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# Brothers in the Dark

by Kevin Esser

It's the day after their mother's funeral, and the boys have just arrived at their new home. Aunt Mary and Uncle Ken are showing them around the house. It's a nice little one-story place on the west side of Sandburg. To the boys, it smells like old people – like cough syrup and pipe tobacco and musty carpets. They've been here before, but it was a long time ago, maybe six or seven years ago – when their father was still alive, when their mother was still alive, when everything was still good and safe and happy.

They end up at the back of the house in their new bedroom. Aunt Mary says, "You boys settle in and then I'll get you some lunch." She gives each of them a hug and then goes back to the kitchen with Uncle Ken.

The two boys, not saying much, look around the room. It's a small guestroom with only one bed, a double bed with big brass railings at the head and the foot. "That's where I'm sleeping," Patrick announces. Robby looks at him and rolls his eyes and says, "That's where we're *both* sleeping, asshole. There's only one bed."

"That's bogus," Patrick grumbles. "This whole place sucks."

"Don't talk so loud."

"Eat me, man."

Robby shakes his head. "You're so incredibly stupid," he says. "I wish you'd grow up."

Robby is fifteen years old. He's shorter than most boys his age, but he's strong, sturdy, with wide shoulders and heavy legs. He looks like a young weight-lifter or a junior wrestling champ. But he's not into sports. He likes heavy-metal music, comic books, science fiction. He has an earring and he wears his hair long, almost down to his shoulders, curly and uncombed. Uncle Ken says that he looks like a "blond poodle." Aunt Mary says that he has such pretty golden hair, just like his poor mother, God rest her soul. Just like his mother. Same round baby face and upturned nose, same pink complexion and nervous blue eyes. So pretty. Just like his mother.

After putting their clothes away, the boys go out to the kitchen for lunch. Aunt Mary brings a big pot of vegetable soup to the table. Patrick wrinkles his nose and says that he hates soup, especially vegetable soup. Robby pokes him in the shoulder and murmurs, "Come on, Pat, be nice." But Patrick won't eat anything until Aunt Mary finally coaxes him with a hot dog and potato chips. He's been like this for several weeks now, ever since he turned thirteen and started changing and getting bigger. He's almost as tall as his older brother now, but still much thinner, lighter, with a lean whippet body ideal for athletics. He plays baseball and soccer at school, swims, runs on the track team. He always seems sweaty and hyper and out of breath. All the girls love him because he's a jock and because he's so cute – not pretty like Robby, but cute, a totally hot stud with sexy dimples and wicked reddish blond hair, spiky on top, plenty of mousse. Ten days ago – just before his mother's accident – he got laid for the first time, and he loved it. He wants to do it again as soon as possible. Fucking chicks is even better than baseball.

After lunch, Aunt Mary and Uncle Ken leave for a couple of hours to visit a sick friend in Peoria. Robby explores the living room while they're gone and finds a case full of oversized art books. Robby likes to look at old paintings and statues. Someday, maybe, he would like to be an artist himself, he would like to be an artist and paint pictures of dragons and warriors.

He finds one book that he especially likes, a book about the Italian Renaissance. It's full of great stuff – like a statue of David and a painting of Cupid called "Triumphant Love". There are also some nude women, but Robby flips past those to look for more guys, more nude guys.

On the other side of the house, in the bathroom, Patrick is taking a shower. He's soaping himself between the legs, using both hands to make lots of lather and to get everything nice and slippery. His dick is getting hard. He loves to feel it and to look at it because it's a big one, he knows it's a big one, he's seen other ones in the locker-room and his is better. He's eager to use it again, to stick it into another chick. The whole puberty deal is so cool – getting really big nuts, growing lots of dick hair, being able to shoot real cum. It's all so totally cool.

Robby is in the bedroom when Patrick gets back from his shower. Being together like this seems strange to both of the boys. They haven't shared a room or taken a bath together or seen each other naked since they were tiny kids, probably ten years ago. The strangeness makes both of them feel edgy and self-conscious.

