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The Healing House

Michael Brian Cundiff

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THE HEALING HOUSE



Michael Brian Cundiff, B.S.

A "Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Lindenwood College in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Art

1992

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COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY:

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FOR JANET

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Claretians,
My parents,
Lindenwood College,
Fr. Dan Drinan,
Curtis Lyle,
Barb McCullough,
Craig Cleeve,
Lorie Jones,
Melissa Balsom,
Jancen Bovick,
John Tieman,
Dr. Castro,
Jack Harmon

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"Remember, that if thou marry for beauty, thou bindest thyself all thy life for that which perchance will neither last nor please thee one year; and when thou hast it, it will be to thee of no price at all; for the desire dieth when it is attained, and the affection perisheth when it is satisfied".

Sir Walter Raleigh

Portland, Oregon

Wednesday, the Twenty First of June.

Colleen Mary Sage was about to leave on a two week vacation, and her husband couldn't wait. He waived good-bye, exposing a row of bitter teeth, watching as her executive friend drove her out of the driveway and down the street. Immediately, he went inside, took out his briefcase, and opened it up wide. He reached under an assortment of computer printout paper, bills, receipts and pulled out a canary yellow legal pad. Wedging his fingers between the last piece of paper and the dark gray cardboard was an envelope overstuffed with a collection of documents, including a folded up and stapled letter. He pulled the letter apart, and there in clean, carefully printed words, contained a complete account of his 'before' responsibilities.

Number 1. Call the fish babysitter. The Sage's owned a fifty-five gallon hexagon aquarium, filled with nine tropical varieties. Brian dialed the number printed on a white index card that was tacked to a S-shaped cork symbol above the telephone. When a elderly sounding woman came to the phone, Brian asked politely to speak to

Suzie. Suzie was a teenage girl that lived two doors down from the Sages. Her parents had the spare key to his apartment. Moments later Suzie came to the phone. Brian explained to her that he and his wife would be out of town for at least two weeks. Her instructions were to feed his beloved saltwater fish once a day, every day, keeping the lights on alternating days so too much algae wouldn't grow on the tank and to give the fish all the love and support they need. Finally, for her trouble, under the statue of Little Lord Fauntleroy was fifty dollars for her. Suzie responded, sounding somewhat puzzled, "That is very generous of you, Mr. Sage".

Number 2. Finances. Ah, the more difficult task of shifting money and account numbers. Brian had spent last Saturday at the bank figuring out what their cash value amount was. He devised a complicated yet equitable division of that amount. Fortunately, Brian had access to the banks sophisticated computer thru his job. There were so many variables to consider before the calculations. The phone account was listed in his name. That had to be cancelled so Colleen could not dail 'time and temperature' in Hong Kong or a 900 number and leave the phone off the hook. Electricity must be maintained to keep the aquarium's filtration system running. Gas could be cancelled. Leave water connected. Withdraw all money from savings and checking accounts to be put in

special escrow account with lawyer's assistance. All other details (there would be many) will also be left in the hands of his semi-capable lawyer. Cable could be nuked. Credit cards had been cancelled this morning.

Number 3. Packing. That was simple enough. The old suitcase was in the east side of the storage bin, stacked along with his badminton rackets, bird seed, and snow shovels. The suitcase was filled with underwear, socks, tennis shoes, ties, sweats, and dress shirts. He would wear his suit to the airport. The last items he tossed in on top of his clothes: toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, floss, cologne, razors, shaving cream etc. He brought along his tapeplayer. Tape case included the following tapes: Sam Cooke, Carol King, Joe Cocker, Otis Redding, George Winston, Chicago, etc.

Number 4. Call Dan for ride to airport. Brian phoned his brother at work. However, his brother had no intention of driving him. "Tomorrow, at twelve thirty. Yes, I'm leaving. No, I will not tell you where. I don't want Colleen to get it out of you. I don't know when I'll be back. Not for several weeks at least. Yeah, it's passive-aggressive. That's me though, I am kind of a passive-aggressive person. I found out about her last month. Let's say a third party told me. No, I'm going. Will you drive me or should I call a cab? I want you to keep my car when I'm gone. That's been taken

care of. Believe me, everything has been taken care of. Go ahead an' call her -- she's in Venezuela." Brian slammed down the phone in its cradle, picked up a red ink pen, and scribbled in bold letters on his yellow pad: call Suzie back. Tell her the fifty dollars will be under the smashed statue of Little Lord Fauntleroy.

Friday, the twenty-third of June.

Chicago, Illinois

Brian Sage had his hands locked behind his head and was staring at the pale ceiling. The room was as simple as a monk's. Bed, desk, bookcase, crucifix, door leading to balcony. He was on the third floor, and as far as he knew, alone on that floor. Everyone else was downstairs at a welcoming party, waiting for the rest of the volunteers to arrive.

Brian had voluntarily signed up in the Summer Volunteer Program to escape what he perceived as a unendurable, dysfunctional marriage. This irrational decision was made spontaneously; however, the process of finalizing employment took two months. The day his wife informed him of her trip to Venezuela, Brian called a doctor who had once spoken of the SVP in passing. Brian began the application procedure that day. The Summer Volunteer Program took people between the ages of

eighteen to twenty five and sent them to economically depressed urban areas to co-run summer camps for inner city kids. Brian assumed it would give him a chance to leave Oregon and solidify some decisions about his future. The decision was half made on impulse. The SVP was organized by Catholics, so when enrolled, he wasn't sure the program would accept him since he was from a different religion and had not been in a church for over two years.

The SVP gave applicants their choice of camps to choose from: Detroit, Chicago, Camp Daffodil (Wilderness Camp) New York, or Toronto. Brian chose New York. It was far away from Oregon, and he banked on New York being the exciting, most active camp. He received the literature from the SVP at his office. (He used his office as a mailing address to keep the correspondence a secret from his wife). The pamphlet he received disclosed a black and white photo of a decrepit public housing project named Towers. Towers was composed of four adjacent buildings twelve stories high. From the air, Towers gave the appearance of a large X on the city landscape. He also received, in the same packet, a list of names of people with whom he would be living and working. Brian didn't want to be pessimistic, but what were the odds of five strangers from various parts of the country, all culturally and ethnically different, living

together and being socially compatible? He anticipated it wasn't very likely.

The volunteer program mailed him his acceptance letter with a small profile of each individual. The profiles were compiled from the applications and interviews. Brian remembered receiving the list with apprehension, thinking - - what if one of these is an eager do-gooder that tried to get in touch with him at his home? Fortunately, that never happened and Brian found himself reading and rereading his acceptance letter.

May 25,

Dear Mr. Sage,

We are pleased to inform you that your application for the Summer Volunteer Program has been accepted. The location request part of your application was checked for New York. The campsite you will be attending is in Port Altruim, N.Y. Port Altruim is located next to the Hudson River near the Lincoln Tunnel. The camp is based in St. Teresa's parish. St. Teresa's church is over one hundred fifty years old and is on New York's Historical Landmark Register. The current pastor is Father T. Voss. The director of the camp is Clarisse Dominick. Enclosed is a profile of those individuals who also enrolled for our Port Altruim program.

Camp begins Monday, June twenty-sixth; however, there is a mandatory orientation in Chicago. Orientation begins Friday, June twenty-third. We will be in contact with you later regarding your plane tickets. We hope this summer experience will be a rewarding one for you. See you in June!

John Daniels,
Director S.V.P.

Stapled to the cover letter was a print-out list of the four volunteers, and a little paragraph about each.

Paula Rome. 22. Paula is from Louisanna. She just begun working on her M.S.W at Milliken College. She currently works in the Nilsen Respite Home in New Orleans. Paula wrote a popular editorial column at her undergraduate college where she won homecoimg queen last year.

Brian Sage: 23. Brian lives in Portland, Oregon. He has worked for the last four years at the Hughes Bank.

Carlos Ungamen: 22. Carlos was born in Puerto Rico. He is currently attending Princeton University on a scholarship. Carlos co-manages a baseball team in Trenton, New Jersey. Carlos's baseball team was a finalist in last year's State Championship. Carlos also plays saxophone for a

successful New Jersey jazz band.

Lauren Wardenburg: 22. Lauren is from Orange County, California. She goes to college in San Jose. She plans to obtain a teaching certificate by the end of next semester. Lauren has been a classical music teacher for the past three years. She also is a part time volunteer for the Green Trails Children's Home which serves a 100 bed L.D./B.D. population.

Brian was curious where SVP got those people. They sounded more like contestants for 'Jeopardy' than camp counselors. These small biographies indicated that they were successful and talented. However, Brian could not shake his stereotypical image of them being hippies, sitting in a circle, playing guitar and discussing their relationships with God. It was his opinion that these "do-gooders" were not part of the mainstream but rather social misfits collected together for companionship. A stereotype reinforced by his high school church group. He left Portland after bailing out on Colleen, not necessarily inspired to help children and, in the back of his mind, wondered what their motivation was. Then, for an instant, he wondered if all those people possessed some magic quality or mystical ability that would enable them to be more effective than he working with the children. Brian chased the thought out of his mind. He

had not worked much with school age kids, then again, what was to know? How difficult could the work of a child care specialist be? You just tell the kids what you want them to do, when you want them to do it. If they get out of line -- threaten them. Simple.

Regarding his summary of work experience to the SVP. It wasn't exactly resume fraud, however, on his application he elaborated about small incidents to make himself appear more knowledgeable regarding child care and resident life. (Okay, it was resume fraud.) Combine that with the excellent recommendations he got from friends and employees at the bank and a superb performance during the interview with John Daniels' assistant, he naturally was offered the job. What was there to know? How hard could it be working with children? Read them books, sing them songs, distract them with bright objects, have them play catch. More importantly, this was the opportunity he was waiting for - a chance to escape an intolerable situation and a vengeful mental attack on Colleen.

The noise of a car horn outside snapped Brian out of his daydream. SVP must have picked up the rest of the volunteers at Midway. Brian leapt from the bed and quickly went to the window. He stood back and slid his forefinger and thumb into the slit in the Venetian blinds, and spread them apart. He barely could see over

the edge of the balcony and down to the alley below. A door on a lightly colored van swung open and around fifty people fell out. They all started hugging each other and offering to carry each other's suitcases. This added to his isolation as he had never embraced a stranger. Which one of those people would be Paula, Carlos and Lauren? Where they going to sing church songs and have group prayer all summer? It was hard for him to determine what was happening below because his vision was half-way obstructed by a series of potted plants.

He was drawn by a desire to wander downstairs and meet the people he had become curious about, but he didn't. If they were a bunch of flakes, he reasoned, he might have a difficult time ditching them that evening and anyway, they would be together soon under the same roof. Since they didn't know where he was to begin with, he was safe. Brian went back to the bed to rest. He was restless and fidgety and could not sleep. He slid a cassette into his tape player and listened to side 2 of Neil Young's "Harvest." He started to feel very anxious again and tried to shake it off. He tried to pretend that he was on vacation. A summer in New York, isolated from those individuals who wished to bother him. Brian sat up in the bed. His curiosity to meet those people seemed overwhelming. He turned off the tape player and went into the bathroom to get cleaned up. The light in

the bathroom was directly above the mirror. Brian turned on the cold water and let it in run into the sink, he cupped his hands underneath the tiny waterfall and splashed his face, then he examined his features in the mirror.

Brian would stand out in Port Altruim. A white male in his early twenties, with light hair and dark green eyes. His face was one of those that always looked sunburned no matter what the season was. He had the ex-athlete appearance. Brian's fashion proclivity was toward ornamentation. He wore a gold colored necklace, a thick high school class ring which had a fancy ruby-looking stone. Brian dropped his ring and necklace at the side of the bed on his way down to meet the others. Nearly a half hour had passed since the van had returned from Midway bringing the rest of the group. Half-way down he paused in the stairwell and realized since he was the only member not to welcome the newcomers here, he may already be viewed as a distant, aloof outsider. Brian accepted this and decided maybe being estranged wouldn't be so bad.

Downstairs in the great room, a crowd was gathered. Brian spied the room through the crack in the door. All of the volunteers from all of the SVP's sites were here. It looked like a United Nation's meeting. A brutal mixture of color, size and fashion. There was a

big table of food laid out, with tiny sandwiches, cheese and fruit slices, but Brian was looking for an open bar. Nothing too elaborate, just a beer or something. Mr. Daniels, head administrator of SVP and organizer of the weekend, came up to Brian with a broad smile, "Brian, how are you? We were looking for you earlier." Daniels wore a dark blue suit and had big black spectacles.

"Have you met your group?" he asked.

"No, not yet. Do you know where they are?" Brian asked with sincerity in his voice.

"Let's see," Daniels scanned the room his squinting behind his glasses. "There, do you see that lady with the purple dress? That's Clarisse Dominick. She is your camp director. She'll know where everyone is."

"Thank you. I'll go see her now." He replied stoically.

"Fine, I hope you have a good evening" Daniels said after him.

Brian made his way through the crowd, squeezing sideways past a group of business-looking individuals, to the lady in the purple dress. She was black, very pretty, had her hair pulled straight back across her head, then it exploded about her shoulders and back. She looked to be about twenty-five, but was actually much older. As Brian approached, he noticed her outfit looked Egyptian and her complexion was flawless, smooth and

soft. She wore a long purple dress with stop light red slashes. Brian cut through some more people and edged up beside her, nervously. As she turned her head to him, he offered, "Clarisse Dominick? I'm Brian Sage."

"Oh yes. Nice to meet you Brian." She said in a collected voice, shaking his hand very professionally. Brian felt more like she just sold him a car, rather than meeting the person she would spend the whole summer with.

Brian spoke up over the crowd, "Do you know where the rest of the group is? I haven't had the chance to meet them yet."

"I believe they are outside talking." She gestered toward the door.

"Okay, I'm going to try and find them. Maybe I'll see you again later."

She smiled, "I'm sure you will."

Brian wedged through the crowd. He paused at the screen door and looked onto the alley. It was twilight. He opened the door and saw three people standing closely together in a tight-knit triangle, next to the mini-van. Two of them had their backs turned to him, but the one facing him, a small thin girl with brownish-red wiry hair, saw him. She smiled and he saw her mouth his name softly. There was no way of postponing this encounter any longer. He walked up as the other two began to turn around. Brian took a deep breath; at that moment he felt

the air enclose around him and become heavy, his ears popped; it was as though he was about to open an envelope containing a letter he wanted to read for years.

All three faced him in a protective V-pattern. He approached slowly, like John Wayne through swivel-doors on a saloon. Suddenly, a jolt of shock ran up his spine when he saw the second girl. He was stunned by her beauty. She had light brown skin, dark, dark brown eyes and long straight black hair that came down to the center of her back. She wore a light pink dress over her delicate frame with extreme precision of action and a subtle gracefulness. No dictionary would have a word descriptive enough to accommodate her beauty. It was difficult to access what her ancestry was, maybe American Indian or Eastern Mediterranean. Brian wondered if his dumbfoundedness was noticeable. He tried not to stare but he felt compulsively drawn to her loveliness.

The other male was a young Hispanic about his age. He was meticulously groomed, almost like he was in the army, and looked like he was into weight lifting. He had a thin mustache and protruding, square jawbone. He wore a white muscle shirt underneath an olive green work shirt. Brian smiled faintly,

"Is this the Port Altruim group?"

"Uh-huh," the small girl said, "You Brian?"

"Yeah, I am," he said and shook her hand, noticing

two small rings of dark circles under her eyes. She introduced herself as Lauren. Brian then shook the other male's hand, "Carlos?"

"Carlos." he said, shaking hands tightly.

"I'm Brian. Nice to meet you."

"You too, Brian." Then he turned around to the tall girl. Before he greeted her, she spoke to him, saying, "So, Brian, did you have a nice nap?"

"Pardon me?" Brian was taken back.

"We've been here for at least twenty minutes. When we asked John Daniels where you were, he said you were upstairs sleeping." Her emphasis on 'sleeping' was not subtle.

Brian just stood there looking at her. He was completely caught off guard. What was the meaning of this attack? He kept his jaw clamped shut. Mentally stumbling for words and finally retaliating, "as far as I remember, no one was in that room with me, so how would they have known if I was sleeping or not. Why would it matter anyway. Do you have our sleeping schedules prearranged? 'Cause if you do, I didn't get a copy."

"Well no." she defended. "I thought it would be a traditional gesture for you to have come and said 'hello' to us."

"That's what I'm doing now." he said, then turned to Lauren and Carlos, giving Paula his back, "How was your

flight in?" he asked pleasantly. The Port Altruim volunteers were off to an awkward, inauspicious, beginning. Brian wondered on what scale could he measure the 'extremeness' of this entire 'volunteering' blunder.

During that weekend in Chicago, a list of activities were prepared for the counselors. There was a ton of work to be done and a short time before the beginning of camp. The first order of business was for each of the sites to get acquainted with its members. Each group divided up and asked each other a series of motivational questions. The questions covered a variety of topics, including autobiographical information, motivation for enrolling in SVP and listing any future goals. Brian went through a similar orientation before he started at the bank so he was well equipped to deliver standard information in a basic, monotoned and non-revealing way.

Later in the afternoon, Mr. Daniels went into detail about the duties and responsibilities of each camp. He dismissed them all in the late afternoon. Carlos, Paula, and Lauren borrowed a car and went out to dinner, near the Improv. Brian had slipped away and sat watching the joggers on Lake Shore Drive and throwing bits of Waverly crackers and stale finger sandwiches to hungry seagulls. Clarisse went into John Daniel's office alone, she sat in the wooden chair next to a desk stacked high with papers and a box of SVP brochures. She managed to find the

phone and asked the operator to connect her to her number in Port Altruim, New York, and reverse the charges. Soon a young girl's voice came over the line. "Saint Teresa's." the voice said.

"I have a long distance call from Clarisse. Will you pay for the charges?" the operator asked.

"Yes, we will." the girl responded.

"You may go ahead." the operator told Clarisse.

Clarisse spoke to the girl, "Andrea, how are you?"

"I'm fine Clarisse. How is Chicago?"

"It looks like it is about to rain."

"Yeah, they are predicting a storm here too. You want to speak to Father Voss?"

"Please." Clarisse said and waited for a moment.

"Father Voss? Clarisse is on line two." Andrea said, then told Clarisse goodbye. A man's voice came over the line. "Hello Charisse."

"How is everything, Father? Have you gotten any concrete news?"

"Things are still a little uneasy. There is going to be an article in tomorrow's paper," the priest said.

"Any idea what it'll say?"

"No, the paper called here earlier. I didn't talk to them, but I left a message with Andrea to tell them not to run any articles until I have had a chance to speak with the family. We'll just have to wait and see

what happens."

"Keep an extra paper for me," Clairssa requested.

"I'm keeping a detailed record of all this."

"Have you met the volunteers yet?" Voss asked.

"Oh yeah, I was with them all day. Interesting group."

"What do you think? How will they adapt up here?"

"It's difficult to say. Um, I think they'll do okay, but, this is somewhat complicated. They're all young, early twenties, but they seem,... I don't know. I think they fancy themselves as tough guys, most of them. Except Lauren, she's a special case. I'll tell you about her later when we have more time. During the group discussion Daniels set up today, they were reluctant to speak on any personal-type issues. It's like they have intelligence but not warmth. They at least appear or act to be tough, but not Port Altruim tough. They didn't develop any kind of immediate rapport and that disturbs me a little.

"What do you attribute that to? Could it just be pre-camp jitters or that they're so demographically unlike each other"?

"I don't think either. They actually have more in common than past groups. It may be a competitive thing. It may have to do with one of girls being extremely attractive." Clarisse acknowledged.

"Well, you'll get them in shape anyway" the priest told her.

"I hope so" Clarisse responded, not sounding so sure. "Are you going to pick us up at the airport?"

"What time does your plane come in?" Voss asked.

"Two fifteen at Kennedy."

"Two fifteen. Yeah, I can be there. No, wait. Let's see. Yeah, I think I can be there. I have to go get Travis and Frankie out of juvy hall tomorrow at one fifteen."

"What did they do?" she asked immediately.

A short pause came over the line, "You ready for this?"

"Tell me." Clarisse said apprehensively.

"The elite P.A. police caught them throwing bottles through the back porch windows at the Healing House."

Clarisse shook her fist, "Fraaankie. NO! Wait 'til I get my hands on him."

"You'll have to stand in line behind his father. He had to get out of bed to go and get Frankie out of jail."

"Good. That'll be some news I'm sure the volunteers will be delighted to hear. The house you're spending the summer in has just been vandalized."

"Yeah. Listen, don't tell them who did it." Voss suggested. Frankie will be in camp this summer. We don't want the counselors detesting Frankie before camp

starts. He'll do himself in soon enough."

"Good point. Okay, see you tomorrow afternoon. You still have the flight number?" Clarisse asked.

"Andrea's got it. I'll be there tomorrow."

That night while the volunteers slept safely in their air conditioned rooms in Chicago, a violent storm hit New York. The storm had been moving northwestward for hours. The meteorologist had predicted heavy rains accompanied by damaging hail. Water levels went five feet above flood stage. Temperatures falling into the forties for the tri-state area. When the cloudburst came, it hit like a Nordic invader, militantly attacking the city. Waves of rain battered the city. Manhattan reported intense traffic problems, even more so than usual. Brooklyn had several thousand dollars of hail damage, mostly to vehicles. Kloane was pounded by the storm and even had a fatality due to an automobile crash. In Port Altruim, one of the residents living in Towers West had a window blown in. Several sailboats harbored in the Raritan Bay were damaged.

The turbulence lasted for forty minutes. It was a dazzling display of lightning and wild force. When it was all over tree branches and debris were everywhere. The sidewalks and streets were light brown, inebriated with rainwater. The cities quickly came back to their frenzy, and the planes flying into JFK were only slightly

delayed.

In Chicago on Concourse B, Gates 17-25, the volunteers waited in line behind a man dressed in a bright green military shirt and camouflage slacks. The rest of the line was made up of dark gray and navy blue suits, all of them had alternating light or dark brown briefcases.

The Trans World plane was powerful white with a red slash across its center and a bright block-lettered logo, and dark red hydraulic stairs propped underneath it. Carlos was excited to get the seat next to the tiny oval window, even though it looked down upon a massive silver wing and engine. On the strip below, a man with a tan shirt and black 'Jim Beam' hat drove a small tractor pulling carts loaded with luggage. A flight attendant with her hair in braids and a black bow tie, walked down the aisle to the service area. She pulled on a shiny lever and a small compartment opened revealing a simple metal bar. The attendant pulled on that bar and a bright silver coffee pot slid out. She grabbed it and disappeared down the row. "I thought she was going for a parachute." Carlos whispered to Lauren.

The humming of the engine was present over the sound of a gentle orchestra playing on the intercom. Soon the Captain's voice came over the intercom interrupting the soft music, "Welcome to flight six-thirty-seven from

Midway to J.F.K in New York. Please make sure all luggage is secure either under the seat or above in the overhead storage. If you do have luggage stored overhead make sure it will not fall out if the compartment is opened." Just as the voice stopped, a lady with circle glasses and short hair opened the overhead and a London fog overcoat fell flat on her face. Lauren bit down hard on her lip to hold back the laughter and shot a stream of air out her nostrils.

Next, the attendant went around offering ear phones that looked more like stethoscopes. The voice came back, "Good evening, ladies and gentleman. We have clearance, but because of some unusually high air interference and the storm last night, we will be slightly delayed. The delay shouldn't be any more than fifteen to twenty minutes." A jet of cool air blew down from the airhead. It came down Brian's sweaty collar. He lifted his face up to the cool air and removed his uncomfortable dress shoes. Leaning up, he pulled out the air sickness bag from the elastic pouch and examined it curiously to see if any instructions were listed.

Soon the engine's humming noise became more powerful and the volunteers felt the floor vibrating. The plane was backed out of dock and glided off majestically down the concrete runway. His plane nosing skyward, Carlos watched as Chicago vanished underneath, and the horizon,

still worn from the storm showed off a heart dull pink.

Kennedy Airport, New York.

Sunday, the twenty fifth of June.

"Where is he, Clarisse?"

"You think he forgot about us?"

"He's probably already been here an' left."

"Maybe the storm last night damaged his car."

"Did he know which airport to pick us up at?"

"No, he'll be here. He told me there was some business he had to take care of first." Clarisse said. The five travelers stood underneath a little overhang outside of the airport. Their scheduled flight wound up entering Kennedy fifty minutes late. It was already going on five o'clock. They had been waiting for their ride for over an hour and a half. The sky above New York was dark gray. It had been drizzling since they retrieved their luggage. One article that Carlos brought with him on the plane and never left out of his sight was his prized lap top computer. Carlos had traded in his beloved saxophone for his new obsession - writing. The band he played in was temporarily defunct.

From the air, J.F.K International Airport looked like a series of geometric shapes connected together by the enclosed passenger way. Terminal buildings A & B both had appendages stretching out to the various decks.

Their crew had been very accommodating and the landing flawless. They had unloaded and retrieved all their luggage. The street beside them formed puddles that splashed up water as the cab came by. The group stood quiet and sullen sitting upon a truck load of various colored suitcases and handbags. Brian took out his tapes and turned on 'Chicago's Greatest ' softly. The soothing melody of 'Wishing you were here' went well with the rainy atmosphere. Lauren looked down at the tape player, up at Brian, then down at the tape player again. She asked him, "You like that kind of music?"

"That's 'Chicago'." he exclaimed. His posture was defensive.

"Rock 'n roll?"

"Well, I suppose it falls into that category. It's 'Chicago'. It's universally liked. It's rock 'n roll, but it isn't necessarily loud or offensive."

"Is that the only kind of music you like?" she asked.

"Not necessarily. Are you inferring that there is something wrong with my taste in music?"

"Everybody has different tastes. Nobody is right or wrong."

Brian asked, "What do you listen to?"

"I like rap, funk, you know, I like black dance music."

"I don't believe it," Brian shook his head, "I view music as a way of relaxing, a way to put yourself into a peaceful state. I like music that has some sense or meaning behind it, not just jarring or repetitive noise."

Lauren threw her arms up in the air, "Repetitive? How old is that music your listening to? How many times have you listened to it? My music is now, it gets me goin', it puts me in a good mood."

"I thought you were a classical music teacher."

"That's what I teach, and I like it, but when I go to a nightclub I want to dance to a good beat, not listen to Shostakovich."

"I would rather be shot in the forehead with a dart gun than go dancing."

"You don't like to dance? Why not?"

"Why not? Brian asked, "Why it has no function for me. It serves no purpose. You look ridiculous when you do it. Notice you never see anyone dancing by themselves, in public at least, that's because they'd look crazy."

"I think it has a purpose. It's fun, it's good exercise, it's a good way to meet people. You mean to tell me you never go dancin'."

"No, I go, but not by choice. Anytime you're at a bar with a woman, it's next to impossible to keep them off of the dance floor. I dance, just because it's

expected, kinda like payin' taxes."

"Well Brian all I can say is when I hear the music, it moves me, it makes me want to dance. It's not just movement. It is almost instinctive and I have seen people dance alone." Lauren looked over to Clarisse who was standing, pulling an orange windbreaker around her tightly.

Lauren asked, "Clarisse, are there many nightclubs in Port Altruim.?"

Clarisse nodded and said, "Uh-huh, a few. I haven't ever been in one, but there is one close to the Healing House."

Paula had been sitting down on her plaid suitcase, she joined the conversation, "Why is it called the Healing House?"

"Originally it used to be a shelter for abused women and children. It had to be closed because of funding problems." Clarisse shook her head, disgusted. "Politicians are spending tons of money on these 'fact finding' missions in Bermuda. The things we manage to find money for and yet, there is not enough money to support abused women and children. There is a bureaucracy and government waste by the truckload. It's shameful. Anyhow, St. Teresa's rents the building now. The bottom floor is hardly ever used except for storage. Downstairs used to be a temporary shelter for people to

stay overnight or just a few days. The floor had several rows of cots, and some little playpens for toddlers. Upstairs, that's where we'll be, has a lot of room. There are six bedrooms. One has been converted to an office. There is a kitchen, a family room, a laundry room, two bathrooms. The stereotype of housing in New York is expensive, claustrophobic flats. The Healing House isn't like that. It's really spacious. I think you'll like it." Clarisse paused for a second. Her gaze on the steady flow of mist coming down from the clouds. For a moment she remembered the days of the shelter and one night in particular when she turned a woman away, because they were out of space and food, and she was the only staff member in the entire house.

When she continued, her voice was strong, her eyes distant. "The layout is like a big rectangle. As you come up the stairs there is a turn off, you could go either to the kitchen or the family room. The family room has another door that leads to the bedroom hallway. If you go through the kitchen, there is a door that leads to a long back porch, all glass. At the other end of the back porch is the entrance to the laundry room. You can also get to the laundry room from the bedroom hallway. So, it's possible to walk completely around the upstairs, making a huge rectangular pattern."

A taxi cab pulled up to the curb, the driver got out

and assisted an elderly lady underneath the overhang. Brian thought that was odd. On television, New York cabbies were often portrayed as crass and rude, yet, here was one helping someone. The old lady smiled and handed the driver a folded bill.

Everyone was still listening to Clarisse. Her tone changed from nurturing to garnished with spite, "The odd thing is, when they built the Healing House, they thought it would be a shelter for a long time. At least a lot longer than it was. You remember, neon lights went through a period of popularity there for awhile. So a permanent neon light was affixed above the front door. High enough to be out of the reach of vandals. The sign said 'The Healing House is Open'. It is the same type of light that would say "Budweiser" in a window of a tavern. It ran continuously, because the shelter would often accept women in the middle of the night after someone had roughed them up or raped them. That light still works, believe it or not, even though it's been years since the shelter closed down. The House still carries a kind of protective stigma with it. A couple of prostitutes work in front every night, I guess for some reason they think it's safer there."

The volunteers exchanged glances with each other and shared mutual apprehension. This experience was foreign and completely new to them. Slowly the realization that

they were about to enter a violent and volatile society become acutely evident.

Soon a mini-van pulled up. Clarisse saw it coming and alerted the volunteers to gather up their luggage. The van had to pull past where they stood outside the airport to find a place to park. Gathering up their bags, they dashed through the light rain and climbed into the van through the side door. Carlos slid his computer gingerly underneath the seat like it was some precious artifact leftover from the Holy Roman Empire. A large man in a black suit sat behind the wheel. He briefly shook hands with them as they hurriedly climbed in and found places to rest the luggage. He introduced himself as Tom Voss.

Father Voss was from Zanzibar, an island off the eastern coast of Africa. Zanzibar is part of Tanzania. Voss was orphaned at the young age of five. Catholic Charities sent him to the United States when he was six. Twenty three years later he became a priest. Voss never returned to his homeland but still carried an accent that people curiously mistake for French. Voss apologized for his lateness in a very deep, coarse, "Sorry, but I was detained at juvenile hall." They went around introducing themselves to the well dressed priest. Voss went on, "I told Clarisse yesterday that I'd be here on time. I called the airport and because of the storm, they said

your flight would be delayed. Still I thought I'd be here sooner than this."

Carlos looked around to make sure everyone had the baggage inside the van and closed it's side door. Clarisse pulled her wet hood down around her neck. With the six people and the luggage it was crowded. They did not have far to go, only as far as the Hudson River, but they had to face the New York traffic. Voss drove away from the airport and got on the highway. His passengers began to settle in. Voss explained his tardiness, "Yeah, two days ago I received a call from the police department. They had arrested two teenagers throwing bottles through the back porch windows at the Healing House. One of them used to be in our parish until his family moved to the outside of town. He still comes by a lot though. I had to go down and say that I didn't want to press charges. The police wanted to keep the boys at juvy hall anyway because the parish doesn't own the Healing House, we rent it. Finally, I was able to talk them out of it. The boy's parent agreed to pay for the windows, provided the boys work off the money at the parish. So it looks like St. Teresa has two employees for the summer who'll be workin' cheap.

Paula and Lauren looked uncertainly at each other.

"They're not bad kids. Don't be worried about the glass. The windows are not directly attached to the

house, they're on a connected porch. It shouldn't present a safety hazard. Just don't walk around barefoot. And, of course, make darn sure that back door remains locked."

Carlos looked over his shoulder at Paula and Lauren with a concerned expression. What had they gotten themselves into?

Voss continued down the highway, taking turns with Clarisse telling stories about their community and its people, over the sound of squeaking windshield wipers.

The area around the Healing House was set up like this. Directly in front was Todd Street which runs east and west. Across Todd Street is a row of commercial buildings. This business section had two story buildings stacked closely together with nothing between but narrow alleys. There was the Port Altruim Pizzeria, Farrell Beauty Salon with a fluorescent yellow sign 'Hair, Nail, and Cosmetic Products'. There was the large 'Home Center' sign with the N missing. There was a pet shop, a pharmacy, and the Port Altruim Bank. Further down the street the stores were closed down. Huge pieces of tan and gray plywood covered the windows, the only customers were the vagrants. At night the store fronts had black metal cages that pulled down from underneath the awnings. Some stores had a solid protective shields for nighttime that worked and looked much like garage doors. Those

solid black gauntlets provided perfect canvases for aspiring graffiti artists. Graffiti painters favorite subject was by far their first names or gang logos. Last names were out; graffiti provided immortality assuming you keep your cloud of anonymity. Above the store fronts were windows that had clay pots growing an assortment of flowers. Some windows were covered by white shades, some rich pink curtains, and still others nothing but a pane exposing some cluttered room like a wound. Todd Street was ornamented by street poles, hydrants, and public waste cans which read, 'New York, Let's clean up New York'.

The sidewalk down Todd Street was cracked and tilted. It was like a pavement quilt with different colored slabs of brown, gray, and rust. There were clanking grates that rattled under the feet of those who walked over them. Those feet carried the wealthiest assortment of individuals gathered anywhere on earth. Brian observed a woman in her middle thirties, around twenty to thirty pounds overweight. She wore a brown corduroy suit top and skirt. She had on hot pink leopard leotards and cowboy boots. Her bleached blonde hair was held back with a violet ribbon. Around her neck she wore a necklace with an assortment of rainbow colored plastic pieces. Two dangling earrings clanked noisily about her neck and around her wrist was a bracelet resembling a

slinky. The lady was walking down Todd Street with a pink cup, eating yogurt with a flat stick. An older man hunched over. His hair was thick and gray, combed straight back from his widows peak. The man's facial features were deep and cavernous, especially the lines running from his nose to the sides of his mouth. His eyebrows were manes of bushy black hair. He wore a flesh toned shirt and had hair protruding from all the sleeves and his neck noose. Long fingers were covered with black curly hair. When the man smiled he showed off a half-set of sharp singular teeth. Another man appeared wearing a black leather jacket in the middle of summer. Underneath the jacket was a white collared shirt. The man's hair was midnight black and hung down to his shoulders in a ponytail. He was bald except for a few strands of hair combed over the other side of his scalp. His eyes were intense, he had a goatee and mustache that connected together but all other facial hair was cleanly shaven. The man was walking at a fast pace down Todd Street and out of the side of his mouth a cigarette hung effortlessly. A young black woman with heart shaped gold earrings and a clean, pressed work uniform. An elderly man dressed completely in green, with a 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman' button and grumbling under his tooth. A short Vietnamese woman with a worn face, dark outfit and walking a miniature collie. A teenager with a

colored sweat-top and a fluorescent aqua carrying bag. Another teenager with a letter jacket draped over her arm that contained white letter's reading 'Altruim Tech'.

The volunteers appearance was absolutely out of place.

Cutting Todd Street perpendicularly was Duncan Street. The Healing House faced Todd Street. A block west was St. Teresa's church and offices. St. Teresa's, an octangular shaped structure built with dark red New England brick, was one of the oldest standing structures in the city. It had two large stained glass windows on either side of the vestibule and a concrete statue of the Virgin on a platform over old-fashioned walnut doors. Behind St. Teresa's was a gymnasium where camp was to be held. Behind the gymnasium was a baseball field. The baseball field was the only area around that wasn't concrete or steel. In between and north of the church and the house was a large, school that shut down twelve years ago. Next to the school along Duncan Street were public housing projects called 'Towers'. There were four Towers; North, South, East, and West. Towers East was badly burned and like the school, no longer in use. Towers West was closest to the church and the Healing House. All the area in between was pavement or parking lots. The biggest lot was in between St. Teresa's and the Healing House in front of the school. There were

several basketball backstops set up with rusty chain nets. At night there was always a game going on played in the streetlight. From the glass back porch Tower's West could be seen. The building was twelve stories high and no matter which end you stood on it always seemed to be leaning over you. Tower's West and East were a slightly different shade than South and North. Gangs developed based on the color of the building they lived in. Gangs, drugs, and unemployment were the big problems in Altruim just as in many other cites like it. There was something different about Altruim though. Voss knew it and Clarisse knew it. The city had a quiet yet determined spirit running through it. It was still a community where many of the residents knew each other by name. Many of it's inhabitants had escaped much worse environments and were happy just to live in the U.S. Despite the urban decay appearance, this city was not dead, far from it, and it really came to life during the summertime.

The van stopped in front of a grocery store in a neighboring city called Kloane. The volunteers picked up just enough food to last them a few days, until they got settled in. They bought a couple of frozen pizzas, bread, eggs, diet soda, lunch meat and grapes. Paula grabbed a tube of toothpaste just in case.

The volunteers were paid a monthly stipend of one

hundred and fifty dollars. That was a meager amount of money, however, they had absolutely no bills. Rent, utilities, food, gasoline and all camp supplies were all provided. Each of them had brought some money with them from home and in Chicago they were given seventy five dollars.

Driving into Altruim from Kloane, the new arrivals were captivated by their new environment. All conversation had ceased, faces were pressed up closely to the windows, amazed at the sheer immensity of the cities and population they passed. Time was now spent by looking out of the windows dotted with raindrops. They passed building after building. More buildings than they thought ever existed in the world. There were water towers and huge industry smoke stacks. Occasionally one of those stacks would have flames dancing on the top of it. It was dark now and the buildings were illuminated by dozens of street lights. Voss got off the highway and after a few stoplights they were headed down Todd Street to their summer home. The van pulled up in front and parked. The front of the Healing House was eighty feet long. The bottom half was yellow painted concrete and the top half brick. On top of the front door was the neon sign Clarisse told them about at the airport. Clarisse got out of the van and went to unlock the front door. The outlanders began to gather up their

belongings. Voss warned them to take the food up with them too, or else it would be stolen. They unloaded their possessions and the food and started making their journey upstairs. Curious neighbors and passers-by paused to see what the commotion was about. Brian was the last one up the stairs. He gently laid down the suitcase and white plastic bag full of food. Clarisse asked if he would go back down to the van and bring any remaining supplies. Voss was at the bottom of the stairs, he shouted up to them to have a nice evening and he would see them tomorrow morning. Brian caught him on the way down, shook his hand, and thanked him for the ride. (Even if it was extremely late). Voss left for the office. Brian and Clarisse were dragging the remaining articles out of the van when Brian got a chance to meet the office secretary, Andrea. Andrea was an eighteen year old who lives in Towers. She had been working for St. Teresa's for seventeen months. Andrea and Clarisse had worked closely and had become good friends. She helped coordinate all activities last summer and was anxious to see what the new batch of counselors would be like. Brian gathered everything out of the van and stepped back out into the cool damp wind. The neon light buzzed loudly over his shoulder. Clarisse introduced him, "Brian Sage, this is Andrea. She works in the office at St. Teresa's. We couldn't run the camp without

her."

Andrea smiled and made a brushing movement with her arm, "Tha's not true." she said. "Nice to meet you Brawn."

Brian set his things down back in the van. He gave her a businessman's handshake, "It is nice to meet you too."

"You're from...?"

"Oregon."

"Or-gon. That's right. Well I hope you have a good time putting up with those kids all summer."

"I hope so too." he said politely. "I'm gonna get these things upstairs." he said picking up the supplies. A box on top turned upside down spilling scissors, crayons and small bits of tissue paper all over the sidewalk. Brian cursed to himself, got down and began picking up the mess. The bits of tissue began to dissolve on the wet pavement. Clarisse knelt down to help him but he stopped her, "Don't worry about it, Clarisse, I can get 'em." Clarisse and Andrea exchanged on uneasy glance at each other. Brian finished pulling all the things together tightly against his chest, told Andrea that he would see her tomorrow, and excused himself to go upstairs. When he vanished inside, Andrea looked at Clarisse and laughed. Clarisse told her, "Be nice. He's new here."

Andrea covered her mouth, she raised her eyes to the upstairs window where the light just came on, "These people are going to be chewed up and spit out like baby food."

"Give yourself to something great, enroll under the banner of a high cause, choose as your own some standard of self sacrifice, attach yourself to a movement that makes not for your own gain but for the welfare of men, and you will have come upon a richly satisfying as well as engrossing adventure".

Stephen S. Wise

Monday, the twenty sixth of June.

That first night they choose bedrooms. Arguments over who moved into which room were minimized because all the rooms were identical. Every room had a bed with fresh linen. Every room had a dresser, a desk, and a sink, with a mirror. The Healing House did not have central air, but there were air-conditioning units that they set up in their windows. Carlos graciously set up the large gray air-conditioners in the ladies windows and fastened them in to the frames.

All the rooms were lined up so that the windows faced south toward Todd Street. On the opposite side of the bedrooms, the northern half of the Healing House, all other rooms were located including the kitchen. The kitchen was a deep and narrow room with black and white checkered wallpaper. The ceiling was made up of small styrofoam tiles. Plastered up on the left wall, a green and orange poster: 'First Aid for the Choking Victim'. On the right side was a long counter that contained a microwave, sink, coffee brewer, and stove. The counter was also home to a empty ivory vase and big jar full of

matches. Next to the kitchen the family room, office, and laundry room were located. Beyond that, the porch with its many panes of glass, some boarded up with fresh cuts of plywood and dark silver electrical tape.

This is how the room order went: Clarisse had already inhabited the first room by the stairway. Next came Carlos, then a bathroom, then Brian, then Lauren, and Paula had the last room next to the second bathroom.

That first night they also divided up assignments, who would teach what and when. Clarisse told them in a reassuring tone, that their responsibilities would be liberally assigned and they could trade with each other whenever they wanted. Lauren was given music class, she was the obvious choice for that, given her background as a musical tutor. The music room was located in the downstairs of Clarisse's office, it had a piano, was acoustically adequate and best of all, air conditioned.

Paula was given art class. Art was to be located in the small cafeteria to the right of the office in the gymnasium. The room directly as you walk in, completely separated from the athletic part of the gym. There was a long cabinet that ran along the east wall, the shelves were stashed with colored paper, scissors, and glue. Paula thought the first project for art could be pinatas.

Carlos was given the class called personal sharing.

Personal sharing was to be set up for the kids to learn about sharing, fairness, empathy and other social characteristics. Personal sharing had one of the private classrooms behind the gym's stage. Clarisse also informed Carlos about a nurse friend that would give a sexuality and hygiene lecture later in the summer. The nurse would be speaking in Carlos's class.

Brian's class was to be a collection of everything else, but with an academic slant. There would be an emphasis on reading and mathematics, but Brian had a freedom over the lesson plans. The camp day was set up like this:

8:00 - The counselors arrive on camp grounds for daily preparation.

8:15-9:15 - Camp officially begins. Individual group meetings. Group game. Morning prayer.

9:30-10:30 - All campers were divided into groups and assigned a counselor. All campers started the day with their assigned camp counselor.

10:30-11:00 - Recess

11:00-12:00 - Class 2.

12:00-1:00 - Lunch and recess.

1:00-2:00 - Class 3.

2:00-3:00 - Class 4.

3:00 - Camp dismissed.

The day was set up to provide ample amount of playtime mixed with learning and studies. Clarisse had already divided the campers into four groups. The division was random, except for trying to provide an equal amount of boys and girls and some age variety. The amount of campers each counselor got varied from day to day. Some children only came every other day, some went to summer school half a day. They all could expect around twelve boys and girls a day. Brian's list of names read:

1. Manu Hill
2. Alisha Miles
3. Nick Rodriguez
4. Danny Bushmann
5. Maurey Abarico
6. Chilvonna Aly
7. C.C. Cook
8. Blanca Newell
9. Maria Diaz
10. Ricaro Shipley
11. Maria Vanazquez
12. Lydia Paloma

Brian, along with the rest of the volunteers, memorized the list before the first day of camp and got to know the names and faces of many others during the course of the first few weeks.

