

Adam

A Novel in Two Parts



Richard Allen Stotts

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Adam

By Richard Allen Stotts

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Part One
A Ward of The Nation

End game

The collection of government and chartered civilian helicopters had learned from hard experience not to press closer than a mile to the boy, those that did found themselves making emergency landings with fuel supply problems. Pinching a fuel line to constrict the flow was a piece of cake. The approaching ring of what in better times had been the FBI was the real problem; the so-called agents knew that firearms were useless against their quarry, so they were issued with wooden baseball bats. The boy finally realized that he had lost the game, there were simply too many to take out without killing them. At this point in his life

he knew that he could never harden himself enough to take so many lives.

Less than six months ago Adam had been America's hero. The boy's 'special' abilities had been utilized by the government and its various intelligence agencies in both well-publicized operations that had totally dominated the news, and on deep black operations that would never see the light of day. Since the age of eight he had been finding the lost and solving the unsolvable. He had only just turned twelve when his government began doing it's very best to destroy him. They feared what they could no longer control.

Adam was by now just too physically and mentally worn down to run any further. He finally just sat down to rest and to wait for the arrival of the soulless bastards, hoping that it wouldn't hurt too much when they fell upon him. The boy remembered something that his doctor had once told him as she prepared to take a blood sample. He really hated needles.

“Close your eyes and think nice thoughts.”

So he did.

Famous Potatoes

Idaho was a fine place to be a kid, but it would be a much better place if you had someone you could point at and call your parents. It helped even more if you weren't the designated runt of the house. But most of all it helped if you didn't give the people around you a galloping case of the 'willies'.

Adam had been at his latest group home for almost six days now without any major incident, almost a record. Five other boys shared the average looking house with him. Four of them, aged seven to ten, acted at least marginally human. Brian Alsop was the number five, and the designated house bully. At eleven, Brian was the oldest, the biggest, the meanest, and of course the dimmest bulb in the building. In a short while Brian's limited perception of his fellow man would be forever altered.

It was allowance day, in theory two entire dollars a week. For Brian it was twelve dollars a week after his collections were made. In return for not altering the other five boy's features, four of them readily gave the bully their weekly pittance and agreed to keep quiet about it. Being the new guy, Adam had failed to see the wisdom in this system of wealth redistribution. The boy had plans for his two dollars; he intended to save up for his favorite computer magazine (\$4.50!). When Adam demurred on Brian's pointed request for his modest funds the stage was set for a show down, big time.

The group home's garage had been converted into a simple rec room; it was here that Brian cornered the home's newest inmate.

"You little turd! Cough up the two bucks or kiss your skinny ass good by!" Brian was eager to pound some flesh, he secretly hoped the new kid would give him the excuse.

The situation now seemed perfectly clear to the new boy. Adam stepped back two paces and said, "Try to get a grip Brian. Besides, I think you've dropped

something.”

Brian’s skull was several millimeters thicker than the norm, but it slowly dawned on him that his Levi’s and Fruit of The Loom’s were somehow now positioned down around his pudgy ankles. Unable to process the mechanics of his predicament, Brian attempted a step backwards and immediately found his self sitting, after one distinct bounce, on the cold tile floor. When he tried to get up the resident bully failed to notice that both of his shoelaces had somehow become one knotted mass of intertwined confusion. Brian landed on his ample stomach this time; his language became limited to simple four letter oaths.

At this stage in the proceedings Adam took the opportunity to head for the back yard or points east. Judicious applications of his abilities had saved Adam’s small butt on more than one occasion in the past. The downside was that you then tended to be branded as being seriously strange and were moved on to yet another county run warehouse. Adam was

indeed seriously strange, not a bad strange, he was just so very different. He had some very odd abilities.

Like a bull entering the Plaza de Toro's, Brian charged out of the back door, his dull gray eyes finally spotting the small blond haired figure that was at this moment trying to disappear into the shrubbery. His southbound garments once more ensnaring his ankles abruptly halted the bully's advance.

Impact, grunt, dust rising, hysterical blaspheming.

"You weird little piece of rat shit! I know you're doing this! What the hell kind of fucking freak are you anyway?"

Brian was deeply into losing all control by now. The house nemesis pulled off his again entangled shoes, stood, and then yanked up his pants into their approximately correct position. Like a boa constrictor with its eyes on a rat, Brian slowly advanced on his prey.

Adam had another defensive weapon in his odd arsenal, he didn't like to use it since there was a chance of really hurting someone, or worse. This seemed to be one of those 'him or me' situations, so from ten feet away the small blond kid gently applied some localized pressure to the blood vessels that supplied Brian's simple brain. If you did it slowly enough, the person on the receiving end would feel woozy and sink slowly to the ground, do it too fast and they dropped like a rock, do it too long and they would never wake up, a prospect that was too awful to think about. Adam got it right this time and the bully did a slow, wobbly collapse onto the dusty lawn, completely passing out as his head gently contacted the earth. Adam held the pressure for a few seconds more before releasing the invisible tourniquet. When Brian's simple brain had managed to re-boot itself a few minutes later, his first sight was of Adam sitting on his haunches in front of him.

“Have we learned anything at all today?” Adam asked pleasantly.

“Get away from me! I don’t want your money, just leave me be!” Thoughts of any monetary gain that day were no longer in Brian’s head.

“I will Brian, but first you have to promise me that you’ll stop taking everyone’s money.” Adam sensed that he had the bully on the ropes.

“Yes! Puh-please, anything!” Brian was advancing into serious blubbering; he then wet himself quite thoroughly at this point.

“Good deal. I think you need a nice hot shower right now, you seem a bit sweaty and over stressed at the moment.”

Any eight year old who on occasion talked as if he were about forty-seven also gave people an uneasy feeling.

The four other denizens of the group home had watched slack jawed as the small drama played out in the back yard. As Adam walked toward them on his way back into the house they kept a discrete distance and tried to avoid any eye contact with the weird blonde kid. The other boys couldn’t decide whether to slap Adam on the back to congratulate

him, or to simply head for Iowa without further delay.

Mrs. Lewis was the house 'mother' for the group home. She had heard the yelling coming from the garage and back yard; no real screams of pain were forthcoming so she had tuned it all out. She was not unkind or unpleasant to her charges; she also wasn't very organized either.

As Adam passed her small cluttered office she was deeply into rooting around for a lost document of some importance.

"Lose something, Mrs. L?" He asked quietly.

"I can't find that blasted supplies reimbursement form," she fumed, "go on son, you can't help!"

Adam hesitated a moment, then hunkered down to retrieve a pale green sheet of paper from the middle of one of the many stacks on the floor.

"Here you go Mrs. L, you must have just misfiled it or something."

The flustered woman sat heavily in her chair and just stared at the back of the departing boy's head.

All of his life Adam had always known where to find anything that was lost or missing. He always went straight to the missing item without any fuss or fanfare, he just knew. This ability didn't help to keep people calm and collected either.

Later that afternoon there was an announcement of some importance. Early tomorrow, Adam and the other boys would leave to go on an overnight camping trip to the mountains with Deputy Sheriff Waters riding herd. For some reason he was unwilling to discuss, Brian had elected not to be included as one of the happy campers. Adam was less than enthusiastic himself about the expedition but kept his thoughts to himself. "Dirt, bugs, sunburn, freezing water and bad food. Oh joy!"

Deputy Ben Waters enjoyed taking the occasional batch of waifs camping, more importantly he enjoyed getting away from the screeching harpy that he was married to. The kids seemed to (mostly) appreciate getting outdoors and getting grubby.

There was a new kid along this trip, Adam something or other. He had blond hair, deep blue almost purple eyes, scrawny for his age, and just a bit creepy. Not bad creepy, just sort of on a different wavelength. The new boy surely didn't talk much like a kid; he used big words and made you feel as if you should have paid more attention during your education. The other kids were happy to let him sit in the front seat of the car, they seemed uneasy being in close proximity to him.

The drive to the mountain lake was a mercifully short forty minutes, much longer than that and a car full of young males were likely to need a shot of pepper spray to restore order.

The recreational area consisted of a small to medium sized lake ringed with 'rustic' campsites (bring a shovel and drinking water). The mountains sloping up from the lake once bustled with gold and silver mining operations, tailings and closed off shafts dotted the hillsides.

As the off duty officer supervised the unloading, tent pitching, and general confusion, he took notice of some sort of activity across the lake. There were several forest ranger four-by's and a couple of his department's cruisers clustered along the access road. The new kid had also taken note and just stood quietly staring at the assembled vehicles.

"I wonder what that's all about?" Deputy Waters said mostly to himself.

Adam pointed to the rocky slope above where all of the vehicles were parked. "There's a little girl who's fallen down one of those hole things over there, on that hill. Her leg's hurt too."

The large peace officer peered down at the short blond kid as if the boy had just beamed down from the Starship Enterprise.

"Now who told you that? We just got here for Pete's sake!"

"Maybe we should go over there and tell them where she is, they're not looking in the right place!" Adam seemed to be getting very upset with the situation.

“Look son, making up stories like that can get you in serious trouble. We’ll all walk over there just to see what’s going on, probably some drunk got in a fight with his old lady or something.”

“I’m not making anything up sir.” The boy was used to such disbelief, still it would be nice if he didn’t have to go through the usual ‘you’re lying’ song and dance routine just for one time.

The deputy and his four escorts trooped the half mile around to the site of all the commotion, along the way he kept glancing down at Adam, trying to decide if the kid was just a creative liar or seriously deranged. When the small procession reached the center of all the commotion Deputy Waters shook hands with one of the uniformed deputies he knew from his department.

“Hi Wally. What’s the commotion here?”

“Those people over there seem to have misplaced their daughter.” He indicated a couple sitting together on a log amid the confusion. “The girl, name’s Mary, went missing about three hours

ago, we've been looking for a couple of hours now. We notified Search and Rescue, they should have a team here in about twenty minutes or so."

Waters just stood and stared at Adam for a few moments, something made the back of his neck tingle just a little bit.

"Wally, this is going to sound a bit strange, well... a lot strange. See that little blond kid, name's Adam. Just after we pulled into the campground across the way there he tells me that a little girl had fallen down a hole on the side of that hill over there. He didn't sound like he was making it up either, said her leg was hurt too." Waters knew that he must sound like an inferior episode of the X-Files.

"You're trying to me that the kid's one of them psychics, Ben?"

"I dunno what he is Wally, but me and the kids are gonna hike over there to where he says the girl is, it can't hurt anything. I've seen enough strange shit in my life not to give it a shot."

"Okay, Agent Mulder. Just in case, take one of those radios over there on the picnic table and give us a shout if you turn up something." Wally thought

that the off duty deputy had lost a few gear teeth, but what the hey?

Waters called Adam over and told him to lead the way, and that if he were making this all up he would get tossed into the very cold lake, twice. The boy seemed unperturbed at the prospect of a cold dunking and started off toward the gravel slope.

With Adam following God knew what for directions, Deputy Waters and the three other rather subdued boys trailed along behind. The footing was a bit dicey, lots of loose tailings and gravel, an occasional scrubby looking bush or tree broke the monotony. Just a few hundred yards up the slope the boy stopped beside one of the bushes, got down on his stomach and partially disappeared from sight. There was indeed a small opening.

“Hey! Mary! Mar-eee! Wake up!” Adam yelled down into the inky blackness.

“Get back son, let me see!” Waters grabbed the boy by his jeans waistband and pulled him up and

out of the way.

The deputy strained to make out anything in the narrow dark opening. After his eyes had adjusted to the dim light he could just make out the girl's white T-shirt and her blonde hair.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! She's down there!” Waters sat back and again just stared at the seemingly unperturbed Adam. The fact that no one had mentioned the girl's name to the boy escaped him for the moment; he did manage to remember the radio he was carrying.

“Base, this is Waters. We've located the girl. Get up here with some rope and something to dig with. I think we'll need a stretcher too, the boy said that the girl's leg is hurt.”

Wally was the first to reach them, gasping and huffing from the run up the slope; he had some brown nylon rope and a shovel with him. Both deputies exchanged silent 'how in the hells' before starting to clear away the loose debris and rocks from around the hole.

“I'll bet this is an air shaft or something left over

from all the old diggings around here!” Puffed Wally. “It looks mostly caved in or she could have dropped halfway to Tibet.”

Adam and the other boys moved back a ways and hunkered down to watch all the excitement, as about half of the population of Idaho seemed to be swarming up the slope toward them. The girl’s hysterical mother along with her rattled father were led up to the edge of the opening. The mother was finally able to get the small girl to respond to her shouts, the small answering voice said that she was thirsty and that her leg really hurts. After about thirty minutes of furious digging and clawing, and some not inconsiderable cursing, one of the skinnier park rangers was able to wriggle down far enough to grab the small girl’s arms and pull her up and out of the opening. A civilian medivac helicopter had arrived by then and was waiting down below on the access road. The paramedic’s examination revealed that her left leg had what was probably a simple fracture below the knee. The girl was then flown off to Boise; her parents would be driven there

in a sheriff's cruiser.

Deputy Waters then had to explain to the assembled rescuers just how in the hell did they know where to look. When he had finished speaking things were pin-drop quiet for a long time. The assembled law enforcement officers and park rangers stood looking at one another, and then at the small boy perched on a rock. Several men made it a point to quietly shake the child's hand and thank him for what he had been able to do, most didn't really know how to respond and simply wandered off shaking their heads. Before leaving, the missing girl's parents administered a severe hugging and kissing upon Adam, who then managed a very passable blush and grin. Adam finally brought the day back into some sort of focus by asking what was for dinner.

As the deputy and his charges hiked back to their campsite a camera crew from one of the local television stations drove past them on its way to the assembled rescue vehicles, a bit late as usual.

Eventually the news crew found their way back to the campsite occupied by Waters and the boys. Once more the deputy was made to recount the events of the day, if he had been thinking straight he would have said “no comment.” The reporter’s attempt to get anything out of Adam was not a notable success; Waters did have the presence of mind to keep them away from Adam and did not give them his name. The reporter had to settle for some rather distant footage of all of the boys wading in the cold lake in just their under shorts (much to their later amusement and embarrassment).

Dinner was weenies and beans (mostly beans), followed by s’mores and hot chocolate. Waters was glad he would have his own tent that night. Later in the evening when the boys had wound down Waters began to ask the small kid sitting next to him on the log some hard questions.

“Tell me Adam, how did you know?”

“I never know how to explain why I know things. It’s sort of like trying to explain colors to a blind person I guess.”

“Do you see like a... vision, or something?”

“I’m not sure what a vision is. Right now you know where your wallet is don’t you?”

“Sure. I’m sitting on it.”

“It’s the same feeling when I know something. It just seems like it’s an obvious thing.”

Waters had to keep reminding himself that he was talking to an eight-year old boy. “Can you do anything else?”

“Anything weird you mean?”

“I suppose so. This is sort of hard for me to come to grips with.”

“I know. Yes I can.”

“Well, what?”

“There’s a word, I looked it up once, telekinesis. Do you know what it means?”

“Haven’t a clue.” Waters responded.

“Moving or affecting an object with just a thought.”

“And you can do that?”

“Yes.”

“Show me then.”

There was still a couple of marshmallows left in

the plastic bag near the fire. The bag seemed to rustle a little as if a mouse might be inside, then one of the white puffballs floated slowly out of the bag and positioned itself about six inches in front of the deputy's nose. The three boys across the fire shut up and made small o's with their mouths, Waters simply froze up. When the marshmallow had finished returning itself to the bag the deputy resumed breathing.

“Jesus wept.” Waters croaked.

“Yes he did,” Adam replied, “now you know why I never live in one place very long. I give everyone the heebie jeebies. I can't help what I am, I wish I could.”

Eventually the deputy composed himself enough to herd the boys off to their tents and sleeping bags. It upset Waters that the other boys crowded into one tent and made Adam sleep in the second tent by himself, he wanted to say something to them but he bit his tongue and didn't. For a long time the deputy just sat looking into the remains of the fire, it would be accurate to say that he was in a mild state of

shock. When he finally gathered his wits enough to turn in he wished he had broken his own rule about never bringing any alcohol along on these outings.

The ride home the next day was rather subdued. Adam sat next to him in the front, the other three boys were again happy to be in the rear seat.

Waters kept glancing at the small boy next to him, not sure what to expect next.

The deputy finally asked the boy, “Have you ever helped the police before, to find people, or to find missing things?”

“I find stuff all the time for people. I’ve never done anything for the police though. Car keys, dogs and cats mostly.”

“If we asked you to track someone down who was lost or missing, or to find something missing, could you do that?”

“Sure. Why not?”

Waters had to keep reminding himself about the floating marshmallow and had he really seen that? He found himself parked in front of the boy’s group

home, only vaguely aware of having driven there. The three boys in the back seat tumbled out and dashed into the house. Adam sat for a moment and looked up at the man.

“Thanks for the camping trip. It was nice talking to someone who didn’t totally freak out.”

“It was my pleasure Adam, although I’m afraid I may have ‘freaked out ‘ just a bit. I’m glad to know you, son.” Waters shook the boy’s hand. “Now help me unload some of this junk.”

After carting in sleeping bags and assorted paraphernalia Adam headed for the bathroom and Waters headed for Mrs. Lewis’s cluttered office.

“We need to talk.” Waters announced.

“Which one of them committed a felony this time?” Mrs. L gave a small sigh of resignation.

“None of them, there’s no problem with the boys. Tell me what you know about Adam.”

“He’s been a ward of some sort of agency almost his entire life, since he was just a baby.”

“Why no adoption?”

“His records show there was an adoption when

he was two months old. His would-be parents returned him after two weeks, no reason recorded as to why.”

“What about his biological parents?”

“He was found in a bus station rest room, no trace of the mother or father, no birth records ever turned up.

“I have a story to tell you.” Waters sat down and carefully recited the events at the lake the previous day; he omitted the part about the floating marshmallow.

“If you were talking about any other kid I have here I would see you out the front door. Adam’s only been with us a few days, but it’s pretty obvious there’s something very different about him. He’s always trying to be nice to the other kids and myself, but there’s just something else there besides an eight year old boy.”

Betty Lewis then recounted the episode with the lost form.

“He told me he can always find stuff,” Waters

replied, “is there anything else you know about him?”

“His IQ tested out very high, they think. I guess he didn’t quite fit their molds. He likes computer stuff, he can play the piano if one’s available, we don’t have one here, naturally. No health problems, not even a cold.”

Waters said, “I can’t believe no one’s ever adopted him, he’s really a pretty nice kid.”

“His transfer record is loaded with “incompatible personality” and “fails to fit in.” Personally I think that’s a crock, he just makes people feel uncomfortable for some reason. He was with one foster couple for about six months, they taught him the piano. Then the wife died in an auto accident and her husband just couldn’t handle things anymore, the boy’s been shuffled around ever since.”

“What do we do next?” Waters asked.

“Well, I need my job, you probably need yours. If we went public with a wild tale like this we wouldn’t be able to get jobs at McDonalds flipping burgers.”

“It’s already public.”

The deputy had forgotten to tell her about the television crew.

The networks had picked up the local story about the unusual rescue of the girl as a human-interest segment. It was a slow news week and by the next morning there were two satellite trucks parked in front of the group home. The knocking on the door had begun around four in the morning, eventually Mrs. Lewis had to call the police to shove the mob of reporters off of the property. Deputy Waters wisely chose to keep a very low profile during this period.

About nine o'clock in the morning, and after consulting with the county officials, Mrs. Lewis agreed to issue a statement on the condition that the reporters would then leave. Anything was worth a shot if it would get rid of the reporters.

The nervous woman began:

"I have a short statement to read and then I will answer a few questions. Saturday morning four of the boys residing at this home left to go on an

overnight camping trip under the volunteer supervision of Deputy Sheriff Ben Waters. Deputy Waters has taken groups of boys on these outings on several occasions in the past.”

“Upon arriving at the campground one of the boys told deputy Waters that a young girl with an injured leg had fallen down a hole on the side of the nearby hill. Deputy Waters was quite skeptical of the boy, but decided to investigate some sort of activity occurring on the far side of the lake. After conferring with another on duty deputy, Waters learned that there was indeed a missing girl and that a search was underway for her. Deputy Waters decided to follow the boy to the place where he said the girl was, he was still quite skeptical at this point but decided to err on the side of caution and investigate. The boy led the deputy and the other boys up the side of one of the nearby hills and directly to a small opening in the ground that was partially hidden by a bush. The girl was in the partially collapsed shaft.”

“When she was freed about thirty minutes later, it was discovered that her leg was indeed broken. Neither Deputy Waters nor myself or anyone else for that matter can offer a rational explanation of how the boy knew about the missing girl. State law forbids me from releasing the identity of the boy involved or any details about him. My hands are tied on that issue. Any questions?”

Pandemonium.

Mrs. Lewis gave up in disgust after it became apparent that the reporters were only going to ask questions about Adam that she couldn't supply answers to. It was nearly nightfall when the last of the satellite trucks trundled off in search of other sensations. For several days the networks carried stories filled with more speculation than fact. They did manage to ferret out two actual facts. The boy's name was Adam Valentine and he was eight years old. The footage of him wading in the lake was run behind every story that aired.

The supermarket tabloids thought they had died and risen to paradise. Their coverage of the incident was of two persuasions: (1) The kid was some sort of space alien, or the child thereof, or (2) Jesus has returned and is residing in Idaho.

The few television news programs that Adam saw left him with a deep and lasting distrust of the media in general. When Mrs. Lewis asked him what he thought about the news coverage he just shook his head silently. He didn't like to use bad words. The entire country had seen him wading in the lake (over and over) in just his wet and baggy under shorts for crimony sakes!

In the next few weeks of summer Deputy Waters stopped by several times to visit with the boy. He earned Adam's undying friendship by bringing him all the computer magazines that he could lay his hands on, plus several nerd books on programming and technical mumbo jumbo. Waters didn't understand much of anything in the books but the boy seemed to eat it all up. The deputy was

keeping his eyes out for some sort of computer to be donated to the home, preferably a Mac like the boy said he liked.

Brian Alsop ran away twice and was finally transferred to a different home across town where he then became the youngest and smallest resident. Several university types had been trying to get their hands on Adam for use as a lab rat, so far the county had said no way.

On consecutive days during the last week of July four young girls, ages eleven to fourteen were snatched off the streets of Boise and the surrounding area. There were no witnesses to the abductions, no bodies had been found, no ransom notes. The girls seemed to have disappeared into thin air, one was from a wealthy family, two were middle class, and the last victim came from near poverty. The Sheriff's Department, the town police, and a now a team from the FBI was trying to cope

with an increasingly shrill populace and a total lack of leads. Deputy Waters decided to make a modest and very discreet proposal to the FBI team leader.

Special Agent Monroe was not amused.

“The Bureau has played around with psychics before. Throwing darts at a map blindfolded produces the same results. We look bad enough on this case as it is!”

“A month ago I would have agreed with you.” Explained Waters. “I’ve seen this boy do things that I can’t explain or begin to understand, all I’m saying is why not give him a shot at this, very low profile, no press, off the record. If it doesn’t pan out it never happened.”

“He’s a ward of the county, or something. Would they let him do this?” Monroe was looking for an out, any out.

“I know the supervisor at his group home really well. I think I can get her to go along if we keep the news dogs away from this.”

“What about the boy,” Monroe asked, “is he up to something like this?”

“I think so, he’s not your average kid by a long shot. If you give the okay, I’ll talk to him about it, not until then.”

“Shit! All right, but the Bureau doesn’t know anything about this if it hits the fan. Is that really clear to you, Deputy Waters?”

“Perfectly clear, Agent Monroe.”

As Waters was getting up to leave, Monroe added, “If and when you get this circus set up call me and no one else, I’ll tag along with you.”

Waters smiled just a little, “Very good, Agent Monroe.”

After Waters had left the FBI agent put his face in his hands and thought to himself, “I’ve lost my God-damned mind.”

Deputy Waters was trying to explain the situation to Mrs. Lewis.

“Look Betty, Adam won’t be put in any kind of danger and the FBI certainly doesn’t want the kind of publicity you’re talking about. It shouldn’t take but just a few hours. There are four young girls missing, just vanished. We haven’t clue one to go on!”

“I’m legally responsible for that child’s safety and well being!” Betty had the volume up several notches. “I won’t have him exposed to the type of circus we had around here the last time he went on a trip with you!”

This was not starting at all well.

Waters tossed yesterday’s newspaper on her desk, on the front page were four photographs of the missing girls.

“Look at that and tell me Adam shouldn’t have a go at this.”

Mrs. L glared at the deputy for a moment and then quietly asked, “Do you think Adam can really find them?”

“I honestly don’t know. Can we talk to him about it, just you and me?”

“All right. Go bring him in here, I think he’s in his room.”

Adam was actually waiting in the hall just outside. Waters just smiled at him and motioned the boy to come in. After Adam had sat down the boy said, “I think so.”

“You think so, what, Adam?” Asked the woman.

“I think I can find those girls.”

“You knew what we were going to ask you?”

Asked Waters.

Adam just shrugged his shoulders.

“It may not be very nice Adam, people can do some awful things to one another.” Explained Mrs.

L. “You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

“I know. Aren’t we wasting a lot of time here just talking?”

“Let me make a phone call.” Waters replied.

Mrs. L had the sinking feeling that things were getting out of her control where the boy was concerned.

In the discussion with Agent Monroe it was decided that Waters and the boy would pick up the FBI agent in the deputy’s personal vehicle, Ford Escort station wagons don’t attract a great deal of attention. After a stern lecture of some length and volume from Mrs. L, Waters and the boy drove over to the supermarket parking lot where Monroe had agreed to meet them.

As Monroe got into the front seat, Waters gestured to the small person in the back seat. "Say hello to Adam."

The very large black man in the suit turned around and offered his enormous hand to the boy.

"Hi Adam, I'm Agent Monroe. I work for the FBI."

"Pleased to meet you, sir." Adam's hand was totally engulfed.

Monroe thought to himself, "My God, a polite child!"

He then turned to Waters and asked, "How do we do this?"

"I talked to Adam on the way over here, he says he would like to go see one of the girl's homes and talk to her folks for a few minutes, then maybe go check out the area where she was last seen."

"He said that, did he?" Monroe asked with his sarcasm poorly concealed.

"Yes he did."

"O-kay. Let's start with the last one to go missing." Monroe felt like a total ass.

The Perkins 'residence' was a somewhat battered

mobile home, it wasn't a complete dump, and the lot it was on was clean and uncluttered. The Perkins' could just have used a few more breaks in their lives.

"I've met with them before, let me go in and talk to them for a few minutes first," explained Monroe, "I'll try to give them some sort of sensible explanation as to why we're here."

Adam and the deputy sat quietly in the car as the FBI agent knocked on the door and after a moment was allowed in.

"There so sad, the people inside." Adam said softly.

"You can feel that can't you?" Waters asked the boy. "It's a very hard thing to lose your child, not knowing what has happened to them."

"Yes sir."

Monroe came to the door and motioned them to come inside. Waters guided the boy into the small living room; the missing girl's parents appeared pale and drained. The father looked at Adam for a long moment and then shook his hand.

“You found that little girl in the mine shaft didn’t you?”

“Yes sir. I’m sorry we’re pestering you like this.”

“You’re not pestering us son, what can we do to help?”

“Can I look in Alice’s room for a minute?” No one had thought to tell Adam the girl’s name yet, but then they didn’t really need to.

“This way, Adam.” The mother led him down the narrow hallway.

The girl’s tiny bedroom held a bed that was covered with the usual assortment of stuffed animals and dolls. The walls held posters and cutouts of the current male heart breakers. Adam sat down on the small bed and picked up the oldest and grubbiest stuffed animal. The woman explained, “That was her favorite toy since she was very small.”

“Fuzzbutt. I know.” Answered Adam. He did know. He always did.

The woman put her hand over her mouth, “How

did you know what she called it?” Adam just smiled gently at her as he continued to listen to some sort of inner briefing on Alice. Waters and Monroe stood quietly outside the girl’s room, uncertain about what came next. There were no procedures to follow on something like this. After a short while the boy stood up and seemed to be looking off at some distant object, listening for some unhearable sound.

“Thank you Mrs. Perkins,” Adam said, “we have to go right now.”

With handshakes and a hurried thank you, the two men followed the boy out to the car. They both wondered what his big rush was all about.

“Slow down son! What is it anyway?” Demanded Monroe.

Adam turned and spoke to the men, “Alice is alive. She’s not too far I think, that way.” The boy pointed off to the west. The direction that the boy indicated was mostly empty with just a few small ranches and the occasional house.

“Adam, can you tell us anything about where she is, who’s with her?” Asked Deputy Waters.

“It’s some sort of big metal building, like a barn or something. There’s a lot of junk and stuff outside. The other girls are there too.”

Both men exchanged looks at this last revelation.

“Maybe we should call for some help on this?”

Suggested Waters.

“Not until I see something more concrete!”

Snapped Monroe, “I need more convincing before I hang my career out in the wind.”

“Let’s get moving then,” said Waters, “Adam, you point and I’ll drive.”

All three piled into the front seat of the small station wagon with Adam in the middle. Waters followed the tip of the boy’s finger like it was a compass needle. They drove for about twenty minutes, first on the main highway, and then onto a gravel secondary road. Monroe grew more skeptical by the mile.

“Stop here a sec!” Adam demanded, somewhat out of character.

Waters pulled over to the side of the road, there didn’t seem to be much of anything in sight.

“Way over there,” Adam pointed, “where those trees are.”

If you had young eyes you might have been able to make out the low collection of buildings and used farm equipment grouped under the distant stand of pine trees. Waters remembered a compact pair of binoculars in the glove compartment and nearly squashed Adam reaching for them.

“There’s a metal prefab building, a travel trailer, and a lot of junk and farm equipment scattered around. We need to get closer.”

“The guy’s asleep in the trailer.” Observed Adam rather matter of fact.

Waters drove slowly down the gravel road until they reached a private drive that led to the building.

Adam’s eye’s widened as the FBI agent checked the large black gun he carried under his left arm.

“Talk to us Adam,” Waters asked quietly, “tell us everything you know.”

He did.

“Alice and the other girls are in the big metal

building. They have like chains or something metal on their feet, they don't have any clothes on or anything, geez! He's been hurting them... doing stuff. The guy in the trailer is asleep in the back; he has some guns in there. He took the girls."

"Let's get some back up here!" Demanded Waters. "This could go sour really fast!"

The FBI agent still wasn't totally convinced. "Not yet! No offense Adam, but I'm going to take a look in that building and see with my own eyes first. Waters, here's my cell phone, use it if I signal you to or if things get hot, and keep this boy safe!"

"There's a lock on the metal building's door," Adam explained, "I opened it for you." The FBI agent just looked blankly at the boy for a moment. Now what?

Deputy Waters took out a quarter and held it in his open palm. "Show him how son." The twenty-five-cent piece floated off the man's hand and spun slowly in front of Monroe's eyes. The FBI agent stared at the coin as if it were a gun pointed at his nose.

“I am not seeing this,” Monroe croaked softly.

“Yes you are,” replied Waters, “now go and have a look in that building and be damned quiet about it. If you find what I think you will, give me a thumbs up signal and stay put. I’ll call in the Marines.”

Adam reached out and snagged the floating coin and then grinned. “Times-a-wastin’ Agent Monroe.”

The FBI Agent shook himself, quietly opened the car door and moved off toward the building. He kept as far away from the trailer as possible. His .40 cal. Smith & Wesson was out and ready, his finger laid alongside the trigger guard per procedure. There were two doors, one the large roll up type, the other a normal size swing open. The padlock on the smaller door hung open on its hasp.

“Thank you Adam,” thought Monroe, as he quietly lifted the lock free and placed it quietly on the ground. He eased open the door and peered into the dark interior, his eyes straining to adapt to the change in light levels. He could hear someone softly sobbing as he stepped into the warm darkness and stood silently against one wall. After

a few moments his eyes had adjusted enough to make out the four small nude figures huddled together around one of the support beams in the middle of the filthy cement floor.

“Jesus Christ on a pogo stick!” He muttered under his breath.

As the agent approached the children on the floor one of them sensed his presence and seemed about to cry out. Monroe put his finger to his lips as a signal to keep quite and then knelt beside the frightened girls.

“Stay quiet kids. My name is Agent Monroe. I’m with the FBI. You’re safe now but I need you to keep quite and be patient for a little while until we get things under control. Do you understand what I’m saying to you?”

Two of the girls nodded their heads in understanding; the others seemed to be in a state of shock and were unresponsive. After reassuring the girls some more, Monroe returned to the door and carefully peered out. The agent waved his thumbs

up signal and nodded his head for Waters to call for all of the cops west of the Mississippi.

Patton would have felt at home leading the column of squad cars that descended on the remote junkyard. The word had been passed for a quiet approach, no sirens, park on the gravel road and approach on foot. As the fat thing in the trailer snored peacefully at least fifty weapons of various calibers zeroed in on his door and windows. Adam and Deputy Waters were by now parked safely behind the largest of the defunct bulldozers on the lot.

“Are they going to have to shoot him?” Asked the boy.

“Not if he comes out and behaves himself.” Waters thought about getting Adam out of here, he didn’t really need to see what was probably going to happen.

“I messed up his guns, they won’t shoot or anything now.” The boy seemed anxious that the thing in the trailer not be hurt.

“What do you mean son, how did you ‘mess up’ his guns?”

“I’ll show you. Give me the rest of your change. I have a quarter.”

Waters dug out two pennies and a dime and gave them to the boy. Adam stacked the coins along with the twenty-five-cent piece he had snagged earlier atop each another on the car’s dash. The boy looked at them for a moment and asked the deputy to pick them up. By this time Waters pretty well played along with anything the boy suggested. He picked up the small stack of coins. They were fused into one solid mass, they weren’t warm and didn’t look melted, and you just couldn’t pull them apart.

“Good Lord. You did this to his guns?” Waters thought he was beyond amazement by now.

“Sure. They can’t shoot or anything. Can’t they just go in and arrest him or something?”

“You stay right here boy, don’t you dare leave this car until I get back!”

Waters got out of the station wagon and walked

quickly past the line of cocked and aimed firearms. Before anyone could react or stop him Waters had raced up the front steps of the trailer and kicked in the door. Within two minutes the deputy reappeared and shoved the obscene thing call Otis Blocher face forward down the steps. Otis missed all of the steps and did not land lightly.

After Waters superiors had finished 'asking' just what the hell he thought he was doing (he told them he had some reliable inside information) he sought out Agent Monroe by the metal building. Monroe was also mightily pissed.

"Adam messed up the creep's guns. I was perfectly safe." Waters seemed entirely too calm to the FBI agent.

"Whadda you mean, 'messed up' his guns?" The deputy sheriff handed the fused coins to the agent and answered, "like this."

The FBI agent studied the coins delicately, as if handling an explosive butterfly. "And he did this to the guns?"

"He did. I checked out the shotgun in there, it's

just a paperweight now.”

“My father wanted me to become a plumber,” replied a shaken Monroe, “good money he said. I may reconsider his advice after today. I need some sort of adult beverage, several in fact.”

Two ambulances had arrived to transport the four girls to the hospital but the paramedics were hindered by the heavy chains and hardened locks that secured the girls ankles. The only bolt cutter available was not up to the job of cutting them off and Blocher wouldn't supply the key. Monroe quietly ushered Adam into the dim building, the girls by now had blankets around them. The surrounding police and paramedics were treated to the unsettling sight of the four heavy padlocks snapping open one after another as the boy freed the girls from their captivity. Despite Monroe's warnings to everyone in the barn all of this would immediately filter out to the news media.

The arrival of the local news fools was as expected as the buzzard's return to Capistrano.

Before the reporters had time to closely focus in on the small blond boy, Waters was hustling Adam back to Mrs. Lewis' Home For Excess Boys.

On the return trip the boy seemed especially pleased that Deputy Waters had prevented the creep from assuming air temperature.

"Thanks for going in and getting that guy. I know what he did was really awful, I just... I don't like seeing people get hurt."

Waters looked at the small boy out of the corner of his eye for a moment and then replied. "Good for you Adam, hang on to that."

By the time the two crime busters reached the group home the first news bulletins were unfolding in front of Betty Lewis' eyes. She met Waters and Adam at the door and she was not at all amused.

"Low Profile? No press? Do you have any idea what this place is going to be like in the morning?" She demanded, her tone just a bit shrill.

When Adam had found the lost girl in the mountains the press coverage of that event was

only a tiny preamble to what followed over his involvement in the multiple kidnapping. In the press briefings given by the local authorities and by the FBI, several important details of Adam's assistance were purposely omitted. The Perkins family gave a lengthy interview to the networks relating the boy's visit to their home. Deputy Waters took to wearing disguises. There was a near riot among the reporters surrounding the group home where Adam lived, but despite their best attempts they never succeeded in actually interviewing the boy. Eventually they were drawn away to the west to cover a celebrity murder in Bel Air. Special Agent Monroe was called to give a comprehensive and detailed report in person to a highly attentive Director of The FBI.

The federal government had by now taken official notice of young Master Valentine. Having the government interested in your life can be a very mixed blessing; people spend their entire lives

avoiding just that. Confidential meetings took place in several imposing buildings in Washington, D.C. Final decisions were made in the oval office of the White House.

The Attorney General was speaking.

“We can make a good case for having the boy declared a ward of the federal government on the basis of it being in the interest of national security. The child welfare types in Idaho will put up a fuss, but if we lean on the right judge we should be able to get him out of there within a couple of weeks.”

The President:

“Where, exactly, do we put him once we have him?”

“The FBI has a very secure facility at Quantico, its part of the academy complex,” explained the Attorney General, “they track and profile their most wanted cases there. They have the room and facilities to properly house him and take care of him. He would be instantly available to employ on the most urgent and high profile sort of cases.”

“What about his schooling, some time with kids

his own age? I won't see him being kept like a rat in some lab cage." The President was a parent, and lately a grandparent; this helped him to retain some small sense of decency missing in many politicians.

The Attorney General:

"Work is already underway to convert three of the offices at Quantico into a small apartment for the boy. He'll have his own living room, a bedroom and a bath, kitchen. There's even a small music room with a piano. There will be agents with him or close to him around the clock. There are Marine families living in base housing at Quantico, lots of kids. I think a private tutor will work out better than public schooling, less security problems."

"Try to find some agents experienced with children. Parents if possible."

"Yes Mr. President. It will be a far sight better for him than the parade of foster homes and county facilities that he has known for most of his life."

The President nodded and turned to the agent who had last dealt with the boy.

“Agent Monroe. I’ve read your report. Can this boy actually do the things you claim?”

“He can, Mr. President. It sounds like cheap science fiction, it goes against everything that science and logic teaches us, but I saw him in action, it’s all very real. If I might also add sir, he’s a very nice little kid. Decent.”

“And I want him treated like a “nice little kid.” We’ll go forward on this. Keep things as low key as possible. Have FBI issue some sort of statement when the boy’s at Quantico, keep me informed on any pertinent developments. I don’t want the damned press running completely away with this thing.”

As is usually the case, whenever the President of The United States wanted something to ‘go forward’ things began to happen in rapid order. Toes get stepped on, egos suffer abuses, and sometimes judges get ‘leaned on’. Life is hard.

Twelve days later two plain clothes Federal Marshals knocked on Mrs. Lewis’ Home for Adrift Boys. It was nine o’clock in the morning and they

had 'papers'. They had very little in the way of a sense of humor.

"Good morning Ma'am. May we come in and talk for a moment, please?" Asked suit number one. Since the woman found herself looking at two very impressive badges, she motioned the men into the living room.

"What can I do for you gentlemen? Did one of the boys knock over a bank?"

"No Ma'am. We have a federal court order to escort one Adam Valentine, a minor, to the FBI facility at Quantico, Virginia. We also have a court order that makes the boy a special ward of the Government of the United States of America. Is the boy here at the moment?"

The boy in question was standing back in the shadows of the hall watching the adults. He waited for the familiar words that usually ended in "pack your suitcase." Betty Lewis stared at the papers the marshals had handed her.

"But this says today! You just can't waltz in here without notification or a hearing and grab one of

these children!”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Lewis, but we have our instructions and the court orders are very specific. You can confirm these papers by calling the numbers on their cover sheets if you wish to.”

“I wish to! You guys just sit tight for a few minutes.”

“Yes Ma’am,” said suit number two, “take your time.”

Betty’s first call was to Deputy Waters to tell him to get his butt over here. They were taking Adam! She called the numbers on the court orders and was put through immediately to the judges in question. Very sorry, hands were tied, cooperate with the marshals. Crap! She called her own Child Welfare Services, they had just been served the same orders, hand over the boy, nothing more we can do, sorry. Double crap! By the time Betty got off the telephone, Deputy Waters was letting himself in the front door, he seemed about ready to start shooting people. Waters glared at the two marshals and asked what the hell was going on.

“These are federal marshals, they have court orders to take Adam back to the FBI in Virginia, today!” Betty was totally frustrated. “I’ve been on the phone, it seems this is all a done deal.”

Waters stood reading the documents the woman had given him.

“Well, just shit! Have you told the boy? Where is he?”

“In his room, I think.” Said Betty.

Waters shook his head as he went to the boy’s room. Adam was packing his small suitcase; he seemed to know how it was done.

“What about my computer books?” The boy asked, no tears, no fuss. It was all so familiar to him.

“You can take them along. We’ll find you a box or something.”

Waters sat on the boy’s bed and gave him a hug.

“I didn’t know this was going to happen until a little while ago.”

“I know,” Adam replied, “I sort of felt something

like this was going to happen, don't sweat it Deputy Waters." Waters stood and blew his nose. It was not until now that the deputy realized how he really felt about the boy.

"I guess we should get this done Adam, all packed?"

"Yeah. My wardrobe is a bit limited, let's go." In the living room Adam kissed Mrs. Lewis on the cheek. Then the boy quietly walked out of their lives.

As the car driven by the marshals moved down the street, the small figure in the back seat turned and waved to the woman and the deputy sheriff standing on the curb. Waters noted two more carloads of suits pull in behind and in front of Adam's car.

"At least they're taking his security seriously," he said to his equally forlorn companion.

"What did you say to that one marshal just before they left?" Betty asked, "I thought you were about to commit mayhem."

"I just told him that Adam was a very special little

boy, and that if anything happened to him I would track down the marshal and feed him his own liver. He seemed to take it rather well actually.”

During the ride to the airport Adam sat buckled into the back seat, the two silent marshals up front. The boy seemed only mildly interested in the passing scenery, he had seen it all before on his many shuttle trips from home to home. When the car turned into the airport Adam began paying more attention, he had never flown before and if you pressed him he would have confessed to being just a bit excited. Maybe really excited.

The feds’ aircraft was a shining blue and white Gulf Stream II; this wasn’t a low budget operation. Still carrying his small suitcase, Adam trundled up the stairs ahead of the two marshals, they had offered to carry it for him but he seemed to want to do it himself. One of the marshals carried a cardboard box filled with his computer books and magazines. Once inside the aircraft Adam peered around at the plush interior, it smelled of expensive

leather and the taxpayer's money.

“Cool airplane,” was Adam's one comment.

“Very cool, Adam.” Agreed suit number one.

“Take a seat and buckle in, the pilot of this thing thinks he's still flying F-16's over Iraq. You get airsick any?”

“I don't know I haven't ever flown before.”

The marshal groaned quietly and thought to himself, “If I get kid puke on this new jacket somebody besides me is going to pay for it.”

As things turned out the marshal's fears were unfounded, Adam loved to fly. During some heavy turbulence over Ohio that had the other passengers thinking about smoking craters in the ground, Adam just grinned and kept his nose pressed against the window.

It was raining hard in the late afternoon when the Gulf Stream settled onto the runway at Quantico. A car pulled up to the base of the stairs and Adam was only partially soaked getting in. Two FBI

Agents in the front seat had replaced the Federal Marshals; they drove the silent child some distance across the base and pulled up in front of an imposing four-story building that seemed to be all glass and chrome. A wide perimeter around the building was marked off with two chain link fences, one inside the other, each topped with coils of razor wire. Some very grim looking Marines occupied the outer guard post, they seemed a bit peeved at being out in the rain. The Marines worked off their ire by giving the vehicle a minute inspection from headlights to tail pipe, they did manage a smile for Adam, whose face was by now becoming very well known.

“These jarheads really enjoy taking their time!” Fumed Agent John Parker, “I’ll be glad when we get our own security for the perimeter.”

“Jarheads?” Asked Adam quizzically.

“Marines’ son. Jarhead is sort of an uncompliment. Don’t ever call them jarheads to their face.”

“No sir.” At least this place was going to be

interesting.

Eventually the “jarheads” allowed the car to pull into the covered area at the front entrance to the building. Parker and the other agent got out and led Adam through the glass doors. More guards met them. These guys seemed to Adam to be civilian security people, their badges all said “FBI” on them. The two agents with Adam placed their palms on a print reader and pressed one eye to a retinal scanner. The guards hung a plastic card around Adam’s neck that said, “VISITOR - MUST BE ESCORTED” in large yellow letters. It may as well have said “SHOOT THIS PERSON FIRST.”

Several people came up to say hello to the boy and welcome him to the facility. Adam was polite and smiled but he couldn’t help thinking that all of these people tended to dress like The Blues Brothers. The entourage took the boy up to see his just completed ‘apartment’ on the top floor. Still more guards to pass through.

Adam's new quarters were a light-years improvement over his last dwelling. In the living area was a big soft couch facing a killer home entertainment theater, the remote control appeared to be plutonium powered and sported about a hundred buttons. There was a soft carpet on the floor and assorted neat things scattered about. Behind the living area was a small kitchen complete with a compact stove, fridge, and microwave, even a dishwasher under the sink. Off to the side was a tiny breakfast nook next to the window. The bedroom held a big soft bed covered with a thick down comforter; there was a large walk-in closet, and a dresser. Off of the bedroom was a bath with the usual plumbing, complete with a large tiled shower.

“How do you like it Adam?” Asked Agent Parker.

“Who do I have to kill?”

“Actually no one. We've saved the best for last, follow me.”

Agent Parker led the boy out of the small apartment and down the hall to what had been a corner office.

The large room had windows on two sides and was occupied by two prominent objects. Next to the wall away from the windows were a computer desk and chair. On the desk was the latest top of the line Mac computer (donated by the maker). In the corner formed by the glass walls was a concert grand piano. The name on the piano read "Steinway and Sons."

"This is for you Adam, we thought you might like to spend some of your spare time in here," explained Parker.

Adam walked slowly into the middle of the room and stood silently trying to take it all in. This was one of the very few times that anyone would ever see the boy's cheeks wet with tears. He even hugged Agent Parker.

After regaining some composure Adam said, "Thanks everyone, this is really nice!"

"Let's go meet your boss, Adam." Parker was really starting to like this kid.

"It's Agent Monroe, I know. He's a nice guy, we've met before in Idaho."

“How did you know it was Agent Monroe, it was supposed to be a surprise?”

“Remember why I’m here, I know stuff.”

“Yeah, I guess you do at that.” Parker replied quietly.

This kid really was like they said in the briefing, strange but nice. He certainly didn’t talk like any eight-year-old child that Parker had ever come across. Adam followed the agent down a series of halls and turns to the Boss’s office. Monroe was seated behind his desk and got up to come around and shake the boy’s hand.

“Hello Adam, welcome to the panic factory. How was your flight and everything?”

“It was nice. It got really bumpy for a while, that was neat. Cool plane.”

“I guess you didn’t expect to see me here did you?”

“Well, actually I did know you would be here.”

“How, son?” Asked Monroe (as if he had to ask). Small shrug.

“Never mind, I should know better by know. Are

you hungry?”

“Starving. When’s dinner?”

“Right now if you want. Let’s walk next door. We’ve made arrangements for you to take your meals at the staff dining room at the academy. The food is actually pretty good there, of course there will be stuff to eat in your place too.”

“I may just move into the piano room. That was really nice, now I can practice every day and not sound so awful.”

“My spies tell me that you don’t sound awful at all. We interviewed just about everybody in Idaho about you.”

“That must have been really boring,” replied Adam.

“Let’s talk about your schedule for tomorrow, son.”

“I have a schedule?”

“Afraid so. We want to do a bunch of tests and things, sort of see what makes you tick, just what your abilities actually are. In the morning you’ll get a medical exam at the base hospital, just to make sure you’re in good health and all.”

“Needles!” Adam’s face betrayed his biggest phobia.

“What’s that son?”

“I don’t like needles very much.”

“Well, I don’t either, but they tell me that they won’t be doing anything really horrible to you. Just try to grin and bear it.”

“Rats!”

“Let’s wander over to the dinning room, we can talk on the way.”

The large black agent and the small blond boy walked slowly over to the other building. The rain had all but stopped, so they could take their time. Adam sensed that they were constantly being watched, as indeed they were. Security measures at the facility had recently been increased tenfold. Monroe introduced the now famous boy to the dinning room staff and showed him to the small window table that had been set aside just for his use. There was a small sign on the table that read “Reserved - A. Valentine.”

“Cool. My own table and everything.”

The boy managed to get on the outside of an

enormous hamburger (his choice) and a chocolate milk shake. Monroe had a salad and watched in amazement.

“Good Lord child, if you eat any more I’ll have to take you over to the hospital right now!”

“I can wait. They have pretty good food here.” He was used to the ‘economical’ cooking that one usually got in foster homes.

“Let’s get you back to your place for now, you’ve had a pretty long day and you have to be up early in the morning.” Explained Monroe.

Monroe shepherded the slightly bulging boy back to his new quarters. Adam asked if he could try out the piano for a little while before going to bed. The agent agreed reluctantly, not really wanting to sit through a session of chopsticks or something equally trying. It was not even close to being chopsticks.

Adam perched himself in front of the large piano and did a modest rendition of Scriabin’s Etude in D sharp minor that would have brought a smile to the

composer's face. By the time he had finished the piece, everyone within earshot had migrated to the hall outside the open door to listen. As had happened before on several occasions, no one could seem to think of much to say, so they just applauded. A blushing Adam got up and gave a small bow. Monroe just stood there trying to figure out just what the hell the FBI had got its hands on.

“Come on son, time to hit the rack,” said Monroe. “I don't know what it was you played, but it was really very beautiful.”

“Thanks, it was Scriabin. I'm afraid it was pretty shaky, I do better if I practice some every day.”

“I'm more of a BB King fan myself, but I know beautiful when I hear it.”

“Thank you again Agent Monroe, BB King is pretty cool too.”

As the FBI agent was supervising Adam's preparations for bed, he pointed out the large softly glowing buttons scattered about on the walls of the small apartment.

“Son, these are ‘panic buttons’. If you feel sick or scared or have any sort of trouble at all, just press any of them. This is very serious business, they will sound an alarm and people will come running. Don’t press one just for the fun of it, understand?”

“Yes sir,” answered Adam, “only for emergencies.”

“Real good. We thought about putting cameras in all of your rooms or having someone in here with you all of the time. We finally decided that would just make you feel creepy, I know it would me. There are heat and motion sensors everywhere that will tell us your location, but we can’t see you.” Explained Monroe.

“Good. I wouldn’t want to go to the bathroom on television.”

Monroe laughed and turned out the lights, the ‘panic buttons’ made nice night-lights.

“Good night kid.”

“Good night Agent Monroe.” And then, “Agent Monroe!”

“What son?”

“Thanks.”

“And thank you, Adam.”

Your average eight-year-old might have been very scared and lonely this first night in such a strange place. Adam was by now very used to the lonely part, he also sensed nothing really threatening about this place. All the same he did wake several times during the night to prowl around the apartment, once he got up and poked his head out into the hall. The guard on duty down the hallway waved and smiled at him, the sensors had already told the man that the boy was up and moving about the apartment. Adam just waved in return and closed the door again, after that he slept the rest of the night through.

Every time the boy had got out of bed a notation had been made in the guard’s logbook. The last one read “0135, boy opened hall door and looked out. We waved. 0137, boy returned to bed after using bathroom.”

Seven A.M. pounced on the sleeping boy and shook him awake. Actually Agent Harper did the pouncing and shaking.

“Come on Adam, grab your socks. Doctor’s in one hour and thirty minutes!”

Special Agent Marilyn Harper was twenty-six years old, single, and the only daughter in an Army family of six kids. Her father was a career Sergeant Major who had run a very tight operation. Agent Harper understood boys, or at least she thought she did.

“Ummmng. G’way.” Adam was not, and would never, ever be a morning person.

“Sorry, I only understand English,” she said as she yanked off the covers. “Put ‘em on the floor! Time to poop, shower and shave!”

“Geez.” Was all that Adam could manage to respond with.

Clad in just his somewhat threadbare briefs,

Adam wobbled a bit unsteadily into the bathroom and modestly closed the door to begin his morning routine. Agent Harper listened at the bathroom door for the appropriate toilet and showering sounds. Satisfied that the boy was running on most of his cylinders, she began to lay out some clothes, socks and clean underwear. She made a mental note to request a shopping expedition to buy the poor child a decent wardrobe. After a time a slightly damp and mostly awake boy emerged from the bathroom wearing a large blue towel around his middle.

“Adam, I’ve put out some of your clothes for you, go ahead and dress then we’ll get some breakfast into you.”

The female FBI agent stood waiting, looking at the boy and he stood looking at her. Finally he said, “Could you please turn around while I put my underpants on?”

“Oh! Sure. Sorry.” Agent Harper complied, smiling at the boy’s sense of propriety. Many were the time she had wished that her five dopey brothers had any such sense.

“Okay, I’m decent. Thank you Ms. Harper.”

“Had I told him my name?” She thought to herself. No, she hadn’t. Ms. Harper turned to find the boy pulling on his jeans and asked him, “What do you like for breakfast, we can go over to the staff dining room?”

“I just like some cereal and juice for breakfast, I saw some in the kitchen last night.”

“Okay. Get your shoes and socks on and I’ll check out the pantry.”

Agent Harper rounded up a bowl, milk, corn flakes, and a carton of orange juice and put them on the small table. Adam wandered in and sat down to quietly begin munching and slurping his way through the simple breakfast.

“Tell me about yourself, Adam. I’ve heard some...well, odd things on the TV and in the staff briefings here. Tell me, are you “The Son of Space Aliens?”

Adam and the female agent both laughed at the last description.

“I confess, it’s all true. The mother ship is due in three weeks to pick me up.”

More giggles and a bit of spilt juice.

The small puddle of orange juice brought Agent Harper back into complete focus. Adam had looked at the puddle for a moment, and then it seemed to coalesce into a round ball and hopped back into the juice glass. No more mess. Simple.

Agent Harper sat very still and said nothing, her mind trying to analyze what her eyes had just seen.

“About now most people develop the willies. How are you doing?” Asked Adam.

“Moderate willies I guess. Remind me to attend mass this Sunday.”

“I like going to church, could I go with you?”

“Sure Adam, that would be nice.”

She thought to herself that maybe confession would be a good idea too.

“Come on Adam, let’s go, time to get stuck, poked, and prodded.”

Agent Harper steered her new responsibility into

Monroe's office, he was on the phone and motioned them to sit. As he hung up the telephone he asked, "All chipper and ready to go, Adam?"

"Uh huh." After nine was probably a better time to get any lengthy conversations out of the boy.

"We should make a note, Adam is not at his very best early in the morning," replied Agent Harper, "he is however, partially awake."

"Good enough. There will be a Doctor Simmons to meet you at the hospital," explained Monroe, "she's been assigned as Adam's personal physician. She'll do most of the exam herself and will be with him until he's finished. Stay with them until they're done. Agents Meadows and Steinmetz will go along for security. You may have to sit on the boy, he doesn't like needles."

"Neither do I. Come on Adam, this will be great fun!"

"Is there a bus station around here?" Adam didn't seem to share her enthusiasm.

It seemed to Monroe that Adam and the female agent had found some sort of mutual ground, even if

it was only gentle sarcasm.

The small military base hospital was like all hospitals; there was always a faint odor of things best left unseen and unfelt. Adam and the three agents sought out the examination area specified by Monroe. The small boy attracted a fair amount of attention as they passed through the building, he was after all by now, famous. Doctor Simmons greeted them outside the exam room, she shook hands with Adam and the two seemed to size up one another for a moment.

“Well Adam, I suppose you’re a bit nervous this morning. My informants tell me you don’t care too much for needles?”

“No I don’t, sorry.” Replied Adam while looking around as if searching for possible escape routes.

“There won’t be too many needles here today, maybe one or two, and then we’ll sneak up on you when you’re not looking.”

This produced a bit of a smile from the boy and the doctor assumed she was going to be home free.

She led Adam and Agent Harper into the exam room; Meadows and Steinmetz found some chairs in the hallway and tried to look official.

Inside Dr. Simmons gave Adam a small plastic jar with a lid.

“I need you to pee in this, fill it if you can.”

Adam’s eyes darted around in a moment of a panic.

“Go in that bathroom over there and after you have filled the cup, put the lid on it and leave it on the shelf by the sink. Okay?”

“Oh, okay.” Replied a dubious but somewhat relieved Adam.

After the boy had closed the door to the bathroom, Dr. Simmons turned to the FBI agent and asked, “Tell me Agent Harper, what the heck do we have here?”

“I’ve just met him this morning, but I can tell you that he’s a good kid. He has some abilities that no one seems to have any explanations for. What do you think?”

“I’ve read the reports and briefing material. I’m

having a lot of trouble with it.” Simmons seemed quite skeptical, “I’ll need to see things with my own eyes.”

“I’ve had a small demonstration this morning,” replied Harper, “you better prepare yourself for a new way of thinking.”

Adam returned a few moments later with a slightly sheepish look on his face.

“Any problems?” Asked the doctor.

“None that I would care to relate to you at the moment.” He replied a bit tersely.

At this point Dr. Simmons decided to stop speaking to him like the eight-year-old child he was.

“O-kay.”

The doctor handed Adam a papery examination gown, size quite small.

“I need you to take off your shoes and socks and all of your clothes and put this on, the opening goes in the back. You can undress behind that curtain over there.”

Adam just sighed and did as the lady doctor said.

Time passed.

Slowly.

The boy finally came out from behind the privacy curtain, careful to keep his partially exposed backside away from the eyes of the two females.

“Hop up here on the table Adam,” said the doctor, “we’ll get the needle stuff out of the way first, that way you can quit cringing.”

The boy did as instructed, almost managing to keep his air-conditioned garment in place. He had his eyes glued on a cart that had a covered tray atop it. Dr. Simmons wheeled over the cart and whipped off the white cloth covering the tray. There were several glass tubes with rubber stoppers, some cotton and alcohol, a latex band, and a hypodermic needle that appeared to Adam to be large enough to inflate basketballs.

“I’ll only stick you one time, this is just to get some blood samples.”

“I have enough blood, plenty in fact.”

“Yes I know that, I want to find out what type and all that sort of thing.”

“It’s a nice red color, warm too.”

This was all not going quite as planned.

“Yes, I thought that it might be red. Hold out your left arm while I put this band around it.”

Adam complied as if being offered an electric eel.

The doctor then swabbed the small arm with alcohol, tying the elastic above his elbow. She then picked up the harpoon.

“Make a fist, this won’t hurt nearly as much as you think it will.”

As the tip of the needle approached his skin, Adam’s autopilot kicked in and the sharp thin shaft of the hypodermic curled up like a watch spring.

“Oops, sorry,” Adam grimaced a little, “I really didn’t mean to do that.”

Doctor Simmons stood very still, staring at the coiled needle. Needles were supposed to be somewhat brittle. Agent Harper seemed to be taking it all rather calmly, however.

“Adam, you did this?” The doctor asked while holding up the useless hypo.

“I’m really sorry, I sort of slipped. Maybe if I don’t watch it will be okay.”

The doctor looked at the FBI agent who just nodded her head. After taking a deep breath, Dr. Simmons fetched another hypodermic from the cabinet behind her.

“All right Adam, we’ll try it again. Close your eyes and think nice thoughts.”

“Okay, I’m really sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, I wouldn’t have missed that for the world.”

Once more the keen tip of the needle approached its target.

“Ouch!”

“Adam, I haven’t touched you yet!” Said the frustrated M.D.

“Just practicing, sorry.”

Jab/poke/stab/impale.

“Ouchouchouchouch! Geez!”

The doctor made quick work of plugging in the vials and filling them with blood. Out came the needle.

“Ouch!”

“You’ve said that several times already. We’re all

done with needles, you can start breathing again.”

Replied the exasperated doctor.

“Thank you. Geez!”

Doctor Simmons picked up her stethoscope and started listening, thumping, and tapping. Take a deep breath, etc. She had Adam lie down on the table and pulled up the papery gown to examine his more personal areas. Agent Harper cut the boy some slack and turned her back.

“Criminy!” Adam thought, “Does she have to look at everything?”

The doctor made mental notes for her report: “Normal musculature, no scars or indications of any sexual mistreatment. Slim build but not underweight for height, good posture. Not circumcised.” And so forth.

“All done. You can put your clothes back on and we’ll go in the other room where I’ll ask you all sorts of disgusting questions. Oh yes, first stand on the scales so I can weigh you.”

She weighed the humiliated child and measured his height, making small 'hmmm' sounds. Small for his age. While the boy dressed in about a tenth of the time it took him to undress, the doctor sent off the blood and urine specimens to the lab. Agent Harper asked her, "Will he live?"

"If I don't totally embarrass him to death. He seems to be in perfect health, just small for his age."

Adam returned to their presence, once more unexposed to prying eyes and prodding fingers. They moved to the small office loaned to the doctor for the occasion. Question time. Many questions.

"Do you have many colds?"

"I don't have any colds, Ma'am." The boy had never, ever had any sort of contagious disease.

"Allergies?"

"Just to broccoli, I get violently ill at the sight of it. I break out in purple pustules if I come in contact with it."

"Indeed? Purple pustules? That's most unusual. Do you have regular bowel movements?"

"Yes. Unless I eat broccoli."

“Headaches?”

“Not until today, what does a migraine feel like?”

Ad infinitum.

“Have you EVER been sick?”

“Not until today.”

They did the eye chart routine, the boy had some fun by reciting the fine print relating as to the company who printed the chart. He couldn't actually read the tiny print from across the room but he knew what it said anyway. How does he do that?

Down the hall to the EKG, EEG, and Oh Gee rooms. Lie on the couch. This doesn't hurt, just wires taped to you. He knows. MRI room. Take off your clothes (Geez!), put this on. Lie down, stay still, get swallowed by mechanical monster, and don't worry. Get dressed. He knows.

Done.

He thought.

The dentist found nothing but a healthy set of even teeth, he seemed a bit disappointed at having

nothing to clean, fill, drill or pull. No needles.

“Well, that was just the most fun!” Commented Adam, “I’m starving to death.”

The boy and the three agents forsook the hospital cafeteria for the more palatable fare at the academy. Doctor Simmons sat down to write her report. She kept picking up the coiled needle as if to reassure herself of something she had seen but not believed. Tomorrow the boy went to see the shrinks. “God help them,” she thought.

While Adam was undergoing his inspection, the Office of The Director of The Federal Bureau of Investigation issued a press release about the whereabouts and status of their new ward. For the next two days running, every news report, update, headline, talk show and back fence gossip would lead off with the name Adam. To say that the press was frustrated by their lack of access to the boy would be to call the sinking of the Titanic a boating

mishap.

The boy's sessions with the psychologists, psychiatrists, and assorted rat watchers turned up the following results:

1. They agreed that the boy's IQ was probably toward the genius range, but that his odd mental processes did not lend themselves very well to conventional testing methods.

2. He seemed very stable and well adjusted, despite his fragmented upbringing.

3. Preliminary tests revealed that he could reliably remote view out to at least ten miles.

4. He could reliably trace people and objects.

5. He gave them the first incontrovertible proof that telekinesis did indeed exist (maximum force measured - ten pounds).

6. He could affect the atomic cohesiveness of metallic elements; no one seemed to have an actual name for this ability.

7. He was not telepathic.

8. He was highly empathic. (Don't ever try to lie to him).

9. He had definite precognitive abilities that were erratic and difficult to define.

10. He didn't care too much at all for needles or broccoli.

All of the test results were compiled, opinions were written, meetings were held. At the end of two weeks it was time for the Director to meet with the President.

Earning a Living

The President was on the phone.

“So what’s the verdict, Bill? Have we made total asses out of ourselves or is this boy worth all of the flack were taking on this?”

The Director:

“He’s very much the real thing, Mr. President. I’ve seen the results of all the testing and read all of the opinions. There seems to be a general agreement that the boy has the potential to become the greatest intelligence asset to ever come down the pike.”

“Good Lord.”

“My very words, Mr. President.”

“How do we best use this ‘asset’?”

“I’ve set up a special team to handle him within the CIRG, the Critical Incident Response Group. The consensus is that domestically we put him on high priority criminal cases where the usual investigative procedures have come up dry. For

national security and international matters it's thought that DOD, CIA, and NSA should set up a joint liaison with the Bureau. He's just one small boy, we need to very carefully screen and consider each request with an eye to his safety and well being. We can't run him ragged."

"I agree. The boy is entitled some bit of normalcy. He's flesh and blood after all, not just an 'asset'."

"Yes Mr. President."

"The press is having total conniption fits. We are going to need to let them have some sort of access to the boy in the near future. I was thinking perhaps some sort of controlled interview and photo session. If we keep him completely walled off we'll be up to our butts in ACLU types and children's rights hand wringers."

"All right Mr. President, but first let's put him on a couple of cases, and if that plays out well we'll let the news dogs have their day."

"Sounds like a reasonable plan, Bill. Let's do it."

Agent Harper and the 'asset' were in the FBI Academy swimming pool. The boy could already swim fairly well but needed a few pointers on technique. The pool was Olympic sized; a life saving class occupied one side. The life saving instructor was having trouble keeping his students attention, they were all trying to watch the small and famous boy.

Meadows and Steinmetz were loitering about, not that the boy was in even the remotest danger. Meadows got a call on his cell phone and motioned Ms. Harper to the side of the pool.

"Monroe wants us all back at the operations center. They finally have an assignment on the board."

"Get Adam dried off and into his clothes," said Agent Harper, "I'll meet you outside the men's locker room."

Meadows and Steinmetz hustled the boy through a fast toweling and dressing session in the locker room; both agents were bachelors with little

experience dealing with young humans. The boy sensed this and made an effort not to be a pain in the butt. Adam was also very proud of his very own locker with its brass nameplate “Valentine” on the door. They met a somewhat damp Harper as they hurriedly exited the locker room.

“I’ll bet it’s the Atlanta bombings,” said Meadows, “they’ve come up dry on that for a year now.” Meadows was referring to a string of bombings of black churches in and around Atlanta. Some were saying it was the Klan in action once again; the Klan denied having any part in it and had actually denounced the bomber as a total coward. In reality no useful clue or evidence of any sort existed that pointed to any person or organization. The black populace was getting justifiably steamed at the lack of any visible progress on the case.

When the still moist Adam and the three agents arrived at the conference room, the rest of the team was sitting around the table awaiting the ‘asset’.

Monroe began, “Son, it’s time to earn your corn flakes. This month alone there have been two bombings of black churches in the Atlanta area. So far no one’s been killed, they all occur in the early hours of the mornings. This has been going on for almost a year now and no one has any idea who is behind it. We’ve been given the job. Are you feeling up to it?”

Like the rest of the people who were around Adam for any length of time, Special Agent In Charge Monroe had stopped talking to the boy like he was just a small boy.

“Why are we all just sitting here?” Adam asked quietly.

“I like your attitude son. Let’s go over the background folder on this for a while, we need to familiarize ourselves with the area and what is known about the bombings. We’ll leave later tonight, just the local police chief and one of our agents there will know we’re coming.”

It was almost eleven in the evening on the tarmac

at Quantico. An Air Force C-17 sat with drooping wings as people and vehicles were being loaded aboard.

It had been decided early on that the element of surprise would need to be maintained on any operation undertaken by what was now being called the 'Special Asset Team'. Simply loading all of the vehicles and communications gear on one aircraft and flying in unannounced would rob the bad guys of escape and evade time. Only the most senior law enforcement official in the target area would be informed of the Special Team's impending arrival.

By order of the President, the Air Force cargo plane and its crew had been placed on permanent loan to the FBI and would use Quantico as its base of operations. In the event the aircraft needed more than routine maintenance another aircraft would be rotated in as a replacement. The aircraft commander was Captain Pamela Roberts; her co-pilot was Lieutenant Charles Waxman.

The massive aircraft's cargo consisted of two black Chevrolet Suburbans (armored) and a Dodge van crammed with enough communications gear and weaponry to conduct a medium sized military operation. Staff Sergeant Hooper, the aircraft's crew chief, supervised the loading and shackling of the vehicles. Passengers were seated forward in airline type seats bolted to the cargo deck. The seats were padded and comfortable but this was all several rungs below economy class. There were no windows.

"This is really too cool!" Observed Adam. Agent Monroe was on his left, Agent Parker on his right.

"Tell me that again in about two or three hours. You better stuff these in your ears." Monroe handed the boy some disposable earplugs, the kind you squish up and allow to expand inside your ear. "These things are noisy, like sitting inside a flying vacuum cleaner."

He was right. Things soon got very noisy and

then the deck tilted up at an alarming angle.

“Damned cowboy!” Shouted Monroe. His opinion of Air Force pilots was not what it might have been. In truth the agent just didn’t care much for flying at all.

Adam’s eyes were on full open during the takeoff and climb out, Agent Parker observed that the grinning boy seemed to enjoy the gut wrenching departure entirely too much.

Later in the flight after things had settled down a bit, Adam put on his most appealing face and finagled a visit to the flight deck from Sergeant Hooper. The “cowboy” and her co-pilot took an immediate liking to the small would-be aviator. Any number of regulations were badly bent when Adam was allowed to sit in the pilot’s seat and hold the control stick for a short while.

Way Cool!

Fulton County Airport, The Peach Tree State.

Chief of Police Harold Johnson and Special Agent Thurgood Robbins watched the lights of the taxiing military aircraft approaching their unmarked car. The Chief was not too happy.

“This can’t be happening. An Air Force cargo plane is bringing us an eight-year-old boy to do what we should have been able to finish ten months ago!”

“Don’t rag on yourself, Chief,” Robbins began, “we both know that there hasn’t been so much as a flake of dandruff left behind at any of those churches. Right now the load is on the people in that plane, let them carry it for a little while.”

“The load is on that poor kid.” Replied Johnson, “Can he really do the things they claim he can?”

“I’m still pretty much of a skeptic, but I guess we’re about to find out.”

After the green monster had parked and shut down, one of the black jump suits came out and asked the two men in the car to follow him back inside the aircraft for a briefing. Introductions were

made.

“Pleased to meet you, sir.” Said the diminutive figure holding out his hand to the police chief.

“Well I’m pleased to meet you too, son. They tell me you’re going to clear up this mess we have here.”

“I’ll try my best, sir.”

“You know, I think you will at that.” Replied Johnson.

During the short briefing in the aircraft, Monroe laid out the course of action. The plan was simple, visit the site of the most recent bombing, let the boy do his thing, and hopefully follow his finger to the bad guy(s). After the briefing Chief Johnson and Agent Robbins returned to their car to lead the now deplaned FBI vehicles to the bombing location. The two Suburbans had heavily tinted windows; anyone watching the slightly menacing looking procession would have to just guess about who was inside.

It had been a little more than forty hours since The Church of Jesus The Savior had risen

gracefully into the sky. The small bits and pieces that were left had been scattered over several hundred square yards of the outskirts of Atlanta. Even in the dark you could tell that many of the surrounding homes had lost a lot of their symmetry. Whoever was doing this was into serious explosive events, no feeble pipe bomb nonsense.

Adam was kept in the lead Suburban until the agents were satisfied that the area held no threats. The boy was going to tell them that he had already checked out the area, and that everything was cool, but then he decided that he would sound like a smart Alec if he did.

“Okay, son what do you need us to do?” Asked Monroe.

“Well, it’ll be easier for me to concentrate and sort of focus in on things if you can all stay back here and be quite. I guess I sound sort of bossy.”

“You’re not being bossy Adam, we’ll be quite and stay put, you do whatever you need to,” replied Monroe. “Be careful though, take your time and

watch where you're stepping in all of that mess."

"Will do."

Monroe handed the boy a large flashlight as they got out of the vehicle. Adam stood by the Suburban for a moment and then picked his way slowly into the center of the obliterated church. He seemed to move about aimlessly at first, once stopping to pick up a shredded hymnbook. Adam then stood very still and seemed to be looking at something only he could see.

"What's he doing?" Asked Robbins.

"I don't know," whispered Monroe, "shut the hell up."

After about five motionless minutes Adam turned quickly and looked off toward the southwest, as is suddenly spotting what had been eluding him. The boy turned and quickly made his way back through the rubble to the silent and perspiring knot of people.

"That way!" Adam indicated the direction, "I'm not sure of how far, but that way." Follow the pointing

finger.

Twelve miles later people were starting to exchange worried glances. No need to worry.

“Slow down, it’s close.” Then, “Here, stop here. I think we should turn off our lights and stuff too.”

The four vehicles sat in almost total darkness, the dim lights of the encrypted radios their only illumination. In the distance a white farmhouse was barely visible.

“You have him son?” Asked Monroe.

“Yeah. Up ahead in that white house, something's really wrong though, let me check it out for a few minutes.”

Meaning be quite.

“Can you get Agent Mayhew to come up here with us?” Asked the boy after a couple of minutes. Mayhew was the explosive’s expert in the rear vehicle. Monroe got on the radio and told him to move forward. Mayhew squeezed his ample frame in beside the boy and Monroe. By this time Adam

was trying to draw something on a note pad in the dim light next to the radio, Monroe was looking through some night vision binoculars at the distant farmhouse.

“Whatcha got, Adam?” Asked Mayhew.

“See that metal shed thing in the front yard?”

Monroe handed Mayhew the binoculars.

“I see it.” It was the small prefab, backyard garden tool variety.

“It’s a really big bomb. There’s a stack of boxes full of that white plastic explosive stuff you showed me last week, you know, when you were showing me around where you work.”

“You mean the C-4?” Asked Mayhew.

“That’s it.”

“Just wonderful. How much are we talking about here, Adam?”

“Well, it’s piled up about the size of a refrigerator.”

“Oh my.” Mayhew had visions of flying agent parts.

“It gets lots worse. There’s a ton of metal junk all piled up around the C-4 stuff. Nails and bolts in cans, all sorts of small metal stuff.”

“Shrapnel.”

“That’s the word,” replied Adam. “There’s a wire going into the house under the dirt, it goes into the guy’s bedroom, there’s a big car battery and a switch thing by his bed.”

Adam showed Mayhew the small drawing he had made.

“I won’t do anything unless you say so, but I can disconnect the wires if you want.” Explained the boy.

“How, for cats sakes?”

“You know, make the metal come apart at the connections.”

“He can do it, Mayhew.” Explained Monroe.

Mayhew considered the alternatives. There weren’t any really.

“Then do it son. If that thing goes bang, they’ll hear it in Paris.”

Adam just gazed intently at the farmhouse for a few minutes.

“All done. I messed up the doofus’ guns too. Am I being too pushy?”

“Not hardly,” said Mayhew, “you just saved all of

our butts, son.”

The ‘Reverend’ Amos Fishbourne was as sound asleep as the voices in his head ever allowed him be. On a lunacy scale of one to one hundred, Amos was a ninety-seven. His divinity degree had cost him fourteen dollars and ninety-five cents, plus postage and handling. The Reverend Fishbourne’s mind had begun to seriously diverge from the norm after twelve years of unsuccessful efforts to establish a black congregation of his own. He eked out a modest living these days by relieving truck drivers of their sinful cargos. The shipment of six thousand pounds of military explosives had been a Godsend in his mind, such as it was. For the last year or so he had been delivering God’s wrath on those sinners who had foolishly rejected him.

“You’re not going to shoot him are you?” Asked Adam.

“If he points a gun at our people we may have to.” Replied Monroe.

“But his guns won’t work any more.”

“It’s a hard thing to have somebody point a gun at you and not do anything about it.”

“I can make him faint,” the boy was fairly pleading by now, “will that help?”

“What do you mean, son?”

The boy explained what making someone ‘faint’ entailed. At this point in time Agent Monroe was about fully prepared to beam up.

“All right Adam. If he stays put when we go in he won’t get shot.”

“He’ll stay put, Agent Monroe.”

While Adam waited with Chief Johnson in his vehicle, the team moved quickly into places both at the front and rear doors. Using Adam’s description of the interior of the house made the arrest a matter of a very few, very loud seconds. When the Reverend Fishbourne finally came to he was trussed hand and foot and his home was full of the devil’s servants. Eventually the shouting and screaming ended and all of the explosive devices in the house were rendered inert. The Atlanta Chief of Police then put in a radio call that would summon all

of the police and reporters south of the Mason-Dixon line.

Agent Robbins had become less of a skeptic.

With the arrival of the press it was time for the team to disappear. Agent Monroe rounded up his people and announced, “Let’s get out of here, back to the bat plane.” The sun was coming up. Adam made his one and only demand of the mission, “Feed me!”

On the way back to the airfield “Thelma’s Home Style Breakfast House” establishment had more than the usual clientele. Adam and several of the agents became acquainted with an odd substance called “grits.” The boy decided that it would never replace actual food. The television set over the counter was carrying an account of the festivities at the Reverend Fishbourne’s home. Autographs were asked for. No, your money’s no good here! Adam got kissed so much he gave up blushing.

The C-17’s roar didn’t keep anyone awake, least

of all Adam. The boy was curled up in a ball before the aircraft's engines had even begun to spin up.

The Director was on the telephone.

“Mr. President, all of the flack we've been taking just flew out of the window. The boy's performance on this case seems to have put to rest any misgivings anyone might have had about him.”

“Put out a limited statement about his involvement on this case.” The President said, “Let's do one more operation, then let in the newsies.”

Two days after the Atlanta operation Adam was introduced to his new tutor. Morton G. Terwilliger was every cliché of the tweedy professor type; he did however know his business. Mr. T, as he was to become known as, was more than a little put out by all of the security checks that were ran on him and by all of the badges and nonsense that it took just to

get into the same room with his pupil. The generous salary he was to receive somewhat mollified his outrage. A desk and blackboard had been added to the piano room to serve as a classroom of sorts.

After the formal and somewhat stiff introduction to the boy, Mr. T decided that he should administer some standard tests to determine the extent of the boy's development and education. He had noted during their introduction that the boy seemed advanced for his age, was polite, and seemed ready to cooperate. At least he wasn't the green skinned monster that some of the more lurid publications made him out to be.

Over a period of two days, Mr. T tested the boy in mathematics, science, history, and English. The tests began with first grade level questions and concluded with college level. They revealed that the boy's grasp of mathematics far exceeded his tutor's, as did his general knowledge of science. History was about sixth grade level, English simply bored the poor child to tears and would need some serious

work, fortunately Mr. T loved English (not so fortunate for Adam).

Between the testing sessions the boy would practice on the piano. During these musical interludes Mr. T was unable to focus on the exam results, it seems he shared Adam's love of fine music and so he just decided to take the tests home to score.

While Mr. Terwilliger was evaluating Adam, Agent Harper was voicing some of her concerns to Monroe.

"The boy is cooped up inside this building too much. He needs to get out in the sun for a while every day, run around, goof off, be a kid, make some friends."

"You're right, there have just been so many things to get set up and all. You have the job for right now. Take him out this afternoon and hike around the base, let him explore. Maybe we can get him a bicycle or something later on." Replied Monroe. "Have some security tag along."

Mr. T ceased his educational efforts around two in the afternoon. Agent Harper had the boy put on some light clothes suitable for the still warm weather and chased him outside into the sunlight. By now Adam had his own identification badge (later deemed totally unnecessary) and his retinal pattern and fingerprints were entered into the security system. Now he felt like the rest of the Blues Brothers (except for the dorky suits).

Ms. Harper and the boy made their way across the Academy campus, they were followed at some distance by two casually dressed agents who if searched would be found to be carrying a remarkable amount of firepower. The staff and trainee's they encountered along the way smiled and seemed pleased at being able to say hello to the boy. On an impulse Adam took the female agent's hand for a while as they walked along, it seemed a perfectly natural thing to do somehow. Despite the constant exchange of sarcasm between the boy and the woman, it was obvious that they

had established a deep bond. They came to the obstacle course where the boy passed a happy hour getting filthy trying to get over and under the various adult sized contraptions. He seemed to have an amazing sense of balance.

On the way back a squad of Marines came jogging by in step and in formation. As they passed Harper and the boy, several “Yo, Adam’s” were shouted at the very pleased young man. Cool! As they neared the operations building, the security detail came jogging up behind them.

“We’ve got a call, hustle on up to the briefing room.”

Agent Monroe and most of the team were waiting as Harper and a rather grimy Adam entered and sat down. The senior agent looked at the dirty boy and then at Harper.

“Obstacle course,” Harper explained. Monroe nodded in understanding and began the briefing.

“This morning at about nine o’clock the British Ambassador was snatched off the street as he was

walking his dog. His bodyguard was shot dead. The one witness to the event said the hooded gunmen shoved the Ambassador into a United Parcel truck. The truck, which was reported missing yesterday along with its driver, was found two hours later, abandoned. The company driver was found dead in the back of the vehicle. A manila envelope was found beside the bodyguard; in it was a list of demands from what appears to be a splinter group of the Irish Republican Army. The note also said that any attempt to rescue the Ambassador would result in his execution. So far no leads have developed, no trace of the gunmen. We have the job. Adam?"

"Let me go take a quick shower and put on some clean clothes."

"Go ahead," said Monroe, "we have some details to work out first anyway."

After Adam had left the room a discussion of possible tactics began.

"Sir, this is just too hot of a situation to put Adam into!" Agent Parker voiced what many at the table

were thinking.

Monroe didn't like the situation either.

"I agree. The British Prime Minister is leaning very hard on the President so it all flows downhill to us. We'll just have to take every step possible to keep him safe."

"We can't let the boy be recognized in the area, if he's seen where the Ambassador was the guy's dead meat," replied Parker, "he needs a disguise and a good one."

"Suggestions?" Asked Monroe.

Harper was almost smiling. "I think that Adam would make just the prettiest little girl in a party dress. Throw in a dark wig and drive a minivan instead of one of those black tanks we use." Everyone else smiled, but no one laughed.

"So who's going to sit on him after we tell him?"
Asked Monroe.

"I don't think so! No way am I wearing some sissy girl's dress and a wig!" Adam was eyeing the door, close to bolting.

“Calm down, duty calls, Adam.” Countered Harper. “No one will know it’s you anyway. If those guys even suspect that you’re on the case they’ll kill the ambassador, think about that.”

The boy sighed and seemed to wilt a bit at this, he just glared at the assembled agents. “All right. But the very first person who laughs at me gets turned into a toad.”

“Fair enough.” Monroe agreed. “Can you actually turn someone into a toad?”

“I’ve never tried... yet.”

Agent Harper made some fast measurements of the boy and then an even faster code three shopping expedition to the closest mall. Two Black Hawk helicopters were put on standby at Quantico to take the team to Andrews Air Force Base outside of Washington. Arrangements were made to use a private home near the British Embassy as a base of operations. Moving the boy from Andrews to the safe house posed some problems.

“We put his disguise on him at Andrews and use

a civilian minivan to drive to the safe house, Harper will be the mother taking her daughter to a party or something. We'll have aerial surveillance and a ground unit close by as they make the drive. Then it's just a few blocks from the safe house to the embassy, Adam can ride in the trunk for that short distance." Explained Monroe.

"How does this all sound to you, Adam?"

"Can I have a large bag to put over my head?"

"No," continued Monroe, "it's getting dark anyway, that will help. Let's all get moving."

The Black Hawk landed near one of the large hangers at Andrews, there it was quickly towed inside and the hanger doors were shut. The hanger had been emptied of all personnel except for two Air Policemen and the FBI people. When Adam exited the helicopter the two AP's exchanged surprised looks.

"We can use the maintenance office for Adam to change in." Monroe said to Harper, "Get one of the AP's to go with you."

The Air Policeman led Adam and Harper to a rather cluttered and cramped office along one side of the hanger's interior. He asked Harper what was in the shopping bags she carried.

"My dress." Answered a rather testy Adam.

"O--kay. No more questions from me." Replied the grinning AP.

Harper explained to the AP that the boy had to be disguised for the operation they were on and please keep this information to yourself, forever. Or else!

"Yes Ma'am."

Harper plucked a lovely light blue and flowery party dress out of the bag; it was trimmed with white lace. She then produced a pair of shiny patent leather 'girl' shoes with some frilly socks to match.

"Oh my Lord," moaned Adam.

The large black Air Policeman managed not to guffaw, but just barely.

"Come on Adam, let's get this done. Take off everything except your underwear and get into these things. Don't bother with being bashful, we don't have the time for it."

“Geez, all right.”

Adam quickly did as he was asked and was soon standing there awkwardly in just his underwear. Harper slipped the dress over his head and discovered that his white T-shirt stuck out at the neck and arms of the dress. She pulled the dress back off and then yanked the indignant boy’s shirt over his head.

“I’m keeping my underpants, Agent Harper!” He protested.

“No problem,” she replied as she slipped the dress back over the boy.

“That’s better, let me button the back up and have a look at you.”

Adam turned around once for her, feeling like a traitor to boys everywhere.

Harper made an appraisal, “Not bad, put on the shoes and socks while I get this wig sorted out.”

Adam sat down rather unlady-like on the floor to put on the silly looking socks and shoes, which actually seemed to fit fairly well but felt really funny. Harper

put the black wig on the boy next, the hair came down to his shoulders. Finally the white gloves.

“Perfect.” Cooed Harper, “What a perfectly pretty little girl you are!”

“You’re on really, really thin ice, Ms. Harper.” Hissed an extremely tight-lipped Adam. The Air Policeman seemed to be having some sort of seizure but managed to say nothing.

“Come on let’s go. The minivan is here.” Said Harper. “Try to walk like a girl, Adam.”

“How do I do that?”

“Take shorter steps, don’t just plod along. Act dainty.”

“Criminy!”

“I almost forgot, one more thing!” Added Harper. She then produced a small child size handbag.

“A purse! Why not pink panties, lipstick, and earrings! Geez!” Adam was beyond humiliation and into outrage at this point.

“You’re giving me ideas, child.”

The other agents were waiting by the Toyota minivan and did their very best to contain their

reactions at the sight of the 'pretty little girl' who was walking beside Agent Harper. Adam was making a poor job of walking like a girl; he looked about ready to spit flaming napalm.

"Looking good, Adam! Get up in the passenger seat and buckle up." Said the smiling Monroe. And to Harper: "The rest of the team is already inside the safe house, just park in front like you live there and go on in. There's a Caddy in the garage, we'll hide Adam in that for the ride to the embassy."

The drive to the safe house went off without a hitch; Adam had to be reminded to sit with his legs together and not to slouch so much. He was finally able to see the humor in the situation and after exchanging smiles with Ms. Harper, broke out in a serious giggling fit. When the two arrived at the house, Adam seemed to be getting into the role he was playing and walked primly beside his 'mother' up the walk and into the house. Several of the assembled agents weren't completely able to stifle themselves upon seeing the boy/girl. Adam just smiled his very sweetest smile and fluttered his

eyelids at them. Then one by one all of their pants fell down. Jerks!

A short briefing then took place to map out a final course of action. Adam wanted to change back into his regular clothes for the trip to the embassy. Sorry no time, you'd just have to change again for the tracking run if the Ambassador was close by. Sigh. Let's go.

The full size Cadillac in the garage had an enormous trunk; several blankets covered the floor for Adam to lie on. The boy climbed in, making an extremely bad job of remaining modest in the process. Monroe gave him a flashlight so he wouldn't be left in total darkness.

"All right son, you'll only be in there about five minutes or so. We'll pull into the garage at the embassy and let you out once we're inside, any problems?"

"No. I'll be fine, no one can see me in here."

"Okay son, here we go." Monroe closed the trunk.

Adam thought to himself, “If my friends could see me now.” And then decided that he really didn’t have any friends except the agents. It was totally black in the trunk so Adam turned on the flashlight, he could feel the car moving, it felt strange not to be able to see anything with his eyes so he switched to his other senses.

After a few minutes of turns and bumps the car came to a final halt and the trunk popped open. Agent Monroe and two slightly incredulous British gentlemen were looking down at the supremely embarrassed young man. As Adam climbed awkwardly out of the trunk he was introduced to the Scotland Yard inspector and his companion from MI5.

“Pleased to meet you. I don’t normally dress this way,” explained Adam.

“We understand that lad,” replied Inspector Hughes, “it’s a pleasure to meet you. What do we need to do?”

“Can you take me to where the Ambassador spends most of his time?”

“Follow me young lady,” smiled the MI5 comedian, “We’ll start with his study, he does most of his work in there. Then you can speak to his wife, Lady Parkehurst.”

As Adam followed the two men he pulled off his hot wig and white gloves, enough is enough, at least for now. When they reached the study Agent Monroe motioned the two other men to wait outside with him while the boy slowly explored the room.

“What’s the lad up to?” Asked Hughes.

Monroe just put a finger to his lips. Be quiet.

Adam sat down in the large leather chair behind the desk leaned back, then he closed his eyes for a few moments. It seemed to come to him very quickly this time. He sat bolt upright and looked off to the east.

“Let’s go! I have him!” Adam exclaimed.

“What about Lady Parkehurst?” Asked Hughes.

“No need. We have to hurry, I think.” There was a sense of urgency about the boy. “Sorry if I got cheeky.”

Now where did he pick up “cheeky”?

Back to the garage, into the trunk, back to the safe house.

Once out of the trunk, Adam was hustled into the final briefing before the tracking phase began. The Hostage Rescue Team (HRT) from Quantico took to the air from Andrews in two Black Hawks; they would be called down when the exact location was determined. Two borrowed FedEx vans would carry a SWAT team from the DC Police Department. Harper and her 'daughter' would use an encrypted radio to signal for when and where the festivities would begin.

"Can you put these guys to 'sleep' like last time?"
Asked Monroe.

"I think so. If there's not too many of them."

"Let us know how many you count when you get there, and the location of the Ambassador. If you can't put down all of the bad guys try and get the ones closest to him."

"All right. I'll mess up their guns first, if that's okay."

“Of course, that’s fine son,” agreed Monroe. “It’s time to go.”

Mother Harper helped Adam get his wig back on and the two of them walked out of the front door, the boy once more trying to act like a girl.

By now no one was smiling.

The boy indicated an easterly direction as they pulled away from the curb. Agent Harper activated the GPS tracking unit and tested the encrypted radio. Adam pulled a map out of the glove compartment and unfolded it.

“What’s with the map, Adam?”

“If anyone’s watching us we can look like we’re lost or something.”

“Good thinking, Agent Valentine.”

After about ten minutes of following the boy’s directions they were very close.

“Pull over here and look at the map with me!”

Adam demanded urgently, “They’re watching us.”

“Adam, this isn’t safe, we should keep moving!”

“Don’t worry. I’ve already messed up the rifle that

the guy watching us has. See that big brown house up the street on the other side?”

“I see it, Adam. How can you tell it’s brown, it’s dark out?”

“Trust me, that’s where the IRA guys are, there’s five of them, one’s at the top window next to us, watching the street.”

“Where’s the Ambassador?”

“See that blue van parked way down the street?”

“Got it.” It might have been blue, Harper couldn’t tell.

“He’s tied up in there. There’s some sort of a small bomb thing around his neck. I think it works by radio. Be quiet a sec while I disconnect the battery.”

Adam stared intently at the blue truck.

“Done. It can’t go off now.”

“Time to call in the Marines,” Harper decided, “let’s move the hell out of here.”

The woman agent radioed a full description of the situation. Adam did his best to ‘mess up’ all of the weapons he could locate in the brown two-story

house as they drove slowly out of harms way.

“I don’t think I can knock out all of those guys at the same time. I think I found all of their guns though, they can’t shoot now.”

Ms. Harper radioed the new information to the already descending HRT unit and to the SWAT teams converging on the ground.

“We’ll give them a chance to surrender,” she assured the worried boy, “we’d like to take them alive too.”

Harper and the boy pulled into an empty driveway about two blocks away to watch the unfolding drama. Adam concentrated on opening the locks on the blue van and causing the chain holding the bomb around the Ambassador’s neck to come apart.

Things got really loud and exciting after that. Helicopters hovering, flash-bang devices going off, neighborhood residents running for cover, tear gas. The choking IRA baddies finally staggered out, hands over their heads. The Ambassador was

freed, albeit in need of clean underwear. Adam, Agent Harper, and the rest of the Special Team beat it back to Andrews before the newsies managed to get their selves organized.

When the team finally arrived at the Operations Center at Quantico Adam remarked in a perfect British accent, "I say chaps, it's gone past tea time." There was however, time for a midnight pizza.

Once more, the Director was on the phone.

"I agree Mr. President, the boy is incredible."

"I hear he made a very convincing young lady"

"Apparently, but Agent Monroe says it's a bit of a sore point with the boy, if you speak with him I wouldn't go there at all."

"Point taken, can't say that I blame him. He seems game to do just about anything you ask of him though, gutsy kid really."

"That he is Mr. President, but I must tell you that the team was not too happy about putting him this

close to a hot operation.”

“Neither was I but everyone but the Queen Mother was pressing us to use him. There was a need for haste.”

“Yes sir, point taken.”

“I also don’t have to tell you I guess, we need to let the media have a look at him before they go totally ballistic.”

“We’ve been working on that, sir. I think an interview with just one reporter, and some location footage thrown in will do for now. They can film around the Academy, maybe he can play the piano for them, that sort of thing.”

“I’d like him to come and spend the night at the White House sometime soon, Dora’s been pestering me to meet him, I’d like to get to know him too.”

“I’ll set it up, Mr. President.”

The Interview:

“But reporters are such total dorks!”

“I know that son,” Monroe was in total agreement, “but it’s one of the things we all have to put up with from time to time.”

“What will I have to do?”

“Just talk with her. If there’s something you don’t feel like talking about, just tell her. Just relax and be yourself.”

“Is there anything I shouldn’t talk about?”

“Don’t discuss our operational procedures, no need to talk about all of your abilities either, other than that I guess anything goes.”

“All right... I guess.” Adam would rather eat raw worms.

Rachael DeAngelo was the network’s latest interviewer/sexy voice/rising star. Her journalistic qualifications were at best minimal, but she knew how to draw out her target’s thoughts and feelings, at least she thought she did. The background videotaping was all in the can. Shots of the boy in and around the FBI Academy, a delightful piece of Adam playing some sort of obscure classical piano piece. Now it was time for her to get the boy to talk.

The setting was the faculty lounge at the Academy. The boy looked very small and vulnerable in the large overstuffed leather chair. This was going to get her an Emmy!

“Tell me Adam, are you happy here working for the FBI?”

“Yes.”

One-syllable answers made for a very dull interview.

“You don’t have any friends your age here, isn’t it really lonely for you at times?”

“No.”

“You’ve been involved in some pretty scary situations. Does that bother you at all?”

“No.”

“You seem a little reluctant to talk to me. Have you been told not to say much?”

“No. I just don’t like talking to reporters, no offense.”

“Why is that, Adam?”

“They seem mostly just interested in ratings and stuff.”

This child cannot be eight years old!

“Who told you that?”

“No one. I didn’t just bounce off the potato truck you know.”

“I think you can trust me, Adam.”

“Okay.”

Change tactics.

“You have some very special abilities, how are you able to track and find people the way you do?”

“It’s difficult to explain. I just seem to know when something is so.”

“Is it true that you can you move objects with just your thoughts?”

“I always prefer to use silverware or at least my fingers.”

Things went straight downhill from that point in the interview.

The interview did have one of the biggest audience ratings in networks history, however Ms. DeAngelo is now employed in Des Moines as the weekend weather person. It would be some time before any more interviews were requested, by

anyone.

On Valentine's Day Adam had his ninth birthday. It seems that the authorities in Idaho had approximated his birthday as such and had given him the suitable moniker. The number of birthday cards he received totally overloaded Quantico's modest postal facility. His friends at the Special Operations Center gave him his first and best birthday party. The number of kidnappings in the United States had by now decreased by 42 percent.

Groom Lake

The phone on Adam's computer desk started beeping.

“Yes, Agent Monroe.”

It never ceased to bother Monroe that the boy always knew who was calling him, the kid seemed to have his own built in caller I.D. system.

“Adam, come down to my office, we need to talk for a while.”

“Okay, be right there.” The boy stopped long enough to put his sneakers on before his sprint down to the boss's office. Adam did a well executed slide outside the SAIC's office and gave his usual polite knock on the open door before being asked in.

“Sit down son. I've just been on the phone with the DOD's liaison officer. They want to get their mitts on you for a week or so to do some tests and evaluations.”

“Tests? Needles!” The agent now had the boy's

complete attention.

“I don’t think so, nothing medical that I know of. They want to see what you can do on some defense related things. As usual with them it’s all very classified and hush-hush, they wouldn’t give me many details, but they want to take you out to Nevada, the Groom Lake test facility.”

“Area 51. Far out!” Adam was a big X-Files fan.

“Maybe they want you to pilot a flying saucer or something equally spooky.”

“Well, I am The Son of Space Aliens.”

“You leave tomorrow morning, get your bag all packed. Take something cool to wear because the weather will be very hot out there. Don’t let them run you ragged, if there’s something you don’t want to do just put your foot down and say no. And be careful, I’ve sort of gotten used to having you always underfoot and in the way.”

“Yes Agent Monroe, I’ve sort of gotten used to being underfoot.”

By now Adam used “Agent Monroe” as other children might use “father.”

The aircraft was a military version of a stretched Lear jet. It carried no markings other than a tail number, but the crew was Air Force. An Air Force one-star in civilian clothes was standing by the aircraft's door as Adam's car drove up. The boy got out carrying a small backpack, Agent Parker helped with his suitcase.

“Good morning Adam, I'm General Curtis. Ready for some traveling?”

“Yes sir, pleased to meet you.” Adam shook hands and turned to the FBI agent. “This is Special Agent Parker, sir.”

Parker and the General shook hands, then the agent shook Adam's hand goodbye.

“Be careful, kid. Don't wander off into the desert and get lost or eaten by coyotes.”

“I never get lost, just a little confused sometimes.” Parker got a hug.

As Adam was climbing into the aircraft Parker motioned the general to one side. “You folks take good care of that boy. He's a very game kid and

willing to try just about anything you might want him to do. Don't take advantage of that, General."

"I understand. We don't have anything planned that would put the boy in any sort of danger. If he so much as gets a splinter several promising careers will come to a halt."

"Good enough General, have a good flight. The boy's an aircraft buff, let him look over the pilot's shoulder if the rules permit."

"I'll do that."

During the first hour of the flight Adam and the general sat and talked mostly about the general's hobby, fly-fishing. The general was taking along his fly rod and hand tied flies for some later vacation time in the Sierra's. The intricately made fake bugs fascinated Adam. To the boy's delight the general finally took him up to the cockpit and introduced him to the flight crew.

"Adam, would you like to handle the controls for a few minutes?" Asked the pilot.

"Cool."

“Have you ever been in the pilot’s seat of an aircraft before?”

“Just a C-17 once in a while.”

“Just a C-17 huh?” The pilot and co-pilot exchanged looks.

“Yeah. It’s a neat plane, easy to control and everything. It has a control stick like a fighter.”

“Well just slide in here and grab the controls lightly, it’s on auto-pilot right now.”

The aircraft commander moved out of his seat and Adam carefully took his place, avoiding all of the levers and switches that seemed to cover most of the available surfaces.

“Hold the controls steady now,” explained the pilot, “I’m turning off the auto-pilot.”

Adam could ‘feel’ the aircraft now. His feet couldn’t reach the rudder controls so he used a bit of TK to hold them steady. The pilot had him turn the yoke a bit to the left and right, causing the wings to wiggle up and down slightly. Push forward go down, pull back go up.

“You can’t reach the rudder pedals, but pushing

on one or the other operates the rudder left or right.”

“I know, like this.” Adam ‘pushed’ on the rudder controls gently, causing the aircraft's tail to wiggle a bit.

The pilot saw the pedals move by themselves and did the usual freeze-up.

“How did you do that, son?” He asked quietly.

“TK.”

“TK?”

“Telekinesis, no big deal really. It gives people the creeps though, sorry.”

The general had been looking over everyone’s shoulders during the boy’s flight instructions and thought to himself, “Better call a halt to this right now.”

“Adam, why don’t you go on back and take your seat, I need to talk to the crew for a few minutes.”

“Oh. Okay, thanks guys.” Adam was a bit disappointed at the short length of time he had at the controls but decided against any sort of protest.

When the pilot had retaken his seat and flipped back on the autopilot, the general had a few words.

“Neither of you saw anything here today. Is that very clear, gentlemen?”

“No problem, sir. I can’t believe I saw it anyway.”

“Good, maintain that attitude Captain. And you Lieutenant?”

“Didn’t even meet the boy, sir.”

“Fair enough.”

Groom Lake from the air appeared to Adam to be a lot of nothing with an enormously long runway surrounded by mountains. There were a few large hangers scattered about, plus a collection of smaller buildings. The temperature was about one hundred and five. An air-conditioned blue staff car picked up the general and the boy and drove them over to one of the medium sized buildings, there weren’t any windows in it but at least it was cool inside. General Curtis escorted Adam past the now usual guards and security posts to a small dorm-like apartment that had been prepared for his visit; it was basically a bedroom, TV, and a shower.

“This is a pretty bare Adam, but you won’t be

staying here forever. We have a briefing set up in a few minutes, if you need to use the john or anything now's the time."

"This is fine sir, and I do need to use the bathroom."

"All right, I'll be back in a few minutes."

The general returned as promised and found the boy doing some unpacking.

"All set, son?"

"Yes sir, just putting some stuff away."

"Let that go for now, everyone's waiting on us."

"Yes sir."

The general led Adam down several bare hallways and into a large conference room. Inside were about a dozen military and civilian personnel. They all had their eyes on the boy. The general made the introductions.

"People, meet Adam."

None of the people at the table said anything but a few of them did smile at the boy.

"Hello," said a suddenly shy Adam.

“Have a seat son, these characters don’t bite.”

Adam sat in the central chair that Curtis had pointed out, he felt a bit like the defendant in a trial. One of the civilian types began talking. “How was your flight Adam, are you feeling all right?”

“I’m fine sir, it was a nice flight. I got to handle the controls for a few minutes.”

“Do any barrel rolls?”

“Not intentionally.”

This seemed to break the ice a little as a number of the more grim visages around the table actually smiled.

“Adam, we’ve brought you out here to test your very unusual abilities, and to determine which, if any of them, would be useful to the country’s military and intelligence community. Don’t feel your under a lot of pressure to do everything we throw at you, just try your best and let it go at that.”

“Yes sir, I understand.”

One of the nameless civilians asked the next question. “There are several people around here

who are skeptical of your so-called telekinetic abilities, frankly I'm one of them. Could you give us some small demonstration right here and now before we take things any further?"

"Yes sir, what would you like me to do?"

The civilian pointed to a glass of ice water in front of him.

"Can you move that?"

"Sure."

Every eye in the room stared intently at the frosty glass. Smoothly and without a wobble, the glass rose up off the table and did a slow circuit of the room over the open mouthed heads of the assembled scientist's, landing exactly where it had started from. A small wobbly blob of water then rose out of the glass and hovered over the doubting scientist's head for a moment, it then fell to splash on the astonished man's forehead.

"How's that?" Asked Adam with an impish grin. Silence.

Then after a bit there were a number of "sonofabitches" and one or two "holy shits."

The first civilian to gather his wits spoke to the room. “Anybody else here have any doubts about this boy now?”

No one did. After this small demonstration everyone treated the boy with a measure of respect and ceased to look at him as just a nine-year old child. The meeting lasted an hour longer, it consisted mostly of a bored Adam listening to the assembled eggheads argue and discuss how best to test him. Finally a consensus was reached for the first test.

“Adam are you up to one quick test outside in a little while,” asked Curtis, “if you’re too tired for now we can reschedule for tomorrow?”

“I’m fine sir. Let’s do it.” Anything to keep from falling asleep.

“Okay. It’ll be hot outside, do you have some cooler clothes with you?”

“Yes sir, some shorts and T-shirts, is that all right?”

“They’ll be fine, go put them on. I’ll be by to get

you in a few minutes.”

“Yes sir.”

Adam dashed back to his room and changed into some cotton shorts and a T-shirt that said “The Truth Is Out There” on it’s front. He decided his pair of sports sandals would also be in order. In a little while General Curtis collected him and they drove over to the helicopter pad.

“We’re flying over to a test range. They’re going to launch a target drone that will fly overhead at about five thousand feet. This has been set up in advance for today if things went well at the interview. Things went well. We want to see if you can do anything at all to disable or destroy the drone.”

“Aren’t those things really expensive?” Adam frequently thought about the cost of things, to him five bucks was big money.

“Don’t worry about that, just try to do your best. Those things are made to be shot down anyway.”

“Okay...”

They had to cost a lot of money; they had small jet

engines and everything.

The noisy flight to the test range lasted about fifteen minutes; the landscape seemed to become even more barren, if that were at all possible. They landed at a collection of communications trailers and a radar antenna; it took a while for the dust to settle.

“The drone will be over in about ten minutes, what do you need for us to do, Adam?” Asked Curtis.

“Do you have a pair of binoculars I could use?”

“Sure son.” A pair appeared in about thirty seconds. “Anything else?”

Adam indicated a flat area to the west of the site.

“I’m going to walk over there a ways where it will be quite and I can concentrate. Could you ask the people here to be quiet and to stay put?”

“You’ve got it, son.”

“I sound sort of bossy, but I do better if I don’t get distracted.”

“We understand, no problem Adam. You’ve got the ball.”

The small boy walked out and away from the

shaded control unit and the watching scientists. He stopped about two hundred yards away in the scorching late afternoon sun and waited while looking up at the sky.

“Drone’s approaching, overhead in one minute.”
Someone said. “Shouldn’t we tell the boy?”

“No need, look!” Replied Curtis, “he has it.”
Adam had sensed the drones approach before he was able to see it; he was looking exactly where the tracking antenna was pointing.