Patrick is wearing a long blue towel around his waist. He wanders to the mirror above the dresser and starts fooling around with his wet hair, brushing it in different ways – first spiking it, then slicking it back, then

feathering it forward into bangs – playing and flirting with his own reflection. "This house is so shitty," he finally says. "I hate it here."

"We don't have much choice," Robby shrugs. He's sitting on the bed, reading one of his *Dreadstar* comic books. "Bitchin' about it won't do any good, so just shut up."

"I bet the school here is shitty, too."

"We'll find out next month."

"A bunch of fuckin' geeks, I bet."

"Just shut up," Robby mutters again. He throws down his comic book and rolls onto his side, feeling suddenly sleepy. The room is warm, quiet. Patrick flips his brush onto the dresser, then starts opening the drawers and looking through them for clean clothes. Robby is watching him. A dog is barking from next door. Patrick finally chooses a baggy white Adidas T-shirt and a pair of red sweat-shorts. He drops his towel onto the floor. His suntanned body is brown everywhere but his ass, his smooth white ass. Quickly, without turning or looking at his brother, he puts on his underwear and his shirt and his shorts. Robby watches him for a few seconds, then rolls away abruptly and closes his eyes.

Outside, the dog is still barking.

It's just after three o'clock. Aunt Mary and Uncle Ken are back from Peoria. They give each of the boys five dollars and then drop them off at the nearby shopping mall. As soon as the boys get there, they split up and head in opposite directions.

Robby goes to the comic book store to buy the latest issues of *Nexus* and *Grimjack* and *Dreadstar*. Not finding any of them, he wanders back to the counter to get some help. The manager smiles at him and shakes his head. "One of our suppliers is late with his shipment," the guy says. "Should be here tomorrow, I hope."

"Maybe I can come back," Robby says. "I live pretty close."

"Are you new here?"

"I just moved down from Chicago, yeah."

"I thought so," the man says, still looking at Robby with a friendly smile. "I would've remembered you otherwise, I'm sure." He waves at two boys just coming into the store, then looks back at Robby. "That's a terrific shirt, by the way."

Robby, slightly embarrassed, glances down at himself with a bashful grin. Along with his usual blue jeans – old faded ones, very tight, ripped at the knees – he's wearing a T-shirt from Brookfield Zoo, a yellow T-shirt embossed with pictures of tigers, flamingos, parrots, dolphins, an

entire colorful menagerie. "Thanks," he says, "it's my favorite one. My mom bought it for me last month."

"It's terrific," the man says again. "It looks wonderful on you."

"What time do you open tomorrow?"

"Nine o'clock... but don't come back until the afternoon. Your stuff won't be here until then."

"OK, cool, I'll come in the afternoon."

"What's your name, pal?"

"I'm Robby," the boy says. "Robby McCoy."

"Welcome to Sandburg, Robby. My name is Jeff. We'll probably be seeing a lot of each other from now on."

"Probably," Robby agrees. "Tomorrow for sure." He leaves the store and wanders through the mall for the next fifteen or twenty minutes, thinking about the man behind the counter, wondering if he's gay, if he's one of those guys who likes kids. Thinking about it makes Robby feel agitated and homy, like the feeling he gets after smoking really good grass.

He finds his brother at the video arcade. Patrick is playing one of the games near the entrance, hunched over the machine and shoving his hips against it every time he hits a button or a knob. The back of his T-shirt has worked its way out of his shorts and is hanging loose. His bare arms and legs look fluorescent purple in the arcade's freaky lighting. Robby steps closer. He has the sudden weird urge to reach out and touch his little brother's butt – because it looks good, really good, moving around like that, shoving back and forth like that, flexing hard beneath the stretchy shorts. Robby wants to put his hand on it and see how it feels – but he manages, quickly, to force the notion away.

Later, walking back home, Robby mentions the comic book store to Patrick. "There's a really cool guy who works there," he says. "It's a lot better than the places in Chicago."