Brian woke to the sounds of pounding on his door. He squinted to see the alarm clock. It was six thirty in the morning. Still attempting to regain his mental bearings, he heard Lauren's voice outside his room, "Brian? Are you okay?"

Brian cleared his throat, "What?"

"Are you okay?"

"Yes."

"Good." the voice said, "We're in the kitchen."

Silence.

Brian and Lauren both paused. Brian still hadn't completely awakened, but he managed to squeeze out this question, "Do you want me to be in the kitchen also?"

"Clarisse wants to talk to us."

He sat up, "All right. I'll be there in just a second."

Lauren's voice; "I'll tell her."

Brian went to the bathroom, brushed his teeth, then walked barefoot into the kitchen wearing only a plain white T-shirt and sweat pants rolled up to his kneecaps. No one was in the kitchen. Brian filled up a coffee cup with water and placed it into the microwave. He walked over and opened up the kitchen door that leads to the porch. The glass shards from the busted windows had been swept up, yet Brian did not risk walking on the porch without shoes. He looked upon the Towers complex.

Massive, hauntingly quiet this early. He surveyed the rows of windows and noticed one entire building had been boarded up, the victim of what appeared to be a massive fire. The microwave bell rang. Brian pulled a glass jar of instant coffee from the cabinet, removed the steaming cup from the microwave and retrieved a fancy, small, silver spoon from the drawer. Carefully, he tilted the jar of coffee over the cup, but despite his watchfulness, four times as much coffee than was needed poured into the water. Brian sighed, stirred with the spoon and walked into the adjacent dining room. Clarisse, Lauren, Paula and Carlos all sat motionless looking at him. Brian slowly walked over to an unoccupied chair with his coffee and his uncombed hair sticking up.

"Good morning, Brian." Clarisse said smiling. "Sorry to have to wake you all up this early. The camp usually gets started pretty early. Even though camp has not officially begun, there is a couple of issues that need to be addressed immediately."

Brian sneaked a glance over at Paula. She looked more painfully attractive than yesterday. Her long hair fell naturally along the sides of her elegant, simple face. She wore a long sleeved, bright red shirt, with a pale blue headband twisting in her nervous hands. With effort, Brian pulled his gaze away from her. He did not want to get caught gawking at her. Plus, she was SOOO

good-looking you could burn the retinas of you eyes out if you stared too long.

Clarisse was saying, "I realize that you are all out of your element here. Regardless, I also realize that you knew when you signed up that this wasn't going to be a summer camp. Well, it is a summer camp, but definitely not in the traditional sense. Two things have taken place since you went to bed that we need to talk about."

The volunteers leaned up uneasily in their chairs.

Clarisse continued, "First, I found out that there has been a warrant issued for Father Voss's arrest."

Lauren interrupted, "Arrest for what?"

Clarisse made a soft, pushing down motion with her hand, "This is something that has been coming on for a long time. I don't actually think he will be arrested. The police think that Voss is a revolutionary. That he will incite the community. This is a long story but the short version goes like this. As you know, this is a heavily concentrated ethnic borough. Yes, we have our Spanish neighborhoods, our Mexican neighborhoods, our Puerto Rican neighborhoods and although sometimes there are conflicts among them, basically they are allahhh....united by Catholicism. Voss has been here a very long time. He is much more powerful than say the mayor. Voss and the police department have a long standing feud, and to be quite honest, both sides have

done things to antagonize each other."

Lauren said again, "But what do they want to charge him with?"

Clarisse lifted her shoulders in the air. "I don't know. This struggle has been carried out in the media. Do me a favor, okay, do not speak to any reporters during your time here. Let what happens politically at St. Teresa's be independent from the work we are doing. Deal?"

The four listened to her with zombie like postures.

Clarisse was uncomfortable, yet there was more to tell them. "The rectory has received two death threats aimed at Voss over the past week. Although the likelihood that these threats are legitimate is low, you always have to take them seriously. It has been reported to the police and FBI but considering what I just told you about the police...." Clarisse let her sentence taper off. She did not know how to gauge her new housemates emotional/mental responses but she was on a roll. "Okay. Okay. That is issue one. Moving on. Last night I received a call from the nurse who is my boss at the hospital. She offered me a job promotion. I've already decided that I will take the job; however, because of the nature of the work, I'm willing to wait until after the summer camp to begin it. I'd like to start the training now, but I will bow to whatever your

considerations are." Clarisse knew she was being vague so she went straight to the point. "The hospital wants me to take charge of the unit that works with AIDS babies. There are anywhere from ten to twenty AIDS babies there at a given time. Understandably, some people would feel uncomfortable living with someone who is a health care worker directly in contact....."

Paula turned her shoulders back, "I don't have any problem with it at all, Clarisse."

Lauren joined her, "Me neither. Take the promotion."

Carlos was more hesitant, "What kind of work will you be involved with?"

Clarisse turned toward him, "It will be pretty broad. Total care. Monitoring, administration of medications, changing diapers, feeding."

Carlos continued, "I think that is fine Clarisse, just be careful, okay?" He was smiling but no one could tell if the smile was genuine or not.

"Don't worry." Clarisse said, "I will take every single precaution. Every one."

The group's focus turned to Brian who was transfixed on his image in the coffee cup. Without looking up he said, "It's fine with me."

Clarisse rested her folded arms on the table and leaned toward Brian, "Are you sure? Brian, I need for



you to tell me how you really feel about it."

He looked up at her, without a bit of inflection, repeated "It's fine with me." Then he glanced over at Paula to see what her expression was. Paula averted her eyes to Clarisse who said, "I am glad you all reacted that way. I won't start for a week or two. In the meantime, let's fix breakfast and get started on work." She stood up and walked into the kitchen. Paula and Lauren followed her. Carlos stood up, pushing the chair behind him.

Brian called to him, "Carlos...."

Carlos looked over, "Yeah."

"What do you really think about all this?" Not just Clarisse, but all of this?"

Immediately Carlos said, "You'll be fine, man. Trust me, you'll be fine." Then he too walked out of the dining room, leaving Brian and his coffee alone. Brian spoke into his cup, "That is not what I asked you."

One of the Altruims they met was a young man nicknamed Rooster. They met the night before camp started. Paula, Lauren and Brian were on the first floor of the Healing House. An open room with checkerboard tile floors and wooden panelling. This used to be the shelter part of the Healing House before it was closed down. A large piece of blue felt was spread out on the floor before them. They were making the camp banner. It

was Lauren's creative idea. A blue banner which read across the top, 'Our Family Circle'. In Paula's art class each child was to decorate a human shape cut-out to look like themselves. Then each cut-out was pinned to the banner so it looked like all the children were holding hands in a big circle.

There was a knock at the front door. Brian got up and answered it. A tall hispanic man with a goatee stood there carrying a brown bag. The man started talking in Spanish. Brian waved his hands in a slicing motion. No habla espanol. No habla. No hab-blow. Do you speak English?

The man nodded his head slowly, "Mm-hmm, most everyone here speaks English. Everyone here speaks Spanish too."

"Not me, I'm from Oregon" , Brian said, tilting his head.

"So, you are the token gringo". He handed him the brown bag. Brian took the bag curiously, before looking in it he asked, "This is unexpected. Why did you get somethin' for us?" Have you been introduced to the counselors?

"I got to know the volunteers last year. I drive the school bus for Fatha' Voss," Rooster shrugged, I do some work around here fixin' things, general maintenance. My name is Rue-sta.

"Rooster," Brian asked and he peeked into the bag, "Heey, Stoli's! Thank you, Rooster. C'mon...You want to come in?" Rooster came in. Brian revealed what was in the bag to the girls kneeling on the floor, "Look you all, this is the Rooster. He brought us a house warming gift. Want some?"

Lauren and Paula got up off the floor. Lauren pressed her arms against the front of her legs while standing up. Brian introduced them, "Rooster, this is Lauren."

"Nice to meet you...Rooster." Lauren said his name gingerly, careful not to seem affected by it's unusualness. "Nice to meet you, Larin'." Rooster, Paula, Paula, Rooster." Paula shook his hand and smiled, "How are you?"

"Dios Mio!" the Rooster whispered. Rooster shook her hand a long time. Obviously Paula had another fascinated admirer. Brian did not feel any sting of jealousy, but he did decide to watch this newcomer closely. He held up the bottle to look at the label, "You know," Brian began, "I knew a guy in Oregon called Rooster. He was tall, skinny, had bright orange hair and a big adams apple." Brian suddenly felt like he may have just insulted Rooster because the man just looked at him intensely. Brian quickly tried to explain himself, "You don't look like him, how... did you get that name?"

"How did I get my name?" Rooster asked? "When I first came to the United States I had to take English classes. That was five years ago. The teacher was a Mexican immigrant that was very fluent in English but had a thick accent. This teacher added the suffix 'ster' to everybody's name. Todd was the Toddster, Anne was the Annster, I was the Ruester."

"And your name was 'Roo'?" Brian asked.

"No, my name was Rudy."

"Ahh, I see, you were the Ruester."

"Right, the others in my class called me that and it just stayed with me."

"Did you know at the time your nickname was that of a barnyard animal?" Brian joked.

"What barnyard animal?!" Rooster demanded.

Brian lifted up his shoulders, "Nothing. Nothing. Would you like a glass of this now?" Brian asked.

"No, no. That's for you. Too much work to do now. Welcome to Port Altruim." The Rooster waved his hands.

"Thanks," Brian said, "Appreciate this. Hope I see you again soon."

"I hope so too."

Brian walked Rooster to the door. The girl heard them say their goodbyes and the sound of the door lock. Brian came back in and asked them if they wanted a glass of vodka. Lauren declined, she doesn't drink. Paula

asked, "I'd like some, but what do we have to mix it with? There's no tonic upstairs." Hmmm, there might be some juice though. I'll go check."

The rest of Brian and Paula's night was spent drinking vodka and grapefruit juice and assembling the banner. Lauren excused herself and went to bed early. She wasn't feeling well.

Most of the time Clarisse wasn't at the Healing House. She had a lot of responsibilities outside of her camp director job. She ran several projects for the parish and she put in about thirty hours a week as a R.N for the Port Altruim hospital. Clarisse was the R.N assigned to head the AIDS Child Care Unit in Port Altruim's hospital. She slept barely three or four hours a night. She was obsessive with exercise and often would jog miles in the morning before the counselors woke up. Her time was always accounted for, and she was continuously rushing to meet deadlines. Her tastes in music and clothing could be described as eccentric, her latest trend included fashions from Central African countries. She became intrigued with different shades of crimson, purple and violet. However, Clarisse didn't spend too much time shopping. She had other responsibilities taking up her time. One of those obligations was supervising the new recruits.

Clarisse had watched the development of the volunteers with curiosity and amazement. First, they were distant and indifferent with each other, too concerned with surviving to be open with their cognition and emotions. Most of their conversations circled around tangible and scientific subjects. Quickly they became more amicable and humored, yet always keeping somewhat of a competitive and sarcastic edge. They would bicker about personal habits, musical tastes or certain physical characteristics, then one of them would turn and do the laundry or the dishes for the whole house. They developed a hierarchy and role solidification with one new and alarming trend developing; the practical joke. No one knew who started them up. No one had any alliances within the group. No one knew anyone who was trustworthy. Clarisse was hoping the practical jokes were not carried to far, but said nothing.

Carlos was in the kitchen preparing dinner. The stove's four burners were all going. The oven was on also. Carlos walked back and forth checking different pots adjusting the different temperature knobs when needed. The porch door was propped wide opened and a small black fan was oscillating on the floor. Brian walked into the kitchen with a damp towel draped over his shoulders. He had just gotten out of the shower and his cropped blond hair was combed straight back, but he had

not shaved in three days. The two of them could hear Clarisse in the family room searching for something. Brian leaned up against the kitchen doorway and asked Carlos, "What is that awful smell? Is somebody frying bologna?"

"That's confidential. You'll all find out during dinner." Carlos said peering into a steaming pot.

"That bad, huh?"

"Bad? Say, don't harass me 'til you taste this. This will be the best meal you've eatin' since coming to New York."

"Better than Clarisse's noodle helper?"

"You want a sample?" Carlos asked holding up a wooden spoon.

"If I taste it, will I die?"

"Probably, but that's your problem."

"I guess I'll wait like everyone else. You know, when I cooked last, I noticed someone had left a soda can in the freezer, now there is a Pepsi stalagmite formed in the ice box." As soon as Brian spoke Clarisse walked into the kitchen, Brian pressed himself close to the doorway to make room for her. Clarisse went over to the sink, filled up a large glass of water and took a big gulp. Brian asked her, "Did you find what you're looking for, Clarisse?"

"My car keys? No, I can't find them. I think they

may be over at my office or in the gym, but I don't have time to go look for them." Clarisse brought the glass to her lips for another drink. "I called a nurse friend of mine, she is going to take me. You think one of you could get keys from Father Voss when he comes home, and pick me up tonight?"

"What time is your shift over?" Brian asked.

"Around ten thirty."

Brian nodded, "I can. Where would I go when I got there?"

"There is a parking lot near the emergency exit ramp. I could meet up with you out there."

"Okay."

Carlos asked, "Who's picking you up, Clarisse?"

"A new R.N. Her name is Cornelia."

"Is she good looking?" Carlos quizzed.

"She's married." Clarisse said matter-of-factly.

Brian winced.

Clarisse continued to hold the glass in her hand, "I was her bridesmaid. She's a...What would you call someone from Toronto? A Torontian?"

Brian spoke up. "I don't know."

Clarisse looked closely at Brian, "Are you trying to grow a moustache?"

Brian grabbed his face. "No, I just haven't shaved."

Carlos said from the stove, "You know, you would look a lot better with a moustache.

Clarisse agreed. "He would look good with a moustache. It would hide part of his face."

Brian spoke up. "You two would look a lot better without a moustache."

Clarisse raised her finger, "Maybe I want a moustache."

"Well," Brian said "I noticed you shaved your sideburns. You don't look like, ahhh, Elvis anymore."

Carlos shook his head. "Come now. Don't be cruel."

Clarisse stared quietly at him for a moment, then casually stepped over and threw the remaining water from her glass into his face. Brian's head jerked back, surprised at the blast of cold water on his skin. That was abrupt for Clarisse, but the physical joking has already started. Clarisse softly set the empty glass on the counter, "See you at ten thirty." She cut past him and started heading down the stairs.

Brian stood with a defeated expression. The water running down his face matched the wetness of his recently washed hair. Sticking out his lower lip, he blew droplets of water off the edge of his nose into the air.

Carlos, crossed the room silently, without a word spoken he handed Brian a fresh, farm white egg. Brian took the egg and peered into Carlos expressionless face,

then darted around the corner to the top of the staircase. Clarisse was just about to exit when Brian wound up like a olympic discus thrower and let loose with the egg. The whiteness of the egg was contrasted with each stair of the dark green carpet as it sailed downward. He watched as it traveled in a perfect pattern and splattered in the center of her pressed, white, nurses uniform up by her neck. Immediately Brian felt disbelief with his actions and wondered how he could blame it on Carlos.

Clarisse turned around slowly, her jaw was open, she mouthed his name, BRRII-AAN.

"Clarisse I..." Brian couldn't find any words to excuse himself. He ran into the kitchen and wet a dishcloth. Meeting Clarisse half way up the stairs, he began cleaning shell and yolk off of her virgin white nurse's outfit. She was stamping up the stairs muttering some undecipherable profanity. Brian followed her step by step up the stairs and down the hallway, apologizing and cleaning egg yolk off her with the dishcloth. He stopped short of her bedroom, where she slammed the door. Brian stood in the hallway holding the wet rag. He looked over at the silhouetted image of Carlos standing in the corridor, and said, "God, Carlos. I can't believe you made me throw an egg at my boss."

Carlos said, "At least now she's not worried about

her car keys."

Brian pitched the egg-covered dishcloth at Carlos, who ducked, and yolk splattered on the wall. At ten forty-five that night Brian sat in the passenger seat of St. Teresa's van. Lauren sat in the drivers seat next to him. The windows were rolled down and a night breeze floated into the van. The key was turned for the battery to play the radio. The radio station played a trilogy of songs from Tina Turner and was now featuring 'Conquistador' by Procol Harum. Brian had his back leaned against the door, his body faced Lauren behind the wheel, with her hair tied up. Every few minutes Lauren would wipe the perspiration off her face with a wrinkled paper towel. Lauren asked, "Is it after the time you agreed on picking her up?"

Brian nodded and replied quietly, "Yeah, but don't give Clarisse a hard time about being late, she was enraged with me this afternoon.

"What reason does she have to be upset with you?"

"I pegged her in the back with a egg. She was wearing her nurse uniform at the time."

You threw an egg at her?" Lauren asked incredulously.

"Yeah, because she dumped a glass of water in my face."

"Why?"

Brian looked out of the front window of the van and squinted his eyes, "You know I don't remember the details. It was fundamentally Carlos's fault."

"That was a good dinner."

"Yeah, we are having great food here." Brian agreed.

Lauren twitched in her seat, she looked over her shoulder at the large, ivy covered hospital. "Brian, did you ever have to spend any time in a hospital?"

"Not any extended time." He answered and began to remember an incident in his childhood. "I remember once though when I was a kid, my mother went into the hospital and my father brought me and my brother to see her. Children are not allowed to visit, you know. I don't know if hospitals are afraid children will damage something or be damaged by something or both. Regardless, my dad took us in right through the front doors. We had visited a long time and we were getting restless. When my brother accidentally ripped mom's I.V out my father yelled at us to go look at the newborns or something. So me and my brother went searching through the hospital looking for anything intriguing. Well, we came onto this one wing where all the doors had these tiny plaques that said 'In memory of whomever'. To me and my brother 'In memory of' meant somebody was dead. 'In memory of' is something you see in a mausoleum or a bone orchard. We

decided we had stumbled upon the morgue where they keep all the corpses, right?" Lauren giggled and tilted her head. Brian went on, "I can still remember talking to my brother. We were saying to each other that we'd never seen a corpse before. Then we decided we'd go in and look at one. We figured it would be safest to go in the room farthest away, so any nurses or doctors would not catch us. The hallway got darker and darker as we walked farther away from the main, center part, where the nurses were stationed. We passed metal tables, stacked up wheel chairs and a bunch of other equipment. Neither of us would have had the courage to enter a room alone, but since both of us were there, we couldn't chicken out. Sure enough, the last door on the left had one of those 'In memory of' signs. I pushed it open and we went in. There, in the bed, was an old lady layin' flat with her arms at her sides. She looked pretty for an old lady, but she laid there like Frankenstein on his slab. Remember that? She was completely motionless and had this head of flowing white and silver hair. My brother and I stood at the side of her bed, studying her. It was a very eerie sensation, and I remember feelin' very sorry for her. My brother said, 'So this is what a dead person looks like'. Just then the ladies eyes pop open and she sits up in her bed! And she says real friendly, 'Hi there, boys'. We never ran so fast in our lives gettin'

outta there."

Lauren laughed, "Oh, you two make the perfect hospital visitors. 'In memory of' means somebody donated a half million dollars to the hospital so they'd get a room named after them."

"Now that I think of it, my mother's bill was a half million dollars." Brian stuck his head out the window, "Why don't we see if we can go in there and see what's holding Clarisse up."

The two of them got out and locked the van. They crossed the parking lot and entered through two automatic glass doors. There was an ambulance parked there with the back door open revealing the high-tech instruments inside. A paramedic wearing a blue outfit cut in front of them. They went in the emergency exit and began looking for a directory or information booth. The lady admitting patients was busy, so they took it upon themselves to find Clarisse alone. They went upstairs. The stairs led into a hallway that had patients and hospital employees crowding it. A electronic sounding voice came over the intercom announcing phone calls. Fifteen feet to their right a man in blue hospital scrubs was positioned over a gurney. Brian tugged on Lauren's shirt sleeve, "C'mon, let's ask that doctor where we can find her."

The man didn't see them approach and Brian gently

tapped him on the shoulder. Brian said, "Excuse me doctor, can I ask you a question?"

The man spun around and faced Brian. He wore glasses and had a full dark brown beard, "I'm not a doctor, I'm a nurse." he said.

The corners of Brian's mouth turned down, he rolled his eyes to the side and said, "Oh, never mind then."

The nurse grabbed the gurney and went down the hall quickly and obviously agitated. Brian stood with his hands on his hips and looked at Lauren who demanded, "What did you do that for?"

"I didn't do anything. How did I know if he was a doctor or a nurse? I mean, they don't wear their degrees on their clothes."

"You made him feel bad."

"No, I didn't, not intentionally anyway. I just wanted to ask him a question, I didn't mean to seem rude. I could have said, 'You're not a doctor, but you play one on T.V.'. It was he that took offense, he was the one being disagreeable and nasty. I don't think there's anything wrong with male nurses."

"That's right there isn't."

"So we agree." Brian defended himself.

"I should have known from that story you told that you'd cause a ruckus in here. C'mon, lets find Clarisse." Lauren ordered. Brian followed her down the

hall obediently. Clarisse had not yet started her new position with the AIDS babies, so they did not know where she would be stationed. A few minutes later they tracked Clarisse to the third floor. Since the patients on this wing were terminal, Brian and Lauren had to call Clarisse for permission to enter. As soon as she saw them walking down the hall Clarisse apologized for her lateness. She said she had a few more reports to finish up and she would be with them as soon as possible. Clarisse wanted to introduce them to some patients under her care, but their were sleeping and she wanted to finish her paperwork. She suggested they go down a floor and look at the newborns. "Okay," Lauren agreed, "Does that sound like foreshadowing to you, Brian?" Brian pretended he didn't know what she was talking about.

Brian and Lauren followed Clarisse's suggestion and went down a floor to maternity. As they came out of the elevator, a man in a long white coat with stethoscope around his neck walked by. (This one was a doctor) He smiled a big, familiar smile and called Lauren by name. Brian was dumbfounded. Brian's eyes followed the man as he proceeded past them. How did a doctor in the Port Altruim hospital know Lauren? A tremendous sense of floating curiosity crept into Brian's nerves. "Hey, how'd he know your name?"

"Oh, I met him last week when I was with Clarisse."

"Where? Don't you think it's a little odd that he seemed so friendly with you?"

"I was here with Clarisse and she introduced me to him. It's no big deal. That doctor has got a good memory."

"Maybe he has the hots for you if he remembered your name." Brian commented. Soon he forgot about the doctor's comments but still held to the wondering, uneasy feeling. They continued down the hallway until they reached the maternity ward. Five infants were on display in front of the large glass window. Brian tried to get their attention by making faces and sticking out his tongue at them. They were uninterested. Soon Brian grew tired of this activity and went off looking for excitement, leaving Lauren alone to look at the very young children. He walked past a nurses station. There was a lady in uniform busily filling out a series of green sheets. He continued down a secluded path to another nurse's station. The hospital seemed like a maze. This was the older children's ward. He passed a room where a young boy in a wheelchair was watching television alone. Brian cringed at that. Around the other corner, there was a painting of Mickey Mouse smiling and holding out a flat palmed glove. Next to Mickey was a glass window about the size of a coffee table top. The window opened up on the view of a special

room for children with critical needs. The room was dimly lit. It was past bedtime. Brian looked in and saw a few beds that had oxygen tents over them. While panning the room he noticed a child lying rigidly on her back, up close, next to the window.

It was a young black girl about seven to nine years old. There was a bright swing-arm light mounted over her pillow that shone down hard on her face. The hospital linen was pulled up to her shoulders, her hands grasped the sheets up near her shoulders. Brian felt his stomach tighten and grow strong with sickness. The little girl had tears running down both sides of her face. In her neck was a small bronze hole where she had a tracheotomy. The girl struggled to get a breath of air. Her lungs expanded. She exhaled and again struggled to breathe in enough oxygen and more tears poured down her face. Every time she inhaled her small chest would rise, every time she exhaled it would collapse. The bright bulb made her tears glisten. Brian put his forehead against the glass; she was only a few feet away from him, but she was unaware of his presence. The girl wheezed and again fought to get enough air. Brian's mind went cloudy. He backed up from the window. He felt disorientated and confused that there was no one in the hall. He swallowed hard to prevent himself from vomiting. He knelt down for an instant then gathered

himself up and walked down the hallway with calculated steps. When he reached the main corridor. He heard a voice say, "There you are. Brian, where were you? I was looking for you. Your face is all messed up. What happened?"

Brian shook his head. "Nothing. Let's go outside."

"What happened?" Lauren asked.

"I saw some very sick children. They were in a room alone. There were no staff members around. What kind of hospital are they running here?" he asked, angrily.

"I don't know." Lauren said.

"There was a girl breathing through her neck."

Lauren asked, "Did she have a tracheotomy?"

"Yeah... a tracheotomy."

"Well," Lauren said, "If she had a tracheotomy, then she shouldn't have any problems breathing."

"This one had a problem." Brian said, then added, "Let's go outside."

The stars were visible and the night air began to clear his head. He again fought back the urge to get sick. Lauren lead him to the van and propped him up against it. She demanded, "Tell me Brian. What was it about seeing that child that made you so upset?"

"That little kid with the tracheotomy was struggling to get air. It was difficult. Like watching someone drown."

"Brian, come on. What can you do about it?"

"I like to find somethin' to do about it. God, find some way to help her. Have you ever seen something on television or a photograph that profoundly bothered you? Ever felt sorry for some handicapped person you see while you are out shopping or at a restaurant? Isn't there some time in everyone's life that they'll see something that just causes them to move to action?" his words trailed off.

"So, you can find some way to help her, but for now, you have to get it together. You're not going to be any help to her worrying in the parking lot." whispered Lauren.

"I'm not worrying. I'm only concerned." The glass doors to the emergency room opened and Clarisse walked out. Brian straightened up, took a deep breath. He looked over to Lauren, "Don't say anything about what I just told you." he whispered to her.

"Maybe Clarisse knows the child your talking about.

"I'll find out on my own. Just don't say anything, okay?"

"Okay Brian." Lauren said.

Clarisse came up to them quickly. She said, "You two, I'm am so sorry about this. Things got wild-busy in there tonight. Thank you very much for waiting. Guess what though, I found my keys. They were here at the

hospital, I left them last night." Clarisse sensed something was wrong. Whatever it was these two apparently didn't want her to know.

"How'd you get home if your keys were here?" Lauren asked.

"I didn't drive to work yesterday, remember? Cornelia took me."

"That's great, Clarisse, I'm glad you found them." Brian said calculating, "You ready? Pile on in." The three of them entered the van. Brian started the engine, put it in reverse, pulled out onto the road, and drove off under the New York street signs.

Carlos walked into his room after dark and locked the door. This was his favorite time of the day, the time he could enjoy the solitude. No kids, no campers, no noise. Quiet time spent alone with his computer. He turned on some music to stifle the clicking sound of the keyboard. He opened the window and propped it up with a narrow book. Carlos had not started seriously writing until his last year of college but had accumulated dozens of short stories on wire-bound notebooks from grade school. Some of his short stories were accompanied by pen and ink illustrations. He debated a long time over what the topic of his new work would be until deciding on a new style of driving he and his friends developed. He

set the computer on his desk, turned it on, and searched for that right disk the one marked: T.C.M. The disk was inserted and Carlos moved the blinking green cursor across the screen. A screen that read;

THE THEORY OF CONTINUAL MOTION

A MANUSCRIPT BY C.M. UNGAMEN

THE THEORY OF CONTINUAL MOTION WAS DEVELOPED NOT TO SERVE ANY SCIENTIFIC, POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC PURPOSE. IT ORIGINATED FROM A BASIC 'DRIVE' ALL HUMAN BEINGS FACE AT ONE OR MANY POINTS IN THEIR LIVES; TO AVOID TRAFFIC. THE THEORY NEED NOT BE TOLD TO EVERYONE. ITS PURPOSE IS TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO MEET THE FOLLOWING PREREQUISITES... A) ALL PEOPLE WHO CURRENTLY HOLD AN UNEXPIRED OR UNREVOKED DRIVERS LICENSE. B) ALL PEOPLE WHO ARE FRUSTRATED BY THE INCOMPETENCE OF 'OTHER' DRIVERS.

THE THEORY IN ITS SIMPLEST FORM COULD BE STATED AS SUCH: "IT IS BETTER TO DRIVE TEN MINUTES OUT OF YOUR WAY ON DIRT ROADS AND SIDE STREETS THAN TO SIT IN TRAFFIC FOR ANY LESS AMOUNT OF TIME." (BRILLIANT)

IT IS BETTER TO KEEP YOURSELF IN A STATE OF CONSTANT MOTION RATHER THAN WAIT STAGNATED IN A CRAMPED VEHICLE, IN THE HEAT, BREATHING TOXIC FUMES. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'RE IN A HURRY OR NOT. TRAFFIC SEEMS INESCAPABLE IN THE CITY. THE LINES, THE WAITING, THE WASTE OF TIME AND MONEY. EVERYONE HAS EXPERIENCED IT IN ONE FORM OR

ANOTHER, EVEN PEOPLE FROM NON-URBAN AREAS, LIKE FARMERS.

Subset 1. The farmer axiom. Why is it whenever someone asks a farmer for directions they never know where anything is. Don't farmers grow up and die in the same house? Don't farmers have to travel anytime they need something other than eggs or hay? Would it not stand to reason that farmers would know all neighboring towns by heart and even the shortcuts to get there? Are farmers like the French? They don't like outsiders coming in and asking them questions like 'How do I get out of here'? Now when I ask anyone in the country for directions I use the R.Q.C.

Subset 2. R.Q.C. The Rural Question Coefficient. An example of R.Q.C. "Do-you-know-where-I-can-get-gas? If you do just nod yes. Now will you point in that direction."

BACK TO THE THEORY. WHY DO PEOPLE DRIVE THE WAY THEY DO? WHY DO THEY GO TEN MILES SLOWER THAN THE SPEED LIMIT WHEN THEY ARE IN THE PASSING LANE? HAVE YOU EVER BARELY SQUEAKED THROUGH THE INTERSECTION WHEN THE STOPLIGHT WAS JUST ABOUT TO TURN RED, THEN SEE THREE OTHER CARS FOLLOW BEHIND YOU?" WHY DO THEY ACCELERATE THROUGH YELLOW LIGHTS WHEN THE CARS IN FRONT OF THEM BARELY MADE IT THROUGH THEMSELVES? WHY DO PEOPLE OPEN THE DOOR AND DING THE CAR NEXT TO THEM WITH THEIR DOORS? A SIMPLE RULE TO EASIER TRAFFIC DRIVING IS...JUST DON'T

MAKE LEFT TURNS. GO TO THE NEXT STREET AND MAKE ANOTHER RIGHT, THEN MAKE YOUR FIRST RIGHT, THEN HIT THE STREET YOU WANTED TO TURN LEFT ON ORIGINALLY. IF I HAD A WAY OF COLLECTING ALL THE WASTED TIME I SPENT AT TRAFFIC LIGHTS, I WOULD BE ABOUT FIVE YEARS YOUNGER.

Carlos heard Paula talking on the telephone. He looked up at the screen, mentally debated with himself on what he had written, then said to himself. "Naw, this sounds too much like raving." He hit the delete command and the screen went blank; he turned out his light and quickly fell asleep.

Paula was teaching her class. The older students were involved with pasting strips of newspaper, soaked in flour water, on balloons. They were laughing and flirting but working hard enough. There were several younger kids at the other table. Paula thought that this would be a good chance for her to become better acquainted with her campers. She passed out copies from a cartoon coloring book. The art class all wanted to color the page with the dog. Paula sat down and began coloring herself. A six year old boy next to her started a conversation. "Are you gonna color too?"

"I sure am." Paula said nestling down in the chair.

"But you are a grown-up. You don't color."

"This grown-up does." She told him. Paula believed

that there was something very therapeutic about coloring. sitting, pressing hard on the paper, scribbling, color choice, staying in the lines... "Pal-wa, does your kid go to camp here too?" the child asked.

"I don't have any children."

"Is that why you like playing here?"

She considered. "That's probably why. Do you have any brothers or sisters that are coming there this summer?"

"Do you want me to tell you a story?" the boy changed the subject.

"Umm, sure. I'd like that."

"Okay," he began, "A long time ago I was a baby. But I wasn't out around 'cause I was in my mom's tummy." The six year old paused made a decision on what color to use next, and continued, "And the other day, it was my birthday, an' my mom got me a 'Soupa' Powered Man' doll and,"

"You got a 'Super Powered Man' doll for your birthday this week? Is that your favorite toy?"

"Uh-huh, At my party, Mariel was there, and Jeanette was there and I got lotsa' presents."

"What was your favorite present?"

"My 'Powa' Man' doll."

"Why don't you bring it to camp to show me?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Cause I broke it."

"You broke it? Already? What happened?" Paula asked.

"Well, ahhh-- you know,--I--umm,--huhhh,--You know what?"

"What?"

"Pliers are kinda dangerous!"

Paula nodded, "Yeah, kinda."

The six year old turned his attention back to the job of coloring. Paula grabbed a green crayon from the pile and began working on the dog's collar. Soon the art class settled down to work and the light sound of children singing began emanating from below the office. Lauren's music class was located in the basement of the St.Teresa's offices. The kids liked it because it was air-conditioned. Lauren spent much of her time there even when classes were not in session. With the exception of lunch, Lauren was seldom seen. Sometimes if someone was to run into the office to ask Andrea for copies or something they would hear Lauren's piano and children singing. Carlos and Brian's rooms were behind the stage in the gym. Both rooms had door exits and windows that could be propped open, and enormous metal fans running continuously. Brian had the kids involved in a reading when he heard Carlos teaching next door.

Carlos had manic energy, and a bold, but non-threatening voice, when he taught. He spoke as he paced around his little room, "Anybody ever hear of Darwin? Origin of the Species? The man who sailed around on a ship called the 'Beagle'? You heard of Social Darwinism? Anybody ever hear of Natural Selection? Huh? It goes like this. Animals, and people are animals, are the way they are, because they are best suited to live in the environment. Okay? They can live the best where they are. A polar bear couldn't survive in the desert nor could a lion live in an igloo. Right?" Brian could hear laughter coming out of the room. Carlos continued, "What about giraffes? How did they get those long necks? I'll tell you how. Since all the trees had their leaves up high, the giraffes with long necks could eat, and the giraffes with short necks died. Then the giraffes with long necks had a baby. And the baby looked like his mommy and daddy just the way a lot of times people look like their mommy's and daddy's. The mom and pop giraffe passed down a long neck gene to junior. Since junior could reach the leaves too, 'cause of his long neck, when he had a baby it would have a long neck. Baby long-neck giraffes grew up and their babies had long necks. And the short neck giraffes..." Carlos left the answer open to some students, several guessed it.

"They died."

"Right."

A seven year old hand went up, "Carlos, why dint' the long neck giraffes take the leaves an' giv-um to the short ones?"

"Animals don't do that. You ever have a dog come up to you and say, 'Hey, here's a bone for you'. That's not their nature. Animals don't always behave the way humans do. They do in some ways, not in others."

"Animals don't use toilet paper." An eight year old said, this brought out more laughter, and Brian, in his room, shook his head and grimaced. He was trying to get his students to read a great story. He thought they would love it. The story was simple to read, the main characters were their age, it had horses in it. When Brian felt that they weren't reading it on their own, they took turns reading out loud. This still didn't catch their fancy. Brian didn't really know what to do. Despite his best efforts, his class the kids started wanting to avoid. Students would linger in art or music and say that Brian's class was boring.

Clarisse caught word of this and asked Brian if she could sit in on his class for a day. Brian agreed. Then he became very concerned with what Clarisse would find wrong with him or his teaching. Brian even worried that Clarisse would somehow be able to realize he had never taught before. The day turned out to be as bad as he

thought. The kids were restless and obnoxious. One pre-adolescent went as far as calling Brian, "A six pack, diet Coke drinkin, Oregon stompin', white." Brian had no idea what that meant. When the day was over, Clarisse asked for a conference with him. Brian was agitated and embarrassed. Although his peers did not know the purpose for the meeting, they agreed that they did not need any special intervention from the director. They had all established enjoyable, controlled classrooms. Brian had behavioral problems with students, while Carlos was casually teaching the 'Theory of Natural Selection' to the same group. Fortunately, the meeting turned into a helpful conversation. Clarisse was much more complimentary than he expected her to be. On the stair outside the back porch, she told him, "Brian, you have a gift with kids, it's just undeveloped. You're obviously bright enough to teach a variety of subjects. You may be better equipped than anyone else here to be an effective teacher. But, you have to realize, this is a summer camp. It's not regular school and this isn't Pleasant Grove, America. Try to think in terms of where these kids are, emotionally and intellectually. Life is tough in Altruim. Life can be especially tough on the young. Somewhere, sometime, someone has got to give them a break. Understand?"

Brian sat still for a long time. He sighed, thrust

his head back softly, it made a dull thud on the wooden handrail. He said, "I understand. Don't worry Clarisse, I'll get the hang of this. I will be able to do this."

"I know you will. I have complete faith in you."

"I don't know how you could. I haven't proven anything to you."

Clarisse leaned forward, "You're here aren't you?" she raised her eyebrows then leaned back, "I can't foresee the future, but I've been camp director for five years, and I know, I know, you're gonna be okay."

"I appreciate that Clarisse." Brian said trying to appear refreshed by her encouragement. "Let's address another subject."

"Sure."

Brian cleared his throat, "Danny. He seems to be having a difficult time in my class. He's not totally disruptive but he is not participating or communicating well. He doesn't pay attention. When I talk to him, it is like he is not listening, even if he is looking right in my eyes. Where exactly is he functioning?"

Clarisse immediately responded, "Danny has been diagnosed as mildly retarded. He cannot read. His ability to understand abstract ideas is somewhat impaired."

"And yet, he is bilingual."

"Yeah, that's not unusual around here."

"Well, I'd like to help teach him to respond better."

"Good. Let's get together and develop a program for him."

Brian nodded, "A second thing, the day Lauren and I went to the hospital, I saw a young child with a tracheotomy, who was really struggling to breathe. She was on the same floor as maternity but at the other end of the wing. My medical knowledge is certainly limited, but I was thinking, maybe there is something wrong with her breathing apparatus." Brian grabbed a hold of his neck while speaking. "There was no nurse in the room with her. She was in front of a glass window in a special ward. I can't seem to shake the image of her from my mind. Could you check on her for me?"

"Of course. I have no idea who you are referring to and I doubt there is anything wrong with her tracheotomy. She was probably just having difficulty adjusting to it. But I'll definitely check. Tell me about her." Brian slapped his hands down on his knees, relieved to be taking care of this bit of business, "Okay. She's on the same floor as maternity..."

The sun went down and rose again. The campers walked, bicycled or rode in cars to the gymnasium. They heard the morning announcements and said the morning prayer. They went with their respective leaders to the

first class of the day. Brian's class was subdued, sitting in the chairs sleepily or looking tiredly out the window. Thousands of little specks danced in the morning's sunbeam. Standing in the sunbeam, one girl blew spit fragments into the light. The textbooks had already been passed out to them. Brian came up to the podium, he spread out the text in front of him and said, "Open your books to page two seventy three. To the story 'Critter's Choice'." They did so drearily. Brian spoke in his clear, articulate voice, "'Critter's Choice' a story by Helen Balk," Brian paused and looked out at his class. "Did ya,...Did ya ever get the feelin' like you wanted to take one of these books an-" Brian grabbed the top of the book's pages and began to tear, "An' just rip it to shreds?" He pulled the entire text out of the book binding. The children stared at him in horror. Another teacher had lost it. Brian hopped onto a nearby chair and yelled, "We're not readin' today. Put your books over there in that corner. Go ahead. Do it. Don't carry them, throw 'em." He felt a sense of exhilaration.

Soon the class was standing on their chairs simulating surfing and listening to a tape playing the theme song to 'Hawaii Five O'. Beside them was a disorderly pile of textbooks. It was not exactly what Clarisse had in mind, but it would do as a start.

Clarisse taught them many things during those first days. She taught them about the Altruim customs. Lauren seemed particularly interested in any indigenous cultural customs. One day, when they were alone, Clarisse spoke to Lauren from her favorite chair in the family room, "You will be working predominantly with adolescents and pre-adolescents. In the Hispanic culture a lot of social gatherings happen within the family structure. They do a lot with their relatives. You know, aunts and grandmothers." Clarisse looked down and picked at the tear in the armrest. "The father remains the head of the family. He is involved in most decision making and things like that."

Lauren asked, "What about teenage dating?"

"Well, dating customs are very similar in the U.S and in Latin America. Latins seem to go out more in groups rather than one on one. I believe that chaperoned dating still exists in Latin America. Umm, the expression 'Tengo amiga' implies a casual relationship while 'Tengo novia' means a more serious involvement."

"Do any of the older kids in camp date each other?"

"Ahh, they do a little, but we discourage that as much as possible. It can make for some uncomfortable situations."

Lauren rubbed her thumb with her forefinger. "How important is being bilingual here?"

"It certainly helps. Most of the kids here are bilingual. They grew up in households where Spanish is spoken often, with people who are maybe first or second generation Americans. They learn English in school and from television. It's interesting though, people here have combined the two languages into almost a new language sometimes referred to as 'Spanglish'."

"Oh yeah, I've heard of 'Spanglish'. I suppose I was a little worried because my spanish is rusty. I don't want there to be any kids I can't communicate with."

Clarisse shook her head, "Don't be worried. You'll do fine. Besides look at Brian, he doesn't speak a word of spanish and he gets along fine."

The Healing House doorbell rang. Brian glided down the stairs supporting his frame using the long wooden handrails. He went through the first door and then opened the second. A middle aged hispanic woman stood there. Brian noticed she was very pretty but looked a little concerned. She began speaking very rapidly in Spanish. Brian shook his head and said, "Momento, por favor, umm, no habla espanol," The lady broke into another dialogue strictly in Spanish. Brian tried again, "Do-you-speak-English?" She didn't. She walked away with a disappointed expression before Brian was able

to bring one of his Spanish speaking friends from upstairs down. This seemingly insignificant incident disturbed Brian. He convinced himself the lady thought it was still a shelter for abused women and needed his help. His inability to communicate with her may have made her situation all the more desperate. An objective individual wouldn't have carried any guilt but Brian did. The origin of that guilt was the years of Spanish he studied in his high school in Oregon. Any student with four high school credits of a foreign language would be exempt from taken a language in college. So, Brian skated through his Spanish classes at high school putting forth a minimum of effort and often being a discipline case for his teacher. Now, when he needed the life skill of speaking a second language, he was totally inept at it. That night Brian took a Spanish/English book from the Healing House office.

Lauren began taking walks or bus rides whenever time would permit. Port Altruim was typical of many New York areas in that its residents relied heavily on public transportation or cabs. Buses were usually white with a sky-blue bar down the side, and tinted windows that shielded it's passengers from recognition in daylight. Cabs ran continuously. Advertisements for cameras or television shows plastered diagonally on their roofs. She would soak in the sights of the city as though she

was a momentary visitor. New York city is laid out in an intricate pattern of linear massiveness. Row after row of different height, shaped and colored buildings. Some were identified by red brick, some by fancy reflective mirrors. Some buildings had unbelievably complex architectural decorations, some were plain. Some had advertisements painted on their sides and some had stacks puffing white smoke. The great equalizer was windows, as many as visible stars at night.

One of Lauren's favorite areas in Port Altruim was where the land meets the water. The largest street down to the Hudson is Annunzio Avenue. There is a decrepit dock with several planks missing and many more rotted through. There is an immense abandoned bulldozer with it's paint cracked and chipped. Bits of driftwood, old shoes, pieces of carpet, cigarette butts, tiny rings off milk lids, smashed Molsen Golden cans, styrofoam blocks that have been released from underneath floating docks, all caught up in a web of tall, thin, light brown weeds with feathery clubs on top. There is a proud, singular pole protruding out of the water, a resting stop for seagulls who busily comb the shore for food. The breeze off the Atlantic-fed water is continuous and cool. A remote welding shop over the hill provides a continuous metallic drum in that breeze. At nights when Lauren couldn't sleep, she would climb into her robe and tip-toe

to the back porch. There, in the security of a warm robe, she would look out onto the lighted windows at Towers, every so often shivering at the eerie whistle of wind blowing through the pieces of plywood and glass. The time when the group socialized the most was during dinner. Usually Clarisse was at the hospital at dinner time, although occasionally, like this evening, she sat with her friends. It was Lauren's turn to cook and she made Caesar salad. The conversation centered on campers. Brian was quiet listening to the others speak of Ernesto, Frankie, Hilena and others. Brian was continuously preoccupied by the vision of the child with the tracheotomy. He felt as though the memory of her face would be only an instant away in his memory for all the years of his life. He daydreamed about bringing her toys at the hospital. Paula asked Clarisse, "What do you do with a student that refuses to work or is very frustrating and disruptive?"

