can take care of myself, but Ronnie's too little, and needs someone. Please, watch over him.”

Bill fell asleep shortly after his prayer, and neither boy noticed the doctor come back in and give Bill some medication through his IV. He stood there and watched over the boys for a few seconds. He couldn't get over what both boys had been through, or how well Bill was taking it. He hoped it wouldn't become an issue later, but for now, Alberts knew he would do all he could to help both boys. They had somehow touched something deep within him that he never allowed to be touched.

Ronnie was released from the hospital the day after Bill woke up, but Bill would be in there for a while longer. Ronnie didn't want to go but wasn't left with a choice and made sure that he came back almost every day to see Bill, however, he rarely saw his grandparents. When he did see them, they barely said two words to him. He knew they didn't like him any better than Greg did. At least they didn't know that Ronnie wasn't Greg's son, or else Ronnie would have been treated like Bill was and Bill made sure it stayed that way cause Ronnie didn't need that on top of everything else.

Bill was alone in the room for the next two weeks. Doc had told him that he would probably be in the hospital for about six months total. They had to make sure that there were no long term problems other than the ones they knew about, and wanted to make sure that he knew how to do his physical therapy. During that time he learned all about what the future held for him. He spent a lot of time late at

night crying, often crying himself to sleep but in the end he knew he'd have to get used to it. It didn't make it any easier but over time he gradually came to an acceptance of his condition. What he had said to Ronnie that first day was something he meant every word of. Even knowing the cost he wouldn't change a thing. His brother was alive and that made it all worth it.

He finally did get a room mate who was about his own age. Kenny was his name, and he had been in a pretty bad accident. It seemed a car had hit him while he was riding his bike. He ended up breaking both his legs and had some internal injuries. Kenny was a nice kid though, and helped make the time go faster for Bill. Bill's grandparents hadn't paid to have the TV turned on, so he really didn't have much to do during the day, except read the books that were brought around. When Kenny got there, his parents had turned on the TV, and Kenny made sure Bill could see it when he watched something.

Bill was sad every time Kenny's dad was around. It was obvious the Kenny's dad loved him and cared about him. It made Bill wonder why he couldn't have had a dad to love him. Was something wrong with him like Greg always said? Was it so much to ask God to be loved? He didn't get an answer to his questions just like he never had but loved the time with the other boy's father Kenny's dad, Dave, as Bill was told to call him, picked up on what was going on, and knew from the nurses that Bill's only visitor was Ronnie, and how the grandparents treated Bill. Dave also knew what had happened to Bill's parents, as it had been all over the news. That 911 tape that the news had played was one he would never ever forget to his dying day. When Bill had dropped the phone it had stayed on and it was all recorded. He shuddered at recalling that desperate cry to help them and the even more chilling words "He's back" said with such horror in that little voice. The cry begging the man not to shoot them and the scream of "No" followed by gunshots and finally the barely audible words said to his brother of "I love you" still brought tears to Dave's eyes. Looking at his own son he didn't know how anyone could ever treat a child so horribly or do something like that to one. All he could do that night when he first heard it was go into Kenny's room and hold the confused boy he had woken up to him as tightly as he could. Explanations would come the next day when unfortunately Kenny heard it as well. Then he had been faced with the prospect of answering questions from his son that he didn't have answers to, questions that he didn't know mirrored Bill's. He tried his best to involve the little boy in everything that he did with his own son, and many times brought Bill a treat when he came. The boy became special to Dave in that time and too Kenny as well. He wondered if there wasn't something they could do for the two of them. Bill ate up the attention and could, for a little while, pretend that he had a daddy, a real daddy to love him like he had always dreamed of but, was even more depressed, when Kenny was released about a week before he was to be. As usual nothing could last.

Bill knew that going to his grandparents house was not going to be fun as Ronnie had told him how much they had bitched about the modifications that had to be made for Bill's wheelchair. Ronnie said that he had actually gotten into a fight with them when they had said no to Ronnie moving into Bill's room when he came home. Finally, though, Ronnie's whining had won out, and they allowed it. Ronnie was a bundle of joy when he came in the day Bill was to be released.

While the nurses were getting Bill ready to go home, and the grandparents were getting him checked out, Ronnie managed to find a few seconds when they were alone and told Bill about the sleeping arrangement. Ronnie said that the main reason they allowed it was so that they wouldn't have to get up in the middle of the night in case Bill needed something.

Bill's grandparents barely said two words to him other than what was needed to get him in and out of their car. When they got to their house, his grandfather wheeled him into his room, helped him get into bed, then left him alone. After so long around people who cared about him and were friendly to him

this was like being punched in the gut. It hurt even though he didn't want it to but Ronnie never left his side the whole time, and once they were alone, Ronnie ran over to his side of the room.

"Hey Bill, I found something at the old house that I knew you would want saved. I hid it so they wouldn't find it." The little guy rustled around in his drawer for a few seconds, then came back over to Bill's bed handing him something wrapped in cloth. Bill took it, then unwrapped the object. When he saw what it was he started to sob. He had held everything in for so long, and now it all seemed to come out in a rush. He held the framed photograph to his chest and cried for what seemed like hours. Ronnie held him all the while that he was crying, and soon the older boy cried himself to sleep. Ronnie took the picture and placed it on the dresser next to his bed before crawling back in beside his brother and wrapping his arms around him tightly.

End Flashback.

Tears were slowly streaming down both boys eyes as Bill got done talking. Will held him tight to his chest while the older boy cried. He couldn't understand how anyone could treat someone like Bill was treated. It made him feel bad for how he had felt at being a lab rat for so many years. While it might not have been great, it was nothing compared to what Bill had to go through.

Once Bill was done crying he continued his story. "You know, it sucks having a birthday in the hospital. But what sucks even more was that I had a nicer birthday there then I have ever remembered. They said that since I was turning twelve, that I may need to be moved to the adult section. They were only kidding, but it made me feel weird. Anyways, we stayed with my grandparents for about 3 months, before we left. Things weren't going too well there, as I was basically ignored. Which meant that anything that I needed help with, I either went without, or Ronnie had to do for me. He never complained, but I felt bad having to have him help me with things like going to the bathroom, or taking a bath. I got pretty good at being able to do both by myself, but it's a lot better with help. He stayed by me and kept me going Will, I...think...I think I would have found a way to finish what Greg had started if it wasn't for Ronnie being there," and with that Bill lapsed into silence, and Will spoke up almost immediately.

"I'm so glad you didn't Bill, and if you ever need help with that stuff, let me know. I mean I would like to help you if you need it. And if I can't I'm sure Chang can. He's a doc and knows all about this kinda stuff." Will said as he squeezed Bill tight against his chest. Bill muttered a thanks, then went on with his story.

"One day, as I said, about three months later, Ronnie came into the room in a rush. I asked what was wrong, and all he said was that we were leaving. I knew my grandparents had left for the evening, so I wasn't sure what was going on. When I finally got Ronnie calmed down enough to tell me what was going on, he told me that the grandparents had decided that I needed to be sent away to a school for "kids with special needs." Ronnie said that we were not going to be split up, and had gotten money out of the safe that they kept in their room. It was only about two hundred dollars, but we would have to make do. Ronnie was very insistent that he would not stay here if I went.

I tried to talk him out of it, but he finally looked me right in the eyes, and said. If they send you away, then I'm gonna run away to find you. Now, would you rather go with me, or would you rather me go by myself. Ronnie has always been a stubborn little shit, and I didn't doubt he would do what he said, so we had to go. You know it's kind of funny but being ignored I think is worse than anything else. At least with Greg and what he did you knew you existed but with them you might as well not have" Bill said sadly.

"We loaded our bags with some clothes, and as much food as we could find, then struck out to find a future. We were near the bus station, so we went there. The next bus to leave was going to end up in Salt Lake City, so we told the guy at the counter that we were going to see our grandparents there, and he bent the rules to let us buy tickets."

"We spent two days on a bus, and when we finally got to Salt Lake City, we tried to find some place to go. We only had about fifty bucks left, and didn't know what the hell to do. We were well and truly fucked by this point, we just didn't know it." Bill gave a bark of laughter, and Will couldn't help but join in.

"Finally, after only two days, we were out of money. We had no clue what to do then, but thankfully, we happened to run into Jack, literally. We were coming around a corner, and I ran over Jack's foot with my chair. After apologizing profusely, he must have figured out things were not right with us. He offered to buy us dinner at the Burger King that was across the street, and we took him up on the offer, not having anything better to do, and we were both hungry. Finally, he managed to get our story out of us, and offered to bring us back here. We didn't really trust him, but we had nothing better, and didn't have much to lose. The rest, as they say is history." Bill finished his story, and they both stared off into space thinking about the story that was just told.

After a few minutes, Will asked the one question that was still bugging him. "Bill, there's one part of the story that still bugs me a bit."

Bill looked over his shoulder, "Okay, what's that?"

"Well," Will said, "the picture that Ronnie gave you. You never said what it was a picture of."

Bill nodded his head, then struggled to get sat up. Will quickly moved to help him, then, with a motion from Bill, moved the chair over so Bill could get to it. He reached into a bag that was attached to the back on the chair and started to feel around inside. Finally he pulled out a picture frame and handed it to Will.

Will looked at it for a second, then asked, "Is this you?" When Bill just nodded, he continued. "And who's the other guy?"

Bill held out his hand, and Will handed him the picture. It was of Bill when he was two or three years old, being held by a man in a military uniform, standing in front of a helicopter. His hand shaking and with a deep but unspoken longing in his eyes and voice he said "I... I'm not really sure who it is...but I think...I think it's my... dad"

Will was looking at him when he was suddenly brought back from his memories by Janet walking into the waiting room looking like hell.

Everyone jumped up moving towards her as she held up a hand saying quickly "I have to get back in there, he's still in surgery but I wanted to give you guys an update. He's still alive and we're doing..." but she was interrupted by a voice over the paging system coming on saying

"Code Blue Surgery one, Code Blue Surgery one" and a ragged voice following it with "Janet I need you now!"

At the announcement Bill's and Janet's faces had gone white as a sheet and with the final words Janet spun around and raced back through the door yelling back "Stay there" to the assembled boys who were milling about looking at one another in confusion.

Will finally asked a trembling Bill "You know what that means don't you?" and all eyes turned to the wheelchair bound boy who didn't say anything for a moment or two as they all watched his throat work trying to get the words out until he finally said in a strangled whisper with tears running down his face "It means he's...he's dead!"

## Chapter 14

There was stunned silence from everyone as they all looked at Bill in silent horror at his pronounced looks of shocked disbelief and a desperate need to have misheard on their faces.

Those looks changed to ones of denial and not a few tears began to fall as Adam said in a broken voice "What...what do you mean?"

Bill couldn't speak for a moment as he sat there with his head buried in his chest with Will's hand protectively and comfortingly on his shoulder but finally he raised his head and said in a choked voice, "Code Blue is what they say when the heart and breathing stop on a person."

Adam fell back as if struck and only Logan catching him and easing him down into his lap as he wrapped his arms tightly around him prevented the boy from falling as he whispered "No."

All the others except Juan sank stunned shaking their heads to seats or the floor while Juan crawled in next to Adam and Logan who added him to their embrace.

Will gently took Bill out of the chair and sat with him in his arms holding the crying boy to him as he just tried to absorb what he had heard.

Joe dead?

It couldn't be.

Silence, with the exception of sobs and crying, was all the noise which existed for some time, and then there was just silence.

When Janet came walking slowly out of the double doors once again looking haggard and drawn, Adam, Juan and Logan, all jumped to their feet as soon as the door opened, while everyone else slowly came to their feet all, looking at Janet, all with the same question in their eyes.



Janet sighed heavily, ran her hand through her hair, and looked up with tears in her eyes. Before anyone could react, she spoke. "We got him back, barely, but he's still in surgery, Chang's doing everything he can, but I'm not much help anymore. I'm a geneticist, not a surgeon."

Adam immediately jumped in with. "You need a surgeon? Logan, find the best surgeon in Salt Lake City." He said as he spun and looked at Juan, then to Donnie and Emily. "Get your teams ready, we'll kidnap the guy if we have to."

"Hold on!" Janet said, stopping everyone in their tracks. "Chang is doing everything he can, but frankly, by the time you got the other doctor here, it'll be over... one way or the other." She went on, before anyone could say anything about what she meant. "It'll all be academic, in a little while anyways. We just don't have enough blood. We used everything we had, but we're going to need a lot more that we just don't have. His injuries are that bad."

Adam, Juan, and Logan all spoke in unison. "Use mine!" Everyone else was a second behind them, offering their own blood. Janet got a small sad smile on her face, at the sentiment she saw there. She knew that Joe would be touched by it.

Standing up straighter and taking a deep breath, Janet announced. "Okay, everyone who wants to see if their blood will work, follow me. But you have to know, there is a chance that none of you will be a match. Adam, you're the best bet, as you're his son, so we'll test you first. However, I don't know how the modifications that were made to you will affect things."

Janet knew no matter how bad things were, she had to be strong for her boys, she thought as she looked at all their desperately hoping faces. They were looking to her to bring off a miracle and she just didn't know if that was going to be possible in this case. God, she so hoped so, but she just didn't know. He was in such bad shape, much more than she had told them. She actually was of the opinion that a team of the finest surgeons might very well not be able to do much for him. She shook off such thoughts and strode off, knowing that they all would follow without needing to be told.

Adam just nodded, and they all moved off to a different section on the medical ward. Logan needed to help Adam as his leg was in a cast, but that did not slow down either boy. Janet quickly took some of Adam's blood, when they got there, then went to a machine, and inserted the blood into it. A few seconds later, it beeped; Janet looked at the readout on the screen. She then pulled a piece of paper out of her lab coat, and compared them. Everyone held their breath as they watched her look back and forth between them. Finally she let out a breath that she didn't even realize she had been holding.

"Adam, you're a match." She said excitedly, which caused Adam to break out in his first smile in some time. It wasn't much of one, but it was the only smile that had come upon his face since the accident. "I need to go ask Chang something quick, but I'll be right back. While I'm talking to him, Adam, I need you to get into a hospital gown. IF things happen like Chang thought they might, we will need you here for a bit." She then walked out of the room leaving some rather confused kids there.

Adam quickly did as she had asked, and literally stripped down right there in the middle of the room. He didn't seem to mind that Emily was there; however, when she looked over and saw the naked 13 year old boy, she was at first embarrassed, and then horrified as what she was seeing became apparent to her. She had never seen Adam with his shirt off, but she had heard that he had some scars. She was NOT prepared for the mass of criss-crossing marks that were all over Adam's chest, and back that defined "Some". Some looked to be from surgical procedures, but some looked like deep cuts from a

knife. She was even sure she saw a few bullet wound scars, even though she had never seen one of those before, that's what she thought about when she thought about bullet wounds. When Adam had the gown on, she looked over to Donnie. Donnie had a look on his face that she was sure matched hers.

Janet came back in the room right then, leading an equally haggard looking fourteen year old boy. Charlie Adams was the field medic for Beta team, and currently, the only one of the three field medics that had learned enough medicine to be helpful as something other than an assistant, but from the look on his face and even more so in his eyes, it was obvious that he felt overwhelmed by what he had been through in the operating theatre.

"Okay Adam," Janet said as soon as she was in the room, "you need to come with me. Charlie here will start testing anyone else that wants to be tested." She then looked at Logan and Juan. "You two need to decide between you, who is going to take command for a while. Chang says that he can't, as he is too busy, and Adam will be out of commission for at least a few days with the amount of blood we can take from him. Who ever takes command is not allowed to give blood. Chang was very specific about that." Janet didn't understand why Chang had insisted on this, but she knew he had to have had a reason.

She let the two of them work it out, as she led Adam to a private room in the back. Once they were there, she indicated for Adam to sit on the bed. "Okay Adam, this is what we're going to do. I am going to put two IV's in you, one in each arm. The first one is what we will use to take blood; the second one is what we will be using to transfuse other fluids into you. Normally, a person can handle losing one unit of blood easily. Two units of blood would be pushing it, and three would hospitalize the person, and risk hurting them. However, you're still a child, and have less of a blood supply than an adult." She held up her hand when Adam started to speak. "Hold on, let me finish. Chang says that since you regenerate so quickly, we can take more than we could from a normal person, and I agree. However, we are going to be monitoring you constantly, and pumping other fluids into you. We'll start by taking one and a half units out of you, and see how you are doing. As soon as we feel you can handle giving more, we will take it."

She paused to let what she had said sink in. She had left the hardest part till last. "Now Adam, you have to realize. Joe's injuries are bad. If he wasn't in as good of a physical condition as he is, he wouldn't have survived this long. Hell I'm surprised he's still alive. But his injuries are bad. So far we have found that both legs are shattered, not just broken, but shattered. The right hip is also shattered, and the left one just broke. However, that's not the worst. When the right hip shattered, it sent bone fragments up into his abdominal cavity, shredding most of his intestines." She watched as Adam's face got paler and paler, wincing as she explained the situation Joe was in. "IF he survives this first surgery, he will need to have at least a few more. And no matter what happens, he will never walk again. The legs are just too broken up. We may end up needing to amputate them. But that's something for later on."

She again paused to make sure that Adam understood everything she said. The boy had tears streaming down his face, and as soon as she paused, he started to break down. "This is all my fault, I'm... I'm so sorry."

Janet moved over and held him in her arms. "Shhhhhh... it's not your fault Adam, accidents happen."

Adam pulled back, and looked at Janet, shaking his head from side to side. She had never seen so much pain in anyone's eyes before. "But... it IS my fault. He was supposed to check my chute before we left.... I was still pissed at him, and refused to let him. If I would've, he would've caught the fact

that the chute was tangled...." Adam sobbed the last part out unable to continue, and buried his face in his hands, bringing his knees up to his chest but he didn't need to finish. If he had then the accident wouldn't have happened.

Janet stood there in shock at what she just learned. She had assumed it was just an accident, but now she knew it could have been avoided. She started to get angry with Adam, but a heart wrenching sob quickly defused the anger. She knew Adam would have to live with this for the rest of his life, and didn't need her anger on top of it. Plus she had more important things to worry about than how the injuries happened. The boy may have just killed his father, so she moved over and just held what was now a very scared and pain filled little boy and not the confident leader of a short time earlier, as he cried.

When he finally got himself under control, she brushed the hair out of his eyes. "We can't worry about that now, Adam; we need to work on saving your father. To do that, we need your blood." Adam dried his eyes on the bottom on the gown, and nodded to Janet.

"What ever you need, Doc, take it. Just save Joe... just save my dad." Adam spoke softly, his words ending in a sob, as he lay down in the bed. Janet had to wipe her own eyes, as she moved around the room to get everything ready. First she inserted an IV into his left arm, then hung a bag of fluid, and ran it wide open. She then put an IV in his right arm, and started to drain blood from it. Once she had one bag filled, she unhooked it, hooked up another bag, and started to leave.

"I need to get this to Chang, and get an update. I'll be back as soon as I can. When that other bag gets half full, stop the flow on it. If you start to feel woozy, stop it right away, okay?" She said, as she turned to look at Adam. He simply nodded while staring up at the ceiling. Tears were still streaming down his face.

Twenty minutes later, Janet walked back into the room. Adam was asleep on the bed, and the second bag was full. She silently cursed the stubborn young boy, and went over to check on him. She took his blood pressure, and while low, found that it was still acceptable. She sighed in relief and left the room, letting Adam regain his strength.

Nearly everyone in the complex showed up to get their blood tested. Some of them were turned away right away because they were too young, and that almost started a riot, when Ronnie was told no. Ronnie had become close to Joe since they got here, and being told that he couldn't even be tested pissed him off. Bill finally calmed him down, when they were told they had enough already, and would let everyone know if they needed more.

After being told that he couldn't wait with Adam, and it would be several more hours before they had word on Joe, Logan moved up to the command center. He was assured that he would be notified as soon as there was any word on Joe. He could then make a complex wide announcement to let everyone know, plus he had work to do.

On his way up, he gathered the rest of the Intel team, as well as the Intel Officers from each team. He was going to need as much help as he could get for his next project. Once he had the five boys there, he addressed them all. "Okay guys, we have a situation here, on top of Joe getting hurt. I am going to need all of your help to get this done. First off, I finally got the time to go through Dr. Marcus' files. I found some rather disturbing things in there, most of which are not needed to be shared. However, the-

re is one thing you need to know to do your jobs." He took out five pieces of paper that he had just photocopied.

Handing them each one, he gave them time to read them over, before he continued. "Okay, as you can see, Adam has two half brothers that he didn't know about. The oldest one, James, is nine years old right now. The younger one, Kent, is five. We need to find them. Their last name is Johnson, so that will make your job harder. Last known location is in Barstow California, but they could be anywhere by now. We know that the younger one is in foster care, but we don't know where. James, however, is in the custody of his father, who is an Army officer. Last report that Marcus had was that they were going to start "working" on James as soon as they could. Which means they want to turn James into something like Adam." Every face in the room paled at that thought as everyone in the complex had heard what happened to Adam while they were "changing" him. It was not pretty to think about.

Logan gave them a few seconds to register what he had said, then told them to get to work. They each took a different computer terminal, and were soon lost in their own work. Logan's Team worked hard to find the missing kids, and soon the room was filled with the click of keys, and the muttered curses of kids working hard.

About an hour later, Ray Ray walked in, pushing a cart full of soft drinks, and coffee. Donnie and Emily were right behind him with trays of sandwiches. Logan looked up from his computer screen, and smiled as they all walked in. He got up and went over to Donnie. "Any word?" He asked, hoping that they would have some word on how Joe was doing.

Donnie just shook his head, and offered Logan one of the sandwiches. Logan eagerly accepted it, and Donnie spoke softly to him. "Any luck on your end?" To which Logan shook his head while he took another bite of the sandwich. "Can I help at all?" He then asked, hoping he could do something to help out, the sitting around and waiting was killing him.

Logan thought for a second then said, "Yeah, I could use your help. Here's what I need. We're checking out the different major cities in the area; and if you could take the info we get, and put it on the board over there," pointing to the white board they had set up that currently had a map on it, "it would be helpful. That way we won't have to stop looking, and can just call it out as we find it." Donnie nodded, eager to help, and they called an end to their break.

Jack came walking in about thirty minutes later, just in time to hear Erin, the fourteen year old Intel Officer from Alpha Team, speak up. "I got Kent!" She screamed, causing everyone to jump a bit. She looked a bit embarrassed at having startled everyone, but soon she had everyone crowding around her terminal. "Well?" Logan said when she didn't tell them right away.

Erin looked back at her screen and said, "I found Kent in a group home in Elko Nevada, its run by a church there. I don't have much info on it, but..."

Before she continued, Emily turned to Jack. "Jack, let my team go get him." Before Jack could reply, Logan spoke up.

"It's only about 250 miles from here. And with it being a group home, I doubt they have any security, it should be just a grab and run mission." Logan then put up a map on the screen. It was a blow up of the town of Elko, with a big star on the place where the group home was.

"Wait a minute here," Jack said. He then turned to Logan and asked a question that was bothering him. "Logan, are you sure this isn't a trap? I mean if I had a kid that was genetically engineered to be a weapon, I wouldn't just let him live anywhere."

Logan was shaking his head by the time Jack was done talking. "No, you don't understand. Kent wasn't engineered... he was born like Adam was, and was supposed to be changed later on. However, he doesn't have the genetic markers that Adam and James have. He is not a "viable candidate" for genetic changes. After Juan, they had a lot of problems, and went back to doing it the way they did with Adam." Logan made the quotes in the air during that last part, and Jack looked at him oddly.

"How do you know that?" Jack asked.

Logan grinned, went back to the stack of papers that he had printed out, shuffled through them, took one out and handed it to Jack. "Cause it says so right here."

Jack took the paper, and it was another Military Top Secret Memo. It, basically, said exactly what Logan just did. Jack read it over, getting angrier at this, as he read about more kids that were engineered that did not live.

Jack studied the map for a second, more to get his wits about him, than to see anything. Finally he turned, and grabbed the nearest phone. He punched in the code to make an announcement and spoke into it. "Would Lieutenants William Casey and Juan Casey please report to the command center, on the double?"

Jack then put down the phone and looked to Emily. "Get your team together, and load up in the Black Hawk, unless Will says differently, that's what I want you to take. You're wheels up in one hour."

Emily grinned as she saluted Jack, then turned to a phone and repeated the same process that Jack had a few seconds earlier. "Delta team, prepare to scramble, report to the hanger immediately." As soon as she put the phone down, she moved to the door. As soon as she opened it, she had to move out of the way as Will and Juan came in.

Jack looked at both of them, and spoke before they could. "Will, is the Black Hawk up for a mission?"

Will nodded, "Yeah, but what's up?"

"Erin found out where Kent is; I assume Juan brought you up to speed on what Logan found out." Jack asked, and when William nodded, he continued. "Good, they're about 250 miles away, and I'm sending Delta team to get him. I want you to fly them, and Juan I want you to go as well. This will be their first real mission, and I don't want them going alone. I'll send someone down to you when we have all the intelligence on the place." Jack said, looking at both boys. They both smiled, saluted, and went out at a jog. He then turned back to Logan.

"Okay Logan, you got your wish. Now, get me EVERYTHING you can on that place. I want to know who runs it, how many people are there, if they have any security. Hell, I want to know what they had for dinner last night." Jack finished the last part with a smile. He still wasn't sure about this, but he knew that there would be a mutiny on his hands if he didn't allow it. Logan simply nodded, then turned back to the computer with a grin on his face.

Thirty minutes later, Logan walked over to Jack. "Okay boss, here's what I got. There are 5 other boys besides Kent there. Ranging in age from three to thirteen. It's run by the local Baptist church, and from everything I can find, it's not like most group homes. From what we have been able to find out, it's actually a pretty good place. They have passed all their inspections with flying colors, and all the reports from the kids there say that they like living there." He looked down at the papers he had and went on.

"It looks like there is a married couple that runs the place. Both of them are older, but were unable to have kids of their own. They have run this group home for the last twelve years. Let's see here, their names are Gretta and Hans Bismark. They are fifty five and fifty seven respectively. Neither of them has had any run-ins with the law, and they have no extra money to be found other than what they get for their group home. Oh yeah... and they had fried chicken for dinner last night." Logan added that last part with a grin, and Jack laughed.

"Okay, I have to ask, how did you know that?" He said while taking the print out from Logan.

Logan grinned back and responded, "Easy, that's what she bought at the store early yesterday, and one of the kids said it in an email they sent." Logan was beaming with pride at being able to figure out everything that Jack had asked for, even the last part.

Jack just shook his head in amazement at what he had been able to figure out so quickly. He got up from the seat he had taken and motioned for Logan to follow him. They both headed down to the hanger with Sammy Campbell following him.

He is Delta Team's Intel Officer and as such would be going on the op with them. The fifteen year old was a little giddy, but mostly worried about going on his first real operation. He was praying that things would go well for them, and nothing bad would happen.

When the three of them got to the hanger, it was a flurry of activity. William and Bill already had the Black Hawk outside the Cave entrance, and were running the pre-flight on it. Conner, the ground crew member that was going along to act as door gunner, was checking over the 50 cal. Machine Gun, and making sure the ammo cans were full and free flowing on the belt that fed the gun.

Emily was busy going over the various team members to make sure they had all their gear, and it was secured properly. She was acting very much like the mother hen, and making sure everyone was equipped properly. She wanted to make sure that nothing went wrong on her first operation as the Officer in Charge.

Juan, for his part, was gearing up a bit differently than he was used to, since Becky, the team's medic was still busy helping with Joe, she wouldn't be going with them, and he was acting as the team's Medical Officer. He had already assured Emily that she was in charge, and he was going to be acting only as the Medical Officer, unless she asked him to take over.

Everyone gathered around Jack and Logan when they arrived, and Jack gave them the information that they had gathered. "Okay people, here's what we got. First off, this is a picture of the kid we need to extract." He then handed out a picture of a cute little five year old boy. Logan had been able to find it in the local CPS Computer System, and ran off copies of it for everyone that was going.

"You will have five other children in the house, ranging from age three, to age thirteen. There will also be two adults there, an older couple, who run the place. By the time you get there, they should either already be in bed, or going there shortly. I would suggest that you wait till they are all in bed before you strike, but I will leave that up to Sergeant Larson. You are NOT to use force unless your life is threatened; the life of one of the team, or the life of the subject is threatened. IF that happens, you are authorized to use how ever much force is needed to secure the subject, and protect your own lives. Is that clear?" Jack looked each member of the team in the eyes, and got a nod from each before he continued.

"Sergeant Larson, I want you to check in before you start the operation, and when it is finished. If you have any problems, I will be having Alpha Team standing by to render assistance. No heroics out there, if you need to fall back and call for back up, then do it. Okay?" He met gazes with Emily, and she nodded. He held her gaze for a few more moments, then said, "Good luck everyone."

Emily took that cue, and snapped to attention, saluting Jack. Everyone else followed suit, and Jack returned it. She then looked at her team and smiled to them, hoping to reassure them that everything was going to be alright. "Okay everyone, move out!"

They had just broken up, when Billy Collins, Logan's second in command on the Intel team, came over the PA system. The thirteen year olds voice cracked slightly as he spoke. "Attention on base, I am pleased to announce that Capitan Joseph Casey is out of surgery. He is in extremely critical but stable condition.

A cheer went up in the hanger, and everyone left with a smile on their face. Jack went back to the command center, while Logan went down to check on Joe and Adam.

Adam was smiling slightly when Logan walked into his room. He was still flat on his back, with the casted leg sticking out from under the covers. He had gone through three bags of fluids already, and Janet was talking to him when Logan walked in.

"Adam, you've already given more blood then I think is safe, Joe's out of surgery now, so he won't need more right away. The five units you've given him are enough for now. Plus, if you insist on giving more, I'm going to be forced to put a catheter in you. With the amount of fluids we're giving you, and the amount of blood you're giving, I'm not going to allow you to walk to the bathroom, and you'd probably pass out anyways, and we'll have another accident like you had a little while ago." Janet didn't even notice Logan was there while she lectured Adam, until he laughed out loud.

"Adam, you peed the bed?!?" Logan got out between laughs. Adam for his part just glared at Logan, then looked back to Janet.

"You really don't think he'll need more right now, I feel okay enough to give more." He tried to protest, but when he tried to sit up, the room spun a bit, and his head fell back down on the pillow. Janet was right there, and moved to make sure he was okay. After making sure he didn't hit his head on anything but the pillow, she spoke softly, but strongly.

"I am sure Adam, and even if he did, I would not allow you to give anymore right now. I want you to get some rest, I'll have Ray bring you something to eat, and after that I want you to sleep. Okay?"

Adam nodded, and she looked to Logan. "Don't be long, he really needs to sleep." Logan nodded, and she moved out of the room. Logan thought for a second at how tired she looked, and could imagine that everyone looked about like her at that point. He was sure that it was tough over the last 5 hours, and every single one of them needed a break.

Logan then moved over to Adam's bed, and pulled up a chair so he could sit next to him. "How do you feel?" He asked as he took his boyfriend's hand.

Adam looked at him, and tears started to flow from his eyes. "Logan, I am so sorry for hurting you, and how I treated you the last month. Can you ever forgive me?"

Logan knew that Adam was on the verge of losing it, so he squeezed his hand. "Adam, you were forgiven a minute after it happened. I love you, and I know that you're going through a lot right now. Please don't beat yourself up over it." He smiled down at Adam, then moved in, and kissed him full on the lips. They were soon lost to the world, as all that existed for them was the meeting of their lips, and the love they shared in that one kiss.

They broke the kiss when the door opened up. They looked over to see Ray walking in pushing a cart filled with food. He didn't stay long as he had a lot of other things to do. Adam and Logan ate in silence, and as soon as they were done, Adam was soon asleep. Logan sat with him for a while, just holding his hand, and watching him sleep.

After about an hour, Logan got up, went into the bathroom, did his business, and then went up to the command center. When he walked in, Jack was sitting in a chair near the main radio, talking to Emily. He walked in near the end of the conversation, but he heard enough to know that they were holding until it got later, then they would begin the op.

Logan took a seat in his normal spot, and started the search for Jim. He knew from the papers he got from Marcus, that James would be held in a military laboratory, but he had no idea where. He went into the program that he had Joe embed into the military's computers back when they rescued Juan, and started to root around.

He was surprised when he was broken away from his work to hear Emily saying that they were about to start their raid. He looked up and noticed that he had been at it for three hours. He sat back, and listened to the radio traffic of the operation. He guessed that William was re-transmitting everything using the Black Hawk's very powerful Radio Transmitter.

He listened as they reported that the house was quiet, with the only light coming from the chandelier. Then he heard that they had gained access to the house, and finally that they had retrieved Kent. They had a bit of a problem with the little boy until he was told that he was going to see his brother. He heard that they were making their exit when he heard something that sent a chill down his spine.

"Man down! We have a man down. Assailant neutralized, Medic needed in the Kitchen." The "almost" calm voice of Emily came over the radio. Jack sat up straighter, and picked up the microphone.

"Delta Team, report!" He barked into it.



"Stand by." Was the only response he got, and everyone waited on edge over the next few minutes as the radio was silent. Finally they heard William come over the radio.

"Viper Lead to base, we're heavy one five year old, and have one minor injury." William snickered at saying that, but went on without missing a beat. "Should be back to base in approximately one and a half hours. Will advise if ETA changes."

"Copy that Viper Lead, contact base when your twenty miles out, or if situation changes." Jack said into the radio with a strange look on his face.

"Roger that base, Viper will contact at two zero miles out, or if situation changes. Viper Lead out." William said over the radio the mirth still in his voice.

Jack just put the radio microphone back in the holder, and sat back letting out a sigh of relief. He then looked over to Logan. "Logan, get a hold of Ronnie, and Ray Ray, we need another room set up for Kent. Also, I think it would be best if it was in your pod, that way he can be close to Adam. IF Janet or Chang can, I would also like a full medical work up on him when he gets here. Just to be on the safe side."

Logan nodded, and turned back to his desk. He picked up the phone and relayed the orders. He then lost himself back in his search until the radio came alive again. Will was radioing in, letting them know they were twenty miles out. Jack let William know he had received the transmission, and then got up. Logan got up as well, and they went down to the hanger to wait. On the way out, Logan asked Billy to let Ronnie and Ray Ray know that they were needed in the hanger.

They weren't waiting in the hanger long when they were joined by both Ronnie and Ray. Ronnie was carrying a huge teddy bear that he had asked Logan to order for him. Jack gave him a questioning look, and Ronnie explained.

"I figured the little guy could use him. Besides, mine's bigger, and this was as big as Logan said he could get, so I don't need it." Ronnie said, and Jack reached down and ruffled his hair. He was touched at the sentiment, plus the fact that he knew that Ronnie's teddy bear was a bit smaller than this huge thing he had now, but he didn't mention that fact.

All too soon, they could hear the helicopter coming in for a landing, and they ran out to greet it. First off the bird was Juan and Shane Davidson. Shane was the oldest member of Delta team and at sixteen, he was also the largest. Between them, lying on a stretcher was Zach Tanner. He was lying on his side, holding a bandage to his back side. Jack and Logan looked surprised when they saw this, and seeing their faces thirteen year old Zach blushed a real pretty shade of red. "Hey! She stabbed me," was all he could say before Shane piped in.

"Yeah, she stabbed you alright... in the ASS!!!" That of course got everyone laughing, and they hurried him down to the medical wing to get a few stitches.

Soon they saw Emily walking in carrying a little boy. He looked around at everyone and spoke in a small voice. "Em... who's all these people? I thought you said I's gonna see my brother."

Emily set him down on the floor, and squatted down to be eye to eye with him. "You'll see him soon, as far as these guys, they're friends of mine. See the big guy there, he's in charge here. His name's Jack, he may be old, but he's really nice." She said, while pointing to Jack.

Jack walked over, and extended his hand down to Kent, who quickly hid behind Emily's leg. He looked at Jack for a moment, who just stood there with his hand out for the young boy. Finally after a few seconds, he hesitantly took it. "Hello Kent, I'm glad to see you're okay. If you need anything here, just let me know, okay? I know that my friend David fixed up a special Banana Split just for you. You wanna go see if he's ready with it yet?"

Kent nodded eagerly, but then looked over at the other boys. "Who's they?" he asked. Emily answered by pointing out each boy as she explained who they were.

"Well, the taller one is Logan, he's the one that found out where you were, then we have Ronnie, he's the one with the big teddy bear, and the other boy is Ray." When she got done explaining who everyone was, Ronnie walked up to Kent and offered him the teddy bear.

"Here, he's been lonely lately. He don't have anyone to cuddle with. Think you can keep him company?" Ronnie asked, while holding out the big bear.

Kent's eyes lit up, and he grabbed onto the bear that was almost as big as he was. "I never had a bear this big before, what's his name?"

Ronnie just smiled, "I don't know, he's just as new here as you are, you'll have to give him one."

The boy thought hard for a second, then his face lit up. "I know, I'll name him Joey, my mommy said that was my brother's name before he died"

Logan looked up in shock at Jack who stared wide eyed at the little boy. Very few people here knew that Adam is not Adam's birth name. He couldn't remember what it was, but when they found the papers that proved that Joe was his father, it also had Adam's real name on it, Joseph Alexander Casey IV. Adam had decided to keep Adam as his name because it was easier that way, but now they had something else to deal with. How much did Kent know about Adam.

Emily, who also knew about the secret, having read the papers Logan had found, recovered first. "Kent, what do you mean your brother that died?"

Kent looked up from where he was hugging the bear tightly, and said in a somewhat confused voice. "What da' ya mean, mommy just said that I had an older brother that died before I was born. I think he was like my age when he died in an accident."

Emily nodded, and Kent went back to hugging his bear. Logan, Jack, and Emily shared a look, and before they could say anything else, Ray jumped into the conversation.

"Hey Kent, wanna go see if Dave has the ice cream ready?" Kent nodded, and held out his hand for the older boy. Ray took it, and led him off to the kitchens.

Jack looked at Logan and spoke, being the first one able to. "Logan, I think you'd better go prepare Adam for this. It might be best not to just spring it on him. When he's ready, let me know, and I'll bring the little tike to the hospital section to see him." Logan nodded, and ran off to talk to Adam.

Logan ran into Janet first, just as she was about to check on Adam one more time. "Mom," he shouted, getting her attention, and making her turn around. When he finally reached her, he was out of breath. Janet had to wait, none to patiently, for him to catch his breath. Finally he looked up, and she saw the fear in his eyes, and the concern. "Mom, we may have an issue," he began.

Janet and Logan walked into Adam's room. Adam was sitting up, and reading some reports that Jory had given him. One look from Jory, who was sitting in the chair Logan had been earlier, told them both that he knew what was going on. Adam looked up from his reports, and put them away as soon as he saw the look in their eyes.

"...Dad...." he began to say, thinking the worst from their looks. He let out a sigh of relief when Janet shook her head, "he's still fighting." She was about to go on when Logan placed a hand on her arm.

Logan then went over to Adam's bed, and took the seat the Jory vacated for him. He sat down and took Adam's hand saying, "Adam, I have some news for you that you need to hear. Will you promise to let me finish before you say anything?"

Adam looked very concerned now, because he knew this had to be serious, just by the way they were acting. He propped himself up in the bed so he was sitting up even more then he was earlier, then looked Logan in the eyes, and nodded.

Logan took a deep breath, squeezed Adam's hand, and began to tell the story. "Adam, after mom kicked me out of here, after you started to give blood, my team and I went into high gear. We all knew that you would want to find your brothers, so we started to work on it." Logan took a breath, and Adam was about to jump in, when Logan stopped him. "Adam, please, just listen for now okay?"

Adam nodded again, and Logan went on. "We knew from the papers that Marcus had, that Kent was in foster care somewhere, and that James was taken to a high security laboratory." Adam nodded, saying he knew this part.

"Well, we haven't found out where the base is yet, but we are looking. However, we have found out where Kent was." Logan said, and Adam almost came out of his bed.

"We gotta go get him..." he started to say when Logan pushed him back down on the bed.

"Adam, I said let me finish. We already got him. Juan, William, and Delta team already went, and got him out. He's down in the kitchens eating one of Dave's famous banana splits." Logan said while holding Adam down.

Adam calmed down, and a grin spread over his face. "So, he's seeing the best part of this place right away eh?" That comment made everyone laugh, and Logan released his hold on Adam. Adam looked over to Janet, who had a little smile on her face. "What do ya think doc, think I can go meet my little brother?"

Janet smiled even wider, and then moved over to his bed. Instead of answering, she started to undo the tubes into his IV's. Once she was done, she looked at both Adam and Logan. "Boys, I want to make something very clear. Adam, you are to keep calm, you're still not one hundred percent, right now. As long as Logan promises to stay with you, I won't require you to go in a wheelchair, but I want you back here ASAP. I'm leaving the IV's in as we will need to take more blood later on, but it can wait for now I suggest wearing a robe to hide the IV's though. You don't want to scare the little guy." When she finished, both boys gave her a hug, and Logan helped Adam get out of bed.

Jory had run off to get Adam some clothes, and a bath robe, and Janet left them in there to help Adam get dressed. Once he was dressed, Logan made Adam sit on the bed one more time. "There's one other thing you need to know. From what little we have been able to find out; he knew that he had an older brother besides James. However, he was told that he died when he was four or five. Ronnie gave him that big assed bear he had me order, and Kent named him Joey, after his big brother that died."

Adam sat there in shock for a few seconds, then the tears started. "She... she told them I was dead?" He got out in between sobs. Logan just hugged Adam, and Jory soon joined in telling him how sorry he was. After Adam cried for a few minutes, he finally got himself under control. "Why?" he asked knowing that there would be; could be no answer to his question. There were so many whys about his life and none of them had any answers. He wiped his tears, looked up at Logan with a small smile and said. "Let's go meet my little brother."

With Logan's help, Adam got out of bed, and hobbled his way out of the room. The cast on his leg making walking difficult, but with help he was doing okay. A few minutes later, they found themselves in the kitchen area. Adam paused for a second to take in the sight before him. Sitting at one of the tables was Emily, Jack, and a cute little five year old boy, while sitting in the chair next to Kent was the huge bear. Kent looked up when he noticed the other boys, and Adam gasped. Kent had the same steal gray eyes that he had, and the hair color was very similar. Anyone could see that the two boys were related. Adam slowly moved over to the table, and sat down in the chair next to Kent.

Emily was the first to speak. "Kent, I want you to meet a really good friend of mine. His name's Adam."

Kent stared Adam in the eyes, and time seemed to slow for the two brothers. Kent's small voice broke the silence. "Who are you, you look like James, but you're older."

Adam took a deep breath to try and calm his emotions, and put his hand over the top of Kent's much smaller one. "Kent," he started, and he then took a deep breath, "My real name is Joey, I'm your brother."

Kent stared in shock at Adam's statement, but then he threw his arms around Adam. "Momma said you died," he cried into Adam's shoulder.

"Shhhh... it's okay now, I'm here." Adam said repeatedly, trying to calm the little guy down.

Finally Kent calmed down enough to look Adam up and down. Finally he locked eyes on his older brother again. "Are you gonna get Jimmy away from the bad man too?"

Adam looked Kent square in the eyes, and put all the re-assurance he could into his next statement. "Yes Kent, we'll get Jimmy too. Who's the bad man that took him, and how long ago did it happen?"

Kent dissolved into tears again, but was able to get out so everyone at the table could hear. "Daddy, and one of daddy's friends, the bad man, took him after.... after... after daddy killed momma." He broke into heart wrenching sobs, and buried himself into Adam again.

Logan was shocked by what Kent had said, and when he looked up at Adam, he saw a fire in those eyes that scared him. Even when he looked into Adam's eyes the night that Joe told Adam the he was Joe's son, and Adam lost it, he did not see the same level of anger as he now saw. He knew one thing, he was glad he wasn't Kent's father.

Over the next few weeks, Kent was glued to Adam's side as often as he could be. When Adam was giving blood, or was doing something that Kent couldn't be there for, he was with Emily. Everyone that had met the little boy fell in love with him, and he quickly became like the Unit's mascot. It was difficult sometimes to explain to Kent why they were there, and what they were doing. Emily was very good in explaining things to him, and soon he just went to her with questions.

Adam spent as much time as he could with Joe, during that time. Joe still had not woken up, and they were still worried about brain damage, if he even survived, but they couldn't tell if there was any until he woke up, and they were able to examine him. For the most part, it was all up to Joe now, but everyone was praying that he would make it. Logan didn't know if Adam could take it if their father died.

Everyone else, on the other hand, only stopped in once in a while to see how Joe was. Adam finally asked Janet about it, one time while she was in checking on Joe. "Hey mom, where is everyone, I thought they would all be here."

Janet gave him a sad smile, took the blood pressure cuff off of Joe, then sat down on the chair next to Adam. "Adam, everyone here knows about your brother James. They all also know that he is being held in a Military Base somewhere, and when we find out where, you're going to want to go get him. Every single person in this base has been training extra hard so they will be ready to help you when the time comes. I was informed that all classes are to be suspended for now, so they can, and I quote, Immerse themselves in a lot of "SHIT," Meaning Super High Intensity Training.

Adam had to laugh at that a bit, but then the tears started as he realized what everyone was doing and why. He knew that he would have to do something special to reward them for everything they had done for him. Even after the way he acted like an asshole recently. "Please tell them thank you, from me."

Janet just nodded, and patted Adam's leg. "You worry about your dad, let your brothers handle the training."

Adam just nodded still with tears running down his face, as Janet got up and left the room. Adam reached out and took Joe's hand in his own, then leaned forward and put his lips to Joe's hand kissing it gently. "Dad, I don't really know if you can hear me, but... Well, it's kinda hard right now. I mean I know I've been a shit lately, but you have to understand, I have wanted to be your real son for a long time. But when you told me you were, everything I had felt for a long time exploded out of me. I was always told that you just abandoned us, and that's why mom couldn't handle me. She told me you ran

off with some other woman, and because of that, she met up with a guy that got her hooked on drugs. Then she dropped me off, and I spent two years on the streets. I always thought that you just walked out, and because you did, the military was able to get me, and experiment on me, and turn me into this. I... I just couldn't help but hate you when you told me you were the person I thought was responsible for everything that happened. And... and I was scared. I don't know why, but I was scared you'd do what mom did and dump me when I got to be too much trouble. I don't know, I guess, I was trying to get you away from me on my own terms, and not let you dump me. Then I found out it wasn't your fault. But you'd already saved my life by then, and now you're in here because... because of me."

His voice failed him for a few moments, but when it came back, he spoke again. "Please daddy, I can't lose you now, I just found you again. I... I would be nothing without you. I know everyone here looks to me for the answers, and for me to take charge, but I can't do that without you there to help me when I need it. I'm just a little boy, no matter what anyone thinks, and I need my daddy. Please come back to me."

Adam broke down sobbing on the man's chest at that point, and must have fallen asleep. He woke sometime later when Juan and Janet walked into the room. Adam sat up from where his head was laying on Joe's chest, and gazed over at his younger brother. Seeing the questioning look in the young boy's eyes, Adam simply shook his head "no" and Juan just nodded.

"Okay Adam, it's Juan's turn, you need to get out of here for a bit, and spend some time with Logan. He really needs to be with you." Janet said, while pulling Adam into a hug. She was really worried about Adam since everything happened. He had not left Joe's side for any length of time since that day a few weeks ago.

Adam simply nodded, bent down and kissed Joe on the forehead, and walked out of the room in search of Logan. He finally found him, along with everyone else in the main hanger bay, going over some operational training. When everyone finally noticed that he was there, they all come rushing over to try and see how Joe was. He held up his hand, and finally everyone quieted down, and he could speak. "First off, I just want to thank everyone for your concern. Obviously, this isn't going to be easy, on him, or any of us, but with all of your help, I am sure we can all get through this. Secondly, I have heard about the extra training that everyone is doing. I know why you are doing it, and I am sure I speak for Kent, as well as myself, when I say, thank you. It means so much to me to know that you all would risk your own lives to help my brother." Adam was about to continue when he was interrupted.

A young voice spoke up from the middle of the crowd somewhere. "Adam, please tell me you're not really that dumb." The crowd split while Adam was trying to wrap his brain around someone saying that right now. When Adam could finally see who said it, Ronnie was standing there with his hands on his hips. It was clear from the look on his face that he was not happy.

"I mean Adam, we all know that you've had your head shoved so far up your ass, these last couple of months, that you could have seen your own stomach, but get real. Are you saying you don't know what has happened here lately, what YOU caused?" Adam was dumbfounded, as he had no clue what this kid was talking about. Obviously the others knew what he meant because a few were nodding their heads in agreement. When it became clear that Adam had no idea what he was saying, Ronnie went on.

"Well, Bill always says my mouth gets me in trouble, so let's go for the gold here." He looked around for support, and many of the kids near him were again nodding their heads.

Adam knew it had to be important if they were standing up to him like this. His first reaction was to go off on Ronnie for how he was speaking, but he decided to let the little guy speak his mind. "Okay Ronnie, you've got my attention, let's hear what you've gotta say."

Ronnie took a deep breath, and then stared Adam square in the eyes as he spoke. "Adam, do you really think we're going through all of this shit just for your brother? I'll answer that for you, NO! We're not going through all of this just for your brother; we're going through all of this for OUR brother. I guess you don't realize something we all have. We're a family here. Through good and bad, we're a family." He paused to see what effect he was having, and saw that everyone was nodding their agreement. He saw Adam had noticed everyone as well, but didn't seem to believe, so he pushed on.

"You just don't get it, do you? Before you guys got here, we were just a bunch of kids that had no real future, other than running scared for the rest of our lives. Yeah we had Jack and Dave, but they were too busy trying to make sure we had enough food and stuff to keep us alive to really help us in other ways. They did the best they could, and we all love them for that. But you... you gave us so much more than just a place to stay, and food to eat; You gave us a future. Not only that, but you gave us something so much more important. You made us feel like we WERE something. You make us think that no matter what shit we may have had to deal with, we could get past it."

He paused to take a breath, and Emily jumped in. She had been standing off to the side, with her hand in Donnie's. When she spoke up, she moved forward, dragging Donnie with her. "Ronnie's right, he may need to work on his delivery a bit, but... look at me if you want. Before you got here, I was nothing more than a scared little girl who would jump if someone touched me. You would never have seen me holding hands with someone, especially a guy." When she said that, she raised the hand that was clasped with Donnie's.

"Now, obviously, it wasn't just you. It was all of you, and for me, it was mostly Joe. I doubt you know this, but he sat up with me for many nights when I couldn't sleep after a nightmare. He's been more of a father to me in the past months, than the bastard who sired me, ever was. When you lost control, then turned into a real ass, he and I would spend many nights talking... mostly about you. And you know what? I learned a lot about you in those conversations. One of the things I learned was that you and Joe are so much alike it's scary." Once she fell silent, Adam was assaulted from an angle he really didn't expect.

Tommy stepped up next to Ronnie, and shocked the hell out of a lot of people when he reached over and grabbed Ronnie's hand, holding it a lot like Adam was holding Logan's. "You know something daddy?"

That was a shock in itself, as that was the first time Tommy ever called Adam daddy. "We all have been watching what you and Poppa do. I've heard lots of guys here say that before you two showed up they didn't like boys that loved other boys, but now they know it's not bad." He paused for a second taking in both Adam and Logan's stunned expression. Ronnie leaned over and whispered into his ear, and after a second Tommy broke out in a grin.

"Okay, what surprised you more, me calling you daddy and poppa, or holding hands with nie?" The little imp giggled when Adam's only reply was "yes."

"Well it's simple, you and Logan been treating me like your kid, so I decided to just call you daddy and poppa. You don't mind do ya?" Tommy actually got a bit of a scared look on his face, and Logan moved forward, and picked the little guy up.

"Not at all munchkin, you just surprised us is all. You can call us daddy and poppa if you want to. Now would you mind explaining you and Ronnie?" Adam added his support in by simply nodding. He was still to blown away by what everyone had said to do much else.

"Well, I like Ronnie, and he likes me. Bill said its okay cause him and Will are boy friends too." Neither Adam nor Logan could fault such simple logic, so they just accepted what the younger boy had said.

With tears in his eyes from all the love shown him in the room, Adam finally got his wits enough about him to address the crowd. "Okay, you've made your point. I still have to thank all of you though." He raised his hand before anyone could protest. "BUT! I will repay all of you for this, however, that is a surprise for later. For now, we have a few things to do to get ready to go get my... OUR brother."

Over the next forty-five minutes, everyone hashed over the training schedule. It was decided that everyone would have to qualify on both the rifle range and the pistol range if they wanted to be included in the mission. The assault teams need to be trained to do covert operations, and the pilots needed to be trained on how to fly into a potentially hazardous situation.

Logan had his work cut out for him as well. Adam asked him to try and find body armor for everyone, which was going to be fun seeing as they didn't make body armor for kids, except for specially ordered dignitaries. He had also asked that Logan order about fifty tranquilizer rifles, as he was thinking about using the tranquilizers to knock people out on the mission.

Adam and Logan were getting ready to spend some quality time together in bed. Logan had finally convinced Adam that Joe would be fine on his own, and Adam didn't have to spend every second there. "Besides, Juan is there just as much as you are, if something happens, he'll let you know." Logan had said to Adam, and now, as they were about to move their relationship further, Logan thought back over the last few months, which felt more like an eternity, then the short while it had actually been. The two boys have never really had much of a chance to spend time alone, because almost as soon as they met, things were set in motion to get Adam's brothers free.

During the week between rescuing Juan and going after Jory, Chang and William, Logan had been too tired to do much of anything because of the training Adam and Juan had put them through. Plus, Logan thought to himself, Adam would have been way to keyed up to relax then anyways.

Then they got here, to the complex that was hidden in the mountain, in Utah, and within two days, all hell broke loose. Joe figured out that he was Adam's biological father, and told Adam such. Adam, blaming his father for what happened to him, and believing the lies that were told to him, about his father running off to be with another woman, took it badly. Adam ended up attacking Joe, and would have really hurt him, if it had not been for Juan stepping in.

That, above everything else, really showed Logan what those boys could do. The fight that ensued between Juan and Adam, a nine year old little boy, and his, recently turned thirteen, brother, was something that was truly scary. The blows that the two boys traded would have been enough to break most



grown men in half, then add on top of that, the speed which they both had shown, and the ferocity that both had, scared a lot of people that day.

Then of course, Logan thought that he could get Adam to calm down, and tried to grab Adam's shoulder. That was a big mistake, and Logan had a dislocated shoulder to prove it. Even though that ended the fight, as Adam realized what he had done, it still gave everyone a glimpse of Adam that scared most of them. Even through it all though, Logan's love for Adam grew. He watched as Adam interacted with everyone else, and how he felt about Tommy, the little boy they rescued from the same lab as his other three brothers. Logan watched from a distance, as Adam helped train the boys and girls they found here, and just fell deeper and deeper in love with him. Adam would walk away from Logan any time he got near, and the one time Logan was able to corner Adam, Adam told him to go away, "I don't want to hurt you again, just leave me alone... PLEASE!"

Logan knew that his mother was slightly uncomfortable with their relationship, because of what Adam could be like, but Logan would take the risk willingly. Logan knew that Adam would come around eventually, and he did. Of course, it took Joe having a very bad accident to do it.

Joe got hurt in a skydiving accident where he saved Adam's life. One thing that not many people knew was that Adam blamed himself for the accident, and to be brutally honest, it sort of was his fault. Adam was supposed to have Joe check his chute as Joe was in charge of the jump. Adam wouldn't let him, and Adam's chute was tangled. When Adam jumped, and his chute failed, Joe went after him and saved Adam's life. However, by doing so, Joe was too close to the ground when he pulled his reserve chute, causing him to hit the ground hard.

Since the accident, Adam hasn't been far from Joe's side. Adam did apologize to Logan for pushing him away, and for hitting him. Logan wouldn't hear of it, and just hugged him hard welcoming him back. So the long and the short of it was this. Adam and Logan have never done more than kiss each other. Logan planned for that to change on this night and change it did.

And change it did, Logan taught Adam what it meant to make love. They didn't go all the way, but they got close. Adam was a totally different person in bed, Logan found. Logan was somewhat expecting Adam to take charge, just like he does with everything else. But, to Logan's surprise, Adam proved to be passive while still actively pursuing their mutual pleasure.

Logan's POV:

I slowly led Adam back towards our room, suddenly nervous about what was to come.

Would he like it, would it be everything I wanted it to be?

I just didn't know and believe it or not, I was scared.

As we reached the door, we both came to a stop by some unspoken signal and just stood there. I looked over at my love, wondering for the thousandth time how one person could mean so much to

another but all I knew now was what I had known every time I had asked that question, Adam did, to me.

He was my world and as I glanced at him I realized that he was as nervous about this as I was and seeing that really touched my heart.

He was always so self assured about everything yet here he was just like me, and in that moment something happened that I thought never could, I loved him even more.

I gently reached out and took his hand into my own and squeezed it gently, getting a small smile in return from him as he raised his eyes and looked at me.

I could see the uncertainty and surprisingly, even a bit of fear there as he said, "Kind of weird to be scared by something like this, isn't it?" as he chuckled softly.

I just smiled and pushed open the door as I pulled him into the room, shutting it behind him and answering "No, it's not. I'm kinda scared too."

His head came back up and he looked at me searchingly for several moments before asking in a surprised voice, "You scared? What do you have to be scared about?"

"Adam, this is so special...and so...it's just something that means so much to me; I'm afraid I won't measure up." I told him.

"With you, I don't have to." Adam replied smiling shyly and I knew he had been afraid of the same thing.

"Neither of us does, not with each other." I told him as I moved gently forward and brought my lips to his in a gentle kiss.

It was like an electric shock hit me as our lips connected and I felt a torrent of feelings surge through my body and heard a weird noise, only to realize moments later it was me moaning along with Adam.

I had never felt anything like this and it was totally amazing.

I actually began to hurt as we became closer to being one, straining to be even closer to him as our kiss became much, much, more. As the feelings swept through us, I could tell that Adam was just as inundated with them as I was.

I began to let my hands caress my love's body starting on his back and shoulders then down to his rear, squeezing the firm textured mounds I found there and felt his hands mimicking mine movement by movement.

The feelings were the most intense I had ever felt in my whole life and as our lips separated we were both gasping for air and looking deeply into one another's eyes.

The overwhelming love I saw there in his eyes almost made me cry to think it was directed at me and I brought my lips back in ever so gently and caressed his, before pulling back and saying the most important words in my life,

“I love you Adam.”

He just looked at me and then told me, “I don’t know how I got so lucky to find you, but I love you with everything in my heart and soul, Logan Hayes.”

I gently moved my hands up, touching his chest, running my hands across his front and down his tight stomach, smiling all the while as I saw his breathing pick up as my hands got closer to what he wanted.

His hands had been matching mine and I knew what he was feeling as I let mine drop that last little bit, finally touching what I had been wanting to for ever so long.

Adam gasped and let out a long groan that I realized I was matching, as our hands found one another and felt the hardness that lay trapped within the confines of our clothes, gently kneading and caressing what lay there, as both of us thrust our hips into the other’s hands.

I moved my hands finally, slowly upward and I softly took hold of his shirt and it was then that he reached out and stopped my hand and I could see the fear had returned to his eyes.

“What is it, love?” I asked him.

I could see all the uncertainty and more from a short time ago return to those beautiful stormy gray eyes of his, and I suddenly knew from somewhere, what was the matter as I gently said,

“Adam, I love you, all of you.”

I watched as he looked at me searching for the truth and finally almost reluctantly he dropped his hand from mine, allowing me to slowly lift the shirt up and off of him.

I kept my gaze locked with his as I lifted the shirt up and off before dropping it to the ground and only then allowed my eyes to begin to travel lower taking in his body.

Every scar, every mark, ever little detail I drank in from his neck down to the pants hiding what I was waiting so eagerly for until finally I reached that bulge tenting his pants and returned me gaze to his.

I could see him trembling and the nervousness still in his eyes as I almost whispered, “You are so beautiful,” and watched as he looked for but didn’t find deceit in my answer.

I could see the tension drain from him as he relaxed realizing that I meant every word of what I had said.

For some reason, even though we had seen one another many times before, this was completely different, totally new and as if we were gazing upon one another’s bodies for the first time ever.

He moved his hands up and repeated my actions, slowly taking off my shirt and then just looking at me.

I smiled at him and he smiled back, as I brought my hands up touching his bare chest and caressing him there softly rubbing everywhere until I found a nipple and watched with delight as he gasped at the unexpected pleasure emanating from that area.

I slowly rubbed it and ever so gently pinched it between my fingers causing my love to moan with the feelings this brought about, and I realized his hands had moved to me and were copying my movements giving me the same intense feelings.

I let one hand drop and felt the hardness contained within his jeans and felt his hand move to me.

“Oh God!” he moaned, as my hand found contact and I felt the same way.

“I never knew” Adam cried as he thrust himself into my hand.

I didn’t say anything because I knew exactly what he was feeling.

Of all the times I had played with it and all the times I had done things with friends, this was so not the same that I couldn’t begin to say what it was.

Just completely different and completely better and that doesn’t begin to describe it.

“Me either,” I finally said, gasping for breath with what he was making me feel.

“They used to touch me to teach me how to relieve sexual tension, but this, this is so different. That was cold, unfeeling, this is like fire.” Adam gasped, as I brought my hand off of him and upward.

I couldn’t wait any longer.

I let my hands undo the snap of his jeans and move the zipper downward, causing Adam to moan as his boyhood was released from the confining garment.

I pushed the jeans downward, allowing him to spring up in his underwear, tenting it beautifully.

His hands followed my lead and slowly lowered my pants until I was standing there like he was, both of us having wet spots in the front of our underwear then we just stood there looking at one another’s hidden treasure, pausing a moment before taking that final step.

I could see, reflected in his eyes, everything I was thinking.

We had been waiting so long for this, so very long.

All the times we had been together in the shower, or naked in our room but never having the time or the energy to do anything yet, thinking of the other and this moment when we would finally get to love one another the way we wanted to.

Adam had told me, and I him, that we thought about each other when we jacked off, but now I knew we were both wondering if it would be as good as in our minds and hoping it would be.

Our eyes slowly found one another and Adam said, "I can't believe we're finally going to get to do it," echoing my thoughts of moments before.

"It's been worth the wait love." I replied.

By some unspoken signal, neither of us reached out to the other, but lowered our hands down to our own underwear and slowly began to lower them, revealing the hidden and much desired treasure buried within to each other's sight.

Somehow it seemed right to do that, neither of us taking this final step but each of us giving it to the other as finally we were both free.

Adam had the most beautiful penis I had ever seen in my life.

I slowly led him over to the bed and together we lay down, wrapping our arms around each other and bringing our lips together once again in a gently loving kiss which just seemed to ignite the fires even more within us.

They were lying together in bed, enjoying the afterglow from their earlier actions. Adam had his head on Logan's shoulder, and was lazily running his fingers up and down his chest. Logan was lying there almost dozing off, but absently running his hand over Adam's shoulder and back. They were really just enjoying the closeness that they felt with each other. When suddenly the door burst open and Tommy was standing there with Ronnie right behind him.

"What?" Logan and Adam asked.

"We gotta go; Fluffy had her kittens, come on!!!" the younger boy yelled, running out of the room.

"Hey wait a minute." Logan called, just as Ronnie got to the door and looked back.

"What?" he asked, as everyone heard, "Will ya come on already?" from Tommy somewhere down the corridor.

"We can't go like this." Adam said.

Ronnie looked down and said, "So what's wrong with this?" and ran out of the room, while the two older boys just shook their heads.

"We better go," Logan said just as Tommy stuck his head into the room and yelled "COME ON!"

"All right already," Adam muttered as he pulled on his shorts noticing that Logan was doing the same.

Suddenly, the two younger boys were back and grabbing the older ones' hands as they began dragging them outside.

“You old guys are so slow.” Tommy giggled.

All four boys laughed at that, taking time to tickle the younger boys for a moment, saying, “We older guys can still get ya,” then Tommy took off to his room, where Fluffy also slept, dragging Adam along with him.

When they got in the room, Tommy went right over to where Fluffy was laying with three smaller kittens trying to nurse. Adam stood back and was amazed at what he saw. In front of him were three tiny little cats, two were the same all black that Fluffy was, but the other one was spotted, with orange and white spots.

Tommy and Ronnie went right up to Fluffy, and started to pet her and the kittens. Logan grabbed Adam's hand, and started to pull him towards the four cats, when Fluffy made it very clear that Tommy and Ronnie were the only ones allowed that close.

Tommy looking shocked at Fluffy's outburst, looked at her, then back up to Adam with a sad le. “Sorry Dad, but she says that Ronnie and I are the only ones who can get this close. No offense.” Adam and Logan just shrugged and watched as the younger boys played with the beautiful new kittens.

It was an adorable sight.

“Attention in the Base, would Capt. Adam Casey, Lieutenant Hayes, and Major Bryce, please report to the command center immediately.” Adam and Logan looked at each other; both wondering what was going on. They both shrugged at the same time, and Adam spoke to the younger boys, “Sorry guys, duty calls, we'll have to play with the pussies later. And Fluffy, you have very pretty kitties.”

Logan busted out laughing at that, and pulled Adam out of the room. Adam had this really weird look on his face, “Pretty kitties?!?! Did I really just say that? And please tell me I didn't say I would play with a pussy, ever?”

That of course made Logan double over laughing even harder, and he was still laughing when they got to the command center.

Adam for his part, was also chuckling, but nowhere near as bad as Logan was. Jack looked over at them as they walked in, and the look on his face made both boys get serious quick. “Adam, Logan, it looks like we may need to start planning a different mission...”

They were talking about the upcoming mission when another announcement came across the speakers. “Capt. Adam Casey report to sick bay immediately.” Everyone looked at Adam as his face drained of color. He dropped the papers he was looking at and took off out of the room, at a dead run.

They slowly walked forward towards the crest of the hill, silently contemplating what lay before them.

This was not something any of them looked forward to, not something any of them ever thought; really thought would ever happen, not to one of their own.

Adam could feel the tears silently begin again as he looked over to Logan and saw a similar sight on his love's face that mirrored his own.

He knew if he looked at the others walking with them that the same thing would be reflected in their faces, pain, pain and overwhelming loss.

He as well as the others always knew it could happen but to actually have it do so had hit all of them harder than any of them had ever thought possible.

To be here one moment and then gone the next seemed so...so wrong.

As those thoughts were running through his head the sad procession came to a stop surrounding the final resting place of a member of their family, a member taken too soon.

There was silence for a few moments before Jack began the service with a passage that was very apt to this particular scene.

"Greater love hath no man than he who would lay down his life for another"

He spoke more but Adam was lost with those words which meant so much to him now, for he had certainly done that.

Logan gently prodding Adam brought him back to the here and now along with the realization that everyone was looking to him as it was his turn to speak.

"I..." he began but had to stop and clear his clogged throat before continuing "I thought I would be able to get up here and say something that would make it alright but I can't. Nothing will make it alright ever again" He said before hanging his head for a moment then saying "He gave his all to each of us and me in particular and for that he will be remembered, always. It's my fault that he died and I'll... I'll always love him" but that was all he got out as he broke down and ran from the hill.

Logan looked over at his mother for a moment then ran after him trying to catch up to his distraught love.

He didn't make it but knew Adam would be going to only one place and eventually when he got back to the compound that was where he found him, sitting in a chair and sobbing quietly with the words "Why?" interspersed between the cries that went straight to Logan's heart.

"Adam" Logan said softly as he came up to his boyfriend gently placing a hand on his shoulder.

"NO!" Adam said angrily turning to look at him.

"It's not your fault" Logan softly told him shocked at the haunted look of pain in Adam's eyes.

Adam didn't say anything for a moment then as if all the will to fight had left him he sighed turning his head away and said "Yes, it is, it is Logan"

"He chose to save you" Logan told him placing all the emphasis he could into the word 'chose'

"If I had been doing what I should have been doing he wouldn't have had to" Adam replied.

"Adam..." Logan started to say but Adam interrupted him saying "No, Logan he's dead because of me, because I killed him. Everyone gets hurt or...or...dies that I care about, everyone" and with that Adam placed his head down and began to cry brokenly once again leaving Logan to stand there stunned.

He didn't know what to do, how to get through to him, the pain he saw was more than he thought he could handle but if he didn't know what would happen to Adam.

He could see Adam falling into a vast pit, had seen it since it happened, and for all the love he had for him he just didn't know what to do about it, but did know he'd better figure out something and quickly.

"Adam, it'll be alright, just give it some time" Logan told him.

"No it won't." His lover cried forlornly.

"No Adam, that's not true" Logan vehemently protested but Adam had turned away again lost in his own private agony once more only uttering a soft "Yes it is. Maybe I'm just not cut out for this, maybe it would be better if I hadn't tried to escape so long ago. Maybe..."

## Chapter 15

"Come on Jer, you can do it, just 10 more feet come on baby."

Jeremy looked up, only to see his father looking down on him smiling encouragingly. He was so close; he just couldn't give up now. The ten year old boy reached his hand back, and dipped it into the pouch that was hanging on the back of his harness, right over his butt. He pulled it back out, and shook the excess chalk off of it; he was going to do this. His fingers were on fire, his arms shook with the strain, and his legs weren't in any better shape.

He looked down, and really saw for the first time how far he had come, he knew this rock face was just over one thousand feet tall, and he was only ten from the top, he could do this, he WOULD do this. He looked back up at his dad, and reached up as far as he could.

"Shit!" He muttered under his breath. He couldn't find a hand hold, and his other arm was really starting to hurt. He could feel his fingers starting to give way, and his legs were quaking with the strain. He could see the hand hold, only about six inches from his finger tips, but he just couldn't reach it.

He knew he had only one chance, one chance to make this climb. One chance to achieve the goal that his father had said was too much, but after months of whining and begging, finally gave into and agreed to let the young boy try, a climb on an Expert Cliff.

Jeremy knew his dad wouldn't be upset if he had to be hauled up to the top by his safety rope. He knew his father would just ruffle his hair, and tell him for the hundredth time, "It's okay Jer, I didn't even make this cliff the first time I tried it, and I was an adult then." Damn it, though, he came this far, he wasn't going to fail now... he wouldn't allow it. He drew up what little energy he had left, and jumped.



He jumped with everything he had, he only had to go six little inches, and he could grab the next hand hold. He felt his fingers grab the rock that was jutting out; he felt his small hand latch onto that last piece of cliff that would let him get to the top.

He held on with all his might, as his feet slipped out from under him. He started to swing out away from the rock, but he held on with everything he had. He wasn't going to get pulled up to the top. He pulled himself back to the cliff face with his one hand, and finally got his feet set, and then his other hand found another hand hold.

He clung to the cliff face for several seconds, trying to catch his breath; that had been too close. He could hear his father calling down encouragement from above, but right now he couldn't let himself hear what was being said. He was too focused on finishing the climb. Jeremy looked up, and with sweat pouring down his face, he saw the last few hand holds he would need, then the top.

He took a deep breath, and climbed the last few feet. This part was easy, but with everything he had done already, it was a lot harder then it looked. His dad backed off as he reached the top. Andy wasn't about to ruin this for his son, by hauling him up now.

He knew his son well enough to know that Jeremy wanted to get to the top, and stand up on his own. As per tradition, you never really climbed a mountain till you were standing on the top. And this one was no different. He waited patiently as Jeremy pulled himself up over the edge, and lay there for a few seconds catching his breath. Then he slowly struggled to his feet, and stood up, looking out over the valley below.

Andy's heart swelled with pride at his son's accomplishment. Even with everything else that Jeremy had done, Andy still thought this one was too much for a boy of only ten years, but the boy had persisted in convincing him that he could handle it. Finally, Andy gave in, and they set out to climb "MacArthur's Peak." While it wasn't the hardest cliff face in Utah, it did rank up there as one of the most difficult, and came with an "Expert" only rating. Andy thought back to the first time he had climbed this cliff. It was about six years before Jeremy was born, he had just gotten out of the Marines, and he hadn't even made it.

"YEEEEAAAHHHHH!!!!!" Jeremy hooted, bringing Andy out of his memories. "I told you I could do it, Dad!" Andy almost fell over as the 75 pounds of his son slammed into him. Jeremy had jumped into Andy's arms, and was now perched on his hip just like when he was little.

"I did it Daddy! I told you I could." Jeremy was so hyper at this point it was hard to tell he had just done the hardest thing he had ever done in his short life.

Andy couldn't help but laugh at the boy's excitement, "Yeah you sure did Tiger, I am so proud of you."

Jeremy just basked in the praise his dad had given him, and they stood there together, Jeremy perched on his father's hip, looking out over the lush green valley below while Andy just hugged the boy to him. Both of them lost in thought, thinking about the accomplishments they had made. Jeremy thinking about his finishing the climb, and Andy about how well Jeremy turned out, even with everything that had happened recently, his mother dieing two years ago. Still Jeremy gave everything he had into anything he did.

Jeremy's POV: Three days later:

"Hey Dad, what's for dinner?" I asked as we were coming home from the camping trip. We spent two more days on top of the cliff, before we repelled back down. I think the repelling was actually more fun than the climb.

"Dinner, you just had lunch" he replied, looking at me shocked, like he always did as I giggled and replied with what I always said, "But that was, like, like hours ago."

He smiled and shook his head and finally said what he always did in response, "Oh I don't know, how about Sheep's brains and Brussels Sprouts?"

"EWWWW!" was my reply, and then we both broke up laughing like two little kids instead a just one.

He would change what he said the main courses were but they were always something gross.

"Let's run into the store here and grab some soda and curry powder and I think I'll make Curry Chicken in that Cream Sauce you love so much" he told me.

It was just him and I since mom had died when I was eight and he was the bestest dad in the whole world.

He had even let me skip Martial Arts today so we could spend more time on the cliff. Dad owned the largest Martial Arts studio in the area, and even had a few studios in nearby towns. Some of my first memories were of the studio, and currently I was working my way towards my black belt. It would be at least a year or two before I was ready for that. Dad always seemed to push me harder than any of the other students, but it really made me love him all the more.

Dad had been in the Marines before I was born, and since he got out, he had done really good with his business. Which is why we could afford to take time off to go camping.

"Yummy!" I said, as we pulled in and parked.

We hadn't had Dad's Curry Chicken in a while and it was the best. He cooked the Chicken Breasts in butter and two different kinds of curry powder adding some Cayenne Pepper to make it even spicier, then he put real butter with pure cream into the pot, adding some Corn Starch to thicken it a bit then serve it over buttered white rice and it was the absolute best.

We got out of the car and began walking towards McHenry's Market which was a little store in our neighborhood that Mr and Mrs. McHenry owned, and according to Dad, had owned forever.

They were like real old but they were nice and always gave the neighborhood kids a piece of candy when we stopped in and said hi to them.

As we came in they called us by name and said hi which was real nice and not like the big places that didn't even remember you if you had been there the day before.

We stopped and talked for a moment and Mrs. McHenry gave me a piece of chocolate she kept behind the counter just for us kids before we headed deeper into the store with a cart to get what we needed.

When we got back up to the front, there was this teenager leaning over the counter and I could tell something was wrong as Dad suddenly said in a whisper, "Run and call 911, they're being robbed."

Then I saw the knife in the kid's hand as Dad said "Hey You!" and I took off running.

I heard the kid yell, "Get that brat back here!" followed by an "Oooof" and I knew Dad had him as I found the phone outside and dialed 911.

"911 what is your emergency?" I heard the dispatcher ask.

"Someone's trying to rob McHenry's Market!" I said in a rush, as I turned to try and see what was going on. Unfortunately I couldn't see anything.

"Okay honey, where are you at?" She asked me, and I could hear her typing rapidly in the background.

I told the dispatcher where we were at and what was going on, then hung up and ran back into the store where I was able to see Dad holding the kid with his arm up behind his back.

"Picked the wrong place to rob, kid." Dad was saying, as I walked in.

"Dad the police are on the way." I told him, as I began to walk smiling towards my dad.

"Thank God you were here Andy." Mrs. McHenry was telling Dad when from out of the aisle another kid came running.

I guess he had been hiding and now was going to rescue his buddy.

"DAD!" I screamed just as the kid got to him and something bright glinted in his hand, as he brought it up and into my dad's back who didn't have time to even turn around.

I heard him say "Guess you picked the wrong place to play hero huh, white boy?" as my dad made this weird "oomph" sound and a look of surprise came over his face.

I watched in horror as Dad started to slump to the ground, and time slowed down to a crawl.

"DAAADDD!!!" I screamed, and raced at the two boys. The first boy was turning around smiling at my dad, and the second boy, the one who had stabbed my dad, was raising the knife to stab him again.

I didn't think about what I did next, I just acted. I let instinct take over, and as the second teen raised the knife, I rushed him. His face took a surprised look, and I jumped up, and rammed the point of my fingers into his throat, crushing his trachea.

He dropped the knife, and fell to his knees clutching his throat, and struggling to take in air. Unfortunately for him, no air could pass.

I hit the ground, rolled, and came back up to face the first boy. The look on his face was sheer astonishment, but that momentary lapse in concentration, gave me all the time I needed. I leaped forward, kicking out with my right foot. With a satisfying “crunch,” my foot connected with the older teens testicles.

He started to double over, and I brought the heel of my hand up hard right under his nose, breaking it, and sending the bones straight up into his brains. He barely had time to grunt before he hit the ground dead.

It was all over in one orchestrated move, and mere seconds before I fell to my knees alongside my father whose blood was pooling under him.

“DAD!!!!” I cried, as I ripped off my shirt and stuffed it into the wound in his back.

“Daddy, no, please” I kept saying as I heard the one boy choking, trying to breathe through something that would no longer allow air to pass.

I heard Mrs. McHenry talking to someone begging them to hurry but all I had attention for was my father.

I remembered Dad always saying that in a crisis situation, you had to keep your wits about you, or you wouldn't know what to do.

His eyes opened and looked up at me and I will never forget the look of surprise that was still there and the look of sadness.

He couldn't speak for a moment or two and I told him not to try as I pressed harder and harder on my shirt but no matter how hard I pressed blood just kept pouring out over my hand so much blood, I knew it was too much.

“I love you.” He said to me, and I screamed “NO!” knowing that he was saying goodbye to me.

“No Daddy don't leave! You'll be all right, you have to be!” I just kept pushing hard, trying to stem the flow of blood coming out of his back.

“I'm sorry, Son.” were his final words as his eyes closed and after a deep breath his chest didn't rise again.

“NO, NO, no, no!” was all I could cry as I tilted his head back and blew into his mouth then checked for a pulse like I had learned in first aid class as the tears ran down my face.

There wasn't one.

I began CPR and don't remember much after that.

The police told me later that when they came in, I was performing CPR and saying “No, no, no, no” over and over again staring off into space.

They tried to pull me away, but I ended up putting three of them in the hospital before they backed off.

It was Mrs. McHenry who finally got through to me and as I collapsed in her arms, she just held me as I cried until I lost consciousness.

I woke up in the hospital the next day and didn't know what was going on for a while until it all came back to me and I began screaming until they came running in and gave me something that put me back to sleep.

When I woke up again, it felt as if there was a hole in my heart and I just felt empty.

I remember that I just started to cry and couldn't stop until it got so bad I couldn't breathe anymore, and the thing is that even though that button was right there I didn't care either.

Let me die and I would be with my dad.

Me and Dad was all there was anymore, and without him....

Things were starting to go all fuzzy and black when a nurse walked in then started screaming.

Soon there were a bunch of people in the room doing things to me and I was able to breathe again before they gave me more of whatever it was that put me to sleep.

I remember the nurse's shocked expression when just before I fell asleep again I told her "You shoulda just let me die."

When I woke up next, I didn't feel anything, I couldn't even cry anymore.

They told me they had given me something to help me "Cope" as they put it, but it just left me feeling dead inside.

I didn't bother telling them that I already felt nothing inside, and didn't need them to give me anything.

They brought in a shrink to 'talk' to me but I wouldn't, so he just sat there saying shit like it'll get better.

What did he know, it wouldn't ever get better.

Later, I turned on the TV and saw some black guy, wearing the robes of a preacher. Next to him were two women who were crying and blotting their eyes with tissues.

"We demand justice! This murderer took two innocent youths from our community and their families and he has to pay for that! We will not rest until this monster is brought to justice. Just look at these two grieving mothers. They have to deal with the fact that their children were taken from them in some senseless act of violence. Tyrone, and Jamal deserved better than to be beaten to death by some ruthless barbarian."

I couldn't believe it, innocent, they killed my dad and this guy was saying they were innocent.

The nurse came in and saw what was on TV and quickly turned it off saying I didn't need to be watching that.

I tried to talk to her about it, but she wouldn't so soon. I was left alone again at least until the cops showed up.

"Jeremy I'm Detective Johnson, and this is my partner Detective Reid." the man who walked into the room informed me, as they came up to my bed and took seats next to it.

I just looked at them and didn't say anything until they nervously looked at one another and finally Reid said, "We need to ask you some questions."

I still didn't say anything.

"We need you to tell us what happened that night." Detective Johnson said kindly.

"My dad's dead. What else is there?" I told them.

They looked at each other again before Johnson said, "I know son, and we're very sorry about that."

"Yeah, so am I." I replied.

They traded glances again before Reid said again, "We need you to tell us what you can remember of the incident."

For some reason, I started laughing like crazy when they said that and all I could get out was, "Incident, they killed my daddy and you call it an incident?"

Then the laughter turned to tears and suddenly there was a nurse in the room and soon I was asleep again.

An incident I wondered when I woke up next.

Is that all they think of it, an incident?

The end of my life; and it's just an incident?

Jimmy Connors wet himself one time and the teacher called it an incident, now they kill my dad and that's all it is?

The police came back, but this time it was a woman who didn't call it an incident and even pulled me into her lap and held me as I cried when I told her what had happened.

I think that helped more than anything else, she seemed to really care and being held again felt so good.

She left though, and then another man came in, this one dressed like a doctor wearing a lab coat and all. He looked to be in his mid to late fifties, and I immediately didn't like him. The way he held him-

self told me all I needed to know about him. He was always right, and if you didn't agree with what he said, you were wrong. Simple, end of story.

Dad had taught me how to gage people just from a glance, and what I saw with this man, I didn't like.

“Hi Jeremy, I'm Dr. Grant, I think we need to talk.”

I just looked at him, and waited for him to start. He took a seat next to the bed, and pulled out a note book. He took a few seconds to write some notes, and then looked down at me, over his small glasses.

“I understand you have been through a little bit of an ordeal?” I don't think I have ever heard someone use such a condescending tone, and it pissed me off.

The one thing Dad had never been able to break me of, was my sarcastic streak when I got angry, and right now, I was far beyond angry.

“A bit of an ordeal?!?! Nope, it's just been a normal couple of days, you know, nothing much happening... EXCEPT SOMEONE KILLED MY DAD!”

I laid back on my bed fighting back the tears; don't these people realize that nothing matters anymore?

Dr. Grant simply arched his eyebrow, and wrote notes for a few seconds.

“Okay, Jeremy, sarcasm is not going to help me help you. I am sorry to hear that your father died, but I really think there is a bigger issue here we need to discuss.”

He was about to keep going when I jumped in. “A bigger issue?!?! What could be bigger than the fact that some little prick killed my dad? What's bigger than that?”

“Well.” Dr Grant said while pushing the glasses up higher on his nose. “What about the issue of you killing two people, and putting three other's into the hospital?”

I just stared at the man for a few seconds, and then I spoke softly. “I'm sorry I put the cops in the hospital, I didn't mean to, I just... I don't know, I just reacted.”

Grant nodded, and I felt my eyes drop to my bed sheets. I really did feel sorry about the cops. I know they were just trying to help, and I lost control, and went after them. Other then dad getting killed, that was the worst, I feel as if I let Dad down. He always said you have to keep control no matter what.

“And the two boys you killed?” Grant asked, while I was thinking about what Dad had said. It took me a second to understand what the man meant, but when I did, I snapped my head up, and I knew the fire was back in my eyes.

“What about them?!?! The only thing I'm sorry about is the fact that I didn't get to them sooner.”

That seemed to upset him a lot, and he left and didn't come back.

The woman police officer did, only this time, she had a few other people with her.

“Jeremy, do you remember me?” She asked, as she sat down in the chair next to the bed.

“Yes” I replied looking warily at the others with her.

“Well, I have some good news, and some bad news.” I just shrugged, not like it really mattered to me, I didn't care anymore.

She took a deep breath, and spoke softly.

“Jeremy, you are being released from the hospital.” She paused to see my reaction, but there wasn't one.

“That's the good news, the bad news is, that you are being arrested for two counts of murder.”

I sat there speechless as she proceeded to read me my rights.

I don't really remember all that much after they arrested me. I know they put those hand cuff thingies on me, and led me down to a waiting car. The ride was quiet, and I had a little time to think.

I wasn't sure what was going on, but I knew one thing, I didn't care. My life was over, so what did it matter what happens now?

Soon enough, I was being escorted into a cement walled room, and sat (down) in a seat. People came in to get information from me, but I was silent. I didn't even understand what was going on, not that I cared. Soon after that I was whisked away to another room where I was told to strip.

Now being in the locker rooms in the studio as much as I have, I was used to being naked around others. But I have never once been told to strip, and then have someone look me over so closely. If I cared about much of anything at that point, I may have been upset about being looked at like someone might look at the next steak they are going to eat. Or maybe it was being looked at like a nice new shiny car. I did get embarrassed when they told me to bend over and spread my butt cheeks apart but it was nothing compared to when suddenly I felt something push into me causing me to yell in surprise and try to move away. It was then they moved in and held me while one finished feeling inside me. I suppose I could have fought and probably won but that would require giving a damn, which I didn't, even when one of the men snickered when I was allowed to stand back up because something had gotten hard. I couldn't resist saying sarcastically “Well, I guess we know what you like” and watching as he moved menacingly towards me only to be stopped by another guard.

Next, I was lead to another room where I was told my lawyer would be waiting for me. I wasn't really paying all that much attention at that point, and was pretty much on auto pilot, so I just did as I was told.

So here I am sitting in a cold room, wearing a really shitty set of orange cover alls, hands in my lap, since they're still cuffed together, and you know what the one thought that was running through my head right then? The only thing I could think of right then was the fact that I REALLY hate boxer shorts.

Stupid huh?



I was brought out of my thoughts by a voice from behind.

“Jeremy?” I turned around, and there was a man that I knew very well.

“Uncle Dean!” I cried, as I jumped out of the chair, and ran to him. I crashed into him, and tried to hug him, but the cuffs made it so all I could do was grab his shirt and pull it to me. He pulled me up into his arms, and I felt myself really cry for the first time since I got arrested. Cry for a lot of things.

Uncle Dean held me, and let me cry on his shoulder. I don't know how long I cried, or how long he held me, but it wasn't anywhere near long enough.

As I realized, as he sat me back down in the seat, and for the first time I noticed he wasn't alone. As I looked at the other man, I was in total shock. I have seen some big men before, but I have NEVER seen anyone that big. He looked to be even bigger than the big black man from the movie Armageddon.

Uncle Dean must have seen the look on my face, cause he started to laugh. “Jeremy, I'd like to introduce you to Devon Washington. He is going to help us out of this.”

I just nodded, still looking the huge guy up and down. I swear his arms were as big around as my whole body, and his hands could easily palm my head and squish it like a bug. I have never honestly been afraid of someone just from how they look, but this guy scared me.

He laughed and, God, even his voice was big. “Don't worry Jeremy, I get that a lot. But I promise, I won't “Squish your head with my manly biceps.” He said that last part with a REALLY bad Terminator accent, and I couldn't help but laugh.

He smiled and I immediately felt more comfortable around him. The two men sat down, and then they started to ask questions. I did the best I could to answer everything for them, since I knew I could trust Uncle Dean, and if he trusted this man, I knew I could trust him too.

Uncle Dean isn't really my uncle, but he was a very close friend of my dad's, and also his lawyer. He explained to me that his knowledge was based on business law, not criminal, which is why Mr. Washington was here.

They kept asking me questions for over an hour, making sure they got every part of the attack, and everything that had happened since then, clear in their minds. Devon filled up two notebooks full by the time they were done. “Well Jeremy, it looks like this should be fairly easy. It's clear cut self defense, I'm not even sure why you're here, but we'll work on that. For now, though, I need you to do exactly what I tell you to do, okay?”

For the next five minutes, Devon told me everything that I could and could not do in this place. And these were just his rules, not the rules the jail had. Basically they all revolved around the same thing, keeping my mouth shut. Which was definitely not a problem.

When Devon was done, they both got up to go. I was wrapped into a hug from both men, but it was what Uncle Dean said that really made a difference.

“Jeremy, I knew your father longer then you've been alive, and I'm very sorry that he died. But right now, he would want you to buck up, and face this thing head on. I know you're still young, but do you think your dad would want you to face this cowering and crying, or facing this with your shoulders squared, and your head held high. There will be time for crying later, don't worry. The most important lesson for you to remember right now is this one...” Once he started, I joined in, and with every word spoken, I could feel an inner strength fill me, and I knew that Dad was there. I knew it to my very core.

“Let the Light of my Soul Shine forth and be Revealed.  
Let the Song of my Soul spread Truth into Darkness.  
Let Those Apart be Brought together.  
Know Thyself.  
Seek.  
Love.  
Cherish Life.  
and ABOVE all else.  
DO NOT YIELD!”

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I was shown to my cell after that, and was told I would be sharing it, but the other kid would be around later, since he was out in the rec yard. I was in the section of the jail that was fourteen and younger, and I was told I was the youngest “guest” they had right now. I was also told to watch myself because of that. To be honest, I was actually starting to get scared, but I would not let my dad down, and let them beat me. As my dad had said many times, “They can beat your body, till your dead, but YOU are the only one that can LET them beat your soul down.” I was not going to let my dad down, but that didn't mean I wasn't scared.

I had the option of going out to the rec yard after I got my stuff settled, or just waiting in my cell, I decided to just wait. I was able to make a stop off in the “library” and pick out a few books. I guess it was a good thing I liked to read, not that there was much there to read, but it was better than nothing.

“Well, what do we have here?” Came a voice from the entrance to the cell. I looked up, and it was an older black kid, he looked to be about thirteen or fourteen. “It looks like the guard really like me. Giving me a little white boy, it really must be my lucky day.”

I just went back to my book, hoping he would just go away, but of course, that wasn't going to happen.

“Hey there boy, I'm talking to ya.” The kid said as he came over and pulled the book from my hand. “Now listen here white boy, I's got some rules that you's gonna follow.” He closed the book and threw it back down on my chest. “If you wanna live in my room, you's gonna do what I tell you to. You don't and...well... let's just say your little white ass ain't gonna like it.”

By this point, I was really trying to control my temper. It wasn't like I wanted to be here, or to be his cell mate. Why couldn't he just leave me be and let me do my thing?

"Just leave me alone, and we'll get along fine." I said, trying not to let my anger get the better of me.

"Oh, I'll leave you alone, all right, up until the time the lights go out if you don't do what you told." Leering at me, after that last statement, he walked back out of the cell, and I could hear him talking to some other kids about the "pretty white boy he got, and his "attitude" that was going to be fixed." I was really starting to get scared, but I wasn't going to let things here bring me down. They were not going to beat me.

They weren't.

The news the next night held a rather shocking surprise for Jeremy. He was sitting in the back of a cell block, trying hard not to be seen, and watching what was on TV. He wasn't really paying any attention to the TV, and just trying to not be there. He was lost in his own world of thoughts, especially after the meeting he had just had with Mr. Washington. Mr. Washington told Jeremy, that everything was going to be okay, and that all he had to do was tough it out for now, and things would be okay soon. Because it was the weekend, they wouldn't be able to see the judge before Monday, but he had a meeting with the judge bright and early Monday. Jeremy's attention was brought back to the here and now by the TV, and hearing what was going on. He was just in time to see a middle aged woman sitting behind the desk, talking to some guy who was standing outside the courthouse.

"Jim, can you please tell us what you have been able to find out about this case?" The woman said, and the guy, Jim, nodded before he started talking, every once in a while, looking down to a note book he had in his hand.

"Sure Julie, as you may know, there has been an arrest made in the recent triple murder at the McHenry's corner market on the east side of the city. Well we have been able to find out a few very disturbing details about the murders. We were all under the assumption that there was a robbery and in that robbery the three victims were murdered. On the screen right now, you will see the faces of the first victim, one Andrew Rose. The other two victims were cousins; their names are Jamal and Tyrone Jackson."

The news reporter then took a deep breath, and looked up from his note book, and directly into the camera.

"The police have been very quiet about what happened, and after finding out what I did, I can understand why. It seems that this is really a bizarre and twisted case. From what I have been able to figure out, it seems that Mister Rose, and his ten year old son Jeremy, shown here, were in the corner market when a robbery took place."

Jeremy was shocked when they actually put his photograph up on the TV, and just some how knew that things were going to go down hill from there. Mr. Washington had said that there was no way they would get his name, let alone a picture of him.

Mr. Rose, formerly of the United States Special Forces, attempted to intervene, while his son went to phone the police. So far, everything seems to be normal, however, it is then that things really get bizarre. It seems in the altercation between Mr. Rose, and the, as of yet unknown assailant, Mr. Rose was stabbed, and the assailant escaped. About this time, the other two victims heard the commotion, and

came to see if they could help. Also at this time, young Jeremy Rose got back from calling the police. Jeremy saw his father bleeding on the ground, and rushed over to him. This was when the other two youths got there.”

He took a few seconds to catch his breath, then the news reported went on. “According to eye witness reports, Jeremy saw the two boys come up to him, and started to attack them for no reason. It was said that he was screaming some rather disgusting racial slurs as he rushed them. I know this sounds hard to believe, Julie, but from what I have been told, the young boy, Jeremy Rose, actually killed both of the older boys with his bare hands.”

