

A night scene of a Victorian house with a turret, a full moon, and a shooting star. The house is dark, with a prominent turret on the right side. A person is visible on the roof. The sky is dark blue with a full moon and a shooting star. The title 'Marcus and Me' is written in white cursive script across the middle of the image.

*Marcus  
and Me*

Jay Edson

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# **Marcus And Me**

by  
Jay Edson

# My Real Life Begins

Marcus was a magic person. I don't mean he did tricks. He was really magic. Nobody believes in magic any more. That's why I waited three years before I wrote this stuff down. I was afraid if it got out that I believed in magic they would make me take those drugs that do funny things to your head. Psychiatrists do that if they think you are crazy. But I know better how to keep out of their way now. Anyhow, it's just as good I did wait. I'm 14 now. I didn't write so good when I was only 11.

My real life began the day I ran away with Marcus. That's what I want to tell about.

But if this is going to make sense, I guess I've got to do a social history. When I was growing up I attracted social workers like doo-doo attracts flies and every last one of them wanted a "social history." I thought about making copies of my social history so I could just give it to whatever new social worker came buzzing around, and be done with it. I never did, of course. But here is a quick one I just now did.

When I was four my dad got killed in a car accident. So I guess that was a trauma. A trauma is what they call any really pissy thing that happens in your life. Mom told me that I was closer to him than to her. I think I sort of remember him. Once I was sitting in this guy's lap, playing with the hairs on the back of his fingers. That must have been him.

Anyhow my mom started drinking a lot and got real fat and when I was eight the Department of Human services said she wasn't a fit mother and put me in a home. I didn't like living in the home. But then, living with Mom wasn't all that great either.

The Home was a big mansion on a hill about a half a block from a lake. It was run by the Lutherans. It had a longer name like "The Lutheran Children's Home of Maine," but we always just called it "The Home." I didn't like it much. It's not like they tortured us or anything. It was just so boring there.

So the long and the short of it is this: Mom and I didn't get along. The Home and I got along even worse. I never got along with social workers. Also school and I didn't get along. And church -- well, lets not even talk about church. Fortunately I only had to go there once a week. I didn't even get along with my friends. I mean why go into a lot of detail. I didn't get along with life.

Enough social history. I'll start where my real life began: September 3, 1967.

All us kids from the home were out on a field trip. I think it was to some

museum in Boston. There was 26 of us -- boys and girls from six to sixteen. I was eleven. Going on twelve.

We pulled over into this rest stop so everybody could get off and take a leak and stretch a little bit. I had been planning to run away for some time. The only thing holding me back was that I felt I needed someplace to run to, or at least someone to run with, and like I said, there wasn't anybody I got along with.

So I was wandering around in the area where people walked their dogs and there was some picnic tables. I saw this funny looking guy sitting at a table all by himself. He wasn't real old or real young -- maybe in his thirties. He was skinny. Not too tall. Not too short. Sort of average. It's hard to say what made him look funny. I don't mean he made you want to laugh. There was just something different about him. He had long hair in a pony tail and wore blue jeans and a t-shirt with a picture of whales on it. I guessed he was hippie. We didn't see too many of them up in the part of Maine I was from. But none of that is what made his look funny. He was eating a plum. I remember that. And he sat bolt upright and just stared at everything around him. It was his eyes that made him look different than other people. The way he stared at everything. When he stared at some bird -- the most ordinary bird that he had just thrown some crumbs to -- it was like he had never seen a bird before.

I was looking at him from the side and just saying to myself, yes, its his eyes that make him look funny when suddenly he turned them on me. I think maybe he felt that I was looking at him. Anyhow he just stared at me the same way I had seem him staring at the bird -- like he had never seen a boy before. I was caught in the act. What act I was caught in wasn't real clear. After all, all I had done was to look at him. I thought, maybe he knows I think he is funny looking and that's why I am staring at him. I froze. I didn't know what to do. For a lot of seconds neither of us said or did anything. It was like a time-bomb was ticking away and I didn't know which way to run. Then he smiled, and said, "hi."

It was just ordinary, no bomb or anything. So I said hi back.

"You're on a field trip," he said.

I nodded and wondered how he knew. Then I thought about the school bus and all the kids running around and it was obvious. So I just said, "yeah." I came over closer to his table.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Some museum in Boston."

"Cool," he said. "Which one."

I shrugged. "Can't remember the name of it," I said.

"Have you been thinking about running away," he asked.

Now that one was not so easy to explain. I felt the hair on the back of my arm rise a bit. "Maybe," I said. I didn't want to say how did you know that because I figured that might give him an advantage over me -- like I thought he was a magician or something and I was just an ordinary kid.

"You want a plum?" he asked.

"Sure," I said. I came on up to the table and sat down across from him, and took the plum he offered me.

We sat there eating our plums and not saying anything and with him staring at me like he had never seen a boy eating a plum before.

Finally I said, "Where are you going?"

"West," he said.

"West?"

He nodded.

"West where?"

"As far west as I can," he said.

That wasn't a very exact answer, but my hope was to get as far away from where I was as I could. As far west as possible sounded like it might be just what I was looking for. "Can I go with you?" I asked.

"Why not?" he said.

I wiped some plum juice off my mouth with my sleeve and spit out the pit. "Really?" I said. I thought maybe he was just talking. I didn't know him yet.

"Sure he said."

I glanced over my shoulder to the bus and saw that the kids were beginning to return to it. Soon they would call for everybody and then do a count. They would discover that I was missing and come looking for me. I thought about how I might avoid them.

"Just sit like you are now, with your back to them," he said. At the time it didn't seem strange to me. I guess I didn't even notice that I had not said anything to him about my worry. I turned by back to the bus. "Now," he said, "close your eyes and picture yourself on the bus."

I didn't have a better plan, so I did what he said. The last of the kids, minus me, got on the bus and the door shut. Then there was a long wait. I figured they were counting and began to panic.

"Keep picturing yourself there on the bus," he said. I did so as best I could.

Then the bus door opened and my heart sank. They had found out that I was gone, and would come looking now. The bus driver climbed down. He had a paper sack in his hand which he took to the trash bin closest to the bus. Then he got back on and closed the door again. A few seconds later the bus drove off.

I began to feel how weird this was getting.

"We better get going," he said. He stood up and put the bag with the remaining plums back into a cooler on the picnic table.

"What's your name?" he asked as we walked to his car.

"Jed," I said. "Jed ... Greene." It was a lie. I was afraid he was going to turn me in and figured it would be harder for him to do so if he didn't know my real name.

"OK... Jed," he said. "This is my car." It was an old dumpy looking Pontiac. Mostly it was blue but the left front door was red. The back seat was filled with camping gear. He opened the back door and I put the cooler on the seat.

The man didn't say much for about five minutes after we pulled out of the rest stop and started down the road. Then he turned and looked at me.

"What's your real name," he asked.

"Jed Greene, like I told you," I said.

He didn't answer. Didn't even glance at me. We drove along in silence for quite some time. It was more than silence. It was like he had drifted off to another planet -- like he wasn't there at all with me anymore. I began to get nervous. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer. "Frank," I said. "I'm Franklin Hubbard."

He glanced at me and smiled. "Good," he said, and extended his hand to me. I'm Marcus Bohm. That's b...o...h...m. Bohm" I shook his hand. "You can be Jed when we are around other people, if you want," he said. "How about it if I call you Franklin when it's just us."

"Yeah, that's OK," I said. Actually I liked being called Franklin but to most everybody I had always been "Frank."

"We need to get you a new set of clothes, Franklin. They'll be looking for you pretty soon and it won't do for you to be running around in state clothes. If you are going to be a runaway its best not to look like one."

"OK," I said.

"Better do that right off," he said. "Then we need to get out of this state before they come looking for us."

"How long do you figure we got before they start looking for us," I asked. He thought about this. "Of course I don't know," he said. "First they have to miss you. Then they will probably figure they left you back at the rest stop. We've probably got several hours before they figure that something more serious than a mix-up happened."

So we pulled off at the next exit and we found a clothing store. He bought me two pair of blue jeans, some t-shirts, two sweat shirts, two sweat pants, six pair of socks and the same number of underwear. He even bought me a new pair of sneakers. They were pretty cool. The best I had ever had. Then we lucked out and found an Army Navy store where he bought me a sleeping bag and a duffel bag to put all my things into. Then we went into a drug store where he bought me about a dozen comic books. "So you won't get bored," he said.

When we got back to the car he pulled a small tin box -- the kind sometimes candy comes in -- out of the back seat. He pried of the top and took some money out of it and put it in his bill-fold to replace the money he had used for my things. I was amazed. This guy would be so easy to rip off. I filed that fact away in the back of my head.

When we were back on the road he told me that I better change right away because if they were looking for us they would say what I was wearing. Also, he said, I probably had my name on my t-shirt and underwear. He was right about that. They wrote my initials on all our clothes at the Home so nobody could steal and we wouldn't argue about whose things was whose. I looked around at the other cars on the road. Sometime one would pass us.

"Can't you go any faster?" I asked.

"Don't want the cops to pick us up for speeding," he said. "We want to be as invisible as possible."

"People in other cars might see me changing," I said.

"I don't think they can see much," he said.

I was a little nervous but when I got all my clothes off I sort of liked it. I put on one of the new t-shirts. It had a cool picture of a moose on it. But for a little bit I didn't put anything else on. One car that passed us had a girl sitting in the back seat -- one about my age. I waved at her but she was reading a comic book and didn't look up. Then a pick up truck passed us and a woman looked over at us. I realized that because she was higher up she might see that I didn't have any pants on. Don't know whether she noticed or not but then I finished getting dressed.

After an hour or so we came to another rest stop and Marcus pulled into it.



He told me to put all my old clothes in the paper bag that came with the new clothes and we threw all my old things in a trash bin there. We both took a leak. Then we went to the vending machines and he got himself a cup of coffee. "What would you like to drink?" he asked.

"I'll have a cup of coffee too," I said, trying to sound casual. No adult ever let me drink coffee.

"Cream and sugar?" he asked. Just like that. No lecture about how it would stunt my growth or something else dreadful because I was a child.

"Yeah," I said. "Usually I take both." Course there was really wasn't no 'usually' about it. I had never tasted coffee before. He pushed all the buttons to make the machine cough up a coffee with cream and sugar, and we went back to the car. Seems like that must have been the last rest stop in Maine because pretty soon we came to the Kittery Bridge. I'd never been on a bridge that big before. It was cool. We were about half way across and I was looking down at the water and wondering what it would be like if the bridge collapsed when he said, "It would be a Federal case now if they caught us."

"A federal case."

"Yeah. I'm taking you across a state line. The feds could charge me with kidnapping."

"You didn't kidnap me. I asked to come."

"That wouldn't make any difference. They would call it kidnapping."

I frowned. I didn't like it that they could just call it anything they wanted to. I knew whether I was being kidnapped or not. "I'm hitch-hiking," I said.

"They would say you are too young to hitch-hike and that I was kidnapping you."

"What are you supposed to do?"

"Do about what?"

"You know. So they won't call it kidnapping."

"Take you to a police station and say that I picked up a run-away."

I thought about this for a bit while I stared at him. I was trying to read something in his face. "Would you do that?" I asked.

"Turn you in?"

"Yeah."

"No."

I kept staring at him. What I was trying to read is whether I could trust him. Was he trying to break it to me easy that he really wasn't going to take me to the West?

"How bad would it be if they caught you for kidnapping," I asked. I thought his being scared about that might be why he would turn me in.

"Pretty bad," he said.

I looked behind me at the Kittery Bridge. It was slowly getting smaller as we drove away from it. Then we went around a curve and I couldn't see it anymore. "How bad," I said.

"It might mean the chair," he said.

"The chair?"

"The electric chair."

"Oh," I said. I nodded. No grown-up was going to take a chance like that just to give me a ride. He was going to turn me in for sure. "What if I told them I wanted to go with you," I asked.

"Then maybe they would just give me life imprisonment," he said.

"That would be better than the chair," I said.

He looked at me so long then that I thought he was going to forget to watch where we were going. Then he shook his head slowly and such a little bit you could barely notice it. "No," he said. "That would not be better."

"But at least you'd still be alive," I said.

"Not really," he said. I was only eleven but I knew what he meant.

"So you going to turn me in?" I asked.

"No."

I had never trusted anybody up to then and didn't see a whole lot of reason for starting. I thought I might run whenever we stopped for gas. But where would I go? "But you think you might get the chair if you don't turn me in," I said.

He shrugged. "Maybe they would just send me back," he said.

"Back?"

"To the hospital."

"Are you sick?"

"Its a mental hospital," he said.

"The loony bin?" I asked. Right away I was sorry I said that. That was

what us kids called it but just as I was saying it I realized that it might not sound nice. So I tried to say something to make him feel good. "You don't seem loony to me," I said.

"I don't to myself either," he said. I had never thought about this. Does someone who is loony seem loony to himself? The truth is that I didn't know if he was loony or not. For all I knew he was the sort that cut your heart out and ate it and left the rest of you to rot in the woods someplace. I saw a movie about a guy who did that to a lot of people once. Mat Sheppard at the home told me it was a true story. I read a story in the National Enquirer, which I read all the time in those days, about a guy who killed his pal and ate pieces of his flesh. So I knew people really did this sort of thing. The idea of getting away from this guy the next time we stopped for gas was looking more sensible to me.

We drove along for a while longer with neither of us saying much. Then we saw this fox run across the road in front of us. He was red and had a big bushy tail. Marcus had to slow down a bit to keep from hitting him.

"Look," he said. He seemed real excited. Grownups didn't usually get all that excited at seeing foxes and things.

"Yeah, a fox," I said.

"He made it across the road," Marcus said.

"He was lucky," I said. "Could have been smashed."

"That probably means we will get away without getting caught," he said.

"Oh," I said. I looked at him. He was serious. This guy really is a little weird, I thought.

"Doesn't mean that we will be safe forever," he said. "But on this trip the spirits are protecting us."

"That's good," I said.

He nodded.

"How long were you in the hospital?" I asked.

"Couple of years."

"They let you have a car there?"

"No."

"Where did this one come from?"

"I stole it."

"Oh."

"Don't worry. I didn't steal it from a person. I would never do that. It

would hurt that person. I stole it off a used car lot. I figured they wouldn't miss it much. I took an older one. Got the plates from a junk yard. "

He seemed proud of himself. But it didn't make me feel any better. Not only was this guy a loony but a criminal as well. He was probably very dangerous. Sure he seemed nice. But I saw a movie once about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll was nice. But at any moment this other part of him, Mr. Hyde, might come out. He would do awful things to people. Also we were in a stolen car. I thought about asking him right then and there to pull over and drop me off. But I was afraid that would let him know that I was on to him, and God knows what he would do then. I decided I would just wait for the first gas stop.

But then a cop pulled up behind us. He's going to pull us over I thought, because they will see that it's a stolen car. Probably they are all looking for it. If the cop pulls us over I'll tell him. I'll whisper it to him about how I am being kidnapped. I hate to see Marcus get the chair in a way, but God knows how many kids this loony had killed when the Mr. Hyde part came out.

"Don't worry about the cop," Marcus said. I guess he had seen me glancing over my shoulder. "He won't stop us. Remember the fox."

I could see that the cop had a hamburger in one hand and was juggling a soft drink in the other. He was steering with only his wrists on the wheel. He didn't look like he was paying much attention to us. I thought about making some secret hand signals to him but realized that I didn't know any. While I was thinking about it the cop pulled off the the right and took an exit. He had only pulled in behind us to get into the right lane to pull off the interstate.

We drove on for quite a spell without talking. Then I told him I had to pee.

"Me too," he said. "Coffee goes right through you."

So he pulled off the Interstate at the next exit and found a gas station. I made it to the bath room first. Then while he was in the bathroom I pulled the box where he kept his money out of the back seat and opened it. There was a lot of money there -- probably hundreds of dollars. I couldn't bring myself to take all of it. After all he had bought me all those clothes and stuff. Even if he was a loony he had been nice to me. I'll just take Mr. Hyde's part and leave Dr. Jekyll's part for him, I decided. So I took about half of it. Even if he had been nice to me so far, I just couldn't take a chance being with him. I stuffed the money into my pocket and walked out to the road and put my thumb out. I was very nervous but I figured he couldn't do anything to me out in plain sight of everybody else even if he

came out before I got a ride. Several cars went by and a couple of them looked at me, but none of them stopped. Then he was standing beside me.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"South," I said.

"Thought you were going West with me."

"Changed my mind."

He thought about this for a bit. "OK," he said finally. "But you will need your duffel bag and sleeping bag. He went back to the car and brought them to me. Then he held out his hand to shake. I shook it. His hand felt soft and friendly. And I could see that he looked sad.

"Goodbye," he said. "Good luck." He handed me a map. "You will need this to see where you are going," he said.

He turned and went back to the filling station. I think he was going to get another map.

By the time he returned to the car I was back in my seat beside him.

"Ah, you are still here," he said. "I thought you were going South."

"Changed my mind," I said.

"That's good," he said. He looked really happy. "What made you change your mind?"

The real reason I changed my mind was that when he gave me the map and looked sad I decided that even if he was a loony he was probably a harmless one. He wasn't the kind that was going to cut out my heart and eat it or something like that. But I couldn't very well say its because you seem like a *harmless* loony.

"I just think that West might be better after all," I said. And I opened the map he had given me and buried myself in it to avoid any talking.

"We've got to make a choice," Marcus said. "We could use interstate highways or we could use back roads. If the cops are looking for us they might watch the interstates more carefully. On the other hand we could make better time on the interstates and probably the further we get away from Maine the less likely it is that anybody will be paying much attention. What do you think?"

I didn't know what to think. First of all I didn't know what to think about which roads we should use. But more than that I didn't know what I thought about him asking me. Was he for real? Didn't he understand I was a kid? As far as I can remember no adult had ever seriously asked me for my advise on much of anything. At the home they didn't even ask us what we liked to eat. They told us what we liked. Mr. Springer, the director,

told us when we went to bed, when we got up, when we should do our homework and pretty much everything else. We were never asked. For Mr. Springer to say, "what time do you think you kids should go to bed?" would have been super weird. It would have been like God coming down out of the sky and asking Mr. Springer, "What do you think, Mr. Springer, should I smite the Russians?" Mr. Springer thought that God was going to smite the Russians. It's because they are a Godless country. But he never claimed that God asked for his opinion on the subject.

I knew a lot about what Mr. Springer thought. That's because every Sunday night after supper he would make all the kids in The Home come down to the dinning hall for Vespers. In the morning, of course, we went to the Lutheran church and to their Sunday School. But Mr. Springer didn't think that was enough religion for us. So he added Vespers. We would sing a few songs and listen to some Bible readings and then Mr. Springer would talk to us about what he thought. He called these his "little talks." They weren't so little, some of them. He told us what was right and what was wrong. He kept saying "you know what is right and what is wrong." But he must not have believed it because he felt he had to keep telling us over and over. Also he told what made people go to Hell and what it was like there. And what bominations were. There were a lot of bominations. Most anything about sex was a bomination. For sure "men lusting after men" was one of the big ones. So was "self-abuse." I never knew what self abuse was. Well, I did in a way. I knew what jacking-off was. But I never understood that's what he meant until a lot later.

So why was Marcus asking me this? I wondered. Maybe he just didn't understand that grownups didn't get permission from kids for doing things. That's upside down. Or maybe he was just humoring me. Sometimes grown-ups do that. They ask kids what the right thing to do about this or that is, and then they wait for the kids to come up with the right answer. Maybe it's part of his sickness, I thought. A houseparent we had once told us that being loony was a sickness. I decided to play along. After all if it was a sickness he couldn't help it.

"I don't know," I said. "What do you think?"

"I can see it both ways," he said.

"I think maybe the back roads," I said. "We can hide better there." Really I didn't have any idea. I just made this up to have something to say.

He nodded. He acted just like a grown up had told him that. "O.K." he said. I wasn't sure. Maybe he didn't have it upside down about kids and grown-ups. Maybe I had just given him the right answer. I had never met anybody like him before. He was hard to make out.

We were coming to an exit. He pulled over into the right lane and put on his turn signal. Is he really going to do this, I asked myself. "I'm not really sure," I said. I really wasn't sure. But more than that I didn't want to be responsible for what we did in case it went wrong.

"I'm not sure either," he said as he turned onto the exit ramp.

When we got off the ramp he pulled over onto the side of the road and pulled a big folder of maps out of the back seat. "Can you read maps?" he asked.

"Sort of," I said.

"Good." He said. For now we will just head west and worry about the details later. On a map of New England he showed me where he thought we should go and gave me some information about how to add up the millage. He showed me where he thought we could get to that day. It was a state forest.

## **Marcus Tells Me Some Weird Stuff**

That night we camped out. It was on a dirt road that looked like it was never used. We put up his tent beside a little creek. It was almost dark by the time we got everything set up. He showed me how to collect dead wood for a fire and he made in a little circle of stones from the creek as a fire place. He didn't make a real big fire. But it was bright and warm. Whenever it died down he added another stick or two. The biggest sticks he used were no bigger around than my arm. We sat on two fold-up chairs that he kept in the car with the camping gear. Seemed like he was into being comfortable. He asked me questions about my life at the home.

It felt a little scary sitting beside the fire. I couldn't see what was in the dark around us. Also I was starting to get cold.

"I'm going to get my sweat shirt," I told him.

Back at the car I rummaged through my duffel bag and pulled out my sweat shirt. I looked over at him sitting beside the fire. His back was to the car. So I pulled out his money can, opened it and put all the money I had stolen from him back in, real neat, so he wouldn't notice it had ever been gone.

I returned to the fire and no sooner sat back down when he said, "Thanks for putting the money back."

"Oh, well, sure," I said. Right off I felt really stupid. What a dumb thing to say! How does this guy know things, I asked myself. But I knew he did. So I knew there was no point in lying about it. What else could I have said?

He nodded. It was very casual, like he had thanked me for helping to clean up the dishes after supper, or something like that. Then he changed the subject. He started telling me about the Mohawks that lived in this area before the Europeans came. He seemed to know quite a lot about them.

Finally he said, "Well, I'm going to turn in," and began to tell me what to do about the fire when I decided to go to bed. I looked up and saw lots of dead limbs from the pine trees hanging over me. Only the very tops of these trees were green. And I stared out into the darkness. There was no way I was going to stay out there alone.

"I think I'll turn in too," I said. So we put out the fire together.

"What if one of those limbs falls on us," I asked.

"Good point," he said. We were on our way to the tent. He stopped, and of course I stopped with him. He had the flashlight. He looked up and shined the light all around through the trees. Dead limbs everywhere.

"Hello trees," he said in a voice that was loud enough to startle me. "We are going to stay here tonight, over there in that tent. We are your friends. We won't cut any live trees."

Then he put his arm around my shoulder in a protective way. "The woods aren't sure we are friends with it anymore," he explained. "I don't think they will harm us now."

"Do you think they can hear you?" I asked. "They don't have ears."

"They can still feel the vibrations of my voice," he said. Then he thought a moment. "But really I think they can just feel what we feel and somehow know what we think. But sometimes I feel like it works better if I talk out loud."

"Like telepathy," I said. I was proud to show off that word. I had learned it only a couple of weeks earlier in a book called, "Ghosts and Other Unexplained Things," that I had taken out of the library.

"Sort of like telepathy," he said.

Telepathic trees! I had been listening to Marcus and almost taking him seriously. I looked up at him. I had almost forgotten that he was a loony. I knew I should be afraid of him. It would be easy to escape with all these dark woods around. I stared out into the darkness. From time to time I could see flashes of light. There were thunder storms in the area. Plus anything could be out there. I remembered what I read in the National Enquirer about Bigfoot. I didn't want to meet up with him all alone.

"Do you think Bigfoot could be around here," I asked.

"Bigfoot isn't real," he said.



Then I knew I really couldn't trust Marcus. He believed trees could hear you, but didn't think Bigfoot was real. I read about Bigfoot in a real newspaper that I bought in a super market. Well, I didn't buy it really, I stole it. But stole or bought, I had read about Bigfoot in a newspaper, and I thought that they couldn't print stuff that wasn't true. But I didn't want to argue with him so I didn't say anything.

Inside the tent we stripped down to our underpants and crawled into our sleeping bags. I had no more than dozed off than I was wakened by a big clap of thunder. There was a lot of wind around us. Then there was a big flash of light and more thunder. I could hear the wind in the trees and knew the trees were swaying around in it. They had to be. I heard the crash of some limbs falling -- or maybe it was a tree. Then the rain hit. I thought the storm was going to rip the tent right up off the ground. Maybe it lasted a half hour or so.

Then the storm went is fast as it came. Marcus had put a tarp up over the tent. We didn't even get wet

We got up and looked around. Pretty soon we could see patches of the sky where there were stars, and after a while we saw the moon. The clouds at the end of the storm were still swirling past it. But you could see that the storm was definitely past. There were limbs around that had blown down, but we didn't see any real big ones.

"Well, lets get some sleep," he said. So we went back and settled in again. But we weren't going to get off that easy. It seemed like I no sooner dozed off again that I was waked up again by another crash.

Marcus and I both sat up and listened. We heard car doors open. I heard a woman's voice say, "What is it Ralph?"

"We ran into a fallen tree limb." Marcus leaned forward and pulled the tent flap open. We could see headlights through the trees. The car had been coming down the road from the same direction we had come.

"Why did you bring us down this road?" the woman asked."

"I thought you would like it," Ralph said.

"Well I don't. It's dark and creepy out here. What did it do to the car?"

"I don't think it did any real damage," Ralph said. "But it's stuck."

It turned out that Ralph had a saw in the trunk of his car. With a bit of sawing and tugging and swearing he soon had the tree limb pulled out from under the car.

"I don't like it here," the woman said. "Let's turn around."

The car backed up until they found a place to turn around and they were

soon gone.

"See," said Marcus. "The trees were protecting us. They put that limb in their way."

"Would those people have hurt us?"

"They might have wondered who we were and given our license plate number in to the police."

"What would they have learned from your license plate?"

"That I stole it from a car in a junk yard."

The business with the storm and car and the tree limb got me all nerved up and I couldn't sleep. I was still thinking of Bigfoot too. I kept tossing and turning. I couldn't get comfortable. I thought I was too cold and then that I was too hot. I itched. I was thirsty.

"Is there any water around?" I asked. He produced a canteen from somewhere and let me drink as much as I wanted. Then he asked if I wanted a back scratch. "Sometimes that helps a person to relax," he said.

I said OK.

He pulled the sleeping bag down to my waist so he could reach my back. The back rub felt super good. I wanted it to go on forever. Then he began to sing. He was always singing his folk songs. He must have know hundreds of them. At that moment they seemed more beautiful than any music I had ever heard.

When he began singing a lullaby I felt a little insulted. I was eleven. Going on twelve. That wasn't exactly a baby. But the song was pretty, and I liked it in spite of myself. It must have worked its magic because I was asleep before he finished.

When I woke up the next time Marcus was asleep. He had a quiet way of snoring that I found sort of comforting. It was almost like a cat purring but just a little louder. I had to pee. I didn't really want to get up but even less did I want to pee in the sleeping bag. I knew where the flashlight was. Marcus made sure I knew where it was in case I needed to get up in the night. But the moon had come up and I didn't need it.

Once I was outside the tent I looked up. I was amazed at how much moon light streamed down through the tree limbs. I looked up at the pine trees. They were quiet now. They were very tall and they seemed to lean over me in a protective way. I felt very safe. I decided to walk down to the stream to pee. Even though I only had my briefs on, I wasn't cold. I waded into the water which was only a little more than ankle deep, and I peed in the stream. The noise of my pee mixed itself up with the noise of the water that swirled and bubbled around rocks in the stream. I know this must

sound like I was getting a bit loony too, but right then it sounded almost like music to me -- like a song with two parts. We sang rounds sometimes in music class at school. It was sort of like that. The moon shining down on me in the little clearing seemed like a friend. Or like a mother. And I had the thought that the big pines were like fathers. It was like we were all a big family. I didn't have any words for what I felt then. Still don't, really. I thought now that I know this I can never be unhappy again. I was wrong about that, but the memory is still there.

After a little while I began to get cold so I returned to the tent and went back to sleep.

The next morning he was up before the sun. By the time I dragged myself out of my sleeping bag he had a fire going and was cooking breakfast. He was frying bacon and eggs in a big frying pan that was resting on a gridiron. Off to one side on the gridiron he had a coffee pot and some toasting bread.