"Are you speaking of someone specifically?"

"Frankie-steins monster."

"Yeah, I've come close to killing him a few times myself." Clarisse admitted freely. Then she answered Paula's question seriously. "There is no cookbook approach. Basically because you have to account for individual differences. Of course, all responsible teachers adhere to certain societal rules, for example,

no corporal punishment."

"Is part of the problem, people not understanding the adolescent process?" Lauren asked.

Clarisse nodded, "I think so. The trouble is, parents have gotten accustomed to certain ways of dealing with their kids, but when their children turn into adults, you need to begin to change the ways of interaction. Certainly negotiation plays an intricate role. Also, sometimes people need to be reminded that even in the ideal circumstances teaching and parenting will be difficult."

"A lot of the conditions around here are less than ideal," came the editorial comment from Carlos.

"You're right." Clarisse admitted, "I think the kids here are doing remarkably well considering some of their disadvantages."

"I agree." Brian spoke up loudly. His first and bold comment took the group by surprise. Brian had been increasingly thoughtful at home and alarmingly eccentric at camp. Clarisse viewed these changes as part of maturation. Paula secretly thought Brian was simply getting weirder.

"What we are hopefully able to achieve," Clarisse started again, "is a family atmosphere, emphasizing academics, spirituality, umm, some socialization."

Carlos proposed this question, "So, if we are

offering what is so desperately needed. Something that is paradise for kids. Paradise, why would any child act out?"

Clarisse paused, thought, then responded, "Several reasons. Now, I don't have any scientific examples of why, but part of the difficulty of working with kids is it's impossible to measure some things with a bell curve. To answer your question, Carlos, they act out for attention. They act out to fulfill their role, or their perceived role. They act out because they are hurting and their wounds are so deep that they are unable to ascertain why they behave the way they do." Again Clarisse paused, then brought on her summation. "If they trust you and like you, then they may want to test you. The best way to do that is to see how far you'll be pushed and to see how you respond when the heat is turned up. So, it's time to put on your emotional armor and ask yourself, 'Am I psychologically sound enough to handle it?'"

"Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend,
and his excellence is invaluable".

The Apocrypha

Tuesday, the eleventh of July

Bodies turned sideways as they passed in the narrow hall. Everybody was hurriedly shuffling this morning. Clarisse had not exaggerated about there being excessive responsibilities. It seemed that there was so many activities to take care of that St. Teresa's could use an additional four volunteers. Brian nicknamed himself 'The Man with Many Errands' and was on the lower floor searching through a storage closet.

The weather had been very mild, very pleasant, ever since the thunderstorms two weeks earlier. Most everyone in Altruim forgot there ever was a storm, however the people in Kloane did not. Kloane was a 'clone' of Port Altruim, only larger in population and somewhat more economically affluent. Kloane, only about twelve miles away from Altruim, was hit severely by the storm. Where Altruim had residents lose some windows Kloane lost electrical power and suffered extensive damage. The gymnasium where their summer camp was to be held flooded, and it did not look likely that it would be re-opened soon.

The night before, the director of Kloane's camp

called Clarisse and asked if they could have access to Altruim's gym until the flood repairs were finalized. Clarisse was reluctant to share her gym. Furthermore, Altruim was pressed for space itself and Kloane's director had done something last year which made the relationship between the two camps and even the two cities strained. Jokes about Port Altruim were and had been commonplace in Kloane for years. The Kloane kids called them 'Fart Alldumb' and the adults nicknames were not any more endearing. Kloane looked upon Altruim as a small, dirty and ineffectual city, incapable of achieving prosperity and doomed to mediocrity.

Despite her dislike for Kloane and the camp director Juan, Clarisse agreed to let them use the gym on a limited basis. Although Clarisse would have preferred to keep the gym for themselves, she didn't want the Kloane children to have camp canceled. It was understood that on certain specified days, such as today, the two camps would share the gymnasium and ballfield. It would be cramped but they would make do. The remaining chore would be to tell the counselors what Juan had done last year. Clarisse struggled to find the correct words for her counselors. Words that would not incite more conflicting feelings between the two rival camps.

Early in the morning Lauren was in the back of the Healing House doing some laundry. Paula was on the curb

outside with some girl from camp, talking, laughing. Carlos was at the kitchen table cutting animal shapes out of construction paper. Frankie was at the table with him speaking excitedly, although he knew Carlos was only half listening to him. Every few minutes Carlos would look up at him and say, "Oh, really" then turn back to his activity or check the clock to see how much longer before camp began. Frankie had lived in Port Altruim almost all his life. In the last few years his father's business became more successful and they moved outside of the city. Frankie still hung on to his old social structure in Altruim. When Frankie was much younger, his peers teased him continuously about his freckles and wiry hair. That badgering made Frankie extremely sensitive about his appearance. As he grew older, Frankie discovered that he could gain his classmate's attention by acting up. When Frankie got older his freckles disappeared into a tan complexion, his hair was cut in the current fashion, but his trouble making had become a life long pattern. The only reason he was able to continue to get away with so much trouble raising was his humorous demeanor. Even the toughest teachers shied away from verbal confrontations or trading comments with Frankie.

Clarisse came into the kitchen in her red and blue jogging outfit. She pulled out a chair from the table and sat down quickly. Frankie paused from his dialogue

to listen to her. She wiped her forehead with a pastel colored paper towel and said, "Carlos, today another camp will be spending part of the day with us." She folded her hands together, then added. "In the gym." Carlos looked up annoyed, "Why? Who's camp?"

"First," Clarisse said defensively, "It is because their gym has been flooded and is currently considered unusable. Secondly, we're doing a favor for a neighboring city named Kloane." Frankie's eyes grew wide with Clarisse's words. Before he exploded into an extremely verbal protest, Clarisse cut him off sharp, "You don't have a problem with that."

Frankie exhaled and gave a passive smile, "Heh, no Clarisse. No problem."

Carlos noticed Frankie looking nervous. His eyes went from Clarisse to Frankie then back to Clarisse. Clarisse and Frankie stared at each other. Obviously, something happened with this second camp that Clarisse and Frankie knew about, and yet Clarisse didn't want him to know. Carlos figured he could get the information out of Frankie later. (That shouldn't be too hard.) He felt twinging curiosity about this new situation, and maybe even more unusual, a powerful sense that territory was about to be invaded. He didn't want those emotions to surface so he complacently replied, "That's fine Clarisse. Just let me know if you need anything." He

was nonchalant now.

Just then, Brian came through the door fumbling through a dusty cardboard box. "Clarisse, I found these old workbooks downstairs. There is all kinds of stuff down there. A dilapidated bike, an old aquarium, a set of drums and bongos. They have some crossword puzzles and mazes. You think we can make some copies for me to give to the kids to keep them occupied during the times I'm involved with something else?" Clarisse took one of the magazines out of the box, flipped through the pages. "Yeah Brian, I don't know why not. Just mark the ones you want copied and I'll get to it later today." Frankie butted into the conversation, "Don't rely on worksheets for a teaching tool Brian, they're proven not to work and your students may see it as busy work..."

Brian pointed a stern finger at him, but before he could respond Clarisse interrupted him saying, "I could pass them along to Andrea, if you'd like."

Brian shrugged, "You don't have to do that. I can take care of it myself."

"No, I'll do it. I just don't have time right now. You need them today?"

"No, I don't need them today." Brian scanned his friends at the table, they seemed to have peculiar expressions on their faces, expressions Brian couldn't decipher. He started thinking that he may have walked in

on a private conversation, or maybe these people were speaking about him. He explained himself slowly, carefully matching each of their gazes, "I just have several different kids working at different paces. When one finishes early, I like to keep 'em busy, so as not to have any mischievousness or nonsense." Brian paused and looked at Frankie. Frankie had an exceptionally intense expression on his face and Brian now wondered if Frankie was picking up too many 'trade' secrets by spending so much personal time with the counselors.

Clarisse placed the magazine back in the box, "That sounds like a good idea. I'll get to it later today or tomorrow."

Brian turned with the box and began to exit the room, "Okay, but there's no rush. Whenever."

"Brian." Clarisse called him back. Brian turned and looked over his shoulder, "Yeah?" "Umm," Clarisse paused for a second, "We'll be having another camp join us here for a few days. They'll bring their own counselors of course." Brian looked at Clarisse, then he looked at Carlos and Frankie. They all had the same precise expression on their faces. Brian realized this must have been the conversation he walked in on. He hesitated, then said, "Okay, Clarisse." Brian walked out shaking his head. Clarisse paused for a moment, looked up at Carlos and Frankie. They met her glance

silently, then she pushed her chair back and went out herself. She had a lot to do today.

Over at the gym the camp day had begun. Clarisse was in her office on the phone. The counselors were in their various rooms. Brian was standing on a fold-out chair, shouting instructions to the class of children who were running chaotically around him. Lauren was sitting at the piano in her music room, rows of children singing in front of her. Carlos had a huge picture of an dinosaur skeleton up on the wall, and was naming different bones. Paula was sitting cross-legged, holding up a book and reading it softly to her class. The children were sitting quietly in a circle, listening to the story and examining the illustrations when Paula held up the book.

During first break, kids were running around the parking lot, screaming, throwing a purple rubber ball at each other. Brian was sitting casually on the table in his room. Standing next to him was Carlos, arms folded, and Frankie, who was delighted to have full attention given to him. These three were alone in the solitude room. "Okay Frankie, tell us what's goin' on."

"I don't know if I should," Frankie said. "I mean, earlier Clarisse acted as though she didn't want me to say anything."

"What happened with this other camp? I mean it.

I want to know, right now." Carlos asserted, grabbing Frankie by his neck collar.

"Alright," he agreed and instantly Frankie's voice became serious. "Last year during the festival, the counselors from Atruim and Kloane planned a baseball game. And we practiced all summer long. We weren't great but we felt like we could be, you know, competitors. During the game, the people from Kloane were callin' us names. I don't know why, we had not done anything to them. One older guy poured beer on one of the girl players from Altruim."

"No way. I can't believe the adults allowed that." Brian fumed.

"That borders on child abuse." Carlos said.

"Yes, it happened. That's not the worst part. The game, we lost the game by a score of thirty-three to zip."

"Thirty-three to zero?" Carlos asked, "Were you playin' baseball or football."

"Baseball." Frankie retorted, seemingly offended by the sarcasm. "That was the worst days of my life. Everyone in the bleachers was laughing at us. We had...things just never were the same here since. There was always a kind of competition between us. But now, Kloane has just pulled way ahead."

"Thirty-three to nothin'? How did it happen?"

"They just killed us."

"I can't believe the coach would allow that to go on."

"The coach?" Frankie said, "The coach wasn't playin'. He had no control over it."

"No," Brian said raising up from the table, "I'm talking about the coach from the other team. It's just as much as a negative effect on the winners as it would be to the other team. What's the point of intentionally running up the score to humiliate the other team? What about teaching sportsmanship, fair play? I can't see a coach instructing his players to rub salt in a wound."

"I don't think that coach knows anything about that. He does this thing, the 'Victory Run'. That is when he and the whole team circle the bases after winning the game."

"Well I think the guy sounds like a real-" Brian began but a horn blew interrupting him. Three heads swung simultaneously over to the window. A big school bus was pulling into the St. Teresa's parking lot; Altruim children scattered in all directions to get out of its way. The bus was a deep blood red and had a uniform layer of dust covering it's sides. It had bold, black lettering, a small metal extension above the driver's window, and a tooth-like rusty grill that gave the vehicle's front the illusion of a snarling face. The

bus jerked to a stop, and a cloud of black smoke shot out of its tailpipe. It stood still for a moment, then the bus door noisily folded open and a big, dark man walked out slowly, like royalty. He was about six foot three, had a head filled with big, black curly hair which hung down to his shoulders. He was muscular and toned. He wore a dark undershirt three sizes too tight and navy blue shorts. On his feet were sneakers without any socks and on his face he wore black mirrored sunglasses. The man walked straight across to shake hands with Clarisse who came out to greet him. Then the bus unloaded and curious children from both camps met gazes with each other.

From inside Brian's room in the gym, Frankie took a slow step back from the window. "That's him," he whispered. "That's their coach. His name is Juan." Brian and Carlos approached the cloudy window but said nothing.

As Clarisse led him into the gym Juan was introduced to Lauren first, who shook his hand politely and welcomed him to their camp. Juan had ordered his kids and counselors to stay outside the gym until he had met the Altruim counselors, then he would give them instructions on what to do next. Paula entered the room and Juan features showed instant delight as though he felt he had been destined to come to Altruim today. Juan

pulled off his sunglasses in slow-motion to better see Paula, who was wearing a light green T-shirt with no sleeves, white shorts, her long dark hair pulled back straight from her face. Juan approached her and squeezed her warm hand hard.

"Hello. I'm Paula," she responded.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Juan." He smiled wide.

When Carlos and Brian felt that they had made their unwelcome guest wait long enough, they left the room, walked the length of the gym with Frankie following close behind. They took their time, said 'hi' on their way to some cute little kids. Turned the corner, and saw Juan standing there, practically standing on top of Paula. Even worse, Paula was smiling, as if she was enjoying talking to him, like it was pleasurable to have met him. In all the history of that gymnasium, there were never two people more likely to dislike each other from the onset than Juan and Brian. Competitors, rivals and instant enemies. Brian searched his mind for an appropriate opening comment, he felt he had to interrupt fast before the guy asked her out. What should he say? What could he say? How about something like, "Are you lost?" or "If you're here to replace the commode, the restroom is over there." No, that wouldn't be appropriate, too rude for Paula's and Clarissa's ears. Better to act like a gentleman. Brian straightened up.

"Good morning. You all are from Kloane?"

Juan slowly turned around, sized Brian up, it wasn't often a white male in his twenties, appeared in this area. Then he laughed a sarcastic laugh, and imitated Brian's voice and said with a hillbilly accent, "Yup, we all are from Kloane."

Brian pasted on a grin, looked at Carlos, (he should have used a rude greeting after all.) "That's nice," he choked out, "How was your ride over?"

"About fifteen minutes." Juan replied cockeyed. He was quite effective at making Brian's comments seem foolish and out of place. Brian began to feel hot. He wondered if his face was red or noticeably embarrassed. He didn't want this jerk to get the best of him, not in front of Carlos, and definitely not in front of Paula. "I'm Brian, this is Carlo." The three shook hands. Juan said casually while gripping their hands, "Brian. Carlos." He squeezed their hands tightly. Then he devoted his attention singularly to Brian. "I'm surprised to see you here. We don't get many whites 'round here. Not too often at all."

Brian struggled trying to think of some way to respond. All he came up with was the simple truth, "I'm here."

"I guess you are here for the summer." Juan paused long letting his comment hang in the air. "After that

where are you goin'?"

"Home."

Juan gestured with a flat palm open, miming to Brian to finish the sentence, "Home where?"

"Oregon."

"Oregon?" Juan repeated, under his breath, "Or-re-gun. That's nice. We hope you like your stay in New York."

Brian simply said, "Thank you." and left it at that.

Clarisse suggested they get the kids together and play a game. The volunteers went to collect their children into the gym.

"This game is called 'Steal the Bacon'." Clarisse called out. She was standing on a folded out chair in the center of the gym. Around her were several dozen kids and eight camp counselors. "The game is very simple. It is very easy to play, but you need to listen to me while I give the instructions." Campers from Altruim and Kloane looked at her uneasily, but quiet. "There are two teams. One lines up on the south side of the gym, and one lines up on the north side of the gym. Every player on both teams is assigned a number, starting with one, so that both teams have players with the same number. For instance, there will be two eighteens, two number thirtys, and so on. In the center of the gym, where I'm standing, is a ball."

"Is that the bacon?" a child's voice asked.

"Yes, that's the bacon. When I call out a number, both teams will have someone with that number. Both players run out to get the ball. The object is to get the ball and return it to your side without getting tagged. Does everybody understand? If you get tagged by the other team while carrying the ball, the point goes to the team that tagged you, Okay?"

"What do we do when our number is called?" Another child asked.

"You run to the middle real fast, then you get the ball and go back to your side without being tagged."

"Simple enough." Juan whispered.

"Alright," Clarisse continued, "Everybody from Port Altruim go to that side." Clarisse made huge wiping motions with both hands motioning to the north side of the gymnasium. "Everybody from Kloane go to that side." Clarisse made the same wiping motions to the south end of the gym. The group broke up and children and counselors alike, went to their sides. A purple sphere the size of a basketball divided up two sides of the large room, and on either side, faces growing with anticipation. Brian standing slightly away from the wall, looked down at the line of Altruim kids. On the floor was black tape used for marking out-of-bounds for the basketball games. Brian instructed everyone to get behind the line so no

one had a unfair advantage. On the other end of the Altruim line, Paula was standing with Clarisse giving out numbers. Brian looked across the gym. His stomach turned into a knot when he noticed that Juan had positioned himself directly across the gym floor from him. Brian didn't even think he was going to participate in this game, much less take on the antagonist! Brian understood however, that he couldn't break this silent challenge. His personal code of manhood would not stand for it. Plus, all the kids, from both camps had already begun to realize what was going on. They saw that the big guys, the top dogs were about to go at it. Brian swallowed hard. He felt a very panicky sensation through out his body, but he couldn't show a sign of his nervousness. He held up his head high and watched as his camp director and fellow volunteer came over to the north side. They started handing out numbers to the Altruim kids. Clarisse's voice became audible as she neared him, "Number twenty six, Number twenty seven..." Brian tried to rationalize the situation away, thinking maybe Juan and he would wind up with the wrong number. No, he knew that he was only fooling himself, they would be paired up inevitably. Clarisse would likely give them identical numbers in the name of healthy competition.

"Number twenty eight, your number twenty nine,..."

Brian felt like a child in school who was praying

the teacher wouldn't call on him. She did. Brian's number was thirty-three. Thirty-three. The same number Kloane beat Altruim with at last year's festival. The irony of that number. Clarisse and Paula made the excursion to their spot at the center but along the wall of the gym. Earlier when Clarisse had given Brian his number, she had given him a look that said, "Hey Brian, you're about to go nose to nose with the director of the rival camp, won't that be fun?" Brian smiled back at her as though he was enjoying it as much as she.

Clarisse, of course, had no way of knowing that these two had become instant enemies, embodying in a way the intense rivalry bordering between both camps. To Clarisse it was a harmless game, plus she thought Brian could use this opportunity to help Altruim get one up on their old rivals.

"Just a game." Brian thought. "What am I getting so worked up over? My thoughts are mixed up. Why is this seemingly harmless encounter become an engrossing quest for conquering?" Then he came to the realization of what had taken place for him in the last few weeks. What he once thought to be so important, so vital in his life, the job, the car, his wife, now was completely replaced by the group of city kids he now worked with. In less than a month, the transformation happened. It was startling to him, and at the same time reassuring. These

children, coming from an economically deprived, urban setting had completely and certainly inadvertently, revived him. He had more energy than he had for years, and one better, he had some sense of peace of mind. His new friends, although engaged with him in competition, provided unconventional support while at the same time taking no excuses for mediocrity.

He couldn't let them down. Not while he was 'Brian, the god of Divine Retribution'. He could tell they were looking at him now, but he looked forward, watched the Kloane kids stare in awe at Paula while Clarisse positioned herself back on top of the fold out chair. Brian took in a great breath of air, swallowed it. Paula finished her labeling of the teams on her small scorecard and walked to the purple ball. She sat in the dead center of the gym and twirled while shouting, "After Clarisse calls your number and you finish running the ball, give it to me and I will put it back in the center." Paula went to the side of the gym, in the middle of the opposing teams, where they had a clear view of everything. Lauren and Carlos were keeping the kids behind the black line. Clarisse held a fluorescent orange traffic cone in her hand to be used as a microphone. She placed the small end of the cone up to her mouth and yelled, "Everyone Ready? Here goes, number twelve!"

Two kids, one from each side ran out toward the ball. They reached the center at the same time, and leaned nervously over the ball. After a brief moment's hesitation, one of them quickly reached down, grabbed the ball and the other one easily tagged him. That is lesson number one in 'Steal the Bacon'. If you just grab the ball while your rival is next to you, you'll get caught right there. You need to be fast and you need the flexibility to make contorted movements with your body!

Paula recorded which side got the point. There was a pink piece of paper on her clipboard that had two columns. Each time a team got a point they would get a notch on Paula's clipboard. Before long it was filled with hatchmarks. "Nuuuummber twenty twooo." Brian again tried to control his creeping terror. He felt his forehead grow moist. In his mind he saw himself tripping on his shoelace and going down admist thundering, echoing laughter. He cleared that thought out of his mind, and reminded himself to think positive. He had to be sharp, fast and as mentally alert as he could possibly be. This was serious. This was the pivotal moment of his adult life. This was the most important issue of the whole summer: he needed to get that bacon and return to base safely! "Number fivve." The time was coming soon. Juan leaned forward on one massive foot, his body rocked back and forth slowly. His long hair fell about his shoulders

and neck. His massive forearms swung gently before him. He looked like an olympic sprinter at the start of a race. Brian leaned forward as well, wiping the perspiration formed on his forehead with the side of his shirt. "Number thirty one." Two girls ran out, one obviously faster than the other, grabbed the ball, arched her back to avoid the tag and ran back to a safe haven in the Kloane crowd. Clarisse looked over at Brian. This is it. Brian looked across at Juan, he knew too. Each one in position, motionless, ready. "Nuumber twenty one." False alarm. Each time Clarisse called a number his restlessness grew. She called more numbers, more kids ran into the gym's inner circle. Brian's mounting anxiety turned into frustration and he began to curse Clarisse for pigeoning him in this situation. His mind raced with thoughts, his body with emotion. The fingers on both his hands danced in quick manic movements. Once again, he desperately tried to grapple a hold of his facilities. He challenged himself to the notion that it would be enough of a struggle to compete on strictly athletic grounds without the added nuisance of a doubting mind. "Nuumber thirrtty-three". Brian exploded forward. Digging in the toe of his sneakers for that extra burst of power. Flying, with a look of determination on his face. It seemed to him he was running slower than he could but it only took him a few

bounds to reach the center. Juan came up at the same time. The two of them came upon the ball simultaneously, only Juan didn't slow down as he approached the ball. Instead, Juan kicked the ball as hard as he could, straight at Brian. The ball sailed threw the air, hit squarely in Brian's groin and doubled him over. Then it bounced ridiculously gently into Juan's hands, he scooped it up and easily ran it back. Brian tried half-heartedly to chase him despite his intense pain, but stopped when Juan pulled away. The Kloane side erupted with a cheer. High fives all around. Smiling kids patted Juan on the back. A grinning Juan held the ball up and paraded around slowly, showing off his prize. His trophy. Brian straightened his back up. He turned slowly, tortured and walked back to the Altruim side. That was a long, long walk-about a mile and a half. He had been humiliated. Finally, about what seemed like an hour later, he reached the Altruim side. As he walked across the front of the long line over to where he stood previously, he was greeted by quiet stares of disgust, disdain, and pity.

Juan dribbled the ball over to Paula. He stood before her and handed it to her like a perfect gentleman. "Here you are. I believe that is a point for us." He extended it out to her and she took his gift. Paula walked past him coldly and placed the ball in the center of the gym. Clarisse quickly called another number to

get the focus off of Brian. Brian looked up to the ceiling. He felt terrible, he had let his kids down. This was a painful loss of dignity. Also, would he hold any legitimate power in telling these kids what to do all day, in the classroom and the playground, now that he looked like a fool? Brian rattled his head. No, it can't be over - not like that. He refused to let this setback be the ruling model for the continuation of the summer. What would he do? Suddenly an idea came over him. Not a 'fair' idea, certainly not a 'sportsmanlike thing' to do, but screw it, he would have vengeance. After the two kids rumbling over the ball had finished, (they had all begun to kick the ball now) Paula carried the ball to the center and Brian jogged, or rather semi-jogged, out to meet her. This caught the attention of the entire gym, which fell into a silent frenzy, trying to foresee what was impending. No one could hear what they were saying, however, even the youngest kid there knew they would be hearing the number thirty-three again, probably real soon. As Brian came back into the row someone whispered out "What's goin' on, Brian?" Brian held his index finger up to his mouth. He then got into the row and turned around. There was Juan himself getting ready to run, just like before, only now nobody from Kloane was cheering. Clarisse yelled into the cone, "Number sixteen." A girl ran out, her pig-tails flying

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behind her. Back in the line Brian eyebrows were knitted. The campers had guessed correctly, he had told Paula to tell Clarisse to call out thirty three again, then he added another whispered instruction, to which Paula dropped her eyes to the gym floor and nodded softly.

Brian's cognition had gone from uncertainty to nervousness to shame. Now, there was no uncertainty. Now, he felt confident, assured. He gained complete freedom from self doubting hesitancy. This was no longer a game of chance or unpredictable factors. His temperature was high and his thoughts were ruled by red fury. "Nuumber thiiirrtty six." And the kids ran. "Number fourteen." Again they ran. "Nummmber nine." A moment later when Clarisse was certain everyone had a turn to play, she said, "Can I have your attention up here. The score," she looked to one camp then slowly to the other, "Is twenty four to twenty four. The next point wins it!" The score was close but she lied about it being tied. She wanted Brian to save himself, so she built in the dramatics. "Ready? Nummmbbbber thirty three?" Two very ready bodies sprinted toward the ball, arms swinging powerfully around. Each one about the same fast pace, except Juan prepared himself in case his adversary kicked the ball at his face. Juan wasn't intimidated though. He ran full force up toward the

ball, he knew the Altruims wouldn't hesitate to try some form of deceit to win, and so he was ready for anything. Then Juan noticed Brian leap over the ball and land on the Kloanian side of the gym. Brian ignored the ball and went for Juan's legs. Next thing Juan knew he was being lifted into the air. He saw the ceiling of the gym, then in a whirl, his camp, then the Altruim camp with a bunch of kids jumping upside down, then his camp, then the Altruims and he finally felt his feet placed firmly back on the floor. He violently shook off his dizziness to see Brian standing there excited and Paula running the purple ball back to the Altruim side! She passed the black line and spiked the ball against the floor.

Brian flung his arms into the air, in a large V pattern, "VICTORY." Brian and thirty five kids ran toward each other. They flung their arms around his stomach. He felt pats on his back and saw Tony and Frankie leap up and slap hands. Carlos jumped jubilantly in the air and swung his arm the way soccer players do after making a goal. In between the roar of the crowd and through the waving hands, bouncing up and down in the air, he saw Paula smiling a deep and most beautiful smile. It was one of the better moments in Brian Sage's continuous sequence of changes.

An informal game of kickball broke out later. Carlos sat on the steps leading up to the church

wondering if the ball was going to be put through one of St. Teresa's stained glass windows before the summer was over. Kids were running in diagonal patterns across the parking lot. A group of girls played jump rope and hopscotch on the side of the gym that faced Towers West. Brian came across the parking lot and sat down on the steps next to Carlos. Carlos commended him for his treachery in 'Steal the Bacon'. They slapped hands and laughed. Brian was on an emotional high until he saw Juan making his way toward them followed by some Klonian disciples. He came up to where they sat on the concrete steps and folded his arms. Juan stared at them with a dark mysterious smile that seemed to make his eyes disappear in a squint. The disciples spread out around him in a semi-circle. Juan said in a low voice, "That was dirty pool what you did in the gym."

Carlos spoke up for Brian, "At least he didn't kick the ball at your crotch." Some little Kloanes snickered at the memory of that.

Juan went on, "At least when I did that, it was me an' him. I didn't get a woman to help me."

Brian broke in, showing a flare for redneck aggressiveness, "Maybe you can't get a woman at all." he suggested.

Juan leaned over Brian, "I'll take you out so fast-"
Carlos leaped up and stood between the two of them.

He raised his hands up slightly, "Let's just settle down. We got a bunch of kids 'round here so, you know, stay calm. Remember, your role models. I think I know how to settle this."

An hour later, after their guests returned to Kloane and it was growing dim in the gym, Brian and Carlos spoke behind a closed door in the office. Frankie and three other campers watched them anxiously through a plexi-glass window from the chairs in the cafeteria. Brian would get up, strut around, then sit on the edge of the desk. Then it was Carlos's turn. He pranced and raved. Often one of them would break into a huge smile, other times one of them would run his hand through his hair or bite the end of a pencil. Frankie and the others, frustrated because they couldn't hear, decided to go knock and ask for something out of the equipment cabinet. Frankie went around the corner to the door, he would use the excuse of needing a basketball. Just as he lifted his fist to pound on the door, it swung open. Brian was standing there looking down at him, he said, "Frankie, I'm glad your here. I need to speak to you about something." Frankie and the others came over and sat on the cafeteria tables. Carlos and Brian joined them, still in their old pacing mode. Frankie sat on the edge of the table swinging his legs back and forth.

Brian began, "Today, Carlos and I had a conflict with the leader from the Kloane summer camp."

"The guy who smashed our ball in your--"

"The point is," Brian's voiced raised, "Juan has been a complete annoyance, an irritation to Altruim. Now we got a chance to even things up with an individual who treated this camp unfairly."

Frankie looked confused, "Whaddaya mean? What are you gonna do?"

Carlos, with arms folded, stepped in and spoke up, "What 'we' are going to do, is, compete against Kloane next month during the festival."

One of the boys asked, "Compete how?"

Carlos raised his eyebrows, "Isn't that obvious? In a baseball game."

"You challenged Kloane to a baseball game with our team? Are you insane?" Frankie said with his voice cracking. "Kloane's team is ten times better than ours."

"So we'll hav'ta practice hard. Don't act as though our players are somehow worthless and ineffective," Carlos said growing irritated.

"In a month? This is supposed to take place in a month? No way, it's impossible. You don't have any right to use the team that way without our permission."

Brian lifted his hands up, "I don't understand your takin' offense to this. This is our chance to, to."

Frankie hopped off the table and planted his feet firmly on the floor, "No way. Forget it. It's a terrible idea. You're new here. You may think you know what is going on, but you don't. You have no idea. We can't win and I refuse to try." His voice was filled with anger and conviction. Brian took a step toward him, "Hey! Listen to what you're saying. Can you hear those words? I can't believe you're adopting this attitude." Carlos grabbed Brian by the arm. "Just drop it, Brian." Brian's face grew contorted, "Drop it? We challenged him Carlos. I'm not about to give up."

"Brian," Carlos said sternly, "We'll discuss it later." Brian looked at Carlos for a brief moment, then his tightly wound up muscles collapsed. Carlos loosened up his grip on Brian's arm. Carlos dropped his gaze to the ground but directed his attention to the boys, "You all leave now. Go on. See you tomorrow."

The boys were already prepared to leave. They did so quickly, grumbling, and just a bit guilty for letting the coaches down, even if it was for their own good. When they had gone, Brian and Carlos sat across from each other in the silver folding chairs. Carlos began speaking, his arms outstretched on the table, his fingers making spastic, tapping movements. Brian leaned forward listening intently to Carlos's monologue, "Brian, it's like this; you and I aren't about to back down on this

game; however, there is absolutely no way to play without a team."

"Right." Brian agreed.

"Frankie, God love him, could spoil this whole event. A lot of the camper's look up to him. Why, I don't know. We just can't afford another outburst like the one we just witnessed."

"Especially in front of other kids."

"Exactly. So listen to this proposition. What if we make it seem as though it's a privilege to be on the team. We could trick them. What if we acted like we didn't need them. What if we make this an elite team, whose members are carefully screened by the coaches."

"It might work."

"We would need to create mystery with this. Make them wonder. Make them just crave to want to be on the team. They are pretty sharp kids. Living here obviously they're street smart."

Brian nodded, "Yeah. We would need help, some player from inside the camp."

"Tony would be the ideal man for that position. Beside being an exceptional athlete he is popular at P.A high."

"And he would help us too."

Carlos set his chair back to rest on its two back legs and rubbed his fingers through his black hair. "We

could also stand to use a little help from inside our organization. Someone who may appeal to their prepubescent fantasy Hmmm?" The two men looked at each other and said simultaneously, "Paula!"

"You think she'd do it?" Carlos baited.

"Why not?" Brian took the bait.

"You think it'd work?" Carlos continued.

"It would work alright." Brian's face shone like a star.

"Fantastic, go ahead and ask her!" Carlos had him going, he slide in that question, perfectly timed.

Brian backed off, "Ahhh, maybe we both should ask her. Together."

Carlos clenched his fist and thought, "I almost had him".

Paula was sitting at her desk in her bedroom. She had her light adjusted to shine down close on her paperwork. Laid out in front of her was a large piece of grid paper, some blue print drawn on it. Scattered on the desk was a T-square, several pens and pencils, and different colored files piled behind her. She wore a green hospital scrubs for a shirt and light gray sweat pants, with a sorority logo printed on them. Brian and Carlos stood silently watching her. She looked up and saw them both standing clumsily in her doorway, she threw

her pen down on the desk and rested back in her chair.

"What do you two want?"

"We have a question to ask you," Carlos said.

Paula blinked, looked tired, "Yes? What is it?"

Brian began, "Paula, what do you know about the great sport of baseball?"

"Baseball? What are you talkin' about? What have you gotten into? Some kinda trouble?"

"Sort of. We need some help...coachin'." Carlos told her.

"What? You two can't handle a team by yourselves? I don't believe that. You're yankin' my chain."

Brian walked slowly into the room, fingers from both hands pressed together at the tips. "It's not that we can't handle it. We just could use a little assistance."

"In what capacity?"

Brian looked over his shoulder at Carlos and then back at Paula, "In what capacity would you like to work?"

Paula raised her voice, "What do you need?"

Brian's voice softened, his tone became that of a seasoned salesman, "Carlos has a plan to take on Kloane in a baseball game next month. During a cultural festival at some park. It is a noble endeavor. The problem is, some of the kids are completely against this game 'cause they think there is no chance to win. We have every intention of winning though. I truly think

our team can do it. Carlos had this idea to try to make it really fashionable to be on the team. You are looked up to by all the kids, you know."

Paula stared at the image on the grid sheet. "I don't know how much I'll be able to help. I understand baseball but I never played it. My friends and I used to watch preseason games at Saint Petersburg. That was more for fun than any real interest in baseball. I can't give you any insight. What can I help with?"

"You can help us talk it up."

Paula grabbed her temple with her forefinger and thumb and rubbed it hard. "I'll do what ever I can, but that includes making no guarantees."

"Well, no one is asking for any promises. We appreciate you kickin' in your help." Brian looked excitedly toward Carlos then back to Paula. "Every time a player joins the team, make a big deal about it, like the kid really made the right decision."

Carlos cut in, "We're planning on accepting everyone who wants to play, but we want it to appear like this is an exclusive club."

Paula ran her tongue over her teeth "If it doesn't work, maybe I can play shortstop or somethin'."

The next morning, Clarisse opened up the gymnasium right as the sun was coming up. She was one of the few

people who got a chance to see Altruim quiet and restful. Clarisse turned on the lights to the large room. Soon it will be filled with the sounds and actions of busy children. When the time came for camp to begin Carlos, Brian and Paula had already rehearsed a script to put their plan into action. They went through a series of unrelated traditional announcements then broke into a comment about how they were pleased that all the kids behaved themselves yesterday when the Kloane camp came over. Then Carlos acted like he was wrapping things up before camp started, but slid in a comment about Tony and a few other elitists staying after for an important meeting. "Don't forget, Tony, Ronnie, Andy and Steve meet here right after camp." Paula broke into a twisted smile and slapped Tony on the back. Tony and Brian exchanged a knowing glance and an approving nod. Frankie looked up curiously from where he sat on the floor. Others searched the circle for any face that could explain why Tony was suddenly the recipient of Paula's attention and in the good grace of Brian and Carlos. That was it! That was all it took. Whispering voices immediately started and continued all day. "What is Tony doing after camp?"

"There is something going on. Some kind of meeting."

"Let's ask Clarisse."

"Carisse tol' me it's none of our bis'ness. I
awready ast 'er."

"It's got something to do with the Kloanes."

"The Klones?"

"A baseball game?"

"No way. A baseball game with the Kloanes.
Remember what happened last year."

"Maybe, they have a secret plan. Carlos was the
coach of a team that went to Junior State."

"A secret plan for what, stupid?"

"Revenge?"

"Revenge."

Within a week, Port Altruim had a baseball team of
bloodthirsty, courageous, aggressive teenagers who
weren't actually bad players either.

One day when camp was over but practice hadn't begun
yet, Paula was at the doors leading into the gymnasium
saying her daily farewells to the kids. She hugged about
every third one, spoke to a few about their plans for
tomorrow, congratulated a few about successfully making
the baseball team. The children were already excited
about returning tomorrow. Paula had gotten to know all
their names. She couldn't believe how much time had
elapsed since her arrival in New York. Everything was
moving at an incredibly fast clip. From behind a table

Lauren watched Paula at the doorway, while tying a toddler's shoelace. Paula had an unusual way of tying shoes that made three hoops with the laces. The toddler then ran off to find her mother and Lauren closed her eyes tightly. Lauren began to feel very tired. When she reopened her eyes she noticed Brian was standing next to Paula at the door. Brian seemed to be showing Paula some art work a camper had created. He had two large sheets of paper, when he attached them they created a complete picture. They talked for a minute, started laughing, then vanished out the doorway. Lauren rested her elbows on the table, then slowly lowered her head into her propped up arms. A voice came from behind her dropped head startling her. "Tired this afternoon, Lauren?" It was Carlos. Lauren lifted her head out of her hands, twisted her neck around to see him.

"How was your day, Carlos?"

Carlos pulled an unoccupied chair from the table and swung it around to sit in it backwards. "It was good. I think we're going to stir up interest in the team."

Lauren shook her head, "I don' know, Carlo, I don't think you and Brian should mess with Juan. Remember, we're only here for the summer."

Carlos said, "We can handle it." You gotten homesick yet?"

Lauren thought, she tilted her head to the side,

"No, I don't feel homesick. We're too busy to think about home."

"Did you have a boyfriend there?"

Lauren nodded casually, "Ah-huh."

"What did he think about you leavin' for the summer?"

"Makes no difference. That was my decision."

"Why did you decide that?"

"You are certainly full of questions today."

Carlos lifted his eyebrows, wrinkling his forehead, "Yeah? Well that's an occupational habit, you know. I work with inquisitive minds."

"Me too. I enjoy working with inquisitive minds. Better than the brain dead ninth graders I was used too."

Carlos' tone became more friendly, "Are you upset about something. You don't sound yourself today, Lauren. You're usually the cheerful one of us."

"Sorry, you are catching me at a bad moment. I just wish I had the energy Paula has."

"Hmmm," Carlos said, "It seems like maybe Brian and Paula are desirous of each other. Anyhow, that was the way it seemed during the 'Steal the Bacon' game. That was the way it seemed to me."

Lauren looked at Carlos quickly. She was caught off guard by his directness. "That's a mixed matched couple." She said.

Carlos leaned the chair back, "Would that bother you? If something was to come from it?"

Lauren paused, "It wouldn't bother me really." She paused for a instant. "I just don't want the dynamics of the group to get fouled up. I mean, I think we're doing a great job here. I don't want competition or rivalry or jealousy to destroy our working relationships." Lauren asked Carlos, "What about you? How do you feel about it?"

Carlos wrapped his arms around the back of the chair. He swayed his head in tiny figure eight patterns. "I feel the same way you do." He replied quickly, thinking that maybe he was speaking of a subject best left closed. The two of them let the issue gently drop and Carlos brought his chin down on folded arms. Both of them sat in the cafeteria silently, enjoying the subtle breeze that gently came through.

Brian and Paula walked down Todd Street toward the grocery store. Thoughts of their lives before the summer were only fleeting images that occasionally crossed their minds. Port Altruim was home to them now. Todd Street was what tied it all together. People walked in and out of it's stores and businesses. They waited impatiently for vehicles to pass so they could cross the street. A school bus drove by with an obnoxiously loud engine. Teenagers came by on skateboards and bicycles. Port

Altruim was a community unlike what the volunteers had ever witnessed before. These people know each other; they know each other's relatives and quickly they came to know who the outside volunteers were. The volunteers were not hard to spot, especially the white ones. They didn't dress quite right. They didn't walk the same. They seemed a little lost, a little disorientated, but, nevertheless, they were welcomed. Altruim was patriarchal to the newcomers. The volunteers in years past were treated like a social delicacy. The volunteers this summer seemed especially well liked by the community, particularly because these new ones seemed so pleased to be there. The community watched them with benevolent amusement. Now the volunteers always felt welcomed, but they didn't know that they were also somewhat revered. Brian felt pride to be associated with them, especially Paula who turned the heads of men, women and children alike with her beauty and gracefulness. Her walk was as poised and delicate as a cat's. Even her long hair seemed to understand it's responsibility to composure and dignity. Walking down the street in the sunshine, an elderly lady shaking out a blue rug from her porch smiled at them. Children from St. Teresa's camp rode by on their bicycles and made circles around them. The counselors paused to exchange a quick conversation with them before they rode off down Todd street. Paula

fanned her stomach with the lower part of her gold T-shirt. They were off to the store to buy a bottle of dry, white table wine. Wine which was to be enjoyed on the semi-glassed-in back porch while the sun descended over Towers.

Hilena was a thin young camper that had been randomly assigned to Paula's group. A ten year old, she lived on the seventh floor of Tower's West. Hilena had a very light shade of brown hair and a cowlick in the center of her forehead that sent long strands of hair down either side of her face. For this reason Hilena was always wearing headbands or barrettes. Hilena's face was innocent and pretty, except for obvious half circles under both eyes. Paula noticed those circles upon meeting Hilena but assumed they were just the natural way this little girl appeared. Hilena was captivated by Paula from the beginning. She marveled at Paula's beauty and social grace. Hilena imagined herself looking and acting like Paula when she was in the privacy of her room. (A room that overlooked the church, the gym, and the baseball field). During the first few weeks of camp, in Paula's frenzy, she often would pass over the small, frail girl in order to follow some work related obligation. After Paula settled in and became accustomed to the Altruim routine, she noticed Hilena staying after

to clean-up when camp finished or lingering outside the Healing House before camp started. It soon became a unwritten ritual that Hilena would meet Paula before each day and they would spend time preparing for camp, playing some game or simply talking. In a very brief period of time, Hilena became Paula's favorite child and their relationship progressed, enriched by the activities of each new day.

Father Voss walked up the main isle of his New York church with Rooster walking through each row of pews, collecting missals. The missals St. Teresa's had been using were ten years old. A new batch arrived this week. The Rooster was replacing the outdated, torn ones with the fresh, crisp new ones. Father Voss's problems with the police had quieted down a bit. He was never arrested, and his energies were turned again to the tremendous responsibility of servicing this struggling community. Voss's next project was organizing a rally which focused on the drug problem of the community. He was deep in thought when Rooster shattered the silence in the large church. "Father, I've just finished reading my first completely English book."

"Oh yeah," Voss asked him, seemingly pleased at the accomplishment. "Did you have any trouble with the English?"

Rooster shook his head, "A little, but I was able to get through it all."

"Great, great." Voss said. "What book did you read?"

"'Fahrenheit 451'."

"Hey, that's an excellent book. What did you think of it?"

"I liked it. Um, I think the first half was a little more interesting than the second, but it was a good book."

"Did they have you read that in your English class?"

"No," Rooster told him. "Next week, we're going to start 'Johnathon Livingston Seagull'." "Oh yeah. Bach. If you like 'Jonathan' try reading another book he wrote, a better one in my opinion, entitled 'Illusions'."

"You know a lot of books, Father?" Rooster asked.

Voss nodded happily, "Oh yeah, I used to teach literature at the Catholic high school near Philadelphia."

"What books did you have them read?"

Voss became reflective remembering the pleasant years he spent teaching. "Well, basically I taught the novels previously established on the curriculum. Ah, 'A Separate Peace', Shelly's 'Frankenstein', 'Raisin in the Sun', some nonfiction like Marx's 'Manifesto'."

"Were there ever times the student's parents

demanded you to stop teaching a book because of its content?"

"You mean, because it was controversial? No, the parent's were good about that. I got worried they would a couple of times but they never did. However, there was a time when the town's bookstore was picketed.

"Who picketed it?"

"A group of women did." Voss brought his hand up to his forehead. "They found a book to be sexist. I can't seem to remember which book. I can remember the jacket cover, but the title escapes me."