The orange colored drone was indeed powered by a small jet engine and was about twice the size of a standard cruise missile, it was also moving along at over four hundred knots. Adam knew a jet engine’s most vulnerable place. He read a lot. The boy pushed his remote sensing until he seemed to be almost inside the target. “There, the turbine blades,” he thought, “make them come loose.”

The target drone’s engine turned itself into a fair imitation of a land mine as the spinning turbine blades exploded out in all directions. In an instant

the drone was a fireball of fuel and assorted scrap metal descending toward the barren landscape below.

“Cool!” Adam said quietly to himself.

Over at the control unit hats were thrown skyward, backs were pounded and numerous bad words were shouted, some of them new to Adam. When the wreckage was recovered and returned for analysis the next day it was learned that the turbine blades hadn't snapped or cracked, they had simply pulled apart like taffy.

Adam's final comment on the day's events:
“What's for dinner?”

The next two days were filled with experiments that ranged from elaborate to silly.

In the next scheduled test the research group wanted to try and detect just what sort of force it was that the boy was controlling. In a large open lab area they arranged a series of weights for the boy to lift using just his telekinetic ability. The

weights began with a chicken feather and progressed up to bowling ball. Numerous sensors that detected everything from magnetic fields to those that were sensitive to gravity changes were arrayed around Adam and the weights he was to supposed to lift. The boy himself was clad in just his under shorts to allow for the many electrical contact patches and sensor wires that were stuck to him in a grid pattern from head to toe. He balked when they had wanted to continue the pattern on the areas of his body one would consider 'private'. Adam consoled himself; at least they weren't actually sticking needles into him.

“All right Adam, were ready now. Let's start with having you lift the feather.” This was a Dr. Scribner who was in charge of this phase.

“Okay, here goes.” Adam secretly thought this was all a tad loopy.

The small white feather jumped up and hovered about a foot above the sensitive electronic scale it had been resting on. None of the sensors or

instruments registered anything. Adam's brain waves were normal, no unusual electrical activity anywhere on his body. The scientist's rechecked all of their connections and tried the next weight, a golf ball. Same results.

"We're still not registering anything, lets just go to the last weight." Scribner decided.

This was harder. Adam had to concentrate fully on the heavy bowling ball; it was about at the limits of what he could lift. As the heavy ball wobbled and slowly lifted off the scale, the only thing that the scientist's detected was a very slight rise in the boy's brain activity. The session ended with the scientist's having Adam stand on a scale himself to see if he could move himself or affect his weight. His weight dropped from his runty sixty-two pounds to a really puny forty-one.

That afternoon, with the boy again wired from head to toe, his ability to alter metals was put to the test. The lab setup was similar, only this time there were lengths of various types of metals in thickness

that ranged from fine wires to heavy construction beams. The results were fairly spectacular, Adam could deform or melt all of the samples, the really heavy pieces just took a while longer.

That evening after the sun had relented, there was one simple test that was conducted outside on a patch of desert that had been recently plowed and smoothed over. Adam stood next to General Curtis as they surveyed the one-acre plot; the boy was holding a cardboard box full of bright yellow tennis balls.

“Okay kid, this is a mine field. Don’t worry, the mines are fakes. If you can, start walking and put a ball on top of every mine you can see or sense or whatever the heck it is you do.”

“Yes sir, no sweat.”

There were twenty-five balls in the box and twenty-five ‘mines’ in the small field. After ten minutes all of the balls were on top of all of the mines. It took a while for the technicians to dig up

the mines and confirm the boy's accuracy but Curtis knew before they even began digging that Adam had been spot on with all of their locations.

The next morning found Adam at a makeshift firing range. Paper targets had been set up at ranges from ten yards to one thousand yards. A long table held an assortment of firearms, small caliber target pistols up to a .308 HK sniper rifle.

"Ever fire a gun before, Adam?" Curtis asked.

"No sir, they won't let me do that at Quantico."

"That's all right. This test may come to nothing, we just want to see if you can somehow use any of your abilities to accurately fire these weapons."

"What do we do first?" Adam was very uneasy about holding and shooting an actual gun.

"Put on these ear protectors," Curtis handed him a pair of plastic headphone-like protectors, "and we'll try one of these small .22's first."

Curtis handed Adam a Colt target automatic with the caution to keep it pointed down range at all times. "With your finger away from trigger, pull back

the slide and let it snap forward by itself, then it's ready to fire."

"Yes sir." Adam was still a bit nervous but he managed to do as instructed.

"Real good. Now take aim at the nearest target and gently squeeze off a round, it will jump just a little, don't worry."

The pistol made a sharp snapping sound and a small hole appeared in the white at about ten o'clock on the target.

"Not very good, sir." Adam was disappointed with his first shot.

"That's fine for a first shot. Don't tense up, try and relax and focus in on the target and your pistol, get the feel for putting the next round in the black."

Adam thought for a moment and took a deep breath, as he exhaled and relaxed he closed his eyes and raised the pistol. Snap! Dead center.

"Bulls eye kid!" Curtis was ready for what came next. "Finish off the clip now, take your time."

Seven more snaps, just one slightly larger hole at dead center. All of the rounds had gone through the

same hole.

“Cool.” Adam had opened his eyes by now. “I did better after I closed my eyes.”

Curtis had been standing behind the boy. “You had your eyes closed?”

“Yes sir, I could see things better that way.”

Curtis took the pistol from Adam and laid it gently on the table, shaking his head at all of the hours he had spent in his life just to become a mediocre shot.

“Let’s try the rifle at the far target. It will make a lot of noise and kick some, but don’t let that scare you.”

“All right sir, show me how.”

Adam only fired the sniper rifle twice; the kick hurt his small shoulder too much. He didn’t bother with the powerful telescopic sight; he just closed his eyes and fired. One of the range technicians jumped in a jeep and drove off to collect the distant 1,000-yard target. When he returned the paper had one hole punched dead center where both bullets had gone through.

“Call me Adam Oakley!” The boy was obviously the best shot on the planet, not that he could ever bring himself to shoot anything that breathed.

Adam only rebelled at one of the tests. In one of the labs was a white rabbit in a cage; it's head and body wired for sound. One of the lab coats gave the boy his instructions.

“Just put the rabbit to sleep like you did to that bomber in Atlanta.”

“Well, okay.” Replied a somewhat reluctant Adam. The rabbit twitched its pink nose a few more times and then fell over on its side. The boy immediately released the light pressure and the rabbit sat up and resumed its nose twitching.

“Now we want you to hold the pressure until the rabbit is dead.”

“What!”

“Just hold the pressure till it dies son.”

“Forget it!” Adam was in total rebellion mode. “I'm not murdering a bunny!”

“It's just a lab rabbit son.”

All of the wires fell away from the rabbit (bunny),

and the metal cage proceeded to fly apart. Adam scooped up the silly white fur ball and they both made their escape down the hallway.

General Curtis found the boy and rabbit sitting on the bed in his room.

“What’s wrong Adam? They said you just ran out of the lab.”

“They wanted me to kill this bunny. I didn’t sign on to kill bunnies!” Adam still thought of rabbits as ‘bunnies’. He always would.

“I see. It bothers you to hurt animals or people, doesn’t it?”

“Yes sir it does. I’m sorry.”

“No need to apologize son, it might be a better world if more people had your attitude. I’ll go talk to the nitwits who sat up that test. The rabbit won’t be harmed, ever.”

“All right sir. Thanks.”

General Curtis was as good as his word. The term “ass reaming” is totally inadequate to describe the conversation he had with the scientist involved.

“You’re off of this project! You’ve pretty well managed to totally alienate that boy! What the hell we’re you thinking of, you’ve read the psych profiles on him, he wouldn’t hurt a hyena if it were chewing off his Goddamn foot! (It gets really loud and obscene about here) Get out!”

The scientist involved was put on the next aircraft off the base with a warning never to speak to anyone about the nature of any of the tests at Groom Lake. He had the sense to follow those instructions. Adam calmed down. Curtis calmed down. The bunny calmed down. The next small experiment involved an H-bomb.

On the third day at the base, Adam and General Curtis drove to one of the more remote buildings on the base. He led the boy into a large darkened room and flicked on the lights. There was nothing in the room except for one cone shaped object resting on a wooden support, it was about four feet high and maybe two feet across its rounded bottom.

“Have a look at this son. Do you know what it is?”
Asked Curtis.

Adam slowly approached the object and lightly touched it with one hand. He drew back his fingers quickly, as if bitten by something.

“Yes. It’s an atomic bomb, isn’t it?”

“Close enough. It’s a double stage thermonuclear device, an H-bomb actually. The casing is a MIRV re-entry module. This one was built in Russia, don’t ask me to tell you how we got our hands on it.”

“Why are you showing it to me?”

“I want you to use your abilities to look all through it,” explained Curtis, “get to be completely familiar with what it feels like to you.”

“So I can find one if I have to, right?”

“It may come to that someday. These things are beginning to fall into the hands of people who shouldn’t be trusted with sharp scissors. We may need you to track one down.”

“Lord!”

“I agree, son.”

Adam sat on the floor up against one wall studying the awful thing for almost an hour. Finally he got up

and asked, "I have it now. Can we go now? This place gives me the creeps."

"It gives me the creeps too, son. Let's go do something that's fun."

The 'fun' was a side trip to Fort Irwin, where the Army and assorted hard cases conduct war games. Realistic war games. Adam was going to play commando.

A team of six Army Special Forces personnel had been briefed on their unusual assignment. The usual head shaking and doubts about the sanity of whoever dreamed this up followed this. Adam landed by helicopter at the makeshift command post and was introduced to the team and its leader, Captain Ross. The initial personal reactions of the team members were normal. "This is just a little kid, for Chrissake!"

The mission objective was simple. During the upcoming exercises, Spooky Team, as they would be called, was to infiltrate the Blue Forces command

center, render its communications inoperative, and if possible take prisoner the commanding officer.

Adam was to be the key to any success they might have. The boy gave a demonstration of how he could render firearms inoperative (they would only be firing blanks in any case) and how easy it was to short out electronic equipment by causing small bits of copper and solder to shift their positions.

Vehicles didn't run well with inoperative fuel pumps or disconnected batteries either. One of the team members volunteered to be 'put to sleep'. Adam's abilities to do reconnaissance without moving an inch pretty well shut up any remaining doubters.

During the preplanning for the operation someone was thinking ahead and had come up with a kid sized black jogging suit, lightweight boots, and a cap to conceal Adam's blond hair. Adam, of course, thought that this was all entirely too cool. The boy would carry a small light pack that would contain water, a pair of night vision binoculars, and a bundle of plastic crowd control type handcuffs for tying up people who were 'asleep'.

A classified sound suppressed helicopter would insert the Spooky Team five miles from Blue Forces' headquarters. They would have to hike on foot through the heavily patrolled desert area. Everyone, including Adam, was fitted with a Miles laser system. Instead of live bullets, their weapons and the enemies weapons fired an infrared laser beam that registered on the detectors worn by each team member, if you were hit, a light and beeper would go off and you would be 'dead'. Adam wouldn't be carrying any weapons, but he did have the detectors on his pack harness.

Just before boarding the quiet chopper Captain Ross took Adam aside for a short talk.

"Adam, are you really up to this? We'll be moving pretty fast by foot over several miles of rough ground, you can keep up?"

"I think so. Just try and remember that my legs are only about half as long as yours are. I'll do my best."

"That's all I can ask son, just do your best. If you

need a rest say so, don't kill yourself trying to keep up."

"Will do, Captain Ross."

"I want you to stay close to me, let me know when you sense something ahead as we move along."

"Yes sir."

"Time to go kid."

The team boarded the sound suppressed helicopter and lifted into the cool night air. Adam was stuffed in between two of the large soldiers and away from the open door, they all had instructions to keep the boy as safe as possible, they would have done so anyway. The flight to the drop-off site only took about fifteen minutes. The helicopter touched down quickly and everyone tumbled out and lay flat as the aircraft lifted off and disappeared into the night. Adam had been carried bodily out of the chopper and thumped down beside the Captain.

"Ouch!"

"What's wrong kid?" Asked Ross.

"Banged my knee, no sweat."

"Take a look around kid," said Ross, "tell me

what's out there.”

“All right. Be quiet for a minute, sir.”

Adam scanned the surrounding area and found it empty, he did detect people somewhere far up ahead of them.

“It's clear around here, Captain. There's some one way up ahead, maybe a mile or two.”

“Good. Let's move out. Stay close kid.”

“Yes sir.”

The small team moved out at a fast walk, for Adam it was a medium jog. All of the swimming and horsing around on the obstacle course back at Quantico had helped the boy's endurance and he was mostly able to keep up. His knee stung a bit but was not a real hindrance.

Adam grabbed Captain Ross' sleeve and signaled a halt.

“Tired, kid?” He asked.

“Shhh. Quite. I'm okay. There are two guys up ahead, over that far hill. I think it's some sort of sentry thing,” whispered Adam, “they have a radio

too.”

“Can you take out the radio?”

“Yes sir.”

“Do it.”

After a moment, “Done. I took out their rifles too.”

“Get out two of those plastic ties, when we get up close you can put them to sleep and we’ll tie them up, okay?”

“Okay.”

The team spread out and moved quietly up the small hill until they could look down on the two bored sentries. Adam gave the plastic ties to two of the team members. When Ross gave the signal the two sentries sort of wobbled down to the ground and passed out. They were bound hand and foot before they woke up. Duct tape would silence any yell for help. The team moved off before the awakening sentries could make much sense out of what had happened to them.

At about mile three Adam called another halt.

“What is it kid?”

“I could use a break,” the boy gasped, “five minutes?”

“No problem kid, you’re doing great.” Replied Ross. “ Take ten, we have plenty of time.” Actually, everyone appreciated the break.

Adam used the time to look ahead and scout out the terrain. When his breathing had slowed to normal, he spoke to Ross.

“The command center is up ahead, maybe a half mile. There are some sentries around, but not very many. I don’t think they’re expecting any visitors. If I can get in fairly close I can take out all of their radios and stuff.”

“Great! We’ll take out enough of the sentries to give us a free path to the center,” replied Ross, “then you can go to work.”

The team moved slowly and quietly towards the collection of tents and communications vans. Along the way a total of six sentries took naps. Hidden behind some rocks and scrub brush Adam began

working on the center's electronics.

“Doesn't all of that stuff cost a lot of money?”

Adam asked.

“Don't worry kid,” said Ross, “just waste it.”

“O-kay.”

The first things to go were the thick cables leading to all of the antennas, then the generators supplying power to the center began making awful grinding noises and seized up. Darkness. Next, Adam began locating and shorting out all of the battery powered portable radios he could find, several cell phones began smoking alarmingly. The boy finished up by disabling all of the vehicles parked around the center and by freezing up all of the weapons he detected. The center was now blind, dumb, deaf, and defenseless. Time to grab the General.

The General in question was having a hissing fit. The place was in the dark; he had no communications at all, his attempts to send messengers failed when their vehicles wouldn't

start. It was almost an anticlimax when the black clad team of soldiers burst in and 'shot' everyone in the center except himself. Every Miles unit on every one of his staff was blinking and beeping, so they had to play dead. Adam kept hidden in the rocks until the team returned with the very pissed off general officer. The hike back to the pickup point was tiring for the boy but he smiled almost constantly at the sight of the hand cuffed and cursing officer. The General couldn't get anyone to explain to him what a small boy was doing in the midst of a war game.

Adam wasn't of much use in the debriefing, since he was curled tightly into a ball, snoring softly. Captain Ross told the assembled officers and civilians that if we had a half dozen Adams' working for us most of the Army would be out of a job. Back at Groom Lake the dusty and still sleepy Adam was fed, hosed off, bandaged, and put to bed, tomorrow he could go home (if they ever got him awake).

All of the tests were deemed a success. The

incident with the bunny didn't make it into the final report quite as it occurred, it was said that the boy probably wouldn't ever be of much use in any 'wet' work the CIA or anyone else might have in mind, too gentle you see. The one injury during the commando raid was to the boy; the mission summary listed it as "abrasion, right kneecap".

The next morning after Adam had been mostly awakened and then fed, he had a final meeting with General Curtis.

"Adam, I want you to know how much we all appreciate the effort you put into making these tests successful, especially the raid at Fort Irwin."

"I had a lot of fun General. I hope I can be useful to you sometime."

"You already are useful, son. We need to talk a bit about security now. The things that you did here are highly classified, we would like your word that you won't discuss any of the things that you did here. That means not even with the FBI people that you work with, the fewer people who know what you can do the better. This is very important son, do you

understand?”

“Yes sir. I’ll keep my lips zipped, you have my word. I won’t even mention the flying saucer.”

“Flying saucer? What are you talking about?”

“The flying saucer over there in the underground hanger, you know, by the hills.”

“There are no flying saucers here, son.”

“But...”

“No flying saucers.”

“Oh. Right. My mistake, Sorry.”

“Who told you about flying saucers?”

“Well, no one actually, I was sort of looking around the other night before I went to sleep and found it. But I didn’t find it, must have been a dream or something. Never mind.”

“You forget it son, understand?”

“Forget what sir?”

“That’s the spirit.”

“On second thought, wait here a few minutes.”
Said Curtis. “I need to talk to some people.”

“Okay, sir.”

Adam had practically dozed off by the time Curtis finally returned.

“Change of plans. We need you for one more day. Let’s go look at the flying saucer.”

“That doesn’t exist,” grinned Adam.

“That’s right.”

General Curtis and the boy were driven across the installation to the base of the hills. A piece of the hillside lifted up just enough to allow the car to pass underneath the massive door.

“Cool!” Was Adam’s wide-eyed observation.

“The rocks and dirt are actually aluminum and fiberglass,” explained Curtis, “they did a good paint job.”

Adam’s attention was on the spacecraft. It resembled two Frisbee’s stuck together edge to edge, except it was about one hundred feet across. It seemed to be sitting on the smooth concrete floor; in reality it floated about six inches above the floor. There were no doors visible, no seams, nothing. It appeared to be one solid piece of shimmering silver metal.

The car stopped about twenty yards from the massive object. Adam was the first out of the car. He just stood and stared.

“This thing was dug out of the side of a clay riverbank in Alaska fifty-five years ago. The geologist’s say that it was probably buried there in a flood about forty-five thousand years ago. Bringing it here undetected was a major miracle of security measures and misinformation. Some sort of field it generates has kept us from getting closer than six inches since it was first brought here. The eggheads call it a ‘stasis field’ for lack of a better name,” Curtis explained. “Can you tell us what’s inside?”

“Yes.” Adam replied softly, “It’s really weird.”

“Is anyone, or anything in there, alive or dead?”

“No, there’s just a lot of goofy looking machinery and things. I think I can make it open, should I?”

“Jesus! Don’t do anything!” Curtis didn’t quite scream.

“Okay.” Adam cringed at the man’s reaction.

There was a delay of three hours while the

scientist's and lab nerds scurried around setting up cameras and sensing equipment. Finally things seemed as ready as they would ever be and the word was given.

“All right Adam,” asked Curtis, “what are you going to do?”

“There's a sort of control panel thing in front of some silly looking chairs. It feels like the knobby gizmo on the right might control the stasis field. Shall I turn it?”

“Okay. Go really slow, turn it back if we say so.”

“Here goes nothing.”

Nothing was what happened.

“What's wrong son,” Curtis frowned, “Didn't it work?”

“It doesn't turn. Wait a sec, you have to squeeze it!”

The giant Frisbee settled to the floor with a muffled rumble. The surface of the spacecraft lost the rippling shimmer that it had. Several of the white lab coats rushed up with instruments and proclaimed that there was no radiation. There was

still no indication of a door or portal on the seamless surface.

“Now what?” Asked Curtis.

“Just a sec, you have to squeeze all of the controls.” Said Adam, trying to concentrate amidst all of the hubbub.

With a distinct hiss worthy of the worst science fiction film an oval section of the spacecraft pulled itself in and upwards. At the same time a black surfaced metal ramp slid out and lightly touched the concrete.

“Shall we go for a spin?” Asked an entirely too smug Adam.

“Not just yet. Maybe in a year or twelve,” answered a very wide-eyed General Curtis.

“Come on, let’s go inside!”

“No. Not until we have had a long time to study that thing. Sorry, son.”

“Well, Geez!”

And that was that. At least for the time being.

Adam flew back to Quantico that evening. He

was still a lot put out that he never made it into the spacecraft, but he did manage a nice goodbye to General Curtis and the assembled lab coats. There was just himself and the crew on the return flight, so he curled himself into the usual ball and slept his way through flyover country. It was just becoming light when the Lear jet's tires smoked onto the runway at Quantico. Agent's Parker and Harper drew the welcoming committee duty.

A yawning Adam, made his way down the small jet's stairs, Agent Harper caught him unaware and gave him a serious hug and kiss.

"Welcome back Adam, how was Nevada?" She asked.

"Hot. I'm starved."

"I'll fix you some breakfast. What did you do out there, anyway?"

"Oh, stuff."

"Stuff?"

"Yeah. You've done something to your hair." He observed, changing the subject.

"I had it cut. You're not talking, are you?"

“Nice weather today, Nevada was way too hot.”

Adam had Saturday to sleep till noon and generally goof off as he saw fit. He went to mass with Agent Harper Sunday morning; afterwards he even spoke with the priest about what was involved in joining the Catholic Church. This didn't really surprise Agent Harper; the boy seemed to draw some real strength from the religious services that they attended. He still wouldn't talk about anything he did in Nevada, it finally came to Agent Harper that the boy had strict instructions to zip it.

Monday morning found the as usual bleary-eyed Adam in Monroe's office.

“Welcome back, son. Agent Harper tells me that you didn't have much to say about what you did out west. Anything you'd care to talk to me about?”

“Well sir, they asked me not to discuss the things I did, and I told them I wouldn't.”

“Fair enough I guess. I'd give a month's pay to know just what went on out there, but if you aren't supposed to say anything, then you shouldn't.”

Harper said your knee was bandaged, any comment?"

"Banged my knee on a flying saucer."

Silly grin.

A Friend Indeed

Adam had been with the Special Team for more than six months. A working routine had evolved that averaged one case assignment a week. This left plenty of spare time for his music, tutoring, computer nerding, and generally messing around. Some members of the team had voiced concerns from time to time that the boy still hadn't found a friend his own age. Introductions had been made, but none of the children that Adam had met really seemed comfortable being around the very famous and sometimes strange boy. It was hoped that Adam would meet some one on his own, instead of the artificial meetings the staff tried to arrange. Friendships cannot be arranged they just have to happen. Eventually a friendship did happen.

Adam had recently taken up the sport of roller blading; he enjoyed the effort and balance it

required to move smoothly from point A to point B. The agents made him wear a helmet and pads so as to not leave his skin and senses on the pavement. His escort usually rode along on bikes, although Agent Harper was still gamely trying to master the sport.

On a rare sunny, and almost warm Saturday in February, Adam was tearing along the paved bicycle path that ringed much of the base. Frederick W. Richter Jr. was similarly equipped and skating along in the opposite direction. As both skaters rounded a fairly sharp curve zigs and zags were attempted, but the boys managed to pretty well collide head on. The helmets and pads paid for themselves at that moment.

“Oww! Geez!” Were the comments that Adam came up with as he tried to untangle himself from whatever lunatic he had collided with.

“You stupid little dork!” Frederick was trying to examine his protesting behind as he got to his feet. “Why don’t you go practice on the runway!”

By this time alarmed FBI agents looking for broken bones or missing pieces surrounded both boys. Frederick's eyes widened as he took in the firearms showing under their jogging clothes, he decided to hold his tongue for just a bit.

"Are you okay, Adam?" Agent Steinmetz could see a mountain of paperwork falling on him if the boy was really hurt.

"Yeah, I'm all right. What about that loud mouthed doofus?" Referring to Frederick. Harper asked the other boy, "How about you child, are you all right?"

"I guess so, I think I need a new butt though!" Snapped Frederick.

"You both need to be more careful. Now cool off and shake hands, make nice!" Her tone left no room for delay or disobedience.

Both boys rather distastefully took each other's hand for a quick shake and a muttered "sorry."

"You're that weird FBI kid, Adam, aren't you?" Asked Frederick, "I guess I'm in dutch now, I just

knocked America's little darling on his cute little butt."

Adam managed a slight grin and replied, "I guess it was a mutual butt knocking. I suppose I won't have you shot, maybe just slapped around for a while."

This seemed the beginning of peace between the two boys.

"Let's skate down to the snack bar," Frederick suggested.

"Okay, Freddie. You lead."

"How did you know my name?"

"Lucky guess."

Adam glanced back at the agents as if to ask if it was all right to go, they nodded and motioned him on.

"I do believe they're hitting it off. Two minutes ago I thought we might have to break up a fist fight." Observed Steinmetz.

"Typical boys," said Harper, "I hope Adam can actually make a friend."

After swooping into the small snack bar/hamburger shop, the two boys sat at a table

outside sucking up slurpees. The agents sat some distance away so as to give Adam and his new acquaintance some space. They observed both boys break out into a fit of giggles over something that Adam said.

“I wonder what’s so funny,” asked Harper, “they seem to be hitting it off pretty good?”

“So what’s it like, you know, being famous and everything?” Asked Freddie.

“I don’t feel famous, I feel like a nine year old kid. I like working with the FBI people though, they’ve been really nice.”

“I’ll be ten in a few months, you seem sort of puny for your age.”

“Gee, thanks. You seem sort of overgrown for your age.”

“I see your ugly face on the TV just about every week. Some of those stories are pretty weird.”

“Sometime I can be pretty weird. A lot of the stuff on TV about me is just totally silly though.”

“You don’t look like a space alien, more like your average dork.”

“Look who’s talking? What’s your family like?”

“My dad’s in the Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Richter.”

“Sounds sort of grim.”

“Sometimes. He’s why I’m the biggest guy in my class, you don’t disobey any of his orders, and I can tell you that. I have a sister; she’s thirteen and probably brain dead. My mom is the best cook on the planet. Wanna have dinner at my place? We always have enough to feed half the base.”

“Gee, I don’t know. Would your folks mind?”

“My sister won’t even notice, my dad will probably tell you to get a haircut and my mom will tell you to eat more, you need to grow.”

“Sounds cool.”

“Neat. Come over about five. I have to get back now and get the leaves raked and stuff before my dad gets home, or else.”

“I thought all the leaves on the trees fell off by this time of year?” Adam asked.

“I think we have mutant trees or something, I rake leaves all the damn time.”

“It sounds like you had better do a good job!”

Freddie gave Adam directions to his house (not that Adam would need them) and zoomed away to his obligations.

“See ya!” Shouted Freddie. Adam waved in return. Geez, a real family to have dinner with!

The agent’s were a bit disappointed when the new boy darted off in a hurry; they assumed that he was spooked, as was the usual case.

“So Adam, where’s he off to in such a hurry, I thought you two might hit it off?” Asked Ms. Harper.

“He has to get the yard raked before his father gets home.”

“Oh. What’s his name?”

“Freddie Richter, his dad’s in the Marines here. I got invited to dinner later, can I go?”

“Well sure! Great!” Harper seemed about to bust. “By the way, what were you two laughing so hard about?”

“Oh that, I was just telling him about your part time job as an exotic dancer.”

Adam was very glad that he still had on his helmet and wished that he owned some butt pads. Geez.

After the rolling procession of agents and boy returned to the Operations Center some discreet inquiries were made about Freddie Richter and his family. A quick review of records made it clear that there didn't seem to be even the remotest security problem with Adam spending time with the Richter's. Needless to say these inquiries were never mentioned to Adam.

"What do I wear?" Adam asked, "I haven't really done this sort of thing before?"

"Just wash your face and put on a clean shirt. You don't need to get all dressed up just to have dinner with a friend." Instructed Ms. Harper.

"Oh. Okay. Can't I just go alone, I mean...?"

"Don't worry, we'll just drop you off and hide in the bushes or something. A house full of armed FBI types sort of puts a damper on things."

"Thanks."

"Take your cell phone along. When you're ready to come home or they throw you out give us a buzz and we'll pick you up."

“Okay, will do. Thanks.”

During this interlude, Freddie casually asked his mom, “Is it okay if I asked this new friend I met today to come over for dinner tonight?”

“Well, I suppose so. You tell me sooner next time though, so I can fix something nice.”

“You always fix something nice, mom.”

Freddie always knew how to get to Mrs. Richter.

Promptly at five, an FBI staff car let Adam out in front of the Richter’s two-story home. The house would be under surveillance for the length of the boy’s visit. Adam went up the front walk and rang the doorbell, noting that the lawn seemed well raked and clipped. A cross between Thor the God of Thunder and Erik the Red in a Marine uniform answered the door and stared down at the small boy from a great height.

“Uh, hello sir, my name’s Adam. Freddie asked me to come by for dinner.”

“You look familiar boy, have we met before?”

“No sir. I’m pleased to meet you.” Adam offered

his hand to the Marine; it was like shaking hands with a redwood tree.

“Well, pleased to meet you. Come on in, Freddie’s up in his room, I think.”

“Thank you.”

“What’s your last name, son?”

“Valentine, sir.”

Colonel Richter looked down at the small boy again and then noticed the two ‘suits’ standing by a car across the street. They smiled and waved.

“I’m a little dense sometimes. Honored to have you in my home, son.”

“Honored to be here sir.”

“Greta! Come see who Freddie invited to dinner!” Even the brain dead sister (Hanna) seemed pleased by the celebrity in their midst. Adam thought the girl was very beautiful but knew better than to ever say anything like that to Freddie.

If this was a simple meal Adam wondered what Freddie’s mom would come up with given a weeks notice. Good Lord, even the broccoli tasted good! He knew that it was polite to leave a little something

on your plate when you finished, but this evening he decided to throw etiquette aside and polished his plate to a shine.

“Mrs. Richter, that was the best meal ever!” Said the stuffed boy, “I’m available for adoption you know.”

“Thank you Adam. Perhaps we could move Freddie into the garage or maybe the shed out back.” Mrs. Richter was beaming.

“Mom!” Freddie hoped she was kidding.

“Great idea, mom!” Hanna said with a wicked smile directed at her pesky sibling.

Colonel Richter had a question. More than just one.

“Tell me Adam, there’s been a rumor floating around that you were spotted out at Fort Irwin a while back, any truth in that?”

“I’m supposed to say “no comment” sir.”

“Ah. I see. End of questions.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“What’s at Fort Irwin, dad?” Freddie was missing something here.

“Never mind, son.” The look in his father’s eyes told Freddie to do just that.

“Sir, would it be all right if Freddie came by my place once and a while?” Asked Adam, “There’s a neat pool at the academy, it’s indoors and everything.”

“Well, I suppose so. Your people wouldn’t mind?”

“No sir. They cut me quite a bit of slack.”

“All right then. You have him thrown out on his butt if he gets too rowdy.”

“Yes sir.”

“Neat-O!” Freddie’s day was made.

“Adam, I have one more question, then I’ll stop pestering you. There’s been a lot of talk about some of the things you can do. Can you show us, I mean...? “

Adam answered the Colonel’s awkward and unfinished question when the saltshaker lifted quietly off the table and drifted around the dining room. The Richter family just sat wide-eyed and silent during the shaker’s excursion. Freddie’s mouth was open.

“I hope I haven’t totally spooked everyone, I’ll go now if you want me to.”

“No son don’t be silly,” said the Colonel, “you’re always welcome here. That just takes a bit of getting used to.”

“Yes sir, I know is does, thanks.”

There was an awkward pause for a few moments before the Colonel changed the subject. “Everyone at this table always helps with the clearing and cleaning up after dinner, company’s no exception. Adam, you’re on garbage detail.”

“Yes sir.” Adam smiled; one didn’t dare disobey the Colonel.

After the kitchen was put in order for the evening, the two boys took off upstairs to Freddie’s room for an inspection of the boy’s computer. Colonel and Mrs. Richter sat down in the living room and shared a very rare shot of brandy to calm their nerves. Hanna telephoned every girl within a one hundred mile radius. “You’re just not going to believe who had dinner with us tonight!”

Around eight o'clock, Adam decided that he shouldn't overstay and make a pest of himself so he thanked everyone for the nice meal and visit. He impressed Freddie to no length when he pulled out the smallest cell phone the boy had ever seen and pressed two buttons.

"Hi. Yeah, I'm ready to go now. Okay." Adam said into the tiny telephone.

About thirty seconds later the doorbell rang and that impressed the Colonel.

Monday afternoon Colonel Richter received a phone call in his office.

"Good day Colonel, I'm Special Agent Monroe, I work with Adam."

"Nice to talk with you. Any problems?" The Colonel was a little worried that he may have asked one question too many of the boy the other night.

"No, none at all. I just wanted to tell you how pleased we all are here that Adam has finally made a friend his own age. I can tell that it means a lot to the boy. How are things on your end?"

“Good. I have to tell you when he came to the door Saturday I didn’t even realize who he was at first. My son didn’t tell us just who he had invited to dinner.”

“Adam seems to think your wife should get the Nobel Prize for cooking.” Monroe added.

“He’s a good kid. I asked him for a small ‘demonstration’ while we were at the dinner table, perhaps I shouldn’t have been so nosy. I still have trouble believing what I saw. It shook us up a bit, but I think we’ve gotten past it.”

“A normal reaction, Colonel. Your son is welcome to visit with Adam here whenever the two of them want to get together. They can use the facilities at the Academy, the pool and so forth. They can just be couch potatoes in Adam’s quarters if that suits them. Security is very tight here, your son will be looked out for.”

“That’s good to hear. Adam is welcome at our house anytime. If the two of them get out of line, they’ll be dealing with me.”

“I think we have an agreement, Colonel. When you have the time let’s set up a visit, you can take a

look at this place for yourself.”

“I’d like that.”

Colonel Richter was almost mellow with his staff for the rest of the day, he only administered one minor chewing out and two medium butt kicking’s.

Adam’s case assignments and Freddie’s grade school occupied the two boy’s time until the next Saturday. Phone calls were shared during the week, big plans were made for the weekend.

Around ten o’clock in the morning Freddie wheeled his bicycle up to the imposing guard post at the Special Operations building. The razor wire and armed guards gave the boy some serious second thoughts about his new friend.

“Er, hi. I’m Frederick Richter. Adam said I could visit with him today.”

“Good morning Mr. Richter,” answered the very large and scary looking guard, “we’ve been expecting you. Let me call Adam, he’ll come down and escort you inside.”

The guy sounded like the Terminator.

Freddie felt like he had just successfully passed counterfeit money or something. While he was waiting the guard clipped a yellow badge to his shirt that said “LIMITED ACCESS-ESCORT REQUIRED” and then had him sign some sort of form with a lot of fine print on it. Freddie started breathing again when Adam dashed out to the guard post and high-fived the now smiling guard.

“Morning Freddie. I see they haven’t caught onto you yet.”

“Not yet. Uh, this is pretty cool here, sort of.”

“Follow me. Try to look like you should actually be here.”

“Oh sure. What about my bike?”

“I don’t think anyone will be bothering it.”

“I guess not!”

Freddie followed Adam into the glass and chrome building where they crossed the small lobby under the eye of yet another armed guard. The elevator took them to the top floor; of course they met still another guard.

“There are places here where you aren’t supposed to go. My place is down this hall, don’t wander off and start exploring things.” Explained Adam. “That sounds sort of grim, no one will actually shoot you or anything, they’ll just chain you up in the basement for the rest of your life.”

“Well that’s nice of them.” Freddie hadn’t really planned on wandering anywhere.

After the sterile hallway, Adam’s quarters seemed like another planet.

“Whoa! Check out that TV and stereo!” Freddie was very impressed.

“There’s a DSS satellite dish on the roof. I get about nine million channels.”

“Even the Playboy Channel?”

“Well, no. They don’t let me order pay per view either.”

“That sucks.”

The boy’s wound up in the small kitchen area where Freddie immediately checked out the food supply.

“Who does your shopping and stuff?”

“We order it by phone and the store delivers it downstairs. Mostly I just eat over at the academy.”

“Man, you’ve got everything here!”

“Yeah, even indoor plumbing.”

“I’m moving in here, you don’t have to mow lawns or rake leaves do you?”

“No. I just have to save the world about once a week.”

“What are those big buttons on the walls?”

“Panic buttons. Don’t press one unless Godzilla is coming in through the roof.”

“What happens if you do press one?”

“A whole bunch of overly excited people with large guns will come charging in here and you’re the person wearing a visitor’s badge.”

“Oh.” Freddie replied very softly.

“Come on I’ll show you my computer.” Said Adam.

As the two boys were about to leave Adam’s living quarters, Agent Harper knocked on the open door.

“Good morning Adam, Freddie.”

“Hi Ms. Harper.” Adam replied. “Freddie, this is Agent Harper, she’s sort of nosey and pushy, but mostly nice.”

“Hello, Ma'am, I remember you from last weekend when we collided.”

“What are you two plotting this morning?” She asked.

“I was just showing Freddie around,” explained Adam, “later I thought we might go swimming and then maybe set fire to the building or something.”

“That’s nice, start the fire in my office, it’s a total mess.”

“No problem.”

Freddie was pretty sure they were just kidding.

Adam then led him down the hall to the piano/computer/school room.

“I remember you said you had a Mac,” asked Freddie, “how are these things?”

“I like them better than Windows machines. Things are simpler to get done, less baloney in the way. They run my graphics programs better too.”

“How much RAM do you have in it?”

“Three hundred eighty four megs right now,

maybe more later. It's running the new 1.2 gigahertz processor," bragged Adam, "this sucker flies."

"Criminently! What do you do with it?"

"Mostly 3-D graphics and animation, stuff like that."

"Any games?" Freddie's IQ was more towards the norm.

"Not really, most games seem pretty boring after the first five minutes. There is a chess program."

"I have a chess program, it always wins though."

"What setting do you have it on?"

"Novice or Idiot Mode," replied Freddie.

"Well, that seems about right."

Adam's last remark was rewarded with a solid punch to his arm. He was also reminded that his new friend, while close to his age, was almost a head taller and a whole lot stronger.

"Geez! I'm going to press a panic button!" Freddie looked a bit panicked himself until he realized that his friend was kidding (he hoped).

"Want to go for a swim? They have a great pool over at the Academy," suggested Adam.

“Sure! Oh wait, I didn’t bring any swim trunks.”

“I’ve got some Speedos, a couple are way too big for me, they ought to fit you though. Sports companies are always sending free stuff for me to wear or use. We can change over at the locker room.”

“Okay, great!”

Adam took the other boy into his bedroom and rooted around in the chest of drawers for the right size racing trunks, one pair seemed about right as he held them up to estimate the size of his new friend. Freddie looked somewhat askance at the skimpy blue racing trunks.

“Let’s go,” said Adam, “they have towels over there.”

Adam stopped a moment to call the security detail to tell them where they were going. They were met in the lobby by two casually dressed agents who then trailed after them on the walk to the pool.

“Doesn’t it bug you to have those guys always following you around?” Asked Freddie.

“Sometimes. They have to do their job though,

no point in getting mad at them.”

“I guess the odds on you getting mugged are pretty slim.”

“True.”

The two boys entered the Academy athletics complex and made their way to the locker room by the pool. One of the agents followed them inside, while the other checked out the pool area.

“We’re supposed to take a shower before using the pool, some sort of rule.” Explained Adam, “This is my locker, we can both use it.”

As the boys zipped out of their clothes and dashed into the showers to rinse off, Adam took one look at the solid body of the other boy and decided that any sort of physical fight with his new friend would be very one sided. When they put on the nylon racing trunks Freddie complained about how thin they were. “Man! There’s not too much to these things, you can see your dick and everything through them!”

“I know, don’t sweat it, everyone wears them here

when they do laps. You can go faster in them, less drag than big and baggy trunks.”

“Anything will help me, I swim like a drowning cow!” Said Freddie.

“I’ve gotten better, Agent Harper gave me some pointers. Grab a towel on the way out.”

The two wet boys went out into the pool area, there were just a few people swimming laps, no classes were in session. Adam dived right in, Freddie stuck a toe in the water first, he had experienced jumping into an unheated pool once. The water was nice and warm so Adam’s friend took the plunge also. Soon the boys were engaged in a game of drown your friend while the security agent kept a very close eye on them. After about twenty minutes of senseless horseplay the boys took a break and sat on the side of the pool. A group of people had entered the far door being led by a lecturing agent.

“Uh-o. Tourists.” Adam did not sound happy; their escape route to the locker room was cut off.

“Tourists, here?” Asked Freddie.

“Well, they give VIP’s and certain groups of people tours of the Academy on Saturdays. Try to look inconspicuous.”

The group consisted of two congressmen and their families. The agent in charge of the group motioned the boy’s security escort over.

“Looks like we have to grin and be polite unless you can hold your breath for a half hour.” Adam knew the routine by now.

“I feel silly in these skimpy swim trunks!” Freddie even looked a bit silly...

“Do like me, wrap a towel around yourself. Here they come.”

The groups of adults, along with some giggling young girls, were introduced to the famous boy and his friend. The congressmen and their wives shook hands with Adam and uttered the usual smooth lines that were their stock and trade. The girls produced autograph books that Adam had to sign, and with some effort he wrote nice things. One of the girls got carried away and gave Adam a quick kiss on the cheek and a hug. Blush. Geez! After an eternity

the tour guide managed to herd his sheep away from the boys and out the door.

“Well, that sucked rocks.” Observed Freddie.

“Well spoken. Old ladies are the worst though, they always pinch my cheeks.”

“Your ugly face or your butt?”

“Hardy har. Let’s do a couple of laps and head out, I’m starved.”

After rinsing off the chlorine and dressing, Adam and Freddie had to decide on lunch. The staff dining room, make sandwiches in Adam’s quarters, the snack bar, Mrs. Richter’s kitchen? Easy choice.

“Let’s just ride our bikes over to your place.” Suggested Adam, hoping for more good things to eat.

“You have a bike?”

“Yeah. I keep it in the janitor’s closet on the ground floor.”

Adam talked to the security team for a few minutes and they gave the nod to the bike trip. The agents would trail along in a staff car. The

operations center was dutifully notified.

When the two boys arrived back at the Operations center, Adam fetched his bicycle from the storage room and wheeled it out to his waiting friend.

“Man! Cool bike! What is that thing?” Exclaimed Freddie.

“A custom bike builder made it for me, no one even asked him to. It’s got a carbon fiber frame, active suspension on both wheels, and about twelve hundred gears. I phoned the guy who donated it to thank him, he seemed like a real nice guy.”

“I guess so!”

“Want to ride it? I’ll ride yours”

“Is the Pope Irish?”

Mrs. Richter could even make ham sandwiches taste like five star cuisine (in Adam’s opinion). The lady had a gift. Some people have green thumbs; Greta had a golden brown, glazed thumb.

“Great lunch, Mrs. Richter, thanks.” Adam meant it.

“You’re very welcome, Adam. What are you two

up to now?”

“Come on Adam,” interrupted Freddie, “dad’s out in the garage working on the Sprite, let’s go get in the way.”

“Sprite?”

“Yeah, it’s an old British sports car he picked up when we were stationed in England, he’s been tinkering with it for three years now. It’s about the size of a skateboard.”

“Cool.”

Freddie led his friend out into the garage where his intimidating father was having colorful words with the small auto’s starter motor casing.

“Hi, dad. How’s it going?” Asked Freddie.

“Oh. Hi son, hello Adam. This motor’s cracked, must have been a bad casting. I don’t know where I’ll find another one, maybe I can get this one welded up or something.”

“Hi Colonel Richter,” replied Adam, “maybe I can help fix the crack.”

“Well, I don’t think you can do much son, but thanks anyway.”

“Could I look at it a minute? There’s a thing I can do with metal.”

“Well, okay. You can see where the crack is, it won’t hold together very long if I use it. Just what is the ‘thing’ you can do with metal?”

Adam didn’t answer right away. He took the heavy motor and sat it down on the garage floor to examine it.

“What are you doing, son?” Asked the Colonel, totally puzzled.

“Just a sec sir.”

The silvery metal on both sides of the flaw moved together slightly and the crack simply disappeared. The casting was now once more a solid piece of steel. Adam then handed the motor back to the stunned officer.

“Piece-O-Cake.” Smiled Adam.

“How did you do that?” Richter was failing to cope.

“Molecular cohesiveness. I can affect metallic things that way. Don’t ask me how, I sure don’t know.”

“I won’t. Thank you Adam.” Richter once more

had thoughts about a shot of brandy.

“Do you mind if me and Freddie ride over to the flight line, I want to show him the bat plane?”

“The bat plane?”

“The C-17, that’s what we call it at Operations.”

“Sure, why not. Stay off the runway.” The Colonel was more than a little distracted by know.

“Thanks sir, and thanks for lunch!”

Freddie managed to close his mouth and followed his odd friend outside.

“You were getting really weird again.”

“Sorry. It slips out now and then.”

“That’s okay. At least you’re not boring. Can we really get in to see the bat plane?”

“If the flight crew or maintenance people are around. It’s a nice ride over there anyway.”

Adam spoke once more to the security people before starting off for the flight operations area. The agents gave the go ahead and made a few more phone calls. After about ten minutes of moderate pedaling the boys found themselves at the guarded gate to the flight center. They were expected and

the Marine on duty gave the boys a snappy salute and waved them through. He made the FBI security team show their identification, as if to make a point.

“This is so cool.” Said Freddie as they pedaled past helicopter gun ships and assorted flying bad boys.

Their destination was the hulking green monster with the drooping wings. The back cargo ramp was open.

“There’s Sergeant Hooper. We’re in!”

Sergeant Hooper had been in the maintenance hanger taking a nap when the call came that his favorite kid was coming by. He went out and dropped the rear ramp on the aircraft (it lets in more light, you see) and sat down to wait. The boys pulled up to the ramp and parked their bikes; they seemed very small next to the enormous cargo plane.

“Hi, Sergeant Hooper. This is Freddie Richter. Can I show him around?” Asked Adam.

“Sure thing, kiddo. Don’t start the engines though.”

“No problem. Thanks!”

Adam led his amazed friend up the sloping ramp and into the belly of the aircraft. The FBI vehicles sat shackled to the cargo deck, there was still plenty of room to walk past them considering that this aircraft could carry an M1 battle tank.

“These are the vehicles and stuff that we take out on the cases we get. They keep them loaded all the time so if there’s a big rush on all we have to do is jump in the plane and go.”

“This thing is huge! Where do you ride?” Asked Freddie.

“Up there,” Adam pointed toward the front of the aircraft, “there’s seats and stuff up front.”

Sergeant Hooper was trailing along at a distance, aware that if anything happened to either child he would be repairing snow plows in Alaska. Adam showed his friend the passenger seat that he usually occupied as the crew chief caught up with them.

“Sergeant Hooper,” asked Adam, “can we go up

to the flight deck?”

“Sure son, let me tag along so you don’t press the wrong buttons.”

“We’re not going to press any buttons, Sergeant.”

“Good.”

Adam and his friend spent half an hour sitting in the pilot’s and co-pilot’s seats while Sergeant Hooper explained the various controls and switches to the boys. Adam knew most of them already, but he also knew that Freddie was eating this all up.

“We better get back now Freddie, before Sergeant Hooper gets fed up and tosses us out.” Adam said.

“Anytime, son. I was half asleep until you two showed up.”

The Sergeant and the two boys made their way to the rear of the aircraft and down the ramp. Adam and Freddie shook the Sergeant’s hand and both boys thanked him for the tour.

They were very welcome and ride those bikes safely.

On the way back to the Richter's home the small cell phone in Adam's jeans pocket started chirping, Adam pulled up to answer the insistent thing. The security detail also received a call and stopped just behind the boys. Another car of agents came screeching up in front of them. Freddie thought he was in some sort of cop movie.

"Yes sir. All right. Now? On my way, bye." Adam folded away the telephone.

"I have to split Freddie. Something's come up. Do you want someone to drop you off at your place?"

"Nah. I'm halfway there now, take off. Thanks for the neat time today."

"Okay. I'll call you when things calm down."

"See ya." Freddie said as he rode off. He thought to himself, "Man! Never a dull moment!"

The agents tossed Adam's bicycle into the trunk and took off for the FBI Center. The United States Navy had a big problem.

Messing About in Boats

SSN-690, the USS Philadelphia, a Los Angeles class nuclear attack submarine had gone missing. The Philadelphia was conducting “oceanographic research” off the coast of The Peoples Republic of China. The research in question was to test the effectiveness of the Chinese Navy’s anti-submarine force. During the many years of the Cold War the U.S. Navy had developed submarine warfare to more than a fine art, they were simply the best. The Chinese military are pragmatists; they know their limitations and make adjustments accordingly. The Chinese knew the American submarine was snooping around, actually goading them to test their responses. After a week of failed attempts at cornering the American sub, the Chinese got fed up and played their hole card.

Anti-shipping mines are a very cost-effective way of disrupting your enemy’s operations. Anti-

submarine mines are more costly and sophisticated, but still are a bargain as far as weapon systems go. For several years the Chinese Navy had been quietly laying down multiple lines of passive listening mines designed to be activated remotely when enemy submarines were thought to be in the area. These mines could sit quietly on the sea bottom for years, patiently awaiting their orders. The mines had practically no metal parts aside from their small electronics package and lithium power supply. They were for all intents and purposes undetectable.

The Chinese Navy had finally had enough of the American submarine's probing and testing. They withdrew all of their own submarines from the area in question and activated the minefield. A Los Angeles class submarine is very quiet, but it is not totally silent. The simple brain in one of the mines detected a noise source approaching on a heading that was within its preprogrammed specifications for activation. After computing the speed of the approaching object and its approximate depth, a circuit closed that tripped the hold-down solenoid.

The mine drifted upwards, its prey approaching unaware.

The mine's calculations were off just a little, instead of detonating the massive shaped charge under the middle of the submarine it succeeded only in mangling the stern section. The submarine's rudder and propeller ceased to be recognizable. The reduction gear spaces began instantly to flood, only the actions of the crew in closing the watertight hatch prevented the immediate loss of the boat. Several of the crewmen, however, were on the wrong side of that hatch. The explosion also ruptured fittings on two of the high-pressure air tanks used in blowing ballast water overboard. The submarine sank stern down in nine hundred feet of water, driving itself deeply into the soft mud bottom. Naturally, the emergency locator beacon had jammed in its tube and decided not to eject. The submarine's reactor had shut itself down, but a restart was accomplished after only thirty minutes. The ship's surviving crew had power, they had air, but they weren't moving, ever.

Word of the missing submarine filtered quickly through the military's intelligence community. The submarine's exact position was unknown due to the covert nature of its mission. It needed to be found, considering the fact that it was probably in Chinese territorial waters, locating it might be a bit dicey. Word of the submarine's predicament reached a certain General Curtis, who then made several phone calls.

The White House.

The Chief of Naval Operations didn't have any of the answers that the President and his advisors were looking for.

"Are you telling me that we have no way of locating that submarine?" POTUS was not amused.

"Not without having half of China shooting at us. We would have to put P-3's overhead at the least, a surface search is what's really needed and that's clearly out of the question, Mr. President." Explained the perspiring admiral.

“Is there any chance that the crew might still be alive?”

“A slim chance sir, the water in that general area is shallow enough, assuming the boat wasn’t destroyed outright.”

“If we knew where they were, could they be rescued?” Asked the President.

“We could piggyback a DSRV on another sub and do an underwater transfer, assuming the Chinese Navy is otherwise occupied.”

“DSRV? That’s that small rescue submersible?”

“That’s right, Mr. President.”

Everyone at the table turned to General Curtis, they were out of options.

“Do you think the boy could actually locate that sub, General?” Asked the President.

“As you know sir, I spoke with Adam this morning in person. He thinks he might be able to find the sub. He’s an honest kid, he said he really didn’t know for sure but he was willing to try. If we put him on one of the search submarines and got him in close enough, I think he would have a good shot at

it. I've seen him do some incredible things.”

“What would be the danger to the boy, Admiral?”

Asked the President.

“If the sub he's on can stay outside of their territorial waters, I would say the danger is minimal. I wouldn't feel at all comfortable sending him in close sir, it could get pretty hot in a big hurry.”

“How soon could we have our vessels in position to begin an operation like this?”

“Three days. Mr. President. I've already taken the liberty of repositioning the support craft, the Carl Vinson is off the Philippines right now.”

“How would we get the boy onto the search submarine?”

“We fly him out to the Vinson, it rendezvous with the sub and transfers him on board, Mr. President.”

“Hell of a trip for a young kid.”

“Yes sir. It's a hell of a trip for anyone.”

“If I might interrupt Mr. President,” Curtis continued, “the boy is a pretty tough little cookie. His performance at Fort Irwin proved that.”

“Yes, I know. But if anything happens to that child we'll all be testifying before congress for the next ten

years, if we're out on bail.”

“The Philadelphia has over one hundred men on board. They may still be alive. How much are our careers worth?” Asked Curtis.

No one said anything for a few moments. The thought of a long slow death under the sea could move even a politician.

The President rolled the dice.

“All right. It's my decision. We'll go ahead with using the boy. He'll supplement whatever conventional search methods we can come up with. Get him out to the carrier and if things hold together we'll go from there. Anyone leaking any of this will become fertilizer for the Rose Garden. Keep that boy safe above all else!”

Was the President wrong to put at some risk the life of one boy in exchange for the lives of over one hundred men? What would you do?

The Chinese Navy had detected the distant explosion that sank the Philadelphia; they did a

careful search of the area but narrowly missed locating the American submarine. Eventually they moved off and deactivated the minefield defense system; perhaps the foreign devils had learned their lesson.

General Curtis had met privately at Quantico with Adam on the day of the White House meeting. When Agent Monroe had asked what they had discussed the boy had just smiled and said he might have to go on a trip for a few days. That evening an Air Force KC-10 tanker picked the boy up at Quantico and flew nonstop all the way to Anderson Air Force Base, Guam. None of the agents were allowed to accompany Adam on the flight or even knew where he was going. General Curtis was on board for the flight; fly-fishing was once more discussed for a time. By this point in his short FBI career Adam had learned that the best thing you could do on a long flight is to just sleep. When the plane touched down in the warm humid air of Guam Adam had his usual question: "What's to eat?"

The giant KC-10 was parked at a remote fueling ramp for the boy's transfer to the Navy S-3 Viking. The compact twin jet anti-submarine aircraft didn't have very much free space inside. For this flight the ASW officer had been left behind on the Carl Vinson, Adam got his seat. General Curtis got left behind on Guam.

"Son, I know you have a lot of good sense so I guess I don't have to tell you not to fiddle around with any of the switches and stuff?" Asked Lieutenant Washington, the S-3's co-pilot.

"No sir," replied Adam, "I brought a magazine to read, not as dangerous."

"Good thinking. Stay buckled in, sometimes it gets bumpy."

"Yes sir. What's the in-flight movie?"

"The Hunt For Red October."

"Cool."

There was of course no in-flight movie. No bags of stale peanuts either.

It got 'bumpy' during the night landing on the

aircraft carrier. Twenty minutes out from the carrier Lieutenant Washington came back to check on the boy.

“We’ll be landing shortly, it gets pretty exciting sometimes. Let’s get you cinched down and puckered up.”

Adam had on a life jacket that supposedly inflated automatically, and a flight helmet that was way too big. He was sitting on an ejection seat that could be fired by the pilot; his parachute was part of the upholstery.

Needless to say, the boy didn’t exactly feel in control of the situation.

“You guys do this all the time, I suppose?” Asked Adam.

“Nah. This is only our second landing.”

“Uh huh. What happened the first time?”

“We all had to eject, hit the stern, very messy.”

“I’ve changed my mind, let’s go to Tahiti.” Adam grinned.

“Too late, not enough fuel.” Washington liked this kid. “Hold on to your buttocks. Don’t unbuckle until

the engines stop.”

“I’m not ever unbuckling, Lieutenant!”

From Adam’s seat in the aircraft outside vision was practically nonexistent. He used his other senses to look outward, he didn’t care too much for what he found. This was truly scary.

Landing on an aircraft carrier is basically a controlled crash, a night landing is something to avoid if possible. Adam finally figured out what Lieutenant Washington meant when he said, “get puckered up.” On the approach, the pilot is constantly playing with the throttles, the aircraft is moving in about four directions at once, there is a tremendous screech and thud, the engines roar. This is followed by the feeling that your body is going to continue on out through the bulkhead and windshield. After a while the engines shut down and you remember to breathe.

“You okay kid?” Asked an entirely too calm Lieutenant Washington.

“Well, I’m glad I brought extra underwear.”

“Ha! Welcome to Naval Aviation, kid!”

Adam hadn’t actually needed dry underwear, but he had the feeling that he had come close. These people were nuts!

After clambering out of the S-3, the boy was steered into the island of the giant aircraft carrier where crewmen relieved him of his helmet and life jacket. Whenever safety allowed, the eyes of the flight deck crew had glanced toward the small figure being shepherded inside. After a confusing series of turns and stairways (ladders?) Adam found himself being ushered into the Captain’s wardroom.

“Welcome aboard the Vinson, son.” Said Captain Abrams, “How was your landing?”

“Thank you sir, it’s nice to be anywhere. I nearly wet my pants.”

“Then you did better than some do.”

There were several senior officers in the room. The ship’s captain introduced them to the boy, and then an awkward silence lasted for a moment.

“We’ve all heard about your good work with the FBI, we know you have very special abilities, but I have to tell you most of us have some real doubts about bringing you out here to look for a missing submarine, it’s a hell of a big ocean.” Abrams said.

“I know sir. I hope I can locate them, I’ll do my best.”

“That’s all any of us can do son. I’m afraid you won’t get too much rest for a while, the Houston is due alongside in two hours.”

“I’m all right sir, I slept most of the way to Guam.”

“Good. Anything you need right now?”

“Well, a bathroom and maybe something to eat would be nice.”

“They’re called ‘heads’ on board a vessel son, right through that door over there.” Captain Abrams directed, “We’ll get something in here for you to eat.”

“Heads. Thank you, sir.”

A white jacketed steward served Adam his favorite, hamburger and a shake. The chief steward seemed to enjoy waiting on the boy; he had three

sons of his own. Captain Abrams and his executive officer let him finish his meal in peace and then sat down to ask a few pointed questions.

“Adam, are you bothered any by being cooped up in closed spaces? A submarine can bring out claustrophobia in just about anyone.”

“I spent a little while in a car’s trunk once. That didn’t bother me any.”

“What were you doing in a trunk, son?”

“Sneaking into the British Embassy in Washington, sir.”

“Ah, the IRA kidnapping. I read about that.”

“We had to be pretty low key, I even had to wear a disguise for part of the time. It was embarrassing.”

“What sort of disguise?” Abrams was smiling by now.

“Well... A dress and wig.” Adam mumbled, “I was supposed to be a girl.”

Abrams managed not to laugh too loudly. “That took some guts son, I think you’ll be able to handle most anything after that!”

Adam blushed and just nodded his head.

The two officers talked with Adam for a while longer, they asked for the usual 'demonstration'. This time a model of an F-14 took off from its stand and did a nice barrel roll on its way around the wardroom. Adam heard some words that he would never think of using himself.

The Pacific Ocean north of the Philippines was calm and at times almost glassy smooth; there was a half moon on the horizon. When the Submarine Houston surfaced near the carrier it was decided that a surface transfer would be safer for the boy than a helicopter trip. The aircraft carrier and the submarine performed an unusual mid-ocean maneuver; they both came to a dead stop. A small Zodiac was lowered and moored to the boarding ramp. Adam's flight bag was tossed into the inflatable, followed by the boy who was wearing a life jacket nearly as large as he was. As the small craft began to skim its way to the waiting submarine, Adam turned and waved goodbye to his new friends on board the giant vessel.

As the Zodiac approached the submarine, Captain Hector Ramirez turned to the officer next to him on the sub's conning tower and said: "I've been in every cat house in the Pacific and this is the strangest thing I've ever done."

"Well put, Captain." Replied his executive officer.

"A nine year old kid on a submarine! I hope he's housebroken."

The Zodiac ran up onto the curving bow of the submarine where four seamen were standing by. The boy's bag was tossed to one of the men and then the boy himself was lifted bodily onto the rubbery sonar absorbing deck. Adam shouted goodbye to the departing Zodiac crewmen as he was herded towards an open hatch in the submarine. Two of the seamen had iron grips on the boy's life jacket, they had orders that if the boy fell overboard they would both be swimming back to port.

Below deck, about a dozen pair of eyes were

watching the open hatch as first a black flight bag dropped down, followed by a small pair of non-regulation sneakers as the boy carefully climbed down the ladder. Two seamen were ready to help but Adam made the descent unaided. The boy turned and looked around the cramped area, he felt like he had green skin and antenna sprouting from his head.

Finally, the Chief of The Boat extended a large hand and broke the silence, "Welcome aboard son. Let's get that vest off of you and go see the Captain."

"Thank you sir. Nice to be here."

"Just call me Chief Rolly, or Chief. I'm not an officer."

"Yes, Chief."

When Adam finally got rid of the life vest he trailed Rolly aft toward the center of the submarine. Along the way he shook a couple of hands and received one head rubbing, after all this kid was famous. Very.

Chief Rolly introduced the boy. "Adam, this is

Captain Ramirez. If he says hop you jump just as high as you can.”

“Hello Adam, welcome aboard the Houston,” said Ramirez as he shook the boy’s hand.

“Thank you sir. I’m pleased to meet you.”

Ramirez thought to himself. “At least he’s polite and respectful, not like most smart Alec kids these days.”

“How was your trip, you must be pretty tired by now?”

“It’s been a really long trip. The night landing on the carrier pretty well woke me up though.”

“Those people are completely nuts. Give me a nice safe submarine anytime.”

“I thought they were nuts too, but I didn’t say that to any of them.”

“Heck son, if you had they would have agreed with you!”

“Yes sir. They were all real nice to me though.”

“Were making a high speed run to the search area, we should be there in about forty-eight hours. For now why don’t you go with Chief Rolly and get a hot shower and a bunk. We’ll talk after you’ve had

some rest. Are you hungry?"

"No sir. I ate a little while ago on board the Vinson."

"All right then son, we'll see you in the morning."

Adam followed Chief Rolly further aft past the mess area and galley.

"You got lucky, we have an extra bunk this trip. You won't have to sleep in one of the torpedo tubes." Explained Rolly.

"Gee, and I was looking forward to that!" Adam grinned.

Rolly decided he had another kidder on his hands; the damned boat was already full of them.

Submarines are referred to as boats, not ships, boats.

"Here's your bunk, you're on the top. Seaman Bronson has the bottom rack. If he snores too much, stuff a sock in his mouth."

Rolly continued, "The mattress swings up, you keep your personal stuff underneath in the storage space. You can pull this curtain to shut out the light

and have a little privacy. There's some towels and stuff under the mattress already. This is where you change your clothes, when you go to the shower you can wear a towel. Bronson will help you get squared away later, ask him lots of questions, better safe than sorry."

"Yes, Chief."

Chief Rolly lifted up the mattress and retrieved a towel and a bar of soap in a plastic container.

"Come on kid, let's get you hosed off and into your bunk."

Adam quickly took off his shoes and socks and then skinned out of his clothes, he wrapped the large white towel around himself and followed the Chief to the shower area. Along the way some comedian made some comment about "dear old Momma Rolly" that was instantly and painfully regretted. The Chief steered the boy into one of the conventional looking showers and asked him if he needed anything else.

"There's no rubber ducky in here."

Damned kidders.

After a while, a tired and clean Adam was in his bunk and dead to the world. Seaman Bronson came off duty an hour later and peeked inside the curtains of the top bunk. The boy was curled into a ball and softly snoring.

Bronson made an effort to keep quite as he turned in, not that it would have mattered in the least.

Morning on board a submarine is a relative thing. There is no sunrise, only the passage of time and routine signaled the new day. True to form, Adam was reluctant to acknowledge the 'morning'.

"Come on kid, we've been torpedoed! Abandon ship!" Yelled Seaman Bronson.

"Mmph. G'way."

Words were not working. Plan B was initiated.

Bronson pulled off the blanket and sheet and scooped up the boy, placing him mostly feet first on the deck.

"Geez!" This was almost always Adam's first remark of the day.

"It's alive! Good morning kid. Time for breakfast,

get dressed. Big meeting with the Captain and officers in one hour.”

“You must be Seaman Bronson.” Mumbled the boy.

“Call me Ted.”

“Good morning Theodore, I need to go pee.”

Adam bumbled his way through dressing and using the head. He managed to splash some cold water on his face and became partially awake. Seaman Bronson escorted him to the crew’s mess room where he had his usual cereal and juice. He was acutely aware of the curiosity of the crewman who shared his table. It was like eating breakfast in Macy’s display window.

Several of the men edged over to the boy, they had a wager to settle.

“Adam, I’ve made a bet with these morons that you could bend this spoon, like that Uri whatsisname.” Said Seaman Clarke.

“What’s the bet?” Adam sensed money to be made.

“I’m down five bucks apiece to these guys.”

“What’s my cut if I can do it?”

This produced a general uproar in the mess. Finally Clarke said, “You get a third, how’s that?”

“Half.”

“All right then, half,” agreed Clarke.

“Okay. Put the spoon on the table.”

“Don’t you have to touch it or something?” Asked Clarke.

“No.”

Seaman Clarke placed the spoon on the table in front of the boy. With a small grin on his face, Adam looked carefully at the spoon for a moment and then up at the men. It became very, very quiet in the mess area as the spoon floated up off the table and seemed to melt into a very good imitation of a large ball bearing. Several of the men took a step backwards and just stared. When the ball dropped to the table and bounced it got very noisy.

“Pay up!” Adam demanded with his hand out. Fifteen bucks. Easy money.

Captain Ramirez and several of the submarine's senior officers were seated around the table in the wardroom which was located just forward of the crews mess. Seaman Bronson knocked on the open door and produced the subject of the meeting.

"Good morning Adam, come sit down." Said Captain Ramirez.

"Good morning sir."

The captain introduced the other officers at the table and each shook the boy's hand. Adam was getting used to meetings like this; still, all of the questioning eyes looking at you could still be daunting.

"What was all of the racket in the mess room just now?" Asked the Captain. Most of the boat had heard it.

"Just earning some pocket money sir, I won half of a bet."

"I don't think I really want to know the details son. How are you feeling, all rested?"

"I'm fine sir, Seaman Bronson has been keeping me out of trouble."

"It sounded like he was getting you into trouble."

"Well..."

“Let’s get down to business. We rendezvous with the Miami in about six hours; they’re carrying the DSRV, the rescue submersible. We need to know what kind of distances you can do your remote viewing thing at.”

“I can do it pretty reliably out to about twenty-five miles, I have done it out to almost fifty miles a couple of times.”

This produced a number of raised eyebrows around the table.

“What do you need from us when you do this...viewing?” Asked Ramirez.

“Well, I need a quiet place if possible, and I need any people around me to be as still and quiet as possible, it helps me concentrate. I guess that may be a little hard on a submarine.”

“What if we pull everyone out of the torpedo spaces and go to a quiet routine?” Suggested the Executive Officer.

“How does that sound to you, Adam?” Asked Ramirez.

“That should help, I’ll need something to sketch

on, a writing tablet or something. I usually try to make a drawing of the search target if there's time."

"You can visualize things well enough to draw a picture?"

"Yes sir."

"What if you come up dry, if you can't find them?"

"Then I'll tell you, sir. I won't waste your time, I know how serious this is."

"How long do you usually take to find something, or someone?" Asked the Exec.

"Sometimes just a few minutes, once it took me three hours, but that was in a big city, Houston. There were a lot of distractions."

"How many times have you actually failed to find what you were looking for?" Asked the Captain.

"Well...never, actually."

"How do you direct your people at the FBI to the search target?"

"I just point in the direction of the target and they follow my finger."

"You can't pick out a spot on a chart, or map?"

"Not very well, I just know the direction to go in, distances are sort of tough."

The Captain then spoke to the other officers. “If he finds the Philly we’ll need some way to guide Miami to the right location. We can go shallow and send burst transmissions to CINCPAC, they can relay directions to the Miami with the E.L.F. system. In the meantime Adam, why don’t you spend some time in sonar? You can practice trying to locate surface shipping, the guys in sonar can verify if you’re getting good results.”

“All right sir.”

The boy was led up one deck and forward a ways to the sonar room where he was introduced to the supervisor. An extra chair was crowded in beside the senior sonar operator. When Adam sat down the technician was looking intently at the device called the waterfall display, there was one bright line on the left side of the screen.

“Okay kid, tell me what you see out there.” Asked Chief Ricardo.

“Give me a few minutes, it’s sort of hard to

concentrate in here.”

“All right, we’ll shut up for a while, go for it.”

Adam closed his eyes and covered his ears for a couple of minutes.

“There’s some sort of really big ship off in that direction.” The boy pointed to the northwest. “I think it’s one of those big oil tankers, it’s really big.”

“How far do you think it is, son?” Asked Ricardo.

“I’m not too good with distances, maybe fifteen or twenty miles.”

The technician picked up a telephone handset and asked the Executive officer to please come up to sonar. When the officer arrived a couple of minutes later, the technician gave him a report.

“Sir, a few minutes ago I asked the boy to see what he could find in the area. He reported a large vessel, possibly an oil tanker, and then pointed to the northwest. He gave the range at fifteen to twenty miles. I now have a contact on the waterfall at three hundred and sixteen degrees, range seventeen miles, classified as a very large cargo vessel or oil tanker. I would say that Adam was

pretty well dead on, sir.”

“Christ. How long did it take you to do that, Adam?”

“Just a few minutes, I think I could do better in a less crowded place.”

“You did pretty well here. I’ll tell the Captain what you’ve done, keep practicing here for a while. We’ll set up a place below and forward where it will be quiet and isolated for you.”

“Yes sir, thank you.”

Adam spent the next two hours in the sonar room; he located three more cargo vessels, five fishing boats, and the USS Miami approaching from the east.

The two submarines rendezvoused at a depth of five hundred feet and forty miles from the last estimated position of the Philadelphia, well outside of Chinese territorial limits. The Houston began a slow approach to the search area, the Miami trailing one thousand yards astern.

Adam was alone in the torpedo space; he sat

cross-legged on one of the crewmen's bunks that were crowded even into this unsettling place. The boy was surrounded by several thousand pounds of high explosive warheads. A headset and microphone had been rigged so he could talk directly to the Captain; he had a large tablet of lined paper in his lap to sketch on.

“Adam, this is Captain Ramirez, can you hear me okay?”

“Yes sir, I'm going to start looking now, if that's all right.”

“Go ahead son. Just talk to me when you know something.”

“Will do.”

Adam left a small part of himself in the submarine and began a sweeping search of the vast spaces around him. The distances were greater than he was used to working with but the emptiness made spotting things much easier. As the Houston slowly paralleled the Chinese coastline, its crew maintained a quite routine, no unnecessary movement, and no noise. For nearly an hour the

boy sat still, his breathing slow, his eyes closed. Captain Ramirez sent the Exec below to quietly check on the boy.

“He’s just sitting there Captain, no movement at all.”

“I wonder how long we should keep this up?”
Asked Ramirez.

Not too long.

“Captain Ramirez?”

“Yes Adam. Go ahead.”

“I have them now sir, most of them are alive.”

“Jesus! Talk to me son.”

“They’re quite a ways off, maybe fifty miles or so, ahead of us. Sort of to the right... to the starboard of the direction we’re heading. Most of them are alive, I’m afraid there’s some dead men in the back... the stern of the boat.”

“You’re sure about this, son?”

“Yes sir, absolutely. If you could please come down here I have a sketch I’m working on.”

“On my way.”

Captain Ramirez touched the deck in about three places on his way forward. Adam was still sitting cross-legged on the bunk adding some final touches to his simple drawing.

“Show me what you have, Adam.” Ramirez thought he was in some sort of a dream at this point.

“This is us here, the Miami is over here.” Adam showed the sketch to the Captain. “The Philadelphia is off to the right of where we’re heading now, if we change course this much we’ll be heading straight for them.”

Ramirez studied the drawing for a moment and asked. “What can you tell me about the shape they’re in?”

“Well, the stern is all smashed up, that’s where the dead men are. It’s sitting mostly upright, the back... the stern is pushed down into the mud. The bow is pointing up a ways.”

“Is the area forward of the conning tower clear? Can the DSRV get in there?”

“Yes sir, there’s nothing in the way. Piece of cake.”

“All right, I’m going to contact the Miami. You sit

there and keep an eye out. Let me know if any other surface ships or submarines come into the area, okay?”

“No problem sir.”

The officer turned and started to make his way quickly back to the control center, he stopped for a moment, turning to speak to the boy. “Damned fine job, son. Well done.” Adam’s wide grin signaled his pleasure at the man’s words.

Captain Ramirez ordered all stop on propulsion. The Miami was contacted on the Gertrude system and apprised of the situation. While Miami continued on the approximate course that Adam had indicated, Houston went shallow and contacted CINCPAC via an encrypted burst transmission.

“Adam, how are we doing?” Asked Ramirez on the headset.

“All right sir. The Miami is about halfway there, they need to go left, to port just a few degrees.”

“Real good. I’ll relay the course change. Anything else in the area?”

“No. Just a couple of small boats, they’re just fishing.”

“Keep at it son.”

“Yes sir. Could I maybe get something to eat down here, a sandwich or something?”

“On it’s way.”

The seaman delivering the sandwich and milk was given orders by the Exec to just quietly set it down by the boy and to then get the hell out. The crewman disobeyed orders just a little and gave Adam a squeeze on the shoulder as the boy smiled at him.

Adam sat munching his bologna sandwich as the Miami descended toward the sea floor and reduced speed to slow ahead. The rescue submarine could only receive the E.L.F. transmissions from CINCPAC, it’s progress was known only to the small boy sitting in the midst the torpedoes of the Houston.

“It’s there. It’s found the Philly.” Adam announced into the headset.

“What’s it doing?” Asked Ramirez, “Describe it to

me, son.”

“The Miami is stopped on the bottom next to the Philly, they’re talking to one another on their Gertrude things.”

Ramirez sent another burst transmission advising CINCPAC and started chewing on a fresh pencil. Thirty minutes passed.

“The DSRV is moving over to the Philly now. I need to go to the head really bad.”

“Take a break son, but not too long.”

“Yes sir.”

For the next three hours the DSRV shuttled back and forth between the stricken Philadelphia and the Miami with Adam doing a play by play. A total of eighty-nine crewmen and officers were rescued, the disabled submarine’s reactor had been brought to a cold shutdown and time delayed charges were set to destroy classified material and equipment. As Adam kept Captain Ramirez up to date on the progress of the rescue, Ramirez kept CINCPAC informed, CINCPAC then kept the White House informed.

“They’re starting back now sir. The Miami is moving up and turning around.” Adam yawned.

“Hot Damn! Anything else in the area?”

“No sir, just those same fishing boats and they’re not catching much.”

“How are you doing?”

“Sort of tired, I’ll be okay though.”

“Hang on for a while longer if you can, until Miami can get within range of the Gertrude.”

“No problemo, Captain.”

The Miami put on as much speed as was possible with the burden of the DSRV attached to its hull. In two hours both submarines were once more alongside one another and on a course for Guam. CINCPAC radioed a well done to all concerned from the President. Captain Ramirez went forward to collect Adam who by his time was sound asleep on the bunk.

The decision was made for Adam to stay on board Houston until the submarine reached the naval base on Guam, no point in risking him in

another transfer at sea and then a carrier takeoff.

The White House.

During the Houston's voyage to Guam, the President and his national security advisors met to decide how best to handle the incident involving the Philadelphia.

The President:

“Obviously we can't keep the sinking of one of our submarines a secret. What's going to be our story on this?”

The President's Chief of staff replied. “The submarine wandered off course and into an unmarked Chinese mine field. It's emergency beacon signaled it's position and we were able to mount a successful rescue mission despite a lack of cooperation from the Chinese government. We lodge an official protest with China, demand compensation for the dead seamen and for the loss of the submarine.”

“What about the boy?” Asked the President.

“He was never there. Anyone having contact with Adam signs a non- disclosure form. Top Secret, you talk, you go to jail.”

“It seems a shame that he can’t get the credit he deserves on this. The Navy says they may never have found those men in time without his help.”

“For his own safety it’s better that certain nations and organizations around the globe don’t appreciate the extent of his abilities,” replied General Curtis, “we shouldn’t make him more of target than he may already be.”

“You think he’s already in some danger?” Asked POTUS.

“He’s very high profile, he’s been responsible for putting a lot of bad guys out of business. He doesn’t need another bulls eye painted on his chest.”

“Very well. Adam was never there, but let’s arrange some sort of thank you for him, we owe him more than a lot for this.”

The Houston’s run to Guam took the better part of three days. Despite his exotic surroundings things got a bit tedious for Adam until he discovered The

Poker Game. Technically, gambling on board a naval vessel is strictly against regulations. Anyone ever serving in the military will tell you that certain regulations are often loosely enforced. The Captain and Chief Rolly had an understanding. If a poker game was restricted to nickel/dime/quarter dimensions, then it didn't exist. Rolly enforced that agreement by confiscating any poker pots that he deemed too large, and then donating the proceeds to charity. The games were often held in the Goat Locker, the Chief's quarters on board.

On the second day of the return voyage and after the evening meal, Adam had wandered forward in search of something, anything, to do. People were playing cards, cool. He stuck his head in the partially open door.

“Hi guys. What's the game?”

Bronson answered. “Yo, Adam! The name of the game is five card draw, you know how to play?”

“Of course, I work for the FBI. What kind of stakes?”

“Just nickel dime quarter.”

“Got change for a five?” Adam asked with a grin.

“Pull up a chair kid.”

“I have to tell you, I cheat.”

“That’s good, kid. So do we.”

Adam made the fifth player at the small, improvised table, Chief Rolly was watching from his small desk. After the boy’s crumpled five had been transformed into coins he was given the deck to deal the next hand.

“Jacks to open, trips’ to win, deuces wild.”

Proclaimed Adam rather matter-of-factly.

“Jesus, I think we’ve been suckered here!”

Observed Seaman O’Bannion.

Adam did a very neat job of dealing each player five cards.

“Any openers?” The boy asked with an innocent grin.

What Adam didn’t say was that he knew exactly what cards everyone held. After all, he had told them that he cheated.

Six hands later Adam was four dollars ahead,

Chief Rolly had caught the boy's wink early on in the game.

"Who taught you to play poker, son?" Asked Bronson.

"Mr. Hoyle knows all of the rules, Sea-Man Bronson."

"Very funny. I'm beginning to smell a fat rat."

"Beg pardon?" Asked Adam with his most angelic and innocent expression, perhaps a bit overdone.

"I think you know what cards we're holding."

"Now how could I possibly know that? Poker lessons are always expensive, Sea-Man Bronson."

"Anyone who can find a lost submarine in a zillion square miles of ocean probably knows what a poker hand is three feet from his face."

"They're on to you kid, better cut and run."
Advised Chief Rolly.

"Oh man! And I thought you were my friend!"

"Grab him!" O'Bannion shouted.

Adam had been discreetly trying to stuff his winnings into his jeans during the course of the game, to no avail. As he began his move toward

the door Seaman Seward, who stood six foot one, snagged the boy's T-shirt and quickly up ended him, holding the boy by his ankles. Adam's winnings were soon scattered on the deck beneath him, his pockets having been turned inside out.

“Oww, child abuse! Let me down! Criminy sakes!”

No one was really mad and Adam hadn't actually thought he could pull it off; still it had been worth a shot. For a while the next day the boy was six dollars ahead on a game of darts, but in the end that venture just got him thrown into a cold shower with his clothes on. Geez!

In all truth by the end of the voyage there wasn't a man aboard the submarine who wasn't more than proud to have served with Adam. Scraps of paper with his neatly written autograph would be framed, kept for children and grand children to puzzle over.

The news of the Philadelphia's sinking and the subsequent rescue of most of its crew broke twelve hours before the two submarines docked at the

naval base on Guam. Television crews recorded the Philly's survivors coming ashore from the Miami and the short dockside memorial service for the crewman left behind. The Houston was moored some distance away; its role in the rescue was described as being one of standby support. Adam had to wait on board Houston until nearly midnight; he went ashore in a large duffel bag carried over the shoulder of Seaman Bronson. Welcome home.

The boy wasn't totally ignored. At Quantico the President, the JCS, and the Secretary of the Navy met his KC-10. Of course there were no press on hand and the ceremony took place in a closely guarded hanger. The FBI didn't even know he was back until he was dropped off at the Operations Center. He did, however, get a nice civilian medal that he wasn't supposed to show to anyone. Ever.

A Bloody Mess

The remainder of Adam's ninth year settled into a relatively mundane routine (if dashing around the country nabbing nuts and criminals was ever mundane) of the usual one or two case trips per week. Tutoring, piano practice and computer nerding filled in the off days. Weekends were usually open for goofing off with Freddie.

Rumors of the boy's involvement in the submarine rescue surfaced from time to time. No comment. Agent Monroe had asked him point blank if he had been a part of the naval operation, the boy replied that he had just been out messing around in some boats and stuff. Agent Harper often helped Adam pack and prepare for their trips, once while burrowing through his dresser for socks she came upon what appeared to be a flat jewelry case. Adam was in the bathroom showering at the time so she decided to snoop just a little. The case contained The Medal of Freedom, the highest

civilian award the country bestows on a person. There was also a gold dolphin insignia worn by submariners. She debated telling Monroe, finally decided that he should know also.

“They don’t pass those out for best personality and perfect attendance!” Said Harper.

“This pretty well cinches it. Lord, I’d give anything to hear him tell that story,” replied Agent Monroe. But they never did. Adam knew how to keep his lips together.

Adam made five million dollars. Actually he earned five million dollars and quietly signed the entire check over to The Sisters of Charity, his favorite cause since recently joining the Catholic Church.

All he had to do was pose for a certain athletic shoe company for one afternoon. The shoe company knew a good deal, their sales increased two hundred and seventy-three percent on their smaller models. The FBI couldn’t really come up

with any rule or regulation that said he couldn't earn the money, he was listed on their books as an unpaid civilian consultant and it was after all for charity. All of the agents agreed that the photography team the ad agency sent were the strangest collection of human beings they had ever worked with, but they apparently knew what they were doing. Every small girl in the country now had one or more posters of Adam on their wall; the one of him sitting on the loading ramp of the C-17 in his black jump suit was the best seller (it was free if you bought some of the grossly overpriced shoes).

Adam turned down his first case. He had always been offered the final say on whether he took an assignment or not. When he actually refused one everyone was pulled up a bit short. He actually said no? Adam?

There had been a long string of abortion clinics being torched. The arsonist's had always been very careful to avoid any loss of life and were even careful about adjoining property. Still the law is the

law, and the FBI was called in.

“Adam, why don’t you want to take on this case?”

Asked Monroe.

“I guess I sound like some sort of religious nut, but I think that killing babies is just awful.”

“But the law is being broken, buildings are being burned down.”

“I know that, but no one’s been hurt or anything.”

“That’s beside the point, son. Arson is a felony, we can’t selectively enforce the laws to suit ourselves”

“I know that too, sir. I don’t know which way to think or feel sometimes.”

“The law say’s that abortion is a legal procedure.”

“On several cases we’ve been out on, we’ve passed by some of those places that do lots of abortions. I can feel what’s been happening in them, it makes me feel awful.”

“You’ve never said anything about this Adam, you should have.”

“I guess I should have sir. Do I have to do this assignment?”

“No. The sun will still come up tomorrow if you

don't"

"Thank you Agent Monroe. I'm sorry if this is going to cause you a lot trouble."

"Don't worry son, the whole country is pretty well torn up on this issue. What if the arsonist's had hurt or killed some one, would you have said no then?"

"No sir, then they wouldn't be any better than the people killing the babies."

"All right then, we'll consider the subject closed."

The Director wanted to know why Special team had refused an assignment.

"We've always had an understanding with Adam that if he didn't feel right about an assignment, he had the final veto," explained Monroe.

"This seems very out of character for the boy, is there some sort of problem going on with him?"

Asked the Director.

"No sir. It's not really out of character for him either. He's always been concerned on all of the cases we've had that no one, not even the worst sort of scum we're after, ever gets hurt. He's just a very gentle soul, and he's one of those people who

see abortion as killing a person. He didn't say so but I think he would just as soon see every abortion clinic in the country burned down."

"Well, just about everyone is on one side of the fence or the other on this issue, I suppose he's entitled to his own opinion too."

That June when school was out for Freddie both boys got packed off to Maui for two weeks of intensive goofing off. A Hollywood director who was in tight with the President loaned the FBI the use of his vacation home near the town of Hana. The large estate was fairly remote, it had a small white sand beach that could be sealed off to the public, and there was a cove for swimming and snorkeling. Perfect. Armed Marines tended to perimeter security around the estate. Offshore various naval frigates and destroyers took turns at anchor, this tended to discourage the average pleasure boater, or any bad guys for that matter. Word of the boy's role in the rescue of the Philly's crew had been illegally whispered and passed on; the Navy had become very protective where Adam was

concerned.

Agents Harper and Parker got lucky and drew the 'job' of escorting the two boys. Before the vacation was over Parker had popped the question (finally) and Ms. Harper accepted. They would be married in September.

Adam got to sleep as late as he wanted to for a change. As it turned out he was usually up and bumbling by nine, this was too neat of a place to waste time sleeping all day.

Adam and Freddie spent most of their time swimming and snorkeling in the clear warm water of the cove. There were coral formations and all manner of bright tropical fish. Freddie had to constantly keep himself covered with sun block to protect his fair skin, Adam just turned a shade darker each day, by vacation's end his body was almost mahogany save for the area covered by his Speedos.

On the second day both boys were horsing

around in the light surf when Adam stood up and stared out to sea.

“What is it Adam?” Asked Ms. Harper who was sitting close by on the beach.

“Friends.” Replied a distracted Adam, who then began to swim out into the cove.

“What’s he talking about, Freddie?”

“I dunno, I think he’s getting weird again.”

The ‘friends’ turned out to be six porpoises; they arrowed straight for Adam like warm-blooded torpedoes. For the people on shore things got very tense for a few minutes, guns were even drawn. It was soon apparent that the porpoises were just happy to be with Adam. There was some sort of communication going on between the two species. The porpoises maneuvered to be closest to the boy, to have him touch their skin. Adam waved at Freddie to come join him, when he did the porpoises tolerated his presence but it was Adam that they were interested in. After a while Freddie swam back to the beach, the porpoises had arrayed themselves around Adam like spokes on a wheel, the boy at the

hub.

“This is very strange.” Commented Agent Parker who had joined the people on the beach.

“This is very wonderful.” Replied Ms. Harper.

After a few minutes the porpoises wheeled as one and returned to the deep blue from where they had come. Adam bobbed in the water for a while longer and then slowly swam back to the beach. By now a crowd of FBI, Marines, and naval personnel stood watching the spectacle.

“Adam? What was going on out there?” Asked Ms. Harper.

“Just making friends, they said they’d be back tomorrow.”

“They said that, did they?”

“Well.... sort of. They’re really nice people.”

“Yes, I guess they are at that.”

“I’m hungry. What’s for lunch?”

“Child, when are you not ever hungry?”

“Tuesdays, four o’clock.”

The porpoises came back every single day of Adam's vacation; they still do till this day. Every day.

There was one other incident that at the time alarmed everyone. Two nights before they were to return to Quantico Adam wandered down to the beach and sat down in the sand to look at the stars for a while. Freddie found him an hour later just sitting there with his face tilted upward, his eyes closed. Freddie couldn't get any response out of his friend despite shaking and yelling at him.

It was almost one in the morning when Adam finally blinked and looked around. Everyone was there; they had almost decided to have the naval doctor administer some sort of stimulant.

"Hi, what's going on?" Adam was clueless as to why a crowd of FBI and naval personnel surrounded him.

"What was wrong with you?" Mother Harper demanded.

"Huh?"

“You’ve been sitting there like a stump for almost five hours!”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“Well...Why?”

“I guess I was just doing some exploring, out there. Maybe I went too far.” Adam pointed to the myriad of stars above them.

“Out there? Where out there?”

“A nice place. Sort of like here, cool beaches. No people though.”

Where had he gone?

In between a bank hostage situation and a serial rapist hunt Agents Harper and Parker got married. Adam was designated as the ring boy, he was heard to remark that his tuxedo made him feel like a darn penguin. The boy was also very happy for his two good friends. They tactfully declined his most generous offer to go along on the honeymoon to keep them company. To avoid confusion, people

would still call the female agent “Harper.”

Adam spent Christmas with the Richter's. This was about the first time in his life that he felt like he really belonged and was welcome with a ‘normal’ family. Presents were exchanged. From Adam, Colonel Richter got a speedometer for his Sprite, it was original in the box and unused, the Marine almost wept. He gave Mrs. Richter a perfect recreation of the Nobel Prize medal; it read “For Achievement in The Culinary Arts.” Hanna got some absurdly expensive perfume and a prepaid cell phone, good for unlimited use for one year. Freddie got a mountain bike that should have had NASA printed on its frame. It seems that the shoe company had made so much money on the ad campaign featuring Adam that they had actually felt some corporate guilt. They gave him an additional one million dollars, and this time he was taken firmly aside and advised to keep it for a rainy day, he did.

Adam received from Colonel Richter a sweatshirt with the globe and anchor of the USMC on it. At

Adam's special request to Santa Mrs. Richter gave him four-dozen of her chocolate chip cookies (woe be unto those who even looked sideways at them). Hanna gave the boy a too large hand knitted sweater (her first), and best of all a big wet kiss. Freddie gave his friend a subscription to Nerd World magazine (he had raked a lot of extra leaves). Best of all they gave him some love on which no price can be placed.

The week before Adam's tenth birthday someone dusted a schoolyard in Los Angeles with anthrax spores, twenty-seven luckless children eventually succumbed to the disease. The school in question was primarily Latino and the inevitable charges of racism quickly had the city on the edge of another terrible riot.

Local and national police agencies feared that the attack on the school was merely a test; things could get much worse very soon. There were no

substantial leads, or reliable witnesses. The special team got the call and birthday parties could wait.

The schoolyard and the surrounding neighborhoods had been sprayed with a strong chemical solution and were declared safe. Large cities always posed the boy a problem, so many distractions, so many people. Adam, clad in a full body protective suit and mask to play it safe, spent nearly two hours at the school before he finally came up with a target, it was only four miles away.

“The big house up ahead, on the other side of the street.” Said a somewhat muffled Adam from inside the cut down protective garment.

“What’s inside?” Asked Monroe.

“Two men, one woman. The anthrax stuff is upstairs in the back bedroom.”

It was one o’clock in the morning; the residential neighborhood was quiet and mostly dark.

“Talk to us Adam.” Said Monroe.

“I’ve taken out their guns, I don’t see any bombs or explosives anywhere. The germ stuff is in metal

cylinders, I think these creeps are from outside the country.”

“Probably trying to start a nice little race war.”

Said Parker.

“This is probably a bad time to bring this up, but I really need to go to the bathroom.” Adam was in a bit of distress from too much liquid intake during the mission.

“Hold it for a while, let’s grab these nitwits, then we’ll find you a john.” Monroe answered.

“Cool.”

Monroe gave the word for the agents to preposition themselves front and rear at the house.

“Put ‘em to sleep, Adam.”

“Hold on, wait.” Thirty seconds passed. “Okay, go!”

The door kicking and handcuffing took about sixty seconds. Within a few minutes the flashing lights of several dozen patrol cars lighted up the neighborhood. Every front yard was filled with curious people. Adam was allowed out of his ‘spacesuit’. Time to head back to the bat plane.

“I’m not gonna make it that long!” The poor boy was almost in tears. “Maybe these people here would let me use their john!” Adam pointed to the house directly adjacent to their vehicle.

“Damn! All right, scope out the house first, Adam.” Monroe was ticked off. Sometimes he needed to be reminded that the core of the Special Team was still just a kid.

“It’s cool. These people are nice!”

“Parker! See if they’ll let us borrow their john!”

“Right.”

Parker got out of the black Suburban and went up to the people standing on their front porch where he flashed his identification.

“Evening, folks. The young man in that vehicle over there is Adam Valentine and he really needs to use a bathroom, could he possibly use yours?”

Mr. and Mrs. Mendoza’s eyes went very wide.

“Of course! Our pleasure. It will cost him an autograph though.” Said Mr. Mendoza.

“Fair enough, thanks.”

Parker waved for Adam to come ahead, three agents surrounded him and moved him quickly into the small house. Mrs. Mendoza led the distressed boy to the immaculate bathroom. Relief! When Adam finally emerged from the bathroom he shook hands with the Mendoza's and signed his name inside the family's bible. He got the usual kiss from Mrs. Mendoza.

As the boy and the agents emerged from the house they heard a rapid series of popping sounds that sounded like firecrackers from somewhere down the block. Then more popping sounds as one of the flowerpots on the Mendoza's front porch shattered, as did one of their front windows. Everyone, including Adam, hit the ground. The boy was then grabbed by Agent Monroe and almost thrown into the open door of the Suburban. Once inside, the order was given to get out of Dodge as several more rounds impacted the bulletproof glass of the vehicles.

Adam was in the back seat with Monroe to his

left, Parker was on the right. The boy felt that something was decidedly wrong; his right leg was starting to really sting and his ribs on the right side hurt. After a while he realized that he must have been shot or something.

“Ouch! Shit! Criminally!” This rare profanity got everyone’s attention.

“What’s wrong, son?” Asked Monroe, who was occupied with looking over his shoulder to see if anyone followed them.

As Adam pulled his hand away from his right thigh it felt all wet and sticky.

“Can you turn on the light just a sec?” Adam asked, not really wanting to see what he already knew was there.

Monroe reached up and flipped on the dome light. Adam was looking at his right hand, it was covered with blood and so was his pants leg.

“Oh Christ! Get us to the nearest hospital, now!” Monroe shouted to Agent Harper who was driving.

“What is it?” Demanded Harper, trying to look in two directions at once.

“Adam’s been hit! His leg’s bleeding bad! Haul ass dammit!”

Parker produced a very non-regulation switchblade and slit open the boy’s soaked pants leg. Blood was spurting out of the small wound midway between his crotch and knee in time with his rapid pulse. The agent placed his hand over the little geyser and pressed firmly.

“It looks like an artery was hit, how soon to the hospital?” demanded Parker.

Ms. Harper had been on the radio requesting directions and escorts. “Maybe ten minutes!”

“Fuck! Make it less! A lot less!”

Adam seemed to be taking recent events slightly better than the rest of his friends. “I suppose this would be a bad time to mention my ribs?”

Agent Monroe pulled up the boy’s black sweatshirt to reveal that his white T-shirt was now a wet red color on his right side.

“My God! He’s been hit there too!” Monroe was getting totally rattled by now.

“Stay cool Agent Monroe, a little duct tape and I’ll

be fine.” Adam was doing his best to calm things down just a little.

Parker and Monroe did some fast maneuvering and managed to get the boy lying down on the seat. His leg seemed by far the worse of his two wounds.

“How much longer?” Demanded Parker.

“Five minutes, we have about a dozen LAPD running interference for us, the hospital knows we’re coming!” The female agent had been on the radio non-stop all the while, to her great credit she remained calm enough to coordinate with the local police dispatcher while maneuvering the heavy vehicle at high speeds through downtown Los Angeles.

The pressure that Parker was applying to the boy’s leg greatly slowed the bleeding but did not completely stop it. The wound to his rib cage only oozed slowly and didn’t seem life threatening. After what seemed an eternity of turns and traffic the armada of police and FBI vehicles screeched to a halt in front of the emergency entrance to the hospital. It appeared that about half of the trauma

facilities staff was waiting for them on the curb.

Agent Monroe quickly lifted the somewhat dazed Adam out of the back seat and placed him on the gurney while Parker kept his hand pressed against the boy's blood soaked thigh for the trip to the treatment room. By now Adam seemed somewhat detached and confused, looking about at the many strange faces who stared down at him. About two-dozen cops and FBI agents tried to crowd into the confined treatment area, this would not do at all. The resident in charge, a Dr. Morton, ordered everyone out except Agent Harper and she had to promise to stay back and out of the way. While a nurse took over from Parker and kept pressure on the boy's thigh, two others began cutting away his soaked clothing, tossing the bloody mess onto the floor.

"How are you doing, Adam? Asked Dr. Morton. Tell me how you feel?"

"Okay I guess. My ribs really hurt."

"Are you having any trouble breathing?"

"No, it hurts to take a deep breath though."

“Then don’t take a deep breath.”

“That’s a big help, Doctor. Geez!”

By this time Adam was totally naked and exposed in a room with Agent Harper and about eight strangers who were working over him, if he could have spared the blood and really cared enough he would have blushed from head to toe.

“I feel sort of cold, doctor.” Adam shivered some, he was moving into shock.

One of the nurses took notice and spread a warmed blanket over most of him, leaving his leg and ribs exposed.

“Thank you. Geez.”

Doctor Morton made a quick phone call to alert the surgical staff to prepare for action. He then gave more instructions to the trauma staff.

“Get a line in him and a blood type. He goes right up to surgery, we need to find that bleeder pretty fast.” He turned to Agent Harper. “Any health problems or allergies that we should know about?”

“He’s always been as healthy as a horse, no allergies that we know of, his blood type is O-

Positive. He really hates needles.”

Harpers' last words were punctuated by Adam's yelp as one of the nurses inserted a garden hose into his left arm. Geez!

“Too late about the needles,” answered Dr. Morton. “Why don't you hold onto his hand for a while till we get him into the O.R.”

“Thanks doc.” Harper said quietly. The female agent moved quickly to the boy's side and took his free hand; it was still sticky with his blood. She then leaned over and kissed him gently on the forehead.

“Agent Harper, you're married now, people will talk.”

“Sometimes I get carried away, twerp. How are you doing?”

“It seems I have some extra openings.”

“Well, now you have spares.”

“I feel really cold.” The boy seemed to be losing a lot of his self-assurance.

“That's sort of normal,” Harper explained, “you've had a big shock.”

“Try to avoid getting shot,” Adam replied. “this really sucks out loud.”

“I can see that, I’ll do my best to avoid it.”

Adam weakened for just a few moments, he didn’t quite cry but felt like it. “This is pretty scary... please don’t go away yet.”

“We all love you kid, no one’s going anywhere, and you’re going to be fine.” Harper prayed she was going to be right.

The scene in the hallway outside the treatment room was grim. There were seven FBI agents, four of them with MP-5 submachine guns, plus uniformed and plain clothes LAPD personnel for as far as the eye could see. Television crews were beginning to arrive in waves, one of the more insistent reporters was fed his own microphone. The admitting desk had already fielded one telephone call from the White House. By now the news of the shooting was being carried live by all of the news services and networks.

As Adam was being wheeled up to the operating

room Agent Monroe was able to talk to him along the way.

“Adam, I am so sorry I let this happen to you.”

“You’re being pretty silly, Agent Monroe, I was the one pitching a fit to go to the bathroom.”

“We should have moved you out of that area first.”

“I would have peed in my pants.”

“Better than being shot. Twice.”

Adam turned to Agent Harper. “When you get a spare minute would you please slap some sense into Agent Monroe?”

“My pleasure, can I leave bruises and cuts?”

“Yes.”

The boy was separated from his friends at the operating room door. He managed a semblance of a smile and a wave as the door closed, although at this point he wasn’t feeling all that chipper. There was a waiting room down the hall but that seemed too far way so everyone just stood with their backs to the wall and stared at the closed door. Agent Harper just stared at her hand that still had Adam’s

blood on it.

She wept.

The operation on the boy's leg was fairly straightforward; the surgeon enlarged the small wound and followed the bullet's path to the partially severed artery. Adam was lucky in having a very skilled vascular surgeon on his side, the artery was neatly repaired and the bleeding stopped. A small .22 caliber bullet was plucked out of the muscle tissue just beyond the damaged blood vessel. The 9mm bullet that clipped Adam's rib had entered and exited cleanly, an incision was made and a bone chip from his rib was removed. The surgeons were finished in ninety minutes; the closely monitored boy seemed to tolerate the procedure quite well. There was one moment of excitement when the operation began, a small metal bowl on one of the tables started vibrating violently and then took off and hit the wall hard enough to chip the ceramic tile. After the operation Dr. Morton and the surgeons spoke with the FBI Agents.

“Adam’s going to be fine. He’s being moved into the recovery area right now. We repaired the cut artery in his leg and pulled out a .22 slug. The chest wound was fairly superficial, the bullet chipped a rib, and we fixed that. He was in moderate shock from the blood loss. We think he lost about a pint and a half of blood, quite a bit for his small body size. We transfused one pint. Adam will be very uncomfortable for a few days but we’ll give him something for the pain if needed. Barring any infections or nerve damage in his leg he’s going to be okay, so stop worrying.” Explained Dr. Davies, the vascular surgeon.

“Thank God, when can we see him?” Everyone asked at once.

“Right now but he’s still pretty much out of it, don’t expect any sparkling conversations, if any.”

The agents were shown into the surgical recovery room. Adam seemed to be asleep; tubes ran from his left arm and other places.

“He looks so small and pale, of all people why did he have to be the one to get hit?” Harper was teary

eyed again.

Adam stirred a little; his eyelids opened enough to see his friends standing around him. He smiled slightly when he found Agent Harper's hand and drifted back into a deep sleep.

The hospital officials held a news conference after Adam was out of surgery, it had to take place outside in a parking lot due to the size of the crowd. The news media provided the usual endless speculations and interviews throughout the night. Around seven o'clock in the morning the boy was wheeled into a private room, by this time Dr. Simmons had arrived from Virginia to see about her star patient.

Adam awoke with a small groan around nine in the morning; someone seemed to be beating on his leg with a hammer. Dr. Simmons was sitting in a chair next to his bed reading his chart; she had earlier ordered the exhausted FBI agents off to get some rest.

“Good morning Adam. How are you feeling?”

“Hi, Dr. Needles. My leg really, really hurts and I could use a drink of water!”

The lady doctor pushed the call button and gave Adam some water through a straw, making him stop before he wanted to.

“Not too much right away. We’ll give you something for your leg. How are the ribs?”

“They’re okay. Oh shit, my leg really hurts!”

The resident and a nurse appeared and after a quick consultation Dr. Simmons ordered a hypo of Demerol for the boy, she knew that he must be hurting; she had never heard him swear before.

“You really like needles too much.” Adam tried to put on a brave front.

“It will make you stop hurting, which will it be, the needle or the pain?”

“Gimme the needle, please!” The boy was close to tears.

“Thought so.”

When the nurse returned they rolled Adam to his left side a bit and before he could mount a suitable protest the nurse jabbed the needle into his exposed

behind.

“Ouch! Geez.”

“You never fail to say that.” Observed Dr. Simmons.

“It’s traditional when you puncture me.”

“I see your wit is unaffected by your injuries, how about a little Jell-O for breakfast?”

“Maybe later. How long does that stuff you stabbed me with take to work?”

“Pretty quick, be patient.”

“I am a patient. Now that you mention it I do feel a little better, sort of dreamy.”

The doctor managed to get a little of the cherry gelatin into the boy before he drifted off to sleep for a while longer, the painkiller worked just fine.

The flowers began arriving early in the morning, every florist in the LA basin was working overtime and soon the hospital had flowers in every room, even the prison ward. Eventually, the floral arrangements began to pile up outside the building, a plea went out not to send any more. The flowers that made it into Adam’s room were from the Mayor

of Los Angeles, The Governor of California, The President of The United States, the JCS, the British Ambassador, and of course, the Richter's.

With the news of the FBI's success in finding the terrorists responsible for the anthrax attack, tensions in Los Angeles and the nation relaxed. The shooting attack on the team, and the wounding of Adam Valentine, prompted certain elements of the community to move into action.

The would-be gang members responsible for the shooting thought that they would be making a name for themselves by attacking the FBI. When it turned out that they had shot the boy responsible for solving the anthrax attack on the schoolyard things did not go quite as they had planned. The leaders of the area's real gangs held an almost unprecedented face-to-face meeting, an agreement was quickly reached, inquiries were made, butts kicked. A call to the LAPD took place. The shooters were in custody before the sun went down; they were not especially well treated by anyone.

The press coverage of the terrorist attack and the shooting of Adam had moved well beyond what might be described as a frenzy. As was usually the case when denied access to the principle figures of a story the reporters began interviewing one another. In Washington, several Senators and Congressmen called for an immediate special hearing and investigation of the events in Los Angeles, the opportunity for free 'face time' on national television was too good to pass up. The ACLU and several children's rights advocates talked about legal proceedings to place Adam in some sort of foster home or institution for his own protection. Pending an internal FBI investigation Agent Monroe was relieved of his duties as head of the Special Team, a scapegoat was required.

By Adam's second morning in the hospital the pain had subsided to a dull ache and further injections of painkiller were not required. Agent's Parker and his wife, Agent Harper, came to visit with the boy around ten that morning, Monroe had been

ordered to return to FBI headquarters in Washington.

“Morning, kid!” Parker’s greeting seemed much too cheery to the boy.

“Hi, Mr. and Mrs.” Replied Adam.

“Feeling a little better today?” Asked Harper.

“Yeah, I’m okay. Where’s Agent Monroe?”

The two married agents looked at one another for a moment.

“What’s wrong?” Adam demanded. “Something’s happened to Agent Monroe, hasn’t it?”

“They’ve called him back to Washington. He’s been relieved of his duties as the head of the team.” Parker felt like dog shit telling the boy that.

“That’s crazy! It’s not his fault I got shot!”

“We agree Adam, but there’s been an enormously big flap about this. I think they just want someone to blame.”

“Then blame me! I was the one pitching a fit about going to the john!”

“Monroe was in charge, he was responsible for your safety. The heat gets put on him.”

“That’s not fair! He’s always looking out for me, and for everyone else too. Who took him off the team?”

“The Director himself, Adam.” Replied Harper.

“Will you help me phone the Director? I need to put him straight about what happened!”

“Maybe you should wait, Adam, let things settle down some.”

“Bullshit!”

Adam said bullshit?

“Now calm down, son.” Pleaded Parker.

