David A. Patterson, “Silver Wolf” (Adely Unegv Waya)
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Daniel’s New Home

“I’m not sure I made the right decision,” Daniel mumbled as he continued to drive around the block circling and scoping out his new neighborhood and home. His mind raced, trying to grasp how his life will change in just a few minutes when he walks into the doors of the First Step Program.

“Living in a building that houses homeless people, the mentally ill, alcohol and drug addicts, criminals and lord knows what other kinds of people, might not be the best living arrangements for me right now.”

The old red brick building was once a local hospital for African American folks. But the hospital and all of the trained medical staff were long gone. From the outside, it fit into the context of its community. Old shotgun style homes with barred windows surrounded the dilapidated building.

Any living organism has two stages, a living stage and a dying stage. When a tree stops growing, it begins to die. The same is true for communities — the minute they stop growing, they begin to die. This community has been in the dying stage for many years. Efforts to revive it have long ago stopped. Unfortunately, the people who end up living here — if living is the right word – are pulled right into the dying stage.

“Why have these people allowed their own homes and neighborhood to get in such poor shape?” Daniel thought to himself.

He thought about viewing the neighborhood from the back alleyways but worried about his tires going flat driving over broken bottles and trash.

“For god sakes…clean this shit up!”
“Wait” he thought. “…who am I to say this?” A while back, my life was just like these alleys. Ignored…abused…totally disrespected.”

The shotgun homes with bars on their windows outnumbered the ones without. There were also plenty of homes that had been boarded-up after the people left. No one else was desperate enough to risk moving in.

Although Daniel questioned his decision, he was capable of fitting into any community. After pulling in the small parking lot, he paused to gain his composure, eyes shut, head on the steering wheel. He thought about the path that brought him here and his unknown future.

“Fuck it…let’s do this thing,” he said as he leapt from his car.

He entered the building and walked up to the person sitting behind the front desk.

“Hi, I’m Daniel, the new resident manager at First Step, I think Mike the program manager is expecting me.”

The woman nodded and pointed to the stairs. “You know where to go…right?”

“Yes ma’am, thank you.”

Daniel had been in the building before. When he interviewed for the resident manager’s job, Mike led him on a tour of the different floors explaining what each provided. As Daniel walked the steps, he recalled the different aspects of the programs on each floor. The building’s first floor consisted of a small cafeteria that served some of the more needy residents. Ten tables and mismatched chairs sat disorganized and off-balance in the dirty, dingy area that accommodated thirty or so people for three meals a day. The one full-time cook, an obese, middle-aged African American lady, made sure that anyone who was hungry was fed.

The second floor housed the men diagnosed with a dual disorder. The combinations of conditions that these men suffer are endless. Men deteriorating from major depression and
alcoholism, or alcohol, drug addiction and bi-polar disorder. There were forty beds on this floor and they were never empty more than a day or two. The waiting list to get into this program was long and many men left only to return a few weeks later. The rooms consisted of either two or four beds. Each man had his own clothes locker. The light-gray tile floors matched the darker gray concrete walls. The few pictures hanging around this floor had a religious theme, some with inspirational or provocative statements like, “Live one day at a time” or “God Loves You and You Should Too.”

The senior therapist in this program was an ex-priest. He became frustrated with the ways of the Catholic Church and their primary focus on buildings and money, rather than the needs of the spiritually sick, and returned to school to earn his degree in social work. Although he openly discussed his distaste for the priesthood, he wasn’t an angry person. Regardless of what brought people to his office, whether to talk politics or their personal problems, he remained the same calm, gentle presence. His thick glasses partially obstructed his blue eyes, which never veered away from the eyes of the person he was speaking with. Unlike the rest of the floor, his office was clean and brightly lit. The bookshelves behind his desk were orderly and comfortable chairs welcomed people into his room and his world view.

The men on the third floor were either on their way to prison or close to completing their prison sentence and were transitioning back into their community. The Half-way There Program had a different feel than the other programs in the building. It had the overwhelming feeling of a correctional facility rather than a treatment program. The main focus was control, not therapy. Although most of the workers were alcohol and drug counselors, the program’s requirements demand that workers become prison guards. The workers liked the feeling and powers that came with their role as unarmed guards rather than unarmed therapists. A lot of manipulation
happened in this program, by both the clients and workers. The best way to survive in this program was to show no weakness.

Every floor in the building had the same gray tile and white drop ceiling tiles, where there were still tiles, anyway. The walls and pictures set each floor apart. Painted murals sprawl through the halls of the Half-way There Program. There was one of Jesus carrying a cross. Another down the hall had a group of different colored people holding hands. Clients who can draw or were tattoo artists got the task of painting various scenes around the program. No one has ever had their life changed after looking at one of these wall paintings. These paintings are more about keeping the current clients busy rather than helping any future clients.

The fourth floor was called the First Step Program, a program for men who need longer treatment than the usual thirty-day stay. This program takes about nine months to complete and the graduate is expected to be clean and sober the entire time, have a job, a safe place to live, a sober support group, actively working the Alcoholics Anonymous 12-steps, and able to be a productive member of society. Not the society of bombed-out projects right outside their front door, but St Louis’ suburban society. While the other programs in the building were designed to stabilize and control people, this program was devised to clean up the wreckage of one’s past and develop a plan for a sober future.

The men in the First Step Program had regular, daily chores. They were responsible for keeping their rooms clean, attending regular AA meetings, and mostly becoming a community of recovering adults. This means that the men were expected to confront and change any behaviors that do not fit within the expectations of physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness. For instances, if a client became aware of another client’s inappropriate behavior, that behavior was openly confronted. These sorts of issues were usually discussed during nightly group time. Every
evening at 6pm, after dinner and evening chores, clients would attend group. It was an opportunity to not only discuss the happenings of the day and work through simple day-to-day living issues, but to also address issues related to untreated alcoholism and drug addiction.

This hour-long group was the highlight of the day for many, especially Mike, the program’s clinical manager. He was the one full-time counselor in this program. He was also a full-time student, working on his master’s degree in counseling. Mike made sure the program had everything it needed to function. These clients did not eat in the first floor cafeteria. Mike ordered all the food and supplies and these men rotated chores in order to learn how to cook, clean and be personally responsible. If a client says he did not know how to cook, he was given the cook’s helper chore for a week in order to learn. Every man had to do his own laundry. If he did not know how, he was taught. Mike is in his late forties, and had been an alcohol and drug counselor for about fifteen years. He entered treatment in his early twenties and stayed clean and sober since. Mike usually came to work about 9 a.m. each morning and stayed until group was over at 7:30 p.m.

When Mike was not there in the late evenings and on weekends, the resident manager was present. This was Daniel’s new position. His official title was resident manager, but the truth is, he had only a little more recovery time than clients and is a trusted, unpaid person who can call Mike if anything happens.

Daniel quit his job so he could live rent-free in this program and enroll in the local community college, so he could get a bachelor’s degree in social work and become a counselor like Mike. Daniel was in his late twenties and looked up to and respected Mike. The fact that Mike trusted Daniel enough to be the resident manager in this program inspired Daniel to continue traveling the right path.
“Hey Daniel…come on in,” Mike said. “I am so glad to see you. Are you ready to move into your new room?”

Daniel carried everything he owned in one garbage bag and a suitcase. He was drenched in sweat from lugging his belongings from the parking lot in the late July heat.

“Sure…just show me the way,” Daniel replied, trying to mask his uneasiness by smiling and standing straight up. “I introduced myself to the lady at the front desk and let her know I was the new resident manager.”

“She should have known about you already,” Mike knit his brow in frustration. “I told all the front desk staff you were coming today. They’ll get to know you I’m sure.”

Mike opened the door that says “Resident Manager.”

“Welcome home, my friend!” Mike said as he held the door open.

Daniel squeezed past Mike and put his bags down on the wood framed twin bed. The biggest thing in this narrow little room was the window overlooking the parking lot where Daniel’s car was parked. Daniel’s outstretched arms could almost span the width of the room. The bed and nightstand were just wide enough to sit side-by-side, and the dresser wedged by the door looked to be made for that space. The small opening just inside the room consisted of a toilet, sink and stand-up shower. There were no pictures on the gray walls and the only thing the last resident manager left was a roach trap in the corner.

“Once you get settled man, come back to my office.” Mike said as the door shut.

Daniel began to unpack his clothes and bathroom supplies and placed his wind-up clock on the rickety nightstand. He opened the window and pulled out his small fan, plugged it in and adjusted it to High. He sat on his bed and checked his watch.

“5:38 p.m.”
Group

There was a gentle knock on the door as it opened. A thin African American man peered into the room.

“Hey dude…my name is Willy.”

“Hey Willy…I’m Daniel.”

“Yeah Daniel, we met a few months ago at a Wednesday night AA meeting…I liked what you had to say,” he said with a welcoming grin, the crow’s feet stretching toward the greying hair at his temples.

Daniel was uncomfortable. He couldn’t recall meeting Willy and even though this visitor was thin and slight-framed, the room was too small for two men to talk at a relaxed distance. Willy had been in the program about six months and was currently working in a warehouse.

This was Willy’s first serious try at getting clean and sober. He had been using drugs, mostly smoking crack and snorting cocaine, since he was a teenager. Willy was a very nice man when he was straight. But under the influence of drugs, he made poor decisions, like pulling a gun on his on-again off-again long-time girlfriend, the mother of his only child. He took her hostage for several hours once.

“Mike let everyone know in group last night that you were coming to live with us,” Willy said as he took a step toward the door. Willy continued, “We have group in about 15 minutes and no one can be late…not sure if you can be late, might want to check that out with Mike, I have to get my chores done real quick.”

“If you need anything just let me know,” Willy said as he swung the door open. “I’m one of the old timers around here.”
Daniel walked straight towards Mike’s office. He was talking to a client about how to correctly mop the hallway floor.

“You’re getting way too much water on this floor. Please strain that mop head more dude. Someone could break their neck walking through here,” Mike said. He looked up and nodded his head at Daniel. “Hey Daniel, it’s almost group time…come on in and experience your first group with these crazy knuckleheads. We will meet for a bit after group in my office…Ok?”

“Sure…thanks, look forward to it,” replied Daniel.

The group room was empty except for a circle of metal chairs against the walls. The T.V. mounted on one of the walls was only used for special occasions like sporting events. There was something else special about this room: it had carpet.

What a difference carpet makes in a room, Daniel thought. Carpet makes this room less cold and institutional. Coming into this carpeted room is like entering a different space and atmosphere.

The men flooded in just before the 6 o’clock deadline. They opened group with a prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Mike broke the brief silence after the prayer.

“Well…as you all can see we have a new face and resident with us today. Let’s go around the room and introduce yourselves to Daniel.”

Each man recited his name in order: Jackson, Josh, Dave, Larry, Bobby. Some added a little gesture of greeting, a wave, a nod, a “sup?” but these quirks of movement and speech failed to distinguish themselves in Daniel’s mind. He stopped listening after Bobby.
“So, let’s get going” Mike said. “Larry…do you have something to tell us?”

“No, I don’t think so.” Larry sat back in his chair and crossed his arms.

“I’ll give you some time to think about it,” said Mike. “It is important you remember.”

The group fell to a hush and everyone looked at Larry but tried to act like they weren’t.

“Is it about something that happened here in the program?” asked Larry.

Mike just raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders, not providing a clue. Mike was setting a trap for Larry. If this was something serious and Larry couldn’t or wouldn’t recall his behaviors, it indicates that Larry acted without thinking and can’t be trusted alone. At this point, the longer it takes Larry to speak, the deeper the hole he digs for himself. The other trap was that Larry may have more than one bad behavior and he was not sure what Mike knew. Without Mike divulging what he knows, Larry was not sure what to admit to.

“Does anyone in the group know what I’m talking about?” asked Mike.

Now we have a larger trap that could snare an accomplice! For instance, if Larry broke a rule in front of another client and that client did not tell anyone, they were both in a jackpot now. It is always easier to defend yourself when you know what the other person has on you. Clients who hung out with Larry the most were now growing more visibly discomfited. Mike continued to remain silent with a calm expression on his face. Daniel, like the others in the group, waited for someone to break.

“Well…what I know about Larry is that he did not go to work yesterday,” Jackson said as he readjusted in his seat.

