

A New Day Dawns

by
The GunRunner



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CHAPTER 1: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

As he ran as fast as he could, the last thing Tanner Michaels heard was a bottle breaking on the wall and his foster mother yelling, "Get out of here you no good piece of trash." 'Great,' he thought, 'she's drunk again. I need to get out of here and let her cool off.' As he started to walk to his best friend's house, he thought back on the circumstances that brought him here in the first place. Life had not been that bad. He used to have two great parents who loved him very much. They had money, they had a house, and they did all sorts of fun things together. However, that all ended a little over a year ago when his parents died in that crash. Tanner started to cry and yell at nobody in particular, "Why did you have to die! Why do I have to live with these drunks! Why couldn't I live with DJ! Why!"

As he continued walking, he started to think about the one person in this world who made him smile. David James McAllister, "DJ." They were both 13 years old, actually only 3 days apart in age. Tanner was born February 26, 1991 and DJ on March 1st. Their parents had been the best of friends, and he couldn't remember a single childhood memory that DJ wasn't a part of. Life had been so good. DJ had been there for him when his parents died, and he had been there for DJ when his mom disappeared and his dad started getting mean. They were each others strength. Now he was hoping that DJ would still be there for him when he dropped the bombshell on him that he was gay. He had known for a while now, but had always been afraid to tell anyone. He was especially afraid to tell DJ because he was the one that made him feel complete. He was that very special someone who showed him what love was.

Tanner stood outside DJ's door for a while, silently sobbing, and wondering if he was doing the right thing. As he got ready to knock, the front door opened, and there stood his only love. For a quick moment he just stood in awe at his best friend. He was the most beautiful thing in the world to him. He was standing there in his white Tommy shorts with about an inch of his Joe Boxers hanging out and wearing a black wife beater. His hair was the color of sand on a tropical beach and his eyes looked like two emeralds.

Tanner was shaken out of his daydream when DJ said, "Bro, what's up? Why are you crying? Did that witch do something to you again?"

DJ reached out and pulled his best friend into a hug and said, "Man, don't you worry, we'll get through." With those words, Tanner just started bawling like a baby. "Come on bro, let's go inside and calm down." "You're scaring me," DJ said as tears started to well up in his eyes. "Please don't cry," he begged.

As DJ led Tanner to the couch he felt helpless. *'If there was only a way I could tell him that I love him without ruining our friendship,'* he thought. DJ had long admired his best friend's ability to cope with things. He also secretly admired his good looks. Tanner was the same height as him, 5'3" but had a perpetual tan which made his strawberry blonde hair and steel gray eyes just pop out at you. Plus he thought the 8 inch long thin pony tail was so cool.

When they had both settled down, DJ asked Tanner if he wanted something to drink. After both had cokes in their hands Tanner said, "DJ, I have something I need to tell you." The look he gave as he said it told DJ he was serious.

"Ok," he said, "but I have to tell you something, too." Without a word, they both walked up the familiar stairway to DJ's bedroom. When they got in the room they took seats facing each other, and at the same time said, "You go first."

"No, you go first," they both said.

Finally, Tanner got up the courage and said, "After I tell you this, you are going to hate me and never want to talk to me again, but I can't keep this in anymore, it's killing me." By this time Tanner was back in tears and DJ said, "Nothing you can say will ever make me hate you."

"Yeah right," Tanner muttered to himself. *'Oh well,'* he thought, *'might as well get this over with.'* "DJ, I think I am gay; actually I know it, and I love you."

In the complete silence that followed, Tanner began to panic, next he began to cry. Finally he got up and started to run for the door. DJ was quick to jump up and grab him before he could leave. "Please don't hurt me," Tanner whimpered. "I'll just leave now and never come back."

"Like heck you will," DJ quipped back. "Not until I tell you that I love you, too. I'm not sure about all of these feelings and dreams I have been having, but one thing is for sure. I don't ever want to be without you. Please stay with me, please?"

Tanner wasn't sure what to say. It was as though all of his dreams were either coming true, or he was being played a fool. "Are you serious," he asked?

"Serious as a heart attack," DJ said. Tanner bent forward and kissed DJ on the end of the nose, and as he pulled away he saw a tear begin to form in DJ's eye.

"I'll stay forever if you let me." With those words spoken they leaned back into each other and began the kiss that would change their young lives forever. There was no animal lust, no heated passion, just plain and simple love. As they pulled away, both were blushing, not only about what they did, but also at the sight of the obvious tents each other was sporting.

"Wow, did you feel that," Tanner asked? "I don't know what I felt, but I have this feeling that everything is going to be good."

"I gotta tell you man, I'm scared. I mean, I'm glad that I told you but if my dad finds out, I'm in deep stuff."

Tanner looked at his friend as he considered his reply, then said, "After all that you two went through, if he can't accept you for who you are, or us, screw him!"

"I know what you mean man, but he has gotten so mean since my mom took off. I just don't want to piss him off."

Tanner took a long drink from his coke than said, "He doesn't have to know yet." Then he reached out and tickled DJ's armpit.

"Hey, stop that," he giggled. This of course is teenager language for "Bring It On!!" As they kept tickling each other things began to get more heated. Soon they were grinding in to each other and quickly reached the point of no return. Just before things got to far out of hand, DJ grabbed a hold of Tanner's crotch.

Tanner gasped and then said, "Go ahead, we've seen each other naked before." DJ slowly unzipped his fly, moved the boxers around and Tanners boyhood, all 4 inches in its glory came into full view. Slowly he started to stroke his friend and lover. Tanner was moaning lowly, but getting louder.

"DJ, dude, I'm gonna, I'm unggggggggghhhhhhhhh." As Tanner blasted off, DJ heard a noise and looked towards the door. When it opened, his heart almost popped out of his chest. There at the door stood the massive 6'2" 250 pound frame of his father Colin.

"What the hell do we have here?" he bellowed. "Answer me boy! What is this? I've got me a limp wri-
sted fairy for a son. I should have known. And you," he pointed at Tanner, "I always thought you was queer." Tanner was hurrying to get dressed. "That's right queer boy, put that little pee shooter away and I'll show you two what a real man has."

"Dad, please don't," DJ cried.

"Shut up!" Colin fired back

"Please dad, just leave us alone." DJ screamed, "PLEASE!" Before DJ had a chance to utter another word, Colin hit him in the stomach so hard he immediately began to gag. Tanner started to run toward his friend and lover, but Colin jumped in the way and said, "Try it runt, your dad would have wanted me to beat your ass anyway." With that he shoved Tanner back onto the bed.

While DJ was busy trying to catch his breath Colin started undoing his belt and unzipping his fly. All DJ could do was moan and shake his head no violently.

As Colin came close to DJ he said, "Now, what you are going to do is suck this man size cock, and I better not feel teeth." As he put his steel rod up to DJ's mouth, DJ opened up wide and began throwing up all over his dad.

"You sick little fairy," his father yelled. In his anger he picked up DJ and threw him into the wall leaving a dent the size of his small frame. As DJ slumped down to the ground in agony and fear Tanner grabbed the closest thing he could find, which happened to be a baseball bat. Just as Colin turned around to him, still hoping to get some kind of action, he got hit in the side of the head with Tanner's first swing. Colin fell to the ground groaning and bleeding as Tanner got in one more shot. That shot put his lights out. At first Tanner thought he had killed him, but he saw Colin was still breathing.

Next, he turned his attention to DJ. DJ was mumbling that he was a dead man. Tanner went to him, and DJ fell into his arms crying uncontrollably. "Shhh, don't worry DJ, we're gonna get out of here. Everything is going to be ok, we've got each other." Tanner then looked around and said, "Go get cleaned up. Get some clothes in a duffle bag, find as much money as you can and we'll go. Don't worry about him," Tanner said as he pointed at Colin. "If he makes another move, I'll pop him again. Now go! I want to get you out of here."

DJ limped out of the room towards the bathroom. When he looked in the mirror he saw the same kid he saw earlier, only now his life had changed. Better or worse, who knows.

After he cleaned up, DJ packed his backpack with a couple days' clothes, his pocket knife, and \$420 cash from the safe in his dad's bedroom. He took one look at Tanner and said, "let's go." As they walked out the front door DJ said, "I can never come back here again, and I don't want to either."

With that, the two boys made their way to Tanner's house. Tanner secretly hoped that the foster 'rents were gone so he could grab and go. When they got to Tanner's house, however, they saw that both of the fosters were there. They snuck in the back door, through the kitchen and to his bedroom.

Tanner's Foster Parents House:

Once there the boys began to talk about what they can do. Tanner first suggested they call the police. DJ said, "Bro, they would never believe me, I mean my dad has been on the force for like 18 years, and all cops stick together. Besides, if they believed me I'd be sent to a foster home and we'd be split up. I can't do that. No, no police."

Their conversation was interrupted by the sound of Steve, Tanner's foster dad, yelling out, "Mary, where the hell is that damn kid at. That was the cops on the phone asking if we've seen him. Something about him assaulting another cop."

"He ran out of here earlier after we got in a fight, I ain't seen him since," Mary replied.

"Well the police are on their way to talk to us about him. Probably gonna get his butt landed in juvie. Then we don't get any more money," he came back with. "I'm going to go look for his sorry butt," Steve said. "I'll be back."

"Well that settles it," Tanner whispered. "They only want my parent's money, my inheritance. There is no way we can get help from them and I am NOT staying where I ain't wanted. Besides, this is a hell hole."

"So what are we going to do," DJ asked?

"We're taking off, that's what. We can find someplace else where we can go. Anyplace would be better, as long as it's not here, and we stay together."

With that Tanner kissed DJ, and then started to pack for their journey. Tanner packed some clothes, an envelope, and the ATM card that accessed his inheritance. They snuck out the window and took off.

They were no more than two blocks away when they saw a police cruiser slowly making its way around the neighborhood. The two boys, however, easily avoided it by heading for the creek.

"What's the plan Tanner?" DJ asked.

"I don't have one yet, except for this; We need to go to an ATM so I can get out as much cash as it will let me, then we need to hit the road."

DJ looked Tanner in the eyes and started to cry. The boys embraced and just let it all out.

After they regained their composure Tanner said, "I Love you DJ, I always have, and I always will. As long as we have each other, we'll be ok."

"I know, and I love you too. As long as I breathe, I will always love you."

With that Tanner handed DJ the envelope he packed earlier and said, "Here, I wrote this for you and it kind of fits now." DJ opened the envelope and inside was a piece of paper. He unfolded it and looked at the following words:

*The wind fills my sails
To take me afar
To a place I've never been*

*But where we'll go
I do not know
Or as to why or when*

*But this I know
Deep down in my soul
A place that has no end*

*I will travel with you
Side by side
Always as your friend*

*This road will be long
With pits and hills
And fences that block green lawns*

*But we'll get past that
'Cause were friends wherever were at
And always A New Day Dawns*

DJ was in tears again before he finished the poem. He took his lover in his arms, and kissed him deeply. Then they started to walk.

Authors note: This story is dedicated to Logan and my former childhood self

This is my very first attempt at writing something other than poetry. I sincerely hope you enjoy it.

I would like to send out some special thanks to the people who have made this possible.

Logan, you are most definitely an inspiration to me for this. Your smile and laugh make light in a dark world. I am so blessed to have a nephew such as you. Enjoy your new family, they love you and will do anything for you. And I am always just next door.

The Story Lover, for the editing help, the kind words, and the encouragement. Thank you my friend

Jeff, we seem to connect in a lot of different ways. Besides, you're one of the only people who actually think my poetry is good.

8-)~

Last but DEFINITELY not least ... AC & Greybear, you two gave me encouragement when I needed it most. You believed in me. You showed me (and Logan) friendship when we desperately needed it. You were ears when I needed to vent, and you helped me to discover gifts I didn't know I had. You guys are the best!! I owe soooooo much to you. Luv -n- Hugz to you both.

CHAPTER 2: A SEARCH FOR A NEW LIFE

Tanner's thoughts:

I can't believe that this is happening. When I started my day today, I knew that I was going to try and tell DJ how I felt. I even knew that something strange was going to happen. But I never thought this is what was going to happen. I should have known things were going to get weird when I had that fight with my foster mom this morning. Now I have a boyfriend (-smile-) I have left my home. I am probably wanted for hitting Colin with that bat (he's lucky it was only a bat,) and now we are runaways.

God if you can here me, please protect me and DJ. Help us to find a place where we can be loved and still be us. Please help us, Amen.

DJ's thoughts:

What are we going to do now? I am so scared. I wish I would have never woken up this morning. No, that's not true, now I have Tanner. I don't know where we will go from here, and I don't care either. All I want is for us to be together, forever. People say that it takes years to decide if a person is the right one to be with forever. We have been together since we were born. Isn't 13 years long enough?

God, if you can hear me, please let Tanner and I stay together forever. Please keep us safe. Please show us the way. I am so scared. Please be with us, Father. Amen.

Somewhere in the great beyond, a very special Saint was listening....

"Okay," Tanner said, "we need to get to an ATM machine and get as much as I can."

"What next?" DJ replied. "Where do we go from there?"

"Well, I think we need to go and get supplies." Tanner replied. "Since it is a four-day weekend, nobody will question a couple of teenage boys buying camping gear."

"Camping gear?!" DJ exclaimed. "What are you thinking, bro?"

"Well, I'm not sure of where we can go yet or who might be able to help us, so I figure we should head up to the river and camp out a few days and try to figure out where we can go and what we can do. I agree with you, now, I know we can't call the police. But I don't even have an idea where we should go," Tanner said.

"Well then," DJ started, "I think we need to get out of town first, before anyone catches up with us. Too many people know us here, and even more know my ex-dad. I say we catch the bus and go up to Auburn, then we can buy our gear and hit the river from there. At least if we get out of Dixon we can keep out of the spotlight."

"Good idea," Tanner said. "Let's head to the stop and get the hell out of here."

As the two young boys made their way to the bus line, it started to sink in to DJ that this was reality. This wasn't two buds going on a weekend camping trip. This was their life now. All they had was each other. They were runaways, two barely teenage runaways running for their lives and their own freedom. As this thought coursed through DJ's being, he looked to his boyfriend, his best friend and soul mate and said, "Tanner, I don't know where we are going, or even how we'll get there, but I do know that no matter what, we will be together always. I love you with all of my heart, and nothing will change that."

"DJ," Tanner began, "We have known each other all of our lives. I have always loved you, and I think it has always been this kind of love. I trust you with all of my soul. I know that we can find a place where we can be who we want to be. I am asking you to trust me. I promise we will find the right place, together."

They two boys reached the stop and boarded the CTL Link to Sacramento, then Auburn. DJ gave the driver the fare for both of them, and then they made their way to the back of the bus where nobody was sitting.

Once they were seated Tanner said, "Okay, DJ? Why did you pick Auburn as the place for us to go first?"

"Simple," DJ began, "we want to get out of California, right? Okay then. I-80 is the main route out of here. Auburn is just a trip up the highway. I know where we can camp at Lake of the Pines, and we can make our way from there. It's actually a better spot than at the river. I think it's more private. Other than that, I was just shooting in the dark. I just want to get out of here. I'm sorry if you don't like it," DJ continued as the tears began to well up."

Tanner pulled DJ's chin up and gently said, "I think it's a brilliant idea. I told you I trusted you. We have to trust each other if we are going to make it. We have to work together and agree with each others ideas and decisions. We have to, or else, why are we even trying?"

"You're right, Tanner." DJ said. He then continued. "Now, more than ever, we need to be strong for each other. I love you. Now let's get some rest."

As the bus motored down the highway the two boys leaned on each other to take a little nap. They had more than 2 hours to finally get to Auburn, and both were exhausted, mentally and physically.

Tanner's Foster Parents House (Steve & Mary Kramer):

"Well, what appears to have happened," Detective Rob Gunn began, "is there was an altercation between your boy and Officer Colin McAllister, DJ's father." What he claims, is he was disciplining his boy, and while this was going on your son hit him in the side of his head with a baseball bat. When he tried to steady himself, he was hit again, rendering him unconscious."

"To be honest with you Detective," Steve began, "I think that Tanner is a bad egg. He's been very rude to me and my wife both. You can see there on the wall where he broke a bottle this morning. He is rude and destructive, but we think we can break him of it. He has been through some hard times in the last year with the loss of his parents. But neither of us thinks that a juvenile detention center is the right place for him. He needs to be here with us where we can nurture him."

The cold chill that Rob felt at that moment could freeze alcohol. All of his police sense and his training at the academy told him that these were very bad people. He had no doubt that there was more to the situation than he could see, but he was going to find out.

"I am going to need some more information so I can really investigate this," Rob began. "You two mentioned that Tanner left here this morning upset. "Is that correct?"

"Yes sir," Mary replied.

"You also stated that at some point during the afternoon, unbeknownst to you, he returned and took his backpack, some clothes and other items from the house?"

"That's right," Steve replied. "I wish I would have caught him. I would have ..."

"You would have what sir?" Rob inquired.

"I would have sat him down and had a long talk about his behavior," Steve stammered in reply.

Rob suddenly thought to himself that Tanner would have been beat silly. *'Good going kid. I'm glad you got out of this pit. I just hope that you and your friend are okay, and you try to get help.'*

"Am I correct in my thoughts, that you assume he and DJ have run away?"

"It appears that way now, doesn't it?" Steve said sarcastically.

"Sir, if we are to figure this out and bring the boys home safely, we need you to cooperate. You behaving like a child by making sarcastic replies will not get us anywhere!"

Rob continued in his thoughts that he would have to get more information about these two yahoos in front of him. There is more to them than meets the eye.

"I think I have just about all I need as far as your statements," Rob started. "However, I will need a recent picture of Tanner. An inventory of what you found to be missing from his room. I will also need both of your personal information, i.e. driver's license, social security, date of birth, and phone numbers where I can reach you with any new developments, both home and work please."

"What do you need our social security and drivers license for?" Mary asked defensively.

"Those two numbers are identifiers for Tanner's foster placement file with CPS. I will need to access his file to continue the investigation." Rob politely informed them.

Once all of the information had been traded, Rob gave them a business card with the case number, and bid them a good day.

Rob's Thoughts:

Rob had never been so glad to leave a home before. His gut instinct told him that there had been abuse going on here. He knew without a shadow of a doubt that Colin had lied in his statement. He had worked with Colin for 5 years now, and he didn't trust him one bit. He still felt that Colin had something to do with his wife's disappearance. He just couldn't prove it. Rob had known DJ for a couple of years now, and he couldn't believe that he would run away without a good reason. No, something very bad was going on here.

Rob decided he had to dig a little bit deeper, so he called into dispatch.

"D-4 to dispatch."

"Dispatch, go ahead D-4"

"Dispatch, be advised, I am 10-24 my last location at 1322 hrs."

"Copy, D-4 is 10-24 at 1322 hours. No additional calls in queue,"

"Copy that dispatch, in that case please mark me as 10-7 for 1 hour."

"Copy D-4 is 10-7 for one hour. Be advised, Sergeant Christopher requests you call his mobile ASAP."

"10-4, inform him I will call him momentarily."

"10-4, dispatch clear."

"D-4 clear."

Rob pulled out his cell phone and dialed his longtime friend Jack Christopher.

"Jack, hey, it's Rob."

"Rob, something isn't right here. How about we meet at our normal lunch spot in 15 minutes?"

"See ya in a bit."

As Rob pulled into Cattleman's he saw the familiar Lincoln Navigator of Jack. When he went inside, the waitress took him to Jack's table. Rob thanked her and ordered a diet Pepsi, then sat down.

Rob looked at Jack. They had been friends for almost 20 years. Since way back in Jr. High. "Jack, something is terribly wrong. Those kids are in danger."

"I know," Jack replied. "I just left Colin. I know he's lying. Plus, now I know he is a pervert."

Rob looked at him and said, "What do you mean?"

Jack slid a manila envelope across the table. When Rob opened it up his blood began to boil. There were 3 pictures of DJ masturbating, taken obviously when he had no idea he was being watched.

"Where did you get these?" Rob inquired.

"When we got to Colin's house and got him loaded up on the ambulance, something told me to look for his medical records. I found these and over 100 similar to them instead."

"Shit, Jack," Rob whispered. "That's illegal search and seizure!"

"I know," Jack stated. "That's why we can't show these to anyone."

"So, how are we going to nail him for this then," Rob asked?

"Well, I talked with the Captain ..."

Rob shot Diet Pepsi through his nose, choked, and spat out, "You talked to Jason! This could mean your badge my friend."

"No, no ... Now calm down," Jack calmly stated. "The Captain and I are both in agreement on this one and you need to hear me out. If after I am done you don't want to be a part of this, just say so, okay?"

"You have my attention."

"Alright," Jack began. "Obviously our primary objective is to get those two boys out of danger. Secondly, we need to take care of this child pornography thing. Third, and correct me if I'm wrong, but you have some serious suspicions about the foster parents, correct?" When Rob said nothing, Jack continued. "My gut tells me that this is all intertwined and the stuff will hit the fan. Jason and I both want to put Colin away for what he has done, and we haven't even hit the tip of the iceberg, I'm guessing. What we are proposing is this - we want to gather as much information and surveillance as we can with

regards to Colin and DJ. Talk to people at his school - friends, teachers, anyone you can. Second, we need to do the same for Tanner's foster parents. I want to know every bit of information I can get about them. Third, I want these people tracked, financially, everything. When we have enough to bust them, we are breaking the chain of command. We will not be sending this to the D.A."

"Why not," Rob asked?

"Simple," Jack countered. "Jason's uncle is a bigwig over at Starfleet Command in San Francisco. With all of the media regarding the recent uses of the Safe Haven act, and Starfleet's busting the balls of anyone doing wrong by a child."

Rob asked, "The Safe Haven Act? What's that?"

Jack replied, "It's a law that was passed by the Federaion Council back in 2002 to help abused kids throughout the Federation. It was first used last year by Lt. Commander Charles Dodds of the Starship Enterprise to protect Aaron Carter. Jason and I think involving them, once we have enough substantial evidence is a better option. Besides, you know as well as I do that our beloved District Attorney is as crooked as Lombard St. All Colin would have to do is give him a few bucks and it would all go away. I want HIM to go away! Colin and I went to the academy together, he was best man at my wedding, and I am DJ's Godfather for crying out loud. It makes me sick to see what he has become. Plus, I feel like he had something to do with Katie's disappearance. I just can't prove it."

"Okay then Jack, I'm in," Rob firmly stated. "What do you want me to do?"

"I'm glad you said that," Jack said, looking visibly relieved. "As of now, you are on detached duty. Jason will take care of everything at the department so nobody starts asking questions. We can't risk this information being leaked. You will only report to me, or the Captain. However, you will do so only to a specified private phone number. Remember, this would normally be an investigation for IAB, but they make the D.A. look like a saint." Jack then slid a briefcase across the table. "Inside here is all of the information we have so far. Pictures, financial statements (not very recent though) everything. There is a list of contacts that can help you with anything you need. Some of them are at Starfleet. Don't forget, Starfleet can track a spec of dust riding side saddle on a gnat's ass. There is a new cell phone for you. It is a secure line. There is a Visa card to cover all of your expenses. We have also found out that Tanner took his ATM card for his bank account. We can use that to track his whereabouts. Rob, I am trusting you to find these boys, and make them safe, as well as helping to put away that piece of work DJ has for a father. Be safe my friend. Don't end up dead."

"By the way Jack," Rob began. "Who is Jason's uncle at Starfleet?"

Jack replied with a face so straight you could fool the Pope. "Admiral Harrison Morrow. Have you heard of him?"

Rob just stood up, picked his jaw up from the floor and gave his friend a hug and left to start his new project. He was on duty now, and by God he wasn't going to let those boys down.

Just as the bus started to enter Auburn, the boys woke up. They had fallen asleep on each other.

DJ looked to Tanner and said, "Man I gotta pee, bad."

"Me too," Tanner shot back.

Tanner reached up and pulled the cord to indicate that they wanted the next stop.

When the doors opened up, both boys shot out of the bus like they had a fire in their shorts and ran straight into a Taco Bell. First thing they ran right for the men's room and took care of some needed business. After they had cleaned up they decided to get some food and discuss what supplies they needed. Luckily enough there was a Super Wal-Mart right across the street and they figured that they could get everything there.

"Well, it will be dark in about 4 hours," DJ began, "the lake isn't to far from here, but we'd better shop and hit the road so we can set up camp."

When the boys reached the store, the first thing they did was go to the ATM machine. The sign said you could withdraw up to a maximum of \$1000.00 dollars each day. Tanner swiped the card, entered his pin and tried for the maximum. He wasn't sure how much money there was in the account, so he just went for it. After taking about 30 seconds to process, the screen showed a picture of money being dispensed, and 50 twenty dollar bills came out. The boys took the receipt and went shopping.

"This money and your money are going to have to last a long time," Tanner said. I'm not sure if they can track us with my ATM card, and I don't want to give the police any clues.

"Good thinking," DJ offered.

The two boys went back to the camping section and picked out what they needed. 2 camping backpacks, sleeping bags, a small fishing kit that included a collapsible pole, hooks, weights, bobbers, and bait. They also found a small camp cook kit, a 2 person tent, a small first aid kit, 2 canteens, water purifying tablets, a compass, maps, and a flashlight and lantern with batteries. Next they found a hatchet with a sheath, and then went to get food.

On the food aisle's they bought canned ravioli, granola bars, protein bars, trail mix, powdered Gatorade mix, hot cocoa mix, instant oatmeal, potatoes, a package of burger, some foil, paper towels, and toilet paper.

As they walked up to the front to check out they also bought a magazine with a picture of *NSync on the front. (That was their favorite band, and hey, they had to read to keep their minds sharp, right?) They also bought a couple of newspapers (so they could start a fire.)

When they reached the checkout, the lady just smiled and started ringing things up. She then asked, "Are you sweet young kids going camping this weekend?"

"Yes ma'am," Tanner said. "We are going on a trip with our Boy Scout troop."

Everything totaled \$275.00. Tanner paid, thanked the lady and they left the store.

When they went outside, they began packing their items into the packs, and strapping the rolled sleeping bags to the bottom of the frames.

While they were doing this an older teen drove by and yelled out, "Look at the faggoty boy scouts. Where are your faggot leaders, and the rest of your faggot friends?" Then he laughed, threw his cigarette out at them and sped off.

After he was out of sight, Tanner began to cry. "I hate people like that. Why does he have to laugh at us?"

"Some people are just ignorant, or jealous."

"Jealous?" Tanner sniffled.

"Yeah, jealous," DJ shot back. "How many of them can say they have a boyfriend as cute as you?"

"I can only think of one person," Tanner said. "Me."

As they boys started to walk toward the lake DJ stated humming. Tanner was trying hard to catch the tune but couldn't place it. Finally he asked, "What song is that?"

"You wouldn't know it," DJ said. "It was one of my youth choir songs a couple of years ago. It's a country song by Mark Wills called Don't Laugh at Me."

"Please sing it for me," Tanner asked.

DJ agreed, and soon the air was filled with his sweet angelic voice:

*I'm a little boy with glasses
The one they call the geek
I'm a little girl who never smiles
'Cause I've got braces on my teeth
And I know how it feels
To cry myself to sleep*

*I'm that kid on every playground
Who's always chosen last
A single teenage mother
Tryin' to overcome my past
You don't have to be my friend
But is it too much to ask...*

*Don't laugh at me
Don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we're all the same
Someday we'll all have perfect wings
Don't laugh at me*

*I'm the cripple on the corner
You've passed me on the street
And I wouldn't be out here beggin'
If I had enough to eat
And don't think that I don't notice
That our eyes never meet*

*I lost my wife and little boy
When someone crossed that yellow line
The day we laid them in the ground
Was the day I lost my mind
And right now I'm down to holdin
This little cardboard sign...So*

*Don't laugh at me
Don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we're all the same
Some day we'll all have perfect wings
Don't laugh at me*

*I'm fat, I'm thin, I'm short, I'm tall
I'm deaf, I'm blind, hey aren't we all...*

*Don't laugh at me
don't call me names
don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we're all the same
don't laugh at me*

By the time Tanner was done with the song, DJ's eyes were misty, and they were at the entrance to the campground.

They walked down by the lake and looked around, and found a clearing up in the trees about 150 yards away from the lake. The area was deserted, which was perfect for them. They then began to set up camp.

First order of business was to clear the area, make a fire pit, and scout for firewood and kindling. Both boys *actually* being Boy Scouts made quick work of this task. Next was to set up the tent and get their things inside. Finally they worked on building a fire. As Tanner started to bunch up the newspaper to make the fire, he noticed an article that he wanted to keep.

"Hey DJ, look at this."

DJ walked over and looked at the article which was entitled; *Federation Youth Services Director Teri Short Tackles Child Abuse to Help Gay and Abused Children* .

By the time both boys had read the article, they had decided. This was the person who they needed to find to get them help.

Once they had a fire going they decided to get dinner started. DJ took some potatoes down to the water to wash and get some water to boil, while Tanner made some hamburger patties. When DJ came back they wrapped the potatoes and the burger patties in foil, and set them in the fire.

When everything was cooked, the boys ate their supper in silence and just watched the sun setting, the fire, and each other. When they were done, they cleaned their dishes in the hot water and put everything away. One more time they went down to the lake to get more water for purifying. Once they had the last of their chores done, they went into their tent to call it a night.

"Hey, do you want to zip these bags together so we can keep each other warm," Tanner asked?

"Absolutely," was DJ's enthusiastic reply.

After that was done, both boys began undressing. They took off everything but their boxers. When they reached those Tanner bashfully reached out and started to pull DJ's off. Then DJ returned the favor. Both boys stood there looking at each other in the fast dimming light then lay down next to each other. Not a word was spoken as Tanner started to lightly touch DJ. First he started by outlining his face, then he slowly moved down to his neck. When he reached down for the nipples, he leaned in closer and began to kiss DJ deeply. As the kissing continued Tanner moved his hands down further and started to play with DJ's belly button. Next he moved in for the kill, and lightly touched the top of DJ's now very hard 3 1/2 inch shaft. DJ moaned in anticipation as Tanner slowly started to play with first the tip then the base of his boyhood. Finally Tanner got brave and went down and kissed the head, sending a bolt of electricity though DJ like he had never felt. As Tanner continued to work on him, DJ moved himself around and found his prize staring him right in the face. DJ moaned again as he felt Tanner's warm mouth engulf his pole. DJ too took Tanner in all the way to the base. As both boys slowly sucked on their partner, the moaning got louder and the tent got hotter. Neither one had ever experienced such pleasure, plus they both were equally enjoying giving pleasure in return. DJ sensing his fast approaching orgasm, pulled away to warn his love of his impending release. Tanner never missed a beat and just continued to work on his project at hand. DJ as well went back to work and very quickly both boys were very close. DJ was first to the finish line. He tensed up and let loose with what seemed to him like a full gallon of cum. Tanner didn't miss a drop. As he was swallowing his first offering, he too lost all control and had the biggest orgasm of his life. DJ took all he could, but some dribbled out. Finally both boys were totally spent. They turned back around to each other, kissed and relaxed.