Julie came back up on the screen just as Jim finished that last part, and she gasped, and covered her mouth. “You mean to say that the sweet and innocent looking boy that we just showed on the TV screen was actually the murderer of the two other boys, and that he did it with his bare hands?”

Jim was nodding as he responded, “that's what I have been told Julie. However, we were able to investigate this some, and the young boy is not as sweet and innocent as you might believe. It seems his father, who also owned one of the largest martial arts studios in the entire city, was also a very active member in a white supremacist organization. As a matter of fact, it is said that he and his son had just returned from a training camp put on by the Neo-Nazis. Andrew Rose reportedly was a martial arts instructor, while Jeremy was being taught classes in many other subjects that they deemed important. I hope to have even more information for you tomorrow about this time...”

Jeremy was floored by what was reported, and stood there speechless. As he recovered, he was able to notice that there was nothing but silence in the entire room of over 30 kids. All of them were looking right at him. It was at this point that he realized that about three quarters of them were black. He turned and ran back to his cell before anyone there could see him start to cry.

## Chapter 16

Jeremy lay on his bunk, for what must have been at least a few hours, just letting his mind wander over the events of the past three days. As much as he knew that it was all real, it still seemed like a dream to him or maybe he just hoped that it was. Too much had happened, and this was really the first time that it was starting to sink in as he lay there with nothing to do but let it. So much was going on, and now some idiot on the news was spewing lies about him and his father. He knew his dad wasn't a member of any damn racist group. He had hated them, and thought they were all full of shit. Hell some of Jeremy's “Uncles” were black Jeremy thought, thinking about them. All his “Uncles” were people that his dad had known in the military, and they had kept in touch since he was released, they were family. He wondered where they all were now and what, if anything, they could do to help him.

He was brought out of his thoughts when his cell mate, who he found out earlier was named Mariq, or as he liked to be called, Diamond Dawg, came into the cell. Jeremy had his back to him, and nothing was said as Mariq got ready for bed. All too soon, a guard came by, and checked on them, shutting the cell door before moving on.

Jeremy just lay there listening to Mariq, and wondering what, if anything, the other boy was going to do. He soon got his answer as he was treated to the distinct pleasure of listening as Mariq jerked off in bed. He really wished the older boy would have been quieter about it, but it seemed that Mariq liked to be as loud as possible as if he felt the need to show off what he could do. Why Jeremy didn't know,

cause his dad had told him all boys did it but that sure seemed to be the case here. Between the squeaking of the bed springs, and the moans coming from the bed next to him, Jeremy had to imagine that the older boy was having a very good time, not that he really wanted to picture that in his mind but... Finally, after about ten minutes, and a loud scream in the end, the older boy turned over, and went to sleep. Thanking God and whoever else might have had a hand in it Jeremy waited until he could hear the boy snoring softly, before he let the tension drain from his body, and he could finally let himself fall off to sleep as well.

For some reason, Jeremy dreamt that night of one of the many times his father had given him personal instruction in the martial arts. This wasn't like the other times though. This time it was more of a sit down discussion where they talked about what it meant to know the things that Jeremy was learning.

"You're being taught something very valuable here Jeremy, and also something that is easy to abuse. Yes, you are learning how to fight, but more importantly, you are learning some of life's most important lessons." Andy had said, when Jeremy was nine years old. "When you go into the studio, what is my most important rule?"

Jeremy grinned as he knew this one. It was the first thing that his dad had told him when he first started to learn martial arts, when he was just four. "The most important rule is to always give your all. Giving anything less is not just an insult to your teacher, but also an insult to yourself. To give less than your all is to show that you do not take what is being taught seriously." The young boy had said, reciting from memory, but more importantly, from his heart, as he took those words just as seriously as his dad did.

Andy smiled down at the young boy who was his son, and let the pride he felt show through. "Good, now for the next lesson. Everything you do in life should be just as if you were doing it in my studio. When you decide to do something, you should put everything you have into it." Andy was surprised when Jeremy just nodded his head, and interrupted the lesson.

"Of course, Daddy, to do less would be stupid. If something is important enough to do, then why wouldn't you give everything you have for it." To Jeremy it just made sense.

Andy nodded his head and ruffled Jeremy's hair, which elicited a little giggle from the boy. "So true Jer, so true. Too bad not everyone has figured that out. That was going to be my lesson to you for today, but I guess you already know it, so I am going to do something different. I have one other question for you, but I want you to think on it for a while before you answer it, okay?" Jeremy nodded, and his dad continued. "What is the most important thing to be, when you are faced with a surprising situation?"

Jeremy sat there pondering the question, while his father went ahead and prepared dinner for the two of them. All through dinner, Jeremy thought about the question his father had posed to him. It wasn't till he was almost done, that suddenly he looked up with a big smile on his face. Andy saw the look, and put his fork down, waiting to hear what Jeremy had to say.

"The most important thing to be when faced with a surprising situation is calm. You can't focus on the problem unless you're calm, and if you can't focus, you can't figure out how to handle the situation." Jeremy said with a bit of triumph in his voice.

His father smiled broadly and nodded. "Very good, Son; if you can remember that, then nothing will ever be too much for you to overcome. Most people get confronted with something surprising and just blindly react. Most of the time, they react badly, and sadly, the situation is often made worse by their initial reaction. But if you can remain calm, and use your brain to think through the situation, nothing is too big for you to overcome and that calmness will allow you, and not the other person to be in control."

"I know Dad, you have to remain calm no matter what, so you will be in control of the situation," he said, smiling up at his father.

"Yep, you got it kiddo." Dad said, ruffling his hair once again.

Jeremy nodded again, and was soon lost in thought once more, thinking about what his dad has said.

Jeremy was rudely awakened from his dream by a pillow being shoved down on his face. He could hear Mariq laughing as the boy pushed down on the pillow. "Whadda ya think now white boy? Not so tough nows is ya?" And with that, the older boy punched Jeremy hard in the side. It knocked the wind out of the smaller boy, and he started to frantically struggle to break free, just as he felt another punch land. He was thrashing around, but Mariq easily outweighed him by 30 pounds, and was really leaning on the pillow hard as he punched him over and over, all the while, laughing and taunting Jeremy.

Then suddenly a calm came over Jeremy, and he heard his father's voice again saying. "Remember Jeremy, you can do nothing here, if you're not calm. Stay calm, focused, and most importantly, THINK about what is going on; if you do that, then you have a chance of controlling it."

Jeremy did, and even though he was still getting hit, he really didn't feel it any longer. He was in the state of calm that he always got when he meditated, and in his mind, he was able to see what was going on. It only took him a second or two to think about what needed to be done, and once he figured it out, he simply did it.

His hand shot up, and grabbed the hand that was holding the pillow to his face. Mariq was pushing down with all his weight, so Jeremy had no hope of pushing him off. But the older boy couldn't be prepared for Jeremy to pull him down on top of himself. Which was just what Jeremy did, pushing the boy to the side as he came down, allowing Jeremy to roll in the opposite direction off of the bed and onto the floor. As soon as he hit the ground though, he sprang back up to his feet, and was just in time to see the older boy take a swing at him.

However, in the state of calm, and with the amount of focus the young boy had, it looked to Jeremy as if Mariq was moving very slowly. Jeremy easily ducked the punch aimed at his head, and drove his fist hard into the boy's side hearing a satisfying whoosh as all the air escaped from the older boy's lungs.

Jeremy then leapt back, and stood there facing the thirteen year old, ready for anything.

"You don't want to do this Mariq, I don't want to hurt you." Jeremy said, in an almost pleading voice as he watched the older boy trying to recover.

Mariq gave a half grin as he started to advance on Jeremy. "Oh no there white boy, you ain't gotta worry bout hurt'n me, yous got to worry about me hurtin you."

The black kid then lunged at Jeremy, but again, to him, it looked like the older boy was barely moving. Jeremy easily side stepped the boy, and gave him a little push, which sent the bigger boy sailing into the wall hard, face first. He watched as Mariq slammed his fists against the wall while screaming out in frustration.

When he turned around, Jeremy could see blood now trickling down from the older boys nose, as he snarled. "Oh now yous gonna get it! I was just gonna hurt ya, now though, I's gonna have to kill ya.!"

He then simply charged at Jeremy, but still the older boy moved so slowly to Jeremy's mind. As he watched the slow motion charge it was then that he heard his father's voice again saying. "Son, it's time to end this, once and for all."

Jeremy smiled savagely when the boy charged him, and saw that it had the desired effect, Mariq faltered momentarily, and Jeremy took that advantage for all it was worth. He dove in low, and at the last minute, planted his feet and lifted with his legs, just as Mariq ran into him. The result was that the older boy was lifted off the ground, only to then come slamming back down, hard, on his back. Jeremy didn't give him any time to get back up though, as he jumped on the boy, and delivered two quick punches to his face.

He then hauled the boy to his feet, and threw him into the wall. Mariq recovered faster than Jeremy thought he would, and sprang back off the wall, coming at Jeremy with a fist full of force. Jeremy ducked and slammed his open palm hard into the boys sternum, and was rewarded with a creaking noise from the protesting bones. Jeremy didn't hit him hard enough to break the bones, as he wasn't trying to kill him, but he did hit him hard enough to stun the boy.

Jeremy then came up and grabbed Mariq around the throat. Jeremy was very strong for his age, thanks to long hours working out, and his love for mountain climbing. But in this instance, the adrenaline pumping through his body made him even more so.

Jeremy lifted the older boy off his feet and slammed him into the wall, holding him there with his feet just off the ground. He cocked his other hand back to hit him, but instead, he leaned in real close, and in a voice that would haunt the older boy for the rest of his life, said, "DO NOT fuck with me again. Next time, I WILL kill you, do you understand me?" Jeremy's voice was deathly calm, and Mariq swore that the eyes that stared into his were those of someone who was already dead, and didn't care about anything; what he didn't know was that it was the truth. That, more than everything else, scared him, and Jeremy's answer came in the form of the older boy wetting himself.

With a snort of disgust, Jeremy dropped the older boy who just went down to the floor sobbing and trying to catch his breath. Jeremy then calmly walked over to Mariq's bed, and grabbed the towel that was hanging off the end. With barely a look back, he threw it at Mariq. "Clean up your mess, asshole, and don't bother me again. Is that clear?"

As he continued on back to his bed, where he climbed in, and laid there thinking about what had just happened, Mariq quietly cleaned the mess up, and without another word, changed his clothes and went back to his bed. Jeremy was sure that soon he heard the older boy crying, but he just didn't care anymore.

Over the next two days, Jeremy hardly moved from his bunk. He knew that everyone out there knew what had happened the second night he was there. He knew there was no way anyone could miss the big black eye that Mariq had, but nothing was ever said to him on the few times he came out of his cell, for meals and such. Monday morning bright and early, he was dressed, showered, and in a nice suit for the court hearing that was scheduled. To say that he was nervous was an understatement, but Mr. Washington said there wasn't really anything to worry about.

He was taken to the courthouse in the back of a van that was modified to have a cage in the rear, all the while, being handcuffed, with an officer sitting in the back with him. Nothing in his short life had prepared him for anything like this, and although he was trying to be strong, it was slowly starting to wear him down.

He met up with Mr. Washington where he was again told that he didn't have much to worry about, and if everything went well, he would be able to leave the jail today. Jeremy was really hoping that Mr. Washington was going to be able to pull it off. Everything that was going on right now was really starting to affect him and not for the better either.

When they finally got into the courtroom, and sat down at the table, Jeremy finally got a chance to look around. He was rather surprised at how many people were there. Mr. Washington said that the courtroom would be open for other people, but he hadn't expected there to be this many. As he looked around, he realized that the room was almost completely full, and everyone was staring at him.

"What the....?" he heard Mr. Washington say when someone came in and sat down at the table across from them. She looked to be about twenty five years old, and would have been a beautiful black woman, if it wasn't for the sneer that Jeremy saw when he looked at her.

He was about to ask what was wrong, when the bailiff called the court to order, and the judge came in. Everyone rose to their feet as the old man came walking in. He was almost as black as the robe he was wearing, and Jeremy was starting to see a pattern, and did not like what he was seeing.

"All rise, this court is now in session, the Honorable T. Elliot Graham is now presiding." The officer called out, and the judge motioned everyone to sit down once he was.

"Okay everyone, I see we have a packed courtroom in here today, so I wanna make a few things very clear. This is a juvenile court, and as such, I have a lot more freedom in how I do things. In other words, this is my courtroom, and we do things my way here. I will not tolerate anyone speaking unless I tell them that they may. Any question?" Jeremy almost had to laugh when the judge didn't give anyone time to answer as he just rushed on. "Good, didn't think so, let's move on, then."

"Ms. Guthry, I am rather surprised to see you here," The judge said to the prosecutor, "It says here that the District Attorney had assigned someone else to the case, I am curious as to why the sudden change."

The lady at the other table stood up and addressed the judge. "Your honor, I was just recently assigned to the case after the District Attorney decided that I would be better suited to deal with such a large case."

The Judge snorted a bit, and shook his head, muttering under his breath something about election time, but waved his hand in dismissal, and the woman sat down, but did not look happy.



“Okay now, it looks like we are here to decide on the matter of bail for one Jeremy Rose. He is being charged with two counts of first degree manslaughter.” The judge started, but was interrupted when Ms. Guthry stood up.

“Excuse me, your Honor.” She said, and the judge's eyes shot daggers at her for being interrupted, but finally nodded and said, “What is it?”

“I'm sorry your Honor, but it is the position of the State that the charges leveled by my predecessor, are not the proper ones for such an act. The state is amending the charges to two counts of Murder in the second degree.”

While Jeremy didn't really understand what was going on, he knew by the reaction of everyone in the courtroom that it wasn't good. The people in the audience section broke out in cheers and applause, his lawyer silently cursed under his breath, and the judge's jaw hit the table. Of course the judge's reaction was short lived, before he started to pound his little hammer on the table.

“Order in the court... order in the court...” The judge was yelling, but it wasn't stopping anyone from cheering, and Jeremy could see that the lady sitting across from him had a big grin on her face as she looked back at all the cheering people. “That's it! Bailiff's clear this court room, NOW!”

The Judge had screamed to be heard over everyone else, and the bailiffs quickly cleared the court room, much to the protests of everyone there. After a few minutes though, the Judge looked down his glasses at the ADA, and the look was not a friendly one.

“Now Ms. Guthry, please explain to this court why I should allow you to entertain such an unusual request?”

At this point, Jeremy tuned out what was going on. He knew now that things were just as bad as, if not worse than, he had feared. It really didn't matter what happened anymore, nor did he really care. He knew in his heart that he had killed those two to save his dad, but he couldn't even do that right, and now he had to pay the price for his failure. He didn't react to anything anymore, he just didn't have the energy, and when he heard the judge declare that he would have to spend the time before the trial in the jail, he didn't even blink, he had known that it would happen.

Now he just had to deal with whatever came.

Jeremy didn't even listen to his lawyer later on when he tried to tell Jeremy that things were not as bad as he thought. In Jeremy's opinion, they certainly were. He also didn't really realize anything till he got into his cell later on that day. It was like he was in a daze and nothing was real or maybe he just wished it wasn't. He realized as soon as he got there though, that things were different. Sitting on the bunk that Mariq used to have, was now a boy that Jeremy had only seen a few times. He looked to be maybe a little older than Jeremy, but in a few ways looked younger. Darryl, Jeremy remembered the boys name, being a rather shy and somewhat pudgy boy, with sandy blond hair, and rather fair skin.

Jeremy was really in no mood to talk when he got back that afternoon, but to his complete surprise, soon found himself opening up to the other boy. The next thing he knew, he was crying again, only this time, he was wrapped up in someone's arms, and for just a few minutes, Jeremy actually thought they were his father's arms, and that made him cry even harder.

Darryl became a very important part of Jeremy's life over the next few days, as Darryl was really the only boy in the entire place that was nice to him. He hadn't realized just how much feeling so alone all the time had hurt, until he suddenly wasn't anymore. It was kinda weird though, as Darryl was two years older than him, but Jeremy kept thinking that Darryl was younger as he was slightly smaller than he was. Also, Darryl was a certified genius, and everyone else felt threatened by how smart he was, so they avoided him. That was something they shared.

Just about everyone in the place avoided Jeremy, and he knew why. He knew that once word got out about what happened in the cell that night, and how he had beat up Mariq, that people were avoiding him. And to be honest, he was glad of that. But he also noticed that people avoided Darryl much the same way that they avoided him, which is probably why they got so close so quickly.

The next day, something happened that would bring Jeremy and Darryl even closer. Jeremy had finally been convinced by Darryl to go to the library room they had there, and find himself a book. At first Jeremy had no real interest in it, but Darryl was insistent, and finally Jeremy did as the older boy had asked. He supposed that since he loved to read so much that it didn't take all that much convincing. He spent a few minutes looking around, till he settled on one of the Harry Potter books. It helped that it was also the same one that he had been reading when everything started, but had never gotten the chance to finish.

He was almost back to his cell, when he heard some commotion coming from inside. He rushed in, and saw that one of the older boys had Darryl pushed over one of the beds, and was trying to pull the small boy's shorts down. Darryl was fighting as hard as he could, but he was just not built as a fighter and was therefore no match for the older boy.

Jeremy dropped the book from his hands, and rushed into the cell. The older boy never knew what hit him, as Jeremy spun the boy around pushing him back and away from Darryl before following up with, a spin kick to the side of the boy's head. Knowing that the boy was no longer a concern, Jeremy immediately went over to Darryl, who was crying, and trying to get his shorts pulled back up.

The smaller boy threw himself into Jeremy's arms, and cried into his chest. In the meantime, the older boy slowly got to his feet, and quietly made his exit staggering a bit as he went. Jeremy kept his eye on the boy till he was out of the cell, but before he left, the boy stopped and looked at Jeremy saying, "this ain't over, not by a long shot."

Jeremy just looked at him, finally saying, "It better be," and then after a pause "For your sake."

With that, the older boy looked away and quickly left.

Since that incident, Darryl and Jeremy had really been inseparable, and Darryl started to teach Jeremy everything he would need to survive here.

It had been a week since he got back from court, and Jeremy was actually starting to fit into the jail life. Or at least he was starting to understand how things worked in here, and since he really had no interest in upsetting the balance of life in the jail, he just went along with things as much as was possible just as long as he and Darryl were left alone.

That Friday, after breakfast, Darryl told Jeremy that he had better watch his back as he had overheard some of the older boys talking about trying to get him back for what he did to Mariq.

Jeremy wasn't really worried about it, cause there wasn't really anyone here that he had to worry about, so he just shrugged it off.

Later on, he wished he would have listened better.

That afternoon, Jeremy went off to get a shower, and as always, he had the large shower room all to himself. He picked this time to shower, cause he knew the other boys were usually out in the exercise yard, and he didn't have to deal with anyone else.

Usually.

Jeremy's POV

I was soaping myself up thinking, "I really hope Darryl is okay when I'm gone, yeah he's older than me, but he's such a small kid..." Then I heard a sound from behind me and quickly ducked under the water to rinse off before turning around. I was just in time to see ten kids walk into the shower room and I wondered just what the heck was going on. I wouldn't have to wait long for my answer.

"Well lookey what we got here boys, if it ain't wonder boy the bad ass." The biggest of them said while everyone else just laughed, as they spread out to surround me in a semi-circle.

'Oh shit; this can't be good' I thought as I looked at what was happening. I glanced over to the exit but saw they had made sure that there was no way out for me. All of a sudden, I started to get very scared. This wasn't supposed to be able to happen, at least three of these boys were older, a lot older with the oldest looking to be about seventeen. They shouldn't be able to be here. They weren't allowed in the younger boys' section of the complex, ever.

"Tell you what, Whitey," The biggest boy said, seeing the look of fear in my eyes. "Hows about we all have some fun here. See, we all came here to get a piece of your tight white ass. And we's gonna get some... the hard way, or the easy way it be your choice which way we's gonna do it."

At first, I didn't get it, but then I watched as the rest of the boys started laughing and grabbing their crotches and seeing that instantly I could feel the blood drain from my face as I realized what they meant.

The other boys laughed at seeing that, and I started to hear comments coming from all over the place about who was going to 'bust my cherry first' and others like that.

I began to wonder if my training meant anything at all. I knew I was terrified and knew I was going to get hurt, but I didn't really care anymore about that. They could kill me as far as I was concerned. There just wasn't a point to living now that dad was dead. The thing is that I also knew what these kids wanted to do and that it was worse than death, much worse and it made me scared, scared about what they wanted to do and even more scared that I wouldn't be able to stop them.

All I could do was plead silently. "Please God, not that, let em kill me but don't let em do that to me."

Suddenly, I could once again hear my dad's voice.

"Calm down Jeremy, this isn't as hopeless as you think." I was back in the studio dad had owned. Standing around me were the eight other students in my class, and Dad was giving a lesson about dealing with multiple opponents.

"The key to this kind of fight is to try and escape. First and foremost on your mind should always be to get out of a situation without having to fight. For the sake of this exercise, we will assume that you could not find an escape route, okay?" I just nodded as Dad squeezed my shoulders and took a step back.

"The next thing you have to do is figure which one of your opponents is the biggest threat to you. That person is going to be your first target. Remember your biggest advantage is being able to think. They won't expect that and probably aren't thinking very much themselves. If you do that, you have a good chance of getting out. Most people in a fight just react, you guys are taught to think, no matter what. However, to think, you need to be calm. Now take a deep breath and think about this. If you can remain calm and in control, then you WILL be IN control." Hearing Dad's voice so loudly and clearly in my mind as if he was standing right there alongside of me, allowed me to push back the panic and terror enveloping me to the point that I could bring myself to a sense of calm and therefore control.

I looked around and started to look at who was here surrounding me. I knew that the big guy that was doing most of the talking was the biggest threat, but it was as I looked around that I noticed that most of these kids were pretty nervous. They were trying hard to hide it, but I could see it in their eyes. Now that was an advantage that I would have to use, if I could just figure out how.

All this happened in the space of a second and I knew that when the biggest boy saw me calm down, that he took it as resignation to what they wanted to do to me. I could see it in his eyes, as well as the satisfied smirk on his face even before his next words. "Well boys, it looks like little Mr. Bad Ass here finally figured out what's gonna happen." That drew some laughs as he looked back to me. "Tell ya what kid, get over here and suck my big black cock and maybe we won't be so rough with ya." He added, laughing.

My eyes went wide in shock, as I watched him actually reach down and start to undo his pants. I knew now that I had a chance. I didn't much care for the idea that I would actually have to take this kid's dick in my mouth, but I also knew it was the only option I had. Maybe after I dropped this prick, the others would back off enough to let me run. Maybe...

I slowly began walking over to the bigger boy, doing everything I could to use my training to keep my fear in check, but it was really hard when I saw what he had taken out and had waiting for me. I went to my knees as the other kids laughed at me. I felt ashamed at what was happening even though it might just save my life. I felt the older boy roughly grab my head then, and pull it onto his erection.

Then I was back in the studio and dad was speaking once again to us. "Jeremy, the rest of you, it's important to remember that at this point, you are more than likely fighting for your life. You can't be squeamish about what you may need to do. Especially you girls here, but the guys too. You must do whatever it takes to end the fight as quickly as you possibly can and escape. Go for the eyes, penis and testicles, they are the most vulnerable." I remembered some of the kids going, "Ewww," then at hearing that and Dad looking at them before drawing himself up and saying in a dead serious voice, "If someone hits you in the head and kidnaps you, then takes you somewhere, it will be to sexually assault

you and probably kill you afterwards. That means hurting you badly in your private parts. If that person gets you away from people where you can't call for help, you will have only one chance of living through it. To make it, you will have to do what you consider "Ewww!" Is your life worth it?" I remembered the dead silence that met that question. As I came back to the here and now, I realized that I now had that choice to make, even as I realized that I had already made it.

I braced myself for what I was about to do and when I felt the boy pull me down as far as he could onto his erection, I bit down with all my might. I felt him let go and then scream which was the point where I pulled my head back and to the side as roughly as I could, like a dog savaging a bone. I almost started to choke as the blood exploded into my mouth and I suddenly knew I had not just bitten into the thing but that I had bitten it clean off.

I watched as the older kid stumbled back, and I jumped to my feet spitting out blood and pieces of flesh as he fell to the ground clutching at the remains of his ruined appendage while screaming in a voice filled with terror and shock.

I noticed almost as an afterthought that the boy wasn't doing anything to stem the flow of blood and knew that meant he would bleed out but then again I didn't really care if he did.

I quickly put him out of my mind and looked around to see what everyone else was doing. I had hoped that they would be stunned enough so that I could get around them and get out of there but felt my hopes dashed as I saw one of the older kids charging at me.

It was pure instinct mixed with barely suppressed terror as I reacted to the threat and kicked out with my leg right to the side of the kid's knee. I then jumped to the side and as the kid went down, followed it through with a kick to the back of his head. I heard a sickening crunch as the boy's head rebounded off the cement floor and he didn't move again.

I swung my head towards the exit now desperate to try and get out, but I could see that it was not to be. Unfortunately, looking had made me turn my back and allowed a boy to get behind me and the next thing I knew I felt a punch to the back of my head. I felt the world start to spin as I fell to my knees and could taste the tangy taste of blood in my mouth. This is it, I knew as I listened to the laughter and mocking jeers from the boys still around me. It's all over, and I've lost was all I could think.

Suddenly I felt something I had never felt before flow into me, something I didn't even recognize at first, it was so alien. "Why did they hate me so much? Why? Why did they have to take my dad? What had I ever done to deserve this?" All these thoughts flew through my mind and suddenly I felt my fear being pushed aside as all the anger, pain and rage of the last weeks took its place, and now I recognized it. Rage, unbridled rage mixed with sadness and incomprehension. What was left in its place was nothing except those feelings. I had never felt such primal emotions before, and I felt myself losing all control to them.

It was like something alien took over my body, and I had no more choice in the matter. I have heard people talk about "seeing red," but I never really understood it. Now, I knew exactly what they meant though. I was seeing everything through a reddish tint, and time seemed to actually slow down for me.

"Ya wanna play do ya?" I could hear a voice say. A voice that, while at the same time I knew to be my own, was also one which I didn't recognize. "Fine, I'll show you how to play."

I looked up through the red haze, and saw that the other kids were trying to encircle me. It reminded me of watching a wolf pack hunt a deer. They would encircle the creature, then move in for the kill. Unfortunately for them, this deer wasn't anywhere near as helpless as they thought.

My eyes met with one of the younger boys, and suddenly he stopped moving. I could only imagine what he saw in my eyes. But then again, maybe I didn't want to know. I'm sure he will look back on this and remember clearly the look in my eyes, but then again, maybe not.

The boy started to take a step back, but I was having none of that, I was far beyond caring now, beyond escaping, now it was time for some serious payback. Payback for everything, yes, EVERYTHING, not just this as I felt the rage consume me even further. This kid wanted to hurt me, so I was gonna show him just exactly what hurt was. I leapt straight at the boy with a scream of pure hate and rage. The impact pushed us both back and into a wall. With a quick movement, I landed three hard knee kicks to his solar plexus knocking the wind out of him. Then, when he bent down from the pain I grabbed the back of his head and with all the strength I could muster, I rammed his face into my rising knee. The kid flew back and hit the wall with blood running down his face. I knew in all likelihood that the boy was dead with the bone driven back and into his brain but I just didn't care.

Not bothering to wait to see the boy hit the ground I spun around looking for a new target. "YOU WANNA FUCK WITH ME?!?! I'm gonna make you wish you never got the balls to come down here!" I screamed, having lost all semblance of control by now, and acting on pure adrenaline and rage. If I had stopped to analyze it, I would have realized that all rational thought had left me in my fight for survival, but of course I didn't.

Another boy was charging me now, and I almost laughed out loud at the pathetic way these kids tried to fight. They simply had no clue. All I had to do was step to the side, grab the kids neck and let the kid's momentum do all the work for me. I didn't even have to take my eyes off the rest of the kids as I heard the crunch of the neck bones as the boy crumpled to the floor.

Four down and six more to go I thought, when they all rushed me at the same time. I kicked and punched with everything I had in me, and knew I was hurting the other boys, but I also knew somewhere in the back of my mind that they were getting hits in on me too but in the state I was in, I wasn't feeling anything other than the rage.

Time meant nothing to me and what could have been hours but was actually only a short time later, I found myself standing with my back to the wall and now there were only three kids left facing off against me. I knew that I was hurting but by the looks of the other boys they were too. I was just thinking I might make it out of here after all and was about to press my next attack when I saw one of the boys look over his shoulder and shout out "Guys get your asses in here."

I looked over in time to see five more kids run into the room. They stopped in their tracks and took in the carnage that was the shower room. They were younger boys but they quickly came to the aid of the others and blocked off any chance that I might have had of escape, if I had been thinking of taking it.

I also saw that there was only one of the original three or four older boys left. I knew I would have to go after him first, but I was really starting to feel the injuries I had suffered in the fight now. I was trying to figure out what to do next when suddenly all eight of the boys rushed at me at the same time. I fought with everything I had, and again I knew I was being hurt but I knew I was hurting them

too. I was still running on nothing but hate, anger and rage, but even that can only fuel a body for so long.

I felt my head hit the wall, hard and it stunned me long enough to let the other boys shower down a rain of kicks and punches, too long as it turned out. As hard as I fought, they finally dragged me down. The last thing I saw was a foot come rushing in at me and I felt it connect with the side of my head then merciful blackness overtook me.

I woke up a short time later when water was thrown in my face then really wished I hadn't. I couldn't move and soon realized why. They had me held down on my stomach with a boy on each arm and one on each leg spreading them as wide as they could.

I looked up to see the last of the older boys standing there with a grin on his face. I watched as he reached up and wiped some of the blood away from a split lip and looked at it. His grin disappeared as he looked down at me and that's when I noticed that he was naked.

"Well there whitey, you's got some fight in ya. But now we's gonna make you pay for that." The older boy said before spitting blood from his mouth into my face and walking around behind me.

"Please God no, don't let them." I begged silently, knowing I had lost even though I tried to struggle. It was no good, they had too tight a hold on me. All I could think was 'please not that!'

I managed to turn my head in time to see the boy lean over me and knew what was going to happen, even though I couldn't see what shortly began. I felt it though, as the pain of being brutally raped began. I screamed in agony at the invasion, but one of the other boys quickly shoved his organ into my mouth to silence me and then the rest of the boys resumed beating on me. Maybe there was a God after all, because finally one of the punches to my head combined with the agonizing pain and knocked me out. The last thing I saw was stars and then everything began to turn black.

It was finally over I thought, and would have cried what was my last thought if I had been able to, but of course I couldn't.

"Daddy."

Officer Roberts was having a bad day already. He was fighting with his eldest son about the friends that the boy had, and this morning, Ethan, his son, stormed out of the house, and went to school early. Which was a miracle in and of itself, considering how hard it usually was to get the boy out of bed. Roberts knew that the teen years were the toughest, but Ethan wasn't even a teenager yet, and they were already having titanic battles. He even thought about letting Ethan come to work with him and see exactly where the kind of kids he hung out with would end up.

He was making his rounds in the younger section of the jail house, and as often was the case, was puzzled how kids so young could end up in a place like this. He really tried to be nice to the kids here cause he knew most of them had just gotten a raw deal in life. But some of them in here were as hard as they come, and he knew no matter what happened, no matter what he did, most of the hard kids here would end up living off the state for the rest of their lives. It didn't mean his heart didn't break seeing the little ones though.

He sighed as he thought about that yet again, and continued on his rounds. He knew things had been tense in here lately with the addition of the Rose boy, and he couldn't understand for the life of him why the kid wasn't in protective custody, but that was not for him to question at least he wasn't suppose to question it, but he did anyway. He thought it was a disaster just waiting to happen, only he didn't know how soon it would. He didn't know it but he was about to find out. He just had to do his job, but he was determined that he would look out for him as much as he could.

He was making his way to the shower area, when he heard one of the showers was running. This was odd as there wasn't supposed to be anyone showering right now, so he picked up his steps, and moved more quickly that way. Whoever was in there showering, was going to get in trouble, and around here, that could mean something as small as being confined to his cell for a day or two, or if it was someone that was always in trouble, it might mean solitary. Who ever it was lucky that it was Roberts who would find him, as he usually went lighter on the boys than some of his other officers would.

He turned the corner into the shower bay, and stopped dead in his tracks staring in horror at what lay inside. What he saw in front of him was like something he might have seen back in his army days when they were in a war zone. There was blood all over the place, most of which was being washed down the drain in the center of the room yet even the water couldn't wash it all away or fast enough. There were ten boys laying on the floor, and every single one of them were covered in blood. "Oh my God!" Roberts muttered, as he reached up to key his radio mic. "1 Charlie 17 10-33 Code 12, 902R cell block C showers. Get those medics in here NOW!!!" Knowing they would be locking the place down now and sending the medics as well.

He was answered almost immediately, and was relieved to hear the captain's voice come over the radio. The captain was a harsh but fair man, and knew how to handle just about any situation. "Control, what's going on Roberts?"

By this point, Roberts had moved into the shower room, and was going from boy to boy, seeing if any had a pulse. "I'm not sure Captain, but we got ten kids down, four dead, and at least one who looks like he's gonna join them soon. Where the hell are those medics?"

Roberts didn't bother to wait for a response, but sighed when he heard the captain come back over the radio issuing orders to lock down the entire jail, as well as ordering all medics to the shower room "Right this fucking second."

He knelt down beside the boy that was still alive, and finally realized that it was the Rose boy Jesus, the kid was almost unrecognizable he had been so badly beaten. His face was all bloody, and he knew that some one, or some ones had worked him over real well, and left him for dead.

As with all officers in the jail, Roberts knew first aid and CPR, and knew that there was no hope for the other four boys, so he concentrated on Jeremy. He was starting to go over the boy when he heard the young boy start to moan. Roberts quickly moved back up to the boy's head, and held it on either side. He didn't know if the boy might have a neck injury, so he held him down to make sure he didn't hurt himself any more.

"Shh... son, it's gonna be alright." Roberts said gently, trying to hold back the tears he felt at seeing this little boy like this, as Jeremy opened the one eye that wasn't already swollen shut.

"Daddy?" Jeremy said in a voice that could barely be heard by the man.



"It's okay Jeremy, you hang in there buddy, helps on the way." Roberts whispered to Jeremy losing the battle with the tears which he could feel running down his face at those words, but truth be told, he didn't know if they would get there quickly enough.

"I....I'm sorry daddy. There were too... too many of them... I... I just couldn't stop them. Sorry." Jeremy quietly said, then let his one eye shut, and Roberts heard the boy exhale, but not inhale as he stopped breathing.

"NO!!!!!" Roberts screamed, as he heard people running down the hallway to him.

He quickly moved and started CPR, as the others came into the shower room sending up a prayer with everything in him to not let this little one go.

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Officer Roberts paced outside the local emergency room waiting for word on the condition of the kid he had brought in. When everyone got into the shower room, all hell had broken loose. The entire place had been locked down, and every available guard crowded into the shower room until the Captain told everyone to leave. Everyone that was except Roberts. The officer had still been holding the kids hand and talking to him, trying to convince him to hang on as the medics performed CPR. He held the boys hand all the way to the infirmary they had there, and then when the ambulance came to take him away, all it took was a look to his captain, and Roberts rode to the hospital with Jeremy. Now, he was just waiting for word on whether or not the young boy would live, if he did, he would be the fifth to survive out of the ten he had found, the one hadn't made it and joined his four friends before he had left the shower.

So far, all he knew was that he was in surgery, that he was severely injured, and they were doing all they could for him. He had been waiting for more than four hours so far, and had already called his mother to ask her to take care of the boys that evening. Thankfully his sons loved their grandmother, and very rarely gave her any problems. Even with the kind of terror that Ethan had become, he was always just as nice and polite as his younger twin brothers when it came to his grandmother. Now, since he knew his sons were taken care of, he could sit here and wait.

It was only about twenty minutes later, that a doctor came out to see him. The doctor led Roberts into a smaller conference room, and after gesturing Roberts to a seat, took one himself. "I'm Doctor Kimball, the pediatric surgeon that operated on young Jeremy, I understand that he is in your custody while here?" The doctor began, and Roberts just nodded, then sighed.

"Well, whoever did this, really went to town on him. He has a rather extensive list of injuries, but is now in stable condition. I am worried about something though, but I will get back to that in a second. First off, his injuries are numerous, and include multiple broken ribs, one of which punctured his left lung, while another one nicked the ascending Aorta, which is the major artery that pumps blood from the heart to the rest of the body. How he didn't bleed out from that alone is a miracle, in and of itself, but he didn't. Both of those have been surgically repaired, and I believe he will make a full recovery from them. He also has a severe concussion which I believe was a result of repeated blows to the head that should clear up but we'll keep an eye on it anyway and hope there has been no permanent

injury to his brain. He also has multiple fractures to both his right arm, and right leg. Both of them have been set and cast.” Kimball had been reading from a file up to this point, but he closed it and looked up at Roberts. The look in the doctor's eyes reminded Roberts of someone who had seen and done way too much in their life.

The doctor sighed heavily before he went on. “As you can guess, there were also many internal injuries, which required exploratory surgery to find and then effect repairs on all of them. We had to remove his spleen, because it had ruptured, and also stitch up a tear in his left kidney. However, I am not sure you are aware of the rest, as it was not reported by either yourself or the paramedics.”

Roberts cocked his head to the side, not knowing what the doctor was referring to, but somehow he knew he wouldn't like it.

“I can understand how you missed it,” Kimball continued, “with all the rest of the injuries, and all.” He sighed again, and re opened the file folder he had. “It seems that the people that did this to him were not content on just beating him up. He also has severe damage to both his anus and rectum...”

Roberts looked up and gasped at this as he realized that what the doctor was implying and in shocked disbelief finally asked what he dreaded to have answered. “Wait a minute, are you saying this kid was...was raped?” He got out.

Kimball snorted, “Raped is an understatement.”

Roberts let his head fall into his hands at that, sweet Jesus he thought as if everything else wasn't bad enough and now this too. He wondered just how much one small boy was expected to take. Finally after he regained control of his emotions, he looked up and nodded for the doctor to continue.

We did a full rape kit on him and do have semen samples at least from those old enough to produce it and we have sent blood out for an STD panel but right now we just don't know. I've started him on broad spectrum antibiotics for that as well as his other injuries and we'll hope for the best. The damage was...extensive” and with that the doctor trailed off for a moment before finally continuing.

“Okay, we also had to remove Jeremy's left testicle, and he needed to have a little bit of re-constructive surgery on his penis. From the looks of it, I would say that he had been repeatedly either kicked or punched there, and they have inflicted some severe damage to those areas. I do believe that he will be fully functional in that area, and I am sure you know that men can still survive with only one testicle”

Roberts just nodded and his sympathy for Jeremy rose to even new levels. No one, no matter what happened, should have to have endured what it seems that Jeremy had to.

It had been just over a week since the incident at the jail, and Roberts had requested, and gotten permission to be one of the guards assigned to Jeremy. Anytime one of the inmates had to go to the hospital, it was required that they have around the clock guards. Roberts was able to convince the captain to let him take his shifts at the hospital, so now, everyday at nine in the morning, Roberts showed up, and relieved the other guard. Roberts would sit inside Jeremy's room, right next to him sometimes holding his hand or sometimes stroking his forehead and cheek. They say the unconscious can hear you so Roberts even talked to the boy telling him that everything was going to be alright while at the same time trying to convince himself of that, waiting to see when the boy would wake up and wanting to be there for him when he did.

On this particular Sunday morning, Roberts walked in, just at the same time that Doctor Kimball was walking out of the room. "Hey there Doc, what's up, you look a little worried?" Roberts asked, after seeing the look on the doctor's face.

Kimball didn't answer, but simply motioned for Roberts to follow him. Once they got into the doctors office, and both sat down the doctor began. "Technically, I am not supposed to talk to you about the boy. I really should only be reporting to his lawyer, or social services." Roberts was about to protest, but Kimball lifted his hand to cut him off.

"I said technically. I can see that you actually give a damn about the kid, which is more than I can say about the social service worker, and the boy's damn lawyer can only smell the blood of a lawsuit. I mean I guess he cares about the boy, but he's still a lawyer." Kimball paused, removed his glasses, and rubbed the bridge of his nose for a few seconds. "Anyways, I am concerned about Jeremy. While his injuries were severe, and we have been keeping him sedated, mostly with pain medication, that's been tapered off, and he still hasn't woken up. We just did a CAT scan on him, and he is in a comatose state right now, but we can't figure out why. Each day that passes, he gets weaker and weaker, and I just can't explain it."

Roberts sat up straight when Kimball said that, and asked in a soft voice, "What are you saying doc?"

Kimball shook his head and looked down at the desk for a second. When he raised his head, Roberts could see tears threatening to fall. "What it means, is this boy is dying, and I can't figure out how to stop it. It's almost like Jeremy is willing himself to die."

With that the doctor left a stunned officer sitting there as he left the room. Roberts had seen him losing the battle with the tears and knew he didn't want him seeing him that way. For some reason doctors weren't supposed to feel. Roberts did though and through his own tears he made his way back to the boy's side taking the small hand in his own and squeezing it gently as he told him. "You fight Jeremy, you hear, don't let those sons of bitches win, you fight and you live!" Then he bowed his head as the tears fell on their joined hands and prayed for the little boy that no one cared about lying there dying because he didn't want to live anymore and Roberts understood why even if he didn't agree.

Jeremy found himself floating in a dark, cold place. He had no idea how long he had been here, nor why he was here. He just floated along feeling nothing at all. He was totally at peace without a care in the world right now. He closed his eyes, and sighed deeply. He had no idea who he was, where he was, or anything, all he knew was that he didn't hurt. He didn't remember why he had been hurting, but he knew he didn't want to hurt anymore and this was much more preferable.

Suddenly a face flashed before his eyes. The face was that of an adult, lean and tanned. He saw the face come again, only this time there was a body attached to it. Well muscled, and toned. But what he noticed most, was the man's eyes. There was so much joy and love in those eyes love directed at him and of him. Suddenly a name came to him, and even as he spoke it out loud, the man shed. "Dad? DADDY!" Jeremy screamed out into the darkness, and suddenly it all came crashing down on him.

The robbery, seeing his father get stabbed, and then doing CPR on the only man he loved. He remembered being in the hospital, and being told there was nothing they could do to save his father, and at that moment, feeling something inside of him scream in anguish, and then die.

Once the memories started though, they wouldn't stop. He remembered being arrested, being fingerprinted, being strip searched. He remembered listening to the lies they told about him and his dad on the news that second night in jail. He remembered Mariq, and what the older boy had tried to do to him.

But mostly he remembered that day in the shower. He remembered the look on the ten boys, as they surrounded him. He vividly remembered getting down on his knees and taking the penis of the oldest boy in his mouth. He remembered the feel of it as it was pushed roughly in and out of his mouth. He felt the penis as it was shoved down his throat to the point he couldn't breathe. And he felt the gush of blood going down his throat as he bit with all his might.

Suddenly he was back in the shower room, but this time he was watching the fight from above and a little off to the side. He saw the older boy jump back as his hands flew down to what had once been his pride and joy, but was now nothing more than a bloody stump that ended about three inches from his body. He saw himself jump to his feet, even as he spit out the remaining pieces that had been in his mouth. He saw, with perfect clarity, the look of terror on the face of the older boy as he stumbled and fell on his ass.

He also saw the looks of fear and astonishment on the faces of the other boys, as Jeremy jumped to his feet, and squared off with them. He saw one of the older boys rush him, And watched as he kicked out with his leg, and caught the kid right in the side of the knee. Then watched as he brought his leg back around, and slammed the kid in the back of the head.

Jeremy saw himself look towards the exit with a frantic look on his face. That's when he got hit from behind, and he saw himself go down to his knees.

He then saw the look on his own face that scared him. The look was that of feral animal or something even worse. It was a face that Jeremy had seen in nightmares ever since the beating. The face of pure hate, and rage, and... almost... the face of purest malevolence.

Jeremy almost couldn't bear to watch what happened next, but he couldn't seem to tear his eyes away from it. He saw someone who wore his body, wade into the kids and with every punch, or every kick, someone got hurt. The other boys did get hits on him, but it never bothered the other Jeremy. He was too far gone to realize that he was hurt. Then he saw the other boys come in from outside. Jeremy knew at that point that trying to escape would have been pointless. At the same time he realized that this other Jeremy didn't even want to escape any longer, he wanted to hurt them.

Jeremy then had to watch as the fighting started again, only this time, the other boys had finally worn Jeremy down enough, and with one lucky hit by one of the boys, Jeremy's head bounced off the cement wall. That was all they needed, and soon Jeremy was dragged down.

Jeremy couldn't stand to watch what happened next, and even though he had his eyes firmly shut, he could still hear the laughing boys as they got ready to rape him.

Jeremy saw his other self start to wake up just as the older boy lined himself up over top of Jeremy and roughly shoved his erect penis deep into Jeremy. The Jeremy that was floating above it all screamed at the same time as his other self did, and tried to turn away from the scene before him, but found that he couldn't. He found himself forced to watch as every single boy that was left took his turn.

He got to watch as they hit and hit him, kicking him while they were at it. He got to watch as the blows rained down everywhere. He got to watch as they laughed throughout although his other self was long unconscious by that time.

He got to watch it all.

After what seemed like an eternity, the boys were finished with their fun, and left Jeremy lying there, along with the bodies of their fallen companions, as they all rushed from the shower room.

Jeremy was then returned to his darkness, and there he cried an anguish filled scream, that seemed to rip at the heavens.

How did it get to be this way? He cried not out loud, for in this place there was no sound, but he cried it just the same. "Just two weeks ago I had a life, I was happy...now..now I just wanna die, I wish I was dead." With that he let his head fall into his hand and just sobbed asking one word "Why?"

Sometime later, he raised his head, and saw that he was no longer in the darkness, but now was sitting in a lush field, and just being here brought about a sense of clam, and love. He looked around and saw that he was sitting next to a stream, and leaning against a large tree. Off in the distance, he saw a huge mountain range, and he smiled slightly as he thought about climbing those tall peaks.

"It's quite a view from up there, I can promise you that." Came a voice from behind him, and Jeremy shot to his feet, and spun around. Standing there was a boy that was maybe a bit younger than he was, he had straw yellow hair, and a mischievous grin on his face.

"Who are you?" Jeremy asked, and the younger boy just shrugged.

"Sorry, I can't tell you that right now, not that it would make any sense if I could, but if you need something to call me, call me Danny." The young boy said, and before Jeremy could say anything else, the young boy rushed on. "Tell you what, let's go have some fun."

The next thing Jeremy knew, he was hanging from a cliff, reaching behind himself to chalk up his hands. He felt the gentle pressure of the climbing rig that was wrapped around his waist, and the tugging from the rope that went up. He followed the rope with his eyes, and there, about twenty feet above him was the younger boy. Jeremy looked down, and gasped, as he was too high to even see the ground. All he could see below him were clouds.

"Come on Jeremy, we only got a little ways left to go to get to the top. You'll absolutely love the view." Danny called down, then turned back to the climbing.

Jeremy shook his head, and without even thinking about it, started to climb. He felt freedom like he had never felt it before. The wind blowing through his hair, and sound of his heavy breathing, and the occasional grunt as he pulled himself up to the next hand hold.

Time meant nothing to him as he climbed. The past held no power over him, and he was free. Nothing could hold him down as he pushed and pulled his way to the top. Finally, he crested the top, and was met with a bright grin from the boy who had brought him here.

He climbed his way to his feet, and looked around. Danny had been right, the view was absolutely breath taking. Below him all he could see were clouds, and poking up from the clouds were other peaks, but none of them as high as this one.

"I told you." Danny said after letting Jeremy look around for a few seconds. Jeremy turned back to Danny, and again gasped as he saw what was behind the boy.

"What the?" Jeremy gasped as he beheld a golden arch, with beautiful silver gates that were wide open. He could also see a stream of people slowly making their way into the gates, and disappearing once inside.

Danny just grinned as he looked over his shoulder at what Jeremy was seeing. "Well, I told you the view would be grand. I just didn't mention that there was more to see than just over the side of the mountain. And yes, before you ask, those are the "Pearly Gates."

Jeremy gasped and took a small step back. "You mean.... you mean I'm dead?"

Danny smiled softly, and sadly. "Not yet your not, but you seem to be willing yourself to die."

And with that everything came flooding back to Jeremy, and he let out a strangled gasp as he sank to his knees. He started to sob, and felt the younger boy wrap his arms around him, and gently rock him.

"It hurts..." Jeremy kept saying over and over again while Danny held him and tried to comfort him. Finally, after a few minutes, Jeremy got himself under control enough to look up and notice that Danny was silently crying as well.

"Why... why did you bring me here?" Jeremy asked, and Danny gently pulled Jeremy to his feet and turned to face him.

"I brought you here to give you a choice, and hope I can convince you to choose the right one." Seeing that Jeremy didn't really understand, Danny went on. "Right now, you are actually lying in a hospital bed, where the doctors are fighting to save your life. The problem is, that while your injuries are not fatal, you seem to be dying. The reason for that is simple, you're here, not there."

Jeremy took a step back, and anger showed in his eyes. "You want me to go back don't you?" All Danny could do is nod, and Jeremy took another step away from him.

"Why? Why do you want me to go back? Why would I want to go back. I've lost everything, and... and...they raped me!" Jeremy struggled to get the last part out, and then just as suddenly as the anger hit him, it fled from him and he dropped to his knees again sobbing and saying in a whisper, "They raped me".

Danny wrapped him up again, and could barely hear him cry over and over "Why." It took a few minutes, but finally Danny got Jeremy calmed down enough to where he could talk to him, but this time, he kept his arms wrapped firmly around the older boy.

"I wish I could answer that Jeremy, but sometimes, they happen. Only know that they happen for a reason." Danny had been trying to comfort Jeremy, but realized right after he said it, that it was the wrong thing to say.

Jeremy pushed Danny away, and sprung to his feet. "What do you mean they happen for a reason?" Jeremy practically snarled at the younger boy. "What possible reason could there be for my dad getting murdered, and me ending up in jail, then raped? HUH! Explain that one! Why should I WANT to live?"

Jeremy was on the verge of attacking the younger boy but stopped when he saw the look of pain and sadness that was in the boy's eyes as he said, "At least you have the chance to live. That's more than I can say for myself, and more than I can say for a lot of others. You've had it rough lately, but just know that there are those that have it a lot worse than you do. Do you think you're the only one that has ever been hurt? Do what you want, but know this. If you throw away your life just because you've had a shitty deal recently, you'll never know the good you could have done. The good your father wants you to do."

Before Jeremy could say anything else, Danny vanished. Jeremy stood there for a few minutes in shock, then he looked around again. On one side was the cliff he had just climbed, and on the other side... on the other side was his release from the pain and suffering he knew awaited him if he went back.

But he couldn't stop thinking of the tears running down the other boy's face and the pain as he had said that one sentence. "Do you think you're the only one that has ever been hurt?" Somehow Jeremy knew he was talking about himself as he looked back towards those gates and...and his father.

## Chapter 17

### Officer Robert's Point Of View

Walking back into the room I stopped for a second to look at the still form laying there on the bed, the much too still form.

Jeremy still hadn't woken up and seemed to be dying from what the doctors had said even though there wasn't a medical reason for it.

I went over and sat down thinking the poor kid certainly had no reason to live with everything that had happened to him as I picked up the file I wasn't supposed to have and began looking through it again.

The more I read of what was in this file the more certain I became that Jeremy just didn't have the heart to go on and was willing himself to die, maybe to join his father.

I could understand why too.

I wasn't supposed to have that file but the Captain, seeing how attached I had become to Jeremy, had given it to me and reading it I learned a lot more than the barest details I had had of this child's life up until now.

Jeremy had had a very good life up until several weeks ago when he had lost it all.

His father had been brutally murdered in front of the boy while trying to stop an armed robbery and then instead of helping a distraught boy get through the loss of his only family the system had instead began to systematically start screwing him over and now this.

I couldn't imagine what he was going through after what had happened and shook my head at the thought that I had asked him to come back to all this pain and suffering.

What right did I have to ask that of him, he was all of ten years old for God's sake.

I'd seen a lot in my life but this, this was...

"How the hell do You allow this kind of thing to happen?" I said softly looking up towards the ceiling. "How?"

I didn't expect an answer and wasn't surprised when I didn't get one as I turned my gaze back to the pitifully frail form lying there.

How much more can one child be expected to take anyway?

The media had somehow gotten a hold of what happened in the shower and as usual were reporting things that were completely devoid of facts.

It had ranged from Jeremy attacking a group of black children to him killing twelve of them and it taking three officers to restrain him.

They even reported that guards had had to shoot Jeremy multiple times and that he still fought on and injured several guards before being subdued.

I had to wonder if any of these reporters had a single brain cell divided between them to report such crap and say it like it could even be remotely true.

Somehow with all the safeguards in place to prevent a child's identity from becoming public, in this case it had, and it had turned into a local media sensation the likes of which hadn't been seen around here since Old man Conner's fourteen year old boy had been caught with a neighbor's cow back in 88.

Maybe I shouldn't ask him to come back to this and what awaited him here but damn it I just couldn't let him go either.

I reached up and took his hand in my own and softly caressed the back of it for a few minutes thinking about things and then told him

"Jeremy, I know you don't want to come back and I know how much you're hurting but you gotta fight. Don't let them win like this. Don't let them make you give it all up. If your father was anything like the guys I used to know in the military he wouldn't want you to give up, you never give up. Come back Jeremy and we'll fight this together, just don't die."

There was no response as I looked at the lifeless face and bent forward brushing the hair from his forehead and kissing him softly.



“Don’t give up little one, don’t you give up.”

Several months later:

“Your turn Ethan,” I yelled as I tossed the Frisbee towards my oldest son who caught it easily before sending it on to Trevor.

He was so good with the twins I thought looking at them sending the Frisbee back and forth between them now.

Ethan was close to being eleven now and the twins were seven going on eight.

At least Trevor and Kyle were wearing clothes for a change which was more than they usually wanted to do.

I shook my head thinking about the incident at the pre-school when they were four, the school for some reason did not find it as amusing as I did.

Even their grandmother had stopped trying to get them to wear anything when they were at her house, mom could definitely recognize a lost cause when she was confronted with one.

“Off..Officer Roberts?” I heard a questioning voice ask me as I quickly moved my hand to my concealed gun and swung around.

There were not too many people who knew who I was and those that did were usually not the type you wanted to find you out at the park.

I was staring at a young boy who looked vaguely familiar but who I couldn’t place right away.

“It’s me, Darryl,” he said looking at me and I could see the fear on his face as he realized where my hand was and what it surely had to be gripping.

“Darryl?” I said thinking rapidly and trying to remember, then it hit me.

Jeremy’s Darryl.

I relaxed as I heard, “Dad?” and looked to see Ethan approaching.

The other two were standing back and I knew Ethan had told them to stay away.

“It’s okay son.” I called as I turned back to Darryl.

“I’m sorry son I didn’t recognize you at first,” I told him.

Ethan had come up to my side now and was standing there looking at the boy.

“That’s okay,” the boy said, kind of sadly I thought.

I realized then that maybe he felt that no one did.

“Ethan this is Darryl, he was a friend of Jeremy’s.” I told my son.

“Jeremy, is he okay? Where’s he at?” Ethan quickly asked and I could see the excitement on his face but I could also see the disappointment on Darryl’s and instantly knew he wouldn’t get an answer.

“I was going to ask you that,” he mumbled dejectedly

“Ethan why don’t you go and play with the twins so I can talk with Darryl.” I asked, then added “Please” when I saw the look of determination to stay come across his face.

“Okay dad,” he replied before moving off to join his brothers.

“I thought you would know,” Darryl said and I could see tears starting to run down his face.

I moved forward without thinking and took him into my arms holding him close as he cried.

We sank down to the ground as I held him until he calmed down some.

He pulled back and looked at me before asking “What’s happened to him?”

“I don’t know.” I said softly.

He didn’t say anything for a while and just sat there looking down at the ground but finally looked up at me and said. “I haven’t seen him since that day in court and we didn’t get to talk or anything. We tried calling social services and finding out where he was but they won’t tell us anything and I’m really worried about him.”

I took a deep breath looking out over his head into the trees and simply replied. “So am I son, so am I.”

“But you’re a cop. You gotta be able to find him.” He asked.

“I’ve tried Darryl. I’ve been searching for him since that last day in court and can’t find him anywhere. I’ve pulled in favors from everywhere I can, and even my Captain has called in a few, but it’s like he’s disappeared, or been deliberately lost.” I said.

“Lost?” He asked

“Yeah, lost in the system either by accident or on purpose but no one seems to know where he ended up.” I stated.

“He looked so...so awful the last time I saw him.” Darryl said, and I knew this little guy was hurting.

“Yeah, I know. I hope he’s still alive.” I responded without thinking until I heard a gasp from the boy in my arms.

I looked down to see the look of horror that was across his face as he said, “what... what do you mean?”

“Darryl...” but then I had to stop and look away for a moment thinking back to everything.

“Darryl you know what happened to him right?” I finally asked.

“Um..yeah” he mumbled.

“It was very bad for him.” I lamely told him.

How can you describe being so hurt you didn’t want to live anymore.

“What happened? I mean I know about THAT but then he went to the hospital and all and I didn’t get to see him again until the day he came back to the jail, but he never said anything about what happened in the hospital.” Darryl asked me.

“I suppose of anyone you have the right to know.” I said looking out at my sons playing and wishing every child could have that simple joy and never know pain such as Jeremy had.

“Some of this I learned later but I’ll tell it to you in order so it’s less confusing. You know what happened that brought him to the hospital and that he almost died, several times as a matter of fact. What you don’t know is that it seemed like he didn’t want to live. Of course with what had happened, everything that had happened, who could blame him? He was dying and it wasn’t because of his injuries. I just sat with him and tried to be there for him as much as I could. I would talk to him and tell him to fight, to come back to....”

“Don’t give up little one, don’t you give up.” I said to the boy as I brushed another soft kiss onto his forehead before sitting back down again.

I kept hold of his hand but I guess these twelve hour shifts were catching up with me because the next thing I remember was some small sound waking me suddenly and bringing me instantly awake.

I looked around the room but relaxed as I didn’t see anything to have awakened me then turned my gaze to the boy lying there motionless and unconscious for so long.

It was then that I realized that he was unconscious no longer and tears were silently running down his face.

“Jeremy?” I questioned

I heard a moan as I got up and brushing the hair off his forehead softly told him, “It’s okay now sweetheart, you’re safe.”

He moaned again then slowly began to try to open his eyes as I repeated. “You’re safe now, no one will hurt you again.”

“Da...daddy...it...it hurts.” He half cried out in a whisper.

My heart broke at hearing that and I quickly pushed the call button to get some help in here.

“I know baby, I know. Help is coming.” I told him as a nurse pushed the door open and seeing Jeremy awake quickly went back out.

She was back moments later with several other nurses and a doctor who pushed me out of the way and began going over Jeremy, while I retreated to the other side of the room and just watched.

I was trying to hold back the tears I could feel on the edge of escaping over that, I knew he didn’t know who was there when he started to begin to awaken but it still broke my heart to hear him say those words.

He had no one in his life that cared and I guess me doing so had made him think of his dad as his first thought. I couldn’t imagine if it was my kids in any kind of similar situation who didn’t have anyone to give a damn about them.

I watched as they spoke to him and finally the doctor administered something before coming over to me.

“I’m Doctor Palmer.” she said.

“Ethan Roberts.” I replied

“I gave him some pain killer as he is in quite a bit of pain but what most concerns me is that he didn’t speak. There isn’t a medical reason for it that I know of.” She told me.

“I don’t know. He spoke to me briefly to tell me it hurt but that was all before you came in.” I said.

“Well we’ll keep an eye on it and see what happens, I would imagine it’s psychological in nature if it persists though.” She informed me as she turned to leave.

“Can you blame him?” I asked realizing that I did so rather bitterly.

She turned back and looked at me appraisingly for a moment before saying, “No, I can’t,” then turning and walking out.

I stood there for a moment before walking slowly back over to his side and just gazed down at him for a bit.

Finally I took my chair and his hand and dozed off again.

This became the pattern over the next few days, I would come to work and check in with the outgoing officer before walking into the room and saying “Good evening” and asking how Jeremy was doing. He would look at me, shrug his shoulders and stare at the ceiling.

Nothing more.

I tried to engage him in conversation but it didn’t work.

He wouldn't speak to me either so after a few days I stopped trying.

Then I got the idea to read to him as it would pass the time and hopefully engage him in something other than what had to be thinking about things.

I knew my boys loved having me read to them, even the 'I'm getting too old for that stuff Dad,' from Ethan Jr.

I brought the first of Katherine Kurtz's Deryni novels in entitled "Deryni Rising," thinking that he might like that one as it's main protagonist was a thirteen soon to be fourteen year old boy.

He watched me as I sat down and opened up the book to the first page, but before I started reading I said, "I kind of like talking so since you don't want to I thought I would read aloud, I think you'll like this."

He looked at me incredulously for an instant before the same look of disinterest that had been on his face for days took back its place on his countenance and he went back to staring up at the ceiling.

Fine then I thought as I smiled to myself let's see if he can resist the charms of Kelson Haldane and began to read the first page.

"Brion Haldane, King of Gwynedd, Prince of Meara, and Lord of the Purple March, reigned in his horse sharply at the top of the hill and scanned the horizon. He was not a big man, though regal bearing and a catlike grace had convinced many a would-be adversary that he was. But his enemies rarely had time to notice this technicality....."

"Kelson knew what he wanted to do. He wanted to run to Morgan as he'd done as a child, to fling his arms around him and sob out his relief, terror, pain, all the nightmare of the past two weeks; let the calm and sometimes mysterious Deyni lord soothe away his fears and ease his troubled mind with that awesome Deyni magic. He had always felt so----safe with Morgan. If only he could... But he did not. He was a man, now-----or supposed to be. And furthermore he was a King! Maybe! He interrupted himself apprehensively---if Morgan can help me to survive long enough!"

(Above passages copy right to Katherine Kurtz from her novel Deryni Rising)

I stopped at page 47 and was rewarded with him turning his head to me with a sharp look clearly wanting me to go on but then his expression blanked and he looked back to the ceiling but it was enough. I had gotten through to him or should I say the man-child that was Kelson Haldane beset from all sides had managed to get through to him.

I would imagine that Jeremy saw in Kelson a kindred spirit as I am sure he felt the same way at this point.

I had kept my expression neutral and simply said, "Tomorrow is another night my prince," and could see him start to turn to look at me with a very slight smile at the corners of his mouth but just as suddenly catch himself and stop.

It was enough.

I laid the book down and dimmed the lights allowing him to sleep if he so chose before hitting the bathroom and settling myself in for the night in my chair and was soon rewarded with the soft breathing that bespoke sound sleep coming from his bed.

I soon joined him thinking there were quite a few books in her series so they should work for some time if need be. She was one hell of an author and this series was my favorite of her works. The seven books she had set in the time of Kelson were wonderful as were the Camber ones set some two hundred years before. I only hoped I would be able to get through all of them to the point where we got to Cinhil's sons for they were some of her finest yet saddest novels in the entire series.

With those thoughts running through my head I drifted off to sleep.

This went on for several days before our lives once again took an unexpected turn that neither of us liked.

I had begun reading to him as I had been doing lately when suddenly the door to the room burst open and two people came running in shouting.

I jumped up reaching for the gun I didn't have in an attempt to pacify the hospital administration who didn't care for weapons in their building even though I had the right to carry one as a peace officer.

It was a man holding a camera and a local reporter.

The woman was shouting questions at a terrified Jeremy who was trying to crawl backwards in his bed except the only problem was that there was no place for him to go.

I was already moving towards the man as I took all this in and slammed into him sending his camera flying across the room and into a wall.

All I could hope was that the very expensive piece of equipment was good and truly ruined.

He fought me and it scared me that I wanted to hurt him so much, but when Jeremy, in trying to escape the woman, fell off the side of the bed and onto the floor with a scream of pain I slammed the sucker down hard to the floor and pulled my cuffs out placing them on his wrists before jumping back up and going for the woman who was screaming about the first amendment and her rights.

I grabbed her turning her around and shoved her roughly into the wall placing my second set of cuffs on her and informed her coldly. "The only rights you have are to remain silent and right now I suggest you do that."

I don't know if it was the coldness of my voice or what but she actually went completely silent at that and I placed her on the ground as two security officers from the hospital came rushing in.

I was running over to Jeremy at that point and it broke my heart to see him lying there in a crumpled heap crying in pain because of people like this.

"Get those two the hell out of here, they're under arrest and get me some help in here NOW!" I yelled at the two officers.

One ran back out of the room and the other roughly took a hold of the man hauling him to his feet and led him out the door.

“Ah Jeremy.” I said as I bent over and gently picked him up to put him back on the bed.

I noticed then he was bleeding and got even more worried as I laid him down.

“It hurts,” he said softly as the tears ran down his cheeks.

“I know but helps on the way.” I told him.

At that moment several nurses and Doctor Palmer came running into the room.

I was pushed out of the way as they went to work on him but he cried out and begged me not to leave him.

Doctor Palmer looked up at me and nodded so I went back over and took his hand in mine as they worked on him.

He had pulled his IV out for one thing so they were trying to re-establish a line for that and I noticed they were inspecting his wounds carefully.

“Jeremy, you’ve broken open some of the stitches and I think maybe re-opened some of the internal injuries as well. We’re going to have to go back in and fix it but you’re going to be alright.” Doctor Palmer told him.

He looked over at me and I could see the terror in his eyes.

“Don’t leave me!” He begged as I gently squeezed his hand.

“I’ll be right here when you get back, I promise.” I told him putting everything I had into that to make him believe me.

He didn’t say anything else as I watched Doctor Palmer inject something into his new IV, I just kept my eyes glued to his until I saw them slowly try to close.

“Shh go to sleep and you’ll be all better when you wake up.” I said softly to him and watched as he stopped fighting it and let himself go.

“Let’s get moving, I want him up in the OR now!” She said to the nurses who began wheeling him from the room.

She watched him until he was gone from the room and then turned on me. “What the hell happened in here?” She asked of me.

“A reporter and camera man busted in here and scared the living hell out of him.” I said in reply.

“How?” She asked

"I don't know but I sure would like to." I answered.

"So would I." She responded and began marching from the room with a stony expression on her face.

God I wouldn't want to be the one to tangle with her right now was all I could think, as I followed behind her as she went angrily up to the nurse's station.

"I want to know just how in the hell they got onto a locked pediatrics wing!" She said to the nurse standing there.

The nurse stood looking back at her and then said, "I'm sure I wouldn't know." She said in a tone that made me want to smack the smug look off her face.

The doctor just looked at her for a minute before saying. "For your sake that had better be true because regardless of the legal ramifications to you if you had something to do with it I can personally guarantee that you would never work in the medical field again in any state in this country, do I make myself clear?"

The nurse just stared sullenly back and I added, "Doctor would it be possible to get the security tapes from this area? I am sure they would shed some light on just who might be responsible."

I watched that sullen look change to one of fear on the nurse's face as the doctor without breaking her gaze on the nurse said, "I think that would be an excellent idea."

Then she walked around the desk and picked up the phone dialing some numbers into it.

"This is Doctor Palmer, who am I speaking with?" She said into the phone.

Then she continued, "Sergeant Anderson I want all the security tapes pulled for the last couple of hours that pertain to the Peds ward and access points to it and brought to my office. I want you and you alone to bring them and stay with them at all times until I say otherwise. I am holding you personally responsible that nothing untoward happens to them is that understood?"

"Good, I am going into surgery so it will be a while but you are to wait with those tapes and give them to no one and I mean no one, is that clear?" She asked then hung up the phone.

"I'll let you know how he's doing." She said to me then before turning and walking briskly away towards the elevators.

One of the security officers came up to me at that point and asked what I wanted to do with the prisoners.

"I told you they're under arrest, call county and have them transported and booked." I said.

"Yes sir." He said with a grin, then left.

One more duty to do.



I walked over the elevator and took it down to the main floor where I headed to the ER where the security department was located and more importantly where my gun was at.

When I got there they buzzed me in and I asked for my weapon which was promptly given to me.

I inserted the clip and chambered a round before putting it back in my holster where it never should have left and after thanking the man there turned and walked out of the room.

As I expected I hadn't even reached the elevators when after seeing me not leaving the hospital but instead going back into the officer came running up behind me shouting "Sir! Sir!"

I stopped at the elevators and after pushing the button turned and faced him.

"Yes?" I said.

"Sir you can't have a weapon inside the hospital, you know that." He told me.

I was through with playing after the events of the evening and in a cold voice told him. "Let me explain something to you. I am a peace officer in the State of Utah which means I can carry a weapon any God Damned place I want to including this fucking hospital. It should never have been agreed to in the first place to follow this political bullshit and I'm done following it now!"

He just stared at me for a moment before saying, "I have to report this."

"I'm sure you do but you can also report that I will arrest anyone who tries to take it from me for interfering with a police officer do you understand me?"

"Yes Sir." He replied before turning away.

Let him report me, they could all go to hell for all I was concerned.

I went back upstairs to Jeremy's room and sat down to wait.

Eventually they brought him back and I again sat by the unmoving form, holding his hand and softly stroking it, telling him that I was here and wouldn't leave him.

Some time later I got up and walked over to the TV, turning it on and flipping through the channels until something that made me sick brought my finger to an abrupt halt.

It seems that the cameraman wasn't just taping what happened earlier but had been broadcasting live.

In all it's glory after the anchor's comments of course saying how despicable it was for them to have done such a thing they showed it all.

Of course despicable or not this news channel didn't have a problem using the footage.

I watched in horror as they barged into the room and I saw the terror on Jeremy's face not knowing who they were or what they wanted and he couldn't do anything to defend himself if they meant to attack him.

I saw me jump up screaming at them and charge the cameraman then the picture went all wild for a bit as the camera sailed through the air but apparently they built the damn things pretty tough because it kept broadcasting from the floor pointed back towards the room.

It was all caught on tape, me slamming the cameraman to the floor, Jeremy tumbling out of bed and crying out in pain mixed with his fear.

Everything.

Then the good Reverend was there to offer commentary as usual and it sickened me to listen to him spouting about the how the reporter's first amendment rights were trampled tonight and then when the anchor asked what about Jeremy's rights he said such "vicious murderers" shouldn't have rights anymore.

That was all I could stand and I reached up and turned off the set before turning back to Jeremy.

To my horror I found that he was awake and had tears running down his face.

I quickly walked over to him and took his hand in mine as I said. "I'm sorry I didn't think you'd be awake so soon, you shouldn't have seen that."

"Why does that man hate me so much?" He asked in a such a small hurt voice that it almost brought tears to my eyes.

I thought about my answer for several moments before saying. "I don't know honey. I'm not even sure he does. The man makes his living, and then some, by going all over the country and turning every issue he can find into one about race regardless of the facts. Whether he actually believes the crap he spews I have no idea but he does make a lot of money by spewing it."

"Why?" He asked bewildered.

"I don't know. I'm sure you know that there is racism in this country and that it needs to be combated, but he and others like him go around trying to make everything somehow be about race. A few years ago there was a case in Illinois where several black teens started a riot at a high school sporting event. They got expelled and arrested of course, but several of his kind went out there and claimed it was racist and even had the audacity or maybe stupidity to say that what the youths had done was normal in black culture and called 'Fussing' and that whites had to understand that and accept it. I just laughed to think they were saying it's part of black culture to riot and fight but they were serious and actually had thousands turn out to support them. Another case involved the Chicago School District who came up with a policy of if you fail your grade then you don't go to the next one. They protested that as racist too, and said it mainly affected minorities. I could go on and on but this is what these people do." I told him.

"I don't get it. You fight you get in trouble, everyone knows that." he said.

“Yeah you would think so.” I replied smiling.

“How could they even want their kids to go to the next grade if they can’t do the stuff they need to in the grade they were in?” He asked.

“I don’t think they care much. Their big argument was that all their children’s friends would be in the next grade and their kids wouldn’t be with them. It’s called social promotion.” I said.

“That’s stupid. They need to learn to read and write, they can play with their friends after school or something.” Jeremy said as only a kid can.

“Well you and I know that but the thousands who showed up to protest the policy didn’t seem to.” I said chuckling.

I was glad he had gone onto something else although I knew it still bothered him.

We talked for a while about race in this country and some issues surrounding it and I was quite surprised at just how articulate a boy this was.

He was able to converse quite well on the topic and offer insights that usually came to someone much older than ten years during the conversation.

Jeremy spoke to me from that point on and we became closer as time went by and he recovered in body if not in spirit.

Something was dead in him and I didn’t know how to bring it back to life or even if it could be brought back.

I could see the dead look in his eyes at times even when he tried to hide it from me and it broke my heart but I just didn’t know what to do other than hold him when that became possible and let him know there were people who cared.

With that in mind I had taken to bringing JR by to visit him and was surprised when they hit it off right away.

Jeremy had told me that at first he thought Ethan Jr. was just BSing him over liking climbing but after my son had started spouting off all the statistics about MacArthur’s Peak and then the absolute astonishment and envy Jeremy had seen there upon learning that Jeremy had actually climbed it had convinced him otherwise.

JR had become a fixture there in the hospital room almost every day and even the terrible twosome came sometimes.

Jeremy seemed to love having them visit him and the boys would all play games they had brought for hours until I had to send them home when their grandmother came to pick them up but only after many protestations.

Of course Kelson had become a favorite and Jeremy wouldn't go to sleep without having me read as much as I would to him.

We had made it well into the third book when the first court appearance arrived and I could tell he was really nervous about what was coming with the morning.

Finally by unspoken mutual consent we gave up on reading for the night and I pulled him into my arms and just held him.

Neither one of us could concentrate on the book this night of all nights.

There were no words spoken for a long, long time as I held him closely in my arms but finally I heard him softly speak what he had been trying to suppress all evening.

"I'm scared."

"I know." I said.

I just continued to stroke his head gently as he said, "They hate me so much."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He didn't respond for a while but finally said, "I know you didn't want me watching the news but, well I have been and they are saying so much stuff about me."

I shook my head but replied, "I know honey but it's not true and you can't let it get to you. I'll be there with you tomorrow and you'll get through it fine."

"You promise?" He asked.

"Yes I promise." I said.

With that the silence returned and I held him until I heard the soft breathing and felt the total relaxation that I knew meant he had fallen asleep in my arms and not for the first time.

The next morning seemed to bring back his nervousness in full measure and then some as I helped him get dressed in a new suit that his attorney had brought several days earlier.

He was still in a cast on both his arm and a leg and even after all this time the bruises were still visible on his face from the attack.

He looked good in a suit and I told him so but even that couldn't get a smile from him as I finally finished with his hair and got him into his wheelchair to take him down for the ride to the courthouse.

He kept a death grip on my hand whenever I could spare it all the way there, and once we were in the waiting room that defendants are taken to before being brought into court he was out of his chair and into my lap with his arms wrapped around my neck in a strangle hold.

His attorney came in and I tried to leave but Jeremy wouldn't let go and begged me to stay.

The attorney finally nodded and with Jeremy still in my lap I stayed.

Mr. Washington basically told Jeremy that everything was going to be fine and not to worry, that the judge wasn't going to grant the motion before them today and to relax.

Jeremy didn't.

Then it was time and we were called.

I put Jeremy back into his chair and still bending over said, "Remember, don't let them get to you. You're going to do fine, just fine." Then began wheeling him out and over to the courtroom.

I only hoped that what I was telling him was true.

We entered the room and silence greeted us as I wheeled him forward towards the defense table but it didn't last long at all as the crowd in attendance started muttering and phrases such as "God will punish you," and "Murderer, rot in hell," began to be heard.

I saw Jeremy stiffen and I placed a hand on his shoulder squeezing gently as we came to our place at the table next to Mr. Washington and I took a seat next to Jeremy.

"All rise for the Honorable Judge T. Elliot Graham." The bailiff intoned as we all rose to our feet.

A tall elderly black man entered the room in judge's robes with white streaking the sides of his hair and took his seat up on the bench saying "Be seated."

As everyone sat back down he next said, "Bailiff call the case please"

"This is a motion hearing in the case of State of Utah vs Jeremy Rose, motion is to change the minor's legal status."

"Very well thank you. First of all there will be decorum in this court and if there isn't then you won't be allowed to remain in it." He said to the gallery with a hard look.

When he was sure he had gotten his point across he turned his gaze to Mrs. Guthrie and said. "You have brought forward a motion to try Jeremy as an adult and I would like to hear just what makes you think I am going to grant such a motion regarding a ten year old child."

I watched as Mrs. Guthrie stood up and looked around for a moment before saying. "Your honor the State at this time is also filing a motion to amend the charges."

"Objection!" Mr. Washington called.

"Mr. Washington?" The judge asked.

"We have received no notice of this your honor." He replied.

"The decision was reached this morning your honor, there hasn't been time to notify the defendant's counsel." Mrs. Guthrie interjected before the judge could reply.

"I'll entertain the motion and clear up both at this time. What do you want to amend the charges to Mrs. Guthrie?"

"Two counts murder in the second degree which we already have. We are hereby filing additional charges of five counts of murder in the first degree, five counts of assault and battery with great bodily harm inflicted and five counts of assault and battery with the intention to inflict great bodily harm. We are also charging special circumstances in all counts as these were racially motivated slayings and crimes." She told the court.

There was stunned silence in the room before it broke out in loud cheers, everyone knew what 'special circumstances' meant.

Before the judge could do more than pick up his gavel to call for silence Mr. Washington was screaming objection over and over again while Jeremy had a completely stunned look on his face at this turn of events.

The judge finally got the silence he requested but it took a while and he made clear in no uncertain terms one more sound out of any of them and he would clear the courtroom.

After silence was restored for several minutes all he did was stare at an increasingly uncomfortable district attorney who finally began to fidget.

"Let me get this straight Mrs. Guthrie. You are actually coming into my courtroom and asking for special circumstances to be applied to a ten year old boy?"

"Yes your honor, the nature and brutality of the crimes with the racial motivation behind the attacks clearly meets the guidelines for it to be invoked." She replied.

"Well not in my courtroom it doesn't. Motion for attachment of special circumstances denied on all counts." The judge said.

"Your honor I object!" She protested.

"I figured you would but I will not countenance sentencing a child this young to die notwithstanding the recent Supreme Court decision ruling out Capital Punishment for those under sixteen which you should be well aware of. Personally I find this grandstanding for the media and certain elements of the community and I don't like it." The judge told her.

"Very well your honor." She said realizing that she wasn't going to win this one.

"Now I would like to hear about these new charges and why you think he should be tried as an adult." He asked.

"Your honor the defendant is a menace to society and harbors an unreasoning and unacceptable hatred of African Americans that has resulted in the brutal murder of seven innocent children so far and the

severe injury of five others. In addition to that he attempted to cause great bodily harm to an additional five children but was prevented from doing so.” She told the court.

The judge looked over at Jeremy for several minutes before responding. “Mrs. Guthrie do you have evidence to back up these claims because they seem rather outlandish.”

“Yes your honor, in addition to sworn statements regarding the attack at the market which originally brought us here I also have a sworn statement from a guard who overheard the defendant on the way to attacking the other group of boys say, and I am quoting here so please forgive me, ‘I’m gonna get them Goddamn Niggers.’”

With that pandemonium broke out in the courtroom as people began screaming and yelling at Jeremy who was cowering back in fear.

Suddenly one man jumped up and ran towards where we were sitting, jumping over the rail to get at Jeremy.

I was reaching for my gun when Mr. Washington moved faster than any man I have ever seen and almost before I could even realize it had the man by the throat and was holding him in the air.

My weapon was out and ready for anything else that might happen but by this time the bailiffs were clearing the courtroom and one had came and taken the attacker who I learned later was a brother to one of the dead boys in the shower, away and into custody.

I was standing over Jeremy in his chair and watched as they attempted to get things under control but it took them a good five or so minutes to accomplish the task.

When I was sure that there was no more danger to Jeremy I holstered my weapon and set about trying to comfort the terrified little boy who was trembling in my arms now.

Once order had been restored the judge addressed the court again.

“Before we get underway I would like to know who you are?” He said and I realized he was addressing me.

I tried to put Jeremy back in his chair but he wouldn’t let go of me and only managed a strangled “No!” in plea so I decided to hell with it and simply looked up at the judge and hoping this wouldn’t get me transferred for becoming too close to my charge answered.

“Your Honor my name is Ethan Roberts Sr. I am a corrections officer with the county currently stationed at the juvenile facility where Jeremy resides. At the moment I am assigned to guard him while he is in the hospital receiving medical treatment.”

“I see. You are assigned by Captain Sabian is that correct?” He asked me.

Surprised that he knew that information I quickly replied. “Yes Your Honor.”

"From this moment on you are to consider yourself on detached duty and your sole responsibility is the protection and welfare of young Jeremy Rose. This order stands until and unless you hear directly from me is that clear?" He asked.

"Yes Your Honor." I replied.

"Also I am directing you to make sure that once he gets back into the jail that no more such untoward incidents occur." He added then turned to Mrs. Guthrie.

"You say you have a signed statement then I want to see it." He told her.

She proceeded to search through her briefcase for a moment before taking a document from it and handing it to the bailiff who brought it to the judge.

He looked at it for several moments before saying, "It says here that your witness is anonymous?"

"Yes Your Honor, he wishes to remain anonymous in this matter but the District Attorney can attest that he is a peace officer employed at the correctional facility where Jeremy Rose was incarcerated awaiting trial." She told him.

"I'm sure well you should be aware that a law enforcement officer cannot claim anonymity unless he is working undercover so is he?" The judge asked.

"No Your Honor." She replied.

"Good then get him in here. You see I also have several sworn statements from Mr. Washington with names incidentally which state that they either saw or heard individuals going to the shower room and they were talking about going there for the express purpose of harming young Mr. Rose. Now what is interesting is that a number of them were older children who were not allowed in that section of the facility which makes me wonder if your anonymous guard could be the same one who allowed them into a restricted area in the first place." He said to her coldly.

"Yes Your Honor." A rather pale faced prosecutor said before sitting back down.

"Now Mr. Washington do you have anything to add?" The judge asked.

"Your honor obviously we protest the leveling of these additional charges but if they are sustained then we also will present clear evidence at trial showing them to be false. I strongly urge the court not to transfer this to adult jurisdiction as this is a very young boy who did nothing more than defend himself against aggressors all of which were older than he." He said.

"Very well, then here is my ruling. Motion to amend sustained with NO special circumstances. Motion for moving Mr. Rose to and to try him as an adult, Denied this court in is adjournment. I'll see you all again at the commencement of the trial." The judge ordered then stood and walked from the courtroom before we could even get to our feet.

With that it was back to the hospital for Jeremy who was quite bored with everything but we tried our best to keep him occupied.



The boys came all the time, especially Jr., to visit him and I got through several more books in the series before he was transported to a rehabilitation facility for further care.

Eventually though it came time to return him to the jail and I could tell he was sad and not a little bit afraid to be going back.

I marveled again on how much perseverance the kid had as he worked way beyond what the physical therapy instructors asked of him.

He simply told me he had to get back in shape and pushed himself many times to tears with the workouts he gave himself to perform.

Nothing I or Jr. could do would convince him to let up any so we just tried to be there for him as much as possible.

The night before he was to return was a sad one but I tried to tell him that I would still be there but we both knew that it wouldn't be the same as it was now.

It couldn't be because I wasn't going to be able to spend all my time with just him.

I found that I was going to miss that.

We brought him back the next morning, and I left him with Darryl after giving him a long hug and telling him to come to me if he had any problems.

It was several days before the trial when I saw Jeremy going towards the showers only he didn't see me as I followed discreetly to make sure he didn't have any surprises since I could hear the shower running.

I heard him go in and then nothing so I looked around the corner and felt my heart go down into my throat at what I saw.

Neither boy could see me from where I was but I could see them.

One had a look of fear on his face while the other had one of pure rage.

I could see Jeremy clenching his hands, and noticed the blood dripping from them because he had them so tight that his nails were cutting into his palms.

Then stupid opened his mouth as he started backing away from the angry boy confronting him.

"Hey man what are ya doing? Look dude, I'm really sorry for what happened but it wasn't my fault."

I closed my eyes for a second in disbelief knowing that this was one of the boys who had brutalized Jeremy, and when I opened them I found Jeremy rushing the older and heavier boy grasping him by the throat and shoving him up against the wall as he growled. "Not your fault?"

I started to move forward when suddenly stupid pissed himself and Jeremy froze for a moment before looking down and watching the stream of urine hitting his leg.

Then to my complete surprise he started laughing and I couldn't help but smile as he dropped the boy who slid down the wall not daring to move while urine continued to dribble out of him in his terror.

I backed off quickly as Jeremy turned to leave and was around the corner when I heard something that chilled me to the bone.

"Don't worry kid, I will be seeing you soon, real soon but not today."

It was said in such a cold hard voice that it even scared me.

Three nights later Jeremy's world was violated again.

Guards came into his cell in the middle of the night and Jeremy thinking he was being attacked again, started fighting with everything he had in him.

Even Darryl fought back, and got in some good blows, but it only took one of them to hold him down while it took three for Jeremy, but eventually they got him down, and put the cuffs on him.

The guards involved would remember it for a while though, with all the bruises they now had, but sadly Jeremy had some new ones of his own as they led him down the hall to an interrogation room where after cuffing him to a chair they left him alone.

He told me later he figured they were doing it to soften him up, and scare him so he was determined not to let them see him that way.

Eventually about an hour later or so the two of them came back in.

One of them was the Perv as Jeremy had taken to calling him since that day when the man had performed the cavity search on Jeremy and had enjoyed it so much.

He came over and sat down across from Jeremy while the other one sat behind and to the side of Jeremy both just staring at the boy who stared back defiantly.

"Good morning!" Jeremy said smiling at them which they didn't like much.

"I want to know how you did it?" Perv asked menacingly.

"Did what?" Jeremy asked with an innocent look plastered on his face.

"Don't play games with me you little shit. I want to know just how in the hell you did what you did to-night?" Perv said while the second one remained silent.

Jeremy just looked at Perv for a moment before a mischievous smile played upon his face briefly then he answered. "Well you see....it's like this, I took my thumb and two fingers and placed them on either side of my dick and began rubb...."

"I don't mean that you little fuck!" Perv screamed as he launched himself out of the chair and lunged at Jeremy bringing his hand up to strike the boy who moved back in fear as far as the cuffs would allow.

Perv stopped himself just inches away from striking the boy as the other guard loudly said. "That's enough Jack!"

I meanwhile had been making my rounds when I found Darryl handcuffed to his bed and sobbing, with Jeremy obviously not there.

I freed him and finally got out what happened.

They had came and taken Jeremy.

Pissed as hell, I went looking for them, and soon found them in the interrogation room.

Knocking loudly on the window, I saw pissed both of them off, but they did come outside where I was waiting.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" I asked as soon as the door was closed.

"Interrogating a suspect." Jack told me sneering.

"Without counsel or a guardian present, are you crazy?" I asked.

"Fuck off Roberts! This ain't your business." Jack said moving towards me.

"Oh please, I'd love for you to make a move, come on." I said hoping the asshole would try something.

"Jack don't." His partner said.

"I'm getting tired of his shit." Jack responded angrily.

"I have a court order placing Jeremy in my protection, and I'll be glad to call Capt. Sabian if you want confirmation. This 'interrogation' is over."

"We'll see." Jack snarled as his partner grabbed his arm and said, "Come on," dragging him from the room.

Yeah we certainly will I thought as I took out my cell phone, and called the Captain at home filling him in on what I had just walked into.

To say he wasn't thrilled was somewhat of an understatement, but I had a feeling that good ole Jack, and his days of body searches were finally going to be over.

I moved over and entered the room to find Jeremy looking up at me apprehensively and I quickly knelt down and undid his cuffs telling him.

"Oh Jeremy I'm so sorry I couldn't stop this."

He looked at me for a second then said. "That's alright but what...what's going on?"

I stopped and looked at him looking deeply into his eyes before asking. "You mean you don't know?"

He just shook his head in the negative.

I thought after all this time that I had gotten to know the kid, and would be able to tell if he was telling me the truth or not, so kept a close eye on him to gauge his reaction.

"Well Jeremy somehow, some way, the five kids who are left who were involved in the assault on you, were themselves attacked." I said waiting for something, anything but I didn't get it.

"I just came from the med center, and all five are in really bad shape. They don't think any of them will die, but...well...they won't ever be able to have any children."

I just looked at him, but was surprised when there was absolutely no reaction to gauge.

I was met with a stony and hard look that told nothing about anything.

He matched my stare for several seconds before a small, very small smile started to play at the corners of his mouth and he said in a saccharine sweet voice "Oh darn" then gazed at me with such a look of doe eyes innocence that it took my breath away and I just knew he had played the other cops for all they were worth.

It also told me he had somehow done it.

I would give a lot to know just how in the hell he pulled it off but figured I never would and it also left me with another dilemma, and that was the fact I was a police officer and was supposed to report such things as this.

The problem was those cretins had certainly deserved exactly what they had gotten, and I couldn't blame Jeremy for bringing them to justice for what they had done to him.

That was the final determining factor for me.

What those punks had put this kid through there could be no excuse for and if it damned me to hell I wasn't going to say a word, ever.

"Come on then let's get you back to bed, somehow I think you've had enough excitement for one night."

He gave me a knowing smirk but simply said, "Okay," and with that I led him back to his cell.

"Good night Jer." I said as I turned and walked away.

"Thanks Ethan, thanks." I heard from him before I turned the corner, and went back on my rounds.

The next day was the beginning of the trial and I took Jeremy and transported him to the courthouse for it.

Once again he was nervous and frightened and I told him it would be alright, but he just looked at me, and I could tell the answer was, 'no it won't.'

When we pulled in front of the courthouse on the way around to the back we got a shock at all the protesters out front, and the huge amount of riot police present to try and keep order.

Jeremy looked white with shock and asked, "What's going on why are they here?" Pointing to the many people in the white sheets with pointed caps.

"Well Jeremy many people seem to believe what has been said about you and your father. You're right in the middle of a racial shitstorm I'm afraid." I told him.

I could see the tears on his face as he said. "But it's not true, it's not. Dad hates those people."

"I believe you Jer but like the blacks these people will jump on anything they can for their own purposes as well." I told him.

He was silent the rest of the way around to the back, and inside where I stopped off in the bathroom so he could clean his face up a bit.

Then it was on to court.

The bailiff called the court to order which was packed once again and in walked the judge who ordered everyone seated.

"Okay listen up people. I will not have a repeat of what happened last time. Any, and I mean any outbursts, and you all will be out of here is that clear?" He said.

"Good, let's get this circus on the road Mrs. Guthrie?" He said next.

"Good morning your honor the state will begin with the two murders at McHenry's Market and will show that the defendant did willfully, and with malice take the lives of two innocent teenagers who were simply trying to assist the boy's gravely injured father...."

It went on and on until she finally wound down and took her seat.

"Mr. Washington?" The judge asked next.

"Well obviously I disagree with the District Attorney's office and the defense will show that in all cases Jeremy was simply defending himself or his father." With that he sat down. Short and sweet, hopefully enough.

"Very well, remember what I said and Mrs. Guthrie you may begin." The judge said, while looking at the prosecutor.

Mrs. Guthrie called one witness after the other, to the stand, who all said basically the same thing. The two boys entered the market, and were trying to help the injured man when Jeremy screaming racially charged epithets charged them and attacked them. They all said they were sickened as they watched the boy repeatedly kick and hit the two boys who never even tried to fight back.

At one point Jeremy jumped up screaming, "That's a lie" as I grabbed onto him trying to pull him back down into his seat.

The judge was calling for order in the court as Jeremy fell back sobbing in my arms and I was sure that everyone could hear the heart wrenching pleas. "Why do they hate us so much?," followed by "Why are they lying about us, why?"

The judge admonished Mr. Washington to keep Jeremy under control, but then surprised me by telling Jeremy that he would get his turn, but he had to remain quiet for now.

Mrs. Guthrie looked all too pleased with the result.

The judge motioned her to go on, and she kept at it calling witness after witness who all testified to Jeremy's unprovoked attack on the good Samaritans, all the while screaming things like 'Niggers' and other such tripe.

Mr. Washington surprisingly didn't ask hardly any questions of the witnesses other than to clarify a couple of things like how many times the two teens were kicked and punched and where those blows landed.

When the last witness had been called the judge asked. "Am I to understand you wish to break this down into the market deaths and then tackle the shower incident Mrs. Guthrie?"

"Yes if it pleases the court your Honor." She replied.

"Very well, Mr. Washington your turn." He said.

"Thank you Your Honor, I would like to call Doctor Jeff Spicoli to the stand."

The doctor was called and sworn in.

"Doctor Spicoli can you please state who you are and where you are employed outlining your responsibilities." Mr. Washington asked.

"Certainly I am Dr. Jeff Spicoli, and I am the Chief Pathologist for city and county of Salt Lake in the State of Utah. I am in charge of the Coroner's office, and of performing and/or overseeing autopsies in my department."

"Can you tell this court if you had the occasion to perform autopsies involving the two teen boys in this case from McHenry's Market?"

"Yes I did." He answered.

“Can you tell me what you found during those autopsies?” Mr. Washington asked.

“Objection.” Mrs. Guthrie called out.

“To what?” The judge asked.

“Relevance Your Honor, anything found could be prejudicial to the two boys and serve no useful purpose in this matter.” She replied.

The judge turned his gaze onto Mr. Washington who quickly said, “Your honor the results not only will show motive for robbery, but directly refute the testimony of ALL of her witnesses.”

“I’m willing to listen, overruled.” The judge said and Mrs. Guthrie sat back down not looking happy.