“Say more about that Jackson,” Mike said. His eyes zeroed in on Larry’s movements.
“Well…as everyone knows, Larry and I work at the same place,” said Jackson, avoiding Larry’s eyes as he nervously scanned the group. “When our ride pulls up out front, I get in and Larry tells us he will see us later, that he is not working today.”

“Okay” said Mike. “What else?”

“As we pull off, I see Larry cross the street headed north. That’s all I know, man.” Jackson punctuated his statement by pulling up his sleeves and wiping away the beads of sweat on his top lip.

“Was any of what Jackson just said not true, Larry?” Mike asked.

“Uh…I guess not,” Larry shrugged.

“Uh!? Define what that sound means for us, Larry, and don’t start your answer off using that sound again,” Mike demanded in a calm but direct voice. A few of the group members couldn’t hold back their amusement and let out a stress-relieving laugh. Larry was not laughing and Jackson’s laughter was strained and forced.

“Uh…I mean…I don’t know why I do that, it is just a habit,” Larry stammered.

“Is it the sound you make while thinking about how to best respond to a direct yes or no question?” Mike asked.

“Uh…god damn it! No!” Larry blurted out as he shifted around in his seat. “That’s just a fuckin’ habit!”

“I think your habit is trying to tell a lie as if it is the truth,” Mike shot back.

“No…I didn’t fuckin’ lie,” Larry snapped.

“If you didn’t fuckin’ lie, then I must know what you did when you were supposed to be at fuckin’ work yesterday. Let’s start with that and see where this takes us. Where did you go instead of work yesterday?”
Mike set his coffee cup down in front of him, leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs.

“Uh…ahhh…Mother Fucker!” Larry shouted. He slammed his hands on top of his head and slowly slid them down the front of his face.

“You asked me if any part of Jackson’s story was not true and I said it was true,” Larry said in a more controlled voice.

“I don’t think that is what happened,” Mike said. “Does anyone remember what Larry said?”

Mike’s strategy was to involve the group and increase the number of people who would join in on pointing out Larry’s bullshit. All of these men were experts on verbally and physically defending themselves. They had been shielding their bad behaviors for years. What they’d usually try to do was put the questioner on the defensive. They tried to do things like attack the way they ask the question or the questioner’s own behaviors. These men have used alcohol and drugs for years. That means they have been in training that entire time, developing skills to avoid talking about their own bad behaviors.

That “Uh” sound gives the appearance of a beginning response; however, it is really a brief stall tactic to allow the addict’s mind more time to articulate the best lie. If there are no lies the mind needs to deal with, then clear, quick responses are easy. For instance, if Larry did, in fact, go to work and Mike asked if he went to work, then the mind-to-mouth response would have no barriers. However, if Mike asked Larry if he went to work and Larry did not go to work, the mind has different variables to process through. The clouded, addicted mind stumbles. It is similar to seeing the word “Buffering” while trying to watch a video online.
“What Larry said when you asked if any of Jackson’s story was not true was... ’uuuhhhh, I guess,’” Willy said as the group all cracked up laughing.

“That was also before all those sweat spots showed up on Larry’s shirt,” Willy added, smiling. Willy quickly broke back in before the laughter died down: “I’m sorry Larry, I meant no disrespect man, I know what you are going through right now because I have been in the same spot you at. I feel you my brother, but the best thing to do, is to be completely honest right now... ’cause Mike is a ruthless Mother Fucker man. He will break you down.”

“I appreciate that Willy,” Mike said. “But it is not me who breaks people down — it is the truth!” Mike paused to let that sink in. “Let’s focus on the truth right now Larry... What do you say?”

“I mean... juz cause I’m sweatin’ doesn’t mean I’m lying,” Larry was using his hands like wind shield wipers to wick away the sweat coming down his face.

“It’s hot in the Mother Fucker man... god damn!” Larry said, wiping and shifting in his seat.

Larry does not have much credibility with Mike or for that matter, most of the clients. Larry just got out of prison after serving thirteen years. Within a month of getting out, he was arrested for assault, resisting arrest and public intoxication. According to Larry, his girlfriend was attacking him and just as the police pulled up, they witnessed him slap his girl in self-defense. He assured everyone all the charges would be dropped once his public defender went to court.

Larry was not fully convinced he was an alcoholic or drug addict, but he did admit that being at First Step could help him deal with other issues. When he interviewed with Mike to get into First Step, Mike said that Larry did not have to admit he was an alcoholic or drug addict to
get in. But to stay in the program, Larry had to follow all the rules and would be expected to do what everyone was expected to do. Larry agreed. During the interview process, past criminal charges are discussed. It is a policy that no convicted child molesters are allowed to live in the building. Larry had been charged with sexually assaulting an underage female, along with many other things, but as part of his plea agreement and fifteen-year prison sentence he was allowed to plead guilty to contributing a controlled substance to a minor.

Larry left prison with many tattoos that spread from his hands all the way up to his neck. He was in his early fifties but looked much older. He kept his thinning, white hair mostly in a ponytail. Since he came to First Step, he mainly kept to himself and got a job with Mike’s help.

Mike gave Larry a minute to collect himself and another client handed him some tissues to dry off his face.

“What did you do when Jackson rode away to work?” Mike asked.

“I went to my girlfriend’s house.”

“Where does she live?”

“University City.”

“What does that mean – University City – the address please?”

“I don’t know man…close to the corner of Maple and Union.”

“How long did it take you to get there?”

“Oh…about thirty minutes.”

“The U City is about twenty miles from here…it took you just over a minute a mile walking!?”

“Oh…naw man, I got a ride.”
“Oh…” Mike said, “This is getting more interesting. First, are you supposed to be with anyone other than a First Step client?”

“Uh…I guess not.”

“I’m hearing a lot of ‘Uhs’ again…who gave you a ride?”

“You don’t know him.”

“No shit Larry…I did not ask if I knew someone…I can guarantee you I know none of your f***ed up friends. Who picked you up – say a name.”

“Uh…Kee Kee.”

“His name is Kee Kee?” Mike sat up in his seat and leaned forward. “His mama gave him that f***in’ name?”

“Naw…that is his street name. I don’t know his real name man.”

“Ok” said Mike, “Jackson, what time did your ride show up yesterday?”

“7:00 a.m.”

“What time did you sign back into the building yesterday, Larry?”

“5:00 p.m.”

“You were away from this program ten hours yesterday, unsupervised, with god knows who, doing god knows what,” Mike said. “Well…we are out of time and you guys need to get to your AA meeting on time. Larry, you will remain with Willy tonight. You will walk with him to the meeting, sit next to him during the meeting, and walk home from the meeting with him. If Willy reports to me in the morning that you were out of his sight, I will help you pack your f***in’ bags. As soon as this group is over, walk straight to my office. The only reason you got your job is for being here and the deal was if you were having problems in this program, you
would not have a job. Well my friend...you are having problems here and I cannot trust you.
You clear on everything I just said?”

“Uh...I guess.”

“Let’s close,” Mike said as everyone stood and joined hands. They repeated the same
prayer used to start the meeting — the Serenity Prayer. As they filed out of the room, Mike
called out, “Hey Daniel...let me grab a fresh coffee and we can meet in my office. You want
some coffee?”

“No thanks.”

Just as Mike instructed, Larry was standing at Mike’s office door.

Daniel took a seat and Mike instructed Larry to sit. Before Larry was fully seated Mike
asked, “Why were you dishonest in not going to work, Larry, from the time you thought about
your plans all the way through until you arrived to group last night?” Mike continued before
Larry could answer. “In order to carry out your plans it took a lot of effort on your part. And
finally, before you answer, you have to know that you are not that fuckin’ good at this shit. Your
best thinking got you into prison...into First Step — and into my office right now. So don’t try to
use your poor, fucked up thought process to bullshit me. Your best move is to see me as your
ally and not your warden. Now go ahead...tell me the whole story, beginning to end.”

Larry was not sure where or how to begin. He knew if he told Mike the whole truth, he
could end back up in prison. Breaking one or two First Step rules is great cause for concern.
However, breaking multiple rules in order to carry out breaking a major rule, like Larry did, was
sure to get him kicked out of the program and fast tracked back to jail.

“Mike...I fucked up man,” Larry said in a hushed voice. He looked at both Daniel and
Mike.
“I just spent 157 months in prison, man. I get out and within a few weeks I end up in this fuckin’, sorry… end up here. I wanted to see my girl, Mike, and I was not going to let your rules stand in my way. That is the honest truth dude, um…Mr. Mike sir.”

Mike remained still and quiet, keeping his eyes on Larry’s every movement. Although it was cool in Mike’s office, Larry started sweating again. The more Larry tried to ignore the beads of sweat running down the sides of his face, the more he squirmed in his seat. He clawed at the sweat on his forehead like he was scratching an itch.

“Whose car did you get in and don’t give me a fuckin street name?” Mike demanded.

“Uh…James.”

“James who?”

“Um…I don’t know man…he’s my girl’s cousin.”

“How did you contact him to pick you up?”

“What?”

“What — my ass…how did you two connect?”

“Uh…my girl set it up.”

“You mean you and your girl set it up?”

“Yeah…I guess so man.”

“Ain’t no ‘guess so’ Larry…every time I asked a question about what you did, you take your name out of it.”

“You were gone all day… did you use?”

“No.”

“Can you prove it?”

“Uh…how would I prove it unless I took a piss test?”
“Not sure…would a piss test prove you did not use?”

“Uh…I guess.”

“Well…you guessed right…you will be getting tested any minute now. Want to say anything about it now?”

“No…I’m clean.”

Mike turned to his phone and called the front desk. He hung up and continued the questioning. “Ok…tell me every place you went yesterday from the time you signed out in the morning until you signed back in at 5:00 p.m.”

“I told you man. I got a ride to my girl’s house and then came back here. I hung out with her and then her cousin brought me back here.”

“You have to understand, Larry…if you got pulled over in that dude’s car and it turned out to be stolen, what would happen?”

“Um…I would go back to prison I guess.”

“Right…what if your probation officer showed up at your work yesterday to check on you and you were not there, he came here and we tell him you were signed out to be at work. What would happen?”

“Uh…I’d be in some trouble I guess.”

“Let me take the guess out of things for you, Larry, my friend…you certainly would be in trouble if that happened and you are in a jack pot now. Your working privileges are over, your phone, your visits, and all of your alone times are all over. Everything you do, until further notice, ask permission before you do it. If you do not know the answer to one of our questions…the answer is NO! You made a mess for yourself and you have to work to gain back some level of trust with me,” Mike said, his face hard and unsympathetic.
“What am I going to tell my PO when he finds out that I am not working?”

“That’s a very good question,” Mike responded. “I hope you figure it out. That’s not my problem — it’s yours!”

Before Larry could say anything or ask another question, a man showed up at Mike’s open door.

“Hey…here’s your opportunity to prove yourself. This good man is here to take your piss,” Mike said, grinning.

“Come on Mike…don’t say it like that man.”

“Are you Larry?” the man asked.

“Yeah.”

“Hey. I’m Frank. Come on with me and we can take care of this before you go to your AA meeting. I’ll see you later, Mike.”

“Alright Frank, good seeing you man. Let me know how I’m supposed to say you are here to get some piss next time. And Larry…be more like your piss, because piss doesn’t lie, man.”

“Come on Larry, man,” Frank said, “Mike says some wild shit sometimes.”

Mike got up to shut his office door. When he returned to his seat he asked, “So Daniel…what did you think about group tonight?”

“It was interesting. Would you say that was a typical group?”

“Well…I guess, sometimes there are very targeted issues we discuss…like Larry’s bullshit, but after years of doing this, things usually don’t change much. These are sick men who have, because of their addictions, lots of problems. They are used to lying and manipulating folks
to get their way. No one has ever held them accountable for their bullshit. I attack their thinking and thought process — that’s their main problem.”

“Yeah, I can relate to that,” Daniel said.

“I want you to know, Daniel, that I don’t consider you a client here. And don’t let these guys treat you like you are a client — you’re not. Most won’t, but I can guess that some clients will try to bring you down to their level. You will notice that there are guys here trying really hard to change their lives. The guys who are not trying, or are too scared to change, resort to what works. They attack those they see growing and changing — they say and do things to try to drag them back down. So, in a sense, change is hard, especially in here. But for those who do want to change, this is a great place, because if you can improve in this program, change becomes easier in the real world.”

“Do you mind if I asked you about your thinking or your strategy in group?”

“Not at all. Go ahead.”