"Want some coffee?" he asked.

I said I did, and he poured me a cup. "How long you been up?" I asked.

"About an hour."

"Why do you get up so early."

"Early is the best time for my meditation," he said.

"Meditation?"

"Yeah."

"What's that?"

For a little bit he didn't say anything. He was like that sometimes. It seemed like he didn't hear you. But he just wasn't one for "ums" and "hms." He didn't give you any way of knowing he had even heard you until he was ready to answer. He scooped some eggs out of the frying pan, and put them on a plate. He added to this some bacon and toast.

When he put the bacon on my plate he said "Thank you Pig."

"Are you praying?" I asked. It didn't seem like a good idea to be calling God "Pig."

"Not exactly," he said. "I'm just thanking the pig who gave us this bacon."

Oh, yeah, I thought. I had almost forgotten that this guy is a loony. "Oh," I said. And smiled.

Finally he gave me some orange juice that he had prepared earlier from fresh oranges with one of those glass orange juice squeezers. It had a lot of pulp in it and I thought I wouldn't like it but it was really good. In fact it

was about the best breakfast I ever had.

"Meditation is when you become one with whatever is around you," he said.

He handed me my plate of bacon and eggs.

"I see," I said. But I must of had a blank look on my face because he went on to try to explain.

"Its like this," he said. "Most of us most of the time think we end at our skins. But we don't. See, our bodies are systems of cells and organs and all that kind of thing. A system is anything that has lots of parts that all work together -- like a car. Or a city. Or the whole world. We are systems and we see systems all around us."

I nodded. I could sort of see what he meant. I remembered them saying something like this in science class.

"But the body is not the only system we live in," he said. We live in the woods right now. It's a system too. It has all kinds of parts -- bugs and trees and flowers and streams and many other things too. Us, for instance. When we are in the woods it is a part of us just like our bodies are. It's like another bigger body wrapped around our ordinary body."

"How does it feel to have a big body like that -- a body as big as the whole woods?" I asked.

"It's a happiness," he said.

"Last night when I got up to pee the moon was up," I said.

"It's almost full," he said. "It can really be bright."

"I felt happy. And I wasn't afraid of Bigfoot," I said.

He nodded. "Yes," he said. "That's meditation."

I understood now what he meant. Maybe that means I'm getting kind of loony too, I thought. Maybe it's catching.

"What did you think about how the trees protected us," Marcus asked.

"By not landing on us?" I asked.

"That and by putting that limb in the road so that it got in the way of that car."

"The wind did that," I said. "It was the storm."

"Thats just the mechanical cause," he said. I didn't understand at all what he meant by that. But I was afraid I was getting as loony as he was and I didn't like this idea about the trees protecting us. I mean it was nice in one way. But it was creepy too.

"It was just one of those things that happen by accident," I said. "There is a word for that but I forget it."

"Coincidence," he said.

"Yes," I said. "It was a coincidence."

He nodded. "Maybe so," he said. "Want some more coffee?"

Later in the day when we stopped along the road Marcus pulled the money can out of the back seat and counted it out to show me exactly how much he had. "I have a friend who from time to time sends me some more," he said. "It's my money but she looks after it for me. There is not a lot there, but if we are very careful there is enough to get by."

"I'm sorry I tried to steal from you," I said.

"It's OK," he said. "It was a temptation. I understand that. But I hope you don't do it again."

"I won't," I promised. I really meant it.

"If you need anything you just have to ask. The money belongs to both of us as long as we are together.

How did driving down the road together make *his* money become *our* money? He had lots of weird ideas. But that's how he saw it, and it was OK with me.

## **I Think Maybe He Is A Sex Fiend**

The next day as we were driving through Ohio Marcus pulled into a sporting goods store in one of the towns we were passing through. It was late in the afternoon. He said he had forgot to buy me a canteen and that I needed one of my own. While he was looking around for the canteen I went to look at the guns, the bow and arrows and the sling shots. I always had an interest in that kind of thing. I noticed that there was a Wham-o sling shot. It was sitting on a shelf where you could get at it. They really ought to keep things like that locked up in a case I thought. There was only one clerk in the store and he was talking with Marcus about canteens. His back was turned to me. I picked up the sling-shot and slipped it under my belt and pulled my shirt down over it. I was wearing a t-shirt that was too big for me so it didn't show. I walked over to where Marcus was talking to the clerk.

"I'm going out to the car," I said.

"OK," he said

The clerk hardly looked at me.

As we drove off I pulled the sling shot out from under my belt. "Look

what I got," I said.

He raised his eyebrows. "Did you steal it?" he asked.

"Yeah. He wasn't looking. It was easy. "

He frowned but did say anything. We drove some ways in silence. I could feel it that he didn't like it that I stole the slingshot. It couldn't have been more plain than if he had been hollering at me.

"You steal too," I said finally.

"Not very often," he said. "I pay for things whenever I can."

"You stole this car and the license plates for it."

"You should only steal when you really need something and there is no other way to get it," he said. "And you should only steal from the rich."

He was always making up rules like that. He didn't like the rules of society. He told me once that he was an anarchist. That meant not believing in the rules of society. So he replaced them with rules he made up. They weren't found in the Bible or in real books or newspapers. But sometimes his rules did make sense in a way.

"I really need this," I said.

"What for?"

"Suppose Bigfoot would come after us. How would we protect ourselves?"

He just looked at me and shook his head.

"I know you don't believe in Bigfoot," I said. "But I do."

"Well, if you feel you need it, then maybe you do," he said. And that was the end of our conversation about the sling shot, at least for then.

I never did get him to believe in Bigfoot. I had seen pictures of him in a newspaper. He had been seen in lots of different places and his footprints were everywhere. The thing I couldn't tell was whether there was just one Bigfoot or whether there was lots of Bigfeet. I was hard to be sure of that kind of thing. But Marcus never believed in Bigfoot at all.

The next night we checked into a motel. He explained to me that he did this once a week -- every Wednesday night -- so that he could get a shower and get really clean. He said he couldn't afford to do it every night which is why we camped out most of the time.

"Sounds good," I said.

I stayed in the car while he went in the office alone to check in, just in case I was reported as kidnapped and they were showing my picture on the

T.V.

Our room had two beds in it -- a big double bed and a smaller single one. He threw his duffel bag on the double bed and I threw mine on the single. Then he started undressing. I sat on the single bed reading a Fantastic Four comic book. Well, really I wasn't reading the comic book. I was spying on him. I had seen lots of boys naked at the Home but I had almost never seen a naked man. He didn't try to cover himself or anything. I was interested to see how big his thing was and where he had hair that I didn't. "Get undressed and we can shower together," he said. "I'll wash your hair."

A shock of fear went through me. "No thanks," I said, trying to sound real casual.

He shrugged. "O.K." he said. And he went on into the shower.

"That's it," I whispered to myself. "This guy is a sex fiend. " I figured that was why they had him in the hospital. It all made sense now. I thought about leaving while I still had a chance. I thought about it he didn't seem like the type that would attack me. But then I remembered that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde movie I had seen. I wondered if sex fiends were that way. Maybe he was nice some of the time and then just suddenly changed and became a sex fiend and did what sex fiends do. I wasn't exactly sure just what it was that sex fiends did, but I knew it was pretty awful.

I heard him singing in the shower. He always sang in the shower. He didn't seem to be a dangerous sex fiend right now. And I did want to sleep in a real bed that night. Even the idea of a hot shower seemed good to me. At the home we only had a bath tub. I can sneak away from him sometime tomorrow, I thought.

When he came out of the shower he was still naked. But he didn't come after me. So I sneaked past him and went into the bathroom. When I was inside I shut the door and then locked it. I tried to be very quiet when I locked the door because I didn't want him to know I was onto him. The shower felt pretty good even though I was nervous. Then I realized that I didn't have any pajamas. I hadn't given any thought as to what I would wear to bed. When we were out camping I had just stripped down to my briefs. That was what we did at the home and it seemed normal. But now that I had figured out that he was a sex fiend, that wouldn't be enough anymore.

He told me that I could change my underwear and socks every day because every five or six days we would stop in a laundromat and wash them. I liked that idea. I had never had so much clean underwear and socks at the home. But I didn't have a change of clothes with me in the

bath-room -- only the dirty things I had been wearing. So I took the towel I dried off with and wrapped it around me very tightly. Then I picked up my clothes and unlocked the door as quietly as possible. I opened the door and walked very rapidly over to the single bed. He was in the double bed and was reading a book. He glanced at me as I went by but didn't stare. I went over to the single bed and sat down on the side of it furthest from his bed. I pulled a t-shirt out of the duffel bag and put it on. Then I got out a pair of briefs and pulled them on under the towel I was wearing. Finally I took the towel off and put on both a pair of sweat pants and a sweat shirt.

"It's pretty warm in here," Marcus said. "Aren't you afraid you will be a bit too warm with the sweat pants and sweat shirt on?"

"Maybe," I said. So I took the sweat shirt off, but kept the sweat pants on. I wasn't going to take them off for anything.

I slipped under the covers and started reading my Avengers comic book again. Actually I felt sort of cozy there, and almost safe. I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I knew it was morning. He had not attacked me in the night. I still thought he was a sex fiend, but he he didn't seem like a very fierce one. If I always keep my guard up I'll probably be all right, I thought. So I decided not to escape from him that day.

## **This In-between Thing**

We kept on driving West. Some days we covered 400 or 500 miles. We could have done more but we were slowed down by all the towns we went through and we had to stop fairly early to get our campsite set up each evening. Some days we only drove a little bit because there was something he or I wanted to see. We didn't have to make it to California at any time in particular so we stopped whenever we wanted and took whatever side trips we liked.

Marcus always made sure we ate well for breakfast and supper. For lunch we would just have a sandwich and some fruit. So I had everything I could have asked for as we drove and mostly I was happy. For a while I stopped thinking about running away from him again. This was a lot better than The Home.

I think we were in Omaha. Anyhow it was a big city. As we were driving through the down-town area Marcus noticed the a movie called "The Innocents" was showing at an old theater. So he pulled over and we ate supper in a restaurant -- something we didn't do that often because it was too expensive. He said he had seen this before but he wanted to see it again. Also, he said, he wanted me to see it. We got to the theater just a little before the ticket office opened and stood around in a small crowd of other people who were waiting to see the movie.



While we waited I noticed a boy who was with a man. Well, I think it was a boy. That's what was so interesting to me. I couldn't really tell for sure. He looked like he was just a little older than me. He had hair that went down to his shoulders -- but it wasn't all scraggly like a hippie might wear it. It was clean, neat, and combed. He wore a bright red t-shirt and blue jeans with some flowers embroidered on the back pocket and down the sides of the legs. And he had a necklace of beads around his neck. I say he, because that's what I finally decided he was. But I tried a trick in my mind while I watched him. I would say to myself that I was looking at a girl, and it looked just like a girl. She was a little bit boyish but still very pretty. Then I told myself that I was looking at a boy. And he was still very pretty.

If it was a girl she wasn't getting any breasts yet. I could see her shape through the t-shirt. I stared at the crotch to see whether there might be a bulge there that would solve the mystery. I thought I could see a little bulge, and that's why I finally decided it was a boy. But his jeans weren't that tight so it was hard to be sure. Whatever he was, I couldn't take my eyes off of him.

Lots of people think kids at the age I was then don't have sex feelings, but I can tell you they are wrong. I saw lots of people that got me sexed up when I was eleven, and even younger. Some were girls and some were boys. Sometimes a picture of a man or a woman would do the same thing. Whenever I got a chance to, I looked at pictures of naked people. There were hard to come by at the The Home, where anything that had to do with sex was against the rules. I mean it was so much against the rules we didn't even need rules about it.

Anyhow what got me so excited about this guy was that you couldn't tell if he was a boy or a girl. He was both. It was like he grew up to a certain age when a person has to choose to be a boy or a girl and he decided not to choose. That was how I wanted to be. I didn't understand that until I saw this boy. I had always been confused about what I really wanted to be. Sometimes in the bathtub I would hold my privates down between my legs in a certain way so you couldn't see them, and I would imagine what it would be like to be a girl. But other times I really liked having a dick and wouldn't have chosen to be a girl for anything. Now I knew what I wanted, even though I didn't know a name for it. I wanted to be this in-between thing that was both a boy and a girl. That way I could wake up one morning and say, "Hey, it's good to be a girl," and wake up the next morning and say, "Hey, it's good to be a boy."

In a funny way it was the beads that were the most exciting thing to me. They were fairly big and were the color of balls of pine sap you sometimes

see in the woods. I guess you call it amber. He was saying something with those beads. He was saying I want to be this in-between-thing.

I wasn't sure I would ever have the nerve to say that because I knew how bad the other kids would tease me for that. But all at once, while staring at that in-between person in front of the theater I knew what I wanted.

We went in to the movie pretty soon and I never saw this boy again, but I never forgot him. As for the movie, it was really scary even though almost nothing really happened. I never did understand it too good.

"What do you think?" Marcus asked me when we left the movie. "Were the ghosts real or was the governess crazy? "

"I don't know," I said. "But why did Miles die?"

"Because he was separated from Quint," Marcus said.

"Yeah, I guess so," I said. I could see that he died just when the governess saved him from Quint. But I still didn't get it. Why would that make him die?

"What do you think?" asked Marcus.

"I guess the devil must have killed him," I said.

"Perhaps so," said Marcus. "But who was the devil?"

At the time I didn't know. I hardly understood his question. Now I think I know the answer. It was the Governess.

## **A Squirrel For Supper**

I got a new supply of National Enquirer magazines and comic books that evening before we went on to find a place to camp for the night. The place we found was down in a dried creek bed. It seemed to me that there were a lot of dead trees around. More than usual. I had a lot of trouble sleeping because I kept feeling that something was going to come into the tent and get me. When I had to get up to pee I was scared to go more than a couple of steps away from the tent. I was glad when daylight came and we were back on the road again.

In the daylight life seemed good. I read my National Enquirer and my comic books as we drove. Sometimes we would talk about things. He would ask me about my life. He really seemed interested. Sometimes he would tell me what he thought about different things I told him but mostly he would just listen. When he talked it was mostly about the places we were driving through, or about the animals and plants we would find. He seemed to know a lot of interesting stuff about all that kind of thing. Driving with him was like being in a science class that just went on and on

except it was interesting. At school mostly it wasn't.

It seemed strange to me that I was so happy even though I was driving down the road with a sex fiend.

I practiced with my Wham-o sling shot every chance I got. I always carried a bunch of smooth pebbles around in my pocket. When we stopped for lunch I would take a few shots at some cans or bottles. Also when we stopped at a camping place, in the evening before it got dark and in the morning. I got pretty good.

One evening -- I think we were in Wyoming -- we stopped in a really nice spot beside a stream. We were in some mountains. A path went along the stream and I went followed it up the mountain a ways while he was fixing supper. I saw a squirrel. That wasn't unusual. I saw lots of squirrels on our travels. But mostly they were quick to move to the opposite side of the tree or they were pretty high up in the branches. I shot at lots of them but never hit one. But this one kept sticking its head around the tree to get a better view of me. I took careful aim with my sling-shot and the next time he stuck his head out I nailed him.

I was thrilled. I ran up and found the squirrel lying on the ground. The problem is that he wasn't quite dead. So I ran to the stream and found a good sized rock. When I got back he was trying to crawl away, but he wasn't going very fast. I held him by the tail and smashed his head with the rock. Even that didn't quite kill him because there was just soft dirt under him. I dragged him back so that his head was over a root and hit his head with the rock again. How hard he was to kill sort of upset me, but I was still excited at what I had been able to do. I thought I was like an boy in an one of those Indian tribes that Marcus told me about. I liked pretending that. I liked the idea of running around in just a breach cloth or even naked and hunting and picking berries for a living.

I picked him up by his tail, and pretending to myself that I was returning to my Indian village with my first kill I ran back to where Marcus was fixing supper.

"Look what I got," I hollered. "Can we eat it for supper?"

Marcus stared at the squirrel. Then he stared at me. I could tell he wasn't that happy. Not like I had hoped he would be. I thought he would be proud of me. He made himself smile, and said "sure."

He cut off the squirrel's head and showed me how to skin it. He seemed to know everything about surviving in the woods. Then he put some butter on it and grilled it over the fire. I was surprised at what a small amount of meat there was after the head and fur and the insides were gone.

"How would Indians eat this?" I asked him.

"They would probably put it in their soup to spread it around more," he said. "They made soups out of anything they could find."

"That sounds good," I said.

Marcus had fixed us some potato soup for supper. It had onions and different vegetables and all sorts of good things in it. He poured half of it in one bowl and the other half in another. He cut all the squirrel meat off the bones and put it in the soup he handed to me.

"Aren't you going to eat any?" I asked.

"No thanks," he said.

I looked down at all the squirrel pieces in my soup. They were still sitting on top. "Why not," I asked.

"No reason," he said.

"No, really. Why not?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," he said. "I'm not a vegetarian. I knew you were shooting at squirrels and I told myself it was all right. It's just the natural way of things."

"What's a vegetarian I asked." I was slowly stirring the squirrel bits into my soup.

"It's someone who doesn't believe in eating meat."

"What wrong with eating meat?"

"A vegetarian would say that animals are people just like we are. Or at least they are conscious and want to live, just like us."

"But you don't believe that?" I asked, hopefully.

"They are people in a way," he said. "I agree with that part."

"But we eat bacon every morning," I said. "If animals are people then pigs are people."

He nodded. "I guess so," he said. He buttered each of us some French bread that he had grilled. For a little bit neither of us spoke. I stirred my soup some more, but didn't eat any. It was like we had this problem and we couldn't get on with eating. "It's like this," he said finally. "I love nature. But in the system of nature everything lives by eating other living things. Remember I told you what a system is. Well, more than anything else, Nature is a system of things eating other things. If you don't like that you don't like nature. Maybe you like some picture of nature in your head but you don't really love nature. That's how I see it. So I never became a vegetarian."

"But you still don't want to eat any of the squirrel," I said.

"That's different."

"How?"

Wherever I stop I always make friends with the squirrels and the other animals I find in the woods," he said. And I knew that was true. I had watched him do it. He was always watching them and feeding them and talking to them. He paused a long time -- looking at the ground. Then he said, "I just can't bring myself to eat one of my friends."

That put the whole thing in a different light. But I didn't know what to do about it. All I was sure of is that I couldn't eat one of his friends right in front of him. "I see," I said. Then I smiled. It wasn't a real smile. It was like the smile he gave me when he first saw the squirrel and heard me ask if we could have it for supper. It was the kind of smile you do to cover things over.

"I found a cool place along the stream," I said. "I think I will go eat my supper there."

He shrugged. "OK," he said. "I'll see you in a little bit."

I picked up my bowl of soup and the bread he had given me and trudged up the path until I was out of site of the campsite. Then I sat down to eat my supper. I took a bite of the bread. Then I took a sip of the soup -- but not part of it with any of the squirrel in it. Then I just sat there for a long time thinking. Well, it wasn't exactly thinking. I didn't know what to think, actually. I just sat there trying to understand and feeling sad.

"Thank you Squirrel," I said finally.

But that didn't work either. So I dumped the soup out in the weeds behind me and sat for a while longer -- long enough that I could have eaten my supper. After washing the soup bowl out in the stream I went back to the campsite.

We didn't talk any more about the squirrel. I don't think either of us knew what to say. But that night after he gave me a back scratch I asked him if I could sleep with him. That seemed like a very dangerous thing to do, even though I had my anti sex-fiend pants on. It might make the Mr. Hyde part of him come out and he would attack me. But after that problem we had with the squirrel I wanted to be close to him. So we unzipped both sleeping bags and put one under us and one over us. That way I could cuddle up to him when we slept. That felt real good and it seemed to make everything OK between us again. And nothing bad happened.

## **Marcus Freaks Out**

The next time we stayed in a motel we watched TV. When we turned it on there was a movie showing that had a fox hunt in it. Marcus watched

this very closely. That was unusual for him. He didn't seem to like TV very much for the most part. When the fox got away he nodded.

"That means we are going to have a close call, but we'll get away," he said.

"How can it mean that," I asked. "It's just a movie."

"There are no accidents," Marcus said. He didn't say this in a mysterious way. It was just like he was telling me that it was raining outside or  $2 + 2 = 4$ . For him it was just a fact. I wasn't sure whether I believed it myself, but it was not any stranger than lots of things I read about in the Enquirer.

Then the news came on. They showed all the usual car crashes and stuff and then they told about the war in Vietnam. It seems like every day they did a body count and showed pictures of some of the dead Vietnamese. I remember that they had a bunch of these Vietnamese bodies laid out beside a rice paddy and there were some American soldiers hanging around them. It was sort of like pictures you sometimes see of sportsmen showing off a batch of fish they had caught. Then I noticed that Marcus was muttering to himself. "Fuck em," he was saying. He kept repeating this ever so often. I thought maybe he was talking about the dead Vietnamese. But then he began screaming. I mean really screaming. I was afraid the people in the near-by rooms would hear him.

"Why the fuck are we even over there," he screamed. "Why are we killing all those people?" He turned all red and was shaking. "God damn you," he said. "God damn you." I think he was damning the soldiers who did that killing or maybe the people who sent them over there. But he wasn't damning the Vietnamese. To him it must have seemed like they were his kin or something. Why else would he get like that. Anyhow it was really weird. Most often he hardly ever swore.

It was like watching the Hulk. I mean one minute there he was -- a sensible ordinary sort of guy like Bruce Banner and the next minute he was a raving lunatic. This was his bad side coming out. I was sure of that. I had come to believe that everybody had a bad side. One of the social workers I had told me that but I didn't believe it at the time. I thought nobody really had as bad a side as I did and most people probably didn't have a bad side at all. But that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde movie got me to thinking about it some more. Then I read that article about the nun that was caught worshipping Satan right in her little cell. I was shocked that she could do that right there in front of Jesus and God and everybody. It was in one of those newspapers that you can buy in the supermarkets. I forget which one. But I was pretty sure it was true. I mean there was this picture of her altar. She kept that hidden away during the day-time. She asked

Satan to make the nose of the head of her Abby fall off. They had a picture of that too. It was pretty gross. So then I decided that if nuns had bad sides then probably everybody did. And this was his -- or at least part of it. He was a Commie.

He jumped up and turned the TV off. Then he just stood there shaking. Then he looked at me, and seemed almost like he was surprised I was there. Like he had forgotten that he had picked my up and we were traveling together.

"There is not reason for us to do that?" he said to me. "No reason."

"But Marcus, they're Commies. They want to take over the world," I said. I remembered an article I read in the National Enquirer about how the Commies already had control of the United States Army. Perhaps it was already too late.

He glared at me. That was the first time he had ever glared at me. He looked like he was really mad at me. I was afraid maybe he was going hurt me. Instead he tried to calm himself down. "All the Commies want is to have more or less what other people have," he said. "They want food when they are hungry and medicine when they are sick. Or their children are sick. And they want to be respected. What is so bad about that? Why should we kill them because of that?"

"No reason I guess," I said. I didn't want to argue any more with Marcus. Especially I didn't want to argue with him when he got all crazy like that. Marcus is a Commie, I thought. I was amazed, and very upset. That was almost worse than being a sex-fiend and I thought he was probably that too. Earlier that summer I had read an article in the

The National Insider. That was one of my favorite super market newspapers. The article was called, Civil Rights Sex Orgies. That article made it pretty clear that all those people who went on and on about civil rights were really Commies, and that they were perverts too. All those things sort of went together. If you were a pervert or a sex maniac you were pretty likely to be a Commie. And here it was right in front of my eyes -- just like they said. It was hard to get around.

What happened next was sort of like the business of the squirrel. Its hard to explain. But the argument we had about Commies really hurt. I didn't want him to be a Commie, but I wanted us to be close again. "Can I sleep with you in your bed," I asked.

"Sure," he said. He didn't sound like he really meant it, but he said I could. So I went over and sat down on his bed.

He hadn't taken his shower yet.

"It's kind of warm in here," I said.

He nodded.

"I think I'll take off my sweat pants," I said.

"OK."

So I did, and then crawled into his bed.

## **All About My Comic Books**

While he was taking his shower I thought about comic books.

I used to read a lot of comic books. Up until I was eight, Wonder Woman, Superman and Batman comics were my favorites. I also liked horror comic books but the superhero ones were my favorites. I could make do with a Donald Duck comic book in a pinch, but nothing compared to the adventures of Batman and Robin. But then one day I discovered the true and original Captain America and Human Torch comic books, and I was hooked.

This is how I happened to make that great discovery. When I was growing up I had a fascination for sneaking and exploring and discovering secret places. Sometime I just sneaked for its own sake. I wasn't sneaking about anything. It gave me a feeling of power. So maybe I was bound to discover what was in the attic of The Home, sooner or later. The Home was a big old three-story mansion not too far from the coast of Maine. I was told that at one point it belonged to a very wealthy family. Wealthy people used to come up from Boston and Philadelphia and places like that during the summer for vacations. The houses they owned -- some of them real mansions -- were just summer cottages for them. I guess they had servants and everything. One summer night when I was about eight I had trouble sleeping. I went down to the bath-room to pee and then -- on an impulse -- climbed out the bathroom window. Our sleeping quarters and bathroom were on the third floor. The bathroom window opened out onto the roof. It was very high up. I found that thrilling. The moon was about half full so there was enough light to see my way around. I was dressed only in my underpants, which made it even more thrilling. Being naked in places where I shouldn't be naked, where I might be discovered by other people -- especially girls -- has always been exciting to me.

I wanted to be either Batman or Robin. I settled on Robin and imagined that Batman had been captured by Two-Face, and I had to save him. Two-Face was my favorite villain. He was a mixture of good and evil. I felt that I was a lot like him, only I hoped that my good side would win out. With Two-Face, which part won out was a matter of chance -- the toss of a coin. Very carefully I sneaked around on the roof, staring into the other



windows that also opened out onto the roof. Then I climbed up the the highest part of the roof -- where it covered the attic. That's where they are keeping him, I thought to myself. I sneaked over to a little window and peeked in. It was too dark to see in, but I imagined that I could see Batman tied up in there. He was guarded by both Two-Face and the Penguin. I imagined that I went in and tricked Two-Face into releasing him. By then, I was beginning to get scared for real, so I returned to the bathroom window, sneaked back in and went to bed.

But that was just the beginning. A few nights later I got back into my adventure. But this time I was better prepared. In addition to my underpants, I wore a black t-shirt and a cape. The cape was a dark blue towel I swiped from the laundry room. I couldn't find a black one, but thought that it would be hard to tell the difference in the dark. This time I had a flashlight with me. I swiped the flash-light from the Woolworth store in town and the batteries from a drawer in the kitchen at The Home.

After waiting for the rest of the kids to go to sleep, I sneaked out the bathroom window and put on my cape. I had even thought to swipe some big safety pins at Woolworth's, and had one with me to fasten the cape. I really felt ready. I climbed up the the attic window and shined my light in. It was full of boxes, old clothes, books, magazines, furniture and a bunch of other things. It was the perfect place to explore. Unfortunately the window was locked. I managed, however, to dig some old crumbly putty away from one of the window panes, and remove it. I let most of the little metal fasteners in place so that the pane could be replaced, and I reached in and unfastened the window.

Most often when I explored new areas it ended in disappointment. What I actually found wasn't usually as great as looking for it. The attic, however was not a disappointment. The amazing collection of old things filled the room with mystery. I couldn't have done better if I had been exploring the deepest tunnels beneath an Egyptian pyramid. A gun and some iron traps reminded me of how dangerous and cruel people could be. The frills on some of the dresses -- with their low fronts -- excited me. I thought of big breasted women filling them. The ancient books and magazines spoke of more deep truths than I would ever be able to explore in a lifetime. But the greatest treasure I discovered there were three large cardboard boxes of comic books. This was the gold that that dragon protected in the fairly tales I had read.

Here I found Captain America Comics, Young allies, USA comics and All-Winners Squad. There were a few other titles, but these were the most common ones, and the ones that seemed most interesting to me. Most of them were world war two comics showing the super heroes fighting the

German Nazis, and the Japanese. The "Krauts" and the "Japs." They were pictured in these comics as monstrous creatures -- full of hatred, and evil.

Captain America was especially interesting to me. He had a side-kick named "Bucky." Bucky was supposed to be a young teenager I think, but in some of the comics he looked even younger. I could imagine him as being my age. The Human Torch had a side-kick too -- a boy like Bucky. He was named Toro. He also could become a flying torch. How I wished to be Bucky or Toro in those stories! Sometimes Toro and Bucky would go off together and have adventures on their own. I thought that was pretty cool, but didn't want them to stray too far from their grown-up heroes.