“Doctor?” Mr. Washington asked

“Jamal was found to have sustained a crushed trachea resulting in death by asphyxiation. Tyrone had sustained significant trauma to his testicles, and minor trauma to his penis. He also was found to have the nasal bone to have been forcibly interjected into the brain causing almost instantaneous death. Both boys showed also showed significant toxicity levels of illegal substances in their systems.” The doctor said.

His final comment got an angry reaction from the crowd and one woman standing up saying, “You lie, my boy don’t do no drugs!”

The judge called the room to order and had it cleared once again before the trial could resume.

When it did Mr. Washington began again. “Doctor can you tell us in your professional opinion if a boy was punched and kicked repeatedly with great force, a number of times either, just prior to or just subsequent to, death would you find evidence of such an assault on his body?”

“Certainly.” He replied.

“Can you tell us if you found any other type of injuries of any kind on either boy?” Washington asked.

“Not like that. Tyrone had a scrape on one knee, but that was all other than what I have already noted. Jamal had no injuries either. Both boys had tracks marks from needle usage, but there was no indication of trauma such as you describe.” The doctor said.

“One more question if you will please. Could such trauma be inflicted upon a person and not show up in your examination?” Washington asked.

“No. That would be impossible.” The doctor replied.

“No further questions and I think that directly impeaches Mrs. Guthrie’s witnesses.” Mr. Washington said.

“Objection!” Mrs. Guthrie called at that.

“Overruled.” The judge replied.

There wasn’t much she could say to that. After all her witnesses had said that Jeremy kicked and punched the boys after they were down over and over again and the doc had just said it didn’t happen which basically said they were all lying.

“I would like to call Mr. William McHenry to the stand.” Mr. Washington said next.

We watched as an elderly man clearly nervous was led into the courtroom by the bailiff and taken to the witness stand where he was sworn in. Then Mr. Washington asked him some basic questions about who he was and how he was employed before getting to the main one.

“Mr. McHenry can you tell us what happened on the night in question?”

“Aye, young Jeremy and his da came into our store like they always do to buy some things I suppose, and went off to the back of the store after my wife gave him a piece of candy he likes so much.” The old man said sparing a smile at Jeremy.

“What happened next?” Mr. Washington asked.

“Well bad business that. Two teen age boys came into the store while Adam and Jeremy were in the back. They looked around a bit and came up to the counter where one of them grabbed me and pulled me across the counter top while he held a knife to me throat.” He paused there and took a sip of water before continuing basically recounted what I knew Jeremy had said had happened that day.

I just held onto Jeremy’s hand, and he had it in a death grip by the time it was the testimony was over with.

“Thank you, just one further question for you and then you can go.” Mr. Washington said then asked. “Can you tell us if you have surveillance cameras in your store?”

“Aye, we have them.” Mr. McHenry replied.

“Were they working on the night in question?” Washington asked.

“Aye, they were.” He replied.

“And can you tell us if you have a tape of that night?” Mr. Washington asked next.

“I did, I gave it to the police when they asked for it.” He told the court.

“I see, thank you. No further questions.” Mr. Washington said.

After Mr. McHenry left the stand the judge asked. “Mrs. Guthrie can you tell me where this video is?”

“Ah..no Your Honor I can’t.” She replied.

“You can’t?” The judge questioned incredulously.



Looking decidedly unhappy Mrs. Guthrie finally said. "It seems to have gone missing."

"Missing?" Was the judge's response.

"The police have it logged into evidence, but can't locate it." She told him.

"Your Honor we have requested this tape over and over again, but have gotten no response from the DA's office at all." Mr. Washington said.

"Is this true?" Graham asked of the prosecutor.

"The defense has never contacted our office about anything Your Honor, matter of fact I have never spoken to Mr. Washington at all." Mrs. Guthrie replied smugly.

"Really?" The judge asked before turning to Mr. Washington and asking. "Care to explain that?"

"Certainly. Mrs. Guthrie is technically correct when she says that I have never been in contact with the DA's office or spoken with her but it has not been for lack of trying. The District Attorney's office and Mrs. Guthrie have never returned phone calls I have made. Nor did they have time to see me when I went down to their office in an attempt to discuss this case." Mr. Washington said.

"That's a lie!" Mrs. Guthrie yelled.

"I was afraid this might happen Your Honor, so I have brought phone records for my office phone, as well as my cell phone. I also have parking receipts for my visits to the courthouse." Mr. Washington said.

With that Mrs. Guthrie sat down.

"Mrs. Guthrie all I can say is that this borders on prosecutorial misconduct if it doesn't outright cross into it, I will be referring this to the ethics panel for review. I want that tape and I want it now! Mr. Washington any further witnesses?" He asked.

"Yes Your Honor I would like to call Jeremy Rose to the stand."

I saw Jeremy start at that and gave his shoulder a squeeze as he slowly got up and made his way to the witness stand.

"Jeremy I know how hard this is for you but can you please tell us what happened that day and evening?" Mr. Washington asked.

I could see Jeremy look down for a moment and then back up trying to find the courage then he began. "My dad and I went camping that weekend and I finally made it to the top of MacArthur's Peak. We were coming home from that and Dad was going to make my...he was going to cook my favorite dinner to celebrate."

I could see the tears in his eyes from here and felt matching ones in mine as he went on.

“You see my dad, he made the best Chicken Curry in cream sauce in the whole world...he knew I loved it...” Then he stopped as he broke down in sobs.

There was silence in the courtroom and all I wanted to do was go and take the boy into my arms but that I couldn't do right now.

“Jeremy can you continue?” The judge asked.

“Yeah, I'm sorry it's just...I'm sorry. We didn't have all the stuff to make it so we stopped at the McHenrys to get it. We had gone in and picked the stuff we needed up when as we were walking back towards the front of the store dad suddenly grabbed me and told me to run outside and call 911 because the store was being robbed. I saw this kid holding Mr. McHenry and he had a knife to his throat. Dad took off running towards the kid and I ran outside and called the cops. Afterwards I went back into the store and told dad the police were on the way and it was then I saw the other boy...”

Jeremy stopped then and looked down and I knew he was fighting to be able to go on.

Finally though he looked back up and although there were tears running down his face he continued. “He was coming at dad and he had something shiny in his hand. It took me a second as I screamed 'DAD!' to warn my father to realize that it was a knife. And then...I didn't warn him soon enough and saw the kid stick it in his back. Then dad was just falling and he looked...he looked so surprised like...like it couldn't be happening. I remember I screamed again as I saw the boy bringing the knife down to stab him again and I just reacted. I couldn't let him hurt my dad no more...I couldn't...” Jeremy stumbled to a halt crying openly now, shoulders heaving in great wrenching sobs of grief.

I wondered if this was the first time he had let it all out or not.

As he got control or at least some semblance of it back Mr. Washington asked what happened next.

“I went after the greatest threat at that moment, which was the boy about to stab my dad again, and making a sharp wedge of my fingers drove them into his trachea then rolled and came back up to deal with the secondary threat. I aimed a kick for his balls, and then when he doubled over sharply from that used his own momentum to add to my own as I brought the heel of my hand up and into his nose forcing the bone there back into his brain.” Jeremy said before stopping again.

“Then...Then...he was bleeding...he was bleeding so bad, I tried to stop it but...Oh God I tried, but I couldn't...I swear I couldn't.” With that he lost all control, and I said to hell with it as I jumped up and ran to his side taking him into my arms and hugging him tightly to me as I sank to the floor with a devastated little boy in my arms.

I heard the judge order a recess of thirty minutes, but I didn't care at the moment, there was only one thing on my mind at this point and it was the poor kid in my arms.

Finally, he looked up at me and with tears still streaming down his face said. “I tried Ethan, I tried so hard but I just couldn't stop it.”

“I know, you did everything you could.” I told him.

“Why did he have to die, WHY?” He begged me for the one answer that could make some sense out of it, but I didn’t have an answer for him.

I could only shake my head and say, “I don’t know.”

“Why???” He softly cried as he buried his head in my shoulder again.

We stayed that way until the judge came back and asked us if Jeremy could continue.

“Can you go on?” I whispered in his ear and heard a soft, “I guess I have to don’t I?” as he looked up and then wiped his face.

I helped him up and back to the stand before grasping his shoulder once again and heading back to my seat.

Mr. Washington walked up and said, “I’m very sorry to have to make you relive this Jeremy but I need you to finish telling what happened that night.”

“It’s okay. I started CPR like I learned in first aid class and that’s kind of the last thing I remember until I woke up in the hospital.” Jeremy said almost woodenly and I knew he was clamping down on everything as much as he could in order to get through this.

“Jeremy just one last question and I’ll be done. Can you tell me if at any time you deliberately sought to kill those boys?” Mr. Washington asked.

“No.” He replied.

“Thank you nothing further at this time.” Washington said returning to his seat.

Now came the hard part as Mrs. Guthrie got up and walked over to Jeremy smiling at him in a friendly way which I hoped Jeremy could see was bullshit.

“Jeremy that’s quite a story you told and very emotional too. I’m certainly sorry your father died in the altercation but it’s clear from witnesses those two boys had nothing to do with it. So with that in mind how do you expect anyone to believe the story you’ve made up?” she asked.

“I don’t expect you to believe anything Mrs. Guthrie.” Jeremy replied coldly while looking at her as if she were a bug or something.

“Really then why get up here in court and tell such a story then?” She asked implying it was all a fabrication.

“Just because I don’t expect you to believe it, doesn’t mean it isn’t the truth.” Jeremy told her.

“So you want the court to believe it then?” She asked.

“It really doesn’t matter what anyone believes, my dad is dead.” He told her.

"Yes he is and I hope someday we can catch who is responsible for it." She replied.

"I already did." He said glaring at her.

"Jeremy many witnesses say otherwise." She told him.

"Oh really cause that's real funny." He said

"Funny?" She asked

"Yeah cause ya see, there was the McHenry's, me and dad and then there were the two kids robbing the place. There wasn't anyone else there to 'witness' anything." Jeremy told her.

"So you say." She snapped back.

"Yeah so I say." He threw at her.

"Let's see here. In your testimony you stated you didn't intend to kill either of those boys yet they're dead. How do you explain that?" She asked.

He looked at her perplexed for a minute but finally said, "I crushed the trachea of one and sent a bone into the brain of the other that's how."

She looked surprised for a moment before saying, "that doesn't seem to bother you much."

"It bothers me a great deal." He replied.

"That's funny because I haven't seen anywhere in any of the reports I have on you that you have ever expressed the slightest bit of remorse for taking two innocent lives."

"They weren't innocent! They killed my dad!" Jeremy almost growled back at her.

"You keep saying that but, are you sorry you killed them or not?" she asked him not letting up.

"The only thing I'm sorry about is that I didn't get to them sooner." He almost yelled now.

I was getting worried because he looked like he might attack the bitch, which wouldn't be that great a loss, but it also wouldn't look real good either.

"You're sorry you didn't kill them sooner?" She asked in disbelief.

"Yeah that's right if I had then my dad might still be alive... but I couldn't move fast enough." Jeremy said through gritted teeth.

"So you're glad they're dead." She asked.

Jeremy didn't answer at first and I could see him trying to calm himself.

“Answer the question!” She demanded and he snapped. “You’re damn right I’m glad they’re dead, they killed my father and they deserved to die.”

“So you did intend to kill them?” She asked satisfied now.

“No.” He said

“You just said you did.” She snapped back.

“Try listening, I said I was glad they were dead but I never said I intended to kill them.” He told her.

“Well it sure sounded like it to me.” She retorted.

“Then clean out your ears.” He jibed.

“Objection your honor.” She said to several snickers including the judge.

“Overruled. Jeremy can you explain what you mean?” The judge asked.

“Well you are trained to stop an opponent and while that can mean killing it doesn’t automatically. You want to neutralize the danger as quickly as possible in the most effective way. I had one who had a knife who was about to use it again, and another who was also a threat and his knife was on the counter next to him. I reacted to what I was faced with, to stop them in the quickest way I could and to also ensure they wouldn’t continue to be a threat. My dad needed medical treatment right away and having them be able to get back up right away would put us right back in danger. I didn’t even think about it just did what I had to do to stop the threat.” He said.

“Yeah dead certainly stopped it.” Mrs. Guthrie muttered.

“You have something you would like to say?” The judge asked her as he glared at her, while Jeremy looked like he would gladly strangle her if the opportunity presented itself.

She shook her head no and the judge asked “Anything further?”

“Yes your Honor. I would like to continue on to other matters at this time.” She replied.

“Very well.” He said.

“Jeremy one last thing, you say you just reacted is that correct?” She asked

“Yes.” He replied.

“So did you just react when you put three police officers in the hospital?”

I watched Jeremy hang his head in shame at that before saying “I didn’t mean to.”

“You didn’t mean to?” She asked.

"I...I don't really remember what happened." He admitted.

"I see." She said. "Tell me do you remember what happened when you savagely attacked a group of African American teens in the shower at juvenile hall?"

His head snapped up at that and he glared at her but didn't say anything.

"Well?" She asked again.

"I didn't attack anyone." He said finally.

"Then maybe you can tell me why it looked like a war zone in there after you were through?" She prodded him.

Again he didn't answer.

"I'm waiting." She told him.

"I don't wanna talk about it." He told her.

"I'm sure you don't but you aren't being given that option." She informed him.

"Fine then, tell me, when was the last time you knew of one little white boy attacking fifteen older African American boys huh? Tell me when?" He yelled now.

"Jeremy you will have to control yourself." Graham said shocked at the look on the boy's face.

Even Guthrie had backed away a bit at seeing Jeremy's expression.

"Ummm...there are five dead children because of you and five more who were severely injured. You can't argue that, so tell me do you not remember what happened that did that to them." She said loudly as she grabbed something off the table and walked back to the boy setting them down in front of him.

"You did this so you're telling me you don't remember." She yelled now.

That was it, Jeremy was up out of the chair and coming towards her screaming. "I can't forget you stupid bitch, how can I forget. I wished I could but I can't. Yeah I did it. I'm only sorry I wasn't strong enough to kill them all." All the while I was screaming Jeremy while the judge was calling for order in the court.

I got in front of him and called to him. "Jeremy listen to me, listen to me, you have to calm down. You have to get control. Jeremy."

I was never more scared than I was at that moment. It was because the absolute dead look in his eyes was worse than anything else could have been. I had been expecting rage, and it was there, but it never reached his eyes.

Suddenly, the little boy was back and he fell forward collapsing in my arms as I lifted him up, and held him to me while he cried over and over again. "That's all I want to do is forget."

"Your Honor I want him restrained!" Guthrie cried from across the room where she had ran.

"Listen you damn bitch you caused this to happen. He's been traumatized enough as it is, and there was no excuse for what you did!" I yelled before the judge could respond.

That earned me a look from him but he turned back to Guthrie and said. "Mrs. Guthrie, I don't know what purpose that was supposed to serve, but frankly it just ended your case as far as I'm concerned, and my judgment is the only one that matters. While I don't appreciate usually things like Officer Roberts said in my courtroom, this time I'm forced to agree with him. Any further evidence which you have you can present but Jeremy is through unless Mr. Washington wants to cross."

Mr. Washington was looking very unsure at this point but finally nodded his head that he did.

I asked a still shaking Jeremy. "Are you up to more?"

I heard a whispered "I don't know, I lost control and I'm scared."

"What do you want to do?" I asked softly.

"I'll try." He finally said and I carried him back over to the witness stand.

After returning to my seat Mr. Washington got up and approached Jeremy. "Jeremy please tell us what happened in the shower that day"

"I don't want to." He said looking down.

"I know that, and that this is going to be very difficult, but you have to." He replied

Jeremy wouldn't look up but finally said, "I was taking a shower when they came in."

"Who came in?" Washington asked

"These boys. There were ten of them and they surrounded me. I was real scared, but when they came for me I fought back. I wasn't doing to badly until five more came in. There were just too many." He finished still without looking up.

I saw Washington look at the judge and bite his lip and knew what he was going to bring up next.

"Jeremy that's not all that happened that day is it?" He asked.

"Yes it is, nothing else happened, nothing." Jeremy said desperately now looking up with pleading in his eyes.

I knew he didn't want the world to know even though they already did.

"Jeremy you have to tell us." Mr. Washington said softly.

"Nothing happened! I swear it! Nothing! Please!!" He begged tears running down his face again.

There was silence for a while until the judge said kindly, "Mr. Washington I have the doctor's reports and lab tests. I don't think Jeremy needs to expand on those. I will take them as evidence of what took place."

I could see the look of horror and shame that came upon Jeremy's face as he said. "You... you know?"

"Yes Jeremy we do, and you have to remember that it's not your fault." The judge said kindly.

Jeremy just looked down, and didn't answer as the judge dismissed him getting up and slowly walking forward to sit next to me once again, but he wouldn't look at me and when I put my hand on his shoulder he shrugged it off.

"Your honor, since he's denying the rape took place, I move that any allegations of sexual assault to justify his actions be stricken from the record." Mrs. Guthrie said.

I watched as each word seemed to shake the boy and the judge turned an angry stare at the prosecutor.

"Mrs. Guthrie I've had about enough of this..." But was interrupted by the door opening and Darryl along with a police officer carrying a manila envelope came walking into the room.

The judge recessed the court and taking the officer and boy with him disappeared into his chambers.

"Jeremy..." I started to say but he turned to me and said. "No, it's not alright and it's not going to be just leave me alone!" I could see that lost and dead look back in his eyes.

A few minutes later the judge came back out alone and sat down.

"Alright I'm ready to rule in this case." He said holding up his hand when Guthrie started to protest. "Don't say it, I don't want to hear it. I have just seen the video from the store that you couldn't seem to find, Mrs. Guthrie and am adding that to the list of things I am sending to the ethics board. It clearly shows what happened in the store that night, and clearly shows that Jeremy acted in self defense of both himself and his father. I am also releasing it to the news media in an attempt to put to rest this racist garbage that has been foisted off upon this community. Accordingly I find him not guilty of the first two counts in the indictment. As to the remaining counts it is beyond my comprehension how you could see fifteen boys against one boy as an attack by that one on the rest. Chuck Norris couldn't have pulled that off, and it is beyond any common sense that Jeremy would have initiated any type of altercation under those circumstances, and that is even without taking into account the fact that there were older teens in the shower area that should never have even been in that part of the building. It is clear from a number of statements that those boys went there with the express purpose to attack and seriously hurt, maybe even kill Jeremy, and also for the further purpose of sexually assaulting him. That they managed to do all those things except kill him is despicable in my opinion, and I am ordering a review of all juvenile facilities to find a way to make sure this doesn't happen in the future."

With that he paused and looked down at Jeremy for a moment before going on.



“Jeremy, I can’t begin to tell you how sorry I am that this happened to you. None of it should have and I wish there was something I could do to help ease the pain you are suffering. I am sure your attorney will be filing appropriate legal action to hold accountable those who have defamed you and your father as well as caused you such grievous injury, since none of what happened would have if they hadn’t falsely arrested you for something that I believe they knew to be untrue. I also know that no amount of money will be able to make the pain go away or ease the ache in your heart. All I can do is tell you that my prayers are with you and that I strongly urge you to seek help for what you have been through. I know you don’t want to hear this right now but I am going to say it anyway. There are resources out there that can help you if you avail yourself of them. I am going to give you the name of a rape crisis center, and I really hope that you will contact them. It is comprised of people who have been through what you have, and know what you’re going through. It’s not just talk, they’ve been there Jeremy, and they can help I promise you. So I find you not guilty on all charges but unfortunately due to a number of factors including your own testimony and actions here today I cannot release you at this time.” He told him as Jeremy’s head snapped up.

“Objection!” Washington called out coming to his feet.

“Sit down.” The judge ordered.

“I’m truly sorry, but I’m afraid that until you deal with the pain, and more importantly the anger that you have inside of you, that you are a danger to others and even possibly yourself. As you said on a number of occasions today, ‘you can’t control yourself,’ and that worries me. I will not see you spend anymore time at the detention facility but I also can’t release you out in the general population. Because of your extensive training you pose a threat if you lose control. Therefore, it is the order of this court that you are to be placed in a supervised foster home under the auspices of Child Protective Services, and are to receive psychological counseling to help you recover from what you have been through, not only the attack but the loss of your father. I will monitor your progress closely, and I want monthly reviews of your status. I hope you’ll be out soon, but for now this is the only option. Good luck Jeremy.” With that he stood up and said, “court adjourned,” as he walked from the room.

He turned to look at me with such despair in his eyes that all I could do was to reach out for him, but was surprised when he pushed me away and stood up.

I wasn’t sure what to do as the case worker walked up and said “Jeremy if you’ll come with me.”

“Jeremy...” I started to say but he turned and in a dead voice that matched his dead eyes said, “It’s not going to be alright, I knew it wouldn’t be. I wish I had died. Why couldn’t I have just died?” He then turned and walked from the room leaving me standing there in shock.

“So you see Darryl that was the last time I saw him. Judge Graham had an automobile accident almost one month later just before the hearing was scheduled and I haven’t been able to find where they put him.” I said to the boy sitting in front of me with tears running down his face and I realized running down mine as well.

“Do you think he...that he might have...” But he couldn’t complete the sentence.

I didn’t want to.

“I don’t know, God I hope not, but I just don’t know son.”

## Chapter 18

Adam was actually glad that Logan had convinced him to get out of the base for a bit. It had been just over a week since Joe's accident, and he just couldn't get himself out of his funk. He couldn't help but feel guilty about what happened, and no matter what anyone said, it wasn't helping. So Logan insisted that he join them to go into town for a bit. Janet had wanted to get some shopping done, and Logan was looking at purchasing a new warehouse for getting supplies into the base.

First stop was at the mall, and Adam couldn't help but chuckle at some of the things that had happened. He knew that his brothers weren't all that experienced with "normal" society, but it became very apparent, very quickly, just how bad it was. They weren't in there for more than five minutes, when Juan started wanting to kill people. All because someone didn't see him there and bumped into him. Adam thought to himself that there has to be something that can be done about Juan's temper, and his lack of control of it, but that was something for later.

Then they went into a store that Janet wanted to go into so she could get some clothes for everyone. She was trying to find some jeans for Chang to wear, when she handed him a pair and told him to try them on. When she looked back a few seconds later, Chang had his pants around his ankles and was getting ready to take them all the way off.

"CHANG?!?!?! What are you doing?" Janet shouted before lowering her voice and looking around. Thankfully there was no one around to see what was going on.

"Mother? I was just doing as you requested." Chang said obviously bewildered by her reaction.

It took Janet a minute or two to understand what was going on, and realize that Chang had never been to a store before hence never knew about changing rooms. Add the fact that he didn't have any modesty, he couldn't after growing up in a lab his whole life, and you couldn't expect him to behave in a conventional manner.

"I am sure that doing it here will be much quicker and easier. I do not see what the problem is." Chang said still not understanding.

She finally explained to him about the changing rooms, and he went off to try on the jeans. When he got back, he handed the jeans to her with a nod, and said "These do fit properly, however, it would have been far more expedient if I were to have just tried them on here." Janet was about to reply, but was interrupted, when, Jory came up with a shirt that he wanted to get. When Janet had asked him why, he grinned, and held the shirt up so she could read the back. "I am a Bomb Technician, if you see me running, try to keep up."

Janet stood there for a second trying to make coherent words come out of her mouth while the rest of the kids just cracked up laughing. Jack tried hard not to laugh, but couldn't help it, and soon joined the rest of the kids. Janet tried to be serious but even she had a smile on her face as she took the shirt and added it to the pile. Adam knew instantly that Jory would be wearing the shirt often.

Logan had convinced his mom to allow them to go to the food court to get something to eat. Logan just couldn't believe that none of the Unit boys had ever eaten pizza, or had McDonald's. 'I mean that is like

sacrilegious to a kid' he thought to himself. So Logan had dragged the whole group, Janet, Jack, Bill, Ronnie, Adam, Juan, Chang, Jory and Will, into the food court.

There they split into four different groups. Bill took Will, and Chang, while Ronnie took Jory and Juan, leaving Logan and Adam by themselves, and Jack and Janet by themselves. Each one of the "tour guides" took their group around to each of the different food stores and told them what was in each.

Bill was shocked when they got to the Chinese food stand, and Chang walked right up, and started to converse with the person behind the counter in fluent Chinese. He explained afterwards that he was very familiar with Chinese food as that was his primary diet in the lab.

Adam had chosen to eat pizza with Logan, and after a bit of awkwardness, he finally got the hang of eating with his fingers. He sort of remembered eating pizza when he was younger... before the lab, but he wasn't really sure.

Logan groaned out loud, and Adam turned to look at what he was worried about, only to see both Juan and Jory coming to the table laden down with food from McDonald's. "What's wrong?" Adam asked, and Logan just shook his head. "Do you have any idea how much sugar is in those big assed sodas they got?" Adam just chuckled and shook his head, this was definitely going to be a memorable day.

After they were all done eating, Janet walked over and gave Logan a couple twenty dollar bills. "Why don't you take the kids over to the arcade for a bit, then we can go and finish our shopping."

Logan gave his mom a look that clearly stated 'are you nuts?!?!' She, meanwhile, gave him a look that said 'don't argue with me.'

"Okay, is this one of those conversations that don't have any words?" Adam asked. Both Janet and Logan busted out laughing.

"Yeah Adam it was, and Mom won." Logan said while shaking his head.

"Well of course she did," Adam said, "I learned along time ago that she ALWAYS wins." that sent everyone else to laughing, and Logan took them all off to the arcade.

Anyone that knew Juan, knew what games he would go to first. They had this really neat game that had a sniper rifle and you needed to kill people using the scope. Juan immediately went to it, a few seconds later he came back to Logan. "Logan, it says I need a dollar, can you give me one?" The little guy practically begged.

Logan just chuckled, "Sure Juan, hold on a minute," he then went over, changed one of the twenties for quarters, and handed Juan four of them.

Juan let out a cry of joy and ran over to the game. "Damnit!" he exclaimed, "I can't reach the thing!" Logan couldn't help but laugh as he drug a stool over for Juan to stand on. "This is so not funny Logan... why can't they make these games for someone our size?"

"Because, that game's not made for babies... why don't you step back and let someone who should play that game have a chance." Came a voice from behind them, followed by some laughter. Juan and Logan turned around to see three older kids standing there with smug looks on their faces.

'Oh no!' Logan thought to himself, but Juan really surprised him with his response. "Tell ya what... I got twenty bucks saying I can beat you on this game." Juan said to the older kid. Logan was sure that Adam must have been talking to Juan cause that's exactly what he could imagine Adam saying.

The older kids laughed, and the one Juan challenged spoke up, "sure, I'll take your money, but first, I wanna see that you got it. I mean twenty bucks is a lot of money for a little boy like you."

Logan was sure that Juan was going to loose it any second, but the younger boy just plastered a smile on his face and looked over to Logan. "Hey Logan, can I borrow twenty, I'll give it back to you after I teach this punk a lesson."

Logan laughed a bit, and reached into his pocket and pulled out the other twenty Janet had given him. He took a look around and saw that everyone he knew was standing around somewhere in the arcade watching them. Logan was actually really glad for the training that Adam had given him because with out it, he never would have noticed that they were being watched. He should have known that, at least, Adam and his brothers would know what was going on due to their link, but it was reassuring.

Logan decided to play along a little bit as he handed the money to Juan. "Sure thing little brother, but, do me a favor, and don't beat them too badly. I'd hate to see big boys like this crying." Logan was really glad to see that the other boys looked like they were enjoying the banter back and forth, and it seemed that all of this was in good fun. That made Logan a lot more at ease.

Juan let the older boy go first, and just stood back and watched. The older boy was good, but Juan wasn't really worried.

The kid put up a good score, then stood back. "There you go shorty, why don't you just give me my money now?" He said with a laugh.

Juan actually put on a worried look, and looked back and forth between Logan and the older kid. "Umm... damn... that was a high score. Umm... well I guess I better at least try." He then put the stool in place, inserted his quarters, gave a nervous little laugh, then started to play.

The older kids stood there with the jaws falling further and further from their faces as Juan played. Juan played for almost twenty straight minutes. Not only had he beat the other kid, he had put up a new top score, and he finished the game... all with out loosing a single life.

"DAMN!!!! you mean there's no more?!?!" Juan said as he stepped back off the stool. The other kids just stared at him, as the arcade employee came up to him. "Son, you can't use that language in here!" the guy said to Juan.

Juan noticed that he worked there, and turned to face him fully. "You work here?" he asked, but went on before the guy could answer. "I wanna log a complaint about this game. The scope is off target by two degrees to the left. No wonder most people can't beat the game... it's rigged!"

The guy just stood there staring at Juan. Logan decided now would be a good time to leave, so he grabbed Juan and started to drag him off. Juan wouldn't budge till he got the twenty from the other kid, but then let Logan drag him off.

They finally met up with Janet and Jack to continue their shopping, and everyone was laughing to hard to really tell the adults what had happened. Neither Janet nor Jack were really sure they wanted to, and were just glad that all the boys came back in one piece, and from the looks of things, none of them had killed or maimed anyone else.

Finally they left the mall in fear that security was going to kick them out. Someone had made a rude comment about Bill being in a wheel chair, and Will took exception to it. Will had taken Bill into the bathroom to help him into one of the stalls. A few older boys were already in there, and started to pick on Bill for being a "helpless gimp." Bill just shrugged it off, but Will got into their faces. One of them was stupid and actually took a swing at the lanky eleven year old, and Will had left them all in a heap on the floor. He then helped Bill do what he needed to, and they left the bathroom. After relating what happened to Janet and Jack, it was decided that maybe they should go to take a look at the warehouse the Logan was looking at, and they left the mall. Juan just really didn't understand why Janet was so uptight about the fight Will was in.

'Mom just doesn't get it! Be this. Be that. Don't do this. Don't do that. I mean can't she realize that we're NOT the perfect little normal "human" boys she wants us to be? Jeez. You can't bring any weapons to the mall. Adam you frisk all your brothers and promise me that they do not have any guns on them. It was just small ones in the boots and little Glock 9mm in the small of my back.

Juan is so wrapped up in his thoughts that he doesn't realize that he is moving away from the rest of his group and heading down a different row of cars.

'I mean if we had taken guns the thing with Will and Bill in the bathroom would never have happened. DUH! I mean no one would have fucked with us if Mom would have let us go like I wanted to. You strap a gun under each arm, one on each hip, one in each boot, one at the small of my back, and Barret M95 slung across your back. No one would have ever messed with us. Will would have not had any problems if he was packing like that. Why can't mom see that. They would have been all. "Damn. Look at those guns. I ain't messin' with him." Hell No! That's Right! You won't be messin' with me. You want a piece of me punk!'

Juan did a little dance at his last thought, and giggled to himself.

'See mom guns woulda helped. Problem solved. I just don't get it.'

'I mean my God, I was even drooling over the fucking b-b guns... If Jory ever heard me thinking that he'd never let me live it down. I mean my GOD... a FUCKING b-b GUN!!!! What have I been brought down to. Oh God! If I don't stop thinking about b-b guns Jory'll pick it up. Gotta stop. No that's not working. No b-b guns. Damn. I did it again. Okay. Just calm down and don't think about b-b guns. Oh shit I did it again. Damn stupid b-b guns. They won't leave me alone! AHHHHHHHHH! See Mom. Look what you've made me sink too. Bet you're sorry now huh?'

Somewhere across town:

"Come on Jeremy let's go." Toby called to the lagging older boy.

“Alright,” Jeremy sighed, he really didn’t see what the big hurry was to get back to that place.

I still can’t believe I’m stuck there I thought as I jogged to catch up to Toby.

He was a cute kid but always seemed so happy about everything that it got me down sometimes.

“Come on guys.” I called back to Tyler, Mark, Eric and Keith who were behind me.

The little ones had gotten home earlier so it was only us left.

As Dad would say another day in paradise although I kinda woulda said hell.

“The Barnholm Children’s Home,” or as the kids had named it “The Butt Hole Children’s Home,” although we usually just called it the hole.

Everyone knew what we meant.

It was a large farmhouse that had been converted into a home for children.

It had seven bedrooms that usually held ten kids and the houseparent.

It was supposed to be some new thing to make all the kids lives’ better, yeah right.

“Hey Jer, you okay?” Tyler asked as he caught up to me and put an arm around my shoulders.

“Yeah,” was all I answered as I kept walking.

They all knew the story, the whole story, but it didn’t make it any easier when I got reminded of it.

We got back to the house and the little ones all came over to get some hugs although Tom was staring at us from the porch and clearly didn’t like it.

Too bad!

Tom was the houseparent at least until five when the next one came on but he was the head dick of the place and even more was the one responsible for most of the hell we lived in.

He glared at me and I glared right back.

I had found out that the reputation I had actually came in useful for something after all when I got here.

He didn’t mess with me as long as I didn’t mess with him too much but the bad part was he made it clear he would hurt or worse the little ones if I interfered too much with his program.

I hated what he and the others did but didn’t have much choice in letting it happen or much worse would instead.

He had tried once and only once to make me do the stuff and when he could speak again we came to an understanding that I hated but didn't have any choice about.

I couldn't be there all the time and he knew it.

He or one of his asshole buddies could get to the others anytime they wanted and there would be nothing I could do about it.

Him being afraid of what I would do to him was about the only thing that kept him from doing more.

The one good thing was that I was able to get him to agree to some things that he didn't want to like the kids not coming back bruised and bloody anymore.

At least that was something if not much, that and he left me alone.

I couldn't resist as I walked by him with pissing him off some more.

"Hey Tom, where's Dick and Harry?" and then as he look lost added "Oh sorry that's right you're hairy and a dick so never mind" as I smiled and walked on inside leaving him standing there with his face turning red while some of the others snickered at him.

What I wasn't expecting was to find him suddenly behind me slamming the door shut just as I entered my room grabbing onto my shoulder and swinging me around.

"You keep that mouth shut you hear me?" he yelled.

I just looked at his hand and calmly said "Would you like it broken or permanently disabled?"

"You think you're hot shit don't you boy?" he snarled.

Tom had this disgusting habit of spitting when he talked.

"I guess I get to choose" I said as I brought my hand up and grabbed onto him twisting his hand and placing him in a control hold that put him on the floor crying out in pain.

"Don't fucking ever touch me you understand?" I whispered in his ear.

"Let me go or one of them is going to get hurt, bad." He told me which instantly shot fear through me and I released him to sit there cradling his hand.

"Don't ever do that again." He said.

"Then don't ever touch me again or it'll be worse." I replied.

"One of these days you little..." He started but I interrupted him "Maybe... but until then you know our bargain."

"I'm getting tired of our bargain" he told me.

“Really well just remember one thing, if any of them get hurt, I’ll kill you” I said looking him right in the eye just like daddy always said to.

He looked away first and got up walking to the door.

When he got there he turned and said “One of these days you might be surprised on that score,” and walked out slamming the door behind him.

How long could I keep this up I thought as I sank down on the bed shaking with what had happened.

He was right, one of these days he would get me and there was nothing I could do about it because I knew he was way too scared to take me in an open fight where it would be the other way around.

What was I going to do?

Things couldn’t keep going on like this.

I just didn’t know what to do.

I had thought of going to the police once but as if he could read my mind the next day when I got home from school I found a police car in the drive and the chief of the town cops sitting in the living room getting blown by Jimmy while Tom just smiled at me.

The son of a bitch actually asked if I wanted a turn next.

So we lived in an uneasy truce.

He got to keep selling the kids but not as much as he used to and he couldn’t sell em to the ones who wanted to hurt them and I kept my mouth shut and didn’t cause him any trouble.

Some bargain.

Tyler came in then and took one look at me and ran over pulling me to him and hugging me and that was all it took before I was crying into his shoulder.

I had been here about eight months now and Tyler had become very close to me.

All the kids were like family cause each other was all we had but Tyler was special and I just held onto him until I could regain some control.

While we were all close and loved each other, Tyler was the one kid here who I could talk to, I mean really talk to.

I could tell him anything and did.

I had told him about my life before and about that night and he told me everything too.

It was like he was a part of me or something and I always felt better when he was near me.



When I had calmed down he asked “What happened?”

“Oh Ty, he’s gonna kill me one of these days, I just know it and then what’ll happen to all of you?” I said.

“He can’t take you and you know it” Tyler said laughing trying to cheer me up.

“He won’t. He’ll stick a knife in me in my sleep or something, it won’t be a fair fight” I told him.

Tyler gasped and said “Then you gotta run away Jer”

“No! I won’t leave all of you here with that” I replied

“Tyler, if he’s gonna kill you then you got no choice” he told me.

“I won’t leave you guys, ever. You’re family now” I said back to him.

“Jer, you gotta. I...I can’t lose you too” he said softly.

“Tyler you know the minute I left what would happen” I replied.

“We got by before we’ll just have to do it again” he said

I was shaking my head before he had finished and finally said “You know how bad some of the kids were getting hurt, especially the little ones, I can’t let it happen again, I can’t.”

He just hugged me tighter and we didn’t say anything else for some time until the door burst open and the only houseparent we loved stood there asking “Jer, honey, are you alright?”

He came into the room and sat down next to me pulling me and Ty into his arms and holding us.

Why couldn’t they all be like this?

Adults were supposed to love us and take care of us like daddy and like Dave, not hurt us.

Why?

Dave had come to work here shortly after I came here and within days saw what was going on but like me they got him by the balls and he had to remain silent about what was happening.

They wouldn’t even let him quit and go somewhere else.

Dave had come to the area thinking he had a job teaching but the job hadn’t happened so he took one here instead.

They had known somehow that he was going to stop all this and one day Tom showed up with pictures of Dave’s little boy tied up somewhere to a chair with a knife against his throat pressing in just enough to cut and show some blood.

Tom had told him that if he said anything at all then it didn't matter where they went, Tom or his friends would find him and the boy and kill the boy real slow in front of Dave.

He also threatened Dave with hurting the kids here and Dave didn't want that to happen.

The final thing though was Tom drugged Dave or something and sent a couple of kids into his room that night while he video taped what happened next.

We came home from school the next day and Tom had us all sit down in the living room where Dave and his son were sitting and said he had a movie for us to watch.

I could tell Dave didn't know what was coming as he seemed surprised at hearing this and when the video started playing he looked sick.

The video was of Andy and Mark doing all sorts of things with a laughing and very happy Dave.

It was quite detailed and clear and pretty much covered everything two guys could do together.

Tom made us watch the whole thing and then told us "Dave won't be saving any of you so give up that bright idea cause not only will this be given to the cops but his son won't live to see daddy's trial" and walked out of the room.

Dave just put his head in his hands and cried along with his son.

Since that day Dave had become a dad to us and we all loved him while Kenny had become a brother.

He did everything he could for us and took care of us but we still were stuck living in this hell.

We talked about that video and both Mark and Andy told Dave how sorry they were but that they didn't have any choice in the matter.

Dave told them it wasn't their fault and just wanted to make sure he hadn't hurt them.

Mark said "You ain't that big" which got everyone laughing.

Dave was what grown-ups were supposed to be and he was as close to having a dad again as I could allow myself to think.

My dad would have liked him.

Some of us did wonder about Dave and after we all spent some months getting to know one another and finding out that we now had a dad who loved us Keith went to find out one night.

He told us the next day what had happened.

He went in asked if he could sleep with Dave after lights out and like many of us before had done was told alright.

This time though he put his hand down there on Dave and began touching.

Keith said that Dave simply moved his hand away and told him “I’ll love you sweetheart but I won’t in that way,” and even though Keith protested that he could tell Dave liked it all they did was cuddle up together and sleep.

That’s the way it had been ever since too.

Since then we had all decided that Dave would like it but wouldn’t do it, we just didn’t know if it was because we were in this place or something else.

I got him alone one night and asked him why he wouldn’t if we wanted to but all he would say was “You don’t need that kind of love right now,” and with that we had to kinda be okay.

Dave was one grown up that I would have liked to do things with I think but he never would and so we just kept to ourselves for that.

Finally Dave asked what had happened and I told him which just caused him to hold us tighter.

“You can’t keep antagonizing him, or you are going to get hurt” he finally said.

“I know but he’s so mean. He hated that the little kids got hugs from us when we came home from school” I replied.

“That’s because there is no love in his heart and he can’t stand to see it anywhere else” Dave said

We were quiet until he finally said “Come on guys, you can help with dinner” which got us groaning even though I did like to cook.

We said “Okaaaaay” and slowly got up making like it was the worst chore in the world.

He just laughed at us and we smiled up at him before he turned all serious and asked “You have those weapons still right?”

“Yeah I do” I replied as we walked out of the room towards the kitchen thinking about some of the things I had been able to make or get with his help. It wasn’t much, but ten shurikan, and a Tanto, would have to do if I was faced with Tom and his friends.

Meanwhile, back at the Mall.

Juan was distracted from his ranting by a sound coming from behind a van. He turned his attention in the direction of the Van. He didn’t need to do anymore investigating. He already knew what was happening on the other side of the the security fence behind the van.

“Let’s kill him. We know what he’s gonna do to that kid. We gotta stop him!” Juan stopped dead in his tracks as he heard the voice of the “bad kid” in his head.

“Ahhh! No! Don’t touch me there!” Juan is temporarily distracted from the conversation in his head.

SMACK!

'Damn that sounded loud.'

'See. He's trying to rip the kids shorts off. We can't let it happen. Six blows, thats all it'll take. Four blows to the chest, and two to the throat. That's all it will take.'

'Okay jerkwad! Guess what. You get to meet "Him."'

The nine year old's eyes suddenly turned yellow.

Juan charged the man letting out a terrifying war whoop. The startled man looked up and couldn't believe what he was seeing. A nine year old Hispanic kid with yellow eyes and the look of a predator was barreling straight for him. He barely had time to shove the little boy whose shorts he was just ripping off away before Juan collided with him. In almost the same moment Juan delivered six precise blows.

Four landed on the man's chest completely shattering the man's sternum and ribs with a loud snapping sound not unlike dry kindling being snapped in half to be placed in a fire. The last two blows landed on the man's throat crushing the windpipe and spine. The man died gurgling, drowning in his own blood, before he could even fully comprehend what was happening.

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Janet came running to where Juan had gone. Everyone but Ronnie and Billy reached the van at about the same time. Billy being in the chair had slowed him and Ronnie down a bit. What she saw made her stop dead in her tracks. A young boy, maybe eight or nine, who's ripped shorts were hanging down around his knees was laying on the ground, and was watching Juan literally beat a man to a pulp.

"What the Fuck?!?" Juan screamed!

He was staring at Dr. Drake. The man who had raped and tortured him in the lab.

"I killed you already you son of a bitch!"

Janet made her way quickly to the young boy Juan had rescued and pulled his pants back up as she pulled him into her arms. Her eyes hadn't left Juan. She was horrified by the scene in front of her. As soon as she had the boys shorts back on she gave the frightened child a reassuring hug, and passed him off to Chang.

Juan began to pummel the dead man's face into a paste. Everyone was stunned and just stared at the bloodbath in front of them.

"Lets see how you like having your balls removed Doc."

With the ferocity of a tiger he grasped the dead man between his legs and ripped the contents of his groin from his body.

"I'm not frightened of you. You arrogant son of a bitch. How do like it when it is done to you?!? Huh? You having fun Doc? HUH!?! I'm not scared anymore!"

Janet made to put her hand on Juan. Adam realized suddenly through his link that Juan was out of control and about to kill Janet. "No," he screamed as he moved quickly to intercept the blow that Juan was aiming at Janet. He almost didn't make it. He caught the younger boy's fist in the palm of his hand just inches from Janet's face. The ferocity of Juan's attack was making Adam exert himself.

Juan's eyes locked with Janet's. She had never seen such ferocity before. Those eyes scared her more deeply than anything she had ever seen. There was nothing but blood thirsty rage behind them. There was no recognition of her, just the desire to kill. She was acutely aware of the fist just inches from her head and the struggle that Adam was putting up to keep Juan at bay.

This was not the fun loving little boy she had gotten to know. These eyes belonged to a cold, hard killer, that wanted nothing more than to destroy everything he could touch.

Janet had never been more afraid than she was right then staring into the eyes of this boy. She watched as Juan started to blink a few times, and she could almost see a struggle going on behind those eyes.

Finally Juan closed his eyes for a few seconds, and when he opened them again, his eyes were back to the brown that he usually had. He stared at Janet in horror for a few seconds, then broke down and collapsed to the ground sobbing.

"No! I'm sorry Mommy. Please don't be mad at us."

He was sure he had lost his mom. She would just toss him away like the broken piece of shit he was. "He" had ruined everything. Juan felt like a piece of his very soul had been ripped from him. He wanted his mom to hug him, but he could see that she was trying to get as far from him as she could.

Janet stumbled backwards, and almost fell on her butt, but Jack was there to catch her. Adam was now on the ground trying to comfort Juan. Everyone else was just standing there staring in shock and disbelief at the scene before them.

Adam was the first to regain his senses. He lifted the still sobbing Juan into his arms. "Will, you and Jory, hide the body, we gotta get out of here. Now. What are you all standing around for? Get moving! That's an order!"

That seemed to snap everyone out of it. Will and Jory quickly did as Adam told them, and dumped the body of the guy into a dumpster. Chang was holding onto the boy that had been attacked by the man. "The boy", as he was now thinking of the boy Juan had saved, had passed out at some point. Adam was thankful for small favors.

"Okay lets get back to the helicopter and get home." Adam said as they made their way to the vehicle. Janet was still out of it a bit, but at least wasn't needing to be carried. Suddenly Juan launched himself out of Adam's arms and threw his arms around Janet's legs at ankle height. This caused Janet to gasp. She was about to pull away but Juan's tears and anguished voice froze her in place.

"I'm sorry Mommy. Please don't hate me. Don't throw me away!"

Juan began to beat his head against the pavement. Adam made to stop Juan, but Janet waved him off.

"I'm bad. I know it. I'm no good. I'm sorry mommy. Don't get rid of me. I won't let the bad boy out again, just don't hate me!" How he was managing to say this while bashing his face into the pavement was beyond understanding.

Janet knelt. She placed a hand under Juan's face. Her emotions were a jumble. She was feeling horror and fear. She was feeling guilt for her part in the experiments that had done this to these boys. She was feeling rage at the people who had hurt Juan so badly. Juan's head slammed into her hand. She could feel the bones break and she let out a cry of pain. Juan froze instantly at the sound.

"No. MOMMY! I didn't mean too."

"Shhh now mister. You just calm down. Take some deep breaths. I want you to look at me. Right in the eyes, so you know I am telling the truth okay?"

Juan was still breathing raggedly and was struggling to suppress his sobs. It was making him take gulping breaths. Finally he managed to get out a reply.

"Yes Mommy." Juan sounded like a four year old instead of the nine years he had. He looked her in the eyes.

"I am very frightened of you right now, but I want you to know that I still love you. What you did to that man scared me, but when you tried... Well I have never been so frightened in my life."

Juan began to sob again, but his eyes never left Janet's. He could see she was telling the truth and he knew he didn't deserve her love.

"Juan." She gently touched his cheek as she urged him to stand with her.

Logan, Jack, Adam, and the rest could not believe what they were seeing. Logan was terribly angry at Juan and horrified by what had happened. He could not believe that she was reacting like this. The more he thought about it though, the more he felt a compassion for Juan. He seemed like such a tough little prick most of the time. However, he was also a very hurt and scared little boy. Logan decided that his mom had to be the most amazing person in the world. She was so brave. He hoped that he could live up to the example she was setting. Logan's thoughts were generally shared by his companions.

The trip back to the base was solemn and quiet. Janet had held Juan all the way back, while he cried on and off, even held him while Chang splinted her hand, and gave her a shot of pain killer. She had carried him to his pod despite her broken hand, and removed his clothing, then placed him in his bed. She stood up and looked down at Juan.

"Mommy. Will you stay with me?" Juan's eyes found Janet's. This frightened terrified little boy she was seeing was not the same as the one in the parking lot. His eyes were pleading with her. She was certain that Juan was suffering from a "Depersonalization Disorder" at the very least, if not from a full blown case of "Dissociative Identity Disorder." She was in over her head. They needed a fully trained psychologist, or psychiatrist. Someone with a lot of experience working with kids and the more severe types of disorders. If she was going to help Juan she would have to find someone. Her expression softened slightly. She hated to admit it, but she was scared of him. You had to be. He was a killer, but at

the same time he was a scared little boy. She had trouble wrapping her head around it. Somehow he was surviving these two sides in conflict. How do you resolve something like that?

“Of course I will honey,” she responded. She lay down with him, and put her arms around him. She was still terrified by what happened, but her conscience would not allow her to abandon these children. Juan began to relax as she stroked his cheek. Soon he closed his eyes and his breathing became heavy. Suddenly his hand started fumbling around under his pillow. He pulled an enormous handgun from under his pillow. Juan stuck his thumb in his mouth and began to suck it while he cuddled the enormous handgun like a small child would a teddy bear. Janet was shocked. It was both alarming and funny at the same time. Finally Juan fell into a deep sleep. She gently disentangled herself from the boy after carefully moving the muzzle of the gun away from her face.

Adam and Logan were waiting outside of Juan's room with concerned looking faces. Janet put her finger to her lips and winced. Her broken hand had not been attended to yet, except for the temporary splint. Logan and Adam looked at each other and a silent understanding passed between them. Mom was one Hell of a lady. They made their way to the hospital pod. Janet was cradling her broken hand to her chest. For some reason they didn't say a word. They each remained in their own little worlds.

Once they reached the hospital pod it was like a floodgate opened and Janet let it out. She began to sob. It was wrenched from somewhere deep in her soul. Adam and Logan wrapped their arms around her as she shook from the intensity of her sobs. Soon all three were crying. Janet was the first to speak.

“I can't believe how we have ignored Juan's problems. He is such a hurt little boy inside. He doesn't have any idea about how he should act in 'normal' society. I kept telling him to behave like a 'normal' kid and he doesn't even know what that means, because the way he is, is normal to him. It is all he knows, and I ignored it. I failed as his mother.”

Adam and Logan were about to respond when they realized that they weren't alone. Chang and a very scared looking eight year old were staring at them and whispering to each other quietly. Chang had a hand supportively on the boy's shoulder and would gently squeeze the boy's shoulder when he spoke to him.

“Hi Chang,” Janet said as she made her way over to him. The boy looked at them fearfully and gripped Chang's hand tightly with his and pressed himself against the older boy.

“Do you think you can do something about this broken hand son?”

“I will do my best Mother.”

“Can't ask anymore than that. Now who is this little guy that has a death grip on your hand?”

“This is Jamie, Mother. Jamie this is Mother, Adam my brother, and commanding officer, and another brother of mine, Logan who is our intelligence officer.” The boy jerked his head and looked up at Chang. He saw sincerity in Chang's eyes. He trusted Chang. So if Chang trusted these people, that was good enough for him.

“Hi everyone,” was all Jamie could get out. He was still somewhat in shock.

"Jamie, could you release my hand so that I may look at Mother's injury?" Jamie looked back and forth from his death grip on Chang's hand and the three newcomers.

"You may stay at my side and assist me." Jamie's body relaxed visibly when Chang said this. He slowly released Chang's hand.

Once Chang was done tending to Janet's hand, he looked up to the three assembled there. "I am forced to report that we must return to town shortly." He looked over at Jamie and smiled trying to reassure him that everything was alright. "Jamie is very insistent that we help his "family." They are a group of homeless kids that have banded together for mutual protection. I believe that we must invite them to live here if they so wish."

Jamie's head shot around and he looked hard at Chang. "Are... are you serious? You're gonna invite the rest to come out here?"

Adam moved over towards Jamie slowly. He knew the younger boy was still scared after almost getting raped. Having to watch as Juan had his breakdown could not have helped matters either. Adam was being very slow and deliberate in his motions. He squatted down to be on eye level with Jamie.

"If that is what they want then yes. I'm sure you've noticed that things work a bit differently here, so it will take some getting used to, but I promise you, if they come here, we will teach them what they need to know to defend themselves, and just maybe have a better life than they do now."

Jamie locked eyes on Adam, and searched for some type of deception there, but couldn't find any. Finally he nodded, and hugged Adam.

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Janet was walking through the hallway with Jack, Logan, and Adam. She had a lot of things to go over with them. The first one she needed to address was the gun that Juan was sleeping with.

"Adam. Did you know that your little brother sleeps with a gun?"

"If You mean the colt .44 Anaconda that he cuddles with at night, then the answer is yes." Adam was able to suppress his laughter. He knew what was coming next.

"Well, at least tell me that thing is not loaded." Janet said in exasperation.

Adam stopped walking, and looked intently at Janet. "Actually Mom, it is. As Juan would say, what's the use of having a gun if it's not loaded?"

Janet shook her head in disbelief. She just couldn't understand Juan sleeping with a gun, I mean what could be worse than that?!

"Oh God, Jory... PLEASE tell me Jory doesn't cuddle with some sort of explosive!" Janet said emphatically. Adam knew he had to deal with this situation carefully.



“Mom, you know how back in the lab you sometimes told me that it might be necessary to lie to someone... is this one of those times?” Adam asked with an innocent smile.

Both Janet and Jack were stunned into silence, imagining the sight of Jory cuddled up to some type of bomb. It was not a picture that comforted either of them. Suddenly Janet's eyes go wide open. The color drains from her face. Without a word she bolts away. Jack hollers at her to explain, but the only words she seems to be capable of making are, “Jory... little... kids... boom!”

Jack suddenly understood Janet's cryptic words. He experienced a moment of panic, but years of discipline kicked in and he acted. He races toward the little kids pod. If his suspicions proved to be correct something would have to be done quickly and with as little excitement as possible. The thought of a five year old sleeping with a hand grenade was enough to upset his stomach. He had seen what a grenade could do to an adult. He did not want to learn what one could do to a child.

Jory had recently taken all the youngest members under his wing, and was trying to look out for them as much as possible. He really seemed to like, and care for the little kids, and they absolutely adored him. So much so that lately, Jory spent most nights in their rooms, cuddled up with at least one of them

Soon everyone found Janet frantically punching the button for the elevator. We all took the elevator down to the level where the kids slept. They entered the pod and found that the kids were all huddled up in a pile in the center of the common room. Janet was relieved to find that Jory was not in the pod with the kids like usual. Then to Janet's horror she realized that every last one of the little kids including the five year old Kent, were cuddling with teddy bears. Each of the “teddy bears” was holding a grenade in its paws. Janet eyed the “teddy bears” suspiciously, then mouthed her concern to Jack. “Is that what I think it is?” Jack just nodded. The “teddy bears” were molded out of C-4. Janet looked as if she was having a seizure of some kind while she tried to collect her thoughts. She was looking wildly from the kids to Jack and back again. Her panic was interrupted by a comment from the doorway.

“At least I was able to convince him to let me take the detonators off the bears and the grenades he gave to the other kids to sleep with. None of theirs are live.” Adam said this lightly as he turned and walked out of the pod and down the hall, leaving both adults slack jawed.

Once Janet was able to breathe again, she went to Juan's room. She knew that he was really hurting right now. She knew that she was more than a bit scared of him. All this did was make her even more determined to overcome it. She had to if she was going to help the boy, and that was a certainty in her mind.

She quietly crept into Juan's room, and sat down on the edge of the bed. She almost had to laugh at the sight. Juan was still cuddled up to the gun as if it were a little kids teddy bear. She sat there and stroked his forehead for a few hours while she thought about everything that had happened since the day she had gone to work for Dr. Marcus. That was the day she had become part of the Genesis Project. She hadn't known what she was becoming involved in at the time. She felt that because it had been placed in front of her, that she was capable of doing something about it, and that the opportunity had been given to her, and she had chosen to take it, that she must finish what she started. She had made a commitment not only by her words, but by her actions.

She had let those boys call her Mom. As a mom you try to do your best things for your kid. She took this responsibility very seriously. She had always tried to engage Logan and help him to understand things. These boys needed someone to teach them the meaning of social interactions. Things that most

people were being taught when they were one year, two, three... five, etc. were absent from their experience. How was she to deal with stuff that was so basic with these intelligent and precocious children without harming their sense of self esteem. That was her basic rule. She always had tried to make sure that Logan had enough room to screw up and come to her with it. She had always made it about solving the problem and accepting the consequences of your actions. How was this going to work when a screw up could be so deadly? She wasn't sure. Doubt plagued her mind on this subject.

Janet knew she had invited that scared and lonely little boy she had met in the lab on the day she had discovered the true face of "Project Genesis" into her family. Every day she told a story to Adam about Logan it had been reaffirmed. Every time she had shown Adam a picture of Logan it had become that much more concrete. It had only been a matter of time. She had committed herself to help Adam. It was not something that she had done lightly. She intended to be their Mother.

Sometime later, she felt Juan start to stir. Slowly his eyes fluttered open, and he smiled when he saw Janet sitting on the edge of the bed. "Hi Mommy." Juan said. He then seemed to remember about the gun, cursed silently, and shoved it under his pillow.

He was blushing slightly as he looked back at Janet. "Sorry Mom. I know how much you don't like guns."

"Shhh... It's okay Juan, I don't mind. From now on, I just want you to be yourself, and IF you want to learn how other kids act, then I'll try and teach you. But it's up to you, I won't push you to be what you're not. Okay?" She was speaking softly, and saw Juan almost immediately start to tear up.

"Okay Mommy," was all he got out before throwing himself at her in a hug again. A few minutes later Janet convinced him it was time to get up, and that she had other things to attend to. Before she left, she heard him say in a very small voice. "I love you Mommy."

"I love you too my little guy."

Barnholm Children's Home.

It wasn't much but I had ten small shuriken that I usually kept hidden on me somewhere and one Tanto that was in my room also hidden.

If Tom came at me with some of his buddies it would help even the odds a bit.

Kenny immediately came up to us and hugged us asking if I was alright and then the others were there too.

We kept having to reassure them that I was okay and he hadn't hurt me any before they would let us start on dinner.

I think threatening them with not eating did the trick more than anything else.

After dinner we went in and watched TV until Tom showed up to take Toby and Paul for fun and games.

After that we just couldn't bring ourselves to keep having fun and laughing as we thought about the two boys and what fun and games they were going to be doing.

At least now each kid didn't have to do it more than twice a week and usually not more than once.

That was part of the deal, because when I got there they were pretty much all going out every night.

We all waited up till they came back at ten to make sure they were alright before we headed to bed.

Tyler and I slept in the same room so one of us crawling into the other's bed was easy not that any of the kids had a problem with it anyway.

We all had fun together although since Dave was here it was more for fun I thought when we did stuff than what it had been before.

As our hands touched each other that night and then our mouths I was able to forget the problems we all faced and the threat to me and by the time we had that most wonderful of feelings slam into our bodies I didn't care either as I slipped into sleep with Ty snuggled up in my arms to dream of past events.

And then came the nightmare.

I woke up in the middle of the night screaming out in pain, as I remembered that day in the showers. With in a few moments, I had both Tyler and Dave cuddling me, trying to calm me down.

Now I had a dad again and a family but it seemed like every time someone brought it up I would have "The nightmare" as Dave called it for it was never 'a' nightmare but always 'the' nightmare.

"You okay sweetheart?" Dave asked as I came back to the here and now and I simply nodded hugging him tighter.

"I love you Dave" I said softly

"I love you too honey" he replied as I let him go and settled back down with Ty in my arms.

He lent over and kissed both of us goodnight and told us to come get him if we needed him.

After we told him we would he left and I went back to sleep, this time without any memories.

Two hours later my life changed again.

I woke up suddenly knowing something was very, very wrong but at first couldn't figure out what it was.

I stayed real quiet and still as I felt around grabbing my shuriken and tanto from where they were hidden, waiting, waiting and listening.

Then suddenly I heard noises and Dave came running quietly into the room to Jimmy's bed and looking behind him all the while.

He was waking Jimmy up and telling him something urgently when another figure walked into the room.

I couldn't see well in the dark but the figure was small, dressed darkly and there was something glinting in his hand.

At that moment all I could see was dad and that boy from McHenry's Market, again as the figure crept silently up to Dave.

I slid out of bed and onto the floor coming to my knees as I saw the figure raise the knife and suddenly Dave stiffened up as I heard a voice say "Time to die fucker."

## Chapter 19

"Let the kids go." I heard Dave say begging.

"Don't ya worry bout the kids, we'll take good care of them." The figure said.

I threw a shuriken and heard it strike home as the figure suddenly fell back crying "Shit!"

I threw another one as I got to my feet and heard the cry of pain as the figure said, "Son of a bitch, that's my ass"

"Turn around and I'll get the front too." I said as I threw a third striking the girl, for her voice had definitely not been a man's, in the leg as she cried.

As she fell crying "Fuck" I jumped up drawing my tanto from it's sheath and leaping onto her writhing body as I brought it down on her throat.

All movement ceased as I calmly said, "Now whose time is it to die?"

"Yours" she said as I suddenly and very surprisingly went flying backwards through the air.

I rolled and came up just as she was getting to her feet, charging her with a flurry of kicks and jabs. I had gotten my black belt almost a year and a half ago, and had sparred with many different people including a lot of adults, but I have never fought someone like this.

This girl was hitting harder, and moving faster than anyone I had ever seen. I felt several of my punches and kicks connect, but she never even slowed down.

All I knew was that I needed to protect everyone, and couldn't give up. She was good, but I couldn't let her win. I couldn't let her get to the rest of the kids.

I re-doubled my efforts, and felt myself go with everything I had. Punches and kicks were flying faster than most people could see. It wasn't enough.

I felt several connect and then she decked me sending me sailing once again with an "Ooomph" as I crashed into the wall and lay stunned with tears running down my face and my head ringing.

Shit that hurt.

Dave was walking towards me and the figure started this way just as Dave got to me.

Dave knelt down and cradled me in his arms asking “Are you alright?” but before I could answer him the girl said “Get away from the kid”

Dave turned and got in front of me and said “Leave him alone, take what you want but don’t hurt the kids.”

At that moment Kenny ran into the room crying “Dad!”

“Shit!” The girl said as Kenny ran up to his dad.

I had gotten to my feet and tackled the girl again when Kenny distracted her.

It didn’t take much, a few punches and she tossed me back again. Only this time I didn’t think I could get up. I looked up with tears of anger and pain running down my face.

“Let them go and you can do whatever you want with me.” Dave was saying to the girl as he knelt down by me.

“Oh I’m gonna do what I want with you anyway now move away from the kids.” the girl ordered Dad

“No” both Kenny and I said at the same time.

“Well I suppose I can make the shot from here.” I watched in horror as his arm came up holding some type of gun in it

“NO!” I screamed as I struggled to my feet in front of Dave.

I was swaying and could barely stand not to mention Dave was whispering urgently “What are you doing get behind me,” as he tried to move me out of the way.

Suddenly the light came on to a voice asking. “What the hell is going on in here?”

I was blinded as I heard the girl say. “Trying to get these kids and take care of some trash.”

“Man you look like shit and you’re bleeding all over the place,” the new voice said as my eyes adjusted to a sight I couldn’t believe.

The girl was a little dark haired boy of about nine and the other voice was an older boy of twelve or thirteen, both wearing black outfits with weapons all over them.

“Yeah well this little fuck threw some stars at me when I wasn’t looking,” the younger boy said glaring at me now.

“I’m just sorry I aimed for non-lethal spots” I spat at him.

“Yeah you never should do that” the younger boy said grinning now which for some reason on him scared me even more.

“I’ll remember that” I said which earned me another smile.

“Well, neutralize the primary and let’s get outta here” the older boy said angrily as he turned away.

“Leave him alone you fuckers” I said through clenched teeth.

Shit it hurt, that kid can pack a punch.

The older boy turned back and looked at us and about that time another boy slightly younger came into the room asking “What’s going on?” then saying “Shit that kids hurt and so is Juan”

“I’ll live” the girl, now boy called Juan answered never taking his eyes or gun off of us.

“I’m not so sure about the other kid” the third one said as he pressed something and said “Chang I need you in the third room on the left, two injured, one team member and one non-combatant”

Juan made a snorting noise as that was said and it was my turn to smile at least for a moment.

Shit it hurt.

Dave tried again “Look I don’t know who you are or what you want but please don’t hurt the kids, they haven’t done anything”

The third boy looked surprised for a moment but walked over and said “Hey no one is going to hurt the kids, we’re here to rescue them from you”

“Me?” Dave asked and I could hear the confusion in his voice as he said that.

About that time I felt my legs giving out and I began to fall but Dave caught me saying “Jer! Jeremy!” worriedly as he gently lowered me to the ground in his lap.

“Hey they’re all out, we’re just waiting on you now, so can I blow it up now, can I, can I?” Another kid came into the room asking before stopping and saying “What the hell happened to you Juan?”

“Nothing” Juan said

“It doesn’t look like nothing to me, so can I blow it up now?” the younger boy said.

I don’t think anyone else saw it but I gasped as Juan’s eyes turned yellow. He turned quickly and told the younger boy “I said nothing happened!”

“Okay, okay already, nothing happened then,” the younger boy said smiling impudently giggling as Juan turned back to us with his eyes their normal color muttering “Little kids, jeesh”

“No you can’t blow it up yet” the second boy said into the silence

That was when a fifth boy walked into the room stopping and asking very formally after taking in the scene “What has been occurring in here?”

“If one more person asks that I’m gonna shoot em” Juan said. The new boy raised an eyebrow before replying “That will not be necessary”

The boy walked over looking around and stopped and picked up one of the shuriken examining it briefly before saying “This is not one of ours”

“No it’s mine” I said as he walked up and began looking Juan over reaching down and pulling something from him that caused Juan to yell “Hey be careful back there would ya?”

“It could be worse, it could be the front” the boy replied.

I couldn’t help it as I started giggling at that and even Juan laughed remembering my suggestion although I soon found that laughing wasn’t the brightest of ideas right now.

The boy came over and knelt down just as Dave said “Don’t hurt him please?”

Very properly the boy said “I am Chang and I am a healer. I will not harm the child. Please allow me to examine him”

Dave nodded his head and Chang began poking me here and there finally taking out a bandage and putting it on my head which had been bleeding I realized.

“How did you sustain these injuries may I ask?” he inquired.

I just nodded my head towards Juan.

Chang got a look of surprise on his face as he looked at me and then at Juan before he said “You fought against Juan?”

“Yeah, didn’t win though” I said bitterly.

“You never could although I am surprised at how well you did do by the sight of his injuries” Chang said.

“Yeah next time I’ll put the thing in his throat” I said

Chang actually smiled as he said “That would be most unfortunate to lose a brother in that manner but you will be alright. You have numerous bruises and a concussion but nothing serious.” I could feel Dave relax slightly.

“Now can we go Logan, this op is running a bit long” the second boy said worriedly as he looked at his watch.

Logan looked at us and Dave before saying “Adam bring the grown-up with us”

“No Logan, he’s the on-site target, the last to be mopped up” Adam replied.

“Please don’t hurt my dad” Kenny said as tears ran down his face.

“He’s the only one who gives a damn about any of us and we love him” I said into the stunned silence.

The boy Adam walked over closer to us, staring at us all the while before stopping and asking “Has he ever hurt any of you?”

Both Kenny and I said “NO!” loudly as I added “Dave would never hurt us”

“We have a tape....” Adam started to say while looking at Dave but I interrupted him “That tape was made after they drugged him to keep him from getting help for us.

“And they said they’d kill me if he told” Kenny added.

Adam looked at us for a moment before saying “Take him back to base we’ll sort it out there later”

“Adam?” Juan said turning to look at him.

“Do it,” was all he said before walking out of the room.

Juan mumbled something but not anything I could understand, as he motioned for us to get up.

Logan came over and helped me up and said “I’m Logan and it’s going to be alright now, you guys are safe”

Juan, Logan and Chang led us out to a big military type truck and helped us into the back where all the other kids were and Ty was there right away asking if I was okay or not.

I told him I was and they all were asking what was going on from Dave who didn’t have any answers for them.

Ty told me he had been taking a piss when they grabbed him and couldn’t do anything and I told him it was okay.

Most of all the kids just wanted to be hugged and Dave did a lot of that before Juan made everyone sit down and then the truck started moving.

They took us in the truck for a while then we got another shock as we came to a stop and were led out of it and to a big helicopter that was sitting there waiting.

We took off and flew back to what had been the home and it was there that we could hear that little kid asking “Can I? Can I?” again only this time Adam said “Yes” with the boy replying “Finally” in a completely annoyed tone. Then we were treated to the spectacular explosion of what had been essentially our prison, then we flew off into the night.



If we all weren't so scared it would have been fun but we were and it wasn't with some of the little kids crying and I think even some of the bigger ones.

We finally landed and were brought into a cave where people led us to a big room with a bunch of other rooms around it like spokes on a wheel and told us to sleep and they would talk to us in the morning. They all said everything would be okay now and we were safe but I don't think anyone was willing to believe them.

They tried to take Dave away but all the kids started screaming "NO" and crying so they finally left him there with us.

In the end we went into the bedrooms and got mattresses, pillows and blankets and brought them all out to that central room and that is where we slept for the night, together and holding onto one another.

When we woke up the next morning we were all a bit confused about where we were and how we got here until it all came back to us and then we were just scared again.

The first problem is that several boys had been up for a while and really needed to go but none of them wanted to leave the comfort and safety of the others so they were about to burst.

Dave walked to the door and opened it only to be met with a kid holding a big gun who said we had to stay in the room.

"Look, the kids need to go to the bathroom" Dave said.

The boy got a surprised look on his face, then seeing the pile of blankets, pillows and kids on the floor said "Each room has a bathroom in it"

"Thank you" Dave said before shutting the door.

Everyone was already scrambling to said bathrooms before Dave could finish turning around. When he saw that, he started laughing.

I had to admit it was funny to see.

Soon everyone was back and the next thing was "We're hungry" from several kids. That was echoed by most of the others.

Before anything else could be said though there was a knock on the door and everyone got real quiet and all stood behind Dave shuffling nervously as he said "Come in."

A friendly looking woman came in then smiling at us before stopping and frowning "Those boys! They didn't tell you anything did they?" she asked anger in her voice now.

We just shook our heads no.

"Well being boys I would imagine you're all quite hungry so if you'll come with me I'll take you to breakfast and explain things to you." The woman said.

Not one of us moved, we all looked at Dave who was looking at the woman.

“You won’t harm the children?” he asked

She looked shocked for a moment before saying “I am going to kill those brats” and at our shocked looks added “Not yours.”

“May I sit down?” she asked

“It’s your place,” Dave replied warily.

She shook her head and took a seat before saying “Please sit and I’ll explain a little before breakfast... or better yet... Gage!” She called out, and soon the door opened up and the boy who was standing outside popped his head in. She didn’t let him say anything, and as soon as head popped through the door, she said, “call down and have breakfast for eleven starving boys and two adults sent up please.” He smiled at her affectionately and replied with a respectful, “Yes ma’am.”

I liked the interaction. It showed that they cared for each other. I could tell that Dave was thinking the same thing from the look on his face.

She then walked over to the phone, picked it up, and punched in a few buttons. A tone sounded from all the speakers, then her voice could be heard coming through speakers in the ceiling. “Adam Casey...” she said in a not so nice tone of voice, “you and your brothers get your little butts down to pod C-17 right this second... and bring that scrawny boyfriend of yours too.”

A few moments later that “little girl” who had whipped me showed up. He was a bit grumpy when he came through the door. “Mom. I am ready to eat. It’s breakfast time. What you buggin’ us for?” I couldn’t help myself. I chuckled a bit. Juan gave me a stare that I was sure was supposed to intimidate me. I just ignored it like my father had taught me. The woman froze him with a look.

“Juan. Please wait right over there until all your brothers arrive.”

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Juan knew something was wrong. Maybe she was mad at him because he had fought with that boy. It wasn’t his fault. The kid had stabbed him in the butt for crying out loud. How was that his fault. He couldn’t for the life of him figure out what he had done now. He was beginning to panic a little.

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I could tell that, that Juan kid was frightened. It disturbed me. What was she going to do to him? What could be so bad that it would frighten a kid like him? She didn’t look like she was the sort to do terrible things to a kid.

“Well now. How about we start again...” She looked at Dave expecting him to give his name. He looked at her blankly for a moment then realized she was waiting for him to supply a name.

“Uh. Dave. My name is Dave.” I could tell that he was still uncertain about the place, but he seemed to be relaxing a bit.

“Hi Dave. My name is Janet.” She was interrupted by another boy entering the room.

He was someone called she called Will. He too was sent to stand in silence next to Juan.

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Will reached out questioningly to Juan with their bond but only got the mental equivalent of a shrug. So they waited.

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When everyone settled down she continued talking to us. “This compound is a safe haven for children who are abused or have no place else to go”

Everyone was looking at each other but no one said anything as she continued

“I know for a fact that it will take you time to believe that you are safe here, but you are. No one will ever hurt you again that I promise you.”

She was interrupted by the arrival of someone named Chang. He entered the room, said “Morning Mother,” and moved quickly to stand right next to his brothers without another word. It was like someone had told him what was happening before he got there. I didn't see how that was possible.

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Chang had been informed through the bond that Mom was pissed and that he should just come in and stand with them.

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Suddenly Dave's voice cut through the silence. “What is this place and who were those kids who were playing soldier last night?”

“As I said, this is a safe haven for kids who need one, and they weren't playing” she replied.

“But they're kids,” Dave said.

Things were interrupted once again as three more boys came into the room. They all silently joined the “little girl” Juan and the others at the wall by the door. Again it was as if someone had told them what to do before they got to the room. I know. That's impossible, but it really seemed that they knew.

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For their part the bond was working furiously as they tried to figure out why Janet was pissed.

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I saw that the “little girl,” Juan, was getting upset. I was concerned. I wondered what a kid like him had to worry about. That Janet person suddenly went over to him and smiled. I was relieved by what she did. Some part of me wanted him to get it, but the look of panic that had been creeping across his face made me feel for him. She brushed his hair from his face, and lay a hand on his shoulder. She gave a squeeze and she kissed his forehead. Juan visibly relaxed and gave Janet a nervous smile. I relaxed too.

“Yes Dave. They are kids, but they’re more than that, much more. I’ll give you the details later but the Unit who rescued you last night was comprised of genetically engineered children who have been, let’s say, enhanced. The government wanted super soldiers you see, and they were created. Adam escaped and rescued his brothers and they have dedicated themselves to helping other kids who need it. They found out about what was happening to you guys and set up a rescue mission to get you out.” Janet finished this and settled back into her chair again.

Everyone was looking at one another with disbelief and wonder on their faces but then Kenny said, “They tried to kill Dad.”

You could have heard a mouse fart in the silence that followed his declaration.

“Dave is your father?” she asked

“Dave is Dad to all of us,” I said before Kenny could answer.

“You’ve been hurt, are you alright?” she asked sitting up now that she had gotten a good look at me.

“I’ll live, that little kid packs quite a punch” I said

She looked surprised before saying “You fought with one of the kids last night?”

“Yeah, the one they call Juan.” I said

“Juan, is that how he got his bruises?” she asked

The “little girl” Juan just nodded his head which caused Janet to start shaking hers.

“You’re a tough one aren’t you? I mean it. You don’t know how lucky you are son. Juan is one of those kids I was talking about. You know. The ones who are a lot stronger and faster than a normal person. You could have been killed!” She said this with a lot of feeling.

“He was trying to hurt Dave,” I said in reply.

She looked at me for a moment but didn’t say anything.

“Look from what I understand they thought all the adults associated with that home were abusing you and selling you. They did a reconnaissance earlier in the evening and found a....” she said, but then stopped as if unsure how to say what else she wanted to impart.

“A tape showing me having sex with two of the boys” Dave supplied for her.

“Yes” she said looking straight at Dave.

“The day they took that tape they had kidnapped Kenny and drugged me. I woke up the next day and didn’t know it had even happened. That afternoon they brought me, Kenny and all the other children into the living room and showed it to us all. They said it would be distributed to the police if I did anything to cause them problems. They also said Kenny would be killed” Dave told her before reaching into his pants and pulling out his wallet and removing a picture which he handed over to her without saying anything more.

I knew it was the picture of Kenny in the chair with a knife to his throat.

Mark spoke up at this point. “I saw Tom put something in Dave’s soda and Dave was so stoned when we did it, he didn’t even know what was going on.

“You guys have been through a lot, haven’t you. I am sorry that we didn’t take the time to think about how this would be for you. Most of the boys over there on that wall probably don’t understand what I mean, but two of them have been my sons long enough that they should have know better. They should understand that you can’t just grab people and dump them in a room.”

A blond haired kid who looked a lot like Janet turned bright red. The black haired kid standing next to him, with the gray eyes, reached over and took his hand and gave it a squeeze. He was angry. He leveled his gaze at her. Janet looked a bit surprised at the look. I was puzzled. I could not figure out what was going on between them. It looked as if she was saying that he was responsible for everything, and he was disagreeing with her criticism on how he had conducted things. I had to be reading this wrong. There was no way that a kid was in charge. That just didn’t happen... did it?

Janet looked away from the dark haired kid. She then looked at the kids and Dave before she said “I’ll let everyone know what really happened. You have my word on that. It’ll be good to have more adults here. You don’t have any specialized training in anything do you?”

“I’m a teacher, but what’s that got to do with anything?” Dave replied.

“Mom.” The dark haired kid said softly, although I thought he looked like he was about to blow a gasket.

“A teacher?” she asked as she ignored Adam like she hadn’t heard him.

“Yes we moved there so I could take up a position that ended up not materializing. We were almost out of money so I took the job at the home and, well you know the rest” he said.

“Mom. May I have a word with you in the hall?” The kids voice was soft, but it carried authority. He did sound like he was someone in charge. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing.

“Well you’ll be a wonderful addition to this place if you decide to stay that is” she told him, as once again she ignored Adam.

Suddenly breakfast arrived. All conversation ended.

I was hungry. We hadn't eaten since the night before, and we had been up for a while now. The smell of the food was intoxicating. Soon we dug into it. The other boys had all seemed to come back from wherever they had been. I thought it strange. I had thought they would eat with us, but Janet made them stay there while we ate. It kinda upset me. I remembered that the "little girl" Juan had said he was hungry. I felt a bit guilty. Dad had taught me to be good to people, even people I didn't know... or didn't like. But I couldn't really say that I didn't like them. They were kinda cool. I mean they are kids, just like me. I stopped mid bite and found myself staring at Juan's eyes. I was wondering why they had turned yellow a while back, or had I just imagined it. I thought I could almost see that there was a yellow tint in them now.

I raised my hand. I couldn't think of what else to do. I immediately became embarrassed at myself. Janet turned to me and spoke.

"What is it sweetie? Go ahead and ask me."

"Uhm. Janet... sir... I mean Ma'am!" This came out in an embarrassed squeak. I couldn't believe what I had said. I was coming across as a total dork. "I mean. Can't they eat too? I just can't stand eating like this in front of them when they are hungry."

"Well if you really want them to join you, I can have some more food sent up."

"Mom?" The kid said again. The voice was still soft, but now it carried a barely suppressed rage.

"It will have to wait until we have eaten Adam." Janet said this just as softly as he had. Her voice was stone. It expected no argument.

After a few moments Adam's control disappeared. He literally screamed at Janet. "Fine! If you want to criticize my decision making ability you of course may. I will never suggest that you can't. I won't deny that any soldier, no matter how skilled, cannot make mistakes, or have room for improvement. However, let me tell you what I won't accept." Janet made to cut him off, but Adam didn't pay her any heed as he continued on his rant. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

"I will not have my orders questioned in a public setting. I will not have my leadership disrespected in that way." The blond haired boy had gripped Adam's hand as hard as he could. His face had turned white as chalk. It suddenly came together for me. I was sure that I would have put it together earlier, if the night before, had it not been so unsettling. They were boyfriends, and they were also the sons that she had mentioned earlier. It also seemed that he was in charge, at least of something. He was the one who had given the rest orders. He really was in charge. I was floored.

"Let me tell you something else Mom. I did what I do. I am a soldier. It is what I am and what I do. I don't know anything about this stuff!" Then he burst into tears. As he left his foot took the door right off of the frame and slammed it into the wall across the hall when he kicked it. He screamed "Fuck" at the top of his lungs.

The slamming of the door against the wall seemed to bring Janet back to the here and now. "Adam Joseph Casey, get your butt back in here... right now!" Janet's voice was a mix of stunned disbelief, and anger.

The boy walked back in the room, glaring at Janet. They stared at each other for a few moments, then Janet moved to sit down in a chair. "Sit" was all she said, and Adam did, right across from her.

The staring contest went on for a few moments, but then Janet softened up. "Adam, I was not questioning your leadership, or your orders. All I am saying is that you can't just rescue someone and dump them in a room with out saying anything. Don't you realize that?"

I knew that this was a family moment, and I'm sure everyone else did too. No one said anything, but we all followed every word.

"No mom I don't. We rescued them, that's what we do. What did you want us to do? Cuddle them the whole way back?" Adam said totally exasperated.

Janet sighed heavily, and took a few moments to get her thoughts together. "You really don't get it do you? You can't just dump them off. You have to talk to them, you have to let them know what's going on. You have to let them know that their okay!"

Adam just shook his head, I knew he was fighting hard to fight back tears. I really couldn't believe that these kids didn't know things this basic. But then I remembered that Janet had said they grew up in a lab. It all made so much more sense now. Janet and Adam's conversation turned into a whispered conversation, and soon Adam moved over and hugged Janet. He had tears in his eyes, as he stood, looked to the other boys who were still standing there, and then left.

I turned my head and looked at the other boys. They all looked just as upset as Adam had been moments before. Their faces held a very similar look, but their eyes had a distant, unfocused look to them. After a bit they seemed to regain their senses. They all left without saying a word.

The blond haired boy locked eyes with his mother for a few seconds, then shook his head and turned to leave. "Logan?" She called to him, making him turn around.

"Don't Mom, your were wrong on this one." With that he turned and left.

They rest of the meal was rather subdued. Everyone finished eating in silence. It was shortly after this that Janet suggested that we tour the base. She had a couple of kids come and take us around. Who could've imagined that a half an hour could totally change your life, but that is just what happened.

It was awesome, they had so much stuff here. When we got to the practice area we found the boy named Chang practicing. I recognized the moves, "Caressing the Ball in Horse Stance, Cloud Hands, and Hit the Tree in Horse Stance." His movements were powerful and fluid. I could tell from just these exercises alone he was very skilled. Suddenly he took a deep breath and moved. It was so fast that I could not follow him. His swords flew in and out of their scabbards. The motion was fluid and flawless. Anyone who had stood in his way would have been shredded. I was glad I had not faced him. I didn't think I had ever seen anyone so skilled before. I couldn't wait to get to the practice area. They had a bunch of martial arts stuff there. It looked like a completely stocked dojo. I had really missed practicing all this time. We moved on after watching the incredible display for a few minutes.

It was during this tour that Dave suddenly stopped and said in a strangled voice "Bill!" I watched as a boy in a wheelchair swung around and stared at Dave. The look of question on his face turned to one of surprise, then shock followed by joy as he cried out.

“Dave! Kenny!” He wheeled himself over to Dave, who ran to him and picked him bodily right up out of the chair before hugging the boy to himself.

Kenny ran to join them and was soon hugging the boy as well. We all stood around kind of shocked. I noticed that the boys who had been with Bill were just as shocked as we were. As Dave was seating Bill back in his chair they got over their shock and joined them. In no time at all everyone was talking all over themselves. Finally the boy named Will said, “So you know this man Bill?”

“Yeah Will, I do” he responded as he smiled up at Dave.

“When I was in the hospital you remember me telling you about the boy in the bed next to me and his father, the one I had wished I could have had for a dad?” Bill could not contain the emotion in his voice.

Will’s eyes got big as he said “This is that man?”

“Yeah, I don’t know how but this is Dave and that’s Kenny” Bill said. Dave finally shook off the shock.

“Bill what are you doing here? How, I mean I thought...” Dave was saying before tapering off into stunned silence.

“You guys aren’t the only ones who got rescued, me and Ronnie did too.” Bill said still grinning.

The next day found Adam and his brothers in town again, this time, hopefully, things would go much smoother than they did the last time. Thankfully things had calmed down between him and Janet, and Adam had promised himself he would start to try and take other people’s feelings and emotions into account when dealing with people he didn’t know.

“It’s just up there on the left.” Jamie said to the assembled kids inside the SUV. Jamie was in the SUV that had Janet driving, Adam sitting up front, Logan, Juan, and Chang in the backseats.

Logan leaned up to whisper in Adam’s ear after Jamie gave them the directions. “If I don’t miss my guess, this is the same warehouse we were coming to look at.” Adam looked back at Logan in shock, then smiled, this almost seemed predestined.

“Right over there,” Jamie said, pointing to a spot next to a rather well maintained Buick. “Oh cool...Grandma and Grandpa are here!” He said all excited, but then noticed the confused looks on everyone’s face. “Well... they’re not really my grandma and grandpa, they kinda adopted us, and take care of us as much as they can.”

Adam just shrugged and got out of the vehicle as soon as it came to a stop. He looked around and noticed that this really wasn’t a bad place, however, he could see many windows that were broken, and a few holes in the walls.

The entire group assembled, and followed Jamie into the Warehouse. They followed Jamie around a few turns, making sure to watch where they were walking, as the floor was littered with broken glass, and other debris. Finally Jamie led them to a center room where there was a group of people. Some of



them were sitting on an old sofa that had definitely seen better days, while others were laying down on old mattresses.

There was a love seat sitting there that was in pretty good condition, and in it were sitting a rather elderly couple. They were sitting there talking to the other kids in the room. Adam saw six other kids in the room, and of course the older black couple.

All conversation stopped as Jamie led the group into the room. The older couple stood up, and turned to face them. Jamie took off, and ran into the older woman's arms with a cry of "grandma!"

She bent down and enveloped Jamie in big hug while keeping an eye on Adam's group. "Hello Jamie, honey, who are all these people?"

Jamie pulled back from the hug, and looked up at the older woman, "These are people I met today down by the mall. They said they could help us."

Every eye was now focused on Adam and his group, and he knew it was time to take over. "Sir, my name's Adam." He said as he stepped forward and offered his hand to the older man. He took the offered hand and Adam thought that the man had a very strong grip for someone who seemed to be around seventy years old. "Please let me introduce everyone else. Over there is Jackson Bryce, next to him is my adoptive mother Janet Hayes, then there are my adoptive brothers Chang, Juan, William, and Joris, he likes to be called Jory though. Standing next to William is Bill, and his brother Ronnie, and then there is Tommy, next to Ronnie." Adam said, and everyone nodded when he said their names. He turned back to the older man with an expectant look on his face.

"Sam's the name, this here be my wife Martha, over by the sofa you got Pedro Montoya and his brother Hector, and Phil Becker. Over by the bed there Lynn Masters, and her son Lincoln, and you already seem to know Jamie Rorack." The man said, while pointing to everyone. Adam was shocked when he saw that Lincoln was only about two or three years old. It was kinda odd because the little guy was wearing a ratty shirt with no pants, but he had what looked to be a brand new diaper on. Someone was obviously doing what they could to take care of this boy.

"So what's this 'bout you helpin' the yougun's?" Sam asked in a very deep southern accent.

"Well sir," Adam said remembering in his sociological training that southern men were primarily traditionalist, and as a boy, Adam would be expected to address the man as "sir" unless told otherwise. "We are a part of a group that was set up to help kids in need..." Adam started to say, but was quickly interrupted by Sam.

"Look here boy, I's been a cop on these streets for the last twenty years, and I never heard of no group like that." Adam heard the man say, at the same time the man shifted slightly, and Adam could tell that his hand now rested on the butt of a gun.

"Not only that, but I wanna know why's all of you are packin'." The tension in the room just went through the roof.

Janet stepped forward, not really knowing how bad things were getting. "Sir, I can assure you that none of these boys are armed..."

Sam cut her off with a look and a small grin, "I hate to call ya a liar, but I also spent twenty years in the Navy as Shore Patrol, I know when someone's wearing a gun and when their not."

Janet shot a glare at Adam, as she didn't really think that the boys would be wearing a guns just to come into town. Adam was sure she was about to say something, but Juan interrupted. "Oh yeah?" he said to Sam, and Adam couldn't help but groan.

Juan stepped around Adam, and the older boy was glad to see that Juan had his hands out and away from his side. "If you're really that good, then how many guns do I have on me?" Juan asked, then did a slow spin, while keeping his arms out.

Sam looked him up and down, and when fully turned around and was looking at the man again, Sam said. "Four... and two empty holsters." Sam said. Juan's arms fell to his side, as he let out a disgusted sigh.

"FOUR?!?!?" Janet cried out, as she turned to Juan who was grinning now.

"Well... I woulda brought more, but Adam said I gotta be able to hide them all... and you can't really hide the Barrett Lite Fifty now can ya?" Juan said still grinning in his very childlike way, that for most people would have looked completely innocent... on Juan it just made everyone sure he was up to something.

Janet's mouth was on the floor and the rest of the boys had to stifle a giggle. Sam however, looked less than pleased. "I don't think I even want to know why a boy his age would be even talking about such a gun, let alone be carrying one."

Juan spun around and was about to say something, when Jack stepped in. "Sam, you said you've been a cop here for twenty years?" To which Sam just nodded, still having his hand close to his side. "Do you remember a case about a year and a half ago about a girl named Emily Larson?"

Sam thought for a second, then a look of recognition came over his face. "Yeah, she was reported as being kidnapped, but when the officers looked into it, they found out that she was being prostituted out by her step father for the last few years, and the girl was only fifteen then."

Jack just looked at Sam as the realization hit him. "You mean... your the people that are takin' care of Emily?" Jack just nodded, and Sam let his hand fall from where it was resting, and he moved over to shake Jack's hand. "I heard a lot about you from Beth, she said you guys took in a lot of kids that she couldn't help."

Jack smiled slightly, "we did what we could, but sometimes it wasn't enough."

Sam nodded, "I know what you mean, it seems like it'll never be enough."

Jack agreed with him then turned to Adam. "You see Sam, my partner and I were doing what we could to help those we could, but it wasn't even enough, then Adam came along with his family, and things have really turned around. All the kids there now actually have a future, and some place to call home. It may not be what most people call normal, but I know the kids that were there before Adam got there, and they are all a lot happier, and better off now."

Sam got a confused look on his face, and turned back to Jack. "Jack, I don't mean to question ya like this, but I don't see how one young boy could make that big of a difference."

Jack laughed and said, "Now that, is a LONG story. Lets leave it at the fact that these kids would be better off, and a lot safer with us than here, plus we have the means to provide them with just about anything they want. Between everyone that lives with us, we have a lot of opportunities that you would find very hard to believe."

Sam seemed to consider this for a few moments, then looked back at the other kids. Most of them looked kinda anxious to see this new place, so he turned back to Adam and Jack. "Okay, tell you what, if the kids wanna go, they can go, but I wanna come with, to look this place over... if you don't mind."

Jack was smiling as Sam said this, and nodded. "Of course, but I'll warn you about a few things first. One, your gonna see some pretty strange things, but trust me, it's all on the up and up. And secondly, if you do come to the place where we stay, you may end up not wanting to leave. Of course, I like that idea, cause we could use a few more adults there to keep everyone sane." He said this last part laughingly, and it got a round of "heys!" from the the other kids. Of course that just made everyone laugh harder.

"Give me a minute to talk to everyone would ya Jack?" Sam asked. He didn't wait for a response and the way he asked it had made it sound more a certainty than a question. The kids and the old couple huddled together and talked for a quite a while. Finally they came to a decision. They would all go and try the place out for a while. First Sam and Martha would have to approve the place, and everyone would give it a month. Then if they didn't like it, they would would be free to go somewhere else.

When Sam told Jack of their decision and the requirements the group had he had instantly given his word. Soon, all the kids that lived there were packing there few personal belongings, when Jamie went running off into the back on the warehouse. "Rocky!!!! Come on Rocky, we gotta go!"

Adam looked questioningly over at Sam, who just shook his head with a smile. When Sam noticed Adam looking at him, he grinned even more. "You don't mind pets do you?"

Adam smiled and came back with, "no, not at all... as a matter of fact, Tommy over there has a rather large cat that stays with him. As long as Rocky isn't a dog, we should be okay."

"Nope, Rocky's his cat. Some stray he found about a year ago, Jamie's been stuck on the damned thing ever since." Sam replied chuckling lightly.

"Well, hopefully he'll get along with Fluffy." Adam said still having to laugh at the name Tommy gave to his cat.

About a minute later, Jamie came back holding a big black cat. The cat was just purring away as Jamie was quietly cooing to him, and scratching behind his ears. A few minutes later, everyone had all there things packed, and started to head outside. It took a few minutes to get everything loaded into the back of the pick up truck, and then everyone situated into the vehicles, but finally they were pulling out, and heading to where they have the helicopter waiting.

Fifteen minutes later, they were out of town, heading to the rendezvous point, they had four different vehicles with them, and Adam knew they would have to go a little slow as Sam's vehicle couldn't hand-

le the terrain as well as theirs could. Adam had just got off the phone with the base, and they were already preparing rooms for the new group. He was told that everyone would be waiting to see the new group.

Finally they made it the landing zone, and all the new kids were out and staring at the Chinook in awe. "Are we actually gonna fly in that thing?" Hector asked as he walked around it.

"Yup," Will said as he walked up to him. Bill was already lowering the back ramp, and then was going to start to pre-flight from the inside. "Tell you what... you like helicopters?" Will asked, and the older Latino boy smiled and nodded. "Yeah, dad used to have one before he died, he used to take Pedro and I up in it sometimes. I always wanted to fly again." Will saw the familiar look in the boy's eyes, and knew that he might have another pilot here.

"Okay, how about this, why don't you help me do the pre-flight out here, then I'll let you take the co-pilot's seat for the flight back." Will watched the kid stop in mid stride and slowly turn to him with a look of utter disbelief written on his face.

