

Chapter 11 - August 27 - Current year

"Go on." Continued Wayne Noyes-Goode.

The boy simple grimaced and shook his head slightly. "Enough for now, I think."

The therapist was perplexed. "But certainly there's more to your story. What about the child? He was born wasn't he?"

"Wayne, I believe we agreed at the beginning that we would mutually share in this exchange - an exchange, Wayne, indicates both parties offering information."

"I don't know what you think I can offer that will be of interest. More importantly, it's not pertinent to our..."

"Not pertinent? Oh, you have no idea how pertinent it is Mr. Goode." The boy waited, watching the therapist patiently.

"Listen, let's talk more about your obsession with Monica. Why did you believe she was meant to be with you?"

"Mr. Goode, are you familiar with the story of Roanoke Island?"

"Of course, English settlers who disappeared after they settled a small portion of the new world, the late 1500's I think. No one really knows what happened to them. Right?"

"Oh Wayne. A little word told us everything we needed to know about those people."

"Okay, I'll bite. What did the word, ah 'Croatoan' correct? What did that tell anyone? Some think the word found carved into the tree on Roanoke was a clue leading others to believe they had re-settled on Croatoan Island nearby but why would they leave?"

"Oh, they had a particular motivation." The boy smirked at Wayne and nodded his head affirmatively.

"Well yes, those experts who believed this thought that due to running out of food and resources and due to continued

insurmountable conditions on Roanoke they decided to branch out to another geographical location and make a new start. There are others still who believe the Croatan Indians invited them to join their tribes on Croatoan Island. The Croatan peoples had always wanted a peaceful relationship with the European settlers."

"What other reasons might there have been, Wayne?"

Wayne was perplexed and the look on his face showed as much. He seemed to consider re-focusing the conversation on the boy and Monica. He even opened his mouth to draw in breath and suggest they concentrate on that subject. He gently threw his notepad onto the table situated close by and slowly rolled his pen between his palms maintaining eye contact with the boy. A short inhalation of air and a sigh later Wayne Noyes-Goode shook his head slightly. Taking his pen by the tip in his right hand he shook it toward the boy, "Okay, okay," he said. "We can take a short break and discuss this if you wish." Another sigh. "But we get right back to your story after this." He shook his head again, eyes closed. "All right?"

"Wayne, we will discuss what I want when I want to discuss it. You see, it will be my way. All right?" Now the small features of the boy's face were curled up into a sneer.

"Listen, I've studied these things for many years, now I'll concede that you are well-read, more so than a lot of people I've met. Intelligent beyond your years I must admit, but I think I know best how we should proceed..."

"Fuck you Wayne Goode!" The boy whispered. "You want my story? You want to *help* me? We do this after all cards are on the table." The boy blinked his eyes closed. He kept them closed for an usual length of time for emphasis, licked his lips and continued. "Wayne, you are nothing but a disgusting hypocrite and a fucking worthless waste of space and human skin, organs, gas and water. The human body is made of an immense amount of water. You want to know how I know that? I have been elbow deep in the human body cavity more than once. Sometimes while the person was still alive and screaming, begging for mercy. Do you honestly think you, you insignificant puke can take charge here? Intimidate me? Toy with me or analyze me?"

"I certainly think I can offer some insights and together, with your cooperation I can most definitely help you make some progress. Is that frightening to you?"

"Yes, let us speak of fear Wayne. Let us speak of enlightenment. Let us speak of understanding and finally, let us speak of responsibility. Answering for wrongs committed. More specifically, we should be completely honest with one another."

"Yes I think that's a good idea." The therapist replied.

"Good then, Wayne." The boy smiled now. "I have been completely honest with you and until you reciprocate I am finished talking to you."

"Right, so you want me to tell you that I'm not a perfect human being. Okay I'm not. I'm lazy. I wasn't good at being a cop. I was a worse student. I graduated dead last in my class and without help, a lot of help from a friend in my Master's program I would never have completed my thesis and would not be able to work as a therapist. What I have done is care for people enough to keep trying. Where all other efforts on my part have failed these things have prepared me to make a difference, albeit a small one, in the lives of people who haven't enjoyed the small fortunes I've had in life. So can we dispense with this nonsense? I have no other dirty little secrets."

"Wayne, Wayne. You are not being sincere. Until you are we cannot make any progress. You have more to admit."

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Wayne, go home. Go home and think about this. You only have a few more opportunities to hear all my dirty little secrets. The Judge limited your time with me. Do not forget that, all right? If you are being honest and you genuinely do not know about your dirty little family secrets, I suggest you learn them. If you have repressed what you know, somewhere in that mind of yours what you and your family have done I will give you this one more chance. Do not disappoint me again."

"You want to know about my family?" The expression on Wayne's face change to one of further confusion.

"Yes Mr. Goode. I do. More importantly I wish for you to admit the hypocrisy of your past. Only then will you be prepared to take responsibility for your own."

"I am not my past." Wayne replied.

"Oh yes you are. Do you know how one becomes one's past? By repeating it, over and over again. By not making the effort to break the chain. One becomes one's past by being no different than one's past."

"Fine, you want to talk about my Grandfather? Fine. Let's talk about him but let's not get sidetracked okay? That's not why we're here."

"Your defensive posture betrays you Wayne." The boy licked his parted lips.

"What, do you suggest is my part in what my Grandfather may have done back in the seventeenth century?"

"We are all responsible for what took place in our past. Especially those things that we have yet to apologize for and make right. Innocent people, Goode. Or should I call you Noyes-Goode?"

"You know my name." Wayne stood from his chair and paced back and forth.

"Is Nicholas Noyes a name with which you are familiar?"

Chapter 12 - August 18, 1590

It was a simple word, carved on a post, the remnants of the fort, now largely dismantled. On a nearby tree the three letters "C R O" appeared. Now men stood around it, staring at the massive trunk in confusion. Governor White, who had been the first to lay eyes on the word is not significant to this story but he certainly had been to those who it was now assumed had left this clue perhaps alluding to their current whereabouts. He had returned to the home from whence they had all come with promises to return just as soon as possible. What had that meant? In the long run, nothing. Especially now that the families were all gone. Including his daughter and granddaughter. Had the native people come for them? Would they have taken the time to leave this apparent clue if they had been attacked? They certainly had been instructed to leave some sign but this word was not it. One tribe of these native peoples had seemed so docile, even eager to build relationships with their visitors from across the "big blue water" and beyond. Why then would such an event as a savage massacre had taken place? Could conditions between the two peoples have deteriorated so much in the time that had passed since he was called away? He had seen many things in his vast experience and it was indeed possible. There were certainly other tribes of people who had shown hostility toward the English settlers in the past. He still believed this was due to the actions of the man called Lane who had been so aggressive with them. On the other hand, he did not view these as satisfactory explanations. What did he base this belief upon? He could point to no logical explanation why he thought so; it was just a feeling.

One of the others had offered a different solution to the puzzle. The man was a loyal and capable member of this crew and had served White well several times and in many different ways. White had no reason not to trust him. Having studied, for some time, the lay of the land and area surrounding this original colony he seemed to recall hearing tale of an island bearing a name strangely similar to the word that comprised the only sign that man had been on this land in centuries. The new theory was that perhaps their families, their people had come across some reason to relocate elsewhere, to some other geographical position and had left the word as a clue to find them now. They would search more at this location and then continue to the Island whose name appeared carved into this tree.

Upon searching for the fort they had built years in the past White and his men found few remnants and no evidence of it ever having been there. Only a signet ring bearing the insignia of Master Kendall and two buried skeletons indicated any European had been there.

Past expeditions and the rough treatment of natives with whom they had come in contact had left conditions between the Europeans and the then Weroance tense. Weroance was the native people's way of referring to their leader or chief. Because of these strained relationships Governor White could only hope that the new theory would bear some fruit; that his daughter and granddaughter on whom he had never laid eyes may have moved to another geographical location, not simply been killed. Though he feared the worst might have come to his family. He found it hard to believe that a simple silver cup could have brought this mysterious end to his daughter. A silver cup that had been stolen and some of the natives had been severely treated as a result.

Now, it is no Earth-shattering revelation that by 1609 there were reports in London of Englishmen from Roanoke Island living under Chief Gapanocan apparently at Pakerikinick. Some said he held four men, two boys and a young maid and forced them into service as copper workers. Governor White, once deciding that further exploration of Croatoan Island was vital if he might discover the fate of those who he'd left at Roanoke determined to set sail for that location but rough weather had disturbed the men and he was forced to abandon such a voyage.

What happened to those English settlers who were running low on food supply but were certainly not on the verge of disappearing when Governor White left to return to England? Many theories exist. As stated before, Governor White plays no more significance in this story than what has already been stated. The settlers, on the other hand, those who vanished from Roanoke Island and the simple word, carved in wood and left behind however just may be vital.

Where did these would-be colonists go? Were they attacked? Did environmental conditions on Roanoke deteriorate to such a state that they were forced to find a more suitable locale? If the settlers were attacked, did any of them survive? Some theories and in fact recent scientific developments indicate that they

may have done so. That they may have integrated into the tribes of Native American Indigenous peoples with whom they had come in contact is a strong possibility.

Chapter 13 - October 23 Last Year

Little Nathan Skolnik sobbed horridly as I ran dragging him behind me through the dark streets and over the front lawns of all of the neighbors. I called these people sir or ma'am whenever I saw them in the light of day. However, at night, I watched them secretly, seeing things that young boys should never see. I knew their dirty little habits and I wished to join them at times. I plotted to torture and kill several of them. But first, I was thrilled at the opportunity with the one of them that I hated most, a not quite two year old brat that had been disgusting to me since his conception.

Every so often I would reach back and strike the little brat on the head with the sock full of rocks that I had brought with me on my journey into hell and destruction tonight. It seemed that no matter how hard I smacked his beautiful face he would not shut up. I was growing panicky with thoughts that I might be caught due to the noise. And this was only my first attempt at a human life.