DJ came to his senses first, and looked at his lover and said, "Tanner that was the most awesome feeling ever. We were a part of each other. I love you so much."

Tanner took DJ's hand and said to him, "We were meant to be."

Both boys held each other until they finally fell asleep, tangled in each others arms and legs, breathing contentedly, and dreaming of their life together.

Don't Laugh at Me performed by Mark Wills and available on his 1998 album, "Wish You Were Here"

Authors Notes:

Wow, I can't believe I got all of that out so fast. See what happens when you have a few days off to wrestle with your inner-writer.

The two boys are on their way now, and just praying that they will make it to someplace where they can be themselves.

To my editor, Bill you are the best. Your father is in my prayers as are you, my friend. You are making this fun. To think I hated English in High School, and despised it in College!!

To my new found brothers ACFan, Greycub, Jeff. I couldn't do this without y'all.

Chapter 3 is well on the way to being finished. There are some interesting surprises in that one as our two boys continue their journey towards safety and freedom.

Stay safe, and help a child. The answers lie beyond the pain.

-The GunRunner

CHAPTER 3: THE NEXT STEP

Short Residence, Des Moines, Iowa:

"DJ!!!" Timmy screamed. "Nooooooooooooooooooooo!"

Sean and Cory jumped up and ran to the recliner to see what was going on. They were both surprised to see Timmy drenched in sweat; breathing heavily and showing his war paint.

"What's wrong, kido?" Cory asked in shock.

"Daddy!!" Timmy started crying hysterically as he lunged out to Cory. "DJ's hurt! He's hurt!"

It took a minute to calm Timmy down enough to talk, and then Sean asked him, "Who's DJ, munchkin?"

"I don't know Papa," Timmy sniffled. "But he's hurt."

"Was it just a bad dream, lil' guy?" Cory asked.

"NO, DADDY!" Timmy replied forcefully. "DJ's hurt and he is asking for help."

"Well tell us where to find him Timmy, and I promise we'll go help him." Cory calmly replied.

"I don't know Daddy!" Timmy said as he started sobbing uncontrollably. "I (gasp) just (gasp) don't know."

Cory reached around and felt his son's forehead. He looked up at Sean and said, "Babe, go get Mom, Doc Austin and Dan. He's burning up; one of them has gotta know what's up. Jamie, Jacob; see if you can figure out what's happening!"

As Sean ran out of the room, Cory held his son, stroking his hair and telling him it would all be okay.

After their first night together, DJ and Tanner woke up early enough to watch the sunrise. As the first signs of light were making their way into the eastern horizon, Tanner was busy getting the fire re-started.

Once they had the fire going good and the water was getting hot for their cocoa, DJ said, "Last night was awesome. I am so glad I have you. I can't imagine life without you now."

"Me, too babe," Tanner replied. "I just hope and pray that we find a place to grow up and be who we are, without someone trying to tell us that our love is wrong."

"I have to be honest with you Tanner," DJ stated. "Last night I had a very strange dream. At first I was dreaming of you, but then it turned into yesterday all over again, and during all of that, a small boy named Timmy and an eagle was reaching out to me telling me to follow them and everything would be alright. It was as though I could feel everything going on in Timmy's mind, and I know he could feel everything I was feeling too. It was like we were connected."

"That is a weird dream DJ," Tanner replied. "Did the sight of the boy and eagle scare you?"

"No," DJ said. "Just the opposite. When Timmy told me to take his hand, I felt like everything would be okay. It was like he wanted to lead me to safety."

"Well then I think that is just God's way of telling you we are doing the right thing by getting out of that situation and trying to find a better life. Or," he joked, "it was indigestion from those burgers we ate last night."

Seeing that his stupid comment had just upset his love, Tanner reached over and pulled him into a hug and said, "I am sure it was the first thing and not the second. I was just trying to make you laugh."

DJ just stared at Tanner for a moment to see if he was serious. When he finally was satisfied he said, "Well, on a different note then, I think the person we read about in the paper is the right place to look. If I understood all of that correctly, she is helping kids in situations exactly like us."

"I agree," Tanner added, "But I still think we need to lay low for a while and make our own way to her, because I don't want your dad or my fosters causing them problems. Besides, I am not ready to face the world yet. I just want to be with you."

"Okay; but I think instead of lying low we should try to get out of here soon," DJ noted. "If they can track us using that ATM charge, and my dad sees Auburn, he will be able to figure out where we are. I think we need to eat breakfast and look at the map. Once we figure out where we are going we can discuss how and get a move on. I want to be able to throw people off. What do you think?"

"Makes sense, I mean what would they do to two 13 year old runaways," Tanner said. "We would probably end up in juvie and split apart forever. I would rather be dead than apart."

"I know, me too," DJ agreed.

As the two boys started getting ready for breakfast both was thinking about what was going on, what they could do, and where they were going.

Tanner's thoughts

'What a night. I can't believe that we are here. What happened to having loving families? Now all we have left is each other and the hope that we can find the love of a family again. I really think that this Teri person is the right person to ask, but what am I supposed to do, just call her and say, "Hi Ms. Short, I'm Tanner and I'm 13 years old. Can you help me?" Yeah right, she'd just send me right back to the foster 'rents who would love to kick my ass again. All they ever did was drink, do drugs and spend time on the computer. No love there.'

'God, please help us to find this Ms. Short. I think that she is the direction you are pointing us in. Please help us find the way. Also, God ... Thank you for giving me DJ. I promise I won't let him down, Amen.'

DJ's thoughts

'I can't get over that dream. It was sooooo real. I swear that a kid named Timmy and an eagle was pulling me someplace. I think if I would have let them pull me away, I wouldn't be here right now. Was I dying? I know that can't be right. I can feel him right now. He is someplace talking about me. He wants to help me. Who is this kid? Will he help Tanner, too?'

'I feel so much better today though. I got away from dad and now I have Tanner. I don't know how we are going to get to Des Moines, it is sooooo far away. But I know that is where we have to go. I hope this Mrs. Short person is all she is cracked up to be in the papers.'

'God, thank you so much for Tanner. He is the missing part of my soul. I feel like I was always meant to be with him. Please guide us safely to where you think we should be, Amen.'

Once they had breakfast done, they started eating and looking at the map.

"Well," Tanner began. "It looks like we have about 1700 miles to get to Des Moines, and that is following the highway, which would be impossible to do all of the time. If we walked 30 miles a day it would take us about 2 months to get there. That would put us into November, and probably snow. So we have to figure out a better way to get there. We have the money to take the bus, but if we do that we would have to change our appearance and go in different directions so they couldn't track us as easily. I

suggest we walk, then take a bus, walk some more, take a different bus and zigzag around so we aren't so traceable. What do you think?"

DJ digested all that Tanner had said, and stated very urgently, "I think we should get started as soon as possible then. The longer we stick around here the more chance there is of us being caught."

After they had finished talking the boys turned around to go and start packing. When they looked around both froze in sheer terror. There standing no more than 10 feet away from them was a young man and woman, no more than 20 years old staring at the two of them.

"We're not going to hurt you, and we're not cops," the man began. "My name is Russ and this is my fiance Sara. What are your names?"

Both boys looked apprehensively at each other, set their jaws, and kept quiet.

"Okay, I understand you not wanting to talk," Sara began. "So why don't you listen for a couple of minutes. Let us talk to you and if after we've had the chance to talk, we will walk away and leave you alone if you want us too, okay?"

"And then what!" DJ spat out. "You're gonna call the cops?"

"No," Russ promised. "We won't call the cops. Okay?"

DJ looked at Tanner and just nodded.

Tanner said, "I'm Tanner and this is DJ."

"Well guys," Sara stated. "We're glad to meet you. How old are y'all?"

"13," DJ replied.

"Do you mind if we sit down?" she asked.

"Please, help yourself," Tanner said as he gestured to his right. "Pull up a log."

"Thank you," Russ began. "So, would you like to talk about what happened to make you guys runaway?"

"What makes you think we're runaways?" DJ asked defensively.

"We kind of overheard a lot of what you were saying a few minutes ago," Sara said gently. "It's okay. I promise that you can trust us."

"Do you mind if DJ and I go and talk alone for a couple of minutes?" Tanner asked.

"Take as much time as you need," Russ said. "We aren't going anywhere."

When they were safely out of earshot Tanner looked at DJ and said, "I don't know, babe. They seem like they are being honest. What do you think?"

"The only thing I can say is that my gut tells me it's okay to trust them," DJ began. "I'm willing to talk to them and see where it goes. If they are really willing to help us, let's see how much. But before we make any decisions, you and I will have to talk them over. Does that sound fair to you?"

"It sounds fair," Tanner replied. "But I want to make sure that no cops or agencies get involved. I don't trust any of them. I don't want us getting split up."

"Okay then, let's go and hear what they have to say," DJ said.

While the boys were away talking, Russ looked at Sara and said, "I don't know why I feel this way, but we have to help them."

"I agree," Sara started. "Something about those two just cries for help. I am willing to help them in anyway that we can."

"I'm sorry that this is putting a damper in our weekend together," Russ said.

"Hey," Sara replied. "We have the rest of our lives together. You know my beliefs. God will give us challenges and projects as He sees fit. I believe we were sent here to help these little guys. So no apology is necessary. Lets see what we can do for them, okay?"

"Okay."

As Russ and Sara finished their conversation the boys walked back into the clearing and announced that they were willing to talk to them.

"I'm glad," Sara stated.

"But," Tanner interjected. "You have to agree that no matter what, you won't involve the police or any form of government, okay?"

"You're not going to tell me you're an axe murderer, are you," Russ joked.

"No," Tanner somberly answered. "We haven't broken any laws other than running away. Well, actually, I did, but I had a good reason. I was trying to save DJ's life, but we'll tell you all about that."

With that the boys made themselves comfortable and began with yesterday morning. They told them everything, even the part about coming out to each other. When they reached the abusive part Russ interrupted them by saying, "I think I'm going to be sick."

Sara watched in shock as her fiance ran to the trees and was violently sick. After the heaving subsided, he took a swig of his water, gargled and spit. He then made his way back to the group.

"I'm sorry about that," he began. "It just makes me sick to think that a father would do that to his son. He actually was going to force you to do that? Why?"

"Because I'm a no good queer," DJ said.

"Whoa," Russ growled. "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Stop right there. Don't you ever let me hear you talk like that again! Do you know how much B. S. that is? Don't ever talk down about yourself like that. You're gay, not queer. And so what, it's who you are. Don't give up your own dignity and stoop down to the level of that no good s.o.b. by calling yourself that. Let me set you straight here. My younger brother was gay. That's right, was. He talked down about himself too; he let everyone talk down to him. He finally started to believe that he was no good. Finally I came home one day and found him hanging naked from the rafters in the garage. He killed himself. He was only 15! And do you know who called him no good most of the time? It was my father!"

Russ was so worked up by this that he was shaking, Sara was sitting in shock, and both boys were crying.

When they finally regained their composure Russ said, "I'm sorry guys. It hurts a lot to bring that stuff up, but you needed to hear it. I just don't want to see you go down the same path as my kid brother."

"What was his name," DJ asked?

"Colton."

DJ got up and went over to Russ and wrapped him up in as big a bear hug as he could and said, "Thank you, from me and Colton."

Russ looked at him with tears in his eyes and said, "No. Thank you."

When he was finally ready to let go, Russ reached up and tickled DJ's ribs. However, instead of a giggle, the response was DJ turning white as a sheet and whimpering.

"What's going on here?" Sara asked?

"They hurt really badly," DJ replied.

"Let me take a look, okay," Sara requested. "It's okay, I'm almost finished with my nursing degree."

DJ reluctantly pulled up his shirt. What everyone saw was enough to make Tanner see red. There in the middle of DJ's stomach was a black, blue, purple, and yellow bruise about 8 inches in diameter.

"How did this happen?" she asked.

"It must have happened when my dad hit me," DJ replied.

"That jerk!" Tanner screamed. "If I ever see him again, he'll wish I would have killed him yesterday!"

With that comment both Russ and Sara looked at him strangely.

"Why don't you and I go finish our talk about what happened yesterday, while Sara bandages up those hurt ribs, okay," Russ requested.

While Sara was busy taking care of DJ's bruising, Tanner finished the rest of the story about how he had beat Colin with a baseball bat. He also told them about what had happened when they snuck into the foster 'rents. He even went so far as to tell Russ about Colin being a cop, and how he was afraid that all cops stick together and no one would have believed them.

"I normally would never condone what you guys did," Russ plainly stated. "But under the circumstances, I think you did the right thing in running away. Who knows what else could have happened yesterday, or any other day for that matter, if you hadn't gotten out. I swear to you Tanner, we will help you in any way we can. I have a couple of ideas, but let's go discuss them with Sara and DJ as well, okay?"

"Okay."

The two guys walked back into the camp just in time to see Sara helping DJ get his shirt back on and say, "there, does that feel better?"

"A little bit," DJ answered.

"You're going to have to take it easy on those ribs for about a week or two. No wrestling with your boyfriend," she smirked.

DJ turned about every possible shade of red and meekly replied, "Okay."

Sarah then continued, "I don't think any of them are broken. Fractured maybe, but not broken. You just have one heck of a bruise. If it doesn't get any better soon, or you see blood in your pee, then its hospital time, understand?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Good."

Russ and Tanner made their presence known when Russ announced, "Okay, I have some ideas as to how we can help you, but first I need to get some more information, all right?"

"What do you want to know?" DJ asked.

"Well for starters, when Sara and I walked up on you guys, you were talking about going to Des Moines, is that true, and if so why?"

DJ handed Russ the article from the paper and said, "Here, read this and you'll understand why we chose Des Moines."

After he and Sara had both read the article, she stated, "I've heard about that Safe Haven Act. It was first used to help Aaron Carter."

"Okay," Russ began. "I agree with your thought process that she is the one to ask for help. With that in mind, why don't you just call her?"

Tanner took over and told them that he believed that if they just called her, they would be sent back. That and they both wanted there to be some cool down time for both families involved. He explained their fears and finally told them that they thought it would be best if they made their way out to her and then asked her for help in person.

Russ said, "While I don't necessarily agree with your thought process on this one, I will respect it. Are you absolutely sure that you want to go that route?"

Tanner replied with certainty, "This might be our only chance to grow up without people telling us we are wrong for who we are. If we work our way towards our goal, we always have the option of making that call or going to some agency. But if we make that call now, we are not going to be given the same types of options, and we could very well be split apart. Does that make any sense to you?"

"Okay then," Russ stated. "Here is what I propose. You two should come with us to our hometown, Wendover, Utah. When we get you there, take a day or two break to look at your options of where you will go from there. Then Sarah and I will put you on a bus to your next stop. Does that sound okay so far?"

Both boys nodded in the affirmative.

"I know you thought that it would take you a couple of months to get to Des Moines. I would prefer it only take you a couple of weeks at most. The longer that you two are out on your own, the more chances there are for something bad to happen. Neither Sara nor I want to see that happen. I am already willing to break major laws to help you, but I also want to have some assurance that you are safe. Are you willing to agree with us on this?"

The boys looked at each other for a long moment before DJ gave their reply. "We appreciate what you are willing to do for us, and we don't want to cause you trouble. We are willing to go with you to Wendover. The further we get away from here the better. There are a few more things that I would like to tell everyone once we get going. And also, Russ, we are paying for the gas and any other expenses to get there or the deal is off, okay?"

"Okay."

"I guess we had better get camp cleared up and pack." Tanner said.

Since everyone worked together to get the boys ready to go, the job only took a matter of minutes. Before they left, DJ doused the fire and cleaned up any evidence of their ever being there. With one last glance around the perimeter, Tanner and DJ headed hand in hand for the car and the unknown.

Once they got to Russ's Chevy Avalanche and loaded up, Sara asked them if they had learned anything from this experience.

Tanner started off by saying that he had learned to show trust while being cautious. He had also learned that not everyone in the world was out to get him, and sometimes you just have to go with your gut.

DJ said a few different things. For instance he told everyone that he learned that you're not born into a family, a family is made of love and respect. For that reason his father was no longer considered family. Secondly he mentioned that he learned that sometimes it is better to get another person's opinion

before reacting to something. And finally he changed the whole mood and even got Russ to shoot his soda 10 feet away through his nose when he said, "The biggest thing I learned, is that even though my dad is a jerk and I hate his guts for what he did, if I end up anything like him physically, I'm gonna be hung!!"

Tanner just turned every shade of red possible as he nodded his head.

Sara just smiled, shook her head and said, "Get in the truck, horse boy!"

Colin McAllister's House:

After being released from the hospital with a broken nose, mild concussion, and a splitting headache, Colin made his way home to begin working on damage control. His first call was to Steve and Mary.

"Steve," Colin began. "We need to get together, and soon, so we can get this situation under control."

"I agree," Steve replied. "We've already been visited by one of Dixon's finest to investigate."

"Who was it?" Colin asked.

"Detective Rob Gunn," was Steve's answer.

"Good," Steve laughed. "He couldn't find his own butt with a roadmap and a rope. Just get over here so we can go over things. There were a few interesting developments before I got this headache that will make our cash flow situation even sweeter. Bring some beer and a pizza when you come, okay?"

"Sure thing, Colin," Steve said. "Mary should be home soon, and then we'll be on our way."

As soon as Steve hung up with Colin, he called Mary and told her to grab the beer and pizza then pick him up so they could go and have their pow wow with Colin. Mary told him that she would be there in about 15 minutes. He told her he loved her and hung up.

Colin's Thoughts

'I've got to go about this the right way. First, I want to make that little shit pay for bashing me in the melon. But I have to do it in a way that he doesn't cry abuse. I need to apologize for what I did. Make him believe that I was just trying to scare him away from a gay lifestyle. He should believe that, after all I am his dad. I can't let him know that I want him to continue his escapades. Shit, the black market value for surveillance tapes of those two getting it on would be worth a fortune. Why should I care if he turns out to be a fag as long as I can make some god money off of it?'

'I also have to get in touch with that freak, Rob Gunn. I have to find out what he knows. Make him believe that I only want to find my son and bring him home. If I sweet talk the D.A., I can make sure that neither of the boys spends any time at all at Juvie. Rob has no reason to suspect anything anyway. I

mean damn, I've been on the force for 18 years, his supervisor, Jack, is one of my oldest friends, and Rob and Jack have known each other since junior high. I think a few calls to some friends should get everything working in my favor. I want to make some money; a cop's salary is pitiful. I just have to play this like the grief stricken parent whose son is missing.'

When Steve and Mary arrived, Colin showed them to the living room and went into the kitchen to get some plates and napkins for the pizza. When he came back out, he said "The boys took over four hundred dollars from my safe when they left here. I think the little shit's have just gone off for a weekend of fun at my expense. My guess is that they are at the river, camping out, and letting things cool off."

"Why did they bash your head and run?" Mary asked.

"Well," Colin smirked, "that's actually part of the reason we are going to make so much more money when they get back."

Steve and Mary both looked at him with a confused look, so he continued by saying, "When I came home the other day, I walked in on them being queer with each other. Our two little boys have decided they want to play the fag game. So, if I strategically place some cameras in this room and Tanner's as well, we should be able to catch some stuff that is worth far more than the couple of thousand pictures we have of those two going solo."

"So they hit you and ran because you caught them?" Steve queried.

"No, they did that because I let my dick get the better of me. When I saw them doing that, I decided I would get in on the action. When I told DJ to go down, he threw up and I lost my temper and threw him into the wall. When I did that, his little boyfriend Tanner came to his rescue."

Steve looked at him with a grin and said, "You know, if we could get them to do some stuff like that we could really bring in the cash."

Mary just smiled and gave a weak laugh.

"So what I am going to do is first thing tomorrow I am going to make some phone calls to some of my good friends at the DA's office, Rob Gunn's boss and Rob himself. I am going to get as much information as I possibly can and see if I can help in the investigation. Seeing as how he is my son, they should welcome my help in finding him. But I bet they are home on their own before Tuesday. Let them have their little weekend out. Make them think they made a mistake. When they get home we have to show them love and caring and let them think they are forgiven. If we do that, by this time next year we will be very rich."

Before they got ready to leave Steve threw in one more piece of vital information when he said, "Tanner took his ATM card to his inheritance money with them. The funds in there are very low; about \$500 I think, since we transferred all of his money to our accounts. If he tries to use it though, we will be able to find out exactly where they are."

"Good going Steve," Colin beamed. "See if you can track them that way, and I'll see what I can find out through my channels. We can get together for dinner tomorrow night and share what we know. Who knows? Maybe they will be home tomorrow night."

Rob Gunn's House:

As Rob was eating lunch and going over some of his notes from his investigation, the private cell phone rang; causing him to dump a forkful of macaroni and cheese right down his clean pressed white shirt.

'Damn,' he thought, 'what a mess. I guess I am going to have to change shirts now.'

Rob picked up the phone and answered, "Gunn here."

"Rob, Jack here."

"Jack," Rob began, "I was just about to call you."

"I beat you to it," Jack teased. "Listen, there is a couple of reasons that I am calling. First of all, I needed to let you know that Jason set up an appointment for you to speak with Admiral Morrow at Starfleet. He will be expecting your call shortly. He will fill you in on some details that I am not privy to. Second, I am backing down from this investigation just a little bit. The reason for that, and Jason agrees, is Colin might try to contact me for some information and the less I know, the less he can try to pry out of me. Be warned, he will probably try to contact you as well, and if he does we have to play this right. You will have to act like you know nothing else and you are conducting a routine investigation to try and help one of your brother officer's get his son back. Finally, I wanted to tell you that I got Colin's house bugged for you. He came home today and I want us to know what is going on. Before you ask, Jason got that one done through his uncle. Do you have any questions for me?"

"No my friend, I don't right now," Rob stated. "I just want you to know that I will not let you or those boys down. I will see them to safety, and WE will see Colin and anyone else involved in this go down. I promise."

"Your promise to me is worth gold, Rob," Jack said. "This will have an acceptable ending. Now go and make that phone call. Jason has emailed you the correct phone number and authorization code. Be safe my friend."

With that Rob ended the call and checked his email. When he opened up the secure encoded message, he read it, and then began dialing the appropriate sequence on his phone. The call was immediately answered and he was prompted to give his authorization code.

"Gunn six one x-ray delta golf," he replied.

"Authorized. Transferring call, please hold."

Rob waited for all of 3 seconds before a voice came on the line saying, "Detective Gunn, I appreciate your promptness in this call. I will try to keep this short and to the point. First of all, I am Admiral Har-

rison Morrow, and it is a pleasure to be working with you. The reason I wanted to speak with you is this. I realize that you are on a detached duty status with your department to investigate the allegations of one Colin McAllister and the disappearance of two minor children DJ McAllister and Tanner Michaels. At the request of my nephew, your captain, you have the full assistance of Starfleet, and as of a short time ago, Clan Short of Vulcan."

"Pardon my interruption sir," Rob stated. "But did you just say Clan Short of Vulcan? Would this be the same 'Short' as in Teri Short that I was briefed about?"

"Close, Detective," the Admiral began. "Teri Short is the mother of the Clan Patriarch, Cory Short. Cory also happens to be an Ensign assigned to the USS Enterprise . They will be assisting you as they have diplomatic immunity that will prove vital in bringing these boys to safety and putting that piece of trash Colin away for good. Mr. Gunn, I'll make no bones about it - I want to see these boys to a safe place and bring Mr. McAllister to justice, and you have our full support. From this point forward I would like to list you as a liaison between local authorities and Starfleet command. I would also like your permission to have some of my security personnel beam to your home and set up a console which will allow you to communicate better between Clan Short, Director Short, myself, and my security division. They will also assign you a communicator and a phaser, and give you instruction on all of their uses. Would that be acceptable?"

"Yes Admiral, that would be fine," Rob answered.

"In that case, please stand by while I have them beam to your location with the equipment. They will beam in right next to you, so don't be alarmed."

Rob, even though he had been warned, flinched when no more than 10 seconds later watched as 3 people materialized right before his eyes.

The security officer closest to him approached and said, "Detective, I am Lt. Commander Christiansen. Please continue your conversation with the Admiral. We will set this equipment up in the corner by your computer and explain everything to you when you are done speaking, is that acceptable."

"Yes Commander it is, thank you," Rob replied.

"That won't take them but a few minutes to complete, so I will finish this up," the Admiral began. "After you are trained, it would be in your best interest to contact Teri Short and Clan Short. They already have a great deal of information about the situation, and have already taken measures to ensure the success of this operation. I have been in personal contact with Ensign Short and have informed him of your pending contact with them. Please do not be offended when you see these people. Cory is only 14 years old, but he is a Starfleet commissioned officer, and has accomplished more in a short time than most men do in a lifetime. He, his mother, and Clan Short will be invaluable in assuring we are successful. Now as for timing, I realize that we will have to go about this delicately so we can make things stick, judicially speaking. For that reason, I have instructed Clan Short that they are to let the two boys make their way to where ever they are attempting to go, and just ensure their safety. When Cory feels that it is appropriate for contact to be made, he will confer with you and then act. It is my hope that Ensign Short will take the boys in to a protective environment and establish the correct procedures for the Safe Haven Act to be initiated. Do you find this to be acceptable, detective?"

"Yes Admiral, I do," Rob replied. "And rest assured that Ensign Short's age will have no bearing on my impression of him, nor will it affect our professionalism. We will work together to ensure a successful operation. I welcome his help and that of his Clan, as I also am very appreciative of your help."

"Very good then, feel free to contact me if I can be of any more assistance to you. Morrow out."

With that Rob ended the call and went to the security team to get his training on the use of the equipment they had brought.

Once the team had left and Rob had the chance to change shirts, he set down in front of the terminal, pressed in the sequence, and waited. After a couple of moments the viewer came to life. A young man appeared on the screen and said, "Clan Short Headquarters, Communications Officer Thomas Short. How may I assist you, Detective?"

Even though Rob was expecting it, the sight of a twelve year old Communications Officer threw him for a loop for a second. He recovered quickly and replied. "Good afternoon Thomas, I need to speak to Cory Short."

"Please stand by, Detective. He will be with you momentarily."

Rob had to work hard to keep a straight face when Thomas forgot to mute his end of the terminal before calling for Cory. *"CORY! Stop chewin' on Sean's ear and git your skinny bee-hind over here! That there Detective Gunn the adm'ral was talkin' 'bout is waitin'!"*

Cory appeared in front of the terminal, and turned seven shades of red when he noticed that it was not muted. "Good afternoon Detective Gunn, I'm Cory Short. I've been expecting your call; did the Admiral brief you on what we've discovered?"

"Well first off, you can call me Rob," he began. "If we are going to work together like partners in this, I would much rather lose the formalities."

"Okay Rob," Cory began. "I can handle that. What can I do for you?"

"Well, I was kind of hoping that we could all get together and discuss what we know, and also the best way to approach this." Rob said.

"Give me one minute to gather everyone up that is involved, then we can conference about it, okay?"

"That would be great," Rob replied.

Cory walked over to the intercom on the wall and announced, "Hey! Intelligence team working on the DJ and Tanner case; please come to the Rec Room for a conference with Detective Gunn!"

Cory then turned back to the console and said, "They should all be here in a moment. While we're waiting, I am going to make an adjustment to the console so that you will be able to see everyone."

Once everyone was in the room and all of the introductions had been made, the team got to work on sharing the information that each had gathered.

Rob was quite impressed at how far everyone had gotten so far and was pleased to let them know this fact. "I am amazed at all of you. That little sleight-of-hand with the inheritance account is going to help a lot. You have done work in an afternoon that would have taken me many sleepless days and nights trying to compile. I think now that we know where they have been, and with the reconnaissance of your eagle William, we should be able to ascertain their whereabouts soon. Once we have an idea of where they are, we can place someone to guide them in the right direction. It is my hope that we can take care of this situation and bring these boys to place where they are safe, and do so in a reasonable amount of time. I am aware of the directive Admiral Morrow gave you with regards to that, and am of total agreement. As for the information you have on the adults in this situation, I will need to contact you about that tomorrow or the next day. I want to put together all of the information that we have shared about the boys and work on them at the moment. Colin, Steve, and Mary will hang themselves on this one. Is that okay with everyone?"

Once everyone had voiced their agreement, Rob finished up by saying, "I have always believed that you should never judge a person by their age, but by their actions. You boys have proven to me today that you are mature, knowledgeable, and most certainly the right people to be working with on this. I am proud to associate myself with you, and I look forward to our working together towards the same goal. I shall contact you soon to work on the next phase of this operation."

Cory looked at Rob and stated, "Rob, failure is not an option. Those boys will be safe and loved, and the three jerks will pay. I promise. Live long and prosper, Rob."

Live long and prosper, everyone," Rob replied. "Gunn out."

Authors note: *Dang that was a long one for me. Energizer bunny syndrome. Keep going and going and going and ... Well you get the picture.*

Hope you all aren't ready to kill me and ACFan for that one, but we had planned this for a while now.

Hugs go out to the TwoHyperPups. I am so proud of you guys for all that you are. I love ya both, never ever forget that.

Bill, I will never quit thanking you for all that you are doing to help me.

Jeff ... Did we meet your expectations on this one ... If not, too bad. J/K

AC & Greybear... You two are sooooo awesome. I am really having fun working on this with you, and everything that you do means so much. I think it's working Hugz to ya both.

Special Note to AC; This was great. I cant believe that we managed to get this to work so well, and in such a short amount of time. Thanks for everything. Now how should we boggle their minds next
Hmmmmmmm????

Note from AC:

I know some of you already suspect where this is going; hang around, because these two are worse than a few cast members of Memories. You never know WHAT they are going to get into on their journey to safety. Greybear and I are just as much in the dark as the rest of you as to what the final outcome of this will be, GunRunner is doing an awesome job and we are proud to have him as a featured author on the Annex.

On a personal note, I want to send out some HUGE hugs to our favorite TwoHyperPups. You guys are totally awesome; Greybear and I are both proud to be called part of your extended family. You guys are a blessing to everyone who meets you, online and in real life. Just remember, you are not alone anymore, all of us are here to back you up; all you have to do is ask. Strawberry shakes all around! (And I remembered to put the lid on the blender! <giggle>) Greybear sends huge hugs too, guys. You both are special to both of us.