"You mean it? Wait, don't you gotta ask that Jack guy, I mean he's flying this ain't he?" Hector asked while looking over to see Jack talking with Sam and Martha. Will couldn't help but laugh. "Well... not really. You see Jack couldn't fly his way out of a paper bag. Hold on a sec. Jamie!" Will shouted over to Jamie who had just came out of the back of the Chinook after stowing his stuff.

"Yeah Will?" He asked when he jogged up.

"Quick Question for you... Who was flying the helicopter when we came in this time?" Will asked him, and Hector looked expectantly at him.

"Well, you and Bill did." Jamie said with a smile as he saw Hector start to sputter as he looked back and forth between him and Will.

Will for his part just smiled and and turned away. "Come on Hector, I'll show you what to do."

Meanwhile, Sam was talking to Jack. "Well Jack, I'll say this for ya, I wouldn't have pegged you for a fly boy."

Jack got a small smile on his face, and turned to see Will taking on of the new kids. "Well Sam, you know how I said that you'd have to be ready to expect some pretty weird things?"

Both Sam and Martha just nodded, and Jack was only slightly worried about how this would go. "Well... you see... I really don't know how to fly..."

Sam cut him off before he could go on. "You don't?!?! Then who's gonna fly this bucket of bolts?"

"Well, Sam, you remember the boy in the wheelchair?" Jack asked, and as if on cue, the rotors started to turn on the big helicopter. "Well.. he's the one that's gonna fly us outta here?"

Jack watched with just a bit of amusement as Sam and Martha both stared slack jawed at him while the helicopter's rotors continued to turn faster. "Come on, lets get inside and strapped down before the wind kicks up."

Jack started to head into the back of the Chinook, and after a second or two, Sam and Martha joined him in the back. They waited as the kids went around and made sure that the new kids were all strapped in, then Will came up leading Hector. He lead Hector up to the front, helped him get strapped in, then went to the back and strapped in himself.

Lynn was very worried about her little boy, Lincoln was only three right now, and this was going to be a shock for the little guy. She was hoping that this would work out, she didn't want Lincoln growing up on the streets.

When she found out she was pregnant, she had already run away from the foster home she was staying at. She was only thirteen, and the bastard there made it clear the first night what she was expected to do for him. She didn't have anywhere to go really, but she couldn't stand being raped every night, so she left. Of course, she had tried to tell her social worker about it, but was flat out called a liar, so she left.

She met the other kids at the warehouse shortly after she left, and right before she found out she was pregnant, and they accepted her into their group easily. Once Lincoln was born, she was able to find a job working in a local motel, under the table. She made enough money to support herself working there, but not enough to support herself, and Lincoln.

She made the only decision she could. While she could get an apartment, she couldn't afford that and food, diapers, and everything else you need for a baby, so she stayed in the warehouse, dropping every cent she had into making sure Lincoln was as comfortable as possible.

The other kids were great with the baby, and took care of him while she was at work. All the other kids took real good care of him, and it was almost like he was everyone's little boy. He never lacked for love.

Lynn was brought back to the here and now when the helicopter landed, and everyone started to get up. She reached over to the car seat that they had put in here out of Grandpa's car, and unbuckled Lincoln. She had no idea how it happened, but Lincoln had fallen asleep on the ride in, but was waking up as she unbuckled him.

"Where are we mommy?" He asked around a big yawn.

"I'm not really sure baby boy, why don't we go find out." She lifted him out of the seat, and followed everyone else out of the back of the helicopter. She was shocked when she saw that there were a lot of other kids hanging around. Must have been thirty of them waiting just outside a huge cave.

She followed everyone over to the side where Adam was waiting for them. Once everyone was there, he started to introduce all the kids that were already here.

"And last we have my youngest brother, Kent, and his teddy bear." Adam said with a bit of a chuckle.

Kent shyly walked up to Lynn and Lincoln, “hi... ummm... I'm Kent, and this Joey. Umm... well... Ronnie gave him to me when I first got here, so I wouldn't be lonely. And... well... I'd like you to have him now. That way he can make you not lonely too.”

Lynn let Lincoln down to the ground, and Kent offered the teddy bear to him. Kent looked between the teddy bear and Lynn, and she nodded. As soon as she did, he latched onto the big bear with a death grip. Kent smiled, and stepped back.

“Thank you Kent.” Lynn said trying to choke back the tears. Maybe this place wouldn't be too bad.

Several hours later found Adam, Sam, and Jack sitting in the dinning room of the base sipping on coffee. Ronnie was taking the other kids around to show them what was where, as well as getting them settled into their pod. Sam and Martha were assigned their own pod, as they would probably welcome the privacy of it, and Martha was currently working in there to get it ready.

Sam had come to Adam and Jack after the tour and told them that he and Martha had decided to stay here if that was alright. They were both getting bored in their little house, and they still wanted to do some good, so this was the perfect place for them to stay. Of course, Jack and Adam agreed instantly, now, they were just taking a break.

“I still can't believe everything you told me about this place Jack.” Sam said for the hundredth or so time.

“Well Sam, trust me on this one, it took me a long time to believe everything these kids can do.” Jack said laughing as he got a far off look on his face. “Hell I watched them one time find a kid in a foster home in Nevada. All they had to go on was a name, and with in two hours, they knew everything there was to know about the kid. Hell, Logan is so damned good at it, he was even able to tell me what the kid had for dinner that night.”

Sam choked on his coffee for a second, “You're joking... right?”

Jack shook his head. “Not at all, from what he said, he hacked into the credit card records of the people who ran the foster home, and found out that the foster mother usually bought everything for dinner that day. He then got into the stores computers, and figured out what she bought that day.” Jack couldn't help but laugh again as he thought back to that day.

“I'll tell you this much Sam, I was in the Army, and saw lots of guys who thought they were king shit cause they were special forces. I'd put this lot up against any of them any day. What Adam and his brother's are doing here is simply amazing.” Jack said now looking serious.

“Jaaaack!” Adam whined, “we ain't doing all that much.”

“Adam, you still don't really get it do you? Your doing so much more then just teaching these kids how to fight. Most of the kids here had absolutely no self worth, and they weren't really going anywhere with their lives. Most of them would have ended up back on the street cause they didn't know how to do anything other than hide from the bad guys. Not to mention the abuse that almost all of them have been through. Now, they have skills, they feel good about themselves, and they know that they are doing good for other kids.” Jack stopped for a second, and took a sip of his coffee. He could see that Adam still didn't believe that he was saying.

"Sam, when you were in the Navy, did you ever have a Commanding Officer that you would have followed into Hell if he asked?"

Sam smiled reminiscently, "Oh yeah. I would've followed him to the ends of the earth. He was the best commanding officer I ever had."

"Well Adam, every single one of these kids here would do that for you... Hell so would I!" Jack said in total seriousness while holding Adam's eyes.

Adam didn't know what to think. He didn't know what the hell he had done to deserve this, nor did he know if he really wanted that kind of responsibility. He really wished Joe was here to talk to right now.

Sam could tell that Adam was more than a bit uncomfortable right now, so he changed the topic. "I hate to break into this, but I do have one big question."

"Okay?" Adam said thankful for the change in topic.

"Well, I was just wondering HOW it is that you know enough to be in command, and teaching all these kids everything. I mean, no offense. But your what...twelve or something?" Sam asked hoping that he could finally start getting some answers to questions that have been bugging him since he met these kids.

Adam took a deep breath, set his coffee cup down and looked at Sam. "Well Sir, now THAT'S long story." Over the next hour, Adam told Sam everything about the Unit and their creation. Jack interrupted every once in a while with how things came to be at the cave, and Adam ended up with. "And now, your here."

"Riiiiight." Was all Sam could think to reply with. He wasn't really sure if he wanted to believe the story he was just told, but things made more sense now. Suddenly he remembered something a friend of his talked to him about a few weeks ago. "Adam... Jack said that your Logan can find anyone?"

Adam simply nodded, and Sam reached into his wallet and pulled out a picture, looked at it for a second, then handed it over to Adam. "A friend of mine is looking for this kid. He thinks the kid might be in some kind of trouble, and he can't seem to find him. Think you could have your boy friend give it a shot?"

Adam's eyes snapped up when Sam said that. He was sputtering trying to figure out what to say, and Sam just laughed. "Come on now Adam, I see the way the two of you look at each other, and it's easy to tell your in love. Remember, I was in Shore Patrol, I've seen some things that would have curled your toes a bit. Things like that are easy to spot, if you know what your looking for. And don't worry so much, I knew before we even left the warehouse, and if I would have had a problem with it, I wouldn't be here now." Let the kids go

So with that they began their new life. All the kids found their new home and new family. They learned very quickly that this place was one big family. They also found out that most of the kids already there, had come from a situation that was like theirs. They could understand each other. Hell Jeremy even came to like the "little girl" too.

## Chapter 20

Amur Khan sat alone in the “kill” room. His senses were at their most alert. He was in battle mode. He was preparing himself for what must follow. Truth be told he was looking forward to it. There would be a hunt. The people who held them in bondage would die. There would be blood. It was going to be a good day. He grinned, which looked more like a snarl than anything else.

Through the link he had with his brothers, he knew that it was time. It was time to leave this place. He was almost sorry that he had to leave... almost. Slowly he stood up, and gracefully he moved to the door. On the other side of the door was the man that he must kill. No one else mattered to him right now, but his “handler.” He had ceded leadership to him, and now he must take it back. He had never seeded ruler ship to his “handler”, but he had let the man take command, now it was time to take it back. The rest only followed this man because Khan had told them to, now, that would change.

Khan pressed the button that would open the door, and waited. He knew the second he gave the command that all hell would break loose here, and he was concerned. Yes, they were better than those that held them, but it was still going to be a fight. A very short fight if “Father” has not done what he said he would. They would know shortly.

The door opened, and Khan saw his target. He was the man that had trained him, and helped hone his skills till he was nothing more than death on two legs. This would be the fight that once and for all proved that Amur Khan bent knee to no man.

Commander Tulaey looked up and saw Khan walk out of the practice hall, immediately the man knew what was happening. The way that Khan held himself, the snarl on his face, and the way his muscled rippled all told the man exactly what was happening, just as if the boy had told him. No matter what anyone else said, Amur Khan was still just a fifteen year old boy.

Tulaey stood up, and grasped the controller into his hand. He knew what the controller did to Khan, but also knew it was the only thing that would stop him. Khan slowly approached the man, and, even though no words were spoken, a conciseness was reached. They would fight.

Khan winced when the man brought up the controller. If “Father” has not taken them out, this would all be a moot point. He moved forward slowly, he knew that the other man was preparing himself. Tulaey was too good to rely on something else, such as the controller. What the man wasn't going to be prepared for, at least Khan hoped, was just how good Khan was. He had never let the man see just how good he was. Nor had any of the rest of his family. That was the lesson of their leader, their “REAL” leader, and one that they learned easily.

Tulaey pressed the little button on the controller and watched as nothing happened. He was expecting this, even though he was hopeful he was wrong. He knew he had trained Khan well enough, that he would never attack unless the one thing that gave him the undeniable edge was gone. Slowly he put the rifle down onto the table he had been sitting at, and drew his sword. All of his life, Tulaey had preached that when fighting in honorable combat, you never use a gun unless your opponent also had one. If he was going to die on this day, he would die with his honor intact. Khan stopped about ten feet from his teacher, wordlessly he bowed to the man, while bringing his own sword to the fore. Tulaey returned the bow, and with their Honors satisfied, there was nothing left to discuss. The dance was on. The two Samurai's started a dance that was thousands of years old.



Khan came in high and fast, and the swords sparked off of one another as the two battled for supremacy. Khan knew the man had more skill than he did, however, Khan was faster and stronger, and had a few tricks of his own. They were evenly matched to Khan's mind.

Around them the alarms started to go off, and Khan knew that his brothers had felt the combat begin. Now they would have their own enemies to deal with, but Khan had his.

Sparks flew time and time again as the two swords bounced off each other. Tulaey was starting to push him back to the wall, but Khan was not worried. Effortlessly he turned, kicked off the wall, and sailed over the man's head only to land on his feet behind him. The man had spun around, and Khan almost wasn't able to block the attack that came at him. Again the two found themselves in the middle of a very deadly dance.

Tulaey was both concerned and proud at how well his student was doing. He had guessed that this day would come, but the people in charge wouldn't even consider the idea that something could go wrong, and now they would pay for it. Tulaey would be happy to meet his end at the hands of this student, but that did not mean he was going to make it easy for him.

Tulaey fainted left, but swung around to the right, and caught Khan across the left arm, laying him open. Khan roared in pain, but it only made it re-double his attack.

The fighting was fast and furious for several long moments, and Khan knew that he was slowly wearing out the man. This was what he had hoped for, cause truth be told, he now has several cuts all over his body, and didn't know how much longer he could go on like this.

The swords crashed together like thunder rolling across the plains, the sparks like lightning. Both combatants were vaguely aware that they now had people watching them, but neither could spare the second it would take to look and see who.

They both parried, fainted, reposted, and thrust with all they had. Blood was running down both of their bodies in rivers, yet neither one would relent. Only one of them would walk away from this fight alive. Both of them were working hard to strike at the vital areas of their opponents, thus was how the Samurai's fought. Trying hard to disable their opponent so that the killing blow could be made.

Finally Khan gave a mighty roar of anger, and with all his might, he brought his down from a high guard, and Tulaey was barely able to get his sword up in time to parry the blow. It didn't help.

Tulaey sword shattered with the ferocity of the attack. With a swift change of direction, Khan brought his sword back, and thrust it deep into the man's chest. Khan pulled the sword back, and Tulaey slowly sank to his knees, his hands trying in vein to hold the blood inside. "Very good... my student." He managed to cough out as he knelled in front of Khan. "Now... finish it... Let me die with honor."

Khan nodded slightly, raised his sword, and with one strong swing, took the man's head from his body, then slowly, he sank to his knees.

Elsewhere:

Vishnu knelt down next to the slain guard, thankful, yet again for the claws they had given him. Slowly he stood up as more guards rushed around the corner. He gave them a feral grin, and charged. They didn't even have time to raise their weapons as Vishnu slammed into them, and before they hit the ground, all three of them were dead. The little boy wasted no time as he charged off down the corridor, there were others that needed to be rescued. His brother, Kartik, was right next to him by the time they got to where the rest were being held, and it took but a moment for the two of them to kill the guards and get the keys.

It took a bit of time, but finally they had unlocked the last of the rooms that held their family. They then took off and, with the rest following behind them, headed for the exit, and their freedom.

They were almost there, when they were met by a line of guards. Both Vishnu and Kartik took off faster, and slammed into the line of guards, and with in a few seconds, none of the guards were left alive to hamper their escape.

Kartik looked up to Vishnu with a mouth full of gore and grinned at his brother, "Hey, do you think we have time to stop for a snack?" He laughed "nah, we gotta get outta here. Maybe Khan'll let us eat when we get topside."

"COME ON!!!" They both turned and saw Khan standing at the end of the corridor next to the room that held their gear. Soon it would really be time to play.

They all turned at the same time when they heard rapid footsteps coming down the other hallway. If plans worked out, it would be the rest of their family. And it was. At the head of the line was the only adult they really trusted.

"Dad," as he had become called by almost all of them, was a man in his mid thirties, with graying hair, and bright blue eyes. He was carrying a rifle, and smiled broadly when he saw the rest of them. "I don't believe it... it actually worked."

Khan spared him a quick smile as he was getting his gear ready, "Of course it did, Father, you made us, they trained us... what more could we have asked for."

After that, everyone quickly got their gear ready, and into their body armor. They knew they would have to fight their way out of here, and while it would probably not be as bad as it was down here, it was still not going to be easy.

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Ten minutes later, the first group was ready to go up the elevator. It could hold twenty people, but Khan was worried about what they would find up top, so he and his ten brothers went first. The rest

would come up after they did, and hopefully they would all be able to make it to the helicopters and leave.

Khan, once again, was thankful that the military was so big on secrecy as he fitted the specially made helmet on top his head. With his full body armor on, no one could tell what he looked like, and he had to say they looked pretty intimidating with their full armor on, carrying all their weapons. Once the elevator reached the top floor, the brothers all crouched down readying for combat. They were not to be disappointed.

The doors opened up, and immediately the bullets started to fly. The kids body armor were able to handle all the incoming bullets. They all flew out of the elevator, firing as they went, and dropping the troops that were not as well armored as they were.

Within a few moments, they had cleared and secured the room that housed the elevator. He was really hoping that the people here had not alerted the rest of the base as to what was going on. He knew from what "Dad" had said that the base housed over one thousand people including military families, and Khan did not like the idea of having to kill innocent civilians, or even other military personnel that were not involved with what was going on down stairs.

The only good thing was, if the plan Khan came up with worked, they wouldn't have to deal with everyone else. The plan was a simple one, secure the building, and with snipers on the roof, they would keep anyone else from getting close enough. They knew that the helicopters were next door, and with everything going according to plan, they could get them, load them with what they want, and get out, all without much of a problem. Hopefully, the hard part was over.

They waited till the elevator opened up again, and let out the next twenty kids, then started to move and secure the rest of the building. Everything went according to plan, and thanks to the intelligence team, everything that they had wanted was sitting nice and neat in the warehouse attached to the building. Khan had been a bit skeptical when they said that they could modify the orders that the base sent out for equipment, and have it waiting for their escape, but they had done it.

Lining the walls of the ground floor of their building was crate upon crate of military equipment. Khan smiled broadly at it, but didn't hang around long enough to go through it. There would be plenty of time for that later, for now, he had an escape to lead.

Once he was able to look outside, he was presented with something a bit unexpected. He looked around and spotted one of the youngest intelligence team members, and called him over. "What's in those?" He asked the kid, while pointing to four large cargo containers that were stacked side by side outside.

The kid just grinned and slapped Khan on the back. "That there is our computer equipment. We were about to change out the computers here with a major supercomputer. THAT is what is in those containers. We WANT them."

Khan grinned and shook his head. He knew how to use computers, but he never understood the fascination that the Intel kids had with them. But... if they wanted it, and he could give it to them... they would get it.

By the time the last set of kids came up the elevator, they had the building secured, and the snipers in place. He could hear over the radio that was installed in his helmet that everything was going according to plan. The Intel team had reached the control room up here, and were activating their escape plans from there. The plan was to kill power to the base, and turn off all radar and guidance systems, essentially blinding the people in command. Thanks to the body armor that all kids wore, having had passive night vision installed in them, they could see better than the attackers.

Once the lights went out, Khan started to issue the orders to get them out of there. "Helicopter teams, get your birds ready... Grunts, get everything over to the doors to be loaded up. Intel, get your butts down here as soon as your done... Snipers, let me know if anything big starts coming our way... Everyone else, help with moving equipment...I want out of here in ten minutes."

The grunts, helped by the "normal" kids, made short work of moving everything they wanted, into position, and once the helicopters were there, everything started to get loaded up. Khan couldn't help but think again that the Mi-26 was just one big assed helicopter.

They wheeled the helicopter so that the back of it was twenty feet from the doors. That was really closer than they should have been, but for what they needed to do, it would work. The two doors on the back opened wide, while the tail gate lowered to the ground. A few of the kids with guns took up position on either side of the doorway to provide cover while loading took place. It could take a little while to load it up full because of how big the damned thing was. The Mi-26 Halo, is over one hundred and ten feet long, close to twenty seven feet wide, and twenty six and a half feet in height.

They had four of them they were going to take with them. One of them was set up to be a cargo transport, which is the one they were filling up right now. A second one was being topped off with fuel. It was a re-fueling version of the MI-26, and could hold just over thirty seven hundred gallons of fuel.

The third one was set up as an aeronautical ambulance. That one would be loaded up with some cargo, but there wasn't really all that much room for extra cargo. The last one was the one they would all pile into. It could hold around eighty full equipped adult troops, so there shouldn't be much trouble fitting in the eighty some odd that would have to squeeze into it. If everyone made it out alive, they would have one hundred and two people leaving, thankfully they had all the room they needed.

Ten minutes later, Khan ordered the snipers down to the helicopters. With it being the middle of the night here, and the fact that they were in a remote part of the base, he hoped that the explosion they were about to set off would cover their escape.

The Intel kids were setting up a decoy as well. They had made a video of "dad" trying to set off the self destruct on the base while they were trying to escape. If things went perfectly, that will be the last video feed they get from the base. "Dad," bruised and bloody, running into the control room, and activating the self destruct... then "BOOM!!!"

They had to wait as the helicopters got into the air, then they were able to hook up to the large containers on the ground. They were too big to fit inside, but the helicopters were big enough to be able to lift them, and tow them underneath.

They all loaded into the troop transporter after the other three helicopters took off, they flew low to the ground until the were far enough away for the explosion to go off. Khan was handed the detonator by one of the kids, looked around, and met the eyes of all of his family, for just a brief moment, then held

the thing up high so everyone could see. He knew that his radio was being broadcast to the kids flying the other helicopters, so they would hear him as well. "Dad once quoted a movie to me that fits very well here. 'Every man dies... but not every man truly lives'. From this day forward, I vow to you, my family, that we will never live as slaves again, we will never live as "lab experiments" nor will we ever live to please someone else. From now on, we live for ourselves." With his final words, he pressed the button on his detonator, and every single one of them could hear the explosion, even though they were miles away. The explosion, however, was quickly drowned out with the cheers of one hundred and one children.

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Meanwhile, in a cavern complex in Utah...

Adam snuggled down into Logan's arms and sighed. This was the life that he truly wanted. He was with his family in their pod, getting ready to watch some video's that Logan had downloaded off the net. In the room were his brothers, as well as Janet, and all the little ones. Jory has really gotten himself close to the really young kids in the compound lately. Jeremy and Tyler were also snuggled up together on one of the couches next to Bill and Will.

Jory had all the pillows and blankets pulled from his and Juan's rooms, and layed them out on the floor in front of the TV. All the little ones were sprawled out in the massive nest, getting ready for what was to come.

"So Kent, have you decided what were gonna watch tonight?" Janet asked as they had all agreed to let Kent pick out what they were gonna see.

"Yup, sure did Momma Janet. It's called Thunder Cats, and it's totally kewl." He said in youthful exuberance. All the little ones, including Jory, chimed in to voice their enthusiastic agreement on how "kewl" the Thunder Cats were.

Adam knew what they were going to watch, and was kind of excited. He hadn't been able to watch cartoons in the lab, and Logan said that Thunder Cats was one of his all time favorites, so Adam was sure it was going to be good. Truth be told, though, he didn't care what they watched, he just wanted to enjoy time being with his family.

He didn't have to worry about it as minutes later he was wrapped up in a fantasy world where cat people ran around saving the world. More than a few times he was laughing as hard as everyone else was at the antics of some of the characters.

They took a break after the second episode so that the little ones could go to the bathroom, and get more snacks. Right before they were ready to start again, Kent wandered over to Janet. "Mama Janet? Are the Thunder Cats real?"

Janet smiled, reached out and ruffled his hair. "No honey, their just a cartoon." Janet could see the disappointment in his eyes. "Oh, I was hoping I could meet the Thunder Cats someday."

"Come on Kent, we're ready to start!" Jory said, and Kent immediately brightened up and scampered off to be with the other younger kids.

After about two hours of watching the cartoons, Janet stood up from her chair. "Okay guys, I think it's time for the little ones to go to bed."

Of course that got many protests from all the young boys there, even though more than once they had to protest in between yawns. Finally Jory got them all to head to their rooms only after promising to read them a story before bed.

"You know, he really is good with them." Janet said after Jory led the troop of little kids out of the room. They had only been there for about a week, and already they were following him around like the piper. "Now if we could only get him to stop giving out those damned teddy bears he gets." She said with more than a hint of exasperation.

"Mom, I don't know why your so worked up over those bears." Adam said turning to look at her.

Janet looked at Adam like he was insane. "Adam, those teddy bears are BOMBS!"

Adam nodded trying hard to suppress a grin. "Yes Mother they are, but Jory made the C-4 that the teddy bears are made of, and I know they're safe."

"What do you mean Jory made them?" Janet asked, her eyes narrowing to slits. "I thought it was the explosive stuff you were having Logan order in."

This time Adam couldn't help but laugh. "Mom, we haven't had to order any explosives, Jory makes them all. As he says, the military stuff ain't up to his standards. So he makes all his own down in the lab."

Adam wasn't sure if Janet was going to explode, or pass out. She kept going from red faced to pale. Finally she just sank back into her chair. "Oh I give up. You boys are gonna be the death of me."

Chang, showing one of the rare times that he joked with his brothers, walked over, and cuddled up in Janet's lap. "But you still love us... right Mommy?"

Janet just laughed and hugged him to her. Most people didn't really think of Chang as having a sense of humor. He did, he just chose his times very carefully to display it. Most of the time it was only when it would have a very big impact, like this time.

They all settled down again to watch one last movie before they went to bed. This time it was Juan who picked it out. When he asked Logan for a suggestion, Logan had grinned and said simply, "Die Hard." Of course Juan loved the movie.

The helicopters finished the first round of refueling as they were over the high desert of Nevada. So far everything had gone according to plan. It had been just over an hour since they had escaped, and so far no one had noticed them. They were flying low and slow, and avoiding populated areas trying to make sure that they weren't detected.

Khan walked back from the pilots compartment, and sat down on the bench next to one of the youngest kids with them. Alvin was apart of their Intel team, however, of all of them, he was the most reserved and the most skittish. Something Khan had noticed about the Intel team was that they seemed to really have problems if they were separated from their brothers. Khan had seen Alvin and his two closest brothers in action. The three eight year olds made up the Intel Infiltration team, and they were very good at what they did. He remembered a time when they had been on a mission in South America...

They had been ordered to go into a hostile country, rescue some American's being held hostage, and kill everyone else. The orders also stated that they needed to leave no trace of their activities, and to make it all look like an accident. And if possible, they needed to extract some information from the computer systems.

Alvin and the brothers that were on his team went in first to disable their security. Not only had they made it in, and unlocked everything for Khan and his team, but they also made it in with out having to kill anyone. No one even noticed them until they had fulfilled their mission objectives.

The three eight year olds often said that there wasn't a computer system out there that they could not hack into. And so far they haven't come across one that even gave them difficulties. Including the one on the base they were in.

When he sat down next to Alvin, the boy jumped a bit, as his head shot over to see who was sitting next to him. "It's okay Alvin, it's just me." Khan said in a voice as soft as he could while still letting Alvin hear him over the helicopter.

Alvin nodded with a look of relief, "What'da need boss?"

Khan shook his head, "nothin, just seeing how you were doing."

Alvin smiled slightly, and Khan could see the worry in his eyes. "I... I don't know. I mean I should be happy that we got outta there, but... I guess I'm just worried."

Khan patted the little boy's leg and tried to give him a reassuring smile. The boy cuddled up into Khan and both were lost in their own thoughts for a few moments.

Alvin pulled himself away from Khan, and looked at the man sitting directly across from him. "Uncle Tony... do you think our brother is gonna like us?"

Anthony Marcus Jr. sat there trying to figure out exactly how to answer that one. He knew exactly what the little boy was scared of, and knew why. Hell he knew better than they did about who they

were, and why they should be scared. He also had to take a second and think about the dichotomy he was seeing. First off, there was a scared little boy sitting across from him who was worried about whether or not his brother will like him. That wouldn't make him think twice except that the eight year old was wearing full body armor, and carrying a rifle that was almost as big as he was.

“Yeah Alvin, I'm sure you'll worm your way into his heart, just like you did mine.” Tony said with a smile, and could see Alvin relax a little bit. He was definitely a kid that needed a lot of reassurance that people loved him for who he was... genetically engineered experiment and all.

Tony watched Alvin smile, then cuddle back under the huge arm of Khan. He saw the boy close his eyes, and heave a great sigh. Moments later, Tony could tell that Alvin had fallen asleep. How anyone could sleep with all the vibrations, and noise of the helicopter flying was beyond him. He reached down, and picked up the big brief case he had, and opened it up. Inside this case were most of the important documents that outlined project Genesis. He pulled out one folder, and started to look at it for the hundredth or so time. He ran his fingers over the picture of the boy in the folder. Soon he would finally get to meet his nephew.

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“Attention on base, Alert plan Bravo, possible hostiles in bound, report to Bravo battle stations. This is NOT a drill. Repeat, Alert plan Bravo...”

Both Adam and Logan were down in the mess hall getting something to eat for breakfast, when the alert came across the speakers. Before Adam could do anything, Will was speaking to him through their link. *'Adam, Bill and I are up in the Black Hawk, we're about two minutes out from intercept...shit... hold on, getting something across the radio...'*

Adam was already out of his seat and running towards the main cave entrance before Will could finish. He didn't even need to look behind him to know that Logan was right on his heels. They were both really glad to see Janet pass them by while herding the little ones into the mess hall.

If everything went according to plan, Janet and a few of the other adults would be barricading themselves as well as the little ones into the mess hall. That way if anything should go wrong, they can at least try and keep the younger ones safe. That was the biggest problem Adam had with this base. One way in, and only one way out.

*'Adam, they say their friendlies, and to not shoot. Their asking for asylum... they... they say their part of project Genesis.'* The disbelief was clear in Will's voice, and what he said brought Adam up short. So much so, that Logan ran right into the back of him.

“What the... Adam... What's wrong?” Logan asked as he came around and saw the look of shock on Adam's face. It only took a second before Adam's mind snapped back to the here and now.



"Come on... I don't like this." Adam said as he started running again. The whole time Logan could hear him muttering under his breath. He knew that Adam was talking to his brother's, and giving them orders.

"Will, I want you to tell them to land in the canyon we use for target practice. I don't want them anywhere near us till we know exactly who they are. I'll have one of the other pilots bring us the- re. Chang, Jory, meet me in the hanger. Juan get your ass up on the canyon wall and cover us." Adam said all of this while running towards the elevator. Once they got on, he turned to Logan, "I want you in the command center. I want to know the second anything changes. I'll keep you updated. Once we're clear of the base, I want you to close the blast door, and not open it again unless I give the all clear. You remember the code words?"

Adam didn't really need to ask, as he knew Logan had a memory like his, but he needed to make sure that everyone know what they had to do. He gave Logan a quick kiss when the elevator stopped, and then he took off into the hanger.

Logan continued on to the command center, and when he got inside, it was bustling with activity. He came in just in time to hear Billy Collins, his second in command of Intel, giving a report to Jack who also just got there.

"Sirs, we got four helicopters inbound. They look to be Russian design MI-26. From what they've said over the radio they are project Genesis refugees asking for asylum. Viper Lead has intercepted them, and is escorting them to Baker's canyon. Capt Casey is going to meet them out there."

Jack sat down in the main command chair, and nodded, "very good." Logan for his part rushed over to his terminal and quickly pulled up what was known about the Mi-26. Quickly scanning the screen, he was relieved to see that, unless modified, the '26' didn't come equipped with weapons. However, he was surprised by how big the things were. He estimated they could almost fit the Chinook in it's hold.

Logan looked up from his screen to see the camera they had installed in the hanger show that one of the Huey's was taking off with Adam, Chang, and Jory inside. Juan, he could see, took off out of the hanger at a full run, and for a second, Logan was again shocked at how fast these kids could move when they wanted to. He watched as Juan scrambled up the cliff face that was at least one hundred and fifty feet tall in about a minute and a half. It was just simply amazing.

He shook his head to bring him back to the here and now, reached over, and hit the button that would close the blast door, essentially sealing them into the cave. Jack looked over in surprise, but then with a grim look, he nodded.

"Viper Lead to command." Will's voice came over the radio. Adam snatched the radio up just as they got out of the cave entrance, and began to fly to the canyon they were going to meet at. "Go ahead Viper Lead."

"Sir, Unknown aircraft are complying with hand signals, and are in formation to land in Baker's Canyon. They have gone radio silent as per regs, they said. Also I got a look at the pilots... they are kids, and every bird has got a sling on it with some type of cargo container under it... could be more troops in there."

“Copy that Viper Lead, when they land, make sure you stay up to give us cover. Also, tell them to drop the container on the north side, and land on the south side. Only one helicopter is to land. Copy?” Adam said as he was going over in his mind everything that this could mean. ‘were they really friendly, or was this just a trap?’

Adam's helicopter was almost to the canyon when will reported over the radio that the other helicopters were following the instructions exactly. He also heard from Juan that he was in place, and would be ready to cover them should it be needed.

Adam's helicopter turned a corner, and the four new helicopters came into view. “God damn, those are big fuckers.” He heard Jory say, and couldn't help but agree. They watched as the helicopter lowered it's cargo to the ground, then the cables holding it up were released, and the helicopter moved to the other side of the canyon, where they landed.

“Okay, take us down, Will, keep us covered, Juan, let us know if something happens.” Adam said into his mic as the helicopter came in for a landing a short way away from the other helicopter. Adam, Jory, Chang, Donnie and Emily got off the bird and ran over to a spot half way between the helicopters.

Three people disembarked from the MI-26, and jogged over to them. Adam eyes them suspiciously, the first two were kids, one about eleven, the other about seventeen. The third one however, was just a huge person. He, or she, as Adam couldn't tell, was completely covered in body armor, including a helmet.

None of the three had any weapons, as far as Adam could tell, and he was starting to relax a bit. The eleven year old took the lead when they got up to them.

“Captain Adam?” He said and Adam just nodded. All three of them snapped to attention and saluted. They held their salute until Adam saluted back then dropped his hand. Adam thought that this kid looked really familiar. Before Adam could ask what was going on, the boy continued.

“Sir, I am Private First Class Todd, this is Corporal Alex, and Sergeant Amur Khan.” He said as he pointed to the two other people with him. Adam was still curious as to why Amur Khan felt the need to keep his full gear on thought.

“Sir, on behalf on the survivors of Project Genesis, I formally request asylum.”

Adam nodded, “Granted private. Now, tell me something... how many of you are there?”

“Sir, there are one hundred and one Genesis survivors on board, and one doctor, that helped us escape.” Todd said, and everyone could see the pride he had that they had all managed to escape.

Adam though was stunned. 'Over a hundred, I knew there were more, but I never suspected that there were this many.' He looked back at the landed helicopter and saw that there were a lot of kids looking out of the windows and crowded into the door way. He knew that they were all watching what was going on, and he saw a common look of concern on all their faces. They weren't sure what was going on, and he could almost feel that they were worried about if he would accept them. If they were who they claimed to be, then they were family, and Adam would never turn away family.

“Very good private, please return to your helicopter, pick up your load, and follow us back to base. By the way, what's in the container?” Adam asked.

“Sir, the containers are full of equipment, as well as one of the helicopters is a cargo hauler. One of the birds is also set up for re-fueling, and the last one is set up for medical. We all figured you may be able to use it, so we brought it with us. And before you ask, we are positive we were not followed.” Todd said again Adam could tell he was proud of what they had done.

Adam smiled and nodded, “very good, follow us.” Adam watched as they ran back to the helicopter, then turned to everyone else. “Thoughts?”

The rest looked between each other before Emily started. “A hundred?!?! did you guys know there were that many.”

Adam shook his head, “we knew there were well over five hundred that were forced into the project, but we had no way of knowing who survived and who didn't. Logan hasn't been able to find out anything about the project other than that. Most of what we have is just what we THINK is going on.”

Emily shook her head as she looked back at the helicopter. She still couldn't believe that the military would do this kind of thing to children, but the proof was right there in front of her.

“Well lets get back.” Adam said and they all went back to the helicopter. Once they were back up in the air, Adam got in touch with Logan. “Command to base.”

“Go ahead Command.” Jack's voice came over the radio, and Adam could hear the strain and tension in his voice.

“Base, we are heading back to base with the four helicopters. So far everything is going well, however, I think it would be best to keep the base under lock down until we can appraise the situation more fully. Please have the other teams standing by, and keep the blast door shut. Keep an eye on us through the cameras though.”

“Captain, are you sure they should be brought here already?” Jack's voice was full of concern, and Adam took a deep breath.

“Sir, I can't explain it, but I am certain we are not in any danger. That being said, I would be foolish if I were not cautious.”

There was silence for a few tense moments, but finally Jack came back over the radio. “Very well Capt. Please keep us advised of the situation, and we will be monitoring you through the camera.”

Less than ten minutes later, Adam watched as the four helicopters swung in low, settled their load on the ground, dropped the cables, then moved off, only to land on the other side of the canyon.

Soon the final helicopter landed, closer to them with the back facing them. They watched as the doors swung open, and the ramp lowered to the ground. Soon kids were running out of the back of the helicopter, and lining up in front of Adam and his group in inspection style lines.

Adam waited for all of them to get lined up, and then watched as Todd and an adult walked up to him. Adam was still certain he had seen the boy somewhere else, and the man was really starting to look familiar as well, but he couldn't seem to place them.

"Sir, if it would please you, we are ready for your inspection. Also, I would like to introduce the doctor that helped us escape, and has become like a father to us all. Sir, this is Doctor Anthony Marcus, Jr."

Adam's eyes flew open wide, and before he even knew what he was doing he had his gun out and pointed at the man. Dr. Marcus... now he knew why the guy looked familiar... he looked just like the Dr. Marcus that had tortured him back in the lab, only this man was much younger, must have been his son.

"Adam please, I know what my father did to you, and I can't stress enough that I'm not him." The man said trying to remain calm.

"SIR!!! Please... he's never hurt any of us." Todd said emphatically, trying to reason with Adam.

Adam, for his part, was shaking with rage as the memories of his time in the lab came flooding back to him. He struggled with his own inner demons for several moments before he slowly let the gun fall to his side. It would be wrong to blame this man for what his father had done, but that also didn't mean that Adam wouldn't watch him closely.

"Dr. Marcus, please forgive me.." Adam started to say, but the man quickly cut him off.

"No need son, I can only imagine what you had to go through. And I definitely don't hold it against you. Please though, allow me to fix my family name." Dr. Marcus spoke softly, and Adam couldn't help but believe the man was sincere in what he said.

Adam nodded and turned back to Todd. "Okay Private, lets see this group."

Todd started at one end of the line, and Adam was very glad for his photographic memory as there were a lot of kids here. First were the five different strike teams, and Adam quickly noticed a pattern.

"Todd, please tell me if I am right here. These kids were all born in the lab, right?" When Todd nodded in agreement, Adam went on. "They were born in batches too right?"

"Yes Sir" Todd answered, "First were the strike teams leaders, they are all seventeen now. Then come the second in commands, who are all sixteen. Those two groups were male, the next group, who are all fifteen and have been trained for intelligence are all female. The next two groups were born a few months apart and are all now fourteen, half were trained for medical, the other half for tions. The final group born were all females, and are thirteen now. They were trained for heavy weapons and sniper duties." Todd finished and Adam simply nodded. "Very well, please continue." Adam said and they moved on.

"This next group are children that have been recruited from all across the world. If you would like, I will go into details about that later..." Todd paused to see what Adam's decision was, and when Adam nodded he went on.

“They were brought to the Genesis base as the next group to be genetically altered like you were. The Doctors said they finally perfected it, and were ready to try again. All of them have the equivalent of basic training in the military, and have yet to receive any specialized training.” Adam knew he would have to learn more about this program later on, but for now he just let it go with a nod to Todd. He nodded back and started to lead them off to the next group.

“Captain?” Adam turned to Marcus with a questioning look. “Before you get to the next group, I think there is something you need to know.”

Adam was floored by what the Doctor had just told him, and if he didn't see the proof of it right in front of him, he would never have believed it. He knew that this was going to cause a few issues, and would have to be dealt with VERY carefully.

Adam still didn't know exactly how he was going to deal with it, when he was lead to the last group. He put all the concerns about the situation with the previous group out of his mind as he came to the very last group of kids. Every single one of them was wearing full body armor and helmets. Adam did a quick count and saw that there were twelve of these kids all together. He recognized one of them... the biggest one, as Amur Khan just as the kid went to a knee in front of him.

He pulled a knife from his side, and pulling it across his palm, Adam saw blood welling up. “My Blood, My Life, MY Honor are now yours Sir.” Adam heard the kid say, and it was quickly echoed by the other eleven kids.

Adam was momentarily stunned by the display, but he knew exactly what was going on. Twelve people who held strongly to the way of the Samurai, had just sworn fealty to him. Adam clearly remembered the day that Chang had done the same thing, using almost exactly the same words. He knew what he had to do, but there was one question left in his mind.

“I accept your oaths, please, rise, and let me look into the eyes of those who have just sworn to me.” Adam said formally, and watched as Khan got to his feet, slowly the kid reached up and pulled his helmet off his head. There were gasps of shock from all around him, as Adam stared into the face of... a cat.”

## Chapter 21

Adam walked up to the control room still totally at a loss as how to handle the newest twist in his life. After being confronted with the “cat kids” as he has taken to calling them, he still couldn't get the other group out of his head. Yes the cats were going to cause a stir, but would they cause as much of a stir as the Intel team? He really didn't know.

Adam had told Chang to get with Ronnie and get all the new kids rooms split up how ever they wanted to be split up, he had to go talk to Logan. He had been told that the helicopters and those cargo containers were full of equipment for them to use, but he hadn't been able to give that more then a cursory thought, his mind was definitely elsewhere.

He knew that Juan and Jory were staring to go through them, and he also knew that Will was looking at the birds. He also knew that the base was not out of lock down yet. He figured it would be a good idea to introduce the kids here to the new kids all at once, so he had told Logan to make an announcement

that everything was under control, but they didn't want people to leave their stations yet. That also meant that Janet wouldn't run into the Intel team yet. Emily and Donnie were escorting them to the main conference room while Adam went to get Logan so at least everything could be handled away from everyone else.

Adam also had Dr. Marcus on his mind. After all the introductions, Marcus had handing him a large briefcase full of more information on project Genesis. Things that Adam didn't even know, but knew that it was about to turn two people's worlds upside down, and he hated having to do it.

The doors opened onto the control room, and all eyes were on him. Logan could immediately tell something was wrong, but waited for Adam to tell him what was going on. "Jack, can I have a word with you... out here?" Adam said from the door way.

Jack got up from his seat, and made his way to the doorway, where Adam stepped back allowing the older man outside. Once the door was shut, Jack turned to Adam, "okay, what's going on?" He asked Adam.

"There was so much about Project Genesis that we never knew, Jack. We got just over a hundred more kids out there that were part of it, most of the genetically altered in some way or another. Hell there's twelve kids out there that are half cat!" Adam said as he leaned up against a wall.

"WHAT?!?!" Jack exclaimed

"Yeah, half cat. From what I saw, and I may be wrong, but three of them are half tiger, Three are half lion, two jaguar, two cheetah, and two are cougar. But that's not the worst part." Adam said while rubbing the bridge of his nose, trying, in vain, to stave away the head ache that was forming.

"Wait a minute...that's not the worst?!?! What could be worse then that?" Jack said not able to believe that there could be more then that.

"There are thirteen kids out there... their Intel team... they were all cloned. All from the same person." Adam said now looking Jack right in the eyes.

"Who?" Jack asked not really sure if he wanted to know the answer to that question.

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Logan watched Jack walk out the room and was now very curious as to what was going on. They had been able to see much detail about what happened outside, all he knew was that a bunch of kids got out of the helicopters and lined up in a military formation. That made sense if they were actually Genesis kids. He knew that everyone else was watching what was going on closely, so he split his attention between what was going on outside, and the latest project he was working on.

He had heard when Adam reported that all was okay, but to still keep everyone on station for a bit longer, and that Adam was coming up to talk to Jack personally, so Logan just had to wait. He was insanely curious as to what was going on, but knew that he would find out when the time was right.

He looked up as Jack walked back in the room with a strange look on his face. Logan looked over to Adam who was still standing in the doorway. When their eyes met, Adam cocked his head in such a way that Logan knew that he wanted him to follow him. Logan looked to Jack who just nodded before sitting down in his chair in the middle rubbing the bridge of his nose as if trying to get rid of a head ache.

Logan logged out of the system, got up and followed Adam back out of the command room. "What's up?" Logan asked once the doors were shut.

"Logan, we've got a situation to deal with, and I'm not really sure how to handle it." Adam began as they started to walk down the corridor.

"Okay... well tell me what it is, and we'll see if I can't figure it out."

"I... I don't think I can explain it right, so I might as well just show you." Adam said as they reached the door to the conference room.

Adam stopped and turned to face Logan. "Just remember love, we can handle everything together."

"Adam, what's going on?" Logan asked as he locked eyes with Adam.

"Just... well... I think it would be best... umm.... oh hell... I'll just show you. I know you'll have lots of questions, but let's wait for mom to get here first."

Adam leaned forward and gave Logan a quick kiss on the lips, but Logan was starting to get worried. Adam was really beginning to scare him.

Adam broke the kiss, and Logan let him take the lead into the conference room. He stopped dead in his tracks just inside the door, and his jaw rebounded off the floor. Logan stood there shocked as he looked around the room at the thirteen identical faces... thirteen faces identical to his.

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"Mother?" Chang asked from the doorway to the cafeteria. The room was pretty full right now with all the young kids in here, plus the other adults.

Looked up from where she was reading a book to Lincoln, saw Chang, nodded and spoke briefly to Lincoln before setting down on the floor. With a pat on the butt, she sent the little boy on his way. She got up, and walked over to where Chang was still waiting in the doorway.

When she got close enough, Chang spoke in his normally formal tone. "I was asked by Adam to bring you to the conference room."

"Okay, and I suppose you can't tell me what's going on?" Janet said with a slight smile on her face. Of all the boys, she knew that Chang was the only one who she couldn't get any answers out of unless he was willing to give them.

"I am sorry mother, but I was instructed not to discuss this with you yet. Please forgive me." Chang said while turning and leading her away from the cafeteria.

Janet was really starting to wonder what was going on, but knew it had to do with the new kids that just showed up.

They made their way up to the conference room in silence, Janet's thoughts wondering exactly what was going on, but knowing that she would find out soon enough.

Chang knocked on the door, then opened the door, and motioned for Janet to enter. Janet walked in and stopped dead in her tracks. She saw her son, Logan walking towards her, but she couldn't pull her eyes away from the kids that were sitting around the table.

She took a quick count and realized that there fourteen Logan's in the room. Her son was the oldest she saw, but it was like looking at moving pictures of when he was younger.

She closed her eyes tight, and opened them again hoping she was just seeing something, but no luck there. "Mom?" She heard "her" Logan say.

"Ummm... would someone mind explaining to me what's going on?" she said as she moved to a seat and sat down hard. She didn't trust her legs at the moment.

"I think I can explain that," came a voice from down the table and Janet stared in shock again. Standing there was an older version of Logan. Not an exact copy like the other kids were, but definitely related somehow.

"Okay, and who are you?" Janet asked and after looking at Logan knew that he was wondering the same thing.

"My name is Anthony Marcus Jr." the man said and Janet couldn't help but take in a surprised breath.

"I never knew he had any kids... but... I mean how... this doesn't make sense." Janet said not really sure how this man who was Dr. Marcus's son could look so much like Logan.

"The explanation is not going to be an easy one for either of you to handle." The man said as Logan sat down next to Janet and Adam next to him.

Dr. Marcus got up and handed Janet, Logan, and Adam folders that all had Project Genesis on the front of it. He had one himself and opened it up.



"This is the official project history. As you can see, the project started well over one a thousand years ago with selective breeding. The military got wind of it, and took over the project about twenty years ago. That's when they brought my father into the program. See he was actually apart of the project. He was one of the people who was "breed" into the program... so where his children. See Dr. Marcus had two children, obviously me, but he had a daughter as well. One that was raised by another woman."

Anthony stopped there and was looking right at Janet. 'Was he saying what I think he was saying? No... it couldn't be... it makes no sense.' Janet was fighting with her self now.

"Doc, are you saying what I think your saying?" Logan asked after a minute of uncomfortable silence. "Are you saying that mom was actually part of project Genesis?"

"Yes and no." Anthony answered, and everyone stared at him demanding a better answer then that.

"You see, before the Military got a hold of it, there wasn't really a name to it, it was just a selective breeding program, trying to get the best and brightest to have children with others like them. They were trying to breed out undesirable characteristics, and genetic defects. However, what they didn't realize is that there is a certain randomness to genetics that we have yet to figure out, right Janet?"

Janet just nodded her head still trying to take everything in. However, once Anthony started talking genetics, she calmed down, and the doctor side of her took over an what he was saying. "Yes, the one line one of my professors used to always preach is "no matter how much we think we know about genetics, mother nature will still stick her nose in and change things."

Anthony laughed in agreement. "Very true, as a matter of fact, that point is brought home very clearly with the children sitting in this room. See Janet, you were also a part of this project." Janet could do nothing more then blink in surprise. 'How was she a part of it. Could it be that...'

"Janet, I'm sorry to have to tell you like this, but Dr. Marcus was your father."

"How?!?! I mean... how could that be." Janet sputtered. She felt her entire world rocking with those few words. Everything she had always "known" was being changed.

Anthony reached into his brief case, and handed Janet another folder, this one having her name on it. Slowly she leafed through the file, every once in a while having to wipe tears from her eyes. This was more then she could take in right now, but she still had so many questions. Logan beat her to it though.

"So... your saying my mom is Dr. Marcus's daughter?" Logan asked in disbelief.

"Yes Logan that's what I am saying. Which of course also means I am your uncle. I was sure that both you and your mom would have difficulty believe this, which is why I had a complete genetic work up done on my father, myself, and your mother. I am sure by know she is looking at those."

Janet was indeed looking at those, and it was proof, irrefutable proof, that what Anthony was saying was true.

“Okay, but... that still doesn't explain all of this.” Logan said while sweeping his arm indicating the other thirteen boys there. For their part, every single one of them was both nervous and intrigued. They hadn't know all the details either, just that they were all related to Logan.

“Well Logan, you see, the Military doctors, who studied all the records that were kept about the selective breeding program, hypothesized that the culmination of the program would be the “perfect” human. No pre-dispositions to getting ill, pre disposed to be as strong as possible, as fast as possible, and extremely intelligent.” Anthony said while alternating between looking at Janet, Logan and Adam.

“So... your saying that mom was the culmination of this selective breeding project?” Logan asked looking wide eyed.

“No Logan,” Janet said, putting the file down. Logan turned and looked at his mother with wide eyes. “What he is saying is that YOU are the culmination of the project.”

Logan's jaw hit the table, and Adam reached out to take his hand. “How...what... I mean... it can't be... I'm not special.”

“Oh come on babe, you know that's not true. Look at how smart you are. Look at how quickly you picked up on the training. I can tell you for a fact the neither Juan nor I took it easy on you. Hell we were both shocked at how well you did.”

“No... it's can't be... I'm not like you guys.” Logan said still shaking his head. Adam got a somewhat hurt look on his face when Logan said that but he was too far gone to notice the look.

Janet took Logan in her arms, “honey, we're not saying that you were engineered or altered or anything like that. But if this is true, you were the culmination of a selective breeding program.” Janet still didn't fully believe it, nor was she comfortable with it, but the evidence was right there in front of her face, and as much as she may not like it, she had to put her own feeling aside about the matter, and try and help her son through this.

Anthony meanwhile knew that there was one final part to this that needed to be explained, and while it might not be the best time, he thought that it needed to come out now. “Logan, I know this is hard to accept, but there is one more part to this that you need to be aware of.” All eyes were again on Anthony. “See, I'm not too sure about the details here, only what's in the reports, but it was reported that you were reading by the time you were two, and by the age of four, you already were doing complex math problems from a high school grade equivalent.”

Both Logan and Janet were nodding at this point. Janet always knew that Logan was brilliant, but she didn't think that it had really been tapped yet. “Well the military thought that is what would happen, so, right after you were born, they took the umbilical cord, and saved it. When it became clear how smart you were, they tried to duplicate it. They made clones from your DNA. Three different batches of clones to be precise. One set, four of them, were born just over a year after you were. Another set, six this time, were born about a year after the first group, the last group, three of them, are now eight years old.” Anthony stopped there to let that part sink in.

Both Logan and Janet just couldn't help but feel a little bit violated at what they were just told. To learn that your DNA was used to make other people, and never even know about it, that was something that

was just beyond Logan's frame of reference. But then something struck him. Something that really began to make sense in his head.

Since he got in here, he was wondering why the other boys were looking so fear full of him. It was almost like they were afraid of him. Now he could understand why. If all this was true, then he was their father? No, that didn't fit... he would be their older brother.

"What they didn't expect, was that none of the clones were of the same caliber in the intelligence department as you were. They were off the charts on IQ tests, but they never reached the levels you did, Logan. No one could ever explain it, other then to say that mother nature stuck her hand into things." Anthony finished up and sat down.

For a few moments, Logan let everything sink into his head. It made a certain amount of sense, but, he still didn't like it. Logan knew what he had to do as he stood up, and one by one, he went around the room, and took each of his brothers into his arms, welcoming them into his family.

Janet, taking the example of her son, walked up to Anthony. She could see the uneasiness in his eyes, and knew he was afraid of how she would handle everything. She put his fears to risk and she took him into her arms, and whispered softly into his ear, "I guess my dream of having a brother came true."

When she broke the hug, she was greeted with a smile and the beginning of a tear in his eye. She knew she would have to spend some time getting to know this man who was her brother.

Once everyone was settled down, and the tears were dried, Adam went over to the phone, and punched in the code that would bring his announcement to the entire compound. "Attention on base... Stand down from alert status, repeat, you may stand down from alert status. In ten minutes there will be a full briefing in the auditorium, I would ask that everyone on base be there. Again, in ten minutes there will be a full briefing for everyone on the base, please make your way down there as soon as possible. Capt. Adam Casey out."

Adam turned to Logan, smiled and gave him a quick kiss. "I'll meet you down there." Logan returned the kiss, nodded, and smiled as Adam walked out of the room. He turned back to his brothers, smiled, and started to get to know them better.

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Adam walked into the auditorium, still not exactly sure what he was going to tell everyone. Sure, everyone in the base knew about project Genesis, but how much did they really need to know? He figured for right now, and until they had a lot more proof, he would just leave things the way they were.

People were starting to file in, and he was glad to see that the "cats" were already there. That was another thing he wasn't really sure how to take. Up until this point, he hadn't even thought about the possibility that they would try and make something like them... yet here they stand. He was really wondering how they would be taken by the rest of the kids that lived here. Yeah, they were all very accepting of Adam and his brothers when they showed up, even once they found out who, and more impor-

tantly, what they were. But they did still look to be normal humans. Khan and his group did not, nor could they really hide what they were. The rather long tail got in the way.

“OH MY GOD!!!! It's the THUNDER CATS!!!!” Adam heard the shout, and spun around. There, in the doorway, staring open mouthed was his little brother Kent. Adam suddenly remembered Kent's fascination with the cartoon, and had to groan aloud. Kent tried to drag Jory, who had come in with him, over to the cats, but Jory leaned in and had a short, but very animated conversation with the little boy. After a few moments, Jory led Kent off to the seating area.

Finally, everyone was in there, and Adam moved to the podium, and looked out at the assembled group. 'God there's a lot of kids here,' he thought to himself. The entire group quieted down, and Adam began.

“For those of you who have been here for a little while, I'm sure you've noticed that we have a few new additions.” That comment got a few chuckles from the audience, and Adam couldn't help but smile as well. “Okay, more than a few. They have asked for asylum, and we are going to give it to them. They are all refugees from Project Genesis, just like we were. Yes, some of them look strange, but all of you know what they were doing with the Project, so it's understandable.

I already know that some of them have been trained as pilots, and some have been trained for strike teams. What I would like to propose is this, over the next week, the new kids get settled in and figure out how things run around here. Then, I will meet with each one of the kids that don't have a specific job, and see what it is you would like to do. Unfortunately, everyone here has to learn how to do something, it may not be combat, but there are a lot of things that need to be done to support the combat teams.”

Adam took a deep breath and looked around the room, trying to gauge everyone's reactions. No one seemed to have a big problem with it, so he continued. What we need to do now, is everyone that is available, needs to head outside. When they came, the new kids decided to bring us some presents, so we need to go see what they brought us.” Adam said with a big grin, and that got everyone's attention. Soon the room erupted with questions about what was in the helicopters.

Adam was really glad to see that the kids that had been here for a while, immediately went over and introduced themselves to the new kids. Of course, Kent immediately went over and started talking to the cats. He was very insistent that they were the real thunder cats.

After a while of getting to know each other, everyone moved outside. There were many different people that marveled that the size of the helicopters. Adam knew about this style of helicopter, but never really thought he would see the monster. The thing had pretty much the same cargo capacity as the C-130 cargo plane.

He was just standing there staring at the thing when suddenly Juan came running out of the back of one screaming. “ADAM!!!! You gotta see this shit!” The young boy exclaimed as he dropped the crate he was carrying, literally ripped open the top, and pulled out a shoulder mounted surface to air missile launcher.

The thing looked obscenely huge on the small boy's shoulder, and Adam wondered what would happen if Juan actually tried to fire the damned thing. It would probably make him fly backwards.

He started to walk over to Juan who was excitedly trying to get the loaded, when he heard another cry of excitement. This one came from Logan and it made Adam wonder, as Logan has never really been all that excitable.

“Juan!!! do NOT load that thing!” Adam said as he started over to where Logan was.

“But Adam?!?!?” Juan cried out.

“NO!” Adam said with a smile, knowing that if he let him, Juan would have the thing loaded and would fire it off as soon as he could.

“Oh damn it!” Juan exclaimed as he stomped his foot. “No one lets me have any fun no more!”

Adam was laughing as he reached his boyfriend. “What do ya got Log?”

Logan, who was just staring at what was inside the container he opened up, looked over at Adam, mouth moving, but no sound coming out.

Adam's curiosity was peaked, so he took a peek inside the thing. What he saw inside the container didn't really impress him much. It just looked to Adam to be nothing more than a bunch of computer equipment. It was about that time that one of the youngest of Logan's “brothers,” came up to the two of them.

“Hey Logan, if you like that, you'll love what's in that one!” He said while pointing to a different container. Logan shook his head, and ran over to it. It took him a second to pry open the door but when he did, he took a few steps backwards sputtering. Adam got over there and looked inside. All he saw one large piece of equipment.

Logan finally got his wits about him, and turned to the younger kid. “Ummm... sorry, what's your name again?”

“Alvin.” The younger boy said with a smile.

“Okay Alvin, is that what I think it is?” Logan said, his attention again riveted to what was in the container. Once Alvin started to respond, Adam knew he was well out of his element, they started talking techy, and he was lost by the second word. It only took a minute before Adam had to leave cause he was starting to get a massive headache trying to keep up with Alvin and Logan's conversation.

Will in the mean time, was looking through another one of the helicopters. He was pawing through all the equipment when he found a few things that got his gears spinning. He looked over to Charlie who was there with him. “Hey Charlie... you thinking what I am?”

Charlie, who was in the military as a pilot for a long time, knew exactly what he was thinking. “You really wanna try it? The military never got it to work right.”

Will just grinned and nodded his head, very much the kid in a candy store. Charlie just grinned, then shrugged. “Okay, but I have a few thoughts about how to do it better.”

Will nodded, “so do I... I think this'll be fun, and Bill will love it.”

That set the scene for the next few months. Everyone was very busy playing with all there new toys, and Adam was both happy and very frustrated with all the new things going on.

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It had started as soon as Logan had become aware of the equipment that he had available. His mind had started creating. He had the raw equipment, but it required a plan and detailed knowledge of the various types of hardware. Over the next several days Logan ate, drank, and slept with his little brothers.

If you were to open the door to the computer room you would be greeted by deafeningly loud classical music and the sight of Logan and several of his brothers working as hard as they could in front of the computer screen. One of the littlest guys was almost always with him. They had latched on to him, and it seemed that they were afraid to be separated too long. Alvin, Simon, and Theodore had become his shadows.

A funny thing had happened one day when one of the kids from supply had asked them what they wanted to have on the sign for the door to their Intel Room. They had debated it for a good five minutes before Mike Walker had interrupted and suggested the “Spook Room.” They had all stopped and then decided that was it.

Logan had designs that he had been working on for the last several years. The scale and sophistication of the equipment he now had available made it possible for the first time to fully implement what he had created. He had been working on his own operating system and had already deployed it when he first had set up the computer systems on the base. It was designed to do things more efficiently than your standard OS, but the hardware had limited what he was trying to do. Now... Well he would now be able to go in directions that he had not considered before due to lack of equipment. It had been his intent to get into a university such as the Institute, or even the Academy. Hell. He had considered going to both.

The Intelligence Division was undergoing some major changes. Logan had discovered that his brothers had brought 30 high end state of the art mainframe/servers and the makings of a scalable supercomputer network. Well, not just any supercomputer. This supercomputer would be able to do very complex calculations in just minutes, that would take the high end server units weeks to do.

With the help of his new brothers he had found and cleared out a level they had discovered below what they had previously thought was the lowest level of the complex. It was already set up to house a server farm. It had redundant power, it's own backup generators, and was set up for three phase industrial grade power needs. The depth it was at would help the HVAC keep the computer systems cool and make maintaining a suitable temperature easier. It had wonderful air filtration and ionizers to attract dust.

Logan had gone around mumbling under his breath about the discovery. He had rewired the entire base, and now had discovered why none of the existing computer networking in the base had worked. All the fiber had been routed through this previously unknown level and had ended in several rows of patch

bays. Nothing had been connected to anything else. If they had found this months ago it would have saved so much work. Poor Adam had been hearing about it almost every time he was with Logan.

One thing that was turning round in Logan's head was that the more they got to know their new home, the more it seemed tailor made for them. It made him suspect something, but he just wasn't sure what. It seemed like he should know, but it would never come to him. When he had mentioned this to Adam he had said that he kinda felt the same way, but could not put a finger on it either. They had both talked with Jack and Janet about this and received about the same response. So Logan pushed the feeling from his mind and got on with the tasks at hand.

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Kent could not get over his fascination with the Cats. He was convinced that they were the "Thunder Cats." He knew that they weren't the "Thunder Cats" from the television series because they were "real Thunder Cats." The youngest kid, Lincoln, would squeal, "Kitty Cats," at the top of his lungs every time he saw one of the cat kids.

The Cats for their part, were amused by this more than anything. The "Cats" had jumped and let out startled noises at first, but once they saw the little three year old they would smile a toothy grin and roar or scream for him. He would clap his hands and do a little dance while continuing to say, "Kitty! Kitty!" Of course this always set Kent off, who would tell the little boy that they were not Kitties, but "Real Thunder Cats."

It was a great relief to everyone. Jack, Janet, Logan, and Adam had discussed this at length with each other as well as the other adults on the base. Adam's brothers assured everyone that they would keep an eye on things. Even Juan had seemed to understand that he needed to watch what was going on with the little guys. It was mainly because he had been hanging out with Jory, and since the little guys were with Jory a lot he had gotten to know them, and he had already become very protective.

When Kahn had been asked about the possibility of one of the cats hurting the little kids because they wouldn't leave them alone he had laughed. "None of my pride would hurt a little one. It would not go well for them if they did, even by accident. It is the job of the Pride to take care of their young." Kahn had gone on to explain that they considered every resident of the base a member of the Pride. Besides, he had told them, he thought it was cute when the Lincoln did his dance and screamed "Kitty" at the top of his lungs.

Jory pretty much spent his time with the little guys. He was every bit as good with them as Jeremy was. Everyone had been a bit worried, but after watching him with the kids for a short period of time, it became obvious that he was very good with them. He kept his eye on them and made sure that whatever they did was safe. Now some people might think that showing a five year old how to make plastic explosives was dangerous, but C-4 is well known for its durability, reliability, and safety. It does not explode even if hit by a bullet, punched, cut, or thrown into a fire. He would stay with them the entire time, and make sure that they only mixed things when he was right there with them. Besides, the only reliable method for detonation of C-4 is to use both heat and pressure to make it explode. That means a detonator or blasting caps are needed, which he would never let the little kids near.

Lynn Masters had felt some trepidation at leaving Lincoln in Jory's hands at first, but after she had watched him with her son, and been assured by first Adam, then Logan, Janet, Jack, and finally Jeremy that Jory was really good with the kids she had relented at bit. After a week of carefully spied on visits, she was even ready to admit that he wasn't just good with them, but that he was great with them. He taught them things and explored with them. He showed them how to do stuff in ways that they could understand. He also seemed to revel in his time with the younger kids. He was getting some of the childhood he had missed out on back, and Lynn was left with the thought that it was very sweet.

The little guys had introduced Jory and Juan to Wile E. Coyote / Road Runner cartoons one day. After much debate, they had gotten all the little guys together and gone out to find road runners. Vishnu had seen them all going outside and decided to follow them at a distance. His curiosity just couldn't leave it alone. He had watched as they had searched all over for something. He was dying to know what it was they were looking for on the plains. Finally he decided that he would need help to figure this out. He called his brother Kartik through their bond and had filled his brother in on what was happening. Once Kartik had been told what was going on he couldn't suppress his curiosity either.

The "Cats" had stalked Jory and crew for the better part of fifteen minutes before Lincoln and Danny Schavers had come upon some large boulder and decided that they needed to check if a roadrunner was hiding in them. Vishnu had jumped on top of the largest of the boulders where he could observe them unseen. Danny had put Lincoln onto his back and begun to climb over some large rocks blocking their path. Vishnu had seen the rattlesnake before it had become aware of the children heading it's way, and he made a silent leap toward the boys. As the boys came over the edge of the ledge where the snake was sunning itself, Vishnu landed and snatched the snake away from Lincoln's face just before it struck him in the cheek. Danny had panicked and fallen backwards down the face of the rock, but before they hit the ground fifteen feet below, Vishnu had let out a scream and then propelled himself to the ground with a powerful thrust from his legs while flinging the snake into the distance. He had caught the boys and set them down on the ground.

Danny had found himself speechless and shaking, however that wasn't a problem for Lincoln. He had simply said, "Kitty," and thrown his arms around Vishnu. The little guy had then hugged the stuffing out of Vishnu who began to purr loudly. Kahn would be proud of him. He had protected the Pride. Soon Kartik arrived followed very closely by Jory and Juan. After everyone had appeared, and Danny had calmed down, everything was explained.

Juan and Jory had moved off to the side with their group of roadrunner hunters, and they had all decided to let Vishnu and Kartik in on the hunt. When the "Cats" told Jory that they didn't know what a roadrunner was or who Wile E. Coyote was, they made for the base immediately to show them the cartoons they had watched earlier.

They had continued their search for roadrunners for several more hours, until Juan and Jory had received a message through their bond from Adam that Lynn was looking for her son. Defeated they had called it a day.

Juan was disgusted. Why couldn't they find a roadrunner? Finally he decided to ask the smartest person he knew. After Logan had stopped laughing when Juan had told him what they were doing, and he had wiped the tears from his eyes, he told him that the only place in Utah that had roadrunners was the extreme southwest of the state.



Juan had screamed his thanks, then he had immediately gone to find Will. He would load up everyone in one of the helicopters and they would head down to Southwest Utah to find a roadrunner. After searching all over the base he finally used his bond to contact him. Will was down in the hanger working on the helicopters. Juan had shaken his head on hearing this. He knew that he should have started there in the first place. Then the image of a middle finger entered his head and Will said clearly, "NO ADMITTANCE, AND YES THIS MEANS YOU!" Juan's eyes had flashed yellow, and he had stalked off in a foul mood to find Jory while muttering all the awful thing he was going to do to Will under his breath.

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Will for his part of the "playing with new toys," had taken all the people that were interested in either flying a helicopter, or working on the ground crew, and had gathered them all in the hanger. "Okay everyone, here's what we got." He started, and then went through and explain the plans that he and Charlie had developed over the last few days. Basically it was turning one of their helicopters into more of a gun ship. The military had tried it, but it hadn't worked out very well. Both Will and Charlie were convinced that they could do better.

"...So for the next little while, if you guys are up to it, we'll be eating, sleeping, and shitting here in the hanger. It's gonna take all of us if we wanna get the modifications done anytime soon, but I guarantee you that by the time we're done, you will know your helicopter, or your job, inside and out. Any questions?"

Will looked around and nothing but excitement in the eyes of everyone there. He knew that this was gonna work out great. But then there came a small voice from the back. "Umm... Will, I'm not sure why I'm here..."

Will smiled as Ray came up looking really confused, as he worked in the kitchens, not on the helicopters.

"Well, you see Ray Ray, your job is simple. No one other then those of us here, are going to be allowed in the hanger till this is done. Not Adam, not Jack, no one. However, we are gonna need to eat. That's where you come in. you gonna be the only one outside of the helicopter people that are allowed in here. Now that also means you gotta keep it a secret. I'm sure Adam'll try to pry this secret out of you. But... you wanna know what'll happen if you tell him?" Will asked, and before the seven year old could answer, Will launched himself at the boy, grabbed him, and started to tickle him mercilessly.

Everyone was laughing hard, and Will didn't let up till the younger boy was begging him to stop. When he did though, Ray had to run off to the bathroom. That sent everyone off laughing again. When he came back out, he was all smiles, but when he got to Will, he popped a salute, "no one will pry the information from me! SIR!" Will returned the salute laughing, then reached down and ruffled the boy hair. This was going to be fun he thought to himself as they all got down to business.

Logan was busily connecting a server rack in the Intel Office. It would be the primary server for Intel and interface with the server farm and supercomputer cluster they were constructing. Several of the kids they had drafted to help them set things up, had asked all sorts of questions. At first it had annoyed Logan and his brothers, but the questions were intelligent, and they sometimes gave them another perspective. Now they listened carefully and tried to answer all question to the best of their ability. Logan and his brothers knew programming and how to make these things work, but the kids helping had shown them the need to make a user interface that even the littlest kids could use.

It had so excited them, that they had cobbled together a user interface that was simple and efficient. You could add and subtract control elements. It was very intuitive. They had enlisted the help of the three five year olds, Kent, Andy, and Paul, to test out it's features. It took the boys little time to be able to get the computer system to do the tasks that Logan and his brothers asked of them. It had been quite a success. Every pod would be equipped with a terminal, and there would be an interface that everyone could use.

Logan for his part was so excited about the great leap his Intelligence Section was making, that he had not heard Adam come up behind him and say hello. Adam had then tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention. Logan hardly responded, and Adam tapped again.

"Logan. I wanted to know when you're coming to bed? I wanna play."

"That's nice Adam." Logan said, his attention still elsewhere.

Adam was somewhat hurt by this. He didn't like being ignored by his lover. "Logan. Are you even paying attention to me?"

"Uh huh." was the monosyllabic response.

Adam was further convinced that Logan was not paying attention to him. "Well a new form of life came out of the shower drain. It looked up at me and said, 'Mama'. Kinda strange huh?"

"Yeah." Logan responded. Adam knew that Logan was totally consumed by his current project. He gave Logan a defeated smile and turned to make his way out of the storage area, when suddenly it had clicked for Logan, and he realized what Adam had said.

"What do you mean a new life form? Oh! I'm sorry Adam. This stuff has me stoked. I. Well this is equipment to make a high end server farm and a supercomputer cluster. I never thought I would get to actually use anything on this level. I mean I have read about what is being done. I have studied the schematics for these very machines and I was thinking about majoring in electrical engineering and minoring in applied mathematics. I always thought I would end up doing my doctorate in Artificial Intelligence. But, I mean, to actually have the equipment to work with. We are setting up an information / computing network that will be the envy of small and large countries alike. We can set up server..."

Adam had looked at his boyfriend's eyes. It wasn't going to happen. He was not going to get a cuddle with his boyfriend tonight. He could tell by the eyes that Logan was all business. He was talking with

his youngest brothers telepathically. Adam knew how distracting this could be at times, especially when you were just beginning to get a handle on it. He felt frustrated. He just wanted to spend some time with Logan, but this was his boyfriend in his element. He knew that he could convince Logan to come with him, but part of him would still be here. Adam sighed. He knew a losing battle when he saw one.

“...So once we get that wired though the fiber network, anyone on the base will be able to connect to the supercomputer and use it to run complex calculations like digital signal processing, discrete Fourier transform calculations at various chirp rates and durations, things like that. We could do proteome folding, flaviviridae anti-virus research, or even perform climate prediction calculations. It could give us the ability to...”

Adam felt his eyes begin to glaze over. Logan was running on a mile a minute about Nodes, FLOPS, peta this and tera that, and giga whats. What in the world was Massive Parallel Computing? This was the boy for whom he had fallen. He is so smart that he doesn't realize that most people can't keep up with him if they tried.

“Uh. Logan. In English please.” Adam said this with a small grin.

Logan looked annoyed for a moment then smiled too. “It means that we would have a computer that the NSA would envy. I mean there are countries and organizations that would literally kill to get equipment like this.”

“Well, why didn't you say so in the first place.” Adam said with a laugh.

“I did.” Was the mumbled response from a blushing Logan.

“Logan.” Adam said this softly and looked him in the eyes. He leaned toward him and gave him a kiss on the lips. They were interrupted by the giggling of an eight year old. Alvin had been watching them for a while, and he could feel how good Adam made his big brother feel. When they had turned their eyes on him he had suddenly felt panicked. He was going to be abandoned. Suddenly Simon and Theodore appeared behind their brother. They all clung to each other. Adam looked questioningly at Logan who mouthed silently, “Give me a moment. I'll explain then.” Adam had smiled and nodded.

“Guys,” Logan began. He was projecting this to them through their bond, but he was also speaking out loud so that Adam could hear as well. “You are my brothers. You will always be my brothers. I haven't known you guys for very long, but I don't know what I'd do if you left me. I mean... Well, that I love you guys. Adam is someone that I love too. He won't make me love you any less, or want to abandon you.”

Silently the little guys communicated with each other, then almost as one they came over to Adam and threw their arms around him and gave him a hug. Adam for his part was a little taken aback. He was still finding it difficult to relate to others outside his immediate family. The awkwardness faded almost immediately when he looked down at the little guys and saw the peaceful looks on their faces while they hugged him with their eye squeezed shut. It hit him from out of nowhere. It was sudden, and certain. These were his love's little brothers, and that made them his little brothers. He felt very protective of them all of a sudden. When his eyes found Logan's, he saw the smile on his face, and that he had tears trickling down his cheeks. Adam was sure that Logan knew what he was feeling.

They had all sat down for a moment and talked. It had been a strange thing for Adam, but something to which he was becoming accustomed. It left him feeling a bit out of sorts though. After he kissed Logan goodbye, which was accompanied by three sets of giggles this time, he went in search of Chang or Kahn. He needed to think, and always found that a good fight helped him to center.

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Adam enter the upper level of the practice room that served as an indoor running track. It ringed the top of the entire practice room and allowed people to run while others used the practice room for exercise or martial arts. He looked down and had found Chang and Kahn using the practice room already. There were already several others watching the battle.

Chang was very deliberately pressing Kahn back. He sliced back and forth going after one vital spot after another. Chang's skill with the blades was outstanding. Kahn was physically much stronger and was trying to use his power to overcome Chang, but it wasn't working. Adam dissected the fight in his mind. He was trying to get inside the heads of the combatants. Battles are won and lost in the mind. The crowd had doubled now. Adam now counted twenty two people on the track with him. His blood was beginning to pump harder. His mind quickly ascertained the best way to attack and remove all the onlookers. He reevaluated as five more persons entered the track. Word about the battle was spreading quickly.

Chang's skill with the blade was outstanding. Adam could see the teachings of Master literally embodied in Chang. The blades were slowly shredding Kahn's clothing and trickles of blood could be seen running down his body. The movements were so fast that Adam was certain that it was just a blur to those watching who were not enhanced.

Suddenly they flew past each other. Kahn used his tail to distract Chang and managed to nick him on the cheek. Chang's response had been so fast that Adam had barely followed the motion. Chang had struck four killing blows with the dull side of his katana, while he struck Kahn a blow to the forehead with the hilt of his wakizashi. Kahn had roared his anger at his defeat.

There were now thirty four people watching. It was more than Adam could stand. Adam vaulted the rail, and made weaponless straight for Chang, who simply turned and allowed his brother to fly past him, but Adam had another idea. He planted a foot and changed direction hard. He brought a kick meant to catch Chang in the chest, but was thwarted when Chang fluidly crossed his arms and shrugged off the attack.

It was all the time that Adam needed. He propelled himself into the air and headed straight for his swords that were still on pegs in the wall. Chang, however, read his intention, and was already blocking his brother's path. Adam was barely able to twist himself around the sword thrusts aimed at him. Kahn had seen the look from Adam as he landed just beyond Chang. He charged, but it had no effect. It had been read. Chang's swords were sheathed in a fluid motion, and he leveled a vicious series of blows at both of his assailants. He drove them both back, and Adam was prevented from reaching his swords.

Jeremy had come into the practice area right as Chang had blocked Adam from reaching his blades. He stopped stunned, and watched from the doorway as Adam and Kahn moved away from Chang and placed themselves on opposite sides of him. They were trying to split Chang's attention. It wasn't working. Chang backed straight for where Adam's swords were on the wall. He lowered his body into a ready position with one blade pointing at Adam and the other at Kahn.

Jeremy was floored. Adam and Kahn had charged Chang. They both outweighed him. Jeremy was sure they would crush him, but it was not how it happened. They had both reached him at the same time only to be met with a flurry of sword strokes and kicks. Kahn met these head on, while Adam who had expected this from his brother had kicked out, then suddenly changed legs and used Chang's wrist to propel himself over Chang in an attempt to reach his swords. Chang had read this and had executed a flip over Kahn's sword attack and nailed Adam on the side of his head with a kick, which sent him sprawling.

Adam for his part had rolled and brought himself upright. Kahn continued to press his attack furiously, he noted that the many of the techniques used were the same as the ones he had learned from Tulaey, only the execution and use of them was far above anything that Kahn had seen or been able to pull off himself. Kahn was also startled at the strength of the blows. Someone Chang's size, even being "enhanced," should not be able to achieve. Kahn let out a deafening roar as he engaged Chang again. They began a back and forth and Kahn began to deliberately drive him away from Adam's weapons.

By this time everyone who did not have an active duty post was watching the battle with rapt attention. A call had gone out over the intercom base wide. "Adam and Kahn are battling with Chang. You gotta see this. It's effing awesome!"

Adam had begun a drunken wobble around the room. He began feinting left and right, up and down. He was using his speed and strength to propel himself around the room in what seemed like a random fashion, but in truth had a plan. Chang was seeing through it though. Every time Adam made for the swords he was blocked.

Jeremy was forced to rethink his belief that he could have taken Juan, even if he had trained everyday. If Juan even approached this level in any way... Well the "little girl" was good. He would leave it at that.

He was pulled from his thoughts as a bleeding Adam charged past him to the wall and removed a pair of swords that belonged to no one in particular from a case right behind Jeremy. His presence had given Adam just enough time get the swords.

Adam had given Jeremy a small smile. They were fast becoming friends, and Adam was happy with the way Jeremy dove into the tasks in front of him. He had begun training him for command and had seen nothing in the boy to make him regret his decision.

Chang, Kahn, and Adam were circling each other slowly. "Now I will have to stop holding back my brothers. I apologize in advance for the pain I will now cause you." Kahn had been about to respond when he noticed the change in Adam's demeanor. It was obvious that he was taking Chang's declaration seriously.

As Adam began to swing the blades around they became a blur. Kahn knew instantly that Adam was someone whose ability with a sword was practically unmatched. He could learn much from these two. He already had in this match. Suddenly Chang and Adam flew at each other, but Adam veered off his attack.

"You have learned to avoid that one at last my brother. I am impressed." Chang said this with a serene smile on his face.

Adam gestured to a fresh cut in his thigh and responded, "But I didn't escape getting cut."

Kahn let out a gasp. He had not seen Chang's swords move. How had he cut Adam. Kahn felt something he had not felt in a long time. It was real fear. It was not like he hadn't felt fear going into battle, but this was different. This was someone who could kill him without a doubt. Someone in whom death resided. Well, how did the saying go? Yes. He remembered it now.

Kahn let out another deafening roar and cried out "Today is a good day to die!" Which drew a small smile from both Adam and Chang. With no hesitation he threw himself into the battle again.

It was an impressive display. Those who had seen Kahn in battle before were astonished. He had reached a different level over the course of this fight. This type of battle has been referred to as the 'Dance of Death,' and perhaps a more appropriate name for it has not been found. The movements were fluid, powerful, graceful, and deadly all at the same time.

Blades flashed, hands flew, feet struck powerful blows. Blood was flowing freely from Kahn and Adam after a few moments. Chang on the other hand looked calm and only had some minor cuts, and most of those were already closing up from his enhanced healing ability.

"Regretfully my brothers I must end this most enjoyable workout. I am on duty in 30 minutes and require time to bathe and change into fresh clothing."

Chang sheathed his swords, grabbed Adam's right wrist and twisted, while at the same time he did a split kick which sent Kahn flying into the wall and sent the sword in Adam's left hand flying. Before he had touched the ground he executed a flip and sent Adam flying after Kahn, while he followed straight behind him. He arrived virtually at the moment Adam collided with Kahn, and delivered several elbow / knee combinations to the stunned pair.

Kahn and Adam were lying on the floor with swords on their throats while a trickle of blood flowed from where the point made contact with their skin. No one had seen Chang draw his swords. Gasps and cries of disbelief erupted from the crowd.

"One of these days you are going to make a mistake, and I am going to get you bro," Adam said with a big smile on his face.

"Everyone needs a fantasy my brother," was Chang's serene reply as he left the practice room.

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It was going more smoothly than Logan had thought possible. The existing server nodes and switches had made it so much easier than it would have been otherwise. The biggest time saver was the discovery of building blueprints and wiring diagrams. They now knew the location of every wire, microphone, speaker, and camera on the base which included every room and corridor. What might have been months of work was reduced to a single week. Every room was wired and could have a networked computer or terminal installed with little trouble. Suddenly all the extra wires, conduits, and such that had been so confounding before were explained. He would have to see that every pod had several terminals in them so that everyone could use these computers. The most amazing thing about the new setup was that even if every person on the base had a computer or terminal going full tilt on the network, they would never be able to approach the networks maximum capacity.

Logan and his little brothers had mirrored all the information that was part of Genesis onto the new storage units. Everything had at least two if not three or four redundancies. After they had everything set up they integrated the new system into the existing network pipe. Suddenly Logan was connected via a stolen government satellite link and they had 10,000% or more the computing power at their fingertips than they had a moment before. It was a stunning achievement.

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Adam and Logan were laying in bed one morning. Adam had woken up and looked at Logan's face. He leaned forward a bit and had wrapped his arms around his love and pulled him closer. As he gave Logan a kiss on the lips he caught some movement out of the corner of his eye. He looked up and gave a start as he found himself looking at a younger version of Logan. Adam had pulled back and bumped into something behind him. He reacted before his mind had time to contemplate what had happened. He had jumped out of the bed and pulled Logan with him, and had let out a startled, "What the Fuck?!?"

Logan for his part had come awake and was muttering curses in between his confused questions. On the bed were three terrified little boys. They were clutching each other and shaking violently. Alvin, Simon, and Theodore had snuck into the room and climbed into bed with them. Adam was shocked. He hadn't heard them open the door, then come into the room, climb on the bed, or noticed that they had snuggled up them. Damn they were good!

Logan had immediately jumped back into the bed and scooped his brothers into a hug, but they let out little squeals of fright when Adam had come close. It had stopped him dead in his tracks. Logan was trying to calm them down, and reassure them that everything was alright, and there was nothing to be scared about . It wasn't working.

"Guys. I'm not angry. I'm impressed. Really impressed. You guys are amazing. It was real cool the way you got in here without me sensing it. Wow." Adam said this softly. By the time he had finished he had four sets of eyes glued on him. "What I want to know guys, is how you got in here without waking me?"

The little guys could tell from Logan that Adam was not mad, and really wanted to know how they had done it. Finally Alvin had worked up the courage to answer.

"Uhm. Well first we found the door locked, and you guys were busy. So we obtained a blueprint of the base. Then we found all the different entry points, which in the end turned out to be just one, and we made for the hall again. We went up into the ceiling and climbed into the ventilation shaft and made our way through the shaft until we got to your room. You guys were..." Alvin blushed, and so did both of his brothers. Adam waited expectantly, but nothing more was forthcoming. He noticed that Logan had a distant look on his face and realized that they were speaking mind to mind. Simon and Theodore were staring at Adam fearfully. Logan's face turned scarlet, and suddenly it clicked for Adam. They had waited until they had finished making love and fallen asleep before coming into the room. Now his own face turned scarlet.

“Jeez guys. Just knock on the door next time.” Everyone had blushed even more if that was possible and had giggled.

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Logan was going through the boxes of electronic equipment that had come from the Genesis Base, and had not made it into the new computer complex. They had all sorts of interesting surveillance equipment, computer accessories, and portable Intelligence systems. You could set up a better “Intel Room” in the field in the back of a van, than the one that Logan had before his brothers had arrived. It was equipment that had been only a dream before now. It was more than state of the art. A lot of this was strictly “no such thing” exists type stuff that wasn't going to be available to anyone officially for another ten to twenty years.

Then something had happened that would change everything. As Logan was going through one of several crates marked “Miscellaneous,” with Alvin he had spotted another one that had strange marks on it next to the label. He had pried open the container and then literally yelled at the top of his lungs.

“No effing way. Take a look at this. Is this what I think it is Alvin?”

Alvin for his part, had looked inside the crate and been surprised himself. He was not sure where it had come from. It was not on any of the manifests. None of his brothers were saying it was something that they had procured, and there had been no record of it the files that they had taken with them. It should have concerned him, but he had dismissed it and smiled at his older brother while he nodded that it was indeed what it appeared to be. The guards in the storage room had all run over to see what was happening. They had asked what was wrong.

“Sorry guys. This stuff is just WAY too cool,” was Logan's excited reply.

For the next several days Logan and his brothers were busy getting the equipment they needed from the storage level to where they were setting up the new Intelligence HQ. It was an interesting sight to behold. Watching fourteen “Logans” of various ages run around directing the kids from supply and support was crazy. They were very efficient in what they did. Everything was done with maximum speed and alacrity. Logan had assumed the position of elder brother and leader of this group within days of them arriving on the base.

They almost never spoke when working anymore, at least to each other. Once Logan had discovered that he could communicate mind to mind with the youngest of his brothers through their bond they had chosen to work that way. It wasn't really so surprising. The Intel Squad had worked that way before finding Logan. They had found it the most conducive way to work.

Logan had found that while he had this bond with all his brothers, it was very hard to control. Mostly he just knew where everyone was in some vague way. If you asked him where any of them were he could point right in their direction. Sometimes he could share his thoughts with them, but it was erratic. It was different with the youngest of his siblings. After knowing them for no more than a day, he had found that he was always able to reach out to them and they to him. A deep connection had formed, so



he communicated through Alvin, Simon, or Theodore with the rest of his brothers. Besides, the volume of music that they all seemed to like made speaking out loud in the “Spook Room” a futile gesture. It was an interesting situation.

Logan was sure that the surprise they were planning for everyone would be ready in a week or so. He could not wait to see the shocked looks on everyone's faces when they learned what he had found in that container, and what they had done with it. It was one of his dreams come true. He was so glad that he had found Adam, and that they were doing what they were. He pulled his mind back to the task at hand and asked his brother a question...

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An elderly Asian gentleman, one would guess to be in his fifties, made his way up the hall with the assistance of an intricately carved cane which he leaned on heavily. Passersby did not seem to notice that he was there, and when they did he would smile at them and they would go on their way. Isamu Takamura was lost in his thoughts. This had not been part of his original plans, but then life was like that. He knocked on the door to Adam's office. A voice responded from inside and it made him happy to hear it once again.

“Enter.” Was the one word instruction.

“Hello my student! It is very good to see you again.” Takamura said with a small hint of laughter on his face and in his voice after he opened the door and entered the room.

Adam jumped to his feet and whirled around. He looked at the one man he had respected above all others while he had been a captive of “Project Genesis.” He placed a fist in palm and bowed out of deep respect for the man that had given him the tools to survive his captivity. When he looked up he could not contain his emotions any longer.

“Maser. How? I can't believe. How did you?” Adam composed himself and managed his question at last. “I mean. How did you get here past all the guards?”

Isamu tilted his head and looked at Adam with his eyes like they were looking over the top of a pair of glasses. Adam shook his head at the look and said, “Please have a seat Master and tell me why you're here.” As soon as Isamu was close enough Adam threw his arms around the man and gave him a hug. When he thought about what he was doing he pulled back and stammered an apology.

Isamu wanted to put Adam at ease. He placed a hand on his shoulder and gave a small squeeze. “Don't worry my son. I am very glad to see you too.” Tears had begun to trickle down Adam's cheeks. There were so many things he wanted to ask Master. This was a man who understood him. He smiled warmly at the man's kind face.

“I have come here to seek asylum for twelve people who have traveled with me. They became involved with some people that they would have been better off never knowing. The children have had some

hard times, and it has affected their parents greatly. These are wonderful and intelligent people and I believe they will benefit the children here greatly with their presence.”

Adam responded without a moments hesitation. This was the man who never had lied to him. “Of course they may stay here Master. You only have to ask. Will you be staying long?”

Isamu looked at the boy he had trained. He had been such a hurt child when they had met. “I don't know how long I will stay my son. It depends on circumstances, but I do plan to be here for a while.” They are interrupted by a voice from the doorway.

“Master?!?” Chang said from the doorway. “I am most grateful for the opportunity to see you again.”

“As am I to see you again my son. How goes your path?” Isamu said while he looked at the best pupil he ever had.

“I follow where it leads Master.” Chang said as Isamu made his way over to the boy and gave him a hug. Chang's face broke into a smile, and he literally beamed as he returned the hug. “I have missed you Master. It is good to see you.”

Again Isamu was interrupted as Juan Jory, and Will appeared in the doorway. They had sensed what had occurred through their bond and had raced to greet the only person who had treated them like people when they were in the lab. They all had spoken for a while before they had introduced Isamu to everyone and gone to the hotel where he had left the people he had helped to escape a nasty short life and painful death.

Janet and Jack had asked him all sorts of questions about his involvement with “Project Genesis,” but all he had would say was that they had hired him to train some children in combat and tactics and that he had accepted.

Logan was a bit overwhelmed, because he found himself greeted by someone who, just moments before, had been nothing more than just the larger than life person in stories told by Adam. He had been shocked when Isamu had used his name and told him that it was nice to meet the boy who had stolen his “son's” heart. When he had met the “Cats” he had bowed and said, “It is nice to finally meet you and your Pride at last Kahn.”

Soon accommodations were found for everyone. Isamu found himself staying in the same pod as Sam and Martha Washington. They seemed to take to each other right away. Martha had been in the kitchen baking some sweetbread. Chang had made to introduce their new pod-mate, but Isamu had bowed and introduced himself.

“I am called Isamu Takumura Mrs. Washington. What you and you husband have done for these kids is very special. I am honored to finally meet you.”

“Well now honey, you just call me Martha. It's nice to meet you too. My you sure are a polite one, just like our Chang over there.” She smiled warmly at the man leaning on his cane in front of her as she pointed to a blushing Chang. At that time Sam had walked in and Isamu had turned to face the man. He had extended his hand and taken Sam's in his. After he had warmly pumped it up and down he said.

"My name is Isamu Takumura Mr. Washington. I am told that while I reside here that this will be where I live. That is of course if you will consent to it." Sam looked Isamu up and down with an appraising eye.

"Well now I reckon that you must be alright if the boys there like you. So's I reckon as to how you can stay." Sam smiled warmly at Isamu. He didn't know why, but he was sure this was someone he could trust.

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Kent had discussed his plan with Logan for an hour. He wouldn't let Logan dismiss him. Finally Logan had given in and ordered what the little boy had requested so emphatically. After all, even if the investments he had made hadn't been doing so well, they could afford to spend a small sum like this.

When the shipment had arrived Kent had enlisted the help of Danny Shavers, Jory, and Juan. They had spent an entire day locked inside one of the pods. When Kahn and the other "Cats" had returned to the pod they discovered the trio standing outside the door behind a grinning Ken.

"What brings you here little one." Kahn had gone down to one knee so as to bring himself down closer to the little boy's level. Kent had blushed, and twisted his body around in that terribly cute way that little kids do.

"Well you sees. Since Yous awre weal Thundewr Cats and yous saved Winkuhn 'n all. I thawts thats wes get yous a pwesent!" Kent gasped it all out in one rushed breath in his excitement. Jory opened the door to the common area. Upon entering the "Cats" were confronted with a giant ball of yarn. Kahn had eyed it suspiciously before he asked what it was.

Kartik and Thor had made for the mysterious ball in the middle of the room. It was at least six feet around, and seemed to be made from something that had been wound round and round.

"Suwrprise! It yous ball o' yawn!" Kent had screamed at the top of his lungs unable to contain his exuberance any further.

"What..." Kahn began but was cut off when first Thor and then Kartik had taken a swat and made the ball roll. Kuan Ti's tail had twitched once and he had let out a roar as he launched himself at the ball at the same time as the female "Cats" Aphrodite, and Atemus did. They had collided with the ball and latched onto it with their claw as it rolled around the room. Soon all the cats except for Kahn were attacking the giant ball of yarn. His tail was twitching with excitement, but his dignity would not let him join in the fun.

Kent and Danny were jumping up and down in excitement, while Juan and Jory laughed at the antics of their brothers.

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Logan had looked up from the monitor in the "Spook Room" and had smiled at Adam. "I guess I had nothing to be worried about love."

"I was sure of that hun. Even if they hadn't liked it I am sure that Kahn would have thanked them anyway. I think Kent has found himself a job though. He is going to be the 'Cats' official recreational officer." Adam said right before placing a kiss on Logan's lips to stop his reply. "Lets go to bed." Logan had smiled.

"Now that sounds like fun to me. Daileass? Will you keep an eye on things and let us know if anything pops up?"

"Certainly Logan. You and Adam go and enjoy yourselves." Was the reply of a disembodied voice.

"We should really tell everyone about 'him' in the morning Love," Adam said as he looked into Logan's piercing blue eyes.