“I’m not working for some chickenshit outfit that would treat one of its best people like that! Tell the Director to find himself some other weird kid!”

“All right, now you just cool off, this isn’t good for you. We’ll call the Director and see if he’ll talk to you, okay?”

“Fine. Sorry I yelled at you like that, I’m not mad at you.”

“I know that kid, we all feel the same way you do.”

Agent Parker finally managed to get through to the Director.

“Sir, I don’t think you fully appreciate how upset the boy is over this thing, he’s really dug his heels in.” Explained Parker.

“I understand that but I can’t let him dictate policy, there will have to be a hearing. I’m taking a lot of heat over this.”

“With all respect sir, you’ll be taking a lot more heat if Adam flat out refuses to work with us anymore.”

“All right then, I’ll talk to him. He’s intelligent, he’ll see how things have to be.”

“I’ve never seen him this mad sir, he even used profanity.”

“I said I would call him.” (click)

The phone beside Adam’s bed rang at about one-thirty that afternoon.

“Good afternoon Adam, how are you feeling?”
Asked the Director.

“I’m fine sir, thank you for calling me.”

“Agent Parker tells me that you are quite upset about Agent Monroe being relieved.”

“It wasn’t his fault I got shot sir, he shouldn’t be punished for something that I was to blame for.”

“Now son, he was the agent in charge, someone has to be called to account for what happened to you. You could have bled to death.”

“If a plane fell on my head right now, who would be to blame?”

“Well, no one son, but...”

“There you have it. Agent Monroe can’t anticipate everything, no one can.”

“I’m sorry Adam but the hearing will have to go ahead.”

“Then I quit. Send me back to Idaho, I’ll get a paper route!” (click)

Adam hung up on The Director of The Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Director called back but Adam just let the damned phone ring.

Doctor Simmons was upset that her patient was upset.

“Adam, you need to eat something. Your body requires fuel to heal and get well.”

“Sorry, I’m really not very hungry.” This was

almost unheard of. Actually it was completely unheard of.

“If Agent Monroe were here he would tell you to shape up and eat your dinner.”

“Well, he’s not here. They won’t even let me talk to him.”

“Would you eat something for me then, please? Things will work out.”

“I suppose if I don’t you’ll start with the needles again?”

“I have a really dull one all lined up.”

“Geez.”

He ate.

The President was on the telephone with the FBI Director.

“Bill, I suggest you get things ironed out with Adam and Agent Monroe. I’ve just spoken with Adam’s doctor, she say’s that nobody has ever seen him so worked up about anything. As far as the boy is concerned Monroe is family and you’re about to sack daddy.”

“Mister President, we can’t let a ten-year-old boy

dictate Bureau policy.”

“He’s not trying to dictate anything, he’s just being loyal to his family.”

“Adam will get over it, I have a new man lined up for the job, and he has kids of his own and knows how to lay down the law. The boy will be back at the Operations Center in a few days, he’ll cool off.”

“And if he doesn’t get over it what do we do, ground him? What about the hearings that are coming up, there are things he could talk about that would have us all out on the street.”

“Let me try it my way sir, I think it will work out.”

“Okay. Give it a shot, but I’m telling you if the boy balks put Monroe back in. No arguments.”

“Yes Mister President.”

Doctor Simmons had Adam up on crutches by his third day in the hospital. The wound in his leg had ceased to drain and was healing nicely, as was the injury to his chest and rib. A pool photographer was allowed to take some video of the boy as he practiced using his crutches. If the cameraman was looking for a cute smile he didn’t get one. No

interviews were allowed, which of course led to endless speculation amongst the talking heads.

Adam talked to Freddie and his family on the telephone every day. His friend could tell that he was really upset about Agent Monroe's absence and tried to cheer him up, but nothing really seemed to help much.

The day before Adam was to fly back to Quantico his new would be boss came to visit. Agent Harper introduced them, not relishing the job.

"Adam, this is Special Agent Kincaid. He's been placed in charge of the Special Team."

"Hello Adam, it looks like you're up and around." Kincaid extended his hand.

"Nice to meet you sir." Adam was polite and shook the man's hand.

"I'm looking forward to working with you, I have a son about your age."

"Nothing personal sir, but I don't work for the FBI anymore."

Kincaid exchanged a long look with Harper; she just

shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

“I know you’ve been really upset by things, but we need to get on with business.”

“I’m sorry sir, but you’ll have to get on with business without me. I quit. I’m not some sort of slave, at least I hope I’m not.”

This was not a good beginning.

“Adam, we all have to do things we don’t want to. I didn’t request this job but I intend to do my best now that I have it.”

“I understand that sir and I didn’t request my job. I guess you think I must be some sort of spoiled brat, but Agent Monroe is the best there is. I won’t work for the FBI if this is how it treats its people. I know you’re a good person and I’m sorry to talk to you like this, but it’s like I said before, I quit, find someone else.”

“Well, I hope that you’ll change your mind. I understand your loyalty to Agent Monroe, he’s a good man but I have to do my job the best way I can.”

“I won’t make any big dramatic scenes in front of

people,” Adam explained, “I know you’re on the spot, but tell the Director I’m out of the crime busting business.”

“All right son, I guess we understand each other. No hard feelings?”

“No sir. I know this makes things tough for you, I wish it didn’t.”

“Don’t worry about me, I have a very thick skin.”

One week after the shooting incident Adam was released from the hospital and flown back to Quantico. His progress from the hospital to the airport was covered live as if it were the inaugural procession of a president. The same C-17 that had brought him to Los Angeles was the aircraft that returned him to Virginia. During the flight Adam hobbled up to the cockpit to visit with his favorite pilot, she gave him a kiss and an oversized brass medal that read “Purple Fart.”

Ah, with friends like these!

The Richter family was on the tarmac waiting for their number two son. Everyone got a hug and the

ladies got kisses.

“Welcome back son, try to duck next time, you gave us a hell of a scare.” Colonel Richter didn’t quite crack the boy’s sore ribs.

“It’s good to see you all. Sorry about all of the excitement.”

“How are you feeling? How’s your leg?” Asked Mrs. Richter.

“Stiff and sore, but it’ll be fine with some intensive chocolate chip therapy.”

“I’ll bake them tonight.”

“Bless you, Mrs. Richter.”

“Nice to see you again, dork.” Freddie was going to punch his friend in the arm, but decided on a light rap to the head instead.

“Nice to see you doofus, mind if I sleep in your garage?”

“No room, we’ll find you a cardboard box, you can sleep in the backyard.”

“Cool.”

At Dr. Simmons suggestion, Adam moved in with the Richters for a few days. She felt that the

situation at the Operations Center was too tense, and besides, he could use some of Mrs. Richter's cooking. The boy enjoyed being with his 'family', but clouded up whenever the FBI and Agent Monroe were mentioned. Agent Kincaid made it very clear to the Director that he was up against a stonewall as far as the boy was concerned.

The day after arriving at Quantico, Adam began a closely supervised program of physical therapy. Walking was somewhat painful but the boy managed several circuits around the Richter's backyard after breakfast. Doctor Simmons made sure that things began slowly; bullet wounds are not skinned knees.

Agent Monroe was in limbo, he had been ordered to appear before a review panel that was to have convened five days ago. The review had been postponed with no word of explanation. Agent Monroe found it particularly hurtful that he had been expressly forbidden to have any contact with Adam, he had to rely on the television news coverage and

calls to the Parker's to keep track of the boy's condition. Monroe had never married but he considered Adam to be a part of him, his loyalty to the FBI was strained to the breaking point. Finally, something seemed to be happening, he was summoned to the Directors office.

"Have a seat Monroe." Said the Director.

"Thank you sir."

"I suppose you are aware of the shitstorm that's been going on about Adam?"

"Yes sir. I wish I could talk to him, I don't think that would be asking too much."

"I'll get right to the point. The boy has it in his head that if you aren't reinstated as head of the Special Team he won't have anything to do with the FBI. The President has made his wishes on this matter crystal clear, therefore you are as of now back on duty as head of the team." The Director continued, "Is this acceptable to you?"

"Yes sir it is. Thank you."

"Thank the boy, he seems to think very highly of you. There will be no review, I think there should be

but I've been overruled."

"I understand."

"Get on back to Quantico, let's not have a repeat of this God damned mess, Agent Monroe."

While the Richter children attended school and the Colonel was on duty, Adam and Mrs. Richter had the house to themselves. Dr. Simmons came by twice a day to supervise the boy's exercise program; in a few days she would have him start swimming again. Mrs. Richter and Adam were in the kitchen peeling some carrots and potatoes for the evening meal when the boy looked up, a big smile on his face.

"What is it, Adam?"

"It's Agent Monroe, he's back! He's coming here!"

"But how do you know, child?"

"Trust me, he's back!"

Adam got down from the kitchen stool he was sitting on and made his way to the front door as quickly as his stiff leg would allow. When he opened the front door, Agent Monroe was just pulling up to

the curb in front of the house. The two of them met about halfway and Adam launched himself into the tall agent's arms. Monroe was afraid he might hurt the boy's leg or ribs as he caught him, not to worry though, the tears on the boy's face were from happiness, not pain.

"Geez, I'm glad you're back!" Cried Adam.

"I'm really glad to be back, son. I hear you just about mutinied."

"I did mutiny. I think the Director is a total jerk!"

"Just between the two of us, so do I. Don't tell anyone I said that."

"Okay. Come say hi to Mrs. Richter, she's been stuffing me full of everything for the past few days."

Monroe sat the boy down on the walkway and the two of them went up to greet Mrs. Richter who was dabbing something from the corners of her eyes.

"Hello Mr. Monroe, you must stay for dinner, Adam and myself have been hard at work in the kitchen."

"Well, thank you Ma'am, a home cooked meal does sound good."

“Mrs. Richter is light years beyond good, be prepared to gain weight.”

Adam had recently suggested that she write a cookbook.

It was a very happy dinner table that evening, the Richters were happy that Adam was again his old self, Monroe was happy to be back on the job (thanks to Adam), and Adam was just plain happy. The only down note of the evening was from Freddie, he confessed to blowing a history test and got a C-minus. The Colonel would have some terse words with him later that evening.

Adam returned to his quarters in the Operations Center the next day, the mood there was definitely upbeat after the previous dismal period.

The boy was back and happy, Monroe was back and giving orders, things were as they should be. Agent Kincaid returned to his previous assignment more than a little relieved to be off the hot seat.

It was announced that a Senate Committee would

convene the following Monday to investigate the events in Los Angeles. The local child welfare people filed suit to have Adam placed under their protection.

The Big House

Dr. Simmons continued to closely monitor Adam's progress, his right leg would eventually regain it's full strength and mobility, in the mean time it would ache when he was tired and did not have the strength that it should. His ribs ceased to be a problem beyond some lingering tenderness. Swimming seemed the best therapy and the boy spent as much time in the Academy pool as was possible.

Agent Monroe began a series of meetings to revise security procedures during field operations. Adam would wear a Kevlar vest whenever he left the armored Suburban, he would not leave the vehicle at all in any potentially dangerous areas. Two fully qualified emergency medical technicians would accompany the team on all assignments, along with a fully equipped medical vehicle; there was plenty of room in the C-17.

The Senate committee began its hearings into the incident in Los Angeles. The proceedings were carried live by all of the networks, with strangely enough, no commercial interruptions. Among the witnesses called were Agents Parker and Harper, Agent Monroe was given the lengthiest questioning; he stated that the danger should have been anticipated and that he took full responsibility for the incident. Then it was Adam's turn to testify.

The Committee Chairman began the session. "We appreciate you being here today, Adam. Are you feeling up to some questions?"

"I'm fine Senator, thank you."

"Adam, let me begin by telling you how much this nation appreciates the work that you've done with the FBI. You have proved to be invaluable in solving some of the most intractable criminal cases and have without question saved many lives in the process."

"Thank you sir, the people on the Special Team make it all work, I just tag along."

“You’re too modest, son. You are the Special Team.”

“Hardly, sir.”

“Adam, are you happy where you are, would you rather be leading a more normal life somewhere?”

“I don’t think I could ever have a ‘normal’ life sir. Until I began working with the FBI I was in so many foster homes and group homes that I’ve lost count of them all. I don’t really fit in with most families, I give most people the creeps.”

“I understand that you’ve made friends with a military family at Quantico, you seem to fit in there.”

“Well, they’re very special people. I spend a lot of time with them... I love them. If I were to become a permanent part of their lives though, things would become very complicated and difficult for them.”

“Are you happy?”

“Yes sir, I’m doing useful things, I’m with good people, I’ve made real friends for the first time. I’m very happy, sir.”

The Senator continued. “There are more than a few people who say that a young person like

yourself should not be subjected to the dangers and risks that you have faced. You were very nearly killed in Los Angeles.”

“Sir, twenty-seven kids were killed by the people that I helped to find. They tell me that there were enough anthrax spores in that house we raided to wipe out most of the city of Los Angeles. Should I have just stayed home and watched cartoons?”

The Senator was silent for a time. “No son, I suppose not. We just don’t want any harm to come to you.”

“Neither do I sir. Special Team takes very good care of me but they’re not superhuman. I could fall out of bed and break my neck.”

The senator from Virginia had some questions. “Son, there are some persistent rumors that you were involved in the naval operation that rescued the survivors of the submarine Philadelphia, that you were in fact the one who located them. Is that true?”

“Sir, there are rumors that I’m Jesus or the son of space aliens.”

The packed room erupted into laughter but the senator from Virginia didn't join in.

"But did you help on that operation?"

"Why are you asking me this, Senator?"

"The American people have a right to know son."

"Sir, I'm only ten, but I've read the constitution, all of it. There's nothing in there about a right to know."

"Son, I really must insist that you answer my question."

"No sir I didn't locate that submarine, I'm afraid of water."

More laughter.

"Now we know that's not quite the truth, don't we son?"

The Committee chairman interrupted, "We are not here to give this brave child the fifth degree. Adam has shed his blood for this country and has stepped up to the bat whenever he has been called. He has the everlasting gratitude of this republic. These proceedings are now adjourned."

In the end it came down to two simple choices. Did the country need the abilities of Adam Valentine,

or should he be playing little league baseball and video games. As Adam would say, "Piece-O-cake." The child welfare people and the good Senator from Virginia had of course, other ideas.

Three weeks after the shooting, Special Team was ready to resume limited operations. Adam was walking well without crutches and was getting a bit antsy with all of the inactivity. His leg still ached some when exercised, but good progress was being made.

A nasty bank hostage situation that was occurring in Washington, D.C. was only a short helicopter flight away. Monroe thought that a brief operation would get things back in the groove for everyone while not being too tiring for Adam.

Three heavily armed men had entered a Federal Credit Union building hoping for a quick in and out money grab. The robbery attempt went immediately bad when a bystander with a cell phone called 911 almost as soon as the trio entered the bank. The bystander was then promptly shot dead for his

trouble. By the time the robbers attempted to leave the building was totally surrounded by the Washington D.C. Police Department. There were fifty hysterical people on the credit union floor and the bad guys were threatening to shoot one of them every ten minutes unless their demands for an escape vehicle and non-pursuit were met.

The Special Team arrived ten minutes before the first deadline was set. A Brinks armored transport was pressed into service to hide and protect the flak jacketed Adam. Unless the robbers had anti-tank weapons the boy would be perfectly safe. Agent Monroe coordinated with the senior police official at the scene, it was agreed that Special Team would make the initial entry after Adam had rendered the bad guys inert. All of the entry team wore radio headsets so that Adam could talk to them directly.

“We’re set when you are, Adam.” Said Monroe.

“Okay, here’s what I’ll do. I’ll freeze up their guns first, open the front door locks, and then put the bad guys to sleep. Don’t move in until I give the word.”

“Sounds fine to us, do it.”

Everyone shut up and remained still while Adam went to work. The robbers assault rifles ceased to have any moving parts, likewise their handguns. The metal slide bolts in the heavy front door liquefied and ceased to be of any use. Time for a nap.

“Okay, get ready guys.” Said Adam.

In quick succession, the three hooded figures dropped abruptly to the floor inside the credit union.

“Go! They’re down!”

The entry team was up the steps and inside within twenty seconds, Adam gave them directions to all of the robbers, within ninety seconds the three miscreants were cuffed hand and foot and began to slowly regain consciousness. Word was passed for the D.C. Police to enter and take charge of the situation. The Special Team quickly departed, no one had even seen Adam during the operation.

Adam thought that the Kevlar vest he had to wear was hot and uncomfortable but he kept his

comments to himself, he knew what Monroe would have to say. The team was back at Quantico in time for a swim before dinner. Most of the team decided to join Adam in the Academy pool to relax and cool off for a bit. The sight of the boy's scars caused some black thoughts about what should happen to the shooters, still the boy seemed to be his old happy self. That wasn't to last for long however.

As Adam and the two married agents sat on the edge of the pool talking about the credit union bust the boy noticed a group of people enter the pool building.

"Uh oh, trouble." Adam whispered.

"What is it?" Asked a somewhat alarmed Parker as he pulled off the towel covering his service pistol.

"Do gooders. Shooting them won't help any." An agent was escorting two Deputy Sheriffs and two civilians; they all had on visitor badges.

"Guess I better pack my bag again." Sighed Adam.

The female civilian introduced herself and her

companion. “Hello, my name is Patricia Long, this is my associate Ralph Beeker, were with the county child protection agency.”

“What is it we can do for you, Ms. Long?” Asked Parker with a sinking feeling shared by all.

“I’ll come right to the point, we have a court order to take Adam Valentine into protective custody pending a court hearing about his safety and well being with the FBI. Recent events seem to suggest that the boy’s best interests and safety are not being adequately seen to. You may verify the authenticity of these documents if you like.”

“This is crazy! When does this order take effect?” Demanded Harper.

“Immediately, the boy is to accompany us to the central facility today. He needs to get dressed and to pack a few clothes. I might add, if you do not cooperate with this court order you can and will be held in contempt.”

“Shit! We’re going to get dressed, and then you can follow us back to the Operations Center. We’ll sort things out there.” Parker would have preferred to simply shoot the snotty twit.

“Very well.” Sniffed Ms. Long.

Agent Monroe was undergoing a true conniption fit.

“There was a federal ruling making Adam a special ward of the government, specifically the FBI!”

“I’m sorry, but this court order supersedes that ruling on the basis that the child is in imminent danger and has indeed been seriously injured while here.” Replied an overly smug Ms. Long.

“I need to make some phone calls, you’ll have to wait for a while.”

“Go right ahead, Agent Monroe.”

Monroe made inquiries as far as the White House, but to no avail. For the time being Adam would have to accompany the county officials and remain in their custody until the legal battles were fought. It was agreed by all that this question of custody was politically motivated, if you controlled the boy, you controlled power.

“What sort of security arrangements have you made for the boy?” Asked Monroe.

“He’ll be placed in our maximum security juvenile facility for the time being, he’ll be quite safe there.” Replied Beeker.

“That’s a jail for juvenile offenders for Christ’s sake! Adam’s certainly no criminal!”

“We don’t use the term ‘jail’, Agent Monroe, and it’s for his own safety until more suitable arrangements can be made.”

“How very correct of you! If you let anything happen to that boy, if he so much as gets a hangnail, you’ll be looking me in the face, is that clear?”

“Threats aren’t helpful in this matter, Agent Monroe, and besides, he was shot and nearly bled to death under your tender care.”

Monroe just turned and stalked out of the room. Now he had to tell the boy he had to go with these cold fish.

Adam was sitting on his bed; he had a small knapsack packed with some clean clothes and a few

personal items. He remembered the routine.

“I’m ready to go. I’m taking my cell phone, maybe I can sneak it in.”

Monroe was at a loss. “Adam, I just don’t know what to say, this is totally insane!”

“Don’t worry about me, Agent Monroe, I think they’ll find out that having me there might be, shall we say, a tad disruptive?”

Monroe smiled a bit, he knew what disruptive could mean.

“Try not to burn the place down, son. We’ll all be working overtime to get you back here.”

“I’ll leave it standing. I guess we’d better go now.” Adam gave the large agent a hug and together they went to meet the ‘welfare creeps’.

“Hello Adam, I’m Patricia Long, it’s nice to meet you.” She extended her hand toward the boy.

“Hi.” No handshake. No smile.

“This is Ralph Beeker, we work together.”

Not even a “Hi” this time.

“Well, we should get going, it’s getting late in the day and we still have a lot to do.” Said Ms.

Horseface.

Adam gave each of the agents a hug, or a hug and a kiss, as the case might be. The two civilians and the uncomfortable looking deputies who seemed to have little stomach for their assignment then escorted him out. Adam rode in the deputy's cruiser, the civilians led the way. The trip was not without a number of incidents.

About a mile outside the Marine base the welfare worker's sedan began to shed various components. The hubcaps went first, popping off one at a time and clattering to the roadside. The side rear view mirrors then fell off, bouncing and shattering on the pavement. Chrome strips and assorted trim pieces joined their fallen companions. Finally both the trunk and hood of the car flew up and the civilians had to pull over.

"What the hell is the matter with that car?" Asked the passenger side deputy.

Steam and smoke began rising from the stricken vehicle. Long and Beeker walked back to the

deputy's car and requested to ride with them.

Adam didn't want to ride next to them, he insisted on riding up front with the deputies who were only too happy to oblige.

"I can't understand what went wrong with that car! It was in perfect condition this morning!" Exclaimed Beeker.

"Must be the nuts behind the wheel." Mumbled Adam.

As the journey continued, things began to happen to the deputy's cruiser. Eventually the vehicle lost all electrical power, one wheel fell completely off, even the deputy's portable radios and cell phones ceased to function. The five people had to walk the last mile to the juvenile facility, all the while Adam loudly and pitifully complained that his leg was hurting him terribly. It eventually dawned on the rather dim welfare types that the boy had caused their misfortune and they confronted him about it.

"You did those things, didn't you?" Demanded Ms. Long.

"What things? My leg hurts!" Adam whimpered

as he limped along.

“You ruined those cars!”

“How could I do that?”

“Those weird abilities you have! We won’t tolerate that sort of behavior, you could be charged with vandalism!”

“You could be charged with impersonating a person!” Adam was getting rather worked up too.

“Be quite! No more impertinence out of you!”

“Bite me!” Adam’s usual standards of decorum had slipped more than a little in recent weeks.

“Things can be made very difficult for you if you don’t cooperate and do as you’re told, am I getting through to you?” Ms. Long was quite red in the face.

“No you’re not. I’m feeling faint from the pain in my leg!”

The deputies were doing their very best not to fall on the ground laughing. After a noisy eternity, they all finally arrived at the juvenile facility.

“This place looks like Alcatraz!” Exclaimed Adam as he collapsed pitifully onto the sidewalk.

“Be quite and get up! Some of the children here

just have a few behavioral problems.” Snapped Ms. Long.

“Yeah, like murder and rape. Nice razor wire on top of the fences, real homey.” Adam made a major production of struggling to his feet.

“Shut up!”

“No. Will I have my own leg shackles, or will I have to share?”

“You need to learn some discipline, you’re a spoiled brat. All of that fame has turned you into a little monster!”

“Will I have my own wooden bowl for the gruel? What about the guards? I’ve heard they’re mostly child molesters in places like this!”

“Will you *SHUT UP?*”

“No. Will I get a blanket, or does everyone sort of huddle together naked for warmth at night?”

Ms. Long appeared about ready to physically attack the boy when one of the deputies placed himself between them.

“Ma’am, let’s just go inside and get the paperwork done.” Suggested the deputy.

“Yes, of course!”

The guard at the facility's front entrance inquired about why they were all on foot, Ms. Long just glared at him and stomped on past. Adam shook the man's hand and said he was pleased to meet him. Once inside the two welfare workers led Adam into the administrator's office. The two deputies went off to telephone for a working vehicle.

Like Ms. Long and Mr. Beeker, Senator Brimley of Virginia had promised the administrator of the facility a rosy future. All they had to do was keep Adam under their control, or rather the Senator's control.

"Hello Adam, my name is Mr. Hawthorne. I'm the administrator of this facility."

"Charmed, I'm sure." Adam mumbled.

"How are you feeling, your leg and everything?"

"They made me walk for over a mile on my wounded leg, it really hurts. She kept yelling at me too!"

Hawthorne glared at Ms. Long.

"That little monster ruined both vehicles, don't ask

me how, they just fell apart on the way over here. He's been giving us nothing but lip and trouble the entire trip!" She explained.

"Is that true, Adam?"

"Of course not, she hates me! Why am I being put in a jail?"

"This isn't a jail Adam, it's a juvenile facility. You'll be safe here until permanent arrangements can be made."

"What's my crime?"

"You haven't committed any crimes son, the nation is very proud of your work."

"Then why am I in a jail?"

"This isn't a jail!"

"Will I be locked up?"

"This is a secure facility. The doors are kept locked for your safety."

"Then it is a jail. Will the guards beat me a lot?"

"No! And this is not a jail."

"Do I get a phone call?"

"No you do not. Who do you want to call?"

"The Marines."

"Very funny, you like to kid people don't you?"

“I wasn’t kidding. You’re not one of those guys who likes boys are you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, a peda..peda... a sex pervert.”

“You mind your mouth! I will not tolerate that sort of talk from any of the inma.. any of the boys at this facility, no matter how famous they may be. Is that understood?”

“You almost said ‘inmate’, didn’t you?”

The administrator whirled and snatched up the telephone.

“Washington! Get in here and start this boy through in processing. I want it done by the book with no exceptions, and I mean no exceptions!” He turned and faced Adam. “You won’t be quite the little smart ass when she’s through with you.”

“Golly jeeppers!” Exclaimed Adam.

Mrs. Alesha Washington stood five foot eight and weighed about two hundred and five pounds. She entered the administrator’s office, put one hand on the boy’s shoulder and then led him outside and down the hall.

“Come on boy, let’s get this done. Rule number one around here is whatever I say it is.”

“What’s rule number two?”

“There is no rule number two.”

“Oh.” Adam sensed that this person was cut from sterner material than his most recent acquaintances.

“What’s in that back pack?”

“Just some extra clothes and stuff.”

“You give that to me, you won’t be needing it here, we supply what you wear.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“I swear, I can’t figure out why in the world they sent you of all people to a hard place like this.”

“I think someone is playing political football and I’m the football.”

Mrs. Washington led the boy into a large tiled room that had one large table in the middle of it; there were shower nozzles along one wall plus the ever-present observation camera.

“Uh oh,” thought Adam, “this looks like really bad news.”

“Take off all of your clothes and jewelry, put them

on the table, then take a shower over there, use the green shampoo on your hair.”

Adam hesitated a moment, there seemed no way out of this short of a jailbreak.

“What’s the matter, boy? Don’t tell me you’re bashful or something?”

“Well, sort of. You’re a lady.”

“I ain’t no lady and you ain’t got nothing I never seen before, now stop dawdlin.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

The mortified boy slowly took off his watch, shoes, and socks and put them on the table. Resigning himself to his fate, he even more slowly undressed under the watchful and all seeing eyes of Mrs. Washington and the observation camera.

“Lord child, just look at them bullet holes in you! I’d sure like to get my hands on those homeboys that did that to you. That leg bother you much?”

“Some, it’s getting better though.” Adam attempted to cover his male parts with his hands.

“Well, get on with your shower, mind you do a good job too.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

Adam got under the strong spray and did as he was told while keeping his back to the guard. The green shampoo smelled like some sort of medicine. When he had finished and rinsed off, Mrs. Washington tossed him a white towel. She spoke to him as he dried off.

“I’m supposed to do a cavity search now.”

“Oh, okay. My teeth are fine anyway, I don’t have any cavities.”

Mrs. Washington explained what a cavity search entailed. “We have to check to see if you have anything hidden up your butt.”

“Oh Geez, that’s gross!”

The lady guard leaned close and spoke in a low whisper. “I know it’s silly putting you through such a thing, but if I don’t do it then that fat slob in the front office will have the excuse he needs to get me fired, I got a daughter to support.”

“But lady! Why...” Adam knew he was wasting his breath.

“Toss your towel in that bin and bend over the

table, this won't take but just a minute."

Adam felt helpless and exposed; he almost put the lady guard to 'sleep' but slowly did as she asked.

The woman put on a latex exam glove and smeared some sort of clear jelly stuff on her index finger.

"Just relax son, it goes easier if you don't clinch up and resist."

"Oh Geez lady, do you have to do this?" Adam pleaded, almost in tears.

His answer was a firm pressure on his anus, then a quick thrust into him to explore and feel for something that shouldn't be there. Adam sucked in his breath at this uncomfortable invasion of his most private place, in a few seconds the intrusion ceased as the woman withdrew her finger and tossed the glove in a trashcan.

"I'm sorry son, but I have to follow the rules here, those surveillance cameras don't allow for no rule bending. Hope you don't hold it against me."

Adam stood up, feeling violated and beyond humiliation. He did manage a civil reply to the woman.

“I understand. Why am I being treated like a criminal, I didn’t do anything wrong?”

“I know son, I’m sorry about all of this.”

“I’m naked, can’t I please get dressed?”

“We supply your clothes here. Come on with me.”

“What about my watch?”

“You get it back when you leave.”

Feeling like a germ on a microscope slide, the totally bare boy tried to cover himself as he followed the woman out into the hall and down two doors to the clothing issue room, thankfully they didn’t encounter anyone else along the way. Everything was of course too large by several sizes. By rolling up his sleeves and pants legs, Adam managed to look only somewhat ridiculous. The cheapo sneakers felt like clown shoes.

“Boy, you’ll need to grow some if you’re every going to do time.”

“Yes Ma’am, it would appear so. When’s dinner?”

“Afraid you’re too late, dinner’s over. Breakfast’s at seven in the morning.”

“Rats.”

“We got them here, too.”

“Geez!”

Adam collected some sheets and a blanket, along with a rubbery toothbrush and comb. Mrs. Washington led him down a corridor lined with heavy metal doors. Not quite barred cells but almost.

“This is the isolation section. You’ll have a room to yourself in here, it’s safer. You won’t be mixing with the general population. Your meals will be brought to you here. You’ll get to go outside to the special yard every day.”

“I can only wonder where I would be if I had actually committed a crime.”

“Ain’t that the truth? Here’s your room, make up your bed, the lights go out at nine o’clock. Sleep tight, son.”

“Yes Ma’am, thank you.” Adam walked into the tiny room.

Mrs. Washington then closed and locked the door behind him.

“Well this totally sucks.” He said to the four bare walls.

During Adam’s unpleasant introduction to the penal system the Agents at Quantico began making numerous telephone calls, the majority of them were to the news media to inform them of the boys’ new address. When the President was first informed of the end run done by Senator Brimley he threw a very expensive Remington bronze at an equally expensive antique mirror. The crude term “shitstorm” can only describe the uproar and the outrage that resulted when the networks broke the news to the nation. It would seem that the good Senator from Virginia had made a miscalculation of biblical proportions.

Adam’s room consisted of a metal-framed cot that was bolted to the floor. The decor was accented with a stainless steel toilet/sink combination. A single fluorescent fixture was built in flush with the ceiling. There was a small, wire-covered window high up on the wall opposite the door. The boy

made up his bed and lay down to consider his next action. Might as well go 'exploring'. Now where did she put that backpack?

Adam left a part of himself in his room and moved out to locate his backpack that contained his cell phone. He quickly found the wire enclosed storage room where personal possessions were kept. There it was! The zippered side compartment opened and out popped his phone. At least they hadn't stolen it. The small device floated over to the security wire, several strands distorted and allowed the phone to pass through. Adam kept the cell phone up against the ceiling on its trip back to his room. Along the way, a security camera was made to go out of focus, permanently. Once at his room the phone dropped down to floor level and slid through the small arch that had formed along the bottom of the steel door. Time to make a phone call.

"Special Ops, Agent Matthews speaking."

"Hi, this is Adam. Is Agent Monroe still around, or should I call him at home?"

“Adam! Where are you? We’ve been going crazy!”

“Just sitting here in stony lonesome. I managed to retrieve my cell phone.”

“Great! Hang on, I’ll put you through to Monroe.” During the brief pause Adam checked the battery indicator on the phone, about three-quarters full.

“Hello Adam! Are you okay?” Asked a frazzled Monroe.

“Hi. I’m all right. I missed dinner. They have me in an isolation room, they said it would be safer.”

“How have they been treating you?”

“Well, I had to undress and take a shower with this lady guard watching, she was nice but it was still pretty embarrassing. No beatings or torture. They gave me some clothes that would fit you. This place is a jail, I don’t care what they call it.” Adam didn’t want to make any mention of the mortifying cavity search.

“We’re working very hard to get you out of there. The President went on national television and absolutely flayed the child welfare services here for playing politics with you. He also called for the

impeachment of Senator Brimley, who's behind this whole mess. There have been demonstrations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, all calling for your release. The one in LA was almost a riot."

"Oh man! Was anybody hurt?"

"Nothing serious, the police were almost on the side of the rioters. I understand the facility where you're at is pretty well surrounded by news crews and demonstrators right now. They may need to call out some national guard to protect the place."

"Good Lord. I didn't look out that far. You can't hear anything in here where I'm at. I don't have a radio or anything."

"Hang in there son, things are happening, we'll get you out."

"Okay. I better hang up and save the battery in the phone, I don't have any way to recharge it."

"All right. Call if anything happens, get some sleep for now."

"Will do. Goodnight."

"Goodnight son."

Promptly at six-thirty the next morning the light came on in Adam's room and a loud bell rang in the hallway outside. True to form the boy just curled up tighter and pulled the blanket over his head. He was supposed to get up, make his bed and be ready for the guard's inspection before breakfast at seven, naturally none of this occurred. The morning guard unlocked his door and walked in, it was not Mrs. Washington.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? The bell rang a half hour ago!" Screamed Mr. Johnson, the morning shift guard.

"Mmph. Huh?" Adam still wasn't a morning person.

"Get out of that rack! I don't care who you are, when you're in my section you toe the line!"

Johnson yanked the covers off the boy and grabbed his T-shirt, yanking him to his feet on the cold floor.

"Geez!"

"Shut up and get dressed! You just missed breakfast. Maybe next time you'll get the message when that bell goes off!" Mr. Johnson was not a very

nice person at all.

The guard turned and slammed the door shut on the slightly dazed but awake boy. He was going to yell after the guard that he hadn't had any dinner either but decided that he'd better not. He made his bed and performed his morning routine as best he could in the bare room. His stomach was becoming audible. After a time he decided to make another phone call.

“Adam! Good morning son. How are you doing?”
Asked Monroe.

“Hi, I'm okay. Don't you ever go home, it's only seven thirty?”

“I came in early. What are you doing?”

“Starving to death. I missed breakfast too.”

“Why? They have to feed you, it's the law!”

“Apparently I didn't get out of bed when I should have, the morning guard is definitely Gestapo material.”

“I'm calling the administrator! This is ridiculous!”

“Don't do that, they don't know I have this phone,

they'd probably try to take it away. Any progress on getting me sprung?"

"The President has instructed the Attorney General to go directly to the Supreme Court for a final ruling on your status. The court will agree to an emergency session tomorrow morning. This hasn't been released to the public yet, there are some details to be worked out, but it's going to happen. The country is really worked up over this. Some of the Marines at Quantico were about ready to bust you out, come hell or high water. It wasn't a mutiny but it came close. Colonel Richter talked some sense into them, they listened to him since he's almost like a father to you."

"My gosh. I'll call Colonel Richter, maybe he can tell everybody there I said to be cool."

"That sounds like a good idea. I'm going to come over and see if I can bull my way in to visit you. You hang tight, don't make any big waves, this'll work out."

"All right sir, thanks. Bye."

"See you later kid."

Adam waited until the clock on the cell phone said eight and then dialed Colonel Richter's office at Quantico.

"Richter here!" He didn't sound at all happy.

"Good morning sir, it's me, Adam."

"Adam! Am I glad to hear your voice! Are you okay?"

"Sure. Agent Monroe said there was some excitement at the base."

"Just some hotheads, can't say I really blame them though."

"I'm sorry this is causing so much trouble, maybe you could tell the men that I'm okay and they should just be cool. There's a whole bunch of stuff in the works to get me out of here."

"I'll do that this morning. Is there anything I can do for you now? Just name it."

"Tell Mrs. Richter to bake me a cake with a file in it. I better hang up for now, I'm using my cell phone and I need to conserve the battery."

"All right son, God bless you. Don't take any crap from anyone."

"No sir, bye."

“Goodbye.”

“If they don’t get him out of that place, they’ll deal with me and the Corp!” Richter said to himself.

Senator Brimley did a cut and run routine, denying any connection to the child welfare authorities. Ms. Long and Mr. Beeker were left, as the expression goes, to twist in the wind. The judge who signed the court orders was on a sudden vacation and couldn’t be reached. Administrator Hawthorne was in a blind panic by the time that Monroe and five FBI agents barged into his office.

“My name is Monroe, I’m with the FBI. We’re here to see Adam Valentine.” Monroe thrust his ID in front of Hawthorne’s nose.

“I’m sorry, only family members are allowed access to the boys here.” Hawthorne seemed about to wet himself.

“We are his family. Now unless you want us to release the items we’ve turned up about your lack of professional qualifications to hold this job you’ll let us see the boy, now.”

“What do you mean, are you threatening me?”

“Your diploma is a phony and yes, we are threatening you.”

Hawthorne seemed to wilt completely. “Very well, I’ll have the boy sent for.”

“No. You take us to him.”

“All right, come with me.”

The somewhat unsteady administrator led the six agents through the facility to the isolation section. People moved quickly to get out of the way; there was something about the look in the agent’s eyes. The morning guard, Mr. Johnson, stepped lively to unlock the boy’s door. Adam was waiting for them and launched himself at Monroe.

“Agent Monroe! Welcome to the big house!”

“Hi, inmate. You look like someone in a gangster movie”

“You dirty rat!” Adam’s Cagney imitation wasn’t very good at all.

“Have you had anything to eat yet?”

“Just a piece of my foot. I almost caught a cockroach.”

Monroe sat the boy down and turned to the sweating Hawthorne.

“Could you please tell me *WHY THIS BOY ISN'T BEING FED!*“?

Even Adam cringed at the volume.

Hawthorne's eyes darted about like he was a mouse at a cat show.

“Johnson! This is your responsibility! Why hasn't this boy had anything to eat?”

“He didn't get up when he was supposed to. It's your rule, I was just following procedures!”

Stammered Johnson.

Monroe spoke almost in a whisper. “I don't care what the reason is. I don't care if Adam murdered twelve guards and set fire to the building. If there isn't a decent meal in front of this child in ten minutes I will personally arrest the both of you on child abuse charges and parade you in front of those TV cameras out front. You'll be lucky if you're only lynched.”

Johnson nodded his head and took off down the hall toward the kitchen area. Monroe spoke once more

to the administrator.

“I need to speak with the boy in private, go away.”

“I’ll be in my office.” Hawthorne also could move pretty fast.

“What happens when you really get mad, Agent Monroe?” Asked Adam.

“You’re too young to hear about things like that.”

“Cool.”

Adam greeted and high-five the other agents before he sat on the bed with Monroe to talk.

“I still can’t believe the stupidity of the people who engineered this farce. The consensus is that Senator Brimley wanted you under the control of the local authorities, which would put you under his control. People would have to come to him for your help. It seems to have backfired totally.” Monroe explained.

“Remind me never to vote for the good Senator.”

“It looks like you’ll have to spend one more night here at least. The Supreme Court is rushing things, but it still takes some time.”

“I’ll survive. I think the screws are afraid of you. I

could always bust out if I had too.”

“You’ve seen too many cop movies. You’re starting to talk like Al Capone.”

“This place does that to you.”

Johnson zoomed up the hall with a covered tray and gave it to one of the agents. Breakfast! The guard outdid himself, the toast wasn’t burnt and the eggs didn’t bounce. There was even orange juice, sort of. Monroe didn’t get much conversation out of the boy until the tray was empty.

“Better?”

“Um. It’s not five star, but beggars can’t be picky.”

“Here. I brought you an extra battery for your phone. Where do you hide it anyway?” Asked Monroe.

“Inside the door.”

“That’s a metal door.”

“Yeah.”

“Oh. I keep forgetting. I guess you really could bust out of here at that.”

“There ain’t no joint built that’ll hold me!”

“Stop it with the Cagney, please.”

“Sorry.”

“We should go for now. There’ll be some people from HRT stationed just outside this dump. You have any bad trouble, get on the phone, they’ll be in here in sixty seconds.”

“No problem. Don’t worry. I think you put the fear of God into the jerks here, you sure scared me.”

“I did? I’ll have to remember that.”

Adam gave the agent a hug and said goodbye to the others. As the FBI agents were walking away from the boy’s room they heard the parting shot.

“Top of the world, ma!”

“That boy really needs to work on his Cagney.”

Monroe grinned.

Johnson dropped his keys when the metal meal tray floated out of the room and came to rest on the hallway floor. With Adam giving him his best smile the guard barely managed to close and lock the door.

“Thank God that fat bitch Washington takes over this afternoon.” Thought Johnson.

At eleven that morning Adam got his daily 'outing' in the special yard. It was actually just a small courtyard with concrete walls on all sides. The top was fenced over with double chain link. Johnson escorted the boy to the door that opened into the yard.

"Enjoy, weirdo. One hour."

Adam stuck his head out and said, "Cool, no firing squad."

The boy blinked as he walked out into the bright sun. At least it wasn't raining. His leg had stiffened up some from the lack of activity so he began walking briskly around the edge of the courtyard. The oversize shoes made walking awkward and since the pavement was warm he took off the sneakers and his socks and continued his excursion bare footed. One of the more daring news helicopters that constantly buzzed around the facility made a lower than normal pass over the facility, Adam looked up and waved to the noisy machine as it came to a hover.

The female reporter yelled to her camera operator.

“There! In that fenced over yard! Zoom in, dammit!”

The pictured blurred and bobbed for a second and then the helicopter news team was rewarded with Adam’s face looking up at them and smiling. He even waved at them.

“That’s him! That’s him!” Squealed the reporter, “Go live to the network, now!”

The image of the small barefoot boy in the baggy blue denim uniform was instantly flashed across the country, and then around the world. Finally, they had something to put on the screen. They certainly had an audience.

“This is Karen Woods, we’re live from the Action 5 News helicopter. As you can see we are overhead the county juvenile facility for boys. The figure you can see who just waved to us is definitely Adam Valentine. He appears to be alone in that fenced over courtyard, and he doesn’t seem to have any shoes on. His clothing looks far too large to fit him.

There, he just smiled and waved again. I wish we could talk to him. He seems to be just walking around the perimeter of the yard. He appears to be limping some. This must be some sort of exercise period. You would think that they could give the dear child some shoes.”

Hawthorne’s television had been on all morning and when he looked up he saw the image of a small boy limping around the special yard. He didn’t bother using the intercom, he just yelled for Johnson at the top of his lungs.

“Yes sir?”

“Look at that!” Hawthorne pointed at the television.

“Shit! On my way!”

The helicopter reporter continued.

“Adam is still making his way around the yard, wait a minute. Someone, a guard it seems, has entered the yard and is approaching the boy. Adam’s trying to back up, now he’s raising his arms as if to protect himself. This is just awful! The

guard has him by the collar now and is pulling him toward the door. He fell! The poor boy fell! My God! Now the guard has pulled him up again, they're moving near the door, Adam's hanging onto the edge of the doorway, they're inside now and the door has been shut. Ladies and gentlemen, this is just the cruelest sort of treatment imaginable for that young boy. Adam Valentine, a boy who is a truly genuine American hero. A boy who was seriously wounded just a few short weeks ago in service to this country. This is just unforgivable!"

Emmy time.

Adam knew that the helicopter had television equipment on board so he hammed it up a little, actually a lot. He thought that the raised arms and the fall were great touches. After he was returned to his room he immediately called the Operations Center to speak with Monroe.

"Adam! Did that bastard hurt you?" Demanded Agent Monroe.

When the boy finished laughing he said, "Heck no, I

thought a pitiful performance might turn up the heat some on the jerks. I'm fine, Mr. Johnson didn't hurt me at all, I think he's afraid to."

"But we saw you fall!"

"Neat touch, huh?"

"You faked that?"

"I ought to get an Oscar."

It was Monroe's turn to laugh now; it took some time to compose himself.

"Get a grip, Agent Monroe."

"Adam, you're giving me more gray hairs every day."

"Makes you look distinguished."

"I'd better pass the word around about what you did or the next helicopters over there might be Marine gun ships."

"Okay, talk to you later."

All nine Justices of The Supreme Court saw the videotape of the courtyard incident before the day was over, this could not hurt. Employees of the juvenile facility had to be brought to and fro in a National Guard armored personnel carrier. There

was a crowd gathered around the facility estimated at fifty thousand.

Mrs. Washington came on duty at three that afternoon. As soon as she was able to she came by to see Adam. While she was fumbling with her keys, the lock clicked open and the door swung inward.

“Hi Mrs. Washington. Nice to see you.”

“Hello boy. Wasn’t that door locked?”

“Yes Ma’am, I saw you coming and opened it for you.”

“What do you mean?”

Adam pointed at the lock, the bolt clicked in and out several times.

“Like that. Easy.”

“Good Lord in heaven! All them weird stories about you must be true then!”

“Well, not all of them. I’m not a space alien.”

“Maybe not. You ought to see the crowd of people around this place. I had to ride to work in one of them damned tank things!”

“Cool.”

“Cool my butt! I thought I was gonna suffocate in that noisy thing!”

“Sorry. What’s for dinner?”

“I don’t know and you probably don’t want to know either.”

“Oh. Lunch sort of sucked. I didn’t know lunchmeat came in those colors. Can I order a pizza from outside?”

“Any pizza delivery guy would have to drop in by parachute.”

“Just a thought.”

“I was watching some TV before I came to work, seems like Mr. Johnson would be safer on some other planet.”

“I can’t say I’m really sad about that.”

“Me either, boy. I’ve got some rounds to make, you stay put. I’ll bring you supper in an hour or so, we can talk some more.”

“Thanks, you’re the only nice person I’ve met in here.”

“You ain’t seen me mad then, have you?”

“Well, no.”

Mrs. Washington chuckled and closed the door but

before she could lock it she heard the bolt click into place.

“He’s a nice boy,” she thought, “sure gives me the creeps though.”

Dinner was ‘meat loaf’, which Adam liked, especially if Mrs. Richter fixed it, but the brown slab on his meal tray looked liked some sort building material. The mashed potatoes looked all right until you actually tasted them. The peas had no taste at all. The bread and butter were okay. The Cool-Aide was purple, sort of.

“Do any of the kids here make it out alive?” Adam asked.

“Most do. The ones who eat the meat loaf usually don’t”

“You’re a source of valuable information, Mrs. Washington.”

“You ought to have some of my barbecue. You need to grow some.”

“I’ll give you ten thousand dollars to sneak out and get me a hamburger.”

“That’s right, you made a pile of money on them shoe company pictures. I heard you gave it all to some charity or something.”

“Not all of it. Easy money, Mrs. Washington.”

“You’re tempting me, boy. I don’t know how I would get in and out of here or I’d take you up on your offer.”

“Maybe when I get out of here I can take you up on your barbecue offer.”

“I’d like that. I’ve got a daughter about your age, she’s got two of them shoe company pictures on her wall. She’d have a fit if she got to meet you.”

“Janet.”

“How’d you know her name?”

“I’m weird, remember.”

“Yeah, but you’re okay anyway.”

In light of the rising domestic tensions and the amazing amount of heat that just about every politician in the nation was getting, the Supreme Court agreed to a late night emergency session. In the space of five minutes the court order placing Adam under the authority of the child protection

services was rescinded. A separate ruling clarifying the boy's status was issued: "The unique and valuable abilities of Adam Valentine requires, that in the national interest, he be made a permanent ward of The Government of The United States of America. The Federal Bureau of Investigation shall be appointed guardian and be held responsible for his care and safety."

It had to be one of the strangest rulings in the history of the court and the nation. Word was immediately passed to all of the news media in hopes of avoiding violence in the larger cities. As it turned out, the celebrations that followed the good news were just happier riots.

Around one in the morning Mrs. Washington rapped on Adam's door and unlocked it.

"Wake up son! You've been cut loose!"

"Ummmph. Huh?"

"Sit up child, I've got your clothes here. Get dressed, you're getting out of here."

"Oh. Okay. Geez."

“Your people are on the way over here now. Get your own clothes on now, you don’t want to walk out of here in those baggy things do you?”

Adam became partially awake and quickly changed into his street clothes, by this time his sense of modesty had become a good deal less modest.

“Oh, my phone! Hold on a sec.”

“You have a phone in here?”

“Yeah it’s in the door, I’ll get it.”

The boy bent down to the base of the metal door, the heavy sheet metal puckered and formed an oval opening, out popped the cell phone. Adam smoothed the metal back into place and stood up. Mrs. Washington just stood very still; her eyes could not possibly get any bigger.

“Okay, I guess I’m all set.” Adam said.

“Child, you scare the bejesus out of me sometimes.”

“No need to be scared, Mrs. Washington, I hardly ever turn people into frogs.”

“Let’s go before I lock you back up.” smiled Mrs. Washington.

By the time Adam and the guard reached the administrator's office the Special Asset Team was entering the front door of the building. Hawthorne was still in his office, afraid to venture outside where the mob awaited. The boy and the FBI team met in the hallway and much backslapping, hugging, and head rubbing took place. Adam introduced Mrs. Washington to the agents. Monroe then called Hawthorne out into the hall and thrust a paper under his nose.

“Sign this, it's court order for custody of the boy.” Hawthorne's eyes bugged out at the letterhead of the court involved as he scribbled his name quickly on the line.

Monroe continued. “The results of our investigation into your background have been sent to the County Prosecutors Office, I wouldn't make any long range plans if I were you, or even any short range one's” Hawthorne paled and scabbled back into his office and slammed the door.

“Come on kid, put this vest on under your coat and let’s make tracks. We’d like you to say something to the press outside so people around the country will calm down, will you do that?” asked Monroe, “I know you despise reporters.”

“Can Mrs. Washington come out with us, she’s been really nice to me?”

“Of course.”

“What should I say to the reporters?”

“Whatever you like. Maybe a few calming words of some sort.”

“Okay.”

Adam, the agents, and Mrs. Washington, proceeded to the front entrance. Before opening the door Monroe again spoke to the boy.

“Scope out the crowd for a few minutes, look for any kook, especially kooks with guns.”

“All right. Give me a sec.”

Everyone stood quite and still.

“It’s cool. Just a bunch of nutty people.”

“Great. Let’s go smile at the cameras.”

The FBI Agents surrounded Adam as they

emerged into the blinding glare of the television lights. A tremendous roaring cheer went up from the crowd when they spotted the boy. A bank of microphones had been set up and Agent Monroe spoke first.

“As you can see, I have just served The Supreme Court’s ruling to the administrator of this facility. Adam has been returned to his home with the Special Team at Quantico. I can tell you that I for one am very relieved that this whole sorry episode is over. I’ve persuaded Adam to say a few words to you. Adam?”

Someone had thought to provide a plastic milk crate for the boy to stand on.

“Hello. I’m not very good at public speaking but I would like to thank everyone who worked to get me released and back to where I belong. I’m fine, although I am looking forward to some actual food.” This produced a big laugh from the crowd. “I would especially like to thank Mrs. Washington here, she’s one of the guards. She was very nice to me and helped me a lot. She’s invited me over for barbecue

sometime. I understand that there have been disturbances in some places about me, I hope there won't be any more, it's silly. Please go on home and get some rest, that's what I'm going to do. Making trouble is pretty pointless, especially now, there's been enough crazy things happening as it is. Good night, thanks for all of your help."

A hundred reporters shouted questions at the boy but he just waved and got down off the milk crate. Two Marine helicopters were waiting for the FBI personnel; an auto trip would have been impossible with the crowd situation.

It was nearly three in the morning before Adam finally made it into his own bed and people went home for some rest. Freddie came by the next afternoon and after a heroic struggle managed to shove his comatose friend into a cold shower. The weekend was going to waste, for Pete's sakes! The weekend was sort of a waste anyway; all Adam wanted to do was eat.

Library Books

Agent Harper was on one of her “clean up this mess” crusades. The building custodial staff did part of the cleaning in Adam’s quarters, he was responsible for the rest. It wasn’t that the boy was a slob, like most young males neatness just wasn’t too high up on his list of priorities.

“Your bedroom is a disaster! The janitor was complaining again that they couldn’t even vacuum in there. You can kiss off going over to Freddie’s this weekend if you don’t clear a path in there.”

“Yes, mother.” He knew this really peeved Harper to call her that.

“Twerp!” She knew this really peeved Adam.

“You win, no rest for poor wounded little Adam, America’s heroic son.”

Agent Harper did her best to look stern, a hopeless task, so she just pointed at the boy’s bedroom and turned to leave.

“Wait a sec!” Adam exclaimed.

“What is it?”

Adam came over to where the female Agent was standing and looked at her curiously, and then a smile came over his face. He then placed his hand lightly on the woman’s abdomen.

“What in the world do you think you’re doing, young man?” Harper asked indignantly.

“It’s a girl.” He said.

“What’s a girl, have you blown your hard drive or something?”

“No, really. It’s a girl, your baby.”

“My what?”

“You’re a mommy, didn’t you know?”

“If this is one of your silly practical jokes, you’re in big trouble.”

“I thought that ladies knew when they were pregnant.”

“This is nuts, we use... never mind. I need to sit down.”

The totally flustered Harper sat down on the couch, Adam could see and feel that she was quite upset.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you feel bad, I thought you knew.”

“How can you tell? She asked.

“Well, it’s sort of hard to explain. I just know there’s another person in there somewhere and she’s a girl.”

“My God. This can’t be happening, we wanted to wait a while before having kids.”

“Kids are great, Agent Harper, look at how wonderful I’ve turned out!”

“Oh my Lord.”

Adam ran and fetched her a cold washcloth.

When Agent Harper had regained her composure somewhat she went off in a daze to call her physician’s office to make an appointment, she didn’t trust those home pregnancy tests. Three days later she knew that Adam hadn’t been pulling one of his silly practical jokes. Now she had to tell her husband, Agent Parker. During a mission briefing, Adam bailed her out.

“All right then, we leave in three hours, any questions?” Monroe was wrapping up the meeting.

“Oh, just one thing sir. I have this for Agent

Parker.” Adam slid a small wrapped parcel across the table to the agent.

Everyone looked at the package and Agent Parker, who was at a complete loss.

“Well open it, Parker!” Said an impatient Monroe. Knowing Adam’s tastes in practical jokes Parker gingerly tore off the paper wrapping as if diffusing a bomb. It was just a book.

“What is this?” Asked Parker as he held up “The Handbook For New Fathers.”

“You’re a daddy, dummy.” Adam announced to one and all.

Harper had turned a beet red as she nodded her head yes at her husband. The meeting degenerated into applause and rude remarks; everyone had big silly grins on their faces.

“When did you find out?” Parker asked his wife.

“Adam told me a few days ago. My doctor confirmed his diagnosis.”

Now it was Adam’s turn to redden some.

Parker looked at the boy. “I hate to even ask, how did you know?”

Adam just gave him one of his patented shrugs.

How indeed did he know?

Three weeks later, the White House.

“Mister President, ladies and gentlemen,” began the Director of the CIA, “three hours ago one of our oldest and most reliable assets inside Iraq passed us some very grave and urgent information. It is almost a certainty that there are now two nuclear devices in place in the United States, timed to explode at noon eastern time, twenty-three hours from now.”

The room erupted into shouts of disbelief and outrage. Finally the President was able to restore some order.

“How is this possible?” Demanded the President.
“Are you sure of your source?”

The CIA Director continued. “The devices were almost certainly brought across the border at El Paso in a motor home, from there one was to be

sent to the San Francisco bay area, the other is in or near New York City. Our source for this information is very high up in the Iraqi intelligence community, he has always provided completely accurate information to us.”

“God in heaven! Can we find them?” Asked the President.

“We don’t have any exact locations. If the devices have been properly shielded they will be almost impossible to find by conventional means. I’ve asked General Curtis here today to offer one possible solution.”

“Mr. President, as you may know when Adam was out at Groom Lake for evaluation he was made familiar with what a nuclear weapon looks like, and to him, what it ‘feels’ like. I think he may have a shot at finding them. We shouldn’t put all of our eggs in this one basket, but I think we should put him on it, right now.”

“It seems like every time the shit hits the fan we turn to that boy. Do you really think he can find them?” Asked the President.

“I honestly don’t know sir, but we don’t have a lot

of hole cards to play here.”

“All right. Get him moving on it at once, we’ll begin whatever other search operations possible.”

“Then if you will excuse me sir, I have things to do.”

“Go. Any resources you need, you have.”

“Yes sir. Thank you.”

As General Curtis was leaving the room, the possibility of evacuations was brought up. Not knowing the exact locations of the devices would entail moving tens of millions of people in a very short time to where? The loss of life and property damage due to the panic, looting, and confusion that would follow such an evacuation order would probably exceed that caused by the nuclear detonations. A contingency plan was initiated in the event the devices detonated, part of it involved turning Iraq into a slagheap.

When Adam’s phone rang at Special Operations in Quantico Mr. Terwilliger was struggling to keep his student focused on the great poets of Victorian

England. The boy lunged for the telephone as if it were a life raft in a sea full of sharks.

“Adam here.”

It was Monroe. “Make tracks for my office son, something’s hit the fan.”

“On my way.”

Mr. Terwilliger was vexed. “What is it now, how can I do my job under these conditions?”

“Sorry Mr. T, my country calls.”

As the boy vanished through the door his tutor just sighed and sat down on the piano bench. “I deserve a raise,” he thought.

Adam skidded to a halt and knocked on Monroe’s open door. The agent motioned him in and handed him the secure telephone.

“It’s General Curtis.”

The boy raised his eyebrows at Monroe as he took the receiver.

“Hello sir, this is Adam.”

“Hello son, how are you doing?” Asked Curtis.

“I’m fine sir, something’s wrong, isn’t it?”

“Very wrong. You remember when I took you to have a look at that nuclear warhead out at Groom?”

“It still gives me the creeps. I have to find one, don’t I?”

“Two of them I’m afraid, are you up to some fast moving?”

“Yes sir, what should I pack?”

“Very little, there isn’t very much of a stowage area in an F-15. Wear something warm.”

“Geez. All right sir.”

“Get yourself ready, by the time you get out to the flight line there your transportation should have landed.”

“Yes sir, will do.”

“Let me talk to Agent Monroe before you hang up.”

Adam handed the phone to Monroe and took off to change and pack his knapsack. Curtis had a few words more for the AIC.

“This is an end of the world situation. Get that boy over to flight operations as quick as you can, there will be two F-15’s landing there at any

moment, one is just a back up. All that the pilots know is that they are authorized to bust windows all the way to JFK in New York to deliver the boy.”

“What’s the panic for Chrissakes?”

“I’ll tell you. You tell no one else. There are two nuclear devices, one in the New York area, the other in or near San Francisco. They go off in less than twenty-two hours. Any more questions.”

“Sweet Jesus. How will Adam know what to look for?”

“He’s been acquainted with the beast.”

“Groom Lake?”

“That’s right. Keep this to yourself, we intend to pull him out of the search areas if he comes up dry, we’ll do our best to keep him safe, but I have to tell you everyone is considered expendable if it means stopping those things from detonating.”

“I understand, I don’t like it, but I understand.”

“None of us like it, it’s a shitty world sometimes.”

Adam had changed into jeans and a sweatshirt by the time that Monroe and Harper charged into his bedroom.

“What should I take along?”

“Where are you going?” Asked Harper, sounding very much like the mother she would soon be.

No answer to that. “It all has to fit in my knapsack.”

“Take your cell phone and an extra battery, a warm jacket, those wool gloves. A change of underwear, socks, toothbrush.” Agent Harper was going to make an excellent mother.

“How about my blanky?”

“Don’t be cute. Be careful! We don’t want to have to break in another weird kid.” Harper said.

“Will do, keep baby safe, Mother Harper.”

At the Quantico flight ops center the NCO in charge of flight equipment and personal gear was scratching his head, things didn’t come in sizes this small.

“This is the smallest helmet we have, I’ve added some extra padding to take up the slack. He’ll have to wear what he has on, flight suits don’t come in sizes anywhere near small enough.”

The F-15 pilot, Captain Kirk (yes he took a lot of

ribbing) looked askance at his undersized passenger.

“It will have to do. I have to get him to JFK in a half hour if he has to wear a chicken suit. Let’s go.”

Adam gave Monroe and Harper the hugs that they had come to expect and jogged trailing behind the Air Force pilot out to the waiting fighter. Along the way the pilot talked to the boy.

“You’ve flown a lot before, I understand?”

“Yes sir. Not in anything like an F-15 though.”

“You ever get airsick?”

“No sir. I did a carrier landing once, I kept my cookies.”

“What the hell were you doing on a carrier..? Oh, the sub thing.”

“No comment.”

“Yeah, right.”

As they walked up to the side of the two-seat version of the F-15, the pilot stopped and took the boy by the shoulder.

“They haven’t told me why I’m flying you to New

York in such a damned big hurry, I don't suppose you would know?"

"I do know and you really don't want to know, Captain Kirk, trust me."

"I could be flying tourists to Hawaii, and look at me. Up the ladder kid, step into the seat when you get to the top."

"Yes sir."

Adam scampered up the flimsy looking boarding ladder and did as the pilot said. His small knapsack was stowed in an equally small compartment in the side of the aircraft.

"All right, here's the drill." The pilot said.

"Needless to say, don't touch any of the switches or controls. Especially do not touch the yellow and black striped ejection handle, the one that's down between your legs. These seats will be armed. You're sitting on a small rocket. Keep your belts fastened at all times. If something goes haywire and we have to punch out, I will do it all from my seat up front. Any questions?"

"Let's go before I change my mind."

“Good idea kid.”

The pilot plugged in the boy’s headset cord and oxygen line. He gave Adam instructions on how to lower his face shield and how to brace his body in case of ejection. Adam gave him a thumbs up and Captain Kirk got in the front seat. With a signal to his wingman, the two fighter’s engines began to wind up and howl as the canopies lowered.

Monroe and Harper felt very helpless as the two fighters began to taxi toward takeoff.

“I don’t suppose you can tell me what the hell General Curtis had to say to you?” Asked Harper.

“Adam always jokes about ‘saving humanity’, this time he may well have to.”

“Just what the f.. heck has he got himself into this time?”

Monroe wouldn’t answer.

“Pray for him. For all of us,” he finally said.

During the taxi to the runway the pilot further briefed Adam. “This will be just a short hop, maybe

twenty minutes. We've been told to refuel at JFK and standby for a longer trip after that, any idea where?"

"San Francisco probably, if it's still there."

"What was that?"

"Nothing, sorry."

Conversation was cut short as the two fighters turned onto the runway and were given immediate permission to depart.

"Hold on to your nuts kid, here we go." Said Kirk. Both F-15's went to full afterburners about halfway into their takeoff run; Adam was mashed back into his not too soft seat. By the time the aircraft had passed through five thousand feet they had already gone supersonic, much to the chagrin of anyone on the ground trying to take a nap. Some windows were broken, a large number of chickens seized up and refused to lay eggs for several days, complaints were filed. Tough. The flight profile resembled the parabolic arc of a missile. As soon as the aircraft reached it's most efficient high speed cruising altitude they began their descent into the New York

area, still at supersonic speed.

“How ya doin back there, kid?” Asked Kirk.

“I’m not sure I’m still back here.”

“You must be, I didn’t hear you eject.”

“Then I guess I’m fine.”

The entire New York metropolitan area heard two thunderous booms that had police switchboards jammed for two hours. Air controllers at JFK had orders to divert all traffic that might be in the path of the two fighters; this caused numerous delays in airline schedules.

Again, tough.

“Air Force flight of two, you are cleared for a straight in approach, meet the ‘follow me’ vehicle at the end of the runway.” The JFK tower personnel wondered what two Air Force fighters were doing landing here, and with such a God Almighty high federal priority.

“Roger tower, over the outer marker, thank you for your help.”

The controller turned to the person next to him and

said. “Now just what in the hell is this all about?”

The ‘follow me’ truck led the two aircraft to an emptied cargo hanger where ground personnel directed them to taxi straight inside and shutdown. Three Air National Guard Black Hawk helicopters sat nearby beside the hanger. Ladders were placed against the fighter as the canopy finished lifting. A ground crewman climbed up and helped Adam untangle himself from all of the belts and hoses and then made sure of the boy’s safe descent down the ladder. One of the civilians in the group waiting came forward and introduced himself to the boy.

“Hello Adam, my name is Tom Meyers, I’m with CIA, this guy beside me is Fred Kurtz, and he’s with the Department of Energy.”

“Hello, nice to meet you both.” Adam politely shook their hands, wondering what was next.

“Let’s go over to that office where we can talk,” said Meyers.

Adam had yet to be in a hanger that didn’t have

some sort of cluttered office in it. Meyers and Kurtz led the boy into the room and motioned him to sit down at the table, the rest of the assembled group waited outside.

“Let’s get right to it, the clock is ticking. What do you think would be the best way for you to look for this thing, surface or air?” Asked Kurtz.

“Well, I think we can cover more area faster in a helicopter. Since I’ll be looking for a ‘thing’ and not a person it should be easier for me to concentrate from the air, less distractions.”

“That was mostly our line of thought too. Good. How close do you think you will have to be to find it?”

“There’s so many people and stuff in a big city, as close as possible, maybe a mile at the most.”

“Okay. We’ll start at the center of the city and work outwards in a spiral pattern, how does that sound?”

“Okay. Let me use the john real quick and then let’s get going.”

“Right in there.” Meyers pointed to a door at the rear of the office.

While Adam was in the bathroom, Kurtz issued orders for the helicopters to start their engines and to get ready for an immediate takeoff.

When Adam emerged, Meyers asked him where would it be best for him to sit in the helicopter.

“Up front, next to the pilot if I can. I can see more from up there.”

“You’ve got it.”

“When we start the search can you ask everyone to keep conversation and radio talk to a minimum, it sort of distracts me? Adam asked. “Sorry to sound so bossy.”

“You’re not being bossy. Whatever you need to make you’re job easier, just speak up.”

“Yes sir, thanks.”

“Let’s do it then.”

At the helicopter, Adam was fitted with a headset and buckled into the right-hand front seat. As soon as the other helicopters were loaded they took off in a vee formation with the boy’s craft in the lead. The formation headed for the central part of Manhattan

Island, there to begin an outward spiral search pattern.

They got lucky.

Adam's attention was caught by something almost dead ahead. He recognized the famous shape of the building; everyone has seen the movie King Kong.

"Up ahead!"

"What is it son?" Asked Meyers over the headset.

"That's the Empire State building up ahead, isn't it?"

"Yeah, that's right. This is no time for sightseeing, though."

"I'm not sightseeing, that's where the bomb is, up near the top."

"Holy shit! Are you sure?"

"Yeah! Move us in close, on the far side of the building."

The helicopters flew in a wide arc around the building and came to a hover near the top floors. Adam focused in on every detail of the empty office where the device sat.

“There’s no one in the office it’s in. It’s inside of some sort of big copy machine or something. Let me look at it for a while.”

The three military helicopters hovered in place while the boy studied the device. People in the building were coming to the windows to watch the spectacle. Since the destruction of the Trade Center towers it didn’t take a lot to spook people in high-rise buildings, in any building for that matter.

“Uh oh.” Adam said.

“What is it, what’s wrong?” Meyers seemed about to burst.

“It’s booby trapped, a lot.”

“How?”

“It’s in some sort of pressurized case, if you open it will go off. There’s a motion sensor, if you move it, it goes off. Shall I go on?”

“Damnation! Are you saying it can’t be disarmed?”

“No. I can do it, but I need to get close to it, with no distractions.”

“How in the world can you disarm it?”

“Did you get any sort of briefing on my abilities?”

“A short one, there wasn’t much time.”

“Anything about my ability to affect metals?”

“Yeah. Oh, I think I see.”

“I’ll just sever the wires that lead from the firing module to the squibs in the shaped charges around the core. Simple.”

“How close do you need to be?”

“Put me in the office with it.”

Meyers grabbed the pilot’s shoulder and said.

“Put this thing on the ground, now!”

“Where? That’s New York City down there!” The pilot wasn’t quite screaming.

“On the street in front of the building, West Thirty-Fifth I think it is!”

“There’s a zillion fucking cars down there!”

“Then they’ll just have to move.” Said Meyers.

“Kurtz, tell the command center to notify the NYPD, tell them to roll everything they have to clear the street.”

New Yorkers are accustomed to bizarre sights and catastrophes of all sorts, but three large military helicopters descending into the urban canyons of their city caught even their jaded attention. The three helicopters had to hover at about two hundred feet while the first patrol cars on the scene struggled to open a space in the traffic. The noise and air blast from the helicopters helped persuade the more reluctant drivers to be elsewhere. Finally, Adam's helicopter was on the pavement and the doors were slid open. Several hundred astonished onlookers caught sight of the famous boy as he and several men in civilian clothing dashed for the front entrance of the Empire State Building.

“What floor, Adam?” Asked Meyers.

“How would I know? The boy replied. “Up high, let's just get in an elevator and go.”

The group of six weapons and intelligence personnel, one undersized ten year old, and four of New York's finest crowded into the closest elevator. Sorry people, but you'll have to get out.

“Let's try sixty-five,” suggested Adam.

“Why not?” Mayer pushed the button.

After several stops where waiting passengers had to be told to take the next elevator, the group approached the sixty-fifth floor.

“Two more! Up two more floors.” Adam said.

The doors opened onto the sixty-seventh floor and discharged its load. Adam had it locked in by now.

“Come on, follow me.”

Adam took off at a dead run down the hallway and around a corner, Meyers and crew at his heels. The boy pulled up sharply at a door, it read “O’Bannion and Chivers, Attorneys.”

“This is it. It’s in here.”

“Anybody in there?” Asked Meyers.

“No, I think this is a phony office.”

“Shall we go in?”

“*NO!* Jesus! There’s one of those infrared motion detectors hooked up to it, open that door and we’re all fallout.” Adam was all but shouting.

Meyers and Kurtz seemed about to faint. The four policemen demanded to know just what the hell was in that office?

“You officers keep this hallway empty. We need some quite here for a while.” Ordered Meyers.

“Okay Adam, what now?” Asked Kurtz.

“Well, if it’s all right with you guys, I’m going to disconnect all of the firing squibs around the core, once that’s done it won’t matter if you throw the thing out of the window.”

“Okay. But I have to know, where did you learn about disarming nukes?”

“Popular Science magazine and Area 51. Let’s all be really quite for a few minutes.”

Adam sat cross-legged on the floor, seemingly just looking at the door in front of him. The intelligence types just stood there, afraid to breathe.

“All done.” Adam said quietly after about five minutes.

“That’s it?” Kurtz was a bit incredulous.

“We can go in now. The firing circuits will still trigger, but there’s no where for the current to go to.”

Showing off just a little (maybe a lot), Adam pointed at the door. There was a click as the lock opened, then the door swung inward.

“Good God.” Was about all that Meyers could come up with.

Across the nearly empty office stood a large Xerox machine, which Adam pointed to. He then pointed to a motion detector mounted on the ceiling above the door, a wire led over to the Xerox machine.

Before anyone could stop him, Adam walked into the office. A very faint snapping noise came from the Xerox machine.

“There went the firing capacitor, obviously we’re still alive and New York is still here. Now I think I better get out to California.”

One of the weapons experts started throwing up out in the hallway.

There were less than seventeen hours left on the clock.

When the device was later analyzed it was

determined that it was a rather outdated thermonuclear device of Russian origin. Still, one megaton is one megaton; New York would have been only a memory. Instead of two skyscrapers obliterated all of Manhattan would have ceased to exist, a big chunk of America's heart would have died too.

The same helicopter that had brought Adam to Manhattan departed from Thirty-Fifth Street twenty minutes after the device had been disarmed. Meyers accompanied the boy to JFK where the F-15's were already preparing for a quick departure. During the helicopter flight, Meyers had a chance few minutes to talk with Adam.

"How are you holding up?"

"I'm okay, I could use something to eat though. Actually I'm starved."

"I'll radio ahead, maybe they can round up something for you to chew on during the flight."

"Thanks, I'm not very picky."

After Meyers got off the radio he asked the boy:

"You just saved about ten million lives, how does

that make you feel?”

“Just call me sire, and bow respectfully.”

“No problem, sire.”

“You didn’t bow.”

“Bad back.”

“Oh.”

The White House.

When the news came through that the bomb in New York had been located and disarmed, the Secretary of Defense fainted dead away and several senior military officers were seen to be saying a silent prayer. The President finally found his voice.

“Ladies and gentlemen, let us reflect for just a moment upon the great gift we have just received. Let us pray that Adam can repeat this miracle he has already performed once today.”

There was total silence for several minutes before the President spoke again.

“Where is the boy now?”

The Chairman of The Joint Chiefs answered: “He should be arriving at JFK about now. The F-15’s are fueled and ready to go. There are tankers in position for refueling them, they can haul balls coast to coast, pardon my French.”

“See if you can get me in touch with the boy before they take off.”

“Yes Mr. President.”

The helicopter with Adam on board had just touched down when the pilot relayed a message that the White House was waiting on the land line phone in the hanger, they wanted to speak to Adam. Once inside, Adam was hustled over to the same office he had been in earlier in the day. Captain Kirk was holding the telephone out to the boy as he came in.

“It’s the White House, son.”

“Thanks,” said Adam as he took the phone.

“Hello, this is Adam.”

“Standby one.” Said a female voice.

“Hello Adam, God bless you boy, you did it!”

POTUS was a happy man.

“Hello sir. Thank you, I had a whole lot of help.”

“The entire country owes you so very much, how are you doing?”

“I’m all right sir, just hungry. They said they would get me something to eat pretty soon.”

“Are you up to the flight to California?”

“Of course sir, not to be rude sir, but we’re burning time here.”

“You’re very right. I won’t keep you, just remember that we are all truly praying for you.”

“Thank you very much sir, I’ve been saying a few prayers myself.”

“Then I’ll say Godspeed and good luck to you.”

“Thank you sir, goodbye.”

Adam turned to Captain Kirk and said. “Let me use the john for a minute, then let’s go to warp nine.”

“You know, I never did like that stupid TV show.”
Kirk replied.

The Air Force captain saw to it that his very important passenger was properly helmeted, plugged in, and belted down before handing him a small paper bag with assorted snacks and candy bars in it.

“This is all we could come up with on such short notice. There’s a water bottle down by your right leg. We have to haul butt now, any last requests.”

“Can I fire the plane’s cannon?”

“It’s not loaded.”

“Well, never mind then, let’s go.”

As the two fighters spun up their engines, Captain Kirk contacted the tower.

“Tower this is Air Force Special, flight of two, initiate emergency clearance procedures, we’re rolling.”

“Air Force Special, roger. Proceed prearranged taxi route, holding all departing traffic for you.”

“Thank you tower, sorry for all the trouble.”

“No problem, what are you guys up to anyway?”

“Pizza run, tower.”

“Pizza run my ass!” Said the controller to the

other tower personnel. "Somebody is pulling some very long strings."

The two F-15's taxied through a line of heavy commercial jets and onto the main runway. A United pilot and co-pilot got the closest look at the two fighters.

"Did you see the rear-seater in that thing?" Asked the pilot.

"Yeah, it looked like a little kid."

"Must have been a trick of the light or something."

"Or something."

The fighters rolled onto the runway and the pilots shoved their throttle controls all the way forward. The pilots of the waiting airliners watched in envy as the two jets pulled into an almost vertical climb on full afterburners, they were out of sight in seconds.

During the crushing climb out, Captain Kirk asked Adam how he was doing.

"Capin, I dinno how much more the warp engines can take, the dilithium crystals are a startin ta crack!"

“Hold 'em together Scotty, the Klingon’s are closing on us!”

“Aye, Capin.”

“I’m going to change my name.” Thought Kirk.

At thirty-five thousand feet, and about one thousand knots, things smoothed out a lot. It was time for lunch/dinner. Adam fished through the stuff in the paper bag. There were two granola bars, two Snickers, and chewing gum. All of the basic food groups.

“Captain Kirk, want something to chew on?”

Asked Adam.

“No, I got to eat lunch while you were off playing games.”

“You’re missing some real gourmet stuff back here.”

“No I’m not, I’m the one who bought that crap.”

“This is going in my report,” Adam said.

“You have a report to make?”

“I do now.”

Somewhere near Cincinnati the two F-15’s linked

up with a KC-135 tanker. Adam was enjoying the show immensely as their wingman hooked up first.

“That is so cool. How do you keep your speed matched up so well?”

“There’s a hole in the bottom of the plane, we stick our foot out some to create just the right amount of drag.”

“I thought you just put the transmission in ‘refuel’ or something.”

“No, these crates have stick shifts.”

“Bummer.”

Adam kept quiet while Captain Kirk refueled their aircraft. There was a time for silliness, but this wasn’t one of them. Other than looking out the canopy at the scenery below there’s not much for a passenger in a fighter aircraft to do. Somewhere over Indianapolis Adam decided to take a nap, it lasted through the second refueling; Captain Kirk woke him up near Sacramento.

“Yo, Adam! Start breathing again. Touchdown in twenty minutes!”

“Mmph. What’s happening?”

“We’re almost there, come alive!”

“Geez.”

Moffett Field/NASA Ames Research Center.

The two F-15’s came whistling in low over highway 101 to touch down at the former naval aviation anti-submarine base. Four Army Reserve Black Hawks were parked near the giant blimp hanger. Both fighters were directed through the massive hanger doors and shut down their engines near the center of the massive structure. It was like parking in the middle of the Astrodome.

Adam had most of the straps and connections unfastened by the time a ground crewman got the ladder in place. The boy took off his helmet and placed it on the seat of the aircraft before climbing down.

“Hello Adam, my name is McPhee, I’m in charge of the show here, welcome to California.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Answered the boy.

“We’ve been on the phone with Meyers, he’s

been briefing us in the operation in New York. You did one hell of a fine job there.”

“Thanks, what’s the deal here?”

“No progress on the conventional search, we have about ten hours before we have to get you out of here.”

“Where do we start the search?” Adam asked.

“If you haven’t any suggestions, we thought that we would start over San Francisco and work our way out from there.”

Adam turned and looked off toward the southwest, not saying anything for a moment.

“I’m having one of my hunches, what’s in that direction?” Adam asked while pointing in the direction he was looking.

“San Jose, Santa Clara, Sunnyvale.”

“Silicon Valley?”

“That’s right, Nerddville.”

“Can we start there?”

“You think it may be down there?” Asked McPhee.

“Just a feeling, they usually pan out for me.”

“Then that’s where we’ll start, are you ready to

go?”

“Point me to a bathroom first.”

“Way over there, against the wall.”

Adam took off for the john; it seemed about a half mile away in the enormous hanger, one of the security guards jogged along with him. After a time the boy and the guard came trotting back to the waiting search team.

“I’m ready if you guys are,” Adam said.

“Let’s move.” Replied McPhee.

As before, Adam took the seat next to the pilot, there were still several hours of daylight left, the speed of the F-15’s had put them on the ground in California at about the same time that they took off from in New York. The helicopters flew at about one thousand feet toward the center of America’s computer and semiconductor industry, there were very few really tall buildings in the area, most of the structures were low, sprawling, warehouse-like buildings.

“This may be harder then New York, there it was

up high and out of all the clutter.” Adam explained, “Everything here is down on the ground.”

After an eternal hour had passed, McPhee and the others were beginning to really worry. They would give it one more hour here and then move up to San Francisco.

Thirty minutes later Adam found the hellish device.

“Down there! Those long orange buildings!” Adam shouted.

“That’s a storage yard. You rent units to keep excess junk in.” Explained McPhee.

“It’s in the middle row, about halfway along!”

McPhee told the pilot to put them down on the street; traffic was relatively light in the area, not like New York. There were power lines in the way and the pilots had to be very careful as they gingerly maneuvered down between them. Adam and the search team made their way to the front entrance gate of the storage yard; it was secured with some sort of electronic access card lock. There was no attendant around.

“This must be a self service type of thing, we’ll need something to cut through that gate.” Said McPhee.

“Hold on a sec, I’ve got it.” Said Adam. The boy walked up to the heavy barred gate and looked at the locking mechanism. There was a clicking noise and then the electric motor powering the gate kicked in and slid it aside.

“I may take up burglary.” Adam grinned, showing off some.

“I may take up therapy,” said the stunned McPhee.

As the team trotted toward the storage units Adam gave them a do and don’t briefing. “When we get there, don’t touch anything. The last one had all sorts of booby traps to set it off.”

“That’s what Meyers said. You just take a long hard look at it before we do anything.” Said McPhee.

“I intend to.”

As they neared unit number forty-three, Adam motioned everyone to stop while he went up to the

door and sat down on the ground. He turned to the men and put a finger to his lips. Be quiet. He studied the device and the storage locker for a full twenty minutes before he got up and came over to the team.

“It’s set up pretty much like the one in New York. If you open the door, it goes off. Move it, it goes off. Open it, it goes off. I’ll do like I did there, disconnect all of the squibs in the core charges.”

“All right son, go ahead, take plenty of time. Get it just right.” McPhee answered.

Adam returned and sat crossed legged once more on the pavement in front of the unit. Ten minutes later the device was inert and the boy waved the men over.

“All safe. We can go in now.”

“You’re absolutely positively sure?” Asked McPhee.

“I double checked everything, and then checked again. All of the leads from the firing module to the squibs are cut and moved apart.”

After Adam clicked open the padlock on the rollup door, McPhee helped him slide it up and open. The noise of the door hid the snapping sound of the firing circuits discharging. This device was inside a Maytag refrigerator; it was the same type and design as the device in New York.

“It’s just like the one in New York,” Adam said. “I hope there aren’t any more of these things floating around.”

“Looks like you’ve saved our bacon again, kid.”

“Speaking of bacon, I’m about ready to eat my shoes.”

“Let’s get you back to Moffett. We’ll find you something to eat there. We’re starting to draw a crowd here anyway.”

As Adam and McPhee walked back to the lead helicopter they ran into a large collection of police cruisers, several hundred onlookers, and two news teams trying to get organized. One of the reporters managed to get within microphone range of the boy.

“Adam! Can you tell us what you were doing here today?” She shouted.

“Tracking down some overdue library books, it was terrible, just terrible!”

And that was all they got out of him.

When they arrived back at Moffett Adam descended on the NASA cafeteria at the Ames Center. Toward the end of his meal it became evident that the boy was about to nod off in his apple pie. An office and a cot were found for Adam in the center. Armed guards insured that he would sleep totally undisturbed.

The White House.

“We’ve just dodged two of the biggest bullets in history thanks to that boy. Now what do we do about Iraq?” Asked the President.

“We tell the world what they did. Then we bomb every place where Saddam may be, where he might possibly ever be, at the same time destroying his military down to the last latrine.” Said the Chairman

of The Joint Chiefs.

“Let’s not jump in with both feet, we’ll let the nation know what has happened, then we’ll go to the UN with the evidence. I don’t think Saddam will skate on this one. If we have to the United States will go it alone and eliminate him and his military.”

“What do we do about the boy?” Asked the FBI Director “He was seen by hundreds of people at the bomb locations, they even have some news footage of him in San Jose.”

“We acknowledge his roll in the search and disarmament of the bombs. We give him the public thanks that he deserves for a change.” The President said.

“The country is going to go insane when this breaks,” observed the Secretary of State.

That evening the White House called all of the networks and requested live coverage for the President to address the nation at ten p.m. eastern time. The networks were told it was a matter of the gravest concern.

“My fellow Americans, today this nation succeeded in preventing the most terrible attack on its soil by a foreign nation in the history of this republic. Less than twenty-four hours ago, intelligence sources learned that the nation of Iraq had successfully placed two thermonuclear devices on our soil.”

“One of the devices was said to be in the New York metropolitan area, the other in the vicinity of San Francisco. I am greatly relieved to tell you that both of these devices have been located and disarmed. The United States views this action as an absolute act of war and will react accordingly. It would be very easy to retaliate in kind against the nation of Iraq. Such an action would result in the deaths of millions of innocent civilians who have no control over the despot who leads their country. We will look to the United Nations for recourse in this gravest of matters, if such a course proves unsatisfactory the United States will take matters into its own hands.”

“The device in New York was found located near the top of the Empire State building in an empty office. The other weapon was found in the heart of California’s Silicon Valley area, specifically a storage facility in San Jose. I can tell you with complete certainty that the citizens living in those cities owe their lives tonight to one small boy, Adam Valentine. His remarkable abilities and the brave actions of those who worked with him in locating these devices have saved literally millions of American lives. We cannot ever repay the debt owed to Adam and to the men and women who averted catastrophe this day. I would urge calm and reason tonight, the urge to strike out is great, and I might add justified, but let us keep a level course and remain Americans. Thank you, and good night.”

Agent Parker and his expectant wife were at home when the President’s short speech was broadcast. For a short while they just stared at the television.

“Good God.” was all that Parker could manage to say.

“Yes, He is.” Replied Mother Harper.

The Special Team got the word to fly to California to bring home their wandering son. They were on the ground at Moffett Field as the sun was rising; needless to say Adam was not anywhere close to rising. Every television station in the nation with a news team sent a crew to California to cover events at the former navy base. It was a Thursday, but most people across the country just stayed at home from work and counted their blessings. In the Silicon Valley area, thousands of people began making their way to Moffett Field. They came in cars until traffic became grid locked, then they simply came on foot. By the time Adam was awakened, there were at least a half million people surrounding the base.

“Anyone alive in there?” Monroe prodded the lump under the blanket.

“Mmmph.”

“Doctor Simmons, I think he will need some sort of injection, he seems to be in a coma.”

“I’m awake! Geez!” Adam jerked upright and looked around in a panic.

“Morning, son.” Monroe said with a crooked grin.

“Where’s Dr. Simmons?”

“Virginia.”

“Criminy! What’s for breakfast?”

“Anything you want.”

Monroe used more prodding to get the boy into a shower at the NASA facility and then into some clean clothes for the flight home. While Adam was dressing, Monroe brought him up to date with events.

“The President went on the television last night and told the nation about the bombs, the country seems to be in state of shock about it.”

“Well, no wonder. Look at all of the people who nearly got killed.”

“He also gave you the credit for averting it.”

“Oh no.” Adam said quietly.

“Oh yes. There’s about a gazillion people

standing around this base right now because they know that you're here, and that you saved their lives."

Adam stood still for a moment and used his ability to look outward.

"I can't handle this. Let's just make a run for the bat plane and go home."

"After breakfast. Then I'm afraid you'll have to shake a lot of hands and say something cute for the press."

"Hide me."

"Sorry."

"Maybe if I put on a dress and a wig?"

"We didn't bring them."

"Geez!"

Being distracted by all of the turmoil around him didn't deter Adam from eating some breakfast. Most of the Special Team and the flight crew from the bat plane joined him in the cafeteria. Outside, dignitaries from the state and surrounding cities jockeyed for position to greet the boy. When Adam

had finished his corn flakes Monroe tapped his watch and nodded toward the door.

“I have a terrible stomach ache!” Adam complained, just a tad too pitifully.

“If you have to throw up, aim for a politician.” Monroe suggested.

“My leg is starting to hurt really bad again.”

“I have some aspirin.”

“You’re no help. Can’t you just shoot me in the foot or something?”

“Too much paperwork afterwards.”

“Okay. Lead me to the adoring mob.”

Talking heads around the country ceased their commentary when the flight crew and the Special Team began filing out of the flight operations center. Between the doorway and the awaiting C-17 was a semicircle made up of the local mayors, the governor, and assorted dignitaries. A small girl held a bouquet of flowers. Opposite the politicians, were most of the video cameras in the known universe.

When Adam and Monroe walked out into the

morning light the politicians broke into loud applause, from the far distance a muted roar could be heard from the people surrounding the base.

“You’re on kid.” Said Monroe.

“Please shoot me.” Adam pleaded quietly, trying to smile.

Monroe put one hand on the boy’s shoulder and guided him toward the girl with the flowers. The small child walked up to Adam and handed them the bouquet.

“These are from the people of California.” She said, and then kissed him on the cheek.

“Thank you, Elizabeth.”

“How did you know my name?” She asked.

“Lucky guess. Take my hand and let’s go say hello to the vote seekers.”

By the time the politicians had finished with the hand shaking, backslapping, and cheek kissing, Adam felt more than a little dazed. The governor made a mercifully short speech thanking Adam and the others who had taken part in the bomb search, and then he asked the boy to say a few words.

“This is amazing. Thank you. I seem to be getting all of the glory here, that’s not right. A lot of people took part in the operation to find the two bombs, without them I would have been perfectly useless, please don’t forget what they did. Why don’t we all go home now and be with our families and friends, that’s what I want to do? Thank you.”

Adam stood back from the microphones and shook the governor’s hand once more, and then he headed for the bat plane at a very good speed. Just before ducking inside the aircraft, he turned and lifted the flowers up and waved goodbye to the crowd. Phew!

Before taking his seat, Adam stuck his head into the cockpit.

“Crank this sucker up before they make me start kissing babies.”

“Buckle up kid, while I light the fires,” his favorite pilot smiled.

The giant aircraft wasted little time once the engines spun up, it taxied directly to the main runway and without hesitating roared off into the morning sky.

“I’ll sure be glad when we land at Quantico, all of this excitement is bad for a young person like myself.” Adam remarked.

“We’re going to Andrews.” Explained Monroe.

“Huh?”

“Then to the White House.”

“I quit. Shove me out over Idaho.”

“I don’t think there any parachutes on this crate.”

“You could still just shoot me.”

“That temptation is always there.”

Normally Adam slept his way across the country, but the prospect of more ceremonies, politicians, and TV cameras gave the boy the fidgets. He wandered over to where Parker was sitting and decided to pester him for a while.

“How’s Mother Harper doing?”

“She doesn’t like the restricted duty routine, but we can’t have a pregnant lady dashing all over the

country catching bad guys.”

“Any morning sickness?”

“How would you know about morning sickness?”

“I’ve been reading up a lot. How are you holding up?”

“The shock has worn off, I guess. I’ve never thought of myself as the father type.”

“I think you will make a great father, have you studied up on diaper changing?”

“I’ve been avoiding that chapter in the handbook.”

“Then just cover the nursery floor with kitty litter and forget about the diapers.”

“You may be on to something, I’ll tell Marilyn about your suggestion.”

“Don’t do that, I bruise easily.”

“You ready for all of the hoo-rah in Washington?”

“I asked Agent Monroe to shoot me, but he wouldn’t.”

“It would be a bad career move for him.”

“I really hate it when people make me out to be some sort of hero.”

“Defusing two H-bombs might qualify you as being at least a semi-hero.”

“Very semi.”

“Listen, whether you admit it or not you saved the lives of several million people yesterday. That makes you a hero, period.”

“People already treat me like I stepped out of a flying saucer.”

“We don’t.”

“Well... you all know me.”

“Just take things as they come in the next few days, I gave up worrying much about things I have no control over some years ago.”

“I suppose so, but getting up in front of a bunch of people and trying to say something gives me the shakes.”

“Just visualize your audience as if they were sitting there naked.”

“I always feel like I’m the one who’s naked.”

“If they’re laughing, maybe you are.”

“You’re always a real help, daddy. I’m going to go look for a parachute.”

About twenty minutes out of Andrews, the C-17 picked up an escort. The pilot sent word for Adam

to come up to the cockpit.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“We have an escort, two F-15’s and apparently the rest of the Air Force.”

“Cool. Hey, that’s Captain Kirk!” Adam pointed to the lead F-15, he could sense his friend. “Can we talk to him?”

The co-pilot handed Adam his headset and gave him the go-ahead.

“Captain Kirk, I thought the Romulans got you!”

“We escaped, stole their cloaking device.”

“I’m afraid we’re entering the forbidden zone, Washington, D.C.”

“Going where no kid has gone before.”

“Keep that crate warmed up when we get there, I may need to make a quick escape.”

“See you on the ground, kid.”

“Not if I run fast enough, bye.”

Adam handed the headset back to the co-pilot and took another look at the armada of aircraft off of each wing.

“They want us to make one pass over the airfield before we land, there’s over a hundred aircraft in the

escort.” Said the female pilot.

“What would they do to you if after the pass over the airfield you did a slow graceful turn to the west and landed in Maui by mistake?”

“I’d be driving a hay bailer in Nebraska, when I got out of prison.”

“Just a thought. Never mind.”

“Buckle into the jump seat, you can watch the show.”

It was indeed a show. At the parking ramp at Andrews a large podium had been erected overnight to accommodate the President and his cabinet, the Vice President, the Joint Chiefs, and whatever leading senators and congressmen who had enough pull to make the cut. Bystanders had been limited to the base personnel and their families. There were, of course, a sea of reporters and cameramen. There was even a red carpet.

CNN.

“It’s a warm and clear afternoon here, we are told

that the Special Team's aircraft is just minutes away. The scene here is one of anxious anticipation as America awaits the arrival of the boy who has been so much in the news the last few months, and who now is credited with averting an unimaginable nuclear catastrophe in this country."

The scene shifted away from the reporter and focused on a distant formation of aircraft.

"We can see them now. There is an enormous V-shaped flight of aircraft. The 'bat plane' as it has become known as, is at the lead. It's moving quite swiftly, we're told it will make one pass and then land. The aircraft are now over the runway fairly low, the fighter aircraft are pulling up and splitting off now, two of the fighters remain in formation with the cargo plane. Just now the two remaining fighters have gone to afterburners and are accelerating nearly straight up, the C-17 is climbing and is beginning a steep turn to circle the field. This is quite a show."

The dark green cargo jet circled the air base, all

necks bent to watch. In less than a minute the aircraft was lined up with the runway, its tires making a puff of white smoke as the large jet touched down. A cheer went up from the crowd as the bat plane came into full contact with the concrete. The two F-15's appeared once more and began their approach to the runway.

Adam kept his jumbled thoughts to himself as the pilot of the C-17 concentrated on getting her taxi approach to the area in front of the podium just right, it wouldn't do to overshoot the red carpet or to squash the President. She got it spot on.

"I'm not dressed for this." Protested Adam.

"None of us are kiddo, I think your Marine Corp sweatshirt will make you some points back at Quantico." Said Monroe.

"Maybe some extra chocolate chips?"

"One can hope."

"What are we supposed to do now?"

"Well, I guess you walk down the red carpet and say hi to the President."

“ALONE?”

“That’s the plan.”

“I’m dead. I’ll faint or throw up or something.”

Sergeant Hooper opened the forward personnel door and lowered the stairs; he turned to Adam and said. “Break a leg, kid!”

Under the eyes of an estimated three billion people, Adam carefully made his way down the short stairway and stepped onto the tarmac. He was vaguely aware of the assembled spectator’s shouts and waves and managed a smile and a wave in return. The red carpet looked about a mile long as he began to walk toward the waiting President, he concentrated mainly on not tripping over his own feet. After about a week he reached the outstretched hand of the President.

“Hello Adam, nice to see you again.”

“Thank you Mr. President, it’s nice to see you again.”

“How are you feeling, up to some hand shaking?”

“My hands are already shaking.”

“Relax, these people are all on your side. Just smile and say hello.”

“I’ll give it a shot sir, pick me up if I faint.”

“Fair enough.”

After the endless greetings were finished and the President had made his short speech, it was time for Adam to once more face the microphones.

“Thank you all very much. I said in California this morning that I would have been useless without all of the other people who were involved in the search operation and I need to say that again here. Please don’t focus on just what I managed to do. The search teams in New York and Silicon Valley should be standing here beside me right now. I see Captain Kirk over there! Him and his wingman flew the F-15’s that got me across the country at warp speed. I need to apologize to him for all of the Star Trek wisecracks I made during the trip. The FBI Special Team, headed by Agent Monroe, are like my family, without them I would be totally lost.”

“Let’s all say a prayer when we go to bed tonight. Let’s be thankful for our friends and families, and for God’s help in getting us past this bad time. Thanks.”

It went over very well, to say the least.

Adam spent the night in the Lincoln bedroom. Before he went to bed a tailor stopped by and took all of his measurements for suitable clothing to wear while in Washington. When the boy was finally pushed upright the next morning, a complete wardrobe was waiting for him, tux and all.

During breakfast with the President and First Lady plans were mapped out for the next few days. Adam was horrified. New York wanted to do a ticker tape parade, there was an awards ceremony scheduled for this afternoon on the south lawn, a TV interview was scheduled, various foreign embassies wanted to have parties with Adam attending. Photographers were even now taking pictures of Adam having breakfast with the President.

Noting the boy's obvious distress as the events were ticked off, the President spoke to him.

"Adam, is something wrong, are you feeling bad?"

"Mr. President, I guess I sound ungrateful, but do I have to do all of these things. I just want to go home to Quantico."

"The country just wants to say thank you, son."

"I know sir, but I'm just not cut out for these sort of things, I nearly died yesterday at Andrews trying to say something in front of those microphones."

"All right then, let's do a compromise. We have just the award ceremony and a short television interview, then we'll let you make your escape."

Adam's face lit up. "Deal, Mr. President, thank you!"

A press release was issued from the White House detailing Adam's revised schedule, and the reason behind his shortened stay in Washington. For the most part people sympathized with the boy's wishes, a few politicians were put out that they wouldn't get 'face time' with Adam on national television.

The Award ceremony that afternoon was trimmed a bit, but still lasted for more than an hour. Adam felt uncomfortable in his blazer, white shirt, and tie. He tried not to fidget too much knowing that about a zillion people were watching his every scratch and tug at his collar.

Captain Kirk and his wingman were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses; both were promoted on the spot two ranks by the President. McPhee and Meyers received the Medal of Freedom and promotions (the fact that they worked for the CIA was omitted).

By a unanimous voice vote of both houses of Congress, a special civilian issue of The Congressional Medal of Honor was placed around Adam's neck, for past services and for his role in averting the nuclear disaster. Now all he had to do was get through the stupid television interview.

At eight P.M. that evening the most watched interview in the history of television took place. There were two reporters in chairs turned toward the boy's seat in the middle. In the background, a cheery fire crackled in the fireplace, never mind that it was almost summer. The competition to be one of the reporters at the interview was, to put it lightly, vicious. The two network anchors that won the prize were already thinking about substantially more lucrative contracts.

The interview began with a view of the boy sitting somewhat nervously in the antique striped chair. His tie and shirt had been traded in on a more comfortable white turtleneck that looked nice with his blue blazer. The CBS anchor started things off.

“Good evening Adam, it's very much of an honor to be sitting here with you this evening.”

“Thank you very much, it's nice to be here.”

“How are you handling all of this attention and adulation you've been receiving in the last few days?”

“Not very well. I’m not cut out for this sort of thing I’m afraid.”

“This surely isn’t more stressful than tracking down H-bombs?”

“Give me an H-bomb any day.”

“How is your leg coming along? Asked the CNN reporter.

“Oh, it’s fine. It aches a little bit if I exercise a lot, but that’s almost gone.”

“That must have been very frightening for you, getting shot like that.”

“I happened so fast, I didn’t have time to be scared really. The agents with me had several cows though.”

“The story is that you kept Agent Monroe from being transferred after the shooting?”

“It wasn’t anyone’s fault, I always feel safe when Agent Monroe is running things. I made some noise when he was relieved, that’s all.”

“Did you threaten to quit if he was relieved?”

“No, I did quit.”

“The Director of the FBI backed down?”

“I wouldn’t call it that, he just changed his mind,

he's allowed to do that"

"To get back to the bomb search, wasn't being in the same building with an armed H-bomb terrifying for you?" Asked the CBS anchor.

"No more so than being in the same city. If it had gone off none of us would have known anything about it anyway

"By the way, you probably saved my life, thank you."

"My pleasure, I had an awful lot of help."

CNN: "It's pretty much common knowledge that you were responsible for finding that sunken American submarine, can you tell us something about that experience?"

"No comment."

"You've spent some time at classified locations in Nevada?"

"No comment."

CBS: "What are your plans for the future?"

"To get back to Quantico and hide."

"Do you have a girl friend yet?"

"Yes, we're getting married next month."

“I see. Any honeymoon plans?”

“Las Vegas.”

The interview lasted about an hour, when it was over the two reporters were soaked with sweat.

Adam just yawned and wandered off to bed.

Grounded

The President let the United Nations do the Dance of The Diplomats for two weeks before getting totally pissed. Iraq was then hammered with fuel-air bombs at every military installation or troop concentration. A fuel-air bomb is the next best thing to atomics, the blast effects are something to avoid. Iraq had a new government after six days; its previous leader was dragged through the streets behind an '87 Toyota pickup truck. There wasn't much left of him except the rope.

By the time that Adam had turned eleven the media's obsession with his every activity had waned somewhat, this was just fine with him. It was now sometimes possible to watch an entire news broadcast in which his name wasn't mentioned. He was however, a virtual prisoner within the confines of the base at Quantico. Perimeter security for the entire base had to be increased to keep out the photographers, curiosity seekers, and the

occasional dangerous nut. At least once a week some young heartsick girl would be caught trying to get onto the base to see her idol. In California, a cult had been formed who worshiped the boy; they referred to him as “The Messenger.” Adam didn’t know whether to laugh or cry when he first heard about them.

Mary Elizabeth Parker came into the world. When ‘Mother Harper’ went into labor it was a toss up as to who was in a bigger dither, Agent Parker or Adam. Shortly after the birth, Adam was allowed to hold the tiny baby, he would deny it if asked, but his cheeks were a bit damp at the time. He became an undersized Godfather to the child. His first present for Mary was a sizeable college fund that he had set up using some of his shoe company earnings.

While Adam’s body continued it’s somewhat reluctant growth, his special abilities began to increase at a much faster pace. His telekinetic strength could exert over forty pounds of continuous pressure. Remote sensing expanded out to over two hundred miles, further under the right

conditions.

Much further.

Adam became his own best bodyguard, his ability to sense when some danger was about, or when someone intended harm, had become so finely tuned and acute that he was allowed to move about the base at Quantico without a close escort. Anyone intending harm to the boy or those close to him would find themselves face down and unconscious on the ground. Experience had taught him to keep a careful watch, now it didn't even require a conscious effort to do so.

Colonel Richter asked for an extended assignment at Quantico so that his family could remain close to Adam, in doing so he jeopardized his chances at further promotions. Agent Monroe told Adam about what the Colonel had done and what it could mean to his career. That same evening Adam placed a very discrete phone call to the White House, before the week was out Colonel Richter had traded in his silver oak leaves for

eagles. Friends in high places weren't much good if you couldn't occasionally call on them for help. Colonel Richter later asked Adam if he might have had anything to do with his promotion. The boy did his best to look innocent and pleaded ignorance, the Colonel just nodded and rapped the boy on the head with his knuckles. Geez!

Freddie and Adam had another two weeks in Maui and renewed their friendship with the porpoises. A marine biologist was on hand to observe and record the interactions between Adam and the sleek mammals. The resulting video footage was the subject of his doctoral thesis and a PBS science special.

July found the two boys back at Quantico with a bit too much idle time on their hands. While Adam was a remarkable human being, he was still a boy. Put two boys together and their individual judgment and common sense can tend to be nullified by one another.

Saturday morning found Colonel Richter trying unsuccessfully to control his language as he rebuilt the Sprite's transmission. Adam and Freddie were hovering about ready to help, in truth the Colonel secretly wished they would find someone else to 'help' for a while. The Colonel did better work when he could throw things and use his full vocabulary.

"You two need a project for the summer, why don't you tear down Gertrude and see if you can get her running again?" Suggested the Colonel.

"Gertrude?" Adam asked.

"My dad's old motorbike, he had it when he was in Okinawa, even before he met my mom."

Explained Freddie.

"Cool, where is it?"

"It's buried in the storage shed out back."

Colonel Richter laid down the rules: "You can use my tools as long as you put them back clean, where you got them. Do the work in the back yard. Put down that old sheet of plywood that's behind the shed to work on, no grease or oil on the patio. If

and when you do get it running, under no circumstances will you attempt riding it unless I say so, understand?”

Two heads nodded in full and sincere agreement.

“Okay then, go to it.” Concluded the Colonel.

When the boys were out of earshot the Colonel said to his self, “Damn, I’m just too brilliant sometimes.”

“Man, it’ll take all day just to get it out of there!”

Freddie complained.

The motorbike was, of course, behind everything else in the crowded shed.

“You need the exercise, your mom’s cooking is making you porky.” Adam observed.

“Dork.” was Freddie's standard comeback.

“Doofus.”

It only took about a half hour to extricate the dusty, rusty, and over-used motorbike. It could never be mistaken for an actual motorcycle; the engine was about the size of a kitchen blender.

“Your dad rode this thing?” Adam couldn’t picture

the giant Marine astride this buzz bike. “He could pick it up with one hand!”

“I guess this was all he could really afford at the time.” Freddie explained.

“Both tires are flat.” Observed Adam.

“You noticed that?”

“I’m a fully trained employee of the FBI.”

“We’re going to have to take it completely apart just to get the rust and gunk out of it.”

Adam reached over and unscrewed the gas cap.

“There’s the first piece, nine hundred to go.”

When Adam returned to the Special Team’s building that evening the guards held him up at the gate.

“Who are you?” Asked the shift supervisor.

“Bill, it’s me, Adam!”

“Naw, Adam’s a white kid. You seem to be a Camouflaged-American person.”

“Very funny, I’ve been working.”

“Now there’s a first, you have a job in a coal mine now?”

“Close. Me and Freddie are working on a

motorbike.”

“Well, all right. You can come in, just stay off of the floor. They just mopped and waxed it.”

“Thanks, I’ll use the walls.”

“And try not to clog the drains when you clean up.”

“Everybody’s a comedian.”

Adam’s shower was quite a bit longer that evening. As he stepped out of the stall he noticed the new color that some of the tiles had taken on. Rather than feel the wrath of Agent Harper and the custodial staff he spent an additional half hour cleaning the bathroom. He put his clothes in the washing machine and just prayed for a miracle worthy of the Vatican’s attention.