"Did they remove the book for the store."

"No, but we took down the window display of it. I wish I could remember that title. All I remember was once they started picketing that book, they couldn't keep enough of them in the store. Controversy really sells."

"No one knows more about controversy than you, Father."

Voss laughed.

Rooster asked him another question, "When you worked at the school, were you able to take home books for free?"

Voss nodded, "Yes, we could sometimes. If they over ordered or if one of the novels got damaged, I occasionally took one home. I mean, we could take home a paperback that cost a few bucks, but certainly not a

forty dollar dictionary. Then again, who would want one?" Voss mused.

"Not much plot there." Rooster added.

Clarisse walked down Port Altrium's hospital wing for AIDS babies. In her hand was a brown bottle and cotton swabs. Halfway down the hallway from the nurses station was a staff restroom which she entered, pulled off her white hat, and laid it neatly on the counter. Clarisse was dressed in her bright white nurses uniform, and despite the fact she only got two hours of sleep the night before, her facial features were bright and light which was evident in the small mirror that was positioned over the assortment of medicine and sanitary devices. Clarisse picked up three cotton swabs together, the bottle of rubbing alcohol, and her nurse's cap, then made her way toward the employee rest room. Her friend Cornelia noticed her bringing the bottle and swabs in and decided to follow her. The employee rest room was intensely bright and the floor was made up of hundreds of cleanly scrubbed olive-green tiles. Clarisse entered and positioned herself in front of the mirror with the bottle and cotton resting on the porcelain sink below. Clarisse was examining her eye in the mirror, when her friend came in and asked her, "Clarisse, is everything all right?"

Clarisse looked at her and smiled pleasantly, "Sure,

everything is fine."

"What do you have the alcohol for?"

"Oh,...Ah, the Meyer baby scratched my eyelid." Clarisse told her unscrewing the cap of the clear bottle.

"Don't put rubbing alcohol on your eyelid. That could get in your eye."

"I'm going to be careful and mix it with water."

"Okay." Cornelia began, then took a step forward, "I don't know, do it. But...be careful."

Clarisse assured her, "I will." She dabbed the swabs with a tiny bit of alcohol then ran them under the faucet. She kept the water flowing as she doctored her small cut. When it had been cleaned Clarisse splashed her face with the running water. Her friend handed her a wash cloth to dry her face. Clarisse took the cloth without a word and dried her skin. She folded the washcloth into fourths and handed it back to her friend who accepted it gingerly. "Thanks." Clarisse told her. Her friend asked softly, "Clarisse, you're not worried about becoming infected are you?"

"Absolutely not. The scratch was caused by a fingernail, there was no exchange of blood."

"Still, are you alarmed? I guess that could be rather unnerving."

"No, Clarisse reassured her, I'm not alarmed, nor do I have any reason to be." Clarisse's voice was melodic,

almost singing. "Simply because there was no possible way to transmit the virus that way. I'm okay, don't worry."

The other nurse smiled, "You know, you are probably the best nurse on staff here."

Clarisse was putting her cap over her silky black hair, "Second, only to you, hon." The two nurses walked out of the bathroom hooked together arm in arm, ignoring a rude stare down by a visitor positioned in the hallway. "How is everything at the camp? How are the volunteers working out?"

"Ohh," Clarisse began as they continued down the hallway, "They are fantastic. They've exceeded my highest hopes for them. You should see them with the campers. I've had good counselors in the past, but no group has ever compared to this lot. It is truly amazing. For instance, last year's group would eat lunch together in the kitchen, taking turns to watch the children in the cafeteria. They really deserved the break, I would never take that away from them. I guess I assumed this group would do the same thing. But every day they are out in the cafeteria eating the same packaged lunch as the kids. They want to be with them. What makes it interesting is that they have no idea what an incredible job they're doing. They believe it's par for the course."

Cornelia asked, "Are you going to tell them how much you think of their work?"

"Yeah, eventually, everything is going so well right now, I'm just going to ride out the next few weeks, having them do the exact same thing."

"Really?"

"I'm going to take them to dinner in Manhattan soon. Tell them how much I appreciate the job their doing."

"I hope everything continues going well."

"Me too." Clarisse agreed, then added, "Why wouldn't it?"

The next morning Paula was the first volunteer to arrive at camp. She walked over to the gym with Hilena who waited outside the Healing House for her. Frankie and some others were already practicing on the baseball diamond behind the gym. When Paula arrived and opened up the large doors with Clarisse's keys, Frankie and other campers came down and asked her for a basketball. Paula went into the office and unlocked the metal cabinet where the sports equipment was kept. She and Hilena stayed in the office, going through papers while Frankie and the others played ball in the gym. Frankie had brought along a huge cassette/radio which he sat down proudly on a chair and turned up loud for them to enjoy while they played ball. Immediately the bounding rhythms of rap

music infiltrated the office where Paula sat going through files. She looked at Hilena out of the sides of her eyes, and Hilena smiled at her. Paula raised out of her chair and leaned over the desk while sliding the plexi-glass over to one side.

The music clamored into the office, "Cop bust my head, slap my face, down on my luck, cause he don' like my race."

"Frankie....Frankie..."

"Nothin' went as planned, It don' seem to fail, Judge said, 'Steady now, son', An' threw my booty in jail."

"HEY FRANKIE!"

Frankie stopped dribbling the ball, "What?"

"Will you please turn that down?"

Frankie was dressed in cut-off sweat pants, a undershirt with it's sleeves removed, and a dark blue headband, he said, "Paula, I thought you liked rap?"

"I do," Paula said trying to keep her patience, "But not that loud, an' not this early."

"That music is helping me become a future professional basketball player."

"I wouldn't worry or be concerned about the future," Paula told him, "If Carlos catches you playin' basketball instead of practicing for the baseball game, he'll dismember you."

"I don't know why, but for some reason that doesn't comfort me. C'mon, Paula, it aint that loud."

"It's loud and that particular song has terrible language."

Frankie pulled the basketball to his hip, looked at Paula in the window, "Who are you, the 'Rap Grammar Critic'?"

"Turn it down." Paula ordered, she backed out of the window and slid the plastic glass shut. Back in her chair she continued going through the files. Hilena had pulled out a page from the coloring book and sat next to Paula at her desk, coloring. Paula pulled out a manila folder she had never seen before from the desk drawer and opened it. It was some documentation on the early days of the Healing House. The pages were bright and fresh, it appeared that this folder had not been widely read. The first sheet read, 'The Healing House: A Profile'. Underneath was a list of facts about the House. The date which it was founded. That it was a non-for-profit organization. It was located in Port Altruim, N.Y. and run by the Catholic services there. Annual budget of 45 thousand dollars. Provided temporary shelter, food and clothing for battered and abused women as well as long term care for 14 women. Paula turned to the next page, it contained facts and figures regarding the financial cost in terms of staffing and a data chart comparing it

to average costs compared to hospitalization. Paula looked through the line graphs and statistical data somewhat uninterested. Frankie's music was turned down to an acceptable level. Paula enjoyed this moment of relative peace, the majority of campers had yet to arrive and she could leisurely read what was contained in the yellow folder. Ultimately, her attention was called off the papers all together by a remark Hilena made. The child asked Paula, "Are you mad at Frankie?"

Paula looked at the little girl whose head was tilted down towards the coloring book, busily scribbling dark blue, not attempting to stay within the lines. Paula thought out her answer carefully before responding. "No, Hilena, I'm not mad at him. I got frustrated with him, but I'm not angry."

"Is that why you're in a bad mood so often?"

"What? I haven't been in a bad mood and I'm not mad now." Paula shouted at her. Part of the child's face was hidden by hanging brown hair.

The little girl raised her eyebrows up, "Oh."

"Do you think that I've been in a bad mood?" Paula asked innocently. After all, didn't she agree to help Carlos and Brian with the team, with only having them go through the minimal amount of pleading?

"You're not as bad as you used to be. The first week was the worst."

"Could you be a little clearer? In what ways did you think the first week was the worst?"

"Well, you were crabby with Frankie and Danny. You yelled at them for going into the office that Tuesday. Also, you sent Yolanda to see Clarisse for sneaking a cigarette outside by the backstop on the ball field."

Paula was shocked by this runt's blatantness. She was even more shocked Hilena remembered everything from the first week in such detail. Paula herself forgot about yelling at Frankie and Danny for going in the office. "Well, listen, you all didn't make it the most pleasant week, you know. That first week there was a lot of noise and ah, loudness."

Hilena just colored, she didn't accept that excuse and let Paula know by her silence. Paula dropped her eyes to the desk, then up to Hilena who was choosing a fresh crayon. Paula's voice became softer, "Listen, hon, I never meant to be mean with you all. Sometimes teachers need to correct kids for misbehaving. Right? Maybe I was slightly cranky, but, that certainly was not directed at you. I suppose that I may have just let other things get on my nerves."

Hilena colored.

Paula asked, "You're not mad at me, are you?"

"Do you like it here?"

"In Port Altruim? Yeah, I like it here. I think

this is a nice place to be."

The girl added some highlights to her artwork, "Maybe, you could stay here forever, if you like it so much."

Paula felt relieved she was not in trouble. She rested her hand on Hilena's shoulder, "You never know. Maybe, I will."

Paula found last year's counselor's journal among some papers that day. Strange, the current volunteers didn't use any kind of journal or log. It had a power blue plastic cover and a piece of typing paper taped to the front showing the year. She placed it back in the bottom of the drawer and laid the yellow folder on top of it. Later that weekend during a semi-secluded and quiet moment she pulled it out. Paula had agreed to make a poster for Brian and Carlos asking the people of Altruim to donate or loan baseball equipment. She had drawn out large block letters on a pure white sheet and scattered felt tip markers on the table top. She sat with Hilena in the gymnasium cafeteria. The doors were propped open but there was no one else with them. Paula opened the journal to page one, there was loose leaf papers connected by three silver rings and all had dates above the entries. Before she began she debated whether or not it was ethical to read the journal. She decided it was

because she wasn't breaking any commitments or promises by reading it and also its contents might have a direct effect on her life this summer. That rationalization actually did not convince her, but once she began her curiosity overwhelmed her reluctance. The entries were written in different pens, some blue ink, some fine line black markers. It read:

Friday 27

This weekend there will be six students that need to be taken into Manhattan early on Saturday morning. It's the entrance exam for Xavier's freshman class. Xavier is a prestigious New York high school. We can drive into the city that morning, but I don't think it's a good idea to leave the van there until their exam is over. Can anyone bring them back on the subway? Frank and Clarisse can't.

The little paragraph was written in black ball point pen and signed Marie. Paula was glad she recognized Clarisse's name. It was much more fun to spy on people you're familiar with. There were other names: Leigh Donna, Evelyn and Nikki that were new to Paula, she assumed they were the names of last year's volunteers. Who was Frank? Could they be referring to the camper

Frankie? Why did he go with Clarisse to a meeting?
Paula read on.

Sat. 28

It's 6:35 a.m. I am the only person awake in this neighborhood. I wanted to record some quick observations before camp started today.

1.) On the back of C. Midkiffes geography notebook are some crudely drawn pictures. When I questioned her about it, she said that it was her notebook and she would write anything she felt like on it. So, I confiscated the notebook and found several letters inside. Letters both to and from boys in the camp.

"What a dirty little snoop." Paula thought.

2.) Clarisse, I wanted to congratulate you about Frank. That is such exciting news! Let me know if there is anything I can do to help you prepare. Evelyn and I want to throw you a shower at the H. House before the end of summer. Let's get together and plan something.

Paula shut the book. Now she felt that she was intruding into and violating her friend's private life. Yet, still Paula was drawn by a thirst to go farther into the little journal with it's sloppy penmanship and sentence

fragments. At least to find out who Frank is, then she'd stop completely. Clarisse had never spoken that name, still the journal indicated that there to be some type of relationship. Paula reopened the book and skipped some lines to try to solve this mystery. The next entry was two days later. The journal read...

Apparently there was some kind of conflict at summer school today. P.A.'s principal's secretary called and said Frankie has to stay late. Frankie's mother also called from work and said she would work out some kind of arrangement with us for a ride. He needs to be picked up an hour and a half later than usual. I believe he is in some type of In-school-suspension.

Leigh Donna.

Paula turned the page.

I picked up Frankie today at P.A.H. He was in the suspension room with Mr. Gomez. I spoke with Mr. Mays, who was the teacher that assigned Frankie the detention. I also spoke with Frankie on the way home in the van. This is how I interpreted what happened today. Mr. Mays teaches Frankie biology class. Frankie and he have been having a personality clash since the beginning of the school year. Now,

I know Mr. Mays, and he fashions himself as knowing a lot about adolescent psychology, which he really doesn't. He is somewhat of a hardnose teacher. On the other hand, we all know Frankie and how capable he is at getting underneath someone's skin. It isn't surprising that these two don't get along. About a month ago, there was a huge blowup in the class. Mr. Mays and Frankie got into it. There was a parent/teacher conference, the principle attended and there was an extensive IEP. I don't know really what solutions these individual came up with, but one of the outcomes was Mr. Mays announced Frankie was to be given one last chance in his classroom. Since then, according to Frankie, Mays won't tolerate anything. Frankie is not allowed to ask any questions nor ask for permission to leave the room for any reason. The only thing he is allowed to do is answer questions. Today Frankie got in trouble answering a question. Frankie maintains that it was just a misunderstanding. Biology class is fourth hour. The day's topic was 'Disease, Hunger and Disaster'. The class focus this day was periods in history when large segments of the

population died off in short periods of time, like during wars or the Black Death in Europe. Mays asked the class to brainstorm and answer the question, "What would it take to control overpopulation?" Frankie said he thought of the starving children in Third World countries, raised his hand, and when called on answered, "Mass starvation." Mays thought Frankie said the way to control world population was 'Masturbation'. He got irate and sent Frankie to the principal's office. I realize Frankie can be difficult to deal with; however, this does seem like a case of a simple misunderstanding.

Evelyn

Evelyn, regarding what you wrote earlier. I'm not sure I understand. What's wrong with saying 'masturbation'?"

Marie

Marie, I do not think we should trivialize this situation. First of all, Frankie caused a row in the classroom today, whether he meant to or not. Mr. Mays has enough problems on his hand teaching Altruim teenagers that he doesn't need Frankie to disrupt. Also,

pleading 'misunderstanding' is one of the oldest manipulations teenagers use to avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Secondly, joking about masturbation in front of school children, especially girls, is unacceptable. Joking about it is the same as lowering the degree of harm it does. The Bible, many religious groups and our own collective society have norms forbidding it's practice. When I taught Sunday school, I warned my pupils to think long and hard before they masturbated and I think we should do the same now.

Leigh Donna

10:15 pm.

I believe Marie was only asking what's wrong with saying masturbation and not condoning the act in and of itself. At any rate, perhaps it's best this whole situation was dropped and left up to P.A. High School.

Nikki

4th

Nikki is correct. I was only asking what's

wrong with saying the m-word and not actually doing it. Since you brought it up though, I'd like to inform you that masturbation is universal among children. It may be universal among adults too, but...you know...nobody's telling. I'm not trying to rustle any feathers, I do believe the situation w/ Frankie calls for understanding. These kids have enough to worry about without us throwing that at them too.

Marie

5th

Dear Marie, thank you for your one sided approach to everyone's morality. I'm sure the theologians and preachers are glad you came along to clear up these sticky situations for them. Let me remind you of a few 'universal' facts. 1.) In the months that I've worked here (2 more than you) I've noticed what the kids are worried about. It's not acid rain, or the ozone or mass starvation. It's how to avoid algebra. How they can spend more time on the basketball court. 2.) This call for understanding and compassion is very noble of you in a liberal sort of a way. Hopefully,

your education taught you that teenagers and children need structure. Part of the reason Frankie is not a successful student is he doesn't have enough structure in his life. People have made too many concessions for him.

3.) I'm not recommending a nightly hand check or issuing chastity belts, (Although that might be effective) I want us to adopt a stance that is educationally appropriate, socially and morally upright and structured.

Leigh Donna

TO ALL STAFF,

-----I'M LEAVING TODAY WITH FRANK FOR NORTH CAROLINA. DO NOT LET THE CHILDREN KNOW I'M OUT OF TOWN. -----SOME OF YOUR JOURNAL REMARKS RECENTLY HAVE BEEN SARCASTIC AND FLIPPANT. PLEASE KEEP YOUR COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS IN THIS LOG LIMITED TO PROFESSIONAL OBSERVATIONS. -----I WILL BE BACK JULY 7th.

Clarisse

Paula whispered, "That's the way Clarisse, put it in their face." She thought that the group the year before must have been the most sniveling, griping, annoying batch of whiners Clarisse ever had to put up with. Paula resolved at that moment to devote more energy assisting

Clarisse with her burdensome responsibilities and to try and have a more pleasant demeanor with the rest of the group. After reading the journal she felt relief that the tension between her co-workers and her was comparatively minimal. Who was Frank? Paula read on and on in the journal skipping over entire paragraphs, reading ahead to see if she could pick out any information. Paula eventually concluded the book without reaching any conclusions. Hilena was still coloring quietly. Paula decided maybe she had some of the answers. She asked, "Hilena, you were in camp here last year too?"

The child laid down her crayon and nodded. "Who...Did you ever meet an individual named Frank? I'm not talkin' about Frankie the camper. I mean an older person. I don't know his last name, but I know he was friends w-"

"Sure, Frank. I knew him. Clarisse's boyfriend."

Paula reached over to brush Hilena's hair out of her face. Paula's hand must have startled Hilena, the girl's head instinctively jerked back. Hilena realized Paula was only moving her bangs aside and slowly continued her coloring. Paula pulled her hand back and asked, "Where is Frank now?"

"I don't know."

"Oh." Paula was disappointed.

"He was in jail." The girl said casually.

"In jail?" Paula said loudly. "Why was he in jail?"

"I don't know."

Paula's mind began racing, filling itself up with the most heinous crimes she could imagine Frank perpetrating. She thought of many various offenses such as murder and burglary, she thought of crimes punishable by death or mutilation and forfeiture of land and goods thereof.

"He probably was put in jail for writing bad checks." the girl said.

"How would you know that?" Was this kid his parole officer or something?

"I heard Frankie tell Tony. He said that the police came to where Frank worked and took him away."

"When that happened did Clarisse ever say anything about it?"

Hilena shook her head, "Naa, she never said a thing about it since."

Paula closed the journal. Moments later she returned it to its home in the desk. Paula never took it out again and none of the others ever read it. Paula never mentioned Frank to Clarisse and Clarisse chose not to reveal that information to anyone.

If you leaned out any bedroom windows that faced Todd Street there was a small, concrete ledge that protruded out eight inches. It was possible to sit comfortably, if not somewhat dangerously, on the window sill when the windows were cracked open. Tonight each volunteer sat on their respective perches and looked down on the traffic and streetwalkers below. Todd Street was filled with loud engines, action and voices. The afternoon's humidity had left and a comforting breeze would occasionally pass over. Periodically someone would look up and see the eight pairs of legs swinging out the open windows, each spaced by an alternate window with an air-conditioner, and the faces of these temporary visitors. Carlos, Brian, Lauren and Paula talked about campers, people they have known who have died, odd looking individuals on the street, the 'Yankees', television programs. They told stories about school, their parents, first loves. Brian's mind traveled back to Portland. For an instant, he became aware of a sense of free-floating regret. He didn't know if that feeling stemmed from his leaving home in that manner, his having such an enjoyable time in New York, or his feelings toward Paula. Paula was swinging her legs back and forth, high above Todd Street, making jokes about her uncle's foreign car business. Carlos was listening to Paula while studying the traffic behavior below. Lauren

carefully adjusted herself on the sill, kept her eyes below searching for any campers. A nice pleasant evening among friends and colleagues.

Somewhere in seemingly tranquil Oregon, Colleen Sage was grilling poor, little Suzie (the fish baby-sister Brian hired before leaving) for some cold information. Information about what Little Lord Fauntleroy's smashed head was doing on her jewelry tray...and where was her husband?

Tuesday, 18th of July.

"Your conduct, gentlemen, has not only grieved Almighty God, but seriously displeased me".

An Oxford proctor: speaking to some undergraduates in the 19th century.

Carlos and the team were on the field practicing before camp had begun. Lauren had disappeared into her basement classroom, with dozens of pieces of sheet music, to start preparations for the day. Paula was pushing folding chairs neatly underneath the tables. Brian was curiously carrying boxes from the Healing House to his classroom behind the stage. Clarisse saw him returning to the house, and then come back. She was about to ask him what he was doing, but a child with a bloody elbow distracted her. Clarisse looked around and saw that the gym could use some cleaning. She was slightly concerned about the bishop's visit today. The bishop, a man she had been introduced to at a AIDS benefit in Queens, but never spoken to for any length of time, had a long standing relationship with the parish priest. Clarisse knew that the bishop had been critical of Voss's relationship with the Port Altruim police department. Voss remembered the riots in Port Altruim a little more than two decades ago. He could still envision people

running around frantically, throwing stones, rocking cars back and forth, all while Tower's East was burning up and the streets and sky were full of black smoke. Port Altruim had been the focus of national attention at the time. St. Teresa's church was turned into a temporary shelter and, of course, the Healing House was running full force taking in residents whose apartments were destroyed by fire. St. Teresa's was the only building near the Towers that was not vandalized by the rioters. When the fire in Tower's was finally brought under control, seven people were dead as the result of smoke and flame. Fire officials at the time said Altruim was fortunate. Considering the amount of residents in the twelve story building, the list of casualties could have easily been ten times higher. An elderly lady, whom Voss had never seen before, died in his church that day. Voss had found fault with the local politicians and the police then. There was a front page write up in the New York Times with Voss quoted as calling for an internal police investigation of the handling of the East fire. (Clarisse still had the article in her scrapbook.) Soon after the furor trailed off from the public, the parish started receiving threatening phone calls. One monday a manila envelope arrived at St. Teresa's doorstep. It contained a large black and white photograph of the inside of St. Teresa's with a red swastika drawn over it.

During that period the diocesan bishop wanted to assign Voss to a college in the Midwest. Voss refused. He stayed and had been St. Teresa's priest for twenty years. He occasionally was the source of controversy, a favorite subject of New York reporters.

Voss's fear was that eventually another riot would take place. This time maybe Tower's North or Tower's West would be torched. Voss continually worried what would happen if any of the housing projects caught on fire. It was his private phobia. He once saw a documentary on television where residents were caught in the upper part of a building during a fire. People were jumping to their deaths rather than burn in the incredible heat. One man grabbed a hold of a mattress and lunged out a window. The image of the man holding the square white mattress falling down through the thick gray smoke was with Voss every time he looked out his window at Towers. It was Voss's self-imposed obligation to avoid another disruption with the great masses. In his struggle to keep the residents believing that Altruim governmental system provided justice to them, he made several enemies. Voss had enemies at City Hall, building inspectors, the P.A police department, and among some residents over charges he had made in the New York paper. These charges regarded allegations of civil rights abuses

police had made in some of their arrests. The most recent was a Mexican-American family whose father was aggressively searched without a warrant. The Hook's house on Duncan Street had been ransacked. The police claimed they were searching for drugs. Father Voss was interviewed by the newspaper and demanded an internal police investigation. Father Voss received several new death threats after the publication of the paper. Voss was not afraid of those unsigned letters or threatening phone calls. He was a cultural hero to the mostly Catholic and Hispanic population. The dangers of a hostile minority could be cautiously overlooked, with one cardinal exception; the bishop. The bishop and Voss were friends but they did not share a real understanding of one another. The bishop thought Voss was rebellious, and needlessly stirred up trouble. He didn't understand the promise Voss had made to himself or the weight of the responsibility he had put on himself to be a leader, peacemaker and fireman. The bishop got there early as planned. He pulled into the rectory garage in a black Buick, parked, and entered through Andrea's office. The bishop was a large man, born in Argentina, about fifty-five, with thick gray-and-black hair and a gray mustache. He was very clean shaven and stood upright, and wore a dark suit. Andrea announced the bishop's arrival to Father Voss on the intercom. Father Voss came

out of his office smiling, they shook hands and then Voss followed the bishop into the room. When the door slammed behind them it made a terrible, powerful noise and Andrea jumped in her seat.

Carlos greeted his morning class, "Today we're going t' go outside on the baseball field. If you are on the baseball team, then bring your glove, if you have a glove. If you are not on the baseball team, but want to play, I will loan you a glove. I have five. If you aren't on the baseball team and don't want to play at all, you can play on the playground next to the field."

"Can we turn on the hose?"

"Ahhh, I don't know, that may not be such a good idea. You'll get all muddy."

A chorus of voices broke out, "No we won't. No we won't. Pleeeasseeeee.

"Listen, I don't want a bunch o' muddy field mice trackin' dirt inside the gym."

"We won't. We promise."

Carlos considered, twisted his mouth to the side, "All right, I'll let ya. But no mud inside or on your bodies. And remember, what's Carlo's golden rule?"

The group sang in unison, "No crying. No bleeding."

"Right. Let's play some serious baseball."

Paula was giving instructions about today's art project. The kids who tuned her out at first, now became interested, when she shared a personal story for the first time. "Where I used to live, I taught a class of kids that were just like you. One day, I saw this poster that said 'ART CONTEST' on the side of this trendy record store and I said to my kids, let's enter that contest and try to win. You know what we did? We rolled out a big piece of paper, as big as a rug. We had two pots of paint, one red and one black. We took off our shoes and our socks. And we stepped in that red paint and walked all over tha' paper. And guess what?"

"Your mom spanked you?"

Paula turned her head slowly, "Noo."

"Your boss fired you?"

"Nooo, we won the art contest. Remember the art contest? What I was just talking about. The sign on the record store. We came in first place." Paula smiled, "You want to do that today?"

They did. After their cries of approval, Paula warned them, "Hey, this could become a real big mess if you're not careful."

In Brian's room behind the stage, his first class walked in to see a curtain hung from the ceiling with old brown string. Brian stood in front of the curtain,

obviously protecting whatever secret it held, away from the kids. Brian's position was stable, and his fingers were hooked behind his back. He looked like a sergeant standing there. He was smiling a child's anticipation smile, ignoring their requests to see what was behind the curtain. He made them all sit down in front of it. After they complied, he brought out a electronic tape/radio player and set it on a table before him. Then he pulled a tape out of the drawer, opened the container and placed it in the machine. "You all know Todd Rundgren?" he asked. They sat there curious. Brian spoke up in his teacher voice, "This is a song, an old song, a classic song. It's called 'Bang a Drum'. Listen carefully to the words, I want you to learn them for the activity I've planned today." The music started. The class glanced around unsure. Then an addicting drumbeat got their tiny feet tapping. Next vocals... "Ever since I was a tiny boy, I don't want no candy, I don't need no toys, I took a stick and an old coffee can, An' I pound on that thing 'til I got blisters on my hand. ...'Cause I don't want to work, I wanna' bang on the drums all day, I don't want to play, I jus' want to bang on the drums all day."

Now Brian began singing with the music. Kids looked around curious, wondering, small children put their hands over their mouths. They thought, "That counselor is

probably the strangest one of the whole group. That's saying a lot since they are all significantly strange."

Brian kept singing, "When I got older, they think I'm a fool'. The teacher told me I hav'ta stay afta' school..." Brian reached his hand over the side of the curtain and pulled it aside hard. Voice noise broke out as students bounded to their feet. There was a collection of different sized drums and a set of bongos brought over from downstairs at the Healing House.

No one was laughing in Voss's office. The bishop and Voss were having a passionate discussion on the church's relationship with the community, both sides presenting their case firmly and professionally. The two men were finally about to reach a compromise. The bishop was saying, "I realize this situation with the Hook family on Duncan Street has been a troublesome state of affairs, Tom. This community has been brought to the edge before and neither of us want that to happen again. What I feel is necessary to point out is that you're a leader to these people. They all look up to you, they respect you. This community still has scars from when Tower's East went up. I know you feel the pot boiling again. You have the ability and the power to stop a riot before it happens, yet you seem to be the one causing all the ruckus. These people all are up-in-arms following

your crusade."

Voss held back, "Yes," he said gently. I don't want a burning city. I want to stop it before it reaches that extreme, by having the police investigate it themselves. I'll abide by what the internal affairs department concludes. I believe the Hooks have found a Manhattan lawyer. As far as my leadership, that power will be taken away the instant the residents feel I've misused it."

"Tom, I know you hold the best interest of the people in Altruim. All I ask is you respond to this situation in a way that is not so ..." the bishop struggled for the proper phrase, "emotionally heightening."

"I appreciate what you're saying sir. I will continue to do my best to serve the needs of this community as I perceive them."

"And what is your perception of its needs?"

Voss clenched his fountain pen tightly. "This community has many needs. The needs are diverse. Regarding the one discussed a moment ago, I feel the need to put legitimate pressure on those people who are positioned in the local governmental and judicial departments, until the citizens in Altruim stop getting trampled upon."

"Your choice of methods--"

"Forgive me for interrupting. It seems we have reached a point where it may not be productive to go on. Why don't the two of us sit down with Greg Medlock, the chief of police, and see if we can reach some agreement we'll all be content with. I'm not preaching street fighting from the pulpit, I'm using the media and other legitimate peaceful means."

"This is a very volatile situation." The bishop argued.

At this point the two men's conversation was interrupted by the sweet sound of children's singing voices. Voices which emanated from Lauren's classroom in the basement. "Listen to that." The bishop commented, "The children, God bless them."

Voss smiled, "Yes, we have something very interesting going on here with the summer volunteers."

"What's that?"

"Well, Clarisse has really gotten things to go along superbly. I don't know what we'd do without her. And the volunteers, I think that this is something like the fifth year we've had the S.V program here, and this current group is easily best ever. They're doing an outstanding job with the campers. Top notch."

"How's Clarisse doing? She still at the hospital?"

"Yes. Why don't I call her to give us a tour of the camp."

"I'd love that, first, however I want to get Mr. Medlock on the phone. We need an immediate resolution to all this."

"The faster the better." Voss said picking up the phone. "Andrea, will you look up Greg Medlock's number on the computer and try to get him on the line?"

"Okay," Andrea's reply came over the intercom.

"Oh, an' Andrea, what is Clarisse's extension number over at the gym?"

"Three five two."

"Three five two. Thank you." Voss hit a clear button then dialed the extension number. "Clarisse? Hello, how's everything? The bishop would like to see the camp. Would you care to take us on a tour? Could you be ready in about fifteen minutes? Sure, that will be fine."

Fifteen minutes later Clarisse crossed the parking lot and entered the rectory through the side door. The sun was straight up and the summer heat was collected in the asphalt parking lot. She met Voss and the bishop. After a brief conversation which included questions about the hospital, the three of them walked downstairs. Lauren's room was clean and cool. The children sat on mats or small chairs. Lauren was positioned at the piano. The group sang two songs for their guests, 'Earthen Vessels' and 'Penny Lane'. Their guests

applauded loudly. Clarisse proudly decided that Lauren was probably the most effective of her four counselors and the one the kids seemed most affectionate towards. After a good showing downstairs, the three crossed the steaming parking lot and entered the front of the gymnasium. As the front room came into view, they heard a bloodcurdling scream. Next, two kids came running past them. The first, small and skinny was running with a big grin plastered on his face, and everytime his feet hit the floor, a red stamp of his footprint was left. After him came a chubby and short kid, named Oggie. Oggie was laughing, running and leaving black footprints! The bishop stared in disbelief. Skinny and Oggie ran off through the gym and vanished behind a wall. Paula came over apologizing, shoulders down, the sides of her mouth turned down. "Sorry 'bout that. We're doing an art project."

"Paula, this is Bishop Hyatt." Clarisse introduced them.

"Nice to meet you. Sorry about those kids."

"What type of an art project involves painting people's feet" the bishop asked?

"Oh, we weren't painting feet. We were dipping feet into paint and walking around on paper."

Just then a little girl walked up to the bishop and said, "We're gonna win an art contest, and we're not

gonna get spanked."

The bishop leaned down, "Who's going to spank you, little girl?"

Paula frantically waved her arms at the child behind the bishop's back, trying to signal her to stop talking.

"Nobody is gonna to." the girl said squinting her eyes at Paula. "If somebody tried to spank me I'd-" the girl made a fist and an uppercut motion, "I'd bop them in the face."

"Why don't you get back to the project, sweetie?" Paula pleaded.

"I'd clip 'em in the ear." the girl said.

Clarisse interrupted with a uptight voice, "Why don't we visit Brian next?"

"I'd mash up their noses."

Brian had pulled back the curtain to reveal a drum set. He divided up the drums and gave drumsticks to the older campers, to the younger ones, bongos to beat on with their hands, and to the tiny ones, sticks and old 'Maxwell House' cans. As long as everyone had something to beat on, they were content. Brian spoke a moment about rhythm and how not to poke a hole through the drums. After five more listenings to 'Bang a Drum' they were ready to go. Brian stood on two telephone books that raised him half a foot off the ground. He wore dark sunglasses, a Japanese headband, and used two ends of a

broken yardstick to conduct with. He stood next to the recorder which was turned around, facing the kids. Brian, the conductor, stood with his back to the door, "Ready?" He hit the play button and the music started again. The children loved to play those drums. They struck them repeatedly, beating, pounding. Thumping and tapping un-rhythmically. Brian sang and danced around. He moved his arms up and down in the air at different times, he wiggled his waist around. It would have normally provoked ridiculing comments from the kids but they were too involved in their music, their drumming. It came up on the middle of the song. "Big solo, now." he yelled. A little girl came running up to him, he scooped her up, spun her around and set her on top of the table next to the blasting recorder. Clarisse, Voss and the bishop walked across the acoustically sound gymnasium floor. They heard strange noises coming from the direction of Brian's room. Their pace quickened as Clarisse's fear deepened. They climbed the stairs on the side of the stage, walked past the stage curtains, to the room and flung open the door. Brian was singing and dancing, oblivious to the visitors behind him. At his right was a tape player and a small girl dancing on a table. In front of him was an assortment of kids, drums, and it was pandemonium. Brian loudly sang the lyrics... "Every day when I get home from work, I feel so

frustrated, the boss is a jerk, and I get my sticks and go off to the shed, and I pound on that drum like it was the boss's head. Because I don't want to work' I wanta-

"Several kids noticed the 'administrative people' standing there and immediately stopped playing. Their guilty eyes lowered. Brian noticed their faces and slowly turned around. Clarisse, Voss and some big guy in a black suit stood in the doorway. He quickly shut off the music and helped the child down. The rest of the kids stopped playing except for one boy who was so involved in pounding on a tin can he hadn't even noticed the music had been shut off. He kept beating the drum spastically. "Stop it, Marshall." Brian said in his softest, most angelic voice. Marshall kept pounding out his solo. "STOP IT MARSHALL!" Marshall looked up curiously. The pounding stopped. The room was left with only the hollow, faint sound of the drums echoing off the wall...and Brian's heart beating.

Voss and Clarisse apologized over and over to the bewildered bishop as they walked outside the back of the gym for some fresh air. "This is very unusual for them to behave this way." Clarisse offered. "It was just that we randomly happened upon them during a bad day, that's all." Voss rationalized out loud. Just then a baseball came flying at them, nearly hitting the bishop in the

head. It smashed into the brick wall right beside them. From over the top of a small sloped hill a young boy, about thirteen, came running. He was covered in mud from head to toe. There was a grassy piece of sod caked in his hair. "Watch out!" he yelled at the unwitting spectators. "That could be a homer." The young boy picked up the ball and flung it over the hillside. From over the side came a voice from an unseen Carlos yelling, "Relay. Relay. Relay." The bishop started up the hill to see what was happening, followed now by the three community leaders and a muddy player. When the bishop reached the peak of the tiny hill, which was about fifteen feet up, he saw a base runner passing third, making the turn and heading for home. The outfielder had just thrown the ball in to the shortstop, who caught it, spun around in a whirl, and relayed it to the catcher. It was a play at the plate! Bishop Hyatt's eyes followed the ball as it made it's journey. In the infield, the runner was just about home when the ball collided with his head sending him sprawling through the air and landing hard in a patch of black earth. There was an audible thud. Then came Carlos leaping up and down, "Did you see that? That was great! What a shot! That musta' been a hundred foot throw from the outfield. Right on target too." Carlos grabbed the hand of a player who had nothing to do with the play and shook it

hard. "Great job. Great play." The bishop looked to the boy covered in mud standing at his right. The boy looked at him with a unconcerned face. The bishop said in a hoarse whisper, "Son, what on God's great green earth do you have going on here?'

The boy replied, "I don't know. But, I think he would have been out at home plate. What do you think?"

Watercolors framed in black mat board from earlier camps decorated the Healing House office. Previously the office was a smaller bedroom. Years ago a counselor moved in a large stained desk from the old high school, a set of metal filing cabinets, an overstuffed green chair and a ridiculously bright, shaggy red rug. Brian and Carlos sat in the chairs separating coloring markers from crayons. They needed a poster to put in the back of the church, on the bulletin board, asking residents to donate money or gloves to the baseball team. They spoke a little about how it should look. "It should be flashy and colorful so it will attract attention." Carlos said.

"Uh-huh, also it needs to be simple and bold so everyone will read it as they pass by it."

"You're right. There are so many signs and flyers on the church bulletin board, no one pays any attention to them any more. Everyone has become poster blind."

Lauren came and knocked on the door.

Brian and Carlos looked up. Lauren leaned her head in the office. "Clarisse wants to see everybody in the family room right away." Brian and Carlos looked at each other, they said, "Uh-oh." The five of them came to the meeting with apprehension. As a group they were together continuously, but this was an organized meeting. They sat in a circle. Brian and Carlos on the ends of the couch, Lauren in the rocker, and Paula and Clarisse on the long padded bench. The television had been turned off and the only sound was the ticking of a table clock. Clarisse had a clipboard with several sheets of paper resting on her lap. She spoke calmly, "Several issues needing attention. First, thank you for that great showing today in front of the bishop."

"Clarisse-" Carlos began.

"That's the only time I want to bring it up again. It's something better forgotten, I think." she said disgusted. Then her attention turned to Lauren. "Lauren, I realize that the problems today weren't your fault. So this isn't directed toward to you." Clarisse brought her hands up and rubbed her eyes. "What happened today is not something I would choose to happen. Bishop Hyatt thinks we're all dangerously incompetent here. The problems weren't anybody's fault. You all were simply having fun with the kids. You've made the camp very enjoyable for them and I appreciate that. But you acted

like real yo-yos in front of the bishop, the only person we're trying to impress. Now, I had a lot of things I was going to say to you, but I decided not to. We're doing fine, so lets move on."

The counselors sat in silence.

"Secondly, the next issue I would like to address is the re-establishing of some goals. Lauren has something she would like to say as well. Before that, I'd like to ask you all a question. You've been here a few weeks. Apparently everything is proceeding well enough. My question is, why are you here? Why did you come here?"

Carlos answered, "We're here for the kids."

Clarisse shook her head, "No, that is not what I'm asking. Why did you decide to leave your homes, schools, families, whatever. Why did you decide to work here?"

Brian felt a sudden shock. Had Clarisse found out about his wife? Carlos looked toward the ground, then back up to his friends around the room.

"Outside of the fact that I'm attempting to receive partial credit for student teaching, I came here to work on a paper. I'm interested in getting something published. Something I wasn't able to concentrate on where I lived. I thought I would have more seclusion here, since I didn't know anybody. I thought I would have time to be alone to work with my computer. I realized that there would be hard work involved with the

camp too." Carlos looked down again, then he looked up and said, "I have less time here actually, but I'm certainly not complaining. This is satisfying work. It's a lot more enjoyable than I thought, but I still intend on finishing my manuscript."

"What's your manuscript about?" Paula asked.

"That's difficult to explain. I guess it would fall under the category of a driver's manual."

"Huh, that's interesting. Good luck with that Carlo.s" Clarisse added, she turned her head to the right, made eye contact with Paula. "Paula?"

"Um, there is no real reason. Nothing tangible." Paula said returning the glance. "I had several friends who went through the S.V.P program, in different cities, and they really raved about it. Basically, it is through them I decided to volunteer. I spoke at great lengths with them and felt it was something I wanted to do. Up to this point, I feel I made the right decision, although it's not how they described it. It's hard to describe this program to a person who has never experienced volunteerism or S.V.P community living. A second reason is that I'm planning on being a teacher, so it was time to start dealing with some kids. Get that experience."

Brian sat motionless. This was the worst thing they could talk about. Brian wasn't ready for any honest

sharing of personal history. While he was growing up, in his family or in his marriage, there was very little self-revelation. Brian was not comfortable speaking out loud, about his private reflections. Certainly, he would not say to these people that he left his wife when she went to meet her boyfriend in Venezuela. That was something he would never share. He thought of these people as good-natured and friendly, but did he like them enough to disclose personal secrets? No. Besides with the bombardment of responsibilities and activities of camp, the memory of Colleen did not persist in his mind the way he thought it might. Since he wasn't thinking of her, why make them? It wasn't fair. These people wouldn't understand that Colleen drove him to do the things that he did. He was dealing with enough not to be burdened by telling others.

"Brian?"

"I'm like Paula." he said quickly. "No huge underlining reason. I'm not Catholic but I knew a doctor and he told me about the program."

"Were your parents against it?"

"My parents?" Brian laughed, "No, they weren't against it. They don't even know about it. They're older. I haven't talked to them in months."

Clarisse closed her eyes and slowly reopened them, "Do you feel it is time for a phone call to them?" She

asked in a non-threatening way, a friendly suggestion.

"Yeah, I was going to call this week."

"Okay, good." Clarisse turned her attention to Lauren. "Do you want to talk or not?"

"Yes, I'd like to talk." Lauren's head raised up. She lifted her legs up into an Indian-style position. "This is something I hope you don't feel slighted for not knowing earlier." Lauren exhaled deeply. "It is awkward bringing this up in social situations, but, I'm not uncomfortable discussing it." The counselors put on their guard. Paula lifted herself up by the chair's armrests and shifted in the chair. "I have granulocytic leukemia. It's chronic." She told them. "I only found out recently. I had gone to my doctor complaining about fatigue and that's when it was discovered. I don't know exactly when its onset was. I do know that it is uncommon in children, it usually hits in adulthood." Lauren momentarily stopped speaking at that point. It was then Brian seemed aware of the loud ticking sounds of the table clock. Lauren continued, "I want us all to be real cerebral about this. At home, I felt like I was being treated special and different. People were being nice to me out of pity or whatever. I feel, ...okay. I see a doctor in the hospital that Clarisse works at. She tells me I have a lot to be optimistic about. I wanted you all to know. However, in telling you, I would like

to make it as clear as possible, I don't want this to interfere with the camp. I don't want this being associated with the camp. I don't want this to be a 'St. Teresa's thing'. It is an unfortunate happening, but I came here to enjoy this summer. That's still my intention. I'll be going to the hospital more regularly for treatments, but that doesn't mean I foresee myself becoming a problem for the camp."

Brian offered, "You shouldn't be worried about the camp. We can handle it."

"You're misunderstanding me." She told him firmly. "I want to be concerned with the camp. I want the involvement of the camp. Okay?" Lauren gestured with her fingers clasped together. "I can handle it mentally and physically. I can still play the piano."

Brian said, "All I meant is, your first concern should be your health. What are these treatments you were talking about?"

"There are a couple. Because of complications, they all won't work for me. In some patients, it can be controlled with mild chemotherapy. The doctors have told me all the options and which of the treatments won't work for me. I try to take a determined attitude about staying as healthy as possible. Secondly, to stay too busy to dwell on it. Like I said earlier, it's something I wanted to share with you, but not have it interfere.

I want things to go on as before. Taking turns cooking dinner, insulting each other's taste in clothing, things like that." Lauren looked around the room. No one spoke. Lauren asked, "Do any of you have any questions you'd like to ask me?"

They all had questions. They wanted to know how long the doctors had given her to live. No one dared asked her that. They wondered how long she knew. About how she was dealing with it. Will this interfere with the camp regardless of her wish that it doesn't? No one asked any questions. Brian felt guilty for feeling sorry for himself. The air in the room felt awkward and heavy. Lauren wished one of them would speak up. Not even Clarisse would end it by speaking up or moving to the next issue in the meeting. The clock ticked on. Lauren bite the inside of her lip.