God damnit! The little fuck must have a skull like a rock. Six, seven now eight times I had clubbed him and yet he was still conscious. He was screaming with pain. There was sorrow in every sob as if he was trying desperately to understand why I was hitting him. With all of the creatures that I had practiced on, I believed that I had polished this action to a fine skill, but this little shit seemed to be defying me for spite alone.

I was not as afraid of being caught as I was of accidentally killing him before I returned home with my prize. I would not be welcomed back warmly at all if I brought back a dead corpse to *them* instead of a living plaything. *They* would be very dissatisfied with me indeed, if I failed them. I knew my goal. This being my first time notwithstanding, perfection was expected of me and if I slipped up I would become the experiment instead of Nathan.

As I dragged him through the neighborhood I could not help but fear that I was leaving a telltale, bloody trail for the neighborhood people to follow. As I smacked him, once more I hoped that I had not drawn enough blood to be leaving any clues. By god this little brat was fucking heavy.

No one would have cared if I killed or dragged off some animal. Especially some already damned stray cat from the park or the alley back of the Tollman house. Rats and other small and usually unseen rodents would never be missed. My own parents did not miss even my little dog until he had been gone nearly four weeks. Tonight was different. Not only would they miss the fat little fuck, I had nearly been caught in his nursery snatching him out of his crib. God damnit, Monica had just checked on him as usual at about midnight before she went to bed herself. I had watched them for weeks planning this and had nearly had to go home without him and my need for blood left unsatisfied. How can this kid be so hard headed when she went down so easily? Just one whack to the head is all that it had taken for her.

When the door to the nursery had opened, I had scurried away to the windowsill with amazing quickness considering the weight of the prize I carried. I guessed his weight to be about twenty pounds. While holding the baby with one arm under his chin and around his neck to cut off any sound that might escape I used the other to open the window but could only manage about six inches before she noticed me standing there. Upon seeing my small shadow and seeming to recognize the rotund bundle in my arms, she gave chase after me across the darkened nursery room. She was wailing and had instantly burst into tears. She managed to make only one recognizable sound, that sound was the word, "NO!"

With an expertise that I had practiced for many months now, I swiftly lifted the window to its full extent, stopping first to set the fat child on the floor between the terrified mother and me. Nathan was leaning back against my body and he began to cry aloud in reaction to his mother's noise. Monica fell to the ground a few feet in front of me. She had not yet reached her crying child. Toys, a stroller and other nursery room items proved valuable conspirators to my goal. I had planned and taken the time to litter these items about in the event of an unexpected and unwanted intruder. These created the necessary obstacles to aid me in eluding the pursuing mother now. I wrapped both arms about the hollering brat and threw myself backward out the window, hauling him with me. In mid-air I attempted a backward somersault so as to land on my feet instead of my head. As happens with some plans I failed. Seeing as how the child weighed considerably more than I had expected, I

landed flat on my back, feeling the paralyzing effects of the wind escaping my body and gasping for breath.

I had practiced this flip several times but under the child's considerable extra weight I had not succeeded. I had, in essence, fallen on my back from the second story window with an extra 30 pounds. Nathan was still in my arms on top of me, yet there was nothing I could do about it presently. This created the opportunity for Monica to make up the ground she had lost tripping over the obstacles in the nursery room above.

My diaphragm was cramping horridly and my chest was heaving in erratic convulsions. No matter how hard I dragged at the air around me my lungs seemed fully deflated and would not receive any of the air I frantically labored to take. My head felt, not so much like a head anymore, but instead, thick and groggy. I had seen a bright flash of light on impact and I was sure that all the blood in my body had rushed to fill the void surrounding my brain.

In one terrible instant, as I teetered between unconsciousness and the awareness of where I was, I caught sight of the mother lying in a crumpled mass next to me on the ground. She too, seemed to be shaking off the effects of a clouded realization of where she was but was still able to grab aimlessly at the child in my arms. Her hands pawed as if in slow motion and I heard her voice as though she were an old 78" LP set to the 33" speed on a record player. I do not believe that she was forming actual words, but the idea was clear.

The child, as I have said still lay atop my body and somehow, I had held one of my aching arms tightly around his middle. He was not making a sound, but after only a split second of terror thinking he might be dead, I realized that he was conscious and seemed in good health for our trip thus far. In my clouded recollection of the moment, it seems to stand out that he almost seemed amused at the recent ride from his bedroom window to the ground outside.

Monica had now regained her senses enough to make it up to her knees. She crawled the few feet to where her child and I lay. Upon her reaching us I began to see my work coming to an end. With one huge gulp of air I finally sprung into action. We were both still in a state of dazed confusion but we both seemed aware that this would be the defining moment for each of us.

I had always heard that a mother protecting her child was like the ocean, you cannot stand in its way and if you try, you will end up the worse for your trouble. With a strength that I had not expected she wrenched little Nathan from me. Still trying desperately to heave breath back into my lungs I joined in the struggle. Our plight was a clawing, scratching desperation to win the child from each other and I knew that I must not fail. Failure was not an option for me.

I grasped violently at him, trying to overpower her. We were engaged in a brutal hand fight back and forth. I felt my parcel slipping slowly but steadily away from me. She was much older than I was and at the age of seven years, thought I was stronger than the boys my age were, she was not my age and therefore better equipped to succeed. I found myself becoming more frantic. I heard the blood pounding through the tiny capillaries in my earlobes. Dismayed at the thought that I would never have this chance again, I knew that I must do something fast.

If my quest did not prove prosperous tonight, I feared what would happen to me. How could I explain my failure? I knew the answer to this question. She would watch him closely his entire life. She would never again let her guard down enough for me to have another opportunity to snatch the little bastard and torture him to death. She would surely watch him every minute of his life. Therefore, this attempt must be fruitful or forget it.

With these thoughts racing through my mind I experienced dread in a way that I had never before known. However, in planning the exploit I had not failed to bring a weapon. This was one of the first things I had arranged.

I had brought with me an old hunting sock of my father's. I call it old only because he had purchased them so many years ago. They had not been used much, if at all. They were not even noticeably dingy. I chose this particular article because the sock was so thick and seemed to be very strong. He would never miss them.

Now, into this sock I had placed several small rocks that I had carefully selected. The stones were all fairly close to the size, if not the exact shape of a golf ball. Incidentally, one

golf ball also made its way into the sock. I had spent the better part of two weeks selecting the various rocks, pebbles; shards of broken Coca-Cola bottles, oh yes, and just one golf ball to place into the sock. I stuffed these items into the sock, filled it about half full and made a knot just above the bulge. Lastly, I made a loop at the end so that I could stretch it over my hand and let it hang from my wrist. Mind you, this sock was one of my father's so it was large. The size was perfect for me to carry and swing it easily.

That was just the thing for this moment. As I remembered this weapon, I felt foolish for a brief moment at having not used it already. Nevertheless, my shame was fleeting. The time had come to do something or lose this fight.

I had practiced the art of using my weapon and had even become rather skilled at knocking pigeons out of the air, mid flight. The various rooftops throughout our neighborhood offered an ample supply of targets on any given day. To be truthful, the real art however is to be able to be quiet while approaching a bird that has landed. Patience is the key. The approach, that is the most difficult. One must not think of the excitement of the death that is coming. If you are excited like that or if you are too impatient they sense your heartbeat and your soul's intentions and fly off.

In tonight's circumstance stealth had flown long ago. The moment was now. I forfeited my grip on the little fucker with one hand and felt around frantically for the sock full of rocks. It was not there. I must not have noticed that it had been pulled free during the struggle. Now I WAS panic-stricken.

I had held on with one hand but was now losing my grip on the fat little boy. In an effort to regain some control, I grabbed hold with both hands again. I noticed that the efforts of the young mother were bearing all of us across the front lawn of the house and toward the driveway. She was drawing closer to the dry surface and I was convinced that if she reached it my plight would be over. She was stronger than I yet the slippery surface of the wet grass had helped me by evening the odds a bit. It would be just a few more feet until she reached the driveway and I knew that I could never hope to overpower her with a solid, dry surface under her feet.

Where had I dropped the fucking sock? I looked around frantically and could not see what I was looking for. Was it on the ground behind me? Was it somewhere trapped between our two bodies? Leaning back in my efforts I looked over my shoulder and there I spotted it, hanging from the top of a young sapling planted in front of the window from which I had leapt. The weight of the rocks was pulling the treetop down toward the ground. It was near but not quite at a height that I could reach without jumping. However, it was several feet away from where I was now.

I do not know if I had become too preoccupied to prevent it but Monica had reached the driveway and the struggle was over for me. I could never hope to win now. Leaning back once more and slipping across the last few feet of grass between the driveway and me I looked first at her, then at the tree and let go of the child. Monica was still tugging with all her might when I let go and she and the child went tumbling away. The child again began to scream his painful sobs.

Not stopping to think I ran to the tree, running into it in my desperation. When I stood up and looked into the tree the sock was missing from the branch. Had I imagined it there? Instantly, I dropped to the ground and felt around for the object and found it there, between my knees. It had fallen out of the little tree when I jarred it by running into it.

Picking it up I turned to the mother expecting to see no sign of her. But instead of running away from me to the safety of her home, her rage was enough that she was coming toward me. She had the child wrapped tightly in her arms to ensure that she would not lose possession of him again. Her arms were covered with welts, scratches and spots of blood. Her face was puffy from the bruising that we had both suffered.

Did I feel sorry for her at the sight of her? I can truly say that I did NOT. For I knew what awaited me if I returned without the child. She could never suffer as greatly as I would, not simply at the mere loss of her child. I had to bring the fat little fucker back with me to my basement.

Just before she reached me I raised my arm in the air. Before she could stop herself I had hit her violently over the head and she dropped to the ground. The baby slipped slowly out of her arms and she fell on her face and did not move again.