"That guy is probably a pervert," Patrick remarks. He has a can of Coca Cola in his right hand. He takes a gulp from it, then lets out a loud burp. "Those guys are all sex perverts," he adds. "A cop came to our school and told us about it."

"That's bullshit, man."

"They bone kids up the ass and then kill them and chop them up."

"Don't be stupid," Robby mutters. "This guy isn't like that at all."

They turn the corner onto Mulberry Street. Aunt Mary and Uncle Ken's house is at the end of the block. Patrick drains his can of Coke, then throws it away into the street. It clatters noisily against the concrete. "A chick at

the arcade was checkin' me out," he says, glancing at his brother with a smug grin. "She had really gigantic tits, man, I swear."

"Great."

"I bet she's a hot fuck."

"Yeah, probably."

"Did you ever fuck that Lisa Van Fleet chick last year?"

"Sure," Robby lies, "it was way cool, man, she was awesome."

Aunt Mary is in the kitchen when the boys get back. "Well," she smiles, "did you have a good time?"

"It's a nice mall," Robby says, nodding. "I'm going back tomorrow for some comic books. Is that OK?"

"Of course, dear, that's fine." Aunt Mary wipes her hands on her checkered terrycloth apron, then glances at the big clock above the stove. "You boys have about one hour until dinner," she says. "We're having fried chicken, hope you like it."

"Fried chicken is great," Robby says. "We like it a lot."

Patrick, already on his way out of the kitchen, announces that he's taking a nap. Robby follows him into the bedroom and says, "Be nice to Aunt Mary, Pat, she's trying to help us."

"I didn't ask to come here."

"Try not to be such a prick."

Still wearing his clothes and his shoes, Patrick flops onto the bed and burrows beneath the sheet. "I'm tired," he says, "so don't bother me."

Robby takes one of his books and sits in the chair across the room. "Take off your shoes first."

"Suck my dick, man."

"I'm serious," Robby says angrily, "take off your goddamn shoes."

Patrick finally gives in. He reaches beneath the sheet and pulls off his dirty gym shoes and drops them thudding to the floor. And then, just to be devilish and to upset his brother, he starts undressing all the way. He strips off his T-shirt and drops it next to his shoes. "There's my goddamn shirt," he says, looking at Robby with one of his sly, dimpled grins. "And here's my goddamn shorts." He reaches beneath the sheet again and comes back out with the red sweat shorts and drops them onto the pile.

"Stop being a jerk," Robby mumbles from the corner, barely paying attention. "Act intelligent for a change."

"And here's my goddamn underpants," Patrick continues, fumbling once more beneath the sheet. He pulls out a pair of white Jockey briefs and waves them over his head, then flings them across the room at his brother. "There, asshole, now I'm naked."

"Stop it, man."

"I'm totally *naked*," Patrick announces again, growling the last word with special, gleeful relish.

Robby looks up from his comic book, suddenly curious. "We're eating dinner pretty soon," he remarks vaguely, not sure what else to say. "Settle down."

"I always sleep *naked*."

"Thrilling."

"It's best for screwing chicks," Patrick adds, then rolls onto his belly and starts humping the mattress. "Like that chick at the mall, man, big time! She was such a fox." The sheet is riding up and down on top of his pumping rear end. "Huge fuckin' titties!"

"Quiet down," Robby mutters. The bed springs are squeaking, making too much noise. "Uncle Ken can probably hear you."

Patrick rolls onto his back. He's giggling at his own silliness and mischief. There's a fat lump in the middle of the sheet, right between his legs. Patrick reaches down with both hands and stretches the sheet tighter, making the lump easier for his brother to see. "Now there's a *real* man's dick," he says, a raw, nervous edge to his voice. "Look at that big old boner."

"Come on, Pat, put your clothes back on."

"Eat me."

Robby drops his comic book and sits forward. "Put your clothes back on, moron."

Patrick giggles louder and reaches under the sheet with his right hand. "I'm not done yet," he says, still just joking around, still just trying to tease his big brother and get him pissed off. "I'll be done pretty soon, asshole, don't worry." His hand is making the sheet jerk up and down. He lets out a fake groaning noise and rolls his eyes.