Adam usually had dinner with the Richter’s on Saturdays. He knew that this weekend they had been invited to an important dinner at one of the Colonel’s friends and so he had begged off accompanying them. Adam tried not to intrude on everything that his adopted family did because they

too had a life. Finding himself alone except for the watch officer and the security staff, it was time to send out for pizza and catch up on some mail. There was an established procedure for pizza.

“Hello, Fast-N-Hot pizza.” The counterman answered.

“Hi, the password is heartburn.”

“Yo, my man Adam! What will it be?”

“One thick crust medium combination, no anchovies, extra mushrooms.”

“Twenty minutes.”

“Great, I’ll tell security, bye.”

When the pizza reached Adam there was a piece missing, as usual. The guard on duty always said it was being tested for poisons. Yeah, right.

Adam sat on the couch and worked his way through the pizza, the television was tuned in to an ancient I Love Lucy episode. A stack of letters was on the cushion beside the boy.

Adam received literally tons of mail, a permanent staff tried to open most of it to filter out the nuts and

perverts. A sampling of the mail was sent on for Adam to read when he had the time. Some were letters of thanks, some wanted autographs, and a few could break your heart.

From Ida Stevens, Portland Oregon:

“Dear Adam, I realize this letter will probably never reach you, I’ve read about how much mail you get. I am writing about my daughter Amy, she’s ten years old and a big fan of yours. Six months ago Amy was in a car accident that has left her unable to walk, the doctors say her spinal cord was crushed. If you can find the time to write her a short note or something it would cheer her up a great deal. Not being able to run around like her friends has left her pretty depressed. God bless you and the people you work with.”

“Oh, man. What to do?” Adam asked himself.

“Hmmm. Wait a sec!”

Adam picked up the phone by his couch and pushed the button for the watch officer.

“Evening, Agent Morris. Don’t we have a trip to Portland on the board as a standby assignment?”

“Let me look, hold on. Yeah, it’s been bumped up though. You’ll probably go next week. Why do you ask?”

“There’s someone in Portland I would like to visit for a little while, maybe I can twist Agent Monroe’s arm.”

“It’s worth a shot. Don’t tell the people there we’re coming.”

“Oh no. I know procedures, thanks.”

The boys got in a few more hours of motorbike dissection on Sunday afternoon. The amount of grime that the boys accumulated was less than the day before, but not by much. They were making a list of things that couldn’t be put right and that they would have to buy.

Two tires and tubes Brake cables Clutch
thingy

Battery Spark plug

Gas lines Piston rings Gaskets

Now if they could just find a place that carried parts

for aged motorbikes.

The Wednesday morning briefing was about Portland and the string of violent bank robberies that had been occurring there. As the meeting was wrapping up, Adam raised his hand to speak.

“Yes Adam?” Monroe said.

“I was wondering, I got this letter from a lady in Portland about her daughter who was hurt in a car crash. I checked out the location on the computer, it’s not too far out of the way from the route we’ll take. Could we stop by there for a few minutes on the way back to the airport, after we’re done?”

“Let me see the letter.” Asked Monroe.

Adam floated the letter down the length of the table using some TK. Monroe read the short letter for a moment and looked up.

“Okay. We can swing by there for a quick visit. She’ll appreciate that more than a letter or something.”

“Great! Thanks.”

After the meeting was over, Monroe called the

Portland field office and asked them to make a very quite inquiry into the Stevens' family to verify the letter. You can't be too careful.

The Portland operation went by the book. The bat plane touched down just before dawn and the four teenage Dillinger's were bagged and tagged two hours later. Around nine o'clock that morning eight Portland Police cars and the black Special team vehicles pulled up in front of the Stevens' modest suburban home.

"Scope it out, Adam." Said Monroe.

The boy concentrated for a few minutes. "It's cool. There's just Amy and her mother at home. Amy's in her room, her mom is in the kitchen. I think her father has gone to work, he's not there."

"Any weapons in the house?"

"There's a hunting rifle and a shotgun locked inside a steel cabinet in the back bedroom closet. These people are okay."

"All right, wait here a minute."

By this time Ida Stevens had poked her head

through the kitchen curtains, she grew alarmed at the sight of all of the police cars. The two armed and black clad men walking up her driveway added to the feeling.

Monroe rang the doorbell while looking around for assassins to leap out of the rose bushes. A very nervous looking woman answered the door.

“Good morning Ma’am, my name is Special Agent Monroe, this is my associate, Agent Parker, we’re with the FBI.”

Both agents held their identification up to the screen door.

“Oh dear, am I in trouble for writing that letter to Adam?”

“Of course not, in fact Adam is here now and would like to meet with your daughter, is that possible?”

“Dear God! Yes, I mean... Please come in.” Monroe turned and motioned for Adam and his escort to come ahead.

“Heavens, it’s really him isn’t it?” She asked. Monroe held open the door as Adam shook hands

with the lady.

“Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Stevens. We were in the area and had time to stop by for a few minutes.”

“Hello Adam, this is wonderful. Please come in, I’ll get Amy.”

Mrs. Stevens went into her daughter’s room.

“Honey, there’s someone here to see you.”

“I don’t want to see anyone. I hate people seeing me in this crappy wheelchair!”

“It’s Adam Valentine.’

“Oh, sure, and I’m Mary Poppins.”

Adam stuck his head into the girl’s room.

“Hi, Amy. How are you doing?”

Amy put both of her hands up to her mouth, unable to say anything.

“Mrs. Stevens, would it be all right if I talked to Amy alone for a little while?”

“Of course, I’ll be in the living room.”

“Thanks.”

After the woman had left the room, the black-garbed boy sat down on the bed near the girl’s

wheelchair.

“Pardon my attire, we’ve been out catching bad guys this morning.”

The girl finally found her voice.

“It’s really you, isn’t it?”

“In the flesh. I hear you had a really bad accident a while back?”

“Yes. I can’t get my legs to do anything, I just have to sit in this stupid wheelchair all day.”

“I have that problem with my entire body every morning.”

This provoked a smile from the girl. Adam seemed to be studying the girl for a moment, as if trying to locate something.

“What are you looking at, I know I’m not very pretty.”

“Sorry to stare, your back was hurt, down low, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. They say my spinal cord got messed up.”

“Can I try something? You’ll have to sort of trust me for a few minutes.” He wasn’t quite sure himself what he meant to do.

“All right, what do you mean?”

Adam got up and stood beside the girl. "I'm not getting fresh." He then placed his right hand down low on the girl's back. Something seemed to be occurring, he wasn't even sure he was controlling it.

"Can you feel anything at all different?"

"My legs feel a little tingly! Usually I can't feel anything at all!"

"Cool. Try to move your toes a little."

"I don't think I can, they just won't move."

"Give it a shot, nothing to lose."

The girl concentrated on her toes, Adam concentrated on her back, then her right big toe twitched just a little.

"It moved, my toe moved!"

"Neat! Keep working at it."

Soon the girl's toes were fully flexing. "Now try your feet."

"I'm doing it! I can move my feet!"

"Far out! I think we're fixing your problem. Why don't you stand up now and walk out to your mom?"

"I can't do that!"

"Sure you can. Just remember how. I'll help."

The girl pushed herself up on the wheelchair arms, her arms shaking with the effort. Gradually she put her weight on her legs. With Adam's hand on her back, she let go of the wheelchair and stood erect.

"Ohgosh ohgosh ohgosh! I'm standing up!"

"Just stand still there a minute and get your balance." Adam cautioned.

The girl steadied after a while and seemed more confident.

"Try a small step now." Adam said.

Amy moved her right foot forward a few inches, then her left.

"Keep at it, we'll make it into the living room."

"My legs feel so weak!"

"They need a lot of exercise. You haven't used them in a long time."

Gradually, Adam and the girl moved down the short hall to the living room, along the way the boy took his hand off the girl's back. Her mother had her own back to her daughter as she spoke with

Monroe, she noticed the agent looking past her at something and turned around.

“Mom, look! Adam fixed my back!” Amy cried.

“Oh sweet Jesus!” Exclaimed Ida, just before she fainted in a heap.

There was some considerable confusion as the team medics where summoned in to revive Mrs. Stevens. After that, all she could do was cry and hold her daughter. Adam had once more managed to stun and dumbfound his fellow team members, maybe even himself. The boy went over and peeked out the front window and then turned to Monroe.

“I think we better make tracks, the news dogs have caught up with us.”

“All right, let’s go then.” Monroe seemed very subdued and distracted.

Adam kissed Amy goodbye. The girl's mother was still incoherent. On the way out to the vehicles one of the reporters shouted a question to Adam.

“Adam, can you tell us what you were doing here today?”

“Just visiting a friend, no big deal!” He yelled back.

Very little was said on the drive back to the airport. As the team sat waiting for the C-17 to take off, Monroe finally asked Adam about what had happened at the Stevens’ home.

“I give up, how did you do that?”

“I’m not really sure, it’s sort of scary in a way. I could see where her spinal cord was sort of mashed. I just fixed it somehow. Totally weird.”

“You could see into her body?”

“Sort of, I could feel where she had been hurt and kind of visualized it.”

“Have you ever done this sort of thing before?”

“No. Well... maybe. There was a mouse once... it was caught in a trap. I think I helped it, made it better, anyway it ran off. I was about six, I think. I just felt like it was something I could do, so I tried it.”

“Does this fall under the heading of healing the lame?”

“If I start walking on water just throw a net over me.”

Adam curled up and went to sleep. The rest of the team watched the boy more than they normally would. A lot of soul searching occurred between Portland and Quantico.

Adam and his friend spent the following afternoon calling motorcycle dealers and repair shops. The clutch and piston rings were the problem.

“Maybe we could just call the Honda factory?”
Suggested Freddie.

“They’re in Japan and probably speak Japanese, doofus.”

“How about the internet?”

“By Jove Watson, I think you’re on to something!”

Adam’s computer seemed to be calling them both complete idiots.

-Your request lists 135,765 sites under
MOTORCYCLE, PARTS -

“I think we need to narrow our search a little.”
Observed Adam

“Well, duh!” Freddie whacked his friend on the head.

After two hours of hair pulling and some language that Mrs. Richter would not approve of, the two mechanics came up with “Sam The Motorcycle Man,” in Ames Iowa. He even had an 800 number. They called it.

“Sam’s, whatcha need.” Answered the raspy voice.

“Hi, we’re looking for a clutch assembly and some piston rings for a 1981 Honda 55cc motorbike.” Explained Adam.

“A real mean machine you got there. Let me check my computer inventory dingus a minute, hang on.”

“Okay, thanks.” Adam turned to Freddie. “He’s checking.”

After what seemed like a week, Sam came back on the line.

“You’re in luck sport, I have a set of brand new rings, and a rebuild kit for the clutch. You’ll have to rework the clutch yourself, they don’t sell the whole assembly any more.”

“Cool! We’ll take them!”

“How you gonna pay for this?” Sam asked.

“Oh, I can put it on my Visa card.” (Yes, he had one)

“You sound kinda young to have a credit card, kid.”

“Well, I do have one.”

“Okay, whatever. Read me off the number and expiration date.”

Adam recited the numbers after a frantic search through his wallet for the card.

“Name and address?”

“Adam Valentine, FBI Special Oper.....”

Click.

“He hung up!” Adam just stared into the phone.

“He hung up on me.”

“You said that. Now what do we do?” Asked Freddie.

“Put on your best smile and act normal. We’ll ask the watch officer for some help.”

Agent Steinmetz had the duty that day. He found himself surrounded on both sides by two extremely well behaved and totally charming lads.

“All right, what do you want? No women or booze!”

“We need you to make a phone call for us, to Iowa.” Adam smiled sweetly.

“There’s nothing in Iowa.”

“There’s Sam The Motorcycle Man. We just talked to him.”

“Don’t tell me, he got mad and hung up on you.”

“You could take over my job, Agent Steinmetz!”

“I don’t need to be psychic to figure you two out, what’s the deal?”

Adam related their dire problem and gave the agent his credit card. Steinmetz made the call.

“Sam’s, watcha want?”

“Hello sir, this is Special Agent Steinmetz, I’m with the FBI. I believe you were just talking with Adam Valentine?”

“What is this, April fools? I got stuff to do!”

Steinmetz continued calmly. “I’m going to hang up. When I do, I want you to make a collect call to the FBI Operations Center in Quantico, Virginia. I will instruct them to accept the call and transfer you

here. Will you please do that sir?"

"This is a joke, right?"

"Please make the call sir, otherwise one of our agent's will have to make a very long and very tiring trip out to your place of business, he may not be in a very good mood when he gets there." Steinmetz hung up.

"I give him sixty seconds, any bets?" Said Steinmetz.

"You're a very bad person, Agent Steinmetz." Adam observed.

It actually took almost two minutes.

"Special Team Operations, Agent Steinmetz."

"Uh, hi. It's me, Sam's Motorcycles. I thought someone was pulling my leg, I'm real sorry!"

"No problem Sam. I'll connect you with Adam now."

The parts arrived the next day, FedEx. No charge. Could you please send me your autograph? The hand written thank you note from Adam hangs framed today in Sam's walk-in sales area (actually, it's bolted to the wall).

Don't touch it.

By the middle of August the motorbike was almost back together. The new tires and several cans of red spray paint had it looking almost new; the few dribbles and runs in the finish weren't too noticeable. There was fresh oil where it should be and the gas tank was filled halfway. The brake cables were still on back order.

"Let's see if it actually runs." Suggested Adam.

"Cross your fingers." Freddie answered as he swung out the small kick-start lever.

Twenty kicks later, Freddie was running out of steam.

"Try switching on the ignition." Adam pointed out.

"What! You nitwit, why didn't you say something?"

"It just now came to me, sort of like in a religious vision or something."

"Dork!"

On the twenty-first try the motorbike emitted an

impressive amount of blue smoke and began clearing its throat. After some coaxing and a great deal of yelling the motor settled into a smooth purr. The motorbike was up on its center stand with the rear wheel off the ground. Freddie pulled in the clutch lever and clicked the gearshift lever into first. When he let out the clutch, the rear wheel began spinning at a good rate.

“Cool! We have liftoff!” Adam exclaimed.

Freddie put it back in neutral and switched off the ignition.

“Let’s try it out in the alley!” Freddie was being controlled entirely by adrenalin and poor judgment at this point.

“Uh, I dunno. Your dad said not to ride it.” Adam was waffling, visions of a giant and berserk Marine Colonel in his head.

“Just up and down the alley won’t hurt anything. You’re not chicken to ride it, are you?”

No self-respecting male child will ever admit to being chicken.

“Criminy. Okay, but just in the alley. What if your

mom gets back?”

“She’s grocery shopping, it takes her an hour just to pick out a head of lettuce.”

The two daredevils pushed the small machine out the back gate and into the gravel alley that ran behind the block of houses. Both boys had on shorts, T-shirts, and sandals, perfect protective gear to wear motorcycling. Freddie switched on the ignition and started the machine on the first try.

“Get on!” Freddie was ready to jump over lined up city buses.

“Take it easy, those brake cables are mostly rust!” Adam took a firm grip on his friend’s shoulders.

“Don’t be such a little pussy!”

By the time they neared the end of the alley they had obtained the heady speed of twenty miles per hour. Needless to say when Freddie decided it was time to stop and turn around, both brake cables departed this veil of tears.

“*STOP!*” Adam often said the most obvious thing.

“*I CAN’T STOP! NO BRAKES!*” Freddie had lost

all of his self-assurance at this point.

The motorbike and its two panicked passengers shot out of the alley and into the paved street. Freddie managed a shaky left turn as he tried to down shift the motorbike. A base security vehicle took this opportune moment to appear down the block, heading in the boy's direction.

"TURN OFF THE IGNITION!" Adam suggested (screamed), rather too loudly.

By now Freddie's lack of experience and too much adrenaline had pretty well locked his hands onto the grips. Adam was too rattled to use his abilities to turn off the ignition or anything else for that matter. As the motorbike shot past the security vehicle the two Marines inside did an open mouthed double take. At the intersection a blue Ford Taurus appeared from the left and Freddie swerved sharply to avoid it, in the process both boys parted company with their mechanical steed. Adam and Freddie did manage to keep their brains and skeletons intact,

however they did leave a considerable amount of needed skin on the hot asphalt.

For just a moment Adam thought it was rather peaceful lying on the pavement while looking up at the blue sky. After about ten seconds the now exposed nerve endings in his buns, knees, and hands began to scream at him.

“*OWWW! GEEZ!*” This was worse than being shot.

Freddie had yelled something his father sometimes used during foreign car repairs.

By the time that Adam had stood up and begun taking inventory of his anatomy two grim looking Marines were standing in front of him. Freddie was sitting on the curb, the lady driving the blue Taurus was in a total panic; the motorbike was up on someone’s lawn making sick sputting noises before finally dying with a shudder.

“You okay, boy?” Asked Marine number one.

“Do I look okay?” Adam was a bit ruder with them

than the situation really called for. Pain will do that to you.

“Not really, you do look familiar.”

The two Marines were very new at Quantico.

“Sorry, don’t think we’ve met. How’s Freddie?”

“Your friend looks about like you do, like a skinned cat. What’s your name?”

“Adam.”

“Valentine?” Asked Marine number two with a panicked tone.

“I’m afraid so.”

The two Marines gave each other an “Oh Shit!” look.

“Call it in! Roll some medics!” Said Marine number one.

“We’re okay, can’t we just go on home? We didn’t mean to ride on the street, we were in the alley... the brakes gave out.” Adam could just see Colonel Richter launching into a low earth orbit. Monroe too.

“Sorry Adam,” said Marine number one, “if we let this slide we’ll be guarding goats in Mongolia.”

Within five minutes the street was filled with Marine security, concerned neighbors, the FBI, and

two ambulances. Agent Monroe had arrived, he was not even close to being amused.

“Adam, are you all right?” He demanded.

“Yes. Geez, we don’t need those ambulances!” Adam was standing and trying to keep his shredded shorts turned away from the agent.

“What in the world were you two doing?”

“We were trying out the motorbike in the alley, things sort of got a little out of hand. The brakes...”

“Who let you get on that thing, surely not Colonel Richter?”

“No one did. We just were just going to go up and down the alley behind Freddie’s place, the brakes didn’t brake and we wound up in the street.”

“Well you’re going to the base hospital to get checked out. That will be a pretty good place to be when Colonel Richter hears about this!”

Despite their protests Adam and Freddie were put in one of the ambulances and transported to the emergency room at the base hospital. During the short trip they compared notes.

“Is strangling a painful death?” Freddie

wondered.

“We should have just hit a bus or something. It’s been nice to know you.” Adam was resigned to his fate.

The emergency room staff had been alerted that Adam and his friend had been injured and had pulled out all of the stops. Surgery was put on standby; residents readied themselves to perform extreme procedures.

“It’s just a road rash!” Protested Adam. Eventually the doctors agreed with him.

It seemed to Adam that hospitals were created just to embarrass him. They had him laying face down on the treatment table, his abraded behind exposed for all to view and make observations and comments about. Freddie was in the treatment area next to his suffering a similar fate. Mother Harper showed up to inspect the damaged area and to further humiliate the boy. Agent Monroe suppressed a grin at the sight while he asked some pointed

questions.

“Do you have any idea how I am going to explain this to people, especially to the Director and the President of The United States?”

“I just lost a little skin for Pete’s sake!”

“A little skin, you practically need a butt transplant!” Monroe continued, “I’m really disappointed in you. You’re smarter than this.”

“Apparently not.”

As if things could not possibly get any worse, Colonel Richter then made his appearance. At least he didn’t appear to be armed.

“Monroe, what in the blazing hell is going on here?” Very narrow eyes.

That wasn’t too bad of a start considering the Colonel’s reputation.

“It seems that your son and Adam here decided to play Easy Rider today.”

“You took out the motorbike?” He demanded of Adam.

“Uh... yes sir. We just meant to ride it in the alley,

the brake cables gave out and we wound up in the street.”

“Didn’t I give you both very specific and direct orders not to ride that thing without my permission?”

“Yes sir, you did.”

“Well, why did you?”

“Stupidity, sir. Please don’t kill Freddie.”

“That thought has crossed my mind. What you both need is to have your butts tanned, but I see there’s not much left there to work with.” Colonel Richter just glared at Monroe and stalked out of the room.

“Well, that went pretty well, are you okay?””

Asked Adam.

“He’s right, you know.” Monroe added.

“Especially about my butt.”

Colonel Richter drew upon all of his training and discipline and merely grounded his son for two months. The boys were forbidden to meet or talk during that time. The atmosphere at Special Operations was really strained for a few days as far

as Adam was concerned. The doctor at the emergency room had given Harper a tube of antibiotic cream to be applied twice daily to the injured areas, which she did personally just to further embarrass the poor boy. Smiles were exchanged among the staff when Adam was heard exposing his abraded body parts to soap and water. The boy elected to stand during the next mission briefing.

The incumbent President's last year in office was going from bad to much worse. The economy was in one of its periodic downturns. No President really has a great deal of effect on the forces that drive the nation's economic strength. For the last six months unemployment had been edging up toward double digits, industrial output was being pared back, even the high tech dynamos were laying off. Someone is always blamed for such conditions and that someone is always the President. To heap injury on insult the front running opposition candidate gave an

impassioned speech that included blaming the President for endangering Adam's life for his own personal political benefit.

Alfred Whitmore Packer felt the time was right for a run at that biggest of prizes, the Presidency. He had never held any elected office, he had instead spent most of his adult life pulling strings and buying favors from the Washington establishment. His considerable personal fortune had been amassed buying low and selling high. He had been accused of insider trading on several occasions, but no charges ever seemed to get filed.

Chicago.

“When I take office, and I will, we'll need to get that boy on our team. After the new FBI Director is put in we can replace that flying circus with our agents and have Adam in our hip pocket. With that boy on board with us there's nothing we won't be able to accomplish.” Packer was nothing if not sure of himself.

Richard Flagg, political strategist for the Packer campaign wasn't so sure. "Reports have it that he's extremely loyal to the members on the team, he may not play along. They're like his family"

"Hell's bells! He's a kid! We'll break up the team, kids can be made to do as they're told!"

Flagg just nodded his head. You didn't butt heads with Packer and remain conscious.

Light Speed

The incident involving the two nuclear devices made it imperative to certain factions in the government that the capability should exist to move Adam great distances very fast. The Air Force's Aurora derived craft was deemed impractical to base at Quantico since officially it didn't exist and made one hell of a racket. The final choice was to have an F-22 stationed on a rotating basis at the Virginia Marine base, the aircraft's capability for sustained high speeds won the day. Like the F-15, the F-22 was normally configured for just one-seat and also like the F-15, a two-seat version also existed. Agent Monroe and the rest of the team members (except Adam) did not feel it was a good idea, to say the least.

"I told the Director that with that rocket ship always parked here it would be just too tempting to pop Adam into it and fire him off for less than a truly

dire situation involving the national interest.”

“I’ve read that the F-22 has a pretty good reliability record, but still...” Parker left the rest unsaid.

“Yeah, still. Anything that performs like that is pushing things to the limit. Things can go sour in a real hurry in a fighter aircraft that can loaf at a thousand knots.”

“Adam seems to like the idea.” Harper certainly didn’t.

“He’d be happy strapped to a Patriot missile, if it flies, he loves it.” Monroe concluded.

Of course, Adam did love it. He had just finished an afternoon at the flight facility being instructed in the workings of the F-22, and most importantly in its emergency procedures. The boy had also just been measured for a proper fitting helmet and flight suit. When they were ready he would be scheduled for a familiarization flight. Monroe joined him for dinner that evening at the academy dining room.

“Tell me Adam, are you really comfortable with

the idea of flying in that missile? All you have to do is say the word and you won't have to set foot in it."

"It's a great plane! It can fly straight up and accelerate at the same time, it can even go supersonic without afterburners."

"That's what worries me and the rest of the team, we don't think you should be put at unnecessary risk in that thing."

"It's only for real emergencies, it's not like I would be taking it down to the snack bar every day."

"Well, I don't have the final say in this, if I did that plane would never have landed here in the first place."

"I flew in that F-15, we needed the time it bought. The F-22 will buy even more time."

"But that was a real end of the world situation."

"There may be another mess like that someday."

"That's true. We just worry that they'll start zapping you all over creation for things that don't mean the end of the world."

"That sort of happens now, only a lot slower."

"Point taken. This is a screwy business we're in."

"In that case I guess they have the right people

on the job.”

“Or at least the right kid.”

Adam changed the subject. “My banishment is up in two days!”

“That’s right, you and Freddie get out on parole. Any plans?”

“I guess the first thing I need to do is apologize to Colonel Richter, when I work up the nerve to go over there.”

“I wonder if Freddie is still chained in their basement?”

“No, I caught a glimpse of him the other day. He was just nailed to the garage door.”

“That’s not so bad, he gets some fresh air that way.”

“Yeah.”

Saturday morning was two days later. Adam screwed up his courage and rode his bike over to the Richter home. He parked the bike in the driveway and dithered for a moment.

“What do I say?” He asked himself.

Adam took a deep breath, walked up to the front door, and rang the bell. He could sense that it was the Colonel coming to the door.

“Good morning, Adam.” The stern faced Marine squinted down at the boy.

“Uh, good morning sir. Could I talk to you for just a minute?”

“Of course. Come in.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The giant Marine motioned for Adam to sit on the living room couch and then sat down beside him.

“What’s on your mind, son?”

“I really need to apologize to you for riding the motorbike with Freddie, you told us not to and we did anyway. I’m sorry I let you down.”

Colonel Richter looked at the boy for a moment and slowly nodded his head, he was mightily resisting the urge to pick Adam up and give him a crushing hug.

“Very well, apology accepted. You’re young enough to make stupid mistakes. I know I’ve made

my share of them. Let's shake hands and put this behind us."

Adam's face lit up as he shook the big hand offered to him.

"Thank you sir."

"Freddie's out back. You two try to stay out of jail till supper time."

"Yes sir. I think maybe we'll just sit in the middle of the yard and not move."

"Good plan."

On the way through the house, Mrs. Richter intercepted Adam and came close to cracking his ribs.

Freddie was raking the never-ending supply of leaves that seemed to fall out of an empty sky.

"Morning, doofus." Adam said quietly.

"Hi, dork." Freddie responded, also suppressing the unmanly urge to run and hug his best friend.

"Dad didn't strangle you or anything?"

"No. He was really pretty mellow, sort of."

"I know. He's starting to worry me. How's your butt?"

“Minor scarring only.”

“Me too.”

“Let’s take up skydiving or maybe rock climbing.”

“How about leaf raking?” Suggested Freddie, pointing to the box of plastic garden bags on the patio.

“You rake, I’ll stuff.” Adam knew the routine by now.

Mrs. Richter had been planning the dinner that evening for weeks. It was truly awesome. Adam decided that if died tomorrow this meal would be the high point of his life.

“Mrs. Richter, please let me live here!” Adam was still working on the dessert.

“Don’t they feed you over at that awful place?” She asked.

“No. It’s a really terrible place. I just get a little gruel every other day.”

“Poor child. I’ll send you over some of our table scraps.”

Colonel Richter switched topics.

“Adam, there’s been an F-22 parked on the ramp for a few days. Any comments?”

“If I have to be somewhere in a big hurry, that’s my taxi.”

“Good Lord son, you’re an eleven-year old boy, not Chuck Yeager!”

“They do supply a pilot, sir.”

“Well that’s big of them! I think it’s a crazy idea.”

“Man! I never get to do anything exciting like that.” Protested Freddie.

“Next time there’s a big flap on, you’re welcome to go in my place.” Adam offered.

“My only weird ability is getting into trouble without even trying.”

“There you go! You’d be perfect. I’ll set it up with Agent Monroe.”

“Ha ha. Listen to me laugh.” Freddie failed to see the humor.

“In fact, you can take my familiarization ride in the F-22 next week, I’ll come over here and mow the leaves.”

“No, that’s okay. You might mow your toes off or something. That’s a high performance mower we

have here.”

“It doesn’t even have a motor, you have to push it!” Adam responded.

“It builds character.” Observed the Colonel.

“It sure worked on Freddie, he’s the biggest character I know.” Adam quipped.

Hanna interrupted the sarcasm.

“Adam, I read that some movie producer has been trying to get you to appear in one of his films, is that true or is it just silly gossip?”

“Silly, but true. The guy who lets us use his place in Hawaii wants me to do some small bit parts in some sort of police comedy they’re going to make.”

“Are you going to?” Hanna was a big (huge) movie fan.

“Well, he’s been real generous to me and the team. He says it would be a big plus for the film if I appeared in it. If we can work it out, I’d be happy to do it, sounds like fun actually.”

“What would you do in it?”

“I’m not really sure, he said something about just playing myself in a few scenes involving the FBI.

I'm in big trouble if they expect me to be able to act."

"I'm always available for any sort of leading lady role." Hanna offered.

"It's not a zombie movie." Freddie was riding close to the edge again.

"Dad, permission to whack my brother!"

"Granted, after dinner is cleared away."

The next Tuesday found Adam once more at the base flight facility. His custom helmet and flight suit had arrived and preparations were underway for the training flight. Major Williams was explaining.

"This is special long underwear, it helps keep you warm when it's cold, and cool when it's hot. The flight suit is Nomex and it's fireproof. The gloves are the same stuff. The boots you already have will be fine. Questions?"

"Do I get a white scarf and cool sunglasses?"
Asked Adam.

"You have to supply your own."

"That figures."

"Okay, get this stuff on and we'll go flying."

Adam put on the long underwear and insulated socks, then the dark gray flight suit. After he laced up his boots he checked himself out in the mirror on the equipment room wall.

“I’m bad. Short, but bad.”

Major Williams handed the boy his helmet and oxygen mask that they had trained with earlier. Time to go.

The sight of the exotic F-22 being prepped for takeoff had attracted a small crowd of onlookers, including most of the Special Team. Adam stopped and spoke to them for a moment.

“How do you like my pilot person clothes?”

“Too cool, Adam.” Parker observed.

“How are you doing son, nervous?” Monroe asked.

“Not as nervous as you seem to be, don’t worry so much.”

“It’s my job, I have a master’s degree in worrying.”

“I better go now or Major Williams will make me ride on the outside.”

“Be careful.” Added Mother Harper, with a kiss to

the top of his head.

Adam walked over to where Major Williams was waiting beside the aircraft. He put on his helmet and climbed up the ladder to the rear seat. Remembering where to step and what not to touch the boy got his self settled down into the ejection seat. One of the ground crew buckled and tightened his harness straps and then plugged in the oxygen hose and headset connections. The crewman pulled out a yellow flagged pin from the seat and showed it to Adam. He nodded his understanding, the seat was now armed. Major Williams did a second double check of the boy and got into the front seat.

“Com. check, Adam.” Williams spoke into the helmet mike.

“I hear you fine sir. Me?”

“We’re talking. Any last requests?”

“I want my blanky.”

“Too late. Hold on to your buttocks.”

“Holding buttocks, sir.”

The two enormously powerful engines began their piercing whine, cables were unplugged, wheel chocks pulled free. As the aircraft began moving the dual canopies lowered and locked shut. Adam waved to his friends as the aircraft turned onto the taxiway.

“This is absolutely nuts.” Observed Monroe as he waved back.

“Totally.” Agreed Harper.

“Okay Adam, we’re up next. I’m going to do a full power climb out, you’ll be mashed back in your seat some, so don’t panic.”

“I’ll delay panicking until we’re back on the ground.”

“Good deal. Here we go.”

After the tower gave it’s clearance, Major Williams shoved the throttles past the Oh Golly mark. The aircraft picked up speed at an amazing rate and leaped off the runway into a near vertical climb.

“Geez La-weez!” Adam thought to himself. There seemed to be a moderate sized sumo wrestler

sitting on him.

They leveled off at forty thousand feet and twelve hundred knots. Their course was out to sea for the moment to minimize sonic boom complaints.

“How you doing, kid?” Williams asked.

“Piece of cake sir, I’ll clean up the mess back here after we land.”

“I could do a few nine-gee turns.”

“Let’s not and tell everyone that we did.”

“I’m going to go subsonic, then you can try out the control stick for a little while.”

“Cool!”

Williams throttled back until the aircraft was poking along at a mere five hundred knots.

“Okay kid, grab the stick. Don’t make any major moves with it.”

“Yes sir. I have it.”

“Try a slow turn to the right until the compass says due south.”

“All right.”

Adam gently coaxed the aircraft into a wide sweep until the compass said “S”, and then he did a

fairly decent job of leveling the wings and holding the new course.

“You’ve done this before I see.” Williams observed.

“A few times, this handles really easy.”

“Yes it does. Want to try a loop?”

“Sure!”

“Okay, just pull the nose up at a good rate and hold it until we’re almost level again, then push forward past the neutral position.”

“Okay, here goes.”

Adam pulled the small side mounted control stick back sharply causing the aircraft to do a tight three gee loop up, over, and back to level. He was a little late in leveling off, but compensated by pushing forward a bit more.

“Hell, son. You don’t need me. I’m going to take a nap.”

“Great, then I can buzz the beaches and bust windows!”

“Maybe I’ll take that nap later.”

“Probably a good idea.”

Closely following Major William's instructions Adam steered the aircraft on a return heading and descended toward Quantico. With William's prompting, turns were made, descent rates adjusted. Very soon they were on the approach path to the runway.

"I'd better take it from here." Williams said.

"I think you're right sir, you have it."

The sleek aircraft smoked down onto the runway and popped its drogue chute. In a few moments it was back at the parking ramp where they had started. Special Team was still there, waiting for their boy. Once on the ground, Major Williams grabbed Adam under his arms and picked him up to administer a mild shaking.

"You're a natural, kid. You can fly in my back seat anytime!"

"Thanks Major, this has been a very cool day." They then walked over to where Monroe and the rest were waiting.

“How did it go, Adam? You okay?”

Williams interrupted. “Hell, the boy flew most of the mission!”

Monroe looked at the Major, who nodded his head in the affirmative.

“Does this mean I get flight pay from now on?”

Adam asked.

“Nice try, you can stay up an extra half hour tonight.” Monroe answered.

“Gee, thanks dad.”

The F-22 was kept inside one of the hangers at Quantico from then on. Every two weeks a replacement pilot and aircraft were rotated in to keep crew and equipment in top form. Adam always met with the new pilot and reviewed his original emergency procedures training. Monroe and the rest of the team still held to the justified opinion that the whole idea was a stupid risk for the boy.

Adam had just sat down at the Richter’s

Thanksgiving Day table when his cell phone totally ruined the long anticipated meal.

“Adam here.” He really didn’t want to answer the damned thing, his voice betrayed his frustration.

“This is Operations Adam, I’m sorry kid but we have a Light Speed activation.”

“Now?”

“Right now, the car should already be out front.”

“Criminy sakes! I’m on my way.”

“What is it son?” Colonel Richter asked.

“I have to go sir. I’m really sorry Mrs. Richter, save me a drumstick.”

Before anyone could protest further or manage more questions, Adam was up from the table and out the front door. Squealing tires signaled his departure before all of the Richter’s could even get to the living room.

Captain Davis was the current alert pilot; his holiday dinner had also been interrupted. He met up with Adam as they both skidded into the flight operations equipment room.

“Where to, Captain?” Adam asked.

“Seattle, don’t ask me why.”

“This better be really important, I’m missing a world class turkey dinner!”

“Get changed son, we can complain after take off.”

“Yes sir. This hero crap really sucks ass sometimes!”

“I agree.”

In Seattle a 747 jumbo was sitting on the taxiway, the 342 passengers on board were trying to figure out why they had to have the bad luck to be flying with a walking bomb.

Adam suited up as quickly as he could manage and made a precautionary dash to the men’s room. When he emerged, he was pointed toward the nearby alert hanger by the security escort.

“Make tracks’ son, Davis might leave without you!”

When the F-22 roared off of the runway the

setting sun was just moving level with the horizon. Several million holiday dinners were interrupted as Captain Davis totally disregarded the regulations governing supersonic flight over populated areas. The sun seemed to be rising in the west as they moved at a pace best described by the rude term “hauling ass.” This flight was ‘business’ so Davis and the boy kept small talk to a minimum and Davis did all of the flying. They slowed for refueling over Nebraska and then once more resumed rattling the nerves of the populace below.

On board the 747 in Seattle, a retired Navy Seal caught a good look at the ‘bomb’ strapped around the waist of the ranting nut bucket holding the plane hostage. Being an expert with explosives, the former commando immediately saw that the ‘dynamite’ in the bomb was in fact just red painted cardboard tubes. Having had enough of this Goddamned silliness, the ex-Seal calmly got up from his seat, opened the nearest passenger door, and then proceeded to throw the screaming lunatic out headfirst. There was no boarding ramp in place.

The cement was very hard. End of hostage situation.

The Light Speed aircraft got the cancellation order near the western border of Wyoming. Captain Davis worked off his frustrations by making a tighter than necessary 180, much to his passenger's great distress.

"Ooof! Geez, Sir!"

"Sorry kid, this really burns my butt!"

"Well my butt is just plain flattened!"

"I'll try to control myself."

"Thanks."

Somewhere over the Big Horn Mountains a section of the main fuel feed line to the port engine gave in to a premature case of metal fatigue. A spray of raw fuel filled the engine space and immediately burst into flame. In the cockpit just about every light that could turn red, did so.

"We've got a fire in the port engine! Get ready to punch out kid!"

Adam tried not to totally panic as he managed to lower his visor, scrunched down, and put both hands on the one lever that he never wanted to touch. He had practiced it all many times and by now his actions were almost automatic.

But this was for real.

Davis shut down the port engine and triggered its fire bottle. The fire diminished for a few seconds but then rebuilt the trail of flames that now followed the aircraft. Davis sent out two quick Mayday calls and told Adam to brace for ejection.

“I’m going to blow your canopy! After it goes, count to three and yank that damned lever! God bless you kid!”

Adam was going to say the same to Davis when the canopy blew off and all of the wind in the world filled the open cockpit, they were still traveling at almost seven hundred knots. The boy tried to count three seconds off and then yanked up as hard as he could on the ejection handle. When he came to and

his eyes focused again he was hurtling through ice-cold air toward the black empty terrain below. He caught sight of the flaming aircraft off to his left and slightly below him; it then blew up in a spectacular fireball. With the feeling that something had been ripped out of him, Adam knew and felt that Captain Davis did not make it out.

His ejection seat made a noise as it popped out a small drogue chute that stabilized his descent, then straps released him and he was separated and falling on his own. All of this happened in the space of a few split seconds. Time slows down during such events. Adam remembered that his parachute was set to open automatically and hoped that the terrain below was far enough away. It was.

Near Alcova Wyoming.

The entire Billings clan had just finished off an amazing quantity of turkey and all of the trimmings and was sitting down to watch a rerun of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Their digestion was

interrupted by something screaming across the sky, ending with an explosion that caused the farmhouse to give a distinct dish rattling bounce.

“Now what in the Sam Hill was that?” Grandfather Billings complained.

“That sounded like a plane crash, get your coats on everyone and let’s have a look.” His son wasn’t looking forward to what they would probably find but they had to go all the same.

As Adam descended under his parachute through the freezing air he calmed himself enough for a look around and sensed people off to the south. He flipped up his visor for a better view and caught sight of a distant farmhouse, just beyond the house what was left of the F-22 and Captain Davis burned brightly. He was nearing the ground now and his rattled brain tried to remember what it was you were supposed to do when you land.

“Flex your knees and roll, flex your knees and roll. Stay loose.” Adam recited to himself.

Even with the parachute's light load the snow covered ground seemed to come up at an alarming rate. Adam's left foot managed to land on a football sized rock just under the foot deep snow, so much for flex your knees and roll.

Monroe had been having a nice meal with the Parker's when the Light Speed activation came in. They cut things short and assembled with the rest of the team at the operations center. Everyone expressed his or her opinion about who had called this shot, more so when the mission was canceled even before Adam had arrived in Seattle.

The secure phone was flashing and the watch officer snatched it up before the second ring.

"Special Operations, Agent Warfield."

"This is Light Speed Control at Langley. Light Speed is down, I repeat, Light Speed is down. We've had a brief Mayday message. Location is central Wyoming."

"Oh shit! Keep us updated, I'll notify the team leader."

Most of the team had assembled in the briefing room when Warfield ran in.

“Adam’s plane is down somewhere in central Wyoming!”

“Down! What are you talking about? Did they land?” Monroe demanded.

“Langley had a Mayday from Light Speed.”

“Oh Jesus. Not Adam, not again.” Harper was already in tears.

The Billings family had only to walk a quarter mile from their house to get to the smoldering crater in their west pasture. Two head of their cattle had also met their end that evening. John Billings kept his family back as he investigated the crushed and molten wreckage. He found a blackened pilot’s helmet under some crumpled composite material; it still had a head in it.

“Let’s get back to the house and call the Sheriff’s office, there’s no one here to be helped.”

Adam landed face down in the snow with his parachute drifting silently down on top of him.

Mercifully there was no wind to speak of that evening. The boy lay totally still for a moment trying to gather his wits and take stock of the situation. He then rolled slowly over onto his back and sat up in the snow.

“Ouch! Geez!” His ankle had checked in.

The boy fumbled with the yards of nylon fabric covering him, and finally poked his head out into the frigid night air. It came to him after a while to unfasten his parachute harness and its attached emergency pack. A half-mile away he could see the small strobe light on the ejection seat flashing once a second.

“Emergency radio,” he said to himself, “better see if it’s working.”

Adam located the small emergency pack attached to the parachute harness and fumbled through it for the small hand held radio. He was in a daze and perhaps some shock, it seemed to take forever to do anything. When he finally switched the radio on there was a tiny green light and slight hiss of static.

“Well, at least something’s gone right tonight.” He observed.

The death of Captain Davis had been pushed to the back of the boy’s consciousness, not entirely lost. A part of him wondered how he could do that. He also observed that it was freezing cold and that his flight suit and long underwear would not be sufficient for a night in the snow. He slung the small emergency pack over his shoulder and stood to begin the slow trek toward the distant farmhouse he couldn’t see but knew was there. Every time he put down his left foot, a quite “Ouch! Geez!” could be heard.

One half hour after the crash a deputy’s cruiser pulled up in front of the Billings house. Calling 911 in these parts didn’t result in an instant response; the distances were just too far.

“Evening John, what’s out there?” The deputy asked.

“Looks like some sort of military fighter maybe, the pilot’s dead. There aren’t many big pieces.”

“Oh my. Well, I’ll call it in first and then we’ll go have another look.”

Numerous search aircraft had already been launched, anything that could fly and pick up an emergency distress beacon. Word came in from local authorities that a military aircraft had crashed near Alcova with one dead confirmed. Special Team got the word shortly after that.

“They’ve found the plane! The pilot was in the wreckage, dead. Nothing about Adam yet.” Warfield said.

Monroe and the rest of the team were settling into a numbed acceptance that Adam was probably dead, their good and gentle boy. The next message changed that.

“Two Air Guard F-16’s have picked up an emergency radio signal not far from the crash site!” Warfield shouted from the Com. center. Hope was not totally lost after all.

“Light Speed, this is Air Force search, say again

identity.”

“Uh, Air Force this is Adam, I’m moving towards a farmhouse, I’m okay mostly.”

“Outstanding! Will relay your position, stay put.”

“Air Force, it’s really cold down here, I’ll freeze. I’m going to keep moving towards the farmhouse.”

“Understand, leave your radio on. We have to split for now or run out of gas.”

“Go on home guys, thanks for your help.”

Three thousand six hundred and forty-two “Ouch! Geez!” later, Adam limped into the Billings front yard. Some distance away he could see several law enforcement vehicles shining their headlights on the bits of smoldering aircraft wreckage. He clumped up the front steps of the old farmhouse on numb feet and knocked on the door. The smallest Billings, six-year-old Dorothy, answered the door.

“Hi Dot. Could I please come in and use your telephone?”

“How did you know my name?”

“You look like a Dot.”

“Just a minute.” She politely answered, and then

slammed the door in his face.

Adam could hear the shouted conversation that followed.

“Mommy! There’s a funny looking boy on the porch, he wants to use the telephone!”

Mrs. Billings came to the door while giving her daughter a puzzled look.

“Hello Ma’am, sorry to intrude, but could I use your telephone.” Adam still had on his helmet; his flight suit said “United States Air Force” on one side and “Valentine” on the other.

“Lord in heaven! Come in child, were you in that plane crash?”

“I ejected. I’m afraid the pilot didn’t make it out.”

“You’re Adam Valentine, aren’t you?” Even Wyoming isn’t the far side of the moon.

“Yes Ma’am. Could I please sit down for a minute?”

“Yes, of course! Sit here on the couch! Adam limped over and collapsed onto the soft cushions.

“Your leg’s hurt?”

“Just my ankle.” He answered, while taking off the helmet and his gloves.

“Everyone’s out at the crash, I’ll send Dot to fetch them.”

“Thank you, could I make that phone call now, it’s really important.”

“Yes, of course, I forgot.” Mrs. Billings handed him the cordless telephone.

“You look completely frozen, I’ll fix you something hot while you make your call.”

“That sounds really nice, thank you.”

Adam punched in a long string of numbers and leaned back.

“Operations, Agent Warfield.”

“Hi, this is Adam.”

“*ADAM!!!* My God boy, where are you, are you all right??”

“I’m okay. I’m at these people’s farmhouse. I had to walk quite a ways to get here or I would have called sooner.”

“Hold on, hold on! Let me tell people here.”

“Sure.”

“HE’S OKAY, HE’S ON THE PHONE NOW!!”

Everyone in the building heard that.

Everyone in the building then charged into the Com. Center where Warfield handed Monroe the receiver and switched on the speaker.

“Adam! Child! Talk to us!” Monroe had definite moisture on his cheeks.

“Hello Agent Monroe, sorry about all of the excitement.”

“Are you all right?”

“I screwed up my ankle when I landed, other than that I’m okay. Captain Davis didn’t make it out, I think he waited too long making sure I got out.”

“We’ve heard that they had found him, I’m sorry Adam.”

“Yes sir.”

“We were all crazy here, we didn’t know what had happened to you.”

“I landed quite a ways from here, it took me a while to walk here.”

“You walked?”

“Yeah, the search aircraft said to stay put but it was just too cold, I would have been an icicle if I had

waited out there.”

The Billings living room had suddenly filled with deputies and family members.

“The sheriff’s people are here now, do you want to talk to them?”

“For a minute, put them on.”

Adam handed the receiver to the nearest open-mouthed deputy.

“This is Deputy Farnsworth, who am I talking to?”

“Agent Monroe, FBI Special Operations, Quantico. What’s going on there?”

“Jesus. Uh, we’ve all just been out at the crash site, apparently Adam here just walked up to the front door of the house. We didn’t even know he was here until just a few minutes ago.”

“I understand that. He says that his ankle is hurt, when you transport him to a medical facility be sure they also check his back and neck for compression fractures and that sort of thing. He’s just ejected out of an F-22, tell the doctors that. How does he look to you right now?”

“Well, he looks to be in pretty good shape, just

cold. He's sucking up some hot chocolate at the moment."

"Great! Please get him to a hospital as soon as it's practical."

"We're working on that right now, there's some Air Guard choppers still in the air, we're trying to contact them."

"Thanks for your help deputy, let me talk to Adam for a moment."

"Yes Agent Monroe?" Adam wiped the hot chocolate off his lip.

"Listen, they're going to take you to a hospital to be checked out. We'll be coming out as soon as we can get organized for the trip."

"I really hate hospitals."

"I know, maybe we'll bring along Dr. Needles just to torment you."

"Lord. Well, people are in a major flap here, I guess I better hang up and talk to them."

"Please stay safe Adam, I can't take many more nights like this."

"I can't either Agent Monroe, bye."

“There’ll be a helicopter here in about a half an hour to fly you to Casper. Let’s try getting that boot off and maybe put some ice on your ankle.” Deputy Farnsworth explained.

“Okay, although I think it’s been iced pretty well already.”

The deputy did his best not to hurt the boy as he unlaced and eased off his left boot. When he pulled off the insulated sock, he could see that Adam’s ankle was already discolored and swollen.

“That looks nasty son, does it feel like anything is broken?”

“I don’t think so, walking on it as far as I did probably didn’t help much.”

“What happened tonight?” Farnsworth asked. “What in the hell were you doing in an Air Force fighter on Thanksgiving day?”

“Trying to get to Seattle in a big hurry.”

“That high jacking thing on the radio?”

“Yeah, they canceled before we got there so we headed back. There was an engine fire or something and Captain Davis told me to eject. He

waited too long making sure I was out, I guess.”

“That was his name?”

“Yes.”

“That’s bad. If it helps, I don’t think he really suffered any.”

“I saw the plane explode, I felt him die.” There were tears on Adam’s cheeks; a few sobs were choked back.

Deputy Farnsworth just looked at the boy and thought to himself. “I believe he did at that.”

Wyoming Medical Center, Casper.

Wyoming is not the media capital of the United States and this fact helped, at least initially, to keep Adam’s arrival somewhat calm and organized. The Air Guard medic in the helicopter had radioed in a description of the boy’s condition and vital signs. The trauma resident in charge had the good sense not to put the entire hospital on alert. Despite Adam’s protests, he had been placed on a stretcher

with his neck in a stabilizing collar. As he was wheeled into the treatment room he once more voiced his objections.

“There’s nothing wrong with my neck or back, trust me!”

“You’re probably right Adam, we’re just being extra cautious, please just humor us.” The resident explained patiently.

“I’m sorry, it’s been sort of a long day.”

“No problem. When you ejected, did you feel any pain in your back, is your neck sore anywhere?”

“No, I was braced pretty good. I can’t remember actually ejecting.”

“The G-forces probably knocked you out for a moment.”

“It was just a second or two, I remember the seat separating and my parachute opening.”

“So the only discomfort you have now is your ankle?”

“Yeah. My foot landed sort of sideways on a rock or something.”

“I understand you walked on it for quite a ways?”

“Maybe two or three miles.”

“That must have hurt some?”

“It did, but it was either that or freeze.”

“All right, we’re going to do an x-ray of your neck and back, and one of your ankle. We need to be sure things are where they’re supposed to be.”

“Okay. This won’t involve needles will it?”

“No, they may come later if that ankle needs some repairs.”

“Geez.”

“Right now we need to get you out of that flight suit and give you a thorough once over, then we’ll do the x-rays.”

On a humiliation scale of one to ten, Adam gave it only a 5.9. Not too bad. Nothing was broken; the ankle was a bad sprain that would eventually take care of itself. He was put in a private room for the night to get some rest and to await the arrival of the Special Team. The local media made do with a briefing from the trauma resident and interviews with the Billings family.

The Natrona County Airport became quite a bit

busier during the remainder of the night and the next day. The bat plane was reserved a parking slot and arrived just before dawn.

People were starting to ask a lot of pointed questions directed at the White House.

Adam awoke to find Mother Harper kissing his forehead.

“We have to quit meeting this way.” Said Adam with a slight smile.

“How are you?”

“I’m mostly all right, my ankle is a mess.”

“We thought for a while last night that you were dead. It was just awful.”

“It took me a long time to get to a phone, sorry I worried you all so much.”

Monroe took Adam’s hand. “My head is getting grayer by the hour.” The agent had left himself wide open for a witty remark, but it didn’t come this time. “There’s going to be another big stink over this, I hope they ask my opinion about putting you in rocket ships and launching you all over the damned

country.”

“Well, they can’t shove this off on you this time, at least they better not try.” Adam replied.

“The President okayed Light Speed. That windbag running against him will probably get a lot of mileage out of it.” Added Parker.

Dr. Simmons and the staff at the medical center compared notes and decided that Adam really didn’t belong in a hospital. There was, however, concern that he seemed very depressed over the death of Captain Davis. With the boy back on crutches once more, the FBI team quietly boarded the bat plane and headed east. No interviews were given to the media, so once again they were reduced to interviewing everyone except the one person they wanted to.

At Quantico, Mrs. Richter had a special plate of Thanksgiving leftovers waiting. The Colonel’s wife fretted that Adam only seemed to pick at the meal halfheartedly and didn’t seem himself at all. It was decided that Adam should spend the night with the

Richter's. The two boys went to bed in Freddie's room about ten, with Adam taking the bottom bunk. Freddie couldn't get too much conversation out of his best friend.

It was one in the morning and Freddie was shaking his father to wake up.

“Dad! Wake up, something's really wrong with Adam!”

The Marine Colonel sat up abruptly, trying to come awake.

“What? What is it?”

“It's Adam, dad. He's crying and won't talk to me or anything!”

By this time both of Freddie's parents were awake and beginning to move quickly down the hall to their son's room. They found Adam soaked in sweat and curled tightly into a ball, he was sobbing uncontrollably.

“Adam! What is it boy?” Colonel Richter sat on the edge of the bed and shook the boy to wake him but there was no response.

“Call Monroe and Dr. Simmons!” He told his wife.

Adam’s doctor and the FBI agent arrived together about twenty minutes later. Hanna met them at the door and hurried them up to Freddie’s room.

“He’s been like this since we called.” Explained Colonel Richter.

Adam was still tightly curled, his body shaking as he wept. Dr. Simmons sat on the bed beside the boy and tried to rouse him by shaking his shoulder and speaking forcefully to him.

“Adam! You have to stop this! We’re all here with you, can you talk to us?”

He seemed oblivious to anyone or anything.

“I’m going to give him a sedative, if that doesn’t calm him down we’ll need to get him to the hospital.”

“What’s wrong with him?” Monroe looked stricken.

“I think maybe the shock of seeing Captain Davis killed has finally caught up with him.”

Dr. Simmons took out a vial from her bag and jabbed a hypodermic into it. She pulled off the boy’s blanket and sheet and slid down the back of his

under shorts to expose his left buttock. As soon as the needle touched the boy's skin the hypodermic shot out of her hand and disappeared into the far wall with a sound like the crack of a rifle shot. It missed the Colonel by scant inches.

“Jesus! Hanna, Freddie, outside now!” He barked, “Move aside Doctor!”

The huge Marine snatched up Adam as if he were a baby and held him tightly, the boy seemed to respond to this and put his arms tightly around the man's neck. After a few moments Adam seemed to calm somewhat and the wracking sobs eased. Richter nodded to the doctor. “Let's try that sedative again now.”

A slightly shaky Dr. Simmons filled a new syringe and this time only a small jerk from the tightly held boy signaled the needle finding its mark. In a short while Adam relaxed and seemed to fall asleep. Colonel Richter gently put him back onto the bed and covered him with the sheet and blanket.

“He seems all right for now, let's not move him to

the hospital just yet.” Decided the doctor. “Let’s just keep a close eye on him and let him get some sleep. We have no idea what makes that brain of his tick, much less about what can go wrong with it.”

“Let’s pray that it hasn’t gone too wrong.” The Colonel would indeed pray, so would they all.

Colonel Richter later examined the hole in the wall left by the syringe; he could see light from Hanna’s room coming through. A further investigation revealed that a neat hole had been punched through four walls, including a six-inch thick support beam. In the morning he would discover that the needle was buried somewhere inside the trunk of the large oak tree in the back yard. There was immense power at work here and it frightened the man.

Freddie was left to keep a close watch over his friend while the adults and Hanna went downstairs for some coffee around the kitchen table. By now the Parkers had also arrived to join in the vigil over their boy.

“Has Adam ever witnessed anyone killed before on your team’s missions?” Asked Dr. Simmons.

“No, never. He’s always made very sure that the bad guys made it through in one piece. It always bothered him when someone was even just roughed up.” Monroe explained.

“I think he suppressed his reaction to Captain Davis’ death, he had too much to deal with at the time.”

“We should have paid closer attention to his behavior, he didn’t seem himself, that’s pretty clear now.”

“Do you think this has done him any permanent harm?” Asked Mrs. Richter.

“The next few days will tell. He’s a pretty tough kid, but he’s also dealing with forces and emotions that we can only guess at.” Dr. Simmons replied.

“Speaking of forces, are you aware of the power that was behind that needle? Asked the Colonel. “It punched through this house like a round out of a fifty-caliber machine gun.”

“His abilities have been growing in strength, I think the stress of the moment must have amplified

them.” Dr. Simmons answered.

“I wonder what he’ll be like when he’s grown?”
Richter asked.

“We don’t know. His abilities could level off and remain about what they are now. Not to sound overly dramatic, but he could also become enormously powerful, God-like.”

“I love him like my own son, but do you think he might cause harm to my family?”

“Colonel Richter, I think you and your family are the last people on this planet that Adam would ever want to harm, assuming he could bring himself to harm anyone.”

“Sometimes I ask too damn many questions.”

Adam awoke a little after ten the next morning. Freddie had been up for some time and was sitting on the end of the bunk bed reading a magazine and watching over his friend as he slept.

“Morning, dork.” Freddie said.

“Doofus. What time is it?” Adam was trying mightily to focus his eyes.

“After ten. Are you okay now?”

“Yeah, why? What’s going on anyway, why didn’t you wake me up?”

“Don’t you remember last night?”

“I dunno, I guess something happened.”

“You’re telling me. We all thought you had totally freaked.”

“What do you mean?”

Freddie told him about the night’s events.

“Oh Geez. Did I really do that?”

“Afraid so.”

“I feel like a total asshole.”

“Good. Now get up and put some clothes on, everybody’s downstairs. They don’t know whether to puke or go blind.”

“I’m too embarrassed, they probably think I’m certifiable.”

“Look on the bright side of things.”

“There’s a bright side?”

“You didn’t wet the bed.”

Freddie prodded his limping friend into his clothes and then down the hall to the bathroom, when they came downstairs it looked like a funeral was in

progress.

“Hey folks, look who’s alive!” Announced Freddie to one and all.

Seven people jumped up. “Adam!”

“Uh, hi. Freddie says I went sort of nuts last night, I’m really sorry.”

Monroe lost some more of his control and grabbed up the boy.

“You’re going to be the death of me yet! How do you feel?”

“Really, really silly. What’s for breakfast?”

While Dr. Simmons gave Adam a quick check, Mrs. Richter flew into action. If an appetite was any indicator of mental health, Adam was the sanest person in the house.

Hello to Hollywood

Quantico.

Adam was soaking in the Jacuzzi at the academy pool complex. His ankle was it's normal size again but a lingering soreness still remained. The boy seemed to be himself mentally, his sarcastic wit had returned, he smiled and laughed. On occasion however, he simply 'went away' for short periods of time.

"Adam! Hello! Anyone home?" Parker asked with some concern. The agent was also in the large tub, there wasn't anything wrong with the man, it just felt good.

The boy was looking off into the unseen distance, a slight smile on his lips.

"Huh? What... Oh, sorry." He was back.

"Where were you? La La land?"

"No, Maui. It was raining though, bummer."

“What do you mean, Maui?”

“Just looking around, it’s usually so nice there.”

“You can see that far now?”

“Just some places I know really well. Sorry if I wiggled out on you.”

“No problem, let’s get you out of this stew pot before you turn into a total prune.”

After Adam and the agent had returned to the team complex Parker looked on the Internet for the current weather in Maui. It was overcast with moderate rain. He talked to Monroe for a few moments about what had occurred.

“He was talking with me you know, just sitting there in the Jacuzzi. Then for a few minutes he wasn’t there. His body was there, but he was somewhere else.”

“Where?”

“Maui. He said it was raining there. I checked later, it was like he said it was, raining.”

“I’ve moved past astonishment where Adam’s concerned. He’ll be twelve in a few months. Dr. Simmons says that the last blood test they conned

him into shows a normal rise in male hormones consistent with the onset of puberty. She believes there may be a correlation with that rise and his expanded capabilities.”

“Then what are we looking at down the road?”

“I think something wonderful, if Adam survives being surrounded by us obsolete Homo sapiens.”

“You know something more about him than you’ve told us, don’t you?”

“I guess you have a right to know. His DNA structure isn’t quite the same as the rest of us, there are significant differences in places.”

“He’s a mutation?”

“The white coats don’t think it’s a freak thing, more like a new stage in our evolution.”

“He’s the all new deluxe human being, you mean?”

“How does it feel to be a Neanderthal?”

“Just fine, actually. I wonder if he’s one of a kind, or just the first new model off the assembly line.”

“If the rest are like him, there may be hope for us all.”

The President personally approved of Adam's vacation time in Hollywood, the boy deserved some fun. As expected he had lost his bid for re-election and was merely filling time until the inauguration of his rival, Alfred Packer. The President told those who had voiced objections to Adam's excursion to tinsel town to perform unlikely sexual acts with themselves.

Before the trip to Hollywood Adam had talked with the producer about Hanna and Freddie.

"I was wondering, are there any scenes where two of my best friends might be used as extras. You know, like in crowd scenes or that sort of thing? Nothing big or anything, just for fun."

"There's always a need for extras. Tell me about your friends."

"Well, Freddie's my age but lots bigger, his sister Hanna is fifteen and a total knockout."

"They're Colonel Richter's kids?"

"Yeah. Uh, I don't want to be a total pain about this, I just was wondering if it might be possible. I haven't even told them I was going to ask you."

“It’s not a problem, really. We’ll bring them along. They can have some fun and earn a few bucks on the side.”

“Great! Hanna will go totally ape when I tell her.”

It was a Saturday dinner when Adam sprung the news on Hanna and her family.

“Colonel Richter, when I go out to Hollywood next week, I was wondering, would it be all right if Hanna and Freddie came along?”

“I don’t know son, they have school and you’re going to be pretty busy out there, what would they do?”

“They’ll be on Christmas break. Also they would be acting in the film.”

Hanna and Freddie’s eyes bugged out, especially Hanna’s.

“Come again?”

“I’ve sort of set it up with the producer for them to be hired as extras in some of the scenes, if it’s alright with you, sir.”

“Oh my God!” Hanna squealed.

“Seriously?” Richter asked. He didn’t quite glare

at the boy.

“Yes sir. They would be in just some crowd scenes and that sort of thing. They would even earn a little extra money in the process.”

“I don’t know, who would keep an eye on them?”

Richter was searching for any excuse to say no.

“Studio security, you and Mrs. Richter, and the FBI.”

“But I have duties here.”

“It’s just for a few days sir, you have lots of leave time coming, I checked it all out.”

“Who’ll be paying for this thespian expedition?”

“It’s all being taken care of by the studio.”

“I see you’ve been working on this presentation.”

“I’ve have been rehearsing some, sir”

“All right then, I surrender. Movie people are mostly flakes in my opinion. If anything happens to my family out there you’ll be a new throw rug on the living room floor.”

“Yes sir. Understood.”

Hanna nearly fainted into her mashed potatoes.

The studio sprang for first class air fair and a

large rented beach estate in Malibu for Adam, the Richter's, and the half dozen FBI security. The local media had gotten wind of their arrival in Los Angeles; this resulted in a truly amazing spectacle at the airport. Just getting to the beach front property took on the look of a military operation. The next morning found Adam attempting his first scene on a closed sound stage. Hanna and Freddie, under the watchful eyes of their parents, were off being part of a panicked crowd during a location shot in downtown Los Angeles.

“All you have to do is be yourself.” Al Metzger was used to handling non-actor celebrities.

“Well, I’ll do my best. Just keep in mind I haven’t a clue here.” Adam replied.

“We all know that. We’ll lead you through this. Relax and don’t try too hard. Just remember to ignore the camera and the crew.”

“Easy for you to say!”

“That’s because it is easy. Let me tell you the great, deepest dark secret of Hollywood. All of those big overpaid Academy Award winners; their

trick is that they're able to just shut out everything and become just what the script says they are."

"Okay, let's give it a shot, but if I really stink up the place please let's not waste everyone's time and money."

"You've got it, kid!"

The scene required Adam to walk into a seedy police detective operations room accompanied by some very impressive looking FBI agents/actors. The leading man was to be sitting with his back to the door, deep in sorting out clues in the case, oblivious as to who had just entered the room. Adam was then to walk up to the leading man/detective, lean over, and then tap him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me sir, is this the kidnapping task force?" At this point the detective was required to suddenly jump up and shout "That's it!" as if suddenly coming to some important point in the investigation. In the process he was to knock Adam backwards onto his butt. He did.

Adam did an impressive fall and back flip, then he went limp, feigning unconsciousness.

The actor/detective did his required double take at the scene behind him and uttered his one remaining line for the scene.

“Oh, shit.”

“Great! That’s a take!” Cried the director.

The actor had felt himself make solid contact with Adam as he jumped up; he was panic stricken that he may have actually injured the boy.

“Oh crap! I really whacked him! I think I hurt him!”

Adam lay perfectly still for a long minute and then started shaking with laughter, in a moment the whole set was falling down hysterical. Adam jumped up and gave the panicked actor a quick hug to reassure him that he was all right. The leading man had to sit down for a few minutes and for the rest of the filming he was to bear the nickname “Whacker.” To rub salt into his wounds, the real FBI agents watching over the set would always put their

hands on their side arms and give him a hard stare during his scenes with Adam.

This was fun!

The ongoing gag line during Adam's scenes was that the leading man would always manage to clobber the boy in some sort of unlikely mishap. The filming would be compressed into a few days, the footage spaced throughout the length of the film. The intent was that Adam would become a medical basket case by the end of the movie.

In the second scene a meeting was being held about the kidnapping of the Mayor's daughter. Adam, with an impressively bloody bandage on his forehead, was seated uneasily next to the leading man. The detective was to have a large cup of steaming coffee next to his hand that he would knock into Adam's lap while reaching for some papers. Of course the coffee was only room temperature, the steam would be added later with computer effects. After the spill the actor/detective would grab some ice water and dump it down the

front of the screaming boy's pants. 'Whacker' got even for the earlier scene by having the crew use real ice water.

"Quite on the set! Stand by, and... Action!"

The detective reached for the papers catching the coffee cup just right to spill the entire contents onto Adam's lap.

"EEEEEEeeAaarraaaggghhhh!" Adam did a convincingly blood curdling scream and jumped up, his crotch soaked with 'hot' coffee. Acting panic stricken, the detective/actor grabbed a carafe of ice water from the table with one hand, while pulling Adam's waistband open in the front. Water, ice and all, goes into the scalded boy's under shorts.

"OOOOOhhhGEEEEEEEEZZZZAAAAAAAaaaaa aahhhh!!!" Adam wasn't acting this time and began to frantically pick ice cubes out of his soaked and freezing underwear.

"Terrific! That's a take!" Yelled the producer.

"That was real ice water for criminy sakes!" Adam was still doing odd contortions to find all of the ice.

"Gotcha, kid!" Grinned the leading man.

It took some time for a sense of calm to return to the set. Even Adam came to see the humor in the situation (eventually).

That evening at dinner Adam and the Richter's compared notes.

"I just cannot believe this is happening to me, I even had someone put makeup on me today!" Hanna was floating.

"Yeah, to make you look human." Freddie just never learned and was sitting entirely too close to his sister. Whack!

"Tell us what you did today, Adam?" Mrs. Richter asked.

"I had ice water dumped into my pants."

"Do tell."

Adam related his day at the studio and the two scenes he appeared in.

"Sounds like Academy Award time, son." Colonel Richter observed.

"Best performance by an undersized dork." Freddie offered.

“You may have my autograph for a mere five dollars, ten if I write something nice, twenty if I mean what I write.”

“What can we get for fifty cents?” Freddie asked.

“I will allow you to grovel at my feet and touch my shoes.”

The evening before Adam and the Richter's were to return to Quantico the producer gave a ‘small’ party at his home. As might be expected Hanna was in a terminal dither.

“Oh God! What will I wear? I need shoes! My hair is a disaster! I’m going to be sick!”

Adam and the two Richter males were observing the girl’s distress and spoke of it quietly among themselves.

“Perhaps some sort of an horse tranquilizer might help?” Suggested Adam.

“Definitely a net. Or even duct tape.” Freddie offered.

“I’m leaning more towards cold towels and electroshock.” Colonel Richter added.

Adam and Freddie nodded in solemn agreement.

It wasn't an especially lavish party, as Hollywood measures these things, but an invitation to it was to kill for. With the cooperation of the police the area around the producers hilltop home was sealed off to all but those holding invitations, and of course to a few invited entertainment reporters. When Adam and the Richter's made their appearance, the assembled stars and moguls gave them a standing ovation, strangely enough they even meant it. Hanna managed not to faint or fall into the pool. She spent a glorious twenty minutes talking with the chap who was the subject of a poster on her bedroom wall at home. It didn't even matter to her that she knew all he wanted was an introduction to the guest of honor.

Hanna made the introduction. "Adam, this is Steve Cooper, he wanted to say hello to you."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Cooper." Adam replied with a handshake.

"Wow! Just call me Steve! This is so great getting to meet you! I wanted to thank you, my folks

live in New York City, and they're alive because of you."

"A whole bunch of people made it possible for me to help out there."

"Still, I owe you. Anything I can ever possibly do, just ask."

Adam motioned Cooper away from Hanna and whispered in his ear.

"I see they have a small band here. When they start playing, could you ask Hanna for a dance, then I'll owe you."

"My pleasure. She's a nice kid."

"But just a kid." Adam added, he had read about these Hollywood people.

"Not to worry, I've just met her father."

"You don't seem injured?"

"He shook my hand, I'm having it x-rayed later tonight."

On the return flight to Quantico Hanna sat beside Adam for a few quiet moments.

"Adam, I had just the best time I could ever

imagine. I wanted to thank you for taking me and my family along.”

“Hanna, as far as I’m concerned you are family. I’m really glad you had a good time.”

“I’ve guess I’ve had two brothers for some time now, and I love them both. Just don’t ever tell Freddie I said that.”

“Never.”

This was a happy time for Adam, and just about his last.

Bad times

Alfred Whitmore Packer was inaugurated on a cold and rainy January morning. The weather was an omen for the dark times that would follow. On the same day that the new President was sworn in the Director of the FBI resigned, effective immediately. He had wanted to stay on but a brief meeting with the new President's Chief of Staff had convinced him that it would be in his best interests to vanish. It seems that the Director had committed certain marital indiscretions of which some remarkably good photographs existed. His replacement was one John Harcourt Crispin, a state appeals judge with no discernable law enforcement training. Crispin's winning qualifications for the job was his total loyalty and unquestioning obedience to Alfred Packer. In all large organizations, especially government organizations, there exist bootlicks and toadies who gain advancement not by their abilities, but by their skill at saying yes. The FBI is no exception, and it was Crispin's first order of

business to surround himself with a cadre of yes-men who would in effect turn the FBI into the private police force of the White House. Very soon, Special Team would feel the effects of this sea change in leadership. For Adam another, more personal change was already underway.

Colonel Richter had asked Adam to come by after dinner on a Thursday evening; there was something he wanted to speak to the boy about. Adam knew that something bad was going to take place but hadn't said so during his short telephone conversation with the Colonel. When he entered the Richter home everyone was sitting in the living room and no one was smiling, Hanna seemed to have been crying.

"Hi folks. What's wrong?" Adam asked quietly. In his soul he already knew.

"Come sit down, son." Colonel Richter motioned the boy to sit next to him.

"You're leaving, aren't you?"

"I got my orders just this morning, out of the blue,

no warning.”

“Where to?”

“Okinawa, we’ll all be going, it’s a two year assignment.”

“Oh no.” Adam barely whispered.

“I tried appealing this transfer all the way up the chain, no luck. I did find out that the order originated in the White House.”

“They want you all away from me, but why?”

“This just totally sucks out loud!” Freddie was on the edge of tears too.

“I was speaking with Monroe this afternoon, he feels that the whole setup with you and the FBI may be changing soon, what with the new Director and that bottom feeder in the Oval Office.”

Adam sat stunned. He was losing the closest thing to a family that he had ever had. “I wish I could just quit with the FBI and go with you all.”

“So do we Adam, we’d adopt you in a flash, but they would never allow such a thing.”

“Well, don’t ruin your career trying to fight them. I’ll be all right, it’s not like you all are leaving the

planet.”

“We may as well be! Okinawa for God’s sake!”

Hanna cried.

Mrs. Richter starting sobbing and went into the kitchen.

“When will you have to go?” Adam finally asked.

“I have to leave in two days to get things set up there and to get acquainted with my new command.

Greta and the children will follow in a few weeks.”

No one said anything for several minutes, the males concentrating on trying not to cry. It was not a very pleasant evening.

When Adam returned to the operations center that night Agent Monroe was waiting for him in his quarters.

“You knew about this earlier, didn’t you?” Asked Adam.

“Yes. Colonel Richter wanted to be the one to tell you.”

“He said the White House was behind it. Why would they do something like this?”

“I have some suspicions. There’s a big shakeup

going on now in the Bureau. I expect those shakeups will occur here also. You need to prepare yourself for personnel changes around here. I think Crispin will want his own hand picked people running the show here.”

“So I’m going to lose you and everyone else too?”

“You will never ‘lose us’, but we may be reassigned elsewhere.”

“Just like that?”

“We’ve lost our ally in the White House, there’s only so much any of us can do. If we want to stay in the Bureau, we’ll have to follow orders, go with the flow.”

“And if I don’t want to work for the Bureau and go with the flow, what are my choices?”

“I honestly don’t know son. For the time being I think you should try to adapt to the new people. Life is change, the situation here couldn’t go on forever without people coming and going.”

“This is all wrong. I have an awful feeling about what’s happening.”

“I may sound a little cold, but you need to harden yourself some. Life doesn’t play fair a lot of the

time.”

“Time to grow up?”

“Well, I guess something like that. More along the lines of don’t let the bastards get you down.”

“When will they start taking over?”

“I don’t know, probably sooner than later.”

Two weeks had passed when the team returned from a munitions theft case in Utah. There were reassignment orders on everyone’s desks, except of course for Adam’s. Everybody had been expecting something but were outraged at the back door method employed to notify them.

“Real classy! They couldn’t even tell us to our face!” Parker was livid.

“From what I’ve heard this is pretty much the way those Crispin assholes operate!” Steinmetz also had a low opinion of the new Director.

“Have you read these orders?” Harper exclaimed. “We have an entire forty-eight hours to report to our new assignments!”

Adam couldn't handle the situation at all and simply went to his quarters and closed the door. He already had to say goodbye to Colonel Richter more than a week ago. Freddie and his mother and sister were in the last stages of packing for their move.

"Just like old times." Adam remembered his many homes and foster parents.

Saying goodbye to his family of agents as they came to him one by one the next day had left Adam numb and empty. Some of the new team members had already begun moving into their predecessor's offices. Monroe was briefing the new team leader, Agent Michael O'Hare.

"I've learned from experience to always go with the boy's hunches, that and to trust him when he tells me something that on its face seems impossible."

"Can he follow orders, do as he's told?" O'Hare really wasn't paying very much attention to what Monroe was telling him.

"Of course. He's never really been any sort of a

discipline problem, but he's not your average eleven-year-old boy by any means. Treat him as an adult and he will respond in kind, treat him like a kid and he'll shut you out."

"As long as he's a team player and follows orders, we'll get along fine."

"Some words of caution, you can take it or leave it. One, don't ever try to lie to the boy about anything, it cannot be done. Two, if he's pushed into a corner, he can and will push back."

"Sounds a bit like a threat."

"Not at all. Just advice. Keep in mind just who and what he is."

Monroe gave up on the briefing and went to say goodbye to his short friend.

"Hawaii is a neat assignment." Adam observed.

"I'm not worth a damn at saying goodbye to people, so I won't. You get in touch with me if you need me, otherwise I'll get really upset."

"I've seen you upset a couple of times, if I have big problems, you'll be the first person to know."

"Parker and Mother Harper will be in Los Angeles.

You can...”

“I know son, they’ve already given me my orders too.”

“I have to go now, your new keeper is champing at the bit to have a staff meeting.”

“He’s a total, world class jerk.”

“I know, stay cool.”

“Check out Maui when you have the time.”

“I intend to.”

Adam got the call to attend the first team briefing held by Agent O’Hare. When he entered the meeting room, all of the chairs were filled with new faces. O’Hare motioned to the central empty seat.

“Sit down Adam. This is just a get acquainted meeting.”

“Yes sir.”

O’Hare introduced the other team members to the boy; each received a polite “hello”. The term “empty suit” kept running through Adam’s mind with each introduction. Adam was polite but he wasn’t smiling.

“Everyone here is proud to be serving on this

team with you, we're all very aware of the things that you've accomplished, and of your service to the country."

"Thank you sir."

"This is all a big change for you, I hope you can see the need for people to move on from time to time."

"Sir, we had a very efficient and well run operation here. To be honest I don't see why that all had to be thrown out of the window."

"The new Director has made many new appointments and personnel changes throughout the Bureau, Special Team needed some new blood."

"It's pretty common knowledge that the new Director just does whatever the President tells him to."

"And where did you hear that?"

"Practically everywhere, sir."

"I think we're getting off to a bad start here. You don't seem to appreciate the position you're in."

"Sir?"

"The Bureau is for all practical purposes your parent. You are under the protection and control of

this team and as such you must show proper respect and obedience. Is that clear?”

“Agent Monroe told me to stay cool and go with the flow, I’ll do that as best I can. Just don’t ask me to smile and like it.”

“Fair enough. Just do your job like the rest of us and we’ll all get along.”

“Yes sir.”

“One more thing, President Packer wants to meet you, we’ve set up a meeting day after tomorrow at the White House.”

“All right sir, what time should I be ready to go?”

“One o’clock we leave here, unless something comes up.”

“Yes sir, I’ll be ready.”

That evening he rode his bike over to the Richter's for a rather sparse dinner in the now bare looking house. The movers came tomorrow and then the last of his friends, his family, would be gone.

“I thought I was in a room full of spiders.” Adam

began.

“Maybe it’s just all of the new faces and everything.” Mrs. Richter was ever the optimist.

“I wish. Something’s decidedly rotten in Denmark and it goes by the name of Packer.”

“I don’t understand how that dreadful little man ever became President.” The woman looked ready to bite through nails.

“Most of the people some of the time, Mrs. Richter.”

“I suppose so.”

“Have you heard from the Colonel?”

“Yesterday. We’ll have a nice house and everything, he was stationed there once before, you know.”

“That’s where he bought Gertrude.” Adam replied.

“That motorbike! Nothing but trouble.”

“My buns still smart when I think about it.”

Finally some smiles appeared around the table.

Adam stood on the curb watching his family drive

away. Everyone had put on a brave face up until the last moment when hugs and kisses were exchanged, then the tears began. The boy had held it together until they were out of sight but then he sat down on the curb and also wept. Finally, he rode slowly back to the operations center, not really wanting to ever arrive there. When he returned even the uniformed guards had been replaced at the building, they seemed unsure of themselves and unfamiliar with their duties.

“Hold up there! Where do you think you’re going?” Asked the guard.

“Uh, inside.” Adam replied.

“This is a secure Federal Installation, you aren’t allowed to just walk in here.”

“But I’m supposed to be here.”

“Get lost kid, before you get in trouble.”

“Okay, Fine.” Adam wheeled his bike around and rode over to the academy grounds where he found his favorite sunny spot. He then turned off his cell phone and lay down on the grass for a nap.

“Where’s Adam, he’s supposed to be at this

meeting?” O’Hare asked.

“He went over to say goodbye to the Richter's, that’s been over three hours ago.” Answered Agent Flores.

“Find him and get him here! He can’t just wander off and ignore his duties like this!”

“Yes sir.”

After a frantic ninety minute search by all of the available agents the snoozing Adam was finally located and shook awake.

“Wake up kid! O’Hare’s really pissed at you!” Agent Flores was sweating from the frantic search.

“Why, what did I do?”

“You disappeared! You missed that staff meeting!”

“I couldn’t get back in the building!”

“What!”

“The new guards told me to get lost, so I did.”

“Come on! O’Hare’s going to blow a gasket about this.”

O’Hare met Adam and Flores at the guard post;

he had already blown a gasket and was working on his fuses by now.

“Where have you been?”

“Taking a nap.”

“Didn’t you know about the meeting this afternoon?”

“Of course sir. It’s just that these gentlemen here at the guard post wouldn’t let me in the building, they told me to get lost actually.”

O’Hare whirled and faced the guards. “Is that true?”

“We didn’t recognize him, we just came on duty. He didn’t have a badge...he didn’t say who he was!” Stammered Guard Number One.

“Why didn’t you tell them who you were?” O’Hare asked Adam.

“They weren’t listening to what I had to say. They told me to get lost, so I got lost. It’s not my fault your people don’t know their butts from a gopher hole!”

“Get inside! We’ll talk about this later.”

“Fine, sir.” Adam wheeled his bike inside while giving the ex-guards a pleasant smile.

“Flores!” O’Hare bellowed.

“Sir?”

“Get some people on these posts who breath can through their nose!”

“Yes sir!”

The delayed meeting was finally underway, it wasn't very organized. It also wasn't very pleasant.

“We have our first assignment on the board, Chicago. We need to coordinate our travel, movement routes, and contacts in the target area. Suggestions?” Asked O'Hare.

Silence.

“Has anyone taken any actions on these things yet?” O'Hare was getting red.

“Adam, how were these things done with Monroe's team?”

“I thought Agent Monroe briefed you?”

“Well yes, he did. We didn't go into too many details though.”

Adam sighed and then tried to explain things.

“Call flight operations, tell them where and when we have to be. They'll give you a departure time, be

there thirty minutes ahead of time. Notify only the senior law officer in the target area about when we'll be there. Do not let the media know under any circumstances. Obtain federal or local search warrants, if needed. Check and pack any special weapons or equipment the mission may need. Notify the medical team so they'll be ready. Run a background briefing for the team on the search target. Check local weather in the search area and pack appropriate clothing. Be sure security is maintained and that no one talks to outside personnel prior to the mission. Coordinate with Langley if satellite tracking or photography will be needed. If overnight accommodations are needed, arrange for them. Shall I go on, sir?"

O'Hare and the other agents were taking notes furiously; a sense of mild panic could be felt setting in.

"The Director wants us to keep the local news media informed when we're in the field." O'Hare said.

"You're not serious, are you sir?" Adam asked

quietly.

“He feels a higher profile on our operations will enhance the Bureau’s image.”

“Our success has always depended on the element of surprise, you tell the news media we’re coming and we may as well just sit in the plane and play poker. The bad guys will be five states away and much harder to track down.”

“We have to follow the Directors instructions.”
O’Hare said.

Adam just shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

“Very well then, let’s get going on these things. There will be a final mission briefing in forty-eight hours. Adam, don’t leave the building.”

“Yes sir.”

Adam returned to his quarters and shut the door. “The Keystone Cops are alive and well.” He said to himself.

The boy partially packed his small flight bag and laid out his black jump suit and boots, the final briefing would indicate what special clothing he

should take, assuming the new bunch could figure out that much. Some time with Chopin at the piano helped Adam to remove himself from his current predicament for a while.

Tomorrow he had to go meet with the new President and that should be a real hoot.

The White House.

The President had sent one of the special Marine helicopters assigned to the White House. The machine was polished and bore the presidential seal, inside the seats and fitting were a definite upgrade from the bat plane. Agent's O'Hare and Flores accompanied Adam on the trip to Washington. Director Crispin would meet them at the White House. The only high point of the trip for the boy was when he got to say hi to the helicopter's flight crew. When Adam walked down the steps of the helicopter after landing at the White House a Marine at the bottom of the steps snapped him a sharp salute. Rather than feel silly trying to return the salute Adam stopped and offered his hand to the

surprised Marine.

“Hi, nice to meet you, Sergeant.” Adam said.

“Welcome to the White House Adam.” The Marine smiled and crushed the boy’s hand in welcome; he then resumed his attention stance, still smiling.

O’Hare was very flustered at the boy’s actions.

“They salute everyone, you don’t have to stop and be friendly with them!”

“I don’t like to ignore people, especially Marines.” Adam responded.

“Well come on, let’s not keep people waiting.”

Whenever Adam had visited the former President he had always been waiting outside to greet the boy. Not so with the new President. They were escorted through the historical mansion to the Oval Office where they had to wait in the adjoining offices for ten minutes. Adam soaked up impressions of the people and the mood of the place while they waited. This was not a happy house.

Finally they were ushered into the President’s

office. Packer did get up from his desk and walk around to shake Adam's hand.

"A great honor to meet you Adam, welcome to the people's house."

"Thank you Mr. President, I'm honored to be here."

Adam had thought he was shaking hands with a walking cadaver.

"Let's all set down on the couches over here and have a talk." Packer motioned the group over to the small conference area. Adam did remember his manners and waited for the President to sit before he did.

"I'll get right down to business," Packard continued, "I want to discuss your role in some of the upcoming changes that we have in mind for the country."

"Changes, Mr. President?" Adam had one of his bad feelings already.

"National security. This country is too open to subversive actions from people and groups who don't see things the way patriotic Americans should.

We need to initiate a program to root out these people and expose them for what they are. Adam, your unique abilities will be invaluable to us in the operations that we anticipate along these lines.”

“Uh, yes sir. Just what would I be doing?”

“Primarily assisting in covert intelligence gathering operations, surveillance, pre-emptive raids against certain subversive groups.”

“Is that legal in this country, Mr. President?” Adam already knew the answer to that.

“Oh of course, we’ll have the proper court orders for searches and such.”

Adam knew that was a damn lie. Didn’t these creeps read any of the briefing material about his abilities, or maybe they just didn’t care?

When Adam got back to Quantico that evening he felt the need to take a long hot shower with lots of extra soap to wash off the feeling that he had acquired that day in the White House.

The first mission briefing.

“The Mayor of Chicago, a close personal friend of the President by the way, has requested our help in solving the recent string of child abductions and mutilations in the Chicago area. There have been a total of seven incidents attributed to the same person or persons. The M.O. is always the same, no usable clues have been turned up by the local police. The last kidnapping occurred just last night around nine PM. Questions?”

“Do we have the case files on each abduction?”

Asked Adam.

“No, they’re not here yet.” Answered O’Hare.

“What about the community assessment workup by the local agents?” Adam asked again.

“I don’t... No, we don’t have that.”

“Do you know what a community assessment report is, sir?”

“Well, no. What is it?”

“It measures the mood of the community toward law enforcement in general, and the FBI in

particular. What sort of support we might expect, the level of potential hostility, that sort of thing.”

“That doesn’t seem really important to me.”

“Sir, the last time we did a mission without an assessment report I was shot two times, it’s sort of important to me.”

“Yes, well we’ll see that one is provided on future cases.”

“Sir, do we at least have a general idea about the neighborhood where the last child was taken, what’s the family like?”

“I’m sure the local police will be able to tell us that when we get there.”

“How many people there will know we’re coming?”

“There’s the Chief of Police, the Mayor and his staff, some community leaders, and some pool reporters from the local stations.”

“Good grief sir, everyone in Illinois will be at the airport, the perps will be in Brazil!”

“Now look here son, those people are under strict orders of confidentiality.” O’Hare was several shades above red by now.

“I can’t do a decent job in the middle of a mob, I can’t concentrate. It’s bad enough just being in a large city with all of it’s distractions.”

“You’ll just have to adjust to working around more people from now on, those are the new guidelines we have to work with.”

“What rocket scientist came up with these guidelines?”

“The Director.”

“Well that figures.” Adam was really starting to lose his cool.

“You just watch your mouth and your attitude! In case you haven’t noticed, you’re not the person in charge of this unit!”

“I haven’t noticed that anyone was in charge!”
The boy went way over the line on that one.

“Get out of this meeting right now and wait in your quarters until departure!”

Adam got up and walked out of the door, which had swung open untouched. The door then slammed shut behind him, also untouched. The effect was not lost on the assembled team.

“Jesus Mike, did you see that?” Asked Flores.

“Yeah, I saw it. That little freak better start playing ball or we’re all up shit creek.”

“So what do we do now?”

“I don’t know. I’d like to take my belt to his back side.”

“The country worships that kid, lay a finger on him and you’d be hanging from the nearest lamp post.”

“Let’s just get our shit together,” O’Hare sighed, “the kid was right about one thing. This team is about as well prepared as my wife’s cooking.”

Adam plopped down on his couch and flipped on the weather channel.

“Just great! It’s snowing in Chicago!” He mumbled to himself. “Maybe if we get lucky the airports will be closed.” The boy reached for the phone to talk to Freddie, then he remembered that his friend was probably in Okinawa by now.

Eventually the call came to proceed to the flight line and board the C-17. Adam smiled at the team’s varied attire; apparently they hadn’t even come up with proper jump suits yet. He wondered if they had

even checked on the weather in Chicago, some of them were going to freeze their nuts off.

“Sergeant Hooper! How’s the bat plane?” Adam greeted his good friend.

“New rubber bands in the engines, we’re all set to go.”

“Cool. Keep an eye on these clowns, they’re liable to mistake one of the personnel doors for the door to the john.”

“You don’t sound too impressed with them?”

“Depressed is the word.”

“Well chin up kid, things will always get worse.”

“That’s a comfort.”

Adam stuck his head into the cockpit before taking his seat.

“Hi Major, Captain! Mind if I hide up here during the flight?”

“This new team seems a tad green.” She replied.

“If you can spot some nice turbulence, head for it.”

“You are a very bad boy, Adam.”

“Yes Ma’am. More like the cabin boy on the Titanic, actually.”

During takeoff, Adam sat by himself in the last row of seats. The pilot put some extra angle into the departure, giving the boy his first good laugh in a number of days. The panicked agents must surely have left claw marks on the seat arms. After the aircraft had leveled off Adam calmly strolled past the pale team members and disappeared into the cockpit for the remainder of the flight. The small uncomfortable jump seat up front was preferably to the grim company aft.

Even at noon, Chicago was barely open for business, having just dug out of almost two feet of snow. True to Adam’s prediction, the entire country knew the team was coming. Despite the snow there were thousands of people at the airport, many waving perfectly silly signs reading “Welcome Adam.” So much for the element of surprise. As the team deplaned the warmly dressed boy turned to O’Hare and made a small suggestion. “Perhaps

between receiving the key to the city and the ticker tape parade, we could have a quick look around for the bad guys?" O'Hare just glared at the boy.

The Mayor, Chief of Police, and assorted hangers-on were waiting on the tarmac to greet the team.

"Pleased to meet you Mr. Mayor." Adam said politely.

"An honor to meet you son, welcome to Chicago!"

"Begging your pardon sir, but I thought our arrival was to be unannounced."

"Well, word got out, as you can see. People just wanted to say hello and make you welcome."

"This is all really nice, and I mean that, but I can't be of any use in the middle of all this uproar."

"What do you mean, son?"

"I need quiet and as few people around as possible to be able to concentrate. Also whoever has been killing these children is probably in Paraguay by now, they're not going to hang around and wait for me to find them."

"But you've been able to do such amazing things

in the past, the community is depending on your help.”

“I’m sure the boy will be able to solve this in short order.” Interjected O’Hare.

“This is Agent O’Hare’s first operation as the leader of the new team, he seems to think I’m some sort of solve-it machine, I’m not.” Adam explained. “I can try late tonight, without some sort of parade following me around. I’ll need to visit the home of the last victim, unannounced, no crowds. If I try now, with all of this mess, I’ll just be wasting everyone’s time.”

“That’s what I tried to explain to His Honor here.” Said the Chief of Police. “I spoke with Agent Monroe about this three weeks ago, at least he seemed to know what he was doing!”

There was an angry and awkward silence for a few moments, and then the Mayor spoke again.

“All right then, we’ll arrange for a place for you all to stay until tonight. Adam, we’d like for you to speak to the press here for a few minutes first, if you

would?”

“Your Honor, please, I’m not running for office and I don’t like the press. You also might not like what I have to say to them about this silly fiasco.”

The Mayor paled for a moment and reconsidered his request. O’Hare looked like he was about to have cattle. The Chief of Police was grinning from ear to ear.

“Police headquarters. We can control the situation there and plan for tonight.” The Chief made it sound more like an order than a suggestion.

“Finally, someone making some sense!” Agreed Adam.

After the stony silence of the ride to the police building, talking to the Police Chief alone for a few minutes was a pleasure for the boy.

“I take it you don’t have too high of an opinion of Agent O’Hare and the new team?” Asked Chief Hayes.

“I’m just a kid and kids should be respectful of their elders, but I’ve been having a lot of trouble doing that lately.”

“He doesn’t seem like the brightest coin in the pile, does he?”

“They’re all political. They have the job because their lips are in constant contact with Crispin’s butt.”

“I will admit to some butt kissing in my time to get where I’m at, but I do have my limits.”

“They don’t”

“How are you holding up?”

“I’d like to call it quits with the FBI and the government in general. I don’t know how to go about that, though.”

“They do have most of the cards.”

“They have all of the cards.”

“I wouldn’t say that. A great many people owe you big time and would be willing to help you.”

“I’ll hang in for a while, maybe things will smooth out.”

“If you ever need a friend, I’m one of those people who owe you. My daughter lives in San Jose.”

“Thanks. I was thinking about tonight. Let’s just you, me, and a couple of plainclothes guys visit the home of those people tonight, rather than drag along the traveling circus.”

“That’s going to really piss off your FBI team.”

“They’re the traveling circus I mentioned.”

“I’m about ready to retire anyway, we’ll sneak out about one.”

“Just be down in the parking garage, I’ll find you.”

“They won’t stop you?”

“They need both hands and a map to go piss, I’ll ditch them.”

“Okay, I’ll be there at one in an unmarked car.”

O’Hare had made plans for a three AM trip to the home of the latest victim’s family, Adam figured this would give him and the Chief a good hour and a half lead to accomplish something useful. By sticking to the emergency stairwells and using his abilities to create some small diversions Adam slipped undetected into the dimly lit underground police parking garage. He stood in the shadows for a moment until he spotted the Chief and two detectives sitting in a darkened car in the shadows. The three men in the car jumped a bit when Adam appeared silently from the area to the rear of their car.

“Jesus kid, you gave us all heart attacks!” Said the Chief as he opened the rear door and motioned Adam inside.

“Sorry sir, I was keeping a low profile. Let’s go before Sherlock upstairs figures out I’m gone.”

“Okay, get down on the floor until we’re away from the station. No sense in advertising.”

“All right, watch your feet.”

Adam scrunched down on the floor behind the front seat; the Chief tried his best not to use him for a footrest. When they were a few blocks away the Chief gave the all clear and Adam took the seat beside him.

“What can you tell me about the family?” Adam asked.

“They’re working class Irish, the father owns a small sports bar, the wife works there too. Three kids, the youngest one, Liam, was eight. What was left of his body was found in a dumpster about a mile from their home.”

“What has this creep been doing to the victims?”

“It’s pretty bad, you sure you want to now?”

“I’ve seen a lot of pretty bad, I need to know.”

“All right. The victim, whether boy or girl, is always sodomized. The throat is cut down to the bone, the body cavity is sliced open from neck to....and then all of the internal organs are pulled out.”

“Dear Lord. I’ve tracked a bunch of these ‘things’ and I still don’t understand how they can do what they do.”

“I can’t either. They’re not human anymore.”

The car was silent for a while as they drove through the snow-covered streets.

“Are the victims always found so near to their homes?” Adam finally asked.

“Yes, that’s the weird thing about this case. You would think they would be taken to some more remote location.”

“A big van.”

“What’s that, son?”

“One of my hunches. I think he’s using a big van, killing them inside of it close to the place they’re

taken, then dumping the body locally.”

“How reliable are your hunches?”

“So far I’m batting a thousand.”

“It does make sense. It accounts for a number of things.”

At Adam’s request the unmarked car stopped about a block from the victim’s home.

“Why stop here, son?” The Chief asked.

“I making sure the place isn’t staked out by the press.”

“But how... Oh yeah, I keep forgetting.”

“It’s okay, let’s go see them.” Adam replied after a few seconds.

Their car pulled into the short driveway where they sat for a moment, again at Adam’s request.

“The father and mother are sitting in the kitchen, the two kids are asleep upstairs. There’s a handgun on the top shelf of the hall linen closet. Make sure you show your badges and stand in the light, they seem pretty spooked.” Adam explained.

“You can see all of that?” The Chief was

somewhat incredulous.

“Yeah, it’s what I do.”

“Okay, let’s go then.”

One of the detectives rang the doorbell and stood back from the door. The Chief and the two detectives held up their badges, while Adam stood behind them.

“Good evening Mr. Nelson. We apologize for disturbing you at this hour. Adam Valentine is here with us and would like to meet with you for a few minutes.” Explained Chief Hayes.

The man looked carefully at the badges and then noticed the boy peering around from behind the men.

“We thought he was coming earlier, there were a million reporters and people here earlier today. Come in, come in.”

Adam shook the man’s hand as he entered the house. Mrs. Nelson quietly greeted them and asked them to sit down.

Adam began: “We’re sorry for barging in on you like

this, but I can't get anything done with a big crowd of people around."

"Don't you usually work with that FBI team?"

Asked Mr. Nelson.

"Let's just say we're not seeing eye to eye at the moment."

"What do you need us to do?"

"Can you take me up to Liam's room?"

"Yes. We closed it up, we couldn't bear to go in."

Mrs. Nelson replied.

The woman led Adam up the stairs as he motioned for the rest to stay in the living room. Mrs. Nelson paused in front of her son's door and hesitated.

"Ma'am, why don't you wait out here and I'll look around on my own."

"Let me unlock it for you."

"I have it." The lock clicked open and the door swung silently inward.

Mrs. Nelson crossed herself and said a silent prayer at the sight of the door opening on its own.

As he had done so many times before, Adam found himself sitting on the bed of a lost or dead child, looking around at the small things that had mattered to them. This time he knew there was no child left to find, just the creature that had preyed upon him. As he always was, Adam found himself drawn in a certain direction. Time to go.

“Thank you Mrs. Nelson. I think we may put a stop to these killings tonight.” Adam hugged her and went downstairs; he could hear her sobbing as he entered the living room.

“Mr. Nelson, thanks. You need to be with your wife right now, we’ll be going.” Adam shook his hand and motioned Hayes and the others to follow him outside. In the car he explained what came next.

“The van is inside some sort of building, maybe five miles from here, that way.” Adam pointed to the southwest.

“Should we call for back up now?” Asked Hayes.

“Let’s wait till we get close, you guys drive and I’ll point.”

The detective behind the wheel looked at the Chief

for some sort of go-ahead.

“You heard the kid, Morris. Let’s move it.” Said Hayes.

Following Adams’ directions they drove as quickly as the frozen streets would allow them to. Twenty minutes later Adam asked for the driver to pull over to the curb and stop.

“That big building down the street, some sort of moving and storage company I think.” Said Adam. “Let me check it out for a few minutes.”

“How.. I mean..” Hayes hadn’t quite caught on to the routine yet.

“Just be quiet for a few minutes, guys. Sorry to be so pushy.”

“No problem, go for it.” Hayes answered.

Adam scanned the building from top to bottom. The van was parked just inside the large roll up door. There was a small office/apartment on the top floor, the monster was there.

“I don’t believe it. The creep’s inside asleep. Top floor, back of the building.” Adam explained. “I think

he wants to be caught.”

“Now’s the time for that back up.” Hayes said.

“Tell them he’s not armed, there’s no guns in the building. Just knives in the van.”

“You can tell that?”

“Yeah. Trust me on this. You can just walk in and arrest him.”

“Call it in, Morris.”

In a short while the dingy building was alive with police and one Alvin Speckles was in custody. The inside of the van had been soundproofed with foot thick slabs of foam insulation; the floor was a sheet of linoleum with a drain hole cut in it. There were many very sharp knives in brackets along the walls; you could shave with any one of them.

“I guess you better get me back to the police station now, O’Hare will have given birth to an entire herd of cattle by now.” Adam said to the Chief.

“It just came over the radio, they’re on the way over here right now.”

“Then you really need to get me back to the

police station!”

“Come on kid, I’ll drive you myself. You like pizza?”

“Love it. I’m starved.”

“I know a great all night place on the way, we’ll stop and get fatter.”

“Cool. You’re okay, Chief Hayes.”

“So are you kid, I wouldn’t have missed this night for all of the whiskey in Ireland.”

“You’re not Irish!” Adam regarded the black officer.

“No, but I like Irish whiskey.”

“I’m more into milk shakes myself, no hangovers.”

While Chief Hayes and the boy sat working their way through a large combination, no anchovies, the television in the all night eatery was carrying the events at Speckles Moving and Storage. Agent O’Hare was explaining to the assembled cameras how the Special Team had solved the case, and that Adam was tired and been sent back to police headquarters for some sleep.

“That guy’s a real piece of work.” Observed Hayes.

“Well, a piece of something.” Adam grinned.

“How did that clown get put in charge?”

Adam went over the events of the recent month.

“And they even transferred the Richter's?”

“I guess they thought I was too attached to them.”

“Something needs to be done, you don’t rate this kind of treatment!”

“I’m open to suggestions. Remember, they have friends in low places.”

“Such as?”

“The White House.”

“Packer’s behind this shit?”

“He’s ruining the FBI, he’ll ruin the whole country if given half a chance.”

“What are you going to do, Adam?”

“Depends on what they have me doing, I guess. As long as it’s legitimate cases and stuff, I’ll play along. If they go over the line they’ll have to do it without me.”

“Well, like I said before. You need a friend, I’m your man.”

“Thanks Chief, I think we better get back now, people in here are starting to stare.”

Adam had managed a little more than an hour of sleep on the cot at police headquarters when O’Hare shook him awake.

“Wake up you little shit!”

“Umph. Huh?” Adam tried to focus.

“Get up! What kind of silly crap did you pull tonight?”

“Oh, good morning Agent O’Hare. Nice to see you too.”

“What makes you think you can just run off like that and play cops and robbers?”

“What’s the problem? You got your face in front of the cameras, the team got credit for the bust, what else do you need?”

“I need for you to follow orders like everyone else!”

“I can follow orders just fine as long as they make at least a little bit of sense.”

“What do you mean by that, you little smart ass!”

“The only way I was ever going to find that creep

was to ditch you guys and your orders. Start running the team with a little common sense and things will work out just fine!”

O’Hare grabbed Adam by his T-shirt and pulled him close.

“You think you’re really hot shit, you little freak, but from now on if you so much as fart without permission you’ll find out just how cold your crap can get!”

O’Hare roughly shoved the boy back down onto the cot and stalked out of the room.

When Adam and the team returned to Quantico it didn’t really surprise the boy to learn that Dr. Simmons had been replaced and Mr. Terwilliger had been sacked. So far they hadn’t thought to take away his piano and computer. The morning after their return Adam headed for the academy pool for some exercise, but mostly just to get out of the operations center.

Agent Flores intercepted him as he left his quarters.

“Whoa sport! Where do you think you’re going?”

“Just over to the pool to do some laps, why?”

“You got permission?” Flores asked.

“To go for a swim?”

“To leave the building.”

“But I go for a swim almost every day!”

“Ask O’Hare first.”

“Forget it, I’d rather eat worms.”

Adam turned around and went back into his quarters. Flores went off to kiss buttocks and inform O’Hare about the encounter.

“The kid just tried to leave the building, said he wanted to go for a swim.”

“And?”

“I told him to ask you for permission, like you said. He said he would rather eat worms.”

“Then let him. I hear worms have lots of protein.”
O’Hare smiled.

“What about his meals, he usually eats over at the academy?”

“He can ask me for my permission, then he can go eat.”

At lunchtime Adam headed toward the staff dining room. Flores once more stood in the way.

“What’s wrong now?” Asked Adam.

“Where are you going?”

“Well, it’s lunch time, I was just going to go eat and come back here..”

“Ask O’Hare first.”

“I have to ask his permission just to go eat?”

“That’s right.”

“What about using the bathroom, do I have to raise my hand?”

“Keep smarting off and you probably will.”

“Never mind lunch, I’ve lost my appetite.”

Back in his small kitchen area, Adam did an inventory of his food supply.

“Let’s see, a half box of corn flakes, no orange juice, half quart of milk, three frozen waffles, four slices American cheese, quarter loaf of bread, mayonnaise, two cokes. I can last for weeks, or at

least till tomorrow.”

That evening Adam decided that waffles topped with melted cheese gave a new dimensions to the expression “yuck.”

O’Hare called a staff meeting for the next morning at ten. Adam sat quietly (except for his stomach) in his place as the session began.

“Good morning Adam, how are you today?”

O’Hare asked just a bit too pleasantly.

“Fine sir.”

“Anything you want to ask me this morning?”

“No sir.”

“You know we don’t have to play these silly games.”

“Games, sir?”

“All you need do is ask permission.”

“Why do I need permission to eat, nobody else has to ask?”

“You need to learn who is in charge here.”

Adam shrugged his shoulders and said nothing else. O’Hare was clearly expecting more from the

boy. When it was obvious that Adam had nothing further to say O'Hare moved on to the next topic.

"I've been in touch with Director Crispin, and it's been decided that the team will revert to the no-notice policy on case assignments. Any assignment on the board will be closely held information, no leaks will be tolerated."

Adam smiled just a little, but he said nothing.

"We're expecting to move on the manhunt now underway in Nebraska within the next two days if nothing has turned up. I want all preparations made in advance so we can move in a hurry if we get the call."

O'Hare looked around the table and came to the last point.

"Adam, you're to meet with your new doctor this afternoon at one o'clock for a check-up and a get acquainted session. Be ready to leave here at twelve-thirty, the exam will be at the base hospital." Adam said nothing.

"Do you understand?"

“Yes sir. What happened to Dr. Simmons?”

“The new doctor is thought to be more qualified in certain areas.”

“Why was Mr. Terwilliger fired?”

“He was deemed a security risk and unnecessary since you’ve already passed your high school equivalency test.”

“What about the college courses I’ve been working on with him?”

“You may continue with those on your own time.”

Adam said nothing more at the meeting and after a lunch of one slice of cheese and the last coke it was time to go to the hospital for his checkup. Agent Flores and three other agents accompanied the boy.

“Hello Adam, my name is Doctor Forbes.” The new doctor extended his hand.

“Pleased to meet you.” No handshake. Adam smelled another rat.

“Well, all right then. The agents can wait outside here while I give you your checkup in the exam

room.”

Flores and the other agents took seats in the hall as Forbes guided the boy into the examination room.

“Tell me, how are you feeling in general these days?”

“Hungry.”

“Why is that?”

“I have to ask permission just to eat, so far I haven’t asked.”

“You need to eat. Better ask permission.”

“Not likely.”