Until next time; everyone take care.

AC

CHAPTER 4: THE JOURNEY FOR FREEDOM

"I told you we were going to pay our way," Tanner argued as Russ balked at the money being presented to him. "You are helping us, and gas is the least we can do in return."

Russ finally relented and took the fifty dollars that Tanner was handing to him.

"I need to pee," Tanner said to DJ. "Come with me, and then we can get some snacks and go to the ATM."

As the two boys made their way through the store, they silently discussed taking the max out on the ATM card again. They reasoned that if for some reason the account got cut off, they wanted to have as much money as possible to survive with.

Tanner walked up to the machine and saw that it, too, had a limit of one thousand dollars. He inserted the card, pressed the buttons, and crossed his fingers. Thirty seconds later the boys each had an additional five hundred dollars in their wallets, shoes, boxers, etc.

When they reached the check out with their purchases, the man behind the counter, an aging fat man that looked as though he had never owned a toothbrush, looked over the boys and said, "OK runts, what are you stealing from me? Empty your pockets right now!"

Noticing the problem at the front, Sara came over and asked the man if there was a problem.

"Wait your turn lady," the man spat at her. "I've got to take care of some thieves."

"Sir, I assure you that my little brothers didn't take anything from you. As a matter of fact, it looks as though they are about to pay for their items."

"I saw those two over by the cash machine in the corner. Kids their age don't have ATM cards so they have to be up to no good," he angrily replied. "I want them to empty their pockets before I call the sheriff."

The boys did as they were told and emptied their pockets and turned them inside out. Seeing as they didn't have any contraband on them the man asked, "what in the hell were you doing over there then, playing with yourselves?"

"No you jerk wad," DJ replied. "We took twenty dollars out of our savings account that WE DO have a card for to pay for this stuff. What are you, some kind of pervert or something?"

With that the man rang up the items, took the money and just grunted. The boys seeing that they were no longer welcome just left the store with Sara and went out to the truck. As they walked, DJ swore that he saw a shimmering light fade away out of the corner of his eye. *'Must be getting tired' he thought.*

When he returned to the truck, Russ asked the boys what that was all about.

DJ said, "He was just a jerk. He was saying that we stole from him because we were back by the ATM. We were just pulling out some more cash. We didn't steal anything; by the way Sara, what was that about us being your little brothers?"

"I was just shooting from the hip on that one and said the first thing that came to my mind. I just wanted him to leave you alone, and figured if he thought that there were two adults with you in here, one being your older sister, he would think twice about making accusations. Besides, what girl wouldn't want a couple of cuties like you as little brothers? You guys are going to break a lot of hearts as hot as you are, both girls and guys."

She then looked DJ square in the eye winked at him and made a horse sound, which of course made him turn about 10 shades of red. Everyone in the truck was laughing, and Russ for the second time in one day shot soda through his nose.

"Dang it," Russ yelped. "That's twice in one day. I'm beginning to feel like roto-rooter is up my snout. Can we stop the talk on the poor boys' equipment; it's giving me a bad mental image and an inferiority complex he giggled."

This brought on another bout of laughter from everyone and DJ, being the eternal smart Alec, reached forward and patted Russ on the shoulder as he said, "Don't worry man, it's not the size of the ship, it's the motion of the ocean. Besides, don't they say that size doesn't matter?"

"Sit back and shut up," Russ playfully growled.

After about a half hour of silence, DJ became curious about the distance and asked, "How long of a drive is it to your house?"

"About six hours," Sara answered. "That's plenty of time for us to get to know each other better and also to make a plan of action for you two. No arguments either. We are going to help you. I can't just dump you off somewhere and hope that you are ok. I have to know that you are going to be safe, understood?"

"Yes ma'am." Both of the boys answered in unison.

"What was the name of the town that we just stopped in," Tanner asked?

"Truckee, why," Russ wondered?

"I just want to remember the names of the places that I never want to go back to again. That guy was such a jerk, and I would never want to meet up with him again," DJ stated very matter-of-factly.

"Well, I can understand you have bad feelings toward that man but let me offer you some insight," Sara countered. "I know that you two have been through some rough times in the past, and I also know that you are going to go through some more with the fact that you boys are gay. I hope that you will tell us more as we drive so I can better understand your lives and maybe offer you some more help and ideas, but for now let me tell you this. If you go through life looking at people and not trusting them you will lose trust in each other. You need to have an open heart. Even if it means that your heart might get stepped on from time to time. Pain can cause us to grow and it's up to us if we let it make us grow stronger or weaker. Life is all about taking chances. Tanner, you took a chance telling DJ that you were gay and you loved him. That's exactly what I am talking about here. If you don't take a risk, you will never grow. You both took a risk when you let us in and agreed to let us help you. If you hadn't of done that, the next person you happened across might not have been so nice. I'm not saying you need to trust everyone; you need to learn to understand the soul of a person. The only way you can start to do that is by understanding yourself. *To thine own self be true.* You need to be honest with yourself and each other. At the end of the day you still have each other and that is something sacred. Treasure it. Cherish it. Don't mishandle each others hearts. Learn to trust your instinct, and learn to trust God. Whenever I am in a situation and I don't know what to do I follow some advice my grandfather gave me. Pray about it and then go with your gut. What that means is ask God to tell you the right thing to do and then be very quiet. Wait a second then go with your gut instinct. God speaks to us through our souls and hearts, and most every time after I pray, if I go with my gut instinct, it is the right answer. Does this make any sense to you?"

"So what you are saying is," Tanner began. "Give people a chance and don't judge a book by its cover, right?"

"In a nutshell, yes," Sara replied. "While we are at it, are you guys ready to give us the unabridged version of your lives and stories. I would really love to hear more about you?"

"Ok," DJ began. "I'll go first."

"I can't say that I've had a very bad life. Everything was going pretty good until a couple of years ago. My mom went missing. One morning I said goodbye to her on my way out the door. She gave me a big hug, and I never saw her again. A few months later, the police still had no leads and the Chief had my father removed from the case. He said that he was too close to the case and that he should back away and try to help me instead. What happened instead was he became a control freak. He wouldn't let me do anything. Heck, unless I had a friend coming over or we had other company, I wasn't even allowed

to wear clothes except for my boxers around the house. He always said I would get the furniture dirty and ruin it. Then he started getting mean. He would pull my britches down and spank me if I even looked at him funny. I thought I was getting too old for spankings and I told him so one time. He got so mad at me that he yanked them down again, beat my butt red, and made me stand naked in the corner for over an hour. He said it wasn't my place to tell him how to do things. He started telling me that my body was changing and I was getting smelly, so he would sometimes watch me take a shower, so he could make sure I was getting clean. One time he caught me, well, you know, and after that he always made me leave my bedroom door open at night, and he would make mean comments like, 'are ya having fun with that little thing of yours' or 'what, do you think if you pull on it enough it's gonna grow?'

As DJ continued his story Russ was getting more upset every moment. He was beginning to realize that this kids' father was a pervert and was getting off on seeing his pubescent son naked and even masturbating. What kind of sick freak is this guy, he thought?

By the time DJ had brought everyone up to the present he was in tears and clinging to Tanner like he was hanging on for dear life.

Sara gave the boys a few minutes to compose themselves before saying, "Never until today did I ever think that running away was the right thing to do. DJ, your father has a sick and warped mind, and who knows what would have happened had you stayed in that situation. I swear to God, I will help you two get to Des Moines if that is in fact where you want to go. I will do anything in my power to ensure that you are safe, and never have to endure that kind of pain again. He had no right to do what he did to either of you. He should be in jail. It was his job to protect you from the world, not throw you into it before you can even comprehend what the world is all about. He stole your childhood. You two have had to become men in the matter of a few days. He owes you your innocence back."

Tanner then looked DJ right in the eye and said, "I promise you right now that from here until forever, I will always love you, and will always do my best to protect you. I see some similarities in what has happened to us, and once I tell everyone my story you will see what I mean. DJ, I've kept some things from you, and I am sorry for that, but I didn't know how to say them. Will you please forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive," DJ replied. "I understand that it is hard to tell people you love things that you think might hurt them. Go ahead and get it all off your chest. It helps, trust me."

"Ok," Tanner started. "Here goes nothing. My life has fallen to junk since my parents were killed in that crash. That day still haunts me. It was right after DJ's mom disappeared, so both of us were dealing with some bad junk at that time. Right after it happened, I stayed with DJ for a couple of days, and then Colin worked with DCFS to get me placed in a foster home. He was the one who suggested Steve and Mary. For a little while they were really nice to me. They tried to comfort me when I was sad, which was and still is, most of the time. Then one day Steve came home and told me that he wasn't going to put up with anymore whiney crybaby stuff and he yanked down my pants and beat my bare butt. He said, 'there, now you have something to cry about,' my parents never spanked me. They always put me on a time out or took away privileges when I misbehaved. I was so mad at him for hitting me that I started to yell that he wasn't my father and to go to hell. This made him even madder, so he did it again. I noticed that he and Mary started watching me a lot. They caught me doing, well, you know, and when I looked up it was like they were really watching me. They always made me sleep naked and I don't know how many mornings I would wake up and the covers would be off of me. I just assumed that I was getting too hot, but after what I discovered last week, I know that wasn't the case."

DJ just looked questioningly at his boyfriend.

Tanner just continued on by saying, "I'm getting there, just hold on. Like I was saying the thing just started getting more and more weird. I was having more fights with Mary. Steve was constantly beating my butt, and he was doing strange stuff like taking my towel and clothes from the bathroom so I would have to walk bare naked and wet to my room. I know it was him because I caught him doing it. I remember hearing a conversation about a week ago that he was having on the phone. I'm not sure who he was having it with, but I do have a clue. Anyway, Steve said, 'Things are working just the way we planned. I have made a new contact in Russia that is willing to pay double what we are getting for the them, and he has offered even greater amounts if we can get them to do things willingly.' He then continued to tell the person, 'No, he doesn't even have a clue. He's about as dumb as they come. And by the way, the amounts we discussed earlier have been transferred to the specified accounts.' After I overheard this conversation, I began to get curious about what he was doing. I thought that he and Mary might be selling drugs and I wanted to catch them so I could get out of there. I went snooping around and found some things that made me so mad I could've killed them, but I kept my cool. I wanted to call the police, but I figured it wouldn't do any good. So I finally decided it was time to tell DJ how I felt about him. If he would have rejected me, I would have just turned them in or probably killed myself.

"Ok partner," Russ stated. "I told you guys we would help you no matter what. But I don't want to hear talk about people killing them selves do you understand? I wish I could have just a few more minutes with Colton to tell him how I feel. Spit it out, tell us what you found."

"You asked for it," Tanner said as he began to shake. "I found pictures of me and DJ. Naked pictures. Soft, hard, showering, sleeping, jacking off, red butts, everything. I found a zip file on the computer that had been emailed with over 2000 pictures of us. I found an email with a receipt for a wire transfer to them. I found a copy of a check where they had paid over fifty thousand dollars to someone. DJ it was your dad that they were paying. They are exploiting us, making child porn, and they are in it together! There are probably pictures of us all around the world by now!"

"PULL OVER NOW, QUICK" DJ yelled!

As soon as the truck was at a safe stop, DJ jumped out and began to throw up. When he was finally done, he started yelling. "That no good sorry sick demented piece of shit. I'm his son. I WAS HIS SON! Why did he have to do this? What am I to him, a paycheck, or a way to get off at night? I swear I will kill him if I ever see him again!"

DJ ran to the side of the road and began hitting and kicking a sign that was posted.

Everyone gave DJ some space to vent. When he was done he looked at Tanner and said, "I am so sorry you had to go through this. I am so sorry." With that he collapsed onto the ground crying and shaking.

Tanner ran over to him and cradled him and started crying as well.

Russ just walked over to them and softly said, "Come on guys, let's get in the truck and get out of here. I promise everything will be ok. I won't ever let them hurt you again."

Both of the boys looked weakly at him and obeyed. Before they got in the truck, however, they wrapped him up in a bear hug and said in unison, "thank you both."

Once back in the truck, the two boys just curled up to each other and within minutes, both were sound asleep.

As they drove down the highway, Russ and Sara were discussing what they were going to do next.

"We promised that we wouldn't bring in the authorities," Sara whispered. "But how else are those sorry people going to have justice for their crimes. Those two cuties are now probably a fantasy for sick minds. They didn't deserve this. Those two boys need a loving and caring environment to grow up in. They sure weren't getting that at home."

"I know baby," Russ replied. "The kind of people who hurt kids like that just don't deserve to live. I want to make sure that they never hurt another child again. I don't care what we have to do, but we will help them."

"I've got an idea," Sara exclaimed! "That article that the boys showed us about Teri Short is perfect. They said that they are heading for Des Moines to get her help. Well, why don't we call ahead to her and give her a heads up about the boys, and fill her in on what the boys have said. We can still honor their wishes by letting them make their own way to Iowa, but I think we need to get the ball rolling for them. We just have to do it quietly so that they don't know. They might get very mad if they find out, but still, I want them safe and happy. If we contact her, and tell her everything, she might just agree to let them make their way there, but maybe we can help guide them as well. And if she doesn't want anything to do with it, maybe she can help point us in the right direction and we can lead the boys that way. What do you think?"

"I think," Russ retorted. "That I married a mind reader. I agree, when we get home we need to look up Teri Short and call her. I also want to get more information about the department she works for. If it's about helping kids like these two guys, I want in."

Sara and Russ continued to discuss back and forth for a couple of hours as the boys soundly slept in the back seat. As they were putting the finishing touches on their plan Russ almost wrecked the truck when out of the back seat DJ sat up straight and yelled, "Timmy, no don't go!"

Russ slammed on the brakes and pulled to the side of the road, looked in the back at DJ who was sweating profusely, and asked, "What in the hell was that all about?"

DJ looked around and started to cry. "I don't know what's going on. This Timmy kid is talking to me in my head. It's the same one from my dream last night. He said he is sending help for me, and that I need to help you Russ. He said someone named Saint Mikey is going to help you understand, I don't know what he means, and I'm getting scared."

Tanner just wrapped his arms around DJ and said, "Shhh, everything is going to be ok. Let Timmy help us. God knows we can use all the help we can get."

With that DJ stiffened up and started to shake for just a moment. When he relaxed he began to speak in a voice that wasn't his own. " *Bubba?*" " *God I miss you.*"

Russ turned as white as a ghost. "Colton, is that you?" "I mean, is it really you?"

"Dang straight Bubba." "We've got to talk and I don't have a lot of time. When you say your prayers tonight, thank Saint Mikey for this happening."

"How do I know it's you," Russ stated. "Prove that it's really you."

"Ok," Remember the time that you and I went and egged old lady Jones's house, only we didn't know the eggs were hard boiled and we ended up busting out her two picture glass windows. Then when dad questioned us on it we both blamed Tommy Nelson for it?"

"Ok," Russ said excitedly. "Only you knew about that. How did this happen? How are you talking to me? How come you are talking through DJ? Are you ok? Why did you kill yourself? I miss you!"

"Hey, I said I didn't have much time. This is really hard on DJ so listen up. Saint Mikey sent me here to tell you a few things. First of all, the idea you and Sara had will work so get to it. Secondly the person you were talking about already knows what's going on. So go with it. Bro, I'm sorry I left you like I did. I felt like I had no other way out. Only now do I realize the pain I caused. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be happy, and he is watching you. I am ok. There is no pain here, Bubba. Only love. I want you to know that I am always watching over you. I will always be with you. You have a work to do down there and I will be with you every step of the way. I can't wait for the day that we will be re-united here. Don't worry; it will be a long time from now. Right now, though, you have work to do. I will guide you as best I can. I love you Bubba, God bless you, my big brother."

With that DJ shook his head and weakly said, "What happened?"

Russ just reached into the back seat and pulled DJ into a tight hug and said, "Thank you so much."

Russ cried into DJ's shoulder for a few minutes. When he finally gained some composure the group of four began to discuss what had just happened.

"It was weird," Tanner began. "You were like possessed by Colton. You were Colton for a few minutes. He talked to Russ through you."

"I was someone else," DJ queried?

"Yeah," Tanner said. "Russ, what was Colton talking about, 'the idea will work?'"

"Just some things me and Sara have been talking about for a long time, nosy," Russ kidded. "At least I hope that's what he meant."

"I'm hungry," DJ announced. "Can we get something to eat soon?"

"I figured you guys would want to eat soon," Russ stated. "You've been asleep for almost 4 hours. Tell you what, we are almost to Wells. We can stop there and get a bite, Ok?"

"Cool," DJ said. "How much further from there is it to your house?"

"About an hour," Russ told them. "Then we can all get a good night sleep and start fresh tomorrow ok."

"Ok."

After everyone had their fill at the McDonalds in Wells they continued down the road. Tanner and DJ were never happier to see a house as they were then. As soon as Russ opened the door, both boys asked, "where's the bathroom?" It seemed as though they hadn't peed all day, even though they had at the restaurant. The two boys headed towards the bathroom en masse. When they got in front of the commode, both boys let loose with a refreshing stream that just seemed to be never-ending. When they finally finished their business and washed up, the boys headed out to see Sara and Russ

Sara and Russ had already brought everything into the house and Sara was busy putting sheets on the guest bed.

When Russ saw them he motioned them over. "Guys, while you are here this is your house. If you want something, help yourself. If you need something, ask. Sara is setting up the guest room for you right now. Why don't you guys take showers and hop into some clean clothes. I will wash these ones and anything else you need, ok?"

"Russ, would it offend you if DJ and I take a shower together," Tanner asked?

"Nope, not at all, that just saves my water bill," Russ joked. "Just toss your dirty clothes into the hallway and I'll collect them. Take as long of a shower as you want. My hot water heater has never run out before."

"Is that a challenge," DJ quipped?

"Knock yourselves out," Russ bullied. "I bet you guys ten bucks that you'll give up and get out long before the hot water runs out."

"You're on," Tanner remarked.

Russ thought to himself, good, with them in the shower for a while Sara and I can call Teri Short and get the ball rolling. There is no way they can run that thing out of hot water. I love a long shower, that's why I installed two 100 gallon hot water heaters. My setup is better than some hotels.

While the boys slipped off to the bathroom to get cleaned up and who knows what else, Russ and Sara went into the office to make the call. Russ went online and managed to find the number to Teri Short listed in the Des Moines Iowa phone book and dialed the number for Sara. After three rings the phone was answered, "Short Residence, Aaron speaking."

"Yes sir," Sara began. My name is Sara Wagner and I am looking for Teri Short, The Federation Youth Services Director. Have I reached the correct residence?"

"Yes ma'am you have," Aaron replied. "May I ask the reason for your call?"

"I am calling on the behalf of two runaway boys that my fiancé and I are trying to help, and we believe that Ms. Short may be able to provide assistance in this matter."

Short Residence, Des Moines, IA:

"Hold on one moment please while I get her," Aaron said. "Mom! There is a phone call for you about some runaway boys," Aaron yelled. A moment later, Teri was taking the phone from Aaron. "Hello this is Teri."

"Teri, my name is Sara Wagner and I am calling you from Wendover, Utah. I apologize for calling so late into the evening, but this is the only time we've had away from the boys to make this call. I am calling on behalf of two runaway boys that my fiancée and I have been helping today. Right now they are getting a shower so we took the most opportune moment to call you. We had promised the boys that we would not involve the police due to some situations they are facing. They had told us that they were making their way to Des Moines to ask you for help after they had read an article about you in the newspaper. They figured that since you have helped gay and abused children in the past you might be able to help them. After talking extensively with them, Russ and I agreed that we would help them in any way we could, which is why we decided to call you. The boys don't know about this call and they probably shouldn't, but I figured that perhaps it would be best if you had a heads up on this one so you could plan on your end."

"I appreciate that," Teri began. And I assure you that I wouldn't have been in bed for quite a while yet, with the tribe I have here at my house. You say you are calling from Wendover, Utah and the boys that you are helping have asked you to not call the police, is that correct?

"Yes ma'am."

"Please, just call me Teri. Can you tell me a little bit about the boys and what you understand to be the situation?"

As Sara began to go through the diatribe of information that she had received since this morning, Teri began to have a sinking suspicion that these two boys were the one that they were looking for and decided to bring Sean and Cory into the picture to help, so she covered the phone and yelled for them to join her. When they came in the room, Teri scribbled a note to them telling them that this might be a lead on Tanner and DJ and to contact the *Enterprise* to get a trace.

As Teri continued listening to Sara, Sean and Cory got busy. Sean ran to get the rest of the team on the case and Cory pulled out his communicator. "Ensign Cory to *Enterprise*."

"Enterprise, Uhura here, go ahead Cory."

"Hi Aunt Nyota, I need you to help me, please. I need to pinpoint to origin of the landline phone call taking place at my residence now. We have reason to believe that the contact is involved with an investigation we are working on for Admiral Morrow."

"That's not a problem, Cory. I am locking onto the location right now. Just one more second and I'll have it."

"Thanks, Aunt Nyota."

"Got it," Nyota stated. "Would you like for me to download the information to your console, Ensign?"

"That would be perfect, it is ready and awaiting your transmission. Thank you."

"Not a problem, Cory. Enterprise out."

Just as Cory was closing his communicator Captain Kirk came on saying, *"Kirk to Ensign Short."*

"Ensign Cory here, go ahead Captain."

"Cory, Nyota has informed me that you just requested use of the ships resources to trace a landline call to your residence. Is there anything that I can be of assistance on?"

"Not at the present time sir," Cory replied. "We are in the middle of an investigation for Admiral Morrow and we have reason to believe this call might be related to that investigation."

"Understood Ensign. I expect to be de-briefed on this investigation once it has been concluded and deemed unclassified information. Until such time, the full resources of the Enterprise are at your disposal. Kirk out."

Once the conversation had concluded Cory looked at his mom and gave her the thumbs up sign. At this point Teri asked Sara if she could please have the names of the two boys.

"Tanner and DJ," Sara answered.

Teri just pumped her fist in the air which got the entire intelligence team on the move. Teri at this point began to inform Sara of what they knew at this end.

"Sara," Teri began. "We have already been involved in an investigation regarding these two young men. We are doing everything in our power to ensure that they are going to be safe, and never have to deal with the former adults in their lives again. We are willing to let them make their own way here as we know they are not very trusting at this time. I am afraid that if we try to contact them now, the results would be less than desired. At present time we have been in contact with one detective from the police force in their home town. He is serving on detached duty for Starfleet in conjunction with our investigation. We will pass on any information that you give us to him. He is one of the good guys and we trust him explicitly. Another twist in this affair is my grandson Timmy for some reason seems to be able to communicate on some level with DJ and Timmy's Eagle William is giving us recon on the boy's whereabouts. "

"Excuse me, Teri," Sara interrupted. "But did you just say Timmy and an Eagle?"

"That's correct. Why?" Teri asked?

"DJ has been having dreams about a boy named Timmy and an eagle trying to help him and Tanner."

"I hate to break it to you," Terry started. "But they are not dreams he's been having. Timmy somehow is able to communicate with DJ. He is also sharing DJ's moods. Would it make sense to you if I told you that today DJ has been riding an emotional rollercoaster?"

"Absolutely," Sara laughed. "Well then perhaps you can answer another question for me. Have you ever heard of a Saint Mikey?"

"Mikey was my oldest son," Teri replied. "He was killed some time ago and first became a guardian angel and now has reached the status of Sainthood."

"This is all so surreal," Sara sighed. "What a day this has been."

"I understand your feelings, Sara, believe me," Teri said with a laugh. "Sometimes it gets very overwhelming for me and my family as well. But we are all in this together to help kids. That's a reason that is as pure as new fallen snow."

Teri continued to converse with Sara about how she wanted to handle the situation and when they had finally come to some agreements Teri gave Sara another number that she could be reached on and promised to call her if she had any more information. Sara promised the same as well and told Teri what she was going to do for the boys tomorrow. They both said their goodbyes and hung up.

About that same time the boys were getting ready to get out of the shower after spending the better part of the last forty minutes letting the water run down their bodies.

"This place has enough hot water to fill a small lake," Tanner commented.

"I guess we each owe Russ ten bucks," DJ reminded him.

"Oh well," Tanner said. "It was worth it just for us to be able to relax like this. I promise you we are going to be ok. We should probably get a good night sleep tonight, because tomorrow is going to be a busy day."

"Yeah," DJ groaned. "I know it is. We really have to thank Russ and Sara for everything that they are doing for us. I just hope this will all be over soon. I want to see that SOB behind bars and I want us to start a new life."

The boys kept on talking while they dried off and put on clean clothes. When they were done they walked out and saw Sara just hanging up the phone. When she saw them she said, "Hey guys, you feel like some pizza?"

"Actually," Tanner stated, if you don't mind, I think we'll just turn in. We're both kinda tired and since we just ate not even two hours ago I know I'm not really hungry right now, but thanks anyway."

"A kid that turns away pizza," Sara said with mock astonishment. "What's the world coming to?"

This erupted a small round of giggles from both boys.

"Ok then," Russ began. Why don't you guys get some sleep and we will talk tomorrow over breakfast and see what we can do to get you to Iowa, Ok?"

Both boys walked over to them and gave each a hug and thanked them for everything then made their way to the bedroom.

Short Residence, Des Moines, IA:

"Ok everyone, listen up," Teri announced. "We have new information to process about Tanner and DJ. Here's what we need to do; One, we need to get Rob Gunn on the comm and get him up to speed. Two, get William moving toward Wendover, Utah. Timmy, why don't you and your Uncle Kelly go look at a map and pass on the route to him so he doesn't get lost. Three, make sure that the ATM they used earlier in Truckee, California is scrambled. Four, I need someone to get a list of bus terminals and routes from Wendover to here. Five, we need someone to trail the boys once we get them on the bus, if anyone has suggestions make them known. Six, we need to hack into Colin McAlister's and Steve & Mary's computers. I want to know who is receiving these pictures of the boys and what's being done with them. See if we can stop them from distribution or if we can destroy them. Tap into all of their financials, account for every penny for the last three years. I also want to know what happened to the inheritance account, find that money and be ready to freeze it as soon as we are ready to move in. Finally, Sara believes that the three adults had something to do with the disappearance of DJ's mom Katie and the deaths of the Michaels. Exhaust every resource to prove that theory right or wrong. I want those boys safe and in protection within ninety-six hours at most. Once we have them we will move in and take actions against the adults, and trust me, they will rue the day they ever messed with those two boys. Remember this case involves police corruption so Cory it is up to you to utilize your diplomatic immunity under the charter of Clan Short, contact Ambassador Sarek if you think it will help. We are stepping on ice with heavy feet. Tread lightly. If there aren't any questions let get moving!"

Before anyone had a chance to move, Timmy crossed his arms in front of his chest and spoke up saying, "Uncle Kelly, find a stinkin' map, Gran'ma is grumpy. Get to work or she won't let us have any brownies!"

The entire room was silent, and you could have heard an ant fart when Teri stopped dead in her tracks with her jaw hovering just inches from the floor. She looked at her grandson and calmly, almost inaudibly told him to come to her. Timmy slowly walked over to Teri, not sure of what was going to happen. When he got to her, he just stared at the floor. When he finally looked up at her, her face was like stone. He started to say something but she just cut him off. As he started to look back down to the floor she reached out (with lightning speed) and grabbed him into a big hug, then started to tickle him unmercifully. As she tortured the small wiggling boy he started to yell, "stop, Stop, STOP, please, I'm gonna pee!"

That remark made her let him go. Teri just smiled big and looked around the room as she said, "Does anyone else think I'm grumpy? Hmm? Good. I am so glad. Now MOVE IT!"

With that chaos erupted as everyone went their own ways to get their particular task underway. In a sense Command Central was born in the rec room. Cory was first on the job when he went to the con and hailed Rob Gunn.

"Rob," he began. "Cory here. We have had quite the evening and have a large amount of information to process and pass on to you."

"You have my attention," Rob answered.

"What we know now is this," Cory continued. "The boys are currently safe in Wendover, Utah. They were taken in by a young couple who are vowing to help them and us as well in getting them here safely. They have found out a great deal more about Colin, Steve, and Mary. I am downloading information as it is processed into your console. You should be seeing a stream of information coming in right now."

"Yes Cory, I see it right now," Rob said.

As Cory continued to fill Rob in everyone else was getting all of their information compiled. After the better part of two hours the Clan was satisfied that they had a good work underway in the case. Rob agreed to go and tail the boys and was leaving for Utah immediately. Admiral Morrow was sent a message detailing the progress and William was perched on the roof of Russ and Sara's home. Timmy was even trying to help by sending DJ good dreams.

After all was done Teri de-briefed everyone and got status reports from all involved. When she was satisfied that they had covered all bases everyone was sent to bed for a few hours of sleep. They would all have to get an early start in the morning to see what had transpired.

Before he headed off for bed, Cory went to talk to Teri. "Mom," he questioned? "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Of course you can, baby," she answered.

"Thanks for all of your help in this," Cory said as he gave Teri a big hug. "This is all so much sometimes," he continued as the tears began to well up in his eyes."

"I know, son," Teri stated as she rubbed his back. "You and Sean have been through so much, and you never cease to amaze me. You have taken on a load that most grown men couldn't handle, and I am proud of who you have become. I just don't want you to forget, even though you are an officer, a patriarch, and a father, you are still a little boy yourself."

"Moommmmmm," Cory groaned.

"I'm being serious here Cory," she continued. "You still haven't had a chance to grow up yourself. Your body is changing, and with it so are your emotions. Most men don't experience one-tenth of what you are going through before they are fully grown. You're having to deal with this and puberty all at the same time. Don't be afraid to continue letting your emotions show. It's actually something that tells me and Dan that you are ok. If you stopped showing them, I'd be very afraid. You still have my permission to be a boy. In fact, consider it an order. I don't want anything bad to happen to you, I don't know that Sean or myself could handle that again. Just remember, no matter what, you always have my support, my admiration, and my love without end."

As the two continued their embrace, they started to feel a little bit warmer as they noticed the faint glimmer of wings surround them, and feelings of hope and love washed over them.

"I love you both, and I will always protect you," Mikey whispered.

Gunn Residence, Dixon CA:

'Holy Toledo,' Rob thought as he scoured over the information that he had received from Cory. 'This is amazing; these kids are doing a better job on this investigation than the friggin FBI could.'

As Rob continued to read, he came across some interesting information regarding the disappearance of Katie and the deaths of Tanner's parents Dave and Michelle Michaels. Both reports were filed by the same officer, James Turner, James had been arrested, tried and convicted 3 months ago for dereliction of duty, filing false police reports, and attempted murder. As he looked closer at the documents he came to a startling conclusion. I don't think Katie is missing, I think she's dead and Colin, Steve, and Mary set all three incidents up so they could go ahead with their child porn plans. This is getting bigger by the minute. This was cold blooded, pre-meditated murder. Now I just have to prove it.