“Personally…and this is just my first day…but I don’t trust that Larry dude for some reason. Wouldn’t it be easier just to kick that fucker out of here?”

Mike smiled, “Yeah, sure, but easier for who? If I kicked out every addict who acted impulsively, lied, manipulated, or acted like a straight up prick, there would be no need for this place. Addicts would all be in prison. I see addiction as an illness. Symptoms of that illness include lying, stealing, cheating, manipulation, and acting like an asshole. It would be like a dentist kicking people out of his office for having bad teeth. Larry is sick, one of the sickest in here. I have an obligation to try to help him. He may be better off locked up — we all may be better with him caged up. He knows how to survive in prison, that place is easy for him. What’s more difficult for Larry is dealing with me and the rules of this program. I do not intend to let up
on him until he proves he is on the road to recovery. Kicking him out of here is the easier road — for me. This is not about what is easiest for me. It is about what is best for him: having a chance to change. If he does not take advantage of this opportunity, I will happily comply with his wishes of going back to prison. Now, if I find out that he is actively hurting someone, his ass will go straight to jail. But that goes for anyone in this program.”

“Yes…that makes sense. Thanks for sharing that with me, I appreciate it.”

“I’m glad you are here, Daniel. I’ve seen you at meetings and watched you grow in recovery. I trust you and that’s why you are here. Keep your eyes open and be sure to talk with me. These guys need someone like you — don’t be afraid to offer your insights. You have lived on both sides of the street now, addict and recovering addict. You have a lot to offer. The more you invest in other addicts, the more you will get in return. As the prayer says…accept the things you cannot change, courage to change the things you can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”
Willy and Daniel’s First Real Talk

“Hey Daniel…can I come in?”

“Sure Willy, come on in my friend.”

It was late in the evening. Daniel was sitting in Mike’s office, searching the web and reading the latest news online. Daniel had the run of the place in the evenings and on weekends so if the guys wanted to seek out advice, Daniel was the best person to talk with. Although Daniel and Willy had briefly talked during Daniel’s first couple of weeks, they never spent much time alone getting to know each other.

“What do you think about our groups?” Willy asked as he sat down.

“Well…I can say you were telling the truth when you said that Mike’s a ruthless mother fucker man!”

“You got that right,” Willy nodded. “These men are no match for Mike.”

“What is up with Larry?” Daniel asked. “I don’t trust him one bit.”

“The reason you don’t trust him, Daniel, is because there is something not right with that man! I don’t trust him for some reason. Every time I’m in groups with him I get a bad feeling,” Willy said, pointing in the direction of the group room.

“Are you trustworthy Willy?”

Willy smiled and chuckled under his breath. “I think I am trustworthy…more trustworthy than cock suckin’ reformatory raised Larry!” Willy replied. He rocked back and forth in his chair.

“I wouldn’t brag about being better than Larry at something,” Daniel smiled.

“You right man,” Willy said as his rocking came to a stop.
“What’s your deal Willy? No one gets in here for being the type person you are trying to come across as.”

“Damn, Daniel! What are you, Mike’s little brother?” Willy asked jokingly. He began rocking again. “You can’t just say that kind of shit to people, especially around here.”

Willy shook his head in disapproval.

“I have changed man,” Willy said, “You not meetin’ the Willy that walked into this mutha fucka!” Willy got a bit more dramatic now, lifting his hands as he spoke and rocked in his chair.

Daniel said, “I got about two years clean now. I’ve changed, but not sure all the bad stuff is completely gone yet.”

This put Willy back at ease.

“What recovery issues are you still working on here, Willy?”

“Shit, man, a lot.” Willy clapped his hands and laughed. “I’m still one angry, jealous bastard, especially when it comes to my baby’s mama, Tisa. That bitch drives me crazy, man.”

They both looked at each other, laughing. Relationships in this program are built on trust. Daniel knew not to get too close to Willy if he sensed that Willy was mostly full of shit. Although Daniel liked Willy right off the bat, he needed more information before he could put some faith in him.

“Your girl’s name is Tisa. What’s your baby’s name?” Daniel asked.

“Lavonda. She’s twelve now.”

“That’s good, Willy. You a good dad?”

“I don’t know man…I use Lavonda for an excuse to see Tisa,” Willy admitted.

“How did you get into First Step Willy?”
“Man… I was all fucked up after being awake for a few days smoking crack and I was stalking Tisa. I sat out in front of her house for like six hours, man — drinkin’ and smokin’ that shit. Although she had already cut me out of her life, I wanted to know if she was seeing anyone else. I see her pull up with this black mutha fucka. I was out of my fuckin’ mind with rage, man. I had an old pistol…” he started laughing as he spoke. “…I didn’t have any bullets in it cause I didn’t want to spend my drug money gettin’ em.”

“So what happened?” asked Daniel.

“I jump out of the car and bounce over there like I am going to whip his black ass, and this mutha fucka goes about six foot five – two-fifty pounds!”

They were both laughing now. Willy waved his hand, trying to stop Daniel from laughing so he could tell the rest of the story.

“Look…Look, man…here I am, five foot seven, built like JJ on Good Times and this big black bastard stands over me like King fuckin’ Kong.” Daniel covered his face with his hands and shook his head, laughing. Willy was standing next to him now, his hand on Daniel’s shoulders.

“This ain’t no shit…man,” Willy said through waves of laughter.

“My mind said, ‘You better run your ass back to that car and get the fuck away from this gorilla,’ but all that crack I smoked and all of my rage said, ‘Put that pistol in that mutha fucka’s face.’”

Daniel bent over in his chair, laughing and wiping away tears. He laughed and flung about harder each time Willy tried to get more serious.

“Crack make you do some fucked up things man.”
When Daniel laughed harder, Willy couldn’t help but join him. As the laughing and chuckling calmed down, Willy got quiet and stopped smiling.

“I pistol whipped Tisa that night. That man didn’t want anything to do with me — he jumped in his car and took off. That rage all came out on her.”

The office fell silent as Daniel looked towards Willy. Daniel noticed him looking down, rocking side-to-side again. Willy continued in a low voice.

“She’s down on the ground and I’m beating her with my gun and fists. I look up and I see my daughter standing behind the glass door yelling, beating on the door, screaming for me to stop beating her mama. If I had bullets, I would have killed her that night — right in front of our daughter, man. The only reason I stopped beating her was I was too tired, I was weak from being up for days not eating, only smoking that shit.”

“You’re lucky no one died that night, man,” Daniel said.

“Naw man…I ain’t lucky. No one is lucky in them situations. My daughter is scared of me still. Tisa won’t have nothing to do with me…and I have to force myself not to jump off the MLK.”

“What do you mean, Willy?” Daniel asked.

“Man I don’t know…whenever I get down, I walk the MLK Bridge.”

“Why would you do that, man?”

“Well…my father and older sister jumped off that bridge. All of their problems were gone after they jumped. When problems get too much for my family, that river heals us. It can handle problems better than we can. We let the river take us and our problems away.”

Willy continued talking at a steady pace, looking out the window, rocking. Daniel was still, watching and listening to Willy.
“After I pistol whipped Tisa, I drove to our bridge. It was about two in the morning. Only a few cars were on the road. I crossed that bridge ten times in my car. Illinois to St Louis and back again — over and over. There’s a parking stop on the Illinois side that I always use.

“Tisa and me had our first date on that fuckin’ bridge. We held hands, walked and talked. It was like introducing her to my family.”

Willy wiped away a tear running down his face and continued.

“That was one of the best nights of my life, my first date with Tisa on that damn bridge. I had a small bottle of liquor we were sharing as we walked. We smoked a little weed too. We were having a great time.”

“Did you tell her about your dad and sister?”

“Fuck no, man…that would have ruined our moment. Things were going too good and I thought she would run away from me if she found out about my family, or even me, too soon. I had to trick her into loving me first before I could talk about all that shit,” he said with a little chuckle.

“We get back to my car and we just start kissing and rubbing all over each other. I wanted her, man, and I could tell she would have probably let me do anything to her that night. I had to force myself to stop. She’s always had big soft tits and a fat ass, man. I grabbed them up that first night, but that was as far as it went. I did not want her to think I just wanted to fuck her in my car. I wanted it to be right, man…not like all them other street whores I usually ride with. I took her home after our first date on that bridge and did it correct, man. Walked her to the door and treated her respectable.

“What I did to her in front of her house with our little girl watching was not respectable, man. I kept seeing our little girl’s frightened face standing in that doorway, as I stood on that
bridge. I talked to my daddy that night; I talk to him all the time when I walk the bridge, trying to figure out the exact spot where he jumped from. I wondered about all the problems in his life — what problems were pushing him over the rail — the rail that I was leaning on. I climbed over. I grasped the rail behind me. It was wet. I would stretch my arms out straight, looking down onto the water moving past. All my problems would soon vanish beneath that black river. As I was just ready to release, I was snatched up man.”

“Yeah…well thank god, man,” said Daniel.

“Somehow two fucking cops walked right up to me without me noticing them. They locked onto me. I was lifted over that rail, put on the ground, handcuffed, and rushed right down to Barnes Jewish’s psychiatric center, man. It took me a minute to realize what happened. I asked the cop who’s driving, ‘Hey man…you arresting me?’ he says, ‘Just relax, man, I’m taking you to see a doctor.’

“I spent some time there and ended up in this hell hole of a place. It’s changed my life though, man. That mutha fuckin’ Mike broke me down — he is no joke, man. This program is hard but if you are serious, it will change you, man. Some of these fuckers in here could care less about changing.”

“Name them, Willy,” asked Daniel.

“Well…my opinion, the worst person here is that fuckin’ Larry.”

“Why you say that?”

“I don’t trust him, man. He never talks in group unless he is getting confronted about something. He’s a nasty, sweaty white racist mutha fucka, man!”

“Has he said something racist to you, Willy?”
“He don’t say nothing to me, man…and when I try to say something to him, like something that’s been helpful for me, he treats me like I don’t even exist. He does that to all the black folks here. I try to be sympathetic because he has been raised by the state, in a system that’s racist, but man, that mutha fucka needs a big brick upside his head… sorry …I don’t mean that … my thinkin’ is still somewhat sick!”

They both began to laugh again.

“You alright, Daniel.”

“Thanks man…I enjoyed our talk and appreciate you sharing your story with me.”

“Do you think I’m fucked up, Daniel?”

“Shit man, we are all fucked up…we have to learn how to solve problems without alcohol, drugs, or walking that fuckin’ bridge, Willy!”

Willy laughed, reaching to shake Daniel’s hand.

“Damn, man…take it easy on a brotha.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna take it easy. I see you on the MLK, I’m gonna hit you upside the head with a big ass brick.”

They stood up laughing and hugged as they walked out of Mike’s office. They headed toward their rooms.

“Alright my brotha…I’ll see you tomorrow.”
Bobby’s First Night

The anticipation of Josh and Bobby’s first night together as roommates had been building since their first day meeting. The men who live at First Step have very limited free or alone time. There are few opportunities for any sexual relief for these mostly young men. When those times do present themselves, the men aggressively act on those strong urges. Josh arrived at the program about two months prior to Bobby. Josh had run away from home at the age of sixteen and had mainly lived on the streets prior to moving into First Step. His ultra-conservative parents struggled with Josh’s free-spirited lifestyle and the fact that he was gay. The only way Josh could live the life he so desired was to break away from his parents and their disapproving attitudes and comments. He began smoking pot before leaving home, and with the total freedom of being away from his parents he began to experiment with many other drugs. Before coming to the program at the age of twenty-four, he had spent the prior thirty days in an inpatient alcohol and drug treatment program a few miles away from First Step.

With a month clean and sober, he entered First Step looking more like an attractive young college student moving into his dorm room than a person who lived on the streets for the past seven years. He was slim, with thick, blond curly hair. Unlike most of the men in the program, he was always well dressed, clean and very polite. Josh was a confident young man who did not worry if you knew he was gay or cared if you did know. The physical, mental and sexual abuse he had lived through in his short lifetime resulted in strength rather than destruction.

Bobby entered the program through his lawyer’s wishes. Mike, like Bobby’s lawyer, believed being in treatment would help Bobby stay out of trouble and out of prison. It was clear to Mike and Bobby that one more arrest would result in him going straight to prison. Bobby’s addiction to alcohol and other drugs propelled him to engage in multiple risky acts and all of his
arrests were related to him being drunk or high on drugs at the time. About five minutes with Bobby and you’d start to realize his immaturity. Although he was twenty-five, his baby face and adolescent behaviors put him visually and emotionally at about thirteen years. Bobby was also a follower. He was easily influenced by anything that looks or feels good.