For the first time since I had approached the house, nearly two hours ago, I felt completely calm again. I approached her slowly, the excitement rising in me. My heart was pounding. She did not move. I was not sure she was breathing. Suddenly I was overcome with an emotion that I could not understand and had never felt before. Perhaps I had felt it, but not this strong. I knew I should grab the child up and run for my life but I did not. In an instant frenzy took me, I could not control myself and I began hitting her as hard as I could in the head and back. Six, seven eight times I hit the girl whom I have told you had defended me so many times when others tortured me. With the first three or four blows her body convulsed violently. After that, she did not so much as twitch. Somehow satisfied by this act and after striking her how many times, I had lost track, I collected the child in my arms and dragged him across the front lawn toward the dark end of the street. I had two blocks to cover carrying my heavy bundle and I was already physically exhausted.

People were emerging from their houses and scurrying to the spot where the girl lay on the ground. Her blood was soaking into the wet grass. Fortunately for me, I had just escaped their view and had tucked myself into a corner between a fence and a house. I set the baby on the ground and tried to catch my breath, struggling against the exhilaration that filled me now.

Laboring desperately to breathe, I leaned against the house. I was careful to keep the little brat close to me. I gave thought to what may happen if he was to be heard. Then, though it took an effort on my part to think of it - I realized that Nathan had quieted and seemed in fact, somewhat contented.

I watched, as the neighborhood became a hive of throbbing sensation. People came out of their houses and oddly enough each of them went through the same steps. First, they seemed dumbstruck and a little annoyed at being jolted from their sleep and dreams. That slowly progressed into a curiosity that increased steadily with every minute that they observed the crowd that was growing outside the Bishop house. From all directions, up and down the street they came in droves. Goddamn! Are there really this many people in our quaint little part of the world?

Slowly, stirred from their sleepiness, one by one the urge to know what was happening would take each of them. They would call, absent-mindedly to a loved one still inside the house, telling them that they would be right back though not waiting for acknowledgement. They would have already begun to walk toward the commotion.

They progressed as if they made up a gigantic hoard of zombies all making their pilgrimage to the unholy land. One or two of them forgot to tie the belt to their robes while others still fumbled with theirs, never quite getting it right.

Was the little brat conscious? I looked down again, shaken from my mental distraction. He was moving his fat little fingers and rubbing them back and forth on the wilting petals of a flower in the garden that we had trampled finding our hiding place. He seemed just as retarded as he ever had and I hated him more now than ever.

No one lived in the house where I was hiding. But plenty of people lived beyond it and I feared that the slightest noise from my little friend would alert someone to my presence there. I huddled down behind the overgrown foliage in the garden about me and held Nathan tightly to my body. I could feel my own heart racing with the excitement, and Nathan's pounded so heavily I thought that it must be audible to the whole world.

I had to take a chance soon, before someone in the growing crowd down the street came to realize that the child was missing and they started looking for him.

I left the little boy in the garden-hiding place that we had found and ventured out into the wet grass so that I could get a better vantage point of my escape route. I glanced toward the house where I had encountered Monica and had, I was certain now, killed her. She had not moved from the spot where she had fallen and I had beaten her. The only thought that I could recognize was that of being disappointed. She was dead! I had killed her! I had done that! And yet, I had not been able to enjoy it due to the tenseness of the circumstances.

Soon I would have the chance to kill slowly and enjoy each calculated step toward that goal. But god what a waste. I must be more careful next time to plan better.

I already knew what I would do different if given the chance. I would wait until sleep was upon her, but just barely. I would tape her to the bed and terrorize her first before stealing the breath from her permanently. She was too strong to kill slowly, perhaps. But seeing horror in her eyes, and sensing it in her soul before her brutal death would have sufficed. Instead, she got to die in a fit of rage. This was not satisfying to me at all.

As I stood looking in awe at what I had created I began to get a proudly invigorated feeling. But my pride betrayed me at that moment. The result would prove a perfect alibi for me later. For as I stood looking in the direction of the hell that had come alive because of me, four of the older boys from a few streets away had approached from behind me and I had not heard them.

I was startled by their unexpected arrival and forgot for a moment that the little fucker was still hidden away. They taunted me and began swinging their fists at me. I could smell the strong stench of alcohol but though they seemed incredibly intoxicated, more than half of their punches were landing.

I recognized them all from my last school. They were a small representation of a larger group of boys that used to torment my friend Isaac and me.

Suddenly reminded that Nathan awaited me secretly I was gripped by the fear that he would crawl out while I couldn't get away. As this thought terrified me I became distracted and was struck violently by a kick to the back, just between my shoulder blades. The force was incredible and I fell to the ground striking my head against the cool concrete of the sidewalk.

I felt the little creatures inside my head, no not just in my head in fact, in my body. Tiny little things coursing through my veins. At first, most of the things I did were truly not my fault. When an unwilling hand prevented me from carrying out an action they would rush to it and move it on their own.

Like a hand that has fallen asleep by lying on it the wrong way, I can feel these little creatures within my skin, running so fast that the friction they create is torture to me. Can you perhaps feel them right now yourself? Maybe, while hearing these words you have been sitting cross-legged and it is only a

matter of time until you feel them in your presence. Sometimes I get the tiniest little pinprick in the back of my head. Is it them? It must be.

I heard one of the boys saying something and though I could not decide which of them it was his words were clear enough.

"We oughta kill the little creep and throw his body in the tunnel at the railroad yard. What was it like to hit your only friend in the head with a hammer until he couldn't talk anymore, you little weirdo?"

Another of the boys asked what the hell was wrong with me and kicked me in the face. It was not a terribly strong kick and it did not hurt much but the pain of remembering added weight to it and I began to sob.

Where were the little creatures at a time like this? Why could I not lash out in a violent, uncontrollable rage just then and free myself? Seems that now, I shall never find out.

As I cried I gulped air into my bruised lungs until I was hyperventilating. I cannot tell you much of anything about what happened next because I lost some degree of consciousness for a brief few seconds. This was just long enough to get hold of myself and forget why I had been crying. When I came to again, Mr. Bishop was scolding the other boys severely and picking me up off of the ground. He helped me to my feet and as he was preoccupied by this distraction the boys ran away in all directions.

When I recognized Mr. Bishop I asked him why he had stopped, what was he doing? Something was terribly wrong at his house, had he figured out what had happened?

"I was just on my way there when I saw those older boys bothering you." He explained. "I stopped the car thinking that this had something to do with the commotion down the road."

I didn't say a word in reply, but I nodded my head and shrugged my shoulders at the same time. I could not quite tell what he made of my confusing response to his words, but he picked me up in his huge arms and began walking toward his own house. I had no option but to go along with him.

I looked back over his shoulder as he carried me away. I could not see Nathan and hoped that did not mean he was gone. What was I going to do now?

When Mr. Bishop and I had reached the front yard at his house I thought he'd see what had happened and put me down. I would wait a reasonable amount of time so as not to arouse suspicion and then I would be on my way again. This time, I made the mental note in my head; I will not stop to gloat over my work.

But when we got to his house and he recognized the battered form of his daughter lying face first in the grass he held me tighter. He ran with me in his arms to the spot where several of his friends were looking on his only child and falling to his knees began to ask what had happened? Was she all right? Had anyone seen anything? The answers to these questions were an extreme point of interest to me as well. So for the moment I did not make any attempt to escape his grasp.

The paramedics had arrived and were asking him sternly to keep out of their way while they tried to help her.

HELP HER? SHE'S DEAD! I KILLED HER!

Or could it be that she had somehow survived? I knew one thing; I wasn't going to stay here to find out. I had one very important thing to get to right then. If I did not get to him soon he would be gone and my chance to kill the little fatso would be gone forever.

I struggled to break free from Mr. Bishop's grasp. By god! Now I could see where Monica got her strength. This man was very large and was now sobbing on my shoulder as he embraced me closely.

"My god!" He said, "They beat her and came down the street and started in on you. And I let them go."

Between sobs and apologies to his unconscious (maybe dead, I am hoping dead, please let her be dead) daughter and me he swore that he had not realized what had happened when he came upon me up the road.

Now, frantic I had to break free from his grasp. I began to kick and thrash. In reaction to this at first, he held me

tighter, then when I had lost all hope he let go of me and wrapped his arms around himself. I ran away as fast as I could, not knowing which direction I was headed yet and one of the paramedics stopped me. He mentioned my bruises and scrapes to his partner and asked for some kind of kit. Understanding that he meant to detain me even longer I did the only thing that I could, I sat down in the wet grass, dejected and exhausted.

As I walked the hall of the hospital I was surprised by the fact that the hard tile floor was warm to my bare feet. I obsessed over this fact for several minutes as my father gave the lady nurse information concerning our insurance. For once the old man could take me for medical attention. Usually, he had to hide me away in the basement until the swelling went down and my bruises disappeared.

I felt as though I was dreaming again, the little creatures coursing through my body with their tiny little ideas were deliberately keeping still. Keeping still as if to tell me that I had fucked this up myself and now I could get myself out of it. This was truly surreal; I was a boy that others cared about. They were concerned about how I felt and if I wanted anything.

This was perplexing to me. In such a short time as this I had been transformed. I am awake yet something is there. Hidden thoughts. What are they? What do they want from me? What do they want? They want me. At the back of my head I felt something warm so I reached back there and with suspicious fingertips I touched my skull. No blood. Yet still something warm and distinctly wet was there. I resolved to sit quietly and talk to the walls. Tiny people with little ideas lived within me yet their ideas were hidden from me right then. It had been a long time since I experienced that void and I felt detached from myself. It felt as if a limb had been removed though I still strained to flex the muscles.

I lay down on the examination table and fell asleep immediately. I dreamt again. I dreamt of the little creatures and their little ideas. Still, in my dream their ideas were hidden from me. And yet I seemed to understand what they wanted. I slept for I do not know how long and the entire time I dreamt of them. They were angry with me I know. But they did not hurt me though; we are old friends.

My dreams turned to more positive things and this dismayed me. I was lost in a beautiful flower garden. Roses mostly. They were calling to me from just outside the perimeter of the garden. It seemed they could not come in yet they wanted desperately for me to come out, and quickly. I moved to the edge and realized that I could almost make out the figure of one of them. The detail was hazy as though I had been hit in the head or was just waking from a deep sleep. I blinked my bleary eyes repeatedly trying to recognize some distinct feature or shape. The more I blinked, the blurrier the figure became until it was only a shadow. It was only a dark spot blocking the light that was shining from behind it. A painful tingle in my right foot gave me the idea that I was not asleep at all.