Bucky was always getting captured by either the Japs or the Krauts and being tortured in some fantastic manner -- by monstrous creatures. I remember one in which a huge evil-looking Buddha overlooked everything. But always Captain America arrived to save him. It never occurred to me to wonder whether Bucky might be more trouble than he was worth. I mean every time you turned around he was getting himself captured. But Captain America loved him. That was what counted.

During the next weeks I returned to these comic books every few nights. I always wore my Batman outfit. In Maine, even during the summer, most nights are fairly cool. I found an old quilt and a mattress to a baby bed and set up a little reading nest that was quite cozy. But it was getting toward fall and the nights were getting cooler.

One night when I returned to the bathroom I found the window shut. I knew that I had left it open when I left, but figured one of the other boys had gotten up to pee and closed it. With a little extra caution in case he might still be awake I tried the window that led into the dorm only to find that it was locked.

Right off I was in a panic. The idea of staying all night only to be discovered the next day on the roof of The Home in nothing but my underpants was awful. I searched around the roof for a way down. I knew that even if I had got to the ground I would still be faced with the problem of getting back into the house. They locked the doors at night. A very big poplar tree grew close to the house and its limbs reached almost to the roof. I went and stood on the edge of the roof -- which was two stories high at that point -- and studied the limbs of the tree. I could not reach them from where I was but thought if I leaped far enough I might be able to grab one of the limbs that was fairly close to the house.

I knew that Batman would be able to do this.

But I wasn't really Batman.

I knew that Robin could do it.

But I wasn't really him either.

In my mind I was teetering on the edge: to jump or not to jump. All at once a saving thought came to me. This was really lucky. I am pretty sure that if I had leaped for one of those thin branches I was looking at, I would have been killed, or at least hurt real bad. The window to the attic was easy to get open, and maybe there was a way down into the house from there. That was my thought. This turned out to be true. The staircase to the main part of the house ended at a door with a dead lock that could be opened from the inside -- which is where I was. I had seen the door from the other side many times, but they kept it locked. I turned the dead lock, opened the door, let myself down into the hallway, and shut the door quietly behind me. The coast was clear. I made it to my bed without any problem.

The business with getting locked out turned out good for me. The door to the attic was now unlocked, and that's the way it stayed for the rest of the fall and winter. This meant that I could sneak up into my secret comic book stash one or two nights a week. I lived there. The world of my superheros was much more interesting than my real life. Sometimes I would bring a half dozen or so comic books down to my room where I hid them in a little cubby-hole I fixed behind the baseboard that was closest to me bed. That way I could read about my superheroes during the day time when no one else was around, or in my bed in the dorm under the covers at night. I was very sneaky. For example I always kept a second, ordinary, comic book under the covers with me so that if I was caught reading under my covers, which happened from time to time, I could give up the regular comic book and never let them find out about my secret and most precious stash.

Sometimes I was pretty tired when I went to school, and I dozed in class. But my comic book habit improved my grades. That's hard to believe, but it really did. For the first time in my life reading was interesting to me, and I read a lot. In time I became one of the best readers and writers in my class.

## **I Become a Lawbreaker**

When Marcus came out of the shower he did something I had never seen him do before. He rummaged through his duffel bag and pulled out a pair of pajama bottoms. Sometime Marcus slept naked, and sometimes in his underwear. But I had never seen him wear pajamas. With his back to me he put them on. I was a little disappointed that I couldn't see him. I hadn't really admitted to myself up until then that I sort of liked seeing him naked. His muscles were pretty big and he had hair lots of places I didn't.

When he crawled into bed he turned his back to me. It was like I wasn't really in the bed at all. It felt very lonely. After a bit I touched his back. He didn't seem to respond at all. But he wasn't pushing me away. Then I began to rub his back. I had never done that before. He had always been the one to rub my back. He turned over onto his stomach and seemed to relax a bit. So I sat up and started to rub his back with more energy, like he did for me. Then I said, "are you still mad at me?"

He turned over to face me. He smiled and pulled me down beside him and put his arms around me. That really felt wonderful. "I'm sorry," he said. "I got upset about what the US is doing. I'm always upset about that. But I didn't mean to take it out on you."

"It's OK," I said.

We cuddled like that for some time and then I heard him breathing in that slow way with the purring snore, and I knew he was asleep.

My thoughts went back to the comic book stories. One day The Human Torch decided that he was a danger to humanity, and that he had to allow himself to self-destruct. His plan was to go far away from the earth and let himself become a super-nova. Toro begged him not to but was finally convinced that there was no other way. So he tried to accept it that his best friend had to die. But when I read this, I couldn't accept it. I was heart-broken. Maybe there is some other way, I kept saying. Maybe this is just a big mistake. But it wasn't.

This story that I remembered had a moral about my situation with Marcus. In the comic book it said that The Human Torch was "dangerous to humanity." Therefore Toro had to let go of him -- allow him to self-destruct. If Marcus was a Commie as well as a sex fiend -- as I had long suspected -- he was a danger to humanity. He was not going to self-destruct. So I had to turn him in.

I remember the night when I read about the Human Torch letting himself explode into a super nova. It was the summer after I first discovered this stash of comic books, and I was in my comic reading cubby hole in the attic. I was shocked. Very seldom did any super-hero actually die.

In those days I had Toro and Human torch costumes as well as a Batman and Robin ones. These costumes were simple. For Robin I wore my underpants and a the same t-shirt I used for Batman, but with a green towel for a cape. The Human Torch and Toro costumes were even simpler. To me they both looked naked when they were on fire. My theory was that the fire just burned the clothes right off of them. So for them I just went naked. After all, I did all my pretending on the roof at night. Nobody could see me.

After reading about the death of the Human Torch, I sneaked to the very peak of the roof of The Home and sat down. I was in my Toro costume. The moon was only about a quarter full but the stars were very bright. I could hear the loons down in the lake. Their howling and warbling sounded real mournful and sad. I half expected to see a big explosion of light, but of course I didn't. I imagined that it had already happened -- the Human Torch had self-destructed. I cried.

That was how I understood my situation with Marcus. He was too dangerous to the world. I had to give him up.

The very next day I had my chance.

We were driving along this winding road through some hills. I think we were in Nevada. All at once a cop is behind us with his lights flashing. It seemed like like he came out of nowhere.

"Shit," Marcus said under his breath. "I know I wasn't speeding." He pulled over and waited for the cop to come up to the car.

As soon as he leaned over and his face filled the window on the driver's side, I looked around Marcus and smiled at him. "Gee I'm glad to see you," I said. That "gee" bit was something I picked up from a TV show about this really normal family. I never really said "gee" in ordinary talk, but I could tell from the TV show that grown-ups liked it. They always thought a kid who said "gee" was earnest and truthful.

"Well that's a change," the cop said. He was a big gruff mean-looking guy but he actually smiled at me. "Why you glad to see me?"

I looked down and for a minute I couldn't say anything. I knew it was my duty to tell him about Marcus.

"You can tell me," he said.

"Because you can catch that guy who speeded around us," I said. "He was going way too fast." I looked up at the cop, using my most earnest expression. I practiced different expressions in the mirror and was pretty good at them. "I'm really scared that he will kill somebody."

"How fast was he going?" asked the cop.

"It was like we were standing still -- and he passed us on a curve," Marcus said. Marcus was fast like that. He could pick up what I was doing and join right in.

"He must have been going a hundred," I said. "It was a blue car. A Ford. With California plates."

"OK," said the cop. "We'll get him." He turned to go, and then glanced back. "By the way," he said. "One of your break lights is out." And he left.

He had bigger game to hunt now. I watched him pick up his radio and talk to somebody. Then he pulled back onto the highway, his wheels spinning in the gravel.

"Wow," said Marcus. "That was a brilliant move on your part. Quick thinking."

I shrugged. "It was obvious," I said. But there seemed to be real admiration in the look he gave me.

"He might have checked the license number and everything, and it would have been all over," Marcus said. "I'm sure glad I picked you up. You're a life saver."

That had been my chance. But I just couldn't do it. For years I had been imagining how I could win the admiration of Captain America by some daring and heroic action that would save America from its enemies. And when the opportunity came I just couldn't do it. It didn't happen as I expected it would so I wasn't prepared. But Captain America only lived in the comic books. When I was up in the attic at The Home reading about him and the adventures he shared with Bucky, he was real to me. He was more real to me than all these uninteresting people walking around in what social workers called the real world. But Marcus was even more real than Captain America. I had his admiration. I guess you just have to get what you need from wherever you can get it. I knew now that I was in love with Marcus. I don't know just how that happened, but it was true. He was my Captain America, and even if he was a sex fiend and a Commie, I couldn't betray him.

I leaned back in my seat and sighed as I watched the cop car pull away. "I guess we better get that brake light fixed," I said.

"No question about that," he agreed. He laughed. "He must have been going a hundred," he said repeating what I had told the cop. "You were great, Franklin. You deserve a prize."

When I heard him say that it came to me that right now he would probably give me anything I wanted. As far as that goes he never had told me I couldn't have anything I wanted. But I hadn't asked for much other than the comic books and newspapers.

"I could use a prize," I said.

"What prize would you like?" he asked.

It found that I was a little embarrassed about what I wanted. Even with Marcus I felt a little embarrassed, though he seemed to accept things no one else in the world would.

"When we were back in Omaha at that movie theater I saw a boy wearing

beads," I said. "Do you think it's OK if boys wear beads?"

"Of course it is," he said. "I think it's OK for boys to wear beads or earrings, or dresses or anything they want."

"Don't make fun of me," I said. "I'm serious."

"So am I." he said.

I looked at him real carefully. I can usually study a person's face and tell if they are serious or not. I learned to do this because grown-ups lie to kids so much. I wanted to be able to tell what they really thought. I could tell he really was serious.

"Well, that's what I want for my prize," I said.

"A necklace?" he said.

"Yeah. Maybe one with some beads on it."

He glanced over at me and smiled. "Sure," he said. "Next town of any size we come to we'll find a store where they sell them."

That gave me a little courage. So I decided that now was the time to bring up the other thing I wanted to ask him about.

"What's a hermaphrodite?"

I guess I pronounced "her-map-roe-dite. See, I didn't know that in some words "ph" was really an "f." I didn't read then as good as I do now. So first time around he didn't get what I meant.

"Her-map-roe-dite," I repeated. "I think it has something to do with privates."

"Ah, you mean 'hermaphrodite,'" he said, and laughed.

"Don't laugh at me," I said. "How was I supposed to know." I was nervous enough talking with a grown-up about privates. His laughing at how I pronounced a word didn't help.

"No way at all," he said. "I'm sorry. You read very well, but how were you to know that a "ph" is pronounced like an "f." Where did you learn that word?"

"In the National Enquirer. It told about this movie star who was really a hermaphrodite. I mean a hermaphrodite."

"You can't believe everything you read in those newspapers," he said.

"But what is one?" I insisted.

"It's a person who is in some ways like a man and in some ways like a woman," he said.

"Like a woman who has a dick?" I asked.

"Sort of," he said. "Look, it's almost time for lunch. I can explain it to you better with a pencil and paper.

When we pulled over for lunch at a little roadside picnic table, Marcus got out a pen and paper and had us sit side by side at the table. While we ate our fruit and sandwiches he drew pictures of how boys look and how girls look. "Every part that a girl has a boy has," he explained. "Only they are a little different. Like you have nipples even though they will never grow into breasts. But until they do grow bigger on a girl, boys and girls look pretty much the same."

"But not down below," I said.

Then he explained how the clitoris, which I had never even heard of, was like a very small penis. And how the balls on a boy were like the ovaries on a girl. Only they were inside the girl and dropped down into the sack in a boy. He explained about how when the baby develops in the womb at first both boys and girls are the same and then they "differentiate." He taught me that word. "Differentiate." It was because of Marcus that I began to take an interest in words. That's one of the reasons I write so good now. He explained how sometimes the boy or the girl didn't differentiate enough and it was hard to tell which it was. When he taught me things I could learn them better than from any other teacher I ever had. And he didn't beat around the bush about sex things. He just told me like it was.

Then, when we finished our lunch and he seemed done with the lesson a really strange thing happened. He leaned over and put his hands on either side of my face and he kissed me on my mouth.

I was too amazed to know what to do. I didn't kiss him back but I think that was just because I didn't know how to kiss, and I was too surprised.

He looked down. I could see that he was upset. "I'm sorry," he said. "I won't do that again."

I didn't know just what to say. For a little bit we just both sat there without saying anything because we were embarrassed. Finally I said, "It's OK." I didn't say that it would be OK if he did it again, or that it wouldn't be OK. I didn't know what I thought about that. But I was thrilled that he had kissed me. I couldn't hide that from myself.

We came through a large town later in the afternoon. We found a department store there. It was a small store, all on one floor, but it had everything we needed. I wandered around looking at things but found that I didn't have the nerve to go buy a necklace.

"Why don't you ask a clerk to help you,"



"I'm afraid she will think it's weird for a boy to ask for a necklace," I whispered.

"I can't hear you," he said.

"That's cause I'm whispering."

"I Know," he said. "Why are you whispering?"

I pulled his head down to where I could get close to his ear, and repeated what I said.

"Ah, I see," he said. "Come on. I'll take care of that."

He led me over to a clerk. It was a skinny woman who looked kind of old. "Hi," he said to get her attention. "My daughter here would like to look at some of your necklaces."

Daughter?? I was shocked. What did Marcus have on his mind? Then I realized that there was nothing I was wearing that made it absolutely clear that I was a boy. And my hair was beginning to grow long. Why not go along with this?

The clerk looked at me. "Sure honey," she said. "we keep them in this case over here."

She showed me a bunch of them. None of them looked just like the one with beads that the boy at the movie theater wore. But I found a necklace with some brown beads that looked like either a boy or a girl might wear them. I told her I wanted those. Then Marcus asked if I wasn't low on shirts. I shrugged. Who was I to turn down something extra? The clerk led me over to the girls section. I was beginning to find this really exciting. There were all sorts of pretty shirts here. They had lots more colors than boys shirts. I was still shy so I looked over some shirts that were sort of like t-shirts a boy might wear, but were more colorful and softer and they fit looser. I picked out a red one and a green one. Marcus paid for the two t-shirts and the necklace and we left.

As soon as we hit the road again I changed into the green t-shirt and put on the beads.

"How do I look?" I asked.

"Great," Marcus said.

That night after we had finished eating supper and cleaning up our dishes and were getting ready to settle down to get some sleep. He asked whether I wanted a back scratch and I said I did.

I kept on my underpants and my anti-sex-fiend sweat pants over them. As he was rubbing my back I sort of started wishing that he would rub my butt too. I say "sort of" because it was almost like it wasn't me but my butt.

It was talking to me. Not out loud or exactly in words but still it was telling me what it wanted. "I'm lonely," it said.

"I'll rub you later," I said.

"I want him to," it said.

"I can't let him do that," I said.

"Why not?"

"Cause he's a sex fiend," I said.

"How come your back gets all the fun," he said.

"All right, I said. But only with my sweat pants on."

"OK."

So I said out loud to Marcus, "You can rub my butt too if you want."

"O.K." he said.

"But I think I'll keep my sweat pants on," I said. "It's a little cold."

"Sure," he said. And he began to rub my butt along with the rest of my back. It felt good.

"It would feel better if you weren't wearing so much," my butt said.

"You again. What do you want now?"

"Take off your sweat pants."

"Not in front of a sex fiend," I said.

"But he's a harmless one. He won't hurt you."

"All right but not my underpants," I said.

"What was that?" Marcus asked. I realized that I had said that last thing out loud.

"I'm going to take my sweat pants off," I said.

"Why not?" Marcus said.

I squirmed out of my sweat pants and stretched back out so that he could rub and scratch my back from the back of my head to the bottoms of my feet. It felt really good. I didn't hear any more complaints from my butt that night. But when he rubbed me like that I got a boner. When I stood up and went out to take a pee before going to sleep my boner made my underwear stick out in front. I tried to hide that from him. I was a little worried that maybe I was becoming a sex fiend myself.

Well, not a sex fiend really. Earlier that day I had decided that he wasn't a sex fiend. A sex fiend would have done something terrible to me. He had plenty of chances. He could have killed me in the night or done whatever

else it is that sex fiends do. He was too gentle to be a sex fiend. Even when his other side came out, like when he watched the body counts, all he did was scream and swear a bit. He never hurt me. So I figured he must be a sex pervert. I suspected that he might be the sort of man who lusted after men. Maybe he even lusted after me. I could tell that he wanted to see me naked. And he tried to get me into the shower with him. And the way he kissed me right on the mouth. That wasn't normal. That had to be a bomination. So, yes, he was a pervert. But that wasn't as bad as being a fiend.

So the question was this: was I becoming a pervert too? Vampires turn you into vampires by biting you on the neck. Could it be that perverts could do this too? Maybe if a pervert bit you on your neck you became a pervert. He could have done this any night when we were sleeping in the same tent or motel room. The trouble was that I really liked it when he put his hands on me. Even when he put his hands on my butt. But I guess that's the way perverts are. They like that kind of thing. Anyhow I started checking my neck to see whether I had any fang marks. I saw what I thought might be one once, but then decided it must be a mosquito bite. The reason was that there was only one mark. Vampires always left two marks. I figured perverts would do the same.

## **We Meet the Wilkins**

We first met the Wilkins on the beach. I had never been on a warm beach before. At the Home they took us to a beach on the ocean a few times, and it was fun. But the water was so cold it froze your balls off. They didn't really fall off of course, but it made them ache so much you had to get out. Here in California you could actually swim in the water.

The beach was fairly small and hard to get to. We had to park our car in a little parking lot by the road and walk about a half a mile to get to the beach. Marcus and I got there real early and we were the only ones on the beach when we first arrived. I didn't have a bathing suit. Somehow we had forgotten that I might need one when we bought the other clothes I needed. Well, I did think of it when we were in the store buying my beads, but I didn't want to go buy a girl's bathing suit. And if I had bought a boy's suit that would have given me away. Anyhow, Marcus explained to me that this was a nude beach. People didn't have to wear bathing suits.

I had gone skinny dipping in secret a few times at the Lake near the Home. I would sneak out at night. I knew a secret way down to the lake through a couple of back yards. I liked to pretend I was with other people when I was skinny dipping. Girls as well as boys. But even all alone it was a happy feeling. Mr. Springer would have killed me if he had ever found out. Modesty was a big thing to him. He didn't think anybody should ever

see anybody else naked. He used to talk about that sometimes in the Sunday vesper services. He said how we should always be careful to keep our bodies covered because if anyone saw us naked it might cause "lustful thoughts."

When we got down to the beach Marcus took off all his clothes. Even though I liked the idea of skinny dipping, really doing it with other people was scary. Other people would probably be coming down to the beach. What would they think? So I said I would just keep my underpants on. He never tried to make me do anything. Never told me what I could or couldn't do like most grownups. He just shrugged and said, "Sure, if that's what makes you feel good." We played in the waves for a while and then he went and laid down on a big towel. He liked to sun himself. I began making sand castles close to where the waves came.

Pretty soon this family came walking down the path. There were four of them. The man was tall and had a real thick beard and long hair. If there was such a thing as a "typical hippie" he was it. The woman was just a little heavy. I can't say that she was really fat, but she was kind of big. She wore a long dress and lots of beads. There were two kids with them. A boy who was little -- maybe four or five years old, and a girl who looked like she was just a year or two older than me. Both the girl and the woman had red hair. The man carried a picnic basket and all the others carried towels and swim masks and bags with all sorts of things in them.

I was nervous about what they might think of me playing there in only my underpants. But I didn't need to worry. They put down all the stuff they were carrying and got undressed. I mean all the way undressed. They acted like it was nothing to be naked in front of other people. I went ahead with my sand castle pretending it was nothing to me -- like I saw naked people all the time. The truth is that I had never seen either a naked girl or a naked woman in all my life. The nearest thing was some pictures in a National Geographic. I was really curious , but I tried not to stare.

After a while I got used to it a little bit. By a little bit I mean that it was still pretty weird but I was able to concentrate on making my sand castle. Every now and then more people would arrive. Mostly they looked like hippies who looked like they were in their twenties. There were not many kids or older people. They would get naked and then either sit around and smoke or lay around in the sun. Some of them went in to swim from time to time.

The tide was coming in and I was trying to build up the wall in front of my castle in order to prevent it from getting washed away. I had little sticks that were supposed to be people stuck in the sand all around the castle. I pretended they were trying to build up their sea-wall with sand

bags to prevent a flood. But it was a losing battle. The waves washed the wall away faster than I could build it back up and pretty soon it drowned all the people around the castle and began to wash away the castle itself. When there was nothing more I could do I stood up and watched as my creation got destroyed.

Then I looked down the beach I saw that it wasn't only my sand castle that was being attacked by the tide. The picnic basket that the family had brought was sloshing around in the water and looked like it was going to be washed away at any moment. I ran down the beach, grabbed it, and hauled it to dryer ground.

"Hey you guys," I shouted to the mother and the the two children with her. They were playing in the surf a little further down the beach. I waved at them. "You almost lost your basket."

The mother scooped up the boy and they all started down the beach toward me. The girl ran on ahead. "Wow, I'm glad you saw that," the girl said as she got close to me. "That's our lunch."

"It was getting ready to set sail for India," I said. I thought that was a pretty good line. Sometimes things like that just pop into my head.

The girl laughed. "Well, I'm glad you caught it," she said.

When the mother with her son arrived the girl repeated my comment. The mother laughed too. This was really going well. "We can't afford to feed the starving Indians," she said. "We can just barely feed ourselves."

As she began to rummage through the basket to see what the damage was the man who had carried the basket down wandered over. He didn't seem to be in any hurry. He was smoking a home-made cigarette in a funny way. He would hold the smoke in his lungs for a long time before exhaling. "What's up?" he asked.

"We almost lost our lunch," she woman said. "This boy here saved it."

"Far out," the man said. "What's you name, kid?"

"Jed," I said. Then I corrected myself. "No, its Franklin. My name is Franklin Hubbard." For some reason I didn't want to lie to these people. I wanted them to know who I really was.

"Don't you know what your name is?" the girl asked.

"Of course I do," I said. "But sometimes I just like to call myself Jed."

"That's cool," she said. "I like to pretend too."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Becky Wilkins," she said.

"And I'm Heather and this is Dylan," her woman said, indicating the boy who was now helping her rummage through the basket. "And that's Mike." Mike was the one smoking the cigarette.

"Hi," he said. "Glad you caught the basket."

"You left it too close to the water, Mike," Heather said.

"Didn't think about the tide," he said. "Anyhow, it's no big thing. Nor real damage."

"The bread is all wet," Heather said. "That's going to make our lunch kind of skimpy."

"Not by bread alone," Mike said, inhaling deeply on his cigarette.

Heather shook her head. "You smoke too much."

"Nothing wrong with smoking," Mike said.

"No, but you do it too much."

Mike shrugged. "I'm going back to my towel," he said. "Nobody gets on my case over there."

A minute or two after Mike went back to smoke in peace Markus arrived. He had been in swimming and came over to see what was happening. After I introduced everybody he looking at the basket. "How much did you lose?" he asked.

"Bread and napkins," Heather said. "The cheese and wine are OK." She pulled two soggy loafs of French bread and some wet napkins out of the basket.

Marcus picked them up. "Look, we've got some bread back at the car. Let me take these and throw them away and get our bread. If we put everything together we'll have plenty of lunch for everybody."

"Cool," said Heather. "Sounds good to me."

"Let me get it," I said.

"You want to?" Marcus asked.

"Yes," I said.

"OK," he said. ""You might pick out a little extra fruit too and bring it along."

So I went over and got dressed and carried the soggy bread and napkins back to the parking area. It was about a fifteen or twenty minute walk, up a seep slope. They had a trash can there and Marcus was a fanatic about never leaving any trash in natural places. Nobody was in the parking area

so after throwing away the trash, I changed into dry underwear. The wet ones really weren't very comfortable. After putting the rest of my clothes on I dug out two loafs of bread -- one rye and one whole wheat. Marcus hated white bread and bread that had already been sliced. Said that kind of thing had no taste. I picked out an assortment of fruit. That was another one of Marcus' big things. He loved fruit and saw to it that we always had lots of different kinds with us. Like I said, we ate well.

When I got back down to the beach the first thing I did was strip down to nothing. After all, I was the only one on the beach who was wearing anything. It was getting embarrassing. I never thought you could feel embarrassed because you were wearing some clothes rather than being naked. But in this world where Marcus was taking me, everything was upside down.

Pretty soon it felt good being naked. I liked looking at all of them naked. And I liked it that they could see me. And the sun and the breezes felt super good on my skin. I thought about what the guys at The Home would say if I told them all about this. Probably they wouldn't believe me.

The rest of the morning I spent with Becky and Dylan. She looked after her little brother real carefully, and it seemed like she enjoyed teaching him things. We explored the beach from one end to the other, looking for crabs, interesting shells and anything else that was alive or pretty.

I remember seeing a small fish that the tide had washed up on the shore. It was flopping around, trying to get back to the water. I thought I would go over and throw him back into the ocean, but a sea gull beat me to him. I was startled at how quickly the fish disappeared. One minute he was there. The next he was gone.

I found a sand dollar that was in perfect shape. "Mike can drill a little hole in it and you can make a necklace out of it," Becky said. She could see that I was wearing my beads. She couldn't help but notice that, because it was all that I was wearing. She didn't seem to find it funny that a boy might wear a necklace.

Like Marcus suggested, we shared our lunches. He had prepared some sandwiches made with cucumbers, tomatoes, cheese and some weird green spread that looked awful but didn't taste too bad. Margaret and Mike thought these sandwiches were great but I preferred plain French bread with some butter on it. Becky and I stacked whatever we wanted on some tin plates that Marcus had bought in an Army and Navy store. She poured herself some wine and when I saw that nobody said anything about it, I poured myself some too. If anybody noticed they didn't say anything. Then she and I went off to eat our lunches together. Earlier we had found a drift wood log and we thought it would be cool to eat while sitting on it.

"What was Mike smoking," I asked, after we settled down.

"Grass," she said.

"Is that like marijuana," I asked.

"It is marijuana," she said. "It's just another name for it."

"Do you smoke it too?"

"Not much," she said. "It makes me cough and I feel happy without it."

"Does it make Mike see funny colors and think he can fly and see demons?"

"That's acid," she said.

"Acid?"

"LSD."

"Oh."

"You don't know much about drugs do you," she said.

"I'm from Maine," I said. "I don't think we have any of them there."

"I wouldn't know about that," she said. "But we have plenty of them around here."

"What do the drugs do to you?" I asked.

"Different ones do different things. Grass make you feel peaceful. Acid makes you see things in a funny way. Some people say it makes them see God. Cocaine makes it so you don't feel any pain. Not in your mind or your heart even. But also not in your body. And it gives you all kinds of energy ."

So these people were druggies. Marcus was a pervert and a Commie. And now I was getting mixed up with a bunch of druggies. They seemed nice, but that is just how Mr. Springer said it would be. Satan would not look like a nasty evil creature, he often told us at our vespers. Satan would look like a nice guy and be friendly. Temptation always looked nice on the surface. Satan used friendly looking people for his work. Satan would beguile you. Mr. Springer liked that word "beguile." I never understood exactly what it meant, but it seemed to mean something like tricking you. Am I being beguiled by these people? I wondered. Once you were hooked on drugs you were already knocking on the gates of Hell. How could I ever forget Mr. Springer's Sunday evening talks?

Still it was very nice being with these people. When else was I going to get a chance to be naked and well fed with lots of other naked people. Maybe Becky was beguiling me. I couldn't be sure. But I didn't think I was in too much trouble just then. I didn't have to take their drugs. I didn't



think they would force them on me. I took a sip of wine, and looked at Becky.

"Did you ever take acid?" I asked.

"Only once," she said.

"What was it like."

"I didn't like it very much," she said. "I guess I had a bad trip."

"What kind of bad trip?"

"I saw monsters, and creepy things. I don't know. It was sort of like a nightmare. Anything could happen at any time and there was nothing I could do about it."

"Did you think the monsters might be real?" I asked.

"At the time I did," she said.