In the days after the meeting the group was somber. They did their daily routine. Woke up early in the mornings. (Clarisse would already be gone). They had some kind of breakfast. They were conditioned on quick, simple things like cereal, raisin toast or oranges. Usually they moved at different paces and left for camp singularly. A girl from camp would be waiting for Paula outside on the same curb prostitutes were the night before. At camp they would teach their various subjects in their various styles. Children pasted, glued, sang

songs, learned about nature, had recess. The counselors became more acquainted with the children. After camp, Brian, Carlos and sometimes Paula ditched their old habit of taking naps and got involved in the grueling practices with the baseball team. News about the illness put them into a mental haze, but Lauren's continued good-spirits and good humor slowly began to bring them out of it. Lauren and Carlos began to spend hours together after dinner always talking about some philosophical point or mindless notion. Lauren had a soothing, peaceful effect on Carlos. Carlos even began to wonder if he would become so full of serenity that he would be unable to finish the 'Theory of Continual Motion'.

One day Carlos took Lauren to the top of the Empire State Building. Downstairs they purchased tickets who stubs read, 'EMPIRE STATE OBSERVATORIES: Souvenir of Visit to the Most Famous Building in the World.' Carlos believed that the Empire State Building was probably better than the World Trade Center to get the feel of the immensity of New York City. The Trade Center was taller but the State Building had a more centralized location. Looking over the edge gave Carlos trouble with vertigo, so he stayed back from the concrete rampart with it's silver wire cage. As far as the land extended to the water New York was occupied with manic activity and

glorious massiveness. The height didn't seem to bother Lauren, she bounded around the four corners happily looking straight down as much as the protective barrier would permit. Carlos leaned back against the glass observatory. Many of the visitors were from foreign countries. Carlos recognized German, Spanish, and Japanese languages. The visitors wore comfortable clothing and had cameras dangling from neck straps. One wore tight jeans with a frosty gray shirt. He had a tiny red-brown beard and plaid cap. There was an elderly lady with bright white hair and a navy polka dot dress, who kept a napkin pressed to her nose. Lauren was enamored with the view, many places were available to the sight: Brooklyn, Staten Island, J.F.K. International Airport, The Statue of Liberty, China Town, the East River. There were also many bridges: the Brooklyn, Manhattan, Williamsburgh, Triborough and Queensboro. Lauren and Carlos stayed out to midnight and excitedly turned in her film at the Port Altruim grocery center. Carlos told Paula and Clarisse the story of their trip downtown. As Friday approached Clarisse wanted all of her volunteers to get away and have a night in Manhattan. She made the necessary arrangements and told them all during Thursday night dinner. "Friday, I was going to take you all to Manhattan, if you'd like. It's pretty exciting there and I kinda' know my way around. Of course, if there is some

other place that you would prefer to go to that's fine. Whatever you want."

Brian's eyes flickered, "Let's go to Manhattan."

Paula asked, "How would we get around there? We can't drive; there is no place to park."

"Subway." Clarisse told her.

"You mean go down there for the night, eat dinner and all that?"

"Sure. There is Polynesian restaurant down there. If you haven't ever had Polynesian food, it might be something different. Is that okay? Good, we'll plan on Friday."

Friday early at camp, Father Voss was on hand for the morning prayer. The campers were pepped up and talkative. Clarisse stood up to make some announcements. "Be quiet please, Frankie,...Marshall, quiet. This is the last day of our fourth week. Only two and a half more weeks to go. You all have been very good. We have had a lot of fun at camp so far and we plan to have even more. Next week, we have a trip to the park scheduled, and if it rains, I think we may go indoor swimming." That was good news for the children and they got noisy again. "Shhh. I think Brian and Carlos have an announcement, then I've asked Father Voss to say our prayer. Remember, our prayer is the most important thing we do all day here."

Brian and Carlos stood in the center of a large ring of kids. Carlos began, "The baseball practice for tonight will only go until five, but there is another practice tomorrow and Sunday at ten a.m. Tonight until five, tomorrow and the next day we'll begin at ten. If you can't come this weekend I don't want to hear about it. I want everybody to be there but if you can't make it, don't tell me about it. I don't want to hear about it. Everyone knows what to do? Good."

Brian added, "And remember, you can always practice on your own. Even if you don't have equipment, you can jog, or do push-ups. Anything you do to get better conditioned."

Father Voss led them in a prayer next. After he finished the kids were ready to begin camp. Voss took Brian and Carlos aside and told them, "I need to speak to you both before camp starts today." Brian and Carlos nodded and told their groups to play quietly in the gym until they returned. Carlos thought Voss might want to talk to them about the problems with the Altruim police. Brian thought Voss wanted to yell at them about what happened yesterday with the bishop. They were both wrong. He asked, "You two think you could carry some boxes from the garage to the storage room of the gym? It will probably take both of you, both 're pretty heavy."

Brian answered, "Sure. I don't think that will be any problem."

"Well, I have something to attend to in my office. Just put them in the storage room. Thank you boys." Voss just kept on walking towards his office, he didn't even turn around. Carlos became indignant and when Brian and he angled over toward the garage, Carlos spoke under his breath, "What does he think we are, the movin' men?"

"I think movin' men make more than one fifty a month." Brian said taking up the refrain. They walked side by side around the office and into the garage. Despite the door being open, it was hot and smelled like gasoline as they entered. "Where is it?" Carlos asked, "I don't see any box."

"There's a box in front of the van up against the wall."

"You think he could have hid it any better?" Carlos asked sliding around in between the van and the garage wall. Carlos stepped over equipment and some lawn chairs. The box was in front of the van, next to the wall outside Andrea's room. It stood about three feet high and three feet wide, on the top was a yellow piece of paper folded up. Carlos looked over his shoulder and called to Brian who was stationed behind the van. "Brian, there's only one box. I think we should get Voss to pull out this van first."

"I'll go get the keys from Andrea."

"Wait a minute." Carlos whispered to himself.

"There are some instructions on it."

"What instructions?" Brian asked him.

"Brian, come take a look at this!"

Brian came over the edge clipper and lawn chairs and stood crowded next to Carlos. Carlos was holding a piece of folded paper from a computer printer. The handwritten note said:

Dear coaches: This showed up at my doorstep last night. I couldn't find any use for it. I thought you might be able to. Let me know how everything works out.

Fr. Voss

P.S. Knock Kloane into the void!

Brian and Carlos exchanged glances, then simultaneously lunged forward and began tearing the brown tape off the lid, like children on Christmas morning. Each one fumbling over the others arms. The label on the side of the box read 'Victory Sportswear; For All Your Specialized Needs. Port Altruim, N.Y.'. The cardboard lid was torn off exposing plastic and styrofoam. Brian reached his hand into the box as if he had just pried open a treasure chest. He pulled out a silvery

plastic-wrapped glove. His nostrils were filled with the smell of the new sports equipment. Carlos pulled out a stack of white shirts with brown sleeves. He removed one from the bundle. It read in fancy colored lettering 'St.Teresa's'. They stared in disbelief. It was bonus Friday! In all there was fifteen new gloves, (thirteen right handed, two left handed) and thirty jerseys all in a variety of sizes. Carlos said without taking his eyes off the jerseys, "Forget that comment I made about being the moving men."

"He must have had to pay out the wazoo for this." Brian responded.

"Let's go show the team."

"No, no." Brian said grasping Carlos sleeve. "Let's wait. We'll tell them we got a big surprise if they have a great practice. Show them this later!"

"Yeah. Good idea." Carlos agreed. "Tricky."

That was how the St. Teresa team got the their gloves. Father Voss wanted it to be an anonymous gift. The jerseys and the gloves would became a part of the official Port Altruim team for how ever long gloves or teams last. The team were as happy about the gloves as Brian and Carlos. Paula kept track of who was assigned a glove. They all took turns trying them on. Some members had to share their gloves and others decided to keep the ones they had. It was the perfect motivator the

team needed. With brand new gloves and bright clean jerseys how could you lose? For many members of the team, doubting their chances against Kloane, the pendulum seemed to swing back toward their side. Maybe they would obliterate Kloane after all. Maybe they would crunch Kloane, thirty four to nothing, and leave their battered, bleeding bodies crumpled up in the dirt. HA!

Like many Americans, Lauren got all her mental images and pre-conceived stereotypes about New York from the media, but movies, novels, and magazines never could capture the experience of actually being there, walking in the streets looking up at the skyscrapers and watching the hazardous mixture of people. By this point in the summer, she had become familiar with Altruim's demographic layout. Carlos and Lauren were off at the grocery store which did their film developing. They were meeting the rest of the group back at the Healing House around six-thirty. Clarisse was in Towers. She was talking to Andrea and her mother in their clean, small fifth floor apartment. Paula was in the Healing House washing dishes. Her week at camp had been hectic and she was glad for the weekend and to be alone finally. She heard the door slam and the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. Soon Brian entered, carrying a small black puppy with long gray whiskers which was playfully attempting to lick his face. Brian arched his neck back

to prevent getting slobbered. "Okay, girl, that's enough." Paula felt herself growing frustrated and angry. The Healing House did NOT need a puppy or mascot. She placed the dish into the creamy foam of the sink, turned off the water, and confronted Brain. "What is that?"

"She's a lab named Bone. Our new friend." Brian said holding her up for display.

"She's not staying." Paula said coldly.

"Oh really Mom? Can't I keep her please?"

"No, you may not. Now go out and put her in the street."

"Can't do that. Promised Rooster I'd watch her 'til he got back."

"Will you keep her downstairs, please?"

"Don't you want to pet her?" This animal seems to gravitate toward humans."

Paula said, "Animals only seem to gravitate to the front tire of my car."

"You're sure you don't want to hold her?"

"I'm sure I don't."

"Why not? You afraid you'll want to keep her?"

"I'm afraid I may blundgen her. Now, quit botherin' me and take her downstairs."

"She may make a mess down there." Brian reasoned.

"Don't you think that's better? She does it down

there, and not up here, where we live."

Brian turned his back to Paula and started down the staircase, talking to the dog in a comforting voice, "Don't you mind her none, Bone-head. She won't hurt you as long as you keep those ruby slippers I gave you." After Brian had disappeared downstairs to play with the dog, Paula wiped her hands off with a dishcloth and headed for the family room telephone. She called her mother in Louisiana and talked for twenty minutes. She told her mother that she was having a good time but things were a little out-of-control. New York was a lot faster pace than what she had been accustomed to. New York was also more social than she was used to. People who live in high rises with a thousand others, tend to make more friends than those who live on acre lots, separated by pastures and wire fences. Occasionally Paula's conversation was interrupted by sounds of a dog barking. When the sun had gone down, Paula remembered the dishes, she thanked her mom and told her that it was nice to hear a sane voice. After she hung up the phone she was in much better spirits. Rooster came and picked up his puppy. Brian jogged loudly up the stairs. He had to take a shower before they all went downtown. The light was on in the kitchen and Paula stood making a new sink full of bubbles. Through the doorway Brian silently watched Paula. Watched her long, tan arms protrude out of

her blouse and her hands hidden into the white bubbly soap. Paula looked over and saw him. He asked, "You're still doing dishes? How many were there?"

"Plenty. Thanks for offering to help."

"I was takin' care of Rooster's dog."

"You were? Oh, my mistake. I didn't realize how hard you were working. Why don't you go relax on the sofa and take your shoes off."

Brian stuck his jaw out, "Paula, I like you and you are a fairly pleasant person - - usually. But, right now you're approaching the limit of my tolerance for you. So you better not open up the bin of sarcastic comments."

"Or you'll do what?" she questioned.

"Something you would find painful and troubling."

"Like," Paula looked up to the ceiling pretending to search for words. "Like having this conversation with you. Or maybe meeting your relatives."

"That does it. You asked for it. I'm washing your mouth out." Brian ran over from the door and grabbed Paula by the elbows. She screamed. He put his arms around hers so she couldn't grab him. Standing to her side he leaned her torso toward the sink of dirty water and suds. "Now, I'm going to give you a chance to retract your comments."

Paula screamed again and laughed, "Hey, you're acting out. Stop it, or I'm gonna get seriously mad."

"I don't care. You ready for your weekly bath?" He nudged her closer to the water. She brought her hands as a brace on the counter top. "Brian, I swear if you don't stop you'll regret it forever."

"I don't know if I can do that."

Paula tilted her head to look back at him, long strands of hair fell in her face, "Okay, you let me loose and I won't give you any more trouble."

"Is that a bargain?" he asked her.

"I promise it."

"You promise?" he asked.

"Yes." she said reluctantly.

"Forget it. No bargains. No deals."

Paula's wet hand slide across the countertop and splashed some water in the sink. "Oh my God. My ring! You made me knock my ring in the water."

"You didn't have any ring." Brian said with conviction but let loose her shoulders, and Paula immediately spun and smashed a handful of soap suds in his face. Brian took a step back and wiped his face with the side of his shirt. When the soap was out of his eyes, he could already see Paula making her way out the porch door. He started in after her, out the door, into the porch where the broken windows were covered with plywood squares. Paula was already going through the other entrance leading into the laundry room. He ran

down the length of the porch, dark red matting under his feet. Paula darted through the laundry room and tripped over an empty basket. Brian flew the rest of the length of the porch, made the same turn and entered the house again. Paula got back onto her feet and tried to slam the door behind her, leaving Brian out on the porch. At the last moment Brian grabbed the door handle from the other side. He heard Paula suppress a laugh again and take off through the laundry room. He swung open the door, followed her through the laundry room and raced down the bedroom hallway into the kitchen. They had just ran a long rectangle pattern. Paula skidded into the family room and was breaking for the stairs that led outside. Just as she reached the couch he caught her. She stopped and he spun her around. Then he released her and she pressed up against the side of the couch. They paused facing each other, breathing heavy, both hearts were beating fast. Paula looked into Brian's face and he leaned forward towards her and then they heard the sound of paper rustling. Both heads turned simultaneously toward the door and saw little Hilena grinning, and holding a small brown paper bag with both hands.

Immediately Paula felt embarrassed. In camp she was always reserved and proper. Now one of the kids saw her laughing and screaming and being chased. Maybe she

should say she was playing tag. Brian was a little surprised to see the camper. It wasn't that children were unwelcome there, they just made it a point not to invite any. Nevertheless, here was one standing in the doorway. You couldn't deny that. How did she get there? Who let her in? Paula slowly walked over to her and knelt down to speak, "Hilena, what are you doin' here?"

The little girl shrugged. She was quiet but amused at the commotion in the Healing House. Brian asked, "What do you have in the bag?"

Hilena held open the little bag to show them. "Ice cream." she said.

"You brought us ice cream?"

"No." the child said looking at Brian like he was stupid, "This is for my mom."

"Oh."

"I can bring you some tomorrow though."

"That's okay. You don't have to." Brian said walking toward the kitchen door. He glanced at Paula, "Time for me to get cleaned up. I'll leave you two girls alone to talk."

When Brian had left, Paula looked again at Hilena, "What are you doin' here, hon? Is everything okay? Are you just comin' to visit?"

"I went to the store. Tony tol' me you had a puppy here."

"Yeah, the puppy went home with Rooster."

"Your door was opened. I knocked."

"Well, I glad you came to visit me. Do you want to put your bag in the freezer? I have some colorin' books."

"No, I got to go."

"Is your mother waiting for you outside?"

"She's at home."

"Did she say it was okay to go out? It's dark out there now, Hilena. Are you allowed out after dark?"

"Yeah." Hilena said. She meant it like 'of course.'.

"I don't think it's a good idea for you to walk around Towers after the sun goes down. Maybe I should walk you home."

Hilena wanted no part of that idea. She defensively walked backwards out of the room into the darkness of the hallway. "Naw, I'm okay." Hilena began her descent of the stairs quickly. Paula stood up and called out to her, "Hilena, does your mother know you're out buying ice cream?"

Hilena continued her descent, "Yes. She tol' me to." She turned the knob at the bottom of the stairs and went out into the street and shut the door behind her. Paula got up and went over to the west window, so she could at least watch her walk part of the way home.

Paula reached the window and waited for her to come back into her view. Brian entered the room . He also looked out the window, with his arms folded standing next to Paula. "What happened?" he whispered.

"Her mother sent her out after dark, to get ice cream. Do you think that is safe? She grew up here and all. She's pretty street smart, but do you think that is safe? Do you think that's prudent?"

"No, I don't. But, what can ya' do? She is bringing home ice cream. She doesn't want it to melt. She'll probably go straight home. I wouldn't worry about her."

"Someone is here. I just heard the door downstairs."

"That'll be Clarisse. I got to get in the shower." Brian left and passed by the door to the stairs. Clarisse and Andrea were walking up. Brian paused for a moment at the top of the stairs and called down to the ladies. "Hello Clarisse, you got a visitor for us?"

Clarisse looked up, "Andrea has agreed to join us this evening. Are you all ready?"

"I'm getting in the shower now. Hello Andrea, I'm glad you're coming with us. Ahh, Lauren and Carlo aren't home yet."

Clarisse reached the top of the stairs, "Yea, they are," she exhaled, "I saw them pull up right outside."

They said the car is all gassed and ready."

"Oh, good. I'll be ready in a second." Brian said and left down the hallway. Clarisse and Andrea went into the family room. Paula was still staring out the window.

"KYLE!"

"Kyle." the voice came again low and grinding. "I've been lookin' for you." Juan said, approaching the boy on the bicycle. Juan slowly pulled off his mirrored sunglasses. The boy nervously squirmed on his bike seat. One of Juan's two friends lifted up the back of the bike by its frame and the boy slide off the seat and his groin smashed up against the gooseneck. Juan grabbed him by the back of the hair and jerked his head back.

"I heard you were giving C.C Ava Marie Gonzelaz a difficult time last week on the bus."

"No, I didn't." the boy protested.

Juan tightened his hold of the boy's tuft of black hair, "Don't lie to me Kyle. I would just as soon smack the snot out of you than not smack the snot out of you. Also, I'm very fond of C.C. Ava Marie Gonzelaz and I don't appreciate you giving her a hard time." Juan pulled the hair tighter, "You understand Kyle?"

The boy trembled, "I'm not Kyle." he whimpered.

Minutes earlier, little Marshall Morgan was riding his bicycle through traffic in Kloane. Marshall was at his uncle's house playing darts and now raced home before

the sun went completely down. Marshall zig-zagged through the traffic and peddled hurriedly down sidewalks. The wind whipped his sweatshirt and whistled in his ears. Marshall had oversized ears which protruded straight out from the sides of his head. Marshall squeezed the handlebars, turned down street, when suddenly two silhouettes appeared blocking the sidewalk. When Marshall got close, one of the two reached out and grabbed him by the hood of his sweatshirt and yanked him to a stop. Marshall turned and twisted but couldn't shake loose, by now the hook was tight, and poor Marshall and his bicycle was pulled to the side of a building under black, metal fire escape stairs. Next thing Marshall heard was the clanking of footsteps coming down those metal stairs. Both individuals held Marshall tight and awaited the enforcer. Juan walked around the side of the metal cage staircase, his steps now softened by pieces of cardboard that were laid out on the sidewalk. Juan, his two thugs and Marshall were the only occupants of the street. Marshall shook like a scared rabbit in their shadowy grasp.

Juan looked at the trembling boy then up to the two that held him. Juan leaned his face toward the boy and asked in a soft voice, "Who are you then?"

"M-M-Marshall."

"Marshall?" Juan looked up, paused for a second,

then reached out and slapped the one that pulled Marshall's bike up, causing him to fall off the seat. "THIS ISN'T KYLE."

The one whose faced was slapped blurted out, "Man, I thought--"

"Oh, you thought," Juan said, "That explains it." Juan turned a disgusted face away from him and turned his attention to Marshall. "Where are you from, huh?"

"Port Altruim." Marshall told him, still frightened.

"Altruim." Juan whispered, "C'mere here with me." Juan motioned him out from underneath the stairs. Juan walked out to the street corner and dug his thumbs into the sides of his slacks. Juan began speaking, thinking that Marshall was right beside him. Then he turned around to see Marshall still leaning back on his bike, hesitating.

"COME HERE MARSHMALLOW!" Juan demanded, but then added in a pleasant voice. "I'm not goin't to hurt you."

Marshall positioned himself back on the seat and coasted a few feet over to Juan. The two others stayed by themselves underneath the stairs. When Marshall came next to Juan he felt Juan's heavy hand placed firmly on his shoulder. The gesture seemed friendly but Marshall knew he could not escape if he wanted to. Juan said to him, "I'm sorry about that kid. They thought you were

someone else that said something really offensive to Ava Maria Gonzelaz. I was just lookin' out for a friend, you know. Anyway, forget about that. You're from Port Altruim, huh? I have some friends there. You know Paula? Paula works in the camp, she's a art teacher. Do you know her?"

"Yes."

"Really? Good." Juan nodded his head. "She goes out with that one twelve-pack, milk-drinkin', Oregon-stompin', white, doesn't she?"

"I don't know."

"Is she dating that white guy?"

"I don't know."

"You don't like him, do you? I mean, what is he doing here anyway? You can think what you want, but I'd watch out for him. I wouldn't trust him a bit if I were you. That's just some friendly advice." Juan patted Marshall hard on his shoulder. "Oh, by the way, don't tell Paula about you and me and about C.C Ava Maria Gonzelaz. I wouldn't want her to think you were acting unmanly."

Marshall shrugged. Juan let loose. "Alright Marshmallow." He felt Juan smack him on the back, which was his signal to leave. He leaned up on the pedals and took off, never turning around to see if Juan was watching or not. Marshall rushed off down the sidewalk,

feeling incredibly relieved, he sped all the way home without stopping. When he finally got there his momma spanked him for being late and making her worry.

Half an hour later they were ready to go. Clarisse was wearing a red blouse and had her black hair pulled back into a 'Wilma Flintstone' ball. Andrea had on a tan army-styled shirt and khaki pants. Carlos wore a white muscle-shirt and dark jeans. Lauren had on a red and white striped shirt and a long pastel shirt. In her purse she brought her camera which had just been loaded with a fresh roll of film. Brian wore a light blue collared shirt and white slacks. Out on the street, before they left, a prostitute named Samfort agreed to take a picture for them. The group stood together smiling. Carlos had one arm around Lauren and his hand on Andrea's shoulder. Samfort clicked the button and then they all twisted their way into the car and took off. Clarisse driving towards Staten Island. On the way they argued a little about which radio station to listen to. As it turned out, it didn't really matter what they listened to because their ride was filled with conversation. Clarisse had to do an errand in Staten Island on the way. There was a three dollar toll every time a car passed onto the Island, like it was 'Disneyland' or something. Clarisse accomplished her errand, pulled into the public

parking area near the Readland Ferry Terminal, explaining that the ferry would take them into the heart of Manhattan. The car would have been a hinderance because of parking and theft problems, plus they wanted to see the city on foot. Not out some car window.

Andrea had lived in New York since birth, yet only Clarisse had any idea where she was going. The volunteers wanted to be taken on a tour, craving a sensory overdose. Even before the entrance of the subway there was a million things to look at. Buildings, architecture, motels, hotels, factories, churches, houses, apartments, skyscrapers, restaurants, cars, bars, people, people, people. Their group followed Clarisse over a walkway which was suspended on top of the street. Below, in gridlock traffic an older hunch-back man was going from car to car on foot. He was dressed from head-to-toe in navy blue clothing. In his left hand he held a gas station squeegee and in his right a small bucket of brown water. The man went from car to car washing windows. After the completion of each car he would go to the driver's window looking for donations. Some would give him change, some would scream out an obscenity, most would ignore him. On the other side of the cross walk, the sidewalk opened up into a concrete cave with descending steps. Crowds of people entered and exited. As they went down, they noticed the slanted

ceiling with it's geometric design and fluorescent lights. On the walls, spaced evenly, were clear plastic poster containers advertising movies, toothpaste and hair cream. At the bottom of the stairs was a platform that extended about ten feet. At the end of the platform was the drop off and the train tracks. It was loud, dark and crowded. Brian was filled with both apprehension and wonder. The native New Yorkers seemed to take it casually, but Brian who lived in mostly rural areas all his life, was astonished. Clarisse was over near a wall checking out an intrinsically complicated map of the underground. Soon, she found the correct train for them once they crossed into the city. Inside the subway train did not seem much different than riding a bus. There were seats, lights, graffiti, and people. Brian wondered if his pretty-boy outfit stood out with the subway crowd. Carlos daydreamed about a chapter entitled 'Subway Etiquette' and wondered what was the role of subways in the 'Theory of Continual Motion'. Sitting down next to Paula and Andrea, Carlos spoke in detail of his experience earlier with the equipment Voss had given them. All the others listened unobtrusively while staring out the windows at metal railings flying by. When it came time for their departure, Clarisse again led the group out of the train down another platform and into an immense room. The room looked like four St. Teresa's

gymnasiums put together. Four square columns suspended the ceiling and in the center of the room squated old fashioned benches stained a deep, rich brown. There was a brass colored sign on the wall that read 'Readland Subway Station'. There was a newspaper stand in the center selling magazines and mugs decorated with the Statue of Liberty. After walking for a while, looking at the billboards and lights they came upon the Polynesian restaurant Clarisse told them about. Inside, they went through hanging beads. On the wall was a somewhat abstract painting of a man on a hill with dozens of people and sheep standing around him. No one knew who the man symbolized or anything about Polynesian culture. Over the intercom came sounds of eerie eastern music, a women's high pitched voice and lots of drums. "Sounds like your music." Brian whispered to Lauren. The waitress, a pretty Arabian-looking women, sat them down at their table. The table was small and circular in shape. Around the table was a series of small, round, wicker chairs that were very difficult to sit in. The place had a very distinct atmosphere and, after they settled in, they ordered and spoke among themselves while watching thru the window people pass by on the streets. The food they ordered came out on an oval tray that perfectly fitted on the table top. It was a group of different meats and sauces. Paula told them about a

pseudo-Polynesian restaurant in the town where she went to college. It served beer, burritos and crab rangoon. They ate beef, lamb and vegetables. It tasted spicy and the lamb was the first to go. By the time they left, they had drunk five bottles of honey wine and were half-blitzed except Andrea. Back on the street the tour continued incoherently. Tables were set up on street sidewalks selling clothing and jewelry. One vendor was selling brightly colored scarfs. A tall Australian man was selling books of his poems for two dollars. Outside restaurants had well dressed couples sitting and eating. In the streets, cars waited patiently for groups of people to pass. A boy with hair sticking straight up and a dangling earring walked by. People made eye contact. People smiled. People said 'hi'. Paula said to Clarisse, "What is this stereotype of New Yorkers being impolite? They're not on this street." They walked around somewhat aimlessly for an hour. Talking briefly to the natives and streetwalkers and looking in shops which stayed open all night long. One o'clock came, the volunteers were drinking cappuccino, and the city was still rocking. This city never slept. They came back to 'Readland Subway Station' before two. They waited on long dark brown benches for their train. Brian and Carlos sat next to Andrea and looked about the station. It was not nearly as crowded as earlier. A few

stumblebums and bag ladies floated around tuned only into themselves. Andrea noticed uneasily the presence of a man crossed-dressed sitting on the bench across from them. Brian said under his breath to Carlos, "It looks like the socio-economic status of this place has faltered since we left."

Carlos gave an appreciative laugh. The other three, Clarisse, Lauren and Paula were conversing emphatically about some unknown subject. The evening appeared to be winding down when a group of black girls in uniform marched single file into the room. All were dressed in white blouses and black skirts. They each had a leather strap extending from their left thigh around their right shoulder. As far as Carlos could tell when he looked close, four were black, two were Asian. Another older girl, in her mid-twenties, stood in front of them the way a sergeant stands in front of his troops. Brian noticed them curiously. Something strange was happening. Each one of the uniformed girls had something on their right hand. A puppet? Brian squinted his eyes. It was a puppet, six, green-headed, white-necked mallard duck puppets. The leader said something and the girls in line started quacking while moving their duck's mouth. "Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, quack."

Brian dipped his head down and looked at Carlos. "What the... Did you see that? What's happening.? Why

are they doing that?"

Carlos had his back straight against the bench. "Sorority." he said.

"And this is initiation? This is a rush?"

Carlos spoke up quickly, "That reminds me of this fraternity house up where I started college. They had all their pledges go into liquor stores and buy porn magazines with men in it only. Then all during the time of initiation, they had to carry a page from the magazine in their pockets. When one of their members would see a pledge on campus, they would ask "You got that picture?" Then the pledge would have to embarrassingly pull out the picture and show them.

"What else did they do?"

"Well," Carlos said smiling, "I heard they made one guy eat a vaseline sandwich."

Brian shook his head, "That's horrifying, You think these people are going through hazing."

"I don't know, I guess so."

"I gotta' get a photo of this." Brian stood up and walked over to Lauren. She had not yet taken notice of the puppeteers. She was too involved with the conversation with Andre, Paula and Clarisse. Brian knelt down on the cold floor before them. "Ladies, take a look at that."

"Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, quack."

"What are they doing?" Clarisse asked.

"Car pool says they're in a sorority."

"It must be a pretty eccentric sorority." Paula commented.

"Lauren," Brian said, "Can I use your camera? I want to document this on film."

"Yeah, sure." she reached into her purse and retrieved the camera. "You know how to use it?"

"Oh yeah." Brian said taking the camera from her.

Clarisse looked up, "Brian, I don't know. I don't think this is a real wonderful idea."

"Don't you fret your furry little face, Clarisse." Brian said and walked away.

"My face isn't furry!" Clarisse called after him.

Brian went around the bench and walked up next to the line of girls. Now more people began to pay attention. Several of the downtrodden came over to witness the spectacle.

"Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, quack."

Brian went up in his photographer feet. He pointed the camera in their direction, making sure not to cut off the heads of the ducks. Carlos hopped off the bench and jogged over. He wanted to be in the action too. Brian got down for a dog's eye view of the girls with the puppets. Carlos ran up behind the line of girls, Brian snapped off a flash of Carlos's grinning face in between

two very serious looking girls faces. The two returned to the bench laughing boldly. "Here's your camera, Lauren, you'll have to make double prints of that." Brian handed the camera back and he and Carlos returned to their seats. They laughed again and slapped hands. Brian leaned back and exhaled. Then he took note of the sorority girls heading for him in a single file line, right behind the leader, and God, did she look upset! Uh oh. They rounded the bench and walked directly toward Brian and Carlos who stood up slowly. More people gathered to view this exhibition. The humor of the incident left Brian and he stood arms folded, waiting for the confrontation. The sorority leader came face-to-face with Brian. The girls behind her automatically made a semi-circle surrounding him. (How did they know to do that?) She stood about six inches shorter, but had a polished and vigorous look on her face. The great room became quiet.

"You got a problem?" she asked.

"No," he answered confidently, although he wasn't confident.

"Then why you botherin' my girls?"

"Why are you humiliating them?"

"This is nothin' that concerns you."

"I'm not concerned." he said, but he was.

"Then why are you botherin' my girls if you're not

concerned." she demanded. Her tone became increasingly agitated, her anger growing like the crowd's size. Brian thought if he responded with non-threatening, non-direct answers to the girl, she would leave him alone. He was wrong. It already had gone too far. She had dug in. Carlos tried to think of something to say that would not add fuel to this fire, but couldn't. Brian went on the offensive. "Seems to me they'd be more bothered quacking like ducks in public, than if somebody takes a picture of them."

"How-do-you know what they think?"

Brian's voice raised, "I never said that I did--"

"You just did. I don--"

"If you care so much about them why are you--"

"You comin' 'round with your--"

"Ma-kin' fools outta them--"

"White-class rules and--"

More people gathered. There was an atmospheric feeling of an impending fight. Karen grabbed Andrea by the wrist and started leading her out of the room. Three black men wearing identical jackets and identical haircuts came and stood behind the girls. Paula and Clarisse stood up but did not join the crowd. A middle-aged white man with an orange pull over hat climbed over the bench and shouted what Brian thought sounded like a racial comment to the girls. The man

dressed like a lady came up and started shouting also. Everyone started screaming. The crowd moved in closer together, enclosing Brian and Carlos. Carlos panned the room. Where were the police? There must be one somewhere near. The place felt like it was about to go up. There were at least twelve people gathered and many more watching. The crowd became violently loud and dangerously tempered. One man threatened another and they approached each other with hands drawn. Two others pushed each other. "Shut-up. STOP IT!" a voice exploded, "Everyone calm down." The voice belonged to Brian. He continued. "I started this, okay. I didn't asked for any of your input." The crowd was offended. Just who was this jerk anyway? How dare he take credit for a riot? Brian went on quickly before anyone had a moment to respond to him. He turned toward the sorority leader and said loudly, "I'm sorry. I apologize if you felt insulted. I did not mean any harm. Obviously, I had no idea what you were doing carried such strong feelings for you. Next time I see puppeteers, I promise to walk in the other direction." Brian turned and faced those behind him, "I have a young child with me." Andrea looked at him in shock and buried her face in Lauren's shoulder near the pillar, "I don't want her to get injured. Please, everyone just back off Take a step back." The crowd looked at him like he was too weird to

be in New York. Brian held his hands up, "Please, just go back to what you were doing. Please." They directed a few selected insults at him, to which he passively nodded and said, "Yes, that's me." Then they slowly went back to their business. Brian turned around, the sorority leader's eyes were still fixed on him. Now, her eyes no longer seemed to contain anger. She shook her head at him, then she and her friends went away in single file, (only now they didn't make any more animal noises). The heaviness of the air lifted and Brian and Carlos collapsed onto the hard wood bench. Andrea was still freaked out by him. Brian avoided the gaze from Paula across from him. He looked at Carlos, Brian said, "This is the most embarrassing moment of my life."

"What life?" Carlos said good-naturedly, " That was tough but wait until we get those pictures."

Brian closed his eyes. He opened them again and saw Clarisse, Lauren, and Paula, accompanied by one of the black guys with the jacket and haircut coming over towards him. Everyone sat down. Brian looked straight forward, refusing to make eye contact. "No comments anyone." he told them. " Trust me when I say I feel terrible about it." Brian then heard the man with the jacket and haircut laugh. A long, loud laugh. He looked at Brian, "Haaa-heee, they had you on the run, man."

"Thank you, thank you." Brian nodded his head

softly.

"But you shut them down. You shut them down." he added, then he turned his attention to Paula. "You here with him?"

Paula looked at Brian and said, "We are all here together." The man laughed again. Then he told them about the girls Brian had just antagonized. He said they were nice girls that he has known a long time. Then Paula asked if it was unusual what they did with the puppets. He took off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeve. There on his arm was the Greek letters of his fraternity permanently fixed into his arm by a burn mark. The members of his fraternity branded their letters on their arms. Lauren winced. The Greek talked about stiff initiations and his friends in the fraternity. He stayed and talked to them about fifteen minutes. He listened with interest when he found out they were from all different parts of the country and had come to New York as summer camp counselors. He told them about himself, where he grew up, and the fraternity. Before he left he invited them all, but especially Paula, to a party. He said he knew they wouldn't come, but he wanted to be polite. Then he smiled and left. For ten minutes, the four Altruim girls talked about how nice and handsome they thought he was. Brian was beginning to develop a hangover.

Monday, July twenty fourth.

"Moments that can never happen again and never lost their wonder".

Stephen Spender

"Practice doesn't get cancelled for rain." Carlos said. "We'll do some sprints here in the gym, take a little longer today to work on flexibility. First I want to speak more on conditioning."

The players rolled their eyes. Carlos was standing in the center of the gym in the late afternoon. Surrounding him, twelve adolescent ballplayers, all somber because they couldn't go outside. There was another summer shower. The other volunteers were off somewhere. Camp today was difficult. Kids couldn't burn off their energy outside, they were restless and cranky. Brian was making phone calls in the office, so until he got back, coach Carlos was having a team pow-wow. Carlos had everyone sit down on folding chairs. Now, standing before the small crowd, baseball gloves resting on the floor beside them, he began, "I consider you all athletes. Hopefully, that is the way you look at yourselves too. What does that mean, 'athlete'? To me it means several things. It's how you think, act and behave. All those things are connected. First, an

athlete conditions himself or herself. What you do on the field or the court is directly related to your physical condition and it is a lifelong commitment, okay. That means exercise. That means flexibility. That means no drugs. Conditioning is mental as well as physical. How many times have you seen a team get momentum and just take another team? It happens all the time." Carlos accentuating his words with dramatic hand gestures. "A classic example, years ago nobody gave the U.S hockey team a chance in the world to beat the Soviets. Not one chance in the world, but they won in the Olympics." Carlos paced while speaking, his arms made exaggerated movements.

"You will all achieve mental conditioning by continued practice. Don't let negative thoughts creep in. Would you eat something that tasted bad and was bad for you? Of course not, then why let negative thoughts in your mind? It's the same thing." Carlos went on quickly before anyone pointed out that the lunches they served were bad and bad for you. "On the field you play as tough and hard as you can. At all times act like a man, be courteous to adults and your peers. A good athlete is not a clown in class either. Take pride in yourselves. Do the job in the classroom. During this game at the festival remember that we are guests at the park and we will behave like guests always. Never do

anything to embarrass your fans or the team and play as hard as you can. Play your best every time. That's what it's gonna take to win. Make sense? Me and Brian are proud of you all." Carlos paused, leaving those words floating for a moment. Then he said, "Let's begin by taking some extra time to work on our flexibility."

The team got up. There was the sound of the chairs being folded back up. Carlos was collapsing a chair when Frankie approached him. Frankie asked in a quiet voice, "Do you really think we'll beat Kloane, coach?"

Carlos raked the chair noisily and rested his hand on Frankie's shoulder, "Yes, I do."

After practice Brian and Carlos walked back to the Healing House. Lauren was making salad and chicken for dinner. She indicated it would be ready in roughly twenty minutes. Paula and Clarisse were watching a video of last summer's talent show. Carlos decided to spend time writing with his lap-top. He closed his bedroom door, turned on the radio and worked at his small desk by the window. Brian thought he would rest for just a little while, pass some time in the privacy and coolness of his bedroom. He went into the room and kicked off his tennis shoes. He twisted his back, stretched out some muscles, turned the radio on and lowered the volume just a little. Then he hopped on the bed and CRACK. Someone had placed some foreign article underneath his sheets.

He got up angrily and pulled the sheets back. There were eight books of the Encyclopedia Britannica, editions A-thru-J placed in a neat row. Brian rubbed his lower back. "Paula, Clarisse and Lauren will pay. They will pay. Oh, how dearly they will pay. Messing with an individuals bed is going too far. That's taboo." Brian marched over to the door and grabbed the doorknob, it was covered with Vaseline. He pulled his hand away and saw the clear jelly on his hand. He made a tightened fist, "They will pay and pay and pay."

Clarisse caught Carlos between classes in the shadowy part of the stage, behind the old velvet curtains. Clarisse asked him, "How has baseball practice been?"

Carlos considered his answer, "It's been fine. Why do you ask?"

"You're aware of what happened last year with the team from Kloane?"

"I'm aware of it."

"Good. I wanted to be sure you know what you're doing. This game deserves serious treatment. Are you going to allow Danny to play?"

Carlos ran his hand through his hair, "I spoke to Brian about that. We decided that we would probably put Danny in for an inning. Left field. He is not a bad

player, actually. He has some problems with hand/eye coordination and motor skills."

"I wanted to advise you that Danny's father will be attending the game at the festival. Danny's father and I have recently had a rather heated argument."

"In regards to the camp?" he asked.

"No. In regards to pre-enrollment at P.A. High. The school has special education classes for mentally retarded students up until lunch time. After lunch they either go to some other school or they are allowed to take some classes with the mainstream kids. Danny's father and I disagreed on which classes he should take."

Carlos lifted and dropped his shoulders, "What was the argument about? About what level Danny should be functioning?"

Clarisse shook her head, "No. They wanted Danny to take woodworking."

"Why?"

"To teach him a life skill."

"That makes sense to me. Why are you opposed to it?"

"For several reasons. One, in that class, electrical saws and other potentially dangerous equipment are eventually in use. Secondly, the students in woodworking tend to be real low functioning themselves. With lower functioning adolescents you tend to get more

cruelty and teasing towards a M.R."

"Clarisse, you said that? That's a pretty strong statement. Why did you tell the father that?"

"The father had all these grandiose expectations of what Danny can accomplish. It's a shame we got into this conflict. I always liked Danny's father. I don't know whether or not he will make a public issue of this."

"Are you sure you're not just jealous that Voss is getting all the controversial limelight." Carlos joked. Clarisse laughed, "That must be it Carlos. I won't be satisfied until the Healing House gets fire bombed."

The next morning the sun shone on St. Theresa. Paula pulled the string and her shade rolled up. Her eyes met Hilena's outside, sitting on the curb. They waved to each other. Hilena waited for her every morning. Lauren was the first to get to camp. She took the keys from Clarisse. Already kids were there waiting. "It's about time you got here."

"What do you mean?" Lauren smiled, "Camp doesn't officially begin for another fifteen minutes."

"Can you get us out some stuff from the office?" they asked.

"Hmmm, that depends. What do you need?"

"I need the kickball and some jumping rope and the chalk and-"

"Hang on now. Wait 'til I see." She stuck the key

in the door. The heavy metal lock clicked and they went inside to raid the office. Twenty minutes later Brian was the last counselor to arrive. His hair was a mess and he hadn't shaved. When he walked past the office Lauren saw him and called out, "Whatsa' matter, Brian? Didn't you sleep well?" Brian stopped and leaned backwards to see into the office. He said, "You know somethin' 'bout that you wanta' tell me?"

Lauren looked innocent, "Huh?"

Brian asked accusingly, "You know anything about the Encyclopedia Britannica?"

"I know you can sell it by leads in Trenton." she said.

"Why did you ask how I slept?"

"I was just concerned about you gettin' enough rest."

"You know, Lauren, it would be significantly wiser for you to break this alliance with Paula and join me. I am much more ruthless than her and you won't feel so much pain when the hammer comes down."

"I can't break the alliance with Paula, we're both girls."

"So? What difference does that make?"

"We're bonded by a common thread."

"That thread is about to be cut by an extremely sharp axe. I don't think you'll like where you fall."

"I'll consider myself warned." Lauren said and went back to her activity. Brian sat down at a lunch table. There was the noise of children playing outside. He picked up a section of the paper that was there. Soon, he began to filter out the sounds of screams and laughter and listened to a conversation between Frankie and Lauren. He wasn't eavesdropping as much as he was tuning in while he sat somewhat sleepily there. Frankie was talking about some older lady in the neighborhood. "She's driving me insane. You would not believe this lady. Okay, I been doing jobs for her since I was eleven, carrying boxes to the attic, yard work, things like that. She is an invalid who lives on the east end of my neighborhood. It takes me fifteen minutes to ride my bike there. All she does is talk, talk, talk. About how she wants this to look, how she wants that to be. She can hardly do anything by herself. Last Thursday, I had to clean her bathroom."

"That really bothered you? Even when you knew she couldn't do it herself." Lauren asked nicely.

"I don't think you understand Lauren, I had to physically scrub the bathroom on my knees."

"I could see how that might bother you. Look at it this way, you're getting paid."

"Not enough to do that. No way. Not when I have to sit there and listen to her go on and on about her plants

or cats."

"Well then look at it this way, you're probably the only person she gets to talk to all week long. Think about that. Have you ever felt lonely before. Huh? Next time you go over you may want to keep that in mind. She probably looks forward to seeing you. You are probably the only person she speaks with. The only one." Frankie was quiet for a long time. Now Brian was eavesdropping. Lauren's perspective was profound given her circumstances. She worked so comfortably with the kids. Frankie spoke at last, "I never figured it that way. I just never thought of her as being a--I guess I just didn't look at her like needing anything but work done."

"I think the lady is fortunate to have you." Frankie wanted to change the subject, "Thanks. Hey, can I have the basketball now?" Brian was impressed with Lauren. He wondered what he would have said to Frankie if presented with the same situation. Then he remembered something that Lauren had said to him during the first week, when he was having problems with the kids. She said, "It's not what you teach, but how you teach."

Lauren wasn't always that sharp. Last weekend, the kitchen table and chairs were occupied by Carlos, Lauren and Brian. In daylight hours the room was illuminated by

sunshine, the kitchen windows opened up onto the porch. At night the room grew very dark except for the circular light suspended from the ceiling that shone down upon the glossy table. The table's centerpiece included two empty candlesticks and a small vase with violet dried flowers on a lace doily. The transparent cream draperies had lace boundaries and cigarette smoke stains. The volunteers sat on uncomfortable wooden chairs playing poker for crayons. Orange was worth a dollar, green fifty cents and blue, a quarter. Between games Carlos mentioned an idea about bringing players to the YMCA for weight lifting.

"Of course, Brian, one of us would have to be there to supervise at all times."