Rob gathered up all of his information and papers, made copies and packed his bags and got ready to leave. He was going to Wendover Utah. He would follow the boys himself.

'If they could murder before, those kids are in real danger if they figure out the kids are running away and know what is going on. They would kill them and make it look like an accident involving runaways to cover their own asses. What kind of scum am I dealing with here?'

After everything was packed, the console was hidden, and the house was secure, Rob hit the road. As he made his way toward the highway he called Jason on the secure line.

"Captain," he said. "I am going to Utah to protect the boys. This is going to get very ugly. I have new information that is going to cause a great deal of stink when it comes to light. Can we meet quickly before I leave so I can share this with you?"

"Absolutely," Jason exclaimed. "Meet me at the turnoff to the causeway on I-80. I'll be in my unmarked truck in the pull-off."

"Understood sir, Gunn out."

As Captain Jason Morrow sped down the highway with lights flashing but no siren he thought to himself; *'I hope Rob knows what he is doing. We need to put a lid on this thing quickly, and if we can close some other cases in the process, that would be even better. I don't want to see anything happen to those boys. I could never forgive myself if something bad happened. I swore to protect and serve, and by God, that's what I'm going to do.'*

When the two men met, Rob handed Jason an envelope with all of the copies he made. Jason opened it up and read for nearly ten minutes in silence before looking at Rob and saying, "Oh my God. I knew this was going to be bad, I just didn't expect it to be like this. Do you think we can prove it? If you can, it's the needle for all of them. If my uncle gets a hold of them the needle will look like a vacation. This is bad, Rob, very bad. Go, get out of here. I've got your back and I am going to pass this on to my uncle. Be safe, don't end up dead."

The two men shook hands and Rob left.

McAlister Residence, Dixon, CA:

Colin, Steve and Mary were all discussing the information they had uncovered during the day in hopes of getting a lead on the boys as well when the phone rang.

"Hello," Colin answered.

"Colin, it's Chad," the caller replied. "I've got some information for you."

"Chad, good to hear from ya buddy," Colin said. "Where've ya been?"

"I've been undercover on a meth ring in Truckee," he answered. "You're never going to believe who I saw today, Colin. Your kid and another kid I've never seen before went into a convenience store I was staking out. Then after a few minutes they came back out and got into a Chevy Avalanche with a couple of adults. Seeing as I was on duty, I ran the plates to see if I needed to stop them for my case. I figured I'd give you a call and let you know before I went after them."

"You did great, buddy," Colin said. "I owe you on this one. The boys ran away the other day after we had an altercation. I need to get to them and quick. You said you ran the plates, can you give me the information? By the way, we have a new contact to send to in Russia. Your next check is ready for you, along with a bonus for this info."

As Colin wrote down the information he got a big smile on his face, thanked his friend and hung up.

"Get packed," Colin said to Steve and Mary. "We're going to Utah."

"Utah," Steve spat. "Why in God's name are we going to Utah?"

"Cause that's where the boys are headed," Steve replied. "That was our buddy Chad from the bureau, the one supplying us with the other pictures and videos I showed you. He saw the kids and found out where they are heading. I'll explain on the way. Like I said, we're going to Utah."

TO BE CONTINUED ...

Author's Notes:

Well another one in the book so to speak. I had a lot of fun once I got over the writers block.

The Boys are safe for now. Who knows what they'll get into next.

I took a couple of surprising turns and now the story is writing itself, or is it Mikey???

Thanks as always to The Story Lover, my editor. You have made life easier, and fun and definitely more grammatically correct =) My friend, all of your hard work to help bring this story to the readers is greatly appreciated. Thank you so much..

To Jeff: Artwork is a pain in the butt, huh. Thanks for what you said to me the other night. You really helped me out when I was in doubt. I almost scrapped the whole thing!

AC & Greybear, You guys are great, thanks for being who you are

Logan and Coby ... What can I say. I love you guys. This one's for you!!! Oh and thanks so much for the birthday cake. The candles were a little much don't you think? (One complete set from each boy and one from the dog. The cake had 105 candles on it and I almost developed emphysema trying to blow them out. A couple more seconds and I would have required the assistance of our local fire department) . 8-)~

Until next time; The Answers Lie Beyond The Pain

-GunRunner

Editor's Notes:

I just wanted to say thanks to GunRunner for letting me come along on this wonderful ride he is taking us on. It has been fun seeing what his fertile mind comes up with next.

Logan and Coby great big hugs to you for all you have gone through. Hang in their life will get better as long as you keep Uncle Rob around J .

Just to let the readers know Editors don't always know what the authors have up their sleeves. After reading Chapter Three I was going to send Rob an e-mail suggesting using Duke or William to keep an eye on DJ and Tanner but I still had to read Chapter 35 of Memories by ACFan first, and lo and behold there it was.

-The Story Lover

AC & Greybear's Corner:

I just wanted to add my two cents worth to this chapter. This is a wonderfully written story and I'm proud to host this story on The Annex. It shuld be interesting to see what Rob has in store next for these two young men.

Logan and Coby - great big HUGS to both of you for everything that you have had to endure. I know for a fact that life will get better. And while you're at it, keep your Uncle Rob on his toes for me. I Love You both.

Until next time, Live Long and Prosper,

-Greybear

CHAPTER 5: AND SO IT GOES . . .

The next morning as they began to wake up, DJ and Tanner both looked around at the unfamiliar surroundings; for a quick moment they were confused as to where they were.

"Tanner," DJ said quietly. "Where are we?"

Tanner looked around for second before the previous day's events came back to him and replied, "Russ and Sara's house."

"Oh yeah," DJ said sheepishly. "For a moment there I thought this was all a dream."

"Nope, not a dream babe," Tanner said as he wrapped his arms around DJ in a warm embrace.

As they lay like that for a few minutes, it dawned on the two boys that they both had bladder issues in need of immediate attention. "I gotta pee," Tanner stated.

"Right behind you," was the quick response.

The two young boys jumped out of bed and started a quick trot to the bathroom to take care of their problem. As they made the turn into the hallway both boys ran straight into Russ, sending him onto his butt. However, they never missed a step as they just jumped over him and continued on their way with a quick "sorry" thrown behind them. The boys made it to the commode just in time. As the sound of their release echoed throughout the bathroom, DJ said, "This has got to be one of the best feelings in the world. I feel so much better after a morning pee."

"Well I can think of other things that feel better," Tanner remarked, causing DJ to turn scarlet red. "But I have to agree, a good morning pee is so refreshing."

After they had finished the urgent business at hand, the boys decided it would be a good time to take another shower and clean the fog out of their heads before they sat down with Russ and Sara to discuss their fate. DJ made a quick exit to go to the bedroom and get their clothes for the day. As he came out of the bedroom, Russ and Sara were making their way to the kitchen.

"Good morning there, Crash." Sara said.

"Crash?" DJ said bewilderedly.

"Yeah, I called you crash," Sara quipped. "My poor little Russ here is going to have a big bruise on his cute little rear end from you two bash brothers knocking him over."

With that Russ took the opportunity to ham it up by groaning and grabbing his butt in mock agony.

"Well I don't know about cute, nor do I want to, and it sure ain't little," DJ teased. "But I am sorry for knocking you over, but it was an emergency ... We HAD to pee."

"Far be it from me to stand in the way of a man with a full bladder," Russ giggled.

"Are you squirts hungry?" Sara asked.

DJ was about to say no but his growling stomach told the truth for him. "A little bit I guess," DJ meekly replied.

"A little bit!" Sara scoffed. "If that growl was just a little bit, we'd need ear plugs if you were really hungry! Why don't you guys go and get cleaned up while Russ and I make a mess of bacon, eggs, and hash browns, how does that sound?"

"You said the magic word. Bacon," DJ said. "We'll be out in a few minutes."

With that DJ scrambled as fast as he could back to the bathroom so they could get cleaned up. He didn't want to miss a breakfast like that one.

As the boys really were quite hungry, they didn't waste much time playing around in the shower, but just got down to the business of getting clean.

As Tanner was lathering his hair, he looked at DJ and said, "Did you have any dreams last night?"

"Yeah," DJ replied. "I'm not quite sure what to think, but I think that Timmy and I can talk to each other in our dreams. He told me that his eagle, William, would be here waiting for us and is telling him where we are so they can help us. He also told me not to worry, that we were going to be safe and happy. I feel weird about this, but good too. It's almost like we are part of the same whole. Like maybe he is my conscience. Or he is like a guide to me. All I know is that he is worried about you and me and he is trying to help us to get to safety. And as far as that goes, I thought we were safe. But Timmy told me in my dream that my dad is out of the hospital and he is looking for us. That scares me, but Timmy says not to worry. There are people that are looking for him and don't want him to get a hold of us. You see ... I think I am going crazy in the head."

"No you're not." Tanner said vehemently. "I believe in things like this, Deej. If you say that Timmy is trying to help us, then I believe it. You can't lie about things like that. We are going to be safe. You and I are never going to go back to that kind of situation again. I won't let them make us. Timmy won't let them make us. Russ and Sara won't let them make us. We have people that are on our side, and we have to let them help us. I want for us to be ok just as much as you do, but I have also figured out that we are going to need help to get where we need to be. *You Are Not Crazy!* Maybe you and Timmy have some kind of ESP or something. There is an easy explanation for this, but we don't need to worry about that right now. What we do need to worry about is getting the shampoo out of our hair, getting dried off, putting on clothes, and getting to that bacon."

DJ just wrapped his arms around Tanner and cried. "I love you so much, and I don't know what I'd do with out you," he choked out. "Please forgive me for being such a spazmo."

"There is nothing to forgive," Tanner softly said. "We all have to be a spazmo some of the time. But no matter what, we will always be together, and I wouldn't have you any other way. I love you for who you are, and that means every last bit of you."

After the boys had dried off and gotten dressed, they cleaned up the bathroom and made their way to the kitchen which was easy to find. All they had to do was follow their noses to the smell of the bacon and they were there.

As the group gathered around the table to begin eating DJ folded his hands and began to pray. As his heartfelt words echoed throughout the kitchen everyone bowed their heads and reverently listened as he said; *"Our Dear Heavenly Father. We bow our heads in humble gratitude for all thy gifts and blessings that we have received. Father, we are so grateful to feel the love that thou hast for us. We ask that You might bless this food, that it will strengthen and nourish our bodies, that we might have the strength to do thy will. Father I also ask a blessing upon Russ and Sara for taking us in and helping us when we were most in need. I know Father that You sent them to us. Father I also ask you to bless Tanner. Please keep him in Your spirit. Father, I also pray for safety to all that we care for. Please help us to get to Des Moines and keep us safe from harm. This we pray in Jesus name, Amen."*

As everyone said the final amen, there was not a dry eye at the table. After another moment of silence, Russ spoke up and said, "DJ that was beautiful. We are honored to be a part of your prayers. You both have touched our hearts and there is nothing that we wouldn't do to help you. We will try to ensure that you get to Des Moines, and we will always be there for you should you need us. Now ... Dig in!"

After everyone had been served, Sara began the conversation by saying; "OK boys, I have done a little bit of research for you guys. First thing I did was find out bus and train routes to get you to Des Moines. The next thing I did was find out more about Teri Short and look into something called the Safe Haven Act which I think will benefit you. Finally I made inquiries about getting you guys a cell phone. The reason for that is simple. I want you to have a phone, so if there is an emergency you will have a quick way to get a hold of us. We will also program the number for Teri Short, which I have found for you through directory assistance. Russ and I will pay for the phone and the service and there will be no argument to that. What I have found for transportation is this. Greyhound seems to be the best option. There is a bus that leaves daily at 8:30 a.m. and again at 8:40 p.m. I think the later one is the best option as there are not as many lay-overs. I don't want you two sitting alone in a bus depot for long periods of time as it might attract attention from the wrong kinds of people. If you would like, I can get you tickets for the one that leaves this evening. It will get you into Iowa in the early evening the next day. If you would like to stay longer here, you are more than welcome. The bus is a daily route. Next, as for Ms. Short; I have done as much research as I can find about her and find that you both were absolutely correct in your assumptions. She has helped many boys in similar situations to you and is the leading expert on the Safe Haven act in the country. The act allows her to remove a child from a bad situation in an instant and can place them in the custody of the Federation which will prevent Earth authorities from claiming jurisdiction. That means plainly if she places you under Safe Haven protection, your parents will not be able to touch you. With that said, I leave the floor open for discussion."

"Well," Tanner started. "With no offense intended, I think that we should try to get on the bus leaving tonight. The sooner we get to Iowa, the sooner we will know whether or not we need to look elsewhere."

"You won't ever have to look elsewhere, guys," Russ interjected. "You always have here to come back to."

With tears in his eyes Tanner hugged Russ and thanked him and Sara both for all that they have done. He then continue by saying; "Sara, I can't believe how much research you did in such a short amount of time. You must have stayed up all night long trying to come up with all of that stuff. As for what you

said about the Safe Haven act, I have heard a few bits and pieces about it before, and the way that you present it makes it sound like a good possibility for us. Now the cell phone I know you said is not up for discussion, so I will just say thank you and not try to argue about it."

DJ continued the conversation when he remarked that he was in total agreement with Tanner. "Don't get me wrong," He began. "I like it here and I know that I for one feel safe and loved here, so please don't think we are being ungrateful for leaving so soon. I just want to put some distance between me and Colin. I want to put that son-of-a-bitch behind bars for what he did to me and to Tanner. I'm not quite sure that I can forgive him for trying to molest me in front of Tanner, or for exploiting either one of us. He's a cop and he's worse than some of the criminals he arrests. What a hypocrite."

"No, trust me, we don't think you are being ungrateful for leaving so soon," Russ began. "Actually, I think that the two of you are making adult decisions and doing it in a very appropriate manner based on the facts that you have. You two are to be commended for your resiliency and your ability to look a problem face on and work to find a good solution. There are many adults in this world that could learn a lesson from your example. We just want to ensure that your decision is going to keep you safe. We are in this with you all the way now. Just remember ... Help is only a phone call away, anytime you need us, day or night. You both are a part of our lives, and there is no way you can get around that, even if you wanted to. Now if you both are up to it, Sara and I would like to take you into town to pick up a cell phone, buy your bus tickets, and also get you some new clothes. All of which we are paying for, and there will be no arguments."

DJ opened his mouth to say something when Sara covered it for him and said, "No arguments, and I mean it!"

With that said, the crew helped each other clean up the dishes, and then they headed for the truck. As they drove around through town the boys were kind of silent so Russ asked, "What's up guys, cats got your tongue?"

"Just thinking about the future," Tanner said solemnly.

"Well the future hasn't happened yet kiddo," Russ retorted. "So don't worry about it. The words of your book haven't been written yet. The choices you make coupled with the actions you take and the love you have for each other will write your story for you. As long as you do things based on facts and act out of love, not anger or hate, your story, or your future, will be bright. If you spend too much time dwelling on what might happen, you'll miss out on what does happen."

After that exchange they pulled up to the Greyhound Bus Depot and went inside. When their turn in line came up Russ stepped forward and told the attendant, "I would like to purchase two one way tickets to Des Moines, Iowa for my little brothers here."

"Will they be traveling alone," she asked.

"Yes Ma'am," Russ replied. "Summer vacation is over and it's time for them to go home and start the new school year. Although I wouldn't mind keeping them around, it was more fun with them this time since they've grown up a bit. My how the years go by," he said which elicited a small giggle from the attendant.

"I have a couple of younger brothers myself," the attendant stated. "It would be fun to have them visit once in a while. It gets lonely with no family around. That will be one hundred seventy two dollars for the tickets."

Just then the man behind them farted rather loudly which brought the boys to another round of giggles. Nothing like a good fart to get a boy laughing. Even Russ had a hard time keeping his composure until Sara elbowed him in the ribs.

Russ the handed the money to the attendant and once they had the change and the tickets they left. After the bus depot they headed to the mall where they got a new cell phone pre-paid with twenty-five hundred minutes and two new outfits a piece. When they were done with the shopping DJ and Tanner treated Russ and Sara to lunch at a Mexican restaurant and they headed for home to get rested up and packed for their next journey.

When they got to the house, the boys decided they wanted to take a little nap so they went to the bedroom to sleep and do whatever it is that two boys do, and the adults went into the den to make a few necessary phone calls. Sara picked up the phone and dialed the number to Teri Short's home. After two rings the call was answered, "Short residence, Thomas speaking."

"Hello Thomas," Sara replied. "This is Sara Wagner; may I please speak with Teri?"

"Yes Ma'am," He answered. "Just one moment please."

After a brief wait Teri finally came to the phone and greeted Sara by saying, "Sorry that took so long, but my young grandson just got out of the pool and was doing his impersonation of a an old Ray Stevens song through my living room before I finally tackled him with a towel and sent him to see his Daddy."

"Now there's a mental image I won't soon forget," Sara laughed. "Seriously though, I wanted to give you an update to the situation while Tanner and DJ are taking a nap."

"I am all ears."

"Well," Sara began. "First thing is first, I am going to put you on the speaker phone so Russ, my fiancé, can join in on this one."

After the mutual pleasantries were exchanged Sara continued by saying, "We have worked it out with the boys so they will be leaving tonight on the 8:40 Greyhound. This particular route worked out better as it didn't have as long of stops and it only has one lay-over in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The stops in route to Des Moines are all on the I-80 corridor. The will have brief stops for passenger pick up and drop off in Salt Lake City, Evanston, Rock Springs, Rawlins, Laramie, then they reach Cheyenne. At Cheyenne they will have to transfer buses after a two-and-a-half hour lay-over before continuing on. Their next stops will be in Sydney, Kearny, Lincoln, and Omaha before they reach Des Moines. We also bought them a cellular phone pre-paid with twenty-five hundred minutes and programmed our phone number as well as yours. They think we got your phone number from directory assistance, so they are none the wiser about our conversations. I told them that if they ran into any trouble that they should call one of us."

Russ interjected with his thoughts when he said, "Teri, I have explained to the boys, and I think that they understand, that they don't have to go at this alone. I even told them that I'd bet if they called you right now, you'd find a way to get them, but they want to do this. I think it is their own way of finding some independence and building the strength in each other that they will no doubt need in their lives if they are to survive the stigma of being gay. I don't want to do anything that might harm their psyche. I am counting on you to help guide them down a path where they will find love and peace. I am so angry for what the adults in their lives have done to them. If I could right the wrongs I would, but since that is impossible, the best I can do is help them. Whether or not they are doing the right thing right now is irrelevant. They have made a choice that no person could change even if they wanted to. These two boys have strength beyond measure and are as hard headed as the day is long. My main concern is that they get there without harm, and secondly that the people responsible for their pain are brought to justice, and honestly, right now, my idea of justice is a bullet. Is this something that you are willing to take on, because if your not, I will find something else for them, I won't let them go down the same path as my little brother. Tanner and DJ need love and support, caring and understanding, and they also need closure on the recent chapters of their lives. I will now step off of my soapbox and I am sorry for ranting."

"No apologies are needed Russ," Teri stated. "It is plain to me that you care for these boys, and believe me, that care will make a big impact in their lives. I will now try to answer your questions. First of all, not only am I willing to take this on, but I have already taken the appropriate measures to ensure that they have the exact environment that they need. With my tribe here all you have to do is sneeze and you have the support of at least a dozen people before you can wipe your nose. As for the justice part, trust me, believe me, it WILL be handled. There is much more to this situation than you know right now, and by the time we are finished with those three pieces of trash, Tanner and DJ will NEVER have to worry about them ever again. I promise you that with all that are sacred to me. Now let me fill you in on some of the things that we are doing on this end. I know you were a little freaked out about your encounter with your brother yesterday. Sara has no doubt filled you in on that. I also know that she has explained to you about Timmy and his eagle, William. Just so you know, William is an Indian spirit guide, and he can communicate through my grandson. For instance, right now I can tell you that you live in a white home with green trim. Your truck is a Blue Chevy Avalanche and it is parked on the right side of your driveway if you are facing the house. It is partly cloudy at your house, the wind is from the southeast at 10.2 miles per hour, and the temperature is 86 degrees. The rose bush by your front door has six blooms on it and the big yellow one needs to be picked. There are two rocks on your front step and you didn't take in your newspaper this morning. Your next door neighbor to the east has his green Cadillac parked halfway in his garage, your neighbor to the west just left in her white Toyota Camry."

"How in God's name do you know all of this?" Russ inquired.

"If you go outside," Teri began, "you will see on the eve of your roof a large American Bald Eagle. This is William. When he sees you he will screech three times. Two short screeches and one long one. He will then fly down onto your lawn, and will let you stroke his head as long as you are gentle."

A young voice cut in over Teri from the background. "Tell'em William's wantin' to take a bath! Can they turn on the sprinkler for him?"

Russ and Sara had to stifle chuckles as Teri commented "That was the streak, otherwise known as Timmy. I hope you don't mind bathing eagles in your yard; it seems that William is feeling comfortable there!"

"You gotta be kidding me," Russ and Sara both said in unison. "This I have to see."

"I'll wait for you to get back."

Russ and Sara went outside and even though they were told what to expect, they both jumped at the sound of William's screeches. As they were told, he flew down onto the lawn and let them stroke his head. William then stretched his wings out and flapped them a couple of time to show his beautiful feathers. Both Russ and Sara were lost in the sheer majesty of their guest.

As they walked back towards the house, Russ turned on the sprinkler system, and much to their delight they watched as the large bird played in the water. After William was done with his refreshing shower, he perched himself on the top of the maple tree in the font yard and began to preen himself.

Sara and Russ went back inside still amazed at what they had seen. "If I hadn't of seen it with my own eyes I wouldn't have believed it," Russ said as soon as they were back to the speakerphone. "That bird is amazing."

"William wants you to know that you have a salsa stain under your shirt pocket," Teri chuckled. "How unfair is this, y'all go out for Mexican and I get to eat Mac and cheese."

Russ looked down at his shirt, and sure enough there was a stain from the salsa. "Well now I've seen it all," he quipped

"So do you believe me then?" Teri asked.

"Yes we do," they answered.

"Good, I am glad we are over that hurdle," Teri continued. "Would you guys please do me the favor of calling me back after you have gotten the boys on the bus. In the mean time if either side comes up with any new information we should try to contact each other."

After they had said their goodbyes, Russ and Sara went into the kitchen to pack some food for the boys' journey, and Teri sprang into action.

Short Residence, Des Moines:

As soon as Teri had hung up the phone she went to the intercom and called everyone who was involved in the case to the rec room. Once everyone was assembled Teri began to share the information that she had just received.

"OK guys," She began. "The boys will be mobile as of 9:40 local time tonight. They will be traveling by Greyhound bus and will be stopping in numerous cities with one lay-over in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Russ and Sara have given the boys a cell phone and programmed this number into it should they run into an emergency. Don't worry, they have told the boys they looked it up for them in the directory assistance. They know nothing of our conversations. Their lay-over which is two and a half hours long will take place at 1:15 pm local time tomorrow, so if we have anyplace to go we need to be sure that this

phone is forwarded. We can't leave the line unattended. Now that I've had my say, what does anyone else have to add?"

Cory was the first to speak. "OK guys, Mom has done a great job as a liaison between here and Utah. Now we need to take control of this. Things could happen very quickly one way or the other. Timmy has already sent the warning that Colin is out of the hospital and looking for him. So first things first, we need to make a plan and execute it, logically. Priority one is for us to make sense of all the information that we have so far. Once we have it all together, we need to get the information to Rob Gunn. Does anyone have any objections with us having him beamed here? It will give him the chance to put everything together and then we can beam him back to where ever he needs to be for the boys. I know he has been driving non-stop since last night, and I wouldn't doubt that he is already in Utah, but I think he needs to be in Cheyenne where the boys' will have that long layover."

"I think you have a good idea," Aaron fired back. "Sometimes that brain of your amazes me. Do you think you can get the *Enterprise* to help with that one?"

"I don't think it will be a problem," Cory replied. "The Captain said the ship's resources are at our disposal. But nonetheless I will contact him momentarily to gain the required permissions. As a matter of fact, Aaron, while I go do that, would you please take over this meeting?"

"I would be happy too, Cory."

While Cory went to the console to contact the ship Aaron continued the meeting of the minds. "OK everyone, while Cory is on the con, we need to look at everything else we have gathered. Let's put everything into categories on the table here. I want all information about Colin here. Steve and Mary need to be here. Be sure the tracking of their financials is in each of their respective piles. I want all information that has been gathered about Russ and Sara right here. Intelligence regarding the missing trust fund money right here please. School records for the boys in this pile right here. I want a pile each for the files on the deaths of Tanners Parents, and also for the disappearance of DJ's mom. Find out what those people were all about. I need files regarding the pictures that were sent to Russia. If I have forgotten anything, make a pile for it too. If Cory gets everything set up we need to be ready to brief Rob Gunn in a short amount of time. Let's show him the kind of work Clan Short does. Let's Move!"

When Cory came back from his conversation with Captain Kirk he said, "The Captain is more than willing to beam Rob here, he can even beam Rob's car! Now all I have to do is get in contact with him and get it set up. Is everyone ready for him to come here?"

Everyone nodded in the affirmative so Cory called Rob's cell phone. After a few rings Rob answered the phone and Cory sprang into action. "Rob, this is Cory."

"Cory," Rob answered. "I am glad to hear from you. As a matter of fact I was just about to contact you. I have some information that you might not be aware of."

"Try me," Cory said.

"Colin, Steve and Mary are on their way to Utah, and as my tracking device shows they should make it to Wendover late tonight. I had a small device place on all of their cars so I could tack their movements. I am not sure how they found out where they boys are, but they are most definitely headed for here."

"Son of a" Cory yelled. "Hold on Rob." Cory then turned to the clan who were all staring at him from his outburst and were equally shocked when he said to them, "Would anyone care to figure out how in the hell Colin, Steve, and Mary figured out where the boys are? They appear to be on their way to Utah. They have been tracked as headed east on I-80. I want a team to get on this RIGHT NOW! Now we also need to make sure that Russ and Sara are going to be safe. MOVE!"

Cory then returned his attention to Rob. "I'm not sure about this but now we have many more problems on our hands. Where are you right now?"

"I am in Wendover at the Comfort Inn," Rob replied.

"Rob I have an idea, and I have already gotten clearance for it, but first I need to tell you that the boys will be on a Greyhound bus leaving Wendover at 8:40 this evening."

"If they leave then, Colin, Steve, and Mary will miss them by a couple of hours."

"Good," Cory began. "Do you feel comfortable with leaving Wendover? The reason I ask is this. The boys will have many short stops along the way. The one place where I see a possible breach in security for them is when they have a two and a half hour layover in Cheyenne Wyoming. They have to transfer busses there. I don't think that the trio will be able to catch up to them until then, and that is IF the figure out which way to go. We are going to try and make them run into a dead end when they reach Wendover."

"I am not opposed to leaving Wendover, Cory," Rob began. "But Cheyenne is 540 miles from here. I have driven all night long and need to doze for a little while. So with that in mind, I need to figure out a way to get to Cheyenne early in the morning."

"That is where my idea kicks in," Cory said. "I have already gotten clearance from my Commanding Officer aboard the *Enterprise* to have you and your vehicle transported to our home in Des Moines. We can meet together here and go over all of the intelligence that we have, feed you some dinner, and give you a bed to sleep in. In the morning, we can go over any new developments eat breakfast, and then beam you to an undisclosed location in Cheyenne. If you are willing that is."

"Before I say yes," Rob began. "I need to know if you feel comfortable with my leaving Wendover. Do you feel that the boys are in safe hands with Russ and Sara? Finally, are you sure you have enough food to feed me, I'm starving? Cheeto's and Mountain Dew just don't cut the mustard."

"Yes, yes, and yes," Cory giggled. "If you are willing then, here is what you will need to do. First after you check out of your room you will need to drive your car to an area where you won't attract attention. Once there, use your communicator and contact the *Enterprise*. Tell them who you are and that you are prepared to beam up. It will only take a quick second after the beam starts that you will be parked in my garage, ok?"

"If you say so Cory," Rob stuttered. "I trust you on that one. I should arrive within the half hour; does that sound ok to you?"

"That is perfect Rob," Cory stated. "We will see you shortly."

Once they hung up Rob got all of his things together and went down to the desk to check out. After he had paid his bill he went out to his car and drove around the corner to a parking garage. He drove to a deserted level and pulled out his communicator.

"Detective Gunn to *Enterprise* ."

"Enterprise, Kirk here. I have been expecting your transmission Detective. Are you prepared to beam to Clan Short Headquarters?"

"Yes Captain, I am in a secure location and am prepared, well as prepared as I can be, to beam. On another note Captain, thank you for your assistance in this matter. I appreciate it."

"The pleasure is all mine detective. I hope you are prepared for the shock of your life when you see these boys in action. They all continue to surprise me daily. Prepare to beam, Kirk out."

A split second later Rob found himself in unfamiliar surroundings - the garage of Teri Short's home looking right at Cory Short. He got out of the car and shook hands with his young partner and made his way into the house.

After Rob was introduced to everyone in person they got right to work. As they rifles through the mounds of information that the clan had gathered, Helen brought out a plate of sandwiches and said, "This should hold y'all over until I can get dinner finished. Rob, do you like lasagna?"

"Miss Helen," Rob replied. "If it has pasta, cheese, or garlic in any form it is a gift from heaven. I am Italian and would never turn down lasagna, and I look forward to trying yours."

"Helen," Cory asked. "Do you think we have enough food to feed Rob here, he wasn't sure?"

Rob turned beet red as Helen replied, "Detective, if I can fed this clan, your scrawny rear end should be no problem to fill, but just in case, I'll make and extra pan."

Rob then looked at Cory and shot him an I'm gonna get you back for that one look.

As they continued to go through the information, each one of the clan came forward and presented their findings to Rob. He was quickly getting to information overload when a document caught his attention. "Wait; let me take a look at that," he said. I remember this case. It was a couple of years ago. Colin worked this case as a joint task with both Yolo and Solano County sheriffs departments. A woman was burned beyond recognition and thrown into the glory hole at Lake Berryessa."

"What's a glory hole," Sean asked?

"It's a whirlpool device that sucks the water down into the hydro-electric turbines at Monticello Power Plant for PG&E," Russ replied. "They were able to only piece bits of the body back together, but the one big discovery was the intact skull. No, it can't be. Caleb, can you access the California DCI database and pull up the microfiche files on this case, specifically the photos and dental records related to the skull, then if you can pull up the dental records for Katie McAllister, date of birth 17, March 1963?"