By now there were quite a few people at the beach. Most of them took off all their clothes. One of them had a big radio and he turned it up loud. He was playing some rock music. Mostly they were younger people -- like in their twenties. But there were some older people and some kids too. They put a volley-ball net up and got a game going. Anyone could play. They didn't care if you were any good or not. I was never super good at sports but I joined the volleyball game as soon as I could see that no one got shouted at when they did something stupid or clumsy.

After I tired of the volleyball I went to the picnic basket and got myself a snack of some French bread and butter. Also I poured myself a little wine. People just came and helped themselves to the food whenever they wanted to. Then I went over and sat down beside Mike. He was just sitting there smoking one of his cigarettes and watching the people.

"Hey, buddy, you want a hit?" he asked.

I said "no thanks."

"Cool place, eh?" he said.

"Sure is," I said. We sat in silence for a bit. I was down-wind from him and found myself inhaling some of the smoke from his cigarette. It had an odd smell that I sort of liked. I felt no pressure to keep up a conversation when I was with him. Just sitting around together without saying anything seemed OK with him. But I had a question. "Becky says maybe you could drill a hole in my sand dollar here," I said. "She thinks it would make a nice necklace. I had it with me and handed it to him.

Mike looked at the sand dollar very carefully for a long time. While he looked at the sand dollar I looked at him. He had tattoos all over his body. They were pictures of dragons and strange looking creatures mostly. They

were very pretty. Also he wore lots of jewelry. He had a total of five rings on his two fingers, he wore ear rings, and he had two necklaces around his neck. One was just a gold chain. The other one had a turquoise pendant hanging from it. "That's a nice one," he said finally.

"Could you do it," I asked.

"Do what," he asked.

"Make it into a necklace."

"Sure," he said. "That's what I do. I make jewelry. Do you want me to decorate it?"

"I don't know," I said. "What would you put on it?"

"A design."

"What design?"

"It would look good with a yin-yang symbol in the middle," he said.

"Yin-yang?"

"Yeah. Like so." He drew the symbol in the sand. "It's about opposites and how they come together to make one thing," he said. "Like wet and dry, or hot and cold. Positive and negative. Or boy and girl."

"Cool," I said.

"The only problem is that I don't have my equipment here," he said.

Mike explained to me that He had a shop at their home in Nevada. He said it was over near the Utah boarder. He had all his equipment there. He told me a little bit about the area around their home. He seemed to have a special interest in bristle cone pine trees. It sounded like a real dry and rugged area, but he clearly thought it was the greatest place on earth.

"When you come to visit, I'll show you around," he said.

"Are we coming to visit?" I asked.

"Marcus says you are," he said.

That was news to me. Not that it sounded like a bad thing. "Cool," I said. I was beginning to feel a bit dizzy. It wasn't a bad feeling really, but I felt like getting up and moving around a bit. So I swallowed the rest of my wine and got up. "See you later," I said.

He tried to give me the sand dollar, but I didn't take it. "You keep it for now," I said. "When you get back to your place you can make it into a necklace. And give it to me when we come."

"Sure," he said. Even though he was sort of dreamy a lot of the time from all that marijuana he smoked I noticed that he was very careful with my

sand dollar. He didn't just put it down in the sand -- even for long enough to finish his cigarette. Instead he took it right back to his Volkswagen and stashed it in a safe place out of the way.

I washed the glass out down at the edge of the ocean and put it back with our picnic things. Then I went down to swim.

## **Gaia**

I found that once you got out just past the place where the surf was crashing you came to a place in the water where it was fairly calm. I was a pretty good swimmer. One good thing about The Home was that every summer they let us go to the beach at the lake that was near us pretty often and I learned to swim there. I could do most anything in the water. So I turned over on my back and just floated along for a while. I stared at the few clouds that were drifting across the sky and pretty soon I began to have that happy feeling again like I had in the woods that night. The Ocean lifted me and dropped me down gently out here and it seemed like a friendly thing. I was those clouds. I was the wave that I could hear. I was the sea gulls soaring in the sky.

I lifted my head and looked toward the shore. I was not that much further out, but I had drifted in a current along the shore. The beach where we were all gathered was no longer directly in from where I was. I felt very small in that huge ocean and began to panic. I had the thought that I had better swim back in and make my way back to the beach. From where I was it looked like I would be able to climb out onto the rocks. I thought that probably the cliffs were not too steep for me to climb. Once at the top I could just walk back to the beach. So I began swimming in.

At that moment something grabbed my leg. I just about died. What kind of thing would grab my leg in that way. A shark would have just bit it off. When I looked back I saw that it was Marcus.

"Not that way," he said. "We have to swim back before we try to go in."

"You scared me," I said.

"Can you still swim? Are you too tired?"

"I'm hardly tired at all," I said.

"OK, that's good" he said. "First, swim out a little further -- just enough so that the waves don't drag you in."

I did as he said and he positioned himself on the shore side of me and we began swimming side by side back toward where the beach was -- always staying just outside the breaking waves. It was slow going. I was getting tired now. I guess I began slowing down a bit. "Even if you are tired, we can't rest," Marcus said. "We can't even slow down. We have to go faster

than the current." So I pushed myself as hard as I could. I guess fear helped me. I realized that if we couldn't swim faster than the current we would probably be killed.

Fortunately we were able to go faster than the current. It seemed like a long time, but after a while we got to a point that was directly out from our beach. "Now we can go in," Marcus said. "Stay with me. We'll try to catch a wave."

I did my best to stay with him and I guess we did "catch a wave." Sort of. At a certain point he said "OK. Now swim as hard as you can."

At that point I was too tired to swim very hard. I did my best and we did get washed in -- head over heels -- but nevertheless, in. He pulled me out of the surf and dragged me into the shallower water.

As we walked up onto the beach I stared at the water swirling around me feet as the waves came in and receded. Marcus was very close to me. "If I had tried to swim in from where you found me..." I said. I paused to catch my breath and looked up into his face. "If I had done that..." I paused again to get more air inside me. "What would have happened."

"You would have been smashed against the rocks," he said.

"And.....?"

"Probably you would have been killed," he said.

I started shivering. I'm not sure whether it was from getting chilled from being in the water too long or from being afraid. While we were swimming back I mostly just thought about what I had to do minute by minute. Now that I was safe everything that could have happened started flooding into my mind. Suppose we had not been able to swim faster than the current....

Marcus put his arm around my shoulder and guided me toward the place where we kept our things. I looked around at the other people on the beach. As far as I could tell nobody had even noticed that something was wrong. Mike was still sitting in the same place where I left him, smoking another cigarette. Heather was talking with a small group of women down at the other end of the beach. "Why did you know something was wrong?" I asked.

"Because I love you," he said. There wasn't anything drippy or even emotional in his voice when he said this. It was simply the answer to my question. Of course it felt good to hear that, but it didn't quite answer the question for me. Or at least I didn't see how it did.

I shook my head. "But how did you know?" I asked.

"When you love someone, you know when he's in trouble," he said.

I still wasn't satisfied. "But how did you know where I was," I asked.

"The gulls knew where you were," he said.

Well, if he's going to be talking back and forth with trees, I thought, why not gulls?

Just then Becky came running toward us. "Franklin! Franklin! There you are."

"Yep," I said. "Here I am."

"I've been looking everywhere for you," she said. "I was getting worried. Where were you?"

Marcus smiled at her, and then at me. "See what I mean?" he asked.

"Already she knows when you are in trouble."

I nodded and then turned to Becky. "Swimming," I said, weakly.

Marcus pulled a big beach towel out of his bag and wrapped it around me. Then he sat down and arranged me in his lap. With the towel and his arms around me, and with the sun beating down on us, I felt myself beginning to warm up. But I was still shivering.

"He needs something sweet to drink," Marcus said. "And something to cover him better."

Becky ran to where her family kept their things and returned with another big beach towel and a Ginger Ale. She gave me the drink and draped the towel over me. Then she down beside us.

"He swam out too far and was drifting into a dangerous place," Marcus explained to her.

I was clinging tightly to Marcus and the way he cuddled me and rubbed my back to warm me up we were practically making love. It crossed my mind that other people might think this was a bit weird. But I didn't really care that much. I needed to be held. And I *did* love him.

"You could have drowned, Franklin," Becky said. "You shouldn't take chances like that."

"I know," I said. "But it was so pretty ..."

"It was like it was with you and the moon, wasn't it," Marcus said.

I thought a minute and then I nodded. I knew that Becky had no way of understanding what he meant by this, but I did. He was right, of course. It was a lot like that time I peed in the stream in the moonlight.

"What's with him and the moon?" Becky asked.

"It's like the Oneness that Wicca people sometimes feel," he explained to her.

"Oh," she said, and stared at me with her brows sort of scrunched up in a kind of question mark. I could have been a bug or a scientific specimen that she was beginning to see in a new way.

I didn't understand his "Wicca" comment to Becky. But that's what I mean about Marcus being a magic person. He seemed to know what everybody thought and felt even before they said it, and he knew how to explain things to anyone in words that they could understand -- with words that were special to them. That seemed like a kind of magic to me. That, and how he knew I was in trouble and where I was. All that was magic too.

"Do you know what it's like to be a spoon or a rock," Marcus asked. This question was aimed at me. That seemed to me to be a really ridiculous question.

Sometimes he is really off the wall, I thought to myself. "Of course not," I said.

"That's because you only know a rock or a spoon from the outside," he said. "But you know what its like to be Franklin don't you."

"Of course. Cause that's who I am. "

"You know who Franklin is from the inside."

"I guess you can say that," I said.

"So there's these two ways of knowing things, aren't there," he continued. "You don't know what its like to be a spoon or a rock. You just know what it looks like from the outside. But you know you own self from the inside. You know what it is like to be you. How it feels."

I nodded. I still didn't see where he was going with all this.

"When you were out in the woods with the moon, you and and the woods and everything around you was just one big thing. It was all inside you. Same with the Ocean while you were drifting around out there."

I had to think about this for a minute. But then I said, "Yes. That's how it was." And it was too. I could not have found words for it. Even now when I'm three years older it's hard to find the words. If I had not known Marcus maybe I would never have found any words that even came close.

"The thing is this," he continued. "When you see things from the outside you must not forget what they are like from the inside. And when you see things from the inside you must not forget what they look like from the outside. " I'll never forget him saying that.

"I guess I see what you mean," I said. In some vague way, I did. But I

couldn't see why he was lecturing me on insides and outsides right now. I didn't want a science lesson. I didn't especially want to think at all. It was too much work. I just wanted to be held and to get warm. But he persisted. Sometimes he was like that. He would just talk and talk until you understood something.

"You were out there getting to know the Ocean from the inside, and that was cool," he said. "She feels like a Mother and a Goddess and something grand and huge and full of darkness and sunlight and it's exciting to be a part of all that. But you forgot what She looks like from the outside."

"I don't get what you are trying to tell me," I said.

"If you watched her from the outside you would know that She doesn't care about death. She doesn't care about the seal that is captured in teeth of the killer whale, or the unwary sea-gull who gets dragged under the surface by some unseen predator."

He paused to let this sink in. I thought about the fish I had seen disappear into the gullet of the seagull.

"Life begets death and death begets life," he said. "Its all the same to the Sea."

I nodded. I knew the beget and the begat words from listening to Mr. Springer read the Bible. So I was more or less following him.

"The Ocean would have smashed you against those rocks without giving it a second thought," Marcus said.

"Yes, She would have," I said.

"I'm not the Ocean," Marcus said. "I don't want you smashed against these rocks. Or any rocks."

I snuggled in even closer to him. "Me neither," I said.

"So you must try to keep both eyes open," he said.

Eventually I warmed up and went back to roaming the beach with Becky. I was very happy even though I was still a bit shaken. I was never careless with the ocean again. I think I learned something then that I never forgot. Marcus treated me just like another person. He let me come and go as I pleased. He never did the "you must obey me" thing that most grown-ups do with kids. He would hold me and cuddle me and teach me when I needed those things. But he never bossed me. And because this was so I realized that I had to boss myself. I had to look around me and tell for myself what was dangerous and what was not. If I didn't look carefully and made bad decisions I could find myself in deep shit. I had to keep both eyes open.

Behind the parking lot at the top of the slope down to the beach there was a small camping ground with a picnic table. That's where we went to eat supper. Marcus and Heather planned it together and Becky and I helped out. We had a spaghetti feast with garlic bread and tossed salad and wine. For some reason I remember this as one of the best meals I ever ate. Maybe it was being outside in the fresh air. Maybe it was being with the new friends. Or maybe it was because the the huge gap that had always been there between kids and adults had suddenly closed. I was with grown-ups that I could like, that I could talk with, and that I could be like.

We cleaned up after supper and made a campfire. When it was dark we all gathered around it and talked. Becky and I sat on a log. Mike was stretched out on a blanket. Marcus and Heather sat in a couple of old collapsible lawn chairs that Marcus kept in his car and Dylan was snuggled in Heather's lap. At first it was very nice. I felt very close to these people. But then the conversation turned to politics. They started saying a lot of bad things about the US. It seemed like these people had the same thoughts about our war in Vietnam as Marcus did.

"There's going to be a march," Heather said.

"I had heard that," Marcus said. "You got the date?"

"October 21st."

"What's on the agenda?"

"Abbie Hoffman is going to exorcise the Pentagon. Cleanse it from evil spirits."

"He's ambitious if nothing else," Marcus said.

"Yeah," Heather said. "He's going to make it levitate and turn orange."

"Far out," said Mike. He sat up to hear more.

Marcus laughed. "That would be cool to watch," he said.

"It's going to be the biggest peace demonstration ever," Heather said.

"We'll put an end to their Goddamn war yet."

All this talk about the need to end the war made me very uneasy. After all the United States was fighting Commies who wanted to take our freedom away. It was very confusing to me. Most of all it made me feel that I wasn't really so close to these people as I had thought. That left me feeling very sad. I had run away from The Home because I felt that those were not my people. For a little bit I had felt that I had found my people and that felt wonderful. But now I was having my doubts again. There were too many red flags that were telling me that these were not really good people. The hatred of the US. The willingness to give up the war on Communism. The drugs. The perverted sex. And I was getting drawn into it. Maybe



nobody was my people. Maybe I just didn't get along with life.

Anyhow I wanted to get away from them.

"I'm tired. I'm going to bed," I told them. Actually I just wanted to get into my sleeping bag and read my super-hero comic books. Our tent was already set up so it would not be a big hassle.

"Go ahead," said Marcus. "I'll be there in a little bit."

"No," said Becky. "Wait."

"What," I asked.

"I've got a Monopoly game," she said. "Come play with me."

That seemed a lot better than listening to all this political talk so I agreed.

They had a Volkswagen station wagon. It was painted all over with flowers and trees. It was very pretty. They slept in it at night. Becky invited me inside. She had a battery powered lamp that gave off plenty of light. We set the game up and began playing. It had a soothing effect on me at first, but then she began to win. She had the whole blue and green side of the board. My four railroads and a few lesser sets were no match for that. But she kept lending me money so that the game wouldn't end. It got so that it wasn't much fun because I knew that however long the game was went on I had no chance of winning. She would keep getting richer and I would keep getting poorer.

"I give up," I said, after I landed once again on Park Place.

"Don't," she said. "I'll loan you some more." She picked up the piece of paper on which we were keeping track of what I owed her. There was already a long list of numbers listed on it. God knows how much I owed her. A lot.

"Never mind," I said.

"Well, OK," she said. "We can play again tomorrow."

"Cool," I said. But there was not much enthusiasm in my voice.

I began helping her pick up and sort all the money and cards. As she worked she kept glancing at me with that funny way -- in the way she did in the afternoon on the beach. It was a look that made her brow wrinkle in a question-mark sort of way. "When you were out there floating around, did you have that happiness feeling?" she asked.

I nodded. "Until I got scared I did," I said. "Then it went away."

"You could have got killed," she said.

"I know that."

"Sometimes a person should be afraid," she said.

"I guess so," I said. I handed her all the piles of money I had sorted out.

"How come you know about that happiness feeling?" I asked.

"I'm a Wiccan," she said. "That's what we are all about. It's being One with the Earth Spirit. It gives happiness."

"What does Wiccan mean," I asked.

"We're witches," she said. "Wiccan is the religion of witches."

"Oh." I couldn't take this in all at once. "Mike too? I thought witches were women."

"Men can be witches to," she said. "Mike is one. But he likes to call himself a wizard."

"A wizard is a magic person," I said. "Do you think Marcus is one?"

"I think so," Becky said. "Mom told me he has a lot of magic. He has power."

"I think so, too," I said.

"You could become a wizard."

"I have my own religion," I said.

"What's your religion?"

"I don't know."

She laughed. "How can you have your own religion and not know what it is," she asked.

"I think I'm Lutheran," I said.

"Well, that's all right," she said. "Any religion is OK if people are nice and they accept people with other religions."

That sounded nice, but I was sure it wasn't. At least I was sure that being witches and wizards wasn't OK. But Becky wanted to be my friend. And I wanted to be her friend too. She was just about the nicest girl I ever knew. The other ones I knew never treated me nice. And she was very pretty. Even with her clothes on she was pretty. How could she be a witch? I couldn't put it all together in my head, and right then I just wanted to get away and be by myself.

"I'm sleepy," I said. "I got to go to bed."

"You can sleep here. Mom won't mind. We got plenty of room for one more."

"What about Mike?"

"Mike is always OK with anything."

I thought about this for a minute. I really did want to be alone more than anything else. "Thanks, but I think I want my own place in the tent."

I could see she was disappointed. I was sorry about that. But what she had just told me upset me a lot.

I had trouble going to sleep that night. Marcus and the other two grown-ups were out there at the campfire talking for a long time, but I was still awake when Marcus finally came into the tent. I pretended to be asleep because I really did want to be alone. I didn't even want to talk with him.

I had more or less got used to the idea that my best friend was a pervert. Hell, I probably was one too. As soon as I figured out that he wasn't a maniac I could sort of handle that. That he was a Commie was a little harder to take. And here he was talking to other people who also talked like Commies. That was tough, but I was working on getting used to that too. Then I found out that the Wilkins -- well, at least Mike -- were druggies. I knew what drugs could do to a person because of because Mr. Springer had made that real clear. And I had seen pictures in the National Enquirer about what drugs made you do. But I didn't have to take them. What finally really freaked me out was that they were Satan worshipers. There was no way around it. I had heard it straight from Becky. They were witches. I knew that witches worshiped Satan. I guessed that everybody knew that. This was a real Satanic Cult, just like the ones I read about in my supermarket newspapers.

I didn't doubt that Marcus had magic powers. Maybe he got them from the Devil, I thought. Maybe I was alive because the Devil helped him save me. In that case I already owed the Devil something. Was it my soul? Maybe the Devil had the power to make you love someone you shouldn't.

Becky and Marcus both seemed to think that the happiness I knew peeing in the woods (the same one that I felt while I was floating in the Ocean before it almost killed me) was the same happiness they knew in their Wicca religion. If that was true I was already captured by the Devil. Maybe it was true, but that was hard for me to accept. That happiness was the biggest happiness I ever knew, except maybe having Marcus put his arms around me when we slept. The happiness that came to me in the woods and the ocean felt like it was good. So it had to be that my happiness was not the same as their happiness. That was my conclusion. They had a kind of happiness that looked like mine on the outside, and that sounded like mine when it was talked about, but deep down inside it had to be a totally different kind of happiness.

# Escape From the Satanic Cult

In any case, I knew that I had to get away from these people. This was a Satanic Cult I had gotten mixed up in. God might not send me to Hell for that. It was, after all, just an accident. But if I kept on hanging out with them even after I figured it out that they were a Satanic cult, well, that was a different matter. I knew I had to get away.

I decided that right after breakfast in the morning was the time to make my run for it.

The next morning we shared our food again and put together a big breakfast. Eggs with fried potatoes, toast, cereal with peaches, orange juice -- the works. Whether we were alone or with other people, Marcus always saw to it that we ate well. I would miss that.

After we all went down to the beach the next morning, I told Marcus I had to use the out-house. I told him this because I didn't want him to think I went out into the ocean and drowned. The outhouse was up by the parking lot. It was right next to the road. I stood beside the road and put my thumb out whenever a car went by.

I was sure this was the right thing to do. But the more I thought about all those people -- especially about Marcus and Becky -- the sadder I felt. Such a sadness it was. I wouldn't know how to begin to describe it. But the relief was real too.

Luck was with me. After about ten minutes an old and dented car pulled over and stopped. I ran to the car and the back door opened. I jumped in.

In the back seat with me there were two girls -- one looked like she was just a little younger than me, and the other was very young -- maybe three. A man was driving. He wore a cowboy hat and had a bandanna tied around his neck. His hair was tied up in a pony tail and his face was hiding behind about three days worth of a beard. I couldn't tell whether he thought he was a cow-boy or a hippie. A woman with long scraggly hair and a kind face sat beside him.

"Where you going?" the man asked as he pulled back onto the highway.

"San Fransisco," I said.

"Kind of young to be hitchhiking ain't you?"

He smiled as if to say that he meant no harm by the question, but I knew I had to come up with a plausible story pretty fast or he might turn me into the police as a runaway.

"My mom is sick in the hospital," I said. "I have to go see her."

"Which hospital is that, Honey?" the woman asked.

I didn't know anything about any hospital in San Francisco. "Can't remember the name of it," I said. "It's that big one near the center of town." I figured any city was bound to have a big hospital in it somewhere near the downtown area.

"He must mean San Francisco General," the woman said.

"Yeah, that's it," I said.

The man glanced back at me. "Seems like an easy name to remember to me," he said.

"Go easy on him, Tom" the woman said. "Can't you see he's upset?"

But Tom was like a hound dog on the scent of a fox. He wasn't going to be put off that easily. "How come you hitchhiking," he asked. "Ain't you got no people?"

"Sure," I said. "I'm staying with Uncle Bob and Aunt Mary. They agreed to keep me until Mom gets better." I was creating a whole family and a story out of nothing. I was pretty good at that. And I was careful to remember everybody's names and keep all the facts straight.

"But they don't want me to see her," I explained.

"Why is that?"

"Because they don't want me to know how sick she is."

"How sick is she," asked the woman.

I have this talent. I can make my eyes water and my lower lip quiver just like I am about to cry. I found this useful at The Home on occasion, so I practiced it a lot in front of a mirror. I got my lip to quivering, and lowered my eyes, which began to water. "I'm afraid she is going to die," I said.

It was perfect. I was sure this would throw the hound dog off my trail.

"See how upset he is, Tom," the woman said.

"Maybe so, Marge," Tom said. "Maybe I am too hard on people."

The littlest girl was sitting next to me. She patted me on my knee and said, "don't cry."

I nodded. "What's your name?" I asked.

"Sally."

"And your sister?"

"Mary Joe."

"Your Mama's going to be all right," Mary Joe said, as though she had some inside information on the subject.

I looked down and let my lip quiver a bit more. "Maybe so," I said, and shook my head doubtfully. A couple of tears rolled down my cheeks.

"General ain't too far out of our way, Tom," Marge said. "Let's run him by."

Tom was silent. I could tell that he was the sort that didn't like people playing him for the fool. He still wasn't sure whether I was or not. But finally he nodded and said, "OK. I guess we got time for that."

Mary Joe rummaged through some papers and clutter that was thrown up on the shelf behind the seat and below the window. "You want to look at a comic book?" she asked.

"You got any Superman?"

"Nope."

"Wonder Woman?"

"Donald Duck."

"Nope."

"What you got?"

"All I got is Little Lulu."

"That sounds good," I said. It wasn't my favorite comic book but I liked the stories that Little Lulu sometimes told to Alvin. It would do.

Sally snuggled a little closer to me and tried to see the comic book.

"You want me to read it to you?" I asked her.

She nodded.

As I read to Sally, I noticed that Mary Joe put down her comic and also listened.

"Can you read?" I asked her.

"Sure," she said. "But I still like being read to."

So for quite a few miles I read Little Lulu comic books to Mary Joe and Sally. Periodically I looked up to keep track of where we were going. After a while I noticed that we were going up onto this huge bridge. I set the comic book down. "What's this?" I asked.

"The Golden Gate," Tom said. He knew I was impressed, and I could hear a little pride in his voice, like he owned it or had built it himself. "Its the biggest bridge in the world."

"Second biggest," Marge corrected him.

He glared at her. "It was the biggest for a long time," he said.

First biggest or second biggest, I had never seen anything like it. It was impossible to imagine how people could build anything so big. As we crossed it I kept thinking of what would happen if it collapsed. It was such a long ways down into that water.

Not long after crossing the bridge we arrived at San Fransisco General Hospital. As I got out of the car everybody told me how they hoped my mom would get well soon and that I should take care of myself and all that sort of thing. Then Tom said, "And Tell your Uncle Herald that he should bring you to the hospital next time."

"It's Uncle Bob," I said, and smiled at him. "Yeah, I'll be sure to tell him."

I asked around and got directions to the center of San Fransisco. It was close enough to walk to. I spent the day wondering around and just looking at things. The biggest city I had ever been in was Portland Maine, and it was nothing compared to San Fransisco. I had a little change in my pocket left over from when I last bought some comic books. I had enough for a steak sub for lunch and at about 4:00 I bought a hot dog so I wasn't hungry. But I was getting very tired.

I went into a big department store and sat down in front of a television set they had running in the section of the store where they sold them. They were showing the evening news. After talking about a few local events that didn't mean much to me they started showing more dead Vietnamese soldiers and giving body counts. I could sort of see why Marcus got so upset that night. War was a nasty thing. It was never like they showed it in Captain America comic books. Still though, what could we do? The Commies were trying to take over the world.

A clerk came by and nudged me with the toe of his shoe. "No loitering, Sonny," he said.

I got up and wandered around the store a bit more. I had to figure out where I was going to spend the night. I took the elevator up the floor where they sold beds. They sure did look nice. It was 5:48. When I came into the store I had noticed a sign that gave the store hours on the door. Today it was supposed to close at 6:00. I found the restroom and went into a stall and sat down. Then I lifted my feet up off the floor and rested them on the edge of the stool -- and I waited. In a few minutes I heard someone open the door and come in. My heart was beating so loud I was afraid maybe the person could hear it. Suppose it is someone who really does need to use the bathroom, I thought, and he opens the door the the stall. But all he did was turn a faucet off that was dribbling a bit, turn out the light, and shut the door.

It was very dark in there. But I was using my ears to tell what was

happening. I heard some people say good night to each other and then heard the elevator stop and start again. For a little while I could still hear someone rummaging around outside on the floor. I couldn't tell what he or she was doing. After what seemed like a very long time I heard the elevator stop and start again and then it was quiet.

Very carefully I sneaked out of the bathroom and cautiously looked around the floor of the department store where I was. I felt it was too risky to check out the other floors -- at least right then. Maybe later, I thought. I went over to the section where they sold beds and found the biggest and the softest one there. It had all the good points of the Mama Bear's and the Daddy Bear's and the Baby Bear's beds rolled up into one. I had never seen such a bed -- much less slept in one. I flopped down on it and stared at the ceiling. I thought I would be safe until morning when the store opened again. I figured I would just do my bathroom trick again in reverse. If someone caught me I didn't need to admit I had been there all night.

I didn't know about night watchmen. I thought when they closed a store at night they just locked it up very carefully and unlocked it again in the morning.

As I lay on the bed I thought more and more about Becky and her family. I really liked them. And I thought about Marcus. I missed him most of all. I thought about all of us swimming and having fun together. Never had I felt so sad, and so alone. Even the wonderful bed I was in didn't give me much comfort. It did, however allow me to fall asleep.

In Maine we didn't have a lot of black people. As I was growing up I didn't give a lot of thought to black people. I supposed that there weren't too many around because they didn't like the cold. They were used to warmer weather. So I don't think I had much of an opinion about them one way or another. They just weren't part of my world. But I did have the feeling that there was something strange and sort of magical about them -- and maybe I was a little afraid of them. So it was a jolt when I was waked up by someone shaking my shoulder, and seeing a black face staring down at me as soon as I opened my eyes.

"What are you doing here?" son, he asked.

"Who, me?" I asked. I realized right off how stupid this must have sounded. But I was just waking up. My brain wasn't working yet.

He looked around as if checking to see if there might be anybody else he could be talking to. Then he said, "Yeah. You. Who else?"

"I didn't want to sleep on the cement," I said. That was true enough, but I realized it didn't really answer his question.



"You're just a kid," he observed. "You lost?"

"I don't think so," I said.

He had been shining his flashlight in my face and I had been shielding my eyes. I guess he could see that I didn't like the glare in my face, so he turned it off. There was still some light in the room from a couple of night-lights and the moon light coming in the windows. As my eyes adjusted to the semi-darkness I could see what he looked like better. He wasn't frowning and really he looked almost friendly.

