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Acolyte Reader

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Secret Brothers

by C. R. LaBarge

Chuck couldn't help watching out of the corner of his eye as Nicholas shifted on the floor and scratched between his butt cheeks. A second later his other hand was deep down the front of his blue pajama bottoms relieving another itch. Chuck saw the boy's parts jump around beneath the loose, soft fabric.

"Your turn, Chuck. Yo, Chuck!"

Josh's deep voice quickly brought Chuck's attention back to the cards in his hands. Poker. Yes. It was his turn to discard. Across from him, Josh sat cross-legged on the floor, waiting. He'd just thrown three pennies into the paper plate they were using as a pot.

"Come on, what are you going to do?" snapped Josh. He pushed his glasses farther up his nose and stared intently at Chuck.

Chuck studied his cards. Why did Josh's nine-year-old little brother have to keep scratching himself down there? It made Chuck think of things he didn't want to think of. Besides, Nicholas was supposed to be helping him, not distracting him. Chuck had never played poker before.

Nicholas stopped fidgeting and slid across the rug to Chuck's side. "Let me see."

Chuck turned his cards toward the boy; and Nicholas moved closer, hooking his arm around Chuck's neck.

Nicholas tilted his head back so that he could see under the thick mat of dirty blond hair that covered his forehead and hung into his

dark brown eyes. "Keep these two," he said. He rubbed his fleshy round nose, then pointed to the king and queen with a stubby finger. "Get rid of the rest."

"Why?" asked Chuck. According to the way Josh had explained the game, Chuck had nothing. So why should he keep anything? The king and queen seemed no better than the 4, 5 and 9 that he wanted him to get rid of.

"'Cuz, when you draw, you might get more of them – and they're better than these." Nicholas plucked the low cards out of Chuck's hand and threw them on the discard pile.

Chuck didn't argue. Nicholas at least had played the game before, which was more than Chuck could say. And besides, they were his pennies they were betting.

Chuck drew a five and two more queens.

"Yes!" shouted Nicholas, raising his fist triumphantly in the air. "Now bet five."

Josh scowled, running his hand through his bristling forest of inch-long hair, and called Chuck's two-cent raise.

Chuck's three of a kind took the pot. It was his third win in a row.

Josh threw his cards onto the floor and made a grab for his little brother, a grab the boy easily eluded. "That's enough, dick-o-less," he barked. "Let him play for himself from now on. Why don't you go get lost somewhere."

"No, pervert. Mom said I could stay until bed time."

"Don't call me a pervert, you cockless wonder," said Josh, leaning forward and socking Nicholas on the side of the head. It was a hard hit – too hard for a little kid. At least Chuck thought so.

He wanted to say something, especially when he saw Nicholas' eyes start to glaze over with tears, but he wasn't sure he should. He really wanted Josh to like him. Though Josh was fourteen and a year

younger than Chuck, he was the only guy in the neighborhood who was even close to his age. He'd been thrilled when he learned the new family moving in next door had boys. He'd gone over to meet them the first day, along with his mother who'd baked the boys and their divorced mother a welcome-to-the-neighborhood apple pie.

Now Josh had invited him to sleep over. His first sleep-over ever. He didn't want to blow it.

He sighed and picked up the cards, telling himself that punching was just the way some brothers handle things. And after all, Nicholas had called him a pervert. If his little sister ever called him that, he would want to hit her too – though he knew he wouldn't because his parents would kill him.

"Want to shuffle?" Chuck said, giving the cards to Nicholas and placing a hand on his shoulder.

Nicholas was big boned and sturdy, just like Josh, who was several inches taller than Chuck and a lot heavier. But the little boy had a sweetness that set him apart from Josh. The walls of their room were covered with posters – basketball stars or guys on motorcycles. But there was one poster of a deer in a forest, its ears perked up listening; he knew, even without asking, that it belonged to Nicholas. If Josh had ever liked anything as gentle as a deer, he'd left that interest behind with his tricycle and teddy bear.

Nicholas smiled at Chuck and began shuffling the cards. "I wish I could sleep in here with you guys tonight instead of in Mom's room."

"Well, you can't," said Josh. "There isn't space for the spare bed."

"I could sleep on the floor."

"No!" said Josh sharply. "Mom doesn't want another ruined sleeping bag – or a wet floor."

"Shut up!" said Nicholas, his face getting red.

"I'm just stating the facts," said Josh.

"Well, you're a pervert and that's a fact too."