"Yeah, you're right. When Master Takamura showed up it kinda threw us a curve ball. I had meant to tell everyone a week ago. It kinda slipped my mind. Well at least we know 'he' isn't going to die now. We'll call a meeting tomorrow and introduce everyone." Both the boys turned back to the room as they exited through the door.

"G'night Daileass." They both said at almost the same time as the lights turned themselves off.

A soft, "Night guys," was the response they received.

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Will was really excited the next day. It had been four months of hard work, but they were finally ready to show off the helicopters, all but one anyways. He had set it up the day before, for Adam, Jack, Janet, and the rest of his brothers to be at the hanger right at noon. After showing off what they had done to the helicopters, it would then be time to take them out and show them the biggest surprise, the modifications they made to Bill's Chinook.

Right on time, the group showed up outside the hanger, and Will was waiting there to meet them. "So," Adam said, "are we finally gonna be able to see what you've been doing these last few months?"

Will just grinned, and opened the door to the hanger. They all walked in, and stopped dead in their tracks. Before them were the three hueys, the four MI-26's, and Will's Black Hawk. Each one of them were painted a gloss black, with a design on them in red. It was a skull and crossbones with golden crossed arrows under the bones. Adam knew that the golden arrows represented special forces, and the design was just cool. He walked up to the closest 26, and read the inscription surrounding the design. "Mourn the Lose of Childhood" was written over the top in an ark, and underneath, read, "Give em Hell Kid."

"KEWL!" Was Juan's reaction, and everyone mirrored his reaction.

“Okay, as I'm sure you know, it's customary to name your helicopter, so the crews of each of the birds gave them a name. Mine got named “Puff” after”Puff the Magic Dragon.

He pointed to the 26's “That one's the troop transport, and named Phantom. The ambulance was named UMAA, which stands for “Unit Medical Aeronautical Ambulance.” That one's named “The Big Gulp,” and obviously is the re-fueler, and the last one, the cargo transporter got named “the Mule.”

Everyone was laughing at the names, but they all fit very well. He then moved over and gave the names for the Huey's, Clifford, Betty, and Bam-Bam.

“Okay Will, is it just me, or is there one missing?” Adam asked as he looked at the spot that the Chinook is usually parked.

Will just grinned, “I'll get to that in a minute. What you need to know is this. We also tweaked the engines a bit. The Chinook got modified to be able to haul a heavier load. Unfortunately, that means it's top speed is greatly reduced. The Huey's for their part, were modified to have a greater top speed, which makes the Huey's and the Chinook roughly equal on speed. The 26 weren't really messed with other than to make it so their ceiling was elevated, since we are in the mountains, their now running with leaner fuel, and can go a bit higher. Other than that, most of the time was spent working on the Chinook. If you'll all come with me to the firing range, we'll show you what we did.”

Everyone then loaded into the jeeps for the ride to the helicopter firing range. When they got there, they saw all the other pilots and the ground crew waiting there for them, but the Chinook wasn't there.

They all off loaded, and looked around. Adam was immediately suspicious as he saw targets set up, and a LOT of them. He knew that normally, the Chinook wasn't armed with anything more than door guns. Before he could ask anything, though, Will was on his radio.

“Viper Lead to Viper one, go ahead with your run.” Will said and everyone could see he was just bouncing with excitement.

“Roger that Viper lead, ETA four-five seconds.” They heard Bill, and all eyes were then riveted on the target area below them. Will was grateful that they were actually on the canyon rim looking down into the range, as that would give them a much better view.

About thirty seconds later, they started to hear the Chinook coming in. As soon as it came into sight, they heard Jack gasp. “No... it's can't be!”

Will just laughed, “Yup, it is.”

Janet looked back and forth between them, and finally said, “WHAT?!”

Jack just breathed out, still in shock. “It's a Guns-A-Go-Go!”

“A what?” Janet asked, but any response was drowned out as the Chinook came charging into the canyon. As soon as it was lined up, Bill opened up with the side mounted twenty millimeter cannons, and the side mounted rocket pods. It totally obliterated the target that Bill was aiming at, he brought the

thing in low, and let the side guns take out the targets all around them. There were five different .50 cal machine guns pointing out, two on each side, and one in the back.

While they were doing that, Bill started rotating around a target below him, going to town with his forward mounted grenade launcher. Everyone just stood there stunned as they “killed” all the targets that were there, then flew off.

Once they were gone, Will looked over to the assembled group. “Well now you got to see a bit of what the new and improved Chinook can do.”

Everyone was still stunned into silence, and Will decided to lay the real kicker on them. “By the way... Bill named the Chinook just like everyone else did, but he decided to name it after the scariest woman he knows. It's called the Janet!”

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Ronnie knocked on Emily and Donnie's room, and waited for an answer. It'd been almost five months since the other Genesis kids had gotten there, and things had been so damn hectic that Ronnie had forgotten something major he had wanted to do before they all came.

“Come in.” Ronnie heard from inside, he opened the door, and walked in to find Donnie working at one of the computer stations, and Emily drying her hair after a shower. “What's up Ronnie?” Donnie asked.

“Well I was wondering if you guys could take me into town.” He said looking at Donnie with pleading eyes.

“What's in town, and why aren't you talking to your brother, he's the one that normally flies people to town.” Donnie said while glancing over to Emily.

“Well, you see... umm... I kinda wanna get something for Bill, and it's a surprise.”

Both Donnie and Emily raised their eyebrows, “Oh, what did you get him?”

A big smile came across Ronnie's face, “it's a helicopter model that he hasn't been able to find, but always wanted. It's a huge replica of the Chinook, and I think he'll love it. See, Bill used to do models all the time, but since he got hurt he hadn't done any. I really think this might be good for him, and make him wanna do models again.” Ronnie said excitedly, and both Donnie and Emily were touched.

They looked at each other for a moment, then Emily nodded. “Sure brat, we'll take you into town.” Donnie had taken to calling all the younger kids “brats,” but they all knew he was doing it lovingly. He wasn't anything like the asshole he was before Adam and his family got here.

“Cool thanks guys, I just gotta go get my money.” Ronnie said as he turned to leave.

Emily called out right before he got to the door. “Ronnie, just how much does this model cost?”

“Well, I already put half down before the cats got here, and then I forgot about it, when I get in there today, I'll need to give them the other half, just over four hundred dollars.” He said as he turned and ran out of the room.

Donnie and Emily stared at each other in shock. “Eight hundred dollars for a model?!?” Donnie said, and Emily just shook her head and got ready to go into town.

It was about seven pm when they finally got into town, and Ronnie was giving them directions on how to get to the hobby shop he needed. Neither one of them had seen Ronnie this excited before, and had heard more about Bill's models then they ever really cared to know, but they both played along with the excited boy.

They got there, and Ronnie went proudly up to the desk, and after paying them the rest of the money, was handed a big box that held the prize he was after. He clutched the box tight to his chest the whole way back to the truck they brought into town, and carefully put it in the back seat.

He had just back out of the truck when he was grabbed from behind and someone slapped a hand over his mouth. He could see Donnie and Emily trying to fight off a group of people, and they were doing a good job of it.

Ronnie bit down on the hand that was covering his mouth, and then kicked backwards right into the shin of the person who grabbed him. He dropped to the ground, spun around, and kicked out right into the guys crotch. Unfortunately, he didn't see the guy come up from behind him. He felt something the smelled really bad cover his nose and mouth, and almost immediately he started to black out. Just before he went unconscious, Ronnie saw Donnie get hit in the back of the head with a base ball bat, and then the guy turned on Emily. After that, everything was black.

## Chapter 22

Adam watched as the large jet came in for a landing, then taxied over to the private hanger that Logan had arranged for this meeting. Everyone was really wondering who this guy was, and how they could possibly help with finding Ronnie. The last set of people that arrived were right now getting their things loaded into the vehicles, and getting some refreshments from their plane ride, and now they were waiting for the other guy.

It really surprised Adam when he found out how quick this guy could get here, but it worked out fine as they were already coming here today. Adam really was worried about little Ronnie, as they had grown rather close lately. But if this guy could help, then he was all for it.

The plane came to a halt just outside the hanger doors and the door to the plane opened up. Chang and Jory pushed the set of stairs up to the door, and they were just waiting for this guy to come down. Adam was a bit relieved to see that this guy was more to what he thought that an ex military guy should look like. He looked to be in his mid thirties, close cut hair, wearing slacks, a nice shirt, under a black leather jacket, as well as some rather nice, and expensive looking, cowboy boots. It was almost instinctively obvious to Adam, and through their link, he knew that Jory, Chang and Juan knew as well, that this man was wearing a gun under that jacket.

The man started down the Steps, and Adam walked out so that they could meet at the bottom of the steps. Everyone else stayed back, and Janet was confused as to why Jeremy would be hiding behind here if this man was his uncle.

When the man reached the bottom, Adam snapped to attention, and saluted, "Captain Reynolds, Welcome to Salt Lake City. Thank you for coming. I'm Colonel Adam Casey." He then waited for the man to return his salute.

The man returned his salute, and while looking a bit annoyed, he said, "You got me here now what exactly is going on, and how did you get that information you used to bring me here?" Adam was about to reply, but a voice from behind him stopped him and made him turn around.

"Uncle Mike?" Jeremy asked in a small, almost scared voice. He moved around Janet, and stood to her side. Janet, sensing that Jeremy was scared, reached out, and put her arm around his shoulder.

"Jeremy?" Adam heard the man say, and turned back to him just in time to see the man reaching for his gun. Adam quickly stepped back, and he heard Juan cry out "gun!" Before the man could do more then put his hand on his pistol, Adam had already drawn, and flipped the safety off on his pistol. "Sir, I would not advise drawing that weapon. We are not here to hurt you."

Everyone stood there for a second, not really sure where to go from here, when things went from bad to worse. "Maybe y'all don't wanna hurt him none, but I don't got that problem and the first one is gonna be the woman now drop those guns right now." Adam was shocked to see a small hand, holding a big gun, and just a little bit of this person's head in the entry way to the plane. Adam saw right away that the person was wielding a Sig Sauer nine millimeter and he had it pointing steadily at Janet.

Adam was getting reports from the other boys, and every single one of them said the same thing, they could not hit the boy with the way he was positioned.

Then man didn't move an inch, but he spoke up while Adam was getting the report. "Let the boy go and drop your weapons." He said in a tone that brooked no argument. Adam was momentarily stunned, he couldn't understand why this guy would think that they were holding Jeremy against his will.

"Uncle Mike! Adam! No!" Jeremy screamed as he bolted from under Janet's arm and got in between Adam and Mike. Adam immediately lowered his weapon, and he no longer had a clear field of fire.

Jeremy turned to face Mike, and took a hesitant step forward. "Uncle Mike, no, these guys helped me, their friends."

Before Jeremy could say anything else, everyone heard a voice from the side of the hanger. "God DAMNIT Mike, can't I even take a fucking piss with out you starting world war three?"

Everyone looked over to where this new voice came from, in time to see their earlier arrival, walking quickly towards them, trying to pull up his zipper.

Adam heard a small voice, the one attached to the big gun in the plane say in a startled voice, "is that..."



The man that was moving towards them really had made Adam wonder when they first got here. When the man stepped off the plane, he was dressed exactly as he was now, as he came across the hanger. He was wearing a sleeveless T-shirt, with a smiley face, that had a bullet hole and some blood running down, a pair of cut off jean shorts, long free flowing hair, and flip flops.

"He still can't keep it in his pants dad." Adam heard the young voice say again, and then giggles, followed by the man looking up towards the plane, flipping the kid off, and saying, "I heard that you little brat." Which brought a few more giggles.

Adam looked back and saw the kid lower his gun, and Jeremy jump into Mike's arms, wrapping him up in a hug. Adam then holstered his weapon, and stepped back. Giving the two of them some space. He didn't even need to look back to know that everyone else had holstered their weapons.

"Tony?" The man asked in a shocked voice.

"What ya didn't go blind on me did ya?" Tony asked.

Then the kid came bounding down the stairs and jumped into Tony's arms screaming "Uncle Tony!" Adam could now tell that the kid was around ten or eleven, brown hair, and eyes, and an infectious smile.

"Hey munchkin." Tony said, as he hugged the young boy to him.

"Ya know that's only a myth don't you and it's a good thing it is too?" The kid said giggling again. Adam couldn't help but wonder what the kid was referring to, but he heard Logan snicker, so he figured he would have to ask later.

Mike was talking to Jeremy, and Adam could easily tell that this man cared a great deal for his friend. "Jeremy it's good to see you. Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm okay Uncle Mike." He said.

"I don't understand what's going on here baby?" Mike said softly to Jeremy.

"They really are okay Uncle Mike they saved me." Jeremy responded.

"Jer where's your dad?" Mike asked, and Adam inwardly groaned. Jeremy had not been able to talk about his dad yet with out breaking down, and Adam knew he had to try and put this off for a bit.

"Jer?" The man said again as Jeremy tears started to fall on to the man's shoulder.

"Ummm, excuse me sir, but I believe it would be best if we were to explain everything that is going on on the ride back to our base." Adam thought that man might argue for a moment, but finally he just nodded his head.

Adam nodded his head, and looked back to the rest of the kids there, waving them up. He started issuing orders to get the plane's cargo bay loaded into the trucks, then turned back to Mike as everyone moved to the underside of the plane.

“Sir, we have vehicles waiting, and if you would like to have the rest of your party disembark, we can get started back to our base.”

Mike nodded his head, but then got a considering look on his face. “Alright but I got quite a group with me including two boys in wheelchairs.”

Adam simply nodded, “that will not be a problem sir.” He then moved back to where the other kids were loading their bags into the vehicles they had with them. Adam was now glad that they brought the big troop transport truck, and Mike wasn't kidding when he said he had a lot of stuff. He was also glad now that Logan had decided to rent them a small bus to transport everyone.

Adam helped get the stuff loaded into the back of their truck, along with the stuff the other family brought. He then turned and saw people start coming out of the plane. Adam also heard that boy Sammy ask Tony what was going on, but also heard Tony tell him later which was a good thing as he really didn't want to get into it sitting here on a public tarmac.

Adam was actually a bit surprised at how many people came out of the plane. There was Mike, an older woman, she looked to be in her early thirties, and Jeremy. Then came out twelve kids all ranging in age from about fourteen or fifteen, to one little boy who couldn't be any older than four. Adam did notice something a bit strange though when they all got down there. Two of the boys were obviously not members of this group. The oldest boy, and another boy of about eleven moved off to the side away from everyone else. Adam could also tell immediately that those two boys had some training. They were both looking around making sure they knew what was going on. Adam would have thought that these two boys were members of his Unit, but he knew they were not. He made a mental note, and passed it on to his brothers, to keep an eye on those two.

Once they all got down to the bottom of the ramp they all kind of milled about in a group. Adam noticed that two of the boys were identical twins. The twins, and a boy just a bit younger than them, obviously their brother by their looks, stepped up close to Adam.

“Hey are those real guns?” One of the twins asked.

“Um yeah,” Adam replied when they all rapidly reached under their jackets and pulled weapons identical to what the boy Sammy had had earlier out and said “You mean like these?” With big grins on their faces.

'Oh shit,' Adam thought as his hand shot down to the holster of his gun, when he heard Mike yell out. “Randy! Kevin! Danny! Where in the hell did you get those?” He asked as just as quickly they disappeared again.

“What?” They chorused.

Mike just looked at them while Sammy giggled.

“Where?” Mike asked.

“Uh...well...we got em from Sammy.” One of the twins finally said.

“Sammy?” He repeated.

“Well we thought you might need some help.” The other twin chimed in with.

Adam turned to look at Sammy who had his innocent looks plastered on his face

“Sammy?” Mike asked again.

“Yes dad?” He answered

“Where did you get the guns from?” He asked him.

“Umm, the plane?” The boy answered.

“Where on the plane?” Mike asked

“Ahh well, in your office.” He told him.

“Sammy I do not leave guns lying around anywhere including my office.” Mike said.

“Oh I know that dad.” He said.

“Then kindly tell me where you got them from?” Was Mike's response.

“Do you really want to know?” Sammy asked with an impish grin on his face.

“YES!” Mike said finally getting annoyed. Adam really had to hand it to the man, he had the patience of the saint.

“Well, from your safe.” He said. 'Oh boy' Adam thought to himself, wondering if he should get in the middle of this.

“MY SAFE!!! How the hell did you get in my safe?” The man said obviously not believing it as Tony snickered.

“It's not funny.” Mike told him as he glared in Tony's direction.

The three brothers were trying, unsuccessfully, not to giggle behind the man.

“Well I kinda know your combination.” Sammy finally admitted blushing a bit.

“Do I want to know how you know that?” Mike asked.

“Ummm, not really.” Sammy said and with that almost everyone broke out in giggles. Adam knew he had to do something quick, so he stepped forward and got Mike's attention. “Sir, If you'll all follow me we can get going.”

They were loading all of Mike's family on the bus, when the other group of kids being herded by Elena came running up and got on the bus.

They all got loaded up, and the bus took off. Jeremy made it a point to sit next to Adam, who listened quietly to the conversation that was going on around him.

"Tony, Elena's here and with the kids too?" Mike asked surprised as the bus got under way.

"Yeah Mike. I don't how to tell you this..." he said before stopping and putting his hand up to his face for a moment but when he pulled it away it seemed that Tony looked suddenly years older than moments before.

"Mike, about a week and a half ago Miguel went to the movies with a friend of his. He didn't come home." Tony said and everyone could hear the pain in his voice.

"What do you mean he didn't come home?" Mike asked suddenly very much afraid for the boy and what might have happened to him.

Sighing Tony went on, "Mike when they didn't meet us out front I went in looking for them. We found his friend Carlos passed out in his seat, chloroform, but of Miguel there was no sign."

"He's been kidnapped?" Mike asked not wanting to believe it.

"Apparently. Carlos said they were watching the movie when suddenly something was put across his nose and mouth. He struggled but passed out rather quickly. He said Miguel fought back but that was all he could remember. We found blood at the scene and it wasn't Miguel's so he got at least one of them a telling blow. We've been tearing the countryside apart looking for him but haven't had any luck. No ransom or demands either," he told Mike.

Tony was silent for a moment while he let Mike digest what he was telling him. Elena started to softly cry in the background, and so did the other young kids from Tony's family. It was obvious how hard this was on them.

"About all we could find out is that a supposedly a boy threw a tantrum at some point and then later the boy's supposed father took him home after he fell asleep. We think it was Miguel. We found out through some contacts that Miguel was brought across the border from Mexico into the United States and we came. Then we got a call from these people saying they had located Miguel as well as another boy who is with them named Ronnie who had also been kidnapped. Mike they had contact codes that no one should have, I can only guess they came from Jeremy." He said looking over at Jeremy who looked away.

Adam wasn't sure what was going on with Jeremy right now, but he had a pretty good idea. He knew how hard this must be on the younger boy as well. Jeremy had said many times that he didn't want to contact anyone, he had said he just wanted to start a new life, and forget everything from the past.

Mike leaned closer to Tony and almost whispered. "Do you think they had anything to do with it?"

Adam had to bite his tongue at this point. He could understand why Mike would think that, but it still was annoying.

Tony looked pensive for a moment before saying, “No, I don’t think so Mike. I’m pretty good with people and I don’t get any bad vibes from them.”

Then he added, “But we’re somewhat equipped although not nearly as well as we would like to be if it’s needed.”

Adam almost laughed. They wouldn’t need to worry about equipment, ever since the other Genesis kids got there, one thing they were not lacking for was equipment.

“Then we need some answers.” Mike said softly before leaning forward but was surprised when Adam suddenly turned and with a emotionless face said in the same tone, “Sir, we will address these issues in the briefing that will occur when we reach our base, you will need to hold your questions until that time when they can and will be answered.”

“Look...” he started to say angrily but looked surprised when Sammy put a hand on his arm saying, “Daaaad!”

Mike looked back and forth between Adam and Sammy, then it seemed like he decided to listen to his son. Adam was very glad for that as he really didn’t want to go into things on the bus. Also they were just about to arrive at the helicopter, so it would save him from any further questions.

The rest of the ride was spent in silence, an uneasy silence but there were no more confrontations.

When they got to the landing zone, Adam heard Tony whisper in a disbelieving voice, “My God it’s...” Mike’s head popped up, and in a startled voice he whispered, “...a Halo!”

Adam couldn’t help but smirk, and he had to stop Will from making one of his normal smart assed comments. Unfortunately, this was not the time for those.

“Cool” Adam heard from behind him and turned to find Sammy staring captivated at the sight before him.

“No” he heard Mike say, and again Adam stifled a chuckle. He had a feeling that this Sammy was going to fit right into their group.

“But...” he started to reply but Mike just said again, “No!”

“Daaaad” He said with a pout and a dose of little boy puppy dog eyes.

“Not happening!” Mike replied and Adam knew that he was going to like this kid.

“Damn!” Adam heard while the other kids could be heard giggling.

Adam got off the bus first, and led the group over to where Charlie and Will were waiting for them.

"If you'll all stand back we'll get the truck loaded." Charlie said, and everyone watched as Jack drove the truck onto the helicopter then Tony Vance, the Load Master of the Phantom followed it on and secured it.

Once it was secure, Charlie turned to Bill, "Okay Bill let's get you strapped in and you can take us home."

Adam watched Mike's jaw hit the ground again, and he had to admit he was taking a bit of sadistic pleasure in blowing the man's mind. 'Just wait till we get back to the base,' Adam thought to himself.

Adam couldn't help but notice the grin on Sammy's face at hearing the Bill was going to pilot them home, but Mike, of course, just came back with, "NO!" Sammy only smirked in reply.

Mike walked over to where Adam was standing a few feet away and asked "Ummm... did I hear correctly that the young boy in the wheelchair was going to be flying that?" Pointing to the helicopter.

"Sure is, today's his check ride." Adam replied, barely suppressing a grin as he began to walk off towards the rear of the aircraft where the entrance was located.

"Check ride?" Mike asked in disbelief which earned a few giggles that suddenly went silent. Adam knew that Mike had to have given them the patented "parent glare."

Adam couldn't help himself anymore, so he turned and stopped a few feet away and said, in perfect, accent less Russian. "By the way to answer your other question, no, we're not Russians," he then turned and walked quickly off.

Once everyone was seated, the rest of the crew for the helicopter went around to make sure that everyone was secured properly.

Bill did extremely well on the way back Adam thought, although it was clear the Mike didn't think so. The entire ride back to base, Mike had a death grip on his harness to the point where Adam saw his fingers turning white. Adam found it kind of amusing, 'it must be an adult thing, mom was this bad the first time she rode with Will, and Jack still seems nervous every time one of the kids is flying. Although Dave says it's just the fact the Jack doesn't like to fly.'

Adam was also beginning to wonder if maybe the little demonstration that everyone had planned for Mike and Tony's family wouldn't just send him over the edge even more.

He knew that everyone was planning on being lined up in full uniform so that they could show off for the new people. It had actually been Janet's idea, and Adam knew immediately that it was a good one. Every single member of the Unit was very proud of what they had accomplished, yet didn't have anyone outside of the people here to show it off to. These people would be the first outsiders to really see them at their best. Adam had to be honest with himself and admit that he was a bit nervous too.

They touched down in the canyon, and Adam laughed again as Sammy played the cute little innocent kid, that it was clear he wasn't. Why Mike fell for it every time Adam couldn't guess, but it was certainly amusing. "Hey Sammy hold on a second." He called bringing Sammy to a screeching halt and turning to look back.

“What’s up?” Sammy asked.

“Let’s wait for everyone else.” he said, then helped the twelve year old crew chief unbuckle all the visitors. Everyone else, except Janet and Jack, were already off the helicopter, and by the time everyone was unbuckled, Adam knew they would be in place.

Once they got everyone unbuckled, Adam lead the way off the helicopter. Once he hit the ground, all the assembled kids went to attention and saluted.

“Wow, cool! You gotta see this dad.” Sammy said from beside Adam as they got to the bottom of the ramp.

Adam had to admit that the entire Unit looked sharp, and judging from Tony’s comment of, “I don’t think we looked this good back in the day.” He was right.

“Sirs, if you would please follow me, the entire base has turned out, and would like the honor of being inspected by those who had been in the Special Forces.” Adam lowered his voice so that only those nearby could hear him. “You have to understand something before this will make sense. Every single one of these kids has been abused or neglected in one way or another. They’ve never had any sense of self pride, and the uniforms with the medals, are one which they have all earned. Their ranks are given based on their own performance, and accomplishments, and they take a great deal of pride in them.”

Mike stopped and looked around at the assembled group, and after a moment, Adam heard him say, “We would be honored...Very honored.” Tony nodded his agreement, and in a line, they went off to inspect them.

Adam saw that both Mike and Tony were affected by what he had said and were taking the inspection seriously as they diligently moved up and down the rows trying to find something wrong with the kid’s appearance just as if it were a real military inspection. He knew they still didn’t realize just what they were and thought of them as playing soldier rather than being ones. The two oldest children that Adam knew were named Esteban, and Marissa, were doing a very good job in keeping their younger brothers and sisters in order as they walked through the rows of Unit members.

Adam wondered how long their decorum would last when they got to the “cats” and the Intel team. But so far everything was going extremely well.

They got done inspecting the “support personnel,” and moved over to the “strike teams.” Adam was extremely pleased at how things were going so far, as neither Tony nor Mike could find anything wrong.

Adam was just leading them up to the first group when he over heard Mike commenting to Tony, “Those almost look real.” Adam suppressed a chuckle, but Adam couldn’t let Tony’s response go.

“Yeah they do, cute as hell though,” he replied in just as quiet a voice. Before Adam could say anything though, Mike responded. “They sure are aren’t they?”

Adam couldn’t hold back any longer, he turned to the person he was right in front of. “Corporal Bethany, please hand me your weapon.”

"Aye Sir," Was her response, as she handed the MP5 over, and Adam still had to wonder how she got such a thick English accent growing up in the lab.

"Sir, I am sure you will realize that these weapons are indeed real, and loaded. If you would like, you may discharge the weapon." Adam said not really annoyed, but he knew that it may effect the kids. He didn't think they would like being called "cute."

While Adam was holding the gun out to Mike, he finally got his wits about him enough to mouth the word "real?"

Adam just nodded and Mike was again floored by this. Adam could only imagine what was going through the man's mind right now.

He continued to hold the weapon out as Mike tried to figure out what to do. Finally, and much to Adam's relief, he took the weapon, while saying "I'll be happy to inspect this soldier's weapon."

He expertly dropped the clip, handing that over to Tony, and went through the weapon. As he was inspecting the weapon, they heard a small voice pop up from the background. "Hey can I fire it, I've never got to shoot one of those before."

That earned some laughter from Mike's and Tony's kids, as well as a few smirks from the Unit members. Mike just looked down at the little imp, "maybe they will allow it at another time." He then proceeded to hand the weapon back to the Corporal telling her, "Immaculate condition soldier, very good."

She simply nodded and Adam allowed himself a small smile as he turned away to continue the inspection.

They were almost to the end of the line when Adam stopped and turned to Mike and Tony. "Sirs, the rest of the group here may seem a little strange to you. They are sort of expecting a surprised reaction, and I will explain fully to you during the briefing. Just please understand that they had no choice in who and what they are."

Mike nodded, and Adam turned and brought them to the next group which was the Intel team. Adam gave Logan a brief smile, then watched closely to figure out how they would all handle fourteen identical faces.

Adam was impressed to say the least with Mike. He didn't even bat an eyelash when they walked up the the line of clones. He heard Tony gasp, but that wasn't anywhere near as bad as they had expected.

It was then that one of Mike's little ones, Peter, walked up to Mike and said in a puzzled voice, "Daddy, they're all the same?"

Adam squatted down so he was on the same level as Peter. "Well you see Peter, that's because they're all brothers." Adam waited while Peter seemed to digest this. Finally the little boy nodded and said "okay."

Adam stood back up, and looked at Mike. "Brothers? I don't think so."



“Well actually sir, they're all clones.” Adam said with a smile playing on the edge of his lips.

It took Mike a second to recover and finally he said in a flat voice, “That's not possible.”

Adam suppressed a grin as he just motioned to the line of boys. “Well if it's not possible... your really gonna love this.” With that he turned and started to walk to that last group of kids, while motioning over his shoulder for them to follow.

Right before they got to the cats, Adam turned to the group following him and said softly, even though he knew the cats could hear him. “Sirs, a bit of a warning. They really do not like to be called pussys.”

Adam grinned and winked at Khan who's face didn't move, but Adam could see the tail swish a little bit in a way that Adam could read as amusement. When they got there, Adam heard Mike stop and exclaim, “HOLY SHIT!”

Meanwhile, Tony gasped out, “Jesus, Mary and Joseph and may the saints preserve us.”

Mike glanced back to Tony, “Ain't that the Irish?” To which Tony responded, “It's fucking applicable!”

About the same time everyone heard Sammy's, “Wow, COOL!” and then Alexei crying out in pleasure “KIIIIITTTT CAAAATS!!!”

Adam almost busted out laughing when he heard Kent's young voice cry out, “They ain't kitty cats they're Thunder cats!”

Mike finally managed to gasp out “How? What?” before just stopping and staring some more.

Adam lost his smile and said “You ever hear of black ops?” But before he could even think to answer Alexei piped up with “Can I pet the kitties?”

“Ah...um” Mike said before he just gave up looking once more at them as they just looked back with a grin.

Alexei meanwhile had gotten tired of not getting an answer, and before anyone realized it he was standing next to Khan, and petting him right above the tail. Of course, Khan loved it, and even though he tried to remain stone faces, everyone could hear the deep rumbling purr start.

Pretty soon all the younger ones had found a cat to pet, and even a couple of the older ones like Derek had went over. Sammy was looking at Mike like he really wanted to join them but he was at least behaving for the moment. Finally Mike relented, and Sammy ran off, he ended up actually talking to Vishnu before gently stroking his fur.

It was about this time that Logan came walking up to them with a folder. He saluted, “You need to see this right now,” he said and handed the folder to Adam who took it and started to read through it. Distantly, he heard Chang cry out that the inspection was over, and that everyone was to return to their duties. The only ones who didn't leave right away were the cats who were still getting petted by Mike and Tony's little ones.

Adam's face turned red with anger as he read through the papers in the folder. Finally, he looked up to Mike and Tony, and almost in a growl he asked them. "Are either of you two familiar with a three star named Adams?"

Adam watched as both Tony and Mike's face got hard with anger. "You could say that although I think you somehow already know that." Mike said as Sammy came running up with a face filled with concern.

"What's wrong dad?" Sammy asked looking back and forth from Tony and Mike to Adam.

"I think we're about to find out." Mike replied not breaking his gaze from Adam.

"Well Sirs, it seems that General Adams actually had something to do with Miguel's kidnapping." Adam was about to continue when he was interrupted.

"HE WHAT?!?" Mike said while taking a step forward, his face red with rage. At the same time Tony exclaimed, "What the hell do you mean that son of a bitch had something to do with Miguel's kidnapping?" Adam wasn't really afraid of a normal human, but the rage in Mike's eyes made Adam glad it wasn't directed at him.

"Who is this Adams you're talking about and why would he kidnap my son?" Adam heard and realized that Elena had walked up and heard what Adam had said.

"Dad isn't he that dick head you told us about when you told us the story of..." then he trailed off. Adam wondered why he stopped.

"Yeah SamSam that would be him," Mike replied while still looking at Adam.

Adam took a deep breath, "Well, I wasn't going to bring this up in the briefing, as we had no proof of this till now. But it seems that General Adams has been planning for a long time to get revenge against the team you used to command. I will explain a lot more once we get to the briefing room, and I think now would be a good time to head there. If you would like, I can ask Janet to take care of the little ones, while we are busy."

Tony looked to his wife for a few seconds while unspoken words passed between them. Finally he looked to Mike and nodded. Mike then turned and looked at Adam, "I think that would be a good idea on both counts."

Adam led everyone to the briefing room, he was dreading this moment, and had already decided that he wasn't going to go into the full brutal details right now. They didn't need to know everything. Before Mike and Tony entered, he stopped them and pulled them down the hallway a bit. "I will explain all of this in more detail later, I'm sorry to have to tell you like this, but about a year ago, Andy Rose was murdered. It happened when he tried to stop a robbery. You also need to know that Jeremy's time since then has not really been pleasant till he came here a little over four months ago." Both Mike and Tony looked stunned as well they should at the news, and Adam watched as they turned away for a moment but not before he saw the tears they were fighting to control in their eyes. He left them and headed on into the room to give them a moment feeling terrible that he had to break it to them this way. Although he wondered if there was any good way.

Once everyone was in the room, and seated, Adam began the briefing. He turned one of the large boards over which had the pictures of twenty seven children. Every single one of them was a facial shot that they had taken from the videos.

“Before I begin on the briefing I would ask that you hold all comments or questions till after I am done. I will probably be answering all your questions during it.” Adam looked around and got nods from everyone in attendance. He still wasn't sure about having some of the children there, but it was the decision of the adults.

“These twenty seven children are all being held in a secure compound about thirty miles north west of our current location. We have been able to confirm that they are being used to make sexually explicit videos which are being sold on the Internet.” Adam then dimmed the lights, and turned on the projector starting to go through the slides that Logan had made up earlier.

“As you can see, they are located inside a walled compound that is very well defended. According to what we have been able to find out, they are a religious separatist group that has been paying off the local officials so that they can get away with what ever they want inside. No questions are asked, and no one complains because those that would are kept as little more then slaves who can't escape.

They have approximately one hundred and fifty people inside, not counting the children. However, only about seventy five of them are listed as targets. The rest are women and children too young to be used in their videos. We do know that they are heavily armed, and keep a roving patrol, however, we are certain that they are not worried about people getting in, it's more, that they are worried about people trying to escape.

Now, as to how your General Adams is involved. It seems that ever since your fated encounter with him many years ago, he has been plotting his revenge. We do know that he had a plan in place to kill off Jeremy's father, however, Andy was killed in a robbery just before he put his plan into motion. We have also been able to link him to the death of two of your team members that have been ruled accidents. One was a car crash, and the other a home invasion/robbery. We do know that it was Adams that had Jeremy's judge killed and made it so that Jeremy went through hell these last few months.”

At this, Adam paused and handed a folder to both Mike and Tony with the evidence that Logan and his team had been able to gather regarding those deaths.

“From what we have been able to figure out from his private and secret computer files, he wasn't just planning on killing you Tony, first he wanted to make you suffer, you and Elena over what happened ten years ago. He decided to go after your children to do that and this porn ring was a convenient tool to extract that vengeance upon you.

“Now I am going to make an assumption here, but I gather that at least some of you will want to go on the rescue. I have already factored that into the plans, and will have equipment ready for you once you let me know who is going to go. We are expecting stiff resistance, and do know they have a plan in place to kill the children at the first sign of an armed invasion. However, I can guarantee that before they know we are there, the cats will have the children secure. If I wasn't interested in killing all the mother fuckers there, I'd just go in and get the kids out quietly.” Adam took a moment to calm down before continuing.

“The current plan is to hit them tonight. We would have hit them two nights ago when we found out where they were, but when Jeremy saw Miguel in there, he insisted that we call you two. To be honest I wasn't going to agree to that at first, but then I got to thinking how I would feel if I was not allowed to get my share delivering justice to them, so we waited.” Adam finished up, and brought the lights back up to full. “Now, if any of you have questions, please feel free to ask them. But remember the full mission briefing will be happening later on once we figure out which of you will be going, and what you want to do.” Adam then waited to see if they had any questions. He didn't have to wait long. Mike, along with Tony, Elena, Marissa and Esteban all said at the same time, “Kill them,” and then Sammy said in such a cold voice that I turned startled towards him “I'm going with you.” Adam simply nodded with acceptance, and with that the briefing broke up and everyone started to file out of the room. Once they were out of the room, Jack told everyone they could follow him, and he would lead them to their rooms.

A little while after the briefing, Adam was standing at the window in the main conference hall, looking over the pictures that Logan had found for the hundredth or so time. It made him so angry, yet so grief stricken that Ronnie was in these pictures. Adam hadn't even been abused like this while he was in the lab, Juan had though, and from what Juan had allowed Adam to see through their link it made him understand why Juan was the way he was.

Adam knew that these people would not survive the night. Not if he had anything to say about it, and he did. They may have been able to pay off the local people to be able to get away with this kinda stuff, but there wasn't enough money in the world to pay him off. He would never look the other way to anyone, let alone a child, being treated this way.

He was startled out of his thoughts when he heard someone walk up behind him. Looking over his shoulder, he saw Mike walking up towards him.

Adam turned around and looked at Mike. “Why do I get the feeling that you have a few questions.”

Mike chuckled a bit, and in a very sarcastic voice, he said “Oh, maybe one or two.”

Adam couldn't help but laugh himself. “Well, where would you like me to start?”

“The beginning works, and what the HELL are those cats?!” Mike asked. Adam pointed him to a chair, and they both sat down.

“Well, the cats come a bit later on in the story, but let me start at the beginning, and understand, I am giving you the brief version.”

Mike nodded and Adam began the story. Over the next hour, Adam told Mike the hows and the whys of the Unit and how they got to be where they are. Many times through out his telling, Adam was brought to tears and so was Mike.

When he was done, Adam knew that Mike still had many questions, but those really could come later. For now there were other things to get into.

“There is something that I didn't bring up during the briefing, mainly because I didn't know how Tony and Elena would take it...” Adam trailed off while looking at Mike.

"I take it that it's not good?" Mike said, and Adam could only shake his head.

Adam snorted, "that's one way of putting it. I don't know how to explain this in any way that will soften it, you need to see these." Adam then handed the folder over to Mike letting him see in graphic detail what Ronnie and Miguel were going through.

"The first set of pictures is of Ronnie. He's one of my guys, and also the brother to the kid who flew us in here." Adam said as he watched Mike go through the pictures.

Adam watched as Mike opened the folder and looked at the first picture. Adam knew all too well what the picture was of. He had spent many hours looking at it, and looking into the eyes of Ronnie, as he was being brutally raped and beaten.

"Sweet Jesus!" Mike gasped out, and Adam just shook his head. Just knowing what Mike was looking at was enough to bring tears to his eyes. Those pictures both of Ronnie and Miguel would be burned into his mind for the rest of his life.

Finally Mike got to the last picture, and Adam knew it was of the man looking over at the camera with a big smile on his face, as he brutally raped Miguel. Mike dropped the folder which Adam caught, and just stood there staring at that one picture. From the look in his eyes, Adam knew that this man would be on the top of Mike's hit list.

Suddenly, from the doorway, Adam heard a voice cry out, "Dad?!"

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Bill's POV:

After the briefing Sammy had been bombarding us with questions about the Halo and flying, so we decided to take the kid down to our room where we'd be out of everyone's way, and tell him about it. It was obvious that he really liked flying and had told us he flew his dad's Lear all the time, and wanted to learn helicopters in the worst way.

We'd been down there for a while and it helped to take my mind off of Ronnie and where he was right now.

It was something that I didn't want to think about even if I couldn't stop thinking about it, I had promised to protect him and I hadn't.

We had been talking about flying and I had told him all about Will teaching me and putting the special controls in that allowed me to fly, even being like I was and, I had even told him a little about some of the missions we had flown since I learned to fly.

Then he hopped up and after asking where it was headed off to use the bathroom.

I just smiled after him finally looking over with love at Will and asking, “was I that bad?”

“Nah, worse,” Will replied laughing as he bent forward and gave me a kiss.

Sammy came back in and I could see a million more questions in his face when he suddenly stopped letting out a little gasp as if he had walked into a brick wall.

“What’s wrong?” I asked as Will asked, “Sammy are you alright?”

I looked at the expression of shock and heard him say barely above a whisper, “Where did you get that?”

I didn’t understand what had gotten him so upset or what he was talking about, as there wasn’t anything over the way he was looking except the picture of me and my dad when I was little.

Will asked, “the picture?”

“Yeah,” was all that Sammy answered.

Why did the picture upset him so much I wondered.

“It’s Bill’s dad taken from when he was little.” Will said as Sammy turned and looked at us in shock and disbelief.

What the hell?

Will jumped up as I rolled forward and he asked him, “Sammy what is it?” But Sammy didn’t answer him for a minute, just standing there with that shocked look on his face.

Then so suddenly it was almost like watching Will or Adam move he had picked up the picture and was running from the room yelling at us, “come on you gotta come with me, now!”

We both started yelling questions to him but he never even slowed down, and I could feel Will grab my wheelchair and begin pushing it really fast after the departing boy.

He may not have been genetically engineered but he could sure move, I thought as we tried to catch up but Will could only safely push me so fast.

We did catch up to him finally but only because when we did we found him doubled over as if in pain and when he stood up it looked like someone had punched him in the stomach or maybe the balls his face was so white.

“Sammy are you alright?” I yelled but he simply shouted, “we gotta find dad right now!” Then took off running again.

We took off after him and followed him around the corner where he came to a sudden stop.

In front of us in the conference room were Adam and Sammy’s father.

I could see Mike was crying and he had something crushed in his hand as Sammy said “Dad,” and we all went the rest of the way into the conference room.

Sammy walked up to Mike who had been looking at something, “Dad, Are you alright?”

Mike turned away, and I saw Adam reach over and take something from Mike, just as Sammy wrapped his arms around him.

“Dad, what’s wrong?” he asked.

Mike couldn't answer for a moment, and I was really starting to wonder what he and Adam had been talking about.

“Nothing,” was the man's only response.

He pulled his head back and looked up at him silently for a moment before burying it back in his chest and squeezing him real tight then letting go.

“Dad there’s something you need to see” he said holding out the picture he got from my room. 'Why would Mike wanna see that?' I wondered.

“Okay,” he said and took the picture. He started to look at it and a small smile crossed his face. I didn't really like strangers seeing that picture. I'm always afraid they'll hurt it or something, and I don't have a copy. It's the last thing left from my dad.

“Sammy, where’d you get this? I thought we left it at home.” Mike said, and now I was really confused. What the hell was going on here.

“You need to ask him.” he said pointing towards me.

“It's mine,” I said as they walked over to where Will and I were at.

“Yours?” he asked startled, and it pissed me off. I really didn't like people having that picture.

“Yeah it’s me and my dad taken when I was a little kid.” I said.

“You and your dad?”

“Yeah, me and my dad.” I said, as I was really started to get annoyed.

I saw the tear splash onto the glass of the picture followed by another and another, finally he handed the picture back to me, still with tears falling down his face, and reached into his back pocket, pulling out his wallet.

He fumbled around in it for a moment then handed me a picture, I slowly took it, and looked at it. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, he had a copy of my picture. “Billy?” he asked, and my head shot up, I hadn't let anyone call me that in so long.

"Billy is that you?" He asked, and I couldn't believe it. 'Could it really be? It had to be!'

I launched myself from the chair, and into his arms. "Daddy?" I cried as he caught me, and hugged me tight to his chest. I was crying so hard, that I couldn't say anything, but these arms I knew. These arms I remembered from so long ago. Every night when the asshole beat me up I went to sleep thinking I was in these arms, and I always fell asleep peacefully, now... now I was in those arms again.

---

Bill cried himself to sleep in Mike's arms, and there wasn't anyone in the room that wasn't openingly crying. Mike picked up the smaller boy, and with a look to Will they went out of the room. Will grabbed the wheelchair, and led them down to the room they shared together.

Nothing was said the whole way down there, or when they got into the room. Mike gently laid Bill down on the bed, and Will pulled the covers up over him. With a nod of his head, Will indicated that Sammy and Mike should follow him out.

Once they were in the common room, Will grabbed soda's for everyone, handed them out, and sat down. He was still stunned by this turn of events, and didn't really know what to make of it.

It was then that something else hit him, and he couldn't help but gasp out loud. If Mike was Bill's dad, that that also meant he was Ronnie's. Will knew exactly what Mike had been looking at when they got there. Now Mike had to deal with not only a close friend's child being abused like this, but also the son he never knew about. Will's heart went out to this man who was sitting there staring off into space.

Finally Mike looked over to Will. "Will, what happened to Billy, why's he in that chair?"

Will just shook his head and stood up. He went over to his bag, and pulled a small tape recorder out of it.

"Telling you wouldn't do it justice. Here, listen to this... it should tell you everything."

---

#### Mike's POV

With that he pressed play on the recorder and I heard something that I would never forget, something that I had never forgotten.

I knew that Sammy hadn't either.

"911, what is your emergency?" an adult voice said.

"Please I need help! My step dad is trying to hurt us, my brother isn't moving, please." A young boy's voice could be heard crying into the phone and you could tell he was having a hard time speaking through his tears.



“Okay honey it’s going to be alright, what’s your name, and where are you at?” The ladies voice said trying to reassure the terrified young boy and you could hear her typing on a keyboard in the background.

“Please!” the boy begged “He’s not moving, please help us,” the child’s voice continued.

“Honey listen to me you have to tell me your name and where you’re at, you have to or we can’t get help to you or your brother,” the lady said desperately and clearly trying to get the boy to calm down enough to give her the information she needed.

It seemed to work as the boy’s voice noticeably calmed as he began speaking “My name is Bill Tompkins, and I live at 335 south tenth st...” but he had just started when you could hear a loud pounding from a door somewhere nearby. After that you could hear a whimper from the boy and the chilling words “He’s back”, followed by the lady asking something that was interrupted by the unmistakable sound of a gunshot and then a door being kicked in.

You could hear the boy scream as the phone fell to the floor and then an anguished plea of “No Greg! Don’t Shoot!” from the terrified boy then various noises followed by desperate cry of “NO!” , a gunshot and then a piercing scream of agony.

You could hear the thud as the boy hit something on the enhanced recording and then nothing for a few seconds followed by sounds of a struggle somewhere and two more gunshots.

There was silence for the most part then a scream of such terror that it still made me jump when I heard it.

Silence again which was almost worse than the other when that boy’s voice yelled defiantly “Leave him alone” and I knew he was talking about his little brother.

Now you were able to distinguish other sounds in the background and voices yelling from far away followed shortly by the clearly articulated order to “Freeze” apparently issued by the police who had finally arrived on scene.

A domestic violence or family disturbance call was every cop’s worst nightmare and these officers were about to have theirs come true.

Then into the silence there was a gunshot followed by multiple more shots being fired and a man’s voice asking “Son are you okay?” and that same boy’s voice gasping out in a struggle with each word “I...Don’t...Think...So” before going silent.

You could hear the officer screaming for medical assistance on his radio that he had two kids, victims of gunshots and then the dispatcher coming back with an acknowledgment followed by the officer telling the boys that help was on the way and that everything was going to be alright but it was the words that came next that will always stick in my mind and heart.

In a barely audible exchange between the two brothers in what was clearly thought to be a goodbye the boy who had called 911 trying to save his brother’s life simply as his last act told him the most important thing of all.

"I love you."

As the tape ended I could feel the tears running down my face as I realized who that boy had been and just what Billy had been through and done.

I had Sammy holding onto me for dear life and I could see him crying as well knowing that he remembered when that call had been played on the national news day after day.

I hadn't known who it was obviously but the details had come out of the boy calling for help to protect his little brother and then throwing himself over his little brother's body trying to save that boy's life twice before taking the final shot that would leave him paralyzed for life.

They had told of how the boy almost died and how he had been abused for years but it was hearing that tape that put it all into reality for so many.

It had broke my heart then and hearing it now had broken it again.

---

When the tape finished, Will put it back in his bag, then looked over to Mike. He saw that the man had tears in his eyes, which made what he was about to say even harder. But he knew he had to, Bill was too important to him.

There was unbroken silence for several minutes until Will broke it with these words.

"Mike I hate to say this and frankly I can only hope you'll accept it but Bill and I are together, we love one another" he said pausing and if I didn't know by the final words the emphasis on 'together' certainly left no doubt as he continued "Please keep that in mind when I say this. He hasn't had a lotta luck in the dad department and I'd really hate to see him hurt again. If you're gonna hurt him or leave him, then just go now, cause if you hurt him...if you hurt him I'll hunt you down and I WILL kill you"

His eyes were on fire as he said the final part then he simply got up and left the room leaving me stunned and not having the chance to tell him that I would never hurt Billy and that I also would never ever leave him again.

---

Around noon the next day, Adam walking into the room, where all the strike teams, pilots, and anyone else that would be going, where assembled, and went immediately up to the podium. As soon as everyone saw him walk in the room, they got quiet, and waited for him to start. He took a deep breath, knowing that this was going to be the first real test for some of these people.

"Okay, here is the plan," he said, while turning on the projector. "First off, Bill will be flying the Chinook, Charlie will be flying one of the MI-26, with Dierdra flying the other one. Will's gonna be in the Black Hawk. We'll fly in low, and land about three miles out. At that point, we'll have to go on foot till we get to the actual compound. Once there, we will fan out around the building. Alpha and Bravo

teams, along with Mike and Sammy, will take the front gate. Charlie and Delta, with Tony, Elana, Esteban, and Marrison will take the back gate. The cats will spread out before hand, and before we go in, they will take out the guard towers, they head immediately over to the barracks where the children are being held. Juan, Jory, Chang and I will be going in with the cats, but we will be going for the guard barracks. Echo, Foxtrot, and Gamma team will wait in the second Mi-26, and come in as back up if needed.”

Adam paused there to make sure everyone was on the same page. Once he was sure they were, he went on. “Once the cats have the towers secure, both gates will get blown open, and the other teams will make their way to the barracks. Make no mistake here, the kids are the main objective. Get there as quick as you can, and drop anyone who fights. Remember, there will be non combatants on the field as well, pick your targets carefully, only those that fight back.”

Again he waited, this time he tried to catch the eye of as many as possible. Once he got nods from everyone, and was sure they understood, he went on. “Once the kids building is secure, and the area around it swept, Charlie will come in with the 26, with Bill and Will flying cover for him. Charlie, you need to land right here,” he said pointing to the area in front of the building. “Once your on the ground, we'll start loading the kids on board. Once that's done, and the kids are on board, Alpha and Charlie team will board, and you'll get the hell out of there.”

Adam looked over at Janet and smiled as he said the next part. “Remember guys, the kids will be real scared, you gotta try and reassure them as much as possible.” Janet just nodded with approval, and Adam went on.

“Once that's done, the rest of us will clean up and get out on with the Chinook, or the Black Hawk. Any questions?” Adam looked around, and saw no one had any questions, so he dismissed everyone with one last comment. “Okay, we have fourteen hours till we go wheels up. Get some rest if you can, and meet up in the hanger in thirteen hours. Until then, dismissed.”

Everyone got up, and made their way to the doors. Adam saw Mike and his crew hanging back, so he walked over to them. “Hey guys, how about that tour now?”

“Sure, sounds good about now.” Mike said, and with that Adam showed them around the base. About an hour later, they had seen everything except the hanger. Will and Bill, had come with them, and was dying to see their reaction.

They had just gotten in there when Mike stopped dead in his tracks. “That can’t be a...” He said in a voice full of surprise.

Will grinned, “Yes it can only we did it right.”

---

Everyone got into position around the base as Adam had instructed them to in the briefing. So far everything was going according to plan, and they could see the people in the guard towers keeping watch.

With it being this late at night, there weren't all that many people wondering around which was a good thing as Adam gave the order, and he, his brothers, and the cats all took off at a run. They hit the wall, and even Adam was impressed at the cats as they jumped up, and landed halfway up it's side. With the benefit of their claws, they were able to scamper up the rest of the way almost noiselessly.

There was barely a sound as the cats killed the people in the towers, then dropped ropes that Adam and his brothers quickly climbed up. Once they had all four towers secure, Adam gave the order for the rest of the teams to go. Almost immediately, there were two different explosions, and he could now hear the sounds of people screaming. Adam was in his element, this is what he was made for, and he felt more at home right then, then he had in a very long time.

Donnie's POV:

Everything was going according to Adam's plan as they hit the building that housed the kids they had come to rescue. They hit the door, and went inside, only to find Vishnu waiting for them, with two dead adults laying at his feet.

"No more bad guys here, we'll be back." The little cougar boy said with a grin, as he ran off out the door they had just come in.

"Okay... Gage, Jenny, you got the door, if they're not ours, drop them. David, Kelly, Alex, Andy, make sure this bottom floor is secure. The rest of you with me. We'll bring the kids down here, and secure them in this room. Once we have them all I'll call for the bird. MOVE!" Donnie then hit the stairs and took them two at a time.

When he got upstairs, he started going room by room. He found each of the rooms were locked from the outside, but a good kick by him sent the door flying inwards. Inside the room was two kids, both of them huddled up against the far wall. It took him some time, but he finally got the two boys to leave the room with him, and go downstairs. When he got down there, Donnie saw that the rest of his teams were doing what they could to comfort the scared children. "Any one seen Ronnie, or Miguel?" Donnie asked after he looked around, and hadn't seen either one of them. No one answered, so Donnie took off back up the stairs.

Five minutes later, Donnie was getting really worried and really pissed, he checks every room in this building and hadn't been able to find either of the two they were looking for. He had to get outside before he let his anger get out of control and scare the little ones even more.

When he got outside, he saw Mike walking up to him, with Sammy right behind him. "Well, it looks like everything went exactly according to Adam's plan." Mike said with a small smile.

Donnie just shook his head. "Not quite everything... we can't find Ronnie or Miguel."

"WHAT?!?!!" Mike cried as he charged past Donnie and into the house. Donnie was right on his heels and saw the man frantically looking over the kids hoping to find either one of the boys.

"Are you looking for Ronnie and Miguel?" Came a heavily accented voice from the back of the crowd of kids.

Donnie looked, and saw a kid wearing a white hooded sweatshirt standing in the back row of kids. Mike just nodded emphatically, and the kid spoke again. "Follow me, I know where they're at. But their hidden."

Donnie followed after the kid as he ran off, and knew that Mike, Sammy, Tony and the rest of his family were right behind him. Emily even joined him as they ran deeper into the house.

They got to what looked like the office, and they saw the little kid trying to move a filing cabinet. Donnie went right over, and helped him move it out of the way. Under where it was, they found a trap door, that the kid reached down and tried to pull open. It was a bit heavy for him, so again, Donnie leaned in and helped him. Once they got the door open, they saw a set of stairs that led down to another door.

Donnie drew his weapon, and started down the stairs with Emily right behind him, and the rest behind her. When he got to the door, he tried it and found it unlocked. With a deep breath he threw the door open, and went through with his gun at the ready.

He saw two adults sitting at what looked to be a television station's control room. They both spun around, and tried to draw weapons. Donnie dropped them both before they could even clear the guns from their holsters.

He moved into the room, making sure there was no one else in it, when he heard from behind him, "Oh my god!"

He spun around and saw Emily had a hand to her mouth, and was looking at the TV monitors. When he looked he felt his blood start to boil. On two of the monitors were Ronnie and Miguel, both of them had two other adults in the room with them, and both of them were again being brutalized.

The kid with them, sadly shook his head, and moved for the doorway. "Come on!" he called once he opened the door and was standing in a hall way. "Miguel is down that way, and Ronnie down this way."

The two groups split up with Donnie, Emily, Mike, Sammy, and the little boy racing down the hallway to Ronnie's room, while Tony, Elena, Marrison, and Esteban when to get Miguel.

Mike was the first one to get to the room that Ronnie was in, and didn't even slow down. He just lowered his shoulder, and rammed into the door, sending it splintering open.

---

Mike's POV:

When I reached the door the boy had pointed out to us I didn't even stop but slammed into it and into the room placing a bullet into the man standing there watching while running forward to grab the other man and pull him off of and out of Ronnie, throwing him across the room as I did so.

Seeing nothing but red at this point as a rage I didn't know I was capable of feeling engulfed me I put a bullet into his knee as he started to get up saying "You God-Damned Son of a Bitch!"

Then the gun was in it's holster and my fist were pounding into him over and over again until I heard a whimpering voice say "Please don't daddy, no more"

I stopped with my fist inches away from what was left of this guys bloody face and dropped him turning back to the bruised and battered form lying there on the bed.

I walked slowly over to the boy looking down at him "Ronnie?" I whispered as he coughed and some bright red blood burbled up from his lips.

Then it was as if time had reversed and it was another little boy laying there as I asked "Are you okay?"

"Not really" he gasped as I reached up in a daze remembering another little boy without thinking keyed my mic saying urgently into it "Josh I need you my position, man down and for God's sake hurry"

I was brought back to the here and now by a voice asking "Who the hell is that and who is Josh?"

"We need a medic and we need him right now!" I heard Sammy say into the radio before I could reply

"Help's on the way" I told him gently taking his hand in mine.

"I knew you'd come dad" he said through his pain and I could feel the tears in my eyes looking down at him.

"You did and how did you know I'm your father?" I asked a bit shocked.

Ronnie looked off to the back of the room where the boy had went to and smiling said "He told me"

I followed his gaze as the boy said "You didn't think I'd let it happen again did you Papa?" as he began walking towards me.

Papa?

There was only one boy who had ever called me that.

I gasped in surprise and disbelief as the boy walked up to the bed and taking Ronnie's other hand pushed the hood back from his head.

"Oh my God, Pablito???" I asked stunned.

"Geez a few short years and he forgets me already" the smartalecky voice I never thought I would hear again said.

"Pablito?" I asked again not being able to believe it as the tears ran down my face now.

With that Pablito gently pulled Ronnie up amid whimpers of pain and hugged the small boy to him and I watched as a glow seemed to surround them.

“A friend of mine is helping me do this because I can’t and then we’ll get my brother next,” he said as the glow began to fade.

When it was gone Ronnie sat there smiling as Pablito stepped back all injuries gone now.

“We’ve healed the physical injuries but I can’t take away the memories Ronnie, they’re a part of you now and you’ll need them” Pablo told him.

Ronnie just nodded.

“How? You’re...You’re...” I tried to say but was at a loss for words.

“It’s called ‘dead’ papa” he said with a smirk as Sammy and Ronnie both giggled.

I got up and walked around to his side of the bed as he looked up at me and took him into my arms pulling him to me tightly and determined to never let go this time.

As if he could read my thoughts I heard a giggle and then he told me “I gotta go Papa”

“No” I said into his head as I inhaled his scent but he simply pushed back from me and smiled up at me with that same impish grin he’d always had.

Then looking at Sammy he said “He sure likes to hug a lot don’t he”

“Yeah I know” Sam replied smiling.

“See ya round Papa” he said walking over to Sammy and wrapping his arms around him giving him a hug before saying “Welcome to the family little brother”

With that he began to fade away smiling at me and just as he was about gone he added “Hey tell Tony I can still kick his ass”

Then he was gone although the giggles lasted for a moment or two along with an admonishing voice saying “Angles don’t swear” and a response of “Whatever”

I went over and picked up Ronnie into my arms and holding him began to walk from the room but it was as we got to the door he said “Oh Pablito wanted me to tell you something”

“What?” I asked

“The last thing you ever said to him he said to tell you ‘He’ll always love you too’” he said and I stopped remembering that day.

“It’s going to be okay.” I was telling one of the kids I was helping to the helicopter when I heard the scream followed by “ADAM!”

Before I could do more than begin to turn around something slammed into me just as I heard the report of a shotgun blast followed by fire from Sammy’s gun along with a “Ooomph”

I pushed what I realized was a person off of me only to find Jeremy lying there groaning and that was when I realized that he had been shot, that and when I saw all the blood.

“MEDIC!” I yelled as I cradled him in my arms, “Jeremy hang on bro, helps on the way” I sang urgently to him.

Damn this was bad.

“You’re alright” the boy gasped as his face contorted in pain.

“I’m fine. You saved me” I said as I felt tears coming to my eyes “You saved my life so you hang on” I told him.

“Where the fuck is Chang” I screamed only to hear someone say “He’s coming”

He better come fast I thought.

Juan was there trying to staunch the blood pouring from the wound with me muttering all the while “Shit, shit, shit”

“Jeremy stay with me bro” I said as I saw him start to fade out.

“Tired” he mumbled.

Juan was crying as he said “Don’t be such a wuss, you stay here, you hear me”

“Tell Ty I love him please” Jeremy said

“No, you have to tell him yourself, you tell him” I said crying as much as Juan now or more.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to do that sir” the younger boy said smiling briefly before the smile turned to one of pain as blood bubbled at his lips.

“Adam...it...hurts...” he gasped out looking surprised that it did and then his head fell to one side as his eyes dimmed.

“NO GOD DAMMIT!!! NO!!!! JEREMY YOU STAY WITH US” I yelled

“CHANG!!!!!!!!” I screamed as the medic came running



“JEREMY!!!” I cried as Chang pushed me aside to work on the boy at the same time Juan was crying “Jeremy no, no”

Then I had Juan in my arms and we were both crying as Chang worked to save the boy’s life.

Jeremy had saved my life.

He had thrown himself in front of the blast to save my life was all that ran through my head as I watched Chang try everything he could to save the boy.

We loaded him as quickly as we could into the helicopter and we were off. Charlie was flying for all he was worth, and he knew that call had already been made back to base. Mom would be waiting for us.

I held Juan in my arms, both of us crying while Chang and medics worked feverishly to save Jeremy. I only hoped it would be enough.

When we landed, a gurney was quickly brought in, and they transferred Jeremy onto it. He was still fighting, and that was a good sign.

“JEREMY!!!! NO!!!!!!” I heard as I exited the helicopter after the gurney. Tyler was there, and ran up and gathered him into my arms.

“What... what happened?” He asked, and I just couldn’t bring myself to tell him that his boy friend died because I wasn’t doing my job. So I just shook my head, and we followed the gurney down to the waiting room.

Janet stopped us with a look when we tried to follow her into the ER, so we sat down, and waited. I hated this place. It felt like only yesterday that I was here.

---

They slowly walked forward towards the crest of the hill, silently contemplating what lay before them.

This was not something any of them looked forward to, not something any of them ever thought, really thought would ever happen, not to one of their own.

Adam could feel the tears silently begin again as he looked over to Logan and saw a similar sight on his love’s face that mirrored his own.

He knew if he looked at the others walking with them that the same thing would be reflected in their faces, pain, pain and overwhelming loss.

He as well as the others always knew it could happen but to actually have it do so had hit all of them harder than any of them had ever thought possible.

To be here one moment and then gone the next seemed so...so wrong.

As those thoughts were running through his head the sad procession came to a stop surrounding the final resting place of a member of their family, a member taken too soon.

There was silence for a few moments before Jack began the service with a passage that was very apt to this particular scene.

“Greater love hath no man than he who would lay down his life for another”

He spoke more but Adam was lost with those words which meant so much to him now, for he had certainly done that.

Logan gently prodding Adam brought him back to the here and now along with the realization that everyone was looking to him as it was his turn to speak.

“I...” he began but had to stop and clear his clogged throat before continuing “I thought I would be able to get up here and say something that would make it alright but I can’t. Nothing will make it alright ever again” He said before hanging his head for a moment then saying “He gave his all to each of us and me in particular and for that he will be remembered, always. It’s my fault that he died and I’ll... I’ll always love him” but that was all he got out as he broke down and ran from the hill.

Logan looked over at his mother for a moment then ran after him trying to catch up to his distraught love.

He didn’t make it but knew Adam would be going to only one place and eventually when he got back to the compound that was where he found him, sitting in a chair and sobbing quietly with the words “Why?” interspersed between the cries that went straight to Logan’s heart.

“Adam” Logan said softly as he came up to his boyfriend gently placing a hand on his shoulder.

“NO!” Adam said angrily turning to look at him.

“It’s not your fault” Logan softly told him shocked at the haunted look of pain in Adam’s eyes.

Adam didn’t say anything for a moment then as if all the will to fight had left him he sighed turning his head away and said “Yes, it is, it is Logan”

“He chose to save you” Logan told him placing all the emphasis he could into the word ‘chose’

“If I had been doing what I should have been doing he wouldn’t have had to” Adam replied.

“Adam...” Logan started to say but Adam interrupted him saying “No, Logan he’s dead because of me, because I killed him. Everyone gets hurt or...or...dies that I care about, everyone” and with that Adam placed his head down and began to cry brokenly once again leaving Logan to stand there stunned.

He didn’t know what to do, how to get through to him, the pain he saw was more than he thought he could handle but if he didn’t know what would happen to Adam.

He could see Adam falling into a vast pit, had seen it since it happened, and for all the love he had for him he just didn't know what to do about it, but did know he'd better figure out something and quickly.

"Adam, it'll be alright, just give it some time" Logan told him.

"No it won't." His lover cried forlornly.

"No Adam, that's not true" Logan vehemently protested but Adam had turned away again lost in his own private agony once more only uttering a soft "Yes it is. Maybe I'm just not cut out for this, maybe it would be better if I hadn't tried to escape so long ago. Maybe..."

"Hey... what's all the tears for? I ain't dead... yet." Adam's head popped up at the raspy voice, and couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"DAD!!!! Oh daddy!!! Your awake!!!" Adam launched himself at Joe, and wrapped him up in a huge hug. He quickly let go of him however, when Joe started to cough.

"Sorry dad! Are you okay?" Adam asked looking at Joe with concern.

Once Joe was finished with his coughing fit, he looked up at Adam and smiled slightly. "I am now... you know how long I've waited to hear you call me daddy?"

Adam busted out crying again, and gently hugged Joe again. "Oh daddy, I'm soo sorry. I was all my fault."

"Shhhh, it's okay... just forget about it... it's over." Joe said as he looked up at Logan with tears in his own eyes.

"Adam?" Came a voice from behind them, and Logan spun around, and stumbled back at what he saw.

Standing there was, what Logan could only call, an Angel. He looked to be in his late teens with golden wings, and a glowing aura around him.

Adam jumped to his feet, and looked in awe at the Angel.

"My name is Mikey, and I'm sure your thinking that I'm an angel. Well your right, and wrong. I'm actually a Saint."

No one in the room could do more than stare as this "saint" spoke to them. This was defiantly not something that you could prepare yourself for.

"Adam, why are you so upset?" Mikey asked, and Adam felt everything come crashing down on him again.

"I... I failed... and... and because I failed, Jeremy... Jeremy's dead." Adam got out in between sobs.

Mikey looked at the boy with sympathy in his eyes. He knew just how bad this boy was hurting.

Adam looked up at Mikey with a pleading look. "Can... can you do something about it.... I'd give ANYTHING to have him back!"

Mikey looked into Adam's eyes, and saw that this was really tearing the kid up inside. He knew what he had to do, and if everything worked out...

"You'd do anything?" Mikey asked, and Adam just nodded his head, and said very forcefully. "ANYTHING!"

Adam had expected Joe or Logan to say something, but when he looked, they were both still as statues.

"Would you be willing to take his injury upon yourself, if that's what it took? Would you be willing to be nothing more then.. a... squishy I believe is the term you use." Mike asked

Adam never even hesitated, "Yes... what ever it takes. I'll do anything."

Mikey nodded his head, and suddenly he and Adam were in the emergency room on the base. Adam saw Janet and Chang working hard on Jeremy.

"Make absolutely positive that you want to do this. Once I do this, there's no going back."

Adam watched as Chang and Janet worked so hard to save his friend, but he knew they weren't going to be able to.

Just then, the heart monitor starting buzzing, and Chang immediately started to do CPR. Less then a minute later, Chang looked over to Janet and shook his head. There was nothing more they could do.

"Yes!" Adam cried out. "Yes I'm sure, just don't let Jeremy die!"

Mikey sadly nodded, and walked forward to where Jeremy was lying. Suddenly he became visible, and Chang and Janet jumped back. Mikey raised his hand, and touched Jeremy.

"Adam, please come here." Mikey said, and Adam moved closer. Once he was close enough, Mikey touched Adam, and all three of them started to glow.

Adam suddenly felt the worst pain he had ever felt before. He had been shot before, but nothing like this. It felt like his side exploded out of him, and he dropped to his knees letting out a cry of pain, then blackness.

Janet ran over to where Adam had fallen, "What have you done?!?!" She asked acusingly to Mikey.

Mikey sadly shook his head, and started to fade, "Exactly what he asked me to do."

Janet reaction was cut off by Jeremy let out a loud gasp from the table. Chang looked Jeremy over quickly, and seeing no injury, he rushed to help Janet get Adam onto a table and start to treat his "wound."

It took them nearly fifteen minutes to treat the wound, and to make sure nothing else had happened. Jeremy stood there the whole time, after finding a gown to wear, watching. Somehow, he knew what had happened, and what Adam had done.

Janet was just finishing up the bandage around the wound on Adam's side when he started to wake up. He groaned in pain, but then started to look around. When his eyes fell on Jeremy, he smiled broadly, then fell back into the bed.

"What did you do?" Janet asked. She was more than a bit pissed right now.

Adam, sensing her mood, struggled to his feet. He was very thankful at this moment for all the training he had in blocking out pain. He still felt it, but he could at least move around a bit.

Once he was finally standing, he looked over to Janet, and simply said, "what I had to."

With that he stumbled over to Jeremy, and gave him a hug. He put his arm over the younger boy's shoulder, and started walking to the door.

"Adam, get back here..." Janet started to say, but gave up when he turned, and she saw the look in his eyes.

He struggled out of the room, with Janet following right behind him. When they got out to the waiting room, everyone jumped up in surprise.

"Adam? Jeremy, what's going on?" Logan asked as he ran forward and grabbed onto Adam, helping over to a seat.

"Adam... Adam gave everything up to save me. He... an Angel came... and... Adam took my injury... the Angel said he's... just a human now." Jeremy said with tears coming to his eyes as he thought about what Adam had given up to save him.

Logan looked into Adam's eyes and knew that Adam was scared. No one knew Adam like Logan did, and he knew immediately what scared Adam the most. He gently wrapped his arms around Adam. "I don't care what you are, Adam... I love you."

## Chapter 23

Adam woke up in pain worse than he thought he had ever felt before. For a time he couldn't even remember anything that had happened in the last few years, and he found himself back in the lab, reliving the horror of his existence there. He tried to think back to what caused the pain this time. What injury had they inflicted now, that they wanted to see how he healed from this time.

He started to run through the process of figuring out how bad he had been hurt before he even showed signs of waking up. He had learned to do this early on, because the doctors would want to know everything about how he was feeling, and if he didn't have the answer right away, they would get upset, and that usually meant more pain, and with the way he felt now, he sure didn't need any more.

He knew he wasn't stabbed as this pain was totally different from the times he'd been stabbed. No, this was defiantly a gun shot wound. A wound to his side, and he figured by a shot gun. They had done that to him before, but this was SO much worse. This was like nothing he'd ever felt before.

He tried to take a deep breath, and groaned out loud with the pain it caused him, fear flooding his system. Did they hear him? What would they do now? Then suddenly, that's when it all came flooding back to him. The Unit, and their base. The other kids that they'd helped rescue. And finally, there was Jeremy and how he was injured, how they both had been injured.

He loved Jeremy, and due to his own actions, he'd almost lost the younger boy. He didn't love Jeremy in the same way that he loved Logan, but it was close. Jeremy was so much like him that it was scary sometimes. He had decided almost as soon as he got to know the younger boy, that he would try and mold and shape him into a leader. If anything ever happened to Adam, he would want Jeremy to take over.

The fact that Jeremy had done exactly as he would have in giving his life for another, just proved his feelings about him were right.

He groaned aloud, again, when he tried to move, as the last events he remembered rolled though his mind. He didn't regret his decision at all, even with the pain in his side flaring up like a wild fire. It meant that Jeremy survived.

"Adam, you okay?" He heard Logan ask, as his lover came around to the side of the bed that Adam was now sitting on.

"Yeah." Adam managed to croak out, but the wincing, and the pain filled look on his face told Logan a different story, no matter how much he tried to hide it.

"Here, take these, Mom left them for you." The blond boy said as he handed Adam a small cup with two pills in it. Adam was so used to taking pills, that he didn't even need water anymore. He just dropped them in his mouth, and swallowed.

He then thought back to the training he had been given on how to ignore pain and began to put that training into much needed use. Slowly, the pain started to fade, and he opened his eyes. He was met by the wonderfully caring eyes of his lover, and for a moment, he became totally lost in those deep blue pools.

"Logan, are you sure your okay with..." Adam started to ask, fearing he might lose the best thing that ever happened to him.

Logan sighed, and sat down next to Adam. Gently taking the other boy's hand and giving it a squeeze, he placed his other arm around Adam's shoulder and pulling him close softly said with all the feeling he could put into the words, "Adam, as I said in the waiting room, I don't care what you are, I love the you that's in here..." and with that, he patted his life's love's chest. That released the floodgates and all the fear and worry he had been holding began to pour forth as the tears started to flow freely. He couldn't begin to describe the amount of love that wanted to burst from him, so he did the only thing he could. He threw his arms around his lover, and cried into the other boy's arms.

A few minutes, or was it years, later the tears stopped and the two boys just enjoyed the closeness they felt to each other with their arms wrapped tightly around one another. Finally though, Logan gently pushed Adam back, and looked into his lover's eyes once again as he said. "Adam, there's something you need to know."

Adam simply raised an eyebrow in question so Logan continued. "Last night, after you passed out again, everyone went to bed. So far, everyone has said the same thing. They... we... all had the same dream. Adam... what I'm trying to say is... everyone knows what you did for Jeremy."

Juan was sitting next to Joe's bedside in sickbay. He, like Adam, had been there every day for the last, almost, five months. He had talked to Janet about it right after Joe slipped into a coma, and found out that some people say that people could actually hear what people were saying to them while they were in a coma, so Juan had started talking to Joe about everything that was going on. He didn't know if it did any good or not, and he really didn't care. This was the only man he had ever called Dad, and if nothing else, it helped Juan deal with things.

"Hey there Daddy, it's me again. Oh boy, has a lot of stuff happened over the last few days. Sorry I didn't tell you about it till now, but I really had no idea what to make of it. You would be so proud of both Jeremy and Adam."

I told you about Jeremy, he's the one that we rescued from the group home, and was this Mike Reynolds' nephew. Well, we went and rescued Ronnie and the other kids, and everything was going fine... till we were about ready to go. We were all trying to do what mom had told us to do, and be nicer to the kids that we were rescuing. Well, it took our minds off of what we were doing, and the dangers that could still have been around, and Jeremy paid the price. Jeremy saw the guy first, and jumped in front of the shot gun blast that was aimed at Adam." Juan stopped for a moment as he fought back the tears. Very few people knew just how closely attached Juan had become to Jeremy. He respected the older boy in a way that he didn't many other people. Jeremy had gone toe to toe with Juan, and fared a hell of a lot better than a squishy should have. Juan couldn't help but respect that a lot. And from that respect grew a close friendship. Outside of his brothers, Juan thought of Jeremy as his only real friend.

Finally, after getting his thoughts back together, he continued his story for the unconscious man. "It was bad, Daddy, Jeremy got hit in the side with a load of buck shot. Chang and mommy worked as hard as they could... but they couldn't save him." Juan couldn't keep going. The memories of what had happened were still too fresh in his mind. He took a minute and let the tears flow. He would never allow anyone to see him crying like this... at least no one outside the family. But here, he just let himself go, he put his head down on Joe's chest, and cried like the little boy he really was.

"Adam... Adam talked to an angel... and the angel brought Jeremy back. But, Adam's... Adam's human now. That was the price the angel wanted, and Adam paid it. Everyone knows what happened, we all had a dream last night, that showed the angel coming to Adam, and Adam agreeing. Then... then Jeremy wasn't hurt anymore, but Adam was... and Adam isn't healing like he should be. He's healing like a squishy." Juan paused, not really sure what else to say. He didn't know if talking to Joe really made any difference, or not, but it was really all he could do. He put his head down on the man's chest, and soon he fell asleep.

I guess ya know me and Jeremy got kinda close, almost like he was one of my brothers, that kind a close" Juan said to his motionless dad.

Taking a deep breath, Juan continued, “Well I guess ya might have heard about me and the sex stuff that happened to me in that place.”

“It was real bad, Daddy, and it’s another reason I love Jeremy so much, him and Tyler...well, something happened a while back.....

~~~~~Jeremy's POV~~~~~

I thought I heard crying from Daddy Joe’s room and turned back towards it stopping in the doorway as I saw what it was and heard what Juan was saying.

I guess ya know me and Jeremy got kinda close, almost like he was one of my brothers, that kind a close,” Juan said to his motionless dad.

“It was real bad daddy, and it’s another reason I love Jeremy so much, him and Tyler...well something happened a while back.....

It was obvious that he couldn’t continue and I didn’t hesitate but walked into the room and took him into my arms hugging him tightly.

I knew how hard this was for him, as I softly asked him “You want me to tell him for you Juan?”

The little guy just sobbed into my chest and nodded his head so I began

“Well Daddy Joe, a while back, me and Tyler were.....”

\*\*\*Flashback\*\*\*

We had finally gotten to bed for some cuddle time and hopefully more.

Things had been so busy around here lately I thought looking at Ty and leaning down to give him a kiss as he smiled up at me.

So much had been going on and it seemed like there was always something that needed to be done or someone who needed us for something.

Alone time had been a bit lacking to say the least recently and other than the occasional hug or touch we hadn’t been ‘together’ in a while.

Sometimes we were so tired that all we could do was drag our clothes off and fall into bed in each others’ arms and nothing more.

A few times we had tried but fell asleep in the middle of it, which is real embarrassing for someone our ages who are supposed to be able to always be ready and willing if ya know what I mean.

Of course the worst was when we actually thought we might stay awake long enough and began to have some fun and one of the little ones would come in wanting to sleep with us and of course giggle at seeing what we were doing.



They just didn't understand closed doors or more likely they didn't give a flying fig.

Sometimes Ty and I thought they were doing it on purpose and knowing them they just might be, too.

At last tonight all the little ones were over with Tommy and Jory in their nest and we were alone, alone at last.

"You thinking what I'm thinking?" He asked, his smile changing to a very naughty grin as I let my hand reach down and take hold of something that was already clearly happy to see me, make that very, very happy.

I just returned the grin as I felt his hand move downward and take a hold of my equally excited and oh so sensitive friend.

"Yep!" he said, or more like moaned, as our touching became more intense.

Oh, this felt soooooooooo good.

"Yes!" I felt myself moan as I heard "Whatcha doin?" from the doorway, followed by an "Oh," as I thought, 'Ya gotta be kidding me.'

We quickly pulled apart, breathing quickly to find Juan standing there with the strangest look on his face that seemed almost one of disgust mixed with fear.

Juan afraid, I thought, that didn't make sense, Juan wasn't afraid of anything.

"Sorry" he muttered and began turning away as I looked quickly at Ty before saying, "Juan wait."

He turned back around slowly and I asked, "What's wrong, little guy?"

"Nothin," he muttered, acting even more strangely than before.

"You want some cuddles?" Ty asked, and Juan actually looked up with a panicked look on his face as his whole body got stiff as a board.

I was up and out of the bed in a flash heading for him, but he backed away like he was afraid of me.

"Juan, what is it?" I asked, again stopping at seeing his reaction.

"I gotta go" he said, moving towards the door again.

"Wait, tell us what's wrong," I said, as I felt Ty join me.

I could see him stealing glances at Ty and me and it was then I realized that the glances were not at us so much as at a certain part of us, one that was still wide awake.

Whoah, wait a minute; it was something about what we were doing that had him so freaked out.

I didn't know much about Juan's past except what most everyone here knew, and that was that he had been an experiment of the US Government.

I also knew that they had put Adam and his brothers through hell in those places, but I hadn't heard anything about sex really, except for the thing with Janet teaching certain things to Adam that still made Logan blush whenever it was brought up.

That type of thing shouldn't be freaking Juan out like this though.

I mean for us, it might be embarrassing to have our parents teach us how to masturbate, although Dad had talked about it lots with me, he'd never actually taken matters into his own hands, although I think it would have been fun if he had.

The closest it had come was me going to him and by demonstrating, I asked him if I was doing it right and that made me feel even closer to my dad and certainly not something bad.

Juan though, like Adam and the others, never knew that it was unusual so an adult telling them to get naked and then taking hold and showing them how to get 'relief' as they called it was looked at as just as normal as everything else in their lives.

So what had made Juan so upset?

This didn't make any sense.

I looked at Ty and he just shrugged his shoulders as I turned back to the obvious freaked out little boy who was now trembling.

"Whatever it is, it has something to do with what we were doing, doesn't it?" I asked and could see that trembling increase at hearing the question.

I moved forward quickly and heard him gasp "No" as I took him in my arms and hugged him to me, while Ty joined in the hug.

"Juan, you know I'd never hurt you and neither would Tyler, you know that," I told him.

He felt like a piece of wood in my arms; he was so stiff as I just kept saying "It's okay, it's okay. We're not gonna hurt ya," over and over again.

Finally, I felt the shaking die down and a distant mumble, "You promise?"

This wasn't the Juan I knew and what was here now scared me.

I wish Adam or someone were here, cause something was very wrong with this picture.

It was like another kid was standing here with us and it was so different than the Juan we all knew that it was starting to freak me out more than a little bit and looking over at Tyler, I could see it was him too.

“Of course I promise,” I said, as reassuringly as I could.

“Me too, we’d never hurt you, Juan” Ty added.

After a while of just holding him and rubbing his back gently, we could feel him calming a bit as the shaking got less.

“Tell us what’s wrong, Juan, we can’t help if we don’t understand,” I told him.

He pulled back and looked at us carefully, almost as if he expected us to do something to him, before he finally said,

“You...you love each other.”

I looked at Ty, completely baffled again, before he said, “Yeah we do,” while I just nodded my head.

He looked back and forth between us and said, “But...but...you...you...were...you were gonna do...” and stopped looking down at the floor.

“Gonna do what, Juan?” I asked him.

In a whisper that I almost couldn’t hear, he said, “S...s..sssex stuff.”

I could feel my eyes go wide in surprise at that, since we had been doing ‘sex stuff’ when he walked in, there was no ‘gonna’ about it.

The question was why was this bothering him so much.

Could he feel left out, maybe that’s it, maybe no one does those things with him.

Yet if that was true, why did he seem so afraid?

Maybe he’d been told it was bad or bad for boys to do stuff together.

“Yeah we were,” Ty replied.

He looked up at us with a look of disbelief on his face.

“Why would you want to do that?” and he said ‘that’ as if it was something nasty, “if you love each other?” he asked.

I could see and just about know what Ty was thinking with the look he gave me.

*‘Nine years old and he doesn’t know why you’d want to do that?’*

*Wow, that place sure messed him up.*

*Maybe they didn’t teach the ‘relief’ thing til the kid got older or something.’*

“Cause we like it,” Ty told him and got another look of disbelief on the younger boy’s face.

“You like it?” he asked, in a shocked voice.

“Oh yeah, it’s the best feeling in the world,” I said, as his face went white.

Tyler was looking at me and I could tell what he was thinking again as I said to Juan, “Would you like to join us?”

Ty nodded his head and Juan looked back and forth between us before saying “You want to do sex stuff with me? I thought you liked me?”

“We do, or we wouldn’t offer to share that with you, Juan” I told him.

He looked down for a minute then straightened up and said “Alright, I’ll be right back,” and walked from the room.

We both watched him leave and just stood there in silence, shocked at the look on his face as he left. It was almost like he was going to die or something.

“What the hell?” we both said at the same time as we fell into each others arms and headed back to the bed.

“I don’t know love, something strange but I don’t know,” I said.

“I thought maybe he’d never done nothing before but now I’m not so sure Jer,” Ty said to me.

“Yeah, there’s something we’re missing here,” I replied looking at the doorway in thought trying to figure out what the hell was going on.

Some of it could be explained by what Ty and I thought, but not all of it.

He was afraid and afraid of sex for some reason and the more I thought about it, the more I wondered if it wasn’t more than just not having done it or being told it was bad.

Then I had a thought and turned to Ty “Do you think someone abused him in that place?” I asked.

“I don’t know. We know kids who were messed with and even though they didn’t like it when they got made to do stuff, they did know how good it felt and didn’t mind doing stuff as long as they wanted to,” he said.

“Yeah you’re right,” I replied, still thinking.

“Remember Mark though. He had been raped and forced to suck his stepfather. He was really freaked out by seeing the guys messing around until we took him someplace private and explained then showed him what it’s supposed to be like,” I added

“Yeah, his stepfather had never made him feel anything good while doing that stuff to him, and him being so little, he never had learned how awesome it can feel,” Ty said.

“Maybe something like that happened to Juan. Maybe someone there forced him, and he’s little enough that he might not know how good it can feel,” I said.

“Well, we’ll show him then, he’s like a little brother to me,” Ty replied.

“Yeah, me too, we’ll make this the best in the world for him,” I told him giving him a kiss.

We were lost in that kiss and hard as rocks when Juan came back, and we only knew when we heard the gasp from the doorway.

“Mmmm, you ready Juan?” I asked, as I broke away from Ty’s sweet lips.

Juan had walked over to the bed as I turned around to look up at him smiling only to have it change into a look of horror as I saw him.

Tyler gave a strangled gasp as he said, “Oh my God.”

“Y...yyy..yyes” Juan stuttered at that point.

Standing before us was Juan, naked and holding things in his hands with tears running down his face.

He looked lost and alone and he looked completely terrified, even as he tried to be brave.

In one hand was several sets of handcuffs and in the other....

“Oh Jesus!” I cried, as I got a better look at what was in that other hand.

Both of us sat up and Ty angrily said, “What the hell is that stuff for?”

Juan just looked confused but finally answered, “Y...you...said you wanted to do s...ssssex...ssstuff”

I could see the anger drain out of Ty’s face as it went white in horror and disbelief and I knew my own matched it, as I reached out striking the metal plate and sending it and all its contents flying across the room to Juan’s stunned look.

I saw Tyler take the cuffs from Juan’s hand and throw them to join the rest, both of us with tears running down our faces as I pulled Juan down unresisting into our arms crying, “Oh Juan, no, no, no, no, no!”

We wrapped our arms around him and held him tightly to us, hugging him with everything we had as we asked, “Why?”

I almost wished I hadn’t, as over the next little while he told us exactly why he’d brought the handcuffs and the metal plate full of things to our room.

For on that plate were surgical instruments.

Knives, things that pulled, things that pinched and things of which I didn't even want to know what their purpose was.

Seeing those things in his hands, Ty and I both understood why Juan seemed so afraid, we would have been too.

Much later, all of us crying, his story had been finished, and I now knew why he was regrowing something when I met him.

"We're so sorry Juan, we never knew," I said, as we lay there still holding onto him tightly.

"You seem surprised; is there some other form of s..ss.ssex that doesn't involve...well, pain?" he asked shyly.

"Sex isn't ever supposed to involve pain Juan, ever. It's not something that anyone should ever force someone else to do, and it should never hurt," I told him while Tyler added, "It's the best feeling in the world, and even better if it's with someone you love."

Juan looked at us, clearly not believing it, yet I could see something buried deep in his eyes that said he desperately wanted to.

I looked at Ty and he nodded, smiling as I turned back to Juan and said, "Little brother, let us show you what it's supposed to be."

He looked at us with trusting eyes, although the fear was still there but finally nodded and with a smile, our hands went out and began touching him.

His cheek, his forehead, his arms, his chest and legs and finally after a long, very long time of just gently caressing his entire body, everywhere except the center we moved down there.

It was all ready for us as we knew it would be and it hadn't been touched yet as my hand found it and Ty's went to that which lay below both of us giving those areas gentle loving for the first time.

Juan's response was everything one could hope for, and everything we had hoped as he gasped, crying out in surprise as he arched his body at that first long awaited touch of that area that he hadn't even known he was waiting for, but it was the smile that was on his face, the smile and the look of wonder that I would remember for the rest of my life as we showed him exactly what it was really supposed to be like.

If I or Ty had thought the beginning was good the ending was fantastic.

I had never seen anyone actually pass out from that before, at least until now.

When he woke up, the look in his eyes was so full of love, disbelief, wonder and gratitude that it made me feel like a king for having been able to give this gift to him and cause that look.

I could see the same thought in Ty's face as we looked at one another and knew that it was something that would always stay with us as one of the most profound things to ever happen to us in our lives.

"I never knew...." Juan said softly in the afterglow

"Now you do bro," I told him as he smiled up at us with a look of contentment and peace on his face.

"Yeah and I think I'm gonna really like sex from now on," he said and I could see some of the old cocky Juan back now.

It was damn good to see it too, I thought as Ty and I looked at each other thinking the same thoughts, as we turned our gaze down on what awaited.

Reaching across, we each took the other into our hand and with all that had gone on, quickly gave the other the same joy as we had just given to Juan moments before while he watched without fear now, as we pleased each other.

That in itself was worth it all; to see him watching with love in his eyes but not the other that had been there.

As we were lost in the feeling and coming back, we heard our old Juan back and couldn't help but giggle both in relief and in joy.

"Ewww did ya have to make a mess all over me?" he said before adding, "Next time, point em somewhere else, gross."

We wrapped our little brother once again in our arms as we giggled at his indignation, and we all fell asleep sometime as the giggling stopped, but not before telling one another between the laughter, "I love you."

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As I finished, Juan pulled away and giving me a kiss on my cheek, took his father's hand saying softly, "I understand now Daddy, I really understand," as he turned a smiling face back up at me.

I think this was the final thing he needed, to tell his dad.

Kevin, Keith, and Karl were all walking from the room they shared, into the dinning area. They still couldn't understand why the people here were so nice. They had only been here a few weeks, and everyone here had accepted them in with open arms. Kevin was sure it was because of the old Japanese man that had showed them where this place was.

He still wasn't sure about everything that was going on here. He had been warned by the old man that they would see strange and wondrous things here, but they were still a bit hard to believe. Who would actually believe genetically engineered people, and cat hybrids, not to mention the dream they had a few nights ago, where an actual angel came down and saved someone's life.

They ate quickly as they were scheduled to do some firearms training today. All three of them eagerly accepted the offer to train with the kids here, and learn how to be soldiers. Their mother didn't like it much, but their dad was okay with it, since he spent lots of time with Will and Bill in the hanger. He was a pilot in the military and then spent time working on aircraft after he got out. Mom, for her part,

spent most of her time working with the kids that had problems to talk out. That was something she was always good at, and since she had given up her job as a social worker, this was her only chance to do what she liked to do.

“Hey guys, over here!” They all turned and saw Sean Patrick standing there with the other members of their “team.” Everyone had taken to calling their “Strike Team” the “Tiny Terrors,” as Sean, the oldest of them, was only fourteen. The other two members were Tyler Morse, and Doug Crawford. Tyler was still a little bit shaken from almost having lost his boy friend Jeremy, but they all thought some extra training might help him take his mind off what had happened, so they were here just for that.

When they all got out to the firing range, they noticed that Sammy and his dad were there. Sammy seemed to be a bit out of it, and they all knew what it was. None of them had ever had to kill someone before, but they all knew that it took its toll on someone.

We watched as Mike placed his hand on Sammy’s shoulder and lead him off to a private corner where they spoke together for a few minutes.

~~~~Mike's POV~~~~

“You okay son?” I asked as I placed my hand on his shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

He looked up at me with a lost expression before mumbling something unintelligible.

“Come on baby boy.” I said leading him off to a corner that afforded some privacy.

The old Sammy was gone and had been since the night of the rescue.

He’d also avoided talking about it too, but that was about to change.

“SamSam?” I asked softly when we had gotten out of earshot.

He looked up at me and he looked so lost at that moment that I just pulled him to me and hugged him tight for a few moments before letting go once again.

“Dad, I don’t know what I’m supposed to feel. I’m glad I shot him. I’m glad the guys are alive and he’s not yet...yet it makes me sick thinking about it. I can’t stop seeing him. Even when I’m asleep I see him.” he told me.

“I know baby, I know.” I said.

“What do I do?” he asked.

“Go on, realize you didn’t have a choice and go on. He made the choice, not you honey and you have to realize that deep down.” I told him.

“How?” he asked

“Let’s go somewhere more private.” I said



"Later Dad, I think I want to shoot now." he replied and before I could say anything, he moved off towards the firing line.

Vishnu came out of the shadows where I hadn't noticed him before now and after giving me a hug said, "He's hurting inside because he shot that man?"

"Yes honey, he is." I said.

"Why? He did what he was supposed to." he replied.

"I know that, but taking a life isn't easy, shouldn't be easy and he's finding that out." I said.

He looked after Sammy for a moment and then said, "You do what you gotta do," as he walked off.

I knew he'd been trained to take lives, but I hoped he would never have to, because he would lose something if he did, something Sammy lost the other night, his innocence.

Adam was sitting at the table, talking to both Logan and Janet about everything that had happened. Janet still wasn't happy with what Adam had done, not because it saved Jeremy's life, but because it had hurt Adam.

"Adam," she began, "I want you to know that I'm really proud of you for what you did, but..." She trailed off not really knowing how to say it. She just couldn't vocalize the feelings she had when she had thought that Adam was going to die. Even the thought of it was just too painful, she couldn't lose him, and more, Logan couldn't either.

"Mom, I know what you mean, but... But he did what he had to do." Logan said, before Adam could respond. She saw the tears threatening to spill in Logan's eyes, and knew how much it was affecting him. He had almost lost his boy friend, but again, she knew he had to do it... that was just the way Adam was, and if it meant his life to spare one of his own, then...

Adam was about to say something, when suddenly he clutched his head and screamed out in pain. Logan and Janet were out of their seats in a flash and at Adam's side with Logan crying "Adam, what's wrong?" but Adam was lost in the feelings coursing through him, still clutching the sides of his head as he whimpered in pain.

"D...Dad..." he barely got out as he struggled to his feet. Logan helped him up and they all started to run to the room where Joe had been in a coma for the last four months. Both Logan and Janet fearing the worst, that Joe had finally died.

Adam was barely able to keep running, leaning on Logan heavily while still holding his head and saying "Dad...Dad!" over and over again. Still it didn't take them long to make it to the hospital section of the complex, and to the room that Joe was in. Adam seemed to regain a bit of his strength as he got closer, and because of that, he made it to be the first one in the room.

"DAD!!!" Adam cried as he entered the room, and saw Juan lying across the bed hugging Joe gently, yet very firmly. The little guy had tears running down his face. He barely even noticed the others in the room till Adam was right next to him hugging Joe as well. Janet, meanwhile had pushed past Logan

who had stopped dead in his tracks at the sight which confronted him, to get to Joe's bedside fearing the worst, mumbling "No, please no, not again," the whole way.