Josh was Bobby’s “24-hour buddy.” The First Step program requires that a new client pair up with an experienced client. For Bobby’s next 24 hours, Josh would get him settled into his room and bed, introduce him to everyone, help him understand the rules, and make sure Bobby was ready to be part of the recovery program. When these two first met, they were both in a six-man room. All new clients begin in the largest, six-man room and work their way into a four-man, two-man, and then finally a one-man room during the last phase of their stay. The new client’s 24-hour buddy remains a special relationship because this is the first person they meet and get to know. Josh was the perfect 24-hour buddy for Bobby. They were about the same age, Josh was making good progress and he had a great attitude about program rules and expectations. Mike hoped that Josh’s positive attitude and behaviors would transfer over to Bobby.

Josh being gay in an all men’s program was not a concern for Mike. A few men had voiced concerns during group sessions and one-on-one counseling times, but for the most part, Josh did not make a big deal about his situation and neither did others. When Bobby discovered that Josh was gay and that they had both shared a six-man room and shower, Bobby was very upset. It took Bobby a few weeks to realize he was in a program with a gay man, but after that, Bobby went out of his way to express his uneasiness with Josh being gay. The other men understood Bobby’s immaturity, having spent almost a month living with him, which resulted in everyone ignoring his concerns. However, Josh sat back and took it all in. He quietly kept an eye on Bobby, analyzing every act and word. Josh knew what others and even Bobby did not. Bobby
was not angry with Josh being gay; Bobby was at a time in his life with many unanswered questions. Secretly, Bobby wanted his questions answered and moving into a two-man room with Josh provided a prime opportunity to address Bobby’s issues head on.

The only rooms with air-conditioning were the manager's room, TV room and group room. The other rooms had fans. In mid-summer, it was still about eighty degrees outside at night, but with the program being on the top floor, open windows provided some breeze. With the extra help from a fan, bedrooms were not too unbearable. Josh had been sleeping in a two-man room for several weeks when his roommate left. Bobby was next in line to move in. He was happy to be moving up and out of a four-man room but wanted everyone to know it was Mike who made the decisions who moved and to which room. The six and four-man rooms were small and consisted of bunk beds with a footlocker. Two-man rooms were the first to have the bunk beds dismantled into two separate twin beds. None of the bedrooms had showers. Showers were shared by all the men and were located in the hallway.

Everyone had to be in their rooms with lights out by 11 p.m. Josh had always showered before bed, saying he slept better in the hot rooms after taking a cool shower. On Bobby’s first night in the room, Josh entered the room as usual after his shower at about 10:30 p.m., sat on his bed and began applying lotion to his body.

Bobby tried to seem busy putting his remaining clothes away in his footlocker. With about ten minutes before lights out, Bobby said, “...it was a good idea to take a cool shower before bed.”

He grabbed his towel and quickly exited their room stating, “I got about five minutes to spare before lights out.”
When Bobby returned the lights were already out. The clock on Josh’s footlocker showed 10:58pm.

“I just made it!” Bobby said as he sat down on his bed. The light from the clock and open window were enough to break the darkness of the small room. Bobby could see Josh lying on his bed, his bare chest and legs exposed above the sheet.

“It’s kind of small and hot in here but at least it is better than being in a four-man room,” Bobby whispered nervously.

Josh was silent, but empathized with Bobby’s nervousness. The fresh fragrance from Josh’s lavender lotion lingered around the room. With the lights dimmed and the outline of Josh’s clean body in the same room, it was becoming more difficult for Bobby to control his emotions and his hardening penis.

Bobby’s mind swirled with sexual thoughts and scenarios as he shifted to capture a clear look at Josh’s face and mostly naked body. As Bobby’s eyes adjusted to the darkness, the room and Josh became more visible. His restless shifting in bed was the only sound until Josh quietly asked, “Are you okay over there?”

“Yes…” Bobby replied.

“It’s always hard to fall asleep during the first couple nights whenever I sleep in a different place,” Josh said.

“What do you do when you can’t fall asleep?” Bobby asked.

This questioning provided Bobby a natural opportunity to purposely look over at Josh without feeling uncomfortable. Josh raised his hands and placed them behind his head as he stretched, spreading his legs out on the edges of his bed. “Well…sometimes I try to think about all the things I want to do when I get out of here, starting my life over clean and sober.”
“How long does it take to fall asleep, thinking about those things?” Bobby asked.

“Some nights it takes a pretty long time,” Josh whispered. “But when that does not work for me, I also have a more reliable way to quickly fall asleep.” Before Bobby could speak, Josh continued, “It’s a little more difficult to do in here, and when I was in another treatment program before I got here, but I make sure I get into my bed with one of my long white tube socks.”

Josh assumed that all men would know what happens next, so he waited to see if or how Bobby would respond. Although Bobby clearly knew this trick to falling asleep, his pounding heart, engorged cock and swirling, sexual imagination could not allow this opportunity to pass. Bobby tried to collect himself and his thoughts. He did not want to make his feelings obvious. He looked at Josh’s body as the dimmed lights reflected just enough to see the sheet barely covering his waist. All that Bobby could think to say was, “Yes…ok.”

Josh continued, “I wait until I think the others in my room are asleep or not paying attention to me. I turn on my side, making sure that my sheets are completely covering my body.”

Josh moved his body exactly as he explained this process to Bobby.

“I roll my sock up halfway and insert my hard dick into it. It fits tightly to the shaft and gives me the sensation of shoving it into someone’s mouth.”

Josh was on his side now facing the wall and away from Bobby. Bobby was unsure if Josh was really masturbating or just explaining and making the moves to appear like he was. Regardless, Bobby was also on his side facing Josh’s bed. He saw Josh’s sheet fluttering as Josh continued.
“As I picture my dick sliding in and out of a hot wet mouth, I try to hold back from cuming as long as I can. As I get closer to exploding, I reach a point when I can no longer hold it back.”

As Bobby listened and watched Josh’s trembling sheets, he began to rub himself. Bobby… hardly able to speak and holding back his own eruption, softly asked, “Are you afraid someone will know what you are doing?”

“By this point I don’t care,” Josh said. “My mind is locked on the image of a dripping wet mouth begging for me to cum.”

The room was quiet other than Josh and Bobby’s muffled grunts of synchronized relief. Bobby turned over, facing the wall, processing what just happened. He thought about how his relationship with Josh would change and if he would be able to quickly fall asleep in his sticky sheets covered in his sweat and semen.
Daniel and College

When Daniel was not in First Step talking with clients or going to AA meetings, he was focused on college. He had gotten close to many of the men in the program and they looked up to him and often sought his advice. His participation in group had increased and he was becoming a voice of common sense insight, using a no-bullshit approach. The guys had learned not to try lying to Daniel or manipulating him. Daniel was also active in AA meetings. He was on a good road to recovery.

On campus, he kept his life a secret. He felt out of place enough without letting people know he lived in a treatment program and that he was a recovering addict. His goal was to keep his head down, stay out of trouble with the professors, and quietly graduate.

“It’s extremely hard to concentrate with all these beautiful, young girls running around here,” he thought as he hung around campus. He usually found excuses to go to campus so he could hang out and girl watch. He sat at different locations around campus and read, or tried to read, the assigned material for class. The area around the cafeteria was the best place to sit and watch. Students would come in and out of that place from morning until night.

Daniel tried to be respectful about looking, not like some of these young pricks who’d point and gawk at these stunning young beauties. There was one girl in particular that he waited to see. He first saw her during his first period class, Economics and Political Power. He was sitting in the front row when she came strolling by.

“Hi,” she said as she walked past his desk headed toward the back of the classroom. He sat frozen, unable to reply. She was short, and to Daniel, chunky in all the right places. Her bright green eyes complemented her frizzy strawberry blonde hair. She wore her hair pulled up on top that morning, with the sides and back hanging free. The large buttoned up, white shirt she
wore, hung down far enough to cover her tight legs and ass, which were covered by dark spandex leggings.

Their paths have also crossed on campus, outside of class. One day, Daniel noticed her walking his way. He immediately panicked. As soon as she saw Daniel, she smiled and kept approaching.

“Hi, I’m Tami. Tami with an i.”

“Hi Tami with an i. My name is Daniel, nice to finally meet you.”

Tami smiled. “What other classes are you in, Daniel?”

“Let’s see…math, music, and biology. What about you?”

“Math, psychology, and a nursing class.”

“Are you a nursing major?”

“Yup, sure am. What about you?”

“Social work.”

“Oh yeah. Do you know Sarah? She’s in the social work program.”

“Yes. She’s very smart — I hate her!”

Tami laughed and tapped Daniel on the arm. “That’s not nice Daniel…she’s sweet.”

“Is she sweet enough to write a paper for me?”

“Oh you’re bad! I’m headed to the cafeteria, you want to go?”

Internally, Daniel was falling apart. He could not believe how easily his words came as he talked with Tami. Usually, he was a nervous wreck when he talked to beautiful girls, or any girl for that matter. But with Tami, he was able to relax and enjoy his time with her.

They talked more after that day and eventually, he called her at home and asked if she wanted to attend a chili cook-off event with him.
Part of Daniel’s anxiety came from not knowing how to be around girls who did not drink or use drugs. Being under the influence helped to ease the discomfort of dating and could be used as an excuse for odd behaviors. Being drunk all the time is also good for never having an honest discussion. Relationships take work and honesty. That’s why many counselors discourage getting into relationships during early recovery. It is hard enough working on one sick person, much less two.

Tami and Daniel’s first date turned out great. They attended the cook-off, drove around a new, expensive community looking at mansions and talking about their own dreams. They ended their night with an ice cream. Around midnight, he walked Tami to her door, making sure to respect her wishes and expectations. As they reached her door, she turned, hugged Daniel and they briefly kissed.

Their dates and alone time increased over the weeks and they grew closer. They were lying on her bed one evening, when Tami asked, “Daniel, why did you stop drinking and using drugs?”

“Well…many things I guess, but if I had to say, one of the most important things was a kid getting hurt by a drunk driver.”

“Really! What happened?”

“You don’t want to hear about, that do you?”

Daniel was hoping not to spoil the mood with a bad story. He and Tami were alone in her bedroom and her roommates were out for the night. In the back of his mind, he had plans, and they did not include telling a traumatic story.

“Ok…when I was still drinking, I was driving home one night at about two in the morning. I was not drinking, so I wasn’t worried about getting pulled over or anything. So I’m
following this car and I notice it is weaving all over the place. I thought it was best if I just hurried up and passed him. So that’s what I did. The rest of the night, I thought about that guy and how many times I had driven drunk. Anyway, I forgot about it until I saw on the news that a kid had been run over by a drunk driver. I searched the news online and read the local paper like crazy. It turns out that this fuckin’ lawyer, after a night at a country club drinking, ran over a teenager who was riding his skateboard on the side of the road. It was on the same road I passed him on.”

“Oh my gosh, Daniel… what did you do?”

“Nothing, for a couple days. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t see the face of the guy driving or get a license plate number. Hell… I didn’t even remember what kind of car it really was. But I knew it was him. I knew it was this fuckin’ lawyer’s car — I just felt it. I read that he didn’t stop to help that kid — he just went home. He said he didn’t know that he hit a kid until he heard a police scanner saying that some kid had been killed by a car on that specific road he was on. He said he was so distraught after hearing the news, he began drinking alcohol. Because his car was leaking fluids, the cops followed the trail right to his house and arrested him. He had the prefect story, his blood alcohol level was way over the legal limit for driving when he arrived at jail, but his attorney said that was due to him drinking heavily after hearing the news.”

“That bastard!”

“Yeah… he ended up getting off saying he thought he hit an animal. He kept his law license and is walking the streets a free man.”

“Did you ever tell the police or anyone?”

“You know, after I read his bullshit story, I called the St Louis Police and told them everything I saw that night. The cop on the phone said that a detective on the case would call me,
but I never heard anything. I called back after a few weeks and asked who was investigating that case. When I told my story to that detective, he said thanks, and that he would get back to me. I never heard back from anyone.”

“Why do you think they didn’t call back?”