It was truly late at night now. And so many things had happened tonight that I could not change. I lay there thinking that I had to move, but I might be dead.

Chapter 14 - October 23 Last Year

Tree after tree swept by her as the wind blew her hair straight. Over rocks and twigs, tree stumps long uprooted and decaying became obstacles in her way. The sweet smell of rain filled her nostrils as she ran from what she did not know. Stumbling forward she came to a small stream running across her path. It wasn't a wide stream. In fact, one might call it a trickle of water instead. In this particular area the water had seemed to form in a straight line giving her the idea that it was running steadily downhill. This part being only a couple of feet wide she thought that she would be hard pressed to find a better place to cross it.

She placed one foot firmly on the ground and stepped over the watery hurdle before her in a kind of running step. As she landed on her foot on the opposite side of the stream her other did not follow. It was stuck in the mud behind her. Her body twisted and she fell to her left side, downhill. As she was wrenched toward the ground the trailing foot came out of its shoe and the shoe remained embedded firmly in the mud. Slowly, the mud engulfed the shoe and it disappeared. She only gave the departing shoe a brief thought when her head came down hard on a rock that stuck out just above the water's surface.

When she awoke she was coughing up water because she was lying on her face in the little stream. She lifted herself up to her elbows with both arms. It was terribly difficult to hold herself in this position, let alone turn herself over. Something in the back of her mind nagged her, telling her that she must keep moving.

As she supported herself on her weakened arms she felt the warmth of something running off her forehead and into her eyes. She was bleeding from the gash that she had suffered as her head hit the rock. Feeling light headed she summoned up all her strength and in an effort to keep from losing consciousness, face first in the water a second time, she turned herself over to her back.

Now, ghastly aware of the sound that she was making she lay perfectly still. She must be very quiet. Quiet means life. Do not sob or cry. Control yourself or they will certainly find you. With a vain effort she tried desperately to stifle a

gulping sob and failed. Were they still looking for her? She felt the strength drain from her exhausted body and gave way to the tears and the violent cries of pain and anguish.

After a few minutes of releasing her emotions uncontrollably she picked her head up and looked to her left. This was the direction she thought she had come from. For a few seconds she held perfectly still and listened. Physical fright now invaded her soul, as she heard nothing but the sounds of nighttime and quiet. Knowing that the noise she had made would have revealed her hiding place to them it was a physical effort to hold in her screams. Suddenly, the quiet was broken by the snap of a twig coming from up the hill toward her feet. Her elbows sank deeper into the muddy water beneath her as she supported herself on them. She held her breath with some effort and listened intently.

The sound of her own heartbeat seemed deafening as it thumped wildly within her bosom. When she could stand the suspense no longer she cried out in madness. Suddenly leaping from her resting-place with a surprising effort she began to run again. The terrain on the path she took was leading steadily up the side of the hill. With an alarming realization she knew that she had previously been running downhill before falling into the stream. Terror also ripped through her mind as she remembered that the twig-snapping sound had come from up the hill as she lay on her back in the stream. Was she running now in the direction of her pursuers? She stopped herself and then took rapid steps in every direction as if trying to make a decision. Again, the cloudiness came and this time she nearly fell to the ground. She must stay conscious. Now, after suffering a head injury, she knew she hadn't much time left. She would lose consciousness eventually, which was inevitable; the only question was when.

She began running again. Her thoughts were coming with considerable effort. It didn't matter much now, in which direction she ran. The key was to keep moving. Before too many steps she realized that she was in the water again. This time she had run right through it having not realized that she was wet until she had stepped in, out again and now back into the stream. The splashing of these footsteps seemed to bring her halfway back to consciousness as the noise reached her ears. She turned to the right to escape the water's path. Not certain that she was running from the thing anymore, and not caring

much, she stopped to listen. For a brief moment she heard nothing. Soon, the loud thumping of footsteps coming toward her from her left followed the quiet. Every third footstep or so would reveal the splash of water. It was near the stream that she now stood in.

On she ran at hearing this. Now struggling to keep her feet under her as the ground sloped away and she descended. She knew that her head injury would not allow her to run much further, but she would rather die than be conscious when they caught up to her again. She had lost any hope of making it home alive.

She had soiled herself sometime during the last few minutes. Stinging pain gripped her as feces and urine saturated her pant-legs.

Tonight she had seen many things that she felt were all too real. She laughed, as she thought how she did not wish to survive. She had been alone to see what young girls should never see. She heard what young girls should never hear. And now she could never forget those things.

If survival were possible now, the pain would haunt and torture her the rest of her life. Nothing she could do now would change that.

At these thoughts her tears returned, along with the violent cries and mental torment. She couldn't run any longer anyway. Her body was bruised, not at having been physically battered, but from crying so hard that she was bruised on the inside.

Once she had stopped running it was easy to fall to the ground. Her legs simply collapsed under her. She had landed on the ground in a half-seated position. She slumped over to one side and rested her head on the cool grass and gave way to all her emotions.

The tear in the flesh on her forehead had bled severely and had run into her eyes. They felt sticky and it was an effort to open them at all. Suffering from this inability to see she wished only to will herself into unconsciousness or death. Using her last ounces of strength she turned herself over onto her back and looked into the sky.

Clouds had slowly rolled their way across the sky for miles from all directions all over the world and they were above her now as if watching to see what she would do, if anything.

The clouds seemed to be waiting for something to happen and when it did not, they burst into a rain. It rained hard as though the clouds sensed that they must cry for her as her tears were all used up.

She breathed deeply and the rain fell harder to the ground. It rained so hard that in only a few seconds her eyes were able to open easily again. She lay watching the raindrops fall to the ground toward her. She was fixed on this spectacle when she noticed the clouds immediately above her began to dissipate and spread themselves open to reveal a starry sky in the thin crack above. The clouds continued to move slowly and intentionally until there was a perfect circle in the middle where she focused her attention. The stars were glowing with all the beauty and brightness they could muster.

Suddenly the terror returned as she recognized the footsteps and deep breath of the things from which she had run. Hopelessness filled her at the thought that she would not escape another conscious episode with *them*. Shadows appeared to block out the light of the stars. She could make out the figures of the creatures now and her soul sank. She screamed and no sound came out. Wild, hard sobs shook her body violently as she lost consciousness again; her last thought was of home.

Chapter 15 - June 18 Current Year

"HEAR YE! HEAR YE!" Came the cry from the court bailiff. "THIS COURT WILL NOW COME TO ORDER! THE HONORABLE JUDGE EPHRAIM CONRAD BIEL BEAM PRESIDING." Then aside to the man sitting high on his perch, but in a voice still audible in the back of the room, "Good morning, your honor. Will you require anything before we begin the day's hearings?"

"No Eusiphus, you are too kind." Then to the court stenographer he added, "However madam, you may please me greatly if you will only confirm that you have, as I asked this morning, brought the transcripts from our last meeting in this court with Mr. Noyes-Goode."

"Yes, your honor, I have them." Was the only reply.

"Good. Now, then Mr. Noyes-Goode I assume that you had an enjoyable stay in our facilities over the last three weeks. Yes or no? And I warn you, sir when I ask you for a yes or no answer, you'd better heed that."

"No, sir." Replied the frazzled man that looked as though he had slept in his clothes for several nights in a row. After all, he had done so.

"Well then Mr. Noyes-Goode, while you did not enjoy this stay it does seem to have gone a long way to instilling a feeling of humility in you. The last time I spoke to you, you behaved abominably and I haven't forgotten that. However, I am willing to do so if you give me no reason to doubt you. I heard you say that you did not enjoy your stay - good, if you had answered any other way I would think you were trying to please me. I want straight answers, not appeasements. Now then, I have a decision for you and I expect that you will view this as my final decision on this matter. But first, do you have anything you wish to say?"

"Yes, your honor I do wish to make a brief statement to the court at this time." Wayne replied.

"By all means Mr. Noyes-Goode, go right ahead." With the judge's permission so forthcoming, Wayne paused a moment for a skeptical but brief observation of the other man's demeanor. He

observed that Judge Beam seemed very sincere in his intentions today, could this be a sign that something favorable was about to happen in this case for the first time? He suddenly remembered the lack of patience the judge displayed in all his other dealings with him and felt an immediate need to press on.

"Your honor, I think it is important that we learn something from this child. We have an opportunity here to glean information to which we have not had access ever before. What if we pass up this chance and leave this kind of behavior a mystery? We should be able to recognize the warning signs of these tendencies and intervene at an early stage to prevent such violent and spiteful actions in the future. We are not ever going to be able to prevent all types of crime but I submit that we have a duty to make the effort when given a chance. And if that isn't enough, we also have a chance to try and help this boy."

Wayne paused to review how judge Beam was taking this remonstrance. Upon seeing that the man seemed to be paying attention but trying to affect a sense of boredom for appearance sake, he continued.

"He hasn't had any kind of life to speak of in the short time he's been in this world. He is only seven years old now, surely there is time for him to recover from the damage done to his psyche and afford him some quality of life from here to the end. He wasn't given that opportunity, ever. I can give him that, I am certain if the court will only see fit to give me the chance." He continued, checking his demeanor first to ensure avoiding a repeat of his last meeting with Ephraim Beam - he composed himself and added one last thought. "Sir, I can see that you have probably already decided and my words today mean nothing anymore, but if I may say, and I do mean with all due respect, is your decision based on what's best for the boy? Or is it based on your opinion of me?"

The courtroom became very quiet and nothing was said for several minutes. A man who Wayne recognized as a journalist cleared his throat and coughed a bit, outside the birds sang their morning tunes and could be seen flitting past the high stained glass windows at the sides of the huge oak paneled room that he stood in now. There was maroon carpeting on the floor that leads down the center aisle between the wooden, bench-style seats in the courtroom. Wayne wondered to himself as he stared intently at

it, trying not to meet the gaze of anyone in the room. He felt as though he was beaten. This was it. He would not make another appeal to win this cause again. He was, in addition to being physically exhausted also mentally and emotionally devoid of the energy that further struggle would require, and he knew it. He knew the judge knew it. He knew that anyone in the room that understood any of the history to this hearing could tell by taking one glance at him that he was completely spent, and if they couldn't tell, they were probably mentally exhausted themselves.