Lauren who was involved in a daydream, broke out and said, "You two want to see an amazing card trick?"

Carlos looked over at her, shrugged his shoulders, then turned his attention back to Brian. "When I was in high school, I witnessed a terrible accident in a weight lifting room." Carlos leaned forward into the brightness of the hanging lamp. Brian noticed Lauren begin to place the cards face up in five precise rows. Carlos continued with his story, "A friend of mine named Cooper was at the universal machine. At the leg lift. The way that it is set up is that the person sits down and pushes two metal pedals forward. The weight is adjusted by a long pole

that goes down through several bars, each twenty pounds. You decide on how much weight you want by placing a pin through the weight bars into the long, metal pole. Most anyone can lift much more with their legs than with their arms, so Cooper had a lot of weight stacked on that pole. While he was pressing the pedals, his leg slipped off and slid into the machine. The pole with literally two hundreds pounds of steel on it, came crashing down on his leg. Cooper started screaming, 'Jesus God, help me. Oh, Jesus God, help me'." Brian rattled his chair closer to the table. Lauren placed another card in the row. Carlos continued, "Think of it as a extremely heavy spike being dropped in the center of your leg. Anyhow, a couple of football players got the weight up, pulled him out and wrapped a tied towel over the wound. Cooper had passed out, so we decided to take him to the emergency room instead of waiting for an ambulance. They carried him to the passenger seat of my Camaro. I started driving manically, racing toward the hospital. I was drving like a madman. Sometimes I took side streets because in the theory of contin.... well, forget that. I was driving when suddenly, Cooper woke up and started having convulsions. Shrieking about the pain in a piercing voice. The cloth interior of my Camaro was soaked with blood and it was shooting out Cooper's leg like a small hose. He was screaming, 'There's a nail in

my leg. There's a nail in my leg. Pull it out. Pull it out'." Carlos was gesturing as though he was playing a game of charades. Lauren was almost finished the placement of her cards. "Cooper was screaming," Carlos said, "He was bouncin' around the front of my car. I was driving over seventy. There was blood everywhere. 'Auuugh. Pull out the nail'. My knuckles were bright white, strangulating the steering wheel. I didn't know what to do! So, I reached out and jacked him in the face. He went unconscious again." Carlos relaxed back into the wooden chair and added casually, "And, later on, he never even remembered me punching him."

"I'll bet you an orange and two blues the next card I turn over is the three of clubs." Lauren said. Brian shifted his eyes quickly back and forth between the two of them. For a long time he was quiet, looking at the pile of outlaid cards among the crayola chips, but finally he responded, "So, ah, did Frankie pitch well this afternoon?"

Friday, the sun had gone down but light still hung in the sky. The clouds were long and thin, colored orange and light blue. The last of the campers were leaving and Paula was sweeping up the art room floor with a big gray dust broom. Brian walked in through the door and slowly approached her. Paula leaned the broom up

against a table, put her hand on her tailbone and stretched her back. She and Brian stood in the dusty room. Silently, Brian held up his hand showing off a key ring wrapped around his index finger.

She asked him, "Where are you going?"

"You feel like taking a ride?"

"A ride? Where do you want to drive to? The liquor store is right down the street."

"Yes, but I don't want to go there. I want to go to the Port Altrium hospital."

"Why? Is there something wrong with Lauren?" Paula asked quickly.

"No, no. Lauren is fine. There is someone I want to see. Once I went to pick up Clarisse at the hospital and there was this little child. A really sweet little girl. She had a tracheotomy, and she was really struggling to breath. For some reason, it stuck with me. She always seems just a flash away in my memory. I asked Clarisse to check on her."

"What did Clarisse say?" Paula asked.

"She said that she is still there."

"I don't understand. What are you going to do at the hospital?"

"I bought her a stuffed animal and a fishing rod."

"You bought her a fishing rod?"

"Yeah, I don't know why. Maybe I thought it may

motivate her to get out of bed and go fishing."

"That is a nice idea, but this isn't 'Yosemite National Park'. How many girls in New York go fishin'?"

"I don't know. Don't ask me why, Paula, I just bought it impulsively."

"You want to give her presents even though she has no idea who you are?" You'll drop in like Santa?

"Yeah. She doesn't know you either. I thought I could just make up some reason why we were there. The Salvation army or something." We're just two people who walk around handing out gifts."

"Why do you want me to go with you?"

"I just wanted you to go." He told her, beginning to get frustrated.

Paula looked at him rushing her hand through her long black hair, "Okay, I think I'd like to go. I need to finish cleaning my room, then take a shower."

"Well, I'll help you clean and you can let me know when you're ready."

"Nice offer, but you don't have to do that. I know you already cleaned your classroom."

"Then I won't help to be kind. I'll assist, to hurry you along, because I'm anxious to get going."

Paula said, "Yeah, okay. Let's slide these tables over. Danny spilled glue there earlier."

Brian had asked for and received permission to use

the parish van. He went to the bathroom and took a shower. Went to the hall closet, pulled out a brand new razor, and shaved in the sink in his bedroom. He applied deodorant, brushed his teeth, flossed. He combed back his blond hair and even styled it. He took his gray suit out of the closet and emerged from the room clean, starched and pressed, smelling like cologne. He carried a big pink tiger and a fishing pole wrapped in Christmas paper. Paula didn't spend near the time nor concern on getting ready, yet Brian thought she looked spectacular wearing a bright white collared shirt tucked in her faded blue jeans. "I didn't know you were getting dressed up." she said.

"You look great. Let's go." he responded. The two of them stood side by side, checking their appearances in the hallway mirror. Quickly they walked down the stairs to the van which was parked and ready outside. Brian opened the van door for her as Paula climbed in, Brian handed her the presents and walked around the front of the van and entered. He started up the engine and headed off to the P.A hospital.

Carlos set the lap top on his bed. He climbed onto his bed and sat cross legged facing the screen. He rubbed his temple and flicked the power button on. He brought the proper file out of the menu and the green images came into view. Carlos looked at the screen,

selected a few command buttons. It had become more and more difficult for him to write ever since his arrival at Port Altruim. In his own mind, he compared it to a rugby or football player. A good rugby player likes to take hits and give hits. A rugby player's idea of an enjoyable time is to run full blast, straight on, and collide into someone else. There is that certain edge, that feeling of taking out the week's anger, the week's frustration, on the poor clod that happened to be on the other team. That's what Carlos did when he wrote. It was an exorcism of sorts. A cathartic exercise where he took out his own frustrations on the driving population. There were two reasons that Carlos's difficulties writing his drivers manual began to mount. One, was the time he spent driving had been exponentially reduced. Two, the frustration and anger, that once accompanied his daily routine, had been replaced by feelings of exhaustion and satisfaction. He felt as though he was accomplishing something important. Altruim had done the worst thing it could to a writer. It gave him peace of mind.

THE THEORY OF CONTINUAL MOTION.

Carlos stopped, considered, and went back to the key board.

THE LAW OF CONTINUAL MOTION.

A Manuscript by Carlos Ungamen

Carlos stared, contemplated his psychology of driving and cleared the screen. It was no use. The life of cooperation and the spirit of sportsmanship made it impossible for him to write as he once did. The edge was taken out of him. He didn't have the fire flowing through his blood because he had gone through a transformation since this program started. An epiphany. Maybe if he changed the whole theme of his work. Carlos remembered a story he thought of months earlier. It was story of a man obsessed with a woman. Completely and utterly obsessed. Head over heels in love....He began typing.

...The man decided that he wanted to insure his relationship for eternity with fate. He was to bury a special wooden token known as the 'Vasaric' in the deepest woods. Bury it in the secluded part of the forest. Their relationship would always stay intact, as long as the token stayed buried. So, the man made a journey deep, deep into the forest and found a completely hidden and obscure spot near a dry river bed composed of white, volcanic rock. He dug a deep narrow hole and buried the special idol, wrapped like a mummy with loin cloth, far down in the earth. He filled the hole back up with dirt, stomped down on

the ground, covered the spot with leaves and a fallen tree, and marked the area with a triangle shaped rock. He knelt at the spot for a long time and eventually hiked back to his campsite. Shortly after the secret journey the man married his obsession. Time went by and the couple had two sons. Everything was going well until around the fifth year. The obsession began to fade. (It is said infatuation generally lasts about two years). His wife grew crabby and demanding and abusive towards the children. Her appearance waned. She ran the man into incredible debt. She tossed out his prized comic book collection. The relationship became more and more strained until eventually the man could stand it no longer. His thoughts turned back to the special idol and the triangle shaped rock. The man took his two sons on a little vacation to the woods. They packed up the car with a tent, sleeping bags and, of course, a shovel. It was a long drive back to the woods where the idol was buried. Along the way the man told his children stories of a reclusive hermit who buried a fortune of gold in old coffee cans

and buried it in the woods. He said they were going to try to dig it up. Like panning for gold. They parked the car, loaded on their gear and went off to find the treasure. Five hours later, the boys grew weary, so they raised the tent and built a fire. The man wished he had drawn himself a treasure map all those years ago, but he never imagined he would be returning to find what was so well hidden. He especially felt guilty about including his two innocent children in such a devious plot to rid them of their mother. He rationalized how much happier they would be without her constant nagging and criticism. The next day the man set out alone, accompanied only by a rocky terrain and a piercing sun. Hours later, he found the spot marked by the triangle rock and began digging. The hole became deeper and deeper and the man began to wonder if the idol had been dug up by wood gnome or devoured by some wood-hungry insects. With one final thrust the blade of the shovel hit across a sharp object. The man dove into the hole and used his hands frantically scrapping out the red clay. He held the dirty, wrapped idol in his hands for

a moment and remembered years ago when he started this cycle. The man climbed to his feet, smashed the idol with a shovel against the rocks, and spread out the small pieces on open land. With apprehension he started back to the tent. He found his boys playing in the shallow water of a little creek. He claimed he couldn't find the treasure and they packed up the gear. When the three of them returned home, there was a note taped to the man's tool closet. His wife had run off with a man from her office who she met in the copier room.

Carlos focused on the computer screen. The ending seemed too...happy or was it unhappy? Carlos debated changing it to be a little more uplifting. He then decided to leave it as it was. Not all stories have happy endings. A lot of people believe the short story was dead anyway. He cleared the screen and rolled over in his bed.

Brian came to a stop light and looked over at Paula, who had the pink tiger on her lap. She petted the stuffed animal as if it were real. The light turned green and Brian accelerated through the intersection. Paula said to him, "This was really nice of you. I like this lion. Did you have a pet in Oregon?" Brian

nodded, "That's a tiger, Paula. Um, anyway, I had a ferret when I was a kid."

"A ferret? What is that, some kind of a bird?"

"Nooo. Don't you know what a ferret is?"

"Tell me."

Brian bit his lower lip and began, "Well, it's a domesticated animal."

"Yeah."

"It's descended from the Old World polecat. It eats dog food. It hunts rabbits. It's meat is undesirable."

"C'mon. Are you yankin' my chain?" Paula asked.

"No, I'm serious about this. Once a ferret gets a taste of blood it turns mean, so I had to watch him kinda' close. It was a little rodent but I got pretty attached to it. It didn't smell too good so I would put a few drops of 'Polo cologne' on him every day."

"You had a ferret that smelled like 'Polo'? What ever happened to 'em?"

"It died under very unpleasant circumstances. Max had a cage that I would put him in for a few hours a day. It had snowed a few days before but it was pretty warm out that day. Well, the little guy escaped. He got the lid off the cage and this big dog from down the street came after him. My brother called in and told me what was happening. This dog, it was a Alaskan husky or something, it attacked Max."

"Max was the name of your ferret?" Paula asked.

"Yeah, Maximilian. Anyway, this dog attacked her. My brother hit the dog with a snow shovel and cut off a piece of it's tail, but it was too late. Max had been torn up real bad. He was bleedin'. We had to destroy him right away 'cause he was in so much pain."

"You had him put to sleep? At the veterinarians?"

"No," Brian paused, stared through the windshield, "I asked my brother to do it immediately. Euthanasia. He broke it's neck with wire clippers."

"That's terrible."

"It really was. It bothered me for a long, long time. I was just a little kid at the time."

"What about the dog?"

"The dog was fine as far as I know. I saw him several times after that. You know, that whole ordeal made me into somewhat of a animal rights activist."

Paula shook her head. The van pulled into the lot near the emergency entrance. It took Brian a little longer to find a spot to park. The Port Altruim hospital seemed extremely busy tonight. Brian found an empty spot eventually. He climbed out of the van breathing in a long gust of fresh, cool summer air. The night made Brian come to life and he was very excited about seeing the little girl and hopefully making her evening a little better. Paula unfastened her seatbelt and grabbed the

little girl's presents. She climbed out of the van with Brian's assistance. The two of them walked excitedly in through the emergency entrance. This time Brian knew exactly where to go. Paula followed Brian as he bounced up the stairs to the same floor as the newborns are kept. When they approached the window, Brian peered in to see the bed occupied by a small boy sleeping. Brian told Paula, "She's not here. I don't know why not. Clarisse told me she hasn't already been released. They musta' moved her to different ward."

In Portland Oregon, Brian Sage's older brother, Daniel was dumping a basket load of dirty clothes into his washing machine. He added a splash of blue liquid detergent. Daniel was dressed in a matched set jogging outfit and was drinking beer out of a green longneck bottle. Daniel's apartment was decorated with brown leather furniture and dark cream colored walls, his C/D player had a Fleetwood Mac disk playing. Daniel looked much like his younger brother except he was thinner, had shorter hair and wore a small diamond earring. A loud knock came at the door. Daniel stepped over his orange cat on the way to answer it. It was an old man with a Jimmy Stewart fashioned derby and dark green overcoat. Daniel spread open the screen door and waved off the taxi, he lifted the old man underneath the arm and slowly

helped him inside to be seated at the sofa, then sat down across from him in recliner, and said, "What are you doing here, Dad?"

It's been awhile since I've seen you." the old man said shaking.

"Since the fourth."

"How've you been?"

"I'm fine Dad. What are you doing here?"

"How'ze your brother?"

Daniel nodded. He realized why his father had stopped to visit.

"Brian is fine, as far as I know."

The old man took off his derby and held it in his lap, "When was the las' time you spoke with him?"

Daniel rested deeper in his recliner, pulled the cloth string from his jogging suit and bit the end of it. Daniel sighed, "It's been awhile since I spoke with him. Dad, it looks as though Brian and Colleen's marriage is in the dumper."

The old man's shoulders fell, "I figured as much."

Daniel broke in reassuringly, "Dad, I know that's a disappointing bit of information for you to hear. I'm even more sorry that it's me that is telling you this. It really should be Brian. You know, Brian left for the summer. He told me before he left that he was leaving. He didn't tell me where, and I didn't press him for the

information. I did tell him to stay here and either work out things with Colleen or file with his lawyer."

"You don't know where he is?" the old man asked.

"Have you spoken with him recently?" Daniel asked.

"He called. He didn't say that he wasn't in Portland, so we assumed he was. We didn't speak of Colleen."

"I don't blame him for leaving, Dad. Could you live with Colleen? I wondered why her parents were so happy at the wedding, when they obviously had animosity towards Brian. It was because they were so glad to be rid of Colleen."

"Oh, I could never forget that wedding."

"You'll be happier if you do."

"Where's Colleen now?" The old man asked.

"Right now she is staying at their apartment. I don't think she'll be there for long. I had--she came by last Tuesday. She's realized that something is up, but she doesn't know Brian left town. Colleen was extremely irate, even more so than when we see her socially. She threatened to call my boss and have me fired."

"What in God's name for?"

"I don't know. I have no idea what she was talkin' about. She doesn't have anything on me. She sure got me thinkin' though. What if Brian told her something in the strictest confines of marital secrecy? What's to keep

her from tellin' everybody?" Daniel raised his eyebrows, paused and placed his palms open in miming the question symbol. "Getting back to Brian, I don't know exactly where he is at, but I'm positive I know a few things for sure." Daniel leaned completely forward in his chair now, speaking with conviction. "I know Brian isn't very far away. I know Brian is probably dying to come back. He'll very likely show up within a week. And above all, he will eventually get out of this stage of sin, squalor and destitution which he is now involved, and come back to the normalcy of obligations, responsibilities and societal expectations."

"Well," the old man shook his head, "I sure hope so. You know, your mother gets worried."

In the recovery ward, a nurse wiped down a glass pane that shone into a brightly colored room. There was a blue, red and green balloon painting on the wall. There was a boy, laid back in the bed with a popsicle. On the table next to him was a ceramic frog with a plant sticking out and an elderly man read to him from a large comic book. Next to them, was what appeared to be a young family, even though all three were radically different in appearance. There was a little girl who breathed freely, held a goofy pink tiger under her arm and had a fishing pole leaned up against her bed. Beside

her was a very attractive lady with long dark hair and blue jeans, and a man in a gray suit, leaning forward in a chair with his fingers locked, and a smile on his face.

Tuesday, August 1st.

"Forgive us for pretending to care for the poor, when we do not like poor people and do not want them in our homes".

United Presbyterian Church,
Litany for Holy Communion.

During Bingo night, things are quite different in St. Teresa's gym. The counselors and some of the teen helpers set up tables after camp. For most of the people who come for bingo, it is the only time they go near a church. Those people who frequented St. Teresa's for bingo were not indicative of it's congregation on Sundays.

It was Paula's sixth week in Altruim and her first Bingo night. Paula erroneously imagined that the gym would be filled with kindly old ladies, wearing bonnets and pastel dresses. She was surprised to see the gym filled with smoke and most of the people dressed in dingy colors of brown and gray. This was not the ideal place for her to bring an eleven year old child. Earlier, during lunch at camp, Paula invited Hilena to come up so they could spend some time together. Paula was far too busy at camp to devote singular attention to one child. This was a chance for Paula to spend some time with a

child that had began to stick out from the others, displaying an unconventional personality.

Hilena was soft-spoken, graceful, displaying a sense of artfulness and social alertness. She responded well to other children prompts for play, but seldom approached potential playmates herself. She painted horses and rainbows, much like others her age, except Hilena's paintings carried a magical quality to them. Paula viewed Hilena as an eccentric, unspoiled child of the city. Hilena thought Paula was the most beautiful woman in the world and attached many positive attributes to her.

When Paula walked passed Towers on her way to the gym. She looked up to Hilena's window hoping to see her. All she saw was white curtains blowing in and out, like a white flag in the wind. That flowing garment contrasted against the flat brick surface. The fact that a child's window would be left broken like that for weeks angered Paula, especially when she lived so high up the building. Paula decided she would call someone tomorrow and have that fixed even if she had to swallow the cost herself.

Bingo began at seven and continued until ten. Paula kept a close eye out for Hilena, while sitting on the steps watching others file in the gymnasium. It wasn't safe to be out late at night. Hilena was a few minutes

late.

"Hilena, I'm glad to see you." Paula said, brushing off her pants as she stood up.

The girl pulled her headband out, shook her hair, then slide the bracket over her head again. Paula wondered if the child was nervous about something. "Does your mother care if you come out tonight?"

"No."

"Good. Have you ever played bingo before?"

The girl shook her head no. Paula smiled, "I haven't either but I know how to play. Let's go get some boards okay?"

Paula led Hilena by the hand. The gym was loud and crowded. Men were walking by talking to their friends in Spanish and laughing hard. Older ladies sat guarding their cards out of fear a neighboring player might claim them. The kitchen was selling chili, cold pretzels and beer. Up on the stage, a table was set with an old fashioned bingo machine that blew small white balls in the glass casing furiously. All this commotion and excitement was intriguing to Paula, but again she wondered if this was a proper place for Hilena. There was smoking and drinking and cursing. Paula rationalized that this was where Hilena lived, she already had this exposure daily, and anyway Paula didn't have any other place to bring her, except the Healing House where the

other volunteers didn't want any kids because that was the only place where they could plan, sleep or be alone.

The bingo cards cost a dollar apiece. Paula figured between the two of them they could handle three cards. There were other people who were using a lot more than three cards, but Paula and Hilena weren't hardcore bingo fanatics. The man who sold them the cards, a large hispanic man with a mustache that curled up on the sides, gave them cover chips for free because, as he said, "They were the two prettiest girls there." The man also gave them a dark green stick. Paula had no idea what it was used for. The man told them, "It's a bingo wand. The chips are mag-net-ick. The wand swoops them all up."

"I see." Paula said. "Thank you."

"Jus' bring them back to me when you finish."

"I will." Paula promised. Then she set out with the child, looking for a place to sit. The gym was crammed with people. Paula made her way through the rows of tables and found a spot with two free chairs toward the center of the room. The game was about to begin. Paula placed the cards out in front of them and dumped out the container of red chips. Hilena took the magic wand and ran it through the small pile. The chips all clung to the stick. She pulled them off singularly with her fingers and repeated the action.

"Hilena, you can have this card. I'll do this card,

and this third one we'll both do. If your card wins, you can keep the money. If the card we're sharin' wins, then we'll split the money down the middle, alright?

"And if your card wins, you keep the money." It was Hilena's first sentence since she got there.

"Okay." Paula smiled. She looked at the lady across the table. An older lady with an obnoxious wig and big glasses. Paula asked her, "Maam, how much is it if you win."

The lady responded, "Usually about fifty to seventy five dollars for each winner."

Paula turned to Hilena wide-eyed, "Fiff-tee dollars? What would you do with that kind of money, Hilena? Buy a car or just invest it?"

The girl smiled shyly.

Despite the fact that they played for about an hour without winning, and the smoke began to hang thick in the air, Paula and Hilena were enjoying themselves. Paula told elementary jokes and stories of Louisanna. Once, when the lady on stage waited too long before calling out the number, the crowd started yelling at her to get moving. Hostile. The people wanted the action to keep coming. Paula commented that she wasn't aware bingo players were so ruthless. When it was a few minutes after eight, Paula asked Hilena if she wanted to go outside to get away from the smoke.

Hilena answered, "I want to go home and ask my mom if I can stay out later."

"Sure, do you want me to go with you?"

"No. I'll be right back." The girl said getting up from the table.

"Hang on a second. I don't want you out there by yourself."

"Why not?" the child asked. A few people near them also waited to hear Paula's response.

Paula said firmly, "It's not safe for you to be out on the streets at night."

"I'll be okay." Hilena said, then turned and left.

Paula watched her go out the door and disappear in the night. She guessed the child could control any dangerous circumstances, she lived here all her life. The lady on stage called out another number and Paula got involved again in the game. It would be nice to win fifty dollars, especially when you're getting paid a meager hundred and fifty a month in salary.

The game was almost over. Paula stopped playing at eight forty-five. It was now ten'til ten, and Hilena hadn't come back. She had left ninety-five minutes ago for a trip that would have taken twenty minutes at the longest. Lauren had come over and was cleaning in the kitchen. Paula wanted to share her feelings of dread and worry with someone. But what could Lauren do about the

situation that she couldn't do herself? Where was Hilena? Could she have run into some trouble? Maybe her mother said, "No you can't go out young lady. Eight o'clock is your bedtime. Now, go take a bath and get to bed." Only Paula believed that Hilena's mother was not that type. Hilena herself said her mom didn't care if she went out late at night by herself. The night Hilena surprised Brian and her at the Healing House, she was out getting ice cream. Paula didn't know what to do. Clarisse had a list of all the children's phone numbers and parents' names, but Clarisse was at the hospital. Paula considered phoning the Altruim hospital and asking Clarisse for that number.

Just then Brian came in through the front room of the gym. He was wearing a Green Bay Packers shirt with dust from the ballfield on it, bluejeans and a red ball cap. All of the counselors were supposed to tear down the tables after bingo, clean and mop for the next day of camp. Paula walked over to him, "Brian, can I talk to you alone?"

Brian felt a knot in his stomach. Her tone made him uneasy. "Sure, Paula. Is something wrong?"

"Let's go into the office."

Brian followed her to the door. Paula dug deep in her pocket and felt the metal keys, she pulled them out and slid a round, gold one in the key lock. They entered

and Paula closed the door behind them. Brian's curiosity was overwhelming. He sat on the edge of the desk, rubbing his palm up and down on leg of his blue jeans. Paula stood in front of him. She began, "Do you know the girl in my group named Hilena? She has light brown hair that is cut shoulder length and wears it kinda' back."

"The girl that meets you every morning outside the Healing House? The girl who came over the night we went to Manhattan?"

"Yeah. Do you know what she looks like? I mean would you recognize her?"

"Paula, you know I know her. I know all the kids in our camp. Why?"

"Hilena is a really special kid to me. She seems to stand out when I think of the class, and she seems distant. So, I told her to come up to bingo tonight. She did and then she left to ask her mom if she could stay longer. That was two hours ago and she hasn't come back. I know which room she lives in, so I checked her window from the outside and her light is not on."

"You think something happened to her?" Brian asked quickly.

"No," Paula said, not wanting to sound panicky, "But I'd like to check on her."

Brain asked, "Where does she live?"

"Tower's West."

"Why don't you call her?"

"I can't. It's not listed in the phone book and Clarisse has the phone numbers with her at the hospital."

"Paula, if you're that worried about her, call Clarisse at work and get the number. I'm sure she won't mind. Clarisse is about the nicest lady I know."

Paula just stared at him. Brian looked at her in the silence. He sighed and twitched his mouth, "You want me to go into Towers and look for her?"

Paula whispered, "Bingo."

Brian walked through the opening in the wire fence by the abandoned school. Several kids were out playing basketball. They paused and looked at him, then decided their game was more interesting. Paula had taken off Brian's red baseball hat. She had said as she pulled it off, "There. Now you look a lot less like an idiot." Brian thanked her and took off toward Tower's West, the building closest to St. Teresa's. The ground area was completely paved. It was rare even to see an olive green weed sticking out of the streetcracks, although there was green graffiti and some sprayed on brown hopscotch squares. Tower's West entrance had one naked, fluorescent lightbulb that hung upside down illuminating

its entrance. Outside, several collected patches of older men watched Brian, They stood motionless in the darkness. Brian raised his head, conscious of his footsteps. The building seemed to be leaning over him, like it was slowly tilting, and would finally just fall. Brian ate his fear and began walking, shoulders back, into the oriface of the building. He passed the men and went under the glow of the single light. Just then he heard them break into shrills of laughter, at what, he had no idea. Once inside, the passage opened up into a darkened hallway. The floor was a flat, beige surface and the hallway walls were a putrid light brown. It was a good surface, however, for graffiti. Brian didn't take the time to read who loved who, but proceeded directly to the staircase. Paula had given him the exact room Hilena lived in from the outside the building. Hilena's window was the one with the glass blown out. Brian knew what floor the girl lived on, but finding the specific apartment would be a crap shoot. He began his solo climb up, every footstep intentionally placed. There was much more noise inside Towers. Every time he reached another flight, he could hear televisions, loud music or laughter. Despite the fact Towers was unkempt and decaying, it had more energy this one night than Brian's apartment complex in Oregon had any night. When Brian reached the fifth floor he saw two girls walking down the

corridor. When they got closer, he recognized one of the girls as Andrea, St. Teresa's secretary. When she saw him, she stared in disbelief. She gasped, "Brian, what are you doing here?"

He took in a big breath, "I'm looking for Hilena. Paula is worried about her. Do you know what apartment she is in?"

Andrea looked at the girl next to her. Brian felt as though his presense was somehow embarrassing to Andrea.

"I think she lives on the seventh floor. Are you going there now?"

"Yes. Yes I am. I know it's late, but I want to check on her. She was supposed to see Paula two hours ago. We got worried."

"Oh, okay then." Andrea and her friend turned to leave, continuing their conversation after the brief interruption. Brian felt angered by her coldness and continued up the stairs faster and louder. By the time Brian reached the seventh floor, he had become somewhat disoriented regarding where Hilena's apartment would be. He knew that her window pointed toward the church and the gym, so where would that put him? Every floor in Towers was in a horizontal X pattern. Hilena's window was on the end of one of those wings. Two older women passed Brian in the hall and said nothing. He didn't ask for

assistance. Finally, Brian got his bearings and came to the apartment he believed was correct. The paint on the door was completely cracked and falling off in huge pieces. On the door at eye level was a peep hole and rust colored letters that said 7WR. Brian took another deep breath and knocked twice. What was he going to say? He heard someone approaching the door and it opened the distance the chain lock would allow. From behind the door a man's face appeared. The man wore a white undershirt and jeans. His black hair was matted and he was unshaven. He held a cigarette between his finger and thumb. He looked at Brian the way someone looks when they see a bright light first thing after waking up. Brian opened up by apologizing, "Sorry to bother you, sir. I know it's late. My name is Brian Sage, and I work at the St.Teresa's summer camp across the street. Is Hilena here?"

"She's asleep." the man said under his breath.

"She was supposed to meet a friend of mine a while ago. Another counselor. When she didn't show up, we got concerned."

"Well, she's here now and she's asleep." the man said and shut the door. Brian stood in the hallway alone for a moment, then walked slowly to the stairs. On his way down, he wondered who he had just spoken to. Was it Hilena's father? Her mother's boyfriend? He felt

angered for having a door slammed in his face and embarrassed about the overall situation. Brian's fear had completely left him. It was like he was walking down the stairs at home. He slid down the bannister and went outside where there was a new group of people. They didn't pay much attention to him. Brian pace was steady and he almost reached the opening in the fence when he heard a car coming up behind him. He spun around. There was a police car speeding through the school parking lot, headed right at him with it's lights off! Brian jumped out of the way. The car screeched to a halt right beside him. Immediately, a tall white officer hopped out and slammed his door hard. Then a black one came out the passenger side. The white cop was menacing looking. Six-four, Six-five, broad build and a thick brown mustache. He had a shining brown nightstick at his side. His name tag read, "Spencer." Brian stood with his arms at his sides silently, appering calm. The white officer walked up to Brian, grabbed his 'Packers' shirt, and backed him forcefully into the fence. The fence clanked loudly and Brian spread his feet slightly to keep balance. The officer continued his hold of Brian's shirt, and slid him across five feet of the fence. He felt his back slide down the wire diagonals, until he grasped on the fence behind him, strong fingers hooked in the silver diamond-shaped wires. The black cop had

already come over and grabbed the white one's arm. "C'mon Bob. Cool down." As he said it, the white cop released his grip. The black cop was just as mean looking. He had a long forehead with a deep forehead wrinkle, a rigid jaw line and big eyes that had long bloodshot streaks in them. Those bloodshot eyes, highlighting two dark circles, stared closely at Brian. "Whaddayou doin' here?" he demanded.

Brian wondered if any of those people who were outside Towers or playing basketball earlier had seen him get assaulted. Brian spoke bravely, "I was looking for someone."

The officer took a step closer to him, got in his face. "You live around here?"

Brian wondered how to answer that. What if these were the cops that Voss had disparaged in the newspaper. What if they wanted to set him up to get back at Voss. Brian believed it would be prudent to be honest about any information, then get their names. "Yes, I live here."

"Where?"

"Over there." Brian pointed to the Healing House, he also noticed several faces looking out behind drapes in Towers.

"Where?" the officer began to sound frustrated.

"Over there." Brian's voice raised. "In that physical structure I'm pointing to. That building, that

edifice."

"What? Don't you got no address?"

Brian looked at them, "I live in the Healing House."

Now, the white cop came over to him, Brian balanced for another blow. The cop said, "You're one of those people running the summer camp."

Teeth grinding, "Yes."

The two officers looked at each other for a long time. Finally, the black officer said, "We've been looking for an individual that fits your description for weeks now. White guy, young, hanging out in the public housing areas. Here, and in Brooklyn, Kloeane, wherever. He goes on foot, selling drugs. Yesterday a ten year old..." The two officers stayed a while telling Brian about their attempts to catch a drug selling criminal. Brian realized that this could be a smoke screen to cover themselves for pushing him against the fence. Brian was careful what he said regarding the camp or Voss. Brian purposely was polite during the conversation, shaking hands with the cop who pushed him. He knew the police stayed there and were pleasant just to save themselves from any kind of legal problems Brian may have caused. Brian decided not to tell Voss and add any fuel to the already dangerous situation. This way he'll be square with New York for that 'Readland Ferry Terminal'

Incident. Besides he wanted to get back and talk to Paula.

Brian jogged across the street, through the church's parking lot and into the gym. Carlos was tearing down tables and placing them into a large cart. Lauren had a damp cloth and was wiping off the tabletops. Paula saw him and came up quickly. "Brian, what happened? Did you find her? Why were you gone so long?"

"Man, do I have a story for you." He said breathing heavily. "You know Andrea, I saw her in Towers, she blew me off."

"Brian?"

"And I got pushed by a cop. Why? For doin' nothin'."

"Brian, what about Hilena? Is she okay?"

"I think so. When I got to her apartment, a man answered the door. He said that she was there but she was sleeping."

"Thank God. I was so worried."

"I wouldn't be relieved just yet. The person who answered the door was a real derelict."

"What's this about a cop hitting you?"

"Yeah. I had a run in with two of them on my way out. One of them pushed me against the fence. He said he thought I was a drug pusher."

"I don't doubt it. A white guy, hanging around Towers, late at night..." Paula said with an offhand tone.

"I don't necessarily think jacking a suspect is included in the Miranda rights." Brian said sarcastically, offended that Paula was not more concerned about his well-being. Paula recognized his defensiveness. "Thank you very much for doing that for me."

"Well you know, I was anxious about Hilena too."

"She is a great little kid. Still, that was really brave of you to go in there. I know it would have scared me to death."

Carlos called over from the other side of the gym. "Hey, you two. How 'bout maybe pickin' up a broom or a mop or something?"

Brian turned to Paula, "Why don't you help me stack those tables and I'll tell you everything that happened." Brian excitedly began his story. Paula listened intently while she wiped syrupy soda stains and cigarette ashes off the table.

The next morning Clarisse was talking to Lauren at the breakfast table when a groggy Brian staggered in and flopped down on a chair next to them. Lauren got up, collected some dishes and went into the kitchen. Clarisse

had some video tapes on top of her briefcase. Brian rubbed his eyes, "What'cha got there, Clarisse?"

"We're doing hygiene later in camp right? These are some films I thought we might show the campers." Clarisse answered brightly.

Lauren came back from the kitchen with a cup of hot coffee and sat it down in front of Brian. "Here," she said, "You look like you could use this."

"Oh wow. Thank you Lauren. This is fantastic." Brian said and sipped from the mug.

Clarisse continued looking down at the pile of papers in her briefcase. "I'm going to have another nurse from the hospital come to camp during hygiene day. She is really good with kids and will bring them all toothbrushes and other stuff."

Lauren asked, "What's the name of the film you wanted to show?"

Clarisse replied, "It's animated. The title is 'Tommy Toothdecay and the Plague Germs'."

Brian spit his coffee out in a spray, "Tommy Toothdecay? I saw that in the fifth grade. We can't show them that."

"And why not?"

"Because it's moronic, it's pathetic. I remember being in the fifth grade and Mrs. Needlemyer bringing us down to the cafeteria with all the grades under us, to

watch a molar riding a horse cowboy hat, fight some monster named the Dreaded Yellow Tooth."

"There is nothing wrong with the film."

"Clarisse don't show that film unless you want us to be the butt of jokes for the remainder of the camp."

"The kids don't care, they need this information." Clarisse protested.

"That's right they need this information, but please, from some other source than Tommy."

"I think your wrong. I think I know the kids pretty well and I don't believe they will respond to it that way."

"Even Frankie?"

"Yeah, even Frankie."

"You wanna bet?"

"How much."

"Ten dollars." Brian said.

"Ten dollars that Frankie won't find the film as terrible as you say." Clarisse clarified

"Right. If Frankie likes it you win, if he finds it a boorish waste of time, I win."

"You are on." Clarisse said in a defiantly cheerful way.

The coaches had made many preparations for the game next week. Emotions were already flying high. Brian's plan was for Carlos and he to keep the team so involved

with practice, that they didn't have time to think or worry, and were so tired from working that they fell unconscious as soon as they went to bed.

Carlos athletic ability was very helpful. They had pretty much formulated who would be playing what position and the batting order. Tony was able to play all the infield positions. Frankie wound up being the pitcher. The game was next week and the Altruims would enter it a talented but unpolished team. Brian's mind was so wrapped up in the game, the team, his class, his friends, and Paula that he too didn't have time to think about his old life in Oregon. It had been awhile since he'd spoken with his parents or brother. When negative thoughts would creep in, he would shut them out by crowding his mind with the tasks at hand. Only a few more days until the showdown with Juan. Brian couldn't wait to feel the exhilaration and euphoria when Altruim sweeps up the field with Kloane's noses. This was fun. This was the most enjoyment he ever had in his life, and it was almost over. Soon he would have to go back to the existence he formerly endured passively.

Brian felt pride that he'd overcome the obstacles that faced him before the summer, but that pride had a shadow over it. The shadow cast when he escaped social imprisonment through deceitful trickery. Brian started having daydreams during work and practice. He saw

himself staying in Altruim, continuing to help and assist the community. Those daydreams quickly turned into a theoretical possibility. Maybe Voss would give him a job. Maybe Clarisse could find him a cheap place to live. Maybe he would not have to return to Portland at all. Maybe he could stay in Altruim indefinitely. Maybe...

The next day in the office of the Healing House, Brian sat by himself with the telephone on his lap. He was leaning back in a recliner facing the air conditioning unit which was turned on high. On the wall beside him hung a series of fingerpainted city landscapes. One was a crimson house with sky-blue cursive writing, 'The Healing House is Open'. On the bottom of the page written in pencil was the name, Janet. On the other wall, watercolors from previous camps were proudly hung. Brian picked up the phone and began dialing the number to Voss's office. Andrea answered, "St.Teresa's."

"Andrea, this is Brian. Is Father Voss able to come to the phone?"

"Let me transfer you to his office."

"Thank you."

A moment later, "This is Father Voss."

"Father Voss, this is Brian Sage, over at the

Healing House."

"Yes Brian."

"I was curious if you had any time today to schedule a meeting with me.."

"Is there anything wrong? Is it an emergency?"

"No, it's not an emergency. I needed to discuss something with you."

"Today is not good for me. How about tomorrow?"

"That's fine."

"Tomorrow at quarter past five?"

"Perfect. Practice is over with at five."

"How is the team coming along? Will they be ready for Kloane next week?"

"Next week will be our game."

"Good. My money is on you. See you tomorrow a little past five."

"Good-bye." Brian hung up the phone. The next day Brian cut practice twenty minutes early and jogged home to take a shower and put on his suit. He was, after all, about to have a job interview. Once out of the shower, he brushed his hair straight back, applied deodorant and flossed. He checked the time; straight up five o'clock. Brian pulled out his light blue colored shirt which went so well with his gray suit. He slid into his pants praying that Paula or Lauren hadn't sewn the pant's legs up. He decided to skip the tie because he didn't want to

appear too formal with someone he already knew so well. The last steps were socks, black shoes, and cologne. He was ready to go. Maybe he would pick up some wine afterward and deliver it to Paula, since he was extremely well groomed and fancily dressed. He skipped along quickly to the office. It was hot out and he began to perspire, so it felt good to enter into the air-conditioned lobby where Andrea sat. Andrea was wearing glasses and sliding papers into manila envelopes. She said, "Well, it must be going to snow today, Brian is wearing a suit."

"What do you say? Just good looking, or the most handsome man you ever seen?"

"Definitely the most handsome."

"Thank you. Is he in?"

"Yes, but he's with the mayor." Andrea just mouthed the word 'mayor' as if it was profane.

"Oh." Brian said, "I'll just sit over here."

"He'll be out in a minute. What are you here to see Father for?"

"Nothing is certain yet, but I'm thinking of staying on here after the summer camp is over."

Andrea's eyes lit up, "Really? That would be great. You think you will?"

"That depends. That's what I'm here to ask for though."

Ten minutes later, Voss came out of the office with a tall hispanic man. They were speaking spanish so Brian couldn't understand what they were saying. Maybe later he could get Andrea to translate it for him. The man walked out without saying a word to Brian. Voss smiled and invited him into the office. "You want some coffee or anything, Brian?"

"No thank you. I'm fine."

Voss invited Brian to sit down. Voss had an appealing office. Window, big wooden desk, and immense bookcase with thousands of books packed in it. Books of all different sizes, Brian glanced at several of them. There were books on philosophy, psychology and pseudonyms, on socialism, sociology and Spanish moss, and on liberty, lockjaw and lycanthropy. On the wall beside them was a detailed map of Africa and a print of the Wyeth painting 'Christina's world'. Looking at the print Voss said, "You may know this, the girl featured in that painting had a disability. Polio, I think. She got 'round from place to place by dragging herself with her arms."

"I've seen that before. I didn't know the story behind it though."

Voss sat down in a royal looking chair. "What's on your mind today? What did you want to speak to me about?"

Brian leaned back in his chair and collected his

ideas. "Things at the camp are going really well. Certainly better than I imagined they would. Now, I wouldn't necessarily say this to them, but the camp counselors whom I work with, are top notch, very professional. Clarisse is running a real quality camp. They are excellent with the children."

"I agree with you. I told Clarisse that the group we have here this summer has been the best group ever." Voss told him making a sweeping motion with his hand.

"I appreciate that. Ummm, the camp will be over next week and it seems to me that after the camp is gone, the need will still be there. School will start again, of course, but I think you will still need someone who knows the kids, to stay and run the program. After school activities like volleyball or softball. I was thinking of staying here when the camp terminates. I could work in a capacity with the ball team coaching. This will be on a volunteer basis. I realize that I'll need a separate job to finance myself. There is a bank on Todd Street. It should take-

Voss interrupted him, "What about your degree?"

"I have accumulated close to a hundred hours. I'm not currently enrolled in any university. It hasn't been a part of my immediate plans to complete graduation, but if I ever wanted to, I could go to school here. I could finish up the degree in some New York college. Any

school I attend I better plan to spend a year at because colleges have a policy; you need to take the last thirty hours from the school you graduate from. That's to keep people from transferring to a prestigious school for their last class and graduating in a high wage bracket. But, independently from that, I want to stay on here."

Voss locked his fingers together and rested them on his desk top, "I think that is a generous offer. And God knows we need the help, there is only so much Clarisse and I can do to keep this office running. Clarisse has her outside commitments as well. The needs of a parish like this are diversified and sometimes intrinsically complicated--"

Brian started tuning out Voss and entered a dreamlike state of self-talk. He was wondering what point Voss was making with this extemporaneous digression. Voss went on speaking of the areas that needed work in his parish. This prompted the next logical question in Brian's mind, "Where are you going with this Father?" However, he dared not ask that.

"You take for example someone like Andrea. How infrequent it is that someone who grew up in Towers would go to college. It's just tremendous. That is proof of what Clarisse means to girls like her. An example of what they can accomplish. An example of how far they can go in life."

Still, back in Brian's brain the thoughts continued, "You've been talking to politicians too long. You're givin' me the double-talk."

"-Especially someone with the abilities Andrea has."

Brian now spoke out in loud voice, "I don't understand. I really don't feel that Andrea or Clarisse are relevant. I guess this confusion is my fault. I wasn't being articulate enough. I am offering to stay here as I have been. On a volunteer basis. For free. With no cost to you."

"No, I understood you. I was trying to explain to you why I couldn't accept your offer."

Brian's eyebrows came close together, "Are you tellin' me...NO?"

"That's correct."

"Why? For what reason. I am acting by choice. I'm not looking for a salary. I was planning on obtaining an independent job here and working with the kids."

"I understand that. That is not the problem."

"What is the problem?" Brian burst out. "That my religion and skin is different than everyone's? That I don't have a degree? Have I been ineffective with the campers?"

"Absolutely not any of those things." Voss said assuringly.

"Will you explain to me, then, what reason?" Brian asked throwing his hands in the air.

"There is a tendency for someone who had the experiences you had here, to glorify it in their minds. Some people rose tint the time spent here because often it's their first exposure to community living and the rewards of volunteerism. I'm not saying that is what you've done specifically. I simply feel your decision may not be prudent."

"I disagree. It's not something that I arrived at on an impulse. It wasn't something that just popped into my mind. I thought a long time about this decision. Every possibility was examined with great care. I've scrutinized my choices, and I feel that this is the best choice for me now."

"I'm sure you did think carefully about it. It's a generous offer. I want you to go back home, graduate, maybe take a few Spanish courses, and if you still want to come back....Then we would be honored to have you."

"But I'm here now."

Voss smiled, "Yeah. For a little over a week longer."