“I don’t know. That’s the question I’ve been asking myself for over two years. Maybe I didn’t see enough or could not help their case. Regardless, I told myself then and there: I would never allow anyone again, especially some drunk, to hurt someone.”

“Did you stop drinking that day?”

“No. About a week later I was out with my friends. At that time, we were at a bar drinking and shooting pool. We all drove there and were well on our way to getting buzzed. It hit me what a fuckin’ hypocrite I was. If, on the way home that night, drunk, I hit some kid, I would have acted just like that fuckin’ lawyer. I would have been self-consumed, only concerned for myself. I called a cab, slipped out of that bar and left that life behind me.”

“Wow, Daniel,” Tami said quietly.

“When the opportunity arose to move into First Step and learn about alcoholism and drug addiction, I took it. It also allowed me to attend college full-time without worrying about paying rent or all those other bills. Although it is a pretty tough program with some hardcore men living there, it has worked out for me so far.”

While thinking about this story and, even more, telling it, brought Daniel down, their night together progressed, but not the same way it would have if he hadn’t told that story. After talking about other things, the mood changed somewhat, and they started making out on Tami’s bed. Daniel and Tami rubbed each other and dry humped to the point of almost cuming in their
pants, but they did not have sex. Daniel also had First Step on his mind; he needed to get there soon after curfew to ensure everyone made it back on time.

He arrived back at the program and, after checking on all the men, he began reading the St Louis news online. Just before finishing and getting ready to turn the computer off, he saw a small headline towards the bottom of the page: *Police need help with North City murder of 12-year-old girl.*
Bobby and Josh’s Second Night

Bobby and Josh never openly spoke about their first night together. Though they had a typical relationship like other roommates in the program, no one ever suspected anything more. During group sessions, when there was a community issue to be addressed like chores not being done correctly or other minor concerns, these two usually spoke with one voice. They were both serious about getting and staying sober, and these attitudes were clear to everyone, even Mike. It had been at least two weeks since Bobby moved in with Josh. Their days since their first night consisted of mainly following the program design and rules. Their nights were spent carefully staying away from that first night and focusing on how their lives were changing for the better. They also spent a lot of time talking about what their plans were after graduating. There were some times when they would catch the other glancing their way. The frequent looks resulted in excitement and their sexual tension grew stronger night after night as they tried to avoid the subject.

Mike believed that unless a client was close to graduating the program, no one should be alone. If a client asked to go to the local store or to a different AA meeting, there had to be at least one other client go along.

One morning, Bobby asked Mike if he could go to K-Mart to pick up a few things he needed. When Mike asked if there were any clients around who could go with him, Bobby said that Josh and Gregory were the only ones available. Gregory was an older German gentleman who had only been in America a short time. He had two master’s degrees, one in chemistry and the other in biology. He was in the First Step program because every time he got a new job as a chemist, he would eventually brew some alcohol in the lab and be found passed-out drunk. Gregory had been in this program for nearly four months and was making good progress.
Unfortunately, he had been in these kinds of programs off and on for many years, never able to stay sober for more than a year or so.

Mike gave Bobby permission, as long as all three went together. Bobby entered the TV room where Josh and Gregory were sitting and asked, “Do you guys mind walking to Kmart with me?”

“It beats sitting around here I guess,” Gregory said as he stood up.

“What do you need from Kmart?” asked Josh.

“I need some toothpaste, I am out of lotion and I need some long white tube socks,” Bobby said, looking directly at Josh.

“Hey, I’m glad you said that. I need some new tube socks myself,” Gregory said.

Josh and Bobby tried not to laugh as they eyed each other walking out of the room.

Bobby had been extremely conflicted since his first night with Josh. Every time he talked with his girlfriend on the program’s pay phone, he couldn’t help but to get a hard-on thinking about having sex with her and his night masturbating with Josh. He did not consider himself gay or bisexual. The thought of having sex with a man was a complete turn off for Bobby and he would become extremely angry and violent toward anyone who called him gay. However, thinking about his night with Josh and picturing Josh rubbing his cock sent sexual shockwaves through Bobby’s body.

Part of the reason they avoided talking about that night was that if it became known, they would be quickly terminated from the program. Clients are not allowed to have sex with anyone in the program. There is also a rule against pornographic magazines, movies or pornography of any kind in the program.
Before Mike became the program manager at First Step, he was a counselor at an adolescent treatment facility for both boys and girls. Part of the recovery process is working not only on the addiction to alcohol and drugs, but to all other mind and mood altering behaviors. Sex is a huge problem for addicts. It could be said that addicts use substances to distract them from the main problem, that is, the guilt and remorse of living a life on self-will. If addicts can learn how to repair the wreckage of their past and have a plan for future problem solving, they would have no reasons to use substances. Unfortunately, the recovery process takes a long time and is hard work. It is a lot easier and quicker to drink alcohol, take a drug, or fuck a stranger for distraction. It also feels good.

Mike had to stay on his toes, dealing with men in treatment who now cannot have alcohol or drugs to solve their numerous problems. It was difficult to keep these men from seeking some kind of sexual relief, especially from others who are also trying to recover. Hook ups are all too common and usually happen before, during and after AA meetings. This is when the “nobody can be alone” rule comes in handy. If a client does try to hook up with someone, he would have to be alone or convince another client to remain silent. There have been many group sessions where clients were confronted about their behavior after trying to get away from the group or trying to talk another client, usually the newest one, to break a program rule.

Josh and Bobby’s secret night was an ideal situation to remain under the radar. They were roommates, safe behind a closed door after lights out. And, if either one of them decided to tell another client or Mike, it would be one’s word against the other’s, with the most likely outcome being to move one of them into another room. Young men trying to quietly masturbate in the privacy of their own beds at night would not be a major concern for Mike. If there was a client whose behavior became a concern, it would probably be discussed privately, and then brought up
in group, in a general way, how certain behaviors are part of the recovery process. An alternative that had been offered in group before was to conduct your business behind a locked bathroom or shower door.

Bobby and Josh found a way to conduct their business behind closed doors. They developed an unspoken mutual arrangement. What happened in the past or what might happen in the future, within the privacy of their room, would remain their own business. They were both making progress in the recovery program and neither seemed to be at risk for being kicked out or for relapsing. However, they both knew that their private relationship was risky and could become complicated if known to the program, or for that matter, known to the general public.

Since that first night, and Bobby’s comments about getting tube socks at Kmart, they both felt the sexual tension increasing. Josh enjoyed the idea of having a “virgin” to play around with and Bobby blushed at the thought of experiencing someone and something new.

“We’ll have to lower our window tonight because of the storm coming,” Bobby said as he straightened up his area before lights out. Josh was silent as he dried off from his nightly shower, pumping lotion into his hands. Bobby grabbed his towel and left the room. When he returned, right at 11 p.m., the dark room lit up from the hallway lights shining in through the open door. Bobby caught sight of Josh’s naked body at the window, curtains dancing wildly as the wind and rain blew in.

“I think you are right about our window…” Josh said. “…I will pull it down a little.”

As Josh turned around to slip into his bed, the door closed slowly enough for Bobby to finally see the front of Josh’s naked body. The closed door darkened the room and calmed the wind blowing through the window. Josh said, “Maybe with the door closed we can raise our window some more. We might get more fresh air.”
Before Bobby could think, he said, “I’ll get it.”

As he got up, he was surprised by his growing hard-on and tried to hide it. Although it was dark, enough time had passed for their eyes to make the adjustment. Bobby got back into bed and began to recall the image of Josh’s naked body. The appearance of Josh standing at the window came to his mind. His curly blonde, wet hair hung down to his shoulders. Josh’s hairless, thin frame was the perfect match for his perky, peachy ass. In Bobby’s mind, it was a beautiful female standing at the window. She had smooth, sweet-smelling skin. Bobby’s heart and thoughts raced as blood sped to his enlarging penis. When his mind remembered the image of Josh turning around to expose his front, although it was a quick flash, he knew this was no beautiful women but a man. Unlike Bobby’s, Josh’s bush was trimmed. The pruned, neat hair accentuated Josh’s hanging shaft. Bobby had never seen anything like this before. While he had noticed other boy’s private parts during high school gym, Josh’s area was different. Bobby became aware how hard he was breathing as these images spun through his mind. He also lost track of time and did not want to miss his chance for another unforgettable night.

Just as Bobby was thinking about something to say, Josh broke the silence. “The storm is getting worse.”

Bobby was so focused on picturing Josh’s body that he did not notice the drapes flapping around from the increasing strength of the wind blowing and the occasional thunder and flashes of lightening.

“Should we close the window more?” Bobby asked.

“Naw…” Josh said, “I like listening to storms and the smell of rain…it helps me relax.”

Josh continued. “When I was a kid, I moved my bed right next to the window in my
house. I would listen to all of the noises outside and wondered what all of the creatures were doing in the darkness. All those creatures making sounds at night... I could never see them when it was light outside. When it would storm, I liked having the cool rain blow in on me through the window.”

Bobby was quiet, listening to Josh as he continued talking in a hushed voice. “I never thought I would end up in a program like this.”

“You shouldn’t think about things like that now. When I do, it makes it harder for me to fall asleep. You should continue enjoying the storm,” suggested Bobby.

Bobby was lying on his side facing Josh’s bed. The room was small enough to almost reach out and touch Josh’s bed. The next lightening flash allowed Bobby to see that Josh was lying without any sheets covering his nude body. Bobby began to slowly rub his erect penis. He finally got up enough nerve to ask a question.

“Will you need help falling asleep tonight, Josh?”

“Yeah... I helped you out with my special technique...” Josh breathed. “Do you have any ideas how to help me relax tonight?”

“Did you bring your sock to bed?” Bobby asked.

“Yes... I always sleep with my socks close by,” Josh confessed.

In a whisper, Bobby said, “Place your sock over your eyes.”

Josh complied and laid his long sock across his closed eyes, completely masking his vision. Bobby eased out of his bed, fully naked, and crawled over to Josh’s. He was kneeling on the small rug next to Josh’s bed. This was the first time Bobby would be able to touch Josh’s body. He had imagined it during that first night together and had replayed that night over many more times in his mind. But tonight would be the first opportunity to actually play out some of
his scenarios. Bobby placed his hand on Josh’s inner thigh and began to rub, getting closer and closer to Josh’s cock. Bobby’s heart was pounding, his head was spinning. He could hardly breathe as he fully grasped and began to stroke Josh’s erection.

“Does this feel ok?” Bobby’s voice was hushed and shaky.

He barely heard Josh’s approval over the rush of blood in his ears, his pounding heart. Josh’s skin had the texture of silk. Bobby could still smell the fresh lavender lotion he rubbed on before getting into bed. Without much notice, Bobby’s face was extremely flushed and his mouth was filled with saliva. As he continued to rub and stroke Bobby, he realized that Josh’s dick was a bit thicker and longer than his. Bobby’s slow strokes on Josh’s penis felt different from rubbing his own. He switched back and forth from rubbing Josh’s solid dick to his large testicles.

Josh enjoyed the attention from Bobby. He tried to relax and control his mind as he felt Bobby’s hands move freely around his body. If certain thoughts made their way through, the enjoyment would certainly vanish. Josh has learned over time how to control his mind during these types of sexual encounters. His first experience having his penis stroked happened when he was about eleven years old. An older neighbor kid had invited him to spend the night. They both had worked several hours on a fort in the neighbor’s backyard. They drove sticks in the ground, running rope around them and back to a fence to hold them in place. They then stretched several blankets over the ropes and fences creating a make-shift covered hut.

They were so proud of their work. Josh’s parents were open to allowing him to sleep outside for one summer night. The boys collected their sleeping bags, a few snacks, and their own flashlights. As the sun went down and the backyard and hut became dark, they pointed their flashlights around their structure, talking about how they would build a bigger and better hut next time. Having each other lowered their anxieties about being alone in the hut after dark.
There was no way to know what time it was, but they knew it was late, as their flashlights were no longer working. As they lay inside unable to see anything except their hut’s and their own shadowed outlines, the long day of work and melody of the crickets began to quite them.

Without knowing how it all started, the neighbor boy was showing Josh how to masturbate. Josh, like most boys that age, had experienced the sensation of a hard-on, but it wasn’t until this night outside that Josh felt the sensation after continuing to stroke his penis. Although the older boy ejaculated, which was very surprising to Josh, he finished without any liquid coming out.