Dr. Forbes regarded the boy a moment and asked him about his gunshot wounds.

“Any problems with your leg or ribs?”

“No, they’re fine now, no problems.”

“And your ankle?”

“Just a twinge now and then.”

“Any recent illnesses?”

“No.”

“Sit up here on the table and take off your sweatshirt and undershirt, I want to listen to your heart and lungs and take your blood pressure.”

Adam did as the doctor asked and cooperated with his examination, it seemed rather cursory compared to Dr. Simmons methods.

“You sound fine. I’ve been talking with Agent O’Hare and it seems that you’ve been having a lot of trouble adjusting to the changes that have been going on. I want to give you an injection that will help you to calm down and relax. It will make things go much easier for you. Then you can take some medicine twice a day by mouth.”

“I don’t need any drugs, Doctor.”

“Let’s just try it for a while.”

“No.”

“I’m your doctor now Adam, you have to do as I think best.”

“This is the only body I have, no drugs, sorry.”

Forbes went to the door and asked the agents to come in.

“Now Adam, if you don’t cooperate and let me give you this injection, these gentlemen will have to hold you while you get your shot.”

“No drugs, you quack!”

Adam jumped off of the table and moved away from the doctor.

“Grab him and hold his arm still!” Forbes ordered.

The four agents backed Adam into a corner and grabbed him as he tried to dart past them. Flores held the boy around the chest while two of the other agents helped to wrestle him up onto the table. Soon his right arm was held out and exposed for the doctor’s needle. Needless to say, the needle curled up like the one that Dr. Simmons now keeps as a prized souvenir.

“Look at that!” Dr. Forbes held up the useless needle.

“You did that?” Flores demanded of Adam.

“Well, duh!”

“Knock off the weird shit kid! Doc, get another needle!” Flores ordered.

This time the needle flew out of the doctors’ hand and began dancing back and forth in front of his face like an angry wasp. Forbes did some rapid

backpedaling as the needle pursued him across the room.

“Stop It! Flores, make him stop!” Forbes was in a full panic by now.

Before Flores could react, the needle flew across the room and began flitting around and stabbing at the agents. In the confusion Adam squirmed free and bolted out of the room. He left the needle hovering menacingly in the open doorway as he tore down the hallway past startled medical personnel and patients. It was some time before Flores and the others could get past the needle by using a chair to knock it to the floor and smash it. The shirtless Adam was out of the hospital by then and heading for the base perimeter.

The temperature outside was in the low forties but Adam didn't feel it in his all out attempt to put distance between himself and his pursuers.

Squealing tires behind him signaled to the running boy that reinforcements from the operations center had arrived. As Adam cut across a grassy

area he employed the tried and true method that he had perfected back in Idaho. The six pursuing agents did headers into the turf as one by one, their pants flew down around their ankles. In the distance Adam spotted a squad of Marines on a training run and headed toward them. The Gunnery Sergeant leading the squad instantly recognized the shirtless boy running toward them and ordered a halt to his men.

“Guys! I need your help! Please help me!” Adam gasped as he reached the squad.

“Adam? What’s going on for Chrissakes?” Sgt. Thompson could not believe he was seeing this.

“This’ll sound nuts, but those guys tried to drug me over at the hospital!”

By now the FBI was up and running again toward the Marines.

“The FBI was trying to drug you, why?”

“I wasn’t being a good little Nazi!”

“Get into the middle of the squad, we’ll let the base commandant sort this out.”

Twenty pissed looking Marines met the six out of breath agents as they reached the squad.

“Hold that kid! He needs to be in the hospital!” Agent Carter demanded.

“You better have a damn good explanation for this!” Sergeant Thompson barked.

“Just hand him over, jarhead!”

That was not what the Marines wanted to hear at all. Sixty seconds later the FBI agents were disarmed and lying on the ground in various states of consciousness and health.

“Come on kid, let’s trot on over to General Hartman’s office.”

“Thanks guys! You do good work, Geez!” For once the boy wasn’t too upset about someone being roughed up.

“Damned straight! Replied Thompson as he wrapped his sweat jacket around the shivering boy.

The arrival of Adam and the squad of Marines at the base headquarters caused an enormous flap. A Marine major escorted Adam and Sergeant

Thompson into the base commandant's office.

"Adam, what's this all about?" Asked Brigadier General Hartman.

"I need some help sir. They just tried to use some sort of drug on me!"

"What are you talking about, son?"

Adam gave the general a complete rundown of the last few day's events, ending with the melee between the Marines and the FBI agents.

"Judas Priest! Do you know what it was they tried to inject you with?"

"No sir, but the doctor was really afraid of that needle."

"Don't take offense son, but this is important. You're not polishing the truth about anything here are you?"

"No sir. You know Colonel Richter sir, he can tell you I don't make a habit of lying."

The general looked at the boy for a moment and reached a decision. He turned to the major and issued an order.

"I want the base Alert Force around this building

in ten minutes. This boy is staying here until this mess gets sorted out.” Hartman put his hand on Adam’s shoulder and said quietly. “You’re safe for now, settle down. I have a phone call to make.”

“I’m sorry about this sir, I just don’t know what to do.”

General Hartman placed a call to the Commandant of The Marine Corps.

“Sir, Hartman here. I have one hell of a situation on my hands.”

“It had better be, I’m due at a meeting of the JCS.”

“It’s Adam Valentine sir. He was running for his life from that new bunch of FBI over at Special Operations. He asked a squad of my men for help and they decked the bastards chasing him and brought him here to the command center. The boy said that they were trying to drug him, to make him cooperate. I’ve talked with the boy and I believe he’s on the level.”

“Hartman, do you know how crazy that sounds?”

“I do know, sir. Something’s very wrong here, that boy is scared of those people.”

“What’s the situation right now?”

“Adam’s here in the base command center, I have the alert force outside.”

“Any contact with the FBI yet?”

“No sir, not yet.”

“Let me know the minute they make contact. Don’t turn Adam over to them without my say so. I need to talk to some people.”

Twenty minutes later Agent O’Hare put in his appearance and demanded that Adam be handed over.

“General Hartman, that boy is the responsibility of the FBI. You have no authority to hold him.”

“He’s not being held, he asked for our protection.”

“He’s mentally unstable, he needs to be in the hospital!”

“I’ve talked with him, he seems perfectly rational. Why is he afraid of your people?”

“I would suggest that you not make this situation any worse than it already is, General.”

“I don’t think I like you very much, Agent O’Hare. There are two hundred armed Marines outside who would walk through flaming shit for that boy. Am I making my point?”

“What you’re doing is making the mistake of your life here, General.”

“I suggest you leave, now.”

O’Hare left.

“They’ll get the President to order you to turn me over to them.” Adam said to General Hartman.

“You may be right. What happens then?”

“I don’t know. I can’t go back there, those people shouldn’t be running a lemonade stand, much less Special Team.”

“The President is the Commander in Chief, he’s the Commandant’s boss and my boss. We would have to obey his orders.”

“I’ll run if I have to. I could be really hard to catch if I wanted to.”

“Where to son, you’re one of the most recognizable people on this planet.”

“I don’t know. I do know they’re not going to turn

me into some sort of zombie, I'd rather die first.”

“Don't talk about dying Adam, things will get ironed out.”

O'Hare, Director Crispin, and the President were in a conference call.

“Forbes tried to give him the initial shot and he bolted. He made it out of the hospital, a bunch of damned Marines beat the crap out of the agents who were after him. He's holed up now at base operations, Hartman won't turn him over to us.” Explained the nervous O'Hare.

“You sorry piece of shit! How could you possibly screw things up any more than you have?” The President was practically screaming.

“I've been following every order I've been given, sir! The boy doesn't trust us, he fights every move I make!”

“We came on too strong with him initially,

intimidation doesn't work. We still need to get that conditioning shit into him." Crispin explained.

"If this mess gets out to the press... what's our spin?" Packer demanded.

"That he's suffered some sort of emotional breakdown, his special abilities have made him unstable, maybe even dangerous." Crispin offered.

"That sounds plausible. Make it all sound like a great tragedy."

"Yes Mr. President." Replied Crispin.

"I'm going to order that he be turned over to you, O'Hare. I suggest you don't foul up again." Packard hung up.

Adam was finally having something to eat. The ham sandwich and coke were disappearing at an alarming rate.

"You act like you haven't eaten in days, son." Hartman observed.

"I had to ask permission to go eat. I was too stubborn to ask."

“They wouldn’t let you eat without asking for permission?”

“No sir. I haven’t been following their orders too well lately, I guess they were trying to make a point.”

“I have half a mind to level their operations building.”

President Packer was now speaking with the Marines Corps Commandant.

“Tell Hartman to turn over that boy immediately. He’s in need of medical treatment and needs to be in the hospital.”

“Sir, Hartman has reported some very disturbing actions on the part of the FBI people at Quantico.”

“General, you have your orders. Carry them out!”

“Yes Mr. President.”

After the connection was severed, the

Commandant punched in the number for Hartman's office.

"Jack, I've just got off the line with the President. He gave me a direct order for you to turn over the boy."

"Oh Christ sir, that boy surely doesn't deserve what's in store for him!"

"I agree, but our alternative is a mutiny. I won't be the first Marine to be a part of that."

"No sir. I'll follow my orders, and then I'll submit my resignation. I won't be a part of any government capable of shit like this."

"I guess that makes two of us then. My letter of resignation has been typed up and ready to sign for weeks now. Packer's nothing but a disease that's infected this country."

"I have to go tell Adam now sir, I feel like Judas."

"Do your duty. God forgive us both."

"I've just been speaking with the Commandant."
Hartman began."

“Is there a back way out of here?” Adam smiled a little.

“There is if we look the other way for a few minutes. Then what?”

“I make tracks. I have some friends, I can make it very hard for people to follow me.”

“Where will you head first?”

“West. Or maybe south, or north.”

“Good answer. Let me rearrange things outside then I’ll come back and point you in the right direction. It’s getting dark, that will help.”

“Thanks. I wish I could have worked for people like you, sir.”

“So do I, son.”

As Agent O’Hare and six other agents were approaching the base headquarters building, General Hartman was with Adam at the rear of the building.

“Head straight out from here, the perimeter fence is just beyond the trees and jogging path. Can you get over it?”

“I won’t have to, I’ll go through it.”

“How son, it’s chain link and razor wire?”

Adam picked up a stapler from the desk near the door. He held it in his palm for the general to see as it turned to liquid and splattered on the floor.

“Mother of God! Those stories about you seem to have been true!”

“Yes sir, like I said, I won’t be too easy to corner.”

“All right then, time to go. If anyone asks you, we never had this conversation. God bless you Adam, be careful!”

“God bless you sir, thanks.” Adam then dashed for the fence and was soon swallowed up in the darkness.

Hartman returned to his office and waited for the arrival of the FBI, it was a short wait.

O’Hare was fairly gloating when he walked into Hartman’s office.

“You have your orders now. Produce the boy.”

“Just a moment, I’ll send for him, he’s taking a nap right now.”

Hartman got on the intercom and asked that Adam

be brought to his office. Several long minutes passed, then several more.

“What’s the hold up, Hartman?”

“I’ll check again.”

As Hartman was about to use the intercom again, his aide walked into the room.

“Sir, we can’t find the boy. We think he may have ducked out one of the side windows!” Major Boyd almost smiled.

“You let him get away on purpose!” O’Hare exclaimed angrily.

“I’m not running a jail here, I’m sure he can’t be far. We’ll check down by flight operations, he has some friends there.”

Of course flight operations was in the opposite direction from the perimeter fence behind base headquarters.

“I want you to call a general alert and shut down this base until he’s found!” Demanded O’Hare.

“My orders were to turn him over to you, when we find him I will. In the meantime you are not in

command of this base or me. If things aren't moving along quickly enough for you, go find him yourself."

"I can have your star for this!"

"That might be a tad difficult, my resignation takes effect at midnight."

O'Hare was about to say something else, but instead turned and just walked out of the room.

Hartman sat down behind his desk and lit up an illegal Cuban cigar in his 'no smoking' office. He said a silent prayer for the boy and cursed a world that had Agent O'Hare's' in it.

When Adam went through the fence he took the time to reattach the severed links on the fence. A close examination would reveal where the wire had been flowed back together but from a distance the fence appeared undamaged. Scanning behind and in front as he went, the boy moved northwest through the hills and woods for three hours until he finally came to the edge of a housing development. The tired and cold boy sat resting on a rise at the edge of the woods looking down at the houses, trying to decide what came next.

The Invisible Boy

“I need to move far and fast.” Adam thought.

“Maybe there’s an empty house down there.”

The boy scanned the neighborhood, sensing people in house after house. Finally his search paid off.

“There! No one home. Let’s see, no mail in the box, no newspapers outside, space for a car in the garage,” Adam said to himself, “must be on vacation or something.”

After ten minutes of careful movement, and hiding twice while cars passed, Adam was at the front door of the unoccupied house. Standing in the shadows, the boy checked for an alarm system, there was one. He found the push button panel just inside the entryway. After a careful ‘look’ at the alarm control, he caused the buttons 4-6-2-8-5 to depress. The indicator light turned from red to green.

“Piece-O-Cake!” Adam whispered, as he then moved the deadbolt in the door. “I guess this falls

under the heading of breaking and entering.”

Resting for a few moments on the couch in the darkened living room Adam almost dozed off. The table lamp next to him clicked on, nearly causing him heart failure until he realized it was on a timer. After his breathing returned to near normal Adam decided to do a quick tour of the large house. Along the way he found a thermostat and remedied the deep chill in the house. His “hunch’ told him that these people wouldn’t be back anytime soon.

It seemed apparent that the people living here had only teenage daughters (three), clean clothes that fit would be a problem. After some serious rooting around Adam came up with a pair of faded jeans that sort of fit if rolled up at the ankles, and a blue sweatshirt that had probably been washed on the wrong temperature setting. Clean underwear of some sort would have to wait. “No way am I putting on girl’s underpants! What if I’m caught? Geez!”

Adam decided that a hot shower was next. He

undressed and stuffed his by now filthy clothing and Sergeant Thompsons' aromatic sweatshirt into a clothes hamper in one of the girl's bathrooms. He then got under the deliciously hot spray in the shower, soap and shampoo returned Adam to a civilized appearance after his long hike through the dense woods. As he dried off and dressed, his stomach reminded him of his next priority: Food.

The refrigerator held four cans of beer, some catsup and some mustard.

"Cripes! These people must have left for Mars or someplace."

The cupboards yielded canned soup, pork and beans, tuna, stale crackers. It wasn't Mrs. Richter's cooking, but it filled the void. Adam cast proper behavior for a young boy to the wind and tried one of the beers.

"Well, it's cold and wet, sort of bitter though." Observed the boy. "I can't see what the big attraction is though?" Burp.

Turning out the kitchen lights, Adam wandered

upstairs, undressed and crawled into the large bed in the master bedroom. Exhaustion and most of one beer had him asleep in seconds.

Back at Quantico, Agent O'Hare was once more making excuses to Director Crispin and the President.

"He had to have had help! There's no way he could made it off of that base in such a hurry, if he's even off the base!"

"You simpleton! Didn't it even occur to you to keep that headquarters building under surveillance?" President Packard was past exasperation.

"They had it surrounded by two hundred Marines, if he got out of there it wasn't by himself!" O'Hare responded.

"What's our course of action?" Crispin asked.

"We don't go public just yet. Put every agent you have into that area, beat the bushes, go house to house. If the boy surfaces and goes public, we use the mental illness story. I want that boy back, he's too damn essential for the things we have planned

down the road. Move on it!” Packard terminated the conversation.

At nine twenty one in the morning Adam experienced the first real headache of his life.

“Ow, Geez! What the ...”

Adam slowly sat upright in the bed, holding both sides of his skull. By the time he managed to get both of his feet on the floor it came to him that the beer had been a totally bad idea.

“Man, I just had one can! Why do people drink that stuff?”

A quick shower seemed in order, and after Adam had dried off, his head began to be return to its normal proportions. Breakfast was postponed for the time being.

“Now, how do I get out of here?” Adam was looking out at the street in front of the house. He considered his options.

“(A) I could probably drive a car with an automatic transmission, I’d get about two miles before every cop in Virginia pulled me over. (B) I start walking at

night, looking for more empty houses or something.

(C) I find a ride with someone.”

‘C’ sounded best. Now who would give him a ride?

After his head settled down he made a survey of the surrounding homes. An enormous motor home two blocks away caught his attention; the family in the house where it was parked seemed to be loading their every possession into it. Adam focused in for very close look and listen and determined that, (1) they were leaving early tomorrow morning for the weekend, and (2) their destination was grandma’s house in Charleston (Adam hoped they were talking about West Virginia). The motor home had some very large storage spaces along its side below the floor level.

“Guess I better get up really early in the morning.” Adam decided.

At Quantico, every FBI Academy cadet and agent had been pressed into the search for Adam. The Marines at the base stood down, their newly

appointed commander gave the order to not interfere with the search, but the tacit understanding was to not assist it either. A team of actual bloodhounds was being called in to attempt tracking the boy.

It occurred to Adam that he might do something to make himself less recognizable. His blonde hair seemed a good place to start. A search of the master bath turned up something called “Raven Wings Ebony.” The lady (or maybe the man) of the house must have had a few gray hairs. Adam read the instructions on the box.

“Let’s see, shampoo hair, use rubber gloves, gently massage in. Allow to set ten minutes, rinse twice, blow dry. Piece of cake. I better do this in the shower.”

Time passed.

“Whoa! I’m not me!” Adam inspected his wet and very black head of hair in the mirror. After the suggested blow drying the effect was even more dramatic. “Sunglasses. Maybe a hat or something,”

were Adams' next objectives. During his search of the house and garage Adam snagged a too large ski jacket, a small backpack (it had flowers on it!), flashlight, small first aid kit, dinky portable radio, quart size bottle of drinking water, and best of all, a compact down filled sleeping bag. It troubled the boy that he was now a thief on top of everything else he had done lately "These people won't miss this stuff too much, it's not like I'm carting away their TV and stereo."

After some breakfast/lunch of tuna, crackers, canned green beans, and no beer, Adam turned on the television with the volume low to see if he was on the most wanted list yet. None of the all-news networks had anything, nor did any of the local stations. Cool.

"They must still be trying to keep this quiet, easier for me to get around if the whole country isn't looking for me."

The one thing Adam hadn't yet come to grips with was his final destination. Just where was he

actually headed?

Adam turned off the television and concentrated on the operations center back at Quantico. He began in his quarters, feeling a pang of loneliness at the familiar surroundings. There was a great deal of activity down at the Com. Center, more new agents coming and going. O'Hare was in his office yelling into the telephone about a delay in the arrival of the search dogs. "Dogs! I wonder if they can track me this far?"

Pushing his abilities to the limit, Adam decided to try an experiment.

"I wonder if I can short out their comm. gear at this distance?"

He could. The main telephone cables into the building were in the basement, one by one the myriad of thin copper wires inside the cables began melting back from their connections. On the roof of the building the microwave links and the satellite dish's suffered grievous injuries to their circuitry. In the equipment room, all of the portable comm. gear ceased to be comm. gear. Twenty-seven cell

phones in various locations cashed in their warranties. Sensing that he was on a roll, Adam chopped all electrical power to the building and shorted the transformers, which produced a marvelous bang and light show.

“I guess they know now that I can bite back.” Adam thought.

The Special Team had to move their operations into the academy office complex.

“He has to be close by to have done all of that shit! I want this base gone over again and again until we find him!” O’Hare had gone without sleep for too long, it was taking a toll.

“We’ve already looked under every rock on the base, a lot of the people in the base housing are refusing entry to our men, they’re insisting on search warrants.” Flores explained.

“This is a hot pursuit, we don’t need any damn search warrant!”

“Doesn’t that only apply in criminal cases?” Asked Flores.

“I don’t care where it applies, search this damn

base! And what the hell is keeping those dogs?”

More than anything, Adam had wanted to call his friends and tell them what had been happening to him. He also knew that every telephone belonging to everyone he knew would have a tap and tracing gear connected in the switching centers that served them. E-mail would be just as vulnerable.

“Maybe I could write them a snail mail letter?” He thought.

There was a computer in the father’s den, and another upstairs in one of the girl’s rooms. Adam sat down at the one in the den and switched it on. To the boy’s disapproval it was a Windows machine. Oh well, any computer in a storm. He decided to send identical letters to everyone to save time.

“Dear folks,

I am sending this same letter to all of you, as I am short on time. Yesterday, during a so-called physical exam the new doctor they have assigned to me tried to give me some sort of drug (needle!) to calm me. Please believe me when I tell you, I didn’t

need calming. They only want me to be more cooperative, to smile and say yes sir. I made it out of the hospital without getting the shot, some Marines and the base commander kept the new goons from catching me again. Right now I am sort of on the run. I'm ashamed to say I've broken into a house where the people are away. I'm taking a few things, clothes and stuff. I guess that makes me a burglar. I can't go back to Quantico. I won't let them make me into some sort of drugged zombie.

These people are just plain bad, watch out for yourselves. Don't mention this letter over the phones or e-mail. In case they get one of these letters I won't say where I'm headed. I guess I really don't know where I'm headed anyway. O'Hare, Crispin, and President Packer are the creeps behind this whole mess. Be careful who you talk to about this. I will try to stay safe, you all do the same.

I love you all,

Adam.”

Adam ran off ten copies from the printer, he then

hand addressed the envelopes, and marked them “personal.” He didn’t have specific addresses for most of the people, the letters were sent to the FBI field offices in each city. Adam did have the Richter's new address on Okinawa. It seemed best not to put any sort of return address on them. After some digging in the desk, he found enough stamps for the postage.

“I’ll mail them in the morning before I get in the motor home.”

Adam had done a very thorough inspection of the motor home he planned to stow away in. One of the large storage compartments held only the two children’s bicycles. His plan was to remove the bikes before dawn and stash them in the shrubs at the side of the house. There would be plenty of room in the compartment for himself and his backpack. No plan was perfect, he just hoped that nothing else would be put in the compartment while he was in there waiting for them to depart.

That evening before he went to bed, Adam

rounded up every alarm clock radio, and anything else that could be set to go off. Four A.M. was the hoped for awakening. His backpack was crammed with the accumulated junk and canned food that he had amassed during his searches; the sleeping bag was tied below the pack with some electrical cord. One more look at Quantico showed Adam that the search was still centered there; there was nothing on the television about him. And so to bed.

Someone was selling the “All new Veg-Y-Master 2100,” another voice called for repentance of your lustful ways, yet another declared the temperature was thirty-one degrees and the time as four-oh-two. Adam stirred, and with an effort few could ever appreciate, came awake.

“Geez! This fugitive business sucks!” His feet then made reluctant contact with the floor.

By four-thirty he was coherent enough to have made a survey of the neighborhood, and specifically the family who owned the motor home. They were still asleep, but probably not for long. Adam turned

down the house's thermostat to "standby" and armed the alarm system. He stood for a moment on the front porch in the black early morning chill, nobody was stirring for blocks. The mailbox on the corner received his letters with a silent prayer that he wasn't placing any of his friends in danger. Two blocks away he was standing next to the motor home.

For several years now locks of any sort had come to have little meaning for Adam. The lock on the storage compartment was laughable. Moving quietly, he slid out the two children's bicycles and rolled them quickly into the thick shrubbery at the side of the house. His backpack and sleeping bag slid into the metal compartment, then himself. There was no air circulation in the storage area, so he caused the sheet metal to form several openings near his head. As a precaution, Adam fused the compartment lock. So far so good.

The Kendall family inside the house was stirring; Adam watched them as they prepared for their

weekend excursion. When he turned his attention toward Quantico, things were not as reassuring. The dogs were on the job.

The County's Search and Rescue unit's prized bloodhounds were at the fence, baying to follow the scent.

"The trail leads right up to the fence. No way he went over that, he'd be cut to shreds!" Deputy Reynolds was at a loss.

Agent Flores shined his flashlight on the fence and took a close look. There were small imperfections in the links, as if they had been cut and welded back into place. He traced the outline formed by the marks.

"He went through it. Right here!"

"Uh Oh!" Adam did some quick looking and thinking.

The deputy carried on his belt a small aerosol spray container. Adam knew what was in that spray can.

"I'm really sorry, doggies, but you'll get over this."

Adam said quietly.

The deputy jerked around as he felt something tug at his belt. The spray can had dislodged itself and flew up and out of sight. As the assembled search team concentrated on cutting the fence, the small spray can darted in front of the three dogs and discharged into their supersensitive nostrils. The poor animals made pitiful yelping noises and tore loose from the grip of the deputy. Adam cringed and winced at the pain the dogs felt. The bloodhounds were eventually found three hours later near the base motor pool, unable to follow anything.

A clattering and banging sound brought Adam back to the motor home. The Kendall's' were up and loading still more junk into the compartment next to his.

“Why in the name of God you have to bring along every stuffed animal in your room is beyond me, there's no more space in here!” Exclaimed the exasperated father.

“Put them in with the bicycles, Dad!” Whined the daughter.

Adam heard the man trying to open the fused lock to his hiding place. After several curse filled moments, the man gave it up.

“Just great! Now the damn lock’s broke! There’s no time to fix it, I’ll open it when we get to your grandfather’s place, the old coot’s got every damned tool made since the stone axe was invented!”

Phew!

“Let’s get this show on the road!” Adam said quietly.

Twenty minutes later, Adam heard the squabbling family board the enormous land yacht. Reluctantly at first, the large diesel engine in the rear of the vehicle rumbled into life.

“Geez, I’ve been on smaller aircraft carriers than this thing!” Adam thought.

When it became apparent that the exhaust fumes were going to do him in, Adam temporarily sealed off the holes he had made in the storage compartment.

“Maybe it’ll be okay when we start moving, if we ever do!”

He was right. After the motor home had pulled out of the drive and began rolling, the airflow brought fresh air past the storage compartment. As the rolling tribute to wretched excess moved onto the main highway Adam settled down to work on his backlog of sleep.

After another delay of two hours, yet another team of tracking dogs was put on Adam's trail. Some dirty clothing from the boy's laundry hamper provided the scent the animals needed, the track led straight into the woods past the perimeter fence.

"Finally! There's no way that little son of bitch will outrun those dogs. He's as good as ours!" O'Hare felt confident for the first time in hours.

After more than two hundred miles of twists, turns, starts, and stops, Adams' mobile hideaway was nearing grandma's house. Downtown Charleston seemed like a good place to part company.

Lee Street/U.S. 60.

The motor home pulled up behind traffic at a stoplight. Time to move!

Adam used his senses to look around at the area surrounding the motor home. In an instant the lock on the storage compartment released and the boy was out onto the street and between parked cars to the sidewalk. Try to look cool. One surprised motorist caught sight of his departure from the vehicle, then traffic began moving again. Adam jogged off toward a side street and someplace to hide for a while. He wore a Yankees baseball cap and aviator sunglasses, his black hair completed his disguise. Just another goofy kid in baggy clothes.

Money was an immediate problem; Adam had a total of four dollars in his wallet and no change in his pockets. Using his credit card or ATM card would be like standing in front of a police station and screaming out his name. Adam spotted an ATM on the side of a large building down the street. Maybe he wouldn't need to use the card. Stopping some distance from the machine he first severed the

connections to the cameras in the ATM. Waiting behind a customer using the machine, Adam studied its inner workings. There were three solenoids, one to open the cash door, and two others to activate the payout mechanism. When his turn came, there were no other people in line behind him, Adam made motions that looked like he was putting a card in the machine and punching in a PIN.

As he stood in front of the machine, the cash slot door clicked open and twenty-dollar bills began appearing. Adam counted off fifty of the bills and released the controlling solenoids. The thousand bucks in his pants pockets would smooth things out some in the following days. A good meal seemed the best place to spend some of his ill-gotten gains.

“Let’s see, breaking and entering, burglary, interstate flight, bank robbery. Is an ATM considered a bank?” Adam counted up his offenses thus far. “I suppose I should feel really guilty, but somehow I just don’t.”

An upscale sandwich shop and deli just down the street were the boy’s next destination.

After two hours of tearing through woods and brush, the search team stood looking down at the small upscale housing development.

“Contact the local police, he’s got to be in one of those houses down there!” Flores ordered. O’Hare had elected to let the younger agents run the pursuit, a helicopter could have him there in ten minutes.

The dogs were allowed to resume their tracking, in minutes they were barking at the front door of the home that Adam had used. Curious neighbors were coming out of their homes to watch the excitement. One of the bystanders came up to Flores, a key in his hand.

“I’m Fred Baker, I live next door. What’s the problem?”

“We think there may be a fugitive inside this home, please stand back.” Flores answered.

“The people there are in Europe, they left me the key and the alarm code.”

“Give me the key and the code!” Flores then

ordered the man to move back to his own yard.

Fred Baker said to his wife, “You’d think they would have their guns out if they were looking for some sort of dangerous criminal?”

Flores opened the front door and after a quick look inside, entered and disarmed the house alarm system. By now the local police had arrived and were assembling on the lawn. The six agents in the team entered and did a quick room-to-room search of the house. No boy.

“I think he’s been here, there’s some dirty dishes in the sink, the bed upstairs in the master bedroom has been slept in. It looks like he was looking for something to wear, a lot of the dressers and closets look sort of messed up.” Agent Delgado reported to Flores.

Another agent came down with some clothing. “Fifty bucks says these are his jeans and that jarhead’s sweat jacket.”

“Get those dogs working again outside. See if they can pick up a trail leaving here!” Flores

commanded.

The dogs were moved around the area surrounding the house and soon picked up a different trail. A block away they paused briefly by the post box and then continued on to the house where the motor home had been parked. The dogs milled around aimlessly in the driveway as the agents pounded on the house's front door.

An elderly neighbor approached the team. "They left early this morning in their motor home, don't know where they were headed though."

"Did you see them leave?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Anyone with them you didn't recognize?"

"No, just the two kids, the man and his wife."

"Shit!"

The agents searched the house, finding no trace of the boy. They did find the two bicycles that Adam had stashed in the bushes, a quick and dirty check for fingerprints showed that Adam had handled the

bikes.

Flores asked the neighbor about the motor home.

“How big is their RV?”

“Sucker’s huge, barely fits in the driveway.”

“Lots of storage space I guess?”

“Yeah, all along both sides, big bins with doors on ‘em.”

“Do the kids usually take their bikes along on these trips?”

“Let me think, yeah I once saw them stuffin ‘em in one of those bins, they take every damned thing they own when they go somewhere.”

“You wouldn’t know the license number on it would you?”

“Nope.”

Flores contacted the state motor vehicles agency and from there obtained a rundown on the occupant of the home. The number and types of vehicles owned and their plate numbers were soon forthcoming. A multi-state bulletin was put out to stop and detain the motor home. They were a bit late, as the RV in question was by now parked

beside the rural home of the children's grandparents. Back at Quantico, Agent O'Hare was too tired to do more than throw a chair against the wall.

The counterman eyed the scruffy looking kid looking up at him.

"Hi, I'd like a Super Natural Submarine and a chocolate shake please."

"That's about nine bucks kid, you have the money?"

"Oh, sure. Here." Adam handed the man one of his twenties.

"All right my man. Take a booth over there and I'll bring it to you."

"Okay, thanks."

Adam took the time waiting for the meal to look around for several square blocks. Nothing unusual seemed to be going on, he had no feeling that anyone had recognized him. None of the other customers in the deli seemed to be taking any special notice of him. The arrival of the food

occupied Adam's attention for the next half hour. His first substantial meal in several days made things seem a bit rosier.

"I need some better clothes and stuff," He thought some shopping was next on his agenda.

Adam sat out from the deli in no particular direction, after a while he found a small park and sat down on a secluded bench for some serious scouting of the city. About a mile away he spotted a Wal-Mart. "Wally World! One stop shopping!" Ranging outward he spotted an airport. The sign said "Yeager Airport," it seemed to have all sorts of mixed commercial and private aircraft, even a few air guard aircraft.

"Flying would get me very far and very fast, tough to get aboard though." He then came upon an airport business on the outskirts of the field, "Custom Ultra lights." Now there was a thought. How tough could it be to fly one of those kites? "I've handled the controls of a half dozen jets, and the C-17. I wonder what the range of an ultra light

is?” Adam was doing some fast thinking.

“First things first. On to Wally World!” Adam dumped his makeshift survival pack and sleeping bag in a park trashcan. He could get new stuff at the discount palace. An urgent side trip to the park’s rest room was in order first. Inside it wasn’t a total disaster, the boy found a semi-presentable stall, entered and closed the door. After finishing, Adam went to wash his hands when a well-dressed man entered the rest room.

“Uh Oh.” Adam had a bad feeling about this guy. His feelings were always spot-on.

“Hi kid, haven’t seen you around here before,” the creep began.

“Just passing through.” Adam speeded up his hand washing.

“You’re just about the cutest kid I think I’ve ever seen.”

“Uh, okay.”

“Would you like me to make you feel really good?”

“What do you mean?”

“Just let me show you for a minute, I can tell you have just the nicest body.”

Thud!

Adam stepped gingerly over the now unconscious form as he quickly left the rest room.

“Pervert!” Adam thought in total disgust.

O’Hare was talking to Director Crispin.

“We think the family may have been headed to Charleston to visit the kid’s grandparents, we have two choppers on the way there now.”

“Any indication they were helping the boy intentionally?” Crispin asked.

“No, we think he stowed away in one of the storage compartments under the RV.”

“If the motor home turns out positive, alert the police in Charleston, but not before.”

“Yes sir. We’ll run him down sooner or later, he’s too recognizable to stay hidden very long.”

“He’s done a pretty good job so far. Make it sooner.”

Adam decided a cart was in order at the Wal-Mart. In the boys clothing department he put two pair of blue jeans, a six pack each of briefs and undershirts. A pair of long underwear, two sweat shirts, and a pack of sweat socks filled out his clothing needs. Also one ski mask for cold weather, and some insulated gloves. A top of the line down filled jacket would replace the oversized coat he now wore.

In the sporting goods department a new and very compact cold-weather sleeping bag, a tiny one-man tent, back packing stove, water bottle, assorted odds and ends. Finally, a boy sized backpack capable of carrying all of the junk he had amassed (hopefully). As an afterthought, four freeze-dried meals went into the cart. On the way to the check out area he grabbed a miniature AM/FM radio.

“Geez, I’ll have to carry all of this junk!” He hoped

he hadn't outshopped his capabilities as a beast of burden.

At the check out counter the clerk looked at the boy's expensive cart full.

"Son, how were you going to pay for all this?" She asked.

"My dad gave me some cash and told me to get everything he had on the list." Adam replied like the good and obedient son.

"All right then, put it all on the belt."

The scanner did a great deal of beeping and finally came up with an amount, plus tax.

"That'll be \$432.56 son." The clerk eyed him suspiciously.

Adam peeled off twenty-two bills and handed them to the relieved clerk. She then cheerfully gave him his change and bagged up his purchases for him.

"You have a nice day son!" She chirped.

"Thanks, you too." Adam started for the exit with his full cart.

"Oh son!" The clerk called after him.

"Ma'am?" Adam turned in a slight panic.

“Do I know you?”

“Oh, I don’t think so, we’re just stopping off here on our way to Maine.”

“Okay, have a good trip.”

“Thanks.”

Out the door.

“Now where do I change clothes and get the pack ready?” Adam asked himself.

Adam pushed the cart around to the side of the enormous building, looking for some sort of private place. Towards the rear of the building was a structure that housed transformers and electrical panels for the store. It also had a locked door. Making sure that no one was watching him, the boy unlocked the room and looked in, there was space to change and prepare the backpack. He tossed in all of his purchases and shoved the cart out into the parking area. Inside he locked the door and flicked on the overhead light to begin organizing his purchases.

A change of clothes came first; he stripped of his

makeshift outer clothing and took stock of his inventory. The new and clean clothing felt nice as he quickly dressed. The long underwear went over his briefs and T-shirt; the weather was turning much colder. The new jeans fit pretty well, as did the sweatshirt and down filled coat. He kept on the cap and sunglasses that helped with his black hair disguise. The backpack was soon stuffed and closed up, the straps adjusted.

“Not too heavy, if you’re a mule.” Adam observed as he hefted the backpack. “Now all I need to do is make it to the airport.”

The two FBI helicopters sat in the field next to the farmhouse where the motor home was parked. Mr. Kendall was trying to explain that the lock on the storage compartment had been broken when they left in the morning.

“We put the bikes in there last night and locked it. This morning we went to put some more crap in and the lock wouldn’t budge, I figured I could open it here. When we pulled up here the lock was open and the bikes were gone. There’s two holes in the

back of the compartment too.”

Flores examined the distorted lock and the two melted looking holes in the bin and turned to the agent next to him. “He was in here. Notify O’Hare.”

Adam finally decided that the safest way to the airport was simply to walk. Using side streets, alleys, fields, and railroad right of ways, the boy finally had his objective in sight. It was nearing sunset as he lay in a thicket of small trees studying the airport, most especially the building that housed Custom Ultra lights.

There were three of the small aircraft that appeared to be ready for flight. One was an open air, two-seated affair that promised to freeze the pilot to death in short order. One was something that resembled a small fighter aircraft with barely room for a pilot, it looked too hard to control to the boy. The third seemed just about right. The craft had two seats, one behind the other, a flimsy but closed cockpit, and large fat tires that shouldn’t be too fussy about what they landed on. The three craft sat in a small hanger that served as a

showroom and maintenance area. There were three people still in the building; Adam hoped that they didn't plan on working too late. This seemed a good time for a nap, it had been a long day and the night promised to be much longer.

“We think it's likely that he got out somewhere in the downtown Charleston area, the motor home was stopped at lights there several times.” O'Hare said.

“I think it's time we went public on this, use the mental breakdown story. Be sympathetic towards the boy, stress that he may be a danger to himself, etc.” Crispin suggested.

“Very well, I'll hold a brief press conference in one hour and announce a nationwide search for the boy, concentrating in West Virginia for the time being. None of this would be necessary if either of you had shown even a small level of competency in handling one small boy!” Packard seemed disgusted with the both of them; then again he was disgusted with most people.

Adam's nap lasted about two hours before the evening's chill stirred him into action. The boy did a sweep of the surrounding area and the airport, there didn't seem to be any unusual activity. The ultra light business was deserted now, only a dim light left on in the office. To get to the building, Adam would have to cross the busy main access road to the airport and go through the chain link fence surrounding the entire facility.

"Feet don't fail me now!" Adam thought as he dashed across the road and into the dry drainage ditch that ran alongside of it. After waiting for passing autos to clear, the boy was again up and running, hardly slowing as he moved through the break in the fence he created, When he had reached the shadows of the building, he turned and concentrated on repairing the boy sized opening in the wire fence. Adam spent a few moments checking for alarm systems, and to his surprise discovered there weren't any.

“Must be a low crime area, or they’re on a tight budget.” Adam thought.

The dead bolt clicked back and Adam was inside the dark, quiet hanger. For the first time the boy had some serious doubts about the wisdom of what he was about to undertake. The ultra light aircraft, while small, seemed much larger up close. The aircraft that he had chosen had a for sale sign and description sheet taped to the thin Plexiglas canopy. “T-Bird/Rotax 582 with electric start, modified cockpit-fully enclosed, high flotation tires, brakes. Instruments: compass- alt-eng temp-oil press-dual fuel tanks for extended range. \$12,500. Lessons included.

“Yikes! Now I’m into grand theft ultra light!” Adam said to himself.

Lying on the front seat was an owner’s maintenance manual. Adam opened the flimsy side door and brought the slim book over to the light to read. Skimming quickly through the manual, Adam learned where to check and add oil, fueling

procedures, starting procedures, shutdown procedures.

“Lot’s of procedures for so little aircraft.” He thought.

After two hours of following the instructions in the manual, Adam had succeeded in fueling both tanks, checking the battery charge and oil level, and generally going over the control surfaces and cables. He stuck his backpack in the back seat and belted it down. The night was clear and cold, so Adam dressed as warmly as his wardrobe allowed. He opened and spread the sleeping bag on the front seat to use as a sort of a blanket if things got really uncomfortable. After ‘borrowing’ a flashlight from one of the workbenches, Adam decided that now was the time.

“This is going to be real interesting, I hope it turns out better than motor biking with Freddie.” He thought.

Adam climbed into the tiny cockpit and strapped himself in as tightly as possible. After closing the

canopy, he went through the engine start procedure and jabbed the start button. The small engine instantly roared into life, the noise in the closed hanger was deafening. After the engine settled into a smooth buzz, Adam eased the throttle back to idle. Using his somewhat rattled senses the boy scanned the surround area, both on the ground and in the air. There was a 737 on final approach to the main runway, there didn't seem to be anyone on the ground near the ultra light building. Adam caused the switch controlling the hanger doors to move to the 'up' position and in a moment the way out was clear.

"Time to fly." Adam said to himself as he released the brakes.

The White House Press Room

"Good evening folks, I'm afraid I have some very distressing news." Began the President.

"For the last several weeks, that extraordinary

young man, Adam Valentine, to whom this country owes so very much, has been suffering from what his doctors call “a form of paranoia and sensory overload” caused by his increasing psychic sensitivity. This mental breakdown is especially tragic in one so young and whose heroic services to his country have saved so many lives.”

“While at the medical facility at Quantico, Adam became violent and refused a course of treatment. He then ran from the building before he could be restrained. Using his amazing abilities, the boy has somehow managed to flee the area entirely and is at this moment thought to be somewhere in the vicinity of Charleston, West Virginia where an intensive search is now underway. It is thought that the boy may pose a danger to himself, and could conceivably cause harm to others.”

“I would ask that anyone seeing Adam not approach him, but instead contact your local law enforcement authorities. Let us all pray for the safe return of this very special and brave child.”

Pandemonium.

The small buzz-kite rolled smoothly out of its darkened hanger as Adam let off the brakes and opened up the throttle just a small amount. While experimenting with the steering the boy lined the craft up on the taxiway in front of the row of small hangers and buildings. Using the main runway for a takeoff was dangerous and unnecessary; the ultra light could lift off after a roll of only a few hundred feet. Adam had decided to turn west immediately after take off to avoid as much of the airport as possible.

Adam again released the brakes and shoved the throttle to full power. Things happened very quickly. As the speed of the small aircraft rapidly increased Adam decided to just let it fly itself off the taxiway and to keep his control inputs small and conservative. Almost at the same time, the tail lifted up and then the front wheels cleared the pavement.

Airborne! Adam pulled the stick back a bit to increase the rate of climb while putting the craft into a slow left turn toward the west. It seemed pretty scary flying at night at low altitude and with no anti-collision lights. The boy's special senses more than made up for the lack of radar or night vision ability that the situation would normally require. At five hundred feet, he leveled the aircraft off and reduced the power setting to what seemed about right for easy cruising. The cockpit wasn't totally wind tight but conditions inside were quite bearable. The boy looked down at the brightly lit streets and businesses of the downtown area as they passed below as his airspeed indicator indicated a steady seventy miles per hour, not exactly an F-22!

"So far, so good. Better keep as low as I can, under the radar clutter. If I can make two-hundred miles tonight and find a place to stash this thing for tomorrow it'll only take me forever to get anywhere," he thought, already having second thoughts about the wisdom of all of this.

Adam's departure hadn't gone without some

notice. A security guard driving the perimeter road noticed the illegal night takeoff of the ultra light and notified the tower. After arriving at the open hanger it seemed obvious that some one had made off with one of the small aircraft, the guard then called the Charleston police.

In the first hours following the press conference about Adam there were 476 sightings, tips, reports, and rumors of the boy's whereabouts. Any young blond boy in the vicinity of West Virginia who happened to be outside that evening ran the risk of being snatched off the street and driven down to the local police station for fingerprint identification. A number of irate parents threatened lawsuits as they reclaimed their frightened sons. The media interviewed one boy who bore a striking resemblance to Adam about his treatment. He replied that "I kept telling them my name was Danny Meyers and where I lived, but they wouldn't listen!"

In Los Angeles Agents Parker and Mother Harper were between outrage and disbelief.

“Paranoia my ass! That boy’s the sanest person I’ve ever met! What kind of shit are they up to, anyway?” Parker exclaimed.

“I didn’t like any of those new people, especially O’Hare. Adam didn’t like any of them either, and he always knows what people are really like.” Added Harper.

“What can we do?” Her husband asked.

“I’m going to make some phone calls, from a pay phone.”

“You think they might bug our home phone?”

“The Bureau is rotting from the top down, nothing they do would surprise me anymore.”

“I just keep thinking of that poor boy on his own somewhere, he just doesn’t deserve this sort of thing. He does his best and it always winds up being thrown back in his face!” Harper was crying by now.

“We’ve talked about resigning from the Bureau before, as far as I’m concerned this just about decides it for me.”

The number of small country roads, rivers, and streams that crisscrossed this part of the country amazed Adam. He was fairly sure that he was now over Kentucky. The terrain was a combination of lumpy farmland, wooded hills, and forested mountains. Not too many landing places down there. Taking off in one of these contraptions was starting to seem like a worse idea by the minute. He estimated that he might have come between seventy-five and one hundred miles so far. Several times he had to waste fuel and time climbing over ranges of high hills and even mountains to keep heading in a westerly direction. The odds on finding a good landing spot where the ultra light could be hidden and fueled seemed slimmer and slimmer.

Flying the ultra light was proving easy though, there was little turbulence and the night was mostly clear, the craft was also inherently stable and forgiving of mistakes. As an experiment, Adam tried pushing the small craft along with his TK ability. He found that he could throttle back to an idle and still

maintain a decent flight speed, but it was difficult to concentrate for the long periods needed to make it practical over the long term. It would help in a pinch though if fuel became critical. As he glanced below a long freight train was winding its way through the hills, he began to have some serious thoughts about switching his mode of transportation.

Back at the Yeager Airport the detectives were examining the scene of the unusual theft.

“There’s absolutely no sign of a break in, are you sure you locked up and that no one else has a key?” Asked Detective Paxton.

“Yes! The people working here with me are all family too.” Responded the owner of the ultra light business.

Paxton was in the process of dusting a gas can for prints while asking question. There were what appeared to be a child's prints on the can.

“Any kids ever hang around here?” Paxton asked.

“No, never. Too many insurance hassles to allow that.”

“Well, these are either a kid’s fingerprints, or a

very small adult's."

"Maybe Adam Valentine stole my plane!" The owner joked.

Detective Paxton lifted several of the prints with clear tape and put them on a white card. He asked one of the patrolmen present to bring him the FBI sheet on Adam from the patrol car; it had a blowup of the boy's prints on it. When Paxton compared the prints with a magnifier he whistled softly and turned to the business owner.

"You said that maybe Adam Valentine stole your plane?"

"I was joking, what are you saying?"

"Well, apparently he did steal your airplane."

"Holy shit!"

"My thoughts exactly."

Near Pineville Kentucky

Things were reaching a decision point. Fuel was getting low, Adam was getting very tired, and a landing place was in sight. There was a small lake,

a road, railroad tracks, and then a small flat meadow. The area seemed deserted this late at night, Adam scanned the area for people and found none except for the rare motorist on the nearby two lane.

“Looks like this is the place.” Adam decided as he throttled back and began descending toward the east end of the meadow. He had decided to leave the engine running when he landed, unload his backpack, and use his TK abilities to remotely fly the craft into the middle of the nearby lake.

Throttled back to idle, the small aircraft touched down and bounced once. The roll out was rather bumpy, but Adam soon managed to brake to smooth halt. Moving as quickly as he could, the boy tossed his backpack clear of the craft and fastened both doors. Using a small pocketknife he had snagged at the hanger he poked several holes in the nearly empty plastic gas tanks and unscrewed their fill caps. The tank’s buoyancy might otherwise serve to keep the light craft afloat and visible.

Adam stood back from the craft and with a pang of regret and more than a little guilt caused the throttle to move all the way forward. The now very light ultra light accelerated swiftly and seemed to leap onto the air. It very nearly stalled nose up due to its unloaded condition and Adam's over-controlling. After several heart stopping seconds it was fairly level again and headed toward the small lake across the railroad tracks. When Adam judged that it was near the middle of the body of water, he nosed the craft over and dived it vertically into the lake. The impact was not very spectacular, just a muffled splash and the end to the engine's noise. The tiny aircraft floated upside down for several minutes before slowly disappearing under the inky water.

Adam was too tired to mourn its loss for very long so he then shouldered his backpack and moved off to the northwest and the safety of the wooded hills. After about a mile he came to a sign that said "Pine Mountain State Resort Park."

"Cool. There should be drinking water and stuff,

shouldn't be many people around this time of year either." He decided.

"He stole a what?" Director Crispin thought he had misheard.

"An airplane. An ultra light actually." O'Hare was growing weary of these damned phone calls.

"How in the hell could he do that? Where did he learn how to fly?"

"It seems he's always been an aircraft buff, he's spent a lot of time with the pilots of the C-17. He's handled the controls of a number of aircraft, including the F-22, and F-15. Ultra lights are supposedly very easy to fly, at least most of them."

"Sonofabitch! How far can he get in that thing?"

"Maybe two hundred miles, it had an extra fuel tank."

"It ought to be easy to spot on the ground! I'll get the President to have Langley re-task a satellite. Spot that plane and the boy shouldn't be too far."

"Yes sir, but that's still a lot of area to cover, we

don't really know what direction he took from Charleston."

"I'm betting he's headed west, toward Idaho maybe, that's where he's from originally." Crispin concluded.

Okinawa

The Armed Forces Radio and Television Service carried the news story while the Richters were about to have dinner.

"This sounds so totally wrong! There's got to be more to this than what they're giving out!" Colonel Richter was hopping mad.

"That boy had one bad experience, he was over it the next day. He's not crazy, I know he's not!" Mrs. Richter was near tears.

"It's those new FBI creeps! Adam said they were like a bunch of spiders!" Freddie knew his friend too well to believe what the television was saying. Hanna had the same look in her eyes that her father

did, fury.

“I’ll call General Hartman, he should know something.” Colonel Richter decided.

Adam was so very bone tired by the time he had pitched his small one-man tent in the dark and unrolled the sleeping bag. He had decided on an isolated spot deep in the woods away from any trails and the designated campsites. The dark brown tent was back under some thick pines trees and up against a large rock outcropping; only a close ground search would be able to locate it. There were patches of snow on the ground in places, overhead the stars had been blotted out by thickening clouds. Adam didn’t care if asteroid impacts were imminent; he was asleep as soon as his sleeping bag was zipped up. Just before dawn it began to snow lightly, the wind picking up in anticipation of the approaching storm.

America awoke to the news reports and opinions about Adam and his theft of an aircraft. All of the talking heads agreed, this was not the boy who had worked for a good part of his life helping the FBI solve crimes and save lives. This was not the selfless lad who had averted a nuclear nightmare. Something must be terribly wrong with the poor child. The news programs offered an endless procession of psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychic 'experts' who offered their learned opinions as to what had caused the boy to suffer his apparent loss of reason. No one seemed to consider the possibility that Adam had good reason to run, that he was perfectly sane (mostly).

Short blonde males across the nation found it easier to just remain indoors and out of sight. Police departments everywhere were swamped with 'Adam sightings'. One poor boy in Maryland was carried into a police station bound hand and foot. His not too bright captor was convinced that he was the fugitive Adam.

The FBI then offered a reward of \$500,000 for information leading to the safe capture of the diminutive fugitive.

When Adam finally came to life his tent was pressing down on his legs and the world was entirely white. He needed to pee.

“So much for global warming!” Adam complained aloud as he struggled to extricate himself from his partially buried abode. “Camping out in the snow wasn’t in my escape plans.”

After thrashing around for an endless time in the snow he managed to finally repack his sleeping bag and tent, he then sat down on a still exposed rock to scan the area for a better, less exposed campsite. About a half mile to the west he spotted a rock formation with a large overhang, the area below the overhang was almost free of snow. Shouldering his pack, Adam set off through the foot deep new snow. He glanced at his watch, almost noon, but then his stomach had already told him that hours ago.

“Nanook of Kentucky!” Adam puffed as he

trudged toward his new campsite. “Should have got some snow boots!”

The new spot promised better protection from snow, wind, and rain. The ground was dry and firm under the rock overhang; a few pine branches could effectively hide his tent. He again erected his small shelter and rolled out the bag inside it.

Breakfast/Lunch was now the next priority.

The compact stove’s lid served as the cooking pot when you attached the clip-on wire handle. Soon the butane flame was melting some snow for the freeze-dried stew he had bought at Wally World.

“Let’s see, empty contents into boiling water, stir, allow to stand five minutes, eat.” Adam read the meal pouch’s instructions with some doubts about the results. There was even a small packet of hot chocolate included as an introductory offer.

“Mrs. Richter would not approve but freeze dried stew is much better than no freeze dried stew.”

Adam finished it all and then made the hot chocolate, which was actually pretty good.

The sun was making brief appearances, he perched himself on an exposed log with his hot chocolate and turned on the small radio to search for any news.

“....strong late winter storm has hindered search efforts today in the hunt for Adam Valentine. So far there has been no trace of the small aircraft the boy allegedly stole, there are fears that he may have crashed in the worsening weather last night. National guard helicopters are standing by to aid in the search as soon as the weather permits. There continues to be numerous reports of sightings of the boy, but none have as of yet proved to be anything more than false alarms. In a related matter, two FBI agents who until recently were members of the Special Team have resigned from the FBI to protest what they say is a “massive cover-up of the mistreatment of Adam under the new administration.” The agents, identified as a married couple, stated that Adam was “one of the sanest people that they have ever known.” No response has been forthcoming from the FBI about the

charges made by the ex-agents.”

“Parker and Mother Harper! Somebody’s on my side!” Adam felt like crying when he thought of being with them. When he thought about where he was now.

“Now where do I go from here? How often do the trains run through here? How fast are they moving when they do? What do they carry? Where do they go?” Lots of questions to answer. Adam decided to rest where he was for a day or two, check out the surrounding area and keep tabs on the railway traffic. Most important was the need to avoid all contact with people; the whole country was going nuts looking for him.

The White House

Director Crispin and a haggard looking Agent O’Hare were alone in the oval office with the President.

“We have confirmation that the boy bought some camping equipment and clothing at the Wal-Mart in Charleston. He spent over four-hundred dollars there.” O’Hare explained.

“Where did he get the money?” Asked Packard.

“From an ATM we think. A machine in Charleston had its cameras disconnected, the wires seemed melted and it was short a thousand bucks.”

“Are you saying he can just walk up to any ATM in the country and get money, how does he do that?”

“His telekinetic abilities would make it even easier than using a card.”

“And no trace of the transaction?”

“Only the missing money.”

“Well wonderful! Any other little tricks he can pull off?” Packard snapped.

“The possibilities are endless. Locks of any sort are useless, likewise alarm systems. He can disable a vehicle or aircraft with just a thought. He can render people unconscious at will, if he was the violent type he could kill just as easily.” Crispin explained.

“Do you think he would kill?”

“Very doubtful, he’s always avoided hurting people.”

“You’ve painted a picture of someone who could be nearly impossible to catch.”

“Yes Mr. President, he’s going to be damned hard to corner.”

Adam ventured away from his hidden campsite to climb a bluff that overlooked a good part of the countryside, and most especially, the railroad tracks. During the two hours he kept watch only a single train made up almost entirely of auto carriers passed by. The rail cars were covered with protective steel mesh and sheeting to prevent loss from vandalism and theft. There seemed to be large steel doors at each end of the rail cars, allowing the vehicles inside to be driven on and off. Adam decided that it would be easier for him to make a hole in the protective mesh than to try moving the heavy doors. The speed of the train was the big problem; it was moving at least sixty miles per hour.

There were, however, signal lights a short distance up the track used by the railroad to control the movements of the trains.

“A red light means stop. So they’ll get a red light and I hop on,” Adam decided. “I hope they’ll be carrying Cadillac’s or something nice to ride in.”

Honolulu

Agent Monroe submitted his resignation to the newly appointed SAIC of the Honolulu field office. In a voice loud enough for the other agents in the office to hear he spelled out his reasons for resigning.

“The Bureau has been my life for the last twenty years, but no more! I will not be a part of what is becoming the White House’s private police force. I know Adam too well to ever swallow that line of total bullshit that Crispin has been spooning out about him. If he made a run for it, he had a damned good

reason to! If I can help him in any way to stay out of Crispin's slimy reach, then I'll damned well do it!"

To the consternation of the new SAIC a number of the agents stood and applauded Monroe as he stalked out of the office.

Adam spent that evening listening to the radio and organizing his few possessions for boarding the hoped for train the next day. He would have one freeze dried meal left and little else in the way of food. His one water bottle wouldn't be sufficient for a prolonged trip; some way to refill it along the way would have to be worked out.

"Maybe a flying water bottle when the train is near a lake or something, I can boil the water to make it safe to drink."

He thought.

It seemed possible.

Before turning in for the night Adam did a precautionary scan of the area for miles around. No

people, not even many animals about. The frigid temperature outside the tiny tent made him very glad that he had bought the best sleeping bag that Wally World had to offer. He also felt so very alone.

The morning was crystal clear and even colder than the night, hot chocolate had to suffice as the boy's breakfast. Adam tightly rolled and packed his sleeping bag and tent and with a quick scan of the area he set off towards the south and the railroad tracks. Moving carefully and keeping away from open areas, and most importantly stopping often to scan for people, he made it to the west side of the railway around ten that morning. A clump of boulders and some brush near the tracks made a good hiding place that offered a view of the distant signal light. He spent a good twenty minutes studying the inner workings of the control box on the light. It looked like a red signal would probably also signal the central control facility so Adam decided not to test his ability to trip the light, no sense in having a repair crew show up.

Now if the right kind of train would just show up!
He extended his senses for miles down the tracks.
Nothing showing yet so he curled up to conserve
warmth and dozed for nearly an hour.

Adam jerked awake with the feeling that
something was happening. He looked far down the
tracks and sensed the approaching train, too far
away yet to tell what sort it was. "Don't trip the light
yet!" He told himself as he tensed for the coming
events.

The train was over a mile long; it carried nothing
but dusty black coal.

"Criminy! What do they do with all of that crap?"
Adam asked himself.

The coal cars seemed to take forever to pass.

Adam expected a caboose with someone in it to be
at the end, but there was only a red light attached to
the last coal car.

"I hope the car carrier trains are set up the same
way, less chance of being spotted."

Adam did notice that he was beginning to talk to himself more these days.

By late afternoon it seemed that the day was going to be a total waste, a hungry night was probably ahead. Adam was cold, tired, hungry, and cramped from huddling next to the tracks all day. He had about decided to try again tomorrow, but first he did one more scan down the tracks. There.....just at the edge of his senses, another train!

“Please please please let it be a car carrier!” He prayed.

It was.

Adam had read somewhere that a big train took a very long distance to come to a stop if it was moving at any speed. When the locomotive was about a half mile away he triggered the red signal light. At first nothing seemed to be happening, but then his ears detected a thin screeching sound that indicated the train was braking and breaking hard. On board the lead locomotive the engineer began using language that he had promised himself he wouldn't

use again since he had found Jesus.

This train had a caboose, perhaps because of the value of its cargo. Adam kept watch on both the front and back ends of the train as it came to a clanking halt beside him. When it finally stopped he was about two thirds of the way back from the two locomotives pulling it. Adam pulled on his backpack and cinched up the straps. When he sensed that the people in the locomotive and the caboose were looking elsewhere he darted in between the two nearest cars. This was not Amtrak; Adam had to jump up to reach the lower rungs of the steel ladder. By sheer will and some TK he was finally able to get his right foot onto the lower rung. In a few seconds he was up to the lower deck of the auto carrier, when he reached the steel mesh part of the large door he made his own private entrance. Once inside he quickly repaired the mesh so that only a close examination would reveal any defect. That done he took stock of the cargo.

Minivans.

Not Cadillac's but a lot more roomy.

The White House

“We’ve used up six months worth of maneuvering fuel on two KH-14’s to survey the entire flight range of that ultra light! We have nothing at all to report.” The head of the Office of Strategic Reconnaissance was tired and not in the mood to be bullied by anyone.

“You have the most sophisticated surveillance system on the planet! Are you telling me that you can’t find one damned airplane?” Packard was not impressed.

“I’m telling you that we haven’t turned up the aircraft, it is not visible. What else do you require, Mr. President?”

“Results, Godammit!” Click.

The President tended to hang up on people more and more these days.

Black minivans, green minivans, red white and blue minivans. Adam climbed up to the second deck of the carrier and got into a metallic red kid hauler. He was cold and tired and hungry as he took off the backpack and dumped it on the cargo space behind the rear seat. Adam opened two windows slightly and curled up on the carpeted floor of the vehicle. As he rested, the train jerked and bumped and began to move forward.

“On the road again,” Adam sang slightly (a lot) off key.

He could play the piano beautifully, singing was another matter.

The train was up to speed and moving along at about seventy miles per hour when the obvious finally dawned on Adam.

“Turn on the stupid damn engine and use the heater!”

There was only about a quarter of a tank of gas in the minivan but that was plenty to warm up the

engine and operate the heater for a long while. The moving train carried away the exhaust fumes.

After a time Adam was able to take off his down coat and revel in the toasty warmth, the first he had felt in days. He set up the small backpack stove on the cargo floor of the van and carefully boiled most of his water supply. In went the freeze dried turkey and noodles. It seemed almost the best meal he had ever had until he thought of Mrs. Richter and the loving home she kept at Quantico. Hunger does indeed produce the best of all sauces.

After consuming everything but the plastic bags that the meal came in he turned on the vehicle's radio and found an AM station that wasn't playing some hillbilly lament. Reception wasn't very good in the metal-shielded rail car.

The national talk show host was fielding callers comments about what had happened to Adam and where he might be. It seemed that most of the callers displayed a healthy distrust of the

government in general, and the FBI in particular. Life didn't seem quite so hopeless as the sun sat, sleep became a welcome refuge from the new realities.

Dawn found Adam in his usual coma, the train was moving into northern Texas. The condition of his bladder finally stirred the boy into a state resembling consciousness.

"Geez! Why don't they put bathrooms in these dorky things?" The minivan didn't have that plumbing option listed on the window sticker.

Adam fumbled his way out of the vehicle, unzipped, and then let fly through the steel mesh covering the side of the carrier. The countryside seemed flat and brown, no place to hide out there. "No one to get pissed on."

"Where the heck am I?" He asked aloud. It occurred to him to see if the invoice things on the van windows indicated any destinations.

"Mission Chevrolet and Nissan, Los Angeles," he read. "There must be some sort of distribution place

before that, probably in California somewhere.” He thought about his situation for a few moments. “I’ll starve, or at least suffer horribly.” He still had no real destination in mind. A permanent sort of hiding place would have to be found, and very soon.

The letters that Adam had mailed before beginning his odyssey began arriving at their destinations. The letters to Monroe and the Parker’s were routinely forwarded by the FBI mail clerks to their home addresses, apparently they hadn’t yet thought to intercept their mail. Agent Steinmetz in Denver was the first to read the boy’s quick note.

He knew the letter was truly from Adam when he recognized the neat handwriting on the envelope; Mister T had been a real stickler about good handwriting. When he had finished reading and then re-reading the short letter he carefully folded it and put it in his suit’s breast pocket. Steinmetz then

walked into his SAIC's office, threw his ID and pistol onto the woman's desk and told her to perform an unlikely solo sexual act. This was his last action as an employee of the government, ever.

Steinmetz's next move was to visit the local network affiliates and present them with the letter along with his views on what the Bureau was becoming. Despite the contrary opinions of several well qualified handwriting experts the government declared the letter to be a fake and denounced Steinmetz as an opportunist looking to cash in on his past association with Adam.

“Amarillo. Now what the hell is in Amarillo?”
Adam wondered aloud.

The train had slowed to a crawl as it left the empty prairie for the modest urban congestion of the north Texas city. For nearly an hour it sat without moving, Adam 'saw' that they were changing crews

and doing some sort of maintenance on one of the big diesel's air hoses. The area where the train had stopped didn't look too promising for a quick food and water hunt. Adam did spot a water faucet about one hundred yards away on the side of some sort of tractor repair business. He drank the small amount of remaining water in the plastic bottle and sent it flying out of a small hole he made in the mesh. Moving at an astonishing speed just off the ground the bottle was quickly under the faucet. Adam caused the handle on the faucet to turn and allowed the water to run for a while before filling the bottle. In a flash the bottle was back inside the rail car where he filled the small pot on the camp stove, then he repeated the entire process to refill the bottle.

“Now I have water, just nothing to eat.”

Adam spotted a lean looking jack rabbit loping across the tracks, the idea of killing it and dealing with the blood and guts of the situation made him feel a good deal less hungry. In truth, he still thought of rabbits as being bunnies. “Could I kill a

cow? I like hamburgers,” he wondered aloud.
Not likely.

The train gave an abrupt and bang-noisy jerk and then another as it began to once more move forward. Adam kept watch for any sort of food opportunities and was about to give up when he spotted a distant McDonalds. “Hot damn!” He exclaimed as he focused in on the fast food restaurant. “The drive up window!”

The harried window attendant started to hand a paper bag full of artery plugs to the distracted driver in the noisy, kid filled station wagon. For some odd reason the bag slipped out of her grasp and fell toward the ground next to the auto. The attendant leaned out and looked down expecting to see spilled burgers and fries to clean up, instead there was nothing. “Must have rolled under the car,” she thought.

“Manager!” When in doubt, pass the buck upwards.

In truth the bag did go under the car, then it went

through some decorative shrubbery, then straight up at about two-hundred miles an hour. Sixty seconds later Adam was inspecting the contents of the somewhat wind tattered bag.

“Geez! Four Big Mac’s, four fries, two fruit pies! I’m saved!” He managed to get on the outside of two of the hamburgers and one of the fries, the rest he wrapped back up in the oily bag.

“Too bad there’s no fridge in these dorkmobiles.” He paused a moment, then he remembered a car commercial he had once seen on TV. Adam went up and down the collection of minivans looking at the option lists on each window.

“Ha!” The sticker read: “Chilled glove box-food storage.” He had to run the engine and air conditioner to make the dingus work, but it soon had the small compartment icy cold. He put the food inside and let the engine run for another half an hour. “That ought to keep them from spoiling for quite a while,” he decided. A full stomach always improved one’s outlook on life. Unless you’re on

death row.

The White House

“The letters were mailed somewhere near where he got that motor home.” Crispin explained to the President.

“How many did he send?” Packard asked.

“No way to know for sure, they were printed out on a laser printer, maybe a dozen or so.”

“Well that’s just great! Now more of the damned things will be popping up on every fucking news program for weeks!”

“We should just keep with the hoax spin,” Crispin offered.

“We should just find that shitty little brat! He makes all look like a bunch of fools! He’s becoming too much of a liability, we may need to rethink his value to our plans.”

“Meaning, sir?”

“Meaning we may be better off with him out of the

picture, do I have to write it on the wall?”

“No sir.”

Liabilities could be made to disappear, if you could find them.

“Albuquerque,” Adam marveled over the convoluted spelling. “I bet the kids here are in high school before they learn to spell that.”

The weather here had warmed somewhat and Adam was more than ready to give up his life on the rails, at least for the time being. He cleaned up all traces that he had been in the minivan, adding littering to his list of offenses as he tossed out his small bag of trash. The cold hamburgers and fries had proved mostly inedible; the fruit pies were in better condition and served for his simple dinner as night fell.

The train had slowed almost to a walk when he tossed his backpack clear and made the short jump

to the gravel roadbed. He seemed to be in some sort of freight yard, there were trucks backed up to loading docks transferring cargo from sidelined boxcars. There was also one hell of a thunderstorm beginning to brew.

“Better find some cover pretty quick or spend the night soaked.”

Sticking to the shadows, Adam worked his way around to the front of the cargo terminal, he was getting really tired of having to hide and sneak around all of the time. There was a medium sized canvas covered flatbed truck parked in front of the yard offices, the lettering on the door read “Taos Custom Marble.” No one seemed to be around so Adam tossed his backpack into the back of the truck and climbed in after it. In the dim light there were two large pieces of what looked like granite strapped to wooden pallets. The boy lay down out of sight of the truck’s rear window and hoped that the driver was finished loading. The thunderstorm then arrived with a real vengeance, the rain pounded on the thick canvas roof of the truck, it leaked in a few

places but Adam dodged the worst of it. The driver's side door finally opened and then slammed shut and after a moment the truck started up and began moving.

“Taos. I've heard of that, some sort of artsy tourist trap or something.” Adam was talking to himself again.

There wasn't anyone else to talk to.

Interlude

The truck drove out of the thunderstorm after about twenty minutes. The madly flapping canvas had finally torn and let in a deluge of water, by now Adam was soaked and starting to shiver. The driver pulled over at a rest stop and walked around to the back of the vehicle; Adam could hear her mumbling something about the damned canvas. She shined a flashlight up at the rip in the canvas, then down at the cargo. The cargo blinked at her and managed to chatter out a “Hi.”

“Hi yourself,” she asked with hard eyes, “do I need to call the cops on you?”

“No Ma’am, I’m sorry. I thought I was catching a dry ride but it turned out sort of wet. I’ll be going, I didn’t mean any harm.”

“Come on out of there and let me see you.”

“Yes Ma’am, just a sec, I have a backpack here.” Adam finally stood shivering in front of the woman

and started to put on his backpack.

“Hold on there, squirt! You’re soaked and your teeth are chattering! You get up in the front with me before you catch the plague or something!”

“Well, all right, thanks.” He felt too cold and miserable to run or do much else than agree, warmth was beckoning.

Adam pushed his backpack onto the floor in front of the passenger seat and climbed in after it, his rescuer also got in and then stared at him for a very long moment.

“Take off that wet coat and I’ll crank up the heater. I’ve seen you before somewhere, you live around Taos?”

“Uh, no Ma’am.” Adam had the sinking feeling that he was in the process of being recognized.

“Take off that baseball cap a second!” She ordered. There was no disobeying. He slowly removed the cap and tried not to look her in the eye.

“You’ve dyed your hair. I’m a sculptor and a sometimes sketch artist, I study people’s faces.

Honored to meet you Adam.”

“Oh Geez! Please don’t turn me in lady, just let me out and forget you ever saw me! I’m not the nut they say I am!”

“Relax squirt, I wouldn’t turn you in if you were Charles Manson. We better get going now, it’s a long drive to Taos.”

She started the engine, put the heater on roast and then pulled back onto the road. “I haven’t any use for the government, the FBI, President Pecker, or even the postman. You can stay with me, at least for now. My place is pretty isolated and my nearest neighbor won’t even say drop dead to me.”

“Thanks lady, that’s the best news I’ve heard in weeks.”

“My name’s Veronica Burns, the last friend I had called me Ronnie.”

“My best friend usually calls me Dork.”

“Dork and Ronnie. Doesn’t have the same ring to it as Butch and Sundance.”

“Maybe Bonnie and Clyde.” Adam smiled.

“Closer.”

Adam could sense that he was with a good person for a change. In a short while he was curled up on the truck's bench seat, still damp but warm in the overheated cab. The boy tried to stay awake and talk with the woman but eventually exhaustion caught up with him.

"Wake up squirt, we're there!"

"Huh?"

"Come alive, the sun will be up before you make it to the house!"

"Oh, Geez. Did I sleep all the way here?"

"Part ways. Come on now, I'm beat. We both can use a bed."

"Okay." The boy stumbled out of the truck and followed the woman. Adam didn't have a clear recollection of following Ronnie into the house/studio/workshop. He sleepily obeyed her instructions to undress, take a hot shower, and to get into the spare bed somewhere. They both slept till mid afternoon. For once Adam was the first person up. He had on a huge T-shirt, size XXXL

that came to his knees, and nothing else.

“Now how did I get this on, where are my clothes?”

He was in a small sort-of-bedroom in what seemed a jumble of living areas and work places. Adam wandered out into the main studio workshop. There were marble headstones, marble nudes, granite headstones, granite nudes. There were several easels, one held a landscape, the others were more nude figures, male and female. Against one wall was a large canvas covered something. Adam lifted up the tarp and peered underneath. More nudes.

“Geez! I feel like I’m in a petrified nudist colony!” Adam didn’t quite blush, he was much less of a prude these days.

He wandered over to the door and stuck his head outside; it was almost pleasantly warm for a change. Adam stepped out into the sunlight and took stock of the surrounding area, near and far. The building he had been in was the largest on the property; it

seemed more like a small industrial building than a house. There was a greenhouse and what looked like a small barn behind the main building. A creek ran through the property, part of it had been dammed up to form a small pond. Using his senses, Adam scanned the surrounding countryside. The nearest neighbor was about two miles away, an elderly man who was at the moment burning some trash in a metal barrel. This was a safe place, the lady inside was nice, and maybe he could find some peace here for a little while.

“Morning Squirt!” Ronnie was in a terry robe and floppy sandals.

Adam turned around from his reconnaissance to greet his new host.

“Hi, I was just looking around some. You’re an artist.”

“I like to think so. I supplement my income by doing headstones and memorials for cemeteries.”

“I was looking at the stuff in the workshop inside, I would say you’re an artist.”

“Thank you. How are you doing this afternoon?”

“I’m okay. Sort of hungry. All I have on is this big T-shirt.”

“You were very tired,” she replied, “I helped you into the shower and steered you to a bed.”

Adam felt a little silly that she must have seen him naked but it didn’t seem like a big deal. “Thanks, I guess I was pretty out of it.”

“You were. Don’t fret about it. Let’s have something to eat.”

“Great! I’m not fussy, if it doesn’t move I’ll eat it.”

“Sometimes it moves here, keep an eye open.”

Something to eat was scrambled eggs, hash browns, onions, green peppers, some bits of ham, and a few scraps of cheese, all wrapped in a large flour tortilla. There was orange juice and coffee. Adam even had some of the coffee.

“That was really good. Thanks Miss B... Ronnie.”

“You’re very kind. That’s the very best thing I make. I hope you can cook.”

“I can do spaghetti and I order a pretty good pizza.”

“They don’t deliver this far out, it’ll have to be

spaghetti.”

Adam was quite for a moment and then said
“You’ll be in deep doodoo if they find me here.”

“There’s no need for them to find you here.
What’s happening to this stupid country anyway?”

“President Packard is happening. Why do people
vote for someone like that?”

“They vote their wallets. If the economy is down,
they blame the incumbent. Darth Vader could have
been elected.”

“He was.”

“You ran away. Why?” She asked gently.

“They replaced the entire Special Team. I could
sort of understand that, with a new Director and
everything. The new people were just bad though, I
can tell when people are decent and when they’re
not. They didn’t know what they were doing either, I
could have lived with that. They would have caught
on eventually. I guess I wasn’t being too
cooperative by then, they tried to drug me during a
physical checkup. They said it was to calm me

down. That's when I ran. The Marines helped me get away, they're good people."

"My brother was a Marine," Ronnie spoke softly, "he died in Lebanon when I was little."

"I'm sorry. It's hard to lose some one."

"Yeah. Where do you go next, squirt?"

"I don't know what to do. I can't go back to Quantico, ever."

"What do you think they'll do?"

"They can pretty well do what they want to, they're my legal guardians, sort of."

Adam and Ronnie sat for a while without talking, then the boy began clearing the dishes and putting the cluttered kitchen space in order. The woman pitched in and washed while the boy dried. After a time there wasn't anything left to clean or put away.

"Come on, let's go for a quick dip. The water's cold enough to freeze a brass monkey, it clears the head." Ronnie directed Adam out the back door.

"What'll I swim in, all I have on is this overgrown T-shirt?"

"Haven't you ever been skinny-dipping, child?"

“Uh, no.”

“There’s always a first time. I’ll turn my head while you get in, you can do the same while I get in if you’re the bashful type.”

“Oh. Okay.”

The late winter sun was barely beating back the approaching chill of evening as they stood by the small rocky pond. Ronnie kept her word and turned her back as Adam pulled off his oversized T-shirt and stood a bit nervously, he was torn between his being nude and exposed and getting into the cold water. She was right, the water was freezing.

“Eeeeeyowwww! Geez!” Adam was in the water.

The boy saw that Ronnie was taking off her robe and quickly turned to face away as she plunged into the frigid water.

“I told you it was cold!” She said as they bobbed face to face.

“How do you do this?” Adam gasped.

“Briefly. Last one out does the dishes tomorrow!”

Adam had forgotten about any silly modesty as he and the woman exited the freezing water. He was aware of their nakedness, but somehow it didn't seem as important as getting out of the liquid nitrogen he had been submerged in. He quickly donned his T-shirt, and she her robe. They wasted no time in retreating towards the warm house.

"You did good," she said, "it took me two years to be able to jump into that ice water."

"I think some of my parts may have froze off."

"There's still some hot coffee on the stove," she suggested.

Adam beat her there.

"It gets cold here at night this time of year, your clothes are still in the dryer from last night, better dig them out and put them on."

"Uh, where's the dryer?"

"Off the workshop, side room."

Adam went off to find his clothes, there was a small laundry room where she said it was. The

clothes were clean and dry, but wrinkled from being left in the dryer. He quickly donned his garments and put on a pair of his socks. Adam felt really good; the icy dip had left him feeling very awake and tingly. He then wandered back into the small front living room to sit on the couch with Ronnie, all the way stopping to look at various works of art.

“What are you going to do with those big pieces of rock in the truck?”

“The small piece will be a headstone, the big one’s going to be a statue, part of a fountain on some rich jerk’s property.”

“They must weigh a ton. How do you move them?”

“Carefully and with my very ancient fork lift. You can help tomorrow.”

“Okay. What’s the statue going to be?”

“Not sure yet, the wife of the rich dude wants a figure of a child, the guy wants a female nude, they’re still fighting about it.”

“How do you decide what it will finally look like?”

“I usually do sketches of a model to start with, I

take measurements, maybe some photos.

Sometimes a small clay model for the client to approve. Then I start carving the rock.”

“Sounds like an awful lot of work.”

“It is, but when it turns out right it’s worth it.

Finding the right model is usually the hard part.

Most people don’t have a figure you’d want to see in stone. You’d make a pretty decent model.”

“Me, you’ve got to be kidding?”

“Not at all. You’re well formed, not fat or too skinny, good posture.”

“Doesn’t the model uh, like have to undress and everything?”

“Well of course. You can’t do a nude sketch or photo with clothes on.”

“I think I would be too embarrassed to pose like that.”

“Of what?”

“Well, you know, being naked and all.”

“That’s silly. I saw all of your anatomy last night when I was herding you into bed, and just now at the pond. You don’t have anything to be ashamed of, you have a perfect body for a boy your age,

maybe a bit short though.”

“Thanks a bunch. I guess I’d have to get used to the idea.”

“Not to worry. You’re my guest here, you don’t have to pay for your keep by taking your clothes off and being embarrassed to tears.”

“Thanks again, really... And thanks for letting me stay here, I hope it doesn’t get you in trouble.”

“I’m always in trouble, it makes life more interesting.”

“Can we turn on the TV for a little while, maybe they’ve declared me dead and will just forget about me.”

“Fat chance. Help me find the satellite remote.”

Adam glanced around the room before focusing in on the bookcase, which he pointed to.

“It’s over there,” he said, “I’ll get it.”

The remote did a neat arc as it crossed the room in front of the woman to land in the boy’s hand.

“Shit!” Ronnie looked like some one had exploded a firecracker behind her back.

“Sorry. I sort of spook people the first time they

see something like that.”

“I thought those stories about you were mostly a load!”

“A lot of them are, some aren’t. Do you still want me to hang around?”

“Of course! Don’t be silly. Just give me a minute.”

Adam took her hand and held it, she was trembling a little.

“I’m not a monster, I’m just sort of weird.”

“I know you’re not a monster, and I’m sort of weird myself.”

“Let’s watch the news, I’ll lay off scaring you silly for a while.”

“Good idea. Try Fox or CNN.”

“...than a week now since Adam ran away from the Marine Base at Quantico. No trace of the boy has shown up since the theft of the ultra light aircraft at the Charleston West Virginia airport. Authorities have expressed the opinion that the boy probably crashed in some remote location and may have perished.”

“Meanwhile, one more letter has surfaced alleged to be from the boy. This time the former team leader, Agent Monroe, came forth in Honolulu and declared that the government was mistreating the boy when he ran away. Monroe has also resigned from the FBI. The letter Monroe received was identical to the Steinmetz letter and the writing on the envelopes and the boy’s signatures were both the same handwriting, this according to independent experts. The FBI issued another statement declaring the letters part of an elaborate and cruel hoax.”

“Did you actually mail those letters?” Ronnie asked.

“Yeah, I ran them off on the computer in the house I broke into, I mailed them to a bunch of people.”

“They were going to drug you?”

“Yes. They said I needed to calm down.”

“Nazi bastards!”

“That description crossed my mind too.”

Neither Adam nor the woman spoke for a while as they watched the endless series of speculative stories on the news networks. Finally Adam asked some questions of his own.

“What about you, tell me your life story?”

“I got married while I was studying art in college. Got divorced two years later, no kids. I’m twenty-nine, my hair really is this shade of red. I have a temper, it’s worse since I quit smoking. I make a passable living selling various bits of art in the galleries in Taos. I do headstones and stuff during the off months.”

“Off months?”

“When the tourists ignore the town, they buy most of my work.”

“For what it’s worth, I think you’re very talented. Also not a bad looker.”

“Well thank you, twice. I keep most of the beer flab worked off wrestling with blocks of stone and hiking in the hills around here.”

“I had a can of beer in that house I broke into.”

“And?”

“My head hurt the next morning, and I never have headaches.”

“On one can of beer?”

“Yeah, I guess I’m not much of a drinker.”

“Stick to soda pop and milk, less complications.”

“Do you like hot chocolate?”

“Not too subtle of a hint there, boy. I’ll get some the next time we go into town.”

“The next time *you* go into town. I better stay clear of people.”

“Guess you’re right. Your face is way too easy to recognize.”

“I have some money, you’re welcome to it if you can use it.”

“You keep it, you probably had to save it up or something.”

“Actually, I stole it.”

“My God, I’ve taken in Dillinger! Where’d you get it?”

“ATM machine in Charleston, a thousand bucks.”

“You have an ATM card?”

“I didn’t want to use one. Remember the remote control that spooked you?”

“Yeah.”

“Telekinesis. I manipulated the gizmo’s inside the ATM, out came money.”

“Holy shit! Maybe I can get you to ‘manipulate’ my bank account.”

“Probably. ATM’s are easy though.”

“Any other crimes and misdemeanors I should know about?”

“I dunno, grand theft airplane, littering.”

“You really flew that thing, didn’t you?”

“It was pretty easy, actually.”

“They’ve been looking all over for it. How’d you hide it?”

“It’s at the bottom of a lake in Kentucky. Sort of a shame really, I hope it was insured.”

“Have you hurt anybody in this crime spree?” She asked quietly.

“Gosh no, except maybe that pervert in Charleston, I think he bumped his head on the floor.”

“Do tell me about the pervert.”

“I had to use the rest room in this park there. He came in and wanted to pull down my jeans....you know, to do sex stuff. So I put him to sleep.”

“To sleep?”

Adam explained the process to the very attentive woman.

“I guess I’d better be really polite and say please around you.”

“You’re safe. Feel free to kick my butt if the need arises.”

“It’s hard to imagine you getting out of line.”

“It’s not unheard of.”

Morning attacked Adam with its usual lack of mercy.

“Wake up squirt! Work to do, knuckles to skin, outta bed!” Ronnie was way too awake for seven AM.

“Geez lady, just call the feds and turn me in!”

“Come to think of it, there is that reward money.”

“What’s it up to now?”

“A cool ten million. Easy money.”

Adam sat up and made contact with the cold floor.

“Criminy! I may turn myself in.”

Breakfast was everyone for them selves. Adam located some shredded wheat and juice. He was

also developing a taste for coffee.

The both of them stood looking at the massive block of stone sitting in the truck.

“I thought it was granite, or something.”

“Nope. Pure white Italian marble, very pricey.”

“So how exactly do you get three thousand pounds of pure white Italian marble into the workshop?”

“First, the fork lift, if it starts. Then rollers, like the Egyptians and the pyramids.”

“I thought space aliens built the pyramids.”

“Naw, they just drew up the blueprints and split.”

“Oh.” Adam thought about Groom Lake for a moment and just smiled.

“Let’s get the forklift cranked up, it’s in the barn.”

“This thing looks big enough to lift a Buick!” Adam walked around the dusty and greasy machine, it also looked in need of a lot of maintenance.

“It can lift a Buick. Getting it to run is another matter sometimes.”

“It runs on bottled gas?”

“Yeah, propane.” Ronnie climbed up into the drivers seat and tried starting the machine. Silence.

“Damn! I just charged that piece of shit battery!” Her temper was beginning to show.

“Hold on a sec.” Adam looked into the open engine space under the seat.

“Don’t tell me you repair old forklifts as a sideline?”

“No, old motorbikes sometimes. Try it now.”

Ronnie raised her eyebrows skeptically and turned the ignition key again. The engine cranked for a moment and then sputtered into life, settling down to a rumbling idle.

“What’d you do?” Ronnie yelled over the noise.

“Battery cable, down by the starter. Bad connection!” Adam shouted back.

“How’d you know that? And how did you fix it, you didn’t even touch it?”

Adam smiled and just shrugged his shoulders.

“Better move it outside before we die of carbon monoxide or something!”

Ronnie was still shaking her head as she drove the

forklift around to the rear of the truck. Adam understood now why much of the area between the barn and the workshop was covered with concrete, you don't move heavy loads over soft ground.

"Stand clear when I lift this sucker, I don't want kid juice all over the damned place!"

"No problem!" Adam moved well away from any danger.

Moving slowly and carefully, the woman lifted the refrigerator size block of stone from the truck bed, backed up and then lowered it almost to ground level. In a few moments the pallet and marble block sat on the ground in front of the roll up shop door.

"Cool!" Adam commented as Ronnie shut off the engine and climbed down.

"Yeah. Now comes the fun part. We have to set this thing on end and shove it into the shop, the stupid forklift is too tall to fit through the door. You can't float this thing like you did with that remote control can you?"

"Sorry. It's way out of my weight class."

"Thought so. Let's get these metal straps cut off

first, go in the workshop and get the bolt cutter that's hanging by workbench."

Adam hesitated a moment, looking at the taut steel strapping that held the block to the pallet. Ronnie regarded him curiously and asked, "What's wrong? We need to cut those off."

"Stand back a minute, those straps are going to go zing when they let go."

Ronnie started to say something when, one by one, the heavy steel straps began snapping and whipping loose. In a few seconds all of the restraints lay on the pavement. For a moment the woman didn't say anything as she looked from the boy to the pile of tangled straps.

"Sometimes I show off a little. Don't freak on me." Adam told her.

"I'm not even going to ask how." She replied. "You're sort of handy to have around."

"I don't do windows."

Using chains and the lifting ability of the forklift,

Ronnie managed to up end and set the block on her improvised roller system. Adam mostly tried to keep out of the way; he knew she was worried that he might get totally squashed.

“It’s crude but it works. The block sets on this plate, the plate rests on these metal water pipes. We winch it across the ground, moving the pipes in front of the plate as it goes. Just like the Egyptians. I think.”

“Shall I winch or carry pipes?” Adam asked.

“You crank the winch, you may need all of your fingers someday.”

“That’s true. It’s hard to play the piano with your nose.”

Twenty minutes later the marble block was sitting in the middle of the workshop floor.

“Cool.”

“You said that earlier.” Ronnie replied.

“I tend to repeat myself.”

They repeated the process on the smaller block of stone left in the truck and by then it was nearing lunchtime. The day had warmed considerably so

Ronnie called for a quick dip before fixing lunch.

“Oh man! If it was any colder you could ice skate on it!” Adam complained.

“Don’t be such a dainty little daisy, it improves the appetite. You’ll need that with my cooking.”

Ronnie prodded the reluctant boy over to the pond and began to undress. Adam was finally coming to the conclusion that his being so body shy all of the time was sort of silly and childish. In a few moments he stood bare and a bit awkwardly by the side of the pond. The woman was the first into the water; Adam hesitated for a moment, reluctant to take the icy plunge.

“Come on, grin and bear it!” Ronnie urged him on.

“I’ve already bared it, I’m still working on the grin!” Finally he jumped in, the usual screams and shrieks ensued.

“This is going to stunt my growth or something!” He gasped.

“You just need some practice, pretty soon the water will feel almost warm to you.”

“When, in August?”

“July.”

The woman swam to the side and pulled herself up onto the smooth flat rocks to warm in the sun. Adam still felt a bit awkward as he did the same and sat to the left of her with his knees drawn up to cover some small amount of his shrunken modesty.

“You still have your scars.” Ronnie observed.

“Oh, where I got shot. Yeah. They’ve faded quite a lot though.”

“What was it like, getting shot and all?”

“It was pretty weird, when it happened I didn’t even feel it, later I really felt it.”

“I remember watching the television coverage when that was happening, I was ready to chew nails I was so mad!”

“It was a freak thing, the idiot shooters were a block away.”

“You don’t seem so terribly bashful about your body today, am I corrupting you?”

“I guess I was being kind of silly. It feels sort of nice here in the sun without anything on, I suppose my body isn’t unique or anything.”

“You’re body is just right. I’m afraid this warm weather won’t last, winter hasn’t quite given up on this part of the country yet.”

Adam found himself looking at the woman's body, staring actually. Ronnie noticed his attention and teased him a bit.

“You’re staring, Adam.”

“I’m sorry, it’s just that I’ve never sat next to a naked lady before.” Adam looked away and blushed.

“That’s all right, I’ve never sat next to a naked hero either.”

“I’m no hero.”

“You practically saved the world, Congress made it official, you’re a hero.”

“Then why is there a price on my head?”

“Good point, squirt. Let’s go eat some lunch, then I have to go into town for some groceries and crap.”

Before Ronnie left for town in the truck Adam insisted on giving her two hundred dollars of his money.

“I eat a lot, I need a toothbrush. Take the money

or I'll hold my breath and turn blue."

"Okay squirt, I'll bring you a comic book or something."

"Nerd World."

"Whatever. Stay close to the house and don't answer the phone unless you hear me on the answering machine. Keep an eye on creepy old Mr. Smithe down the road, I think he snoops around here when he knows I'm gone."

"Yes mommy."

"Don't get cute. I'll be back before dark."

"Drive carefully."

"Yes daddy."

As Ronnie disappeared down the gravel road, Adam scanned the surrounding countryside and again found nothing except the old guy that he had been told to watch. He was sitting in his living room watching Ronnie drive by at the moment. Just as Adam started to turn his attention elsewhere, creepy old Mr. Smithe walked out to his battered Jeep and started up the road to where Adam was.

"Oh crap! Better lock the doors and hide!" Adam

said aloud.

The boy dashed around checking the locks on the windows and doors, and then climbed the ladder up to the storage loft above the workshop. The jeep pulled onto the concrete next to the building as Adam sat quietly 'watching' the old man's movements.

"Now what does he think he's up to?"

Smithe was going around the building, peering into every window and trying all of the locks as he went. He spent the most time looking into the workshop area; he seemed to like the various art pieces he could see. Adam had the impression that he wasn't really a bad person, just sort of lonely.

After a while the old man got back into the Jeep and returned back down the road to his small cabin. Adam came to the conclusion that the poor old guy badly needed to have someone just to talk to.

"I wish I could go visit with him. No way I can now, though."

Adam tried to make himself useful the rest of the afternoon; he left a part of himself on guard as he made a stab at cleaning the workshop and living areas. Tools were put up on their hangers, the floor swept. A wet rag removed most of the marble dust that seemed to cover everything in the shop. In the kitchen he found enough to make preparations for a spaghetti dinner. A trip out to the greenhouse netted enough lettuce, green onions, and cucumbers for a respectable salad. He set the table and soon had everything waiting for Ronnie's return. His rummaging unearthed a bottle of red wine and on an impulse he put that on the table also.

Shortly before dark as promised, Ronnie returned from her shopping foray into Taos. Adam met her with a wave as she braked to a halt behind the building.

"Hi squirt, grab some bags before everything melts." Ronnie was very big on frozen meals.

"How was the big city?" Asked Adam.

"Expensive. That place ought to be charged with

highway robbery.”

“Tourist town, huh?”

“You’ve got it.”

Adam followed her into the kitchen area, struggling with more grocery bags than he should have attempted.

“What’s this?” Ronnie surveyed the set table and meal preparations.

“I’m cooking the one meal I do, spaghetti. All I have left to do is just boil the spaghetti and heat the sauce.”

Ronnie kissed the boy on the head and gave him a hug.

“You’re okay squirt. You finish the cooking and I’ll put this crap away.”

While storing the groceries and assorted household supplies, Ronnie went out into the shop area.

“Oh my God! I can see the floor!” She exclaimed with mock surprise.

Adam told her about Mr. Smithe’s visit when she

returned to the kitchen.

“That old coot! I’ve half a mind to go down there and punch him in the nose!”

“Don’t do that. He’s just all alone. I can tell when people are actually bad and he’s not. I think sneaking up here when you’re gone makes him feel like he knows you or something.”

“Then why is he such an old crank, I’ve tried to make friends with him.”

“I don’t know. People get weird when they’re all alone.”

“Maybe so. I’ll back him into a corner someday and make him be nice.”

“There you go!”

“So what’s with the bottle of wine big boy, trying to seduce me or something?”

“Geez,” Adam blushed, “I found it when I was ransacking the kitchen! I thought you might like it.”

“You ever have wine with dinner?”

“Gosh no! I don’t want any of it, one beer did me in.”

Ronnie pointed to the stove. “Watch the spaghetti, it’s about to boil over.”

“Agh! I said I could do spaghetti, I didn’t say how well.”

“I need a quick shower, keep an eye on the pots, chef.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

Dinner was a success, although Adam made way too much spaghetti. Ronnie coaxed him into trying a few sips of wine.

“Tastes a little sour or something.” He judged.

“It’s cheap wine. If you drink enough of it, it starts to taste better.”

“No thanks, it’s all yours.”

“Smart kid. I remembered to get hot chocolate for later.”

“Now you’re talking.”

“So where did you learn spaghetti?”

“Mrs. Richter, my friend’s mom. She could make dirt and rocks taste good.” Adam had to look away for a minute.

“It hurts, doesn’t it?” Ronnie asked.

“God, what a mess I’m in!” There were tears on Adam’s cheeks.

“Come on squirt, don’t let the bastards wear you down.”

“I’m sorry. I just think about the way things used to be and the way they are now.” He wiped his sleeve across his face.

“Well, for right now things are okay. I don’t believe they have a clue as to where you are, if we’re careful we can keep it that way.”

“I worry about what might happen to you if they find me here.”

“As far as I know there haven’t been any criminal charges filed against you, so legally I guess you’re just a runaway. I’m just giving you a place to stay, no jury around here is going to worry much about that.”

“It’s those creeps in the White House and the Bureau you have to worry about.”

“If I get too worried, I’ll let you know. Let’s clean up this mess and have that hot chocolate.”

True to Ronnie’s prediction the weather the next day turned cold and blustery. During the morning the woman began work on a headstone she had an

order for, Adam went to work reducing to firewood the heavy wooden pallets that the marble was shipped on. Adams's job went quickly, as the heavy nails holding the wood together fell apart. He then stacked the wood to ready it for the chain saw, which Ronnie had expressly forbidden him to use.

After more odd jobs and lunch the boy turned his attention to the greenhouse. He pulled out dead plants, reseeded some of the growing trays, and with Ronnie's guidance, mixed and added the liquid fertilizer to the watering system. By mid afternoon it was spitting snow and Adam retreated into the warmth of the workshop.

"Farmer Valentine," Ronnie inquired, "how goes the greenhouse?"

"I turned the propane heater on low to keep it all from freezing."

"Did you shut all of the windows?"

"Yeah. It's getting really nasty outside."

"I'm ready for a break, this headstone is all roughed out. I think I'll sketch for a while."

"Have the rich dudes decided on what sort of

statue they want?”

“They called while you were making firewood, now they want a bronze of a child sitting by the fountain, I have to show them some preliminary sketches.”

“You do bronze stuff?”

“I have. I do the clay sculpture here, then I take it to a foundry in Santa Fe to have the molds made and the bronze poured. Then back here for final finishing.”

“What about the big piece of marble you bought?”

“They already paid for that, they said I could have it for my trouble.”

“Sounds like they have more money than sense.”

“There’s a lot of that going around.”

Adam thought for a moment, not sure of how to broach the subject. “Would I be of any use as a model for the bronze?”

“I told you that you didn’t have to do that Adam, you’re not obligated to do that sort of thing.”

“I know, but now I don’t feel like it’s a big deal anymore, if it would help you out I’d like to do it.”

“Are you sure you feel comfortable with it?”

“You’ve already seen all of me there is to see, such as there is.”

“Well, all right then, if you’re sure. We’ll set up a spot over by the windows, the light’s better there. Go grab a blanket to sit on and I’ll set up the electric heater so you won’t get goose bumps.”

Adam returned with the blanket which Ronnie spread doubled on the floor. A reflective heater was set nearby and pointed toward the blanket. The woman brought her sketchpad and a chair and sat, ready to draw.

“Okay squirt,” Ronnie smiled, “I’m ready if you are, time to bare it all.”

“Here goes, no laughing or pointing!”

Adam sat down and tugged off his shoes and socks, then stood to quickly pull off his sweatshirt and jeans. Hesitating a moment, the boy then removed his T-shirt and quickly slipped down and stepped out of his white briefs. He then stood a little nervously, not quite sure of what to do or how

to act with all of his body so plainly open to view to a female.

“You look very nice Adam, don’t be so damned nervous, this is easy. You have a perfect body, all of your parts are just right. Let’s have you sit down with your legs sort of curled to one side, put one hand on the blanket to lean on, pretend that you’re looking into a pool of water.”

“Like this?” Adam tried to sit as she had instructed, painfully aware of his bare body and how it looked.

“Close.” Ronnie got up to reposition his legs and arms. “There, try to remember that position.”

“Okay. That heater feels pretty good today.”

“Tell me if you get cold or tired, you can take breaks.”

“If my friends could see me now.”

“Would they laugh or cry?” Ronnie teased.

“They would definitely die laughing.”

The woman did a total of four sketches showing the nude boy from all sides, as the sculpture would

appear by the fountain. Adam was patient and tried to hold the pose until his cramping muscles protested too much. As the time passed he also began to feel more at ease with being nude in front of the woman, even sort of enjoying the sensation of having her see all of him. Several breaks to stretch and move around lessened the tedium of staying in one position for so long. The waning light then signaled an end to the session and time for dinner.

“That’s plenty for today, you did really well squirt. These sketches will be enough to show the clients, to see if this is what they have in mind. I did some alterations to your face, no need to advertise who my model is.”

“Good idea.” Adam was glad to be able to finally stand up and stretch like a young cat. He leaned over to look at the sketches. “I think you’ve made me look better than my already incredibly handsome self, if that’s at all possible.” His firm bare bottom was too tempting for the woman; Ronnie placed her hand on his right buttock and squeezed it playfully.

“You have the cutest butt, Squirt.”

Adam jumped a little in surprise when she touched his behind, but then he smiled at her impishly at the pleasant sensation. He stood facing the woman for a moment, again unsure of what to do or say. Ronnie pulled the boy to her and hugged him tightly, he felt a warm excitement as she ran her hands over his bare back and cupped his behind in both of her hands.

“Geez Ronnie, this feels so nice!”

“You feel so nice too, Squirt. Let’s go into my room and be comfortable.”

The woman led the bare boy into her bedroom and sat him down on the bed. Adam watched open mouthed as she quickly undressed and sat down beside him.

“Are we going to... you know, do it?” He asked quietly.

“Have you ever made love, Adam?” She asked.

“Geez, no. I’m only just twelve, well almost!”

“That’s old enough for a boy to learn how, it’s different with girls. Don’t be nervous or embarrassed, there’s nothing at all that you can do

wrong.”

“Okay. What should I do?” The trembling boy felt a warm flush all over.

Ronnie responded by pushing the boy gently onto his back. “Just relax, let me make you feel really nice first.”

“All right.” Adam’s heart was pounding, not sure of what was next. Ronnie placed her hand on his smooth chest, she could feel his heart beating. The woman kissed him gently on the forehead and then on his lips. She moved her hand up and down on his chest and abdomen, each time moving lower. Adam grunted softly with surprise as she began rubbing him, then evolution and instinct put him on autopilot.

“Oh gosh!”

Ronnie laughed softly at the amazed boy’s reactions.

Events followed in natural order, the earth didn’t actually move but the house shook sharply for a few seconds as his emotions sought an outlet.

“We did it,” gasped Adam, “we really did it, Ronnie!”

“You did real good, Squirt. You’ll get even better with practice. Try not to knock the house over!”

The two warm bodies snuggled together for a while, the boy marveling at the wonderful new sensations he had experienced and still felt. Ronnie finally gave Adam’s bare behind a painful swat and told him to get dressed for supper.

After their simple evening meal the two of them sat talking on the couch, the TV turned low and ignored. Ronnie was feeling more than guilty about what had transpired earlier.

“I shouldn’t have taken advantage of you like that,” she began, “you must think I’m really awful.”

“I think you’re really nice,” Adam replied, “I’ve been trying to figure a way to say thank you for showing me... you know, how to do it.”

“Well, we shouldn’t do it anymore. It’s really not right for a boy your age to be doing that sort of thing, especially with someone my age.”

“Why is something that seemed so nice wrong?” Adam was at a loss to understand the woman’s guilt feelings.

“For one thing it’s against the law, people go to jail for years for doing what I did. I took advantage of you.”

“Well, I’ll never tell. Please don’t feel bad about it, it felt wonderful.”

“Okay Squirt, but let’s try to control ourselves next time, me especially.”

“All right, but it was really nice being out of control for a little while.”

The days passed in a routine of stonework in the shop for Ronnie with Adam helping out where he could be of use. The weather gradually began to be more warm than cold. The initial sketches that the woman submitted for the fountain bronze were approved and an advance payment was made on the commission. The news about Adam on the TV remained the same, still no sign of the boy, he must have surely perished. There was talk of a national memorial service.

There were no more lovemaking lessons, there was however a deep bond between the woman and the boy. Ronnie would have pangs of guilt for the rest of her life for her moment of impulse and stupidity. As for Adam he would remember the moment and cherish it for all of his days. Was it so wrong? You decide.

Ronnie decided it was time to start work on the full size clay model for the bronze.

“What’s first?” Adam had visions of a huge pile of oozing mud.

“I need to build a metal frame that’s strong enough to hold everything together when it’s moved for casting. I use rebar, that’s thick metal rods they use to reinforce concrete with.”

“I’ve seen it,” Adam replied, “it’s all knobby on the outside, comes in different sizes.”

“Right. Bending and welding it all together takes a while. I’ll need to take a bunch of measurements of you to get all of the proportions and everything

just right.”

“I can help with the rebar.” Adam offered.

“I don’t know squirt, bending and welding it is pretty tough work.”

“Do you have any here now, rebar? I can show you.”

Ronnie went over to a scrap bin and pulled out a three-eighths inch thick piece of the metal. “Here you go. Now what are you up to?”

“Watch, I’m showing off again, better sit down.”

Adam took the two foot long bar and put it on the floor in front of him. The middle of the bar seemed to develop a thin shiny line around its circumference. The boy lifted up one end of the bar, the rest lay undisturbed on the floor.

“You just cut that in two!” Ronnie had a bad case of wide eyes again.

“Yeah, keep watching.” He then touched the piece of bar in his hand to the middle of the piece on the floor to form a ‘T’. The metal flowed together to form one solid piece of metal, stronger than any weld. Adam finished up by forming the top of the ‘T’

into a perfect circle, welded together.

“See. I can do the welding and forming for you, no fuss, no cuts, no burns, no sweat.”

“This time I will ask how. How?”

“I can affect metals, change the structure on the molecular level. Don’t ask me quite how, but I can. I used it with the FBI to freeze up the bad guys guns, things like that. It comes in handy for defusing H-bombs too.”

“I thought you just found those things? Ronnie was once more in awe of her young guest, “You disarmed them?”

“Yeah. I just disconnected the firing squibs.”

“I guess you have a job then. Christ Almighty!”

“Cool.”

“Tell me, is there anything else you’ve been holding back on?”

“Well, there is just one thing,” Adam whispered, “it’s pretty embarrassing and really personal.”

“What’s that child,” she replied with real concern, “you can tell me anything at all, you know that.”

“Promise you’ll never tell anyone, this is so really

embarrassing!”

“I promise. What is it Adam?”

“It’s really just awful. Every full moon you’ll have to lock me up. I get hairy all over and start howling and snapping at things.”

Knowing that she had been totally had, Ronnie scooped the boy up and slung him across her shoulder. Out to the pond and into the icy pond he went, clothes and all.

“Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeyowww!”

Served him right.

With Adam doing the ‘ironwork’, and Ronnie marking and measuring, the skeletal foundation of the clay figure was finished in one day.

“It looks like the Terminator sitting down.” Adam regarded the robot-like figure with some ill-disguised skepticism.

“Building that would have taken me two weeks, thanks squirt!”

“No problemo, baybee.” Adam’s Austrian accent needed a lot of work.

The next day Ronnie began applying clay to the framework, working carefully to avoid air pockets and gaps that could lead to cracking. After the rough outlines had been established the artistic talents of the sculptor came into play with the smoothing and shaping of the clay. At later stages in the process, Adam was once more called on to sit patiently as final measurements were made. During one of the brief modeling sessions Ronnie made an obvious observation.

“You know your blond hair is really starting to show at the roots.”

“What should we do?”

“Cut it off short or re-dye it?”

“I think we ought to re-dye it,” Adam replied, “from a distance it attracts less attention.”

“Next time I go to town I’ll pick up something.”

“Okay.”

“You have a birthday next week, Valentine’s Day.”

“Oh! You’re right, I’d forgot about it.”

“Twelve, right?”

“Yeah, and still a runt. Guess I’m slow developer

or something.”

“Give it time, someday you’ll be a big hairy jerk in need of a shave.”

“Better than being a short hairless jerk with nothing to shave.”

Adam sat up straight in alarm. “Someone’s coming. It’s a cop car!”