"You a run-away?" he asked.

"Sort of," I said.

"Sort of?"

"Well, I guess you could call me a run-away." I was being vague on purpose because I was trying to think up a story that would help me get out of this mess.

"What are you running away from," he asked.

"A home in Maine," I said. I could have kicked myself for letting him know that. But I hadn't had time yet to make up a lie.

"They mean to you there?" he asked.

"Not usually."

"So why are you running away?"

All at once a good story came to me. "I'm trying to find my father," I said. Now that I had a lie to tell him I felt more confident. I sat up in the bed and looked straight at him. People are more likely to believe lies if you look them right in the face. I can't remember what comic book I read that in. Or maybe it was in one of my supermarket newspapers. But I did know that liars usually didn't look you right in the face. "See the State took me away from my father just because he lost his job and they put me in this home. Now my father says he has a job but they still won't let me go back to him. So he wrote me to come and see him." That sounded pretty good to me. I hoped it sounded good to him too.

"So you're not from California?" he commented.

"Never been in California before," I said. "Never been outside of Maine."

"I suppose I ought to call the police and have them take you back," he said. "They would send you back on a bus or something."

"Please don't do that," I said. "My father is a really nice person and I love him and that's where I want to be. Don't make me go back to The Home." He frowned. Not so much in a mean way as in a thinking way. "And I'm

sorry I slept in your bed," I added.

"Not my bed," he said. "Belongs to the Company." He brushed off some sand that had fallen off my shoes onto the bed spread. As far as I could see it didn't leave any smudges. "I ran away once," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

He thought a minute and then shrugged. "Lots of reasons," he said.

I waited for him to explain this in more detail, but he didn't say anything. So I figured he wasn't going to tell me anything more about it. But it did seem that we had something in common.

"All I want is to live with my father," I said. "I really want to find him."

I don't know how to explain this. I was trying very hard to lie, but somehow I told the truth in spite of myself. Not that Marcus really was my father. But he was the closest thing I ever had in my life to a real father. Even if he was a pervert and a Commie he loved me. At least I hoped he loved me. He seemed to. Even that I could not trust completely, yet. But I knew that I loved him and wanted more than anything in the world to find him -- and to be back with him.

"Do you know where to find him?" he asked.

I nodded. "On a beach not too far from here."

"How far."

"Don't know exactly." Maybe 30 miles.

"He live there?"

"That's where we are supposed to meet. He told me that in a letter."

"What's the name of this beach?"

"I can't remember."

He looked at me suspiciously. "How you going to find it then?"

"I can find it. I know the way there."

"You been there before?"

I realized he was tripping me up. I had just finished telling him I had never been outside of Maine. So how did I know how to find this beach? Also, if my father had told me where we were to meet he would have told me the name of that place and that would have been the most important piece of information in the world to me. So I would hardly forget it.

He watched me while I thought all this through and waited patiently for me to answer. "My father described the way there in a letter to me," I said.

He smiled at me. "OK," he said. "Come with me."

I was really worried now. This guy was smarter than me. It was like I was playing a game of checkers and he always know better moves than I did. The only other one I ever met who was like that was Marcus. Most people I could trick. But I knew that this guy was seeing through me. He didn't argue with me. But he knew what was what. The question was, what would he do with what he knew. I thought I had better not tell him my real name if he asked.

"Please don't let them send me back," I pleaded.

"I'm not going to turn you in," he said. "Just want to show you something."

I wasn't sure I trusted him, and thought about making a run for it. But this guy looked like he was in pretty good shape and after he caught me I figured I would be in even worse trouble. So I stood up and went with him.

He led me to the elevator, and we went up a couple of more floors. On this floor they had toys, but we walked right past them to a book rack. "Can you read?" he asked.

"Pretty good for my age," I said.

"Good. Reading's a good thing," he said.

He pulled two books off the rack. One was "Huckleberry Finn," and the other was "Oliver Twist." Both books were abridged versions of the original. They were meant for older children rather than grown-ups. I still have them. They were the first things other than comic books and supermarket newspapers I ever read that I really liked.

He took me back to the my bed and gave me a little flashlight that he kept in his pocket. "I keep an extra one, just in case," he said. "I need it back. But if you can't sleep you can read under the covers."

"Thanks," I said. I took the flashlight.

"You need to take off your shoes," he said. "You're pants are dirty too, so you better take them off. "

I did as he asked and crawled into the bed. He held the covers up for me so that I could get under them. "I got to finish my round," he said. "Don't go anywhere. I won't turn you in." Then he bent over and kissed me on my forehead. "If you fall asleep again I'll make sure you get up and out of here before anybody finds out about you." He turned to leave. "I'm Lloyd," he said, looking over his shoulder as he walked away.

"I'm Jed," I said. "Jed Green."

"OK," he said. "I'll call you Jed."

I could hardly believe it. Nobody in my whole life had every tucked me into bed and kissed me good-night. And Lloyd hardly even knew me. Maybe that's just how black people do things, I thought.

I was wide awake from the excitement so I turned the little flashlight on under the covers and started reading Huckleberry Finn. I could tell right off that Huck was a guy who was a lot like me. If Marcus taught me to be interested in words, Lloyd taught me to be interested in reading. Just by giving me those two books he did that. But right then too much was happening in my own life for me to concentrate for long on a book. I knew I wanted to go back and be with Marcus. But what about the Satanic Cult? I decided that for some reason he must just not have noticed that he was getting drawn into one. Maybe he didn't read about that kind of thing as much as I did. I would just have to warn him.

As worried as I was about everything I was awfully tired and I must have fallen back asleep pretty soon. The next thing I remember was Lloyd waking me up.

"Get your clothes on," he said. "You got to get out of this store before anybody comes." He brushed and straightened the bed while I put my pants and shoes on. Then he took me down in the elevator to the ground floor and led me to a back door. On the way down in the elevator Lloyd gave me very careful instructions about how to get to a nearby park, and told me to wait for him there. He would drive me to where I was to meet my father.

His directions were good and I found the park. The sun was just coming up. I sat down on a bench and thought about my situation. Did I really dare to wait for Lloyd? Suppose he was tricking me and all he was really going to do was take me to the police. You really couldn't trust anybody to be who they pretended they were. But I had another big worry. I had been taking it for granted that Marcus would still be camped next to the beach. There was no reason at all to think this had to be true. It was his habit to keep on the move -- to never stay in one place more than a day or at most two. He had no reason to believe I would come back and try to find him. The more I thought about it the more I thought that he might be leaving this morning. He might at this very minute be driving off. When I traveled with him we were usually eating breakfast by the time the sun came up and we would leave pretty soon after that. If Lloyd really was going to take me back to the beach, that was my best bet for getting there on time.

True to his word Lloyd arrived at the park about a half hour later. "So where are we going," he asked after I got in his car.

"You know where that great big bridge is -- the Golden Gate?" I asked.

"I guess everybody in San Francisco knows that," he said.

"Well, if you get me there I think I can tell where to go then."

After we came down off the bridge I gave up pretending. He could tell I was looking for familiar landmarks and road signs, and must have known I was trying to get back to someplace I had been before. So I didn't bother to make up a story about how I had lost the letter from my father and was just going by the memory of what it had said.

Partly my memory was good, and partly I was lucky. It wasn't too long before I saw the road leading down to the beach where we had met Becky and her family. He drove down to the parking area and stopped.

"Thanks for the ride," I said. "And for the books." I figured he would leave then. But he said he would stay with me until I found my father. I walked over to the little hidden away place where Marcus had parked the car. It was gone. With a sinking feeling in my stomach I walked on down to the beach. Lloyd went with me. I looked up and down the beach hoping that I would see him. Then I began to cry. Only this time I wasn't pretending. "He's gone," I said.

"Maybe he just hasn't got here yet," Lloyd said. He put his arm around my shoulder. "Something may have held him up."

"No," I said. "He's gone. He was here, and now he's gone."

"What are you going to do now?" he asked.

I couldn't make up a plan. I couldn't even make up a good lie. All at once there was no point in anything. I shook my head. "I don't know," I said.

## **I Find Marcus Again**

Then I heard someone behind me say, "Franklin?"

I turned and saw that it was Marcus. I ran to him and threw my arms around him. "Dad," I said. "I thought you had left."

Marcus looked over at Lloyd. He realized right off that I had told him that I was his dad and went along with it. "I would never leave you, Franklin," he said. "I would have waited here all summer."

"Where's the car?"

"Cops kept coming by and I was afraid they would check out the car if they kept seeing it. So I had to move it to a more hidden place."

I couldn't hold him tight enough. It was like I was afraid if I loosened up a little he would float away. Marcus reached out and shook hands with Lloyd. "I'm Marcus," he said. "Thanks for bringing Franklin here."

"I thought his name was Jed," Lloyd said.

"That's my nick name," I said.

"OK, he said."

"Did you go much out of your way?" Marcus asked.

Lloyd shrugged. "A little," he said.

"Let me pay you for your gas?" Marcus said.

"No," said Lloyd. "I was glad I could help."

Marcus insisted, but Lloyd would not hear of it.

"He reminds me of myself at that age," he said. He patted me on my back, shook hands with Marcus, and turned to go. Marcus thanked him again as he walked off.

Then Marcus turned to me. "I asked for you to get some help," he said.

"You mean you prayed?" I asked. This gave me a fleeting bit of hope. Maybe he was Christian after all. In which case he couldn't be a Commie.

"Not exactly," he said. "At least not what you would usually think of as praying. I just talk to whatever it is around me that is alive and I listen to what comes to me."

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We spent the rest of the day having a great time on the beach and then went to his camping site, which was a few hundred yards away. Marcus fixed a super special supper that evening. I think it was because he was happy to have me back. He made spaghetti with a sauce that had wild mushrooms he had picked during the day. How come he knew about mushrooms, I don't know. He seemed to know everything about nature. He even made an apple pie. He had this funny looking metal contraption that he said was a camper's oven, and he was able to bake things in it. As we sat at the picnic table eating the pie I decided that I had better get this business of the Satanic Cult sorted out. Marcus was still planning to go visit the Wilkins.

"Did you know that Mike and Becky and Heather are all witches?" I asked. "Probably Dylan too, if he is old enough to be one."

I expected some sort of shocked response. Instead he just said, "Uh hunh" in this lazy sort of way.

I felt that this news deserved more of a reaction than just an "un hunh."

"Did you know that?" I asked.

"Yes, I knew that."

There wasn't any alarm or worry or anything in his voice that told me he was getting this, so I felt I had to drive the point home. "That means they worship Satan," I said. "Did you know that?"

"No," he said. "It doesn't mean that."

"How can you say that?" I said. "Everybody knows that witches worship Satan. We've got a Satanic Cult on our hands."

He chuckled, and gave me a hug. "No. Most people don't know anything at all about it. They belong to the Wicca religion."

"Right, that's what Becky told me."

"Wiccans worship the Earth Mother and the Sky Father. Mostly the Earth Mother, really. At least for most of them. But they don't worship the devil. That's just something that most people think."

"I read it in a newspaper," I said.

"Newspapers are full of garbage," he said.

That was a new idea to me. I had always figured that for something to be in a newspaper is had to be true.

"They have to print the facts," I said. "There is a law or something about that."

"No," he said. "They print lies and crazy stuff all the time."

"How can they get away with it?" I asked.

"They print what their readers want to hear," he said. "So who's going to bother them?"

We were quiet for a while. After thinking about it for a few minutes I decided he was probably right. I had learned a long time ago that most adults lie to children about all sorts of things. I had caught them in some whoppers, but never told them that to their faces. I know better than that. I thought if they lied to kids, they probably lied to each other too. And adults write newspapers. So it made sense that newspapers would lie too.

"Are you sure about that," I said.

"About what?"

"About newspapers lying."

"Yeah," he said. "I'm sure about that."

"And about Wiccans not worshipping Satan?"

"Yeah, that too. Becky and her family aren't a Satanic Cult. Nor do they belong to one."

"Then they aren't evil?"

"No," he said. "They think people should be able to do pretty much what they want to do as long as they don't hurt anybody. That isn't what most people think, so most people think witches are evil."

"Are you a witch?" I asked.

"Not really," he said. "I'm not any one thing. But mostly I agree with the Wiccans."

"Becky told me that Heather thinks you are a wizard," I said. "Heather thinks you have power."

Marcus laughed. "What does she know?" he said.

I felt pretty reassured about this. Marcus was the only grown-up I knew who never lied to me. Just like he was the only one who never tried to make me do things. I guess he must have thought kids -- just like grown ups -- should be able to do pretty much what they liked as long as they didn't hurt anybody. Anyway he acted like that's what he thought.

## **A Bomination**

That night I was so happy to be back with Marcus again I didn't care whether he was a Commie or a pervert or anything. I just wanted to be as close as I could to him. So as soon as we were in the tent I took off all my clothes and told him I wanted a back scratch. He took off all his clothes too, and began giving me a rub down. How good that felt! And how good it was to be close to him again. But then another problem came up. It was my dick. I had another one of those conversations like I had with my butt, but this time it was my dick.

"I feel left out," it said.

"Keep out of this," I said.

"Your butt gets to be rubbed. Why not me?"

"Cause it would be a bomination."

"What you are doing now is already a bomination."

"It would be a worse one if he rubbed you," I said.

"I can give you even more happiness than you feel now," he said.

"I take care of you myself," I said.

"It would be even better if you let him do it," he said.

"I can't ask him to do that," I said.

"Just turn over and see what happens," he said.



"I guess I could do that," I said.

"Sure you could," said my dick.

"It wouldn't be my fault if something happened."

"Right," he said.

So I turned over. "I think maybe you could do this side," I said.

I had a boner and I could see that he had one too. It was much bigger than mine.

He smiled and began rubbing my chest and then my stomach and then the fronts of my legs. Wow, did that feel good. Then he began playing with my dick a little. Real gentle like. He was a pervert but he wasn't the sort to cut your heart out and leave you for dead.

Then he did this other thing that I had never thought of. It's hard to say what it was because it sounds so nasty when I put it into words. That's what is so strange about it. When he did it, it didn't seem nasty at all. It seemed nice. But when I put words on it it sounds nasty. Sometimes words just don't let me say exactly what I mean. Anyhow, here it is. He put my dick in his mouth and he sort of sucked on it. He sucked on my dick. There. I have said it. And it made a super good feeling happen.

After that I felt more peaceful. More peaceful than I could ever remember, and I curled up next to him and we went to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning Marcus was already out fixing breakfast. I lay in bed thinking about what had happened the previous night. It gave me a good feeling just thinking about it.

I had liked it.

I knew, of course, that this meant I was damned. I was going to Hell. Mr. Springer had told us a lot about Hell, and I knew I didn't want to go there. Also I wanted God to love me. Not hate me.

This was when I realized that there were two of me. It was just like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Mr. Springer had talked about this too. He had called the two parts our good self and our bad self, and said we would always have to fight against our bad self. I named the two parts in my soul Dr. Good and Mr. Dick. And they sure did fight.

Dr. Good: You know you shouldn't do things like that.

Mr. Dick: Like what?

Dr. Good: You know what.

Mr. Dick: Doing it to him or letting him do it to me?

Dr. Good: Both. Both are evil.

Mr. Dick: It feels like love. Love is good.

Dr. Good: It not good. It's a bomination.

Mr. Dick: It doesn't hurt anybody.

Dr. Good: It will make God throw you into Hell.

After the first time, I let him do that thing to me any time he wanted. I say "I let him do that." That isn't quite fair. I wanted him to do that. I went on doing those bominations because I liked them. I paraded around naked in front of him. I took showers with him and let him wash me all over. Little by little I began touching him. At first I was afraid to do that, but then I learned that I could give him happiness too. I just did to him what I did to myself to get that good feeling. It was sort of awesome that I could cause that much excitement to happen to a full grown man.

In other words I became a pervert.

So I had to admit that Mr. Dick had the upper hand, and I couldn't just ignore that bit about going to Hell. The next few days we drove around California "seeing the sights." He said that we were going to visit the Wilkins family in Nevada in about a week, but we had time to see different things here. While we drove around I thought a lot about how I should bring the war between Mr. Dick and Dr. Good to some kind of end. Finally I decided on a plan that would make Dr. Good win.

The plan was pretty extreme. But my situation was extreme. To be punished in that horrible, horrible way forever and ever -- well, you can't get any more extreme than that. So I needed an extreme solution. What came to me was this: I could cut off my dick, and ask God to forgive me. Mr. Springer a lot of times read a place in the Bible that said if anything offended you you should cut it off and throw it away. He explained it like this. Suppose it was your eye. If you liked looking at bad pictures too much. That's what the Bible meant about your eye offending you. He explained that real clear. So it meant that if any part of your body gave you a kind of good feeling that was wicked, you should cut it off. Mr. Springer also said that if we asked in Jesus name, God had to forgive us.

Well, cutting off my dick seemed like a terrible thing to do. But maybe it was better than killing myself which was the other thing I thought about doing. Terrible as it was, though, after it was done maybe I could have some peace. Peace of mind, Mr. Springer always told us, was the greatest gift of all.

The problem was the pain. I got my dick caught in my zipper once when I was was experimenting with not wearing any underwear. It really hurt a lot. Cutting it off would hurt a lot more. I knew that I wasn't brave enough to make myself hurt that much. But then I remembered the drugs that

Becky told me about. One of them made it so you couldn't feel any pain. I could just take a whopping big dose of that one and then do it. I couldn't remember which one that one was. But we were supposed to be at her place in a few days. I could ask her. And she had told me that Mike had just about every drug you could think of around his place. I could steal some.

I felt a lot better as soon as I had this plan. I didn't have to go to Hell just because I was a pervert. The main thing was to be sure I didn't get killed in some stupid way before I had a chance to carry out my plan. Maybe I could save Marcus to.

In the meantime I figured I might as well enjoy myself.

## **The Motorcycle Gang**

We spent the next day on the beach. More people were there and I had a good time. I was able to put all that bomination stuff out of my mind. We went back to the campsite for supper, but then returned to the beach together. It was dark by then, and everybody else had gone home and we had the beach to ourselves. We wandered up and down a while, not speaking too much. Naturally we were naked. I had learned by then that naked is the only way to wander on the beach. After a bit we found a big drift-wood log. He sat down leaning against it, and I snuggled between his legs and leaned back on him. For some time we were silent, just listening to the waves and looking at the moon.

So I just sort of settled in and started to enjoy the waves and the moon and having his arms around me again. But pretty soon our peacefulness got interrupted.

It began with the sound of motorcycles roaring in the distance. As they came closer they were super loud. I thought they would just drive on by and we would have our peacefulness again. But it wasn't to be. I could hear them stopping at the path that led down to the beach, and could hear them yelling and swearing. Then I heard Marcus swear too.

"Shit," he said.

He didn't swear too much except when things were really bad. So I knew that we were in trouble. Then the people we had heard started down the path with their motor cycles and began to arrive on the beach.

"These people could be very dangerous to us," he said to me quietly. "Just stay very still and don't make any noise. We will be invisible. It's magic. Trust me."

I didn't know whether I trusted what he said or not. I didn't feel very

invisible. Of course we were more or less in the dark, but all they had to do was shine one of those motorcycle lights on us and we would be seen for sure. But I was really scared and I couldn't think of anything better to do.

We had left our clothes back at the campsite. So we were sort of trapped. The path was the only way out and there wasn't much of anyplace to hide.

There were about eight motorcycles. They were all driven by very scary looking men. They were big and wore bandannas. I think five of them had women with them. If I had been a woman I would have been afraid to be with these men. I remembered reading an article in the National Enquirer about a 16 year old boy who sold his sister to cycle hoods. I wondered if one of those girls these motorcycle guys had with them might be her. I felt sorry for her but knew there was nothing I could do. I would do well to get out of this alive myself. I really couldn't see them that clearly and don't know exactly why I thought they looked mean. It was just something I felt. I didn't doubt for a minute what Marcus said about them being dangerous. I mean what were they going to think if they found us sitting like we were, all naked and everything? They would think we were perverts. Maybe they were right. I didn't think they were the types to have a very good opinion of perverts.

Some of them crashed back into the woods and found some sticks and logs and began to make a messy looking pile out of them. They did everything in a real noisy way. They weren't very particular about what they found. If it was wood they threw it on the pile. Then they poured a lot a gasoline on it and tossed a match at it.

That made a huge bonfire with a lot of smoke because some of the stuff they threw on was green. In one way the fire made things better. They were satisfied with how much light they had and they turned all their motorcycles off because they didn't need to keep their headlights on. I thought if one of those headlight caught us we would be goners.

Someone had a big radio with them which he tuned to a hard rock station. He cranked it up real loud. They started drinking a lot of beer and smoking cigarettes. After a bit I could tell they were smoking grass because it had the same smell as the stuff Mike smoked. Clear down where we were we could smell it. I guess the breeze was blowing our way. Smoking grass seemed to make Mike peaceful. Not these guys. Maybe it was the beer or maybe nothing would make them peaceful but they swore and laughed real loud and spit and shoved each other around. A couple of them started wrestling. Then two of the women and some of the men stripped down and ran for the water. I was scared.

Then, after they had been there about an hour one of them came over very

close to where we were and began taking a leak. I mean if he had had taken two more steps he would have peed right on us. That's how close he was. He looked right at us. At least it seemed that way to me. I thought it was all over but I still didn't move. Then he turned and walked back to the group.

"See," Marcus whispered to me. "We are invisible."

By then I almost believed him. "I wish they would go away," I said.

"Don't worry. They will."

"When."

"Soon."

"They don't look like it," I said.

"Something will make them go," he said.

"What?"

"I can't tell. But I can feel it."

I didn't believe this. I thought he was just trying to comfort me.

The party went on for about another 20 or thirty minutes. It did seem to quiet down a little bit. Maybe the grass did have some effect. Then we heard some sirens. At first it was hard to be sure but pretty soon it was clear.

Pretty soon I could tell that there were flashing red and blue lights up at the black top. Then I could see some lights bouncing down the path -- and I knew that some more motorcycles were coming. The Hell's angels guys -- cause I guess that's what they were -- turned to face the one's coming down the path.

About four police motorcycles came into view and the cops on them got off. One of them walked down toward the fire. "You guys need to be moving on," he said. "Nobody's allowed on the beach after dark."

"Fuck you," one of the motorcycle guys said. I had never heard anybody talk like that to a cop before. I never thought it could happen. But the cop didn't seem to be too scared.

"You got a choice," he said. "You can move on and get out of this county real fast, or you can come spend some time in our jail. "

Nobody had turned the radio down and the engines of the police motorcycles were still running. They were more or less screaming at each other above the noise.

"What's the fucking charges," the Hell's Angel's asked. "We ain't bothering nobody."

"Suppose we shake you down," said the cop. "Might be we would find some drugs."

"I don't see nobody big enough to shake me down."

"Better not bet on that," the cop said.

While they were talking about a dozen or so more cops had arrived. Two of them had rifles out and a whole bunch of them had their billy clubs out. They were crowded around the entrance to the path.

These two groups of guys stared at each other for a spell without anybody saying anything.

Then another one of the other Hell's angels came forward and sort of nudged the one who had been talking up to then aside. "You got us all wrong," he said. "We was just leaving. Don't pay no mind to Jeremy's rough way of talking. Your rude way of ordering us around kind of pissed him off, but he didn't mean nothing."

The gang gathered their things together and started up their motorcycles. Their women got on the back. Then they started up the path. The cops stood back to let them pass. Pretty soon I heard their motorcycles roaring off.

A couple of the cops came down to the fire and kicked what was left of it apart. They had their flashlights out now. One of them shined his light up and down the beach. It shined right on us for a few seconds. I realized that I was almost as scared of being caught by the cops as by the Hell's Angels. But we must have been invisible to the cops too because he just turned and started back up the path.

When the cops were gone to, we got up.

"Lets get back to our tent and get some sleep," Marcus said.

"Yeah," I said. "I'm sure glad they're gone."

"Watch your feet," he said. "There may be hot coals scattered around."

The next day as we were eating breakfast I asked Marcus how he did that invisible thing.

"It isn't something I did," he said. "This kind of thing only happens when I am really afraid or there is some other very big emotion in me."

"You didn't make us invisible?"

"No. Something just said to me 'stay still. And tell Franklin to stay still. You will be invisible to them.' So I did. If I have any magic at all it is just from listening to things. And it isn't exactly that we are invisible. We just put ourselves in our own world. I get help doing that, in some way I can't explain. And people who are enemies can't see us from their world. It has

something to do with how their brains work.

I didn't understand that too well. But he seemed to be saying he didn't understand it either, so I figured he was explaining it as best he could.

"Who did you want to win last night," I asked.

"Between the cops and the Hell's Angels?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I wanted the Hell's Angels to go somewhere else."

"Yeah. Me to."

He nodded. "They are very violent. Even when they aren't doing anything they are violent."

I nodded.

"But the cops are too," he said.

"They have to be," I said. "Or they would get beat up."

"I suppose so," Marcus said. "And I admit I was real glad to see them last night. But I'm trying to tell you something else. See the Cops -- or at least what they stand for -- create the Hell's Angels as much as the Hells Angels create the cops. They are two sides of the same coin."

That was too much for me. "I don't get it," I said. "You make it sound like there is no way to win. The cops win. The Hells Angels win. Its all the same."

"More or less that's right," he said.

"So which team are we for?" I asked.

"Neither," he said. "Somehow we have to mint a new coin."

Well, that made about as much sense to me as two plus blue equals cream-puffs. "We have to mint a new coin." It was just words. But I was sort of used to the fact that a certain amount of what he said made no sense. Sometimes it would fall into place later and I would see it. Sometimes not. Maybe he knew it would work like that. Or maybe he just doesn't realize that I am a kid, I thought. I couldn't tell. But I decided to let it go at that. At least I understood that he wasn't too keen on either cops or Hell's Angels.

## **Trip to Nevada**

A few days later we started toward Nevada. That was where the Wilkins lived. Over in the eastern part near the Utah border. I remember the moment we came into the Nevada. There was this big sign that said, "Welcome to Nevada." I no sooner read that sign than I had this horrible

sinking feeling in my stomach. What's that about, I asked myself. Then I remembered. This was the state where I was going to cut off my dick. I was really looking forward to seeing Becky and her family but this kind of spoiled it. Then I thought that if I cut off my dick I would be more like a girl. Becky and I could be sisters. That thought helped a little bit. But not very much.

After we had been driving through Nevada a ways I had to take a leak so I asked Marcus to pull over. I wasn't nearly as modest as I was before romping around on that naked beach in California. I was happy to just stand on the shoulder and do my business with my back to the road. What difference did it make if people saw me. They couldn't see my dick, and what if they did anyhow?

Taking a leak feels good. That's something you don't hear people talking about a lot. But its true. I don't mean its the most wonderful thing in the world. But its at least as nice as eating a cookie. So I was enjoying myself making patterns in the dust with my pee when my dick spoke up again. Not out loud, you know. But just in my mind.

"You can't do this to me," he said.

"What?"

"You know what."

"Cut you off and throw you away?"

"What else?"

I looked down at him. He had finished peeing and looked sort of sad to me.

"I have to," I said.

"Why?"

"I don't want to go to hell."

"You won't," he said.

"I will. I'm already half way there."

"You'll be sorry."

"I am sorry. But it's either you are me."

"I am you," he said.

I didn't know what to say to that. I just put him back into my pants and got back into the car with Marcus. The hills that we drove through were dry and empty.

That evening we could have made it to the Wilkins easily, but Marcus said



"morning's the best time to arrive. So we stopped just short of their place and camped on our own for the night. The next morning I put on my best blue jeans, my new red shirt, and my necklace. I wanted to look my best.

Heather had drawn a little map showing just how to get to their place. It wasn't all that easy to find. After we left the main road I acted as navigator and think I did a pretty good job. Even so we had to backtrack a couple of times. The dirt tracks that we followed were hardly even roads, and of course there were no signs. Finally though we found the little hill on which they lived and started up toward their property. I could see Becky waving at us. When we reached the top Marcus pulled in beside their Volkswagen bus and I jumped out.

Becky threw herself on me and hugged me so tight I could hardly breath. Then she ran to Marcus and hugged him. She led us up a little path to flat area where there were a bunch of small buildings.

"Mama, They're here," she called. "Mike. Come see."