Josh made a fist and lunged at the boy, but Nicholas threw down the cards and dashed out the bedroom door just in time. It slammed behind him.

"You ever jerk off?" Josh asked later, after they'd climbed into their respective bunks. Chuck was in Nicholas's bed above, Josh in his own below.

Chuck didn't know what to say. He tried to pretend he was asleep. But a second later, he felt Josh's foot poke at the bottom of his mattress. "Hey, I'm talking," said Josh.

Chuck grunted, the plastic mattress liner below the sheet crinkling as he squirmed.

"So do you?"

"That stuffs kind of personal," Chuck finally said.

"So? It's no big deal. Everyone does it. Back home we sometimes had jerk contests – you know, see who could shoot the fastest and the farthest. But that was when I was a kid, of course." He paused, then added. "You guys around here ever do that?"

Chuck grunted again. He didn't know what to say. He pushed the covers off himself. It was hot all the sudden. He didn't want Josh to think he was a geek, but how could he tell him what other guys did at night when he didn't know himself? This sleep-over stuff was all new.

"I'm basically into girls now," said Josh. "But if you're horny for a jerk contest, I could probably get up for it."

"No, I guess not," said Chuck.

"Oh, you only let girls see your boner? Is that why?"

"No."

"Well, why then?"

"That stuff's not cool." Chuck turned nervously in the bunk. The crinkling of plastic reminded him of things in his past that he wanted

to forget.

"Who says it's not cool?"

"Everybody," said Chuck. Masturbation was bad for you. At least that's what they told you at St. Peter's. Guys made fun of any boy who stayed in the bathroom too long, accusing him of playing with himself. And he couldn't imagine his parents would approve. They never talked about sex of any kind. "Don't you ever go to church or Sunday school?"

"No!" said Josh. He sounded angry. Chuck heard him roll onto his side. "And if they teach that jerking's bad, then I'm glad I don't go."

"But don't you feel guilty about it after?"

"What? For jerking off?"

"Yes."

"No. Neither did my friends back in New York. Why should we?"

Chuck lay quiet for a while, then he asked, "What are you giving your speech on next week?"

"I don't know," Josh grunted, still sounding annoyed. "Something about motorcycles maybe. I hate speech class. I'm sorry I took it. I never know what to say."

"Not me," said Chuck. "So far I'm getting an A in it." Though Speech 1 was mostly filled with freshmen like Josh, Chuck had wanted to take it anyway. Speech hadn't been offered at St. Peter's. It wasn't that he liked getting up and talking in front of people. He didn't. But he did like writing – and seeing how others reacted to what he wrote.

"Quit bragging," said Josh.

"Maybe we can work together on our speeches. You know, help each other with writing and practicing." Chuck rolled to his side and peered over the bunk down at Josh, the mattress again broadcasting his movements.

He saw Josh smile slightly. "That would be cool. Thanks." They were silent for a minute, then Josh asked, "So, how old's your sister anyway?"

"Eleven."

"She's cute. Ever do it with her?"

"What! No way!"

"Why not? I would. She's old enough."

Chuck got sweaty again. Was sex all Josh thought about? He wondered if Josh talked this way around Nicholas. Maybe this was why Nicholas called him a pervert.

He rolled onto his back, the plastic again crinkling. "Josh, does Nicholas wet the bed?" Chuck asked.

"I'm not supposed to talk about that," said Josh. "But yeah, he does. But you got to keep shut up about it. I don't want everyone at school knowing I got a baby for a little brother."

"It doesn't make him a baby," said Chuck, clenching a fist and trying not to lose his temper. "Some kids just have special problems, that's all. Nicholas is a great little guy. You're really lucky to have him."

"Are you kidding?"

"No. I wish I had a little brother."

"That's only because you don't got one. You don't know what it's like. They're always getting into your stuff. And you can forget about having any privacy, especially if you have to share a room."

Chuck didn't say anything. What Josh was complaining about were the very things Chuck dreamed of. All his life he'd wanted a little brother he could share things with and teach things to – and, yes, someone who would look up to him and make him feel like a hero.

"It's worse than you know," said Josh. "A guy can't even jerk off without having the little monster busting in on him."

"You mean Nicholas has seen you do it?"

"Sure. Like I said, with a little brat around, you got no privacy. Mostly I try to do it at night. He sleeps like a log. But sometimes even that doesn't work."