To Josh, thinking about that night did not cause any pain or hurt feelings. He considered it as part of the growing-up process. The neighbor boy and Josh played around a few more times but it stopped as they aged. The excited feelings on that first night in the hut with his neighbor returned in his and Bobby’s first night.

These thoughts did not impact Josh’s emotions as he enjoyed Bobby’s hand job. What would destroy this moment were all the other thoughts when sex and violence converged. Josh purposely forced these memories away from his current thoughts. If any of these past experiences intruded, Josh knew he would become repulsed by what he was letting Bobby do to him. The more he tried not to think of these circumstances, the more likely they would appear. With years of experience controlling his mind, he snapped back into the moment. Josh figured he should move things along.

“Are you going to use your sock on me tonight?” Josh asked.

“No…I have something better in mind,” Bobby said.
Bobby slowly leaned over and collapsed his mouth around Josh’s cock. He tried to take all of it into his mouth, but it was too large. Josh laid his hand on top of Bobby’s head. The sock covering Josh’s eyes was beginning to fall to one side as he jolted from the pleasure of Bobby’s mouth and hand moving steadily up and down. Josh’s hips began to thrust in rhythm.

If someone came into their room now, there would no more hiding it. There would be no denying their sexual relationship. Bobby trying to say that he had a girlfriend would not be enough to overcome what was happening in their room. However, neither was thinking about their agreement to the program rules or the risk they were taking to satisfy their needs. This night was all sexual satisfaction.

Bobby had never touched another man’s penis, much less sucked one. He realized he was good at giving a blowjob. He was enjoying the idea of giving Josh pleasure and sucking his dick like he would want his girlfriend to suck his. He heard Josh’s moans as he continued. He was nervous about how he would react to having semen shoot into his mouth. He had never considered being in this situation before. Bobby was not turned off by the smell or taste of semen. Once, after a night drinking and no one to go home with, he tasted his own semen after jerking off. He did not believe he was gay after licking the semen from his hand. He justified it in his mind that they were his own juices and that there was nothing wrong with it. However, he had never let anyone know what he did.

Bobby knew Josh was close to cuming. He thought about what Josh said their first night masturbating together and how he had to imagine someone’s mouth as he used his sock. Tonight Bobby was happy that Josh was thinking about his mouth. Bobby began to slow down as his mouth could feel Josh’s cock throbbing, ready to erupt. Josh’s body fluttered, clutching his sheet
with one hand and he grabbed the back of Bobby’s neck with the other. Josh was going to make sure Bobby’s mouth was going nowhere.

A lightning bolt shot across the sky about the same Josh finally ejaculated. The light revealed Bobby kneeling at the side of Josh’s bed lip-locked onto Josh. Bobby gladly accepted Josh’s entire warm explosion as the room faded back to dark.

Bobby leaned over to Josh’s bedside trash can and spat out the remaining semen. He stood and snatched a tissue from Josh’s nightstand. He rubbed his face and mouth dry. As he bent over to throw the tissue away, he saw Josh sitting up on the side of his bed, with his feet on the ground. When Bobby stood back up, Josh grabbed Bobby’s ass with both hands and pulled him in. Bobby’s knees were sore and his mouth was a little worn out. He was happy to be standing.

Josh was squeezing and rubbing Bobby’s ass while teasing Bobby’s cock with his moist lips.

“Grab my hair with both hands,” Josh insisted as he continued licking around and sucking the head of Bobby’s penis.

Bobby reached down and ran his fingers through Josh’s thick hair and grabbed two hands full. Bobby rammed his rock hard dick into Josh’s open mouth. Josh’s mouth and throat took Bobby’s entire erection. Josh continued to pull Bobby’s ass in and out hoping Bobby would get the message to pound Josh’s mouth.

“Oh yes,” Bobby moaned as he understood Josh’s intent. With both hands full of Josh’s blonde hair, Bobby began to thrust in and out of Josh’s welcoming mouth. As the storm continued to occasionally light up the room and the wind blew the curtain around, they continued.
Josh felt Bobby’s knees begin to shake. With every thrust, Josh could sense the closeness of Bobby’s burst.

“Oh my god…” Bobby moaned as he finally discharged his burning liquor deep inside Josh’s throat. Bobby tried to remain standing on his wobbly legs, releasing Josh’s hair. Josh continued to slowly suck Bobby’s softening dick, milking it dry. They released each other and collapsed in their cool beds.

No one walked in. Their stormy night together would remain their secret. At least that was Bobby’s goal.
Willy Graduates First Step

“Hey Willy, are you ready for your big night?” Daniel asked.

“Yeah, man. I’m kind of happy and sad. I have to go back out into the real world again.”

“You are ready bro. You have made some big changes. You’re my fuckin idol!”

“Stop it, Daniel, man… I’ve been holding back crying all day I don’t need you to fuck with me right now.”

“Come on… let’s hug it out, bitch,” Daniel said as they hugged and laughed.

“Who’s coming to be with you tonight Willy?”

“Well, my granny and auntie are coming… I don’t think Tisa or my daughter Lavonda is coming. I found out they moved to North City somewhere, her cell says it is disconnected and I don’t know her address or nothing, man.”

Graduations are very special occasions. They happen on Fridays during usual group time and the man who graduates invites his family and supporters in to join the celebration. Willy made great changes in the program and has worked on dealing with his depression instead of walking the MLK Bridge. He still obsessed over Tisa sometimes but he sought out someone to talk with instead of spiraling out of control. Most times he went to Daniel to talk, often for hours.

At 6 p.m. the graduation group started off with the serenity prayer. Mike opened the night by welcoming the guests and explaining how the night would go. Every client would say something supportive to Willy, a good experience they shared or something Willy had said or done that helped the client along the path of recovery. After the clients shared, he and Willy hugged. Everyone attending got to say something to Willy and hug him. This was about telling another man how he was helpful and learning how to appropriately say goodbye. Most addicted
relationships end badly. This night was about ending something on a very good and supportive note and beginning a new journey — at least for Willy.

Daniel helped Willy’s granny and auntie to their chairs, one on each side of Willy, before the night began. They both hugged and held on to Daniel as they walked toward their seats. Once they were comfortably sitting, they held on to Daniel’s hands.

“Sugar, we heard about you and all the help you have been to our baby.”

“He’s not a baby any more, Grandmother,” Daniel glanced at Willy and smiled.

“He’s our baby. He’s the only one we have left.”

Daniel’s smile faded as he saw these old ladies raise their thick glasses, using their tissues to wipe away the tears falling from their wrinkled, squinty eyes. Willy put his arms around his elders while Daniel knelt, holding their hands.

Because Willy is a very emotional and grateful person, kind words and expressions of thankfulness touch him deeply. As the night went on, Willy constantly used his handkerchief to wipe away tears. Many of the men did the same — especially his friend Daniel.

After every one spoke, Willy leaned over to let his granny and her sister know they could say something, if they liked. Granny whispered to Willy and he moved to help each of these ladies slowly stand up, ensuring they were stable. With each by his side, holding on around his waist, Granny looked up at Willy, tears running down her face, and said, “We love you, William Miller Jr., with all our hearts. I’m as proud of you today, baby, as I was when you were born and I first saw you laying in that little bed right inside this building when it used to be a hospital for us. Sugar… you have been reborn… you have a new life now with all these men who can help you. I can’t get around too good no more… and I need help too. Let these good people help you stand up now baby. Your daddy… your daddy is here tonight, Jr. I know he is. You have to
forgive him now, William. You have to forgive him and your sister honey… and move on with your new life. There is nothing on that bridge or in that water that can help you now — you understand?

“Come here baby,” Granny said as she motioned to Daniel. She grabbed him and pulled him in to her arms.

“William Jr., your daddy or sister never had a friend like this to help them. You need him and y’all need each other.”

Looking up at Daniel, Granny said, “Stay close to my baby, ok, Daniel?”

“I will Grandmother, I promise.”
Larry and Bobby

“Hey Bobby,” Larry said, “You want to walk to the store with me? I still can’t be alone.”

“Which store you going to?”

“Dollar Store down the block, the one you, me and Josh went to a while back.”

“Are we coming right back? I got to do my chores and a couple other things.”

“Yeah man, it won’t take long.”

Mike had loosened up on Larry a bit after his piss came back clean. Larry still could not work or contact his girlfriend, but the focus on him became less and less each day as he kept out of trouble. Larry was good at keeping a low profile when needed. He told his PO that he was not working anymore because he wanted to concentrate on getting clean and sober. He hoped his PO would not talk to Mike, who would surely explain the whole story. Not everyone dealt with Larry like Mike. Mike listened to and examined every word someone said, especially if he did not trust them.

Larry was very careful when Mike was around, but with others, Larry returned to his usual dishonest, devious ways. He specifically targeted Bobby to walk with him because Bobby was young, weak and an easy target. Larry honed his skills in prison. In prison, you are either predator or prey. Any signs of weaknesses are exploited. Larry entered prison as a prime target. It was his first time; physically, he was small and weak-looking and he was white. His first two years in prison were challenging. He was beat up several times, stabbed, and raped by three black dudes. Larry spent time in the protective custody unit and transferred to three different institutions in the region. Regardless of where he went, the word was that he would lay down and
not fight back and that he was a “punk,” which in prison terms means he would do anything to avoid getting harmed.

Larry’s reputation changed after about two years when he arrived at Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City. This prison first opened in the 1800s and the facilities, along with the attitudes, were antiquated. Although the white Aryan Brotherhood prison gang did not like Larry — they saw him as a weak “nigger lover” — what they hated even more was how the blacks got away with fucking over another white man.

Larry was given an ultimatum by the members of the Brotherhood: either he fought back and stabbed the next “nigger” who fucked with him or he would be killed by the white gang. Larry was given a crudely-made knife and assured them that he would soon use it. He had to decide whether he would be protecting himself from the blacks or whites. Had it been known that one of Larry’s charges was related to harming a child, he would have certainly been stabbed to death by any inmate of any race. Larry knew his only chance of surviving his remaining time behind bars was to join with the whites. The only problem was, he would have to kill or at least fatally stab the next black guy who disrespected him. He stood at a turning point, faced with two very bad decisions.

About a week later, while standing in line to use the phone, a black dude walked up, cut in line, pushed Larry back and stood in front of him. Larry was used to these kinds of things happening to him and reacted in his usual way. He straightened himself up, looked down and acted like nothing happened. However, when he raised his head back up, he saw two Brotherhood members looking his way. They saw the entire thing happen. Larry’s stomach churned and sickened, knowing it was time to decide. As he thought about what he had to do, his knees shook and he was close to shitting his pants.
Out of the corner of his eye, Larry saw the two white guys walking directly toward him with their hands hidden behind their backs. Larry’s adrenaline was rushing like never before. Even with a knife, he knew he would not survive a fight with either the black guy who disrespected him or the white guys charging. A thought came to his mind.

“This is not about surviving…this is about standing up.”

With his knife in hand, he moved with efficient purpose. His first hit went directly into the middle of the black guy’s back. Larry felt the blade go deep, bouncing off gristle and the boney spin. The second and third propulsions pierced through the twisting man’s fleshy ass and thigh muscle. As the black man tried to get away, screaming for help, Larry followed him, chopping down and hitting the man’s shoulder and neck. After a total of about fifteen punctures, Larry stopped the chase, turned around and ran towards the two white dudes, who quickly guided him away from the area. They took his weapon and bloody coat, instructing him to go to the yard where the Brotherhood hung out.

From that day on, Larry’s life in prison drastically changed. He was no longer prey; he was total predator. Every new man who entered prison weak, as Larry had entered, was abused, physically, emotionally and sexually by Larry. He was involved in several more violent acts after nearly killing the black man who disrespected him that day. His rage and hate grew toward weak men who would allow themselves to be manipulated and abused, especially toward every black person. He was schooled by his white brothers on how blacks and gays are scum and should be treated as such.

Living this way of life for ten years could not be undone after a few months at First Step. His trip to the Dollar Store had been planned for several weeks. All Larry needed was time and opportunity.
“Man, I appreciate your support these last few weeks, Bobby,” Larry said as they walked along the sidewalk.

“Sure, man, no problem… I thought for sure Mike was going to kick you out of the program last month.”

“Uh… me too, man. Having clean urine is the only thing that saved me. I’m trying to change, man, but it’s hard.”

They continued to talk about the program and their struggles in the recovery process as they entered the store.

“What do you need, Larry?”

“The main thing is I’m out of mineral oil, but I also want to get some chewing gum.”