Dejected at the thought that he had spent all this time to end up denied so many times after so much effort he raised his gaze skyward with a jerk of his head and an exasperated sigh escaped through his parted lips. The courtroom once again became quiet and it seemed that all present were holding their breath, waiting for Ephraim Beam to explode.

Upon hearing this frustration escape from Wayne Noyes-Goode's exhausted body the judge's head snapped up from the paperwork on his desk and he fixed a stern gaze on the man awaiting his decision.

"I shall dispense with the niceties and meaningless pomp and circumstance that usually accompany a court hearing, Mr. Noyes-Goode. In other words, I'll get right to the point so as not to waste anymore of your precious time. I'm certain that, considering the time you have just spent in our facilities, you have a lot of work that has piled up on your desk. However, in discussing your track record, attitude and current standing with your city's police department, and more specifically your boss, I can say that it seems you'll be returning to your old job for a short stay."

At the mention of this Wayne felt an old knot in the pit of his stomach release and disappear. At the same time, a new and unfamiliar tenseness appeared inside him. All of his muscles in all of his limbs, back, neck and face began to tighten. Judge Beam continued.

"This court has, as you know had ample opportunity to visit and revisit this issue with you the first half dozen times you brought it to us. You have displayed nothing if not determination for a cause that I am certain you still view as existing on a higher standard of morals. By the same token, I

grow weary of telling you no, Mr. Noyes-Goode and yet you come back to me, not studied in the law, not very well prepared with anything but a terrific zeal for a work that you say has the best intentions for this child and our present day society. I have, on several occasions taken pause to consider the possibility that you are after some recognition or compensation for this proposed plan of yours. Your interests, the studies you've engaged in and even the status of your current employ have suffered greatly, and at what gain? At what cost does a man continue to pursue a hopeless goal with such obsession? Or should I consider it dedication?" The judge paused for effect.

"Sir?" Replied Noyes-Goode, not certain whether the question was rhetorical or required such a response.

"Do you have something to add, Mr. Noyes-Goode?"

"Your honor, I only wished to clarify whether an answer to that question was what you wanted, or not. Do you, sir?"

"Do I what, Mr. Noyes-Goode? Do I wish to be interrupted further by you while I try to put an end to this nonsense? No I do not! At this stage and after such experience as you've had with me, I should hope that to be clear by now." He paused only to breath in precious air.

"I am tired of the issue that you insist on bringing forth every week. I am tired of arguing the point with you and of trying to explain that I find you to be grossly under-qualified in this undertaking you propose. Furthermore I do not fully understand your intentions. But mostly, I am tired of you, Mr. Noyes-Goode. I have no idea where your ill-mannered nature originated, your attire, even before being jailed for days on end has always depicted to me what I view as a direct insult to this institution around which I have built, not only a career but on which I have based my life. Your display is an irreverent insult to everything I hold dear, and to me on a professional and personal level. With that said, I must say that you have convinced me, sir that you care about this boy. Yes, common concern. I regret to say that I have found a rare quality in your most despicable character. And the quality that I have found has been hard fought on your part. In this business of nonsense that you have insisted on resurrecting each time I have shot you down, you have succeeded in at least one thing, you have restored my hope in humankind to a certain

degree. If there is one man out there that can display this level of care for a boy you don't even know, perhaps there is hope for the rest of us."

A smile began to make its way onto Wayne Noyes-Goode's face. He seemed to think that he had won.

A loud, "MR NOYES-GOODE!!!" Startled him from his thoughts. And judge Beam added,

"If there is something that you'd like to share at this crucial state in this affair I would be happy to postpone my comments sir and yield to you. I cannot guarantee yet that such a choice on your part wouldn't change my present decision. If you do not wish to take such a chance, I suggest that you clear the smirk from your lips and show one small bit of respect for me as I tell you that I am granting you a redesigned version of your request."

Fighting back the urge to laugh, scream, cry or faint all at once, Wayne almost shouted, "No, your honor, I wouldn't think of insulting you any further," through clenched teeth and more emotion than he'd ever felt.

"Well then, I rule that you will be allowed one interview with the boy for every year he has been in this life. I believe this boy to be in an extremely fragile state and expect you to approach him as such. These interviews will be conducted within the confines of the hospital where he now resides. You will not take him out of the facility, but I won't limit the interviews by a specific number of hours. So long as the boy gets his meals and doesn't seem fatigued, a matter I'll leave it to the administrator or the boy himself to decide, you can visit with him as long as necessary. I advise you that the boy may not accept this process as warmly as you expect. This boy, while I believe him to have been let down by his parents, the school systems and our society in general has conducted himself in a manner unbecoming a human being, acting as few grown men have been able to stomach in terms of the horrid atrocities he has manifested. Under no circumstances are you to be alone in any room with him, except the common public areas where others may enter at will and at any time. The boy is to be restrained during all moments that you are together. The hospital administrator assures me that when confronted with his past he becomes violent. And lastly, under no circumstances is he to be

allowed any contact with the outside world, we've damaged him enough. Any contact that you are found to help him make with those people in his life or from his sinister past will result in your defaulting this agreement. Not only will residual interviews be promptly cancelled but also you will face criminal charges for disobeying a direct ruling by this court. I believe that you have found me to be a man of my word, Wayne Noyes-Goode? And yes, I do expect an answer, now."

"Your honor has been very clear on this subject, yes sir."

"Good, now get the hell out of my courtroom. And take this promise with you, if I see you in it again, I can confidently say that you will regret it for the rest of your natural life."

#

Wayne seemed to glide out of the courtroom though his legs felt very weak and wobbly. Out the courtroom door he went, down the long marbled hallway and past the restroom (which he desperately needed right now but thought better of stopping to use) and down the stairs to the fresh air of freedom that he longed to breathe again.

At the bottom of those stairs was a vast foyer that was once the site of extravagant masquerade parties that the governor's held during the late 1800's to early 1950's. But these parties were permanently cancelled when attendance dropped fantastically after a former city recorder that delved deep into the ancestry of the town wrote a book telling all.

The floor here was also marble and Wayne remembered coming here as a child with his grandmother to fight a parking ticket that she had received as a result of parking on the street immediately in front of her old home on Raven Avenue. Still, to this day he marveled at how the floor could be so cold and that he could feel it through the soles of his shoes.

The thoughts rushed back into his mind of the time he had just spent in the courtroom upstairs and he began to get light-headed. He desperately wanted to make it outside and, if possible, to his car before he lost consciousness. If he was going to pass out, he wanted to do it on a soft seat reclining back and safe to remain asleep for hours if necessary. The thought came to his mind that it had been some time since he

parked his car out in the police department's parking lot. Would they have towed it? God, he couldn't believe they'd do that to him. While he wasn't respected as a law enforcement officer anymore, he was easy to like. No, he thought, they wouldn't tow me out of spite, but what worried him more was if they would think it funny or clever for him to come outside and find his vehicle gone.

The next 372 seconds of his life he will never remember, but somehow he made it outside, across the street and the vast lawn of the city park but failed to regain consciousness before he was face down in the pool below the fountain that had existed here for over one hundred years. There were seven steps that lead down to the pond and he had stumbled down several of them, keeping his feet, but in his unfortunate state he finally fell to the ground and slid, face first the few remaining feet between the bottom stair and the edge of the pool.

He was coughing violently from having inhaled a lung full of water when he had fallen. He was too occupied with gasping at breaths and trying to expel the fluid to notice that he had cut himself rather badly on the top of his head and torn both knees out of his jeans and one sleeve of his shirt, scraping and gouging knees, forearm and elbow in the process. His shirtsleeve, or what was left of it was stuck to his wounded arm and tiny bits of gravel and dirt were lodged inside all of the scrapes and cuts. Blood now tainted the water in the vast pool as he steadied himself on his arms at the bottom of the steps.

With as much effort as he could muster he turned himself over, realizing that he could not hold his face out of the water much longer. Laying now, on his back with his head still half hanging over the edge of the pond and his feet up the stairs, he stared at the sky and fell asleep while the gash on his head dripped steadily into the pond below.

Chapter 16 - September 3 Current Year

The boy turned slowly to look at the man. Wayne Goode's eyes were red and puffy. "Mr. Goode, you look as if you have not slept in days."

"Well, I've had a bit of preparation to do. How are you today?"

"I would prefer to dispel with this nonsense to be quite honest. I think you a vulgar, meek and stupid man. What do you think you stand to gain by bothering me? Do you consider yourself a sort of savior, Wayne?"

"I'm just a man. I care and I want to see if we can't help you get back to being a little boy. You certainly should be given..."

"I am a little boy, Goode!" Snapped the child. "Flesh and blood like you"

"Has he been medicated today?" Wayne asked of the orderly who had shown him into the visiting room.

No audible reply, only a slight nod of his head, keeping his eyes on the boy, always on the boy but without making direct eye contact. This man feared the young child before them. But why?

"Recently, then?" Looking directly at the hospital employee.

"Yes sir, two hours ago." The man nodded, still watching the boy. "We were told not to let him see you without medication. AHHH!" The orderly jumped back and screamed as the boy jerked his head toward him. Wayne looked at the boy who sat upright in his hospital bed. He was at the end of his restraints pulling hard against them in an effort to reach the orderly, showing his teeth with a horribly contorted look on his face. Aside from the effort to achieve this posture the boy was not making any other movements, just leaning against the restraints and making it abundantly evident of what he would do to the man if he could only get his hands on him.

"Thank you, orderly, Reggie isn't it?" Wayne asked.

"Yes sir, Mr. Goode. My name's Reggie."

"It's actually Noyes-Goode Reggie, and you may go." Wayne quickly snapped out the words, "Reggie, please tell Doctor Parris I wish to see him at his earliest convenience, would you?"