Robby gets to his feet. "Stop it, man, I mean it."

"Fuck off."

"This is the weirdest thing you've ever done."

Patrick agrees with a delighted burst of laughter. He puts his other hand beneath the sheet and starts playing with his balls. It feels great, the whole thing feels great, and suddenly, somehow, he realizes that he's actually jerking off now, not just pretending, not just kidding around, but actually jerking off for real – and he can't stop, he doesn't want to stop, even though his brother is with him in the same room, right there in the same room, just a few feet away, standing there and watching.

Robby takes a step forward, then back, then forward again,

flustered, embarrassed, not certain whether to stay or to leave the room. He can't stop staring at his little brother. Patrick's mouth is still open, but he's not smiling any more. His eyes are strange and unfocused, his hair is ruffled, his face is red. The sheet is down to his bare stomach. He looks messy and feverish and hot. His breathing is getting faster, shakier. Finally, Robby backs away. "It's almost time to eat," he mumbles, then turns quickly and leaves the room. Patrick doesn't notice. He lifts his knees beneath the sheet and spreads them, getting his legs open as wide as he can, really enjoying himself. Letting himself drift. Away. Totally away.

Later, at dinner, both boys eat plenty of fried chicken and mashed potatoes. Robby also eats two or three helpings of fresh buttered asparagus, but Patrick won't touch the stuff. "Vegetables are gross," he says. "I can't even look at 'em." He takes another piece of chicken instead.

Afterwards, Uncle Ken challenges the boys to a game of checkers. They take turns playing against him, losing every time. At eight o'clock, they put the board away to watch a baseball game on television. The Cubs are playing the New York Mets. Uncle Ken settles back in his favorite chair and lights his pipe. Patrick, wearing only his red shorts, sprawls on the floor in front of the TV. He asks his brother to give him a back rub. "Like at home," he says. Robby kneels beside him and starts doing it. Patrick murmurs, "Mom always does it better."

"You say that every time."

"Because it's true."

"Just shut up."

"She does it better," Patrick murmurs again, then closes his eyes and grins.

When the baseball game is over, the boys say good night and head for bed. Aunt Mary kisses both of them and says, "Things will look a lot brighter tomorrow." Robby gives her an extra hug before leaving the room.

Patrick, in the bedroom, spends several minutes setting up his boom box on the night table. He always listens to music when he goes to bed. He puts in a tape of Fine Young Cannibals and turns it down low. "That's quiet enough," he decides, mumbling to himself.

Across the room, Robby is undressing for bed. He takes off his T-shirt, then his jeans, and lays them both across the chair in the corner. His body is husky and pale, creamy pale everywhere but his sun-reddened arms and face. Patrick glances at him. Robby is still wearing his underpants. Silky purple ones. "Those are cool," Patrick says. "I want some like that."



Robby almost says, "Ask Mom about it," then shrugs silently and peels off his white socks.

"They're really cool," Patrick says again. He seems distracted and jittery. "I'm sleeping naked tonight," he adds after a few seconds.

"I know," Robby nods. "Me too."

"So we'll both be sleeping naked," Patrick confirms, settling the issue. "That'll be OK, I guess."

Robby crosses to the door. "I'm going to the bathroom," he says. Patrick jumps to his feet and follows him across the hallway. They go to the sink together and stand there brushing their teeth. Robby finishes first and steps to the toilet. He tries to pee, but he can't – he can't because his cock is starting to get stiff, it's starting to get stiff and long in his hand, and nothing will come out. Patrick, still holding his toothbrush, glances over at him. Robby glances back. Neither of them says anything. The water in the sink is still miming. Robby turns slightly to let his brother see him more clearly. He's rubbing his thing now, making it bigger. His legs feel strange and shaky. He exchanges another glance with his brother, both of them still standing there silently, watching each other, afraid to talk.