"Wow," said Chuck, lying back. Josh had just described his most tormenting fantasy: having another boy watching him do it – a younger boy. He sometimes imagined letting the boy do it for him. He always felt guilty afterwards – for thinking that way about a little kid – but he couldn't seem to stop himself.

"What's it like, Josh, having him watch you?"

"Huh?" Josh asked groggily. "Hey, I thought you were all holy about sex. Why are you asking so many questions about it?"

"Forget it. Good night."

"Yeah, good night."

That weekend Chuck thought a lot about what had happened, especially in bed with his erection goading him on. What would it be like having a jerk off contest with Josh? Would Nicholas watch? Would Nicholas join in? Chuck knew his old teachers would have given him whacks for even thinking that way about a sweet, pure little kid like Nicholas.

But if he did have a jerking contest – with Nicholas watching and maybe scratching himself down in his pants...? He'd win, of course. He'd shoot instantly and probably spray stuff a good five feet.

There was something else he thought about a lot that weekend. It was something personal he could only talk about with Nicholas and had nothing to do with sex. He didn't like the idea of opening an embarrassing old wound, but to help Nicholas he knew might have to.

When Chuck knocked at the front door on Monday afternoon, it was Nicholas who opened it.

"Hi, Chuck!" Nicholas grabbed his arm and dragged him into the house. "Josh isn't home from soccer yet and Mom's at work, so we can do anything we like. Want to wrestle? I used to wrestle a lot with my friend Jason back in New York. I wrestled Josh too, but I don't like doing it with him any more. He's too rough. Besides he's become a pervert."

Nicholas jumped on Chuck and forced him to the floor. The match was on.

"What do you mean, Josh is a pervert?" Chuck asked, after he'd let Nicholas wrestle on top of him and pin his shoulders down with his knees. The activity hadn't stopped any too soon. Chuck had that excited, tickly feeling down in his guts that meant his organ was dangerously close to getting hard and throbbing. He didn't want it to happen with Nicholas. He didn't want him to think he was a pervert too.

"You got to promise not to tell," Nicholas said, glancing down at Chuck from under his long bangs.

"I promise. I'm good at keeping secrets."

"Okay." Nicholas moved his hand to his small crotch bulge and pretended he was masturbating. "He does this a lot and talks dirty and looks at naked pictures. Do you do that kind of stuff?"

Chuck felt his face get hot. "Let's talk about something else." He raised himself up onto his elbows. "Nicholas, I noticed you have plastic on your bed. Do you..." He paused for a moment, then decided to come right out with it. "Do you wet the bed?"

Nicholas lifted himself off Chuck and slumped beside him on the floor in a heap, his back turned, looking like a balloon with all the air let out.

Chuck rubbed between his shoulder blades. "Hey, it's okay, Nicholas. Really."

"No, it's not." Nicholas made a fist and shook his head. "I hate it! Mom was supposed to take it off before you came, but she forgot. Now you probably think I'm a baby."

"No, I don't."

Nicholas glanced over his shoulder at Chuck through the mussed hair screening his eyes. "You got to promise not to tell."

"Cross my heart and hope to die." Chuck made a large X on his chest with his finger. He rubbed Nicholas's back again. "And it doesn't mean you're a baby either. Did you ever try that machine that wakes you up when you start to pee?"

Scowling, Nicholas turned his body around to face him. "What machine?"

"Some kids have what they call a deep sleep pattern. The machine helps them wake up. It has this loud buzzing sound that could bring a dead guy back to life every time you got to go. After a while you don't need the machine any more."

Nicholas studied him intensely. "I never heard of it. How come you know so much about it?"

Chuck squirmed and felt his face get red again.

Nicholas's eyes suddenly widened. "Do you pee the bed too?"

Suddenly Chuck remembered how relieved he'd felt when he finally learned he wasn't the only boy in the world who wet the bed. Now he wanted Nicholas to experience the same relief. Slowly he nodded. "I used to – until I was way older than you. You're the first kid to know. Just don't tell Josh, okay?"

Nicholas's smile was like sunlight breaking on his face. "Don't worry, I won't," he said. He crossed his chest as Chuck had done. "That machine really cured you?"

Chuck nodded. "I was one of those kids with a deep sleep pattern. Maybe you are too. If you want, I could talk to my mum and dad about letting you borrow it. It's up in the attic."

"That would be great!" Nicholas grinned and swiped at his bangs. "Then I could have sleep-overs, and join cub scouts and go camping, and go and stay over night at Aunt Jan and Uncle Bill's like Josh gets to. Wow!"