Heather came out from one of the buildings and Mike from another. After hugs and greetings they led us into the building where Heather had been. There was only one big room in that building, but it was divided into three parts -- a kitchen area where they had a sink, a dinning area and a sitting around area. Most of the things in the room looked home-made. I don't mean it wasn't nice. It just wasn't the kind of thing you would be likely to find in a store. The dinning room table where everybody sat down, for example was round and in the middle there was design made out of pebbles. Later Becky told me that the design was a yin-yang symbol. Mike had made it. It was finished and shiny and very pretty. But like I said, it just wasn't something you would ever find in a store. Heather cooked up a big pot of coffee and served us all home-made donuts. They were really good dipped in sugar. Pretty soon the grown-ups were deep into some sort of political discussion. I couldn't quite follow it because it was about people and things I didn't know about. Becky seemed bored with this too.

"Come on, Franklin," she said. "I'll show you around."

She grabbed my hand and dragged me out of the dinning room. Dylan followed us.

"The best way to explain it is that our house isn't in one piece," Heather said. "We all worked on it, but Mike was the one who planned it. He's a carpenter. Makes jewelry too. Fact is he is very good with his hands. I'll show you his workshop."

She took me into a room that was almost as big as the dinning/living room where we had been eating donuts. This room was chuck full of things. Lots of tools, nuts and bolts, nails and most anything you can think of for

making things. There was so much stuff there that at first it looked cluttered but then you saw that everything was in its place. At one end of the room he had his table set up for making jewelry. And didn't he have a lot of things made. Ear rings, regular rings, necklaces, and anything you can imagine. "He sells this stuff at fairs and festivals," Becky explained. "It's very popular."

Then she led me up to the highest point on the hill where they lived. Mike had built a little platform there. It was very smooth so you could sit on it without getting splinters, and there were some pillows scattered around on it. Also there was a big easy chair. It looked in the out-of-doors like that. Becky and I both crowded into the chair, and Dylan jumped on top of us. "We call this area up here 'The Chair,'" she said. "It's where we meditate. It's very nice here in the morning just as the sun is coming up. Evenings and sun-sets are neat too."

But she wasn't into meditating then. She led me back down the hill and showed me the double seater out-house that they used, the partly underground room that Heather and Mike used for their bedroom, and a small building that looked like a play house. That was Dylan's room. He could sleep there if he wanted to, but usually slept either with Heather and Mike or with Becky in her room, which is where she took me next.

Becky's house was up on stilts -- and was maybe ten feet off the ground. She slept there. And she kept all her stuff there. "You can sleep here with me, while you are here," she said.

"That sounds neat," I said. "But I'm afraid that Marcus might get lonely without me."

"He gets to sleep with you all the time," she said.

I didn't argue with her. I figured we would sort it all out when the time came. In her room Becky had a big cushion and a straight chair you could sit in as well as the bed. She and Dylan plopped down on the bed and I settled onto the cushion.

"Why did you run away?" Becky asked me.

"You mean at the beach?"

"Yeah. One minute you were there, and the next minute you were gone."

"I guess it was kind of sudden," I said.

"Marcus was really upset."

"Was he?"

"Of course he was. He loves you."

"He does?"

"Of course. Can't you tell that?"

"I guess so."

"So why did you do it?"

"Run away?"

"What else?"

Of course I knew what she meant. But I was trying to buy some time. I couldn't think of a good lie to tell.

"Why did I run away?" I repeated.

"Yes."

I was running out of time. I could see that. Becky really wanted to know. Why wouldn't she? She wasn't going to let up. And here I was sitting with only the truth in my head. So I decided to do something really strange and risky. I decided to tell the truth. "I thought that your family was a Satanic cult," I said.

For some reason she found this funny. I thought she would get mad yell at me or something. But instead she laughed. "You thought we were a Satanic Cult!" she said.

She looked at Dylan. "Maybe it's true. Dylan can be a regular little devil."  
"I'm not a devil," he said.

Becky laughed some more. She took hold of Dylan and hugged him.

"Course you're not," She said. "But he thought we were a Satanic Cult."  
Dylan started laughing too. I don't think he really knew what was going on but was laughing just because she was.

This was hurting worse than if she had hollered at me. I knew it would be a mistake to tell the truth.

"Stop!" I said. I guess I said it pretty loud. "Stop laughing at me."

They both stopped laughing and stared at me. They looked surprised.

"I don't like people laughing at me," I said.

"Don't be mad," Dylan said.

"I'm sorry," Becky said. "It just seemed so funny -- the idea of us being a Satanic Cult."

"It was because you said you were witches," I said.

"Oh, that. Yeah, sometimes people think we worship Satan. I can see why you might have thought that." She nodded in an understanding way. But I

still thought she was making fun of me.

"I read it in a newspaper," I said.

"You can't believe newspapers," she said. "They are full of lies."

I stood up. "I've got to go," I said.

"Where to?"

"The bathroom."

I didn't go to the bathroom. As soon as I thought she couldn't see me from her bed-room house I circled around and made my way to "The Chair." No one was there so I plopped down in the easy chair and tried to make sense of what was happening in my life. Why was everything so confusing? Why did I seem to be such close friends with people like Becky and her family and with Marcus one minute and the next minute they seemed like enemies? I thought about running away again, but I realized that I couldn't just keep running away from everybody. These people were the closest things to friends I had ever had.

I don't know how long I sat in the chair. It seemed like hours and hours, but time can go pretty slow when you aren't doing anything. So it probably wasn't more than an hour when Becky arrived. Dylan was trailing along with her. She came over close to the chair and sat down on a pillow.

"Hi, Franklin," Dylan said.

I didn't answer.

"I'm sorry that I laughed at you," Becky said.

I still didn't answer.

"I was afraid you had run away again. I don't want you to do that."

Dylan came over to me and climbed up in my lap. I let him do this but didn't help him or cuddle him. "Don't be mad," he said.

"I don't like it when people laugh at me," I said.

"I won't do it again," Becky said.

"OK," I said.

I put my arms around Dylan and pulled him to me. He melted into me and put his thumb in his mouth. For some reason feeling him up against me and making up with Becky made me want to cry. Every time I turn around I'm crying, I thought. I'm getting to be just like a girl. I tried to hold it in, but tears came from my eyes and I started sniffing. Dylan looked at me and rubbed the tears away. "Don't cry," he said.

"I'm OK," I told him.

"Sometimes I cry too," he said.

So I re-joined them and we spent the afternoon with Becky showing me some of her "thinking places" and a little house she built out of sticks and bits of cloth. I thought I could have made a better one, but it was sort of cozy in its own way.

I decided it might be fun to sleep in Becky's bedroom like she asked me to. I talked with Marcus about this. He didn't seem to mind. Dylan wanted to join us, which was fine. He slept next to me on a mat on the floor. He was just about the most cuddly kid I ever met. After he fell asleep Becky told me more about the Wiccans -- about their beliefs and celebrations.

"The things you felt in the woods and with the Ocean -- those happy feelings -- don't fit in too good with Christianity." she said.

So what do Wiccans say about it," I asked.

"Its the Mother God, that's all," she said. "The Mother God was holding you and you could feel it."

I could see this. It did sort of feel like a mother. Well, I guess it did. I never had a mother that felt like that, but its what you might think a mother would be like.

She also told me that Wiccans couldn't possibly be Satanists because they didn't even believe in the devil. "The devil is just like Santa Clause, but the opposite. They are just ways grown ups try to get kids to behave. Santa gives you big rewards for behaving. Satan punishes you worse than any grown-up in this world would dare do when you're not behaving." They were both just made-up things, according to her.

The plan was that we were going to stay at their place for about a week. Then we were going to a Wicca celebration in W. Virginia. After that we were going to the March on the Pentagon in Washington D.C. During the first couple of days Becky and I spent almost all our time together. I was surprised how well we got along. We played Monopoly, looked for lizards and spiders and scorpions, and talked. We talked about our lives. The life I had at The Home in Maine was very different than the life she had with her hippie family. And in some ways she and I were very different. I was more moody and secretive than she was. And probably I was harder to get along with. But we also shared a lot of interests. I don't think I ever had a real friend who was more or less my own age before. Not someone I could really talk to. I liked it a lot.

## **Are We Perverts?**

One day while we were hanging out in her tree house, Becky decided that I needed to have my hair trimmed. This made me pretty nervous but I

went along with it.

"But don't cut a lot off," I said. "I want it to grow long."

"Yes," she agreed. "You should let it grow longer. I'm just going to trim it a tiny bit."

She insisted that I take off my shirt so that she wouldn't get any hair on it, and had me sit down in a straight chair. She was careful to cut only the tiniest bit away here and there. Mostly she was into combing and "styling" my hair.

"I'm a hair dresser," she explained.

This was a game I liked quite a bit as it gives me a peaceful tingly sort of feeling when anyone plays with my hair. It's a hard feeling to describe but I like it a lot.

After she was satisfied with the "styling" she took out a make-up kit she kept in her drawer. "Heather doesn't like make-up," she said. "Says it isn't natural. But sometime I like to use it."

"She lets you use it?" I asked.

"Sure. It doesn't hurt anybody." She arranged the make-up on a little table beside me.

"Pretend you are a girl," she said. "And I've got to make you pretty" She spent a long time putting eye make-up on and then said I had to have some lipstick. She put it on very carefully and then had me purse my lips together to get it just right. I liked this too. I guess I just like people messing with me. But also it was interesting to pretend I was a girl.

"Do I make a nice girl?" I said as she stood back to see myself in a mirror she had on her door.

"Beautiful," she said. "But your blue jeans aren't very pretty."

She had me stand up and she unbuckled my belt and unzipped my pants, letting them fall to the floor. I stepped out of them and wondered what was coming next.

"Those are boy underpants," she said. "You have to take them off."

I was a little embarrassed to do this. She had already seen me naked, so that was not a problem. But I had a boner. Somehow at the naked beach I never got one. But I went ahead and slipped out of my underwear.

"You've got a boner."

"Yeah," I said.

"How come?"

"Because you are looking at it I guess," I said.

"It's pretty," Becky said. "But we have to make you into a girl. That doesn't help."

"Mr. Dick does what he does." I said.

"You call it ... him... 'Mr. Dick?'"

"Yeah."

She laughed, but I knew it was because she thought giving my dick that name was a clever thing to do. She wasn't laughing at me, so it was all right.

"Will Mr. Dick go back down?" she asked.

"Probably, when I get some clothes on," I said.

"Well, it won't show," she said.

She went to her drawer and took out a pair of her panties and a skirt. The skirt was a plaid wrap-around that had a big gold pin that held it together. She had me put the panties on and then put the skirt on. It was not too bad a fit. Then she stood back and looked at me.

"Yes," she said. "You can be my sister. I always wanted a sister."

"Its just pretend," I said.

"Of course it is, silly," she said.

"But I always wanted to know what it's like to be a girl," I said.

"Go show the others."

"They'll laugh," I said.

"No they won't."

So together we went out of her bedroom house. First we went over to Mike's workshop where he was making some jewelry. "Well, its two lovely girls," he said and smiled at me. I noticed that there wasn't any smell of marijuana in his work-place. Becky told me later that he never smoked when he worked. I liked what he said about how we were "lovely." I felt like he wasn't just joking but sort of meant it.

"You came at just the right time." He motioned to me to come closer and I did. He picked up the sand dollar I had found on the beach from his bench. It had a thin silver chain threaded through two very neat holes. It had a black and white yin-yang design painted on it. It was very carefully done. Then, to make the two circles he had put a little bit of something like rocks. "The white circle in the black part is mother of pearl," he explained. "And the black circle in the white part is black onyx." He put it

around my neck and fastened it. Then he pushed me away so that he could admire his it. "Cool." He said. I guess he meant the sand dollar necklace. But he seemed to think that I looked OK too. Anyhow he didn't make fun of me.

"Those stones are really pretty," I said.

"They are semi-precious stones," he said. "The mother of pearl comes from the inside part of oyster shells. It's really the same stuff pearls are made of. Onyx is just a stone, but a very nice one."

"I don't have anything to pay you with for this," I said. "Unless Marcus could."

He laughed. "Don't be silly," he said. "I do things like this for friends because I want to."

I thought about the design on the dining room table. "You sure do like that yin-yang design," I said.

He nodded. "I do."

"You told me on the beach it was about opposites."

"Yes," he said. "You've got a good memory."

Then we went into the kitchen/dinning room house where Heather was fixing some lunch. "Hello girls," she said and smiled. But she didn't laugh. It was just a friendly smile. It was like I always had been a girl. But Becky had to say something about it.

"I fixed him up" she said. "How do you think he looks?"

"He -- or she -- looks very nice," Heather said. "Maybe we should call her "Francis now."

"I'm just pretending," I said.

"Nothing wrong with that," Heather said.

"What are you making, Mom," Becky asked.

"Lentil soup," she said. "I could use some help on the vegetables."

"OK," I said. "What do you need done?"

"Let me help her," Becky said. "You go show Marcus how you look."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"I think he's up in the chair," Heather said.

"OK," I said. "I'll go see."

Marcus was up at the platform, and was sitting in the chair. I thought when I first saw him that he was asleep. But when I got closer to him I saw that



he was just very still. His eyes were open.

"Hi Marcus," I said.

He turned his head to me and smiled. "Hi, Franklin," he said. He didn't say anything about my new outfit. Just acted as if it was ordinary. I liked that.

"What's on your mind?"

"Nothing much," I said. Then we were both quiet from some time. We didn't feel we had to fill up every minute we were together with talk.

When we were in the car driving someplace we would be quiet unless we had something to say, and it was fine. But now I did have something to say.

"Can I sit on you," I asked finally.

"Sure," he said. I went over to him and he helped me into his lap. I snuggled up to him and for a little while just sat there. He was rocking the chair very slightly. It was the kind of chair that let you do that. And he was scratching my back just a little. Real gentle like. I knew it was OK with him if I experimented with being a girl. He wasn't going to laugh at me. I looked up at him. And then I pulled his head down and kissed him on his lips. I was surprised that I did this. But he didn't seem to be.

We sat together for a bit longer, just rocking slightly.

Then I said, "Marcus?"

"Yes?"

"Are we perverts?"

He thought a minute and then said, "I can't answer that."

"Why not."

"It's hard to explain. Where to begin? Well, why are you asking this?"

"I like it when you do certain things to me."

"Uh huh."

"And you seem to like it too."

"What things."

"You know."

"I think so. But tell me so I am sure."

"Well, like sometimes you rub my butt or my dick."

"And how is that for you," he asked.

"It feels good," I said.

"OK. So we have something that feels good to you and to me and you are

wondering whether we should dig into that bag of nasty labels that we carry around with us and pin a label on it that turns something good into something bad."

"You are talking too fast. I don't get what you mean."

"The things that we do feel good to both of us. The things you mentioned. The label is pervert. It changes the good thing into something nasty. It's like wearing those colored sun glasses that make everything look rosy. Only in this case we are putting on glasses that make things look nasty. I can see why people would want to wear glasses that make things look rosy. But why would anyone want to wear glasses that made things look ugly?"

I still didn't quite get this. It wasn't that the idea was so hard. But it was new. Marcus always said that any new idea was hard to get at first. And then when you got it, it seemed simple. "What glasses are you talking about?" I asked.

"Words," he said. "In this case the words, 'pervert' and 'perverted.'"

I thought about this. Then all at once I saw what he meant.

"So words are like glasses that can make things look any way you might want them to," I said.

"Pretty much," he said.

"So are we perverts?"

"Why would you want to use those glasses?" he said. "Why pin that word on what we do?"

"Because everybody else does," I said.

"Ah," he said. "That's the rub isn't it." He bent over and kissed me on my neck in a way that made me giggle and squirm. "Does Mr. Everybody know what it is like for you when I kiss you?"

"No way," I said.

"Then what does he know?" Marcus asked.

"Nothing I guess," I said.

"So the question is, should you use the same words for your experience that Mr. Everybody does?"

"But if everybody says I am a pervert because I like these things, maybe I really am," I said.

"Maybe so," he said. "But, again, what is it like for you if I rub your but or suck on your dick?"

"It feels good."

"I wouldn't do it to you if it didn't," he said.

"I know that."

"OK. So perverted means sick. Does it make you feel sick."

"No. "

"Do you get sick afterwards?"

"No. "

"Does it make you happy?"

"Yes."

"So if it doesn't make you feel sick and it doesn't make you sick later and in fact it makes you happy, does it make sense to say it is a sickness?"

"I guess not," I said.

"Don't agree just to please me," he said.

"No. It really doesn't make sense."

"So what I am trying to say is don't let anyone else name your experience. You pay attention to your experience and name it yourself."

For a couple of days after this conversation I tried to do what he said as best I could understand it. I tried to think about how it was being with him and how I liked it when he rubbed my butt as well as the rest of my back. And when he did things with my dick. What name could I give to people who liked that kind of thing? After giving it a lot of thought I decided that we were perverts. Everybody said so. You can't just go around making up your own labels about everything. Like suppose I started calling trees bloxes. Nobody would know what I was talking about.

But I also decided we were good perverts. That was the label I decided that I would use in my own mind.

"Good perverts."

That was tons better than sex maniacs. Then, seeing as it wasn't quite such a big sin, I thought, maybe I don't have to cut my dick off after all. Maybe I can just ask God to forgive me sometime before I die. If I did it in Jesus' name He was supposed to. That was the deal.

There didn't seem to be much point in asking for forgiveness right off because I sure wasn't going to give up the all over rub-downs and other stuff with Marcus. And I wasn't quite ready to stop seeing what it was like to be a girl. I knew, of course, that doing that was a bomination. Also, I wanted to keep on seeing Becky and her mother naked. Even thinking

about things like that was a sin. Mr. Springer was real clear about that. So there didn't seem to be much point in asking forgiveness right now. I knew that God wouldn't take me seriously. Maybe I could just wait until I was real old and didn't care about sex things any more. I heard that people got that way. Of course if I got killed real quick sometime -- without warning -- like in a car smash-up, I would end up in Hell. But for now I would just have to take that chance.

## **Bristlecone Ridge**

One morning, just a couple of days before we were due to begin our trip to W. Virginia, Heather said she was going on a hike to Bristlecone Ridge. She asked who was coming along. She needed to know because she had to plan how much food to bring. Becky came to me with the news. I was just sort of wandering around near Marcus' tent thinking about what I wanted to do with the day.

"Come on," she said. "We have to help Mama get the food ready. You will love the Ridge."

I was in a bad mood that morning because of a nightmare. The previous night I dreamed that the Devil came and got me. I was walking along a high mountain ridge where it was very beautiful when suddenly these two hands reached up out out the dirt at my feet. I know that nothing like that could happen in real life, but dreams don't care about what is possible. One of those hands grabbed one of my ankles. I knew it was the Devil. I'm not sure how I knew that. It could have been just some dead person reaching up from his grave. But in the dream I knew it was the devil. He pulled me down into the ground, just like it was quicksand. Then he had both his arms around me and kept pulling. I was being pulled under the earth. Just at the time only my head was above the ground I woke up.

So of course I was in a bad mood.

"What's so great about Bristlecone Ridge?" I asked.

"What are you so grumpy about this morning?" she asked.

"Nothing. I just wanted to know about Bristlecone Ridge -- I mean about why it's such a great place."

"It's a power place."

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know," she said. "It's hard to explain. It's a place where you can know things. Where the bristlecone pines can speak to you."

"OK," I said. But she could read it all over my face that I wasn't buying

this stuff about talking and listening to the trees."

We were almost at the dining house. "You don't have to believe me," Becky said. "But maybe Mama can explain it better."

While we prepared the food for the trip Heather did explain about the trees that grew on Bristlecone ridge. She told me that bristlecone pines were the oldest living organisms on the earth. Some of them were almost five thousand years old. They grew very slowly and were especially adapted to thriving in very harsh, dry and windy areas where most other plants could not survive at all.

"Because of their great age we think they have a lot of wisdom," she said. "So the forest where they grow is a power place for understanding and knowledge."

The hike up to Pine Ridge was not much fun. It was a hot windy dusty day. The trail was rough and very rocky. I wore my sneakers. I didn't have any hiking boots. And I was still grumpy from the dream about the Devil. I couldn't get him out of my mind, but I didn't want to talk about this to anyone. I guess my first idea with anything that means a lot to me is to keep it to myself. Also, I also knew that the people who I was with didn't understand the Devil the way I did. They didn't even think he existed.

I have to admit it. I bitched and belly ached a good deal as we climbed the mountain. Becky didn't argue with me, but I noticed that she chose to walk with other people. It was a hard climb. Mike had made a kind of special back-pack in which he carried Dylan part of the time -- sort of like a papoose. So Dylan didn't have to walk the whole way. I don't think he could have. Marcus walked close to me some of the time and he was the main one I bitched to.

"This is really ugly countryside," I said.

"Hmm."

"This goddamn dust is going to kill me."

"Hmm."

"My feet are really hurting."

"Hmm."

"Is it all uphill?"

"It isn't too much further," Marcus said.

I lagged behind them and finally sat down on a rock. "I'm not going any farther," I said. "You can pick me up on the way back."

"Why don't we all rest for a minute," Heather suggested. So they all sat down on rocks about twenty yards ahead of me. Nobody said much. We

were all pretty quiet for a while. Then Dylan came down to where I was sitting. In spite of myself I couldn't be grumpy or mean to him.

"Hello, Dylan," I said.

"Hi."

"Long walk, eh?"

"Yeah," he said. Then we sat there together for a little bit without either of us saying anything.

Finally he said, "Don't run away again, Franklin."

"You think I'm going to run away again?"

"You might."

I didn't know just what to say. I didn't have any plan to run away right then. I wasn't sure I wouldn't run away. I still thought about it when I couldn't seem to get along.

"I don't know," I said finally.

"I will miss you," he said.

"OK," I said. "I won't." Just as sudden as that it was plain to me that if he was going to miss me I couldn't run away. I knew he wasn't lying. I don't think he even knew how to lie yet. I thought that maybe some day I could teach him.

So he and I walked back up to the rest of the group and we all started up the trail toward Bristlecone Ridge again.

I was happy enough when we finally arrived at Bristlecone Ridge. We were done hiking for a while, and I could rest my feet. But I must say that I wasn't all that impressed when bristlecone pines when I saw them. The "forest" consisted of about a dozer or so trees, and they weren't even big or healthy looking trees. This certainly wasn't my idea of a "forest." Most of the trees -- especially the older ones -- looked half dead. Only a few of their branches had anything alive or green on them. But I guess they had looked that way for centuries so they weren't likely to die anytime soon. They were all twisted and weren't very tall.

Heather said that the bristlecone pines had wisdom from being so old, and that this fact gave the ridge we were on special healing powers -- especially for the mind. She suggested that we all sit quietly for a while and see what what pictures came into our minds. I think she said most of this just for me because I had already figured it out that they all knew these things about the ridge and that we had really come here just for this purpose.

I didn't figure it could hurt anything, so when the others sat down and got

quiet I did the same.

What I saw in my mind was the Devil. This time he didn't come from under the ground but from the sky. He was huge. After a while the pictures in my mind were almost as vivid as my nightmare -- and as scary. I felt that he really was there. What I was seeing in my mind was just a picture -- I knew that -- but I thought it was a picture of something real. The Devil reached out of the sky and this gigantic cruel hand came toward me. It was like the Green Goblin coming after me -- but there was no super-hero to save me. I thought maybe I was going to die right then and there -- without even having asked God for forgiveness. In Jesus name, like you got to do. It was because I was with these people -- these witches and Devil worshipers.

Then this funny thing happened. Dylan stood up and faced the Devil. Not in real life. But in my vision he did. "Vision" was there word for those pictures you saw. Dylan didn't seem to be afraid. The Devil puffed himself up so as to frighten him, but instead of being frightened Dylan just puffed his own self up by taking a deep breath, and he then blew a puff of air at the Devil. I guess it must have been a magic breath, or Dylan was a super-hero of some sort. Maybe like Bucky or Toro, but even younger than them. Anyhow the puff of air he blew at the Devil made the Devil begin to come apart. It was like he was made of smoke and blowing on him made him lose his shape until he became nothing at all. I felt relieved. I felt saved from the worst danger I had ever faced in my life -- and I began to cry. Sometimes you can cry from relief. It was like that.

Then I felt somebody really take a hold of me. For a second I thought the Devil had sneaked back and found a way to get me after all. From behind. I just about shit. I opened my eyes and saw that it was Dylan. He had his arms around me.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"Because of what I saw," I said.

"Don't be sad," he said. "We are here."

Somehow that made me cry even more. I really was acting just like a girl now but I didn't even care.

"What did you see?" asked Heather.

"The Devil," I told her.

"And what happened?"

I told her the whole vision. Then I told her about my nightmare -- the one I woke up from that morning.

"He thought we were Devil worshipers," Becky said. "I'll bet that's why he

had the dream and saw the Devil."

"Yes," said Heather. "Your dream was about your fear. It didn't show you what was going to happen, but what you feared."

I nodded. I could see that.

"And your vision here told you that the Devil that you feared so much was no more than a bunch of smoke in a frightening shape -- something that could be blown away by a small child. A thought. Nothing more than a thought."

"The Devil isn't real, is he," I said.

"No," said Heather.

I began to really cry. Dylan didn't try to stop me this time. He just held me. Becky came over and held me too.

Could I trust it? If the Devil was not real, and the terrible place he owned where I was going for sure to be punished for for ever and ever was not real either, that was the best news I ever heard. If that was true I could be happy in my life. That was what I was crying about.

I hate to admit it but my own vision is the only one I remember very well. I guess it was such a big thing for me that it crowded out almost everything else. I do remember, though, a conversation between Marcus and Heather. When the other people told about their visions either Marcus or Heather would say something about what they meant. Marcus was very good at this. I was surprised at how much Mike and Heather respected what he said. They didn't seem to think he was loony at all. When they had listened to everybody else's visions and told what they meant, Heather asked him if he saw anything.

"Nothing much," he said.

"But something," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Yes. Something."

"What was it?"

He didn't seem to want to tell, but she insisted.

I don't remember all the details, but he told about a fox that got caught in one of those nasty spring traps they use to catch wild animals. It chewed its leg off. I had heard of animals doing that but didn't know if it really happened. Anyhow in his vision the fox limped on down to a river and let himself die.

"Any particular river?" Heather asked.

"The Potomac," he said.



That seemed upsetting to Heather. "Maybe we shouldn't go to the march," she said.

"We got to go," Marcus said.

"Why?"

"How is Abbie going to get that pentagon off the ground without our help?" Marcus said.

Heather and Mike laughed.

"Good point," Mike said.

"But I'm serious," Heather said. "Maybe you could stay at our friends farm in West Virginia while we go into DC."

"No," said Marcus. "We all need to go, and we need to stick together. The fox wasn't that unhappy. He found it sort of peaceful down by the river."

"I don't like it," Heather said. "You shouldn't ignore dreams or visions that are trying to tell you something."

"I'm not ignoring it," he said. "But I'm going to the march. I hope we all decide to go together."

That was it. He wouldn't discuss it any more. On the way back to the homestead Marcus fell into step with me. "How would you feel about sleeping in my tent with me tonight?" he asked.

"Sure," I said. It was such a rare thing for him to try to get me to do one thing rather than another, I always listened when he did.

"Sometimes I feel a little lonely," he said.

On the evening before we were to start out on our trip to W. Virginia and Washington DC I was hanging with Becky and Dylan in Becky's bedroom house. I was asking her about March on the Pentagon that were were going to. I didn't understand the point of it too well.

"It's to stop the war," she said.

"I know that war is awful," I said. "But if we don't keep fighting there, won't the Commies take over?"

"It's their country," she said. "Why should we try to say how they run it?"

"Don't they want freedom?" I asked.

She tried her best to explain that the war was not about protecting freedom. The US, she said, was fighting to help the rich keep their power over poor people. It was so they didn't have to share. I didn't know exactly what to think. I had never heard these ideas before. The way Mr. Springer had explained it, if the Commies won in Vietnam they would then try to

take over places like France and Canada, and pretty soon they would take over the United States and rule us. Becky said maybe if they invaded the US we would have to fight them, but it wasn't our business to tell everybody else what kind of government they should and shouldn't have in their own countries.

At this point I wasn't exactly convinced about what Mr. Springer had told me about the Commies. It seemed to me that he was wrong on a lot of other things, so maybe he was wrong about this too. But I wasn't convinced by Becky either. She was just a kid like me, and there were lots of things she didn't know. But her real feelings were not so much about which side we should fight for. Her real feelings were about hating war. It seems to me that she hated war about as much as anyone I ever met.