Another jerk of the boy's body in the direction of Reggie had him moving toward the door before responding. "Yes, Mr. Goode, ah, Noyes-Goode." With that, Reggie, the orderly left the room. Wayne couldn't have known that by the next time he came to visit the boy, Reggie would be unable to deliver the boy to the room, Reggie would be unable to speak, Reggie would be unable to feed himself.

"Disappointed Wayne?" Asked the boy sarcastically.

"Why should I be disappointed?" Asked the therapist while pulling up a chair and making himself comfortable.

The boy retained his sarcastic tone but as for the body language and demeanor toward the recently vacated orderly, he seemed very much at ease now. He continued in a soft-spoken and almost timid voice.

"I am no fucking good to you and your purpose if I am drugged up, right?"

Wayne Noyes-Goode began to make notes on his pad of paper.

Remarkable, the boy can transform from a proper acting young man with the vocabulary of a well-educated college graduate one minute while in the very next his vernacular degrades to one that might make a sailor blush, finally, he is capable of communicating on an intellectual level that resembles a child of his age, slang included. Though there always seems to be edginess to his overall mood. Rather ominous...

"What do you know of the macabre?" Interrupted the boy.

"What do I know of the macabre? Hmm, that's quite a question. Might I ask what brings that subject to your conscious mind just now?"

"OMINOUS, Wayne!" The therapist started slightly. How did the boy know what he had written? The boy continued, "Worrying? Portentous? Gloomy? Warning? Threatening? Menacing? Ill-

omened?" He shouted. "Boding evil? You chose the word Goode. Do you not know what it means?" The boy seemed bored now and sat back in his bed again shaking his head periodically, clearly annoyed at Wayne's surprise and the time it was taking to reply.

"How did you know..."

"What you were writing? Well, it seems *they* have returned. I must need to know more about you. You must be important somehow. Although for the life of me I cannot guess why."

"I must be important somehow?" Wayne paused briefly, "What do you mean *they*? Who is this *they*?"

"I believe you mean who are *they*? Yes?"

"Yes."

"Well, Wayne Goode. This *They*, as you refer to them wrote it."

"Wrote what? Who are you talking about?" Wayne was reeling still, not quite able to figure out how the boy knew what he was writing as he wrote it. He looked from his notes to the boy and back again, then round the room. Given that they were a good six feet or more apart from one another he could not fathom how the boy had done this unless a reflective surface of some kind were near.

"Wayne, pay attention! *They* told me what you wrote just as *they* told me what was written in that thing."

The therapist knew the boy was a genius and was attempting to use his intelligence to try and confuse Wayne and set them on a different course, one of his own choosing.

"O.K." the therapist replied, "I'll bite. What thing did *they* write?"

Exasperated now, "The book. Please keep up with me on some detail. Are you completely out of touch here?"

"What book?"

"Well," the boy began sarcastically. "That question already? What do you know about this place, really? You claim to have

lived here all your life yet you really are ignorant about the history here. I hope you have done some of the research into your family history as I assigned you to do. Meantime let us go a different way, shall we? Have you ever heard the story of Wilfrid M. Voynich, Wayne?"

Noyes-Goode shrugged his shoulders and shook his head in the negative at the same time.

"He bought a case of Coptic manuscripts from a remote and unnamed place in Italy some time ago." At this point the boy paused looking for some sign of recognition from the adult in his company. When he saw nothing but more of the same confusion written on his face as from a few minutes earlier he went on.

"In this purchase he found many rare and sought after works from artists dating back as far as the twelfth century. Quite a treasure really but one of the books was especially mysterious. It was a work written in a completely unknown language and illustrated with odd pictures of unidentifiable plants, animals and nymphs, nymphs some say of the catharses. Do you know of them? Probably not, of course. Well, they are not nymphs of the catharses; they are a bit more, what was your word, ominous? You see, to this date no one has been able to read the manuscript of Voynich. He died and then his widow not long ago sold it and the book changed hands many times since. Finally it ended up donated by some half-wit to a university. Can you believe it? Where it has of course, been locked up since. Oh they are quite stingy at Beinecke. But I know what the book is about for *they* told me."

"How do they know?" Wayne had been drawn into the story now.

"Well, if you put a work of study together yourself you would know what was in it would you not? That," the boy seethed, "is how *they* know, they wrote it. Or at least *they* dictated it to a fellow human of ours, one of the only people who have ever roamed this earth who would ever have been capable of transcribing it for *them*." Wayne puzzled and the boy smirked. "Not a small mystery by itself that you are from the same species as he who received *their* words."

"But," started the therapist, speaking slowly as if to understand the words himself, "but you told me the book was written in the twelfth century. How..."

"Wrong, Wayne Goode! Wrong! You must listen if I am to enjoy myself in this at all. If I do not enjoy myself I shall refuse to see you. If I refuse to see you who will you be able to impress with your acts of selflessness toward a lost little boy such as I? I told you the old man discovered other works dating back to the twelfth century. No, this manuscript, this so-called Voynich Manuscript, now labeled at a rare books library as manuscript 408, was written long before that."

"What did Voynich do for a living?"

"It does not matter, Wayne. My dear man, pay close attention. The fools at that university, scholars my fucking ass, they have tried and Voynich even hired experts to translate it for him. They all look in the wrong places. It is in the practice not the mere reading that the true meaning of the book comes to one."

"Have you seen this book, yourself?"

"No, I told you a rich old man acquired it some time back. Do you think those who believe they own it now would let a boy like me touch this treasure with my grimy little hands?" He held them up as if to demonstrate and the chains clinked softly. "No, I have not seen this book. But there are others, of course."

"You seem to think that I should know this story, why? What has it got to do with me?"

"Once again, Goode you have failed to listen completely. Is that not what you therapists are supposed to do so well? Listen?"

"Well, I, you see I..." Wayne cleared his throat several times, fidgeted in his chair, pointed to his notepad and began again. "I still don't understand..."

"There is much you do not understand, I am beginning to fear you never will. Just the same, you are sacrificing for me, yes? I will sacrifice for you and try to keep filling in what you are

unable to grasp or should we say what you could not fathom?" Goode began writing madly. "Forget the god damned notes will you?" The child screamed. "I will explain how I was able to know this but you must listen now. Stay with me and you will know everything I know. Then you can tell me how you and yours fit into the events leading up to this day. I never said this part of the story had anything to do with you but to understand the part that does concern you requires references to things you can look up, study. Do you know where Edith Voynich lived out the balance of her years? Right near here."

"And Mrs. Voynich is the man's wife, correct?"

"I shall be forced to spoon feed you then? Just as well. Yes, Mrs. Wilfred M. Voynich, Edith was her name. She has written some novels, somewhat interesting themselves inasmuch as a person capable of surmising the evident effects of living with the thing for so many years, not to mention the obsession in the very place she called home, could glean them through her works of fiction. Ha!" The boy laughed. "Fiction indeed! Everything in those stories of hers is tripe without the underlying themes hidden in the very pages she penned with her own hands. You remember I said before the one who transcribed *their* work for them was one of the few men who have graced this place with enough intelligence to undertake such a voluminous task?" Wayne only nodded in the affirmative. The young male continued. "Edith Voynich was not such a person."

The man listening interrupted. "But you say her novel tells a different story if the person reading it is able to decipher the hidden meaning. Are you telling me she had the same intelligence as this man who received the body of work within this manuscript of Voynich?"

"No, I did not say that. The body of work within manuscript 408 is well beyond that of the Voynich bitch. That is precisely why her stories tell a different one than that which she intended. She was so vapid that they were able to use her but it is on a much simpler level than MS408." Shaking his head with disappointment he continued. "*They* are able to connect with people in different ways. The intelligent are those with whom *they* are able to communicate and converse, just as you and I are conversing now, and there is true comprehension between the parties. The vacuous are those whom *they* are able to use, bend to their designs. You would fit in the latter category, Wayne.

I tell you this because you seem to have such a need to personalize this lesson."

"So *they* are able to guide her hand, so to speak? As she writes? But why Edith Voynich?"

"It is important to understand that she was exposed to *their* manuscript many times and for long periods of time. Not so much did *they* guide her hand as *their* essence enveloped her. It became more intrusive upon her subconsciously the more frequently she came in contact with it. So much so that she only had to reside in the same house with it for *them* to become a part of her. Believe me, this was no ordinary home. Wilfred was wealthy I told you. He had several homes, the manuscript traveled with him everywhere he went. When he took his wife to Europe, the manuscript came along with the two of them. Sooner or later the manuscript would have effect on most of the human population if a human came within a few feet the person would more certainly be affected, and only a choice few would notice it. With her it was even easier."

"Yes?" Replied the therapist who was not taking notes any longer. "But what has this to do with a little boy such as yourself? How about we change the subject slightly? Why do you feel it is that you are drawn to the ominous, to use the word again?"

"Have you heard nothing I have said to you just now?" The boy's eyes screwed up into a tight squint of annoyance. "Very well Wayne, you want to know what makes people who they are? Do the things they do? Very well. What makes you who you are Mr. Goode?"

"Noyes-Goode." He replied. "We're not talking about me."

"Oh, yes we are, more than you may know. Perhaps I should say more than you are willing to admit? Perhaps not." He awaited a reply.

Leaning forward on his hands the forty-something year-old man clasped his hands, interlocked his fingers and stared at the floor. He knew now more than ever that the boy wanted to reach out to someone and he wanted so to be that person. He was about to start out on another approach when a light knock came at the door leading out into the hallway, the door opened a crack and

Dr. Martin Parris poked his head just slightly inside the room. Keeping a watchful eye on the boy, in fact never looking away from him the doctor asked, "Wayne, the orderly told me you wanted to see me?" Goode lifted his head and turned toward the voice and just as he did so Parris saw the boy scowl at the side of the therapist's head. There was enough hatred in that expression that Martin Parris started and in doing so he hit his head hard against the door. Suddenly a bright flash of light blinded him temporarily as the dull pain reached its crescendo and slowly subsided. As his head cleared again he saw the boy, no longer shackled to the bed frame strolling across the room toward him.