Patrick finally turns off the water. "I'm going to bed," he mumbles. He puts away his toothbrush and leaves the bathroom. Robby, alone now, pulls up his underpants and sits on the edge of the tub. The porcelain is slick and cold beneath his bare thighs. He's thinking about Patrick. And he's thinking about Jeff – the guy at the store. And he's feeling homy. Definitely homy. He wants to finish masturbating. Right away. But not there in the bathroom. Not alone. He's tired of doing it alone.

He goes back to the bedroom. The Fine Young Cannibals tape is still playing. Patrick is already in bed, curled on his side beneath the sheet. His shorts and his underwear are on the floor beside his shoes. Robby pauses to shut off the lights, then quickly pulls off his own underpants and stretches out next to his brother. On top of the sheets. He doesn't want to cover himself. Not yet.

He realizes suddenly that Patrick is crying. He nudges him in the back. "What's the matter? Are you sick or something?"

"I hate this place," Patrick whimpers. "Everything about it is so shitty."

"Give it a chance, man."

"I want to go home."

"We can't go home," Robby murmurs back. "Nobody lives there any more." He puts his hand on his brother's bare shoulder. "Come on, Pat, don't cry, we'll be OK." He kisses Patrick on the neck. The kiss

seems to surprise both of them. Something weird is happening. "We'll be OK," Robby whispers again. Something totally weird. "Just cool down, man."

The tape runs out. It clicks off and starts rewinding. Robby is staring at the bizarre moon shadows on the ceiling. He still has an erection. He wants to start playing with it again, right now, but he's afraid to do it, he's afraid to move.

Patrick sits up to flip the cassette. He wipes his eyes quickly and pushes the "play" button. The music starts again. The boy looks around at his brother. "Anyway," he mumbles, "I'm not crying."

"It's OK."

"I'm not some fuckin' baby."

"I know, man, forget it."

Patrick glances down between Robby's legs. He lets out a soft grunt of laughter. Robby shakes his head. "It won't go down," he says quietly. "Stupid boner." He hesitates another moment, then takes the thing in his hand and starts working it, working it slowly at first, nervously, then a little faster, really rubbing it, really rubbing it good. Something definitely weird is happening. More than just goofing around or jerking off. Both boys can feel the difference, can feel the tension, the risky tension between them.

Patrick watches for another few seconds, then drops back against the mattress. "This room is too hot," he mutters. "I can't go to sleep." He pushes at the sheet, pushes it down to his waist. Robby rolls towards him. He puts his hand on Patrick's stomach. "You're all sweaty," he says.

"It's too fuckin' hot in here."

"Just relax, man, everything is OK."

"I can't go to sleep."

"I know," Robby whispers back, "me neither." Timidly, he gives Patrick another kiss, this time on the cheek. Patrick doesn't say anything, doesn't resist in any way. He's breathing rapidly, breathing noisily, waiting. Robby kisses him on the mouth, the throat, the chest. He pushes the sheet down to uncover his brother's penis, to finally get at it, swollen there fat and hard against Patrick's belly. Patrick is trembling. Robby scoots closer and presses against him, starts humping against him, rubbing his boner against the side of Patrick's leg – both boys uncovered now, naked now, naked together on the bed, seeing and feeling each other's bodies, each other's bare bodies, bare cocks, getting each other more excited, more turned on. Robby starts humping faster, getting ready to jizz, getting ready to jizz against his little brother's leg. He's kissing around Patrick's belly button, using his tongue

now, making everything wet, working down farther. He can smell the dirty sweet sex smell from around Patrick's balls. He starts kissing them, licking them, licking Patrick's balls and Patrick's dick, up around the big swollen knob of Patrick's dick, running his tongue around it, tasting the funny stale sperminess of it, getting it foamy with spit – and then, slowly, savoring it, he slides the whole long thing into his mouth.

Patrick closes his eyes. He smiles. Everything is better now. Everything is OK. Being there in the dark. With his brother. Just the two of them. Feeling good. Feeling safe. Together.