"But if you do borrow it, you can't tell Josh where you got it," said Chuck. "I'd die of embarrassment."

"No problem," said Nicholas, jumping up and sitting on Chuck's crossed legs. He wrapped his arms and legs around Chuck's middle and hugged him.

Chuck hugged him back.

Dropping his head on Chuck's shoulder, Nicholas sighed, "I wish you were my brother instead of Josh."

"Me too," said Chuck, stroking the back of Nicholas's hair. He hugged the boy closer and felt a wonderful warmth spread from his chest throughout his body.

A few minutes later Josh came home and the spell was broken. He and Chuck went into the bedroom to work on speeches.

The next day Chuck saw Nicholas get off the school bus, unlock his front door with the key that hung around his neck and let himself into the empty house.

"Guess what?" Chuck said, when he and Nicholas were again wrestling on the floor.

"What?" grunted Nicholas.

"My parents said you could borrow the machine. My dad said no at first. He didn't like the idea of anyone else finding out. But if your mum promises to keep quiet about it, he said she could have it. She should call him tonight and they can talk about it."

Nicholas screeched in joy and barraged Chuck with questions. Would he finally be normal like other boys? How long would it take to work? Was it messy? Did it hurt? Would it wake up Josh, too? Nicholas bounced up and down on Chuck's stomach as Chuck tried to answer all the little boy's questions.

Then Nicholas pulled off his sweaty T-shirt, revealing a pudgy belly that Chuck couldn't resist tickling. They were soon wrestling again, and Chuck's penis inevitably began to harden.

Nicholas had rolled on top of him, sprawling upon him lengthwise. As the little boy struggled to pin Chuck's arms to the floor, his groin slid across Chuck's. Suddenly he froze. "Hey, you got a boner!" he said, grinning. He moved his hips back and forth across Chuck's embarrassing bulge. "It's a big one!"

Chuck freed his hands and pushed Nicholas off. He sat up and turned away. Now it was his turn to feel deflated. "I guess you think I'm a pervert too."

But Nicholas crawled over and hugged him around the neck. "No, I don't. It's okay, really. I get 'em too. Especially when I wrestle. It means you really like me. I was hoping you did. I think it's great."

"No kidding?"

"Sure! How could it be bad? I mean, if I like you and you like me, and we're both boys, then it's cool."

"It is?" Chuck finger-combed his hair, got up and sat on the couch. "But I thought you said that stuff was perverted."

"No, I didn't. I meant Josh is perverted." He went over and stood by the couch. "Sometimes I don't go to sleep right away, and I hear him. He's down there with his bed light on jerking himself, looking at naked pictures of girls and whispering dirty stuff." He lowered his voice and began pantomiming masturbation. "Oh, Tara. Oh, Michele," he moaned. "Suck me. Suck my cock."

Nicholas's piping imitation of deep-voiced Josh made Chuck smile. He could just see macho Josh lying in his bed, playing with himself and moaning like that.

"A couple times I looked down and told him to shut up, but he got real mad. It makes me sick, all that girl stuff. It's disgusting. That's why I call him a pervert."

Suddenly he scowled at Chuck. "You don't get all gooey over girls do you?"

Chuck shook his head.

"Didn't think so." Nicholas grinned. "That's why I like you." He knelt on the couch next to Chuck. "You want to be secret brothers?"

"What's that?"

"Well," said Nicholas, glancing down and lowering his voice as if slightly embarrassed. "It means we can do secret stuff together – you know, private stuff. In New York I had this friend – Jason. He was my age and we used to feel each other and get boners. We were secret brothers too." He glanced back up. "So, you want to?"

Chuck grinned and nodded his head furiously.

"Great! But don't tell Josh that we're secret brothers. He might get mad. Okay? He thinks secret brothers is sissy. But that's because he's a pervert and only thinks about girls."

"Okay." Chuck kissed Nicholas on the forehead, feeling his pants begin to swell out again. His parents would kill him if they knew the pact he'd just made with Nicholas, but maybe they and the teachers at his old Catholic academy were wrong. After all, adults didn't know everything. There were some things a guy just had to find out for himself. For now, his special friendship with Nicholas didn't feel wrong. How could anything that felt this great be anything but right?

He placed his palm against Nicholas's and they entwined their fingers. "Secret brothers forever."

"Forever," said Nicholas solemnly. He pressed his other hand firmly against Chuck's bulge.

Chuck shuttered and carefully reached between Nicholas's legs.