Chapter 17 - September 22 Last Year

Jacque gave Monica a glance and paused for a moment, not certain what to say to her friend anymore. They had once been very close but since Monica had become a mother none of their group related to her very well anymore. She was different while at the same time none of them could explain why or how she was different.

Monica tried too hard, Jacque thought. Since little Nathan was born Monica was different. Jacque again assured herself that they hadn't treated Monica any different than before. Starting right after the birth she didn't talk to them the same and there was awkwardness when she was around. They'd all mentioned it. The others felt it too and they had made an effort to avoid her. None of them had discussed it. They hadn't made any kind of pact, mind you, but they had slowly begun to grow distant from her.

Jacque tried each time they saw her. Jacque really wanted to make Monica feel welcome but Monica just wouldn't let herself relax. She displayed an attitude that made Jacque feel inferior. As though being a mother somehow gave Monica all the answers to life's little questions, and they all resented it. Jacque still tried whenever Monica was with them.

"You must love him very much." Offered Jacque. "What is it like to love someone that much?" Monica seemed to be in her own world just then and didn't answer.

"Monica!" Anita chastised. "Jacque is talking to you, girl. God, you're such a space cadet today. What's with you, woman?"

"I'm sorry Jacque, what did you say?" Answered Monica, not trying to hide the glare she directed at Anita.

"You must love him, I said." Repeated Jacque.

"Love who, Jacque?" The young mother inquired, having not quite returned from her own thoughts.

"Nathan, of course. Who'd you think I meant, Brad?" She replied sarcastically. "We all know he's a dick to you. Does he still hit you when you argue?"

"Oh, Nathan. Of course I love him. A mother loves her child no matter what."

The girls, even those who had only been eavesdropping while continuing their own conversations reacted to the seeming indifference in Monica's tone as she replied. She was distant, had been all morning but something about her voice told them there wasn't meaning in what she had said.

She went on with more conviction than before, "And Brad, I've pretty much resolved to stay away from that asshole if I can. I really wish he'd have just kept his pecker in his pants." She was definitely bitter and didn't care who knew it but this bitterness seemed to be, for the first time, spilling over to comments about her son.

"Monica! Brad may be an asshole but that isn't Nathan's fault." Jacque wasn't sure what to say but thought this is what her mother might have offered.

"Yeah, well Jacque you just don't know what you're talking about do you? Do you know what it's like to have your life taken away from you while everyone else goes on as though nothing has happened?"

Anita chimed in again, "Well you know, if you'd have kept your legs together you wouldn't be in this situation."

"Is that right?" Asked Monica incredulously.

"Come on now." Interjected Melanie Porter. "Jesus girl, what the fuck are you talking about?" She addressed Anita. "Shit, the last thing we need from you is a sermon on the sanctity of moral chastity. At least when Monica got knocked up she knew who the father was, no question about it..."

"Fuck you, Melanie Porter!" Replied Anita hotly. "I'm smart enough to have learned the phrase, 'No glove, no love' honey."

"Well, Brad and Monica were in love, its different if you're in love." Added Jacque.

"Is that what Carl told you, Jacque. How many times've you let him dip his whip without a rubber?"

"That's enough!" Shouted Monica. "None of us knows anything about being in love. None of us has been in love. I never loved Brad and he sure as hell doesn't love me. Shit, I haven't seen him since last Tuesday. That's the way I have to get along now so you all better think about it carefully before some of you get stuck in the same place I am, a husband I don't want and who doesn't want me, a life gone down the toilet, a child I couldn't take care of even if I liked him..." She stopped abruptly, shocked at having made this last comment. The rest of the girls present were so quiet you could hear the leaves on the trees rustling in the light wind.

Several minutes went by and Monica felt every emotion possible. Among her feelings were relief at having finally said it out loud, pain at having uttered such a cold statement about her own child, and she also shivered at the thought that her life was hopeless. She felt as if she were stuck somewhere she didn't want to be and yet didn't dare tell anyone that she had actually meant what she'd said about not liking the child.

"Oh no. No you don't mean that." Said Jacque, finally breaking the silence. You can't."

"Maybe she does, Jacque." Offered Melanie.

"Well, don't expect me to feel bad for you." Anita added coldly. "You're a fuckin' slut and that's all there is to it. Keep your panties on you skanks. Keep your panties on and your legs together and you won't be askin' us to feel bad for you someday like poor little Monica here."

"Oh fuck you! Anita." Melanie began to defend the young mother.

"No, Melanie. She's right." Said Monica holding up a hand as a signal to stop. "I am a slut simply because everybody knows that Brad and I have done it together. Because I did get myself knocked up and now everybody knows it. If no one knew I could be self-righteous too. I just have to ignore them," she jerked her head toward Anita, "and remember that there is no one but myself to blame."

"To hear it correctly, some people knew it before you got pregnant." Anita suggested.

Jacque wanted so bad to tell Anita just what a bitch she was being but remembered how Monica had always told her to let Anita say what she wants. 'Let her say what she wants, she'll make an asshole out of herself and if nobody reacts to her, she'll shut up soon enough. But egg her on or argue with her and even if she doesn't believe her own bullshit she'll argue about the subject indefinitely just for argument's sake.'

"Oh what the hell is that supposed to mean, Anita?" Monica was bothered herself now.

"Oh, nothing. I just heard from a fairly reliable source that that weird kid who used to spy on you quite often even watched you and Brad. Of course, you didn't know that, did you Monica?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Anita. I don't know any weird little kids." She said this more because she knew the little boy about whom Anita was speaking. She also knew that the little boy was, shall we say, weird. But she felt sorry for him. He did follow her around quite a lot and she imagined that he was there somewhere, at this moment, listening to their conversation. She didn't want to hurt his feelings. He had a crush on her and she thought it was cute. Though she knew inside that she had encouraged some very inappropriate behavior in him in the past.

She always kind of liked the little boy when no one else seemed to care that he was around. The older boys mistreated him awfully and Monica was the only person who seemed to get the least bit angry about it when it happened. Even his own parents never did anything about it, they seemed to know he was weird and felt that somehow he deserved the abuse just for being so weird. They were ashamed of him, or so it seemed.

"You know damn well who I'm talkin' about, that little creep you're always stickin' up for in the neighborhood. What is it with you and the little pervert? I bet you knew he was watching and you let him. I bet it made fuckin' Brad more exciting. Didn't it? Did you tell the little sicko whenever you and Brad were goin' to do it and where?"

"All right, that's enough!" Melanie Porter exclaimed. "Monica, just ignore her, you know how she gets."

"How could you say it, Monica?" Asked Jacque. "He's your own little boy. You can't mean you don't like him."

"Sure she does, Jacque. She has no sense of responsibility for the life she's brought into this world out of her own carelessness." Anita answered.

"I swear to god, Anita if you don't shut up..."

"What're you going to do about it, Melanie?" Anita stood up. "You're a little shit you know, you better just shut up and be glad I don't kick your ass." She added, "You little bitch!"

"You two both shut up!" They didn't acknowledge Jacque's words. "Now Monica, please you must realize that what you're saying isn't right. He's your own child. Don't say such things. You've got to love that baby. You can't leave it up to Brad."

"I'm only telling you Jacque, that I'm not happy and something has got to change or I swear it, I'll go mad, I'll crack up. When I say I don't like him I only mean that I resent the situation and of course not that it's his fault at all."

"Well a mother just can't say such things. Its not right for a mother to say such things."

Anita and Melanie had continued their own argument and had moved aside from Jacque and Monica. They were posturing and name-calling as before.

"Jacque you don't know what its like. You can't understand how it feels to be dead at seventeen years of age." Monica went on and probably too far she thought.

"But you're not dead Monica. You're alive and you've created a human life. He's a beautiful baby. I understand that you created that life with someone who is not who he seemed to be before, but you've done something special, you need to look at it that way."

"You're right about one thing." Monica stated flatly, "The Goddess only knows that I am not dead. It'd be better if I were, or if someone else were. Nathan's beauty is a big part of the problem. Brad wasn't abusive before the baby was born. Nathan's such an effeminate boy Brad can't handle it."

In spite of their shouting the two girls who had been arguing heard this and fell silent immediately.

"You want me to kill that bastard husband of yours, honey?" Anita joked.

"Yeah," added Melanie, "Maybe you could fuck him to death slut. It'd be just as though he was another of your cheap gigolos from the football team. What the hell's one more, give or take?"

"Melanie!" Shouted Jacque.

"Oh, don't worry Jacque dear." Said Anita. "Monica doesn't like him anyway and besides, I think he's kinda cute, I wouldn't mind. Fuck him to death, huh? Sounds fun. Though for him I'm jail bait now."

"Anita your such a slut."

"I know it darlin'. But at least I'd be smart enough to make him wear a rubber. Don't wanna end up in poor Monica's same situation. Hell, I'd probably make him wear two." Anita picked up her bag and books and added, "Goodbye girls. You're boring me to death. Maybe I will go see if Brad's due for a smoke break at work." And with that she walked away.

Melanie sat down next to Monica and put her arm around her shoulders as a form of consolation. Jacque just sat staring at Anita's back as she walked away from their small group.

"Why do we hang out with her?" She asked.

"Oh hell. Not this again."

"No, Melanie! Why do we have anything to do with her? When's the last time we had any fun with her?"

"We've known Anita since third grade, Jacque. You don't just find new friends."

"Maybe we should." Suggested Monica.

"Oh, don't you start listening to little Jacque girl, Moni. You know she's the dumbest girl we've ever known. Hell, even Jacque knows she's stupid."

"Yeah I do know I'm dumb and naïve too, but I'm not mean to people who're supposed to be my friends just for the sake of being nasty." Jacque replied, surprisingly unaffected by Melanie calling her stupid.

"Monica needs us right now Jacque, just forget about Anita would ya?"

"Listen you two, its not that I don't appreciate you trying to cheer me up. But this is something I've just got to resolve myself. I can't go on like this, it's killing me." Tears began to form in the corners of Jacque's eyes, "Monica, please don't talk about killing yourself. I couldn't bear it if you did something stupid like that. We love you honey, we'll help you any way we can, just don't talk about suicide."