Our conversation about whether the US should be in Vietnam sort of came to a stopping point where neither of us knew just what to say. We sat there without saying anything for a while. Then she said, "I want to show you my scrapbook."

"Oh no," said Dylan, rolling his eyes back in his head. "I hate that book."

"Then don't look at it," Becky said.

"Read me a comic book," Dylan said.

"I will as soon as I look at the scrapbook," I promised.

"OK. I'll go get some," he said. He kept his comic books in his bedroom house.

Becky pulled a big scrapbook out from under her bed. When Dylan was gone she told me to sit on her bed beside her. The scrap book had a picture that she drew on the cover of it. Below the picture was the word "War" in big red letters cut out of construction paper. It was a very bloody picture of some soldiers killing a family of people. It was very gory. After she showed me this she spread it out on her knees between us. It was full of pictures that had been cut out of magazines and newspapers and books. Mostly they were pictures that showed some of the real bad things that happen in war. Kids with missing arms and legs. Pictures of villages being bombed with napalm. Things like that. Some of them weren't really pictures of war, but just pictures of people being punished or killed for crimes. Like one was the picture of a man sitting in an electric chair. I could see why Dylan didn't like the book. It made you depressed to look at all these awful things you couldn't do anything about.

I remember one picture in particular. It was an old painting -- like from the dark ages. It was a picture of some rich people sitting on horses. They looked like they were just having an ordinary day. Behind them there were two men hanging from a tree. They had their hands tied behind them and

there necks were stretched and bent in a real crazy way. I never knew that hanging people did that to their necks. I thought it was neater.

"That's not really a war picture," I said. "I think those are just criminals or something."

"It's all the same," she said. "It's always rich people killing poor people, or hiring poor people to kill other poor people."

So that was how she saw it.

I didn't know how to argue against her then. I didn't know about the French Revolution, when the poor people had their chance. But she probably wouldn't have liked that either. She just plain did not like war.

Dylan had come back with his comic books and he waited while she showed me the scrap book. But he didn't come over and look at the pictures himself.

"Read to me, now," he said as soon Becky closed the book.

"OK," I said.

"Why don't you wear your girl clothes?" Becky asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"I'll get them out for you," she said.

"He's supposed to read to me," Dylan said.

"Do you care if I put on girl clothes first?" I asked.

"I don't care," he said. "Just don't take all day."

So I put on the girl clothes and then sat on the floor with Dylan and read a couple of Donald Duck and Scrooge Mc Duck comics.

The rest of the evening I wore the girl clothes. I liked being able to switch back and forth. I think if I had to choose between being a boy and a girl I probably would want to be a boy. But I also thought about how when they grew up women could have babies. That seemed nice. Mostly what I liked though, was the idea that I didn't have to choose.

I slept in Becky's bedroom house that night. After Dylan fell asleep next to me, she and I got to talking.

"I always wanted a sister," she said.

"Is that why you keep wanting me to dress up like a girl?" I said.

"Yeah. I think you would make a nice sister," she said.

"We are sort of that way anyhow," I said. "Like a brother and a sister, or two sisters or whatever."

"Why don't you be a my sister on the whole trip to W. Virginia," she said.

"You mean out there in public?"

"Sure. When you get all fixed up no one can tell."

I thought about this idea for some time before answering. At first it sounded too crazy. It was weird. Someone would notice. But then I thought about how I could go into the women's bath rooms. I had always wanted to know what they were like.

"It would be cool," I said.

"It would," she said.

"Maybe on the way back we could both be boys," I said.

"I make a good boy," she said.

"You could stand at the urinals and watch the men pee," I said.

We both laughed. "That would be fun," she said. "But they would notice."

"Notice what?"

"That I couldn't use the urinal."

"You could get there first, and when somebody came you could pretend you were just finishing up."

She seemed to like this idea. But then she was real quiet for a minute. I knew she was thinking about something.

"Are you coming back with us?" she asked.

"You mean after the March?"

She nodded.

"I hope so," I said.

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On the trip out to W. Virginia it was bomination after bomination. It was wonderful. Boys weren't supposed to wear girls clothes and I did it every day. Men weren't supposed to do sex things with other men, and certainly not with boys, and Markus and I did those things whenever we liked. Girls weren't supposed to kiss girls and Becky and I kissed all the time. She especially liked to kiss me when I was dressed up like a girl. She taught me to "French kiss" which I came to like quite a lot. Well, maybe it was two girls kissing and maybe not, depending on how you saw it. But it was the girl part of me, and I'm sure it was some kind of bomination. And boys weren't supposed to go into the women's rest rooms -- not boys as big I was anyhow. I don't know that there is anything about that in the Bible but I am sure Mr. Springer would have found some Bible rule that it broke.

Actually the women's rest rooms weren't as exciting as I thought they would be. Everybody used stalls and you couldn't ever see anything except their ankles, which you could see any day. But still it was fun sneaking in and not have anybody notice I shouldn't be there. And whenever we came to a place where we could swim we would all skinny dip. Men and women and boys and girls all together. That was one of the neatest bominations of all. And having people see a girl when they looked at me, and calling me Francis and thinking I was pretty -- it was heaven. What I learned on this trip was that if there wasn't any Devil you could do whatever bominations you wanted and as long as you didn't hurt someone else, it was no big deal. Without the Devil watching over everything, you could be happy.

Some of the time I would travel in the Wilkin's' Volkswagen. I would read comic books to Dylan, or Becky and Dylan and I would play "I see something Blue," or some other traveling game. Also I got into reading Huckleberry Finn out loud. Even the grown-ups seemed to like this. Heather would drive with Marcus when I did this. They seemed to like talking together. One day While we were driving through one of those states with corn field after corn field Becky said to me, "Mama thinks Marcus is a Saint."

"Can't be," I said.

"How come?"

"Because he isn't Catholic." I had heard that only Catholics could be saints.

"Doesn't make any difference," Becky said. "It's about his being an old soul and knowing a lot and being able to see things."

"I don't think so," I said.

"Well, I go by what Mama said."

I shrugged and looked out the window at all the passing corn fields. Becky and I didn't usually argue and I didn't like it when we did. Also I didn't want to say the real reason I thought he wasn't a saint. He was a pervert. I told her about him and me sometimes doing things together but she didn't seem to get it. That meant we were both perverts. But she kept treating me and him like we were just normal people. Still, I was sure that perverts couldn't be saints. I mean that would make God look really bad.

"Lets play 'I see something blue,'" I said.

Sometimes Dylan or Becky would travel with Marcus when I rode in the Volkswagen. There wasn't a lot of extra space in it because of the things they had packed in for the trip, so if I traveled with them someone had to go in the car with Marcus. But that was fine with everybody. Sometimes

Dylan and Becky would argue about who got to travel with Marcus. Everybody liked him and so everybody was happy to take a turn being with him. It was like "musical chairs" with the cars.

Once when Becky was driving with Marcus I sort of snuggled up against Heather. I was afraid she wouldn't like it. I wasn't her kid after all. Or I thought maybe Mike would be mad. Maybe he would be jealous. Even though I wasn't really grown up I was a pretty big kid. And I was getting to be a man. You could see a little hair growing around my dick. Well almost you could. I mean you had to look close, but it was there. But I was dressed up as a girl, so maybe that was why he wasn't jealous.

Anyhow, Heather pulled me in close to herself and I snuggled against her with my head resting on her breast. She had kind of big breasts. I liked them a lot. And it felt really good to have her arms around me. I had never been held like this by a woman before -- at least not when I was big enough to remember. The bouncing and movement of the car was soothing to me -- almost like a lullaby. For a long time I rested like that in her arms sort of in between sleeping and waking. I don't think I ever felt so peaceful in all my life. Then I fell asleep and didn't wake until we came to a rest stop.

When we would stop in a town to buy groceries Becky and I would always walk down the sidewalk or through the aisles of the grocery store together. Sometimes we held hands. Everybody who saw us thought we were sisters. "I really like having you as a sister," she said to me once. I liked it too. This was some of the best sneaking I ever did.

One day when we were driving through Ohio, just short of the W. Virginia boundary, a car ahead of us hit a fox that was trying to cross the highway. The car didn't even stop. But Marcus did. Dylan was driving with him at the time. They pulled over and ran back to the fox, which was sort of flopping around on the shoulder of the road.

Mike had been following Marcus. He pulled over before getting to the fox and we all got out to see what was happening. By the time we got to where the fox was Marcus was leaning over him, petting him and trying to comfort him. "It's back is broken," he said.

"Can we take him to a vet?" Dylan asked.

Marcus shook his head. "No, there is nothing to do," he said. "He is afraid and in a lot of pain, but he will die very soon."

Even as his said this the animal was beginning to get quieter. Marcus kept talking to him. "Don't be afraid," he said. "You are going back to the Fox of foxes." I remember his saying that. "The Fox of foxes." I sounded strange to me. He said other things too, that I don't remember. Just kept

talking to him as he got quieter and quieter. Then the fox stopped moving at all. Marcus just sat with him for a little bit and then dragged him down into the woods and weeds off the the side of the road. I went with him.

"I want to go with Marcus now," I said when we came back. Nobody argued.

We drove along in silence for a while. I remember seeing the sign saying we were entering W. Virginia. For a while after that we were still silent. I thought about his vision at Bristlepine Ridge, and how Heather seemed to find it upsetting. Now even Marcus seemed upset. He was pale and his face looked real worried.

"That's bad about the fox, isn't it," I said, finally.

"Yes," he was a beautiful animal and was in a lot of pain," he said.

I nodded and didn't say anything else for a minute. "I mean, it's bad about what it means, isn't it." I said.

He glanced over at me. Then he smiled. He looked a little sad, but the color was coming back into his face.

"I don't know," he said. "I guess it depends on how you see it." That was all I could ever get out of him on that subject. I tried a couple of times later but he just brushed me off. He never did say what he meant by "it depends on how you see it."

## **I Was His Magic Sand-Dollar**

Our destination in W. Virginia was a farm owned by two women who were Wiccans. I guess they were more or less married and were very important people in the Wicca world. At any rate that's what Becky told me. Their names were Helen and Lori. Helen was tall and thin and Lori was short. She was hardly taller than me. She wasn't fat, really, but she was rounder than Helen. I thought of them as Mutt and Jeff but I didn't have the nerve to say that to anyone. I never got to know them very much because they were busy with so many visitors on their property. But they seemed nice enough.

The farm was in the mountains. All their land was rough and mountainous so there weren't any big open place for growing huge amounts of things like they do in Nebraska or Indiana or places like that. They had patches in different places -- corn, tomatoes, beans, cabbages, lettuce, radishes, pumpkins and other things. They also had some fruit trees -- apple, peach, pear and plum. Nothing grew in big enough amounts to sell, but they had lots of food for their own use. They also had pigs and chickens.

There was a little creek that ran through their land and in one place someone had damned it up with rocks so that it made a pool that was big

enough to swim in. At least in a few places it was over my head. There was a rope rigged up on the far side of this pool that you could use to swing out over the pool and drop. That was cool.

All together there were about eight families or groups at this farm. I say "families or groups" because I didn't always know what to call a car-load of people that came here. They might be two men and one woman or two women and some kids or whatever combination you could imagine. At times it was a little hard to tell who the kids belonged to. Even so these different groups lived together like families. So I will call them families. Like Marcus and me were a family. And Heather and Mike and Becky and Dylan were a family even though Becky wasn't Mike's kid, and Mike and Heather weren't actually married. A family was just whoever loved each other and wanted to live together.

These different families all set up campsites in different places around the property and more or less took care of themselves, though lots of times we did things together. Most of these people were already there when we arrived. We were going to stay there about a week before going to the march.

Most of the families had at least one or two kids with them so there were lots of us. Most of the time we hung around the swimming pool and played water games. Dylan made some friends that were close to his age -- two girls and a boy. He introduced them to me and we played "The creature from the Black Lagoon Is Going To Get You." Naturally I was the Creature.

While we were there, me and Becky talked about everything under the sun. We talked about things I had never dared mention to anyone else.

Also I helped Helen and Lori with different things they needed doing around their property. I like working for them. One day all of us kids went out and gathered berries. These were for everybody. A couple of times we all ate a meal together on tables that were put out under the trees. On one of those feasts we served the berries that we picked with ice cream.

Sometimes I dressed as a girl and sometimes as a boy and nobody made fun of me. A lot of the time I was just "sky-clad." That's what they called it. It means all you wore was just the sky. I loved having nothing but the sky wrapped around me. Everybody at the swimming pool was sky-clad except sometimes in the early morning before it warmed up.

Two nights before we were going to D.C. they planned an all night ceremony. Becky told me the reason for this was to bring down the power of the moon so they could use it in the demonstration. I wasn't quite sure what that meant, but I understood it was their way of getting ready.



Usually they had their ceremonies when there was a full moon. It was pretty big that night -- maybe three-fourths full. But that was when they needed their power. They couldn't wait for a full moon.

I helped collect fire wood during the day. Mostly they wanted dead wood from the woods around the house. Some of the logs had to be sawed. That was hard work, but I helped out. After supper I went down to the pond to wash off.

Becky found me there and she took a quick swim too.

"Will they let us be in the celebration?" I asked as we sat on the grass drying off.

"Sure," she said.

"Do we have to be in it?" I asked.

"Course not."

This sure was different than the Lutherans.

"I heard it lasts all night," I said.

"It does, but you don't have to stay for the whole thing if you don't want to."

"I might get sleepy," I said.

"I have something for that," she said. She picked her shorts out of the little pile of clothes she made when she got undressed to swim, and checked their pockets. She pulled out a couple of pills. She handed one to me.

"Here, you take one, and I'll take one," she said.

I looked at it suspiciously. "What will it do to me," I asked. "I don't want to see any devils or scary things."

"Its acid or peyote that will make you do that," she said. "This is just to keep you awake. It's speed."

"So it's like coffee?"

"Yes. Only more so."

"OK. That doesn't sound too bad."

We went down to the pool and washed the pills down with some water from there. She told me the stream was clean enough to drink.

"Do they take lots of drugs at these ceremonies," I asked.

"Some do, and some don't," she said. "Some people have some acid here but I wouldn't take any."

"Why not?"

"It can really do weird things to your head."

"Did you ever take any?"

"Only a little. I guess I had what they call a 'bad trip.' I don't know. But I didn't like it."

"I wonder if I would have a bad trip," I said.

"You might. I heard Marcus talking with Mom about you."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"What did he say?"

"He was saying how he thought you had a 'delicate inner chemistry.'"

"What's a 'delicate inner chemistry?'"

"I'm not sure exactly. I think it has to do with maybe you could go crazy."

"Delicate inner chemistry," I repeated. I shook my head. "He's always talking like that ...like a book."

"He does. But my Mom always understands him. She talks that way too sometimes."

"So does he think I'm going to go crazy?"

"No. At least I don't think so. They were talking about drugs. As best as I could get it, I think he was saying that he hoped you would keep away from some of the heavier drugs. He thought they would rattle your brain too much."

"Heavier drugs?"

"LSD and peyote. And of course heroin. That's nasty stuff for anybody."

"Does anybody have heroin around here?"

"No. We keep away from that."

We were both quiet for a few minutes -- just looking at the bugs skating around on the top of the swimming hole.

Then she said, "Marcus thinks you might be a shaman when you get big."

"A shaman?"

"A teacher."

"Shit, much as I hate school I don't figure I'll go back to one when I get big."

"It's not that kind of teacher."

"What then?"

"Its like a teacher of holy things."

"Like church stuff? I don't like that either."

"I don't think its Lutheran stuff. Its more like Indian or Wicca things. I think its like being a wizard."

I didn't know what to make of this. I liked to pretend that I was a wizard sometimes, and that I could wow people with doing magic things. But if I ever learned how to do those things I didn't think I would teach them to other people, except maybe my friends.

I never exactly sorted it out about what Marcus might have meant, but this led to our talking about all sorts of things. I think we were psyched up about the ceremony they were going to have, and maybe the speed helped, but we got to talking like I've never talked before. She said the same was true for her. That's what being sisters is supposed to be. We talked about the stars. The moon. What happens after you die. Where we were before we were born. What being in love is. The Wicca idea of God and the Lutheran idea. Bominations and sins. All kinds of things. It was good just sitting there talking with her about these things. Then we saw they had already started the fire. It was in a clearing that was only a little ways off. Like maybe about a half a foot-ball field away. We could see the glow. It was already dark and the ceremony would begin pretty soon.

"I want to take my clothes back," I said. "I'll meet you there in a little bit."

I ran back to the tent and stuffed my clothes in my bag. Then I found my bead necklace and my sand dollar one and put them both on. I kept them in a box so they wouldn't get broke. I knew everybody would be "sky-clad" for the ceremony so I didn't bother to put any clothes on. Just some sandals so I could walk easier.

When I got back to the cove people were still coming. As I expected, none of them had any clothes on. I found Mike. He was sitting off to himself, smoking a cigarette. I sat down beside him.

"Show me how you do that," I said.

"What?"

"Smoke marijuana."

"Sure."

First he showed me as he did it. Then he gave me the cigarette. At first I coughed.

"That' OK," he said. "You don't smoke. Try again. Only a little at first."

I kept trying and pretty soon I could inhale a little bit and hold it down. Just about then Becky came by. She sat down on the other side of Mike.

"Smoking, are you?" she said.

"Just want to try it," I said.

"Sure," she said. I offered her some but she shook her head.

"No. I like being my ordinary self," she said.

I could begin to feel something funny happening to my head so I decided I had enough. "Thanks," I said to Mike, giving him his cigarette back.

After a while Helen started the ceremony with a long talk about the war in Vietnam and why it was wrong and what they had to do about it. We were going to get power from the earth. And from the moon. I didn't follow all of her talk. In fact I sort of wandered off and just walked around looking at things. I can only listen to so much talk. Its too much like school. I didn't go very far. I just explored the little paths and places near where the fire was. I really liked looking at things.

Then I heard drums and recorders. I thought they were very pretty and I returned to the fire. People were beginning to dance around it. I watched. They were very graceful. Heather saw me watching and made signs for me to join them.

"I don't know how," I said.

"Never mind," she said. "Just come in and move with us." So next time she came around I took her hand and came into the circle. During this part of the dance they were all holding hands. There was a regular step they used which I didn't know. But nobody seemed to mind. I could move any way I did and it was OK. Little by little I started catching on to how they did their dance. I felt good being with them circling around the fire with all of us sky-clad. That feeling I had that night while I was pissing in the stream, or that afternoon when I was floating on the ocean, started coming back to me. Each time that feeling was a little different. With the trees and stream it was one thing. With the Ocean it was something else. Now with people and fire it was still different. I think maybe I liked this the most of all -- when it happened while I was with people. Underneath there was something in all these things that was the same. Like the water in the soup. The vegetables could be different but the water was always the same. In my own head I just called it the Soup. I would say to myself when I noticed that feeling come on, I'm in the Soup again.

After a bit we stopped dancing and Helen led a kind of ceremony. Mostly she said something like poems to the moon. She was calling to it. She was trying to get its power to come into all of us.

Then we danced some more around the fire. I saw Marcus dancing and took his hand. He seemed happy to see me. During this time everybody

everybody was doing their own dance. Marcus picked me up and held me close and twirled around. Every time on this trip that I discovered a new happiness I figured it had to be the biggest happiness of all. Then another one came along that was even bigger. It was like mountain ranges rising up behind mountain ranges -- each one taller than the last. This was the best of all. Twirling around under the moon with Marcus. I was his girl. His boy. His baby. His precious stone. His magic sand-dollar. After a while he put me down and then he had to go rest. He was very strong, but I was almost twelve. That's pretty big to twirl around with.

We celebrated all night long. I would dance some. I would smoke a little marijuana with Mike. Then I would go down to the pond and swim. Off and on the drums and the music went all night. I saw different people I knew and danced or talked with them. I never got tired until it was beginning to get light. Then I went back to the tent and slept until the middle of the afternoon.

When I got up I got some bread and cheese and some fruit to eat and went down to the pond. Becky was there. I sat down beside her and shared my food with her.

"This is the Garden of Eden," she said to me.

"I thought you didn't believe in the Bible," I said.

"Some of it might be true," she said.

Bible or not, what Becky said was true for me. What I knew on that farm in W. Virginia was like the Garden of Eden. Never before, and never since have I been with a whole group of people who were all just what they were -- where no one was pretending to be anything else -- and where I was accepted just as I was. I didn't have to be this or that kind of person to be accepted. I didn't have to hide. I was a boy and a girl and a man and a woman. I was perverted and I was normal. I was smart in some things and dumb in other things. And that was all right. I was brave and I was afraid. I was everything and nothing. I think that this being together with people where everybody can be just who they are, and no one has to hide, is the biggest happiness anyone can ever hope for. That was the coin that Marcus was trying to mint. You can't help loving each other when it is like that. I couldn't have found the words for it then, but that's what it was all about. Even now, three years later, I am not sure I have the right words for it. But I was in Heaven once.

## **The Protest**

The night before we started out for DC I had a bad dream. I was lost in some woods. I was looking for Marcus. I kept thinking this path or that path would lead to him but the paths just went nowhere. It was dark and

there was a terrible war going on. I thought maybe some enemy soldiers got Marcus. I was afraid they would come after me too. I thought that they tortured people. Then I heard them coming to get me. There were lots of them and I was in their path. I tried to run but it was like it is sometimes in dreams. I couldn't make my legs go fast. It was like trying to run in water that is up to your waist. I knew I couldn't get away. Then I woke up. Sometimes I can wake myself up out of a really bad dream. I was sleeping in the tent with Marcus. I touched him lightly on his face. I didn't want to wake him but I wanted to be sure he was real.

I got up to pee and sat down for a little bit outside the tent. The dream made me think about war. I thought about Becky's scrap book. I remembered how it upset me to leaf through that book. I thought about that horrible picture she had of people hanging from trees with their necks all stretched out of shape, and the men on horses near by in their fancy clothes -- who weren't even bothered by the awful scene behind them. I thought about napalm and about villages burning and children running and screaming. And smoke billowing into the sky. After a while I was sleepy again and went back into the tent. I cuddled up as close as I could to Marcus and got a little more sleep.

We got up super early. By the time the sun came up we had already eaten breakfast. I put on my beads and red shirt, but decided to go there as a boy. Lots of hippie boys and men wore beads and necklaces and I wanted to look like one. The plan was that Marcus would follow the Wilkin's Volkswagen if that was possible. We knew, however, that with all the traffic and confusion we might lose them and we agreed we would meet back here at the farm after it was over if we got separated.

We were back on the road again. I didn't want anybody else to drive with Marcus in his car on that last bit of our trip to D.C. I didn't want to let him out of my sight.

I was thinking about everything I had learned about the Wicca people and their religion as we wound up and down and around all the curvy roads of the W. Virginian mountains.

"Are you a Wizard?" I asked.

He glanced at me. The road was too windy for him to look at me for long. But even in that little glance I could tell that he had that funny little smile on his face that meant I wasn't going to get an easy answer.

"Yes and no," he said.

I knew it. This was going to be one of those yes and no things that drove me up the wall. "What does yes or no mean?" I asked. I am sure he could hear the irritation in my voice.

"What does your question mean?" he asked.

That's how he was. Often as not he would answer a question with another question. "I mean that Wiccan religion," I said. "Do you belong to that?"

"No," he said.

"Then what are you?" I asked.

"I'm Marcus," he said.

"I know that. But I mean what religion are you. Like I am a Lutheran. I guess I am anyway. I don't really know anymore."

"I'm a follower of Marcus," he said.

"But you are not like Jesus or Moses or the pope," I said. "You have to follow someone like that."

"No I don't," he said. "I can take a little from this and a little from that. I take truth from wherever I find it. If I was just a Wiccan or a Christian or a Buddhist I would only be able to get their truth and I would miss all the other truths."

"So you can be all those things at once."

"All of them and none of them," he said. "It's just that there is some truth in every religion."

"Even in Satanism?" I said. I thought I had him on this one. I never heard anyone defend Satanism.

He nodded. "Even in Satanism. Satanists understand that what they most want is good. That's a very important truth."

"So why do they do evil things? I asked.

"Well, I'm not sure that in the real world they actually do that many more evil things than anyone else."

"But sometimes they do. What's the reason for that?"

"Same reason anybody else does."

"Why is that?"

"They don't always know what they most want."

"You're weird," I said.

"That's probably true," he said. "But what does that have to do with what we are talking about?"

"Maybe your ideas are weird."

"They might be. You have to judge that for yourself."

This didn't seem to be getting anywhere. I wanted to nail him down on

something. I was tired of all these complications he kept coming up with. I wanted clear, easy to understand answers. "Heather says you have power," I said. "Where do you get that power. Do you worship the devil?" "No."

"Where do you get that power, then?"

He didn't answer right off. That was a bad sign. It meant he was thinking up more complications. But he seemed to be thinking hard and I didn't want to interrupt him.

"I have more power than most people," he said. "That much is true."

"So what's it from?"

"I know something that most people have forgotten. That's what my power -- what little there is of it -- is from."

"What is it you know?" I asked.

"The knowledge I have is this: I know what I most want."

"That doesn't sound real hard," I said. "I think I do."

"You are learning," he said.

"So what's the big deal about it?"

"Maybe its not as easy as it seems," he said. "Most people allow themselves to be told what they most want and that way they become confused and lose their power. At least they lose the only power that counts -- the power to make themselves and others happy. They replace that power with the power to make other people do or think or feel things the way they want them to. Power over other people."

"You are talking like a book," I said. "I can't follow you."

"Sorry," he said.

"So what are you trying to say?"

"When people don't know any more what they most want, they get into bossing everybody else around."

"Like all the grownups who bossed me around," I said.

"Exactly," he said. "And it wasn't just that they wanted to tell you what you had to do. They were going to tell you what you had to want."

"Yes," I said. "They wanted to boss me in everything."

"That's right," he said. "They wanted to boss you in everything. That's what people in power always do. They will try to control what we want with lies and deceit if they are able to. With preaching. With advertising. But they will do it with bombs and fear and brainwashing and shaming



and torture if need be.

"So you know what you most want and other people don't?" I asked.

"The sounds a little arrogant, doesn't it," he said.

"Well, it is. Like you are the only one who knows."

"I'm not the only one," he said.

"But one of the few."

"Yes. It does seem that way. I don't know what to tell you. It's just that I watch people and listen to them all the time. And I watch myself and listen to myself. And when I watch and listen, this is what I notice: When most people talk it's not them talking. It's the TV talking through them. Or it's their preacher talking through them. Or their mother. Or it's Mr. Everybody. It's what they imagine they are supposed to think and feel and want. But it's not them.

"There are so many things I can't understand," he continued. "When we try to understand the basic things, everything fades off into being a mystery really fast. But one day I realized that there was one thing I could know: I could know what I wanted. I could know this because I was the one doing the wanting. I could know it first hand. And this knowing what I want, I came to think, is the most important thing there is to know. It's a shame to throw that away.

"But most people do throw it away," I said. "That's what you are saying."

"Yes, most people do," he said. "It's not a matter of being arrogant or not arrogant. It's just what I notice when I look and listen. I see people throwing this most precious thing away. I see them trading it in for a lot of porridge."

"So what do you most want?" I said.

"I want to love and to be loved. And I want to create space here on this earth where people can love and be loved in ways that are natural and right for them. Not as I tell them to love -- or as anybody else tells them -- but as they find it in their own hearts."

"You think you can do that?" I asked.

"Did I create a little space where you and I could love each other?" he asked me. He looked at me and smiled.

This was the few times he ever talked about us loving each other. I felt my heart pounding against my ribs like a wild animal in a cage. It wanted to escape from all the rules against love that had ever been put around it -- bar by bar -- from the time I was born. I wanted to tell him how much I loved him -- how happy it made me that he spoke of loving me. But like

always, I was a little afraid to let on. You got to be careful letting people know what's most important to you.

So I just nodded, and said, "I guess so."

Then I was done with talking. I lay on my side with my back to the seat, and pushed my head under his arms on onto his lap. "I'm sleepy," I said.

He didn't say anything more. He simply kept on driving. When the road wind all over the place too bad and he could steer with one hand he caressed my cheek, and my hair and fiddled with my ear. This was even better than sex. Or maybe it was sex. Maybe my whole body was Mr. Dick -- and maybe all Mr. Dick wanted was to love and be loved in every way imaginable. But really loved -- the way Marcus loved me. Loved for everything I was. I stuck my thumb in my mouth and was very very happy.