“Grab your clothes and shoes and get up in the loft! I’ll check around down here for any signs you’ve been here. Move your butt!”

Ronnie sped around the shop and living quarters checking for obvious signals that someone else, especially her someone else, was living there. A county sheriff’s cruiser pulled to a stop in front of the building, two uniformed deputies got out and knocked on the front door.

“Afternoon Ma’am, could we talk to you for a few minutes?” His nametag said, “Price.”

“Okay, sure. Come on in.” Ronnie was trying not to pass out.

“I’ll come right to the point Miss...?”

“Burns.”

“Miss Burns. We have a big problem with the dope growers around here, I guess that’s no big secret. We’re trying to eliminate all of the law-abiding greenhouses from our aerial survey we made last month. You’re not in any way legally required to allow us to, but could we take a quick peek inside your greenhouse?”

Relief!

“Well sure. Come on out back, there’s nothing in there but salad fixings.”

“Thank you Ma’am, again you’re not required to do this.”

“That’s okay. Let’s go out through my shop, watch where you step.”

Maybe she wouldn’t faint after all.

Ronnie led the two burly deputies out through the living area and out into the shop area.

“You’re an artist, I see.” Said Price.

“I make a living. This is going to be a bronze for some of the overly rich in town.” She pointed to the clay sculpture that she and her fugitive friend had been working on.

“That’s really beautifully done Ma’am, what does something like that cost?”

“I’m getting fifty-thousand plus materials and expenses.”

“That’s way out of my price range.”

“Mine too, I don’t get very many commissions like that.”

The two officers followed her on out to the greenhouse, she opened the barn first to show them that nothing illegal was lurking or growing inside.

“That’s my forklift, I use it to move big pieces of stone and such.”

“Looks a little used, Ma’am.”

“It’s a lot used. There’s the greenhouse, help yourselves.”

The two officers did a quick look around and found nothing more illegal than some tomato seedlings.

“You’ve been real patient Ma’am, you’re now officially off of our dooper list.”

“No problem. Anything else I can do for you?”

“That old guy down the road. He told us to get the hell off his land, we did.”

“That’s Mr. Smithe. He’s cranky as a wet cat, and I think pretty lonely. He’s a pain in the ass but he’s not your dope growing type.”

“That’s about what we decided. Thanks again for putting up with us.”

“You’re welcome. Anytime you need a statue or headstone, stop by.”

“Never say headstone to a cop, it gives us the creeps.”

“Then please just stay safe.”

“Yes Ma’am, thank you. Bye now.”

When they two deputies were out of sight, Ronnie started breathing again. Adam came down after a while and stood beside her.

“They seemed pretty decent.” He said.

“I know. I sort of liked Deputy Price.”

“Let me go fetch some wet towels, you seem feverish.”

“Keep in mind the pond.”

“Sorry.”

The White House

“It’s been two months now. The kid is either living with someone who’s hiding him, or he’s dead.”

Crispin seemed very uneasy, he always did when he was here.

“We have to go with the assumption that he’s still alive. Satellite surveillance has come up dead dry on the ultra light.” CIA's Director added.

“Shit! What does it take to find one God-damned kid?” Packard demanded.

“If we do locate him, then what?” Crispin asked.

“He’s become a danger to the country, totally insane, he gave us no choice. Any questions?” Packard had made it all perfectly clear.

Ronnie held a small birthday party for her guest, the attempt at a birthday cake was a bit uneven but it tasted good and held twelve candles. Adam’s presents were on the practical side, a good pair of

hiking boots, jeans, underwear, and some more hair dye.

The clay original of the sculpture was finally completed. Adam and Ronnie spent two days carefully packing and padding the clay likeness for the trip to Santa Fe. They prayed that the thick foam rubber under the packing box would absorb any road shocks.

“Adam, it’ll take me the better part of a week to get this thing to Santa Fe, have it cast, and get back here!”

“I’ll be fine. There’s plenty of food, I won’t wander off and fall in a hole. You can call me anytime. The answering machine will run interference. Geez!”

“I care about you squirt! Just be careful and keep an eye out.”

“You be careful yourself, don’t hit any bumps.”
They held one another tight for a while before parting then Adam watched the truck move off down the road, he prayed he would watch it come back.

Adam had learned with time and practice to set a

part of his mind on a sort of area guard duty as he went about his other activities. It came as no surprise when Mr. Smithe made his now routine visit to the place Adam was beginning to call home.

As the old and battered Jeep pulled into the yard, Adam was again up in the loft being very, very quiet. The old man did his rounds of the house trying the locks and looking in the windows. At the rear door he twisted the handle and it swung open.

“Oh shit!” Adam thought, “I forgot to lock that one!”

Smithe hesitated, unsure about whether or not to enter. Curiosity got the best of him and he edged into the shop area.

“What’ll I do?” Adam was close to panic. The old man moved slowly out into the front living area and then sat down on the couch for a minute.

“This can’t go on all of the time, I think it’s time to go meet Mr. Smithe.”

Adam climbed quietly down the ladder from the

loft and moved silently into the living area. Smithe was looking at some of Ronnie's sketches of him.

"Good morning Mr. Smithe," Adam said pleasantly.

Smithe spun around like a lion had just roared in his ear.

"What the hell... Who in blazes are you?"

"I've been staying here with Ronnie for a while. Do you always just let yourself in like this?"

"I... the door was open. I didn't mean any harm boy, I didn't take nothin'."

"You know, it's easier to just be friends with people than to sneak around like this when they're gone."

"People don't... well, I rub people the wrong way, always have."

"Why don't we just shake hands and try being friends?" Adam extended his hand to the man.

"Well...sure, okay." Smithe took the boy's hand. "First name's John."

"Mine's Adam. Pleased to meet you."

"Boy, I've seen your face on the TV, your hair's different though."

“I’m Adam Valentine. Are you going to turn me in?”

“Lord! I’ve stepped in it this time! No. I don’t see you’ve done anything but run away from a bad situation. I ain’t no saint myself, as you can see.”

“There’s some coffee left on the stove, Mr. Smithe.”

“That sounds good boy, my nerves are pretty frayed right now.”

Adam poured two cups of the strong brew. “Let’s go out back and sit in the sun.”

The two of them sat on the back steps without speaking for a few moments, and then Smithe asked a question. “The TV’s been saying that you might be dead.”

“An exaggeration, as you can see.”

“They also say that you’re a nut case, even dangerous to be around.”

“What do you think?”

“I think that description fits me better, you look about as dangerous as my dog, and he’s dead.”

“What kind of dog did you have?”

“Just a mutt. Good dog though, smart.”

“Dogs are good company, you should get another one, maybe.”

“Wouldn’t be the same.”

“Of course it wouldn’t be. It would be different, you’d have to get acquainted, make friends.”

“Think so, huh?”

“Better than talking to yourself and cussing at the TV.”

“You think I do that?”

“Just a guess, no offense.”

“None taken. I do talk to myself and cuss at the TV.”

“Ronnie...Miss Burns says she’s tried to make friends with you.”

“She’s got a temper, so do I. We wind up yelling at each other.”

“You should try again, I’ll be referee.”

“Those sketches in the living room, is that you?”

“Yeah, she’s been working on an expensive bronze for some rich people, she needed a model and I was around.”

“You posed in just your birthday suit?”

“Well, yeah. It’s was no big deal really, she’s an artist and all.”

“I sat for a portrait once, ‘bout a thousand years ago. Had all my clothes on though. Damned tiring thing to do.”

“I know, my muscles kept cramping up.”

“Where’s Miss Burns off to now?”

“Santa Fe. She’s having the bronze cast there, she’ll be several days.”

“She left you here alone?”

“No choice, I can’t go out and be around people, it’s too dangerous. Besides, I’m not alone now, am I?”

“I ain’t much company, but I’m just down the road if you need me.”

“Thanks, that means a lot. Maybe we can visit some every day, there’s nothing else to do.”

“That sounds good. Come on down to my place anytime.”

“Great, but until Ronnie gets back I need to stay close here for when she calls and everything.”

“You like stew?” Smithe asked on an impulse.

“I like anything.”

“I’ll bring by a pot full tomorrow evening, put some meat on your skinny bones.”

“Cool. I’ll be waiting.”

On the short drive back to his cabin Smithe had a smile on his face for the first time in too many years. “Friendly little pup, not the way they make him out on the idiot box,” he said aloud. Like Adam, he tended to talk to himself.

Ronnie called, the subject got around to Mr. Smithe.

“YOU DID WHAT?”

“Geez, don’t yell! He’s really a pretty nice old guy. We talked for a while about stuff. He’s going to bring some stew by tomorrow for dinner.”

“Is this safe?” She asked. “What if he drops a dime on you to collect the reward?”

“You didn’t.”

“Yeah, but that’s me.”

“I trusted you Ronnie, and I feel the same way about Mr. Smithe.”

“You’re sure?”

“He won’t turn me in, it’s something I just know.”

“Well shit, okay then. You be damned careful though!”

“Yes mommy.”

“And stop calling me that!”

Adam spent the next day trying to find something useful to do, but after the laundry was finished and put away there really wasn’t anything left that needed doing. He decided to do some reading and work on his suntan out by the pond.

The combination of the warm sun and boring book soon had the boy dozing peacefully and in doing so he let his guard down. He never sensed or even heard the quiet approach of the deputy’s cruiser.

“Afternoon, son.” Deputy Price succeeded for once in quickly awakening the boy.

“Geez! Oh, uh hi officer.” Adam jumped up and dropped his book.

“Doing a little reading?” The deputy hadn’t

mentioned the boy's lack of swim trunks.

"Oh, yeah. Criminy, let me put some clothes on! I didn't hear you drive up!"

"No problem, where's Miss Burns today?" He asked. "She's actually the reason I came out here."

"In town." Adam dashed over to his clothes on the steps and began yanking them on.

"You her son?"

"Nephew. I'm just here for the school break."

"The schools here are all in session right now."

"Private academy in Vermont. They have a weird schedule." Adam could see and feel that he was found out.

"How long have you been hiding out here, Adam?"

Adam seemed to wilt and sat down on the steps. "A while. Ronnie's a nice person, she's been good to me."

"You know the whole damn world has been looking for you, lots of people thought you were dead."

"I can't go back to that place, you don't know what

those people are like!” Tears blurred his eyes now.

“It can’t be that bad son.”

“It is. I won’t go!”

“They say you might be dangerous, are you?”

The officer’s heavy automatic flew out of his holster and landed in Adam’s hands. The deputy took a step back, real fear in his eyes. Adam stood up and handed the weapon back, butt first.

“I could be, but I’m not.”

The totally rattled deputy put the pistol back in its holster, unsure of his next move. “What do we do now, son?”

“You could just leave and let me have some sort of a life here.”

“I have my job to do Adam, you know that.”

“Too many people keep saying that.”

Just then Mr. Smithe’s ancient Jeep wheezed into the yard. The old man was carrying an equally ancient looking twelve gauge and was waving it threateningly at the deputy. “Adam! Are you all right?” Smithe shouted.

“I’m all right, Mr. Smithe. Please put the gun down!” Adam pleaded

“Calm down now, pops!” Price didn’t know which way to jump. “Just lower that cannon. No one’s been hurt here!”

The boy collected his wits long enough to fuse Smithe’s shotgun, plus the deputy’s service weapon and ankle backup.

Smithe finally lowered the shotgun. “Adam, I didn’t call the dogs on you!”

“I know that Mr. Smithe, don’t worry.”

The old man leaned his weapon against the Jeep and started over toward the boy. He was about halfway there when the massive heart attack hit him. He moaned softly and slumped down to the ground, Adam and the deputy were at his side instantly. Price felt for a pulse and found a weak and erratic one.

“I’m calling for a medivac helicopter, stay with him.” Price dashed for his cruiser and it’s radio.

Adam knelt beside his new and old friend and put his hand on the man's chest. He could clearly see the problem; some sort of gunk was blocking one of the big veins on the struggling heart.

"Just there," Adam mumbled to himself, "make it go away."

Price returned and started to pull the boy away, something felt but unseen shoved him back and Adam told him to be quite. The deputy watched in stunned silence as the ashen pallor of the old man was replaced by a more healthy pink. In a few moments, Smithe's eyelids fluttered and opened. Adam was smiling at him.

"Hi, welcome back." Adam said quietly.

"What happened?"

"Your heart attacked you. I fixed it, you're okay now."

Price finally found his voice. "What did you do, son?"

"He had some gunk blocking the blood to his heart. I made it go away."

“God in Heaven. How... I mean...”

“I’m dangerous, remember?”

Smithe sat up, also wondering what in the world had just happened,

“You going to arrest Adam?” He gruffly asked the deputy.

“I’ve just made a radio call that I wish I hadn’t. In a few minutes every cop in New Mexico will be driving up that road.”

Adam looked out and saw he was right; he then dashed into the house. Price started to follow him, but the old man caught his arm.

“Leave him be, you’ve fucked up bad enough for one day!”

Adam returned shortly wearing his hiking boots and carrying Ronnie’s small knapsack.

“I’m out of here! Anything’s better than what’s waiting for me at Quantico. Tell Ronnie thanks.” He paused for a moment longer. “Tell her... well, just tell her thank you.

Then he ran.

A Little Rest

Veronica Burns' hillside home and workshop were immediately dubbed "The Burns Compound" by what had now come to pass for the media. The FBI immediately sealed off the buildings and arrested Mr. Smithe for abetting a federal fugitive. The paperwork actually declaring the boy a federal fugitive would be drawn up eventually. Deputy Price was taken to Taos and held for debriefing, indefinitely. Ronnie was picked up in Santa Fe and promptly broke the arresting officer's nose.

Adam was somewhere in the hills moving north. Everything and everyone who had pursued him so far had developed some sort of problem, mechanical or otherwise.

The White House

President Packard was speaking with Crispin and O'Hare on the telephone.

"We have him. It's just a matter of time until we close in on him!" Crispin tried to sound sure of his self, he wasn't.

"I've heard that tired crap before. I want every military unit available dumped into that area. Retask those damn KH-14's, use their infrared or whatever the hell it is they have for shit like this! Get all of your agents who can tie their own shoes moving. Get that little bastard!"

The military community was as close to open revolt as it had ever been since the founding of the republic. The Packard administration's obsession with hunting down a boy that they considered a national hero and one of their own was just the last straw on a very large pile. The Joint Chiefs held a very discreet meeting and a consensus was reached. Stand down. National defense would be maintained independent of the White House. Packard would simply be ignored.

As nightfall approached the exhausted Adam searched for some sort of shelter, anything. He knew about infrared night vision devices, his body would stand out like a road flare if he were out in the open. A cluster of large rocks and boulders ahead were worth investigating. For once his luck was working, an overhanging rock ledge formed a hidden recess in the cluster of boulders that would block his image from above and on all sides. As the sun went below the horizon he did a careful scan for miles in all directions, nobody was moving his way, nobody was close. He was too tired to do much thinking so he finished off his remaining water and curled up. Sleep was instantaneous.

The President was speaking with the chairman of the JCS.

“Yes Mr. President?”

“I ordered units of the 101st Airborne into New

Mexico four hours ago. Why is there no movement at Fort Bragg?”

“It’s late, people need their sleep sir.”

“What? Did you say people need their sleep?”

“Yes sir, at least eight hours every night.”

“Are trying to be funny with me, General?”

“No sir, not at all.”

“Then get those troops moving now or I will relieve you of your command!”

“Yes Mr. President.”

Of course nothing, especially the troops at Fort Bragg, moved anywhere.

Quantico

“I’m sorry Agent O’Hare, the aircraft is down for maintenance. Shall we call in a replacement?” The flight operations officer was being very correct, very polite.

“How long will that take?”

“Hard to say. Perhaps a day or so.”

“We need to get to New Mexico now, not in a day or so!” O’Hare wasn’t quite shouting yet.

“Then I’d suggest United or American, they have the most flights sir.”

“Do you know who you’re talking to?”

“I have to go now sir, the copy machine is acting up again.” Click.

O’Hare and Company finally decided on United.

The night chill awoke Adam several hours before dawn. He was shivering and miserable and remained so until the sun was well up. Moving along would have warmed him up but in the pre-dawn hours it would have been like shining a spotlight on his location. When he had judged the day warm enough, he moved off toward the west. It was his plan to move in a different direction every day until he could find some sort of transport out of the area. He paused at a small creek to fill his water bottle and have his breakfast of the last granola bar. His mind was filled with past images of a warm

beach, his good and best friend, and porpoises.

The Office of Strategic Reconnaissance had actually followed the White House's directions, mostly.

"We have no heat images in the search area on anyone matching his size and weight Mr. President."

"Are you telling me he's not there?"

"No sir, he could be blocked from observation. A daytime photo will be tougher, even with the SuperCom image search program."

"I need results, not technical claptrap. Find him!"

Adam paced his progress, he didn't have much (none) in the way of food, and water was where he found it. He constantly scanned the surrounding countryside, keeping track of the search teams and aircraft. He noticed that the number of search personnel had actually decreased as the day wore

on. The local authorities had no real stomach for what they were doing; too many of them secretly hoped the boy would escape.

That evening large numbers of FBI began arriving at the Taos search headquarters, by morning they would be positioned around the best estimates of the boy's location. They each carried a special weapon, one that could not be fused or short-circuited. A wooden baseball bat.

Adam spent the second night huddled under a flood carved overhang along a dry creek bed. His last thoughts before sleep were of Mrs. Richter's apple strudel.

The Last Day

If this were a western movie, John Wayne would have said, "They got us surrounded!" Indeed, they had Adam surrounded. The small grassy hill he was

on sat in the middle of a small valley. There was no direction he could move in that would not bring him face to face with the blue-jacketed FBI. An assortment of civilian helicopters brought in more and more of the bat-wielding thugs that now called themselves servants of the people.

Adam knew it was all over, a thousand men with clubs moving at him could never be stopped or could all of their weapons be disabled. There was just time for a short prayer, he knew he wasn't close to being a perfect person and he asked his God to forgive him.

"They're going to beat me to death, I wonder if it's going to really hurt a lot?"

Doctor Simmons told him to close his eyes and think about something nice. He did.

Maui.

It was always nice there, even if it rained.

God, he wanted to be there!

When the first FBI reached his location they at first thought that they had him. His clothing was

arrayed in a boy shape on the ground, socks in boots, underwear inside jeans and shirt, knapsack strap around the shirt. There was no boy inside any of the garments.

The White House

“What do you mean, he wasn’t there? You had him surrounded with most of the FBI, he was in sight for Chrissakes!” Packard was actually screaming this time.

“His clothes were there, he wasn’t. No trace of him. No scent trail, no infrared, no footprints, nothing.” O’Hare was right on the edge telling this asshole where to go.

“Are you saying he just vanished into thin air?”

“That’s exactly what he did. It’s on the video, we taped the final push to get him.”

“You idiot! What kind of fool do you take me for?”

“A big one, Mr. President. You find him, I quit!”

Transition

The eastern tip of the island of Maui.

He was falling. It was dark and warm and he was falling.

The impact with the water knocked the breath out of the boy as he plunged deep beneath the surface. For a moment he didn't know which way was up, then something told him to start swimming toward the dim light above. As his head broke the surface and he gasped for his first breath he realized that the water was warm and salty, the dim light had been the moon.

“What the hell... where...?” The total disconnect from the cool dry hills in New Mexico to this warm ocean had left Adam dazed and confused. In the distance there seemed to be a thin line of white, it was all that Adam could make out so he began a slow, tired swim in that direction.

Adam awoke with sand in his mouth as he struggled to sit up and focus his eyes. He was on a beach. After a while he gathered himself and walked unsteadily over to the gently lapping surf to rinse out his mouth with the salty water and to try and clear his head. He then moved ever so carefully back to the dry white sand and sat down again to take stock.

He decided that it was early morning. He was totally naked. It wasn't cold. No one was trying to beat him to death. In fact, there wasn't anyone around. For nearly an hour the boy sat in the sand, his knees drawn up to his chest, trying to make sense out of what his senses were telling him. As he looked around the familiar profile of the land and the curve of the beach told him where he was.

“Hana. This is Hana. Am I dead now?”

He remembered being ready to die and wishing with all of his heart to be here. Hunger and the need to pee told him he was probably still alive. A

little later he took note of two people walking up the beach towards him.

The newly wed Mr. and Mrs. James Petersen, of Macon Georgia, thought that they would have the early morning beach to themselves. Instead they found an unclothed and totally confused boy who looked very familiar. Mr. Petersen wrapped their beach towel around Adam and led him back to the honeymoon bungalow that they were blowing a thousand dollars a day on. Their first thought was to call the police but the look in the boy's eyes told them to wait for a while.

Eventually Adam began to understand his one special ability that had until now lain dormant and unused.

He had shifted through space.

This changed everything.

It needed some practice though; actually it needed a lot of practice.

In the meantime he asked his puzzled rescuers the obvious question.

“What’s for breakfast?”

Part Two
War and Evolution

Paybacks

Adam was standing quietly on the sidewalk looking through the iron fence at the front of the White House. He knew he was quite safe here, even in broad daylight. The past six months had seen his abilities grow in strength to the point where they sometimes frightened even him. The hardest to master, and perhaps the most useful, was only recently acquired. He could now shift through the fabric of space itself, whether it was a move of ten feet, or ten thousand miles. Very handy if someone would do you harm, it also tended to cut way down on your travel expenses.

Inside the White House was President Alfred Whitmore Packer, or whom a good part of the populace now referred to as "President Pecker." The President's plans for America had been somewhat short circuited when Adam had fled from the FBI unit at Quantico and when the Joint Chiefs of Staff

had quietly stood down the armed forces of the United States. The fact that the military was quietly ignoring anything coming out of the White House was not yet generally known to the public.

Adam's face was too well known and he was starting to attract a crowd as he stood looking at the People's House, so much the better. Let that bastard in there know that he was in for his own bad times for a change.

Several uniformed White House guards were now moving somewhat nervously toward him, guns drawn and not quite sure of what to do. The boy turned towards the guards and smiled.

“Hi guys! Who are you going to shoot?”

“Just stand real still son, we don't want to hurt you. What are you doing here?” Asked the larger of the two guards.

“Give your fearless leader in there a short message from me. Tell him I'm not going to go away, and tell him that he should.”

“Get face down on the sidewalk, now!” The guard

had seen far too many episodes of “Cops.”

“I have to be going for now,” Adam waved to them, “sorry about your guns, you’ll have to get some new ones.”

And then he simply wasn’t there.

Maui

The nice couple from Georgia had ordered Adam some breakfast, which the boy then inhaled in just a few short minutes. The couple's honeymoon had been rudely interrupted when they had come upon the confused and dazed boy huddled naked on the early morning beach. For a while it was a toss up as to who was more confused, Adam or the newlyweds. Eventually Adam had sorted out the events that brought him so abruptly to the small resort town of Hana on the island of Maui. He knew that the authorities would still be after him, better that these decent people he was now with didn't get involved in his problems.

"I need to go now, you don't need the kind of trouble that'll fall on your heads if they know you've helped me."

"Son, all you have on is our beach towel, where will you go?" James Petersen was still trying to figure out how the boy got here.

“Are there any stores around here where I could get some clothes?”

“Hasagawa’s, they have anything there.”

Petersen replied.

“Could you... I don’t have any money?”

“You don’t have anything, son. You take a shower and get the salt and sand off while we zip over there and get you something to wear.”

“I’ll pay you back, I promise,” Adam said.

“No sweat, besides there’s no telling just what we’ll come back with from that crazy place.”

The two honeymooners seemed to be enjoying their aiding and abetting role as they drove off in their small rental Toyota. Adam did as they said and showered off the dried salt and sand that still clung to his skin and hair. He resolved to soon try his newly discovered ability, perhaps over some short distance, and hopefully to be able to bring his clothes along for the trip this time.

After about forty minutes the couple returned with a bag full of somewhat zany clothing.

“They mostly had T-shirts and shorts, that sort of thing.” Petersen continued. “We also found some sandals and some under shorts, these dark glasses, and this dopey looking hat. That’s the craziest damn store I’ve ever been in!” He held up the floppy hat, it appeared to have every flower native to Hawaii printed upon it.

“These are fine, thanks again for doing this.” Adam was indeed truly grateful for their unselfish help.

The boy went into their bathroom to change into the tourist clothes while the Petersen’s sat down on the bed and tried to figure out just what the hell they had gotten themselves into.

Adam emerged from the bathroom. “How do I look?”

“Like a total hick tourist!” Mrs. Petersen laughed.

“Great! That’s the whole idea,” Adam continued, “now I need you to help me try one more thing, out on the beach.”

“Well okay son, what do you have in mind?” The man asked.

“It’ll be easier to show you than to try and explain, we may need to bring along a beach towel too, I think.”

As the three people walked toward a mostly deserted section of the beach, Adam attempted to explain what he needed to try and do and why they had found him on the beach that morning.

“Are you saying that you can just move from place to place just by thinking about it?” Petersen wasn’t quite ready to accept the notion.

“Apparently. How else do you explain my being in New Mexico one minute and here the next?”

“I can’t explain it. You’re going to try it again now?”

“Yeah, I have to. Just a really short ways though.”

“What do we do?” Petersen still wasn’t buying this but went along, he was still trying to believe that he was aiding the most sought after fugitive on the planet, and one that seemed a bit loopy at that.

Adam explained what came next. “Well, I need

you to go down the beach maybe a hundred yards and take the beach towel with you. I'm not sure my clothes will come along for the trip, they didn't the last time. Mrs. Petersen, if you could wait here beside me while I try it, you may need to bring me the clothes if they stay behind."

"Okay Adam, this is really silly though." The woman was about ready to give up and go call the cops, the poor boy must be truly insane like they said he was.

"Yes Ma'am I guess it seems that way, let's just give it a quick try."

Mr. Petersen set off down the beach and after about a hundred yards or so turned and faced his wife and the boy.

"Well, here goes nothing, wish me luck." Adam stared intently at the spot beside the man down the beach. For a moment nothing at all happened, and then silently and in the blink of an eye, the boy's clothes dropped to the beach beside the woman and Adam was standing next to the stunned Mr. Petersen.

“Rats! Uh, could I have the towel now?” Adam asked urgently.

“Oh. Sure, here!” The stunned Petersen handed Adam the large towel that the boy quickly wrapped around himself. Mrs. Petersen stood perfectly still for a moment, then she was trotting toward them with his clothing in her arms. When she reached them there was a short silence between the three of them. Finally Adam spoke.

“It worked. But I can’t just hop around and show up naked every time. Let me try it once more, maybe concentrating some on my clothes at the same time will do it.”

Unable to come up with anything intelligent to say, James Petersen trotted another hundred yards up the beach. The boy quickly dressed, using the towel for a bit of modesty. Soon they were ready for another go at it.

Adam tried to become sensitive to the feeling of his clothing as he concentrated on once more moving toward the man. This time it worked, Adam

arrived fully clothed as he dropped a few inches onto the warm sand beside the man.

“Cool!” Adam commented with a smile.

“I’ll be dipped in shit,” Mr. Petersen added.

Mrs. Petersen rejoined them; she seemed to be trembling just a little.

“My God, what are you?” She asked the boy in a shaky voice.

“Just me. Don’t be afraid, I wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

Adam took the woman's hand and held it for a moment. She seemed to calm down as the boy smiled at her. Something about touching him seemed to put her more at ease. “I need to get moving, you two have been really nice and helped me when I really needed it, but I can’t let you get in trouble for doing that.”

“Where will you go son, do you need some money?” James asked.

“I’m going to practice moving around some, get myself organized, visit some good friends when it seems safe. Money won’t be a problem.”

“This has turned out to be some kind of

honeymoon son, it's been an honor meeting you. If you pop up in Macon Georgia sometime we'll be real displeased if you don't look us up." Mr. Petersen offered his hand to the boy.

"I may surprise you one of these days, thanks again, both of you." Adam gave them both a hug and kissed the woman on the cheek. He stood for a moment and scanned the surrounding town. There it was, an ATM!

"Bye folks!" Then he simply vanished from in front of their eyes.

There was one customer at the outdoor ATM of the local bank branch, he didn't see or hear anything as the boy appeared behind him. When he had finished collecting his cash, the customer turned and was startled by the boy standing behind him.

"Where did you come from?" He demanded.

"Oh, just popped in, sorry to startle you sir."

The overweight tourist muttered something and hurried off to add his withdrawal to the local economy. Adam stepped up to the ATM and smiled into the hidden security cameras, may as well tweak

their noses. The machine spit out two thousand dollars before the boy released the pressure on the proper relays and solenoids inside the mechanism. Adam distributed the wad of twenty's in all four of his white short's pockets and then waved goodbye to the ATM camera as he left. A small roll of ten of the bills was sent flying off in the direction of the beach where the Petersen's were still trying to collect their wits. The two hundred dollars seemed to fall from the sky and landed on James Petersen's head.

“What the f...” Petersen first thought of birds, and then saw the money lying in the sand next to him. “Well, he said he would pay us back and so he did.”

It was still late morning and Adam decided to walk for a while to try and collect his thoughts. He knew where the film producer's home was, the place where he and his friend Freddie had spent so many happy hours. Soon he found himself standing at the front gate to the large resort home, a look inside told him that both the producer was home and the former President and his wife were visiting there.

There were also several Secret Service personnel in and around the estate. The President and his friend were out on the back veranda overlooking the sea, the President's wife seemed to be away somewhere at the moment, no agents were in view of them.

“I think I'll pop in and say hello.”

Adam appeared behind the large rattan chairs where the two men sat talking. The boy quietly walked around into their view and said hello.

“Adam? My God boy, is that you?” The President stood in shock.

“Yes sir, it's real nice to see you again. Hello Mr. Meyers, how's that film coming along that I was in?” Adam shook both amazed men's hands and got an embrace from the President.

“There were reports that you were in New Mexico, some said you had been killed!” The President still wasn't sure of his eyes.

“They tried to kill me, they were all FBI, or at least that's what they call themselves. They're really just hired goons these days.”

“How did you get away? How did you get here?” Meyers had a thousand questions.

“It’s sort of hard to explain, lately I’ve discovered an ability I never knew I had. It involves moving through space, from one spot to another.”

“What are you saying, Adam?” Asked the former President.

“I guess it’s easier to show you than to try and explain it.” Adam pointed to the far side of the large lawn area. “Watch over there.”

The ex-President and his friend were soon looking at the boy from across the yard; he waved at them, and then appeared once more beside them.

“See. The first time I did it I was about to be beaten to a pulp and I just thought about Maui to shut out what was coming. Then I was in the ocean here offshore a ways. Weird huh?”

“Wonderful is the word. Good Lord child, what are you becoming anyway?” Asked Meyers softly.

“I don’t know, I’m mostly still me, I don’t think I’m going bonkers or anything. Maybe I’m changing some.”

“Pull up a chair son,” the President said, “we have a lot to talk about.”

Adam and the two men talked quietly for the next three hours, pausing only to eat when the housekeeper brought out lunch to them, the boy consumed the most of the ample spread. The Secret Service became aware of his presence, they were suitably alarmed at first but then after being introduced to the boy they decided that the warnings about him were just so much crap. The Secret Service had yet to fall totally into the black hole that was the Packer administration.

“Adam, are you saying that Packer actually wanted you dead, beaten to death?” Meyers found the idea very hard to accept.

“Yes sir. They all had wooden baseball bats, not much I could do to those to make them unusable. It sounds pretty unbelievable, but if you’ve ever met Packer you’d know what a total creep he is.”

“We need to go public with this!” Said the President, anger in his voice.

“Packer has too many cronies in the media, they’d make us look like poor losers, nuts, or worse,” observed Meyers.

“I think Mr. Meyers is right sir,” Adam agreed, “it seems like they just recite whatever the White House hands them.”

“What about the military?” The President knew they had no liking for Packer.”

“I think they know most of it already.” Adam responded. “The Marines helped me to get away from Quantico, there were never any military people or aircraft after me that I know of.”

The President continued. “I’ve heard some rumors, well...more than rumors that there may be a general stand down underway, that the military isn’t responding to the White House. If so Packer must surely see the handwriting on the wall.”

“Do you think the military will move against him?” Meyers asked.

“I think that idea is too abhorrent to them,” explained the President, “they’ll probably continue to protect the country as best they can and hope that

Packer folds his tents and runs. Tell me Adam, what are your immediate plans?"

"I'm going to be moving around a lot, I need to practice with this new ability, I've only used it a few times. I want to visit with some people, I guess you know who."

"The Richter's?"

"Yes sir, and Agent Monroe, the Parkers, lots of people."

"Will you at least stay the night here?" Asked Meyers.

"I don't think that would be a good idea sir, it's just a matter of time until they're onto me again, you don't need them on your case."

"They've already leaned on me not to release "Gun Sweat" because of your cameo parts in it." Meyers added.

"What did they do?"

"Threatened me with IRS troubles, labor troubles, legal troubles."

"Well that sucks. Hang on to it sir, I'll bet it gets released one of these days."

"I'm going to, I have the negatives and some

copies squirreled away in case they try to arrange some sort of accident for the prints.”

“How did it turn out, the film,” Adam asked, “was I bad or just awful?”

“I should have had you as the lead, you’re a natural comedian kid. The out takes I tacked on at the end are the best part of the film.”

“I think I’ve been insulted,” Adam replied in mock indignation, “I’m obviously the sexy hunk type.”

The three were silent for a few moments, and then Adam stood up.

“Time to go, thank you Mr. President, Mr. Meyers. Don’t worry about me, I think Packer is the one who will soon be doing the worrying.”

“What do you have planned for him, son?” Asked the President.

“Bad times sir, bad times.”

Adam looked out at something neither of the men could see and then vanished from before their eyes. Meyers turned to the ex-President and said, “The boy has a good soul, but I wouldn’t want to be in Packers shoes when he shows up on the White

House steps.”

Adam moved in small steps, at first less than a half mile at a time, then farther and farther as his confidence grew in his ability to manage his new talent. He moved west, west was where the Richter's were in Okinawa. In the late afternoon he was on the western tip of Maui, he stood looking across the sea toward the island of Molokai.

“Looks like about ten miles or so,” He thought, “I’d better make really sure of this one.”

The boy carefully examined the shoreline of the other island using his now formidable remote viewing abilities. He locked in on a small deserted beach, inaccessible from the rocky cliffs above it.

“Just there.” That was where he wanted to be.

And then he was. A bit high, he dropped about three feet onto the soft sand, landing on all fours. A further ‘look’ around told him that there were no people for at least a mile. The sea was calm and

looked very inviting.

“Time for a swim.”

Adam quickly shed his clothing and dove into the warm sea. For the first time in many months he felt completely free and unthreatened by anyone or anything, well almost not anything. There was a ten-foot blue shark slowly cruising about one hundred yards offshore. Adam sensed it almost as soon as he had dove into the water. But the shark just moved slowly down the shoreline, not interested in the odd disturbance that Adam had created as he swam near the beach. The boy floated lazily on his back for a few minutes, then slowly paddled back to shore. The warm air and sun felt good on his body, he thought of the first time he had gone skinny dipping back in New Mexico. The water there took your breath away, it had been like liquid ice. He sat for a while on his clothes as the air-dried him, the sun was going down now and he would need to find a place for the night (and dinner!).

It was well after dark and numerous ‘jumps’ later

before Adam settled on some people to approach. There seemed to be some sort of vacationing youth group camped at a place called Kalawao Park, maybe he could weasel his way in for a free meal and a place to sleep for the night. He stood some distance away and studied the group of people.

Girl scouts from Salem Oregon on their big trip to the islands, they were apparently fixing the evening meal.

Cool.

Adam walked quietly up to one of the women who was off to the side and seemed to be in charge of the group. "Evening, Ma'am. Is there a chance on my buying a meal from you all?"

Edith Hamilton spun around in surprise at his quite approach. "You startled me! Where did you come from, boy?"

"I apologize for scaring you, I'm sort of in transit at the moment. I have money to pay for a meal."

Adam still had on his 'silly' hat.

"Where are your parents? Are you alone out here?" She asked.

Adam took off his sunglasses and hat. “Ma’am, I won’t lie to you. My name is Adam Valentine and I need a place to stay for the night and something to eat. I’ll go if you don’t want me around here.”

“God in heaven! Please don’t hurt any of the girls, you can have anything we have!” Edith seemed on the verge of losing it.

“Geez lady, calm down! I’ve never hurt anyone and I’m not about to start here. I guess I better go, I didn’t mean to scare you.” Adam turned to leave but was stopped by the rattled woman.

“Wait a minute! The news keeps saying that you’re dangerous, mentally disturbed!”

“I’m sort of weird I guess, I don’t think I’m nuts. They’ve been putting out a lot of lies about me lately.”

“Well... You don’t really look like a maniac. You’re shorter than I thought you would be, how old are you now?” Edith seemed to be calming down by now.

“Twelve, barely.”

“You’re sort of small for twelve.”

“I’ve always been the runt.”

The woman seemed to calm some more, then she came to a decision. "Oh what the hell! Come on, the girls are lining up for dinner, grab a plate and get at the end of the line."

"Thanks Ma'am, I'll leave right after I eat."

There were about ten girls in the troop clamoring for food as Adam snagged a paper plate and some plastic utensils. The boy stood quietly at the end of the line unnoticed by all but the girl closest to him.

"Hi, who are you?" The girl asked.

"Adam. Nice to meet you."

"My name's..."

"Sandra. Pretty name." Adam interrupted

"Now how did you know my name? You look real familiar, do I know you?"

"No. I'm just sort of panhandling a meal here, Ms. Hamilton said it was okay."

By this time they were up to the food table where they both piled on fried chicken and corn on the cob. The girl steered her new acquaintance over to one of the log seats around the campfire. By now all of

the girls were looking and giggling at the boy now in their midst. A couple of the girls stared open mouthed at Adam, they recognized who he was, and soon spread the word.

“Looks like I’ve been found out.” Adam told the girl.

“What do you mean, why is everyone staring at you so much?” Sandra asked.

“My last name is Valentine, this chicken is pretty good.”

Sandra sat very still for a moment, her corn cob posed halfway to her mouth.

“Don’t be scared, I don’t turn into a werewolf until the full moon is up.”

“My gosh, it is you! This is so cool, America’s most wanted is sitting next to me!”

Ms. Hamilton came and sat down amid the girls, her plate loaded to capacity. “Girls, meet Adam. I invited him to have dinner with us. I don’t think he’s quite the lunatic that the news says he is.”

Half of the girls seemed ready to bolt, the other half

seemed ready to swoon over the short male desperado in their midst. Adam smiled at them and waved his drumstick in greeting.

“Hello girls, sorry to butt in like this. Don’t be afraid of me, I can’t commit major felonies with my mouth full,” Adam tried his best to reassure them.

After a few minutes the assembled females were soon talking excitedly among themselves about the undersized fugitive sitting across the fire from them.

“How did you get to Hawaii?” Sandra asked between bites.

“I sort of beamed down, it’s a long story. What are you all doing here?”

“This is our reward for selling all of the Girl Scout cookies in the known universe, also our parents kicked in for part of the trip.”

“How old are you?” Of late Adam had begun to take a bit more than a passing interest in the opposite sex, with some reason since his time in New Mexico.

“Thirteen, well...I will be in a couple of months. Your hair is black.”

“Yeah I’ve been dying it, that seems to be pretty much a waste of time though.”

“It’s starting to show through at the roots really bad.”

“Again? Maybe I’ll cut it off and just let it grow back the way it was.”

By now the boy was pretty well exhausted, his yawns attracted the attention of Ms. Hamilton.

“Adam, you look beat. Why don’t you turn in for the night, you’ll be safe here.”

“That sounds really nice. Where should I park it?”

“Well, how about by the fire here? We have an extra sleeping bag. If it rains tonight you can get in the van, there’s room in the back. I don’t think it would be quite proper to stick you in a tent full of girls.”

“You’re a good person, Ms. Hamilton. I’ll be leaving in the morning. I think it would be a bad idea if anyone found out that you helped me.”

“Maybe so. I was scared silly when you first showed up, I can see now that what they’ve been saying about you is baloney.”

Ms. Hamilton shooed the girls off to their respective tents and brought Adam his sleeping bag. The night was clear as the boy curled up next to the remains of the campfire, he took the time to scan the surrounding territory and found no threats.

Mid-morning found the boy standing on the western tip of Molokai. Oahu was off even further to the west, a very long jump but not impossible. Adam sat down and 'viewed' the shoreline of his newest destination. Many more people plus the large urban area of Honolulu would probably mean he would be spotted, but that was of less importance now. Adam felt that on his last 'jumps' he hadn't concentrated carefully enough, a mess up could get a person killed landing in the wrong place, or too high, or too low, or any of a dozen wrong things. What would happen if he appeared ten feet underground or something? Was that even possible?

Adam could see a small stretch of beach that was near the main road running around the shore of the

island. After studying the place with great care and patience he stood and made the jump.

Oahu, east shore.

“Not bad.” Adam congratulated himself as he appeared on the small strip of sand, this time he had got it just right. The two young ladies who thought they had the small beach to themselves and were sunbathing topless were a bit flustered when the boy walked by and caused their eyes to open with his greeting. “Morning ladies, you’re looking very good today!”

Cool.

Geez!

During the morning before his jump to Oahu Adam had decided that simply stowing away on one of the Air Force’s large cargo aircraft would be the safest and easiest way to get to Okinawa. The jumps that would be involved would be too far, since

they were out of the effective range of his remote viewing. The Pacific Ocean was rather large and Adam had no mental picture of Okinawa or points in between.

“Hickam. That’s part of the commercial field at Honolulu.” Adam remembered this from his other trips to the islands in happier times. In the meantime he would find some lunch, no he would buy some lunch in a decent restaurant for a change. Let them spot him! So what! He decided a stop at a nice clothing store would be in order first, his hick tourist garb was almost embarrassing to be seen in. Several short and easy jumps found him standing on a busy street in downtown Honolulu.

“Criminy! So much for grass shacks and charming island people!” The place looked a lot like a misplaced section of Los Angles. Adam spotted an upscale looking barbershop and decided to trade in his bad dye job for a very short trim. As he went in and sat down to wait no one paid any particular attention to him while he perused some of the

magazines. Newsweek had a long article on him, it read like a eulogy for a one time hero-gone nuts that had died a tragic death.

“Your turn son.” The barber interrupted Adam’s light reading.

“Oh. Thanks.” Adam hopped up into the chair after taking off his hat and sunglasses. “Cut it real short so all of the black is gone.”

“Okay. You had it dyed?” This seemed very unusual for a kid.

“Yeah, it’s a long story.”

“It’s going to be really short, maybe a quarter inch.”

“That’s okay, let ‘er rip.”

In a few short minutes the boy’s black hair was in a pile on the floor, his blonde hair cut to a length that wouldn’t give a drill sergeant anything to complain about. By this time the barber was remembering where he had seen this kid before. He was remarkably calm about it.

“All done, Adam.”

“Spotted me did you?” Adam grinned pleasantly.

“Yeah. You’re not going to run amok on me or anything are you?”

“No, I only do that when the full moon is up. What do I owe you for the trim?”

“Fifteen bucks, on the house if you’re short on green.”

“No problem,” Adam pulled out a twenty, “keep the change.”

“Thanks kid.” The barber handed Adam a black felt marker pen and pointed to a blank space on the wall. “How about an autograph, right there, make it really big.”

Adam stepped over to the wall and asked the barber his name. Then he wrote with a flourish, “Nice haircut Pete! Best wishes, Adam Valentine.”

“Thanks kid, you take care of yourself.” By this time everyone in the shop was gathered around Adam and Pete, some handshaking ensued. The boy put his sunglasses back on and dumped the silly looking hat in the trash on the way out (Pete

grabbed the hat and swept up the black hair for souvenirs). “Bye Pete!” Adam waved as he left.

“Bye kid.” Pete said quietly.

The lack of hair made Adam’s head feel cool and naked in the shadows and somewhat parboiled in the sunlight as he walked along the main boulevard. A swanky department store caught his attention next.

He thought about a decent wardrobe as he entered the coolness of the expensive store. “Let’s see, shoes, socks, pants, nice shirt for lunch, cooler sunglasses. Maybe I’ll get something warm for the plane flight later.” He consulted the store directory for where they kept the kid stuff, “third floor, that figures.”

The trip up to the children's department was uneventful, although a few of the customers seemed to look at the boy strangely. Adam found some nice tan slacks and was searching for a belt when one of the clerks came up to him.

“Good morning young man, may I help you?” The clerk was just too sweet to bear.

“Uh, yes Ma’am. I need a belt and a nice shirt to go with these pants, some shoes too.”

“Very well, are you here alone this morning?”

“Yes Ma’am, I have money to pay for it all.”

“Come with me then and we’ll get you fixed up.”

In the space of a half hour Adam was in the dressing room changing into his new clothes and shoes, the wrap around sunglasses were just too cool. After pulling off all of the tags and putting his money in his new pants he went out to the waiting clerk.

“They fit just fine Ma’am. I’ll wear them now, here’s the tags with the prices.” He handed her the small handful of price tags.

“Oh. Very well, what about your other clothing?”

“I tossed ‘em in the trash can in there.”

“I see, well let’s get these paid for then, follow me.”

Adam sensed something was going amiss about this time and as he stood at the cash register paying for his purchases he wasn't surprised when six Honolulu police officers began exiting the escalator. As the clerk was giving him his receipt the six officers spread out and surrounded him cautiously, hands on their holsters. Adam then turned and faced them.

"Hi guys! You all look pretty grim this morning."

"Just stand still son. Are you Adam Valentine?"

Asked one of the officers.

"Guilty. Don't panic." Adam raised his hands. He also fused the metal parts in their firearms just to be safe.

"What are you doing here, they said you were probably dead?"

"Just buying some clothes and stuff. I paid for them, here's my receipt." Adam offered the paper to the officer while focusing in on the sidewalk about a block away from the store.

"Will you come along quietly with us son, none of

us here mean you any harm.”

“I know that, but I have to be going now, you all have a good day.” And then, of course, he wasn't there anymore.

When the boy vanished from in front of their eyes, the six officers didn't react at first, and then slowly they turned and looked around the store. All they could see were several stunned customers and the sales clerk who had just fainted.

Adam appeared on the sidewalk in front of two tourists from Japan, they nearly jumped into the street in fright. The boy just smiled at them and continued on his way, making one more jump down to the beachfront where all of the pricey hotels were. He picked out the most impressive looking of the establishments and walked into the lobby.

“They gotta have a nice restaurant in here.”
They did.

The maitre'd looked down his nose at the short boy as if he were some stray animal that had

wandered in off the street. “May I help you, little boy?”

The “little boy” handed the man two twenties and asked him for a table by the windows, no he didn’t have a reservation.

“This way sir.” The maitre’d’s attitude had improved a good deal by now.

Adam had a nice table with a view of the beach, as far as the eye could see tourists were oiled and broiling in the sun. In short order his waiter appeared with a menu and kind words.

“Hello, I’m Stanley, I’ll be your waiter. Can I bring you something cold to drink before you order?”

“Just a Coke, lots of ice. Thanks Stanley.”

Stanley left the menu and flitted off to fetch the soft drink. Adam still had his sunglasses on, but even so some of the customers were looking in his direction. So what?

“Let’s see, a nice salad and this fish stuff,” Adam decided as he read the grossly overpriced menu, “maybe a piece of cheese cake for dessert.”

Mrs. Richter’s cheesecake had been worth time in

prison for just one piece.

Stanley zoomed back with the Coke and took his order. “Very good, my young man. Are your folks staying here?”

“No, I just felt like a good meal. Don’t worry, I can pay for it.”

“Never a doubt. Won’t be long.”

Adam made a mental note to leave Stanley a nice tip, the guy worked really hard for his money. In a fairly short time the waiter returned with Adam’s salad and placed it before the boy with care and a bit of a flourish. The boy took off his sunglasses and started in on the crisp greens (with ranch dressing), when he did so several of the customers became very quiet as they tried to decide whether to finish their lunch or to head back to California. After about ten minutes Stanley returned with the main course and finally recognized just who occupied his table.

“Hi Stanley, nice salad.” Adam said pleasantly.

“Oh my! You’re him....Adam!” Stanley was not quite trembling.

“Relax Stanley, the rumors of my horrible deeds are greatly exaggerated.”

“What should I do? I mean...”

“Don’t worry, calm down. I’m just here for a nice meal, and then I’m gone. By the way, you’re a pretty good waiter.”

“Well, thank you. I suppose you’re a pretty good customer too.”

Stanley resisted the urge to bow as he left Adam’s table and quickly vanished into the kitchen area.

As Adam was polishing off the remainder of his pretty good cheesecake a large man in a mediocre business suit walked slowly toward his table. The boy knew that he had cop written all over him in capitol letters. It didn’t take any odd mental abilities.

“Officer Marsden, please have a seat.” Adam stood politely and motioned the man to sit.

“Hello Adam. How did you know my name?”

“One of my many weird talents. They have good

food here.”

“They should for the prices they charge.” Marsden didn’t quite know what to do next.

“I suppose you have the place surrounded, as the saying goes?”

“Pretty much. What are you doing in the islands?”

“Just passing through.” Adam waved at Stanley for the check.

“Will you come along with me?” Asked Marsden. “We sure don’t like doing this.”

Stanley hurried over with the small tray with the bill and then high tailed it for safer areas.

“Actually I can’t right now, but don’t worry, I’ve never hurt anyone and I’m not starting now.”

“I have no choice in the matter, I have to take you in, you know that don’t you?”

“Sure. No hard feelings.” Adam dug five twenties out of his pocket and placed them on the tray with the bill for the meal. “Tell Stanley to keep the change, he earned it.”

“Let’s go then, son. Let’s get this over with.”

Marsden waved at two of his men near the entrance to the restaurant. When he looked back at Adam the boy was of course, gone. Several of the restaurant's more excitable patrons began screaming.

The White House.

“Are you saying that the little shit can just disappear and pop up somewhere else?” President Packer had hoped that his small nemesis would have somehow met his fate by now.

“Six cops in a department store and a restaurant full of people saw it happen. Just like New Mexico. So far we've been able to contain the news, that can't last forever.” FBI Director Crispin had some time ago regretted his appointment to his present office.

“So how do we catch the little fart?”

“Maybe we catch someone he cares about,

maybe the Richter boy.”

“Bait?”

“Yes Mr. President, make him come to us.”

“Where’s Master Richter right now?”

“Okinawa, Camp McTureous, with his parents.

Marines up the ying yang.”

“Can you get him out of there?”

“Difficult, not impossible.”

“Do it.”

Adam sat for a while on the main beach at Waikiki with his shirt off soaking up some of the tropical sun and warmth. During this period he had scanned the area in and around Hickam Air Force Base, looking for a likely cargo plane headed east. Finally, he found the military cargo routing operations area and in it a computer terminal listing pending flights, destinations, aircraft tail numbers, and assigned cargo.

There it was, a C-141 direct to Kadena Air Base,

Okinawa. Cargo listed as medical supplies and chemical protective gear. It was scheduled to leave in four hours.

Passing tourists had taken note of his presence as he sat quietly in the sand. Once more a group of police, ten this time, were moving toward him. They formed a wide ring to box him in while the other sunbathers in the area decided to be somewhere else. This routine was getting to be a major drag.

“What’s happening guys?” Adam began putting his shirt back on, he had already disabled their firearms.

“Just sit real quite son. Can we talk for a minute?” It was the same Officer Marsden from the restaurant.

“Sure officer, pull up some sand.” Adam smiled and indicated the spot next to him.

Marsden sat down with his knees drawn up in front of him. “How did you do it?”

“What’s that, sir?”

“How did you just disappear like that?”

“Smoke and mirrors, sir.”

“My ass. You just totally vanished, lots of people saw it.”

“I didn’t think vanishing was illegal, is it?”

“Only if you’re running from the law.”

“What am I charged with now?”

“Let’s see. Felony grand theft, interstate flight, vandalism, bank robbery. I could go on, son.”

“You left out littering and public drunkenness.”

Adam smiled just a little. Marsden had to smile a little at that too.

“Will you let me handcuff you now and take you in?”

Adam stuck out his arms, wrists together. “Slap ‘em on, officer.”

Marsden took out his cuffs only to have them dissolve in his hands and dribble shiny globules onto the sand.

“Jesus! Now how did you do *THAT?*” Marsden was getting really edgy again.

“Sorry, just teasing you some. Your guns don’t work, neither do your radios.”

“I could just grab you, then what?”

“I turn you into a sand crab. Sorry, just teasing again. Please don’t try grabbing me.”

Marsden tried anyway but something firm and invisible shoved his hands away as they neared the boy. The cop stood up and moved back a bit in alarm, signaling his men to move in closer around the boy. Adam looked off into the distance and spotted what he was looking for.

“Time to go guys, you may as well give up chasing me around like this. I haven’t hurt anyone and I’m not going to, so why not have something cool to drink and relax some, it’s a beautiful day.” The ring of police charged to grab the boy, but like before he just wasn’t there anymore.

The dark green C-141 Starlifter was fully loaded and all buttoned up save the crew entrance. Adam made himself a soft nest atop one of the cargo pallets, some foam packing material made a small mattress. The aircraft was very hot and stuffy from sitting in the sun; Adam hoped they would be leaving on time. After a half hour of serious

sweating the boy was finally rewarded with the sounds of the crew boarding the aircraft.

“I hope they don’t decide to inspect the cargo too closely.”

The crew chief did a walk through checking the cargo tie downs and the condition of the rear hatch locking mechanisms. Adam was hidden from casual view; he could only be seen if the man climbed up on top of the pallets. He didn’t. When the crew chief returned to the front of the aircraft there was another hot wait of twenty minutes, then the four engines began to spin up, their whine soon filled the inside of the aircraft.

“About time, now I’ll probably freeze to death when we get airborne.” Adam knew all about military cargo aircraft.

The aircraft seemed to be taxiing all the way to Okinawa, but finally the engine’s whine turned to a roar and Hawaii was left far behind.

The White House.

“We have the Richter boy. We hired some locals to do the job. They got him on the way home from school. He’s on a fishing boat right now, he’ll be in Japan in about two days.” Crispin was fairly beaming.

“That was quick work.” Packer seemed actually pleased for a change.

“We thought we had better move quickly so we pulled out all of the stops.”

“Where will we take him from there?”

“He’ll be flown to a safe house in Nevada, we’re setting up a surprise there for Adam. The site is very remote, we can do as we please out there.”

Somewhere north of the Bonin Islands Adam jerked awake up with the alarming sensation that something was not right with the Richter's.

“It’s Freddie. Something's happened to Freddie!”

Adam sat quietly as he scanned the vast expanse of ocean, seeking his friend and his adopted family. Something drew the boy to the sea just north of Okinawa, a small fishing trawler. Freddie was on that trawler.

“What in the world...?” Adam tried to understand why his friend would be at sea in a small fishing craft. He pushed his remote viewing ability to its far limits for a close examination of the vessel; Freddie was in one of the small bunks bound hand and foot.

“The bastard’s kidnapped him! They want to use him to get at me!” Adam felt true rage at the idea. Finally he collected himself and climbed out of the ‘nest’ he had made in the cargo, then he moved quickly to the front of the aircraft. When he appeared at the crew chief’s station the dozing sergeant nearly screamed when he was tapped on the shoulder.

“Where the hell did you come from?” Sergeant Pimms was very awake by now.

“Sorry I startled you, I sort of stowed away. I

need to speak to the pilot, it's important."

"Jesus! You're that Valentine kid, aren't you?"

The Pope was less recognizable than Adam was.

"Yes, don't worry, I'm pretty harmless."

It took a few moments for the crew chief to organize his wits. "Well, come on then, let's make Major Carlson's day."

When Adam's presence was made known to the aircraft's commander it was a good thing that the plane was on autopilot.

Adam attempted to make the peace.

"I'm sorry sir I didn't mean to bring you into this but I need to contact a Marine officer on Okinawa, it's about his son, my friend."

"Whatever for?" Carlson wasn't so much mad as bewildered.

"It's pretty hard to explain, you know about my weird abilities?"

"The whole world does, son."

"My friend has been kidnapped, he's the son of Colonel Frederick Richter, at Camp McTureous."

“Alright then, I’ll see if we can get a phone patch through to him. No guarantees it will work though.”

“Thanks sir. This won’t make trouble for you will it?”

“I’ve already got that, don’t worry.”

“How long till Okinawa, sir?”

“About an hour.” The pilot told his co-pilot to try and get through to Colonel Richter; after about ten minutes had passed the connection was made. The co-pilot gave Adam his headset.

“Hello sir, this is Adam.”

“Adam! God it’s good to hear your voice, but we have troubles here, Freddie’s missing.” Colonel Richter seemed to be between desperation and rage.

“I know sir, I’ve located him. He’s been kidnapped.”

“How... Where is he for God’s sake?”

“He’s on a fishing boat, I think it’s heading for Japan. It’s maybe fifty miles north of Okinawa right now.”

“How did you know about this, son?”

“I was on my way to visit with you all, something felt wrong about Freddie. I searched for him all over and found him on a fishing boat. He’s tied up in a bunk.”

“Who’s taken him?”

“The people on the boat seem to be all Japanese or something, odds are that Packer is behind this to get at me.”

“God damn that man! Can you direct some helicopters to an intercept?”

“Yes sir, but we need to be real careful. Freddie is evidence right now, evidence can go overboard in a hurry. I need to be on one of the helicopters, I can take out the boat’s crew long enough for your guys to board and get to Freddie before they can.”

“Good Lord. You’re right of course. Your aircraft is landing at Kadena?”

“Yes sir, less than an hour from now.”

“I’ll be there with helicopters and a team, we can move out as soon as you land.”

“Yes sir. I never thought they would do something like this to get at me, I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for, the sons of

bitches that took Freddie will be the one's who are going to be sorry! I have to sign off now and get things going here, God bless you son."

"Thank you sir, see you on the ground."

Adam handed the headset back to the astonished co-pilot and explained the situation to him and Major Carlson.

"It may be a little exciting when we land."

Observed Carlson.

It was late afternoon when the C-141 landed at the busy military field on Okinawa. The aircraft was given special taxiing instructions and came to a halt near the flight operations building where six helicopters, four of them gun ships, were waiting on the tarmac.

"Thanks for all of your help guys, I apologize for picking your aircraft to stowaway in." Adam shook the pilot and co-pilot's hands.

"Our pleasure Adam, you better hustle now, those Marines look totally pissed."

Adam bounded down the short crew steps and

took off at a run toward the large figure in battle gear standing beside the closest helicopter. The boy and the large Marine fairly collided as Adam launched himself into the arms of Colonel Richter. The other Marines standing by glanced at one another with their first smiles in quite a while.

“Oh geez sir, it’s good to see you again!” Adam had tears on his face.

“Dear boy, what have you been going through?” The Colonel’s eyes seemed to be bothering him also.

“Too much lately, let’s go get Freddie!”

Colonel Richter and the boy boarded the helicopter, it’s rotor already getting up to speed. Adam asked for the seat next to the pilot and after takeoff spoke to Richter over the headsets.

“Sir, I don’t want to tell you your job at all, but I think it might work best if we flew several miles ahead of the rest of the flight and came in fast and low when we get to the boat to surprise them.”

“All right, what will you do when we get close?”

“Take out the crew, put them to sleep, wreck any

weapons on board. Then you and me snatch Freddie and then let the gun ships persuade them to turn around.”

“We’d have to rappel down on ropes to the deck, I don’t want your neck broke.”

“I won’t have to use a rope sir.” Adam then explained his newest ability to the disbelieving Marine.

“Son, that’s just plain impossible.”

“Sir, I’ve never lied to you and I’m not starting now. The first time I did it jumped me from New Mexico to Maui. It took me a while to figure out what I had done, short jumps are real easy now.”

“My God. What was going on in New Mexico that you had to leave that way?”

“Crispin’s goons had me surrounded, there were too many of them to take out. They had baseball bats to kill me with.”

“Baseball bats?” The Colonel looked about ready to kill something himself.

“Yes sir, I can’t disable a piece of wood.”

“And now they’ve taken my son to draw you in.” Adam nodded miserably. “We need to turn a bit to

the east sir, were coming up on the coastline now.”

Another twenty minutes of flying put them in sight of the fishing boat. The UH-60 Black Hawk dropped down to within a few feet of the waves while Adam scanned the boat ahead. There were four crewmen plus Freddie on board, almost as one the crew dropped where they stood as Adam put them to ‘sleep’. Two handguns and three AK-47’s became useless as their parts fused together.

The helicopter came to a hover beside the slow moving boat while Adam prepared to ‘jump’ over.

“I’m going to Freddie now sir, see you on deck.” Before the Marine could respond the boy was gone from the helicopter and standing on the pitching deck of the boat. He waved at the helicopter and ducked inside the aft structure. The crewmen were starting to come around by now and were quickly put back to sleep. Adam made his way back to the small dank cabin where his friend was tied up and then pummeled him awake.

“Doofus! Wake up you big lump!”

“Dork?” Freddie stirred some and kept blinking his eyes.

“Yeah, you’re rescued, sit up! Your dad’s here too!”

Adam dissolved the padlock and chains around his friend’s wrists and ankles and helped him to stand up.

“Are you okay, did they hurt you any?”

“They slapped me around some and made me take some pills to put me to sleep, but I’m okay. I feel dopey and hungry.”

“So what’s new? Let’s go. Your dad may start shooting up the place.”

“Fine by me, I hope he does.”

The two boys staggered out onto the pitching deck just as Colonel Richter was setting foot on the boat. By now four gun ships were hovering around the area, itching for a target. Two more Marines followed Richter onto the deck, as the Colonel grabbed up his son Adam directed the others toward the unconscious crewmen. Richter sat his son

down and moved with his M-16 toward the cabin where Adam interposed himself between the Marine and what he intended to kill.

“Move aside son, I have business in there.” The Colonel was intent on a father’s justice.

“No sir. Those goons aren’t worth the bullets, please don’t!”

The Marine hesitated a moment then slowly nodded his head in agreement.

“All right Adam, for you I won’t kill them, but only for you.”

“Thanks sir, let’s get Freddie home.”

When the boat was secured a rescue harness was lowered to bring up Freddie and the Colonel. Four more Marines from the other Black Hawk repelled down to join the two left to guard the boat crew. Adam made the ‘jump’ to the lead helicopter and appeared next to the pilot, much to the Marine’s astonishment.

“Let’s go home,” was the Colonel’s final order.

Okinawa

Mrs. Richter and her daughter Hanna were waiting on the flight line when the helicopter carrying her husband and two 'sons' landed. Freddie's mother had fared worse than any of the family but managed to compose herself enough to not totally go to pieces when she was reunited with him. After the weeping woman had finished crushing her son it was Adam's turn, holding the boy seemed to help her to calm somewhat. Most of the camp's personnel had formed a cheering and waving crowd to greet their wandering boys. As the family pushed through the crowd to the waiting vehicles about a thousand hands were shook, Adam got the worst of it. His face was covered with lipstick by the time they reached the car.

The house was different but the home was the same. The Richter's had been through a small hell the last few days but they made Adam feel like he was home again at last. Mrs. Richter was intent on

fixing dinner that evening but Hanna and Adam staged a revolt and made her go sit down and rest, they made spaghetti and meatballs. Freddie went to bed soon after dinner, the effect of the sleeping pills had not completely worn off and a doctor's exam had already pronounced him mostly fit. Adam gave it up soon after the kitchen was put back in order; his day had been a very long one also.

Before turning in Adam spoke with the Colonel for a short while.

"I suppose if you hadn't stopped me today I would have turned those bastards into hamburger."

"I guess you would have been justified sir. I feel awful that you all have been put through this because of me." Adam replied.

"Don't think that way. While you and Hanna were making dinner I was on the phone with the Commandant of Marines and gave him a full rundown on just what Packer has pulled this time."

"What did he say?"

"I won't use his language, he seemed about ready to storm the White House."

“I hope he doesn’t, the military has never done anything like that in our country.”

“No it hasn’t and we really don’t want to start now, something needs to be done though.”

“I think I’ll soon be ready to do something, my abilities are starting to get pretty impressive if I do say so. I can make things so bad for our dear leader that he may be glad to resign and go to jail.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“Disrupt his communications, make the White House into a haunted house, he’ll have to walk to get anywhere. Generally raise hell I guess.”

“They’ll be gunning for you.”

“I don’t have to be very close anymore, I can move ten miles in the blink of an eye, much further if I take my time.”

Richter shook his head for a moment, “Somehow I think you might just pull it off. You can stay with us for a while, can’t you?”

“Yes sir, right now that sounds wonderful.”

“Yes it does. See you in the morning, son.”

The White House.

The Commandant of The Marine Corps was having a 'conversation' with the President.

"Mr. President, you are one sorry son of a bitch! Kidnapping a child to set a trap for Adam, you disgust us all!"

"Don't you dare speak to me that way! I am the President, you work for me!"

"Only technically. Don't ever bother calling on any member of any of the services for anything. The Marine guards at the White House have been withdrawn, all of the military support people in your communications detachment are withdrawn. Air Force One is parked, if you need to go somewhere call a cab. Oh yes, you no longer have access to the nuclear launch codes. Good day sir."

Click.

The President just opened and closed his mouth silently, unable to voice his rage.

The Richter household slept late the morning after Adam and Freddie returned, the detachment of armed marines guarding their house contributed to the peace and quite. Strangely enough, Adam awoke before his friend then showered and borrowed some too large clothing to wear while his own went into the wash. The Colonel and his wife were sitting at the kitchen table when Adam went looking for food, the warm hugs and kisses from Mrs. Richter were as good as the breakfast she placed before him.

“So Adam, what are your plans for the day?”
Asked Colonel Richter.

“Well sir, unless there’s something you’d like me to do I think I’ll just sort of rest and vegetate for a while, things have been too exciting lately.”

“Permission to vegetate granted. That sounds like a good plan for all of us today, and tomorrow.”

“What happened to those guys who snatched Freddie?”

“A Japanese naval frigate picked them up from our guys, they should be in a Tokyo jail about now.”

“I’ve heard the Japanese tend not to coddle their prisoners.” Adam responded with a smile.

“They deserve whatever they get. I expect they’ll be singing about who hired them in very short order.”

“Not too hard to guess who.”

“There’s been nothing on the network satellite feeds about any of this, Packer must have them pretty well buttoned down,” said the Colonel.

“That’s maybe the scariest part of this whole mess,” Adam responded, “how is he able to control them like that?”

“Packer’s dirt files are said to make J. Edgar Hoover’s files look like a stamp collection. Direct threats will also go a long ways toward making people cooperate. There’s been talk of a lot of people who have just gone missing.”

“What about the internet?”

“As soon as an anti-Packer site comes on line there are ‘technical difficulties’ with the server.” Richter explained.

“But people must surely know some of what he’s been up to?”

“Idaho and Montana have all but seceded from the Union, they’ve ejected all federal government workers, save for the military and the post office.”

“Good Lord. What about the Congress?”

“Hard to say, it seems pretty well paralyzed, as usual.”

Freddie finally made it to the breakfast table.

More hugs and kisses.

“Morning, dork.” Freddie greeted his wandering friend.

“Hi, doofus. It’s hard to tell with you, have the drugs worn off yet?”

This elicited the obligatory punch in the arm to Adam.

“Very funny. Thanks for saving my bacon yesterday.”

“No problem. Feel like motor biking today?”

This last remark caused both of the Richter adults to look at Adam with narrowed eyes until they saw he was teasing about the past unfortunate incident involving the motorbike.

“Do you still have Gertrude?” Adam asked the Colonel.

“Yes, I occasionally ride it to work when the weather is dry.”

“Man, all that work me and Freddie did to get it running and you’re the one riding it!”

“As I recall the last time you two got on that thing you both left large portions of your butts on the pavement.”

“Sad but true. I think that was the start of my criminal career.”

The Colonel hesitated before asking the next question. “Any serious felonies we should be hearing about?”

Adam was also silent for a moment and then looked Richter in the eye. “I’ve had to do some things I’m ashamed of, I never hurt anyone though.”

“I’m sure you had very good reasons, you had to stay alive and free.”

“Yes sir, but stealing things and robbing ATM’s isn’t right.”

“Neither is being turned into a drugged tool of

Packer's. When things get sorted out in the end you can see about making restitution for what you had to take, people are very forgiving, especially to someone who has saved as many lives as you have."

"Thanks. Do you think things will really work out?"

"Someone once said, I think it was Gandhi, that all tyrannies will fall, at least sooner or later. Words to that effect."

"Let's pray for sooner."

"Amen to that, son."

Adam spent nearly a month with the Richter's. He was more than tempted to just stay with them forever and forget about the darkness that had settled over America. His abilities continued to grow in power and range; it took a measure of self-control few can appreciate not to yield to the corruption that great power always tempts one with. The boy's telekinetic abilities were becoming truly awesome. This was demonstrated one afternoon when Adam and Freddie were walking home from the base

theater's Saturday matinee. Taking a shortcut through the motor pool area, the boys were attracted to shouts coming from one of the maintenance bays. A junior NCO had been working on a Humvee, it had slipped off the support jacks and pinned him under the right rear drive assembly. Other Marines came running, so did Adam and Freddie. As the Marines scrambled to get other jacks and put them into place, Adam simply floated the three ton vehicle up and out of the maintenance bay, much to the open mouthed shock of everyone at the scene.

“Holy shit!” Freddie looked at his short friend with a mixture of amazement and some very real apprehension.

“Stay cool, doofus. Let's see if the guy's hurt bad.” Adam replied calmly.

He was hurt bad. His chest had been crushed, he couldn't breathe. Adam gently pushed back the Marines hovering over their comrade; they felt the sensation of a giant soft hand moving them back out

of the way. Adam knelt by the gasping and bloody man and 'looked' into him. Ribs were moved to their proper position and repaired, blood vessels mended, the deep laceration on his chest closed. Adam still didn't know the how and why of what he was able to do, it was enough for him that he could.

Only the siren of the approaching ambulance broke the silence as Adam stood and looked around at the stunned Marines and his friend. The injured Marine slowly sat up, trying to understand why he was bloody but seemingly uninjured. Adam knelt once more beside him and took his hand.

"Hi guy. How are you feeling?" The boy smiled pleasantly at the bloody Marine, his touch calming the man.

"Okay I guess," the man replied, "what the fuck happened?"

"You were trying to impersonate a jack, you had a Humvee on top of you."

"You're Adam aren't you?"

"Yeah. Freddie and me happened by. Better let

the medics check you out, I'm kind of new at this doctor stuff."

Adam stood once more and tugged at Freddie to come on along with him, he felt very ill at ease the way all of the assembled Marines were looking at him. Several of the men had reached out to gently touch the boy, as if to reassure them that he was real. The two boys walked quickly away as the ambulance pulled up, Freddie had been amazed many times by his friend's abilities, but this took all of the cake and the ice cream too.

"Dork?"

"Yeah, Freddie."

"That guy was totally squashed... mostly dying. Humvee's weigh tons."

"I know. It's sort of scary isn't it?"

"Very. I don't know what to think about you anymore."

"I'm still me, doofus. Please don't be afraid of me."

"I don't think I am, it's just hard to see you do

things like that and not feel well, spooked somehow.”

“Imagine how I feel.” Adam stopped and looked his friend in the eye. “I have no idea how I did that.”

“What do we tell my folks?” Freddie asked.

“I don’t know, let’s just let it slide. I think I need to get back to the States pretty soon, some of my good friends are going to be in bad trouble if I don’t have it out with Packer.”

Freddie stood awkwardly for a moment, and then he said something one said only to a close and trusted friend.

“This will sound really sappy, but me and my folks, well, we love you a lot. Like you were family. Cripes, I sound like a fairy!”

“I feel the same way about you all,” Adam replied, “let’s get on home now before we both start blubbering or peeing in our pants.”

At dinner that evening Adam said the words that they all knew would be coming sooner or later.

“I need to get back to the States. I’d rather stay

here with you all for the rest of my life but things need to be put straight, I have a bad feeling about the people back home.”

Colonel Richter had heard about the incident at the motor pool, as had the rest of the base. He looked at the undersized blonde boy and slowly nodded his head in understanding.

“We know son. You’ve become something beyond the rest of us, something very special. Is there anything at all we can do to help?”

“I don’t know sir,” replied Adam, “I think I should check in with the military, maybe at the Pentagon or someplace, so I can tell them what I’m going to be doing. Maybe you could give them a heads up.”

Richter regarded the boy for another moment.
“What did you have in mind?”

“Packer is going to have some bad times. I won’t hurt anyone, but maybe they will wish I had.”

“I’ll call the Commandant. He’ll let JCS know that you want to pay them a visit.”

“Thank you sir. I want to visit some people on the way there, the Harper’s, Agent Monroe. Ronnie.”

“Ronnie?”

“She lives in New Mexico, Taos. She let me stay with her. She helped me get past some rough spots. I owe her a lot.”

“Adam, you’re safe here,” Mrs. Richter pleaded, “all of Packer’s thugs will be trying to kill you!”

“I’m a lot stronger now, and I think maybe quite a bit wiser. I’ll be careful. I don’t even have to get very close to them.”

“But still...”

“Ma’am, they kidnapped Freddie to get at me! It’s only a matter of time until they go after everyone I’ve ever cared about, including all of you.”

There was an awkward silence around the table for a time, something needed to be done and it was apparent that only Adam was in a position to do it.

“When do you plan on leaving, son?” Asked the Colonel.

“I think in the morning. Summer’s beginning, it’s a good time to start a war I guess.”

“You can find a place to stay at any military base anywhere, I guess you know that.”

“Yes sir. It seems like the military is the only decent part of the government left.”

“There are still a lot of good people left in the government, they’re just afraid.”

“Afraid for their bank accounts and retirement funds.” Adam was showing more cynicism lately.

“That’s a bit hard, son.”

“I’m sorry sir, but people just seem too ready to look the other way and just do their jobs. It’s like it was in Germany when Hitler took over. As long as it’s the other guy being trotted off to the ovens, then it’s not their concern.”

“I guess there’s some truth in that in any country at any time. Try not to let it sour you completely on the human race.”

“No sir, sometimes I get kind of worked up though.”

“Well, you’ve been given plenty of reason lately. Just remember that we all love you, you’re family as much as Freddie or Hanna.”

The rest of the evening was rather subdued. Adam and the Richter's watched Casablanca on the

television, everyone knew all of the lines (except Freddie), but that only made the film the more enjoyable. Adam knew that in the morning he wouldn't be here, he had grown to really hate goodbyes.

After everyone had gone to bed and Adam knew that his best friend was sound asleep, he quietly dressed and sat down at Freddie's desk to write a note of farewell.

Dear folks,

Please forgive me for sneaking off in the middle of the night. Saying goodbye always seems too final and depressing. I will be back, God willing. I have had some awful feelings about my friends back in the states, I think Packer has them and is going to try to use them to get at me, I won't let that happen, I can't. I love you all.

Adam

And then he left.

Family

Adam was drawn to the place where his good and dear friends were being held. He knew better than to approach closer than ten miles or so, even at night. The land was flat and barren, the Black Rock Desert had been the site for several land speed record attempts, now it held a small compound of prefab metal buildings in the middle of what had once been a shallow lake in prehistoric times. Adam studied the collection of structures and the surrounding area; he knew it was all a trap set just for him.

The Parkers were there, even their small daughter Mary Elizabeth. There was Agent Monroe who had been like a father in so many ways. Deputy Waters and Mrs. Lewis who had been a part of his beginnings in Idaho. Agents Meadows and Steinmetz, they had watched over him and

protected him with their lives and offered a shoulder to lean on when he needed one. Now they were all hostages.

Adam studied the compound with infinite patience; it was a masterpiece of the art of booby-trapping.

“Nerve gas, I guess that’s what’s in those cylinders?” Adam was taking inventory. “Enough C-4 to lift the place into orbit, poison dart projectors? Hardly any metal inside, those cells must be some sort of composite material.”

There were no other people anywhere near the compound, which meant the place had to be under remote observation. Adam spent the next hour scanning the countryside; he spotted a total of two-dozen camouflaged cameras and hundreds of sound and motion sensors.

“First things first,” Adam decided, “disable all of the bad stuff, then make my move.”

It was nearly dawn before the boy had all of the destructive devices disabled or disconnected. The gas canisters had their valves frozen shut; all of the explosives were disconnected. Just before moving in Adam chopped all of the main surveillance cables and radio links. Now the bad guys knew something was afoot, just what they would have to guess at until they showed up to have a look.

In a blink the boy shifted to the middle of the compound where the structure housing his friends/family stood. A growing fury had been brewing in him since he started his observation of the place. He took it all out on the entrance to the building. Not bothering with any subtleties like causing the locks and hinges to melt apart. Adam simply tore off the door and a good bit of its surrounding framework and hurled it several hundred yards out into the desert. The resulting noise awoke all of his friends, little Mary Elizabeth, the Parker's daughter, began crying. The boy moved toward the place where the small child wailed, in a moment he was looking through the

carbon fiber bars at Parker and Mother Harper as they tried to calm their small daughter.

“Hi, folks.” Adam said quietly.

The Parkers turned as one and saw the boy that had brought them together and whom they loved as they did their own daughter. Mother Harper found her voice first.

“Adam?”

“Hi. Geez, I’m so sorry for all of this, are you all okay?”

“Oh God, we thought you were dead!” Marilyn Harper, AKA Mrs. Parker, reached through the black bars to touch her ‘first child’.

“Close, but no cigar. Stand back from the bars, I need to get you out of there.”

Almost without effort the tougher than steel cell bars were ripped from their foundations and slammed against the far wall. Adam went down the short row of cells greeting and freeing his friends. The tearful reunion was all too brief; the forces arrayed around dry lake were making their move.

“They’re coming.” Adam wiped the tears off his face and took stock of the situation. Monroe was ready to do hand to hand combat, likewise the other agents. “What do we do?” Monroe felt frustrated, “We’re defenseless here!”

“Not completely, Agent Monroe.” Adam’s quite tone and the look in his eyes had everyone’s attention. “You all stay put, I’m going to stop them.” The boy moved through what used to be the door to the building, the rest followed him, disobeying his request for them to stay put.

Nearly a hundred vehicles were tearing across the dry lake at high speed; they were mostly SUV’s of one sort or another. By now Adam’s anger was at a level he had never experienced before, they had taken his friends and family and now they sought to kill them all, including himself. They knew he would stay to protect his people, his family, but they didn’t know what they were now up against.

The approaching vehicles began in rapid

succession doing high-speed rollovers, careening and bouncing in massive clouds of dust. The occupants of the SUV's were mostly reduced to bloody and battered casualties in the crashes; a few would trouble no one ever again. Ten of the remaining vehicles turned tail and ran, five pressed on, for a while. By now Adam was pretty much in a blind rage, one by one the remaining vehicles were simply picked up and lifted several hundred feet straight up and released. Of course, they came down again.

For the first time in his life Adam had killed. He killed with the rage and desperation of one protecting his family from wolves at the door. There was no gentleness in the boy this day.

A slight breeze blew away the clouds of dust hiding the destroyed vehicles. The small group of ex-FBI and 'family' watched in numbed silence as Adam sank slowly to his knees and began to sob quietly at what he had been made to do. His people moved slowly to the boy's side, not sure of what to

say or do. Monroe knelt beside the boy and finally found his voice.

“Son, I... are you alright?”

Adam’s head jerked up after a moment, as if being awakened from some sort of bad dream. He looked at the man for a bit and seemed to come into focus. “I killed them....”

“You saved our lives, you did the only thing you could do.” Monroe explained, still trying to come to grips with what he had witnessed. “We would all be dead right now if not for you.”

“If it wasn’t for me none of this would ever have had to happen.” Adam spoke in a soft voice, sad beyond description.

“You never asked for a life as a ‘asset’ belonging to the government, no one ever gave you a choice. You are a credit to the human race, I’ve never been prouder of you than today.” The ex-agent continued, “Now stand up and give me a hug dammit, it’s been too long since the last one!” Adam did just that, with everyone.

After the tears were wiped away the reunited 'family' was still in trouble, they were in the middle of nowhere unarmed, with no transportation, no communications. The bad guys would probably be back. Adam finally regained enough of his composure to take stock of the situation.

"I need to go for help," the boy explained, "you all need to get to a safe place. Where the heck is this place anyway?" Adam had known where his people were but not the name and location of the where. Steinmetz supplied the needed information

"This is the Black Rock desert," the ex-agent explained, "it's a dry lake. I was here once years ago when I was in college, we came to watch them break the sound barrier, the land speed record thing."

"Nevada?" Adam had a vague recollection of the name of the place.

"Yeah. Up towards the north part of the state, not much around here." Steinmetz continued, "Adam, how the hell did you get here anyway?" Everyone had been too stunned until now to ask that obvious question.

“It’s another weird ability I’ve acquired in the last few months, I can shift from place to place just by wanting it to happen. I was in Okinawa with the Richter’s before I came here. I made the shift here in two jumps.”

Everyone just looked at one another, after what they had witnessed the boy do to the attacking force of ‘FBI’ they were open to just about any revelation.

“But how...?” Monroe voiced everyone’s question.

“Watch over there.” Adam pointed toward the flat emptiness to the south. In a blink the boy was a small figure in the distance who waved once at the assembled group and then appeared once more in their midst. “Cool, huh?”

No one said anything for a moment, and then the Parker’s tiny daughter broke the silence with her opinion about thirst, hunger and a bad diaper rash caused by the lack of any proper way to care for her.

“Good God son, is there anything else you can do?” Monroe looked down at the weary Adam with an expression of disbelief.

“I’ve gotten pretty good at breaking all sorts of

laws.” The boy smiled just a bit, revealing some of the Adam that they all had grown to know.

The White House

President Packer sat watching the relayed images from the long-range cameras in the Nevada desert, cramping bowels and a cold sweat were beginning to get their grip on him.

“He’ll come here,” Packer spoke hoarsely to his assembled ‘cabinet’, “that fucking little monster will come here! Then what do we do?”

No one had an immediate answer for the shaken President, for the most part they were making their own silent plans to be elsewhere, and fairly soon.

Adam was beyond tired but he knew that he had to get some help for his family and right away. Groom Lake was the closest installation he was

familiar with and after scanning the countryside around the compound for immediate threats he spoke to assembled group.

“I’m going for help, there’s no one close to here right now, I’ll only be gone for a little while.”

Monroe asked, “Where son, there’s nothing for miles?”

“Area 51, Groom Lake. There’ll be military there, they can get some people here by air pretty quick, maybe from Nellis or maybe Fort Irwin.”

“General Curtis may be there, I talked to him shortly before we were all snatched.” Explained Monroe, “He said he would be doing some research there, mostly to get away from Washington I think.”

Groom Lake, again.

General Curtis was in his office in the retro-engineering complex, he was deep into an analysis report about the alien craft’s propulsion system. It made for pretty thick reading, most of it was

conjecture. The officer failed to notice that there was a small dusty boy standing off to the left of his desk.

“Hi, sir.” Adam spoke quietly.

Apparently the General’s heart was in pretty good condition, he survived the shock.

“*SHIT!*” This is probably the most common expression that people use in times of great stress. “Adam....Good God son! How did you..? I mean where... Crap, I don’t know what I mean!”

“Sorry I scared you sir. I have a big problem, I really need your help! Agent Monroe and some more of my friends are in big trouble, Packer’s goons have kidnapped them! I’ve sort of rescued them for now, but they’re still stuck out in the middle of the Black Rock desert, they’re in a lot of danger there!”

“Son, how in the hell did you get in here?”

“I can shift through space, kind of an instant travel thing, sort of. It’s also sort of a recent development. Totally weird.”

“How can you “shift through space?” Curtis’s

pulse rate was still pretty high.

“I just visualize where I want to be, it’s sort of hard to explain. Sir, we really don’t have much time to talk, Packer’s bunch may come back and try to finish what they started. Please help me!”

Curtis shook his head as if to clear his mind and reached out to touch the boy’s shoulder. “Of course son. Let me call Nellis, they can have some air cover there pretty damn quick. Do you have any sort of location?”

“Black Rock desert, way to the north of here. They’re out in the middle of a dry lake, there’s a small compound. A bunch of crashed cars with dead guys in them a ways from the compound.”

“Who did that?”

“Me.” Adam answered softly.

Curtis moved as if in a dream but managed to make several phone calls. In short order there were forces in the air from Nellis and from the Groom Lake facility security detachment, and they were all pissed.

“I have to get back there now sir, they’re just sitting ducks there in the middle of nowhere. I can fight off the dogs until your guys get there.”

“You look like forty miles of bad road son, when did you sleep last?” Curtis asked.

“I can sleep later, I have to go now sir. Thanks!” Adam gave the befuddled officer a quick hug and blinked out of existence. Curtis managed to get himself sitting down to collect his wits, or what was left of them.

Had this all really happened?

Black Rock

Adam’s reappearance was almost too late. His ‘family’ had retreated to the inner parts of the compound with good reason, there were five helicopters bearing in from the west. Apparently the airborne FBI teams hadn’t been apprised of the fate of the ground forces.

“Jesus H. Christ!!” Monroe nearly jumped straight

up when his small ex-employee appeared next to him.

“Sorry Agent Monroe, help is on the way.” Adam was bone weary but managed a small grin for the man.

“Those choppers, we’re still totally exposed here!” Monroe itched for at least a good-sized rock to throw at them.

There was no time for niceties and Adam knew it. The boy had come to finally realize that there was a time for peace and gentleness and a time for war and killing, he had to defend what was his and what was right.

All five helicopters separated from their main rotors. Enough said.

Groom Lake

Adam had been dead to the world for twelve hours, his ‘family’ was now awake, bathed, diapered

and fed. They took turns watching over their boy as he slept. There had been bad nightmares at first, but now Adam seemed at peace. The building he now rested in had lost a small piece of its roof during the worst of the bad dreams. At hour thirteen his bladder and stomach urged him back towards the living.

“Geez!” Adam sat up and rubbed his eyes. Some things would never change.

“Welcome back, son.” Monroe was sitting on the end of the boy’s bed.

“Hi. I’m starved. Where’s the john?”

Monroe pointed toward the facilities, “Over there. How are you doing?”

Adam wobbled out of the bed and caromed towards the bathroom, “I guess I’m okay, how are you all?”

Monroe spoke as the boy achieved relief in the bathroom, “We’re mostly alright. Little Mary was a bit dehydrated and had terminal diaper rash, she’s doing better now. I called Colonel Richter and told him you were safe, he said they were all praying for

you.”

Adam showered and put on his clothes that someone had thought to hand launder during his hibernation, his nightshirt had been an enormous t-shirt that one of the security staff had donated.

Breakfast was everyone, including General Curtis, sitting around the table watching Adam eat. The boy still seemed a bit dazed and out of focus but the food and good company were fixing most of that.

“Could I have some coffee?” Adam asked.

“You’re drinking coffee now?” Mother Harper didn’t quite seem to approve of this latest development.

“Yeah. I suppose cigarettes and whiskey will be next.”

The coffee quickly appeared and everyone joined the boy in having some.

“So what’s next, son?” Monroe posed the question they all were going to ask.

“I’m going to go visit with Ronnie and Mr. Smithe. I’ve been checking on them all along. They seem to

be okay for now, at least they're at home and alive."

"Tell us about them." Agent Parker asked.

"They're in New Mexico, Taos. Ronnie's an artist, she does sculpture and stuff, she has a studio place out in the country there. She took me in when I was in a jam. She's.. Well, she's very special to me."

"And Mr. Smithe?"

"He's her neighbor, he's an old guy. We made friends. He came charging over there right after this sheriff's deputy found me out, Ronnie had to go into Santa Fe, he was about ready to use his shotgun on the deputy. That's when I had to run again."

Mother Harper gently asked the next question.

"Where did you go from there?"

"I just headed for the hills, eventually I ran out of steam and the FBI goons had me surrounded." It pained the ex-agents to hear the boy speak of the FBI like this, but they found it hard to disagree with his description of them.

"They were going to catch you when you... When you 'shifted'?" The woman wasn't quite sure of how to describe his most remarkable ability.

“They weren’t interested in just catching me, they wanted to kill me, they had wooden baseball bats. They were real close, I guess I prayed for a minute, I thought about you all. I remembered what Doctor Simmons once told me, “think nice thoughts.” Then I was in the ocean off of Hana, I nearly drowned getting to the beach. I was really tired. A nice couple from Georgia found me and helped me, they were there on their honeymoon.”

There was a stunned silence around the table; the anger was something you didn’t need to be psychic to feel. Finally Monroe broke the spell.

“I can’t believe this is America anymore. Where did we lose it?”

Adam continued, “It gets worse. They kidnapped Freddie to draw me in. I was close enough to Okinawa by then to help stop that, along with Colonel Richter and the Marines. I guess when that didn’t pan out for them they decided to snatch all of you.” Adam’s eye’s betrayed some of the rage he still felt. “After I’ve checked on Ronnie and Mr.

Smithe I'm going to pay our dear leader a visit."

"And?" Curtis already knew the answer to his query.

"President Packer will know that hell is in session, not Congress."

"He should stand accountable for what he's done son, he won't if you take the law into your own hands."

"I don't intend to hurt or kill him, or anyone else, sir. They'll just maybe wish that I had." Adam asked the next question,

"What are you all going to do?"

"For now everyone will go to Nellis," Curtis explained, "it'll be safe there, the facilities will be better than this God forsaken place."

"Adam, can't you stay with us for a while?" Mother Harper asked, "You still look tired and worn out." The boy nodded his head, "For a day or two, I can't wait too long, there's no telling what Packer might try next."

"We need to be doing something, anything!" Monroe was agitated, "I think we ought to work on

some way to get the word out about what you've been through and what Packer has done."

Curtis had some words on that subject. "There has been a contingency plan in place for several months now, it involves commandeering key commercial broadcasting complexes. It would have to be a military operation but so far the JCS has been reluctant to undertake such an operation. That may change, they now have a full report on the last few days, we sent them video of what's left at Black Rock."

"If the American people see what Packer's been up to, maybe you won't need to do anymore."

Parker aimed this last statement at Adam.

"I don't know, the creep's pretty smart. I think he'd just claim that the military was trying to stage a... what's the word, a coup." Adam said, "Let me work on him for a few days first, get him so rattled maybe he'll throw in the towel. Without the military to back him up there's not a whole lot he can really do, is there?"

"I'm surprised he's held it all together for as long

as he has,” Curtis said, “the Vice President won’t be any help to him, rumor has it that he hates Packer’s guts.”

“Who doesn’t?” Adam expressed the consensus opinion.

The impromptu planning session was interrupted by a smiling airman who handed a message to the general.

“Your transportation has just arrived.” Curtis announced, “I think you might guess what it is.” Adam already had, “The bat plane!”

Too cool!

Taos

“Shit! Crap! God....” Veronica Burns caught herself for a moment, trying to get a grip on her temper and the stupid lug nuts on her truck. The front passenger-side tire was totally flat; it was

almost the last straw for her. The FBI had trashed Ronnie's home and workshop, there was no electricity, and her bank account had been made to go away. Worst of all Adam was gone and probably dead. The only good thing to happen lately had been her very early release from jail; apparently New Mexico was also starting to part ways with Washington and the FBI.

Crotchety old Mr. Smithe was likewise out of jail, he was trying to help the woman put her place back together, the both of them felt an empty place when they thought about the boy who had been with them for too short of a time.

"Get some WD-40 and squirt it on the nuts." This said as Smithe looked over the woman's shoulder at the truck wheel.

"Yeah. Shit." Ronnie sighed in agreement and started to get up. A small screech from the tire stopped her. The lug nut was turning by itself.

"Hi, folks." Adam was standing behind the couple.

Ronnie got to him first.

“Squirt!!” The woman grabbed up the boy and proceeded to crush his ribs. “Oh God, it’s good to see you! We thought you were dead or something!”

“I nearly was!” Adam’s eyes were as wet as Ronnie’s were, along with Smithe’s. When she finally sat the boy down he greeted Smithe with another bear hug of his own.

“Good to see you, sir.” Adam grinned up at the dusty old guy.

“Lad, where have you been, how did you get here?” Smithe had to stop and blow his nose.

“A lot has happened, Mr. Smithe, too much.” Adam finally halted the crying and laughing session with his usual sort of question, “What’s for lunch?”

Lunch was tuna sandwiches and warm sodas around the kitchen table, not that anyone cared, it was just nice to be back together again. Adam did his best to get Smithe and Ronnie up to speed on recent events; they filled him in on their own experiences with the Packer administration. It was a toss up as to who was the more outraged. Ronnie

and Smithe had the most questions after the meal as they all retired to the living room.

“Squirt, I’ve seen you do a lot of strange stuff, but “shifting across space,” please!” Ronnie’s imagination had some limits.

The three of them had settled in the woman’s living room, or what was left of it. Adam was sitting on the old couch with the woman and Smithe, and then in a blink he wasn’t.

“Over here.” Adam was now across the room. Ronnie and Smithe were still staring between them at the empty spot on the couch. Now they believed him.

Ronnie said nothing for a few moments, and then she slowly got up and went to the partially restored bookcase. Behind a book about Stonewall Jackson was a bottle of Jack Daniels. The woman returned to the couch and took a mind-clearing swig straight from the bottle. Smithe took the bottle and downed another belt. Finally Ronnie found her voice.

“Squirt, what’s next? Leaping over tall buildings

in a single bound?”

Adam returned to the couch (he walked) and sat once more between them. “I’ve tried lifting myself a few times, I can’t seem to control it very well. I just sort of wobble around and crash into things.”

“Can you lift bigger stuff now, lad?” Smithe asked.

“Yes sir, lots bigger.” As Adam pointed out the broken front window Smithe’s battered old Jeep went drifting by rather serenely.

The two adults just looked at each other and took another swig of the whiskey.

“What’s that stuff taste like?” Adam indicated the Jack Daniels bottle.

Ronnie smiled at the boy and handed him the bottle. “Here, knock yourself out, before we knock you out.”

The boy sniffed at the open bottle and then tried a swallow like he had watched the adults do, most of the swig he took wound up as a fine spray. It took some time for Adam to stop gasping and coughing, eventually he was able to croak out a few well chosen words,

“Geez!! God, that’s awful!”

Both adults had held their tongues until the boy had taken a swig of the firewater, then they broke out in eye watering laughter at their odd young friend's distress. Adam failed to see any of the humor.

"You could have warned me or something, geez!" His voice still sounded like he had a dead bat stuck in his throat.

"So, would you like some more, big boy?" Ronnie asked.

"No way! I'd rather gargle with bug spray!"

"Lad, leave the whiskey to grown ups," Smithe explained, "they don't have any better sense than to drink the stuff."

"Gladly!" Adam went to the kitchen sink and rinsed his mouth out with water from the bucket, no electricity meant no running water. The taste in his mouth improved a bit, but not much.

Yuck.

Adam pitched in and spent the afternoon helping in trying to clean up the mess left by the FBI, it appeared that the so-called agents had indulged themselves in vandalism for it's own sake. For

some reason the agent's hadn't bothered with Smithe's small place. The FBI had even shot off the power lines from the poles for most of a mile from Ronnie's place, apparently just for the target practice. Adam had an idea, he knew some things about wiring and such.

"I think I can get the juice back on, I'll just reconnect all of the power lines where they cut them."

The boy had Ronnie open the main circuit breaker to the house and then set off with Smithe in his Jeep. The old man drove slowly as Adam 'lifted' the power lines back up into their proper places and fused them back together. They had decided not to fix the phone lines just yet. You can't bug a phone that's not hooked up to anything. The whole task only took about forty-five minutes. Back at the house the three of them stood looking at the circuit box. Ronnie was going to do the honors.

"Here goes nothing, let's hope the place doesn't explode or something." Ronnie then threw the main breaker back in and the lights in the workshop area

came on. This earned Adam another bone crushing hug from the woman and a back slap from Smithe.

“I get union pay, electrician’s make good money.” Adam quipped.

“You’re outta luck there kid,” Ronnie answered, “my bank account seems to have disappeared.”

“I know, you told me earlier.” The boy grinned at the woman, “I have an idea about that, too.”

“What, bank robbery?” She asked.

“No, Packer robbery.”

“Do tell.”

“Knowing that creep, he has to have loose cash or something stashed at the White House or someplace.” Adam explained, “I think that might be a good place to start when I pay him my first visit.”

“That’s too dangerous!” Ronnie exclaimed, “Don’t you even think about going there!”

“Lighten up, I’ll be perfectly safe. I’ll scope out the place from miles away, find the money or whatever, then I’m in and out in sixty seconds. Piece-o-cake!”

“No way! I won’t have you risking your scrawny

neck for me, just forget it!” Ronnie seemed pretty pissed at this point.

Adam took both of the woman’s hands in his and looked her in the eye.

“I’m going to wage war on that bastard, he’s tried to kill me. He had my best friend kidnapped, he kidnapped just about everyone I care about and would have killed them too. Look what he’s done to you and Mr. Smithe! Look at what he’s doing to the country!” The woman and the boy said nothing for a moment, then Adam calmed a bit and continued. “I love you Ronnie, you know that, but I won’t be stopped from what I have to do.”

“But how will you...It’s clear across the country!” Ronnie sensed her arguments were useless.

“Remember how I got here, Ronnie.”

The woman sighed resignedly and seemed to wilt, “When are you going then?”

“Tonight. I won’t be gone but an hour or two,” Adam explained, “I’ll need a knapsack or something if I find any loot.”

“You’ll just get your fool self killed, lad.” Smithe

liked nothing of what he had heard.

“No sir, I won’t. They won’t even see me.”

Dinner was better than lunch had been, they had electricity and the well pump now supplied running water. Ronnie and Mr. Smithe gave up trying to talk the boy out of his upcoming ‘raid’ on the White House, they finally realized they were just wasting their time and couldn’t stop him if they tried. Around nine that evening some small preparations were made.

“I can’t find my damned knapsack anywhere!”

Ronnie was sure the FBI had taken it.

“I took it when I ran,” Adam explained, “I guess it got left behind when I jumped to Maui, I’m sorry.”

Ronnie pulled the boy to her and hugged him tight.

“I don’t care about the stupid bag, I care about you! Jesus, be careful tonight.”

“I will, I will! How about a pillow case?” Adam replied.

The woman released him and stood erect. She asked, “Just like a burglar, huh?”

“That’s me. What’s one more felony among friends?”

“Takin’ Packer’s loot ain’t no felony!” Said Smithe. “I remember something Disraeli said about someone he didn’t like much. “He has committed every crime that does not require courage.” That seems to fit Packer to a T.”

“Mr. Smithe, you are a learned man!” Adam replied with a smile.

“I barely finished the eighth grade, but I did learn how to read.” answered Smithe.

It was a little after eleven and Adam was ready for his jump. The TV and satellite receiver had been smashed so they had to rely on a small portable radio for a current weather report for the east coast, sixty degrees and overcast. Perfect. The boy had been to the nation’s capitol many times and that made it easy for him to zero in on his target, the Lincoln Memorial.

“I’ll just stop there a minute and get my bearings,” Adam explained, “then I’ll find a nice isolated place

to take a long look at the White House.”

“Be careful!” Ronnie implored.

“You’ve said that thirty-seven times already, I will. Geez!”

After another round of hugs and kisses it was time to go. Adam stuffed the pillowcase under his sweatshirt and asked his friends to be quite for a few minutes. The boy turned and looked off towards the east, Ronnie and Smithe stood frozen and silent. Adam cocked his head a little and smiled, target acquired! There was no pop or sizzle, no flash of light; he was just not there anymore.

The two adults didn’t say anything; they just turned and held on to each other.

Washington, D.C.

It was after one in the morning, a Tuesday. The crowds of tourists had evaporated for the day. By now there were just a few late night strollers and

muggers wandering about. No one saw the boy arrive, if they had they would have doubted their sanity. Adam sat down on the great steps leading up to the monument, his senses told him that there were no threats nearby. After a few moments he settled for the roof of some nameless office building a few blocks from the White House, his next destination. Before he left he turned and looked up at the great statue of Lincoln.

“Well Mr. President, wish me luck.” Then he was gone.

The office building’s roof was perfect. There was a wall that ringed the roof designed to hide from view all of the air conditioning and ventilation equipment. The wall also did a good job of hiding a short twelve-year-old boy. Adam sat down against one of the box-like structures on the roof and began a slow and careful exploration of the distant White House.

There were still people working on the lower floor, some housekeeper types, there were Secret Service

people wandering about. The upper residence floor was mostly dark; apparently the President had gone to bed. Adam found him and resisted a sudden urge to simply strangle the creep.

A full sweep of the residence found the President's wife asleep in a bedroom at the opposite end of the building.

"Can't say that I blame her," Adam thought, "who'd want to sleep in the same bed with Darth Vader?"

There were numerous safes in the historic place but the one Adam wanted was down in the basement in a locked storeroom. It took him almost a half hour to find the damn thing.

"Bingo!" Adam spoke aloud. The safe was stuffed with cash and papers of some sort. "No doubt perfectly legal campaign contributions. Sure!" The door to the storeroom was wired with an alarm, not so the safe.

"Cool. I won't be using the door anyway."

It was a small storeroom so Adam took extra care

with the jump. The boy found himself standing in total darkness when he arrived, his senses let him quickly locate the light switch. The safe was about the size of a small refrigerator and looked like it weighed tons. No sweat.

Adam decided on turning the inner mechanisms to their proper positions, rather than just melting the door and letting people know he had been there. The boy's life with the FBI had made him familiar with all sorts of safes and vaults. Adam knew there was a lot of money in the safe but when the door clicked quietly and swung open it almost took his breath away.

“Holy shit!” He whispered quietly, “There must be a zillion bucks here!”

Adam just stared for a while, then he remembered his pillowcase and went to work. There were no bills smaller than 100's and 50's. It was hard to stop grabbing the wrapped bundles of bills, the boy finally ceased when there was just enough room left in the pillow case to use the left

over material to tie it shut.

“I hope this comes with me when I jump.” Adam had never tried taking along much more than the clothes he wore.

The boy quietly closed the safe and twirled the dial several times. He then turned off the light switch and held the stuffed pillowcase close to his chest. “Here goes!”

It worked. The boy was back on the office roof, the pillowcase full of money still tightly clasped in his arms.

“Too cool!” Adam decided that if he ever had to really turn to a life of crime he wouldn’t have to work very hard at it.

The boy sat down the sack of money and looked first at his watch and then back at the White House. He had been gone from Taos for almost the two hours he thought the trip would take. Still...

“One quick visit to Leader Dearest.”

Adam stood very quiet in the man’s bedroom.

President Packer was snoring loudly, the racket probably made any stealth unnecessary. The large dresser mirror would make a perfect writing surface, now what to write with? In the dim light near the dresser, Adam could make out a tube of lipstick. The boy wondered what it was doing in the creep's bedroom until he picked it up, and then the images came to him.

"I should have known! The only sex he gets is what he pays for." Adam wasn't the babe in the woods he once was.

The message Adam wrote on the mirror was short and to the point:

*SORRY -- I'M NOT DEAD --
YOU WILL WISH
THAT YOU WERE
IF YOU EVER AGAIN
GET NEAR ANYONE I
LOVE.*

ADAM V.

P.S. YOU REALLY SNORE!!

With that done the boy placed both of his hands flat on the mirror, he knew they would dust for fingerprints. Just before he left he turned on all of the lights in the bedroom and stood at the foot of the bed, after a time Packer stirred and then quickly sat up. Adam just smiled sweetly at his worst enemy and then vanished.

The screaming from the presidential bedroom started almost at once.

Taos

Adam made a slight miscalculation and dropped about a foot to the floor of Ronnie's living room, in the process he lost his balance and landed head first on top of the pillowcase full of money. The woman and Smithe had been tied in knots since the boy had left; they thought he was hurt or something as they rushed to his side. Their alarm was quickly

replaced with confusion because they couldn't get Adam to stop laughing.

After about twelve "Stop it's!" and a good shaking, Ronnie finally got Adam to cease laughing and to explain himself.

"I paid Packer a short visit while he was asleep." Adam had to wipe his eyes. Ronnie gave him a Kleenex to blow his nose.

"You did what?? Are you nuts?" The woman didn't quite scream.

"He was snoring loud enough to rattle the doors, I wrote him a little note on the bedroom mirror."

"Christ almighty, lad!" Smithe felt like turning the boy over his knee.

"What did you write, you little nitwit?" Ronnie demanded.

"I just told him to leave my friends alone, or else."

Adam remembered one more thing. "By the way, your money problems are pretty much over for right now." The boy gave the sack of money on the floor a nudge with his foot.

Smithe and the woman looked at one another and then at the bulging pillowcase. Ronnie picked up the heavy bundle, her eyes getting wider by the moment.

“Let’s go in the kitchen and count it,” suggested Adam.

They did.

There was exactly \$360,000 in the pillowcase, used bills, non-sequential serial numbers. Ronnie and the old man finished off the Jack Daniels; Adam opted for some instant hot chocolate and his old bed.

The White House

FBI Director Crispin thought he was getting used to Packer’s rants, until today.

“That fucking little freak was in my bedroom!! I

didn't dream it!!"

The President looked much worse than usual, the bags under his eyes had grown alarmingly, he hadn't bothered to shave, maybe he didn't trust his shaking hands.

"Try to calm yourself, Mr. President. Yes he was there, the prints confirm it. I think if he could have hurt you he would have. He didn't."

"There's seventy-four dead agents laying out there in that God damned desert, he sure hurt them!" Packer lowered the volume just a notch. "Nobody even has the balls to go back out there to collect their bodies!"

Crispin had no ready answer, what was left of the FBI was already suffering from a large number of resignations and no-shows.

"And what the hell happened to Monroe and the rest of those bastards?" Packer had more questions than Crispin had good answers.

"The military has them, probably the boy too, maybe at Nellis."

"Well, isn't that just special!" Packer sneered.

“Sir, there were enough F-16’s overhead to flatten Iraq. There was no way we could get back in there, and besides, the boy was still there.”

Packer finally lowered his voice, the effort it took was obvious.

“So what do we do?”

Crispin had no clue, silence was his best answer but he chose another.