Having comprehended what she thought the young mother had actually meant, Melanie answered for Monica. "I don't think she was talking about killing herself, Jacque."

"She's right, Jacque. I don't want to kill myself. I'm just tired of being a mother. I don't think I was meant to be one, especially not at our age. I'm too young and my life feels ended."

"You know, there are other options." Jacque offered, trying to be helpful again.

"My parents would never dream of letting me put him up for adoption. They told me there was no way that would happen back when we told them I was pregnant. 'No adoptions! No abortions! Not in this family. We take our responsibilities seriously in this family little miss.'" Monica had mimicked her mother's mannerisms and tone of voice for the girls as she had shared the philosophies of Mrs. Bishop. They knew the impersonation very well. It was really quite good.

"It really isn't their decision to make you know. You could decide on your own." It was Melanie's attempt at an idea this time.

"And what do you think Brad would do to me if he found out, Melanie? Oh, I'm sure he'd be perfectly understanding."

"But Monica, I've heard him say he can't stand the fat little fucker..."

"Melanie!"

"Sorry, Jacque. But I am using his words, not mine."

"All the same, you don't need to talk about a baby like that, not Monica's baby, not right in front of her."

"Jacque," Monica began, "don't you think I've heard it from Brad a hundred times?"

"You shouldn't hear it from everyone."

"It's all right, Jacque." Monica reassured her.

Melanie continued, "If Brad doesn't like him, why would he care if he were adopted to someone who might want him?"

"You know Brad. He may look at his son as feminine and he may be ashamed but he still holds out hope that Nathan will grow out of it one day. So do I. The sooner the better."

"So you really are fucked." Melanie mumbled.

"I am fucked. But like Mrs. Bishop says, 'you shouldn't have been messing around with boys. They only want one thing.' Yeah, I really am fucked. Who knows, maybe I'll join a convent and disappear from the face of the earth."

"Yeah, you in a convent. Imagine that Jacque, this witch in a convent. Just where would you draw your circle then? You know they frown on witchcraft in most nunneries, don't you?"

"They just don't know what they're missing." She sighed. "Get a few of those frustrated nuns naked, dancing and chanting to the goddess and they might just loosen up."

"Yeah," Jacque replied. "And maybe Carl won't try to get in my pants tonight." They all laughed at Jacque. She even laughed at herself. Monica honestly believed at that moment that Jacque

was still a virgin. She also caught herself wondering whether Carl would even know what to do if Jacque gave in someday.

"Well, I've gotta go you two. Thanks again, for trying to cheer me up." Monica stood up, feeling no better than when she'd come out to the football field to visit with the girls; and it showed.

Jacque asked, "You all right, Moni?"

"I don't know, Jacque, I just don't know."

#

Monica watched her feet move one in front of the other, side by side as she made her way across the bright green grass of the practice football field toward her home. The walk would take her a good twenty minutes. Maybe she'd come up with a plan before she got there and maybe that plan would prevent her from having to go inside that house ever again.

Brad had a good job for a High School kid, but he worked for his cousin and didn't have any ambition to look elsewhere. As a result, they couldn't afford to rent their own place now, after two years of marriage anymore than they had when they were first wed nearly two years ago. This was especially troubling for her because it meant that they had to live with her parents until such time as Brad got more motivated or his cousin finally followed through on his threats to fire him. Either way, Monica was destined to live at her parents while trying to raise a child she didn't want.

She had given thought to the idea that she could get a job herself once Nathan got old enough for preschool. At least that would get her out of the house, away from her mother, away from Nathan. It wasn't that she didn't love him, but she hated him. It wasn't that she hated him, but she didn't like him. It wasn't that she didn't like him, but there was something wrong with him. It was almost as though he were retarded or something. Could Brad have been right? Is it possible for babies to be born gay? Oh, goddess, she thought. "I'm the mother of a fucking gay retard."

"Oh Goddess," NOT "Oh God," because this was her way. She'd never been sold on the Christian way. She had always felt that

something was there, some so-called Supreme Being, but Jesus, God and that whole thing wasn't for her. She just didn't believe, never had.

When she found Wicca, she felt as though she had come home from travels that had lasted a lifetime. For the first time in her life she felt as if she belonged to something. Pagan Born, Worshipping the Goddess and the mother earth made her feel well again. It always seemed to regenerate the energy that so many experiences and so many people in her life sapped from her at every turn. But the Goddess seemed to have deserted her of late and she thought she knew why. The resentment she felt for her child had affected her worship. She had spent three years now as a solitary practitioner and couldn't imagine worshipping in a group but desperately needed something to inspire her again.

Her religion was the one thing in her life she had found to be too personal to allow someone, anyone else to influence in this time of her life. If it came from within herself or from within her circle of worship she felt it was divinely guided. When it came from another human being it always felt too tainted.

At this moment she was little more than a young mother. Nearly a young single mother for what that was worth. She gave little thought to the fact that because her mother was always home she could pretty well come and go as she pleased, within reason. Learning how much of being gone was too much took a very short time and she avoided pushing her parents' patience to the point of being lectured by them on the responsible ways of parenting. Monica did not feel as though they had been stellar examples of parenting and she was plenty screwed up as a result of their inadequacies, but unfortunately for her nothing had changed about the 'If you're going to live under our roof, you'll live by our rules,' philosophy. She mouthed the words, mocking her father this time and as she jerked her forefinger from side to side she was surprised to physically bump into a little boy who had not been there one second and yet seemed to appear out of nowhere to be there an instant later.

"Hi Monica. How are you today?" Asked the little boy.

She was a bit startled and though the boy was much younger than she'd been she was embarrassed at having been interrupted while impersonating her father.

"Oh, it's you. Hi. Yeah, I'm all right. Staying outta trouble?"

"I am always staying away from things that could cause me trouble Monica Bishop. It is just that I cannot seem to hide from it. Would you take a minute or two just to sit down with me and talk? I want to discuss something with you."

"Sure, but I don't have a lot of time, O.K.?" She winked and tousled his hair gently.

"Oh sure. I have just been thinking a lot you know. I spend a lot of time by myself and I think a lot." He said. Under a tree next to the sidewalk by an abandoned grocery store, he sat down.

She puzzled at the mysteriously well-groomed patch of grass under the tree and it was a hot day anyway, so she found herself very susceptible to the idea. Besides, she really didn't want to go home just yet. This boy had always had a little crush on Monica and right now she could use a little worship from someone in whose eyes she could do no wrong.

Brushing the hair back from his face to reveal his deep blue eyes she caught herself staring at them for an extra second. She did not notice but the hair at the back of his neck stood up and his body was instantly covered with the tiny bumps of goose flesh that he experienced only when she touched him with her soft skin. He was truly a young boy but he had seen things a boy his age should not see. To be honest, a boy twice his age should not see what he had already seen in his young life.

She broke her gaze into those eyes of his with some great effort and sat down with her back against the tree. The place where she sat put her directly in front of him but a few feet away and his upper lip twitched and curled up at the corner as instant anger shot through him. He was angry that she had not set closer to him, angry that she had no feelings for him to match those that he'd always felt for her.

As he began to speak to her of his great admiration for her and gratitude for the way she defended him when the younger boys battered him she found herself drifting back into thoughts of her own despair. It was an effort to pay any attention to what the boy said but she had kept up with the general points he made

so far when suddenly he spoke of listening to her recent conversation with Melanie and Jacque on the football field.

"I will never be an athlete you know." He told her with sullen eyes that never diverted their gaze from her or her body. He counted her breaths and how many times she faded into and out of coherence. He knew she was not listening to him but falling further into misery and had not fooled himself before when trying to decide if he should stop her and ask her to sit with him for awhile. She would not listen much. She cared about him but she did not feel the real love for him that he had always felt for her. Furthermore, he knew what was on her mind for it was on his mind too. How do we get rid of the two people causing her the most pain and suffering she had ever experienced? And for him, he wondered how they could get rid of the fat little fuck (her child) and that inbred, redneck husband of hers once and for all so that he could have her to himself. But he was a little boy, and somewhere inside himself he knew that she would never love him. Still, he had to offer, he had to help her if he could.

"See, you girls migrate to athletes. Even when there are no athletes around, even when its just a bullshit session with the other girls you still find your way to the football fields so that you might feel the presence of testosterone."

"What kind of way is this for a boy like you to be talking? And what do you know of bull sessions with the girls? Were you listening to our conversation back there? Have you been following me again?"

He was fidgeting and looking for a way out of the spotlight in which he'd found himself when she let him off the hook.

"Listen, its o.k. But you've got to learn not to eavesdrop on other people's private conversations. I think it's cute. I'm flattered, really. Don't worry about it."

He didn't relax immediately. Instead his eyes darted from her face to her shoe, from her shoe to a crack in the sidewalk; from the crack in the sidewalk back to her face when her smile reassured him and he breathed out heavily. He didn't begin speaking again for a minute or two and this gave Monica time to wonder to herself at how well spoken he was. Perhaps he was a little older than she had guessed him to be. She laughed a

short sharp laugh upon thinking that he couldn't be old enough to explain his vocabulary and mastery of the language that she and her friends butchered quite frequently.

When she laughed he thought it was at him and he reacted in a way that betrayed his thoughts to her. Instantly she explained herself, "I'm only laughing at how beautifully you express yourself."

"I amuse you. Great. You know that somehow that was not what I would have hoped to accomplish."

"No, no I only mean that at our age and with a lot more education my girlfriends and I cannot express ourselves so well as you do. When I laughed I only thought that we are pathetic. If you've learned as much as you obviously have, what could we have done had we applied ourselves a little more?"

"Now you sound just like your father."

She wasn't certain how to react. The air between them and immediately around the area where they sat became cold and heavy at once. She caught sight of his deep blue eyes again and found herself trapped in contact with him for several minutes. In those eyes was a knowing element and it seemed he was trying to communicate vast volumes of knowledge to her in a single instant. She felt he knew her just by the feeling in his stare, but she knew that it was not a warm familiarity it was foreboding.