Her hand flew to her mouth as she choked back a sob as she heard. "Hell... I always knew I'd end up in Hell." Joe said, in a very raspy voice, and all three boys now covered him up in hugs. "Easy guys... I still feel like shit." He added, at his sons' exuberance.

All three boys jumped off of him at once, and began apologizing profusely. The door opened, and in came Chang, followed by the rest of the Unit boys rushing in with Donny and Emily right on their heels. Everyone was overjoyed to see that Joe was awake, and Janet gave them a few moments with him before she started to chase everyone out of the room so she and Chang could look him over. She was surprised to see even the usually emotionless Chang had a tear in his eye at watching what was going on.

Everyone got their chance to give Joe a hug, but then Janet and Chang made them all leave while they checked Joe over. It was a much happier group sitting in the waiting room than had been there in the past. Someone had told Alvin what had happened, and the next thing they knew, an announcement was made throughout the base. Of course, that meant that everyone that knew Joe, flocked to the waiting room.

It took Chang and Janet over an hour, but they finally came out to the waiting area. Janet looked around, smiled, and a cheer went up in the room. Once everyone quieted down, she began to tell them what was going on. "Joe is indeed awake, and doing well. It will take some time to know the full extent of his injuries, but so far as we can tell right now, there is no brain damage."

Another cheer went up, and when Logan looked at Adam, he had tears openly streaming down his face, but those tears were on a face that was smiling finally. Logan was so happy to see the face splitting grin that was on his face that he had begun to wonder if he would ever see again, that he couldn't help but shed his own tears, both for Joe and for his love. He looked back just in time to see his mother raising her hand to quiet everyone down.

"He's still very tired, and needs a lot of rest. For now, I would like to try and keep the visitors down to a minimum. What I would ask is that you keep the visits short, and keep in mind that lots of people want to see him. Joe asked that Adam, Logan, Juan and Emily be the first, so I'm sorry, but the rest of you will have to wait." With that, she led the four kids back into the hospital ward.

When they walked into the room, Joe was sitting up in the bed, reading from his medical chart. Emily and Juan rushed over and gently hugged Joe. When they broke from the hug, Joe looked up and saw Adam standing in the background, with tears running down his face, and a slightly worried look on it now.

"Come here son, every thing's okay." Joe said, and that broke the dam that had been held in check for so long. Adam rushed into Joe's arms, and began crying. Over and over again he kept saying how sorry he was, and Joe just kept holding him and telling him that everything was going to be okay. Once Adam calmed down a little bit, Joe looked at Logan, opened his arms to him and smiling said softly, "Come on Logan, he's not my only son you know, and I want a hug from one of my other ones now." Logan smiled as even more tears came to his eyes as he went over and joined the hug with Adam and Joe.

Janet was smiling as she walked back to her room. Right before Joe's accident, they had been talking about relationships, and where theirs might lead. She was really starting to love Joe when the accident happened, and for the last four months, she wasn't sure if he was even going to live. She was starting to have some major doubts about relationships with what had happened. She thought back to the only other man she had ever loved, Cody, Logan's father. She also remembered the day, when Logan was barely two years old, that she got visitors to their home... two men dressed in full military dress uniforms. She knew immediately what that meant, she had been bracing herself for it since she married Cody. She knew all too well the dangers of loving a military man.

\*\*\*Flashback\*\*\*

Twenty six year old Janet Hayes was sitting in the living room of their home on Fort Bragg Military Base. Her two year old son, Logan, playing contentedly at her feet. She had a smile on her face as she watched her son playing with the Lincoln Log set he had gotten for Christmas. Once again, she thought about Cody, and knew he would have loved to be here to see this. Logan was his life, ever since the little boy was born.

The last time Cody was home, all of the men in his unit said they knew more about Logan then they did about her. Of course they would always laugh when they said that, but she had no doubt that it was true. She didn't have to doubt Cody's love for her, but she also knew that his eldest son was the center of his universe. Of course that will all change in about three months. She patted her stomach, thinking about the baby that was growing inside of her. She and Cody had both decided that they didn't want to know what the baby's sex was, they both wanted to be surprised. Janet was sure it was going to be a girl, but Cody had insisted it would be a boy.

Janet was suddenly brought out of her thoughts by the sound of car doors closing outside of their little house. She got out of the chair she was sitting in, and walked to the window to see who it was. Her hand shot to her mouth as a gasp escaped. Walking up her walkway were two men, both dressed in their full military uniforms. She had heard about this plenty of times, but somehow she had never quite believed it would be she who was seeing it on her walk, and knew that it could only mean one thing. Her beloved Cody was dead.

Even though she had been watching them, she still jumped slightly when she heard the knock on the door, but she couldn't move, she didn't want to answer it.

"Mommy, someone's at da door." Logan said from his place on the floor. She looked over at him, and he jumped to his feet. "Mommy! Whad's wong?" He asked, as he toddled over and hugged her knees, instinctively sensing that something was wrong, as only the very young can.

She couldn't say anything, as she slowly moved to the door. When she finally was able to open it, the two men were standing there with their hats in their hands. "Mrs. Hayes?" The one asked, and she could just barely nod. "May we come in?" The other one asked, and numbly she nodded, and let them in.

They sat down, and proceeded to tell her that Cody had died in an attack on a Federation Embassy in Europe. Cody was in command of the Embassy's Security, he and his troops had held back the attackers while the Federation Personnel were evacuated. Somehow the attackers had made it impossible to beam everyone out, so they had to fight their way to the shuttles. Cody made sure all the civilians had

escaped, before he ordered his troops to fall back, and escape as well. Unfortunately, he didn't make it out alive.

Janet sat there in shock the entire time the men were talking. She just couldn't believe that Cody was dead. Logan, not really knowing what was going on, was still sitting on the floor playing. How was she going to explain to him that his daddy was not ever coming home. She knew he was smart, but he was still only two years old... how do you explain death to a two year old. Suddenly, she cried out in pain and doubled over on the floor. All she heard was Logan screaming, then it all went black.

She woke up some time later in the base's hospital. She cried when she found out that she had lost her child. The doctors said that the stress of losing Cody had sent her into pre-mature labor, and the baby didn't survive.

Cody had been right, it would have been his second son.

Adam walked into Joe's room two days after his dad woke up. Adam hadn't been this happy in a long time, and although he was still very sore, he almost never seemed to not have a smile on his face. "Hey Dad," he said, as he walked into the room, and over to the side of Joe's bed.

"Hey there Adam, you look happy." Joe said, putting the papers he was reading down. Adam saw that they were the reports that Adam had written about the incident, many months ago.

"Yeah, I really am. I really didn't know if I would ever get to see you again." Adam said, and Joe saw that the tears were getting ready to spill from Adam's eyes again. Joe just opened his arms up, and Adam fell into them, and again Adam cried tears of joy that he had his dad back once more, after all this time.

It took a few minutes, but the tears finally ended, and Adam stood back up. Joe sat back on the bed, and patted the side of it for Adam to lay down next to him. The boy happily hopped up on the hospital bed, and cuddled into his father's arms. "So Adam... I understand that a lot has changed here lately. Why don't you fill me in."

Adam smiled up at him, and nodded his head. "Well, lets see... a few things have changed. We now have over two hundred people here."

"What?!?!" Joe exclaimed. Janet had said that things changed a bit, but she told him that Adam would be the best one to explain. He didn't think that they had changed that much though.

Adam just giggled, and began to tell Joe the events of the last four and half months. "Well... it started out when we found a boy at the mall being harassed by an old guy who wanted to rape him. Juan put an end to that real quick, and we ended up bringing him, and the other people that lived with him here. You see they were all homeless, so we gave them one." He said grinning at the look still on his dad's face. Adam then went on to tell Joe as much as he knew about all of them, as well as Martha and Sam, who everyone has taken to calling Grandma and Grandpa. At some point, Adam moved to sit in a chair next to Joe's bed.

Next, Adam went on to explain about the four big helicopters that came and landed near them, and how the kids that were on them were Genesis, and how their Intel Team actually found out where Adam and the group were at, then staged an escape so that they could join up with them.

He explained how they were all part of the project that produced his brothers and himself. How none of them were on the same level as The Unit, but they were still more than a normal human. He then went on and told Joe about how they had spent the last months doing some massive training, and refitting the helicopters the way that Will wanted them.

He also told Joe about Logan's brothers. To say that Joe was shocked would be an understatement. Thirteen more Logan's... that had to be interesting. He then explained about the cloning and about the real past to project Genesis.

Joe was told about their old Master coming and staying with them, as well as those he brought with him. But he saved the two best things for last. "There's two more things that I haven't told you about yet." Adam finally said, almost an hour later.

Joe, who had listened to everything in amazement, just nodded for Adam to proceed. Adam jumped up from the chair he was sitting in, and went to the phone. He picked it up, and punched the buttons for the intercom system. "Attention on base, would Khan and Vishnu please report to the hospital ward as soon as possible." Adam said into the phone, then hung it up. He stood there for a few moments thinking about everything that had happened, and how happy he was to have Joe back. After a minute or two, he turned to go back to his chair. He had barely gotten back there, when there was a knock at the door.

Joe sat there waiting after Adam made his announcement. He was really curious as to what else had happened since the accident, and if Adam had waited till now to tell him, it had to be good. Soon a knock came at the door. Adam turned back around and went over to the door, opening it to allow two figures to enter. Both were dressed in blood red robes which covered them from head to toe, so Joe couldn't see their faces but the thing that shocked Joe right off the bat was the size of one of them.

Adam introduced them as Amur Khan, and Vishnu. Vishnu wasn't all that large, but Joe just couldn't get over how big Khan was. He had to stand seven and a half feet tall, and Joe could easily tell just by the way he moved that he was a VERY dangerous person.

"You asked to see us, Sir," came the rumbling from behind the hooded Khan.

"Yes I did, please, be at ease." Adam said, and Joe saw both of them relax visibly. "I asked you both here, so I could introduce you to my father."

They both nodded, and Joe worked hard to keep his face neutral as he saw furred hands reach out from the cloaks, and pull the hoods back. Unfortunately for Joe, he couldn't keep the gasp from escaping when he saw Both Khan and Vishnu's faces.

Joe couldn't believe what he was seeing. Humanoid cats... that just wasn't possible! Ummm... Ummm... Damn... This is some good shit that Janet's got me on." Joe said, knowing it had to be the drugs that were making him see things.

Adam busted out laughing, and Joe looked back and forth between him and the cats. "No Dad... it's not the drugs, they really are cats. They were a part of Genesis too, but a different part. They're trained to be an all out assault team, and are very good at what they do." Khan stood there stone faced, but Vishnu gave a boyish grin, that while it looked totally innocent, Joe couldn't help but notice the very sharp teeth that hid behind the smile.

Joe took a few moments to gather himself after being introduced. “Ummm... Nice to meet you.” Joe said, as he extended his hand. Khan gave a small smile as he shook it, but Vishnu absolutely glowed as he grabbed Joe's hand and shook it, then carefully hugged the man.

“The commander's told us so much about you. I'm so glad to see your gonna be okay.” He said, and Joe couldn't help but chuckle at the little cat's enthusiasm.

“Okay Adam, you said there were two more things, this was one, what's the next... I'm almost scared to find out.” He said, looking back to Adam.

Adam grinned, “Well... there's one more person you need to meet. You'll have to ask Logan, if you want specifics.”

“Ooookay.” Joe said, now getting really confused, Adam walked over to the computer monitor and turned it towards Joe. “Hello Daileass.” Suddenly a face appeared on the screen. It was a boy, about thirteen years old, with blond hair and brilliant blue eyes. “Hey Adam, what's up?” The voice came from the speakers in the room, and everyone stood there slack jawed.

Not even Vishnu or Khan knew about Daileass yet.

“Well, it's time for you to start meeting people, and I figured you could start with my dad.” Adam said, while motioning to where Joe lay.

The face on the monitor looked over, his eyes landing on Joe, and his face lit up. “Cool, I'm so glad to see that you're awake. Adam's been driving everyone nuts worrying about you.” The boy said with a smile, and Joe just shook his head.

“Yes Dad, he's an AI that can see and do anything in the base.” Adam turned his attention back to the screen. “Hey Daileass... where's Logan at?”

Daileass got a look of concentration on his face for a moment, then said. “He should be here in about three point two seconds.” He grinned, and just then a knock came at the door, and everyone let out a bit of a chuckle.

Adam opened the door and let Logan into the room. All eyes were on him, so he stopped and looked around to see what was going on. “Hey Logan.” Came the voice from the speakers, and Logan just grinned.

“Hey there Daileass... I see Adam is starting to introduce you to everyone.” Logan said as he walked over to the monitor, and patted it on the top. The face on the monitor looked extremely pleased, and Joe could have sworn it was the look of someone who just got patted on the shoulder.

“Yup, but I think he had more in mind than this... but then again, I know everything that happens here, and I know he has something else in mind. Yes Adam, it is ready for you.” The voice said, and everyone could clearly hear the excitement in his voice.

All eyes were now on Adam who had a silly grin on his face. "Okay... he's right... there is one more thing that I've been hiding from you guys, but let's wait till everyone else..." Just then a knock came at the door, and into the room filed Juan, Jory, Emily, Donnie, Will, Bill, and Chang.

It was chaos for a few minutes as everyone got a hug from Joe and asked how he was doing. Once everyone was convinced that Joe was doing fine, he looked over to Adam. "Okay, so what's this surprise of yours?"

"Well, while everyone was busy over the past few months, I've been working on something, with the help of a few select others. This was kept top secret, and they were not allowed to mention it to anyone until I made it known. So, except for five others, you will be the first to hear about it. After I explain it to you guys, I will be making an announcement for everyone in the base to assemble outside, so that everyone can see it." Adam paused and looked around to make sure that everyone understood what was going to happen, then he started to tell them what his big surprise was. By the time he was done, every single person there had their mouth hanging open in shock. Adam just grinned, grabbed Joe's wheelchair, and after he had helped Joe get into it, he led everyone out to the front of the complex.

He knew that his sudden announcement that anyone wanting to see a big surprise should meet out front had taken most everyone by surprise and he couldn't help but grin to see their curiosity at what it was, because very few actually knew what it was about. He almost laughed out loud at seeing the bundles of excitement that were Juan and Jory, especially considering how hard he had worked to keep it from seeping through their link and giving it away to them.

What made people wonder even more than being called outside, was the fact that Adam had told everyone to bring the new body armor they had gotten just a few weeks ago. This was very high tech armor, and looked almost futuristic. It was based off of what the cats wore, and was all black including the helmet and full face shield.

But what was really interesting was just how high tech the armor was. First off, the helmet's face shield actually had a heads up display. On the arm, there was a small computer, that could be used to bring up different maps and such on that display. But the real advantage of the body armor was that while it was extremely flexible and allowed for full range of motion, it was just as tough as the harder body armor out there. It really was the best you could get.

"Hey, has anyone seen the Cats?" Adam asked, once everyone was out there. He was looking around for Khan, but didn't see him or any of the others.

"Don't worry about it Adam, they'll be here... just go ahead and start the show." This coming from the radio on Adam's side, it was Daileass' voice. Adam just shrugged and raised his hand to quiet everyone down. It took a few minutes, but it was soon quiet enough for everyone to hear him.

"Okay everyone, thank you for coming out here. I know many of you are wondering why you are here, so instead of blabbing at you, I'll just show you." Adam grinned and heard a few laughs as he brought the radio to his mouth. "Okay Phantom, you're on."

A few seconds later, everyone could start to hear the sound of a helicopter in the distance, then quite suddenly, the MI-26 popped up out of a canyon and continued to gain altitude. Underneath it, everyone could see something huge being suspended. Adam raised his voice to be heard as the helicopter started to come in closer.

"I would like to present to you the U.N.I.T's Mobile Command Center!" Just then, the Helicopter flew over head of them at full speed. Adam looked puzzled because this was not what was supposed to be happening. He saw that the back hatch was open, and just as he was about to radio Charlie and find out what was going on, he saw ten figures jump out of the back. Everyone gasped as they were not wearing parachutes... not that there would be enough time for them to deploy and slow them down before they hit the ground anyway.

Adam could only watch what was unfolding. He couldn't believe that they would just jump from that high.. I mean they were over one hundred a fifty feet off the ground! Not even they could survive hitting the ground from that height.

Suddenly, every single one of the cats brought their arms and legs together, shifted them around for a moment, then spread their legs and arms out as wide as they would go. In between their arms and legs, Adam could see some type of material that was catching the wind and slowing them down. "HOLY SHIT!!! They had made themselves gliders!"

The Cats glided down to the LZ as the Helicopter banked and came around for another pass. When they hit the ground, all the Cats rolled and came up with their rifles drawn looking for targets. "CLEAR" Adam heard them call out one by one. It was a perfect show of how to secure an area.

Then Charlie brought the 26 in low, stopped and hovered with the command center about ten feet off the ground, and then he slowly came down till the command center touched down. Once it was down, the cables released and Charlie banked to the right and sped off.

Adam just shook his head and grinned as everyone else erupted into cheers. Finally, Adam turned to Logan, "Well, what do you think?"

Grinning, Logan shook his head as they started to walk forward. "What did you do Adam?"

"WHAT?" He asked with a grin, "We needed one, everyone else was busy, so I made it. I think you'll like it too."

"I'm sure I will. Why don't you tell me what I'm seeing then, that way I can know what I'm supposed to do... since I figured this is for us Intel people."

"Right you are, Babe. Okay, first, as you can see, the main floor is about five feet off the ground. Under the floor are the power generators, air conditioning and ventilation units. The flaps there, drop down to add extra armor to protect those areas." They had been moving around the outside, and had just got to the main door in the back when Adam finished up.

"Now, watch this." He said, as he brought the mic back to his mouth. "Okay Alvin, go for it."

Just then, the main door lowered, making a ramp. Alvin, sitting at the controls of a small Bob Cat Front End loader, rolled out. "That's for digging in, if we have the time, and want to, we can use this to actually dig a hole big enough for this, and put the generators and such under ground. Of course, that's why you have the stacks on the side, so they can breath and the exhaust can be diverted out."

Logan just nodded and moved out of the way as Alvin drove the bob cat out a little ways, shut it down and jumped out. He ran over to Adam, "Every thing's set up Colonel."



Adam nodded, and led Logan up inside. Logan had just passed the entrance when he came to a dead stop at seeing the set up that was inside. "Holy Shit... This is almost as good as the Intel room in the base!"

Adam grinned and nodded, as he then went about and showed Logan all the different computer terminals and what each one did. Logan was more and more impressed as he went on, but he nearly fainted when he got to the main control terminal.

"Hello Logan," said a voice from the terminal, and Logan knew right away it was Daileass.

"Daileass? But, how?" He asked in amazement.

"That's simple love," Adam said, as he sat down in the commander's chair. "This thing has satellite up link capabilities. Once the up link is in place, Daileass can operate anything here, just as if it were in the base. Who do you think taught me how to do all the computer wiring and what not?" The grin on Adam's face was huge as he kicked back, and put his feet up on the terminal.

Logan pulled Adam up into a tight hug, and started to kiss him deeply. The love he felt for Adam was boundless and this just made him love Adam even more. Logan had said that they should make one of these, but was complaining about not having the time to do it. So Adam had done it for him, even taking the time to learn how to do everything that was needed.

"Will you two knock it off already, you can christen that place later on. GEEZZZ!!!! It's not like you guys haven't had sex in almost every other place on base." Daileass's voice rang out, and the two boys jumped apart, blushing, much to the amusement of everyone else that was there.

Adam looked at Logan and grinned. "Man... did you have to put cameras in everywhere, including the kitchens."

"EWWW!!!!!! Don't tell me you did that in MY Kitchen!" Came the high pitched voice of little Ray. Everyone dissolved into laughing fits at that.

Janet was sitting in her office, talking to Clare. She had called her down to the office to talk to her. The girl had been feeling ill lately, and had gone to the doctor to see what was going on. "Well Clare, we got the tests back, and... well... it looks like you're pregnant."

"WHAT?" The girl asked in disbelief. "I... It's not... I... Can't be..."

"Sorry hun, but you are. I did the test myself." Janet said, trying to reassure the girl. She knew it had to be hard to find out you're pregnant when you're only fifteen.

"But... you don't understand... I CAN'T BE Preg..." Clare was stammering now, she couldn't even bring herself to say the words.

"Clare... you did have sex, right?"

"Well... yeah.. but..." She said blushing a bit

“Well, even if you used birth control or condoms, they don't always work. Trust me... I've seen it before.” Janet said in full mother mood now.

“No... you don't understand... I CAN'T be pregnant... I don't even think it's possible.” Clare was saying when they were interrupted by a knock at the door.

Chang walked in and stopped, seeing that Janet was busy. “Oh, I am sorry Mother, but I have something you need to see.”

Janet nodded and Chang walked over to her, handing her a piece of paper. “I just got done testing Father's blood.”

Janet took the paper and started looking at it. Her face took on a look of stunned disbelief. “This... this can't be. Are you sure these are right?”

Chang nodded, “Yes mother, I have rechecked these results nine hundred and seventy two times... all with the same readings. Father is beginning to think he is a pin cushion.”

Janet's face had drained of all color as she read over the report one more time. 'This simply isn't possible' she thought to herself.

“Can I have everyone's attention please.” Jack spoke into the microphone, and then waited as the room quieted down. “I want to thank all of you for coming tonight, even though it was an order for you all to show up.” Everyone in the room chuckled politely at Jack's poor attempt at humor. “I would like to ask all of you to find your seats, and as soon as everyone else shows up, we will begin.”

People started to move to their spots when a voice spoke up from the doorway. “Hey, you guys don't have to wait for us, you should know that it takes forever for a woman to get ready.” That did bring the laughs that Jack had tried to get before, as everyone turned to see Joe being pushed into the room by Janet. She paused just long enough to playfully slap him in the back of the head.

Adam couldn't resist, as he spoke up. “Hey mom, don't hit him, you just spent the last four months trying to fix him up.” That brought another round of laughs as Joe flipped Adam the bird. The two adults made their way up to the front table, and took their places.

About five minutes later, it looked like everyone was in their place, so Jack stood and again took his place in front of the podium. “Okay, it looks like everyone is here. Before we begin, I just want to tell all of you to have fun, I know most of you have never been at a formal dinner before, so I'll give you this little tip. As far as the silverware goes, just start on the outside and work your way in. Other than that, don't worry about it, as Janet has already said that she will not be grading anyone on their performance tonight.” That did get everyone to laugh, and broke the tension in the room as a voice from one of the younger boys in the back rang out. “Okay, enough talk already, lets eat!”

That set the mood for the evening, and over the next hour, they were all treated to a wonderful meal that was prepared by David and his crew. They had a nice salad to start things off, and the meal just got better from there. After the meal was over, the serving crew came out with bottles of wine, and proceeded to fill everyone's glass with some wine. Everyone was told that they would only get one glass of wine, and they were told to hold off on drinking it till they were told.

After the serving crew disappeared again, Jack took his place behind the microphone. "Okay everyone, it's going to be about ten minutes before we start so that the serving crew can have time to change and join us. Now would be a good time to get up and stretch your legs if needed and hit the bathroom. The official part of this evening will take a little while, and I would prefer that no one have to run to the head in the middle of it."

Ten minutes later, Jack again stepped up to the microphone. "Can I have everyone's attention please." He had to wait for a few second while everyone found their seats and quieted down. Once he saw that everyone was ready, he spoke. "Before we begin, I would like to express our appreciation to Major Hathaway, and the entire Domicile Staff for their hard work to put this meal together. From what David has told me, they started this morning at 05:30, and have been working hard ever since."

The auditorium erupted in applause as the eight kids and one adult stood up and took their bows. Everyone could see that all of them were exhausted from a long days work. When the room quieted down again, Jack started up. "As much as I am sure all of you would love to hear me talk all night long, I think I will turn this over to our Master of Ceremonies. Please welcome Colonel Adam Casey."

The room again erupted in applause as Adam took the mic. Once everyone settled down, he started. "You know, it's hard to believe that seven short months ago, this place was nothing more then a dust covered secret, and all of you were nothing more than either, a bunch of homeless kids, barely getting enough to eat, while you hid out from people who would try and hurt you, or locked up in some laboratory somewhere. It's hard to believe that only eight short months ago, I was sitting in a different, laboratory waiting for the next test that they wanted to perform. It's also hard to believe that just a few short months ago, I didn't know I had a family. Now, I have a real father, a person who may not be my birth mother, but she IS my mother. Now I have four brothers who have gone through a lot of what I did in the labs. I have a boyfriend that has stuck by me through everything that has happened, both good and bad. And, as I found out just a few short months ago, I have two half brothers. One of them is here, the other one we are still looking for. I would like to ask for everyone to take a moment to send their best wishes to Jimmy. Know that we are still looking for you, and we will find you." Adam paused, and bent his head. He didn't want everyone to see just how much pain he was in both physically, and mentally.

After a few moments, he looked up, and spoke again. "Most importantly, beyond those I just mentioned, is that I have found something even more incredible and that's all of you, you have become my family just as much as my original brothers and half brothers." Adam had to stop at the thunderous applause that greeted his last statement and he also had to fight back the tears to see the love they held for him in their eyes as he looked out over the assembled group, but finally he began again. "Okay, now onto the rest of the evening. As I am sure many of you may have noticed, we have video cameras set up all over the room. The reason for this, is I have asked Logan to record tonight so that we can all remember what happens."

Adam nodded over to Logan, who got up and went to the back of the room where they had a video camera set up. Adam took a few moments to adjust his uniform so that it was exactly how he wanted it, then nodded to Logan. Logan gave a thumbs up and Adam began.

"Thank you all for coming tonight. My name is Colonel Adam Casey, and it is my honor to preside over this awards ceremony taking place at Camp Casey. This camp is named after the man that made this camp possible, a Mr. Joseph Casey Sr. This is the first awards ceremony to take place at this camp. Every award that is to be given this evening has been approved by a council of officers, namely Major

General Jackson Bryce, Commanding Office of Camp Casey, Brigadier General Joseph Casey the third, Executive Office of Camp Casey, and myself, Colonel Adam Casey Sergeant at Arms of Camp Casey. They were also approved of by the civilian representatives in Camp Casey, Mrs. Janet Hayes, Mrs. Martha Jackson, and Mr. Samuel Jackson.”

He then paused there and took a sip of water. This next part was something that only his brothers and Logan knew was coming. They had all agreed to it, and it was now time to spring the first of many surprises he had for tonight. With a nod to Logan, he started to record again. “My next announcement is something that was not discussed with the adults, as we felt that they did not really have a say in this. This was a decision that was made by Chang, Jory, Juan, William, Logan and myself. As you all know, we have come to call ourselves the U.N.I.T. Which stands for the Universal Next-Generation Infiltration Team. We have all decided that we would be honored if all of you would consider yourselves part of our Unit. Each and every one of you has worked hard to get to where you are, and I speak for all of us when I say that you all deserve to be recognized for your accomplishments.”

With that, Adam stepped back, and started to applaud. He was soon joined by his brothers as they all stood up and applauded as well. After a few moments, the adults also stood and joined in. Adam could see that there were many people that had tears in their eyes, as the hard work that they had put in over the last several months was realized. The kids seemed to know that this was meant for them, and not a single one of them moved until the people at the front table stopped, and re took their seats. Adam stepped back up to the microphone.

“I would like to start this off, by calling up each person, stating their rank, age, and position at Camp Casey. This may take a little while, so I ask that you bear with me. Everyone will be receiving a new beret. There are four different colors of berets. First we have the Black berets. They will be worn by the strike teams, and the intelligence teams. Second is the Blue berets, they will be worn by the non-combatants. Third, we have the red berets that will be worn by the aviation wing, including pilots, aircraft crews, and ground crew. Lastly, we have the green berets, they will be worn by the assault teams, which include the Feline Assault Team, and the original five members of the U.N.I.T. First, I will start with the strike teams. Lieutenant First Class Donald Williams age seventeen, commander of Alpha Team” When Donnie walked up, Jack was waiting for him. He handed Donnie a Black colored beret. Donnie came to attention, returned the salute, then after Jack dropped his hand, Donnie followed suit. That was repeated as Adam kept calling people up. “Lieutenant Second Class Jeremy Rose, Age eleven, Second in command, Alpha Team.” Adam continued until everyone's name was called, and everyone received their beret.

“Now, I promise this is almost over, but there are a few more awards that need to be handed out.” Adam reached down onto the table and picked up a small box that was sitting on it. He opened it up to make sure he had the right one, then moved around to the front of the table, and for the first time using the small microphone that was attached to his collar. “Would Lieutenant First Class, Ronald Tompkins please step forward.”

Ronnie was surprised when his name was called, but recovered quickly, and the nine year old moved to stand next to Adam. Adam turned the boy around to face the rest of the Unit, and everyone could see the little guy blush as all eyes were now on him. “Lieutenant Tompkins, from the moment that we started this new Unit, you have been right there to help everyone who needed it. It has come to our attention that you have gone many nights with little or no sleep so that you could get all the supplies that have come in, sorted and put in their proper place. We had given you the title of Quartermaster thinking that we would need to help you out when things got rough. Not only did you not need our help, but you

performed above and beyond the call of duty. For this, you are being awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.” Adam then bent down, and pinned the medal to the front of Ronnie's coat. He then stepped back and saluted the younger boy. Ronnie returned the salute, and when Adam dropped his hand, Ronnie did as well. “Now this next part is not anywhere near as happy. You are also being awarded with the Purple Heart. The Purple Heart is... 'Awarded as an entitlement entitled upon being killed or wounded in a manner meeting the specific criteria of AR 600-8-22: sub section 9, 'While being held as a prisoner of war, or while being held captive.’” Adam again pinned the medal on the younger boys coat, and saluted. Ronnie saluted back, and even though there were tears in his eyes, Ronnie's face stayed neutral. He then executed a exact about face, and marched back to his seat. The room was silent for a moment, but then someone started to applaud. Soon the noise was deafening, and everyone was on their feet.

Adam had joined in the applause, and as soon as it died down, he reached back on the table and pulled up another box. He again opened it up, and looked to make sure it was the right one. The room was deathly silent as everyone waited to see who would be the next one called up. “This next one, is rather special to me. Even though the circumstances of how this person earned this medal may be humorous, the fact that there is such a medal is not. Would Corporal Zachary Tanner please come forward.”

Adam was pleased to see that while there were a few smirks, as everyone knew why, the thirteen year old, Zach would be getting a medal, no one out and out laughed. When Zach got up there, he was a bit red with embarrassment, but he was taking it well. “Corporal Tanner, while you were assigned to Delta Team, you were sent on a mission to extract a youth from a household. During that strike, you were confronted with an adult female who was being very confrontational. While you were under orders to not use deadly force unless needed, the situation has been reviewed, and force would have been authorized. However, you had decided to try and subdue the adult in question, and in the process, you were stabbed with a kitchen knife. It is with a great deal of honor then, that I am presenting you with the Purple Heart. The Purple Heart is... 'Awarded as an entitlement entitled upon being killed or wounded in a manner meeting the specific criteria of AR 600-8-22: sub section five, As a result of any action by a hostile force. I will always be thankful to you as the military action in which you got injured was the one that helped to reunite me with one of my brothers. I will be forever in your debt.” With that, Adam stepped back and snapped a salute. Zach returned the salute, and then returned to his seat.

Adam turned and reached for another box. He opened it up to make sure it was the right one, then turned back to the crowd. “Now, I would ask that Samuel Patrick Reynolds please come forward.” Sammy looked rather shocked to be called up. He stood up, and walked up to the front. He stood next to Adam, and the older boy rested his hand on Sammy's shoulder.

“Now Sammy, I understand that you are not officially part of the Unit, however, we decided that you and your entire family will become honorary members of the Unit. Less then one week ago, you participated in a mission with the Unit, even though you have minimal training for such operations. While on said operation, you were forced to kill someone. We know that being forced to do something like that is never easy, but due to your quick actions, the threat was neutralized. For your actions, you are hereby being awarded with the Distinguished Service Medal. This medal is awarded for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force.”

Adam then lowered his voice so he was talking directly to Sammy. “I know it is never easy to take someone's life, nor should it be. But understand that what you did probably saved the lives of many others, possibly including myself. I am forever in your debt.” Adam straightened back up, and did a very crisp salute. He dropped it after Sammy saluted himself, and retreated from the stage.

Adam turned back around, and felt a lump form in his throat as he knew what the last four boxes held. He took a second to regain his control, then picked up the first one. He turned back around, and spoke in a very serious tone. "Would Brigadier General Joseph Casey the Third please come forward." No sound was heard as Joe wheeled himself over to where Adam was standing. Janet had started to get up to help him, but Logan's hand on her arm held her in her seat.

"General Casey, normal protocol would have the highest ranking members be the one to bestow these honors, however, I was given permission to be the one to give these to you. General Casey, on June second of the year, two thousand and four, you preformed an act of extreme heroism. During a parachuting training exercise, in which you were acting as the Jump Master, you noticed that one of the jumpers had not properly had his chute checked by someone else as is required, and as you had instructed. Because of this, that soldier jumped with a faulty chute. Upon realizing that the chute was not functional, and that the soldier could not perform the needed break away to activate his secondary chute, you took it upon yourself to break away from your chute, and attempt to rescue the stricken jumper. You were able to reach this jumper, and extract him from his faulty chute, you then had the presence of mind to realize that this person was close to blacking out, so you also pulled his reserve chute. By the time this was all done, and you were far enough away to activate your own reserve chute, you were too close to the ground to get away without injury. Because of your actions, that soldier is here with us today. But because of his actions, you were grievously wounded. It is because of these actions, that I am honored to present to you the Distinguished Service Cross. This is an award to you for gallantry in action."

Adam was surprised that he was able to get all of that out without breaking down. He reached down, and pinned the medal onto Joe's chest, but did not salute.

"There is one other medal that you have earned due to your actions. It hardens my heart to have to present this to you because of my own actions. General Casey, I also award you with the Purple Heart." He again bent down and pinned the Medal on his chest. Then he stepped back and saluted. Joe returned the salute, and Adam dropped his hand after holding it for a bit longer then he had with the others. He had tears streaming down his face as he turned back to the assembled crowd. He took a few minutes to regain his composure, and after taking a few long sips of water, he turned back to the crowd.

"The last two medals go to one who, without a second thought, threw himself in front of a bullet meant for me." Adam had half a smile on his face as he finished his sentence. "Now, I don't know why it is, but everyone seems to get hurt trying to save my sorry ass... and I'm the one that's designed to be tougher than the rest of you."

That got a small laugh out of the crowd, but soon Adam turned very serious again. "Would Lieutenant Jeremy Rose please come forward."

All eyes were on Jeremy as he slowly got out of his seat and walked forward. Everyone could tell by the way he was walking that he took this just as seriously as Adam did. His back was straight, and his head was held high. He had gotten a second lease on life, and vowed to himself that he would not let it slip by.

When he got to the front, Adam saluted, and Jeremy returned it. They both turned towards the crowd, and Adam started. "Lieutenant Rose, on October 18th, you were involved in an action that resulted in the rescue of members of our family who were kidnapped and assaulted. During that action, you observed an enemy combatant who was about to fire a shotgun at me. Without thought for your own life, you attempted to knock me out of the way of the blast. Thankfully you were able to do that, but in the process, you took the shot. For your actions, you are being awarded with the Distinguished Service Medal. This medal is awarded for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force."

Adam leaned in and pinned the medal to Jeremy's chest, then reached down and picked up the last box. "Also, due to your actions, you are being presented with the Purple Heart. As you know, this award signifies that you were wounded in battle. While I am grateful you are still here to receive this, I do not want to ever have to award this one again."

They both had a few tears running down their faces as Adam once again pinned a medal on Jeremy's chest. He stood back up full, and saluted. Jeremy responded with his own, but then Adam dropped his and grabbed Jeremy up in a hug. When the hug broke, they were both crying more openly.

Again, Adam took a few minutes to compose himself as Jeremy walked off the stage. He then turned back to the crowd, and motioned for Chang. "I would now ask the Lieutenant Colonel Chang Casey come forward to award the last items." Adam barely got it all out before he walked off from in front of the table. He made his way behind the curtain of the stage and stayed there for a bit to get his emotions under control.

Chang cleared his throat to get the attention of everyone, as they watched Adam leave the table. Once he had everyone's attention, he walked over to where he and Juan had placed the box on a table, and opened up the top of it, showing long objects wrapped in silk. "It is customary for officers to wear a sword on their side. Adam and I already have our Katanas, however, I have noticed that none of the other officers have one. It took some doing as I did not want to involve Logan in this, as it was meant as a surprise." Chang looked over at Logan who just stuck his tongue out at the younger boy. Everyone in the room chuckled a bit at Logan's antics, and Chang had to clear his throat to calm everyone down again.

"As I have worked with each of you in the art of sword play, I can say that it is time for you to each receive your own blade. Now you must understand, I am not just giving you a piece of metal with an edge to it, I am giving you something that took over one thousand hours each to craft. They are not the display swords that one might find in the local sword shop. These were hand made, in the traditional Samurai style. It is said that a Samurai's sword is an extension of his own soul, and I believe that. Please do not dishonor the crafter of these fine blades by misusing the sword." Chang was speaking in an almost reverential tone, and when he finished, he reached into the box and withdrew one of the wrapped swords. He opened it up just enough to see inside, then closed it again.

"Juan, would you please step forward." Chang asked, and Juan stepped forward. This was one of the few times that Juan did not have his characteristic grin on his face. He knew this was serious business, and he stepped forward, and bowed in front of Chang. He stayed bowed until Chang also bowed, he was happy to see that his youngest brother knew the proper way to handle this situation.

"I hereby present you with a blade that was made specifically for you. It has etched into the blade, the marking of an Eagle. May this blade serve you as you serve your fellows." Chang withdrew a sheathed Sword, and presented it to Juan. Juan took it with a bow, and exposed the blade just enough to see the markings on it. Right below the hilt was an eagle in flight. He pushed the blade back into the scabbard, and then moved back to his seat. This was repeated for all the officers, and Strike Team Commanders. Once everyone had their sword, he stepped back to his seat, and Jack took the podium again.

"Okay everyone, that part's over with, and we are about to begin the party. I just have one quick announcement before the party starts. Janet has just informed me that she is canceling all classes for tomorrow." This had the desired effect, and the room erupted in cheers. As the cheers were starting to die down, the sound of a guitar was heard coming from the speakers spread throughout the room.

"Adam, do you have a minute?" Mike asked Adam later on that night. Adam had been talking to Logan about the party, when Mike had found them.

"Of course Sir, what can I do for you?" Adam said, coming to attention.

"Mike... Just Mike. Sir makes me feel like an old man," he said with a grin.

"Alright Mike, what's up?"

"Well, I was just thinking, you boys have worked hard here lately from what I've heard, and I really don't like the idea of leaving Billy and Ronnie here after I just found them. So why don't all of you come up to my place for a bit. Call it a vacation of sorts."

Adam pondered for a second, then grinned. "I think that would be nice, but, would you mind if I turned it into a working vacation. Most of the kids here have never gotten to train in a forest environment before, and from what I understand, your place would be great for it. It's certainly big enough."

Mike thought for a second, then nodded. "Sure, why not, but I do have at least one condition to it... do not blow anything up... I like my property the way it is." He added the last part while chuckling.

Adam couldn't help but laugh as well. "No problem, Mike... I'll make sure we don't blow anything up. But you know... it does get hard to control Jory sometimes. Especially at a new place. He'll want to play with his new creations."

"Adam..." Was all Mike said before Adam busted out laughing. Mike just grinned and shook his head. "You're as bad as Sammy!"

"Hey! I think that's a good thing." Sammy said from behind Mike.

Mike turned around and smiled at his boy as Sammy pushed into him under his arm. "Well, that's a matter of opinion there kiddo." Mike said while hugging the boy to him. Adam thought it was really good to see Sammy smiling again.

Vishnu, watching from a short distance away, thought he knew why Sammy was smiling now.



A short while earlier as the party began, Sammy had suddenly got up from the table and walked silently away with Mike looking after him worriedly then following.

What they hadn't known was that Vishnu also followed them out of the hall.

\*\*\*\*\*Mike's POV\*\*\*\*\*

The music started and I saw Sammy look down for a minute before suddenly standing and walking away.

He hadn't been the same in days and now this happened.

I thought I knew what was wrong, and I knew that "later" had become now.

I quickly got up and followed in the direction which he had gone beginning to look for him as I left the Cliff side.

He was standing on an outcrop a little ways off, staring at something in his hand and I kind of knew what it had to be.

As I reached him he softly said without turning. "They gave me this for killing someone."

I wrapped my arms around him bringing him back against my chest as I saw the medal he was now holding in his hand, staring at it, and I could hear the confusion and pain in his voice.

"They gave you that for saving people." I told him just as quietly.

"But I killed someone. I know you've trained me and all, but..." He said, then fell silent.

I knew what he wasn't saying.

I had trained him, in firearms, martial arts and some combat skills, but all the training in the world didn't bring it home until or unless you actually had to put it to use and Sammy had done exactly that.

Eleven years old and he had been forced to take a life.

It didn't matter if the guy deserved it or anything else, Sammy had killed someone and even for grown adults that was hard to take.

"Yes you did. There is no changing that, but what you have to do, now, is ask yourself if you had any other choice. You saved lives the other night. If you hadn't killed him he would have killed others maybe even including you," I said

He turned around in my arms and looked up at me and even in the darkness I could see the tears glistening in his eyes.

"Why does it hurt so much then?" he asked, in a lost voice.

“Because you have a heart and no matter what the circumstances were, it still was taking a life. That’s never easy nor should it be. I’ve killed people Sammy, quite a number of people, in fact, and it never ever gets easier. I don’t want it to get easier either, because it shouldn’t be. I was trained to terminate the enemy with extreme prejudice, which means that was what I was supposed to do, kill people, but all the training for it in the world doesn’t make it any easier to actually do when the time comes. You were faced with a choice that night, kill or let him kill your friends and family. It’s a choice that no one and especially a child should ever be faced with, but you were and you made the right choice, never doubt that for a second, Son, you made the only choice you could. That medal is about the choice you made, the lives you saved, the people here now because of what you decided out there that night. It’s not about killing that man, it’s about Adam, Ronnie, me and who knows who else who are still here because of you. It’s about life, not death, SamSam.” I said, trying to get through to him.

He didn’t answer me for a while, just kept his head on my chest, but eventually he said, “It’s all mixed up, Dad. I don’t regret killing him cause it saved people, but I also hate that I had to kill him. Does that make any sense?”

“Yes, Honey, it does.” I told him

“The thing that scares me, Dad, is that it was all so easy. It was like it wasn’t real, it was just like training and he was a paper target or something. It shouldn’t be that easy, Dad, it just shouldn’t,” he said.

“Was it easy or was it that you didn’t have time to think about it and just reacted with the training you had?” I asked him.

It was very important that he see this, because it would make all the difference in the world for him.

He didn’t answer for a while again, as he thought about it, then he said “You’re right. I just reacted the way you trained me. I knew what to do and it all went in like slow motion or something. Seeing him, bringing up my gun, taking aim center mass, then firing three rounds and waiting to see the effect, it was just like in training.”

His voice had taken on a tone of almost wonder at discovering this, and I knew it was a major turning point for him.

“Many times when someone is confronted with using deadly force against an opponent, there is no time to ‘think’ about things. Most times you have seconds or less to react or die, and all you have to rely on is your training, which is what you did. You didn’t stop and think about it; you just reacted and that saved lives. It’s now, after the fact, that you’re thinking about it and beating yourself up over it,” I told him.

“Hold me, Daddy,” he whispered, as I sank to the ground with him in my arms. “Just hold me, please,” he added.

“I will, Baby, always,” I replied, as I hugged him to me.

\*\*\*Vishnu\*\*\*\*\*

I watched as Mike sank to the ground with Sammy cradled gently in his arms and I wondered what I would think if I ever had to do what Sammy had. I had been trained all my life along with my litter ma-

tes to kill, but as I was seeing now, doing wasn't the same as training for it. Would I be able to do it when the time came, which I thought sooner or later it would, or would I freeze? Would I be able to deal with it afterwards or would it bother me like it bothered Sammy? Mike was right, no kid should have to face that decision, but then again we lived in world that didn't seem to care a whole bunch about us kids. I had the feeling that at least some of us would, someday.

They stayed that way for a long time before heading back inside, with me quietly following them.

It was later that night as I was getting ready for bed that Sammy knocked on my door.

"Come in," I called out.

"Hey Vishnu," he said, as he walked into the room, shutting the door behind him.

"Hello," I replied.

"I just wanted to say thank you," he said, smiling at me.

"For what?" I asked, confused.

"For being there tonight, for guarding us, for caring," he said.

"You knew?" I asked, wondering how he could possibly have heard me.

"Yeah, I knew," he said, as he walked forward and wrapped me in a hug.

"Thanks, Little bro," he said into the top of my head.

I pulled back and looked at him as he smiled down at me then let me go and quietly left the room, shutting the door behind him.

I sat down on the edge of my bed thinking about that hug.

I found that I rather liked them, especially from him and Mike, and that they were different than the touching that all of my litter mates always did between us.

It had always been just us, but with Mike and Sammy, along with his family, I felt something different, something that I couldn't name but something that I wanted more of, a lot more of.

Mike was always hugging me or holding me and I noticed he did it with all the kids too.

They seemed to like it as much as I did, although I didn't understand why I did so much, but it was another thing I wanted much more of.

Then I thought of his last words to me, 'little bro', he called me 'little bro' and for some reason, that made me feel all funny inside.

He called me 'little bro', I think I like that.

Adam was sitting in the co-pilots seat in the Black Hawk thinking over all the events of the last week. Of course, there was everything that happened with Jeremy. He had absolutely no regrets for what he did, although the really fast healing would have been nice. He'd never had to nurse a wound before, and it really sucked.

He was really glad that Billy and Ronnie had found their father. Adam knew it had been really hard on the boys not having a father around. Joe had tried to fill that role for so many kids, but, then again, he'd been in a coma for the last few months.

He still couldn't believe that his dad had finally woken up. He had been so worried that Joe might never wake up, and if he did, what condition would he be in. Well, all those questions had been answered. He woke up, granted he couldn't walk, cause of how bad his back had been broken, but he was mentally okay, and that was the most important thing.

I was Joking around with Logan when suddenly a voice came over the radio. "Man Down!" The voice shouted. It only took Adam a split second to realize that it was Ronnie's voice on the other end of the radio. "We need help! It's a damned war zone down here! Adam, can you read me?!"

Adam snatched up the radio, "I've got you Ronnie, what's going on?"

"Adam, we got a lot of tango's here, Dad's down, and just about everyone's been shot! I don't know what the...." Adam heard Ronnie's voice fade out, and Adam was sure that someone was now jamming communications.

"RONNIE!!!!!" Adam shouted, as he felt the Black Hawk tilt forward, he already knew that Will was accelerating to full speed, and he could hear Will shouting orders over the radio.

"Viper, lead to all Birds, dump your tanks, and take it up to full speed, we got an unknown situation with at least one man hit. Drop to tree top level, and fly at full speed, Vipers three through six, stay with the others, they're your cover; contact me when you get to five miles out for further orders, we should get there about five minutes before you do." Will was calmly talking over the radio as he was flipping switches. Everyone felt the bird jump a bit as Will dumped the fuel from the external tanks, before dropping the tanks.

Bill came over the radio, on a secured channel, after he was done doing as ordered. "Will, what the fuck's going on, was that Ronnie?"

Will knew that this had to be tearing Bill apart, since he had always taken care of Ronnie and protected him. Now he wasn't there when his brother needed him, and it was showing in his voice.

"Yeah, love, it was, Adam's still trying to raise him, I'll let you know as soon as I know anything. Just stay calm, and get there in one piece, okay, don't over fly that thing." Will was trying to comfort his boyfriend as much as possible. If there was shit going down there, they were going to need everything that Billy was carrying, not to mention everyone on board.

Billy was starting to get hysterical, and Will knew he needed to get him under control. "Billy! Listen to me! If you wanna help Ronnie, then you gotta make it there in one piece. I need you to get everyone there suited up and ready to go into a hot LZ. Can you do that for me?"

Will heard nothing for a few seconds, then Billy came back over the radio. It was clear that Billy was struggling to keep himself focused, but, for now at least, it seemed to be working. "Copy that, Viper lead. Dumping tanks now, adjusting course for a tree top run, will report at five miles out. Everyone will be ready for a hot landing."

Will sighed with relief, and then turned his concentration to flying his helicopter. Right now, they were skimming the ground, only about ten to fifteen feet above the tree line, doing just in excess of two hundred miles an hour. It was times that these that he was very glad that he and Charlie had tweaked all their birds a bit.

Meanwhile, in the back of the helicopter, everyone except Janet was getting into their gear, and checking weapons. Adam had already climbed out from the co-pilots seat, and was checking his gear. He looked around, as a plan was starting to form in his mind. He had no real idea what was going on, but he was now planning for the worst. "Mom, can you do me a favor and jump in the co-pilots chair, Will may need another set of eyes."

Janet nodded, and climbed up front. Adam moved up next to her, and helped her strap in as well as get the helmet adjusted for her. Once that was done, he gave her a brief run down on how to operate the communication equipment, that way she could hear what was going on, as well as talk to Will without shouting.

For the next ten minutes, Will was busy weaving his way through the mountains, and everyone else was busy checking and re-checking their gear. The tension in the air was almost palpable, as everyone was running different scenarios in their minds about what they might find when they got there.

Finally, Will came over their radios, "Five minutes out, got nothing on radar, we should be in visual range in three. Ascending to ten thousand so we can come in high." The helicopter then tilted up, and they all held on for dear life.

They all got a shock when they heard Janet come over their radios. "Adam, could you come up here, and teach me how to use this big gun?"

Adam shook his head, but moved forward, and gave her a crash course on how to use the nose mounted turret. "Mom, all you gotta do is use this to keep them pinned down," Adam said, after he was done. "You don't have to worry about actually shooting anyone, we'll take care of that."

Janet nodded, just as Will came over the radios, "coming into visual range just over the next rise." Everyone crowded forward so they could see what was going on. They all gasped as they saw what looked to be a full blown war going on below, as they crested the rise.

Adam took stock of what was going on. He saw that there were guys in black armor fighting other guys that looked to be in star fleet uniforms. Adam was a bit surprised to see that a bunch of the people with phasers looked to be nothing more then kids themselves. He also saw that there was a group of people huddled down next to a shed. They were taking heavy fire from the black armored group, trying to advance on them. He thought back to what Clint and Ian had told him about the clan they belonged to, and suddenly knew what was going on. Someone was attacking the clan.

"Will, fly over that shed, Mom, Vic, Toby, target the guys in the black armor. Will, I want two passes made, then hover over the shed. We'll jump out there. After that, cover the Star Fleet guys. I'll give you

further orders once I figure out what's going on. Everyone else, when we go, Juan, I want you to get on the roof of the house. Chang, Jory, Logan, I need you with me for now. Logan, get your rope ready." Everyone nodded and held on as Will started to make the passes. They couldn't hear much, once Janet started opening up with the turret, then it was even more deafening when Vic and Toby opened up with their machine guns.

Once both passes were made, Will brought the helicopter to a hover right over the shed. Adam, Juan, Jory and Chang, jumped from about forty feet up, while Logan dropped his rope, and slid down that.

The five boys hit the ground, rolled and came up with their weapons at the ready. When they saw that everything was clear, Adam nodded to Juan who took off at a fast run. He then made his way over to the first person he saw. He looked to be about fourteen years old, with blond hair, although he was covered in dirt. He had his right arm hanging uselessly at his side, and an open wound on his left leg. Adam nodded to Chang who moved with him, shouldering his rifle, and grabbing his med pack.

"Hey there, you okay?" Adam said, when he got close to the boy.

"I'm Cory Short, Patriarch of Clan Short. Which one of you is in charge?" The boy asked, the pain he was feeling evident in his voice.

Adam's eyes widened for a second, and he took a moment to look the kid over. Adam had a lot of respect for this kid, after everything he had been told about him by Ian and Clint. He popped to attention and saluted. "I'm Colonel Adam Casey, commanding officer of the U.N.I.T. We are ready to assist in any way sir."

Cory weakly returned the salute. "At ease Colonel." He seemed to think for a second then added "You're the guys Ian and Clint told me about. They recommended that we invite you to become an independent branch of the Clan; you just earned that. I'm in no shape to continue out here on the field; will you accept a commission as the first division of the Clan Short Assault Group?"

Adam was momentarily stunned by the offer, but nodded his head. "It would be my pleasure, Sir. If you could just attach someone to us so that we can get a sit rep, and also to coordinate with everyone else, I would be happy to relieve you of command." (Author's Note: Sit rep, stands for Situation Report.)

Cory nodded. "You have command, Commander Casey. One second, I'll get a rep here for you." Cory paused then said, "Ark, I need JJ here as soon as it is safe to do so." Adam was a bit confused as to who Cory was talking to, and then jumped slightly when suddenly a young boy, no more than twelve appeared next to Cory. He had what Adam assumed to be a Phaser at the ready. "Stand down JJ." Cory quickly ordered.

Adam took the boy in and saw that he had strawberry blond hair, and hazel eyes. The kid looked at Adam then back to Cory, before saying, "Are these the guys that just saved our butts?"

Cory nodded. "JJ, this is Commander Adam Casey, he's heading up the new Clan Assault Group. Anything he needs, give it to him. Contact CIC immediately and inform them that anything he needs he gets." Cory then turned back to Adam. "Commander, this is our head of security JJ Richardson. If he does not know an answer, he can find it for you."

Adam was confused about the whole “Commander” thing, but figured he could deal with that later. He nodded to JJ, and extended his hand. After the other boy shook it, he looked around, noticing that the fighting was dying down. “Okay, it looks like things are calming down. Are we expecting more attacks?”

JJ nodded. “They haven't stopped yet.” Adam noticed Cory starting to sway next to JJ. The other boy noticed this too, and put his arm on Cory. “Mr Short; give Commander Casey your communicator.”

Cory complied weakly, passing his communicator to Adam.

As soon as Adam had the communicator in his hand, JJ nodded. “Ark, emergency transport of the Council Crafter to the AI hospital immediately.” As soon as Cory disappeared, JJ turned to Adam. “What do you need to know?”

“Well,” Adam replied, while taking in a report from his brothers, “Juan says that he doesn't see any more targets, Will says the same thing, I think we're clear for now. What I need to know is how many people you have on the ground, and what their capabilities are.” Before JJ could answer, Adam held up his hand to stop him.

Will was talking to him through their link, ‘Adam, the other birds should be here in about five minutes, where do you want them?’

‘Stand by Will, I'll let you know in a second.’ Adam then lowered his hand and looked at JJ. “Sorry about that, just found out that the rest of my team will be here in about ten. I have a total of thirteen full teams, and eight other helicopters inbound, roughly two hundred.”

JJ looked a little shocked at the number, but didn't have time to say anything, Adam was already moving. He grabbed his radio, “Will, I want the Command Center dropped just north of the barn. I want the LZ just in front of that. Off load Viper five first, then six. Teams in five need to secure the area, teams in six help get the command center set. All non-combatants get their asses into the barn!”

Will's POV

‘God damn, it's a fucking war zone down here.’ I thought to myself as I banked the black hawk hard to the right, and opened up with the 20mm cannons on the side. Mom was doing the same with the turret, and she had gotten to be pretty good at using the thing. I heard Vic calling out for a re-load on one of the flank guns. I still can't believe they haven't melted the barrels down on those things.

“SHOTS FIRED, SHOTS FIRED!!!! 100 CHARLES, WE'RE TAKING AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRE OUT HERE, SHOTS FIRED!!!!”

Who the hell was that?!?! I looked down and saw that it was from the radio that was monitoring all the local channels, so I knew it had to be close. Frantically, I started looking around.

“What was that?” Mom asked. She had this sort of wild look in her eyes, but her color drained face, and the lines around her eyes told me just how scared she was, and to be honest, I was too. This is more than any of us had ever dealt with before.

“Some local cop or something, close by... I'm trying to figure out where.... THERE!!!! over there!” I finally spotted them, and banked hard to the left, and threw the throttle stick all the way forward. I saw Billy doing the same thing, and knew that we'd have plenty of cover for what ever was going on over there.

“Oh my GOD!” Mom gasped out, and I knew why. Sitting in the middle of the road, with it's barrel slowing turning was an old style Russian TANK!

Grinning, I flipped the selector switch, and activated the Hell Fire Missiles. “WILL!!! Don't you fucking dare! That's MY TANK!!!!” Juan yelled through our link, and I laughed saying, “Sorry little brother, but that thing's about to fire on friendlies.... I gotta take it out!”

“Billy, Adam, help us please, they're shooting us.” A young boy's voice sounded over the radio and in shock I realized that it was Kevin's voice. He was down there in that vehicle and in trouble. I knew that they needed help, so I keyed the mic. “Coming right up little brother.” Then I pulled the trigger. Juan screamed 'NO!!' just as the Hellfire Missile slammed into the side of the tank. Oh, it was a pretty picture, the thing exploded in a great pretty fireball. “Finally I got to use one of those suckers! YEAH, burn baby burn!” I just couldn't help myself, I was actually starting to feel giddy... this was cool.

“100 Charles warn your people off this area and stand by for evac. Kev come on we're coming in hot.” I heard Billy say, and saw him go in for a landing. I turned back towards where Adam was, knowing there wasn't much that 'Janet' couldn't handle.

There wasn't much left for us to do, so we went back to fly cover for the 26's that were just starting to come in. I had already relayed Adam's orders, and saw that they were all in formation to carry them out. 'UMAA', our med chopper was just getting ready to drop the command center in place, and 'The Mule' and 'Phantom' were in line ready to off load.

I could only imagine the chaos that was going on in the back of those helicopters. Obviously no one was prepared for combat when we left this morning, so while they had their gear with them, they didn't exactly have it ready to go. I know they spent the last few minutes scrambling to get into the gear, and get their weapons checked. The biggest concern I really had then was the fact that all the little kids and the non combatants were in those two helicopters as well.

“Command center's down, we're outta here!” Dierdre said over the radio, before she gave the huge helicopter full throttle and banked to get out of there.

We flew a few circuits around the area looking for bad guys, and thankfully we hadn't seen anyone, maybe they finally got the message that they had bitten off a bit more than they could chew.

The teams that were in the Huey's had to fast rope down, but from the smiles I saw on their faces, they loved every minute of it. 'The Mule', was circling a ways away waiting in line to drop it's people while, 'Phantom' dropped it's back hatch and everyone was getting ready to egress, as we made another pass and we able to look right at it when Juan's scream came over the radio.

“SAM Incoming!” I banked the Black Hawk as hard as I could while scanning my screens. “FUCK! It's heading right for the 26!” I shouted, and heard Janet gasp in shock.



Charlie was a damned good pilot, and did exactly what we was supposed to do, he gunned the engine and banked as hard as he could to get away from the SAM. But it wouldn't be enough, I realized. You just can't turn that much helicopter quickly enough.

I switched the control stick, and depressed every trigger I had. Both the cannons on the side, and the nose turret started to whine as I fired every bullet I could at the SAM. It's a one in a million shot, but maybe... just maybe I can hit the missile.

"Oh God... Please no." Mom said softly, as everyone watched. I could see the kids in the back of the helicopter screaming as it banked hard. Some of them falling out, as Charlie tried hard to get out of the way.

## Chapter 24

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

I saw the helicopter come in for a landing. From what Will had said, the local Sheriff was on board, along with his three boys. Of course, I knew Kevin, Randy, and Danny, and I knew their dad was the Sheriff, but they sure picked the wrong time to make a house call. I watched as Billy set the Chinook down and they all scrambled out of the back. I had to chuckle when I saw Fluffy, and the looks the man was giving the big cat. Few people really understood Fluffy, and I certainly wasn't one of them. But Tommy says she actually has a wicked sense of humor... and I'm starting to believe him.

Once they got over to us, Kevin spoke up. "Adam this is my dad Eric Carlson."

I turned to him and said "Welcome to hell Mr. Carlson, I'm Commander Adam Casey and this is Major Hayes."

"Just what in the hell is going on here and where's Mike and Sammy?" Eric said after taking a few seconds to get his bearings.

Damn, he had to ask the tough questions right off the bat. "Sir, they were attacked and have been evac'd to an advanced medical facility elsewhere."

"Adam are they hurt?" Kevin asked before Eric could say anything.

"Yeah Kev they are." It would do no good to lie to them, so I didn't bother. I knew how close they were with Sammy, and I'm pretty sure they'd know if I tried to lie.

"Are they...are...?" Eric tried to get out, and I knew what he was asking. Unfortunately, I didn't have lots of information.

"They're all still alive but...well some of them are bad, real bad." The three boys threw their arms around their dad, and started to cry. I knew what they were feeling. Maybe not the depth, as I wasn't as close to Mike, Sammy, and the rest as they were, but I was still worried.

I saw Eric's face tighten, and a look of rage came across it that I knew all too well. This man may just be a local cop, now, but I knew from that look that this man was a shooter. And he just put his game face on. "Who did this?"

"According to Cory, it's a religious group called the FCC." I told him, hoping that maybe he'd have some more information on this group, cause mine was rather sketchy.

I watched as the boys disentangled themselves from Eric, and went over to where people were stacking crates full of supplies. Supplies that were supposed to be used for training. Now, they would be used for the real thing. I just hope everyone's ready.

"Sir, do you have any information about this FCC? I know what Mike told us when he was in Utah, but he didn't have a great deal of hard Intel." Maybe with him being the sheriff, he would know something.

Over the next minute or two Eric went over everything he knew of the FCC, unfortunately, we had already heard all of this. It didn't really help us much, but I thanked him anyways as the Unholy Trinity, as I heard they were called, came back over to us.

Logan had been busy talking into his mic, trying to coordinate the set up of the command center which had just been set into place, when Alvin ran up. He handed me a radio, which I then handed to Eric. "Here, you may need this." he nodded and took it just as Kevin tapped him on the back, "Dad, this is for you."

The look on his face was so funny as he turned and saw them standing there with their guns and armor, and if it wasn't for what we were doing here, I would have probably laughed, but not now.

He didn't say anything for a moment, then he just reached out and, one thing at a time, took the items from us and put them on.

While he was doing that, I took a look around to see what was going on. Everything was going just as planned. 'UMAA' had set the command center in place, and 'Phantom' was about to land and let everyone out of it. 'The Mule' was circling a ways away waiting their turn to let their people off, and the Huey's had already dropped their people by fast rope. Things seemed to be settling down, and if we were really lucky, we may just have scared this FCC off.

"Thank you," he told them, before turning back to me and saying, "You tell me what you need, and I'll try to provide it."

"Well right now..." I started to say, when suddenly over the radio I heard Juan yell "SAM incoming!"

I spun around and saw it, the white streak that came from the woods. "Oh my God," I breathed, as I knew instantly it was heading right for the 'Phantom'." The helicopter was still about fifteen feet off the ground when Juan's call came in, and Charlie banked it hard, and gave the beast full power. He turned hard to the right, desperately trying to climb, so hard that some of the kids even fell out of the back. I knew that there were almost a hundred people in the bird, but my thoughts focused on one in particular. "Kent." It came out more as a strangled gasp than anything else; I had just found him a few months ago, now I could lose him.

With Charlie banking as hard as he was, it didn't take but a few seconds before the back hatch came into view, and I swear I could see the faces of the kids back there. Of course, what Charlie couldn't have known, was that when he banked that hard, it put the back of the helicopter right in the path of the SAM.

Will started to open up with the Black Hawks guns, trying to shoot the missile down. It's a one in a million shot, but maybe, just maybe he'll hit it.

"Oh no!" Kevin gasped out, and I could hear his brother Danny crying desperately as if he could help the bird get away. "Go, Go, Go, come on Charlie Go!"

We all just stood there as time seemed to drag on. It was like someone put everything in slow motion as I watched the SAM streak through the air, and the helicopter tried valiantly to get out of the way. But the big lumbering beast just couldn't move quickly enough, and I watched in horror as the SAM actually flew inside the back of the helicopter before it exploded into a fireball that blew out of the back of the 26.

The 26 seemed to stop in mid air, banked hard on her right side, and just floated there for a brief second before dropping like a stone. The impact of it shook the very ground, and for a brief second, all was quiet.

Then, as suddenly as it was quiet, time seemed to snap back to normal, and I heard many people screaming, myself among them. I couldn't think... I didn't have the time to think, I needed to act.

"Get your asses moving! I want the Med Evac set up right FUCKING now and we need to get any survivors out of that helicopter. Logan, get the Command Center going NOW!" I said, as I broke into a full sprint towards the downed craft. It hadn't blown up, thankfully, but it was on fire, and it wouldn't be long till it did.

Just as I was about to reach it, Chang and Jory were at my side. All three of us jumped the thirty feet up to get to the only accessible door. What I saw inside of that will be burned into my mind forever. It was nothing but a charred ruin in there. I quickly jumped down, and fought to try and find a foot hold. I was amazed to see that there were still people alive. The fire was bad, but the smoke was even worse. I could barely breathe, and couldn't see much at all with all the dark smoke. "KENT!" I screamed, hoping beyond hope that he was one of the one's still alive. Jory and Chang jumped down next to me, and together we started trying to sort out which people were alive, and which were dead.

I was surprised when I heard a bang on the side of the helicopter, and then the sound of tearing metal. Suddenly, I saw daylight start to stream in, and looked over to see that Kahn and Kuan Ti had literally ripped a hole in the underside of the helicopter, and made a sort of doorway. That would make things a lot easier, and soon there were others in there with us trying to get the survivors out.

Everyone stopped short when Juan's voice came over the radio again. "Shit! They got another SAM! Helena, break left!"

Oh God no... not another one.

~~~~Dennis's POV~~~~

"Wow it's getting pretty crowded up here." Seth remarked, as I scanned the skies around us trying to keep a safe distance from the multiple other helicopters in and around the area.

"Yeah it is, let's see if the boss will let us take HI-CAP." I said, as I thumbed the mic button on the cyclic, "Viper 8, lead?"

"Yeah, go ahead Dennis." Will responded from his bird.

"Hey boss can we kick it up to about 2.5 or so, it's getting kinda crowded up here." I asked him.

"Sure Viper 8, you're cleared HI-CAP at 2.5 to 3 but be ready to come back down if we need you." Will, said over the radio.

"Roger that, Viper lead." I replied as I raised the collective and turned the throttle, slowly climbing above the other aircraft in the vicinity to give us some breathing room.

"Ah that's better." Seth said as we hit our new altitude and kept up the patrol.

"Yeah it is." I said.

"So you think they bugged out for good?" He asked next.

"Don't know, but I hope so." Was my answer.

"Yeah but we missed all the action and I was hoping to get some." Seth said.

"Why were you hoping to get in the shit, man, I wanna stay the hell out of it." I asked in disbelief.

"Well...ya see, if we came back heroes and all then maybe Sally would give me some." He replied.

"Jesus Seth, is that all you ever think about?" I heard Keith ask disgustingly over the intercom.

"Well.....yeah!" he said, grinning.

"Forget it, Sally ain't never gonna do nothing with you." I said laughing.

"If that's all I'm gonna think about in a couple of years, then I hope I never grow up." Keith replied as we all started laughing.

"Ah kid, it ain't that bad." I said into the mic to a "Hmmmph" in response.

"Really, it's pretty neat." I heard Eric say and figured at eleven and just starting, he might actually know.

"But that's all...." Keith started to say when a scream cut through his voice over the radio "SAM! IN-COMING!!!"

"Find it!" I yelled over the intercom as I spun the Huey around trying to get a visual.

"Oh Jesus!" Seth gasped as I turned to where he was looking.

"Dennis it's going for 'Phantom'!" Eric cried into the radio.

I finally got a look at what they were seeing as I got the bird faced towards them and dropped the nose.

Charlie was jinking the bird for all he was worth and I could see kids falling out the back as he tried to get away from the SAM, but I also knew that he was too low and slow to have any maneuverability in that flying boat.

I could hear Seth mumbling, "Climb, climb, climb," as if that would make any difference.

Will was firing everything he had at the SAM, but the chances of him hitting anything were next to impossible.

It was going to hit, there just wasn't anyway for Charlie to escape it, no one could have.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity the inevitable finally occurred.

"They're hit, they're hit!" Keith cried out, as the missile impacted straight up their chute and a fireball blossomed outward.

"Oh God!" Seth cried.

There had been over one hundred kids in there was all I could think, as I watched the copter hang there for what seemed like ages, before suddenly plummeting to the ground.

I could hear ragged crying over the intercom from the younger boys and looking over I could see Seth had tears running down his face as well, I knew they matched my own.

We all knew who had been on that bird, all the little ones including Kent, Adam's brother.

But most of all, it was knowing that Lincoln, who had kinda adopted us and who had become our mascot since he found out we were named "Bam Bam" after his favorite cartoon character, was on that helicopter that had just been shot down. That hit us the hardest, although we knew all of the rug rats on it.

"Viper 8 descending to one thousand and we're live." I said quietly, into the radio, as I activated all of our weapons systems from stand-by to active mode.

Fuck them, they messed with the wrong people this time, those kids were our family and those bastards were gonna pay.

"Look alive, we're hot and it's payback time." I said into the intercom, knowing I had to get them focused.

I saw it worked on Seth as he wiped the tears from his face and I heard the crying subside to sniffles from the back.

Then Juan was back on the radio saying something that sent an icy tendril of fear down my spine.

"Shit! They got another SAM! Helena, break left!"

They were heading for the 'Mule' and there wasn't anything we could do about it.

Another hundred plus kids were about to die.

DAMN IT!!!!

"Do something!" Seth screamed.

I shook my head as I answered. "There's nothing we can do." As I watched, Helena begin trying to evade the incoming missile, just as Charlie had, minutes before.

I knew it would be just as successful too.

"There's gotta be something!" Keith cried from the back.

"Dennis, ya gotta save em, you can't let them die too!" Eric added.

"Guys, there's only one chance, and if we succeed then we won't make it out alive." I said, realizing the only hope those kids had.

Suddenly, I felt a hand squeezing my shoulder and glancing up, I saw Eric looking back at me.

I also realized that Keith was doing the same to Seth.

Both said "Do it." at the same time.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"We can't let em die." Eric said, looking me straight in the eyes.

I looked to Seth and he just nodded his head.

"Hang on to your balls then!" I said, as I maxed the throttle and lowered the collective while pushing the cyclic forward and hard over, sending us straight towards Helena and hopefully what would save her and her cargo.

"Viper 8! Dennis! What the hell are you doing? Get outta there!" Will screamed over the radio, but I just pushed this baby forward with every thing she had.

The engines screamed in protest and warning gages were going off, but it didn't really matter anymore, as I keyed the mic and said simply. "What we have to."

"Dennis, no!" Will cried, but the time for talking was over and I didn't answer as I was almost there.

"I wonder if ya can get any up there?" Seth asked, smiling over at me as Keith moaned "Leave it up to you to worry about that."

"I love you guys." I said, as I turned the cyclic the other way and at the same time pulled sharply up on the collective, bringing us to an abrupt halt and putting us directly between what was coming and what was already there.

Damn, it looked so small.

"Guess we're gonna find out bro." I said, just as I felt Eric tighten his hand on my shoulder and it hit.

Will gasped, "No!" watching in horror as the missile struck Dennis's ship and it blew apart in a massive explosion.

~~~~Janet's POV~~~~

My God, the missile actually went into the helicopter before it exploded. I can't believe this, so many kids in there... so many. We were all silent, and just stared at the horror as the helicopter fell down to the ground and just sat there smoking. A few moments passed and nothing happened. No one moved... no one could move, and then Adam's voice came over the radio. "Get your asses moving! I want the med evac set up right FUCKING now and we need to get any survivors out of that helicopter. Logan, get the Command Center going NOW!"

That seemed to shake everyone out of the horror induced paralysis, and everyone started running around. "Will, get me down there, they need me!" I said into the radio, and Will just looked at me and nodded. He turned the helicopter away from the wreck and started to drop altitude. It was going agonizingly slow, and I had to stop myself from telling Will to go faster. I knew he was doing his best.

The wheels had just touched the ground and I reached up to take the headset off when Juan's voice rang out again. "Shit! They got another SAM! Helena, break left!"

I gasped in horror, as I saw the other MI-26 that was acting as a troop transport suddenly bank hard to the left. I couldn't move, and all I could think about was another group of kids blowing up. I knew the 'Phantom' hadn't exploded, and I'm pretty sure that was because it didn't have far to fall. It was only about fifteen feet off the ground when it got hit, but the other one was a lot higher.

I just sat there watching, as the white streak came into view, I was hoping that Juan was wrong, but the thing was heading right for the other craft. "Viper 8! Dennis! What the hell are you doing? Get outta there!" Will shouted, and that's when I saw it. Dennis was flying his Huey hard and fast right for the 26. It almost looked like he was going to ram into it, but then I saw him pull up, and get right in the path of the missile.

"What we have to." Was all that Dennis said, as he sat there, right in front of the missile, not even trying to move to get out of the way.

"Dennis, no!" Will cried again, but he wasn't gonna move, I knew what Dennis was doing, and at that moment, I couldn't have been prouder to have been called Mom by him. I didn't want to watch, but I couldn't tear my eyes off the scene in front of me, as the white streak got closer, "NO!" Will shouted one last time, and then, nothing but a fireball, and I knew I had lost four more children today.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

"Oh my GOD! Dennis just flew into the path of the SAM. Helena, you're clear, get the hell outta here." Juan's voice cried over the radio, and I could tell that he was crying.

I looked over at Chang and he was just as wide eyed as I was. I grabbed my mic and shouted into it. "Will!!!! Clear that damned tree line. I don't care if you blow up half the forest!"

"Gotcha, bro." Will said, as I finally made it to the front of the helicopter. I knew the others behind me were grabbing survivors and getting them out, but I was looking for Kent. When we left, he was sitting right at the front with Lincoln and his mom. Maybe that protected him.

I heard gun fire, and sounds of missiles being fired, and from the sounds of things, the rest of the helicopters unloaded everything they had into the woods. Maybe that'll push the bastards back for a while. But they better come back... I wanted blood now.

"HELP... somebody help me!" I stopped and looked around, trying to figure out where the screams were coming from. The smoke was so dense in here I couldn't see more than a few feet in front of me. Finally, I figured it out, and moved in that direction.

When the smoke cleared enough for me to see what was going on, I saw Lynn was on her hands and knees with a big piece of metal across her back. I could smell the burning flesh and I knew that the metal was burning into her. I rushed over, grabbed it, and lifted it off of her. Thankfully, I was wearing my combat gloves.

She rolled off to the side, and that was when I saw them. Kent and Lincoln were lying underneath where she had been. She was using her own body to keep the burning metal from hitting the two young boys. I dropped down beside them and called out. "Chang! Get over here, NOW!!!"

I looked over at Lynn when she spoke softly. "Please... please help my baby." I just nodded and she closed her eyes, slumping down on the floor.

"I am here brother..." Chang said; when he got to my side, but his voice trailed off as he dropped down to inspect the two boys.

"They are alive, but we need to get them out of here." Chang said, as he scooped up Lincoln's badly burned body. As soon as he was out of the way, I grabbed Kent, and moved after him.

"You're going to be okay, Kent." I said softly to him, as I carried him from the helicopter, praying that he would be.

He was burned so badly and I could feel tears stinging my eyes and knew they weren't just from the smoke as I made it out of the door.

The little figure in my arms was even worse to see in the clear light of day and I tried to choke back a sob, rather unsuccessfully, at seeing his poor burnt body and face.

The clothes that he had on had melted to his skin and the burns extended up and onto his face.



Oh God, how could anyone survive this I thought, as I could only thank God he was unconscious and didn't have to feel it.

I could see that Lincoln fared no better and felt the nausea rising, as I looked back and forth, between the two tiny bodies.

As I reached the medical evacuation and treatment area, I gently placed Kent down onto the ground, next to where Chang was laying Lincoln, and looked up at him in mute appeal.

Please tell me they were going to be alright.

Chang just looked at me for a moment before lowering his head and I felt the tears falling, as I looked back upon the brother I had so recently just found and now appeared as if I would lose.

"Don't leave me now, little brother, I just found you." I said softly, as I brushed a lock of hair surprisingly unburned from his forehead.

It was one of the few areas where he hadn't been burned to varying degrees.

Chang called out, "JJ, we need you!" and I looked up as the other boy came jogging over.

I could see him bring his hand to his mouth gagging at the sight that presented itself when he got to us, but then he quickly spoke to that unknown person, calling for immediate transport of Lincoln and Kent.

I watched as both boys disappeared, and I feared that it would be the last time I would see them; I hung my head and felt the tears flood my cheeks as I let out a ragged sob followed by another one.

I noticed Khan laying Lynn down nearby, but all I could think about was that I had failed them.

"I was supposed to protect them and now look!" I cried as I felt arms surround me pulling me close.

"You couldn't have known, and you did the best you could." Eric said, and I realized it was his arms holding me as I let myself fall into them, crying.

"It's my job to know, and it sure looks like my best wasn't good enough, doesn't it?" I said into his chest.

"Sometimes we can't protect those we love most, or know everything, son. You can't beat yourself up over not being a God. You're not." He told me.

"Why? Why did this have to happen?" I asked, sobbing.

"It happened because there are people out there who hate, who hate for no reason other than hate itself." He said softly.

"I promised them that they wouldn't get hurt anymore, and now look." I said.

"Was there anything you could have done differently? Was there any aspect of their training that you neglected? Was there any way you could have known just what was going to happen today?" He asked gently, as I felt him brushing his fingertips against my forehead.

I thought about it for a few moments before finding myself answering, "No," even though I didn't want to.

"They need you now more than ever, Adam, you're their leader and you need to lead now." He told me.

I knew he was right. I had to lead now and that meant I had to somehow pull it together. I would cry for Kent and the others of my family that I had lost today at a later time. Now, I had things only I could do.

"You're right, Eric, thanks." I said as I slowly began getting to my feet with him giving me a hand up.

"Alright, is everyone out of there?" I asked, turning to Chang as I saw the Trinity carrying another child from the wreckage.

"I believe so." Chang replied

At that moment Khan yelled "It's gonna go any minute," and I screamed "Everyone get back, it's going to blow up."

I heard a voice scream "Kevin, come back!" and looked over to see Kevin running back towards the helicopter.

Both Eric and I screamed "KEVIN, NO!!! GET BACK!!!" at the same time.

I heard Kevin call back "There's someone still alive in there" and then he was through the door.

I started in that direction, along with Eric, but before we'd gotten far Kevin was running back out of the now near engulfed helicopter with a small figure in his arms.

"GET DOWN!! IT'S GOING!!!" Kwan Ti yelled, and we all hit the deck, my last vision of Kevin was him almost throwing the child down ahead of him and jumping on top of him as the helicopter exploded.

The heat and flying debris kept us pinned for long moments, before we heard a boy crying out. "Oh my God, Kevin, DAD, CHANG somebody!!!"

I was up and running, with Eric not far behind me, before the echo of his scream had ended and I knew that Chang followed closely on my heels as I ran towards the young boy in question.

I got there and Eric dropped to his knees slowly reaching out to touch his son and cry "Oh Kevin, what have you done?" As he gently turned the boy over.

"Couldn't...let...Andy...die." Kevin gasped out, and I could then see the piece of metal that had entered his back almost on his side, that and the blood flowing out from around it.

"Is...he...?" He tried to ask, but couldn't finish as he began coughing.

Chang had dropped down alongside of the boy and was checking his pulse as he yelled once again for JJ.

"Kevin, you're going to be alright, just hang on, son." Eric said, sobbing.

"Don't die Kev, please don't die!" Danny cried, while Randy who was on his knees staring at his brother and looked like he was in shock.

JJ ran up just as Eric turned his gaze to Chang and pleaded, "Please help him!" before breaking down crying again.

Once again JJ called in and soon Eric was left with nothing to hold in his arms, but that didn't last, as both the other boys threw themselves into them, crying their hearts out.

I looked over at the young battered and burned body of Andy who had come to us with Jeremy and felt sick once again. So many were dying today, and looking at him, seeing the massive burns and the bone sticking through his pants leg I thought this one was going to be another one. Jeremy was going to be devastated as Andy had been especially close to him. All the little ones from Jeremy's group home had been. Chang was working on him and once again as had become all too frequent an occurrence in the last little while, he just silently gazed up at JJ who again called in and moments later Andy joined so many others wherever they had gone.

I turned back to Eric, and now it was my turn to try and offer some comfort, only I didn't know how. Sammy had told me that the Trinity were truly a threesome and I could see that now. It was like a piece was gone from the whole, and Eric was...well Eric looked like a part of him had been ripped out, thinking about, it I suppose it had, but I also knew we couldn't stay here any longer. It was time to turn this around and make them pay for what they had cost us, this day.

"Eric, we have to get to the command center." I said, as he looked up at me with a blank look in his eyes. He was lost in his pain and I had to shake him out of it.

"Eric, we can't stay here, we have to go. Kev is getting the best care out there right now, but we have to start planning how to avenge him and the others. These people have a hell of a lot to answer for, and the only way they're gonna is if we start figuring out how." I told him.

I could see it starting to get through, finally.

"Will Kevin be alright?" Randy asked, suddenly looking up at me with a distraught and totally stricken look on his face.

"I hope so, little guy; they're doing all they can, now it's our turn." I told him gently.

He looked at me for a long time and I held his gaze until he finally said, "Yeah, it is."

I saw a look come into his eyes that should never be in a child's eyes, and I shuddered at it as he pulled himself from his Dad's arms and stood up.

"Come on guys; let's get to the command center." He said and turned, starting to make his way there, as we all followed.

Danny quickly caught up with him, and Eric followed them with me at his side.

"I'll never forgive them, for that alone." He said softly.

"What?" I asked.

"For taking their innocence away, for taking their childhood." He replied, and there was nothing I could say to that, for it was true.

That was the look I had seen in Randy's eyes, something lost, something forever taken away, something else in its place, something I didn't want to think about.

There would be time for that later, since for now, we needed to get organized if we wanted to strike back and that was the place to do it.

~~~~~Logan's POV~~~~~

"WE'RE LIVE!" Alvin shouted out, and I looked to see that we had indeed gotten the satellite link up in place.

"Daileass!" I shouted out, and was rewarded with his voice coming back through the speakers.

"Jesus Logan, what the fuck is going on out there?" Daileass's voice sounded frantic, and Logan could see by the data flowing across the screen that he was bringing himself up to date very quickly. "I got all the radio frequencies bugged, and there's a shit load of traffic coming in, but I think I've isolated their channel, and just got it cracked. Also, I took the liberty of hijacking a military satellite, and getting it into place."

"Cool!" I said, just as the video feeds from outside the command center came on the screens. "Jesus," I breathed, as I, for the first time, really got a good look at what had happened out there. Of course I heard it all over the radio, but this was the first time I really saw it. "Alvin, Simon, Theodore, you're with me." I said, as I got up and went outside. I saw that Adam was heading towards us, and I figured I'd meet him outside to give him an update.

We got outside and ran over to Adam and the others. I could see Adam had been crying, and knew he was hurting inside. He's had to deal with so much lately. This was just supposed to be a vacation, and instead it's turned into this hell. I did the only thing I could do which was wrap my arms around him and squeeze as tight as I dared. I knew his side still bothered him, but he'd never admit it.

"Hey baby, we got everything set up inside, and Daileass says he's got the FCC's radio frequencies, and they just got them cracked. Also, he got us a military satellite, although he was grumbling about not being able to get a federation one. He says even he can't crack those thing's security quickly enough." I told him everything just as quickly as I could; I knew he had a lot of things to keep in his mind right now. I saw JJ mouth something to the person on the other end of his radio, but didn't have any idea what he said.

Adam nodded his head at me, and was quietly thinking about something for a minute or two, when I heard Daileass's voice ring over the radio. "HOT DAMN! You won't guess what just happened. Someone named Ark just handed me access to a Federation satellite, and then told me to have fun with it. DAMN I could get used to these things. Give me two minutes to get it in place, and I'll be able to count each of the fleas on Vishnu's ass from here." No one could stop themselves from busting out laughing at the excitement in Daileass's voice.

Adam's head snapped up, and he had on a mile long grin. "Cool beans, Daileass, get me pictures of this area, ASAP!"

"No prob boss, I'm already burning up my processors with this shit. You'll have it in a snap!"

Just then, something caught my eye behind Adam. "What the..." I said, and everyone spun around to look where I was pointing. There seemed to be a kid, maybe ten or eleven running towards us with his hands high in the air. From the looks of it, someone was shooting at him from behind.

"Oh god, someone's shooting at that kid!" I screamed, as I pulled my MP5 around and started looking for whoever was firing.

"What the..." Adam said. He was staring intently at the kid, with a weird look on his face. "Something's not right here.... SHIT! Juan, drop that kid!" Adam screamed into his mic.

"WHAT?!?!?" Came the shout from several people around him, just as a single gun shot rang out from the house, and the kid was thrown to the ground, where he rolled a few times before stopping and not moving.

"ADAM! WHAT THE HELL..." Joe and Mom started to say, but Adam cut her off. "There's something wrong with this, Jory, Chang go check it out."

They both just nodded, and took off at a run to the kid. The shooting from the woods had stopped, and everyone was just staring at Adam. Mom looked like she wanted to say something, but a look from Adam told her not to.

"Adam! This kid's got a bomb strapped to him, it didn't go off, but I gotta do something about it before we can move him, and Chang says he's still alive!" Jory shouted into his mic, and our jaws hit the ground.

"How..." Joe started to ask, then suddenly I was flying backwards. I don't know what's happening, one second, I'm standing there, and the next, I'm flat on my back... and... I can't breathe...

"LOGAN!" I heard someone shout, but from so far away, why can't I move? I have to struggle to even turn my head, what's going on. That's when I realized, I'd been shot.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

"What the..." I said. There was something just not right about this situation. Why would a kid be running out of the woods with someone shooting at him, especially since he isn't one of ours. Not to men-

tion the fact that he's wearing a flack jacket... "Somethings not right here.... SHIT! Juan, drop that kid!" I screamed into my mic.

"WHAT?!?!?!!" Came the shout from several people around me, just as a single gun shot rang out from the house, and the kid was thrown to the ground, where he rolled a few times before stopping and not moving.

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"Adam! This kid's got a bomb strapped to him, it didn't go off, but I gotta do something about it before we can move him, and Chang says he's still alive!" Jory's voice came back over the radio.

"How..." Joe started to ask, but then I heard the gun shots start. I spun and dropped, trying to find out where they were coming from.

"LOGAN!" I heard Alvin scream, and when I looked over, my blood ran cold. Logan had been hit... my baby's been shot. Oh God no, not Logan.

Alvin jumped on Logan as even more shots rang out, and I saw his body jump, once... twice... three times, then stop moving. I couldn't move, I was frozen in shock, not Logan, not my only reason for being. Time stopped for me, and all I could do is stare. The pool of blood from under them was growing much too fast.

Time snapped back to running, and a soul wrenching cry erupted from my throat, "LOGAN! NO!" and then I was there. I threw my gun to the side, and dropped down next to them. I barely registered that Khan was taking command and ordering the helicopters to strafe the woods again, and for the snipers to lay down cover fire.

I gently rolled Alvin off of Logan, and gasped in horror at what I saw. Logan had taken a hit, center mast, and it blew through his body armor like it wasn't there. The hole was huge, and blood was bubbling up from inside. "Adam! Come on, we gotta get them back!" Someone hollered and then Alvin, Logan, and I were being drug back behind the command center.

I fell down beside my love, and pulled him into my arms. I could see his blood was all over my hands, but I didn't care. Nothing mattered anymore, not with Logan gone. Oh God, my Logan, Why?!?!"

"ADAM!!!! You have to let me in there!" I looked up at the voice and couldn't recognize who it was through my tears.

I felt someone pull me away, and I just didn't have the strength to stop them. I fell down on my ass and just sat there and watched crying the whole time. Chang came running over, and started to work on Alvin. The little guy tried, but it didn't do any good, I lost Logan. Nothing matters anymore.

~~~~Amur Khan's POV~~~~

I watched in shock as the snipers started to open up. First to go down was Logan, and then Alvin, one of the most fun loving kids I ever knew, tried to use his body to shield his big brother. Shield him he did, three bullets hit him, while he protected his brother. I glanced at Adam when I heard his screams, and could only guess at what was going through his mind.

We have had many long talks at night, and the one thing I knew better than most was just how much Logan meant to him. Everyone says that it's Adam that keeps them going, but it's Logan that keeps Adam going. I knew I had to do something, so I let my training kick in. This was a war, and Adam would expect those of us that could, to step up and take his place.

"Viper Lead, clear the tree line again! Snipers in the trees, clear them out." I yelled into the radio, I saw where some of the muzzle flashes were coming from, so I opened up to try and make them take cover. I looked over my shoulder, and saw that they had indeed gotten Logan and Alvin to safety, so I didn't have to worry about that, for now.

I looked around and saw all of my brothers here, all trying to keep the snipers down, but it was in vain, most of our weapons couldn't accurately reach the tree line. Then I saw it. Two cases sitting on the ground, and I knew exactly what was in them.

"Kuan Ti... you're with me... the rest of you... cover us." Everyone just nodded, and Kuan Ti and I ran over to the crates. As soon as we got there, he knew what we were going to do, and he had a grin on his face. We ripped open the crates, and sitting inside of them was a 20mm cannon each. These were the same kind that we put on the helicopters. These we had brought along to use as spare parts, in case something went wrong. But I also knew that they could be fired manually if... you knew how, and you were big enough to handle the kick. Both of us were.

It took us less than a minute to get the things out, and the ammo that was sitting next to them loaded in. Kuan Ti grinned at me, and I clicked on the radio. "Everyone near the tree line, get down and stay down till the all clear is sounded."

The helicopters had just made a pass and were circling around to make another one. I saw another SAM get launched out of the woods, and there wasn't even enough time to say anything. Will banked hard at the last second, and it hit the black hawk square in the tail rotor. "Fuck! We're going down... Viper lead going down, and going down hard!"

And then they were down. Unfortunately... they went down in the trees. I glanced over, and my brother's grin was gone, replaced now with a look of steely determination. Upon seeing it, I just nodded. "Cats... let's go get them. We got the lead!" With that, both of us opened up with the cannons.

It was damned hard to keep the guns pointed in the right area, and walk forward, even for people our size and strength, but we had no choice. We chewed up the trees and saw many of the snipers dive for cover and start to retreat. Once we were close enough, we both dropped the cannons, and swung up our MP5s. They were a lot easier to use, and we broke out into a full run, with the others right behind us. One thing we were all good at was running and fighting in the woods. A few of the enemy had the good sense to run, the rest died. Most of them quietly, at our claws. This is what we were made for.

Roaring loudly, we broke into the clearing made by the helicopter going down, and saw that another team had already made it there before us. I could only grin as the team we had named the Tiny Terrors came out from inside the helicopter. Obviously, they had the same thoughts that we did, make sure no bad guys got to the downed crew.

Sean, their Team leader, snapped a salute once we got near the downed craft. "Sir, the craft is secure. Most of the crew is okay, just a few minor injuries. We should be ready to pull out momentarily."

I just nodded, and watched as Will came out of the helicopter, now dressed in his body armor. "Oh, That's fucking it! These assholes are so fucking dead!" I couldn't help but laugh as he grabbed his rifle and looked around for someone to kill.

He didn't have long to wait, as people started to erupt from out of the woods. Will quickly fired off his rifle and dropped two of them. "Everyone back in the helicopter!" We all did, and soon we were engaged in a hell of a fire fight. They were shooting at us from all angles and we were shooting back. They had us surrounded, and for the moment, we were definitely pinned down. I looked over to Will and he just shook his head at me.

I reached down, and grabbed my mic. "Cats to command! We're pinned down where Viper Lead went down... need immediate assistance. Repeat we are pinned down, need immediate assistance."

"Received, we have your location... get ready for your help!" Came the voice over the radio and I didn't have time to respond as I quickly had to take down a few guys who were trying to get close to us.

"GRENADE!" I heard the shout and spun around to see the little grenade bounce into the downed craft, and land right in the middle of where the Tiny Terrors were holed up. I didn't even have time to react, as I heard my brother roar, and then I saw him dive into the middle of the group and onto the grenade. I watched in horror and screamed. "NO!!!" but it was far too late.