“We just don’t know how to catch a ghost, Mr. President.”

Not what the President wanted to hear.

Taos

It was nearly noon. Smithe was still asleep on the couch; Ronnie was awake (after some strong coffee) and was sitting on the edge of Adam’s bed. She watched the curled up boy as he slept, trying to understand what he had become, what he now was. He looked to her like an angel right now. She knew

now that he was also an avenging angel with a mighty sword, if the situation called for it.

The woman still felt a lot of lingering guilt about her behavior when Adam was last under her roof. Had she really made love with the poor boy? Why had she done such a totally stupid and selfish thing with him, taken such advantage of his trusting nature, his innocence?

Adam stirred a little, his eyes opened some as he yawned and stretched. The boy smiled when he realized that Ronnie was watching him.

“Hi.” Adam was never very good at conversation when he first awoke.

“Hi, squirt. How goes it?”

“Okay. (yawn) I smell coffee.”

“It’s on the stove.”

The two were quiet for a moment. Adam seemed to be trying to collect his wits.

“Ronnie?”

“Yeah, squirt?”

“What ever happened to the bronze... that I

helped with?”

“They were just pouring it when the Gestapo marched in and grabbed me. The foundry got hold of me while I was in the cooler, they still have it there, they’ll store it till I can come get it and pay the bill.”

“Oh. Adam was silent for a bit... “You feel bad about something, don’t you?”

The woman hesitated, “What we did before, what I made you do with me that time...”

“Oh, that. We both got a little out of control. You didn’t make me do anything I didn’t want to. Criminy, I’m no saint or anything!”

“I started it, led you on,” Ronnie continued, “there’s no excuse for what I did.”

“Geez, you’re not going to start blubbering or something, are you?” Adam smiled at the woman.

“I guess not, I just wanted to say that I’m sorry.”

“Very well. Now get thee to a nunnery and eat only bitter roots for the rest of your days.”

“Maybe I should.” Ronnie managed a small grin.

“Is there anything left in the kitchen?” Adam’s mind had few alternate tracks when he was hungry.

“Get your butt out of that bed, I’ll fix you some bitter roots.”

“Umm. How about you serve me breakfast in bed?” Adam thought it was worth a shot.

“How about I throw you in the pond to wake you up?” Ronnie replied.

Adam had vivid memories of the frigid waters and quickly sat up in the bed. “I’ll be right there!”

Nellis AFB, Nevada

“Something definitely happened at the White House last night,” Curtis explained, “our people on the inside said all hell broke loose at around three in the morning. Packer was going nuts.”

“Any word on Adam?” Monroe voiced what all of the assembled group wanted to know.

“We only know that he isn’t there now, they don’t have him.”

Monroe just smiled, he knew that Adam’s war had now truly begun.

Taos

Breakfast/lunch was Ronnie's specialty; it consisted of whatever was lying around wrapped in a large flour tortilla. Smithe had a bad hangover and just opted for some coffee. Adam ate everything within reach, as usual. Ronnie was torn between eating and wanting to re-count that amazing pile of money.

Smithe put up a fuss about accepting any of the money, even though his finances weren't in much better shape than Ronnie's. Adam counted out seventy-five thousand and pushed it across the table to the old man.

"If you don't take it you can't buy dog food." Adam explained.

"I don't have a dog, he died. You know that."

"You will have a dog just as soon as you go into town and stop at the animal shelter," replied a

grinning Adam.

“Think you’ve got me figured out, do you lad?”
Smithe asked.

“Pretty much. Take the money, you’ve earned it and a lot more. Get a mutt, you said they were always the smartest kind.”

“Well, okay then, I... Maybe I’ll get me a new TV with one of them fancy dish antennas while I’m at it.”

“Great,” Adam replied, “more channels to cuss at!”

Ronnie asked what Adam had up his sleeve next.

“I’m going to zip over to Nellis for a little while, I want to check in with General Curtis and everyone. I think I should go meet with the JCS and see what they have in mind.”

“You rub elbows with some pretty heavy players, Squirt.” Ronnie observed.

“I just say sir or ma’am and smile when I talk to them.”

“They ought to be calling you sir, it seems like you’re fighting all of their battles for them.”

“Not fair, Ronnie. The military has never, ever,

moved on the government, they don't want us to turn into some tin plated military dictatorship or something."

"Yeah, but look at what we have now."

"Maybe not for long." Adam wasn't smiling when he said this.

Nellis AFB

"Dammit child, can't you figure out a way to knock or something?" Monroe still couldn't get used to Adam's new mode of travel.

"Sorry, Agent Monroe, I didn't mean to scare you." The boy was taken aback at Monroe's strong reaction.

Seeing Adam's distress made the large black ex-agent feel like a total jerk. "Come here a minute." Monroe proceeded to grab the boy under the arms and picked him up to hold him close.

"I apologize son, I didn't mean to snap your head off, it just scares the living crap out of me when you

just appear like that.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t just pop up next to people like that, I’ll pick a spot a little ways off next time.”

“That sounds like a good solution, no hard feelings?” Monroe asked.

“Never, Agent Monroe.”

“Are you all right, we had a report of some considerable excitement at the White House last night?”

“I’m fine, don’t worry about me. Where’s everyone else?”

“They’re over at the officers pool trying to unwind a little, they’re all worried silly about you,” Monroe explained. “I was just sitting here trying to catch up on some intelligence reports and stuff.”

“Let’s go join them and I’ll tell you what happened, a cool dip sounds nice,” Adam suggested. “I think you need to unwind just a little too.”

“That I do, son. That I do.”

A female airman drove the two friends across the base, she seemed about to bust with excitement over who her passengers were.

The base officer's swimming pool was alive with off duty officers and their dependents; Adam endured endless handshakes and kisses as he made his way to the men's locker room with Agent Monroe. Once inside it finally occurred to the two of them that they had no swim trunks. One of the pool attendants came to the rescue with 'loaner' swim trunks. Monroe's trunks fit okay. Adam's trunks came down almost to his knees and bunched up around his waist.

"Cripes! I wouldn't look any sillier if I was naked!"

"Come on kid, no one cares about that," Monroe said.

And no one did, their kid was back with them again.

Adam's poolside description of his impromptu trip to the White House had his friends torn between wanting to thrash him for being so reckless and laughing themselves silly at his description of what he did to Packer. The intelligence report that Curtis recited about the screaming heard from the residence floor set everyone off again. Eventually

some calm was restored, Adam voiced some concern over his inability to communicate with his people while he was away.

“I’m afraid to reconnect the phone at Ronnie’s place, it would probably be traced or something. I don’t want Packer’s bunch showing up there again.” Curtis had a possible solution, “Son, do you think you could ‘jump’ from here to Taos while carrying along a gizmo about the size of a shoe box?”

“Yes sir, I think so. I carried that big sack of money.”

The general stood and addressed the group, “I’ll excuse myself for now folks, I need to go round up a few things and make some phone calls,” Curtis explained. “Adam, you stop by my office before you head back to Ronnie’s place.”

“Yes sir, will do.”

About an hour after the general left Adam called an end to his short visit,

“I better get back, I don’t feel good leaving Ronnie and Mr. Smithe just sitting there all exposed.”

“We’ve been working on that,” Monroe explained, “there’s a plan in the works to get your friends some heavy duty protection real soon. It’s either that or bring them here.”

“Great! I don’t think Ronnie or Mr. Smithe would leave, they’re both really stubborn.”

“That’s pretty much what we thought,” Monroe answered.

“Uh, what kind of protection, Agent Monroe?”

“There’s going to be about two-hundred Marines, some light armored recon vehicles and a mobile anti-aircraft missile battery, the convoy should arrive there about noon tomorrow. In the meantime you might notice more than the usual number of military aircraft buzzing around overhead.”

“Cool!” Adam’s face could have lit up a fair sized city.

“They’ll be scattered around the property at some distance,” Monroe continued, “fresh troops will rotate in ever so often for as long as it takes. They’ll be self-sufficient, you won’t know they’re around.”

“I’ll know they’re around and I’ll shake every one of their hands, Agent Monroe.”

Adam and Monroe stopped by Curtis' office as instructed; the general had the "gizmo."

"I guess Monroe told you about the Marines?"

"Yes sir, that takes a big load off my mind.

Thanks, sir!"

"No problem," Curtis indicated the olive drab metal box on his desk. "This is an encrypted satellite phone, it uses military links only, with this and the Marine's communications equipment you will have instant access to anyone you want. You can also take this along on your 'excursions'."

"Neat! How does it work?" Adam asked.

"It's dirt simple, just open it up and lay the antenna panels flat. Pressing the power button makes the connection automatically, use the handset just like a regular phone." Curtis demonstrated the device as he explained it. "The battery lasts about twelve hours with continuous usage, you can recharge it on one-ten house power in about an hour. Frequency and channels are already preset, don't mess with the settings. It won't work inside a concrete or steel reinforced building,

it's best used in a small wood framed structure or outside, outside is best. If you get a good signal indoors, just leave it plugged in and on standby, there's a beeper that will let you know we're calling you. There will be someone on this end here at Nellis monitoring the channel around the clock."

"Got it sir, thanks again!" Adam loved tech-toys.

"You're very welcome, son. Lord knows this country owes it to you."

Just before Adam made the jump back to New Mexico he asked Curtis about meeting with the military's leadership.

"I'm in the process of setting that up right now, for the time being we'd like you to lay off visiting Packer for a day or so," Curtis replied.

"Will do, sir."

Mother Harper caught up with the boy just before he left; she had a few new clothes for Adam that she had obtained earlier from the Base Exchange. The female ex-agent got in the last kiss and hug.

Taos

Adam remembered how he kept scaring Monroe so he arrived near the pond on Ronnie's property, from there he walked over towards the workshop. The boy stopped about midway to the shop and looked up at the blue afternoon sky. Two Air Force A-10 'Warthog' tank busters whined over at about 2,000 feet, Adam grinned from ear to ear and continued on his way. Smithe and Ronnie were still trying to put things straight in the house.

"Honey, I'm home!" Adam couldn't resist yelling it.

Ronnie poked her head around the door to the kitchen, "Squirt!"

Smithe's head joined the woman's, "Adam, lad! How was Nevada?"

The boy couldn't answer until the kissing and head rubbing ceased. "Sort of hot, I got to go for a swim though."

“What’s that stuff?” Ronnie pointed at the metal box and plastic shopping bag the boy carried.

“Military satellite phone,” Adam explained, “very cool. And some clothes.”

“We can dial 911 now?” Ronnie asked.

“Better than that, we can dial nine-one-kick-Packer’s-butt. I’m supposed to try it out when I get here, let’s go back outside.”

The two adults followed the boy out to the pond, they all sat down and Adam unfolded the two antenna / lids.

“Here goes.” Adam pressed the power button. The delay lasted all of four seconds before a voice came over the handset.

“Nellis Special Operations, go ahead.”

“This is Adam, just testing. How do you hear me?”

Smithe and Ronnie were all eyes and ears as they watched the boy.

“I read you five by five, how me?”

“Loud and clear Nellis, thank you. I’m going to take this thing indoors now to see if the signal is

okay.”

“Roger, kid. We’ll stay tuned.”

Once back indoors and with the unit on the coffee table in the living room, reception seemed about the same. Adam did as the general said and just left it plugged in and on standby.

Ronnie and Smithe were very impressed. Adam was too.

Adam filled in his friends as they sat around the kitchen table.

“It’ll probably get sort of noisy here for a while tomorrow,” the boy began.

“It’s noisy now, what’s with all the damn jets and stuff?” Ronnie asked.

“Be glad for the noise, they’re keeping you safe.”

“You mean those planes are there because of us?” Smithe asked, eyebrows as high as they would go.

“Yes sir. It gets better, the Marines arrive tomorrow.”

“Marines?” Ronnie asked softly.

“Yeah, a convoy. Two hundred or so Marines plus

major firepower. They're your bodyguards till things get settled with Packer."

Smithe and the woman were silent for a moment, Ronnie finally found her tongue.

"I'll say one thing squirt, you sure have connections."

"What's for lunch?" Adam asked.

What else did you expect him to say?

Deputy Sheriff Price had finally worked up the nerve to return to Ronnie's isolated home and workshop. The FBI had originally held him for three days after he had called in the radio report about the boy's location; they had let him go after they finally decided he hadn't actually helped Adam in his escape.

Deputy Price felt like rat turds for being responsible for what he thought was Adam's probable death. Maybe a talk with Ms. Burns would help some, if she didn't shoot him first. He had sort of liked the woman the first time they had ever met.

Five miles from Ronnie's home and work place the deputy's cruiser slid to a dusty and badly controlled stop. Two Air Force F-16's had just laid down lines of 20mm cannon fire on each side of the road, dust and gravel from the impacts covered the deputy's vehicle.

"Maybe later." Price decided. The deputy also found out how fast his cruiser would go while in reverse.

Smithe had decided to take Adam's advice to drive into town to see about getting another dog. The old man told his two friends that he would be staying at his own place for the night when he got back, so the new pup would know where home was supposed to be. Smithe would stop by Ronnie's place tomorrow morning.

After the late lunch and after Smithe left, Ronnie and Adam resumed their cleanup and repair efforts. They finally finished fixing the truck's flat tire; with

Adam helping they didn't have to bother with the jack. It seemed like old times with just the two of them working together and talking about small things instead of the heavy conversations of late. Only the occasional low pass of military combat aircraft reminded them of what the world still was, Ronnie got a kick out of waving at the aircraft, often the pilots would rock their wings in acknowledgement.

Towards dusk Adam's stomach alarm went off again, it was getting too dark to work outside anyway.

"Are you up to a quick dip in the pond before supper?" Ronnie added, "I'll behave myself."

"Oh man, I was hoping you had given that up!" Adam cringed, the skinny-dipping didn't bother him anymore but the freezing water certainly did.

"Come on, daisy. It's warmed up a lot since winter."

"I'll bet!"

The woman prodded the reluctant boy over to the pond; as usual she was in the water before the boy,

and as usual terrible screams were heard when Adam jumped into the frigid water.

“Geez! I thought you said it was warmer!”

“It is, sissy! It’s got to be at least fifty degrees.”

Ronnie explained innocently.

“Oh, well heck, that’s almost boiling!” Adam gasped.

As usual their time in the pond was brief, even Ronnie didn’t stay in till her teeth chattered.

“Come on Squirt, let’s go ruin dinner.”

Adam almost set a pond record for leaving the water and dressing. Criminy!

Dinner was mostly salvaged canned stuff.

Ronnie would need to restock the refrigerator and pantry now that the electricity and cash were back on. The main course was Spam-ala-ketchup; side dishes were canned potatoes and peas. The house wine was grape Kool-Aid. After the day of hard work none of the simple meal went to waste. Adam had even surprised the woman by saying a simple grace.

Indeed, thank you Lord.

The White House

Packer hadn't calmed down a great deal with the day's passage.

"I want a Secret Service agent in every fucking room of this damned mausoleum!"

"Yes, Mr. Pre...." The chief of the Secret Service for the White House was having trouble finishing his sentences lately.

"I want the grounds covered, the roof, the God-damned basement!"

"Yes...."

"And I want two agents in my bedroom, all night!" The senior agent didn't answer but did make a mental note to supply some ear plugs to the two unfortunate agent's assigned to Pecker's bedroom.

"And I want my own pistol! Get me a small revolver, a .38 or something!"

"Yes Mr. President."

The agent silently hoped that the evil little asshole would simply shoot his self by mistake.

Taos

There was hot chocolate; fortunately it didn't require milk, just hot water. Ronnie and Adam were in the living room talking quietly of times past and future while 'watching' the radio. The talk show host on the local AM station was taking calls about the reports of all of the military aircraft reported over Taos and the surrounding area during the day. The general consensus was that it was bad for the tourist business, which was in full swing. The news on the hour was concerned mostly with the sexual escapades of the CEO of a certain giant software company/monopoly. The satellite phone's beeping interrupted the exciting evening.

"Hello, this is Adam."

"Hello boy, Curtis here. How are you doing?"

“Hi sir, everything’s fine here, no problems.”

“Good. Listen, can you be at the Pentagon tomorrow at about two in the afternoon Washington time?”

“Yes sir, no problem. Where do I go when I get there, I’ve never been to the place?”

“Do you know where the building is?”

“Yes sir, I’ve seen it from airplanes a bunch of times.”

“Just show up at the main entrance lobby, people will be expecting you. They’ll take you to the JCS offices.”

“Will do sir. Tell the folks there at Nellis I’m fine, I’ll pop in to see them real soon.”

“I’ll do that, son. By the way, the Marines are on the way, they’ll be there a little ahead of schedule.”

“Great! We’ll be watching for them.”

“Alright then, I’ll talk to you later. There will be infrared equipped observation aircraft overhead tonight, not much chance of anything bigger than a mouse going undetected.”

“Real good sir. Thanks!”

“Bye kid.”

“Good bye sir.”

It took a while to answer all of Ronnie’s questions; eventually the woman and Adam gave in to the day’s labors and retired to their separate beds. As always, the boy scanned the countryside for miles around and found no threats, he did note with some great pleasure that Smithe was trying to get his new pup to be quite for the night.

377Th A.B. Wing, Kirtland Air Force Base,
Albuquerque

The last C-5 had arrived and within the space of an hour the convoy of armored recon vehicles and troop carriers had fueled up and proceeded to haul ass up highway 64 towards Taos. The anti-aircraft missile unit was running a bit late, but not by much, it would follow later in the day. Civilian traffic on 64 tended to pull over and get the hell out of the way when they looked in their rear view mirrors.

By the time that Adam and Ronnie were starting to rouse themselves for the day the convoy had entered the outskirts of Taos. The fast moving column of Marines was something the local police weren't quite prepared to handle. One of the more self-important and junior members of Taos' finest decided to halt the rumbling convoy just before it entered the more tourist-intensive part of town. Bad judgment.

Major John Carter, USMC, peered down from the six-wheeled recon vehicle at the stupid nitwit of a cop whose cruiser was pulled across the road.

"You're in the way, Barney!" Carter wasn't known for his tact with civilians.

"Just where the hell do you think you're going, jarhead?" Officer Cline would very soon regret this poor choice of words.

Carter said nothing more to the police officer but instead spoke into the com headset he wore.

Officer Cline's unoccupied police cruiser ceased to be a roadblock shortly after the recon vehicle's

cannon opened fire. 'Barney' moved out of the way with some good speed also, the doctors tell him that his hearing will probably be okay, eventually.

The tourist activity in Taos was not quite up to par for the rest of that day.

Ronnie and the boy were in the kitchen trying to decide which fixit project to tackle next when Adam looked off to the south and smiled as much as humanly possible.

“What is it, Squirt?”

“The good guys are here!”

Twenty minutes later the rattling dishes told Ronnie that the Marines had landed.

The White House

Packer's Chief of Staff was trying to brief the President.

“Our resources in Taos say that a Marine convoy moved through the town and out towards the Burn’s compound, they blew one police car totally to shit that tried to stop them. We think the boy is back at the woman’s place, the Marine’s are probably his new bodyguard.”

Packer just sat down at his desk in the Oval Office and cradled his head in his hands. The President was starting to have occasional thoughts about his property holdings in Paraguay.

Taos

Adam and Ronnie met the lead convoy vehicle as it pulled up in front of the house; the armored six-wheeled recon unit’s diesel idled for a moment and then shut down. Major Carter climbed down from the desert tan monster and extended his hand to the grinning boy.

“I’m damned honored to shake your hand, son!

It's good to meet you."

"Welcome sir, the honor is mine!" Adam introduced Ronnie next, "This is Veronica Burns, sir. This is her home here."

The Marine took the woman's hand, "Pleased to meet you ma'am, we'll try not to tear up the landscape around here too much."

"You can strip mine it if you want to, we're just glad that you're here!" Ronnie responded with a smile and a kiss to the Marine's cheek.

The introductions and greetings were interrupted as a Humvee pulled up; the Marines had given Mr. Smithe a lift from his place. Smithe got out carrying a squirming brown puppy that seemed to be all ears and feet. As the old man came over to the group he sat the puppy down on the ground. The confused little mutt made a wobbly beeline for Adam who picked it up and started laughing when the puppy proceeded to give the boy's face a proper licking.

"What are you going to name him, Mr. Smithe?" Adam asked between lick attacks.

“I think I’ll call him ‘Squirt’, so far that seems to be his only real talent.”

“My God, I don’t think I can handle two ‘Squirts’ around here!” Ronnie quipped.

Under Major Carter’s able command the column of vehicles moved out and into a wide ring around Ronnie’s place that was roughly a half-mile in diameter. Carter soon had half of the troops doing patrol and reconnaissance of the surrounding area, while the rest of his command set up fortified positions, a command post and the tents to house everyone. Adam went around to all of the Marines not out on patrol and shook hands and introduced himself. It seemed like everyone had brought along small cameras and wanted their pictures taken with the famous boy, Adam was only too glad to oblige them.

Major Carter had not been briefed on the boy’s odd mode of transportation, when Adam gave him a private demonstration he reacted with the one word that the boy had come to expect from people.

“Shit!”

It was nearing lunchtime and that meant that Adam had to ‘jump’ over to the Pentagon. The boy decided on the new clothing that Harper had given him, they were much more presentable than the dusty jeans and t-shirt that he had been wearing around Ronnie’s place.

The White House

“Our people in the Pentagon have gotten wind of some scuttlebutt, Mr. President.” Director Crispin was briefing Packer over the phone.

“Yes, well?” Packer snapped.

“Word has it that the boy is going to show up there today, possibly at two.”

“Can we get him?” Packer’s voice betrayed his rising hopes.

“If someone was close enough to him, maybe yes. It would be a suicide mission even if the

shooter succeeded.”

“Who do we have there who would do it, what would it take to make it worthwhile for them?”

“We don’t really have anyone who would be willing to give up their life to get the boy, the worst shit we have on any of the operatives is one guy who does kiddie porn videos, and he doesn’t have the spine for it.”

“But the little shit will be right under our noses!”

Packer seemed to have an iron set of vocal cords. Crispin had to hold the phone further and further from his ear, eventually he just quietly hung up.

The Pentagon

Adam made the trip in two ‘jumps’. The boy paused for a few moments in a remote part of the vast parking area to get his bearings and to look for the lobby area that Curtis had told him about. Adam decided on a men’s room off of the lobby area, popping up in the middle of the busy place might

create more of stir than his host's might appreciate. The two Army personnel using the urinals never saw him arrive and only caught a glance of him as he walked out of the men's room. There were extra security people in the lobby area that had been briefed to expect him. He was spotted him almost at once.

Army Lieutenant Anne Meredith was the first to greet the boy.

"Welcome to the Pentagon, Adam. It's an honor to meet you."

"Thank you ma'am, it's nice to be here." Adam shook her hand and decided she was the best looking lieutenant he had ever seen. Geez!

"Follow me, it's a bit of a hike."

"Ma'am, I'd follow you anywhere."

Lieutenant Meredith decided with a smile that she was being flirted with.

Foot traffic in the lobby had pretty much halted when people realized who the kid was. Six other military police fell in around Adam and the woman

officer as they started the trek to the JCS offices. During the march through the vast building Adam and the woman spoke.

“We didn’t see you come in, Adam.”

“I sort of snuck in ma’am, I have a talent for it.”

“They just told me to expect you in the main lobby. How in the world did you get here, all alone and everything?” It was obvious she hadn’t been briefed on Adam’s travel arrangements.

“If I told you I’d have to kill you, ma’am.”

Lieutenant Meredith laughed at the boy’s words, she had heard the expression many times before. Ignorance is sometimes a blessing.

After a few miles the JCS offices were arrived at. All four of the officers were waiting in the entrance area for the boy. Adam had never seen so many stars in his entire life.

The Chairman of the JCS, Air Force General Charles Lyman, was the first to greet the boy and shake his hand.

“Welcome, son. It’s an honor to finally meet you.”

“Thank you very much sir, it’s a real honor to be here. I want to thank you all for asking me here.”

General Lyman introduced Adam to the three other heads of their respective services, Navy, Marine, and Army, they seemed genuinely glad to meet the boy, but as is often the case with people they were a bit ill at ease. Lieutenant Meredith took her leave as the officers ushered the boy into the inner offices, Adam’s backwards glance at the woman caught Lyman’s attention.

“She’s a remarkable officer, wouldn’t you agree, son?”

“Good Lord sir, I think I’m in love!” This remark loosened things up a great deal with the somewhat nervous officers.

“Son, you and about half the Pentagon are in love with the same woman.”

Adam just sighed, “I was afraid of that, sir.”

Lyman indicated a short corridor ahead, “We’re going into the ‘cage’ to have our talk. It’s totally bug

proof, even in the Pentagon you can never be too careful.”

The five people passed through what appeared to be a metal detector. In fact it was mostly a bug detector. Adam set off the noisy contraption.

“It’s probably your wrist watch, son,” this from the Marine Commandant, General Colms, “the chips in some digital watches sometimes react with the scanner.”

Following the officer’s instructions, Adam took off his inexpensive plastic watch and handed it to one of the security guards who had trailed behind the procession of officers. Passing through the detector the second time was without any alarm. The guard promised to return the watch.

The ‘cage’ was fairly small with only a simple round table and plain chairs in the middle of the square room. The door that closed behind them seemed to be about a foot thick.

“Have a seat, son. Let’s talk.” said Lyman.

“Thank you, sir.” Adam was expecting what the first question would be.

“We’ve all read General Curtis’ reports about you, your remarkable talents, and we know of your past service to this country,” began CINCNAV, “but we are men with our feet planted mostly on the ground. Can you really just ‘shift’ from place to place by just ‘thinking’ about it?”

“Yes sir, I can. I don’t blame you for what you’re thinking, with your permission I can show you.”

The four officers glanced at one another and as one shook their heads in agreement. Adam stood and moved back from the table a bit, his arrival point in the parking lot seemed like a good target. The boy smiled slightly at the doubting Thomases and proceeded to make believers out of them, he was only gone for about forty-five seconds. It was a toss up as to which affected the four officers the most, his disappearance or his return.

As Adam resumed his seat it appeared that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were gripped in some sort of mass paralysis, eventually the Army’s El Supremo found his voice.

“Shit!”

In moments of great stress...

A short recess to collect their thoughts was finally called for by the military’s leaders, this was fine with Adam, he needed to go pee anyway. About twenty minutes later all concerned seemed finally ready to get down to brass tacks.

“Our source’s tell us that you’ve already paid the President a visit?” Asked General Lyman.

“Yes sir, for a little while. I raided his money pile and left him a message on his bedroom mirror.”

“You took money from him?”

“Yes sir. The FBI wiped out Ronnie...Ms. Burn’s bank account! They totally trashed her home and workshop. She needed the help, she helped me when I needed it.”

“Still, taking money is...”

Adam angrily interrupted the officer, “Sir, this is very personal with me! That creep started out trying to drug me and then he tried to kill me, he almost did too! He kidnapped people I love just to get at

me and would have killed them along with me when I came to help them! Look at what he's doing to this brain dead country! You don't even follow his orders anymore so don't sit there and look down your spit shined noses at me just because I took some of his dirty money!"

This outburst from the boy caught the officers totally off guard; the truth in what Adam had said was also all too evident. Adam was a bit surprised with himself for losing control so much. The Marine Corp commandant made the peace, "Calm down son, sometimes it's hard for us to keep in mind just what sort of a person Packer really is."

"Yes sir. I apologize for talking to you all like that, I was way out of line."

"No apology is needed, son. You've been through a lot of shit this last year, maybe you have the right to sound off now and then. Let's just try to figure out our next move, okay?"

Adam smiled and relaxed some, "Thank you sir, any suggestions?"

The moves decided upon were incremental in nature. Alfred Whitmore Packer was in for *really bad* times.

The White House.

Packer was trying to flush the Goddamned commode in the small bathroom that was just off the Oval Office; something seemed to be jamming the handle. Using some of his vast library of obscene language, the President finally gave up in disgust and started to wash his hands. You're catching on, the faucets didn't work either. It was a small start to what would follow later.

Adam was some blocks away on the rooftop he had used earlier, it was just a short hop from the Pentagon and even in daylight the boy was well hidden from view. With a rather evil little grin the boy called it a day and returned to his friends in Taos. Adam knew that the plumber would soon

arrive and he knew that said plumber would report that the plumbing fixtures weren't just stuck, they were fused into solid pieces of metal.

Packer would know that his favorite boy was still around.

Nellis AFB

'Mother' Harper, AKA Marilyn Parker and her husband were in the small visiting officer's quarters that were on indefinite loan to them, as was often the case the subject of their conversation was the boy who was once the heart of the FBI's Special Team.

"Am I being selfish or does it seem like Adam prefers to be with that Burns woman and the old man, rather than with the team?"

John Parker raised his eyebrows and answered, "We've never even met them. I don't know, the kid has led a very hard life these last few months,

maybe he found a real home with them for a little while.”

“I suppose,” answered the woman, “but sometimes I feel like we’re losing him a little bit at a time.”

“People change, Marilyn, he’s starting to grow up some. Maybe he just needs a little more room. Sometimes I’ve thought that he would have given anything just to be a run of the mill boy, just a kid, not some sort of super human government ‘asset’.”

Taos

During Adam’s absence the anti-aircraft missile units had arrived, these were ground-launched variants of the Sidewinder missile normally carried on fighter aircraft. A total of eight of the missiles carried on two modified Humvee’s were the core of the missile unit, for some reason the vehicles encountered no interference from the Taos police when they passed through town.

If all of this seems like a bit of overkill to protect three people and a puppy you must remember the fierce allegiance that the military felt towards the boy and the deep and abiding loathing and distrust they felt for their Commander in Chief.

When Adam arrived he went unnoticed at first, Ronnie and Major Carter where in somewhat of a heated conversation.

“Dammit Major, if I don’t get into town and do some shopping we’ll be chewing on rocks and wiping our butts with pine cones!”

“Look lady, it’s not safe for you to go into town just yet, we can do a much better job taking care of you all if you stay here! Make up a list of the things you need and I’ll detail some of the men to go into town for you!”

Ronnie was silent for a moment, trying to get her volatile temper under control. Adam took this opportunity to make his presence known.

“Hi folks, who’s winning the fight?”

“Squirt! You’re back!” Ronnie exclaimed.

“Apparently,” replied Adam, “I think Major Carter is right about not going into town.”

“But we need a ton of crap, I need some personal things, female stuff! It’s embarrassing, for Chrissakes.”

“Oh. Well...” Adam wasn’t so dense as to not understand the woman’s plight.

“Look, I’ll send a couple of the married guys,” Carter offered.

“Come of Ronnie, just make up a list,” Adam said, “this won’t last forever and then you can do your own shopping.”

The woman took a deep breath and seemed about to argue some more.

“Pleeeeeease,” Adam whined.

“Shit! Alright, but it’s going to be a long list!” Ronnie turned and stalked back into the house.

“She’s a tad spirited, isn’t she?” Carter observed.

“Yes sir, don’t take it personal, she’s been through quite a bit lately.”

“I hear you, son. How did things go at the Pentagon?”

“Pretty well, I’m sort of supposed to keep my mouth shut about it for now.”

“Can I at least ask you who you talked with?”

“Well sir, let’s just say that no one out ranks them except Packer and he doesn’t count.”

“Enough said then. You sure lead one hell of an interesting life, kid.”

“I’d settle for a long spell of dull and boring right now,” Adam sighed.

A Slight Delay

The best-laid plans of just about everyone often go ass over teakettle. Adam's plans for President Packer would be delayed. NASA's plans for the International Space Station would really be delayed. Canceled in fact.

The orbiting space station was finally complete when the law of averages caught up with it. The odds of being struck by a meteor or a piece of orbiting space junk large enough to do serious damage is quite small. From time to time the space shuttle and various satellites have been hit and sustained minor damage, the most serious was a pitted window on the shuttle, apparently hit by a paint flake. The space station is/was quite large, the odds on it being hit by a dangerous object were higher.

Shortly after 2345, GMT, one of several large

liquid oxygen storage tanks on the space station merged orbits with the remains of an expended explosive bolt segment that was once used to separate a satellite from its final booster. The combined closing speed of the space station and the bolt fragment was nearly twenty-eight thousand miles per hour. The bolt fragment struck a shallow glancing blow just deep enough to vaporize a one-half inch hole in the oxygen tank. The tank remained intact but the oxygen venting out of the hole produced fair imitation of a small rocket engine. This would not have been a major threat to the station if it were not for the fact that this oxygen tank was located out near one of the far ends of the multi-segmented station.

Personnel on the space station were first alerted to the trouble when an alarm went off that signaled a drop in pressure in the punctured oxygen tank. While absorbed in dealing with the oxygen tank they did not at first notice that the entire station was slowly starting to spin. Efforts to isolate the large tank from the rest of the oxygen system were

successful, there was no way however, to stop the gas from spewing out of the holed tank. The large gyroscopes used to maintain the station's proper attitude weren't up to the job of counteracting the jet of gas.

The rate of spin increased at a slow but unstoppable pace, the space station was in no way designed to spin, things would quickly tend to break off and fly away. The large and fragile solar panels went first, then several of the larger antenna arrays. Stresses on the main modules were building, in time they too would part company and the station would break into multiple pieces.

There was no space shuttle currently docked at the space station, the small escape craft maintained at the station could hold only ten people. There were eighteen people on the station. Apparently the bean counters at NASA had never heard of the RMS Titanic.

In an earlier time it would have been woman and

children first. There were no children and the women were living in the age of sexual equality. A deck of cards (magnetic) was hastily produced and all proceeded to draw one of the go or stay tickets. The crew holding the ten highest cards would leave, the rest would hole up in the strongest section of the station and hope for the best. Time was short, the fragile components of the station could be heard creaking and popping under the force of the still increasing spin. In the outer parts of the station the spin was producing about one-eighths of a g, or one-eighths of normal gravity, not much gravity but enough to strain things to the breaking point.

There weren't enough pressure suits for everyone, nor was there enough time to go through the time consuming process of donning them. After the 'stay behinds' had sealed all of the hatches that would isolate the central part of the station, the ten evacuees began entering the escape 'taxi'. Six of the astronauts had made it into the escape craft when it's docking collar snapped under the strain. All of the ten people who had drawn high cards died

within sixty seconds, most were blown out into space. The great out rush of air from the open docking module gave the extra needed spin to the station to finish the breaking up process. The whole episode from fragment impact to break up had taken thirty-six minutes. There were no pressure suits in the central core.

Taos

The sight of combat equipped Marines strolling up and down the aisles of the local supermarket and piling household items and foodstuff into shopping carts was a spectacle the clerks in the store would relate till their dying day. The checkout clerk thought it best not to smile or comment on the several 'feminine' items purchased by the unsmiling Marines. A news crew showed up at the store and taped some footage of the military shopping expedition, it ran on the local station, but as usual the networks ignored anything coming out of New

Mexico.

Ronnie and Adam were still putting away the boxes and sacks of household provisions that the Marines had brought back from town. The woman had cooled down from her earlier snit about not being allowed to do her own shopping. Tonight's meal would be special, there was fresh everything for a change, no canned stuff! Major Carter was even invited for the feast. Smithe had begged off, tonight was wrestling night on his new TV.

The portable radio was on the kitchen counter spewing out muzak, mostly ignored as the woman and boy went about their mundane domestic duties. A network news alert signal caught their attention and caused them to pause.

"This is an ABC news alert. There has apparently been some sort of serious accident or malfunction on board the International Space Station. Preliminary reports indicate that an evacuation of the station is currently underway, apparently due to

a venting oxygen tank that is causing the orbiting complex to spin out of control. ABC will continue to keep you informed and up to date as events develop and unfold.”

Adam and Ronnie turned to one another, this was serious business.

“Oh geez, that sounds really bad if they’re having to evacuate!” Adam exclaimed.

“Wait a minute, I read where that the escape thing only holds ten people,” Ronnie said, “what about the rest?”

“What about the shuttle?” Adam asked.
More questions than answers.

As the woman continued putting things straight in the kitchen, Adam quietly left the room and went outside into the early evening dark. The boy sat quietly by the pond with his knees drawn up, staring up at the emerging stars, searching for something only he could see. A look of horror came over his face when he finally found what he was seeking.

Captain Carter had arrived via the front door and was now talking with the woman about the news on the radio as she went about getting the steaks ready to broil and the salad made. Ronnie was about ready to go look for Adam when he entered the kitchen as quietly as he had left, the look on his face instantly caught both the woman's and the Marine's attention.

“What’s wrong, Squirt?” Ronnie asked.

“The space station, it’s all broken apart. A lot of the astronauts are dead.” Adam’s quiet tone and stricken expression left no doubt as to the truth he was telling.

“But how do you know...” Carter still wasn’t quite up to speed on the boy’s abilities.

“Trust him, major, he knows.” Ronnie said. Another radio bulletin confirmed what the boy had told them.

“This is ABC News, It has been learned that the evacuation craft broke away from the spinning space station while the astronauts where in the

process of transferring into it. It is believed that all ten astronauts have perished when the craft and that section of the space station it was attached to lost all air pressure. Radar and visual tracking now indicates that the main body of the station has broken up, as of yet there is no word on the eight astronauts left behind, it is hoped that they may be still alive in the central core section of the station.” At this point coverage of the mishap in space became non-stop on all of the networks and news services.

Ronnie went ahead with the meal but not even Adam had much appetite, conversation at the dinner table was pretty subdued. Later news reports stated that the remaining core of the station was spinning at a rate that would make rendezvous with any shuttlecraft impossible. In any event it would be a least a week before the next shuttle could be made ready for liftoff. There was still no radio contact with what remained of the space station.

Adam went back outside and sat in the dark once

more, Ronnie knew he needed quite for what he was doing and cautioned the Major to remain inside with her and to be quiet. Twenty minutes later the boy came back inside and made a straight line for the satellite phone. He answered the questioning expression of the two adults.

“They’re alive.”

Nellis Special Operations instantly answered Adam’s call and put him through to General Curtis within another thirty seconds.

“Curtis here.”

“Hello sir, this is Adam.”

“Yes son, how are you doing?”

“I’m fine sir. I’m calling about the space station, the accident.”

“A terrible thing, there doesn’t seem like much can be done.” Curtis was getting an inkling of what the boy might say next.

“Sir, the other eight astronauts, they’re still alive.”

“You’re certain?” Curtis asked, his voice betraying some rising hope.

“Yes sir, they’re trying to rig up some sort of radio, they’re all in the big central hub thing. They’re worried about the air too, I guess a lot of stuff isn’t working, there’s just some emergency battery lights.”

“I’ll get the word to NASA...”

Adam interrupted the General, “Sir, I think I can get to them.”

“Now think straight son, they’re in outer space, they’re orbiting at 18,000 miles an hour!”

“I know that sir, but when they’re overhead they’re only a couple of hundred miles away.”

“But what could you do?” Curtis’ mind was moving in about twelve directions at once.

“Take them a radio, stop the spinning. I’ve never tried it with a person before, but I might be able to take them off one at a time.”

“Son, you might also wind up trying to breath in a vacuum.”

“I don’t think so sir. I just can’t sit here and not try!”

Curtis sighed with resignation, “You’re going to try it with or without my permission, aren’t you?”

“Yes sir.”

“Then come here first, lots of things will need to be coordinated.”

“Yes sir, thanks.”

“No son, thank you.”

Needless to say, Ronnie was having a silent convulsion during the boy's conversation with the general, when he hung up the phone the fit became extremely loud. Major Carter just stood back and tried keep out of the way.

“This is the stupidest, most hair brained thing you've ever come up with! Have you lost your tiny little mind?”

“What am I supposed to do, sit here all warm and comfy and watch them all die?” Adam surprised the woman with his own tone and volume.

“This stupid country has been trying to kill you, you little nitwit!” Ronnie countered, *“Why don't you look out for yourself for a change?”*

Adam said nothing for a moment, then in a quieter voice..“Please stop yelling at me. I need you to help

me.”

“Help you? Do what, carve your stupid headstone?”

“No. I need sort of a guinea pig.”

“For what?” Ronnie’s voice dropped to a more tolerable level.

“I need to see if I can shift to Nellis with you for company.”

For the first time that the boy could remember Ronnie had no instant come back, it took a few seconds this time.

“No way! I’m not going to be a part of this stupidity, you’re going to get yourself killed, you crazy little shit!”

“Please, Ronnie.” Adam looked like he had been slapped in the face.

“No! Forget it!” Ronnie’s temper had her beyond reasoning with.

Adam stood quietly for a moment and then turned away from the woman, and then he was gone.

Nellis AFB

Adam appeared outside Curtis' office, no point in again startling the crap out of the officer. The door was open so the boy stuck his head in and knocked. Curtis was in the initial stages of contacting a great many people, few of whom believed anything that the officer had to say. Curtis smiled and waved Adam in and pointed to a chair, the general seemed to be talking with someone at NORAD's Space Command.

While the general continued on the phone, Adam tried to sort out the awful shouting match that he had with Ronnie. Why had she yelled those things at him? What did he say or do that was so terrible? Did she just expect him to not at least try to help those people on the space station? The boy's self-examination was ended when Curtis finally was able to hang up the phone.

"It's good to see you son, sorry about the phone."

"It's nice to be here sir, what's the situation right now?"

"We're doing an end run around NASA's director

and his political cronies. Right now our Air Force reps at NASA are trying to figure out just what's the best use to put you to, if you go at all. They're trying to figure out some sort of small radio for you to take along. Getting a signal out of the core module is the problem, the metal walls will block any transmission or reception."

"Yes sir. I just had a bad shouting match with Ronnie, she had a fit about me wanting to help. Maybe we shouldn't tell Agent Monroe and the rest for now."

"I can't say that I blame her, no one will think the less of you if you don't try this, it's damned dangerous in my opinion."

"I just can't sit on my butt and not try, sir. Right now I need to try a jump with someone, to see if I can take someone along. I was going to try it with Ronnie but she was too busy yelling at me."

Curtis nodded his head in agreement, "Who did you have in mind to try this with?"

"Have you ever been to Maui, sir?"

Curtis just blinked.

“What do you need me to do, son?” Curtis asked with some major league reservations.

“Well, I think we need to hold on to each other real close. You’ll need to be real still and quiet too.” Adam explained.

“How...What do you...?” Curtis didn’t quite know how to start the awkward experiment.

Adam motioned the general into the middle of the room and held out his arms as if to embrace the man.

“This doesn’t mean we’re in love sir, but give me a tight hug.”

“Alright son, you’re the driver.”

It was still daylight when the strolling tourists were treated to the sudden and unsettling sight of an Air Force officer tightly embracing a young boy on the beach; it was even more unsettling when they watched the intertwined pair vanish from sight.

“Cool! It worked!” Adam exclaimed as Curtis released his death grip on the boy and stood back, they were back in the general’s office at Nellis.

Curtis suppressed a shiver and sat down on the couch in the office. It took the officer a few moments to once more collect his wits, a process that was becoming practically a routine when Adam was around. Curtis knew he hadn't imagined the whole thing, there was still beach sand on his shoes. Time was pressing and the general couldn't ration out much more delay just for the sake of his nerves.

“Son, I've set up a video conference with some people in about an hour,” Curtis explained, “I still have about a hundred more calls to make.” Adam took the hint, “Yes sir, I need some more time to study the core module. I'm going to go off to somewhere quite so I can concentrate.” Adam checked his watch, “I'll be back in one hour, is that okay?”

“That sound like a good plan, the conference room in an hour.”

“Yes sir.”

Adam just used his legs to leave Curtis' office. A

quick 'look' around the base found a dark and unused baseball diamond. The grass wasn't damp in the warmth of the desert night, so the boy stretched out on his back and looked up at the sea of stars above him. The space station core module was presently over western Australia, it took Adam about five minutes to zero in on it.

It was cold and dim in the module, the attempt to jury rig some sort of usable radio had failed for lack of any power other than the batteries in the emergency lights. The air was starting to get foul, no fans to circulate it or power for the equipment to purify it. The eight astronauts were sitting on the bulkhead that led to the shuttle-docking airlock, the spin that had been imparted to the module provided them with almost one-half normal gravity. There had been talk of simply popping the hatch and getting it over with, but the consensus was that passing out from lack of oxygen was better than having your body explode like a water balloon.

The White House

The space station tragedy was an unwanted distraction for President Packer; still he went through the motions of making a sad speech to the nation and declaring a national day of concern and prayer. Ten minutes after the camera crew departed the Oval Office the President's Chief of Staff was once more enduring what was rapidly becoming unendurable.

“What’s going on at Nellis? That idiot Burnside at NASA says he thinks there’s something going on there that has to do with the space station fuck up!” Packer saw Adam behind every door these days. The Chief of Staff offered an explanation. “Maybe they’re going to use the boy to help save the rest of the astronauts, assuming that they’re still alive.”

“What if we put out a story saying that the little dipshit caused the break up,” Packer offered, “that he sent a letter threatening the space station and then followed through on it?”

“I don’t know if the public will swallow that, Mr. President.”

“They’ll swallow whatever the assholes on the networks tell them to swallow!” Packer snapped.

“I don’t know sir, it’s getting harder and harder to keep a lid on the Internet.”

“Fuck the Internet, I’ll shut it down if I have to!” Packer’s estimation of the American public wasn’t far off but his grasp on technology was tenuous at best, it would seem that so was his grasp on reality.

Nellis

Adam returned to the conference room after the hour that he had promised. General Curtis was talking with several officers and one civilian, all of them new to the boy. After Adam made his appearance Curtis made the introductions to those present and to the faces on the three video monitors arrayed at one end of the conference table. Each monitor had a small camera mounted on top. There

was also a small portable oxygen tank and mask on the conference table. Curtis closed the door and asked everyone to have a seat.

“Son, we’ve been going over our options and trying to round up what small equipment we think you might need to take with you.” Curtis explained, “So far we have this oxygen tank and mask, the air will be getting bad, we don’t want you passing out if and when you get there.”

Adam raised his hand and interrupted the officer, “Sir, I’ve just spent the last hour doing a very close inspection of the core module and the crew, they’re in bad trouble. The air is getting bad and it’s getting really cold. I need to go right now, there’s not enough time left to fiddle with the details. I’m sorry if I sound like a smart ass, but time is running out.”

“Things are that bad?” Curtis asked

“Yes sir, they...” Adam’s reply was interrupted by voices outside the door and then by Agent Monroe and the rest of the former FBI Special Team barging

into the room.

“Curtis, just what the hell is going on here?” Monroe demanded, “We just got a call from Ronnie Burns about some wild ass plan to use Adam in some sort of rescue operation for the space station!”

“Monroe, this is a closed meeting!” Curtis countered angrily.

“I could care less! You’re not risking that boy’s neck in this hair brained scheme!” Monroe shouted, he then pointed at Adam. *“I absolutely forbid you try ‘jumping’ to that station, is that clear?”*

“But this was my idea...” No one was listening to Adam at this point, least of all Monroe.

Things went downhill in rapid order, it seemed to Adam that everyone in the room was shouting at the same time, Monroe and Parker both told him to be quiet and shut up. Curtis and Monroe seemed moments away from actual blows. Mother Harper came around the table to the boy and tried to take him by the arm to lead him out of the room.

“Leggo! This is crazy!” Adam ‘pushed’ the surprised woman away and then stood and snatched up the small oxygen tank. The boy found it almost impossible to concentrate in the noisy room but managed to zero in on the nearby baseball diamond he had visited earlier.
Gone.

Adam sat cross-legged on the grassy field, trying to calm his anger and clear the confusion. Why had everyone he knew turned into such total assholes lately? Didn’t they see that he had a good shot at saving those people on the space station? He’d risked his neck before when he worked for the FBI; no one had tried very hard to stop him then. After a while the boy pushed these thoughts to the back of his mind, there were more pressing matters for now. Could he really pull this off?

When the boy found the core module it was relatively close, just crossing over Baja California. Adam cradled the oxygen tank in his lap and put the mask on, twisting the valve produced a slight hiss.

The extra oxygen seemed to actually help in zeroing in on his target, the very middle of the core module, the axis around which it now rotated. The air in the module was colder now, growing more foul and harder to breathe by the hour.

“I hope I don’t totally freak them out.” Adam said to himself.

ISS, Core Module

In fact the eight astronauts didn’t even see the boy arrive, some had their eyes closed in a sort of half sleep, the rest were talking quietly and not looking ‘above’ where they still sat near the docking airlock. Adam was in a near panic, he had arrived exactly where he wanted to but he hadn’t fully taken into account that there was no gravity at the spin axis, he felt like he was falling. The pain in Adam’s ears stopped when he yawned to adjust to the lower air pressure in the module. After flailing about with his free arm for a bit he managed to grab the pull

handle on some sort of storage compartment, he also found his voice. “Geez!”

Biologist Joan Cummings jerked her head upwards at the strange voice coming from above, she thought that hallucinations were finally commencing, there seemed to be a young boy about halfway up the core. She wasn't the only one to hear things. In a moment all eight astronauts were staring open mouthed at the odd apparition. No one said anything at first, they just sat silently watching Adam trying to come to grips with zero gravity, or anything else that was handy.

“Hi, folks!” Adam managed a somewhat muffled greeting and then pulled down his oxygen mask. “Don't be scared, I'm sort of here to rescue you, I hope.” In fact the boy felt like he was in need of some sort of rescue himself. The eight astronauts sat in shocked silence as they watched Adam start to try and work his way down to them. As the boy moved away from the spin axis the feeble gravity began to take over. In a moment he had lost his

grip and was doing a slow bounce and tumble routine down the length of the module. Adam landed in an undignified heap in the midst of the astronauts; the small oxygen bottle followed close behind and hit him on the forehead hard enough for the tank's valve to draw blood.

“Ow! Shit!” Adam sat up and felt the small but bloody cut on his head. The astronauts seemed to snap out of their trance as they came to realize that there was actually a flesh and bloody boy in front of them, a boy who looked very familiar. John Tinker, the British astronaut, found his voice first

“You're him....Adam...” It was hard for any of the astronauts to think clearly with their oxygen deprived brains.

“Yes sir, I'm me. Sorry to scare you all that way, there was no way for anyone to let you know I was coming.”

“But where... How in the bloody hell did you get here?” Tinker demanded.

“It's sort of a long story. I guess you all know about my weird abilities, how I used to work for the

FBI?”

Joan Cummings had some real fear in her eyes as she spoke. “They said you were probably dead, that you went insane.”

“I know ma’am. As you can see I’m not dead and not totally nuts, at least not yet.”

Everyone seemed to ask the next question, again.

“But how did you get HERE?”

“One of my recently acquired weird abilities, I can shift or move across space. Ten minutes ago I was at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, the actual jump seems to take no time at all.”

“And you expect us to believe that cock and bull?”

Tinker sneered.

“Well sir, I’m here aren’t I?”

Tinker could find no response to that obvious fact and seemed to be re-thinking his doubts.

Adam felt a little light headed and realized he wasn’t used to the lack of oxygen in the module. After a few deeps breaths from the oxygen mask the feeling passed. “People, we’re running out of time. The air is getting really bad in here and it’s freezing

cold too. I can take you along with me to Nellis one at a time. If you all want to live you're going to have to just trust me, the shuttle can't make it up here in less than a week. Who wants to be first?"

Surprising himself and everyone else, Tinker raised his hand.

"I'll be the lab rat. What do we do?"

Adam gave the oxygen bottle and mask to Ms. Cummings, "Let's stand up sir, then we have to hug each other really tight."

"Bloody hell! Alright laddie." Tinker stood and did as the boy asked.

"Everyone be quite for a minute," Adam said, "let me concentrate."

Nellis

Adam and Tinker's arrival was about two feet high and they collapsed in a tangle on the grass of the baseball field. The man was totally disoriented in

the full gravity and the warm dark of the desert night, at least the air seemed to fill his lungs.

“Where the fuck are we?” Tinker gasped.

“Nellis sir, this is a baseball field.” Adam tried to explain.

“A what?”

“Never mind for now, sir. Just sit right here while I start bringing the others back. Stay cool, people will be here to help you as soon as I get everyone off.”

“Alright laddie. God this air smells good!”

“Yes it does. Stay put.” Adam focused back on the core module, much easier now that he had been there.”

Despite the increasing distances between Nellis and the remains of the space station, Adam had all eight of the astronauts sitting in the middle of the darkened baseball field within twenty minutes. The boy had planned on trying to take the spin off of the core module but he found that the rapid series of jumps with ‘passengers’ had tired him to the point of exhaustion. Screw it, maybe later sometime. One short jump over to the conference room finished the

day.

Everyone was still waiting in the conference room, there didn't appear to be any sign of major violence having taken place. When Adam walked quietly in the door the assembled group stood as one and started to move toward the boy, their recent anger seemed to have passed. Mother Harper spoke first.

“Adam, your head's been bleeding!”

The boy absently put his hand to his forehead, the blood had mostly dried and clotted. “I'm okay. The astronauts are over at the baseball field, they're okay too, I think. They're pretty confused right now. You need to get some people over there. I'm going to bed now, so leave me alone for a while. I'm really tired and I don't feel like being yelled at anymore today.”

Despite numerous shouted questions Adam just turned and walked out of the room, then down the hall towards the room that had been set aside for

him when he had first arrived at Nellis. Mother Harper, her husband and Monroe ran after the boy, catching up with him as he entered his room. Adam sat down on the bed and began tugging off his shoes and socks, Harper made him hold still while she looked at the cut on his head.

“That needs to be cleaned and then maybe a stitch or two.”

Adam answered as he stood up. “It’s fine, I’ll fix it. I’m going to take a quick shower now, I don’t need an audience.”

“What were you thinking about when you pulled this stunt?” Monroe asked.

Adam began undressing as he answered, “I was thinking that eight people were dying and that I could save them. I did save them.”

“How did you hurt your head?” Harper demanded.

“I bumped it on my oxygen tank. Can’t I have a little privacy?”

No one seemed to be budging so the boy

defiantly proceeded to undress down to his skin in front of the three ex-agents, Harper was a bit nonplussed at his sudden nudity, the boy used to be so modest in front of her. At least they didn't try to follow him into the shower.

In the few short minutes that Adam was showering the three ex-agents tried to make sense out of the last few hours and why 'their' boy seemed so hostile. When the boy emerged from the shower the blood on his head was gone, so was the cut. Adam toweled off as the three adults crowded into the small bathroom, Harper once more looked at his forehead.

"It's gone. Your cut's gone." Harper whispered.

"I fixed it. I'm going to bed now." Adam replied as he headed out of the bathroom, still in just his birthday suit.

"We need to talk things out first." Monroe replied. Adam just sighed and sat down on the bed. As if making a sudden decision he began pulling his clothes back on.

“What are you doing?” Monroe demanded.

“Leaving. I need some peace and quiet.”

“Okay, okay! We’ll talk later.” Harper replied
hastily.

The boy didn’t answer and finished putting on his shoes, then he finally answered. “Maybe the Richter’s won’t yell at me.”

Then he was gone again.

Okinawa

No one was home. Adam did a quick scan for his adopted family, quickly locating them. The Richter’s were attending the annual officers/enlisted personnel softball game and picnic. After a fast visit to the bathroom Adam made a beeline for Freddie’s room where he shucked off his clothes and crawled into the top bunk. After tossing and turning for almost ten seconds, the boy was fast asleep.

Adam had managed almost three hours of

needed sleep when the Richters returned home. Freddie made for his room to prepare for a shower to wash off the dust and sweat from the softball game; he had been in the junior division of the event. Freddie nearly jumped straight up when he saw the large lump under the upper bunk's blanket.

“Dork!” Freddie exclaimed.

“Mmmphf.” Adam stirred a bit but didn't fully return to the living.

Freddie started towards the bunk bed to fully wake his friend but stopped and decided to go spring the news on the rest of the family. The Colonel and Mrs. Richter were in the kitchen when their son casually walked in and waited politely for a pause in the adult's conversation.

“Adam's back.” Freddie smiled a little at the reaction of his parents.

“Where is he?” Colonel Richter asked, also with a big grin.

“He's in my room, dead to the world. I let him sleep, he seemed like he might be pretty tired.”

The two adults preceded their son to his room; along the way Hanna joined the procession.

As the family quietly entered the room Adam was still curled tightly into a ball, his usual sleep position. Mrs. Richter leaned over and kissed their 'adopted' son on the head, the boy moved slightly and stayed fast asleep. The woman put her finger to her lips and whispered to her family, "Shh. Let him sleep for now, he probably needs it."

Two hours later Colonel Richter got a call from Monroe, it took a while to recount the latest events.

"How is Adam?" Monroe first asked.

"Sound asleep. We were all gone when he arrived, he was in bed when we got home. He seemed pretty out of it so we've just let him sleep," Richter explained.

"Then he hasn't told you about the space station?" Monroe asked.

"It was all over the news, they almost canceled today's activities out of respect. Why would Adam want to talk about it, though?"

“There were eight survivors in the core module, Adam located them.”

“That’s great! Will they be able to rescue them?”

“They’ve already been rescued, they’re here at Nellis right now.”

“But how, the news said the shuttle would take at least a week?”

“Adam rescued them.” Monroe said quietly.

The Colonel was silent for a moment, then it dawned on him what the boy had done, “He ‘shifted’ to the space station?”

“Yes,” Monroe explained, “he was able to shift with one astronaut at a time between here and the core module. Everyone here was dead set against him even trying such a thing. We all thought it was just too damned dangerous. He was at Ms. Burns’ place when all of this started. I guess she laid into him really strong about not trying such a thing. He came here and met with General Curtis, he was against it also but there was no real way to stop Adam from trying it. There was a big scene here when the rest of us found out about what was going

on, Adam took off in the middle of our shouting match. About forty-five minutes after he left here all of the astronauts were setting in the middle of the Nellis baseball diamond alive and well.”

“Adam showed up here at the conference area, he was very tired and sort of pissed off about the way everyone had talked to him before, I guess we did come on pretty hard with him. He went to his room here to get some sleep, he had a nasty cut on his head too. We followed him there, we were all worried silly about him. He took a shower and when he came out the cut on his head was totally healed, no scar or anything. I guess we just didn’t know when to back off, he just got madder and then he ‘left’.”

Christ!” Richter thought he could no longer be amazed by anything the boy did.

“Maybe Adam needs some time away from all of us here, he’s been worn sort of thin these last few days,” Monroe explained, “I won’t even go into what’s been going on with him and Packer, he can

fill you in. Maybe we just can't quite get used to the idea that he's starting to grow up, perhaps we've gotten too used to running his life for him."

Richter agreed, "I guess that goes for all 'parents'. I know it's hard for me to know when to butt out of my kid's lives."

"Understood. I don't know how they're going to explain how those astronauts got rescued. Maybe Packer's bunch can come up with some sort of suitable lie." Monroe concluded.

The White House

FBI Director Crispin was once more on the griddle; he was again briefing the President.

"Our informants at Nellis are saying that all eight of the unaccounted for astronauts are now at Nellis, apparently alive and well."

"How in the hell did they get there?" Packer demanded, not quite wound up to full volume yet."

"The only explanation that fits is that the boy was

able to take them off the space station, we think he did it one at a time,” Crispin responded.

“Now how in the hell are we going to be able to pin the breakup on that little monster with those astronauts running around loose!” Packer snapped.

“I don’t see that we can, sir. We’ll do well to keep his part in the rescue under wraps.”

“FUCK!!” Packer was now up to full volume.

Okinawa

Playing time zone hopscotch found Adam awake and up in the pre-dawn hours, Freddie was still sawing logs in his bunk. After quietly dressing in his freshly laundered clothes (thank you Mrs. Richter) Adam sat down at his friend’s computer, turned off the speakers and then logged on to the internet.

None of the news services had a thing about the rescued astronauts; this wasn’t much of a surprise. When Adam ran a search program about himself

there were very few returns, all that turned up were reposted stories about his probable death, or warnings to avoid him if sighted. “So much for the freedom of the internet,” Adam concluded. NASA’s main web page was bordered in black; pictures of all eighteen ‘dead’ astronauts were featured with a bio under each photo. Taos’ local paper’s site had nothing at all about any unusual military maneuvers or activities.

Adam turned off the computer and ‘looked’ in on Ronnie and Mr. Smithe, nothing unusual there, likewise at Nellis. The White House resembled an armed fortress, extra guards, extra guns, and extra paranoia. Out of curiosity Adam zeroed in on his former home at the FBI Special Operations unit at Quantico, what he found was depressing and maddening.

Adam’s small apartment had been turned into a sort of crash pad for the senior agent’s. There was liquor in the small cabinets that once housed his foodstuffs, more so in the fridge. The place was a

mess. Down the hall, the computer and music room was mostly being used for storage. Adam's prized computer was nowhere to be found. The beautiful Steinway was shoved up against one wall, there were cigarette burns on its polished ebony surface.

The boy's growling stomach was threatening to wake the entire household so he made his way quietly into the kitchen and turned on the small light over the sink. Silent rummaging located corn flakes, milk and juice. As Adam sat munching his simple breakfast he tried to sort out the events of the last few days. Had he been a jerk in the way he had reacted to everyone? Was he becoming some sort of touchy teenager (to be, that is), was he 'rebellious'? On the other hand it seemed like everyone he knew was trying to be his boss and that was getting sort of tiresome.

The sun was just rising as Adam rinsed out his dish and glass and sat them in the sink. The boy could sense the adults beginning to stir so he put on a pot of coffee with the amount of water and

grounds that he knew Mrs. Richter preferred. By the time that his adopted 'mother' padded into the kitchen the coffee was nearly ready.

Adam and the woman met halfway in the kitchen where he received a crushing hug and a kiss to the top of his head. The process was repeated (minus the kiss) when the Colonel made his appearance soon afterwards.

"It's good to have you back here son," Richter said, "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine sir, and it is good to be back."

"So how was outer space?"

"Cold and hard to breath. I arrived in the middle of the core module, there's no gravity there because of the spin." Adam explained, "I nearly lost my cookies trying to get down to where the astronauts were."

The Colonel just shook his head for a moment,

"They were in pretty bad shape?"

"Yes sir, the air was getting really bad. I had a small oxygen bottle along with me, I was glad that I

did.”

“I talked with Monroe, he said you hurt your head?”

“I sort of fell down the module a ways, the oxygen bottle bonked me on the head when I landed. No big deal really, just a small cut that bled some, the way any head cut does.”

Richter did a close examination of the boy’s head, “No sign of it now?”

“I sort of fixed it, you know me.”

The Marine nodded his head in agreement, he did indeed know. “You took an awful risk doing what you did, we’re all proud as hell of you but you could have wound up as a small satellite.”

“I took my time to get it just right, I couldn’t just not try.” Adam explained.

“I understand everyone came down pretty hard on you for wanting to try it? I probably would have too.”

“Yes sir, things got sort of hot for a while, I guess I got pretty steamed at everyone too.”

“They just care about you, Adam,” said Mrs. Richter.

“I know that ma’am, but sometimes it gets to be a real drag having everyone telling you what to do, where to go. I guess I didn’t take too well to being yelled at by everyone.”

“Well, no one’s going to yell at you here,” Greta concluded.

“Even if I sneak a ride on the motorbike?”

“Don’t push it, son,” said the smiling Colonel.

“Yes sir.”

Colonel Richter turned on the kitchen radio to catch the morning news from the Armed Forces station; the announcer was reading a wire story from UPI.

“...seemingly out of nowhere. The rescue of the eight remaining astronauts, until now thought to be dead, was accomplished with a still top secret ‘space plane’ operating out of what experts agree was probably the Area 51 experimental base. This is an amazing turn of events to this greatest of American space tragedies.”

“You’ve got to hand it to Packer’s bunch, they are

creative.” Adam observed. The Richter’s small kitchen radio did not survive the Colonel’s somewhat enthusiastic efforts to silence it, even Adam couldn’t fix it.

Geez!

Eventually Adam sat down with his ‘family’ and recounted the events in the Black Rock desert, what he had been forced to do there. Dear God.

The War, Part II

Adam spent three days with the Richter's before returning to Washington. It was time to tighten the screws a bit on Packer and his minions.

The boy hadn't checked in with anyone at Nellis, but had instead gone directly to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial; it was a nice day for a walk, not too hot or muggy for August. Adam enjoyed just walking among the 'normal' people (mostly tourists). Needless to say his presence attracted a great deal of attention, most people tended to scurry away when they realized who he was, a few brave souls wanted to shake his hand and have pictures taken.

The police couldn't get within a quarter mile of the boy, at least fifteen patrol cars ceased to have moving parts, the officers who proceeded on foot had the usual sorts of problems. No one was hurt. Adam added to the general confusion by jumping to

widely separated spots around the city, the police dispatchers were nearly reduced to tears.

Adam was able to spend almost an hour in some of the Smithsonian's more obscure sections. He decided this would be a neat place to revisit from time to time (maybe after hours). The boy had a nice conversation with an elderly couple from Nebraska who were interested in the Native American pottery exhibit; they didn't have the slightest idea who the nice young boy was.

Before winding up on his favorite rooftop to commence making Packer's life more difficult, Adam showed up on the sidewalk in front of the White House. At first he went unnoticed as he stood quietly watching the People's House, of course that didn't last for long. You've already read about what happened then.

"Where to begin?" Adam asked himself. The rooftop was pretty warm, hot actually, even in the shady spot he had found. Best to get right down to

business.

He didn't want to do real damage to the White House, after all it really didn't belong to the President, it belonged to the nation, to the people.

"Gee, I bet it gets real uncomfortable in there when the air conditioning goes out," Adam grinned.

The air conditioning *really* went out. Something went wrong with all of the copy machines; they seemed to be making copies of nothing and wouldn't shut off. All of the smoke alarms went off, randomly. Of course all of the toilets froze up, likewise the rest of the plumbing not connected to the fire fighting system. Every computer in the building ceased computing, or doing anything else ever again.

There were just tons and tons of telephone and communications equipment in the White House, it would all have to be replaced. Before he cut the electricity off Adam jumped over to the small storeroom in the basement, he needed some cash for lunch and things, ten thousand was the most that

would fit comfortably in his pockets.

Packer was beyond the screaming stage, he finally calmed himself enough to order a move over to Blair House, Harry Truman once stayed there during White House repairs and renovations. Adam was sweaty and hungry by now and decided to end his efforts for the day, he even allowed Packer to be driven the short distance to Blair House.

Adam located a McDonalds some distance away from all of the government buildings and marble monuments. The teenage clerk who took his order appeared to be at least partially brain dead, no wonder the 'cash registers' had pictures instead of numbers on the oversize keys. Adam gave the clerk a hundred dollar bill, a bad move. Making change for the large bill seemed to stress the automated cash register, not to mention the clerk. Adam finally gave up in disgust and just told them to just keep the change. This really confused them. No one recognized him.

There was a small outdoor patio to one side of the instant eatery. There were tables and chairs with umbrellas to offer shade. Rather than waste time looking for an isolated spot to eat, Adam opted for one of the unoccupied tables toward the rear of the patio area. The boy was able to peacefully devour about half of his hamburger and part of the shake before the first cops showed up.

“Shit!” Adam had thought he might make it through the meal without attracting attention. It appeared now that the rest of Washington was without any police protection at all; within minutes the area was a sea of blue uniforms. Needless to say the patio became deserted fairly early on in the proceedings. Adam would normally have been long gone but was totally fascinated by the spectacle surrounding him. Disabling firearms required almost no thought or effort on Adam’s part, the DC police department would have a large order to place with the Glock Corporation after today.

With over a hundred (inoperative) firearms

pointed at the boy one of the senior officers on the scene decided it was time for a simple chat, using a bullhorn to order Adam to come out with his hands up seemed a bit uncalled for in this situation. Adam waved in a friendly manner as the nervous black officer approached him.

“Officer Wallace, have a seat.” Adam stood politely and indicated the chair directly across that table from him.

“All right, do you know me?” Wallace gingerly took the seat offered to him.

“No sir, I have a way with names.”

“I guess you do at that.” Wallace didn’t quite know what to say next.

“Want some fries? There’s some left.” Adam pushed the small bag towards the man.

“I’ll pass. I suppose you know that we’re supposed to take you into custody?”

“I sort of deduced that. Remember I used to work for the FBI, when it really was the FBI.” Adam smiled.

Wallace asked the big question, “So will you come

along with me?”

Adam’s response was a simple and easy to understand, “Of course not.”

It was at this point that Wallace really started to perspire.

“Son, there are about a hundred guns pointed at you.”

“Why? I’m not even carrying a squirt gun, are you going to shoot a kid?”

“We’ve had briefings on your abilities, things you can do with your mind.”

“Then you must surely know that all of those guns out there don’t work anymore.” Adam gave him his number four innocent smile.

Wallace reconsidered his situation for a moment, then he fell back on police procedure. Keep him talking.

“So what are you doing in Washington?”

“Turning up the heat on Packer.” Adam quit smiling.

“Why is that?” Wallace asked.

“For trying to kill me and just about everyone I’ve ever cared about. How’s that for starters?”

“That sounds pretty crazy, even for Pecker.”

Wallace had no liking for the creep either.

“So call me crazy. I better be going before things get out of hand here,” Adam explained, “it’s been nice talking with you, you seem like a good person. Sorry about the guns.”

Wallace started to reply when America’s number one fugitive vanished from before his eyes. The officer just sat quietly for a short while, eventually he stood and walked slowly back to the blue confusion on the street, no one could get him to say very much.

Blair House

“We have to up the ante, that little bastard isn’t going to run me out of town!” Packer’s volume was almost at a normal level, a bad sign.

“What did you have in mind, Mr. President?”

Asked the Director of the FBI.

“I want a dead or alive reward of one-hundred million tax free dollars on his head. We’ll put together an address to the nation, explain how he’s been responsible for the deaths of all of those agents and anything else we can come up with. Shoot on sight, Goddammit!”

Even Packer’s Chief of Staff balked at that suggestion, “Sir, that will open a hunting season on every blonde male child who even vaguely resembles Adam, it’s inviting tragedies from coast to coast.”

“You can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs!” Packer barked.

“I can’t be a part of that, Mr. President,” replied the CoS. Apparently the man had some vestige of a soul.

“You can be replaced.” Packer hissed.

“Then do so, you have my resignation.”

The President’s ex-Chief of Staff enjoyed his new freedom and sense of righteousness for six hours and twenty-seven minutes before a silenced .22

caliber bullet entered his brain. Cause of death was listed as a cerebral hemorrhage, which in a way it was.

Arlington National Cemetery

Adam sat alone on a bench under the shade of a large elm tree. It was quiet and peaceful here, the brave souls in their graves weren't afraid of the boy. It was a good place to sit and think.

Would he ever have any sort of normal life, would any of his friends? The temptation to simply disappear and go live as a hermit somewhere was a thought the boy entertained more often these days, everyone he was around was in some sort of danger as long as Packer and men like him were in charge.

Should he go back to Taos and apologize or to Nellis to do the same? What's next with Packer, what will it take to beat him? Too damn many

questions and no answers.

In the end he just went back to Freddie's room. It was the middle of the night and everyone was asleep, but it felt like home.

Okinawa

Time zones suck, Adam slept till about noon. Being a military family, the Richter's understood long distance travel and left the boy alone to try and adjust his sleep schedule. It was a Saturday so everyone was at home; even Hanna's new boyfriend (Jack) joined the family for a backyard barbecue. Hanna's beau was a bit awe struck in Adam's presence, this lessened quiet a bit when the celebrity in question caused Jack's pants to fall down four times in as many minutes. Jack wore plaid boxer shorts, Adam and Freddie thought that this was just too hilarious, but then they were easily entertained. Hanna put an end to Adam and

Freddie's fun when she whacked both of them on the head.

Something totally incredible happened. Colonel Richter decided it was finally time to let Adam and Freddie ride the motorbike, one at a time, with proper shoes, clothing and a helmet. It was a bit of a let down actually, they only got to ride up and down the residential street and they had to promise to keep it in first gear. Having only recently been orbiting the earth at 18,000 mph, the motorbike wasn't nearly as exciting to Adam as the first time he had climbed aboard it. Life is sometimes just one big let down.

That evening found the family in the living room gathered around the satellite fed television. The look in Colonel Richter's eye had earlier given Jack the impetus to bid one and all a good night. Adam marveled at Jack's courage (or lack of sense) for even daring to hold Hanna's hand in the Colonel's presence. The fine day ended on a total bummer, President Packer interrupted a rerun of the movie

2001 for an emergency address to the nation.

“My fellow Americans, it is with a heavy heart and a sense of complete sadness that I address you this day. Adam Valentine, that young boy to whom this republic owes so very much, has now become the most serious threat to our national security since the ending of the cold war. For some time the boy was thought to have perished in his flight from the medical treatment that he so desperately needed. Recent events have shown that Adam is indeed alive and has now caused a great loss of life among those who have sought only to help him.”

“Adam has long had the ability to cause the loss of consciousness in human beings, this talent was used to great benefit in the past with his work the FBI, many dangerous felons were rendered harmless, lives were saved. This special talent has now turned deadly with the loss of the boy’s reason, his inability to discern right from wrong.”

“In the past month Adam was tracked to a remote

part of Nevada, hundreds of FBI and federal agents were dispatched to try and take him safely into custody, to give him the care that he needed. It is my sad duty to report to you that seventy-four brave federal agents perished in the attempt to take Adam Valentine into protective care. Autopsies of the slain agents indicated that they all perished from loss of blood circulation to their brains.”

“The time has come to finally put the safety of the nation and the American people ahead of the well being of this remarkable child who’s reason and sanity has been so cruelly stripped away from him. By executive order, as directed by the constitution, I hereby offer the sum of one hundred million dollars, tax exempt, for the capture of Adam Valentine. It is preferred that he be taken alive if at all possible, but dead if all else fails.”

“This is the hardest duty I have every had to perform, but it is one I cannot shy away from. Let us all say a prayer for the soul of this dear boy and try to remember him for the good works that he has

done and not for the tragic events that his illness has brought about. Thank you all, and good day.”

Adam and the Richter’s sat in a stunned silence for a moment, no one could seem to find the right words to give voice to their outrage, then everyone was shouting at once. Adam was the only person who sat silent, he was beginning to realize that this meant he would have to live apart from those he cared for, they would be in much greater danger just by being close to him. One hundred million dollars was too much temptation, especially if one lived on the edges of the economy.

When some quiet had returned to the living room Adam made ready to say goodbye. “I have to leave, it’s just too dangerous for me to be around you all.” Colonel Richter was still mad as hell, “Don’t be silly son, you’re surrounded by thousands of Marines here!”

“Sir, Marines are good people but they are still people” Adam began, “suppose you were a private or a corporal trying to support your wife and kid on

what they earn, how tempting would a lifetime of financial security for your family be? Suppose you're detailed to the security detail that's outside even now, one short burst from your M-16 and your family's set for life. Then there's all of the Japanese civilians on this island, remember who took Freddie."

"But son...." Richter saw the truth in what Adam was saying, it was ugly but the truth often is.

"I can make out fine on my own for a while, I'll even be safer by myself if no one knows where I am, Packer can't hang on forever."

Mrs. Richter surprised everyone by reluctantly agreeing with Adam. "That hideous little man is going to get innocent children killed. I remember when this all first started, how people were grabbing boys off the street who looked like Adam. The reward was much smaller then too."

"Where will you go?" Freddie asked.

"I'll check in at Nellis for a few minutes, then Taos if things seem safe. From there I might go to the Pentagon again to see if they're ever going to do

anything but sit on their flat butts.”

“But then what?” Hanna voiced what they all were thinking.

“I guess the best thing to do will be to find a place out in the boondocks somewhere, someplace totally isolated. I can still pop in here for quick visits, just don’t tell anyone I’ve been here. Tell everyone that I’ve gone back to the states, that you’re not sure where I am.”

The Pentagon

The four heads of the services met in the ‘cage’ shortly after the President’s speech, what they had to discuss was almost inevitable. Air Force General Lyman voiced what once had been unthinkable.

“Packer’s on the ropes, I wouldn’t give him more than a week at the outside. The question is Adam. The boy’s abilities have grown and are still growing at a rate that is to say the least, frightening.”

CINCPAC agreed, “The genetic profile of Adam says that strictly speaking he isn’t even completely human, he’s a step above us. The science types tell us that he will probably pass along his psychic and telekinetic abilities to his offspring. The human race will be replaced in short order.”

The Commandant of the Marine’s wasn’t buying into the deal, “Adam’s a good kid, and he saved literally millions of lives when he located those nukes. Now you’re saying let’s go ahead and get him to do our dirty work by driving that sack of shit out of the White House. Then we pat him on the head and say thank you very much, and oh by the way, here’s a bullet in your brain!”

“Adam *is* a good kid, the very best, “ agreed Lyman, “but what about his kids, and their kids? Will they all be good? I want my grandchildren to grow up in a world that isn’t being run by a few superhuman ‘things’ who would look down at us mere mortals, as if we were so many tame monkeys.”

The conversation lasted for nearly an hour. In the end the best that the Marine Commandant could be persuaded to do was to remain silent about the matter, he would have no part in the assassination, but neither would he hinder the shameful deed.

Nellis

A civilian maintenance contractor made the first attempt to collect the reward on Adam. The worker had caught sight of Monroe entering the building, he had recognized the black ex-agent from past news stories when Monroe had been head of the Special Team. Putting two and two together the contractor returned to his van and retrieved a .357 magnum that he kept under the front driver's seat. The worker's security badge got him into the building; the toolbox he carried seemed appropriate for his job.

Adam was trying to mend fences and say a

temporary goodbye to his assembled 'family' when he sensed that something was not right. Before the boy could give voice to his concern, the contractor had entered the conference room and was raising a gun in his direction. Almost without a thought Adam froze up the revolver the man held, he then picked up the intruder and pinned him against the wall.

“That’s why I have to get away from everyone, “ Adam explained while pointing to the spread-eagled intruder, “everyone will be safer, myself included, if I’m off someplace isolated.”

Point made.

After Adam had left Nellis and after his would-be assassin was dealt with (none too gently), Mother Harper quietly asked her husband if they would ever see the boy again. Parker had no ready answer. “Things are coming to a head, I think Packer has just about played his last hole card.”

True indeed, twenty-three state’s Governors or Attorney Generals had already made statements to

the effect that anyone shooting at or attempting to harm Adam Valentine, or any boy resembling Adam Valentine, would be facing full criminal prosecution. In the U.S. Congress Packer's threats and blackmail were beginning to sound a bit hollow, likewise the major news media were finally starting to think a bit more about their responsibility to the nation rather than just about their profit margins.

Taos

Adam appeared in the loft over the workshop area at Ronnie's, it was a quiet and hidden place to study things before making his presence known. A scan of the area found the Marines still in their defensive ring around the property, Mr. Smithe and Ronnie were having some lunch at the kitchen table, they weren't saying much, the boy could feel some bad feelings between the two of them.

After quietly climbing down from the loft, Adam

made his way to the kitchen area and knocked lightly on the open door that led out to the shop. No one said anything; Ronnie smiled and got up to give Adam a tight embrace and a whispered apology.

“I’m so sorry for the way I treated you, Squirt.”

“Then we’re both sorry, I didn’t exactly make things easy,” Adam replied.

“We saw that asshole Packer’s speech to the nation, God he’s unspeakable!” Ronnie sighed.

“I know. I can’t stay here, I can’t stay with anyone for a while. I was just at Nellis, some nut tried to get at me while I was with the Special Team, he could have shot the people next to me, all he saw was 100 million dollars.”

“But squirt, we’re safe here, we’re surrounded by the damn Marine Corps!”

“Yes Ronnie, but they’re just human beings. Don’t ask them to be saints, some of them qualify for food stamps.”

“Bullshit! I’m not afraid of the Marines or anyone else! You’re not going to run off like some damn criminal, you’re not! You’re the best thing that’s ever

happened to this stupid country!”

Adam hugged the woman tighter; Mr. Smithe was by now beside them, his hand on the boy’s shoulder. “I love you both, I’ll be back when it’s safe.”
Gone.

Alone Again, Naturally

Adam's ability to shift locations in an instant brought about new and easy ways of dealing with what had once been major problems when he first ran from the FBI. Buying clothing, supplies, food or whatever could be done in widely located cities, staying in the remotest and most inaccessible hideaway was as easy as staying in some downtown Hilton.

During one of the Special Team's manhunt missions, back before things went to hell, Adam had once been to a remote area of central Oregon; it was here that he began his search for the perfect hidey-hole. The boy was searching for some abandoned cabin or mining operation, what he found was provided by Mother Nature.

The tiny lake that he had paused at may have had a name and was surely on some map

somewhere, but there were no roads to it, nor even any hiking trails. There was a large granite bluff at one end of the crystal clear lake, a debris fall extended from the edge of the lake to about one-third of the way up the bluff. A dark recess near the top of the bluff caught Adam's eye, he decided to explore with some easy remote viewing. It was perfect. In an instant he made the short jump up to his new home.

Adam couldn't figure out what sort of weird geological process had created the deep recess in the solid granite, it was almost like a cave. The floor of the recess was mostly flat, the walls rose to form a rough vee shaped ceiling. The only problem was that the entrance was wide open to the elements and to the view of any who might take a close look at the place with binoculars, this could be fixed by piling up some of the rock debris to wall off most of the entrance. There was no evidence of water seepage, the place was bone dry. Anyway, if the weather got too awful he could always jump to Hawaii or someplace. Adam had the feeling that he

may have to be here a long time, no real logic or information to that effect, just a feeling. First things first, get a sleeping bag, some food, and the usual camping crap.

Grant's Pass, Oregon was a good place to shop for crap; Adam located a Wally World and repeated the shopping expedition that he had once made back in Charleston, West Virginia. Having over \$9,000 in his pockets made it easy to buy the best of everything. Of course the boy attracted a great deal of attention on his trips up and down the aisles, the cops arrived but seemed perfectly content to surround the store and wait for him to come out. By the time he had assembled his purchases the store was completely deserted, this made check out a snap. Adam dutifully used the check out scanner to total up his purchases, and then he left five of Packer's hundred dollar bills on the cash register. Most of the stuff got crammed into the backpack he had bought, the rest into a large plastic bag. Adam shouldered the pack and held the bag close to him, then he was back at his 'hole-in-the-wall'.

The cops in Oregon waited outside for a very long time.

The sun was nearly down when Adam finished setting up his modest abode, tomorrow he would get some more stuff to make it more homey and maybe pile up the rocks to wall off the entrance. A quick before dinner dip in the lake seemed like a good idea so Adam quickly undressed and 'jumped' down to the edge of the lake. The still warm air and the last rays of the sun felt good on his bare skin, a toe stuck in the water told him that it wasn't quite as cold as the stream fed pond back at Taos but it was a close second. He stifled a yelp after he surfaced from his dive, it took your breath away at first but then it felt really good. Adam marveled at the clarity of the water and made a note to pick up a facemask on his next shopping expedition. After a few minutes in the cold water he climbed out onto a flat rock and laid belly down on it to warm himself, he chuckled at the way his genitals always tried to shrink back inside of him when exposed to very cold water. One could forget a lot of cares in such

beautiful surroundings and for a little while he did.

When he was dry and warm again he 'jumped' back to his rocky lair, the air hadn't started to cool yet so he opted not to bother with clothes, after all there wasn't anyone around to offend and he enjoyed the feeling of just wearing his birthday suit. Dinner was going to be a freeze-dried approximation of spaghetti and meatballs, maybe he would get some 'regular' food tomorrow, but for now this would do. Adam had purchased a small water-purifying pump, which he used to fill the cooking pot and canteen at the lakeside; he had read that sometimes nasty little critters lived in the most beautiful water. The lake didn't seem to have a stream feeding it; Adam decided it was probably formed by snowmelt.

By the time that the water for dinner was boiling on the small butane camp stove the sun had dipped below the horizon. The air temperature started to dip also, this was a mountain lake, it gets cool in a hurry when the sun goes away. Adam pulled his clothes back on, grateful for the warmth they

provided. Mental note: Buy some warmer clothes.

After his belly was full and the pot and spoon were washed (with sand and water) Adam, sat on the edge of the opening to his cave. It wouldn't do to sleep walk here, the drop was at least seventy-five perfectly vertical feet. The news on the small radio he had bought held nothing of great note, other than the several near tragedies that had occurred when nitwits thought they had America's most wanted cornered.

It occurred to the boy that all of that money in the basement of the White House might not be there very much longer. Three trips with his back pack stuffed with Packer's slush funds and jewelry ended the evening on an up note, if Adam ran out of something to do he would get around to counting it. He left a simple one-letter note in the empty safe, "V."

And so to bed. Turn off the candle. Scan for people (no one for light years).

Mental notes before sleep-----

Toilet paper!

Toothbrush.

Soap.

Propane heater and lantern of some sort.

Big screen TV and fifty-mile long extension cord
(maybe not).

Instant Coffee!

And finally:

Get a couple or twelve of those foam pad things to
go under the sleeping bag. "Geez, this rock is
hard!"

A prayer, "Lord, please forgive me for killing all of
those people, please watch over my friends."

Sleep.

Breakfast was freeze dried ham and eggs. Adam
voiced his opinion of the meal with a number of
colorful expressions that he had picked up while
helping the navy find one of it's missing submarines.
A trip to an actual supermarket was in order
sometime that day.

Walling off most of the cave entrance was simply a matter of floating up a procession of good-sized rocks and setting them carefully in place. Adam had decided to put the wall up about twenty feet back from the opening, this would hide it's unnatural appearance and lessen the area to be heated if he had to stay on until cold weather set in. Some pieces of heavy deadwood made a crude doorframe, maybe a blanket or something could be hung across it later. The wall made it very dark even during the day; lanterns or something would be a must at night. Maybe he could rig up a window later on. He still couldn't shake the feeling that he might be here for quite a long time.

The next shopping expedition occurred in Salt Lake City, Adam thought that shopping in just one city would narrow down his general location too much and unduly alarm the populace. The large sporting goods chain store produced a propane powered lantern and heater; they both could be plugged into a variety of gas bottle sizes. Three

sleeping pads! Waterproof matches, ad infinitum. Of course the police made their obligatory appearance. In the course of things the one police captain who ventured inside the by now deserted store ended up advising the polite boy on the best sort of long underwear to buy. The police captain put in for an early retirement after witnessing Adam and his purchases vanish from in front of his eyes.

Seattle had nice supermarkets so Adam picked one. Fresh milk, instant coffee, bread, canned goods, actual food. Things that would keep for a while without refrigeration. Some of the stuff could be stored in the cold lake water in plastic baggies. It was quite a basketful. The magazine rack yielded Nerd World's latest edition, something to read by the lantern tonight. This time the police did the wait outside routine while Adam fiddled with the check out scanner and paid for his groceries.

There was one elderly lady left in the store, she had very poor hearing and eyesight and had not noticed the departure of customers and staff. The

poor dear mistook Adam for a rather short check out clerk, he obliged her and scanned and bagged her small purchases. Her change came to four dollars and twenty-one cents, Adam substituted four of his one hundred dollar bills for the one's. She never noticed.

“Have a nice day, ma'am.”

The old woman walked out the front entrance and stopped for a moment to squint at all of the (useless) guns pointed at her. She became quite vocal when the police had the impertinence to try and take her in for questioning; in the end they just gave up and drove her home. Adam was long gone by then with thoughts of an actual lunch in mind.

It was another warm day so Adam had a quick dip in the lake before making his lunch; he resorted to his nature boy attire of the previous day and resolved to wash his clothes after lunch. He then proceeded to construct a world-class ham-cheese-tomato-lettuce-mayo sandwich; the side dish was Cheet-O's washed down with a lake-cooled Coke.

Bliss.

Now for a short nap.

Household chores. Adam's clothes weren't actually 'dirty' but they needed washing. The boy wasn't an environmental nut, but he knew you didn't put soap into unpolluted water, especially if it was your drinking water. A severe pounding on a rock and a general thrashing in the lake seemed to remove most of the stains and general untidiness that accumulate with human life, some dead tree limbs provided a handy clothes line.

The groceries were organized and put on a shelf made of flat rocks, things that were best kept chilled were put in the baggies the boy had bought and then put in a rock covered pen he built on the lake's shore. Were there any raccoons around here?" Better sleeping arrangements were made, the foam pads made for a decent mattress. The lantern and heater were assembled and tested, he would need to get a supply of gas bottles if he was going to be here for any length of time.

In the afternoon Adam went for a slow and careful barefoot walk around the lake and the surrounding forest, it was the most peace he had felt in nearly a year. The cool green of the trees, the feel of the warm sun dappled on his bare body, birds and small animals seen and those only sensed, the clean smell of life as is should be. Near an open area the boy felt a large animal moving in his direction, there was no hint of menace as he stood waiting for it to appear. An adult female black bear shuffled into view, Adam had thoughts of a jump back to his safe lair but decided to wait for just a minute.

The bear stood across the small clearing, it tilted it's head from side to side as if trying to appraise the odd creature that it's not so keen eyes had finally spotted. Something drew the bear towards the boy at a slow walk, was it curiosity or something else? The animal sensed no danger, only a vague feeling of warm security not felt since she was a tiny cub.

Adam met the large bear midway in the open

area, the two stood within touching distance, the boy ready to vanish if things went sour. The bear was powerful and equipped to make short work of the soft looking creature that stood before her, but there was no desire to do so. The boy slowly reached out to offer his hand; the bear sniffed and flared its nostrils at the new scent on the extended fingers. After a bit Adam lightly caressed the side of the animal's massive head, sending a slight shudder through the powerful bear. The two mammals then stood back from one another, the moment of contact had passed. The bear snorted as it turned and ambled back into the deep woods, Adam smiled, it would seem that he had made a new friend, sort of. Cool!

Sitting cross-legged on one of the sleeping pads near the cave entrance, Adam finally finished counting Packer's loot. It was just ten thousand short of a cool million. The boy was no expert on jewels and such but he thought that the sheer size of the diamonds in some of the pieces probably added another million in worth to the pile. On an

impulse he tried on the largest and most garish of the pieces, a necklace with an enormous central ruby surrounded by diamonds, it felt cold and heavy on his skin. "I'll bet Ronnie would like this." He then decided that it was probably stolen or something and could probably be traced. "I'm starting to think like a crook!"

After dinner was finished and the cool of the night returned, Adam dressed warmly and settled down to read his favorite publication by the surprisingly bright lantern. The Apple people had come out with yet another faster and better line of computers, the boy found himself lusting after any and all of them. "Damn! I wish this place had electricity!" The new laptops promised longer battery life, "I'd need some way to recharge them. Hmmmm."

Reading the magazine from cover to cover caused sleep to catch up with him. After finishing his simple preparations for bed he stood for a while looking out over the moonlit lake, it was beautiful here but he couldn't stay in this place for the rest of

his life. Tomorrow he would finish things with Packer. "Him or me."

Blair House

Adam's careful reconnaissance of the place took less time than his examinations of the White House; it was simply a smaller place. Every weapon in the building was fused; all of the exits were welded shut save the front door. There were snipers on the roofs up and down the street; they may as well have been holding umbrellas instead of rifles.

He appeared in the middle of the street directly in front of the small guard post and walked slowly towards the open-mouthed security team. Four automatic pistols were instantly pointed at Adam, the guards frantically trying to pull their triggers. All four of the men were tossed none too gently into the shrubbery, the front door blew in as if hit by a truck. "*Anyone home?*" Adam yelled. Numerous Secret

Service agents took naps as the boy made his way toward his quarry.

Upstairs, Packer was scrabbling and babbling. He finally made it into the bathroom and slammed the heavy door. The bathroom had also been designed as a 'safe' room in the event of armed intruders; the walls and door were reinforced with heavy steel plates. Packer huddled in sheer terror in the shower, a terror that deprived Adam and the nation of any real justice. The President died of fright before the boy had finished climbing the stairs to the top floor. It was actually a massive heart attack but "scared to death" could have been used on his death certificate.

Adam stood over the remains of the pathetic wretch, he felt empty and tired, but at last it was over. The boy's thoughts were interrupted by a feminine voice, it was the First Lady.

"Is he dead?" she asked quietly.

"Yes ma'am, he is. I didn't kill him."

“It doesn’t matter,” she answered, “all that matters is that he’s dead.”

Adam looked at the woman and saw that a great load had been lifted from her; she kissed him on the cheek and left the room with a slight smile on her lips.

Adam left the room too.

Hole-in-the-wall or The Bat Cave

A swim in the cold water helped to clear his head, later he sat on his favorite flat rock warming himself and trying to figure out what came next. It had all ended so quickly, Packer’s death was never in Adam’s plan, he wanted to see the creep face some sort of legal justice for the things he had done.

The Pentagon

The Marine Commandant was absent from the 'cage', the other three officers sat discussing the small Iridium System satellite phone on the table in front of them.

"It's really a quick and humane way," explained Lyman, "after the boy answers, a coded signal sent from us detonates the shaped charge behind the earpiece. He won't suffer at all, he won't even feel it."

The head of the Air Force nodded his head, "Still, it's a hell of a reward for all that he's done."

"We need to think of the future, so there will be a future. The Senate Committee is in full agreement about this," Lyman added.

Nellis

Adam had decided to meet quietly with General Curtis. He didn't feel up to facing everyone else just yet.

“I didn’t kill him,” Adam began.

“We know,” Curtis explained, “our guy there said he probably croaked before you got to him. The news reports are carrying it as a heart attack, there’s been no mention of you as of yet.”

“I wanted to see him in front of a jury or something.”

“We all did, son.”

“What’s next, sir?”

“JCS called, they want you to stop by there.”

“All right, did they say why?”

“I think they just want to shake your hand and thank you, no big ceremony or anything, I told them you didn’t like that sort of thing. In fact they want it to be kept low key for now, till things quiet down some. You can just go directly to the JCS offices, in the meantime it’s probably best if you stay wherever it is you’ve been hiding out at, people are still going crazy looking for you.”

“Okay. When do they want me there?”

“Tomorrow at two, east coast time. Is that all right?”

“Yes sir, I’ll be there.”

Curtis wasn’t privy to the plan to kill the boy; he was just relaying instructions that he thought reasonable and prudent.

Hole-in-the-bat-cave

“Something’s not right,” Adam said to his self as he went about opening the can of pork and beans (no, he didn’t need a can opener). There wasn’t anything he could pin down; he was just having one of his ‘feelings’ that had always served him so well in the past.

After dinner he sat with his cookies and instant coffee on the edge of the drop-off, the setting sun was making a light show on the scattered clouds. The feeling he had earlier was still there, but why?”

The Pentagon

Adam had paused in the parking lot to scan for threats or anything unusual, he found nothing out of the ordinary but still couldn't shake his sense of foreboding.

The same Lieutenant Meredith greeted Adam in the outer area of the JCS offices; the boy decided that he was still in love with her.

"Hello Adam, welcome back!" She too had no inkling of the plot.

"It's nice to see you again, ma'am. Will you marry me?"

"I'll have to check my schedule," she smiled, "I may be free in about six years."

"Rats!" Adam took the gentle rebuke quite well actually.

"They're waiting for you in the cage," she explained, "come along with me."

The heads of the Army, Navy and Air Force stood and greeted the boy as he entered the security

cage. The Marine general was absent.

“Welcome son, it’s good to see you again,” Lyman began as he shook the boy’s hand. The two other officers repeated the welcome.

“Thank you sir, it’s nice to be here.” Adam responded and then hesitated a moment, “Uh, where’s General Colms?”

“He’s down at Parris Island (true), some sort of command problem to iron out (also sort of true). Lyman motioned Adam to sit as they all took their chairs. The officers seemed stiff and ill at ease, more so than on Adam’s first visit with them.

CINCPAC began the talks, “We want to thank you for all that you have accomplished, the nation is well rid of Packer.”

“I never wanted him to die, I wanted him to stand trial. I didn’t kill him, I guess he was just so afraid...”

“We know son, although I don’t think anyone would have really blamed you if you had strangled the son of a bitch,” Lyman said.

“What comes next, sir?” Adam inquired,

something was very wrong here.

“For the next few days we would like you to lie low just as you have been doing, things are still in quite an uproar. The Vice President, correction, the President is starting to really shake things up, no one really thought that he had it in him. He’s shut down the FBI pending a total reorganization and personnel review, he’s cleaning house with a bulldozer. A lot of rats are jumping off the boat all through the government. Even the Congress is showing signs of growing a backbone.”

“That’s great sir,” Adam replied with a smile, “maybe things will finally get back to a decent way of doing things.”

The meeting lasted another ten minutes, the officers never lied about anything, they knew better than to try. The satellite phone was a calculated risk they thought they could take. As the meeting broke up and they exited the ‘cage’ they were again met by Lieutenant Meredith, she was holding the oversized cell phone. Lyman explained what they had in mind.

“Take this along with you, Adam,” Lyman took the phone casually and handed it to the boy, “this is a civilian Iridium satellite phone, you can check in with us every day so we can keep you up to date on things.”

It took every bit of self control that the boy had ever possessed to smile and take the phone from the officer, the instant he had laid eyes on the device he had known what had been bothering him. They wanted him dead.

“Thanks sir, this is really neat!”

“Its battery will last quite a while if you only use it for a few minutes at a time, the number to call is written on the inside of the flip-out cover. Give us a ring later today to make sure it’s working right.”

“Yes sir, I will.” Adam was numb with the feeling of total betrayal, how he kept his outward composure is a mystery. He had glimpsed into the phone, it had a bomb in it. They had given him a bomb!

“I should go now, sir. Thanks for all of your help

and everything.”

“Thank you, Adam. Stay safe, give us a call later.”

“Yes sir, goodbye.” Adam shook hands with the three men and then with Lieutenant Meredith, and then he vanished.

The three generals went back into the cage for a final word.

“Do you think he suspected anything? Asked the Army officer.

“No I don’t, he seemed really happy that things are going well for a change,” replied Lyman.

“The poor little bastard,” whispered CINCNAV, “God forgive us all.”

Hole-in-the-bat-wall

Adam sat at the cave entrance cradling the satellite phone in his lap, a thousand thoughts raced

through his mind all at once.

After a while the logical part of his brain took over and pushed the chaos back into a small dark corner. A study of the device revealed the cone shaped explosive cleverly molded behind the earpiece. Detonator wires ran down to a tiny circuit board wired into the phone's logic circuitry and then over to the battery terminals. Adam melted back the leads to the explosive's detonator before he opened up the case for a more careful assessment of the device. The first thing he did was to remove the small mass of clay-like explosives along with the tiny detonator; he didn't recognize what sort of explosive it was. "It's not C-4," he decided, "probably something worse."

The complexity of the bomb's circuit board meant it had to be more than just a turn-it-on-and-boom sort of device. The boy's time spent with the Special Team's explosives expert had taught him a lot about such devices, this one was a work of art. The simple and deadly logic of the device finally became clear to him, they wanted it held next to his

ear when it went off, there wasn't enough explosives in it to insure killing him if held at arms length, they would send a signal that would set it off.

“I need some sort of indicator to connect to the firing leads,” Adam muttered to himself. He had decided that if they wanted him dead it would be best if they thought they had succeeded. He searched his mind for a moment longer and then fetched the small portable radio he had, the small red L.E.D. battery indicator in the radio would do. It was his plan to turn off the phone as soon as the firing signal was received, would simply pressing the disconnect button be the thing to do? “Does this thing send a signal out when you disconnect?” Adam didn't know the answer to that question so he came up with a better solution, disconnect the battery after the firing signal came, the way an explosion would do. He would need to rig up a switch.

After nearly an hour of fiddling and using his ability to alter metallic elements, Adam had a badly

wounded portable radio and a satellite cell phone that had some odd modifications. Using wiring from the radio and some strips of metal from a tin can the boy had rigged a simple hold-down switch that would cut off the power to the phone the instant the switch was released. The radio's battery indicator was connected to the firing leads and placed where he could see it while speaking into the phone. The instant the L.E.D. lit up he would release the switch. Now it was time to make the phone call he so dreaded.

Adam jumped down to the lake and sat down on his favorite flat rock. The boy's mind had yet to fully come to terms with the enormity of his betrayal, still his hands trembled just a little as he extended the stubby fat antenna and dialed the number written on the phone, the hold down switch he had made was lightly depressed with one finger. Maybe he had been wrong or something, maybe Packer' goons were behind all of this; maybe they would call him later. "Please let me be wrong," he prayed.

“JCS communications, Sergeant Banks speaking.”

“Uh, hi. This is Adam, General Lyman asked me to call him this afternoon.”

Please don't let it be so!

“Hello Adam, standby one moment for the General.”

“Okay, thanks.”

Please no!

The boy heard a rapid series of tones and then the L.E.D. glowed with a deadly brilliance. Without thinking he instantly released the pressure on the hold-down switch and the phone went dead. The shattered boy sat for a long while with tears rolling down his cheeks, just staring down at the silent telephone. Adam finally stood and wiped his face with his free hand, and then he threw the damned phone as hard as he could out into the lake.

"Fuck you people! Fuck all of you!"

The Pentagon

General Lyman and the others listened to the briefing officer in the cage.

"Signal cutoff was within parameters, the firing program in the phone sent the receipt of command sequence, and then there was a total signal loss. The device detonated."

"Were you able to get a triangulation on the phone?" Lyman asked.

"Not a useful one sir, just the western U.S. If you had agreed to speak with him, kept him on longer, we..."

"I couldn't do that, I couldn't listen to him die," Lyman said quietly.

"Yes sir."

Ghosts and Angels

Adam lost his mind for a time. He lost his way, his reason for being. The boy had spent a good part of his young life trying to do right, to serve his country, to be loyal and true to his friends and to those he thought of as his family. He had saved his homeland from a nuclear catastrophe, saved lives and property from one coast to the other. He had endured being shot, shedding his blood for the good cause. He had rid his beloved country of its worst tyrant.

In the end they had rewarded him by trying to murder him. They were afraid of him.

After he had thrown the satellite phone into the small lake Adam had retreated without thinking to his hole-in-the-wall. There was no thought of dinner that night either, no thought of even his body's most basic needs. He curled up in his sleeping bag and for the first time since he was five years old he had

cried himself to sleep. He stayed there for almost two days. He wet himself, the second day he soiled himself. He didn't know where he was, he didn't care. His mind took him to far places, places where no human had ever ventured. Eventually he slowly edged back into the world he had left behind, the world that had betrayed him.

The smell and the buzzing flies were his first sensations. He was so very thirsty, his belly so very empty. "What the... Oh geez!" He came to a level of consciousness that allowed him to realize what his body had done when it was left unattended and neglected.

"Gross!"

With an unsteady determination the boy crawled out of his fetid sleeping bag, he was still fully dressed, his jeans and underpants were unspeakable. There were no people for miles around but he felt deeply ashamed at what he had done in his troubled sleep. With total disgust he undressed and threw his clothing and his sleeping

bag over the edge of the cave's entrance. He found the canteen that he always kept filled with filtered water and completely drained it's contents.

Adam collected himself enough to jump down to the edge of the lake; the clear cold water cleansed his fouled body and helped to clear his mind. He sat for a long while in the afternoon sun, his bare body warming, his reason slowly returning. After another long time he became aware of the large black bear that was now sitting peacefully at his side.

“Hi.” Adam wasn't up to lengthy conversations just yet.

The black bear cocked her head to one side, she didn't return the greeting, and she did seem to be sort of friendly.

“I guess I've been mostly nuts lately, what do you think?”

Snort.

“Yeah, me too. I'm starving, how about you?”

Snuffle.

“Let's eat.”

Double snort, grunt!

“Cool.”

The bear liked Spam a lot more than the boy did. Adam had opened the canned meat and a can of peaches for the bear before fixing his own simple meal up in the cave. Towards dusk the bear (Mrs. Bruin, thank you!) lost interest and wandered off into the woods. Adam lit the propane lantern and looked at the sad ruins of his small radio. Nothing was totally ruined, the remains of the Spam can provided the needed metal to replace the ‘borrowed’ wiring. The battery indicator was at the bottom of the lake, no matter. The radio looked like a bit of modern sculpture in miniature, the un-insulated circuitry looping and standing unsupported. Most importantly, the radio still worked.

“...is mostly calm after a day of violent protests. It was announced today that a congressional investigation will be conducted into the charges that President Packer used the FBI for his own...”

Adam finally turned off the radio; he had listened for

three hours, no word about himself, no word of his friends and family. Shit on everyone!

The boy stayed close to the cave for days, he swam in the lake and took short walks, but mostly he just thought about things. He couldn't bring himself to try and launder his disgusting clothing and sleeping bag; in the end he just took them into the woods and floated a big rock down on top of them. The weather was still quite warm, during the daytime he wore his skin, at night he donned the two pair of long underwear that he had purchased earlier. He still got cold in the pre-dawn hours and would have to light the small propane heater to get warm. He didn't want to go on a shopping expedition just yet, he wanted no part of being near people.

Adam had to re-think his recent way of life. Now that he was 'dead' he would have to be very careful not to let the authorities know that he was indeed still alive. No fingerprints, no open shopping like before, no contact with friends and family, no one

could see him. He would have to steal everything he needed or wanted, but so what? He felt he owed no excuses to anyone; the world seemed to want him dead, why should he care what he did to such a world in order to survive?

The boy had no thoughts of looking in on his people; they were part of a world that had passed from his existence, better for them if they thought him dead. He still wept at night, but he kept some control over himself, he held on to his fragile sanity. Loneliness was a part of his life now, better get used to it.

The food was gone. About all he had to wear were some long underwear and his Nike's. It couldn't be put off any longer, he had to go to town. How about Los Angeles, better yet how about Beverly Hills? Lots of rich people, ritzy stores, he may as well steal the best of everything, no more Wally World! Adam asked himself, "What was the name of that snooty shopping place? Oh yeah, Rodeo Drive."

It took almost an hour of moving from rooftop to rooftop to find his destination, L.A. was one big mess, Adam had been there before but he only had a vague idea of where the big money lived. He presented a rather silly sight, running shoes, backpack, and long underwear. But it was two in the morning and no one would see him anyway. He located his destination after finally resorting to snatching a city map out of a locked and darkened bookstore, he didn't have to touch anything to take it.

There weren't many places on the expensive street that carried kid's things but those that did were something to behold. Adam studied the contents of the store below his feet, there were ski clothes, sportswear, all sorts of the stuff he needed. Geez, they even had designer underwear for kids!