"Yes sir, I can," Caleb replied.

"Look here at this image," Rob almost shouted. "The District Attorney for Dixon signed off that there was no available match to the dental records and placed the case in the cold file as unsolvable due to insufficient evidence. Just the fact that he had anything to do with this at all raises a red flag to me."

Just then Caleb said, "I've got them both. Do you want me to split the screen so we can look at them side by side?"

"Yes please," Rob answered. "Oh my God! Look at that filing on the second bicuspid and the zigzag crack on the number 1 wisdom tooth. This is Katie. That son of a bitch!"

Suddenly Rob turned white as a ghost and said, "I think I am going to be sick."

Cory just looked at him and said, "That way," as he pointed towards the bathroom.

Rob got up and ran to the bathroom. In his absence Noah came to Cory and said, "Look at this, Cory." "Katie went missing just 3 days after the first large lump sum was distributed to Colin. I am guessing that she caught him and figured out what was going on so he had to get rid of her."

"I'll be damned," Cory said.

Just then Kelly came running over saying, "Katie had filed for a legal separation the day before she went missing and she had also filed a report with DCFS regarding abuse to DJ."

"Why didn't anyone catch on to that," Cory asked incredulously?

"Everything was signed off by the D.A.," Kelly replied.

When Rob finally re-joined them he was filled in on what else they had found. "We got him," Rob said triumphantly. "We got all we need to fry his behind."

Before dinner was served Rob and the clan had managed to prove that Colin had killed Katie. That he, Steve, and Mary had orchestrated the deaths of the Michael's. They had found all of Tanners trust fund money and put a freeze on it. They had also been able to trace where some of the pictures had gone to, but thus far were unable to counter that particular aspect of the investigation.

As they sat down to a dinner of lasagna, salad, homemade garlic bread and red wine Rob told them this; "Never in all my years of law enforcement have I seen an investigation turn so much up. You have all outdone yourselves. I am so proud to be associated with each one of you. I am absolutely astonished at the work that you have done. Even though you are young, you have proven yourselves to be the finest of investigators. You should each be proud of your accomplishments in this. With God's grace, tomorrow evening we will have the boys here and safe, and then I can move forward with the prosecution of one of the worst groups of criminal minds I have ever seen. Thank you all so much for what you have done."

"Thank you as well Rob," Teri began. "Your help in this is equally important to what we have to do. Rest assured that you have the backing of Starfleet and the Federation on your prosecution of these three pieces of trash. When all this is said and done, I would like to talk to you more about some different job opportunities."

"While I know that you want to get these guys Rob," Cory began. "I think it might be appropriate to look at other avenues in their prosecution. Specifically, I would like to investigate the possible outcomes should they be tried under a Vulcan Flag. I am not saying no to you going forward, I am just saying that we need to keep our options open. Vulcan Law and the Clan Charter have a jurisdiction in this case that surpasses that of Teran Law. We might be able to accomplish more from that avenue."

"Cory," Rob answered. "I don't care who gets them as long as they get got!"

After the dinner and desert were all done, Rob made a call to Jason to fill him in on what was going on. He was more than pleased to hear that they were going to be able to close those cases, and he was ecstatic to hear that the boys would most likely be in safe hands within a matter of hours.

Cory also prepared a report for Admiral Morrow, and sent it on to him. He was quite sure he would receive a reply as soon as it was read.

After all was said and done, Rob and the Clan retired for the evening. Proud of what they had accomplished, yet still worried about what was to come.

7:00 p.m., the previous evening, Colin McAlister's residence:

"You know what," Colin began. "Hold that thought just a minute. I have a better idea. Let's get some sleep first and leave in the morning. I can call a contact of mine who lives in the Wendover area and give him this information. He can trail them and see if they are making any movements. If we get some sleep tonight we can get a fresh start in the morning. There is no sense in us busting our balls to get there in the middle of the night."

"I agree," Steve replied. "I for one would like to know a little more about what we are getting into. If you can have your man do some recon for us we can make a better plan of how we are going to get them back here. We still need to let them think that they are in control."

After a restful nights sleep Colin woke with a sense of purpose and a plan. He called his friend, Jacob Thomas in Wendover and filled him in.

"Jacob, its Colin McAllister, How are you," He began.

"Colin, ya ole' salty dog," Jacob replied. "How in the heck have you been?"

"Not too bad my friend," he answered. "Listen the reason for my call is two fold. First I was wondering if you would do a little undercover work for me?"

"Sure thing Colin, I'd be glad to. Haven't been doing much here lately. What do you need?"

"I need you to stake out a house and fill me in on what is going on there. Follow them and keep your distance. I need to know what they are doing with the kids they have with them."

"I can do that," Jacob replied.

"Good," Colin said. "Here is the information."

When he had finished giving Jacob all of the particulars he said, "Oh and by the way. This is worth thirty thousand dollars if you do it right and keep out of sight."

"I've got you covered my friend," Jacob replied. "I will call you as soon as I have something."

After that Colin went to pick up Steve and Mary to hit the road towards Utah.

As they traveled the three talked about ideas to bring the boys back without drawing unnecessary attention. They also talked about the new contact in Russia that had offered them a 7 figure payoff for more pictures and videos of the boys.

They were nearing Lovelock, Nevada when Colin's cell phone rang.

"Colin, its Jacob."

"Have you got something for me," Colin asked?

"You bet, Jacob replied. "I followed the adults and kids to the Greyhound Bus Depot. They bought the boys 2 one way tickets to Des Moines, Iowa."

"Des Moines," Colin wondered out loud. "What in the heck is in Iowa other than corn? What time does the bus leave?"

"It leaves at 8:40 tonight," Jacob answered.

"Damn," Colin said. "I can't get there that quick. Can you give me the route and its stops and lay-overs?"

As Jacob gave Colin the information he was writing it down and devising a plan to go to Cheyenne, Wyoming.

"Thanks buddy," Colin said. Keep an eye out still and let me know if anything else comes up."

After they hung up Colin told Steve and Mary what he knew, and both were equally surprised at the Iowa twist. "We can catch up to them at Cheyenne, Wyoming. They have a long lay-over there. We should have the boys back by lunch time tomorrow. We need to make some miles go behind us. Let's all take shifts and only stop when we have to. When we stop we will grab snacks, gas up and go to the can. Other than that, no stops, agreed?"

With that they put the pedal to the metal and headed for Wonderful Wyoming.

Russ and Sara's Home, one hour before departure:

The boys finally had everything packed and were ready to go. As they loaded up the truck to go to the bus station both were holding back tears.

"You don't have to go you know," Russ said.

"Yes we do Russ," Tanner said. "You know that."

"Well then," Russ shot back. "You are welcome to come back anytime."

Both boys at those words just wrapped themselves in a four way hug with their rescuers. "Thank you both so much for everything," DJ said. "We both love you."

After they had all had a chance to share their feelings they got in the truck and headed for the depot. They got there just in time for the bus to start loading the luggage. After they had put their bags underneath Russ went to the driver and introduced the boys by saying, "Sir, my little brothers are going back home to Des Moines and have never traveled alone like this before. Could you please take good care of them for me?"

"What is this, Romper Room," The driver joked. "My name is Charlie and I will be your driver until Cheyenne, Wyoming. I will be happy to take care of you guys. You remind me of my grandsons. Why don't you take a seat in the back with the other little boys who are traveling by themselves? Maybe you guys could become friends. They are going to Des Moines as well and they seem scared and lonely."

So after a few more tears and hugs, Tanner and DJ boarded the bus for the unknown. At least Charlie the driver seemed nice.

As the bus pulled away the boys waved to Russ and Sara until they were out of sight.

After they could no longer see them, the boys walked to the back of the bus and there they saw two boys who looked to be about eight to ten years old. The older one was about four feet 6 inches and had hair that looked almost white and you could see his blazing blue eyes. The younger one had almost black hair and the same eyes and looked to be about four foot three.

As soon as they got close to the boys DJ said, "Hi, I'm DJ and this is Tanner. Can we sit with you?"

The oldest boy said, "I'm Toby and this is my little brother Beau. We'd like it if you sat here. It's been lonely."

The boys sat down and began talking to each other and where they were going. Toby said, "Our mama sent us away to find our relatives in Iowa. We've never met them before but mama said she couldn't take care of us anymore and the best she could do is buy a bus ticket for us. She told us if we couldn't find our great aunt that we should just go to an orphanage."

"What about your dad," Tanner asked?

"He killed himself three months ago," Beau said as the tears welled up in his big eyes. "Mama has the cancer and she can't take care of us. I am so scared. Toby is all I have left. We don't have anymore money and we are getting hungry, and it's scary out here. Would you guys please be our friends?"

DJ just reached over to the small boy and pulled him into a hug. "From here until forever, we will be your friends."

Beau just smiled as his stomach growled.

After the grumble was over Tanner reached into the sack that Sara had prepared for them and shared the dinner she had made with their two younger friends. As they continue to talk Tanner asked, "So how old are you guys?"

"I'm twelve and Beau is ten," Toby replied.

"Wow," DJ said. "I thought you guys were like eight and nine years old."

"We didn't have much money so we didn't eat all that good, I think that's why we don't grow too well," Toby said. "Mama and Pop were really poor. I am not sure what we are going to do next. If this great aunt can't or won't help us, we are probably going to be split up."

"I promise you that we will help you. You two don't have to worry about being split up," DJ said.

"Nobody is gonna want a queer kid with a puny little brother to live with them," Toby squeaked. "I bet you won't even want to sit here now that you know I'm gay either. Thanks for the food. You can leave if you want to."

DJ just looked him right in the eye and said, "Why would I care if you are gay. Tanner and I are both gay. We're boyfriends. I said we'd help you and I mean it. You have nothing to worry about."

They boys continued their conversation well into the night. After they had told each other just about everything Beau said, "Do you think this Teri gal could help us too?"

"I don't even know yet if she'll help us, Tanner stated. "But I promise you this; I'll try to get her to help all four of us. If she can't then we'll find help together. We won't leave you guys. I promise."

"Pinky swear," Beau said as he extended his pinkies.

"Pinky swear," Tanner said as the rest of the boys all locked their pinkies together in a four way promise.

"Brothers," Toby asked?

"Brothers," all four replied.

Authors Notes: *Man that one was fun to write. Boys, you did great. Thank you soooooooooo much for your help. I think we have our readers totally captivated now.*

Hugs to all that have been there from day one. Y'all know just who you are. This one was for you!!

-Gun

Editor's notes: *Well are things going how you thought they would? Thanks to Coby and Logan for another great job from Rob. The integration with the Memories Cast is well done. Don't forget to e-mail Rob and let him know what you think; authors thrive on feedback.*

AC & Greybears Corner: *On my, what a chapter!! The Pups did one hell of a job is co-writing this chapter. Keep it up, Boys. I like the integration with both the Memories and Enterprise Tour casts. It's a first-rate job. Keep up the good work.*

Live long and Prosper,

-Greybear

CHAPTER 6: THE END OF THE ROAD

Saint Mikey;

Well you all didn't think I could just drop two more kids on you with out popping in and giving you an idea as to what's up did you? Yup, it's me, Mikey. Sometimes being a Saint can be hard work. Toby and Beau were destined to die at a very early age if Our Father hadn't stepped in to save them. As a matter of fact, if He hadn't told me to intervene when I did, they would be gone already. You see, when DJ and Tanner did the pinky swear and they all agreed to be brothers, they saved Toby and Beau's life. The two of them were just about ready to give up all hope and go out the same way that their father did.

The reason why this has been hard for me is tied up in multiple reasons. First of all, Our Father has a plan for these four boys, which I don't even understand. Secondly, for some reason, my vision regarding them seems to be cloudy (Maybe I should ask for glasses ...A four eyed Saint!) The third problem is where do I put them? I know that the logical answer (SPOCK!! Leave me ALONE! Get OUT of my head!) is to turn them over to my brothers, but I am worried that this is getting to be too much for them. Cory is really starting to be affected by all of the chaos in his life. The final reason this is so hard is also the driving reason behind why I can't fail, and why I must do everything in my heavenly powers to protect them. Our adversary (yeah, him ...The guy downstairs with the fire under his butt or is it in his butt?) wants to get at these boys really bad. Apparently he sees the plan that Our Father has for them, and doesn't want it to succeed. Which is typical, he never wants Our Fathers plans to succeed, but this one really has him all fired up (no pun intended.) So you see it's a dilemma of sorts. I cannot fail them. So for now, I must leave you. Something tells me that I am going to get busy here very quickly. Yup ...I gotta go. Peace be with you!

As the bus motored on through the night, the boys were getting used to each other and fast forming a bond that would never be able to be broken. With all of the time they had in front of them, coupled with the large amounts of sugar and caffeine they had digested there was no possibility for sleep, so instead they talked about their lives and who they were.

DJ stared in amazement momentarily at the two new boys who he had just promised he would be brothers to and decided he wanted to ask some questions. "Guys," he began. "I know it might not be easy

to talk about, but could you please tell us more about yourselves? I mean, if we are going to be brothers forever, we might as well know about each other, and not keep secrets

Beau and Toby stared deep into each others eyes. Communicating on a level that is usually only to be had from blood family, but DJ picked up on it and tried to communicate with them also; "Don't be afraid guys, we will keep our promise to you and nothing you can say or do will change that. I know that this seems weird and it is all happening fast, but you can trust us. We will not let you down."

Toby and Beau looked in astonishment at DJ and asked in unison, "How did you do that? You are the only other person in this world who can talk to us in our minds!"

"I don't know," DJ replied. "I seem to have come across this little gift in the last few days. I don't know what it means exactly, but I do know that I want you two to trust us. I know that it might not be easy to do that, but please, give it a chance. I promise we won't do anything to hurt either one of you. Besides, you both are too cute to hurt," DJ continued as he began to blush.

"Well," Toby sighed. "We are from Carson City, Nevada. As for our family, our Dad was a construction foreman. He worked hard, but in the last year or so, he began to get depressed, and even started drinking. Our Mom was always pretty cool, but eight months ago she was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and the doctors said there wasn't much that they could do. They only gave her ten months to a year to live. When our Dad killed himself three months ago, everything started to go down hill. Since he killed himself, the insurance would only pay half of his benefits which left us with very little. Mom couldn't work very much because of the pain she was in. Finally she decided to send us to live with our Great Aunt Gloria Masters, who we have never met ..."

Flashback ... (Toby & Beau McClure):

"Boys," Jane shouted from the bottom of the stairs! "Would you please come down here for a little bit? It's family meeting time."

"Yes mommy," Beau yelled!

As the boys trampled down the stairs a feeling of dread came over them. Both wondered why they were having a family meeting. Usually those meant something bad was happening. And with they way things had been around the house the last few weeks, both boys were sure that nothing good was going to come out of this meeting.

As the two boys made their way into the living room they both instinctively looked into their parents eyes. Ira, their father was a large strong man. He stood well over six feet tall with broad shoulders and blond wavy hair. His bright green eyes usually had a sparkle to them, but here lately, that sparkle was dulled and muted. Their mother Jane was the sweetest woman they had ever met. Her kind caring disposition was accented by her perennial smile. She stood at about five and a half feet tall with long black hair that even braided still hung down past her thighs. Her blue eyes were as deep as mountain lakes but had warmth to them that could make even the grumpiest little boy giggle. Her eyes danced to a melody that only she could hear, but she made everyone around her feel that rhythm. However, here

in the last few weeks her usually smiling eyes seemed clouded. Almost as though she were trying to hide some kind of pain.

Both boys noticed these things as they walked in and began to become very afraid.

As they walked to their parents they could see that they both had been crying. Each one of them went to their parents and hugged them as though they would never be able to do so again.

When everyone finally had their emotions under control the two boys sat down on the couch in between their parents and snuggled up close to them.

Ira began the conversation by saying, "Boys, some of what you are going to hear is going to be scary, and some of it will make you sad. But just remember that me and mommy both love you very much and that will never ever change. Now neither of you is old enough to remember either one of my parents, but do you remember your mommy's daddy, Grandpa Joe?"

Both boys nodded.

"Well remember when Grandpa got sick and he kept getting worse and worse?"

"Yeah," Toby said. "He had cancer and then he died. Why are you asking ...Hey! ...NO! Who?"

"It's me baby," Jane replied almost in tears. "I went to the doctor because I haven't been feeling good lately. He ran some tests and told me today that I have stomach cancer. That is why I have been hurting so much."

Both boys fell into their mothers arms and bawled. Jane tried her best to comfort them but soon the two along with their dad were all hugging Jane and crying.

"What did the doctor say," Toby asked?

"He said that the cancer is pretty advanced," Ira began. "They are going to try chemotherapy, but they aren't to optimistic about her chances."

Beau looked at his dad and asked, "Daddy is mommy going to die?"

Ira just slowly nodded his head and broke down once again.

"When," he asked?

"Baby, the doctors told me that if they can't get this under control and stop it, I might not make it to Christmas."

Jane stopped again for a moment to regain her composure. When she was ready to talk again she said; "But I don't want you to treat me any different. I am not dead yet, and there is always a chance that I might beat this cancer. From this day forward we are just going to enjoy being a family. I want to live each and every day to the fullest. I want to experience different things. I want to play and have fun with you and try to be the best mom in the world to you guys. I want all three of you, to have good memo-

ries of me if I should die. I also want you boys to help your dad. He is going to need you as much as you need him.

4 months later ...

"Dad," Toby began? "Can I ask you some questions?"

Ira was momentarily stunned at his sons' presence. The last few months have been getting harder and harder. The doctor had just told them that Jane's death was inevitable and the bills were piling up. He was feeling like a complete failure to his family and especially to his sons. He kept thinking he had to do something to ensure his family would be taken care of, only he wasn't sure what that would be.

"Anything my son," Ira replied as he lay down his gin and tonic.

"A couple of boys at my school are saying they are going to beat me up because I am a fairy. They also said that the only way I could get out of getting beat up is to do things for them and I don't want to do the things that they are talking about. They said they know I am a fairy because they caught me holding hands with Davey. They even threatened to tell the whole school that Davey and I are fairies so everyone can beat us up."

"Whoa there mister, let's get a couple of things straight. First of all the slang they are using refers to someone that is gay. Do you know what that means?"

Toby nodded his head so his dad continued.

"Ok, good. You never knew your Uncle Marcus because he died when he was only 15. He was gay and a couple of kids tormented him for it. One day they were picking on him and really getting rough when he lost his balance and fell off of the sidewalk. They forced him out into traffic where he got ran over by a car and died. Son let me tell you right out front that there was nothing wrong with my brother, he was a loving caring human being, and in my opinion the best brother in the world, gay or not and if you are gay as well, there is nothing wrong with you either. You are still my son, and in my opinion one of the two best sons in this whole wide world. You don't chose to be gay anymore than you chose the color of your eyes. Let me ask you this, do you think that you might be gay?"

"I know that I like being with Davey more than any other friend I have ever had. Sometimes we hold hands and it feels good. I feel warm around him."

"Well then you might be. Or you might not. Your body is starting to change and with it you will have different feelings. The trick is to recognize those feelings for what they are and to not let them consume you. Just know this; you have my support no matter what. Heck buddy, you're only 12, so who knows what might happen. You don't need to rush in anything, just let nature take her course, ok? And while we are at it, I want the names of the kids who are giving you a hard time. I also want to know exactly what it was that they wanted you to do, and don't be embarrassed, I've just about heard it all in my day. Heck, I bet I already have a good idea what you are going to tell me, so just spill it, ok? After you tell me I will speak to the principal and I bet we can get that to stop quick and in a hurry ok"

"Ok Dad," Toby said as he wrapped his arms around his father.

Toby leaned forward and whispered the whole story into his dad's ear, blushing the whole time. When he fished he hugged his dad tighter and said, "Thanks for being there for me. I love you."

"I love you to son, I always will."

Side Thought - Ira McClure:

After Toby had gone to bed, Ira called James Mandler, the principal at Toby's school and filled him in. James agreed to put an immediate stop to the problem. Ira thanked him and hung up. After he had had a while to reflect on things, Ira really started hitting the bottle hard. He was remembering the day that his little brother died. As all of the visions went through his head he began to write a letter, when he was done he sealed it into an envelope and put it in a box of pictures where the boys might find it some day. After he was done, he went to bed and passed out next to his frail dying wife.

The next afternoon Jane was sitting in the living room watching some cartoon with her sons when the doorbell rang. Toby ran to get it and when he opened the door he saw two police officers.

"Mom." He yelled. "There are a couple of cops here at the door."

Jane's first thought was, ' oh great, what did Ira do now?'

When she got to the door the officers asked if she was Jane McClure. When she answered yes they said, "Ma'am, I am Officer Roberts and this is Officer Daniels. We are from the Carson City Police Department Victims Advocates division. May we come in?"

Jane showed them to the living room while she was trying to recall what the Victims Advocates did.

After they were all seated Officer Daniels suggested that the boys leave the room while the adults talked.

Jane however quickly responded that the boys could hear anything. This was a family and no secrets were kept. She then asked the officers if they should wait until Ira returned home.

Officer Roberts replied, "Ma'am, it is your husband we are here about. I am not quite sure how to tell you this, but your husband was involved in an accident at work today. I am so sorry to inform you that he died as a result of the accident."

Overcome in grief, Jane and the boys fell into each others arms and cried, screamed and fell to pieces. When they were finally able to speak again Jane asked the officers what had happened.

"Ma'am what appears to have happened is this; your husband was working on the fourth floor of the new County Courthouse Annex. As he moved from one of the beams he lost his footing and slipped. When he started to fall his safety harness broke and he fell head first into the back of a loaded cement truck. We are assuming that he died on impact with the cement. Again, I am so sorry for your loss."

End Flashback

"Anyway," Toby began. "The officers stayed a while longer and gave my mom some information. We had the funeral 3 days later. After a month had passed we got a letter from the Construction Companies Insurance Company saying they had video evidence that dad died as a result of suicide. He was caught on tape weakening his safety harness so that it would give out. As a result we only got half of his life insurance money and got no settlement for the accident. After all of this happened mom got really bad and she talked with us and decided to send us to Aunt Gloria's because she didn't want us to see her die."

About that time the bus rolled into a station and Charlie came back to the boys. "Guys, we are in Salt Lake City. This is a pretty big place and I would really prefer if you stay on the bus. If you tell me what you want for snacks, I will get them for you, ok?"

The boys all thanked Charlie and gave their munchies order to him and Tanner paid for it all.

DJ then pulled an envelope from his pocket and said, "Guys, this here is a poem that means the world to me. I would like for you to hear it. Maybe then you will understand that we are in this together, no matter what, ok?"

"Ok," both boys replied.

The wind fills my sails
To take me afar
To a place I've never been

But where we'll go
I do not know
Or as to why or when

But this I know
Deep down in my soul
A place that has no end

I will travel with you
Side by side
Always as your friend

This road will be long
With pits and hills
And fences that block green lawns

But we'll get past that
' Cause were friends wherever were at
And always A New Day Dawns.

When the poem was finished all four boys knew without a doubt, that they would stay together forever, some way or another.

Beau looked at the other three and said, "Can I play you a song on my stereo? It is a song that makes me think of Mommy and Daddy, but I like it."

"You bet little buddy," Tanner replied. "What song is it?"

"It's called Wish You Were Here, by Mark Wills," Beau said.

"Hey, I know that one," Tanner exclaimed! "Can I sing it with you?"

"That would be cool," Beau started. "I love to sing."

"Me too," Tanner said. "Start the music."

As the music began all four boys were lost in another world and when Beau and Tanner began to sing along DJ and Toby sat in amazement at their vocal abilities.

They kissed goodbye at the terminal gate
 She said you're gonna be late if you don't go
 He held her tight, said I'll be all right
 I'll call you tonight to let you know

He bought a postcard, on the front it just said HEAVEN
 With a picture of the ocean and the beach
 And the simple words he wrote her
 Said he loved her and they told her
 How he'd hold her if his arms would reach

Wish you were here, wish you could see this place
 Wish you were near, wish I could touch your face
 The weather's nice, it's paradise
 It's summertime all year and there's some folks we know
 They say, "Hello, I miss you so, wish you were here"

She got a call that night but it wasn't from him
 It didn't sink in right away, Ma'am the plane went down
 Our crews have searched the ground
 No survivors found she heard him say

But somehow she got a postcard in the mail
 That just said HEAVEN with a picture of the ocean and the beach
 And the simple words he wrote her
 Said he loves her and they told her
 How he'd hold her if his arms would reach

Wish you were here, wish you could see this place
 Wish you were near, wish I could touch your face
 The weather's nice, it's paradise
 It's summertime all year, and there's some folks we know
 They say "Hello, I miss you so, wish you were here"

The weather's nice, in paradise
 It's summertime all year and all the folks we know

They say "Hello, I miss you so, wish you were here"
Wish you were here.

After they were done singing, a tear streaked Charlie gave the boys their snacks and a big hug to each. "That was absolutely beautiful boys. You can sing on this bus as loud as you want."

The blushing boys said their thanks and then dug into the snacks. Cheetos, mountain dew, and m&m's. The staples of every kid's diet. Enough carbs, sugar, and caffeine to wire them up for a while.

As the bus began rolling again Tanner began to relive parts of his life for everyone.

Flashback - Tanner Michaels:

Guys, I had a pretty good life going on before my mom & dad died. We had a nice house, cool cars, and we had a good amount of money. It was after they died and I got put into foster care with Steve and Mary that everything started to go downhill.

The morning that my parents died we were sitting around the kitchen table eating breakfast when my dad asked us if we wanted to go down to Fairfield that night to go and eat and then hit Scandia the local go cart, bumper boat, and mini golf joint. Being that it is one of my favorite places I was all for it. That day at school I asked DJ if he wanted to go with us that evening and he got permission to, so both of us basically were bouncing off of the walls all day long waiting for school to get out.

After school got out that afternoon we went to my house to wait for my parents to show up to get us. However, when we got there DJ's mom and dad were waiting for us. When they told me that my parents were dead, I started to run. It was DJ who caught me and held on to me while I cried.

The driver of the other car was also killed when the collision happened and some of the police that were investigating the accident said it almost looked intentional but as the other driver died as well, we would never know.

I went and stayed with DJ and his family for a few days until after the funeral was over and then I was placed with Steve and Mary. While I was at their house I caught Colin taking pictures of us when we were naked and stuff and I really got weirded out by it.

Finally I moved in with Steve and Mary, who were both friends of Colin's somehow. He was the one to get the placement taken care of so quickly for me. But once I was there things went south.

Just a few weeks after mom and dad died, DJ's mom, Katie, went missing. When that happened, Colin spent a lot of time at our house, which I thought was kind of cool. I actually got to spend some time with DJ. We were trying to help each other get through a very bad time. I am not sure either one of us would have made it if it weren't for each other. It was then that I started having feelings for him, but I was afraid to tell him because I thought he would reject me for it. I was terrified of telling him that I might be gay and that I have the hots for him. I was beginning to wish I were dead.

Steve was never a nice person from the beginning. Whenever I was home I had to be in my boxers so I wouldn't get the furniture dirty. I was not allowed much privacy. Steve would take pictures of me whenever he could. I caught him taking pictures of me in the middle of the night one time and he was playing with my pecker while he was doing it. He didn't realize that I was awake. At first I thought I was just having a weird dream, but I actually found pictures of him touching me down there. I realized that he was a pervert and I wanted to tell someone. I figured I would tell Colin, but I overheard him and Steve talking about sending the pictures to a contact in Russia and getting big money for them. That's when I started to do some snooping around. I found thousands of pictures of me and DJ doing everything from sleeping to showering to jacking off. I was also able to figure out that the pictures had been sent and found the money that they got for them. They were sharing the money with Colin. They were in a kiddy porn business and me and DJ were the star attractions.

The more I found the madder I got. Finally one morning Mary was drinking her fat ass into oblivion and we got into an argument about her husband being a pervert and a freak. She threw a beer bottle at me and missed. I finally had had enough and ran away. I decided I was going to tell DJ that I was gay and loved him and then I was going to leave. I went to his house and was so nervous that I actually barfed on their lawn. DJ and I talked for quite a while and I found out that he had the same feelings as me. We were in his room and things began to get a little bit hot. Well DJ's dad, Colin, walked in on us in the middle of something and tried to molest DJ. He also threw DJ into a wall, so I hit him twice with a baseball bat and knocked him out. We got DJ's stuff and left. We went to my house and snuck in and we overheard Steve and Mary talking about us, so we decided it was time to run away. That was the last day we spent in Dixon and now we are here.

End Flashback

As Tanner finished his story he looked around him to see tears in the eye is of the other boys. DJ just reached out to him and wrapped his arms around his neck.

"I love you Tanner. I always have, and I always will. No matter what happens, I will be by your side forever.

After they had a chance to regain their composure, DJ went to the front of the bus and asked Charlie where they were.

"We are about 30 minutes outside of Rawlins Wyoming kido," Charlie said. "When we get there do you guys need to refill your batteries? I can go inside and get you some more snacks."

DJ told him that would be great and gave him some more money to buy it with, and then walked to the back.

"We are almost to Rawlins Wyoming guys," DJ said as he sat down. So we are about two and a half hours to Cheyenne. Charlie is going to buy us some more snacks and then I guess it's my turn to tell a tale."

About that time Beau just started crying. Toby reached out to his little brother and cradled him in and just spoke softly to him that everything would be ok.

"Are you ok there little man," DJ asked?

"I just miss my parents," Beau sniffled. "I am scared and I feel all alone inside."

DJ just looked at the little boy and opened his arms and said, "You can come cuddle with me over here if you want, both of you."

Beau shifted over to DJ and said, "Are you guys really going to try and be our big brothers?"

"I will do everything in my power to make sure that we stay together. One way or the other we will make it happen."

As the boys rode the rest of the way into Rawlins, Toby started humming a song and Beau soon followed suit. Tanner was listening intently and finally figured out what the song was.

"Hey," he started. "I know that song too, it's called When You Leave That Way You Can Never Come Back, by Confederate Railroad, right?"

"Yeah," Toby said. "Our parents loved to listen to country music and it kind of grew on us. This song kind of makes sense with our situations. The words all fit. I mean if you think about it, Tanner, everything you have told us so far says that you can't go back to that kind of situation. What you did, even though it was justified would be hard to go back to. No, when you leave that way you can never go back."

"I never listened to much country music, so I've never heard that one. Would you guys sing it for me, I'd really like to hear it," DJ asked?

The boys agreed and soon the back of the bus was filled with a gentle harmony that only a group of boys could create. DJ just sat and listened to the words that would paint a picture for him and give him the courage to tell the boys his story.