“Mineral oil?” Bobby asked.

“Uh… Yeah, parts of my skin get very dry and the only thing I had in prison was mineral oil…so I’m used to it now.”

Larry collected his things and grabbed a coke. He asked what kind of drink Bobby would like. They walked out and Larry handed Bobby his drink.

“I saw some milk crates around the side we can sit on for a minute before we make the trip back. Let’s have our drinks and then head back to get our chores done,” Larry said.

They moved the crates next to a dumpster that was sitting next to the building’s wall, sat down and leaned their backs against the dumpster. They drank their cold drinks and continued talking.

“Prison fucks you up, dude. Are you scared you are going to end up going to prison if you don’t make it in the program?” Larry asked Bobby.
“I don’t know, man… I’ve been in jails and I have an uncle who was in prison. Hell… First Step is like being in prison to me, so I think I can handle prison,” Bobby responded.

“Ok, tough guy,” Larry chuckled. “You don’t want to go to prison… you would be away from your roommate Josh.”

Bobby sat up, looking nervously at Larry.

“What are you talking about man?”

“What… you think I don’t know what goes on in that room at night?”

Bobby stood and said, “I think we need to get back man.”

As Bobby moved in front of Larry, Larry stood and pinned Bobby against the building’s wall, hidden by the dumpster.

“I’m gonna do you a favor, tough guy, and give you a taste of what prison is like,” Larry growled in Bobby’s ear.

Larry knew Bobby would not resist, just like all the other little punks who ended up in the prison’s yard.

“Don’t make a fuckin’ sound, you little bitch,” Larry said and he clenched down harder on Bobby’s neck. “I’m gonna do you a favor this time.”

Larry slipped his pants down and dribbled some mineral oil on his penis. He forced Bobby’s pants down and rubbed the remaining oil on Bobby’s shivering ass.

“If it helps, just imagine I am your faggot boyfriend Josh. You like getting fucked by him don’t you, you little fucking punk?”

Bobby tried to resist at first, but Larry choked him harder. Bobby gave into what was going to happen. His mind raced and he couldn’t believe this was happening to him. He could smell Larry’s bad breath as he got pounded against the wall. Bobby’s total surrender resulted in
Larry’s loosening choke hold. Bobby wished for a quick finish, for it to be over. As he zoned out, he made his anus totally available to Larry, thinking it would end more quickly. Totally disgusted, Bobby tried not to take Larry’s advice of thinking about Josh. Bobby knew Josh would never use force. He thought about the times when Josh told him how he had been raped by an older man. His mind remained on the good things about Josh and how he had overcome these same brutal acts. He and Josh, Bobby thought, were becoming closer as the result of him being raped by Larry.

As Bobby’s mind returned, he felt Larry’s release.

“I’m walking back…you stay here and don’t sign back in until thirty minutes after me. You got that, you little fuckin’ punk?”

Bobby shook his head as he skimmed down the wall and onto his knees.
Josh’s Last Group

“How’s it going?” Mike asked as the men sat around their usual formation. Everyone just shook their heads and tried to avoid being tonight’s subject.

“Well…I got some more good news,” Mike announced, “Larry’s piss came back clean again today.”

Everyone clapped and made supportive callouts to Larry, except Bobby and Josh. They noticed each other, but weren’t sure why the other was not celebrating the good news.

“So it has been about a month or so since Larry made some poor decisions and I think he has earned some more privileges back,” Mike said happily. “All current rules remain in place for the rest of tonight, Larry, but be at my office door at 9 a.m. and we will discuss your future.”

“Uh… thanks Mike, I really appreciate all your help,” Larry said as beads of sweat began to develop over his top lip. “Uh… thanks to all you guys, too… it’s been hard, but I feel like I have made some important changes these past weeks. It will be nice to get some freedom back and get back to work.”

Larry mainly looked at Mike and a few other men as he talked and wiped away the sweat running down his forehead. After Larry finished, he slid back into his seat, crossed his arms and continued smiling. Mike was ready to move on and gave the group time to bring up something without his encouragement. After a few minutes of silence, Mike asked, “Tell me…what’s going on?”

Mike made his standard move of leaning back, crossing his legs and taking a careful sip of his coffee.

“What… everyone get cured?” Mike prodded.
This allowed for a bit of pressure release in the group. Although there are many issues to discuss, no one wants to be the first or to look too eager to call someone’s bullshit out. Daniel could raise a concern about what happens to graduates after leaving the safety of the group. Bobby could discuss lots of issues, as well as many other group members. It is important for recovery that these men confront issues without being forced to do so. Once they leave the program, there would be no one else who can confront their behaviors. Sure, there could be someone in an AA meeting to call them out, but that is very unlikely, as the meeting was about discussing one’s own problems. Being in this group provided great opportunities for self-improvement, if that was what someone wanted.

“I got something to tell the group,” Josh said quietly, looking mostly down.

“Ok, Josh, good. Go ahead, buddy.”

“Well… after thinking a lot about things and everything I learned here, I want to let everyone know that tonight is my last night in the program. I am moving out after group.”

The group was taken aback by Josh’s confession. The group mostly liked Josh and they saw him as a stable presence and good influence. On the program’s timeline, Josh was about halfway through the process. Within a couple months, Josh would complete and leave the program with the full advantages of a First Step Graduate. While the benefits are not much, Josh would always be welcome on the floor and could join in on any mealtime with the residents. He would also be allowed to sit in on groups and support the new members. Finally, all graduates have the full support of Mike and the ability to seek his professional assistance whenever needed. Mike can be very helpful when it comes to things like writing reference letters, talking with lawyers, judges, POs, and spouses, and if graduates are in-between homes, Mike keeps a couple beds open.
“What’s going on Josh?” Mike asked.

“You know, Mike… nothing major is going on… and that’s the issue. My life is good now. I have been clean and sober for several months. I have learned some skills to stay sober and remain sober. I have a support group and I am getting my old job back. I am in a great place mentally, physically, and spiritually. I’m not sure what else there is to learn here — no offense!”

“None taken,” Mike replied.

“Where do you plan to live?” asked Bobby.

“Yeah…thanks, a good question. My old roommate, the one who took me to treatment and does not drink or use drugs, has an open room for me if I want it. It is close to my work, sits on a good bus line and there are all kinds of AA meetings close.”

“Uh… well… it sounds like you’re all set. Good luck,” Larry said.

“Thanks, Larry, but this is not about luck, it’s about preparation and opportunity! I know you can relate to that, right man?”

“Um… I guess, but what do you mean by that?”

“I was here when you got here, Larry, and I’ve watched you. I watch people like you. To me… you seem like a person who would not pass up an opportunity — good or bad.”

“Well…um…I’m not sure exactly what you mean, but I will take that as a compliment.”

“I’m not surprised you don’t understand, and to be honest, I don’t really don’t care how you take it.”

“Don’t worry, Josh, we will help Larry with all his misunderstanding,” said Mike. “Since this is your last group, I want you to leave here under the most positive of terms. What do you need from us or need to say to us so you feel like there are no loose ends?”
“Well… I guess I need to say thank you and I really learned a lot here. When I first got here, I was really messed up — and on some level, I am still messed up, but have tools to use. Thank you for accepting me for who I am. Most places like this have a hard time accepting people like me. I have really gotten close to some of you guys and I will never forget you. You have changed my life. You have improved my life. I wish all of you the best and hope you live a life that is happy, joyous and free.”

“Thank you, Josh,” Mike said, “We will miss having you and your positive presence here. You have changed us and made this a better place. You are welcome back here anytime — clean and sober that is.”

Since it was Friday, Mike discussed some other issues related to expectations over the weekend and dealt with a couple of guys who needed a bit of extra attention. They closed group in the usual way, standing, holding hands and repeating the serenity prayer. As they began to make their way out of the room and prepare for the evening’s AA meeting, a few of the men hugged and exchanged words with Josh. Bobby left quickly and headed straight to their room. Josh’s bags were lying on his bed. His stomach churned as he thought about Josh leaving and the fear of never being with him again.

“Why are you doing this?” Bobby asked as Josh walked in their room.

“It’s what I decided to do. It has nothing to do with you or us.”

“What do you mean it has nothing to do with us? You leaving ends us.”

“That’s probably best, because in here it is us, out there it is you and the fag you room with,” Josh said as he picked up his bags and brushed past Bobby, leaving the room.

Bobby collected himself, left the building and walked toward the AA meeting.
Josh put away his things in his new room. There was a sense of both relief and regret as he moved around the small two-room apartment. There was more storage space than Josh had things to store. He sat down on his bed, emotionally and physically exhausted. His new roommate was away for the weekend. He was looking in the refrigerator when he heard a knock on the door. Before he could make it to the door, a second, harder knock echoed through the space.

“Coming…” He made his way to the door. “Oh…Bobby! What are you doing here?’”

“I had to talk to you.”

“You are supposed to be at an AA meeting. What the hell are you thinking? You could get in real trouble for being here.”

“I don’t care.”

“How did you know where my apartment was?”

“You told me about your friend who supported you and took you to treatment. You said he lived in these apartments and I looked for his name on the mailboxes. Why did you fuckin’ leave, Josh?”

“You heard what I said in group right? What don’t you understand about that?”

“I don’t understand the whole fucking thing.”

“Well… I’m sorry for that, but I can’t help you.”

“What the fuck are you saying? Why are you treating me like this?”

“Treating you like what? A person in treatment who needs help?”

“No…a person who sucked your dick and swallowed your cum, god damn it. Do you think that is something I do all the time?”
“How would I know? You were pretty fuckin’ good at it. And you didn’t seem to mind that I also sucked your dick dry.”

Josh turned and headed towards the back of the apartment to the kitchen.

“You mother fuckin’ little faggot!”

Bobby attacked Josh and slammed him to the floor. Bobby put his elbow on the back of the head, smashing Josh’s face down on the carpet. Josh’s nose started to bleed.

“How you give a fuck now?”

“You need to get out of my fuckin’ house, Bobby,” Josh said, Bobby stayed on top of him.

“I’m not going anywhere until you are honest with me.”

“Be honest with yourself, Bobby… you came over here to get your secret dick fix.”

Bobby exploded with anger.

“I got fucked up the ass, next to a fucking dumpster, because someone thought I am a queer like you… you cock sucker!”

Bobby grabbed Josh in a choke hold, while still on top of Josh and forced his pants off. Bobby spit in his hand and stroked his dick until it was hard enough to insert into Josh.

“No…let’s see how you like getting fucked up the ass?”

Bobby made sure he puts his entire body weight on Josh as he trusted his cock deep into Josh’s anus.

“I learned behind the Dollar General Store that it is best to just surrender your asshole and not fight it,” Bobby said as he continued pumping.

“This is not my first time Bobby, I have learned things too,” Josh said as he grunted with each plunge of Bobby’s dick, “I have been fucked like this all of my life.”
Bobby continued to thrust but began to slow and eased his grip on Josh.

“Oh shit man,” Bobby said, “what the fuck am I doing? You are right…I did come here to have sex with you, but not like this. Mother fucker — I’m so sorry Josh.”

“You didn’t hurt me you little pussy…I like getting held down by a straight guy…keep going.”

Bobby’s anger shifted to complete sexual aggression. He continued to pound Josh as he pushed himself up onto his hands and knees. Bobby held Josh’s hips with all his strength as he sank his cock deeper and deeper into Josh’s ass. They were both trying to muffle their groaning while the sounds of naked bodies banging together overtook the apartment.

“Oh god I’m gonna cum,” yelled Bobby.

Josh was silent, waiting from Bobby to inject his semen. Bobby’s last thrusts filled Josh’s ass. They both fell to the floor. They didn’t say a word, only tried to catch their breath. After several minutes, Bobby said, “I’m sorry Josh…I didn’t mean to hurt you man.”

“I guess I’m not a faggot anymore?”

“I was mad when I said those things.”

“You mean…you were honest when you said those things?”

“What are you talking about man?”

“Why did you come here tonight, Bobby?”

“Uh…I came here to talk to you and figure out the honest reason you left treatment.”

“Why I left treatment… because I got some new information.”

“What are you talking about Josh, what information?”

“Well… what kept you interested in treatment was getting your questions answered about me, right? You got some new information about yourself, correct?”
“I don’t know what you are talking about, Josh.”

“You moved in a bedroom with me and your question was…could I suck a man’s dick? What was your answer, Bobby?”