Brian walked out of the office slowly. He turned and walked down the hallway toward the side door so he didn't have to confront Andrea and tell her that his

offer to volunteer to work here for free got turned down. He felt rejected, dejected, disbelief. How could Voss have done this? Wasn't he grateful that a partially successful young man from a somewhat affluent area would offer to come to work for absolutely nothing. How often does someone get turned down from a volunteer job? Brian walked back to the Healing House with his head hung low. Was it the fact he couldn't stay, or the fact he had to go home, that was bothering him so deeply? Brian figured he would worry about it later, he didn't want this defeat and loss of dignity to carry over to the game next week. When Brian got home Paula caught him in the hallway, before he changed out of his suit. "Were you just over at the gym?" she asked.

"No, I was at the office."

"Have you seen Hilena at all?"

"Not this again."

"I just want to know if you've seen her. She hasn't been to camp in awhile."

"It's been before the night at Towers since I've seen her."

"She used to wait for me every morning outside." Paula said softly. Only Brian didn't know if her comment was directed to him, or if Paula was now talking to herself. She turned and walked past him, never even asking why he was wearing a suit. Brian went silently

into his bedroom and shut the door behind him. With his suit still on, he laid down flat on the bed. When he rested his head on his pillow, it popped the water balloon Lauren had hidden inside his pillow case.

The class sat perfectly quiet. Kloane was preparing for the festival next week as well as Atlruim. Juan, Kloanes camp director, was pacing in front of them walking parellel to a large green chalkboard. He wore a checkered shirt with the sleeves torn off, ragged, and black slacks. In his left hand he carried an old broken cue stick. As he paced he would carefully slap his palm making a loud whacking sound. He spoke to them, "I know you all want to go outside for recess. I know that I would like to start my break. I work hard. We're not going to leave though. You're not going to your next class, you're not going outside, we're just going to sit here. We'll just sit here until someone owns up to it. Until we find out who stole Miguel Malcagno's lunch."

The class sat quietly.

"You know," Juan said patiently, "It's wrong enough to do it in the first place. But, when you do it and don't own up to it...then it's ten times wronger. I tell you these things 'cause I'm your teacher, and I care about what happens to you."

A boy in the last row raised his hand.

"John," Juan exclaimed. "John, I'm glad to see you raise your hand. Bueno. I'm glad to see you speak up. I was going to give a good clip on the ear to whomever took the lunch, but since you showed the courage to speak out, I wont harm you."

"I didn't do it," the boy said arising from his desk, "I just wanted to know if I could use the restroom."

"What? Sit down. It isn't bad enough we get flooded, but we have to put up with this too."

A timid girl raised her hand, was recognized, "What happens to the person who did it?"

Juan put his hands behind his back and swatted himself with the polished cue stick, "Let's just say punishment talks," Juan squinted his eyes with the words, "And I'm about to do some talking."

Another child raised a hand, "Yeah, but what are you going to do?"

Juan picked up a piece of chalk from the small rack in front of the chalkboard and drew a huge picture of buttocks on the great green surface. Juan turned and faced the class, "Whoever did it will stand with his or her nose to this picture for the rest of the entire camp day. If not, you all will."

The class sat perfectly still.

Brushing her teeth was Paula's first activity upon waking up. This morning when she went to her window, wearing boxer shorts, her red toothbrush stuck out of the side of her mouth. The sun had already begun to grow warm. The merchants across the street were lifting their graffiti-covered protective coverings from the front of their stores. People were walking by underneath her window. Cars were parked up and down Todd Street. Paula looked over toward the church and saw Hilena down at the bus stop near the bakery. Paula hadn't seen Hilena since the night they played bingo at the gymnasium. She had felt slighted when Hilena stopped waiting for her every morning outside the Healing House. Paula ran to her sink and spit out her toothpaste in the basin, she slid on a pair of shorts and an undershirt. Opening her door, she took off down the hallway and leapt down the stairs. Paula ran outside barefoot. She moved along the sidewalk and had to wait for speeding cars before crossing Todd Street. She wanted to catch up with Hilena before the bus came. She could feel her heart beating as she ran across Todd Street. Eagerly, she reached the child and smiled, "Hilena. Hi. Where have you been?"

Hilena looked at her as though she were a stranger.

Paula tried again, "The other day, when you left to go talk to your mom, and didn't come back. I got worried."

Hilena was looking off down the street. She was dressed comfortably and wore her traditional beret. She just shrugged and didn't answer Paula. Paula felt her presence was making the girl feel uncomfortable, yet she continued pressing her for information. "I was getting used to you waiting for me. Walking to camp together every morning. Now, you haven't even come to camp at all for awhile."

Paula looked in the direction Hilena's eyes were focused. She saw a large, white bus headed for them in the bright morning light. She spoke quickly, "Hilena, why have you stopped coming to camp?"

The girl shuffled uneasily, "I've had a lot to do."

"What? What have you to do?"

Helena did not answer. The bus braked and came to a loud stop. The air around them immediately was filled with a foul exhaust odor. Paula watched as the dirty door swung open. The bus driver and several other men on the bus stared at her hungrily. Paula looked down at her t-shirt and shoeless feet, realizing how her attire was inappropriate for the streets. She anxiously leaned toward the child, "Hilena, honey, where are you going?"

"I gotta go." Hilena walked past her and entered the bus. The door snapped shut. Then the child paid her fee and sat down at the first seat next to the door. Paula stood there, took note that Hilena didn't bother to check

outside the window to see her. The bus roared off leaving Paula alone, standing barefoot on the warm pavement.

Week 7

Tuesday, August the eighth

"...Put off, put on, youth hurts.
And then it's gone".

James A. Emmanuel

Port Altruim was buzzing. It was one of the most pleasant days of the summer. Even the pigeons seemed happy. The sun shone down a nurturing eighty-eight degrees. A breeze came off of the cool waters of the Raritan Bay. All around the community people began to pack food, blankets, and coolers into their cars. The school bus was already in front of St. Teresas waiting to start the migration to the Festival.

Brian Sage couldn't keep still. He kept walking a semi-circle pattern around his bed. Pacing. On each side of that bed he would stop and look out his windows, peering down over his window air-conditioner on the active residents on Todd Street. The city had come to life with electrifying energy. Cars were parked bumper to bumper from the Healing House all the way to the front of St. Teresa's church. Brian raised his foot to the top of his desk, leaned forward stretching his leg muscles, then went back to the window and searched for any ballplayers in the busy street below.

Paula sat upright and silent on her chair staring hypnotically into the mirror. She tuned the horns and voices from the street out of her consciousness. In her left hand she held her long hair by its end and in her right, her hairbrush. Paula, was in a semi-altered mental state, oblivious to her slow, methodical brushing. She leaned closer to the mirror and stared herself in the eyes. She examined her reflection, becoming slowly dreamlike in movement and cognitions. Analyzing her facial features, her pores, finding it difficult to break even her own gaze in the mirrored surface. Paula sat transfixed on her image. She tuned out all other stimulus in the room so much that when Clarisse knocked on the door, she jumped as though she had been bumped by a burglar. "AHH!" She spun her head toward the door and said loudly, "What is it?"

"It's me, Paula." Clarisse said with a tone of apology, "I wanted to ask you if you had gotten a chance to-" Clarisse was stopped mid sentence by the door swinging open. Paula stood wearing a long T-shirt with a drawing of a cartoon mouse drinking a beer and some faded greek letters. "I'm sorry Reese, I didn't know that was you."

"It's okay," Clarisse said, "Did you all get the stuff I put on the grocery list for today?"

Paula raised her eyebrows and made a face, "No

Clarisse, we didn't, but I was planning on going there first thing before the Festival."

"Fine. Will you pick up um,... a couple of watermelons and fifty balloons."

"Balloons for decorations?"

"No, for a water balloon fight. Lauren's idea. For soothing our long standing enemies."

Paula asked, "Brian and Carcass?"

Clarisse shook her head, "Nooo, Juan and the boys. The Kloaneheads. However, we'll nail Brian and Carlos too!"

Lauren was putting the final touches on the song she'd written, doing her best to edit it on a rather primitive recorder. She could hear the others and wanted to join them, but first she wanted to finish the recorded new verse on the tape. From the hallway she heard Brian yelling, "Today is the day the Lord has made for baseball." She listened to her friends talk and then pressed down the pause button, "I'll finish it tonight." she mumbled walking out the door. She didn't want to miss anything.

Carlos sat in front of the screen working on the THEORY/LAW OF CONTINUAL MOTION. The green cursor blinked tauntingly at him. He reached for the keyboard and began

typing, IN TERMS OF SAFETY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER, IF YOU LEAVE HOME LATE, YOU WILL ARRIVE AT WORK LATE. DON'T TRY TO USE THE LAW FOR MAKING UP LOST TIME. ALTHOUGH THAT IS WHAT THE LAW IS THERE FOR. ALSO, DON'T EVER ASSUME THAT JUST BECAUSE IT'S LATE, OR THE ROAD YOU'RE ON IS DESERTED, THAT THERE WON'T BE OTHER DRIVERS OUT, DRIVERS EQUALLY BAD, IF NOT WORSE, THAN YOU. IF YOU'RE OUT ON THE ROAD THEN SOMEONE ELSE IS TOO. THE LAW OF CONTINUAL MOTION NEED NOT BE LIMITED TO DRIVING. IT CAN APPLY IN OTHER AREAS AS WELL. FOR INSTANCE, A CUSTOMER DECIDES TO ENTER A BANK (as opposed to going to the drive thru) AND THERE ARE THREE TELLERS AND THREE CUSTOMERS. ALL THOSE CUSTOMERS ARE REARRANGING THEIR I.R.A'S. ALL YOU WANT TO DO IS CASH YOUR PAYROLL CHECK FOR A HUNDRED AND TWELVE DOLLARS, WHAT SHOULD YOU DO? WHY DON'T BANKS HAVE EXPRESS LINES LIKE SUPERMARKETS DO? ONLY INSTEAD OF EXPRESS LINE, IT WILL BE CALLED "COMPETENT LINE" BECAUSE ONLY COMPETENT PEOPLE GET TO USE IT.

NOW, WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT INCOMPETENT PEOPLE WHO PERCEIVE THEMSELVES TO BE COMPETENT, BECAUSE VERY FEW ACTUALLY THINK OF THEMSELES AS INCOMPETENT. AS A MATTER OF FACT, ONLY COMPETENT PEOPLE CAN RECOGNIZE INCOMPETENTS BECAUSE COMPETENT PEOPLE HAVE COGNITIVE ABILITY TO SEE WHO IS AND WHO ISN'T. IT IS RARE FOR A COMPLETE MORON TO SAY, 'THAT

PERSON IS REALLY STUPID'. MAYBE THEN THE "COMPETENT LINE" WILL BE SO CROWDED WITH DUMB PEOPLE THAT WE WILL BE FREE TO MAKE OUR TRANSACTIONS SWIFTLY AND EFFICIENTLY IN THE AFOREMENTIONED LINES.

Carlos sat back in his chair and rubbed his chin with his fingers. "I don't know" he whispered.

Voss had instructed Rooster to drive people to the Festival in hour shifts, starting at ten a.m. It was quarter after nine and there were already forty-two residents there. Rooster wound up making his first trip at nine thirty-three. When he reached the park, he saw the leader of the Kloane camp was already there. Juan was drinking a beer (at nine fifty-five a.m.?) and punching his big fist into a tan glove. There was a young man, twenty feet away from Juan, working on his pitching. On the other side of the park, mothers watched as children played on the swings and climbed around the play fort. One small child watched anxiously as two men unloaded a dead pig from a pick-up and began to prepare the roast. The bleachers were empty, but there was a hacky-sack game being played on the field. A tall boy with long black hair ran around trying to impress everyone with his expertise. Cars started to pour into the parking lot. Many people finished construction on food and game booths, filling the park with the sounds of

hammers and drills. The excitement was already building. Rooster backed up the bus and began to make his exit when Juan noticed him and called over. "Heeey. Your drippin' oil on the parking lot. Also, shouldn't you be drivin' a hearse?" Wild laughter broke out at Juan's insulting jab.

Rooster looked over through the small side window of the bus. Juan was standing between two men with beer guts and untucked shirts. Juan cupped his mouth so as to be heard better. "You better hope that heap of a bus breaks down on the highway. I'm gonna hate to embarrass you all again." Rooster said nothing, ignored the laughter of the crowd and pretended not to hear Juan yell, as he drove off..."REMEMBER LAST YEAR!"

Time for the morning meeting in the kitchen. Clarisse was gone but Paula and Lauren stood at the corner, leaning against the cabinets talking. Carlos acted as though he was reading the paper to appear to be casual. He didn't want to let on about the great awareness inside him. Today is the day of the big game. The culmination project of a summer's work. From the other room came a roar. Brian entered beating his chest and holding up an old bowling trophy with the head broken off high in the air. His arms outstretched in a huge V-shape. "Today, Lauren." he smiled

"Today? Brian."

"Today. Paula."

"I know, Brian."

Brian turned, still holding the trophy high with one arm and beating his chest, like 'King Kong', with the other. He walked over to Carlos, "Today is the day, Carbohydrate, my son." Then he turned and walked out the other door. Carlos looked over to the girls and shook his head confused.

Brian continued down the hall, where he heard something going on outside the window. When he approached, he saw Tony and Frankie with several other boys playing ball in the parking lot. He stood for a second watching them. Tony tossed up a ball to himself, swung and sent the ball sailing. A boy ran back, chased it, caught it and threw it back in to Frankie. Frankie turned and threw a little underhand toss to Tony who batted it and sent the boy running again. When the boy finally returned it, it zoomed past Frankie's nose. Frankie yelled out, "Hey, Ernesto. Whaddaya trawin' to do? Gnawk my head off? Quit thrawin' gernades and pitch t' ball right."

The next noise heard was Brian's voice coming from the upstairs window, "Thanks Frankie, I didn't realize you are the coach."

"He can't catch the ball."

"Not with you hollerin' at him he can't. And Tony, how many times did I tell you not to kill the ball in the parking lot. Today you're just going to concentrate on the base hits?"

Tony looked up bashful, "Yeea, I know. We're praktisin'."

Brian paused, "Practice is over. Today were playin'. I'll be ready to go in a second." He looked at his watch. "I want everyone ready to go in twenty minutes. Why don't you go to the gym and make sure everything is in the-um-blue nylon bag. There should be six balls, four wooden bats, and two aluminum, couple gloves, caps, things like that."

"Where is the blue bag at?"

"It's in the...I think it's in the closet in the office. Get Clarisse to let you in."

The volunteers picked out their clothes carefully today. Carlos wore a bright white jersey with green sleeves, gray running pants and black baseball shoes. Paula wore her olive shirt with a white junker necklace and khaki shorts that were a shade lighter than her legs. Lauren picked out a bright, sun yellow shirt and wore it with jean shorts and sneakers. Brian, dressed in stylish coaching fashion, had on a striped goalie shirt, and standard issue nylon football shorts.

They left the Healing House together, filing down

the stairs one after the other. Then as a group, crossed the lot to St. Teresa's. Lauren corraled kids, while Brian, Carlos and Paula talked strategy with the players. Carlos secretly felt that it was somewhat useless to go over the fundamentals again. Anything that happens today will come from what the players learned over the last weeks, not the morning before the game. Since the team seemed interested, it appeared to calm Brian down. Carlos sat quietly and listened to the rhetoric. Brian talked loudly and forcefully, reminded them of techniques and positions, and made faces and spoke in several character voices, "Let us say that for some reason, they get on a roll. That's when teams score a lot of points. We don't want that to happen. We don't want them to get any points at all. Soooo, whenever possible let's break their momentum. Now, I don't want anybody playin' unfair. You are athletes and sportsmen first. We're gonna win today. However, if the other team does start puttin' somethin' together...Well, maybe their foul balls won't be returned right away. Maybe, the pitcher, will have an extra long warm-up. All kinds of delays can break momentum. Who knows." Brian glanced over at Frankie who looked back intently.

"What about time-outs?" a voice asked.

"I'll worry about that." Brian said, "Listen now, don't over do it. Just take your time when you need to.

Every moment by itself is the most important. Ten seconds ago, five seconds ago...one second ago is gone. There is only now."

Carlos stared at him. "Whatever that means." He thought.

Brian continued, "If everyone on this team plays as good as they can for every moment, I have no doubt at all we'll win this game. No doubt in my mind."

Paula's turn, "Kloanians have a reputation for being obnoxious and offensive during these games. They do that to psyche you out and because they're pugnacious by nature. I know it can be distracting, but if you let a spectator or heckler get to you, then you're letting them win. Good athletes are able to tune that out and concentrate on the matter at hand. Playin' ball."

Carlos wanted to add to the chorus, but instead suggested they proceed to the park. The small band began moving towards Todd Street where Rooster was with the bus. Brian reached into his pocket and pulled out a Japanese headband and put it on. It was time to do battle. The team walked quietly and together in a bunch as if there was something magnetic, like static cling, in them.

Paula wished them luck, stood on the corner waving as Rooster's bus loaded up the team and carried them down Todd Street. Paula was riding with Clarisse to the

Festival. She went through St. Teresa's garage into the lobby where Andrea was typing. "Andrea, you're still here? Aren't you going to the Festival?"

"Yeah, I'm going. A little later though. My brother is playing in the game."

"That's right. Clarisse and I are leaving in a few minutes. You're welcome to come with us."

"Okay I may do that. Clarisse is in her office. I just put a call through."

"Great, I'll let you know before we leave." Paula said making her way back to the office. Clarisse's door was shut. That was unusual. Paula knocked gently and called, "Clarisse? Ready when you are."

Clarisse called back, "I'll be out in a minute."

Paula walked back into the lobby. Was there something wrong? Clarisse's voice sounded strange. She asked Andrea if she knew who was on the phone. Andrea told her. "It was some man. The call sounded long distance."

In the private office, Clarisse was in disbelief. The man on the phone had taken her completely by surprise. The man claimed to be Brian's brother from Portland and wanted all the information he could obtain. Clarisse was not about to divulge any. The eerie thing was this man's voice sounded similar to Brian's.

"Maam, I appreciate you wanting to maintain

confidentiality for your employees. You must realize though, I have been looking for my brother for weeks. I have some vital information to tell him. Not only that his wife is furious, but she literally wants to kill him. His life is in danger."

"You must have the wrong Brian Sage. The individual under my employment is unmarried."

"He's married all right. He's married to evil incarnate. Look, Brian is about five foot eleven, medium build, has blond hair."

"That could describe a lot of people." Clarisse explained.

"The mailing address he gave you was 1338 National Street, that's Hughes Bank in Portland."

Clarisse exhaled, collapsing deep in her chair. That was the address. "Okay, Mr. Sage tell me what's goin' on."

Carlos deemed that there should be no talking on the way to the game. The bus drove down the highway with almost complete silence inside. A few players whispered to each other, but most were concentrating on the game. Brian sat watching the buildings go by. The reflection of the brick and windows on the bus window included the image of Brian's face superimposed on it. Carlos was thinking about the game. To most people they were heavy

underdogs. Carlos could not say with a great deal of accuracy who was the better team. If they had only one more week to work on their skills. This game has come on all too fast. Tony sat rocking his body in the seat, his tight fist making indentations in his glove. He had a soldier's expression on his face. No one spoke to Tony today, they were all too scared of him. Frankie was just plain scared. All the insecurities he was able to suppress or cover-up were piling out. What if he screws up? What if he blows it in front of all those people? All his friends? Frankie wished he hadn't been such a big talker all his life. He wished he was just some nameless guy who nobody knew then he could pitch with his head clear. He wanted to talk to Carlos or Brian about his feelings but it was too late. They were almost at the park. Maybe he could fake sickness. No. That wouldn't work. He knew this moment would eventually come and here it was. Rooster signaled and got off the highway. He made his way up the ramp. Next stop; the park.

The park had come alive by the time they got there. Booths selling tacos, funnel cakes, and cotton candy were set up in rows. There were games to play: darts at balloons, duck walk, basketball shoot. People were sitting at picnic tables, playing frisbee. One young couple walked hand in hand, the girl carrying an

overstuffed orange rabbit. A mother was screaming at some children for shooting off bottle rockets. A group of Altruim kids played on the swings and teeter-toters. In the air was the smell of barbecue. That's the way the park was when the St. Teresa bus pulled in.

Clarisse walked into the lobby pulling her purse strap over her shoulder. Paula got out of the chair she was sitting in. Andrea looked up. Clarisse said to Paula, "Are you ready?"

Paula spoke cautiously, "Yeah, I invited Andrea to go with us."

"Sure," Clarisse said looking ahead. Andrea gathered a stack of mail, "Let me drop this in the mailbox and I'll be ready." Andrea got up, walked around the desk, and disappeared into the back room. Paula kept her gaze transfixed on Clarisse, "You look upset Clarisse, is there something wrong?"

"Something I'll take care of later." Clarisse said still looking forward. Andrea came back. The three were off. Andrea and Paula knew the camp director was upset, that was visibly noticeable. During the drive to the park, they exchanged pleasantries hoping that by the time they reached the park, she would be free of her blue haze.

After the bus emptied, Rooster pulled up a long way into the parking lot. Carlos instructed the kids to begin their warm up in an adjacent field. Brian went over to scope out the playing field and what was going on. The park certainly was active. Occasionally he would see someone he recognized from Altruim and say hello. He couldn't count all the people he had met this summer. He crossed the park diagonally passing a face painting booth, a ring toss and various booths peddling ethnic foods, until he came to the field where the Kloane team was already warming up. Juan was standing near home plate with a small aluminum cage filled with baseballs. He had a dirty blue bat in his right hand. He was throwing balls into the air, batting them, and having his infielders practicing grounders. He paused and watched the shortstop chase towards a ball. The outfielders stood far apart, playing catch in the grass. Juan interrupted them, calling out to a team member, "Dude, you want one?" The outfielder yelled back that he did and got into his stance. Juan threw a ball up and smacked it flying, the outfielder ran back, waited, and caught it. Everyone was going about, no one was aware of Brian yet. Not until Brian decided to make himself noticed. He headed toward them in a yes-I'm-busy-but-not-rushed pace. He was even so bold as to cut across the center of the infield, staying out of

the player's line of fire so no one would bean him in the head by 'accident'. Juan saw him coming, anchored the bat in the dust beside him and leaned confidently on it. "Welcome. Your team decide not to show up? They're smarter than I gave them credit for."

Brian made him wait for his response. All the Kloane player's stopped their practicing to watch. Brian came and stood on the other side of home plate, he stood hands on thighs.

"We're here and we will be ready to start when we said."

Juan lifted his hands, palm up, into the air at his side, "We're ready to start now. Bring on your team."

Brian looked side to side. "Where's the umpire?"

"He'll be here. Just go get your team so we can get this thing over with. Got things to do."

"We'll be here when we said we would. I want to talk to the ump before the game starts."

Clarisse's spirits were a little better by the time they had reached the park. She, of course, didn't say anything to Paula or Andrea about the phone call she had received earlier. She also decided that she would wait until this conflict with Kloane was resolved today, before confronting Brian with what she knew. Clarisse told Daniel Sage the number to the Healing House, with

the understanding he would not tell his brother she gave it to him. Clarisse told Daniel not to tell Brian they had spoken.

They got out of the car, Andrea struggling to get a cooler Clarisse had packed out of the back seat. They were standing around the car, when a young man none of them had ever seen before came running up to them. He had long hair that was pulled back in a ponytail and bright clothing that was draped around him somewhat effeminately. He stopped in front of Paula and grinning wide said, "Hey, you're that girl from Altruim aren't you."

Paula said nothing back.

He continued, "You are, I know. I've seen you before. Listen, I'm drawing caricatures here today. My booth is that red and white striped one over there." He twisted his body pointing. As soon as his back was half turned, Paula glanced nonchalantly to her friends, she said, "You two ready to go?"

The drawing man put his hands up apologetically. "You have to go, I know. The game. I just wanted to offer, ah, I will draw your portrait for free if you come ov-"

"I'm gonna be pretty busy today, Walt Disney."

"Anytime you get a free minute. Just come by. It'll only take a second."

"I might, if you go away and leave us alone now."

He backed up, bouncing, "Okay, I'm goin', I'm goin'." See you later though."

"Maybe." Paula insisted. She then picked up one side of the cooler Andrea had. Andrea turned her head. She looked at Paula who seemed unaffected and asked her, "Paula, did that,..does that happen to you a lot? I mean, do you feel flattered by all these people always falling all over you?"

"No. I just feel annoyed." She said and Andrea believed her. Clarisse looked over, saw a tiny smile on Paula's face, and wondered if she was really annoyed at all.

The umpire was there. St. Teresa's team gathered near the playing field by a large shade tree. The umpire wanted to see the coaches and the team captains. Juan was there with his prodigy. Brian and Carlos called Tony as team captain. They wanted a representative bursting with machismo. Brian and Carlos shook hands with Juan, not something either of them cared to do. The five of them stood listening to the umpire give the pre-game instructions. The umpire was a thirty year old, black man. He was fat, as an umpire should be, and had a bald head rimmed with short hair. Brian thought that he looked as though he knew baseball and would give them a

fair game. The umpire spoke the rules and regulations like it was something he recited many times before. "Since this park is public land, we need to decide which team is the home team. Right?" He pulled a shiny silver half-dollar out of his pocket and exposed both sides to prove it's legitimacy. "Since Altruim is closer to the park, they'll get to call it." the ump motioned to Tony, "You ready? Call it in the air I will catch it, I will not flip it over."

"Heads." Tony said. It was tails. The Kloane kid got to choose. "We want to be home team." he said without missing a beat. The umpire checked his watch, "We will offically begin in ten minutes. Any questions?" There were none.

They gathered the team together. Lauren, Paula, Clarisse and Andrea sat on the bleachers under the shade of an big elm with arching and curving branches, listening to Brian and Carlos give out directions. Lauren whispered to her friends, "Why is Brian wearing that ridiculous headband?" The bleachers were full and groups of younger children stood by the fence that outlined the field waiting for the action. The Kloane huddle was on one side, the Altruim on the other. Brian and Carlos tried their best not to display the anxiety they were feeling. Brian noticed how uptight the team

looked. Especially Frankie. His whole face had broken into a fierce sweat, and his expression looked very troubled. Brian guessed the best approach now was to calm them down, or at least try to. "The final point I want to make is this. For a long time Carlos and I been telling you about how important this game is and a lot about good sportsmanship. This game is important, but it's not life or death. Both Altruim and Kloane will go on standing when it's over with. You're althetes and you're out here to compete and do the best you can do. Me and Carlos have watched this team grow and come together over the last couple weeks and we're very proud of you. The only thing to do now is play the best you can, every play, and...have a good time doing it. Don't worry. You've already shown us what you can do. Now prove it on the field."

The umpire called into the air, "Let's begin, gentlemen." The crowd started clapping. Juan and his team screamed out some unintelligent cheer and ran out onto the field. The skinny second basemen did a flip in the air running out to his position. The Altruim team lined up at their bench. The first batter was a consistent hitter, the team called D.'Bonus' Bulldog. Brian went over to the bleachers briefly inviting the girls to come sit with the team. Only Paula did because she was too excited to sit still. The umpire brushed off

home plate and yelled play ball. Again cheering came out from both sets of bleachers. More and more people came over from the festival. Brian and Paula stood at the fence with Carlos and the team. No one wanted to sit down. The Kloane team took their positions. D.B. Bulldog went up to the plate. The first and only game of the season was underway. Bulldog got a hit on the first pitch thrown. He ran safely to first base. The Altruim fans were vocal. Juan was not smiling.

It turned out that the Altruim team got two hits during the first inning but no runs were scored. The players gathered up their gloves and took the field. The first Kloane hitter came up. Frankie stared at him from his pitching mound, and then at the catcher, awaiting the signal. Frankie wound up, delivered the pitch, "Ball." the umpire yelled. The catcher returned it. Frankie swallowed, "That was not a good pitch." he told himself. He got back up on the mound, feeling his hand sweating inside the warm glove. He wound up and delivered the next pitch.

"Ball." the umpire yelled.

The catcher returned it. Frankie took a deep breath of air. Walked back and forth, muttering self-talk. He got the signal and threw his next pitch...

"Ball."

Three balls and no strikes. He was about to walk the lead off batter. From the Kloane bench he could hear Juan yelling, "Don't swing, Jerry, this guy don't know how da' pitch." Frankie wound up. The ball came in. Terrone didn't swing. He walked. Jerry jogged to his place at first base. Frankie started to perspire even more. The second batter came up. Frankie purposely avoided eye contact with anyone on the Altruim bench. He had to keep it together mentally. Frankie's first pitch to the second batter; low and outside, a ball. He heard Brian yell, "C'mon Frankie, get it in there." Frankie walked off the mound and towards the catcher to receive the ball. The next pitch was also a ball. So was the third. So was the fourth.

"We want a pic'sure, not a beeely ick'sure." Came the call from two small boys with their shirts off on the other side of the fence. The third batter came up. Frankie went through the motions and delivered it home. A ball. Some unknown voice screamed, "Heey, gettid' togedder out 'dere." Frankie threw the next pitch, it was a ball, but the batter swung at it and hit it up the first base line. A single. Frankie was relieved that he didn't walk, but now the runner's advanced and the bases were loaded. If he walked the next batter he would walk in a run. The worst thing a pitcher could do. A voice from the Kloane side went out to the batter that got a

hit, "Kelvin, why'd ya' swing. He woulda' walked ya anyway."

"I was gettin' tired of standin' there." Kelvin said from his first base perch. This comment brought laughter from the Kloane bleachers. Over at the Altruim bench Paula saw the muscles in Brian's jaws pulling his mouth shut tight. She whispered to him, "What's the deal with Frankie?"

"He's comin' unglued. You think we should get 'em outta there Carlos?"

Carlos said, "Hang on just a second. This thing is just startin'. I think he's gonna pull through."

Frankie faced the next batter. The fourth batter. The clean-up batter. Normally, the best batter on the team. Frankie inhaled. As much air as his lungs could handle. Then let it out. The catcher signaled. Frankie's pitch,...a ball. More screams came out from Kloane, "Are we gonna play baseball here or what?"

"How are we going to top last year's score, it'll be dark 'fore he walks that many runs in."

"Maybe we should trade my gran'ma to them for their pitcher."

"Naw, yer' gran'ma is too val-ya-ble."

"HA."

The Altruim catcher asked the umpire's permission for time. It was granted and he jogged up to the

pitching mound. Frankie pulled his hat off disgustedly. The catcher said under his breath, "Frankie, wha'cha goin' do. You can't walk this guy, a run'll come home."

"I know," Frankie said through clenched teeth, "Give me the ball."

"Man, you haven't got one across the plate yet."

"I know. Give...me...the...ball!" Frankie opened up his glove and the catcher dropped the ball into it. Then he went back to the plate, shrugging his shoulders at the coaches like, "I tried." The catcher squatted down, pointed two fingers at the ground, and wondered why he was even giving signals. Frankie wound up and delivered the pitch.

"Sss-trrriikke."

Now the Altruim side roared. Some people on the bleachers stood up and clapped. Finally, Frankie was able to loosen his muscles. He got his composure, walked off the mound and raised his glove in the air to recieve the ballback the ball. Unfortunately, his success was short lived. His next two pitches were balls and the jeering from the Kloane side started again. "Okay Tommy, wait for your pitch."

"Make him come to you, Tommy."

"He still needs to come with two good ones. Wait for your pitch. He still needs two good ones."

They called from the Altruim side as well. "Come on

Frankie, you can do it."

"Throw it in there." Danny called.

"Get it over the plate!"

The pitch came in. Ball four. The man on third was walked home. Early, early, early in the game it was already Kloane one and Altruim zero. The bases were loaded with no outs and the pitcher was losing it. Carlos called time. He motioned for Tony to come from the infield. He grabbed Tony, "Tony, look, we're in a jam. I want you to pitch. I know you haven't practiced pitching that much but you're the only guy on the team that can do it." Tony agreed to be the pitcher and Carlos walked out to the mound. Frankie knew he was being pulled and didn't wait for Carlos to approach him, instead he walked off past Carlos. Tony jogged out to the mound and began throwing some practice pitches. Carlos stopped and informed the umpire that their shortstop was now pitching and one of the back-ups was playing shortstop. Frankie continued past his bench, eyes and head pointing toward the ground. He kept walking away from the team and the field toward the other side of the park. Lauren got down off the bleachers to go after him but Brian called, "Leave him be."

As Tony threw his warmup tosses, the Kloanians started on him to. "Hey kid, you know what direction home plate is?"

"Don't worry about this one. We saw the first string, he couldn't be much better."

They were just about to throw in another line when the umpire got up and stared over to their bleachers. Despite his large frame he moved quickly. He faced them with his protective mask pulled up on top of his head. He shouted at them in a loud, husky voice, "You people! I'm tired of your name callin'. If you keep shouting out these insulting comments, I will forfeit this game due to unsportsmanlike behavior and Altruim will win. I will not hesitate to do that." He turned around and moved his large body back to the plate. There were more comments coming from the Kloane side. Things like, "Fat, bald guy" and "The only way they could win is by forfeit." However, none of these comments held any real conviction and were called out weakly by some anonymous stranger. The umpire called for play to resume and Tony threw his first pitch-a strike. The game was back on track. Carlos whispered to himself, "Thank God for Tony Martinez."

The game moved along quickly and by the fifth inning Port Altruim was behind Kloane by only three runs. Kloane had scored three runs in the first inning and one every inning since. Tony turned out to be a fair pitcher and everyone on the Altruim team was hitting well. When

it came down to the bottom of the fifth, Brian kept his promise that every one would get a chance to play and put Danny in left field. This brought about a few disagreements among the team members which were quickly stopped by a piercing look from the coach. Tony got the team out of the inning with no runs and they started the sixth inning Kloane six and Altruim three.

Carlos was clapping his hands at the bench, "You all look good out there. You all look good. Let's get some runs this inning. Start racking up those points."

The Altruim center fielder choose his bat and walked up to the plate. He stood outside the batters box and took a slow motion warm-up swing. Brian and Paula stood next to each other watching him. Their arms were folded and resting on the top of the wire fence. Brian's headband sleeve hung down by the side of his head. He and Paula spoke quietly to each other. "The're playing very well despite what happened with Frankie." Brian said.

"And despite the comments the Kloanes were yelling out. I'm glad the umpire said something to them."

"Yeah, we got a good ump. I heard Kloane did the same last year. God, that infuriated me." Brian told her.

"Do you think they will try to pull anything else?"

"Oh, I think they would, but what can they do?"

We're stopping most of their offense. All we need to do is run up the score board now."

The center fielder fouled out to the third baseman. The next batter walked up to the plate and took his stance. Paula moved her thumb slowly down the gray wire. She said under her breath, "You and Carlos did a great job with this team. You should feel proud of yourself."

The batter swung and hit the ball over the second baseman's outstretched glove. Brian pounded on the fence with clenched fists, over the sound of the team cheering, he called out, "Good hit, kid!" His attention went back to Paula, "It is exciting, ain't it? Yea, I'm proud. I'm bursting with pride. Thanks for being here with us. Thanks for all the help."

St. Teresa's scored two runs that inning.

Six to six in the second half of the seventh inning. Tied. Port Altruim was on the field. Tony still was pitching and feeling more confident about it. Kloane was up to bat. Danny still happily occupied left field. Brian and Paula still stood next to each other, Paula trying to keep him calm. Carlos paced back and forth, yet his eyes never steered away from the field. More spectators had come by. Word had gotten out that Altruim had Kloane by the tail. Suddenly, the place got quiet. Kloane's first batter this inning stepped onto the field. The batter was a black kid, around six foot three, he

wore a black concert shirt and had thick, perfectly groomed hair. He had the appearance of a professional player. One of the younger St. Teresa's children standing next to Paula and Brian gasped, "I don' believe it. It's Matt Cahill." He said 'Cahill' like it was synomous with royalty. "It's Matt Cahill."

Brian thought quickly. What was Juan up to? He couldn't possibly think that they would allow this player as an elligible participant. What was the hustle? Maybe he was trying to psyche out the Altruim players.

"Look, man. It's Cayyy-hill." the Altruim bench whispered.

Brian spoke up sternly, "Be quiet you all. He's not part of their team. He's not playin'."

The young one spoke up again, "But that is Matt Cahill. Man, he's the toughest kid in town."

Brian wanted them to be nonimpressed, "Like Bad, Bad Leroy Brown?"

Too late. The kids were impressed. The little one continued talking to coach Brian, "One time my brother was in an alley, and he saw Matt Cahill comin' after him with a razor!"

"Maybe he thought he needed a shave."

"Brian, you don't know that guy. In his locker, he keeps 'chucks...and a knife."

"Well, this is a baseball game. Nobody is gonna get

hurt unless a ball hits them." Brian glanced at Carlos, "Whattaya think, Carlos?"

Carlos yelled out "TIME" and jogged out to home plate to have a conference with the umpire. Juan also went out to join the conversation. The crowd sat in silence, trying to hear the voices. Carlos was standing next to Cahill, despite Carlos large size, Cahill seemed to hover over him. Carlos asked him, "How old are you?"

Cahill answered, "I'm in my sophomore year."

"No. How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

Carlos spun to face the umpire. He said with conviction, "Ump, there is no way he is sixteen. I'm in my twenties and he looks older than me."

The umpire stared at Cahill curiously. He asked him, "Son, you tellin' the truth about your age?"

"Yes sir." Cahill replied quietly.

Juan said sneering, "Show him your I.D. Matt."

Cahill reached into his back pocket, pulled out a thin leather case, fipped open to an identification card, and showed the umpire. Carlos was not buying it. He said sarcastically, "You just happened to have your I.D. with you? You bring that to bat?"

Juan spoke to the umpire who was carefully studying the identification card, "I told him to bring his I.D. because I knew Altruim would act like a bunch of whining

ladies today. We just came here to play ball."

The umpire looked up at Carlos, "It says that he is sixteen and currently residing in Kloane."

Carlos was not to be swayed, "Look, this is an obvious scam. Kloane is sweatin' because they're losing-"

"It's tied." Juan chimed in.

"Because they're about to lose. So now they try to pass him off as a legitimate player? Why didn't they use him earlier, huh? Why is he appearing now?"

"Sounds like a reasonable question to me." The umpire directed at Juan.

"The simple reason is," Juan began, "I let my second stringers play first. I knew we were playin' an inferior team. Matt has been on the team all along, I just wanted to give all my players a chance to see action. My second stringers stood up against their first string without any problems, now it's time for us to finish off the game. We're not goin' to fool around any more."

The umpire nodded, motioned toward Carlos, "I'm going to let this boy play. The only rules for participation are belonging to a camp. This boy's director vouches he is a member and he has legitimate identification. He handed Cahill back his wallet. Carlos pleaded now, "C"mon ump, you know this is a farce. If he was being a such a good sport, why did they do that

to my pitcher earlier?"

Juan broke in exasperated, "Ahh, enough already. I feel like I'm arguing with a lil' girl out here. Are we gonna play baseball or pattycake?"

The umpire slide his mask back over his face, "You heard my decision." he looked out straight to the field, "Play ball."

Carlos got up into the umpire's stoic face, "I want you to know we are now offically playing this game under protest." he said nastily. "Immediately afterward, I am contacting the park board and informing them of your inability as an umpire to act or rule fairly."

The umpire slowly turned his head towards Carlos, his nostrils flaring, "That is your prerogative. However, you make one more comment, regarding anything, and I'll throw you out of the game."

Carlos stormed off back to the bench. Juan and Cahill walked like foxes over to their bench. Juan stood next to Cahill, the two staging their own private huddle, under his breath Juan said to the toughest kid in town, "Hit it to that retarded kid in left field."

Cahill nodded assuringly.

Carlos informed the team that since Cahill was certified as eligible the umpire had decided to let him play. Then he went over to Paula and Brian, and told

Brian it might be a good idea for him to handle any other conflicts that came up with that umpire. Then the three of them watched as Tony, Altruim's best player, pitched to Cahill, who was obviously a powerhouse and who was reputed to be an outstanding athlete. King Cahill stood at the plate, holding his bat up high. Tony met his stare and received the signal from the catcher, he wound up, and threw the ball hard. Cahill swung on the first pitch and pulled the ball, sailing it into left field. Dozens of heads look simultaneously in the air. The ball reached heaven then began its descent.

Everyone thought it was a home run, but Danny ran almost blindly, and with open glove, caught the ball.

"He caught it!" someone exclaimed.

Danny placed his right hand over the ball in his glove to make sure it didn't pop out any holes. There was an explosion of cheering from the Altruim side. The team was jubilant, making enough noise for a stadium of people. Juan threw his baseball cap in the dust. Tony jumped up on his throne of earth. There was a chorus of cheers, clapping and smiling faces. The centerfielder hugged Danny. Paula threw her arms around Brian and kissed him. Instantly the dugout went quiet and everyone stared at them. Brian looked at her, then guiltily at the crowd of faces. Paula pulled back and straightened out her blouse. Brian cleared his throat and looked

ahead casually, hands locked behind his back. A triumphant Danny, with a broad grin, threw the ball back to the infield, only he missed and shattered the window of a Mitubishi in the next parking lot. Cahill, with a head hung low, darted off the field and into the Kloane bench area. The Atruimians were estatic. The team as a whole had achieved a significant victory, and Danny was a new born hero.

The feeling of victory, however sweet, was only temporary. At the end of the ninth inning the score was Kloane nine, Altruim seven. After the final out, the kids from St. Teresa's summer camp came grudgingly to their bench kicking at the ground. The Kloane side made noise, slapped hands, and chanted obscenities in unison. Then the Kloane team and it's fearless coach, prepared for their patented Victory Run. The Victory Run is when the entire team starts at home plate and runs around all four bases. Brian wondered if the Kloane players would lift Juan up on their shoulders after they circled the bases and came back to home. Brian didn't want the Kloanes to rub salt in their wounds. He said to his team, "They're about to do their Victory Run, but I dont wanna' see that. I do want to speak with you though. Come have a seat over by that shade tree. Clarisse and Lauren, would you please bring us that cooler, that one

with the soda in it? Thank you." The Altruim team turned their backs to the victors and walked away from the field, toward the shade tree accompanied by Brian, Paula, Lauren and Clarisse and even a few parents and fans. The tree, the fence, and the bleachers obstructed their view of the baseball diamond. No one stopped to see where Carlos had gone.

Carlos was standing, hands on hips, dead smack in the center of home plate, blocking it from the Kloanians, who were rounding third base and heading right for him.

The Altruim team plopped down under the big tree. Clarisse and Lauren brought over a big cooler and began passing out lime sodas to the kids. Brian stood up, the sleeve of his Japanese headband occasionally bouncing gently on his face. Paula joined Clarisse and Lauren by the broad base of the tree and listened to Brian talk. A few other curious festival participants eavesdropped on the post game meeting. Brian reached into the cooler, picked up a ice cube and popped it inside his mouth. He stood, leaning back, in front of the team? "What did you all think of that?"

"We lost again." the second baseman said.

"Yes, we lost." Brian agreed nodding his head. He raised up his hand, showing two fingers extended. "By two points. By two runs. That is nothing to be ashamed

of. You played very well. You practiced hard this summer, and, you're a good team now. I mean, this wasn't nothing like last year. Nothing like last year. You were evenly matched. We didn't get tramped. You stayed with them all the way. Every person here felt the game could have gone either way. Kloane was sweatin' bullets. I loved it. An' how 'bout that catch Danny made, huh? Huh?"

Danny embarrassingly teetered his head, a teammates slapped him good-naturedly on the back.

"Way to go Dan-neeee."

"The next Golden Glove recipient."

Brian cut them off, "Listen up. I think all of you should take a moment to thank some of the people from Altruim for comin' out and supporting us. You gave them a great game to watch. Then go out and enjoy the festival, stay away from any of the people we just played. Alright? I mean that. I don't want any of you getting in trouble. Besides, from what I've seen earlier, there are a couple dozen pretty teenage girls out here."

Calls and hollers went out.

"...And you know how to spend your time. Right?" Brian went on. Clarisse rolled her eyes. The team started to get up, and Brian called out, "Wait. Wait, one more second, then I'll turn you loose. Two things,

make sure you throw all the equipment back into the blue bag." Brian picked up the empty blue bag from the grass and held it high. "Take care of the new gloves. We'll turn those in tomorrow. Secondly, there is a party tonight. It will be a 'Going to College' slash 'Congratulations on the Game' party. Andrea's going to Princeton next fall. That will be tonight at the Healing House."