I remember waking in the morning
To the sound of the roosters crow
Mama cookin' in the kitchen
And Arthur Gottfried on the radio

Me and dad were just like strangers
We never did see eye to eye
It came to blows one Sunday mornin'
So I packed my bags and I said good bye

When you leave that way you can never go back
A train won't run on a torn up track
Sometimes I wish I'd never roamed oh no
'Cause when you leave that way you can never go home

Then I met a girl in Knoxville
Oh we set our weddin' date

The GunRunner

I left her standing at the altar
With a baby on the way

When you leave that way you can never go back
A train won't run on a torn up track
Sometimes I wish I'd never roamed oh no
'Cause when you leave that way you can never go home

And Lord I'd love to see my Mom and Daddy
And what I'd give to hold that boy of mine
I'd get down on my knees and say I'm sorry
If I could only go back one more time

But I killed a man in Houston
When he caught me with his wife
And I told the preacher man to leave me alone
When he came to read my rights

And he said son,
When you leave this way you can never come back
A soul won't roll on a torn up track
All through eternity you'll roam alone
'Cause when you leave this way you can never come home

All through eternity you'll roam alone
'Cause when you leave this way you can never come home.

"Wow," DJ said. "You weren't kidding. Even though the situations aren't the same, well one maybe, the came to blows part, this song really hits home. I feel that way too. I can never go back. I won't go back. On another note, you guys sing so awesome together. You sound like pros. We have to stay together at least so you guys can sing for me," DJ kidded. "I am serious, you three sound great. Maybe y'all could teach me to sing."

"DJ," Beau began. "Mama used to say if you want to sing all you have to do is feel it in your heart and open your mouth."

About that time Charlie came to the back and said, "Welcome to Rawlins Wyoming, home of the State Penitentiary. You guys just kick back in here and I will go and get your supplies for the next leg of the trip. And by the way ... Sing louder, my radio is broke. You kids are good, and you sing the right kind of music. None of that boom boom boom junk you hear going down the road from a hundred yards away. Good 'ole country music. The music of the soul and for the soul. I love it."

After Charlie left to go inside the boys all made their way to the bathroom at the back of the bus to make room for more incoming mountain dew. After they were done and had cleaned their faces with those little moist towelettes they sat down and got comfortable.

By the time Charlie made it back with their new stash, all four boys were rearing and ready to go and get to the next stop.

"Thanks for getting this stuff for us Charlie," Tanner began. "I hate going into strange places."

"You're welcome there partner. Now find another song to sing for us," Charlie said as he laughed his way back to the front.

"Well guys, I guess it's my turn," DJ stated. "Please understand that some of this is going to be hard for me, because I feel like it's my fault that we are here right now."

"Hold the phone," Tanner said! "You are no more at fault than I am. Stuff happened and we are dealing with it. I love you and you can't change that, so don't worry about it."

"I know, but still, it's kind of hard, but I know we will get through it."

Flashback - DJ McAllister :

I remember waking up one morning and seeing my dad standing over me taking pictures of me while I was sleeping. I looked down and saw that I was naked and sporting morning wood. I asked my dad what he was doing and he replied that he was just proud to see that his little boy was becoming a man. I didn't know what to think then so I just joked around with him and made him promise me that he wouldn't show that picture to anyone. He just laughed and walked out of the room.

Things began to get weird after that. I noticed that my dad was always taking pictures of me. He had even caught me jacking off one time and I saw him get pictures of me doing that. I saw him peeking at me in the shower and doing stupid things like taking my towel so I would have to run naked down the hallway to get a new one. Every time he was looking at me it seemed that he had a camera in his hand. Finally I got weirded out enough that I went to talk to my mom.

"Mom, we need to talk," DJ said.

"What about baby," Katie answered? "Is everything ok at school?"

"It's not about school mom. Dad is really making me uncomfortable."

"How so?"

"Well, DJ began; I keep seeing him taking pictures of me all the time."

"You know we want all kinds of pictures for our photo album baby. Why would that bother you?"

"Well mom, do you guys really want pictures of me naked and stuff?"

"What kind of stuff DJ, Katie asked nervously?"

"I have caught dad taking pictures of me in the mornings when I am, you know, hard and stuff. He has taken pictures of me when I was doing things too, DJ continued as he turned beet red. Every time I am

naked for any reason he is there with a camera. I have even gone to bed in my boxers and woke up in the morning with them around my knees and him in there with a camera. It is really freaking me out."

"I don't know what to say DJ. Those are not the kind of pictures I want in the photo album. You deserve your privacy, and by the way, you don't need to be embarrassed. All boys do those things. But I have to talk to your father and find out just what in the heck he thinks he is doing."

"Mom, please don't tell dad I told you. He'll beat the crap out of me."

"Oh no he won't. I am your mother and I will go to my grave protecting you. Colin might be my husband, but you are my flesh and blood. That is a bond that should never be compromised. You have done nothing wrong. Don't worry, I won't talk to him yet, but I will do some investigating of my own to see what this is all about. I just want you to promise me that if anything else weird happens again that you will tell me immediately, ok?"

I remember about three days later I saw my mom crying in the kitchen. I asked her what was wrong and she just held on to me for about an hour until she had cried herself out. She told me that she had taken care of everything and all would be ok in a couple of days.

The next morning when I was getting ready to go to school my mom came into my room and told me that there were going to be some changes coming very soon. She also told me that she would tell me more after school and to go and have a good day.

When I got home after school my mom wasn't there, so I figured that she had some errands to run. I went and made myself a snack and got started on my chores and my homework. When I was done she still wasn't home so I tried to call her cell phone. When she didn't answer I began to get worried so I called my dad. He told me that she was probably out and about and her phone battery had probably died. He told me to fix myself some dinner and he would be home soon.

I felt kind of weird because he was acting all nice and happy, and I figured that by now my mom had talked to him about the pictures. Maybe they had gotten all of that figured out. Maybe I was just over-reacting.

After I had eaten my dinner I relaxed on the couch to watch some TV and fell asleep. When I woke up it was well after midnight so I just went to bed. The next morning before I left for school I went to go and talk to my mom but the bedroom door was locked so I figured that she was home and just sleeping.

When I got home from school that afternoon, my dad was there along with a bunch of other cops from the department. My dad told me that my mom was missing. We looked all over the place for her and had to do the news things and everything else.

That morning before school was the last time I had ever seen my mom, and now my guts tell me that she is dead.

All of this happened right after Tanners parents were killed in that car crash. Since then we have been inseparable. I am not sure how I could survive without him. He is my best friend in the world, and I also believe that he is my soul mate.

When my dad pulled his stunt a few days ago and tried to molest us that was the final straw. We had to get out of there. I just know that he is up to something no good. And I am not about to wait around and see what he is going to do to screw up our lives.

End Flashback

As DJ was finishing up his story he looked at Toby who was lost in the middle of writing something.

"Excuse me sir. Do you have something that you want to share with the rest of the class?" DJ asked.

Toby turned beet red and said, "I'm sorry DJ, I was really listening to you, but I have this problem. Somewhere along the way I picked up a like for writing poetry and yours and Tanners stories along with mine and Beaus kind of gave me ideas for a poem. I really wasn't trying to ignore you. I was just writing while I was listening."

"Hey, it's ok bro," DJ began. "Trust me, I feel better just for actually saying some of that stuff out loud. So you write poetry huh? Can we hear this poem or would you rather keep it private?"

"I'll read it to you guys only if you promise you won't laugh or think I am dumb for it."

All the boys made the promise to Toby and waited for him to speak again.

"It's called "Brotherly Love."

Light is to dark
What you are to me
An opposite of just who
I once used to be

I lived in a shell
To cover up all my fear
I would not come out
Until you, friend were near

Alone in this world
Afraid to be me
Eyes always closed
For I was afraid I might see

To open the door
And tear down the brick wall
And face all my fears
Bear my soul out to all

I could not do that
The fear was too strong

The GunRunner

But I knew that I must
Do that before long

The time it grew near
There was no turning back
I had to face fear
My strength could not lack

Unsure of myself
I looked up to you
And asked of my friend
Just what should I do?

You took hold of my hand
And showed me the way
You stayed by my side
Through out every day

And when my fear came back
You helped to brush it away
My strength grew from you
In so many ways

You gave me a needed
Kick in the rear
We fought side by side
To overcome all my fears

No longer in a shell
Afraid not of no light
What demons I still have
I'm not afraid now to fight

For what was once there
That made me to hide
Is gone and done now
Replaced by my pride

A bond that we formed
A brotherly love
I thank for my brothers
To our God above

When the poem was finished being read there were three boys with tear streaked faces and one with a grin from ear to ear.

"Do you guys like it?" Toby asked.

Tanner recovered enough to say; "Toby that is the most awesome poem I have ever heard. Once we get settled into a new home for all of us, would you please let me have that professionally printed and framed? I want to keep that forever as a reminder of the new brothers I have found."

Toby reached over to Tanner and wrapped his arms around him and said, "I would be honored. I am so glad you guys like it. That means the world to me when someone thinks I did a good job."

After all the boys had made some comments about the poem they all looked at each other with very tired eyes and started yawning.

"I have an idea," Beau said. "Lets all cuddle up together in the very back seat. I know it is only for 3 people, but I am pretty small and I bet we could all fit. I am getting tired and don't want to fall asleep while you guys are still talking, so why don't we all go to bed for a while and we can talk more in the morning?"

All the other boys thought that this was a great idea, so they crammed all of their small bodies in the back seat and made themselves comfortable.

Just before they all made the trip into dreamland, Beau touched each of the boys and said, "Goodnight guys, I love you all." Then they all slipped off to sleep.

"Well boys." Charlie said as he tried to gently wake the fearsome foursome. "Welcome to Cheyenne Wyoming. This is where I'm going to have to leave you all. I have already called ahead to the front office and spoken with one of the supervisors that is a friend of mine. She is going to keep an eye on you two until Daniel, your next driver, gets here. I have also already called him. He is a friend of mine and he is going to make sure that everything goes smoothly for you until you get into Iowa. Take care and keep your noses clean."

With that Charlie led them off of the bus and got their stuff out from the bottom luggage area. He then walked with them inside and introduced them to Carla Mahoney. Carla was an older lady, probably in her early sixties with salt and pepper hair and a warm Grand motherly like smile.

"Well aren't you four just the cutest little things in all of Gods creation," Carla questioned? "My, my, my, if I were just a few years younger I would have to get all up in a dither and get myself gussied up to be around four strapping handsome young men like you. Just throw on some tight fittin' jeans, some nice ropers and a nicely formed cowboy hat on your cute little heads and we'd have us some fine lookin' cowboys here."

By the time Carla was finished with her rambling all four boys had displayed more shades of red than you would have thought possible.

When their initial embarrassment was over, DJ looked at Carla and thanked her then turned to Charlie and did the same.

"Charlie," he began. "Thank you for all that you have done for us. You were really nice and funny and made the trip go by fast for us."

Charlie looked at each one of the four boys that he had been traveling with and thanked them all for being such polite young men. He extended his arm and warmly shook hands with each of the boys and then turned to leave.

As soon as he had left, Carla motioned the boys over to the cafeteria area so they could have some breakfast. "Do you boys need some money for breakfast," she asked?

"No Ma'am, "Tanner answered. "We are all set, but thank you."

"Ma'am indeed," Carla snickered. "Ma'am was my grandmother, God rest her soul. Around here, it's Carla. Now get on over there and have some breakfast. I'll be just there in that office to the right. I need to go and have me a piece of bus driver butt for a mid-morning snack. If you boys need anything at all, just holler, ok?"

The boys just giggled as they walked away toward the cafeteria.

After they had gotten their breakfast and sat down to eat. As they were eating and laughing and joking, DJ looked to his left and saw someone that scared him half out of his wits.

"Tanner," DJ said with fear in his voice. "Look to your right. That guy is a cop. He works in my fathers department. His name is Robb."

Almost on cue, Robb got up and walked to the boys. Both Tanner and DJ were frozen to their seat when Robb sat down at their table. Before either one had a chance to say a thing, Robb spoke. "Boys, you have nothing to worry about, don't be afraid. I know why you are here, and I know where you are going, and I am going to help you. And DJ, as soon as we get you guys taken care of, we are going to put that no-good son-of-a-duck's behind father of yours behind bars for a long time. Tanner that goes for you as well. Steve and Mary are in this up to their eyeballs. They will go down as well."

DJ looked Robb in the eyes and asked; "How did you find us?"

"DJ," Robb began. "I am a detective, it's what I do. For now though, you need to listen. I have been working on assignment from Starfleet, not Dixon PD. I was sent to find you and get you into capable and caring hands. I have been tracking you since Auburn. I have also investigated Colin, Steve, and Mary. I have enough evidence to put them away for so many years that their grandkids will be gray. But we do need to hurry, boys. They have figured out where you all are and are headed this way."

DJ was just about to ask Robb about Toby and Beau when Carla came out of her office at a high rate of speed yelling; "Hey you! Get away from those kids right now before I call the sheriff. That's right, you! What in tarnation do you think you are doing? Come over here now or get the hell out of my station! I mean it. Those boys are no business of yours."

Robb told the boys he would be right back and not to move. He got up and walked over to Carla and pulled out his badge. He then motioned her into the office. They both walked in and closed the door.

All four boys just sat in amazement at what they had just heard. None of them were able to move, let alone speak for a good five minutes. Finally Beau just looked at the other boys and said with tears in his eyes, "What about us? Where do we go now? Are we still going to be able to stay with you or at

least be friends? What kind of trouble did you guys get into? Were you guys telling us the truth back there on the bus?"

"I just thought of something," DJ said. "Quick hold hands and look into my eyes, let me see if I can give you a link to Timmy. That way if we get separated you guys can still get help."

Toby and Beau looked at each other that hesitantly held their hands and looked into DJ's eyes for a few moments and a warm cozy feeling overtook them. As quickly as the feeling came it was gone. Beau asked DJ; " What just happened and who is Timmy?"

DJ was straining to find the right words to say. After a moment he started to answer but was stopped when he felt a large hand on his shoulder. He spun around and looked right into the eyes of his father, and Tanner was looking right at Steve and Mary.

"Hello boys," Colin said. "Please don't make a scene here. Just listen for a second. We came to apologize. We realized that we were wrong in what we did. DJ, you are my son. My pride and joy. I hurt you, and I realize that now. I am so sorry for what I have done. I am asking you to please forgive me and come home. I promise I will make everything alright." He then looked right at Beau and Toby and said, "Would you boys please excuse us for just a minute. We need to talk privately to our sons?"

Toby and Beau slowly nodded their heads and walked away from their new brothers, but never once took their eyes off of them.

"DJ looked Colin right in the eyes and said, "I am not going anywhere with you, you pervert. I am going to press charges and have your sorry butt thrown in jail. What you did was sick and wrong. You're a cop for crying out loud. You are supposed to protect the law, not break it. I want absolutely nothing to do with you ever again, and there is not a thing that you can do about it"

Colin tightened his grip on DJ's shoulder and said, "Getting a little cocky here in the last few days, huh? I guess you must have gotten some balls from me after all, but as for pressing charges, I don't think so kido. Remember squirt, I am a cop. They will believe me before they ever believe you. I get my way every dang time, you should know that. You are just a scared little boy that needs to be severely punished for what you did, and believe me you; I will inflict a punishment that you are not likely to forget anytime soon."

DJ's mind was working overtime, concentrating and trying to force his thoughts to Tanner, Beau, Toby, and Timmy; ' Guys, please pay attention. I hope you can hear me. The stuff is going to hit the fan any second. Tanner, if you can hear me when I give you the signal kick Steve, go for his nuts and do it as hard as you can, then run like the wind and call Teri Short, tell her where we are and that we need help. Beau and Toby, run and get Officer Robb and Carla, tell them that mine and Tanners folks are here and are going to cause trouble. Timmy HELP, Please!!'

The strange look that Tanner gave DJ said he understood what DJ wanted him to do. Tanner wasn't sure how he understood this, or how he heard DJ in his head, but he did.

Once he was sure that everyone had understood him, DJ just nudged Tanner and said, "We have all of the proof and evidence we need, so screw off, Officer Asshole! I hope you like jail!"

Suddenly Tanner jumped to his feet and gave Steve a fast hard kick with all his might right to the balls then started running as fast as his legs would carry him.

With Steve on the ground writhing in pain, Colin looked at Mary and told her to go and catch Tanner. He then he looked right at DJ again and slapped his face hard enough to make his nose start bleeding and said, "Listen to me boy. I will not be spoken to in that way ever again. You will do as you are told. Your evidence is meaningless if you can't substantiate it. You have as much chance of putting me away as your little boyfriend has of staying out of juvenile hall for hitting me with that bat. Now I want you to get your stuff and get in that car before I throw you in there myself. DO NOT make me mad again. I own you, you sorry small dick little twerp."

As Tanner ran one way, Toby and Beau started running for Carla's office. Tanner pulled the cell phone from his pocket and hit the speed dial for Teri Short. As the phone was ringing DJ was yelling at Colin from the top of his lungs, "FUCK OFF! YOU THINK THAT I WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOU. IF YOU ARE MY FATHER THEN WHY DID YOU SPREAD PICTURES OF ME AND TANNER NAKED ALL OVER THE INTERNET? WHY DID YOU BEAT ME? WHY DID YOU TRY TO MOLEST US? YOU ARE A FREAK AND A PERVERT AND I WANT YOU TO GO TO HELL! I KNOW ALL ABOUT THE PICTURES AND THE MONEY FROM RUSSIA. I WILL KILL MYSELF BEFORE I EVER GO ANYWHERE WITH A SON OF A BITCH LIKE YOU."

"OH REALLY," COLIN SCREAMED! "IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU WANT IT, THEN SO BE IT. I SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN RID OF YOU LIKE I DID YOUR STUPID MOTHER. I CAN ALWAYS FIND A KID TO TAKE PICTURES OF. YOU WERE JUST CONVIENEINT. BUT INSTEAD YOU JUST GET IN THE WAY. IF YOU WOULD SHUT UP AND LISTEN FOR TWO SECONDS, YOU WOULD SEE THAT WE CAN MAKE SOME MONEY OFF OF YOU AND YOUR LITTLE BOYFRIEND. WE WOULD HAVE GIVEN YOU BOTH A CUT TOO, BUT NO, YOU HAD TO BE ALL SELF RIGHTEOUS. IT'S JUST PICTURES, CAN'T YOU SEE THAT. NO HARM, NO FOUL. BUT YOU SAY YOU WANT TO DIE INSTEAD OF COMING HOME WITH ME? WELL HERE IS YOUR CHANCE. SAY GOODNIGHT DAVID!"

With that Colin pulled from his holster a standard police issue Beretta 9mm handgun and pointed it right at his son. DJ didn't even as much as flinch as he stared down the barrel of his father's sidearm, instead he just looked Colin dead in the eyes and said, "Gotten balls from you? Yeah right! I must have gotten all of my balls from my mother, because you're nothing more than a freak and a pussy! Go ahead and shoot me, I dare you! See if you can just make me disappear like you did my mom, you bastard. Go ahead ...It takes a real man to point a gun at a thirteen year old unarmed boy."

The phone was answered during this yelling match and just about everything that was said could be heard on the other end of the line. Before anyone on the other line had a chance to say a word, Tanner yelled into the phone, "PLEASE, I NEED TO TALK TO TERI SHORT RIGHT NOW! WE NEED HELP!"

"This is Cory, Teri's son. Is your name Tanner or DJ?"

Tanner was puzzled for a moment as to how they knew about them and was about to answer the question when he saw Beau running up behind Colin with a large knife in hand. As Colin aimed for the head and prepared to shoot DJ, a very mad Beau ran up behind him and buried all 6 inches of his Boy Scout knife right into the inside of Colin's thigh precariously close to where his balls might be hanging, sending a stream of blood everywhere and Colin hopping around on one leg. As he was flailing around,

Colin pistol whipped Beau sending him sprawling to the floor and knocking him out cold and leaving a very deep gash about five inches long across the top of his forehead.

Then just as Tanner began to answer the question Cory had asked and to ask again for help, their conversation was stopped dead by the sound of a gunshot.

Colin's shot however was misplaced due to his injury, it definitely hit lower on DJ's body. The shot sent DJ sprawling to the ground covered in blood and the whole station went totally still and silent. You could have heard a pin drop on the floor until Tanner started screaming hysterically. "Nooooooooooooo! Oh God NO! Help us! Please! Somebody, anybody! That son of a bitch just shot DJ! He actually shot him! Oh my God! There is blood everywhere. DJ!!!! Noooooooooooooooooooooo! HELP!!!"

The End of this part .. time skip ahead.

Authors Notes:

Well everyone I am sure you are all going to be mad at me for that ending. But sometimes you have to leave a little suspense. This chapter has been a bear to write. Just ask The Pups, AC, Greybear, Jeff, and The Story Lover. They have all been involved in this one with me. This is actually the fourth complete re-write. I had to make sure that this chapter was perfect for you, the readers. Yes this is the end. Not of the story, but of book one. In the upcoming weeks and months AC and I are going to be working on book two which is about Camp Little Eagle. Now I know many of you are asking, what happened to the boys? Well I will answer that one for you. You need to read Chapter 37 of Memories to find out. AC should be posting it in the next few days. Yes we have been collaborating on this one for a while to make sure that the transition would be seamless. We both sincerely hope you appreciate the effort that we have put into this for you.

Now on to my thanks,

TwoHyperPups (L&C) I am so proud of who you two are. Your ability to cope and overcome adversity is awesome. You two have given me so much to be thankful for. I love you both. Thank you so much for all that you have done to help me with this story. It would have never been this good without your help.

The Story Lover, You have been such a wonderful friend and a great editor. Don't for one second folks let him get off without taking some credit here. He has done so much to help this story out. Without him, I would have never made any sense at all and y'all would have given up on this story 2 sentences in to chapter 1.

AC, this has been a blast. Working with you I have had so many different ideas that I was sure at one point I would have to go to Best Buy and buy a memory upgrade for my brain (LOL) It seems that whenever the two of us get going, we wear out keyboards. I can't wait to see what we come up with next.

Greybear, what can I say man? Every time I would need an idea in a pinch you came through for me. You helped to shape this story into what it is. Now while you are reading this, I need to place an order. I need at least one mind meld, preferably by a well trained Vulcan that can get some of this stuff out of my head. It is so full now that I am quite sure that a rupture is inevitable. Won't you please help me?

Jeff, you really are my brother. Can't wait to see you in bean town in March. Sushi is on me (and I hope that is not literally after you try it!!) Every time I would need to rant about how shitty my story was, you would tell me to shut up, put on some dry huggies and get back after it. You gave me a solid dose of Get Er Done!! You never once let me hold a pity party. Thank you for everything you have done, but more importantly, thank you for who you are.

Last but not least, August. You give all of us a home to be writers. When we need a little cheering up you give it to us, and when we need a stern talking to, you manage that as well. Thank you from all of us for all that you have done, and the friend that you have become.

-Gun

Editors Notes:

GunRunner thanks again for letting my come along on this wild roller coaster ride called A New Day Dawns it has been a fun and exciting trip. Now as to cliffhangers well all I can say is I am waiting for the calvary to come over the hill.

I wouldn't have missed this experience for anything in the world. I am glad I volunteered my services as editor. To those who say you should never volunteer all I can say is that you must have a boring unfulfilled life. One of the most fulfilling times in my life was when I volunteered to be share tutor for a child with what is now called "ADD". It was a very rewarding experience for me as was my Coaching Little League and Youth Soccer. There are a lot of kids out there who need you help be a volunteer and help them.

I am eagerly looking forward to working on Book II. Thanks for an awesome story!

AC & Greybear's Corner:

This has been one heck of an adventure. I've enjoyed reading this story since it's beginning. Now this is out of the way, I can finally ready Chapter 37 of Memories. I've had fun editing and formatting this story, and sadly, all good things must come to an end. This has been one heck of a rollercoaster ride. it hasn't been boring, I'll tell you that. Stay tuned for Part II. It's gonna be a DOOZY!!

I'm about to get on my soapbox now about a subject that is appalling in our society today: Child Abuse. In this country alone, there are thousands of children that are abused and exploited every day. Some unlucky ones are abused for years, then sold off as slaves for other's pleasures, even by their own families. Some are kept in slavery for years at a time, forced to do things against their will. This is an on-going problem in our society, our nation, and our world.

If you know of an abused child, or are one yourself, contact you local Law Enforcement Agency or your local Child Protective Services office. They will help you stop the abuse. You can also get information on exploited children from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. You can visit their website at www.missingkids.com. Let's all band together to stop this growing problem.

Live long and prosper,

Greybear

Credits:

Wish You Were Here , performed by Mark Wills can be found on his 1998 album "Wish You Were Here"

When You Leave That Way You Can Never Go Back , performed by Confederate Railroad can be found on their 1993 Self Titled album

A New Day Dawns and Brotherly Love are both copyright poems by The GunRunner; all rights reserved, and can be found also in the poetry section of the Corner Cafe

CHAPTER 7: ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

Note: This story is intertwined with Memories by ACFan and occurs between Part One and Part Two. You will need to read his excellent story starting from chapter 35 of part 1 to have a full understanding. And on a personal note... Thanks for waiting for me everyone. It is good to be back again

"Boys!" Russ yelled from the bottom of the stairs. "It is time for dinner. Get washed up and come down so we can eat all this food."

The sound of the kids running around to get ready for the food was heard in three different zip codes Dan thought as he helped Helen and Teri carry in the platters of hamburgers from the grill.

"Isn't it amazing how the mention of the word food can get the attention of kids faster than almost any word in the English language," John said to nobody in particular.

"Food?" Justy said. "Where's the food? If I don't eat soon my pants won't stay on anymore."

"Don't worry kiddo." Chip replied. "The day you start missing meals, I will personally seek out medical attention for you. Besides, your pants aren't going anywhere on that big ole trunk you got going there."

Justy sat there for a moment trying to pick his jaw up from the floor and then started doing some kind of instinctive dance trying to get a glimpse of his rear end to see what was big about it when Chip finally calmed him down and told him, "Gotcha."

At this point the tribe of kids started making their way downstairs in time to see Justy dancing around. Cory piped up and said, "Yo, Justy ... you got jock itch or something, or do you need to pick at your seat?"

Cory ducked in time to keep from getting his head pummeled with a flying zucchini, and swore he heard something that sounded a lot like, bite me.

As everyone started to make their way to the proverbial serving line, Sara asked, "Where is DJ?"

"He said he wasn't hungry again and stayed lying down," Beau said. "He sure is acting strange the last few days. All he does is mope around, and I don't think he has eaten much for the last three days now."

"Dan, I think it is time for you to start talking to him," Teri said. "He is on a downward spiral and I am afraid that we might end up with a Cory type situation if we don't do something for him."

Sara agreed and said, "In all my time as a nurse, I have seen this happen so many times. If we don't intervene soon we might have more to deal with than we can handle. We need to nip this in the bud."

"Ok, I will go and talk to him after supper and we can start working on dealing with his issues right away," Dan agreed. "This means boys that I will need your help in making sure that DJ is supported in anyway that he needs. He has been through a great deal in a short amount of time and the only way he can regain a sense of normalcy is to start dealing with those issues. I am not going to lie to you. It is going to be tough. Cory, you will understand this more than anyone here what I am talking about."

Everyone nodded in agreement and then started to eat.

Dinner was a lively event and the conversation was what you could usually expect from a gaggle of hungry boys when Cory looked over at Russ and noticed he was off in another world and decided he was going to see if he was still the master prankster.

"Hey Mom," Cory inquired? "I think I want to get a tattoo. You know now that I am an adult and a commissioned officer."

Russ looked over at Teri as she said, "What do you think you want Cory?"

Russ looked at Cory as he said, "I want to tattoo an elephant in my crotch."

This time Russ just started to smirk as he took a sip of his soda. Kids and their imaginations he thought.

Right on cue Sean burst in and said, "Oh how cute ... A baby elephant with a teeny tiny little trunk."

Half the table had to duck and take cover as two streams of Dr. Pepper launched 10 feet from each of Russ's nostrils as Cory pumped his fists in the air in triumph.

Then it hit him ... Little trunk? Little? "You are so gonna get it now Sean," Cory quipped.

"There you go Cory," JC said. "You got gotten, while you were trying to get someone. I believe that is bonus points to Sean, wouldn't you all agree?"

Everyone voiced their agreements as Cory just sat back and said, "Awww mannnnnn."

Cory just sat back and shut up as he was starting to conjure up the perfect revenge when he looked over at Timmy who was starting to slump over at the table. Just as he got ready to ask him if he was ok, Timmy fell from his chair and went into convulsions.

As everyone around the table started to scramble to help Timmy, they looked in astonishment as Timmy began to go back and forth between war paint and normal.

Before they had a chance to react to the situation though, Ricky also broke into full war paint, screamed "DJ," and ran from the room followed by both birds screeching at full volume.

In that instant as they watched Ricky, Timmy's skin finally settled on full war paint, and he tried to follow Ricky on wobbly legs, before collapsing and being caught by a concerned Cory.

Dan, having the presence of mind to assess the situation just said, "oh shit," and then began to run.

As people scattered in all directions trying to follow Ricky, Sean looked at Timmy and said, "What's wrong son?"

"We gotta find DJ ... Uncle Mikey said quickly, before it is too late!"

"What do you mean by too late?"

"He is gonna die."

At this moment Timmy started to vomit and fell back to the ground in convulsions. Cory looked around the room quickly and said, "everyone go and search for DJ, split into pairs and search every room in the house. Doc, you stay here and see if you can stabilize Timmy. Move!"

Everyone scrambled out of the room at record speed trying to find where DJ was and to see if they could help the situation. Shouts were heard throughout the house yelling his name, and reports of not here, bathroom clear, and so on.

As they scoured the house Dan made his way into the bedroom that he and John were using and what he saw almost made him scream. There on the dresser was a note from DJ and an empty bottle of anti-depressants that was full the day before.

Dan quickly made his way to the intercom on the wall and pressed the button to say, "I found a note and my bottle of anti-depressants totally empty. Find him quick. If he took all of them then we have close to no time before he is gone."

Dan started to leave the room to continue the search when he saw the two birds appear circling above his Camaro, so he yelled, "Outside everyone – **NOW!** – Duke and William are circling my Camaro."

Everyone made a mad dash outside into the 100 degree heat of the late summer afternoon and sprinted towards the black 1993 Camaro.