“Well…I think you know the fuckin’ answer,” says Bobby.

The fact that they are still naked and faced away from each other as they talk adds to the tension of the moment.

“Ok… you arrive here tonight wondering if you could also fuck a man up the ass. It seems the answer is also yes. You came here to fuck me. As it turns out, I determined whether it was against my will or not. I controlled the way I was going to be fucked by you. The new information you got today was that you can fuck and suck a man’s dick in private and still be able to hate queers in public — that’s honesty, right Bobby?”

“Oh god!” Bobby shouted as he noticed the blood on his dick. “You got your fuckin’ ass blood on my dick.”

“Yeah…when you forced your dick in my dry ass and kept fucking and fucking, someone is going to bleed.”

“Mother fucker…where are your tissues?”

“There is a box on my dresser.”

As Bobby wiped his dick clean, seeing blood on the tissues he asked, “I’m confused, you said you left treatment because you got new information…What is it?”

“I left treatment because I found out I’m HIV positive, Bobby.”
Larry and the Detectives

“Mike…you have a call waiting on line two.”

“This is Mike.”

“Hi Mike…this is Jackson.”

“Hey Jackson, what’s up? Are you at work?”

“Yes, sir. I am using their phone. I need to tell you that as me and Larry was waiting on our ride this morning, detectives pulled up and took Larry. I figured I better call you as soon as I got to work.”

“Thanks, Jackson, you did the right thing. You don’t worry and go ahead and do your job. I will see you when you get home. We can talk about it in group if needed. OK, Jackson?”

“Yes sir…I will see you later. Thank you, Mike…Bye.”

Mike hung up and turned to Daniel, who was sitting in Mike’s office,

“Your boy Larry was picked up by detectives this morning.”

“My boy?” asked Daniel.

Larry sat in a room handcuffed to a bar on the wall with a table in front of him. Two empty chairs were on the other side. He ran through different possibilities of why he might have been picked up. Although Larry asked many questions, the detectives didn’t tell him anything on their drive to the police station. He started to get more and more nervous the longer he sat alone, connected to the wall.

Just as he began to stand, to work his nerves out, the door popped open and in walked two detectives. The first through the door was a large African American man with a smoothly shaved head and face. His black three-piece suit with white shirt and striped tie were sharp and well-tailored. Larry noticed his gold watch, bracelet, and necklace as he reached out his hand and
introduced himself. After shaking Larry’s hand, he introduced his partner, a Hispanic man, also wearing a slick suit with a clean shaven face and tight haircut. After they were seated in front of Larry and read him his rights, they begin talking.

“Is your name Larry Logan?”

“Yes sir… you can call me Larry.”

“Do you know why you’re here, Larry?”

“Uh…no sir.”

“Well, let me ask you: where were you on the 3rd of last month? It was on a Tuesday.”

“Shit, man… I don’t know. I’ve been in treatment for about three months, and one day seems like the next.”

“I want you to be careful how you answer, Larry. You see this big thick file? This is about you. We have talked to many people. And we did not pull your name out of a fuckin’ hat to bring you down here. So let me ask you this: did you recall missing any days of work early last month, maybe around the 3rd?”

Larry began to sweat and shift in his seat. He looked at the camera pointing down towards the table where they were all sitting. He tried to think through everything they might know, like signing in and out at First Step; they could have talked to his boss and looked at days missed. But missing work is not a crime and if something happened, there was no way to connect him to anything.

“Uh…I remember missing a day at work last month. I spent the day with my girlfriend.

“What’s this about man?”

“We are investigating a murder.”

“Ok… what does that have to do with me?”
“Well… your name came up and we are following up to get your side of the story.”

“Man… Uh… I ain’t murdered anybody.”

“Your girlfriend live on Locust Street?”

“Um… yeah… I think, man, somewhere around there.” Larry shifted in his seat.

“Did you go to Chambers Park, right around the block from Locust, that day?”

“Uh… I don’t even know where the fuck Chambers Park is, man.”

“What would you say if we told you your DNA was there?”

“Um… I tell you I don’t know what the fuck you are talking about.”

“When we brought you in today, this was in your front pocket. What do you use Mineral Oil for Larry?”

“Uh…you know what… um…I don’t know what you are talking about and I think I just want to talk to my lawyer.”

“Ok, Larry, that’s your right. But let me tell you this: you are being charged today with the rape and murder of Lavonda Miller, an innocent twelve-year-old baby girl.”

The detectives gathered their files and walked out, locking the door behind them.

“Damn, man, I wanted a confession,” said one of the detectives walking back toward their office.

“That fuckin’ criminal ain’t going to admit to nothin’. But that’s ok, we got enough to put his ass away for the rest of his natural fucked-up life.”

“Thank god for our confidential informant who gave us all the information we needed. Without him, we would have never caught this fuckin’ monster.”

“We owe that fuckin’ guy big time, man. What was his name again?”

“Daniel, I think.”
MLK Bridge

Daniel was in Mike’s office late in the evening, talking with a First Step client. They were just about ready to wrap it up and go to bed when the front desk buzzed the floor.

“Daniel… you there? People are trying to get you on your cell, man… why you got a cell you never answer, Daniel? Pick up line two on Mike’s phone, please.”

“Hello, this is Daniel.”

“Daniel…this is Willy, man.”

“Hey Willy, nice to hear from you. How’s it going?”

“It’s bad, Daniel, man.”

“What…what’s bad, Willy?”

“I just found out my baby daughter was killed, man.”

Daniel heard Willy crying uncontrollably and it sounded like he dropped his phone.

“Willy… Willy… Willy…are you there, man?”

“Daniel… I can’t take it, man. I can’t think about how my beautiful baby was killed.”

“I understand Willy, man…I hear you, brother…talk to me.”

Daniel walked around the office, rubbing his head as he talked with Willy. He paced back and forth restrained by the length of the phone cords.

“These fuckin’ detectives come to my work today…”

Willy’s voice faded as he sobbed and tried to catch his breath.

“They ask me all these questions…when I saw her last…when I spoke to Tisa last…and I’m telling them I haven’t talk to them in months, that she left and won’t speak to me.”

“Ok, Willy…that’s good, man…what else?”
“These mutha fuckas start telling me that my baby was found strangled and raped next to a fuckin’ playground, Daniel. Why the fuck they tellin’ me this shit, man? I can’t take that kind of shit — I can’t take the thought of what happened to my baby.”

“Where are you, Willy? Come here… I will come get you. Where are you, man?”

“I can’t take it, Daniel.”

“Please tell me where you are and I will come and get you man.”

Daniel’s hands began to search for his keys in all his pockets. He dumped out all his belongings on the desk, frustrated his keys are not with him.

“I’m on my bridge, Daniel,” Willy said with a calming voice.

“Why are you on the MLK? There is nothing for you there. It’s here, Willy. What you need now is here, man.”

“I’m going to see my family, Daniel. I get to see my baby now.”

“Your family is here, Willy. Remember what Grandma said: you got to let that shit go, man…your family is right here… I’m your family, my brother.”

“I love you, Daniel… you are my brother, man. Thank you.”

“Willy…hey, Willy…Willy!”
Daniel

“First Step! Anybody up there?” came over the floor’s speaker from the front desk.

“Yo…”

“Where’s Daniel?”

“Hold on, I’ll get ’em.”

“Hello…this is Daniel.”

“Waz up, dude? Did you lose your cell phone again?”

“Oh…I think it’s turned off.”

“Tami’s been calling it. She’s on line one for you.” Daniel picked up.

“Hello!”

“Hi Daniel…it’s Tami.”

“Hey Tami, nice to hear from you. What are you up to?”

“Not much…I tried your cell…what are you doing?”

“Just sitting in my room, reading — bored.”

“I have an idea that could help with your boredom.”

“Ok…let’s hear it.”

“It’s a beautiful day; I just made a picnic basket. You interested in going to the park with me?”

“Absolutely…at our usual place?”

“Sure. See you there in about twenty minutes.”

Tami and Daniel were close and getting closer. They found reasons to hang out on campus and be together when they had no other excuse. The rumors about them spending time in the library have spread to other students on campus. Neither cared much about the gossip and
they rather enjoyed having people talk about their relationship. They have had sex many times and there was always something new to try. Their vulnerabilities have decreased, allowing for more freedom to talk about their lives and explore their sexual desires. They were in love.

When Daniel arrived, Tami had a blanket spread out with a couple small pillows and the food basket just off to one side.

“Hey D,” Tami said as she stood for a hug and kiss. “I love this spot in the park, it is open but still private. Sit right here.”

Tami was wearing a yellow summer dress with thin shoulder straps and buttons in the front. It hung down mid-thigh and was loose enough to almost see her pink nipples when she bent over to move a pillow for Daniel. After Daniel sat, Tami straddled him. They sat face-to-face, small talking while kissing and rubbing. Daniel slid a hand up Tami’s leg and realized that she was not wearing panties. Their faces were flush with excitement.

“I thought we could start off with some dessert before having lunch,” Tami said.

Daniel lay back on the shade-covered blanket and helped Tami unzip his pants. Tami began to gently caress Daniel’s hard-on. Daniel’s eyes were on the trees and sky as Tami began to lick and suck him. Her mouth moved all around Daniel as he listened to her moans and quiet slurping. Daniel pulled her up and slid her to where she could sit her wet pussy on his awaiting mouth. She fluffed her dress out, covering his head and shoulders. With Daniel’s hands on her firm ass, she softly pressed and rubs herself on his mouth and tongue. Daniel gladly received Tami’s slow grinds and devoured her juices. Tami’s constant groans fueled Daniel’s excitement.

Tami moved back down, wiping his mouth off with her dress. She rubbed his cock against her clitoris before guiding it efficiently into her. They locked their fingers together as Tami began to move up and down slowly on Daniel. They each helped unbutton Tami’s dress so
she and Daniel could massage her breasts. Although they could hear cars passing and people talking as they walked and ran, their sacred spot provided enough coverage to freely satisfy their sexual cravings.

Tami continued to pump and grind, slowing to permit Daniel to lean up and watch her pussy consume his pulsating dick. After some time, Daniel grabbed Tami and laid her on her back. He pushed up with his arms and began to thrust harder and deeper. They both tried to quiet their exhilaration. Tami pulled Daniel in just in time for their mouths to attach before their surging orgasms. Daniel laid his forehead on Tami’s, each looking into the other’s eyes. He could feel Tami’s pussy squeeze his dick, as he slowed his pumping motion. They smiled, not needing to say anything. They were happy that the other was satisfied. Tami rubbed and caressed Daniel’s face.

“Are you ready for some lunch, D?”

“That sounds great.”

Daniel’s head rested on Tami’s lap as she fed him fruit. He began to think about whether he has been completely honest with Tami about his intentions. Their time together usually starts out with sex followed by finding another reason to hang out. He questions if this relationship is best for his recovery. Basically, he is using Tami, or more honestly, sex, as his latest drug of choice. Although he just ate her pussy, he can’t come up with any honest emotions to talk about with her or how to even frame this kind of conversation. If he told Mike or someone who is educated on addictive behaviors about Tami and his relationship, they would probably say he is high risk for a relapse. If one of the men at First Step had a relationship like this, they would be advised to get honest with themselves. Daniel has heard many times that it’s hard to remain clean and sober hurting other people. Not being honest with Tami is harmful. The fact that Daniel has
these thoughts and scared to talk about them with Tami is a big problem for them both. As Daniel continued to have these thoughts swirl around in his head, he began to feel like a big phony, a hypocrite similar to one of the First Step men trying to avoid the truth. He avoids doing the right thing, like the drunk who ran over the young kid avoided his responsibility. He hates the idea that he gets his sexual fix in a dishonest way.

“I’m so happy I met you, Daniel,” Tami said as she continued slipping snacks into Daniel’s mouth.

“Although my life has been pretty screwed up at times,” Tami continued. “I would not change one minute of it. Changing any of it means I would not be here, right now. I am grateful for everything in my past — good and bad — it has led me right here to this park and to you baby.”

Tami smiled, looking down at Daniel, running her fingers through his hair. “We deserve to be happy and we deserve all the good things that are coming our way. I love you so much D.”

“Um…I love you too,” Daniel said as he leaned up to kiss Tami.

They continued eating their lunch.

“Is that your phone buzzing D?”

“I guess…let me see who it is.”

He looked at the screen. “Willy Calling…”