Stunned silence reigned, moments later when the roar of anguish and pain filled the beautiful valley from eleven throats crying out their loss and agony for the world to hear and feel.

~~~~~Joe's POV~~~~~

I struggled with the damned wheel chair as they brought Logan, Alvin, and Adam to the back side of the command center. I heard Khan shouting orders and I was relieved that someone was taking charge. Janet dropped down next to Alvin, as Chang was working on Logan. Thankfully, Janet kept her wits about her and knew that working on Logan wouldn't be the best thing. Soon JJ came running over and after talking to his contact, both boys vanished.

I had to wipe tears from my eyes as it hit me that I had just lost one of the boys I considered my own. Once again, I cursed the damned chair I was stuck in. I turned myself around looking for Adam. I knew he had to be taking this hard. He puts up a strong front for everyone, but I knew that Logan meant the world to him, knew exactly how he would be taking it. That's when I noticed him. He was just sitting there with his knees drawn up to his chest, rocking back and forth, staring at the spot Logan had been. There was a look of such indescribable loss and pain in his face that it stunned me and made me think that just maybe, Logan and the boy Alvin weren't the only ones we were in danger of losing, today. I started to wheel myself over to him when suddenly he seemed to be lifted off the ground. Shouts of surprise erupted from around us as everyone turned and stared at the sight.



Adam now hovered about 3 feet off the ground, and was surrounded by a soft white glow. His eyes were open, and he seemed to be looking at something or someone. Whatever, or whoever it was, it seemed only he could see it however, as we couldn't. Then he started to talk. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but I could see his mouth was moving.

We all stood there in shock until gun fire erupted around us. The first ones that seemed to recover were the Sheriff's boys, but all too soon, everyone was firing back. Since I didn't have a gun at that point, I took one last look at Adam, who now had tears falling down his face, but was smiling, then I went for the cover of the command center. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to worry about Adam right now. If I did, we may all end up dead, these people really had a hard on to kill us all.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

I just stared at the spot where he'd been only seconds ago. Dead and growing cold as Chang worked to do something anything, but I knew it was too late.

He's dead, my Logan, my world was gone. Logan had meant everything to me, he was the only reason I could go on, in what this life had made me, and now he was gone, my everything was no more.

I knew I should be angry, hell royally pissed would be a better word, but somehow I just didn't have it in me. I felt like...like nothing. I knew now what the term 'dead inside' truly meant.

For that was what I was now, dead, only no one had bothered to tell my body that yet.

Then suddenly I heard a voice, one I knew. "So Adam, how's it feel to be fully human?"

I looked up from my spot, funny calling it that, but it was the last place I had seen my love, so it became my spot.

I looked up and saw an angel standing there, the same angel that had let me save Jeremy's life, by taking his injury onto myself.

The problem was though, that by bringing back Jeremy to life, I had made a bargain to be a normal human.

I no longer had all the things I had hated that made me special, I no longer had what it took to save my love and because of that, Logan was now dead.

"It sucks." I finally replied.

"Adam, you still don't get it, do you?" The angel asked softly, and looking up I saw that he had tears in his eyes.

"Get what? Get that the love of my life is dead because I couldn't protect him?" I said brokenly.

He was shaking his head sadly, and I could see the pain in his eyes as he looked at me and finally said, "Adam, the only 'bargain' there ever was between us, was in your mind. I can't take away that which The Creator has endowed, only you can do that." He said to me, leaving me confused now.

"I don't understand, I gave up everything to save Jeremy. I became human and now...now..." But I couldn't go on.

"Adam, you can't give up something which you never were. Don't you see? You've always been human, except in your eyes, that is. You've never been this freak that you thought yourself as, just a young child that has more control of his body and can do some special things that others can't, but that never made you any less human than any other on this planet. There is nothing that you can do that makes you a freak, and your new Clan family will soon show you that." He told me gently.

"But...but I don't heal anymore and I can't do anything." I said

He smiled and said, "There is nothing more powerful in the universe than the human mind, and yours more than most. You haven't healed because you told yourself that you couldn't anymore. As to doing anything, do you remember jumping from the helicopter or maybe jumping up on the one that went down? Adam, you are as you were before Jeremy died. You have never changed except in here." He said as he pointed to his head.

I felt elation run through me for a moment, but it quickly faded as reality set in once again.

My head being screwed up had killed him then.

"What does it matter anymore anyway? Logan's dead now, the bastards killed my baby, nothing matters anymore." I spit out and I couldn't help it as I broke down and started crying again.

I felt the angel walk closer, then I was enveloped by his wings in a hug that filled me with warmth as he spoke softly to me.

"Hey, who said anything about him being dead? Where he's been sent has some of the best medical equipment in the universe at it, and I happen to know for a fact that it's not his time, or Alvin's. He's alive, Adam."

What? Did I just hear him right? Logan's not dead and neither is Alvin? "But...I saw the wound...no one could survive that." I told him.

The angel smiled warmly and I felt myself ease in his embrace. "Adam, I would not lie to you. Your lover is going to be okay." I felt tears start to stream down my face. He was alive. My Logan was alive. I couldn't believe it.

"But Adam, I think you have something you need to do, now." I looked up at him with questions in my eyes. "There is a job to do, and you're the only one that can do that. The people that want to hurt and kill the clan are here, and there's a lot of them. They care about only one thing right now, and that's making the Clan pay for hurting them. They mean to kill every single one of you. And if they succeed, it will drive fear into the hearts of everyone that might stand up to them. You can't let them win here. Our Father hates fighting, and killing, but right now, they leave you with little choice... either fight them, or let them kill your family."

I looked up into the eyes of the teen aged Angel, and felt his gentle hand reach up and wipe the tears from my face. As I looked into those eyes I saw something I have only seen a few other times. Unconditional love. In that moment, I felt as if everything was going to be okay. I felt, more than saw, the

glow around us brighten and in that moment I felt all the wounds I had, close up quickly. Along with it, all the fatigue and weariness left me. It felt like I was a brand new boy.

As the glow faded, he looked at me one more time. "Adam, your time is now. It's time to go show the world who and what you made in that little cave of yours. These kids would follow you to the gates of hell with smiles on their faces. Go and show the FCC that they picked the wrong people to fight with."

I looked up and smiled at him as he slowly started to fade. And then he was gone. I looked around me and saw that everyone was staring at me with concerned looks on their faces. "It's okay, guys... but I think it's time to show these fuckers just who they're messin' with." Everyone grinned at me, and that's when I took a look around to see what was going on.

I was told later my Mom, that she was actually treating one of the cats, Hermes, who had a gun shot to the arm. She was just getting ready to send him out, when I finally took control. He looked up at Mom, and grinned. "Sorry doc, but I ain't missin' this one." She tried to order him back, but he just turned around and told her that... "If you don't like it, then Court Marshal me." Of course, he had a grin on his face the whole time.

I felt the grin fall from my face as I looked towards the woods. What I saw there made my blood start to boil. Coming out of the woods was Amur Khan at a full run, with many others, including Will, behind him. The ones behind were fighting a running battle with the forces of the FCC. But it was who Khan was carrying that made my blood run cold. I could tell, even from this distance, that Khan was carrying the too still form of his brother Kuan Ti. I could see from the tears flowing from his eyes that Khan knew that his brother was gone, and I couldn't help but force myself to push my own tears back. Later, I would have time to grieve for all those who fell today.

"I want everyone to form up behind the command center!" I shouted into my radio as I saw another one of the helicopters get hit. It wasn't with a SAM, but they were going to have to land. That only left three helicopters. "Vipers, try and keep them pinned down for a few moments. Don't worry about keeping anything in reserve... this'll be over in a few."

I saw all three of them strafe the wood line again, and this time they let loose with everything they had. Billy must have melted the barrel down on one of the guns because it sputtered then literally blew off the side of his ship. Thankfully it didn't cause too much damage.

The "Tiny Terrors" came up with Khan right behind them, and I knew the instant I looked at them, that they had seen too much. They were trying to be brave, but they had that look of people who had seen too much. And why not, they were the youngest of all the strike teams. They trained harder than the rest to try and prove that they were just as good as the older ones were, and they were. In some ways, they were better. But now, now they didn't need to go back. They may never come back from it mentally, and I quickly made up my mind. I walked over to the group. "Hey guys... I need to ask you guys a favor." They all just looked at me questioningly. I could see it in their eyes, they were afraid, but I also saw grim determination, and I had to admire that. "Would you guys stay back and guard the command center. When we go, they won't have anyone there to protect them... I need people I can trust... can you do it?"

I saw all six of them square themselves up and salute. "YES SIR!" They all chorused, and I knew I had said what needed to be said. They saved face, and are doing something that needs to be done.

Khan set the body of his brother down on the ground, and we all knew it was too late. I just grabbed a blanket and laid it over him. Khan had a look of pure, unbridled rage in his eyes, but I could see the sadness in there as well. Tyler spoke up then, haltingly and with tears running down his face. "He saved us. He...he threw himself on...on the...he..." Then he broke down and couldn't continue as he looked at the blanket shrouded form on the ground in front of us.

I grabbed his shoulder and squeezed. I had to fight back the tears as I finally realized what was missing in me. I hadn't felt Kuan Ti die, but I did feel the emptiness. I couldn't lose it now, not now. Now I had to act, I was the one everyone was looking to put an end to this. I squared my shoulders as Amur Khan stood back up and looked at me with tears flowing down his face. "They'll pay for this, Khan, believe me, they'll pay." I told him putting all the pain and loss I felt into that and felt it turning to rage which was good, considering what I was going to do next, what we were going to do. "Come on, it's time they learned what the price of our lives is going to cost them."

With that, I issued the orders, and in a coordinated attack, with the helicopters flying cover, we hit the woods. Thirty five minutes later, we all emerged... covered in blood and gore, but with not a single FCC member left alive.

## Chapter 25

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

After we came out of the woods I looked over and saw that there was a large group of military people there staring at us with gaping mouths. If I had the strength, I would probably have laughed as I pictured what we must have looked like. I couldn't laugh though. I knew that everyone was hurt.

In some way or another every single person who followed me into the woods had gotten injured.

I looked over just in time to see Donnie and Jeremy walk out behind me, they were each carrying someone, and from the tears in their eyes I knew they both had seen things I had hoped they would never have to see.

Today had really illustrated the phrase the "horrors of war."

The Tiny Terrors came up to me and saluted. I gave a lazy one back as right now I just couldn't really muster the strength calling out, "Report Lieutenant."

"Sir, the Command Center is secure. From the reports Daileass has given me, the FCC has pulled back, and is running for the hills so to say. About fifteen minutes ago, members of the Montana National Guard with support from the US Military showed up with orders to assist and to follow the orders of the Clan commander on site."

I just nodded as an older looking guy in a uniform came walking up. I turned to face him, and saw him wince slightly. "Are you Commander Casey?" The way he asked left me certain he really had no idea how to deal with all of this.

I took off my gloves and ran my hands through my badly disheveled hair. "Yes Sir I am."

"I'm Capt. Albert Rodgers of the United States Marine Corps here to offer whatever assistance that I can." I looked around at what he had and was pretty impressed. I knew how long it would take to mobilize this kind of force, and get it to where we were at. He must have read my mind cause he chuckled. "Most of us were about to head out on a training mission in the Sierra Nevada's... and just diverted up here when the call came in."

I just nodded and looked around some more... I really couldn't believe this was the same place that Mike had told me about, and that we had all had plans of relaxing at. All around me was nothing but a full out war zone. There were still fire's burning in the helicopters that went down. I saw a few pieces of debris scattered about, but thankfully all the bodies were gone. The same could not be said for the woods. There the ground literally ran red.

"Sir?" I heard the captain ask, and I brought my attention back to him.

"Sorry, just zoned out a bit." I responded and got a knowing look from the man. I could tell by his eyes that this man had seen combat in the past, and he knew what I was going through. "I guess you guys can help with the clean up. If I don't miss my guess, there should be about five to six hundred dead in the woods."

"Excuse me Sir." Came the voice over the radio, it was Daileass's. "Go ahead." I replied

"I'm sorry to interrupt Sir, but from the calculations I've just run, the total number of dead on their side actually number slightly more the nine hundred and fifty." I fell into stunned silence, that number of dead just floored me. I looked up at Capt. Rodgers and saw that his eyes were as big as mine.

"Jesus Mary and Joseph," he breathed, and I couldn't help but agree with his sentiment. He shook his head, and gathered his composure back. "Actually Sir, we'll take care of the clean up, why don't you and your men head out, and let us deal with the rest. You look like you need a break." I just nodded my head gratefully, and moved off, soon to be met by JJ.

"Adam, are you okay?" I just nodded to him and thought back to my conversation with the angel, as I said. "Not really, but I'll live."

"Have you gotten any word on the others?" I didn't really think I wanted to hear the answer, but I knew I needed to.

"Well, unless there are any more casualties, we lost sixty one total." I closed my eyes and let that number sink in. Sixty one kids died today. Sixty one members of my family died today at the hands of these people. I tried to fight back the tears that threatened to spill, but I was unsuccessful. I looked back at JJ and saw that he too had tears running down his face. "And the rest?"

JJ nodded and wiped his tears away on his sleeve. "The most critically injured are at the Federation Youth Services Hospital in South Carolina. The rest are being spread out through civilian hospitals. While you guys were in there, the Chinook went down, with minimal injuries, and they've already been transported out."

I just nodded and looked around again. JJ turned and was talking to his contact again, and soon the most injured of the kids started to vanish. Khan and Vishnu walked up to me. "Sir, I was wondering if I

could ask you a question." Vishnu asked rather formally. I knew that honor meant a great deal to these kids.

"Go ahead." I said, and saw Vishnu square himself. "Sir, I would like to request that my brother and I be placed on detached duty." I raised an eyebrow in question, and he continued. "Sir, after the actions of this group today, I believe that the Reynolds family may still be in danger. I would like to ask that Kartik and I be placed as protective detail on them, until such time as the threat is deemed to be over."

I thought about what he said for a moment, and noticed how much it seemed he wanted to. I thought back to the time that the two boys had spent with Mike, and knew that this meant a lot to both of them. "Permission granted Corporal, until such time as the threat to them has been neutralized, you and Kartik are assigned as the personal protective detail to the Reynolds family."

"Adam, I think you need to head to the hospital. You really need to get looked at." JJ said and I turned to look at him. I wanted to protest... really I did, but I just couldn't seem to be able to make myself. I just nodded and the next thing I knew the three of us were standing in a different place.

~~~~Chang's POV~~~~

I was glad to see my brother go to be with his beloved. I could only guess as to how much it was hurting him not knowing Logan's condition. While Adam had been assured that he was alive, I have seen wounds like that in the past, and while he may have lived, I also knew there was little hope that he would ever be whole again. Before he left, Adam had instructed me to find out where the injured kids had been taken and make sure that they were okay. I spoke briefly with JJ asking him to look into that and he promised me he would find out where everyone was at, so we could follow up on them and make sure they were alright.

I spoke briefly with the Capt in charge of the Military Units here, and explained to them what was going on, and that they were responsible for this area. I then set myself about the task of sending out the minor injuries. Some of them I had to force to go because they did not wish to leave, they wished to stay and help, but medically they needed to be seen. I also sent the rest out to be checked up on anyway, just because of what they had been through today.

Soon I looked around and realized that my brothers and I were the only ones left. For a few brief moments, I let myself grieve for the family that we had lost on this day. I felt the hot tears start to roll down my cheeks as I stared at the burnt out wreckage of the helicopter that had carried many of my family to their death.

I felt a gentle hand on my shoulder and looked over to see Juan standing there with his own tears. "It'll be okay, Chang, we've avenged their loss."

I could only nod at his words, and his gentle touch, but both surprised me. I did not expect that from my youngest brother.

"But who will heal our souls?" I asked softly, but there was no answer from anyone.

After a few seconds, I looked over to JJ who I could tell was anxious to get home, "I do believe it is time for us to leave."

JJ nodded and spoke briefly to his contact, and soon we were all standing in a hospital waiting room. There was activity all around, and I could even see that some of our family members were here being treated.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

The three of us appeared in a large cafeteria and looked around. I saw Sammy standing over next to a table that Cory and someone else were sitting in front of. On the table was a video monitor and a small camera. It was obvious they were getting ready to, or were all ready in the middle of a press conference. I knew that Cory would want to know what was going on, so I walked over towards them with Khan and Vishnu in tow. We got there just as the younger boy was starting to talk to the people on the other side of the conference.

..."Those members of the FCC who ordered today's attack have been identified, judged, and found guilty of manslaughter. Their punishment is death, upon location of those persons; the punishment shall be served immediately." Kyle paused, then his voice went a little closer to normal. "The doctrine of the FCC has been analyzed and found to be in violation of over fifty percent of the Safe Haven Act; as such all violent FCC members found from this point forward are to be turned over to the Federation to reverse the brainwashing that is done by the so called clergy. Today some of the FCC crossed the line in the sand that the world placed there long ago; Iowa and South Carolina have responded to that line being crossed and for that we are truly grateful. It is now the choice of the rest of the world as to whether they would rather live in the extremist members of the FCC's promised land where kids are killed because they stood up for their rights, or if they want to live in our world that we are trying to build where you are judged by your actions and not your genetic makeup or scar tissue. That is all I have to say."

Suddenly that younger boy turned and looked at me intently and then I heard a voice in my head saying, "I'm Kyle and you're just in time. Cory needs to hear a report about what has happened. I know what you're worried about, so just introduce yourself as commander of Clan Short Special Forces, that's all anyone needs to know."

I was stunned for a moment, but then pulled myself together and walked over to where Cory and the others were and said,

"Sir, I have a report."

Kyle interrupted Cory's response. "Cory, with your permission, why not have Commander Casey introduce himself, and the others with him, and give his report directly to everyone."

Cory nodded weakly. "Proceed with Kyle's suggestion, Commander. Governor Jacobs of Iowa will be accepting your report for the world to hear."

I nodded, squared myself up, and looked directly at the monitor. "Sir, my name is Commander Adam Casey. I am the commanding officer of the Clan Short Special Forces Division, or, more commonly called, The Unit. Beside me is Amur Kahn, the Head of the Feline Assault Team. Also with me, is Vishnu, a member of the Feline Assault Team, and current commander of the Reynolds Security detail. At approximately twelve hundred hours this afternoon, we received a distress call from one of my team members. We were all on our way to Montana to enjoy some R&R and do a bit of training. Upon re-

ceiving the call, I ordered my teams to gear up for a possible hostile encounter." I faltered there for a moment, but knew I had to push on.

"When we arrived, we found a terrorist style attack underway. The apparent target of this attack was the Reynolds family. The enemy combatants were engaged with members of Clan short as well as Cadets who came in to help defend the Reynolds' residence. We acted quickly to push back the assault, and had hoped that, with the arrival of air support, they would break off their attack."

I knew I had tears running down my face, but I kept on, knowing if I stopped, I wouldn't be able to go on. "That did not happen, and soon we were engaged in an all out battle. After approximately forty five minutes of intense fighting, the terrorist element attacking us called a retreat. When it was all said and done, their dead number more than nine hundred and fifty. Casualties on our side number sixty one Unit members dead, and more than one hundred wounded. Of the dead, the oldest, at seventeen, was Private First Class Andrew Shoemaker. The youngest..." The boy paused, fighting to keep my emotions in check. "The youngest was Recruit Mark Little... he was only nine years old."

I then leaned in real close to the monitor. "I heard what Kyle has said, and I agree. The FCC will soon find out that war is what my brothers and I were made for. There is no place you can run and hide. But please... try... all that will mean is you'll die tired." With that, I stood back up, did an about face, and marched off. If I stayed, I may have said something I would have really regretted.

I also had something better to do right now. Somewhere in this building was Logan, and I wanted to see him, I desperately needed to see him. I needed my other half right now so bad. I got to the elevator and waited not too patiently for it. Khan and Vishnu caught up with me, and together we went up to the emergency room.

I spotted someone who looked like a doctor and asked about Logan, he gave me kind of a weird look, and then pointed to one of the curtained off areas. I rushed over then, with my two shadows, and when I pulled back the curtain, I almost collapsed. There, lying on a bed with his hair spread out around him like a halo, was my Logan, my very own angel. I glanced up at the monitors above the bed and saw for myself finally that he was still alive. I slowly walked over and saw that he was still sleeping. Gently I brushed a stray lock of hair off his forehead and kissed him. I didn't want to wake him up, so I kissed him again on the forehead, and turned to look back at Khan and Vishnu. I knew I had tears running down my face, but I also noticed that the room was starting to spin. Khan took a step forward as things really started to move. "I... I think maybe I need a doct...." and then there was blackness.

~~~~Chang's POV~~~~

Will was very anxious when we arrived, so I simply nodded to him, and he went off to the bed that held Bill. I looked around and saw that this was pretty much a scene of controlled chaos. The faces of the medical staff here were all drawn and worn. I could tell that these people had been working hard since everything started up.

I spotted someone who looked to be a doctor and got his attention, "Sir, I am Chang Casey of the Unit, I was wondering if you could tell me if you have seen Commander Adam Casey?"

The doctor looked me up and down, and I knew I had to look quite the sight to him. He then slowly nodded, "Yeah, I think I treated someone who was called Commander. Was he by chance the one that had the really big cat person with him?"



I nodded, knowing he could only be talking about Khan.

"Okay, he passed out shortly after checking on one of the other patients. He'll be fine, but right now he's resting."

"Thank you sir," I said, after he got done talking, and watched as he rushed off. I started to look around to see if I might be able to be of assistance when my eyes fell upon a young teen aged boy who was working side by side with this mechanical creature. I had no idea what they were, but it looked as if they were helping to take care of the wounded. I started to make my way over to them, as I could tell that the boy had at least some medical training, but something seemed to be wrong with him.

I saw him grab the side of the bed, say something to the machine, then topple over onto the floor. I rushed over to the boy just as someone else shouted "DANNY!" and we ran into each other.

"Sorry dude." The other boy said as he picked himself up off the floor and continued rushing over to the fallen boy.

"That is alright, my name is Chang, I am a doctor, may I be of assistance." I asked looking between the boy on the ground and the person he was working on before he collapsed.

"That'd be sweet, Dude, thanks." he replied before brushing the boy's hair out of his eyes. "What happened?"

I bent down, and gently placed my hand on his wrist, counting his pulse.

"I tripped." the boy weakly answered as he tried to sit up. "I'm fine, really."

"Really?" the other boy asked looking at me.

"From what little I have seen, and what I can tell just by observing him, as well as what I am sure he has had to deal with recently, it seems to me that he is suffering from classic signs of exhaustion. I would suggest that you find someplace to relax for a while, you will do no good to these patients in the condition you are in."

"I agree with Doctor Chang." The robot added. "Director Page is showing signs of extreme fatigue. He is running a low temperature, his blood pressure is also low and he complained about his vision being impaired shortly before losing his balance and collapsing."

"Really Noah, I'll be okay. Just give me a second to shake it off." The boy said as he tried to sit up once again.

Noah nodded his head and sat back on his heels while he pulled his communicator out. "No deal, Dude. Two doctors to one, you're benched." Noah grinned as he flipped his communicator open. "Noah to Marc."

"Marc here. What's up?"

"Marc, I really don't want to panic you, but I have a medical emergency you need to handle." Noah replied as he shrugged his shoulders.

"An android?"

"Yeah." Noah paused. "Something's wrong with Danny."

"On my way! Marc out!"

I looked at Noah, then back to the person up on the bed. "Do you believe that you can handle this until the other doctor gets here, because if you can, I believe I should help out this other patient."

"The doctor should clean up first." the robot stated as both boys stared at it blankly before Danny started to laugh weakly.

"They are practical." Danny said with a weak grin.

"Yeah." Noah smiled. "Chang, there's a washroom over on the other side of the nurses station down this hall." Noah said while pointing out the way.

I nodded, then hurried off to wash up, I knew that they would need some assistance here.

~~~Adam's POV 45 minutes later~~~

I walked into the emergency room trying to find out the condition of the kids that were brought here when I noticed that Chang was busy working on someone. I was relieved to see him here, cause I knew he wouldn't leave the field until everything was dealt with.

I started to make my way over to him, when I caught the tail end of a conversation. Some kid was talking to a machine I had recently learned was called a Med bot. "As you wish doctor." The med bot replied as the kid stood up and looked at someone else seriously.

"Who's responsible for the last group that came in?" He asked, as he led the other kids away from the bed.

"Which group?" He asked?

"The patient I took from that last wave. The only name I have on record for him is Alvin." The first one said, shaking his head. "I think he's part of the Unit that took over on the field. I need to speak with whoever is in charge of that kid."

I turned around and walked over to him fearing the worst. I don't think I could handle having to tell Logan that Alvin was dead.

"Excuse me, but is Alvin okay? I heard you say you needed to speak to someone about him. My name is Adam Casey, commander of the Unit." I said with concern written all over my face.

"Commander," he said in greeting, as he shook my hand. "I'm Doctor Furst. Can I speak to you privately about Alvin?"

Normally I may have wondered about a kid that looked younger than I am claiming to be a doctor, but then look at Chang. However, right now, I was more worried about Alvin. "Of course doctor, please lead the way."

Dr. Furst then leaned in and whispered into the other boy's ear. "We'll be in Examining room 3. Right this way Commander." Before turning back to me; I simply followed the doctor to the exam room.

The first thing I noticed was that Alvin was lying on the bed there. He looked like he was sleeping, but I didn't know enough about Star Fleet Bio Beds to be able to read the monitors very easily. I turned to Dr. Furst when I heard him shut the door and asked, "Is Alvin okay?"

"Physically, I think he'll be functioning fine really soon." He said, shaking his head. "Commander, are you familiar with the components in an android?"

To say that I was confused was an understatement, what do androids have to do with Alvin? "Ummm... not really, all that much, Logan would be the one to ask about Androids... if it's techy, he knows it."

"Oh, I should show you something, then." The doctor said as he approached the controls next to the bed and brought up a display. "I'm sure you can tell that this display is showing a human looking cranium with a positronic... er... android brain I mean. I mean it's pretty obvious in this image, right?"

I really didn't know what he was trying to say, or why he was being so pointed about it. "Ummm... yeah."

"That's great." He said, as he punched off the display, with a little more force than needed. "Do you think you can tell me why that android brain is in this human's skull?" He asked, as he clenched his fists. "Exactly what kind of experimentation has your organization been doing out there?"

I looked back and forth between Alvin and the doctor, for once in my life, completely at a loss for words. 'Alvin, an android? How could that be?' Then the last thing he said registered, 'he thinks we did this.'

"Hold on a second Doctor, obviously you don't have all the facts here...." I started to say, but he interrupted me.

"Oh, I'm all ears, Commander." He said with ice in his voice as he folded his arms and leaned up against the wall. The fact that he was so pissed was plainly evident.

"First off Dr. Furst, we had nothing to do with any of what was done to these kids. About four months ago, he, and about one hundred other kids escaped from a lab where the military was trying to create super soldiers. That kind of lab is where most of US came from." I was trying to keep myself calm. With everything that has gone on today, I really had to fight hard to keep my cool.

"I'm sorry." He said, as he looked down toward the floor. "I tend to get a little upset when I learn that a child has been murdered in an attempt to incorporate android components within a human. It wouldn't

be the first time it's happened." He got out, as he quickly pulled out his communicator. "Marc to Noah. Stand down."

"Gotcha Marc." Came a voice from the little communicator.

I can certainly understand why he'd be upset, especially since he thought that we somehow had something to do with it. "Apology accepted, now, however, I have to wonder how many more of us have computer brains?" I didn't think I really wanted an answer to that question, but I knew I was going to have to find out. Logan's gonna go ballistic.

I heard Marc gasp, "You mean it's possible this was done to more of your people?"

I sighed and ran my hand through my hair. "Yeah, see Alvin and twelve others are actually clones of Logan, they were "made" to be the intelligence teams. However, there were just over one hundred other kids in that facility. So your guess is as good as mine. Not to mention that myself and four others came from other labs that were all a part of the same project."

"Holy shit." Marc practically coughed out. "Do you know who's responsible for this?"

I felt my jaw go stiff, and I couldn't help but clench my hands, "General Adams is the one who is in charge of the Genesis project... and this is just one more thing that he'll have to answer for, when I get my hands on him."

"Unreal." Marc said, as he walked closer to the bed and put his hand on Alvin's arm. "I can answer your first question at least. Alvin is going to be fine. The gunshot wounds to his chest luckily missed any major organs. One shot grazed his left lung but that will heal without any real issues." Marc said as he turned and faced me again. "The shot to the head was the problem." He continued as he brought up the display once again. "A human skull is a lot more fragile than an android's. This display shows the crack he has in his skull."

Marc paused there letting me see it on the screen. I saw the large crack that ran down the side and couldn't help but wonder, "Is... is he gonna be okay?" I know my voice cracked, but right now I didn't care. The Chipmunks really had wormed their way into my heart, and losing one of them... well, I just didn't want to think about it.

"Yeah, he'll be fine." Marc said as he patted my shoulder. "See, a positronic brain is just as fragile as a human brain. The only real benefit is that his brain shut itself down out of self defense upon impact. Luckily, the only damage was a severe scoring of the external casing. That score will always be there but nothing inside was damaged at all. Had that shot impacted one inch higher, we would have been looking at total loss of the unit, possibly loss of the stored personality imprint."

"Oh thank God. I don't know how I would have been able to tell Logan. You see, Logan got shot, and Alvin jumped on top of him to make sure Logan didn't get hurt anymore. I don't know how Logan would have handled it had Alvin died saving his life."

"He's not going to die." Marc said with a smile. "He is going to need time for his injuries to heal though." He paused and then continued; "The other question would be, what will his response be when he finds out about what was done to him?"

"I'm not really sure, however, the question I have right now is how many of the others have the same thing... I think I need to find Dr. Tony, he was one of the doctors at that lab, although he dealt primarily with the cat/human hybrids." I was more thinking out loud right then, but I figured I would let him know what was going on.

"Well, if your Doctor Tony needs anything from me or my staff in assistance; let him know he has it. If you guys have a lot more of these experiments in your group, I can't see how it's going to be easy to get through." Marc said as he motioned toward the door. "I need to get back to work. Your people are welcomed to come in and visit with him once he wakes up. If your Logan has any questions about any of this, just have him get in touch with me." He said as he opened the door. "I really am sorry. For the grilling I was lining you up for when I first got you in here, and for the news I just dropped in your lap."

"Thank you very much Doctor, I'll let you know." He just nodded then was out the door. I went over and sat down next to Alvin, taking his small hand in mine and whispering softly "I'm here little one, we're all here for you."

~~~~Chang's POV~~~~

After washing up, I moved back into the treatment area, and started to help out where I was needed. It was quickly clear that they were dealing with the worst of the worst here, and needed every bit of help that they could get. I was now thankful for the training I got with the Federation's medical equipment, since that was what we were using.

Some time later, I felt someone tap me on the shoulder as I finished up one patient and was ready to move to another. "Yes?" I asked, while turning around, only to find my youngest brother standing there. "What can I do for you Juan?"

"Well, I was wondering about the other kids from the base. Someone here said they were being transported to other hospitals."

I nodded as that's what I had been told as well. "Go on."

"Well, I was thinking that maybe someone should go check on them, I'm sure they're scared right now." All the while, he was looking rather lost and more like an eight year old than what I knew him to be.

"That is very kind of you Juan; I think that would be a good idea. Jory and Will are over by Bill, and Donnie and Emily are over there with Ray, why not ask them to go help you with that. When you are done, please report back to me. Adam is currently recovering from his injuries, so I am in charge." I told him, while I started to work on one of the other patients. Thankfully, things seemed to be calming down here. Juan nodded to me, and I watched as he went off to speak to the others.

~~~~Donnie's POV~~~~

I was still in shock, and I knew it. I seemed to just be moving on auto-pilot right now. I had my arm around Emily, who was still crying...hell I was too. I might like to act as a big tough guy, but dammit, we lost a lot of friends today. No, I take that back... we lost a lot of family today.

I got up and went over to the bed that was holding one of my guys that actually survived. Kelly was lying there still asleep, but thankfully, he'll wake up. Which is more than I can say for David, Erin, and Gage. There were just kids dammit, and now they're dead. I had to stop myself from punching the bed, as I knew it would not really help my own wounds heal, but I really wanted to hit something... or someone. I swear that if any of those damned people were here right now, injured or not, I'd fucking kill them.

"You know, anger isn't going to help right now." I turned and saw Emily standing right behind me. She had wiped the tears away, but I could still tell she was hurting. Both of us had actually gotten shot today, though thankfully they weren't that bad, and the doctors here got us patched up real quick.

"Yeah I know, but I'm just so pissed..." She stopped me by placing her finger on my lips, then she leaned in and kissed me. I still couldn't get over how she could take away all the worlds' problems with just a kiss. For that brief period of time, all was right, and I had no worries.

When she finally pulled back, I pulled her into a hug, "Thank you," I said, as I broke the hug. She just smiled, and that's when I saw someone starting to stir in one of the beds. I quickly went over to him, and soon enough he opened his eyes. "Hey there Ray Ray, how you feeling?"

His eyes slowly focused on me, and a small smile came to his face. "Hi Donnie, hi Emily, you guys okay?"

"Yeah little guy, we're okay." He nodded slightly, and I could tell he was in pain. When he had been pulled out of the helicopter, he was a broken mess. From what the doctors said, he broke over half the bones in his body, but thanks to the advanced medical equipment here, they were able to repair everything, but of course he was still in a lot of pain. "Ray Ray, you hurtin'?" I asked him, already knowing the answer. He tries to be tough, but he's still just a little guy.

He nodded slightly, and I flagged down a doctor who didn't even need to ask what was going on, he just hit a few buttons on the bed, and Ray went back to sleep. "Thanks." I said, which just got me a nod as he rushed off to his other patients.

"You really love that little guy don't you?" Emily asked, as she wrapped her arms around me from behind.

"Yeah I do... there are times where I actually consider trying to adopt him when i turn eighteen, but I doubt that's gonna happen."

"Hey, you never know." She said, but before I could reply, Juan walked up to us.

"Hey guys, think you could give me a hand?"

"Sure, Juan, what's up?" I asked, as Emily nodded.

"Well, I was just thinking... you know the other guys that aren't here... well they're probably all alone and scared right now...so I figured maybe we should go look in on them." Juan stammered though this, and I was actually surprised. I didn't figure Juan to be the one to think about something like that.

"Of course we will Juan, that's very sweet of you to think about that." Emily said, and Juan actually blushed. He did smile a bit, as he turned around and we followed him off to where Will and Jory were talking to Bill. I still couldn't believe what happened to Bill.

"We should probably head back to the Utah base and get changed before we go." I said as I looked around at the group and noticed that most of us were still wearing our dirty and torn uniforms, some of them even with blood stains on them.

I walked over to one of the people I assumed to be in charge, and asked them about the how to get transportation. He told me how to go about getting communicators, use them, and how to get in contact with their command center to arrange for transportation.

"Okay guys, here are the communicators we'll need..." I started as I handed them out, and gave them a brief run down on how to use them, then I contacted their command center which I learned they called CIC and the next thing I knew, we were standing just outside the base in Utah.

~~~~Emily's POV~~~~

"You know something; I don't think I have ever seen this place this empty." Juan said while just standing there looking around. This little guy was really surprising me right now. I never pegged him for one that would get sentimental, but here he is with tears threatening to fall.

I walked up behind him, and wrapped my arm around his shoulder. "Come on, little guy, let's get what we need and get outta here. There're kids waiting on us."

Juan nodded, then we all went in to get what we needed. A few minutes later, we were all standing together outside the cave entrance ready to go. I had to chuckle when I saw Juan, but I was glad to see the old Juan back as well. He was fully decked out in a uniform, with a side arm on each hip. A large knife strapped to his thigh, and at least three other weapons hidden that I could see, and I'm sure there's more.

I looked around and saw everyone ready to go, so I got ready to contact CIC. "Guys, before we go, I think it would be best if we split up into teams, just in case." Juan said, and I had to agree with him. With everything that's happened, you just never know what might be next. Obviously Donnie and I were a team, so were Will and Bill, which left Jory and Juan together. Normally, I might have been worried about that combination, but not tonight. I contacted CIC, and next thing I knew, we were standing just outside a hospital.

I looked around, and was shocked at what was going on. Surrounding the hospital were men and woman in fatigues, and all of them had rifles. I looked closely, and saw that they were part of the Iowa National Guard. At the doors were two officers who were checking people's ID, and from the looks of it, finding out who they were and why they were there.

I looked at our group and saw that they were all just as confused as I was. "Okay guys, come on." I started forward towards the front door. Before we even got half way there, everyone fell silent and I could feel their eyes on us. I could just imagine what we looked like. Donnie and I leading the way with Will pushing Bill's chair behind us, and then Jory and Juan behind them. Every single one of us was armed, and I could tell by looking out the corner of my eye, that Donnie was walking just like I was. Shoulder's squared, back straight, and almost marching. The crowd of people seemed to split before us as we made our way to the front door. The military officers there did a double take, then

straightened to attention and saluted. As soon as Donnie and I returned the salute, they turned without a word and opened the doors for us.

As soon as we got inside, we were almost run over by a man in a business suit. Who had come running over as soon as he saw us. I barely caught Juan in time as his gun cleared leather and was pointing at the guy, who came to a screeching halt.

"Um mm... please don't shoot." The man said, and I almost laughed as his voice rose higher than Juan's normally was.

"It's okay Juan... you can put it down." Slowly, Juan lowered the gun till finally he put it away in his holster. The man let out the breath he had been holding and after shaking himself, he came the rest of the way over to us, only slower this time.

"Welcome to Des Moines, I only wish it were under better circumstances. If I don't miss my guess, you're with Clan Short?"

"Yes we are..." I said, as I looked around and saw that everyone was still staring at us. I heard that what had happened had been all over the news, so I guess I could understand, but it was still a bit unnerving.

"My name is Alfred Morgan the third, I'm the administrator of Mercy Hospital, I want you to be sure that all of your team members are being given the highest level of care possible, and are being cared for by my best doctors."

He was about to go on, but right now I wasn't interested in pleasantries. "I'm sure they are, Sir, but if you would be so kind, would you please just tell us where they are at?"

"Of course, my apologies. I would be happy to lead you there myself. They are all being treated on the third floor, so if you will all please follow me." He barely even waited for us to acknowledge him, before he turned and scurried off.

We followed him up to the third floor where we split up to cover more kids at once. We set up to meet back at the elevators in thirty minutes so we could report.

Donnie and I went down the hallway towards where some of the kids were being treated. I thought it kind of odd that there was military stationed up and down the hall complete with weapons.

We were walking by the nurses station when one of them waved us over. Donnie just shrugged so we followed the nurse into the break room.

"Are you two with Clan Short?" She asked, as soon as the door shut.

I just nodded and she rushed on. "There's a young boy in room 315, he was injured in the fighting that happened earlier today, but for some reason, they have him shackled to the bed in there. I overheard one of them saying something about him being a kid in the FCC."



I shot a look over at Donnie, whose eyes had risen in surprise. "The only kid I know that was there with the FCC, was the kid that had the bomb strapped to his chest." Donnie said, and I heard the nurse gasp in surprise.

"I don't think anyone knows why, but a kid, about nine or ten, came running at a group of us, with a bomb strapped to his chest. He got taken down by our sniper, but I figured he was dead." Donnie continued, and I had to agree, Juan doesn't miss, which means if this kid's alive, then there was a reason for it.

"I don't know about any of that, all I know is that there is a scared and hurt little boy in there that's all alone and they won't even let us administer pain killers to him." She said, I felt myself tense up

"What, and just why the hell not?" I said, through clenched teeth.

She took a step back and held up her hands. "They said that he should suffer some for all the suffering he caused. They've been treating him like shit all day. Hell they won't even let him get up to use the bathroom; they told us to just slap a catheter in him..." By now, I was fuming, and I knew Donnie was too.

"Nurse, would you please go find a doctor and have him report to that room as soon as possible. We'll go handle this." Donnie said, then spun on his heel and stalked out of the room. I was hot on his heels, and grabbed his arm halfway down the hall.

"Donnie, I just got a feeling about this... let me handle the boy, okay?"

His eyes locked on mine, and I watched as his eyes softened, and once again I was reminded about what I loved in him. "Sure thing babe, but these guards are going down."

I nodded, and he leaned down and gave me a quick kiss, then I took the lead towards the boy's room.

When we got there, we were met by two rather large men in military uniforms. They looked down at us with annoyance. "What do you want?"

I took a deep breath to try and calm myself down some. "I hear you are guarding a young boy in there, and..."

"And nothing. We're under orders that no one but military officers and doctors are allowed to go in there and see the prisoner." The first one said with contempt dripping from his every word.

"Look," Donnie tried, but he got interrupted as well. "No, you look... why don't you two go play soldier somewhere else and get out of our faces before we have you arrested."

That's it... they crossed the line this time. I didn't even bother looking over at Donnie, but a quick hand signal from me was all it took for him to back off. I was now really grateful for all the training I had been doing with Chang. I didn't want to kill him, so I simply lashed out with my foot, landing solidly on the outside of his kneecap. I heard it snap, and him scream, as I struck out with my palm to the upper part of his chest knocking the wind out him. Before he went down, though, I grabbed the pistol out

of his holster, and before the other guy could do more than turn towards me, I had the pistol cocked and in his face.

"I wouldn't try anything there, sport." I said, and nodded to Donnie who came up, and took the weapon out of the guy's holster, then grabbed his handcuffs. He kicked the guy behind the knees to bring him down, and then proceeded to put the handcuffs on him.

About that time, the nurse as well as the Administrator, and a guy who looked like a doctor, came running up. Right behind them were another group of guards who must have heard the commotion. "What's going on here?!?" Came the administrator's high pitched squeak.

"These assholes have been abusing a child in your hospital. I want their commanding officer up here ASAP, and these two pieces of shit hauled to the brig." I spat out while challenging the other guards, with my eyes, to do something stupid.

Donnie had pushed the handcuffed guard onto his stomach, and was proceeding to hand cuff the other guy who was moaning in pain. The doctor moved to look at the guys leg, and Donnie let him, after he made sure the guy was secure.

"Until then," I continued "we'll be in here. If anyone other than medical personnel, or the Commanding Officer step foot in the room, I'll shoot first and ask questions later. Understood?"

Everyone just nodded, so I turned and walked into the room. I'm sure the kid heard everything that was said, and I wanted to try and calm him down some, cause I knew he had to be scared.

When we got in there, though, he was just lying in bed staring at the ceiling, softly whimpering. Tears were coming out of his eyes, and he had beads of sweat on his forehead. I knew right away that he had to be in a lot of pain. I spun around and threw open the door.

Everyone that was standing there jumped back in surprise. I grabbed the doctor who was working on the asshole's leg and pulled him to his feet. "Forget about that piece of trash, the kid in here needs pain killers, and I want him checked out fully... right fucking now." I was way beyond pissed, and I think they knew it.

The doctor nodded to the nurse who went running off down the hall, and then he followed me into the room. He swore under his breath when he saw the state the boy was in. He went over and started to take his vital signs as Donnie and I stood back making sure that he had the room he needed. A minute later the nurse came running in clearly out of breath, but handed the doctor a syringe. He looked at it for a second, then stuck it into the port of the boy's IV line. A few short moments later, the boy stopped moaning in pain, and within a minute he closed his eyes, and fell into a peaceful sleep.

We left a few minutes after that, and ran into the CO of the National Guard. He stopped me before I could say anything. "Please, let me apologize for the two officers. They will not be making that mistake again. I have already relieved them of duty, and had the military police take them into custody."

"Good, I'm glad we got that taken care of." I said, knowing full well that even though the commander is technically responsible for everything someone under his command does, there are certain limits to that.

"Is there anything else I can do for you then?" He asked and I thought about it for a second.

"Yes there is, I would like another guard, one that can be trusted, placed at his door. Medical Staff are to be granted unlimited access, but no one other than Clan Short members are to be allowed in there if they're not medical staff. When he's ready to be moved, please contact me, and I'll come and get him, or someone else will. I'll leave the number with the nurse's desk. From this point forward, I am taking full responsibility for his care. Is that understood?"

He snapped a salute, "Perfectly. I will let those that need to, know."

I returned the salute, "Thank you." After he turned and walked away, Donnie said softly to me. "Remind me never to piss you off." I burst out laughing as I flipped him the bird, then we went to meet up with the others.

~~~~Logan's POV~~~~

God I hurt, or so I thought and felt even though in reality I realized at the same time that right now, I didn't. It was the memory of it that was hurting so much almost like the phantom pain that an amputee feels from the limb which is no longer there. The problem was that I just can't get rid of the memory of realizing that I had been shot. I can't even begin to describe the feelings that went through me when it happened, but there was something even worse than that physical pain. I was awake right up until they gave me some drugs in the hospital, so I knew everything that happened. I felt it when Alvin jumped on top of me, shielding me with his small body. And I felt the three other bullets that ripped into him.

Not many people know this, but my brothers and I have a bond much like the one that Adam has with his brothers. For me, however, it's strongest with Alvin, Simon, and Theodore, or the Chipmunks, as everyone has taken to calling them. Through that link, I feel, and felt everything that Alvin does, at least a little bit. I also heard the doctors talking shortly after I woke up, and they were very clear in saying that Alvin had saved my life. I'll never forget that.

Even worse though than feeling everything Alvin went through for me was thinking about Adam. With all the pain from the little guy I couldn't speak or communicate with Adam when it happened but I saw what he went through when I got shot. It tore me up all the worse at seeing my love so distraught. I knew he really loved me but after seeing the lost look and pain in his eyes I understood just how much, even more than before.

I looked up as Adam came walking out of the bathroom, drying his hair, I smiled at him thinking how much I loved his long hair. He looked better after a shower; dressed in the new clothes that mom had somehow gotten us.

When I woke up, I saw that he was in a bed next to me, and was worried that he had gotten hurt too. I heard one of the doctors say that he just walked in here, looking fine, but after he got confirmation that I was going to be okay, he just nodded and passed out. After they stripped him, they saw he had been shot seven times, stabbed twelve, and had a few pieces of shrapnel embedded in different places throughout his body. They couldn't figure out how he was still moving, but I knew it was his love. Adam has an iron will when he needs it, or as mom likes to say, "He's stubborn as ten mules," I think I would have to agree.

"What's got you all smiles?" He asked, and I couldn't help but laugh at the look in his eyes.

"You do." I simply said. I don't know if I'll ever be able to figure out how someone as self confident and in control as Adam, could be so centered on one person, I mean he could have anyone, but he chose me.

"I can't help it... I love you." He spoke as if he read my mind. He walked over, sat down beside me, and pulled me into a tight hug. For someone who says that he doesn't know how to show emotions very well, I can read volumes just in the way he hugs me.

"Oh God, I love you Logan. Please don't ever leave me." I felt his tears hit my shoulders, and I couldn't help but start crying as well. I don't know how long we sat there like that, crying in each other's arms, until finally we were both cried out.

I pulled back from the embrace, and wiped away a stray tear from his cheek. "No more tears, not about this." I said softly, and he just nodded, and lowered his head. When he looked back up at me, the tears were gone, but the concern was still there.

"Logan, I can't even begin to describe what I felt when I saw you go down. I... I just couldn't handle it if you died." I knew he was fighting back the tears, again even if we had just agreed to cry no more.

"Shhhh. I know, Love...I know." I pulled him to me again, and just relished the closeness. I knew we needed to get moving soon, and I knew we had to deal with what he told me happened to Alvin, but for now, I just held him, and he me.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

I walked into the area I was directed to. Close behind me were my brothers, along with, Janet, Joe, Logan, Khan, Vishnu, Kartik, Billy, Tommy, Fluffy and her kittens. Immediately we spotted the food line, and made our way over to it. One thing that a battle was good for was to make people hungry. Plus, with the emotional roller coaster we had been riding, we all could really use some food.

I couldn't even remember the last time that we had eaten.

I couldn't help but chuckle as everyone filled their plates to overflowing, but what really got me was when this lady came up with a large tray of rare steaks, the three cat boys grinned toothy grins when they saw that and proceeded to fill up their plates with them. Vishnu even filled a big plate for Fluffy. He gave it to Billy who put it on his lap, and that's when I noticed what Fluffy was doing. She had walked up to a large stack of pizza boxes, put her front paws on the table, and grabbed an entire box.

Everyone laughed as she came back down, and held the box firmly in her jaws. One thing Tommy had mentioned was that Yacko, Wacko, and Dot had grown to love Pizza. I then started to look around for a place for all of us.

Suddenly I heard Vishnu start to growl, followed quickly by one from Kartik as well. Then Vishnu let out a very loud cougar scream, dropped his plate of food, and took off towards a group of people on the other side of the room. Not knowing what was happening, we all quickly put our food down, and drew whatever weapons we had, and charged off after him. Kartik and Khan were right on his heels, with us right behind them.

I heard Sammy's voice cry out "Vishnu, NO!" Then I heard another voice. 'EVERYONE PUT YOUR GUNS AWAY!' The voice in my head held an authority that made me come up short. Somehow, I suddenly knew that whatever was going on, no one was in danger.

Vishnu slowed down, but didn't stop until he was nuzzling Mike on the bed and I could hear Mike telling him that he was okay and thanking him for coming to protect him.

Kartik joined him as Danny moved out of the way and Sammy quickly went over and gave both of them hugs as we all crowded around.

"I'm sorry guys. I...I was told something that hurt me a great deal and made me a bit angry. I'm not in any danger, but thank you all for coming like that." Mike said, while rubbing Vishnu and Kartik's back.

Then Mike turned to face Cory and Sean and said, "I don't know what to say. I knew they had been through hell just from the look of them in court, but I...I didn't know it had been that bad. They're something very special to me and I'll do anything I can to get them back, so I'll follow your lead in this. Thank you for saving them and for giving them someplace safe to heal in until we could find one another again."

I just stood back and watched what was going on. Obviously there was a personal issue being discussed, and I didn't want to intrude. I looked back at the crowd and couldn't help but laugh. Fluffy was literally prancing over, with the pizza box still in her mouth. She pushed her way over to where Mike was and dropped the box in his lap.

'Oh my GOD!' I heard Teri exclaim and then an adorable little four or five year old broke out of Cory's grasp and ran over to Wacko, screaming, "KITTIES!!!!" excitedly, and that seemed to break the tension as peals of laughter could be heard coming from all around the room.

A boy of about six giggled as everyone in the area laughed at the younger boy's antics. "Daddy? Wacko likes Paulie! Can Wacko live with us? He's a good kitty, I promise!"

I just stood there in shock... how could this kid know who the kittens were? I looked over at Tommy who was looking at the boy who had spoken with a small smile playing on his face. Slowly he contorted his mouth and let out a sound that was eerily close to the cats when they were 'talking.'

The two boys 'talked' back and forth for a few seconds, and then a third boy joined in. But then something even stranger happened. Two small eagles then came flying across the room and landed on the boy's shoulders. I immediately looked over at Vishnu who had pulled himself out from under Mike's arm, and looked like he was getting ready to pounce, with his tail waving, all the while licking his lips.

Seeing the look on Vishnu's face, I just knew that about then that he was thinking "Ooooh delivery service."

The boy who had asked about taking Wacko; suddenly swiveled and looked at Vishnu and Kartik. He then said something in what I knew was the language that Vishnu and Kartik used between the two of them. Suddenly both the boys wilted and whined what was obviously an apology but then said plaintively. "But... we're hungry!" It was always funny to see the cat kids using puppy dog eyes on people. The boy said something else and both of them sat back down.

I leaned down and whispered to Tommy, "What'd he say?"

He just looked up at me with a grin and replied, "You don't wanna know, Pop."

Just then another boy walked up holding a big platter full of raw meat. "Did one of you guys drop something?"

Vishnu and Kartik looked between the platter and the boy, until finally the boy smiled and said, "THAT, you CAN eat." Both boys immediately scrambled to get to it while Mike yelped out in pain, "WATCH THE CLAWS!"

Teri laughed and added, "Yep, they're definitely boys!"

Janet just shook her head laughing, "Yeah... that they are."

When everyone had stopped laughing, Eric turned to Mike and asked, "You still functional?" Which earned a glare from him before he replied, "I don't know," which got everyone laughing again.

Vishnu looked over with a mouth full of meat and mumbled Mike. "Sowwy!"

"Your family seems to fit right in here, Mike!" Cory said with a grin. "You're welcome for the thanks you gave before my son decided to try to claim a kitten. Adam, would you please introduce your family to everyone here?"

I let the laughter subside, it was needed. Everyone needed a good laugh right now, and after everything we had been through today, we could all use some. "Sure Cory. First off, this is my Mom and Dad, Janet Hayes and Joe Casey." I said to all of them, and then I pulled Logan close to me... I never planned on letting him get too far away from me again.

"This is my partner Logan Hayes, then there's my brothers Chang, Will, Jory and Juan. Next to Will you have his partner and Mike's son, Billy. You've already met Tommy and Fluffy, and then her kittens Yacko, Wacko, and Dot... Dot's the pretty one, just ask her."

I said the last part with a grin, but laughed out loud when all three boys nodded and said "yup." "Over there you have Amur Khan, Vishnu and Kartik."

During the introductions, the little one who had claimed a kitten, had climbed back into Cory's lap. Wacko hopped up on the bed and put his head into the boy's lap and started to purr loudly.

"Don't squish anything there Wacko." Sean said, laughing at the sight it presented and the wince on Cory's face. I couldn't help but bust out laughing, and so did a lot of other people around. His mom must have gotten into the mood to embarrass her son, cause she immediately replied with, "Maybe your sons will get some sleep if he does!"

"MOOOOMMMMMMM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" Cory and Sean both exclaimed as they began blushing fiercely.

Wacko stood up and leaned over to give Teri a wet lick on her cheek before putting his head back down with a look that Teri could swear was an evil smile.

I knew I had to put a stop to this, if for no other reason than it was us kids against the adults. "Okay Cory, now for your side of the introductions?"

Cory rolled his eyes at Teri before giggling and running down the list, pointing out his other sons and his grandsons that were helping the guests as they became visible to the group. He finished with Crystal and Toby before asking if he forgot anyone.

I nodded to them all as they were introduced, then a thought occurred to me that I voiced to my new host. "Cory, I know a lot has happened today, but I have another concern I'm not sure what to do about. Some of the kids in my Unit are still in hospitals, mainly because I don't know where to send them. I mean I have the base in Utah but I really think it would be best to keep everyone together right now. What I am trying to say is I believe our duties lie here right now and I would like everyone to be together, if that's possible." I stopped because I knew I was rambling. Everything still had me a bit overwhelmed.

Cory smiled as he replied. "They are your family, which means they are family to all of us now. Ark, are there any Unit members which are in a condition which prevents them from being relocated here?"

He was doing the same thing that JJ had done earlier, talking to someone else.

"Wait until Seth tells you that the hospitals have been notified." Cory replied. "If any medical personnel wish to come in to assist with their patients Seth is allowed to authorize it."

Cory nodded at me. "The rest of the group will be here soon; Kyle is letting Seth know what to do now."

"I appreciate that Sir, but can I ask, who were you talking to?" I know the relief I felt at having my family here was matched by everyone else.

Cory tilted his head before replying. "Sir? Please Adam, unless we're at an official function where we have to flaunt levels of authority, just call me Cory. Before I can tell you who I've been talking to, I need to ask one thing. Would you be willing to have the position I gave you on the battlefield, which is second only to me as Fleet Commander of the Clan Short Fleet, made permanent? If so, I will notify the Vulcan Council and the Federation."

I stood there in shock for a few moments, "...second only to him as Fleet Commander of the Clan Short Fleet..." That's like way above my pay grade, I'm just a commander. But then I thought about it, and remembered what I read about The Vulcan Chain of Command. I knew that this was a big deal, and whether he wanted it to be or not, this was a serious situation.

"Sir, before I accept that position, I would like a bit more information, because what you are asking is way above my pay grade."

"Whoever gave you that pay grade cheated you, Adam." Cory replied seriously. "JJ made his report to me through Kyle earlier; our Intelligence Corps is composed of ninety percent telepaths. You have already proven you can do the job; in fact from what I've been told, you've already been performing the

duties of the position for quite a while now. This makes it official, and you would be recognized as such by all Federation planets."

"He's right Adam. I saw you in action today with everything you had to face and everything you had to do. You still kept doing it and against overwhelming odds you prevailed. You'd be great in that position and somehow, I think these people could use you here." Eric suddenly said into the silence that had greeted that statement.

I heard Sammy say "Yeah" at the same time as Kevin, Randy and Danny said it as they all looked at me expectantly.

I felt Dad touch my arm, so I looked over to where he sat. "Adam, this is something that you need to do. I've known since the first time I met you back in the lab, that you were able to do far more than they ever gave you credit for. This is a chance for you to use your talents, and the talents of your family, to help ease the pain of children everywhere. Not just here on earth, but everywhere you go. Make no mistake son, you're the one that brought this family together, and you're the one that turned them into what they are. Now it's time to show the universe what you started here."

I couldn't help but choke up a little at his words. I looked around and saw all my family members that were there, nodding in agreement to what Dad had just said. I knew I had their backing in this, and that was all I needed.

Before I could say anything else, Cory softly added one more thing. "You have a lot in common with Sean, JJ, Kyle, and me, Adam. What you have put together and how everyone in your group feels about each other proves it. If I didn't like you or your family that you assembled into an amazing team, I wouldn't even consider offering this to you no matter how qualified you are. It is your heart that makes the difference; and that difference shows in everyone around you."

Cory's words hit me hard and meant a great deal to me since what he said hit home. Trying to hold the tears back from Dad's and Eric's comments was hard enough, but his almost made them overflow. Straightening my shoulders and bringing myself to attention, I snapped a full salute and stated. "Sir, I would be honored to accept the commission as you have offered." I knew that this was more than a simple military honors situation. There was only one response that would satisfy my honor. I slowly drew my sword and dropped down to one knee bringing the blade of the sword across the palm of my hand bleeding it slightly. Then I reversed the sword and offered the hilt to a shocked looking Cory. I truly hoped he understood fully what this all meant.

What I was asking of him was something that was very arcane, and deeply rooted in the ways of Bushido, and the code of the Samurai. I knew he may not know what he was expected to do, nor what it really meant, but that was fine, I knew what it meant. It meant that I was now accepting him as my lord, and I would become his Samurai. Since the others, who held to the ways of the Samurai code, had all sworn to me, with me swearing to Cory, they would follow suit.

I knew he didn't really understand what was going on, but I was happy he knew enough to follow the demands of Honor. Even though he didn't rise from his seat, I knew he was still weak from his injuries, so that was okay. "Commander Adam Casey, I accept the fealty you present and hereby declare yourself, those who follow you now, and any who may follow you in the future brothers and sisters in the family of Clan Short of the Family of Sarek of the House of Surak of the Planet Vulcan." Cory removed his hand from the sword. "Rise, Commander Adam Casey, Warrior of Clan Short."



I smiled to myself thinking that some day I may have to educate Cory on what it meant to be a "Warrior," and the great honor he did to me by saying that. However, that day was not now. I rose, and re-sheathed the blade while I simply nodded to him. "I will have to get with you soon to know what duties you would ask of us, but I do believe for now, that can wait." No one said anything as I looked around and saw that they were all in agreement with what I had done. I then looked back at Cory and grinned. "I think that concludes the formal part of this evening, and with your permission, I will let my family relax for the rest of tonight."

Cory nodded. "That actually is my orders; your family is your only priority tonight. Tomorrow we can sit down and discuss everything. For now, I think that all we need to do is relax and share the few good things that happened today. Do not worry about security; our guard force that will be in place until sunrise could teach Ninjas quite a few new tricks. After sunrise we have other protections in place which will tell us if an ant walks the wrong way."

I nodded, thinking to myself that they must have some damned good security. I looked around, and figured out who was in the best shape to do what needed to be done. From this point forward, Cory's safety was of primary concern, which meant that no matter what, one of the core family members would be acting as security of Cory. I decided against Juan since I figure they may want to get to know him better before that. Chang must have read my mind, cause he simply nodded to me, then moved over next to Cory. "Worry not brother, no harm will come to Cory while I still breathe."

Then everyone started the congratulations that ensued, while I felt Logan pull me into a hug.

Cory gave me a curious look. "Does this mean Sean and I have company other than Timmy in the shower now?" He asked, with a smile.

I extracted myself from Logan's hug, and smiled at Cory, before I could respond however, Chang spoke up. "I am sure that will not be necessary, unless of course you get attacked by a bar of soap and cannot fight it off."

Brant shook his head as he tried not to laugh. "They use soap?" he giggled. Before anyone could respond, he added. "Would you like the grand tour of CIC, Adam? We can chase down a few people so you can place faces with the names of the people you'll be talking to a lot."

"Thanks Brant, that'd probably be helpful." I turned and looked at the group behind me. "Vishnu, Kartik, you have your assignment. Everyone else, just relax for a bit. Jory, I want you to relieve Chang in a couple hours, okay?" Everyone just nodded as Logan and I followed Brant off for the tour.

As I was leaving, I heard Vishnu ask Mike, "Any chance for another belly rub Uncle Mike?" I couldn't help but laugh remembering the last time.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

Brant was leading us around what they call their CIC. I have to admit that I am more than a bit impressed with the operation they run here. Of course I still like our command and control center better, but this is still nice.

Suddenly Brant stops and is talking quietly to someone like the people here do. He looks over at me with a questioning glance as he says, "Yeah, he's with me... hold on I'll ask. Do you know someone named Jackson Bryce?"

I had been waiting for this. Jack and Dave had gone on a vacation, and would have been on a long plan flight about the time that the shit hit the fan in Montana. They were probably just now getting somewhere that they can watch the news. I could only imagine what was going on in his mind right now.

"Yeah, he's the base commander. He and his partner were going on a vacation." I told him, and he nodded while talking to the other person.

"Well it seems he contacted your base and got transferred to Ark who put him through to Tommy in our communications center. He seems to be a bit stressed."

I cringed a bit, thinking that he well had a right to. "Can I talk to him?"

Brant smiled a small smile as he turned to start walking down a different corridor. "He's all but demanded it."

That made me smile a bit. Jack's a tough old guy that has a heart of gold, but doesn't take well to having to wait for something. We made our way to another room that was set up a lot like the spook room in Utah. There's a kid sitting in front of a monitor, with a head set on. As soon as we walked in, he turned and waved us over. "Please hold on Sir, they have just walked into the room. I am giving you over to Commander Casey right now."

The kid handed me the head set, and I put it on while sitting in the seat he just vacated. The first thing I noticed about Jack was the lines around his eyes. It was pretty obvious he'd stressed out, and I couldn't blame him. "General." I said to him, by way of greeting, and I could see a small bit of relief come into his eyes.

"Adam! What the hell happened?" He almost yelled, and I saw Dave put a hand on his shoulder to calm him down some.

"Well Sir..." I started to say, when he cut me off.

"Can the Sir shit, we both know who's really in charge here." He seemed to soften a bit then leaned forward in his seat. I could see what's going on behind him. He must have been in some police station somewhere. "I'm not worried about the Unit, I'm worried about the kids I've come to know and love, okay."

I nodded slightly, but had to turn away for a second as I felt the tears start up. He's right, we were a hell of a lot closer than a military Unit, and we were a family.

"Adam... is everyone okay?" Jack asked, I can hear the desperation in his voice. Desperate for me to tell him that everything is okay. Desperate for his family to be safe.

I had thought how to answer this over and over again, but I still hadn't come up with any way to do it and soften it any. So, in the end, I simply said; "No Jack... they're not." As the tears I had been trying to hold back began to flow.

## Chapter 26

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

I had trouble sleeping last night, surprise, surprise I suppose, but so many times I would wake up wondering if it all really happened or was just some terrible nightmare. I suppose it's one that all commanders face, losing someone under their command, but so many. God so many. Each time I woke I would look around the room and see so many empty spots and I would know, it wasn't, it really did happen. Then, it was then that I really wished it had been a nightmare as I looked around at those empty places and thought there should be Danny and over there Derrick should be sitting with Tom or why wasn't Gage with Erin. Or why wasn't Keith running around trying to do something else that he knew he shouldn't. So many gone, over sixty of my family weren't ever going to be where they were supposed to be again. Sixty kids that would never grow up and see adulthood. Sixty kids that would never be able to know what having their own children was like. Sixty kids who would never live a life now. More than that though was the realization that over sixty kids who were part of our lives were forever lost to us and we were left behind to try and live without their presence, to fill a void that couldn't be filled. So yeah, I had a bit of trouble sleeping last night.

Not many know but last night when I finally did go to bed I fell asleep in Logan's arms crying. No matter how hard I tried not to, I just couldn't hold it in any longer, couldn't be strong anymore even though I knew I had to be. Every single kid that died kept running through my mind over and over again. Faces, names, memories and loss, the overwhelming loss of it all.

I finally gave up, knowing it would be no use and went out to clear my head. We had taken over the conference room last night, mainly cause I knew that we would all want to be together. While I liked everyone I met so far well enough, I didn't really think everyone would want to deal with meeting new people after everything they had been through.

I made my way outside, then turned my head up to the sky. I wanted to cry out, or scream or something. Anything to let the universe know the agony beating through my heart with each pulse I want to know why, I want to know why this had to happen. Still though, there was no answer to my silent scream which had been echoing for hours with that one word, Why? I felt the tears falling down once again, and I just let them. I had almost thought that I had no more tears left to cry, but, I guess I was wrong.

"You can't change what happened you know?" I heard from behind me, and I didn't even have to turn around to know who was there. I just turned and buried my head into his chest.

"Why Jack, why did they all have to die?" I cried out through my tears.

"I don't know, Adam. If I could take any one of their places I would in a heart beat. But...but...I don't know. It was just their time, I guess."

I didn't look up, but I knew he was crying too. I couldn't help but remember the sick look on his face, and the tears that both he and Dave cried when they finally learned what had happened, and how many kids died. For if those kids were mine to me, they were doubly so to the two men who felt as if every one of us were their children in a way, that and as the 'parents' they were responsible for what happened to us.

"You know, I could be wrong Adam, but I know that every single one of those kids that died out there, died, if not happy, then happier than they had ever been in their lives before now and I damn well know they felt fulfilled when the end came. You gave them so much over the last few months. More than some of them have ever had. They had a purpose and felt needed but much more than that they knew they were finally loved, some for the first time in their short lives. Don't ever forget that. But the one's left really need you now, Adam. They still need you to lead. I know you know this, but they all pull their strength from you." In my head I knew what he said was true. But that still didn't make it any easier. I clung to Jack like a life saver for many minutes. Until I could finally bring myself to ask.

"Do you think they made a difference Jack? I... I mean... do you think that anyone will remember what they did?" I almost couldn't get the question out. Jack pushed me back a little so he could look me in the eyes.

"Of course they will, Adam. They died helping other people. They gave the ultimate sacrifice for others. That can't be forgotten. But more importantly, they'll never be forgotten cause they're in here." He said forcefully as he put his hand on my chest, right over my heart, and immediately the tears sprung back into my eyes. They were my family, I would never forget them, I couldn't forget them, and I was going to figure out some way to make sure no one EVER forgot them or what they gave. I was so caught up in my own emotions that I almost didn't catch what he said next.

"Come on Adam, I want to show you something. Something that I, for one, can never forget."

I didn't bother asking, I just took his offered hand and we went back inside. We had just gotten inside the door when I saw Logan coming towards us. I could see the concern in his look as his gaze passed back and forth, between Jack and me. I still couldn't talk too well, but I didn't need to, as Logan wrapped his arms around me in a silent hug filled with everything that ever needed to be said but couldn't be put into words right now.

"Logan, I'm glad you're here. I was going to take Adam to show him something, would you like to come with us?"

I watched the love of my life pull back slightly and gaze deeply into my eyes and then, without saying a word, nod, take my hand, and together we let Jack lead the way.

He led us into the communications room where he went and talked to one of the kids working there. He came back with a communicator, opened it up, and talked softly into it. I couldn't hear what he said as I was buried deep into Logan's chest, trying to get my tears back under control.

Logan must have heard what Jack said though cause I felt him stiffen up suddenly, then I felt a tickling sensation, and when I looked up we were standing on a path in the middle of a park. I slowly looked around and couldn't help but be awed by the serene beauty of this place.

The birds were out and singing, as the sun slowly rose to the east. I saw the sunlight as it glinted off the water in the pool that was just off to my right. I saw a few people jogging down a path, and I watched one of them as he ran down until I saw what was behind him. Then it struck me where we were. We were in Washington DC, on the National Mall. I saw the giant tower that was the monument to our first President, George Washington, as it rose high into the air.

I turned and looked at the reflecting pool as it shone peacefully in the early morning light. The Giant white granite statue of President Lincoln as he looks out forever over the reflecting pool; forever keeping his gaze on the tranquility of its depths.

Then I saw it, and I instantly knew that this is what we were here for. The Memorial Wall. Of course, I know the history of it well, hell it was something that I had to read up on for my studies. On that long piece of granite is inscribed the name of every American soldier who had died since the forming of the League of Nations in 1916. I know for a fact that there are more than fifty thousand names 50,000 souls who would never be coming back, 50,000 who had given what so many members of our family had, all inscribed on that wall.

Jack started to walk, and Logan, his hand still clenched in mine, followed closely behind him. There weren't many people out at this time of morning, but still I could see some people as they raised their hand gently and touched a specific spot on the Wall. I knew they were trying to get as close as possible to a loved one that they had lost.

Jack stopped at the head of the trail, but Logan walked right by him, and down towards the wall, with me right beside him. No words were passed between us, but when I looked up into his face, I saw the tears falling as we started down the length of the Wall.

We had just gotten to the start of the names when Jack called us to stop. "Hey guys, hold up."

We turned around and he pulled out of his pocket a small tape recorder. "Adam, I want you to think about this song as you look at what is here. I'm sure you know what this is, but really think about it. With your heart, okay?"

I just nodded as he pressed the play button and the soft music filled the air.

*There are teddy bears and high school rings  
And old photographs that mamas bring  
The daddy's with their young boys, playing ball  
There's combat boots that he used to wear  
When he was sent over there  
There's 50,000 names carved in the wall*

I listened to that song as we slowly walked down the wall letting the rich deep voice of a master soak deep into my bones. In the books I've read about the Wall, I've heard about people seeing things in it. I never really believed it, but as I walked down the Wall, and looked at all the inscribed names, I started to see things behind the names.

Maybe it was the song and its words, or maybe it was it's storyteller but something brought images of the family members I had lost, and the times I had with each of them. I saw the days upon days of training and how tired they were at night when we all went to dinner, but mostly I remember how through

it all, they never complained. Hell I had to think hard to think of a time I could imagine any of them without smiles on their faces.

I saw times when Mom would make them study or do school work, and still never did I hear of complaints. I saw the first morning that we played games instead of training. I saw them working hard and giving everything they had to everything they did, and through it all I saw the smiles.

I saw them laughing and playing together. I saw them working together, studying together, and helping each other out in hard times, even a few of them coming to love one another beyond that of brother or sister.

But what I saw the most in the ghostly images behind the Wall, were kids laughing.

*There's cigarettes and there's cans of beer  
And notes that say, "I miss you, dear"  
And children who don't say anything at all  
There's purple hearts and packs of gum  
Fatherless daughters and fatherless sons  
And there's 50,000 names carved in the wall*

I moved on further, and as I did the images changed. No longer did I see just the kids that died yesterday, but I started to see others in there with them. Some of them wearing uniforms from times long past.

I saw them interacting with the kids I knew. Some of them helping them with projects that they had unfinished when we left. Some of them taking the time to work with them on a skill or something else.

But a lot of them were just standing there with open arms welcoming my family members into their new family, and the life that awaited them. I saw many of them just hugging or cuddling with the kids.

*They come from all across this land  
In pickup trucks and mini vans  
Searching for a boy from long ago  
They scan the wall and find his name  
The teardrops fall like pouring rain  
And silently they leave a gift and go*

My vision got blurry as I walked down the Wall, and saw the images that played out there. I started to see scenes of other people's lives, people that were forever enshrined on this Wall.

*There's Stars of David & rosary beads  
And crucifixion figurines  
And flowers of all colors large and small*

*There's a Boy Scout badge and a merit pin  
Little American flags waving in the wind  
And there's 50,000 names carved in the wall  
There's 50,000 names carved in the wall . . .*

(Jamie O'Hara wrote '50000 Names Carved On The **Wall**' in 1997. George Jones added the song to his 2001 album, 'Stone Cold Country'.)

The thing that made me cry the most though was what happened as the last chorus was being sung. I stopped dead in my track as I saw someone I knew very well standing there. There was no mistaking the impish grin, and those sparkling green eyes that were always full of love and mischief. There was no mistaking young Mark Little. Only nine years old... we never were able to find his body in the helicopter, before it blew up.

I watched with tears pouring down my face as he smiled at me, then turned and ran to a man that had his arms outstretched. When Mark flew into his arms, he picked him up and twirled him around a few times before setting him back down on the ground. I swear I could almost hear the peels of laughter as they escaped the boy's mouth. He turned back to me as the music ended and waved with a big smile on his face, then faded with the last notes of the song.

I turned and buried my face into Jack's chest after that; I needed something to muffle the soul wrenching cries that I knew were coming from me right then. I just couldn't help myself.

I heard the start of another song begin to play, and felt Jack go to turn it off when Logan stopped him, saying softly. "No Jack, let it play. Please."

~~~~~Logan's POV~~~~~

I could see what effect this was having on Adam, and I really hoped that this would help him heal. I never really wanted to come to this place, but somehow I always knew I would end up doing so someday. There was something that I needed to do, but I didn't know if I could. I just don't know if I'm strong enough.

Adam buried his head into Jack's chest, and I could feel the pain in his cries. There's just something about when someone cries like that, you can just feel it deep in your soul, and because it was my Adam, my soul ached even more.

Another song started to play, and I could feel the tears jump to my eyes as I immediately recognized it. Jack moved to turn it off, but I put my hand over his, saying in a strangled almost whisper. "No Jack, Let it play. Please."

Jack nodded and Adam pulled back and looked into my eyes. I reached out, and he took my hand. For what seemed like an eternity, but was no more than a second or two, we lost ourselves each in the other, and together we shared our strength.

When our eternity was over, I bent in and kissed him very tenderly on the lips, and then dropped his hand, turned and walked further down the wall. I didn't need to look in the directory for what I wanted... I knew exactly where it was at. The song was softly playing in the background as we moved down the wall.

*I saw her from a distance  
As she walked up to the wall  
in her hand she held some flowers  
as her tears began to fall  
and she took out pen and paper  
as to trace her memories  
and she looked up to heaven  
and the words she said were these...*

*She said Lord my boy was special,*

*and he meant so much to me  
and Oh I'd love to see him  
just one more time you see  
All I have are the memories  
and the moments to recall*

*So Lord could you tell him,  
He's more than a name on a wall...*

I felt the tears falling down my face before I ever found the section I knew had to be there, as I made my way slowly ever more slowly down to it and sank down to my knees as I finally found it letting my fingertips reach out and trace the name etched within as I wiped my eyes so I could see what lay there. One name in particular out of the thousands, one name I still didn't know if I was ready to finally see even though I was now looking at it.

Lieutenant Cody L. Hayes

*She said he really missed the family  
and being home on Christmas day  
and he died for God and Country  
in a place so far away*

*I remember just a little boy  
playing war since he was three  
But Lord this time I know,  
He's not coming home to me*

*And she said Lord my boy was special,  
and he meant so much to me  
and Oh I'd love to see him  
But I know it just can't be*

*So I thank you for my memories  
and the moments to recall  
But Lord could you tell him,*



*He's more than a name on a wall.*

*Lord could you tell him,  
He's more than a name on a wall.*

(The Statler Brothers, 1988)

As I stared at the name one word escaped my lips "Daddy." I had never been able to say goodbye, but I'd never forgotten him either. As I sang that last line in the song, I took a deep breath and said the words I always knew that I would say here, in this place someday. "Please God; tell him he'll always be more than a name on the wall to me too."

"You can tell him yourself." A small voice said and I spun around, reaching for a weapon I didn't have, in shock; before taking stock of the situation and seeing a young boy of about nine with dark hair and an impish smile on his face standing there.

Next to him was....

"Hey puppy." The man said as I stared in disbelief.

"Dad?" I questioned softly in disbelief knowing there was only one person who had ever called me 'cuddle puppy.' I couldn't help it, the tears started to spill down my face.

"I've always known that." He replied as I moved forward slowly and then ran into his waiting arms. I couldn't believe it. I've wanted to do this all my life, but until now had always thought I would never be able to.

"Daddy..." I cried as I hung onto him for dear life. There were so many hugs that I've missed, and I was determined to get them all now. He held onto me tight, and I could feel the tears falling from his eyes, and onto my hair. Finally though, I pulled back slightly and looked up at the man.

"How, I...I thought...we thought you were...." But I couldn't go on. I knew the answer, but I didn't want it to be.

"I am little one; I just came because you needed me right now." He said.

"Oh Dad, I love you!" I have waited for so many years to be able to say that to him, so many years I dreamed of being able to hold my dad and tell him that I loved him, and that I was proud of him.

"I know and I've always loved you too, always." The man replied choking slightly on the words. "I've always watched you puppy. I can't begin to tell you how proud I am of you."

"Dad..." I tried to say but lost it and buried my head back in his chest. I wanted to tell him that I was proud of him to. I wanted to tell him that I knew he would have been here if he could have, but he had given his life to help others. While I would have loved him to have been there for me, I knew he did what he had to do. And I was proud. Most of all though, I wanted to tell him that I understood. I wanted to tell him so much, but I couldn't find it in me. All I could do was pull him close and hug him to me again.

"I know puppy, I know all of it. But... but I have to go now." He said.

"No!" I cried out, suddenly no longer the twelve year old specially trained, and confident soldier, but once again a very little and very scared boy who desperately didn't want to lose his daddy again. I knew he couldn't stay, but that didn't mean I didn't want him to.

"I'll always be watching baby, I'll always be there." He told me as I finally pulled myself from him, and stepped back.

I drew myself upright, mentally preparing myself for what I had to do. I didn't want to, I would never want to, but I had to try and to do what I could to make my dad proud. Even though I could barely see through the tears falling from my eyes, I uttered the words that had been denied to me all those years ago.

"Good... goodbye daddy."

The man smiled down at his son saying softly, "I love you Logan and I'm so proud of you, you and your boyfriend, and everything you have created. Keep it up, both of you."

I gasped as he said that but relaxed as I saw his gentle and understanding smile. Somewhere deep inside I realized I had worried what my dad would think of me and the choice I had made but now... now I knew. With those words and that look, I knew without a doubt burned deep into my very soul that my dad understood and more, he approved.

I felt Adam then slide his arm around me, and I couldn't help but lean into him for strength. I saw the man, my dad, reach his arm out, and slowly another image appeared. Mark Little was standing there with my dad's arm around him. "Don't worry boys, I'll watch out for them... All of them. Until the time comes for you to watch over them again."

We both nodded, as he and Mark started to slowly walk towards the Wall, and then watched as they passed into it. They both turned around and smiled at us. Slowly, one by one, the rest of our family that died appeared around them. Dad lifted his free arm, and suddenly, nine year old Brittney was under it.

Both Adam and I sobbed as they slowly appeared until all of them were standing there. Once they were all there, and as one, they all went to attention, saluted, and after a couple of seconds, they all dropped their arms. Mark came forward, and reached out through the wall. In his hand he held the small leather bag that he had always worn around his neck. Adam reached a shaking hand out, and Mark dropped the bag into it. I watched as Adam opened the bag while Mark made his final request to my love.

"Could you give that to someone for me?" He said as we saw that there were two golden coins in there.

Adam looked up asking, "Who..." But Mark was gone. We both stared at where he had been, Adam's tears mirroring mine, as they rolled down our cheeks. "I'll... figure it out for you Mark. You have my word on that."

We turned away and started to head back over to where Jack was standing. He may not have been able to hear what was said, but I could tell by the tear streaks on his face, he knew what had happened. Suddenly a young voice was carried on the wind. "And don't worry... we'll be okay till you can get here. Seth's already said he's found what he's looking for, and it's not that bad." We stopped confused by that

last comment and looked around, but didn't see anything although I could have sworn it was Keith's voice saying it.

~~~~Emily's POV~~~~

"Huh... what?" I asked groggily as someone shook me awake. I cracked open my eyes, and couldn't help but smile as I saw Donnie there shaking me. "Huh, come on, you gotta wake up. The boy in the hospital just woke up."

"WHAT?!?!" I asked as I shot up from the pile of blankets we had all fallen asleep on. "What time is it?" I asked as I got up, and started to get dressed. I went to sleep wearing just a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, but now I quickly tore them off, and got dressed into a fresh uniform. I didn't really care about the others in the room, with as close as most of us had gotten recently; it just wasn't a big deal.

"It's about six thirty; one of the kids woke me up to tell me they just got a call from the administrator there. I told him to call back and let him know we'd be right there." Donnie said as he handed me my shirt, and I started to button it up.

"They better not have fucked with the kid any... or I'll..." but I let it drop off as Donnie smiled at me, and started to chuckle.

"Calm down momma bear, he's okay." If it were anyone other than him, I probably would have wiped that grin off his face; but Donnie's just too cute.

"Come on," I said as I strapped on my side arm, "Let's go, before they do something... stupid." I said as I started out of the room.

Twenty minutes later Donnie, Juan, and I materialized in the lobby of the Des Moines hospital. Again it didn't take more than a few seconds for the administrator to come running up to us. He stopped dead when Juan fixed him with one of his patented glares.

"Ummm... yes...a...good day to you all. I hope things are going better for you today." My glare matched Juan, as I really didn't like this place that much.

"We'll see when we check up on the boy." I responded coldly. I could see that there was still a small military presence here even though none of ours were still here. Last night they had all been transported down to Orlando so that those that needed recovery time could all do it in the same place.

"Of course. If you'll just follow me...." He started to say, but Juan cut him off.

"No offense sir, but we know the way." of course the way Juan said it, and knowing him the way I do, I don't think he cared if the guy took offense or not. And I really didn't care either. The three of us took off, and made our way to the elevator leaving the administrator standing there with his jaw on the floor and his mouth moving much like a fish does.

Juan managed to hold the laughter in till we got into the elevator. "Man... did you see his face?!?!" He said, and neither Donnie nor I could help but snicker with him. But as quick as it started, the doors star-

ted to open, and Juan's business face was back on, as he led the way towards the room where the boy was being held.

As we got near the door, the guard that was standing outside of it knocked softly, then held the door open for us, never once saying a word. I was almost impressed with his professionalism.

When we walked in, all the anger, and tension drained from me as I looked upon the little boy that was lying in the bed. The sun light was coming in from the window, falling across his light brown mousy hair, and he seemed to be sleeping peacefully. He looked so much better then the boy I had seen in here last night, and I felt immediately that this boy needed our help. I looked over at Donnie, and could see the same look in his eyes.

Juan for his part just looked around the room. Then he looked up at me and said softly, "I'll be outside if you need me." I just nodded and smiled briefly as I heard him telling the guard outside that he could go for now. I didn't hear anything after that so I guess the guard had half a brain and did as he was told, that or else he was unconscious. Juan was still in a bit of a pissy mood after yesterday, not that I blamed him.

When I looked back at the boy in the bed, I saw that he was awake and staring at us. However, as soon as he saw us looking at him, he dropped his gaze, and was now staring at the floor. I knew to file that one away, as I had seen it before.

Softly I walked over to his bed, and I swear I could feel him get more afraid the closer I got. I gave a silent signal to Donnie to stay where he was, as I softly slid into the chair next to the bed.

"Hey there. My name's Emily, what's yours?" I said as gently and softly as I could trying not to frighten the boy any more than I already had.

He looked up at me briefly then, with his lip quivering slightly he responded, "Ummm... Josh.. uhh.. Sir.. erm... ma'am... uhhh." He dropped off to silence and I swear, it was like he expected to get hit or something.

"You can just call me Emily, Josh. I'm not gonna hurt you. I'm here to make sure you're okay." I said, again trying to make him feel at ease. I know I had to do something to make him trust me.

"Wait a minute... you were here yesterday? Weren't you?" He asked, and again I almost had to strain to hear him.

"That's right kiddo, I was here yesterday, and made sure the doctor's took care of you." I said, hoping that this might be the opening I needed to begin to get through to him. I was not expecting what he said next though.

"You should have just let me die." He said softly before dissolving into tears.

I couldn't believe it. What could make a kid feel like that? I watched as he broke down into soul wrenching sobs, and moved over to take him in my arms.

He tried to fight me, but I just held him in my arms whispering to him over and over that it'll be okay. "No one's gonna hurt you baby... it's okay..." Over and over again trying to get through to him.

Finally he stopped struggling, and just melted into my arms, as I held him close rocking him back and forth. "It's okay honey, your safe now. I promise... your safe now." I said again

His tears finally dried up after about five minutes, so he sat back. At the same time, Donnie moved a little closer to see if he could help. Josh immediately covered himself like he was waiting to get hit, and started crying again. "Please... I'm sorry... don't hit me." He begged.

Donnie backed off, and I took him into my arms again. "Shhhh.. honey, it's okay... he's not gonna hurt you." I said as I held him gently in my arms until he had calmed down again.

"You're... you're not gonna punish me?" He asked in a quivering voice.

"For what sweetheart?" I asked, again trying to keep my voice as soothing as possible.

"For... for crying." He meekly said and I felt him tense up again. I just kept rocking him trying very hard not to let my anger get the better of me. Anger at what this boy had to go through to make him react like this.

"It's okay kiddo... you go ahead and cry if you want. Heck I was crying a lot yesterday." Donnie said softly from the doorway, and at first the boy tensed up again. But slowly he relaxed and looked at Donnie.

I knew that he was searching to find the truth in the older boys eyes clearly finding his words difficult to accept. After a few seconds he said softly. "But... but... men don't cry. It's only for girls and babies. And... and when I cry... I get punished. That's what God teaches."

Again I had to fight the anger back down. I swore to myself then and there, that I was going to find who ever did this.

"That's hog wash," Donnie said, and I heard the kid gasp and look up at Donnie in shock.

Donnie moved over even closer and while the kid tensed up, Donnie's talking to him seemed to keep his attention. "I cried a lot yesterday, and I'm not a baby or a girl am I?" Donnie was very gentle in his words, and before the boy knew it, Donnie was holding one of his hands.

Donnie brought the boys hand up to his face, and Josh's eyes went wide with shock as he now felt the moisture from Donnie's tears. "You're... you're crying. But... but why?"

"Cause I don't like to see little boys hurt. And I want to do everything I can to make sure you never have to cry again." Donnie said, his voice choked with emotions, and the boy just stared in disbelief. If I hadn't loved him before, I did then. He has such a huge heart.

The boy looked down to the bed he was laying in, and in a voice that I almost couldn't hear said, "You... you wouldn't want me. I'm... I'm dirty." As he bowed his head, and started to cry again. I looked up at Donnie, and saw the same look there that I knew was in my own eyes.

Donnie sat down on the bed next to me, and the boy stiffened up again. "Shhhh... It's okay Josh. Please... look at me okay?" Donnie entreated, and slowly reached out and lifted the boy's chin till he was looking Donnie right in the eyes.

"The eyes don't lie little one. I want you to look me in the eyes when I tell you this, and if you don't believe me, then we'll leave you alone. Okay?"

The boy sat there, and gazed into his eyes for many moments before slowly nodding. Donnie nodded, then began, "If you'll agree, from this moment on, we would like to look out for you. I know you don't know either of us, but both of us will protect you. You'll never have to worry about being hurt again. You just have to trust us which I know is really hard right now. Do you think you can try to do that?"

Josh sat there for a few minutes never once breaking eye contact with Donnie. I could only sit there and wonder just how Donnie meant to pull off what he had just said, but I knew him well enough that he would move Heaven and Earth if that's what it meant to keep that promise. Finally Josh broke eye contact and looked questioningly at me. I met his gaze and nodded slightly.

With that the dam burst, and he was crying again. This time, though, he threw himself into Donnie's arms. Over and over again, he just kept saying one word as if his very life and soul depended on it. "Yes!"

Some time after that, Josh seemed to fall asleep, and Donnie laid him back gently onto the bed. Once he had the boy situated in the bed, Donnie got up and motioned for me to follow him. We went to the other side of the room, and Donnie looked at me, again, I could see the tears slowly leaking from his eyes. "If I ever get my hands on the...." He started to say. I knew what he meant, so I reached up and gently wiped the tears from his cheek.

"I don't know how I'm gonna do it, but I'm gonna make sure he never has to worry about being hurt again." He said, and there was a fire in his eyes, and I knew he meant to do just that. I was so full of love for him at that moment, that I couldn't help it. I leaned up and gave him a kiss.

When we finally broke away from the kiss, I hugged him and whispered into his ear. "Go see what you can do, I'll stay here with him."

He nodded, hugged me tight for a second, then was out the door. I went over to the chair next to the bed, and waited for either Josh to wake up, or for Donnie to come back with news. I had no idea how he was going to accomplish what he had promised for both of us but I said a silent prayer to whoever might hear to please help him find a way to help this poor baby lying in front of me looking so fragile and alone in the world right now. I knew that neither Donnie nor I ever wanted him to be that way again.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

I still don't really know what to think. I feel a bit better after Jack took us to the Wall, but I still can't help but feeling horrible over what happened. I still couldn't believe the experience and what I had seen there. I knew they were happy now and more importantly I knew that they would be taken care of and loved until we could all be together again but while it helped in a way it still hurt like hell. The pain was still there even if I could tell that seeing them had started the slow process of healing the deep wounds piercing my heart. I had to smile though as I thought back to Mark running into that man's

arms and the peals of laughter escaping from his smiling lips. It wasn't until later standing there alongside Logan as he whispered "Daddy" that I realized that this strange man that had been loving on Mark was Logan's father. They were in good hands now, I knew that, now I just had to figure out how to let them go yet still keep them with me if that makes any sense. When we got back, Logan asked for some time to be alone, and to be honest, I wanted some too. I needed some time for my brain to settle down, and come to terms with everything that's happened, if it can, and I was beginning to wonder if it ever could.

I've been sitting out here, on the steps in front of CIC, for a few hours so far, and I'm still no closer to figuring out what's going on in my head than I was when I got here. I can't help but think about everything I had learned since I got here. Suddenly I'm the commander of a fleet of space ships. Of course I don't know how big of a fleet it is yet, but still.

I did at least get to have a brief conversation with JJ, the Clan's head of security. It seems that he'll take care of anything within the compound itself, and we'll back him up if needed. However, the Unit will take care of anything that's needed outside of it.

I can live with that I suppose but it was hard to turn over the safety of this new part of my family to another which went against all my training. I really need to figure out how to split up the people I have remaining. We only have one intact strike team, and they're rather skittish right now. I still kick myself for allowing them to form a team themselves. I had worries that they were too young, and needed to have someone with some more age and experience in with them. But, I guess I could second guess myself for the rest of my life, and Jack said that I probably would. He told me that any CO that's worth a damn always does but somehow knowing that doesn't make it any easier or stop me from doing it.

I was brought out of my thoughts by a military jeep coming up the driveway. It peaked my curiosity, cause I knew the security here was Star Fleet type, not US Military, so they wouldn't use jeeps. Also, there was only one person inside, and I knew that JJ was smarter than to send out patrols of only one, so I'm guessing it has to be a visitor, and okay since he had gotten this far alive. I knew that after yesterday he wouldn't have if he had been any type of threat.

I watched as the jeep slowly made its way around the compound until it stopped just in front of where I was sitting. I watched as he got out of the Jeep, and the first thing I noticed was that he was wearing standard issue BDU's. I could also tell, by his gray hair, and the way he moved, that he was defiantly someone who has been in the military for a while. I caught the glint of silver on his shoulder, but it wasn't until he came around the vehicle and started walking towards me that I recognized several things.

The first was that the silver I caught on his shoulders were actually four silver stars. I knew there was only one four star general in the US army, and I felt my blood start to boil. Before I knew what was going on, I was on my feet, gun drawn, and pointed at the man in front of me. A man I never thought I would actually get to meet, but someone who I had always dreamed I would be able to. General Thomas Eugene Larkin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: the only person who could have authorized, and actually *did* authorize; project Genesis.

I saw the look of shock that came across his face, as he saw me, and saw that I drew down on him. I couldn't blame him, really. I mean if I have signed the death warrant for more than a thousand kids, I would be a bit shocked if I met one of them somewhere like this too. Not to mention that it was here where I bet he'd thought he'd be safe.

"Hello General." I sneered out, and I could actually feel my lip curl into a snarl as I spoke. This was something I dreamt of being able to do for a long, very long time.

"Whoa now....what's going on here?" He asked, coming to a stop, and raising his hands. I was kind of disappointed; I was hoping he would go for the side arm he wore.

"Oh? What's the matter General, you don't recognize me?" I asked, again in more of a snarl than anything else, but I really didn't give a shit about being polite with this asshole.

"Ahh... should I." He asked, and I actually almost felt sorry for him. He approved the project, but, from the looks of things, like normally happens, he doesn't know who he fucked by it, or didn't care enough to find out.

"Well, I would assume you would like to know the people who you've given a death sentence to." I was really hoping that he would do something to let me kill him right away. But it's not something I needed right now. He will die quick enough. Or, maybe I'll let Juan have a go at him.

Just then, I heard the front door slam open, and out ran Sammy, with Vishnu, and Logan right behind him. I saw there were some more people behind them, but right now I didn't care. I didn't want to give the asshole any time to try and do something.

"Uncle Tom!!! Adam! NO!" Sammy screamed out as I stood there wondering, What the fuck? I glanced over in time to see Sammy running right towards the General, and actually get between me and the General. This was not something I was expecting, and it was certainly not something I either need or wanted right now.

"Get out of the way!" I yelled at SamSam.

At the same time, General cried, "Sammy, get behind me!" As he seemed to desperately be trying to pull Sammy behind him out of the line of fire.

"No way, Adam, don't... this is Uncle Tom. He won't hurt us." Sammy pleaded with me and I hesitated for a second, as I watched what was going on. Something was not right here. I know General Larkin, he's not a nice guy, and I know SamSam too and he wouldn't defend someone like that yet he was. It didn't make sense but before I could think on it anymore I felt a sharp pain.

"FUCK!" I screamed as I dropped my gun from suddenly nerveless fingers, as something hit me in the wrist, and stuck in there making me uncontrollably release the gun I had been holding. I spun around low, and pulled one of my back up guns, so I could face the new threat. But before I knew what was happening, someone's foot hit me square in the chest, and I was sent flying back, ass over tea kettle.

I came up onto my knees, trying to figure out what in the hell was going on, and I saw Jeremy squatted down, in the perfect shooters' stance, with his pistol out, and pointed at me.

Things got real tense for a moment, because I saw that the rest of my brothers were out there. Chang and Will had their pistols trained on Jeremy who never even blinked, while Jory and Logan had his on the General who had managed to finally somehow get Sammy corralled safely although I could see he wasn't too happy with it. Juan, for the first time I think I've ever seen, had his gun out, but wasn't pointed at anyone. I could really see a pained look on his face, and wondered why,



Something was very wrong here, and I needed to find out what and fast, before this got any worse. Slowly I raised my hands up, and then stood up fully. Jeremy still kept his gun trained on me the entire time.