As we got closer and closer to D.C. the traffic got thicker. All the stopping and starting and horn blowing and noise woke me up. I sat up and looked around. At times the traffic hardly moved at all. You could pretty much tell the ones who had come to the march. They had peace sign stickers on their cars, and a lot of the people who were in them looked like hippies. There was a lot of excitement in the air. The problem was that with all the stopping and starting and people crowding in from the side ramps and just the confusion, we lost the Wilkins car. I was kind of disappointed about that, but as long as I was with Marcus it didn't worry me too much. Eventually we got into town and found a place to park. It wasn't very close to the mall where everybody was supposed to gather, but it felt good to walk after the drive.

Marcus said he used to live in this area and seemed to know his way around. Pretty soon I saw the White House and we walked around it. Then after we walked a little further I saw the Washington Monument. And then the Lincoln Memorial. There was this long swimming pool in between them which Marcus said was the Reflecting Pool. Also I could see the Capital of the United States. It was exciting to see all these things that I had heard about from books.

Never in all my life had I seen so many people. It was good that Marcus didn't try to get any closer to the mall where everybody was gathering because we would not have been able to make it. There were people in military uniforms with signs that said, "Veterans for Peace." Of course there were lots of hippies. But there were lots of ordinary looking people too, and quite a lot of people in suits and ties and expensive looking clothes. I loved looking at all the different kinds of people. They were all milling around this way and that. After a bit we saw some people giving speeches and went to hear them. It was pretty hard to tell what they were

saying even when we got very close.

As we pushed through the crowds I held onto Marcus' hand. I didn't care if people might think I was too old to be holding his hand. I was afraid I would lose him.

After what seemed like a very long time of speeches and shouting and chanting the crowd began to move. I guess someone was directing it though that was hard to see. We went across the Memorial Bridge and started up toward the Pentagon. I was a little afraid. I thought they might think we were attacking them -- which in a way we were -- and they might start shooting. But nobody even tried to block our way. At the Pentagon there was a lot of pushing and shouting and sign waving. It was pretty confusing. But I guess the crowd got its main point across. They didn't think we should be in Vietnam. I didn't either now that Becky had shown me her scrap book and explained what it was all about.

These people here wanted a more peaceful world and a world where anybody could be whoever they were. I realized that this mixed up hodge-podge of people were my people. I had a place where I belonged. It was a thrill. I never dreamed there could be so many of people who were like kin to me.

As we were hanging around the Pentagon waiting for something to happen, all at once we saw a group of soldiers marching toward us. They looked like they were hell-bent on getting somewhere. Then, close to us, the sergeant shouted some commands and they stopped. They had their rifles held out in front of them. I couldn't see what they were trying to defend. So we began walking around them. When quite a few of us were behind them the sergeant gave an order again and half the group of soldiers turned around and took a step forward. It was a neat move. Now there were two lines of soldiers each facing the opposite direction. They were protecting each other's butts, but that was about it. It was hard to see much point to it.

People began to talk to the soldiers, asking them why they were doing the government's business and wouldn't they be happier if they joined us -- the protesters -- and things like that. It was mostly friendly talk and you could tell the soldiers didn't know how to take it. I think they felt a little embarrassed.

Then Marcus had this idea. There were some flowers growing nearby. I think the Pentagon planted them for decoration. Even the Pentagon liked flowers. Marcus picked some and came to where the soldiers with their guns were standing. He put one of the flowers in the barrel of one of the soldiers guns, and smiled at him. And the soldier smiled back. That really amazed me. But I understood then that the soldier was just some guy

trying to do his job. He had no reason to hate Marcus or any of us. He thought it was funny to be standing there with a flower in his gun barrel. So then some of the rest of us started doing the same thing until all the guns had flowers sticking out of them.

This was a hard one for that sergeant to figure out. Those soldiers there already looked a little silly standing in that fierce way but just protecting each others butts and nothing else. But now with flowers sticking out of their guns they looked ridiculous. But what were they to do? Attack us with their bayonets? Shoot us for attacking them with flowers? All they could do was stand there and look foolish. They were outmaneuvered anyway you look at it. Finally the sergeant barked some more orders at them and half of them turned around so they were all facing the same way again. Then, with a couple more orders, they all marched off.

One of the girls in the crowd called after them. "Come back! Come back!" she said. "We was just getting to know you. "

"I'm free tonight," shouted another one. Everybody laughed. But of course the soldiers just kept on marching.

I guess it was my idea to go to where the most intense action was. Marcus came along with me. As we got near to where a lot of people were shouting at some soldiers at a doorway to the Pentagon the crowd got bigger and angrier. I let loose of his hand so we could get through the crowd better.

"I'm not sure this is a good idea, Franklin," he said. But it was too late. More people came up behind us and it was impossible to go any direction but forward. I found myself almost at the very front of the crowd. Everything was wild and crazy around me. Some people were sort of charging the soldiers. But the soldiers had clubs out and were hitting them. Mostly only the ones who ran forward got hit, and usually they avoided it. But it was very scary to me. Then when I looked around I saw that I was separated from Marcus. The crowd pushed me forward and I was almost where people were getting hit, so I pushed back through the crowd. I thought maybe if I got out of it I could see where Marcus was. Being smaller than most of the people there did help in a way. I was able to squeeze through openings and get to where the crowd was not so thick and wild.

I climbed a tree and looked around. Off to one side I saw someone who looked like Marcus. He was in a thin part of the crowd too, but was walking away from me. I climbed down out of the tree and went in the direction where I saw him. I kept getting glimpses of him, but when I finally almost caught up with him I saw that it wasn't Marcus after all. Just some stranger. I was really scared now. There were thousands of people

around. Hundreds of thousands I think. It seemed like millions to me. I didn't have any idea about how to find one person in all that mass of people. I wandered around the Pentagon for quite a while and didn't see him. I climbed lots of trees to get a better view but that didn't help.

Finally the crowd at the Pentagon seemed to be thinning out a bit and I thought maybe Marcus would go back down to the reflecting pool or somewhere around there -- close to where the speeches had been given. So I went back across the Memorial bridge and to the reflecting pool.

Still no Marcus.

Maybe he will use his magic to find me, I thought. But where could I make myself easy to find? I remembered that I had seen some trees around the Jefferson Memorial which wasn't too far away. Maybe the trees would help. Maybe I could talk to them and they would call him. So I went over to where those trees were.

I was beginning to get dark. I hadn't eaten anything since breakfast but I wasn't hungry. I was too worried I guess. I sat down in the trees and said, "you got to help Marcus find me. All you trees know Marcus. Please just tell him where I am."

And I waited.

I didn't know whether the trees could hear me or if they could only hear someone with power like Marcus. For whatever reason the magic didn't work. I sat and sat and Marcus never came. So I found a place where the trees and some bushes seemed to protect me a little, and I lay down. Maybe I could just go to sleep and when I woke he would be there. But I was too psyched to sleep right off.

It seemed like I never did go to sleep but I must have because I remember this dream. A lot of us were sitting around the Pentagon in a big circle. We were chanting something. We were witches and wizards. Then all at once the Pentagon started raising off the ground. It was awesome. But then it started toward me. It was floating above my head. Then it started coming down toward me. It was like it was mad at me. Or the people in it were mad at me. But in the dream it was the Pentagon itself that was mad. It was going to crush me. I woke up real sudden at that point.

I looked up. There was no Pentagon hovering over me. Instead there was a big huge orange moon in the sky. It was still my friend. That was good. But it couldn't help me. I was separated from Marcus. Nothing could help me. I tried to go back to sleep for a little bit but couldn't. So I got up and began wondering around.

The sky was just beginning to lighten a little bit when I found myself at the reflecting pool again. Nobody else was around so I took off all my clothes and slipped into the water. I floated on my back and looked at the sky. I can float on my back real good. I felt a happy and lonely at the same time. Its hard to find words for it when lots of feelings are mixed up together like those vegetables in the soup. I was afraid because I was lost. I was lonely because I couldn't find Marcus. But the water felt good on my skin. And I was excited about the sun about to come up. And I could hear some birds. I was afraid someone would come and see me. And somehow I felt everything was going to be OK. I don't mean that it would all work out. I thought things probably wouldn't work out too good. They never had up to now. But I knew that the Thing I felt at times like this was everywhere and when I was with this Thing I was with everybody I loved, wherever they were. And whatever happened that would always be true.

It sounds silly to call it "this Thing." I start it with a capital letter because I guess its a kind of god. I don't really know. It's what Becky called the Mother God. Maybe it would be better to stick with calling it the "Soup. "

I saw some people a ways off. I think they were protesters who might have slept somewhere on the mall. So I got out of the water and got dressed.

Those people saw me and came to where I was. There were three of them. Two women and a man.

"Hi," said the man. "I'm Gaylen. This is Ruth and this is Erica." He nodded toward the two women with him.

"I'm Jed," I said. "Jed Green."

Ruth was sort of tall and blond. She had buck teeth but she was still pretty. Erica was about the usual height for girls. Just a little taller than me. She was pretty too. Her black hair was sort of stringy but that gave her a wild look that I liked. Galen was skinny. He had a beard but it was thin and scraggly. I think he was just barely old enough to grow one. They all wore home-made clothes -- hippie clothes. They sat down on the edge of the pool and put their feet in the water. None of them was wearing shoes. "We saw you swimming," Gaylen said.

"Yeah," I said. I was skinny dipping. I didn't think anybody was around."

"That's cool," said Ruth. "We like to skinny dip too."

"You do?" I said. I didn't really care much if they did or if they didn't. Even a chance to skinny dip with people and see them naked didn't excite me much. I just wanted to find Marcus.

"Who you with?" asked Erica.

"My father," I said. "But I lost him."

"Too bad," said Galen. But somehow it didn't sound like he was too upset about it.

"Care if we skinny dip?" Ruth asked.

"Why should I," I said.

The water isn't really deep enough for a good swim, but that didn't stop them. All three took their clothes off and got into the pool. They really didn't swim, but they splashed each other and washed off and laughed a lot. Then they got out and put their clothes back on. Erica took a cigarette paper out of a bag she had with her, carefully poured a little tobacco into it, and rolled it up. It wasn't the most perfect cigarette in the world, but it worked. She lit it up and they passed it around between them.

"You can have some too," said Galen, and he handed it to me. I took it mostly just to be polite. I didn't care if I was high or not. I inhaled the smoke and held it in my lungs, like Mike had showed me. I only coughed a little. After a few more puffs it did make me be a little more peaceful. Also it made things seem very slow.

When we finished the cigarette they got up and said goodbye.

"I'm looking for my dad," I said.

"When did you last see him?" Erica asked.

"At the Pentagon," I said.

"Well, hope you find him," Galen said. And they started walking away.

They didn't invite me along with them. I think they liked me OK but it just didn't occur to them. I had hoped they might help me find Marcus, but I didn't feel I could push myself on them.

So I was alone again. I had to find Marcus on my own. Or maybe I could find somebody else to help. I knew we had parked near a traffic circle but I couldn't remember the name of it. I walked toward the biggest street I saw around and I put out my thumb to hitch a ride.

Pretty soon a car pulled over. A man and a woman were in it. The man was driving. "Where are you trying to get to," the woman asked.

"I'm lost," I said. "I'm looking for my father."

"OK," she said. "Get in." She reached over the front seat and opened the back door for me. It was a nice car with big plush seats, and both of them were dressed in expensive looking clothes. He wore a suit and tie and she had a dress on.

"What's your name," the woman asked.

"Franklin Hubbard," I said. No sooner had I said this than I wanted to kick

myself. Why had I told the truth? What was wrong with me? I thought maybe it was the grass I had just smoked. Maybe it acted like a sort of truth serum.

"I'm Mary Libby," the woman said. "And this is my husband, Tom."

"Hi," I said.

"Where did you lose your father," Ann asked.

"At the Pentagon," I said. "But I think he might be at the circle. Or at a circle. You know, a traffic circle." I felt like I was talking real slow and wondered if these people noticed.

Tom glance over the front seat with a funny expression on his face and Mary just plain stared at me. "What circle," she asked.

"Can't remember," I said. "Wasn't too far. We walked here."

"Logan circle?" she asked.

"No."

"Dupont circle," Tom asked.

"Yes, that's it. Dupont circle. He'll be there." Still I seemed to be talking real slow but I couldn't help it. Tom glanced over the back of the seat again. He seemed to be sizing me up.

"Maybe if you are lost we can take you to the police station, and they will help," Mary suggested.

"No," I said. "Don't do that."

I must have sounded a little scared because she tried to calm me down.

"It's OK," she said. "They wouldn't hurt you. Being lost isn't a crime. They would just help you find your father."

"Thank you Ma'am," I said. "But if you just take me to Dupont Circle I can find him myself."

"OK," Tom said. "We can do that."

So he swung the car around in a big U-turn and started down the road. I wondered whether he might be taking me to a police station. I could see them talking to each other in a quiet secret sort of way and that didn't help me feel any better. But they took me right to Dupont Circle just like Tom had said. I recognized it when we got close.

"Just drop me off right here," I said.

"We could take you right to your father," Tom said.

"No, right here is fine," I said. I felt like I needed to explain why I wanted off right there. For some reason it was hard to think of a reason. I had to



remind myself that looking normal was important. So I just sat thinking. "I have to get something in that shop there." I said finally. I gestured in a vague way at some stores along the street. None of them was open yet. It was too early still. But Tom and Mary didn't seem to notice.

"OK," said Tom, and he pulled over.

I jumped out and said "Thanks for the ride."

"Goodbye Franklin" Mary said.

"OK, bye," I said and hurried off like I knew where I was going. I didn't really, but after wandering around a while I did see the blue car with the red door. The car that was my home. I ran toward it. Marcus was there, sitting on the hood. He jumped down when he saw me coming. I ran and ran and when I reached him I threw my arms around him and squeezed as tight as I could.

"Marcus," I said. "I keep losing you." And I was crying again. It seemed like that's all I did in those days.

Marcus was as glad to see me as I was to see him. I looked up and saw that he had tears in his eyes too. "You must be hungry," he said. And all at once it was true. Now that I was with him again I was hungry. I wanted to eat. I wanted to live. And I hadn't eaten since yesterday breakfast.

We found a little restaurant and we both ordered bacon and eggs with home-fries, with coffee and orange juice. We said thank you to Pig and dug in. While we ate I told him all about being lost and everything that happened. My world was back together, and I began to think about returning to the Helen/Lori Farm where I would see Becky and Dylan again. But toward the end of breakfast I noticed that Marcus had a worried look on his face. Now I know that he felt something. Like I said, he was like that. He could know things. On the way back to the car he kept telling me to hurry and made us walk real fast. It was one of the only times I was with him when I felt he was pushing me -- trying to get me to behave in a particular way.

We climbed into the car and started off, but we didn't get a half a block before a cop car pulled in behind us with his lights flashing. Marcus pulled over. I could see that he was very upset by this. More upset than I had ever seen him. Then another cop car pulled in ahead of us to block us should we try to get away. There were two cops in each cop car. They jumped out of their cars and came to ours -- two on each side. They told us all to get out of our car and even frisked Marcus to see that he had no weapons. Then they put hand-cuffs on him. They didn't put cuffs on me but one of the policemen held me by my arm -- very tight so I couldn't get away.

"What's your name," asked the cop who was holding me.

"I'm Jed Greene,"

"You told the couple that brought you here that you were Franklin Hubbard," he said.

So then I knew what had happened. That couple had called the police about me. Damn them. Why do people have to meddle in other people's lives? "I lied to them," I told the cop.

"Right," he said. "And what is your relationship to the man you were with?"

"He's my father. His name is Ralph."

While this cop was questioning me I could see that two of the other cops were asking Marcus questions. He didn't answer them. He didn't even look at them. It was like he couldn't see him. They just weren't part of his world. Unfortunately he wasn't invisible to them now. They pushed him into the back of one of the cars and slammed the door. As they drove off I saw him twist around to get a last look at me.

"We don't think that guy was your father," the cop holding me said. "Did he kidnap you?"

"He's my friend," I said. "Why can't you just leave us alone? He's my friend."

The funny thing is that I didn't cry. For all the other crying I did, when this happened I didn't cry at all. It was bigger than crying. It's hard to say. But I read in one of my supermarket newspapers about a guy who got his arm ripped off in a weird car accident. He said it didn't even hurt when it first happened. Sometimes really big injuries are like that. They just leave you numb at first and then start hurting later and then for a very long time. That's the way this was.

It turned out that the Libbys -- those people who drove me here -- suspected I was on drugs and figured some grown up had given them to me. I guess I was sort of spacey. So they called the cops and told them, and then followed me. They saw me find Marcus' car and told the police everything they saw when the police arrived. That was while we were eating breakfast. The cops did a check on the car and found out it was stolen. By talking with the police in Maine they made some pretty good guesses as to who we were.

It didn't make it any easier when when it really sank in that I was the one who led the hunters to their fox. That bothered me for a long time. Still does a little bit.

I have to give those cops credit. That was some fast detective work. A lot of cops are pretty smart. Those people who get to rule the world are

mostly pretty smart I guess, or they wouldn't be ruling it. They just don't get it that people shouldn't be trying to rule over each other so much. That's the only thing they aren't smart enough to figure out.

To make a long story short, I ended up in Maine Youth Center and they took Marcus back to the hospital where they kept him locked up. They found the girls clothes mixed in with my things, and that didn't look good to them. So they decided he must be a pervert as well as a loony and that he was teaching me to be a pervert too.

I don't want to tell about the drive back to Maine locked up in a Sheriff's car, or all the questioning they did. Naturally nothing I told them was the truth. Except that Marcus was my friend. I could tell they wanted to slap me around but they didn't.

## **He Was a Good Pervert**

While I was in the Maine Youth center I saw this social worker. Her name was Natalie Farr. She was kind of old. She was very skinny and little and had long gray hair. Even though she was so old -- almost old enough to retire -- she wouldn't let me call her by her last name. I was Franklin and she was Natalie. She told me that she would not tell anybody else the things I told her. Of course I didn't believe that. I had heard it from other social workers and it was never really true. And she said I was her "client" -- not the state.

"What does that mean," I asked her.

"I means that I'm on your side," she said.

Course that was hard to believe too. But the amazing thing is that I did come to believe her. I tested her a couple of times, like telling her things I did at the Youth Center that were bad, to see if it would get back the house parents there. The biggest test was when I told her about the secret cove I sometimes sneaked away too at night. The dorms we were in were pretty easy to sneak into and out of.

So little by little I started telling her about Marcus and how it was between him and me. She listened and said she agreed with Marcus in almost everything he said. This was really amazing to me. Marcus always told me "don't think you know more than you do. If you don't think you have anything to learn, you won't." This is what he was talking about. I thought I knew all about perverts. They were bad. Then I met him and learned that there were good perverts. And I thought I knew all about social workers. They were spies sent from the grown-up world to discover our secrets. They were there to help the people who ruled over us. They were like perverts. They were bad. Then all at once here is this social worker popping into my life and she turns out to be good. Good perverts. Good

social workers. It was almost more than I could handle.

We met in her office. It was a little room in a building in Portland. She had all sorts of pictures in her office, and a lot of plants, and behind her desk she had this big poster. It was a "yin-yang" symbol. That was a sign. It was one of the things that made me think maybe I really could trust her. Someone from the Youth Center drove me to my appointments with her.

One day, about a year after they caught us in D.C., I told her I wanted to see Marcus. She said she would see what she could do. The next week when we got together she said that she had gone to see him, and had asked about our getting together. She said they believed he kidnapped me. They would have put him in prison for life except his lawyer argued that he was crazy and so they put him in the hospital instead. He wasn't ever going to be allowed to see me. After all, I was his victim. And he and I weren't suppose to write or have any communication.

"That's not fair," I said.

She agreed.

The next week she came to our session with a letter. It was from Marcus. It was sealed and she had not even opened it. I examined the envelope real carefully and could tell this was true. Also she said so and I mostly thought I could trust what she said.

I asked her if I could take it with me.

"It's your letter," she said. "You can do as you wish. But you must be very careful with it. If they find that you have it I will get into trouble and that will be the last one you will ever get."

"I'll be careful," I said.

"I guess you know how to sneak if you have too," she said.

She knew me.

"Yeah," I said, and pushed the letter carefully down into my sock. "I want to read it by myself first," I said.

That night, under the covers with a flashlight, I read the letter. I had a comic book with me too so that if I got caught I could hide the letter and pretend I was just reading the comic book. Here is what the letter said:

*Dear Franklin,*

*I miss you a great deal. The days and nights I spent with you were the happiest in my life. I wish we could see each other but, as I am sure your social worker told you, that is not allowed.*

*This is not a good place to be. In some ways it is better than prison and in some ways it is worse. It is just another kind of prison really. The big*

*problem here is they they insist that I take this medicine. It is what they call "anti-psychotic" medicine. They think I am crazy and that it will make me well. Actually they are the ones who are crazy, and it certainly does not make me "well." It does, however, make it impossible to live out of that place in me that knows what it wants. I still know what I want to some extent. I know, for example, that I still love you and want to see you. But I can't feel my life the way I used to. The magic is gone. The worse bars of all are the ones they put inside your head.*

*I hope they are treating you well. You have a very nice social worker. Please be very careful with this letter. Don't let other people see it -- except Natalie Farr if you want to.*

*You can trust her.*

*Write and tell me what you are doing and how your life is.*

*Love,*

*Marcus*

I did, of course, write to him. I told him all about my life. Once a week Natalie brought a letter from him to me, and I gave her one to take to him.

One day I wrote to him about how bad it made me feel that I was the one who led the cops to him. "When that comes into my head it makes me think I don't want to live," I wrote.

*"I know you didn't mean to do that," he wrote back. "Sometimes I blame myself for not holding onto you tighter. I think I could have stopped you from pushing up real close to where all that crazy stuff was going on, but I felt you should be free to make your own decisions Also I think about how I ignored that dream I told about on Bristlecone Ridge. The one about the fox. That was a warning, but I insisted on going to the march, and I took you there. But all this blaming isn't any good for either of us. We did what we thought best when we did it. We never meant each other any harm. And who knows? Maybe this is the way it was meant to work out. Maybe this was the only way we could learn the things we had to learn."*

I didn't buy that bit about this was what was "meant." Meant by who or what? It seemed to me that it was just another pissy thing like my real father being killed in that accident. But his letter did make me feel a little better. It was true about how we didn't mean to hurt each other. And we did the best we knew how.

Though I still missed him, it was good that we could at least write. When I think about it I can see that it was mostly me talking to him. He would make comments about things I said in my letters and ask me questions.

But he didn't really tell me a lot about his life. Maybe there wasn't that much to tell. Still there was something missing. It was Marcus but something was missing. It was like it was the right soup but it was missing the salt and pepper. I thought maybe he had stopped loving me. I asked Natalie about this. She told me that he still loved me, but that it was hard for him to feel it. It was because of the medicine they made him take.

We wrote back and forth like this for about three months or so when I got a letter from him that really excited me. "I have found a way to escape," he said. He went on about how we were both in prisons and how hard it was to escape. He said that the hippie movement was the "greatest jail break of all time." He had said that before but in this letter he explained a bit more:

*"All of society is a prison. The Hippies and people like them are trying to break out. I don't know if they will be successful. A big effort will certainly be made to gather them up and put them back in jail. But it is glorious while it lasts. You and I broke out of prison together. It's not an easy thing to do because we carry a lot of the prison around in our heads. That's why the hippies take drugs. To try to get the prison out of their heads. This might be necessary, but then they keep on taking those drugs and take too many. They keep taking them after they learn what the drugs have to teach. Once you break free you have to keep a clear head. But we broke out and were free for a while. I think about this always."*

That was mostly what he said in his letter. He never explained in that letter how he planned to escape. But I was sure he would come for me. I thought about how we would drive away again across the country. We could go to naked beaches and we could see the

Wilkins. How I wanted to see Becky and Dylan! I could again be whatever I wanted to be. I pictured us in the blue Pontiac with the red door, but of course I knew we could never find that car again. All that week I tried to understand everything he said about prisons and I thought about me and him driving down highways, and camping in places beside mountain streams, and meeting new people and having all kinds of adventures. I thought about me and him cuddling up together in the tent -- maybe sharing a single sleeping bag. I wrote him a long letter telling him about all these things that popped into my brain.

The next time I saw Natalie I gave her my long letter so she could take it to Marcus and she gave me his letter.

I was surprised that the letter she gave me was so short. I could tell from how thin the envelope was that there was only a single page in it. Just like usual I didn't open it right then. I just stuck it in my back pocket.

"Natalie, do you think Markus could escape," I asked.

"They have him on a locked unit," she said. "I am afraid they put him with the criminally insane." She thought a minute. "I'm not sure I like that term for them, but that's what they call them."

"Marcus is not a criminal," I said. "Well, maybe he stole a car, but he's not a real criminal. And he's not really insane. Not the kind of insane that means he can't take care of himself, anyway."

"He's not insane and he's not a criminal," she said simply. "But they think he kidnapped you and that he abused you sexually."

"I asked him to take me," I said. "I was hitchhiking."

"I know."

"And so what if maybe we did a few little things."

"I agree," she said. "But they think he is a very dangerous person. They know he is very smart so they watch him carefully."

"You don't think he could escape?"

She shook her head.

"How long will they keep him there?"

She looked down at some papers. Then at one of her pictures on the wall. She looked most anywhere except at me. I could tell she didn't want to deal with this. "I don't know what to tell you," she said.

"You think they will keep him there forever," I said.

"They think he is very dangerous, Franklin."

That night I snuck out of the dorm and went down to my hiding place in some nearby woods. I sat down on the flat rock I used as a chair and read the letter by flashlight. I could almost have read it by moonlight. It was full and very bright. The letter was very short:

*Dear Franklin,*

*By the time you get this letter I will already have escaped. I wish I could take you with me. But you have things to do here. I will think of you always. I love you very much.*

*Your friend,*

*Marcus*

At first I felt mad. Really mad. Why couldn't he take me with him? He said he loved me. I helped him in lots of ways when we drove around in the car together before. He knew how much I wanted to escape too.

I sat there pouting when I was startled by a noise in the nearby bushes. I caught a glimpse of something. I thought it was a dog. There were some wild dogs around here and all the boys were a little bit afraid of them.

I picked up a rock and sat real still waiting to see what would happen next. Then slowly a fox came out of the underbrush. For some reason I threw the rock at him. I don't know why I did that. I didn't think he was going to attack me. I guess I was mad at the whole world and wanted to take it out on some one. It was a bad throw. The rock hit the ground in front of him and splattered a few pebbles on him. The rock itself came close to hitting him on the bounce but it missed.

The fox looked up at me. Even then he didn't run. He just stood there staring at me for the longest time. I kept real still then. I never knew anything like that before. The moon was full and we could see each other real clear. Then he slowly trotted off.

I sat there quite a lot longer thinking and trying to understand why Marcus didn't come for me. And I thought about the fox. I mean it had to be an omen. I couldn't have spent all that time with the Wilkins and the Wicca people and with Marcus and not know that. Then at once I knew. That's how it sometimes is with knowing. There is no little bit about it. One minute you don't know and the next you do. In a flash.

I jumped up and ran down to the highway. It was the middle of the night so there wasn't much traffic. I put out my thumb when a car came by and I walked or ran when there weren't any cars. With a couple of rides and a lot of walking and some running I got to the building where Natalie had her office before the sun came up. I sat down on the sidewalk beside the door to the building and waited. Fortunately no cops came by to ask me what I was doing.

The first people that went into the building after the sun came up didn't seem to notice me. I stood up and walked back and forth around the doorway. It wasn't too long before I saw Natalie. Naturally she was surprised to see me.

"Franklin," she said. "What are you doing here?"

"I've got to find out if Marcus is all right."

She gave me a puzzled look.

"I haven't heard anything," she said.

"Then you have to call."

She didn't argue with me. We went up to her office together and she called the hospital where they kept Marcus. She got the ward he was on and told them she wanted to talk with him. I could, of course, only hear her half of



the conversation.

"I'm Dr. Farr. I am authorized to see him." .....

"Yes, I remember you too. Can you tell me how? .....

"I see. When?" .....

"Sleeping medicine. I see. Thank you."

She hung up. She looked at me and shook her head.

I already knew what she had to tell me. She got up out of her chair and came over to where I was. I began to cry. I stood up and let her hold me. She is the only one I would not have pushed away because she was the only one in my life at that time who knew how he was a good pervert. That, and how much I loved him.