John was the first one there and when he looked inside he saw DJ scarcely breathing and laying in a pool of his own vomit. When he realized that the doors were locked and he saw the keys inside, he instinctively pulled off his tee shirt, wrapped it around his fist and made short work of the passenger side window of the car. He opened the door and pulled DJ from the car and carried him to the lawn.

Antonio was close behind with the med kit and began trying to do what he could. He worked in frustration as everything he was trying to do was having the wrong or no effect at all. "We need to get him to a hospital, I don't have the necessary things to reverse this," Antonio said dejectedly.

People started making decisions at once. Chip got on his communicator and called up to the *Enterprise*.

"*Enterprise*, this is Dodds ... Keep a lock on the party I am with right now and be ready for emergency transport. We have a youth suicide attempt and all means used thus far have been futile. Send a med team to the cargo bay transporter room and be ready to bring us all there if needed. We are attempting transport to Mercy General Hospital, Des Moines Iowa at present time with assistance of local law enforcement, Dodds out.

"*Enterprise* here, this is Uhura, Chip we copy and the Captain says use all means necessary. *Enterprise* out."

John hearing Chips words flipped open his cell phone and called into the back line of Polk County Sheriff's Office and filled in the dispatcher of the situation.

"This is John; we are in transport in a blue Suburban in route to Mercy General hospital, advise all local authorities of our situation and be prepared to clear all lanes of traffic through the west mixer. We have a serious medical situation and have no time for medical assistance."

The dispatcher said, "We have you covered John, be safe. We will clear all roads that we can and will notify the hospital of your E.T.A."

As John hung up they all ran to the suburban with Dan and Cory carrying DJ. When they got in a few more of the clan joined them and the rest got into other vehicles. Teri hit the gas and they were on their way while Dan began to read the note that DJ had left.

DJ's Note

Dear Everyone,

I am not quite sure how to begin this, or perhaps to end this. These last few years have been something out of a horror movie for me. First I lost my mother, and then everything went downhill with my father. I watched as Tanner went through his problems when he lost his parents, and then with all that happened with Steve and Mary.

Then we come to the last few weeks. I am not quite sure to handle this, and I am sure that I am in need of more counseling than anyone could ever provide and to be honest, I don't have the strength to even deal with it anyway. I am having constant nightmares about watching my father killed. I am still living in the horror of getting shot. Then I find out that I have a brother who is younger than me physically and in all actuality he is also older than me. My whole life has been a living lie and deception.

Someone please tell me where this has all come from because I can't seem to understand anything anymore. I don't care much for anything. Russ and Sara have been kind enough to take all of us in, and I can see now that the people I care about; Tanner, Beau, and Toby are all happy. That is wonderful for them, but I have to be honest. I am not happy at all. I feel nothing but numbness. I don't want all of this change. I want a simpler time in my life. Baseball games, hot dogs, scouts and friends

I know that they say that suicide is chicken shit and it is selfish to the ones you love, but I have always been the survivor. Whenever someone was down I tried to do for them anything that I could to make it better for them. I have always done for everyone else. I have always taken the brunt so someone else could feel less pain. What about me? When do I get to count? When does it matter to anyone? The only answer I can seem to find is that it will never matter.

Please know that I love you all in so many ways, but this is finally the time for me to do for myself. And the only thing that I want right now is for it all to end. I want the voices in my head to shut up. I want the pain to go away. I want to stop worrying about everyone else and start something different. I want to go where my emotions won't take over my soul and destroy me.

I am sorry for the pain that you will feel now that I am gone, and I hope that someday you can forgive me for causing you this pain, but please know that I am finally free, and I don't have to hurt anymore. I can finally be at peace and never have to deal with the labels that society will pin on me, or have to deal with the pain caused by my father. I am going home to be with my mother. God I need her right now to save me. I swear I can hear her calling me from beyond the veil saying come home. I pray that God will let me in, and that I haven't destined myself to an eternity in hell. However, it is too late to second guess that now. The pills are all down.

I am sorry.

DJ

"Christ," Dan said. "This wasn't a random act Teri, he actually thought this through and is prepared to die and face eternal consequences. He really wants to die!"

As they hit the highway Antonio along with Doc Austin continued to monitor DJ's rapidly decreasing vital signs. "Punch it Teri," Doc Austin said, "He's fading fast."

Teri buried her foot into the floor and the eight cylinder motor made the suburban lurch forward. She looked in her mirrors to see 5 police cruisers hit the highway and flank her and then a few jumped in front motioning her to keep up as they passed by. As the speeds approached 115 miles per hour Teri began to be very thankful for the defensive driving classes that she took two years ago, and even more grateful for the alignment and new shocks that were just installed as the ride was amazingly smooth and stable.

As they made it to the hospital, orderlies and staff began to run toward the vehicle and grabbed DJ with astonishing speed and ran inside. Teri began to follow and was stopped by the hospital administrator who said, Ma'am I am sorry but the doctors are requesting that nobody come inside just yet. Also, as this appears to be a suicide attempt we need to call in a psych team and DCFS to evaluate the situation.

Dan made his way through the crowd and told him who he was as Teri pulled out her Starfleet ID to also identify herself. The administrator just laughed and walked away and told the security officer to "See them out."

As the security guard made his way towards the group Chip and Teri both circled wide around him and went into DJ's room. When they got in they saw a doctor tying DJ to the gurney and a nurse preparing a charcoal flush. They also heard the sound of the security guard as he burst through the door yelling at them that they were under arrest.

Chip flipped out his Starfleet ID and identified himself at which point he found himself on his butt sprawled on the floor after the massive fist of the security guard put him there.

Chip then pulled out his communicator and said, "*Enterprise*, get us all out of here and take everything with you. Security to yellow alert at the cargo bay.

In an instant the entire clan and all the contents of DJ's hospital room were transported to the lower cargo bay on board the *Enterprise* where they were met by Lt. Thompson and Doctor McCoy.

"Grab him!" Chip said as he pointed at the security guard.

Lt. Thompson pointed his phaser at the guard and made it poignantly clear that he shouldn't move very much, and to his credit, he actually understood the point.

McCoy rushed over and along with Antonio, took DJ at high speed to the sick bay, and as they left the room Tanner handed McCoy DJ's note. Dan also followed and was explaining to McCoy what the drugs strength and amount were.

"Damn," McCoy exclaimed. "That is one nasty drug, and not always easy to counteract. It slows down the heart rate and breathing as it also acts like an anti-anxiety drug. I can't make any promises, but I will give him everything I can. The rest is up to him."

Tanner's Thoughts

'OK, so I thought we were always going to be together. I thought that we finally had found something that was going to make our lives better. Now you have to go and pull something like this. You selfish little Brat! You think you always had to be the survivor? News flash, I had to survive too, and you don't see me trying to check out early. Well if that is the way you want it, fine! Go ahead and die. I can make it without you. I don't need your sniveling little whiny butt around me. You cant bring me down. I am stronger than that. If you could hear me right now I would scream at you and tell you to go to hell. But you were always one for getting that last word in. You always have to have it your way. What about me? You think you don't count? What does this say for me? Part of me wants to die now as well, but I won't give you the satisfaction of seeing me on the other side. No! You are going to have to wait for that one DJ. You will have plenty of time to sit there and think about what you did. I hope you are miserable thinking about it. I hope you look down on all of us and see that we are doing fine without you and that we have such great lives. Maybe then you can regret what you did. Hell with this back... I am out of here you bastard. I gotta get away from these people before they drive me bloody insane.'

As the rest of the adults started to go toward the sick bay area, Cory was trying to herd up the kids and take them somewhere out of the way. "Come on Guys, let's go and hit the forward lounge. We need to stay out of the Doc's way. All we can do now is pray."

He then stopped and asked, "Did anyone see where Tanner went?"

"No," Adam said. "I bet he went with DJ though."

"Mom said that only the adults were there," Cory stated. "Oh hell. We have to find him."

Cory then pulled out his communicator. "Ensign Cory to Lt. Thompson."

"Go ahead Cory."

"Sir, we have a missing clan member. Tanner is nowhere to be found and I am concerned that he is vulnerable considering the events of today. I am requesting a detail to locate him."

"Acknowledged Ensign. Lt. Thompson to Bridge crew – bring the ship to active alert. All stations report – be advised that we have a missing child – go to deck computer stations for more information and current photos. Thompson out."

****Sick Bay****

"Damn it," Bones said as he threw another injector across the room. "This should have worked. Antonio, team, tell me if I missed something. Let's do a checklist.

1.) Induced vomiting to expunge any remaining pills – check

- 2.) Charcoal bolus to contain any drugs in the stomach – check
- 3.) Lactated ringer drip .5% saline solution to hydrate – check
- 4.) Counter drug added to combat the effects – check

At this point we have reached a stable bio rhythm.

Next we began the correct formulation, based on body size, to bring him to homeostasis, and regain consciousness. He should, from every reading I see on the bed, be regaining consciousness, but he isn't. We have done 2 injections now, and the most that we can give is three. Do I have any suggestions? Is there anything that I missed?"

There was a collective negative nod of heads. Everyone agreed that the proper protocol had been followed to the tee.

"I think we should give him the third injection sir," Antonio said, and everyone agreed.

As Bones reached into his pocket to grab the third and final injector he found a piece of paper. "What's this," he said to nobody in particular. The he remembered the paper that Dan had handed to him as they rushed to the sick bay wards. He opened it up and began to read.

Dear Everyone,

I am not quite sure how to begin this, or perhaps to end this. These last few years have been something out of a horror movie for me. First I lost my mother, and then everything went downhill with my father. I watched as Tanner went through his problems when he lost his parents, and then with all that happened with Steve and Mary.

Then we come to the last few weeks. I am not quite sure to handle this, and I am sure that I am in need of more counseling than anyone could ever provide and to be honest, I don't have the strength to even deal with it anyway. I am having constant nightmares about watching my father killed. I am still living in the horror of getting shot. Then I find out that I have a brother who is younger than me physically and in all actuality he is also older than me. My whole life has been a living lie and deception.

Someone please tell me where this has all come from because I can't seem to understand anything anymore. I don't care much for anything. Russ and Sara have been kind enough to take all of us in, and I can see now that the people I care about; Tanner, Beau, and Toby are all happy. That is wonderful for them, but I have to be honest. I am not happy at all. I feel nothing but numbness. I don't want all of this change. I want a simpler time in my life. Baseball games, hot dogs, scouts and friends

I know that they say that suicide is chicken shit and it is selfish to the ones you love, but I have always been the survivor. Whenever someone was down I tried to do for them anything that I could to make it better for them. I have always done for everyone else. I have always taken the brunt so someone else could feel less pain. What about me? When do I get to count? When does it matter to anyone? The only answer I can seem to find is that it will never matter.

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I am sorry.

DJ

Then it hit him. He knew at this moment that there wasn't a damn thing he could do from a medical standpoint to save the life of the thirteen year old boy in front of him. He knew that you can't save someone who didn't want to be saved. He realized that the young man in front of him truly wanted to die.

"Damn it boy," He yelled! "I might be a cranky old coot, but I know that there are people who love you and would give anything to have you here with them. Why in the world would you think that this is the best way to go? Fight God damn it! You are only a child. Your life hasn't even begun. Live to see what comes next for the love of Pete!"

Bones looked around the room at the people who were as silent as church mice, wide eyed and staring at him. He then handed the note to his assistant and slowly made his way to the communicator which was lying on the table.

****Captains Ready Room****

"Chip," Kirk began. "What in the hell happened here today?"

"To be honest sir, I am not sure. We have been keeping an eye on DJ for the last few days and have been trying to let him ease into an adjustment period. We even discussed a course of action at dinner to get him the counseling that he needed. I guess we just didn't act fast enough. I take full responsibility for that."

"Why would you take responsibility for that Chip," Kirk asked? "You know that neither you nor anyone else can predict the mind of a young boy."

"I should have forced the counseling issue immediately Captain."

"Well Chip, all we can do now is pray. Try not to beat yourself up too bad. You need to be strong for everyone now. And hopefully we can find Tanner quick enough to get him some help too ... He has to be hurting inside more than anyone of us could possibly imagine."

Chip just nodded his head and continued to explain the events to the Captain, when his communicator went off.

"Dodds," he replied.

"Chip, its Bones. Get the clan together and meet me in sick bay."

"Is everything ok Bones?" Kirk asked.

"I wouldn't waste any time Jim, McCoy out."

Authors Notes:

What?!?!? You didn't think that I could rekindle this one without wrecking some havoc with a cliffhanger. Don't worry ... Chapter 8 is already written and I won't make you wait 18 months before I post it

I'm back :) GunRunner

Editors Notes: This is an exciting rebirth for a wonderful story. I am glad to be back on board for an exciting ride. Welcome back Gun!

CHAPTER 8: WHEREVER YOU'RE GOING – IT'S AL-RIGHT

This chapter is made possible with the assistance and hard work of the CSU Authors: ACFan - JeffP - Akeentia - Dark Star - Greybear - MultiMapper ... and of course

TwoHyperPups

I would like to note that this chapter takes place before the events of the current Memories time line so please don't think that my cheese has slipped off my cracker. If you are having a difficult time understanding where all of this is coming from, I would strongly suggest that you go back and re-read all of the chapters and Memories as well starting with Book 1 chapter 34 - Then you will understand what is going on :P

As Kirk and Dodds ran towards the turbo lift to take them to sickbay, Kirk opened his communicator and did a ship wide broadcast.

"All Clan Short personnel report to sickbay immediately. This is not a drill. All Clan Short to sickbay Stat."

When people started cramming their way into the sick bay McCoy began to address them.

"Everyone, I want you to understand that medical technology, while very advanced, is no match for the will of the human soul. I have done everything that I possibly can to reverse the effects of the drugs that DJ ingested, and while that was successful, his own pig headed stubborn willingness to throw away his life is taking hold of him, and I feel certain that unless a miracle happens sometime soon, we will lose DJ. I am not sure how to deal with this, and I am an adult. You guys are still kids, and I don't have any ideas how to make this easier on you, but I think that it is best if you prepare yourselves for what is most likely going to happen here. You might want to make peace with this young man. I will allow you to talk to him one at a time, with an adult in the room, to say what you will, but understand this. If any of you starts having problems with this, I want you to leave the room and talk to one of us. Nobody here will be alone in this."

"How long Bones," Kirk asked. "Can you prolong it if need be?"

"No clue Jim," McCoy shrugged. "Could be ten minutes, could be ten days, but I can try."

"In that case, I want all involved to meet with me in the conference room," Kirk stated. "And just where in the hell is Tanner?"

"Captain, He asked to be left alone and is in the forward lounge," Teri replied.

"He gets ten more minutes to himself then he sucks it up and comes and talks to me."

"OK Everyone," Kirk began. "This is the situation. We all know that Bones is doing everything he can to keep DJ alive. However, it appears that this might not happen. I think it would be best if people started saying their goodbyes now while he is still alive rather than to wait until after he is gone."

Kirk waited for the raucous noise to die down before he continued, "I think he can probably hear what we would say to him, and perhaps that might jolt his stubborn adolescent ass back into reality."

He again paused as Tanner made his way sulkily into the room.

"Tanner, I know that you are hurt deeply by this, but please try to see past that and show DJ some love now before it is too late. I have seen it all too many times before in my career when people live their lives in a state of regret. Don't fall down that path."

"I also want it made clear, all children will need to have an adult present should they decide to go in and say something to DJ. I don't want people to have breakdowns over this, even though I am sure it will happen should he pass away. But I want a support system in place for all the youth. Cory, I would normally say you should do this, as you are the clan patriarch, but as you are on my ship, and you are an officer under my command, I will ask you to let some of the adults handle this. I am only asking you this because some of us, however ancient we might be, have a bit more life experience under our belts and we all just want to help.

Cory began to argue but was silenced immediately with Kirk saying, "If you won't agree with me speaking as an Uncle to you, then you WILL respect me saying it is a DIRECT order Ensign ... Are we clear.

"Yes sir," Cory replied. "And Uncle Jim, Sir ... Thank you."

Any time Cory ... Any time.

"Now everyone lets go do what we have to do."

Begin DJ's Dreams

As DJ opens his eyes he looks around at the gray blank room he is in. He sees the fog that surrounds him and off to his side he sees the form of Mikey, the saint that he recently met.

"Mikey," What's going on?

"SILENCE!" Mikey Bellowed.

"You are here in this place because you have committed the ultimate sin and have seriously altered the book of life. The punishment for your sin is eternity in hell, but for some reason I have been sent to you to tell you things which might change your course of action and set things straight."

"I did what I had to do Mikey," DJ began. "I don't want to live anymore and be a part of a book of life that causes me so much pain."

"Are you so self centered that you think that you are the only one in the world who suffers pain?" Mikey said while waiting for an answer. When none came he continued. "Let me take you for a quick history lesson. EVERYONE has to suffer pain. It is what makes us grow. You have, or should I say had, a great work to do here in this life. Your actions in future settings would seriously reduce the amount of pain that others had to suffer and would give you great pleasure. Yes, I said pleasure. You had to go through the pain first to understand what real love is. The answers lie beyond the pain DJ! Think about what our brother Jesus Christ had to do. He hung from the cross to prove that love was real. He atoned for all of our sins that we might be able to be with our Father once again. I can tell you from experience that being in His presence makes all the pain worth it. But you decided to take the cheap way out. That in itself negates the love that He has for us. But like I said, I am going to show you some things and hopefully change your feeling on this. Your chances are down to very few so listen good and hard."

"I don't think."

"I SAID SILENCE DJ!" Mikey thundered as his voice shook the heavens and the very room they stood in. "YOU WILL DO THIS. YOU WILL LEARN. NOW GET UP, RIGHT NOW, AND FOLLOW ME."

DJ got to his feet and hung his head as he slowly followed the saint to what he was thinking would be his worst nightmares.

"DJ," Mikey began a little more softly. "I want you to come here and look at this."

"I don't want to," DJ stuttered.

"You will be ok," Mikey said.

When DJ got to where Mikey was standing he was pointed towards a funeral. As he sat there and looked he recognized the faces of the people who loved him and cared about him, all stricken in grief and silently sobbing as they one by one went up to a casket (presumably his) and touched it before walking away. DJ was filled with emotion as he watched Timmy silently walk up to the casket and wrap his small arms around it. The scene became more and more saddening as one by one each of the people paid some kind of silent respect. But this moment was tuned darker when he saw JJ walk up, arm in a sling, and reach out to touch it, only to fall over in agonizing tears. Next he saw a frail looking Cory being helped up to the front by a very tired and gaunt looking Teri. The blank stare that came from Cory's face made it look as though he was only a walking shell of a human being. But perhaps the hardest moment came when Tanner walked up, his left arm covered in bandages. He stopped briefly before the casket and punched a large picture, which fell to the ground, shattered. As DJ looked on, he saw the picture was of him.

"Why did he do that Mikey, why was he covered in bandages, why was JJ in a sling, what about Cory, and Timmy ... What's going on here," DJ asked?

"Grief has an interesting way of affecting people DJ," Mikey began. "JJ, who has suffered much lately with the loss of his mother suffered a breakdown of sorts and in the process of a temper tantrum directed at your stupidity, broke his arm and hand in 6 places. Cory, who lost his memory when I died, is close to being back in the same place all over again. Timmy hasn't eaten a bite since you took the pills and the doctors feel if they don't intervene soon, he will join you, and Tanner is so grief stricken now that he has become violent, and unless his mood changes quickly, he will end up in serious trouble. Now I want you to know that I am not telling you this to make you feel guilty. These are facts, and it is up to you to decide how to react. I don't want you to feel like you are the only thing holding these guys together, but you are a big factor in their lives. Each one of you has a role to play in this unfolding drama called life. It is up to you on what you do. God gave us a wonderful gift called Agency. You can do what you want, but you must be willing to accept the consequences of your actions. Now follow me over here. I want you to listen to some things. I am going to allow you to listen to what everyone is saying to you while you are comatose. You won't be able to respond, but you can hear."

"Tanner hates me now, doesn't he," DJ asked.

"At the moment, yes." Mikey said solemnly. "But that hate will wither, and from that point, I am not sure what will manifest in its place. Pity, sorrow, resentment, or anger. All are possibilities. Only time will tell. Now, come over here please.

As DJ walked closer to Mikey he heard the voice of Timmy as clear as though they were standing side by side, and he was choked up by the words of his little brother, or big brother, or what ever he was.

"C'mon big bro; you promised you wasn't gonna leave me! You gotta come back; I need ya' with me to help our new big brother! If you come back, Daddy's gonna take us to anot'r planet. We're gonna help a big kid there, then we're gonna find a new bro for you an' me - an' he's a an'roid! I've gotta buncha new friends that're gonna come an see you; promise you'll listen bro - pweeeezzzzeee? I don't want you to go. Don't ever leave me. If you die, part of me will die too."

As soon as Timmy finished his voice was replaced by Cory's, and DJ shuddered to think what would come from his mouth, and what was going to happen to him in the future if he was to continue down the path that he had started down.

"Deej, I know things have been rough. You gotta remember something; no matter what, you are always my son just as much as Timmy. You don't know it yet, but you have a grandpa too - when we go off-planet Ambassador O'Neil makes it very clear that he considers you his grandson just as much as Timmy. Russ and Sara need you too, son; they love you just as much as Sean and I do, and you are their son just as much as if you had been born to them. I'll be honest, with everything that's going on in what you see as the future I need you more than ever, Deej. I need all of my family to help me figure out how to handle the new divisions of the Clan that are popping up; I need you by my side when I take on the Federation regarding the status of androids. When things get tough, I know I can count on you to help keep Sean and me on the right track. You are a lot like me, Deej; just the fact that I'm doing this proves it. Right now, you are kinda like I was when Mikey died; you have let everything that happened get to you until your body could not take it anymore. We need you to come back, Deej. Timmy needs his brother, Tanner needs his boyfriend. Me, Sean, Russ, and Sara need our son. We're about to start our own space fleet, and I really want you there to help get it off the ground. I'm not sure how this all

works, but I think that all of the good things that have happened might not happen if you don't wake up. Without you, at least four kids won't have families like I see them having in the future I'm living in. You make that much of a difference, Dee; and I really want to have you with me to see all of the good that will happen just from you being there. I love you son; always and forever I love you. Please listen to us. Life is too good when it's good, but it is only bad when the ones you love leave you. I honestly don't think I could handle losing you now. I know it is selfish, but I need you DJ. Please don't go.

DJ was overcome by emotion as he looked into the shadowy distance. He heard the voices of other friends who were all telling him why he couldn't leave, however, all of that didn't matter the moment that he saw his mother walking towards him.

"MOM!" DJ shouted. "Is that you?"

"Yes baby, it's me." His mother softly said as she got closer. "DJ what have you done? This can't be right. Please tell me that you haven't done this and that it is too late. I want so bad to hold you and tell you that I love you, but if you die now, I will never have that chance. We will be divided by an eternity of sorrow."

"I miss you mom ... I'm sorry."

"I miss you too baby," she began. "But you have too much ahead of you to allow this to happen. I am sorry that I wasn't there for you when you reached your lowest point, but I can always watch over you as long as you don't die. You need to go back David ... You aren't through with your work. Do the right thing son, and I will be waiting for you on this side of the veil, but now you have to go back. Make things right with the people you love and let them love you in return. There is no greater gift than love son, and you have so much to give. Don't sell yourself short. There are many wonderful things for you on the horizon if you just chose life over death. I would ask you to do it for me, but I want you to do it for you son. Live, and live fully, give, and give plentifully, share and share willingly my child. You can do it if you follow the truth you have in your heart. I know you are hurting, and I understand why, but better days are ahead of you and the worst is almost behind you now. Hold on and you will see the truth of my words David. I love you."

"I love you too mom," DJ cried as the form of his mother vanished into the deep fog that enveloped him.

"DJ," Mikey began. "I am going to give you a moment to think before we continue."

With a silent nod, he agreed.

Enterprise

Chip and JC solemnly walked into sickbay with their sons; emotion written all over their faces.

Once inside, they walked into the ICU Unit and saw DJ laying on one of the biobeds. Justy, Jamie, and Jacob walked over to stand on either side of the biobed. "Why did you do it, Dee?" Justy asked.

"Why?"

JC walked over and placed a hand on Justy's shoulder. "Son," he said.

"Yeah, Pop," Justy said, turning to look into his father's eyes.

"Your Dad and I will be in Dr. McCoy's office if you need us, okay?" JC said. Justy just nodded. JC then led Chip out of the ICU Unit and into McCoy's office.

Justy turned his attention back to the bed. "You have everything going for you, DeeJ. Why did you have to do what you did?"

Chip and JC were walking into McCoy's when their oldest son Keith rushed in through the other door. "Dad, Pop, is everything okay? I got a weird message from Just saying that he and the twins needed me up here. What's going on?"

"We don't know all the details, son, but their new friend, DJ McAlester, tried to commit suicide," JC said. "Your brothers are in with him now."

"Can I go in there with them?" Keith asked.

"Yeah," Chip said. "I think it would be a good idea of you did."

Keith nodded then went to join his brothers in the ICU Unit.

McCoy watched the interaction between Chip, JC, and Keith. Once the younger man was out of the room, he turned to the adults. "Do you really think that this is such a good idea?" McCoy said to Chip and JC.

"What are you talking about, Doc?" Chip asked.

"Those boys in there by themselves? Shouldn't one of you be in with them?" the doctor asked.

Keith walked into the ICU Unit to find his younger brothers surrounding one biobed. He noticed the twins were holding on to each other while they held on to Justy, who was quietly talking. "You got to get better, DeeJ," Justy whispered. "We need you, all of us. You got a new family and a whole bunch of new brothers, uncles, and even some aunts."

Keith quietly walked up behind Justy and placed his hands on his younger brother's shoulders. He then leaned over and spoke to the prone figured on the biobed. "We haven't formally met, DJ, but you must be very important to my little brothers," he said. "If they say they need you, then you must be very important to them, and to everyone else." He gently pulled Justy against him, feeling the younger boy beginning to cry.

"C'mon, DeeJ, you gotta wake up," Jacob said, trying to keep from crying.

"Yeah, DeeJ," Jamie said. "Who's gonna show us all of Tanner's tickle spots if you don't wake up?"

After a few minutes of praying and watching the readings on the biobed, Keith spoke up. "Bros, why don't we head into the other room? Dad and Pop are waiting on us."

The three younger brothers simply nodded their head and headed to the other office. Keith stayed back for a few moments. "Those boys think the world of you, DJ McAlester. Don't let them down." He then followed his younger brothers into the office.

"Doctor," JC said, "They're going to be fine. Keith is in there with them. Their big brother will make sure everything is okay."

About that time, the four boys walked into the office. Jacob and Keith went to Chip while Jamie and Justy wrapped their arms around JC. After a few minutes, Chip and JC led their family out of Sickbay. "Let's go home, boys," Chip quietly said.

DJ woke to footsteps and looking around saw a young boy approaching his bed, one he didn't know.

Tap, tap, tap.

The boots the boy was wearing made an eerie sound on the hard floor in the room as the boy stopped in front of the bed DJ was sitting on.

He looked the strange boy up and down seeing a boy of about eleven standing there looking at him with brown hair and intense brown eyes flecked with gold that almost seemed to be flashing in the bright light.

DJ looked around the room and noticed it was sterile and white. Bare with no furnishings before returning his gaze to the boy in front of him who was still standing there without speaking.

"What do you want?" he asked

The boy cocked his head to the side and a small smile played across his features promising mischief as DJ added "You going to try to talk me out of it too?"

"Nah" was all the mysterious boys said now smiling which caused DJ to gape at him in shock.

"NO?" he asked in disbelief, everyone else in this dream had been trying to do one thing and one thing only and that was to get him to change his mind now this kid says he didn't want me to.

"Why bother, no one else's been able to do shit with ya, so why should I try the same crap?" the boy asked still giving him that smile.

"Who the hell are you anyway?" DJ asked in confusion, this didn't make any sense.

"Oh sorry, my name's Sammy" he said

"I don't know you" DJ told him

"Nah you die so we don't get to meet" Sam told him matter of factly.

DJ shook his head in disbelief as this was not going at all like the others had went.

"So what are you doing here?" DJ asked

"Trying the same thing as the others did I guess, Mikey wanted me to try so here I am"

"That's it, you don't even know me and you are trying to get me to change my mind?" He asked incredulously

"Yeah, I know Tanner, Beau, Toby and Timmy and this...it ain't right man. This ain't the way to deal with stuff" he told him

"Yeah what would ya know about jack?" DJ said bitterly as he watched those eyes fill with pain for a moment before saying "I know a few things, a few" with a sadness in his voice which gave the older boy pause as he took a closer look into the young boy's eyes.

"Like what?" DJ asked with a little less anger in his voice

"Like Tanner will never recover from this. He won't ever trust anyone again and he'll grow up to be a mean person. You kept him from that"

"Yeah, the Clan'll help him" DJ replied.

"The Clan can only do so much dude. This hurt he won't get over. Your brothers will never get over it either" he said

DJ looked down for a moment before returning his gaze to the boy

"I don't wanna live no more, it hurts too much" he said with pain in his voice

"I know man, and we all got stuff that's happened to us but there's people who'll help ya if you let em" Sammy told him

"I don't wanna. I just wanna forget and I can't" DJ said looking up with a pain racked gaze at the younger boy who walked forward and wrapped his arms around him looking deeply into his eyes.

"I know Deej, I know. It seems like that'd be best and all but it ain't. My dad says that everything that we experience makes us who we are and if we hadn't had those things happen to us we would be different"

DJ looked at him for a long moment before saying "I wouldn't mind being different"

"Really?" Sam asked him and saw the boy nod his head affirmatively.

"That would mean no Tanner, no brothers, and no Clan, you really want that" he asked as the boy sobbed "No, yes, I mean no... I don't know" as the tears began to fall.

After a few minutes Sammy said "Come on" to the older boy

"Come where?" DJ asked.

"Well the others tried talking, Mikey tried showing you things, I'm gonna try and do both" Sammy said with a grin.

"Showing me what?" DJ asked warily.

"Well my dad says a picture is worth a thousand words, especially this one that he keeps showing people" Sammy said as he giggled "So I'm gonna show you some"

Sammy stood up and commanded "Take my hand DJ" to the older boy.

With some trepidation evident on his face DJ stood up and looking Sammy in the eyes again reached out his hand in trust and grasped the younger boy's hand as Sam began walking leading the older boy away from the bed towards the far side of the room which had become shrouded in gray swirling mist with a smile on his face.

DJ wasn't too thrilled with the fog bank which had suddenly appeared in his room but before he could say or do anything about it they were entering it.

They appeared in a home, in the hallway just as a naked little boy ran into a room down the hall screaming "Can I take a shower with you daddy?"