"Okay Jeremy, I don't know what's going on, but it's obvious there's something. So, why don't you tell me why you would protect this piece of shit." I said, trying to keep myself calm.

"That piece of shit, as you call him, is my Uncle Tom. I don't know what your problem is, but you ain't hurtin him." He spat the words out, and the one thing I knew about Jeremy, was that he was dead serious about this.

"Jeremy, put the gun down, and let's talk this out." The General said as he walked over, and gently put his hand on top of Jeremy's to my complete shock. Jeremy let the gun fall, then, after a second, he resafetied it, and put it back in his holster. Silently I told my brothers to holster theirs.

"Okay, now that all the guns are away, why don't you tell me what's going on son?" The General said looking at me, and I almost lost it again.

"Don't call me son you bastard, you know EXACTLY what's going on here." I snarled out, and he actually took a step back at the intensity. I may not kill him right now, until I know what's going on, but that didn't mean I had to be nice to him. Then again if he called me his son again I might just be persuaded to do it anyway... not that it would take much persuasion.

"I...I really have no idea who you are, or why you would want to kill me." He said, and he looked totally lost, making me start to think. Either he's the best damned actor I have ever seen, or he really is lost.

Jeremy had never stopped glaring at me and I could see he was ready to come to the General's defense in an instant still, alert and tense. Sammy had managed to bring himself back to a strategic position where he could either defend the General or get to me instantly depending on what might happen and I had to wonder why and why they were calling him their "Uncle."

Alright if he wanted to play dumb; "Okay, let's see if there's something I can do to jog your memory." I looked over to Logan, and he got my silent message, and instantly he was running back into the building. I slowly moved over to the doorway, where I could see Mike leaning heavily against the door frame. I wondered what he was doing here, but right now I had more important things to worry about. He surprised me though, when he said softly so only I could hear with my hearing, "I don't know what's going on here Adam but I would and have trusted Tom with my life. He's one of the good guys out there." I glanced sharply at him but he didn't say anything else and before I could say anything Logan was back.

It didn't take Logan more than a minute to get back outside, carrying the very large briefcase that I kept all the Genesis Project files in. Silently I thanked him, then took out a random file and opened it up. Zachery Tanner. I didn't have to read anymore, as I knew every file in there by heart.

I walked over to the General, and handed him the file. I waited for him to open it up, then I started to read it for him.

"Zachary Tanner, kidnapped at age six on March 14, 1998. Parents were Christopher and Deloris Tanner, he had two brothers, David age nine, and Trevor age four, he had one sister, Debbie age eleven.

Deemed to have the proper genetic codes after he was in the hospital to have his tonsils removed. Survived the first round of procedures, however, his body could not handle the increased immune system. Project terminated on February 23, 2000; after his immune system started to reject the changes made to it."

I looked up at the General whose face had gone pasty white. "Trust me General, I was there, he did NOT die easily."

I took a second to let that sink in, then I reached into the brief case and brought out another file. "Would you like to see more of what YOUR Project Genesis did to these kids?"

His head snapped up from the file he was reading, and he stammered for a second before he could get anything coherent out of his mouth. "Wait a minute. Project Genesis. That's... That's impossible, that project was denied operational status over eight years ago."

"REALLY?!?!" I asked, my voice dripping with sarcasm as I reached back into the briefcase, and brought out another file. "So this isn't your signature then, authorizing the project?" I asked as I handed the stunned man the file, then reached in for another one.

"And this one isn't yours either acknowledging the progress reports. Hell this one was from earlier this year... right before I escaped."

I handed him that one, and he really looked to be stunned. I knew I had tears running down my face right now, but I didn't care. As far as I was concerned, this man was responsible for so many of my brothers and sisters being killed. "Oh come on General. I got A LOT more files for you if you want them. Don't you want to see the one thousand three hundred and forty seven children that YOU ORDERED TO THIER DEATHS!"

I couldn't help myself, as I screamed out the last part. I quickly turned and took a few steps away from him. I would have killed him if I had to look at him anymore.

"I don't know what's going on here; Adam, but Uncle Tom would never hurt a kid, never." I heard Sammy say to my back but I didn't move. I was still trying to reign in the murderous rage I could feel coursing through me.

I heard a sob from behind me, and spun to see the General with tears falling down his face. "I... I didn't approve this... I denied it. I would never allow anything like this to happen."

"Then maybe you can explain this then." I said sending a silent command to Vishnu who slowly pushed the hood back revealing his face to the General. I watched the look of shock on his face as he muttered "Oh Dear Jesus" and raised his hand as if to touch the cat-boy before helplessly letting it fall back to his side in horror.

I was about to say something when Jeremy walked up to me. All the anger I felt towards him evaporated as he wrapped his arms around me in a loving hug and softly said. "Adam, I know this man. He's one of my Uncles. He would never allow something like this to happen. Please... if you don't believe him, then take my word for it. He wouldn't." I didn't want to believe him, but I knew Jeremy wouldn't lie to me. Not after everything we had been through.

"He wouldn't Adam. You know it too. Look at him, he couldn't do that." This time it was Sammy speaking and while I didn't know him as well as Jeremy I saw the truth of it in his eyes, brown with flecks of living gold shimmering in them telling me more than his words ever could, and I couldn't help it. I looked up at the general and looked into his eyes. I can't explain what happened, but I started to be able to "feel" things from him. Almost like I can feel with my brothers. Everything I "felt" there told me that they were right. The man who was standing in front of me couldn't do what it said he did. I didn't understand how all the evidence I had could be wrong, but the faith of two little boys and the now haunted eyes of an old soldier told me that somehow it was. I felt arms enveloping me from behind and I just knew it was Mike as Jeremy and Sammy gave me hugs from the front all holding me tightly with love and caring radiating from them in almost palpable waves.

I felt all the anger drain out of my body, as I watched him leaf through the files. I realized it's a good thing that I kept the originals back at the base, and these were just copies as his tears were falling onto them, ruining them. I watched as he gently ran his fingers over the picture of the smiling face that used to belong to Zachary. That above everything else told me that I had been wrong. That look of tenderness and sadness was something that couldn't be faked.

"General, I'm... I'm sorry..." I said quietly. I hated to admit I was wrong but I knew that I was.

"It's okay... ummm... Adam. I would think the same thing with the information you had." He said as he gently closed the file, and handed it back to me. When I took it, he took my hand in his and looked me in the eyes.

"I don't know anything about this right now, but believe me, I WILL find out who is responsible for this, and he WILL not get away with it." The fire I saw in his eyes told me that he meant what he said. I really hoped so, because it's time for this to come to an end. Every beginning had to have an ending and for Project Genesis it was it's time.

~~~~ Amur Khan's POV ~~~~

I really didn't want to do this, I mean who would, but I had made a promise, and I will not back out of it now no matter how much it hurts. It took me a little while to get everything I needed together, however, thanks to the people here, I was able to go back to our base and gather what was required.

It was hard to walk back through those halls again with no one there they seemed so, so empty. Even though we didn't even come close to filling it up, there was usually at least some activity going on some signs of life and the happiness that had come to mean home. Being there now when there was no one there, really brought home everything that had happened. The emptiness seemed to echo with my footsteps as I walked along the halls crying out a lament of where have all the children gone? I couldn't bring myself to answer it's cry and tell the silent place that was our home that many wouldn't be coming back to fill those halls once again with laughter and play. So in silence except for those hollow footfalls and the tears falling, which made no noise, I made my way in and then back out to perform the duty I owed, saddened even more by the brief sojourn home.

I fought back the tears that threatened to spill yet again knowing they would come soon enough regardless of any attempt to prevent them. I could cry later, but now was not the time to do it. I walked into the conference room that we had been using as a home away from home, and looked around until I spotted her. As I had expected, she was with the little ones, trying to comfort them. Lincoln was in her lap, and the rest of the little ones were spread out on the floor in front of her.

Joe was just bringing out his guitar, and saying that he was going to play a song for the little ones. It took him a few moments to tune it, and I couldn't help but sit and listen to it as he sang the song, and most of the kids joined in. It seemed to be a song they knew well, but I had never heard it before.

*Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea  
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee,  
Little Jackie paper loved that rascal Puff,  
And brought him strings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff. oh*

*Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea  
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee,  
Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea  
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee.*

*Together they would travel on a boat with billowed sail  
Jackie kept a lookout perched on Puff's gigantic tail,  
Noble kings and princes would bow when ere they came,  
Pirate ships would lower their flag when Puff roared out his name. oh!*

*Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea  
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee,  
Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea  
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee.*

*A dragon lives forever but not so little boys  
Painted wings and giant rings make way for other toys.  
One grey night it happened, Jackie Paper came no more  
And Puff that mighty dragon, he ceased his fearless roar.*

*His head was bent in sorrow, green scales fell like rain,  
Puff no longer went to play along the cherry lane.  
Without his life-long friend, Puff could not be brave,  
So Puff that mighty dragon sadly slipped into his cave. oh!*

*Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea  
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee,  
Puff, the magic dragon lived by the sea  
And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called honah lee.*

(written by [Leonard Lipton](#) and [Peter Yarrow](#) and made popular by the group [Peter, Paul and Mary](#) in a [1963](#) recording.)

As the song died out, I realized something very important. I may not have ever had to deal with the little ones much, but like everyone else on the base, I considered them more than family. They tried so hard, and did so much for us, without ever really knowing it. They truly became the mascots of all of us.

Many of them were alive because of what Dennis had done for them and I knew Adam was in contact with Daileass going over the cockpit recorders from the two birds that went down, but I didn't know

what he was going to tell the little ones about it. I knew he would tell them something to let them know just how much Dennis and his boys had loved them. Whether he would tell them the love was enough to die for them or not I didn't know. One part of me felt he should as Dennis had died a warrior's death in the most honorable way possible but since I had been amongst the squishies I had learned many things and another part of me didn't know if that would be best for them to know, at least right now. I thought a lot about what Dennis and his group had done. It would be easy to say that I would have done the same thing if I were in Dennis' shoes and I would like to think that I would have, but I know for a fact that you never really know until it happens.

All these thoughts weren't going to get what needed to be done, done so I took a deep breath, squared my shoulders, and made my way over to her. When I got there, I waited as they all took notice of me. Before I slowly pulled the hood of my robe back, and met her eyes. It was like looking into a mirror as I saw the agony from my own eyes reflected in hers and We shared a moment of deep pain, before I took a ragged breath and spoke. "Claire, I have something for you. If you would follow me, I'll show you."

Claire nodded slightly, picked Lincoln up off her lap, and without a word, got up, and followed me out of the room. No words passed between us as we walked to a smaller conference room. Once inside, I motioned her to sit in a chair that already had the small silver box sitting in front of it on the table. She ran her hands over it lovingly as she looked at me with a question in her gaze, but also pain knowing who the box had belonged to. I steeled myself to get what had to be said out as I began.

"It's a tradition in the military to always have letters written for loved ones, before you go off to a battle. However, since we never knew when we would have to go to battle, we just got into habit of always updating our letters. This was...his last one to you." I told her choking up on the last words, and even though I tried, I couldn't stop the tears from falling. I had already read the one he had for me, and knew what he wanted now.

She looked up at me, and I saw the tears that she had been holding back free and begin to fall as she gazed back at the box before her. She was always so strong, and I knew it was taking everything she had to not break down completely. They were so much in love that even someone like me could tell. She nodded again "Thank you. Would you... would you wait with me?" She asked me in a voice that told of the struggle that was raging inside. I simply nodded, and moved back, to allow her some sort of privacy. It really didn't matter as I knew the words by heart already.

She sat there for a few minutes, just running her hand over the box. I was sure the memories were running through her mind at that moment. I Was told that she had actually given that box to him. From what he said to me, it was really the only thing she had left from her family, but she gave it to him, so he would have something to make him think about her, and to let him know that she was his family now too.

She reached out finally with trembling fingers and gently, slowly opened the box. The second she did, music started to come from inside, and a sob escaped her lips. Bag pipes could be heard softly filling the room with the haunting strains of "Amazing Grace" as only those instruments can render it.

~~~~~Claire's POV~~~~~

I couldn't believe it. This was just too much for me right now. I had just lost him, and knew that I would never be able to hear his voice again, or hold him in my arms. But now, now, Khan tells me that

he left a letter for me. We both knew it could happen. We both knew that we could die at any time, and I really thought I would have been better prepared for it, but... but I'm not. I don't know how I'm going to go on without him. He means so much to me... meant so much to me.

The song I knew would come from the box, does, and it's like the flood gates opened up inside of me. I tried hard to stop the tears from falling, but nothing I could do would. Finally, as the music ended, I reached into the box and pulled out what was inside. A sealed envelope, and a CD. Written on the outside of the CD were the words, "You'll know when to play this."

Carefully I opened the letter, and pulled the pages out. Thankfully Khan had thought ahead, and there was a box of tissues next to me. I knew I was going to need them. I opened them up, took the top page, and started to read.

*"My Dearest Claire,*

*Well, I guess it finally happened. Something must have happened and I didn't survive whatever it was. I truly hope that I at least died in battle.*

*There's so many things I want to tell you, but I know that there would never be enough time, or paper for me to say it all. Saying that I love you just doesn't seem to be enough. Not for everything you have done for me, and everything that you mean to me.*

*I remember the first time that we met, back at the base where I was created. It was shortly after you got there, and right after they let you out into the yard. I was standing off to the side like I always did, just watching what everyone was doing. I was always an outsider, so I never even tried to make friends with everyone else. I also knew I scared them.*

*But not you. Never were you scared of me. That first day, I watched as you came out of the barracks, looked around at all the kids playing, then you saw me. I watched as your eyes narrowed trying to figure out who I was. Then, as if you had not a care in the world, you strolled right up to me, and asked me my name.*

*I knew then that you were someone special. What I didn't know was just how special you really were. So many times, all of my brothers and I would not be welcomed with the rest of the kids, but you would always come to us.*

*You took the time to learn why we did what we did, and spent countless hours explaining why you did what you did. And never once did you judge me, or think me a freak. I could never figure out why you did it, but I stopped caring, as I started to fall in love with you.*

*I don't think I could ever really explain everything that you made me feel over the last few years. I guess alive is the best way to put it. Alive and loved, and, my dearest Claire, that means more than anything I ever have, or ever will have.*

*Then you told me the news. I remember it like it was yesterday (mainly because it was yesterday.) I don't think I have ever cried like that before. I'm going to be a father. That's just not something I ever thought about before, and yet here it is. And I couldn't be more happy. Happy that I will have a son, but more so that he will know the same love and kindness that I have known from you.*

*Obviously though, I would have updated this letter after he or she was born, so I must have died before then. I only have two regrets then. The first that I will not be there to watch our child grow up. The second one though, is that I will not be able to help you with the child. I just hope that you will forgive me for that.*

*Well love, I could probably keep writing for hours to you, but it won't make this any easier for you, so I will end it here. Please know that I have always loved you, and I will keep watch over you and all of our family till such time as you can join me.*

*Goodbye my beloved,*

*Kuan Ti.*

*PS. You can play the CD now."*

I slowly put the letter down, the tears making it hard to see. Silently I picked up the CD and put it into the player. It started automatically and I couldn't help the loud sob that escaped as the guitar started to play. I knew this song very well, but I was not prepared to hear his voice, and him singing it.

*Sometimes late at night  
I lie awake and watch her sleeping  
Shes lost in peaceful dreams  
So I turn out the lights and lay there in the dark  
And the thought crosses my mind  
If I never wake up in the morning  
Would she ever doubt the way I feel  
About her in my heart*

*If tomorrow never comes  
Will she know how much I loved her  
Did I try in every way to show her every day  
That shes my only one  
And if my time on earth were through  
And she must face the world without me  
Is the love I gave her in the past  
Gonna be enough to last  
If tomorrow never comes*

*cause Ive lost loved ones in my life  
Who never knew how much I loved them  
Now I live with the regret  
That my true feelings for them never were revealed  
So I made a promise to myself  
To say each day how much she means to me  
And avoid that circumstance  
Where theres no second chance to tell her how I feel*

*If tomorrow never comes*

*Will she know how much I loved her  
Did I try in every way to show her every day  
That shes my only one  
And if my time on earth were through  
And she must face the world without me  
Is the love I gave her in the past  
Gonna be enough to last  
If tomorrow never comes*

*So tell that someone that you love  
Just what you're thinking of  
If tomorrow never comes*

*(Garth Brooks 1989)*

I couldn't help it. I was crying like a child by the time the song ended, but I didn't care. How could I not cry? "I... I always knew you loved me." I said softly, as I felt strong arms wrap around me. I buried my head into Amur Khan's chest, and let myself cry so much alike yet so different from his brother. I felt his tears as they fell on my head, and knew that this was as hard on him as it was on me. Kuan Ti often spoke of how close he and his brother were.

I don't know when it happened, but I must have fallen asleep. I started to look around the room and saw Khan sitting in the chair staring out the window. He didn't even turn around when I sat up but softly he spoke.

"You know Claire, he loved you more than anything else. More than anyone else." I could hear he still had tears in his eyes, and I knew he was hurting. Of everyone other than the cats, I knew Khan the best. And I never imagined seeing him like this, now that I was it broke my heart.

Slowly I walked over to him, and wrapped my arms around him. He stiffened at first, and I thought he would try to pull away from me, but slowly he relaxed and let me pull him into my chest.

"You know, I always knew that he would die like that. Out of all of us, he was the one that was the most protective of the young ones."

I had known that about Kuan Ti. Once, back in the first base we lived in, he threw himself in front of a hard ball that was thrown by one of the bigger kids at me, before I had completed the change. The ball had to have been traveling at over a hundred miles an hour, and would have hit me right in the head. But Kuan Ti threw himself in front of it, and made it hit him. Then he went after the kid that threw it, and if it wasn't for the collar that he was wearing, he may have actually killed the kid.

"I know that, and I am so proud of him for it. He'll always be my first love, but you know something Khan, he would be upset with us if we didn't go on." I was saying this more for myself than Khan, but I think he needed to hear it to. "Kuan Ti loved life, and wouldn't have wanted us to give up now. I need to be strong, if not for myself, then for our child, and also for his memory".

Khan stiffened, and I let him go. He stood up, and wiped the tears from his face. He turned to me, and I could see him trying to find his resolve. "You're Right Claire, we need to be strong now. It would dishonor his memory if we were not. In the letter he wrote for me, he asked me to make sure that I help



look after the child, and I swear to you here and now, I will do my best to help out when and where I can. You will not have to deal with this alone."

~~~~Donnie's POV~~~~

When I left the hospital, it was with only one thing on my mind. How to help that little boy. Now though, I've got a lot more to think about. I really didn't know what to make of all of it, so I went to talk to someone I knew could help me sort things out.

I found him sitting in the conference room at one of the tables, talking softly with Janet. They both looked up as I walked over to them. I guess most everyone else was letting them have their privacy, so when I walked over, they knew I needed to talk to one or both of them. I figured that Janet's advice would also be good, so I walked up to both of them.

"Sir... Ma'am, could I have a word with you two?" I asked as I stood at attention.

Joe smiled slightly, and indicated an empty chair. "Lose the formalities Donnie; we're not on base right now." He said with a slight chuckle.

I smiled slightly, as Janet pushed the coffee pot that was sitting between them my way, as well as a cup. I nodded to her, as I filled it up, and drank deeply from it.

"So what's on your mind?" Joe asked, as he moved himself around a bit in the wheelchair to make himself more comfortable.

"Well Si... Joe, I just got done talking to Teri Short, the director of the Federation Youth Services, and... well she gave me a lot of information, and I'm not really sure where to go with it." I said as I took another sip of the coffee.

"Okay? Well tell us what's going on, and we'll see what we can come up with." He said, while looking over at Janet. I noticed something different at that point. He looked over at Janet, and they both smiled. But what I really noticed was that he had his hand over top of hers, and when he asked her, he squeezed her hand gently, and that's when I realized that they finally figured out what most of us already knew... they liked each other.

"Ummm... well see... there's this kid..." I started to say when Janet interrupted me.

"You mean Josh?" She said, and I knew my jaw was on the floor. They both just laughed. When Janet was finally able to talk again, she looked at me seriously. "Donnie, don't you think we check up on everyone? Plus, I was trying to find Juan earlier, and when I did, he told me all about the boy in the hospital. So, now, what's the problem?"

For a few seconds, I just sat there in shock. For the first time in a long time, I remembered what it was like to have adults that actually cared enough about me, to look into what I was doing. Most kids would probably hate that, but right then, it felt really nice. "Well, Teri told me all about whom and more importantly what Clan Short is, and what they do."

Joe nodded slightly, "I had been wondering at the people here, and was able to do some asking around, but not much yet. What did you find out?"

"Well, the long and the short of it is this. This entire group of kids have been given the job of looking out for other kids. It has something to do with being part of a Vulcan clan. And then there's the Safe Haven Act, which gives the Federation the right to come in and help kids who are being abused. I guess Clan Short has been directed by both Star Fleet and Sarek of Vulcan to enforce the Safe Haven Act as much as they can." I really hoped I got it all right. I think I did, but with everything she told me, and the fact that I know I'm not really all that smart, I just hope I didn't misunderstand something.

Janet was just nodding her head, and when I stopped she looked at Joe, then at me. "You're pretty close on it all. Joe and I already had a long talk with Teri and a few of the other adults, so we know what's going on here. But the question I have is this, what are you going to do with the information you have?"

"Well..." I started to answer, now not really sure I was going to do it. It sounded like a good idea when I came up with it, but now that it was time to actually say it... "I was thinking that maybe Emily and I could.... well... maybe we could adopt him." There I said it. I still didn't believe it, but I was going to do what I could for that kid. But then another thought hit me. "Ray too... I'd want to adopt Ray as well." It slipped out before I could stop it. But it felt right, and I wasn't sorry I said it.

Suddenly I heard a squeaking voice behind me. "You... you really mean it?"

I turned in my seat, and there was Ray standing a few feet behind me. I could see the tears as they started to fall down his cheeks. I nodded slightly to him as I said softly "If you would let me be your father," and the next thing I knew, I had a lap full of a crying seven year old, "Oh thank you Donnie... Thank you... thank you!"

I just held the boy close to me, as tears fell down my own cheeks. I looked up, and saw that both Janet and Joe had tears in theirs as well. "It looks like you know what you need to do Donnie." Janet said to me, and I simply nodded while hugging Ray tight to me.

After a few minutes, he pulled back from me. "Come on... Daddy... Let's go see my new brother."

I couldn't help it... when he said that one little word, I lost it totally. I pulled him closer to me, and just cried... I cried the happiest tears I have ever cried before.

Finally I let him go, and when he got down, he wiped the tears from his eyes, grabbed my hand, and started to pull me away. "Come on, I gotta go meet my brother!" He was so excited he was literally bouncing as he stood there trying to pull me to my feet.

"Hold on there kiddo, I gotta get something first." I said, thinking about the box I had been keeping in my bag for the last three weeks.

~~~~Adam's POV~~~~

Ever since Mark gave Logan and me those coins, I have been trying to figure out what he meant about Seth. I figured the best place to start would be the voice recordings off of Bam Bam. I knew that Dai-leass was recording everything that was said, so I got in contact with him. Seth, the person who is in

command of CIC burned the info onto a disk for me, so I could play it whenever. I didn't know if I could handle doing it now, but I knew I needed to. I called Mom, Dad, Jack, and Dave here to the small conference room, so they could hear it all too. Now I just had to wait for them to get here. Logan, as always, is right by my side, and I can't begin to thank him enough. Not that I'll ever let him go again, after almost losing him.

The four of them came in together, and silently all sat down around the table. They really didn't know why I had called them, so I guess they were just waiting for me. "Thanks guys for coming here. I can't go into all the details right now, as to why, but I asked Daileass to send me the cockpit recorder from Bam-Bam." I said as I slid the CD into the player.

"The main reason I asked for you guys to be here is so that I didn't have to do it alone. So much shit has happened lately, and I really don't know how much more I can handle." I was close to loosing it again, so I didn't say anything else.

Dad wheeled himself over to me, and put his hand on mine, and that's when I noticed mine were shaking slightly. "Adam, you've done so much with this group. More than any of us thought was really possible. I don't know if I've ever really told you this before, but, with God as my witness, I am so damned proud to be your father."

Oh God, I lost it again. I felt him put his arms around me, and pull me into his strong embrace. I heard someone get up out of their chair, then I felt another pair of arms around me. I could tell that it was Janet... that it was mom, and I cried even harder. For the briefest of moments I felt like a small child without a care in the world. As if, while in these arms, I didn't need to be strong. For a moment I let myself luxuriate in that feeling.

But as with everything, reality came back to me, and I knew I what I needed to do. I gently pulled myself out of the three way hug. "Thanks." I said softly, then sat back upright in my chair. They both wordlessly moved back to their spots, and I took a moment to collect myself again.

When I was ready, I reached out, and pressed the play button and I felt Logan's hand gently grasp my shoulder knowing how hard this was going to be for me.

I couldn't help but smile as I heard Seth's voice fill the room. "Wow it's getting pretty crowded up here." I could see it all in my head. All the helicopters flying around the area, keeping a lookout for threats.

"Yeah it is, let's see if the boss will let us take HI-CAP." I heard next in Dennis' voice. "Viper 8, lead?"

"Yeah, go ahead Dennis." Will responded.

"Hey boss can we kick it up to about 2.5 or so, it's getting kinda crowded up here."

"Sure Viper 8, you're cleared HI-CAP at 2.5 to 3 but be ready to come back down if we need you."

"Roger that, Viper lead." I could hear the engine kick up a bit, and after a few seconds, Seth's voice came back over the radio.

"Ah that's better."

"Yeah it is." Dennis replied

"So you think they bugged out for good?" Seth asked next.

"Don't know, but I hope so."

"Yeah but we missed all the action and I was hoping to get some." Seth said.

"Why were you hoping to get in the shit, man, I wanna stay the hell out of it." Dennis asked, and we could all hear the disbelief in his voice.

"Well...ya see, if we came back heroes and all then maybe Sally would give me some." He replied, and I couldn't help but laugh out loud at that, even though the tears were falling.

"Jesus Seth, is that all you ever think about?" We heard Keith ask disgustingly.

"Well.....yeah!" he said, and I swear I could see him grinning.

"Forget it, Sally ain't never gonna do nothing with you." Dennis said laughing.

"If that's all I'm gonna think about in a couple of years, then I hope I never grow up." Keith replied as we all started laughing... until it hit us exactly what he said. And the fact that now he'd never get the chance to know, or to grow up. I was still laughing, but now I was crying too.

"Ah kid, it ain't that bad."

"Hmmmph" Was the only response.

"Really, it's pretty neat." We heard Eric say, and I couldn't help but look around the room. Everyone had a smile on their faces. I don't know about any of them, but I could see this conversation happening in my head as if I were there watching.

"But that's all...." Keith started to say when a scream cut through his voice over the radio "SAM! IN-COMING!!!"

"Find it!" We heard Dennis cry, and I could imagine their frantic looks trying to find the missile.

"Oh Jesus!" Seth gasped.

"Dennis it's going for 'Phantom'!" Eric cried into the radio.

I heard all of them gasp, and then someone, I think it was Seth, quietly chanting, "Climb, climb, climb," Trying to make the helicopter move faster, but we all knew it was in vain.

They all cried out, and I could see in my mind the picture of the missile slamming into the helicopter again. I couldn't help it, I was crying again. I could tell by the sounds around me that everyone else was as well.

"They're hit, they're hit!" Keith cried out.

"Oh God!" Seth cried.

And then there was silence, and I could imagine every single one of those boys trying to digest what had just happened. Finally I heard Dennis say quietly, "Viper 8 descending to one thousand and we're live." I could hear buttons being pushed and switches being flipped, as I watched, in my mind, the four of them, getting everything ready for combat. "Look alive, we're hot and it's payback time."

For a few brief moments there was silence, as they all were getting down to the job they had been trained for. I swear I could see both the fear and the determination in their eyes right then. Fear for what may happen, but determination to do the best that they could.

"Shit! They got another SAM! Helena, break left!" I heard Juan cry out again over the CD player, and I could only imagine the feelings that everyone else had at that moment. I know what I was feeling, and I know I never want to have to feel that again.

"Do something!" Seth screamed, and I knew that they were all thinking the same thing, 'what can we do'.

"There's nothing we can do." Dennis answered, and I heard the strain in his voice.

"There's gotta be something!" Keith cried out.

"Dennis, ya gotta save em, you can't let them die too!" Eric added.

"Guys, there's only one chance, and if we succeed then we won't make it out alive." Dennis said, and I heard a sob escape from someone. Then I realized it was me.

"Do it." We heard both Eric and Keith say at the same time, and I could only imagine the looks on their faces as they said that. Knowing that they were going to be sacrificing their own lives for their family.

"Are you sure?" Dennis asked.

"We can't let em die." Eric said.

I heard someone re adjusting themselves in their seat. "Hang on to your balls then!" I could only cry harder as I heard the engine wind up, and saw in my mind, Dennis swooping the bird down to try to save the precious cargo that was in danger.

"Viper 8! Dennis! What the hell are you doing? Get outta there!" Will screamed over the radio.

"What we have to." Was the response he got and I swear I could hear nothing but peace and determination in that voice. I can only pray, that if I ever have to face my end, it's with as much strength and courage as I heard in his voice right then

"Dennis, no!" Will cried again, but I knew it was useless.

"I wonder if ya can get any up there?" Seth asked, and even through the tears that were streaming down my face I couldn't help but laugh out loud at that. I finally understood what Mark was talking about earlier, and I sent up a quick prayer that Seth finds just as much as he could handle and a thank you for letting Keith find out it wasn't all that bad after all.

Keith moaned "Leave it up to you to worry about that."

"I love you guys." Dennis said, in a voice filled with love, and I could just imagine all of them watching as the missile got closer and closer to them.

"Guess we're gonna find out bro." Dennis said, and then there was static. I couldn't help it, I dropped my face into my hands and cried. From around the room, I heard nothing but the same. While I was crying about losing them, I don't think I have ever felt prouder of anyone in my entire life. Those four boys are what it means to be heroes, and by God, I will make sure people don't forget them.

~~~~Emily's POV~~~~

I sat in here wondering what it was that Donnie was going to do. I knew him well enough to know that he would figure something out, but for the life of me, I couldn't figure out what. So I waited and hoped.

Josh woke up a few times, and we talked when he did, but I wasn't really able to find out much about him, other than he's nine, and is evil. That's all he would say about himself, and I couldn't imagine what it would take for someone to so thoroughly believe that. Mostly though, I just sat here thinking about life.

I was just helping Josh take a sip of water when the door opened up. I looked up expecting it to be one of the doctors. I had talked to one of them earlier, and they said that Josh was soon to be able to be released, as long as they had someone to release him to. I was worried that Donnie might not be able to come up with something in time.

However, it wasn't one of the doctors, instead, Donnie walked in, and to my surprise, Ray was right behind him. Donnie walked up to me, and gave me a hug. He held on for a few seconds longer than I thought he would, but then he let me go, and looked over at Josh.

"Hey there kiddo, how are you feeling?" He asked, while moving over, and sitting on the bed next to him. I saw Josh tense up, but then Donnie just reached down, and pulled him into a hug as well.

He was stiff as a board for a few seconds, but then it was if a dam broke. Josh seemed to relax totally, and I soon heard him sniffing, and sobbing, while Donnie just whispered softly to him. It broke my heart to see the kid so afraid of someone hugging him, and then to see him eat it up like he had never been hugged before, made it even worse. Someone really hurt this poor boy, and I knew it was going to take a long time to get him better.

After a few minutes of Donnie hugging him, Josh started to get some control back. "Sorry for being such a baby." He said, to which Donnie told him that he wasn't a baby.

Donnie helped him wipe his eyes, and blow his nose, then sat back on the bed a bit. "Josh, there's someone I want you to meet. He said he'd like to get to know you, and is going to stay with you, while Emily and I discuss a few things." When he said that we were leaving, Josh got a really scared look on his face, but Donnie quickly went on. "Don't worry little guy, we'll be right outside the door, and if you want, I'll even keep the door open so you can see us... would that be okay?"

Josh nodded slightly, while stealing a glance at Ray who was standing there watching what was going on. Donnie motioned over to Ray, who came and stood next to where Donnie was sitting. "This is Ray, he's gonna stay here and keep you company... okay?"

Josh looked over at Ray, and it was really sad to see that a boy, who was two years older than Ray, looked so totally afraid of him. I shouldn't have worried though, Ray has a way about him that makes everyone feel at ease when he's around, and I saw it working as Donnie stood up, and Ray climbed into the bed with Josh. He was talking so softly to the boy that I couldn't make out what he was saying, but within about thirty seconds, Ray had Josh smiling, even if it was just a small smile.

Donnie smiled as he walked over to me, took my hand, and led me out of the room. Making sure to keep the door open, so Josh could see us. As soon as he turned to me, I asked him the question that I had wanted to ask since he walked in the room. "So? Did you figure anything out?"

He took a deep breath, and I had to fight back the tears. He wasn't able to do something. But then I saw the smile start to appear on his face. "What? What did you find out?"

He smiled stepped up to me, and wrapped me in a tight hug, then kissed me deeply. Even though I really loved him, and his kiss usually was enough to take my breath away, right now, I really wanted to know what he found out. I pushed him back a bit, and just looked at him.

He had this really goofy grin on his face, and I was about to hit him when he softly said, "Before I tell you what I found out, I need to ask you a serious question."

I watched, as he reached into his pocket, and pulled out a box, he opened up, then dropped down on a knee in front of me. I know I gasped out loud and when he looked up at me, I could see nothing but love in those eyes. "Emily, would you marry me?"

~~~~Lynn Masters POV~~~~

Ted and I appeared inside a large room that looked like it must be a living room of some sort. I looked around and was just stunned at the number of kids running around. Ted had told me about this Clan Short, but I really didn't know what to expect. Plus the fact that I was much too worried about Lincoln to care about much else.

"Come on huh, this way." Ted said, while taking my hand in his own. I was really beginning to like Ted. Not just for the fact that he was really good looking, but he was also really sweet, and is one of the few guys that I've known that didn't think of me as a slut just because I had a kid when I was fourteen.

He really liked Lincoln too and I knew the feeling was very mutual, and that was the clincher. Lincoln is easily the most important person in my life, and if Ted didn't like him or Lincoln him, then there was no real reason to pursue a relationship with him.

It was nice to wake up this morning to a face that was familiar. I still don't really remember everything that happened, but Ted was able to fill in the gaps for me. He told me that Lincoln was okay, but I still needed to see him with my own eyes to fully believe it.

We were walking across the room, when someone walked over to us. "Hey Ted." He said, and I guess Ted must have known the boy because he greeted him right back.

"Hey Justy, I'd like you to meet Lynn. She's Lincoln's mom, and my girlfriend." I know I blushed a little bit at that, but I took his hand when he offered it. He looked like a nice enough kid, maybe fourteen or fifteen, light brown hair, and blue eyes. He really was kinda cute, for a kid.

"Hi Lynn, I hope you're feeling better... Ted here told me how you were doing. And of course Lincoln's running around telling everyone that'll listen that his mommy's a hero, and saved his life." I had to bite my bottom lip to stop from crying. Of everything that happened, that's the one thing that still bothered me a lot. Kids his age shouldn't have to know about things like that.

"Ummm... Thanks. Yeah... I'm feeling better. Do you know where my son is?" I asked knowing that I needed to see him for myself soon.

"Of course, sorry, here, let me show you." He said, and I simply nodded as he turned and walked towards one of the doors. Ted took my hand in his and squeezed it as we followed. I couldn't even begin to describe how much he's helped me through this.

We followed Justy through the door, then down a hallway then finally to another door. He stopped just outside it, and I could easily hear the sound of kids in there. Both he and Ted waited for me, and I could feel my hands trembling as I stood there. I don't really know what has me so afraid, but I am. Finally I took a deep breath, reached out and opened the door.

When we walked in, the guys letting me go first, I saw something that I thought I would never see again. My eyes found Lincoln right away, and I watched for a second or two as he and Kent were playing with Hermes, one of the Cheetah kids. The young cat was throwing them up into the air, and catching them. The peels of laughter could be heard clearly even though the room was filled with other people. But something else caught my eye too. In Lincoln's hand was the stuffed doll that Dennis had given him right before we left.

~~~~Flashback~~~~

We were all getting ready to leave to go up to Montana when Lincoln squirmed out of my arms, and ran over to one of the helicopters. I was right behind him, and overheard what he said to the pilot. "BARRNY!!!! Can I wide width you?!" He was so excited that he was bouncing up and down.

Dennis climbed down out of the helicopter where he was doing his pre-flight. "Sorry little man," I heard him say while picking him up and putting him on his hip. "We're all full this time, but tell you what, when we get up there, I'll talk to Will and see if I can't take you for a ride, how's that sound?"



"WEAAALLLLYYYY?!?!" Lincoln squealed. So excited that he might get to ride in his favorite helicopter.

"Sure thing buddy... but we all got you something." Dennis said, as he reached back into the helicopter and pulled out a wrapped box.

Lincoln almost fell to the floor, he was squirming so much to get down and open his present. When Dennis finally gave him the box, Lincoln wasted no time in ripping the paper off, and opening it.

"LOOK Mommy!!!! they got me a Bam Bam doll! Just like's on the side of the hewicopter!" He shouted out as he hugged the stuffed doll to him. "This is the bestest thing I evers got!"

Dennis just ruffled his hair, then popped him on the butt, sending him back to me. He didn't let the doll go the entire ride.

~~~~End Flashback~~~~

"MOOOOOMMMYYY!!!" I heard him scream, bringing me back to the here and now and thinking that the doll had saved his life because without it he would have been on Bam Bam when..... I quickly wiped the tears from my eyes, and saw him running towards me. I took a few steps forwards, then bent down.

Almost falling back on my butt when he slammed into me, but it was the best feeling I think I ever felt. "Oh my baby boy... I thought I lost you." I whispered as I stroked the back of his head, and held him as close to me as I could.

He pulled himself back and looked me right in the eyes. "Of course you didn't mommy... you saved me!" I lost it all right there, and just cried while I held him close to me. I didn't ever want to let go.

After a few minutes of holding him, I finally was able to release my baby from my arms. I wiped the tears from my eyes, then bent down and wiped his face. When I stood back up, I saw Kent was standing there. He looked a bit nervous, so I bent down and looked him right in the eye. "Hey there Kent, what's wrong?"

"Ummm... nothing's wrong, I... I just wanted to say thanks." I saw the tears start to fall, so I pulled him into me, and just let him cry. I picked him up, and went over to some seats, and sat down with him still clinging tightly to me. I sat there gently rocking him, and helping him calm down. "It was no problem baby, I'm just glad your okay." I said to him over and over again. I could just imagine what was going through his young mind right then. Lincoln was probably too young to really understand what had happened, but Kent, at five, probably knew. Of everything that was lost yesterday, these kids childhood was the one thing that I cried for the most. These kids have seen things that no one, even my age, should see.

When I looked down, I saw that he had fallen asleep in my arms, and looked up to Ted in question. He must have known what I was asking, cause he just pointed over to an area that had blankets and pillows laid out all over the floor. The little ones had "nested" so many times before; I knew exactly what it was, so I stood up, walked over there and gently laid him down in the middle.

When I got him situated, I leaned in and placed a gentle kiss on his forehead. "Sweet dreams little one." I said softly, and almost jumped when I heard a voice from behind me.

"Don't worry Lynn, I'll watch over him." I looked over my shoulder and saw Hermes standing there. As soon as I moved out of the way, he laid himself down next to Kent, and gently wrapped his arms around the boy. Kent quickly latched onto the older boy, and snuggled in close. I was surprised as I knew that both Hermes and his brother have a very hard time sitting still, and here he was quietly snuggling with Kent. I watched as he closed his eyes, and a soft purring started to come from his throat. Quietly I went back over to where they had tables and chairs set up for people to sit, and found myself one in a quiet corner.

I buried my head in my hands, and started to cry softly. This time though, the tears were that of relief. "They really are precious aren't they?" I heard from next to me, and looked up to see Martha sliding in to the seat next to me, I quietly nodded in agreement.

"Here, drink this." She said as she handed me a warm mug, "It's just tea." I nodded and took a small sip. I always loved Martha's tea, even though she would never tell me how she made it. Martha really fit into the role of the Grandmother for everyone in our family.

"I know everyone is hurting after yesterday, I just hope that this doesn't destroy the things that all of you have built." She said quietly and I looked up at her, questions in my eyes.

"Well you see honey, things like what happened yesterday are the kinds of things that can break most men, not to mention young kids..." Her voice trailed out, and I finally knew what she meant. I sat there for several moments just thinking about it. I knew that Adam and the rest were strong, but, how strong?

I'm not sure how long I sat there thinking over what she said and sipping my tea, but finally I looked over and asked the question that was on my mind. "Think there's anything we can do?"

She sat there considering for a moment, then she nodded, "Yeah, just be there for them. We're all hurting, but most of us have dealt with failure before, even if they were small ones. I don't think any of them ever have." She said pensively I nodded, understanding what she was saying, and wondering what exactly any of us could do.

I was brought out of my thoughts by a tug on my sleeve. "Momma, do you know where Khan is?" Lincoln asked, and I opened my arms to let him climb up on my lap.

"No honey I don't. I'm sure he's around here somewhere." I said, while pulling him back into me for a cuddle.

"No he's not... I's looked all over for him. He needs me." He said with all the conviction his young voice could muster.

"Why do you say that honey?" Martha asked

"Don't know Grandma... just know he does." He said and again he sounded so sure of himself. I learned early on that Lincoln was special in that he knew what others were feeling. I used to just dismiss it when he said something like this, but I know better now.

I got up and put him on the floor. "Okay little one, let's see if we can't find him for you. Okay?" I asked, and he nodded while taking my hand. Together we went over to where Ted was still talking to Justy.

"Justy, I want you to meet my son Lincoln." I said and saw a big smile come across the teens face.

"Hey there little guy. See, I told you that your mommy was okay. How's everything going now?" Justy said while squatting down and giving Lincoln a quick hug.

"It's doing good now Justy... but I can't find Khan, and I know he needs me right now." He said to the older boy, whose smile faded slightly.

"You know he does huh? Well, let's see if we can't find him for ya... okay?" Lincoln nodded seriously, and I watched as Justy went over to a console on the wall and started talking to someone. A few seconds later he came back over to us. "Well, it seems that Khan asked Seth to transport him back to Montana, where the attack happened. If you would like, I can take you there."

Lincoln looked up at me with pleading eyes, "pwease mommy, we gotta go."

I nodded and he broke out into a huge smile. Justy nodded, "Okay, do you guys mind if I bring someone with me?"

We both shook our heads, and Justy waved someone over. When I looked up I saw a boy, maybe sixteen years old, with beautiful hazel eyes, and brown hair. I didn't need to look further though, cause I saw the look in his eyes as he looked at Justy, and knew that they were an item. I couldn't help but comment to myself about how all the best looking guys were either taken, or gay. And in this place, it seemed to always be both.

He walked up to Justy who put his arm around the boy's waist. "Hey guys, I'd like you to meet my boyfriend Dean. Dean, this is Lynn, and this little guy down here's, her son, Lincoln."

Dean smiled and nodded at me, then bent down and picked up Lincoln. "So you're the little guy that's been running around here all day?"

Lincoln smiled and giggled as Dean pushed his fingers into his ribs and started to tickle him. "Hehehe, yeah... but we's gotta go find Khan."

Dean stopped tickling him, and put him down. "We do, do we, well, do you know where he's at?"

"Yeah, Seth said he transported back to Montana, where the Reynold's live. I was gonna take them there, but wanted to know if you wanted to go along." Justy said, and Dean just smiled and nodded.

"Sure, let's go."

## Chapter 27

### Lynn's POV

It was like I was in a fog, I knew it but it didn't change that I couldn't help it or do anything about it. Too much had happened for me to take in and make fit in my head. My baby had almost died, yet he was still here, I just didn't know what to think about this. Then...then I had almost lost him again. I really didn't know how much more of this I could take. It had all become too much.

"What's the matter child?" I heard as I looked up from where I had slumped into a chair, to find Martha, Grandma as everyone was calling her. She was always there to help and right now I needed someone to talk to, and needed that someone badly.

She smiled gently as she handed me a cup of tea, and then sat down across from me. As was typical for this group of people, they could tell when you needed space, and suddenly we found ourselves with no one around us any longer. I took a few sips of the tea while I tried to get my thoughts into some semblance of order. After she had waited patiently, a few minutes, I finally reached the decision to just tell her what had happened over the last few hours as I really wasn't sure if I could ever get them in enough order to make the telling any easier.

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### Flashback

The four of us arrived in Montana and immediately I began to shake, the memories flooding over me. I knew what had happened here, but seeing the aftereffects was almost more than I could handle. They hadn't started to clean everything up yet, so everything was just as it had been when the fighting stopped. All I remembered was the helicopter getting hit, and then I think I remember the crash, but even that, I'm not so sure about.

I couldn't help myself, I knew I shouldn't, but I just couldn't help looking over to where the helicopter was laying. I gasped when I saw the ruins of it laying there, still smoldering in places. Suddenly, as much as I didn't want to be, I was back in there in the fire and smoke, in the screams, back to when it began.

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### Yet another Flashback(Hey flashbacks are a good thing ?)

"Look mommy, we's gonna land soon!" Lincoln cried excitedly while straining to look out the portal on the side of the helicopter. I was quite worried before the flight that it would be really shaky and rough, but I was surprised by how gentle the flight up here had turned out to be. And now, now we were going into some sort of military action, but I wasn't really worried. With everyone around us that had training, I didn't see that anything could really go wrong. We were given orders to wait until they cleared

the landing zone, then we were supposed to run into the barn. No big deal, and all the little ones are really excited about it cause they got to wear bullet proof vests.

The helicopter shook a little bit, as they started to lower the back door in preparation for landing and, I watched as most of the kids stood up and checked their guns. Had it not been for the last few months, I might find it really strange that kids, younger than I am, are playing around with real rifles. But it's not really all that hard to imagine now and I knew they had all been well trained with them.

"Hey Lincoln, Kent. Why don't you guys stick with me. I'll look out for you." I heard someone say, and looked over to see Mark sitting down next to my boy. I couldn't help but smile he had the most gorgeous green eyes. All of the older boys really did a lot to look out for Lincoln and Kent, and Mark was no exception. I was somewhat surprised however, to see that Mark had a side arm strapped to his waist, but then I remembered that almost everyone had at least pistol training so I guess I shouldn't have been.

"K Marky." Was Lincoln's reply and Kent just nodded smiling, as I watched with fascination the precision that was going on at the end of the helicopter. Every single kid was checking out the gear of the person to their left. Once that was done, they all lined up in almost perfect formation, I saw all the kids with the bigger guns at the back of the helicopter, I guess getting ready for anything that might go wrong. Most people would think that kids couldn't be taught this kind of discipline, but again... they would be wrong, this was an extraordinary group of kids and what I was watching just proved it yet again.

That's when I heard it and with a sinking deep in my stomach I just knew something was very wrong. I felt more than heard the engines wind up, but I had no trouble in hearing the scream of stressed metal as suddenly we're going sharply up, and to the left the silent engines now crying out in a tortured howl. I watched in horror and disbelief as some of the kids that had been standing by the door lost their grip and were thrown violently out the back of the helicopter because of the wild, almost desperate seeming maneuvers. I quickly grabbed the boys around me into a huddled group praying they'd be safe with Kent on one side of me, and Lincoln the other. I felt Mark grab on too, and the three of us held on to one another as tightly as we could as the helicopter continued to bank hard.

Then I saw it out the back, a little streak of white. It seemed so insignificant, so small and I didn't know what it was, but somehow I knew it was bad, real bad. Everyone was screaming now all around us, but I couldn't tear my eyes off that little speck as it came closer and closer seeming to aim right for the open back door and all the kids still massed there.

Then it hit.

I must have blacked out for a second, but when I woke up I couldn't see much other than thick black smoke and flames everywhere. Frantically, I looked around, for and finally found Lincoln and Kent. They were lying next to each other, but both of them appeared to be out of it, I was still looking for Mark but of him there was no sign.

That's when I heard it. Something that I will never be able to forget. Above the sounds of screaming and pain I heard, the sound of tearing metal. I looked up just in time to see part of the railing system rocking and tearing off of it's supports. I knew instantly that it was going to fall on the two boys. I couldn't let that happen and I couldn't get them out of the way in time so, I jumped over them just as the thing gave way in a shower of sparks, and screaming metal.

I felt it as it hit me, and I couldn't help but scream out at the agony as the thing started to burn into my back, but I couldn't... wouldn't let it fall onto my babies. I don't have any idea how long I was there, on my hands and knees holding that piece of metal off the boys. I cried out in frustration and horror as I saw the young boys being burned by the hot fuel that was sloshing all over the place. The fires hadn't gotten here yet, and I had no idea what I would, or could do when they did.

Then I heard the voices. Someone was there. "Help!!! Somebody help me!" I screamed. Putting everything I had into that call nothing left to me now except the one thought ' I had to save my little ones' . It could have been hours later, or it could have just been seconds, but I felt the metal lifted from my back. I could feel it literally ripping the flesh out of my back as it went, and again, I could only scream out in pain, as I allowed myself to helplessly fall to the side everything becoming blurry as I realized I could go now, my duty done, my babies safe.

Through the tears I saw that Adam was there next to me now. I watched as he looked worriedly from me then to the boys and before the darkness finally overtook me. I uttered what I really thought were going to be my last words. "Please... please help my babies."

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"Come on Mamma... we's gotts to find Khan." Lincoln said bringing me back to the here and now, and with a shudder I had to wipe the tears from my eyes. I thought I had lost my baby, that day, but now, now, I know he was given back to me, and I wasn't going to let him go.

I nodded but before I could move an inch the little guy was streaking off into the woods with me moving quickly to catch up but he was soon out of sight. It wasn't but seconds later that I started to hear something which at first I couldn't place but then as I was trying to determine what the noise was the peace became suddenly shattered by what I can only describe as the pain filled howl of a large cat, of Khan.

That sound froze me in my tracks as I listened to the long mourn filled cry which reverberated throughout the forest, none but us to bear testimony to the agony clearly contained within. Because as strange as it sounds, I could feel the emotions in it. It was almost like he was crying out to the heavens with his pain. I knew it was Khan, but I had never heard a sound like that before. So emotional, so utterly not human, yet even as I thought that, I realized that it wasn't. It was so primeval, so raw, it was so real and as the sound echoed around me, I could feel everything in it from him, deep within me down to my very bones. It was then that I realized that it was probably the most human thing I'd ever heard in my life.

When the howl finally faded slowly away, I realized that I was standing there transfixed by the sound rooted to the spot and had to shake myself in order to be able to even move again. I looked around, and just barely caught the sight of Lincoln climbing up and over a downed tree. As I started to move to catch up to him, I heard another sound that brought me to a stop again although not for long.

This one was not a cry of agony filled with pain and loss but instead, this one was filled with anger... Rage even quickly followed by crashing sounds from up ahead. Suddenly fear filled me, and began to run towards where my baby had disappeared. It was just as I reached the tree surrounding the glade that

I saw something that made all the blood drain from my face as icy tendrils of terror ran down my body. I tried to scream, but I couldn't even find the breath to do that.

Lincoln had climbed over some fallen trees, and was walking up behind Khan, who had just ripped one of the skids off the helicopter and was bashing it repeatedly on the burnt out husk of the helicopter the helicopter where his brother had died. The rage and pain in the cries that came from him were even louder than the sound of the tearing metal.

I watched in horror as Lincoln calmly walked up behind him, and tugged on his tattered shirt. Khan spun around dropping the skid. He came around low, with a blow designed to gut whoever had disturbed him.

I screamed, and I know I heard the other two scream as well, as we watched Khan spinning in a deadly dance that had only one possible conclusion. At the last second though, somehow, miraculously, he just stopped with, his claws mere inches away from Lincoln's face, while he just stood there.

For several seconds, no one moved. Khan stared, huffing and puffing at Lincoln, their eyes seemingly locked on one another. Then just as suddenly as everything had stopped, it started again, as Khan fell to his knees, threw his head back and roared with such pain and anguish, that it was a sound which I will never be able to forget.

I could do nothing but watch while the tears streamed down my face as he collapsed on the ground in front of Lincoln. It took a second for me to realize that he was sobbing on the ground there and my heart broke to see what had once been such a proud and fierce warrior broken and beaten down in his inconsolable grief to this. I watched in wonder and disbelief as Lincoln sat down next to Khan and lifted his massive head into his lap, comforting in the way only a child can, with love and total acceptance.

I found the ability to move then, and rushed over to him. When I got there, Lincoln was softly talking into Khan's ear while he stroked the huge cat's head. If I wasn't in such a state of shock, I would have thought that it was really cute and touching, as it was, all I could think about was how close I had come to losing Lincoln again.

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I looked up and barely saw Martha through the tears that were again falling from my eyes. "I asked him later on why he just stood there and didn't move." I had to kinda laugh as I thought back to the answer. "You know what he said. He just looked up at me, and with those huge brown eyes of his, he said. "I knew Mr. Khan wouldn't hurt me."

Martha just sat there with her mouth open in shock. I knew what she was feeling, it's what I was feeling at the time. The thing that I still didn't really know how to take was what happened next as I relayed it to her. "The thing is, after he said that, Khan looked up at me, and in a very soft voice said something that kinda has me wondering."

"What was that dear?" Martha asked softly.

"He said, 'I... I could never hurt one of the cubs. It's my job to protect them.'"

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### Adam's POV

I couldn't help but sigh in frustration. "Yes Juan... I agree. Some of the shit going on here is really fucked up. But you know what... They're trying to help out kids. That's all that really matters to me."

I knew Juan was about to protest, so I beat him to it. Hoping that this would get him to shut up. "Listen... you've always said that the tactics used don't really matter as long as the result is good. Well... they may use different tactics, but you can't argue with the success they've had. I mean you saw the info just like I did. They've helped a bunch of kids, and I really do think that working with them will be best for us. Hell... General Adams can suck Sarek's dick now.... and he can't touch us!"

Well that got the result I wanted. Juan nearly doubled over laughing, and so did everyone else. Except Chang of course, but I did get a half smile out of him, which, for Chang is like rolling on the floor laughing.

I was just about to ask Logan a question, when I caught this movement out of the corner of my eye. Training took over, and I dropped while spinning, trying to knock the legs out from whoever was rushing me. I instinctively knew that everyone else had jumped back, and were drawing weapons.

I watched with amazement as my foot literally just flew through his legs, never touching anything. I came back up quickly, and he had his hands up. I took a second to look this kid over. He couldn't have been more than seven years old, and as I watched he went from slightly transparent to solid again.

"Oops! I forgot..." the boy giggled, the mischief in his eyes showing full well he had not forgotten anything. "I'm not supposed to sneak up on you guys. I'm Levi. Sorry, don't have much time, but you need this." He lifted his hand, and in it was a data pad. I cautiously reached out and took it. And before I could do anything else, the little monster said. "Gotta go! An Alien to rescue, you know... see ya' ll later." Then he just vanished.

We all just stood there staring at the spot where the kid had been. Finally it was Juan who voiced what we were all thinking. "Okay... WHAT... THE FUCK... WAS THAT?!?!?"

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### Janet's POV

I knew that everyone was hurting right now, hell I was hurting, but at the moment, I needed to be strong for the kids. It still amazes me just how well most of them were dealing with this. There were a few though that I was really worried about.



When I saw her get up, and head outside, I figured I'd better follow and make sure that she was going to be alright. She was one of those few. I had heard about the letter that Kuan Ti had left for her, and I was worried about how she was really taking things. I was also worried about the child she carried.

Quietly I followed her out of the building, and across the field. I almost lost her when she got into the woods, but soon I found her again. She was looking down from a small hill onto the grounds below. I could hear her talking softly, so I stayed back wanting to give her some privacy.

For many long minutes she just stood there looking out, and softly talking. Then I heard something I could only describe as an angel's voice, it took me a moment to realize it was Claire's. I felt the tears leap to my eyes as I knew the song the second she had started to sing it. It was the same one that I had sung many years ago when Logan's father died, and softly I began to sing along with her.

*If I had only known  
It was the last walk in the rain  
I'd keep you out for hours in the storm  
I would hold your hand  
Like a life line to my heart  
Underneath the thunder we'd be warm  
If I had only known  
It was our last walk in the rain*

*If I had only known  
I'd never hear your voice again  
I'd memorize each thing you ever said  
And on those lonely nights  
I could think of them once more  
Keep your words alive inside my head  
If I had only known  
I'd never hear your voice again*

*You were the treasure in my hand  
You were the one who always stood beside me  
So unaware I foolishly believed  
That you would always be there  
But then there came a day  
And I turned my head and you slipped away*

*If I had only known  
It was my last night by your side  
I'd pray a miracle would stop the dawn  
And when you'd smile at me  
I would look into your eyes  
And make sure you know my love  
For you goes on and on  
If I had only known  
If I had only known  
The love I would've shown  
If I had only known\**

I listened as the last echoes of her voice faded away and looked up, after wiping the tears from my eyes, and saw something that truly amazed me. There, standing in front of Claire, was a hazy image. I could tell though, just by the sheer size of it, who it had to be. I watched in awe as silently they embraced, and then I saw him look up. For a moment our eyes met, and he smiled at me. I knew then that this was one of those few who I no longer had to worry about. I nodded to him, turned and left them alone to their peace and what I knew would be their final goodbye.

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### Logan's POV

I had asked Adam's brothers to give us some time alone, and they had. He was still having a lot of problems dealing with things, and I was hoping that maybe I could get through to him. I know that this morning's trip to the Wall had helped, helped a lot, but he still needed more. I gently laid him down on the bed, and then slipped in next to him. Just holding him for many minutes while he cried.

It broke my heart to hear him cry like that, but I knew what he was feeling. I'm not sure how I knew, but I could feel everything that was going through him right then, and it made me start to cry myself. We just lay there and cried like that for some time, before I realized that I needed to bring him out of this and do it now. It was going to tear him apart if he kept on like this.

"Adam, you gotta stop; it's not your fault." I whispered softly to the boy I loved more than life itself who I held tightly in my arms.

"Isn't it!? I lost most of my command!" He replied and I could feel the pain in his voice as well as in his heart.

"Adam, you know as well as I do, that they knew what they were getting into, love." I said.

"They expected me to bring them through and I didn't." He replied forcefully.

"Didn't you?" I asked, letting a little bit of anger flow into my voice. He turned around on the bed so we were lying face to face. His eyes staring deep into mine, and my eyes, getting lost in the deep steel gray pools that were his. "How many of them were happy before they came to the base?" He started to answer, but I didn't let him. "How many of them had a family before us...before you. Not many of them. You saw them this morning. They don't blame you, they love you. They love you like... like a savior or something. You gave them something that most of them had lost that most of them never thought they'd have again... life."

He started to cry harder, but I knew I was getting through to him, so I pushed on, hoping I didn't push too far. "You're larger than life to most of them... hell to most of us. You've done more with a group of unwanted kids, than anyone could have imagined. And you did it by being you. You loved them, and through that love, you inspired them to be more than any of them ever thought that they could be." He was crying harder now, but he still kept his eyes locked on mine.

"You trained them right and that's all any commander can do." I told him.

"Tell that to what's left." He said bitterly. I could see that the last line didn't have the effect I had hoped for. I didn't know what to do, it broke my heart to see that he was taking all of this as his personal failure and no matter what anyone did, it didn't seem to help.

Before I could say anything, there was a soft knock on the door and Adam said "Come."

The door opened and in walked our brothers, Chang, Jory, Juan, and Will.

"Brother, you need to come with us. There are people who need to see you." Chang said.

Adam groaned mumbling "Who is it now?" But no one answered except to pull his arms and lead him from the room.

I followed as they led him down to the conference room we were using, and we entered the room but Adam stopped just inside as many sets of eyes turned towards him and locked onto him. I took a quick count and saw that everyone that was left was there. One hundred and twenty eight people, if you count all the adults. Sixty one less than it should be. Sixty one holes on our hearts. Then I looked into Adam's eyes and I saw that Adam had counted to. I saw in his eyes, that the holes were also in his soul.

You could almost sense the mood shift in the room upon seeing Adam, and I watched as he looked over everyone before walking through the room and turning back to face those who remained of our family.

He just looked at them for several moments and they all remained silent looking right back not breaking eye contact as the bond which had always been there was reaffirmed, the bond and their love. He turned and looked at me, and I watched as I saw something in there that I hadn't seen in a while... confidence. This was truly what he needed, and I don't know why I didn't see it before. Adam was the strength that everyone drew off of, but he drew his strength from them.

He turned back around, and I saw a small sad smile come onto his face, as he looked out at everyone seated there before him. "We've been hurt and hurt bad. You all know that. We've lost a large portion of our family and they can never be replaced, BUT, we will go on and we will win over what has happened to us, we will come back better than we were before, We are the Unit. There can BE, only one!" Adam said into that silence strongly, forcefully and finally I realized with a passion and belief in what he was saying that communicated his resolve with every ounce of his being.

I could see that everyone felt it as his words echoed around the room and each sat or stood a bit straighter as they looked eyes brimming with tears but also steely determination and in one voice echoed my beloved's words of moments ago.

"There IS, only one."

Adam looked out at them proudly and it was then that I realized that this group had finally began to heal the hurt that was consuming him. I could see it and more I could feel it in his eyes, his body and in his voice. It would always hurt, but his family had led the way to his going on. My Adam was saved.

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## Will's POV

After Adam's little speech, we all hung out in the main conference room for a while. I was starting to get worried as Billy seemed to be avoiding me like the plague. Every time I tried to go over to him, Ronnie would move him away. I finally just gave up, not knowing what was going on, but I knew I would find out soon. I just didn't know if I could handle if he didn't like me any more. I'm not sure why he wouldn't come near me, but something was wrong here.

It took about ten minutes for me to figure it out. Or more like for them to let me know what was going on.

I was watching Billy out of the corner of my eye, when I saw Ronnie come in and make a bee line right for his brother. Now that wouldn't have been suspicious if it wasn't for the big grin and the large bag he held. When he gave the bag to Billy, I watched as Billy looked into it, smiled, but blushed slightly. Now I knew something was going on, but was still not sure what.

I'd finally decided that I was going to get to the bottom of it though and this time no one was going to stop me. I had started in that direction when, right about then, Jory came up behind me, and asked me a question. I should have known that I was being set up, but I didn't and turned and started to talk to him. It was only about thirty seconds though, when he suddenly told me to turn around. When I did, I saw something that almost made me fall over.

Billy was standing there.... standing in front of his chair. My mouth hung open, as he took a step towards me with a huge grin on his face. I knew him well enough to know that he was in a bit of pain, but... he..he was walking.

"Billy...how...I mean...you're...you're walking?!" Was all I could manage to stutter out in disbelief.

A few people around me gasped in surprise, but a few others just started to giggle and I knew then that a number of them had been in on it. "Yeah Will, I'm walking. Some kid named Levi healed me earlier. It still feels a bit strange, but... but I can walk." He said with tears falling down his face. I knew I had matching ones pouring from my eyes.

He slowly walked up to me, pulled me into a hug, and kissed me. I have no idea how long we were kissing, but when we broke off the kiss, everyone there let out a loud cheer.

Then he leaned in and whispered into my ear. "You know... I think he actually fixed EVERYTHING."

I pulled back and looked into his eyes, not really sure what he was talking about. then he handed me the bag, and I looked inside. I know I blushed hard when I saw what it contained, and I could hear laughter coming from a few of the others. "Ummm.... Ummmm.... Billy... Ummmm." I just couldn't make anything coherent come out of my mouth. But Billy knew what to do. He grabbed me, and kissed me hard again.

This time when we broke the kiss, he leaned in and whispered to me again. "It's been almost three years since I could feel anything...." And that's when it hit me. Ever since he was shot, Billy hadn't felt anything from the belly button down. I always felt bad that I couldn't make him feel as good as I did... but with what's in the bag, I guess he wanted to make up for lost time.

The question was, even with my increased stamina could I keep up with him? As if he was reading my mind he very softly and in a husky voice whispered "Let's go find out."

I looked over to Adam who was smiling broadly. "Bro, I'll see you sometime later on, I guess."

Logan grinned from where he was standing with his arm around Adam. "We won't wait up for you." And with that, Billy and I walked hand in hand out of the room each of us bright red but not caring overly much to find some place a little more private and to see just how well Levi had 'fixed everything' although from the looks of something things were working quite well so far.

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#### Adam's POV

It was maybe an hour after Will and Billy left that we got another surprise. We were all milling about when one of the Clan kids came running into the room. He looked around quickly, then spotted me, and ran over. I was wondering what was going on, and was just about ready for anything by this point.

"Adam?" The kid asked, and I just nodded. "Something's going on, and we're not sure what to make of it."

"Okay?" I asked, trying to get him to tell me what exactly was going on.

"Well, there's a helicopter heading for the compound, but here's the thing... it's one of yours!" He got out in a rush, and I felt stunned.

Every single one of the surviving Unit members was here. That, and I was told that only two of the Huey's, and two of the MI 26's survived the fight. They were back in Utah at our base. Will said he took care of that personally yesterday.

Logan, Juan, Jory, Chang and I followed the kid out of the room, and went at a dead run to where the helicopter was going to land. I guess no one thought to question it, since it was one of ours.

We just got out the door, and were heading to the Shuttle landing pad, which is where they directed the helicopter to land, when we ran into Mike and Sammy. They were heading out there as well, with most of their group. I guess they heard about it too. By the look on Mike's face, I could tell he was every bit as worried as I was.

I shouldn't have been surprised when Juan reached behind his shirt, and pulled out a pistol. He handed it to me, then, while in mid stride, reached down and pulled two small guns from his boots. He handed one to Chang, and one to Khan. Then, from somewhere, he pulled two more. He gave one to Jory, and kept one for himself.

Jory took the gun, and looked at Juan with a weird expression on his face. "Do I even want to know where this has been?"

Juan just grinned at Jory, "Well, I wouldn't advise smelling it." He said with a laugh, then looked at me. He must have read the expression on my face, cause before I could ask he just said, "like the boy scouts say... be prepared."

All I could do was shake my head, and then look up as I heard the helicopter starting to come in. It was one of the MI 26's, and from the markings on it, I could tell that it was the Mule, the same one that Dennis and his crew saved from being shot down.

The one thing that made me not quite so worried was that it WAS one of the 26's. They weren't armed, so I didn't have to worry about them shooting at us. We waited as the helicopter circled, then watched as it set up for it's landing. I tried to get a look at the pilot, but couldn't see anything because of the helmet.

When the thing finally did land, we all made our way to the door, to wait and see who came out. I know all of us are wound up, and not really sure what would happen next. I mean with everything that's happened over the last few days, none of us really knew what to expect.

We waited until the rotors stopped spinning, and then finally the access hatch opened up. I know I raised my gun a little bit, not knowing who was going to come out. When it opened up fully I saw a tall person in a flight suit and helmet on. The figure took a few steps out and onto the descending hatch, stopped and looked around.

Then we watched as he reached up, and undid the helmet, taking it off to show us that it was actually Tony standing there. The Tony that we last saw just that last Friday, and who's son was still recovering from being kidnapped.

He looked around at us, and then in an almost serious tone he looked right at Mike. "Jumping chocolate Jesus Balls Mike, can't I leave you alone for a SECOND without you trying to start world war three?!?"

It took us a second, but then everyone dissolved in laughter, as Tony came down, quickly followed by the rest of his family. There were hugs and laughs all around as this joker came back to the family that they had become a part of just a short time ago.

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### Janet's POV

Well I figured now would be as good of a time as any. I looked over at Joe, and he must have read my mind, cause he simply nodded and took my hand. I know most everyone had figured it out by now, but Joe and I were fast falling in love. At least I know I was, and he had said the same.

This was really not something that either one of us had been expecting to happen. Both of us were happy being single, but with the two of us being thrust together to take care of the boys, things just happened. When Joe had his accident, it made me realize that I had fallen in love with him. Something that I never thought was possible after Logan's father. Now, however, we were about to take a much larger step.

"Could I have everyone's attention!" I called out over the voices of the many kids in the room. Almost immediately everyone quieted down, and turned to face me. Once again I looked over at Joe, sitting in his wheelchair, and had to wonder if we could really handle what we were about to do. The one thing this group has taught me though, is that if you put your mind to it, you can do anything. And this was something that we were going to do.

Logan gave me a bit of a funny look as he sat down, using Adam as a back rest. I just smiled at him, then turned to look at everyone else. I sent a silent prayer that I wouldn't screw this up, then I took a deep breath and started. Of course, as it always happens, I had everything set in my mind on how I wanted to say this, but when I opened my mouth, it all just vanished.

"Now, I know that all of us have had a lot of bad things happen to us the last couple of days, but things are starting to turn around. I know that a lot of you kids have been hanging around with the kids from Clan short, and learned some about them." I was about to go on, when Adam stood up, raising his hand. I just nodded at him, wondering what he was going to say.

He looked around at everyone, making sure that all eyes were on him, and then started to speak in a soft and quiet voice. "I don't know about the rest of you guys, but Logan and I have been talking to as many of these Clan guys as we could, to try and find out what they're up to. Before I go on, I need to know if you guys have been too?" All around him, kids were nodding up and down, indicating that they had.

"And do you guys know what it is that the Clan does?" He asked, again looking around.

"Yeah, they've been asked by the planet Vulcan, and the Federation to help out kids that are being hurt." That from Ronnie. I was kinda surprised to hear his voice, but then I saw that he was standing there with Mike and Sammy. Ever since he found out that Mike was his dad, he hadn't been very far from him, if he could help it.

Adam smiled and nodded, "it's a little bit more complicated than that, but that sums it up real well. Now here's the thing. We have been invited to join the Clan, as their Special Forces Division." People started to talk, but Adam held up his hand to quiet everyone down, which they did in short order.

I do have to say that this was a bit of a surprise to me. No one had told me that they had invited the Unit to join them. But then I remembered something that Teri had said. "Sometimes I'm one of the last to find out when they do something. But I've come to trust the judgment of most of these kids, so I'm not too worried." Now I think I understand what she meant.

Once Adam got everyone quieted down, he continued. "Basically what this would mean for us is simple. We would now be responsible, not only for safe guarding the Clan from harm, but also to be their military wing. Now here's the big thing. IF we accept this, we will be working on an entirely different set of laws, those of Vulcan. We would become part of the most powerful and influential Vulcan house. The house of Surak." Adam paused, and Donnie spoke up.

"What kind of different laws?" He asked, getting muttered agreement and nods from many of the others. Adam knew that Donnie knew full well what some of the changes were, hell he had just adopted two kids. But Adam also figured out the Donnie was asking questions because they needed to be asked, and no one else wanted to. He knew he would have to thank Donnie later on for it.

"Well, one of the biggest things that would change, is that we would no longer have to worry about the Military or law enforcement. IF we accept, every single one of us would become part of Clan Short, and thus, outside of the jurisdiction of any Earth Based organizations. In other words, those of us that have escaped from the military won't have to worry about that any more. However, there is a LOT of responsibility that comes with this. Since we are the military arm, we would be responsible for pulling endangered kids out of some pretty bad situations. Situations that might be like what happened yesterday. We could be putting our lives on the line at any time."

From the looks around the room, I'd say that Adam's reference to yesterday hit them, like it hit me. Like a punch in the gut. But then I saw something else. Almost one by one, each of the sick looks on their faces turned to a look of steely determination. After about thirty seconds of silence, Jeremy spoke up.

"I don't know if I can speak for everyone else, but I think so. Yesterday was terrible. Personally I never want to have to go through something like that again. BUT..." He emphasized that word, and quickly reached up to wipe tears from his eyes. "BUT... Think of what would have happened had we not been there. I don't know how many people would have died. Again, I won't speak for anyone else, but if I'm called on to put my life on the line to help out some kid who CAN'T help themselves, then so be it. If in doing so, I die..." he paused again, as his voice cracked saying it. "If I die doing so, then dammit, I can accept that. That's what we trained to do, and that's what we are... We ARE the UNIT!"

The room pretty much exploded after that. Adam walked over to Jeremy, and with tears in both their eyes, Adam pulled him into a fierce hug. It took a few moments for everyone to calm down, and when they did, Adam looked around, and said, "so I guess we're going to join?"

It took a few minutes for the noise level to die down as they all thunderously agreed to join this group that now housed us. I had almost forgotten about what I was going to say when Adam turned back to me. "Sorry mom, I didn't expect that to be as big as it was. Please go ahead with what you were going to say."

"Oh yeah...." I couldn't help but chuckle a bit as the group quieted down again, and turned their attention back on me. "Well here's the thing. I talked at length with the adults around here, and Joe and I have come to a decision. You see, one of the things that the Clan does when it finds a child, or a group of children, is to make sure they have a loving family to join into. Well it seems that there's a lot of kids here, that don't officially have a family, and Joe and I want to change that. We would like to make it official and adopt every one of you. So what I need to know from each of you, over the next few days, is whether or not, you want Joe and me to adopt you...." Well I wanted to keep going, but I got rushed by a bunch of kids all trying to hug the life out of Joe and me.

The one thing that caused me concern though was seeing the shocked and then saddened looks that had come across two boys faces when I made my announcement followed by both of them getting up and walking from the room. I also saw that Adam had noticed as well and was moving towards them when Mike held up his hand and instead followed Vishnu and Kartik out.



I really didn't want to do this one, but I knew they needed to know. It's been about an hour since Mom had made her announcement, and she was still getting swarmed by all the kids. But I had something else I needed to do, and now was as good a time as any.

Ever since I found out yesterday about Alvin's little issue, I've been dreading this. I mean how do you tell someone they don't have a human brain? If it wasn't the fact that it was true, and verified by both Logan and Chang, I probably would have laughed, but I can't.

Since then, I've had Chang go around scanning everyone. I mean who knew who had the computer brains and who didn't. I will say I was relieved to find out that I didn't have one, but who knows what those doctors could have done without us knowing about it.

Thankfully, it's just a small number of people that have to deal with this, not that that really makes this any easier. I was about to tell thirteen kids that they had had their brains removed and a computer put in it's place... this was going to be fun.

As we walked into a different conference room, I saw that they were all already there. I was surprised how well Logan had taken everything when I told him. He actually said that it made sense. He keeps telling me that things will be okay, but I just don't see how. But then again, with all the shit that's happened lately, I don't think any of us will ever be the same again.

"Hey guys, don't get up." I said as they all started to rise when I walked in. I looked over at Alvin, and couldn't help but feel awed by what he did. This little boy, only eight years old, threw himself on top of the boy I loved more than anything else in the world, and saved him. Chang didn't want to say it, but I knew. Had Alvin not taken three bullets that were meant for Logan, not even the advanced medical facilities they had, could have saved him. I would never forget that.

"I know you guys are probably wondering what you're doing here." I said, looking around and seeing that they all had a question in their eyes. I walked over to the lighted screen that I had brought in earlier. The kind of one you would see in a doctor's office. I pulled out the x-rays that Marc had used, when he asked me about what was going on, and held them in my hands.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush here guys..." I looked over at Logan, and he just nodded. He was going to let me do this. Even though it was my job, I still wished I could have handed it off to someone else. I cleared my throat, and looked at all thirteen boys here. All of them looking just like Logan, just like my beloved.

"We found out a few things about you guys, and I think it's right that you guys know it. When Alvin was getting treated yesterday, they did a brain scan on him, and came up with something very interesting." I then turned on the light, and put up the three different x-rays, so that they could all see them.

Alvin was the first one that got up, soon followed by the rest of his brothers, as they came over and looked at the x-rays. I took a few steps back, and let them look, sure that they would turn to me and ask questions. But they didn't.

Instead of turning to me, they just looked at each other, and I could almost hear the buzzing as they communicated through their link. This only went on for maybe thirty seconds, before they all moved back to their seats. I was on pins and needles wondering how they were going to take this, but I didn't have to wait long.

Alvin looked up at me, after once more meeting the eyes of the other twelve. It always shocked me that one of the youngest among them would be the spokesman, and leader, but, then again, with this group, anything was possible. "Well, I can definitely say this explains a few things." He said in a very calm voice, and I know my jaw just hit the floor. This was NOT the response I had expected.

Alvin giggled a bit at the look on my face, and held his hand up. "I guess you guys never heard that Daileass was actually one of us who died in a training accident. We all remember when we got this done, though we didn't know what happened till now. But it explains why things were different after that." HE laughed as he looked around to his brothers who were all grinning.

"I mean come on... how stupid do they think we are. It's not like you can miss the fact that you can think about a million different things at the same time, do multiple advanced calculations in your head with out a problem, and not KNOW something is different. Hell this is kinda what we thought it was... just didn't know."

God I loved these kids.

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### Chang's POV

None if us really knew what to expect at this full Clan meeting. One thing was for certain, none of us had expected the Clan to be as big as it is. However, the biggest surprise came when they introduced people from a Vulcan group called "The Dragon Division."

It was very intriguing when one of the members, a Klingon, demanded to be brought to the meeting, saying he needed to meet someone. It was even more interesting when that someone happened to be me. I can not say that I was not intrigued with this individual as well. I had heard much about the Klingon's code of Honor, and found that there were many similarities to that of the Samurai, and would like to discuss such matters.

However, he seemed to have a more personal reason to want to meet me. I found it very interesting that he seemed know me very well, and from what the look on his face said, he already had feelings for me. I am not sure where that will lead, but I would not be opposed to the idea. If that is what is meant to be.

I got the sense that, as we walked from the room, talking quietly, that even if a relationship was not to be, there would, at least be a close friendship. I am sure that we would be able to talk for hours about certain topics, especially Honor, and how it related to our lives. And talk for many hours we did.

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### Adam's POV

I was really glad this full clan meeting was finally over. Not that I wasn't really surprised at how large the clan really was, but it was a long and sometimes tedious thing. I really have to say again how surprised I was by how large the clan really was.

"Can you believe how big this group is?" Logan asked me, reading my mind like he usually does.

I was just about to respond when Todd walked up to us. "Hey Logan you got a minute?"

"Sure, what's up little bro?" Logan responded while pulling Todd into a hug. Todd for his part ate up the attention, like they all seemed to do. Every single one of Logan's little brothers, seemed to always be looking at Logan for attention. They all seemed to look to him for re-assurance that he really did like them. Logan of course, was always happy to give them all they needed.

"There's someone I want you to meet. You remember the kid that I told you about that was at the hospital yesterday?" Todd asked when Logan let him out of the hug.

"Sure, I remember him. He's the one that you said helped you deal with what happened." Logan said, and then I remembered what Logan told me. It seemed that some kid from Maine, another part of the Clan, was at the hospital in South Carolina, the same time Todd was there. Todd wasn't really hurt all that bad, but everyone had to be checked out. We had all been waiting for word on how Alvin and Logan were doing, and Todd was a little bit lost. This kid came up to him, and just started to talk to him. Didn't really do much, other than get Todd's mind off of what was going on, and in Todd's case, that's exactly what he needed.

"Well I just saw him over there, and wanted you to meet him." Todd said excitedly, bringing me back to the here and now.

"Okay, little guy... lead the way." Logan said, as he took my hand, Todd took his other one, and began to weave through the crowd. Kent was right there with me, as he was still shy around such large groups of people. As we moved through the crowd, we seemed to pick up a rather large group of people though.

Khan was there, of course. He hadn't really let me out of his sight since everything happened. With him were the Cheetah hybrids, Hermes and Mercury. All three of them scanning the crowd and looking for trouble. Khan, of course, was in front of us, leading the way, and not letting a lot of people get near us. The rest of Logan's brothers also joined up, almost making a circle around us. I'm sure none of them even thought about what they were doing, and it really did make me feel good to know that they were all concerned about me... even in this place. "There he is!" Todd said, and we all moved over to a group of about fifteen kids.

I couldn't help but snicker as I heard one of the kids that we were walking up to stop, and exclaim, "Holy shit, what's that?!?" The kid looked to be about sixteen, with brown hair. The rest turned and looked, and I saw more than a few jaws hit the floor. I knew what they were looking at, it had to be Khan. He could be a little bit intimidating, if you weren't ready for him.

Todd just pulled us past Khan, and walked up to one kid who looked to be about thirteen, and said. "Hey Jed, I don't know if you remember me but..."

"Sure I remember you, Todd, you look a lot better then you did yesterday. How are you doing?" He asked, as he started to look around at everyone that was with us, his face growing more and more confused. I can only imagine what he was thinking, seeing all the kids that looked just like Todd.

Logan started to laugh as he caught onto the look on Todd's face. "Hey Jed, what can I say, Mom was busy. By the way, I'm Logan." He started to reach his hand out to shake Jed's, when he got hit upside the head by Janet who had just walked up. "I heard that, Mister." That of course made everyone start to laugh.

When the laughter died down, Jed extended his hand, and took Logan's. "Hey there. That's quite a group you have with you." He said, as he once again eyed Khan.

Logan just laughed. "Yeah, they' re a good bunch... most of the time. Here, let me introduce you to everyone. This is my partner, and Commander of the Unit, Adam Casey, and these are my brothers..." One by one, he introduced his brothers, and then Hermes and Mercury. "...And the big guy over there is Amur Khan, commander of the G-Cat Assault Team... also known as the Pussy Posse."

We all busted out laughing, except Khan who growled out... "Do NOT call me a pussy." The look lasted for a few seconds before he started to snicker.

Jed smiled and said, "Pleased to meet you. Todd, you'll remember CJ." He gestured to a chestnut haired eight year old standing next to him. "This is my boyfriend Jared," he continued, "and his brothers, Mickey and Raffy. And these are the two guys that rescued me and CJ, Jonas and Harry. The big guy back there is The EMT guy that helped rescue, Jared and them, Skipper, and that's Bobby next to him." Both guys waved to them as their names were given.

At that moment, I saw a shaved headed little boy, maybe ten or eleven, stick his head out from behind Skipper. He looked at me for a second, then looked down to my right. He suddenly got a shocked look on his face, and in a strangled gasp he tried to cry out "Kent!" and then collapsed.

I ran over there, to see what had happened, and to try and figure out how this kid knew my little brother. I knelt down by his side, calling mentally for Chang to get over here, when I heard a gasp from my side.

I looked over and saw that Kent was staring intently at the boy on the ground. Then he looked up to me, and softly said. "Adam...that's... that's Jimmy. That's our brother."

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(Authors Notes: You know... that seems like a really good cliff hanger... but I couldn't just leave it here. I mean that would be soooo very not nice. So I have a bit more... and a better cliffhanger for you. You can thank me later. Roland)

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"What the fuck?" Is all I could think when I looked around and all I see is darkness. It's not the dark of night, or like when I have my eyes closed, but it's like there's nothing. There's no difference in the darkness, no sound, no smells, no wind against my skin. Just... nothing.

Just as suddenly as I found myself here, the nothingness is shattered with the sound of music. The opening beats are unmistakable, only one song that I know about starts off with a drum beat like that. Inside I feel something stirring with that beat. Something inside is rising, it only took me a moment to figure out what it was... Rage.

That's when everything changes, I open my eyes. I look around, as the drum beat starts to make the Rage boil inside me even more. Then a guitar starts, and the rage boils hotter... faster, wanting to explode out of me. And I know why, as I look around, I know why the rage wants out, why I can feel nothing but hatred, and anger, loathing, and spite. I'm in a laboratory.

I could never forget the white walls, the medical equipment placed all over the place, but even more than that, the table in the middle of the room. The table that I am strapped to. I see all the different times that I was brought here, strapped down, and... and. I shut those memories out as I look around more, then hear in my mind the singer starting in a soft and low voice.

*"Can you feel that?"*

*"Aww shit."*

As the singer continues with his vocals, I see the doctors, in their white coats, and masks on. Moving about and writing in charts. They have no idea the demon has awakened. I remember now, that's what they call me, the demon.

I feel a growl escape from my throat, and I watch a few of them turn to me, at the same time, a few of the machines start to beep louder and faster. I look down at the restraints they have, holding me down, and I feel the Rage build even faster, I feel it starting to consume me, to take over, to control me. And I let it. I let the Rage have free reign. No more will they hurt me... no more will I be subjected to their "tests."

Distantly, I hear the doctors shouting to each other. I know what they are trying to do, they are trying to get me back under control, but you can't control a demon. Not THIS demon. Not after what they've done to me. It's time for them to pay.

*Rounding deep in my sea of loathing.*

*Broken are your servants again.*

*It's seems that what's left of my human side is slowly changing In me.*

I again look down at the straps holding me down, and suddenly I know what I need to do. I concentrate on the straps of leather, and watch as they burst into flames. I feel the skin underneath burning, but I don't care, I just let the pain keep fueling the rage. I have been hurt worse than this. This time though, I use the pain to help me escape more.

Screams, now I hear screams, but drowning them out are my own screams. Not the screams of pain one might think they would hear as I feel the skin on my arms and legs burning, but the screams of unbridled, primal, Rage. And then I'm free.

One of the doctors tries to rush me, to try and hold me down, but he's nothing. Nothing more than an annoyance really. I bat him away like the bug he is, and watch with more than a bit of satisfaction as he flies across the room, and slams into some machinery. I feel the smile on my face as he crumples to the floor broken and bleeding.

For a moment there is nothing but silence in the room as the other doctors try to back away from me. I can smell the fear emanating from them in waves, it's the most pleasant smell you can imagine.

Slowly I stand up, and look around some more. Everyone is trying to stay as far away from me as possible, and that makes me smile. I like them to be afraid. They created me, now they'll deal with me. It's a mistake they won't have to live with long, that's something I can promise.

Two of them decide to be brave, and try and charge me, but before they even know what's happening, I reach my hand out, and both of them are engulfed in fire. Their screams are music to my ears. They've heard my screams plenty of times, now I get to hear theirs.

I watch in amusement as the rest rush out of the room, it won't do them any good, I will find them, and then I will kill them.

I start to walk to the door, but stop when I catch something out of the corner of my eye. It's a mirror. I take a second to look at myself. Changed so much from what I remember. Obviously still a young boy, but now, with my head shaved, and no cloths on my body, I take full measure of what they have done to me. Scars criss cross my upper body. Huge, ugly looking marks that destroy the once smooth skin that only a child can have.

Once again I feel the the Rage building to even higher levels, consuming me entirely, and I don't fight it. Why should I? The song gets even louder in my head, as I stare at myself. Suddenly my body is racked with pain. My back arches, and I feel a cry escape my lips. My body starts to convulse and change. Something even more is happening to me.

*"Looking at my own reflection,*

*when suddenly it changes,*

*violently it changes.*

*Oh there is no turning back now you've opened up the demon in ME!"*

I fall to my knees as the change takes hold of me. I don't know how long I was kneeling there, but finally I was able to look up, and see myself in the mirror.

I know I should have been shocked by what I saw, but I wasn't. Instead of the boy that was there a moment ago, now I was looking back at an actual demon. Just like out of fantasy.

Red skin, long vicious looking claws, rams horns coming out of my head, and a long tail the started just above my butt. I actually laughed. They kept calling me a demon, well guess what... now I am one. And this demon is looking for blood.

I walked over to the door, only to find it locked. I couldn't help it... I started to laugh. They think a simple locked door could hold me back. I step back, and raised my hand. I could feel it as the door started to get hotter and hotter. There were no flames, I didn't need flame for this... just heat. LOTS of heat.

It only took maybe thirty seconds before the door heated up and started to melt into slag. By the time I was done, all I had to do was step over the melted chinks of metal. Pure simplicity.

The song was still pounding in my head, and I knew... just knew that the singer was talking to me... or maybe I was singing... I don't know, and don't care really. All that matters is making these people pay.

*Get up! Come on get Down with the Sickness*

*Get up! Come on get Down with the Sickness*

*Get up! Come on get Down with the Sickness*

*open up your hate and let it flow into me.\*\**

As soon as I stepped out the door I heard the gun shots. I jumped back into the lab room that I woke up in, and pressed my back against the wall. I knew I had been shot, but I didn't care. All it did was make me even more angry. I drew all the Rage I had, stepped back out into the hallway and I "threw" it at them, in the form of a huge ball of fire.

I knew right away that it wasn't as effective as it could have been. I couldn't control it enough to make it stay together, but it did what it needed to anyways. The five guards that had been standing there, were now screaming as they, and everything within twenty feet of them was now on fire.

I didn't know where to go, but knew I had to get out. I took off down the hall way after the last scream had faded away. I turned a few corners, and soon found myself standing in front of the doors that led outside. It was dark out there, but I could see trees and a few vehicles, so I knew this was my way out.

I had only taken a few steps into the room, when I heard someone start clapping. I looked up, and walking down the stairs was someone I knew all too well. "Well done, son... I am truly impressed." I heard him say as he slowly came down the stairs. I was about to say something, when I heard noise all around me. I looked around, and saw people in armor pouring out of rooms, and down the hall. I spun around and saw that I was now surrounded by at least 20 people, all of them in armor and holding guns.

My eyes settled back on my "father" as he walked closer to me. "Unfortunately, no matter how impressed I am with you, I can't just let you walk out of here. You just mean too much to this project, and to my future. I can't just let my pathway to being a general walk out the door now can I?"

As he walked closer to me, I did nothing. Nothing that he could see anyways. Inside though, was another matter entirely. Inside, the Rage was writhing to be let loose. I felt it seething in my mind, and knew that it wanted to lash out, just as bad as I did. But I knew if I wanted to escape, I would have to

do this the right way. "I promise you this, father," I spat the word out with such venom that he actually took a step backwards. "I promise that before I leave this place, you will pay for what you have done."

I met his eyes, and for a moment I saw fear. That moment of fear is what I dreamt of seeing for the past two and a half years. That fear, I know, was the same fear I had as he strapped me down time and again for the different "procedures" I was subjected to.

However, just as soon as the fear was there, it was gone. Back was the cocky man that didn't care about anything other than himself and this damned project. This project that turned me into the demon I am is what will be the end of him. Even if it means I die too. I just didn't care anymore.

"Now now son... there's no reason to be hostile. Just put your hands up, and we'll get you back into the lab, and everything can get back to normal. I promise you that the worst is over, and soon you'll be finished, then you can take your place in the new order."

Every word he said just made me grow more and more angry. "Do NOT call me son. You lost that right the second you killed my mother, and brought me to this place. You lost it every time you helped them strap me down so they could do their experiments. EVERY time they cut me open, and fucked with my body you stood there and watched. I'm not your son, and soon, you won't be anything!" The Rage inside of me was now writhing, and seething so much, that I could feel it on my skin. I felt it wanting to rip out of me, and I just couldn't hold it back any longer.

"No father... I will not go back... never will I go back." I watched as his face clouded over with anger, and he took a step forward. That was the last thing he did.

I let the Rage erupt out of me, and in a short moment it engulfed him totally. He didn't even have the time to scream before he died. I watched through the flames that now surrounded me like a shell, as the soldiers all took a step back. I couldn't see their faces, but the wonderful aroma of fear was coming from everywhere.

The rage built even more, till I couldn't hold it back any more. The shell of flame took on a bluish color, almost white, and then, with a scream that tore it's way from my throat, the fire blasted out from me in a shock wave that tore into everything around. I heard men screaming, and heard the sound of gun fire.

I heard the sound of glass shattering and doors being blown apart. Then it was over. Just before I passed out, I saw nothing but fire surrounding me, as the building that had housed me for the last years burnt to the ground.

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\*If I Had Only Known Recorded by Reba McEntire in 1991 on the album "For My Broken Heart.

\*\*Down with the Sickness recorded by Disturbed in 1999

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Authors Note: Well I hope you enjoyed this ride of the Unit. Chapter 27 ends the first book of the Unit. I would like to take a moment and thank a few people that have really helped make this story what it is. First off is Darryl, my faithful editor. {Hey, that's me.} He makes it so that my ramblings can be read by all you fine people. The second, and just as important, is Darkstar. If you cried during a scene, chances are, he helped make it as good as it is. I would also like to thank AC Fan, as none of this would have been possible if it hadn't been for him starting off Memories so many years ago. That story is really what inspired me to write the Unit. And finally, to all of those who have written me about this story. I really appreciate all the feedback that you have given. I hope you all come back and read book two, titled The Unit: Camp Bam Bam. Also, there will be other "books" of The Unit, shortly.

This is the End of "The Unit" Part 1

The adventures of Adam, Logan and the Unit shall continue in:

The Unit: Camp Bam Bam

The Unit: Phoenix Rising

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Editor's Notes: slash me blushes, all kind of red and stuff. You all need to know that editing this story is one of the coolest things that I am privileged to do. Roland is correct when he says that there are times that DarkStar makes things better. Well that isn't exactly what he said, but there is something that I need to say here as well: Sometimes, Roland has a tendency to under estimate how well he writes. I have witnessed some of the scenes that he has written all by himself, and I can tell you for certain that he can bring tears to your eyes without help from anyone. Roland, please don't take this the wrong way, but you need to get some self esteem going. You are a very talented and thought provoking author and you have brought us some wonderful people whom we care deeply about. If DarkStar and I have added a few things here and there, it is only because we also have imaginations, and we see a few possibilities that you somehow missed, the first time around. Besides, it is always your final call as to whether you want to use what either DarkStar or I put in a chapter and send it back to you. That doesn't make what you do any less exciting; it only means that the chapters that we work on, and you approve our additions on, turn out to be a little longer and have some more details in them. You created not only the characters, but also the situations and the on going plots. You brought THE UNIT into existence, and without your talent, it wouldn't be here.

Thank you, Roland; I am ready for more now.

Darryl AKA The Radio Rancher