They got up and started running dropping bats and baseballs into the blue equipment bag. Over the commotion Brian shouted, "Be there at eight." When they were gone, he smiled at his friends underneath the big tree. "Where's Carlos?" he asked.

The Kloanian team broke their stride and went into a half trot when they saw their adversary standing intentionally posed on the base. Juan was in the front of the pack and he slowed and looked at the curious sight. The umpire noticed Carlos while he stood off in the parking lot next to his open hatchback. There were fifteen players on the Kloane team. The coach was Juan, a man not noted for his tenderness. The star player, who kept 'chucks and a knife' in his school locker, Matt Cahill, was there! Still, Carlos guarded home plate. Juan ran up and stopped a foot away from the base, face to face with Carlos. The team slowly circled Carlos,

much like the sorority girls did to Brian in the 'Readland Ferry Terminal'. (Why were people always doing that?) The Kloanes watched stupefied. They had no idea what to expect from this foolish individual. Surely either Juan or Cahill would crush him. Carlos and Juan stood across from each other with defiant postures. Everything was quiet. Carlos said, with his gaze slowly meeting each of them, "I just wanted you all to know, I think you're very unsportsmanlike," then his gaze fell singularly on Juan, "And also...a complete asshole."

Carlos paused just a second, letting his words linger in the silence, then cut through two players and walked off not waiting around to see what their response might be. Juan called to him. "That's right. You'd better hightail it outta here." Carlos ignored him. As he was leaving, Carlos saw the umpire standing alone, protective mask still turned up on his scalp. Carlos approached him. "Excuse me, sir, I wanted to apologize for my behavior during the game. The intensity of the competition made me lose my temper."

The umpire started taking off his equipment slowly, as though he had a back injury. He half-laughed when he told Carlos, "Well, the truth is, that's probably in the top five most difficult game I have ever worked in my life. Whadda' you say to them boys over there?"

"I told them what I thought of them."

"An' they let you walk away?"

"They did for now. I don't know about tomorrow or the next day."

"Heh-heh, you better keep one eye over that shoulder of yours, boy." The umpire advised.

"I'll be fine. Once again, I apologize about earlier. I'm not writing any letter to the park board."

"Awright, have yourself a good time today."

"You too." Carlos replied. Then he noticed the other volunteers, his friends, standing and talking in the shade. He started jogging over there. For some reason, he couldn't wait to see them.

They had a first rate day at the park. Kids played in the playground where teeter-tooters, swings and other equipment was set up. The older ones went around in groups exploring the excitement of the festival. There was a tremendous line in front of all the water fountains. Later they sliced up a watermelon and Lauren had a group of kids bury the seeds. She said by the time the next year's festival arrived the seeds should have grown into big, ripe watermelons, ready to eat.

Above all, the day belonged to Danny. He was the hero of the game. All his friends from camp continually congratulated him. Even adults who he had never spoken to complimented him. Danny ran throughout the park with

the young kids playing around the booths and on the playground. The highlight was when Tony gave him a small plastic prize that he had won at the basketball toss. The prize was a gold colored statuette which had three monkeys sitting next to each other, touching. The first monkey had his hands over his eyes, the second over his ears, the third over his mouth. The prize instantly became Danny's most beloved possession and later Danny gave it a home over his bookcase filled with 'Daredevil' and 'Spiderman' comics.

When the sun was about ready to quit for the day and the cars on the nearby highway had their headlights turned on, the volunteers gathered up the equipment, gear and children, and prepared to make the journey back to Altruim. Rooster had the bus's engine running and welcomed his passengers as they climbed aboard. Over at the car Clarisse, Andrea and Paula loaded in a empty cooler after dumping the icewater out on the grass. Slowly, the people of New York left the festival, those fortunate enough to attend the Port Altruim summer camp still had a party to look forward to. Basically the party was a going away party for Andrea. Andrea seemed to be the heir apparent to Clarisse. She had successfully made it through high school. She always received high grades, stayed out of trouble and even worked for the parish. Now, she was being admitted into

Princeton. The same school Clarisse recieved her degree from.

While Clarisse drove down the highway, she and Paula got an opportunity to discuss college with Andrea. Paula remembered with fondness her days on campus and it was fun for her to share those memories with a friend who was about to begin the experience herself.

Clarisse had Rooster's bus in the sight of her rear view mirror driving back down the highway. Andrea noticed that the day's warmth had begun to give away to a breezy night and she rolled her window up half-way. When Clarisse, Andrea and Paula pulled into the parking lot of St. Teresa's the bus was still following close behind. Clarisse pulled into a vacant spot in front of the gymnasium. The car's occupants exited strecthing their legs and backs. Clarisse leaned into the back seat to grab the cooler and found the water balloons still sealed in their packages. The phone call she recieved earlier had made her forget them. The bus pulled up long ways, parallel to the offices and unloaded a bunch of charged up kids who came off running loudly. Paula and Clarisse walked slowly, across the black sea of the parking lot. At a much faster pace children raced past them in the same direction, into the wind.

Then Paula saw something that made her stomach get tight and her heart race. On the other side of the

fence, next to the road that ran in front of Towers stood Hilena, with an expressionless face. Paula tilted her head forward and squinted her eyes. Hilena was wearing a light blue shirt at least four sizes too large for her and light blue cut-off blue jeans. Her right arm hung straight down by her side, her left arm, across her front and grasping the right at the elbow. The evening wind blew her brown hair over her face. Hilena didn't bother to brush it away. She stared and clicked on Paula's gaze. Clarisse also noticed Hilena. She came and stood next to Paula. Paula didn't acknowledge Clarisse's presence next to her, but simply said, "Clarisse. I want the office, privately."

Clarisse responded, "I'll keep everyone away."

Paula cut a straight path to the fence where Hilena stood. Her own hair blew wildly behind her. She slowly approached Hilena at the fence where Towers stood ominously behind her. Paula hooked her fingers into the diamond shape in the fence. "Come inside Hilena."

Brian walked into the living room casually. He had half of a plastic straw hanging gently out of the side of his mouth. The television set was on and Lauren was resting on the couch reading the New York Post. Lauren was obviously engrossed in her article because she didn't hear Brian enter. He reached down and picked up a

homemade orange and white quilt, wadded it into a ball and threw it at her head. Lauren instinctively ducked when the object appeared in her peripheral vision. The quilt sailed over her scalp and hit the lamp on the table next to her, knocking it on the floor.

"Oops."

Lauren looked up disgusted, "Brian, now you've done it. Is it broken?"

"Hey, it's not my fault. I was aiming at your head." Brian said. He crossed the room and examined the lamp.

"Oh, you're a great shot." she told him. "How'd you ever become a coach?"

"Because I had more..."

The phone rang. Lauren bit the edge of her lip, "That must be someone inquiring about the party."

"If the lamp is broken, don't tell Clarisse I did it. We can blame someone at the party." Brian replaced the lamp, sat down on the chair next to the phone, lifted the receiver up, and attempted to sound Spanish, "Buenos Dios. Los casa medicos."

The voice said, "Is Brian Sage there?"

Brian didn't recognize the voice, must be a camper's parent. "You got him."

"Brian, this is your brother. You would not believe what I have had to go through to find you."

Lauren looked at Brian with nervous curiosity. Who was that on the phone? Why had Brian's face turned ghostly pale?

There were still a few children in the parking lot after Hilena followed Paula inside the the gymnasium. Paula held the office door open and Hilena walked in. She chose the chair by the door to sit in. Paula shut the door, walked over to the plexi-glass and made sure that it was securely shut, then she occupied the chair by the desk. Paula brushed a leaf off of her jacket and looked up at the girl seated across from her. She said softly, "It's been a long time since I've seen you."

The girl moved about uncomfortably in her chair.

"Since at the bus stop." Paula added.

Hilena blinked her eyes slowly.

"I sent Brian into Towers looking for you. He said there was a man who answered the door."

Hilena looked past Paula, out the small window.

"I wanted to know if you were okay. I was wondering why you stopped coming to camp. We missed you."

Hilena pulled off her beret, shook her brown hair, then slid the band back on over her forehead. She asked, "What happened at the baseball game today?"

Paula told her, "We lost. It was really close though."

"How did Tony do?"

"He did great. I wish you could have been there."

Hilena arched her head back avoiding Paula's eyes. Her legs swung back and forth off the edge of the chair.

Paula asked, "What did you do today?"

Hilena shook her head.

"Hilena," Paula leaned up, "Who is that man that lives in your apartment?"

The girl blinked her eyes rapidly, she stuck her lower lip up over her mouth.

"Who is he? Is he related to you? How does he know your mother? Hilena, Hilena look at me." Paula moved her head about trying to make eye contact. Finally, she reached the child's eyes and looked intently into them.

"Hilena. He's not your father, is he? Does he"

Tears ran down the child's face.

A group of children walked along the backside of the Healing House. One of the children carried a plastic bag. They saw Clarisse sitting on the wooden steps that lead up to the back porch. Several of the glass windows were boarded up and the vinyl covered clothesline hung down low. Clarisse waved at the kids as they climbed over a six foot wall in the back yard. In the parking lot next to the Healing House the street lights shone on some other campers coming across from St. Teresa's.

Clarisse called down to them. They helped each other over the wall, crossed the back yard, making their way to the gray, wooden stairs. Included in the first batch was a thin girl with an arm sling. She looked to the top of the stairs and told Clarisse, "We rented a movie."

"Oh yeah? What did you get?"

"Lazer Ninjas."

"You got a karate movie?" Clarisse asked with a tone of disbelief and disgust.

The girl shrugged her shoulders, her arm sling went up with the motion. "No, we didn't."

"You got a karate movie." Clarisse repeated.

"No, we didn't. We got a kung fu movie."

Clarisse shook her head. "Anyway, welcome. Did you have a good time at the Festival today?"

"Oh yeah. It was great. An exciting day in Port Altruim, huh?"

"Oh yeah, it sure is. That's why I'm out here, enjoying a moment of peacefulness before the party starts up again."

Another camper asked, "Whatsamatter Clarisse? Can't you keep up with the younger crowd?"

"I guess not." Clarisse smiled not taking offense. "The others are inside. You're the first arrivals, so I suppose nothin' is going on yet. The campers walked past her and entered through the back porch."

"Excuse me a moment. I want to take this on the phone in the other room." Brian said, looking out of the side of his eyes. He put down the receiver on the small wooden table and asked Lauren, "Lauren, would you be so kind as to hang up this phone for me when I get on the other line?"

Lauren was curious about Brian's need for privacy but she agreed. Brian went out of the family room. Once he reached the long hallway he ran as fast and quiet as he could down to the office, picked up the phone and sat down hard in the overstuffed green chair. He reached over his shoulder and turned the window airconditioner unit on. Lauren hung up on the other end and the two brothers continued their conversation.

"Okay," Brian spoke into the phone, "We can talk now. Tell me now from the beginning."

"I don't know what to say Brian. You simply need to come home. You need to come home right away."

Brian shook his head, "I can't come home right now. I have...responsibilities here."

"You have responsibilities? Brian, you have done the most irresponsible thing I have ever seen an adult do. You left your wife, you left everything."

"Wait a minute. That's not a completely accurate account, okay. You weren't there. Were you?" Brian defended himself. "You weren't being forced to make the

decisions I made."

"No one forced you Brian. You ran away."

"Okay, okay, maybe I did. So what? It's not like I left a child behind or anything."

"And that excuses it? That is your rationalization? That's great Brian." Brian's brother then mocked him. "Judge, the defendant may have been a serial killer but it's not like he left a child behind or anything."

"You're comparing apples and oranges, brother. It's different here. It's not at all like being a serial killer, believe me."

"You're right. Let's just stick to what is pressing, right now. Okay? You need to give up this fantasy you built up and come back home and face the bed you made."

"Sorry. You've lost me while mixing about eight cliches together randomly."

"Forget cliches. Forget accusations. What is going on is this; Your, ...wife has hidden your car, somewhere. She has destroyed your apartment, apparently in a drunken rage. She has moved all of your furniture onto the courtyard outside. It's sitting out there getting rained on, right now as we speak."

"My stereo system?"

"History."

"The fish?"

"She dropped a packet of 'alkaseltzer' in the tank."

"Nooooooooo."

"It's true Brian. She looks like a madwoman. There is this certain evil gleam in her eye."

"She killed my fish? Epictetus, Galileo, Mama Cass?"

"All gone."

"Okay. You need to go over there and move my stuff to a warm dry place. Then--"

"No way, Brian. This is your mess. You deal with it. All I'm doing is delivering the information to you."

"You gotta do it. You are my brother. We shared the same birth canal. You owe me this favor."

"No, Brian, I was against you leaving in the first place. Remember? You need to come home and resolve this yourself."

"I'm in New York City. It's not like I can just hop in a car and drive to Oregon over night. That's significantly more than just going to the convenience shop for diet soda or frozen pizza."

"That's the deal Brian. I'll help you when you get here but I won't do the slightest favor for you while you're over there. You ever hear of co-dependency? That would be considered enabling you to continue this

way."

"Please. Talk to Colleen. I can't leave here. I realize that may be hard to understand, but I'm just about to complete the most important project I ever had in my life."

After a short pause Brian's brother said, "So what you're sayin' is you've met another woman?"

Brian dropped his head. The air conditioner blew cool air down his neck and blew up a small tuft of blond hair on the back of his head. He held the phone away from his head for a moment, tried to think but his mind was jumbled, so Brian hung up on Daniel. He sat back looking at the fingerpainted decorations and trying to enjoy the air conditioning.

Clarisse was still on the back steps, inspecting the wooden stairs for glass shrapnel. Over her head was one of the windows that was shattered earlier in the summer. Her back was pressed against the concrete foundation of the Healing House. From Towers emerged the typical sounds, loud music from television or radios, screaming mothers and children playing. In the parking lot, a basketball game was taking place under the glow of the street light. Clarisse scratched the back of her head and rested her folded arms on her bent knees. It was times like this when Clarisse would grow worried or

anxious about her city and its residents. Tonight, however, Clarisse was filled with pleasant memories of the Festival. Even the phone call she recieved in her office no longer troubled her. She breathed in heavily the night air. The porch door swung open and slammed so hard against the house, Clarisse thought for a moment more glass would shatter. Brian stood at the top of the stairs, looking over the back yard searching for Clarisse. He saw her down on the stairs and immediately descended to stand next to her. Clarisse noticed he was very agitated. The inevitable was happening.

Brian said, "Clarisse, I have a problem."

"What is it?" she asked feigning concern.

"I need to leave and return to Oregon immediately."

"Why? What happened, Brian?"

"It's very complicated. It has to do with my life before I volunteered."

"Tell me."

Brian sighed, looked up to the sky, exasperated. He said, "Okay, but I don't want the others to have this information."

"What information?" Clarisse demanded.

Brian slowly dropped down and knelt beside her, "Before, well and now, I was married. I am married. I'm married."

"To whom?"

"A rather despicable and sociopathic individual, one who is especially repulsive and dishonorable."

"I take it the marriage is an unqualified failure."

Brian exhaled and nodded slowly. "Clarisse, she has dismantled my apartment and murdered by pets. I know I'm not suppose to leave until the end of the weekend, but, can you give me my stipend so I can leave tomorrow?"

"You want to leave tomorrow? Brian isn't there someway you can have someone in Oregon take care of your business until you're regularly scheduled to return home?"

Brian stood back up and leaned against the railing. Shaking his head he told her, "It goes a little deeper than just that. I need to have an eyeball to eyeball with my wife. Granted, I'd rather have my tongue split up the middle, but..."

Clarisse asked, "Brian, you've toughed it out all summer. Can't you stay a few more days? I mean, we're almost through."

"I know," Brian said. "But she's ruining my furniture. Killing my pets."

"Is this an attempt to avoid saying goodbye?" Clarisse asked.

"No."

"I can't let you go, Brian."

"Clarisse, please. I realize this is difficult for

you to understand. It was the phone call from my brother. it triggered something in me. I have to go. The fact is that there is a madwoman destroying all aspects of my life every moment we wait."

Clarisse blinked her eyes. "You know there is a quote from William Blake that goes; 'He who has suffer'd you to impose on him, knows you.'"

Brian shook his head, "What do you mean?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Let's just say you're revealing something of your essential self to me. Your desires."

Brian said, "And I hate having to do that."

"Well?'

"I want to leave if you will let me."

"Well, I don't know, Brian. I suppose I could call John Daniels in Chicago and let him know the situation."

"I'll stay up all night completing any clean ups duties you need done."

"It's not that, Brian. I wanted us to have these last days together as a group. You know?"

"I'm sorry Clarisse. If there was any other way..."

Clarisse gave him a piercing stare. "Have you been just playing games here all summer. Have you been lying about what all this means to you?"

"Absolutely not. It's nothing like that. You don't have to ever wonder about that. I swear it."

Clarisse continued to stare at him, and, for a long awkward moment, neither of them spoke and Brian had a very difficult time looking Clarisse in the face. Finally, the boss said, "Call the airport."

Brian instinctively grabbed her hand and shook it, "Thank you. I really appreciate this. Remember, please don't tell the others."

"I won't."

At that moment the porch door swung open again and Paula appeared at the top of the stairs. She looked down and saw Brian and Clarisse standing in front of each other and, like Brian earlier, pounded down the stairs. She stood next to them, completing the triangle, directing her attention to Clarisse. She said, "Clarisse, I have a problem." She looked at Brian, "Brian, could you please excuse us?"

Brian gave Paula a quick dirty glance. What problem could she possibly have that could take precedence over his problems? He bit down, "I was just leaving." Brian spun on his foot and climbed the stairs, slamming the porch door behind him.

"Clarisse," Paula began, "I just had a very disturbing conversation with Hilena. She gave me some information, and I feel she needs immediate

intervention."

Clarisse tried to clear her head to focus in on Paula. "What exactly can you tell me?"

Paula grabbed her left forefinger with her right hand and began, "This is as much as I've been able to establish. She lives in Tower's West with her mother and at least one unrelated adult male. Her father is somehow missing from the picture and I have no idea where he is."

"Yes, but you know that often times it's not unlike children in Towers to grow up in fatherless homes."

"Right. Um, I don't believe that the mother has any income outside of welfare. I'm assuming the relationship between the mother and the live-in is sexual. Also, Hilena's mother must have given birth at a very young age, because I believe she is still extremely young."

"With no parenting skills?"

"Yes, and worse. Hilena told me the boyfriend was physically abusive towards her."

"She told you that? Did you see any bruises or cuts?" Clarisse asked.

"She looked like she hadn't slept for a long time."

Clarisse glanced up at Towers, "Did she exhibit any other signs of abuse? Blood on any of her clothes?"

"It is hard for me to say. I never looked for any signs, although I suppose I should have been more in

tune." Paula folded her arms, "She did spend an awful a lot of time away from home. Meeting me before camp began, staying after when the others had gone home. Something else, once when I reached forward to brush her hair out of her face, she cowered down. It was a reflex, when she saw my hand."

"What else did she say?"

"The incident she spoke of occurred during the night of the last bingo game. I spoke to you about it. I sent Brian over there and apparently the boyfriend took offense to that. It set him off, and he beat her up. Then the mother forbid her to rejoin the camp."

"This all stemmed from Brian approaching them in Towers?" Clarisse asked looking perplexed. "That doesn't make a whole lot of sense." Clarisse raised her eyes to the Towers, looking at all of the windows. "Paula, are you sure about all of this? You feel that maybe Hilena made up the story because she felt like she wanted to keep you here? So she created a drastic story, hoping it would persuade you to stay."

Paula shook her head violently, "No way, Clarisse. If you had been there in that room with me you would have known this was not a fabricated story. It is the truth. This was more than just my sixth sense picking up on something. She was completely sincere. Besides, if she was so fond of me, why did she stop coming to camp?"

Plus, Hilena's window has been broken since the day we arrived in New York. She has no window on the seventh floor. Doesn't that fit in with what I'm sayin'?"

Clarisse picked up on Paula's defensive tone. "Alright, Paula, what do you want to do?"

"That's what I wanted to speak to you about."

Clarisse rubbed her cheek, "I suppose we could hot-line her."

"Clarisse."

"And we can alert the Division of Family Services."

"Clarisse, I want to tell you something. I want you to take this very seriously. This is not some spontaneous or erratic decision."

Clarisse guessed what was coming next.

Paula said, "I want to get Hilena removed from her current dysfunctional family and file for legal custody. This is not just brought on because of her situation. I was with her a lot this summer and I know I could take care of her. I am unshakeable in my determination on this, okay? I won't wake up tomorrow and change my mind."

Clarisse's tone became calm and soothing, "I believe you Paula. I know you're completely serious. I just don't know how realistic you're being."

"What do you mean?" Paula demanded.

"Well, first of all, it takes an investigation and

a lot of paperwork before the state will remove a child from her home. It simply doesn't happen very often."

"I'm prepared to go to whatever expense it takes."

"And I'll help you outline those steps, but consider this, even if you were successful in getting her removed from her mother's custody, why should the state give her to you? You're very young. Not a blood relative. You're unmarried. You have no substantial income."

Paula shook her head some more. She felt sick to her stomach. Her mind raced with thoughts, the foremost being her promise to Hilena that she would somehow lead her out of this. "I don't care about any of that. I will overcome any bureaucratic obstacle or any red tape."

"There's one more issue you have to think about."

Paula rolled her eyes, "What?"

"It's time for you to ask yourself, 'What is the best thing we can do for Hilena'? Is it really taking her away from her mother? Is it really taking her away from her social structure even if that structure has problems? Will you still have this conviction two years from now, when you want to get married. A girl in her mid twenties with a fifteen year old daughter. I'm not trying to take anything away from what you're doing, Paula, I think it's great. But what is the best thing for Hilena?"

Paula waited for a moment then said, "The best thing

for Hilena is not getting beaten or maybe even molested. That could be happening right now while we have a party. I appreciate what your sayin', Clarisse, but I'm not changing my mind. Ever."

The party's population was increasing, mostly made up of campers. Some were dressed up, others still wore baseball uniforms from earlier in the day. The music was turned up and the kitchen table was filled with cheese popcorn, orange soda and coconut cake. The only thing missing was the hosts. Clarisse had been on the back porch with Paula. Brian had been on and off the telephone and on the back porch. Lauren and Carlos kept everything under control. None of the conversation was focused on the game. The players were already interested in the next order of business, the upcoming school year. Lauren was sitting in between Danny and Andrea on the sofa, a small group of girls sat on the floor in front of them. More and more people flooded into the family room and the sounds of talking overtook the music. Carlos was engaged in a lively conversation with a group of male teenagers about the upcoming tag-team wrestling match. The 'Inhumanitarians' versus 'Phineas Cage and Gila Monster'. Tony tapped Carlos on the shoulder and motioned him into the temporarily unoccupied stairwell. Carlos excused himself from the conversation and bumped his way along the crowd and into the parlor. Tony shut

the door behind him. "Carlos, man, I need to see you."

"Whatever it is, Tony, I can't leave here right now. Paula and Brian and Clarisse are all missing in action. I have to keep an eye."

"Frankie is here."

"He is?" Carlos asked quickly, "Where?"

"He's in the parking lot outside."

"Go tell him to come inside."

"I already did." Tony explained. "He said he wouldn't. He wants to see you."

Carlos blew out his breath and ran his fingers roughly through his hair. "Ahh God, Alright. Tony, listen carefully. I want you to go inside and keep a lid on this party. Take a leadership role. Help out Lauren any way she asks you to. I don't anticipate any problems, but I've learned from past experience with this crowd at camp, things can get a little out of hand. I'll be back as soon as possible."

Tony nodded, "Yeah, okay Carlos."

Carlos patted him on the back and leapt down the stairs using his palms on the handrail as a bouncing board. Carlos passed a group of five campers coming through the door and didn't bother to greet them. He walked outside and stood by Todd Street. A few cars were parked in front and a several passed by. None of the usual streetwalkers were there. He walked around the

east side of the building, down a narrow alley. Carlos found Frankie sitting on the far side of the concrete wall that divided the Healing House from the Towers Project. The area where Frankie sat was shielded from the streetlight and secluded from view by a tall wooded shack on one side and the concrete wall on the other. There was garbage and debris everywhere. Frankie sat on a dark, plastic milk crate turned to its side, his head hung down past his sloped shoulders. Carlos walked up next to him and stood quietly for a moment. Sounds from the party were faintly audible. Carlos kicked up a semi-broken chair to its upright position and took his seat. Frankie said in a controlled voice, "I heard we lost. Sorry."

Carlos asked, "That's not your fault and you know it. Why don't you come inside?"

Frankie shook his head with small movements, "Naw, I can't do that?"

"Why not?" Carlos questioned. "All your friends are in there. It's a good time. C'mon, let's go. How long have you been out here anyway?"

Frankie continued staring at small rocks in the pavement. "How long have I sat here? Um, there are twelve million, sixty two thousand, five hundred and seventy three specks of dirt in the pile of dirt there. Oh, excuse me, there's another one. I didn't see that

one. Twelve million, sixty two thousand, five hundred and seventy four."

Carlos smiled, "That's a long time. Why won't you come in?"

Frankie didn't move but said out the side of his mouth, "I'm embarrassed. I screwed up bad."

"Says who?"

Frankie rubbed his hands together roughly, "We both know what happened Carlos. There is no point pretending it didn't happen. God, I wish I hadn't shot of my mouth to those kids at practice. I don't know if I'll ever be able to look at them again."

"Well," Carlos began searching for the appropriate words, realizing that this child was at a crossroad. "That depends on how you behave now. Everyone is entitled to a big screw-up. The person with class, holds his head high even after a mistake."

Frankie lifted his head to the side and looked at Carlos. Carlos took the eye contact as a positive sign and raced forward, "You know, Frankie, I had a similar experience when I was fifteen. I was on an indoor soccer team with a group of soccer enthusiasts. These guys took soccer seriously, and we had a fantastic season. A championship tournament was the game I blew. The score was tied near the end. I was playing defense. This forward from the other team got a breakaway. It was just

me, him, and my goalie. We had a great goalie by the way. This guy took a shot on goal and would have missed by a mile, but I stuck out my foot to block it, and deflected the ball into the goal. And they won."

Frankie's back and shoulders shook with slight laughter. The two of them breathed easier. Frankie paused in the darkness, listening to the music and voices from the party behind them and said, "I feel-" he stopped himself, "I don't know. I feel so bad about it."

"I understand you feeling that way." Carlos told him in a quiet monotone voice. "But, it's over now. Just got to go on now to the next important thing."

"What's that?"

"You tell me? What else you got goin' on?"

"Nothin'."

"Well then the next thing is finding something important."

Frankie rocked on the crate.

"You ready to go in?"

"Not yet."

"Okay. Let's just sit out here and wait until you are." Carlos said rocking his chair like Frankie's crate. Frankie told him, "You don't have to wait out here with me."

"I know that. I want to." Carlos sat out on the discarded chair near the streetlight and started telling

Frankie about calling Juan names at home plate after the game.

There was a party in Kloane that night. A significant amount of people showed up. They basically stood in small groups talking small talk, everyone was tired from the game and the Festival. Most people left early. Juan stayed by himself, quiet and introspective. Juan began drinking even before the party started and continued throughout the day. He was fatigued and in an unusually spiteful mood, even for him. Upon returning to Kloane from the Festival, he smashed an empty beer bottle against the brick side of the Kloane gymnasium. After that, he felt somewhat better but never could seem to enjoy his victory. At times he remembered, and felt rage, wanting to rip Carlos apart and squash his head like a discarded cigarette butt on the sidewalk. Oddly, at times, he felt like scheduling a rematch just to solidify Kloans's position as the superior team. Mostly, he felt the pleasure had been taken out of ridiculing Altruim, ...kinda like the fun had been taken out of making Polish jokes all those years.

Brian didn't go to sleep at all that night. He borrowed Clarisse's keys to the gymnasium and cleaned for hours. He mopped, put tables where they belonged,

completed an inventory of books and supplies, straightened out the desks into rows in his classroom behind the stage, washed the chalkboards off with a sponge and a bucket of water, ran the dust mop across the floor, emptied old papers into the recycling bin, shut and locked the door behind him. He walked out and stood alone at the edge of the stage. He spent a few minutes in the emptiness of the gym, looking around, remembering different kids he had met over the summer, he shot some baskets. Later, he went home and scrubbed out his sink, packed up all his clothing, took a shower, tossed all bedsheets into the washer. Brian watched the sun come up while standing alone on the back porch. Brian was not tired, he was thinking about saying his farewells last night. After the party was over and the campers had left, Brian told his friends that he had a family emergency. Said goodbye to Carlos, Lauren and Paula. He asked Lauren to say his goodbyes to the campers. He told them Clarisse was driving him to the airport tomorrow. Paula said she was going to go with them.

Lauren and Carlos helped Brian down the stairs with his luggage and tapes. It was early morning on Todd Street, which was vacant except for Marshall riding up on his bicycle. Brian was placing his suitcase under the back seat. Danny had left a group of plastic straw

necklaces on the kitchen table for the volunteers. (Sometimes, Brian wore all of the eight straw necklaces over his suit jacket and tie). Marshall curiously pulled over and leaned on the side of the bike.

"What's goin' on here?" Marshall asked innocently.

Brian walked over to him with his hands raised near his head, "Well, Marsupial, it looks like my tenure is over." He lifted off a straw necklace and placed it royally over Marshall's ears. "In my absense, I ordain you Marshal Marshall of Port Alruim. All hail Marshal Marshall."

Marshall looked up confused at Clarisse, "You're not leaving too, are you Clarisse?"

"No, hon, I'm just driving Brian to the airport."

Marshall leaned back on his bike looking at the volunteers, "Does this mean we don't have to watch the 'Dreaded Yellow Tooth' tape?"

"MAR-SHALLL." Clarisse said, bugging her eyes out.

Brian scratched the side of his head, "What? Ten bucks. Clarisse, ten bucks."

"Na-huh. He hasn't seen it yet."

"You heard about that, huh?" Brian asked Marshall, "Did you know we had ten dollars bet on this?" Marshall answered, "Frankie told us Clarisse said to tell you we didn't like it."

Brian's head spun towards Clarisse, "You did? I

don't believe it. I was going to be deceived."

"Marshall, what are you doing?" Paula exclaimed.

Marshall shrugged.

"Who told you about that?" Brian asked Marshall.

"Clarisse did. Didn't she?"

"It doesn't matter Brian," Lauren broke in, "You're still gonna' lose the bet."

"No I'm not. Not now when I know what is going on. The experiment has been contaminated."

Lauren turned up a hand, "What difference does that make?"

"The bet was made under the assumption we were going to be deciding on the kid's response. The experiment has been tampered with."

"What difference does it make? You're leaving for Oregon. You won't be there today." Carlos stirred practicality into the conversation. Final goodbyes were said. Clarisse, Paula and Brian left for the airport.

After the mini-van had pulled off down Todd Street, Lauren and Carlos decided to go over to the gymnasium to begin the last day. They crossed Duncan street and entered the church parking lot. Lauren noticed that over by the entrance the Rooster was talking to a group of campers, and that little Marshall was there with his bike. When Carlos and Lauren squeezed past the entrance

to the church, through the hole in the wire fence the small group of children were already on top of them. Marshall had told them Brian was leaving. The campers had dozens of questions.

"Why is Brian leaving now?" Alonzo asked.

"Is there something wrong?" Ramona asked.

"Is he embarrassed that we lost to Kloane in the game yesterday?" Ana asked.

Carlos fielded the questions. "Listen to me and I'll tell you. Okay? Someone in Brian's family needs him. We don't know if it is his mother or father or what. All I know is it is a family related problem. Brian felt it was something personal he wanted to handle alone. It has nothing to do with the game. He was, and still is, very proud of you. I'm sure we can all understand why he had to leave although I know for a fact he did not want to."

"Is Paula leaving too?"

"No, Paula and the rest of us will be here 'til the end of the week."

"When did Brian leave?"

"Just now. He is on his way. He is probably still on Todd Street."

"Could we catch him and say goodbye?" Tony asked.

"How?"

"Rooster's here. We could take the bus."

"No way. We could never catch them. There's not enough time."

"Let's try, Carlos, please."

Lauren nudged Carlos. "Why don't we try to meet them? Give them a chance to say goodbye."

"Lauren," Carlos said with a tone of shock, "Voss, would dismember us for taking the van."

"What's he gonna do? Fire us? We are VOLUNTEERS!" We already did what we came to do. We only have a few more days. Let's commandeer the bus." Lauren said to him. She called out, "HEY ROOSTER, WE'LL NEED TO USE THE BUS RIGHT AWAY."

Rooster nodded and signaled okay.

"Alright." One child said.

"Lauren, we can't take these kids on a unauthorized field trip. We can't confiscate the church's bus." ¶

"I HAVE THE KEYS WITH ME," Rooster shouted back.

Lauren lifted her shoulders, "That settles it."

"What about the campers that aren't here yet?" Carlos asked.

Lauren bit down on her knuckle, "Good point. I know, we'll put Andrea in charge until we get back." Carlos rubbed his chin uneasy, "If we're gonna do this, then let's do it fast, cause Brian was late for the airport when he left."

Clarisse pulled into J.F.K. airport. The road curved and Clarisse turned where the sign marked SHORT TERM PARKING. Clarisse pulled a sticker from a toll booth, pulled into the parking lot, and killed the engine. Paula grabbed the tape case by the handle and got out, Clarisse grabbed the tape player and exited through the drivers side. Brian ducked down his head and crawled out of the back seat. Clarisse unlocked the rear door and swung it open. Brian nervously pulled out his suitcase, his untied tie hung over his shoulder like a ridiculous cape and he still wore the collection of straw necklaces. Clarisse took a survey of him and shut the trunk. "You sure you didn't leave anything at the house?"

"You ask me that question now?"

"Forget it. Let's go." The three walked off towards the glass doors. Inside Kennedy airport was like Manhattan at rush hour. All classes and colors had their representation. Brian had to turn his suitcase sideways when they got into the flow of people. First stop the ticket counter.

Carlos was standing at the front of the bus with both hands holding on to the silver poles. Rooster had his eyes glued to the highway. He was exceeding the speed limit by about fifteen miles an hour. Carlos removed a hand from the pole to cup his mouth. "Listen

to me. All of you. I am only going to say this once. Each person who is in the seat with you is your partner. I don't care if you want Sally Sue as a partner or whoever. The person you're sitting next to now is it. Everybody look at your partner. I want the image of their face burnt on your minds. When we get to the airport we are all going to stay together. No matter what. If you have to go to the bathroom, too bad. If an emergency arrives, nothing can override the prime directive. The prime directive is this: I want us all to stay together at all times. I won't say it again, but I want us to stay together. In the airport we may have to move very fast. I don't want anyone to get separated from the group. Do you understand that?"

"We understand."

"Good." Carlos turned around and lowered his head to get a better view of the road. He asked the Rooster, "Are we gonna make it?"

Rooster kept his eyes transfixed on the highway, "It'll be close."

Carlos inched a step closer to Rooster and said in a deadly serious voice, "Rooster, are you familiar with the Theory of Continual Motion?"

Brian asked the lady for the ticket and paid her. The three then raced there. Brian running in the center

asked Clarisse again what time it was. They had twelve minutes. Across the red carpet aisle they went. Brian got his suitcase tagged and watched as it went to God-knows-where on one of those black rubber conveyor belts. Brian kept the radio and tapes with him. The next stop was a security check point where all luggage and people were electronically tested for weapons. Brian asked the oriental woman there if she would kindly not run his tapes through the x-ray machine. He said it may have adverse effects on them. The lady nicely hand-checked his tapes and they were off again. Down the long corridor to the gate area of his flight. Eventually, they found it. As Brian set the radio and tapes down a man's voice came over the intercom, "Flight four sixty-two to Chicago and Portland now boarding. Anyone with children or individuals needing special seating, please board first."

"Your timing is right on, Clarisse. I just made it. I'm glad I rushed you." Brian smiled.

"Naw, you still would have had plenty of time. Don't worry 'bout it." Clarisse said. Then the three stood around, suddenly uncomfortable. Paula excused herself, "I'm going to go get a drink of water. I'll be back in just a second." Brian nodded to her and Clarisse said softly, "Okay." Paula left and vanished down the corridor. Brian and Clarisse hugged. When they let go

Brian still held onto Clarisse's arms at the elbow. He said to her in a shaky voice, "Clarisse, it is very hard for me to leave. It is one of the more difficult things I've ever done."

"I know it is very difficult for you."

"The most troubling part is that I'm leaving so many things unresolved. I wanted to say goodbye to the kids and the team. What are they going to do now? I thought I would get a chance to speak to Lauren in depth about her illness. What will happen with Voss and the police? I wanted to find where that girl with the tracheotomy lives and get her address.

"They may think you're a maniac. They don't know you." Clarisse said quietly.

"So. I don't care. I don't know. I'm not coming undone. I just thought I'd have more time take care of these responsibilities. I don't feel like anything is coming to an end. Anyhow, thank you for keeping the reason I'm leaving a secret. I feel as though if-

"Brian, stop rambling and listen to me before you go." Clarisse interrupted. "You were a genuine delight to have around this summer and your work with the kids - -Fantastic. The special sensitivity and love you have for them all, and you are so patient. You are largely responsible for making this a wonderful summer and the best camp ever."

"Thank you. That's very nice of you to say, but don't call me sensitive. That makes me sound effeminate and timid."

The voice on the loud speaker, "Flight four sixty-two now boarding. All passengers may know board."

Brian hugged Clarisse again, "I guess this is it."

Carlos crouched down in the front of the bus so he could speak quietly to Rooster. "Rooster, man, I don't think we'll have time to park this bus."

"I unnerstand." Rooster told him. "I'll just pull the thing out in front and let you all off."

"Where should we meet you afterwards?"

"I'll just wait about twenty minutes then circle back around. Be in the same spot I leave you off in twenty minutes okay?"

"That's cool. Just pull off to the curb up here whenever you're ready." Carlos turned around and stood up. "This is it everyone. Stay together and stay with me and Lauren. Anybody got any metal objects in their pockets? If you do take them out we're goin' through a metal detector."

"Awwwright." one of the kids said.

Rooster pulled up to the curb and yanked on the silver handle, the bus door sprung open, he shouted, "Here you go chief, curb service. Tell th' boy Rooster sends his farewells."

"I will Rooster, see you in twenty minutes." Carlos lowered his head and went out. Quickly after him the kids started running out. Lauren was counting and re-counting them, "Three, four, five,..."

"Lets go. Lets go." Carlos sang, "Carefully now,"
"Can we go inside, Carlos?"

"Wait for me and Lauren. Just a second."

"Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. We're all here Carlos, les' go." Lauren yelled and ran off the bus. The little band darted across the concrete sidewalk and into the airport. There were scores of people shuffling back and forth. Carlos scanned the upper parts of the walls for an electronic monitor which would indicate what gate they were at. There was a television screen mounted to the wall about twenty feet ahead. He turned to his group, "Everyone keep in mind what I said. Follow me."

Clarisse saw Paula returning over Brian's shoulder, she told him to take care and to contact her to let her know how things turned out. She walked away. Brian inhaled a huge gasp of air into his lungs. He stood straight across from Paula. Paula was standing on the main tile floor part of the airport, an inch away from the red carpet of the boarding gate area. Brian stood about ten feet away from her. He crossed over to her leaving his radio and tapes behind, his body wired tight

with tension. "Paula." he said. Her response, in typical Paulinic sarcasm was, "Brian," in the exact same tone. He ignored that and asked, "Can I call you in a week or so?"

"Well, I'll be here for another week wrapping things up. Then I'm going back to New Orleans, but I don't have an apartment there, so I don't have a phone number."

"I don't know if I have an apartment or a phone number either."

"Because of a burglary?"

"No, not that. I don't know what's left, if anything."

"Here is my mother's phone number." She said scribbling it down on his plane ticket cover jacket. "She usually knows where to find me."

"Thanks." Brian said looking at the number she wrote.

The intercom, "Last call for passengers for flight Four sixty-two."

"Paula," Brian said quickly, "There's something I need to tell you before I leave. I shoulda...."

"Don't." Paula said firmly. "Not now. It's too late. Don't ruin everything now, when you're leaving and you don't have to face it."

"You're right. I'm sorry. Goodbye." he said and leaned over. They kissed. Then he pulled back, spun

around and headed for his small pile of luggage. Paula and Clarisse walked toward each other silently. Brian went to up the man in uniform, who was collecting the tickets. "I need the jacket back from those tickets." he said to the man. It was time to go. Brian gathered up his courage and turned around. Just then a big commotion came down the hallway. A voice yelled, "There he is." It was Carlos, arms and legs bounding down the main hallway, followed by a bunch of running children, then Lauren. No way. He couldn't believe it. He ran over to them. He dropped his remaining belongings on the floor while hugging Carlos and Lauren and giving high fives and back slaps to the team. "We stol' the bus at the last minute." Lauren said breathing heavily. "Yeah," Carlos broke in, "Rooster says so long." Brian stood with a huge grin on his face, "I can't believe it. I'm totally taken by surprise. I didn't know what was going on when I saw you all running this way."

"What's that they say about people in airports who run at each other in slow motion?" Lauren asked. "Only we weren't going in slow-mo, we set a record running through this airport." Carlos said exhaling, "Let me tell you it's not easy keeping up with these kids."

"I sure found that out this summer." Brian said looking down at them all talking at the same time. Tony, Romana, Marshal Marshall, Ana. The ticket man yelled

over to Brian, "YO, I'M HOLDIN' UP THE PLANE. YOU WANT TO GO YOU GOTTA LEAVE NOW."

Brian looked up at Carlos. Lauren had joined Paula and Clarisse. "I gotta go, Carlos. I'll get in touch with you soon, okay."

"Have a good flight, Brian. I hope everything works out for you."

"Thank you all very much for coming." he said looking down at the children. "I truly appreciate it. Thanks for everything." Brian felt as if all his bones were turning brittle.

"HEY, MISTA' POPULAR. NOW OR NEVER."

"I'm ready." he said still looking down at the kids. Then he picked up the radio and tapes and slid the strap over his shoulder. Brian looked up at the group of volunteers who stood next to each other, Clarisse, Paula with her arms crossed, and Lauren. Then he faced Carlos standing in a small crowd of children dressed in T-shirts and shorts. His mind raced with the people he would not get a chance to say goodbye to, Voss, Andrea, Hilena, Rooster and Frankie. The plane was pulling at him like a vacuum. If only he had more time. Brian remembered something, something he had been wrong about in Chicago, right before meeting these people. He opened his mouth to speak, but then just smiled and turned around. He walked pass the ticket man, not glancing back. His

friends quietly watched him disappear down the narrow enclosed ramp to the plane..

"You almost didn't make it," the flight attendant said to him as he boarded. She showed him the way to his seat. The passenger's glances were distant and unfriendly. Both the window and aisle seat were unoccupied. Brian took the one near the window. The pilot's voice came over the intercom welcoming them, but Brian didn't hear what he was saying. He felt the powerful engines warming up and they pulled away from the airport ramp. Brian's mind became rushed with the memories of the summer, about the games and the kids and his friends. He tried to crowd those memories out with the important work that lay ahead for him. But they returned. He crowded them out again with the thought of his belongings sitting in the light rain in front of his home, vagrants picking through to see what they wanted. The trash men mistakenly pitching his box of trophies. No matter how hard he tried to concentrate, all he could think about was Port Altruim. The memories battered him like rain. The plane thundered forward down the long runway, it gained speed and lifted majestically into the sky. The flight attendant began walking down the aisle offering ginger ale and coffee to the travelers. She handed out soda cans and plastic cups filled with ice but she didn't bother the man with the straw necklaces, the

man who almost missed the flight, and who now was bent over, holding his head in his hands.

In a small corner room on the seventh floor of a housing project in New York, a small girl enters her room. Her window was blown out at the beginning of the summer and the dark green piece of plastic that was in its place was torn also out. The wind blew the little girls curtain's in wild and different patterns. She liked to look out her window at dusk, after school or walking around the city. The window faced west and she could watch the sun go down over St.Teresa's gym and ballfield. St. Teresa's, a place her mother had forbidden her to go. The girl walked to the frame and the curtains opened up to each side, like the wings of a butterfly, allowing her to be close to the window frame. It was the middle of the day, and things were quiet and bitterly hot down on the street below. There were no cars, no bus in St. Teresa's lot. Even the baseball diamond was empty. The girl looked up to the sky, saw the clouds, felt the warm sun on her face, she leaned closer and squinted her eyes. She saw a plane flying over Altruim, heading west, a silver light reflecting in the sun.

THE END.