"Sure honey" was heard from an adult voice in response as Sammy turned and said "They can't see or hear us so don't worry" to an obviously stunned DJ.

"How did we....?" He asked

"Mikey" Sammy replied with a big grin on his face, "Ain't it cool" he said.

"I guess" DJ said looking around

Then the grin vanished as Sammy said "Come on" and led the older boy into the bathroom and to the shower where a sight greeted DJ that provoked an immediate reaction.

"That's sick" he said in disgust as he watched the man collapse back against the wall and looked at what was all over the boy who was smiling.

"Is it?" Sammy asked turning and looking at DJ speculatively.

"Yes it is. Why are you showing me stuff like this?" he asked Sammy

"Because, one little event can change a lot of things DJ" he replied as they watched the man stagger away from the wall and his son as the boy cried "Daddy?"

They heard him snarl "Just finish your shower" as he rapidly exited the tub and then the room before they heard a door slam down the hall somewhere.

"Daddy, wait, did I do something bad?" the little boy cried as he got out of the tub and ran out of the room and they could soon hear him calling plaintively "Daddy what's wrong, daddy. Daddy let me in, please"

A short while later they watched as the boy came walking dejectedly back into the room and crawled back in the shower with tears running down his face.

"So why did you show me some guy messing with his kid like that?" DJ said angrily "Didn't they tell ya nothing bout me?"

"Yeah they told me about ya, and you'll see" Sammy said as he grabbed DJ's hand again. "Things aren't always what they appear to be" Sammy said as he began walking, dragging the older boy into the suddenly forming mist again.

This time they came out in the living room of the same house as the man walked out of the kitchen and the boy ran over wrapping his arms around his legs.

What surprised DJ was the man angrily pushing the boy away from him. "Go eat your dinner" and watching as the boy's face fell in despair.

"It's been 3 days since the shower" Sammy said as they watched the boy pick at his food.

Nothing got eaten to speak of and finally the man said "You don't want to eat then get ready for bed" still with an angry tone of voice causing the boy's head to snap up and tears to begin to run down his face.

"GO" the man ordered

"So the dad's an asshole, your point?" DJ asked as they watched the boy slowly slide off his chair and walk out of the room.

What confused them was the man burying his head in his hands and the sobs that seemed to come out of him until he heard the boy returning at which time he straightened and said before the boy could even get in the room.

"This isn't the way to your bed"

"I..I wanted a kiss and hugs" the boy said as if he were begging for sustenance.

"You're a big boy now, you don't need that anymore, just get into bed" the man said with pain lacing his voice.

The boy reacted as if he had been slapped as he stared in shock at his father finally mustering the courage to cry out "But dad..." only to be told in a growl "Just GO"

The boy turned and ran with tears flying from his face as Sammy took DJ's hand once more and pulled him into the mist.

They next appeared in the same house to find the father on the sofa and the boy hesitantly walking into the room and coming over to find his father dozed off on the couch.

The boy crawled up in his father's lap and snuggled in and the boys could almost hear him purring in contentment as Sammy said "It's been a week since the shower" in a quiet voice.

Both boys watched as the father stirred and wrapped his arms around the boy hugging him to him and moaning in his sleep before waking, looking confused, and then to DJ's surprise at least, panicked as he saw what was in his arms.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" he screamed at the child and before the boy could respond pushed him roughly off his lap telling him "I told you, you are too old for this nonsense anymore, go to bed now" causing the boy to begin crying uncontrollably as he shakily got to his feet and ran off towards his bedroom.

Then they watched as the man began crying again pleading for someone to help him.

"I don't get it" DJ said in confusion "He treats his kid like shit but then cries about it, he must be whacked"

"You don't yet" Sammy said as he waved his hand slightly

"What did you do?" DJ asked suspiciously as he looked around

"Just moved us forward a few minutes" Sammy replied as the man who had been staring off into space got slowly to his feet and headed towards the back of the house.

"Come on" Sammy said as they followed the man then Sammy pulled him by the hand and they were in the boy's bedroom where said boy was touching himself almost absentmindedly DJ thought.

They watched as the father came into the room and froze at the sight. A smile had started to come across his face but it suddenly turned to rage and he advanced screaming at his young son

"What are you doing, you don't do that" and then as they watched he struck the boy once, twice and then again as the boy screamed in pain.

DJ had run forward at the first blow but found out that in this form he couldn't affect anything.

"You can't do anything" Sammy sadly informed him as they watched the father rant at the little boy before turning and stalking from the room.

"You have to do something, you can't let this kid be hurt like this" DJ said furious at what he had just witnessed.

Sammy shook his head as he watched the little one curled up on the floor now crying and sobbing hysterically.

"There's nothing I can do" was all the response DJ got.

"Come" Sammy told him

"I can't leave him like this, what if he comes back?" DJ said "We have to at least call someone" he added in fury.

"Come, there's nothing to be done, the boy survives, for now" Sammy said with tears running down his face as he grabbed an unwilling DJ dragging him towards the mist once again.

"But..." DJ began but didn't get to finish as he was pulled into the swirling tides of time to reappear once again in the boy's room only this time the boy wasn't there but two older boys, both naked and both engaged.

"What?" DJ asked turning in confusion as Sammy said "It's the same boy, just when he's older" and DJ noticed the pain etched on Sammy's face as he asked "What is it?"

"Just watch" was all that Sammy could say and they did.

DJ turned back to the bed and the two boys who appeared to be about eight years of age lying on it exploring one another.

DJ thought it was cute but that thought quickly changed to terror as the door to the room was flung open and the father from before entered screaming at the boys.

His son never got to voice a word that his mouth had opened to do before his father's fist came crashing down on the boy's young face.

"Fuck ... do something" DJ screamed in tandem with the other child who was trying to get the man off his friend.

The man turned and hit the boy in the head sending him crashing into the wall where he slumped down unmoving for the moment as the man pummeled his son screaming in a blind rage.

They watched as the other boy woke and slowly crawled away reaching into his pocket where he pulled something out that DJ recognized as a communicator fumbling with it with one hand until he got it open and pressed what DJ recognized was the emergency signal button and then passed out once again.

It was obvious to DJ as he witnessed these things that the boy was injured and he thought the son had to be dead by now because the man hadn't stopped hitting the boy.

He glanced over and saw Sammy staring at the boy on the ground with tears running down his face.

In a strangled sob he replied "I can't"

Moments later the room filled with the familiar glow of a transporter as Gabe, JJ and Cory all materialized in the room all noticeably older but unmistakably them.

"STOP IMMEDIATELY!" Cory shouted at the man who froze in mid motion.

They watched as the man turned, looking at them and then returned his gaze to what was left of his son before beginning to look back and forth between the two.

DJ watched in disbelief as he said "What have I done?" before crying "NO" and charging the boys.

JJ fired first followed by Gabe as they watched the man collapse to the ground unmoving.

"Aw shit" Cory said as he ran to the boy, pulling a tricorder from his waist and aiming it at the child, JJ was doing the same to the boy on the floor

"Matty, Matty" he called as he waved the device over the prone boy before pulling his communicator from his waist as Cory turned around with tears in his eyes and just shook his head.

"JJ to Lafayette emergency transport plus one injured, one in custody and one...one dead" he said brokenly into the communicator.

"Acknowledged" a voice replied as Cory asked "How is he?"

"Broken arm and concussion that I can see" JJ replied.

"Isn't there anything..." Gabe started to say but Cory shook his head and said "No" with absolute finality in his voice as the transporter hum filled the room taking them away leaving only two very stunned and shocked boys in their wake.

"WHY?" DJ turned on Sammy screaming "WHY SHOW ME THIS?" he demanded with anger clearly in his voice.

"Because you needed to see it" Sammy said with the tears still running down his face.

"WHY, I DON'T KNOW THESE KIDS WHY!!!!" DJ said again

"Cause one of them is my brother" Sammy choked out, before saying "And the other one would have been if you hadn't died" he finished softly causing DJ to freeze in his pacing of the bloodied room.

"What? What do you mean?" he asked stricken of the younger boy.

"Come" Sammy said in a choked voice

"Not until you tell me what the hell that's supposed to mean" DJ yelled at him

"What you didn't think you're leaving this world would cause shit to happen well it does. You weren't there to save Damien and this is what happened" Sammy said with anger replacing the sadness of moments ago.

"You think you don't affect anyone else well just ask that kid there, Damien would be alive if you were!" Sammy yelled back at him before saying in a softer voice "And my brother wouldn't be hurt and spend years blaming himself for his friends death" and DJ could hear the pain behind those words.

"I do something if I live that prevents this?" DJ asked

"Come" Sammy said not brooking any argument this time just reaching out and grabbing a stunned DJ's hand and pulling him into the mists.

When they emerged again it was the same bedroom and the same two boys doing the same exact thing as before.

"No, please" DJ begged as he saw the scene from minutes ago about to unfold once again before him.

"Watch" was all that Sammy would say as once again the door went flying open and the kids looked startled only this time the man laughingly said "Sorry to disturb you guys, next time you might want to shut the door" grinning the whole time as he quickly began to back out of the doorway.

"It's ok dad, I don't mind" Damien said causing his father to blush as he said "Well maybe your friend there does" which caused Damien to giggle and look a bit chagrined as his dad pulled the door closed laughing.

"You're dad is really cool" Matty told him

"Yeah he's the best dad in the whole world" Damien said smiling softly as Matty said "Nah mine is" giggling as they got into a war of "No mine"

DJ turned to Sammy in shock who was smiling now and said "How?, What?"

"Little things mean a lot" Sammy said as he took DJ's hand once again saying "Come and this time you will get to feel what they feel" causing DJ to suddenly become worried wondering what was going to happen next. Before he could get too worried they entered the mists reappearing in the bathroom once again.

This time it was as a little voice shouted "Can I take a shower with you daddy?"

"Sure honey" was the response from inside the shower.

The boys and in particular DJ watched and more importantly felt the events as they unfolded this time and understanding made all the difference.

When it was over DJ looked wonderingly at Sammy and said "He wasn't"

"No he wasn't" Sammy replied.

"But I don't understand" DJ said.

"Come" and took the older boy by the hand bringing him to each of the places he had visited before immediately after the shower.

When they got to the last one DJ turned and said "He thinks he's protecting his son"

"Yes" Sammy replied sadly.

DJ shook his head in disbelief at this.

"I was so sure...." He said as his voice tapered off and Sammy replied "So sure he was abusing his kid and was an asshole?" Sammy asked

"Yeah, I mean..." DJ said before continuing "He loves him and it's hurting him to push the boy away like this but he thinks he has to"

"Yeah, he thinks that's the only way to protect the boy. He sees what happened in the shower and thinks he's evil for what happened" Sammy told DJ

"But it wasn't dude, nothing happened" DJ said

"Yeah but he thinks it did. His son grabbing him and washing him like that brought a lot of feelings suddenly out and he came almost instantly remember?"

"Yeah but he wasn't doing nothing bad" DJ said

"I know that, and you know that but HE doesn't"

"He didn't even have time to tell his son to stop before it happened. Now he's scared to death to touch the kid cause he thinks he's some kind of pervert or something and he's doing this stuff cause of all the crap his head has been filled with" Sammy told him.

DJ was just shaking his head. "I was so wrong" he said

"You reacted to what you saw and sometimes that can be a good thing but other times....." Sammy said letting his voice trail off

"Yeah I guess that's why Russ and Sara are always telling me to think before I do stuff.

"Probably, my dad says that too" Sammy replied with a grin.

"So how do I change things?" DJ asked

"You don't if you don't live" Sammy replied sadly.

"If, I mean if I do?" he asked

"Come" Sammy said as DJ extended his hand and Sammy grasped it and they walked together for the first time into the mists.

They emerged into a mall and DJ looked around with interest before asking

"What are we doing here?"

"Watch" was all that Sammy said

At that moment several boys came around the corner walking down the concourse.

"Hey that's me" DJ exclaimed in surprise

"Yes it can be in about a month or so" Sammy said causing DJ to give him a questioning look as they watched the antics of the boys as they got closer.

It was DJ, Tanner, Jamie and Jacob along with JJ and Gabe and they were obviously clowning around and having fun.

DJ was looking at this intently and had a sad smile on his face and Sammy could see the tears forming as he watched his other self existing with the one he loved.

"I miss him" DJ said softly

"I know and he misses you too" Sammy said with sadness evident in his voice causing DJ to look at him quickly before returning his face to the boys with yearning now present.

Then the other DJ stopped suddenly and pulled on Jamie's arms whispering urgently to him.

The boys watched as the other kids gaze locked on a man and young boy walking across the aisle from them as DJ gasped "Damien"

"Yes, it's been about a month since the shower now" Sammy said as they looked at the boy and his father.

"They look like shit" DJ observed.

"Yeah, dad from guilt he shouldn't have and Damien from not understanding what he did wrong and missing his father's love" Sammy replied.

Sammy and DJ watched as the boys suddenly made a bee line for the father and son and began talking to them.

They watched as the father was taken aside and Jamie spoke with him getting an angry reaction before JJ showed him something in his hand and he settled down.

"What's going to happen to them?" DJ asked

You and Tanner are going to take Damien for now while his dad gets help from Dan and the Clan to deal with his feelings as well as his fears. Damien will also get some help understanding that he didn't do anything wrong and that his dad still loves him. After about six months they will be reunited and.....well you saw what happens in a few years"

DJ looked in wonder at the group before him as they all began walking from the mall.

"All because of me?" DJ asked

"Yeah, little things bro, little things" Sammy said grinning.

"What happened in the shower did it all didn't it?" DJ asked

"Yeah, that one little thing destroyed two lives for nothing, you save two lives just by caring about a little kid"

"And your brother?" DJ put in

"Yeah and my brother who suffered for a long time because of what happened to Damien and because of some crap that he'd been through before" Sammy replied.

"Why didn't the Clan just take Damien for good like they usually do?" DJ asked perplexed.

"That's something your Clan needs to learn, you don't always have to destroy families to protect the children. Sometimes just working through things can save em too. Damien's dad loves him to death, but he did what he did out of love not hate. It just wasn't the right thing" Sammy replied sadly.

"Yeah" DJ said looking after the group as they reached an exit and left the mall.

"Come on DJ one last thing and then you need to get back" Sammy said as DJ reached out and took his hand leading Sammy towards the mist this time and they entered.

Once again they were in Damien's house and in the bathroom as the father was preparing to enter the shower

"Daddy can I take a shower with you?" came the little voice and the boys watched as the boy came tentatively into the room while the father stiffened before relaxing and turning to face his young son

"I think I would like that honey" the father told his son smiling fondly down at him which earned a dazzling smile filled with love in return as the boy quickly ran to his father and was picked up as they entered the shower together.

The boys watched as the same events were eerily repeated from another shower while Sammy whispered "This is the first night that Damien was allowed to move back in with his father"

They watched as everything happened like it had before only this time when it was over the father didn't get upset he just smiled as Damien asked "Did I wash it good daddy, did I?"

"Yeah honey, you washed it good" the father replied as he scooped up his young son and held him to him kissing him on the cheek

"I love you daddy" the boy said

"I love you too munchkin, I love you too" the father replied inhaling deeply and letting out a long sigh as the boy giggled and said "Can we wash this off now daddy?" still giggling as the father said "Sure baby"

Both DJ and Sammy had tears of joy on their faces at what they had just witnessed as Sammy said "That's the way it's supposed to be"

"Yeah it is" DJ replied as the father and son got out of the shower and dried off walking out of the room naked to be met, much to the surprise of DJ, by the other DJ.

"So how's things going?" he asked looking between them

"Fine" dad answered smiling down at his son.

"Weally good, daddy said I did a good job" the boy answered as the other DJ said "I'm glad to hear that" and the relief showed on his face with his words.

"After Timmy set me straight, it'll never be a problem again" the dad said chuckling while the other DJ laughed and said "Yeah the little munchkin has a way of doing that don't he" and the boys watched as they walked down the hall towards their room with the dad reaching down and picking up a giggling little boy.

DJ and Sammy both had smiles on their faces as suddenly the mists seemed to rise up and envelop them in darkness before dissipating and when they were gone they were back where they had started in the white room.

DJ looked around and said "I guess I got some thinking to do don't I?"

"Yeah bro you do, it's all up to you no one can make you stay. I hope you do though, I'd really like to get to know you" Sammy said looking directly into his eyes as he spoke.

DJ just looked back at him and Sammy hoped, really hoped that this had done some good.

"Well I gotta be going before the munchkins get into more trouble" Sammy said smiling at him as he turned and began walking away with that click, click, click again echoing hollowly in the space.

"Sammy" DJ called

Sammy stopped and turned back to DJ who walked over to him and wrapped his arms around him giving him a hug before saying

"Thanks, bro. I'd like that too"

Sammy just smiled and nodded his head hoping as he turned once again to go back to the land of the living leaving a very scared and hurt little boy alone once again to make a decision that would affect so many and hoping that he had contributed in some small way to him making the right one.

There were so many things he hadn't shown him, what he had was the mildest of the things that would happen if he died, as he felt his body regaining it's true age once again.

He just hoped it did some good, too many needed him for him to die.

As DJ looked on he saw the form of Sammy start to fade away. Another unfamiliar form beginning to take shape in front of him as Sammy's voice came back in a whisper through the mists; echoing in the sterile chamber. " The Ones You Left Behind have their own story to tell."

The Ones You Left Behind

You thought you were doing the right thing

You thought things couldn't get better

You thought no one cared

You were wrong many people cared

People you knew, people you hadn't met and people who weren't even born yet.

You thought no one would miss you

You thought you hadn't made a difference

You were wrong you will be missed

Your smirking smiles, the sparkle in your eye

The grin you thought no one could see

You will be missed by the son , the daughter you never had

The son or daughter who asks Mommy can Daddy see my poem?

Daddy, can Uncle or Aunt see me play?

The child on the street who lived for your smile

The parents whose lives now have a hole in it that may never fill

The Boyfriend or Girlfriend you will never meet

These people care and many more

The help is there just ask for it

The help may take some time but it will come

The friend you need may be on their way.

Just reach out for help it will come.

You made a difference to many lives you just couldn't see

Sometimes we are too blind to see those who need our help.

Just give us a chance reach out your hand,

Help will be there it may be slow, but give us a chance

The ones you left behind send you their love

The ones you left behind will shed many a tear

The ones you left behind will ne'er forget

Remember someone always cares they may be near or far but someone cares.

So remember before you go, think of the ones you leave behind!

As the ghostly voice faded away, the next apparition materialized. "Who are you?" DJ asked as the tears continued to fall down his face.

"My name is Rook." the boy answered.

"Rook," DJ asked quizzically? "I don't know you"

"That makes two of us," Rook replied. "Is this a dream?"

"More like a nightmare," DJ answered.

"Dream or nightmare. That doesn't matter. This place looks familiar. You tried to kill yourself didn't you," Rook stated. "I recognize all of this. I have been here before."

"How did you know that," DJ asked?

"Like I said, I have been here before. I know this place. You are caught in between life and death. But for some reason you are talking to me, so I think I am supposed to tell you that you shouldn't do this. I know you don't know me, and I don't know you, but I think that we are supposed to meet each other. I get this feeling down in my guts that if you cross that line lives will be ruined forever and not just yours I mean. You have no reason to believe me, or no reason to trust me, but all I can tell you is that I understand what it is like to be in the same place as you and trying to decide which line to cross. Life or death. It should be simple, but nothing in life is ever simple. That is the beauty of it. Every day is a challenge to make it to the next. I don't know if you have been visited by others, but I know that I was. I am sure they have told you that this is the wrong way to do things, and they are right, I know that from experience, but the only thing that I can tell you is this. No one can make any promises that things

will get better. The only thing that they can promise is to support you and be there for you, and if they have done that, then I can say this. You can make a difference. I have this feeling that you are going to make a difference in my life if you chose the right path, so all I can do is ask you to do the right thing. Please?"

DJ sat there with tears streaming down his face as he watched Rook disappear into the fog that surrounded him.

As he shivered again DJ cried out in pain. Pain for all the wrongs and rights that he knows. "GOD! Why can't this be easy? I want to do what is right! Part of me says it is right to die, and part of me says it is right to live. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO."

As his crying subsided, DJ looked around and saw a dim light in the distance.

He didn't know what to expect, but decided to move toward it to find out what it was.

As he moved closer, he saw a group of four boys looking back at him.

"Hey, how you doin'?" The smallest of the boys asked casually.

"I... I'm not sure." DJ said in confusion.

The oldest of the boys gave a good natured chuckle and said, "That sounds about right."

DJ walked a few steps closer, feeling instinctively that these guys weren't going to hurt him.

"Who are you?" DJ asked cautiously.

"I believe to ask 'What' are we would be a more appropriate question." The second to the oldest of the boys said, and DJ was surprised to see that he was Vulcan.

"Um... Okay, what are you?" DJ asked hesitantly.

"We are concepts given a physical form. I am the concept of Logic." The boy said without emotion.

The youngest of the boys giggled and said, "I bet he could have guessed that."

The Vulcan boy raised an eyebrow at the statement but didn't reply.

The oldest of the boys said, "I'm Feeling."

The smallest boy quickly said, "Yeah, and I'm Need and this is my twin brother Want. People always get us confused."

DJ considered what they said for a moment, and then asked, "So what are you doing here?"

"We're just here to help you sort out some things in your head. Don't worry about it buddy, it's nothing horrible or painful or anything like that." Feeling said with a warm grin.

"Oh... okay." DJ said hesitantly.

"I believe it would be logical to begin by assessing the motivations and realities of your recent decision to take your own life." Logic said simply.

DJ felt a wave of panic at the words and looked at the four boys with wide, frightened eyes.

"I think we should have eased into the subject T'hy'la. You're scaring DJ." Feeling said gently.

Logic looked up at Feeling with an uncertain expression, and then said, "Proceed."

Feeling gave the boy at his side a loving smile, then turned his attention to DJ and said, "Well, it's really pretty simple. You listened to your feelings and thought you were listening to your logical mind."

"Hey, don't forget about us." Need said firmly.

Feeling chuckled and said, "And you confused Want with Need. Like he said, people confuse them all the time."

"Okay, so what should I do about it?" DJ asked cautiously.

"Just take some time to think. We're not here to tell you what to do or to make any decisions for you. We're just here to point you in the right direction so you can help yourself." Feeling said seriously.

"It is logical to examine the motives driving one's decisions and actions." Logic said simply.

"Yeah, and remember that me and my twin brother ain't the same. Sometimes we're just alike, and sometimes what you want and what you need are completely different." Need said seriously.

Want looked DJ in the eyes and spoke for the first time. "And no one knows what you want unless you tell them. They can't help you if they don't know."

Feeling nodded his agreement and said, "That's right. Just like it's okay to feel whatever you're feeling, but it's not okay to act on every feeling, you need to listen to logic before you start doing crazy things like taking a bunch of pills."

DJ looked at Feeling with surprise at saying it so bluntly.

Feeling shrugged at DJ's expression, and then asked, "Do you have any questions for us?"

"Um... It feels weird to call you Feeling and Logic..." DJ trailed off.

The sound of a clearing throat drew DJ's attention to the smallest boy.

"...Oh, and Need and Want." DJ finished quickly.

Need nodded his head firmly.

"Okay. Why don't we try this? Jake, Xain, Kenny and Kevin." Jake said as he pointed to each one in turn.

"Um, okay." DJ said cautiously.

"Now do you have any questions?" Jake asked seriously.

"Yeah, what am I supposed to do?" DJ asked helplessly.

"Think about why you decided to kill yourself. Think about what was logical thinking and what was just feeling. Think about the things you want and the things you need. After you've done all that, then decide if this is what you really want." Jake said firmly.

"What does it matter now?" DJ said in a hopeless whisper.

"Xain, you try, I'm coming up empty here." Jake said in frustration.

"DJ, if it were not important to consider these things, would we be here?" Xain asked simply.

DJ looked up with surprise at the statement.

"Do as we have said and consider your motives. We will leave you alone for a time to think." Xain said in a calm voice.

"Wait. Will I see you guys again?" DJ asked as the boys started to fade into the darkness.

"That's up to you buddy. If you make the right choices today, someday you'll not only see us again, but you'll be one of our brothers." Jake said with a smile.

DJ stood in silence as the four boys faded from sight, leaving him standing alone in the darkness.

"Mikey," DJ said dejectedly. "I can't do it. I can't go back to a world where Tanner hates me and where I have caused so much damage. I think it is time for me to go now. I heard everyone that talked to me, but never heard his voice. And honestly, he is the only one I need to hear."

"Listen then, you only heard the words, but I will now let you hear a prayer.

Dear God. Why did this happen? Why DJ? I don't want to live without him, but right now all I feel is anger toward him for leaving me like this. I know that is selfish, but I want him back. I thought you were supposed to be a great God, full of love and forgiveness. Why couldn't you keep this from happening? Where is the mercy in letting him die? I need him. I can't imagine life without him. I don't want to even try. Please bring him back to me. I don't ask for much in life, and I feel like you owe me this one. If you are so great and almighty, then give me back the one I love. I need you to do this for me. Either that or take me too. You can prove to me that you are real by granting this one thing to me. If you do, I won't ever ask for anything again. Please God? Help Me? Amen.

"If I die," DJ said. "Tanner will resent God and he will end up like that Sammy kid said, wont he?"

"It is very possible DJ."

Again DJ looked out into the distance and saw in the fog the room that he was in on the ship. As he watched closely, he saw Tanner walk into the room, alone. As he walked up to DJ, he placed his hand on the bed and said the eight words that made DJ decide to live, "Please don't leave me alone, I love you."

With those words said; DJ looked to Mikey and said, "I want to go back."

At that moment, an intense light filled the room that they stood in and DJ looked to see a personage that defied all beauty and glory.

DJ fell to his knees and said over and over, "I am so sorry, please forgive me."

The person, whom DJ could only assume to be Jesus, came to him, placed his hands on his head and said, "I died, that you might live, go in peace and love, and never forget."

DJ opened his eyes to see Tanner next to him, eyes closed, with tears running down his face.

"Tanner," DJ croaked. "I won't leave you again. I love you too."

"You asshole," Tanner yelled. "You need to learn to talk and listen to logic before you go off doing what you want instead of what you need. I am always here for you. Please don't do that again."

The commotion caused Doc McCoy to come running into the room. When he saw Tanner giving DJ a good tongue lashing he smiled and said, "DJ, I see that Tanner has the situation well under control. You guys talk and I will go and get the rest of the gang together. Oh and by the way DJ, you are going to fix the biobed where JJ punched it and broke his hand, and I am sentencing you to a lifetime of family service and love.

"Um ... ye ... yes sir," DJ stammered. "Okay."

"You had me worried kiddo." McCoy replied. "You tested my medical abilities to the fullest extent. Now I need a vacation."

As McCoy walked out of the room, Tanner lit into DJ again and told him how selfish he was, but he was glad to have him back.

"Tanner," DJ Began. "I don't know which way to go after this. I know now that I have important work that I have to do, and I know that I want us to be together forever, but I don't know which way to go. I feel torn between two different worlds, and I am scared."

Tanner thought for a moment and decided it was best to speak from the heart. "DJ, none of us is sure of which way to go, but I believe that if we follow our gut instincts and keep our hearts true, we will go whichever way is right for us. I won't let you go at this alone. I promise you now and forever that I will always stand by your side and support you. I know that you will have some tough choices to make, and so will I, but we have a great family to watch out for us as well."

The two boys were quiet for a couple of minutes and then Tanner lit up and said, "I want you to listen to this song."

Tanner grabbed his iPod and put the headphones on DJ's head and the sounds of REO Speedwagon flooded his ears

Say good-bye

Look to the sky

Set your course on into the night

You Say good-bye

You hold your head high

Wherever you're goin it's alright

Things must change

You know they always do

Get re-arranged

No reflection on you

Just face the danger

And follow it through

And the change is gonna be for the best

Well I know

How crazy it feels

When you go

Go out shufflin your heels

So take it slow

And make only good deals

You're a young man and it's time to go west

Oooh yes

The GunRunner

You say good-bye

You look to the sky

Set your course on into the night

You say good-bye

You hold your head high

Wherever you're goin it's alright

Take a chance

Go on make your move

Nothin' fancy

You got nothin' to prove

Just make a stance

You know were countin' on you

You are the one with the vision

So move out

Move ahead of the fear

Have no doubt

In your mind there's a very clear route

And someone must steer

It is you who must make the decision

Oooh yeah

You say good-bye

You look to the sky

Set your course on into the night

You say good-bye

You hold your head high

Wherever you're goin it's alright

After the song finished DJ smiled at Tanner and relaxed.

"DJ," Tanner said. "Wherever you're goin', it's alright. As long as we do it together."

"Bring the family in here." DJ said with his trademark grin plastered across his face. "I guess we have some talking to do"

The End

Author's Notes:

Yes everyone, this really is the end. For me at least. ACFan has already started using these characters in the future timeline, and I would be doing him an injustice if I tried to keep this up. This however doesn't mean I won't be involved with the project anymore. As you noticed above, Rook has made a cameo into the world of a Clan Short Member (hint hint), so I guess I have to continue writing From All Ends of the Earth. Plus I will always have a bit of input as to how DJ, Tanner, Toby, and Beau turn out, but they are in most capable hands.

I am sorry it has taken me so long to get this chapter out to you. I have continually written, re-written, thrown away, and started over. You can thank Dark Star for a virtual foot in my ass to get this chapter out. I hope you like it. If not, oh well, because I like it :P

Thanks to all who had a part in making this happen. ACFan, JeffP, Akeentia, Greybear, Dark Star, MultiMapper, Boi From Aus, TwoHyperPups, August Christopher, Pyro, and of course my dear friend and editor, The Story Lover. You guys have been an inspiration and a great support net for this dysfunctional excuse for a writer, and I love you all.

Hugz -Gun

"Wherever You're Goin It's Alright" is copyright ©1985 REO Speedwagon

Editor's Notes:

The empty space that was exists no more; the corporeal and spectral worlds have combined the rift in time and space has been healed. One life can and does make a difference so please always remember that. There is always someone who loves and cares enough to help; you just need to ask.

This chapter ties a lot of loose ends up and allows part of the Clan to move on with their lives. Thanks Gunrunner and all the other wonderful authors who made this possible. This was a chapter worth waiting for.

The link to "The Ones You Left Behind" is to my poem that expresses the feelings of those left behind when someone makes the choice that DJ did and was included with my permission in the hopes that together with the words of these other wonderful authors a life might be saved. "The Ones You Left Behind" ©2004 - 2006 By The Story Lover All Rights Reserved.

TSL