The darkened store was well wired with a state of the art alarm system, please don't think that it took Adam more than two minutes to turn it off and then

to open the back service door. He was most careful to leave no fingerprints at any of his stops; a green pair of thin rubber gloves found in the janitor's closet was his first acquisition. He made three jumps between the store and his lair in Oregon, his backpack and arms bulging with designer everything.

Food was a lot tougher, most big supermarkets are open all night or at least have they people working through the night restocking and cleaning. Adam settled on home burglary to fill his larder. Finding unoccupied homes was easy; the small mansion he selected in Beverly Hills seemed to have enough food in it to feed an army of gourmets. Adam even tossed in a can of caviar just to see what it would taste like. He wound up feeding the fishy gunk to the bear. Yuck.

Before calling it a night Adam located an overpriced sporting goods store, his loot included a sleeping bag that could keep you comfortable at the

South Pole. A larger camping stove seemed in order, a case of gas bottles, more utensils, plates, pots, etc. He found a folding solar cell array that came with a twelve-volt battery charger; this gave him further ideas, tomorrow night he would go computer shopping in a well-stocked nerd emporium.

By the end of Adam's third night of 'shopping' things were considerably less spartan at Hole-in-the-Wall. There were now better things to do at night other than crying one's self to sleep. The centerpiece in the entertainment department was one of Apple's top of the line, no expense spared, total whiz-bang laptop computers. The slim silver machine came equipped with a DVD drive, a large stack of yet unviewed movies sat waiting to one side. A twelve-volt auto adapter powered the computer, a brand new car battery swiped from Sears powered the adapter, during the day the solar array would recharge the car battery. Neat. Adam could shop for high priced software at his leisure, Internet service was all that he lacked, he would

have to work on that.

A multi-band battery radio replaced the butchered little portable, it came with a long roll of antenna wire for the short-wave bands, simply dangling the wire over the drop off seemed to work pretty well. Adam hadn't bothered with television; you would need a satellite dish this far out in the boonies and some way to set up an account.

Trash was becoming a problem, Adam wasn't a neat freak but something needed to be done. What to do? He couldn't dump the trash locally, what if some doofus hunter or hiker wandered into the area and found a big pile of upscale trash? The solution came in the form of a supply of giant plastic trash bags and the occasional nighttime jump to the Medford Oregon municipal landfill. Phew!

Further modifications were made to the wall Adam had constructed to enclose his living area. A small opening for a window allowed more light in during the day, another sleeping bag would close off

the door at night. Adam solved the air circulation problem with another visit to the nerd emporium. A low wattage computer cooling fan connected to the car battery and attached to the end of a piece of pvc pipe brought in fresh air when the door and window were sealed off. He spray-painted the rocks flat black; from outside the cave you only saw a black hole.

The days passed and became a comfortable if lonely routine. Adam tried to busy himself with small projects to keep his mind away from places he didn't like to go to. Mrs. Bruin came by on a daily basis, he always had some tasty treat waiting for her, in truth she was remarkably easy to please. The radio kept him informed of the world, a place far removed from the small peace he had found at what he had come to call Hole-in-the-Wall.

There were events in the news that in past times would have had the Special Team and the boy on the scene and ready to help. There was a hostage situation in Florida that dragged on for three days,

escaped convicts in Oklahoma. Both times Adam had the same thought, "Screw you people, I'm dead, you killed me!" On an impulse he retrieved the satellite cell phone from the lake and put it near the computer, it's presence would remind him not to let his hatred for the government die.

Adam scanned the surrounding countryside several times a day, this place was really off the beaten track. The closest person he had ever spotted was four miles away, the guy worked for a logging company and had taken a wrong turn on the ragged network of dirt roads.

The boy was developing an even and dark head to toe tan. It would be October in a week, in the meantime it was still very warm (hot sometimes) during the day. Clothing was a waste of time when the only female around was a black bear with a taste for caviar. The boy despaired of ever sprouting hair anyplace on his body other than on his blonde head. His daily search for any sign of physical maturity was always ended with a small

sigh of disgust. The movies he watched on the computer at night sometimes brought back memories of that special time he and Ronnie had shared in Taos. He was a healthy young male and he would sometimes relieve his sexual arousals in the time honored fashion. He could find very little to relieve his loneliness.

After a while he paid less and less attention to the news and talk programs on the radio, he just didn't really care about what was going on with the country or much of anything else. One news report in the first week of September did catch and hold his attention for a little while.

“...has been named as interim Director of the FBI. Monroe achieved notoriety as head of the famous Special Team; his work with Adam Valentine made headlines almost on a weekly basis. President Drew is said to have consulted with former President Benson who suggested Monroe for the position. Senate confirmation of the appointment is expected to be a quick formality. The new Director

will have a formidable job rebuilding the Agency, it is believed that many of the agents who have resigned in the past year will be asked to return to their former positions or to promotions, a personnel recruitment program will almost certainly be initiated. In other news the head of the Idaho Free Militia...”

Adam sat with his mouth slightly open; Agent Monroe was now the FBI Director? “I wonder if he knows what they tried to do to me?” The boy just shrugged his shoulders and went back to sorting through his mounting DVD collection for something he hadn’t watched yet.

He entirely missed the sensational series of stories in the following days about his real reason for initially fleeing from the FBI, how the stories of his dangerous insanity had been a Packer administration hoax. There was no longer a price on his head. No criminal charges.

The weather remained fairly warm but that

wouldn't last long. Adam resolved to do some traveling to warmer countries when winter settled in. He had the best mode of transportation since mankind had decided to get up on its hind legs, he may as well use it for something besides burglary. The world was a big place; it may be time to see more of it than just crime scenes and military bases. "I can pop back here between trips," he decided. His small cave in the side of a rock cliff was his home now, it wasn't much but it was his, he was safe here.

Eighteen miles to the southwest of Adam's hideaway was another lake, this one was accessible by hiking in four miles from a trailhead parking area. Another child was lost. It was just like it was more than four years ago when Adam began his career in law enforcement interspaced with various odd jobs for the government. His three times a day scan of the surrounding countryside had drawn his attention to the frantic activity of the search for the little boy lost.

Adam found Davy in about four minutes, it took him a very long time to decide if he should help out the search parties or to just say to hell with it and let them find the kid. The sun was going down, Davy was afraid, he was being eaten alive by mosquitoes, he was afraid mommy would be mad at him for tearing his pants on that sharp stick thing when he fell. His leg had been bleeding where the tear was. The small sounds of the forest frightened him; he was completely terrified of the coming dark.

Shit!

Adam was at his side in an eye blink, the little boy was crying and didn't notice his arrival.

“Hi, Davy,” Adam said softly.

The small boy stopped his sniffing and looked around for the voice, “Hi. Who are you?”

“I'm an angel, I look after lost kids like you.”

“You don't have any wings, you don't have any clothes on!” The kid stated the obvious; Adam hadn't stopped to dress for this spur of the moment rescue.

“Angels don't always have wings or wear clothes.

Let's get you back to your parents, okay?"

"Okay. I tore my pants, Mommy will be mad at me. My leg hurts."

Adam knelt down to take a close look at the boy's leg; it had a nasty looking puncture mid-thigh. The small boy stopped his sniffing as the 'angel' placed his hand on his injured leg, in a minute it was all better.

"It stopped hurting!" Davy exclaimed with his first smile.

"I fixed it for you, stand up now and give me a hug, then we'll go."

And go they did.

The trailhead parking area was the command center of the search activity; there was a county search and rescue unit, forest service personnel, sheriff's deputies, assorted volunteers. A news crew was on the way. It all seemed so familiar. Adam pointed the little boy in the direction he would have walk to bring him into sight of the search command post, he watched from hiding to be sure that the lost child was discovered before he jumped

back to his home. The mosquitoes were indeed bad around there that night; Adam would have itches in places best left to the imagination.

When asked how he had found his way more than four miles from his parent's campsite to the search command post, Davy had responded that an angel had helped him. And what about the blood on his apparently uninjured leg, the torn pants? "The angel made it all better."

Perhaps he was right.

And perhaps Adam hadn't let his own soul become totally lost.

Washington, D.C.

Colonel Richter had been summoned from Okinawa to attend a conference on future rolls of the U.S. Military in the western pacific, at least that was the pretext. Marine Commandant Colms had a different

conference in mind, one that involved just himself and Colonel Richter. Colms was a deeply troubled man.

Colms came unannounced to Richter's modest hotel room the evening that the Colonel had arrived in Washington; he came in civilian clothing and alone. To say that Richter was somewhat taken aback when he answered the knock on the hotel room door was an understatement, it took him a split second to even recognize the man in his civilian clothes.

"Sir! Please, come in sir." Richter had braced to attention as he found his voice.

"Thank you, stand easy Richter, I need to talk with you, it's going to be a hard thing to do. It's about Adam."

It was a hard thing to do. It was an even harder thing to do for Richter to listen to the man. When the General had finished his shameful story Colonel Richter collected his self enough to ask a few

pointed questions.

“Who took part in this, who made the decision?”

“I think Lyman initiated the talks with the Senate Intelligence Committee, Army and Navy went along with the flow,” Colms explained.

“And you?” Richter’s eyes narrowed as he asked this.

“I bowed out. I didn’t do anything to hinder them either.”

“How could you just stand by like that?” Richter seemed ready to physically attack the man, “How could you just let them murder that good child?”

“His abilities were becoming truly fearsome, they were afraid his offspring would wind up replacing the human race in very short order.”

“You son of a bitch! Adam was the finest young man I’ve ever known, any harm he ever did was because he was given no choice!”

Colms said nothing but nodded his head in agreement, “I’ve sent my letter of resignation to the White House, I can’t be a part of any more of this kind of shit.”

“Who else knows about this, there’s been nothing in the news about Adam for weeks now?”

“I’m not sure,” Colms explained, “there’s the Senate committee, whoever handled the technical end, JCS.”

“And the President? What about Monroe at FBI, has he been told?”

“No to both questions. The President isn’t the only person running the country, Packer was only part of the rot.”

Richter stood and came to a decision, “I’m going to tell Monroe, he needs to know what he’s up against, what’s happened to Adam. In a voice of barely controlled rage the Colonel then ended the meeting, “You sir, need to get the fuck out of my sight.”

Two days later Colms placed the muzzle of his father’s old service .45 automatic in his mouth and pulled the trigger. Monroe and Colonel Richter paid a very low-key visit to the new President. The new President did not like what he was told.

Someone like me

The first real cold snap came at the end of October; there were small patches of thin ice around the edge of the lake. Two days later it snowed a couple of inches, Adam's lake was no longer a clothing optional resort, even Mrs. Bruin was moving off to her den for the winter. The cave was snug and warm. His sleeping bag now rested on multiple thick foam rubber pads and was covered with a very costly custom comforter. The small bottled gas heater had been replaced with a larger unit fed by a five-gallon tank of propane that sat just outside the stone wall. Books and DVD's filled a small book rack, Adam's most read publications these days were a world atlas and the instruction manual for a hand held GPS navigation unit that he had 'acquired'. The boy's remote viewing ability was formidable but it would be nice to know exactly where he was when he arrived at his perceived destinations.

He was getting cabin fever. It was time for a vacation. Someplace warm.

The small coral atoll had no fresh water other than what fell from the sky, therefore it wasn't inhabited. The nearly circular reef that circled the tiny island had no opening large enough for a vessel to pass through; people didn't come this way very often. Adam had spotted the dot of land during a brief stop on a remote beach in Fiji. After exploring the few acres of palm trees and white sand Adam was familiar enough with the place to make the trip from there to his Oregon hide away in one jump, he could bring his own food and water for his brief stays.

The warm water of the lagoon was clear and teeming with every sort and color of life that swam or that just sat and waited for something that did swim. Adam chose to swim, his facemask revealing a world far removed from the frozen place he now

called his home. The boy alternated between a lazy drifting paddle and to zooming along using his telekinetic ability to push himself like a tan torpedo.

Adam would alternate between two or three-day visits to the island and a one or two-day stay at his cave to replenish his supplies, the shock of jumping from the warm island to the cold cave was something he never quite got used to. His all over tan grew very dark, his lengthening blonde hair became sun bleached. His body was lean and well defined from the constant swimming. He hadn't bothered to turn the radio on in weeks, what was the point?

On his third visit to the island a tropical squall was starting to blow in so the boy began gathering his things and dressed for the jump back to Oregon. Something fleeting and undefined caused him to pause and look off to the southwest. What was it he had felt? The sensation came and went, like a weak radio signal in a background of static. Adam stood very still and continued to try and focus in on what it

was that he felt. A pelting rain finally interrupted his searching, back to the bat cave.

Adam was back at the island the very next day, whatever it was he had felt there was still nagging at him; he had to track it down! He had brought along clothing suitable for travel in warm climates; he wore them now as he sat on a fallen coconut tree trunk, searching for whatever? There it was again!

Extending his remote viewing in the direction of what he had sensed revealed a land barren and dry. There were vast expanses of dusty red earth and scrub brush. The landscape was flat as the proverbial pancake. Australia! He had to get closer, he couldn't quite zero in on what it was that drew him to that place.

West of Alice Springs, Australia

Evie McDermond had her hands full, as usual.

There were mounds of dishes to wash, dirty sheets to change and clothes to launder, the damned rabbits to feed. She was ten years old and her life totally sucked.

Evie was small for her age; she had deep blue eyes almost to the point of being purple. Her hair was ash blonde. Beautiful is the only word that properly described the child. She could move things about just by wanting it to happen, she could also find things. Her pig of an uncle had learned the hard way not to try and touch here where he shouldn't, in truth he was more than a little afraid of who he thought of as the "little weirdo bitch." Evie's aunt was a total lush, not too surprising considering who she was married to and the total wasteland that they lived in. In theory they ran a sheep ranch, in practice it was a good approximation of hell for the small girl, unfortunately there was nowhere to run to.

Adam sat perched atop the vast stone monolith that was Ayer's Rock. Most of the tourist's had departed for the day, there were none near where

the boy sat. He had found what had drawn him here and he was watching her. “She’s just like me! Shit, I’m not the only freak in the world!” Adam didn’t know whether to puke or go blind, as his good friend Freddie had once remarked.

“What to do now?”

Adam’s indecision was ended when Evie’s Aunt tottered into the kitchen and began cursing at the small girl who was still trying to diminish the stack of crusted dishes.

“Where the bloody fuck is my Cutty? Where’d you hide it this time you little piece of sheep shit?” Evie’s aunt was about at her usual state of consciousness for this time of day.

“I didn’t touch it! It’s on the top of the telly, like always!” Evie didn’t back away from the woman, she could take care of herself and the woman knew it.

“Bitch!” Evie’s aunt turned and tottered back into the small living room, the scotch was right where the girl had said it was.

“Criminy! And I thought I had a bad time!” Adam couldn’t believe that people talked to kids like that (except maybe for Packer’s bunch).

The chance to meet with his one and only counterpart (that he knew of) came when Evie’s aunt had passed out for the evening and her uncle wasn’t yet returned from his own choice of dissipations in town. In the early evening Evie liked to walk out into the cooling vastness that surrounded the small sheep station, it was her only time to be free. Tonight she sensed that something was very different, there was someone out there, someone like her. The two met rather timidly near the dingo fence that was meant to protect the sheep from the wild dogs that still roamed the land. Adam spoke first; it wasn’t a very original opening.

“Hi.”

“Hi yourself.” Evie didn’t really know where to begin either.

“My name’s...”

“Adam. I know.” Evie was giving the boy a taste

of his own weirdness.

“You’re Eve... Evie.”

“No shit. You’re that American kid, the one who worked for the F...”

“FBI.”

“Yeah, FBI. Then they said you went totally crazy.”

“Not true. I’m mostly not insane.”

“I know, it was on the telly. All about how they had lied about you and everything.”

“It was?” This totally caught the boy off guard; he shouldn’t have stopped listening to the radio.

“How the bloody hell did you get here?” Evie’s language wasn’t really her fault. The girl rarely got the chance for a decent conversation.

“I just wanted to be here, I can do that... move from place to place just by wanting it to be.’

Evie didn’t reply right away, she knew about “wanting it to be.”

“I can’t do anything like that, if I could I wouldn’t be here,” she replied.

“How old are you?” Adam asked.

“Ten.”

“I’m twelve, maybe it takes a while to be able to do it. I’m better at things like that than I was when I was younger.” Adam explained.

The two children moved closer together, as one they reached out and touched each other’s cheeks. A deep connection was made, they both smiled, they were the same. They had a million questions for one another that they didn’t know how to voice.

“How did you find me?” Evie asked.

“I was on an island, way off that way,” Adam pointed to the northeast, “I felt something or maybe it was someone, down here, that was you I guess.”

“What were you doing on an island, where are your folks?”

“I live by myself now, the government has been spending most of the last year trying to kill me, you know, because of what I am... what we are I guess.”

“But why were they trying to kill you, I read all sorts of stories about how you helped people and did good things?”

“They started to be afraid of me,” Adam

explained, “after my abilities started to get really strong. Your government here doesn’t know about you, does it?”

“No. Look at where I live, I’ve spent my whole bloody life right here!”

“Those people aren’t your parents, are they?” Adam asked softly.

“No. They’re both total pigs, they’re my aunt and uncle. My real folks died when I was little, they ran an air parcel delivery service for the outback. They crashed.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t know who my folks were, I was dumped at a bus station when I was baby.”

“Then we’re both sorry,” she replied, “I wish I could get away from this awful place. Could I ...?”

“Come with me?” Adam knew what she wanted to do.

“I wouldn’t be a bother, I can cook pretty good, take care of your house.”

“I don’t have a house, I have a cave in Oregon, it’s pretty crude. Right now there’s nothing but snow and ice around there.”

“I’ve never seen snow.” Evie replied, desperately

hoping the boy wouldn't leave her here.

"The island's really nice, we could go there for now. If you still want to come with me then we could go on to Oregon a little later."

"But how can I come with you, I can't move about just by thinking about it?"

"I can move you with me, I'll show you if you trust me," Adam explained.

"I trust you, I think you're the only person I've ever trusted."

"All right, you have to hold on to me. Don't be afraid, it can be pretty scary the first time you do it."

"I'll close my eyes."

The two embraced in a rather tentative hug and when the girl opened her eyes they were standing atop Ayer's Rock, the last rays of the sun just touching them. The girl wasn't at all frightened, she was elated.

"This is bloody marvelous!"

"It is pretty cool," Adam agreed, "we can go anywhere we want to really, it makes for a strange

way to live sometimes.”

“When can we go?” Evie asked.

“Whenever you want to, I guess. You have to understand that right now they think I’m dead, we won’t be able to be out with other people. I have to steal everything I need. It won’t be a piece of cake.”

“Living in a mud puddle is better than staying where I’m at now. Can we stop back at my place for a minute, there’s some pictures and stuff I want to keep with me?”

“Sure, hold tight again.”

Adam waited outside the run down farmhouse; the woman inside was passed out drunk. Evie seemed embarrassed about asking the boy to come inside, afraid he would see how she had to live. He didn’t have to go inside to see that. In a few moments the girl was back beside him with a plastic bag stuffed with extra clothing and her pictures of her dead parents. “Let’s go, uncle pig will probably be back soon,” Evie said.

“Okay, it’ll be dark by now at the island, don’t freak on me.”

Evie didn't 'freak' at all, being with Adam made her feel perfectly safe. The events of the last two hours somehow seemed to be the way that things should be, something she had been waiting for her entire life. The two had arrived on the smooth white sand; there was a half moon low on the horizon. The light shimmered off the calm waters of the lagoon. Evie was entranced, she had never seen the ocean.

"It's so beautiful!" The girl still had her few belongings tightly clutched to her chest.

"It is pretty, wait till morning, the lagoon is full of fish and stuff, I spend hours just paddling around looking at everything.

"I can't swim." Evie seemed a bit ashamed of the fact.

"Oh. Well don't worry, I can teach you, it's easy in ocean water, you float better. You can use your TK to help you swim."

"My what?"

"TK, you know telekinesis, moving stuff by

thinking about it.”

“Oh, yeah. I never knew it had a name, I couldn’t use it much when aunt and uncle pig were about.”

“Come on, let’s set up the tent, I keep a small one here to sleep in sometimes. It rains here once in a while at night, you can have the tent. I have a sleeping bag.” Adam thought it was proper manners that he give the tent to the girl.

Adam lit the small lantern that he kept there; there was a plastic ice chest with food and drinking water inside. The two children made sandwiches and began an endless question and answer session, a session that would last a lifetime.

“You have really nice clothes.” Evie observed.

“Thanks, I only steal the best. We’ll get you whatever you want to wear.” Adam was too polite to comment on the girl’s clean but worn and shabby t-shirt and shorts.

“You steal all of the stuff you need?”

“Yeah, I figure if the whole country seems to want me dead then why should I be Mister Goody-Two-

Shoes. I never take anything from people who can't afford to be burgled."

"Sort of like Robin Hood?"

"More like 'Robbing' Hood, I steal from the rich and keep it." This seemed to greatly amuse the girl and for the first time he was rewarded with her laughter.

Eventually sleep caught up with the two. The girl crawled into the small nylon tent and undressed down to her underpants, a light blanket the boy had given her was fine for the warm night. Adam retired outside to the thin sleeping bag, with a female around he left his under shorts on. There were no thoughts by either child of any matter involving sex, Adam looked on Evie like he would a younger sister, in his mind she was just a little girl to be protected, not some over-endowed woman in a movie to be fantasized about. The girl regarded Adam as one would an older brother; she knew that no harm would ever come to her from the boy. The lonely spot in both children's souls seemed to have greatly diminished that day.

Breakfast was Adam's usual, corn flakes and canned juice, this was fine with Evie, she wasn't much of a breakfast person either. The boy took the girl on a walking tour of the small island; there wasn't a lot to see on land, just a few palms and some low brush of some sort. The place was free of mosquitoes, no standing fresh water to support their breeding. A few land crabs took exception to their presence and waved their pincers at them in a threatening manner. The main attraction was the lagoon with its teeming marine life and warm clear water. Evie very much wanted to learn how to swim.

"Let's go in, you said you would teach me to swim!" Evie was totally excited at the idea.

"Sure." Adam then remembered an important detail, "Uh, what do we swim in? I always just skinny-dip, with no one around and all. We can swim in our underwear if that's okay."

Evie didn't seem to have much grasp on the concept of girlish modesty. "There's just you and me, we don't need to wear anything, do we?"

“Well...I guess not,” Adam replied, “I just don’t want you to feel embarrassed or something.”

“I can’t be embarrassed after living around the pig people all of my life. You’re a he and I’m a she, what’s the big deal?” The girl had seen just about all there was to see as far as anatomy and sex were concerned.

“Well, okay then, let’s get wet.” Adam decided that it really didn’t matter very much, if the girl didn’t care about such things why should he?

In a moment they both stood as God had created them, Evie was open and unashamed of her small body and didn’t seem very much interested in their physical differences, her attitude made Adam feel at ease about the situation. The girl was tanned only on her face, arms and legs; this raised an alarm flag in Adam’s mind. “You’ll sunburn really quick here, we’ll stay in the sun for about an hour, then you better get in the shade.”

“You’re tanned all over, no fair!” Evie was amazed at the boy’s dark and even head to toe tan.

“Sorry, but if you get a bad sunburn you’ll be

miserable for days, it could make you sick.”

“True,” the girl reluctantly agreed, “so show me how to swim in one hour!”

After the girl got used to the feeling of having her face and head in the salty water things went pretty well, the calm waters of the lagoon helped. As Adam had suggested, Evie used her TK ability to augment her awkward swimming motions. The boy stayed very close to the girl making sure she breathed more air than water, he showed her how to use his mask and snorkel which opened up the beautiful underwater scenery to her. It was literally the most fun the girl had ever had and Adam had to almost drag her back to the protection of the shading palms. It was a very happy time for the boy also; Evie was fun to be around. Her crude upbringing added some spice to her good nature. Being bare with the girl didn't seem to Adam like they were doing anything really wrong, it felt as natural as breathing and indeed it was.

After the swimming lesson the two sat letting the

air dry them, they spent a long time comparing their odd abilities. They were both cut from the same cloth but there were decided differences in their abilities. Both of them could move objects with just a thought, Adam was by far the strongest, he felt it was because of their age differences and that the girl would catch up as she grew older. Evie couldn't affect metallic elements at all, zero. The girl did have a special ability with languages that was totally missing in the boy. On her rare trips into Alice Springs she had often struck up conversations with the tourists, in their native languages. She had no idea how she was able to do this. Both children could remote view, but as was the case with Adam when he was younger, Evie had a much smaller range to her ability. They were both highly intuitive and empathic, they couldn't read one another's precise thoughts, but they knew each other's feelings.

As the two sat in the shade Evie coaxed the boy into relating stories from his life with the FBI, he was reluctant at first but found that there were a lot of

good memories before the nightmare of this last year. The girl sat fascinated as Adam spoke of the search for nuclear weapons and the lost submarine. Had he really been in a movie? Those scars are where you were shot? What were his friends like? When pressed to tell about how the government had been trying to kill him, Adam clouded up and changed the subject. "Tell me about you, Evie."

"There's nothing very interesting to tell, not like you. I've spent my whole life at that ratty sheep station. Get up in the morning, bust my arse doing chores all day, go to bed at night. Total bore, really."

"You don't like your folks very much?" Adam asked softly.

"They're disgusting. My uncle even tried doing some sex stuff with me one time, I cured him of that real quick!"

"What did you do?" Adam still couldn't fathom how a man could do that to a little girl, even though he had seen enough of it while with the FBI.

"I squeezed him."

"How.. What do you..."

“Like this.” Evie showed him.

Adam’s unformed question was answered with an invisible and very uncomfortable pressure around his male parts.

“OwOwOw Geez! Stop it!” Adam cupped his hurting anatomy in his hands, his pain obvious.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized, “ I did it a whole lot harder to him.”

“Criminy! I feel sorry for the jerk!” Adam could imagine what that must have felt like.

Evie was ashamed and embarrassed that she had actually hurt her new friend, “I didn’t mean to squeeze you so hard, please don’t be mad at me.” She seemed on the verge of tears.

“That’s okay, I’m not mad at you. Just try not to do that anymore, guys are sort of sensitive there, geez!”

“I promise. Sometimes I don’t know how to act around people,” she explained, “I mean nice people, like you.”

The boy’s momentary discomfort had passed; he took the unhappy girl’s hand and leaned over to give

her a quick kiss to the top of her head. “I think you’re nice people too, I guess we both have a lot to learn about stuff.” Adam smiled a little; he was amazed that in all of his life it never had occurred to him to use such a simple and effective means of disabling someone. Thinking back he could remember several instances in which he could have put the simple technique to very good use.

Toward the end of the day it became apparent to Adam that his supply of food and water wasn’t nearly enough for two people, they would have to make the jump back to Oregon.

“We can get you some warm clothes, all sorts of clothes. We both need a bath, I always just find some empty house and use the bathroom to clean up in.” Adam was explaining things to the girl, “It’ll be really cold and dark when we first get to the cave. I’ll turn on the heater right away, it warms the place up pretty quick.”

“There’s snow there?” Evie asked.

“Tons of it,” Adam replied, “it’s up in the mountains.”

Evie was excited at the prospect of seeing all that the boy had described. “I’ve never been where it snows, or anywhere else for that matter.”

They made the jump with a blanket wrapped Evie carrying just her small bag of possessions, the food and water containers could wait for later. As Adam had explained it was indeed cold and dark in the cave entrance. Using his TK the boy flicked on a battery lantern inside the living area; with a grand gesture he bowed and motioned the girl inside.

“Your palace awaits you, Madame.”

The palace had about the same living space as a small travel trailer, but to Evie it was just fine, marvelous in fact. Adam lit off the propane heater and directed the shivering girl to set down in front of it while he dug out some of his ski clothes and long underwear. After a quick dressing session in the boy’s too large clothing the girl was warm as toast, then it was Adam’s turn to dress in warmer clothes. The cave itself was losing its deep chill as the heater did its work. He wasn’t quite prepared for

the girl's next question. "Where's the loo?"

The girl couldn't 'jump' by herself. Adam had always simply used the woods to relieve himself. If the weather was really awful he had jumped to warmer places when he had to do more than simply take a whiz off the edge of the cave entrance. None of this would do for the girl. Cripes! Why hadn't he thought of such an obvious thing? He remembered a device he once had chuckled at while raiding a sporting goods store. "Don't go away, I'll be back in a flash." It actually took about twenty minutes.

The small chemical toilet was designed for boats, it was self-contained. It even had a water container to flush it, sort of. The boy assembled and set up the square, box-like device just outside the living area. Evie appreciated his efforts and thanked him, but as she read through the instruction booklet she came across the extreme cold weather usage cautions. "Did you get the antifreeze stuff?" Geez!

Due to the time zone differences it was nearly dawn before the two cave dwellers managed to move into the land of nod. The need for warmth with the heater off (not safe to leave it on unattended in the boy's estimation) had the two snuggled together in their long underwear in the boy's large and cozy sleeping bag. For the first time in a long while the boy had a small prayer to silently say. "Thank you lord for this good day, thank you for someone who's like me. Please bless Evie and keep her safe."

FBI Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

Agent Monroe, strike that, Director Monroe was kicking ass and taking names. A deep-rooted rage drove the man as he pursued those who would have killed 'his boy'. Progress was being made, names were known, it was just a matter of time.

The Bat Cave

The two slugabeds roused themselves in the late afternoon, hunger and their body's needs drove them from their small warm nest. Evie stood at the cave's entrance, the pristine white world before her held her transfixed. Nothing in her life had prepared her for this alien world.

"It's so pretty. So cold!" Evie was almost speechless.

"In the summer it's green and warm, I swim in the lake every day. I've made friends with a bear, Mrs. Bruin."

"Lake?"

"The flat place, it's frozen over now."

"Can we go down there, in the snow?"

"Sure. We can go anywhere you want to."

Domestic Life

A clothing for Evie shopping expedition was first in order, that and a bath to rid them of the traces of salt from the lagoon, a swim in the lake would be a bit difficult what with the two feet of ice covering it. Beverly Hills and the surrounding areas were still the boy's favorite 'shopping' grounds; the best of everything was easily had there. The weather in southern California was also pretty decent in the wintertime.

Their first jump put them on the roof of a bank that Adam used as a point of reference and as a place to scout for empty homes. Evie was overwhelmed at the size of the city but was the first to spot a likely target, they both agreed that it felt like the owners would be gone for several days, there was no housekeeper or security in the big house. After arriving in the massive living room Evie was overcome with the opulence of the place that was apparent even in the dark.

“Bloody hell!” This seemed to be her favorite expression.

“Nice, huh?” Adam smiled at her amazement.

“Too right! People really live in places like this?”

“Yeah, and right now so do we. Let’s go find the bathrooms, you can have one all to yourself,” he explained, “we can throw our clothes in the washing machine while we clean up, they can dry while we raid the pantry for a snack. Remember to keep the gloves on except when you’re in the bathtub.” Adam had a box full of latex medical gloves back at the cave; they were better than the thick cleaning gloves he first used to avoid fingerprints.

The bathroom Evie chose was bigger than the entire bat cave, you could almost swim in the tub. Adam helped her fill the enormous bath and added some bubble stuff for her. In a flash the girl was undressed and into the warm suds, Adam left her to soak and enjoy while he took off to wash their clothes and then to have his own soak and scrub in the bath down the hall. Along the way he found a

thermostat and goosed up the heat in the large home.

Adam finished his bath first (of course) and after toweling off and blow drying his hair he donned one of two thick bathrobes he had found in what he supposed was a guest room, the other was for Evie until their own clothes came out of the dryer. He almost had to resort to force to get the girl out of the bathtub/pool/lake; he showed her how to use the showerhead on a hose to rinse off the suds.

“Come on, you’ll turn into a prune!” Adam said in desperation, “We still have shopping to do if you want any new clothes. Put the gloves back on after you get dried off.”

“Alright, don’t get your panties in a twist,” she grinned, “that was the best bath I ever had!”

Adam helped her dry her fine blond hair as she sat bundled in the thick terry robe; he enjoyed helping her and showing her how things worked. The girl’s life on the remote ranch had left her ignorant and cut off from many of the things that

people take for granted.

“What’s that funny little toilet for?” Evie pointed at the low plumbing fixture next to the commode.

Adam had to think for a minute before explaining, “Uh, that’s a bidet thingy.”

“What does it do?” The device fascinated Evie.

Adam reddened a bit, “you use it to wash your butt, after you poop.”

“Bloody hell!”

“I agree, let’s go get a snack, your hair’s dry now.”

The two clean burglars padded into the roomy kitchen, it seemed capable of providing a fair sized restaurant with meals for all. There wasn’t much in the refrigerator; apparently the occupants had planned to be away for a while. There were packages of unopened ham and cheese so they settled on canned soup with crackers piled with the cheese and ham. Evie wanted to try one of the fancy looking bottles of champagne that chilled in the fridge but Adam put his foot down. “It’ll make you act even sillier and then your head will hurt, then you will probably throw up all over the place.”

“Oh.” His answer seemed to make good sense, she knew all about drunks.

After rinsing out their soup pot and dishes it was time to dress and go shopping. In the laundry room the warm clothes felt delicious as the two exchanged their robes for their own clean clothes. Evie would have all new clothes in a little while but who wants to put dirty clothes back on after taking a bath? Before they left on the shopping expedition Adam and the girl collected a trash bag full of canned foods and assorted goodies to add to their larder at the bat cave. The boy jumped with the food and was back in about two minutes. Time to shop.

Even in the darkened store that catered to young people Evie could see that she had clearly died and risen to heaven. The girl seemed to want one of everything she saw. Adam had to steer her towards more practical acquisitions such as warm ski clothes, thermal underwear, snow boots, socks. A few whimsical ‘purchases’ were allowed, some zany

sunglasses, a flashy pair of shorts with a matching top. Later she could shop for anything she wanted but for now she needed things that would keep her warm and comfortable. A silly pair of fuzzy house slippers finished the evening's raid on the upper class economy.

After the two had returned to their small home in the wilderness it was time to catch up on sleep. When you did your shopping in the wee hours of the morning it tended to disrupt your sleep cycle. In the late afternoon both kids were awake and fed, Evie was having a marathon session of trying on new clothes. Adam could see that he would have to rig up some sort of clothes rack, stuff were sort of piling up in the corners. It also occurred to the boy that the girl was totally free to go about in the daylight and to do her own actual shopping, no one was looking for her, no one wanted her dead, she had demonstrated to the boy that she could protect herself quite well (Ow!). He also remembered to tell her about the cardboard box full of cash and jewelry that was over behind the computer.

“Bloody hell!”

Adam took the now warmly dressed girl for her first walk in the snow, she couldn't have been more fascinated if she had been walking about on the surface of the moon. Naturally the outing degenerated into an epic snowball fight, the flying balls of white were very hard to duck when they dipped and swerved and chased you around trees like small homing missiles. A snowman was constructed; it turned out quite well actually, considering that it was over twenty feet high. Sometimes Adam liked to show off his 'muscles'.

“We'll have to get some snow saucers or something,” Adam observed. They wouldn't even need a hill.

That evening Evie revealed an ability that had the boy purple with envy, she was an absolute wonder with computers. All the more amazing was the fact that she had never used a computer before in her entire life. Adam wasn't too much into computer games but he did have one that featured a young

lady with amazing physical endowments and who went about looting tombs and such. Adam thought he would show off his computer expertise as he inserted the CD into the computer and then patiently explained what keys controlled which actions. He needn't have bothered. Within two minutes Evie had stopped using the keys, the buxom lass in the game began doing things that even the game programmers wouldn't have thought possible. Adam noted with silent slack jawed amazement that Evie wasn't using her TK abilities to press the keys, the keys weren't moving at all. Somehow or other the girl was directly interfacing with the computer's operating system. What she was able to do with the boy's 3D modeling and animation programs had him close to pulling his hair out. Talk about ego deflators!

“Maybe I'll just get myself a yo-yo or something,” Adam finally concluded.

The snow was great but both kids agreed that the island was better. Adam spent the better part of two days gathering things to make their small island

more comfortable. A bigger tent (camouflaged) and the usual sorts of camping gear, air mattresses for sleeping and floating. A facemask and snorkel for Evie, sun block, food, water, more food, more water. The multiple jumps with inanimate 'things' didn't tire the boy like jumping with a person, he didn't know why. Finally they could go and spend more than a day or two in the sun.

The Island

Adam smeared the sun block on Evie's back half while she worked on the front, even with such precautions the boy warned her not to overdo her first hours in the sun. The girl's first visit to the island hadn't been long enough to add much of a tan.

"Don't be such a mother hen!" Evie protested.

"I just don't want you burnt, we have plenty of time for swimming." Adam grinned a little; he

supposed that he did sound like some fussy mother. He also truly cared for the girl's well being. Evie was only two years younger, but to Adam she seemed like a small child in need of protection and guidance. In truth the girl was much tougher and more self reliant than he gave her credit for, she had survived mentally and physically intact from a life that many would not have endured.

Adam's initial misgivings about skinny-dipping and being undressed with the girl had completely vanished. Evie had no real sense of modesty; she had never been around people who did. After a time neither youngster even thought of one another as being naked when they were undressed, their skin was their clothing. There was nothing sexual in their casual hugs or silly horseplay, or when they snuggled close in sleep. Adam had experienced one sexual encounter with a grown woman in his lifetime, that episode was off in it's own separate file box. Evie was just a little girl, Adam couldn't see her as anything else.

The boy finished his kid greasing with a sharp swat to the girl's bare butt. "Last one in does the dishes!"

Adam had to do that evening's dishes. Evie had used some TK to trip him head first into the soft sand. Criminy!

The lagoon had a toothy visitor; a six foot long lemon shark had found it's way through the narrow breaks in the reef. The two snorkelers were paddling slowly about one hundred yards from the beach when they both sensed the approaching shark. Neither child was actually afraid of the streamlined eating machine, it didn't really seem too interested in them and it wasn't some twenty-five foot monster out of the movies. Still, it was a shark with very sharp teeth and a poor sense of humor. Adam sent the confused fish up and over the reef in a fair imitation of the small flying fish that sometimes erupted from the water. The shark wasn't hurt and Adam could feel better about the novice swimmer he was shepherding.

Evie's swimming was rapidly improving; her first clumsy efforts were being replaced with more graceful and efficient strokes. She was learning to make short dives down to the shallower depths. Adam had the feeling that she would soon be giving him a swim for his money. The strengthening sun and empty stomachs finally turned the boy and girl back towards the beach. Lunchtime.

Tuna sandwiches, chips and a coke, what more could one ask for? Maybe a rain free day, clouds were thickening with a speed that only the tropics could provide. Before the rain set in Evie had her usual question or thirty.

"You can lift tons more than I can, can you lift yourself up?"

"Not very well, it's not like I couldn't lift my weight, it just seems like I'm trying to balance on my nose or something. I wind up swerving around and crashing into things."

"Could you lift me?" Evie had an endless supply of questions.

Adam considered this for a moment. “Well sure, you don’t weigh hardly anything.”

“So lift me.”

Evie was sitting crossed legged finishing off the last of her chips, she didn’t seem at all alarmed or surprised as she gently drifted off of the picnic blanket and hovered three feet above it. Adam was extra careful while doing this, lifting a living person was way different from tossing rocks or cars around, lifting Evie called for even more care.

“Higher, make me go higher!”

“No. I might drop you or something.” Adam returned the disappointed girl to her previous resting place.

“You’re always worrying so much about me! I’m not made of cobwebs you know, don’t be so bloody careful about everything!” Evie wasn’t really mad at the boy, she just wished he would ease up a bit.

Adam knew he was overprotective with the small girl, the thought of some harm coming to the only person he had ever met who was anything like

himself was too much to contemplate. “Sorry, it’s just that you’re the only person who knows what it’s like to be me, to be like us. I don’t really mean to be so bossy with you and everything, I just don’t want anything to happen to you.”

Evie got up and came over to sit beside her one and best friend, she put her arm over the boy’s shoulder and rested her head against him.

“I’m a pain in the arse sometimes. I guess we’ll yell at each other now and then, don’t ever think I don’t like you,” the girl paused for a bit more and then added, “don’t ever think I don’t love you.” The girl never saw the small tears in the boy’s eyes. The rain shower commenced in a rush and drove them into the tent for an after lunch nap.

The sun didn’t reassert itself until about an hour before sunset, during this time the two castaways talked of matters great and small, mostly they just napped while curled up innocently next to one another. A quick swim in the lagoon ended the day with the sun resting on the horizon. Adam had

brought enough water to allow a brief rinse off at the end of each day, the two took turns slowly pouring the precious fluid over each others heads to remove the itchy salt and sand from their hair and bodies. Dinner was beans and weenies with buttered French rolls. It was a simple meal to fix, if somewhat musical later on.

Evie had asked the boy to include his battery powered short-wave radio in the pile of supplies transported to the island, it wasn't as good as a telly but it was better than nothing. What they heard that night would eventually turn their lives in new directions, toward new perils and new hopes, new possibilities.

“...is BBC World Service. The American FBI announced today that they would be submitting to the Attorney General a list of persons who were directly involved in the murder of Adam Valentine. The Agency spokesman stated that a number of military and civilian employees of the Pentagon have already agreed to testify in return for immunity

from prosecution. It is believed that at least four members of the American Senate and ranking members of the armed forces are involved in what has been described as the most dastardly and shameful chapter in this past year of unprecedented political corruption and misdeeds.”

“You don’t look very dead.” Evie observed.

“No kidding. Let’s try the air mattresses in the water tomorrow, we can have a TK race around the island.” Adam didn’t seem greatly interested in what the rest of the world was now obsessed with.

“Maybe you should let them know you’re alright, when they put the people who tried to kill you in jail,” Evie suggested.

“I don’t think so, I sort of like being dead. Nobody tells you how to live your life. I don’t think I really matter much to them, if I wasn’t such a useful freak they wouldn’t give me the time of day.” Adam’s betrayal had left him with an unfairly harsh opinion of those people once so important in his life.

“But you told me that the Richter’s were like a

family to you?” Evie would have given anything to have had such a family.

“They were, they’re good people. They’re better off without me around, it’s dangerous being my friend. Freddie got kidnapped because of me.”

“I’ll bet they wouldn’t say that they’re better off without you,” Evie said.

“It’s more than just them. When I was with the FBI the news dogs nearly drove me nuts,” Adam explained. “If my darling little butt itched and I scratched it, it was on the six o-clock news with slow motion close ups and analysis by three experts on butt scratching techniques.”

Evie doubled up in laughter, “I didn’t know there were any experts on butt scratching!”

“I guess there aren’t really, but the news dogs could probably invent some.”

Well, you do have a darling butt,” Evie teased.

“Please, no butt analysis!”

Full Circle

The Plymouth Academy, Maryland

The people driving the two rental moving vans motored calmly past the perfunctory security house at the school's entrance, the second van did slow just a little as the driver performed a well executed head shot to the protesting guard. The people in the vans were not delivering furniture.

Plymouth Academy had been selected very carefully; great thought had been given to the tactical layout of the school and to the wealth and power of the student's parents. Not too long ago taking hostage a building full of the rich and famous' offspring would not have been considered, the FBI's Special Team had made such undertakings impossible. The Special Team was no more, the accursed boy who was at its core was dead. Plans

could now proceed.

The large two story stone building at the center of the school was over one-hundred years old, the walls were very thick, the windows fairly small, it commanded a clear view on all sides. During classes there were nearly one hundred and sixty students in the building. The students could count among their parents four Senators, six congressmen, eleven foreign diplomats and enough lawyers to sue a small country into bankruptcy. One didn't simply enroll one's child in the institution, you submitted their name to the selection committee, and if you had to ask about tuition costs you were in the wrong line.

There were twelve men in the vans, six in each truck, two up front, the rest in back with the 'cargo'. The cargo consisted of two heavy M-2 machine guns with tripod mounts; eight grenade launcher equipped M-16's, eight MP-5 submachine guns. There was of course enough ammunition for all of the weapons to last through a medium sized war.

There was also five hundred pounds of C-4 explosive complete with detonators. All of this was courtesy of a poorly secured National Guard armory just fifty miles away.

The twelve men in the trucks did not consider themselves to be terrorists but instead thought of themselves as freedom fighters, but don't they always think that? They were very well trained and rehearsed; they had discipline and professionalism that was missing in your average bomb thrower. They had all made their peace with Allah, they thought of themselves as already dead, if they made it out alive from this undertaking it would be considered an unexpected bonus.

The trucks crossed the snow-cruled lawn as an open-mouthed maintenance worker watched in disbelief. One van backed up to the front entrance of the building, the other did the same at the rear entrance. Two teams of four men from each truck entered the front and back of the stone structure, the remaining four began a rapid transfer of the

cargo into the building.

Classes were in mid session, the first indications that something was very wrong was when the intruders started going from classroom to classroom executing all of the teachers. The students watching this bloody spectacle were in grades one through six.

The island

By the end of the fourth day on the island Evie's tan was starting to look much like her companion's, they both seemed to share the same ability to tan quickly. Adam ceased to nag her about being in the sun too much, in fact he made a special effort not to be so darn bossy. The food and water situation was reaching critical condition, they would have to return to the bat cave soon. That evening's small ritual of slurping hot chocolate while listening to the BBC news program marked a turning place in their brief

life together.

“...total of ten instructors are now believed to be dead. The bodies are still lying in full view along with those of the local police who first answered the call for help from the school. Anyone who has attempted nearing the bodies has come under heavy machine gun fire; the powerful rounds even penetrated the armored Brinks truck that was first pressed into duty as a rescue vehicle. The American FBI is now in charge at this scene of carnage, it is believed that FBI Director Monroe himself has taken personal command and is now at the communications post established just outside the school. Parents of the...”

“Oh no!” Adam pressed his hands to his face, why had he brought that damned radio? Evie had brought his soul back to life, now how could he not do something to help those kids?

“Adam...?” Evie instantly knew what her counterpart was thinking, she knew how he was being torn.

“I could get those kids out of there,” he whispered, “I can help save them, it would be easy.”

“Then we must save them.” Evie replied.

“I must, not you.” Adam could see where this was headed.

The girl’s tone and attitude caught the boy off guard. “I’m only ten but I know that we can’t just spend the rest of our lives running about on this dinky island! If I could get there to help those kids I would try it myself, I’ll bet I could too!”

“Evie, if we show up there we’ll never have any peace. You don’t know what it’s like!”

“We can have some peace anytime we want, if things get bad we can just ‘jump’, no one knows where we are now, or where the cave is. We can always just leave if we get fed up.”

The girl’s simple logic held the truth, they would never be forced to live a life behind security fences and armed guards, and they had a freedom that no one else had ever experienced.

“We can go to the Richter’s, you can stay there till I get back.” Adam didn’t really think the girl would buy this.

“We’re going to that school if I have to swim!
Don’t be a stupid arse, we’re wasting time here!”
Evie wasn’t going to be sidetracked.

Adam stood as if coming to a decision, Evie knew she had won this round. The girl also stood and then hugged her hero close.

“I won’t get in the way, if I can help I will.” Evie’s big blue eyes could melt a tax collector’s heart.

“Criminy! You’d think we were married or something, the wife always wins the arguments.”
Adam knew when he was beat.

Loose items about their small camp were quickly collected and placed inside the tent, clothes were donned, a last look around. Had they forgotten anything? They would need to stop at the cave for warm clothing; it was winter in North America.

Adam had fleeting thoughts about just leaving Evie at the island or maybe the cave, but no, what if something happened to him, she would be stranded at either place, she could die a slow death on the island or at the cave. A shiver of horror passed through the boy when he thought back at the times

he had made jumps from the cave for supplies while leaving Evie behind, how could he have been that stupid! Future jumps from either place would be made together!

The Bat Cave

As usual it was pitch black and freezing cold when the two travelers returned. By the time the place had started to warm both Adam and the girl were dressed in winter clothing and ready for the boy's jump back into the world of the living. The once booby-trapped satellite phone was stuffed into the boy's ski jacket. Maybe they could use the damned thing for evidence or something.

"We'll go to Washington first, I don't really know the exact location of the school, all I have to do is locate Agent Monroe and take us to where he is. I hope Monroe doesn't die of fright, they all think I'm dead"

“What should I do when we get there, what should I say?” Evie asked.

“Just be yourself, they’ll ask about your family and everything, just tell them the truth, they can’t make you go back there.”

“Okay,” she paused for a moment, “will it be really dangerous for you, to help stop those terrorist arseholes?”

“No, they think I’m dead too, they’ll never know what hit them.”

This seemed to reassure Evie, she hugged the boy tight and kissed him on his cheek, “Let’s go then, those kids must be scared stupid.”

Washington, D.C.

The Lincoln Memorial was impressive at any time; four o’clock in the morning was no exception. To Evie it was overwhelming after a life of nothing but dusty flat earth and the ratty sheep station, the small town of Alice Springs had seemed like the big city,

even the disjointed visits to Los Angeles weren't like this.

“It's like a big church (she had seen pictures of churches).”

“It's a special place, let's go inside for a minute.” Adam thought they could spare minute for the girl to be a tourist. They were alone for the moment in the white marble landmark, Evie walked up as close as you can get to the massive statue of the seated Lincoln and reached out and touched the cold stone. She was out of words for a change as she sought out Adam's hand and held it tight.

“I guess we better go now, have you found Mr. Monroe yet?” She asked.

“Yes, he's not too far. Give me a hug and we'll be there.”

Plymouth Academy

Director of the FBI Monroe was managing a few

of hours of sleep on the cot in his makeshift command center. Things were at a total stalemate, there was no way the United States was going to withdraw it's anti-missile units from Israel, no way were they going to do anything the terrorist's wanted. Noon was the deadline at which the Plymouth students would begin dying at the rate of one an hour. Monroe would have to order an assault on the building before that. It was the President's decision. In truth there was no other option.

The two blonde children stood for a few moments in the dim light of Monroe's small office, Evie was the first to whisper anything.

"He's asleep, what do we do?"

"Wake him up, I guess." Adam moved next to the cot, it seemed like it had been a lifetime since he had been this close to the man he had once looked up to in total awe. He found that he still cared for the man but the total trust he had once felt was missing. Adam was about to reach out and shake the man's shoulder when Monroe stirred and then

rolled over to face his visitors, he rubbed his eyes as he came awake and after some serious blinking realized that he was not alone in the room.

“Who’s there?” Monroe sat up and switched on the lamp next to the cot, what he saw made him doubt that he was even awake. There were two blonde kids in his office, one of them was a girl, and the other was Adam.

“Agent Monroe.” Adam would always think of him by that title.

“Adam?” Monroe doubted his senses, maybe it was his exhaustion catching up with him.

“Yes sir,” the boy pulled the suddenly shy girl gently to his side, “this is Evie, she’s weird like I am.”

Monroe put his hand to his mouth and sat silent for a moment, then he with some effort and moved to embrace the boy. Adam stepped back and offered his hand instead. The man sensed the boy’s mistrust and stood still, he then offered his own hand in the tentative greeting. Evie offered her

small hand to the large black man, he shook it with a gentle question in his expression, his voice asked the other question.

“What’s wrong son, what is it?”

Adam didn’t say anything; instead he reached into the large pocket on the right side of his jacket and pulled out the satellite phone.

“Here, they tried to kill me with this.”

Monroe accepted the cell phone, it seemed to have some odd alterations, there were rust and water stains on it. The phone was also the last link in the chain, the key in the lock that would put a very large number of very powerful people in stony lonesome for the rest of their miserable lives.

“Adam, dear God boy, I don’t know where to start or what to say. Forgive me, but I had given you up for dead, for lost”

Adam brought the man into total focus, “I have been lost, now I’m found. Let’s get those kids safe.”

Monroe nodded his head, “The Parkers are here, they have been my right hand people since I was

put in charge, since I was made Director.”

“I know sir,” Adam had felt that they were near, “tell me what you know about what’s going on over there.”

“Over there” was the Plymouth Academy. “Over there” was a small hell on earth for the children who had no voice in choosing their parents.

“We think there are nine of them...”

Adam interrupted Monroe. “Twelve.” The boy had already done a quick scan of the building.

“Christ! Anyway, they killed all of the teachers outright and tossed out their bodies. They killed the first cops to arrive on the scene. Besides small arms they have a couple of ma-deuces in there with armor piercing ammo. We’re pretty sure they’re not bluffing about having the place rigged with explosives.”

“No sir, they’re not bluffing,” Adam added.

“We have till noon, then they start shooting kids. We were planning on assaulting the place, it will be bloody but we have no choice.”

Adam nodded his head and turned to ‘look’ in the

direction of the school building, Monroe asked the obvious question.

“Can you put them down long enough for us to get in there and secure them, twelve of them?”

“I would have to kill some of them. Despite recent events I still really don’t like doing that sort of thing.” Adam continued, “I’ll go in and take them down one or two at a time, after I’ve wasted their guns and disconnected the explosives. When I’m done the kids can come out on their own, then you all can go in and collect the bad guys.”

Monroe had more than a few objections to the plan. “That’s too risky for you, the entry teams can be in there in thirty seconds, they can take them easily if you screw up the bad guy’s weapons.”

“No. Those kids in there are scared shitless, they don’t need a bunch of storm troopers charging in there looking for a reason to shoot someone, the wrong people could get hurt, you know that. It could turn into a total clusterfuck.”

Monroe was taken aback at the boy’s reply and by his crude language, Adam had changed. Evie just stood wide-eyed watching the small drama.

“Adam, I can’t allow you to go in there by yourself. We can preposition the teams, they’ll know that the bad guys have been disarmed.”

“There too much open ground for them to get close enough fast enough,” Adam replied, “this is a take it or leave it deal, if you want my help we do it my way.”

Monroe stood speechless for a moment after the boy’s hard-edged rebuke; his reply was spoken softly when he found his voice. “Son, what’s happened to you?”

“The government that you work for has happened to me, people that I trusted in that government tried very hard to kill me. The only reason I’m here is because of those kids over there, your precious government can go to hell for all I care about it!”

“I’m truly sorry that you feel like that, son. Maybe we can...”

“We’re wasting time,” Adam interrupted, “do I help or do I go?”

Monroe felt like the boy had kicked him in the gut, but he had no choice. “You help. Let me get the

Parker's in here, you two take your coats off, I'll be right back."

While Monroe was out of the room Evie had a word or two for her friend, "He's a good person, I think you were sort of mean to him."

Adam looked the girl in the eye and hugged her close for a moment, "Maybe so. Maybe I've been mean to a lot of people. A lot of people have been mean to me, it gets confusing after a while."

Evie knew all about mean people, it could get confusing.

The reunion with the stunned Parker's was stiff and subdued; they could tell that 'their' boy had changed. Evie had stood off to one side while the married agents hugged and kissed the boy, he was polite but the warm affection that he once felt for the couple seemed to not be there. After an awkward moment they finally seemed to realize that the boy had a friend with him, Adam introduced her.

"This is Evie," Adam put his hand behind the shy girl's back and gently pushed her forward a bit,

“she’s from Australia. She’s like me, she has a lot of the same abilities I do and some that are different.”

Parker took the girl’s hand, “Hi Evie, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Hello sir, nice to meet you too.”

Mother Harper bent down and kissed the girl on her cheek, “Adam used to call me “Mother Harper,” why don’t you call me that too?”

“Okay.” Evie’s shyness had her a little tongue tied for the moment.

“You both look so tanned, where have you been?” Mother Harper asked.

“We’ve sort of been on vacation, “ Adam replied, “lots of sun there.”

There wasn’t time for much of a get acquainted session, maybe that was just as well for now. It was time to ‘start the music’ as the Special Team had done so many times before. Adam laid down some of the ground rules.

“Evie can tell you how I’m doing, when I have the creeps tied up and when the kids are coming out. If I get in a jam I can just jump back here. There’s a

big attic in the place, I'll go there first so I can take my time disconnecting the explosives.”

Monroe had a dark blue Kevlar vest in his hands, he was going to get the boy to wear it if he had to sit on him. “No lip on this, you *will* wear this vest!”

Adam smiled for the first time, “Yes sir, no argument.”

The boy had one final word for Monroe before he jumped, “For Pete’s sakes, don’t send in the troops until those kids are all out of there.”

“You have my word son, but if things go really bad I may have to get my people in there in a hurry, you know that.”

“Agreed. Trust what Evie tells you, she can remote view as well as I can at this distance, she’ll tell you how things are going, where I’m at.”

“I will, our people are primed and ready, they go only when I say so.”

Adam extended his hand to the man, they both shook hands without further words, then the boy was gone.

Evie stood before the large floor plan drawing of the school and gave the first of her reports, “he’s in the attic now, he’s just sitting there.”

That was exactly what he was doing, a long slow look throughout the building was his first priority, what he found justified his caution. The five hundred pounds of C-4 had been divided up into twenty-five pound blocks, every classroom had one of those blocks, they were all wired into one firing circuit.

“Not too smart,” Adam said to himself, one circuit made his job much easier. The battery was disconnected first, then he chopped every lead to every classroom. “At least the place won’t blow up now.”

His next task was just as important, overlooking even one weapon could get a lot of kids killed, not to mention himself. Adam took slow care not to deform the guns as he fused all of their working parts, nothing that would indicate to the bad guys that their weapons were now just so much scrap metal.

There were two entry teams, one for the front entrance and another for the rear. The rear team leader's radio link had a bad chip in its encryption circuitry, it would drop whole words at random, there was no static, no indication of trouble, it worked most of the time, that wasn't quite good enough.

It was nearly dawn, the terrorist's slept in shifts, right now there were six asleep, six awake. Adam opted to first take out the six who were sound asleep; the one on the top floor at the rear of the building had the honor of being first. Nearly all of the children in the classroom were asleep, the terrorist knew that they were all scared to death of him, he slept with the knowledge that they wouldn't come near him or his weapon. There was one boy in the classroom who was awake, Richard Banning was in the sixth grade, his family wasn't known for its tolerance for cowards and weaklings, Richard regarded the sleeping dipshit with the gun as falling into both of those categories. Young Master Banning was about to bash the sleeping terrorist

over the head with the man's own M-16 when a blonde kid he had never seen before touched him on the shoulder.

Adam put his finger to his own lips to keep the other boy from speaking, he then pointed to the roll of duct tape and the cluster of plastic crowd control handcuffs he had in his other hand. Young Banning had always been a quick study; he nodded his head and stood back from the snoring bastard on the floor. The sleeping form seemed to shudder for a second or two as he lost all consciousness. Adam was upon him in an instant rolling him onto his stomach. One pair of the tough plastic 'wire ties' went on his wrists, the other on each ankle intertwined with the wrist cuffs. The duct tape over the mouth finished the job. Richard found his voice, he still had enough of his senses to whisper.

"I know who you are, you're that Valentine kid!"

"Right you are. Things are happening, I'm putting all of these creeps to sleep, the FBI will be in here pretty soon. This guy will wake up in a few minutes, if he starts thrashing around and making noise you have the job of making him be quite."

“I’ll knock his fucking brains out.” Richard would relish the excuse to do so. The creep on the floor had killed his favorite teacher.

“You’re a good man, Richard. Keep cool, keep the rest of the kids quite too.”

Evie: “He’s tied up the first guy,” she pointed to the floor plan, “right there.”

The next two were tougher; they slept in the upstairs hallway on a pile of the kid’s coats. Two very awake guards were stationed one at each end of the hall, their attention focused out the windows. Adam decided to drop the awake guards while the other two slept. He then eased the unconscious men to the floor and ‘jumped’ to the nearest one. By the time he had the burly man hog tied and gagged the one at the opposite end of the hall was rousing himself, only to slump back down again as the boy once more cut off the man’s blood supply to his brain.

Evie: “Two more, here and here.”

As Adam was finishing with the two who were asleep in the middle of the hall he sensed and then heard footsteps coming up the central staircase. The boy waited until the man was fully out into the hall before dropping him like a rock, one more to tie and gag.

Evie: "One more bloke came up the stairs here," she pointed, "he's tied up now too."

"That's number six, he's got half of them down now," Monroe was seeing a light at the end of the long dark tunnel.

Adam was on the ground floor now and down to the last bad guy. It was at this point that Murphy's Law caught up with all concerned. Monroe put out the message for the entry teams to be ready for the children to start coming out at any moment.

"Nobody is to go for the doors unless on my say so."

The rear team only heard "go for the doors, my say

so.”

Evie: “What are those guys doing? Adam’s not done!”

As Adam was preparing to drop the last terrorist the rear entry team placed their frame-shaped entry charge on the rear door and detonated it. The boy was midway in the hall when the blast pitched him forward onto the floor unhurt; as he stood and tried to focus the last terrorist was running towards him carrying his useless M-16. The entry team was running towards Adam and the terrorist. The whole building was filled with the screams of terrified children.

Intent on a glorious death, the screaming terrorist charged past Adam towards the black clad entry team. Two members of the entry team opened up on the screaming man, a total of eighteen rounds were fired, sixteen hit their intended target, the other two rounds quite naturally took Adam down.

Adam was hit just above his right nipple and again slightly to the left of his navel; the impacts knocked him flat on his back. The Kevlar vest stopped the 9mm rounds from entering his body, it hurt like holy hell just the same. People who have stopped bullets while wearing a vest will tell you that it feels something like being kicked by a medium sized mule, it tends to leave remarkable bruises, it does leave you alive.

Evie: "They shot Adam! Those stupid fucks shot Adam!" The girl could not be restrained; the two agents who tried were left howling in pain and clutching their mashed testicles. Evie was out the door and running toward the school building in a flash.

The school building had indeed turned into the clusterfuck that Adam had warned against. Panicky kids bolted for the entrances with wet faces and wet underwear, Adam was half trampled in the stampede, the shouting FBI teams only made the panic all the worse. Not surprisingly, Evie managed

to make her way upstream against the flow of students, none too gently either. She found her moaning and cursing hero lying up against one wall of the hallway where he had sought shelter by a water fountain.

“Adam! Oh bloody hell, Adam! Please be alright!”

“Hi kid, I think I’m alright. I feel like a truck hit me.” The boy’s head was bleeding from being clobbered by some kid’s ill placed foot during the panic.

Evie was still looking for blood elsewhere on her one and best friend when Monroe and the Parker’s found them. Adam had some choice words for them.

“Nicely run operation, Agent Monroe, really professional.”

“Jesus son, I never sent those idiots in! Are you hit?” Monroe knelt to exam the boy, the two holes in the oversized vest told him what he needed to know. Monroe gently pulled back the Velcro fasteners on the vest and opened it up, there was no blood but

nasty bruises were already visible as the man looked under the boy's sweater and t-shirt. "How do you feel, son?"

"Like I've been shot twice, it hurts like hell, so does my head."

"We'll get you to a hospital to have you checked, I don't think you're seriously injured, I do know that it hurts, it happened to me once years ago."

Evie wanted to know who the asshole was who led the rear team into the building, Parker made the mistake of pointing out the man to her. She didn't use any of her abilities on the man; she just stalked up to him and kicked the living crap out of the man's left shin. Adam applauded, even though the effort was somewhat painful.

Walter Reed Army Hospital

Adam had been very much against coming to the place, in fact he had almost jumped with Evie back

to the cave. Evie can be very persuasive, especially where the boy is concerned, in the end he submitted to her pleas to have the “docs” look him over.

By the time the helicopter carrying the boy and girl had arrived at the hospital best known for it's famous political patients, the news media was undergoing one of it's periodic orgasm's of hyperbole, misquotes, rumors and endless conjecture.

Adam had walked from the helicopter to the emergency room, the medics had wheeled out a gurney for him, he had rather forcefully told them to piss off, he didn't seem to be in a very good mood. The doctors and nurses in the examination area did manage to get the boy to undress so they could look him over, all they really found were two livid bruises on his chest and stomach and an impressive all over sun tan, they never did find the source of the clotted blood on his head. The nurses had tried to shoo Evie out while they looked over her hero, the girl had given them a look that could cut steel and then

told them to “bugger off,” they didn’t press the matter any further.

The boy was pretty well exhausted, the girl a close second. The two of them agreed to getting some needed rest and sleep in a private room with two beds. Director Monroe personally attended to the security arrangements; the press could get no closer than the ground floor conference room.

Okinawa

“Dear God, he’s alive!” Greta Richter whispered, she was the first to hear the news on the kitchen radio, the rest of the family was in the back yard preparing for a small family barbecue, it would now be a much, much happier meal even if the Colonel did forget all about the hamburgers and totally incinerated them.

Taos

Old Mr. Smithe's jeep wheezed into Ronnie's back yard, the woman herself sat on the steps with the bottle of Jack Daniels that she favored more and more these days. She was sober enough to wonder why the old fart was grinning so much.

"The lad's alive!" Smithe shouted.

"Squirt?"

"Yes you sorry drunk, you can stop feeling sorry for yourself!"

Which is exactly what she did.

Walter Reed

Before he had been tucked into bed Adam had been given some mild painkiller tablets, they had wanted to give him a shot in his butt, that didn't actually work out too well. Doctor Simmons showed up, her once and still famous patient smiled and put

his arms around her. The woman doctor looked over the boy, reviewed Adam's chart and then consulted with the admitting physician, they both agreed that he did indeed have two very bad bruises.

Adam and the girl slept until well after three that afternoon, the nurses who looked in on them from time to time were a bit nonplussed when they found them both snuggled up back to back in the same bed, the kids rested easier when they could feel the other's presence close by. Finally the two roused themselves, Adam was extremely stiff and sore but the throbbing pain had left him, Evie also had a limited ability to make things "all better" and had taken away some of the boy's pain while he slept.

"Let's just go back to the bat cave," Adam suggested as they lay quietly next to one another. Evie always seemed to think of the more practical side of matters. "I'm starving, let's see if we can get something to eat first."

The choice between a warm meal and the ice-cold

cave was an easy one. “Let’s get dressed,” Adam decided, “then we can get something to eat.”

The two located their winter clothing in the room’s closet, Evie helped Adam dress, it was an effort for him to bend and move very much. They were both nearly finished with putting their clothes on when a nurse led the FBI’s Director and the Parkers into the room, the President of The United States was also with them.

“Good afternoon Adam, Evie.” Monroe began, “I see you’re up and about. The President wanted to meet you and thank you.”

Adam stood somewhat painfully from his shoe tying, Evie moved close to his side, it would take her a very long time to ever get over being shy with strangers.

“Pleased to meet you, sir.” Adam coolly extended his hand to the President.

“An honor to meet you Adam,” President Drew began, “we’re all so very grateful that you are alive, that you showed up when you did to help save those

school children.”

“We were happy to be of use, Evie here helped a lot too.”

Adam once again gently prodded the girl forward a little.

“Hello Evie,” Drew began, “thank you for your help.”

“Nice to meet you sir, we were just going to try and get something to eat.” First things first, in Evie’s mind.

“A practical idea, young lady. Why don’t we all zip over to the White House and have a good meal, then we can talk for a bit. No strings attached, no obligations on your parts.” President Drew had been well briefed by Monroe about the boy’s state of mind, his mistrust of the government. The debacle at the Plymouth Academy hadn’t helped things very much.

“Then let’s go, I’m starved,” Evie accepted the offer before Adam could voice any objections.

The White House

As Marine One settled onto the green lawn, Adam thought back to the good and bad times that he had landed here in this helicopter. As they all exited the aircraft after the President, the boy paused for a second remembering that the Marines had played no active part in trying to kill him, he stopped to shake the hand of the surprised Marine who stood at attention at the bottom of the helicopter's stairs.

Dinner was very good indeed, more than once Adam leaned over to whisper quietly in Evie's ear to slow down just a bit, there was plenty to go around, save room for desert. The boy had loosened up a bit, but there was still that general feeling in him that he didn't really trust these people anymore. After the meal was over and Evie was totally stuffed they all retired to the President's sitting room, it was more informal than the Oval Office, it held less memories for the boy. The President began the discussion.

“Adam, where have you been all of this time?”

“Staying alive, Mr. President.”

“But where son, where have you been?”

“No comment sir. Where I’ve been is not very important. My question is where have you been?”

“What do you mean, son?” President Drew had a sinking feeling about what might be coming next.

“Where were you when Packer was totally screwing this country, when he was trying to kill me?” Adam gave the man his number six semi-sweet smile.

“That’s not very fair son, Packer had dirt on everyone, including me.”

“So you were caught having sex with your fourteen-year old nephew, is that worth a country, is that worth all of the people that simply vanished, worth my life and all of the Special Team’s lives? Are political careers that precious?”

Drew reddened with anger; the boy knew everything, things that not even his wife knew. The people in the room couldn’t have been more embarrassed and shocked at Adam’s small

bombshell than if a large horse had entered the room and relieved itself on the coffee table. The man tried to calm himself some, how do you deal with such a child, someone who could see right through to the dirty little compartments of your soul. “I’m not a perfect human,” Drew began, “not even close. While Packer was alive I hid in the corners, he’s dead now, I can crawl back into the sunlight and try to be a human again.” Drew had never bared his soul this way.

Adam nodded his head and motioned Evie to come and stand beside him. As he hugged the girl close he spoke to the President.

“Me and Evie are the same kind of people, we’re both totally weird, we also both totally love each other. You can get along without us, if the world is coming to an end maybe we’ll show up, maybe not. Leave us alone and we’ll leave you alone. Don’t start another bullshit campaign to turn people against us, I don’t think we deserve that again. If you try to kill me or Evie I will come for you, I will find you and tear you into small pieces.” Adam

turned to his friends, he still thought of them that way, “We’ll keep in touch, we’ll stop by for visits. Be careful about who you all work for.”

The girl and boy vanished; the room was as empty as it is possible to be with six people still occupying it.

The shattered President mumbled his excuses and left the FBI Director and his people to try and put their thoughts together. Monroe spoke first.

“I think we’ve lost Adam. I had some half formed ideas about putting Special Team back together, I don’t think that’s in the cards now.”

“Special team pretty well ruined his life,” Mother Harper began, “I mean just look at the record. We take a sweet eight-year old orphan out of the Idaho boonies, he winds up living in a glass and chrome fortress surrounded by barbed wire and spends his time tracking down the scum of the earth. He gets shot twice, four times now. He gets tossed in a juvenile detention facility while politicians squabble over him, he has to bail out of a jet fighter and watch

it's pilot get blown up. And finally he's rewarded for all of that by having Packer spend a year trying to kill him and then with the military deciding they would also like to blow his brains out. Why should he want to go back to that kind of crap?"

Harper's tirade silenced the group for a while, her husband finally asked about Evie.

"We've identified her as Evie McDermond," Monroe explained, "she went missing from her aunt and uncle's sheep ranch in Australia. No doubt they'll want her back, especially since it's now known that she has telekinetic abilities. Personally I would put the odds on them getting her back at zero or less."

"I wonder where they've been staying?" Harper asked, "They both have all over tans according to the nurses at the hospital, wherever it is it's warm enough to run around all day in you're birthday suit."

"Yet they showed up here in ski clothes," Monroe added, "maybe they have more than one place."

Harper had the last observation, "They could be anywhere on this planet in the blink of an eye, I

don't think anyone should bother trying to find them,
it would be a waste of time.”

Free Spirits

There was enough food and water at the cave to make some more time on the island an easy operation; the warm sun and water would be a good therapy for the sore boy. Besides, both of the youngsters had been around more people than they wanted to for a while.

Although there wasn't anything wrong with Adam other than the lingering soreness, Evie went into full nurse mode. The boy just sat back and enjoyed her putting extra effort into trying to make him nice meals and taking over all of the simple housekeeping chores. At the end of the second day on the island the boy finally felt guilty about taking advantage of the girl's caring nature

Adam was lying peacefully in the shade and with as much discomfort as he could put into his voice he asked the girl if she would bring him something to

drink. When the dutiful Evie returned with the coolest of the Cokes that she could find, the boy leaped up and pounced. Evie received a severe rib tickling that had her teary-eyed with laughter, then she was tossed into the lagoon where Adam joined her.

“I’m fine, you silly little goose! Stop fussing over me!” This was punctuated with a wet hug and then a kiss to the girl’s forehead.

“I know that,” Evie laughed, “you never were fooling me! I was going to dump that Coke on your head but you were too quick!”

When sanity had returned and the two sat once more in the shade of the palms Adam gave voice to what he had been thinking about.

“You know, now that there isn’t an actual price on my head we could see some of the world, be tourists. This island is really nice but there’s so much more to do and see. We have money, we can go wherever we want. We ought to go see the Richter’s first, you’ll like them.”

“What are they like?” Evie didn’t have any

experience with decent families.

“They’re a military family, there’s Colonel Richter, he’s pretty scary until you get to know him, then he’s pretty neat. Mrs. Richter is the best cook on the planet, she’ll stuff you full of everything. Freddie’s my age but a lot bigger, he gets that from his dad. Hanna, that’s Freddie’s sister, is let’s see, about seventeen now, she has a dopey boyfriend.”

“Do you think they would like me, I’m sort of loudmouth sometimes?” Evie just knew that she would say or do something really stupid.

“They’ll like you. You’re a good person and that’s all that they will care about. You can get Hanna to help you with girl stuff, you know clothes and things, what girls your age wear and that sort of thing.”

“Do I dress wrong?” Evie asked quietly. Adam knew he had inserted his sandy foot into his mouth this time, “No, I didn’t mean that. It’s just that you’ve been stuck out on that sheep place your whole life without other girls around. I’m clueless about what females like to wear. I just meant that Hanna would love to give you some pointers. I didn’t mean to make you feel bad.”

“You’re right, and I don’t feel bad. I had some old magazines and stuff, the telly never was on anything but soccer matches and soap operas. I never had any money to buy stuff, I guess I could use a bit of help.”

“Everyone needs help sometimes, I’m not any good when it comes to stuff like that.”

A hug and a kiss settled the matter.

The Bat Cave

Evie was fussing endlessly with her clothes, Adam had assured her that the overpriced jeans and her hand decorated pullover top would be fine for their visit to the Richter’s. The worth of the girl’s shoes could feed a small third-world village for weeks.

“Stop fidgeting! You look perfect,” Adam pleaded, “let’s get going now, we’ll miss dinner and I don’t want to miss Mrs. Richter’s dinner, maybe I’ll just

leave you behind.”

This last remark earned the boy a playful sock in the stomach. Each kid had a small backpack with some clothes and a big wad of money, it was indeed time to go.

Okinawa

Mrs. Richter was the only one home at the moment Adam and Evie arrived, the boy thought it would be best if they just arrived outside and knocked on the front door, he didn't like the idea of scaring the dear woman. As it was she almost fainted when she opened the door.

“Adam..?”

“Hi Mrs. R”

The woman's open arms enveloped the boy, in that moment he moved a step closer towards total sanity. Why had he stayed away from this family, why?”

Both the woman and Adam had tears on their cheeks, they moved apart long enough for Mrs. Richter to notice the small girl who stood back a ways from the reunion. Adam made the introduction.

“This is Evie, Mrs. R, she’s like me. She has special abilities, we’re sort of a pair now.”

“Hello Evie, please come in and be at home.”

Evie moved forward tentatively, the warmth of the home and the woman put a wide smile on her face.

“Hello Mrs. Richter, Adam told me a lot about you.”

The girl received a tight hug and a kiss to the top of her blonde head, it was one of the best feelings she had ever had.

Mrs. R’s family was due home at roughly the same time, Freddie and Hanna’s classes let out at about the same time, the Colonel took off a little early from his duties that day, he had been putting in too many long hours and wanted to be home with his family for a while. When the Colonel arrived home he would have a somewhat larger ‘family’. Freddie made it through the front door first, Adam

opened it for him.

“Dork?” Freddie doubted his eyes.

“Hi, doofus. Criminy, don’t you ever stop growing?”

Adam got a severe head rub and shaking from his friend, after a bit Freddie caught sight of the small blonde girl who was smiling at the two boys.

“Who’s that?” Freddie asked.

“That’s Evie, she’s got special abilities like me, don’t ever get her mad at you.” Adam explained.

“No problem. Hi Evie.” Freddie extended his hand to the girl, she took it with a grin.

“Hi, Freddie. Nice to meet you. Adam said you were bigger than he was.”

“Yeah. Blame my dad.”

Hanna made her appearance, more tears and hugs all around, she took an immediate liking to the small blonde girl, her eye for fashions took in the obviously high priced clothes that Evie wore. “Evie, those jeans are just too cool, where did you find them?”

“Rodeo Drive, they have lots of nice things there.”

Hanna's eyes widened with envy, the time that her family was in L.A. included a quick trip to the legendary shopping area; Hanna couldn't afford anything in any of the shops.

Colonel Richter's arrival concluded the reunion, he picked up Adam like he was a three-year kid and proceeded to strain the boy's ribs to the breaking point. Evie was very impressed with the giant Marine, his uniform and many medals; she was also more than a bit intimidated by him. Richter took quick notice of the small girl. He wasn't so thick headed as to not see that she seemed a bit afraid of him. "Young lady, come over here!" Richter ordered in a gruff voice.

"Ye..Yes sir." Evie felt like she going to be eaten by a bear.

The Colonel stared down at her for a very long moment, then he grinned and picked her up as he had done with Adam.

"Welcome to our tribe, Evie! It's nice to meet you."

Evie's concern turned to a beaming smile, she liked

this big gorilla of a man and returned his hug with one of her own around his massive neck.

Eventually the noise level died down, Evie went off with Hanna to her room where Hanna got to play big sister for a little while, showing her young guest where she would be sleeping and such. Hanna's bed had one of those pull-out second mattresses under the regular part of the bed. Adam had a chance to speak with the rest of the family for a few minutes while Evie was occupied elsewhere.

“She's had a really rotten life. Her folks died when she was little, her aunt and uncle have been raising her, if you want to call it that. She's spent her entire life on a cruddy sheep ranch out in the middle of nowhere, her aunt and uncle aren't fit to be raising sheep, much less a little girl. Please excuse her if her language gets sort of colorful from time to time, it's all she's ever known, she's really a good person, she's just not used to being around nice people.

Greta responded first, “How did you find her,

Adam?”

“I was on an island, down towards Australia. I just sensed something, someone like me. So I went to find her.”

“And she has abilities like you, son?” Asked the Colonel.

“Yes sir, she has some that I don’t have, I have some that she doesn’t. We have some that are the same.”

“Her hair and eyes, they’re just like yours. You’re both so tanned and fit looking” Greta observed.

“I know, maybe the hair and eyes go along with being weird. We spend a lot of time on ‘our’ island. It’s really beautiful there, there’s no one for miles.”

“How old is she?” This from Freddie.

“Ten, like me she’s sort of a runt, she’s small for her age.”

“There may be legal complications for her and for you, son. Her folks will want to get her back, her government too.” Richter said.

“Yes sir, but she’s not going back there, ever. It would kill here to have to be with those people again, her aunt is a total lush, her uncle once even

tried to have sex with her. I didn't kidnap her.”

Greta looked ready to strangle someone at these last revelations, “then she simply shall not go back!”

“How are you doing, Adam? The news reports said you were shot twice when things went balls up at that school,” Richter asked.

“Oh, I'm fine. Just a little sore, Agent Monroe made me wear a vest.”

“I know that, but it still hurts a lot,” Richter said.

“Quite true. Evie found out who shot me and then kicked the sh.. the dickens out of his shin.”

“Good for her!”

Hanna and Evie returned to the group, the smaller girl had an ear-to-ear smile; apparently she was hitting it off well with her ‘older sister’. It was getting to be dinnertime and in this traditional household dinner fell mostly under the jurisdiction of the lady of the house. The three females retired to the kitchen, Evie was eager to help and to watch an actual mother in action. The three males prudently moved out onto the patio to discuss matters large and small. The Colonel had a few delicate

questions for Adam, he wasn't quite sure he should even ask them.

“Son, how are you two surviving on your own, what do you do for food and clothes?”

Without preamble Adam told him. “We mostly steal what we need.” Freddie's mouth sagged open at this.

Colonel Richter was a straight and narrow sort of person, like Adam used to be. “But son, stealing?” “I sort of stopped playing by the rules when the government started trying to kill me, especially when the military tried it.”

“But still...” Richter didn't quite know how to handle this.

“We only take what we need, just from rich places that can afford it. I'm sorry sir, but I just don't feel guilty about it anymore. I've spent my whole life trying to be a good person, trying to do what's right. Look at what it's got me. I used to have a bunch of money of my own, that all went away, it was stolen from me by the government.”

“I'm sorry you feel that way, son. Maybe in time

you'll feel differently.”

“I'm sorry too sir, I know I'm a disappointment to you about this.”

“You're no disappointment Adam, I just worry about you.”

Richter changed the subject to Evie.

“What about the girl, what's to become of her?”

“We're a pair sir, we stay together. Always.”

Adam didn't leave much wiggle room with that reply.

“But a young boy and girl living together, without parents or any supervision.” Richter felt awkward with this.

Adam could sense what the man was feeling.

“She's just a little girl sir, you don't think we have sex or anything do you?”

Richter reddened at this. “No. No I don't think that, it's just an.... unusual situation.”

“Evie trusts me, she loves me. I feel the same for her. When we're on the island we're free from worrying about people and what they can do to us. We don't bother with swimsuits, there's no one else for fifty miles around. That doesn't mean that

anything wrong is going on, because there isn't. She's like a little sister or something, that's all."

"Maybe I just have a dirty mind, I apologize Adam. I didn't mean to give you the third degree or something."

"No apology is needed, sir. I know you only mean the best for me and Evie."

Freddie had a big question. "When you 'jump' with someone else, is it hard to do?"

"It's a little tiring to do it a lot with someone along, like when I brought down those astronauts, but just for a few jumps it's no problem." Adam explained.

"Could I... I mean could you take me along on a jump?"

"Well sure, I mean if your dad gives the okay."

"Dad?" Freddie looked at his father, a silent plea on his face.

"Let me think about that for a bit," Richter answered. The idea of his son zapping all over the planet was rather unnerving.

Freddie had all sorts of things he wanted to say about his father's reticence, none of which he dared

to give voice to.

“Sir,” Adam began, “why don’t I take you to the island, then you can decide if it’s all right for Freddie?”

This caused the Marine to blink his eyes several times, he had never thought of such a thing, in truth he was a bit intimidated at the idea. “Me? You can take me to that place?”

“Sure, nothing to it.”

“I don’t know, when....?”

“How about right now sir, dinner won’t be ready for a little while, there’s still some light.”

Freddie grinned wickedly at his father, “Go on dad. You’re not chicken are you?”

This last remark earned Freddie a long hard glare, the man was on the spot.

“All right then, what do we do?” Richter felt this way the first time he ever jumped out of an airplane during parachute training.

Adam motioned the man to stand with him in the center of the patio. “Just hold on to me, sir. Then

we go.”

Richter held the boy close as instructed; Adam put his arms around the giant Marine. Gone.

“Cool,” Freddie managed to whisper after a moment.

The Island

“Sir! Geez, you’re breaking my ribs!” Adam was being totally crushed.

Richter finally realized that he was holding onto the boy for dear life, he also realized he was on a small tropical island, the patio was nowhere in sight.

“Holy shit!” Richter eased up on Adam, after a while he managed to let go entirely.

Okinawa

“He’s gone!” Evie sensed that her soul mate was

indeed gone, she stopped helping with the salad making and dashed out to the patio in a panic, Hanna and her mother followed close behind. Freddie clued them in. "Adam took dad to that island, they should be back in a few minutes." Evie sighed in relief; the Richter women had a few dozen questions for Freddie.

The Island

"It is beautiful here," Richter was close to speechless, "I see why you two like it here so much."

"Yes sir. It's a good place to do some thinking, and a good place to say to hell with the world."

"I can't believe I'm really here, maybe I should start calling you Merlin."

"Just call me for dinner sir, come to think of it I believe I hear dinner calling. Shall we go?"

Okinawa

Everyone except Evie seemed to jump straight up about a foot when Adam and his passenger blinked back into existence. The Colonel didn't crush the boy quite as bad this time. Freddie spoke first.

"So dad, how was the trip?"

"It was as you say, way cool!" Richter had the beginnings of a big grin on his face.

"Is it okay if I go?" Freddie asked.

"Yes son, anytime."

"Maybe we can all have a picnic there or something," Adam suggested.

"You could take all of us?" Hanna asked, her eyes on double open.

"Sure. Well, one at a time. It would take maybe five minutes for everyone. What's for dinner?"

Dinner was everything that Adam had long come to expect, the aroma alone could feed a family of eight. The meal was something of a trial for Evie,

she tried to copy the table manners of those around her and for the most part she did a good job of it. She sat next to Adam and from time to time he would give her almost subliminal hints about what to do. Evie only said “bloody hell” one time when desert was served; no one chided her for it, although a few smiles were exchanged. The Richter’s liked the small girl a lot, they knew she was doing her very best to be a proper dinner guest, they knew about her past, they also could tell that Adam loved her more than life itself.

The Richter’s had acquired a small upright piano, Greta had always wanted to learn to play and the steal of a price on the modest piano was too much to pass up. After the dinner was cleared and things put straight in the kitchen the family retired to the living room, Mrs. Richter prodded Adam into playing something for them.

“Go on Adam, we’ve heard you play before, you could be a concert pianist if you just tried.” Greta wasn’t exaggerating.

“I haven’t been able to practice in over a year, I’ll be awful,” Adam protested.

“Go on dork,” Freddie urged, “you can’t be any worse than my mom.” (bad choice of words)

“Why thank you, son,” Greta said icily. Hanna did the honors and whacked her brother on his head.

“Geez okay,” Adam conceded, “no throwing tomatoes or rotten fruit.”

Adam sat down at the piano and tried to bring back the many hours of practice he had put in at Quantico, hours that he had always enjoyed. What to play?

Moonlight Sonata was a good choice; it was like he had never missed a practice session. Evie sat open mouthed; her hero was making that beautiful music? Greta had to keep dabbing at her eyes, even the Colonel seemed to have something caught in his eye. Serious applause followed, Adam stood and gave a small bow. Greta despaired of ever being anywhere near as good as the boy; she consoled herself that the price of the piano had been justified by this one performance. Freddie

(who had the musical talents of an artichoke) punched his friend in the arm and congratulated him. “Good job, dork. Maybe you can work yourself up to chopsticks one of these days.”

Evie gave her hero a big hug and a kiss on the cheek; her smile indicated what she thought of the musical treat.

That night Adam took the top bunk in Freddie’s room, Evie roomed in with Hanna, it felt odd to be sleeping alone in a bed, not snuggled against the warm back of one another. It felt sort of lonely.

Morning:

Colonel Richter had a command inspection to perform, Freddie and Hanna had final exams, Greta was left in a dither. What about their young guests?

“Mrs. R, you don’t have to keep us entertained!” Adam explained.

“But it’s been so long since you’ve been here.”

“Tomorrow’s Saturday, we can all go to the island

then. Besides, me and Evie have figured out a side trip for today.”

“Where to, Adam?”

“Tokyo.”

“Do tell.”

Evie had been looking through a travel magazine in the Richter’s living room; a picture of the Imperial Palace had completely fascinated her. So why not take her to see it, for that matter Adam had never been to Japan either.

“It’s just for a few hours, Evie wants to see the palace here in this magazine. It would be pretty neat. Would you like to come along?”

Greta was having trouble adapting to the way that Adam could just flit about the planet like moving from one room to another.

“Oh my, I think I’d better not,” Greta responded. “Is it safe for you two, Tokyo is such an enormous place. Frederick and I have been there, I was completely lost the entire time.”

Adam reassured the woman, “If we get lost we’ll just pop back here. Don’t worry about us, we can take

care of ourselves.”

“But how will you find your w.....” Greta’s voice trailed off, she realized that the boy could do exactly what he proposed.

“Be careful, child.”

“Yes ma’am, we will.”

Tokyo

Los Angeles was a well-organized suburb compared to this place. Adam and the girl stood on the roof of the tall office building that the boy had zeroed in on; it was like looking down on some high tech anthill.

“Geez!” Adam summed it up best.

“There’s so many people!” Evie agreed.

“So where’s the palace?” Adam had to look far and wide, so did Evie. Eventually they found the place that looked like the photos in the travel magazine.

“Let’s jump to that quite spot, there’s no tourists or anyone there.” Both children had found the place that Adam described.

It was indeed a quite place, one that was favored by the unimposing looking gentleman who sat in the shade reading the London Times. Akihito. His Imperial Majesty, 125th Emperor of Japan. Where were those young voices coming from?

“It’s really deserted here, you’d think there would be a mob of tourists or something.” Adam had the feeling that they might be someplace they shouldn’t be. Maybe not all of the palace was open to tourists. Maybe not very much of the palace was open to tourists.

“Everything is so green!” Evie marveled at the immaculate landscaping.

“Come on, let’s walk for a bit. I wish we had a map or something of this place.” Adam wasn’t feeling any better about where they were.

Security at the Imperial Residence was very tight,

but it was focused on keeping intruders outside certain perimeters, security did not reckon on people just materializing inside that perimeter, the Emperor did not allow security cameras in the private garden areas.

“There’s someone just up ahead, maybe he can point us in the right direction,” Adam pointed to the Japanese guy who was just now standing up, the man gestured politely for them to approach him.

His Imperial Majesty knew instantly who the two intruders were, he had followed Adam’s career with the FBI and the events afterwards with great interest, he had always wanted to meet the extraordinary boy and now here he was walking towards him, he knew who Evie was also.

“Welcome, children. It is a very great honor to meet you both.” His English was quite good.

“Uh, hello sir,” Adam was used to being recognized, “we think we may be in the wrong area here. Are tourists allowed here?”

“They are if I say so, this is my home.”

Something was beginning to dawn on the boy; Evie had already figured it out and pulled Adam close to whisper in his ear.

“It’s him, the Emperor!”

Oh geez! Adam felt like a total fool, with some justification.

“Sir, we apologize. We didn’t mean to intrude like this, we should go now.” Adam wondered if they should bow or something.

“Please stay, there is so much I would like ask you.” The man seemed like a nice guy, not pretentious. Adam sensed no menace or hidden motives.

Criminy, this was the Emperor of Japan! “We really didn’t mean to bother you sir, we just arrived in the wrong place.”

“Then it is true that you can move from place to place with just a thought?”

“Yes sir, we should have done a little more research about where tourists are allowed here, we’re really sorry.”

“Please stop apologizing. I have been wanting to meet you for a long time, now you are here. Come and sit with me.”

“Well, thank you sir. That would be really nice.” Adam decided that he liked this fellow. Evie was having an attack of shyness. “I’m forgetting my manners, sir. This is Evie McDermond, she has weird abilities like I do.”

The Emperor bowed slightly to the girl and shook her hand, “I know, there have been many news accounts of her help at that terrible school incident, apparently the Australian government is seeking her return to her guardians.”

This was news to Adam, but then he knew that it would only be a matter of time. Evie’s eyes widened at the mention of her return to the pig people.

“She was very mistreated by them, sir. She will never return there.”

The Emperor only nodded solemnly and motioned his guests to sit in the padded chairs opposite his own. Before anyone could sit down both Adam and

the girl stopped and faced in the direction from which they had come. Two men were running in their direction, security had finally detected their presence.

Adam moved to place himself in front of Evie, the two security men only knew that two people had penetrated the perimeter and that they were now in close proximity to the Emperor. His Imperial Majesty seemed nonplussed as he stepped forward with his hand slightly raised, the security team skidded to a halt at the sharply spoken command he gave them. There ensued a short conversation in Japanese; Adam had no clue what they were saying. Evie did.

“He’s telling them who we are,” Evie narrated, “they apologized, a lot. Now he’s telling them to treat us as honored guests and that we are not to be disturbed. He’s going to introduce us now.”

“How do you do that?” Adam just had his first demonstration of the girl’s language talent.

“Screwed if I know. Smile, here they come.”

Captain Tanaka and his assistant bowed and shook hands with both Adam and Evie, the boy asked Evie to apologize to them for the intrusion. Evie's use of their own language to offer the simple apology caused looks of amazed delight to be exchanged between the security people and the Emperor.

Cool.

Japan's 125th Emperor and his two young guests sat and talked of many things in the secluded garden. The man had endless questions about the boy's life, the events that the Emperor had read about and the boy's accounts of what had actually happened. Adam held nothing back, he told the truth about everything the man asked him, what was the point of hiding things anymore? Evie spoke from time to time, but mostly she just listened to the incredible things she heard.

They were served the most amazing lunch that either youngster had ever had. Neither Adam nor

the girl were too sure about what they were eating (except the rice), but they knew that they were hungry and what they were having tasted really good. The chopsticks were a new experience; most of the meal reached its intended destination.

The visit concluded after what had to be the most exclusive guided tour on the planet, the tour guide in question was the Emperor of Japan.

“Will you come again? This has been a most memorable day for me.”

“Yes s.. Your Majesty. Next time we’ll come to the front gate like proper guests.”

“You were both very proper guests today, my home is always open to you both.”

Okinawa

Good timing, it was almost the dinner hour when the two tourists arrived back at the Richter

residence. There was concern expressed that something may have happened to Adam and the girl, Tokyo is a very big place. As the family sat down to meat loaf and mashed potatoes Adam was asked to relate the day's events in Japan.

"It took us a while to find the palace, we found a quite place to arrive but then we found out it was in the off limits area. A nice gentleman told us where we were." Adam shared a smile with Evie at this description.

"Was there any trouble for being where you shouldn't be?" Greta asked.

"Not really, we even had lunch with the nice man we met."

"Was he some sort of official there?" Richter asked.

"He was sort of the owner of the place." More shared grins with Evie.

"The owner? What are you saying, Adam?" Richter sensed what the answer might be.

"Well, basically he was the Emperor."

"No shit?" Freddie clapped a hand over his mouth

and apologized for his unguarded response.

“Sorry.”

“He was really nice, we talked for a long time, had lunch, then he took us on a tour of the palace.”

“Good Lord.” The boy could still amaze Richter.
“What did you talk about?”

“He’s followed all of the news stories about me since I started working for the FBI, he asked me about that sort of thing.”

“He said that the Aussie government wanted me back.” Evie added with real concern.

Richter nodded his head, “they’ve been pressing the U.S. for help in locating you.”

“Would they come here, would you be in trouble because of me?” Evie had nightmares about going back to the pig people.

Before the Marine could answer Adam responded.

“Evie, you’re never going back to that place, never. They’d have to come through me first and that might prove unhealthy, besides we could just jump to someplace else, we won’t cause trouble for the Richter’s.”

“They might put two and two together and figure out that you two are here from time to time, but it’s like you said Adam, you could be gone in a flash and we could play dumb,” Richter explained.

“Could they charge you with anything, abetting a fugitive or something?” Adam asked.

“I don’t know for sure, this is a sort of a tricky legal situation. An American base on foreign soil, who has jurisdiction? That sort of mess.”

“Maybe we should just go, I don’t want your career messed up for helping us, we’ll be fine. There’s still a lot of traveling that we want to do, people to visit.”

“Nonsense, besides we don’t want to miss that picnic at the island tomorrow.” Richter and the whole family were really looking forward to the experience.

“Well, all right sir. But I think we’d better move on after that, we’ll stop by every once in a while to visit, we won’t just disappear completely.”

One-thirty in the morning confirmed Evie’s worst fears, there were people at the front door and they wanted her. Adam was in Hanna’s room in a flash

telling them to get dressed and for Evie to stop crying.

“It’s going to be fine, we’ll be out of here in a few minutes. You know I love you and you know you can trust me. Now finish dressing and stay here with Hanna while I see what the deal is downstairs.”

“Okay (sniff), please don’t let them get me!” Adam turned back to the girl and held her tight; this seemed to have the right effect. “Don’t worry you silly goose, we can handle these moron’s easy.”

Evie seemed to snap out of her minor hysteria and managed a grin for the boy, then with a kiss to her forehead he left the room to confront whoever the Colonel was having loud words with.

There were four Marine Security people, six of the local Okinawa police and three civilians, there was also one enormous Marine colonel blocking the door with a .45 automatic in his hand. The shouting ceased as soon as Adam walked into view, all had heard tales of this boy’s frightening powers.

“Let me talk to them sir, please put the gun away.” Richter stood back from the door and placed the .45 in his waistband. “Okay son, I wasn’t going to let them get past me.”

“I know sir, I think we can work this out so there’s no trouble for your family.”

The Colonel nodded his assent and Adam stepped out onto the front steps, the people there seemed happy to give him lots of room. One of the suits introduced his self.

“Hello Adam, my name is James Farnum, I’m with the State Department, these two gentlemen here are with the Australian Justice Department, they have a legal warrant to take one Evie McDermond into protective custody for transport back to her legal guardians. We also have a warrant to search these premises if she is not produced. I’m very sorry about this but the laws of Australia must be honored in this matter.”

Adam spoke to the two Australians, “I see. Are you two gentlemen aware of the abusive situation

that Evie left behind?”

“We have no knowledge of such a thing, it will be looked into if evidence is forthcoming. Will you hand over the girl?”

“And if I don’t?” Adam’s smile unnerved both officials.

“We.. We’re authorized to use force if needed. We don’t want to by any means.”

“Indeed. Wait here for a moment, I’ll get Evie for you.”

Colonel Richter was about to voice his objections when Adam grasped his arm tightly and pulled him into the living room and out of earshot of the people on the porch.

“Here’s the deal sir, if we let Evie go with them they can’t come down on you for interfering with them. I’ll let them drive off base and then stop them and take Evie back. If we simply jump from here they might decide to arrest you and your family for aiding and abetting or something.”

“How would you stop them son, if they’re hurt or anything...”

“I won’t need to lay a finger on them, Evie will be perfectly safe. We’ll still have that picnic tomorrow. I’ll take Evie to the island and pop back here to pick up some food and water, then tomorrow I’ll come pick you all up for the picnic.”

“All right then, I guess that does sound like a good plan, let’s do it.” Richter didn’t really like it but what was the alternative?

Evie took things a lot better than Adam had thought she would, she was a sensible and very intelligent girl and when her hero explained the simple plan she readily agreed to it. She was no coward by any means.

“How far will you let them take me?”

“Just off base a ways so they can’t blame the Marines for anything. I’ll make their cars stop and then I’ll disarm them, then we’ll jump to the island. Don’t worry.”

“Okay, I guess. You be careful!” Evie said.

“I will. Let’s go get this done, then we’ll be at the island.”

Adam stopped the small convoy of three cars about two miles from the military base. The civilians with Evie were in the middle car, police were ahead and behind in the other two cars. All three car's engines simply shut down and they coasted to a very quiet stop. Adam disabled all of the police firearms and then welded their cars doors shut, sealing them in. The civilians were still arguing among themselves when the boy appeared and knocked on the driver's window.

"Open up, please." Adam requested nicely as the man rolled down the window just a crack. More arguing between the civilians. Adam decided this was taking too long and simply ripped all four of the doors off the vehicle. Evie was in the back seat with one of the Australians, he reached in and took her hand.

"Come on Evie, let's hit the road."

The man beside the girl was silly enough to try and restrain her; Evie took care of that by 'squeezing' him. He let go of her and proceeded with the urgent matter of screaming.

"Way to go, girl!" Adam exclaimed as he hugged

Evie.

Gone.

The Island

It was a perfect day for a picnic. Most days on the island were perfect. None of the Richter's were 'tanners', lots of sun block was in use. Lacking any proper bathing suits, Adam and the girl wore some of the designer underwear they had liberated from Rodeo Drive; no one seemed to care very much. Colonel Richter had a small waterproof camera that he had borrowed from one of his staff, he wished he had brought more film.

To be on the safe side Adam had given the Colonel the geographical coordinates of the island obtained from the GPS unit that he had used on his first visit to the island. On the previous day Richter had given a sealed envelope to his second in command that contained the coordinates, to be

opened if they weren't back within twenty-four hours. If something should happen to Adam his family wouldn't be forever marooned on the tiny island. The boy knew of this arrangement and agreed with the sensible precaution.

Freddie managed to step on a sharp piece of coral, opening a bloody and painful cut on his heel. Rather than have his injured friend limp over the hot sand to the camp Adam just 'lifted' him and gently floated him over to the shady spot. Freddie's mother took one look at the deep cut and decided that he would have to be taken to an emergency room for stitches, she didn't know that there were two warm blooded 'emergency rooms' wandering around on loose the island.

"Stand back Mrs. R, let me and Evie take care of it." Adam gently moved the concerned mother out of the way. The boy sat in the sand and cradled his friend's bloody foot in his hands; Evie put her arm around Freddie to make the hurting stop. Adam concentrated for a moment and then looked up at

his friend, "Try to watch where you're stumbling around next time, doofuss."

No more cut.

Colonel Richter felt ashamed to be a member of a human race that would see such children dead or used as tools for petty political gains.

When Mrs. Richter regained her composure lunch was served. It seemed to Adam that the woman was capable of producing a world-class meal while giving birth during an earthquake. The cold chicken and potato salad from the picnic cooler were indeed world class.

"Great lunch, Mrs. R." Adam voiced the general opinion.

"Thank you, dear. And thank you for what you did for Freddie."

"Wait till you get the bill, the cost of medical care is a scandal these days."

"Quite true."

The sun was moving towards the horizon as

preparations were being made to return to Okinawa. The first TLAM cruise missile appeared out of that setting sun, Adam almost missed it. He did miss it, Freddie saw it first.

“What’s that?” Freddie pointed at the small speck low over the water.

The moment Adam saw the object he knew that nothing had changed, they were still trying to kill him, they were trying to kill them all.

“Oh geez.” Adam felt a deep sadness, then a deep rage.

It was a nuke. They had launched a nuke at him and the people he loved. Adam fused the warhead firing circuits and pinched off the fuel supply to the tiny turbojet that powered the missile. Under his control the twenty-foot long device came to rest gently on the white sand of the beach. Looking far outward the boy could see that six more of the deadly devices were inbound from two different directions. He had to get these people to a safe place, fast. Or should he risk trying to take out all of the missiles? Colonel Richter provided Adam with

his first priority; the man knew in his soul that there were greater priorities than himself and even his family.

“Get Evie to a safe place first, then us!”

“But sir...”

“Do it! That’s an order!”

He did.

Adam was able to get Evie to the bat cave and then Freddie to his home in Okinawa. There, the senior officer’s military housing unit was full of men in civilian clothes, in a flash Adam jumped to the bat cave with Freddie; no one had seen them.

Something seared through Adam’s being just before he jumped back to the island, Evie had felt it to a lesser degree.

Multiple nuclear devices had eliminated the island, eliminated the Richter's. Eliminated his family.

Freddie’s family. All hope.

Damn them all.

Evolution

Things were very hard for a long time. Freddie had the loss of his entire family to cope with and at first he didn't cope very well at all. After the initial shock wore off he turned on Adam and blamed him for it all. Grief doesn't usually follow logic and reason. Freddie actually hit Adam; in fact he broke his nose, loosened a tooth, and blackened one eye. Adam didn't fight back or do anything to defend himself. Evie had to intervene with her tried and true method of stopping male aggression.

"Stop it you big lump! Adam was only trying to do what your dad told him to!" By now Freddie had indeed stopped and was lying on the floor of the cave curled up from the pain the girl had administered.

"Don't hurt him anymore, Evie. Maybe he's right," Adam said quietly.

"Bloody hell! Don't you start acting nuts too! You both need your arses kicked up between your ears!"

Evie did have a way with words.

In a few days there was semblance of peace and sanity once again. Freddie finally apologized, Adam too. A general crying session then ensued. Then there were hard decisions to be made.

“We need other places to stay,” Adam began, “remote places in other countries. A lot of places that we can shift around to fast.”

“Can I come?” Freddie asked, still feeling like an ass for pounding on his best friend.

“We want you to, you’re part of us. And I think you’ll have to come. If they get their hands on you again you will be a hostage. They also don’t want any witnesses to what happened on the island. Right now the radio is saying that it was a single accidental launch. They probably also think that we’re all dead.”

“Then we have to stay dead,” Freddie added.

“Yes. That and look for more people like me and Evie.”

“Do you think that there are more?”

“Just a feeling.”

“There are more!” Evie added with assurance. Perhaps she did know. As it was to turn out she would be better at finding them than Adam was.

There were indeed others like them. All were younger than Adam and were undergoing the fractured sort of upbringing that he had. Two had been spotted by the government and were quickly eliminated as one might dispatch a rabid animal. Adam and his two life companions spent a furious two years rounding up and caring for those that they had started calling the “New People.” The buildings of an abandoned tin mine in Bolivia served as the main residence for the small tribe for the next seven years. They couldn’t stay there forever, they couldn’t stay anywhere much longer. There had to be a separation, a parting. Homo Sapiens could not co-exist with those who would one day replace them.

It had taken years to gather together all of those who were like Adam and Evie. Years of hiding, moving from place to place. In the process mankind had its nuclear weapons taken away, all of them and all of their delivery systems. Mankind also feared that there was a mortal enemy in it's midst, an enemy to be hunted down. One final jump was needed to a place Adam had once 'seen' years ago on a beach in Hawaii. A place to where they could not be pursued.

There were a total of thirty-seven of the New People, many were young adults by now. Adam was their de facto leader but no major decisions were made without a show of hands. The final 'jump' was finally decided upon, to a more peaceful place. They would all go as one; there could be no jumping back and forth. They were not even sure that it wouldn't kill them all in the attempt but they had to try.

Another planet.

Another star.

A place where children could play and soar through

the blue sky.

A place where pain was not allowed.

2126 A.D.

The old man liked to sit under the trees during the warmth of the day. He was so very old, outliving his wife of so many years, outliving his best friend. His grandchildren, his great-grandchildren, his descendants took turns watching over him. The old man would tend to forget about his body as his mind took him to places that no one but he could visit, where he could visit with Evie, to talk of their children and their children's children. The beach he sat upon was on a different island than the one he had known as a boy, that one was gone forever. The sun in the sky was not the same sun either.

Of course the day came that he did not return from his travels of the mind. His descendants then buried him beside his wife and his lifelong friend,

remembering who he was and what was owed to him. The New People were growing daily in number, they drew a collective strength from one another that could and did on occasions move mountains.

One day they would return to the planet of their birth.

They were almost ready.